Making Better Career Decisions

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To my wife Mariana who has always loved and supported me to become the best I can;

To my children Michaela and Gustavo who show me everyday how great life can be;

To my parents and role models Amália and Paulo who are the reason behind it all
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Making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments  
Table Of Contents  
Abstract  

1. Introduction  
2. Research Objectives  
3. Literature Review  
   3.1 All about processes  
   3.2 Finally the individual plays a role  
   3.3 A change will be started, involving other people  
4. Methodology  
5. Findings And Discussion  
   5.1 Using the CCRT to make better career decisions  
   5.2 Focusing on the Individual Versus the Process  
   5.3 The Role of the Intermediary  
   5.4 Paying attention to feelings during the process  
   5.5 Understanding the Main Drivers for Change  
   5.6 Using the Network to support the Decision-Making Process  
      5.6.1 The role of Spouses  
      5.6.2 The role of Parents, specially Fathers  
      5.6.3 The role of Friends, Colleagues & Others  
   5.7 Uncovering the Triggers that serve as Starters  
   5.8 Demystifying The Matrix  
   5.9 Double-check decisions by reflecting on feelings
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>For the executive</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>For the intermediary</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>Researched Sample</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>Interview Guide</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Making a career decision about a new job opportunity is often hard and shows that we don’t know how to make them well. With globalization, the internet and the increased use of social networks, more than ever executives face new interesting opportunities more often. Most books written about decision-making focus on the obvious part: the process, but pay less attention to the fundamental part: the individual.

Therefore the objective of this paper is to better understand how executives actually make career decisions by identifying, analyzing and understanding their true motives, in particular those related to work, career and family life. In the end, there should be ways to improve the process and execute better informed career decisions, by presenting tools to support both the individual and the other parties involved in the process.

Complementary perspectives taken from the fields of psychology, decision-making and business were considered and applied through qualitative interviews with 15 senior executives (C-Level) who had changed jobs in the last 12 months, by looking at the critical incident. The road map developed: a) helps executives better respond to the thought process required previously to accepting a new job opportunity in the future; b) Considers the weight that soft and hard aspects have on the process; and c) takes into account the individual's life stage.

Understanding the trigger of what makes someone decide for a new job is deep down linked with the person’s Core Conflict Relationship Theme (CCRT) and only through a process of understanding that, will the individual and the sponsor of that change ensure that it might actually work. Moreover, the soft aspects of decision-making
Making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

when taking a new job are far more important than the hard ones and should be paid much more attention to. Here the concept of hidden conflicting commitments might be helpful to uncover these aspects. Finally, knowing yourself and how you make decisions are more important than deconstructing the process itself. The instrument is designed as a self-help tool, although it might be more difficult to be executed, and therefore it should also be used by Human Resources professionals, Executive Search Consultants, Coaches and Career Advisors.

Ideally, the developed conceptual framework can be more helpful to the specifics of decision-making when changing jobs than the traditional ones used for improving broad decision-making. This tool needs further development and testing so as to evaluate its usefulness for the various potential users.

Keywords: career decisions, Core Conflict Relationship Theme (CCRT), job change, people processes
1. INTRODUCTION

Accepting a new job is probably one of the most difficult and important decisions people make during the course of their lives and yet it can shape them. It is a decision that involves many serious consequences: Who am I going to work for and with? Will I like the work culture or environment to wake up motivated everyday and go to work? Will I get paid more, same or less than what I am worth?

“Making decisions is the most important job of any executive. It’s also the toughest and the riskiest. Bad decisions can damage a business and a career, sometimes irreparably (Hammond, 2006).”

Yet most people think about this decision in the same simple way as buying a new house or a car, or deciding to invest money in a fund. Some spend more time comparing products before buying than on the impact of their career choices. Why is that? Because career decision-making is hard work! “It can be overwhelming, generating anxiety, confusion, doubt, error, regret, embarrassment and loss (Hammond, et al., 2006).”

“Lack of readiness is the first type of difficulty that is often encountered prior to beginning the decision-making process and this may result from a lack of motivation, indecisiveness, and/or dysfunctional beliefs (Di Fabio, 2012).”

Moreover, these decisions typically do not only affect the person making them but others around like family members, friends, clients, suppliers and co-workers. Most frequently people tend not to make the right career decisions, ending up working in places that are not aligned with their values, interests, personal attributes or skills, or
Making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

perhaps lack meaning or a great challenge, they might get bored frustrated, burnout, leave that job too soon, or even if they do make the right choice, they tend to suffer a lot during the process of accepting or not a new job. Worse yet, if the wrong people get the job or if their motivations are not aligned, this might have impacts on the society as a whole (e.g. Enron, WorldCom). They are taken with a great deal of risk and uncertainty.

With globalization, the internet and the development of social networks, more than ever executives are being faced often with new opportunities. Through Linkedin and other career-related sites, personal networks, and others, job opportunities are arriving in people’s emails, lunches and cell phones unannounced. How should one react to it?

In fact according to Professor Peter Capelli from the Wharton School, the majority of top executives are willing to take another job if a good opportunity is offered to them. To be precise, 55% of the Executive Directors were willing to participate in a job search and 65% of the VPs as well, according to a recent survey done by him. “The individual is seen as always “in motion” in terms of career assessment, decision-making and change (Mihal, 1984).”

“It is true, we know far less about ourselves than we feel we do. Yet many people are overconfident, prone to place too much faith in their intuition. (Kahneman, 2011).”

In a recent survey with 318 people done by Brazilian magazine Você SA, 74% say they use their rational side when making a decision. But this might not be true, since even when people believe they are rational about something, deep down inside the whole
process is impacted by emotions, which can be probably traced to childhood or youth on how we were raised and developed to be ourselves. “Although rationality should be distinguished from intelligence, since superficial or lazy thinking is a flaw in the reflective mind, a failure of rationality (Kahneman, 2011).”

“Some people react by not making a decision, some have to be pushed into making a decision and some take the initiative for making the decision themselves. The later are called internally controlled by psychologists. They tend to attribute positive events and outcomes to themselves, and are also willing to accept blame. They do not wait around for something to happen (London, 1984).”

Most books about the subject will state the obvious: we don’t know how to make decisions well but yet we can learn to improve at that. “Some argue that the key lies not in what you decide but in the how (Hammond, J. et al., 2006).” Some will say that you have to, first create a vision of where you want to be, make the initial decision towards that (how?), set up a goal, develop the action plan and take action to execute it. Others will also argue that people typically fail to measure the risk involved in such a change. People do not know their own tolerance for risk or perhaps they are not honest with themselves about it. Why? Because risk is normally associated with fear and people do not like to face their fears. It is uncomfortable and unknown. Books also typically teach on how to “structure the decision-making by brainstorming first, then prioritizing and comparing alternatives, creating a criterion, assigning different weights to each criterion item and then finding advantages and disadvantages on the analysis (Quast, 2011).” So there is a lot written about the process.
But “we are prisoners of emotions, habits and biases. We choose A rather than B for reasons that we often don’t understand (Rogers, 2013). This dissertation is an attempt to understand how executives actually make career decisions when faced with an opportunity to change jobs by identifying, analyzing and understanding their true motives, in particular those related to work, career and family life. In order to do that, complementary perspectives taken from the fields of psychology, decision-making and business are presented, and hopefully will leave the reader with the basis that understanding that by knowing yourself and how you make decisions are more important than deconstructing the decision-making process itself.

“We can clearly see when others that we know make a career mistake. It is much easier, as well as far more enjoyable to identify and label the mistakes of others than to recognize our own. Many of us spontaneously anticipate how friends and colleagues will evaluate our choices, the quality and content of these anticipated judgments therefore matters (Kahneman, 2011).”

Most senior executives feel they are in control of their own decisions, as if they were in the driver’s seat. However, this is typically not the case. They are acting in their own movies about their lives and most of them don’t know they are attempting to either correct or just replay their “unawareness of “conflicts, wishes, desires, fears, anxieties, biases, prejudices, assumptions and blind spots (Book, 2012)”.

Moreover, the trigger of what makes someone decide for a new job is deep down linked with the person’s Core Conflict Relationship Theme (CCRT) and only through a process of understanding that, will the individual plus the sponsor of that change
Making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

ensure that it might actually work. In addition to that, we will also learn that the soft aspects of decision-making when taking a new job are far more important than the hard ones and should be paid much more attention to. The idea of competing hidden commitments might be able to better illustrate this issue.

This dissertation is aimed at identifying the skills required to make and implement better career decisions, and at presenting a road map and tools to support individuals and their change agents along the process. Ideally the road map could also be used by Human Resources professionals and leaders (as a self-help tool), by executive recruiters and coaches.
2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

How people make career decisions, especially big and important ones have always intrigued me. On the one hand, some of the folks that are fast and decisive about it impress me but I fear them because they might not have thought through all the consequences of their actions. On the other hand, those that stall and change their minds all the time before making them also give me the frills about their own insecurities but moreover about the time it takes to complete the task and the impact this might have on others. My primary objective is to get the input from the individual making the decision, and understand their real motivations for a change.

Taking a new job is a serious life decision. However, in my professional experience as an executive search consultant for the last 12 plus years, and seeing more than around 100 real live decisions like that being made per year that are provoked by my colleagues and me, on top of all the other ones, we learn during the interview process of perhaps 500 plus candidates per year, my conclusion is that not only executives are very bad at making them but also that companies represented by their hiring managers (CEOs, Boards, HR professionals, etc) or search consultants do not really know how to uncover their true motivations for change and therefore cannot help them make it right. So what this paper would like to address is:

- How do executives make decisions about a new job opportunity?
- Is there a trigger that makes them decide to accept it or not? What is it? Where does it come from? How does it relate to motivation?
Moreover, what can they and we do to make the process better and therefore improve the decision outcome?

If we can go under the surface and uncover the real factors that affect these types of decisions, can we find a pattern? Can we learn from them to be able to act on it? What is the weight people place in the hard aspects of the opportunity versus the soft ones? Can they separate the professional versus the person behind that decision? Does this matter in the end? How much do they think about the decision in front of them versus analyzing them in the process of making that decision?

Why does this matter? First of all, if people make the right career decisions, one can conclude that they will be happier in their jobs and therefore in their lives and will probably have a better performance, contributing more to the companies they are working for and as a consequence to the economy and society as a whole, not to mention their families and closed ones. If you think about the glass half empty syndrome, how much costs can be saved by keeping people from making the wrong career decisions? Therefore becoming frustrated, bored, aggressive and less productive, which might impact performance and results, reducing the companies’ turnover, the family’s happiness, the amount of time someone is unemployed and therefore contributing less to society and even the health-associated costs of treating them for depression and other work-associated illnesses.

The study focused on senior executives, those at the C-Level (CEOs, CMO, CHROs, COOs, etc). The impact they have on the lives and career of others reporting to them is
Making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

also significant. At the same time as the world is getting more complex, the average
tenure of a CEO is decreasing according to an Egon Zehnder study done with the
Imperial College of London Business School\(^1\) and this impacts all the folks reporting to
him or her about their own decisions to stay or leave.

