

A YOUNG  
PROFESSIONAL'S GUIDE TO  
WHY, HOW AND WHERE  
YOU WANT TO WORK



**NAVIGATING**  
*YOUR* **CAREER**

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Boom

## INTRODUCTION

*Of course I want to make an impact and do something with purpose... or is that just what everyone expects me to say? My friends all find start-ups cool... but do they really know what they're talking about? My family tells me to 'follow my passion'... but how can I, if I don't know what jobs are out there? And anyway, I'm not sure I've found my passion yet.*

No wonder so many university leavers are paralysed by indecision, and so many young professionals find themselves in jobs they do not like. Why? Because there is a plethora of options. What's more, they are navigating the expectations of parents, friends and society, as well as their own desires – some of which may be unrealistic.

These dilemmas are the reason why we have written the book you hold in your hands, loosely based on the authors' highly rated course at the Business School of the University of Amsterdam. The chapters that follow address today's career challenges by offering new insights and tools to better understand yourself and the evolving job market. We critically examine generational characteristics and challenge the conventional wisdom of 'follow your passion'. We provide a comprehensive guide for those looking to tailor their career paths to their unique strengths and desires. We thoughtfully demonstrate how to match personal aspirations with the ever-shifting landscape of professional opportunities.

Additionally, the book offers a grounded overview on how the work environment has evolved into its current form, from the diverse generational viewpoints of the co-authors. This uniquely three-dimensional perspective provides aspiring young professionals with key insights that they would otherwise miss.

How are we going to achieve all that? First, our approach transcends the conventional model of climbing the career ladder and encourages a broader view of professional success. Quite apart from analysing your dilemma (and showing that it is perhaps not as bad as it seems),

it addresses the crucial but rarely asked question: 'Why do you want to work?' Second, we include an online personality test (free of charge to purchasers of the book) that connects the many sectors, organisations and roles of the working world to your own natural preferences. Third, we present an overview of the three phases in working life, addressing how you can best realise your potential across the entirety of the career ahead of you. In particular, we explain the crucial transition from personal effectiveness to organisational effectiveness.

Just to make it clear, we will *not* identify your ideal career. Instead, we will equip you with the tools and methodology to find out for yourself what your first jobs might look like. These insights will help you to find the missing link between your preferences and the working world by developing a job market strategy.

Although this book is written mainly for undergraduates, recent graduates and early career changers, it also speaks to organisations seeking to recruit members of Generations Y and Z and parents seeking to better understand their children's career aspirations and challenges (as well as insights on how their own career has evolved). In addition, it will appeal to anyone interested in the job market, particularly professional recruitment consultants and careers advisers.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

We recommend reading the book in order because, together, the chapters present a strategic, structured approach to the job market. Having said that, some readers may prefer to skim through certain chapters or skip occasional sections. Here's a quick preview of all the chapters to help guide your reading.

## CHAPTER 1: CONFRONTING YOUR CAREER

*We live in a world with more opportunities than ever before. But in that case, why do so many people struggle to find personal and professional happiness? Why do so many twenty-somethings burn out? Why do*

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*so many others stall completely in their careers? And why do so few know what they want out of life? Welcome to the twenty-first-century phenomenon of the quarter-life crisis.*

This initial chapter paints a picture of the quarter-life crisis and identifies the 'job-market dilemma' as the main source of the problem. Should you aspire to making money or societal impact? Should you seek prestige or intellectual satisfaction? Should you follow your passion or settle for a more practical option? The first step to resolving such dilemmas is to understand them.

