

**The 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Economics and Social Sciences**  
**Geopolitical Perspectives and Technological Challenges**  
**for Sustainable Growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**  
**June 15-16, 2023**  
**Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania**

## **A Design Methodology for Lifelong Career Transitions**

Dalia POLEAC<sup>1\*</sup>, Raul BAG<sup>2</sup>

DOI: 10.24789788367405546-012

### **Abstract**

*As technology facilitates job automation, individuals feel more motivated to engage in activities that align with their values and life purpose. This trend accelerates the demand for career education through vocational guidance and mentoring. Well-thought-out work design is highly connected with employee well-being, enhancing a positive work attitude and the organisational performance. Workers will not only perform various job tasks in the future, but the duties will be markedly different from what they have studied. Talent mobility and upskilling is currently one of the main focuses of companies that will lead to a migration of the workforce towards more tailored forms of labour. Despite this accelerated transformation of the world of work, the general concept of work design, including task management, operations, relationships, skills, and evaluation, is resistant to change. Assessing and evaluating one's skills, as well as planning a strategy on how to develop new competences, is an individual process. With this article, I intended to build a methodology for designing a personalised lifelong career transition plan, in the context of work automation and the use of digital technologies, for multi-skilled creatives. The methodology, which was carried out following qualitative and theoretical research, consists of assessing and reporting skills, identification of gaps in knowledge mapping work opportunities, and linking individuals' abilities with the most suitable technology by way of design. It is built on the design thinking process, answering four design questions: what is; what if; what wows; what works. Further research will be performed by testing the methodology and iterating it until I obtain the most suitable solution.*

**Keywords:** job design, skills taxonomy, lifelong learning, upskilling, work automation, design thinking, work design.

**JEL Classification:** L10, L25, M30, O10, O32.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania, dalia.poleac@fabiz.ase.ro.

\* Corresponding author.

<sup>2</sup> Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania, raul.bag@fabiz.ase.ro.

## **1. Introduction**

The hypothesis from which this research had started was that organisations do not know how to integrate multi-skilled creative individuals, in the context of a need for this type of candidates for a post-pandemic reset and the transition towards a new era in the field of human resources and talent acquisition, in which the enhanced digitalisation of the businesses and the development of technologies need workforce requiring both human, creative abilities and technological ones. I have attempted to identify the degree of awareness of the organisation regarding the employment needs of multi-skilled creative talent. This niche refers to those individuals that have experience in the domain of creative industries, originating from several fields, from advertising to fashion design, architecture, or film and music. A concrete example is that of an employee hired as creative director, within a translation company using technology and artificial intelligence, that has in their profile competencies associated to the advertising sector, but also marketing and branding. These are candidates who can manage the creative processes of organisations, generate creative solutions, or act as a bridge between the creative team and management or the technical team of the respective company.

## **2. Problem Statement**

### ***2.1 Literature Review***

In this section, the main definitions of the concepts that form the background for this paper will be provided, explaining the main factors that form the basis of the research.

Job design, or job crafting, has many definitions. One such definition given by Cárdenas-Muñoz and Campos-Blázquez (2023), based on the compilation of 76 others, is that job design is the proactive behaviour that makes the employee change their role, demands, resources and their work, in order to develop their full potential, to have a positive impact on their environment (individual, team, enterprise, and society), adapting to any context (face-to-face, remote, hybrid, and Metaverse).

Work design is the process of employees proactively creating their own tasks and activities during work, without changing the job itself, to increase their own enjoyment by raising their level of stimulation, avoiding boredom, and optimising their personal experience of work. Work design differs from job design, reflecting both the technical tasks of the individual within the limits of the fixed job and their engagement in flexible roles outside the limits of the defined job, possibly affecting the interface with other work roles (Reiche, 2023). Work design can even be playful, introducing notions of play into designed activities (Bakker et al., 2020).

By skills taxonomy, there is understood a list of capabilities that is structured. This list identifies the resources of an entity in a quantifiable way, classifying skills within the organisation into groups and clusters, thus creating a common language

and understanding (Guy, 2021). Skills can be translated across taxonomies to form a common tongue (Zhi et al., 2021).

Work automation means the substitution of human labour by technology for specific tasks or jobs, such as processing large databases to discover repetitive patterns needed to generate value, increase efficiency, and support decision making, and also eliminate human errors through automation. (Keegan et al., 2022).

Upskilling basically means learning additional skills. In the context of automation, employees could find that some of their skills could easily be replaced by technology. Upskilling could become a necessity for evolution in one's career.

Lifelong learning can be defined as learning activities undertaken in all the moments of life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and competences from a personal perspective: civic, social, or work (Colin, Le Grand, 2008), and in the current environment, could be considered as a way in which to engage in a continuous education, considering the initial training as only a starting point (Dandara, 2014).

