CAREER Priorities PROFILE™

SECOND EDITION

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Administrator's Guide

This brief guide was written to provide additional information for professionals using the *Career Priorities Profile (CPP).* The *CPP* is designed to help career decision makers identify priorities and evaluate career or job choices based on those priorities.

The *CPP* is not a test; it is a structured self-exploration and career exploration tool designed to assist in the career decision-making process. The *CPP* contains five steps in which individuals gather information about their preferences in regard to work, prioritize them, and relate those priorities to their careers of interest. The final step of the *CPP* (Step 6) involves an analysis of the information gathered and goal planning. The *CPP* provides a structured method for career exploration that leads individuals to identify whether their chosen careers are compatible with their personal and work priorities.

The *CPP* is intended to stimulate discussion between career decision makers and the professional working with them on specific career choices and the relative advantages and disadvantages of each. The *CPP* provides a structured method for identifying potential conflicts, enables active planning, and facilitates an informed career choice.

Congruence Between Self and Work

Holland's theory of vocational choices (1997) states that individuals are continually seeking ways to find congruence between themselves and their work. According to Holland, "People search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles" (p. 4). Often this is not done consciously—individuals may leave a job or look for "a better one" without verbalizing or fully comprehending what need was unmet by that job or the reason for their dissatisfaction.

For people to be truly happy in their work, it must leverage their strengths and match their values. According to Seligman (2002), to maximize work satisfaction, individuals need to use their primary strengths (i.e., values) on the job on a daily basis. Although he advocates making changes within existing employment, there are also clear inferences for choosing a career.

Career Decision Making

Career decision making is a complex process in which individuals are challenged to reach an optimal choice given a myriad of options. The best decision is one that takes into account individuals' preferences with respect to the various attributes of the careers under consideration and achieves the career decision makers' goals (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996).

What makes career decisions unique is that the number of alternatives is vast and there is extensive information available on each alternative. Individuals have a wide array of careers, career specializations, education and training alternatives, and employers to consider. There are also many factors associated with each of the choices (e.g., length of training, type of work tasks, etc.) that must be weighed or evaluated as part of the decision-making process. Finally, there is uncertainty. There are no guarantees that particular opportunities (e.g., school programs, jobs with particular employers, etc.) will be available to the individuals. In addition, individuals' needs and preferences can change over time and the world of work is evolving constantly.

No longer can individuals expect to prepare for a career, gain employment, and remain with the same employer throughout their work life. People now have many points at which career decisions must be made or remade—they must continually reinvent themselves and their careers (Campbell, 2004). Associated with each of these decision points are the innumerable alternatives that must be considered to arrive at an optimal career decision. The needs of recent high school or college graduates seeking their first job are significantly different from those of parents re-entering the workforce after raising children or those of retirees seeking a part-time job to supplement retirement income. According to Frasier (n.d.), people must also consider the inherent attributes of work and the impact their career choices will have on their lifestyles. The work role, although very important, is one of many roles that individuals play. Finding a balance and negotiating the demands of work and personal life may pose significant challenges (Campbell, 2004).

At each stage and for each individual, there is a different set of considerations and satisfactory occupational alternatives. To be effective in making career decisions at any stage, individuals

must have information about themselves, the steps in the career decision-making process, various occupation options, and ways to obtain needed information (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996). In addition, they must successfully resolve internal conflicts regarding their career choice(s). Internal conflicts can arise when individuals have a number of equally attractive career alternatives, have identified important but incompatible preferences, or have identified an aspect of a preferred career alternative that is undesirable, or when their abilities are either insufficient or in excess of those required in a preferred career alternative (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996).

Gati (1986) advocates the need for "a systematic search procedure that can identify a small subset of occupational alternatives" and allow career decision makers the opportunity to explore these alternatives in depth by collecting detailed occupational information (p. 408). The *CPP* is a tool to make sense of the information regarding careers and personal priorities.

Overview of the *Career Priorities Profile*

The *CPP*, previously titled the *Work Preference Match (WPM)*, is a structured, systematic procedure for individuals in the career decision-making process to identify their work priorities, to gather information from career resources, and to make informed decisions about career paths. It was developed and refined through use in a number of career assessment settings for more than a decade.

Most people have unstated preferences about work, whether it is working a particular schedule or a belief in the values of the company they work for. Many individuals have specific needs that must be addressed by their job or employer choice, such as an accessible worksite for a wheelchair user or an environment free from fumes for an individual with asthma. *CPP* information is unique to the individual to ensure that all relevant aspects are considered in career decision making, so the process can be targeted and effective.

