

**THE INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOSOCIAL META-CAPACITIES ON  
LEARNING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN A FOREIGN  
GOVERNMENT AGENCY**

**by**

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## DECLARATION

I Rokshana Khan, Student number: 35115386, hereby declare that **THE INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOSOCIAL META-CAPACITIES ON LEARNING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN A FOREIGN GOVERNMENT AGENCY** is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references, and that this work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other institution.

I further declare that ethical clearance to conduct the research has been obtained from the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, University of South Africa. I also declare that the study was carried out in strict accordance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and that I conducted the research with the highest integrity during all phases of the research process taking into account Unisa's Policy for Copyright Infringement and Plagiarism.

The publication guidelines of the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology and the South African Journal of Industrial and Organisational Psychology were used to structure the dissertation and article. In particular, the APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition guidelines for referencing, tables and figures were used.

30 November 2017

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**ROKSHANA KHAN**

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**DATE**

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*Praise be to Allah, who has guided us to this. Never could we have found guidance,  
had it not been for the guidance of Allah.*

*(Quran 7:43)*

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## ABSTRACT

### THE INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOSOCIAL META-CAPACITIES ON LEARNING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN A FOREIGN GOVERNMENT AGENCY

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This qualitative study investigated the influences of psychosocial meta-capacities on learning capacity development in a foreign government agency that is undergoing extensive organisational change. The data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with seven participants, who are employees of a foreign visa-processing unit based in South Africa. The participants shared their experiences during the organisational change process, and how different aspects impacted on their learning capacity development. The study highlighted self-efficacy and emotional intelligence as key meta-capacities that can be enhanced to aid learning capacity development. Furthermore, the study recommended that organisations intending to introduce significant changes should be aware of the psychosocial meta-capacities that can be exploited to enhance employee learning capacity development, thereby ultimately ensuring organisational success. This study seems to suggest that the **positive influences** on learning capacity development are: **self-efficacy** in the form of self-beliefs about one's performance ability; the ability to take initiative; and learning orientation - for example, a sense of exploration; **emotional intelligence** in the form of self-awareness in relation to what needs to happen, and the positive impact of social support systems, for example, supervisors, role models and fellow colleagues. **Negative influences** on learning capacity development seem to include the following: the inability to manage **performance anxiety**; high levels of **self-doubt**, the lack of **technical expertise**, and **learning paralysis** in the form of procrastination and the lack of self-motivation.

**KEY CONCEPTS:** Psychosocial meta-capacities, learning capacity development, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, self-doubt, technical expertise, organisational change.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>KEY CONCEPTS.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2. BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.3. PROBLEM STATEMENT.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.4. AIMS OF THE RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.4.1. General aim.....	7
1.4.2. Specific aims .....	8
1.4.3. The paradigm perspective .....	8
1.4.3.1. The disciplinary relationship.....	8
1.4.3.2. The research and theoretical paradigm.....	9
<b>1.5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.5.1. Research approach .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.5.2. Research strategy .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.5.3. Research method .....</b>	<b>12</b>
1.5.3.1. Research setting .....	12
1.5.3.2. Entrée and establishing researcher roles.....	13
1.5.3.3. Sampling .....	13
1.5.3.4. Data collection methods.....	14
1.5.3.5. Recording of data.....	15
1.5.3.6. Data analysis.....	15

1.5.3.7. Reporting.....	16
1.5.4. Strategies employed to ensure quality data.....	16
1.5.5. Ethical considerations.....	18
<b>1.6. FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>1.7. DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>1.8. LIMITATIONS.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>1.9. CHAPTER LAY-OUT .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW: PSYCHOSOCIAL META-CAPACITIES AND LEARNING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2.1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2.2. PSYCHOSOCIAL META-CAPACITIES.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2.2.1. Conceptualising psychosocial meta-capacities .....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.2.1.1. <i>Self-efficacy</i> .....	22
2.2.1.2. <i>Employability</i> .....	23
2.2.1.3. <i>Emotional intelligence</i> .....	25
2.2.1.4. <i>Career adaptability</i> .....	26
<b>2.3. PSYCHOSOCIAL META-CAPACITIES AND CHANGE.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2.4. LEARNING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>2.4.1. Conceptualising learning capacity development .....</b>	<b>29</b>
2.4.1.1. <i>Learning</i> .....	29
2.4.1.2. <i>Formal and informal learning</i> .....	29
2.4.1.3. <i>The role of supervisors in the learning process</i> .....	31
2.4.1.4. <i>Capacity development</i> .....	31
2.4.1.5. <i>Experiential learning</i> .....	32
2.4.1.6. <i>Factors influencing capacity development</i> .....	32

2.5.	Learning capacity development and change .....	33
2.6.	<b>THEORETICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOSOCIAL META-CAPACITIES AND LEARNING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT .....</b>	<b>34</b>
2.6.1.	Learning and self-efficacy .....	35
2.6.1.1.	<i>Learning and employability.....</i>	<i>36</i>
2.6.1.2.	<i>Learning and emotional intelligence.....</i>	<i>37</i>
2.6.1.3.	<i>Learning and career adaptability.....</i>	<i>38</i>
2.7.	<b>CHAPTER SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>39</b>
CHAPTER 3:	<b>RESEARCH ARTICLE .....</b>	<b>41</b>
3.1.	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>41</b>
3.2.	<b>BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY .....</b>	<b>42</b>
3.3.	<b>RESEARCH PURPOSE, AIM AND CONTRIBUTION .....</b>	<b>45</b>
3.4.	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>45</b>
3.4.1.	<b>Psychosocial meta-capacities.....</b>	<b>45</b>
3.4.2.	<b>Self-efficacy .....</b>	<b>46</b>
3.4.3.	<b>Employability .....</b>	<b>47</b>
3.4.4.	<b>Emotional intelligence .....</b>	<b>48</b>
3.4.5.	<b>Career adaptability .....</b>	<b>48</b>
3.5.	<b>LEARNING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT (LCD).....</b>	<b>51</b>
3.5.1.	<b>Learning .....</b>	<b>51</b>
3.5.2.	<b>Formal and informal learning .....</b>	<b>51</b>
3.5.3.	<b>Role of supervisors in the learning process.....</b>	<b>52</b>
3.5.4.	<b>Capacity development .....</b>	<b>53</b>
3.5.5.	<b>Factors influencing learning capacity development .....</b>	<b>53</b>
3.5.6.	<b>Learning capacity development and change .....</b>	<b>54</b>

<b>3.3.4. The theoretical relationship between psychosocial meta-capacities and learning capacity development .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>3.6. RESEARCH DESIGN.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>3.6.1. Research approach .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>3.6.2. Research strategy .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>3.6.3. Research method .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<i>3.6.3.1. Research setting .....</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>3.6.3.2. Entree and establishing researcher roles.....</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>3.6.3.3. Sampling .....</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>3.6.3.4. Data collection and recording.....</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>3.6.3.5. Data analysis and interpretation.....</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>3.6.3.6. Strategies to ensure quality data.....</i>	<i>64</i>
<i>3.6.3.7. Ethics .....</i>	<i>65</i>
<b>3.7. FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>3.7.1. Lack of technical expertise.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>3.7.2. Influence of others .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>3.7.3. Supervisor support system .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>3.7.4. Taking initiative to learn .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>3.7.5. Learning through social comparison .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>3.7.6. Selective tasks to manage learning anxiety.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>3.7.7. Beliefs about ones ability to perform .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>3.7.8. Learning and using technology effectively .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>3.7.9. Self-awareness .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>3.7.10. Doubting self .....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>3.8. DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>3.8.1. Self-efficacy .....</b>	<b>74</b>

3.8.2. Learning .....	75
3.8.3. Exploration and experimentation.....	76
3.8.4. Procrastination .....	77
3.8.5. Supervisor and other support .....	77
3.8.6. Emotional intelligence .....	78
3.9. CONCLUSION .....	78
3.9.1. Limitations .....	79
3.9.2. Recommendations .....	79
REFERENCES.....	82
<b>CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS...</b>	<b>98</b>
4.1. INTRODUCTION.....	98
4.1.1. CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM LITERATURE REVIEW .....	99
4.1.1.1. <i>Specific aim 1: To conceptualise psychosocial meta-capacities in the literature .....</i>	<i>99</i>
4.1.1.2. <i>Specific aim 2 : To conceptualise learning capacity development in the literature .....</i>	<i>100</i>
4.1.1.3. <i>Specific aim 3 : To explore the theoretical relationship between psychosocial meta-capacities and learning capacity development. ....</i>	<i>101</i>
4.1.2. CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM EMPIRICAL STUDY .....	102
4.1.2.1. <i>Specific emperical aim 1: To explore the influence of psychosocial meta-capacities on individual employees' learning capacity development. ....</i>	<i>102</i>
4.1.2.2. <i>Specific empirical aim 2: To make recommendations for the discipline of Industrial and Organisational Psychology and future research based on the findings of this study.....</i>	<i>103</i>
4.2. LIMITATIONS.....	104
4.3. RECOMMENDATIONS .....	104
REFERENCES.....	107

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1 Characteristics of the empirical paradigm.....	10
Table 3.1 Biographical data of participants .....	61
Table 3.2 Themes .....	66

## **CHAPTER 1: SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1. INTRODUCTION**

This study investigates the factors which influence or contribute to an employee's learning capacity development during a period of organisational transition. The focus will be on employees in a visa-processing unit, where organisational change means that you either shape up or ship out. This study takes cognisance of the view that employees are unique and that their personal experiences shape the way in which they are able to function, while utilising their inherent coping strategies. It also acknowledges that employees' individual capabilities dictate their performance, which they are able to manage based on their inherent resources.

This chapter begins with a background and purpose of the research, and then explains the research focus, as well as providing a brief overview of the aims of this study. This study employed a qualitative approach to data collection, within a hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm, where the experiences of visa-processing staff were explored in order to gain insight into how organisational changes affected their way of learning. The study concludes with findings and recommendations for future research.

### **1.2. BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH**

The contemporary world of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is fierce - it demands human capital that is a real investment in terms of agility, keeping abreast of changes in an ever-changing environment, functioning at optimal levels, and ultimately ensuring organisational success. Employees have different coping strategies, and this may be due to their innate abilities, such as their sense of coherence (Vogt, Jenny & Bauer, 2013). Savickas (1997) suggests that individuals need to manage their present and imminent work and career challenges, and ensure that they have the resources to do this. How does this all fit in with globalisation and technological advances? Employees must keep up with changes in order to achieve optimal performance and therefore career success. The reality, however, is that not all employees will succeed or reach their full potential (Gallup, 2013).

