A Fresh Look at Career Theories

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What is a theory?

- A theory is 'a group of logically organized laws or relationships that constitute explanation in a discipline' (Heinen, 1985)

- Theories try to explain and allow us to understand behaviour

'There is nothing more practical than a good theory'

- **They can add to our understanding which helps:**
  - to understand and empathise with our clients
  - to guide our conversations
- **Sharing a theory with clients:**
  - can help to validate their experiences and feelings
  - can lead to insights for the client
  - can further enhance our professional credibility

What are the problems with theories?

Jumping to conclusions

Assuming you understand so you stop listening

Why do we need new theories?

- The old theories are flawed

- The world has changed

- Our understanding has improved

Fresh career development theories

1. **Career Inaction Theory** (De Vos & Verbbruggen, 2021)

   Helping us to understand why clients sometimes do nothing

2. **Identity status theory** (Kolbert et al., 2021)

   Helping us to understand clients' career identity development

3. **Career self-determination theory** (Chen, 2017)

   Helping us to understand career motivation and satisfaction

4. **System 1 and 2 thinking** (Kahneman, 2012)

   Helping us to understand human decision-making

Can you think of a client who has found it difficult:

- *To motivate themselves to act?*
- *To work out who they want to be?*
- *To find career or job satisfaction?*
- *To make a decision?*

1. Career Inaction Theory

Verbruggen & De Vos, 2020

1. Career Inaction Theory

Helping us to understand
why people do nothing

Inertia-enhancing mechanisms

Fear and anxiety

Career choices almost always have an uncertain outcome

Short term-ism

Career choices generally entail giving up something safe and familiar

Cognitive overload

Career choices are extraordinarily complex

What can help?

Fear and anxiety

Role models

Making one small change

Short term-ism

A crystal clear desired future

Cognitive overload

Step by step approach

Making one small change

2. Identity Status Theory

Marcia, 1966

Kobert et al., 2021

2. Identity Status Theory

Helping us to understand career identity development

	Low Decidedness	High Decidedness

	Low Decidedness	High Decidedness
Low Exploration		
High Exploration		

	Low Decidedness	High Decidedness
Low Exploration	**Identity Diffusion** No clear ideas Not doing any research Feeling anxious	
High Exploration		

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High Exploration		

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High Exploration	**Identity Moratorium** Open to ideas Doing lots of research Might be struggling with the uncertainty	

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Low Exploration	**Identity Diffusion** No clear ideas Not doing any research Feeling anxious	**Identity Foreclosure** Fixed career ideas Haven't done much research Weak rationale for the choice
High Exploration	**Identity Moratorium** Open to ideas Doing lots of research Might be struggling with the uncertainty	**Identity Achievement** Clear career ideas Convincing rationale Ready for the next step

Identity Diffusion

No clear ideas
Not doing any research
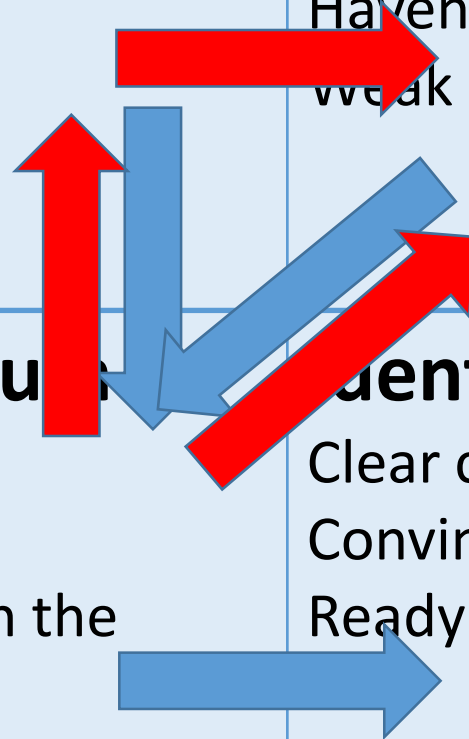Feeling anxious

Identity Foreclosure

Fixed career ideas
Haven't done much research
Weak rationale for the choice

Identity Moratorium

Open to ideas
Doing lots of research
Might be struggling with the uncertainty

Identity Achievement

Clear career ideas
Convincing rationale
Ready for the next step

3. Career Self-Determination Theory

Ryan & Deci, 1995

Chen, 2017

3. Career Self-Determination Theory

Helping us to understand human motivation in career development

Ryan & Deci, 1985

Career Relatedness

Career Autonomy

Career Competence

Chen, 2017

Career Relatedness

Does your job allow for good relationships inside and outside work?

