

A multi-cultural investigation of students' career anchors at a South African higher education institution

by Melinde Coetzee* and
Dries Schreuder**

Abstract

The main objective of this study was to investigate the career anchors of a large, multi-cultural sample of South African respondents in an attempt to better understand how people from the various age, educational, marital, race and gender groups differ in terms of their career anchors as measured by the Career Orientations Inventory. A sample of 2997 students at a South African higher education institution participated in the study. The results indicated significant differences between the various biographical variables and the participants' career anchors. In the context of Employment Equity, and with more women entering the workplace, this study is expected to contribute important knowledge that will inform career development and retention practices in the contemporary workplace.

1 Introduction

Organisational career development and staff retention practices need to take cognizance of the current business environment, which shows a decline in manufacturing and a shift towards service industries that require different working practices. This shift suggests that managers and employees brought up with today's working practices and those who started their working lives 20 years or more ago are likely to have had different work experiences and to have different career orientations (Kniveton 2004). Other significant changes that have occurred over the past 20 years are reflected in the changing definitions of work, careers and job structure, all of which mirror widespread downsizing, subsequent losses in job security, boundaryless careers, shifts in organisational loyalties and the increasingly global nature of marketplace competition (Baruch, 2004; Marshall & Bonner, 2003). The assumption that most employees seek natural progression upwards in the organisation and want to work for a single, stable employer is being challenged in the contemporary complex world of job arrangements, which are characterised by highly divergent and diverse career paths (Baruch 2004; Schreuder & Coetzee 2006; Marshall & Bonner 2003; Suutari & Taka 2004).

* Dr M Coetzee is a Professor at the Department Industrial & Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa

** Dr AMG Schreuder is a Professor at the Department of Industrial & Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa

Contemporary career studies show that younger employees increasingly tend to seek lateral rather than hierarchical paths, and that these paths are upheld by career anchors and values (Marshall & Bonner 2003). In addition, the findings reported by these studies suggest a significant shift in values and motivations across all workplace cultures. Significant trends indicate that security and employment stability have been downgraded in terms of career value: managers and employees now show a higher preference for jobs that are more oriented towards serving people and making the world a better place, and that allow for flexible lifestyle options and provide challenging opportunities for growth and development (Coetzee, Schreuder & Tladinyane 2007; Marshall & Bonner 2003).

Other studies have also found significant positive relationships between career satisfaction and individuals' internal career anchors, which indicates that people have differing career needs (Jiang, Klein & Balloun 2001; Kniveton 2004). Organisations that are endeavouring to retain valuable employees should therefore attempt to provide incentives and career paths that are consistent with the underlying career values, expectations and aspirations of these employees (Järllström 2000; Suutari & Taka 2004). If there is no fit between employees' career anchors and their job environment, anxiety, stress, job dissatisfaction and turnover may well be the result (Feldman & Bolino 1996; Jiang & Klein 2000; Jiang et al 2001).

2 Aims of the study

In view of the apparent importance of understanding employees' career anchors as suggested by the above, the main objective of the current study was to investigate the relationships between various biographical variables and the construct career anchors among various multi-cultural groups in the South African organisational context. A secondary purpose was to establish whether there were differences in the career anchor variables among people who differ in respect of educational level, marital status, age, race and gender. To date there has been relatively little research on how, in South Africa's multi-cultural organisational environment, these various groups differ in terms of their career anchors and values. In the context of Employment Equity, and with more women entering the workplace, this study is expected to contribute significant knowledge that will inform career development and retention practices in the contemporary workplace.

3 Career anchors: theory

The career anchor model developed by Edgar Schein at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has received considerable attention. The concept stemmed from a longitudinal study of Sloan School alumni, 10 to 12 years after their graduation. The concept of the career anchor emerged as a way of explaining the pattern of reasons for career decisions given by the graduates as they progressed through their careers (Erdoğmus 2003). Schein (1978) coined the term "career anchor" to describe a constellation of self-perceived attitudes, values, needs and talents that develops over time and that, when developed, shapes and guides career choices and directions. Subsequent research conducted by DeLong (1982a; 1982b) described the career anchor as a composite of the individual's career orientation and self-perceived talents. Kniveton (2004) and Nordvik (1996) point out that the concept of career anchors does not attempt to categorise the whole person but instead outlines individuals' orientation towards one focused aspect of their lives, namely their work. Career anchors are an important element of individuals' internal careers (or subjective sense of where they are

going in their working lives) and signify the nonmonetary or psychological factors in the career decision-making process (Custodio 2004).

The career anchor theory suggests that individuals have long-term and fairly permanent preferences regarding their work and work environments. These preferences are termed "career anchors" (Schein 1996). A career anchor can also be thought of as a central component of the self-concept which employees are unwilling to relinquish, even when forced to make a difficult choice (Schein 1996). The career anchor is salient, because it influences career choices, affects an employee's decision whether or not to move from one job to another, shapes what an individual is looking for in life, determines personal views of the future, and influences the employee's selection of work settings (Jiang et al 2001). The concept of career anchors takes into account the occupational experiences of individuals and any changes in their work circumstances (Kniveton 2004).

The main utility of the career anchor seems to be that it becomes a stabilising force in the total personality that guides and constrains future career decisions (Schein 1992; Van Vuuren & Fourie 2000). As such, career anchors affect the way in which individuals respond to events and experiences at work (Igbaria, Greenhaus & Parasuraman 1991; Ramakrishna & Potosky 2003). Employees generally discover their career anchors after they have worked for a number of years (generally by the age of 30) by using both self-observation and external feedback on their behaviour in actual job situations (Erdoğmus 2003; Schein 1992). Since individuals' career anchors evolve through a process of career development by which individuals test themselves in various job settings; any job successes they experience strengthen their career anchors in those areas (Lee & Wong 2004).

