

JOBTRANSITIONS

The job transition experience, strategies
employed, and opportunities to improve it

An exploratory research summary by Belinda Ju and Catherine Shen

hello.

We started this project in earnest in December 2017 wanting to find a challenging and meaningful problem area to design for. This report represents a summary of our exploratory research. We don't know where it will go yet—you might say we're in transition ourselves—but we are excited to get started.

One thing that came up again and again during this process has been the often isolating experience of job transitions. We wanted to share some of what we learned so that we can collectively forward our capacity to be successful in our work.

Thank you for reading. We hope you enjoy and stay tuned for the next chapter.

—Belinda & Cat

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DESIGNDIRECTIONS

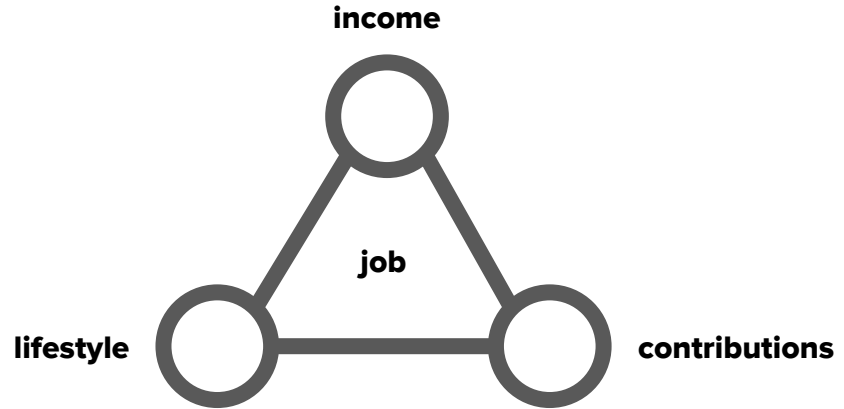
inTRANSITION

Why look at job
transitions?

Jobs—not the Steve kind.

Jobs define your income, lifestyle, and contributions to society. These levers do not have to all be met at the same time and they go up and down at different points in a person's life.

When jobs change, these levers change. And when people leave jobs voluntarily, it's often because they want to change some aspect of these. Maybe they want to increase their income capacity. Maybe they want a different lifestyle (more time for family, less stress), or maybe they want to change their type of contribution to society.

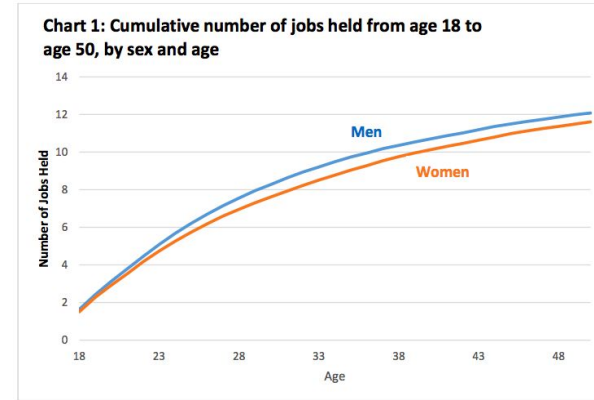


By the time people are in their 30s, they will have had an average of 10 jobs

Among jobs started by 35 to 44 year olds, 36 percent ended in less than a year (and 75 percent ended in fewer than 5 years).

That means slightly over a third of people in the mid-career category who start a job are going to be entering *another* job transition in less than a year.

Source: BLS National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979.



“the concept of a ‘job’ has changed and organizations have to manage their teams in a world of a rapidly changing, mobile, contingent working economy. Companies now have to move beyond ‘succession management’ to putting in place what we call programs for facilitated talent mobility.”

—Ryan Drant, Questa Capital Management

Research questions

We structured our exploratory research to better understand the problem of job transitions around the following issues:

What are people's pain points in job transitions?

How do people navigate them?

How do people feel about their experiences?