The turbulent work environment places huge demands on employees to take responsibility for their personal development, in order to ensure that they are functioning at optimal levels, and that organisational success is ultimately achieved. The protean career is managed by the individual employee, rather than the organisation, and consists of this employee's varied experiences in education, training, work in different organisations, and changes in occupational field (Hall, 1976). This is rather attractive for employers, but what does this actually mean for the part of the workforce that is trapped in their traditional ways of working in a modern environment? Can these people adapt to a protean workforce? According to Siemans (2014), the current working environment is such that employees can no longer enter the workforce and work for one organisation during their lifetime. The extreme opposite is true in the case of millennials, who are reported to have worked in at least 6 jobs or organisations by the time they reach 30 years (Lyons, Schweitzer, Ng & Kuron, 2012). Given the technological advances, this makes sense, as millennials are technologically savvy (Scott, Whiddon, Brown & Penny, 2015).

There is a need for employees to stretch themselves in order to understand their true capabilities, and for them to realise their prime potential. Some studies indicate that optimal performance is linked to the individual's sense of coherence (their ability to cope with different facets of work and personal life), as they are simply able to cope with stress more effectively (Bezuidenhout & Cilliers, 2010; Rothmann, Steyn & Mostert, 2005; Vogt, Jenny & Bauer, 2013). This appears to allow them to engage more openly with a variety of tasks in the workplace, thereby ensuring increased productivity and optimal performance. In turn, this results in job satisfaction (Green & Heywood, 2008). As such, individuals who experience job satisfaction may be inclined to believe that they experience career and work success. Coetzee and Harry (2014) argue that the key to success lies within the boundaries of an individual's psychosocial meta-capacities. Psychological meta-capacities have been conceptualised as a social skill involving an individual's ability to successfully interpret and manage social interactions (Witt & Ferris, 2003). This refers to the key resources between the inner (psychological) and external (social) worlds of a person, and how they use these to deal with their environment (Coetzee, 2014; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Scott et al., (2015) add that some meta-capacities such as emotional

intelligence increase with age, in which case training may be compulsory. In contrast to Coetzee and Harry (2014), but in agreement with Hall (2002), De Vos and Soens (2008) advocate that having a protean career outlook is an originator of career success and, by implication, work success, which can be facilitated through the development of self-knowledge. Thus, the objective of this study is to investigate the influence of an employee's psychosocial meta-capacities and how this contributes to their learning capacity development in a constantly changing environment.

This study relates to the modern, fast-paced, dynamic and ever-changing world of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but looks more specifically at how individuals are able to cope in a volatile environment. In the context of this study, 'coping' does not only refer to the stressors experienced on a day-to-day basis, but encompasses the individual's personal ability to adapt to the changes, and whether or not the individual is able to influence his or her capabilities in order to achieve the desired or optimal performance. In addition, optimal performance by individuals indicates their ability to stay abreast of changes. Ultimately, the individual's ability to improve their learning capacity development and comply with ongoing and ever-changing requirements defines their employability. Capacity development is defined as "The process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions and societies increase their abilities: to perform functions, solve problems and achieve objectives; to understand and deal with their development need in a broader context and in a sustainable manner" (UNDP, 1997, p.3). According to Ahmadi (2017), capacity development has become a popular term in international development over the last few decades - however, there is no broadly accepted definition of capacity development. Capacity development is also considered to be a change process that affects groups of individuals, organisations or larger systems. It is a means to introduce change in terms of knowledge, skills, practices and rules which influence the way in which individuals behave and relate to each other (Greijn, *et al.*, 2015). For the purpose of this study, the researcher will use the definition of capacity development provided by the UNDP, albeit at an individual level.

Simply put, this implies that individual employees must continuously enhance their personal growth and development, in order to survive in a protean workforce. The difficulty may lie in the employee's actual psychosocial meta-capacities, as people

learn certain things at specific stages of development. Furthermore, understanding an employee's natural life span and stages of development has a direct influence on understanding how and when learning capacity development occurs for the individual (Lusthaus, Adrien & Perstinger, 1999). Research confirms that employability, which is the ability to gain and maintain work (Van der Heijde, 2014), is more important than employment (Vanhercke, De Cuyper, Peeters, & De Witte, 2014). In addition, recent research indicates that psychosocial meta-capacities play a key role in guiding employees to manage their career development and employability, which are important for achieving work success (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Stauffer, Maggiori, Froidevaux & Rossier, 2014).

This study proposes that psychosocial meta-capacities appear to be the link between an employee's career adaptability, career development and employability, which lead and potentially contribute to his or her learning capacity development. It is evident that employees have the ability to accept responsibility for their development and control their adaptability if their environment is accommodating. This is in agreement with Hall (2002), who argues that having a protean career direction stimulates people to adapt to ever-changing environments, and encourages them to take responsibility for their careers, rather than leaving it up to their employers to take the lead. Such employees exhibit traits of proactivity, openness to change, optimism, and adaptability (Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004). However, according to available research and in contrast to the latter study, employees need support from their employers in order to gain an in-depth understanding of what career meta-capacities they require in order to sustain their employability (Nazar & Van der Heijden, 2012; Coetzee & Schreuder, 2011; Van der Heijde, 2014). Bolger (2000) agrees and contends that its success is dependent on an 'enabling environment', which refers to an environment in which learning capacity development takes place. In the case of an individual, this could be the employing organisation. Vyas, Jung and Shafiqul Huque (2013) disagree, finding instead that the enabling environment referred to in the latter is not limited to the organisation, but includes individuals' perceptions and social class.

Billet (2011) argues that capacities can be developed through the encouragement of learning, which raises an interesting question about whether or not individuals

control the factors that influence and contribute to their learning capacity development. This does not appear to have been investigated before, particularly within the South African context and the immigration industry, where protecting the borders of a country creates an already stressful work environment. Understanding the factors that influence learning capacity development will allow for a more accurate career assessment diagnosis (Bilgili, Kedia & Bilgili, 2016) as well as improved training and development strategies, all of which contribute to individuals functioning optimally. This in turn contributes to enhancing organisational effectiveness (Potnuru & Sahoo, 2016). A study of this nature has never been conducted before, and while the setting is within a South African context, the research was carried out in a foreign government agency.

The literature review provided clear, insightful information in terms of the different facets that control an individual's ability to succeed in the ever-changing workforce. However, the piece of the puzzle that appears to be missing is the triggers that lead to these facets choosing one path over another. The benefits of identifying, understanding and possibly linking these triggers to the individual may have undeniable benefits for both the individual and the organisation (optimal functioning and organisational success).

### **Context of the study**

This research plans to explore whether employees who are caught up in the traditional ways of working are able to stretch their capabilities and influence their own learning capacity development, thereby making them more employable. The study was conducted in a foreign government agency in the form of a visa-processing unit based in South Africa. Immigration staff are delegated to make visa decisions on behalf of the national government. This, on its own, is a highly pressurised and stressful environment. One of the objectives of this unit is to ensure that there are minimal adverse outcomes, so that a positive contribution can be made, either through tourism, export education, or by filling an essential skills gap. Immigration work would not be complete without accounting for risks, which could be reputational risks or the more generic immigration risks of non *bona fides* (over-stayers, asylum claimants). Immigration staff are required to maintain a certain level of productivity through quality decisions. In this regard, finding the balance between

quality and quantity remains an ongoing challenge. Immigration staff are also required to be knowledgeable about immigration regulations and keep abreast of any changes made to the immigration policy.

In light of technological advancements and globalisation, an executive decision was made to implement a long-term, multi-million dollar change programme. Change leads were put in place, and the changes were introduced and implemented in a staggered fashion. Moving away from a paper-based production system to an online paperless system meant that staff were required to demonstrate agility, nimble learning, and the aptitude to learn, in order to maintain changes as they were introduced. The change programme had the unintended consequence of anxiety, not only in terms of confidence in using new systems, but also because staff feared that they would be replaced by technology. As the change programme progressed, some staff were losing focus, making errors, and showing that they had fallen back into their traditional ways of work, which could never be successful in the new environment. Others demonstrated that they had grasped the changes and that they were very successful in their roles, in spite of the changes. Five years after the initial implementation of the change programme, the government was interested in the benefits realisation, as they wanted a return on investment. This meant that there was even more pressure on immigration staff to deliver results.

Thus, organisations are progressively confronted with the challenge of adapting to business conditions, by designing and successfully implementing changes (Burnes, 2004; By, 2005; Whittington & Mayer, 2002). The focus of this study is directly linked to the field of industrial and organisational psychology, as it examines the influence of an employee's psychosocial meta-capacities (career or otherwise), and how this impacts learning capacity development. The evidence suggests that learning is possible at any stage of an individual's lifespan. This study explores the reasons why psychosocial meta-capacities are used to enable employees to successfully learn and adapt during a change process. This research will increase the understanding of employees' reactions to organisational change, and will offer scholars and practitioners insights into how psychosocial meta-capacities can be used to ensure sustained employee performance during organisational change, thereby leading to organisational success.

### **1.3. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Globalisation, coupled with significant technological advances, is likely to continue to accelerate in the future (Aggarwal, 1999). For this reason, organisations are likely to continue to seek to enhance their human capital, retain talent, and ensure that they remain competitive in the modern, unstable environment (Murongazvombo, 2015). This study uses a qualitative approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of employees and the factors that influence their ability to improve their own learning capacity development during organisational change. Given the complexity of the 'behaviour of people', it is worth investigating the ability to improve capability through a qualitative research design. This will facilitate an insightful understanding of the individual and the factors that influence his or her learning capacity development.

As noted earlier, it is a well known fact that to be successful in a turbulent work environment, employees must be highly adaptable (Hall, 1976). In addition, given the ever-changing, fast-paced environment, employees are also required to negotiate a larger number and variety of role changes (Ashforth, 2001). Employees therefore need to continually manage change in themselves and within their work environment (Fugate *et al.*, 2004). As change occurs, employees are expected to learn new skills and adapt their working style to the new status quo (Fuchs & Prouska, 2014). In view of the paucity of qualitative research on the factors that influence learning capacity development, the following general research question is posed for the purpose of this study: *"What is the influence of psychosocial meta-capacities on learning capacity development in a foreign government agency?"*

### **1.4. AIMS OF THE RESEARCH**

In this section, the general and specific aims of the study will be discussed.

