

Career Anchors – An Empirical Investigation

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Edgar Schein and Thomas De Long developed career anchors in the 1970s (Schein 1978; Schein 1996). The model was formed through interviews with MIT graduates, initially 5 career anchors were put forward and then after further work with De Long the final 3 were added to the model. One of the main criticisms of the model is that it lacks empirical support. The model was developed using a small sample of MIT alumni. From this Schein developed a 40 item questionnaire called the Career Orientation Inventory (COI). This was designed to assess an individual's primary career anchor. The COI consists of 8 scales with 5 questions in each. There is very little information available regarding how the questionnaire was put together. Various articles published since have reported finding different factor structures however all of these have also been based on small specialist samples (Igbaria, Greenhaus & Pringle 1991; Igbaria and Baroudi 1993; Custodio 2000).

Arnold (2004) stated that career anchors may tell us more relevant information about what people want from their career than other models. Career anchors allow for a much broader view of an individual's values around their career to be considered than other models such as Holland's vocational personality, which are more talent focused. Career Anchors are still popular and successfully used by many practitioners to provide guidance to individuals (Evans 1996). However, until the model is shown to be empirically sound it will always face criticism from the psychological community.

Another criticism the model is exposed to, is the way in which it is scored and interpreted. Initially Schein, (Schein 1993) advocated that the questionnaire should not be used alone. He designed a structured interview that should be carried out with individuals to confirm the information found through the questionnaire. In addition a weighting process is used with the COI to find the primary career anchor. Brindle & Whapham (2003) suggest that the weighting process significantly reduces the validity of the questionnaire. A final criticism is that there are no norms available for the COI. Many other popular measures used today have norms to enable us to make comparisons between people. This was also noted by Brindle & Whapham, (2003) as they felt that using raw scores alone to interpret the measure was misleading. Instead they believe both an ideographic and normative approach should be taken.

Objectives:

The main objective of this research was to see if any empirical support could be found for the COI. This was done using

- Factor analysis to explore the factor structure that exists.
- Cronbachs Alpha to check internal reliability
- Test re-test to check for external reliability

A secondary objective was to establish UK norms for the measure and then see if these help with the interpretation of individual's results.

Design:

A quantitative design was used to analyse the data using factor analysis and test – retest reliability.

Method:

The questionnaire was sent to various organisations based in the UK. A mixture of private, public and voluntary sector organisations were approached. 606 responses were received. A random sample of 150 of these were contacted again 12 months later to gather test retest reliability data.

Results:

Exploratory factor analysis was used rather than confirmatory because previous authors have found different factor structures. Therefore it was not felt to be appropriate to assume the 8-factor structure. Principle axis factoring with varimax rotation suggested that there is an 8-factor structure that accounts for 47.45% of the variance. To see if the factors found were representative of those suggested by Schein the factor loadings were considered. Generally items are accepted with factor loadings of 0.3 or above. Of the 40 items only 3 had loadings of less than this and these still indicated the factor structure was as proposed by Schein.

Internal reliability was checked using Cronbach's alpha calculations. Apart from 1 all of the 8 scales had alpha coefficients of above 0.70. The 8th scale had a coefficient of 0.60.

The test retest data is still being collected; the analysis of this will be available in time for the conference.

Norm tables for each scale were developed and have been used in practice in another part of this research. When looking at individual's scores from the measure the feedback indicates that normative scores do add an extra dimension and enable meaningful comparisons between people to be made. The normative scores can also present quite a different picture of a person than is given using raw scores alone.

Conclusions:

This study provides support for the 8-factor structure of career anchors, as measured by the 40-item COI. The internal reliability results are also satisfactory. This is the first study to use a large, varied sample to help provide support for the model. The results from the test retest will hopefully help to provide further support. The findings from this study should make the COI seem a much more viable measure to be used in careers guidance and go a long way to address previous criticisms.

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Summary

The concept of career anchors has been around for the past 30 years. Since then it has faced criticism from the psychological community for lacking in empirical evidence. This paper uses a sample of 606 UK based workers to attempt to provide some empirical support for the career anchor model. Factor analysis and internal reliability findings are positive; test retest reliability data from the sample will be available in time for the conference.