Chapter 8
Career Anchors as a Meta-Capacity in Organizational Career Development

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Abstract The contemporary career paradigm acknowledges the unpredictable, turbulent and globally market-sensitive context within which individuals' careers unfold (Savickas, Journal of Career Assessment 19:251–258, 2011). Individuals are drawing on their personal resources and capacities (i.e. strengths, intrinsic motivation, values, aspirations, and coping capacities) to be more resilient and adaptable in negotiating the person-environment fit harmonics in a more turbulent employment context (Ferreira, Constructing a psychological career profile for staff retention, 2012). The research literature furthermore suggests that individuals will increasingly have to rely on internal definitions and measures of career success in the construction of their careers (Savickas, Journal of Career Assessment 19:251–258, 2011; Schreuder and Coetzee Careers: An organisational perspective, 2011). Schein's (Career dynamics: Matching individual and organizational needs, 1978, Journal of Occupational Behavior 5:71–81, 1984, Career anchors: Discovering your real values, 1990, Academy of Management Executive 1, 80–88, 1996, Encyclopedia of career development, 2006) exploration of the dynamics of the internal career, through his career anchor concept, poses interesting implications for career counseling and guidance in the contemporary career paradigm. Individuals' subjective measures of career success are generally driven by their need for meaningful work that matches their personal motivations, career interests, abilities, motives, and values (internal career anchors). Career anchors act as the motivational forces (meta-capacities) that guide individuals' career decisions and preferences for work and work environments (Schein Career anchors: Discovering your real values, 1990). Achieving a harmonic fit between their internal career needs and the characteristics of the external occupational environment results in enhanced levels of career well-being and career and life satisfaction (Coetzee et al. South African Journal of Human Resource Management 8:13, 2010). This chapter explores the relevance of Schein's career anchor theory to contemporary career development by presenting an overview of various research findings that show how people's career anchors influence their subjective experiences of their work and careers.

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Schein's Career Anchor Theory

Schein (1990, 1996) views the career anchor as a person's self-concept or internal identity that evolves only as the person gains occupational and life experience. As a product of the interaction between the individual and the workplace (Wils et al. 2010), the career self-concept acts as an important motivational element for individuals' internal career and their career choices and attitudes (Schein 1990, 1996). As their careers and lives evolve, individuals discover a dominant career anchor (approximately by the age of 30) that drives their career decisions (Schein 1990). The dominant career anchor reflects people's long-term preferences regarding their work and work environment and how they would like to express or utilise personal resources around three poles: (1) self-perceived work talents and abilities, (2) self-perceived motives and needs, and (3) basic values and attitudes as they pertain to the internal or subjective career (Schein 1990, 1996).

The career anchor is an internal resource (meta-capacity) that functions as a set of driving and constraining forces on individuals' career decisions and choices (Schein 1978). Based on this view of Schein, Du Toit (2010) posits that career anchors form part of the conscious content of the psyche. They represent stabilizing and consistent values and personal views of oneself, one's life and one's self-concept that influence one's career decision-making and experiences of career success. Research conducted by Du Toit and Coetzee (2012) shows that individuals' career anchors are associated with their archetypal values which represent universal emotional, cognitive and behavioral styles that form part of the collective unconscious. Different archetypal values represent unique psychological themes and underlying goals, values and desires which direct individuals' personal development in a particular life phase (Pearson 1991). Du Toit and Coetzee (2012) posit that individuals' career anchors are energized by archetypal life themes that act as psychological forces in driving the expression of the career self-concept associated with the individual's dominant career anchor.

As a career meta-capacity, having a clear sense of one's career anchor (abilities, talents, needs, interests, motivations and what one values) is vital to help one make effective career decisions and experience subjective and objective career success (Schein 1990; Valcour and Ladge 2008). The career self-concept revolves around eight categories of career anchors (Schein 1990):

- *Technical/functional competence:* Values the achievement of expert status among peers and recognition for skills. Desires specialization and further learning and development in one's specialty.

