

The career anchors interview

The interview is conducted with a partner. It focuses on your past, present and future career background, and begins with your education. On the following pages, you will find all the interview questions with a space between each one to allow your partner to make some notes alongside your answers. We advise you to carefully read the following section so as to thoroughly understand the different stages before starting the questionnaire.

The interview focuses on the different choices you have made to date and that you plan to make in the future. For each situation, we ask you to analyse the reasons that helped you to make these decisions or specific actions, and how you felt while making these choices. The interview has been purposely built within a chronological framework. It enables you to piece together your past to enable you to define the different patterns and the reasons that governed your choices. Your partner and you should be keeping an eye out for these patterns throughout the interview. During the interview, you may be asked “what did you do or decide?” before the question of “why?” or “how/ what did you feel in relation to that?”

Now give the questionnaire to your partner.

Interview questions

The aim of this interview is to help both you and your partner to understand the different factors which guide and influence a career, enabling you to identify the main patterns or recurring themes that arise from the events that have taken place in your life and the reasons that underpin them.

Please answer all the questions. Be relaxed and don't be afraid of deviating to other topics that may arise. As a partner, you are there to help the person you are interviewing to draw up a picture of his/her career profile so that you can identify the main patterns and themes together.

Only answer one question at a time. Don't read the following question until you have answered the preceding one.

1) *A biographical overview*

We'll begin by speaking about your life. What has happened to you? What have been the twists and turns in your life? Give me a brief outline of the main events in your life, more freely and in more depth than in a CV. Let the ideas and memories flow. Give the 6 or 7 key dates, the 6 or 7 key stages, the 6 or 7 great events in your life, whether or not everyone would consider them important or simply you.

2) *The foundations*

Most people leap directly from childhood to 18 years old, the moment when they begin their "official career." But to understand what led you to follow your personal career path, you need to think about and analyse what happened before you entered your adult life. What kind of relationship did you have with your parents? With your teachers? With your friends? Or with any other person who had an impact on your personal life?

3) *The important details*

Life is full of fleeting moments and chance events, superficially without importance, but which help us to grow. What did you use to do in the summer? What happened between the end of secondary school (or maturity) and your undergraduate studies? Did you spend a few weeks abroad when you were a student? Did you work in the evenings or at weekends. Have you been in the army? Did you do any voluntary work or belong to any clubs or societies? Think back to the fleeting memories of your childhood and your adolescence that came between the important activities you've already described. How did they influence your relationship with your parents, your friends or with school?

4) *People*

We'll now move on to the beginning of your adult life. Which people were particularly important in your life during those years: your friend, your first boss or supervisor during an internship, your first subordinates at work, a teacher who had a particular influence. What was important about them for you? What was your attitude towards them? This is all useful information. Don't draw any conclusion about the importance of these people. They existed in your life, that's all. Put them into the family photo album.

5) *Education*

Let's move on to your education.

Which areas were you particularly interested in during your studies? (focus on higher education in particular)

Why did you choose these fields? Who influenced you?

How do you feel now about these choices?

6) *First job.*

What was your first job, before or during your studies?

What were you looking for in this first job or this first event?
Why did you make this choice?

How did it work out? Who had an influence on you there?

7) *Goals.*

What was your goal or what were your long-term goals when you began your career?

Who was important to you in defining these objectives, whether consciously or not?

To what extent did your first job enable you to realise your goals?

8) *Next major job or event.*

What was your second job or position?

What were the circumstances surrounding it?

Who instigated the move to this job or position?

What were the reasons behind it?

How did you feel about this change in relation to the first job?

To what extent did it correspond to your goals?

9) *Next job or position.*

What was the next work experience?

What were the circumstances surrounding it?

Who instigated the move to this job or position?

What were the reasons behind it?

How did you feel about this change?

To what extent did it correspond to your goals?

10) Continue to analyse any changes that you consider important with regard to your work, your company, your career or your life, with respect to your different jobs, projects and assignments, and also all your commitments.

Draw up a list of these changes and analyse the reasons and the impact of these changes. Next job (or change or major event).

What were the circumstances surrounding it?

Who instigated the move to this job or position?

What were the reasons behind it?

How did you feel about this change?

To what extent did it correspond to your goals?

