BLOG ARTICLE

# THE CHOCOLATE CAREER: SWEET SPOT OR STRATEGIC SHIFT?

## What is a Chocolate Career? A Flexible and Human-Centred Approach to Work

Where careers were following a straightforward path in the past (qualify, secure a job, climb the ladder, then retire), there is now a more flexible and human-centred option: the so-called **"chocolate career"**. This involves choosing a variety of roles, skills, and passions, like selecting your favourite pieces from a box of chocolates and enjoying them one by one.

Is this the next „Gen Z thing"? A combination of commitment-phobia and cherry-picking while chasing the digital nomad dreams of freedom and fulfilment?

No, it's much deeper than that: **it is a reflection of the changing nature of work itself.**
It is a structural shift driven by economic, demographic and technological factors.

## From Linear Careers to Layered Lives: Welcome to the New Normal

Across **all** generations we are witnessing the rise of:

- **"Slash" careers**, where people have multiple roles like writer/designer/coach.
- **Portfolio careers**, which involve a mix of freelance, part-time, and entrepreneurial work.
- **Interim management,** where senior leaders step in for a defined period.
- **Core + contingent workforce models** within companies.
- **Project-based hiring** driven by AI, automation, and cost pressures.

**This development is not anecdotal. It's systemic and inevitable. The chocolate career trend is here to stay.**

**Workforce scarcity** is real and growing. Europe alone will be lose up to one million workers every year until 2050 due to demographic shifts alone. Other factors such as the digital transition, the impact of AI as well as changing skill requirements add to the challenge.

Consequently, the demand for specialised, on-demand expertise is increasing. As well as working on employer attractiveness and flexible work conditions to keep uf with the competition in the war of talent, more and more companies are moving towards work models where they **buy skills as and when required**, rather than maintaining large, fixed teams – simply because they cannot find, retain, and/or afford them.

Hence, the traditional model of long-term employment is giving way to a **more flexible "core + contingent" workforce**. The first time, I heard about this model was 20 years ago during my MBA. Over the years, I have encountered this workforce model, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world or in certain functions such as IT. And today? It is on the rise as the predominant work model.

## The Business Case for Career Flexibility: Cost, Talent, and Speed

Discussions with your CFO won't disappear. Cost pressure is and will remain a key issue for every organisation. Therefore, it is unlikely that you wil receive more headcount approvals or a bigger budget for merit and bonus rounds and people initiatives.

The discussions with your business unit heads won't disappear either. They are desperately seeking talent to help them achieve the business goals. Organisations need to hire the best people, and they need them now. The more desperate they seek, the more concessions they are willing to make: in terms of salary,

bonuses, flexibility, etc. This will create more issues regarding internal equity.

Also, discussions with your talent acquisition partners and candidates won't disappear. Your TA partners are burning out while trying to find the right candidate. Candidates are highly selective, demanding and in high demand, so organisations have to be quick to secure them and are forced to make to compromises they shouldn't.

HR is caught in the middle of this, spinning endlessly unless you take a step back for a moment and seek out different avenues to address this reality.

**Three hard facts about the future of work:**

- AI will take over routine tasks, but you will still need professionals.
- The pool of full-time-labour will shrink due to demographics.
- Margins will keep tightening.

**What organisations must do to stay competitive in a changing talent market:**

- Reimagine how they attract, engage and retain talent.
- Value experience and expertise over rigid tenure.
- Start building "talent ecosystems," both inside and outside the company.

## What the Chocolate Career Means for Professionals and Organisations

**For professionals**, this shift means taking ownership of your career path, as well as your skills and experience. If you want to build a "chocolate" career, you have to think and act like an entrepreneur. This requires intention, strategy, self-awareness and discipline. While it is empowering, it is also complex as you are managing multiple roles, income streams and personal branding.

**For organisations**, this means understanding and embracing the opportunities presented by this new pool of talent in the form of portfolio workers. These individuals are your strategic partners, not a last-resort option when hiring becomes challenging. It means **rethinking HR, procurement, and your workforce strategy** to tap into this broader, richer talent economy.

**A chocolate career** (also known as a portfolio, slash, patchwork or gig career) isn't a quirky trend. It's a glimpse of the **future of work** — flexible, agile, and better aligned with both organisational needs and individual purpose.

**The world of work is not breaking down — it's breaking open.**

Ready to reimagine your career or workforce strategy? At **PROTEA PARTNERS**, we help individuals and companies navigate the shift toward flexible, purposeful work. **Let's talk**.

**#FutureOfWork #PortfolioCareer #WorkforceStrategy #AIandWork #ChocolateCareer #SlashPath #TalentTransformation #WorkReimagined**