

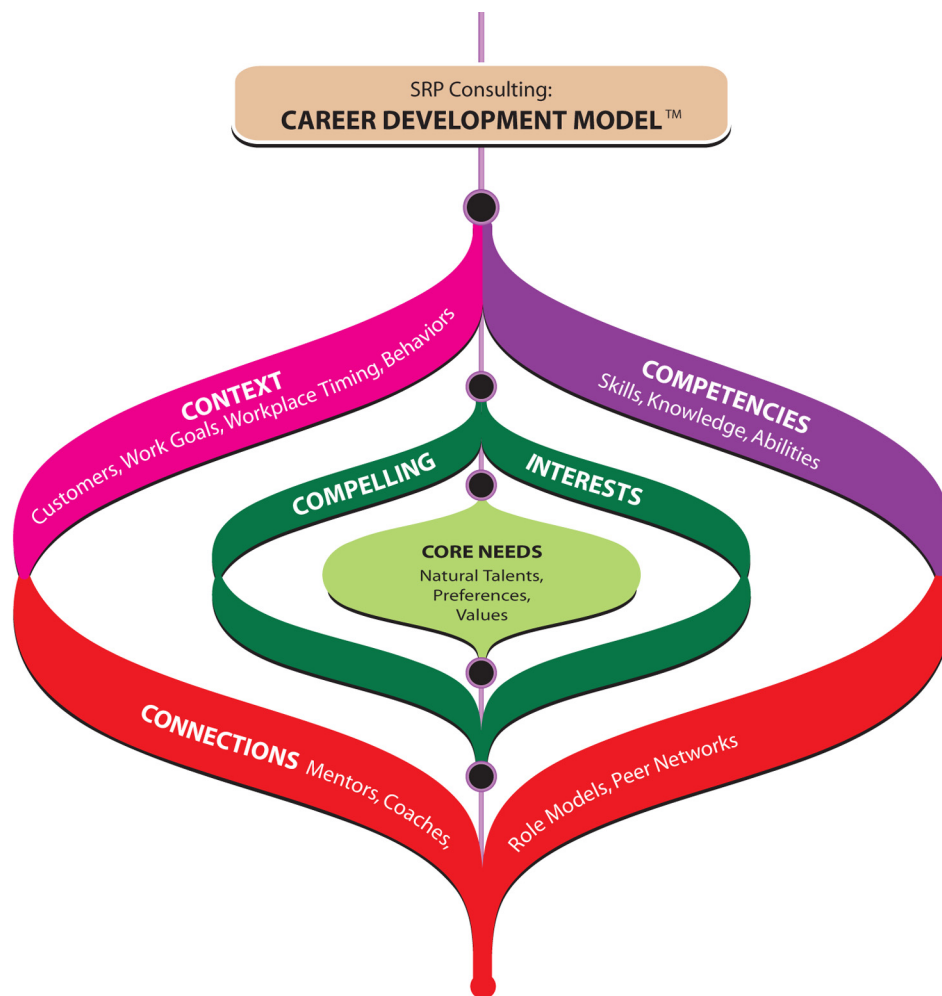
How to make big career decisions a little easier

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How do you feel about the work you're doing? Are you enlivened? Is your career headed down the path you had in mind? Or do you find yourself wondering whether it's time to make a career change that will help you meet your goals? If you're considering such a change, the enormity of this decision may be weighing on you, as you evaluate a choice that will impact more than your work life.

When making career decisions, you'll benefit by breaking the decision down into smaller parts, to help you identify the criteria most important for you. Once you identify your needs, interests, values, and ideals for your work, you will have what you need to evaluate the suitability of your current and potential future jobs.

Take a look at the Career Development Model.



In the center of the model you will notice 'Core Needs'. Theorists have found that we are born with our Core Needs, and they stay with us throughout our lives. Individuals, either consciously or unconsciously, tend to look for ways to have their basic needs met. When

met, individuals feel energized and enlivened. When missing, individuals tend to feel more drained of energy and dissatisfied. To the extent you can align your Core Needs to your work you will realize greater joy and satisfaction.

Questions you may ask to clarify your own Core Needs include:

1. What do you consider essential in order to be fulfilled at work?
2. What are your most cherished values?
3. In what ways do you prefer to interact with others?
4. How do you like to get your work done?

The outcomes of such questions result in your ability to identify your core needs, values, and preferred approach to your work. Take your responses, and start a list of each need you have, and how important each need is. An example is offered below.