- *General managerial competence:* Values the willingness to solve complex problems affecting the entire organization and undertake subsequent decision-making; promotion and higher levels of responsibility. Desires power, influence, and advancement up the corporate ladder.
- *Entrepreneurial creativity:* Values income, profitability of the organization, opportunity for creativity and identification of new businesses, products or services. Desires power and freedom to create wealth, high personal visibility and public recognition.
- *Autonomy/Independence:* Values increased autonomy and personal freedom in job content and settings. Desires freedom to achieve and demonstrate one's competence.
- *Security/stability:* Values recognition for loyalty, long-term employment for health benefits and retirement options. Desires predictability and being rewarded for length of service.
- *Lifestyle:* Values flexitime and balancing personal and the family's welfare with work commitments. Desires flexibility and the freedom to balance work-family life.
- *Service/dedication to a cause:* Values helping others, organizational mission, and working for the greater good of organisations or communities. Desires influence and the freedom to operate autonomously in the pursuit of personal values or higher life purpose/goal.
- *Pure challenge:* Values novel or challenging work and testing personal endurance through risky projects or physically challenging work. Desires power and influence to be competitive and win.

The technical competence, managerial competence and entrepreneurial creativity anchors relate to the work talents of individuals because they center on the day-to-day work performed by individuals. The security/stability, autonomy/independence and lifestyle anchors represent career motives and needs because they refer to the way in which individuals attempt to structure their work according to their basic personal desires and lives. The service/dedication to a cause anchor and the pure challenge anchors represent attitudes and values because they are related to ways in which individuals identify with their occupations and their organizational cultures (Feldman and Bolino 1996; Wils et al. 2010). In line with Schwartz's (1992) view that values are associated with certain motivational domains, Wils et al. (2010) argue that conceptually, the career anchor motives postulated by Schein (1978) are closely related to work values. Their research also indicates significant associations between Schein's career anchors and the work values system of Schwartz (1992). Research by Wils et al. (2010) provides supportive evidence of the conflictual (mutually inconsistent) nature of the opposing poles of career anchor clusters, as depicted in Fig. 8.1.

Figure 8.1 shows how Wils et al. (2010) cluster the eight career anchors in terms of the four values structure model of Schwartz (1992). The horizontal structure contrasts openness to change (pure challenge; entrepreneurial creativity and autonomy/independence) with conservation (security/stability and lifestyle). The vertical
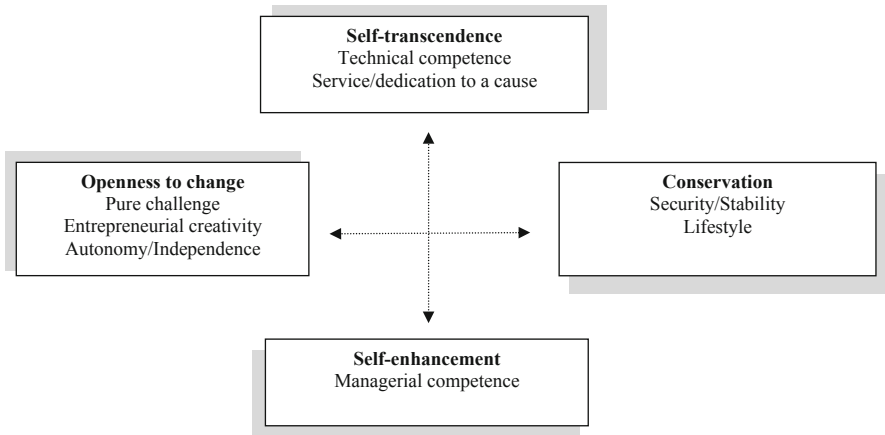
Fig. 8.1 The career anchors structure in terms of the value structure system of Schwartz

axis juxtaposes self-transcendence (technical competence and service/dedication to a cause) and self-enhancement (managerial competence). Each of the four values relates to specific interdependent motivational domains that can be either compatible or mutually inconsistent (Wils et al. 2010).

- *Openness to change* relates to the motivational domains of self-direction, stimulation and hedonism.
- *Conservation* relates to the motivational domains of tradition, conformity and security.
- *Self-transcendence* relates to the motivational domains of universalism and benevolence.
- *Self-enhancement* relates to the motivational domains of achievement and power (Wils et al. 2010).

Career Anchor Patterns

Feldman and Bolino (1996) posit that an individual can have a dominant career anchor in each of the three categories postulated to underpin Schein's (1978, 1990) definition of career anchors: talents and abilities; motives and needs; and attitudes and values. Although Schein (1978, 1996) maintains that over time (generally in the first 5–10 years of work), a single, dominant career anchor emerges that stabilizes, guides and constrains an individual's career path, research (see Table 8.1) provides evidence of a multiple career anchor profile comprising of a primary, secondary, and even tertiary career anchors. The simultaneous existence of multiple career anchors suggest that individuals can develop more than one strong career anchor which may suggest an overlap of values and motives among the eight career anchors (Coetzee and Schreuder 2008; Feldman and Bolino 1996; Ramakrishna and Potosky 2003; Schein 1996; Wils et al. 2010).

