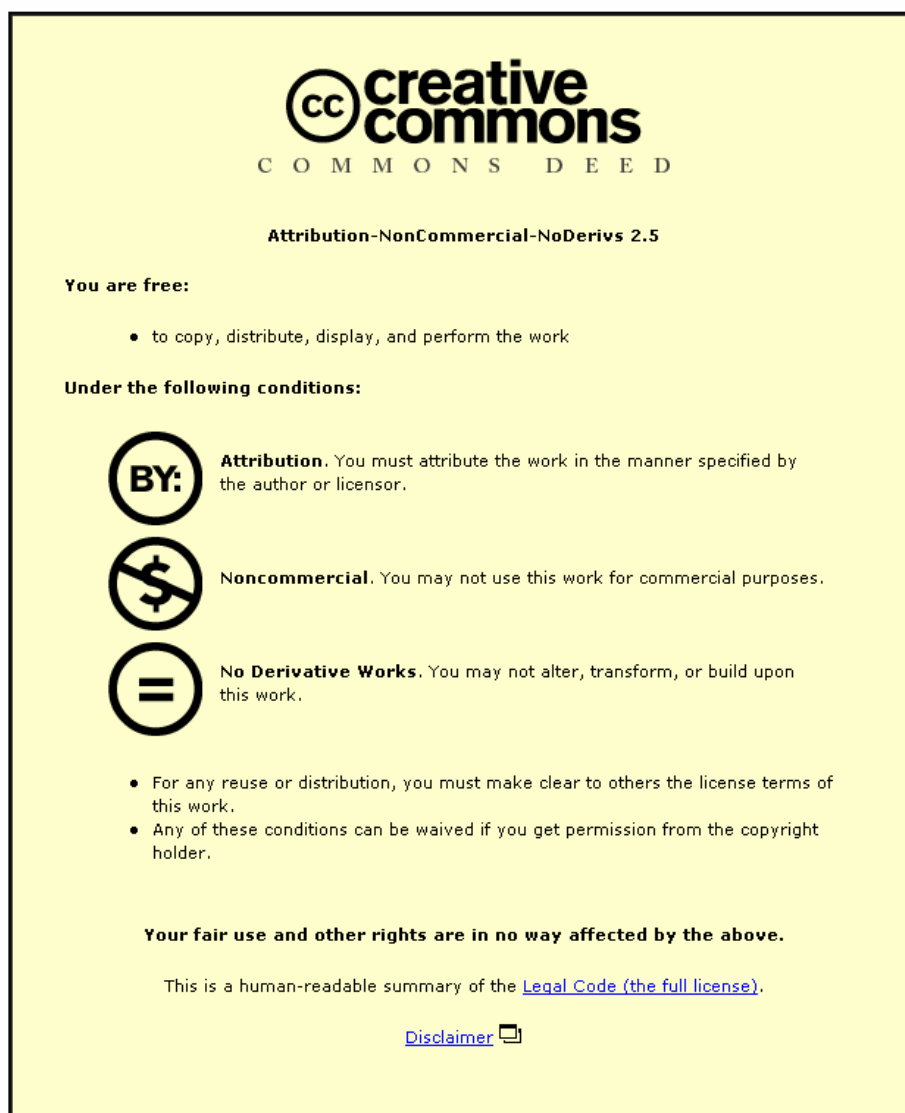




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## MANAGERIAL CAREER ANCHORS IN A CHANGING BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

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**Keywords:** age, business, careers, change, gender, managers

***Abstract:** Trainers need to take into account changes in working practices, which it is argued, influence manager's perceptions of their careers. 540 managers were interviewed, and a questionnaire used to measure the relative importance of individual career anchors. It was found younger managers were more orientated towards their own skills and what they could contribute, whereas older managers were more inclined to be aware of the limitations of their role in the organisation. It was stressed the difference between the perception of their careers of the younger and older managers is something the trainer needs to take into account. Also significant to the trainer was how similar male and female managers were in their perceptions of their career anchors.*

Training needs to reflect the current business environment. Managers brought up with today's working practices, and those who started their working lives twenty, or more years ago, have had very different experiences. What is expected of managers has changed over the years, with the decline in manufacturing and shift towards service industries. Even within industries or occupations, however, there have been changes in working practice inspired by 'MacDonaldisation', in the fast food trade, and 'Disneyization', in the leisure and the service industries (Bryman 1999). The whole concept of 'emotional labour', which these working practices require, puts different demands on managers being trained today, compared to their predecessors. This applies to most occupations, whether it be teaching, or food processing. The aim of the present study is to compare career perceptions of younger managers, and older managers.

