Research Objective

The objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between employees’ career anchors and their psychosocial employability attributes as important career meta-capacities in contemporary career development. The study also explored whether individuals from different age and race groups differed significantly regarding these career meta-capacities.

Description of study

Pro-active career management has become essential in the contemporary workplace for employees to sustain their employability (Bezuidenhout, 2011; Chudzikowski, 2012; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011; Tones, Pillay & Kelly, 2011), especially in the financial sector (Joico & Coetzee, 2011). The financial sector is recognised for its quest to attract, retain and develop talent from diverse groups of people due to global and national skills shortages in this sector (DEET, 2014; Joico & Coetzee, 2011; Pato & Spira, 2008; South African Institute of Chartered Accountants, 2008). The challenge of sustaining one’s employability in a highly dynamic and turbulent labour market with regard to career development is the ability to navigate their career development (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Van der Heijde, 2014).

Research points to the importance of psychosocial career meta-capacities in helping employees to manage their career development and employability (Coetzee, 2014; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Stauffer, Maggioni, Froidevaux & Roccié, 2014; Tones et al., 2011). Career management practices in organisations should help individuals gain awareness of the career meta-capacities they need to sustain their employability (Nazar & Van Der Heijden, 2012; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011; Van der Heijde, 2014). In this regard, the present study focuses on the constructs of career anchors (Schein, 1990) and psychosocial employability attributes (Bezuidenhout, 2011), which have been recognised in the research literature as important psychosocial career meta-capacities in contemporary career development (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2014; Potgieter, 2012, 2014).

Literature Review

Career anchors

Schein’s notion of career anchors (1990; 1996) is regarded as an important meta-capacity in contemporary career development (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2014). Individuals’ constellations of self-perceived talents and abilities (based on actual successes in a variety of real-work settings), self-perceived motives and needs (based on actual experiences with a variety of job assignments) and self-perceived attitudes and values (based on reactions to a variety of norms and values encountered in different work groups and organisations) describe their dominant career anchors and stabilise their career decisions in predictable ways (Chang, Jiang, Klein & Chen, 2012; Feldman & Coetzee, 2019). Contemporary career development (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2014; Potgieter, 2012, 2014). Recognised in the research literature as important psychosocial career meta-capacities in contemporary employment market (Bezuidenhout, 2011; Botha, 2014; Coetzee, 2014; Potgieter, 2012, 2014).

Psychosocial career meta-capacities

Psychosocial career meta-capacities are seen to act as key transactional resources between the inner (psychological) and external (social) worlds of a person in the management of one’s employability (Coetzee, 2014; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). These meta-capacities are regarded as important for proactive career behaviour and essential for sustaining one’s employability in the contemporary employment market (Bezuidenhout, 2011; Botha, 2014; Coetzee, 2014; Potgieter, 2012, 2014).

Bezuidenhout (2011) identified a range of psychosocial career meta-capacities that she termed as essential ‘employability attributes’ in the management of employability. These attributes include psychosocial meta-capacities relating to the career (self-career management, career resilience and entrepreneurial orientation), interpersonal (proactivity, self-efficiency and emotional literacy) and inter-personal (sociability and cultural competence) behavioural domains of an individual (Botha, 2014).

Research Methodology

Research participants

The population was N=180 individuals employed in a single financial organisation. Non-probability purposive sampling was used. The survey yielded a final sample of 108 usable questionnaires (60% response rate). Women represented 67% of the sample. The sample comprised participants at managerial level (31%) and staff level (69%) positions. In terms of age, the sample was represented by participants of ≈ 25 (21%) and 26 – 45 (78%). The racial groups consisted of 45% black African, 11% coloured, 19% Indian and 21% white people.

Measuring instruments

- The Career Orientation Inventory (COI) developed by Schein (1990) and the Employability Attributes Scale (EAS) developed by Bezuidenhout and Coetzee (2010) were used to assess the participants’ career anchors and psychosocial employability attributes. A biographical questionnaire was also included.
- The COI (Schein, 1990) measures respondents’ career anchor orientations on a six-point Likert-scale (1 = never true for me; 6 = always true for me) and consists of 40 items in total: Technical/functional – 5 items; general managerial competence – 5 items; entrepreneurial creativity – 5 items; autonomy/independence – 5 items; security/stability – 5 items; lifestyle – 5 items; service/dedication to a cause – 5 items and pure challenge – 5. The COI has shown good psychometric validity and reliability in other South African multi-cultural samples (Coetzee & De Villiers, 2010; Coetzee, Schreuder & Thadinyane, 2007). Acceptable internal consistency reliability coefficients (Cronbach’s alpha) ranging between .64 (technical/functional) and .79 (entrepreneurial creativity) were obtained for the present study.
- The EAS (Bezuidenhout & Coetzee, 2011) measures respondents’ responses on a six-point Likert-scale (1 = never true; 6 = always true) and consists of 56 items. To control the probability of a type I error, the significance value was set at the 95% confidence interval level (p < .05).

Research procedure and ethical considerations

- Ethical clearance to conduct the research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the research institution. The management of the organisation in which the study was conducted provided permission for the study. The questionnaire was mailed to all the participants. An informed consent form was attached for the participants to sign and return for record keeping and to meet ethical requirements. Thereafter, group sessions were held for the completion of the questionnaires which took on average about 20 minutes. One of the researchers collected the questionnaires from the participants during the group sessions. Other ethical considerations included honouring confidentiality, voluntary participation and utilising the results for broad group-based research purposes only. Individual feedback was provided on the request of the participants.

Statistical analysis

- The IBM SPSS package for Social Sciences Version 22.0 (IBM SPSS, 2013) was used to analyse the data. The statistical analysis involved computing descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations and internal consistency reliability coefficients) and correlations to assess the relationship between the participants’ career anchors and psychosocial employability attributes. To assess whether the age and race groups differed significantly regarding their career anchors and psychosocial employability attributes, Wilks lambda and Scheffé’s post-hoc tests were applied. To determine the source of differences in means, the significance level set was at the .05% confidence interval level (p < .05).

Findings and Discussion

- Table 1 shows that the participants obtained the highest mean scores on the following three career anchors: pure challenge (mean = 4.44; SD = .98); technical/functional (mean = 4.42; SD = .98); and service/dedication to a cause (mean = 4.43; SD = .98). The participants obtained the lowest mean score on the general managerial competence career anchor (mean = 3.55; SD = .88). In terms of the EAS, the participants obtained relatively high mean scores for all eight psychosocial employability attributes. The highest mean scores were obtained for career self-management (mean = 4.75; SD = .83) and entrepreneurial orientation (mean = 4.75; SD = .82). They obtained the lowest mean score on sociability (mean = 4.36; SD = .83).

![Table 1: Descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations and internal consistency reliability coefficients](image-url)
In the investigated financial company environment, employees' career anchors and psychosocial employability attributes were found to significantly correlate. Scheffé's post-hoc test results revealed that age and race differences were notable, with the black African and Indian groups demonstrating varied career trajectory needs compared to the white participants. The study's findings have practical implications for career management practices, emphasizing the importance of understanding and managing the diverse career anchor profiles of different age and race groups. The practical value of the research findings lies in designing career management practices that consider age and race differences, leading to better career development and employability outcomes.