The study claims that age when they started the job, the year the tenure started and
ended, the fact they came as external executives, had previous experience as CEOs, an
MBA education and had poor performance negatively affected their stickiness rate.
But does this explain it all? What were the real factors that drove them to make that
decision of accepting the job? What about the ones for leaving it so soon?

“Finally the average CEO tenure is decreasing. For outgoing CEOs, the mean tenure was
18 months shorter, from 8.1 years in 2000 to 6.6 years in 2010 (Favaro, 2011).” It is
proven that CEOs have a direct impact on the company’s value. One can derive that

\(^1\) Primary Data came from interviews with 5 FTSE 100 former CEOs, secondary data came from Egon
Zehnder private database crossed against BordEx, which turned into over 1,000 single regressions.
Making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

the other main executives might also play a role. Therefore, if executives made better-informed career decisions, would tenure increase? And if so, what impact would that have on results or company value?

“Personal relations are important. When you change too many jobs, you don’t create those relationships (Halzack, 2013).”
3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Decision-Making is a very popular subject and has been taught extensively in most Business Schools at their MBA programs. Therefore there is plenty of literature around how to make better decisions, in general terms. If you google “decision-making”, there are more than 585 Million results, if you add “...when taking a new job” you go down to almost half of that (238 M results). If you do the same on Amazon, you will find 353,065 results but then it is narrowed to only 9 books! However when you read their excerpts, the vast majority talks about the difficulties of integrating in the new company, taking charge of your new role, etc but not specifically about how you go about the process of deciding before you actually take the job and can do all these wonderful things. There also seems to be a lot written for young college graduates to advise them on starting their careers. There are quite a few that go to the route of self-healing on how to change your life, etc. So it seems that the large decision-making subject has not been applied a lot to the specifics about accepting a new job or not, mainly at the senior executive level.

Harvard Business Review says that “many managers rely on gut instinct to make important decisions, which often leads to poor results. On the contrary, when managers insist on incorporating logic and evidence, they make better choices and their companies benefit.”
3.1 All about processes

Most related papers found on career or business magazines focus only on the process and tend to simplify it too much with a typical X step approach: “Brainstorm, Prioritize and Analyze (Quast, 2011)” or a very narrow view such as going through a checklist of topics like “Money Matters, Benefits and Perks, Hours and Travel, Flexibility and Company Culture and Personal Circumstances (Doyle).” But they seem to miss the bigger picture.

In a paper from the Career Center at the University of Waterloo on how to go about career decision making, they use a 5-step process consisting of:

1. Creating a vision

2. Making an initial decision

3. Setting a goal

4. Developing an action plan

5. Taking action

This seems straightforward but looks more as a long-term career planning than a framework for one to decide between staying at his current role or accepting an offer in front of him or her. What is the difference between the initial (step 2) and the final decision (step 5)? This does not seem to be tackled by them.
Another similar model (suggested by London, et al., 1984) distinguishes other five decision-making stages:

1. **Identifying Problems**

2. **Exploring Alternatives**

3. **Evaluating Alternatives**

4. **Making a Choice**

5. **Making a Commitment.**

Yet another one by an anonymous source found on the web stretches it to 7 steps, very similar to the previous ones.

Susan Heiffter, Ph. D. who writes for Psychology Today comes with an even simpler one:
1. Clarify the problem, including your initial proposals.

2. Explore the underlying concerns, listing all of them, pro or con, on one list.

3. Create a solution set (a multi-faceted solution) responsive to all the concerns on your list.

She also warns that men tend to devote insufficient attention to step two, exploring underlying concerns. Instead they often leap prematurely straight to step 3, seeking solutions. Women by contrast have a tendency to get mired down in excessive time in the second step, and sometimes need to be reminded to start generating solution options. Does gender matter when it comes to decision-making regarding a job change?

The more analytical ones are like this anonymous flow chart also found on the web, which breaks it down into 7 steps, a variation of the previous ones with a twist when it warns about distinguishing short and long-term consequences in Step #4.
What is well known is that most people typically build a matrix where they list the pros and cons of a job opportunity to help them decide. But on a more analytical perspective, the concepts of prospect theory from Kahneman and Tversky (2002) found empirically that “people underweight outcomes that are merely probable in comparison with outcomes that are obtained with certainty.” They also found that “people generally discard components that are shared by all prospects under consideration.” Under prospective theory, “value is assigned to gains and losses rather than to final assets; also probabilities are replaced by decision weights. Therefore the popular process must be flawed as we have an irrational tendency to be less willing to gamble with profits (or perhaps accepting a better job) than with losses (potentially quitting a worse job)” reflected in the graph below.

Kahneman goes on saying that “people tend to assess the relative importance of issues by the ease with which they are retrieved from memory – and this is largely determined by the extent of coverage in the media.” When people believe a conclusion is true, they
are also very likely to believe arguments that appear to support it, even when these arguments are unsound. So why bother to build a decision matrix then?

3.2 Finally the individual plays a role

Then there are fewer models that picture the individual in the process. For example, Professor Enrico Decidue from Insead has also developed an interesting framework of 4 stages in the picture below:

First he claims that people typically avoid a rational approach simply because “a human mind has limited information processing and storage capabilities, humans must use simple rules of thumb and heuristics to help make decisions and solve problems. (Simon, 1978).” The problem lies in the fact that “Many heuristics, or simple rules, that people use to make judgments and decisions lead to systematic and predictable errors (Kahneman and Tversky, 2002).” “Therefore we need to get rid of our biases when we gather information prior to making a decision such as anchoring, availability, overconfidence and confirmation. There is some evidence that people restrict their evaluation to available alternatives and then fit their values to the preferred alternatives rather than seek alternatives that meet their goals (Rothstein, 1980).”
Here the piece on incorporating personal preferences seems relevant. It starts again with knowing and avoiding biases like framing, loss aversion and regret, as most people demonstrate inaction inertia. In fact, decision makers engage in “defensive avoidance, a belief that finding a better alternative than those currently available is unrealistic (Janis, 1977).”

The best way is probably to combine intuition (which can be educated over time) with a simple linear model using decision weights. However, most executives don’t seem to really reflect after making a decision to learn from feedback so they might repeat the same mistakes. “People have a hard time understanding the role of chance in life and business, they misunderstand the role of randomness because they think they are somehow in control” (Decidue, 2013). However as we will see further, they are really not in control because they might be acting under their CCRTs without really knowing it.

Another interesting unnamed similar framework is the one that breaks the process in 4 pieces. This focus more on the individual making the decision rather than on the process itself, which seems like the better way to go.
Chip & Dan Heath (2013) from “Decisive: How to Make better Choices in Life and Work” lay down a robust framework for making decisions in general and perhaps could be used to tailor to the process of choosing a new job. Ralph L. Keeney (1992) from “Value-Focused Thinking – A path to Creative Decision-Making” states that ‘values are what we care about. As such, values should be the driving force for our decision-making. The general principle of thinking about values is to discover the reasoning for each objective and how it relates to other objectives.’

Keeney quotes that “many books have been written about decision-making to tell us how to solve decision problems. However, they do not tell us how to identify potential decision opportunities. They tell us how to analyze alternatives to choose the best one. They do not tell us how to create alternatives. They tell us how to evaluate alternatives given some quantitative objective function. They do not tell us how to articulate the qualitative objectives on which any appraisal of alternatives must rest.”

Does it sound complicated? I would say that your values are intimately linked to how you were raised, what your parents or relatives taught you as a child and how you experienced this learning growing up. “What has emotional resonance for him or her? (Kets de Vries, 2006). So yes values are important in decision-making but
Making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

understanding why they matter to you and separating them from the realities of what that new job can really offer you is key to make it right.

Another interesting framework that tells us more about knowing yourself and how you make decisions were pictured in the “Guide to Planning Your Career” from the University of Manitoba:

Where the top half of the Wheel is made up of external factors (e.g.: opportunities, experiences) while the bottom half is made up of personal characteristics (e.g.: skills, interests). They also correctly mentioned that depending on your life circumstances, some sections of the Wheel might be more important to you than others. This could change at different times in your life, which is very much true.

However, how you arrive at your interests and personal style has a lot to do with your CCRT and again goes back to aspects of your childhood and youth, the relationship with your parents or relatives that helped shape who you are as a person. So we need
Making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

to first understand that, before listing interests and styles that seem best fitted for a particular decision.

As Kahneman (2011) says in “Thinking Fast and Slow”: “you know far less about yourself than you feel you do.” He then defines our thinking by dividing it into two systems: “System 1 which operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control. This is typically our first reaction to anything we see or hear. While Systems 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations. So this is when we actually need to think before saying or doing something. System 1 has more influence on behavior when System 2 is busy. System 1 is also the origin of many of the systematic errors in your intuitions.” But we just cannot avoid them. So do most executives use System 1 or 2 when thinking about a job change? Probably as we will see further, System 2 comes in later only to confirm and support what System 1 has already (intuitively) decided. In his words, “System 1 is the origin of many of the systematic errors in your intuition.”

We are generally pruned to move to action if we feel distressed and these job changes typically stress out even the most senior people.

3.3 A change will be started, involving other people

The next level of related theory is about change, which is the closest we can get to uncovering the real motivation for accepting or not a job offer, since a career decision will in most cases start a change process.

For instance, Professor Manfred Kets de Vries talks about the 5 C’s:
1. **Concern**, which could be translated to any negative feelings towards the current job

2. **Confrontation**, perhaps the trigger that starts the process to look for an exit

3. **Clarification**, all the preparatory steps to envision new alternatives

4. **Crystallization**, the most important piece where one goes through an inner journey to clarify discontent, get insight and increase self-knowledge of what the change might be about

5. **Change**, the actual decision to move to a new opportunity

In my profession, I have convinced and/or advised more than 200 executives to do or not a job change in the last 12 years, so I have always been interested in how they come to that conclusion, which sometimes can be very surprising.

After gaining a better understanding of all theories and models, the work proceeded to the research of past and current credible articles on Individual Career Decision Making from many different sources such as the Journal of Employment Counseling, The Career Development Quarterly, Harvard Business Review articles, Econometrica (The Academic Journal of Economics), Bain Insights and the Academy of Management Review.

Another worthy piece is the “The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited” (1983) from Mark Granovetter in which he claims that “people make more consistent decisions if their connection to their network is stronger.” So we should investigate further how people go about supporting or not their own decisions through consulting with others close to them.
4. METHODOLOGY

In order to understand how people make career decisions so we can improve them, the efforts presented herein have mapped the challenges faced by executives when faced with a concrete opportunity to change jobs. The challenges were identified through complementary perspectives, such as psychology, decision-making and business management.

“Career role discrepancy is the perceived gap between the actual state of affairs (i.e. current career roles) and the ideal state (career role expectations) (Mihal, et al., 1984).”

