
Nostromo

A tool for management
to get value
from employees'
resignation process
through empathy

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Academic Year **2020/2021**
Product-Service System Design MSc
Politecnico di Milano



POLITECNICO
MILANO 1863

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As human beings we don't want to end consumer experiences because they remind us of our mortality. This echoes in all the facets of the consumer experience: we have a tendency to overlook endings as customers, we have created a culture of neglecting them in the workplace, we are educated as students that they are unimportant.

(Macleod, 2017)

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Abstract

“Nostromo: a tool for management to get value from employees’ resignation process through empathy” is a thesis that falls within the context of Great Resignation, a trend that took off in 2021, named so by American psychologist Anthony Klotz (Cohen, 2021).



Covid-19 has changed our lives and the way we work, introducing remote work for knowledge workers (Al Jazeera English, 2022; Goldberg, 2021; Microsoft, 2021). A lot of people have experienced burnout and re-evaluated their priorities and decided to quit their jobs (Stone, 2022; Ungerböck, 2022).

But what does the experience of a person quitting look like? So many people experience poorly managed handovers, insistent retention strategies, pro forma exit interviews... And even for organizations, resignations and notice periods are valueless moments, where the priority becomes finding a new person, a replacement. But if managers don’t listen, understand and care about the employee’s exit, even new entries risk getting off on the wrong foot.

fig_01

A Burger King sign in Nebraska.
Photograph by Rachael Flores



How to make the exit experience a valuable moment? How can managers and HR improve their listening skills to understand their employees' decisions and gather insights to improve the organization?

Macleod (2017) noted that designers are almost solely taught to design something new, for the start of experiences and for engagement. But experiences end, and work experiences are no different, especially now that the average number of places a person works during their lifetime have increased (Meister, 2012).

As designers, how do we respond to this new challenge? Based on 16 qualitative interviews and validation workshops, this thesis aims to propose a tool for managers dealing with employee resignations in the knowledge-based work sector.

How to make the exit experience a valuable moment? How can managers and HR improve their listening skills to understand their employees' decisions and gather insights to improve the organization?

Introduction

A growing and evolving work sector

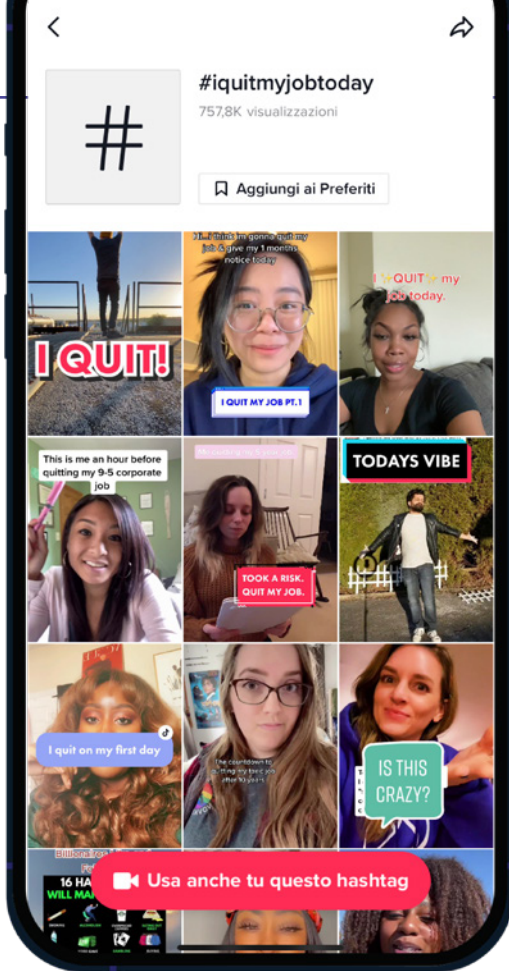
This thesis work addresses knowledge work in organizations. A definition of knowledge work is the following:

“The main feature differentiating knowledge work from other conventional work is that the basic task of knowledge work is thinking. [...] It is the perennial processing of non-routine problems that require non-linear and creative thinking that characterizes knowledge work.” (Reinhardt et al., 2011).

Knowledge workers, who are known for their high levels of creativity, originated as technology-based professionals like computer programmers or web designers. This category has now extended to encompass authors, researchers, accountants, engineers, designers, and others (Ricard, 2020). It is argued that this sector has witnessed the fastest revolution in the mode of work: the shift to remote working because of the Covid-19 pandemic (Microsoft, 2021).

Content overview

The path of this thesis is structured as follows: first, an overview of existing trends on the employee side with respect to resignations. Then, on the employer side, what are the main existing practices to deal with turnover. It then investigates and argues how the fields of Service Design and Human Resources interact. In the fourth chapter it is assessed what are the boundaries of the design challenge that this thesis aims to address. Two UX principles are then discussed to better understand the advantages of designing for these boundaries. The second half of the thesis focuses on Nostromo, a project designed to respond to the challenge of managers dealing with resignations.



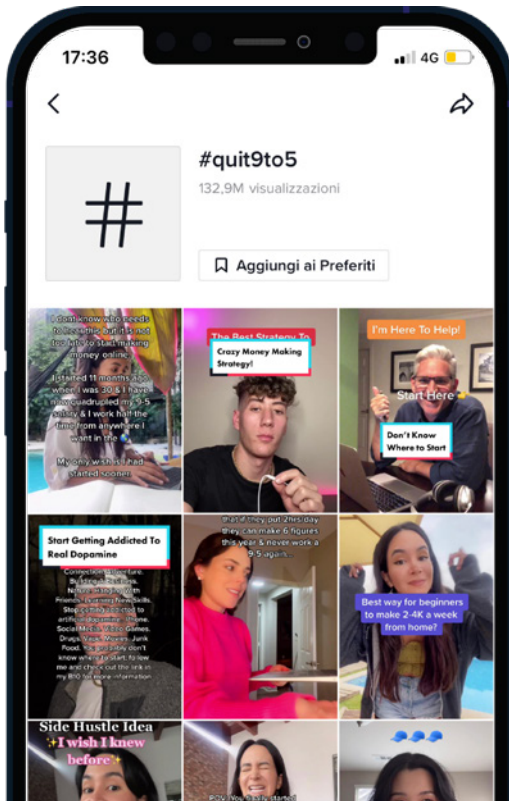
fig_02

TikTok pages of results for the hashtags “#quitmyjobtoday” and “#quit9to5”

The employees’ relationship with their job in the 21st century

The world of work has undergone major changes in the 21st century. Moreover, Covid-19 has boosted existing trends (Lund et al., 2021). Workers change jobs more frequently, various sources support the fact that there are no longer “company men or women” (Dachner & Macharius, 2021). In addition, the transparency of organizations has increased with the advent of social media (Mosley, 2015). By now, not only work-related social media are relevant to employer branding, but also those more commonly used for entertainment. Tiktok or Youtube are used by resigning employees as platforms to talk about their employee experience (Colombo, n.d.; Lo, 2022).

Companies where the value system is weaker risk being less competitive in the talent marketplace because, especially due to the pandemic, people are re-evaluating the role of work in their lives (Chamberlain, 2020; Malesic, 2022; Ungerböck, 2022). The Great Resignation is the manifestation of all these social tensions (Kaplan, 2021b). And the issue of turnover is becoming a priority for CEOs (Lambert, 2022).



Introduction



Employers' practices

In this scenario, employers are trying to address turnover with techniques that were born and developed in the 20th century. Turnover has always been a concern for organizations (O'Connell & Kung, 2007). In fact, there are corporate practices to tackle this issue at every stage of the employee experience (Gallup, 2022). Employer branding and employee engagement are two concepts that are already being developed and invested in (Fulmore et al., 2022). The two most relevant and popular practices adopted at the end of the employee relationship are alumni networks and exit interviews (Bardon et al., 2015; Gordon, 2011). However, the effectiveness of these is debated. What has been demonstrated is that, if they are not practiced at a strategic level but only used to buffer the damage caused by resignations, they are not effective (Pace & Kisamore, 2017).

The role of design in this context

Service design has points of contact with the discipline of Human Resources. It can enrich this discipline through its visual approach, through empathy, that allows different stakeholders to enter into dialogue, and through project process structuring (Auricchio et al., 2018). In addition to Service Design, there are other frameworks and methodologies that allow for a better analysis of this phenomenon and an understanding of its facets. In particular, this thesis focuses on Joe Macleod's theories about Design for Closure Experiences (Macleod, 2017), Jobs-to-be-done (Christensen et al., 2016) and behavioral archetypes (Service Design Tools, 2022b).

The design challenge

After setting the boundaries of the challenge of designing for closure experiences in the workplace, a parallelism between workplace and product service is proposed. In fact, UX is usually applied to the design of products and services but its principles also allow for a better understanding of some dynamics in the employee-employer relationship. Then the theories of Peak-End rule (Doll, 2021) and confirmshaming (Ferwerda & Andersson, n.d.) are explained, in order to highlight why it is fundamental to design good endings and what are the consequences of bad design.

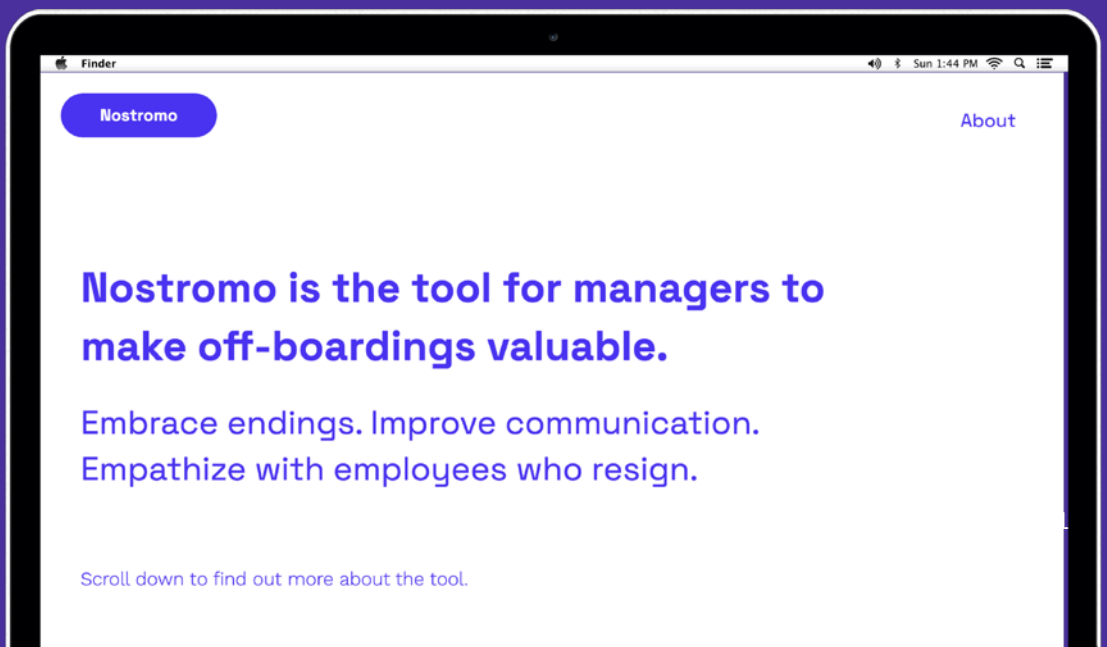
Finally, a tool is proposed, with the purpose of helping managers to collect insights and ideas for improvement on internal processes within the organization. It does so by enhancing the ability of managers to listen and empathize with their employees who have resigned.

Purpose of the thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to raise awareness on the topic of designing for Closure Experiences. As a matter of fact, in the educational field the focus is usually on the design of new products or services or on how to create engagement about them (Macleod, 2017). Also, this thesis aims at contributing to the literature on the more and more relevant topic of resignations and the trends concerning work. As there is uncertainty about the employee-employer relationship (Deloitte, 2021), this work could sparkle reflection about this topic.

fig_04

Project homepage



The era of the
“company man”
(or woman) is over.

(Dachner & Macharius, 2021)

Chapter 1

Employees and the relationship with their jobs.

Summary

This chapter is going to provide a shortlist and an explanation of what are the recognized and most discussed key trends and employee behaviors of the last decade concerning voluntary turnover.

In particular, it is going to present job hopping, the influence of social media in the employee-employer relationship, work-life balance's newfound importance and, finally, Great Resignation.

fig_05

A Burger King sign in Nebraska.
Photograph by Rachael Flores



In this chapter

1.1 Job hopping
The average number of jobs during a career is increasing

1.2 Social media as amplifiers of employees' voice
Entertainment-oriented social media entering the field of work

1.3 Work-life balance and culture taking over compensation
Two factors becoming increasingly important in job satisfaction

1.4 The Great Resignation
Why are more and more people resigning in 2021-2022?



I realized I wasn't happy at the company and at the job. On one hand I feel that this was courageous because I didn't like it, I felt that I spent too many hours at work and I should be doing something different. But, on the other hand, it makes you look like a "jumper". If in your CV you have a short period of time spent at one job they call you "a jumper" because you don't stay long enough in one company. But then, when you think of what it means to stay in a company "long enough"... Who defines it?

Experience 7 Years	Company Size 11 - 50 empl.	Field Startup
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1.1

Job hopping

Job hopping is defined as changing jobs frequently, usually working less than two years in the same company (Randstad, 2019).

The term “job hopping” was already being used in the 2010s, but it became widely talked about and discussed after Robert Half International Inc., a human resource consulting firm, published a report about this phenomenon (Robert Half, 2018) in April 2018. This report identified that, in the United States, younger employees were less likely to see job hopping as a problem. Randstad (2019) mentioned that the same phenomenon has been observed also in Italy and that millennials were the most likely generation to change jobs after two years from recruitment. As a matter of fact, firms such as Gallup (Adkins, 2016) and the media (Meister, 2012) had already started to address Millennials as “*the job-hopping generation*”. Job hopping has been even defined as “*the new normal for Millennials*” (Meister, 2012). In 2012 it was reported, by the United States

**“the new normal
for Millennials”**

Bureau of Labor Statistics, that a worker stayed at their job position for 4.4 years on average. However, the same (Meister, 2012)

Research

report predicted that younger employees were expected to stay in the workplace half of the time (Meister, 2012). Specifically, in the Future Workplace “Multiple Generations @ Work” report, 91% of Millennials anticipated to stay in a job for fewer than three years: this implies that, over the course of their working careers, they would have 15 to 20 jobs (Meister, 2012).

“

The job hopping phenomenon is the “child” of a generation that is not a generation of age but of professional class, a generation that is going in that direction. People are choosing more and more themselves and they are choosing more and more an environment where they like to work.

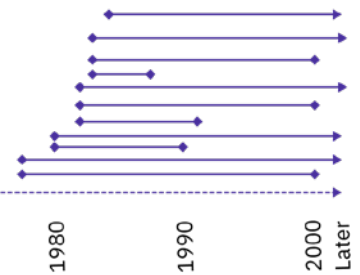
Experience 13 Years	Company Size 1001 - 5000 empl.	Field HR
-------------------------------	--	--------------------

[Taking a step back, what defines a generation?](#) A study about generational differences reports that the concepts of generation and age are sometimes interchanged in the literature about this topic while, on the contrary, they identify two different groups of individuals (Costanza et al., 2012). The term “generation” refers to groups of people that sha-

red the same experiences, such as historical or social events, at similar ages. The shared experiences referred to are usually events such as World War II, September 11 terrorist attacks and economic crises. On the other hand, age is defined as a difference between people linked to developmental factors. Millennials are usually identified as those individuals born between the 1980s and the 2000s, with specific years varying according to the source (Costanza et al., 2012).

Millennials

- ◆ Start year
- ◆ End year
- End year specified as “later”



An article published on Gallup’s website (Adkins, 2016), commenting on their report “How Millennials Want to Work and Live”, argues that data support the fact that millennials tend to move from one job to another more rapidly than others. The same article identifies one reason for this phenomenon: millennials are less engaged in the workplace and they should be treated as consumers of their workplace by their employers (Adkins, 2016).

Another argument supporting that the trend of job hopping is intertwined with millennials is that millennials don’t value employee loyalty as much as their predecessors. As reported on Forbes, data from a 2015 Elance Odesk survey highlighted that 52% of millennials think that employee loyalty is an overvalued concept. As a consequence, this would demonstrate that for them the idea of working for one business for the whole of one’s career is unappealing (Zimmerman, 2016).

fig_06

Visual representation of the birth years used to define the Millennials generation.

Adapted from *Generational Differences in Work-Related Attitudes: A Meta-analysis* (Costanza et al., 2012)

Research

However, Zapier, a company that produces software to automate workflows, released more recently a data report about the relationship between Gen Z and Millennials and technology at work, highlighting that these might not be accurate reads. Millennials and Gen Z apparently plan on staying at their current job for several years, on average 10 and 6, as opposed to the belief that they are not loyal to their companies. Another relevant information brought up by this survey is the fact that these generations seem to feel like their job is a “key component of their personal identity”, a factor that depicts them as quite attached to their jobs but is probably making them more prone to burnout (Zapier, 2020). This is not the only resource going against the established assumption that job hopping is a millennials-exclusive phenomenon. As a matter of fact, a research conducted on generational differences in the workplace claims that, since the definition of age and generation are usually blurred, there is not enough evidence to assess that there is a correlation between generation and intent to turnover (Costanza et al., 2012). What is suggested as an explanation of the differences concerning job satisfaction is age and job position, rather than generational membership (Costanza et al., 2012).

These generations seem to feel like their job is a “key component of their personal identity”

fig_07

Gen Z vs Millennials. Data from Zapier report “Misunderstood generations: what Millennials and Gen Z actually think about work” (2020).

“

My job is a key component of my personal identity

“

My parents don’t understand my job

“

Employers should have a mental health work policy

Millennials	73%	45%	85%
Gen Z	65%	41%	91%

What is the greatest benefit of job hopping?

Robert Half survey on more than 1000 professionals working in an office in the U.S. Responses do not equal to 100% due to rounding.

Earning higher compensation	37%
Gaining new skills	28%
Moving up the career ladder faster	22%
Experiencing a new company and workplace culture	9%
It looks better on a resume to have multiple employers	3%

What are the benefits of this kind of behaviour? One of the most recognized is the possibility to help workers progress in their career (Meister, 2012) and grow salary-wise (Vanderkam, 2014). Moreover, job-hopping can contribute to a higher level of job satisfaction (Meister, 2012).

In the years before the pandemic, job-hopping was widely talked about, but it also started to lose its negative connotation. According to a 2019 survey by Robert Half Australia on this topic, 71 percent of hiring managers would have been more ready to hire a candidate with a history of job hopping than they would have been five years earlier (Robert Half, 2019). Apparently, one of the reasons why the stigma is on the verge of disappearing is also because employers are starting to recognize the value of employees who want to broaden their skill set (Meister, 2012).

On the other hand, it has been argued that young employees started job hopping and normalizing this attitude not just out of their own tendency, but out of necessity. The 2008 economic crisis had workers shape a work mindset more focused on making the most of their skills, rather than on the bond of trust with the employer (Vanderkam, 2014).

fig_08

Statistics from Robert Half report "Should you job hop?" (2018)

Is job hopping getting normalized?



I wanted to quit but I didn't want to damage the relationship with the boss.

[...]

Then I realized we can feel more empowered as employees, we have a lot, we have Glassdoor [...]

If the boss wants to tell the truth I can even tell my side: I didn't have a good working experience, and then they messed up with my final salary [...]

Experience 5 Years	Company Size 1 - 10 empl.	Field Business consultancy
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1.2

Social media as amplifiers of employees' voice

What employees experience in a company is getting more and more impactful. Dube and Zhu (2021) argue that, with the widespread use of social media, companies have become more transparent and have reduced control over their information. Therefore, what employees say can have a bigger influence on consumers too (Mosley, 2015). In the last decade, employees have started posting videos about the reasons why they resigned from a company on social media such as YouTube (why i left buzzfeed - YouTube, 2022) or, more recently, TikTok. In particular, the videos published by TikTokers on the platform have been named “QuitToks” (Colombo, 2021). An article even describes this phenomenon as “public bridge-burning” (Lo, 2022). The same article addresses the fact that if an employee decides to talk about their resignation on platforms such as YouTube or TikTok instead of talking to someone within the organization, this means that they don't feel safe to expose their frustration to the company itself. Unless the company has built psychological safety since the beginning, real exit interviews end up happening on social media in plain sight (Lo, 2022).

#iquit

169k posts on Instagram
509,1M visualizations on TikTok

#quit9to5

30,5k posts on Instagram
132,9M visualizations on TikTok

#quitmyjob

50,4k on Instagram
238,1M visualizations on TikTok

#iquitmyjobtoday

100+ posts on Instagram
757,8k visualizations on TikTok

#GreatResignation

16,9k on Instagram
140,5M visualizations on TikTok

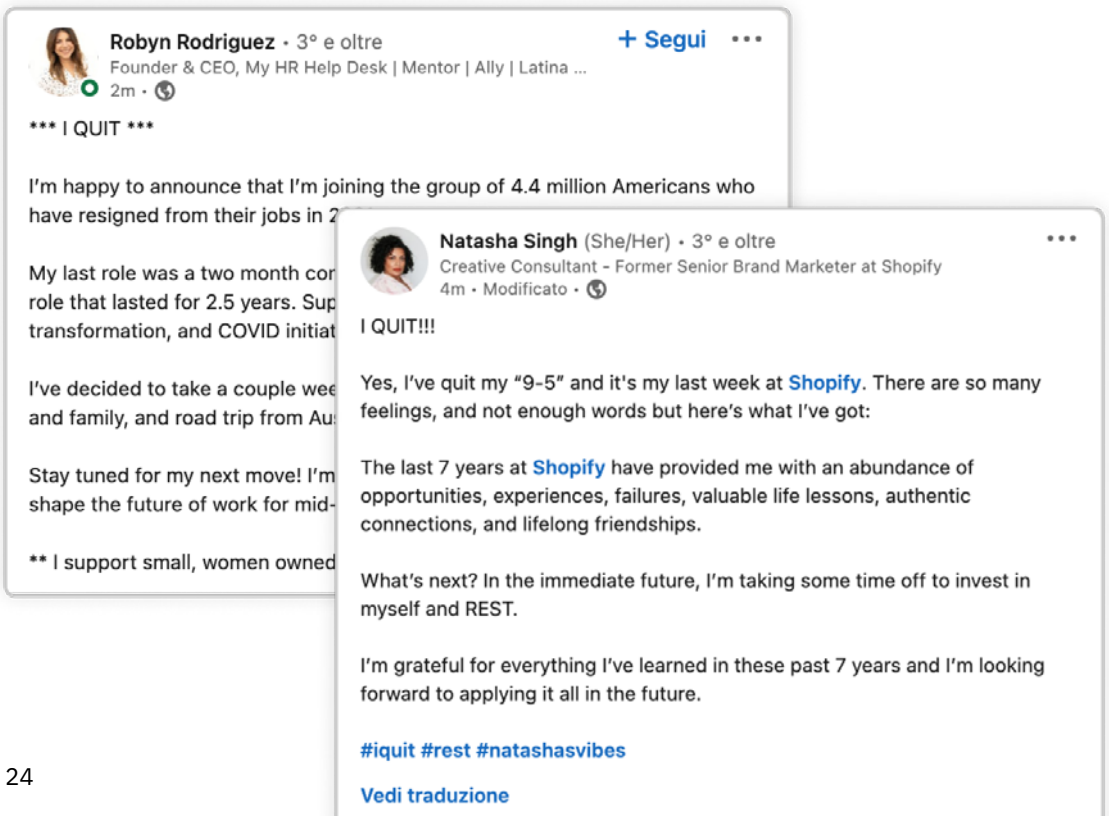
LinkedIn

Another social media that amplifies employees' voices is LinkedIn. LinkedIn was founded in 2002 in California and it is a professional networking site for anyone trying to advance their career. On LinkedIn, users can insert a record of their working experience on their profile and connect to other users in order to expand their network. Other features allow users to apply for jobs and learn new skills (LinkedIn, 2020). The LinkedIn environment is commonly recognized to be more polite than other social media (Lo, 2022).

As it is a professional networking site, it is less common to witness users show their frustration there. On the other hand, it's rather common to see employees giving thanks to their former companies for their working experience and focus on the question "what's next?". As a matter of fact, empirical research on the platform done using the hashtag #iquit shows such results.

fig_09

Two LinkedIn posts about resignation. When users communicate this kind of decision to their LinkedIn network they tend to use a polite tone of voice and not a resentful one.





Writing a post on LinkedIn when you leave: for me that's employer branding. You decide to change by your own professional will and you tell everyone that you got on well. Everyone [who left the organization] did it voluntarily because there really was no real negative reason to leave. It can be a thing but it can't be the company to impose it.

