

Climate change and career: Strategic leaders' perspectives of the role for environmental issues in career guidance

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Abstract

Meeting the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development will require meaningful changes to lives, learning and work. This includes how we think about careers and the practice of career guidance. This study investigated attitudes to environmental concerns and explored the role of these concerns in career guidance activities. The individuals involved in the study were mid-career leaders studying on a level 7 strategic leadership programme. Participants revealed that they feel environmental issues are important and relevant to their careers, but when it comes to including environmental issues in career guidance, they hold varied perspectives and complex feelings about what role it can play, if any. This paper adds to the current discourse around and understanding of green approaches to career, including green guidance, and posits implications for practice and practitioners interested in this area.

Key words: green guidance, career guidance, strategic leaders, environmental issues, career development, sustainability

Introduction

The challenge of addressing climate change and our planet's sustainability is widely considered to be the most pressing concern facing our world (Greenpeace, 2024; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2023; United Nations, 2024).

Governments, organisations and individuals need to respond in a variety of ways. Many organisations are examining their impact and adding sustainability themes to strategic aims (Dupire & M'Zali, 2018; Global Green Growth Institute, 2025) with half of the world's largest companies committed to net zero targets (Net Zero Tracker, n.d.). The green transition within the labour market has consequences for the nature of work and careers and as such is of interest to career guidance practitioners. Studies examining work and environmental issues commonly focus on sustainability practice in organisations, including the policies and structures to modify, or 'green', individual, and organisational behaviour (Ahmad, 2015; Madsen & Ulhøi, 2001). Less is known about how the workforce of an organisation deals with or responds to sustainability and how this relates to their career. This study explores how strategic leaders working in organisations feel about environmental concerns and the relationship between this and their experience of career development. Participants were sent an online survey enquiring about their attitude to sustainability issues and what role environmental concerns play, have played or could play in their careers and in career guidance.

At this point it is useful to clarify language in this study. I use the term *career development* to encompass the different and evolving personal learning activities that individuals undergo as part of their own lifelong career project, a definition that reflects that of the Career Development Institute (n.d.). I used this term with my participants to encourage them to consider a wide and flexible view as to what might be included in their reflections. Similarly, I use *career guidance* when referring to the practice, approaches and interventions of career development practitioners. As my participants are all mid-career and working in organisations it can also be helpful to add the term *organisational career support* which denotes career development activities provided by human resources departments, line managers or similar. Lastly, I use the term *green career guidance* to indicate career guidance approaches that actively seek to consider or address environmental sustainability as part of the overall practice aims.

The literature review for this project brought together studies from different disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, behavioural science and organisational studies, on the topics of environmental issues, career, work and organisations. I investigated methods of evaluating individuals' attitudes to environmental concerns (Kitamura et al, 1997; Schüssler & Axhausen, 2011) and measuring overall job satisfaction (Dolbier et al, 2005; Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). In selecting tools for inclusion in the survey it was important to consider validity, recency and application of the tool in the context of this study. Schüssler & Axhausen's (2011) 14 item scales accounts for awareness of, denial of and attitude to measures for environmental protection, meaning it could provide a holistic score for respondents' environmental attitude. Similarly, Dolbier et al's (2005) work offers a validated shorthand to determine levels of job satisfaction.

As my participants were all employed and working as strategic leaders in organisations it was also relevant to consider organisational attitudes and approaches to environment. Studies frequently focus on the role for Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in achieving organisational strategic aims. GHRM literature predominantly focuses on employee pro-environmental behaviour as a driver of environmental performance towards net-zero targets (Wang, Zhou & Liu, 2018; Wehrmeyer; 2017). The literature on organisations and environmental attitude largely reflect a strategic, self-interested organisational approach to environmental initiatives.

The study engages with ethical principles of organisations and employees, therefore it was pertinent to examine literature on work values. A relevant concept emerging from this research is work value congruence—the alignment between individual and organisational values—which is linked to job satisfaction and career success (Erdogan et al., 2004). Studies show that individuals and employers both prefer and benefit from value alignment (Judge, Zhang & Glerum, 2020; Kristof-Brown, 2000). Psychometric tools exist to measure value congruence (e.g., Uçanok, 2009), however these have not included a focus on green values, limiting the relevance for use in this study.