The next step was then to find more about it by asking executives directly and not through third parties like search consultants, Human Resources or coaches, about real situations that happened to them recently and not rely on hypothetical ones (what would you do in this particular situation type).

After discussing the potential use of quantitative and qualitative methods with a market research specialist, conclusion was that the critical incident method seemed more relevant and could be better captured in a qualitative survey. Therefore the insight would be generated through a personal structured interview. The interview guide\(^2\) tackled the main hypothesis regarding a job change, helping the individual walk the interviewer through their thought process, of leaving their old jobs, discussing how the opportunity came up and what triggered them to change or not. It was built to be somewhat short (maximum of 10 questions), objective and allowing the person to tell

\(^2\) Can be found in the Appendix
a story about how he moved from point A to point B in detail, reflecting on each step taken.

In order to do that, 15 interviews were performed with senior executives who were faced with a new job offer and took it in the last 12 months. The sample (see table at Appendix) attempted to reflect:

- Consistency among senior business executives, so all respondents were either the #1 executive in an organization (N level) in a particular country (6 people in the sample or 40%) or they reported to that person (N-1 level)
- Mature stage of their lives so the average age was 44 years old with a range between 35 and 51 years old. All married but one currently divorced and all of them with children (mostly small, except for 2 with grown-up children).
- A good mix between male and female executives. We had 4 women (27% of the total) which is actually higher considering only the N & N-1 levels in a typical corporation (probably less than 10%)
- For proximity reasons, the pool was mostly Brazilian but a few International candidates were included in order for the conclusions not to be too biased towards that culture. In the sample we had 4 foreigners (a Frenchman, two Dutchmen and an Angolan) although two of whom had have been living and working in Brazil for quite some time
- A good mix of industry sectors, so we had several of them represented such as Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), Industrial, Healthcare, Education, Retail, Pharmaceuticals, Technology, Internet, Financial Services and Private Equity
• The companies they left and the ones they joined were a mix between large and medium-sized multinationals (e.g. J&J, Apple, Unilever, Diageo, Whirlpool), locals as well as less known ones such as a local Hospital and a local Private Equity fund

• An unbiased sample of individuals hired directly by me versus others from my Firm and outside. So only 20% of them were actually hired by me, 27% others by my colleagues and the majority had no relation with our Firm regarding their last job change (so roughly a 47/53% ratio)

• An experienced group of job changers as they had made on average 3.1 changes over their careers, ranging from none to 6 previous changes to the one we focused on.

• They were all contacted directly either by email or phone, with the objective to participate in the thesis about decision-making when making a job change. It was anticipated that it would take at most one hour of their time and a face-to-face meeting was preferable if possible. There was just one exception of a CEO that was unknown and was referred by another participant from the same company who suggested that she be included.

Given the life stage of the sample, there were a lot of similarities in terms of career changes, the need to support children’s education and/or aging parents, so more about others and less about themselves, about their own needs.

Most interviews lasted for about one hour on average, the shortest being about 50 minutes and the longest about 90 minutes. Very few were taped as the majority occurred in public places like cafes or restaurants which were too noisy to enable good
quality recording. Pages of notes were taken and later analyzed to find common patterns. Only 3 (20%) out of the 15 interviews happened over the phone, all the other ones were done face-to-face. All but one individual (93%) were previously known to me. The interviewees were not consulted again after the interview had taken place.

The analysis of the written materials resulted in a detailed write-up for each individual which was later grouped into common themes, such as triggers, feelings, drivers, etc. It was later linked with hard data such as how much time was spent on previous jobs, number of job changes prior to that, marital status, presence of children, level of difficulty for the job change, and others. The real diamonds were the many Relationship Episodes that were generated when discussing their childhood, families, relationship with former superiors, among others. The stories were then grouped to better illustrate each of the key steps in the decision-making process as illustrated further.

The final discussion focuses on the implications of findings to both the executive population in general as well as to the Human Resources or other Hiring Professionals and the Executive Search Consultants or Coaches on how to better support others in making better career decisions.

For confidentiality reasons, none of these displayed cases use the executives names or companies, which was the agreement with them upfront. Some of the stories about to be told are very personal and should not be discussed openly without their consent.
5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Keeney is right in going on by saying that “almost all of the literature on decision-making concerns what to do after the crucial activities of identifying the decision problem, creating alternatives, and specifying objectives.” But where do these decision problems, alternatives, and objectives come from? He then makes his claim for values, which is valid. But what I would like to explore is how we develop such values and the way we end up using them most likely unconsciously in our decision-making when faced with a new job opportunity.

“So where do bad decisions come from? In many cases, they can be traced back to the way the decisions were made—the alternatives were not clearly defined, the right information was not collected, the costs and benefits were not accurately weighed. But sometimes the fault lies not in the decision-making process but rather in the mind of the decision maker. The way the human brain works can sabotage our decisions (Hammond, et al., 2006).”

“Many studies have linked career indecision to interpersonal and intrapersonal processes. Leong and Chervinko found a positive association between career indecision and specific personality traits such as perfectionism, self-consciousness and fear of commitment. Intrapersonal factors such as values, gender, health, beliefs, age, and self-concept can influence career development. (Zimmerman et al., 2007).”

So before we talk about decision models, let’s focus first on what was found in the individual making the decision.
5.1 Using the CCRT to make better career decisions

The central aspect to be explored in this paper is that an executive’s decision to accept or not a new job offer is deeply linked with that person’s Core Conflictual Relationship Theme (CCRT) and without understanding it, he or she will perhaps not make the right decision and the intermediary helping him or her in the process (e.g. search consultant) might be falsely convinced of their real motivations, and be surprised in a few weeks, months or even years later, that this was not the right career choice for him or her.

According to Howard Book, “the CCRT is an easily operationalized focus that speaks to the central, repetitive, relationship to transference, projective identification, and the repetition compulsion that ultimately interferes with developing collaborative, inspired relationships that are mutually rewarding.” In other words, it refers to the “enduring conflict between what the person wishes for in a relationship and what he/she fears he/she may receive from the other. (Book, 2012).”

“The beauty of the CCRT is that it is an atheoretical, easily operationalized activity. It requires no psychodynamic knowledge (Book, 1998). It consists of three components that work in a cascade (Luborsky, 1984):”

1. A Wish (W)

2. A Response from the Other (RO), normally a transference or a repetition compulsion
3. The Response from the Self (RS)

“It can be generated from the person’s relationship episodes (REs). An RE is a vignette or a story that the person tells you about his or her interaction with another person. It is easy because people usually cannot help but talk about relationship episodes. Your task is to learn how to hear, capture and reformulate the information. The best way is to write it down, almost verbatim. (Book, 1998)”. So let’s illustrate how one can use this method to help people make better career decisions.

First of all, the population surveyed in this qualitative research is somewhat senior as described earlier in the methodology section. They are at the top of their organizations, career planning is a very important topic for them, they are experienced in making those types of decisions (as said earlier, on average they had changed jobs 3 times before the most recent one) and they came from solid careers where they invested a lot of time and effort to build their market reputation (on average they had stayed at their previous job for 5.5 years, ranging from 6 months to years). The impact of their job decisions on their families is also important (on average their household comprises 3.8 people, ranging from 2 to 6).

Given all these job changes were very recent (from a few weeks to one year ago), it is not surprising that all of them said they are very happy with the change, as they are still living the honeymoon period with their new bosses or organizations. It could also be that they would not say otherwise given that I had warned them about the subject of our conversation being making decisions about a job change and admitting things
were not going well could document that they had been poor decision-makers in the past. In any case, it was mostly used as an ice-breaker to get the conversation going.

A Harvard Business Review article claims that “good manager’s decision styles evolve in a predictable pattern” (Brousseau, 2006). They then break the process in two: how information is used and how options are created. “In regard to information, some people want to mull over reams of data before they make any decision, which they called “maximizers”. Others just want the key facts, called “satisficers”. Regarding options, they also break them into two, the “single focus” believe in taking one course of action, while their “multifocused” counterparts generate lists of possible options.

The combination of the two by two variable create four styles of decision-making:

- **Decisive (little information, one course of action)**
- **Flexible (little information, many options)**
- **Hierarchic (lots of data, one action)**
- **Integrative (lots of data, many options).**

They also say that decisions made in public might be different from those made in private. Finally they claim that over time, executives evolve to the “maximizing” style so flexible and integrative styles dominate the senior executive level. Finally the claim is that if one does not evolve in their decision styles, it could be fatal for one’s career.’

However, during the course of these interviews, there seemed to be a consistency in the way the senior executives made decisions about their careers over time: it was always linked to their CCRTs. Nonetheless some do go for a lot of data, some do not,
some think about that opportunity alone while others try to see more possibilities, but
without knowing, they seem to be just playing out their own CCRTs over and over
again, as you will see with all the cases discussed further.

It is worth mentioning that if and once the executive can identify his own CCRT and see
how it relates or not to the job choice he/she is about to make, it probably requires
System 2 in Kahneman’s concept to function, which is hard work. “Activities that
impose high demands on System 2 require self-control and the exertion of self-control
is depleting and unpleasant. Moreover, self-control and cognitive effort are forms of
mental work. People who are simultaneously challenged by a demanding cognitive task
and by a temptation are more likely to yield to temptation (Kahneman, 2011).”

One of the aspects worth highlighting here about the use of the CCRT as a tool to
understand the executive’s real motivation for a potential job change is perhaps his or
her perception that it might show his or her weakness to the intermediary helping him
or her in the process or even the future employer. Not everyone is open enough to
spill their most internal conflicts to a potential stranger in a first or second encounter.
Moreover, most senior executives want to portray a powerful positive image to the
market, which includes the search consultant, coach or potential future employer.

Therefore once you learn that he or she might still idealize his father in his potential
superiors or that he/she decides to live up to his or her parents expectations as a child,
would that automatically make the executive less suited for that job or perhaps any
other job? The answer is probably no but as Prof. Martin Stoller (1996) from JL Kellogg
GSM once said “Perception is reality” and the corporate world loves to have supermen
and wonder women walking down the hallways.
Making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

As an example, one of the most impacting cases came from one senior executive who could not avoid crying at the end of the discussion as he remembered how his father suffered at the end of his career and how difficult it was for him and his mother to watch that without being able to do anything for him. He clearly wanted to avoid going through the same process himself in the future. However, this was so heavy for him that impacted all his previous career decisions, inside and outside the companies he had worked for. As Professor Manfred Kets de Vries likes to say “his inner theater might come out”, and it did.

But interestingly at the end of that interaction, my personal perception of that executive changed. I felt he was more human than I had imagined, not so tough on people as I had expected, so overall the breakdown was very positive and I respect him today more than before as a potential CEO candidate. I saw something in him that I had not yet had the chance to see in previous encounters about his career. But will that happen with other consultants in a similar situation? What is even more worrying is that probably very few senior executives would get to that point about their personal stories with a third party.

