

## **Assignment 1: Storyboard**

**Title:** The Great Re-Commute: Three Lives in Toronto's Shifting Work Landscape

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**Course:** Visualization & Storytelling

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### **Introduction & Rationale**

For this assignment, I chose the working scene after the Toronto pandemic as my theme, especially focusing on the conflict between work from home (WFH) and return to office (RTO) regulations. This topic is not only about company policy; It's a profound human story about time, money, community and what we value in our lives. The pandemic situation has completely changed the scenarios between work and family. As enterprises gradually adapt to the "new normal", the whole greater Toronto area (GTA) has felt its impact.

I will explore this theme from the perspective of three different roles. Their lives have been affected by this transformation: a hybrid working parent (Amy), who is trying to cope with the new burden of commuting; A small business owner in the city center (Raj), he is eager to restore the economy of the city center; And a remote technology worker (Leonard), who moved home for a newfound, more affordable way of life and now faces the dilemma of "super commuting"

The idea of this method is to go beyond the abstract statistics of office vacancy rate and public transportation flow. By building data on the life experience of three people, this story aims to cultivate empathy and reveal the complexity of situations and the nature of frequent conflicts. My goal is to explain how the small decision-making on our workplace affects the whole urban structure and affects everything from family dynamics to the survival of local enterprises.

### **Method & Dataset Selection**

The storytelling method I have chosen is **scrollytelling**. This interactive format allows the audience to move in the narrative with their own pace, and dynamically display data visualization to support the story of three characters. This method can effectively interweave personal anecdotes and hard data to create an immersive experience.

For my dataset, I will extract information from open sources and comprehensively describe the situation in Toronto and Canada. The key datasets include:

**Remote Work Adoption Rates:** Data from

<https://www.statista.com/study/88519/remote-work-in-canada/> will show the number of Canadians working from home has sharply increased since the outbreak began, with over 25% of people working from home by November 2020. With the implementation of RTO regulations, this proportion will decrease to 17.4% by May 2025.

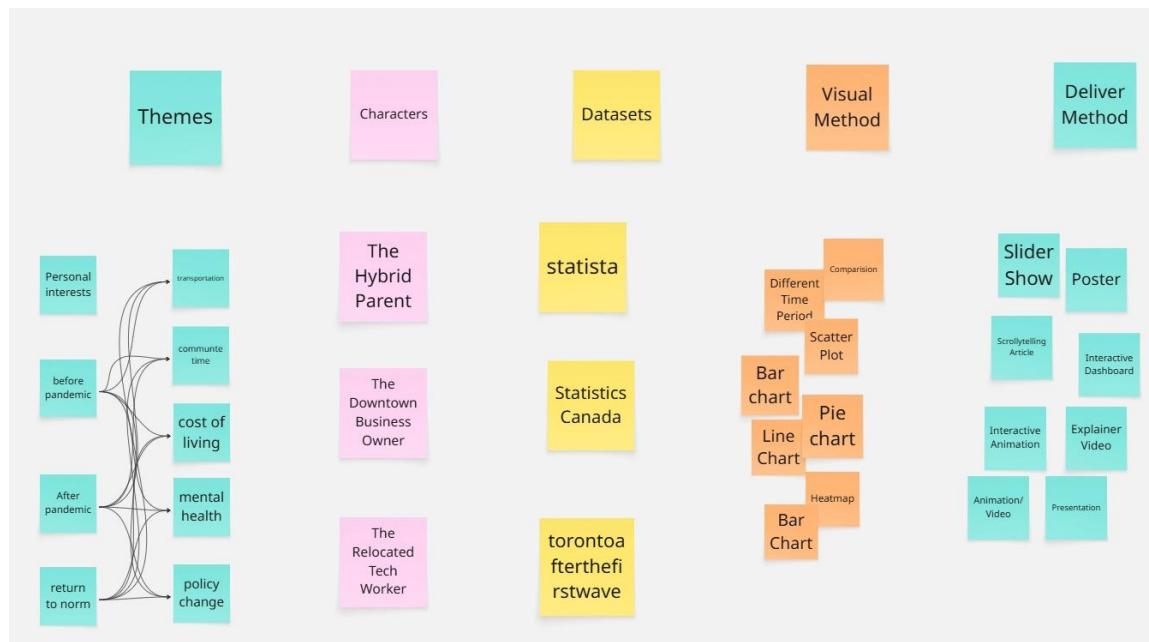
- **Commute Times:** Data from <https://torontoafterthewave.com/dashboards/> will be used to highlight Toronto's position as it is the city with the longest average commuting time among major Canadian cities, recently reaching 34.9 minutes, and the average public transportation commuting time is even longer, at 42.9 minutes.
- **Public Transit Ridership:** Data will illustrate the sharp decline in transit use at the start of the pandemic and its slow recovery.  
<https://torontoafterthewave.com/dashboards/mobility/>
- **Downtown Economic Activity:** The statistics of worker and tourist traffic in the Toronto financial district will be used to show the economic impact of WFH, which decreased by 90% in April 2020.  
<https://torontoafterthewave.com/dashboards/economic-vibrancy/>
- **Employee Preferences:** Survey data from <https://www.statista.com/chart/29722/cellphone-activity-in-north-american-downtowns/> indicating a strong preference among Canadian workers for remote or hybrid arrangements will provide crucial context.

