

British Psychological Society Annual Conference 2008 – Dublin

Investigating the role of career anchors in job satisfaction and organisational commitment;
a PJ fit approach

Objectives: Career anchors were developed by Edgar Schein in the 1970s. Since then they have been a popular model in career counselling. Having an understanding of career anchors can help individuals to make important career decisions. This is becoming an important skill in the workplace as organisations are taking an increasingly hands off approach to career management. Career anchors are widely used but the empirical evidence to support the model is limited. The aim of this work was to investigate the relationship between career anchors, job satisfaction, organisational commitment and career salience. It was hypothesised that good fit between anchors and job or anchors and the organisation would lead to increased job satisfaction and organisational commitment. It was also hypothesised that career salience would moderate these relationships.

Design: 2 approaches were taken to measuring fit. The first was a direct approach, where individuals were explicitly asked to assess the fit between their career anchors and their job. The second approach used a questionnaire to assess the career anchors of an individual's job. A measure of fit was calculated using this data.

Methods: This study was conducted within a UK police organisation. Firstly the career anchors had to be matched to the organisation and to a selection of jobs within it. 2 approaches were used for this. Firstly an expert panel of staff from the organisation were asked to carry out the matching. Secondly job incumbents were asked to complete a questionnaire to assess the career anchors of their job and of the organisation. The results from these 2 approaches were then combined. 2 separate studies were conducted within the host organisation, (study 1; n=122, study 2; n=184) to investigate the hypotheses outlined above. All participants were members of Police Staff from this organisation. Job satisfaction was measured using Warr, Cook and Wall's (1979) measure, Organisational Commitment using Cook and Wall's (1980) measure and Career Salience using Allen and Ortlepp's (2004) measure.

Results: Hierarchical regression analysis was used to investigate the hypotheses. Baron & Kenny's method for investigating moderating variables was used to investigate the role of career salience. Fit between career anchors and job was found to predict job satisfaction and organisational commitment in both studies. Career Salience was found to moderate the relationship between fit and organisational commitment in study 2. No relationship was found between anchor/organisation fit and job satisfaction or organisational commitment. Career salience alone was found to predict both job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

Conclusions: These studies provide support for the role of career anchors in improving job satisfaction and organisational commitment. This suggests that a knowledge of career anchors could help both individuals to make effective job and career choices. Knowledge of career anchors could also be beneficial to organisations in modifying the content of work roles to fit with the individual job incumbents' values and needs. Similarly career anchors could be used to aid succession planning. In another part of this research line managers from one organisation were encouraged to use career anchors as a framework for career development discussions. Feedback was positive from both line managers and staff.