

Exploring Employees' Satisfaction with their Perceived Career Anchors: A Study from PTCL, Pakistan

Samar Batool Shah*, Sehrish Bukhari**, Mubeena Soomro***

Abstract

This qualitative inductive study explores the effects of career anchors on individuals' career selection decisions and their perceived satisfaction with their chosen careers at Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL). It investigates the factors that shape career anchors in Pakistan and explores the factors driving employees' satisfaction with their career selection decisions. Doing so identifies factors that influence an individual's decision to choose a particular career. A sample of 14 employees from the telecom company, PTCL, was selected from lower-, middle-, and top-level management. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, followed by thematic coding and analysis using the Grounded Theory approach. This study identifies factors that help individuals select a career path, focusing on the factors affecting career choice. For the organization, it would be helpful in designing the reward system for employees and placement policies, thereby better fulfilling employees' needs and preferences. The findings would contribute to the existing limited literature on career selection and career planning in the Pakistani context.

Keywords: *Career Anchors, Career Selection, Individual's career decisions, Employees' placement, Career Planning.*

JEL Classification: *J28, M12, M54*

INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic work environment, there is increasing unrest, indecisiveness, and anxiety among people regarding their career choices (Trifonov & Charaeva, 2022). This research aims to explore factors that affect an individual's career choice in the telecom sector. The objectives of this research are to explore the factors that influence an individual's career choice, particularly in the telecom sector; the factors that construct career anchors; and the factors driving employees' satisfaction with their career selection decision in Pakistan. It is

Correspondence:

*Sukkur IBA University, Sukkur, Pakistan. samarbatool@iba-suk.edu.pk

**Sukkur IBA University, Sukkur, Pakistan. sehrish.bukhari@iba-suk.edu.pk

***Sukkur IBA University, , Sukkur, Pakistan. mubeena@iba-suk.edu.pk

based on Schein's career anchor theory (1978). Schein (1987, p. 158) defines career anchor as: "that one element in our self-concept that we will not give up, even when forced to make a difficult decision". A career anchor is a self-concept that reveals an individual's career needs, motives, and the talents he discovers within himself through work-related experiences (Agarwal, 2008; Marinas et al., 2016; Schein, 1978). The career anchor is so important, as it determines the decision to choose a particular career, it affects the decision of leaving a job or moving from one job to another, the perceptions of individuals about the future, what they want to achieve in the future, and the reactions of individuals to work settings and work experiences.

The development of individuals and of society as a whole depends on the match between an individual's career choice and the skills and expertise they possess (van Dierendonck, 2015; Lent and Brown, 2020). Research shows that a poor match between career choice and individual aspirations may lead to high turnover (Akkermans et al., 2021). However, this will not only have negative consequences for individuals but also for organizations (Budjanovcanin et al., 2019; Tian et al., 2019).

The extant literature, such as Haroon (2020), Chapman (2015), Marinas et al. (2016), and Chen et al. (2021), on career anchors highlights the phenomenon of employees' perceived career anchors and their influence on career selection, primarily in the Western context. Pakistan is characterized as a collectivistic culture with distinct cultural values and trends (Hofstede, 2011); the understanding of individuals' perceived career anchors is lacking in current studies. Hence, the current study addresses this gap and explores the different career anchors underlying individuals' career decisions, specifically in the telecom sector in the Pakistani context. Moreover, the study aims to identify factors that lead people to select a particular career, the perceived satisfaction with selected careers, and factors that construct career anchors in Pakistan.

The study has several implications for employees, including helping them with their career planning and management. Identifying one's career anchor is very important for individuals, as it helps them make better career choices and select an organization that aligns with their values. Additionally, identification of such factors has implications for organizations in their recruitment and selection processes. This may enable organizations to design rewards that fulfill employees' extrinsic and intrinsic needs.

