

# INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYEES' CAREER ANCHORS AND THEIR PSYCHOSOCIAL EMPLOYABILITY ATTRIBUTES IN A FINANCIAL COMPANY

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## 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 (João & 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 (DHET, 2014; João & 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 unclear career paths places new demands on employees' 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, Maggiori, Froidevaux & Rossier, 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 & Bolino, 1996; Schein, 1990).

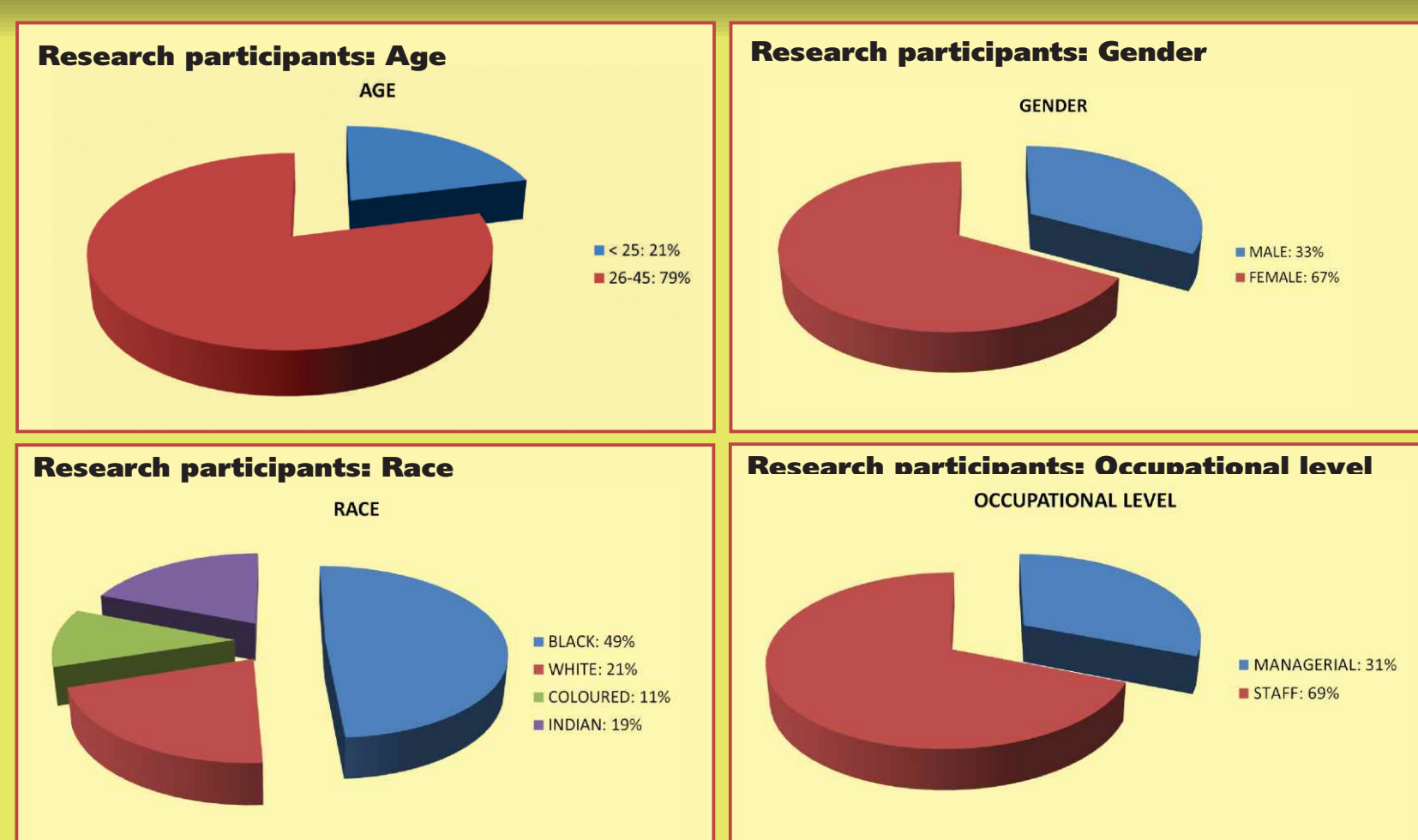
### Psychosocial career meta-capacities

- 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 (career self-management, career resilience and entrepreneurial orientation), intrapersonal (proactivity, self-efficacy and emotional literacy) and interpersonal (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 useable 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 constituted 49% black African, 11% coloured, 19% Indian and 21% white people.