Although Schein (1978) argued that, by definition, an individual can maintain only one dominant career anchor, his own empirical evidence suggested that individuals can nonetheless have more than one strong career anchor. Given that the career anchor includes needs, values, and talents that surface to the top of a person's self-image, it is plausible that there is "room at the top" for more than one anchor (Feldman & Bolino 1996; Ramakrishna & Potosky 2003). According to DeLong (1982b) and Butler and Waldroop (1999), one to three anchors tend to cluster together to form an individual's career and work preferences. To date, no empirical data have eliminated the possibility that multiple career anchors may stabilise over time, thus resulting in multiple stable dominant career anchors (Feldman & Bolino 1996; Kniveton 2004; Ramakrishna & Potosky 2003). According to Butler and Waldroop (1999), composites of the eight categories of career anchors proposed by Schein (1975, 1978) and Derr (1980) can explain why people remain in a certain job or stay committed to an organisation.

Feldman and Bolino (1996) reconceptualised Schein's eight career anchors into three distinct groupings along with their inherent motivations, these motivations being talent-based, needs-based and value-based anchors. Feldman and Bolino's work provides a useful framework for the present study. The talent-based anchors consist of managerial competence (willingness to solve complex, whole-of-organisation problems and undertake subsequent decision-making), technical/functional competence (the achievement of expert status among peers) and entrepreneurial creativity (opportunity for creativity and identification of new businesses, products or services). The needs-based anchors consist of security and stability (long-term employment for health benefits and retirement options), autonomy and independence (personal freedom in job content and settings) and lifestyle motivations (balancing personal welfare and the welfare of the family against work commitments). The value-based anchors consist of

pure challenge (testing personal endurance through risky projects or physically challenging work) and service and dedication to a cause (working for the greater good of organisations or communities). Figure 1 provides an integrated overview of the concept of career anchors.

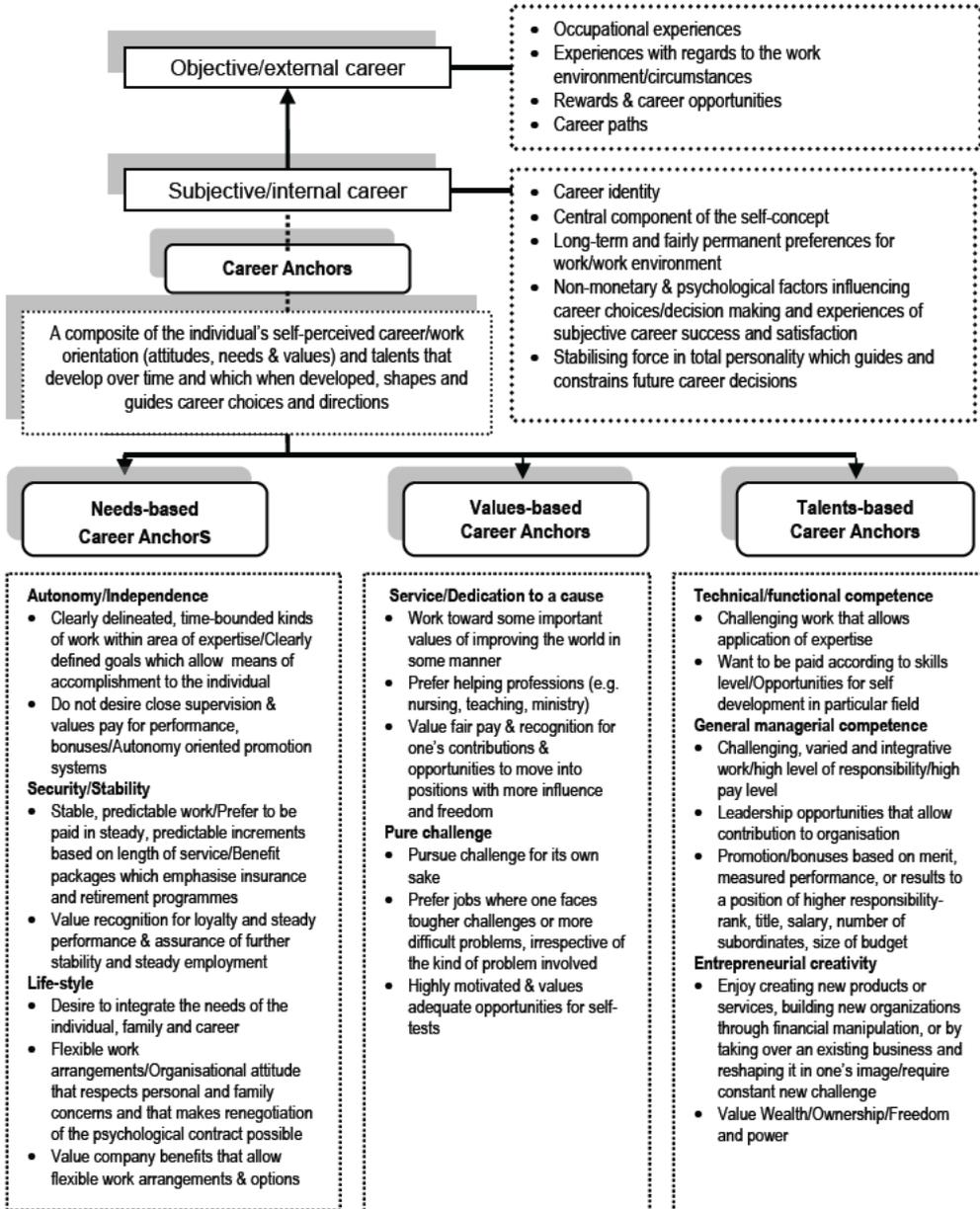


Figure 1
Integrated theoretical model of the construct career anchors

Career anchors have been studied widely in different occupations and in different contexts, countries and companies (Erdoğmus 2003). These studies report significant relationships between age, gender and culture (Coetzee et al 2007; Erdoğmus 2003; Järllström 2000; Jiang et al 2001; Kniveton 2004; Marshall & Bonner 2003; Suutari & Taka 2004). However, up-to-date career anchors research in South Africa using a broad multi-cultural approach is virtually non-existent (Boshoff, Bennet & Kellerman 1994; Coetzee et al 2007; Erwee 1990; Rothmann 2001; Schenk 1987; Schreuder 1989; Van Vuuren 1986). In addition, career anchor studies have also been criticised as concentrating on small samples and being studies of particular, interesting and illustrative cases (Erdoğmus 2003). Against this background, this study attempts to investigate the career anchors of a large, multi-cultural sample of South African respondents in an attempt to better understand how people from the various age, educational, marital, race and gender groups differ in terms of their career anchors, particularly in the South African context. In view of the foregoing, it was hypothesised that the various groups will show significant differences in respect of their career anchors.

