What is decision making?

Successful decision making involves making the right choices in order to achieve your goals. It is through making the best choices that you will be successful in your life. However, making meaningful decisions is a challenging process, and some people try to avoid this altogether – but remember, not actively deciding on an option is in itself making a decision! Nobody makes the right decision every time, but by developing your decision making skills, you can increase your success rate.

When it comes to your career, you may be confused and find it difficult to decide between the varied options that you are considering - you may be looking for the ‘perfect career’. There is rarely a single perfect career for anyone, though, so it is important for you to consider making compromises to achieve the best fit for your own interests, skills and values.

How do you make a good decision?

- Select the most important factors to consider
- Evaluate the relative importance of different options
- Select between good, viable options
- Choose between options by imagining likely outcomes
- Weigh the pros and cons of a decision
- Analyze the pressures for and against change
- Look at a decision from all points of view
- Consider whether a change is worth making

What influences your decision making?

1. Individual Emotions and Thinking

- Your decisions may be influenced by your emotional state at the time a decision is made.
- When you are experiencing positive emotions, you tend to underestimate the negative consequences of your actions.

When you are experiencing negative emotions, you tend to focus on the immediate and short term, and lose sight of the big picture.
2. **Social**

Social pressure or time constraints may interfere with your decision making.

3. **Peers**
   - Your friends and other peers can influence your decision making.
   - You can make good or bad decisions based on your friends' ideas.

It is important to understand the influence your friends may have on your attitudes and behaviours.

4. **Media**

Your thoughts and behaviours in decision making may be influenced by the media.

**Decision Making Tools**

The following decision making tools should help you to consider all of the differing factors carefully and to help you decide which career option is the best fit for you.

We will explore two different career decision making tools:

- Grid analysis
- PMI analysis

Once you have worked through the tools, it is a good idea to make an appointment to speak to one of the Careers and Employability Consultants to discuss your decision making.

**Grid Analysis**

This is a useful technique to use when you are trying to decide between a number of options and you are also taking many different factors into account. It will help you make a decision after carefully considering each of the different factors involved.

1. The first stage is to list all of the options you are considering and write them down the left-hand side of the grid.
2. On the top of the grid, write down each of the factors that are affecting your decision making.
3. Rate each of the factors for relative importance, on a scale of 0-5, where 5 is the most important. It is fine to have factors with equal importance.
4. Now score each of the options against the factors you have decided on. Rating them on a scale of 0-3 where 0 is poor and 3 is very good.

Finally multiply each of the scores against the weighting you gave them in step 3. Add up the scores for each option, the option that scores the highest may be the best decision for you.

Although this sounds complicated, it is actually a very simple tool for making effective decisions. This is a worked example to illustrate the method given above:
Example: Jack is trying to decide between three careers that he’s interested in – teaching, accountancy or working in the charity sector. He’s got some student debt so he’s decided that salary is quite important to him, he doesn’t really mind where he works but wants to be able to work anywhere in the country, he has a few evening and weekend commitments so doesn’t want his hours to be too long and finally, he wants to be professionally trained in his new role so that he feels confident in what he’s doing.

He has ranked his factors to consider from 0-5, where 5 is the most important and has chosen to rate his options from 0-3 in each section where 0 is poor and 3 is very good.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Salary (Weighting: 4)</th>
<th>Location (Weighting: 1)</th>
<th>Working hours (Weighting: 2)</th>
<th>Training (Weighting: 4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity sector</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When he multiplies his options against the weighting he gets the following scores:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Salary (Weighting: 4)</th>
<th>Location (Weighting: 1)</th>
<th>Hours (Weighting: 2)</th>
<th>Training (Weighting: 4)</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity sector</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the factors he considers to be important, his best choice is to become an accountant. However, if he was unhappy with the results, maybe he has under or overestimated the importance of one of his ratings.

**PMI Analysis**

This is a re-working of one of the oldest methods of decision making – weighing up the pros and cons of each option! However, in this case it is considering the Pluses, Minuses and Interesting factors involved in the decision.

This is most useful when you are considering a single decision and need to consider whether or not it is going to improve your individual situation.

It is a very simple tool to use.

Draw three columns on a page, headed Plus, Minus and Interesting

Under each column write down anything you can think of for each section. It is important that you think very positively under the Plus and very negatively under the Minus.
If the decision is not obvious, give each of the comments you have made a score. This may be very subjective, but it may help to give yourself a scale, in the example below this has been given a range of 0-5.

Once you have done this add up the score. A strongly negative score or a strongly positive score should help you decide.

Here is a simple example.

Alex is deciding whether or not to move to London to try and look for a job there.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plus</th>
<th>Minus</th>
<th>Interesting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• More going on (+5)</td>
<td>• Expensive (-5)</td>
<td>• Easier to find new job? (+3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Easier to see friends (+5)</td>
<td>• Have to find somewhere to rent (-3)</td>
<td>Meet more people (+4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Easier to commute (+4)</td>
<td>• Pollution (-2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More job opportunities (+5)</td>
<td>• Less space (-2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this case it is clear that Alex should consider moving to London from the strongly positive score that has emerged.

**Conclusion**

Decision making can be a difficult and stressful process, but it is important to remember that the decisions you make are not irrevocable. The above tools are designed to help you consider all of the options and to make the best decision for you at that specific time in your life. It is important to remember that the decision you make should be the right one for your particular stage in life. You are unlikely to stay in the same career throughout your life so you will always be making decisions about your career path!

**Further reading/resources**

www.businessballs.com/problemsolving.htm
www.mindtools.com

For more information contact the Careers and Employability Service:
www.stir.ac.uk/careers

Updated August 16 All URLs are provided in good faith.