Career Autonomy

Career Competence

Career Relatedness

Does your job allow for good relationships inside and outside work?

Career Autonomy

Career Competence

Have you got the right attributes; are you able to do your job; and do you feel confident in your job?
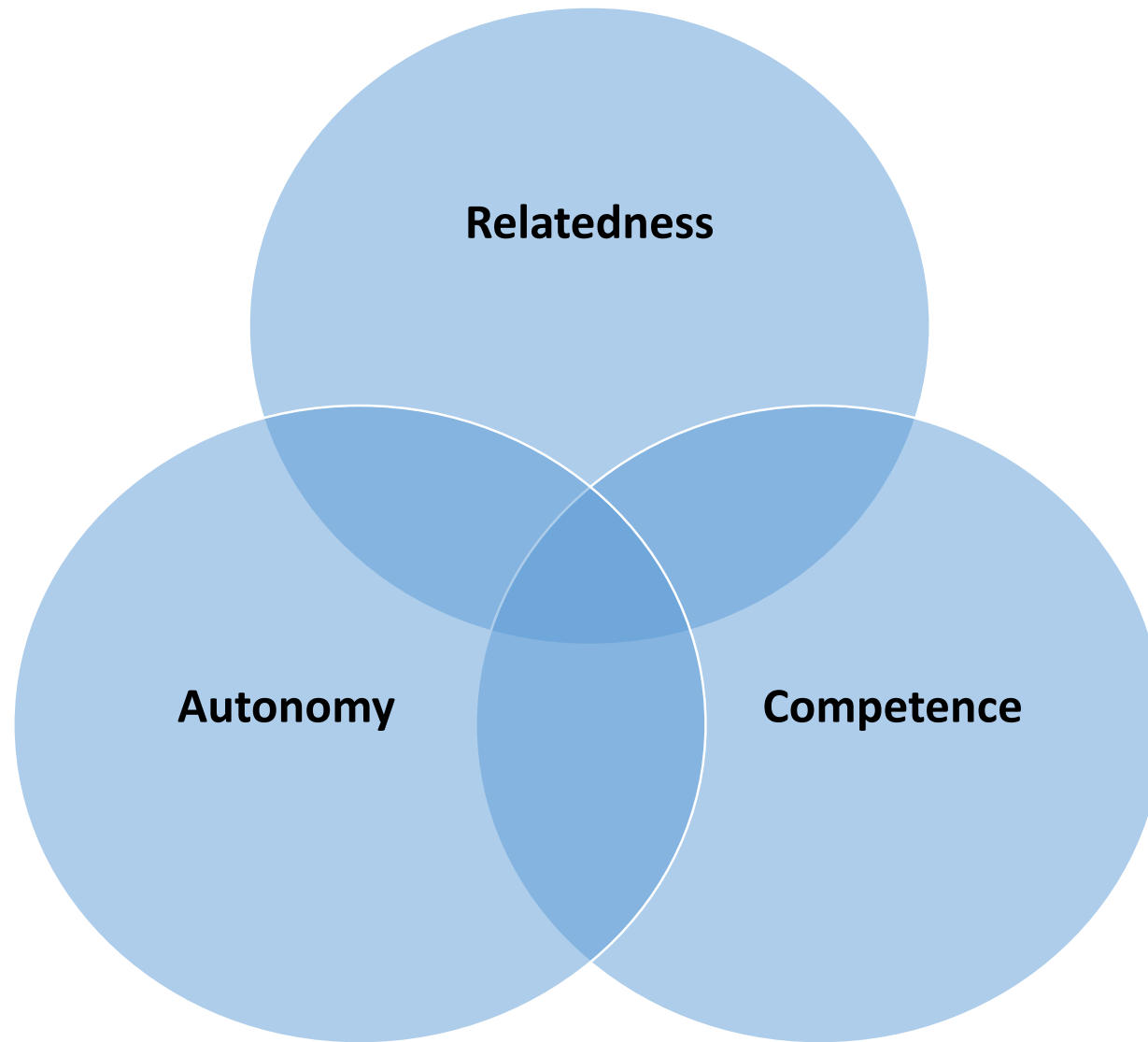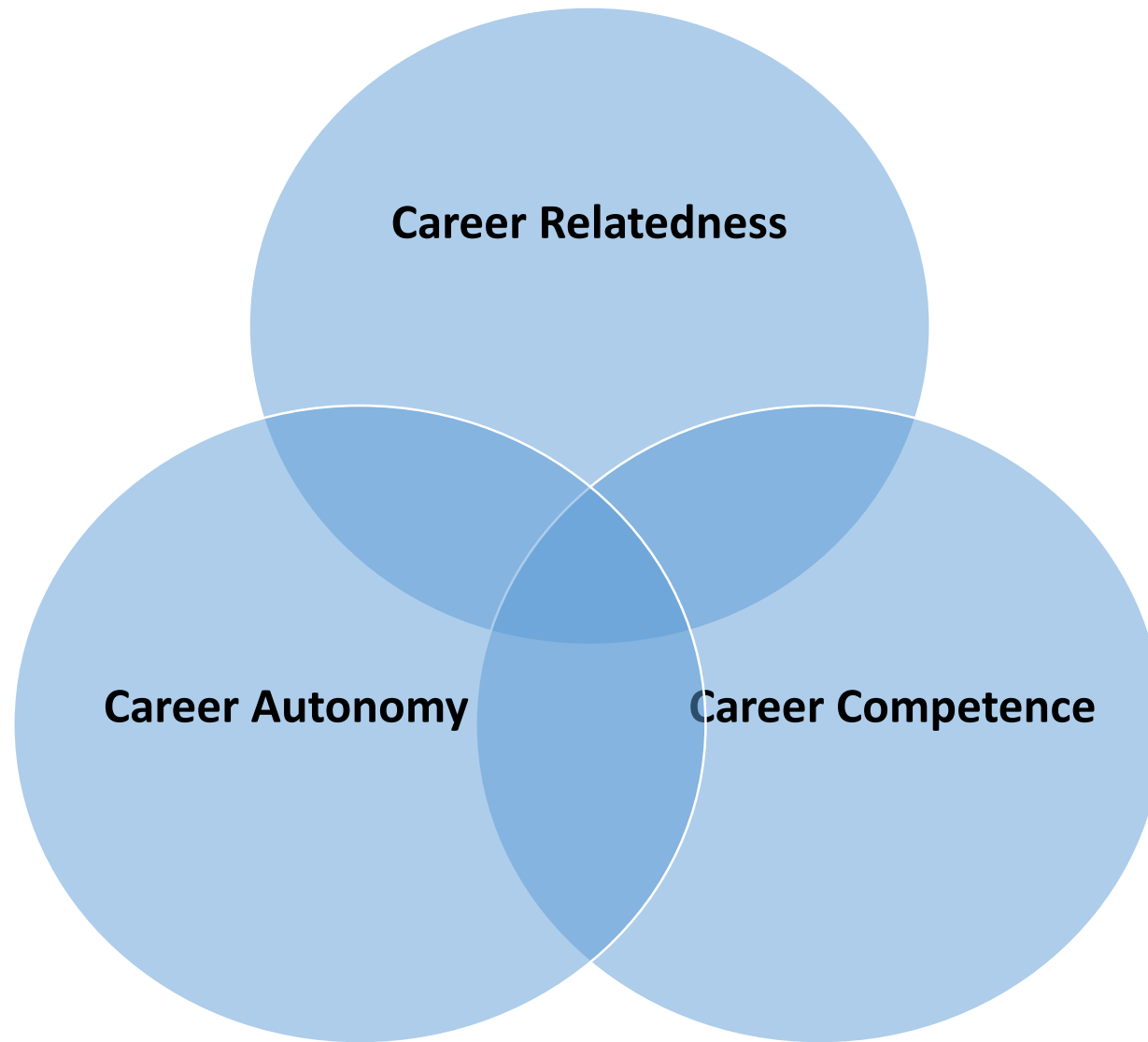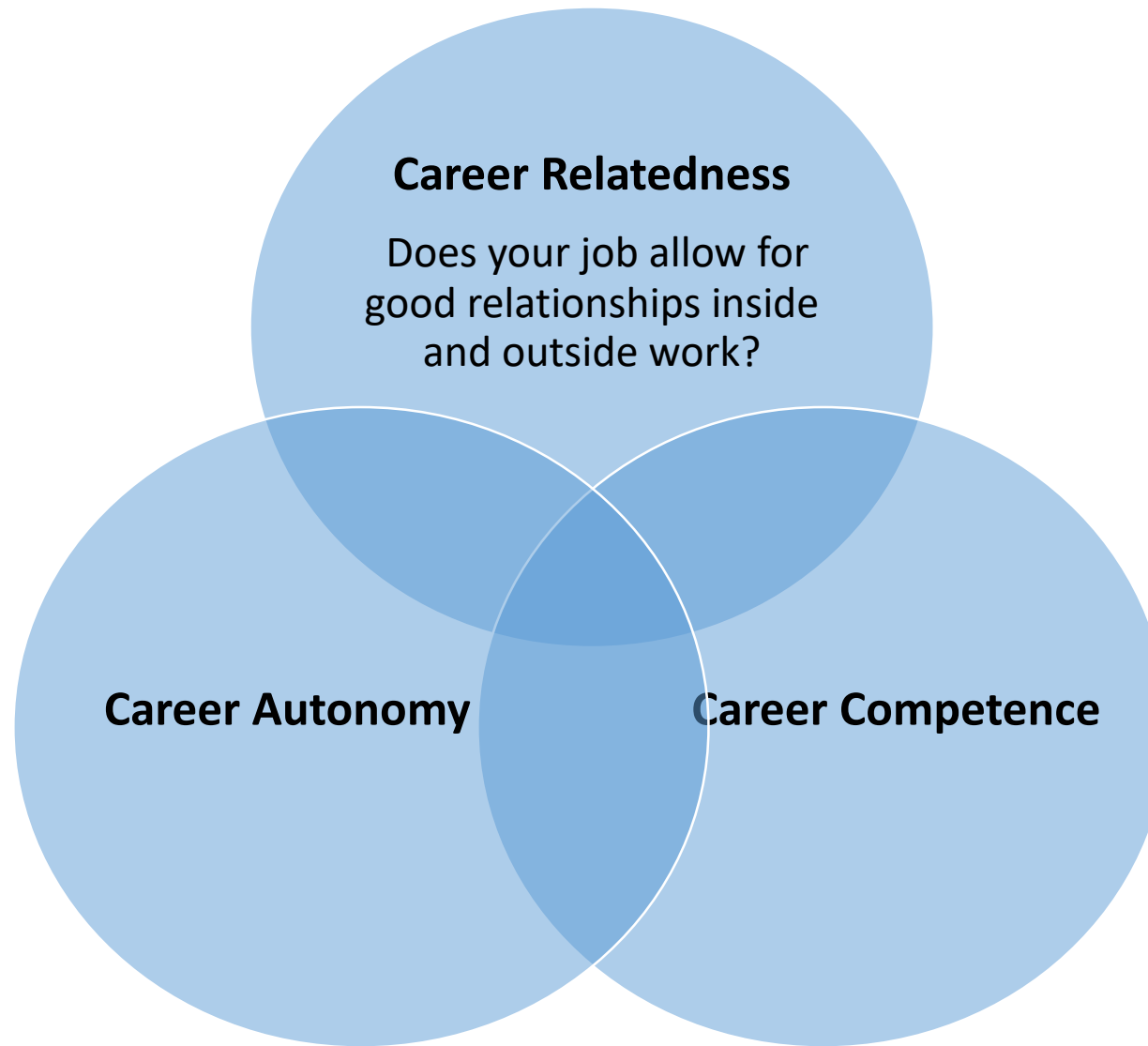
ON A SCALE OF ONE TO TEN...

