Jennifer's Design Spine #2

(note the change of research focus within the same general topic; the development of a more sociologically articulated research question, and lots of ideas about possible research strategies)

Title
Constructing the New Worker: How employee agency and identity are reflected in 'future of work' narratives

Research Question(s)
'Future of work' narratives are descriptions of potential changes to the labour market resulting from technological innovations, emerging occupational fields and non-standard working arrangements. My research hopes to answer the main question - how is worker agency and identity positioned within those narratives?

Why is this important?
There is tremendous speculation on the future of work in the industrialized world. It is the topic of academic conferences, business publications, government policy documents, blogs, and even associations. Given the wide range of narratives available, it will be valuable to understand what is being promoted as 'truth', and how that might influence how people see their ability to act or effect labour market changes, particularly a neoliberal context.

How will this research be done?
Method - Narrative Analysis
Themes and characterizations of the 'worker of the future' will be identified through 3 types of narrative analysis:

(1) Business articles and whitepapers – Identify how businesses might be shaping a 'future worker' through narrative speaks to the inherent power relationship between business owners and workers.
(2) Futurist websites - Identify counter-narratives (different views) of the worker of the future.
(3) Newspapers - Identify what narrative is being conveyed to the general population.
Focus on three geographic areas: North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia.
60 business narratives (twenty from each geographic area) found through available corporate publications
10 non-business narratives found through three widely available Internet search engines such as Bing, Google and Yahoo.
3 national newspapers (one from each geographic location) scanned to identify articles on the 'future of work' over a 5-year period.
A framework will be developed to support the narrative analysis to address the following:
• who the narrative is being created for;
• what roles workers will have in a future labour market;
• how worker agency is positioned;
• if there is an 'ideal worker' being imagined; and
• who might be excluded from this futurist scenario.
The framework will be tested and refined through a preliminary narrative analysis of 2 whitepapers produced by large management consulting firms that specialize in human resources management such as Deloitte, PriceWaterhouseCooper, Mercer, etc.

Are there still other methods and methodological approaches?
Narrative source methodology – a narrative analysis but using three to five 'source' documents to see if other narratives are being created from these 'sources'.

Multiple methods – Narrative analysis can be used to identify dominate discourses and focus groups could be used to see how much people agree with these narratives and how they view their role in the labour market of the future.

What is the tentative (optimistic) research plan?
Analytical Framework to be developed by June 2018
Data collection and analysis to concluded by September 2018
First draft of the research report by December 2018
Final draft of the research report by February 2019

What is still outstanding?
Literary review – will capture what is already known about this issue and situate my research.

Theoretical framework – will emerge from the literature review and preliminary investigations through an abductive approach.

Additional research on narrative analysis as a qualitative method to better understand the approach will be needed.