



Tool

Parallel Lives

PURPOSE: this exercise helps you assess your career options against the criteria that matter to you

HOW TO DO THE EXERCISE:

1. Identify all the factors that are important to you in relation to work at this stage in your life – and list these in the left-hand column – one per row. These might include **practical** considerations like your commute, pension, security, level of income, flexibility of working hours as well as **professional issues** like what experience you might gain, opportunities for development, the company culture and **personal** things like opportunities for making a difference in an area you care about, or the impact a job might have on your family and/or social life.

These are the criteria against which you consider your options or ‘parallel lives’. It’s critical these are your criteria – the things that matter most to you. There are no right or wrong criteria – if having time to visit your mum once a week or earning a minimum amount are important to you, then they need to go on the list. Be specific e.g. instead of ‘*I don’t want to work long hours*’, say what you do want, e.g. ‘*I want to work no more than 2 evenings a week*’.

2. Identify all your options and enter these one per column. If not changing (staying in your current role) is an option then make sure you include that as it can be useful to compare this option with making a change.
3. Then assess each option against each criterion in turn. Try and be as specific as you can in terms of what that options offers you in relation to each criterion. You may identify some gaps in your knowledge - these might be things to ask others about at interview stage (if you are applying for a job) or to research further so you can be more confident in your assessment. Remember not all of your criteria will be equally important – some are essential and others might be ‘nice to have’. It’s not necessarily about ticking all the boxes – and you might find you need to add more or can cross some off as your thinking develops. They might change over time – they key thing is to be honest about what really matters to you at this stage of your life.

Example – comparing a full-time role with a freelance career

My 'criteria'	Option A: full-time role	Option B: freelance
Time with kids	Pick up once a week, 5 weeks of school hols	All school hols. Pick up from school 3 days week
'Me' time	None – only through work	Fridays. Week away once a year with friend, 2-3 weekends away with friends.
Holidays	Big trips – could even buy a camper van?	House swaps, camping. Cheaper options– but more time.
Fitness	Running after work or lunchtimes? Running work from home day? Once at weekend	Running 3-4 times week. Bike 2-3 days month. Racing half marathons 3-4 times year.
Finances	Over 2 years could earn £10K more than if freelance. Would offer security whilst partner establishes his business.	Approx £25K income per annum. Can be volatile.
Ability to get next job	Would have extra 2 yrs track record Would open up more options.	Maybe possible now – but fewer options and would people think I lacked experienced? I feel able to do it.
Best thing: day-job	Managing teams/ people Visitor service – improving engagement Making X most visited gallery outside London	Coaching Variety of work/ people working with Organisational development projects
Worse thing day job	Managing upwards Managing building/ facilities/ operations Commuting Fundraising	Sometimes doing less satisfying projects eg business planning, evaluation, research. Volunteering Bitty
Professional achievements	Improved organisational stability Developed people I manage/ lead. Consolidating success within organisation.	Improving skills in facilitation
Social life	Nil	Thursdays girls night out.

My 'criteria'	Option A:	Option B: