

# CROSS-CHANNEL CAREERS

An exploration of the experiences of self-initiated British immigrants' careers in France supported by the Systems Theory Framework

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## Abstract

**While a growing body of research is focusing on international careers, reflecting the increase in this phenomenon in the 21st century, the concept of freedom of movement which enables such careers has come under threat in the wake of Brexit.**

Exploring the mid to long-term careers of five British immigrants in both rural and urban France, this qualitative case study shines a light on a population of immigrants which has predominantly been the subject of sociological research, focusing on class and lifestyle immigration.

Using the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 2014) to allow a transdisciplinary theoretical interpretation of career through a

storytelling approach, in the form of semi-structured interviews, the study found that work was central to the participants' integration in their new country.

Although their careers often took unexpected directions, the participants unanimously viewed their immigration as a profoundly enriching learning experience.

The study concluded by highlighting the recursive benefits of cross-cultural integration and language learning in an era of global citizenship, as well as the value of the Systems Theory Framework in its potential to enable self-initiated immigrants to build satisfying lives across geographical boundaries.

## Research Question

**H**ow does the Systems Theory Framework (Figure 1) enable an interpretation of the experience of self-initiated British immigrants' careers in France?

The study explored the connections between two contrasting perspectives:

- Participants' objective views of career (contextual factors facilitating or hindering their move and career development in France).
- Participants' subjective views of their careers (feelings and how they attribute meaning to their experiences).