11) *Next job (or change or major event).*

What were the circumstances surrounding it?
Who instigated the move to this job or position?
What were the reasons behind it?

How did you feel about this change?
To what extent did it correspond to your goals?

12) *Next job (or change or major event).*

What were the circumstances surrounding it?
Who instigated the move to this job or position?
What were the reasons behind it?

How did you feel about this change?
To what extent did it correspond to your goals?

Continue analysing the shifts in your work, your career or your life until today, using the same method.

Use an extra sheet of paper if necessary.

13) Retracing the beginning of your career and your life till the present day in this way, can you identify any important transitions, moments when the change passed from being a simple evolution to a real transformation?
Describe each of these moments.

What was the transition?

What were the circumstances surrounding it?

Who instigated it?

How did you feel about this change?

To what extent did it correspond to your goals?

14) Describe other major transitions in the same way.
Use an extra sheet of paper if necessary.

15) Retracing the beginning of your career and your life till the present day in this way, can you identify any moments that you particularly enjoyed or appreciated?

What made these moments so enjoyable?

16) Were there any particularly disagreeable moments?

What made these moments so disagreeable?

17) Have you ever turned down a job, an assignment, a major opportunity to change jobs or a promotion?

If yes, can you explain the circumstances?

Why did you turn it down?

When you think about your career future now, is there anything in particular that you would avoid?

Is there anything in particular that you are afraid of?

Why would you avoid them or why are you afraid of them?

18) Have your ambitions or your goals changed since you began studying?
When?
Why?

How would you describe your long-term goals today?

Which people in your circle or your network could help you?

Still focusing on the future, is there anything in particular that you expect?

Why are you waiting for this?

In your opinion, what will your next job be?

What will the one after that be?

Continue to ask the interviewee until he or she says what he/she would like to do ultimately.

19) What do think will happen in the next ten years of your career?

Why do you think that?

20) How would you describe your work to other people?

In which area are you particularly skilled?

What do you expect most of all from your career?

Which values do you most want to uphold in your career?

Do you want to say anything else about yourself here?

It is now time to draw some lessons from the preceding discussion.

At this stage, the interviewer can help the interviewee with his or her own observations

21) In analysing your answers, what are the main patterns or themes that you can identify?

Which behavioural patterns frequently appear in your career?

Which decision-making criteria appear to be relatively stable? Are they still valid?

What sort of people do you rely on when making changes? How? And where do you meet them? Is this always the best way of going about things?

22) Look for any incoherencies, contradictions or conflicts in what you have just identified?

Can you imagine any situations when these incoherencies or contradictions would disappear?

Are there any kinds of people or situations that you think you should avoid if you were to draw lessons from the past?

Let's now turn to the different categories of career anchor.

At this stage, the person asking the questions hands the questionnaire to the person being interviewed.

Identifying your career anchors

The following descriptions will help to remind you of the career anchors presented in the video.

Technical-functional competence

If your career anchor is based on technical or functional competence and it is something you would not wish to relinquish, then you need to focus applying your skills in this area and to hone your competencies. You draw your sense of identity from putting your skills to work and you are happiest when you are being challenged in these areas at work. Of course, you may find it interesting to manage others in a certain skills area, but management itself is not what interests you. Because of this, you prefer to avoid general management in order to stay in your particular field of expertise.

General managerial competence

If your career anchor is general managerial competence, you will never turn down an opportunity to rise to a level in the firm's hierarchy that is sufficiently senior to allow you to coordinate the contributions made by others across functions or to be in charge of the output of one of the company's business units. You want to be responsible for the overall results of the company that you work for, and you identify your success with that of the company. If you are currently working in a technical or functional position, you tend to view it as a necessary learning experience, but your ultimate goal is to get to a general management position as quickly as possible rather than a senior functional position.

Autonomy/independence

If autonomy and independence are your career anchors, what is important for you is to be able to organise your work in your own way. If you work in a company, you are determined to hold a job that offers a certain degree of flexibility in terms of working hours and methods. If you are totally unable to live by the rules and regulations of life in an organisation, then you will choose a career that can offer you the freedom you need, like teaching or consulting. You will turn down any sort of promotion that could impact on your autonomy. You may even prefer to set up your own business to satisfy this need for independence. However, this competence is different from the entrepreneurial creativity career anchor.