Career Decision Criteria	Importance
<i>Core Needs:</i>	
Make a significant impact	Must Have
Skillful performance	Must Have
Variety	Must Have
Contextual Thinking	Must Have
Ability to take the time needed to get the best result	Must Have

The second set of questions to ask yourself will help you identify your Compelling Interests and Motivations, the next layer of the Career Development Model. Researchers suggest that our interests and motivations tend to stabilize by our mid-twenties, meaning you may experience a bit more change in this area than in your Core Needs. As your career progresses, you're likely to find this area stabilize.

Identify your Compelling Interests and Motivations by exploring:

1. What subjects are most interesting to you?
2. What work activities have you enjoyed the most, and why?
3. What do you find particularly motivating?
4. What do you never grow tired of talking about?

Once you uncover your Compelling Interests and Motivations, you will be able to identify your most compelling occupational themes, interests, and motivating factors that will provide another set of inputs towards your decision.

Career Decision Criteria	Importance
<i>Compelling Interests and Motivations:</i>	
Helping others in original, imaginative ways	Must have
Independence	Must have
Writing	Must have

When you're aware of your Core Needs, Compelling Interests, and Motivations, you'll have a much greater ability to weigh various career decisions against this set of criteria that is true to your ideal career qualities.

Of course, the complexity of a career decision doesn't stop there. Looking at the outer layer of the Career Development Model, you'll find three topics: our work Context, the Competencies we use at work, and our Connections. It is within these three aspects of your career that you may find the most change throughout your work life.

We'll start with the area titled Context: this has to do with who you serve in your work, who you work with, where you work, and how you work.

To clarify your preferred work place, customers, and coworkers, ask yourself questions such as:

1. Where do you want to work?
2. When do you want to do your work?
3. How do you define your ideal work day?
4. What qualities do you appreciate in the people you serve?
5. What qualities do you value in your coworkers?

Career Decision Criteria	Importance
<i>Context</i>	
Working from a home office	Like to have
Having a regular and stable schedule	Like to have
Having a combination of work in a team and independently	Like to have
Working with people who value quality and relationships	Must have

The next area, Competencies, also contains elements that will serve you and remain constant throughout your work life, while others will come and go as your work environments change. This is where you want to do some work describing the knowledge, skills, and abilities you've developed that you want to keep, and what new competencies you want to add.

These types of questions will help you identify your preferred competencies:

1. What knowledge, skills, and abilities have you developed that you enjoy using?
2. What projects or work experiences do you think of as your career highlights?
3. What new competencies interest you?

Career Decision Criteria	Importance
<i>Competencies</i>	
Listening and identifying unmet needs	Like to have
Communicating effectively through writing	Must have
Designing customized programs for customers	Like to have

Finally, the Connections you have throughout your Career will be diverse. Some of your connections will stay with you over many years, and others will come and go as your circumstances change.

When considering your potential change, ask yourself these questions:

- Who do you love to be around, and why?
- How does your spending time with these kinds of people enrich your life?
- Who do you support, and who supports you, in your career?

Career Decision Criteria	Importance
<i>Connections</i>	
Opportunities to stay current in my field	Must have
Finding a mentor in my workplace	Like to have
Working with peers who have similar skills	Like to have

Putting it all together:

After you've found clarity regarding your career decision criteria, you can build a decision table similar to the one that appears below. You can use this kind of a tool as you evaluate your current job, and research new jobs. If you find that your current job truly does meet most of your needs and only one or two criterion are missing, you may want to start by exploring what possibilities there are for bringing what's missing to your workplace.

How much is each value included in the job you're in and the job you're considering?			
Career Decision Criteria	Importance	Current Job (1-5 scale 1, not at all, 5 very much)	Future Job (1-5 scale 1, not at all, 5 very much)
<i>Core Needs:</i>			
<i>Compelling Interests and Motivations:</i>			
<i>Context</i>			
<i>Competencies</i>			
<i>Connections</i>			
Totals (The higher the number, the greater the congruence and potential 'fit' for a job and your needs)			

If you find yourself struggling to generate meaningful answers to these questions on your own, you may want to consider working with a professional career services provider, so they can help you find clarity. Good career service providers offer a full range of career assessments, tools, and resources to help you make decisions and navigate through the career transition process.

The career landscape presents thousands of job choices that can be overwhelming in their diversity. This approach of breaking a big career change decision into smaller parts helps you quickly identify their values, interests, natural talents, and working style preferences, all of which will help you narrow the vast array of choices you're faced with when selecting or changing your career. Once you find clarity regarding your core needs and interests for a career, then the work of active experimentation, networking, informational interviews, job shadowing can take place within a few targeted areas. As you align your work and workplace to your personal preferences, natural talents, and interests, you'll find that you experience much less strain and greater satisfaction in your work.