A detailed description of career anchors and their specifications is provided by Schein's career anchor theory (Schein, 1987), which offers a useful framework for understanding careers and career needs. It highlights different factors known as "career anchors". The basic idea behind Schein's career anchor theory (Schein, 1987) is that an individual's career anchors must be congruent with the work environment, which can lead to job commitment and satisfaction. Alternatively, the unmatched would result in job turnover and dissatisfaction (Feldman & Bolino, 1996).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Career anchor theory, also known as career orientation theory, is a theory of career development. A career anchor is an individual's intended career choice. Schein initially introduced eight categories of career anchors such as technical/functional competence

(enhancing technical expertise in the chosen field, managerial (looking for opportunities to resolve complex problems), security and stability (Preferring stability in jobs over relocation), autonomy and independence (preferring freedom in work), service/dedication to a cause (seeking jobs that matches the personal value to serve people or the society), pure challenge (willingness to take challenging jobs), entrepreneurial creativity (preferring entrepreneurial opportunities) and lifestyle career anchor (motivation to have a balance between job and life style). In later research, Suutari and Taka (2004) identified one additional career anchor, "Internationalism" (desire for international exposure for learning and development).

Previous research shows that a good match between job characteristics and career anchor boosts employees' motivation to work, organizational commitment, and career success (Medsker and O'Connor, 2015; Ghalavandi et al., 2012). However, these studies have analyzed the alignment between career anchors and job characteristics, whereas the current study focuses on exploring career anchors and their perceived satisfaction with their chosen career anchors in the Pakistani context.

Similarly, Greenbank (2011) and Devkota et al. (2022) asserted that students' choice of higher or university education in a particular field is dependent on their preferred future employability. Therefore, students' preferences for future career orientations and preferred career paths are determined by the specific study area that they are undertaking (Ng et al, 2008; Kopanidis and Shaw, 2014; Rudhumbu et al., 2016). Hence, their career paths are shaped by the particular specialization in university education (Kopanidis and Shaw, 2014; Willis et al., 2009). The initial choice of students' educational field, particularly in vocational and professional fields such as accounting, medicine, health, etc, is considered a major predictor of career preferences of students. (Kopanidis and Shaw, 2014; Devkota et al., 2022). Hence, "skills, competencies and abilities" and "education and training" of the students played the most important role in their career decisions (Rudhumbu et al., 2016). Certain extrinsic factors, such as a well-reputed field with potential growth, well-paid jobs, employer brand, job stability, and job security, were also found to be important predictors of career choice (Rudhumbu et al., 2016). Moreover, father's influence on the career choice decision was found to be a significant factor (Zhu et al., 2024).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this study is a qualitative inductive approach grounded in the tenets of grounded theory. Systematic, predefined procedures were used, followed by theorization of the phenomenon under consideration. The research objectives were to determine the effects of career anchors on career choices and the satisfaction derived from their selection in PTCL. A qualitative method was used to answer the research questions. Qualitative research enables researchers to gain a deep understanding of the motives, values, and preferences of people working at PTCL. The philosophical positioning employed for this research is an interpretive framework of social constructionism, with a grounded theory approach to inductively answer the research questions. Fourteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic coding to develop a theory of the phenomenon.

Thematic analysis involves identifying, examining, and recording specific patterns or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first step was becoming familiar with the data by transcribing it.

Then, empirical themes were derived from the data. After that, empirical themes were combined and reviewed to form conceptual themes. Finally, the conceptual themes were refined to form theoretical dimensions of the data. In this way, the data was structured.

The unit of analysis was individual employees at different levels within PTCL because PTCL is a large, reputable organization, and people want to pursue their careers there, as it offers career paths and opportunities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with PTCL employees.

In line with the research objectives, purposive sampling (Miles and Huberman, 1994) was used to collect the data. According to this sampling technique, participants are grouped according to pre-defined criteria. As the current research focused on exploring employees' career anchors and satisfaction with their chosen career anchors in the telecom sector, specifically PTCL Pakistan, purposive sampling was considered an appropriate technique to achieve the study's objectives. The Research Sample is selected based on the available time and resources, as well as the research objectives. However, the sample size in purposive sampling is determined through theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation is a point in data collection at which new themes and ideas no longer emerge from the data. In this way, the same themes or information provided by the respondents are repeated. At this point, the researcher may decide to stop collecting data, as the information keeps repeating, indicating data saturation. Moreover, anonymity and confidentiality of the research participants were ensured.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The findings from the data revealed the following themes after thematic analysis:

Technical / Functional Career Anchor

Among the factors that motivated employees of PTCL to join this career was their interest in learning about technology. So, one of the key anchors found in them is the technical career anchor.

