

# **Career Futures:**

**How the changing work  
environment is impacting  
individual career development.**

By  
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## **Abstract**

According to Forrester's research, 43% of American workers will be telecommuting by 2016. This research and body of work looks at key drivers of change in one's career and how the migration to an office-free work style impacts mid-career professionals. This segment of career professionals has already made a substantial investment in their career. On average they have already spent ten or more years in the workforce. They also have familial pressures like young families, balancing finances and spouses with their own career demands. As the office environment and work-styles fundamentally change so is their concept of what it means to 'go to work'. These mid-career professionals will need to establish ways to adapt to this changing landscape given the long career horizon still ahead of them.

Through research, analysis and by outlining the drivers and reasons behind this migration to an office-free working environment, this work provides a user-centric road map that highlights critical steps and a cadence to transitioning to this new work environment and style. It also highlights critical uncertainties that provide a framework for more extensive foresight work in the area of career development.

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## **Introduction**

Developing and nurturing a career is an evolving proposition. There is the output of one's work, which is the product that is made or the service rendered. There is also the investment of time, attention, tradeoffs and sacrifices made in order to see positive returns on one's investment of labour. Inspired by the turns and pivots taken over the course of a working life while anticipating changes in the future, this research explores the transformations that are taking place in the professional work space and seeks to answer the question 'what impact is the migration to an office-free environment having on mid-career professionals?'

The interest in focusing on mid-career professionals who have ten or more years of career development is because many of them have already established a working-style and routine. With a long career still ahead of them, they will most certainly need to be mindful and adapt in the face of change. Many of them have the familial obligations of young families, or aging parents and if they are in a partnership, it is most likely a dual-income family which requires taking into consideration both careers as they make important life decisions.

By focusing on mid-career professionals (the majority were interviewed in Toronto), this work maps the drivers that lead to career

change and seeks to understand how the physical distance between an individual and the office impacts mid-career professional performance and engagement. It also outlines employee-centric design criteria for future innovations that could enable a smoother transition to an office-free working style.

It's important to level set definitions and contexts so that this work is grounded in a common understanding. A knowledge worker is someone who consistently solves new problems or works through opportunities that require a combination of cognitive thinking. (Drucker, 2001). A career by the Oxford Dictionary definition is 'an occupation undertaken for a significant period of a person's life and with opportunities for progress.' Beyond the dictionary definition, a career is a very personal thing. For some it can be a reflection of the individual, their passions and their talents. For others, it can be a very transactional part of their lives where they put in what's expected by their employer but aren't overly invested or engaged. Regardless of the personal interpretation, the traditional career experience of getting up, going to an office and working eight hours to then return home and repeat the routine day after day within the same organization while seeing progress in responsibility grow and increased annual salary raises is a fading entity (Taylor, 2013). It is being replaced by a more mosaic experience with physical constraints like the bricks-and-mortar office vanishing.

## **Scanning the broader environment**

To look at the implications for the mid-career workforce, it's important to look broadly at the macro contexts as well as the internal and personal influences that drive change. Drivers for change in one's career come from both internal and external factors. By examining the current and potential future environment one can start to see what is influencing mid-career employees and some of the implications.

There are loud signals of change like how the traditional forty hour work week, commuting to work, office culture and water-cooler talk are evolving. The average job tenure is now 4.6 years and the average North American will have 7 or more jobs over a 35 or more year career. (Bialik, 2010) Contrast this to 40 years ago when the average tenure at a job was 15 years with a career average of 2 employers (Toosi, 2002) For the purposes of this research, a job is a defined assignment characterized by an extended period of time with a single employer. It is part of a broader extended career timeline. An emerging reality is that 9% of the US workforce is now working in a mobile context, this is up 41% over the past ten years. It is anticipated that within the next four years this could grow to 43% of the knowledge worker base over the next 5 years (Forrester, 2009). Mobile working in itself has a kaleidoscope of definitions that will be explored in this research, but at the heart of it, a mobile worker is

someone who spends the bulk of their working time outside of a physical bricks-and-mortar working space operated by their employer.

A key enabler of rapid change in the workplace is technology. Over 55% of Canadians are walking around with smart phones, growing 20% year over year. (Handro, 2013) Workers are now able to untether themselves from their desk and offices; they can work at home, in coffee shops, in libraries and still be able to connect across technologies with their fellow colleagues and clients. The implication is that there is more flexibility in how work can be approached from a location and timing perspective. The irony is that while workers are no longer tethered to a desk, they are tethered to devices. Smart phone addictions are real with over 80% of Canadians saying they don't leave home without it and 2/3 saying they use their phone every day. (Oliveira, 2013).

Beyond technological changes in the workplace, there are several external dynamics at play impacting mid-career professionals. Multiple generations are working within the same organization, each with their own preference for collaboration and culture. Generation X'ers, born from 1965-1985 tend to prefer a meritocracy; they are motivated to work for reward. Baby boomers, born 1946-1964 are delaying retirement; some are still holding senior jobs with high-paying salaries. And millennials, born 1980-2001, tend to prefer a working environment that is collaborative, nurturing and feels more like productive play (Hershatter,

2010). All three of these generations working for the same organization can create tensions but also opportunities for better learning and collaboration provided there is familiarity with and awareness of the varying work styles.

There are also more women in the workforce than ever before. Women entered the professional work force in the 1950s, mostly as support and clerical support. In January 2012, according to Statistics Canada's labour force survey estimates, women made up 35.4% of all management positions and 22% of senior management positions. Between 1976 and 2007, the percentage of women with children under the age of six who work outside of the home has doubled from 31.5% to 68.1%. Over the past 35 years households where professional woman's salaries are greater than their spouses has grown 400%. (Mundy, 2012) Women are also having fewer children and both men and women are starting families later than their parents did. For those with families, the bulk of them have additional child care to enable both parents to work. (Mundy, 2012)

### **Changes in the physical workplace**

Another external influence for mid-career professionals is the evolving design of the workplace environment. Bringing people together to work is very expensive for an organization. It starts with choosing a location that is accessible for commuting, a space with natural light, good

air flow and enough square footage to accommodate the current number of employees and room for growth. Beyond the actual square footage and office space utilities there is also the cost of connectivity and tools like laptops, servers, scanners, photocopiers and security. According to commercial real estate company Colliers' annual report, the average cost to maintain a fully functioning office with 200 people in downtown Toronto is approximately \$1,000,000 per year (200 x people 175 sq/ft x \$25 per sq/ft cost = \$875,00 + 15% utilities resources). In addition to the expected tools and resources, required there are important decisions to be made about how to create a productive working environment and a brand accretive culture.

Designing an optimal working space for productivity and engagement can mean very different things for different industries. Traditional office spaces, like those of consultancy firms, lawyers and accountants, often have dedicated closed door offices that are typically allocated by size and window exposure based on seniority. Senior partners will have the corner offices while the junior associates will work in the middle of the office, in an open to semi-open cubicle environment.

Organizations with large employee bases are investigating alternative ways to manage their need for space and the associated expenses. A number of large-sized office-based businesses are

seeking to reduce their investment in actual office space. For example, one multi-national consultancy's Canadian office is undergoing an effort to reduce its square foot allowance per employee from 225ft to 176ft because their leased spaces across eight offices are up for renegotiation. This change in footprint has several implications for some mid-career executives. According to interviewee CR3 (Appendix Table 1 for complete interview list) having an office is viewed as a status symbol, an acknowledgement of seniority and success. This symbol is now being removed as shifts occur which can create some discomfort as people readjust their perceptions of status and value within an organization.

Many employees, not only mid-career workers have experienced a shift to open working spaces in their office environment over the past decade. Statistically, when people are working in a more open and social environment they are generally happier because they are more connected to their working peers or tribe (Biwas, 2013) Companies are taking down walls and creating more open concept spaces designed for interaction and collaboration. GlaxoKlineSmith, a multinational pharmaceutical company with over 90 offices worldwide, noticed conversations and mini-meetings were taking place in hallways, at the copier and water coolers, so when thinking about the

best design for their office space they reimagined the set-up so people could organically connect more often. (Welton, 2012)

### **Variety in design**

Walls and high cubicle dividers are being replaced with pods, which are open working spaces that accommodate four to six people working in a shared and more collaborative space. Fixed furniture is being replaced with mobile furniture, meaning chairs, tables and white boards on wheels which can be pulled together quickly for impromptu discussions and idea sharing. The opportunity is to design working spaces for people to come together with less square footage but while continuing to foster an environment for collaboration and production. Offices, like One Method's a digital innovation company in Toronto, have gone as far as eliminating desks in favour of extended long community-style tables that can accommodate 6 or more people. It's like a modern-day working dining table. This creates a quick and convenient way to access teammates, or cross-functional cohorts. The downside is that this can be a distracting and noisier environment for some individuals, prompting them to retreat from discussion with do-not-disturb symbols such as earphones.

By reducing the office footprint while still maintaining the same number of employees or even accommodating for growth, a company is ultimately designing space to increase its productivity.



This has cultural and monetary advantages. However, some companies are undergoing even more dramatic environment changes and have totally reimagined their office space so a very large population of employees can work away from the office with open, unassigned seating when they want or need to be present. This type of system is called hoteling: the office is unassigned and available for a temporary stay.

### **Mobilizing work environments**

Working remotely or outside of the office isn't new; it has been a big part of sales cultures where nimbleness and working in a variety of locations has been part of its ethos. It can also be part of a ground up proposition for budding businesses where entrepreneurs go out on their own and build up their team and network, one person at a time, sometimes starting in their homes or in coffee shops. In the sales-based business model, salespeople are in the field visiting clients and customers; they grow the business to ultimately take over a larger territory and team. Most of their work is done from the road and it isn't until later in their career, when the geography and responsibility is so expansive, that they end up working primarily in a corporate office. But now there is a very interesting shift taking place. Big Canadian businesses and consultancy firms with over a million square feet of space and thousands of employees are

starting to reduce their footprint, and as result employees are no longer commuting into work the same way they once did. They are being asked to find a way to work remotely. For some, this kind of flexibility is empowering; for others it can be quite intimidating.

### **The opportunity**

By exploring internal and external drivers that impact mid-career employees there is an opportunity to hone in on some of the more emerging and immediate changes influencing career development. The influences driven by employers, specifically the shift to a more remote and office-free work style, is relatively unresearched compared to the current market activity. This shift is taking place in some of Canada's largest organizations and the potential for its impact on commercial real estate, office designers and the individual workers who need to establish new routines could be significant. Deconstructing this change and understanding the impact it is having on individuals will help to illuminate opportunities for understanding and for potential innovation.

