



EDGAR H. SCHEIN CAREER ANCHORS

Profile for:

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Introduction

The purpose of the Career Anchors self-assessment is to help you to manage your career choices. A self-analysis of your career up to this point is essential if you are to make good choices as you look ahead. Why is this important? In many occupations and organizations, careers are either over-managed or not managed at all. You either have to conform to choices that others are making for you or you get the message that you had better manage your own career or you may not get anywhere.

There is overwhelming evidence that, in an increasing complex and global world, individuals have to become more self-reliant. But you cannot be more self-reliant if you do not have a clear concept of what you are good at, what you value, and what motivates you. This self-image of competence, motives, and values is your "career anchor." This report is designed to help you identify your career anchor and to think about how it relates to your career choices.

Your Anchor is:

LS : Life Style

Your Scores

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About Your Career Anchor

Below is a description of your Career Anchor—that combination of perceived areas of competence, motives, and values that you discover you would not give up if you faced a career decision that might not allow you to fulfill it. It represents your real self.

★ LS—Lifestyle

If you scored highest in this column, your career anchor is lifestyle. What you would not give up is a situation that permits you to balance and integrate your personal needs, your family needs, and the requirements of your career. You want to make all of the major sectors of your life work together toward an integrated whole, and you therefore need to develop a career situation that provides enough flexibility to achieve such integration. You may have to sacrifice some aspects of the career—for example, a geographical move that would be a promotion but would require your spouse to give up his or her career aspirations or would require your children to leave a good school. You define success in terms broader than just career success. You feel that your identity is more tied up with how you live your total life, where you settle, how you deal with your family situation, and how you develop yourself than with any particular job or organization. People with this anchor sometimes organize their own careers around the careers of spouses, in terms of the geographic area in which they want to live, or in terms of issues such as where they want their children to grow up or go to school. Geographic issues often play a key role in that people with this anchor seek areas where both career and family needs can be optimally met. The person in this dilemma may have another anchor in one of the above categories but chooses to subordinate the expression of that anchor to the more general lifestyle issues.

LS Examples

Ludwig Schmidt was a high-potential middle manager working for a large oil company in its New York headquarters. He was on a general management track in the U.S. organization, although he was a German with a German wife. When his son was eight years old, Ludwig was offered a major promotion in the U.S. company that would require remaining in New York for the next five years. Ludwig turned down the promotion and opted instead for a lesser job in the German subsidiary because he and his wife decided that they wanted to bring up their son in the German culture and considered the next five years to be crucial in forming his identity. Lisa Sargent, in mid-career on a general manager track, had to choose between a very large promotion in the headquarters of a company located in a rural area and a much less prestigious job in a corporation in a large urban area. Her husband was in a technical field, and his chances of finding a job in the urban area were much better, so Lisa chose the less prestigious job in order to maximize both of their chances to have satisfactory careers.



Description of Career Anchor Categories

FOLLOWING IS A DESCRIPTION of the eight anchor categories that have consistently shown up in all kinds of occupations. After each description, you will find two short examples that help illustrate how the anchor functions and its impact on career decision making.

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The first two anchors to be described—“technical functional competence” and “general managerial competence”—revolve around a dominant sense of what one is competent at.
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1. TF—Technical/Functional Competence

If you scored highest in this column, your career anchor is competence in some technical or functional area. What you would not give up is the opportunity to apply your skills in that area and to continue to develop those skills to an ever-higher level. You derive your sense of identity from the exercise of your skills and are most happy when your work permits you to be challenged in those areas. You may be willing to manage others in your technical or functional area, but you are not interested in management for its own sake and would avoid general management because you would have to leave your own area of expertise. The biggest problem for people with this anchor is that they tend to be pulled into generalist managerial jobs in which they may fail and that they will hate.

2. GM—General Managerial Competence

If you scored highest in this column, your career anchor is general managerial competence. What you would not give up is the opportunity to climb to a level high enough in an organization to enable you to integrate the efforts of others across functions and to be responsible for the output of a particular unit of the organization. You want to be responsible and accountable for total results, and you identify your own work with the success of the organization for which you work. If you are presently in a technical or functional area, you view that as a necessary learning experience and may even accept a high-level management job in that function. However, your ambition is to get to a generalist job as soon as possible. You want to be able to attribute the success of your organization or project to your own managerial capabilities based on analytical skills, interpersonal and group skills, and the emotional capacity to deal with high levels of responsibility.

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The next four anchor types—“autonomy/independence,” “security/stability,” “entrepreneurial creativity,” and “service/dedication to a cause”—revolve around a dominant motive or need.
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3. AU—Autonomy/Independence

If you scored highest in this column, your career anchor is autonomy/independence. What you would not give up is the opportunity to define your own work in your own way. You have discovered that above all else you need to feel free and on your own in what you do in your career. Some traditional organizational jobs allow a great deal of this kind of freedom, but often people with this anchor opt for self-employment or for jobs that are highly autonomous. They can be freelance consultants, professors, independent small businessmen, field salespersons, and so forth. If you are stuck in an organization, you want to remain in jobs that allow you flexibility regarding when and how to work. You sometimes will turn down opportunities for promotion or advancement in order to retain autonomy.



4. SE—Security/Stability

If you scored highest in this column, your career anchor is security/stability. What you would not give up is employment security or tenure in a job or organization. Your main concern is to achieve a sense of having stabilized your career so that you can relax. The anchor can show up in concern for financial security (such as pension and retirement plans) or employment security or geographic stability in the sense of being in an area where you feel you can always find a job. Such stability may involve trading your loyalty and willingness to do whatever the employer wants from you for some promise of job tenure. You are less concerned with the content of your work and the rank you achieve in the organization, although you may achieve a high level if your talents permit. As with autonomy, everyone has certain needs for security and stability, especially at times when financial burdens may be heavy or when one is facing retirement. However, people anchored in this way are always concerned with these issues and build their entire self-image around the management of security and stability. They feel that they can relax only when they have achieved a position of career success and stability that allows them the feeling of having “made it.”