Discrepancy Analysis

The *CPP* utilizes a discrepancy analysis model that mirrors the decision-making process vocational evaluators use to generate viable employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. However, this process can be used by career counselors who work with any client. Discrepancy analysis is a side-by-side comparison of individual priorities to the profile of a desired career or job. It is an effective way for individuals to see where there are matches and where there are not. The use of discrepancy analysis was included as part of a new paradigm for vocational evaluation and career assessment in the 2003 30th Institute on Rehabilitation Issues (U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration, August 2003). This publication is available for download through the University of Arkansas Institute on Rehabilitation Issues (http://www.rcep6.org/iri/tmpt/publications.htm#30th).

By using discrepancy analysis, individuals begin to make the connection between their priorities and the requirements of the jobs or careers in which they are interested. If discrepancies are identified, individuals can then devise a plan to resolve them. In cases where individuals discover major discrepancies, they may decide their targeted occupation is not feasible and

begin to look for other options. A professional telling an individual that a particular career is not a good choice is far less effective than having the individual make that determination him- or herself. For individuals considering a number of career options, the discrepancy analysis profile chart can serve as a pro-and-con list, facilitating an informed career choice. For those simply exploring possible careers for the future, such as students in secondary education, it can serve as a career research and analysis tool.

Target Population and Audience

The *CPP* is designed for all career decision makers but is particularly helpful for people who have to change jobs or careers due to the onset of a disability or a change in life circumstances. The *CPP* has proven to be helpful to a variety of individuals who are in the process of making life decisions about their long-term career paths or more-immediate job placement decisions. It has been used by members of many of the following groups and could be helpful for others.

- Individuals with disabilities
- Injured workers
- Welfare-to-Work participants/social service recipients
- Displaced workers
- Individuals served by outplacement agencies
- Workforce development programs
- Veterans

- Parents in career re-entry following raising a family
- Transitioning youth
- Ex-offenders
- High school and college students undecided about career paths or majors
- Other individuals who may have barriers to employment

The reading level of the *CPP* is 8th grade. It has been used successfully with individuals with poorer reading skills (5th to 6th grade) with clarification of terminology and assistance in completing the research section. For individuals with lower reading levels, using the career videos on America's Career Information Network (www.acinet.org/acinet/videos.asp) can be of particular benefit in the exploration process. The videos may be helpful for other career decision makers in addition to those with low reading levels, as they assist in identifying the "soft" aspects of career choices, such as what a typical day might be like or aspects of the work environment not previously considered (Gati & Asher, 2001).

The *CPP* can be administered without special training or qualifications by

- Career counselors
- Life coaches
- Guidance counselors
- Human service agency workers
- Rehabilitation counselors

- Case workers
- Career assessment specialists
- Job placement specialists
- Vocational evaluators
- Teachers

The *CPP* can also be used independently by individuals who are interested in exploring career options without input or guidance from a professional.

Suggestions for Administration

The following information reviews the content of each section of the *Career Priorities Profile* and offers tips for success.

Step 1: Identify Your Preferences

This step contains more than 100 preference statements that individuals will identify as either important or unimportant. These statements were originally developed around the 25 temperament and work environment factors in the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* but were greatly expanded based on the author's experience in working with individuals in a career-exploration-and-planning process and field review by other practitioners. In addition to temperaments and environmental considerations, the list includes work tasks and responsibilities, physical demands, work schedule, social/work culture, and personal considerations. The list is designed to stimulate thought about what is important to individuals in a career and includes opportunities for individuals to add priorities that are unique to them.

Tips for Success

- When providing initial instruction, emphasize the need for being selective and marking the + or - for only the statements that they have a strong "gut response" to—the ones that *must* or *must not* be included in any job they would consider.

- If preferences are identified that include blanks, individuals will need to check the appropriate line, such as marking either "indoors only" or "outdoors only" under work environment. In some sections, blank spaces are provided for individuals to add additional preferences or needs. Note that "NP" or "No Preference" is not provided as an option for those items that individuals add themselves. It is assumed, if they are adding a preference, that it is one that they feel strongly about one way or the other.

- When adding personal items to the bottom of the "Work Environment/Physical Demands" or "Personal Considerations" sections, it is particularly important that individuals be as specific as possible and record the statement in work-relevant terms. This will enable them to use the statement more effectively when performing the matching (i.e., discrepancy analysis) in Step 5. For example, a statement such as "avoid standing for more than one hour at a time, 3 hours per day maximum" is more helpful than the general statement "foot problem." "Daytime hours beginning no earlier than 7 a.m. and ending no later than 6 p.m., within a 20-mile radius of my home" is more helpful than "child care considerations."

- Individuals might need assistance in putting their personal preferences in work-relevant terms and sometimes require assistance in identifying them in the first place. If the administrator is aware of individuals' personal considerations, he or she can assist the

individuals in generating and recording these if they are unable to craft them on their own.

