

Career choice

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Purpose

This is a 30–60 minute exercise, depending on how long a client discusses possible choices and actions to assist the client's viewpoint about possible directions they can take and avoiding having all their eggs in one basket.

Description

This exercise prompts a 'big picture conversation' about the client's next aspired job or career move. It encourages the client to open up and share thoughts on possible career ideas. It is especially helpful if a client is only considering a job or career move in one direction. It explores multiple ideas for each of the career options (boxes) so if one option does not work out, they still have other options and a momentum to move forward.

Process

- 1 Create a template, or ask the client to draw a two-by-two grid, getting them to add four labels and descriptors for each box, as shown in Figure 4.
- 2 Check that the client understands the meaning of each box. Use the following prompts to clarify their understanding:
 - **Stabilize** – if they are relatively new to a role and/or feel that they still have a lot to achieve in their current

<p>SEARCH . . . For a new role within your existing organization</p>	<p>STRETCH . . . For a new role in a new organization</p>
<p>STABILIZE . . . Stay in the existing organization and in the same role</p>	<p>SHIFT . . . To a new organization doing the same role</p>

Figure 4 Career choice exercise

position, including developing skills that are essential for the next move. Typical if in role for less than one to two years.

- **Search** – look in their existing organization for a new role as they would the external job market. It should be

easier to move internally and transfer skills to a new position than in the external market, especially if they have a good reputation.

- **Shift** – consider a new organization if they enjoy what they do but there is not a good fit with the organizational culture or they want to work in a different location or industry. This might also be a good stepping-stone into a stretch role.
- **Stretch** – change everything about their job. This type of move is likely to take the longest to achieve and probably requires the most effort and preparation.

- 3 Ask the client to talk about their likely career choices, based on the grid. Jot down what they would like to do, allocating it to one of the boxes – boxes can have multiple job options. Encourage them to share all their job thoughts no matter how usual or unusual they are.
- 4 Invite the client to identify their preferred two to three career choices and order of priority. Why? Explain . . . Multiple career options spread the risk of career development. If they only have one option and it is closed off then they will feel stunted and frustrated. More than one option increases the chances of being able to take action, gain results and move in a new direction. Ask the client to identify short-, medium- and long-term actions for each career choice.

Case study

A client came to coaching having been in their current role for two to three years doing something that they were doing more because of necessity than love or interest. They decided that it really was time for a change. We used the career choices grid to talk about the direction(s) they wanted to move to. Up to that point they had only thought about a stretch move. We talked about the benefits of developing multiple career options and identifying a range of quick wins to kick off their career development as well as set up actions for their long-term (and harder) career development moves. As a result, the client started to have conversations with their manager about the types of tasks they

enjoyed and how they could do more of them (which were also their strength areas), as well as the opportunity for an internal promotion. Within the next few months the client earned an internal promotion when previously they had been told there was not any opportunity for promotion. Why? They had demonstrated by shifting their role slightly to play more to their strengths how much they could contribute to the business, and the business was able to reward that when an opportunity came along.

Pitfalls

A client may not want to take the time to consider multiple career options and push forward with a move out of a company.

Bibliography

Kaye, B. (1997) *Up is NOT the Only Way* (revised edition), Boston, MA: Davies-Black.