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
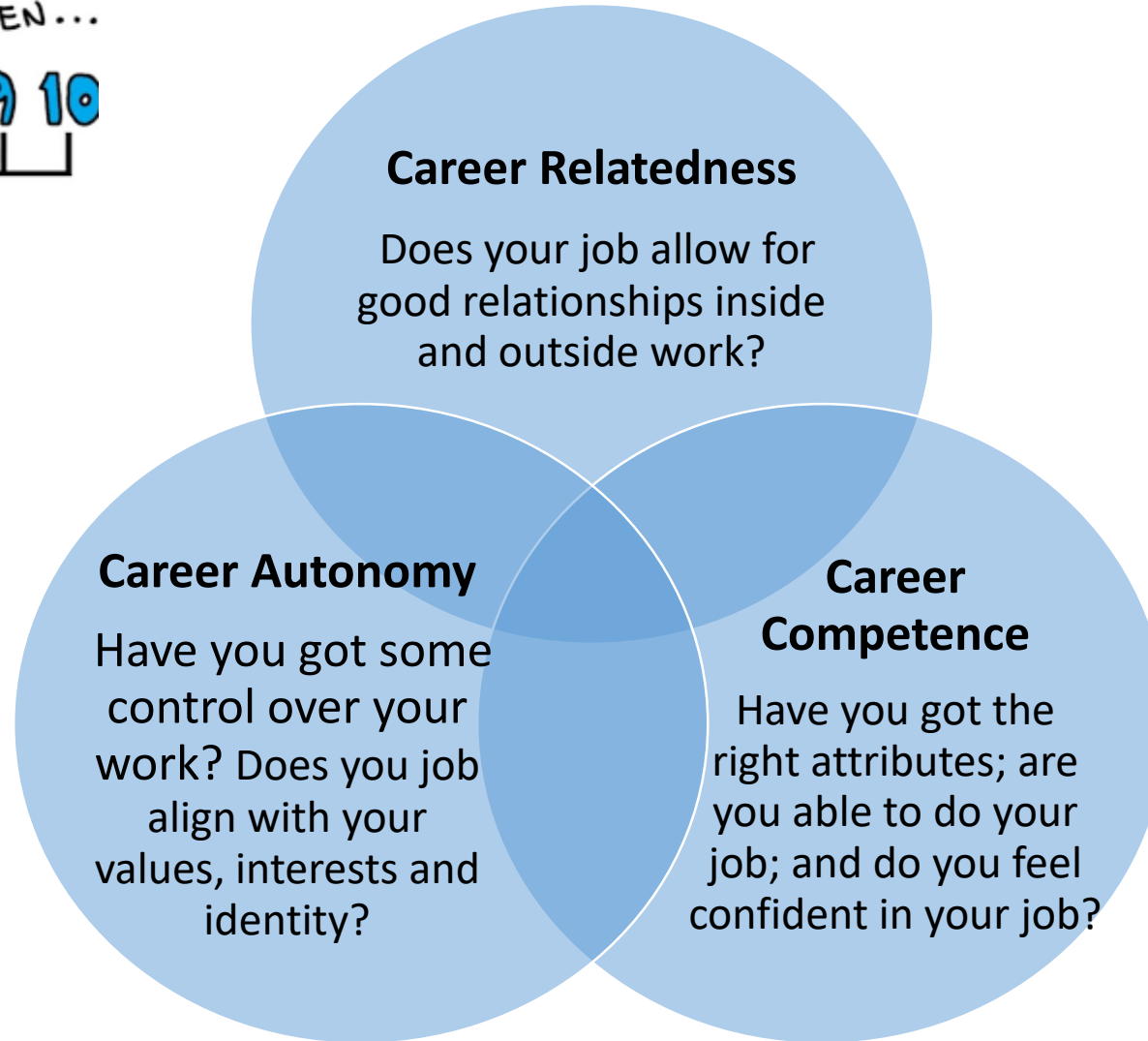
Think about your own job:

