

Excellerate Personal Impact: Identifying your career anchors

Identifying and Understanding your career anchors

Gaining a sound understanding of yourself, what motivates you and what inspires you – and what does not – is essential to effective career planning. Your life experiences, your principles and values, your relationships with family, friends and colleagues, and your professional identity influence your career choices; therefore, the greater your self-awareness, the more satisfying your career choices.

Schein's Career Anchors

Edgar Schein at MIT identified eight career themes and that people have prioritised preferences for these. For example a person with a primary theme of Security/Stability will seek secure and stable employment compared to employment that is challenging and riskier. People tend to stay anchored in one area and their career will reflect this in many ways.

Career anchors help you to understand the motivation and implications of past career decisions, and to inform future choices. They will help you to

- Define the themes and patterns that are dominant in your life
- Understand your own approach to work and your career
- Identify and clarify your talents
- Provide reasons for career choices
- Take appropriate action to secure a fulfilling career.

Identify your career anchors and how well you perceive these to match your current job

Instructions: Read the following descriptions for each of the career anchors and then complete the rating table

Technical/Functional competence

A high score in this area suggests you are the kind of person who likes being good at something and will work to become a guru or expert. You like to be challenged and using your skills to meet the challenge, doing the job properly and better than almost anyone else. You may be willing to manage people in your own area of expertise, but would avoid general management

General Managerial competence

A high score in this area suggests that you value the opportunity to be responsible for the output of a particular part of your organisation. You want to be a manager (and not just to get more money, although this may be used as a metric of success). You like problem-solving and dealing with other people. You thrive on responsibility and enjoy being accountable for total results. To be successful, you also need emotional competence.

Autonomy/Independence

A high score in this area suggests that you value the opportunity to define your work in your own way. You have a primary need to work alone, under your own rules and steam. You like to remain in jobs that allow you to have freedom from organisational rules and restrictions, even if this means turning down the opportunity for promotion. You may decide to run your own business to maintain autonomy; however, this motive is not the same as entrepreneurial creativity.

Security/Stability

A high score in this area suggests that you value employment and financial security. You seek stability and continuity as a primary factor in your life. You avoid risk and build your self-image around security and stability. You usually look for a job for life.

Entrepreneurial Creativity

A high score in this area suggests that you value the opportunity to invent things, be creative and most of all to run your own businesses. You differ from those who seek autonomy in that you will share the workload. Ownership is very important and you want to create an enterprise that is the result of your own efforts. You can easily get bored. Wealth, for you, is a sign of success.

Service/Dedication to a cause

A high score in this area suggests that you value being able to pursue work that achieves something such as helping others or solving environmental problems. You are driven by how you can help people more than using your talents (which may fall in other areas). You may well work in public services but will not accept transfers or promotions that would take you out of work that fulfils those values

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Pure Challenge

A high score in this area suggests that you value the opportunity to work on solutions to seemingly impossible problems. You seek difficult problems, constant stimulation and will change jobs when the current one gets boring. Your career can therefore be varied.

Lifestyle

Those who are focused first on lifestyle look at their whole pattern of living. A high score in this area suggests that you do not so much balance work and life as integrate it. You need a career that is flexible enough to achieve such integration. You define success in much broader terms than just career successes. Your identity is more tied up with how you live your life and your personal development than with any particular job or organisation

Instructions: Rating Table

Fill in the middle column by rating how important you perceive each career anchor to be for you. Then complete the right-hand column by gauging how you rate each career anchor in respect of the position you currently hold.

Schein's Career Anchors	How important is this aspect of your career to you? (Score out of 5 where 0 is nil and 5 is a great deal)	How does this match with your current post? (Score out of 5 where 0 is nil and 5 is a great deal)
1. Technical/Functional competence		
2. General Managerial competence		
3. Autonomy/ Independence		
4. Security/Stability		
5. Entrepreneurial Creativity		
6. Service/Dedication to a cause		
7. Pure Challenge		
8. Lifestyle		

Key Questions

Is there a mismatch between what career anchors you rate as being most important for you and those that relate to your current position?

You could discuss the completed table with a mentor, partner at home or a trusted friend. If you find that most things you value are not met by your current job, this might give you the impetus to make some specific career plans and move on. If you find there's a good match, it may mean you're in the right job.

References

Schein, Edgar H, (1990). Career Anchors (discovering your real values), Jossey-Bass Pfeiffer, San Francisco