### CHAPTER 2: DISSECTING THE DILEMMA

*The reasons for the job-market dilemma can be broken down into three distinct yet interrelated issues. First, there is a bewildering array of options available today, compared to even a few years ago. How can you possibly find out about all of them? Second, most of today's aspiring professionals are members of Generations Y and Z. Typically, the experiences of these two generations make it difficult for them to find their 'dream job', particularly when it comes to making trade-offs. Third, social media, peer and parental pressure are at an all-time high. How are you supposed to find your own path in life in the face of so many different influences and competing expectations?*

This chapter takes a deep historical dive into each of three issues and reassures readers that they are not alone. It explains the evolution of the job market over time, the differences between the various generations (Silent, Boomers, X, Y, Z and A), as well as the major game changer since the beginning of this century: digitalisation. Finally, it lays the ground for focusing on why *you* – not your friends, your parents or your generational herd – want to work.

### CHAPTER 3: WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK?

*It's strange how few people ask themselves the question in the title of this chapter. To put it simply, if you can't define what you're looking for, how*

*on earth can you recognise it when you see it out there in the job market? Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that in a world with more information than ever before, so many people make bad career decisions...*

Based on experience and research, we have identified the seven most important reasons why people want to work. This chapter helps you to understand your personal reasons for working by unpacking them one by one. It's a good first step to becoming more intimately acquainted with yourself – in terms that relate to the job market.

### **CHAPTER 4: KNOW THYSELF**

*Personality tests – they always teach you something, right? They confirm your suspicions about yourself, they make you confront traits that you've never faced up to, and sometimes they tell you something entirely new about yourself! But the one thing they can't do is find you a perfect job. That requires further work...*

This crucial chapter analyses how getting to know yourself better can help you find the perfect job... and how even an imperfect job can help you to understand yourself. The chapter also uncovers the sense and nonsense of personality and aptitude tests. Best of all, it introduces a work-focused assessment tool that we have been using for many years in our course for master's students. This powerful instrument, the AEM-Cube, gives insights into the kinds of roles and environments where you will naturally thrive, those where you will need to make more of an effort and those that you might want to avoid altogether.

### **CHAPTER 5: THE WORKING WORLD**

*How do you translate your personality and reasons for working into a sector, organisation or role, especially as you've never ventured into the world of work before? Of course, you can go to career events, talk to recruiters and recent recruits, even do internships and work experience, but these are essentially random encounters. Why should you leave such an important matter to chance ?*

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This chapter tries to improve the reader's chances and broaden their scope by giving a systematic overview of what's out there. We start with a quick overview of *sectors* – from business to government to not-for-profit. Then we move on to a typology of *organisations* by size, ownership, culture and stage of development. Finally, we look at roles. What do all those opaque job titles mean and how do they all fit together?

### **CHAPTER 6: WHERE PERSONALITY PROFILES MEET JOB ROLES**

*Now you know yourself, and you understand the job market better than you did before. But you still have one major problem: how do you translate your personality profile into a role, an organisation and/or a sector?*

In this chapter, we return to your personal AEM Cube profile (as introduced in Chapter 4) and start to map it onto the working world (as described in Chapter 5). We also tell you about other people's profiles, which should give you a head start in making the most of your first job and ease your progress through the subsequent phases of working life.

### **CHAPTER 7: THE THREE PHASES OF WORKING LIFE**

*In all honesty, you're probably focused on your first job. At the start of your career, it's normal not to be too interested in the long term. We fully understand that. However, with so many options on the table, we recommend that you try to understand their future implications.*

This chapter helps the reader to deal with the questions that arise once they start work. What is my potential? How can I ensure that I fulfil that potential? Where should I be heading? Who should I become: a specialist or a generalist? When should I make my first job move? To answer these questions, we use the simple yet effective metaphor of building a house. First, you must assemble your toolbox and learn how to use your tools. Second, you must design and build a house that fully meets your personal needs. Third, you can settle down and live in the house you have constructed, continuing to make the improvements that will make it your home. Each of these career phases requires

a different approach. To help you choose the right approach at every stage, we carried out some original empirical research, which offers some interesting takeaways about career strategising.