#### **1.4.1. General aim**

The general aim of this research is to explore the influence of psychosocial meta-capacities on the learning capacity development of employees in a foreign

government agency.

### **1.4.2. Specific aims**

The specific *literature aims* are as follows:

**Literature aim 1:** To conceptualise the construct of psychosocial meta-capacities in the literature.

**Literature aim 2:** To conceptualise the construct of learning capacity development in the literature.

**Literature aim 3:** To explore the theoretical relationship between psychosocial meta-capacities and learning capacity development.

The specific *empirical literature* aims are as follows:

**Empirical aim 1:** To explore the influence of psychosocial meta-capacities on individual employees' learning capacity development.

**Empirical aim 2:** To make recommendations for the discipline of industrial and organisational psychology and future research, based on the findings of this study.

### **1.4.3. The paradigm perspective**

The paradigm perspective will be discussed in this section.

#### **1.4.3.1. The disciplinary relationship**

The study is conducted within the discipline of industrial and organisational psychology and relates to the sub-disciplines of organisational and career psychology (Page, 2015). Industrial and organisational psychology (often referred to as simply organisational psychology) is the scientific study of how individuals and groups behave in performing their work activities within an organisational context. It

is a specialised field within the larger discipline of psychology, and is aimed at enhancing organisational effectiveness and human performance (Dipboye, 2016).

The focus of career psychology is human development, guiding individuals to reach their prime potential, ensuring that they are performing at optimal levels, and that they are satisfied in their work-roles (Ramaswami, Carter & Dreher, 2016). This study focuses on the factors which help individuals to acquire skills, or to enhance their innate skills in order to achieve optimal functioning (Spence & Deci, 2016). Humans are unique, and as such it is important to take heed of the individual differences in people, which ultimately serve as a tool for the prediction of job performance (Sturges, 2016). To a certain extent, this study involves gaining an understanding of an individual's capabilities, in order to predict future performance (Chiaburu, Oh, Wang & Stoverink, 2016).

#### **1.4.3.2. The research and theoretical paradigm**

The lens through which we look at or consider the world is the paradigm perspective, the 'what makes sense' to us (Katerndahl, 2016). Humanistic and hermeneutic phenomenological paradigms will be considered in this study. The existential and humanistic theories propose that each individual has the freedom and responsibility to transcend the meaninglessness of their existence (Hounkpatin, Wood & Boyce, 2015). The humanistic approach is concerned with attempting to understand the development of each individual's potential and personal growth, an effective personality molded by a high but realistic degree of self-regard, a positive pattern of social relationships involving appreciation of and respect for the individuality of others, and a clear sense of identity which is connected to a progressive and constructive philosophy of life (Ashok, 2015).

McLeod, (2015) outlines the basic assumptions of this paradigm, namely that humans have free will, not all behaviour is determined; all individuals are unique and have an innate determination to achieve their maximum potential, gaining a deeper understanding of human behaviour can only be achieved by studying humans, and psychology should focus on the study of individual cases (idiographic), rather than the average performance of groups (nomothetic). This paradigm is well suited to the

study, primarily because the investigation will lead to an understanding of why some individuals have been able to embrace change, learn new ways of working, and continue to grow and develop themselves further. This paradigm clearly indicates that individuals are unique and that they have the ability to achieve their maximum potential (McLeod, 2015). Kafle (2011) describes hermeneutics as being closely associated with the experience of the individual as it is lived. It is concerned with listening to the stories of individuals in order to understand their 'worlds'. Hermeneutics is a subdivision of the interpretivist paradigm. The characteristics of this study are tabulated below (Table 1).

Table 1.1  
Characteristics of the empirical paradigm

<b>Representative</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<i>Purpose</i>	To gain an in-depth understanding of an individual, specifically the influence that career adaptability and learning have on their capacity development.
<i>Ontology</i>	There are multiple realities, as it is based on the individual's perception or external influence. Individuals have different views, knowledge and experience, hence their realities may vary. The aim is to investigate how individuals perceive and accept their world in their daily environment.
<i>Epistemology</i>	The researcher and the individual engage on a more personal and interactive level in the process of data collection. There is a dialogue of sessions (interview and observations). The research is conducted in the natural setting of the individual. The data is collected, analysed and interpreted to understand the individual and / or his events (how we know and what we know).

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## *Methodology*

The methodological sets are not fixed for this kind of study. However, it does allow for sampling that is information-rich (relevant to the study), a variety of data generation is made up of interviewing, observation and protocols, which can be selected depending on the context of the study. In this case, interviews are appropriate. Data analysis is often performed by applying the hermeneutic cycle, which consists of reading, reflective writing and interpretation in a rigorous fashion (Laverty, 2003, as cited by Kafle, 2011). However, in this instance, thematic analysis will be used (Van Manen, 2014).

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The specific research paradigm adopted in this study is the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm, in which the researcher will attempt to understand participants' subjective realities through personal interpretations of their lived experiences, and the meanings they attach to these experiences (Smith, 2011).

This paradigm will facilitate a process of gaining insight into how an individual sees the world (Kafle, 2011), which will complement the humanistic approach in terms of understanding why some people can excel in any environment, while others simply do not succeed.

## **1.5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology is discussed in this section.

### **1.5.1. Research approach**

The research approach used in this study is qualitative and descriptive/interpretive. This study will adopt a qualitative approach to data collection, in order to explore the experiences of immigration staff at a visa-processing unit with regard to organisational changes and the impact they have on their way of working. According to Holloway and Wheeler (2002), this is the most appropriate method to use for such a study. The aim of this study is to determine why some staff are able to deal with

changes and excel, while others are struggling to cope. To this end, semi-structured interviewing will be used to explore whether employees have innate abilities that influence their learning capacity development. Since this study seeks a description of the lived experiences of individuals (De Poy & Gitlin, 1998), it is phenomenological in nature. This approach is most appropriate for obtaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in question (Sechrest & Sidani, 1995), and allows the researcher to gain an understanding of experiences from the perspective of the participants (Patton, 2002).

### **1.5.2. Research strategy**

This study will be conducted to gain an in-depth understanding on an individual level in relation to the phenomenon being studied. The research is based on identifying the experience of the individual as it is lived (subjective knowledge), which is acquired through subjective experience, by understanding the world from the viewpoint of the individual. To this end, the interpretivist approach is used, and sets the boundaries of this research (Thorne, 2000).

### **1.5.3. Research method**

In this section, various aspects of the research method used in this study will be discussed.

#### *1.5.3.1. Research setting*

The setting of this study is an immigration visa-processing unit based in South Africa. The unit has undergone extensive changes within the last five years. The change process was intensive but staggered. Management was careful to ensure that training was provided throughout the process. Therefore, all staff received adequate training to ensure that the changes were successfully implemented. The staggered changes were highly successful - however, based on the researcher's observations, it is evident that while some staff are struggling to manage the consolidation of changes, which may appear to be as a result of the inability to stretch oneself to meet the conditions of the ever-changing work environment, other staff have

embraced the changes and appear to be coping and excelling at their tasks. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews will be conducted and recorded in a quiet, neutral location, where the participants are not in danger and there is no intimidation or coercion.

#### *1.5.3.2. Entrée and establishing researcher roles*

The accuracy of data recording is also of utmost importance, in order to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of this qualitative study (Angen, 2000). In this regard, the researcher has an existing relationship with the participants, with whom she currently works. Being based in the same office, the researcher understands some of the frustrations they experience in their daily work and as part of the change program. Therefore, she was able to adapt her communication to the level or standard necessary to ensure that the interview questions were well understood. This gave her a head start, an easier entrée to the understanding of the reactions of the participants. Having an existing rapport with the participants helped to guide the interviews, thereby ensuring that the questions and responses were accurately understood, communicated and interpreted. The researcher's roles included data collection, interpretation and reporting on findings, conclusions and limitations of the study.

#### *1.5.3.3. Sampling*

A convenience and purposive sampling procedure was used in this study. Convenience sampling involves selecting samples that are both easily accessible and willing to participate in a study (Teddlie & Fu, 2007). More importantly, the researcher was able to hand-pick employees who possessed the desired characteristics from the group in which she was interested (Joubert & Ehrlich, 2007). Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to use her judgement to obtain a representative sample (Black, 2010).

Participants who met the following requirements were included in the study: firstly, those who have worked for the organisation for at least five years between 2011 and 2016. The researcher chose this tenure because this is the period during which the

change programme was implemented. The participants were required to have shared experience regarding the phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007); and secondly, those who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Exclusion criteria included those who were not affected by any of the changes, as it was noted that some positions remained the same, as well as anyone who had worked for the organisation for less than five years. In this regard, the researcher used her judgement to select participants who were exposed to the same level of change, but also those who could provide rich information about the phenomenon being studied (Babbie, 2010). Lastly, anyone who was not willing to participate in this study was excluded.

The researcher recruited the participants in person. Demographics such as race, gender and educational background were not variables in this study. The researcher would like to acknowledge here that she is familiar with the participants and that extra care was taken to ensure that there was no bias from her side. Interview questions were limited to the research, and at no time were participants made to feel uncomfortable. The interviews were fairly informal and the environment was relaxed, which gave participants the freedom to express themselves. The researcher was associated with an estimated population of 15 persons who met the criteria for this research study, and anticipated a population of 20 potential participants. Out of these, she aimed to interview 8-10 participants. Given the qualitative nature of this study, a small number of participants is the expected norm. Morse (1994) recommends that at least 6 participants should be considered where the goal is to obtain deeper insight into the experience of individuals. On the other hand, Cresswell (1998) suggests that up to 10 individuals should be interviewed. This is acceptable, as the researcher aimed to gain a deeper understanding of participant experience, as well as the factors that influence learning capacity development.

#### *1.5.3.4. Data collection methods*

Since this study sought to gain deeper insight into the phenomenon under investigation, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted. A semi-structured face-to-face interview is a verbal interchange where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person (the participant or

interviewee) by asking questions. Although the interviewer formulates a list of predetermined questions, semi-structured interviews unfold in a conversational manner, presenting participants with the opportunity to explore issues which they consider to be important (Longhurst, 2003).