“Behavior is cyclical, interactive and frequently interrupted” (Mihal, et al., 1984).” As it will be described later, if you don’t go deep enough to understand the CCRTs, what lies in the surface is probably not enough to explain the real motivation to accept a new offer or not, or worse, to understand if that new opportunity might work for them or not.
5.2 Focusing on the individual versus the process

To focus on the individual rather than the process is a key finding. The first step in making a career decision is deep self-analysis. An in-depth knowledge of one’s attitude, skills, principles, likes, etc is necessary. However, a few problems may surface during the decision-making process (Lakshmi, 2008):

- Considering only the favorable facts, neglecting the unfavorable ones
- Not considering other alternatives
- Using the same cognitive patterns used in the past
- Unwillingness to get an opinion from the concerned person
- Inability to look at the big picture
- Overlooking the negative impact
- Neglecting or ignoring distant information
- Peer pressure to conform to choices held by the group
- Applying the same decision criteria in similar situations

The right cognitive process based on good reasoning leads to successful decision-making. A good decision-maker will:

- Possess a flexible attitude
- Be a good observer and listener
- Be able to balance among various alternatives
- Have high self esteem, courage, confidence and self-awareness
- Form a set of opinions around the decision
- Bring new and unconventional ideas
Accept feedback from others

Be practical and precise

“For instance, by focusing on the individual, one might learn that relationship and belonging at work were more important decisional criteria than were greater earnings, upward mobility, and the pursuit of challenging and stimulating work (Amundson, 2010).”

However, the way we think can trick us. “Researchers have been studying the way our minds function in making decisions for half a century. This research, in the laboratory and in the field, has revealed that we use unconscious routines to cope with the complexity inherent in most decisions. These routines, known as heuristics, serve us well in most situations. Yet, like most heuristics, it is not foolproof. They have identified a whole series of such flaws in the way we think in making decisions. Some, like the heuristic for clarity, are sensory misperceptions. Others take the form of biases. Others appear simply as irrational anomalies in our thinking. What makes all these traps so dangerous is their invisibility. Because they are hardwired into our thinking process, we fail to recognize them—even as we fall right into them (Hammond, et al., 2006).”

But I would claim that we can go a step further into this way of thinking, and beware of behaviors that probably have deep roots in the way we were raised and developed as a child.

As a first example (let’s label it as #1), one executive who decided to pass on a wonderful job opportunity in the past because he stated that he could not let his team down at that time. He felt he could not look them in the eyes and tell them he was
moving to their main competitor at the time. So perhaps his wish (W) is to achieve and help others. Years later, he did leave that company for another start-up, which was being backed up by a major media conglomerate that interested him more as a potential employer. However, things did not develop as he imagined and he started to question himself if he had made the right decision in the past. When faced with a new opportunity, which he was not actively looking, his first reaction was again to decline it.

However, afterwards he realized that the Media group he aspired to belong to, never really considered him or that start-up as part of them so it became easier for him to disengage. So the response (RO) he got from them was rejection.

Once the discussion went over aspects of his childhood, it became clear why belonging was so important to him. He wanted to feel respected and accepted, therefore ended up being frustrated. His parents got divorced when he was a small child and apparently the environment at home was not healthy, as they were constantly fighting and were apparently very tough on him.

For instance, an 8 graded test was never good enough at school. When he lost a chess championship at 8 years old, his father quickly pointed what he had done wrong in the last match, without complementing him for making that far into the tournament. This made him grow quite independently, as he walked to school by himself at a very early age, even living in a big and dangerous city, having had his watch and money stolen sometimes. So if we both knew that his CCRT is trying to belong (to a new Family perhaps), being accepted and respected (perhaps even loved) we could have anticipated that he would have declined that opportunity in the past and at the same
time whoever would like to hire him in the future, would need to make sure that he felt like he would belong at this new environment. Fortunately this new company did this and he accepted their offer.

“It is clear the importance of self-perceptions or how the individual sees himself or herself (Di Fabio, et al., 2012).” Also interesting to notice that “41% of people developed strength or resilience through crisis such as identity crises, financial struggles, workplace challenges, experiences of loss, job uncertainties, and environmental constraints (Amundson, et al., 2010).”

Another example (#2) came from a CEO of a software company. She grew up being the child in the middle and according to her “always being very vocal to conquer my own space.” She actually mentioned the joke she told everybody that “she might have been adopted given she was so different from her siblings.” It is important to notice the importance of her siblings, mainly her older brother. As Randel Carlock (2012) says that “after the parents, siblings are the biggest influencer of personality because one spends more time with them than anybody else in the family throughout their lives.”

Her father was an accountant and she and her brother used to help him as they studied and dreamed of one day starting their own accounting Firm. Life took them to different directions and many years later she managed to join the same company as her brother was working for. Given they were in different countries at first, it was not perceived as a conflict by the organization. However when a new CEO arrived, it triggered in her the feeling that she might not have been chosen in the near future by relating to the fact that she had roughly the same age as him. So she soon reacted positively to an invitation by her previous company to rejoin them now as President.
In our discussion however, not sure if she realized that in her decision-making process, everything boiled down to “pluses and minuses”, as she always talked about trade-offs between different opportunities, for instance some that required more traveling but from which she clearly learned more versus others that allowed her to stay home more often but she felt she gave more than she took. For an external observer, the analogy of her thinking process with her father’s profession as an accountant and the time she spent in her youth probably helping him classify items into debits (“-“) or credits (“+”) became very vivid.

Another interesting aspect was that a few months before the new CEO arrived at her last company, her brother had been transferred back home from overseas, which resulted in their working in the same subsidiary, although in different areas and both reporting to the new CEO. However, this fact could be related to her childhood wish to be different from her siblings, to stand out in that company like she had always wanted to in her family, perhaps to be heard (W). Again on the surface, the trigger might appear to have been the arrival of the new CEO and not the return of her brother. Or could it be that she would compete with her brother for the job? Perhaps even become his boss? By looking at this analysis, the new CEO would probably never have a chance to convince her to stay given the dynamics of the family presence in the organization.

5.3 The role of the intermediary

“We cannot forget that any career opportunity is typically presented to us by another person. And people’s answers are determined by the present circumstances and not by the nature of the role being offered” (Halzack, 2013).” So the way the opportunity is
presented to us and our personal moment when we receive are very relevant to the
decision-making process.

How the researched sample came up with the opportunity was a 50/50 split between
being proactively looking in the market versus being reactive. However, no correlation
between this behavior and how they make decisions was found. One could make the
hypothesis that the proactive ones could have been more careful about their decision
making given they would have been planning it before but in fact, the vast majority
really only start thinking about the decision once a concrete opportunity appears in
front of them.

The fact that the sample was picked mostly through my professional network, it is not
surprising that the majority of these job changes (57%) were provoked by third parties
(e.g. executive search consultants) versus directly by the future employers.

So to better understand the role of the intermediary, we might need to have in mind
that “in fact, the role of the career counselor has shifted from matcher to nurturer, but
unfortunately this is often not yet the case in practice (Dagley, 2004). It shifts from the
one who matches to one who facilitates the consideration of belonging and personal
meaning in career decisions (Amundson, et al.,2010).”

An interesting insight that came up about the role of the intermediary in the process
was not only how influential they were in convincing the executive to take the role but
moreover if they could have manipulated the process somehow in their favor. Again
perhaps because of the seniority and level of the group, some admitted that the
search consultant played a key role in the process but none admitted to being
making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

Manipulated. The danger here might be for the intermediary to understand the executive’s CCRT and then use it against him or her to help convince him/her to join that opportunity, even if not the right one for him/her in the long term.

This could be easily done in one of the surveyed executives who clearly wishes to be liked by others (W) and felt great about a project when the headhunter told him that in the case he declined that opportunity after all those interviews, they would have to restart the project from scratch as the client was “in love” with him and would not accept any of the already identified contenders. He ended up taking the job, but one wonders how much of that speech was really true versus pure manipulation of the executive to feel good about himself and appreciated by his new future organization.

“It is important to note here that the Response from Other (RO) is always generated from the person telling the story’s perspective” (Book, 1998) and not from someone else’s. An interesting quote from one of the respondents who admitted it was a tough decision to make was that “I genuinely felt the headhunter was cheering for me to be selected during the process. This gave me more confidence that it was the right decision for me.”

Another one mentioned that he first rejected the headhunter’s call but accepted to have a coffee with him. There he was convinced by him that the opportunity might indeed be a good fit, as it turned later to be. He said he can smell from a distance the ones that try to hard sell the opportunity by “attempting to fit a square into a circle”, which makes him feel negatively about the process. However, as described later to this individual, being selected in a difficult process is very important as he really
appreciates the praise of being chosen given he was raised in a military environment where this was key in defining the most successful ones.

Here we need to also consider the role of the intermediary’s own CCRT into the process. Consciously or not, the search consultant or coach also brings his/hers own internal conflicts that will somehow interface with the executive’s CCRT. Being able to differentiate them and avoid not playing a role in someone’s script is therefore very relevant to the executive.

In order to illustrate this point, it is worth bringing a personal example of a job change that was perhaps influenced by me without my awareness at the time. Around a year ago, one of my subordinates came to me with a question about how he could make more money in our Firm. Unfortunately I told him that the only two current positions that would allow for that were mine and being in the Firm’s executive committee, which for both cases one has to be nominated by someone else and cannot just apply for. Moreover in a year from then, if everything worked out well, he would be promoted to partnership and that would impact his compensation. But in the short term, he would have to hang on tight as the maximum we could do would be to perhaps advance part of his future bonus. Looking back, he probably did not leave that discussion happier or with a perception that his needs had been addressed.

The background from his side was that he had gotten divorced a year or so earlier, had not been able yet to sell his house and get rid of the mortgage but at the same time, was already in a new relationship in which he wanted to make a good impression, so he was tight for cash. Even knowing all of that, my CCRT is always to be in control (of everything and everyone), never to need or rely on others to do something for me.
Some say that perhaps I was forced to grow up earlier to take care of myself, even though I personally do not feel this way. In any case, I certainly projected my own CCRT into him, as in my mind he just had to “tighten his belt” and spend less, which is probably what I would do if I were in his shoes.

But what happened a few months later was a total surprise to me and others when he quit with a very aggressive offer. If I had perceived that back then, perhaps I would actually have gone the extra mile to do something else for him, not sure if the outcome would have been different though. So in any case, the interaction between two CCRTs is complex and can lead to unforeseen dynamics even if the intermediary has the best interest at heart.

Looking from another angle, it could also very well be that even if the intermediary does very little to influence or not the person to change, it already represents some stability in the process and could act as a transitional object for the executive making the change. This could also explain partially why during the process sometimes candidates behave in a totally different way in front of the potential future employers versus the search consultant. Most times surprisingly showing their insecurity and fears, if perhaps the transitional “object” has been removed from the room.

