

CAREER ANCHORS AND JOB/ROLE PLANNING:
THE LINKS BETWEEN CAREER PATHING
AND
CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Edgar H. Schein

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MIT Sloan School of Management

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The fundamental problem that all organizations face when they attempt to plan for their human resources is that they have to match the ever changing needs of the organization with the ever changing needs of the employees. When one considers that most organizations today exist in a highly dynamic environment in which technology, economic conditions, political circumstances, and social/cultural values are changing at an every more rapid rate, it becomes almost impossible to think clearly about the planning process.

Can and should organizations invest in career development systems that will allow them to build a stable employee pool or should they seek a whole new set of concepts for "contracting" with employees that allows for easier entry and exit as circumstances change? In order to answer such a question one must have a better understanding not only of the changing nature of work, but of the dynamics of the "internal career," the self-image that employees build up of their own work life and its relationship to their personal and family concerns (Schein, 1978, 1985, 1990).

Two concepts and activities will be described in this paper that help to deal with these problems--the concept of career anchors and the concept of job/role planning. Each concept will be described in general terms and the practical activities that organizations can undertake to utilize the concept will be described.

Career Anchors

The concept of "career anchor" grew out of several decades of longitudinal research to capture some of the essential components of how career occupants define themselves in relation to their work. A person's career anchor is the evolving self-concept of what one is good at, what one's needs and motives are, and what values govern one's work related choices. One does not have a career anchor until one has worked for a number of years and has had relevant feedback from those experiences. But once a career anchor evolves, roughly five to ten years after one has gone to work, it becomes a stabilizing force in the total personality that guides and constrains future career choices.

The word "career" is used here in the general sense of the set of occupational experiences and roles that make up a person's work life. In this sense all of us have careers even if our work is very mundane and "non-professional." So everyone develops a career anchor, but in many occupations there is insufficient flexibility in the work situation for the anchor to be expressed at work. Thus production workers have career anchors but such anchors may exhibit themselves more readily off

the job in hobbies than on the job.

Types of Career Anchors

To get a better understanding of the dynamics of the career anchor concept it will help to analyze the major types of anchors that have been identified thus far. These reflect some of the basic personality issues that all humans face and some of the social values that occupational structures the world over seem to generate.

The categories to be reviewed below are based originally on a 13 year longitudinal study of 44 early sixties alumni of the MIT Sloan School Masters Degree Program in Management, supplemented by early and mid career interviews of several hundred managers, teachers, and members of various other professions and occupations to see if the categories applied to them (Schein, 1978, 1985). These interviews and related research by Derr (1980) revealed the need to add several other categories as will be indicated below.

In creating a typology such as the one that will be presented below, it is important to specify the scientific and practical function of the typology. My research goal was to better understand the internal career. In conducting the interviews I observed similarities among the various people interviewed and attempted to capture these similarities. The reliability of the categories was measured by having others read the interviews to see if they would classify them in the same way I did. By this criterion they are highly reliable in that two

independent readers agreed on 40 of the original 44 cases. In subsequent interview studies similarly high levels of agreement were always attained.

New categories were created if at least two cases were found that resembled each other and that could not be fitted into the existing categories. By this criterion it is possible that with further interviews other anchor categories may surface.

The function of the typology is another issue. I was not trying to develop a selection tool that would allow others to label career occupants. Because I was dealing with the internal career, my goal was to create a typology that would help a career occupant decipher his or her own priorities. Since the ultimate goal was to help individuals develop the kind of self-insight that would enable them to negotiate better with organizations in the management of their own career, the typology had to be primarily oriented toward inducing self understanding. This meant that the individual might not be able to classify him or herself cleanly in terms of the categories below, but would still benefit from the exercise of attempting to do so in that it would produce a greater level of self awareness. The categories are presented to the reader in a diagnostic form to stimulate this kind of self awareness.

One of the most fundamental issues that all career occupants have to resolve is the balance between autonomy and security. For some people one or the other extreme of this dimension becomes the overriding factor in integrating their self-image and thus becomes a career anchor.