### **Iteration 1: Brainstorming**

My initial process involved mapping out the core connections and conflicts on a Miro board. I created profiles for the three characters—Amy (The Hybrid Parent), Raj (The Downtown Business Owner), and Leonard (The Relocated Tech Worker). I brainstormed the key components of their stories: the time Amy regained with her family Sheldon, Raj's economic despair for his business, and Leonard's new, low-cost lifestyle. I then started linking these personal moments to potential data points. For example, Amy's 45

minutes commute time can be directly compared with the data of GTA map showing the average commute time in different time period.

This exercise made me realize that these roles are not only independent stories, but also represent different perspectives of an interconnected urban ecosystem and policy changes. Raj's need for a return-to-office mandate is in direct conflict with the desires of Amy's and Leonard's. The entire story is structured around this central tension.



### *Iteration 1: Brainstorming result*

### **Iteration 2: Laying the Foundation**

Moving from brainstorming to a structured outline taught me the importance of iteration. I found myself in a constant loop of drafting and revising, learning to be flexible and allow the story to evolve as the narrative and data began to properly integrate. I changed from brainstorming to a more structured outline. I decided to divide the scrolltelling flow into three different parts to reflect the timeline of the impact of the pandemic:

**Chapter 1: The Before Times (-2020):** Establish the scenario of "original" - daily grind, crowded commute and bustling downtown. These three roles will be introduced in this scene.

**Chapter 2: The Big Pause (2020-2022):** The outbreak of the pandemic has led to great changes. This scene will focus on the sudden changes for each of the characters, and

starting troll out main data points (for example, the traffic flow plummets, the commuter changes, and the work life balance).

**Chapter 3: The Present (2023-):** The introduction of RTO (remote work) mandate has triggered a core conflict. This scenario presents the most complex data, showing the partial recovery of the city center, the continued desire for flexibility, and the tough choices each role has to face.

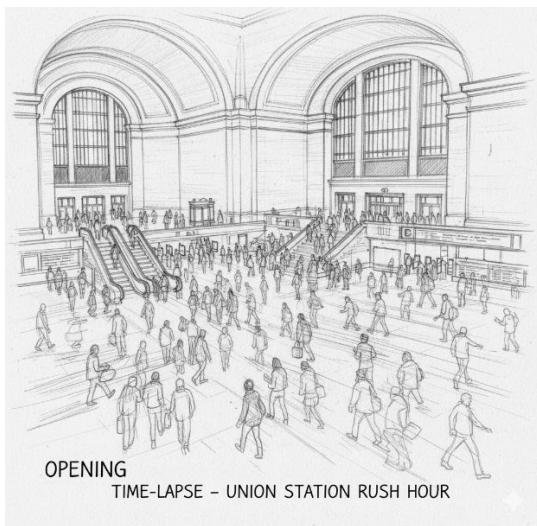
This three-timeslot structure provides a clear and compelling narrative arc, allowing the audience to understand the cause-and-effect relationship before and after the pandemic and the current state of working in Toronto.