4 Research design

4.1 Research approach

For this exploratory pilot study, a survey design was used to achieve the research objective (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister 2003). By applying the Career Orientations Inventory (COI) and a biographical questionnaire, each participant was measured at a particular time in terms of the career anchors construct and the participant's biographical variables. The relationship between the measurements was then determined. The advantages of the survey research approach include savings of time and money, lack of interviewer bias, obtaining accurate results, more privacy for participants, and the fact that samples need not be very large in proportion to the population (Salkind 1997). The major disadvantage of this design is that findings can only be generalised to the sampled population at the time of the survey (Dooley 1995).

4.2 Participants

The participants were a random sample of students registered for studies in various fields at a distance-learning higher education institution for a particular year. The total sample of 2,997 students comprised 58% females and 42% males. Blacks represented 67% and whites 33% of the sample. The black participants comprised predominantly English-speaking Africans (2%); Nguni-speaking Africans (20%); Sotho-speaking Africans (21%); English-speaking Indians (7%); English-speaking coloureds (3%) and Afrikaans-speaking coloureds (2%). Whites comprised 13% English-speaking and 18% Afrikaans-speaking participants. Other minority cultural groups speaking languages such as Portuguese, German, Polish, French and Chinese represented 5% of the sample.

In terms of marital status, 52% were single, 42% were married, 1% were widowed and 5% divorced. The age groups were represented as follows: 25 years and younger – 28%; 26 to 30 years – 20%; 31 to 40 years – 34%; 41 to 55 years – 16% and 56 years and older – 1%. In terms of educational level, 26% had a Grade 12 qualification; 15% had completed their first year of higher education studies; 13% were in their second year and 8% in their third year of studies. Twenty-two percent had a diploma

and 13% already had a degree. Students with a postgraduate qualification represented only 3% of the sample.

In terms of occupational status, 80% percent of the participants were in full-time employment; 12% in part-time employment; 5% were self-employed and 3% were engaged in voluntary work, contract work or internships. Eighteen per cent of the participants were employed at the senior and middle management levels; 54% were supervisors at the first and middle levels and 28% were in non-managerial positions.

The following economic sectors were represented: 35% government; 15% services; 18% financial, insurance, real estate and business; 7% wholesale and retail; 6% transport, storage and communication and 19% other sectors such as agriculture, mining, manufacturing, electricity/gas and construction. The predominant fields of expertise reported by the participants were as follows: financial field (including accounting, auditing, banking, economics) 21%; education 11%; human resource management 9%; protection services (SAPS; security, military) 9%; health care 8%; marketing/media/communication 6%; public administration 6%; IT 5%; legal/law 3%; retail/sales 5%; and catering/hospitality 2%.

4.3 Measuring instruments

A biographical questionnaire was used in conjunction with the Career Orientations Inventory (COI) developed by Schein in collaboration with DeLong (1982a; 1982b) to measure the variables of concern to this study.

Biographical questionnaire

The influence of demographic variables on careers has been examined in a variety of different studies (Allen & Katz 1992; Erdoğan 2003; Igbaria, Greenhaus & Parasuraman 1991; Marshall & Bonner 2003; Schreier & Reitman 1994). In the light of this literature, the questionnaire for this study included a series of self-reported questions in order to obtain biographical data such as information on age, gender, race, home language, marital status, educational level, field of occupational expertise, occupational title and position and economic sector. These data were used to analyse relationships between biographical information and the participants' career anchors.

Career Orientations Inventory (COI)

The COI (DeLong, 1982a; 1982b) is a self-rated measure consisting of 41 items. To avoid neutral answers, a 10-point Likert-type scale was used for subject responses on each of the 41 items. Based on Schein's (1974) eight career anchors model, these items related to the perceived importance and agreement of statements. Total scores obtained for each of the eight categories of career anchors were summed and averaged to yield an individual score for each career anchor. The COI provides a pretested instrument with a demonstrated high internal validity and reliability (Burke 1983; Custodio 2004; DeLong 1982a and 1982b; Wood, Winston & Polkosnik 1985). Since the purpose of this study was not to make individual predictions based on the COI, but rather to investigate broad trends and certain relationships between variables, the instrument was considered to be psychometrically acceptable.

It should be pointed out that the COI does not purport to measure career anchors as such, but rather career orientations. In an attempt to validate and refine Schein's (1978) career anchor model, DeLong (1982b) found that the COI measured career attitudes, values and needs of individuals, but did not reflect individuals' perception of their talents. According to DeLong (1982b), the COI measures a central part of the concept

of career anchors, namely career orientation. Schein (1990) agrees with the view that the construct career anchors can be measured by means of a combination of the COI and a structured in-depth interview exercise. However, applying the COI as a measurement of career anchors for research purposes is regarded as an acceptable and reliable practice by researchers in the field (Burke 1983; Custodio 2004; Erdoğan 2003; Marshall & Bonner 2003).