1) Security/stability: If this is your anchor it means that you are primarily and always concerned about jobs and work that will make you feel economically secure and stable. You will worry less about the content of the work you do and more about the degree to which your employer offers you "tenure," good benefits, generous retirement, and so on. The so-called "golden handcuffs" is exactly what you are looking for. You may have a variety of talents and values, but none of these are more important to you than feeling secure and stable.

2) Autonomy/independence: If this is your anchor it means that above all else you want your worklife to be under your own control. You resist organizational routines, rules, uniforms or dress codes, hours of work, and all other forms of regimentation. You probably would prefer to work as a teacher, consultant, or independent businessperson, but some kinds of organizational jobs might suit you such as field sales, or professional staff jobs such as research and development. But you would become unhappy if you were promoted into headquarters where you lost your autonomy even if that was a "bigger" better paying job.

A second major issue for all career occupants is how much to develop their unique craft, the set of special skills that provide them employment in the first place versus broadening themselves, learning a variety of skills, and, ultimately, moving into administration and management. Extreme positions along this dimension produce two other career anchor categories.

3) Technical or functional competence: If this is your anchor it means that your self-concept is built around your par-

ticular talents or skills, and that the exercise of those talents and skills at ever higher levels is your primary means of "being yourself." You will seek higher levels of challenge within your skill area, and may go into administration or management in that skill area, but you will resist general management because that would require you to drop the exercise of your skill. You seek recognition primarily from others who can appreciate your skill and you will quit jobs that do not challenge you unless for economic reasons you must keep the job. In this case you would endeavor to exercise your skill off the job by moonlighting or developing a hobby in that area. The biggest danger for you in most organizations is that your skill will lead you to being promoted into general management which you will not like and will not be good at.

4) General management competence: If this is your anchor it means that you want to rise to a high level in an organization where you can measure your own competence by the performance of the organization that you manage. You view technical or functional skills to be necessary to climbing the ladder, but you will not feel you have made it until you are a general manager integrating the other functions. You will have learned that to succeed as a general manager you will need some combination of high motivation, skills in analyzing and synthesizing information, interpersonal skills, and emotional skills in the sense of being able to make tough decisions day after day without becoming debilitated by them. Your basic identity and sense of success will come through the success of the organization you work for.

What is to be noted so far is that these four types use different criteria for determining whether or not they are successful, they have different attitudes toward economic rewards, they will respond to different kinds of rewards and incentives, and they will often have difficulty understanding each other. Most organizational career systems are built around the security/stability type and the general managerial type. To the extent that the needed talent resides in technically/functionally and autonomy anchored people, we can predict difficulties in attracting and retaining such people.

Even more problematic is the tendency to move the technically/functionally anchored types onto career ladders that eventually lead to general management and watching such people fail, either because they cannot do the work of general management or they are not really motivated to do it. They are the true victims of the Peter Principle because they would not have wanted such jobs in the first place if multiple career ladders were more available in organizations.

A small number of people in each of our studies showed clear tendencies to want to create something entirely their own. What struck me about these people was that they were genuinely different from others in how they structured their internal career, though their pattern of jobs in the early external career looked quite conventional.

5) Entrepreneurial creativity: If this is your anchor you have always wanted to create a business or product or service of your own, where your success was entirely due to your own cre-

ative effort. You probably already started up enterprises when you were in school, and you think about such enterprises all the time, even while you might be employed in a more traditional kind of job. You want to make a lot of money eventually but the money is not the goal in itself; rather it is a measure of how successful you are in creating something new. The new enterprise is an extension of yourself so you will often give it your own name. You would work for a company if it allowed you to develop your own enterprise and gave you control over it, or if it allowed you to keep your own patents, but you are not willing to be a minority share holder or to share credit with others for what you have done.

From the point of view of this career anchor, the debate about "intrapreneurship" is irrelevant. If a person is really anchored in this way it is inevitable that he or she will start up their own enterprise sooner or later. On the other hand, companies can certainly attempt to use these individuals in the early stages of their career, so long as they are aware that they will not retain them.

The other issue is whether or not the emphasis on creativity implies that the other anchor groups are less concerned about creative efforts. The way to think about this is that in each group the creative impulse manifests itself differently. The technical/functional types certainly want to be creative in their craft and the general manager types want to be creative in how they manage. The point about entrepreneurs is that they are obsessed with the need to create on a large scale and as an

extension of themselves.

