

# An Exploratory Study of Career Anchors in Business Higher Education

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## Abstract

*In this paper we aim to explore the topic of Schein's career anchors in a particular local context (business higher education in Romania). In order to do so, we studied the literature on career anchors and applied the test for 86 students of Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Faculty of International Business and Economics, 1<sup>st</sup> year of study.*

*As expected, we observed a higher negative correlation between general managerial and lifestyle anchors and a series of other general relationships. More than a half of the respondents are autonomy-anchored and more than a third seem to have the entrepreneurial creativity anchor. We are cautious with respect to the results, since people without work experience might find a series of statements very interesting, but value them incorrectly based on a series of assumptions they make. For our small sample we could not validate the hypothesis that women are more lifestyle oriented than men.*

**Key words:** career anchors, business higher education, students, entrepreneurship

**J.E.L. classification:** A20, I23, J24, M14

## 1. Introduction

In recent years a lot of research was conducted on Schein's career anchors, as there is a strong need for finding better ways to motivate different people. Some of the results are quite controversial, which shows the fact that career anchors act differently in different cultures.

In this paper we aim to explore this issue in a particular local context (business higher education in Romania).

## 2. Career Anchors –A Brief Literature Review

According to Schein (1978), career anchors refer to a series of driving and constraining forces on people's professional choices and decisions. The author presented five major career anchors: security/stability, autonomy, technical/functional, general managerial and entrepreneurial creativity. In a later work, he included three more anchors: service/dedication to a cause, pure challenge and lifestyle (Schein, 1996).

Career anchor theory is based on the idea of a real need of congruence between career guidance and the environment in order to lead to professional satisfaction, since, without this congruence, dissatisfaction arises (Afam and Simpson, 2007).

It was shown that career preferences are highly influenced by the social and family context and adapt continuously to people's work and life conditions (Rodrigues, Guest and Budjanovcanin, 2013).

For sure, Schein's theory represents the foundation of career anchors theory and it is the starting point for any research in the field. However, two risks have to be taken into account. First, as Schein had an initial number of five career anchors and then discovered that other 3 should be added, we could expect that some others might be added in the future as a result of the changes in

the work-related values (Rodrigues, Guest and Budjanovcanin, 2013). Second, Schein's original study was based on a small American sample of 44 MIT alumni (panel for a period of 10 to 12 years). Typology could then be adjusted by considering different groups of workers (Mallon, Duberley and Cohen, 2005) and different cultures / countries (Ituma and Simpson, 2007).

In the following paragraphs we present a short description of each of the eight career anchors developed by Schein.

#### **Technical/functional**

People with a strong technical/functional anchor tend to develop their career in their area of competence (Schein, 1978). They need to be experts in their own field, as they perceive their own success depending on the feedback they receive after performing their job (Barth, 1993). Their motivation basically comes from two sources: (1) specialization in a field they enjoy and (2) a strong talent regarding that specialization that makes them become experts. Despite the fact that most of the people start by being quite technical/functional in their orientation, not all of them really enjoy this process, as they might see it only as a step for climbing the managerial ladder or for acquiring the experience required for starting a business. People having this anchor really prefer specialization to being a general manager, although they accept and sometimes really want to become functional managers, in their area of expertise (Schein, 1996).

#### **General managerial**

People having this career anchor feel a stronger need for formal authority, power and influence in general and see specialization somehow as a trap (Schein, 1978). Of course, in order to be good managers, people need to acquire a series of skills and therefore they should focus more on other things than specialization: analytical competence, interpersonal and intergroup competence, emotional competence (Schein, 1996). While we tend to believe that this anchor is somehow opposed to an entrepreneurial career path and more suitable to a career in a multinational, Lee and Wong (2004) found that the managerial anchor had also a positive impact on entrepreneurial intentions.

#### **Autonomy/Independence**

It is clear that some people prefer to stay away from other people's rules and procedures and consider this a main issue. For instance, they might refuse a better job in terms of payment and even in terms of activities if this also meant giving up to their autonomy (Schein, 1996). Feldman and Bolino (2000) observed that people having this career anchor are the most driven by the feeling of living their lives in the way they want to (setting their own schedule, working at their own pace, by taking into consideration their own lifestyle). Schein (1978) found that these people do not necessarily search for financial stability, but rather for a career allowing them to do what they like and how they like.