At the intersection between career and environmental concerns is literature pertaining to green guidance, sustainability education and green careers. Reports from large international institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2024) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (n.d.) focus on how educational organisations prepare individuals for changes in the labour market and processes for embedding green learning frameworks in primary, secondary and tertiary education (OECD, 2024, UNESCO, n.d.). Publications of this nature signify a level of import and strategy for developing career education that factors in environmental issues and the future needs of the labour market. The strategic, organisation-wide, target driven approaches are similar to those found in GHRM and CSR. Literature exploring green career guidance approaches offer examinations of career concepts, models and practice (Bakke et al, 2024; Di Fabio & Bucci, 2016; Kavková et al, 2024; Mowforth, 2023; Plant, 2014, 2015, 2020). Much of this work has examined the significance and potential of career guidance to deliver an environmentally just approach (Hooley, 2022; Nuttall, 2024) and the challenges that practitioners may face in implementing such an approach (Grant, 2024, Kavková & Šprlák, 2024). Studies explore the delivery of career guidance for 'green careers' (and the value of this) and consider the complications that may arise from a green guidance approach (and the risks of not applying it). Within these studies career guidance is presented as having a legitimate and active political role in contributing to social and environmental justice.

The notion that career guidance is a political endeavour is not new. In 1996 Watts proposed a framework identifying four socio-political ideologies—conservative, liberal, progressive, and radical—that underpin career guidance practices (Watts, 1996). He argued that guidance is inherently ideological and reflects broader societal values, particularly in relation to social justice and the role of the state in individual development. Building on this, Packer (cited by Plant, 2020) introduced a green lens to Watts' model, integrating environmental ideologies. Drawing on Dobson's (2007) distinction between environmentalism (light green) and ecologism (dark green), Packer mapped these onto Watts' ideological quadrants. The result is dark green radical and progressive approaches (focusing on system change and individual responsibility respectively) and light green conservative and liberal approaches (focusing on maintaining current practice and prioritising individual freedom respectively). This extension to Watts' typology encourages career practitioners to consider environmental sustainability as a dimension of guidance, advocating for green pedagogy and emancipatory practice that address both social and ecological justice. The work of Watts and Packer is relevant to the current project as it presents a role for sustainability within career development activities and suggests some of the complexities for consideration. What has been less explored is how workers, learners and clients might respond to this approach.

This project is an attempt to add to the discussions of green career guidance by learning about the attitudes, experiences and expectations of a group of mid-career strategic leaders working in organisations.

Methodology

This study employed an online survey with a mix of closed and open questions that explored attitudes to environmental issues, job satisfaction and the career development experiences of individuals working in strategic leadership roles. The combination of questions allowed some opportunity for triangulation of data. For example, examining how participants with positive environmental attitude feel about the role for green career guidance. The questionnaire aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What are attitudes to and awareness of, environmental issues?
- Do environmental issues impact on individuals' relationships to their organisations? How?
- Do participants see a role for environmental concerns within career guidance? What is the nature of this role?

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling drawn from students undertaking a level 7 strategic leader development programme. Students partaking in this master's programme are defined as working in, or developing into, influential, strategic leadership roles within their organisations. All participants had recent experience of career guidance activities through the degree course. A total of 131 responses were received, 80 of which were deemed suitable for inclusion. Characteristics of the participants' gender, age and industry is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Participant age, gender and organisation

Gender	Age (n)	Industry: Selected from Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2022) list.
39 male	20-29 years = 3	Finance and insurance: 16
39 female	30-39 years = 23	Education: 14
2 prefer not to say	40-49 years = 39	Professional, scientific, tech: 10
	50-59 years = 15	Water supply: 10
		Information and communication: 5
		Health: 5
		Arts: 5
		Electricity: 5
		Public administration: 5
		Transportation: 5

The sample is representative of the master's course in terms of gender, age and industry. Some industries are highly represented due to programme level partnership agreements within water supply and building societies. Whilst the sample size is small, and results are

not generalisable, the study offers insights into the participants' environmental and career attitudes.

Other limitations in this study include the potential for bias. Participants with an interest in climate change may have been more likely to respond. Additionally, my insider researcher role as a lecturer on the master's programme could influence participation and/or affect impartiality in the research process. Collecting data via self-report is limiting as it relies on interpretation and can be coloured by multiple factors (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). Further triangulation of the data via interviews with participants would have strengthened the approach. Nevertheless, the online survey approach allowed for collection of a significant amount of data in a short period and the anonymous nature of the data collection mitigated some of the potential for bias.

