Making Effective Career Decisions

This handout can help you make informed career development decisions through building on the strengths of your type preferences and working through the potential blind spots associated with your preferences. Whether you are making a career choice straight out of school, managing your career development within an organization, changing jobs, or starting out on your own, the steps in this handout can help you make more informed decisions.

Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling all come into play in career decisions, and in asking yourself the kinds of questions found in this handout, you can learn to make better use of all four mental functions. In doing so, you use your tools of perception (Sensing and Intuition) and judgment (Thinking and Feeling) to make decisions based on impersonal and personal criteria. If you seek a solution that rests on a solid assessment of the facts, opens up new possibilities, anticipates positive and negative consequences, and fits your values, then that decision has a better chance of being the best one for you. Remember also that career development involves a series of decisions; it doesn’t rest on one big decision.

This handout offers four steps for a decision-making process based on the use of psychological type. These steps will:

1. increase your appreciation of the importance of using all four functions in solving problems,
2. yield new information to be used in your career development, and
3. help you draw some possibly different conclusions about the information you have.
The Zig-Zag Process* for Problem Solving

(1) SENSING
What is the situation?
Be realistic about the facts.
Gather relevant data.
List possible solutions.

(2) INTUITION
Find new possibilities.
Use your imagination.
Generate alternatives.
Identify and clarify the problem.

(3) THINKING
Analyze logically the effects of acting on each possibility.
List steps involved to achieve possible goals.
Weigh the pros/cons of each option, even ones you care about.

(4) FEELING
Weigh the human consequences of acting on each possibility.
Assess effects on self and others.
Determine harmony with personal values.

Once you make a decision (or more than one), be sure to take action and then loop back to evaluate the outcomes and the results of your actions.

For each of the sixteen types, some of the steps of the career decision-making process are easier and other steps are more difficult.

* The Zig-Zag Process was developed by Gordon Lawrence based on a model by Isabel Myers.
The two middle letters of your type formula typically point to the steps that are easier. For example, for ISTJ, the dominant and auxiliary Sensing and Thinking steps are generally easier, and the less preferred Intuition and Feeling steps more difficult. Type dynamics tell you which steps are likely to be the easiest for you (the steps that use your dominant and auxiliary functions), and which are likely to be the most difficult for you (the steps that use your tertiary and inferior functions). This is why discussion and consultation with another type is helpful to provide “constructive use of differences.” Pay close attention to the steps of the decision-making process that you are inclined to skip.

Are you the ESFJ who might miss the new and different possibilities and forget to take a critical look at the consequences of some of your decisions? Or are you the ENTP who might miss attending to the facts of the situation and forget to listen to what you truly care about?

The following questions can help you engage the four mental functions as you work through information gathering and decision making about your career. This self-assessment will help you evaluate which steps you are most inclined to use, and which you are inclined to use less.

Self Assessment

- What are the two middle letters of your four-letter type? (e.g. N F)
  
  These are the steps you are most likely to go to quickly and to do the most naturally. Be sure to build on the natural strengths of these functions as you consider your career choices.

- What are the opposite of those two middle letters? (e.g. S T)
  
  These are the steps you are most likely to skip over or spend less time on. Don’t overlook your less preferred functions and be sure to engage the power of these two functions as you consider your career choices.
Questions to Assist in the Career Decision-Making Process

Think about some part of your career development in which you need more clarity (e.g., whether or not to seek another job, how you might expand or change your current job, which job to seek after graduation). Now keep that issue in mind as you go through the following four steps, which are designed to help you engage each step of the decision-making process.

Step One: Sensing Perception
You use Sensing to determine the facts, data, and givens in a situation. The use of Sensing allows you to face the realities of whatever career issue is before you. Below are some questions that can help you use your Sensing perception.

- Exactly what is the situation now? Use your sensing to look at the facts and to gather data about how things are now and what you bring into the present from your past.

- What are the facts about you now? What are your type preferences? What are your values, interests, skills, and type dynamics? At what stage of life and type development are you? What education do you have? What have you learned from your life experiences so far? What are your assets (don’t be modest) and what resources do you have available? What are your liabilities (be honest but don’t beat up on yourself)?

- Realistically assess what work activities have been most satisfying? Frustrating? Difficult? In what work environments are you at your best? Your worst? As you think about work environments consider such things as how the system works, your physical environment, travel, working in or out of the office, co-workers, superiors, customers, time pressures, and your needs for autonomy or support.

- What is your job history or history in the organization and what does a hard look at it reveal, particularly as your employers have seen you? What commendations have you received? What criticisms or suggestions have you received? About your competence? Your work habits? Your accuracy? Your honesty or integrity? Personal problems?

