



PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT  
AND WELLBEING SERVICE

# Career Dilemmas and Decision Making Beyond Foundation

Professional Support and Well-being Service  
Health Education England, Thames Valley



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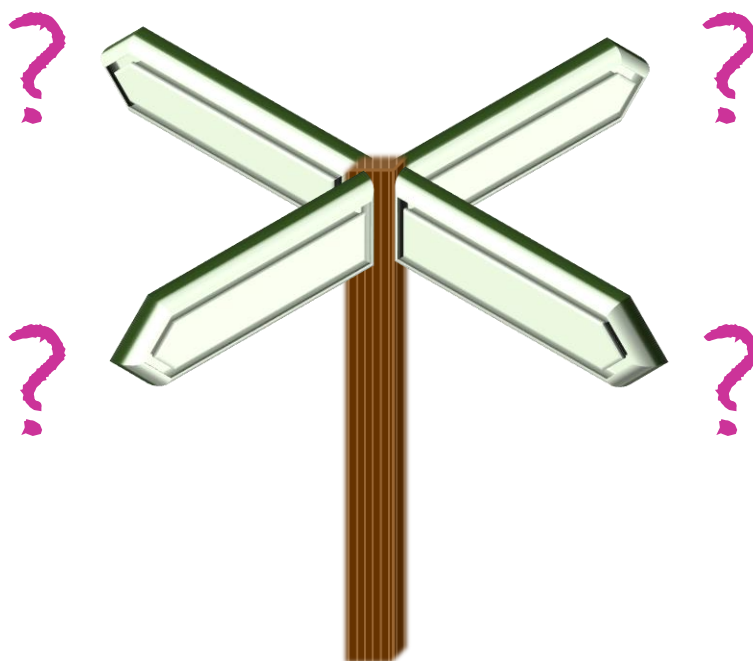


# Introduction

It can be an unsettling experience to doubt your career choice or be unsure of the direction you are headed. Your career identity is the structuring of personal motivations, interests and competencies around a career path, and when this path becomes unclear it can have a deep impact on your sense of self and can almost feel disorientating.



Whilst a career decision is fundamentally personal, you will also probably have internalised the perspectives of other people both in the job and in your personal life. These perspectives, or at least your interpretations of them, combine with your value traits, motivations and ambitions to create a very complex backdrop for a big decision. This can be overwhelming and may make you feel like you ought to rush a decision or may leave you feeling paralysed and unable to make a decision. In either case, take some time to work through the exercises in this booklet either on your own or with a coach or find other ways to help you dissect and analyse the options available to you.



# You

## Values

The values that we each hold are fundamental to the way we experience the world, in both the relationships we form and the behavioural choices that we make. These values guide our thoughts and emotional responses, whether we realise it or not. There are absolute values that are shared by most people within a particular culture – for example, the majority of people would place honesty somewhere in their list of core values but this is shared so widely that it does not really help in discriminating one person from the next or in making significant decisions like a career choice. Other values are much more personal, and will differ, in degrees if not in existence, from one person to the next.

Values are not completely fixed, they may adjust and evolve with maturity and experience. However, they are longstanding and rarely influenced by short term events, occasionally, an experience may prompt introspection and growth but more commonly any change is gradual.

Developing a better understanding of your values may help you to understand both the reasons why your career decision is so challenging and perhaps which of the options in front of you may best align with your values. These reflective exercises may be usefully done on your own or in discussion with someone else.

### Reflective questions

Reflect on your answers to the following questions and see what they might tell you about the aspects of your life and the people around you that you particularly value:



1. Tomorrow, you leave for a ten-year interplanetary mission, you are fit and healthy, money is not a factor and travel is not a limitation thanks to the invention of teleportation. What do you do, where do you go and who do you see?



2. Where and when in your day to day life do you feel
  - a. Most safe?
  - b. Most precarious?
  - c. Most excited?
  - d. Most in control?

How much do any of these feelings matter to your wellbeing?



3. You are now stranded on a desert Island, your physical needs in terms of food, water, safety and shelter are accounted for. What three personal items would you want with you?