A semi-structured face-to-face interview will provide a clear set of instructions for the researcher and can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data. It is often preceded by observation, and this gave the researcher the opportunity to develop a keen understanding of and interest in the topic (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The interview started with an open question in relation to the overall theme of this study, for example “Can you please tell me how you experienced the change programme, and to what extent has this affected your role in this department?”

#### *1.5.3.5. Recording of data*

Since semi-structured face-to-face interviews often contain open-ended questions and it is difficult to conduct an interview and take notes, it is generally best to tape-record interviews and later transcribe these tapes for analysis (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). To ensure data accuracy in this study, interviews were recorded using a voice recorder.

#### *1.5.3.6. Data analysis*

A process of thematic analysis was used in this study. Thematic analysis as an independent qualitative descriptive approach is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). In qualitative research, the data is in a non-statistical form and therefore involves a careful analysis of words rather than numbers (Brink, 2009). During the data analysis phase of this study, the researcher searched through the data looking for information about the experiences of participants during the change process, and from this patterns or themes were identified. This is essentially a thematic analysis, and the process includes transcribing data, reading and re-reading, coding and developing themes (Polit & Beck, 2012). The coding was critical, as it allowed the researcher to group data into similar themes or ideas (categorising) for easy identification and

comparison (Griffiths, 2009). The researcher chose thematic analysis, as in hermeneutic phenomenological analysis, it is a popular interpretive approach to categorise themes in transcribed interviews (Van Manen, 2014). Thematic analysis is also good for presenting common meanings embedded in the transcribed interviews (Ho, Chiang & Leung, 2017).

#### *1.5.3.7. Reporting*

The interpreted information will be itemised or diagrammatised for visual reference. The themes will be presented in sections, with the categories as sub-sections. This will inform the main findings of the study. Direct responses from participants will be quoted to corroborate any findings which will be reported according to the themes emanating from the data, and rich descriptions from the data.

#### **1.5.4. Strategies employed to ensure quality data**

The focus will be an emic one, where the viewpoints and expressions are those of the participant and not the researcher (etic). The researcher is fully aware of her biases and preconceptions, and will be careful not to let them influence the interviews or data analysis.

***Credibility:*** this represents the internal validity of the findings and is the true value of the research findings as experienced and lived by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher used her discretion to accept or reject the credibility of the information based on the research theme. The difficulty here was that the reality in question will be subjective to the interviewee. However, the researcher's familiarity with the participants assisted in this regard. The credibility of the data was increased by seeking feedback from the participants directly, in order to ensure that there was no misinterpretation on the researcher's part.

***Transferability:*** this is representative of external validity. Given the nature of the study, it is difficult to generalise the findings of the research. When considering the transferability of any findings, the context in which the study was done should be taken into consideration (Henry-Vega, 2004). In this regard, the researcher

provided a detailed account of the research setting, so that the reader is able to gauge the applicability of the findings to another setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher also selected a sample which is suitable and representative of the group under study (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002).

**Dependability:** this is representative of reliability, a means to observe the same finding under similar circumstances (Klopper, 1998). It is therefore important to clearly indicate exactly how the data was collected, analysed and interpreted (Kielhofner, 1982), which was done in this study. It is not practical to ensure the dependability of this research, purely because of the setting. The research was conducted in a unique organisation, and the approach is interpretive. This means that different people can interpret information differently. It was therefore important to ensure the consistency of the information, by considering the relevant theory and its assumptions, checking the interpretation of data with participants, and observing participants (this is possible as the researcher is working with the participants). The researcher also checked the findings with her supervisor, who is an expert in the field.

**Conformability:** this is representative of objectivity, and the researcher must clearly account for her own bias. In addition, data collected was maintained in a good order, was structured, and was able to be audited. The researcher will retain raw data so that information can be confirmed. Dahlberg, Drew and Nyström (2001) warn that intellectual honesty and openness from the researcher, as well as sensitivity to the phenomenon, is mandatory.

**Authenticity:** represents a form of validity of the information. The researcher's familiarity with the participants assisted her, as she was able to provide credible explanations and consider participants' actions and words. Furthermore, observing the participants as a second means of checking information also increased authenticity. Using information from the literature review on similar research assisted in informing authenticity. Berger (2013) argues that familiarity with the participants could be dangerous to the research. The researcher was aware of this, and using a semi-structured interview assisted, as it provided flexibility to probe for clarity. When something was unclear, the researcher was able to repeat the

question and/or participant responses to ensure accuracy. Familiarity with the participants also allowed her to communicate at a level appropriate to each participant.

#### **1.5.5. Ethical considerations**

##### ***Permission from organisation and informed consent from participants***

Permission was obtained from the management of the organisation to conduct the research. Ethical and professional registration was ensured, and an application to the Unisa Ethical Committee was approved. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. A verbal discussion was held with each participant prior to the interviews, outlining the purpose of the research as well as the use of their responses for the sole purpose of research. An informed consent letter was submitted to the participant for consideration and signature. Participants were not coerced to participate in the study, and were given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point. Participation was completely voluntary, data was obtained through informed consent, participants were briefed on the research objectives, and were assured that the information obtained is solely for research purposes.

##### ***Protection against physical or psychological harm***

Participants were assured protection from psychological and physical harm, and no unnecessary or extra work/training was delegated to the participants for the sake of this study. It was also important that participants understood that they were not being targeted in an attempt to scrutinise or adversely affect their individual performance development plans in the ordinary course of their work. If anything, the results may be beneficial to the participants. According to Angen (2000), this is in line with ethical validation, which provides practical solutions to the research questions and adds some value.

##### ***Confidence and confidentiality***

Having noted the above, the details of the participants were disguised to prevent any direct links or associations with individuals being made. The participants were assured that any information they provided would be held in the strictest of confidence, and would not be shared. The researcher provided an assurance that

she was the only person handling any data. The recordings themselves would also not be shared, as they contained information which could identify the participants.

### ***Honest interpretation***

As a researcher, it is important to assess one's own understanding of the topic, as well as how this may possibly influence data interpretation. Therefore, a process of self-reflection is necessary to ensure substantive validation (Angen, 2000). The researcher provided an assurance that all information would be presented with complete honesty. She holds high ethical standards for herself as an individual, and therefore assured participants that this was not an issue.

## **1.6. FINDINGS**

A comprehensive report addressing the research findings, methods used and any wider implications is submitted.

## **1.7. DISCUSSION**

An integrated discussion on the findings in relation to available literature is provided.

## **1.8. LIMITATIONS**

Limitations will be presented with regard to the literature review and empirical study.

## **1.9. CHAPTER LAY-OUT**

The lay-out of the chapters is as follows:

Chapter 1: Scientific orientation to the research

Chapter 2: Literature review: Psychosocial meta-capacities and learning capacity development

Chapter 3: Research article

Chapter 4: Conclusions, limitations, and recommendations

## **1.10. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter began with a background and purpose of the research, and then explains the research focus, as well as providing a brief overview of the aims of this study.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW: PSYCHOSOCIAL METACA-PACITIES AND LEARNING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, psychosocial meta-capacities and learning capacity development will be conceptualised. The researcher will then extend the review to include change. The theoretical relationship between psychosocial meta-capacities and learning capacity development is explored to highlight its impact on the individual. This is followed by a summary of the chapter.

### **2.2. PSYCHOSOCIAL META-CAPACITIES**

#### **2.2.1. Conceptualising psychosocial meta-capacities**

Psychological meta-capacities have been conceptualised as a social skill, which is an individual's ability to successfully interpret and manage social interactions (Witt & Ferris, 2003). This refers to the key resources between the inner (psychological) and external (social) worlds of a person and how they use these to deal with their environment (Coetzee, 2014; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Psychosocial meta-capacities are inherent coping mechanisms that all individuals have, which allow for the successful adaptation in various spheres of life (Coetzee & Harry, 2014). In a contemporary environment, these are important for proactive management of individual development and essential for sustaining the ability to be flexible (Botha, 2014). A psychosocial meta-capacity is like a toolbox of help that individuals can tap into to respond effectively to life's impulses. Caplan (1964) also suggested that individuals have two key resources, one of which is the 'self' (such as inner resources), while the other is related to social support (such as a sense of mastery or social support). It is evident that those who are able to utilise their inner and external resources are better equipped to deal with stressful situations (Bandura, 1997; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Key meta-capacities may overlap or originate from a centralised development source. For instance, self-esteem may lead to improved self-efficacy (Hobfall, 2002). For the purpose of this study, the researcher will use the definition provided by Coetzee (2014) because she understands the concept to

have two components, namely psychological meta-capacities (inner resources) and social meta-capacities (external resources).

#### *2.2.1.1. Self-efficacy*

Based on the above research, the emphasis appears to be on the individual. Bandura (1977), as part of the social cognitive theory, discovered that irrespective of the mastery modelling technique used, individual differences were highlighted. He labelled this individual difference self-efficacy and proposed that it would affect motivation to a large degree, because individuals are prone to anticipating outcomes based on their judgment of how well they will perform in a given context (Bandura, 1986). To understand self-efficacy, it is worth understanding the broader theoretical background. It is most widely understood in terms of the social cognitive theory, which is an approach aimed at understanding human cognition, action, motivation and emotion, and that assumes that we are active shapers of our environments (Bandura, 1986; Barone, Maddux & Snyder, 1997). The social cognitive theory has four underlying principles:

- Individuals have powerful cognitive capabilities that enable internal experiences, development of innovative courses of action, prediction of outcomes and the communication of complex ideas and experiences to others. Individuals are able to analyse and evaluate their own thoughts, behaviour and emotions;
- Individuals can respond cognitively, effectively and behaviourally to environmental events;
- The self and personality are socially embedded;
- Individuals are capable of self-regulation. This is the ability to choose goals that regulate behaviour in pursuit of goals, including the use of previous experience and knowledge to formulate beliefs about the future regarding abilities and behaviour.

Self-efficacy denotes the personal conclusion of performance capabilities in a given situation that may comprise unpredictable and potentially stressful features (Bandura, 1977). It also focuses on performance capabilities, rather than personal

circumstances (Zimmerman, 2000). Schunk (1984) contended that although self-efficacy relates to performance expectations in relation to one's capabilities in a specific context, more generic skills and former experiences can affect self-efficacy for learning new material. Individuals who work unenthusiastically on a task do so because they doubt their ability to master it, which implies that they have a low level of self-efficacy. On the other hand, those who perceive themselves as capable of performing at a high level receive positive feedback, and this in turn promotes self-efficacy (Schunk, 1984).