### **Who will find this research interesting?**

Understanding the impact this environment change has on mid-career professionals is important not only for the organization going through this change, but also and perhaps more so, for the

individual. The benefit for the organization is a greater understanding and frame of reference for evaluating and leading change. This information is helpful and important for members of the human resources team, senior leadership and people-managers to frame potential impacts on culture, productivity and engagement. For the mid-career individuals, more information on how change may impact them could provide guidance and manage expectations through the experience as well as help set their own goals for navigating the transition.

### **Research Question**

This project was inspired by the increasing number of different jobs in one's career. There was a curiosity about why there were so many changes and what is leading them to increase in number. Once the surface of this issue was scratched, what lay beneath it presented itself to be an even richer area of exploration that required a more refined approach. The research looks at the internal and external drivers influencing mid-career professionals in their career journey as well as the changes in working environment while looking to specifically answer 'what impact is migration to an office-free environment having on mid-career professionals?' There is an underlying hypothesis that a more mobile working environment will have a greater impact on mid-career

professionals because their understanding of 'going to work' will change dramatically relative to other cohorts.

### **Target Audience**

This work focuses on mid-level career professionals. These are professionals who have a minimum of 10 years of working experience in their professional field, or who have had a collective span of 15 or more years in the work force. There is a variety in their types of roles, ranging from support staff to senior executives, but they are all 'white collar' professionals. For the purposes of this work, the focus is on middle-to-senior management. The reason for this choice is they have made a high level of investment in their careers and, in most cases, their current place of employment. They have gone to college or university and have invested in their education and development.

This group is at a life stage where they have most likely experienced quite a bit of change. They have probably changed jobs at least once and have experienced personal changes in their lives such as marriage, children or familial illness. This group was born between 1967 – 1980, Generation X bleeding into Generation Y, and has been through some interesting cycles. They have grown up without the internet, which has an impact on how familiar they are with technology and how open they are with sharing and accessing information. They saw their parents struggle through the recession in

1990 and 2001, and experienced for themselves the recession that spanned 2007-2009. According to the National Marriage Project this generation was most likely to have divorced parents than the previous generation with divorce peaking in 1980. (Thomas, 2011)

Their work ethic is described as focused, motivated by rewards and hardworking. (Hershatler, 2010) They differ from the baby boomer generation before them in that their tenure at a given working place tends to be shorter and they don't anticipate staying with one company for the remainder of their career. (Hershatler, 2010) But what is particularly interesting about them from a study perspective is that they still have a long horizon of a career ahead of them, about 20 or more years of full-time work. Should a growing number of employers continue to downsize their footprint while still maintaining and growing their employee base this group will be most impacted by this trend because arguably their understanding of 'going to work' is going to change most dramatically. They are in the thick of their career; they established a pattern that will now be dramatically different for the second half of their career.

### **Research methodology**

The research process itself began with a comprehensive and exploratory literature review, followed by a recruitment process for candidates for individual and group interviews. Due to the

expansiveness of this area of study, the readings started broad but were quickly focused on forward-thinking, future of work, or employee-engagement articles. This included many readings about people's experiences coming out of the 2008 recession and how the softened job market for manufacturing as well as knowledge workers impacted the individual's feelings on whether they had the ability and skills to acquire a new job. This change forced them to think and act differently about their jobs. Many mid-career professionals took new roles, some took more junior roles or cuts in pay in order to be employed. Organizations explored new ways to reduce overhead costs and looked to their real estate expenses to find efficiencies.

The research also included a look at present day contexts, such as current population demographics, types of jobs available, future anticipated sources of work and some of the emerging trends. For example, how entrepreneurship amongst the mid-career women according to the Royal Bank of Canada has risen 43% over the past 10 years in Canada, and perceptions around generational differences in work styles. There are many foresight studies in the space, with a great deal of analysis on the types of worlds and working communities that may face knowledge workers

in the future, for example PWC's, a global consultancy's comprehensive work on possible working futures.

Part of the research process included mapping various types of working environment and styles. Ranging from a designated office space with a closed door, to a hoteling, to working in a co-operative working environment where no one works for the same company but enjoys having a place to go to work (Appendix Table 2). There are not consistently used terms for some of these styles of working, and for one type of working environment or condition there can be several different labels. For instance, co-sharing, co-working, shared spaces and hoteling all overlap slightly in definition.

To better understand a mid-level career professionals' individual experience recruiting and interviewing of professionals and key influencers was conducted. Recruiting was facilitated by a call for candidates through a form letter and qualifying questionnaire (Appendix Table 3 for question guide). The questionnaire surveyed years of experience, number of jobs, types of jobs, education level, primary working environment and interest in being contacted for a formal interview. Having this recruitment template facilitated leveraging personal and professional networks to attract potential candidates beyond the researcher's primary network.

This process netted 32 potential candidates, eight of which fit the criteria, which included a minimum of university and college completion, 10 years of professional experience and a minimum of one change of employment, plus the availability to interview. In addition to individual knowledge workers, Human Resources professionals, commercial real estate experts, office furniture design professionals and owners of shared working spaces were also interviewed. In total 24 people were interviewed for this study. (Figure 1. below)

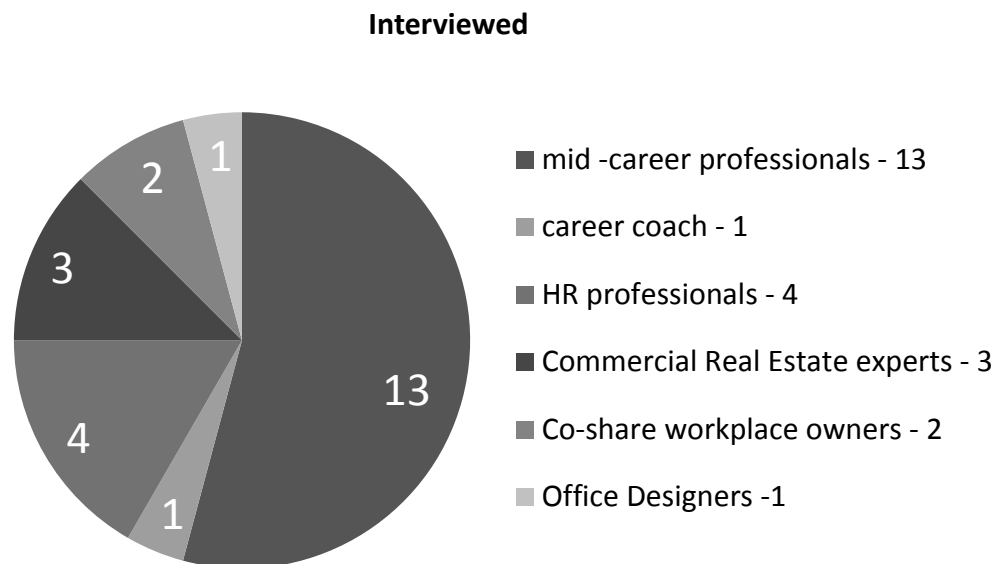


Figure 1: breakdown of interviewees

Half of the interviews took place in person, either in a neutral meeting place or at their place of work; the other half took place over video conferencing or telephone. The focus of the interview was to understand the individual's career path, previous



experiences, pivotal moments of change in their career, the drivers of change and who in their network was influential in their career path. Also covered off in these discussions was how they are currently navigating change in their career and, where applicable, their working environment. Not every person who was interviewed had a mobile, office-free working environment; this was by design so insights could be compared and contrasted if needed.

With respect to interviewing the key stakeholders (the human resources experts and office furniture planners), the objective was to understand what their current challenges are within their industry and, where applicable their place of employment as well as what trends they were anticipating and actively planning against in regards to mobile office-free working environments and employee engagement.

## **Key Findings**

There are a variety of contexts and situations that lead to a job or career change for individuals. In order to properly scope and identify drivers for analysis it was critical to develop a system to capture and organize the key findings for easier reference and insight finding. A very basic two-by-two matrix was developed to organize the variety of influences and showcase drivers that have career implications on mid-career individuals.

### **Mapping with a Matrix:**

The Y-axis represents the spectrum from personal to organizational values; in this case it means the proximity by which a particular driver comes from the individual's personal set of circumstances and values or from the organization's direct influence and values.

The X-axis spans from internally-to externally-derived influences. (reference Figure 2). The source of influence is revealed when mapping along the Y-axis. If the experience or driver is closer to internal, it reflects a source of influence that is coming from within the individual. If the influence is external it is beyond or outside of the individual or the organization's scope of control.

Each quadrant is numerically labeled one through four for easier reference. In order to further contextualize the matrix's usages, imagine a person physically standing in the middle of each quadrant. They are experiencing the various internal and external, or personal or organizational influences. The variations within each quadrant create conditions that would influence their experiences with a particular job or career choice. Based on those experiences, they might choose to stay or change.

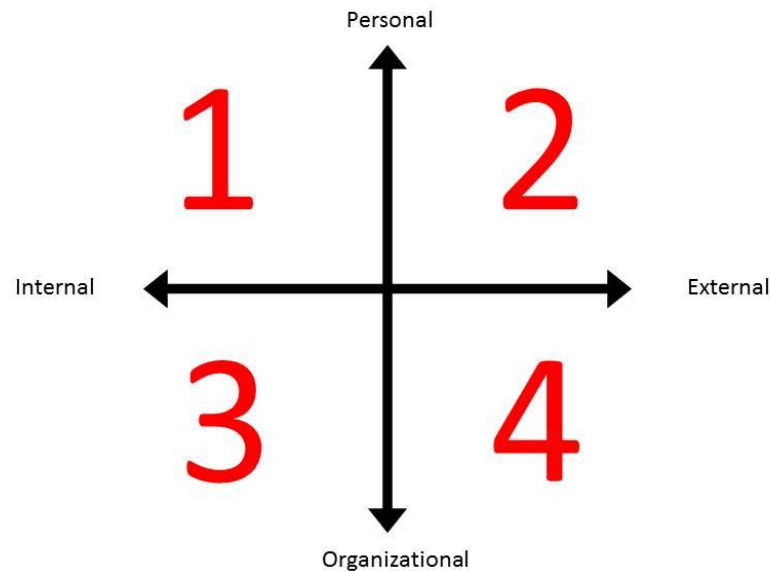


Figure 2 Two-by-Two matrix mapping career change drivers

### Quadrant 1

Personal + Internal. This is the most personally and intrinsically defined quadrant in the matrix because it outlines how an individual feels about their current situation from a personal values perspective. One human resources professional described that there are two objectives when it comes to work: the individual's and the organization's. If organizational and personal objectives are not aligned this could be a key driver to part ways. For example, interviewee MC2 was very bothered by how other women were

acting and being treated at her place of employment. She felt her female colleagues were objectified and discriminated against. This was not in line with her own values and it was a cultural issue within (internal) the company. For her conflict between her personal values and the internal culture became a catalyst to change places of employment. Another interviewee wasn't aligned to the department head's leadership approach. This caused personal discomfort and dissatisfaction with internal working relationships. Instead of leaving the company s/he transferred to another department to find a style of leadership that worked better for them. In another context if employees are attracted to a role because of title, prestige or pay, discover that their personal values are not aligned to the organization's or of what is required in the job, this could be a signal a need for change. They likely no longer feel that their compensation makes up for the compromise they are making in their values.