Considering your thoughts around these questions, what things/relationships/traits might be of most value?

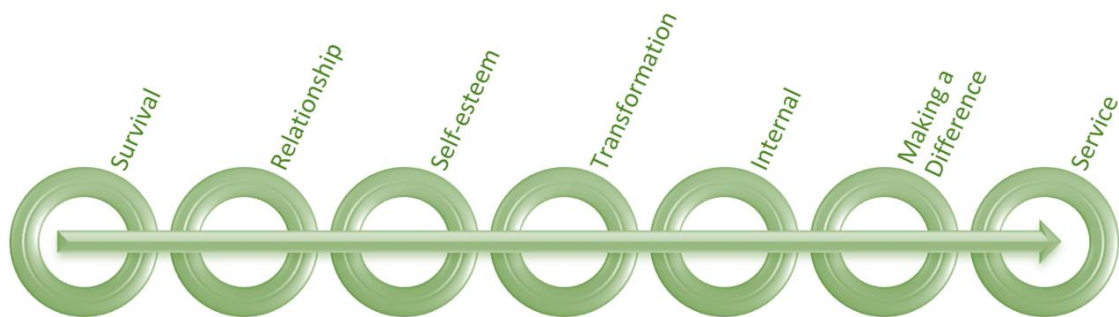
### Personal Values

Of the values listed on the next page, select ten that you feel are most representative of the things you value. You will probably find that you feel like more than ten of them apply, try to pick those that feel most relevant and most applicable when you are in a relaxed state.

Safety	Reliability	Risk Taking	Respect	Integrity	Ethics	Continuous Learning	Accountability
Listening	Team Work	Caution	Entrepreneurial	Wealth	Creativity	Fairness	Forgiveness
Independence	Community Involvement	Personal Growth	Wellbeing (Bio/Psycho/Social)	Competence	Personal Fulfilment	Trust	Family
Generosity	Job Security	Humour/Fun	Achievement	Courage	Control	Openness	Balance (Work/Life)
Reward	Initiative	Dialogue	Patience	Efficiency	Enthusiasm/Positivity	Ease with Uncertainty	Commitment
Vision	Friendship	Power	Recognition	Risk Taking	Compassion	Being Liked	Caring
Ambition	Professional Growth	Environmental Awareness	Perseverance	Health	Self-Discipline	Humility	Future Generations
Financial Stability	Adaptability	Coaching/Mentoring	Personal Image	Clarity	Conflict Resolution	Excellence	Wisdom

Value	Group	Value	Group
1.		6.	
2.		7.	
3.		8.	
4.		9.	
5.		10.	

These values can be grouped and considered to represent a pattern of growth that many people may experience over their life. It is not intended to define one value as better than another, in line with Aristotle's pattern of virtues and vices, each of these values can become positive or negative depending on the context and the behaviours that it prompts.



Categorisation such as this is never perfect, everyone's personal growth is individual and you may interpret the meaning of some of the words slightly differently. However, it is useful to reflect how your values may have shifted over the course of your life so far and how they may continue to shift in the future. This has implications for career decisions that impact on the overall course that your life might take.

Look at the following lists and identify which groups your selected values lie in:

<b>Survival</b>	<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Self-esteem</b>	<b>Transformation</b>
Job security	Listening	Reliability	Teamwork
Caution	Friendship	Reward	Risk taking
Control	Being liked	Achievement	Perseverance
Safety	Caring	Efficiency	Personal growth
Self-discipline	Family	Ambition	Independence
Financial stability	Conflict resolution	Excellence	Initiative
Health	Recognition	Being the best	Accountability
Wealth	Respect	Competence	Balance (Work/Life)
		Power	Continuous learning
			Entrepreneurial
			Adaptability