## CHAPTER 8: HOW TO CHOOSE

*This career business sure seems complicated! You have to recognise the dilemma, understand your personality, uncover your innermost desires, scan the entire world of work and project yourself into the future. How on earth can you do all of this at once?*

This chapter brings together all the considerations of the previous chapters, using the model of the search engine. The reader now has a worldwide web of possibilities *and* the correct search terms. But realistically, the algorithm may not identify a job with everything they are looking for, let alone put the ideal career at the top of the list. Any job search inevitably involves trade-offs and compromises – and it helps if the job seeker can weigh them objectively.

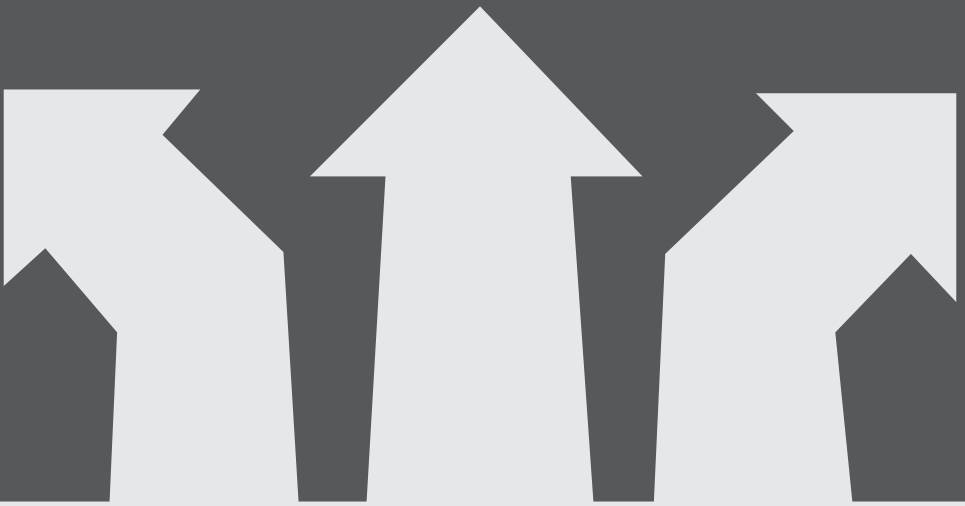
This book is just a starting point for the reader's own research and information-gathering – over many cups of coffee, both alone and with other people. This final chapter deals with the practicalities of that process, whether for a first job, an early move or a later career change. It takes you back to the starting point, and the questions to ask yourself along the way. It reemphasises the importance of navigating a strategic course with an open mind, looking beyond the usual suspects for the role that really resolves your own job-market dilemma.

[www.navigatingyourcareer.info](http://www.navigatingyourcareer.info)



# CHAPTER 1

## CONFRONTING YOUR CAREER





Finding the right career path has never been more challenging for young professionals. With an overwhelming number of options, they must navigate the expectations of family, friends and society – all while trying to figure out what truly excites them.

This book addresses these challenges. It critically examines generational characteristics and questions the often-repeated advice to ‘follow your passion’, offering a more practical, grounded approach to building a career. It sheds light on how the job market has evolved, helping readers understand the landscape and how to navigate it.

In addition to addressing career dilemmas, the book poses a fundamental but often overlooked question: *Why do you want to work?* To help answer this, the book connects individuals’ natural preferences with characteristics of the many sectors, organisations and roles in the working world, identifying both where and how they want to work. Finally, it offers a roadmap of the three key phases of working life, showing how to unlock personal potential throughout a career.

While primarily written for graduates and early-career professionals, this book is also a valuable resource for employers looking to better understand and attract talent from new generations, as well as for parents seeking to grasp their children’s career aspirations and challenges – along with insights into how their own careers have evolved.

A unique three-generation author collaboration offering diverse insights – **Sikko Onnes** draws from his extensive experience at the executive search firm Egon Zehnder; **Ron Soonieus** shares his multifaceted expertise as a senior advisor to consulting firm, Boston Consulting Group, and Director in Residence at business school INSEAD; and **Remon Jasperse**, a young professional at KPMG, is living proof that the approach set out in this book works!

