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Psychological career meta-competencies in relation to job embeddedness among human resource employees

Nadia Ferreira^{1*} and Melinde Coetzee²

¹Department of Human Resource Management, University of South Africa, South Africa.

²Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, University of South Africa, South Africa.

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In this study the psychological career resources, adaptability and hardiness (as a composite set of psychosocial career meta-competencies) of a convenience sample of 355 early-career human resource professionals were investigated in relation to their job embeddedness by means of a quantitative survey design. The sample consisted predominantly of black (92%) and female (71%) participants employed at managerial and staff levels in the South African service industry. A canonical correlation analysis indicated that self/other skills, career directedness, and the career adaptability competencies of concern, control and confidence significantly contributed to the participants' sense of job-embedded fit. The findings may be used to inform career development support interventions aimed at assisting in the retention of valuable and talented staff.

Key words: Retention, psychological career resources, career adaptability, hardiness, job embeddedness, psychosocial career meta-competencies.

INTRODUCTION

Employees' job embeddedness has become an important research construct in a rapidly changing employment context (Feldman and Ng, 2007; Van Dyk, 2012). Because of global skills scarcity trends, organisations find that people with a smaller pool of talent are having increasingly more choices in terms of career options and mobility opportunities, which makes it more difficult to attract and retain talented employees (Mandhanya and Shah, 2010). The changes in the career and work context are further reflected in the changing definitions of work, careers and job structures – all of which mirror widespread downsizing, subsequent loss of job security, highly divergent and diverse career paths, shifts in organisational loyalties, and an emphasis on employability and career agency (Baruch, 2004; Ng et al., 2007; Savickas, 2011; Schreuder and Coetzee, 2011).

Savickas (2011) posits that the information societies of the 21st century need to learn how to deal with uncertainty and chaos, numerous employment transitions and joblessness or temporary work assignments, all of which require individuals to take ownership of their career development and to sustain their employability. Career scholars (and their research) emphasise the psychosocial career meta-competencies individuals need to reconceptualise their careers and redesign their working lives in the 21st century (Bezuidenhout, 2011; Coetzee, 2008; Obschonka et al., 2012; Savickas, 2011; Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). Psychosocial career meta-competencies are a set of self-regulatory adaptive capacities (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012) that are regarded as critical to the career development and construction process and include, for example, individuals' career adaptability,

*Corresponding author. E-mail: ferren@unisa.ac.za. Tel: +27 12 429 3966.

self-knowledge, career preferences and values, career self-management competencies, self-esteem and emotional literacy – all of which allow individuals to be self-sufficient, adaptive learners in managing their own careers (Bezuidenhout, 2011; Coetzee, 2008; Coetzee and Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012; Fugate et al., 2004; Hall and Chandler, 2005; Savickas, 2005; Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). These psychosocial meta-competencies act as transactional resources between the inner (psychological) and outer (social) worlds of a person and helps him or her to adapt to social expectations and work roles and in dealing with career transitions between occupational positions in a more turbulent occupational world (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012).

In this study the researchers sought to investigate the psychosocial career meta-competencies that influence people's subjective career experiences and embeddedness in a changing occupational world. More specifically, the objective of the study was to assess how individuals' psychological career resources, adaptability and hardiness relate to their job embeddedness. While facing new demands in their careers and jobs and searching for ways to achieve a harmonic fit between their personal needs and external opportunities, individuals' repertoire of psychological career resources, adaptability and hardiness act as a composite set of psychosocial career meta-competencies that drive their career development and guide their use of adaptive strategies for implementing the self-concept in various work roles (Coetzee, 2008; Maddi and Khoshaba, 2005; Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). However, job embeddedness is seen to act as a mediating construct between an individual's work and personal life by representing the non-affective reasons for staying in an organisation and the cognitive beliefs about the fit between one's inner needs and the organisation (Mitchell et al., 2001). Considering that person–organisation-fit has been identified as a potentially important factor in the development and maintenance of employees' psychological attachment to organisations (Meyer and Allen, 1997; Meyer et al., 2010), investigating the relationship between these constructs may potentially inform retention practices.