4.4 Research procedure

Questionnaires were posted to 60 000 randomly selected students who were registered at the higher education institution for the particular year, using the postal facilities of the institution. Each questionnaire included a covering letter inviting subjects to participate in the study and assuring them that their individual responses would remain confidential. Participants were asked to complete the questionnaires and return them by mail to the researchers using the return envelope. A sample of 2997 usable questionnaires was returned. The questionnaires were scored electronically according to the authors' instructions.

4.5 Statistical analysis

The statistical procedures chosen for this research were based on their applicability to the exploratory nature of the research design. The statistical analysis was carried out with the help of the SAS System, Version 9.1, statistical package (SAS Institute 2003). Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. Since the tests for normality revealed that none of the eight career anchor variables could be assumed to be normally distributed, non-parametric tests were performed in order to test for significant differences between the biographical variables and the eight COI scales. To determine which groups differed significantly in terms of the means of the COI scales, independent-samples t-tests were applied for the gender-biographical variable. Schéffe's multi-comparison of means *post-hoc* test was applied for the marital status, educational level, age and race/language biographical variables. A cut-off point of $p \leq 0.05$ was set for determining the significance of the findings.

5 Results

5.1 Sample profile

The descriptive statistics revealed that the sample comprised predominantly Nguni- and Sotho-speaking Africans (41%), followed by white English- and Afrikaans-speaking participants (31%). English-speaking Indians, English- and Afrikaans-speaking coloureds and other minority cultural groups speaking languages such as Portuguese, German, Polish, French and Chinese, were under-represented. Overall, black (67%) and female (58%) participants predominated in the sample. The sample consisted mainly of single (52%) and married (42%) participants in the early adulthood life stage (25–40 years) (82%). The mean age of the sample was 32, which implies well-established internal career anchors (Schein 1996).

Participants in the sample had a relatively high educational level, with 84% having attained a Grade 12 qualification, and a diploma or undergraduate higher educational qualification. The sample predominantly represented participants in full-time employment (80%) who occupied relatively high-level positions at senior and middle management level (18%) and middle- and first-level supervisory positions (54%) in the

service industry (81%). Their occupational expertise was mainly in the financial (21%), education (11%), human resource management (9%), protective services (9%), and health care (8%) fields.

5.2 Descriptive statistics

The means and standard deviations of each COI scale are presented in table 1, which shows a high preference for, in particular, the service/dedication to a cause (mean=8.54; SD=1.29) career anchor, followed by the lifestyle (mean=7.39; SD=1.28) and general management (mean=7.08; SD=1.94) career anchors for the total sample. The technical/functional (mean=6.14; SD=1.60) and autonomy (mean=6.14; SD 1.80) career anchors appeared to be the least preferred by the participants. In terms of the various biographical variables, only the means of those variables for which significant differences were found as reported in table 6 are discussed below.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics: COI scales (N= 2 997)

COI scale	Mean	SD
Technical/function	6.14	1.60
General management	7.08	1.94
Autonomy	6.14	1.80
Security/stability	6.35	1.62
Service/dedication to a cause	8.54	1.29
Pure challenge	6.56	1.74
Lifestyle	7.39	1.28
Entrepreneurial creativity	6.82	2.12

5.3 Mann-Whitney U-test for gender and COI scales

An examination of table 2 indicates significant differences between five of the COI scales and gender as a biographical variable. The technical/functional, service/dedication to a cause and lifestyle COI scales do not show any significant differences between the male and female participants.

Table 2
Mann-Whitney U-test for gender (N=2 997)

COI scales	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Sig
Technical/function	1073008.500	1849889.500	-0.713	0.476
General management	832512.500	2362887.500	-11.029	0.000***
Autonomy	1040580.000	2570955.000	-2.104	0.035*
Security/stability	1031681.000	1808562.000	-2.486	0.013*
Service/dedication to a cause	1069856.000	2600231.000	-0.850	0.395
Pure challenge	861754.000	2392129.000	-9.775	0.000***
Lifestyle	1056326.000	2586701.000	-1.429	0.153
Entrepreneurial creativity	818990.000	2349365.000	-11.608	0.000***

***p<0.0001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05

5.4 Kruskal-Wallis test for biographical variables and COI scales

As shown in table 3, with the exception of the technical/functional and lifestyle COI scales, the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed significant differences between participants' marital status and the COI scales. Significant differences were also indicated between the participants' educational levels and five of the COI scales. The technical/functional, autonomy and lifestyle COI scales did not show any significant differences between participants' educational levels. With the exception of the lifestyle and entrepreneurial creativity COI scales, all the other COI scales indicated significant differences between the age groups. In terms of the race/language groups, there appears to be a significant difference between the groups only on the entrepreneurial creativity COI scale.

Table 3
Kruskal-Wallis tests: Biographical variables (N=2 997)

COI scales	Biographical variables	Chi-square	Df	Sig
Technical/function	Marital Status	5.460	3	0.141
	Educational Level	6.137	6	0.408
	Age	19.675	4	0.001**
	Race/Language	5.813	8	0.668
General management	Marital Status	8.968	3	0.030*
	Educational Level	30.236	6	0.000***
	Age	10.191	4	0.037*
	Race/Language	13.068	8	0.110
Autonomy	Marital Status	20.228	3	0.000***
	Educational Level	0.626	6	0.996
	Age	12.944	4	0.012*
	Race/Language	3.811	8	0.874
Security/stability	Marital Status	19.973	3	0.000***
	Educational Level	13.672	6	0.034*
	Age	12.361	4	0.015*
	Race/Language	4.430	8	0.816
Service/dedication to a cause	Marital Status	13.647	3	0.003**
	Educational Level	16.053	6	0.013*
	Age	60.618	4	0.000***
	Race/Language	10.830	8	0.212
Pure challenge	Marital Status	10.340	3	0.016*
	Educational Level	45.229	6	0.000***
	Age	14.951	4	0.005**
	Race/Language	13.167	8	0.106
Lifestyle	Marital Status	2.484	3	0.478
	Educational Level	5.857	6	0.439
	Age	7.297	4	0.121
	Race/Language	3.535	8	0.896
Entrepreneurial creativity	Marital Status	18.717	3	0.000***
	Educational Level	26.133	6	0.000***
	Age	2.149	4	0.708
	Race/Language	19.464	8	0.013*

***p<0.0001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05

5.5 Independent-samples t-tests

The results from the independent-samples t-tests shown in table 4 indicate that the male group achieved significantly higher mean scores than the female group on the general management, entrepreneurial creativity, pure challenge and autonomy COI scales. Females show a significantly higher mean score than the male group on the security/stability COI scale. Both the male and the female participants reflect a strong

preference for the general management and entrepreneurial creativity career anchors, with males having a stronger preference than females for the pure challenge career anchor. The autonomy career anchor is least preferred by both male and female participants.