Experience 7 Years	Company Size 501 - 1000 empl.	Field HR
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Glassdoor

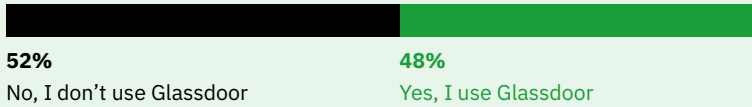
Glassdoor is a platform where employees and former employees can anonymously write a review about a company they worked for and rate it. Moreover, it is possible to compare salaries and rate CEOs (Schonfeld, 2008). Glassdoor was launched in 2008 and, according to the statistics reported on the website, up to February 2022 the platform counts 55million monthly visitors and 1.9 million employers (Glassdoor, 2022). Glassdoor's impact on the labor market can be examined from two perspectives: talents' decision making and companies' practices.

In a 2017 survey conducted in the United States by the company Software Advice, almost half of the participants declared they use Glassdoor when they have to look for a job (Westfall, 2017). This means that a former employee's experience posted on the platform is quite likely to influence a job seeker's choice or future employees' expectations on the company. Also, another finding of this survey was that approximately half of people looking for a job consider reviews from the previous six months (Westfall, 2017). These data highlight the importance for companies to be always up to date in the delivery of a good employee experience. Concerning the impact that a platform such as Glassdoor can have on companies' practices, a recent study looked into whether the increasing transparency of the workplace as a result of employee reviews posted on Glassdoor causes companies to improve their workplace practices (Dube & Zhu, 2021). The hypothesis that companies are affected by Glassdoor reviews was indeed verified: it was even found that usually companies improve their workplace practices within one year after receiving the first reviews on the platform (Dube & Zhu, 2021).

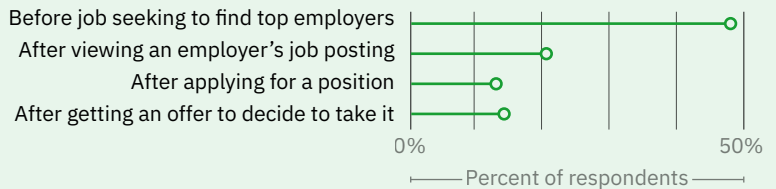
A former employee's experience posted on the platform is quite likely to influence a job seeker's choice

Almost Half of All Respondents Use Glassdoor When Job Hunting

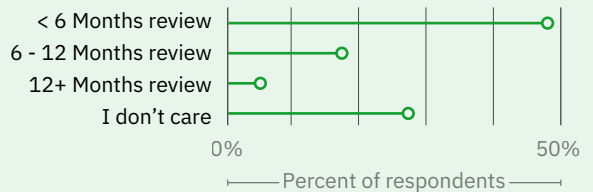
Source: Software Advice.
4,633 respondents



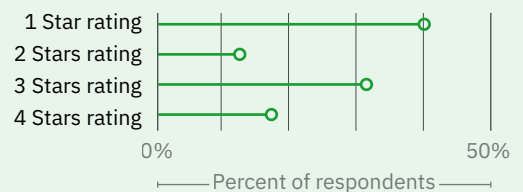
When Job Seekers Use Glassdoor in the Job search



Importance of the Recency of Reviews



Rating Required for Job Seekers to Apply at a Company



fig_10

Statistics about Glassdoor from the report "How Job Seekers Use Glassdoor Reviews" by Software Advice (2017)

In conclusion, nowadays companies cannot ignore the fact that resigning employees' voices can reach further than ever before. This can have an impact on future candidates and on customers too (Mosley, 2015). Another perspective on the issue is acknowledging the fact that the market is moving from being client/job driven to being candidate driven, in a fierce "war for talent" (Nagy, 2015).



I could agree to earn less just to have this peace of mind because I've been crying for three months now. [...]
Organizations should somehow define what culture there is and what are the accepted behaviors in the company, who is a "fit" or not. I came back from this company trip and I'm like "it was weird". I could see that I didn't fit in there. I like joking but they're so above what my boundaries are, even though as a team they are super happy together... For me it's not acceptable, but I couldn't assess it or know it before.
How do I explain this to recruiters?

Experience 7 Years	Company Size 11 - 50 empl.	Field Startup
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1.3

Work-life balance and culture taking over compensation

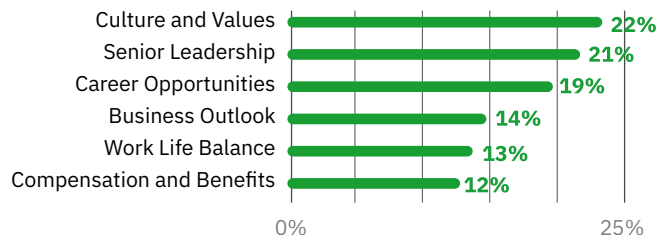
In the years before the pandemic, a trend was observed: employees leaving their jobs for reasons unrelated to compensation that could not be retained with pay raises.

Glassdoor’s Job & Hiring Trends for 2020, a Glassdoor trend report published in 2019, had pinpointed this trend and had foreseen the decade to come to be the “culture-first decade” (Chamberlain, 2020). This report shows graphs of surveys conducted in five countries and the results are consistent. For example, both in the United States and the United Kingdom employees declared that what matters the least in job satisfaction is compensation. Culture and values and work-life balance scored higher (Chamberlain, 2020).

fig_11

Culture and values seem to matter the most to employees in 2020. The results as shown in this graph are compliant with results in UK and other European countries.

The Workplace Factors that Matter Most to Employee Satisfaction in the U.S.



Source: Glassdoor Economic Research
(Glassdoor.com/research)

Research

During the first decades of the 2000s, the world witnessed the rise of Silicon Valley startups, such as Facebook or Google. In the world's most famous technology hub also a different way of conceiving the workplace was born. The tech work culture is usually depicted as a flexible environment where employees can exercise in onsite gyms, have access to free meals or take unlimited vacation days (Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015; Pardes, 2020). These benefits are “designed to take care of the whole you”, as described by Google (Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015). And as they were widely recognized as part of the tech giants' success, even the oldest companies adapted (Pardes, 2020).

“designed to take care of the whole you”

(Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015)



Recently, this work culture has been questioned and criticized, because it erodes the barriers between work and the rest of life (Pardes, 2020). And benefits can be reinterpreted as red flags of a misguided approach to work: people may be persuaded to stay in the office longer if they are offered a free meal, nap pods imply that you take a break at work, which is what you crave if you've been working all night long (Pardes, 2020).

fig_12

Sleeping pods for offices. This kind of sleeping posts are also present in Google offices. Credits: Stan Honda/AFP/Getty Images.

Work-life balance in tech companies has started to be questioned in the years preceding the pandemic. With regard to this issue, an outstanding case is that of Amazon. The New York Times conducted a journalistic investigation of Amazon workplace in 2015. It found that the world's leading logistics company, while having some similarities to other tech giants in the workplace, like campus amenities, has a markedly performance-related approach and a highly competitive environment (Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015). In this investigation it was made public by employees themselves that when faced with dramatic events in their lives such as miscarriages or caring for a sick family member, managers were not in the habit of granting days off, rather prescribing intensive programs to bring performance back to high levels. In some cases, there was even a provision for termination of employment as a result of lowered performance. Not to mention the teasing between colleagues to improve their ranking (Kantor & Streitfeld, 2015).

Such benefits can be reinterpreted as red flags of a misguided approach to work

fig_13

Google offices in Moscow.
Source: Office Snapshots



Research

As the barrier between work and life collapsed, so did the boundaries between colleagues and family. Some professionals have found themselves raising awareness on the definition of these relationships. An article on Harvard Business Review (2014) draws attention to the fact that, even if done with good intentions by many CEOs, saying the company is like a family can lead to misunderstandings. It is then suggested that a more suitable metaphor is the one adopted by Netflix, where employees are encouraged to feel part of the same team (Hoffman et al., 2014). A case that was recently discussed was the one about the CEO of Shopify, Tobias Lütke, emailing his managers about this topic (Fung, 2021):

“Shopify, like any other for-profit company, is not a family. The very idea is preposterous. You are born into a family. You never choose it, and they can’t un-family you. It should be massively obvious that Shopify is not a family but I see people, even leaders, casually use terms like “Shopifam” which will cause the members of our teams (especially junior ones that have never worked anywhere else) to get the wrong impression.”

This event is also linked to the Covid-19 pandemic but it highlights the fact that in the last decades this misconception spreaded in workplaces and there is uncertainty around defining the employee-employer relationship (Deloitte, 2021).

What is employee culture? The Glassdoor’s report aforementioned (Chamberlain, 2020) brings attention to what employee culture means in 2019. It claims that a widespread misconception is that giving value to employee culture implies extravagant benefits such as onsite gyms, free food, and limitless holiday leave. However, new evidence from Glassdoor research contradicts this notion. The concept of culture-first company isn’t about giving incentives; it’s about having a mission that aligns with employees’ personal goals and motivates them to perform at their best (Chamberlain, 2020).



My contract was a permanent one. Why I left was nothing related to this. I couldn't relate anymore to the way they present things to the client saying that they are very empathetic people, and they like to involve other people, and they are very collaborative, but, at the end of the day, the experience itself was very bad. The initial reasons I started there: it was because of this speech.

Experience 10 Years	Company Size 501 - 1000 empl.	Field ICT
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This evidence supports the assumption that benefits to make being in the office more comfortable such as salary or office coolers are not enough to keep a person bound to an organization. Moreover, the trend of people resigning because of culture or because of work-life balance issues has highlighted the fact that overlapping the concepts of work, life and family has brought employees to the exhaustion point. And now that this flawed setting is cracking, it is fundamental to redefine the boundaries of the employee-employer relationship.

1.4

The Great Resignation

In 2021 in the United States an outstanding amount of employees have quit their job. This trend is now commonly referred to as the “Great Resignation”, after the psychologist Anthony Klotz used this term in an interview to Bloomberg (Cohen, 2021).

Historical background. Since 2020, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the workplace has changed a lot, faster than anyone could foresee. As the Microsoft 2021 Work Trend Index puts it: *“the year 2020 changed work forever, impacting every person and organization across the globe”* (Microsoft, 2021). The widespread

of Covid-19 has been a disruptive force in the workplace: lockdowns to control the spread of the virus imposed remote working to knowledge workers all around the globe (Al Jazeera English, 2022; Microsoft, 2021). McKinsey reports that the pandemic has boosted the existing work trends (Lund et al., 2021).

“The year 2020 changed work forever, impacting every person and organization”

Microsoft, 2021

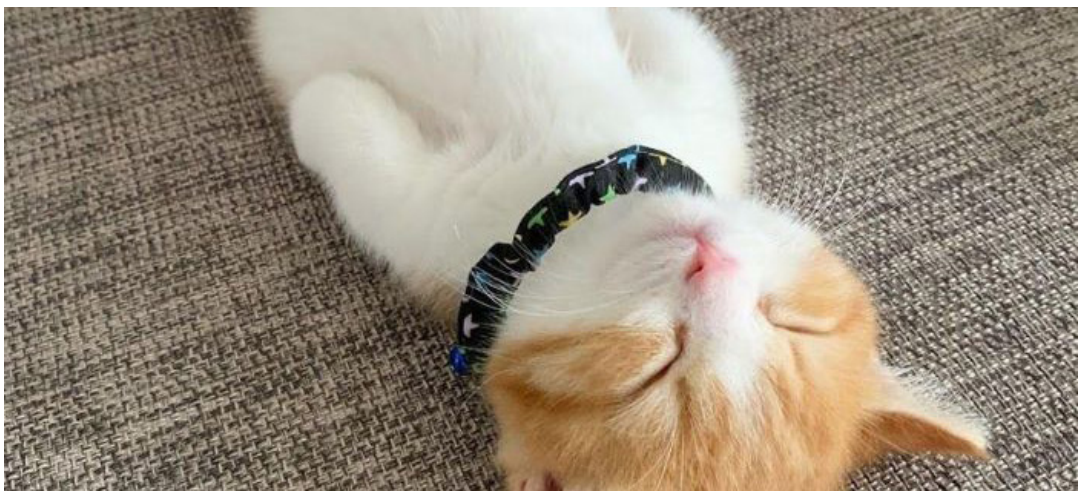
A worldwide phenomenon. Even though it was initially observed and named in the United States, the Great Resignation affected other countries around the world. Also Western Europe has been overwhelmed by the phenomenon. During the summer of 2021, in the UK and Germany have been recorded data similar to those of the United States (Christian, 2021), and also in Italy the Great Resignation is a topic that is being cited more and more (Contardi, 2022). Although differently, work-related conventions have begun to be challenged in Asia as well during the summer of 2021, with the phenomenon of the “lying flat” protest (Kelly, 2021). What is happening in China is not strictly related to resignations, but more to young workers’ motivation. They are rejecting the “996” working model, endorsed by the Alibaba founder Jack Ma. This model implies working from 9AM to 9PM for six days a week. Younger workers are becoming less and less motivated with respect to the work they do, finding ways to waste time at work to make the day go by (Kelly, 2021).

Among the most affected sectors are healthcare and technology. The former because healthcare workers have been put under stress by the pandemic. As for tech jobs, since the sector has had a boost, more job opportunities have been created (Contardi, 2022). In addition, for knowledge workers, borders have been broken down with the shift to remote working and competition for talent is now on a global scale (Al Jazeera English, 2022).

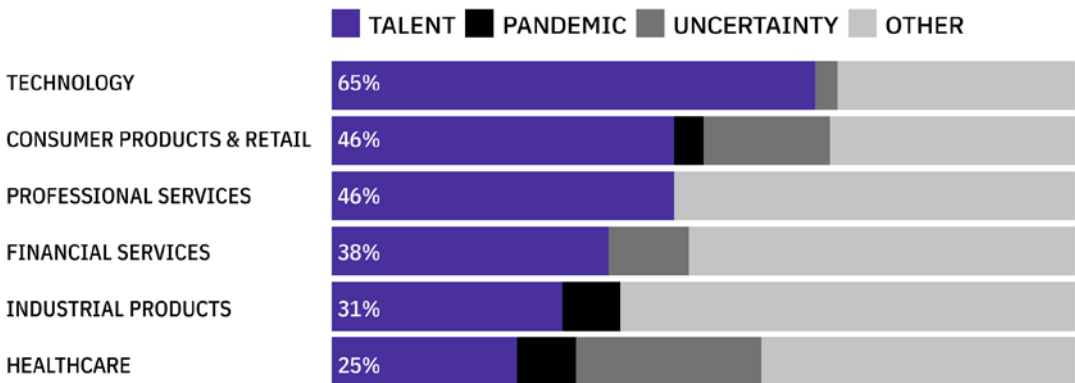
fig_14

The ginger cat became a symbol of the “lying flat” movement.

Source: ABC Radio



What CEOs say is the biggest challenge they face right now Grouped by industry



SOURCE: FORTUNE/DELOITTE CEO SURVEY IN JAN 2021

FORTUNE

The phenomenon of the Great Resignation is such an important trend that it is becoming a major concern for CEOs across all sectors (Lambert, 2022). This was uncovered by a survey conducted by Fortune in collaboration with Deloitte. They provided CEOs from various sectors with a list of 23 options; among them, they had to choose their biggest challenge. Talent/labor option was the top one, with a 44% score (Lambert, 2022).

Why is “Great Resignation” happening now? Anthony Klotz is the American psychologist who named this phenomenon (Cohen, 2021; Kaplan, 2021b). In an interview to the Washington Post, Klotz identified four causes of this trend; 1) employees who wanted to quit in 2020 waited because of the pandemic; 2) burnout; 3) pandemic epiphanies; 4) some people don’t agree with companies’ “back in the office” policies (Jorgenson, 2021).

Using the four causes identified by Klotz (Jorgenson, 2021) as a key to better understand this phenomenon, this chapter will analyze the Great Resignation more in depth.

fig_15

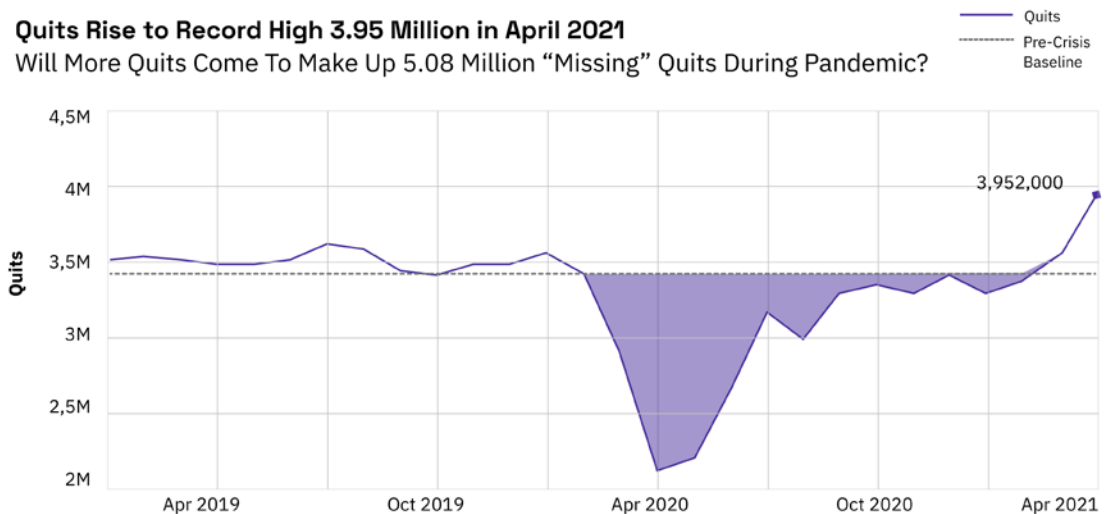
In the post-pandemic scenario, CEOs are mostly concerned about talents.

1. “Pent-up quits”

As Klotz claimed in the interview to the Washington Post, all the people who were planning to quit their jobs in 2020 could finally resign in 2021 because the economical situation improved (Jorgenson, 2021). This is also supported by data from the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, a survey by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. In fact, as shown in the chart, there were far fewer resignations in 2020 than the average for the United States.

Quits Rise to Record High 3.95 Million in April 2021

Will More Quits Come To Make Up 5.08 Million “Missing” Quits During Pandemic?



fig_16

This graph published by Glassdoor Economic Research shows the quits dropping below the baseline during the pandemic in the US.

Glassdoor economist Daniel Zhao posted this graph on his Twitter account and his explanation aligns with Klotz’s one. He argued in an interview to the Insider (2021) that the uncertainty caused by the pandemic is likely to be to blame for the sharp drop in quits. He also named “pent-up quits” the voluntary turnover happening in 2021 instead of 2020 (Kaplan, 2021a).

With respect to the scenario in Italy, the qualitative research conducted for this thesis verified this fact. Several employees stated during semi-structured interviews that they had resigned in 2021 but had been intending to do so or started thinking about it even before the pandemic.

2. Burnout: employees' mental health is at stake.

What is burnout? Burnout has been mentioned as the second of the causes of the Great Resignation by Anthony Klotz (Jorgenson, 2021). According to the World Health Organization, burnout “is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed” (World Health Organization, 2019). WHO (2019) lists the following symptoms: lower professional efficacy, increasing mental detachment from one’s work, sentiments of negativism or cynicism relating to one’s career, and sensations of energy depletion or weariness. Moreover, it is emphasized that burnout is a term used to describe events that occur on the job and should not be used to describe events that occur in other areas of an individual’s life (World Health Organization, 2019).

Bursting into tears at work. The Microsoft 2021 Work Trend Index reports that, during 2020, 1 in 6 people (17%) have cried with a coworker. This trend is cross-sector, and the highest percentages were registered in the healthcare sector, where 23% of people cried with a colleague, followed by travel and tourism (21%) and education (20%) (Microsoft, 2021).

During 2020, 1 in 6 people cried with a coworker.

Microsoft, 2021

Parenting. Burnout has been cited in a Bloomberg article as the cause of Amazon’s recent increase in turnover (Stone, 2022). In particular, this article reports the statement made by now former employee Sarah Schnierer, who accused the company of not taking steps towards employees with children, leading them to burnout. Schnierer is the founder of a group of working mothers within Amazon, the Momazonians. She argued they found themselves having to take care of their children, with the added difficulty of kindergartens being closed for Covid-19, and a company that has not come to meet them. Sarah’s words about her

resignation were the following: “I had tried to be a change maker and I saw some progress but since the pandemic it wasn’t getting better, it was getting worse” (Stone, 2022).

148% Meetings

Weekly meeting time has more than doubled for Teams users and is still rising

40.6B Email

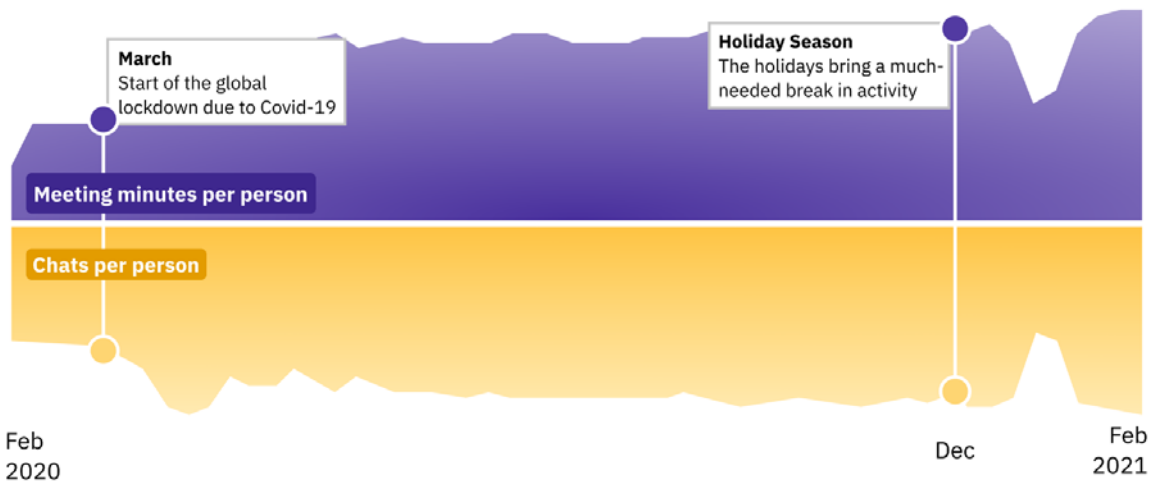
Increase in number of emails delivered in February 2021 vs February 2020

45% Chat

Weekly Teams chat per-person are up to 45% and still rising

66% Docs

Number of people working on Office documents is up to 66% year over year



fig_17

The activity across Microsoft 365 tools shows how the collaboration activity increased and changed over the 12 months after the first pandemic outburst.

Source: Microsoft Work Trend Index

Digital overload and zoom fatigue. Microsoft 2021 Work Trend Index data proves that not only have information exchanges increased, with time spent on Microsoft Teams more than doubling, but the speed of information exchange is also high. In Microsoft Teams chats, people respond within five minutes. What the Microsoft report calls “digital intensity” has increased. Another reason why people feel exhausted and less motivated is because remote work is characterized by urgency. It also creates a communication gap between people: what can be conveyed in person with elements such as body language or tone of voice is lost in digital communication (Microsoft, 2021). To indicate the weariness generated by the use of digital tools, in particular due to video calls, the term “zoom fatigue” has been coined (Ungerböck, 2022).

Research

Will the next pandemic be a mental health pandemic?

Gallup, in its “State of the Global Workplace: 2021 Report”, aimed to measure negative emotions of employed adults: daily stress, daily sadness, daily anger and daily worry. It did so at a global level, and the data are compared to the ones from the previous years. In the introduction, Jim Clifton, the CEO of Gallup, emphasizes the fact that the trends discussed in the report were already worrying before Covid-19 and that measuring this data is key to having a greater awareness of the problem and, consequently, being able to treat it. Clifton even goes so far as to speculate that the next global crisis could be a mental health-related pandemic (Gallup, 2021). The report is built on multiple levels so that it is possible not only to consult data on the global situation, but also learn about the differences between the regions of the world and countries. For example, it emerges that, although globally negative emotions are on the rise, the increase in negative emotions in the Western Europe region is symbolic, with even a decrease registered in daily stress. However, it is worth noting that in the Western Europe countries’ comparison, Italy is always in the top 4 concerning negative emotions, even when the trend is descending (Gallup, 2021).

The next global crisis could be a mental-health related pandemic.

fig_18

Italy is among the top 4 worst country in the Western Europe region concerning negative emotions of employees.

Adapted from “State of the Global Workplace” (Gallup, 2021)

Did you experience the following feeling during A LOT OF THE DAY yesterday?