Step 2: Prioritize

In this step, individuals review the statements they have marked in Step 1, record and prioritize the top choices in list form, and then add them to the Career Priorities Profile chart.

Tips for Success

- It is particularly important for Step 2 that individuals record the preference statements in the proper context, either positive or negative. If individuals have a negative statement, it will require rephrasing (e.g., "*not* work alone" or "*not* work under pressure or deadlines").

- Occasionally individuals will list the general section heading as their priority. For example, they might list "Work Tasks and Responsibilities" as their first priority because they have marked the most statements in that section. Individuals will be unable to do the matching (i.e., discrepancy analysis) in Step 5 using the general section headings. Instead, they should choose individual preference statements, e.g., "continually learn new things" rather than "Work Tasks and Responsibilities" as their priority.

- Individuals might start with the "Work Tasks and Responsibilities" section and find five preferences that are important to them fairly quickly, list those, and stop there. The administrator should ensure that individuals have considered items from all content areas and that the list of eight items is a true prioritization of individuals' preferences.

- For some individuals, an intermediate step between Steps 1 ("Identify Your Preferences") and 2 ("Prioritize") may be required. If individuals have marked a number of statements with + or - or for any reason have difficulty making choices, it can sometimes be helpful for them to list their preference statements on another piece of paper before narrowing them down to the top eight. A separate list will remove extraneous statements from their consideration, and sometimes the act of writing down a preference statement will help individuals determine the strength of the preference.

- Index cards with a different preference statement written on each could also be used. Individuals would then place them in priority order, eliminating those of lesser importance.

- Some individuals may require assistance in transferring the information from Step 2 to the proper locations on the profile chart.

Step 3: Think About Education and Training

This section requires individuals to thoughtfully consider the duration and type of education or training they are interested in or willing to undertake, as well as the practical consideration of their income needs while preparing for a new career.

Tips for Success

- It is particularly important that there is not a conflict between the type of training individuals list and the duration of training they are willing to consider. For example, if individuals state that they are willing to consider one year or less of training, they should not have marked "Associate's degree" or "Apprenticeship program" under "Education/Training Type," as it exceeds the amount of time they are willing to spend in preparation for a new job or career.

- Some individuals may require assistance in transferring the information from Step 3 to the appropriate section of the profile chart. When transferring the information, individuals are given the option of writing their current education or the level they are willing to achieve. If individuals are considering both short-term and long-term career decisions, it might be useful to put both. Later in Step 5 they can match occupational choices to both their current and future education levels.

Step 4: Think About Your Salary

In this section, individuals think about what salary they need or desire. They will compare this with the average salary of the jobs they are interested in when researching their careers of interest. Encourage people to be realistic when considering their preferred salary.

Step 5: Research Careers that Interest You

In this section, individuals list the top four careers that they are considering. They do not have to list them in any particular order. They will then use occupational information resources to relate work priorities to desired jobs or careers.

Tips for Success

- If the *CPP* is used as part of a larger career assessment/exploration process, interest assessments—such as *Self-Directed Search* or the *Strong Interest Inventory*—should be administered first. This will assist individuals by generating options to explore.

- For recent college graduates, listings of careers by college major can be of benefit in generating career ideas. This is also beneficial for more-experienced individuals with degrees/work history in a particular content area looking to utilize their transferable skills in related careers. Sites on the Internet, such as Career Services of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington's "What Can I Do With A Major In..." (http://www.uncwil.edu/stuaff/career/Majors/index.htm), provide a listing of careers related to particular majors.

- The goal of Step 5 and of the Career Priorities Profile chart is to help individuals identify discrepancies between the priorities they have identified and the requirements or characteristics of occupations that interest them. By simply comparing their priorities to the occupational information, individuals will be able to make more-informed career decisions. The profile chart is purposely unstructured. Individuals can take notes in the

squares or simply indicate whether or not there is a match in a certain preference area. Some individuals may want more explicit guidance with this part. Although it is important for individuals to note whether there is a discrepancy, how they do it is much less important than that they do it. Using "+" or "−," "yes" or "no," or "agree" or "disagree" are easy ways to record the match or discrepancy.

- Sometimes individuals list a number of employer-specific preferences such as "receive health insurance and other benefits" or "work where skills/abilities are valued." These preferences usually cannot be validated using general career exploration resources such as the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. If individuals are just starting their career exploration, it might be beneficial for them to remove the employer-specific considerations from the profile chart and, instead, list preferences for which they can more easily find information. Individuals farther along in their career development may wish to do informational interviewing with local employers to gather that type of employer-specific information. For some individuals, a two-step process—first exploring general interests and then expanding on top choices using informational interviewing— can be beneficial.