<b>Internal</b>	<b>Making a Difference</b>	<b>Service</b>
Commitment	Leadership	Vision
Trust	Dialogue	Wisdom
Integrity	Community	Forgiveness
Openness	involvement	Future generations
Patience	Wellbeing	Humility
Generosity	Making a difference	Ease with uncertainty
Humour/fun	Personal fulfilment	Ethics
Enthusiasm/positivity	Environmental	Compassion
Creativity	awareness	
Fairness	Coaching/mentoring	
Clarity		

### Moral Injury

It is possible that your decision to change career has been prompted by a moral injury. This concept, initially developed with war veterans, has since been researched in healthcare and police work. It describes the psychological distress that an individual can experience when they are involved in or observe events that transgress their values. This can be as a result of decisions that cause (or fail to prevent) a situation that conflicts with deeply held values or simply being witness to such events. If you have experienced a situation such as this, it is worth reflecting how it is influencing your decision making. You should also consider if you need some additional help supporting your mental health in these circumstances.


## Motivations

### Intrinsic or Extrinsic Motivators


Extrinsic motivators are the external things that motivate you, usually things like awards and rewards that can be provided by another person or organisation. Within the medical career context this includes workplace assessments, exams, membership and fellowship and ultimately a job as Consultant/GP job. Intrinsic motivators are internally located, these are the things that drive you to enjoy the process of the work from one day to the next, broadly there are four intrinsic work motivators.

- A sense of meaningfulness: work that you can believe is worthwhile and worth your time and energy.
- A sense of progress: a feeling that you are able to move forwards and make things happen at a satisfying rate within your work.
- A feeling of choice: work that provides a level of autonomy that feels positive for you.
- A feeling of competence: jobs that make you feel skilled and masterful in carrying them out.

It can be difficult to clearly disentangle whether a motivating factor is located externally or internally: is the respect of someone else an external motivator as it relies on an external locus or a consequence of the impact this has on self-esteem and therefore internally located? However, the broad principles of those things that will intrinsically motivate people are worthwhile considering in identifying what might be motivating for you in the workplace.



**How well do the options you are considering provide you a sense of meaning, progress, choice and competence?**





# Your Context

## Areas of Life

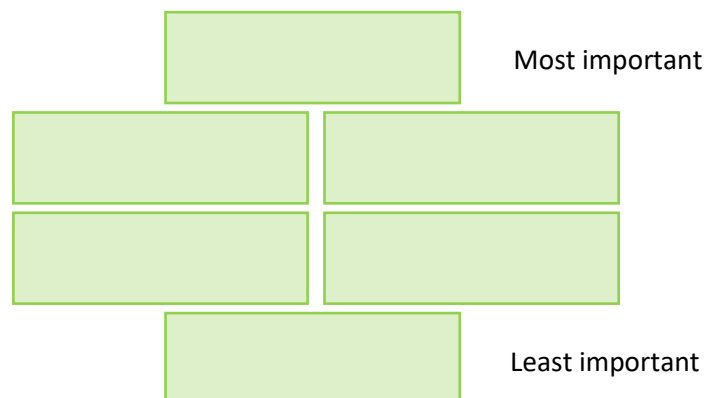
It is natural, when considering a career change, that it impacts more widely on your life. However, it can be difficult to unpick the complex network. The following six areas represent different aspects of your life. Consider the six different areas, you may wish to adapt them or add another but these broad categories tend to cover most people's lives. There are a number of different ways to use these categories, the idea is to place your career decision within the broader context of your life.

Family	Friends	Health
Leisure	Career	Finances

The following activities may support your thinking and discussions around your career decision:

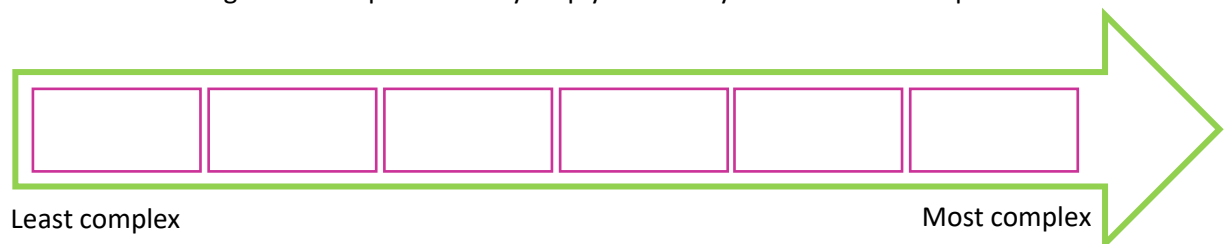
### 1. Importance

Place the six areas into a diamond shape to represent importance to you. Consider why each of them are particularly important at this time, are you able to predict any changes to this ranking? How does your ranking align with the options in front you?