The quantitative data included responses to closed questions about job satisfaction and participant characteristics (gender, age, industry). To determine strength of feeling about the environment participants were asked 14 scaled questions about attitude and awareness to environmental issues (based on Schüssler & Axhausen, 2011) which resulted in an overall score for environmental attitude (EA).

There were eleven open ended questions in the survey prompting respondents to consider how environmental issues have affected their careers to date, their experience of career guidance activities and the nature of the role for environmental concerns as part of career development activities. Not all respondents answered all of the open text questions. Nearly fifty answered each of the open questions, yielding circa 10,000 words. Qualitative text was analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015). This process involves six stages of sifting and coding data resulting in defined themes (see Table 2 below). RTA was deemed an appropriate approach as it encourages researchers to consider their own influence and constructs and helps to identify patterns and themes that may not be immediately apparent. RTA enhanced transparency and enabled an inductive approach whilst allowing for consideration of existing literature during the sense making of themes generated from the qualitative data.

The quantitative data accounts for a smaller (but important) part of the project. Primarily it provides an understanding of the strength of feeling about environmental issues amongst participants and characteristics of the participants (age, industry etc). The qualitative data probes into how participants feel about their career to date and their feelings about a green career guidance approach.

The themes generated via RTA from the qualitative data are defined in Table 2 below. The findings section then is organised by examining results in relation to each of the research questions and themes are identified within each section.

Table 2. Themes identified through RTA

Theme	Definition
Personal importance or relevance of environmental issues	Captures the degree to which individuals perceive environmental issues as significant or relevant to their lives. It encompasses a spectrum of responses, ranging from strong personal identification with and concern for environmental matters, to expressions of indifference or perceived irrelevance.
Agency/liberty	Explores participants' perceptions of their <i>agency</i> — the sense that they can make choices — and their <i>liberty</i> — the freedom to decide whether or not to engage with environmental issues. It reflects how individuals navigate the space between feeling empowered or constrained. Includes expressions of empowerment <i>and</i> passivity, highlighting the interplay between perceived control, autonomy, and environmental responsibility.
Individualism	Reflects participants' emphasis on the individual — both in terms of personal responsibility for environmental action and the prioritisation of individual needs, preferences, or freedoms over environmental issues. It captures tension between environmental ideals and autonomy, or lifestyle choices. Participants may express a belief in the power of individual action but also reveal limits to their engagement when environmental behaviours conflict with personal priorities.
Collectivism	Reflects participants' recognition of the need for collective responsibility, shared effort, and systemic change. It captures a shift away from individualistic approaches, emphasising the role of communities, governments, employers, and cooperation in creating meaningful environmental impact. Participants suggest that individual actions are insufficient without broader societal or structural change.
Trust in organisations	Explores the extent to which employees feel they can trust their employers' responses to climate change, including the authenticity, transparency, and effectiveness of organisational initiatives. Captures both confidence in and scepticism toward corporate environmental commitments, with attention to concerns about greenwashing, performative actions or communications and misalignment between values and practices.
Value aligned career	Explores how participants' personal values — particularly around environmental responsibility — influence their career choices, motivations, job satisfaction and expectations of workplace. Central to this theme is the concept of work value congruence, where individuals seek alignment between their ethical beliefs and the roles or organisations for whom they work. Captures tensions and trade-offs, where some participants prioritise financial stability, job security, or career progression over value alignment. Highlights the interplay between idealism and pragmatism in career decision-making.

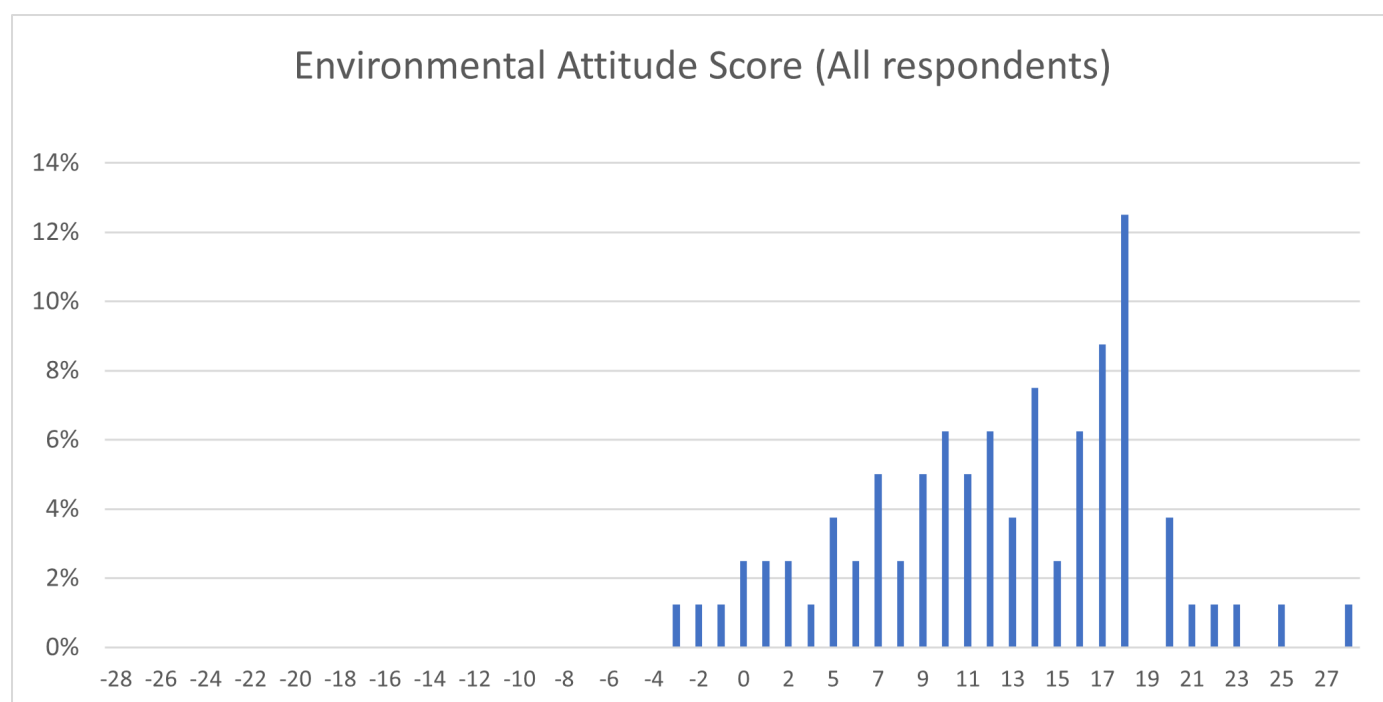
Findings

Research question 1: What are attitudes to and awareness of, environmental issues?

Participants were asked to share their level of agreement (or disagreement) on a series of statements to determine an overall environmental attitude score (EA). Results are shown in Figure 1. A negative attitude towards the environment would be a score below zero and would be characterised by an individual who did not place importance on the issue and did not see value in measures to address it. Examples of statements that participants are asked to respond to include:

- Too much attention is paid to environmental problems;
- Environmental problems have consequences for my life;
- Jobs are more important than the environment; and
- The prices of petrol should be raised to reduce pollution.

Figure 1. Environmental Attitude Scores



The Environmental Attitude graph deliberately includes the total possible range from -28 to +28 to demonstrate the largely positive results of the respondents in this study. A participant with a high score would be very aware of environmental issues, unlikely to deny the effects of climate change and positive about the measures needed to tackle environmental sustainability. The average score was 12.5 with very few respondents (less than 4/80) scoring zero or below. Overwhelmingly participants are interested in and concerned about environmental issues such as climate change and are positive about taking action. Whilst overall EA scores were high, indicating high engagement, awareness and concern, almost all participants reacted negatively to the idea of increasing fuel costs as a solution to cutting emissions. For most a tension exists between the value of a systemic solution and the impact this may have on the individual.

Analysis of the qualitative data affords a deeper look into values and EA. Strategic leaders write about their feelings in relation to the topic and how it aligns to their personal ethics and behaviours. Here there was strong evidence of the theme of *personal importance or relevance of environmental issues* with the majority responding with answers such as; 'It's a subject that I care about and try to improve.' (Female, age 40-49, Administration) and 'It aligns closely with my personal values.' (Male, 30-39, Water Supply).

Within these responses I identified perspectives linking to the theme of *collectivism*. Many participants attribute responsibility for climate change universally and consider everyone, including themselves, to have agency and a role to play in addressing concerns.

Climate change is really our collective number one issue right now, and doing something about it should be our collective number one goal. How we ALL contribute to that is vital to solving the crisis.

(Male, age 50-59, Finance).

Respondents who talk about responsibility in this way often also expressed the need to consider environmental issues in a systemic way, suggesting it needs to be considered 'at every level to effect serious change.' (Female, age 30-39, Manufacturing).

