

Decide



Must Have Decision Making

A Self-help Tool

Introduction

When you are looking at career options, some things will be 'nice to have', and some things will be 'must haves'. This Self-help Tool shows you how to use your 'must haves' to make a career decision.

To use this approach, you first need to know what you are looking for in a career, and which factors are essential - 'deal-breakers' and 'must haves'), and rank these in order of importance. It is particularly useful if you need to narrow down a large range of options quickly, as well as if you need to choose between a smaller number of options.

Sometimes, when we try to make a career decision, it is hard because there are so many aspects to any career. Trying to hold them all in our heads at the same time and making an overall judgment can be difficult.

Our Must Have Decision Making self-help tool is designed to avoid this pitfall, and is based on the idea of what is technically known as 'sequential' or 'lexicographic' decision making.



This tool is designed to...

- Enable you to take a long list of career options and narrow them down.
- Enable you to be prioritise the key factors in your decision making.
- Avoid the pitfalls of trying to make an overall assessment of something complex like a professional occupation.

Consider using this tool if you...

- Are clear about which factors are most important for you.
- Want to reduce a long list of job options to those that really tick all your boxes.
- Want to exclude options that do not float your boat.

How to use this tool



1

First, create a list of all the factors that are ‘must have’ things that you believe a career needs to offer you.

Then rank the list in order from most to least important.



2

Second, check all the career options you are considering and see if they offer your most ‘must have’ factors.

If they do not, then reject these job options as they do not fit with what you are looking for.



Third, continue this process until you are left with prospects that meet your non-negotiable needs.

You should now be left with roles that tick all your boxes (Hastie & Dawes, 2001, p223).

This process can be repeated with the factors that you believe would be ‘nice to have’. Then you should be left with a career path that is best suited for you.

Here is an example: imagine you want to go on a city break. The first thing you might decide is that you only want to fly from a local airport, like Manchester. This immediately rejects all the other cities across the world that you cannot fly to from Manchester, allowing you to focus just on twelve that you can fly to from Manchester.

Then you might say you only want cities by the sea. This cuts out Paris, Munich, etc.

Your next factor is temperature – you want somewhere warm and sunny. So, you reject Belfast and Copenhagen, leaving you free to decide between Barcelona and, at a push, Rome, if you do not mind an hour’s travel to the beach.

This can be expressed as a set of branching decision trees.

Departs from
Manchester?



Reject

Coastal?



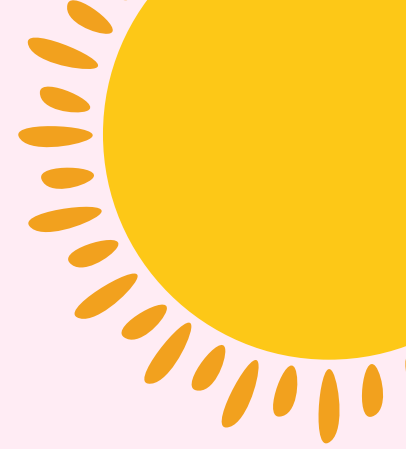
Reject

Warm?



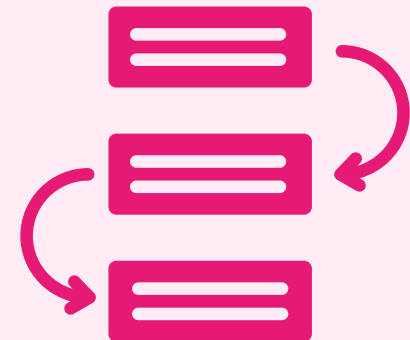
Reject

Has a beach?



Pause, Reflect, Act.

- Sequential decision making reminds us that all decisions are made within limits. It encourages us to reflect upon the limits we have set ourselves. In the example, would the person have done better to try another airport? In terms of careers, could you include more opportunities if you considered moving, commuting, or hybrid-working, for instance?
- What happened when you used this approach with a career decision you are facing?
- How did you feel about the outcome?
- Do you need to re-run the process with different must-haves (or in a different order)?
- What are the key insights you have taken from this Self-help Tool?
- What actions do you need to take now, to build on this exercise?
- Who could help you with this?
- Are there other related Self-help Tools that you would like to use as well?



NB: Because everyone is different, this tool may not work for you, so please also look at our other Self-help Tools as well. Other tools which are closely related include:

- Values under the Microscope (how far does your career choice express your values?)
- Personal Construct Theory (seeing what career differences matter to you.)
- Find the Fit (comparing the weight of pros and cons between different choices.)
- Head and Heart (a very different approach - seeing if there is a conflict between your thinking and feeling response to a career choice.)
- Three Minute Decision Making (a very different approach - using intuition to make a quick career choice.)

References and Resources

- Hastie, R., & Dawes, R. M. (2001). Rational Choice in an Uncertain World. Sage, Thousand Oaks.
- **Dave Stanbury, Feb, 2023**



If you are a member of staff from another educational organisation and want to use a limited number of our Self-help Tools with your students, we'd love to hear from you and share good practice. We'd ask that you retain references to University of Huddersfield as a matter of courtesy, and acknowledge the other sources we've used. Thank you.