- What are the facts of positions, jobs, and the market? What jobs are currently available? What organizational positions are available? What salaries are available? Where do you reside? What are the locations of job openings?
Step Two: Intuitive Perception

You use Intuition to look at the possibilities in a situation, and/or ways to change a situation. Using Intuition also allows you to notice meanings and patterns in the career information you have, and it helps you put it in the context of your life and your future. Below are some questions that can help you use your Intuitive perception.

- What do you become aware of as you open your mind to patterns in the information you have? Do you notice any patterns in the careers, jobs, or positions you consider or reject? For example, do you find that you are only considering careers in which members of your family have worked? Do you find that all of the careers or jobs you are considering allow you chances to make more money based on putting in more energy and effort? Do the careers that you tend to reject require a great deal of contact with people?

- What jobs integrate your values, interests, skills? Even if you don’t think that job exists now. In an ideal world, what would you like to spend your time doing?

- What do you come up with when you brainstorm new ideas, without censoring them in any way? List all the options you have generated, regardless of what you may think or feel about them now. A wild thought might turn into a creative and valuable one. What new or different possibilities come up when you set aside the belief that you are considering the one and only right thing? What would you do if you could do anything that you wanted? Are there other kinds of work that could use your abilities? Are there options that keep coming to you that make no sense but are difficult to discount?

- Are there things that you have ignored in the past that might be helpful to attend to now? Take a second look at career options you may have rejected in the past. Is this the time to follow a dream you gave up in the past? Who from your present or past jobs might have new ideas? Are there better ways to capitalize on your assets? Are there ways to overcome or reduce your liabilities?

- What are the possibilities for growth and change in the careers you are considering? How will you be able to change or grow in a given career, job, or position? Where do you want to be in six months? Two years? Five years? Ten years? Is there something new you would like to learn on a job or in a particular organizational role? How does this current job fit with your dreams and goals for the future?

At this step of the Zig-Zag, you have used your Sensing and Intuitive perception to develop a better assessment of the situation. Now it is time to use your judgment (Thinking and Feeling) to come to some conclusions.
Step Three: **Thinking Judgment**

You use thinking to make a critical and impersonal analysis of the situation: the career facts and career possibilities you discovered in the past two steps. In using thinking you look at all of the consequences, both good and bad, of the various choices you have available to you. Below are some questions that can help you engage your Thinking judgment.

- If you step outside of yourself and the situation, what do you see objectively and critically? About yourself? About the situation? Take a hard-nosed look at how well or how poorly you would fit in the careers, jobs, or organizational positions you are considering. For example, do your values, skills, interests, type preferences and dynamics equip you for a career or role in business management? In sales? In research?

- What would be the positive and negative consequences of acting on each career possibility on your list? In other words, what are the logical outcomes of choosing each career?

- Are you willing to change your mind if you find you are wrong about something? That is, can you step outside yourself enough to change your view of a career if you find information that does not fit your preconceptions of that career? For example, if you enter the career exploration process with an interest in business management, but find that the hours, roles, or pay are really not to your liking, would you be able to consider other careers?

- Are you able to be tough minded about options that involve ideas or people you care about? It’s important to be critical and objective in areas where you are least likely to be—areas where you have strong personal likes or desires. What careers, positions and outcomes have you ignored because of your loyalty to someone, or your concern about their reaction to an option you are considering?
Step Four: **Feeling Judgment**

You use Feeling to weigh how much you care about the possible outcomes of the different career options, and what each choice means to you personally. In using Feeling you give weight not only to your personal values, but also to the values and Feelings of those about whom you care. Below are some questions that can help you engage your Feeling judgment.

- How do you feel about this career or this position? Or the one in which you currently find yourself? What is your gut reaction to each career or job choice on your list?

- What do you care about in your life and career? What is important to you? As you review your options, does a part of you quickly say: this is right or wrong; this is good or bad? What do you value (e.g., freedom, honesty, independence) and would your choices go for or against things that are important to you? For example, would working in a particular business allow you to experience and express the kind of freedom that is important to you?

- Do some of the options have short-term gains, but those options might also go against values that are more important to you in the long run? For example, you might choose a banking job that offers an initially higher salary and security over another job where you develop recreational programs for teenagers. However, you may find the banking job does not ultimately meet your needs to work with and draw out the possibilities in others. Though the job with the teens offers a lower starting salary, it may be a stepping-stone to a higher paying job that also meets your people-oriented values.

- If you acted on each possibility on your list, what would be the effect on you, on other people important in your life, and on your relationship with them? Would you (or they) be happy, excited, or pleased? Or would you (or they) be sad, guilty, angry, or displeased? For example, would your choice of a career, job or position that requires a great deal of travel have an effect on your relationship with your significant other or with your children? What impact would this career or job have on your lifestyle?

- What careers or roles do you really care about, even if you think it is illogical for them to seem so important? Take what you care about seriously.

Remember, once you make a decision (or more than one), be sure to **take action** and then loop back to **evaluate** the outcomes and the results of your actions.
References and Additional Resources


