

# Career Agility



# Career Agility:

## *Strategies for Success*

By

Fiona Elsa Dent,  
Patricia Hind  
and Viki Holton

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## FOREWORD

The world around us is in constant flux, and we have become used to the idea that our jobs and careers will be influenced by external factors. Now more than ever we must be ready for change. The world and life we had all become used to changed dramatically with the advent of Covid 19 during the first three months of 2020.

When we first started researching and writing this book in 2019 employment was high, unemployment low, and the economic forecasts seemed predictable. As far as careers were concerned, within certain parameters there was a degree of choice, and overall, many of us had freedom to carve out a life in general and a working life to suit our needs and situation. Some of the major events on our horizon at the beginning of our writing process were the impact of BREXIT, climate change, and the redistribution of economic power from West to East (among other world events) on the UK economy and job environment. We knew then that these factors highlighted the need for people to take personal control of their careers

In late March 2020 it began to dawn on the whole world that the ‘constant change’ we had become used to talking of was taking on hugely different proportions. Covid 19 means we are living in times that are on a different scale in terms of economic and social challenges. It has brought a whole new meaning to the often referred to concept of the VUCA world (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous). Now everyone has an appreciation of what this **really** means.

It is easy to list the things we took for granted living in the developed world in the twenty first century.

- Freedom to travel pretty well anywhere we want. We had already taken for granted that we could travel easily around the world for either business or pleasure.
- Socialising with people in the environments we choose – in our homes, in restaurants, pubs, theatres, cinemas, sports events, etc....
- Commuting to work daily

- In the developed world, we had reliable supply chains, yet our access to the basic commodities of life were threatened overnight.
- Although prior to Covid – 19 we were talking of the ‘death of the high street’, and the retail sector was struggling to survive, we did have easy access to the ‘retail therapy’ many of us used to enjoy on a regular basis. This is no longer the case.
- Work typically involved travelling to our base and spending time in our workplace happily rubbing shoulders with our colleagues – now we must ‘socially distance’ if we are in a workplace or alternatively work from home. That is of course if you have retained your job and are not furloughed, made redundant or unable to work for some other reason.

Many people have already demonstrated a degree of agility during this period by adapting and flexing how they perform their jobs, however, the following examples show how important it is that the mindset and skills of agility are developed for the long term – they rarely offer a quick fix to the seismic dilemmas faced today.

- GPs have adopted more video and telephone technology to undertake initial consultations thus negating the need for many to attend the surgery and enabling them to spend longer with each patient. For many GPs this has been a move that should have come along anyway, but the pandemic proved to be the catalyst that made it happen.
- Independent coffee shops and cafes developed take away and home delivery services. This has enabled them to continue to offer services to their communities, yet it is unclear whether they will be able to return to a full complement of employees.
- We have also heard that in many environments, decisions about processes and strategies that would have taken months or even years to make were made speedily and efficiently to enable new processes to begin.
- Despite the creativity of the sector, the cultural industries face long term issues. TV, theatres and cinemas have been quick to offer their existing productions online, yet the difficulties of developing new productions and shows have not yet been resolved. Without new material in the pipeline to generate income in the short term, the future remains insecure.
- Universities have been quick to adopt technological solutions to delivering their programmes. This has upskilled many ‘traditional’



lecturers who have rapidly become familiar with on - line delivery, which has proved beneficial. However, there remains the challenge of modifying a business model which has always been dependent on student attendance and face to face education.

So, how do we, as individuals, manage our careers against this background? We believe that more than ever before we will have to be agile in how we manage our working lives. We have all had different experiences of this rather surreal time in our lives – some of us may be:

- Questioning why we do what we do workwise – perhaps having had the time to reflect and review during lockdown.
- Recognising that their working environment has changed forever – how will that appeal to them – for instance, working from home more regularly than previously.
- Facing the fact that their job has disappeared forever.

Some of us may be recognising that now is the time for change. This perfect storm of events provides the opportunity for many of us to recalibrate what we want to achieve and to offer in our work and our lives in general. As you are thinking about your work or career, we hope that our book will give you a structure to assist you in the process and help you on your journey.