There is reason to believe our perception of our career is influenced, at least as much by our early work experience, as by the ageing process itself. Early interests and abilities, have been shown by Holland (1985), to be linked to career choice. Once an individual has gained some work experience, Schein (1974, 1993 and 1996) argues managers will focus on one of eight career anchors. He suggests, this focus continues for the rest of the individual's working life. This view implies that if there are differences between younger and older workers, this is at least as likely to be a result of their different early working experiences, as it is a response to the ageing process. This is consistent with research into other aspects of life. Costa et al (1994), for example, found happiness was not related to age but appeared to be a relatively stable characteristic throughout the individual's life. Costa and McCrae (1997) found a wide range of individual personality characteristics tended to remain largely unchanged, from young adulthood through to old age. Supporting this, research into ageing by Kniveton (1999), found close links between the characteristics of young adults and older people, in aspects of life such as family support, politics, and leisure activities. Attempts to demonstrate a developmental pattern through adulthood, whereby changes can be linked with the ageing process have not been too successful. The early theories were typified by Super (1957), who identified four career stages, from exploration in the late teens, through to disengagement in the sixties. Erickson (1968) produced a similar ageing profile, involving not only work, but also social aspects of life. There has been a great deal of criticism, summarised by Hall (1986 ch. 4), pointing out the stages were not followed by the majority of people. Certainly few experience career stability as they age, for as Nicholson and West (1988) reported, in the United Kingdom, three years was the average time a manager spent in any one job. Further, few managers were able to predict correctly whether they would change jobs, even a few months ahead. This trend has become more marked, with few people experiencing a single career for life. Many marriages fail (Dixon 1995), thus starting a second family later in life is not unusual. It is, therefore, unlikely individuals will simply age in a stereotypical linear path. In the late 1980's and early 1990's many people retired in their early fifties, whereas today with the 'pensions crisis', retirement, for many, is a long

way into the future. Differences between young and older managers are thus, as likely to be a result of their early work experiences, as of the ageing process.

There have, however, been criticisms of the concept of career anchors. Marshall and Bonner (2003), for example, in their international study of 423 graduate students enrolled in various MBA and other management courses, found the proportion of people inclined to certain anchors differed to that found by Schein (1996). Their results, could have been a reflection of the sort of changes taking place in the workplace. Sadly, however, the weakness with this study is the sample, which consisted solely of graduate students enrolled in management courses. It is unlikely they were representative of managers generally, for according to Campbell et al (1980), adults who return to education later in life, tended to be dissatisfied with their lives.

Changes in the business environment do not necessarily affect everyone the same. For example, Marshall and Bonner (2003) found, males and females focussed on different career anchors. Many researchers have observed the impact of gender on career choice. Heckert et al (2002), noted females, more than males, in their choice of career, put more emphasis on factors such as working conditions, facilities for child rearing, career certainty, and working hours. Small and McClean (2002) also noted, males were more likely to want to run their own businesses than females. Further Noon and Blyton (1997) argue, females more than males, desire intrinsic rather than extrinsic rewards from their employment. Gallos (1989) argued women focus more on attachment and affiliation than do men. Roberts and Newton (1987), however, indicated except for elements of fine tuning to do with their families, both males and females have similar views of their career orientation. There is ample evidence (eg Bailyn 2003), however, that despite employment law, organisations are less responsive to females.

