

WHAT IS CAREER DEVELOPMENT?

Career Development is the lifelong process of managing your learning and work in order to move towards your preferred future.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

is about you,

is about crafting the life you really want to live

is about navigating your journey in this world

is a moving target that changes as we navigate our journey

How is CAREER DEVELOPMENT about you?

Career is about who you are and what you do with who you are. As you go through life, you want to better understand yourself, what relationships you want to build and keep, what you want to learn, what work you want to do and what contributions you want to make.

How is CAREER DEVELOPMENT about crafting the life you really want to live?

How you really want to live is your “preferred future”. You don’t figure it out all at once. It is a process that occurs over a lifetime. You change over time and so does your vision for your preferred future. Crafting your life requires learning from your relationships and your experiences and shaping the future you want to have. As you explore responses to questions such as: “What do I think I want to do?”, “What is it about me that pulls me in that direction?”, “What did I learn from that experience?” “What do I need to learn in order to be able to contribute?” and as you gain experience, you will get better at sorting out your career development.

How is CAREER DEVELOPMENT about navigating your journey in this world?

Career Development is about navigating your journey through learning and work. The word “career” is defined as “a path or progress through life or history.” Yet people often think about career as “a” or “one” occupation chosen for life. This just doesn’t fit, either with the origins of the word or with the realities for the majority in the world of work today.

We do not make “one perfect education choice” or find “one perfect job for life”. We navigate options, make choices without perfect information, bounce back from disappointments and constantly learn from experience. We have multiple roles throughout our journeys. Some will be formal jobs; some will not be. Though we cannot guarantee what will be around the next

As we move through our life journey, we can keep learning about ourselves and what we can and want to do.

Navigating is about making the best choices you can on your journey so that you can live the kind of life you want for yourself.

How is career development a moving target?

Look at the circles below. They connect, they influence each other, they may expand in size at some points in our journeys; at other times they may contract. They are not static—they MOVE as we move, grow, understand, change, experience, decide and re-decide.



Adapted from: The Guidance Council, United Kingdom.

Developing as a Person and getting a Sense of Direction:

For most *young people*, these two circles are their career development drivers as they seek answers to:

- Who am I?
- What am I good at?
- What do I think I might want to study and why?

- Where am I heading?
- What should I choose?

Their career development is focused on finding answers to these questions.

Skills for the Future and Employability:

For *young adults*, these two elements most often take precedence. The answers they seek are:

- What learning path will equip me for both what I want to do and where there are work opportunities?
- How do I research so I make the best choices I can?
- What other skills do I need to position myself in order to find the kind of work I want to do?
- What experience do I need to be considered? What routes do I take to navigate smartly?

Progression and Making a Difference:

Progression (moving up or moving laterally or changing work status) is very important for some *working adults*; enjoying work, being stimulated and having a balance between work and family are very important to other working adults. Making a difference and feeling that life and work “matter” and are making a contribution is very important to many if not most.

Their questions are:

- What is my future in this organization?
- What do I need to learn to position myself for my next step in the organization ?
- Am I doing what I want to do and am good at doing? Do I need to try doing something else?
- How do I better balance my work life and my family life?
- Is my work making a positive difference?

The Circles and Cycles of Career Development:

All of us cycle back and forth between the circles over the course of our journeys. One does not complete one circle and move to the next, never to return. We develop as persons throughout our lives; hopefully we know ourselves reasonably well by the time we are young adults and do not need to spend as much time figuring out who we are and what matters to us. At the same

time, as we develop, we may find that we want to change direction. We will discover new issues that matter to us. We may find that we want to learn something completely new. We may decide that we want to make a different contribution.

How individuals move within and across the circles of career development varies hugely. What circles matter most at different times also vary widely. However, for most of us these circles are the focus of our career development as we move through, learning, work and living our lives.

What are Career Development Services?

Career Development services are programs and services that are intended to help individuals to explore and sort out questions in each of the above circles. Such services are provided in many different settings.