Fiona Dent, Patricia Hind, Viki Holton



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

***“Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day  
in your life.”***

**Attributed to Confucius**

Idealistic words perhaps, however, we believe that too many people settle for mediocrity in their working life rather than seeking out work that suits their particular set of skills, abilities and needs. So, ask yourself a few questions: is your job

- Meeting your expectations?
- Fulfilling your dreams?
- Letting you enjoy the lifestyle you aspire to?

If the answer to these questions is yes, please either buy this book for a friend or buy it for yourself as an investment for the future should anything change. If, however, you answered in the negative – then read on. This book will help you to understand what you value most in your working life as well as offering you many practical exercises and insights that will help you to take control of your career.

We all know that the future of work is rapidly changing. Most of us will have to or choose to work longer. For many it will be to fund later life and a happy retirement. In addition to this and with the increase in life expectancy many of us will choose to work longer for our own wellbeing, for economic benefit and for the social and intellectual stimuli provided. The rise of older workers is not only evident within the UK. Over the past decade, except in the US, data from the OECD indicates that the proportion of older employees has risen in the developed world.

Some of the significant changes that we perceive which affect the future of work and career/job choices include:

- The impact and speed of technological change
- The gig economy
- The reduction of loyalty to a single employer and demise of the job for life
- The ongoing changing nature of the global economy
- Major geographical and political events such as BREXIT
- Organisational downsizing, outsourcing and merging
- Social and cultural changes – for instance changing family structures and the one-hundred-year life.
- Access to education
- The COVID 19 pandemic
- Economic recession.

So, many of us are finding ourselves in multiple different careers and jobs throughout our working life – hence the need for what we have called ‘career agility’. By career agility what we mean is the ability and the mindset to grasp opportunities and enjoy a positive and proactive response to the changing and evolving job environment. There was a time when careers moved in a linear direction, with just a few, or even just one, employer throughout a working life and a focus in one career area. This scenario no longer applies, which means that career and job decision-making has never been more crucial and has become rather more complex than it has been for previous generations. With this in mind, and whatever stage we are at in our working lives we must be mindful of the impact of each career decision we make (or fail to make) and how it might affect any future decisions.

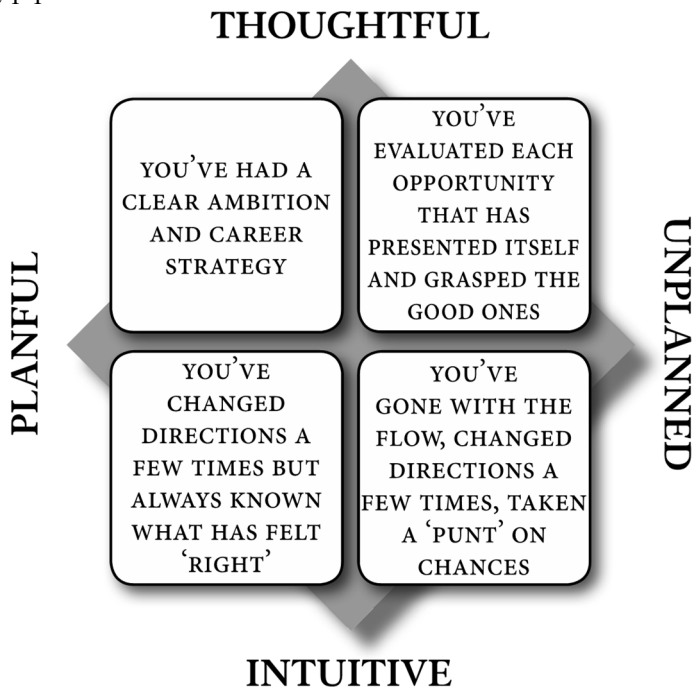
Throughout our lives we face a variety of different job - related challenges. In our roles as trainers, researchers and executive coaches we have heard many different stories about career dilemmas. Some have happy endings; some do not. We do know though that these dilemmas cut across different sectors, countries and nationalities. We have used these stories, and research interviews we conducted during 2019 with a wide range of individuals from all walks of life representing many different sectors, roles, career stages and ages, to compile this book.

The stories are many and varied, illustrating that we are all unique in our lives and our approach to our career and job. There is no set template to follow that will guarantee success, but in this book, we can offer you practical frameworks, tools and techniques to use throughout the rest of your career. Think about your career as a journey or a recipe. In both cases

there are goals and essential ingredients for success and yet there are also options for different routes or (for recipes) different flavours. We believe that the obvious or quickest route on a journey is not always the most effective and, as with a recipe, two chefs presented with the same ingredients will often produce wildly different results. For instance, we would point you to the many television cooking programmes like “The Great British Bake Off” to witness the very different results that can be produced.