What is interesting about change within this quadrant is that, according to HR1 individuals are most open to make a change if their baseline financial needs are met and they feel confident that the change will yield similar results. If they aren't confident they can meet their own self-determined basic needs, they won't make a change.

The other determining factor that human resources experts said can slow down change is where employees are in their career life

cycle and how long they have lived with the incongruence. If they have worked this way for a long time, they may hesitate to make a change because they have become accustomed to the environment. While their overall happiness may not increase they seem to be able to reconcile and justify their choices. Some are able to overcome it by finding like-minded colleagues and forging good interpersonal relationships. Meaning that for some a relationship or friendship could triumph over changing roles; it's a case of the devil you know versus the devil you don't.

On the flip side, those who feel their personal values are aligned to their work tend to have longer tenure and more positive experiences (Sisodia, 2007). This alignment gives individuals a sense of purpose which is a key driver in employee engagement. (Pink, 2011)

## **Quadrant 2:**

Personal + External: This quadrant includes drivers of change that are externally influenced, but personal in nature. Meaning, they don't have to do with organizational derived activities and have more to do with personal incidences outside of the workplace. The two key primary drivers for this quadrant include a change in personal interests or ambition, and a change in family needs or demands.

The first driver relates to the exploration of other areas of professional interest. New areas of interest may be exciting for a mid-career professional because there is a curiosity that pushes them to learn and develop new skills and competencies. This exploration may also even provide supplementary income. For example, a senior executive may start exploring a second career in executive coaching, or a school teacher is exploring a second career in nutrition support. The idea of getting a second job or preparing for second career, is a trend outlined by all human resources experts. It starts to emerge somewhere after 10-15 years of work experience. At this point in one's career there is a greater sense of confidence and proficiency in abilities that can be applied to other areas of interest.

Another indicator for potential change is the age of one's children. For example, teenage children graduating from high school or college can trigger a parent to explore other career paths. It's at this point that parents start to think about what is next for themselves now that they've supported their child to a level of independence.

Other familial needs that drive change include a younger stage of family development where a mother or father makes the decision to leave their job to raise or home-school their children, or a later stage of

family development where decisions to take time off, or reduce working time are driven by the need to take care of elderly parents. These are value-based decision aligned to the individual that can create changes in one's career path.

Another driver of change is a spouse's career development. Over the past fifty years the professional landscape has changed to include women in the workforce, but it is only over the past five years according to a Harris-Decima poll that women as the primary breadwinner has grown to 26% of households across Canada. As a result, more women are becoming the primary income earners in the home. There are a growing number of instances where men are staying home with their children or finding ways for their wife's career to thrive and grow as she becomes the primary breadwinner. This shift in primary income earner has implications for both partners in a relationship, such as adjusting to new societal norms and the stress of reconciling and balancing parenthood and a professional career. This is just a brief summary of what can be very specific to the delicate personal intricacies that drive change for mid-career professionals.

### **Quadrant 3:**

Internal + Organizational: This quadrant includes drivers of change that are outside of the individual's personal locus of control or direct influence; more specifically, it's about the changes that

internally take place in an organization that can impact an individual's career path. The changes being made have a direct impact on professional lives of the individuals. This includes organizational restructuring, layoffs, office relocations, transitions to agile or mobile working environments, mergers and acquisitions, and the reduction of the office footprint along with the shift towards office-free working styles. A footprint independent example of change with implications for employees' level of engagement is when a company goes through an initial public offering (IPO). It's a major transition for the organization: the expectation is that there will be an infusion of cash to support further growth, but the organization is also now accountable to a broader constituency, its shareholders. This change in accountability and pressure can be absolutely inspiring for some and pushes them to fulfill and deliver beyond expectations. For others, the pressure to perform and deliver in this new business model can drive them to look for another role in a different organization.

Change in the office footprint is an organizational change, driven by their organizations own internal objectives, which has an impact on the individual workers. For all of the office-free workers interviewed, the decision to change the locations or allocation of space was not made in collaboration with the employee base, but still



required that employees respond and adapt to these changes. Some received change-management coaching to help understand how and why the change was happening and how to individually adapt to the changes with the guidance of their manager. Others were informed of the change but provided with very little guidance on how to navigate the change for their team. In these cases the transition to an office-free or flexible working style structure was met with some trepidation.

Other organizations, like Yahoo!, have taken the opposite path and physically brought people back into the organization that were working remotely (likely from home) because Yahoo! believed that face-to-face interaction among employees fosters a more collaborative culture. This is an exception to the trend we are seeing, and perhaps even signals that the transition to an office-free routine has perhaps gone too far for some organizations. Individuals who have adapted to a flexible and remote working style can be challenged to understand how the transition back will be personally beneficial as they now have to invest more of their time commuting to and from work and establishing new systems. This can have a significant impact on engagement and morale given that their sense of autonomy, a key pillar of engagement, has been taken away.(Pink, 2011)

The underlying theme is that there is an objective the organization has identified and taken measures to address. The cost of real estate, the need for face-to-face collaboration or the desire to be strategically placed in a trade area are all drivers in what is influencing organizations to transition to different working environments and styles such as mobile working or working 100% of the time outside of an office. These changes in structure may cause a positive, negative or neutral reaction by the employee. They could accept the circumstances, work through the transition and ultimately perform as the organization has chosen to operate and thrive, or they could find another opportunity that is more suited to them. But at the heart of quadrant three, the organization is taking strides to change, without fully understanding if individuals will adapt to or reject the change all together.

**Quadrant 4:**

External and Organizational: In this quadrant drivers of change occur outside the organization's control, and beyond any personal ability to influence. However, the changes will have an impact on the business and will eventually have an impact on the individual. The drivers behind these shifts and changes don't just affect a single organization, but are broadly influencing a larger context, such as an industry, sector or region. According to Lynda Gratton, author of Sh/ft:

the future of work there are major forces that are driving change. The first major force is technology and its capacity to connect billions of people in timely, instant and infinite ways. This has unlocked opportunities to automate services which, in some cases, reduced the need for workers. According to U.S. consulting firm Automotive Compass, the advancements of the assembly line and cheaper labour costs outside of Canada has already reduced automotive manufacturing with an expected 20% decrease in jobs by 2020. The ability to connect instantaneously around the world has reduced the need for flights or business travel, which could create a reduction in services like conferences and lodging, but likely an increase in demand for screens and voice over IP systems over the long term.

The second force for change is the force of energy resources. The cost of fuel will only rise as resources deplete. People won't be able to travel the same way and will be more reliant on technology to stay in touch. In a weird twist of fate, people will become more global because of their connections to one another, but they won't travel as much. However, that doesn't stop fuel from being used, so as climate change continues driven by the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions there will likely be more radical environmental catastrophes which could further isolate or displace people while simultaneously driving measures to adopt a more sustainable culture.

The third force, according to Gratton, is the force of globalization. This includes a growth in the overall talent pool driven by the economic rise of emerging markets like the BRIC nations. Part of their rise in importance is a result of their increased levels of education which have been enabled through the democratization of the internet. This has increased the overall talent pool. Foreign manufacturing continues to have a big impact on many businesses as they have shifted services to countries where the lower cost of labour is an attractive proposition. As a result, many domestic manufacturer workers have lost their jobs, prompting them to either look for other work, learn new skills, or relocate to another organization or market where their services are needed and affordable.

Implications for the mid-career professional include global competition for jobs. Engineers in China and coders in India are competing for jobs that used to be primarily fulfilled by North American workers. For instance, Apple has started to hire more engineers coming out of China because they now have a large pool of talent to tap into, where as it used to be only manufacturing jobs (Duhigg, 2012) signaling that knowledge workers are also being sought after overseas in emerging markets.

There are other implications for mid-career professional's working routines. Pressure on energy resources could lead to

changes like the adoption of a 'no company car' policy or energy blackout periods to save at peak energy times, which could ultimately interfere with working across time zones. These macro changes have significant implications for individuals. They will need to begin looking at how to connect across boundaries, time zones and languages to build professional networks to create a more resilient career in the face of so much change.

### **Using the Matrix:**

The benefit of categorizing drivers that influence individual career patterns with a two-by-two matrix is that it helps to identify and perhaps even predict the locus of change in one's career. Understanding if the pressure for change is coming from a personal driver, like a growing family, or from an external globally impacting driver, like energy costs, could help individuals evaluate options that are best suited for them as they navigate their career. For those seeking a change but who are trying to understand why or what is driving the need, the matrix can help to localize if it's an internal or external influence, or maybe a combination of the two. The benefit is having a tool to help articulate what is inspiring change. The matrix can be tool for dialogue for individuals, their teams and leader as they start to evaluate options and any implications that may come with making a change.



Figure 3 Examples of activities in each quadrant that could have an impact on an individual's career change.

These quadrants don't always operate in isolation. There can be an overlap where a change in one quadrant is a catalyst for another change that aligns to another quadrant. In the case of Yahoo!, the work environment changed and everyone who was working at home was now required to be in the office. This has big implications that align to quadrant 3 in that it is an internally driven organizational change that has implications for the individual. Interestingly, once the change has been made there may be a realization that the change has proven out to be beneficial for the organization in that their best innovation does take place in the

workplace. This could have positive outcomes for the individual workers such as increased self-esteem and confidence in the new leadership. They could in turn feel very aligned to the organization's value set as a result of this change. When they feel aligned this would be an example of alignment in quadrant 1 as a result of a change in quadrant 3. The matrix helps individuals to understand and localize what is influencing their working environment and their relationship within it. It's a tool to facilitate awareness so that when one is going through these kinds of changes one can evaluate where their opportunity is to pivot and adjust if needed. While this work doesn't explore the interdependencies of each quadrant in depth, this is certainly an area for further exploration.