There are websites and guides and self-help tools that help individuals to explore and find their own learning and work directions and make their own well considered choices.

There are many multiple sources of career development support that are not “professional” support but that can be highly effective. These include parents, networks, mentors, and employers. Many people manage their own career development independently and/or with the help of their own circles of contacts and supports and never seek external assistance.

For those who need or want to benefit from professional assistance, there are career courses and centres in schools, community colleges and universities that help direct people to the resources they need and provide group and individual help if needed to make well considered choices and to make successful transitions from school to work.

There are community agencies and employment offices that help direct people to learning and work and that also provide group and individual help if needed to explore learning and work options, make decisions and succeed in finding work.

There are human resource departments in many workplaces to assist employees to develop and implement their career plans.

There are private practice career services in most medium to large cities to support people in most of the circle areas in the above diagram.

What do career development practitioners do?

The focus and scope of what career development practitioners do varies significantly across jurisdictions and delivery settings.

Career Development Practitioners in schools, community colleges and universities “tend” to have a focus on helping individuals to find resources, gain work experience and make education, learning and work choices and decisions that fit best for them as well as making successful transitions from school to work.

Career Development Practitioners in community agencies and employment offices “tend” to have a focus on helping individuals and groups to explore training and employment options and opportunities, make decisions about training and employment that fit for them and their circumstances and learn skills necessary to succeed in training and/or in finding work.

Career Development Practitioners in industry (often called career coaches) would “tend” to have a focus on staff development, mentoring, succession planning and career progression within the workplace.

Career Development Practitioners in private practice would provide the above services and “tend” to have a focus on helping individuals to increase their self awareness and understanding as a basis for making decisions about their preferred futures as well as to overcome employability obstacles.

Career Development Practitioners in any of the above settings may offer a much wider range of programs and services in addition to what is suggested as a probable “focus”. Individuals seeking career development support need to ask questions and check that the programs and services wanted are actually available and offered.

What do I do if I want career development assistance?

First thing is to recognize that it is not only OK; it is *smart* to get assistance when you need it. You are taking charge of building your own preferred future. There are scores of adult workers who regret that they did not take the time to get assistance and/or that they did not know where to go to get help. Many say “If only I knew then what I know now”. So first off, congratulate yourself for taking action now.

Many individuals can benefit greatly from using well developed web-based tools. For many these can start a process that individuals can continue on their own without needing to consult a career development practitioner. Almost every library in Canada has free access to Career Cruising. Try it out if you have not already done so.

If you want to work with a career development practitioner, find out what help you can access for free. Contact your guidance counsellor if you are in K-12; contact the Career Centre if you are in college or university; contact your local employment office if you are out of school and find out what range of services they provide.

If you want to work with a career development practitioner in private practice, ask friends, family and/or individuals whose opinions you trust if they can recommend someone. Ask if they know someone who has sought or knows someone who has sought similar assistance. Find out how helpful the assistance was. Your guidance counsellor, career centre or employment centre practitioner may well be able to refer you to someone with a solid reputation. You can also use the internet to search.

Once you have identified someone who seems right for you, ask for a telephone conversation or e-mail exchange. Briefly explain what your concern is and ask how he or she will be able to help you. You may also want to ask how often they usually meet with someone with concerns similar to your own. He/she will not be able to promise a timeframe of course since they do not know you yet. However this will give you a good idea if you have a reasonable fit. Make sure you are comfortable with the responses and with the person before you book a fee for service appointment.

If after your first meeting, you are not feeling confident that this will help, you need not continue. Shop around until you find the right fit for you. You will be glad you did!

Career Development is the lifelong process of managing your learning and work in order to move towards your preferred future.

Many or indeed most of us will not achieve the “perfect” future. Perhaps there is no such thing. However, if we can come close to our “preferred” futures, we will have more productive, satisfying and meaningful lives. That is the vision of career development for each individual. That is what career development practitioners hope to help each individual client achieve.

Note: This thinking in this paper has benefited from [Hope-Filled Engagement](#) and [Guiding Circles](#)