Psychological career resources

Coetzee (2008) has coined the construct of psychological career resources to help individuals recognise the significance of developing their inner career resources and tapping into these resources to improve their general employability capacities. People's psychological career resources are represented by their career preferences and values, career enablers, career drivers and career harmonizers. These career-related resources enable individuals to adapt to changing career circumstances and to shape and select environments in order to attain

success within a particular socio-cultural context (Coetzee, 2008). People's psychological career resources have been found to be related to their affective commitment (Ferreira, 2009; Ferreira et al., 2010) and their subjective experiences of their work, jobs and careers (Coetzee and Bergh, 2009)

People's career preferences and values comprise their unique views about the paths their careers should follow and guide their career decisions. The career drivers comprise people's sense of career purpose, career directedness and career venturing attitudes. These attitudes energise people and motivate them to experiment with new or alternative career and employment possibilities based on their viewpoints of the possible selves they could become or the possible working roles they could experience. The career enablers comprise people's transferable skills such as their practical or creative skills and the personal and interpersonal management skills that help them to succeed in their careers. The career harmonisers comprise people's self-esteem, behavioural adaptability, emotional literacy and social connectivity. These psychological attributes act as promoters of flexibility and resilience and as controls by keeping the career drivers in balance so that people do not go overboard (or burn themselves out) while pursuing and reinventing their careers (Coetzee, 2008).

Career adaptability

Savickas's (1997; 2005) notion of career adaptability is relevant to the current study. Career adaptability refers to the psychosocial capacities or resources an individual deploys when faced with developmental vocational tasks, occupational transitions and work traumas (Savickas, 2005). Hence career adaptability may be seen as an individual's capability to make a series of successful transitions when the labour market, organisation of work, and underlying occupational and organisational knowledge bases are subject to considerable change (Brown et al., 2012:755).

Savickas (2005) conceptualises career-adaptable individuals as those people who become concerned about their future as employees and then take action to increase their personal control over their vocational future. *Concern* involves a tendency to consider life within a time perspective anchored in hope and optimism (becoming concerned about the vocational future). *Control* rests on the conviction that it is an advantage for people to be able not only to use self-regulation strategies to adjust to the needs of different settings, but also to exert some sort of influence and control on the context (increasing personal control over one's vocational future).

Career-adaptable individuals are proactive by displaying curiosity, confidence and commitment in

exploring possible selves and future scenarios (Savickas, 2005). *Curiosity* about possible selves and social opportunities increases people's active exploration behaviours (they display curiosity by exploring possible selves and future scenarios). *Confidence* includes the capacity to stand by one's own aspirations and objectives, even in the face of obstacles and barriers (strengthening one's confidence to pursue one's aspirations). *Commitment* to one's life projects, rather than one's particular job, means that career indecision should not necessarily be removed since it actually generates new possibilities and experimentation that allow individuals to be active even within uncertain situations (Savickas, 1997, 2005). Savickas and Porfeli (2012) regard concern, control, curiosity and confidence as important self-regulation strategies and adaptability resources in negotiating the person-in-environment fit harmonics in a more uncertain and turbulent career context.

Hardiness

Hardiness (Maddi and Khoshaba, 2005) is viewed as an important stress resilience construct that relates to individuals' psychological career well-being (Ferreira, 2012). It denotes a collection of personality characteristics that functions as a flexible resource during demanding life events. These include the hardy characteristics of commitment, control and challenge.