Care needs to be taken not to link the concept of career anchors with trait theories of personality. This would, be totally inappropriate, for it has far more limited applications, and can be compared with what others, (eg Arthur, Hall and Lawrence 1989), refer to as career values. The concept of career anchors makes no attempt to categorise the whole person, merely to outline their orientation towards one, very focussed aspect of their lives, namely their work. Indeed, Nordvik (1996), illustrated the difficulties of trying to relate career anchors to more general personality characteristics. Schein himself only suggested linking career anchors directly to career choices. Links between anchors and occupations have, however, been substantiated by other researchers, such as. Igarria et al (1999), who demonstrated links between engineers and technologists, and certain career anchors. In the study by Nordvik (1996), with Norwegian workers, he also showed links between certain career anchors and occupations. Beck and La Lopa (2001), with hotel workers in the United States, tried to apply, with some success, anchors to individuals in different positions within the hotel industry. This stretched the use of the concept to link people with different positions within a single industry. The concept of career anchors takes into account individual's experiences, and any changes in work circumstances. Career anchors have been applied in many ways. It has been shown, for example, by Hsu et al (2003), knowledge of career anchors, can provide the employer with a means of providing appropriate incentives to retain individual employees, with very different motivations. In addition its relevance has been shown (Yarnall 1998) in the UK in relation to length of service and grade-related differences.

The concept is, however not without critics and modifications. There are, limitations to how useful knowledge of career anchors can be. With French workers, Mignonac and Herrbach (2003), found willingness to change jobs was linked to career orientation, whereas movement close to the current job was linked with immediate job satisfaction. Feldman and Bolino (1996) criticised Schein's original study for only including 44 participants, and also for the contrived means of ensuring only one anchor was present for each person. They also reconceptualised Schein's eight career anchors into three distinct groupings, (talent-based, need-based and value-based anchors). This provides a useful framework for the present study.

#### **Talent-based anchors consisting of three aspects:**

**Managerial competence:** concerns managing others, advancement, responsibility, leadership and income are all important. They tend to be generalists and regard specialist posts only as a means of gaining some relevant experience. According to Schein (1996), this ranks in the top third, accounting for twenty five percent of individuals responses. He predicts its importance will increase with changing working practices. Marshall and Bonner (2003), ranked it in the bottom third with only 14% responses.

**Technical/functional competence consisting of three aspects:** concerns the content of the work itself, prefers advancement in a technical area rather than in general management. This anchor, according to Schein (1996), was equal top of the ranking, whereas with Marshall and Bonner (2003), it was only ranked fifth. Schein's prediction for the future popularity of this anchor is ambiguous, arguing on the one hand technology is becoming more important, but on the other, it is not seen by many as a basis for a career.

**Entrepreneurial creativity.** mainly motivated by the need to create or to build something to be identified with. More interesting in setting up new projects, rather than managing existing ones. Both Schein, and Marshall and Bonner (2003) give it a low ranking. Schein (1996) predicts an increase in ranking, due to the shift towards subcontracting. Small and McClean (2002) reported fewer females with this orientation.

**Need-based anchors consisting of two aspects:**

**Security and stability.** mainly motivated by long term job security and attachment to one organisation, and willing to adapt to norms and standards. Schein (1996) ranks this in the second level, whereas Marshall and Bonner (2003) rank it at the bottom of the scale. Schein predicts it will become less popular as a result of the increasingly transient nature of employment.

**Autonomy and Independence** concerns independence from an organisation, and individual freedom. Both Schein, and Marshall and Bonner rank this in the second tier. Schein considers this may be more typical of older workers, who have the personal and financial security to be more independent, and self willed.

**Life Style.** Primarily concerned with aspects of the whole life, balancing the career with the family and other interests. Schein ranks this amongst the bottom tier of anchors, but Marshall and Bonner (2003) rank it at the top. It could well be this discrepancy is largely a function of the particular student sample employed in the Marshall study. Schein however predicts an increasing emphasis on this anchor, with the growing proportion of dual career (job and family) individuals.

**Value –based anchors consisting of two aspects;**

**Pure challenge.** primarily concerned with overcoming obstacles or problems, concerned with competition and winning. Schein (1996) ranks this in the bottom third, but Marshall and Bonner (2003) rank it second to top.

**Service and Dedication to a cause:** largely concerned with improving the world, helping society, anxious to work in a field which meets their values, rather than their skills. Schein ranks it amongst the bottom third, but predicted an increase with growing emphasis on ecology and recycling. Marshall and Bonner placed it about mid point in the ranking.

**The Hypotheses:**

The first hypothesis compares the total sample in the present study with Schein’s sample. The second and third hypotheses compare subgroups within the sample.