DATA FOR WESTERN EUROPE REGION

DAILY WORRY

Rank	Country	Change*	%Yes
4	Italy	-2	46

DAILY ANGER

Rank	Country	Change*	%Yes
2	Italy	-1	23

DAILY STRESS

Rank	Country	Change*	%Yes
1	Italy	-4	54

DAILY SADNESS

Rank	Country	Change*	%Yes
1	Italy	+3	29

3. Pandemic epiphanies

According to the definition provided by Anthony Klotz, this term indicates the fact that during the pandemic people found themselves reconsidering major aspects of their life, including their jobs (Jorgenson, 2021). He argued that when people are confronted with death and disease in their lives, they pause for a moment and ponder existential questions. Individuals end up asking themselves what gives them meaning and what makes them happy and whether it matches up with how they're spending their time (Kaplan, 2021b). A mindset shift that many workers have made is the one of realizing that they should be working to live and not the opposite, living to work. They want to be respected by their employers in ways that go beyond monetary compensation (Ungerböck, 2022).

During the pandemic people found themselves reconsidering major aspects of their life.

A newfound importance for family and hobbies. The two main themes of this shift in perspective regarding work are definitely the re-evaluation of time spent with the family and the rediscovery of one's passions. There are several testimonials from people who have turned down promotions or who have left their jobs or found a new form of employment to spend more time with their families (Stone, 2022; Ungerböck, 2022). Others have left their corporate jobs to pursue their passions full-time, such as music (Kaplan, 2021b). Many workers have indeed discovered a new employer who provides them the independence and flexibility they crave: themselves, thanks to a new perspective on their work and a desire to reorganize their life. An article reports that in the United States a lot of new self-employment activities have been registered, 5.4 million, a record compared to the previous year, when 4.4 million were registered. But not everyone who started these businesses has left their jobs. They have simply decided to divert their

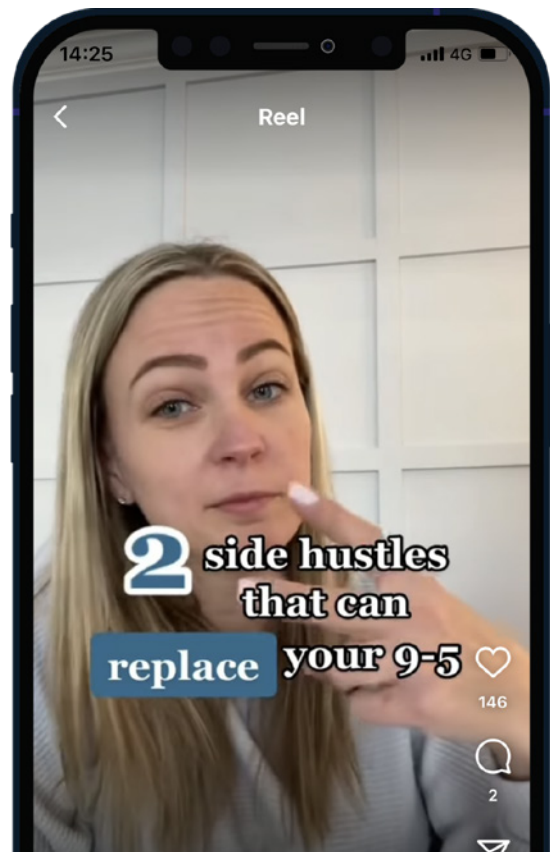
Research

time and creative energies from their salaried jobs. These activities are nicknamed “side hustles” and involve disengagement from the workplace, in a kind of silent resignation (Ungerböck, 2022).

The concepts of work and identity are detaching. The even deeper roots of the phenomenon of pandemic epiphanies can be found in the fact that for many people work is more than just an occupation, work is a matter of identity. According to Klotz, it was foreseeable that the existential crisis brought about by the pandemic would lead to a work-related crisis (Kaplan, 2021b). In fact, it is widely argued that work is the aspect of life that is most valued in American society, something that has its roots in Calvinism, a Protestantism born in Europe. Calvinism supports the belief that those who work hard are God’s chosen ones. As a consequence, if you work hard, you will live a life of social dignity, moral integrity, and spiritual purpose, not simply a life of material wealth: this is the ideal that pushes people to work until the breakpoint (Malesic, 2022). Indeed, it seems that, in a poll conducted by an American institute in 2014 aimed at investigating the personality of participants, as many as 80% responded that “hardworking” was a trait of their personality (Malesic, 2022). Malesic (2022) then argues that burnout is a psychological condition that was born in the 21st century as a consequence of this belief. However, the pandemic broke down the overlapping of these two concepts: the fact that the work sphere went into crisis allowed people to better understand what the boundaries were between the concept of work and the concept of identity (Kaplan, 2021b; Ungerböck, 2022).

fig_19

IG Reel by @themarketingmama02 about replacing 9-5 job with side hustles.



4. Back to the office or not? The hybrid work revolution

Klotz said the fourth major cause of these months' Great Resignation can be traced back to this: some people don't want to go back to the office to work in presence (Jorgenson, 2021). In March 2020, the pandemic compelled the majority of knowledge workers to start working remotely. Remote working happened very fast and it wasn't planned, so most companies were slow to adapt (Al Jazeera English, 2022).



66%

of leaders say their company is considering redesigning office space for hybrid work



73%

of employees want flexible remote work options to stay



67%

of employees want more in-person work or collaboration post-pandemic

The Work Trend Index survey was conducted by Edelman Data x Intelligence, among 31,092 full-time employed or self-employed workers across 31 markets between January 12, 2021 and January 25, 2021.

In fact, it has been observed how remote working, while bringing many benefits such as flexibility and less time commuting, can become an unsustainable way of working. Microsoft 365 usage data shows us precisely that the spikes in notifications on their platforms that were recorded in 2020 were also accompanied by employees responding within minutes and even outside of normal working hours (Microsoft, 2021). New phenomena such as “digital overload” (Microsoft, 2021) and the so-called “zoom fatigue”

fig_20

Hybrid work is inevitable.

Source: Microsoft Work Trend Index

Research

(Ungerböck, 2022) have been named. Workers talk of making calls with customers on the other side of the world in different time zones (Al Jazeera English, 2022). These are some of the downsides of remote working. They are well described by the term “flexibility paradox”. Researcher Heejung Chung named this phenomenon, about which she also wrote a book subtitled “Why Flexible Working Leads to (Self-)Exploitation.” In her research she also discusses gender differences in the context of remote work during the pandemic (Al Jazeera English, 2022).

What organizations are doing. Now that the emergency is receding, the response from companies is diverse. Many tech companies are asking people to come back to the office. Apple’s strategy is to have employees return to the office, but this has been a source of complaint (Browning, 2021). However, the tech giant hasn’t set a return to office date, at least not until February, and has given a budget of \$1000 to its employees to improve their home offices. Facebook, on the other hand, has given employees the option to apply for work from home permanently (Browning, 2021). According to some, the fact that some companies are so reluctant to keep their work remotely and are asking to return full time is a management issue. Needing to have their employees in the office could be due to managers’ being unprepared to manage resources remotely (Al Jazeera English, 2022).

What employees want. Several surveys show that employees prefer hybrid work (Al Jazeera English, 2022). This statement is backed up by Microsoft’s Work Trend Index 2021, indeed titled “The Next Great Disruption Is Hybrid Work—Are We Ready?”. People would like to have access to the best of both work modes, the versatility of remote work and face-to-face meetings. Employees expect employers to provide them choices about when, where, and how they work. As a result, employers who do not know how to provide that flexibility are more likely to be left behind (Microsoft, 2021).



Despite that, even hybrid working has several downsides. An article by the New York Times (Goldberg, 2021) argues that hybrid work requires forethought, by highlighting how this modality can make some employees feel excluded from office life. For example, in meetings where half of the employees are in the office and the other half are joining via videoconference, remote workers might feel excluded because they cannot hear side comments or because they are muted (Goldberg, 2021). This is why the companies that are more bound to thrive are the ones that become aware of the difficulties related to hybrid work and make decisions about it. Without a strategy, the employees have no guidelines to organize meetings and the results can be counter-productive (Goldberg, 2021).

fig_21

Workers having a hybrid meeting in the offices of CommonBond, a US startup.

Source: by Jeena Moon for The New York Times

Your customer is
your employee

(Pollen, 2021)

Chapter 2

Employers' response to voluntary turnover.

Summary

How do employers tackle turnover?

This chapter first defines what turnover is and what are its metrics and impact on the organization. This is followed by an overview of the key practices that are in place to attract and retain employees.

The concepts of employer brand, employee engagement and finally the practices adopted for resigning employees are discussed. In this chapter, Gallup's Employee Experience is used as a reference for the stages of the employee journey.



fig_22

The employee experience.
This graph is going to be used as a guideline in this chapter.
Source: Gallup

In this chapter

2.1 Measuring employee turnover and its impact on organizations
How is turnover measured and what are its costs

2.3 After employee resignation
What happens when an employee resigns and common practices

2.2 Before employee resignation
How organizations attract and engage employees

Foreword. Before elaborating on this part, it is necessary to step back and define the roles involved. Specifically, this thesis aims to provide a tool to support managers in better understanding the resignation and turnover phenomena. There are different types of managers in an organization. Whenever the manager role is referred to, this term means an organizational figure who leads a team and acts as a gateway between team members and higher levels of leadership. Some managerial figures are: line manager, project manager, product manager. These tend to oversee projects or track product development. Among the managerial roles there is also the role of the HR Manager. This is the person who deals with the management of Human Resources. HR managers follow the hiring process, interview candidates, onboard them. However, sometimes even other managers are involved into these processes (Indeed, 2021).

Ashkenas (2014) argues that the relationship between line managers and HR managers is a complex one, and these two roles might struggle when working together. On one hand, HR managers may be poorly informed about the company's business, with little empathy for managers' stress. On the other hand, line managers may delegate too much to HR for example the activities aimed at collecting employee feedback, such as interviews and so on (Ashkenas, 2014; Gallup, 2018). However, what is relevant to this thesis is the fact that both of these roles and up being involved in dealing with resigning employees and share an interest in understanding their motivations, in order to prevent turnover (Gallup, 2018).

The manager is an organizational figure who leads a team and acts as a gateway between team members and higher levels of leadership

2.1

Measuring employee turnover and its impact on organizations

2.1.1 Employee turnover rate

Turnover is defined as the departure of an employee from an organization (Olubiyi et al., 2019). Turnover can be better framed across three dimensions: whether it is voluntary or involuntary, dysfunctional or functional, avoidable or unavoidable (Allen et al., 2010). This thesis focuses on unavoidable voluntary turnover, as when employees resign they are communicating that they have already made the decision of leaving the organization, and usually are being offered a job somewhere else. Turnover is usually measured as a percentage rate with the so-called employee turnover rate (O'Connell & Kung, 2007). Turnover rate formula is the following:

**Turnover Rate = # of terminations/year
÷ average active employees same year * 100**
(O'Connell & Kung, 2007)

**Taking as reference a 100 employees company that hires 20 new candidates, if 15 people leave the organization in the same year, the turnover rate is:
(15 ÷ 120) * 100 = 12.5%**

This percentage however provides incomplete information about the health of the organization as it doesn't tell the causes of turnover (O'Connell & Kung, 2007). That's why, in the Human Resource field, several practices that further investigate resignations, such as exit interviews, surveys and so on have been developed. These are going to be better described and analyzed in the next sections of this chapter.

2.1.2 Employee turnover costs

Turnover cost estimates should keep into account not only direct but also indirect costs (O'Connell & Kung, 2007). Direct costs are easier to measure and include the costs for: 1) staffing, which is the cost for hiring a replacement; 2) vacancy, the cost for productivity loss while the employee has not been replaced; 3) training, the cost for training the new employee (O'Connell & Kung, 2007). On the other hand, indirect costs are harder to quantify and include intangible aspects of the workplace such as lower morale, mistakes by overburdened workers (O'Connell & Kung, 2007), or even the relationships with clients and customers, that could be impacted (Pace & Kisamore, 2017). Gallup's report "Exit Programs That Retain Stars and Build Brand Ambassadors" (2018) adds reputation as a potential indirect cost. As a matter of fact, if an organization does not handle the exit process properly, the former employee's frustration can become widespread through word of mouth or social media. Gallup argues that departures are the chance for organizations to leave a lasting impression on employees about their brand identity, mission and culture (Gallup, 2018).

Indirect costs are harder to quantify and include intangible aspects of the workplace

fig_23



Employee experience phases before resignation. Adapted from Gallup

2.2

Before employee resignation

This section is going to analyze how employers take action before employee resignation. What are the most common practices in these stages of the employee experience? What do organizations do to attract and retain employees?

2.2.1 Attract employees

The concept of Employer Brand. In order to attract talents and maintain their reputation, organizations take care of their employer brand. Employer brand can be described in short as an *“organization’s reputation as an employer, as opposed to its more general corporate brand reputation”* (Mosley, 2015). The concept of employer brand was first defined in the mid-1990s, by Tim Ambler and Simon Barrow. They published a research whose aim was to test whether applying brand management techniques to human resource management could be effective: they verified that it is possible to use marketing in the context of employment (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

In the same paper, Ambler and Barrow (1996), argue that the employer brand’s offer for an employee can be compared to a product brand’s offer for a consumer. As a matter of fact, the offer can be framed across the same three dimensions: functional, economic, psychological. The functional offer consists of the activities, the economic of-

Research

fer of the material reward, and the psychological offer consists of the purpose that an employee can get from a job, or a consumer from a product. It is also argued that the employer brand has a personality, analogically to the product brand (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

How has employer brand evolved in the first decades of 2000s? As mentioned in the quote above and as argued by other sources, given the social changes in the last decades, the employer brand is no longer something that can be merely communicated with posters or recruitment advertising (Mosley, 2015; Pollen, 2021). It is much more up to the people and the corporate culture to convey what the employer values are. And it's much more up to employees to convey to consumers what the mission of the company is (Mosley, 2015). In fact, as

It is much more up to the people and the corporate culture to convey what the employer values are.

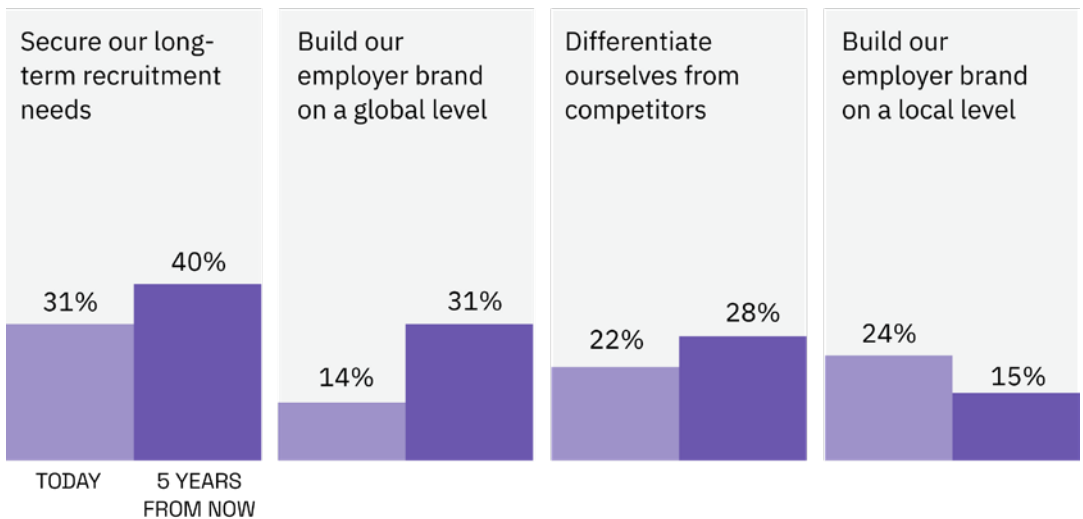
widely argued in the previous chapter, companies have become much more transparent as a result of the rise of social media (Mosley, 2015). As presented in the previous chapter with the phenomenon of #QuitToks, people share through social media the reasons why they leave a company and that information is available to everyone, worldwide (Colombo, 2021; Lo, 2022). Platforms such as Glassdoor allow former employees to post reviews on their employers (Glassdoor, 2022). Consequently, more and more what concerns the reputation of the company as an employer also impacts its reputation with end consumers. An article in the Harvard Business Review presents a survey of CEOs and heads of HR (Mosley, 2015). The survey revealed that leaders believe that employer branding is primarily the responsibility of CEOs and marketing leaders, indicating that it has evolved and has become a factor of strategic importance to a company. In fact, as soon as this practice was named and gained more recognition during the 2000s, it was a legacy of HR departments (Mosley, 2015). This survey also highlighted the fact that, as competition in the job market grows,

leaders see long-term hiring needs and global reputation as the primary employer brand objectives (Mosley, 2015).

Employer Branding Is Becoming Strategically More Important

What CEOs and HR and marketing leaders expect it to do for the company by 2020.

What are your main employer branding objectives?



Employee Value Proposition. Employee Value Proposition, also abbreviated as EVP, is another concept that is mentioned when it comes to employer branding. It is usually defined as *“a set of associations and offerings provided by an organization in return for the skills, capabilities and experiences an employee brings to the organization”* (Browne, 2012). It is a reason why an organization’s overall work experience is better than other organizations’ work experience. In short, the Employee Value Proposition (EVP) should provide a list of the main reasons why people will opt to join an organization (Browne, 2012). EVP is often associated with the concept of employer branding. The term Employee Value Proposition is now being used to characterize the fundamental “value” that underlies an organization’s employer brand marketing and management operations. In fact, it is not uncommon to find references to the term Employer Brand Proposition (Browne, 2012).

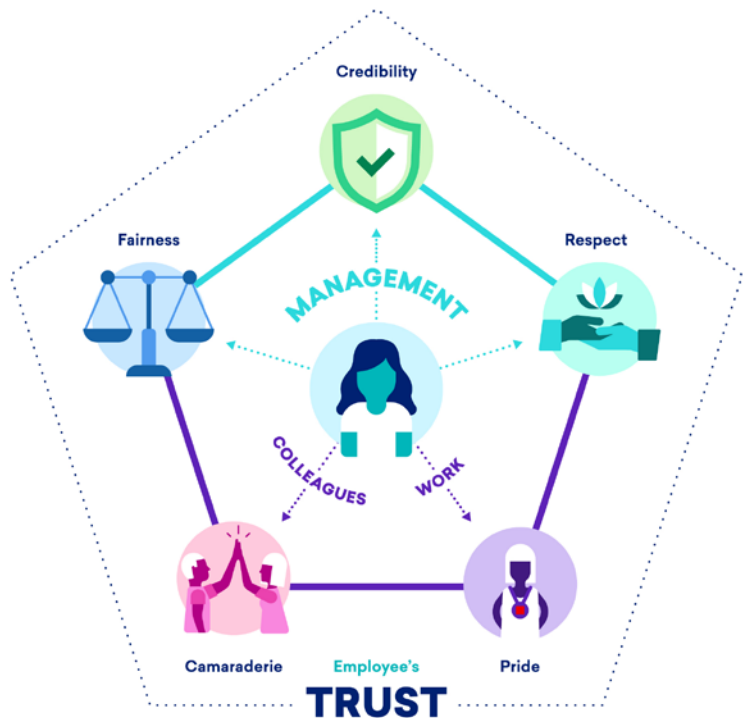
fig_24

Employer Branding is becoming strategically more relevant to CEOs and leaders

Source: hbr.org

Research

How can an organization demonstrate it is among the best employers in the job market? There are formal recognitions for being good employers. One of the most recognized titles for organizations is being part of the “100 Best Companies to Work For” list, a ranking published by Fortune every year since 1998. The magazine compiles this ranking in collaboration with the Great Place to Work Institute with the Great Place to Work Institute (Fortune, 2022). The Great Place to Work Institute was born in the late 1980s with the mission of finding the best companies to work for in America, a task assigned by a New York editor to Robert Levering and Milton Moskowitz, two business journalists at the time (Great Place To Work, 2022). The Great Place to Work Institute now has more than thirty years of history and has developed its own framework. In the countries where it has an office, the Best Workplace report is published annually, ranking companies and detailing best workplace practices. Companies can also apply to be certified by the Great Place to Work Institute according to a model they have developed, whose core is trust (Motta, 2022).



fig_25

The Great Place to Work model is based on trust.

Source: Great Place to Work

When it comes to employer branding it's a must to mention Netflix. Their company culture is known as "freedom and responsibility". These two words sum up the fact that Netflix employees are free to take time off from work but are required to take responsibility for their work and time management. With respect to the topic of turnover, Netflix doesn't make it a taboo, consistent with their two values of freedom and responsibility. They mention it in their careers web page, where it is explained what happens when an employee decides to leave (Netflix, 2022a). This work culture makes employees feel like entrepreneurs in a large corporate environment, as some of them describe in an episode of the WeAreNetflix podcast on YouTube (WeAreNetflix, 2019). WeAreNetflix is the company's employer brand and it is a podcast, a YouTube channel and a Twitter page where "Netflix employees talking about work and life at Netflix." (Netflix, 2022b). To sum up, it can be said that Netflix's approach to employer branding is to get their employees talking about life at the company.

fig_26

The WeAreNetflix initiative is a multimedial initiative. WeAreNetflix is a podcast, a YouTube channel and a Twitter account.



2.2.2 Engage employees

The concept of employee engagement. Employee engagement is defined in multiple ways. According to Gallup (Gallup, 2022) it is “*the involvement and enthusiasm of employees in their work and workplace*”, and it must be distinguished from the employee experience, which instead depicts the whole journey that an employee experiences with the company. Fulmore et al. (2022) define employee engagement along three dimensions: cognitive engagement, emotional engagement and behavioral engagement, which are referred to as the “three facets of employee engagement”. Employee engagement is relevant to turnover because high engagement has been found to be related to low turnover intention (Fulmore et al., 2022; Gallup, 2022).

Organizations attempt to keep employees engaged through what it is referred to as Human Resource Development practices. In fact, research argues that Human Resource Development practices have the ultimate goal of building employee engagement (Fulmore et al., 2022). It is therefore important to clearly define and understand what the concept of Human Resource Development (HRD) is. Fulmore et al. (2022), describe it in terms of four areas: 1) career, 2) work, 3) development, and 4) self-renewal. The area of career is concerned with career planning and recruitment, whereas the area of work is concerned with job design and performance evaluation. Training, coaching, and skill development are all included in the development domain. Finally, the area of self-renewal is concerned with the continuing development and long-term viability of existing human resource processes (Fulmore et al., 2022).

Employee engagement is relevant to turnover because high engagement has been found to be related to low turnover intention.

Empirical research on Google, carried out using the keywords “employee engagement activities” (Employee Engagement Activities - Cerca Con Google, 2022), reports as results various articles and blog posts that recommend activities, entitled for example “The best 10 activities to engage your employees” “Top ideas to keep your employees happy”. Among these resources and suggested activities, it is possible to identify two macro categories:

1) Activities aimed at monitoring the employee experience, such as surveys for employee satisfaction, 1:1 meetings, stay conversations

2) Activities that somehow entertain employees, these are usually aimed at building a sense of community, such as team building, sports events, “silicon Valley”-like benefits, internal social media, learning lunches



fig_27

Lego is a common teambuilding activity.

Source: teambuilding.net

A different approach: considering and prioritizing needs. When it comes to employee engagement, research (Gallup, 2022) claims that, as managers are dealing with human relationships, there are no easy solutions. Simple team-building exercises or employee engagement exercises are not enough to improve an organization's culture. In particular, one of the many mistakes the institute warns against is overusing surveys for mapping employee satisfaction. Indeed, surveys are widely used to get immediate feedback but rarely lead organizations to take action and improve (Gallup, 2022).

The approach that Gallup recommends is a different approach, more focused on the core needs of employees, specifically, they have identified twelve. To measure employee engagement in an organization they propose a survey with twelve questions called Q12. The questions are built upon a pyramid of four levels: Basic Needs, Individual Contribution, Teamwork and Growth. The needs are such phrased: "I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.", "At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.", "In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.", "My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person."... (Gallup, 2022). This approach is also relevant because it emphasizes the importance of the manager. As a matter of fact, Gallup research (2022) claims that employee engagement is commonly acknowledged "an HR thing," which is the leading reason why workplace engagement programs fail.

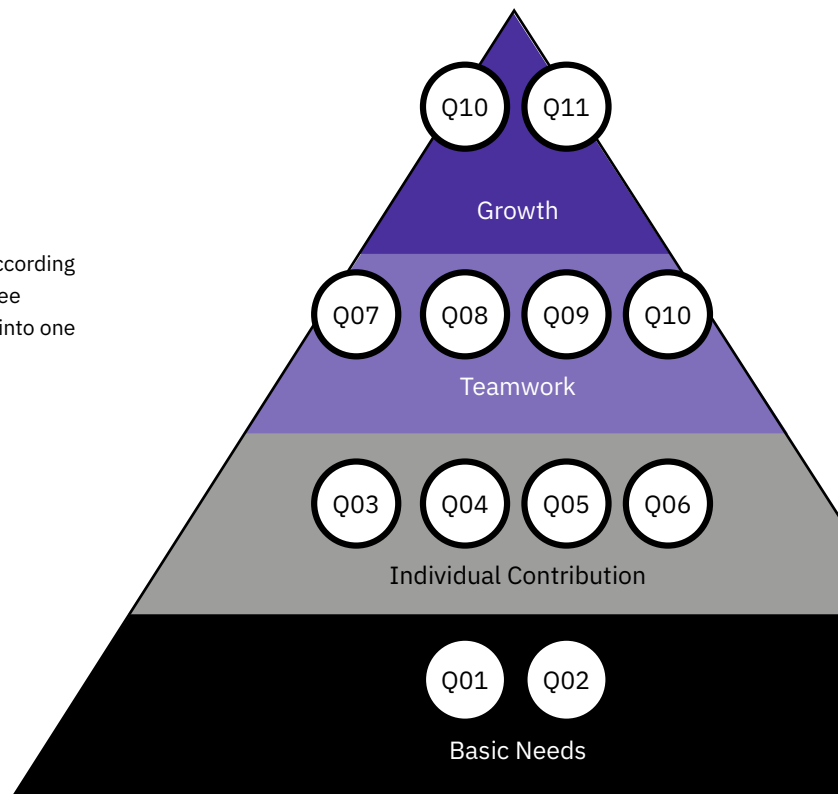
As managers are dealing with human relationships, there are no easy solutions.

