

## Career Anchor

(Adapted from Edgar Schein)



Everyone has to take certain career decisions during their lifetime. What education do I want? What jobs shall I apply for? Where do I want my career to take me? What are my goals? When we take these decisions we are not only influenced by social opportunities, but also by our own values and convictions – our career anchors.

The term “career anchor” was created by Edgar Schein, Professor Emeritus for Organisational Psychology and Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Using career anchors Schein describes what is important to people in their professional lives. An anchor holds a ship “in position”. Even though anchored, the ship has a certain leeway for movement, but is always bound to a particular point by the anchor. So the question is: what orientation do *your* career anchors give you?

For some it is worth working hard to take on an increasing amount of responsibility, for others, to develop their skills and reach expert status. Yet others work above all to bring their professional lives optimally in line with their personal lives, and take career decisions mainly on this basis. The critical issue is to formulate your own values, abilities and priorities clearly, in order to take the career decisions that suit you. However this is often not as easy as it sounds, because values may be latent – that is, deeply felt but not consciously formulated. In fact, the more authentic you are and can be, the greater the satisfaction in your career, which in turn has an effect on your success.

The following questionnaire is designed to help you identify your personal career anchors. Forty statements examine eight different areas which over the course of his studies Schein has found repeatedly to be the central career anchors for describing careers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The questions should help you to reflect on specific situations and values with guidance. Your former experiences and hopes for the future play an important part in this, as they enable you to clarify when you felt comfortable or uncomfortable / satisfied or unsatisfied.

Your job here is to rate the following statements. You should indicate how much the individual points are relevant to you. To do this, please use the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Does not apply to me	Does seldom apply to me	Does partially apply to me	Applies pretty much to me	Mostly applies to me	Completely applies to me

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
Does not apply to me	Does seldom apply to me	Does partially apply to me	Applies pretty much to me	Mostly applies to me	Completely applies to me
<u>      </u>	1.	I want to be so good at what I do that others will always seek my expert advice.			
<u>      </u>	2.	I am most fulfilled in my work when I have been able to integrate the efforts of others toward a common task.			
<u>      </u>	3.	I dream of having a career that will allow me the freedom to do a job in my own way and on my own schedule.			
<u>      </u>	4.	Security and stability are more important to me than freedom and autonomy.			
<u>      </u>	5.	I am always on the lookout for ideas that would permit me to start my own enterprise.			
<u>      </u>	6.	I will feel successful in my career only if I have a feeling of having made a real contribution to the welfare of society.			
<u>      </u>	7.	I dream of a career in which I will always have the challenge of solving ever more difficult problems.			
<u>      </u>	8.	I would rather leave my organization than be put into a job that would compromise my ability to pursue personal and family concerns.			
<u>      </u>	9.	I will feel successful in my career only if I can develop my skills to an ever-increasing level of competence.			
<u>      </u>	10.	I dream of being in charge of a whole organization.			
<u>      </u>	11.	I am most fulfilled in my work when I am completely free to define my own tasks, schedules, and procedures.			
<u>      </u>	12.	I would not stay in an organization that would give me assignments that would jeopardize my job security.			
<u>      </u>	13.	Building a business of my own is more important to me than being a high-level manager in someone else's organization.			
<u>      </u>	14.	I have felt most fulfilled in my career when I have been able to use my talents in the service of others.			
<u>      </u>	15.	I will feel successful in my career only if I have met and overcome increasingly difficult challenges.			

1	2	3	4	5	6
Does not apply to me	Does seldom apply to me	Does partially apply to me	Applies pretty much to me	Mostly applies to me	Completely applies to me
_____ 16.	I dream of a career that will permit me to integrate my personal, family, and work needs.				
_____ 17.	Becoming a senior functional or technical manager in my area of expertise is more attractive to me than becoming a general manager.				
_____ 18.	I will feel successful only if I become a high-level general manager in some organization.				
_____ 19.	I will feel successful in my career only if I achieve complete autonomy and freedom to define my work.				
_____ 20.	I usually seek jobs in organizations that will give me a sense of stability and security.				
_____ 21.	I feel most fulfilled when I have been able to build something that is primarily the result of my own skill and effort.				
_____ 22.	Using my talents to make the world a better place to live is what drives my career decision.				
_____ 23.	I have been most fulfilled in my career when I have been able to solve seemingly unsolvable problems or won out over seemingly impossible odds.				
_____ 24.	I feel successful in life only if I have been able to balance my personal, family, and career requirements.				
_____ 25.	I would rather leave my organization than to accept a rotational assignment that would take me out of my area of expertise.				
_____ 26.	Becoming a general manager is more attractive to me than becoming a senior functional manager in my area of expertise.				
_____ 27.	The chance to do a job in my own way, free of rules and constraints, is very important to me.				
_____ 28.	I dream of a career that will allow me to feel a sense of stability and security.				
_____ 29.	I will feel successful in my career only if I have created an enterprise of my own based on my own ideas and skills.				