Table 4
Summary: Independent-samples t-test for gender

COI scale	Group	N	Mean	SD	F	t	df	Sig
General Management	Male	1246	7.54	1.79	13.042***	10.948	2993	0.000
	Female	1749	6.76	1.97				
Autonomy	Male	1246	6.21	1.84	2.447*	1.928	2993	0.054
	Female	1749	6.08	1.76				
Security/stability	Male	1246	6.26	1.60	0.651**	-2.457	2993	0.014
	Female	1749	6.41	1.63				
Pure challenge	Male	1246	6.94	1.61	10.311***	10.362	2993	0.000
	Female	1749	6.29	1.77				
Entrepreneurial Creativity	Male	1246	7.36	1.95	16.851***	11.929	2993	0.000
	Female	1749	6.44	2.15				

***p<0.0001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05

5.6 *Schéffe multi-comparison of means post hoc tests*

Table 5 shows that the age groups differed significantly in respect of the technical/functional, general management, autonomy, security/stability, pure challenge and service/dedication to a cause COI scales. Overall, significant differences are indicated for, in particular, the early adulthood group (25 years and younger) in terms of the technical/functional, autonomy, pure challenge and service/dedication to a cause career anchors; the midlife group (41-55 years) regarding the security/stability and autonomy career anchors; and the late life group (56 years and older) regarding the general management career anchor.

The early adulthood group (25 years and younger) shows a significantly higher preference than the late early adulthood group (31-40 years) and midlife group (41-55 years) for the autonomy career anchor. This age group also shows a significantly lower preference than the middle and late early adulthood groups (26-30 years; 31-40 years) and the midlife age group (41-55 years) for the service/dedication to a cause career anchor and a significantly lower preference than the middle early adulthood group (31-40 years) for the pure challenge career anchor.

The midlife age group (41-55 years) shows a significantly higher preference than the early adulthood groups (25 years and younger; 26-30 years and 31-40 years) for the technical/functional career anchor and a significantly higher preference than the middle early adulthood group (26-30 years) for the security/stability career anchor. The late life group (56 and older) shows a significantly lower preference for the general management career anchor than the late early adulthood group (31-40 years).

In terms of educational levels, the groups with a degree and postgraduate level qualification show a significantly lower preference for the pure challenge career anchor, with the postgraduates also showing a significantly lower preference for the general management career anchor. The participants with a first-year degree level qualification show a significantly higher preference for the entrepreneurial creativity career anchor. As far as marital status is concerned, the single participants show a significantly higher preference than the married participants for the autonomy and entrepreneurial creativity career anchors, with married participants showing a significantly higher preference than the single participants for the security/stability career anchor. The divorced participants

show a significantly lower preference than the single and widowed participants for the entrepreneurial creativity career anchor. The source of the significant differences indicated for the various race/language groups in terms of the entrepreneurial career anchor could not be detected by the empirical analyses. Table 6 provides an overview of the key significant differences indicated by the independent-samples t-test for gender and the Schéffe multi-comparison of means *post hoc* tests for the other biographical variables.

Table 5
Summary of Scheffé multiple comparison tests: Significant group mean differences (N=2 997)

COI scale: Technical/functional				
(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig
41-55 years	25 years & younger	0.34170**	0.09073	0.007
	26-30 years	0.34010*	0.09767	0.017
	31-40 years	0.28789*	0.08809	0.031
COI scale: General management				
(I) Educational level	(J) Educational level	Mean difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig
Post-graduate	1 st year	-0.8669*	0.22922	0.027
	Diploma	-0.8144*	0.22327	0.039
COI scale: Autonomy				
(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig
25 years & younger	31-40 years	0.29840*	0.08354	0.013
	41-55 years	0.33011*	0.10211	0.034
(I) Marital status	(J) Marital status	Mean difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig
Single	Widowed	0.3405***	0.07114	0.000
COI scale: Security/stability				
(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig
26-30 years	41-55 years	-0.3952**	0.10253	0.005
(I) Marital status	(J) Marital status	Mean difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig
Single	Married	-0.2791***	0.06371	0.000
COI scale: Service/dedication to a cause				
(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig
25 years & younger	26-30 years	-0.2788**	0.07124	0.004
	31-40 years	-0.3710***	0.06247	0.000
	41-55 years	-0.4952***	0.07646	0.000
COI scale: Pure challenge				
(I) Educational level	(J) Educational level	Mean difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig
1 st year	Degree	0.4907*	0.12041	0.011
	Post-graduate	0.7510*	0.20540	0.038
Diploma	Degree	0.5642***	0.11108	0.000
	Post-graduate	0.8245**	0.20007	0.009
(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig
25 years & younger	31-40 years	-0.2553*	0.08285	0.050
COI scale: Entrepreneurial creativity				
(I) Marital status	(J) Marital status	Mean difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig
Single	Married	0.2477*	0.08196	0.028
	Divorced	0.6826**	0.19992	0.009
Divorced	Single	-0.6826**	0.19992	0.009
	Widowed	-1.2909*	0.43437	0.032
(I) Educational level	(J) Educational level	Mean difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig
1 st year	Degree	0.6137**	0.14633	0.007