You might like to consider how you have approached your career or job choices so far? Which of these boxes describes your approach best?

Figure 1-1



## CAREER APPROACHES

By **unplanned** we mean that you have just ‘gone with the flow’, based on what your employers offer and other opportunities that present

themselves. It often means a passive approach where things just happen to you – sometimes these will be great, lucky events but not necessarily.

**Planful** is a far more engaged, active style that means a more careful consideration of options with awareness of your own values, motivations and career ideals.

**Thoughtful** is when you have done your research and have taken an objective overview and worked out a strategy to achieve your goal.

**Intuitive** is when you get a gut feel about what will work for you without overthinking and analysing.

It may not have been easy to choose one of those boxes which represents your whole working life. Many people will be somewhere in between, or in different boxes at different times. But we would encourage you to always ask yourselves the questions ‘which box am I in’ and ‘which box do I want to be in’ as you approach a career decision. It is essential to factor in ‘reflection’ time, to step back and weigh up carefully what’s on offer, what is likely to happen as a result and do you want this? Try to be honest with yourself and to look forward. What else might happen as a result of your choices? For example, what’s the impact not just on you but on your loved ones? What is the impact on your overall career goals, is this likely to help you achieve these?

Our belief is that in an ideal world the more thoughtful you are about your decisions the more satisfactory the short and long-term outcomes will be. Just to be clear about this, we are not advocating plans that are set in stone and rigid but rather we are promoting ideas to help you broaden your horizons and take a more holistic approach to managing your career or job future. Let us show you what we mean with an example of what this difference might mean:

*Harry spent his twenties and early thirties as a flotilla skipper, and freelance yacht skipper, a life he absolutely loved. He was an extremely talented yachtsman, popular with clients and very competent professionally. On his travels, he met his future wife, another lover of sailing, but also an ambitious entrepreneur. A couple of years after they married, Harry’s travelling career was no longer fitting in with the life they wanted as a couple. Just as he began searching for a suitable land-*

*based job, he immediately came across an opportunity to work for the builders of large, luxury yachts as a salesman.*

*This seemed a great fit with his past life, and so he jumped at the role. Sadly, the gulf between sailing and selling proved huge and the move was not a success. Although personable and knowledgeable, Harry's love of yachts did not translate into commissions and the new career eventually led to a voluntary redundancy. At a loss as to what direction to take, Harry accepted the offer of outplacement consultancy as part of his redundancy package. This was thorough and detailed, involving meetings, analysis and advice over a six-month period. Key features of Harry's personality that were relevant to his working life were a love of working with and helping others along with other features that led the consultant to suggest that he consider joining the Ambulance service.*

*Harry applied, was accepted and began his new career almost a year after leaving the sales team. He enjoyed it so much that after two years he applied to train as a full paramedic. Two further years on and he is now immersed in, and loves, this new role – it took nearly five years to get there.*

This is a real example of someone's recent career transition and illustrates how with a bit of help, some analysis and retraining it is possible to replace the job of your dreams with another different role that you also love. We'll be sharing many such examples with you throughout the book and hope that you'll find some time to reflect about your own experiences.

In this book the real-life stories we have heard, together with our own research and experience, underpin the practical tools, techniques, exercises and examples we offer to help you in your career or job journey. So, whether you are fiercely ambitious or indifferent, whether you are at the beginning, middle or towards the final stages of your career journey, whether you think about your working life simply as a series of jobs (rather than 'career'), this book is designed to support you.

Remember, if your own working life involves some responsibility for the careers of others, it is equally important that you need to understand the options and consequences of their job-related decisions. In all these circumstances this book will help you to:

- Take charge of your working life and proactively curate your expertise and skills.
- Challenge and question your assumptions and to think more broadly about your career opportunities and options.
- Be more aware of what you want from your working life.
- Take better decisions in relation to your career and job progression.
- Evaluate where you are today, and how you got there.
- Identify your key strengths and weaknesses by doing a personal audit. And if you have never done this before, it is a fascinating reveal, if you have done one before, noticing any changes is often very revealing.
- Raise your awareness of some of the career dilemmas you might face in your career journey.
- Appreciate some of the values that impact on your ‘ideal’ career. We all have values, it’s just that sometimes they stay dormant until an unexpected event brings them into the foreground.
- Be more aware of the contemporary demands on employees and how this affects your wellbeing and work life balance.