1	2	3	4	5	6
Does not apply to me	Does seldom apply to me	Does partially apply to me	Applies pretty much to me	Mostly applies to me	Completely applies to me

- \_\_\_ 30. I dream of being in a career that makes a real contribution to humanity and society.
- \_\_\_ 31. I prefer work opportunities that strongly challenge my problem-solving and competitive skills.
- \_\_\_ 32. Balancing the demands of my personal and professional life is more important to me than a high-level managerial position.
- \_\_\_ 33. I am most fulfilled in my work when I have been able to use my special skills and talents.
- \_\_\_ 34. I would rather leave my organization than accept a job that would take me away from the path to general management.
- \_\_\_ 35. I would rather leave my organization than accept a job that would reduce my autonomy and freedom.
- \_\_\_ 36. I am most fulfilled in my work life when I feel that I have complete financial and employment security.
- \_\_\_ 37. I dream of starting up and building my own business.
- \_\_\_ 38. I would rather leave my organization than accept a position that would undermine my ability to be a service to others.
- \_\_\_ 39. Working on problems that are difficult to solve is more important to me than achieving a high-level managerial position.
- \_\_\_ 40. I have always sought out work opportunities that minimize interference with my personal and family concerns.

## Analysis

Before we discuss the results together, you can carry out part of the analysis yourself first. To do this, please look for the statements that you gave the maximum points to. From these, choose the **three** that are **the most important** to you. Please add **another four points** to these three statements, so that they have a special weighting.

Then transfer your ratings for each item (incl. additional points) to the scoring table below, being sure to put the correct number of points for each item next to that item's number. Carry over the final point scores into the following table. Finally add up the point scores in each column. Using the total number of points you can identify which career anchors are your **Top 3**.

TF	GM	AU	SE	EC	SV	CH	LS
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
Σ	Σ	Σ	Σ	Σ	Σ	Σ	Σ

### Which abbreviations stand for which career anchors?

The eight career anchors identified by Schein are described in more detail in the next page. Here, we take "career" to mean your inner convictions, which relate to your individual talents, that is your special abilities and accomplishments, as well as your skills, strengths and weaknesses. Over time, everyone has to deal with their own motives (Why am I acting like this?), their needs (What is important to me? What can't I do without?) and objectives (What do I want to achieve?).

Experiences over the course of your working life lead to the development of convictions and standpoints – they crystallize, so to speak. Up to a point all the career anchors relate to everyone who is in work. However the areas that are of special importance to a particular person, so that he or she could not do without them, indicate the "true" career anchors. These do not necessarily correspond to the current job – career paths are influenced by many factors. However the aim is in the long term to bring your career in line with your career anchors.

### TF - Technical/Functional

If your key Career Anchor is strongly placed 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 every 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.

### **GM - General Managerial**

If your key Career Anchor is general managerial, 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; however, your ambition is to get to a generalist job as soon as possible. Being at a high managerial level in a function does not interest you.

### **AU - Autonomy/Independence**

If your key Career Anchor is autonomy/independence, what you would not give up is the opportunity to define your own work in your own way. If you are in an organization, you want to remain in jobs that allow you flexibility regarding when and how to work. If you cannot stand organizational rules and restrictions to any degree, you seek occupations in which you will have the freedom you seek, such as teaching or consulting. You turn down opportunities for promotion or advancement in order to retain autonomy. You may even seek to have a business of your own in order to achieve a sense of autonomy; however, this motive is not the same as the entrepreneurial creativity described later.

### **SE - Security/Stability**

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 succeeded so that you can relax. The value is illustrated by a concern for financial security (such as pension and retirement plans) or employment security. 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. People biased in this way, however, are always concerned with these issues and build their entire self-images around the management of security and stability.

### **EC - Entrepreneurial Creativity**

If your key 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 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.

### **SV - Service/Dedication to a Cause**

If your key 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 pursue such opportunities even if it means changing organizations, and you do not accept transfers or promotions that would take you out of work that fulfils those values.

### **CH - Pure Challenge**

If your key Career Anchor is pure challenge, what you would not give up is the opportunity to work on solutions to seemingly unsolvable problems, to succeed over tough opponents, or to overcome difficult obstacles. For you, the only meaningful reason for pursuing a job or career is that it permits you to succeed in the face of the 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, multi-faceted 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.

### **LS - Lifestyle**

If your key 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 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 upset your total life situation), and 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.

## Practical Implications

What should you do next? Some points to consider:

1. **Learn how to learn more about yourself.** Continue to increase your self-insight and awareness by finding other opportunities to observe yourself and to draw out the implications of what you observe. Learning about yourself is a life-long task, because each new experience will reveal new facets. Get into the habit of analysing your responses and reactions to all your new experiences by keeping a reflective learning journal.
2. **Plan ahead.** Does your vision of your ideal job need re-thinking to be more fulfilling in the future? As you contemplate future career/life moves, are they likely to be congruent with your key Career Anchor/s? What kinds of adjustments do you need to make to ensure greater congruence? Do you need additional education or training? Do you favour certain kinds of lateral or geographical moves? Are there certain types of moves to be avoided?
3. **Communicate your needs.** Who needs to know the conclusions you have reached about yourself in the previous steps? With whom in your professional networks should you share some of your insights and conclusions, so that they help you to plan your career? Do you and members of your family need to discuss these issues to make a better overall life plan?
4. **Become active in managing your career.** None of us has an infinite number of choices when it comes to career management, but all of us have some choices. Figure out your areas of choice and become active in managing them. As the world gets more complex, more and more of a burden will fall on each person to manage his or her own career, because employers will have a harder time figuring out what is best for everyone. Thus, the most important bit of advice is not to become a victim!

*Source: Cardiff University adapted from Schein, Edgar H, (1990). Career Anchors (discovering your real values), Jossey-Bass Pfeiffer, San Francisco*