***p<0.0001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05

Table 6
Summary of significant group marginal mean differences (N=2 997)

COI scales	Biographical variable	Significant group marginal mean differences	Mean	Std Error
Technical/ functional	Age	41 – 55 years (H):	6.43	0.115
		• 25 years & younger **	6.16	0.122
		• 26 – 30 years *	6.14	0.119
		• 31-40 years *	6.21	0.105
General management	Gender	Males (H)***	7.47	0.142
		• Females (L)	6.74	0.134
	Educational level	Post-graduate qualification (L):	6.50	0.238
		• 1 st year*	7.40	0.163
	Age	• Diploma*	7.30	0.148
		56 & older (L)	7.01	0.429
• 31 – 40 years (H)	7.23	0.125		
Autonomy	Gender	Males (H)*	6.41	0.134
		• Females (L)	6.28	0.127
	Marital status	Single (H):	6.30	0.107
		• Married***	6.07	0.103
	Age	25 years and younger (H):	6.54	0.137
		• 31-40 years*	6.25	0.118
• 41-55 years *	6.23	0.129		
Security/ stability	Gender	Females (H)*	6.42	0.114
		• Males (L)	6.24	0.120
	Marital status	Single (L):	6.19	0.096
		• Married***	6.49	0.092
Age	26-30 years (L):	6.15	0.120	
	• 41-55 years*	6.45	0.115	
Service/ dedication to a cause	Age	25 years & younger (L):	8.20	0.098
		• 26-30 years**	8.53	0.096
		• 31-40 years***	8.68	0.084
		• 41-55 years***	8.82	0.092
Pure challenge	Gender	Males (H)***	6.96	0.127
		• Females (L)	6.33	0.120
	Educational level	1 st year (H):	6.94	0.146
		• Degree*	6.39	0.143
		• Post-graduate*	6.08	0.213
		Diploma(H):	6.92	0.133
	Age	• Degree***	6.40	0.143
		• Post-graduate**	6.08	0.213
		25 years and younger (L):	6.36	0.129
		• 31-40 years*	6.70	0.112
Lifestyle	–	–	–	–
Entrepreneurial creativity	Gender	Males (H)***	7.47	0.155
		• Females (L)	6.54	0.146
	Marital status	Single (H):	7.06	0.124
		• Married *	6.71	0.119
		• Divorced**	6.46	0.219
		Divorced (L):	6.46	0.219
	Educational level	• Single**	7.06	0.124
		• Widowed*	7.79	0.401
		1 st year (H):	7.33	0.177
		• Degree **	6.73	0.173

***p<0.0001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05

H: Significantly higher mean than indicated groups

L: Significantly lower mean than indicated groups

6 Discussion

The main objective of this study was to investigate the career anchors of a large, multi-cultural sample of South African respondents in an attempt to better understand how people from the various age, educational, marital, race and gender groups differ in terms of their career anchors, particularly in the South African organisational context. In interpreting the results, the following biographical characteristics of the sample were kept in mind: the participants in the sample were predominantly from the service industry and held mostly managerial and supervisory level positions. Furthermore, the sample represented predominantly black single and married females in full-time employment and in the early adulthood life-stage (25-40 years) who were enrolled for undergraduate level studies at the higher education institution. This could have influenced their high preference for the service/dedication to a cause career anchor, followed by the lifestyle and general management career anchors. Studies conducted by Kniveton (2004), Marshall & Bonner (2003), Schreuder (1989) and Schein (1978) indicate that individuals' particular life-stage (as expressed by the particular age group) has a significant influence on their career anchor preferences. Furthermore, occupational position, gender and race also appear to influence individuals' career anchor preferences (Coetzee et al 2007; Kniveton 2004; Marshall & Bonner 2003; Suutari & Taka 2004). No studies currently exist on the relationship between marital status and educational levels and individuals' career anchors. The findings therefore contribute new knowledge to the discipline of Career Psychology.

6.1 *Career anchor profile*

The results of this study highlight two findings of particular interest. First, as shown in table 7, the predominant career anchors of the participants showed a noticeable shift away from the security/ stability career anchor (as indicated by studies conducted over 20 years ago) to the service/dedication to a cause and lifestyle career anchors. It also appears that the participants in this study are more oriented towards values-based and needs-based career anchors than towards talents-based career anchors. The high preference for the service/dedication to a cause career anchor indicates a preference for work environments in which the participants can be engaged in work that is directed at improving the world or the community. They also tend to be anxious to work in a field typical of the service industry that matches their values rather than their skills (Kniveton 2004). Individuals who are attracted to the service/dedication to a cause career anchor usually value fair pay and recognition for their contributions and the opportunity to move into positions that allow them to have more influence and freedom in pursuing their important values of serving the world or the community (Schein 1996). According to Smit and Cronje (2002:258), Africans also tend to relate to an Afrocentric value system that bases psychological feelings of career success on a preference for quality of life and a common vision that rewards communal effort. The Afrocentric culture also relates to the values of a "feminine" culture that emphasises nurturance, the commonality of all people, vision, values and efforts, as well as a concern for relationships, and the living environment.