In conclusion, research on this stage of the employee experience has shown that, regardless of the approach chosen, this is a stage on which organizations are focusing their effort. This high level of awareness is due to the fact that, as mentioned above, as employee engagement increases, turnover intention decreases (Fulmore et al., 2022). However, as defined by Allen et al. (2010), turnover can be unavoidable. External factors can have an impact on employees. As the interviews conducted for this thesis have shown, employee engagement is not enough to retain employees if they receive a better job offer or if a person's life circumstances change. The efforts of employers and managers cannot focus only on this phase of the employee experience: resignations are a phenomenon that continues to occur and is not in the full control of the organization. In the next chapter, it is argued how employers and managers react after resignation and what practices and roles are involved.

fig_28

This graph shows the hierarchy of employees' development needs according to Gallup. Each of the Q12 employee engagement survey questions fits into one of the four levels.

Source: Gallup





There is a widespread cultural and professional bias: when a person leaves, the organization no longer needs to invest in that relationship. [...]

In our country [Italy] the phenomenon of boomerang employees is quite rare because, to the choice of leaving the organization, one associates a sort of breaking of a pact of loyalty or infidelity. There are then some basic reasons... It is difficult to motivate investment on a person who leaves because its advantage is not so simple to argue.

Experience 25 years	Company Size -	Field HR expert and professor
------------------------	-------------------	----------------------------------

fig_29



Employee experience phase after resignation.
Adapted from Gallup

2.3

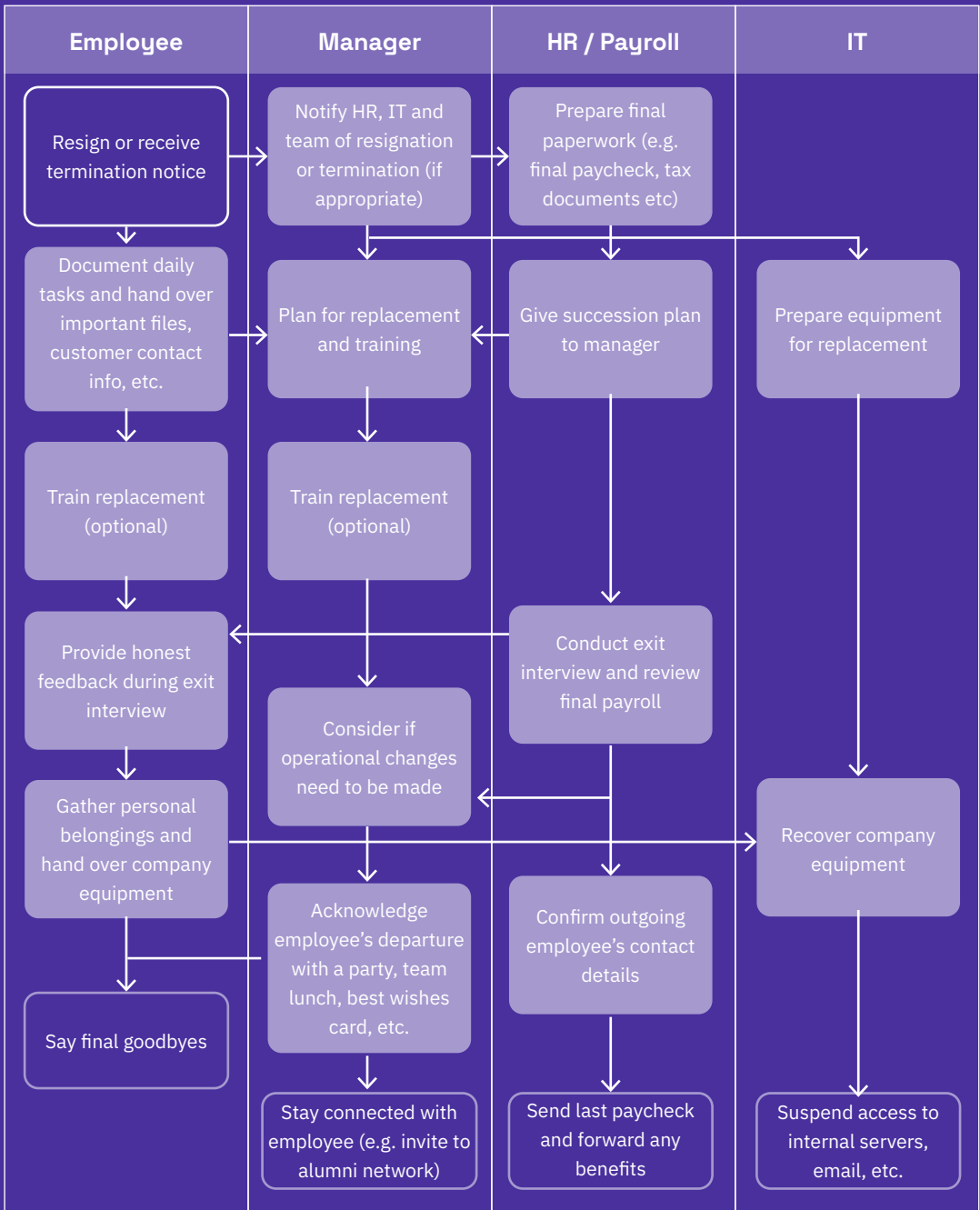
After employee resignation

When an employee resigns, the members of the organization involved in the offboarding process are usually three: the manager or supervisor, the HR and then IT (Adroja, 2019). As illustrated in the graph, the HR has administrative tasks, such as managing the payroll. The manager is instead involved in finding a replacement or making operational changes. Both of them can be involved in interviewing the resigning employee, as their departure can have an impact on the team's relationship/balance. The IT usually has to manage the offboarding of the employee from the digital platforms used in the organization.

Since, as argued in the previous sections, turnover rate is not enough to tell the reason why a person leaves an organization (O'Connell & Kung, 2007), there are several Human Resource post-resignation practices to deal with resigning employees. This section of the second chapter is going to introduce and describe which are the most common activities with their pros and cons.

Turnover rate is not enough to tell why a person leaves an organization.

Research



fig_30 Roles involved when an employee communicates resignation or receives termination notice.
Source: LinkedIn



[during exit interviews] **The employee brings out aspects that they have never brought out before. It is more likely that a person is not sincere before [resignation]. What might happen is that a person fears to open up. They fear that the superior might think they are arrogant, that the manager might not accept the employee's complaint or request objectively.**

Experience 40 Years	Company Size 10000+ empl.	Field HR
------------------------	------------------------------	-------------

Practice

Exit interviews

Exit interviews or exit surveys? The exit interview is defined as “a conversation between an organizational representative and a departing employee to determine the reasons that the latter is leaving the organization.” (Gordon, 2011). An exit interview can be held in different formats such as interview in person, interview by phone, or exit survey. Surveys generate quantifiable data and are usually chosen because they are a low-cost and less time-consuming so-

lution. However, interviews allow the interviewer to collect better qualitative data and information about the emotional content of the answers (Pace & Kisamore, 2017). The recommended basic guidelines for leading an exit interview are: mentioning positive measures taken in the past based on employee feedback and giving impressions of psychological safety (Pace & Kisamore, 2017).

Exit interviews are controversial: not everyone agrees on their effectiveness. Above others, one of the main arguments is the fact that employees are not always honest when interviewed by someone within the organization because they want to avoid “burning bridges” for future collaborations (Pace & Kisamore, 2017). It is also argued that, to be of support, exit interviews should be part of a broader HR strategy (Pace & Kisamore, 2017).

Furthermore, it has been proven that successful exit interviews are subject to the reason why an employee is leaving an organization. Academic research about exit interviews and post-exit relationships has estimated that when employees leave an organization for external reasons, such as a career change, they end up having

more direct conversations with their managers and are more likely to show interest in a post-exit relationship. On the other side, employees who leave for internal reasons, such as issues concerning the employment relationship, find it difficult to use direct communication strategies and initially rely on indirect ones (Kulik et al., 2015).

Successful exit interviews are subject to the reason why an employee is leaving an organization.

Practice

Alumni Networks

Some organizations celebrate departures and support their former employees. They can formally do so by creating corporate alumni networks. These are defined by literature as *“formal networks whose members are former employees of a focal firm”* (Bardon et al., 2015). Hence, corporate alumni networks are not merely former employees who decide to group together, but former employees who decided to formalize their relationship with the organization. Apparently, corporate alumni networks are thriving in many sectors of the economy, as seen by increased coverage in professional publications (Bardon et al., 2015). Another element supporting this is the fact that there are even companies whose business is building corporate alumni networks, such as Enterprise Alumni. This is a software company based in the United States that develops enterprise software for managing corporate alumni and retirees (EnterpriseAlumni, 2022).

One of the oldest and most renowned corporate alumni network is McKinsey's alumni network, born in the 1960s, now the McKinsey Alumni Center. McKinsey Alumni Center is a platform where alumni can collaborate with firm members, attend events and even post or find jobs (McKinsey, 2022). What is interesting and remarkable about this practice is that McKinsey embraced the fact that work relationships end and instead of treating it as a taboo, it built a strategy out of it. An article on Forbes reported that a page on McKinsey's recruitment website stated:

“As profoundly stimulating as it is at McKinsey, people do leave. We're OK with that. In fact, we're proud of what they achieve as global leaders... We think it's great that there's a lot of McKinsey in places other than McKinsey.” (Burkus, 2016)

This mindset is so deeply rooted in their way of dealing with resignation that employees are automatically enrolled in the alumni network when they begin working for the company, rather than when they depart (Dachner & Macharius, 2021).

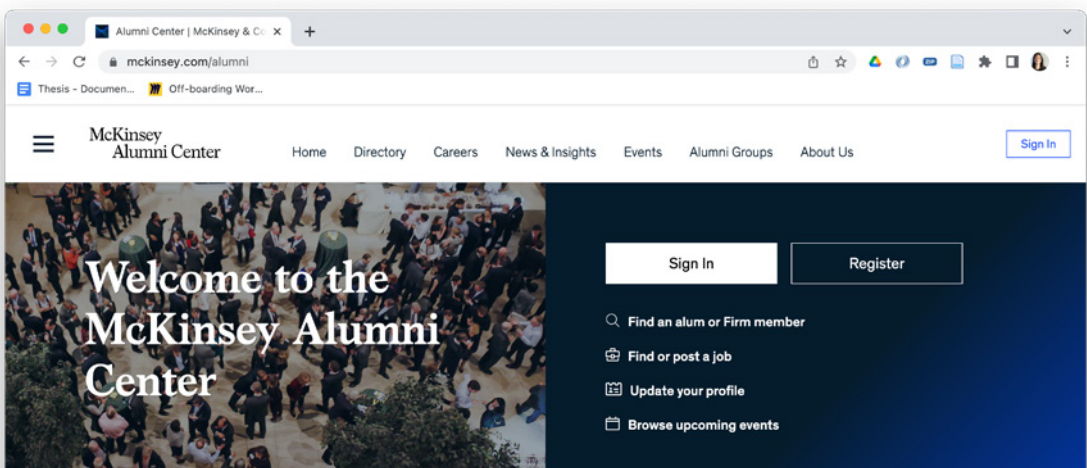
Research

Research proved that the more the alumni identify with the organization, the more likely they are to bring benefits to the former company (Bardon et al., 2015). As a matter of fact, there are several benefits that organizations can get from corporate alumni networks. Generally, through recommendations by former employees to potential new employees or clients (Bardon et al., 2015). Enterprise Alumni provides a more detailed list of the benefits of corporate alumni platforms by dividing them into HR-related benefits and business-related benefits (Enterprise Alumni, 2022). Among the HR goals feature rehiring great achievers and innovators, expanding the pool of mentors available to current employees and improving the employer brand. On the other hand, among the business goals are making alumni customers to produce direct sales, getting the assistance of alumni in forming partnerships and getting support with benchmarking to gain knowledge about industry trends (Enterprise Alumni, 2022).

The more the alumni identify with the organization, the more likely they are to bring benefits to the former company

fig_31

A screenshot from the McKinsey Alumni Center homepage
Source: mckinsey.com/alumni



HR-related goals

To improve the quality of hires by rehiring top performers and innovators (boomerang rehires are low-cost, typically have higher retention rates and reach minimum productivity much more quickly than most external hires).

To increase the number and the quality of employee referrals by expanding the program to include alumni.

To strengthen the employer brand image throughout the industry.

To increase retention rates among current employees by developing a stronger positive image.

To increase the number of mentors available to current employees.

Business-related goals

To generate direct sales by making alumni customers.

To increase the number of leads generated (customer referrals).

To capture ideas and innovations from alumni.

To get product assessment help.

To get benchmarking help and to learn about industry best practices.

To gather competitive intelligence.

To get help from alumni in building strategic partnerships.

fig_32

List of Alumni Network benefits.
Adapted from Enterprise Alumni.

Design and Human Resources consulting are increasingly merging

(Auricchio et al., 2018)

Chapter 3

Why Design?

Summary

This chapter is going to analyze why and how Service Design can tackle Human Resources related issues.

In this chapter

3.1 Service Design for Human Resources
How these two disciplines are getting closer to each other

3.2 Additional methodologies and frameworks considered

3.2.1 Design for Closure Experiences
Understand closure as an experience to be designed

3.2.2 Jobs-to-be-done
Understand decision making

3.2.3 Behavioral archetypes
Understand people

3.1

Service Design for Human Resources

Evolving relationships: a new challenge for organizations and an emerging design need. Even in the years before the pandemic, it was observed that many aspects of the workplace were changing. With the adoption of new technologies in the workplace, changes in society and demographic trends, the way employees related to employers and colleagues at work was transforming (Rossi, 2020). These changes include the phenomena described in the first chapter of this thesis: the emergence of job hopping, the re-evaluation of work-life balance and the disruptive widespread use of social media. These transformations resulted in the emergence of new employee needs within organizations. Thus, with this design demand, companies were seeking to direct their innovation efforts towards internal users and customers, rather than addressing the external challenges (Rossi, 2020).

Two disciplines getting closer to each other. Research has shown how the two worlds of design and Human Resources consulting are increasingly merging. It was noted that Ser-

Design and Human Resources consulting are increasingly merging

Research

vice Design and Human Resource consulting share essential skills, such as empathy and the so-called “perspective transformation”. This is described as the ability to help people shift their points of view by thinking back on their assumptions and values and intentionally formulating and implementing plans that result in new ways of understanding their realities (Auricchio et al., 2018).

Both Service Design for Human Resources (SD for HR) and Human Resource Design (HRD) have been defined, and they are not the same concept.

What does “SD for HR” mean? Service Design for Human Resources refers to those design practices that are “at the service of Human Resource Management”. For example, interventions in the scope of Service Design for Human Resources are defined as those interventions for which the employee experience is redesigned in the hiring phase, or in the interactions with their colleagues. To better explain the relationship between the two disciplines, this is the case where Human Resources is simply an area where Service Design is being applied (Rossi, 2020).

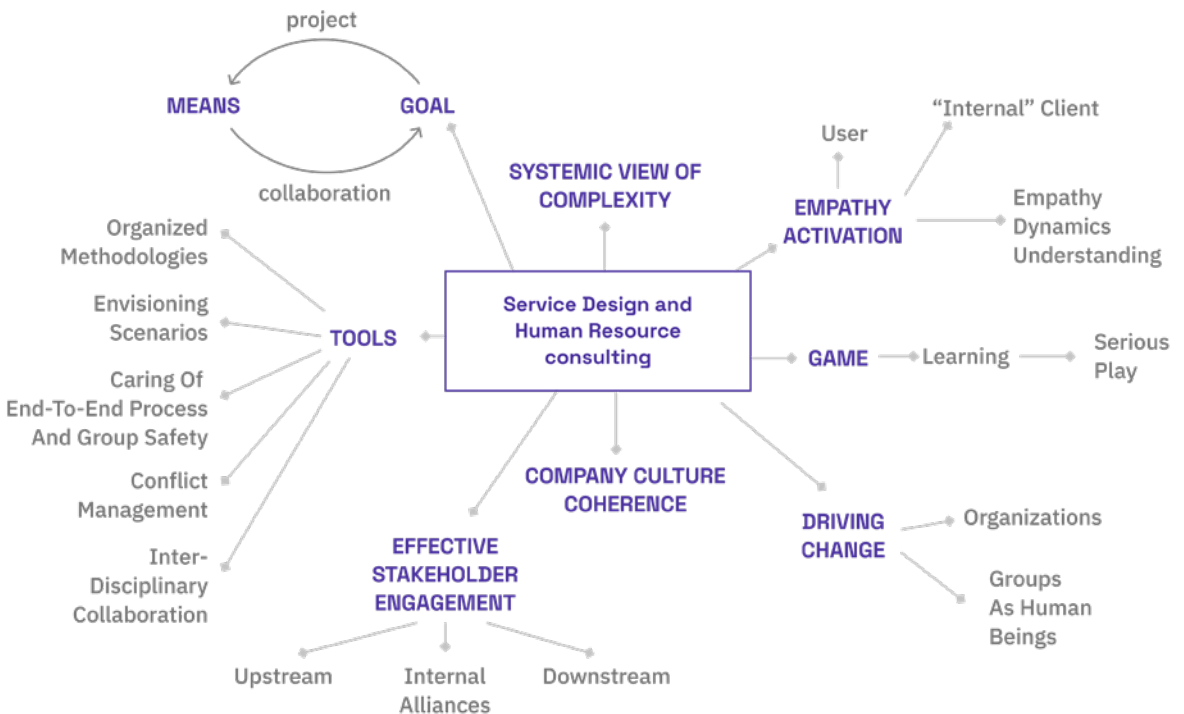
What does “HRD” mean? Human Resource Design has been defined by Rossi (2020) according to three parameters: 1) the so-called “level of depth” of design within the organization; 2) the relationship between the client and the designer; and, 3) the degree of “humanization”. With respect to the level of depth at which design can be found within an organization, Human Resource Design is “core”, meaning at a strategic level, or even “intrinsic”, i.e. it is part of the mindset. With respect to the second point, that is, the relationship between the client and the designer, HRD interventions are characterized by a “partnering” or “facilitating” type of relationship. This means that clients co-design with designers, or designers try to enable clients to apply design methods on their own. To complete the definition of Human Resource Design, the last point highlights the fact that it focuses on finding new ways to work together or new behaviors (Rossi, 2020).

To sum up, Service Design for Human Resources (SD for HR) and Human Resource Design (HRD) are different because there is a different degree of integration of design with Human Resource Management. The first one puts the focus on “what” to design to meet the needs of the employee, and the second focuses on “how” people within the organization could change their behavior to work together in new ways. The two imply interventions at different levels of depth: when the degree of integration of design with Human Resource Management is lower, this constitutes the field of SD for HR, when it is higher, the area is the one of Human Resource Design (Rossi, 2020).

SD and HRD are different because there is a different degree of integration of design with Human Resource Management.

fig_33

Mind map that emerged from a discussion between professionals representing the two disciplines. Adapted from Auricchio et al. (2018)



Research

This thesis and the project connected to it fall within the scope of Service Design for Human Resources Management.

In fact, a tool is proposed, with the purpose of helping managers to collect insights and ideas for improvement on internal processes within the organization. It does so by enhancing the ability of managers to listen and empathize with employees who have resigned.

Service Design methods supporting Human Resources. A research paper that discusses how Service Design and HR are becoming increasingly integrated (Auricchio et al., 2018), illustrates the views of designers and then HR professionals, as opposed to the discipline of others. Listed by HR consultants are the methods and areas of design that would be most supportive of their discipline (Auricchio et al., 2018). In particular, the three following elements are mentioned, which are also at the core of what is the project presented in this thesis.

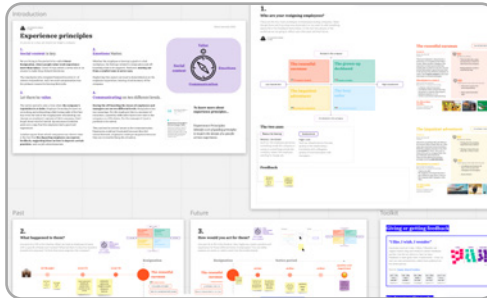
1. Visualization.

Visualization is one of the areas identified by research as those through which Service Design can contribute to Human Resources (Auricchio et al., 2018). In particular, Auricchio et al. (2018) emphasize how integrating maps in projects facilitates dialogue and visualization of needs. Visual representations support the creation of a common knowledge base with respect to a topic and assist in decision making.

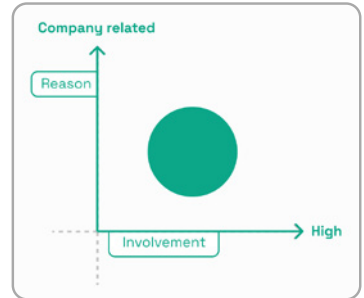
→ A prominently visual approach was used throughout the process behind this thesis project. To better communicate with stakeholders during feedback sessions, maps and visual representations of employee experiences were used. Among these, employees were asked to choose a visual metaphor to describe their resignation process. Moreover, when the interviews session was over and behavioral archetypes were created, these were represented in the final output through a 3D illustration.

Maps

Maps were used to visualize research outcomes and as a support during feedback sessions



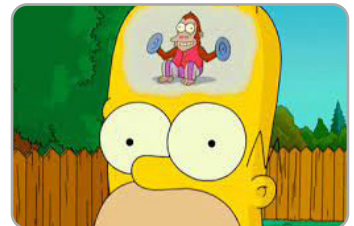
Miro Boards for feedback sessions



Positioning map for archetypes

Visual metaphors

The resigning employees were asked to describe their resignation and off-boarding with an image



Source: Google Images

3D illustrations

The archetypes are not only communicated through maps, but also thanks to 3D illustrations in order to trigger empathy and creative thinking.



Illustration: Martina Andreotti
3D model: Francesco Pedrani

Research

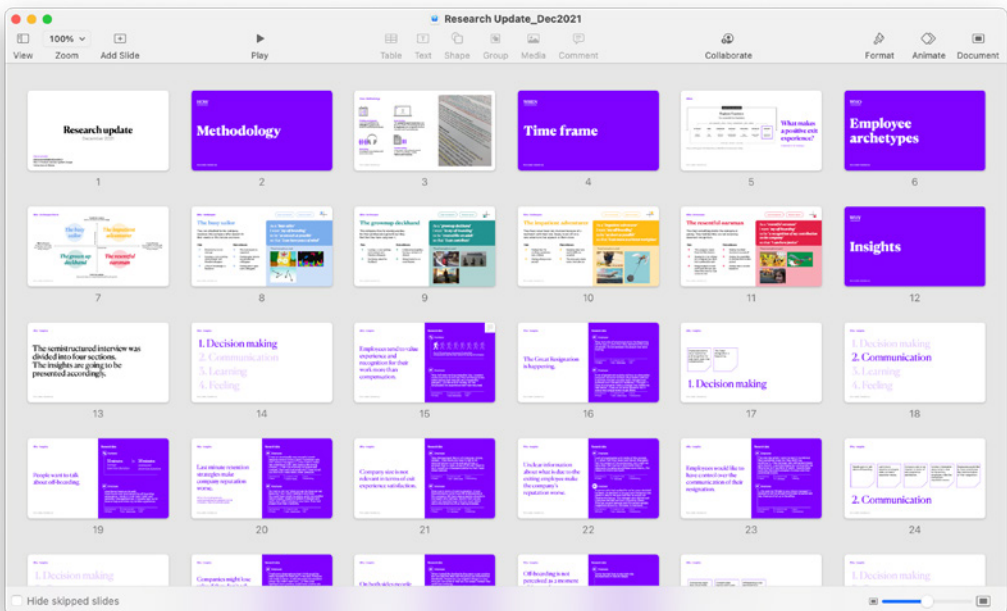
2. Structuring project processes.

The design process is usually iterative and it is fundamental to keep track of outputs, intuitions, findings and discuss them in every step. The design process enables HR consultants to understand the stages of the process in a project, keep track of results and insights, and generate comparable results (Auricchio et al., 2018).