Individuals with high levels of *hardy commitment* are able to believe in the certainty, significance and interest value of who they are and what they are doing – and therefore tend to involve themselves fully in a number of life situations, including work, family, interpersonal relationships and social institutions (Kobasa, 1987). *Hardy control* enhances the individual's motivation to engage in effortful coping because it predisposes him or her to view stressors as changeable (Kobasa, 1987; Maddi, 2002; Maddi and Khoshaba, 1984). *Hardy challenge* generates a zest for facing up to (or even seeking out) difficult experiences because these are seen as opportunities for personal growth rather than potential threats to security (Maddi et al., 2002). Hardy individuals tend to whole-heartedly involve themselves in or commit to whatever they are doing, believe and act as if they can influence or control the events forming their lives, and consider change to be not only normal but also a stimulus for or challenge to development or personal growth (Azeem, 2010; Delahajj et al., 2010; Hystad et al., 2010; Kobasa et al., 1985; Zhang, 2010).

Job embeddedness

Job embeddedness refers to individuals' dispositional orientations or perceptions of their (1) fit (the extent to

which a person perceives that the job, organisation and environment meshes with or complements [fit] other areas and aspects of his or her life space), (2) links (the extent of an individual's ties with other people and activities at work to family, non-work and off-the-job interests) and (3) sacrifice (the ease with which a person feels links can be broken or people's perceptions of what they would have to give up if they were to leave their current positions) (Feldman and Ng, 2007). These dispositions act as mediating constructs between employees' work and personal lives, influencing their cognitive (non-affective) and affective reasons for staying or leaving an organisation or job, and hence their retention (Mitchell et al., 2001; Tanova and Holtom, 2008).

The higher the number of links between the person and the social, psychological and financial web (constituting work and non-work friends, groups, the community and the physical environment in which the person lives), the more he or she perceives himself or herself to be bound to the job and organisation (Mitchell et al., 2001). The better the fit between an individual's personal values, career goals and plans for the future and the larger corporate culture and job demands (the job knowledge, skills and abilities required), the higher the likelihood that he or she will feel professionally and personally tied to the organisation (Mitchell et al., 2001). The more an employee perceives that which he or she would have to give up (financially or psychologically) by leaving a job or organisation, the more difficult it will be for him or her to serve his or her employment with the organisation (Mitchell et al., 2001; Shaw et al., 1998).

Goal of the study

The objective of the study was to explore the relationship between psychological career resources, adaptability and hardiness (as a composite set of psychosocial career meta-competencies) and job embeddedness among human resource professionals employed in the South African service industry. Knowledge of this relationship seems to be potentially valuable for the retention context. The specific research question was: *Do individuals' psychosocial career meta-competencies (psychological career resources, adaptability and hardiness) significantly and positively relate to their job embeddedness?*

METHOD

Participants

The participants were a convenience sample of 355 employed adults who were enrolled for a human resource management programme at a higher education distance learning institution. The sample consisted predominantly of black (92%) and female (71%) participants who were in the exploration and establishment phases

of their careers: 25 to 40 years (78%).

The participants occupied positions at senior management, middle management and staff levels in the human resource management field in the South African service industry.

Measuring instruments

The participants completed the Psychological Career Resources Inventory (Coetzee, 2008), the Career Adaptability Inventory (Savickas, 2010), the Personal Views Survey-II (Maddi, 1987) and the Job Embeddedness Scale (Mitchell et al., 2001).

The Psychological Career Resources Inventory (PCRI) is a self-rated multifactorial measure containing 64 items and five subscales (career preferences, career values, career enablers, career drivers and career harmonisers). The PCRI measures 15 constructs in total: career preferences (stability/expertise, managerial, variety/creativity and independence/autonomy); career values (growth/development and authority/influence); career drivers (career purpose, career directedness and career venturing); career enablers (practical/creative skills and self/other skills) and career harmonisers (self-esteem, behavioural adaptability, emotional literacy and social connectivity). A six-point Likert-type scale was used for subject responses to each of the 64 items. In terms of the internal consistency reliability, Cronbach Alpha coefficients for each subscale ranged between .70 and .95.

The Career Adaptability Inventory (CAAI) is a multifactorial self-rating measure consisting of 55 items and five subscales: concern, control, curiosity, cooperation and confidence. A five-point Likert-type scale was used for subject responses to each of the 55 items. The Cronbach Alpha coefficients (internal consistency) for the five subscales were as follows: concern (.88), control (.90), curiosity (.90), cooperation (.85) and confidence (.90).