During December 2017, we surveyed **75 people** and interviewed **4 stakeholders**.

Our combined networks have high representation in:

- 20s-30s age bracket
- Well-educated
- Tech & creative fields
- In major metropolitan cities in the US
- 5+ years of employment history
- Women (compared to men)

The **types of transitions** that people talked about tended to fall into three tracks.

I. First jobs

From high school, undergrad, or grad school

II. Involuntary Transitions

Being fired for poor role or cultural fit

Being laid off when skills no longer in demand

III. Voluntary Transitions

Switching jobs to a new employer (I want a job I've done before)

Changing careers to a new role (I want a job I've not done before)

Perpetually gigging (e.g., freelance designer) or consulting

Making the leap to entrepreneurship or small business

What we learned
about the job
transition experience

Many professionally successful people spoke of the amount of pain of their job transition experiences.

“doubting my self-worth”

“The money is just
enough to not feel
ashamed.”

“The job market is
an unforgiving
menace”

“The search is
draining”

“bludgeon my ego”

“I had the feeling
‘beggars can’t be
choosers’ ... That was
demoralizing.”

“I took the first offer I
received...because I really
wanted something”

“I dread transitions and they have
always been extraordinarily messy”

“Never actually had
an easy transition”

Key Takeaways

Self-worth & societal stigma

Job transitions are hard. Many people experience feelings of stress, inadequacy, and depression. It is often characterized as a devaluing process that has to be actively combatted. Being unemployed is stigmatized in our society, which further isolates those who took the path of unemployment between jobs.

Need for self-compassion

When asked what advice they would have given themselves, survey respondents spoke of the need to exercise greater self-compassion. This was spoken of in retrospect implying that there exists a notable effect of negative self-perception in the job transition period.

Themes

We had pretty open-ended questions. What did people choose to talk about?



People spoke of wanting **mentors and role models** to show them the way



Networking and knowing people was a dominant theme in the descriptions of easy transitions



The reliance on or lack of **support networks** came up as a bolster against the difficulties of job transitioning



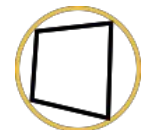
People spoke of creating and needing **structure and accountability** offered by both tools and people



Personal narrative is important for both yourself and others, especially for reinvention



Not knowing what you want came up, especially in relation to choice and options



Different people had different willingness and tolerance to play the 'game' of **cultural fit and assimilation**



Not knowing what to expect, especially around realistic timelines for the process



Location changes came up often from respondents as an inevitable source of change

Theme

Lack of mentors and role models

Many people who made transitions wished they had others who could have showed them the way. People think having mentors and role models would have made their job transitions easier.

When you're trying to break into a new career, having role models who've broken in successfully is inspiring because you know it can be done. People who've had mentors as guides spoke of learning intangible skills faster. However, organically landing a mentor seems to be largely about luck and hard to control.

“I think what would have made a huge difference is a community of peers who knew about the creative/tech field who I could’ve consulted...people who had made the same transition that I could actually chat with...I was flying blind”



Theme

Networking and community

Respondents spoke often of the importance of getting new jobs through networks. In particular, the network functioned as a form of currency for demonstrating credibility—especially when unproven or not having other forms of credibility such as the right education or experience.

Even with many tools available for finding new candidates, people continue to rely on their networks to source trustworthy and credible candidates.

“All opportunities come through humans.”

“The only way I can hope to get jobs is by getting to know people long before the question of the job comes along, via networking [...] It's always about who you know and getting more information than the other person interviewing—for better or for worse”



Theme

Support networks

Job transitions involve drawing upon emotional reserves and fortifying resilience to weather the emotional toll of managing uncertainty, risk, rejection, and failure. When people spoke about what helped in their transitions, many spoke of the value of support, community, and coaching.

“I relied on the support of my husband, and I just kept going.”

“Have people in your life that are just encouraging you. Supporting you. helping you keep the darkness away.”