What mark would you give your job for each of these three psychological needs?
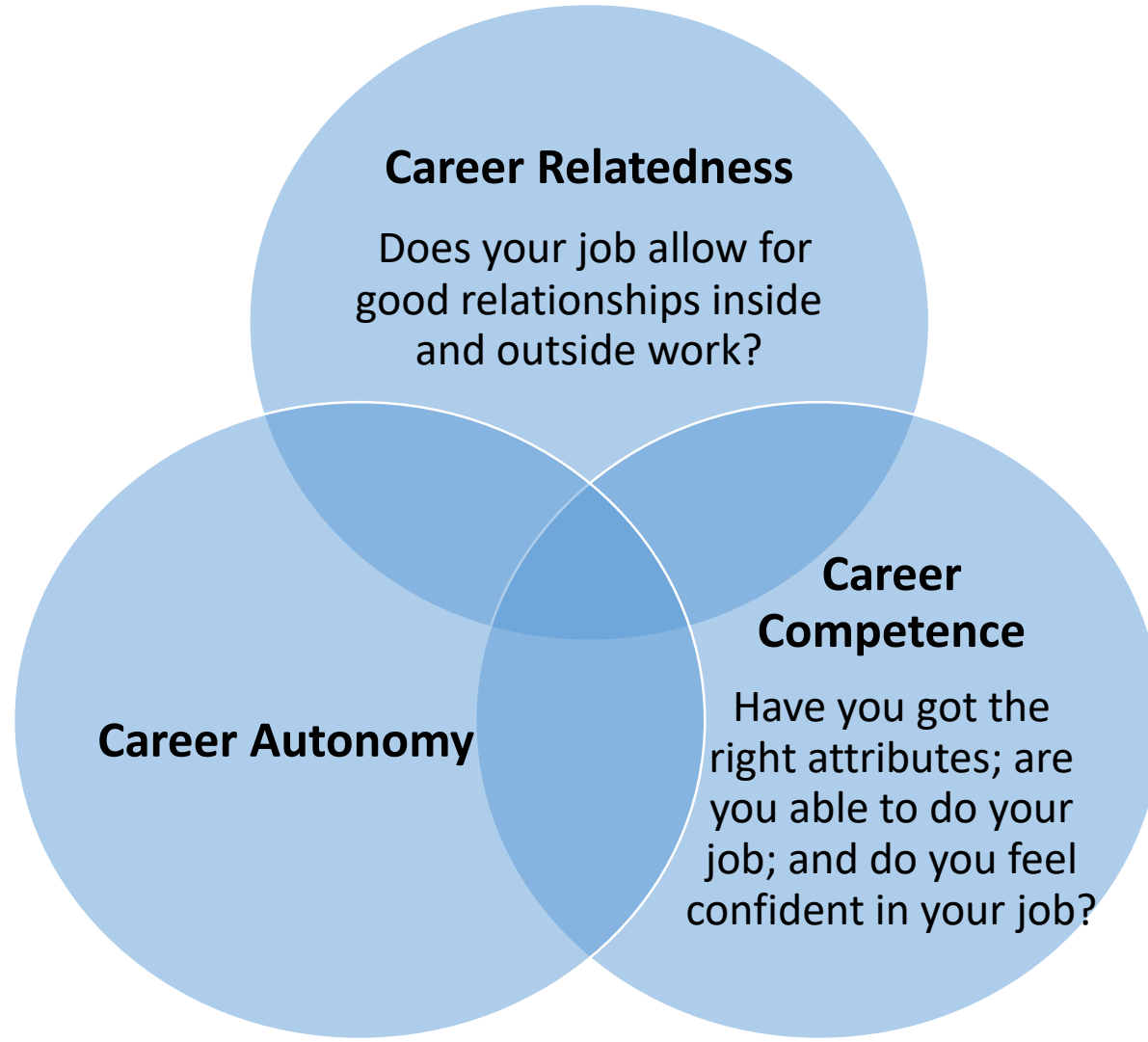
Discuss this with your neighbour – is there anything you could do to increase your scores?

