



**Career Decisions and Job Hunting in the Real World:
A Self-Help Guide for Ethnic Minority Students and
Graduates**

Part 2: Reviewing your values: what do you want?

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Foreword

This part of the guide presents two approaches aimed at facilitating your reassessment of what you want from your graduate career. It begins with a discussion of the notion of the ideal career as a useful focus for evaluating possible career paths. This is followed by an exercise to facilitate a reassessment of your basic values, based on research from social psychology.

In the sections following, another exercise to develop self-awareness of career-relevant values is presented. This exercise, which arose from our research project, provides a self-assessment of what we describe as occupational values: equality in the workplace, social concerns, status and control and personal achievement. The final section of Part 2 discusses cultural differences in values that can result in conflicts for some ethnic minority students and graduates.

We hope that students and graduates of all ethnic backgrounds will find these exercises and reflections on basic and occupational values useful. We would welcome feedback on any experiences of using this part of the guide and all suggestions for improving it.

Notes

1. The project web pages can be found at:
www.bolton.ac.uk/uni/research/psych/behavior.html
2. Contact e-mail addresses:
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1. Introduction

Sometimes people say ‘I hate my job’ and even though they really mean it, they carry on doing it for a long time. People in such a position have no intrinsic motivation for their work. They derive no pleasure, reward or satisfaction from the work itself, and if they continue to do it, it is only for the money – the extrinsic motivation of being able to fund life outside the workplace. Many people find themselves in this situation at some time in their lives, but it is clearly a state of affairs to be avoided in the long term. A higher education should offer opportunities for a career path with higher rewards, hopefully of both the intrinsic and extrinsic kind. The transition from higher education to graduate employment is an excellent time in life to reassess what you want in your career.

Careers advisors recommend that ethnic minority students base their job hunting and career planning firmly on the assumption that the UK graduate labour market is an equal opportunity market regardless of race, religion or culture. This is not to deny evidence of inequality and discrimination, or to argue that it should be ignored in the career development process. Rather, it is to advocate a constructive strategy to deal with such problems. You should first assume, as discussed earlier in the guide, that employers operate an Equal Opportunities policy for recruitment and selection as stated by the University of Bolton. That is, you should assume that the main barriers to your ideal career are the fair ones that all students have to overcome, such as developing the skills a job requires, and competition from other job seekers who may be better qualified. Focussing on such matters puts you ‘in the frame’ for a satisfying and rewarding graduate career. You can then work on improving your chances of success through a realistic appraisal of the unfair barriers that ethnic minority students might face, and an action plan to deal with them.

2. Your ideal career

One standard tactic in career planning is to formulate a realistic image of your ideal career path by thinking creatively and gathering additional information about the important aspects of jobs and careers listed below. This gives your career thinking a focus: you can compare where you are now with where you would like to be, and work out an appropriate job hunting strategy. As well, you can work out what additional skills, knowledge and experience you still need to develop, referring to the skills portfolio discussed in Part 1.

Your ideal job and career will have many aspects, all of which you should evaluate in terms of your basic values¹:

- The environment you work in – its location; the type of organisation, its main purpose or function, and organisational culture;
- The people you work with – their attitudes and behaviour (related to the organisational culture); your role and status in the organisation with respect to work colleagues and management position;
- The kind of work itself – whether you would be managing people or complex information;
- The opportunities for career development through training and promotion;
- The extrinsic rewards of the job and career – its status in the eyes of the world, the opportunities it offers for travel, its material rewards;

- The demands of the work – in terms of time commitment, threats to your physical and psychological health and well-being, pressure on your work-life balance.

3. The importance of values

The 'correct' answer to the question *what is the ideal career for me?* depends on your values. People acquire their basic human values through cultural, societal and family influences, and by thinking about their experiences and what they observe around them. Values are essentially personal, although people with similar cultural experiences tend to share similar values. Personal judgements about which values are important are rather stable throughout adulthood, although they do change in the light of experience, sometimes quite dramatically. When reflecting on your ideal career it can be instructive to reflect on your basic values and the extent to which they are compatible with the jobs you are thinking about. The self-assessment exercise in section 4 below, based on the research of psychologist Shalom Schwartz^{2,3}, is designed to help you do this. It will take you about 10 minutes to complete and you will need a basic calculator for step 2. Alternatively, a computer-aided version of the exercise can be found on the CD-rom accompanying the guide.