Institutional Influence

According to some respondents, they joined PTCL. After all, their father had also worked at the same organization, whereas others joined because their father was a major decision-maker in their career. This can be referred to as institutional influence. Institutional theory describes how human behavior is regulated and shaped by social structures. It can also be interpreted that their father had the most influential role in their career selection decision. According to Agarwal (2008), the most influential person affecting an individual's career decision in India was the father.

Economic Resource/Extrinsic factors

One of the most common theoretical concepts that emerged from the data was the economic resource, as PTCL was considered a large organization with high revenues and higher salaries. PTCL has a worldwide reputation in the telecom industry; it is such a large

organization that people want to work for it, and it is a privilege to be identified as a member. Moreover, respondents emphasized the financial aspects when selecting their career at PTCL, as they sought a handsome salary.

Technical Career Anchor

Another theme that emerged from the data is about their learning experiences. The respondents further stated that PTCL has its own trainers who train employees, which is very helpful to them. He emphasized the role of PTCL as a major provider of valuable training for the department. As far as learning progress is concerned, all respondents were satisfied with the learning taking place at routine work and from the formal training that PTCL is conducting to enhance the skills and capabilities of its employees. They are learning through formal and informal processes at the workplace.

Benefits/Perks

Respondents discussed both the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits they received from PTCL. Intrinsic rewards drive employee motivation. An individual feels internally motivated when they believe work is enjoyable and satisfying. Intrinsic rewards also include promotions of employees from one grade to a higher one. Whereas external rewards cause extrinsic motivation when an individual does something he knows will result in external rewards, such as bonuses and other financial gains. When extrinsic rewards are combined with intrinsic rewards, the result is the best because it satisfies both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Respondents stated they receive extrinsic rewards such as a medical facility, a fuel allowance, a laptop, a car maintenance allowance, a bonus of six months' salary upon completion of specific tasks, and a handsome payment upon leaving the organization.

PTCL is taking initiatives to improve employee well-being. Employees are given a funeral allowance when any of their close relatives passes away, in case of accidental death or natural death, and they are given marriage grants to help the needy ones. They stated that the organization provides rest houses for employees while they are on different training programs. Whereas employees are given the option of flex-timing, allowing them to schedule their work hours according to their convenience. This is the advantage that very few organizations in Pakistan provide. Women employees are given workplace mobility, allowing them to work from anywhere in the world. PTCL provides comprehensive medical facilities to employees' parents.

When we look at the benefits, PTCL is successfully meeting both extrinsic and intrinsic needs of its employees. They are taking initiatives to improve the welfare of employees. They are being promoted, given good performance certificates, offered flex-timing that is very rarely found in organizations and the workplace, offered mobility, scholarship, and access to a comprehensive medical facility.

Satisfaction with salary

Most employees stated that PTCL is not paying them market-competitive salaries. They further said that their salaries are lower than those of their peers working in the same position at other organizations.

So, there were mixed reviews: some considered their pay justified, while others considered

it unjustified. But the general trend was that people were unsatisfied with their current pay, given their experience, and perceived it as not market-competitive. Some of them considered the pay structure to be lacking specific criteria and unfair.

Employees at the top level of management were very satisfied with their salaries, work environment, and assigned grades, but employees at lower levels and a few from middle levels of management had complaints about favoritism in promotions and lower salaries and grades. This might be because employees at the top level were availing facilities that were out of class, so they were satisfied with the system and regarded it as fair and merit-based. This could also be the case because, as the heads and representatives of the organization, they were reluctant to portray an undesirable image to outsiders. Therefore, they wanted to portray PTCL in an ideal light to others.

Security/ Stability Career Anchor

Some respondents reported being satisfied with PTCL. They had spent a long time at PTCL and intended to remain with the organization, believing their job was secure and stable. One employee said he had spent 21 years with this organization. During these years, he was offered jobs at other companies, but he refused them because he wanted to pursue his career at PTCL. Spending such a long tenure with one organization gives a sense of security and stability. Another respondent also discussed his long tenure of 25 years here; he is a diploma holder, which also made it difficult for him to switch to a better place.