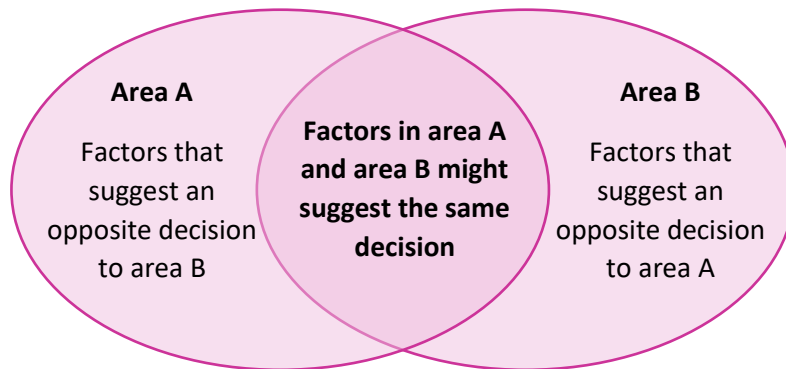
### 2. Complexity

Place the six areas into order of complexity, from the area of your life that feel most complicated to the least. The most complex areas of your life may be those that are contributing to the difficulties of the decision you are making, spending some time deconstructing these complexities may help you frame your decision in simpler terms.



### 3. Conflicting pairs

To help you understand those aspects that may be the cause of conflicting thoughts about the options available, pair up any cards that you feel suggest conflicted outcomes to your decision. Draw a Venn diagram to identify aspects in each area that align and those that conflict with regards to the decision you are making.



### 4. Temporal perspectives

Everyone experiences personal growth at different rates and in different ways. Consider each of factors from the perspective of your past self and potential future self as well as your present self. Would their thoughts and feelings be the same or different?

<i>Past</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Future</i>
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### 5. Personal Perspectives

Select some important people in your life, what would be their perspective on each of the different areas of your life?

<i>A Parental Figure</i>	<i>A Long-Term Friend</i>
<i>A Respected Person at Your Work</i>	<i>A Respected Person in Your Personal Life</i>

Think about what they might say if they were being supportive and what they might say if they were being challenging to extend your consideration of their perspectives on your context.

6. Control, Influence or Accept

For each of the areas of life, consider what aspects are within your control, which you can influence and which you must accept.



# Your Decision

Although it is tempting to rush to this point, a complex and high stakes decision usually requires a significant amount of thinking before reaching the point of making a decision. The questions and frameworks so far in this workbook have been designed to help you to take an open minded approach to reflecting on yourself and your individual context in a holistic manner. You may wish to take these ideas further, to discuss with different people and you may feel that there is more information to be gained. However, if you are moving forward into decision making, you should first reflect a little on your decision making process.

## Maximiser or Satisficer?

As you approach the decision you should take note of your natural tendency toward decision making: are you a maximiser or a satisficer?

### Maximisers

People with a tendency to maximise their decision making will seek out the best outcome. They will research until they have exhausted all possibilities and have found the best option from all those available. The challenge for people taking this approach is the volume of information that is needed in order to fully exhaust all possibilities. It is rare that you can know all the information and all possible outcomes to any decision, so, individuals who tend towards a maximising approach are unlikely to feel that they have enough information and as such may find it hard to make a final decision. The resulting feeling of not having enough information can be paralysing and result in uncertainty and indecision.