Table 8.1 Dominant career anchor patterns

Research studies	Talents and abilities-based career anchor motivations			Motives and needs-based career anchor motivations			Attitudes and values-based career anchor motivations	
	Technical/functional competence	General managerial competence	Entrepreneurial creativity	Autonomy/independence	Security/stability	Lifestyle	Service/dedication to a cause	Pure challenge
	Self-transcendence	Self-enhancement	Openness to change		Conservation		Self-transcendence	Openness to change
Schreuder (1989) Managerial staff in SA private/parastatal/government sectors (n = 258)		3			1		2	
Igbaria et al. (1991) Management Information Systems personnel (n = 464)	1	2	3					
Ellison (1997) SA Midcareer staff (n = 295)	1					2		3
Tan and Quek (2001) Educators (n = 160)					3	1	2	
Erdoğmus (2003) Turkish professionals (n = 138)			3		2		1	
Marshall and Bonner (2003) Graduate students (management) (n = 423)		3				1		2

Table 8.1 (continued)

Research studies	Talents and abilities-based career anchor motivations			Motives and needs-based motivations			Attitudes and values-based career anchor motivations	
	Technical/functional competence	General managerial competence	Entrepreneurial creativity	Autonomy/independence	Security/stability	Lifestyle	Service/dedication to a cause	Pure challenge
	Self-transcendence	Self-enhancement	Openness to change		Conservation		Self-transcendence	Openness to change
Van Rensburg et al. (2003) Pharmacists ($n = 56$)		3					1	2
Nieuwenhuizen and Groenewald (2006) Business entrepreneurs ($n = 50$)			1	3		2		
Coetzee et al. (2007) Human resource specialists ($n = 157$)						3	1	2
Chang et al. (2007) EMBA (IS) students ($n = 145$)					1	2	3	
Singh et al. (2009) Executives (engineering sector) ($n = 1441$)						3	2	1
Weber and Ladkin (2009) Asian convention/exhibition professionals ($n = 700$)						1	3	2

Table 8.1 (continued)

Research studies	Talents and abilities-based career anchor motivations			Motives and needs-based career anchor motivations			Attitudes and values-based career anchor motivations	
	Technical/functional competence	General managerial competence	Entrepreneurial creativity	Autonomy/independence	Security/stability	Lifestyle	Service/dedication to a cause	Pure challenge
	Self-transcendence	Self-enhancement	Openness to change		Conservation		Self-transcendence	Openness to change
Lopa et al. (2009) Hospitality and Tourism Educators (n = 337)				2		1	3	
Coetzee and Schreuder (2009b) Managerial and staff level—service industry (n = 2 978)	3					2		1
Coetzee and De Villiers (2010) Staff in SA financial sector (n = 250)			1		3	2		
Cerdin and Le Pargneux (2010) French expatriates (n = 303)				2		1	3	
Coetzee and Schreuder (2011) Management/economic services sector (n = 270)					1		2	3

Table 8.1 (continued)

Research studies	Talents and abilities-based career anchor motivations			Motives and needs-based career anchor motivations			Attitudes and values-based career anchor motivations	
	Technical/functional competence	General managerial competence	Entrepreneurial creativity	Autonomy/independence	Security/stability	Lifestyle	Service/dedication to a cause	Pure challenge
	Self-transcendence	Self-enhancement	Openness to change	Openness to change	Conservation		Self-transcendence	Openness to change
Du Toit and Coetzee (2012) Science and engineering staff (n = 207)						1	3	2
Quesenberry and Trauth (2012) IT personnel (n = 210)					2	1		3
Chang et al. (2012) Taiwanese IT professionals (n = 10)			3	2				1
Coetzee et al. (in review) Managers/staff in SA service industry (n = 318)						1	2	3
Frequency: dominant career anchor (n/21 studies)	2(10 %)	0	2(10 %)	0	3(14 %)	8(38 %)	4(19 %)	2(10 %)
Frequency: secondary career anchor (n/21 studies)	0	1(5 %)	0	3(14 %)	2(10 %)	5(24 %)	5(24 %)	5(24 %)
Frequency: tertiary career anchor (n/21 studies)	0	4(19 %)	3(14 %)	1(5 %)	2(10 %)	2(10 %)	5(24 %)	4(19 %)