Lifestyle Career Anchor

A few respondents stated that one factor that keeps them in the organization is that they live in Khairpur, which is near Sukkur. Hence, it becomes feasible for them to do a job near their home, thus improving their work-life balance. According to one respondent, he is in PTCL because he is given respect in the department. For respect and future growth, he wants to remain with PTCL. Another respondent said that he has received love, care, and respect from his colleagues and higher officials. Getting respect and care can mean a lot for people in fulfilling their personal values

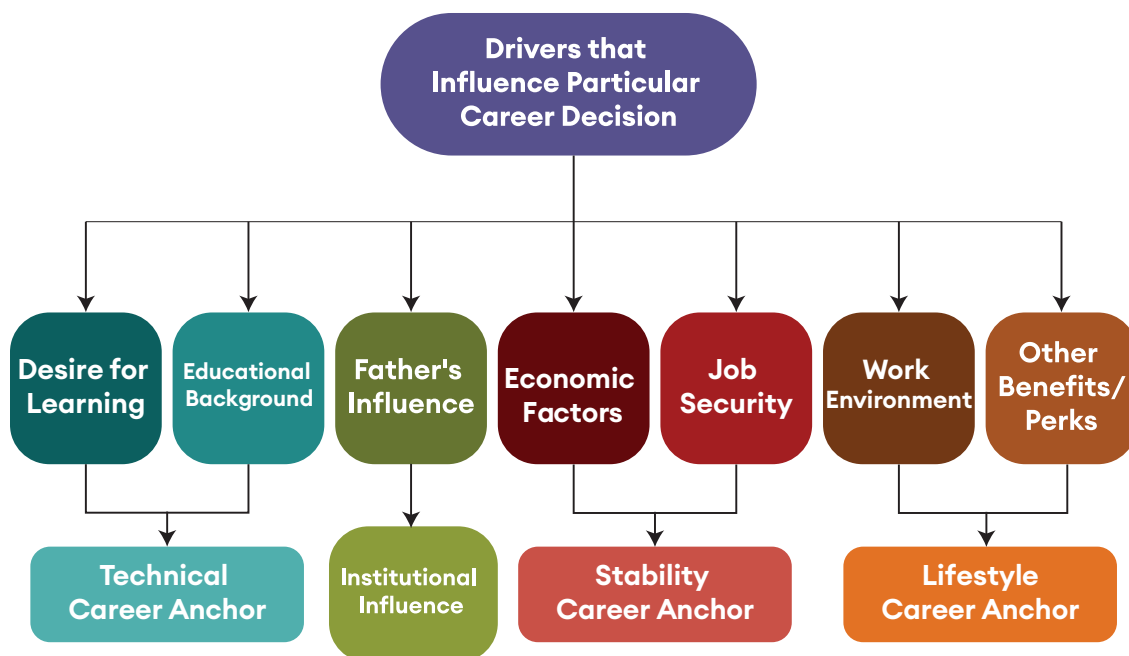
One respondent discussed their personal values and fulfilment. He said that, as a university graduate, he wants to use all the skills he has learned over those four years, but he is unable to do so because the job requirements are different. In this way, he sees his skills as being underutilized. Sometimes, an individual wants to make full use of his skills and enhance them, but because of the nature of the job, his skills may remain underutilized. Another individual said his personal goals related to the workplace are fulfilled.

Work Environment

One respondent argued that “the work environment of PTCL is mixed; sometimes it is tough, and sometimes it is relaxing, because we have to meet certain deadlines, and sometimes it is relaxing. It is a mixture of both aspects. But we have a sort of comfortable environment where we can feel homely.” He also pointed out that the work environment was a mixture of harsh and relaxing environments. Another respondent disliked the work environment. He said we don't have proper offices, although a few employees do. Overall, we don't. Another thing that they found irritating was unfair promotions. The grades assigned to different employees

were perceived to be unjust. According to them, some newly hired employees are given higher grades that seem very unfair. New contractual employees were paid better than permanent employees.