Respondents also revealed complex, sometimes seemingly incompatible attitudes to the solutions for climate change in which they acknowledge the importance and personal relevance of the issue but do not express personal *agency or liberty* to act on their concerns. This theme was identified in responses suggesting capacity for change lies elsewhere, not with them as individuals. These participants reported that they feel like a 'small cog in the larger machine' (Male, age 30-39, Professional) or that the push 'needs to come from legislation and government and private business will follow' (Male, age 30-39, Transportation). One participant suggested that 'the development of environmental policies should be left to the experts.' (Male, age 40-49, Water Supply) whilst another trusts that their 'CEO has environmental issues in mind.' (Male, age 40-49, Water Supply). Assigning responsibility elsewhere links to the theme of *agency/liberty* and for some also a level of *individualism*. For others it was an argument for change to happen where power lies – at system level and it could be argued that this links to collectivism. Further questioning in an interview could have helped to determine more completely the nature of these responses. Examples of *individualism* were further revealed by responses relating to pro-environmental behaviours such as the importance of 'participating in the norm e.g. recycling, reducing waste, printing less.' (Female, 40-49, Finance) and comments about individual waste and excess personal travel to work.

The quantitative and qualitative findings from the survey tell us about attitudes to and awareness of environmental issues. Participants expressed strong concern for environmental issues and many linked this to their personal ethics and behaviours. Their views on responsibility and agency varied, sometimes combining collectivist and individualist perspectives.

Research question 2: Do environmental issues impact on individuals' relationships to their organisations? How?

Closed questions in the survey explored the relationship between strategic leaders' EA and their organisations' engagement with environmental issues, analysing its importance

and impact on their relationship with their organisation. 48 of the 80 of respondents feel their organisations play an active role in environmental stewardship. Of these, 40 consider this to be a valuable or positive contribution. Job satisfaction among the participants is generally high with 58/80 reporting they were satisfied, very satisfied or extremely satisfied with their job role. The findings highlight the recursive and dynamic relationship that individuals have with their employers – and with their own attitudes to environment and job satisfaction – characteristics of one appears to have influence on the other. This relates back to studies that suggest work value congruence is a factor in job satisfaction (Judge, Zhang & Glerum, 2020; Kristof-Brown, 2000). It is also conceivable that individuals with a generally positive outlook report that they are happier at work and are more engaged in world issues such as climate change. Individuals with a higher EA score tended to report that it is important their organisation is engaged with environmental issues, although the sample size was not sufficient for significance testing.

Analysis of the open questions helped to further uncover the importance of work value congruence for strategic leaders, particularly in career decision-making and the impact of *trust in organisations*. Respondents revealed a desire to trust their organisations' environmental initiatives and see them align with their own values. Where individuals report their organisation is prioritising sustainability this is most often integrated in strategic aims and linked to legislation, government emissions targets or UN Sustainable Development Goals. Other responses reveal a level of mistrust and lack of agency due to perceived lack of prioritisation or concerns about greenwashing. Participants express a need to hold the organisation to account and a risk that 'senior management don't take it seriously enough right now' (Female, age 30-39, Admin) or do not communicate their approach effectively. There is a sense that a lack of *trust in organisation* can lead to disengagement or even career changes, whereas its presence reinforces value alignment.

Environmental attitude may link with job satisfaction and choosing an employer. Here we see emergence of the *value aligned career* theme. Participants express the notion that career aspirations that connect with environmental concerns lead to greater personal fulfilment, as presented by this respondent:

An organisation's environmental credentials are important to me, as this aligns closely with my personal values. Without a clear environmental purpose, I feel that I would not be motivated to deliver against an organisation's goals.

(Male, 30-39, Water Supply)

One respondent credits their organisation with her growth in this area of work:

My personal views changed dramatically as my knowledge grew. If it wasn't for the opportunity I had at work to learn, I would not be nearly as passionate as I am now.

(Female, age 40-49, Finance).

Others take the *value aligned career* notion further by suggesting that if their organisation was having a significant negative impact on the planet they would consider leaving and/or would choose not to work for a company that ignored environmental concerns to drive profits.

There are companies I avoid working with because I don't believe their sustainability credentials

(Male, age 30-39, Professional).

Environmental issues influence how individuals relate to their organisations, with value alignment seeming to boost trust, motivation, and job satisfaction. Genuine sustainability efforts strengthen engagement, while perceived greenwashing or lack of priority can cause disengagement or a questioning of career choice. Many participants see environmental credentials as key to career choices and fulfilment. Despite this strength of feeling around *trust* and *value aligned careers*, participants are not consistent or clear on the role for environmental issues in career guidance, as we see in the next section.

