

# Beyond Generation Jobless: Successfully Navigating the School-to-Work Transition

April Dyrda, M.Sc.

University of Calgary

Werklund School of Education

[ajdyrda@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ajdyrda@ucalgary.ca)



# The Background



# What We Know

University graduates are experiencing higher un(der)employment rates than ever before

- 1 in 5 are without work (more than double the national average)
- 40% of employed graduates are overqualified for the work they are doing

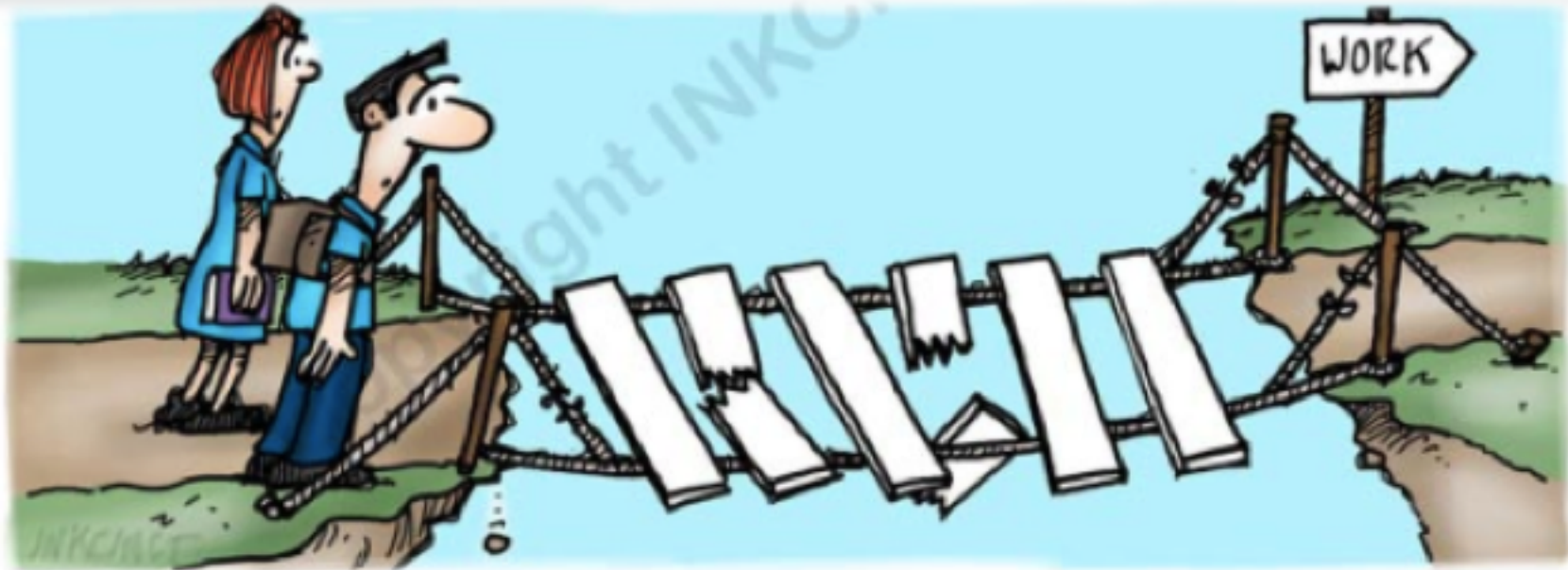


# What We Know

Costs associated with un(der)employment include:

- Loss of skills, knowledge, abilities, diminished current and life-long income
- Deteriorating motivation, self-efficacy, and optimism