#### **Security/stability**

Although up to a point everybody needs some degree of security and stability, there are some people who feel a stronger need with this respect and therefore have more restrictions when making major career decisions.

People who have a strong security-stability anchor tend to be very tied to the organizations offering them professional stability and financial security, as they do not want to take risks (Schein, 1978, 1996). Barth (1993) noticed that, in many cases, this anchor leads to a series of compromises, as people do not leave the organizations they work for, even if this way they lose their freedom or their talents are not recognized.

#### **Entrepreneurial creativity**

Some people observe quite early in their lives that they need to create a new business or a new product. In this case, the desire of creating "something new" is very important (Schein, 1978; Barth, 1993).

Since statements in the questionnaire referring to this anchor generally refer to the intention of owning a business, it is also important to look at the drivers of these intentions. Krueger and Brazeal (1994) showed that people's perceived cultural and social context do have a strong influence on entrepreneurial intentions. In a series of studies, it was shown there were many cases in which people were taking into consideration the entrepreneurial career path as a result of a negative experience in companies they were working (Lee and Wong, 2004; Herron and Sapienza, 1992; Dyer, 1992; Dubini, 1988).

There are authors who consider that creativity and entrepreneurship should be considered two separate anchors (Danziger, Rachman-Moore and Valency, 2008).

**Service/dedication to a cause**

This anchor refers to the need of improving the world, of taking into consideration some values that need to be embodied in people’s work (Schein, 1996). People having this career anchor consider they have success only if they know they did something important for the others. Helping professions (teachers, medical doctors, etc.) might be suitable to such persons.

**Pure challenge**

There are people who feel a special need to overcome apparently impossible obstacles and to solve difficult problems. If everybody is happy (or at least relaxed) after removing the burden of a problem that needs to be solved, for the people having this career anchor it means a lot more, as they generally have a higher level of energy after solving the problem compared to the initial state, before the problem to arise.

They are not technically/functionally anchored, as for them it is not very important these problems to come from a particular field (Schein, 1996). However, a study applied also on students showed that students with technical talent are generally looking for challenge and opportunities to face difficult problems and overcome obstacles (Ona, 2015).

**Lifestyle**

This career anchor was first observed when looking at women graduates in MIT. As it was then increasingly observed also in men graduates, Schein included this in the list.

There are quite many people who need a balance between a successful career and a good family and social life (Schein, 1996). Schein considered that an important lifestyle issue refer to people’s availability to move geographically, if this leads to a further step in their careers.

It is still debatable if this career anchor is more typical to women or there is no clear relationship between gender and lifestyle. However, there are recent studies who still support the idea that women are indeed more lifestyle oriented compared to men (Williams, Grobler and Grobler, 2014).

**3. Career Anchor Test as an Instrument for Teaching Management**

Career anchors are really interesting and represent a good base for teaching management. In order to both introduce some concepts and provoke discussions among students, we applied the original test (with 40 statements, in English) to students studying Management in English at Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Faculty of International Business and Economics, 1<sup>st</sup> year of study. We calculated their individual scores for each career anchor and discussed the results. Of course, their data were not necessarily comparable since for some of them a total score of 19 was high and for the others was not. Therefore, we used proportions and split a total of 10 among the career anchors for each student. Correlations are presented in Table 1.

*Table no. 1 Correlations between career anchors (proportional values)*

	TF	GM	AU	SS	EC	SD	PC	LS
TF	1							
GM	-0.31277	1						
AU	-0.08138	0.019448	1					
SS	0.018784	-0.118	-0.13312	1				
EC	-0.44323	0.080268	0.095703	-0.45607	1			
SD	0.179624	-0.26054	-0.45406	-0.35881	-0.12787	1		
PC	0.06405	0.156697	-0.39895	-0.11699	-0.18543	-0.03347	1	
LS	-0.10674	-0.50778	0.044312	0.290691	-0.25901	-0.12208	-0.3696	1

Source: Own data -Test applied in April 2015 to 86 students in Bucharest University of Economic Studies

A limitation of this method of “proportions” still remain, since the same total is split proportionally to real results in the test and the gaps do not mean the same for all individuals. Therefore, we also tried another limitative method: we ranked the career anchors for each

individual, depending on the total scores and looked at the correlations again. Limitations in this case particularly refer to the differences between values (rank 3, for example, might mean something important or not, as people do not relate to the same number of career anchors. However, results are similar to the ones obtained from the previous method, as it can be seen in Table 2.