## Measuring instruments

- The Career Orientations 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-type 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 & Tladinyane, 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-type scale (1 = never; 6 = always) and consists of 56 items in total: Career self-management – 11 items; career resilience – 6 items; entrepreneurial orientation – 7 items; proactivity – 7 items; self-efficacy – 6 items; emotional literacy – 7 items; sociability – 7 items and cultural competence – 5 items. Similar to the COI, the EAS has evidenced good psychometric validity and reliability in other South African multi-cultural samples (Botha, 2014; Potgieter, 2012). Acceptable internal consistency reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) ranging between .74 (sociability) and .90 (career self-management) were obtained for the present study.

## 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 questionnaires were manually distributed to 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 Social 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 in order to determine the source of differences. To counter the probability of a type I error, the significance value was set at the 95% confidence interval level ( $p < .05$ ).

## Findings and Discussion

### Descriptive statistics

- 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 = .88); and service/dedication to a cause (mean = 4.37; SD = .84). The participants obtained the lowest mean score on the general managerial competence career anchor (mean = 3.50; SD = .98). 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 = 4.78; 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

Variable	Mean	SD	$\alpha$
<i>Career Orientations Inventory (COI)</i>			
Technical/functional competence	4.42	.88	.64
General managerial competence	3.50	.98	.68
Entrepreneurial creativity	3.98	1.13	.79
Autonomy/independence	3.84	.99	.70
Security/stability	4.26	.98	.70
Lifestyle	4.30	.92	.70
Service/dedication to a cause	4.37	.84	.68
Pure challenge	4.44	.98	.70
<i>Employability Attributes Scale (EAS)</i>			
Career self-management	4.78	.83	.90
Career resilience	4.53	.85	.78
Entrepreneurial orientation	4.75	.82	.83
Proactivity	4.66	.78	.82
Self-efficacy	4.71	.85	.82
Emotional literacy	4.49	.93	.89
Sociability	4.36	.83	.74
Cultural competence	4.48	.95	.88



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## Correlations

As shown in Table 2, significant and positive correlations of small ( $r < .29$ ) and large ( $r > .50$ ) practical effects were obtained between almost all the career anchors and psychosocial employability attributes. The technical/functional, security/stability and lifestyle career anchors did not relate significantly to the cultural competence attribute. The strongest correlations (large practical effect) were observed between the following variables: the service/dedication to a cause career anchor and career self-management ( $r = .52$ ;  $p < .01$ ); self-efficacy ( $r = .55$ ;  $p < .01$ ); career resilience ( $r = .51$ ;  $p < .01$ ); entrepreneurial orientation ( $r = .54$ ;  $p < .01$ ); and proactivity ( $r = .56$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Entrepreneurial creativity also had significant correlations of large practical effect with self-efficacy ( $r = .55$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and, as expected, entrepreneurial orientation ( $r = .53$ ;  $p < .01$ ). The pure challenge career anchor also showed significant correlations of large practical effect with self-efficacy ( $r = .52$ ;  $p < .02$ ) and entrepreneurial orientation ( $r = .52$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

TABLE 2: Correlations between career anchors and psychosocial employability attributes

Variable	Technical/ Functional competence	General managerial competence	Entrepreneurial creativity	Autonomy/ independence	Security/ stability	Lifestyle	Service/ dedication to a cause	Pure challenge
Career self-management	.39**	.38**	.41**	.21*	.38**	.29**	.52**	.49**
Career resilience	.39**	.44**	.46**	.33**	.21*	.29**	.51**	.39**
Entrepreneurial orientation	.43**	.45**	.53**	.33**	.25**	.35**	.54**	.52**
Proactivity	.43**	.42**	.49**	.29**	.27**	.32**	.56**	.47**
Self-efficacy	.47**	.48**	.55**	.43**	.36**	.41**	.55**	.52**
Emotional literacy	.39**	.39**	.32**	.26**	.27**	.29**	.47**	.39**
Sociability	.37**	.42**	.46**	.32**	.21*	.31**	.46**	.37**
Cultural competence	.18	.43**	.38**	.29**	.15	.18	.39**	.32**