This book is relevant to anyone no matter your gender, age or occupation who wants to make the best of their working life in any working environment at any level in their organisation.

- It is a valuable resource for anyone thinking of revitalising or rebooting your career or for helping others to do this.
- It includes exercises and examples in a practical workbook style.

Many of us spend too much time with our heads down, busy working and too little time reflecting on our values and where we want to go on our career journey. This book will help you stop, reflect, plan for the future and then of course, hold you accountable for the changes you need to make.

Later in this introduction we set out the structure of the book – you can decide where to dive in or you can read through in the more traditional way of chapter one, chapter two, etc., right to the end. Either way will be fine.



## OUR RESEARCH

Our research was based on a range of interviews with people at many different stages of their working life, in many different job roles and working in many different organisational contexts. We also read widely to gather contemporary issues and trends. We have shared our reading list in the references section at the end of the book.

We have drawn five key insights from our research. Careers are successful when people:

- Stay focused – too many of us just ‘switch off’ in terms of thinking about our careers when we get to a place we are reasonably happy with. This can lead to ‘career drift’. We think most about our careers when we’re dissatisfied, just about to leave, or on a job hunt. We should be continually monitoring, reviewing and planning in order to stay career agile.
- Are prepared to be flexible – don’t assume that what you do now is what you must always do. The phrase ‘think out of the box’ is becoming more and more relevant to organisational structures and job roles. Complacency is the enemy of career agility!
- Are holistic when thinking about our careers. It’s not just about you! What will work best for you, your nearest and dearest and the situation in which you find yourself. This does not mean that you must always compromise. What is best for you may also be best for them, but you really need to consider the big picture, what is possible, plus what will be the probable outcomes of your decisions?
- Are playful. A big generalisation here – but, people do not tend to plan enough for their careers. Opportunism is rife, and short-term options and solutions are often as far as people get. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing as it is the essence of agility, but it needs to be strategic!
- Reach out for help. Successful careers are often those where the individual has sought, and received support from those around them, including their employer. Career agility embraces partnerships, with networks, families and employers to optimise opportunities, contacts

and skills. It also requires that you be consciously aware of developments and changes in your working environment.

## OUR POINT OF VIEW

Most of us spend most of our lives in organisations of some sort – including families, friendship groups and communities and in particular, the workplace organisations in which we invest blood, sweat, and, on some occasions, tears. We believe that each of us has a responsibility to ensure that our working lives deliver the value that our organisations need from us. We believe as well that, in return, we should receive value that contributes to our identities, our life satisfaction, and our ability to care for and support others. Even if, in the model in figure 1, you choose to ‘go with the flow’ when it comes to career choices, this in itself is a decision that you should be comfortable with as the consequences of that option can be as far reaching as any high-powered career development plan.

Therefore, we offer you this book with the key message of understanding that this is your life – the more you know what you want and plan how to achieve it, the more likely it is that you will reach the holy grail of job and life satisfaction. Wherever you are in your working life at the moment, if you find you’re at any sort of crossroads, we believe that taking time for active reflection on who **you** are and what **you** want will help you to make the right decisions.

We also believe that in order to cope with the twenty first century working environment we must all be more agile and flexible in our approach to managing our careers long-term. In the past many people have selected a career path in one particular job field, profession or organisation growing and gaining experience over the years. In today’s more complex and fast changing business and working world the pace of change in organisations and indeed in many career and job areas is much faster than it used to be. Traditional career paths are constantly being eroded and challenged. For us this means that individuals must take account, in a more holistic and opportunistic way, of the career/job landscape. This means regularly taking part in career/job reviews to determine whether or not your current role and path is appropriate.

Career agility means responding to change and evolving job roles. To be agile individuals must be more aware of their key skills, strengths and

development needs so that they can adapt accordingly. No longer climbing a single solid career ladder but rather people must respond to changes, taking and making opportunities that suit their capabilities rather than sticking to a rigid career plan. So, change your mindset and think of your career as a journey through a series of individual stages or projects where you are constantly gaining new skills and learning and recognising that you might have to move or change in a significant way at any point in the process.

## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Throughout this book, our aim is to present you with a practical toolkit to enable you to analyse, review and reflect about your career or job journey in order that you can make good quality decisions based on the information you have at any point in time.

The exercises in the book are numbered sequentially throughout. In each case we have provided you with space to make brief notes, though you may prefer to have your own separate career workbook either online or in a notebook. This, of course, is a personal choice, but we have found when coaching others that capturing your ideas and reflections at the time is a crucial part of moving your thinking forward. It also enables you to have a clear record of your thinking and to hold yourself to account for future actions.

Following this introduction, Chapter Two explores what we have called ‘career predicaments’. We think of a predicament as

*‘a situation that is challenging to move on from or a confusing situation that is difficult to get out of or solve’.*

In career terms, this means that your job may not be meeting your needs, helping you to fulfil your ambitions or just simply not interesting you any longer. As we spend so much of our lives at work, it’s obviously important to resolve such a situation and that is what this book aims to do.

In Chapter Three we consider some of the technical, social and economic changes that have transformed the working world. Whilst often out of our personal control, these changes nevertheless have a direct influence upon us. A better understanding of this background can help you

to see your career options more clearly and, importantly, help you to ‘future proof’ your skill set in a world of continual and fast-moving change.

Chapter Four brings this wider context back down to a more personal level. We explore here the interlinked factors that create the tapestry of our lives, against which we play out our working lives. Here we’ll be talking about things like the impact of living and working in a dual career family, experiencing redundancy and the importance of a good work life balance. These are issues that affect us all and can have significant impact on the satisfaction and fulfilment we can get from our working lives.

In Chapter Five, we focus on helping you understand yourself, where you are now in your career and how you got there. In this chapter we take a close look at your strengths and your ‘areas for development’ in terms of the skills and values that you bring to your career. We know that self-awareness is often the key to success in that it helps us to articulate our principles, what we want from our work, and why this is important to us.

Such reflection is not at all self-indulgent. It’s important to fully understand the value we can give to, and the value we can get from our jobs in order to make sure that we maximise both – a one-way trade is miserable!

*‘Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven’t found it yet, keep looking. Don’t settle. As with all matters of the heart, you’ll know when you find it’*

*Steve Jobs*

This chapter is very practical and continues with the range of reflective checkpoints that have featured in the rest of the book. These are the short practical exercises to help you explore your career strategies and to develop the self-awareness to provide a foundation for great career decisions.

Just a little word of warning here – we won’t be letting you confuse your dreams with reality. Throughout the book, we’ll be keeping your feet firmly on the ground – we want you to be fulfilled, not frustrated. If you really wanted to be the next Wimbledon champion, you may have needed to start some years ago!

So, moving on. In Chapter Six we concentrate on helping you to Find the Way Forward. By this we mean we help you to bring together all your understanding and insights from the previous chapters to formulate a practical action plan to help you not only resolve your current predicaments, but to articulate your vision for a meaningful future career. In our experience, too many people are maybe not actually unhappy at work, but certainly unfulfilled and perhaps feeling like a square peg in a round hole. By the time you have worked through this chapter, you will have a blueprint for your future, whether that means wholesale change or incremental tweaks to improve things.