The next anchor category is, in a sense, at the opposite extreme in highlighting concern for others, for a cause, for a dominant ideal or value.

6) Service/dedication to a cause: If this is your anchor, you see your career entirely in terms of some core values that you are trying to achieve through the kind of work you do. Those values could be such things as "making the world a better place to live," "creating a more humane workplace for people in organizations," "inventing products that will save lives or cure starvation," and so on. You will only remain in a job or organization if it allows you to fulfill the values you hold.

A good example of an individual in this category is the ex-professor of forestry I met in Australia who had been hired by an aluminum company to plan their mining in such a way that the environment would be minimally disturbed. He was not merely to stay within the law, but to actively promote environmental preservation. He showed me with great pride areas that had been reforested, cited statistics on which animals had already returned, and discussed his system for minimizing negative impact. He also made it quite clear that he would resign if the company in any way interfered with his plan.

One is tempted to correlate this anchor with entire occupations such as social work, the ministry, personnel management and the like, but, in fact, one finds service anchored people in every occupation. On the other hand, any given occupation will have most of the anchors represented in it. In other

words, some people go into social work because they enjoy it as a craft, some want the supervision and management, some want the chance to pursue an autonomous practice, some find it a secure career, and so on. Similarly, one will find among doctors or lawyers or policemen, the full range of anchors described here.

We found a small but unusual group who seemed to care less about what they did and more about the degree to which their work tested them on a daily basis.

7) Pure challenge: If this is your anchor you require the kind of work that will always permit you to feel that you are overcoming "impossible" barriers, meeting very difficult challenges, or winning over tough competitors. The kind of work you do is less important to you than the fact that it allows you to win out over opponents or problems. You tend to define situations in terms of winning and losing, and you only get true satisfaction when you win.

This group was originally identified by Derr (1980) in his study of naval officers. He found a set of Navy flyers who were totally concentrated on training themselves to a level of perfection that would allow them to win in combat if and when that opportunity arose. We then recognized that similar concerns were evident in some athletes, in salesmen, and in other occupations where "head to head" confrontation occurred. We also noted that some engineers thrived on solving impossible problems, that some strategy consultants were only motivated if the company they were helping was extremely badly off, and some managers only enjoyed extreme turnaround situations in which everyone else had

failed.

The final anchor group is probably a reflection of changing values in society and structural changes in the labor force resulting from larger numbers of women in organizations and the corresponding increase in dual careers. We initially found this anchor in women graduates of the MIT Sloan School but are increasingly finding it in the men as well and at all ages.

8) Life style: If this is your anchor you feel that your work life and career must be integrated with other aspects of your total life--your family situation and your personal growth needs. You will therefore seek situations that allow you to make that integration even if that means some sacrifices in relation to the career. This situation comes up most clearly for you if you have a career involved spouse and the two of you need to make joint life style decisions. You will decide how each of you will balance personal and professional needs, where you will live in terms of joint job opportunities, whether or not and when to have children, and how to handle situations where your organizational careers might require one or the other of you to make a career compromise. But you will tend to seek integrative solutions rather than letting career concerns dominate the decision.

Our research so far shows that these eight categories encompass all of the people we have interviewed in a variety of occupations. Other kinds of anchors may be found in future research, but so far all the cases we have looked at fit into one of the eight categories above. We have not been concerned about the relative frequency of the anchor types because those vary by

occupation, by socio-economic level, and other variables.

From a theoretical point of view, one wonders why some obvious categories of anchors did not show up. For example, why is pure power not an anchor. My hypothesis about this is that we all have power needs and they get expressed sufficiently in various occupations through the other anchors. Perhaps if one took specific occupations such as politics or elementary school teaching where pure power can be expressed, one would find some members of those occupations with power anchors.

Some people have speculated that variety should be a career anchor, but here again it appears that needs for variety come to be ultimately expressed through autonomy or general management or pure challenge anchors. Organizational membership and the identity it provides could have been found to be an anchor in its own right, but it appears to be expressed more in terms of security/stability needs or general management needs.