### **Iteration 3: The Storyboard**

The final storyboard details the scene-by-scene progression of the scrollytelling experience.

#### **Chapter 1: The Before Times**

- **Scene 1:** Opening with a time-lapse video of a bustling Union Station during morning rush hour.

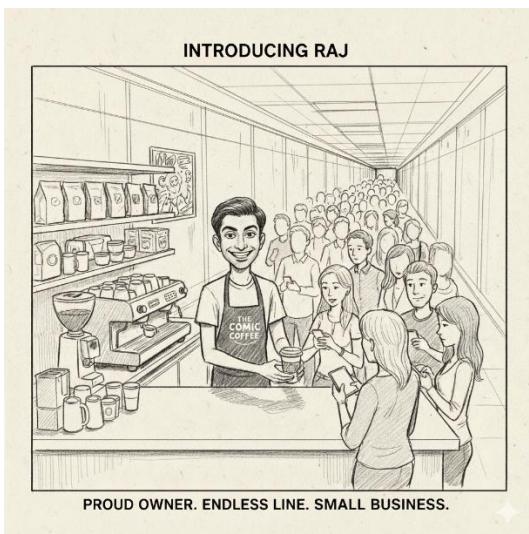


- **Narration:** "Before 2020, this was the norm in Toronto. A city powered by the daily migration of millions."
- **Data:** A map of the GTA daily commute statics with different transportation method, showing how many people migrate to downtown core daily. With a states: "Toronto has one of the longest average commute times in Canada, reaching 34.9 minutes."

- **Scene 2:** Introduce **Amy** on a crowded GO train, looking exhausted.



- **Amy's Quote:** "It was 45 minutes each way. Two hours a day just... gone. I am unable to prepare the dinner for Sheldon"
- **Scene 3:** Introduce **Raj** proudly serving a long line of customers in his restaurant.



- **Raj's Quote:** "The morning rush was chaos, but it was beautiful chaos. It was the lifeblood of my business."
- **Scene 4:** Introduce **Leonard** working in a sleek, open-concept tech office in downtown Toronto.

## INTRODUCING LEONARD



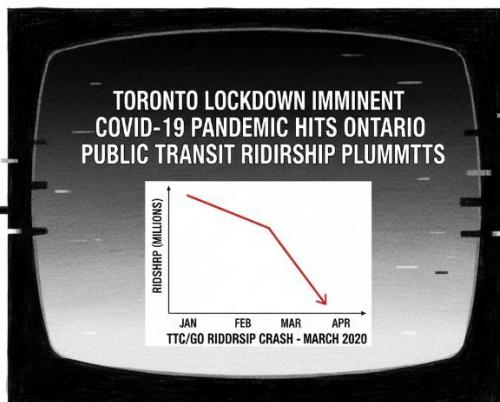
- **Leonard's Quote:** "The office was great, but my condo felt like a shoebox. I was paying a premium just to live near work."

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## Chapter 2: The Big Pause

- **Scene 5:** Screen fades to black, then shows news headlines about the lockdown. A line graph appears, showing TTC/GO ridership plummeting in March 2020.

### SCREEN FADES TO BLACK



### RIDERSHIP PLUMMETS - MARCH 2020

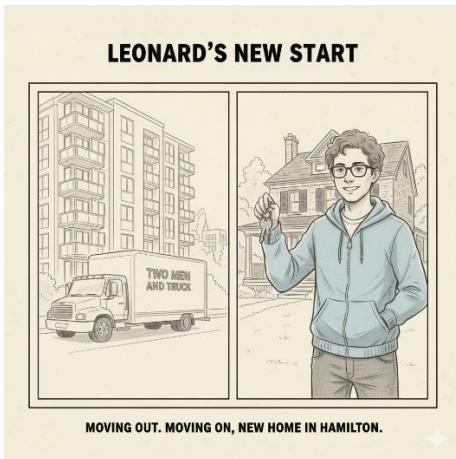
- **Narration:** "Then, in a matter of days, the city stopped."
- **Scene 6: Amy** is at home, having breakfast with Sheldon and family.