### **3. Research Questions / Aims of the Research**

The world of work is going through an accelerated transformation due to rapid automation (Stankevičiūtė, 2023), and the resistance to change displayed by the hiring companies is a factor that risks hindering progress.

For the last 100 years, the workers that were in demand had to develop a linear, scalable economy to answer the needs of globalisation. Today, the new challenge is the dissonance felt at the levels of the emerging businesses and the candidate profiles for leadership positions in these industries. Creative thinking influences the rigid, resistant to change structures.

The initial question that founded my research is: how can I build a methodology for designing a personalised lifelong career transition plan, in the context of work automation and the use of digital technologies, adapting creatives for the future job market?

Talent mobility and upskilling is currently one of the main focuses of organisations, and this will lead to the birth of a multi-skilled creative corporate culture. This collective will need leaders, managers, and business translators with strong creative and soft skills. The aim of this paper is to help bridge the gap between creatives and companies by aligning the capabilities of the multi-skilled individual with a tangible need, through a new job design framework.

### **4. Research Methods**

The research methods used:

- Documentation in the literature, in order to synthesise the context of scientific research, especially in the field of work relationships;
- Comparative analysis between how work has been organised in the past and how it could be designed in the future;

- One-on-one exploratory interviews, held virtually, on the Zoom platform, as well as face-to-face. Using this qualitative research method, I uncovered the ways through which to integrate the creative talent in the organisational environment, by gaining a profound understanding of the role this competence has in business and what the participants want in relation to their future professional development and personal wellbeing.

Design thinking is a creative problem solving methodology that has been used in business since the early 1990s. It is a human-centered approach to innovation which utilises the designer's mindset and tools to integrate the needs of people, the latest technologies and the goals that lead to business success through new products and services. Design thinking has the advantage of being a useful tool in solving wicked problems, meaning problems that seem impossible to solve due to their ever-changing nature.

Exploratory, or in-depth interviews, are one-on-one conversations where the interviewees are treated as the experts. These are one of two design thinking tools that are used especially in the Empathise phase of the process, which sets the foundation for the definition of the problem to be solved, the other one being observation. I have chosen to use the exploratory interview in my research, since this method has the advantage of allowing for a deeper probing into the participants' thinking, avoiding groupthink that could influence candid feedback. I have been teaching design thinking for the past 2 years to students, and due to my experience, I decided to work with design thinking as a starting point for the future jobs design framework, answering 4 questions: what is, what if, what wows, what works. The design thinking process has the advantage to perform in-depth analysis on small groups of people, with the aim to deliver the solution that best fits their specific needs. My research is focused on a small niche that involves multi-skilled creative individuals.

## **5. Findings**

As part of my research, I have interviewed various international experts on the field of work, HR, and organisational design. The interviews were conducted during 2021, over the whole year, and they took place one-line as well as face-to-face. The respondents were selected based on their experience in the field of working with highly creative and multi-skilled individuals.

Mesa is a Portuguese company that creates ad-hoc teams to solve complex problems in a short period of time. They count on the experience and skills of the recruited talent and the working process. The working method of Mesa is based on a simple formula: "a leader at the head of the table to unlock people's full potential, a small team with all the knowledge and skills needed to solve a problem and one mission – a clear reach point with which the whole team compromises with." One process leader at Mesa was interviewed on how creativity can be a key factor when building a solution for a complex challenge. They emphasised that teaming creative people with corporate employees brings more freedom of thinking, adding that "In these hard structures to change, creative people's mindsets will impact."

An expert is the author of a bestselling book and has 20 years of combined executive HR and Talent Acquisition experience, working for Fortune 500 companies, and the president of a leading IT and Engineering Staffing firm. According to them, companies hire young talent for their story, the recruitment process is about building a connection right away. Storytelling and a deep understanding of one's skills and knowledge can help creative professionals land more suitable jobs.

Another expert is the world's leading authority on talent and human resources, ranked as the number one management guru by a leading business magazine, considered as one of the most important business thinkers in the world, and author of over 30 books and 200 specialist articles. They emphasised the importance of the companies' understanding of the current moment we are passing through and the adaptation of strategies that were successful in the past to current global needs: "success is given, in my view, by the current context and how we respond to change. Companies that do not embrace change will disappear. Two aspects are essential in the organisational environment to maintain a permanent state of innovation and hyper creativity: focus from outside to inside and embracing divergent thinking". Regarding innovation at the work relationship level and designing jobs for the future, they point out: "companies that are open to change should ask employees the following question every day: Can you tell me what you did today to help a customer have a better experience? At its core, change is about constantly creating added value for consumers, regardless of the environment or where they choose to work."

The main findings of the research are the urge of businesses to transform the way they attract, hire, and retain talent by ensuring lifelong learning and development for their employees in the context of job automation and a sustainable work-life balance. A sense of purpose and service is mandatory for multi-skilled creative people, to make them enrol in new forms of work. Also, co-creating tailored positions in companies is a competitive advantage and a motivation factor for employees.