The Personal Views Survey-II (PVSII) is a self-rated multifactorial measure which contains 50 items and three subscales (commitment, control and challenge). A four-point Likert-type scale was used for subject responses to each of the 50 items. The Cronbach Alpha coefficients (internal consistency) for the three subscales were as follows: commitment (.76), control (.71) and challenge (.59).

The Job Embeddedness Scale (JES) measures three causal, not effect, indicators of the dimensions for embeddedness: fit (seven items), sacrifice (10 items) and links (six items) on a six-point Likert-type scale. The Cronbach Alpha coefficients (internal consistency) for the three subscales were as follows: fit (.84), links (.77) and sacrifice (.87).

Research procedure

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the management of the higher education distance learning institution in line with the research ethics policy of the institution. The participants attended a three-day study school. The aim of the study, the confidentiality of the responses and the instructions for completing the questionnaire were given to the respondents on the first day of the study school. Each questionnaire included a covering letter inviting the subjects to participate voluntarily in the study and assuring them that their individual responses would remain confidential. The cover letter stated that completing the questionnaires and returning them constituted agreement to use the results for research purposes only.

Statistical analyses

Descriptive (means, standard deviations and reliability analyses)

and canonical correlational statistics were calculated in terms of the objective of the study. Canonical correlation analysis was considered appropriate and useful because statistical analysis involves examining relationships between two composite sets of multiple variables. Canonical correlation analysis limits the probability of committing type I errors (Hair et al., 2010).

The Wilks's lambda chi-square test was performed to test for the significance of the overall canonical correlation between the independent and dependent variates of a canonical function. In order to counter the probability of a type I error, it was decided to set the significance value for interpreting the results at a 95% confidence interval level ($F_p \leq .05$). Effect sizes were used to decide on the practical significance of the findings. In line with the guidelines of Hair et al. (2010), the cut-off criteria for factorial loadings ($\geq .30$) were used to interpret the relative importance of the canonical structure correlations or loadings in deriving the canonical variate constructs. The redundancy index was also considered in assessing the magnitude of the overall correlational relationships between the two variates of a canonical function and the practical significance of the predictive ability of the canonical relationship (Hair et al., 2010). Squared canonical correlation (Rc^2) values of $\leq .12$ (small practical effect), $\geq .13 \leq .25$ (medium practical effect) and $\geq .26$ (large practical effect) ($F_p \leq .05$) (Cohen, 1992) were considered in the interpretation of the magnitude or practical significance of the results.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics: Means and standard deviations

Table 1 shows that the participants obtained the highest mean scores on the following PCRI dimensions: stability/expertise career preference ($M = 5.28$; $SD = .11$); growth/development career value ($M = 5.42$; $SD = .116$); career purpose career driver ($M = 5.39$; $SD = .05$); self/other skills career enablers ($M = 4.89$; $SD = .23$) and self-esteem- career harmoniser ($M = 5.09$; $SD = .10$).

Table 1 shows that the participants obtained the highest mean scores on the CAAI control ($M = 4.39$; $SD = 6.93$), PVS-II challenge ($M = 3.43$; $SD = 5.71$) and JES fit dimensions ($M = 5.04$; $SD = 6.73$).

Canonical correlation analyses

Table 2 shows that the model has three canonical functions (dimensions), of which the canonical correlation of only the first function is statistically significant: $Rc = 0.39$ ($Rc^2 = .15$; medium practical effect; $F(p) = 1.58$ ($p = .003$)). The canonical function explains the overall relationship between the variate for the set of dependent variables (psychological career resources, career adaptability and hardiness) and the variate for the set of independent variables (job embeddedness). The four multivariate criteria and the F approximations for the model are also statistically significant.

Due to the instability and variability of canonical weights and multicollinearity concerns (Hair et al., 2010), only the individual canonical structure correlations

Table 1. Descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations and reliability summary statistics (PCRI, CAAI, PVS-II and JES) (N=355).