Career Relatedness

Does your job allow for good relationships inside and outside work?

Career Autonomy

Have you got some control over your work? Does you job align with your values, interests and identity?

Career Competence

Have you got the right attributes; are you able to do your job; and do you feel confident in your job?

4.System 1 and 2 thinking

Kahneman (2012)

4.System 1 and 2 thinking

Helping us to understand
human decision-making

Decision Making
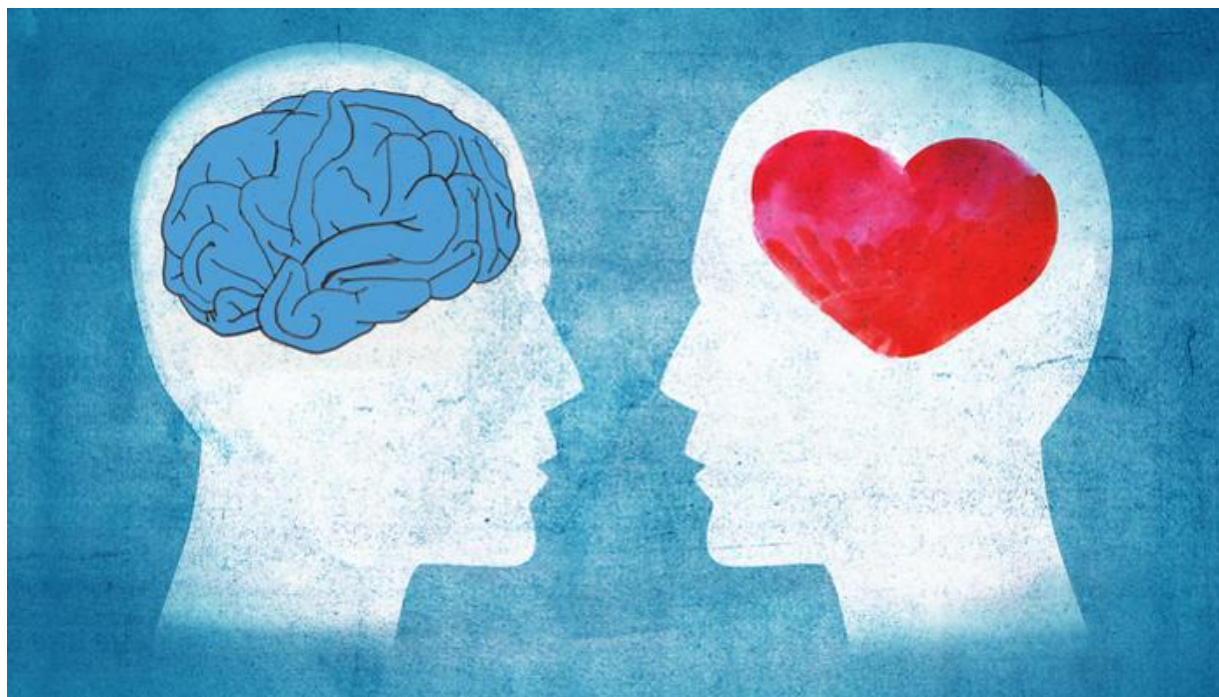
What's the best decision you've ever made?