Following this research, I have concluded that there truly exists a lack of personnel with multi-skilled creative competencies in the organisations and, at the same time, a lack of understanding of these profiles. Presently, the organisations are facing complex problems that require an approach that is different from the one used in the business environment until recently. With this new paradigm in view, I designed a lifelong learning and upskilling process, based on three pillars: pivot, career narratives, and talent manifestation.

## **5.1 Overview**

The method is a holistic approach delivered through a series of 3 interconnected or independent events and one-on-one sessions and includes working with a set of design tools and exercises: starting with the evaluation and measuring of individual capacity, passing to an evaluation of the professional abilities and knowledge and, finally, sketching a career pivot, using transferable abilities and prognosis. The job design methodology is based on the four key questions that drive the design thinking process: what is; what if; what wows; what works (Liedtka, Ogilvie, 2011).

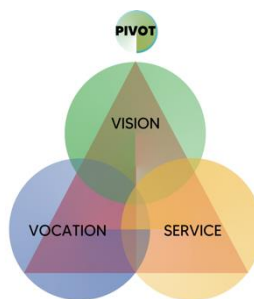
### 5.1.1 What Is?

In design thinking, this stage represents the exploration of the status-quo. It is an empathic process, built on exploratory interviewing and observation, as research methods.

#### 5.1.1.1 Pivot

Exploring the areas of vocation, service, and vision, the first module, Pivot, aims to provide individuals with the knowledge on how to identify and embody their creative skills, measure their strength, and deploy them to improve performance, and trace the impact of their daily work on their personal well-being and health.

**Figure 1. Pivot**



*Source:* Author's personal contribution.

To build an individual answer to the question: - what is the most suitable career path for one's future, creatives are invited to define what their innate abilities are, what is the service they want to provide for the community at large, and what are the skills that enable them to pivot toward a new professional life. This is the pivot step, where they create their own capabilities chart and identify a potential career pivot, which they are asked to write in a „from – to” phrase: from where you want to pivot and where you want to go next.

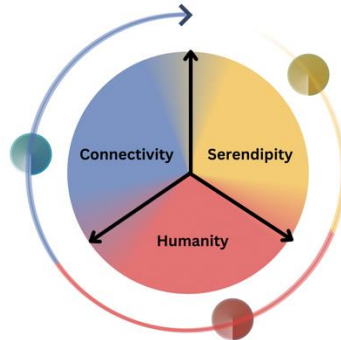
### 5.1.2 What if?

This stage is ideation and the place where designers start to consider new possibilities to create innovative products and services.

#### 5.1.2.1 Career Narratives

For my methodology, the product is the career pivot, which individuals need to tailor according to their needs, values, and baseline skills. This is the second module of the job design process, which provides people with a roadmap and matches their capabilities with a tangible need. This layer is about exploration, and it uncovers 3 possible futures of work. This research is focused on finding new ways to navigate the future job market and establish a pivot in one of these areas of innovation: Connectivity (Marketing, Communication, Customer), Serendipity (Digital, Tech, and Data Science for Business), and Humanity (People, Behaviour, Transformation).

**Figure 2. Career Narratives**



Source: Author's personal contribution.

Which of the following fields enables a pivot to manifest at its full potential? In this session, creatives have to evaluate the context in which to position their pivot, using the landmarks offered by the mentor as a guide to help them align their pivot with a tangible market need.

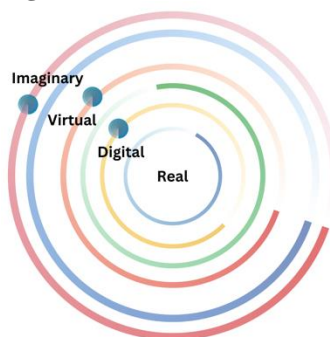
### 5.1.3 What Wows?

This stage helps teams of designers to focus on a solution that stands out.

#### 5.1.3.1 Talent Manifestation

Technology is a key factor in design and is part of the toolkit of any creative professional. This step is very experiential and connects talent with future mediums of expression, in addition to the known reality. In industry 4.0, businesses will have to come up with new ways to manufacture, create, and sell their products. The digital market will become a place for digital native products, and, in this context, the ideation will be focused on how to future-proof our careers by designing collaborative functions which will link technology (AI) with the human creative potential. The last step of the method is designed to break the norms and come up with innovative solutions to be acquired by companies looking to pioneer the future of work.

**Figure 3. Talent Manifestation**



Source: Author's personal contribution.

### **5.1.4 What Works?**

This stage is where small-scale prototypes are born and tested.