Table 7
Ranking of career anchors: A comparison of various studies

Career anchor	Present study (N= 2 997)	Rank	Coetzee et al (2007) Rank	Kniveton (2004)	Marshall & Bonner (2003) Rank	Marshall & Bonner (2003) Rank for South Africa	Schreuder (1989) Rank	Schein (1996) Rank
Service/ dedication to a cause (value)	8.54 (1.29)	1st	1st	1st	4th	6th	2nd	6th
Lifestyle (need)	7.39 (1.28)	2nd	3rd	6th	1st	3rd	4th	6th
General management (talent)	7.08 (1.94)	3rd	8th	2nd	7th	7th	3rd	1st
Entrepreneurial creativity (talent)	6.82 (2.12)	4th	6th	8th	6th	2nd	5th	6th
Pure challenge (value)	6.56 (1.74)	5th	2nd	5th	2nd	1st	7th	6th
Security/ stability (need)	6.35 (1.62)	6th	7th	4th	8th	8th	1st	3rd
Technical/ functional (talent)	6.14 (1.60)	7th	4th	7th	5th	5th	7th	1st
Autonomy (need)	6.14 (1.80)	8th	5th	3rd	3rd	4th	6th	3rd

Mean score standard deviation in brackets

A second, noteworthy finding is that the participants indicated the service/dedication to a cause career anchor as their dominant career anchor, followed by lifestyle and general management as the second and third career anchor preferences for the group as a whole. These findings confirm Feldman and Bolino's (1996) and Kniveton's (2004) observation that individuals are inclined to adopt more than one career anchor. This highlights the fact that the participants in this study do not tend to have a single career orientation. This, in turn, implies that the group of participants has a diversity of career needs and may therefore prefer their companies to adopt a pluralistic approach to career development practices. In addition, providing training and development opportunities that broaden their skills repertoire may also lead to greater job and career satisfaction (Kniveton 2004).

The high preference for the lifestyle career anchor is also of particular importance, since the findings show that all the participants and various biographical groups shared an apparently similar orientation towards this career anchor, namely that of choosing careers that balance their professional and private lives. Being a needs-based career anchor, this finding suggests that the participants may have a preference for work environments that take into consideration their personal lifestyle needs and family concerns along with their career concerns, and concerns for self-development. Individuals attracted to the lifestyle career anchor typically value company benefits that allow for flexible working arrangements and options (Custodio 2004; Schein 1996).

6.2 Gender

An interesting observation from the findings of this study is that, as far as the lifestyle career anchor is concerned, no differences were found between males and females, and people from the various groups based on age, marital status, educational level and race. Similar observations were made by Kniveton (2004) and Marshall and Bonner (2003) regarding gender. On the other hand, research findings by Coetzee et al (2007)

show that females tend to be more committed to organisations that respect personal and family concerns, whereas males tend to be more committed to organisations that provide them with the autonomy that enables them to work independently.

The findings of this study also suggest that the male participants are more needs- and talent-oriented or skills-driven in their career orientations and the females more needs- and values-driven when pursuing a career. The male participants showed a significantly higher preference for the general management, autonomy, pure challenge and entrepreneurial creativity career anchors than the female participants (who showed a significantly higher preference for the security/stability career anchor). It appears that the males prefer work environments that reward goal achievement, freedom to pursue their creativity, opportunities to move into challenging positions of authority and influence and appropriate pay for performance. The females, on the other hand, appear to prefer more stable, predictable work environments that reward loyalty and steady performance and provide benefit packages that emphasise insurance and retirement programmes, as well as the assurance of steady employment. Kniveton (2004) reports findings which indicate that although females have a high awareness of and concern for their family responsibilities, they view these responsibilities as something they have to cope with, rather than as something influencing perceptions of their careers. This implies that, although companies should be aware of females' family concerns and responsibilities and their need for stability, benefit packages and flexible work arrangements, care should be taken not to let traditional gender stereotyping influence employees' career development opportunities.

6.3 Age

The pattern of differences between the various age groups suggests that participants in the early adulthood life-stage (age 25 and younger) are significantly higher needs-driven in terms of their career orientation than participants in the late early (31-40 years) and middle adulthood (41-55 years) life stages. On the other hand, it appears from the findings that the participants in the late early and middle adulthood life stages are significantly more values- and talent-oriented in terms of the careers they pursue in view of their significantly higher preference for the service/dedication to a cause, general management and pure challenge career anchors. These findings are contrary to the findings of Kniveton (2004), who found younger (mean age 27.86) participants in managerial positions to be more inclined to the general management and technical/functional career anchors.

The early adulthood age group (25 years and younger) appears to prefer work situations in which, as far as possible, they will be free of organisational constraints and restrictions and free to develop their professional competence. Since this group has an autonomous career orientation, people in this group are usually averse to close supervision and prefer clearly delineated, time-bounded work within their area of expertise. In addition, they tend to be highly achievement-oriented and value pay for performance reward systems (Custodio 2004; Schein 1996). Participants in the late early and middle adulthood life stages (26-40 years, 41-55 years) appear to place higher value on being in challenging positions where they have the authority and power to influence and lead others in the task of making the world a better place to work and live in. These participants appear to be active learners who require ongoing training and further development opportunities through on-the-job experience that enables them to sharpen their talents and skills (thus making it possible for them to influence and lead others in a service-oriented work environment).

According to Levinson (cited in Greenhaus, Callanan & Godshalk 2000:110), young adults in the early adulthood life-stage are emerging from adolescence and trying to create a niche for themselves in adult society by being predominantly focused on keeping their options open and exploring various occupational roles. The need for autonomy and independence is therefore often stronger in people who are 25 years and younger. The middle (26-30 years) and late (31-40 years) early adulthood (also referred to as the middle adulthood transition phase) life stages are the period during which the life structure of young adults becomes more stable as they begin to settle down and become committed to an occupation, a company or a person. During these two life stages, individuals are usually trying to balance their family concerns with their desire to establish themselves as achievement-oriented, valuable employees during these two life stages. Schein (1996) also refers to the middle and late/early adulthood phase as the period during which an individual's dominant career anchor really begins to stabilise.

6.4 *Marital status*

The results showed significant differences between participants who were single, married and widowed. It appears from the findings that single participants are more attracted towards careers that afford them opportunities to develop their skills and talents in challenging environments in which they have the freedom and power to create on their own (for example, by developing a new product or service). On the other hand, married participants appeared to have a stronger need for a career that offers stable and steady employment and benefit packages. This pattern could be attributed to the high need to integrate family concerns with work and career concerns. Widowed participants appeared to have a noticeably higher need than either single or divorced participants to pursue careers in which they can apply their talents and abilities in creating products, services and new ideas. Schein (1996) contends that companies are created by people who value the entrepreneurial creativity career anchor, and who in turn create new jobs for people who value other career anchors.