Scale dimension	<i>M (SD)</i>	α
PCRI (Psychological career resources)		
<i>Career preference</i>	4.89 (10.92)	.86
Stability/Expertise	5.28 (.11)	.74
Managerial	4.78 (.94)	.75
Variety/Creativity	4.95 (.84)	.72
Independence/Autonomy	4.32 (.39)	.74
<i>Career values</i>	5.13 (3.87)	.85
Growth/Development	5.42 (.16)	.74
Authority/Influence	4.84 (.68)	.64
<i>Career enablers</i>	4.70 (6.40)	.83
Practical/Creative skills	4.47 (.29)	.70
Self/Other skills	4.89 (.23)	.79
<i>Career drivers</i>	4.95 (7.00)	.85
Career purpose	5.39 (.05)	.83
Career directedness	4.69 (.79)	.81
Career venturing	4.75 (.84)	.71
<i>Career harmonizers</i>	4.68 (13.36)	.89
Self-esteem	5.09 (.10)	.82
Behavioural adaptability	4.66 (.28)	.81
Emotional literacy	4.22 (.14)	.71
Social connectivity	4.75 (.34)	.74
CAAI (Career adaptability)		
Concern	4.12 (6.79)	.88
Control	1.39 (6.93)	.90
Curiosity	4.16 (7.08)	.90
Cooperation	4.05 (7.21)	.85
Confidence	4.21 (6.88)	.90
PVS-II (hardiness)		
Commitment	2.31 (6.46)	.76
Control	2.59 (6.47)	.71
Challenge	3.43 (5.71)	.59
JES (Job embeddedness)		
Fit	5.04 (6.73)	.84
Links	4.68 (6.48)	.77
Sacrifice	4.68 (10.94)	.87

(loadings) and their squared canonical structure loadings were considered in interpreting the relative importance and magnitude of importance (practical significance) in deriving the two canonical variate constructs: psychosocial meta-competencies (independent canonical variate

construct) and job embeddedness (dependent canonical variate construct). The canonical structure correlations (loadings) measure the strength of the canonical relationship between a canonical variate and its individual original variables in the set of variables (within-set

Table 2. Canonical correlation analysis relating psychological career resources, career adaptability and hardiness (Independent variables) to job embeddedness (Dependent variables) (N = 355).

Measures of overall model fit for canonical correlation analysis				
Canonical function	Overall canonical correlation (R_c)	Overall squared canonical correlation (R_c^2)	F statistics	Probability (p)
1	.393	.15	1.58	.003**
2	.299	.09	1.14	.26
3	.225	.05	.84	.67

Multivariate tests of significance			
Statistic	Value	Approximate F statistic	Probability (p)
Wilks' Lambda	.731	1.58	.003**
Pillai's Trace	.294	1.57	.003**
Hotelling-Lawley Trace	.334	1.59	.002**
Roy's Greatest Root	.182	2.62	<.0001***

*** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$.

variable-to-variate correlation) (Hair et al., 2010). Those variables that correlate highly ($\geq .30$) with its canonical function variate can be regarded as having more in common with it.

In terms of the independent canonical variate, Table 3 shows that the psychosocial career meta-competencies variate construct was most strongly influenced by the PCRI (psychological career resources) and CAAI (career adaptability) variables. More specifically, the PCRI variables career directedness ($R_c = .64$), self/other skills ($R_c = .61$) and behavioural adaptability ($R_c = .56$) showed a practically large degree of association with the psychosocial career meta-competencies variate construct. The PCRI career preference variables stability/expertise, managerial and variety/creativity, the career value growth/development, the career enabler practical/creative skills and the career harmoniser variables self-esteem, emotional literacy and social connectivity showed a practically moderate degree of association with the psychological career-related meta-competencies variate construct ($R_c^2 \geq .13 \leq .25$). All the CAAI (career adaptability) variables showed a practically large degree of association with the psychological career-related meta-competencies variate construct ($R_c^2 \geq .26$). The PVA-II (hardiness) commitment variable showed an inverse association of a practically moderate degree with the psychosocial career meta-competencies variate construct ($R_c = -.39$). These variables explained 19% of the variance in the psychosocial career meta-competencies canonical variate construct.