Research by Coetzee and Schreuder (2009a), Igbaria and Baroudi (1993) and Igbaria et al. (1999) provides evidence of overlapping or complementary values and motives between the general managerial competence, pure challenge, autonomy/independence and entrepreneurial/creativity career anchors. Wils et al. (2010) found that several career anchors are complementary (e.g. creativity and challenge—being open to change) while others are conflictual (e.g. challenge—openness to change versus security—conservation) in terms of work values and motivational domains. Research also indicates that values change as people age and go through life and career stages (Smola and Sutton 2002; Rodrigues and Guest 2010). Rodriques and Guest (2010) found that people's career motivations may change and adapt as a result of critical events in their personal and work lives. Their study also provides evidence that some people seek to redefine their career priorities when they have met their most important career goals.

The various research studies reported in Table 8.1, all indicated a strong dominant career anchor with two secondary (less strong) career anchors, thus supporting Schein's (1996) proposition of a dominant career anchor. Although the emergence of three strong career anchors in a sample profile seems to support the notion of overlapping and complementary values and motives between the career anchors, one should also take cognizance of the fact that the research on Schein's career anchors are generally based on broad group measures by means of the Career Orientations Inventory (DeLong 1982; Schein 1978, 1990). In the case of individual testing situations, career practitioners must take note of the occupational context and the unique characteristics of the respondent (such as their current life and career stage preoccupations within a particular cultural and socio-economic context) when applying the Career Orientations Inventory (Coetzee and Schreuder 2009a). Qualitative data gathering by means of an in-depth interview (as suggested by Schein 1990), should complement individual assessment. This approach might provide further support for Schein's notion of a dominant career anchor. Quesenberry and Trauth (2012) found, for example, that although individuals quantitatively tend to express sentiments across all career anchors, they qualitatively identify strongly with at least one career anchor and less strongly with a second and third career anchor.

The simultaneous existence of several dominant career anchors may point to the diverse career needs of individuals. Being an expression of the career self-concept, one could postulate that the dominant career anchor may serve to direct individuals' career choices while the secondary and tertiary career anchors may serve as important internal resources in helping individuals to adapt to changing career circumstance or enabling a harmonic fit between their dominant career needs and interests and the characteristics of the external employment environment. Haley-Lock (2008) argues that with increased global mobility opportunities and the boundarylessness of careers, employees are increasingly seeking to fulfil expressive values at work through tasks—and entire jobs—that allow them to exercise a wider range of their talents and interests. However, further longitudinal quantitative and qualitative research is needed to assess whether a multiple career anchor profile exists because of indifferentiation (Wils et al. 2010), overlapping/complementary needs, values and motives among the career anchors (Feldman and Bolino 1996; Wils et al. 2010), shifting life/career stage priorities and interests, or because of adaptation to one's work and life circumstances (Rodrigues and Guest 2010).

An analysis of Table 8.1 reveals that overall the dominant and secondary career anchors of the various studies were predominantly associated with complementary work values clusters (for example, security/stability and lifestyle—conservation; technical/functional competence and service/dedication to a cause –self-transcendence). However, when reviewing the pattern of the career anchors in terms of each individual study, some of the career anchors were associated with both complementary and opposing values clusters, and more in line with Feldman and Bolino's (1996) contention that individuals may have career anchors in each or two of the three categories postulated in their research: talents and abilities; motives and needs; and attitudes and values. In developing his theory of career anchors, Schein (1978) explored a view of careers by examining the interrelationship between individuals' career talents, motives and values. He also posited that a person's talents/abilities, motives, and values are mutually interactive and inseparable (Marshall and Bonner 2003). Forming the basis for Schein's (1978) definition of the career anchor, these three categories seem to act as important personal resources (meta-capacities) that relate to the internal career and the enablement of a harmonic fit between the person and work environment.

It is also interesting to observe that Table 8.1 reflects a shift toward the lifestyle career anchor as being the first, or at least the second career anchor. As noted by Marshall and Bonner (2003), this career anchor was not identified in Schein's seminal work undertaken in the 1970s. It appears that the concerns about job security/stability in the 1970s and 1990s (Schreuder 1989; Marshall and Bonner 2003) have shifted to lifestyle concerns. Both the security/stability and lifestyle career anchors are associated with values of conservation (Wils et al. 2010). Meister and Willyerd (2010) predict that the 2020 workplace will be a globally, hyperconnected and virtual employment environment that provides intensely personalized, social experiences due to the digital revolution and increase in mobile technology allowing people to choose how, when and where they work. Consequently, individuals' concerns about work/life flexibility (conservation) will increase as they seek ways to manage both work and their personal lives better. The increasing emphasis on social responsibility (Meister and Willyerd 2010) and global and moral citizenship (Coetzee 2012; Peiperl and Jonsen 2007) may also explain the noticeable shift to the service/dedication career anchor as either a primary or secondary career orientation.