Notes:  $n = 108$ ; \*\*\*,  $p \leq 0.001$ ; \*\*,  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

TABLE 4: Significant Scheffé's post-hoc test results: Race

Variable	Cultural group I	Cultural group J	$p$	Mean difference
Entrepreneurial creativity	Indian	Black African	.00***	-6.45
Autonomy/independence	Indian	Black African	.02*	-3.86
Security/stability	Black African	White	.02*	3.74
Service/dedication to a cause	Indian	Black African	.01**	-3.55

Notes:  $n$  (black African = 53; Indian = 21; White = 23); \*\*\*,  $p \leq 0.001$ ; \*\*,  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*,  $p \leq 0.05$ . Wilks lambda (COI) significant at  $p = .003$ .

## Practical Implications

The practical value of the research findings lies in the design of career management practices that are based on the associations found between the participants' career anchors and their psychosocial employability attributes. Organisational career management practices should strive to increase employees' self-awareness of their career anchors and how these relate to their ability to manage and sustain their employability (Ndzube, 2013). Career discussions should help employees understand their strengths and weaknesses in terms of the psychosocial employability attributes they require to sustain their employability (Potgieter, 2012; 2014) and how these relate to their career identities or self-concepts and the motivational forces (values) that underpin their primary, secondary and tertiary career anchors (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2014).

Career management practices should also consider the differences observed between the age and race groups in terms of their career anchors. The different career-related needs and motivations of employees in the early life/career stage and establishment life/career stage and the black African, Indian and white employees in the organisation who participated in this study could be used to inform career discussions. Such career discussions could focus on helping these groups understand how their career anchors influence their career decisions and how their career anchors relate to their capacity to manage their career development and employability (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2014; Ndzube, 2013).

## Conclusion

The study could be regarded as a first step in investigating the relationship between two constructs that are recognised in the career research literature as important career meta-capacities in the career development and employability of individuals. Although exploratory in nature, the results also pointed to important differences between age and race groups in terms of their career anchors. In the light of the increasingly multi-cultural work and uncertain career contexts in which employees have to construct their careers, it is trusted that the findings provided valuable insights that may potentially contribute to career management practices in the financial environment.

## Scheffé's post-hoc test: age and race differences

- The Wilks lambda statistic showed significant differences between the age and race groups in terms of their career anchors only. These groups did not differ significantly regarding their psychosocial employability attributes.
- In terms of age, the significant Scheffé's post-hoc test results summarised in Table 3 showed that the age group 26 – 45 obtained significantly higher mean scores than those  $\leq 25$  on the technical/functional (mean difference = -3.00;  $p = .02$ ), autonomy/independence (mean difference = -2.96;  $p = .04$ ), lifestyle (mean difference = -3.23;  $p = .01$ ), and service/dedication to a cause (mean difference = -2.78;  $p = .02$ ) career anchors.
- In terms of race, the significant Scheffé's post-hoc test results summarised in Table 4 showed the following differences: The black African participants obtained significantly higher mean scores than the Indian participants on the entrepreneurial creativity (mean difference = -6.45;  $p = .00$ ); autonomy/independence (mean difference = -3.86;  $p = .02$ ); and service/dedication to a cause (mean difference = -3.55;  $p = .01$ ) career anchors. The black African participants obtained significantly higher mean scores than the white participants on the security/stability career anchor (mean difference = 3.74;  $p = .02$ ).

TABLE 3: Significant Scheffé's post-hoc test results: Age

Variable	$p$	Mean difference ( $\leq 25$ years versus $\geq 26 - 40$ years)
Technical/functional competence	.02*	-3.00
Autonomy/independence	.04*	-2.96
Lifestyle	.01**	-3.23
Service/dedication to a cause	.02*	-2.78

Notes:  $n$  ( $\leq 25$  years = 23;  $\geq 26-40$  years = 76); \*\*\*,  $p \leq 0.001$ ; \*\*,  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*,  $p \leq 0.05$ . Wilks lambda (COI) significant at  $p = .02$ .