Research question 3: Do environmental concerns have a role in career development activities for participants? What is the nature of this role?

This research question attempted to examine to what extent environmental issues have influenced or do influence career development and how individuals respond to the idea that topics such as climate change might be relevant to career guidance. In response to the statement *Career development activities should include discussions of environmental concerns* 46/80 participants agreed or strongly agreed. 22 of respondents were neutral and 10 did not see a role for environmental issues. Whilst the level of support for including environmental issues in career guidance is not as positive as overall environmental attitude, most participants responded positively to the proposal. When probed on this topic the analysis of qualitative text revealed a range of positions from a strong commitment to a green perspective in career guidance, to very definite opposition. Those who regard environmental concerns as relevant to career guidance express different perspectives on how this can be included, with some advocating for individual choice as a key focus and others focusing on a system wide approach to ensure full coverage.

Below, to strengthen coherence, I have grouped participants' perspectives into three groups on a continuum from *not supportive* (My development is my development), *somewhat supportive* (It's complicated), to *very supportive* (I have an idea). The majority of responses were found in the middle ground in which participants consider the idea of green guidance to be positive but express concerns about implementation.

1. My development is my development

This type of response is characterised strongly by the theme of *individualism* and a lack of *personal importance or relevance of environmental issues*. There is reluctance to consider a role for sustainability within career guidance.

I am not certain how you can draw a link in an obvious way between career development and environmental concerns.

(Male, age 40-49, Manufacturing).

For these participants concerns about their own agency and liberty often take precedence over responsibility to the environment, linking again with individualism. Respondents believe career guidance should prioritise individual needs. Concern is expressed that raising politics or personal views could present an obstacle to individual career development.

I don't believe career guidance should include discussion on climate change. These may be personal to the individual, and it should not be feared by the individual their views could hinder their career progression.

(Male, age 40-49, Transport).

Summarising these findings, one respondent expressed the individualistic perspective succinctly with the phrase 'My development is about MY development.' (Female, age 40-49, Education).

2. It's complicated

These responses express a wish for sustainability to be considered within their careers but focus on barriers that hinder this. Many suggest that, under different circumstances or systems, they could imagine a greater role for environmental issues within their careers and in career guidance. Respondents express the value and importance of environmental issues and share concern about how this may affect individuals adversely, linking with themes of personal importance or relevance of environmental issues, individualism and agency/liberty.

Strategic leaders identified reasons why it is difficult for the environment to play a role in their career or career guidance, some of which link with the theme of *agency/liberty*. One barrier was limited capacity or expertise, with one respondent writing: 'People don't know enough!' (Female, age 40-49, Finance). Others suggest that personal priorities are a necessary constraint, suggesting that if these were resolved they may feel environmental issues could play a more important role.

Fundamentally the environment is not the main priority for me on a personal level, it is to adequately provide for my family.

(Male, age 40-49, Professional).

Barriers are identified as being outside of their individual control as seen in this example:

I would like the environment to have more influence, but the cost of living has more impact at present.

(Female, age 30-39, Water Supply).

Competing organisational priorities also have a role to play, as highlighted here:

Implementing climate change conversations in career support activities is impossible. HR professionals and managers are constantly pressed to achieve cost efficiencies to meet business targets.

(Male, age 30-39, Information).

Though respondents acknowledged a role for sustainability in career they expressed concerns for how including it in career guidance might impact individuals in terms of personal conflicts and emotional stress. The findings suggest that a green career guidance approach would need to be done with sensitivity and caution to ensure individual *agency/liberty* is not at risk and to protect against undue stress. As one participant advises:

Environmental factors may align closely with personal values. These are sensitive and sometimes controversial topics...

(Male, age 30-39, Water Supply).

Another evokes concern for individual agency by suggesting that:

Climate change and environmental concerns should be included in such a way that it still supports the person with their career choice.

(Female, age 50-59, Education).

Others expressed concern that thinking about the scale of the challenge will leave individuals anxious and weighed down.

I think lots of conscientious people have feelings of despair or dread over sustainability and the environment.

(Male, age 30-39, Professional).

To summarise these findings, these responses hold the view that, whilst there is a value and importance to finding a role for sustainability within career guidance, their priority is for personal freedom and wellbeing, indicating a perspective aligning with themes of *individualism* and *agency/liberty* and potentially a lack of *personal importance or relevance of environmental issues*.