Theme

Structure and accountability

People spoke of the need for structure during the job transition process. Both people such as coaches, and tools such as frameworks and processes, were used to create a sense of agency and help one be more motivated, productive, and successful.

There are resources that address both the tactical as well as emotional aspects of the multifaceted job transition process.

“I definitely needed help finding the time and motivation -- some encouragement, or even just someone to be accountable to, who I could put a plan together with and who would call me once a week or every other week”

“I had this spreadsheet with to manage the process but then I was seeing all these ‘X’s and maybe I could have learned something from them but I was just like [ugh], I never want to open this spreadsheet again”



Theme

Personal narrative

The stories we tell ourselves and others, implicit or explicit, are important for both self-discovery and persuasive communication while navigating job transitions.



The stories we tell ourselves

Being able to tell your story to yourself is part of the job transition process. You have to know and tell it yourself and be comfortable with the story.

"The personal narrative isn't just important to others, it's important for ourselves. My story didn't quite make sense to me, so how could I explain it to anyone else? Of course, now I see that it made perfect sense. But I did not have that clarity then."

"I lied to people at parties for two years, refusing to commit to the fact that I had left the industry and was actually thriving as a freelance consultant."

The stories we tell others

Being able to tell your story to others is another aspect of the job transition process. People spoke of realizing the need for storytelling to combat projected assumptions and connect dots for other people. Furthermore, the more job transitions one has had, the harder it is to tell their story--but the more important it is.

"Storytelling is crucial for reinvention. People are always trying to put you in a box because it's what's easy and efficient for large companies. It's your job to tell them the story that both rings true for you and is what they want to hear"

"Having a coherent story about your professional history matters a lot, 10 times as much if you've jumped around, and/or worked for startups nobody has heard of!"

Theme

Not knowing what you want

The notion that there is *one* job out there that is your dream job — the work equivalent of a soulmate — is prevalent. It is alluring to aspire to finding, or to have found, your calling. This aspiration is both fueled and exacerbated by the profusion of choice.

People at all stages in their career cited not knowing what they wanted to do.

Sometimes, people were frustrated by only knowing what they didn't want to do, but not what they did.

“I found that I had no idea what I wanted to pursue at all and spent a year aimlessly applying to a different range of careers, many of which I didn't quite meet the qualifications for”

“i hate coding but i don't know what else to do. hence me traveling the world right now ... i am literally running away since i have the savings to do so”

“I'm not sure what I want to do next and there are a lot of options.”



Theme

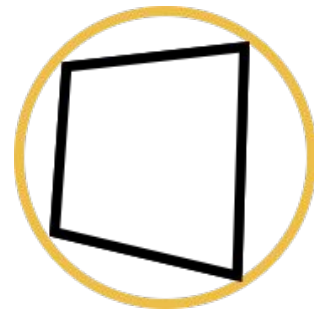
Cultural fit & assimilation

The willingness to 'play the game' of performing cultural signaling and assimilation has an outsized effect on whether you get the job, and also decreased with greater career maturity.

An intolerance for playing the game in an organizational culture that was "ugly" or inconsistent with personal values often preceded respondents' decisions to voluntarily quit.

“only people who already can perform/song-and-dance in the cultural ways of that company get hired, and your job is basically to go find that cultural knowledge and assimilate it before interviewing. It's all so silly, it's not about skills at all.”

“I guess also as I get older, I just care less about jamming myself into other people's molds.”



Theme

Not knowing what to expect

People spoke of not having an experiential barometer for the job transition experience, which would have helped them manage emotions and motivation.

“just some real talk: this is how long it takes, this is what you can expect to be paid, would have been helpful”

“It might have helped to know more about other people's job search timelines, so I didn't feel like I was so alone in my struggle during my job search. I learned later that a friend of mine (who is a super qualified woman engineer with a grad degree) took 9 months to find her job after graduation. If I had heard more stories like that, I might have felt less stressed about the couple of months I was waiting.”