5.4 Paying attention to feelings during the process

“Emotionally stable individuals are thought to experience less career decision-making difficulties both before and during the process (Di Fabio, et al., 2012).”
In the chosen sample, feelings during the process ranged from stress ("could not sleep for days") to calm ("I was analyzing other options in parallel"), to worry ("I did not know what others would think of my decision"), to anxiety ("I wanted to start real soon"), to doubts ("Will they like me?"), to love ("I felt in love with the opportunity and the owners.") which are all perfectly normal. The question is: How much attention do they really pay to these feelings during the process in order to make a better decision?

The reality is that those feelings can actually be traced to each person’s CCRT. For instance, the woman who accepted the job at a Healthcare provider (#3) was apparently raised in a very happy family, with lots of support from her parents and siblings to whatever she decided to do in her life. She claims that in all her difficult decisions, they are very much present ("We do joint calls if needed with both my parents and my brother and sister"), and she feels nurtured and supported throughout her life and career. The hypothesis here is that her CCRT is that she wishes to be loved and understood by others (W) like she is by her family, so she projects that image onto the owners of this company. She felt like they were an extension of her family.

For her, honoring your word and commitments is very important just like in a family. So she claimed that the only time she made a wrong career decision was when it was based solely on money. However, she told that company she would only do the job if they paid her much more than she was making, which they then surprisingly agreed. By talking to her father about this and repeating those words, she was influenced to honor them and took the job, only to leave about a year later. In the end, she never felt liked in that place.
“88% described the importance of meaningful engagement within and outside their work as important (Amundson, et al., 2010).”

Therefore when the response of the Healthcare owners cleared her doubts about their financial health and matched her desires, it was a done deal in her heart and mind. She felt she could be helpful to them. One should never forget that “the Relationship Episode (RE) is a narration of an interaction (real or fantasized) that takes place between the person and another (Book, 1998).” In this case, she is probably projecting her father figure onto the owners and her supportive family onto the new organization.

5.5 Understanding the main drivers for change

Dan Lovallo says that “leaders are skeptical. They tend not to believe that the soft stuff matters more than the hard stuff (Heath, 2013).” However when asked about their main drivers for change, there was a wide variety of reasons. From a basic uncertainty about the next role in the company, fear for the financial situation of the company, the need for more energy from work, will to prove him or herself or leave their comfort zone, broken trust between them and the superior, more balance between professional and personal lives, need for more autonomy or greater impact, desire to revive a good previous work experience, desire to find a company more aligned with their values, a higher purpose like serving others or an opportunity to learn more.

What was interesting here is that the soft aspects of the decision seemed to be more important than the hard ones, which was not entirely expected. So first let’s separate the soft from the hard aspects, which maybe subjective. Hard aspects might be:
Making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

1. First and foremost the compensation - how much more money will I get at the next job?

2. Title of the role (if CXO or VP versus Director makes a difference)

3. Career prospects (confirming that the next role is a step up versus the current one, in other words, “employability”)

4. Benefits (Non Salary benefits are important for 96.7% of the people according to a survey done with 7,500 people from 700 companies by O Estado de Sao Paulo newspaper)

5. Industry (switching to a sexy sector like luxury goods or digital)

6. Location (According to a survey done by Havik Consulting with 700 middle managers, 48% of people consider the distance between home and work as a key factor for changing jobs or not)

On the other hand, soft factors could be:

1. The boss or partners for/with whom I am going to work

2. The company’s image or brand equity (According to a Linkedin survey, the impact of the brand lowers the cost of hiring by 50% and turnover by 28%)

3. The challenge (e.g. turnaround, growth, etc)

4. The purpose (doing something bigger like saving lives, improving living standards, etc)

5. Company Culture
6. The team who he/she will lead

The researched sample had 6 CEOs, from which 3 stated that they did not need to work anymore as they had already achieved their financial independence. Therefore the bulk of the sample (12 people) needed to work for a living. With the exception of one, all of them did not state that money was their key driver for change, again except for one, none said that title was the main reason for change. Only one person was very concerned about his “employability” regarding a job change. The most interesting finding was that many said the job scope was not important, since being a CFO or an HR head at company A would not be much different from company B, but for whom you would work and in which company culture made all the difference. The only hard factor that seemed to have some weight was location. As an individual said “jobs change, bosses change but location stays so you better like it.”

Again perhaps because we were discussing this with a somewhat senior group of people who have already experienced different jobs at several companies and are mostly self-assured, on top of being at a stage of their lives which is approaching the turning point (plus or minus 40 years old) they are mostly after the soft aspects of the new job. Another way of looking might be that at this stage of their careers they could have already conquered what they needed, so they are looking for the intangibles like having fun at work, enjoying a sense of purpose, etc.

So why is this important? Well certainly for the intermediary in the process, knowing that the soft aspects might be more important than the hard ones can direct him or her to spend time on things that matter more for the executive and perhaps ease the pressure on the financial aspects of the offer, which normally tend to be the focus. For
the individual, thinking about these aspects might give hints into their own CCRTs and therefore become more conscious about why they might be deciding for one way or another about that job offer.

What is interesting to notice is that drivers might also reveal hidden competing commitments. This might get trickier as hidden commitments might “call into question beliefs long held close, perhaps since childhood. And it requires people to admit to painful, even embarrassing, feelings that they would not ordinarily disclose to others or even to themselves (Kegan, 2001).”

On the one hand, the executive might want to choose a job because its right sense of purpose (which is probably linked to his individual needs) but on the other hand it might not give him the economic reward he believes he or his family are entitled to (which might be their collective needs). So by deeply analyzing the difference between the hard and soft aspects of a change, one might be able to uncover these competing hidden commitments and work on them. “Even though understanding our shortcomings is not enough to fix them (Heath, et al., 2013)“.

One of interviewed executives who is a CFO (#4) in the pharmaceutical industry is remarried and therefore has to manage a family which is partially hers and partially her 2\textsuperscript{nd} husband’s. She mentioned that alignment with the company culture (soft aspect) was very important for her but at the same time because of her personal situation, location (a hard aspect) was also key given the fact she might need to react quickly to pick up the children at school or take them to hospital in the middle of the day.
Interestingly when she talked about her childhood, her parents got divorced when she was 5 years old and being the elder of 4 children, she had to take care of them. Although she was one of the people whose CCRT was difficult to get, could it be that she managed to get in a situation to relive her childhood when she also had to take care of others who were in principle not her responsibility? She might not have realized yet that these apparently hidden competing commitments come from there, from being stuck in somebody else’s script.

One easy tool that could be used here by the executive or the intermediary to support him or her in the process is a simple worksheet (Kegan, et al., 2001) to identify the big assumptions that support the hidden commitment.

The intermediaries in the process tend to get annoyed by the executive’s complaints during the offer negotiation, however the authors warn us that “complaints can be immensely helpful. People complain only about the things they care about, and they complain the loudest about the things they care the most.” Moreover they suggest that we need to explore their history. The “big assumptions can be traced to early experiences with parents, siblings or friends.”

5.6 Using the network to support the decision-making process

Once the executive was faced with a job decision, all of them discussed the opportunity with others. This should definitely be the norm as “individuals make decisions in a collective manner, motivated by factors that are not reduced to their sole
Making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

interests and preferences, but influenced by their respective social networks which constitutes the social collectivity (Granoveter, 2012).”

“There is an inherent tendency for people to seek out connection, support, and intimacy as an adaptive aspect of human experience (Blustein, 2001; Blustein et al., 2004).”

“94% described the importance of connectedness with family, friends and colleagues within and outside work as a primary factor in their decision-making. Participants made career decisions that enhanced a relational sense of connection. Connectedness involved feeling loved, nourished, and supported or nourishing, loving, and supporting others (Amundson, et al., 2010).”

This is also proven to help the decision-making process. “As under the right conditions, groups often outperform individuals in decision-making - helps avoid biases such as anchoring and overconfidence, combine information. Groups perform somewhat better than average individuals, particularly if all group members are encouraged to express their views (Decidue, 2013).”

However when asking for help using their networks, most executives go only after inputs about the offer itself or the company they might work for. The focus is all external, in a data gathering mode. They seem to miss the bigger picture of asking for their input about themselves, their preferences or how they make decisions.

5.6.1 The role of spouses

Therefore most executives involve the significant other but the weight of that opinion actually varies a lot. Some spouses are very vocal about their preferences (”My wife was against it because it would mean less money and potentially more work given it was a start-up.”), while others are more balanced (“My husband always contributes as
she is very intuitive and helps me weigh the pros and cons”). It is interesting to observe how much this is perhaps still present even though women have conquered their place in the workforce. For example, in a survey done from exit questionnaires completed by salesmen who quit their jobs voluntarily and also from wives of these men in the 70’s said “wives frequently constitute the critical element in their career decision as a man must subordinate his career to the needs and desires of his family (Jolson, 1972).”

At the same time, in some instances the executive decides not to involve the spouse but other people because the process might create stress for them, which could then impact the executive.

To illustrate this point, one of the executives portrayed in the study (#5) stated that his career decisions have always had what is best for his family upfront. Once he is faced with the new opportunity and in his particular case, all past changes also involved a country move, the first thought in his mind is to project how his family would live in that new environment. Once that makes sense for him, only then will he explore it fully.

If you stay on the surface and ask him why he changed from one job/country to another, you will leave with an answer about new learning opportunities, which can make sense at first, given he graduated in pedagogy but went to later work at multinational companies, so he likes to experiment new methods and seems eager for new learning.

“Executives with diverse experiences or that have worked in diverse companies or multiple divisions inside a company have a higher probability of considering a new job
Making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

*opportunity. They believe they will learn something new in the search process* (Halzack, 2013).”

However, by continuing the conversation to better understand why family is so important to him in these decisions, we discovered that he unfortunately came from a very dysfunctional family as his father was an alcoholic and his mother co-dependent and very much absent. In the end, he wishes to be loved and understood, perhaps like he never was while growing up. So as a teenager, he wanted to leave his house as soon as he could and pedagogy was an easy course to get into university. Therefore he is always trying to escape his past, his career decisions are guided towards having a functional family, very different from his own.

As stated earlier, he actually does not involve his wife upfront in the process (perhaps an unconscious link with his own absent mother), as he prefers to spare her from the worries during the process. Only after he has spoken with his former mentors and a family member he trusts, made his decision matrix about professional growth, quality of life and financial rewards, then he is ready to share with her. So the apparent reason for change based on better learning opportunities is embedded in broader family dynamics that shaped his values and preferences as a child.

Could it be that unconsciously he is giving her that right and following his spouse’s interests diligently to make up for his absent mother? The old “Liberation ethic stated: she does not attempt to fit into the life style of her husband’s career. Rather, she demands that her husband fit his career into the life style of the family, even if he must forego promising opportunities. Family ethics demands that her husband always place
the family before his career (Jolson et al., 1972).” Maybe he unconsciously gave her this right and the dynamics appear to be invisible to him.

Another female executive (#6) stated that she never involves anybody else in her decision-making process. She only informs her husband about the process but never asks nor allows for him to voice his opinion if this is the right step in her career. The reason why she behaves this way, is to avoid disappointment in case she decides against what the other person told her to do. For her, it is all about not ever letting down people that trust her. She believes it has to be her sole responsibility in making that decision and that is how she behaves with others, never voicing her real opinion but only stating the pros and cons of each decision.