*Table no. 2 Correlations between career anchors (ranking)*

	TF	GM	AU	SS	EC	SD	PC	LS
TF	1							
GM	-0.26945	1						
AU	-0.06926	0.062677	1					
SS	-0.15421	-0.11061	-0.17459	1				
EC	-0.3057	0.067769	0.045318	-0.31356	1			
SD	0.246503	-0.31255	-0.30508	-0.29889	-0.21667	1		
PC	0.009092	0.095246	-0.42343	-0.09815	-0.25082	0.013372	1	
LS	-0.22656	-0.40339	-0.05337	0.308713	-0.32217	-0.11775	-0.20181	1

Source: Own data -Test applied in April 2015 to 86 students in Bucharest University of Economic Studies

Most of the results presented in the table were expectable. As we were interested to check the correlation between gender and lifestyle, we tried to look at it, but on our small sample we could not find any correlation with this respect.

## 5. Main Findings, Conclusions and Future Perspectives

First, we wanted to see which career anchors apply to each individual. We could notice that some students have only one main career anchor, while most of them are anchored in more such values.

Second, we could be aware of the career anchors that are predominant for the group as a whole. Thus, autonomy/independence was highly appreciated (62.79% of the respondents). Then, entrepreneurial creativity was encountered as one of the main anchors for 39.53% of the students. The not so well represented career anchor was, as expected, the general managerial one (9.30%). We looked for each individual not only at high values, but also at the low ones (representing anchors that are not present for them); thus, we could observe that service/dedication to a cause was the anchor that tended to be present towards the extremes (while 32.56% of the students are service-anchored, 37.21% have a very small total for this anchor).

Then, we analyzed the correlations. By looking at the two tables of correlations, we could observe similar data and some weak to average correlations and two moderate to strong correlations.

- Lifestyle is negatively correlated to general managerial career anchor. Of course, this was expected, since students generally consider they have to work hard in order to achieve a managerial position and to be successful in this career.
- Autonomy/independence is negatively correlated to pure challenge. This relationship seemed to be quite strong, although it is a little bit more difficult to understand the roots of this result (at the beginning we had the opposite expectation, because of some real examples we had in mind and of other results in the field). Since we also have other data about these students (hobbies, own definition of success, results at tests and exams, etc.) we will try to explore this negative correlation through a qualitative analysis in a later study.
- Lifestyle is also negatively correlated to pure challenge. In this case it was as in our initial assumption.
- Entrepreneurial creativity is negatively correlated to both technical/functional career anchor and security/stability. We consider this result shows quite a high degree of maturity among

students. Indeed, in most of the cases, at the beginning being an entrepreneur means leaving your own specialization in order to be able to develop the business (specialization might remain, but the time should be split between various activities). It also involves taking risks, which is opposed to the idea of security/stability.

- Service/dedication to a cause is negatively correlated to both autonomy/independence and security/stability. In the first case, the explanation is quite clear, since dedication to a cause implies, in general, giving up to the idea of autonomy, of being free; therefore, even if maybe at the beginning the need for helping others coexists with the need for having your own schedule, in time the stronger need will win the battle. The other relationship is debatable and for sure contextual. Indeed, we can understand the idea that being really dedicated to a cause can lead to unexpected changes and thus to a lower stability or that a real need for stability will diminish the desire to be always ready for helping the others; however, for some particular causes stability is also considered appropriate.
- As expected, there is a moderate negative correlation between technical/functional and general managerial anchors, showing the fact that students understand the need for a right balance (which varies significantly among people) between being highly specialized and being the one who is mainly concerned with planning, organizing, leading and controlling.
- In general, we have observed negative correlations or we have not observed any correlation at all. We consider this is normal, because people are different, but some career anchors express needs that may suppress others. The only positive correlation we observed (quite weak) was between service/dedication to a cause and technical/functional anchor. As we also have some examples of people who do have both career anchors, we will try to further explore this issue, to see if this was contextual or can express a reality.

We strongly believe in variety and complementary. Although in this paper we insisted on correlations in general, we have to admit that the most interesting and useful results come from analyzing each individual separately. Therefore, a deeper and more qualitatively-focus analysis is needed, by taking into account other pieces of information we have about these students. It would be also interesting to look at what is happening with their career anchors in time.

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