→ In this thesis project, the findings were tracked for each iteration and this facilitated the dialogue with HR professionals and the creation of the final output. Also, the tool developed aims at supporting managers in performing the same task: collecting insights about their organization's turnover.

Iterations

After each key step of the research, the findings were collected and presented to the supervisor or discussed with an expert.



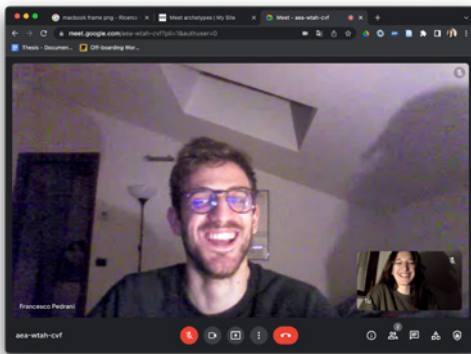
3. Focus on empathy.

Co-design activities require involving people at a cognitive and emotional level while developing new ideas. It is also argued that Service Design and HR share empathy as core competence (Auricchio et al., 2018).

→ This is a core aspect of the project. First of all, because the project focuses on enhancing the managers' empathy towards employees. Second, because during the process HR managers and professionals were involved in the iterations.

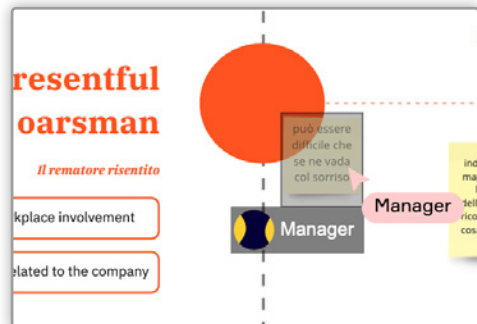
Interviewing

16 semi structured interviews were held between November and December 2021 with employees who resigned in the six months earlier. The purpose was to better understand employees' reasons for leaving their organizations.



Workshop

A workshop was held with a manager to better understand which are the managers' needs and how they usually do "lesson learning" after employees' resignation.



3.2

Additional methodologies and frameworks considered

This work includes contributions not only from the Service Design field but also from a broader field. With respect to the theme of resignations there were three aspects to understand well the nature of: closure, decision making and behaviors. Relevant methodologies have been found that would help to better understand these three facets and how to design for them.

3.2.1

Design for Closure Experiences

Understand closure as an experience to be designed

To understand Closure Experiences and how to design for them, the work of Joe Macleod is a cornerstone. Joe Macleod is a designer who has been working with the theme of Closure Experiences for almost two decades. He argues that Closure Experiences are experiences that need to be designed and not “left in limbo”, as he puts it (Macleod, 2015).

The psychological reasons. In an article published by UX Magazine (Macleod, 2015) he supports the importance of designing for Closure Experiences with three psychological theories: the theory of the experiencing self and remembering self, the Peak-End rule and the Need for Cognitive Closure (NFCC). The first and the second derive from the studies of psychologist Daniel Kahneman, author of the book “Thinking Fast and Slow”. In these studies it is identified that the experiencing self is that part of the self that answers the question “does it hurt now?”, while the remembering self answers the question “how was it?”. Furthermore, Kahneman’s studies have shown that humans judge experiences by their peak and end moments, a topic that will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter of this thesis. These two notions support the argument that first impressions are temporary while last impressions are permanent. Finally, the third psychological principle that Macleod (2015) uses to argue his thesis is the Need for Cognitive closure (NFCC). In short, this notion supports the fact that people need to avoid ambiguity (Macleod, 2015). In his work researching and exploring the topic in recent years, he has noticed a “pattern of denial” in the end of the consumer lifecycle. In fact, digging deeper, he has observed and studied that most of the problems related to consumerism, such as waste, lie behind the denial of the end that comes from a denial of death (Macleod, 2015).

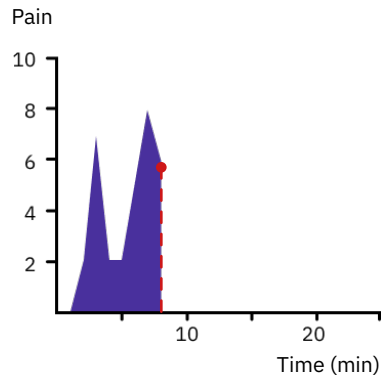
The socio-historical reasons. In his book “Ends. Why We Overlook Endings for Humans, Products, Services and Digital. And Why We Shouldn’t”, Macleod discusses the historical reasons for this attitude. He comes to the conclusion that this happened primarily through changes in religious traditions and the emotional distancing of death over centuries (Macleod, 2017).

Macleod observed that in Western culture, before the 14th century plague, people were in a closer contact with death than they are nowadays (Macleod, 2017; Oslo IxDA, 2017). This was due to various reasons: to mention two, people had a deeper connection with the Catholic religion,

Patient A

Experience: less pain

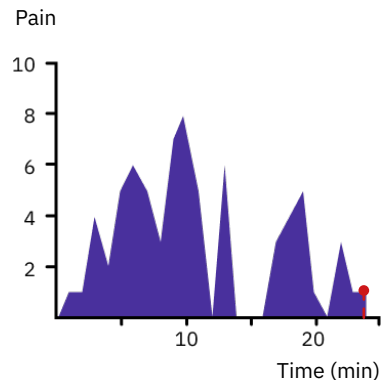
Memory: more pain



Patient B

Experience: more pain

Memory: less pain



fig_34

These graphs from Kahnemann studies prove that memories are heavily influenced by the end of the experience.

Research

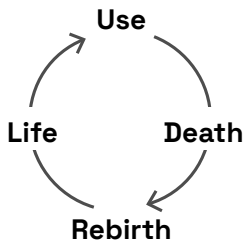
where death is acknowledged through meaningful funerals, and people died earlier. According to him, the outburst of the plague made death meaningless in the eyes of people, and Protestantism arose. It introduced an investment mindset and, as Macleod argues, provided a basis for consumerism. As a matter of fact, the Protestant pattern of investing in better machinery, technology, and science resulted in enhanced production efficiencies, which led to larger financial returns and higher pay. The foundation of consumer society is the creation of new initiatives, reinvesting money, and cultivating a mentality of production and renewal (Macleod, 2017; Oslo IxDA, 2017).

As human beings we don't want to end consumer experiences because they remind us of our mortality. This echoes in all the facets of the consumer experience: we have a tendency to overlook endings as customers, we have created a culture of neglecting them in the workplace, we are educated as students that they are not relevant. As a consequence, this is the way products and services are designed (Macleod, 2017).

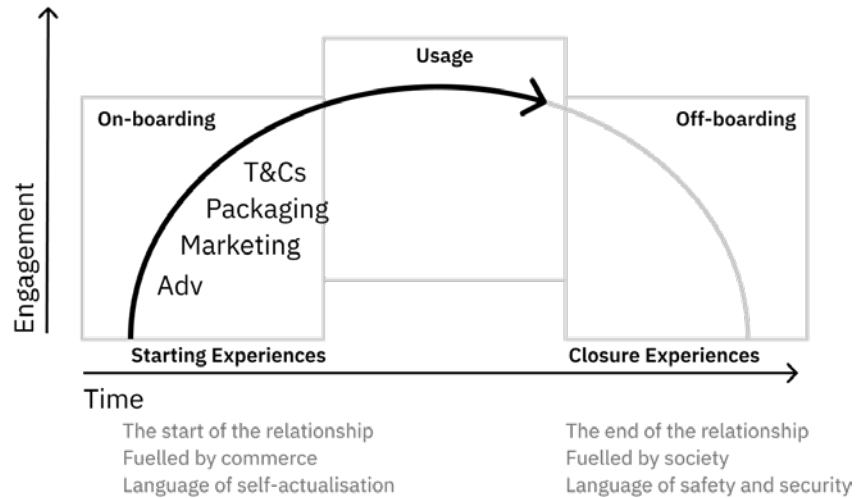
What are the consequences? The purpose of Macleod's research is also to highlight that overlooking endings has an impact. The consequences of not designing for the end are several misbehaviors: among all, an absent-minded relationship between consumers and waste. In the pre-industrial era, waste management was cyclical, the consumer had full control because what was left over in the kitchen was given to animals and animal waste was used as fertilizer to grow what was then consumed in the kitchen (Macleod, 2017). Now, products are harder to dispose of and, as product ends are rarely designed, consumers misbehave. In a 2017 talk (Oslo IxDA, 2017), Macleod mentions as an example the disposal of an ink cartridge. As it is very hard for consumers to dispose of it, it ends up in

The consequences of not designing for the end are several misbehaviors

A) Cyclical



B) Linear



the landfill, while being toxic. But this waste issue isn't just about physical products. Macleod argues that even the digital world can be cluttered. He mentions the phenomenon of Zombie Apps. These are apps that do not appear in the top 300 of the 23 genres of Apple's App Store. Investigating this phenomenon further, he realized that there is a lot of guidance for developers on how to upload apps to the App Store and gain new users but very little on how to remove them and off-board their customers (Macleod, 2017).

When it comes to defining what a good closure experience is, Macleod states:

“A good Closure Experience should be Consciously Connected to the rest of the experience through Emotional Triggers that are Actionable by the user in a Timely manner.” (Macleod, 2017; Oslo IxDA, 2017)

On his blog, Macleod posted a framework he created for businesses that need to develop a product. He called it End Canvas and it focuses on the features that a good consumer off-boarding experience must have (Macleod, 2019).

fig_35

(A) A simple lifecycle of consumption
(B) The consumer lifecycle nowadays

Source: Macleod, 2017

**fig_36**

Ink cartridges are one of the most difficult products to dispose of.

Source: Google Images

Macleod's research is important to this thesis because it highlights why designing Closure Experiences is undervalued and overlooked. This work also gets to the root of why the end of something has become taboo in our society. And, as Macleod argues, better understanding the patterns of off-boarding or ending part of the consumer experience allows for a reduction in its negative effects (Macleod, 2017). Comprehending the behavior of someone who wants to leave is a resource. When people consider ending something, all go through a similar cognitive process. Knowing the stages that people take, helps to create good closure experiences (Macleod, 2017). As it is acknowledged by Macleod (2017) and is widely argued in the first part of this research, now people tend to shift roles and jobs more frequently. The work presented in this thesis is the attempt to apply this mindset to the workplace environment. The purpose is to better understand what happens when an employee resigns in order to provide them a good closure experience and help the organizations catch value.

Understanding the patterns of off-boarding or ending part of the consumer experience allows for a reduction in its negative effects

3.2.2

Jobs-to-be-done

Understand decision making

Jobs-to-be-done, also known by its abbreviated name JTBD, is a framework theorized by Bob Moesta and the Harvard Business School Professor Clayton Christensen in the 1990s (Traynor, 2018). It facilitates the discovery of a customer's real motive for purchasing a product, the "job" that the product is supposedly "hired" to do, according to the metaphor introduced by Christensen and Moesta (Christensen et al., 2016; Traynor, 2018). And they, keeping with that terminology, say that when a product doesn't do the job the person hired it to do, then it gets "fired" (Christensen et al., 2016).

It facilitates the discovery of a customer's real motive for purchasing a product.

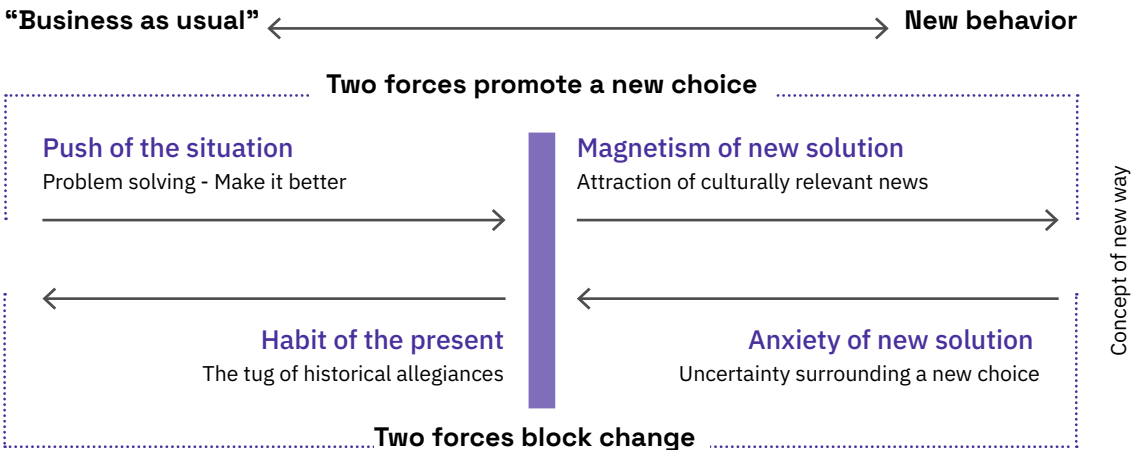
This framework is noteworthy in its focus on what the customer intends to achieve, that is on the final goal rather than on product features themselves (Christensen et al., 2016). Moesta also calls this final goal "progress" and defines JTBD as "*the progress that a person is trying to make in a particular struggling circumstance*" (Christensen et al., 2016; Project A Ventures, 2021). In short, the Jobs-to-be-done approach to products is usually summarized with this sentence:

"People don't want to buy a drill, they want a hole"
(Project A Ventures, 2021)

How to work with JTBD? Jobs-to-be-done are relevant to understand the deeper reasons behind people's decisions. In a 2021 conference, Moesta mentioned two frameworks used to uncover Jobs-to-be-done (Project A Ventures, 2021).

1. JTBD forces of progress.

This framework outlines which are the forces that promote a new choice and forces that block change in shifting from state A to state B. Specifically, the two forces that promote a new choice are called “push”, the desire to get out of a difficult situation, and “pull”, the attractiveness of a new solution. However, there are the forces that hold the person back, which are specifically anxiety, given by the uncertainty in adopting a new solution, and habit (Project A Ventures, 2021).

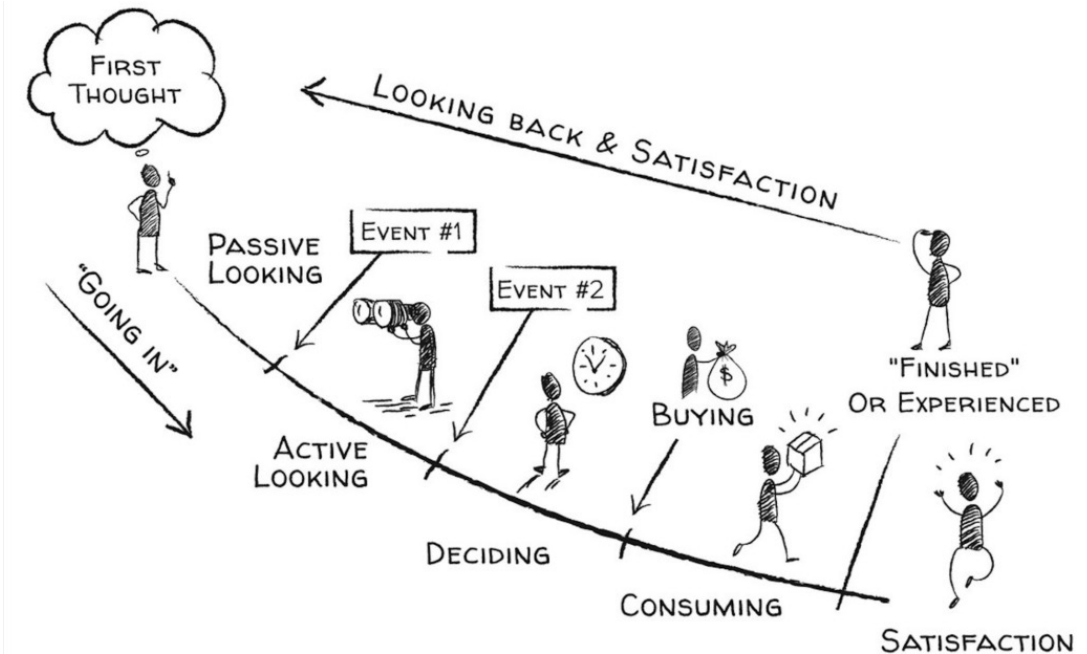


fig_37
JTBD forces of progress.
Source: jobstobedone.org

→ In this thesis project, this was used to understand the forces that brought employees to change jobs. It also uncovered the forces that block change. Many spoke of the previous job as a comfort zone that made the departure from the previous company emotionally exhausting, even though it was sought after. Others recounted considering for a long time whether or not to change jobs because they were comfortable within the organization.

2. Timeline.

This second framework studies the decision-making process behind making progress. Moesta identified steps that he figured out were the same for everyone. These are: first thought, passive looking, event #1, active looking, event #2, deciding, buying, consuming, finishing, looking back and satisfaction (Project A Ventures, 2021).



fig_38
JTBD timeline

→ In this thesis project the timeline was used in a reworked version as a visual representation of the experiences recounted in the interviews by employees. In the interview protocol for example, one of the questions to figure out the employees' decision making process was "when did you first think about changing jobs?". This was then used in project's iterations and integrated in the final output in a simplified version of the timeline.

3.2.3

Behavioral archetypes

Understand people

In the design field, the tool conventionally used to understand users or design for specific groups of people are personas. This is the definition of persona from the online collection of tools Service Design Tools (Service Design Tools, 2022b):

“Each persona is a reference model representative of a specific type of users. Technically, they can be called behavioral archetypes when they focus on capturing the different behaviors (e.g. “the conscious chooser”) without expressing a defined personality or socio-demographics. The more the archetypes assume a realistic feeling (e.g. name, age, household composition, etc.), the more they become real personas, fully expressing the needs, desires, habits and cultural backgrounds of specific groups of users.”



Case study. One of the most popular case study in this area, and one that highlights the differences between these two levels of depth, is the case of the personas created by the Spotify Design team. They realized that problems, needs or reasons for listening to music were consistent across

fig_39

Illustrations of the five Spotify Personas
Source: spotify.design

clusters, while habits and context influence how those people deal with those problems. Thus, instead of simply using the amount of data they have and creating demographic clusters, Spotify's designers cross-referenced needs to music listening context and listening habits. Then, they characterized their findings using illustrations and colors to make the personas relatable (Torres de Souza et al., 2019).

The approach chosen. In the specific case of this thesis project, the approach chosen was closer to behavioral archetypes. This choice was made because the scope of the research was trying to map resignation behaviors. Moreover, starting from a very varied sample of people interviewed, it was unlikely to have enough data to create personas with specific socio-demographics. Respondents were people from abroad and of different age groups, having in common only the area of employment: knowledge based work. However, the behavioral patterns were similar even between different people, as in the Spotify case study. That is why, in reference to the definition of Service Design Tools, later on the word "archetypes" is going to be used to refer to the clusters of resigning employees.

Spotify's designers cross- referenced needs to music listening context and listening habits.

Framing the design challenge

Summary

This chapter explains what are the boundaries of the design challenge. Then, a parallelism between workplace and product service is proposed. Some UX principles are explained, in order to analyze resigning employees experience through this discipline.



fig_40
Process: sorting findings

In this chapter

4.1 Defining project boundaries

What are the points that outline the challenge

4.2 User Experience for closure in working experiences

How does the UX discipline address this issue?

4.2.1 Peak-End Rule

The theory behind this rule

4.2.2 Confirmshaming

An impactful dark pattern

4.1

Defining project boundaries

Following the premises argued in the previous chapters, the design challenge of this thesis is outlined by these points:

1. The trends with respect to employee resignations make it clear that this is an increasingly present issue in the employee-employer relationship. People change jobs more frequently and talk about it on social media. People are more attentive to the cultural value aspects than to the compensation aspects. During and after the pandemic people have changed the way they work and this has led to the opening up of new possibilities, so that organizations are competing even more for talent. **It is therefore widely demonstrated that closure experiences are increasingly common in the workplace.**

2.

Organizations and managers have standard responses to turnover, but literature supports the fact that there is no one-size-fits-all-employees solution. As a matter of fact, research about exit interviews proves that the success of this practice depends on the reason why employees resign (Kulik et al., 2015).

3.

Service Design and Human Resources have several points of contact. **However, there is a gap in the design discipline in designing for closure experiences.** We very rarely design for them, the relationship of human beings with closure has changed as contemporary society has developed. Culturally we are more oriented to new things.

4.

A finding that emerged from the semi structured interviews is that **employee and employer are on two different levels when it comes to resignation** so it is usually a non-valuable, bad experience for both sides. Literature supports this too:

“Managers are more attentive to the economic aspects of their relationships with employees (distributive justice; Cropanzano et al., 2007) while employees are more attentive to the socioemotional aspects (procedural and interpersonal justice; Colquitt et al., 2001). When exiting employees were unwilling to negotiate economic terms with their managers, managers failed to consider the possibility that they could still offer socioemotional support to departing employees.” (Kulik et al., 2015)

The design question then formulated is:

How might we help managers and HR professionals get value from the off-boarding of resigning employees while preserving the employer-employee relationship?

4.2

UX for closure in working experiences

The workplace as a product service. To better understand employee experience it is important to understand User Experience first. As discussed in previous chapters, we are witnessing a very rapid transformation of workplaces. Given the theorization of employer branding and the increasing importance of culture and values beyond mere compensation, employers today cannot focus only on consumer experience and overlook employee experience. In fact, employees are increasingly proving themselves to be consumers of the workplace. Therefore, in this chapter an analogy between workplace and product/services is proposed. Designers usually design products and services in accordance with the principles of User Experience. In this chapter the experiences of resigning employees, collected during semi-structured interviews, will be matched with two principles of UX. This allows

to better understand the discomfort felt by employees in some situations and what should not be overlooked in design for closure experiences and resignations' management.

Employees are increasingly proving themselves to be consumers of the workplace

4.2.1

Peak-End rule

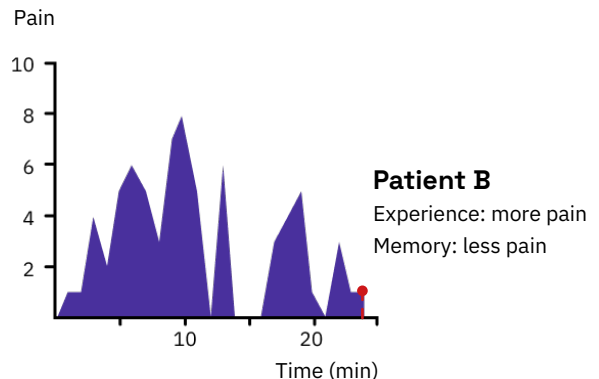
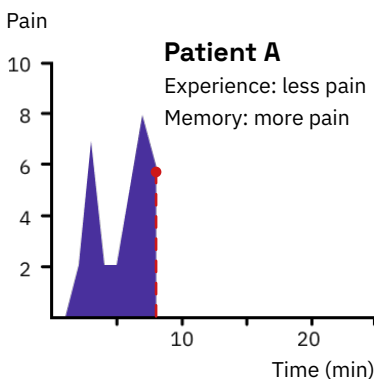
Peak-end theory was defined by Daniel Kahnemann as follows:

“The peak-end rule is a psychological heuristic in which people judge an experience largely based on how they felt at its peak (i.e. its most intense point) and at its end, rather than based on the total sum or average of every moment of the experience.” (Doll, 2021)

Duration neglect. These psychological studies were conducted by observing, among other things, how patients responded to colonoscopies. What emerged from the tests on this medical procedure was that, despite the duration, those for whom the colonoscopy had ended with less pain rated it overall as a less painful experience. So experience and memory of the medical procedure were different. Even though the amount of pain experienced by patient A throughout the procedure was less than the amount of pain experienced by patient B, patient A’s memory is of having experienced more pain (Doll, 2021; Ma-cleod, 2017). The psychological phenomenon that people’s perceptions of the intensity of painful events are unrelated to the duration of those experiences is known as duration neglect. This was also identified and named from research by Barbara Fredrickson and Daniel Kahneman (Doll, 2021).

fig_41

These graphs from Kahnemann studies prove that memories are heavily influenced by the end of the experience.





Evidence of duration neglect in employee experience

When I resigned, the manager missed an opportunity because she told me “we can think about a small raise, a small recognition, maybe a change in the job title” - something I had asked for so many times over the years and over time. And I said “So what were you thinking about?” and she said “I don’t know, I haven’t made up my mind”.

Well, this carelessness was like opening up Pandora’s box. I understood very clearly that there wasn’t a project for me within the organization, so the company stopped being my project. This was a push out of the company for me. Now, a year and a half has passed and I’m out of the company context and still running thanks to the energy this moment gave me. In that sentence they showed a lack of care for a person. Because they could have also given me a sweetener but in that case they didn’t even bother.

I worked 13 and a half years in that company. This made me fall out of love.

Excerpt from interviews

Peak-end rule in resignation. As seen in the quote from the interviews, a 10 or more years’ experience in a company where an employee is satisfied with their job can be overridden by a bad end of the work experience.