5. EC—Entrepreneurial Creativity

If your score is highest in this column, your career anchor is entrepreneurial creativity. What you would not give up is the opportunity to create an organization or enterprise of your own, built on your own abilities and your own willingness to take risks and to overcome obstacles. You want to prove to the world that you can create an enterprise that is the result of your own effort. You may be working for others in an organization while you are learning and assessing future opportunities, but you will go out on your own as soon as you feel you can manage it. You want your enterprise to be financially successful as proof of your abilities. You measure yourself by the size of the enterprise and its success. This need is so strong that you will tolerate many failures throughout your career in the search for that ultimate success.

6. SV—Service/Dedication to a Cause

If you scored highest in this column, your career anchor is service/dedication to a cause. What you would not give up is the opportunity to pursue work that achieves something of value, such as making the world a better place to live, solving environmental problems, improving harmony among people, helping others, improving people’s safety, curing diseases through new products, and so on. You would pursue such opportunities even if it meant changing organizations, and you would not accept transfers or promotions that would take you out of work that fulfills those values.

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The next anchor—“Pure Challenge”—reflects neither values nor motives, but a mixture of personality characteristics and problem-solving style.
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7. CH—Pure Challenge

If you scored highest in this column, your career anchor is “pure challenge,” in the sense that what you would not give up is the opportunity to work on solutions to seemingly unsolvable problems, to winning out over tough opponents, or to overcoming difficult obstacles. For you, the only meaningful reason for pursuing a job or career is that it permits you to win out over the seemingly impossible. Some people find such pure challenge in intellectual kinds of work, such as the engineer who is only interested in impossibly difficult designs; some find the challenge in complex multifaceted situations, such as the strategy consultant who is only interested in clients who are about to go bankrupt and have exhausted all other resources; some find it in interpersonal competition, such as the professional athlete or the salesperson who defines every sale as either a win or a loss. Novelty, variety, and difficulty become ends in themselves, and if something is easy it becomes immediately boring.

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The last anchor—“lifestyle”—is, in a certain sense, not specifically related to a career as such but to the integration of career and family issues. This anchor has become more prevalent as more dual-career families are finding that they must meet the demands of two different, equally valued careers.
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8. LS—Lifestyle

If you scored highest in this column, your career anchor is lifestyle. What you would not give up is a situation that permits you to balance and integrate your personal needs, your family needs, and the requirements of your career. You want to make all of the major sectors of your life work together toward an integrated whole, and you therefore need to develop a career situation that provides enough flexibility to achieve such integration.

You may have to sacrifice some aspects of the career—for example, a geographical move that would be a promotion but would require your spouse to give up his or her career aspirations or would require your children to leave a good school. You define success in terms broader than just career success. You feel that your identity is more tied up with how you live your total life, where you settle, how you deal with your family situation, and how you develop yourself than with any particular job or organization. People with this anchor sometimes organize their own careers around the careers of spouses, in terms of the geographic area in which they want to live, or in terms of issues such as where they want their children to grow up or go to school. Geographic issues often play a key role in that people with this anchor seek areas where both career and family needs can be optimally met. The person in this dilemma may have another anchor in one of the above categories but chooses to subordinate the expression of that anchor to the more general lifestyle issues.



Frequently Asked Questions

After reviewing all of the anchors, you may find yourself asking one or two questions that almost always come up.

What If I Don't Have an Anchor with a Clearly "Highest" Score?

There are two possible reasons for a very flat profile or tie scores:

1. You have not yet had to face a choice and hence do not yet know what your real anchor is. You may feel that you have two or more anchors because you are in a job that permits the expression of more than one. Try to imagine future career options that would force you to choose and see which way you would lean. For example, many people think that they can be both technical/functional and general managerial. Ask yourself whether you would rather be the executive vice president of the whole company or the senior vice president of the technical area. Most people find that they can quickly choose which is really their anchor, if forced to make a choice.
2. You have not faced enough varied occupational experience to know what your real preferences, talents, and values are. If that is the situation, try out different things on a temporary basis and see which ones work best for you. The anchor evolves with life experience and is not something that you have always had or that suddenly appears.

What If None of the Anchors Feels Like "Me"?

The purpose of this self-assessment is to increase your insight into your own career situation. You may well have an "anchor" that is different or some complex combination of the other categories. You do not have to fit into one of these categories, but you do have to get a good sense of who you are and what you are after in your career and life. Take those items for which you scored the highest and see what kind of pattern emerges if you look at them together. Develop your own self-concept from those items. The goal is self-insight, not fitting into a standard category.

Next Steps and Choices

THIS BOOKLET IS AN INTRODUCTION to career anchors and gives you a first approximation of what your anchor is. The Career Anchors Participant Workbook gives you (1) more general information about the career development field; (2) a more complete description of the anchors; (3) an interview protocol to analyze your career history and determine more precisely what your anchor is; (4) instructions on how to analyze your current job in terms of a role map; and (5) instructions on how to do a job/role analysis of possible future jobs you may wish to consider if you are in a career transition. In relation to planning for a future job/role, the Workbook also provides an analysis of where the world of work is going and a Self-Assessment Questionnaire to enable you to determine how you rate yourself on some of the competencies that will be needed in future jobs.