Theorizing Model



DISCUSSION

The current qualitative research aims to explore the factors that lead employees to choose a career at PTCL. Different themes emerge from the analysis of the data. One of them was related to an interest in technology and to learn about technological trends in the telecom sector. Some respondents wanted to learn a variety of new skills and competencies after earning a degree in engineering or another related technological field. This is consistent with the study of Agarwal (2008), who found “skills and competencies”, and “education and training” at the top of the list when selecting any career. These findings also seem to be consistent with Ng et al. (2008) and Kopanidis and Shaw (2014). According to these researchers, a student’s choice of education determines their future career path (Ng et al., 2008; Kopanidis and Shaw, 2014). The learning process in a particular field led him to a definite career pathway (Gamage et al., 2021). As PTCL employees were mostly from an engineering background, it is likely they would choose a technical field.

For some respondents, the reason for selecting a career in PTCL was their father's influence. This finding is also consistent with Agarwal's (2008) findings. He investigated the influence of friends and close family members on individuals' career decisions and found that fathers play the most influential role. This happens because we live in a patriarchal society where the most important decisions that individuals take are determined by their parents, specifically the father (Zhu et al., 2024). This may be related to interpersonal factors.

One of the most common and important themes that emerged from the data was the motivation for extrinsic factors. The majority of respondents reported joining this career because it is a highly profitable, high-growth organization with strong revenue and lucrative salary packages. This reflects the importance of extrinsic factors, including brand name, salaries and income, and job security (Gokuladas, 2010). This finding is consistent with the study by Marinas et al. (2016), which examined business and administration students at a Romanian university and found that students ranked extrinsic factors at the top of the list, such as having well-paid jobs and a reputable brand name. However, interpersonal factors, such as family and relatives, also played an influential role in their initial career path decision. However, the current study examined the influence of the father (an interpersonal factor) as an important determinant of career decisions.

Regarding job satisfaction, the majority of respondents were dissatisfied with salaries and benefits. They considered their salaries uncompetitive and lower than their experience, which could reduce their motivation to perform and stay with the company. It was found that one way to improve employees' performance is to implement strategies that enhance job satisfaction and motivation. Hira and Waqas (2012) also found a positive link between job satisfaction and job performance in the banking sector. Iqbal et al. (2012) also found that job satisfaction positively affects performance in a survey across different universities.

Some employees favored switching jobs because they were being paid less than they felt they were worth. They seem less committed to the organization as they perceived unfair treatment, biased promotions, and favoritism. This is consistent with the study done by Fu et al. (2011), who reported that different aspects of job satisfaction (pay, coworker, supervision, and work itself) had a significant effect on organizational commitment. Employees perceived unfair promotions and nepotism that ultimately affected their commitment to the organization. There is ample research showing a negative association between job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Qureshi et al., 2011; Malik et al., 2010).

The data showed that employees of PTCL were more inclined to extrinsic rewards such as fuel facilities, laptops, mobile phones, medical facilities, bonuses, and car maintenance allowance. However, few were inclined toward intrinsic rewards such as flex-timing, challenging jobs, and interesting jobs. But for most of the employees, extrinsic benefits were more important. However, lower-level employees are more oriented towards extrinsic rewards such as salary, promotions, and fringe benefits. While higher-level employees put greater importance on intrinsic motivation factors, such as learning. However, the findings of the current research indicated that PTCL employees are more oriented towards extrinsic motivation factors, such as benefits, allowances, and grants.

There are conflicting views among scholars on the effects of extrinsic rewards. According to Latham (2007) and Putwain et al. (2012), extrinsic rewards may be perceived by employees as a controlling mechanism that can limit their personal autonomy/freedom. This is because they are exhibiting certain behavior to get some positive outcome/reward. Hence, their behavior is being controlled by how appealing the reward is. In other words, it is actually the reward that controls their behavior and may be considered a barrier to their personal freedom. Whereas other scholars believe that extrinsic rewards can increase employees' self-determination. Thus, employees feel a sense of accomplishment when they receive an award based on their performance (Malik et al., 2015). Employees feel "not being controlled" by the environment;

rather, they believe they can control the work environment (Chen et al., 2012; Eisenberger & Aselage, 2009). The findings of the current research indicate that employees preferred extrinsic rewards over intrinsic rewards, consistent with past research (Chen et al., 2012; Eisenberger & Aselage, 2009). Moreover, it was found that individuals select their career or organization based on their educational background, skills, and abilities, consistent with past research (Ng et al., 2008; Kopanidis and Shaw, 2014).