In terms of the dependent canonical variate, Table 3 shows that the job embeddedness canonical variate construct was most strongly influenced by the JES fit variable ($R_c = .99$; very large practical effect) and to a lesser extent by the JES variables links ($R_c = .69$; very

large practical effect) and sacrifice ($R_c = .64$; very large practical effect). These variables explained 63% of the variance in the JES canonical variate construct.

The overall squared canonical correlation (R_c^2) explains the proportion of variance shared by the canonical variables in each variate set. As observed for the individual cross-loadings, the psychosocial career meta-competencies canonical variate construct explained 15% ($R_c^2 = .15$; moderate practical effect) of the variance in the job embeddedness canonical variate construct.

In terms of practical significance, the magnitude of the relationship between the two canonical variate constructs is measured by the redundancy index. Ideally, the higher the redundancy, the higher the percentage of variance accounted for by the independent variate in the dependent set of original variables and vice versa. Table 3 shows that the psychosocial career meta-competencies canonical variate construct was able to predict only 10% (small practical effect) of the variance in the individual original JES variables. Overall, it appears from the cross-loadings (although small in practical effect size) that the psychosocial career meta-competencies self/other skills and the career adaptability competencies of concern, control and confidence contributed the most in explaining the variance in the job embeddedness fit variable.

The job embeddedness canonical variate construct was able to predict only 3% (very small practical effect) of the variance in the individual original PCRI, CAAI and PVS-II variables. Neither of the two canonical variate constructs was thus found to be a good overall predictor of the opposite canonical variate construct. By contrast, each canonical variate was a stronger predictor of its own construct variables.

The JES fit variable exhibited the highest correlation with the psychological career-related meta-competencies

Table 3. Standardised Canonical correlation analyses results for the First Canonical function variates (N = 355).

Variate/variables	Canonical coefficients (Weights)	Canonical loading (Rc) (Structure correlations) Rc (Rc ²)	Canonical cross-loadings (Squared multiple correlations)	Shared variance		Redundancy index (Percentage of overall variance of variables explained by the opposite canonical variate)
				Average canonical loading squared (Percentage of overall variance of variables explained by their own canonical variate)	Overall Rc ² (canonical root) (Percentage of overall variance in the dependent variate accounted for by the independent variate)	
Set of independent variables						
Career preference (PCRI)						
Stability/Expertise	.04	.36 (.13)	.14			
Managerial	.30	.42 (.18)	.17			
Variety/Creativity	-.01	.38 (.14)	.15			
Independence/Autonomy	-.20	.11	.04			
Career values (PCRI)						
Growth/Development	-.06	.30 (.09)	.12			
Authority/Influence	-.26	.13	.05			
Career enablers (PCRI)						
Practical/Creative skills	.10	.40 (.16)	.16			
Self/Other skills	.38	.61 (.37)	.24			
Career drivers (PCRI)						
Career purpose	-.55	.25	.10			
Career directedness	.40	.64 (.41)	.25			
Career venturing	-.20	.24	.09			
Career harmonisers (PCRI)						
Self-esteem	.21	.49 (.24)	.19			
Behavioural adaptability	.07	.56 (.31)	.22			
Emotional literacy	.20	.42 (.18)	.17			
Social connectivity	-.07	.44 (.19)	.17			
Career adaptability (CAI)						
Concern	.08	.60 (.36)	.24			
Control	.17	.61 (.37)	.24			
Curiosity	-.06	.55 (.30)	.22			
Cooperation	.07	.51 (.26)	.20			

