

## **Professional transitions of PhDs outside the academia. A research on the meaning of transferable skill.**

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In an “age of supercomplexity” educational systems have to face continuously new questions and new ideas about the relationship with knowledge. In particular knowledge actors, roles and networks are constantly changing. Junior academics (e.g. postdoctoral researchers, junior lecturers, PhDs) are at the crossroad of this scenario, facing new constraints and new possibilities. Younger entry level academics are, in fact, dealing with a lack of opportunities regarding long term careers: it is reasonable to agree that the chances of a PhD graduate to eventually have a stable position in public research are hardly higher than a few per cent, and slimmer when geographical constraints are set. This uncertainty inside the academia is often related to a lack of confidence in managing a satisfying professional transition outside the university. Academic experiences, in fact, can be very difficult for a potential employer to read, as much as it is difficult for a researcher to figure which of his/her own experiences can be of interest outside his/her former context. Paradoxically the market itself creates the risk of lack of opportunities even for those who hold those high level competencies that are considered fundamental for the knowledge economy. Over-qualification and skill mismatch are the actual risks of developed economic systems often resulting in lower job satisfaction and psychological stress. The competence assessment process could be not helpful as the concept of competence by itself is not sufficient to orient and clear the dialogue. The problem worsen when the assessment process start considering not only the "hard skills" but also the so-called "soft", "transversal", "cross sector" or "transferable" skills that are considered as the best way to support professional transitions in an increasingly competitive economy based on "grey capital". These kind of skills entails a more complex dimension directly related to the context that enables a certain kind of performativity. Thus the difficulties to highlight those dimensions are stronger as they involve identifying and describing those tacit and contextual aspects that often lies on the background of the learning experience.

I used this considerations as a starting point for a postdoctoral research aimed at interrogating experiences and expectations of young researchers, academic staff and private companies, in relation to the processes of developing, identifying and valuing transferable competences.

The research is at its initial stage. The first aim is to collect experiences, stories, images, and conversations suitable to form a strong corpus of qualitative data, that could be reliable, valuable, and meaningful for the participants and their communities.

The expected outcomes are related to identify the most common assumptions underlying the transferable competence discourse and their effects on the dialogue between young researchers and actors of professional sectors outside the academia.