Self-efficacy arose after a vigorous analysis of motivation and performance across time, a variety of contexts, and different populations (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Multon, Brown & Lent, 1991). It has been noted that self-efficacy has an influence on an individual's emotional reaction (Bandura, 1986) and it can be stated that persistence that is connected with self-efficacy will unquestionably lead to improved performance and productivity (Cherian & Jacob, 2013). Judge and Bono (2001) agreed that higher self-efficacy is associated with positive outcomes such as job satisfaction and performance. Efficacy is a key domain of employability (York & Knight, 2007), since it encompasses the belief that one is capable of organising and executing the necessary actions to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1995). Research also suggests that employability is a matter of individual attributes and responsibility (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2003; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). Since efficacy appears to be a key domain of employability, it is necessary to briefly discuss employability in the next section.

#### *2.2.1.2. Employability*

Employability is a psycho-social construct that exemplifies individual characteristics that foster adaptive cognition, behaviour and affect, and improve the individual-work interface (Wang, Jian & Feng, 2016). This person-centered approach is in line with the key shift in responsibility for career management and development from organisations to employees (Hall & Mirvis, 1995). This, as previously indicated, was referred to by Hall (1976) as the protean career. Employees accept the responsibility to acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities valued by organisations. Essentially, this means that over time, employability encourages employees to

proactively advance their circumstances (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 1999) and become flexible, in order to meet the challenges of changing organisations. Chan (2000) also noted that an individual employee is employable as long as he or she can display person-centered characteristics (career identity, personal adaptability) to manage environmental demands effectively. Previous research (Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Crant, 2000) infers that employees who are more vigorous in their efforts to meet the demands of change are more successful. Active adaptation and proactivity therefore strengthen the psychosocial construct of employability. Effective adaptation does not happen automatically, as individuals must be engaged in their work environments to preserve the three conditions necessary for effective adaptation (Ashford & Taylor, 1990):

- Employees must acquire sufficient information regarding their environment, and their relationship or status within the environment.
- Employees need to possess appropriate inner conditions for adaptability, such as individual attributes (optimism and self-efficacy) and understandings, which allow individuals to negotiate the numerous internal and external challenges of change.
- Employees must maintain flexibility (there must be a willingness and ability to change behaviours, cognitions, and affect).

What appears to be of relevance to self-efficacy is that employability aids personal and job changes (Fugate *et al.*, 2004). Employable people contemplate and pursue alternatives that are consistent with their salient career identities (Ashforth & Fugate, 2001), and are susceptible to personal change. Crants (2000) agrees that employability not only fosters adaptability, but also encourages employees to adapt to change proactively. In fact, Crant (1995) argues that proactivity in the work sphere enhances job performance. When working in an ever-changing environment, employees can feel anxiety about the unknown (Grupe & Nitschke, 2013), but have the necessary psychosocial meta-capacities to deal with these issues. By proactively engaging in one's work environment, uncertainty and anxiety are reduced (Saks & Ashforth, 1996), which advances adaptational outcomes such as performance (Ashford & Black, 1996). Proactivity also provides employees with an advantage over those with passive or reactive orientation (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Crant,

2000), as it affords a measure of perceived control (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Perceived control positively influences employees' coping during organisational change (Terry, 1994), drives employees to condense uncertainty (Ashford & Black, 1996) and has positive effects on employees' ability to cope with organisational change (Fugate, Kinicki & Scheck, 2002). Innate individual resources (such as self-efficacy) have been confirmed to be associated with changing outcomes considered to be beneficial for career development. By demonstrating the shared contribution of emotional intelligence and self-perceived employability, social and emotional competencies for career development and work success are highlighted (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2015). Overall, in order to be considered as employable, employees must display characteristics of transferable generic capacities (Rocha, 2012), and they must be flexible, proactive and engage in lifelong learning, in order to acquire new skills to keep up with the pace of change (Del Corso, 2013). Employability can be positively shaped if one has a deep understanding and insight into the crucial role of skills and emotional intelligence (Aziz, 2017). The psychosocial metacapacity of emotional intelligence will be discussed below.

#### *2.2.1.3. Emotional intelligence*

A long-standing goal in psychology and neuroscience has been to illuminate the tools that enable individuals to construe and interact with the environment in an adaptive manner (Hogeveen, Salvi & Grafman, 2016). According to Shooshtarian, Ameli and Aminilari (2013), emotional intelligence (EQ) is one of the most important concepts introduced in psychology and management in the last decade. Introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990), EQ is defined as a person's ability to monitor and manage theirs and others' feelings and emotions, to differentiate between them, and to use the information to guide their thinking and actions. Serrat (2017) infers that by developing EQ, employees can become more productive and successful in what they do, but that they can also help others to become more successful and productive. There is already sufficient research to confirm that those with higher levels of EQ demonstrate a better ability to manage stress in dealing with organisational change (Di Fabio, 2011; Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009; Oreg, 2003).

EQ is also argued to be a skill that may or may not be exhibited in an individual's everyday functioning (Schutte *et al.*, 2008). Employees with greater stability (emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness) and general plasticity (extraverted persons, openness) have a higher level of EQ and therefore better task performance (Hui-Hua & Schutte, 2015). EQ is confirmed to be related to higher levels of job satisfaction (Meisler, 2013; Schlaerth *et al.*, 2013) and desirable outcomes on work and career measures, including job performance (Joseph & Newman, 2010). Schutte and Loi (2014) found that the higher the employee's emotional intelligence, the more significantly it was related to better work engagement. In a study involving teachers, it was notable that the facets which affect performance could not be overlooked (El-Sayed, El-Zeiny & Adeyemo, 2014). The results suggested that occupational stress was negatively related to self-efficacy and EQ. The same study showed that employees who experienced low confidence in their capabilities had a propensity to look at things as if they were much harder than they actually were. This is indicated to be a belief that nurtures stress, and a prejudiced view of how to deal with problems.

Downey, Lee and Stough (2011) posit that in order for employees to be successful at work, they need to have well developed emotional intelligence. It can therefore be stated that employees can enhance their performance through tailored emotional intelligence programmes (Jordan, 2009). Coetzee and Harry (2014) argue that emotional intelligence and career adaptability are crucial psychosocial meta-capacities for effective coping in general life, including careers. Their investigation also underlined the importance of developing an individual's emotional intelligence, in order to strengthen their career adaptability. The results of the study demonstrated that managing one's own emotions contributes to overall career adaptability, with its four domains of career control, career concerns, career confidence and career curiosity.

#### *2.2.1.4. Career adaptability*

Research suggests that employees have inherent career resources or meta-capacities that can be utilised to impact socio-occupational environments and self-regulate behaviours, in order to achieve success in the contemporary world of work

(Coetzee, 2008; Converse *et al.*, 2012; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Coetzee (2008) postulates that career meta-competencies integrate career preferences, career values, career drivers, career enablers and career harmonisers. Employees who preserve a wide range of psychological career resources have proved to be adaptable to changing career circumstances (Fugate *et al.*, 2004; McArdle, Waters, Briscoe & Hall, 2007; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), and they are also likely to be more engaged in their work and committed to their job, work, career, occupation or organisation (Tladinyane, Coetzee & Masenge, 2013). Career adaptability is the self-regulatory psychosocial resources employees require to successfully manage current and career transitions (Savickas, 2013). Savickas (2012) indicated that the contemporary career is housed within an uncertain economy and unpredictable labour market. This implies that adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> century may be preoccupied with concerns regarding their employability, training and development, continuous learning and coping strategies to deal with change, independence, greater self-awareness and establishment of social ties (Savickas, 2013; Sullivan, 2013). Ferreira (2012) posits that employees need to rely on their personal resources and capacities, such as intrinsic motivation, values and coping abilities, in order to help them become more resilient and adaptable to their environments, especially in the turbulent employment context. Career meta-capacities are regarded as a toolbox of psychological career resources used to actively plan and cope with career development, and to self-regulate behaviour in an attempt to achieve career and work success in the contemporary world of work (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Career adaptability refers to an employee's readiness and intrinsic resources, which permit him or her to cope with current and anticipated tasks, changeovers, and any anxiety regarding occupational roles, which hinder their social integration (Savickas, 2008). As validated by Coetzee and Harry (2014), managing one's own emotions contributes to general career adaptability within its four domains as follows:

- career concern denotes the capacity to be aware of and positively concerned with and plan for a vocational future.
- career control echoes the capacity to take personal responsibility for one's career and work experiences, and to be clear about feelings of self-governing, determination and decisiveness regarding a vocational future.

- career curiosity mirrors a propensity to explore one's environment and, through information-seeking and risk-taking, acquire new knowledge and capabilities.
- career confidence reflects the tendency to sense self-efficaciousness relating to the capacity to master career-related challenges and effectively solve problems (De Guzman & Choi, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Career adaptability has become an important psychosocial meta-capacity for surviving the fast-paced world of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Johnston *et al.*, 2013; Porfeli & Savickas, 2012). Coetzee *et al.* (2015) found that career adaptability can be strengthened by developing employability capacities.

### **2.3. PSYCHOSOCIAL META-CAPACITIES AND CHANGE**

It is pertinent to consider change from a skills supply perspective, and adopting a psycho-social approach is supportive, since it concentrates on the need for employees to self-regulate and be autonomous in accepting change that can potentially impact the context in which they operate (Bimrose *et al.*, 2011). Previous research postulates that notions of flexibility and openness are also rooted in the literature on career adaptability (Blustein, 1997; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Herr, 1992; Heslin, 2005; Morrison & Hall, 2002). In a fast-paced environment, employees need to be encouraged and persuaded that they can embrace change by being flexible in learning new skills, thereby enabling them to develop and adapt. This directly conforms to the definition of flexibility, which relates to an employee's willingness to transform and develop themselves in challenging circumstances (Blustein, 1997). Openness is stated to be a fragment of flexibility, since it relates to receptiveness to change. It is argued that embracing change, such as technological advances, is only some of the advancements of a developing career in the contemporary workplace. Employability forms a big part of guiding employees to survive in ever-changing and uncertain labour markets (Van de Heijde, 2014). Converse *et al.*, (2012) propose that in order for employees to effectively influence their careers and regulate their behaviour, in order to survive in this turbulent world of work, they have to develop their career-related capabilities and characteristics, only because they are now required to rely more heavily on these capabilities.

## **2.4. LEARNING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT**

In this section, learning capacity development will be discussed.