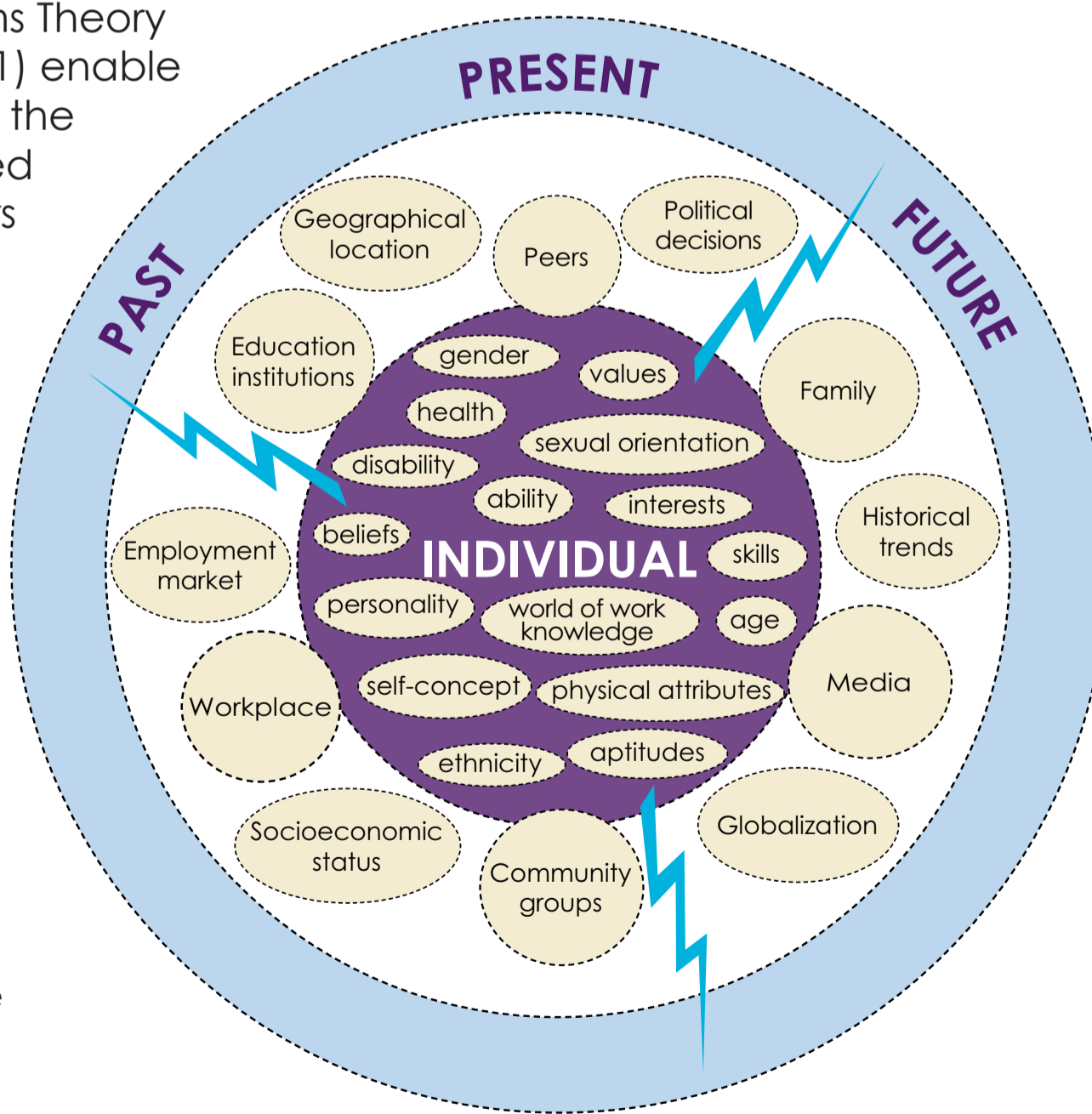


Figure 1: Systems Theory Framework (STF)  
Copyright © Patton & McMahon (1999)

## The Participants (pseudonyms used)

**E**mpirical biographical data was collected through face-to-face or phone semi-structured one-hour interviews with five participants from three major destinations for British immigrants.

- **Paris** - Helen
- **The Lot in rural South-West France** - Simon and Samantha
- **Toulouse** - Emily and Laura

### Participant profiles

- Aged between 45 and 55
- Educated to degree level and/or a vocational qualification
- Lived in France for a minimum of 10 years
- In a partnership with a French national
- Good to excellent command of the French language



## Data Interpretation

Transcripts of 20+ pages condensed to one page in three parts.

- **Part 1** - Participants' circumstances on moving to France
- **Part 2** - How they adapted to their new lives
- **Part 3** - Their careers 10 to 20 years later

Broad 'content influence' themes were developed into sub-themes, e.g., language skills, rural versus city locations, access to state support.

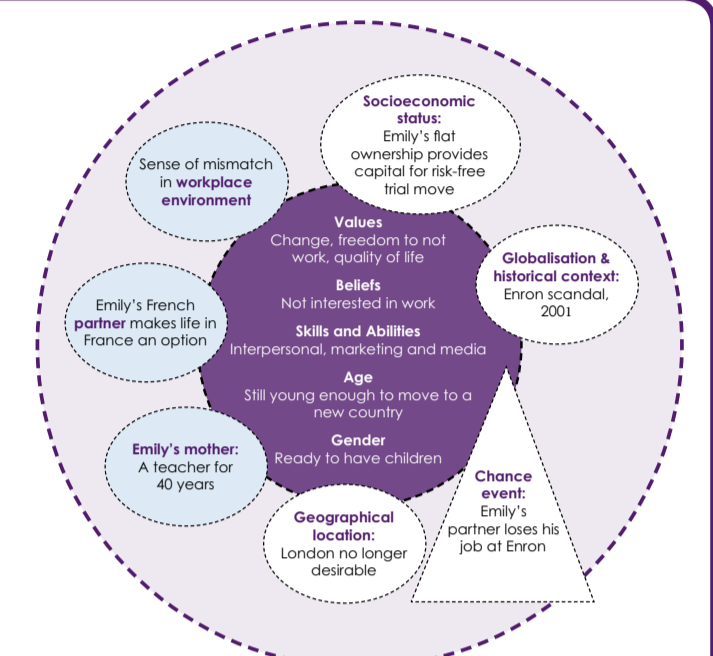
Themes were then explored for their recursiveness, influence on decision-making, or as facilitators or barriers to career development.