# What We Know



SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION CROSSING

# What We Don't Know Yet



<https://joabo42.deviantart.com/art/Missing-the-Bigger-Picture-54004068>



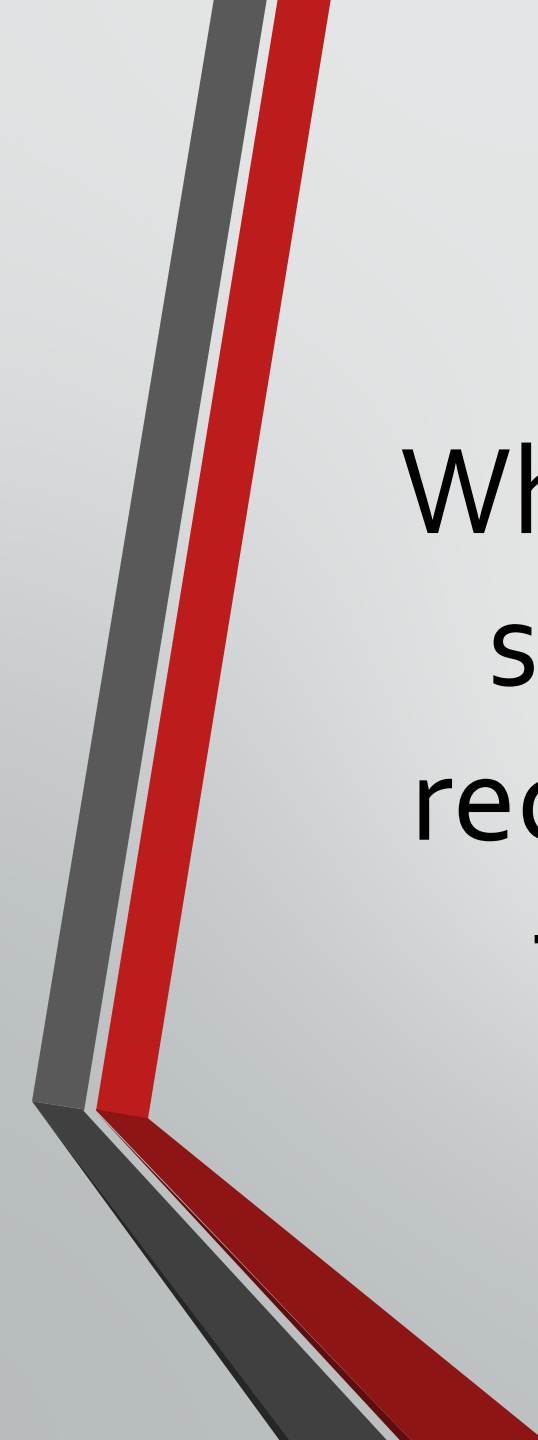
# What We Don't Know Yet

- The perspectives of recent graduates themselves
- Pre-employment outcomes that reflect our current economic state
- The diversity of influences on the job search process



# The Research





What attributions are made about job search **successes** and **struggles** by recent university graduates who have found **meaningful** employment?



# Objectives

- Further an understanding of how meaningfully employed graduates are approaching the job search in a post-recession economy
- Identify internal / external influences perceived to help the process of finding employment



# Methods

- Conducted semi-structured interviews with eight meaningfully employed recent graduates of degree-granting institutions
- Identified factors that recent graduates said helped, hindered, or would have helped their ability to find meaningful employment
- Analyzed data using the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT)



# The Findings

Category	Frequency (n)	Participation Rate (%)
<b>Previous Experience</b>		
Academic	6	63
Occupational	14	100
Personal Learning	5	50
Perceived	3	38
<b>Connections</b>		
Network	16	100
Networking	6	50
<b>Personal Qualities</b>		
Concern	9	63
Control	15	63
Curiosity	17	88
Confidence	7	63
<b>Unexpected Opportunity</b>	5	63
<b>Labour Market Conditions</b>	7	63
<b>Logistical Skills</b>	21	100

# Experience

- Educational, occupational, personal learning, and perceived experience
- Important to the extent that it differentiates oneself from other applicants

“That was a big factor in them hiring me over someone who just wanted to do the regular stuff... Having that extra experience is going to make them more likely to pick me. Everybody goes through school, everybody graduates, and they want to see that you can do more.”

# Connections

- Weak ties: provided information about “unique” job opportunities
- Strong ties: connected recent graduates to specific job offers

“I always go with it’s all who you know, it’s your network... The job that I was applying for at the time hadn’t been posted to the general public, so it was more of an internal thing... That was the only way it was going to happen.



# Personal Qualities

- **Concern** – proactivity and forward thinking
- **Control** – self determination and decision-making
- **Curiosity** – flexibility towards work opportunities
- **Confidence** – self-confidence and self-efficacy about finding work



# Unexpected Opportunity

- Chance or change events, happenstance, serendipity
- “Luck readiness” (Bright & Pryor, 2011)

“ I think I’m a bit of a phenomenon and I’m going to thank my lucky stars because I don’t know how it happened. I think it was just happenstance. Honestly, it’s all just chance. In a lot of ways, I am a lucky graduate.

# Labour Market Conditions

- Recent graduates as particularly disadvantaged
- Low level of supply and high level of demand

“The labour market is swarmed with people. Employers can have the pick of the best. It's not a low skill labour market. There are so many people looking for jobs that are well-qualified people – engineers, chartered accountants, people with master's degrees – so you're competing with very skilled people.