Theme

Location changes

Roughly one-fifth of respondents (19%) mentioned a location change when describing a difficult transition.

These location changes were predominantly about moving back from abroad and also often required industry changes, and the translation of skills sets to a new industry that may be dominant in the new location.

The absence of internal transfers within companies pointed to a very intentional desire for the experience of living abroad.



“when I came back from being abroad, I didn't have any immediate plans, which stressed me out. I came back thinking it would be easy to find a job in the US, but it took more time than I thought.”

What we learned
about job transition
strategies

What did people say they needed?

Transition resources

Money, time, energy/attention

Early stage

Options to respond to / **Resources** to explore options earlier

Permission: Social culture where it's okay to take time off work and live off savings / **Ability** to justify career gaps

Stories for inspiration of people who had done the same thing before

Mid stage

Information about different jobs (shadowing)

Portfolio coaching and **resume critique**

Honest feedback and advice (career coach, mentors, advisors, friends)

Late stage

Job leads (friends, family, networks, job boards, etc.)

People to vouch for your intangible qualities (motivation, work ethic, fast learner, etc.)

Skills for new managers

Emotional relief

Motivation and confidence boosters / People to **commiserate** with
Tools to manage ambiguity, risk, and uncertainty (for structure and accountability)

What do people currently do?

Bolstering transition resources

**Finding out
what they
want to do**

**Finding out
what's in
the market**

**Making the
transition**

Managing emotions

Bolstering transition resources

When people know what they want to do next but they haven't done it before, making the transition can still be hard because of lack of proven knowledge or experience.

Transitions have cost in terms of time, money, attention or energy, social capital, and societal stigma (e.g. resume gap).

Many respondents cited planning for their transition, and the ways in which they bolstered their resources both before and during the transition.



Strategies

Using savings and partner support

“i am literally running away since i have the savings to do so”

“I was fortunate to have the support of my significant other, so my primary concern wasn't money”

Taking on temporary transitional jobs (gigs, freelance, contract roles)

“I saved enough money to take six months where I had work, but not full time employment. That offered me the flexibility to take meetings and also reposition myself with a series of gigs rather than a full time job.”

Taking on unpaid work to avoid resume gap

“I ended up having to take a lot of unpaid work as I waited for the right fit to emerge.”

Taking a working holiday for some emotional (and physical) distance

One respondent took a working holiday abroad doing a new and different job. This offered her rest, emotional and physical distance, and a reason for departure from her job, which maintained good relations with her ex-colleagues, and decreased the risk of her decision should she revert.

Allocating different income sources to different expenditure buckets

“This is my trading water money” vs.
“This is my horse money”

Tools & Services

Internet / job boards for temporary opportunities (paid or unpaid)

Partner support

Finding out what they want to do

Figuring out what you want to do is one of the most challenging phases of the job transition process. Although people often know what they don't like, they might not know what they do like and what would be a good fit.

Strategies

Journaling

Attending events

Holding informational interviews

Enrolling in online classes

Taking strength, personality, and career assessments

Hiring a career coach or consultant

Shadowing or Interning

Tools

Journals
Internet & Email
Online classes
Assessments

Services

Community support
Career coaches or consultants



Finding out what's in the market

It's hard to find out what's in the market because

- **Jobs aren't listed** and are discovered through networking, which is not scalable, defined, or deterministic path
- **Job descriptions are not clear or representative** of the actual skills and responsibilities required; it may describe the unicorn, not realistic, candidate
- **Employers may not know how to hire** for a given role, e.g. if they're a startup that has never hired for that role before



Strategies

Researching through self learning and networking

"I typically do a lot of self learning in the beginning, and once I feel comfortable that I know something, I start talking to people and picking their brains."

Conducting "informational interviews" as a discovery process

"that transition took 4+ months and 70+ rounds of interviews with 40+ different companies and was very much a discovery process in and of itself."