### Satisficers

People with a tendency to satisfy in their decision making have a minimum acceptable level and they will sort through the available options until the threshold is reached. Those who take a satisficing approach may be able to make decisions more quickly and efficiently than maximisers. However, they may miss out on a better option depending on where they have set the acceptable threshold for the decision. Satisficers must ensure that the threshold they have set is genuinely at a level that will allow them to be happy in the future or they risk disappointment with their decision.

So before going any further in the decision-making process, consider the following:

What further information do you need?

What further information do you want?

What further information is obtainable?

**How will you go about finding this out?**

## Heuristic or Rational Decision Making?

Historically, the concept of rational thinking has been considered to be logical; based on measurable values and therefore an accurate way to predict human behaviour. However, in practice this is often not the case. Instead the concept of bounded rationality arose – people are rational, up to a point. This is because people are rational with the information they have and through the lens they view it. In reality, people rarely have every bit of information needed to make a decision, and the

information that they do have is viewed through their personal lens which is subject to the influence of their personality traits, personal values and personal experiences.

The fallibility of rational decision making once it is applied in an imperfect and unpredictable world has led to increasing attention to heuristic decision making – that is decision making based on fewer points of data in order to maximise speed of decision making. It is a decision-making process we all undertake in some circumstances and increased expertise and pattern recognition allows for increasingly accurate heuristic decision making. The ability to make quick decisions can be crucial in some contexts but should be approached with caution in more complex environments with highly individualised factors. Neither approach is perfect, nor is it always easy to disentangle the two but try to consider which approach you are using for your decision making.

## Cognitive Biases

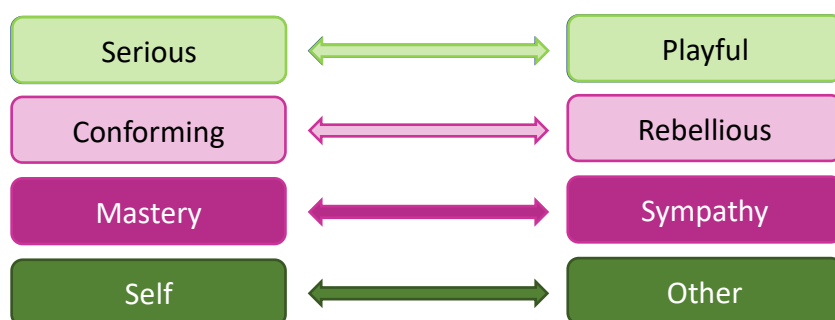
Even apparently rational decision-making processes are susceptible to bias. Everyone is prone to certain cognitive biases, they are the consequence of the way in which we process the world and tend to be of benefit to us. However, occasionally they are unhelpful and it is worth being conscious of those biases that may be particularly likely to impact your decision when you are making significant decisions like a change in career direction.

<i>How much do you think each of these potential cognitive biases may impact your thinking about your career dilemma?</i>	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Regularly	A lot
<b>Anchoring:</b> Your judgement is inappropriately swayed by your first experience/piece of information.					
<b>Sunk cost:</b> You have invested so much that you cling to something and keep investing on the basis of what has already been invested rather than the value of what is being invested now or in the future.					
<b>Confirmation bias:</b> You made an early decision and are now just seeking information that confirms the decision, things that might conflict are dismissed, belittled or ignored.					
<b>Dunning-Kruger effect:</b> As you get to know more and more about the option you thought you wanted, you become less and less confident about it.					
<b>Declinism:</b> A tendency to have a favourable view of past events – to look back on a time with a fondness or excitement that is not representative of your experience at the time.					
<b>Framing effect:</b> You are unduly swayed by the way information is provided rather than the information itself. For example, receiving information from someone you like, compared to the same information from someone you don't know.					
<b>Availability heuristic:</b> Memories that are particularly readily available due to, for example, recency or stress, are disproportionately considered in the overall decision because they are so readily applied.					
<b>Optimism bias:</b> You overestimate the likelihood of good outcomes.					
<b>Pessimism bias:</b> You overestimate the likelihood of bad outcomes.					
<b>Reactance:</b> You dislike feeling constrained and may over-compensate and react against advice even it is damaging.					