4. Assessing your basic values

Step 1. Rate the importance of each of the following as life-guiding principles (circle one number for each):

1. Power

- social power, authority, wealth

Opposed to my principles	Not important			Important		Of supreme importance
-1	0	1	2	3	4	5

2. Achievement

- success, capability, ambition, influence on people and events

Opposed to my principles	Not important			Important		Of supreme importance
-1	0	1	2	3	4	5

3. Hedonism

- gratification of desires, enjoyment in life, self-indulgence

Opposed to my principles	Not important			Important		Of supreme importance
-1	0	1	2	3	4	5

4. Stimulation

- daring, a varied and challenging life, an exciting life

Opposed to my principles	Not important			Important		Of supreme importance
-1	0	1	2	3	4	5

5. Self-direction

- creativity, freedom, curiosity, independence, choosing one's own goals

Opposed to my principles	Not important			Important		Of supreme importance
-1	0	1	2	3	4	5

6. Universalism

- broadmindedness, beauty of nature and arts, social justice, a world at peace,
- equality, wisdom, unity with nature, environmental protection

Opposed to my principles	Not important			Important		Of supreme importance
-1	0	1	2	3	4	5

7. Benevolence

- helpfulness, honesty, forgiveness, loyalty, responsibility

Opposed to my principles	Not important			Important		Of supreme importance
-1	0	1	2	3	4	5

8. Tradition

- respect for tradition, humbleness, accepting one's position in life,
- devotion, modesty

Opposed to my principles	Not important			Important		Of supreme importance
-1	0	1	2	3	4	5

9. Conformity

- obedience, honouring parents and elders, self-discipline, politeness

Opposed to my principles	Not important			Important		Of supreme importance
-1	0	1	2	3	4	5

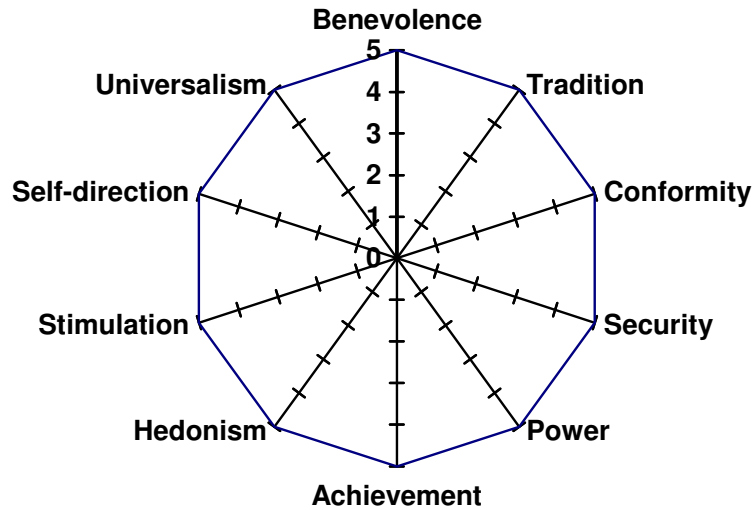
10. Security

- national security, family security, social order, cleanliness,
- reciprocation of favours

Opposed to my principles	Not important			Important		Of supreme importance
-1	0	1	2	3	4	5

Step 2. Your Value Profile

On the chart below, mark your ratings on each line (0-5) with a coloured pen, and join the points to produce a profile of your basic values.



The value profile you produce is based on your spontaneous self-appraisal and may not be a 'true' picture of your current values. If on reflection you want to make some adjustments, go back to step 1 to change any of your ratings and redraw your profile.

Step 3. Pause for thought

The ten basic values making up the circle can be summarised on two dimensions, according to Schwartz. The horizontal dimension reflects differences in a degree of *openness to change* (to the left, universalism, self-direction, stimulation) versus an emphasis on *conservation*, or conserving the status quo (tradition, conformity, security). On the other hand, the vertical dimension reflects differences in the importance of values for oneself or others: *self-enhancement* – power, achievement and hedonism, versus *self-transcendence* – universalism and benevolence).

