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EDGAR H. SCHEIN | JOHN VAN MAANEN | PETER A. SCHEIN

CAREER ANCHORS REIMAGINED



FINDING DIRECTION AND
OPPORTUNITY IN THE
CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

WILEY

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A Letter To the Reader

It is with heavy hearts that we relay the news to you that Edgar Schein passed away on January 26, 2023, just shy of his 95th birthday. Ed, John, and Peter had just completed the final edits for the book you hold in your hands, *Career Anchors Reimagined*.

A legend in the fields of organizational culture, organization change, and career dynamics, Ed was a brilliant and treasured expert whose work and teachings will long be remembered by those of us at who were fortunate to have worked with him over the years.

Ed was clear, direct, passionate, and thoughtful, and always expressed appreciation of and interest in others. A prolific thinker and author, Ed wrote or cowrote nearly 200 articles and books—many of those with Wiley—over the course of his career. The tremendous impact that his work has had on the lives and livelihoods of others will be felt for year and years to come and we will miss him dearly at Wiley.

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Acknowledgments

WE CAN NEVER go far enough in acknowledging the support of all of our family members who endure the moody distractions of writers writing. In this case we must go farther still to recognize how much children and grandchildren have informed and motivated the writing of this new book. The stories we have heard from twenty-somethings through to fifty-somethings about their career journeys keep us honest, grounded, and inspired. Many of these stories are included, with modifications for our subjects' privacy and also for the *Career Anchors* message. We hope our families feel how much we appreciate their contributions.

We remain deeply indebted to the original panelists whose career paths led to *Career Dynamics* (1978) and all editions of *Career Anchors*. It was, after all, their experiences that were distilled into the eight career patterns later to be described as the eight anchors, still in play today. The importance of longitudinal studies cannot be overstated when thinking about careers. Very little about a career can

be captured in a snapshot. You need to see the motion picture to see the patterns. The panelists who agreed to remain as panelists helped make this good research and helped the authors come up with some ways to guide other career seekers over the many years since.

In addition to the original panelists, we must also pay homage to the numerous students, professionals, practitioners of sundry trades, career counselors, consultants, and assorted other card-carrying members of the helping occupations in and out of organizations who have both used and passed on the ideas conveyed by *Career Anchors*. We have certainly benefited from unfettered responses from many of those who were exposed initially to *Career Anchors* in the classroom, training sessions, career workshops, independently online, by text, or word of mouth. Indeed, such reactions have led to the progressive reshaping of our ideas and models as presented in this book.

Lastly, we want to acknowledge each other. Ed and John have written together before. Peter showed up late to work with us on this one. It's not a foregone conclusion that three people will be able to sit down and write a new book together. These three authors who worked well together as a group hereby pat each other on the back in thanks for not allowing this process to be excruciating and forgettable, and instead, for making this new work exciting and fruitful.

Peter Schein
John Van Maanen
Ed Schein

Preface

Career Anchors in the 21st Century

This 5th edition of *Career Anchors* breaks new ground. While the previous editions clearly captured the 20th century world of work, we think the arc of this century has launched us into some new directions that we can already observe and compel us to reexamine and reset our thinking.

VUCAA

We were, are, and will be in a period of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity). This has been our condition most of the last few decades. And that was before the Covid-19 pandemic made VUCA seem quaint.

As we are writing this edition, the world is facing an uncertain pandemic recovery, a “great resignation” and “quiet quitting”, autocratic challenges to an assumed democratic order in

many societies, generationally high levels of inflation, inexorable global warming threatening life and work, not to mention grave concerns for much of Western Europe as Russia continues its imperial expansion into Ukraine.

All of these challenges, and no doubt others, suggest to us that we are in an extraordinarily anxious period, hence we add a second “A,” *Anxiety*, to the term VUCA. We’ll call it VUCAA or *VUCA-squared*.

With this anxiety compounding such unsettledness, it is no longer possible to think of “career anchors” in the same ways as suggested by the previous editions. The concept of career itself has a different meaning in our VUCAA context.

Vocational or professional progress, a steady course of accomplishment in a focused domain, may hold true for many. And yet the other sense of the word “career,” hurdling along at high speed, where it may be more about the pace than the course, fits the experience of many younger 21st-century employees and entrepreneurs.

When *Career Anchors* was first written the notion of “gig” work may have been thought of as undesired “marginal temp work” or a place for someone who has “trouble holding down a job.” Today “gig work” may be thought of as a respectable adaptation to volatile job market conditions, if not an absolute preference for an unencumbered immediate future. Regardless, the pace of change is the feature, not the bug.

This is a different sense of career. A contemporary concept of career must necessarily include experimentation, adaptation, flexibility, opportunism more than dogged “stick-to-it-iveness.”

Different Kinds of Anchors

In early *Career Anchors* editions, there was an emphasis on that single, stable center or fulcrum that guided work choices over time. With this edition we abandon that singularity to emphasize what has always been true but underplayed in our previous writings. We now sense that it is not particularly accurate nor helpful to think in terms of *an anchor* compared to thinking of a pattern of preferences reflected in what job decisions we have made, which helps guide what job optimizations we have and would like to make.

At risk of extending a nautical metaphor too far, we might think of the 21st-century anchor as a sea anchor or drogue. In this context, the anchor allows for direction and stability without stopping movement.

What we need is a sea anchor or drogue to keep from being broad-sided by a new trend, a merger, or a reduction in force, and we can only hope the sea anchor provides us some stability to keep us from crashing into the “rocks on shore” such as a bad career choice or a “toxic” work environment.

In our work lives, strong tailwinds may be just as hard to manage as strong headwinds. In either direction, the metaphorical sea anchor or drogue offers comfort and stability while allowing us to steer and optimize our course.

Going forward, career anchors should be thought of as leanings or preferences that will steady us and may change over time—there is nothing cast iron or buried deep about them. They provide stability in tumult and motivation in uncertainty. They do not stop us from exploring, experimenting, and weathering the storm.

Modernizing the Original Research

The pattern of decisions made at key junctures in our past work and life situations helps us understand our anchors. This was the point when *Career Anchors* was first published. All editions of *Career Anchors* are informed by the original research conducted with a panel of mid-career participants.

This research was a longitudinal study over 30 years. Looking back in time, this panel of 20th-century participants presented pretty clear evidence of professional optimization around a central bias among eight dimensions. The reason we are resetting now *is not* that we are abandoning that research at that time but that so much has changed in the job market two decades into the 21st century.

We see *more volatility*—for example, “five jobs in three years” is not an uncommon pattern for twenty-somethings.

We see *more uncertainty*—for example, employment “at will” provides infinite freedom to leave or be terminated as a normal course of business.

We see *more complexity*—for example, dual-career, multiple job households are the norm, not the anomaly.

We see *more ambiguity*—for example, work norms around dress and decorum vary as wildly as do expectations of when and where to get the work done (“9 to 5” is so last century!).

And lastly, we see *more anxiety* about integrating life and work as a function of the aforementioned changes, profoundly increased by working from home, Covid-19 lockdowns, and exhausting videoconferencing as the best we can do to convene and collaborate while working.

A New Visual: The Spiderweb

In the pages that follow, we will revisit the eight anchors and adapt our definitions of them to reflect the work and life changes we see and feel today. Similarly, we will suggest a new metaphor that allows the eight leanings, or factors to be traded off each other, to be seen in their dynamic context in relation to each other.

This new metaphor is the “spiderweb.” Eight dimensions on the spiderweb or “radar chart” provide for a visualization of the importance of certain anchors relative to less important anchors. A visible comparison among the eight anchors is