Person-Environment Fit Harmonics

Career anchors relate to the internal (subjective) career of individuals and reflect the goals and values they hold in relation to their working lives and the criteria of success by which they judge themselves. The external career refers to the actual job sequences that specify a path through an occupation or organization (Marshall and Bonner 2003; Schein 2006). Whereas the internal career is a self-definition of career success which is long term and stable, representing life, career and work goals (intentionalities), the external career refers to the organizational or professional (occupational) definition

of career success which is more short term, unpredictable and fast-changing (Coetzee and Schreuder 2009a, b; Derr and Briscoe 2007). Individuals' career identities inform their subjective career experiences, both in term of the evolving relationship to their work and to relevant others in their lives (Ibarra and Deshpande 2007; Zikic et al. 2010). Being an integral part of the subjective career, it is posited that people's career anchors (as a personal resource) act as the lens by means of which individuals interpret and negotiate their career experiences, cope with and adapt to career transitions in an attempt to optimize the person-environment fit harmonics.

The subjective or internal career is the focal point of career guidance and counseling which relies on the client's report of career dissatisfaction—generally a consequence of the degree of congruence (or harmonic fit) between individuals' talents, interests, values, desires, motivations (career anchors) and their job/career and occupational choice and development (Schein 1990, 1996; Zikic et al. 2010). Research by Herrbach and Mignonac (2012) shows that individuals' career anchors influence their subjective experiences of career success and how the work environment is interpreted. The internal career desires motivate individuals and the level of motivation influences people's perceptions of career success and satisfaction. People's career anchors are shown to positively influence their subjective work experiences, that is, their life satisfaction, job/career satisfaction, sense of happiness and perceptions of work as a valuable activity (Coetzee et al. 2010), as well as their satisfaction with their self-perceived employability (Coetzee and Schreuder 2011).

Research provides evidence of how individuals' career anchors match their preferred job types and settings (Igbaria et al. 1991) and their job characteristic preferences (Chang et al. 2007). Steele and Francis-Smythe (2010) found that career anchors can be matched to job roles. High levels of congruence also increase individuals' job and career satisfaction, organizational commitment and intention to stay (Igbaria et al. 1991; Quesenberry and Trauth 2012; Steele and Francis-Smythe 2010). A study by Jiang et al. (2001) indicates that career satisfaction is positively related to both individuals' internal career orientations and the external career situations provided by their organizations. Chang et al. (2012) also found evidence of the relationships among internal career anchors, external opportunities, job satisfaction, discrepancy, and perceived job alternatives. Individuals' career anchors positively moderate the relation between their level of work engagement and job commitment (Coetzee et al., in review) and significantly predict their organizational commitment (Coetzee et al. 2007).

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

As argued by the research literature, Schein's theory of career anchors continues to be tested and remains consistent and socially grounded in its premises. The research literature provides evidence of the notion of career anchors being an important career meta-capacity influencing and enabling individuals' experiences of subjective career success. In the career counseling context, the career anchor framework of

Schein (1990) can be a valuable tool in helping individuals gain deeper insight in their career needs, interests, and desires, and how these influence their career dissatisfaction. However, longitudinal studies are required to assess the validity of the theory and the stability of career anchors over time (and how they manifest in different multi-cultural and socio-economic contexts) in a more turbulent occupational and work world impacted by rapidly evolving information technological advances. Guillaume and Pochic (2009) and Herrbach and Mignonac (2012) argue that individuals make adaptations to their career goals over time, especially after the very early career years and as a consequence of later work experiences. Schein (1984) also argued that the specific culture within which career orientations develop should be taken into account in understanding and explaining individuals' career anchors. Gerber et al. (2009) also found that mixtures of career orientations exist across different cultural and socio-economic contexts. Other multi-cultural and gender, and age studies (Coetzee and Schreuder 2008; Coetzee et al. 2007; Kniveton 2004; Marshall and Bonner 2003; Quesenberry and Trauth 2012) showed that occupational position, gender, ethnicity/race and age influence the strength of individuals' career anchor preferences.