### **2.4.1. Conceptualising learning capacity development**

It is necessary to conceptualise learning and capacity development as separate concepts before being able to understand the concept of learning capacity development.

#### *2.4.1.1. Learning*

Learning is defined as a “persisting change in human performance or performance potential ...which must come about as a result of the learner’s experience and interaction with the world” (Driscoll, 2000, p.11). Learning was described by Lindeman (1935) as learning which is associated with the problems encountered in life, and involves having and using that knowledge. Lifelong learning plays a crucial role in society because it capitalises on the employability of adults, economic growth, personal and/or professional development and social inclusion (Kitiashvili & Tasker, 2016). Coetzee, et al., (2015) agree with Hall (2013) that the view of lifelong learning has quickly become a vital player in career meta-capacity for nourishing employability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Positive attitudes towards learning are essential, as the more positive an attitude towards a particular behaviour is, the more willing that individual will be to adopt a particular action (Ajzen, 2011). Kolb (1984) suggests that learning is a process whereby knowledge is generated through the transformation of a subjective or objective experience. The intent to learn relates to an individual’s recognition of the need to acquire knowledge to successfully perform (Noe, Tews & Marand, 2013).

#### *2.4.1.2. Formal and informal learning*

Formal learning no longer encompasses the majority of learning, since informal learning is now a significant feature of learning experience. Most importantly,

learning materialises in a variety of ways, ranging from communities of practice, personal networks, and the execution of work-related tasks (Siemens, 2014). It is important to note that informal learning is learner-initiated, occurs when required, and is motivated by the intent to develop oneself (Tannenbaum, Beard, McNall & Salas, 2010). Both organisations and individuals can benefit from informal learning, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary world of work, which is fast-paced and volatile for the organisation. It is a mechanism whereby employees constantly improve their knowledge and skills to adapt to ever-changing environments, including the use of new technologies. For the employee, informal learning is perilous for success in today's boundary-less careers, which require personal initiative to improve their skill set (Briscoe, Hall & DeMuth, 2006).

Noe et al., (2013) argue that motivation and individual differences may be imperative to facilitate the informal learning process. This is based on the underlying concept that informal learning is under the control of the employee (they choose the place, motivation, or interaction with others). Siemens (2005) also argues that technology is modifying or rewiring our brain, hence the tools we use delineate and shape our thinking. Employees must be able to think globally (Froehlich, Beausaert, Segers & Gerken, 2014) in the contemporary world of work. In times of organisational change, organisations expect employees to adapt to their changing environments. Employees should therefore be prepared to embrace their new roles and acquire new skills in order to meet the new organisational challenges (Pulakos, Arad, Donovan & Plamondon, 2000). Older employees assume that their capacities are declining due to their age, which may negatively affect their self-efficacy in learning, and for this reason they may be less willing to participate in learning activities (Maurer, Barbeite, Weiss & Lippstreu, 2008). Kanfer and Ackerman (2004) suggest that older employees are more reluctant to engage in new skills training because of the limitations related to the biological changes associated with ageing. Previous research suggests that older employees may be more preoccupied with maintaining the status quo than their younger colleagues (Ogilvie, Rose & Heppen, 2001). Van Vianen, Dalhoeven and De Pater (2011) agree that for various reasons, certain older employees continue to be interested in learning and development, whereas others do not. Some older employees may feel supported by their supervisors if they receive verbal encouragement.

#### *2.4.1.3. The role of supervisors in the learning process*

Supervisors play an important role in the learning attitudes of employees (Van Vianen *et al.*, 2011). The study found that older employees who felt well supported by their supervisors were more willing to participate in learning and development opportunities. Employees who can access their psychosocial resources (self-efficacy) at work tend to have a greater sense of self-worth (Hobfoll, 2002). In addition, if they have high levels of psychosocial resources (EQ), they may be more keen to seek feedback from their supervisors, which may assist them to access relevant information in the quest for career and work success (Vandenberghe & Panaccio, 2012). Brophy (1983) argues that self-efficacy is a variable of motivated learning, which is the motivation to acquire skills and knowledge, and not simply completing tasks. Self-efficacy is said to affect motivation, and this means that those who have a high sense of efficacy for learning must try harder and persevere more than those who doubt their capabilities (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Employee learning orientation (a concern for, and dedication to, developing one's competence) (Dweck, 1986) is stated to be positively related to employee creativity, which is mediated by employee creative self-efficacy (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Supervisors have a critical role to play in emphasising behaviours that empower self-development (London & Smither, 1999), and can help employees to have positive experiences, which may result in enhanced creative self-efficacy (Gong, Huang & Farh, 2009).

#### *2.4.1.4. Capacity development*

Morgan (1997) defines capacity development as a process by which individuals, groups, organisations and societies improve their ability to identify and meet development challenges in a sustainable manner. Essentially, this means having an increased ability to utilise and increase current capabilities in an efficient and effective way, a process that recognises the dominance of learning by doing (Lavergne & Saxby, 2001). Horton (2002) highlights that Morgan's (1997) definition emphasises two key considerations: capacity development is fundamentally an internal process of growth and development, and capacity development efforts

should be results-oriented. Since capacity development is a means through which employees acquire new skills and knowledge, which must then be applied in practice, learning by doing (Lavergne & Saxby, 2001) or experiential learning is at the hub of capacity development (Horton, 2002).

#### *2.4.1.5. Experiential learning*

This concept was first introduced in 1979 by Fry and Kolb (1979), based on the social psychology of Bruner and Piaget (1979). It is built on the foundation that individual learner styles should be linked to a preferred learning situation, but also that the adaptive competencies required are linked to learner styles and environmental orientations. This information should be used to design the training or educational intervention. Learning grounded on experience (Kolb, 1984) is seen as an integral part of how employees learn, grow and develop. Experiential learning is based on the psychosocial meta-capacity of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Kolb's (1984) theory portrayed learning as a process in which ideas are not fixed and unchallengeable rudiments of beliefs, but are formed and reformed through experience. Kolb's theory has been developed over time. More recently, 'Action Learning' (Raelin, 1999) or 'Incidental Learning' (Marsick & Watkins, 1990) are examples of experiential learning methods.

#### *2.4.1.6. Factors influencing capacity development*

According to Wenger and Snyder (2000), capacity development can be stimulated through the exchange of information and experiences amongst employees who are working on similar tasks in different contexts. This can be achieved through workshops or networks. Horton (2002) infers that there are tools that can be used for developing capacities, and this can be in the form of training, learning from experience, mentoring or general dissemination of information. Kibel (1999) cautions that although training is generally more effective than the promotion of learning, providing one-off training sessions rarely produces lasting changes in individual employees' behaviour. Experiential learning or reflection (learning from experience, an important facet of learning and its application) has become influential in the workplace (Reynolds, 2017). Based on the literature, this study defines *learning*

*capacity development* as a process whereby employees continuously improve their capabilities through the utilisation of knowledge acquired through experience, in order to identify and effectively deal with developmental challenges.

## **2.5. LEARNING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE**

As contended by Bimrose et al., (2011), learning to adapt is a social process, which is aided by interaction, but which is also inevitably an individual process. It is suggested that robust interactions and engaging with learning does not necessarily lead to adaptability. It is important to recognise that some employees may respond to changes and challenging circumstances by using a very restricted repertoire of reactions, resulting in them becoming less, rather than more, adaptable. Bimrose et al. (2011) confirmed that the development of adaptability has to be self-directed. Fuller and Unwin (2006) and Felstead et al., (2011) imply that learning and development at work may be contingent partly on whether work offers a sprawling learning environment, and employers can play a supporting role in this regard. Learning, development and the application of newly acquired knowledge and skills in the workplace are linked to the individual's perception of subjective career and work success (Du Toit & Coetzee, 2012). Jiang and Klein (2000) also found that individuals are more likely to remain in organisations that encourage career opportunities through learning, and afford them the opportunity to apply their newly acquired skills.

The contemporary world of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is fast-paced and employees have different coping strategies to deal with the associated changes (Vogt, Jenny & Bauer, 2013). Employees must be employable, self-regulating and eager to learn (Van der Heijde, 2014). Globalisation is coupled with technological advances, and it is necessary to consider how different employees view the use of technologies. Barnard, Bradley, Hodgson and Lloyd (2013) inferred that the younger generation is easily able to adopt the use of technologies, because they are born into an era where they are constantly exposed to computers, laptops, ipads, smartphones and other digital devices from primary schools. Mitzner et al., (2010) found that the key difference between the older and young employees was not really the knowledge of technology, but more in terms of their confidence. On the other hand, Lagana et al.,

(2011) confirmed that training was not only about the skills, but also had a positive influence on both attitudes towards technology and self-efficacy of the employee.

Di Fabio, Bernaud and Loarer (2014) found that emotional intelligence based on emotional reaction has a positive effect on employees' resistance to change. This means that they will, due to their ability to manage stress and continuous imposed changes, be able to perform better (Di Fabio, 2011). In a study conducted in the healthcare sector, it was proven that if employees can learn to become more self-aware of their emotions, strengths and weaknesses, and their perception of being optimistic, and if they learn how to express positive feelings, this will help them to become more accepting of frequently introduced changes (Bernaud & Loarer, 2014). Another characteristic associated with emotional intelligence is mindfulness, and this is regarded as a stage during which emotional intelligence can be enhanced or developed (Schutte & Malouff, 2011). Mindfulness is simply being aware in the present moment (Hanh, 1976). Coetzee et al., (2015) showed that lifelong learning capacities (goal-directed behaviour and continuous learning orientation) was a significant factor in clarifying higher levels of career confidence, career curiosity and career control. These career capacities symbolise a sense of agency and responsibility (control), motivation and willingness (curiosity), and efficacy (confidence) to engage in career developmental tasks, which enable employees to adjust proactively to unforeseen necessities that may arise from changes in the contemporary working world, environment and working conditions (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

## **2.6. THEORETICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOSOCIAL META-CAPACITIES AND LEARNING CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT**

Employees differ in terms of their psychosocial meta-capacities - their self-awareness about their goals, ambitions, motivation, personality, interpersonal skills and resilience (Bimrose *et al.*, 2011). Organisations must take advantage of these innate abilities of employees to help them succeed, because as a performance-based measure of perceived capability, self-efficacy fluctuates abstractly and psychometrically from correlated motivational constructs, such as outcome expectations, self-concept or even locus of control (Zimmerman, 2000). They also

vary in their gratitude for learning opportunities, contextual understanding, and capacity to cultivate relationships and networks to support their learning and development (Shipton *et al.*, 2016). Brown (2009) implied that employee capabilities (critical analysis, critical reflection, visualisation and organisation, and the ability to switch between context and generalisation) wholly assist employees to make the most of their learning opportunities. In this respect, career adaptability can empower employees to take positive decisions and actions regarding their skills development (Shipton *et al.*, 2016).