- **Amy's Quote:** "Suddenly, I had time. Time to make breakfast for my family. It changed everything."
- **Data:** A statistic appears: "By November 2020, over a quarter of the Canadian workforce was working from home."
- **Scene 7: Raj** stands alone in his empty restaurant.



- **Raj's Quote:** "The silence was deafening. We went from 500 customers a day to five. I had to let my staff go to cut cost."
- **Data:** A bar chart shows downtown Toronto visitor traffic down by 90% in April 2020.
- **Scene 8:** A moving truck outside Leonard's condo. He's smiling, holding keys in front of a house in Hamilton.



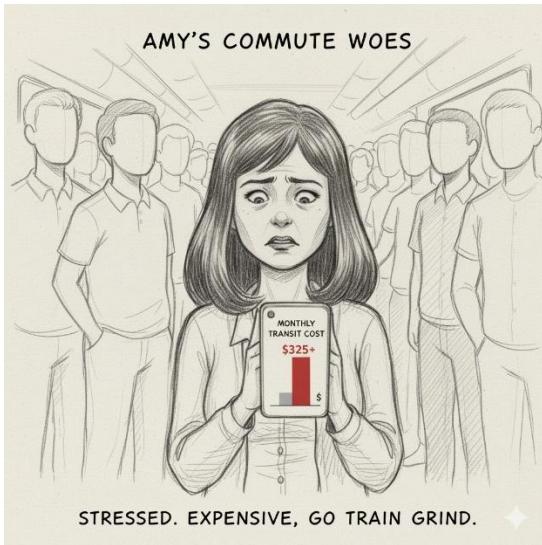
- **Leonard's Quote:** "Remote work was great. I got a backyard and a home office for less than my rent in downtown. I love WFH!"
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### Chapter 3: The Unsettled Present

- **Scene 9:** An email inbox appears with the subject line: "Important: Our New Hybrid Work Policy."



- **Narration:** "But the pause won't last forever. The push to return began to roll out in big companies."
- **Scene 10:** Amy is back on the GO train, looking stressed. A graphic overlays her, showing her monthly transit pass cost.

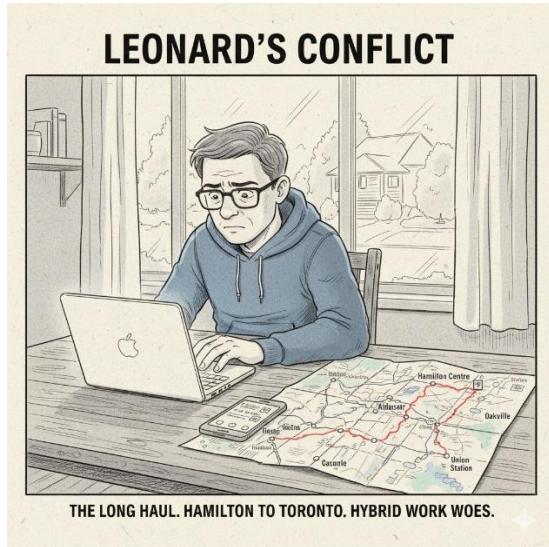


- **Amy's Quote:** "This three-day hybrid schedule is the worst of both worlds; we get all the stress and expense of commuting, but none of the social benefits of being in the office."
- **Data:** A pie chart shows that most Canadians prefer hybrid or fully remote work.
- **Scene 11:** A "Help Wanted" sign in **Raj's** restaurant window. A few customers are inside, but many tables are empty.