It was predicted:

1. Managerial, entrepreneurial, life style and dedication to a cause anchors will be relatively higher, and security relatively lower, when comparing Schein’s (1996) ranking of anchors with the ranking for the overall sample in the present study. This is based on Schein’s (1996) predictions.
2. Younger participants will be more orientated towards talent and value based anchors and older participants more orientated towards need based anchors. This is a reflection of the changes in recent years in the business environment, which have been previously outlined in this paper.
3. Male participants will be more orientated towards managerial competence, entrepreneurial, and pure challenge anchors, and females will be more orientated towards the life style anchor. This follows from the findings of Heckert et al (2002), Marshall and Bonner (2003), and Small and McClean (2002).

**Participants:**

540 participants comprising 269 males and 271 females were interviewed. The sample was divided into younger and older subgroups. The younger 19-39 years sample of 276, had a mean age of 27.86 years, with a standard deviation of 4.17 years. The older 40-64 years sample had a mean age of 48.19 years, with a standard deviation of 5.13 years. All participants, as with Schein’s (1974) sample, had managerial status.

The sample was matched, in that participants were ‘grouped’ in terms of occupation or industry, and were equally distributed within that grouping according to age, gender and status. As far as possible the matching was comprehensive. For example a 30 year old male manager of a fast food outlet was matched with an older manager, in a similar type of outlet, and both were matched with females, in the same trade and of similar managerial status. The occupational grouping was classified as follows: Education 20 persons (3.7%), finance and legal professions 93 persons (17%); food outlet and hotels 82 persons (15%); food processing 24 persons (4.4%); leisure/sport 63 persons (11.6%); manufacturing 94 persons 17.4%); NHS 17 persons (3%) and Retail 147 persons (27%). Including participants from a range of occupations was considered essential, to ensure findings were not an artefact of one particular industry. All participants in the study were employees, located through their places of work, and were interviewed by the author, in towns in central UK. Participants were only included who had not been involved in further education, during the twelve months prior to the interview, and had no immediate plans to do so. The response rate was 92%.

### Interview Format:

The first few questions concerned age, occupation and status in the organisations. Each participant subsequently completed a questionnaire based on statements from Schein's (1990) revised forty item questionnaire. A small number of words were changed to be more appropriate for the English sample. Responses were on a five point scale from strongly agree through to strongly disagree. In the tables, in this paper, the scores on each scale are recalculated and shown out of a maximum of ten. The questions were subjected to a split-half reliability test for each of the scales independently. The lowest reliability coefficient of any scale was .88. After the questionnaire had been completed there was an opportunity for unstructured discussion about reasons behind choices of career anchors. This was supplemented with a number of 'trigger' questions following various themes. These concerned: satisfaction with current employment, feelings about their role in the organisation, views on the requirements of their job, observations about changes in working practices, views about their own career advancement, and employment alternatives. Although the career anchors questionnaire has been validated elsewhere, a crude test of validity was conducted in the present study. Where clear preference for a career anchor had been indicated on the questionnaire, and there was a high degree of job satisfaction mentioned in the interview, the two were related to determine whether they were compatible. A degree of validity was demonstrated for in the 167 cases where this was possible, 135 (81%) had a job, or position, which approximately matched their chosen career anchor.

### Results:

**Hypothesis 1: Managerial, entrepreneurial, life style and dedication to a cause anchors will be relatively higher, and security relatively lower, when comparing Schein's (1996) ranking of anchors with the ranking for the overall sample in the present study.**

The results, shown in table I, indicate little overall support for this hypothesis, as only with one of the five anchors predicted to differ was it actually shown to have occurred. Schein's (1996) predictions for the managerial, entrepreneurial, life style and security anchors are not confirmed as they retain approximately their original rankings. Dedication to a cause increased in the ranking, confirming the predication. In line with Schein (1993) and Marshall and Bonners (2003) findings, table I shows no single group of anchors (talent, need or value based), was consistently the most popular. There are more similarities between the findings of the present study and those of Schein, than between either of these, and Marshall and Bonner. The most dramatic difference between the two former studies, and that of Marshall and Bonner, concerns the life style and pure challenge anchors. Both these anchors are in the bottom third of the ranking with the present study, and the top third of Marshall and Bonner. This may well be an artefact of the characteristics of the student sample used in the latter study.