Practical application. Career anchors can be determined by career occupants through a self diagnostic exercise. The core of the exercise is to work with a partner and to do a mutual career history interview leading to a career anchor determination (Schein, 1985, 1990). Such an exercise is most appropriate under the following conditions: 1) When a crucial career choice has to be made, such as when a person is offered a promotion or a transfer; 2) When the career occupant feels the need of a change, such as when he or she is not happy in the present situation and is seeking something different; 3) When the organization requires

career data for their human resource inventory and each career occupation has to provide some written career plans; 4) When the career occupant is facing a career counseling session with his or her supervisor, an activity that is increasingly required by organizations as part of their career development system; and 5) when in a dual career situation choices have to be made about how best to maximize the potential of both careers.

Job/Role Planning

Most human resource planning systems have components such as succession planning, career pathing, and programmed development activities oriented to getting specific people ready for higher level jobs. Most often these systems start with a pool of people and plan for the people. That is, the organization manages the career and decides how best to deploy its people so that jobs will be filled as needed and people will develop as needed.

There are two fundamental flaws in this model. First, the organization makes assumptions about the motives, needs, and values of the people that may not fit reality. In other words, the career anchor may not match the planned career path. Second, the organization does too little job/role planning (Schein, 1978) and therefore mis-estimates what kind of person with what sets of skills and anchors it will need in the future.

In a dynamic environment, the organization should concentrate primarily on figuring out what needs to be done for the organization to survive, grow, and innovate. What kinds of

tasks will face the organization in the future, and how will those tasks be accomplished. What human resources will be needed can only be determined if there is a good understanding of what work needs to be done.

At the senior management levels this is the job of strategic planning, but at every level such strategic thinking should be supplemented by formal planning for every job that currently exists in the organization. This activity carried out for all jobs throughout the organization is job/role planning.

For example, the job of plant manager is evolving and changing to such a degree that if one pulled out the job description for plant managers even a few years ago, one would find that they do not at all fit current realities. Specifically, whereas in most industries the role of plant manager used to be technical, it has in many cases evolved into a role that is much more political, where the plant manager relies on a technical staff for most of the operational problems while he or she negotiates with the union, the government around occupational safety and health issues, and the local community around issues of pollution and employment.

In principle, all jobs should be periodically analyzed from this planning point of view, but any given organization can of course first identify which particular jobs are going to change most in response to environmental changes and strategic changes in the organization, and concentrate on job/role planning just for those jobs.

Practical Application. Job/role planning is easiest to implement around succession planning. For every key job in the organization where a back-up person is to be identified and where a career development track is to be considered, the first step should be for a group consisting of some present occupants and some managers one level higher to spend a couple of hours doing an "open systems analysis" of how the job will evolve over the next several years.

In other words: 1) What demand systems or other roles is the job connected to inside and outside the organization, 2) How will those demand systems change, and 3) What will this mean for future occupants of that job in terms of the kinds of skills, attitudes, values, and career anchors they will have to have (Schein, 1978).

Only after such an analysis has been done is it appropriate to consider the names of individuals who might fill that job. Doing the analysis in a formal way and writing up the results has a second payoff. For candidates who are being considered (if the organization is using open job posting), or for incumbents who have already been given the job, giving them the actual job/role analysis completed by the group turns out to be far more helpful than giving them the job descriptions. Somehow the job/role planning process gets at the essence of a job in a way that formal job descriptions do not, and that makes it easier for the candidate to judge whether or not his or her own career anchor fits with the future requirements of the job.

Effective job/role planning makes it possible for career

occupants to concentrate primarily on their own career planning and development, and facilitates an effective dialogue between the organization and the individual that permits better matching of what the organization needs and what individual career occupants need. If that dialogue is to work, individuals need to be more self-aware and more skilled in negotiating with their employers to insure a career path that fits their anchors, and the employer needs to be more aware of the realities of the organization's work as it moves into an uncertain future.