Table 3. Cont'd

Confidence	.11	.60 (.36)	.24
Hardiness (PVA-II)			
Commitment	-.41	-.39 (.15)	-.15
Control	.004	-.27	-.11
Challenge	.31	.06	.02
Independent variate construct (psycho-social career meta-competencies)			
			.19++
			.15++
			.03+
Set of dependent variables: Job embeddedness (JES)			
Fit	.98	.99 (.98)	.39
Links (organisation)	-.10	.69 (.48)	.27
Sacrifice	.13	.64 (.41)	.25
Dependent variate construct (job embeddedness)			
			.63+++
			.15++
			.10+

+ $Rc^2 \leq .12$ (small practical effect size); ++ $Rc^2 \geq .13 \leq .25$ (moderate practical effect size); +++ $Rc^2 \geq .26$ (large practical effect size).

canonical variate construct, which explained 15% of the variance in the JES fit variable. Overall, it appears from the cross-loadings (although small in practical effect size) that the psychological career-related meta-competencies self/other skills and career directedness and the career adaptability competencies of concern, control and confidence contributed the most in explaining the variance in the job embeddedness fit variable.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the results suggest that the psychosocial career meta-competencies (self/other skills, career directedness, concern, control and confidence) significantly contributed to the participants' sense of job-embedded fit. It appears from the findings that having self-management and interpersonal skills, clarity and concern about one's

future career direction and confidently exerting personal control over one's vocational future enhanced the participants' perception of fit with their job, organisation and/or environment. These psychosocial meta-competencies seem to support individuals' self-regulation strategies relative to the social and developmental tasks of adapting to a social environment and successfully achieving the goal of person-environment integration (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). Perceptions of high compatibility between one's values, career goals and plans for the future with the larger corporate culture and the demands of the immediate job (e.g. job knowledge, skills and abilities) lead to higher job embeddedness, especially person-job-embedded fit (Mitchell et al., 2001). Savickas and Porfeli (2012) also emphasise concern, control, curiosity and confidence as important self-regulation strategies and adaptability resources in negotiating the person-in-environment fit harmonics

in a more uncertain and turbulent career context. Job-embedded fit relates to the social aspect of working. Individuals who have a strong sense of job-embedded fit towards the organisation will most probably remain with the organisation because they may feel they belong there. A strong sense of fit towards the organisation may in turn have a positive effect on the retention of talented staff within the organisation (Mitchell et al., 2001).

Implications for practice

The findings of this study have implications for managers and human resource practitioners who are responsible for providing career development support, especially in a retention context. The psychosocial career meta-competencies highlighted by the present study (self/other skills, career directedness, concern, control and confidence)

could be used as a competency framework to enhance individuals' sense of job-embedded fit. Negotiating the person–environment fit harmonics in a changing employment context has become an essential part of individuals' career development. The psychosocial self-regulatory career meta-competencies identified by the present study are, amongst others, increasingly recognised to be important in helping individuals adapt to their social and work environments. Learning to adapt is both an individual and social process, facilitated by interaction with others and the environment, and continuous self-reflection on behalf of the individual (Brown et al., 2012). Those who are responsible for providing organisational career development support need to understand the importance of helping employees develop and apply the psychosocial career meta-competencies highlighted in this study at all stages of their career progression in an increasingly demanding and chaotic world of work.

Limitations and future research

Since the present study was limited to predominantly black and female early-career participants employed in the human resources management field in the South African organisational context, the findings cannot be generalised to other occupational contexts and age, socio-economic background or gender groups. Furthermore, given the exploratory nature of the research design, this study can yield no statements about causation. Associations between the variables have therefore been interpreted rather than established. These findings therefore need to be replicated with broader samples across various occupational groups and economic sectors before more comprehensive conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between employees' psychosocial career meta-competencies (psychological career resources, adaptability and hardiness) and their job embeddedness. Longitudinal studies at all stages of individuals' career progression are also recommended to investigate the relationship between these variables and how they influence the retention of employees over the long term. Notwithstanding these limitations, the findings of the study provide valuable insights that may inform retention practices involving the career development of talented staff members.

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