3. I have an idea

Participants who responded positively to the idea of green career guidance held different views on how this could be operationalised. Some felt it would best sit within personal career decision making, suggesting there is value in career conversations that discuss environmental issues as a vehicle to information about 'green' jobs. There is a sense that 'green jobs are less visible or understood' (Male, age 40-49, Electricity) and that this is best addressed as part of information provided at career decision making points. It is suggested that this is a key component in career guidance as it can help individuals understand predicted areas of growth for the future. This *individualistic* approach would enhance early career decision making and help align future career choices with personal values.

The career of the future may look very different and therefore [it is important to be able to] position yourself to ensure you can convert opportunities and improve understanding of industry dynamics and what industry may fit with values on environmental issues.

(Female, age 40-49, Public Admin).

Some participants expressed feelings of regret that this type of information had not been available to them earlier in their lives but also concerns about how applicable it would be.

It is very specific to an individual's career. Where an individual wants to develop their career in more environmentally focused areas it should form part of the discussion, but it doesn't need to be a mandatory element for all.

(Male, age 40-49, Finance).

Participants' responses propose that there is interest in conversations about work value congruence and careers advice 'on industry options that fit with [their] values and concerns' (Female, age 40-49, Public Admin), returning to the concept of *value aligned careers* and retaining a mainly *individualistic* perspective.

There were also those who saw green guidance as an opportunity to incentivise pro-environmental behaviours. As this participant suggests:

We could hold conversations about not participating in the norm e.g. recycling, reducing waste, printing less (...) rewarding good behaviours works better than punishing bad behaviours.

(Female, 40-49, Finance).

These suggestions centred on *individual* responsibility for change in which:

Individuals could each be asked how they can impact environment in their role (...) thinking about new initiatives and the impact this will have not only on career development but also sustainability.

(Female, 30-39, Health).

Conversely there were respondents who were enthusiastic about institution wide approaches flowing from 'organisational strategy rather than being dependent upon the strength of feeling of individuals' (Female, age 40-49, Education), linking to the *collectivism* theme. Here organisational career support is considered an ideal medium. This might include, for example, delivering leadership education programmes that would advance expertise on climate issues and spread knowledge and actions throughout the organisation or department wide professional development targets linked to UN Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2024). One participant comments on the strength of an organisational career development approach that:

Builds environmental concerns into career development will raise the profile of them and embed them as a business priority rather than a fad, or a singular department initiative.

(Female, age 40-49, Administrative).

One participant shared a more radical perspective characterised by the *collectivism* theme:

As people move through organisations they need to be coached and developed to understand how capitalism is going to need to change to accommodate a system where perpetual growth is no longer possible, where resources are becoming scarcer and scarcer, and where energy to produce products needs to be prioritised to things that are important.

(Male, age 30-39, Professional)

To summarise these findings, most participants supported including environmental concerns in career development activities, though opinions ranged from outright rejection to strong advocacy. Responses fell into three groups: those who saw no role, those who supported it but worried about barriers and personal impact ('it's complicated'), and those who offered

ideas for integrating it, either through personal career choices or organisational strategies. Many appreciated the idea of aligning careers with environmental concerns but differed on how career guidance could balance individual agency with systemic change.

Discussion

A foundational learning from the data is that strategic leaders in this study care about the environment and share concerns about existential threats to our planet. They largely identify this as having strong personal importance and relevance. Whilst this is not a surprising outcome it establishes a useful starting point for exploring how these concerns may play a role in career guidance activities. The study also demonstrates a desire for careers that align with values - in this case values that link to environmental attitude - and that a trusting relationship with employers and organisations is an important factor. Some, but not all, see the benefits and possibility of a green career guidance approach but differ in terms of who benefits - the individual or society. Throughout the results from this study there are conflicts between individualism and collectivism, sometimes expressed by the same respondent. Environmental issues are seen as important to address in system wide approach whereas support for career development requires an individual approach. In this it could be concluded that most do not see career as something that can be a collective enterprise, or which lends itself well to address sustainability in a systemic way. The tensions between individual-focused and systemic approaches reflect broader debates about our impact on the planet and how this is addressed - through individual pro-environmental behaviours or system change from governments and organisations.