A Brief Look Into the Future

As we contemplate the increasingly turbulent environment in which organizations will have to operate in the future, can we foresee any trends either for career anchors or for key jobs and roles in organizations. Several observations can be made along these lines:

1) The effect of globalization. Career anchors exist in every culture, but the priorities among them, how careers are perceived, how work and family concerns are balanced will vary from culture to culture. Career development systems will, therefore, have to be culture specific. It is very doubtful that any multi-national organization will be able to use the same systems in all of its country subsidiaries, but the structure of creating a dialogue by doing job/role planning and helping people to figure out their own anchor will be necessary in all of them.

Job/role planning will become even more important because jobs with the same titles will be different in different

cultures. One will not be able to assume that if someone has been a successful plant manager in the U.S., he or she will be able to do the same job in a European or Asian country. In fact job/role planning may be a very important tool to identify cultural variations to avoid making inappropriate assignments.

2) The effect of technological change. All futurologists seem to agree that technological change is accelerating in all aspects, especially information technology. The main effect of this trend is that every organization will need more specialists and that the rate of people becoming technically obsolete will increase. People with a technical/functional anchor will, therefore, become more important to organizations and career systems will have to evolve that can meet the needs of such specialists.

At the same time, job/role planning will reveal that many such people will become obsolete within their own career span so provisions must be made both by individual career occupants and organizations for retraining and reeducation. Whether this is done inside organizations or through educational subsidies of various sorts is not clear, but what is clear is that given specialities will probably not be needed over the entire span of a career.

We will also see a change in the basic structure of organizations that will make the integrative managerial job substantially different. Information technology will make it possible for organizations to create networks that will either displace, shrink, or change the nature of hierarchies. The job

of general managers will become much more one of facilitating, negotiating, integrating, and process consulting (Schein, 1985b, 1987, 1988).

If organizations become flatter, as seems to be happening in some industries, there will be fewer senior management jobs of an integrative nature, but, at the same, with flatter organizations will come more project type of activity which will require more general managers at lower levels. It remains to be seen how this will impact on the nature of these jobs and whether or not they will require people with anchors other than general manager ones. Another related impact will be that functional units will become more important and functional managers will find themselves in more senior positions of influence. With such restructuring the opportunities for technically/functionally anchored people increase as organizations flatten.

This will have an impact on those individuals who have general management anchors in that it will be less and less clear whether or not they can have the individual level of accountability and authority that they may feel they need. They will be more dependent on their specialist subordinates and will have to learn how to influence without authority (Bradford & Cohen, 1990).

3) The effect of changing socio-cultural values. Though this is happening at very different rates in different countries, it seems clear that we are entering a period of the world's development where people expect more and are less willing to settle for autocratically mandated lives. There will be more

people with autonomy anchors, life style anchors, service anchors, and entrepreneurial creativity anchors.

Organizations will probably be more fluid systems and the nature of the psychological contract between employers and employess will be much looser and dynamic. Security issues will obviously remain a concern, but the concept of who is responsible for making someone feel secure may shift away from employing organizations toward the individual and toward new social institutions that have not yet been invented. In other words, in the more developed countries neither the individual career occupant, nor the employing organization will want to commit to golden handcuffs or life time employment.

Whatever else happens, it is my conviction that the more people know about their own needs and the more organizations can understand the realities of how their work is changing and what kinds of human resources they will need to manage an uncertain future the better off they will be.

Conclusion

By way of summary and conclusion, I want to restate that the purpose of the career anchor research is to help individuals to become more self-aware so that they can negotiate better with their organizations around career pathing and career development. I make the assumption that organizations attempting to maintain effectiveness in increasingly dynamic environments will need to improve the process by which work is matched to people. In that matching process they will increasinly be dependent upon career

occupants being open and clear about their own career anchors, so it is in the best interests of both the individual and the organization to stimulate self-awareness and to create a climate in which employees can be more open in stating what their career priorities and anchors are.

At the same time, this dialogue can only work if organizations become more clear about the nature of the work that is to be done, and learn to communicate clearly to future career occupants what they are to do and what they will face. To generate such information organizations will have to do more job/role planning and will have to be more open in sharing the information generated by this process.

What this means, ultimately, is that organizations and management should manage the work of the organization, and that individual career occupants should manage their own careers.

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