**Table I**  
Showing ranking of anchors in three studies.

Career anchor	Present study. Mean score standard deviation in brackets N=540 rank	Marshall and Bonner (2003) ranking	Schein 1996 % sample displaying this anchor Rank
Dedication (Value)	8.20(1.25) 1 <sup>st</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	7.5% 6 <sup>th</sup>
Managerial (Talent)	7.85(1.54) 2 <sup>nd</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	25% 1 <sup>st</sup>
Autonomy (Need)	7.62(1.37) 3 <sup>rd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	10% 3 <sup>rd</sup>
Security (Need)	7.60(1.68) 4 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	10% 3 <sup>rd</sup>
Pure challenge (Value)	7.54(1.39) 5 <sup>th</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	7.5% 6 <sup>th</sup>
Life style (Need)	6.84(1.85) 6 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	7.5% 6 <sup>th</sup>
Technical Talent)	6.76(2.00) 7 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	25% 1 <sup>st</sup>
Entrepreneurial (Talent)	6.08(1.85) 8 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7.5% 6 <sup>th</sup>

**Hypothesis 2: Younger participants will be more orientated towards talent and value based anchors and older participants more orientated towards need based anchors.**

The results shown in table II partly support the hypothesis. As predicted the talent based anchors tend to be more important to the younger participants, and the need based to the older participants. Contrary to the hypothesis there is no difference with regard to the value based anchors.

**Table II**  
Showing comparison of younger and older career anchors

Career anchors	Mean scores. Standard deviations in brackets		t score	prob
	Younger N=276	older n=264		
<b>Talent-based</b>				
Managerial competence	8.37(1.32)	7.31(1.58)	8.45	.000*
Technical/functional competence	6.79(1.86)	6.73(2.14)	0.34	.73
Creativity and entrepreneurship	6.23(1.75)	5.89(1.92)	2.39	..017*
<b>Need-based</b>				
Security	7.03(1.65)	8.20(1.48)	8.72	.000*
Autonomy and independence	7.48(1.35)	7.76(1.38)	2.35	.019*
Life-style integration	6.72(1.80)	6.98(1.90)	1.70	.089
<b>Value-based</b>				
Pure challenge	7.55(1.28)	7.53(1.50)	0.23	..816
Dedication to a cause	8.17(1.22)	8.24(1.28)	0.67	.503

**Hypothesis 3: Male participants will be more orientated towards managerial competence, entrepreneurial, and pure challenge anchors, and females will be more orientated towards the life style anchor.**

This hypothesis is supported only with reference to the entrepreneurship anchor. Table III indicates, in the talent based area, males also score more highly than the females on the technical functional competence anchor. No other anchors display a significant gender difference.

**Table III**  
Showing comparisons of male and female career anchors

Career anchors	Mean scores. Standard deviations in brackets		t score	prob
	Male N=269	female n=271		
<b>Talent-based</b>				
Managerial competence	7.90(1.54)	7.80(1.54)	0.80	.424
Technical/functional competence	6.95(2.06)	6.56(1.92)	2.26	.024*
Creativity and entrepreneurship	6.49(1.73)	5.68(1.87)	5.23	.000*
<b>Need-based</b>				
Security	7.48(1.76)	7.72(1.59)	1.69	.091
Autonomy and independence	7.69(1.32)	7.55(1.41)	1.20	.230
Life-style integration	6.81(1.80)	6.87(1.91)	0.40	.687
<b>Value-based</b>				
Pure challenge	7.60(1.43)	7.48(1.34)	1.03	.305
Dedication to a cause	8.22(1.23)	8.18(1.26)	0.39	.694

**Conclusions:**

Schein (1996) failed to predict changes in manager's perceptions regarding four of the five anchors. The rankings of a number of anchors in the present study, and those reported by Schein (1996), are very different to those reported by Marshall and Bonner (2003). This is probably explained by Campbell et al's (1980) finding, that individuals returning to education later in life (evidenced by the Marshall and Bonner sample), are not

representative of managers in general. Again, this highlights the difficulties trainers face, when trying to generalise research findings gained exclusively from a sample of management students.

It is particularly noticeable that participants in the present study did not adopt a single career anchor, as Schein (1974) claimed, but incline towards a career profile. Indeed only about fifty per cent of the sample had a single dominant anchor. The rest had two or more anchors competing for top ranking. This draws attention to the fact that managers do not tend to have a single career orientation, and so training new, or varied skills can prove individually helpful.