### **Focusing on Quadrant 3:**

There is a wide variety, scale and scope of drivers that can have an impact on an individual's career. Ranging from familial influences that change how hours in a day are spent at work in order to accommodate pickup from day cares to how hyper-connected global working teams are because of technology. There is plenty of exciting research and discussion about work-life balance and the macro changes driving globalization of the workplace. In selecting quadrant three, the discussion is focused on the range of organizational-led changes that have a direct impact on the individual

employee's career. Mergers and acquisitions, selling of the business, deciding to go public or reducing office space with a transition to more mobile employees. These are all organizational-led changes that have an impact on the individual.

Change is the only constant, or so it seems. Some of the activities in quadrant three that are impacting career development are particularly relevant and of the moment because they are less explored. Specifically, the transformation of the office space to an open-concept environment or to a flexible office-free structure and the impact it has on individual employees. Be it their engagement, performance, interest or success it all requires attention and study. There is a rise in the amount of research being conducted that focuses on why organizations are downsizing their footprint and on the cost/benefit analysis of such reduction. But what is absent is a focus on how this trend to a more flexible, but office-free working style is impacting the mid-career knowledge worker. This isn't to say that the activities in quadrant one, two or four don't all individually have an impact, but the drivers of change in quadrant three are being pushed upon the individuals in a way that appear less collaborative, more directive and at a quickened pace. They are also decisions that are determined and controlled by the organization which can make it a bit easier to isolate and study. Many organizations are blazing new trails



and there are not a lot of examples to refer to for guidance or key learnings.

### **Who is making this transition and why?**

In Canada, one of the largest companies and one of the earliest adopters is Telus, the nation's second largest mobile phone company. They piloted a flexible working style initiative in 2006. By virtue of their value proposition, offering a transition to a more mobile working environment is congruent with the services they provide to their clients every day, which is connecting people through technology. Their success and leadership in this space, as established through their own internal employee engagement measures, is a strong proof point of success for their clients who are considering a transition to a similar style. They have a goal to convert 70% of their national employee base to a flexible office-free working environment. The remaining 30% will have flexibility but will be encouraged to be in the office 90% of the time. The types of roles that are currently not able to convert are those whose services require hard copy documents such as the legal team and select finance team members.

In their Canadian offices, both Unilever and Procter and Gamble, two of the world's largest consumer packaged goods companies, have made the move to more open-concept working environments with an emphasis on what they both call 'agile working'

styles. Agile working is another term for a flexible mobile-centric office-free working style. Even large consultancy and private practice firms are making the change to open and even mobile spaces. Some of the larger benefits are monetary. In the US companies like Citigroup saw a reduction in costs of \$64 million in one year based on their move across all offices to an alternative workplace strategy (Deloitte, 2009).

These are big shifts impacting thousands of employees. Telus is one of the larger employers in Canada with over 40,000 employees. And while not all employees are experiencing this shift, organizationally it's a philosophy being driven by senior leadership and therefore impacting everyone, even if not directly within their work space. Both Unilever and Procter and Gamble have smaller employee bases in Canada, approximately 1,000 each, but there are implications for global networks because as one country transitions, the others look to it for guidance and learning as this change is considered for other markets.

### **Two Phases of Change in the workplace**

When looking at the actual mechanics of the shift, there are two distinctive phases of activity pertaining to the traditional office footprint (figure 3) and complementary working styles. The first phase of change is when an organization transitions to a more open concept

environment; the second is the transition from an open space to a flexible office-less structure. (figure 4 + 5)

One office per person

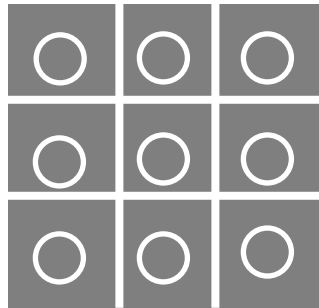


Figure 4  
Traditional office format representing the physical office space walls and people within it.

### Phase 1

The first phase entails literally breaking down the walls of the office and creating a more open office space. In the case of one large consulting firm, eight offices across the country are being maintained but their office space of 1.5million square feet will be reduced by approximately 35% over the next five years. According to CR3 this is all without plans to reduce the number of actual employees; in fact, they anticipate growing their employee base by 5-10% over that same time frame. Getting to specifics, it's about reducing the average square foot of space allocated to each employee. In their case, it's moving from 140 sq/ft to 97 sq/ft. In the US, GlaxoSmithKline has

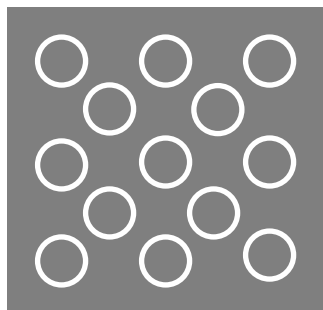
reduced their overall footprint and saved over \$1.5million on rent over the past five years, and they foresee being able to reduce their square footage even further (Welton, 2012).

For some of the more traditional organizations where offices for senior executive are the norm, this shift to an open but more populated space is a significant cultural change. For many mid-to-senior level employees having a dedicated office space is a sign of seniority. A corner office with windows has status. Now the bulk of offices are being converted to collaborative spaces that have fewer partitions and separations between the employees. If offices are still provided to select executives, they don't command the same footprint or window access they once did. The individual employee is now adjusting to having more people in their immediate working space. At its best, it's an open and collaborative working space that enables employees to connect more organically and quickly. At its worst, there is a lack of privacy, which can be distracting due to the noise and interruptions. Interviewee MC5 shared that one of the challenges in his office's conversion to an open working space is that the meeting rooms are always booked because individuals and teams are seeking spaces for private discussions or meetings that used to be facilitated in an office, but now require meeting rooms, of which there are not enough to fulfill the need.

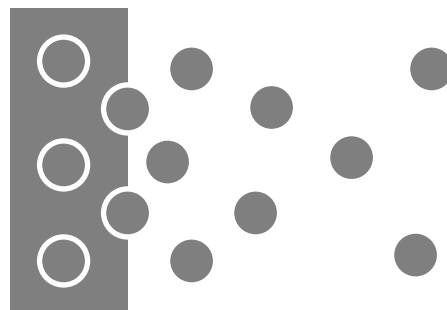
## **Phase 2**

The second phase of this transition is when offices that have already converted to an open concept design, sometimes with a few formal offices, are taking further steps to a more hoteling-inspired office design. Hoteling is a type of office space configuration where there are several unassigned desks for people to use or book as their work space for a limited period of time, such as an hour, an afternoon or a day. The idea is that the organization has intentionally designed the office space so there are not enough seats for the entire workforce. This means the employee and their team need to be thoughtful about when they will be coming into the office and when they will be working from home or elsewhere so when people are in the office, there is the space and the amenities for them to do their work. Not to minimize the impact of an organization's change to an open concept office, but this second phase of change can contain more ambiguity and complexity for the individual. This is because each organization, department and team has different reasons for how they are structured and have different ways at approaching and designing their work. No two teams are alike, so it's challenging to have a one-size-fits-all approach to a successful mobile working structure. There is also some complexity as it pertains to the alternative work environments outside of the office. For a handful of

those interviewed, their homes can work well. But for others, in particular the mid-career professional, working at home when there are either children or spouses at home can be a challenge, not to mention ensuring there is adequate space for a home office set up. In those cases it requires a discussion with their manager to look at alternatives, like actually coming into the office or finding an alternative off-site work space.



Phase 1:  
Open concept



Phase 2:  
Reduced foot print + hoteling +  
office-free

Figure 5 Transitioning from phase 1 to phase 2. The removal of walls, to the downsizing of space

As a baseline, of the people that were interviewed they shared that their employers all shared a ‘it doesn’t matter how you get your work done, it just matters that you get it done’ or a ‘work where you work best’ perspective on this working style. This is a very powerful statement that is grounded in a great deal of trust: trusting that your

team is working and producing, and that individually the organization has your best interest at stake. This has historically been a barrier with employers worrying that they weren't sure their employees would be producing when they weren't in the office. In fact, several studies, like Global Workplace Analytics, and its research arm Telework Research Network have found that workers with the flexibility to work at home work longer hours and produce more work (Tugend, 2013). And while this emerging style and environment has been adopted by some industry leaders, it has a while to go before it's a default normative structure and it will take having more organizations and individuals to go through this transition before it becomes clear or somewhat predictable as to how to navigate a career through this change of environment. This means that while the transition is taking place it can potentially become challenging to map opportunities for career development, change or advancement given some of the traditional ways one might have mapped this process, like the opportunity to network internally through face to face interactions.

### **Reasons Organizations Change**

There seem to be three major reasons for evolving and changing the workplace format and reducing the footprint. The first, and possibly the greatest motivator for change, is cost savings. By reducing the overall square footage being used and increasing the

efficiency of the office space, in addition to off-loading some of the costs of office maintenance to employees who are working from home, an organization can save thousands of dollars per employee per year. Some of those savings get reinvested into the organizational infrastructure, for example technology support, some of it is reinvested in their employees for training and development, but in many cases it is reinvested in the bottom line.

The second is for the organizations' brand. Telus, a western Canadian organization, had a Greater Toronto Area (GTA) office, but it wasn't in the heart of Toronto's commercial trading area downtown where Telus wanted a stronger presence. A major consultancy firm wanted to ensure their clients had a consistent experience in all of their offices. To accomplish this they focused on ensuring the design, layouts and office systems were consistent so that clients received consistent service regardless of the office location or where the team was based.

The third reason for the change is productivity. Organizations like Procter and Gamble and even retailers like Target have invested a great deal of resources and energy to reimagine their working environment by creating a variety of spaces for better forms of working. Their offices are open with different types of areas. There are meeting tables in amongst desks for more spontaneous and



collaborative discussions and working sessions, lounge areas for discussions and casual meetings, and rows of unassigned desks for hoteling workers. There are also fewer large rooms and more smaller rooms for meetings for privacy. One office has modular walls that can form bigger town hall meeting rooms to accommodate a few dozen people and can be re-arranged for smaller breakout rooms. The key is modular, mobile and flexible design that reflects and complements a variety of working styles. With more research indicating that productivity outside the office seems to be increasing for some groups of individuals, there is likely to be more interest on the part of the organization to explore an office-free structure.

### **Steps to transition**

A growing number of large organizations are navigating their way through change on their way to an office-free working structure. The approach to managing this change and the impact on individual employees is unique to each organization. As an organization starts the process of breaking down the walls to create a more open environment that can accommodate more employees as part of its journey to ultimately become a more flexible and even office-free organization, this journey starts with two key initiatives. The first is designing the working space and the environments where individuals and teams do their work. The second is establishing new

behavioural norms as a way of facilitating new ways of working and guidelines for team interaction. These steps occur across all phases of the transition.