Tools

Google
Quora
LinkedIn
Glassdoor
Other Job boards
Company's "Careers" page
Facebook Groups
Other job aggregators (e.g. mailing lists)

Services

Recruiters and talent agents

Making the transition

To actually make the transition into a new job, people use various strategies that allow them to bridge the gap. Often, strategies revolve around people being able to maintain pretense or play an unspoken game. For example, conducting informational interviews as low-stakes job interviews, “reframing” the resume to translate work across industries, and attaining markers of credibility because institutional backing matters.



Strategies

Tapping into friends and networks

“Asking friends and using online Facebook communities is usually the only real way to secure a job because the market is so nepotistic and competitive in New York — you have to know somebody.”

Conducting “informational interviews” as low-stakes job interviews

“I networked aggressively within the companies so I was very ready for the interviews.”

Getting feedback to tell your story and speak the right language

“Resume critique, with questions on why they didn’t understand my resume (over 3 months, I re-wordsmithed my entire resume)”

Active storytelling to establish fit

“[I try] to establish who I am clearly for a

new employer...[to be] explicit about things that I want and am and assume that no employer who doesn’t want those things will want me :) like: I have a baby. I have opinions. Those things all appear in my public persona.”

Retooling for skills and credibility

“I took unpaid work outside of work hours to qualify myself for grad school. Then found a school I believed had strong connections to industry. My choice of grad school hinged almost entirely on their reputation for placing students after graduation.”

Taking a paycut

“I chose a role that I knew I was slightly overqualified for and just took a minor paycut”

Making the transition

cont'd



Tools

- Email
- Social media
- LinkedIn
- Company's "Careers" page
- Glassdoor
- Job boards
- Facebook Groups
- Other job aggregators (e.g. mailing lists)

Services

- Informational interviews
- Resume critiques
- Educational institutions

Managing emotions

In addition to undertaking activities that explicitly progress them in their job search, respondents spoke about allocating time and taking active measures to invest in their well-being as well.



Strategies

Keeping support network nearby for support

“I chose to stay in the area I had gone to school to avoid a big move and to keep my social network nearby for support.”

Prioritizing physical wellness

“I kept exercising and I prioritized sleep to keep sharp.”

Establishing boundaries

Advice one respondent gave: “being able to contain/compartmentalize job searching like a 9-5 job rather than something that bled into all spheres of my life and stifled all other attempts to live a well-balanced, full, rich life.”

Keeping busy

“I stayed busy — travelled to meet friends, went to coffee shops, got a boyfriend”

Tools

Journal

Services

Friends and family
Counseling
Gym memberships

TRANSITION**landscapes**

Job transitions are hard and societal, market, institutional, and cultural factors make it wicked



DESIGNDIRECTIONS

Initial design principles

We believe in a future where...

- People work because it's meaningful
- There is a greater diversity and acceptance of different jobs
- Networks are less defined by socioeconomic backgrounds
- Work is less circumscribed by academic institutions
- We have respect for family personal decisions
- We champion work/life balance

Whatever we design, we want to...

- Design for relief
- Make it a safe space
- Provide structure
- Make it social and communal
- Share knowledge and experiences
- Not commoditize talent (we would rather commoditize the gig instead of talent)

Reinventing Job Transitions

Our goal is to build something that makes people's career journeys more meaningful, effective, and fun.

How might we...

Disrupt the traditional professional development model

Rethink how people discover and choose careers

Help the “non-traditional” candidate land that offer

Flip networking expectations

Create new financing models for job transitions

Directions

Disrupt the traditional professional development model

With the fragmentation of work, education, and traditional company structures enabled by technology platforms, workers are increasingly responsible for their own career management. Meanwhile, companies are struggling with managing and keeping entrepreneurial and innovation talent engaged.

What if we could explode the in-company professional development model to leverage new norms in distributed work networks and the power of technology platforms?

What if there were...