The major difference between the present findings and those of Schein (1996), is the higher ranking of the anchor concerned with service and dedication to a cause. This is largely concerned with improving the world, helping society, and being anxious to work in a field which meets their values rather than their skills. This is an area which, Schein (1996) predicted would be expanding, with increasing emphasis on ecology and recycling. He has certainly been proved right. Interestingly the other value based anchor, pure challenge, found by Marshall and Bonner to be second to the top in their ranking was ranked fifth in the present study. It has already been suggested that their finding may well have been an artefact of their sample.

The pattern of differences between age groups is interesting, for with all three talent based anchors, the younger portion of the sample scored higher than the older. In two cases (management and technical skills) this difference was significant. The younger managers are more aware and concerned about the skills they need in their jobs. The need based anchors show a very different pattern. The older people are more inclined towards identification with the organisation, and yet want a greater degree of independence. These different orientations need to be born in mind by the trainer. It is apparent from these results that work experience and possibly age is producing a different perceptual framework. This could well affect motivation and career development, both of which can impact on training. The participants were asked in interviews, after they had completed the questionnaire, why they responded in the manner they did. The explanations were, of course, individually very varied, but some trends did emerge which helped explain some of these differences. The trend for the younger sample tended to highlight the importance of their own abilities. Much of the discussion centred around the impact they could make on the organisation, as a result of their particular (very varied) skills. With the older sample, there was a far greater acceptance of the idea that the organisation itself was far more likely to determine how successful things turned out to be. It was constantly mentioned, that their impact on it was limited. Many of them did refer back to earlier in their careers, when they felt the organisational structure in which they operated, was more important than now. They talked about current work practices controlling more aspects of their behaviour, and the manner in which they did their jobs, but indicated they felt less central and less involved with the organisation itself, than when they started working.

In spite of conducting individual follow up interviews, it was apparent to the researcher, one of the major limitations of the present study, was the difficulty separating the effects of the ageing process from the impact of different work experiences. It is not possible, beyond all reasonable doubt, to attribute differences in career anchors between young and older samples to either work experiences or the ageing process. Although the suggestion that it is a result of work experience is circumstantially supported, on basis of research on the consistency of various characteristics through the life cycle, a more controlled examination of these two influences is needed.

Of significance to the trainer is how similar men and women are, in their views of what is important to them. The gender differences were limited to the talent based (technical and entrepreneurial) anchors. The males scored significantly higher than the females. This result, in part, supports the literature by Marshall and Bonner (2003) and Small and McClean (2002) which indicates females are less likely to want to run their own businesses. Certainly in the interviews, the dominant view of this, among the females, was that working for oneself was a choice determined by domestic necessity, rather than preference. For the need and value based anchors, there were no significant difference in responses between males and females. This really does support findings by Roberts and Newton (1987) which indicated, except for elements of fine tuning to do with their families, both males and females have similar views of their career orientations. During the interviews females constantly expressed an awareness of their family responsibilities, but this was discussed as something they had to cope with, rather than as something influencing perceptions of their careers. There is no difference between males and females on the life style anchor. This conflicts with studies, such as that of Gallos (1989), who argues women focus more on attachment and affiliation, or Heckert et al's (2002), notion females will be more orientated towards their family responsibilities. What the interviews conducted during this study did highlight,

is that trainers need to be aware that females do have family responsibilities, which on the whole males do not. Care needs to be taken, however, not to let traditional gender stereotyping affect career development opportunities.

For trainers, the idea of career anchors provides a practical means of career guidance. This can be particularly important when take-overs and mergers occur, and large sections of workforces, may have to be realigned. Many employees can be faced with the prospect of applying for their own, or alternative jobs within a changing organisation. The present study raises the need to make individuals aware, they should not view their future options solely in terms of their past career path. An awareness of the range of their own career anchors may help them accept, and even seek alternative training opportunities, which they may not have considered previously. Career anchors can impact on training in many other ways. Mentoring, for example, may well have much to gain from an awareness of career anchors. Knowledge of individual career anchors may make it possible to match workers to appropriately orientated mentors, which might well increase the effectiveness of the technique.

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