

Various research highlights the complexities around understanding career progression. People's career choices and views on career progression are influenced by psychological, sociological, geographical, historical, political, economic, and educational factors, and various models and theoretical frameworks try to reflect this.

Some literature looks at how career progression shapes the identity of the person. McMahon and Patton (2017) argue in their work that career progression and aspirations are influenced by a person's demographic background, personal characteristics, values deemed important within their life, and how they fit into their society. A person's career trajectory is also influenced by the environment into which they were born, the opportunities presented to them, and the socio-economic class they identify with.

Hodkinson (2008) also takes a sociological approach to understanding career decision-making and progression under the "careership" theory. This theory advocates for a nuanced understanding of career development, by connecting an individual's personal characteristics, skills, interests, values, and aspirations with their social networks, resources, and inequalities, all of which can shape their career trajectory. The theory also acknowledges that careers are not linear, and unexpected events in a person's life can significantly change a person's career path. Careership theory offers insights into how effective career counselling and support can lead to better decision-making and better-suited career paths for an individual with opportunities for progression.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2021) has also published significant research on career progression. Their research consisted of conducting online surveys across six countries to understand better the barriers people face in accessing career guidance services. The OECD

regards career progression as “a fundamental policy lever to help adults successfully navigate a constantly evolving labour market through advice and information on job and training opportunities” (pg. 7). The research also highlights the importance of governments taking responsibility to provide strategic interventions to shape people's career trajectories.

In our report, Making Strides, the research participants consistently framed career progression as ultimately working towards a “good job.” Available literature has provided frameworks to define what a good job is. The Taylor Review, a government-commissioned independent review, examined the changing nature of work and its impact on worker rights and protections. The Review found that the labour market was changing in the context of a growing gig economy, and existing legislation to protect workers had become outdated. This risked the rise of insecure and exploitative work that harmed workers' health and well-being. While the Taylor Review acknowledged the importance of work-life balance and fair employment practices, it argued that a comprehensive definition of “good work” should extend beyond initial job placement. The Review called for greater government awareness of career progression pathways and effective support mechanisms to enable people to progress within their chosen careers. With a wide array of recommendations, the Review culminated in the Good Work Plan. The government’s responded by outlining its intentions to implement recommendations aimed at improving workers' working conditions and rights (Taylor et al 2017).

Additionally, the Trade Union's Congress (TUC) also has set out a definition of "decent work" in their Great Jobs Agenda (2017), which identified the following as constituting a "great job": having a voice at work, fair and decent pay, regular hours, fair treatment and respect, healthy workplaces, and opportunities for learning and progression.

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