### **Designing the space.**

The actual physical space of the office and the way it is being designed for collaborative working varies for each organization. Furniture plays a big role as now it can enable collaboration. Hoteling is the predominant model for the hybrid 'work in the office and work at home' arrangement. Amongst organizations that have hoteling systems, there are differences in arranged seating for when employees are in the office. In some cases directors or vice presidents have been assigned offices so that there is a hoteling space outside of their designated spaces. Their teams are expected to sit within that area when they are in the office. For another, the entire working team, including senior leadership, are without offices; some have assigned spaces, some don't. It's almost as if each department is a neighbourhood occupied by a group of nomads.

Regardless of the seating arrangement, there is a common need for clear and enforced expectations around space management. Leaving a mug, a pen or a file at a hoteling desk is not acceptable but not always enforced. One interview said they force themselves to

change their seating location every time they are in the office so they don't get too attached to one particular space.

Some organizations are set up for hoteling, but in reality every worker has an unofficial dedicated desk. This is partially due to the fact that the organization has set itself up today for a larger and more mobile workforce in the future, but isn't enforcing the principles to help enable its current employees to fully experience a hoteling working system. This lack of enforcement could make it more challenging to implement down the road as they do expand to a workforce size that truly needs to adopt a mobile style of work for this environment.

### **Establishment of norms and values**

Culture is king. By understanding how changes might impact culture, individual workers will have an easier time adopting this new style of working. Laying a foundation of trust, common values and clear language around a mobile working relationship is key to building confident employees and united teams. Starting with language, some organizations have different terms for similar work styles. Some call it mobile working and one company calls it open source working styles. Telus has three categories for their style of working: a resident worker, a mobile worker or an at-home worker (Telus, 2012). This means there is either a permanent and assigned working space at the office, the flexibility to work at the office or somewhere else offsite without a

permanent space to work, or the ability to work from home with no need to come to the office, which in some cases is the only option for some of their customer service call center workers. Citigroup has adopted a more formal term 'alternative working styles' for their mobile working format. Procter and Gamble and Unilever call it agile working, while others have called it open-sourced offices. What it's called is important. If employees are clear on the definition, this leads to clarity of purpose and benefit for the change. It also helps to establish norms and expectations.

Establishing preferences for where one works is helpful for the individual as this helps to establish routines and predictable patterns for scheduling. One of the human resource experts interviewed said the number one place to work is the office, but they also advocate for working where one feels they work the best, be it their office or elsewhere. Some organizations encourage working from home but expect employees to be available to come into the office on designated days. For instance, at one office Monday and Friday are mandatory in-office days, the rest of the week's work can be done as the employee prefers to do it. In addition to set days, there can be other mandatories. For example, all meetings have a call-in number, or no meetings booked before 9am or after 5pm in order to respect

the traditional working hours while functioning in an untraditional context.

Even when norms and guidelines have been established, it's important to be mindful of how a working group or team will impact and evolve these norms as they develop their own shorthand and in a sense, their own sub-cultures. Most often there is a variety of different skillsets, talents and personalities within a given group. Be it introverted, extroverted, highly compliant or rule-breaking personalities, designing a way to connect in an inclusive way with the right tools is important. Imagine a scenario with a strong but silent-type team member. Connecting over a conference call could exclude their point of view whereas having a video conference could pick up on more facial and body language responses. In order to ensure equal participation and voice, team leaders need to consider how to plan for subtle cues like lack of facial expressions or zoning out or muting the call while multitasking and how to ensure all members of the team contribute in order to not further distance members of the group.

This change can happen quickly but it's not often immediate. Some departments transition at different times than others due to a variety of factors, including readiness of systems, types of work involved and renovation schedules. To help employees prepare for a

change, sharing the timelines and even collaborating in the plans for change helps to mitigate some feelings of disenfranchisement. Being involved in the process provides a sense of ownership in the outcome. In some cases, this lag in timing can help to reinforce the organization's decision to move to the new set-up because some employees will be curious about the new working spaces and systems, and, for many, new can be exciting and demonstrative of progress and change.

### **Observations and implications for Mid-Career professionals**

Within the next few years the office-free working style could become the norm rather than the exception given the size and magnitude of some of the organizations who are already going through this change. If traditionally conservative organizations like Unilever and Deloitte are making the move and investing in the office-free system they are introducing thousands of employees to this experience (Dineen, 2010). Given these organizations size and scope, this can start to set the norm for working styles. The opportunity is to understand what might be the key implications for mid-career individuals as they adapt to this kind of work style. This isn't to say that everyone's experience will illicit the same implications, but there are a few consistent signals across the ground of respondents.

Observations + Implications for Mid-career professionals	Space as Status
	Forming + Norming
	Out of Sight
	Pace of Production + Stakeholder group
	Freedom

Figure 6. Summary list of key observations and implications.

### **Space as Status**

Status is very delicate area of discussion because it is ultimately about how one feels about themselves, how they feel others see them and what they feel their worth is in return. It's about one's ego and how it may be impacted because of these changes. The consultancy firm is in the first phase of their workplace transition to an open concept office. At this firm, when an employee makes junior partner status, they receive an office. However, now that this firm is transitioning to an open working style this status symbol of achievement is no longer available. This caused some frustration because it has been perceived by some to be a benefit and sign of

professional success that has now been taken away. This has been most unsettling for the mid-career individual who has invested about fifteen years with the organization. What has been a carrot for them, has now been taken away and there doesn't seem to be a substitute to fill the place of that recognition. Contrast this to those who already have the offices, the senior partners, who don't seem to be upset by the change. There is a mandatory retirement age of 62 for these partners, and they seem to be transitioning to this new environment with more ease than expected. It's hypothesized by their human resources team that it has to do in part with the opportunity to connect with more of the junior associates in order to share and mentor them as they plan their exit strategy. They have also achieved and established their senior status with the organization, so for them, the change doesn't have the same impact as it might someone on the way up the career ladder.

For organizations that are in the second phase of transition in that they have a hybrid in-office and office-free structure, there are inconsistencies with how they manage the office setup and allocation of working spaces. Some senior executives, like vice presidents and directors, have dedicated closed door offices spaces. In other organizations these senior leaders are assigned desks in the open working space while the remainder of the workforce has unassigned



seating they can use for hoteling. Some organizations believe senior leadership needs to be present and in the building for collaboration and decision making. One interviewee had mixed feelings about this system. They felt they were a valuable contributor but felt the lack of assigned space sent a signal that they were not required to be on premise and that their services may not be as important or valued. This can significantly impact how one feels about their purpose within the organization. If the reason why there are certain expectations for some but not others is understood, this can go a long way in helping the individual feel at ease with the system.

This group has a lot to handle both personally and professionally. A challenge for mid-career employees going through this transition is the added pressures that one would experience in quadrant two, like family pressures or financial strains. If they own a home they are typically trying to whittle down their mortgage and they continue to have other financial demands and pressures. This change in their career design and routine can add a great deal of pressure to an already pressurized lifestyle. If working in the office on a regular basis isn't available to a team member, identifying a secondary environment for work is important. For many interviewed, working from home was the second default followed by a library, café and for a select few some co-working spaces where they could

rent a space. One person interviewed worked from their in-law's home during the day because they had a young child in the home and it was disruptive for them to work in close quarters all day.

Working from home has its advantages with respect to flexibility and balance. Everyone interviewed who worked at home from time to time shared the benefit of saving time with the commute and felt more productive personally and professionally. Some craved the social interaction an office environment provided.

In the not-too-distant future one can imagine how this group might end up working in co-sharing environments like Project Rhino (<http://projectspac.es>) or We Work (<http://wework.com>), which are both companies that provide office space for working individuals. At present the bulk of their renters are individuals, but a future revenue channel could be corporate memberships whereby organizations pay to have access to a set number of desks for their employees. These environments are bright, lively and welcome dozens of professional individuals like entrepreneurs, small business owners and individual contributors and freelancers like, computer programmer to the space. What they have in common is that they are seeking a place to work that fulfills their need for a routine and dedicated working environment. One significant implication for the mid-career individual employed by an organization but seeking

alternative spaces to work is that, if they start working more frequently in this kind of co-operative space, they may start to lose some of the cultural alignment they have with their current team as they develop ties to the new environment and the people within it. The unintended consequence of one being more interested in the work of a fellow desk renter could be making the move to change jobs all together and work with or for a connection made in the new environment. Regardless of what drove the individual to make the decision of where to work, be it personal or organizational drivers, what's important is that the individual finds an environment that is conducive to their working style.

### **Forming and Norming:**

In this emerging office-free environment being able to perform and contribute optimally as an individual is critical for one's level of contribution and confidence and also for the broader team. Having a level of comfort and confidence with using the technology and resources provided to connect with one's team and work is essential. There is a high level of interdependence and integration required for virtually performing teams and being proficient in and aligned to the forms of communication is critical. It's best to not assume that all of the various available technologies are easily understood and used by

all of the team members. An obligatory immersion and training on the technologies would help team members gain familiarity and alignment to usage and adoption. Even mid-career professionals who are tech-savvy can have a sense of inferiority relative to a younger cohort that was raised with the internet and are more familiar with various technologies. There may even be a bit of fear that they might be leapfrogged by this technologically savvy group.

Making the transition to a virtual working team environment while optimizing one's own working style can be a challenge. Some of the respondents had specific examples of how their organization has worked to establish trust and culture within their team. One of the ways teams are achieving this is through co-developing rules for engagement and interaction. The role of meetings is changing from exchanging information to discussing ideas. For example, important information is shared over email with a follow-up call to discuss the content, but not review it. If and when there is face to face time, the focus is on team development in order to foster an emotional bond. This isn't to say that face-to-face meetings aren't also important to address or resolve critical issues, these are important and worthy of scheduling time, it's just to say that creating some of the critical interpersonal bonds for teamwork are much harder to form outside without face to face connects.

Alignment by the team on the primary technology used to connect coupled with an agreement on the tempo and frequency of communication and clear team expectations and project objectives are paramount. Technology is the cornerstone in a successful virtual business relationship. The challenge is that not all of the individuals interviewed had the benefit of an established immersion process that guides a team through this transition. The implication here for mid-level employees is that they may feel unsure about how to connect and when to reconnect to their group. Not feeling connected to the group can lead to feeling unsure of what their purpose or role is in this new environment which can lead to looking for other opportunities where they feel more confident how to navigate. It's important to establish this bond early in a team's development to help establish baseline relationships. This early bonding of a team, in conjunction with established processes, language and technical understanding helps to provide a common framework upon which to build a stronger working unit.