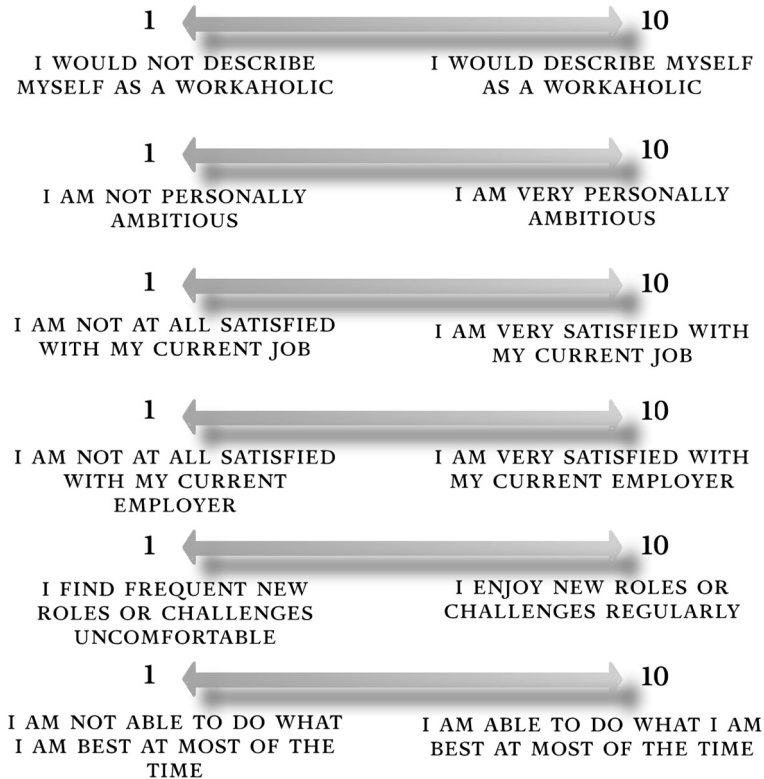


## REFLECTIVE CHECKPOINT 1: IDENTIFYING YOUR CAREER TRIBE

As a starter and before you delve into the detail you might find it interesting to consider the following questions.

Let's start with a broad-brush review of how you perceive your career to date – what is your career profile? Indicate on the scales below where you believe you are at the moment with regard to your career or job. Indicate with a cross or tick which end of the spectrum you are closest to. You can use the midpoint as well – but please be honest with yourself!

Fig 1.2



Using this profile will help to reveal your career tribe – a high level description of your general approach to your career, as shown by the five thumbnail examples below. Use the final box in the chart below to define your career tribe and identify challenges and what you would like to change. This will provide you with a reference point for further reflections.

Table 1.1

|  |
|--|
| <b>Career flourisher:</b> This individual is in the happy position of having found something they are good at doing and being allowed to do it. They feel they are being rewarded and developed appropriately, with a career path ahead of them. They are able to deliver of their best and for now this is a great place to be. |
| <b>Shape and tweaker:</b> Here we have a person who is happy with a reasonably high level of satisfaction with their job. You have ambition, influence and control. You love making things happen and are given the opportunity to do it. However, career opportunities here may be limited and may not suit you for ever.       |
| <b>Give it a go-er:</b> This individual has confidence, chutzpah and energy, a great profile for a budding entrepreneur. Care should be taken about realistic ambitions. Sometimes this person does not always give employers or jobs a chance, so job hopping becomes a habit.  |
| <b>Middle of the roader:</b> This person is fairly comfortable at work, maybe fading into complacency. Ambitions may have been compromised.  |
| <b>Career bystander:</b> This person is disenchanted with their career job or actually find most of their life satisfaction outside their job. In their working life they do just enough to get by.  |
| <b>I would describe my Career Tribe as:</b>  |
| <b>How does this make you feel? What insights does it give you about yourself? Do you want to keep your membership of this tribe or do you want to join another?</b>   |

The remainder of this book will take you on a deeper journey of reflection and understanding of your unique career needs.



# CHAPTER TWO

## CAREER DILEMMAS AND PREDICAMENTS

*“The predicament that you are in, does not define your destiny.”*  
—Anthony Davis