## Reversal Theory

A further challenge to rational decision making in addition to longer term tendencies towards cognitive biases are the dynamic shifts in what you might consider rational. These changes in your view of 'rational' can happen as a result of changes in your motivational drive.

The Reversal Theory of motivation, developed by Apter, is a dynamic theory of factors motivating an individual at any one point in time. Unlike other similar theories relating to personality, this motivational theory describes a framework to consider shifting drives for behaviours. From a career decision perspective, it can help develop understanding into why we can feel conflicted about such a significant decision and may come to different conclusions at different times.



Individuals swing between these motivational states due to a combination of natural ebb and flow, changes to context and frustrations. Each of these states is motivated differently and therefore driven to gain different things from decisions being made.



Focused on long term consequences.

Future orientated.

Satisfaction derived from knowing that you are on a path towards a goal.

Focused on the activity itself.

Present orientated.

Satisfaction derived from enjoyment and pleasure in the moment.

**What is your decision when you are in the serious state? And in the playful state?**

**Is your decision different? Why might that be?**



Thinking and behaving in an expected manner.

Sustains group functioning and social cohesion.

Satisfaction from fitting in and doing what is expected.

Thinking and behaving against the status quo.

Source of critical thinking as well as some more challenging behaviours.

Satisfaction from acting or behaving in a way that challenges what is expected.

**What is your decision when you are in the conforming state? And in the rebellious state?**

**Is your decision different? Why might that be?**



Seeking mastery of knowledge, skills, or being in charge of the situation or other people.

About the ability to make things happen.

Satisfied by achievement, control and organising, for yourself or for others.

Motivation for love and nurturing, this state focuses on relationships and self-care.

About caring for yourself or for others, boosting self-esteem.

Satisfied by caring relationships that are positive and sustain well-being and satisfaction.

**What is your decision when you are in the mastery state? And in the sympathy state?**

**Is your decision different? Why might that be?**



Motivated to focus on your own wants and needs.

This may be in a sympathy state (for example, wanting to be looked after when you are unwell or after a long day) or in a mastery state (for example, completing a course or competing with others).

Motivated to focus on the wants and needs of others.

This may be in a sympathy state (for example, wanting to nurture and look after or protect them) or in a mastery state (for example, wanting them to achieve a goal or gain a promotion).

**What is your decision when you are in the self state? And in the other state?**

**Is your decision different? Why might that be?**

### Making your decision

Having considered your values, your motivations and your context as well as the factors that might be impacting on your decision making: maximising or satisficing tendencies, heuristics, cognitive biases and motivational states, you are hopefully in a better position to objectively consider your decision. Now spend some time weighing up the different factors effecting your decision making, there are different ways to lay out the factors involved so select one that works for you but broadly something including the following ideas can help structure your thoughts:

Option A:					
Factors for...	How important is this?	Why is it important?	Factors against...	How important is this?	Why is it important?

Option B:					
Factors for...	How important is this?	Why is it important?	Factors against...	How important is this?	Why is it important?

In structuring your thoughts, consider how it is important and why it is important. The following questions may help act as prompt:





If you are working with a coach, they may work through some of these exercises or similar ones to help you settle on a direction for your career. Coaching is a coachee centred process, your coach will be there to offer structure, support and challenge to your thinking but not to provide advice. This decision is yours, they are there to support and guide you in the process of making a decision not to advise of the decision you should make. Coaching is non-judgemental and your coach will view you as the expert in this decision. You may identify gaps in your knowledge and your coach will help you identify how you can fill them. So you may expect to have to do some research in between coaching sessions to help move your decision making process forward. Ultimately, you are the expert in yourself and your context so the decision is yours, but that does not mean you cannot seek support in the process of making a decision and coaching is a powerful approach in these situations.

For further information go to <https://thamesvalley.hee.nhs.uk/resources-information/professional-support-wellbeing/> or contact [psw.tv@hee.nhs.uk](mailto:psw.tv@hee.nhs.uk).