“41% developed strength or resilience through crisis such as identity crises, financial struggles, workplace challenges, experiences of loss, job uncertainties, and environmental constraints (Amundson, et al., 2010).”

When you start to discuss her youth, you understand why she might behave this way as she was raised in a nice upper class family where her father who owned a small business and her mother who was a university professor were always working but provided all the support she and her brother and two younger sisters needed, such as 3 maids to take care of them. She described herself as growing up like “a little princess”. Once she went to university, it was a reality shock for her as she moved to the big city without any support, not knowing how to cook nor to wash her own clothes and cried every day. This episode made her stronger and she decided to take care of herself, finding a part time job after being in school for only a few weeks.
5.6.2 The role of parents, mainly fathers

“41% of people described relationships with role models and mentors as important decisional influences (Amundson, et al., 2010).” So here was no different, almost all of them discussed these opportunities mostly with former bosses or colleagues, typically more senior folks, some with their siblings when they were connected to the business world and almost nobody with their parents, perhaps because of their age and state of life, which was distant and somewhat detached from current events. Nevertheless, the unconscious role they play is enormous, as described below.

Four interesting examples came up to discuss the weight that role models (mainly the parent figure) might have on a job decision. The first (#7) is from a quite talented woman who realized she was playing the same role for 5 years and was not interested to move abroad with her company. Then she went after new opportunities in the market and was faced with two very good job alternatives at the same time. After struggling to decide and discussing with her network, she accepted the offer from Company B only to realize 6 months later she had made a mistake and went back to Company A to accept their previous offer, which luckily was still there. The reason that she decided for B instead of A at first was mostly because she did not identify with her future boss there whereas she found chemistry with the other one. However, during these 6 months, that boss from company A left and she loved the new guy during the interviewing process, facilitating her later decision to switch.
Again, on the surface, it all seemed very reasonable. “But many studies have confirmed the influence of family of origin on an individual’s career development and choice (Zimmerman, et al., 2007).” Once we explored her childhood, we learned that her family had left Angola during the war, arrived in Brazil and struggled to make a living. Through her childhood, they operated under survival mode and her father had a very strong influence on her. One relationship episode she mentioned was that she only realized after leaving her 5-year-old job was that she had been operating there on survival mode, just like when she was a child, not thinking too much into the future and just trying to make one day after the other. Here her wish was to assert herself and be independent.

Another one was when she told her father she wanted to play the piano as a child. However, her father said that given their scarce resources, if he managed to give her a piano, she would never be able to quit, carrying it to the end, otherwise she would disappoint him. She later got her piano and started playing but at some point in time, it was not her passion anymore. In any case, a promise had been made and she did not want to let her father down so she kept playing and studying until she was 17 years old, when she desperately got the courage to quit. Perhaps by analogy, by not seeing her father figure at Company A, she decided for B. Once she realized she had made the wrong decision, she could not quit immediately (like the piano lessons). Only when she perhaps found her new father figure at company A, was she at peace with herself to make that change.

The second interesting example (#8) came from a senior executive, who had been a CEO for quite some time. After a very long career at a major FMCG company, he
negotiated an exit given differences with his boss who managed the region at that
time. So he went to the market and quickly enough found another apparently
great opportunity as the President of the Brazilian subsidiary of another blue-chip FMCG
multinational company. There was no intermediary involved, as he already knew the
Regional President. So in a matter of a few weeks, he got the job. However, after less
than 6 months in the new job, he realized he had made a mistake and looked for a way
out.

“A father-son relationship is more influential with regards to career choices than a
mother-son relationship. Some degree of attachment to parents is also a contributing
factor. Men’s commitment process is based on some degree of attachment to their
fathers coupled with conflicting independence from their father (Zimmerman, et al.,
2007).”

So, under a simple “lack of autonomy” reason for not engaging in a successful
professional relationship, one in which he could not create impact, we delved into his
memories from childhood to find out his CCRT: a need to find out an idealized version
of his father, opposed to his reality, in his superiors. What we found was that his father
had been a German officer who later became a diplomat but their relationship had
always been distant given that he saw his father as too hierarchical. He later realized
he did not deal well with authority and developed his own leadership style based on
leading without imposing his will to others.

By going back to all his previous job changes, we could always find a projection of what
he did not like in his father onto his boss at the time. Whenever for some reason, he
failed at doing his homework or perhaps by not realizing that, he ended up facing his
boss head on and as respect for him was lost, it was a sign for him to leave. He only respected the bosses that led not by hierarchy, but by content, for example, someone who would always teach him something new. Therefore, if he realizes this dynamic upon his next career change, he might be able to avoid making a mistake.

Interestingly he recently joined a family-owned company where his main boss is actually a young fellow, descendant from the founders, so less likely for him to project his father figure there, which could lead to a successful outcome.

Thirdly, in a recent project to find a new CEO (#9) for a local retailer, the finalist unfortunately refused the offer after almost 6 months in the process. The given reason at the time was because of another competing and better offer which could not be disclosed back then. Later it was announced that he was going to a very similar position but in an international retailer, with an obvious better-perceived brand image in the market.

After interviewing him for about 90 minutes over this theme, one important aspect he mentioned was the fact that his father, who is a lawyer by academic background but later migrated to work as a Human Resources executive in the insurance area, had never worked for a first tier company in his professional life. This was one of the cases in which the full CCRT was not revealed but if that piece of information had been uncovered about his childhood before, one would know that he would almost certainly not have joined that local organization, given he might want to fulfill his father’s dream of always working for first tier organizations.
The final one (#10) actually showed the importance of the mother in the job change made by a supply chain executive at a global FMCG company. His mother was an artist and always supported him to develop any interests he had, with the final goal for him to be happy. In fact, he claims to be quite a dynamic person always trying to combine his work with his passion for music (he plays classic piano and practices every day) and sports. As he interviewed with this new company, they had just gone through a change of President and the new one was a woman.

When she interviewed him, he had a chance to ask her about her values, what was important to her, and surprisingly he heard the same concepts as his mother’s, such as “I firmly believe that everyone has a potential and we need to develop it to the maximum.” Bingo! Without realizing it, he was probably projecting his mother’s image into his future boss (even though she is almost his same age). He later mentioned that this was the tipping point for him to leave his only job for the last 17 years and make a change.

5.6.3 The role of friends, colleagues and others

Most executives also rely on their friends, who could either be relatives, like brothers, sisters or cousins or childhood friends, university classmates or former bosses or peers from previous jobs. However, the weight they represented here seemed much less relevant than that of the spouse or the father.

“Something that most people never do is to realize that our advice to others tends to hinge on the single most important factor, while our own thinking flirts among many variables. When we think of our friends, we see the forest. When we think of ourselves,
we get stuck in the trees. Therefore, the most single effective question is what would I tell my best friend to do in this situation? Another good advice seems to be diligent about the way we collect information, asking disconfirming questions and considering the opposite. Second, we’ve got to go looking for the right kinds of info. Take our options for a spin before we commit (Heath, et al, 2013).”

A good illustration of that was another interviewed executive (#11) who was thinking about making a career change after being in the same job for almost 9 years and not enjoying it. He had started his career in Academia and always liked that environment. When an opportunity came up to potentially become the Dean of a new business school, he got interested at first but then left it aside thinking they could never match his financial aspirations. The idea however kept haunting him until his neighbor asked him a disarming question: “Do you want to live a life in luxury or live an interesting life?” Once we talked about his childhood and upbringing, you could certainly realize that he would never say no to this opportunity.

He had had very different jobs, from a university professor, to a risk analyst in a Bank, from a researcher/consultant in a big consulting firm to an operations director at a Law Firm. He claims to have never really planned his career, to react more to his instinct and put weight on company reputation or status of the role. However, the fact that his parents survived the war, always struggling but with a fixed goal that their children would succeed and do better than them, made this individual’s CCRT to always prove himself worthy of his parents’ aspirations, to fulfill their dreams. As a child he felt the pressure, and again a B+ was not a good grade for him at school. At the same time, he
also does not want his family to go through the same difficulties as he did, so money for him is important but probably comes second to fulfilling his parents’ expectations.

“We trust our impressions over the averages. So one advice might be to consult a sample who currently or formerly held the same title or to find someone who has solved your problem. (Heath, et al., 2013).”

“Leaders sense, categorize, and respond. First, issues may be incorrectly classified within this domain because they have been oversimplified. Second, leaders are susceptible to entrained thinking, a conditioned response that occurs when people are blinded to new ways of thinking by the perspectives they acquired through past experience, training, and success. Third, when things appear to be going smoothly, leaders often become complacent (Snowden, 2007).”

So in this particular case, he always sensed probably unconsciously the need to fulfill his parents’ expectations, but by oversimplifying it, they did not come to surface. His past experiences of how he and his brother were raised under this heavy shadow of the need to be more successful than the parents guided his thinking, but staying at the same job that paid well but he did not like, made him complacent until the right opportunity came up, at least in terms of purpose.

5.7 Uncovering the triggers that serve as starters

“Problem recognition often emerges after some “trigger” or “last straw” type of event. Typical events include arguments with family or co-workers, lowered job-performance,
unrealistic deadlines, insomnia, ill health, and so on, which motivates individuals to begin the decision-making process at that time (Mihal, et al., 1984).”

There is always a trigger that causes an executive to leave a job and another one to make him accept the new opportunity. Interestingly there is a big timing difference as the past trigger can happen quite some time before the person actually quits the job while the future trigger can happen quite soon as the person starts the interviewing process for the new job.

The trigger can be a disappointing behavior on the part of the person’s boss or another senior person in the company. As in one case (#8 again) where a production Director got approval to experiment with a new formula from R&D, but when it did not work, the Board blamed him and the others for it. This was the trigger. He had been working for that company for 16 years, it had been his only job then. He felt he was no longer part of the family. Trust was broken, the emotional link was gone and he decided to leave. But before that, he planned his exit by switching jobs inside the company to become better prepared for the market, or more employable, where he succeeded almost a year later.

In a study portrayed in the Career Development Quarterly, “53% of participants said that the challenge of balancing opposing career needs and desires was a significant tension. 35% coped with uncertainty by actively moving toward their goals and taking actions to increase their employability. They set goals, generated options, undertook formal education, and emphasized the value of getting practical experience (Amundson, et al., 2010).”
Another executive also mentioned that when he saw his boss’ presentation to his superiors, he felt it was not bold enough. This was the trigger, realizing his boss was not ambitious enough, therefore for him the magic was lost, his boss would not leave his position for him, nor would the area shine inside the company for him to be picked up by someone else. So, he would be stuck in his role and his “employability” would go down.

One person (#12) mentioned that throughout his professional life, he always said yes to whatever challenge he was given, never refused any promotions even if it meant personal sacrifices like working more or moving from one place to another. With this mindset, he managed to advance quite fast and became President at an early age (before 40 years old). But he always based himself on an informal trust contract established with his superiors at whichever company he was working for.