5. Occupational values

As well as reflecting on your basic values, students considering their employment future may find it useful to think about values more directly associated with the world of work. In our research we devised a way of assessing five occupational values related to the basic values discussed earlier but more specifically related to occupational preferences. The exercise in the following section, based on our research at Bolton, allows readers to assess how important they consider the following five occupational values to be: equality in the workplace, social concerns, status and control, low stress and personal achievement. The exercise takes about ten minutes and there is an automated version available on the CD-rom accompanying the guide.

6. *Assessing your occupational values*

Step 1. Written below are 20 characteristics of occupations (e.g. High status, High income, etc.). For **each** of the 20 characteristics, please circle a number on the scale from 1 to 7 indicating how important each of these characteristics is to you, where:

1 = Of no importance, 4= Moderately important and 7= Extremely important, and the other numbers represent the range in between the levels of importance.

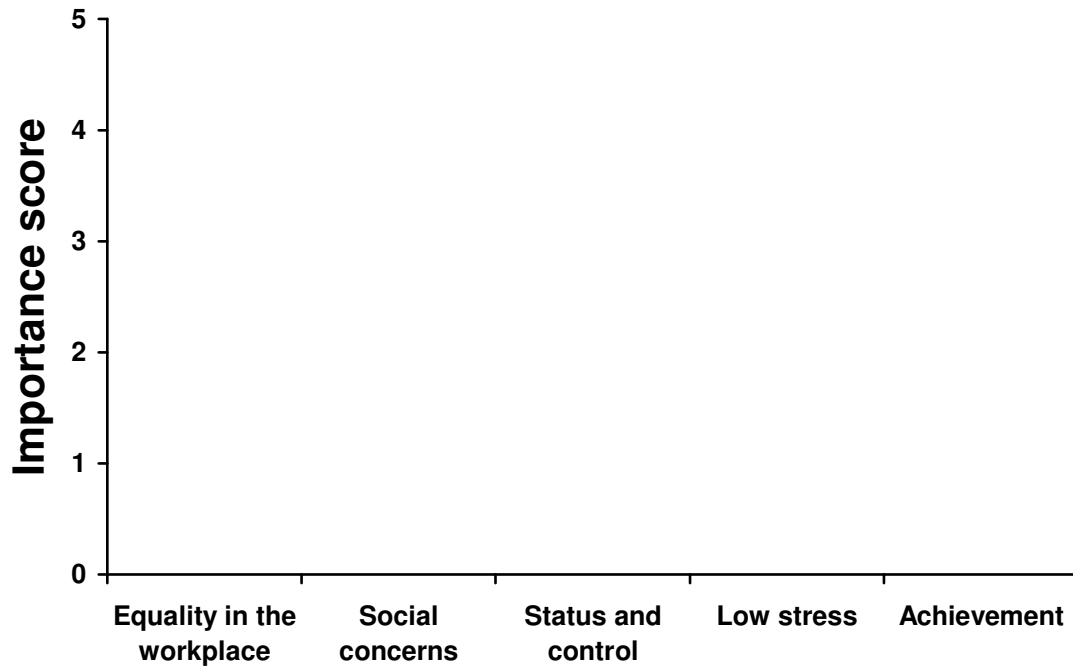
Job Characteristic	Importance Rating						
1. High status	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. A job done mainly by someone of your own sex	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. High income	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Having high control over your workload	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. A mixture of people from different ethnic groups in the occupation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Low stress	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Top positions accessible to all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. A low level of sexism in the workplace	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. A safe working environment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Socially useful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. A low level of racism	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. A job that is easy to obtain	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. A fashionable job	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. High job security	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Flexible working hours	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. A job in which you are part of the community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Managing others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. The opportunity to work with family members or friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. A job related to your degree subject	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. A job that enables you to use your talents and abilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Step 2. Write down your ratings for each of the above question in the table below. Work out your average score in each occupational values category (add scores and divide by the number of items in the category).

