This is a 4-minute read that suggests expanding the use of our project management tools when analytic thinking is needed. Specifically, Robin discusses a tool that helps with the job hunt.

In my experience, project managers (PM) are not much prone to job-hopping; perhaps after 5 years or more a change might be called for. Unless dark clouds are on the horizon, the process should not be rushed. Job changes, marriage, and house-buying need careful thought and an unpressured process. Although mocked for representing an over-analytic approach to life, decision-making tools commonly used as part of PM can also be usefully migrated to everyday life. (Yes, even marriage!)

In this post I will walk through a simple decision-making tool I have used to focus on key elements of a new job offer. Benefits are mainly in avoiding a bad decision, and in highlighting the key negotiating points – where you can accept compromise, and where you must draw the line.

A Decision Tool

Virtually all discussion on job-seeking is centred on 'selling yourself' to a prospective employer – writing resumes that defeat robots, answering interview questions with skill, mustering impeccable references, and making a favourable first impression. All important, yes, but they ignore the number one factor in job hunting – is the job right for you? When you go for the closing interview, you'd better be sure where you stand on that, as this is your last opportunity to swing the points. Just like PM, the best preparation is a consistent and repeatable tool that captures what you consider to be important.

Tool Format

This is a simple format worth adapting to your own particular view of what's important in a job.

DECISION-ASSIST

- **Criteria** used for job selection
- **Significance** or weight of each criterion
- A **Score** on how the criteria are met
- **Confidence** in the Score

Like all decisions, criteria need to be identified and listed as explained in the next section. Inevitably, criteria are not equally important and their significance to the decision should be expressed in semantic terms such as: essential, important, desirable. Each criterion should then be scored, first for your current job, and then for the new job you are considering. I use a 10-point scale for this, with a semantic expression used for the extremes and the mid-point. For example; a score of 1 means the criterion is barely met at all, a score of 5 means it's met in some regards and not others, and 10 means it's very well met. Because the tool is dealing with considerable uncertainty, especially regarding the new job, a useful additional scoring factor is the confidence you have in the assigned score. This can be expressed as a percentage at 10%-point increments with 90% as the high score and 30% as the low score (if you want to assign a confidence lower than that then maybe you should change the rating!).

As is often the case, the creation of the spreadsheet is not quite as important as the process to get there, which helps focus the mind and eliminates over-reaction to what might be short-term problems.

Criteria

The choice of criteria is personal, but to keep the process manageable I recommend no more than ten be listed. Here are eight that I have used and could form the base for your selection:

1. Compensation: self-explanatory.
2. Commitment: the ability or nature of the firm to engender your personal commitment.
3. Sense of Accomplishment: attributes of the job and environment that provide satisfaction.
4. Work/Lifestyle Balance: demands of the job outside business hours.
5. Safety and Security: an assessment of the risks in the position – salary, bonus, downsizing, takeover etc.

6. Positioning for Future: the fit of the job with your future ambitions, internal to the firm or external.
7. Responsibility and Authority: an assessment as to whether these will be adequate to meet the accountabilities of the job.
8. Management and Colleagues: an assessment of cultural fit and personal compatibility.

Example

Here is an example of two criteria and their ratings. Reviewing these results should prompt the following questions: 1) what additional information is needed to improve the confidence rating? 2) What must be negotiated to improve the criterion score? 3) Would you take the new job or reshape the existing?

CRITERIA	SIGNIFICANCE	PRESENT JOB SCORE 1-10	CONFIDENCE %	NEW JOB SCORE 1-10	CONFIDENCE %
Sense of Accomplishment	Essential	3	90%	8	40%
Safety & Security	Desirable	8	80%	4	70%

Takeaway

Most PMs have, or should have, proficiency in decision-making tools such as Kepner-Tregoe, which I have adapted here to create a simple tool to help with job evaluation. My suggestion is to apply PM tools to other areas of professional or even personal life where a more analytic approach might be advantageous. There is a long story on my own experiences, but suffice to say here that sometimes the tool gives the 'wrong' answer! So, these tools should be more correctly named 'decision-assist'.

Other tools also have a role to be considered in decision-making outside the project world – the (well-known) list of pros and cons, the above the line/below the line, the lifeboat list, risk factor tables (cause and effect), force field analysis, critical success factor identification, SWOT tables, cost benefit analysis, and so forth. Each of these techniques treats the problem or decision by applying a specific framework; it's the selection and application of an appropriate framework that will help you 'see the wood for the trees' and bring clarity to the process.

As with so many things, the real value of the job evaluation tool is not in getting a 'result' but in following a discipline that flushes out the true criteria for the decision, identifies how much information you still need, and where to focus your negotiation to get the outcome you want.

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January 2020

Robin's recent publication is *'Commercial Delivery Methodology'* (CDM) available as a Google eBook download. This is a phase-by-phase specification of how to sell and deliver a project contract and make a profit. A treasure-trove of techniques, models, and templates, it's the perfect companion to *'Commercial Project Management'* (CPM).

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