During our conversation, it was clear that financial incentives mattered to him a lot in any job change he did. However, after being a successful regional President and perhaps having a shot at being the Global CEO of a big multinational company, he quitted and joined a small boutique Private equity firm. At first glance, one might imagine that he was again going for money as these firms tend to pay well its senior executives over the long run. However, by discussing relationship episodes, we first learned that his last boss had told him that there was no need for him to relocate to headquarters for some time in order to have a real chance of succeeding him, only to change his mind later (trigger), after the executive had sacrificed himself by moving twice outside of his home country to tackle a difficult challenge.
Interestingly his father had been a senior executive as well and one of the great memories of his childhood was when he arrived from overseas bringing gifts to the children. So, for him, traveling always brought positive associations. But as we went further, we found out that his father had left the company he had worked for almost 30 years without a good severance package, and later struggled in life to survive, finally being supported by his children (including the executive) up to then. So by understanding this executive’s CCRT which might be to assert himself and be independent, never let what happened to his father, happen to him, one might figure out why he chose to now work at a Private Equity Firm, given he knew well one of the founders from the past and trusted him fully.

Kathleen Vohs says that “the idea of money primes individualism: a reluctance to be involved with others, to depend on others or to accept demands from others. Living in a culture that surrounds us with reminders of money may shape our behavior and our attitudes in ways that we do not know about and of which we may not be proud (Kahneman, 2011).” So the trauma inflicted on him by his father’s economic situation triggered a reluctance to depend on others (employers) or to accept demands from others (his boss who demanded him to move to headquarters for a while to have a shot at his succession). The danger here is again to be projecting into his superiors what he has been expecting forever from his bosses – trust, not to run the risk of ending up like his dad.

Another relevant example was a Finance Director (#13) who after working at the same multinational company during his whole career, accepted a similar role at a local company who was in financial distress, perhaps thinking this was his way back to his
Making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

home country after being overseas for a while. After being on the job for only 3 months, he realized the mistake he had made and looked for a way out. But the moment of truth was when he realized the company would go down unless the new owners injected some money. After not listening to his pledge given that turnarounds need both money and time to succeed, he felt they had broken his confidence and decided to leave.

Again once you go back to his childhood, you would learn that it was certain that decision was not going to work for him. He remembered that his father was a big spender, lived life fully but closer to the edge and he thought that tension was unnecessary for the family and there was no need to throw money away. Perhaps this drove his career decision to the financial area after being a professional sportsman during his youth. He has always been very cautious and conservative, trying to avoid becoming like his father, who could never stop working to be able to get by without building any savings. He wanted to be his opposite, be more controlled and responsible for others. As soon as he realized he might be personally liable as the company’s CFO, he was out.

The key question was why did he not think of that beforehand, knowing the company was already in distress when he joined it? Was he perhaps projecting into the owners his opposing father figure?
5.8 Demystifying the matrix

“It is generally assumed that people make better career decisions with more information (Greenhaus, 1981). They conclude that information seeking could facilitate choice, but also that making a decision could enhance information seeking, confirming an individual’s choice. In this case, information may be sought in order to reduce dissonance regarding a choice already made.“

“The most successful managers and executives become even more open and interactive in their leadership styles and even more analytic in their thinking styles as they progress in their careers (Brousseau, et al., 2006).” However, what we saw when they are facing decisions about their careers, is that the process is much more intuitive than analytical. The matrix and processes built behind those decisions are carried out with a bias to support their gut feelings, which is then linked to their CCRTs.

“Decision-makers first establish relevant evaluation criteria (i.e. attributes they want the alternatives to possess) and then evaluate information regarding each alternative and make a choice. Models vary in the emphasis they place on either component (Engel, 1982).“

“Compensatory models (Fishbein, 1975; Vroom, 1964) focus on the information integration component. Information is combined across attributes (e.g. salary, location) in such a way that weakness on one attribute can be compensated for by strength on another (Mihal, et al., 1984).”

Almost everyone builds some sort of model to help decide between two job alternatives. Here in this sample, it was no different.
“The optimizing model requires that people use their judgment in estimating the probabilities and values associated with outcomes. Theorists argue that people use this optimizing model implicitly. However, research has shown that people neither follow the model nor make optimal decisions. They use less optimal ones because they are easier to use. Satisficing refers to looking for an alternative that is good enough. The decision maker simply takes opportunities sequentially. It is more commonly used than optimizing (London, et al., 1984). Typically they:”

- Rely on others, like telling a qualified expert
- Justify an implicit favorite
- Eliminate by aspects, like meeting a minimal requirement (e.g. higher salary).
- Make a successive limited comparison, choosing as it comes along
- Do what worked in the past, mainly if the opposite has not worked
- Muddle through, considering a narrow range of alternatives and then making a tentative choice
- Use mixed scanning – list all alternatives that come to mind, reject those with major objections, and then evaluate those that remain.

However, Kahneman (2011) says that “we give too much weight to the information that’s right in front of us while failing to consider the information that’s just offstage. What you see is all there is. He calls this the spotlight effect. Process matters more than analysis.”

“Moreover he developed the concept of prospect theory which has probably done more to bring psychology into the heart of economic analysis than any other approach. Many economists still reach for the expected utility theory paradigm when dealing with
decision problems, however, prospect theory has gained much ground in recent years, and now certainly occupies second place on the research agenda for even some mainstream economists. Unlike much psychology, prospect theory has a solid mathematical basis — making it comfortable for economists to play with. However, unlike expected utility theory which concerns itself with how decisions under uncertainty should be made (a prescriptive approach), prospect theory concerns itself with how decisions are actually made (a descriptive approach). Kahneman and Tversky wanted to build a parsimonious theory to fit a number of violations of classical rationality that they (and others) had uncovered in empirical work. Prospect theory bears more than a passing resemblance to expected utility theory.” (Montier 2002) “.

“Unlike expected utility theory, prospect theory predicts that preferences will depend on how a problem is framed. If the reference point is defined such that an outcome is viewed as a gain, then the resulting value function will be concave and decision makers will tend to be risk averse. On the other hand, if the reference point is defined such that an outcome is viewed as a loss, then the value function will be convex and decision makers will be risk seeking. (Plous 1993).”

So if economists have proved that these models do not work, why do people keep using them?

“The only decision-making process in wide circulation is the pros-and-cons list, which actually goes back to Benjamin Franklin’s moral algebra in 1.772! However, the pros-and-cons is familiar, commonsensical but profoundly flawed because of a set of biases in our thinking that doom the model. You encounter a choice, you analyze your options,
Making Better Career Decisions

By Luis Giolo

you make a choice and then you live with it. We can’t deactivate our biases, but we can counteract them with the right discipline (Heath, et al., 2013).”

Most put the pros and cons on paper, or build a spreadsheet with a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis; one estimates how much money is at stake. Others say they do it mentally, never writing anything as one said he does not have the patience to write it all down before deciding.

“The general principle used to suggest alternatives here is relevant to almost all decisions. You begin with the fundamental objectives that indicate what you really care about. Then you follow simple logical reasoning processes to identify the mechanisms by which the fundamental objectives can be achieved. Finally, for each mechanism, you create alternatives or classes of alternatives. The general principle of thinking about values is to discover the reasoning for each objective and how it relates to other objectives (Keeney, 1992).”

The most distinctive method heard in this sample did not talk about pros and cons or matrixes. It came from one executive (#5 again) who claims he tries to picture himself and his family in the new work environment. He does not rely on decision matrixes but rather he tries to imagine his life at the new company, in that building/office, what sort of conversations he would have with the staff, his future boss’ and peers’ interactions and how his family would fit or not into the overall scheme of things like location or perhaps schooling if needed to change. After doing the exercise fully, he goes for it or not. It is almost like testing a profession before really entering it, at least mentally or like Chip and Dan Heath (2012) say: “Too ooch is to construct small experiments to test one’s hypothesis.”
However, even if the executive asks to spend time at the potential new future employer’s to get a better sense if it might be the right fit, it will never be the same experience as when one is actually hired and sits in the chair because the real deal will be always different from the conceptual or idealized version, and once you are sitting in the new role, the responsibility comes in to add pressure and confuse emotions. So yes the exercise might be valid but not as easy to be done like perhaps other types of decisions.

5.9 Double-check decisions by reflecting on feelings

Feelings are important even after the decision has been made and the process is finished. Here they ranged from euphoria to depression from loss (“I have never reentered that building afterwards”), to being bothered (“I am still making less money than I wished for”, “I had not finished my cycle there.”), to worry (“how to communicate my decision to my boss”), to happiness (“Happy to be chosen”), to anxiety (“Not let others down”), to fear (“I had butterflies in my stomach all week afterwards”), to relief (“Task is done, now I can rest”) to awkwardness (“I feel like a traitor for leaving my team”).

“53% of participants said that moving toward a new identity, and developing resilience through crisis emerged from the participants’ descriptions of decisional criteria. Stimulation, self development, alignment with values, autonomy and self-awareness were important (Amundson, et al., 2010).”
Here once again, by understanding the person’s CCRT, the feelings are aligned with the response they got from the process as in the case of the executive who was educated in a military school described earlier (#14).

For him, finishing at the top of the class in terms of grades was key in order to be in command of the other students and be praised by the senior officers with a slap on the back and a “job-well-done” quote. So, he did his decision process diligently, always looking for hints (“praise”) from the future employers (“officers”) if he was the chosen one. His wish was to feel good and comfortable with himself. By the time he was, he had the same good feeling as that of finishing first as a teenager and being on top of others, with a sense that he could now rest a bit before charging for the next challenge. He seems quite happy at his new job.

Another important thing to remember is that “CCRT is never generated from one Relationship Episode alone. To be meaningful, we should write down approximately five to seven episodes (Book, 1998).” That same executive, described another episode where the reason he decided to apply for a top engineering school was just because he knew it was very hard to get in, and the feeling of later seeing himself approved at the top of the list was what he was looking for. Therefore, for him, the key in any job decision-making process is to feel scarce, to know he is ahead of others, to feel like the chosen one.

Another executive mentioned that thinking about his future lifestyle in the new company is very important after having children, because he wants to be able to be a present father and participate in their lives. This is probably universally true but understanding his CCRT showed that he might be trying, by all means, not to repeat
the same story of his parents who got divorced when he was a child, perhaps because of the work situation of one of the parents.

6. CONCLUSIONS

“Subjective perspectives reveal that decisions have a wide variety of meanings (Blustein et al., 2004) that depend on the unique psychological experiences of the individual situated within cultural, social, historical, and economic contexts (Amundson, et al. 2010)”

Although most of the written literature on decision-making when applied to a career change focuses on the decision process, the individual should be the centerpiece of attention.