### **Out of Sight**

Several respondents expressed concern about how a decrease of face time may impact their profile and exposure to senior leadership. By not being exposed on a regular basis to peers, leadership and cross-functional teams, some felt this could limit their

opportunities for growth and promotion within the organization. This seemed to be a larger concern for the employees who had just between five to ten years of experience as many of them are focused on gaining traction and building their career. They have already had some successes in their professional career and are just feeling like they can now excel, but the landscape is shifting before them. They now have to pause and reprogram without having the benefit or absolute confidence this transition will be beneficial to their own career development. For some the challenge is the uncertainty of how they are going to develop across the broader organization. Meaning that if they are in a marketing department, but are interested in operations or finance as part of their total career growth, they feel further removed from that team and the opportunity for change when they are no longer based in the office. While there may be opportunities for their own team to connect face to face, it's even harder to connect across greater boundaries. Across all respondents there was a bit of fear that being out of sight translates to out of mind, exposing their career to potential vulnerabilities.

### **Pace of production and stakeholder group**

One human resource expert candidly shared that they are not sure if this new switch to a flexible, mobile-forward working environment is actually going to be beneficial for certain individuals

and teams. They emphasized that flexibility in one's working schedule was a positive for many employees to the extent that many didn't want to reverse it once they had adjusted to this style of working. However, at a team level there were some concerns. Two factors seem to be at play that help to determine likelihood of success. The first is the pace of operations and the second is whether the primary client group is internal or external to the organization.

For example, working in a fast-paced advertising agency setting where the response times are immediate and the actual production process is quick and nimble, a mobile and office-free set-up could prove to be a challenge because so much of the work is team and time sensitive. For a transition to succeed in this environment there would need to be rules of engagement as it pertains to response times, team availability and managing feedback and communication threads. And even then, it might not be the kind of work that can function with a fully virtual-team given the amount of cross-functional team work required. Whereas if the project was on a longer timeframe, for example the development of a website where the bulk of the work is fully scoped and outlined, most of it can be done remotely since it's a part of the production process that doesn't require the constant input of the entire team on an hour-by-hour basis.

If a team's key stakeholder base is internal and the entire organization has bought into the norms and values of a mobile working environment then there is that common language that helps to ground expectations. This makes it easier to understand why a response is delayed, or why a certain individual is calling into a meeting instead of commuting in. Competing cultures and expectations are where tension and challenges in adopting a mobile working style can creep in. For example, the advertising agency and client scenario can be challenging if the two cultures are not both subscribing to the same norms and values of an office-free environment.

## **Freedom**

The flexibility to choose where to work unlocks a lot of opportunities for mid-career individuals. One of the key benefits is that there is a reduction in commuting time. One respondent MC6 spent upwards of two hours a day on the road commuting to the office every day. This time is now reinvested in other ways due to the bulk of work being done at home. Other benefits of this flexibility of time is the ability to blend in personal tasks with professional tasks. Tackling low-touch household tasks like watering plants, letting the pets out for a walk, throwing in a few loads of laundry, these are little time savers that help the individual's overall work life balance needs.



There is also a greater sense of satisfaction. Employees who have more flexibility in choosing where and when to work report having a stronger sense of autonomy, a key pillar in employee engagement, and have better relationships with their families. (Hamilton, 2001) Of the individuals interviewed, all valued and appreciated having the flexibility to work from home or off-site, none wanted to consider a switch back to the office. Telus' employee engagement was at 83 per cent in 2013 placed it in the top position globally amongst organizations similar in size and employee base. Their flexible working policies have been a major contributor to this record performance.

### **Applying the insights**

Creating the ideal system and environment for an employee who is adopting a flexible primarily office-free working environment is subjective. The opportunity for the mid-career professionals as well as their employers is to create a system and environment that works for each individual while taking into consideration the challenges and opportunities that an office-free environment presents. There is an assessment pattern derived from the literature and interviews that can set the foundation for further exploration and innovation. This assessment pattern, when translated to a tool, can help the individual evaluate their current situation, understand what gaps there may be in their setup and help them put a plan in place to set themselves up for a remote working system that is

effective for them and the organization. The organization itself can use this as a way to discuss the level of comfort their employees have in their current situation and plan for any gaps.

### **The S.T.E.T. assessment**

The assessment pattern is the way that people start mapping the steps they take to create a productive and engaging transition to a mobile office space. There are four parts in the sequence starting with the self and moving to external resources . The S.T.E.T. tool is for assessing readiness and ability to succeed in an office free environment. The acronym stands for: Self-assessment, Team-assessment, Environment assessment, Technology (tech) assessment. Reference figure 7 to see how the cadence of its application would start with

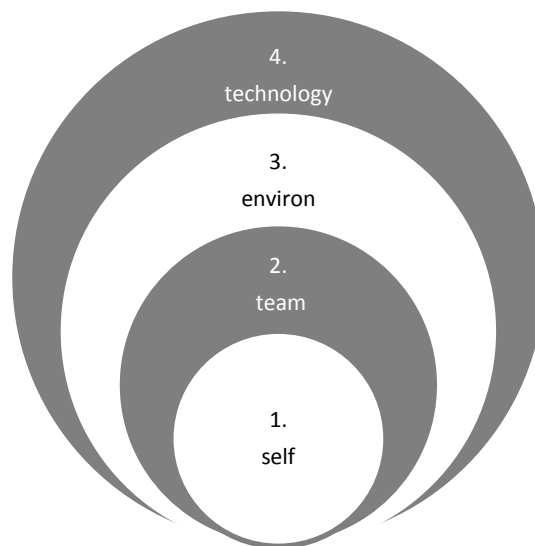


Figure 7 S.T.E.T. model formation

oneself and then build out towards more external areas of consideration for office-free workers.

### **Self-Assessment**

The self-assessment is an opportunity to look at the individual's working style, their working or personality profile (popular assessment tools like Myers Briggs or DISC are just a few of the tools organizations use to profile employees). By understanding what one needs to feel valued, to feel like they are performing and achieving a sense of mastery is critical. Knowing oneself helps to determine what one needs.

### **Team Assessment**

The team assessment is a deeper look at individuals who are part of a team or rely on a broader set of stakeholders to complete their work. Included in this is how mid-career professionals, working as a team, can design the structure and rules of engagement that work for them. This includes frequency of communication, identification of communication styles, timeframe of active work and expectations for response times, status meetings and the like.

## **Environment Assessment**

The environment assessment helps an individual establish and design the appropriate working environment for them. This could be a range of environments depending on the two prior assessments. If the individual prefers group work or engaging in face-to-face discussions more frequently, having a space to work that enables interactivity or connectivity with others is important. This could be scheduling time to meet at co-share working spaces or connecting at a local café or even the office for a few hours. This is also helpful for the individual when thinking long-term about their working environment. The odd day working at home at the dining room is vastly different from making it a more permanent working space.

## **Tech Assessment**

The tech assessment is the evaluation process by which one ranks and files the technology they are proficient with, the technology they need to support their new working system along with what's required for connecting with the team. By assessing technology availability and aptitude one can start to identify what investments they need to make in hardware, software and training.

There are boundless areas of exploration and innovation by using the four S.T.E.T. assessments. It could be used to map an entire team to

determine how aligned they are with each other's skill sets and attitudes, or whether their working styles complement or are in conflict with one another. There is an opportunity to create tools that help to map where one might be within a certain assessment. For example, focusing on Self-assessment one might be able to map and identify what is their ideal working style. Are they at their best when they are a collaborator or individual contributor? What are some of the tensions brought on by this new environment that might affect this working style? A tool that builds off of the Self-assessment could help to provide suggestions and next steps that could aid that individual to navigate and create a better working system for themselves. This could be done for all of the S.T.E.T. assessments which could then yield a very robust mapping and planning tool for individuals as they adjust to an office-free working environment.

What makes this particular approach to assessment unique is that it takes the implications that transitioning and working in the new flexible environment has for all professionals and applies an internal to external lens to help the individual establish what works for them, and to work with their team and their employer to get the support they need to thrive. This S.T.E.T approach helps to guide conversation and fosters engagement by empowering the individual to define for themselves what they need as they map across the assessments, and by starting with themselves first.

## **Future thinking**

The transition to a more flexible office-free working environment has already started and by some measure is already in full swing for many mid-career professionals. What lies ahead is an exciting and evolving time. There are a few critical uncertainties that deserve further exploration as the focus turns to the future. The intention of this work is not to provide a full-scale horizon scan or future scenario map. However, by setting up the critical uncertainties into a two-by-two matrix it helps to build a foundation for further discussion in this area as it pertains to the future of work for all professionals.

The first critical uncertainty revolves around the working environment and whether there is a need for an actual physical office or place operated by the employer. The second critical uncertainty is whether there is a need for permanent employee status with an organization or would a transition to contract based work be the norm. Mapped into a two-by-two matrix these critical uncertainties start to reveal potential scenarios for future planning. (figure 8). The scenarios themselves are set up to reflect the predominant environment and employment relationship for mid-career professionals in that imagined future, coupled with thematic names that give some context and a nod to the potential experience within each.