- ClassPass for professional development
- A marketplace for soft skills coaching for everyone (consumer)
- A curated matchmaking platform to connect those with shared career goals
- Outsourced professional development 'In-A-Box' for startups and small businesses (enterprise)
- A mentorship marketplace for industry entrants and seasoned professionals (e.g. Pledgemusic for bringing mentors and mentees closer to each other)

Directions

Rethink how people discover and choose careers

People spend more time in job transitions than ever before and those transitions can be very painful, disruptive, and costly experiences. The process is unpredictable, nonlinear, and messy, and it can feel overwhelming to start or navigate.

What if the experience of discovering and choosing careers were curated, thoughtful, and personalized -- and didn't have to disrupt your entire life?

What if there were...

- A matchmaking service for learning about new careers with people outside your network
- Concierge service to take care of the administrative burdens of running a job search
- An org-agnostic “Rotational Development Program” for mid-career professionals to explore multiple careers in a year
- New ways to learn about different occupations using different means of content sourcing, media, and dissemination
- Netflix for careers, e.g. algorithmically-personalized potential futures based on scraped LinkedIn profiles

Directions

Help the “non- traditional” candidate land that offer

The “non-traditional” candidate is the new normal. With an average of ten jobs representing potentially dissimilar skillsets by the time they hit mid-career, professionals need new tools for successfully executing on job transitions -- tools that expect a more diverse working history, and support a more diverse set of desired outcomes.

What if we accepted the “non-traditional” candidate with multiple career moves under their belt as the new normal, and built tools to help them land their next offer?

What if there were...

- A service that rebrands internships for experienced professionals changing careers
- A marketplace for free/low-cost freelance gigs for those seeking to demonstrate skills in a new career
- Launch Your “Portfolio Career”: a service to package diverse skillsets to qualify for different, part-time jobs
- Own Your Story: career storytelling service for non-traditional job seekers

Directions

Flip networking expectations

All jobs come through humans — but networking is broken. LinkedIn as a directory of individuals supports passive job searching but poor relationship development — the key to “networking.”

What if we could flip our current expectations of networking from short-term networking needs to the long-term cultivation of relationships?

What if there were...

- An enterprise CRM to cultivate long-term talent pipeline unaffiliated with the organization
- A communication platform for alumni networking
- A LinkedIn for creatives (i.e., passive networking via creative collaborations)

Directions

Create new financing models for job transitions

People spend more time changing jobs than ever before. On one end of the spectrum, the flexibility and freedom to pursue a different type of work (be it for greater income, lifestyle, or contribution) is alluring. On the other end, the social safety net is broken and there are limited vehicles for risk mitigation when making a professional leap.

What if we could leverage new community-based financing models to de-risk professional transitions?

What if there were...

- A timeshare for a bucket o' dough: a community for crowdsourced privatized unemployment insurance
- A Kickstarter meets Patreon for funding early-stage entrepreneurs: backers get the inside peek to stealth startups

next steps

Whew! You made it to the end. Thanks for reading!

Where do we go from here? Well, we're going to prototype and test our ideas to design a solution for a real need in the world in a viable way.

Thoughts, feedback, questions? Wanna help us in any way? Email us at jobtransitionsproject@gmail.com.

If you just want to hear updates from us on our journey, you can sign up for our (infrequent) emails at <http://eepurl.com/dhv1qn>.

Finally, we want to express our gratitude to everyone who's generously contributed their time and shared their stories.

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Methodology

We conducted **user research** by sending out a survey to our friends (some of whom forwarded to their friends) that asked:

1. What has been the easiest job transition experience you've had and why?
What was the transition from and to?
2. What has been the toughest job transition experience you've had and why?
What was the transition from and to?
3. How did you navigate the transition?
4. What would have helped?
5. What did you learn?
6. What advice would you have given yourself?

We also interviewed **stakeholders** in one-hour long sessions:

1. Hillary Pollak, recruiter
2. Jay Colan, career coach
3. Scott Robson, life and career coach
4. Kaneisha Grayson, admissions consultant and small business employer

Credits

Some icons from the Noun Project's

Hea Poh Lin, MY

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