Security/stability

Individuals who are anchored in security/stability would never wish to sacrifice job security and a permanent position in a job or a company. Your main concern is to achieve a sense of success and this is something that reassures you. This anchor is also reflected in the concern for financial security (pension and retirement plans) or job security.

The need for stability may mean that you offer your loyalty and are willing and eager to do what your employer wants in exchange for the promise of a certain degree of job security. You attach less importance to the nature of your work and your position in the company hierarchy, although you may achieve a high level of output depending on your talent. As we indicated earlier for autonomy, everyone feels a certain need for security and stability, especially when you have heavy financial responsibility or when retirement is looming closer.

However, people whose anchors are security/stability are constantly thinking about these issues and build their self-image around these two factors.

Entrepreneurial creativity

Individuals whose career anchor is entrepreneurial creativity are keen to start their own company or business organisation, built from their own skills and their determination to shoulder all the risks and overcome all the obstacles. You want to prove to the whole world that you are able to create a business on your own. You can work for others for a while but you consider this period as a springboard for gaining experience and a time for weighing up the different options, and you will take off on your own as soon as you get the opportunity. The financial success of your company will act as proof of your ability.

Service or Dedication to a cause

If your career anchor is service or dedication to a cause, then you are constantly looking to do something useful like making the world a better place to live in, resolving environmental problems, looking to create greater harmony between everyone, helping others, improving other people's safety, creating new drugs that can eradicate disease, etc. You will pursue this path unerringly, even if it means changing companies and refusing job transfers or promotions which do not correspond to your values.

Pure challenge

When you are driven by the anchor of challenge, you are continually searching for solutions to apparently unsolvable problems, looking to win out against tough competition, and constantly trying to overcome impossible odds. In your view, the only good reason for working is to overcome the impossible. For some people, the challenge is an intellectual exercise. For engineers, for example, it means developing complex plans. For others, it involves dealing with extreme situations and multiple aspects. This is true of the strategic management consultant, for instance, who is only interested in clients who are virtually bankrupt and have exhausted all alternative resources. For other people, the challenge lies in competition with others. This is the case of the professional athlete or the salesperson who sees each sale as a personal victory or failure. Novelty, variety and difficulty are seen as an end in themselves, and facility rhymes with boredom.

Life Style

People who anchor their career in life style view it as something that must be balanced with their personal needs and those of their family. For you, all these factors must fit into a harmonious life style and your career must be sufficiently flexible to form part of a coherent overall pattern. You may be willing to sacrifice certain aspects of your career such as a promotion that would mean moving somewhere that your family is not ready to go to, for example. For you, success does not just mean a successful career. Your identity is reflected far more in your way of life, where you live, a successful family life and personal development, than in relation to your career or a company.

How to determine your career anchor

To do this, you need to look at the main patterns and themes that emerged during the interview. The information that came out of the interview is based on actual events in your life. The two interview partners discuss these issues together and then rank them in the following table.

The table has been designed to allow you to rank the career anchor categories from 1 to 8. One (1) represents the career anchor you feel closest to and 8 the one you feel least affinity with. Do this with your partner and try to reach a consensus after the interview.

It may be that you find it harder to decide on the order of categories when you get to the middle of the ranking, but the most important is to identify the extreme anchors. During this stage, think about what you could most easily discard (positions 6,7 and 8), and what would be hardest for you to give up (positions 3, 2 and 1). Lastly, identify the one which you could never sacrifice (position 1). That is your career anchor.

Career anchor rankings based on interview

1 (career anchor	_____
2	_____
3	_____
4	_____
5	_____
6	_____
7	_____
8	_____

If the partners disagree, or if the results surprise you:

1. Carefully reread all the answers you gave to the questions during the interview.
2. Discuss these divergences with your partner and ask for their observations.

Final analysis:

If you recognise yourself in two main categories or more, try to imagine what you would do in this case. If, for example, you feel closest to the technical/functional anchor and the general management anchor, imagine a scenario where your company offers you a choice between a job as head of division and a job as head engineer (always supposing that the two jobs are more or less equivalent in terms of company hierarchy). Most of the sticking points can be resolved by thinking about specific situations where you had to make choices.

Now, with all the information you have gathered and after the discussion with your partner, make a final decision about which career anchors truly correspond to your personality and complete the ranking table above.