The different discussed models are all variations of N steps into defining the problem, creating opportunities and possibilities and then through judgment, make some sort of trade-off analysis in order to arrive at the best possible outcome. The ones that seem different and closer to adding more value are the ones that call for a better understanding of the self, on its personal preferences. One suggestion might be:
6.1 For the executive:

In order to do that, he/she needs to better understand his/her CCRT and see how that is aligned or not with the decision he/she is about to make. By understanding it, he/she might be able to realize what he wishes from that new relationship and if it will satisfy him/her or not in the long run.

The difficulty lies in the fact that in most cases, he/she is not paying attention to the fact that they both might be in a movie rather than watching it from a distance. The suggested use of a tool like the CCRT, although non-psychological training required, is hard work and “getting at your own CCRT requires a number of self-assessment exercises (Vries, 2006). As he says:

“The executive needs to reflect on a number of episodes during which he/she dealt with another person (ideally 5-7 episodes) and look for underlying patterns in their own wishes, the anticipated response from others, and their reaction to these responses.

1. First for a reviewed relational episode, he/she needs to ask themselves what they really wanted from the interaction. What was the intent or desire? What did they want to see it happen?

2. Next, what kind of response they expect from the other person, given their wishes? What was their greatest fear about the other person’s response? How did they respond to the other person? What did they say or do? How did they feel while responding?”
So, the executive should spend less time building a model or decision matrix as it has been proven by Nobel-prize-winner economists given we bring our deep biases to the table and therefore none of these models are rational enough to help us make a good decision.

Instead, paying more attention to the feelings during and after the process, understanding the real drivers for change and specially pointing out the triggers that lead us to decide to leave one job and accept another are much more valuable than any analytical matrix.

Using one’s network also appears to be very important. “Decisions centered on relational life, on personal meaning and on economic realities. Study results supported and extended contentions that career decisions are embedded in relational life and have contextual meaning (Amundson, et al., 2010).” In this sample, discussions with the father, real or intended, also seem to be more relevant than any other family member or not.

Executives also spent a great deal of time debating the conditions to accept a new job or not. They should better understand their own hidden competing commitments when making their analysis because like most things in life, one cannot have it all. So if one aspect is conflicting with another, why is that? What is behind these conflicts? Again the histories behind them, uncovering the big assumptions and therefore getting to the CCRT might be helpful to bring these to the surface and cope with them.

Even though knowing about the 4 villains of poor decision-making in general can be helpful in a job change (Heath, et al., 2012):
Making Better Career Decisions
By Luis Giolo

- Narrow decision framing, so widen your options
- Confirmation bias, so reality-test your assumptions
- Short term emotions, so attain distance before deciding
- Overconfidence about the future, so prepare to be wrong

What is probably more helpful is actually understanding one’s internal conflicts, how to get out of them and move on with our lives. As Manfred K. de Vries (2006) says: “What are the focal problems that preoccupy this individual? What are the script and setting for this person’s internal theater?”

The more basic advice seems to pay off here, like “applying the 10/10/10 rule, or in other words understanding if that decision would change in 10 seconds, 10 months or 10 years from now (Heath, et al., 2012).” This allied with a better understanding of one’s priorities could address the CCRT. To do that, another way is “to ask yourself if you would still make that decision if you had just made USD 20 Million or if you had only 10 years left to live. (Heath, et al., 2012).” It helps put things in perspective.

6.2 For the intermediary

So, if the executive will not easily find his own CCRT by him or herself, an intermediary could be a great ally here if trained on this tool. It does not have necessarily to be the search consultant perhaps provoking that change, but it could be an external coach, a family member or a close friend. Once provoked by those questions, the executive could then continue the exercise by him or herself during the analysis of the job offer in front of him or her. Even if the search consultant is skilled at this, it would certainly be a valuable aid in deciding if that opportunity is the right one for that executive, if
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By Luis Giolo

his/her motivation is aligned with the new job and not with their idealized version of it based on their own wishes from their internal conflicts.

Let’s not forget the need for the intermediary to avoid playing his own CCRT into the executive’s. Otherwise they might conflict or even the way they relate might mix the process in a different way. Awareness is the first stage, being trained to identify and applying it might come next.

Moreover, the new employers and intermediaries worry a lot about the hard aspects of that potential change (i.e. financial gains). What was found in the study, is that these hard aspects come second to the other ones, here called soft (i.e. who is going to be their superior) at this stage of their lives. So the intermediaries and new employers should balance the time they spend on soft and hard aspects better when trying to convince the executives about a potential opportunity. If they can uncover the big assumptions behind the executives hidden competing commitments, the better they will be.

Finally they need to make an effort to let go of their own biases against the negative perceptions generated by the executives when uncovering their hidden competing commitments. If they are able to create a safe and rewarding experience for the executives, making sure it will not be used against them, it could definitely help to cope with some of these conflicts.
7. LIMITATIONS

First of all, in this whole process I was a participant observer. Not only in 20% of the studied cases I was directly responsible for that job change but moreover, my Firm also responded for another 27% of them, so in essence we were the instrument, and therefore I was drawing heavily on my own emotions, experiences and personal interpretations of these moves.

When I discussed the ideal sample size with professors and coaches, they all stated that 20 personal interviews, which was the initial goal, was probably too much and not needed. Truth is, after the 12th interview, it became a bit repetitive and therefore I decided to stop at 15. But perhaps this is still not the ideal sample size and maybe 5 or 10 more interviews could shed more light into some aspects of the study.

During the course of the interviews, there were 2 occasions (out of the 15) on which the person’s CCRT was not found and therefore there was a missing link to the job change decision. Of course, we all have our own CCRTs and even though you do not have to be a trained psychologist to be able to identify it, you have to have some knowledge in order to involve the other person in telling you their CCRT. “Perhaps because it reflects their character style and defensive functioning, some people will not always produce REs that contain explicit wishes, response to others or response of the self (Book, 1998)”. They were probably unspoken or implicit and I failed at making them more explicit.

Therefore, perhaps in these 2 cases, the interviewer was not good enough for the job. Even though trying to probe for relationship episodes from their childhood and youth,
neither one could find anything that stood out or it was hard to make sense of how they linked with the decision they took. So clearly a more qualified interviewer makes a difference. Perhaps additional questions such as “What had you hoped might have happened” and “What do you think you wanted him/her to do” (Book, 1998) could have been added to the interview guide for these situations.

The other reason might be that as most of the participants were known to the interviewer, either very well or they were well known to some colleagues, they just did not wish to expose themselves, perhaps afraid this might impact their work image to the interviewer or to his Firm. So they increased their self-defense mechanisms and did not allow those barriers to be penetrated, staying mostly on the surface. Even though they were never warned previously about what might be discussed apart from the last job change, given that it might make them very defensive from the start, the conversation most of the time flowed easily from more comfortable work stuff to less comfortable personal stuff.

The sample had 4 foreigners (27%), two of whom had been living in Brazil for quite a while, therefore there was definitely a bias towards this culture and it may not have fully reflected the reality of other countries, specially developed ones like the US or perhaps eastern cultures in Asia.

The setting was probably also a limitation. Most conversations took place in a public area like a restaurant or café, somewhat noisy with a lot of other people around. A few took place in my office, one at the person’s office and three were done by phone in the middle of the workday, so probably more susceptible to interruptions and distractions.
Again here perhaps if all of them had been done in a quieter place like a therapist’s office, it could have been more effective.

Finally there is the matter of time. As mentioned earlier, most of these conversations took about an hour which might be too little for some people to really open up. Most therapy sessions ran for longer periods of time, although there was one specific conversation which lasted for 90 minutes but did not help to find the CCRT. In any case, the method takes time.

If an intermediary like a search consultant or Human Resources executive or Coach is trying to get to know a candidate in a job interview process, the whole interview might take well over two hours, given that about one hour might be spent on the job decisions trying to find the CCRTs while the other hour might be spent on the behaviors to see if they translate to the right set of competencies for which role the individual is being interviewed for. The HBR article on competing hidden commitments talks about 2 to 3 hours to uncover one of them, so time is in definite need here.

Finally the process was always focused on senior executives. Does it work for other type of people like entrepreneurs, independent workers like pilots, doctors, clerks, etc? Even though the overall CCRT concept might get us to the same issues, the ways to get there might be different and reveal other interesting themes.

Finally this dissertation is mostly theoretical as it was always done after career decisions had been made. Therefore, it needs to be tested in the course of a real career decision to see if it can be helpful to the executive as well as to the intermediary in the process.
8. FUTURE RESEARCH

Looking back on the interviews and the stories told, one thought that occurred is making the interview guide a bit broader than just talking about that last job change. Perhaps one way to go about it to delve further into the CCRTs was to ask questions like: “Describe an event/situation be it personal/professional or both that changed your life in a significant way? How did these events influence your personality? (Vries, 2012)”.

In the end, none of the selected interviewees actually refused a job change given I was focused on a change that actually occurred. But that could be perhaps interesting to discuss and learn more about it. Was the new alternative not aligned with the executive’s CCRT? Was it pure coincidence or luck? Did he/she know about his/her CCRTs?

The area of interest was very much focused on senior executives, which is the segment of the population that I normally deal with. Can we extrapolate this to the rest of the population? Perhaps if the sample were larger and also included some junior executives or non-executives, would the conclusions be similar?

As mentioned before in the “limitations area”, expanding the sample to include other cultures like Americans and/or Asians could be helpful to understand if the discussed concepts could be applied in the same manner.

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## 10. APPENDIX

### 10.1 Researched Sample

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<th>#</th>
<th>Executive</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of Birth</th>
<th>Time in previous job (years)</th>
<th># of prior job changes</th>
<th>Interview Method</th>
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</table>

### 10.2 Interview Guide

**Interview Guide – Decision-Making Process on Taking a new job**

**Interviewee (name):**

- Age:
- Gender:
- Life stage (with/out significant other, with/out kids, kids’ ages):
- Who lives at home, check presence of other relatives:
- Current workplace / title:
- Since when (start date):

**Decision-making process**

1. Tell me about your current moment at your new job.
2. How did this new job opportunity come up? (understand if he/she was proactive / reactive)

3. How long did it take for you to decide for it? (understand timing in detail)

4. How was the decision-making process (Easy/Difficult, fast/slow, etc)? Why?

5. How did you feel during the process? How did you feel afterwards?

6. What was the main motivation for change? (explore / understand main motives behind the change, its causes and consequences – try to capture patterns of past similar behaviors in these type of situations)

7. How do you typically react towards it? Is there a standard process you go through (initial feelings, what you normally consider, build a matrix or not, pros and cons list, etc.)? Or does it depend on each specific situation? Explore.

8. During the process, was there a moment when your decision became clear? What caused that? (Understand what was the trigger that made him/her decide for the new opportunity)

9. When you think about your past decisions as a child or a teenager (such as choosing college, etc), do you think your process is the same at present? Or has it changed? (Understand more about his/her childhood/youth, type of family, education of parents, how he/she was raised, size of family, wealth, presence of siblings)

10. Anything else that we have not captured yet but you would like to talk about? (Leave room to capture any “pearls” from the decision-making process)