#### **5.1.4.1 Implementation**

Following one method proposed by the experts I interviewed, after the jobs design process, individuals have 90 days to launch the change and start the transformation. After the expiration of the term, they are invited to participate in an on-line or on site reunion in which to share from their personal experience and iterate in order to move forward with their career pivot.

#### **5.1.5 Research Limitation**

The current study is in an incipient phase and, therefore, has several limitations. First, the data was gathered from a small sample of experts, therefore its results may not be representative for the entire population. Second, the data that was gathered is qualitative therefore its interpretation might be biased. Third, since as mentioned, the research is rather recent, it does not benefit from the improvements brought by testing and iterations.

## **6. Conclusions**

### **6.1 Overview**

The future of work will look differently in the next five years due to the transformations that are presently felt, regarding the crises generated by unexpected situations. These crises are in their turn generators of opportunities. To educate the future generations to continuously adapt to change, personalisation of the requalification programs will be needed, as well as a different approach to the report to everyday work. This need is also felt in the context of the transition from a scalar economy to a symbolic one, in which the business strategies are built around the real values and need of the consumers and require both human and technological competencies to be successfully implemented in the new virtual worlds. Creativity is an often-used instrument in solving complex problems, and there will be more and more need of employees with creative abilities to generate innovative solutions across all industries.

Presently, the biggest challenge for the creative talent is to find a way through which to become interdependent through the identification of the proper technology that would complete their skillset and will support them in their future professional choices.

In conclusion, the upskilling of creative talent in the context of the new economy first refers to the alignment of their values with their personal mission and community service, through new forms of work. The tasks are delivered through processes of co-creation and collaboration between creative and technological communities. The process of pivoting in a career also requires a knowledge of the ecosystem of the new technologies, of the VR, AR, and XR type, and of the

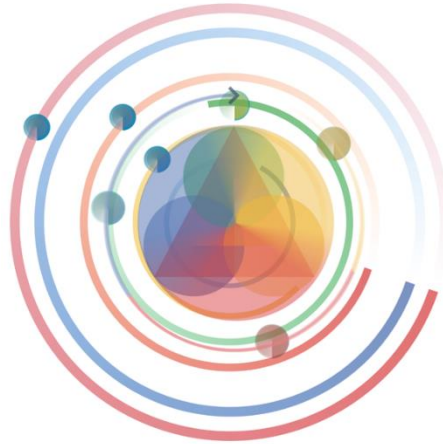


instruments with which the new reality will be built: the metaverse. These instruments are momentarily accessible through games, platforms, and apps, and become more and more easy to use, facilitating the evolution of the creative economy.

## 6.2 Future Steps

To enhance the current methodology, the future steps that would need to be taken are methodological testing with various groups of multi-skilled creative individuals, as well as further iteration based on the new findings and repeated testing.

**Figure 4. Future Jobs Design Methodology**



Source: Author's personal contribution.

## References

- [1] Bakker, A.B., Scharp, Y.S., Breevaart, K., de Vries, J.D. (2020), Playful work design: Introduction of a new concept, *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 23, e19, doi: 10.1017/SJP.2020.20.
- [2] Cárdenas-Muñoz, M., Campos-Blázquez, J.R. (2023). Towards an integrated definition of job crafting, *Intangible Capital*, 19(1), 42-54, <https://doi.org/10.3926/ic.2107>.
- [3] Colin, L., Le Grand, J.-L. (2008). *L'éducation tout au long de la vie*, Paris, Ed. Economica.
- [4] Dandara, O. (2014). Career education in the context of lifelong learning, *CIEA 2014*, Elsevier Ltd.
- [5] Keegan, B., Canhoto, A., Yen, D. (2022). Power negotiation on the tango dancefloor: The adoption of AI in B2B marketing, *Industrial Marketing Management*, 100(2022), 36-48.
- [6] Liedtka, J., Ogilvie, T. (2011). Designing for growth: a design thinking tool kit for managers, *Columbia Business School Publishing*, New York.

- [7] Reiche, B.S. (2023). Between interdependence and autonomy: Toward a typology of work design modes in the new world of work, *Human Resource Management Journal*, 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12495>.
- [8] Stankevičiūtė, Ž. (2023). Job Design for Human and Organisational Sustainability in the Context of Emerging Technologies, *Sustainability*, 15, 4438, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15054438>.
- [9] Zhi, L., Cheng, R., Xianyou, L., Zachary, A. P. (2021). Learning Skill Equivalencies Across Platform Taxonomies. In LAK21: *11<sup>th</sup> International Learning Analytics and Knowledge Conference (LAK21)*, April 12-16, Irvine, CA, USA, ACM, New York, NY, USA, 10 pages, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3448139.3448173>.
- [10] Guy, N. (2021). Skills Taxonomy: Unlocking the Benefits of a Skills-Based Approach. <https://www.aihr.com/blog/skills-taxonomy/>.