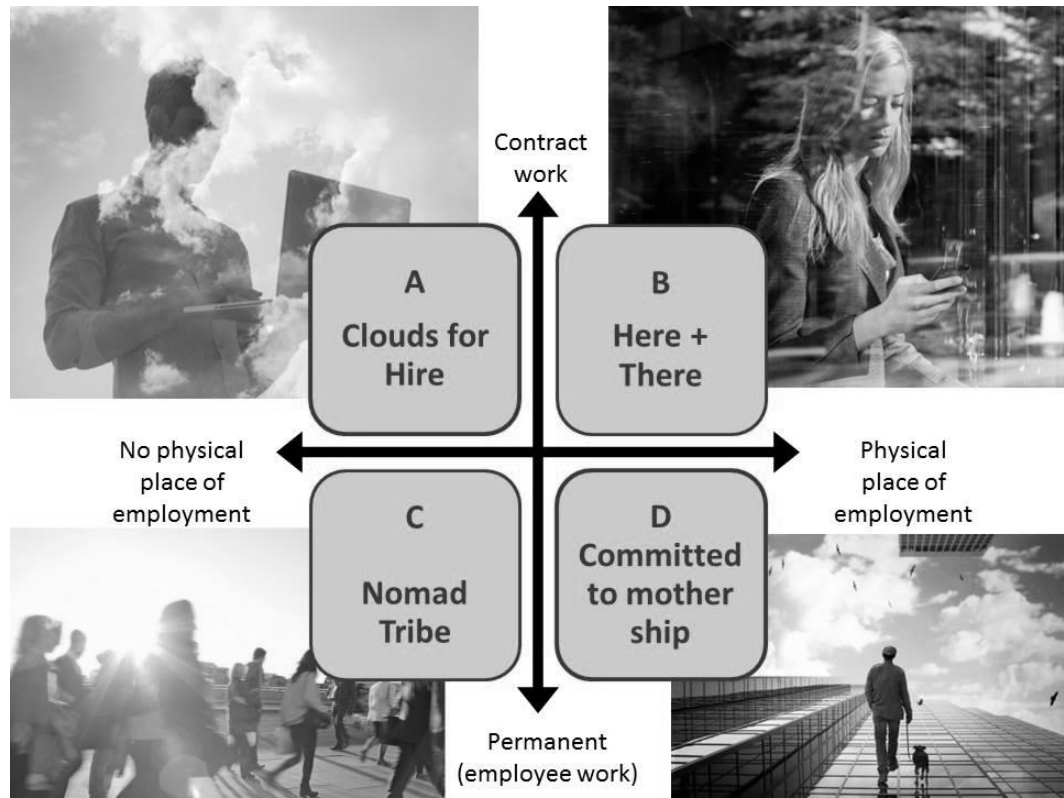


Figure 8 Mapping critical uncertainties to establish four potential future scenarios. All Images sourced from Getty.

The four quadrants represent four potential future scenarios. Scenario A, titled 'Clouds for Hire' represents a potential future where a business exists, but there is not physical representation of it, meaning there is no office, no headquarters, no designated meeting place and everyone working is on contract. It is flexible and potentially the most ambiguous of the scenarios given its few constraints with respect to environment and employment obligations. It can lend itself to an

unstructured and even unregulated scenario. It is foreseeable that in this scenario there are a few permanent employees, for example the owner(s) who are committed to the project, but beyond that the workers are all on contract and working office-free. This enables individuals to find assignments that work for them and their preferred office-free working style. Perhaps more than others, this group of workers will need to be highly networked and will need to invest to maintain positive working relationships as they are consistently physically removed from those who hire and work with them. While they likely communicate often over various technologies, they don't have opportunities to connect and bond the same way others can when they work for the same organization or when they get to connect in person.

In this scenario workers have to be really good to be noticed. There isn't any hiding in a team or an organization. For those 'shining stars' there is the potential that their own personal brand becomes greater than the organization's. This is because only they can provide a certain type of service. In this scenario, it's possible that individuals are the ones being sought after as opposed to the organizations attracting the talent.

In the 'Here and There' scenario, scenario B, individuals will still be contract workers, but will have a physical place or touch stone to familiarize themselves with the organization. It is a place to meet and get familiar with the brand and values of the business. This would breed



familiarity with the organization and could help expedite the immersion timeframe required for a new contract worker. It is possible that offices may not exist at all and in its place are mini-academies that provide information and assignments in a physical place that is specifically designed to support contract workers with company information, coaching and guiding to support their assignment.

For the 'Nomad Tribe' in scenario C, with fewer physical connections to their workplace and tribe this group develops their own routines and seeks out physical places to work while still working for an employer. They may be working at home or in co-sharing working environment. However, when it comes to relationships it would be foreseeable to imagine that as a tribe of employees they could start to more deeply connect. There could foreseeably be more coming together of colleagues to form peer-mentoring relationships to help create a sense of belonging, familiarity and to navigate the organization and its systems.

For individuals working the 'Committed to the Mothership', scenario D, they get the benefit of the physical and culture attributes that comes with being part of a collective group as an employee. They are part of a larger tribe of people who all identify as working for the same organization. Being part of a defined tribe coupled with a physical manifestation of the company, like an office, provides a commonality and like-mindedness about values and organizational priorities. Having access to both, even if

they don't access either for extended periods of time, helps to foster a sense of identify and purposes, which can lead to better engagement (Pink, 2009).

What this means for the actual concept of an office is interesting. If offices still exist, their primary function may be that of a gathering place for teams as opposed to working spaces. This makes the role of the meeting to exchange and build on ideas even more of a reality given the investment of time travel and resources required to bring a team together is so significant. The role of the office could very well transform to be an alter for the brand or business. Think of it as a church or temple in that it's a place to come and get connected with fellow employees but more importantly to get reconnected with the brand, the business and values of the organization.

Across all of the scenarios the individual workers could benefit from using the S.T.E.T. model to evaluate their current situation and design for their optimal working environment. Another potential outcome that has implications for all scenarios is the evolution of gathering spaces. It wouldn't be surprising to find in the next few years the social rooms reserved for parties in condominium buildings being converted to working spaces during the day so residents could come down and work in an open but social space. The building might provide some of the essentials like a printer, scanner, high speed wi-fi and a coffee bar.

The transition of public space also presents an interesting opportunity for places such as libraries. With the decline of paper-based books the future of the library has been often called into question (Frey, 2011). The public library itself could take on a model that looks more like the university library model where individuals come to work independently while the resources, like the books themselves are not often being actively used or are completely absent given the proliferation of the internet.

Building on the idea of evolving working styles and spaces, the co-sharing spaces of today that are filled with entrepreneurs may be populated more and more with mid-career professionals who are seeking a dynamic environment to work or meet with colleagues if their office is too far away or if it's a day where hoteling desks are not available. This intermingling of contract workers and company employees facilitates more networking and opportunities for recruiting new employees and acquiring additional work. It would be interesting to see what starts to develop for mid-career professionals as it pertains to their network. As tools like Linked In continue to evolve, one's professional network and perhaps even their own personal mentors could start to come more from external than internal contacts. Given they aren't working in physical proximity to their immediate team most of the time, and instead may be working in closer proximity to other mid-career professionals what might that mean

for how they form and forge relationships that may ultimately influence their next career decision.

It's exciting to imagine the future working scenarios and how individuals, their team, the environment and technology will evolve rapidly over the next few years and may be completely reimagined over the next ten to twenty years.

### **Future areas of research**

Further areas of research that would build upon this study include looking further at the two-by-two-matrix (Figure 3) that maps all of the individual activities. Within each of the quadrants there are catalysts for career change. Changes in quadrant three, which reflect the internal influences and the organization values like office relocations and changes in the working environment was explored in this work. However the other quadrants, specifically quadrant four, which encompasses external influences and organizational values, has a lot of runway for research given the scope of activity and global implications each of the drivers in that quadrant contain for so many industries and across a broader set of individuals. For example, how rising levels of education in emerging economies are creating greater competition for current jobs.

A deeper look at the interdependencies amongst each of the quadrants (figure 3) is also exciting grounds to explore. Understanding how a driver for change in quadrant four, like emerging technologies,

could impact an individual's value set, for example one's need to disconnect from technology more often, could reveal further patterns for change for all working professionals including those who are mid-career.

Also worthy of more research is understanding in greater detail what the ideal remote working team would look like from a skill, tenure and personality perspective. For example, how an introvert and an extrovert can collaborate and work as a team. Or understanding how new or junior employees gain a greater understanding of the culture and business in order to excel in their roles, but at a distance or with very little face-to-face interaction.

Actually using and evaluating the S.T.E.T. model in action with various mid-career professionals and working teams would be of great interest and a strong build off of this research. Understanding how the tool has been used for dialogue and development of systems and structures that help the individual navigate various scenarios would be critical to validating its application.

There is also the opportunity to build upon the initial foresighting scenarios and the critical uncertainties. Exploring possibilities and opportunities seem almost endless and are of great interest for not only the individual but also the organizations.

## Conclusion

By using dramatic future scenarios that push the boundaries of what having a job might mean for mid-career professionals, this work starts a dialogue about how to navigate change taking place in the present day.

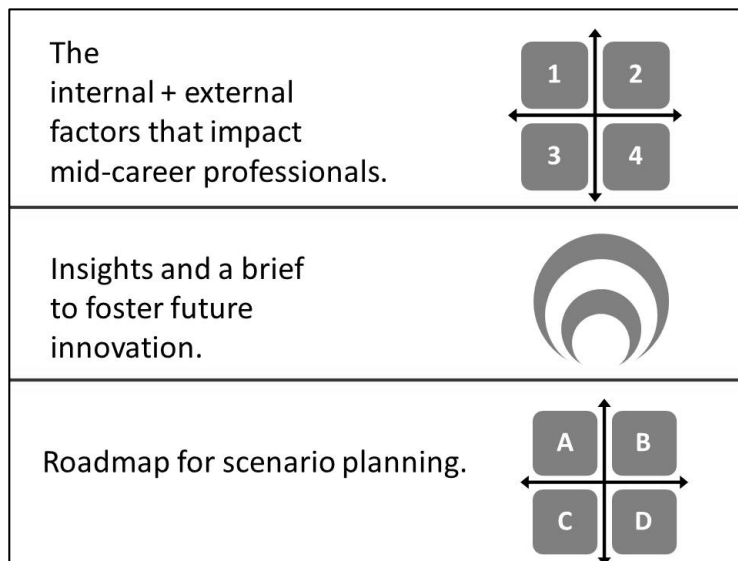


Figure 9. Summary of key tools: insight mapping process, S.T.E.T. framework and future scenario mapping.

A career is an evolving proposition and the landscape in which one develops and nurtures that career is rapidly changing. Businesses are evolving their workplace structures to help stay competitive, relevant and efficient. This is having an impact on the individuals who are working for these businesses. This research set out to answer the question 'what impact is the migration to an office-

free environment having on mid-career professionals?’ which has been answered through insights gathering and mapping.

By classifying internal and external drivers that lead to changes in one’s career development into a matrix format (figure 3), it becomes easier to identify some of more dramatic and immediate impacts for individuals. For example, the migration to a flexible and office-free setup. .

This change is led by the organization with the organization’s needs in mind resulting in many of the individual worker’s needs not being addressed in the transition. By identifying and grouping key observations and implications of these changes for these individuals it became clear that there was a need to create a pathway for dialogue and innovation that could help ease the transition. The S.T.E.T. (Self, Team, Environment, Technology) framework helps to establish a cadence and prioritizes steps to the transition. By putting the mid-career professional, or any worker, at the heart of the transition there is a greater chance that these individuals will more likely feel empowered to navigate these changes. The S.T.E.T. framework offers a starting point for assessing ability and opportunity for change for the individual worker.