Occupational Value	Your rating	Score
Equality in the workplace		
8. A low level of sexism in the workplace		
11. A low level of racism		
9. A safe working environment		
7. Top positions accessible to all		
	Total _____	/ 4 =
Social concerns		
16. A job in which you are part of the community		
5. A mixture of people from different ethnic groups		
18. The opportunity to work with family or friends		
10. Socially useful		
2. A job done mainly by someone of your own sex		
	Total _____	/ 5 =
Status and control (Power)		
1. High status		
3. High income		
17. Managing others		
13. A fashionable job		
4. Having high control over your workload		
	Total _____	/ 5 =
Low stress		
12. A job that is easy to obtain		
6. Low stress		
15. Flexible working hours		
14. High job security		
	Total _____	/ 4 =
Achievement		
20. A job using your talents and abilities		
19. A job related to your degree subject		
	Total _____	/ 2 =

Step 3. Construct a profile of occupational value importance for yourself as a bar chart below (i.e. draw bars of height corresponding to the average importance scores for each occupational value category calculated at step 2).

Importance of Job Characteristics



Step 4. Pause for thought

The 20 job characteristics in the questionnaire are based on student views of the similarities and differences between various graduate jobs. Other students' ratings of their importance could be grouped into the four occupational value categories shown in the above chart. Four of these correspond quite closely to some of the ten basic values discussed earlier: equality in the workplace (universalism), social concerns (benevolence), status and control (power) and achievement, which is itself one of the basic values. The fifth category, low stress, has some relation with the basic value of security in that it reflects a concern for a non-threatening working environment.

7. Values and culture

Some ethnic cultures differ from mainstream British culture in emphasising collectivism rather than individualism. That is, the self-transcending values of universalism, benevolence and tradition, rather than the self-enhancing ones of achievement, hedonism and power. Since the dominant values in the UK are individualist, ethnic minority students with collectivist values, reflected in their assumptions about how to behave, can experience difficulties in the job selection process. For example, interview questions or personality profiling tests can be misunderstood or responses misinterpreted. This issue is discussed further in Part 6 of the guide.

With respect to career decisions, cultural values can have both direct and indirect influences. The direct influence of collectivist values is natural and to be welcomed: careers advisors generally recommend that young people choose career paths compatible with their basic values and the job characteristics they see as important. If these happen to be oriented towards collectivist values, so be it. On the other hand, the indirect influences of values can lead to difficulties and conflicts for young people from collectivist cultures, compared to those from an individualistic background. In the latter case, young people are encouraged to make career choices in their own individual interests by parents and others in their community. In collectivist cultures, however, young people may be expected to make choices more in the interests of their family. For example, there may be an expectation to aim for higher status jobs that would benefit the family both economically and in the eyes of the world, or young women may be expected to give priority to traditional domestic and caring roles rather than to their preferred career.

Most people, whether individualist or collectivist, make decisions on the basis of social influences as well as their personal values and preferences. We humans are social animals, and we understand what important people in our lives value. Furthermore, to differing degrees we want to please them⁴. The pressure to conform to parent and community expectations can be higher in collectivist cultures. Although a harmonious outcome can be achieved (your parents want you to be a nuclear physicist, you want the same thing yourself and you achieve it), there can be more problematic scenarios (as portrayed in the film *Bend it like Beckham*). Careers guides cannot solve such family conflicts. Nevertheless, the principles outlined in the different parts of this guide are intended to support ethnic minority students in setting realistic career goals and adopting job seeking strategies to maximise their potential for a satisfying graduate career compatible with their basic values.

Endnotes

1. This list of important aspects of jobs and careers was developed from several guides for graduates, including 'windmills' and the Guardian guide.
2. The short self-assessment questionnaire is a self-administered version of the SSVS, devised by two Finnish psychologists, Marjaana Lindeman and Markku Verkasalo (2005, 'Measuring values with the Short Schwartz's Value Survey', *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 85(2), 170-178).
3. Shalom Schwartz has devised more extensive ways of measuring basic human values and has developed an influential theory of values. (see, for example, Schwartz, S., 1992, 'Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 25, 1-65; Schwartz, S. et al., 2001, 'Extending the cross-cultural validity of the theory of basic human values with a different method of measurement', *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology*, 32, 519-542).
4. See: Ajzen, I. & Fishbein, M. (1977). Attitude-behavior relations: A theoretical analysis and review of empirical research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 84, 888-918; Ajzen, I. (2000). Nature and operation of attitudes. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 27-58.