# Logistical Skills

- Strong cover letter, resume, and/or interview
- Most critical component impacting whether graduates secure employment

“If it got across the right eyes, seeing a cover letter and resume that was more tailored to their job posting might have grabbed their attention to set me aside in their interview pile.”



# The Implications

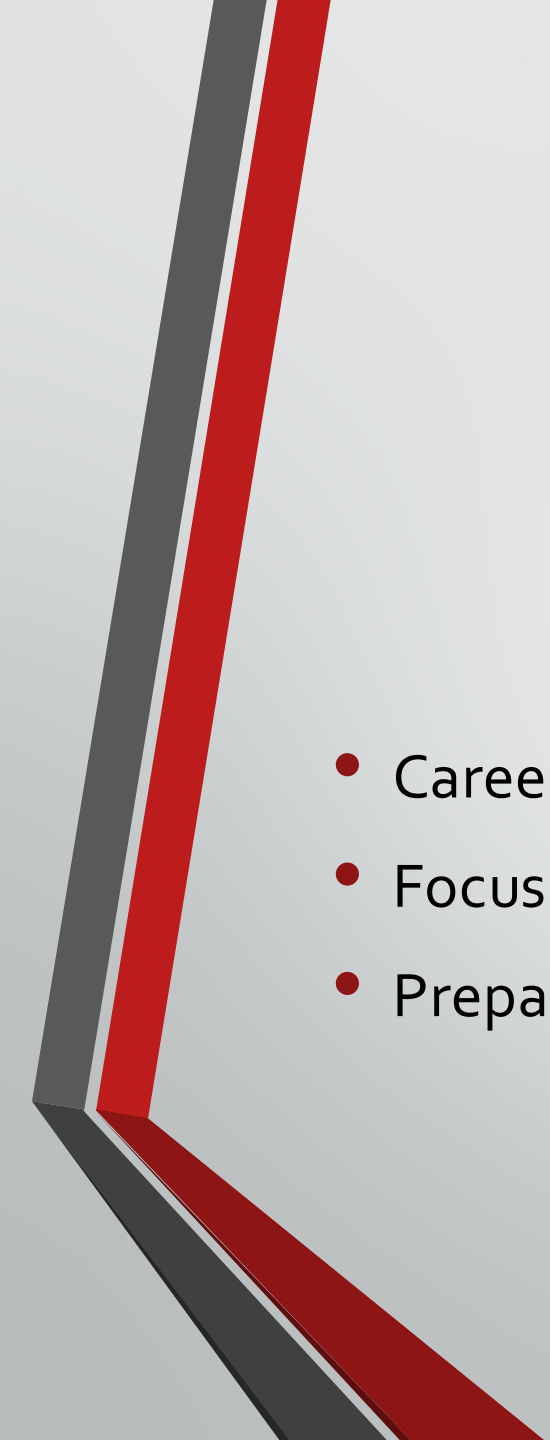


Based on these findings...  
What implications do you see **for your  
own work** with this population?



# Present a **realistic** image of the job search process

- Educate clients on what the job search process looks like in practice
- Dispel common job search myths to develop more accurate expectations