### INTRODUCTION

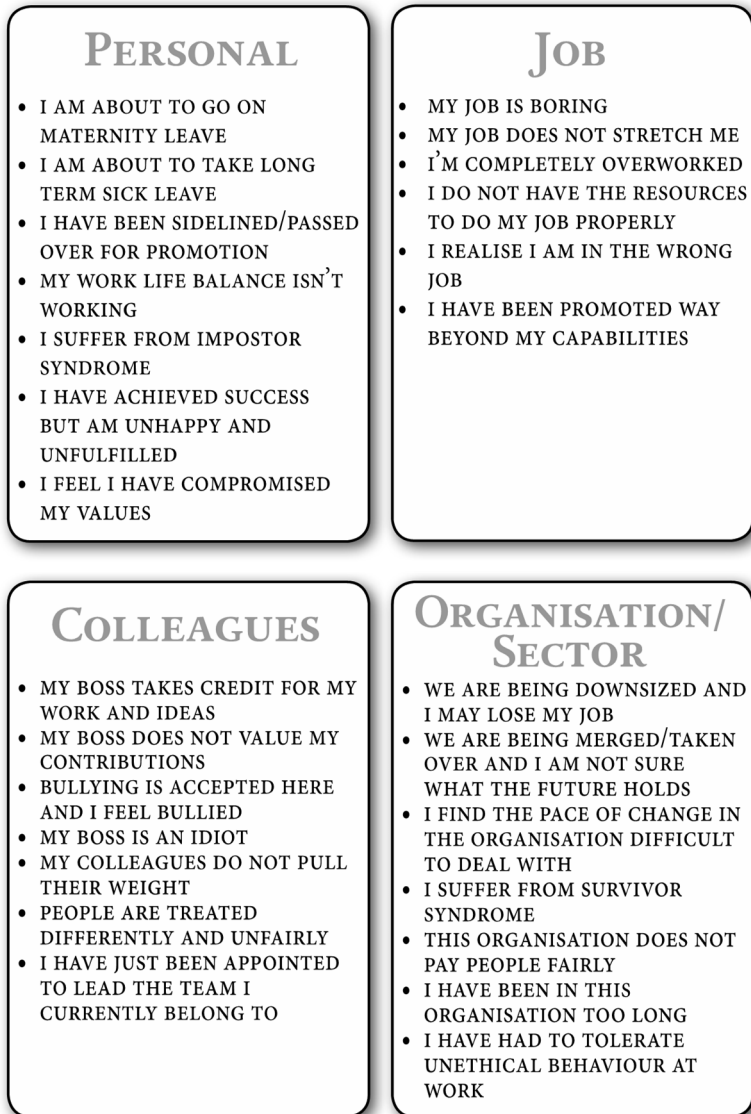
During our research process many people spoke to us of the broader social, technical and economic changes that are affecting the current employment landscape.

We heard that these changes sometimes provoke career predicaments. Our definition of dilemmas is a situation that requires a challenging decision and a predicament is a difficult situation that is not easy to manoeuvre. We have categorised these into two areas:

- The broader context – this section covers the types of predicaments and dilemmas that are universal and environmental.
- The personal context – this section covers the issues associated with an individual’s personal choices throughout the different stages of their life.

The model below highlights four different categories of the various dilemmas and predicaments people told us about, with a few examples in each, you may be able to think of others. Use the chart below to highlight those that apply to you.

Fig. 2-1



Let's examine each of the categories in a little more detail with examples of each.

• **Personal predicaments** tend to be influenced by life events, personality and our personal expectations of work and working life. These are often intertwined with our life stages, our social networks, our family responsibilities and educational opportunities. It's very easy to become 'blinkered' and to make assumptions about what we can and can't do, based on the way we interpret our experiences. Often a new perspective or a 'reframing' of our perceptions can help us to find a way over seemingly insurmountable career hurdles. An example would be

*Mr. A who felt he had reached a dead end in his current career, having been passed over for promotion. He was very demotivated feeling his career was over at 53. His dilemma was whether to take the easy road and sink into complacency or to reappraise and take control. With the help of a career coach he was able to add a developmental dimension to his existing role, mentoring and training others, which revitalised him and added real value back into the organisation.*

Do you think of your skills as adequate compared with others at your level? If so, you are probably keen to learn from feedback about your performance, and welcome challenging new tasks, expect rewards for good performance and are generally comfortable where you are. However, people who have doubts about their skills might avoid feedback and feel undermined by critical evaluations. They may not initiate new activities, might 'play safe' and might be perceived as being a weak contributor to the organisation, although they may be capable of achieving a great deal. The phrase 'imposter syndrome' describes this well and is common in both men and women. It applies when individuals feel they are somehow undeserving of, or unqualified for the position they have achieved.

*Dan, an entrepreneur, took the plunge after some 20 years of corporate life. He now has a small graphic design business which has some loyal clients but was not growing as fast as his talents might suggest. The issue here is that Dan is completely self-taught and often worries that others are aware of his lack of qualifications. The consequence of this is that his competitors often win business as his pitch lacks confidence and he is not well connected due to his reluctance to engage in and network at professional gatherings. His predicament is how to overcome the imposter syndrome that he knows is holding him back. He is managing this by engaging a life coach, who is working with him on his confidence levels.*

• **Job predicaments** can be related to the organisation's culture and values as well as how much control you have or have had in determining your own path. People often hesitate to speak out on such issues, as it may be career limiting to complain about and challenge the status quo. It is often helpful here to do a deep dive into your own career values, to see how aligned they are with those of the organisation. For example,