“This means that employees may pay more attention to how companies manage exits than to how they welcome new hires—and goodwill between a departing employee and an employer can instantly be undone by a poorly handled offboarding. “When people leave, they are going to talk about the company and the way they were treated on the way out,” **Quinn says.** “You want them and your current employees to realize that people are treated well even when they leave.”” (Dachner & Macharius, 2021)

4.2.2

Confirmshaming

Foreword: understanding dark patterns. Before defining what “confirmshaming” is, the concept of “dark patterns” needs to be defined. The term “dark patterns” was coined in 2010 by Harry Brignull, a researcher with a PhD in Cognitive Science, on his blog 90percentofeverything.com (Brignull, 2010). He defined dark patterns as unethical applications of design to user interfaces, schemes aimed at overriding the users’ will, leveraging their psychology and making them do something they would not otherwise be willing to do (Ferwerda & Andersson, 2020). Brignull is also involved in raising awareness about this issue. He has created a website, darkpatterns.org, where the different types of dark patterns are listed and explained. In addition, anyone on the internet can report, via Twitter or other platforms, cases of dark patterns that are then posted on the website. In the section “types of dark patterns” are mentioned dark patterns such as “sneak into basket”, “hidden costs”, “forced continuity” and many others. Among them, features also “confirmshaming” (Brignull, 2022).

fig_42

Typical dark pattern tone of voice.
Source: Bryce Durbin, Tech Crunch



Defining confirmshaming. Confirmshaming is a type of dark pattern defined by academic research as a practice in which the user is guilted when he opts to do something, such as unsubscribing from a digital service (Ferwerda & Andersson, 2020). That, in fact, is the case when this dark pattern is usually implemented. Research attests that confirmshaming is also known as manipulinks, guilt tripping or negative opt-out (Ferwerda & Andersson, 2020).

This mechanism leverages user shame. A person who feels ashamed is a person who feels disgusted by their own actions as a result of breaking moral rules. This can make people wish they had acted differently or it can make them feel inferior to others (Ferwerda & Andersson, 2020).

Confirmshaming makes user experience worse. Since shame is a negative emotion, users tend to remember it for longer than a positive emotion. At the level of memory making it is not a good thing for the organization enacting confirmshaming, because it generates negative memories related to the experience with their product, service or brand. So, this strategy can lead to negative perceptions of the brand because the user might think the organization is desperately and deceitfully trying to retain people (Ferwerda & Andersson, 2020). It is demonstrated that when someone decides to quit a digital service,

Confirmshaming not only worsens the reputation of the organization, but also does not lead to results.

such as a newsletter subscription, confirmshaming not only worsens the reputation of the organization, but also does not lead to results (Ferwerda & Andersson, 2020). With respect to user behavior: the research cited above states that confirmshaming doesn't make people feel ashamed enough to change their minds, in fact it may make people want to leave the service and go to another provider for the way they are being treated (Ferwerda & Andersson, 2020).

Evidence of confirmshaming in employee experience

“

The worst part was when she started saying “Are you really leaving before the date I want you to leave?”. That passive aggressive attitude. The best part was having in mind that in August I was not going to talk to them anymore, I was going to calm down the pressure.

Excerpt from interviews

“

Emotion-wise it was a very stressful month. Several times a week I had calls with various managers, various directors, even figures outside my unit who were trying to make me understand that I was making, from their point of view, the wrong choice. However, this was argued not with “what’s good about the company you’re leaving” but with “what’s bad about the company you’re going to.” So I felt a lot of pressure for a month, plus, several times a week, in the evening, I had these phone meetings of an hour, endless... Let’s say that in theory they have activated a retention mechanism that has not been finalized because until the day before I actually left the company in every sense, I have never received a counteroffer. This has upset me, and has undermined my confidence in the company. It might be a strong sentence but I felt that my mental space was violated, this bothered me a lot. I was really under pressure.

Excerpt from interviews

Confirmshaming in resignation. With respect to the work experience, attitudes on the part of the employer that can be associated with this type of dark pattern are very common and likewise negative. Some of the people interviewed told about being subject to this kind of pressure. The interviewees were all employees who resigned in the six months preceding November 2021, and this makes it evident that with none of them confirmshaming worked as a retention strategy. What is also to be mentioned about this data is the fact that they talked about it as the worst part of their offboarding.

Research

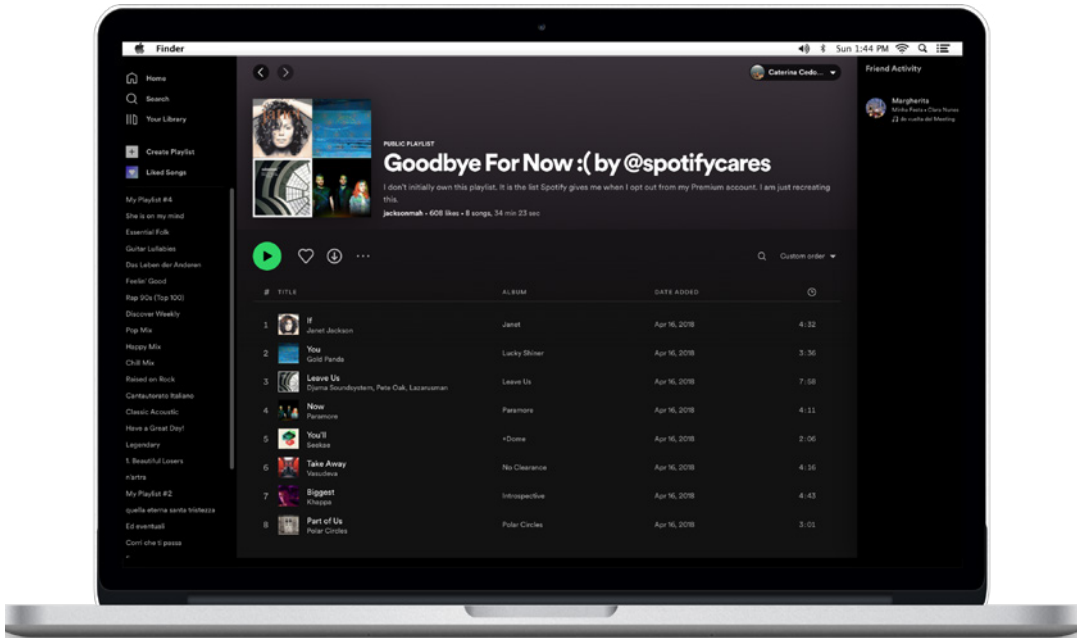
Alternatives to look up to.

An interesting approach to disengagement is Spotify's approach to their users. Rather than shame the person who decides to unsubscribe from the Spotify Premium service, they create for them a playlist titled "goodbye for now :(("Goodbye For Now", 2018). A thread on Reddit shows that users while, recognizing the mechanism, label Spotify as a "marketing genius" (MayLinMar, 2018).

Spotify

fig_43

The song titles compose the sentence "If you leave us now you'll take away biggest part of us"



NeN

Another example along the lines of this is this screenshot of NeN's app. The energy provider has characterized the Robo, the device that monitors energy consumption, and shows it sad when the user decides to stop using it, without triggering a mechanism of accusation or shame for the user.

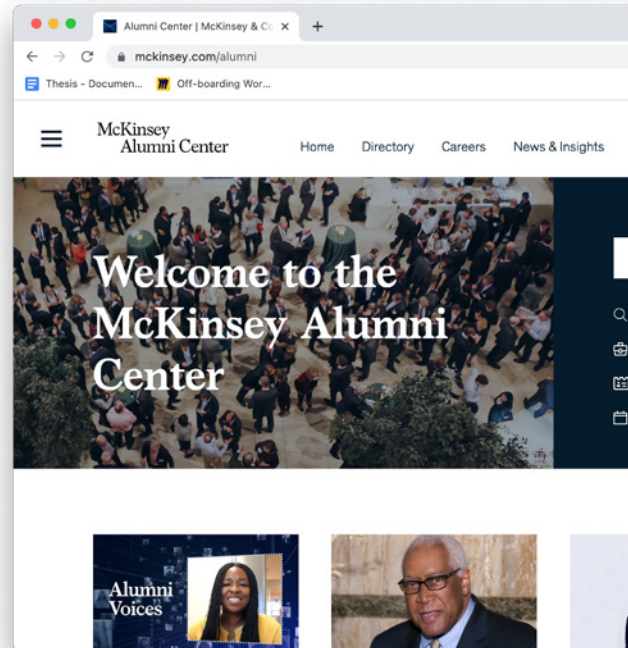


fig_44

Screenshot from Nen's app. The translation is "Your Robo is desperate"

McKinsey

In the employee experience, a well designed example is the initiative of the corporate alumni network, which has been widely discussed above. It gives value to the person who leaves the organization, assigning them a new role.



fig_45

A screenshot from the McKinsey Alumni Center homepage
Source: mckinsey.com/alumni

Methodology

The aim of this thesis is to explore how the approach to design for closure experiences could improve an experience, in particular, the end of the employee-employer relationship. Resignations are no longer negligible. A Great Resignation is going on, boosted by the pandemic. Employees now are fleeing their workplaces, and it's not just a matter of compensation. Though Great Resignation is a trend, every employee is different, and leaving for various reasons. Employers cannot ignore this, and they need the tools to better understand this phenomenon.

How to help managers and HR professionals get value from the off-boarding of resigning employees preserving the employer-employee relationship?

The process to develop this project consisted of several methodologies.

- A) Literature research.**

The research concerned the most relevant 21st century workplace resignation trends, what are the existing HR practices in the area of resignations and the topic of design for closure experiences.
- B) Field research.**

To understand the problems concerning the employee-employer relationship, 16 semi structured interviews were held with employees and 5 with experts. For the employees' interviews, the protocol was divided into four sections: 1) motivation and decision making; 2) communication to management and colleagues; 3) learning; 4) feeling and explain with a metaphor. Another protocol was created for professionals and experts in the HR sector. The interviews were held remotely, to take the opportunity to interview people from other countries, all in the European area. The respondents were all from the same work sector: knowledge workers.
- C) Project development.**

The archetypes resulted from this interview were then used to develop a first sketch of the tool. Then, with the aid of different frameworks such as Jobs-to-be-done and behavioral archetypes the tool was refined and iteratively tested. The first version was sketched on Miro using boards and maps, then an interactive website was made, in order to make it more accessible and easier to interact with.
- D) Feedbacks.**

Lastly, a feedback session with a manager was held in order to understand which are the strengths and weaknesses of the tool.

Mapping the problems of resignation and off-boarding

In this chapter

6.1 Interviews
Understanding the problem
through semi structured interviews

6.2 Findings
Findings from interviews with
resigning employees

6.1

Interviews

To further investigate and understand the topics of resignation and off-boarding, semi structured interviews were held between November 2021 and December 2021.

Master Thesis Research - 5 pages

<p>Research question</p> <p>How might we help HR professionals design the employees' off-boarding experience?</p> <p>November 2021</p>	<p>I'm looking for</p> <p>Experts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Occupational psychologist → HR professional → Personnel manager 	<p>I'm looking for</p> <p>Employees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → You changed job within the past six months 	<p>Why</p> <p>I want to understand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → How we make decisions when we change job → How to measure the success of a well managed off-boarding → And I'm open to listen to whatever you want to tell me about your experience with off-boarding! 	<p>Contacts</p> <p>Contact me</p>
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A. Finding participants. A post was published on LinkedIn to publicize the research and find participants. The requirements and purpose of the research were stated. Respondents were chosen from people who had resigned in the six months prior to the launch of the research, in order to prevent their memories of the resignation experience from being too distorted. In the end, 16 employees and 5 experts were interviewed.

Project

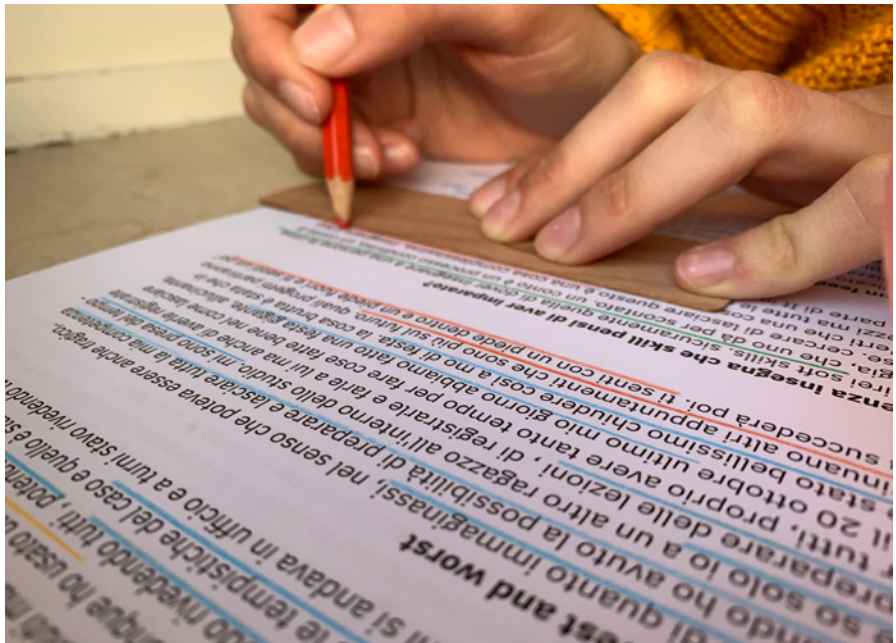


B. Interviewing. Interviews were conducted remotely using video call platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom. The interview guide (Service Design Tools, 2022) was divided into four sections: Decision Making, Communication, Learning and Feeling. The full transcript of the protocol can be found in the Appendix A.

C. Debriefing. Interviews were voice-recorded with the consent of the participants in order to create transcripts.



D. Understanding. The transcripts were then printed and underlined with pencils of different colors to highlight Pains, Gains, Visions and Practices.



fig_46
Underlining
transcripts

6.2

Findings

The findings of this research are listed in the next pages. They are illustrated below using the methodology proposed by the Nielsen Norman Group that includes a heading, then an explanation and data from research that support the finding (Krause, 2020).

The findings were at first grouped according to the topic area of reference designated by the interview protocol: Decision Making, Communication, Learning, Feeling. After initial screening, however, it was observed that there were cross-thematic patterns. Therefore, instead of keeping them grouped according to the subject areas of the interview, the findings were grouped differently and used to draft the experience principles.

fig_47

Sorting findings



Decision making

Employees tend to value experience and recognition for their work more than compensation.

Explanation.

In compliance with the trend presented in the previous chapters, compensation was a minor reason for changing jobs.

Research data.

“Why I left was nothing related to this. I couldn’t relate anymore to the way they sell things to the client saying that they are very empathetic people [...] at the end of the day, for the employees the experience itself was very bad.”



Out of 16 employees interviewed, 2 stated that compensation was the main reason for leaving the company.

The Great Resignation is happening.

Explanation.

The Great Resignation was perceived as a tangible phenomenon by employees. Several interviewees reported their former companies having turnover issues.

Research data.

“They lost a lot of employees since the beginning of the year, [...] but then they started to hire a lot of people. To compensate the people that were leaving.”

“A lot of people are quitting without an alternative proposal, because we have all probably suffered a bit from the way our jobs have changed and suffered from the second lockdown. I thought “I have to change to make a change that makes me feel better”. It was an extreme necessity but it was a very long process to get there.”

Communication

People want and need to talk about off-boarding.

Explanation.

This topic raised excitement when proposed and some during interviews even said they were glad someone was asking them about it.

Research data.

“I just found your post about the off-boarding experience. I REALLY LOVE THIS TOPIC and recently I changed jobs too, 2 months ago, so I’d love to help and share my terrible experience.”

33min > 20min

Average interview duration

Estimated interview duration

Last minute retention strategies make company reputation worse.

Explanation.

The interviews supported the fact that when employees are communicating their decision to quit the organization, they are already gone.

Research data.

“It was an emotionally very stressful month because several times a week I had these calls with various managers, [...] who tried to make me understand that I was making the wrong choice [...] I felt that mentally my space was violated, that really bothered me if I have to tell you the truth. I was really under pressure.”

“He tried to tell me “what can we do, how can we keep you”, but I didn’t believe it any more. He could have raised my salary, given me another role on paper, made me believe in heaven and earth, but I didn’t believe it any more. They had already lost their credibility.”

Being a big company doesn't necessarily imply being more organized in terms of off-boarding.

Explanation.

Contrary to the assumption that global companies are more organized and can support better their employees, interviewees reported mismanagement in both the situations.

Research data.

"Very disorganized. Return of computer, phone, screen... Even there you have to talk to an external person to come and get things, a process that is a joke, arrays of HR and I have to do it myself on a thousand platforms that I have never used."

"Even just in terms of communication, it is an inconvenience not to have HR professionals in the company. We have always spoken directly to managers who perhaps, also by their nature, were not required to go into too much detail about the dynamics, thus making mistakes."

Unclear information about what is due to the resigning employee makes the company's reputation worse.

Explanation.

Lack of clarity with respect to compensation can wear down even an employee-employer relationship that has lasted a long time and worked well. In particular, this carelessness on the way out can be interpreted as treating employees as traitors or disrespecting them for their decision.

Research data.

"Lack of organization and clarity of this process [...] when I left they never paid me all, they gave me the contact of the accountant, but it was not very clear. Not having in mind what kind of discounts my salary would have as an intern... I'm messy but this is too much."

"A person who had worked for us for years decided to leave. He decided in January and the bonus was given in March. He was told that he would not receive the bonus. The manager who did the exit interview decided without consulting others. This has caused damage and this person speaks negatively about our company to everyone."

Learning

Employees would like to have control over the communication of their resignation.

Explanation.

As it is something personal, the decision to resign is something that employees want to communicate personally to affected colleagues. When this need is not met they feel uncomfortable in the workplace.

Research data.

“The next day when I came to work it turned out that everybody knew but they didn’t say anything. [...] The manager was calling everybody after hours [...] and they knew but no one told me they knew so it was kind of weird. I would make sure that the communication it’s clear and that everybody knows.”

“[...]he told me “I’ll talk to your direct manager”. I wanted to tell her myself but I knew he would tell her, as there are only 6 people in the office.”

Managers might lose value if they don’t ask feedback about their practices to employees.

Explanation.

Managers often see resigning employees as human resources who are no longer resources. This is a limited view, because what employees have seen in the company they have reworked to some extent and have their own opinion of it. Interviewees reported they had feedback they would give to their leaders or improvements they would make to the organization’s practices. They also reported that they were not proactive in exit interviews but would have appreciated being asked for their opinion. Some were also very pointed comments about the company’s practices, such as how to improve job advertisements.

Research data.

“I had some observations that I think would be really valuable for them but in the end, if they’re not ready to listen, it will only make the situation worse. So I didn’t even try [...] if they took feedback from me they could have a better job offer, like job advertisement.”

Out of 16 employees interviewed, 3 stated that they were asked for feedback on company practices or strategies

On both sides people don't want positive feedback, they want actionable feedback.

Explanation.

When employees perceive that their manager or boss is not giving them constructive feedback, their experience feels worse. On the other side, managers tend to recognize when the employee is not being honest to avoid bridge burning.

Research data.

"When I asked for feedback it was super positive, but you see when they are not giving you constructive feedback. People can say negative things in a way that you can grow or that you can adapt, instead they said I was amazing..." - Employee

"Who's leaving has a mental detachment that allows them to tell you something useful. You see the company from the outside. You can tell me the good things or not. When the person praises the company I always ask "tell me something useful" Feedback is a gift." - Manager

Off-boarding is not perceived as a moment of the employee experience rich in knowledge acquisition, even though they learn some skills.

Explanation.

When asked whether they learnt something and what was that they learnt, employees firmly stated that during the off-boarding from a company one cannot learn anything. However, investigating a bit more and re-reading the transcripts reveals that they also admitted that this is a time when you acquire soft skills.

Research data.

"I only learned how to deal with bureaucracy in Italy to resign."

Skills mentioned during the interviews:

Soft Skills:

- How to defend your position
- How to communicate bad news
- How to teach your skills to someone else

Hard skills:

- How to deal with resignation bureaucracy (mostly because they had to manage on their own)

Feeling

Whether leaving a good or a bad workplace, the feelings related to resignation tend to be negative.

Explanation.

This happens for various reasons: the working experience in that place can be perceived as a personal failure, the employee is leaving a good place where they are no longer comfortable, they are leaving with disappointment a place from which their expectation was high. It is still the end of something, even for those who had a good experience.

Research data.

“Well, the emotional factor was stressful. Because it’s your team, you’ve been friends for two years, they’re gonna miss you, they were hoping you were going to be there, upper management was hoping that I would be continuing my career there...”

“We both invested time and energy and now it goes to waste because we cannot figure out how to cooperate and that’s both a feeling of shame and regret somehow.”

The issues of employees and managers are on two different levels.

Explanation.

The resignation can be interpreted in two ways. For the employee it can be a consequence of an important life choice or difficulties faced over time in the company. For the manager it’s just a problem to be solved.

Research data.

“They started to not invite me to calls or meetings and they did groups excluding me, it was on purpose to make me upset. For them I was betraying them by leaving the company. I discovered later that the manager introduced a call saying that there was no point in the new guy meeting me because I was leaving. [...] it was very rude and people noticed that.”

“My problem is to ensure continuity. That is, to pass things on to people. Even if you feel caged you have to do what you have to do. [...] I don’t care about easing their pain. If they leave I didn’t do well. What did I do before? Why are they leaving? Emotional experiences, ok... If you don’t want to do your job properly...” - Manager

Project

Experience principles. What are experience principles? According to the definition proposed by the platform Service Design Tools, the experience principles are:

“inspiring values that help create a shared experience vision within an organization, by applying them consistently across several projects and initiatives. They are based on research, and incorporate insights about what users expect from the relationship with a specific organization or service.” (Service Design Tools, 2022a).

It turned out that there are four key drivers, four pillars to consider when narrating, discussing or designing for resignations and the subsequent voluntary off-boarding from an organization. The experience principles are: Social Context, Value, Emotions, Communication.



Social context is key.



Emotions always matter.



Value is always there.



Communicating on two different levels.

The Great Resignation is happening.

Employees tend to value experience and recognition for their work more than compensation.

Social context is key.

The past year has been defined as the period of the so-called Great Resignation, where people value work experience more than salary or leave their current job without a plan B.

→ Neglecting this can make the organisation blind to the social trends that the job market is subject to.

Managers might lose value if they don't ask feedback about their practices to employees.

On both sides people don't want positive feedback, they want actionable feedback.

Value is always there.

The departing employee is a treasure chest of information. Value can be obtained by a departing employee who expresses feedback, suggesting ideas on how to improve Human Resources related processes.

→ Neglecting this can make managers lose the opportunity to improve the employee experience in your organisation.

Project

Last minute retention strategies make company reputation worse.

Unclear information about what is due to the resigning employee makes the company's reputation worse.

Employees would like to have control over the communication of their resignation.

The issues of employees and managers are on two different levels.

Communicating on two different levels.

During the off-boarding the issues of employees and managers are on two different levels. Employees could get frustrated because they feel misunderstood. Managers could get stressed because of the urgency in dealing with the organizational aspects.

→ Don't forget this and try to make it clear to the employee so that you can find a balance.

People want and need to talk about off-boarding.

Whether leaving a good or a bad workplace, the feelings related to resignation tend to be negative.

Emotions always matter.

Whether the employee is leaving a good or a bad workplace, the feelings related to resignation tend to be negative. Moreover, moving out of a comfort zone is anything but easy.

→ Neglecting this aspect can lead to dissatisfaction in the employee experience and create a bad memory of the company.

“

Departures are often emotional events, but a holistic, well-designed offboarding program can ensure that heightened emotions don't prevent an orderly transition. (Dachner & Macharius, 2021)

Define

In this chapter

7.1 Key Insight
Defining the main insight and mapping employees' experiences

7.2 Behavioral Archetypes
Defining behavioral archetypes through the use of metaphors

7.1

Key insight

The main insight generated by this research was the fact that designing a standard offboarding experience for all employees is not possible. The fact that there is no one-size-fits-all solution is also widely supported by the literature. For example, it has been demonstrated that exit interviews conducted with employees who leave for internal reasons have different outcomes than those conducted with employees who leave for external reasons (Kulik et al., 2015). An article in the Harvard Business Review (Dachner & Macharius, 2021) argues that the offboarding process can be different depending on the circumstances in which the resignation occurs, the destination of the employee and the type of employee.

Designing a standard offboarding experience for all employees is not possible.