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusion

The objectives set for this research were to (a) explore the factors that cause individuals to select a particular career in the Pakistani context, and (b) to find factors that drive employees' satisfaction with their selected career in PTCL. The unit of analysis for the current research was PTCL employees.

A grounded theory approach to qualitative research was employed, with the researcher making multiple field visits to mingle with the participants. A semi-structured interview guideline was designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under consideration. Although there is extant literature on career anchors that reflects how they are constructed and how they influence decision-making. But most studies are conducted in Western contexts. To fill this gap, the current study aimed to explore career anchors in the Pakistani context, given the limited understanding of them in our context.

Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study are: it is not a longitudinal study, which limits the credibility and predictive power of the findings. Time limitations were in place, so understanding of the phenomenon and interaction with people were also limited, which in turn limited familiarity and comfort levels. Another limitation was that I conducted a focused literature review based on empirical themes emerging from the data, so only a limited set of factors was considered in the underlying study.

Practical Implications

Understanding of career anchors is very much important. It can help individuals make career decisions, as awareness of one's career is important for everyone. Awareness of one's career not only benefits individuals but also organizations (Eseadi & Diale, 2024). The study's findings will help students select particular careers. At the initial stages of studies, students are somewhat unclear and indecisive about which field of study to pursue, as individuals differ and so do their priorities. However, when an individual discovers within himself the field in which he may excel and perform extraordinarily, this may become a guiding principle for him, and accordingly, he may decide on future actions and set future goals.

Empirical contributions of the current research include that the findings will help PTCL design its rewards and incentive plan so that incentives and rewards align with employees' career anchors. Moreover, this would help them identify factors that lead to better employee performance. The findings of this study would be helpful for PTCL in assigning weightages in

the recruitment and selection process. In this way, they can better satisfy employees' needs, and, in return, employees' performance would be enhanced.

An important and widely observed factor in the data was the desire for extrinsic factors. This is because PTCL is a vast, profitable international organization with worldwide networks. Extrinsic factors include the tangible and intangible benefits that PTCL is providing to its employees. The data show that PTCL employees were eager to learn about technological trends. They wanted to enhance their competencies in the technical field and, to quench their thirst for learning in this field, they pursued this career. Besides learning and extrinsic factors, another reason was their technical education. Some employees reported that they have graduated or earned a master's degree in engineering. So it was likely for them to select a career path that is consistent with their professional education. Because an individual's initial choice for education determines their choice for career. The domain of education and training an individual is pursuing determines the career he wants to pursue in the future. Very few employees reported that they chose their career in PTCL because their father also pursued a career there.

It was observed that some employees were dissatisfied with their salaries. They perceived the work environment as unfair, which made them motivated to remain committed to the organization. This was particularly evident among lower- and middle-level employees, whereas higher-level employees were very satisfied with the system. This could be because they are already in a higher position, so they wanted to portray PTCL as the best organization.

Summarizing the findings, the most important and widely cited reason for employees' career selection in PTCL was extrinsic factors, followed by education from a particular technical perspective, motivation for learning, and, lastly, parental influence (Zhu et al., 2024). For some employees, it was a mix of desire for learning and extrinsic factors. It is a natural tendency for individuals to be influenced by factors such as society, parents (Zhu et al., 2024), and different institutions; hence, these factors play a critical role in shaping an individual's decision to select a career.

Future Recommendations

Future researchers are recommended to conduct longitudinal research to add credibility and predictability to the findings. They can employ a mixed-method approach to theorize the model emerging from the data and triangulate the findings. Given time limitations, future research may incorporate a longer fieldwork period with participants to better understand the people and the phenomenon. Spending more time with people increases understanding and familiarity, so they may come out of their comfort zone and discuss openly and freely. As I conducted a focused literature review based on themes emerging from the data, future researchers are advised to expand their literature review and incorporate additional ideas and factors into the field of career anchors.

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