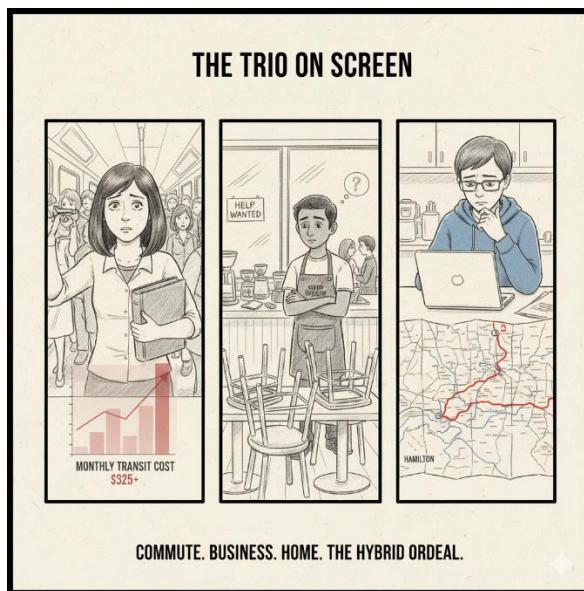


- **Raj's Quote:** "It's better, but we're not back. Maybe 60% of what it was. How long can a business survive on 60%? We need to mandate the policy"

- **Scene 12: Leonard** is on a laptop at his kitchen table in Hamilton, looking conflicted. A map shows the long, daunting GO train route from Hamilton to Toronto.



- **Leonard's Quote:** "They say it's 'encouraged,' but it feels mandatory. Am I really going to spend four hours commuting? Or do I give up the job and find another one? I feel trapped. I cannot go back"
- **Scene 13:** The screen splits into three panels, showing Amy, Raj, and Leonard.



- **Narration:** "This is today's Toronto: a city of difficult choices, where the future of work is being shaped by every commute, every policy, and every personal decision."

- **Final Data:** The screen brings up to a final question: "How do we build a downtown that works for everyone?" The statistic "Toronto office vacancy rates remain high" appears below.

## Audience

The target audience for this data story is broad, it can include:

1. **Toronto-area Employees and Commuters:** They will see their daily calculations and frustrations reflected in their day-to-day commute. Amy is very tired on the GO train, and the high cost of her monthly pass, as well as her feeling of being trapped in a "win-win situation", will resonate with anyone who feels the pressure of being forced to return to the office. Similarly, Leonard made a difficult choice between moving back to the city center and finding a new job with equal pay for equal work to receive economic benefits, which is a familiar dilemma for thousands of families when weighing affordability and convenience. By seeing the descriptions of these struggles, these viewers will feel understood and recognized, and confirm that their personal cost-benefit analysis is part of a larger and shared narrative about modern GTA life.
2. **Corporate Leaders and HR Managers:** The story is designed to encourage them to think beyond productivity metrics and consider the human and economic impact of their RTO policies. Although the data can show that an office is occupied, it is rarely able to capture the human and economic losses caused by its policies. This statement urges these audiences to consider the hidden costs of strictly returning to the office: employee burnout, low morale, and the potential loss of top talents who are no longer willing to make the same compromise. By following these characteristics, they can better understand the impact of their decisions on the real world - how the three-day policy a week is as exhausting as the five-day policy, and the "flexibility" provided is not always seen as a benefit. The story of Raj's struggling small business is also a sad reminder that enterprise policies have a chain reaction to the broader urban economy.
3. **Urban Planners and Policymakers:** The story provides a human-centered lens on data they work with daily, urging them to consider infrastructure and policy solutions for a hybrid future, such as traffic passenger flow statistics, real estate trends and economic activity reports. There is a face on the abstract line chart that shows the plummeting passenger volume of TTC and GO in 2020: Amy, whose daily pressure level is directly related to the system. The trend of urban population outflow is no longer just a statistical data, but a personal and high-risk

choice made by Leonard and his family. This narrative transforms the abstract digital into tangible human consequences, and urges planners and policy makers to actively think about the future. It puts forward key issues about infrastructure, traffic affordability and zoning, and urges them to design solutions not only for the city we used to be, but also for the flexible and hybrid city we are becoming.

The goal is for the audience to gain a more understanding of the WFH/RTO debate and recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

### **Conclusion**

The story aims to weave a personal and people-oriented narrative with clear and influential data, and tell the transformation story after the Toronto epidemic. By focusing on the lives of parents, business owners and resettled professionals, the storyboard provides a framework for a strong narrative and highlights the complex trade-offs at the core of the RTO debate. It is not to provide answers, but to stimulate thinking and encourage more empathic and data-based dialogue on the future work of our city.