Project

Mapping employees' context of resignation and attitudes. To better understand the context and the reasons, employee experiences were mapped. This was done along two dimensions. As a matter of fact, research via interviews has highlighted the fact that the two key dimensions to a person resigning are the following:

1. Reason for leaving.



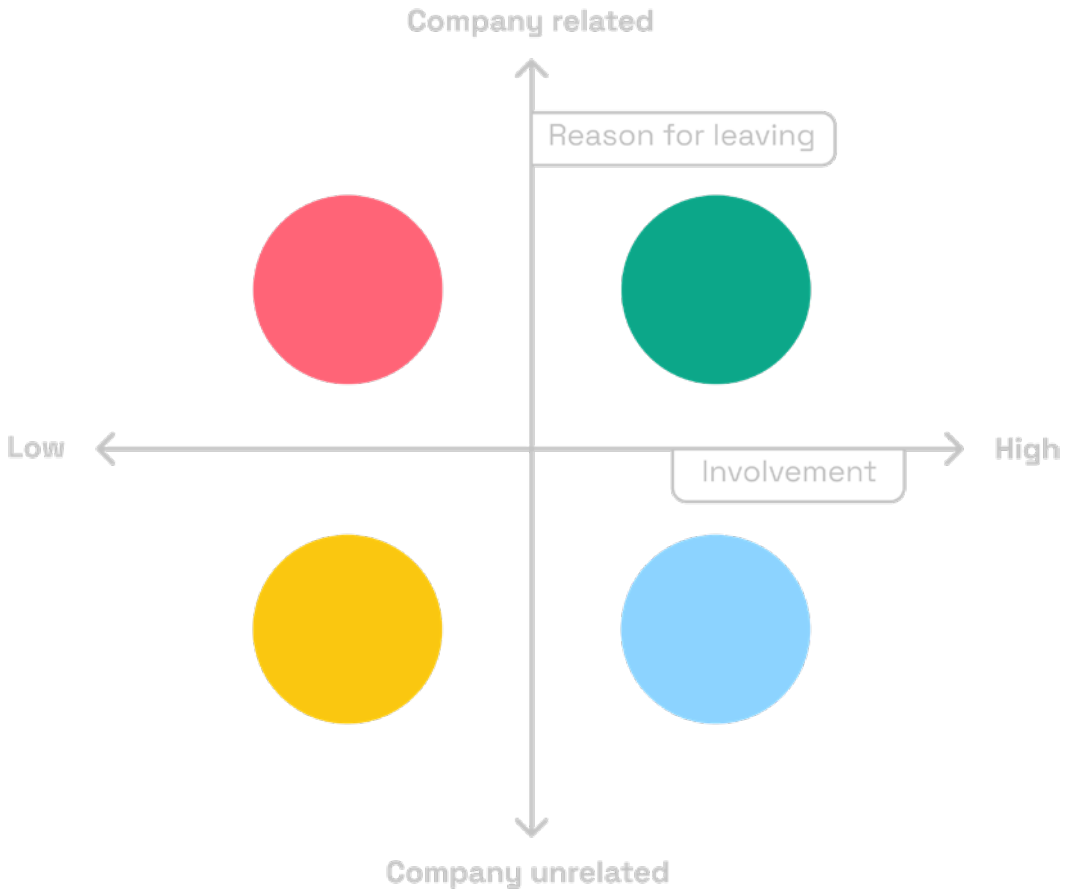
The reason for leaving the organization can be “related” or “unrelated” to the organization itself. It can be understood also as whether an employee is moving “out of” the organization or “towards” a better situation. For example: when the employee perceives something inside the company is unfair and they start to look for alternatives, this is when their reason for leaving is “company related”, as they are specifically moving “out of” the company. On the contrary, whenever something outside the company makes the employee want to change jobs or lifestyle, this is when the reason for leaving is “company unrelated”. This is the case when the employee is moving “towards” a better job position. These two situations cannot be dealt with in the same way.

2. Involvement.

The involvement with the company can be “high” or “low”. This can be measured by looking at parameters such as the employee’s attachment to the task, the quality of their relationships with colleagues, the quality of communication with managers... Basically, this dimension expresses how strong the connection to the company is. For example, if an employee has a strong tie with their colleagues and the communication with their manager is frequent they can be classified as employees with a high involvement in the organization. On the other hand, an employee that is a misfit in the team and is not passionate about their job, is going to be categorized as an employee with low involvement.



Once these two dimensions were defined, a two-axis graph was created in order to visualize what archetypes were generated by the intersection of the two axes. There is indeed a match between the respondents and these four quadrants.



fig_48
The four archetypes graph

7.2

Behavioral archetypes

The basic structure used to define archetypes includes the following elements:

Scenario The scenario is a tool that is usually used for ideation or usability testing. Scenarios owe their effectiveness to the fact that, being short narratives and not lists, they allow designers to empathize more with the users (Salazar, 2021). In this specific case, however, since there was no product to test or design, it was used simply for its empathy enhancing feature. In this manner, managers are presented with a short narrative of the archetypes and can empathize with the experiences of their resigning employees.

Timeline The series of events that led them to resign with that specific attitude. Taking inspiration from the JTBD approach, the elements of the timeline are: first thought, event #1, event#2 and communication.



Pain points Pain points are the problems that a customer experiences with a product or a service and they can be more or less detailed. In particular, Nielsen Norman Group identifies three levels of Pain Points in customer experience:

- 1) Interaction-level pain point;
- 2) Journey-level pain point;
- 3) Relationship-level pain point (Gibbons, 2021).

In this thesis' project, pain points were described as those reasons why the employee is struggling in the relationship with the company, so they can be associated with the third level identified by Nielsen Norman Group's research: relationship-level pain point.

User story User stories are used in service design to link design research with actionable information for IT development. This way of formulating insights allows designers to highlight what clients or users desire to be able to achieve in order to better frame product requirements and features (This is Service Design Doing, 2022). In this project it was used to point out opportunities for redesigning the offboarding experience of these archetypes from their organization. As the offboarding experience is the design object, the user story is rephrased as "during the offboarding" on the website.

As a *"behavioral archetype"*
I wish *"this"*
so that *"I can have that"*

Key action point It is a macro theme, a priority work point for the company. It is the aspect that the company must reflect on when a specific archetype leaves the organization. Each archetype stems from poor management of this aspect, and its departure can be a moment of work and analysis of this key action point. The key action points were identified thanks to research and expert interviewing.

Project

Value for organization Analyzing the causes and the context of the resignation, this graph highlights how the organization can get value. The quadrants of the chart that frame the archetype also allow the company to highlight the points from which it can derive value from the voluntary departure of this type of employee. Each of the four points can be associated with the following benefits:



Reason for leaving related to the company

→ Opportunity to spot / get feedback about company weaknesses.



Reason for leaving unrelated to the company

→ Opportunity to spot / get feedback about company strengths.



Low company involvement

→ The employee departure causes limited damage for team balance and morale.



High company involvement → The employee has the knowledge and expertise to train new entries.

The archetypes are described and presented in detail in the next pages. The metaphor used is that of a ship's crew. The nautical theme was chosen because it is easy to understand and embodies the idea of a working team. As reported in the research part it is better to avoid referring to the team as if it were a family but it is always better to use more team-oriented metaphors. Moreover, as joining and departing from an organization are often referred to as "onboarding" and "offboarding", the ship metaphor fits well to the working context.

Resentful Oarsman

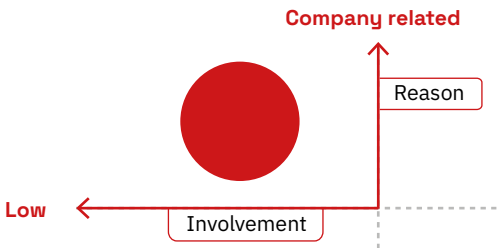
Scenario + Pain Point

They were hoping for a long time for a promotion or a recognition they didn't receive. When another colleague at the same level or below is promoted, they actively start to look for a new job. As soon as they find another option they just want to flee because they think the workplace is unfair. Their trust is cracked so they are unresponsive to retention strategies.



User story
As a resentful oarsman I want my off-boarding to be a recognition of my contribution to the company so that I can have justice.

Key action point
Continuous listening.
 This type of employee allows you to elaborate on the aspects of continuous listening. Try reviewing your listening and feedback strategies.



Value for organization

Company-related. Since this employee is moving away from the company, this resignation can be the opportunity to spot company weaknesses.

Low workplace involvement. Limited damage to team balance and morale.

Timeline



Grownup Deckhand

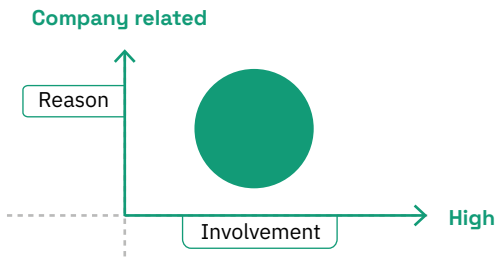
Scenario + Pain Point

They are quitting their first serious job. They are looking for a new adventure: a more stimulating workplace where they can be inspired by new projects or grow more. As they are young and less experienced, hardly ever leadership tries retention strategies with them.



“ User story
As a grown-up deckhand I want, in my off-boarding, to be treated like an adult so that I can be seen as a professional and contribute..

Key action point
Value.
This type of employee allows you to elaborate on your values. Try reviewing your hierarchy and your promotion system.



Value for organization

Company-related. Since this employee is moving away from the company, this resignation can be the opportunity to spot company weaknesses.

High workplace involvement.

The employee has the knowledge and expertise to train new entries.

Timeline



First thought
“I’m not learning that much anymore”

Event#1
Growth expectations are not met.

Event#2
Projects and tasks keep being the same.

Resignation communication
They feel they have something to say to leadership.

Impatient Adventurer

Scenario + Pain Point

They were not getting other job offers at the moment they accepted this one. After some time, they find out that the field in which the company operates or the task is not suitable for them. They start to think of this job as a stopgap while they are looking for their dream job. They are only affected by retention strategies involving task allocation.



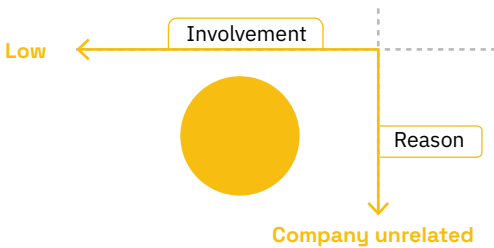
User story

As a impatient adventurer I want my off-boarding to be as short as possible so that I can move to a workplace that suits me more.

Key action point

Hiring process.

This type of employee allows you to elaborate on your hiring process. Try reviewing your job advertisement and job description.

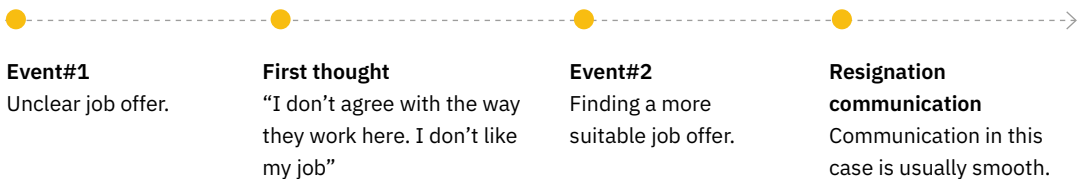


Value for organization

Company unrelated. Since this employee is moving to a new workplace, and not away from the company, this resignation can be an opportunity to spot company strengths or reconsider job advertisement.

Low workplace involvement. Limited damage to team balance and morale.

Timeline



Project

Busy Sailor

Scenario + Pain Point

They are in a moment of life when they need to change their lifestyle. e.g. to go from being employees to being freelancers or vice versa, or to move somewhere else. This urgency is not due to a discomfort they experience in the company but more to the fact that their living conditions need to change: they need more flexibility, more money... Retention strategies are not very effective because they are making a drastic change.



User story

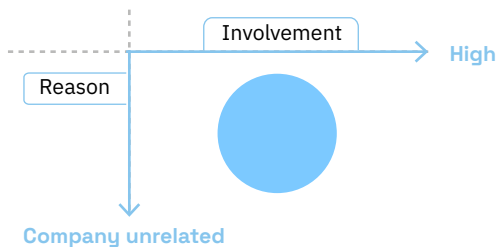
As a busy sailor I want my off-boarding to be as smooth as possible so that I can have peace of mind.



Key action point

Compensation.

This type of employee allows you to elaborate on your compensation system. Try reviewing your pay bands to retain your most talented employees.



Value for organization

Company unrelated. Since this employee is moving to a new workplace, and not away from the company, this resignation can be an opportunity to spot company strengths or reconsider job advertisement.

High workplace involvement. The employee has the knowledge and expertise to train new entries.

Timeline



First thought

A life event that changes their perspective on their job and their life in general, or a latent need emerges.

Event#1

“I need to change my lifestyle”

Event#2

Finding a more suitable job offer.

Resignation

communication

Communication in this case is usually smooth.

Manager - Nostromo

Scenario

They are not involved by the emotional side of the employee departure. As soon as the employee communicates resignation, they tend to consider the next actions and focus on finding a replacement. Organization reputation is among their priorities as well.

“ User story
As a manager I want to make the most out of my employees' off-boarding so that I can find a replacement soon and ensure continuity.

“ It doesn't concern me if the employee is experiencing a problem while they want to leave. My priority is to ensure continuity, that is, to pass things on to the people. As an employee, even if you feel caged you have to do what you have to do before you leave the organization. With respect to supporting them it is not my job to ease their pain. The point is that I have not done well if some employee leaves. What did I do before? Why are they leaving?

Experience 15 years	Company Size 10000+ empl.	Field Consultancy
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Creating a Digital Platform: Nostromo

In this chapter

8.1 **Project iterations**
Overview of the process

8.2 **Nostromo**
Project proposal

8.1

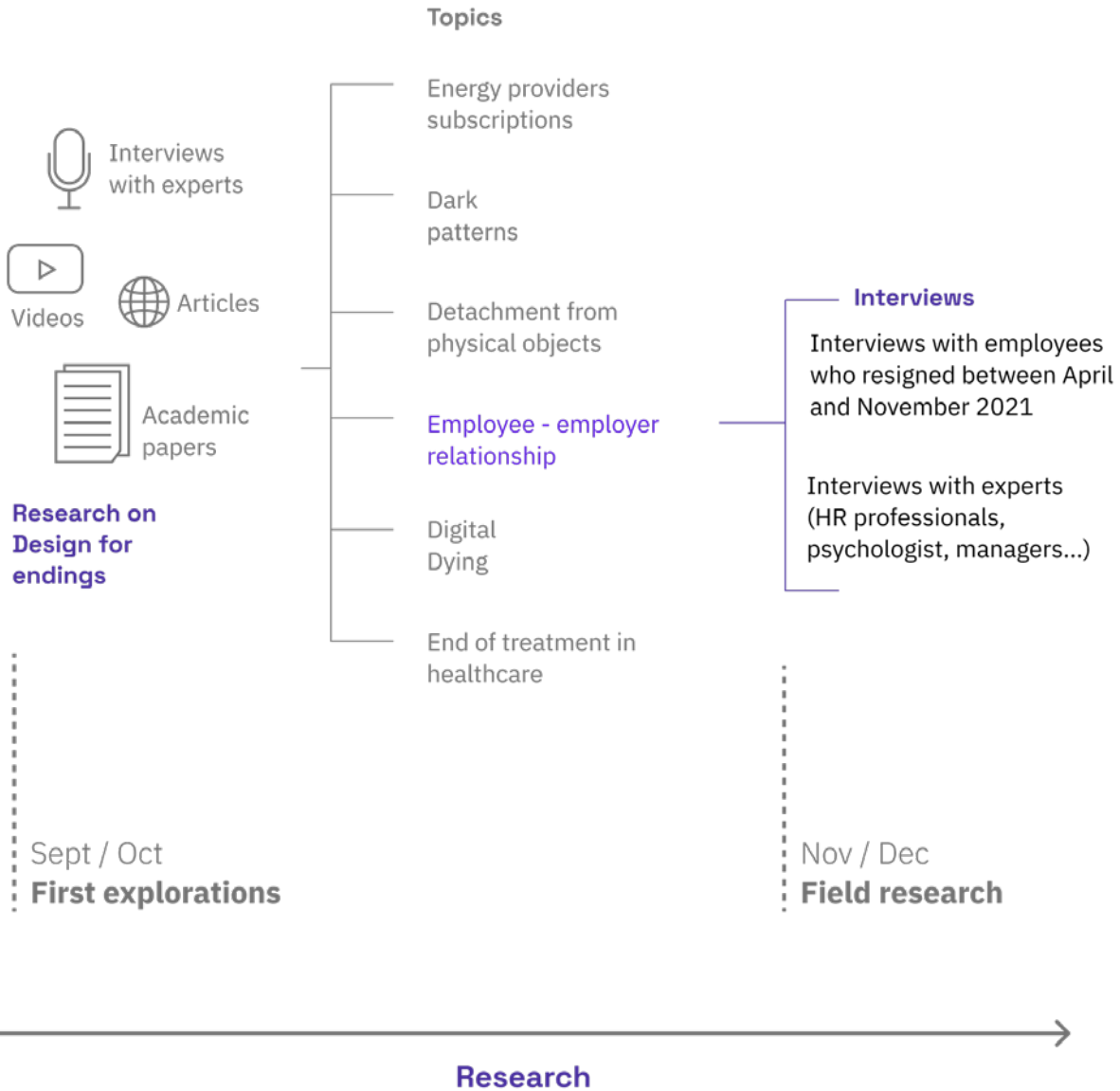
Project iterations

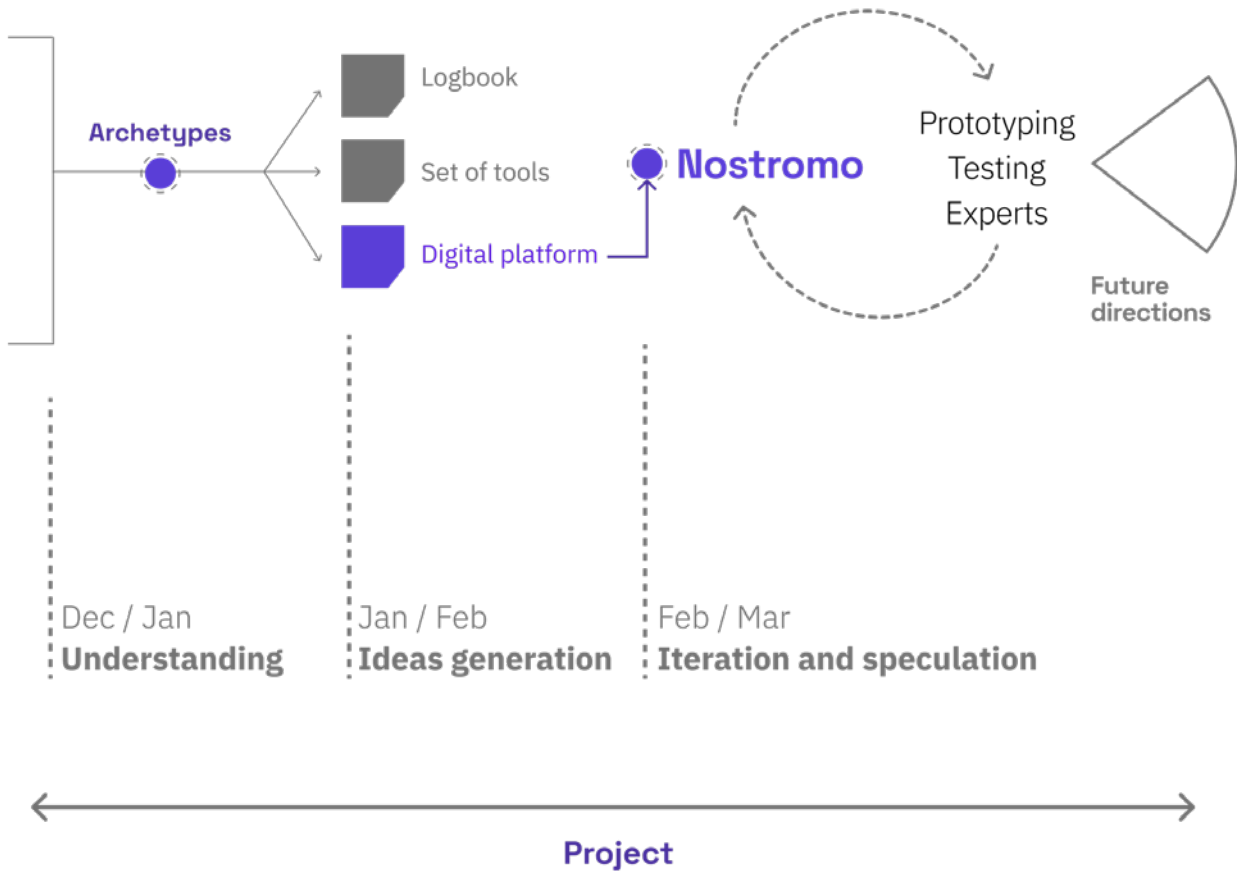
Several iterations were made before getting to the proposed solution. After a research to identify which area to apply design for endings and closure experiences, the theme of the employee-employer relationship was chosen. Once the research was done through interviews, archetypes were drafted. These then became the focus of the project. The archetypes are in fact presented to managers as the key to understanding voluntary turnover in the organization.

The first concept was creating a handbook for managers. The aim was to help managers create customized exit paths for each employee based on their attitude to resignation. This has been tested through the boards of Miro and the key findings were two: 1) it lacked to highlight what were the key points of the processes of the organization related to human resources to improve; 2) it was difficult to browse.

The second test focused on improving the interaction, so a digital platform was tested. The worksheets of the first iteration were kept, downloadable from the site. This version proved itself to be better because easier to navigate, update and distribute.

Project





8.2

Nostromo

Nostromo is the Italian word for “boatswain”,

“a ship’s warrant officer or petty officer in charge of the deck crew, the rigging, anchors, boats, etc.”
(collinsdictionary.com, 2022)

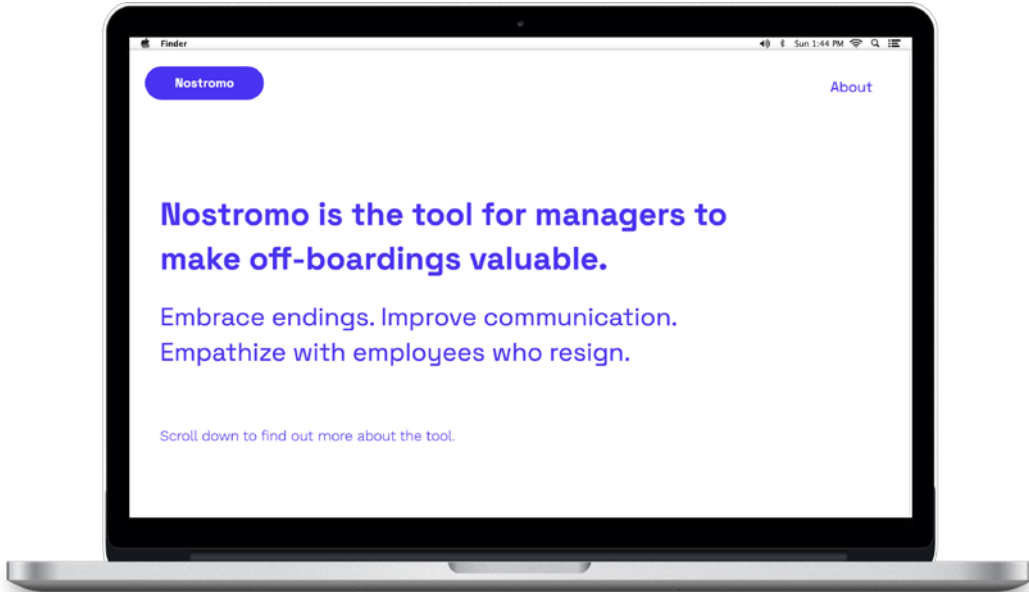
The naming of the project fits with the manager role, as it is someone in charge of the crew and their work. At the same time, the manager relates more often to leadership than employees do.

Nostromo is a website to help managers “navigate” through Great Resignation. It uses behavioral archetypes to help both line managers and HR better listen to their employees and understand turnover. The purpose is to help managers get value from voluntary turnover by understanding better the phenomenon. Moreover, as argued by Macleod (2017), understanding the patterns of off-boarding or ending part of the consumer experience allows for a reduction in its negative effects. In the case of resignations mismanagement, negative effects can be: bad memories for the employee, worsened employee experience, bad reputation, or even loss of clients. The platform contents can improve empathy towards departing employees and also help managers ask the right questions. Then, some parts of the tool are supposed to help the user understand how to gather and elaborate on insights. It is divided into three parts: Part 1 “Before leaving the harbor”, Part 2 “Voices from the crew”, Part 3 “Empathize with the crew”.