*Ros was a stylist at an independent hairdressing salon and whilst the job initially represented achieving a lifelong ambition, and was interesting for the first two years, it became humdrum and lacking in challenge for Ros. Her predicament was she felt she had stopped learning, which was important to her, yet this did not seem to bother her colleagues. She found she was investing less of her energy and considerable skill in serving her customers and helping to develop other staff. With her employers' agreement, she studied for, and passed an intensive and advanced course in the latest hair colour technology. Newly qualified as an expert in her field, Ros found her job satisfaction returning and in fact, was promoted to management quite quickly after this.*

Another predicament in this area might be whether you are allowed to take decisions and responsibility, or whether you have to seek permission, toe the organisational line and follow predefined processes? How much the tensions between these options are in conflict with your sense of individuality and capability will determine whether this is a predicament you may find yourself in.

*An illustration of this comes from a data analyst whose career had been with international companies where she had managed large departments and had a big team of direct reports. Making the decision to relocate for personal reasons, she found herself reporting to a micro manager who valued her analytical skills but would not recognise her management and decision-making experience. Should she put up with this or return to a long and gruelling daily commute? She felt trapped. She managed the predicament by refusing to become stuck where she was. Over several months, she proactively approached larger companies who needed her skills and eventually was able to secure a role which allowed her to work from home two days a week.*

- As we conducted the research for this book **colleague predicaments** were often mentioned. These tend to be about the quality of relationships within teams, between individuals and their bosses, and with peer groups. Human beings are social animals and good working relationships make all the difference to our wellbeing and levels of engagement in our jobs. We were struck, several times by the importance attributed to mutual respect between colleagues.

*We heard one story of a recently qualified accountant, Mohammed, who, whilst settling well into corporate life in a prestigious partnership felt that one of his colleagues was undermining his confidence by interrupting him and contradicting him in meetings. Whilst this seemed too petty to 'surface' with managers, over a period of time he felt increasingly undermined and undervalued. His dilemma was that he began to doubt himself and question whether he was able to fulfil his potential. A long conversation with an old University friend helped him to recognise he could actually leave the company and seek a fresh start elsewhere. Although he was lucky enough to be able to do this, he realised that he should have tackled the problem much earlier.*

Predicaments in this area can also be about a particular boss or colleague who assumes that telepathy between him/herself and direct reports is effective!

*One senior academic we interviewed had spent almost a year designing a master's programme for inclusion in the institution's portfolio the following year. However, in an about turn, his Head of Department aligned herself with the marketing department, who disagreed with the programme's potential and the programme was withdrawn. Our interviewee had invested a great deal of time in the development phase and had committed delivery time to the project as well. His predicament then how was to re-establish both a personal, and organisational, sense of value. You may recognise this example as being fairly typical in siloed organisations.*

• **Organisation/Sector predicaments** can broadly reflect the environment facing the organisation or be much narrower and more focused on things like the personality, values and behaviour of the CEO and his or her team. It's easy to identify certain job roles or sectors that are under pressure. For example, The National Education Union in 2019 surveyed 8,600 teachers asking, "Where do you see yourself in five years' time?" Forty per cent said that they would no longer be working in education highlighting the problems caused by excessive accountability, huge workloads and a culture of fear in some schools. Little wonder that so many people wish to leave.

### **The same is true for many working in the health service**

*Sarah was an experienced and well qualified doctor who had worked in general practice for over 10 years. She quite suddenly decided to resign from her partnership in the practice. Many different reasons contributed to her predicament – bureaucracy in the NHS, constantly changing and unachievable targets and above all else her inability to deliver high quality patient care. An added complexity was the impact it was increasingly having on family life. Her resolution was to restructure her medical career so that she could have more control and flexibility, be able to offer a level of care in line with her values and still do the job she loved. In essence she is moving ahead with a portfolio career in medicine.*

So, think about your organisation's culture. What is valued most – collaboration or competition? If your values are mainly collaborative and you enjoy working in alliances, achieving together yet your organisation operates a competitive environment with winners and losers, this will be hard for you to reconcile.

*One of our interviewees told us of when she worked in the City of London for a leading financial institution. Despite the prestige associated with securing a job there, the constant pressure to achieve individual targets did not fit her preference for working collegiately. After several stressful months, she realised that she was hating her job. Her predicament was whether to sacrifice her health or her significant salary and enviable standard of living.*