Practical Implications for Career Counseling and Guidance

Schein's (1990) career anchors framework and the Career Orientations Inventory (Schein 1990) have proven to be valuable tools for assessing the diverse career needs, motivations and values of employees in the organizational context (Coetzee and Schreuder 2009a; Marshall and Bonner 2003). The career anchor theory emphasizes the importance of organizations to ensure that they offer career paths, reward, recognition, and growth/development opportunities congruent with the diversity of their employees' career anchors. According to Schenk (2003, p. 91), career anchor studies typically find a broad distribution of anchors in every occupation, even though one may expect some bias towards a given anchor in some occupations. Considering that the career anchor is a product of the interaction between the individual and the workplace (Wils et al. 2010), career practitioners should also take cognizance of the changing world of work and how the increasingly knowledge- and digitally-driven workplace will influence individuals' self-perceived talents and abilities, career motives and needs, and their career attitudes and values.

Individuals discover their dominant career anchors by using self-observations and external feedback on behavior in concrete job situations. Although most careers permit the fulfillment of several needs that underlie different anchors, the one true career anchor only emerges after the person has accumulated a meaningful amount of life and work experiences (Schein 1990, 1996). A stable career identity is formed only through the combination of individuals' talents and interests with their abilities, motives and values, as well as through concrete experiences with real tasks, co-workers and workplaces. In this regard, career anchors emphasize the importance

of feedback in shaping the development and crystallization of a person's career self-concept or identity (Schein 1990; Weber and Ladkin 2009). Career practitioners and managers should therefore engage in career anchor profiling and career discussions with employees to increase understanding of the interests, needs, values and motives that drive the internal career satisfaction of employees (Erdoğmus 2003). Providing external career situations congruent to individuals' multidimensional career needs and motivations, as imbedded in their career anchors (internal career orientations), is critical to retain valuable staff members (Jiang et al. 2001). Self-insight about one's career-related interests, abilities, motives, needs and values, and the sharing of such insights in career discussions may reduce the negative impact of job dissatisfaction and intention to leave (Tan and Quek 2001). The multi-dimensionality of an individual's career success orientations and the crystallization of the career self-concept should also be considered when assessing the career anchors profile. In the case of multiple career anchors, career practitioners must help clients consider whether those multiple career anchors are complementary or conflictual (mutually inconsistent), that is, whether it is possible to find a form of occupation or job which fulfils all career preferences. In the case of mutually inconsistent career anchors, job roles may need to be redefined to fulfill the various preferences indicated by the multiple career anchors (Feldman and Bolino 1996; Weber and Ladkin 2009).

Kanye and Crous (2007) found that the contextualized career needs, views and expectations of young adults in the early career stage lack overall congruence with their dominant career success orientations. As argued by Feldman and Bolino (1996), career decisions are based on a complex structure of career success orientations (as, for example, reflected by the career anchors construct) rather than a dependence on a singular career success orientation. Schein (1996) also argues that the career self-concept evolves and stabilizes by the age of 30 once the individual has been exposed to various work experiences. Young adults at early stages of their careers tend to lack a well-crystallized career self-concept and therefore tend to have numerous needs, values, attitudes and capabilities that start to coalesce into several patterns or trends over time as their life experience evolves (Kanye and Crous 2007).

Research by Coetzee and Schreuder (2009b) indicates that individuals' psychological career resources (career enablers, career drivers and career harmonizers) significantly predict the strength of their career anchors. It appears from their research that individuals' psychological career resources provide the energy and impetus that facilitate the actual enactment of their career desires. In agreement with Schein's arguments, Coetzee and Schreuder (2009b; p. 3) view individuals' career anchors as master career motives that act as a cognitive compass; motivating and pulling them towards (or constraining them from) specific career actions, choices and decisions. Individuals' psychological career resources enable them to proactively realize or create opportunities that match their career aspirations. Helping clients gain self-awareness of their career anchors along with their overarching psychological career resources profile, will help them establish their career identity in their career life cycle (Coetzee and Schreuder 2009b; Kanye and Crous 2007) and to capitalize on the strengths of their career anchors as important career meta-capacities in the career construction/design process in today's more turbulent times.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the basic and most recent research on Schein's career anchor theory and its relevance to contemporary career development. It is concluded that the career anchor framework continues to add value to the practice of career guidance and counseling. Individuals' career anchors act as valuable personal resources (meta-capacities) in understanding their career satisfaction or dissatisfaction in a more turbulent occupational world. However, longitudinal research on the stability of and the shift in individuals' career anchors over time is still required to validate the usefulness of the construct as a career meta-capacity in a knowledge- and digitally-driven employment context.

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