## Define career preparation as a **process** rather than an **outcome**

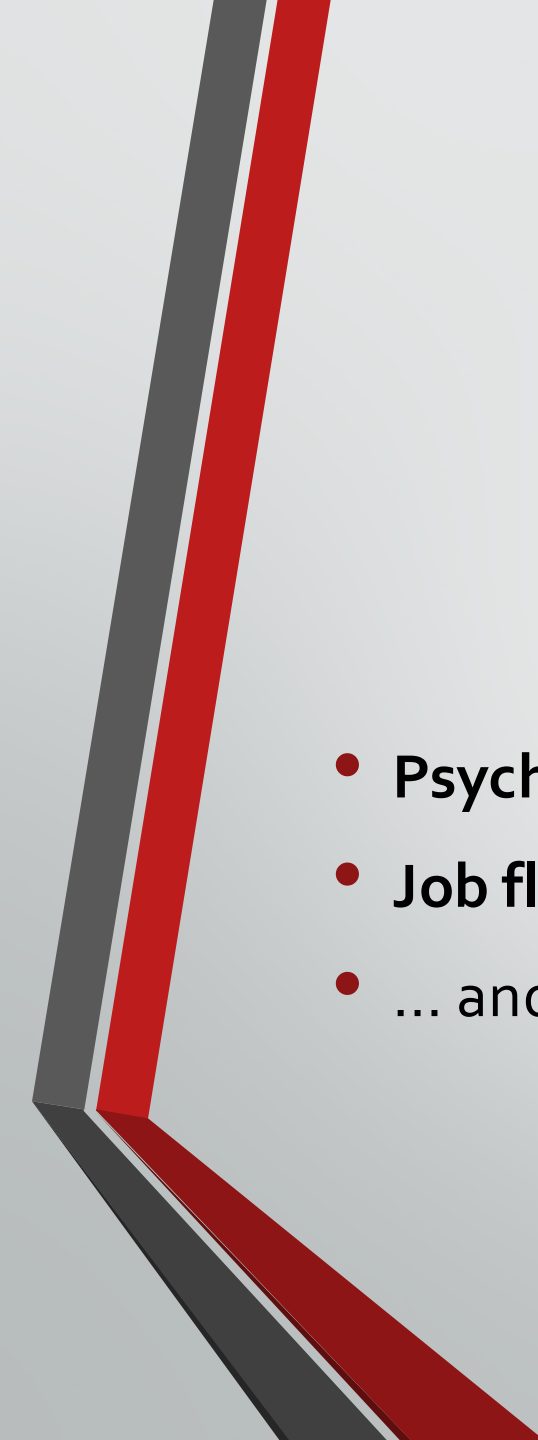
- Career development starts early and is ongoing
- Focus on pre-employment rather than simply job search success
- Preparing students and recent graduates for more than “what works”



# Take a **holistic** approach – career is personal

- Check-in about employment status and the state of their mental health
- “Interwoven with all aspects of [a person’s] life” (Scott, 2002, p. 215)
- Emphasize the relevance of other life roles to career decision making



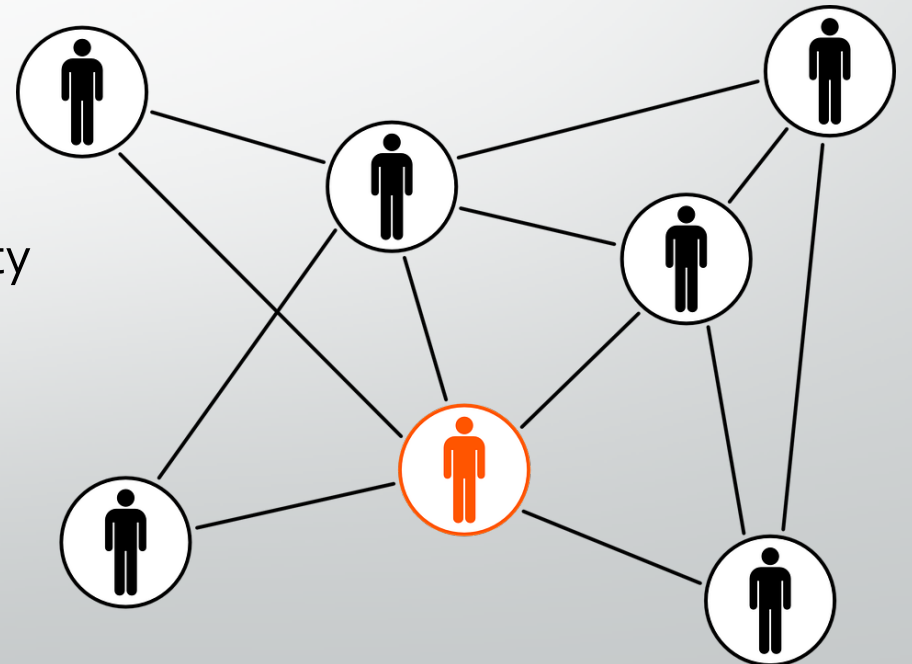


# Broaden the definition of **acceptable** career paths

- **Psychological mobility** – envisioning diverse career options
- **Job flexibility** – accepting a job that deviate from expectations
- ... and the definition of acceptable **career development opportunities**

# Connect job seekers to existing networks

- Taking the “work” out of networking
- Career mentoring programs
  - Ryerson University , Thompson Rivers University
- Career “connecting” programs
  - Ten Thousand Coffees





# Thank you!

**April Dyrda, M.Sc.**

University of Calgary

Werklund School of Education

[ajdyrda@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ajdyrda@ucalgary.ca)