- "Job Outlook" (the pink shaded square on the profile) includes availability as well as the projected growth rate for the job. It is particularly important in rural areas or other geographic areas in which a broad range of employment opportunities is not available. State or local informational resources will need to be utilized to determine local job availability. Individuals can record the prevalence of openings in their locale as well as whether the occupation they are exploring is a growth occupation or is declining.

- When comparing Education and Training, be sure that individuals consider all the qualifications required for a job. In addition to education or training, some jobs require licensing, professional certification, special qualifications, or credentials such as being able to obtain a security clearance. Individuals should list these and other similar career requirements in this column as well.

Step 6: Take the Next Step

This step encourages individuals to do some analysis of the information found and to set short- and long-term goals in order to take action.

By completing the *CPP*, individuals have participated in a self-discovery process. They will have gathered information about themselves and their careers of interest; (hopefully) learned something new; and clearly identified the discrepancies, if any, between their priorities and their career choices. Career targets might become immediately apparent after the profile chart is completed. If not immediately apparent, individuals might have narrowed the range of choices. Individuals may then wish to gather more information through informational interviewing or job shadowing or participate in career counseling to assist with their decision making.

Career counseling can assist individuals in a number of ways. First, a professional can aid individuals in determining the relative probability of actualization (i.e., achieving the desired

choice) or in finding ways to increase the prospect of actualization. A professional might also be able to counsel individuals on the future ramifications of choices made at the present time. Simultaneous pursuit of two paths, if feasible, may also be explored. For individuals who lack confidence in their choices, a counselor can help them locate the source of their lack of confidence and aid in confirming their decisions or reaching different ones in which they will feel more confident (Gati, 2001). Counselors may also assist individuals in finding ways to address a strongly desired preference through avocational pursuits (such as joining an archaeological society instead of a career in archaeology or becoming a volunteer weather observer for the National Weather Service instead of a career as a meteorologist) while taking their career path in another direction. Compromises or trade-offs of one choice versus another choice can be discussed in relation to the career decision maker's priorities.

In cases where discrepancies are identified, individuals can develop a plan to resolve them. The assistance of a professional can be particularly effective in assisting individuals in identifying internal conflicts or external conflicts (i.e., differing views of a significant other) (Gati & Krausz, 1996). For example, an individual who is self-supporting and initially states an interest in spending two years or less in training/education for employment has an internal conflict with pursuing a bachelor's degree in a chosen field of engineering. He or she might try to resolve this conflict by exploring grants/loans, a higher-paying part-time job, alternative housing arrangements, or other cost-cutting alternatives to enable him- or herself to spend a longer time in pursuing the needed education.

A copy of the Career Priorities Profile chart has been included at the end of this guide. You may photocopy it and use it with clients who want to further their career exploration and research.

Observations from the *Career Priorities Profile*

As with any assessment tool, there is the opportunity to make a number of observations. If used in the context of a vocational evaluation or career assessment process, some of the relevant observations may include the following:

- Individuals can spend several hours completing this tool or spend less than 15 minutes—it says a lot about their commitment to making a good career choice.

- Sometimes individuals will have difficulty identifying physical limitations or personal considerations in Step 1. If, through interview or review of records, there are factors for individuals to consider that they have not identified, this may reflect an overall lack of awareness of their personal situation, disability, or health concerns. This might have an impact on employment as the individuals might not seek needed accommodations or they might seek employment for which they are not able to fully meet the demands.

- Occasionally, individuals will not identify discrepancies where they are clearly present. They instead stand up for their own views about their career choices in defiance of the objective career information (Campbell, 2004). "The emotional involvement in the career decision-making process augments these cognitive biases" (Gati, 1986). In these situations, ongoing career or personal counseling may be needed.

- Equally problematic is when individuals identify significant discrepancies with all of their chosen careers (e.g., an interest in only law enforcement/security work with a history of criminal convictions) and do not wish to explore other career options that would be feasible given their objective constraints. Again, ongoing career or personal counseling may be needed.

- Because the *CPP* involves following detailed written instructions, this may serve as an opportunity to assess those abilities or as an opportunity to determine individuals' willingness to seek clarification.

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MY CAREER PRIORITIES PROFILE			
	Job: _____	Job: _____	Job: _____	Job: _____
Education and Training _____				
Earnings From _____ To _____				
Job Outlook				
Priority 1 _____				
Priority 2 _____				
Priority 3 _____				
Priority 4 _____				
Priority 5 _____				
Priority 6 _____				
Priority 7 _____				
Priority 8 _____				
Related Jobs				