There is no certainty about how this transition in the workplace will net out, however one thing is certain: understanding and designing

the evolving and increasingly mobile workplace to assist the individual worker, and in this case the mid-career professional, in a smooth transition that stimulates engagement and productivity is paramount for all those seeking to feel valued and add value. It is also a framework that can help individuals navigate career landscape changes now and into future scenarios.



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## Appendix A

**Table 1**

Complete list of interviews with assigned anonymous coding

Mid-career professional - beverage industry	MC1
Mid-career professional - mining industry	MC2
Mid-career professional - marketing	MC3
Mid-career professional - marketing	MC4
Mid-career professional - packaged goods	MC5
Mid-career professional - advertising	MC6
Mid-career professional - policy advising	MC7
Mid-career professional - product development	MC8
Mid-career professional - project management	MC9
Mid-career professional - IT	MC10
Mid-career professional - product development	MC11
Mid-career professional - IT	MC12
Mid-career professional - broadcast production	MC13
Human Resource Professional - IT	HR1
Human Resource Professional - packaged goods	HR2
Human Resource Professional - marketing	HR3
Human Resource Professional - marketing	HR4
Commercial Real Estate - lawyer	CR1
Commercial Real Estate - project manager	CR2
Commercial Real Estate - project manager	CR3
Office Interior Designer	ID1
Co-Share workplace owner	CS1
Co-Share workplace owner	CS2
Corporate Coach	CC1

**Appendix B**

**Table 2**

List of the various working styles and names associated with each.

<p><b>WHERE the work gets done.</b></p> <p>Majority of time spent.</p> <p>The physical connection to the office and an office-like environment fades the higher the number (1-8)</p>	<p><b>1. Office</b> 9-5, Monday to Wednesday</p>	<p><b>2. Shared Desk.</b> Job share, space share. Two or more colleagues share the desk (i.e. one day one person has it while the other works elsewhere)</p>	<p><b>3. Hoteling:</b> un assigned temporary workspaces in enterprises offices.</p>	<p><b>4. Remote offices:</b> Company owned satellite offices outside of the headquarters where workers can commute.</p>
	<p><b>5. Telework Centers:</b> non corporately owned area for workers to either rent space, or hotel a work space for a temporary time.</p>	<p><b>6. Jellies</b> Organized meet ups for workers to gather for company, not typically for collaboration.</p>	<p><b>7. Home Office.</b> Either 100% of time or majority of time with limited in office work.</p>	<p><b>8. On the Road.</b> No fixed address, office or desk.</p>



## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Questions as of the mid-career professionals**

Discussion Guide for individuals.

#### **A) Introductions**

(5 minutes)

*The objective of the introduction is to set respondents at ease and to encourage them to feel comfortable in expressing their opinions openly and honestly. In this opening, respondents will also be briefly familiarized with the objectives of the discussion and the agenda and have an opportunity to ask clarifying questions about the research.*

#### **Discussion Topic**

Today, I would like to talk about your career. Specifically I am interested in how you are crafting and developing it, I want to understand what is driving you to make certain decisions, what is most meaningful to you in making career decisions and why.

#### **Logistics**

- Informed consent. Reiterate that their privacy will be protected and their names not used without their permission.

- Speak candidly – be open and honest.
- There are no right or wrong answers; I am just looking for your thoughts and opinions based on your professional experience.
- The session will be audio/video taped so that I can review our conversation to ensure that I capture all of your thoughts accurately. All materials will be destroyed 30 days after completion of the project.
- You have the right to opt out of this interview at any time, just let me know.

**B) Who they are + where they work. (5 minutes)**

*The objective of this section is simply to establish some rapport before delving into the subject matter. In addition, it is essential to understand where the participants' points of view are coming from, if we are to put them in the appropriate context.*

- So, tell me about your current role and position?
- How long have been in this role?
- Do you have other roles? *Probe for other jobs, side-gigs, and volunteerism.*

- What is your area of expertise? What is it about this area that attracted you to it?
- How about the role before this one? Tell me about it. How was it similar/different from this one? What prompted the change?

**C) Mapping their Pattern** (20 minutes)

*The objective of this section is to track the history and characteristics of change in their career and what are the key influences behind it. If there are no changes, the opportunity is to understand why that is not the case.*

- I would like to understand what comes to mind when I say “career”?  
What does this word mean to you/your definition?
- What comes to mind when I say “your career”? How would you describe it as it is today?
- Take me on a bit of a story, tell me a bit about your career trajectory:
  - How long have you been working? Start with your first job and walk me through the path ever since.
  - Did you imagine at the beginning of your journey that you would be where you are now?

- What do you think were key influences that brought you to where you are now? (*people, circumstances, opportunities*)
- What might you have wished to change along the way?
- What was the shortest tenure with a job? Why? And what about the longest? Why?
- Have you ever abruptly changed paths/industries? And if so, why? What were the key drivers?
- What about changing employers, but staying in the same industry. Has that been your experience? What drove those changes?
- What kind of education do you have?
  - What made you decide to pursue that path?
  - Does it align to what you are doing now?
  - How important of a role does education play in your life? Is it necessary for your professional life?
  - Have you considered going back to school? If so, what would you study and why?
- When you think about your life today what kind of role does work play for you?
  - How important is it to you?
  - How much time does it take up?
  - Are you comfortable with the role it has in your life right now?

- Are you satisfied with your career right now? If so, why? If not, why not? What are the key drivers influencing your satisfaction?
- When you get up in the morning – how do you feel about work? Why?
- What you think about your area of work/expertise – does it align to your personal interests?
  - What are some of your interests?
  - Is it important to you that they align to what you do professionally?
  - Would you describe yourself as engaged in your work? What is most/least engaging about it? What about in a previous role?

**D) Taking a look around** (20 minutes)

*This is an opportunity to ask interviewees about any observations they are making about their working environment and career context.*

- Talk to me about any changes you are noticing in your own working environment? And/or your clients?
  - What kind of conversations is taking place about career development?
  - Is this something your organization (current place of work) supports? Or influences in a positive way? If so, what kind of

support do they provide? If not, what would you wish they provided?

- What are you embracing about their roles right now?
- What makes you feel successful today?
- What makes you feel successful?
- What does your work mean to you today? Is it important to you? Why/Why not?
- What kind of conversations do you and your colleagues have about changes in your career development? What do you talk about most?
- Do you do any hiring in your current role?
  - What kind of hiring decisions are you making?
  - What sort of candidates do you look for?
- If a team member leaves, what reason do they typically give?
  - How does this change impact a team?

## **USING THE STEEPV METHODOLOGY FOR FURTHER UNDERSTANDING**

- In your opinion, what, if any, influence does your **social** system play in your career choice? How are they supportive? Or not? How has this social network, or even the community at large played a role in your career development?

- Let's talk a little about **technology**. How has it changed for you as your career has progressed?
  - What aspects about it are important to you? Why?
  - What aspects of technology do you wish you add/takeaway?
  - How has this impacted your working relationships?
  - Has it provided more choice and freedom, or less? How?
- When you think of the **economic** factors that influence your career decisions – which ones rise to the top?
  - How does this impact your career decisions? Or do they?
  - What are some of the bigger broader economic/system-scale issues that impact your career choices and decisions?
- We've spent some time talking about your work place and your colleagues, and touch on your own community. So let's talk about the **environment**:
  - What is your ideal working environment? Where would that be?
  - Describe for me what that might look like?
  - What you might need to be successful?
  - What is in the way of that happening for you?
  - How might your environment change to deliver a more satisfying career path?
- When we think of **politics** at play there can be politics within the office, and some outside of the office.

- What are some of the politics within the organization that are influencing your job? What about things like unions/benefits/hiring processes?
- What about outside of the organization – what are some of the broader influences you consider or think about when it comes to your career? What about regulations? Pensions?
- When you think of your own set of values, your personal beliefs, do you feel that your career choices are in line with them?
  - What are these values, and how are they aligned, or not to your career choices?
  - Does work contribute to your identity? If so how? If not, why not? And how do you make that separation.
  - What kind of advice would you impart to someone thinking about designing a career as you have done? What would be the things to take advantage of, or the pitfalls to watch out for?

**D) Thinking about the future (10 minutes)**

- If you were thinking of a change – what would be the key factors you'd evaluate as part of your process?
  - What is important to you, as a lifestyle? How does work fit into that?
- Drawing a line for the next 5-years



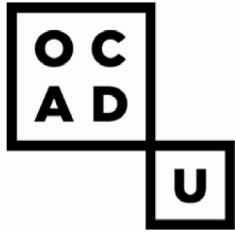
- Where do you want to be in your career?
- What kind of role does work play in your life?
- Where do you physically want to be working?
- How do you imagine your relationship with your career? Do you anticipate feeling more positive/negative? Why?
- How much of your life will be dedicated to work? What is the right balance for you?
- What tools/support do you imagine you'd be using?
- What kind of members do you anticipate will be part of your team?
- What is most important to you over the next 5 years as it pertains to your career? To your personal life?
- What excites you most? What do you fear most?
- What kind of strategies do you feel you want to have in place to realize this imagined future?
- How would you manage this transition from today to your 5-year future self?
  - Who would you turn to for support in making some of these decisions?
  - Or is there someone currently who helps you? Who are they? How do they help?

**G) Magic Wand**

(5 minutes)

The objective of this section is to give the respondent a clear opportunity to consider the context of our discussion.

- Now I would like you to think about our discussion and imagine you had a magic wand that would enable you to invent anything you wanted. What would you invent to create the ideal career for you? What about the ideal working environment? Employer?
- Please help me understand why this would be so valuable?
- *Probe for the real need that is being met*
  - *Physical*
  - *Emotional*
  - *Social*



## Research Ethics Board

November 20, 2012

Dear Jessica Mills,

RE: OCADU73, "The No-Office Career: Finding purpose and value in an increasingly fragmented working environment."

The OCAD University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named resubmission. The protocol dated November 20, 2012 and the consent forms dated November 20, 2012 are approved for use for the next 12 months. If the study is expected to continue beyond the expiry date (November 19, 2013) you are responsible for ensuring the study receives re-approval. Your final approval number is **2012-36**.

Before proceeding with your project, compliance with other required University approvals/certifications, institutional requirements, or governmental authorizations may be required. It is your responsibility to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the OCAD U REB prior to the initiation of any research.

If, during the course of the research, there are any serious adverse events, changes in the approved protocol or consent form or any new information that must be considered with respect to the study, these should be brought to the immediate attention of the Board.

The REB must also be notified of the completion or termination of this study and a final report provided. The template for reporting is attached.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Tony Kerr'.

Tony Kerr