



Career Planning: Are We Expecting Too Much from Middle Schoolers?



This is the fourth post in a series on the role of student self-assessment in career planning. In this post, I discuss the emergence of mandated career plans for students, a weakness in the current process, and a solution that better serves our students.

In several states, students are required to create career plans as early as 7th and 10th grades. It's mandated to the extent that, in principle, a student cannot progress past 7th grade without a plan. While this well-intentioned approach aims to create talent pipelines, there are two key issues:

1. **Inadequate Tools for Decision-Making:** Students are expected to make informed, long-term decisions using outdated self-assessment tools or, in some cases, no support at all.
2. **Stressful Decision-Making:** The pressure to decide on a future career path so early can be overwhelming.

Expecting 7th graders to make critical life decisions without adequate support tools can have profound implications if the chosen career path proves unsuitable. Traditional tools often fail to enhance self-understanding, with interest surveys merely matching students to jobs (without rationalizing the match) and personality tools offering little narrative for meaningful self-reflection. Additionally, these tools are rarely used by employers, making them disconnected from the realities of the workforce.

For career planning to be effective and stress free, it must be an intrinsic process. Students should be encouraged to undertake self-study and use self-knowledge to make big decisions with confidence and with a sense of control over the process.

Career planning can be daunting due to the unknowns and uncertainties involved. Adults often fear the unknown, so it's essential to consider the added challenge for students who are still forming their self-identity while making long-term decisions.



The greatest gift we can offer students is the opportunity for self-study, helping them uncover their talents, qualities, and unique abilities. Simplified neuroscience can provide unprecedented insight into the most important subject—understanding oneself.

As the workplace and job landscape continually evolve, we shouldn't expect a fixed plan from a 7th grader. It would be more productive and less stressful for students and parents if the expectation at 7th grade was focused on career awareness, understanding potential career options, and recognizing key factors in finding a good occupational fit.

With a growing understanding of themselves, by 10th grade, students are better equipped to select a career and commit to a learning program aligned with their career goals. Furthermore, a grounded level of self-understanding has lifetime application thereby preparing students for a disruptive work life.

Give students the opportunity to learn about self before learning about careers.

Mosaic Solutions: what we're about:

We work in the intersection of education and the workplace. Our formula is simple: the right pathway into the right job for the right student/candidate. We think and act holistically, recognizing that to make this formula a reality requires connectivity of the workforce ecosystem and all its stakeholders.

Practical neuroscience generates robust data about the two fundamental components that drive the workforce ecosystem: data about people and data about jobs.