6.5 *Educational levels*

An interesting pattern revealed by the findings is the observation that participants with a diploma or first-year level degree qualification seemed to be significantly more achievement oriented. They are attracted to careers that afford them the opportunity to apply their skills and talents in positions of power and influence, and that afford them with challenging opportunities to apply and develop their creative abilities by creating new products, services and ideas. They also appear to be more aware of and concerned about the skills they need in their jobs. On the other hand, participants with a degree and postgraduate qualification showed a higher concern for their lifestyle needs and the need to have the opportunity to provide a service to others. A probable explanation could be that participants with a graduate and postgraduate level qualification have a greater interest in applying their expertise where they can help make a difference in their own and others' lives, whereas participants with lower-level qualifications are more interested in developing and refining their own talents and skills.

6.6 *Race/language*

Although the results show a significant difference between the various race/language groups on the entrepreneurial creativity anchor, the source of the differences between the various groups could not be detected by means of the empirical analyses. However,

an interesting observation is that the minority cultural group, English-speaking coloureds, Indians and white (English- and Afrikaans-speaking) participants show higher mean scores on the entrepreneurial creativity career anchor, whereas the African participants achieved higher mean scores on the general management, lifestyle, security/stability and technical/functional career anchors. These findings could probably be attributed to the Employment Equity opportunities that are currently being provided to predominantly Africans and women, both of whom are now moving into more senior positions and into management. These participants may therefore be more concerned with sharpening and developing their skills and abilities in positions that carry higher responsibility. Women also seem to be more concerned about finding jobs that offer steady and stable employment, simply because women are trying to balance their family and work life against expanded occupational roles and responsibilities. On the other hand, the coloured, Indian and white participants seemed to be more focused on expanding their entrepreneurial skills and talents to ensure future employment opportunities. Schein (1996) regards entrepreneurial creativity as a valued component in improving people's employability, since employment security needs to be replaced by employability security, given an increasingly unstable and highly competitive work environment.

7 Conclusions, implications and recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

It is evident from the findings that the global shift towards more service-oriented work practices is increasingly influencing the career orientations of employed adults across all race, age and gender groups. Although the service/dedication to a cause career anchor was indicated as the career anchor of choice across all the groups, the lifestyle and general management career anchors, rooted in the overriding need for a balanced home and work life and the need among all groups to develop managerial talents and skills, also strongly dominated the results of this study. As Marshall and Bonner (2003) point out, the possible increase in the number of employees who value lifestyle will impact significantly on the relationship between organisations and individuals in terms of satisfying employees' work and career values, particularly with more women entering the South African workplace. The overall shift away from the security/stability career anchor is also significant for organisations seeking to motivate employees. The promise of increased compensation, security and lifelong benefits is now less significant; people are more interested in pursuing a balanced lifestyle and doing work they find challenging and view as improving the world or the community. The overall emphasis on the general management career anchor also indicates that there is a continued need to develop the management skills of staff at all levels of the organisation.

The findings also confirm the importance of considering the diverse career needs of employed adults in South Africa's multi-cultural work environment. Marshall and Bonner (2003) contend that organisations need people with divergent career anchors, since this provides organisations with a flexible and diverse workforce.

7.2 Implications

The practical value of the research results lies in the design of organisational career development policies, programmes and interventions, as well as reward systems that take into consideration the way in which the career needs and aspirations of the

organisation's employees relate to their age, race, gender, marital status and educational levels, since these variables have been shown to be related to the participants' career orientations. Furthermore, the notion of career anchors provides organisations with a valuable framework to help them offer employees opportunities that are congruent with their career orientations.

According to Brousseau, Driver, Eneroth and Larsson (1996), a pluralistic approach to career development practices should be adopted to meet employees' diverse needs. This approach enables organisations to retain and reward diverse competencies in their workforces. Exploring employees' career anchors can also help organisations to determine the most appropriate career interventions for rewarding and retaining talented staff (Erdoğmus 2003). Attracting, placing and retaining employees in South Africa's multi-cultural organisational context should therefore be done in relation to both organisational and individual interests to avoid unproductive career decision making and to enhance individuals' experiences of psychological career success. As Morrin (cited in Custodio 2004:9) says, an individual's career success depends on the extent to which organisations allow their employees to succeed on their own terms within the context of organisational needs. While individuals should have an awareness and knowledge of their career needs, motives and goals so that they can work out how to align these with the organisation's needs, organisations themselves must find a way to inspire, motivate, and appropriately reward employees.

Knowledge of employees' career anchors helps management to better understand what gives their employees internal career satisfaction and also helps them design appropriate reward, recognition and promotion systems (Erdoğmus 2003). In addition, given the increasing instability of employment opportunities, many employees may be faced with the prospect of applying for their own or alternative jobs within a changing organisation (Kniveton 2004). In this respect, the idea of career anchors provides a practical means of career guidance by helping individuals become aware of the range of their own career anchors and the alternative career paths they could pursue.

7.3 Recommendations

Since the present study was limited to participants predominantly employed in the service industry, the findings cannot be generalised to other occupational contexts. Furthermore, given the exploratory nature of the research design, this study cannot make any findings on causation. Associations between the biographical variables and participants' career anchors were therefore interpreted rather than established. These findings need to be replicated with broader samples across various occupational groups and economic sectors before conclusions can be drawn about the relationships between career anchors and individuals' gender, age, race, marital status and educational level. However, given that little research has been undertaken on the career anchors of South Africa's multi-cultural workforce, the results of this study did provide new knowledge and valuable data on empirically significant differences and commonalities among the career anchors of a multi-cultural group of respondents employed in the South African organisational context.

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