### **2.6.1. Learning and self-efficacy**

Experiential learning is cemented in the psychosocial meta-capacity of self-efficacy, which means that employees have a tendency to take on tasks which they believe they can complete successfully, and that they will avoid tasks that they perceive to be highly complex or beyond their capabilities (Bandura, 1986). Employees will therefore choose the activities in which they engage (Manolis *et al.*, 2013). Experiential learning is shaped around an employee's personal experience (Bandura, 1991) in the learning process. Employees may have vast amounts of knowledge and information, but may be reluctant to engage or be unable to use this information, knowledge or skills in a productive manner (Manolis *et al.*, 2013). Experiential learning offers an opportunity for employees to apply information, skills or knowledge (which they possess) in order to enhance self-efficacy and learn from experience.

Self-efficacy plays a role in learning, as it is related to motivation (Bandura, 1986), and it is important to recognise that its belief can be predictive of two measures of effort: rate of performance and expenditure of energy (Zimmerman, 2000). Perceived self-efficacy on persistence is believed to influence methods of learning, as well as their motivational processes, thereby influencing skill acquisition by increasing persistence (Schunk, 1981). Bandura and Schunk (1981) also found that the choice of activities played a role in performance. This means that employees who were self-efficacious were more accepting of challenging tasks than those who were inefficacious. An employee's intrinsic interest in a motoric learning task was also found to be positively correlated with self-efficacy (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1997). Although self-efficacy is an important psychosocial meta-capacity, it is not the only

influence on learning or achievement. Therefore, an overdose of self-efficacy will not necessarily produce competent performance without the requisite knowledge and skills (Schunk & Meece, 2005). Values are also important, as learners will choose tasks which they believe are important (Eccles *et al.*, 1998). Self-efficacy beliefs supply employees with a sense of agency to motivate learning through the utilisation of self-regulatory processes, such as goal-setting, self-evaluation and strategy use (Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Pons, 1992).

The forces that shape an employee stem from their families and home environments, according to Schunk and Miller (2002), and this is where adolescents obtain their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy and confidence beliefs are enhanced in an environment that promotes effective interactions with the environment. Simply put, this essentially means that when children are given an opportunity to deal with challenges, provided with realistic goals, and receive encouragement from their parents, their sense of competence is built through these supportive role models. McLoyd (1990) indicated that socioeconomic status does impact learning - economic hardship translates into impediments to development and learning. This is especially true in the contemporary world today, since those who earn less cannot give their children access to magazines, computers and travel. As a result, the cognitive development of children is not stimulated. Self-efficacy has validated that it can predict effort and performance (Gist, Stevens & Bavetta, 1991; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

Employees who have greater confidence are more likely to engage in a task, irrespective of their abilities. Generalised self-efficacy signifies whether an employee is assured that he or she is capable of success, irrespective of the task (Chen, Gully & Eden, 2004). Employees with high generalised self-efficacy should embark on informal learning, as they are expected to trust that it has value and are confident that they have the ability to enhance their skills (Noe *et al.*, 2013).

#### *2.6.1.1. Learning and employability*

When dealing with employability, openness is vital to personal adaptability. Openness to change and new experiences supports continuous learning and permits one to recognise and grasp career opportunities. When an employee is open to

change, he or she will be comfortable in unfamiliar situations and will have an increased training aptitude across a variety of occupations (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

To corroborate this further, Chan (2000) provided support for the interdependent/reciprocal nature of adaptation at work. He proposed that the assimilation of individual difference and learning views offers a more comprehensive view of adaptation. The individual difference perspective highlights the importance of inherent individual characteristics that incline employees to adaptability: this pronounces “who” is capable of adapting. The learning perspective determines the behaviours that employees endorse to become adaptive, or “how” employees become adaptive (Fugate *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, the individual difference and learning perspectives are harmonising and demonstrate the collaborative and proactive nature of employability.

#### *2.6.1.2. Learning and emotional intelligence*

Emotional intelligence is considered to be the generic competence in seeing emotions in oneself and others (Zeidner, 2013). As we know, competence assists employees to cope and regulate emotions (Goleman, 1995). Researchers have resisted the idea that the application of emotional intelligence by learners helps them to achieve intellectual stability (Jones & Abraham, 2008; Kavanagh, Hancock, Howieson, Kent & Tempone, 2009). However, Goleman *et al.* (2013) contend that emotional intelligence is learnable and that the problem may be that some employees may be lacking skills in a particular domain of emotional intelligence.

This is either personal competence (self-awareness and self-management) or social competence (social awareness and relationship management). If these skills can be enhanced, employees can learn to be more effective in their roles. Zeidner (2013) suggests that training in emotional intelligence, whether at schools, workplaces or psychiatric institutes, can offer a viable and valuable solution to the manifestations of personal problems, either at work or while undergoing formal education.

Emotional intelligence skills include listening effectively to acquire information, understanding contrasting viewpoints, and having the ability to present ideas verbally

or in writing, and to discuss matters with others (Fortin & Legault, 2010; Jones & Abraham, 2008). Sheldon, Dunning and Ames (2014) found that some employees are unskilled, unaware or uninterested in learning, and this, related to their performance, may be due to their level of self-awareness about their own expertise and feedback. When given feedback, low performers mocked the accuracy of the feedback. Employees can learn, through the concept of self-awareness, that they can influence their emotional intelligence positively. Dewey (1909) referred to the subset of emotional intelligence as social power, which means the learned capacities of control at work or in any social context. Goleman (2001) inferred that emotional competence is a quality of emotional intelligence, which is also a learned capability which can positively influence performance at work or in other spheres of life. Emmanuel et al., (2016) posit that improving and developing students' competencies (interpersonal skills, teamwork, communication and problem solving skills) will increase their value to potential employers, as it will boost their intellectual capabilities, thereby making them more employable (Spowart, 2009). Seligman and Csikszentimihalyi (2000) argued that by instilling positive emotional experiences, employees will learn to have more self-determination and independence in pursuing important goals. This can be achieved by considering personality traits directly related to emotional functioning (such as assertiveness and self-confidence), which can be adapted in some contexts.

#### *2.6.1.3. Learning and career adaptability*

The literature also infers that employees have the inclination to learn and develop their competencies through career adaptability (Creed *et al.*, 2009; Cronshaw & Jethmalani, 2005; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; O'Connell *et al.*, 2008). This can be achieved through work engagement (Brown, 2009) and can comprise of up-skilling, reskilling or perspective transition. Eraut (2009) suggests it can comprise willingness to engage in a wide range of activities, such as asking questions; getting information, finding key people to support you, listening and observing; learning from mistakes, giving and receiving feedback, trying things out, independent study, and working towards a qualification. Bimrose et al., (2011) argue that being self-directed in terms of taking advantage of learning opportunities is helpful for individual development.

Career adaptability is an important psychosocial career meta-capacity that needs to be enhanced during a change process. A key component of career adaptive behaviour is exploration, which is defined broadly in terms of career exploration, self-exploration and environmental exploration (Blustein, 1997; Creed *et al.*, 2009; Duffy, 2010; Patton *et al.*, 2004; Super, 1988; Zikic & Klehe, 2006).

## **2.7. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter commenced by discussing the construct of psychosocial meta-capacities. This construct was explained by describing the components of psychosocial metacapacities, namely: self-efficacy, employability, emotional intelligence, and psychosocial career meta-capacities. The literature review revealed that there are many different psychological meta-capacities that influence an individual employee's learning capacity development, both internal (e.g. self-efficacy, emotional intelligence) and external (e.g. social support). Inherent resources can be enhanced to aid learning and personal development, ultimately leading to organisational success. Employability encourages employees to proactively advance their personal development, thereby enabling them to meet the challenges of change in the environment. Emotional intelligence contributes to learning and helps employees to cope in social settings, and also enables individuals to act as a support for others. In the contemporary environment, we must also recognise that having career adaptability is important, because this skill facilitates openness and flexibility. Enhancing different meta-capacities in individuals can foster learning, and this can easily be achieved in an accommodating environment. Learning is not restricted to time or space, and positive attitudes towards learning help to improve capacity development, as well as to adapt to change. Learning initiated by the individual appears to provide a foundation for learner success.

The discussion was followed by an exploration of how these psychosocial meta-capacities may be affected by organisational change. From the literature review, it can be concluded that while individuals are unique, there is a way in which employee learning capacity development can be enhanced. Psychosocial meta-capacities play an important role in improving the skills development of individual employees, who collectively contribute to the overall effectiveness of an organisation. Capabilities,

generic skills and previous experiences affect the perception of learning new information, and organisations must become more aware of the meta-capacities that influence individual learning capacity development. This is becoming increasingly important in the contemporary world of work, where organisations expect employees to take responsibility for adapting to change and acquiring new skills, in order to meet ongoing challenges.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH ARTICLE**

### **Abstract**

This qualitative study investigated the influences of psychosocial meta-capacities on learning capacity development in a foreign government agency that is going through extensive organisational change. The data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with seven participants, who are employees of a foreign visa- processing unit based in South Africa. The participants shared their experiences during the change and how different aspects impacted on improving their learning capacity development. The study highlighted self-efficacy and emotional intelligence as key meta-capacities that can be enhanced to aid learning capacity development. Furthermore, the study recommended that organisations intending to implement significant changes are aware of the psychosocial meta-capacities that can be exploited to develop employee learning capacity development , thereby ultimately ensuring organisational success.

### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

Industrial and organisational psychologists are at the forefront of guiding employees to perform at optimal levels and consulting on organisational change interventions. This is becoming increasingly important, as the world of work is stifled by globalisation and technological advancements. Over the last few decades, society has seen an increased infiltration of technology (De Wet, Koekemoer & Nel, 2016), and this has transformed the way in which employees think, interact and complete their tasks (Marius, 2012). Employees are unique and their personal experiences shape the way they function, as well as dictating their ability to reach optimal levels in relation to their innate coping strategies (Vogt, Jenny & Bauer, 2013). This research studied employees' psychosocial meta-capacities (inherent resources) and the role they played in driving employees' learning capabilities (Savickas, 1997).