How did you make it?

Head or Heart?
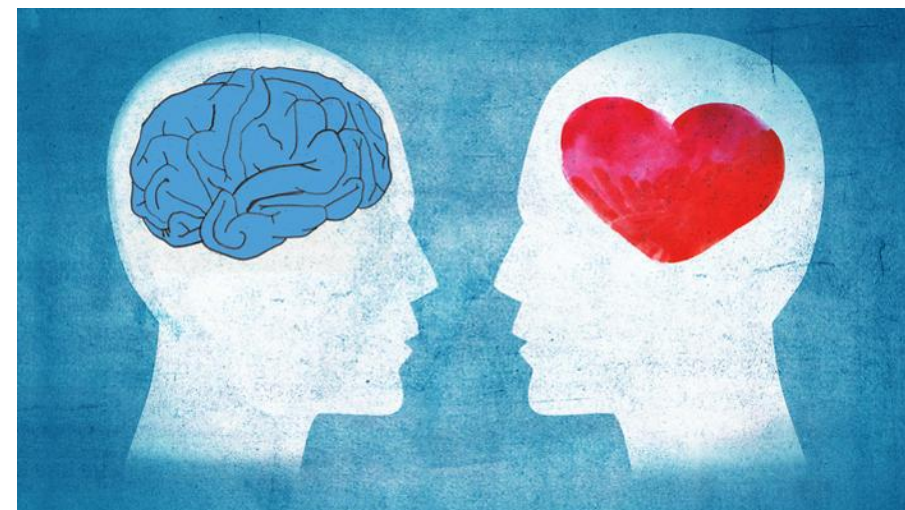
System 1

- Unconscious
- Involuntary
- Fast
- Includes emotions
- Images

System 2

- Conscious
- Voluntary
- Slow
- Avoids emotions
- Words

Rational Career Decisions

- Problem definition / identification of goals

- Generation of options

- Rigorous evaluation of options

- Choice based on utility

	Police officer	Nurse	Graphic designer	Plumber	Teacher
Task variety					
Colleagues					
Working conditions					
Workload					
Autonomy					
Meaning					
TOTAL					

	Police officer	Nurse	Graphic designer	Plumber	Teacher
Task variety	6				
Colleagues	7				
Working conditions	6				
Workload	7				
Autonomy	7				
Meaning	8				
TOTAL	**37**				

	Police officer	Nurse	Graphic designer	Plumber	Teacher
Task variety	6	7	5	4	6
Colleagues	7	7	4	2	8
Working conditions	6	6	8	6	4
Workload	7	5	8	8	3
Autonomy	7	4	8	5	6
Meaning	8	9	4	7	9
TOTAL	**37**	**38**	**37**	**32**	**36**

	Rank (1 – 6)	Police officer	Nurse	Graphic designer	Plumber	Teacher
Task variety	3					
Colleagues	5					
Working conditions	2					
Workload	1					
Autonomy	4					
Meaning	6					
TOTAL						

	Rank (1 – 6)	Police officer	Nurse	Graphic designer	Plumber	Teacher
Task variety	3	6 x 3 = 18				
Colleagues	5	7 x 5 = 35				
Working conditions	2	6 x 2 = 12				
Workload	1	7 x 1 = 7				
Autonomy	4	7 x 4 = 28				
Meaning	6	8 x 6 = 48				
TOTAL		**148**				