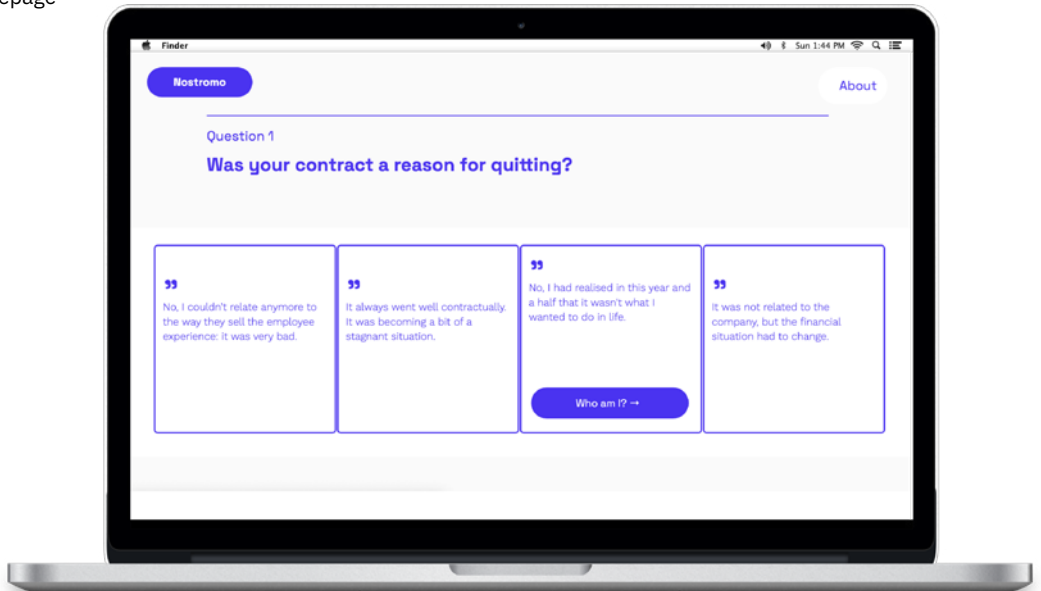
Understanding the patterns of off-boarding allows for a reduction in its negative effects

fig_49

Screenshots from the Nostromo prototype that was used for tests.

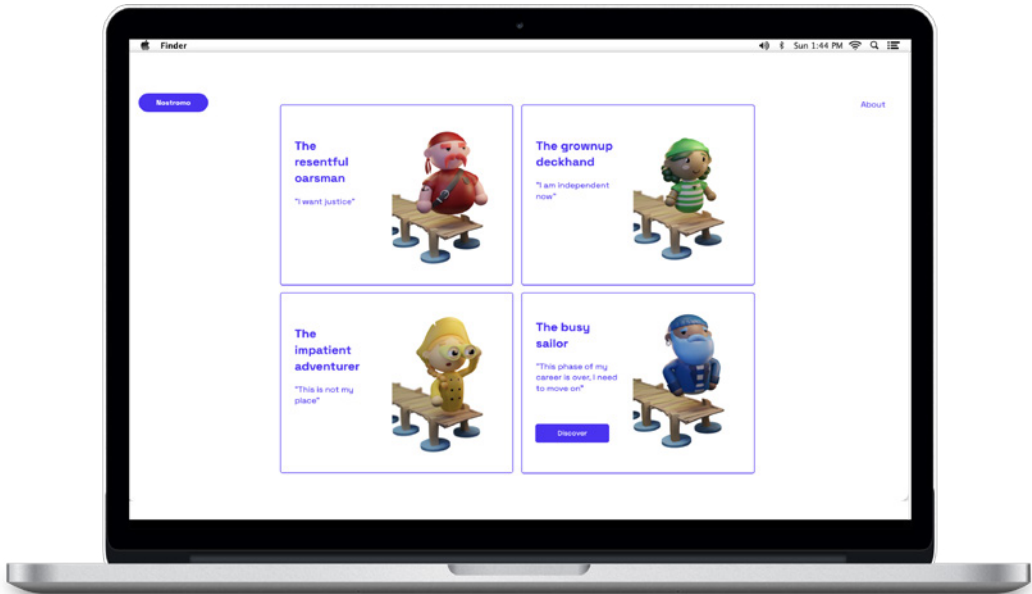


→ Homepage

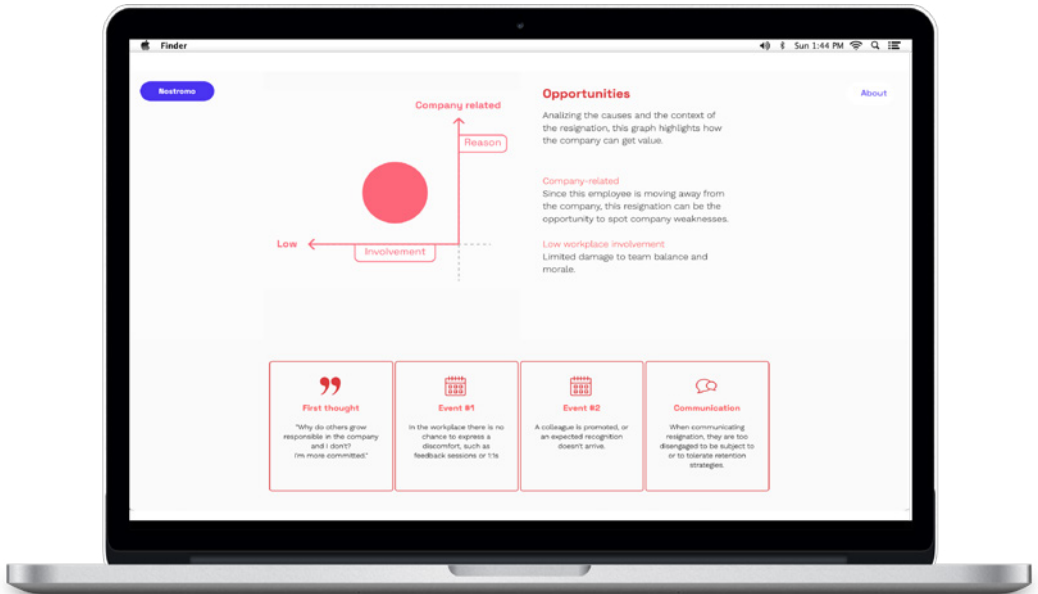


→ Part 2: Voices section

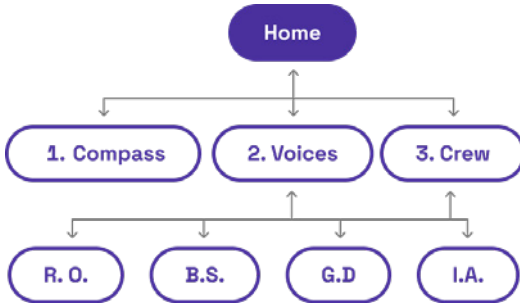
Project



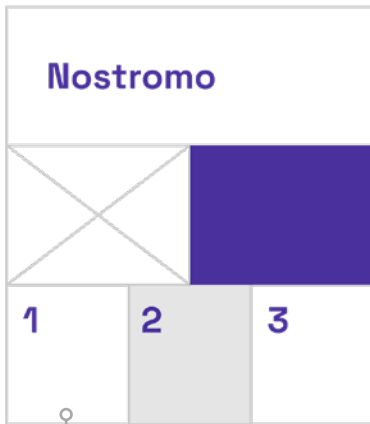
→ Part 3: Meet the crew section



→ Archetype personal sheet



The purpose of this page is to introduce the tool. The information provided are: the purpose of the project, the explanation of the naming and, finally, the three sections. By clicking on the “Read More button”, user can access to the content of the three parts.



Purpose statement.

“Nostromo is the tool for managers to make off-boardings valuable. Embrace endings. Improve communication. Empathize with employees who resign.”

Naming explanation

Links to the three parts of the tool

1. Before leaving the harbor

The company is a ship, so make sure you have your compass.

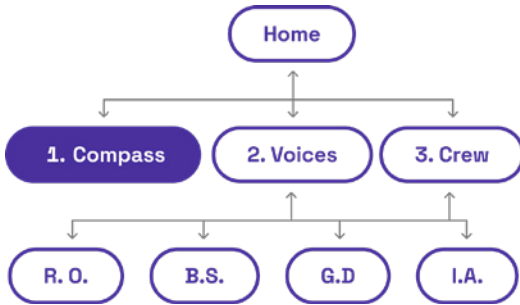
Discover the experience principles to keep in mind when interacting with a resigning employee.

Read More

Component

Each of the components leading to the three parts of the tool feature a title, a short explanation of the aim of each part and a “Read more” button.

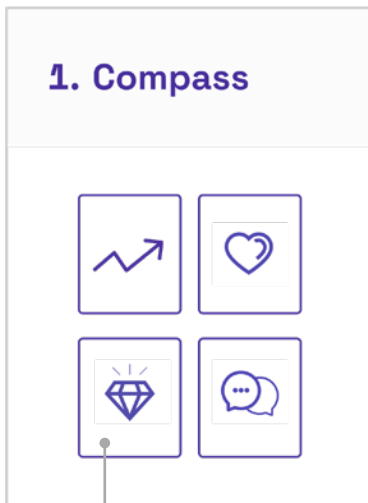
Project



1. Compass

Part 1: Before leaving the harbor.

Sticking to the metaphor of the crew and the ship, this is the part where the “compass” is presented. The term “compass” is a metaphor for the experience principles. These are the values that should inspire managers when interacting with employees who just communicated their decision to resign.



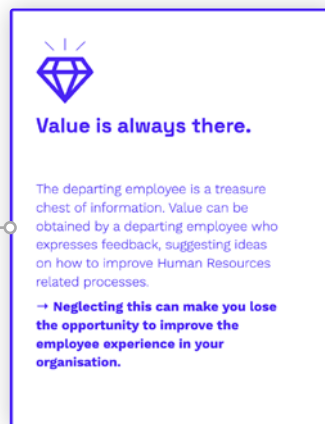
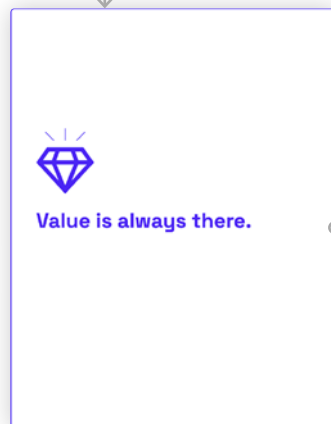
Purpose statement

How to use the experience principles

Experience principles cards.

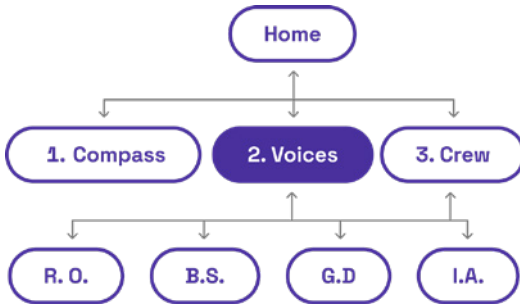
The four experience principles are

- Social Context is key
- Emotions always matter
- Value is always there
- Communicating on two different levels



Component with hover interaction

The purpose of this interaction is to help the user read through the experience principles without creating an information overload.



2. Voices

Part 2: Voices from the crew.

This part aims at making managers more aware of the thoughts of employees when resigning. Moreover, it aims at making them understand what are the different situations of resigning employees. This page is linked to the Archetype personal sheets. It can provide an inspiration for leading exit interviews.

Purpose statement and how to use this information to structure exit interviews

Q&As

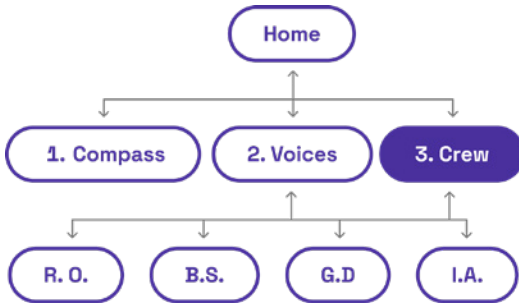
The questions presented are

1. Was your contract a reason for quitting?
2. Did anyone in management talk to you about your future prospects at the company before you started thinking about resigning?
3. When did you first start thinking about changing job?
4. When you communicated your decision how did your boss and your colleagues react?

Every answer box presents a typical answer from the four archetypes. Each box has a button that leads the user to the dedicated archetype page. The purpose of this interaction is to highlight the link between the thoughts of the “crew members” and a specific resignation attitude.

Component with hover interaction

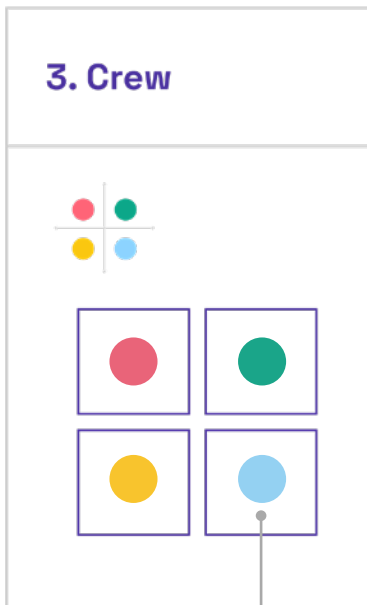
Project



3. Crew

Part 3: Empathize with the crew.

In this section of the website is presented the archetype mapping. From here, the user can access the four archetypes personal sheet.

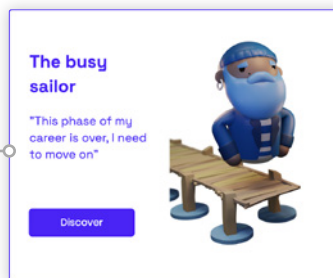
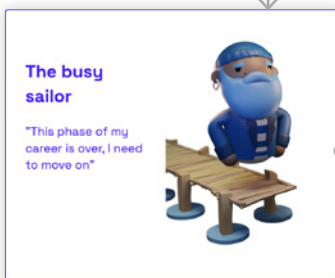


Purpose statement

Positioning map explanation.

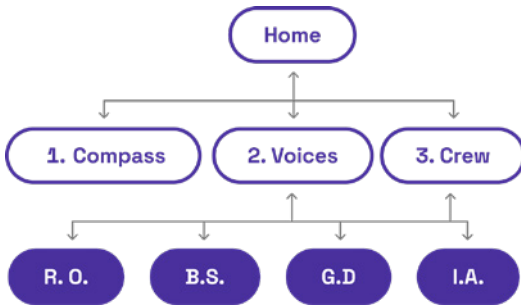
The four archetypes cards

Here are the links to the Archetypes' personal sheets.



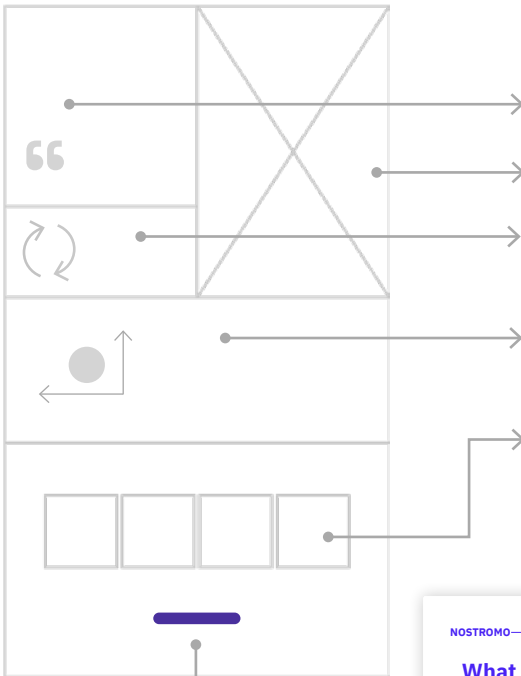
Component with hover interaction

Archetypes are presented with a short quote. When hovering on this preview of the crew members, users can see the the "Discover" button. The button leads to the Archetypes' personal sheet.



Archetype personal sheet.

The purpose of these pages is to explore in detail the four resigning employees archetypes. In the upper part of this webpage there is the 3D illustration to give a visual representation of the archetype. Then, in a sentence their point of view on their offboarding experience and the action point that the organization can focus on. After an explanation of the opportunities where the managers can get value, their timeline is presented. Here, the user can download the timeline worksheet.



Scenario + User Story

3D illustration

Key action point

Opportunities

Timeline

**Download
timeline
worksheet**

PDF

Timeline worksheet

The worksheet tool can sparkle discussion around employees' path in the organization. Full version in Appendix B.

NOSTROMOTIMELINE WORKSHEET 1

What happened to them before resignation?

Use your personal notes to fill in the timeline. What can lead an employee to leave with a specific attitude and mindset? What led them to become resentful towards the company? To think they have outgrown the company?

Resigning employees matrix

Experience pillars

- Social context
- Emotions
- Value
- Communication

Resignation

Workplace involvement

Low

Reason for leaving

Company related

Conclusions and future directions

In this chapter

Takeaways
Research contribution
Weaknesses and improvements
Future directions

Takeaways

Regarding the topic of resignation, the takeaways are several. First of all, it is a complex human dynamic because there are many variables involved. In fact, the inputs and topics that came up during the interviews were diverse: compensation, mutual respect, workplace friendships, individual skills. In addition, the main takeaway was that the priorities of employees and managers are not aligned at all and designing for this mismatch is a complex challenge. Thus, a design proposal that focuses on improving behavioral understanding and insights gathering may be, as of now, one of the most successful contributions.

As a designer, this thesis provided an opportunity to learn how to use the tool of semi structured interviews and practice the design method. In particular, to experiment with the analysis of results and the creation of clusters to identify behavioral patterns.

No less important, at the content level, working on such a topical issue enabled the refinement of the trend research technique. In addition, this research has raised awareness around the topic of design for closure experiences. Overall, this path has led to an enrichment of personal background, both as a future employee and as a designer.

Overall, this path has led to an enrichment of personal background, both as a future employee and as a designer.

Research contribution

The contribution that this thesis brings to the topic of voluntary turnover is the outcome of using Service Design methodologies to address this issue. For example, the Jobs-to-be-done and behavioral archetypes frameworks have been applied to study the motivations that lead a person to leave a company with a specific attitude. A significant contribution is also having understood and formalized the experience principles, the pillars of the resignation experience that should not be overlooked. This might increase the awareness of designers and managers who find themselves dealing with voluntary turnover in their organization.

Weaknesses and improvements

The feedback sessions highlighted not only what improvements could be made but also problem areas.

1. For the stage the project is at now, its operability has to be improved. This project is the first stage of what the Nostromo tool can become: a platform to help companies keep track of their departures and learn from them. In fact, so far it's comparable to a compendium of learnings and insights that can implement the understanding of voluntary turnover. Nostromo could be improved and used as a database where resignations can be logged and turnover patterns can be identified, especially in high volume companies. Another direction could be integrating this platform's feature to already existing People Management platforms such as Lattice, Leapsome or Monday.

“

It's been demonstrated, the workplace dynamics have changed a lot in the last couple of years. Turnover is something that affects many businesses. This kind of project is needed, you just have to figure out how to make the tool really actionable. For now, it's a method of classifying people according to exits. One of the possible directions: that this platform be guidelines for a database. In this database a manager could keep track of what happened so as to derive more and more value from understanding voluntary turnover. Depending on the weight of each of the 4 quadrants the manager can understand not only where the individual case is but where the root of the problem is. In this way the manager can shift the focus to specific parts of employee engagement, understand what's wrong with employee experience management. It is interesting to look at a single case, but if you consider larger companies you can do deeper analysis. It can trigger such questions in management: do we need to work more on how we select people, on how we onboard them, or on how we enhance their careers? Then, Nostromo can become even more valuable because it allows managers to identify a specific problem and the interventions that are needed.

Experience 35 Years	Company Size 501 - 1000 empl.	Field Consultancy
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2. **Improve metrics to measure the success of the Nostromo project.** So far there is no method to measure Nostromo's success that is not purely qualitative. It is known what the results of good resignations management are: employee's LinkedIn posts after resignation, Glassdoor positive reviews, word of mouth, former employees recommending the organization to job seekers or vice versa, being able to develop new practices... However, for now it is difficult to measure and intangible. This also makes it difficult to argue why it is worth investing in this stage of the employee experience.

Future directions

This tool was designed to make managers elaborate on employee resignations within knowledge-based work.

One future direction to explore could be to apply the same research process or to test the platform within other work sectors. For example, it might be worth working in healthcare or hospitality, which are often cited as the sectors most affected by Great Resignation. Another line of research could be to investigate whether the patterns are any different among the various contract types, for example if there are differences between freelancers or employees in their approach to organizations. Another area of interest is testing by firm size. In small or multinational firms, is it possible to spot the same trends or not?

In general, secondary research might aim to answer the following questions:

Are the problems identified in the knowledge-based work sector the same as in other sectors?

By changing sectors or types of workers, can the same employees' behavioral patterns be identified?



Credits: Alessandra Finzi, Monterey, CA 2018

Appendix

In this section

A **Appendix A**
Interview protocol

B **Appendix B**
Timeline worksheet

A

Interview protocol

Decision making

- In case they reached out, ask Why did you reach out to me?
Which kind of contract was it and how did you think it influenced the decision to leave?
- What were the initial reasons for joining the company you're exiting?
And what are the reasons you initially considered for leaving and then chose to follow through?
Tell me, when did you first start thinking about changing jobs? And when did you actively start looking for a job? Follow up question: Are there any external events (such as family reasons) that made you more convinced about changing?

Communication

- In the three months before you left your job, did your manager/supervisor or another manager/leader at the organization talk to you
- about your job satisfaction/ your goals/the future of your career?
When you communicated your decision how did your boss and your colleagues react?

Learning

- Every experience teaches us something. Do you agree? Which hard and/or soft skill did you learn during this process?
- Do you think it helped you orient yourself in the future?
 - Did they ask you for feedback?
Do you think they learned something?

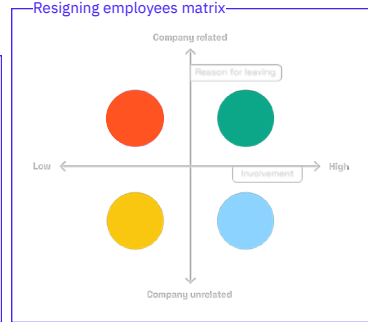
Feeling





















- Tell me which was the best and worst part in your off-boarding experience: tell me two episodes.
If you had to choose a metaphor or a visual to describe your exit process, what would it be?
If you could design and plan your off boarding experience how do you wish it was? You are encouraged to use metaphors.

B | Timeline worksheet

What happened to them before resignation?

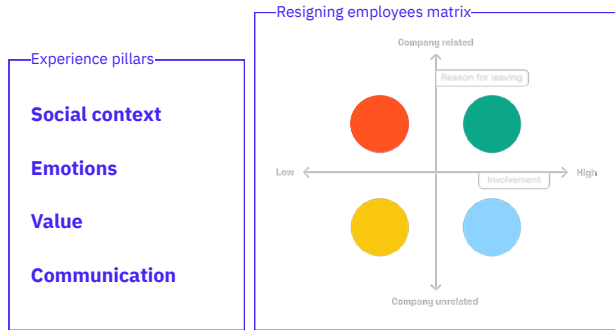
Use your personal notes to fill in the timeline. What can lead an employee to leave with a specific attitude and mindset? What led them to become resentful towards the company? To think they have outgrown the company?



	1st thought	event #1	event #2	Resignation
	 _____ _____ _____	 _____ _____ _____	 _____ _____ _____	 <p>The resentful oarsman</p> <p>Workplace involvement Low</p> <p>Reason for leaving Company related</p>
	 _____ _____ _____	 _____ _____ _____	 _____ _____ _____	 <p>The impatient adventurer</p> <p>Workplace involvement Low</p> <p>Reason for leaving Company unrelated</p>
	 _____ _____ _____	 _____ _____ _____	 _____ _____ _____	 <p>The grown-up deckhand</p> <p>Workplace involvement High</p> <p>Reason for leaving Company related</p>
	 _____ _____ _____	 _____ _____ _____	 _____ _____ _____	 <p>The busy sailor</p> <p>Workplace involvement High</p> <p>Reason for leaving Company unrelated</p>

How would you take action for them?

Use personal notes to fill in the timeline. How might you create a positive exit experience for these different kinds of employees?



	Resignation	Notice period			
<p>The resentful oarsman</p> <p>Workplace involvement: Low</p> <p>Reason for leaving: Company related</p>		<p>action</p>	<p>action</p>	<p>action</p>	<p>positive exit experience</p>
<p>The impatient adventurer</p> <p>Workplace involvement: Low</p> <p>Reason for leaving: Company unrelated</p>		<p>action</p>	<p>action</p>	<p>action</p>	<p>positive exit experience</p>
<p>The grown-up deckhand</p> <p>Workplace involvement: High</p> <p>Reason for leaving: Company related</p>		<p>action</p>	<p>action</p>	<p>action</p>	<p>positive exit experience</p>
<p>The busy sailor</p> <p>Workplace involvement: High</p> <p>Reason for leaving: Company unrelated</p>		<p>action</p>	<p>action</p>	<p>action</p>	<p>positive exit experience</p>

References

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R1

Knowledge

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R2

Visual

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