Reflecting on this tension led me to consider the resonance between this project and the typologies of guidance outlined by Watts (1996). The results of this study and the Watts' model could be seen as trying to tell two sides of a story. The first side of the story (Watts') offers the typologies of guidance, describing and categorising practitioner approaches to career guidance. The second (based on the research in this paper) tells the story of individuals (or clients) and their openness to different forms of guidance. In mapping this I found synergy in the dichotomy between individualism and collectivism and in attitude to change. In table 3 I attempt to demonstrate the interaction between these two stories. It is worth noting that the majority of respondents in this study are best characterised as aligning with Liberal, Progressive and Radical approaches and most expressed views that bridge across more than one approach.

Progressive or radical career guidance approaches focus on challenging the status quo and therefore offer the best opportunity for green guidance. In the mapping below I have attempted to expand on Watts' framework and relate it to responses to green career guidance. The table indicates where the themes from this study help to characterise individual responses to the different approaches and how they align. This may help careers practitioners to build understanding about openness or resistance to a green career guidance practice.

Table 3. Characterising approaches and responses

Watts' characterisation	Career guidance approach characterised as:	Participants aligned to this approach characterised by:
Conservative	● resistant to change ● maintains status quo in existing norms, systems and processes ● not well aligned to green career guidance approach	● perceived lack of individual agency within existing systems and norms ● environmental issues hold less personal import / relevance ● not open to green career guidance approach - attributed to organisational or system constraints or priorities
Liberal	● resistant to change ● supports individual decisions and choices within existing norms and structures ● not well aligned to green career guidance approach	● individualistic perspective ● environmental issues hold less personal import / relevance ● concerns relating to liberty and career decision making ● not open to green career guidance approach - attributed to personal concerns, context and priorities
Progressive	● open to or drives change ● supports individuals to make decisions and choices that challenge existing norms ● aligned to green career guidance (within parameters of individual perspective)	● individualistic perspective ● express desire for value aligned career ● environmental issues hold personal import / relevance ● perceived individual agency/ liberty ● open to green guidance approach - within parameters of individual perspective
Radical	● open to or drives change ● challenges existing norms, systems and processes ● aligned to green career guidance approach	● express desire for value aligned career ● collective perspective ● environmental issues hold personal import / relevance ● open to green guidance approach

Conclusions

Results from this study may help career practitioners and those working in organisational career support to consider the need for different approaches, how people may engage with or respond to methods and how we can work in more progressive and radical spaces towards green guidance. The study identifies barriers and concerns that individuals experience in relation to a green approach and characterises alignment to different

approaches. Below I suggest three takeaways from this study to support further development of green career guidance approaches.

1. Build on the existing positive environmental attitude

This study establishes that the strategic leaders who participated are almost universally concerned about climate change, and many see it as a relevant and important issue that demands attention from them and their organisations and links to their preference for a career aligned to positive green values. This does not equate to universal support for a green career guidance approach, however knowledge that positive attitudes to environment exist can be helpful to career guidance practitioners working within similar settings and cohorts and is a positive foundation from which to build.

2. Awareness and addressing context and barriers

Existential concerns such as climate change are, by their very nature, complicated problems and require complicated solutions. Individuals in this study expressed this sentiment by outlining a variety of barriers, concerns and systems that impede their openness to a green guidance approach. This included worries about their personal liberty, development, priorities and context, a lack of knowledge or expertise, the presence or absence of work value congruence and the value of trust in relationships with employers and organisations. Guidance practitioners can support an openness to green guidance by deliberately attempting to uncover, name, address and/or challenge barriers such as these. We can learn about and acknowledge complexities, including systemic issues, and facilitate access to climate education and experts. In Watts' terms this would involve practitioners working towards progressive or radical approaches to career guidance.

3. Critical reflection for practitioners

The role of career development professional requires reflection and continual professional learning. Moving to a green career guidance approach necessarily involves critical reflection of our current practice and perspectives. The results from this study suggest that to support clients and learners we need to be conscious of their perspectives, as well as our own. Taking time to reflect on positionality can help practitioners to; a) acknowledge their stance and; b) identify next steps and possible adjustments. The 'How green is your practice workshop?' outlined by Grant (2024) offers a structured approach to reflection and prompts to aid practitioners.

This study adds to the current discourse on the topic of green career guidance by exploring strategic leaders' perspectives, experiences and concerns relating to a green career guidance approach. In doing so it supports the view that career practitioners play a role in building critical consciousness around sustainability and our relationship to the natural world. Further studies involving the application of green career guidance strategies and tools with strategic leaders in organisations could advance our understanding and practice.



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