## Data Visualisation

Through a triad of STF-style holograms

- **Central purple circle**  
Individual Influences
- **Pale blue circles**  
Social Influences
- **White circles**  
Environmental-Societal Influences

Example: Emily, Toulouse

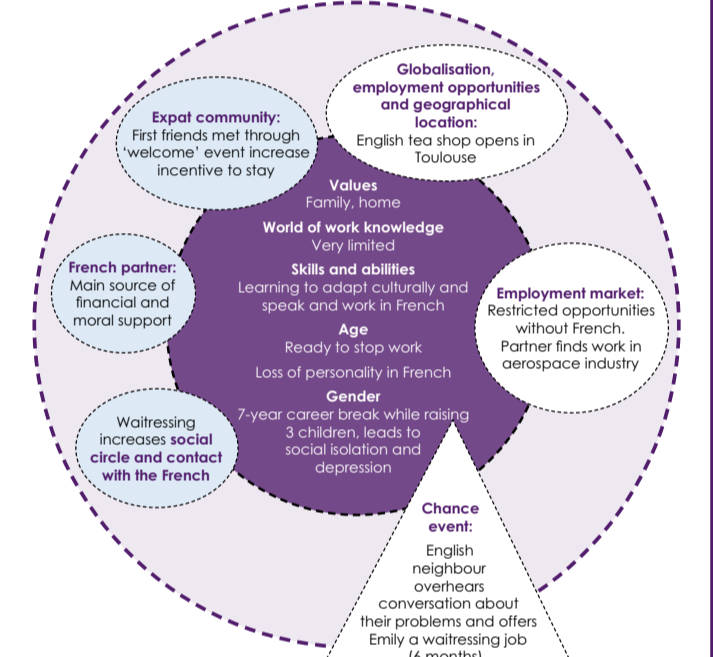


Part 1: Leaving the London 'rat race'

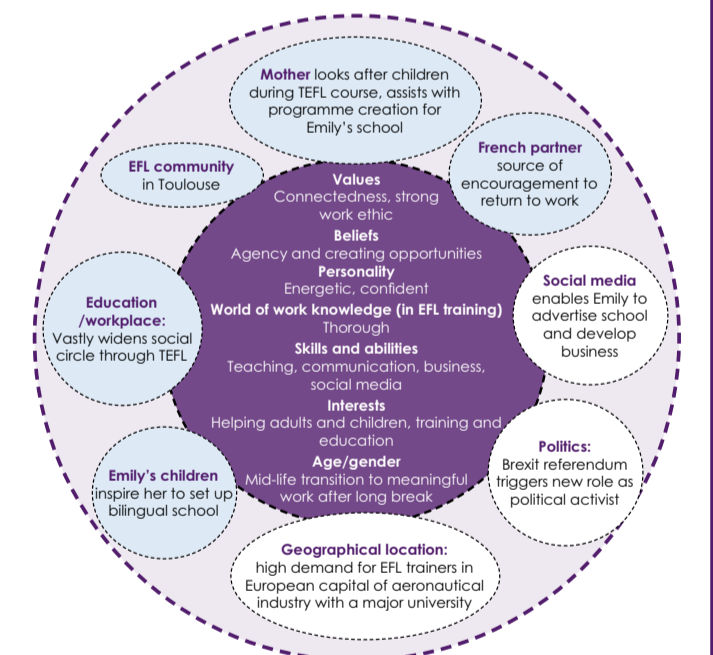
## Findings

Three broad categories of transitions

- 1. Existing vocational identity strengthened**  
Objective and subjective career success combined when a strong vocational identity was allowed to develop due to positive interplay of individual, social influences and environmental-societal influences.
- 2. New vocational identity welcomed**  
Openness to and anticipation of lifelong informal and formal learning, requiring adaptation to develop a new vocational identity in their desired destination.
- 3. Existing vocational identity challenged**  
Underestimation of the upheaval of multiple contextual changes, leading to social isolation. However, reconstructing their self-concept increased self-efficacy and these participants ultimately found their experience enriching.



Part 2: Settling in France and a career break



Part 3: Returning to formal learning: 'a voyage of self-discovery'

## Conclusion

The STF's extra dimensions of change over time and chance allowed richness and depth to be added to the objective and subjective exploration of self-initiated immigrants' careers.

- **Potential benefits of cross-cultural integration in careers**
- Encourages openness and tolerance

- Develops sense of personal agency
- Intrinsic pleasure and mental health
- Benefits of practising a foreign language
- Ability to teach a language and open doors to career opportunities for others

## References

Patton, W. & McMahon, M. (2014) Career development and systems theory: connecting theory and practice (3rd edition) Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense.