

Ability and Interest are the two major variables in career planning.



Written by: Registered Educational Psychologist, Mr. Pang Chi-wah

As Hong Kong shifted from industrial to service-oriented industries, the constant turnover of societal sectors has left many youths feeling extremely helpless about their future prospects. Some young individuals are unsure of what they want or what career path to pursue. If they choose the wrong subjects in secondary school or university, it adds more confusion to their future. Recognizing this, the education sector has begun to emphasize students' career planning.

Youthful years are invaluable, and time is a precious resource. In our growth process, engaging in career planning is akin to a national investment. However, the investment made by young individuals is not monetary but temporal. Where should they allocate this time?

When young individuals engage in career planning, the key consideration regarding time allocation revolves around their personal interests and abilities. Ability refers to what a person can do, which can be objectively assessed or evaluated and compared with the requirements of a job to determine compatibility.

Interest is more subjective, rooted in personal feelings or desires, sometimes challenging to assess objectively due to individual differences. Young people's interests may be influenced by their family background, learning experiences, and social environment, and can be understood through personal interviews.

Considering students' abilities and interests, the two major variables in their career planning can be categorized into four groups:

Category One:

These students may lack the ability or interest, or choose subjects and careers they have no ability or interest in, leading to a painful future. Even though they may currently lack specific interests or abilities, it doesn't mean they never will. Therefore, it is crucial for family members and teachers to help them discover their interests and abilities starting now.

The solution to this issue is to explore different areas. Schools can collaborate with various industries to establish long-term partnerships, allowing students to intern or learn in these organizations. Through these activities, schools can help students better understand the industries they may face in the future and discover their interests and abilities.

Simultaneously, this can reduce their sense of helplessness and confusion when entering society.



Category Two:

These students have interests but lack sufficient ability. They might be interested in certain subjects or careers but have a noticeable gap in their learning abilities. For example, a student might aspire to be a doctor after watching a movie and saving lives, yet their science grades are poor. Or they may wish to be a teacher, educating the next generation, but their speaking or language skills are lacking. Perhaps these students can improve through hard work to bridge the gap between their interests and abilities, but they must be prepared for the significant pressure they may face in the future.

Getting involved and participating hands-on can dispel misconceptions students may have about certain industries due to media or family influence. For instance, a psychiatrist in a movie might seem to earn a substantial income by simply talking to patients. While this appears to be an excellent job, in reality, it involves extensive paperwork, analysis, and diagnosis after conversing with patients. Visits and internships can allow them to truly experience the career path they envision and determine if it aligns with their interests. Therefore, in career planning, time should be invested in various visits and experiences to validate their planned career path.

Category Three:

These students have the ability but lack interest in sustaining it. Contrary to Category Two students, these individuals are often driven by their academic performance in selecting subjects or careers. For instance, excelling in mathematics might lead them to pursue accounting in university, or proficiency in languages might lead them to study linguistics and become a teacher. However, they may realize they have chosen paths where they have the ability but lack interest, potentially leading to a lack of motivation or persistence in the future.

The external environment, such as family or school, can also influence the development of interests in these students. For example, a student may aspire to be an artist, possessing talent and a strong interest, but in a society like Hong Kong that prioritizes commerce, opportunities for artistic development may be limited, dampening their interest. Therefore, teachers and social workers need to have a keen understanding of different industries' characteristics and create a stimulating atmosphere to nurture students' interests.



Category Four:

These students have found careers they are interested in and have the ability to study or delve into. Their career planning direction is clear, allowing them to progress towards a specific goal more easily. However, while these students may have identified their abilities and interests, they still need a good learning attitude to continue developing and truly succeed.

Although Category Four is the most ideal combination, few students can achieve this early on. It is essential to make students understand that career planning involves a growth process, a gradual transformation from one category to another through continuous learning and experience in the journey of life.