	Rank (1 – 6)	Police officer	Nurse	Graphic designer	Plumber	Teacher
Task variety	3	6 x 3 = 18	7 x 3 = 12	5 x 3 = 15	4 x 3 = 12	6 x 3 = 18
Colleagues	5	7 x 5 = 35	7 x 5 = 35	4 x 5 = 20	2 x 5 = 10	8 x 5 = 40
Working conditions	2	6 x 2 = 12	6 x 2 = 12	8 x 2 = 16	6 x 2 = 12	4 x 2 = 8
Workload	1	7 x 1 = 7	5 x 1 = 5	8 x 1 = 8	8 x 1 = 8	3 x 1 = 3
Autonomy	4	7 x 4 = 28	4 x 4 = 16	8 x 4 = 32	5 x 4 = 20	6 x 4 = 24
Meaning	6	8 x 6 = 48	9 x 6 = 54	4 x 6 = 24	7 x 6 = 42	9 x 6 = 54
TOTAL		**148**	**134**	**115**	**104**	**147**

But...there are too many career options

- System 2 thinking suggests that you should looks at all the possible options

- But this is too much information for us

- There are over 25,000 occupations in the UK

- Our rational brains can only cope with 7
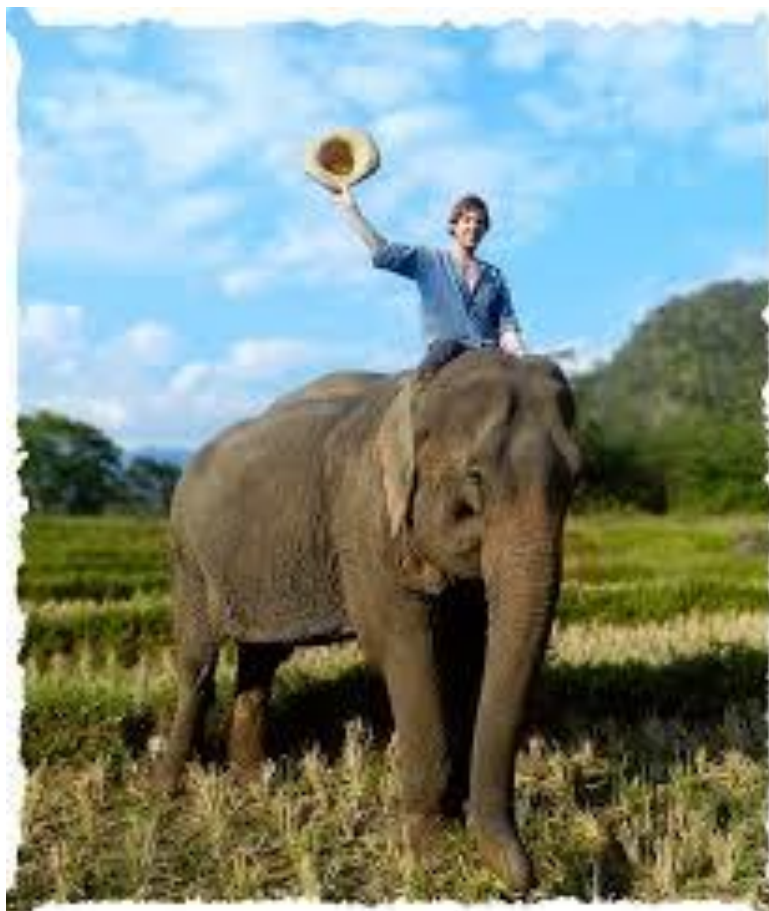
And… the gut instinct is always in charge

And… the gut instinct is always in charge

'No evidence of any kind of rational decision-making process at all'

System 1 career decisions

- It can process enormous amounts of data quickly
- It's much better at thinking creatively
- It's good when there is no definitive right answer

But…

- Instincts are subject to biases
- We tend to be over-confident about our instincts

System 1 and System 2 are both flawed

So we need to use them together

Encourage your clients to work out what System 1 and System 2 are saying, and then explore the differences

Uncovering unconscious ideas

- Drawing
- Possible selves
- Imaginary conversations
- Daydream journal

Fresh career development theories

1. Career inaction theory

2. Identity status theory

3. Career self-determination theory

4. System 1 and 2 thinking

Please talk to your neighbour about these four theories:
- *Which makes most sense to you?*
- *Which could you imagine using with your clients?*

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