### 3.2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The roles of the organisation and the employee have changed significantly over the last few decades (Hall, 1976). The turbulent work environment now requires employees to take responsibility for their personal development, in order to ensure that they are functioning at optimal levels, and ultimately ensuring organisational success. We are no longer in a time where employees can enter a workforce and remain with the same organisation throughout their working life (Siemens, 2014). The extreme opposite is true in the case of Millennials, who are reported to have worked in at least 6 jobs or organisations by the time they reach 30 (Lyons *et al.*, 2012). Given the technological advances, this makes sense, as Millennials are technologically savvy (Scott *et al.*, 2015).

This study relates to the contemporary, fast-paced, vigorous and ever-changing world of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but focuses more specifically on how employees are able to cope in an unpredictable environment. In the context of this study, 'coping' does not only refer to the stressors experienced on a daily basis, but also encompasses the employee's personal ability to adapt to the changes, and whether or not the individual is able to influence his or her capabilities in achieving optimum performance. Psychosocial meta-capacities are defined as the psychological and social skills of individuals that enable them to successfully interpret and manage social and other interactions in any given context (Coetzee, 2014; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Witt & Ferris, 2003). Ultimately, the employee's ability to advance his or her learning capacity development and comply with continuing and ever-changing requirements defines their employability. Capacity development is defined as "The process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions and societies increase their abilities: to perform functions, solve problems and achieve objectives, to understand and deal with their development need in a broader context and in a sustainable manner" (UNDP, 1997, p.3). Essentially, employees must enrich their personal growth and development continuously, in order to survive in a protean workforce. The challenge may lie in the employee's actual psychosocial career meta-capacities, as it is indicated that people learn certain things at explicit stages of development. In addition, understanding an employee's natural life span and stages

of development has a direct influence on understanding how and when capacity development occurs for the individual (Lusthaus, Adrien & Perstinger, 1999).

Savickas (1997) notes that employees need to manage their present and imminent work and career challenges, and that they have the inherent resources to do this, which refers to the psychosocial construct of career adaptability. Employees who exhibit traits of proactivity, openness to change, optimism, and adaptability have no problems adjusting. However, according to available research and in contrast to the latter, employees need support from their employers in order to gain an in-depth understanding of what career meta-capacities they require to sustain their employability (Nazar & Van der Heijden, 2012; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011; Van der Heijde, 2014, as cited by Oosthuizen *et al.*, 2014). There are a number of factors which appear to contribute to the employee's adaptability. Support from employers plays a key role in the advancement of an employee's sense of coherence, which is shown positively in terms of productivity, wellness and overall development of quality of life (Hillier, Fewell, Cann & Shephard, 2005). Bolger (2000) agrees and contends that its achievement is contingent on the 'enabling environment', which signifies the environment in which capacity development is enhanced. In contrast, Vyas, Jung and Shafiqul Huque (2013) found that the enabling environment referred to in the latter is not limited to the organisation, but includes the employee's perception and social class. They agreed that training not only promoted some of the impacts, but also positively contributed to capacity building.

Globalisation, combined with technological advances, is likely to continue to accelerate (Aggarwal, 1999), which means that organisations are likely to continue to seek to enhance their human capital, retain talent, and ensure that they remain competitive in the modern, unstable environment (Murongazvombo, 2015). This research designates various psychosocial means to tackle the barriers employees face in the search for optimal functioning. Billet (2011) argues that capacities can be developed through the reinforcement of learning. Understanding the dynamics that influence learning capacity development may lead to improved career assessment diagnosis (Bilgili *et al.*, 2016) and better training and development approaches, all of which contribute to employees functioning at optimal levels, which in turn contributes towards enhancing organisational effectiveness (Potnuru & Sahoo, 2016).

The literature review provided clear and concise information in terms of the different factors that control an employee's ability to succeed in the ever-changing workforce. However, the piece of the puzzle that appears to be missing is the factors that cause one path to be chosen over another. The process of recognising, understanding and possibly linking these causes to the employee may result in irrefutable benefits for both employee and organisation (optimal functioning and organisational success). Employees are able to take responsibility for enhancing their learning capacity development by utilising their psychological meta-capacities, such as career adaptability, which empowers employees to adapt effectively in numerous settings, and this can be reinforced by developing their emotional intelligence (Coetzee & Harry, 2014). This concept is supported by other researchers, who consider that both emotional intelligence and career adaptability are flexible behavioural traits which can be improved through interventions such as training and coaching (Johnston *et al.*, 2013, Porfeli & Savickas, 2012; Savickas, 2005). It is also noted that employees can help themselves to enhance behavioural traits by becoming more aware of their self-defeating behaviours (Bimrose, Brown, Barnes & Hughes, 2011).

To be successful in a turbulent work environment, employees must be highly adaptable (Hall, 1976), and given the ever-changing, fast-paced environment, employees are also required to negotiate a larger number and variety of role changes (Ashforth, 2001). Employees need to constantly manage change in themselves and within their work environment (Fugate *et al.*, 2004). Bimrose *et al.*, (2011) argue that career adaptability can be managed effectively by both employee and organisation. They further suggest that when employees do not engage in up-skilling or re-skilling through either formal learning or learning on the job, they will run the risk of getting stuck in the traditional way of working. This will in turn make them defenceless and further reduce their ability to adapt. Previous research (Cronshaw & Jethmalani, 2005; Fugate *et al.*, 2004) suggests that individual learning capacity development can be anticipated by career adaptability, which is the tendency of the employee to learn and develop themselves.

### **3.3. RESEARCH PURPOSE, AIM AND CONTRIBUTION**

The following research question was posed in this study: How do psychosocial meta-capacities (as described above) influence individual capacity development? The aim of the research was to qualitatively describe the influence of psychosocial meta-capacities on capacity development. The contribution of this research consists of qualitative research evidence of the influence of inherent resources on learning during a change intervention, which may in future inform learning and/or organisational development practitioners concerned with enhancing psychosocial meta-capacities, as an important element of organisational change.

### **3.4. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature was reviewed extensively, but not all psychosocial resources could be reviewed, as it is outside the scope of this study. The discussion below relates to a number of psychosocial meta-capacities that are linked to change and learning.

#### **3.4.1. Psychosocial meta-capacities**

In this section, we focus on some of the psychosocial meta-capacities, the social skills that individuals possess which enable them to successfully interpret and manage social interactions (Witt & Ferris, 2003), which in turn influences learning capacity development. This refers to the key resources between the inner (psychological) and external (social) worlds of a person, and how they use these to deal with their environment (Coetzee, 2014; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Psychosocial meta-capacities are inherent coping mechanisms that all individuals have, which allow for successful adaptation in various spheres of life (Coetzee & Harry, 2014). In a contemporary environment, these are important for proactive management of individual development and essential for sustaining the ability to be flexible (Botha, 2014). A psychosocial meta-capacity is like a toolbox of help that individuals can tap into to enable them to respond effectively to life's impulses. Key meta-capacities may overlap or originate from a centralised development source. For instance, self-esteem may lead to improved self-efficacy (Hobfall, 2002). For the purpose of this study, the researcher will use the definition provided by Coetzee (2014), because

she understands the concept to have two components, namely psychological meta-capacities (inner resources) and social meta-capacities (external resources).

### **3.4.2. Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy signifies the personal conclusion of performance capabilities in a specified context that may encompass unpredictable and potential stressful features (Bandura, 1977). The focus is on performance capabilities, rather than on personal circumstances (Zimmerman, 2000). Although self-efficacy relates to performance expectations regarding their capabilities in a specific context, more generic skills and former experiences can affect self-efficacy for learning new material (Schunk, 1984). Self-efficacy is a person's belief in his or her capacity to be successful in any situation, which are considered to be features of how employees think, behave, and feel (Bandura, 1994). Employees who work apathetically on a task do so because they doubt their ability to master it, which is indicative of a low level of self-efficacy, while those who perceive themselves as being capable of performing at a high level obtain positive feedback, which in turn promotes self-efficacy (Schunk, 1984). Self-efficacy emerged as a dynamic analysis of motivation and performance across time, a variety of contexts and different populations (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Multon, Brown & Lent, 1991). It has been noted that self-efficacy has an influence on an employee's emotional reaction (Bandura, 1986), and it can be stated that persistence that is connected to self-efficacy will unquestionably lead to improved performance and productivity (Cherian & Jacob, 2013). Judge and Bono (2001) agree that higher self-efficacy is associated with positive outcomes such as job satisfaction and performance. It is imperative to highlight the fact that self-efficacy cannot be considered in isolation, York and Knight (2007) viewed employability in terms of four key domains, one of which was efficacy. This is the belief that one is capable of organising and executing the necessary actions to manage potential situations (Bandura, 1995). Research also suggests that employability is a matter of individual attributes and responsibility (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2003; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006).

### 3.4.3. Employability

Employability (a person-centered approach) is a psycho-social construct that exemplifies individual characteristics that foster adaptive cognition, behaviour, and affect, and improve the individual-work interface, with a shift in responsibility for career management and development from organisations to employees (Hall, 1976; Hall & Mirvis, 1995). Employees assume responsibility for acquiring the knowledge, skills and abilities valued by organisations and, over time, acquire the ability to proactively advance their circumstances (Seibert *et al.*, 2001). Another benefit is that they have a tendency to become more flexible in order to meet the strains of changing organisations (Chan, 2000). Employability is also linked to the efforts by employees - those who are more enthusiastic in their efforts to meet the stresses of change are more successful. Active adaptation and proactivity therefore reinforce the psychosocial construct of employability (Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Crant, 2000). Employees must acquire sufficient information regarding their environment, and their relationship or status within the environment; they must possess appropriate inner conditions for adaptability, such as individual qualities (optimism and self-efficacy) and understandings, which enable employees to negotiate the copious internal and external challenges of change. In addition, they must maintain flexibility; there must be a willingness and ability to change behaviours and cognitions (Ashford & Taylor, 1990).

Both self-efficacy and employability aid personal and job changes (Fugate *et al.*, 2004). Employable people anticipate and pursue alternatives consistent with their salient career identities (Ashforth & Fugate, 2001), and are susceptible to personal change. Crants (2000) agrees that employability not only fosters adaptability, but also encourages employees to adapt to change proactively. In fact, Crant (1995) argues that proactivity in the work sphere enhances job performance. Changing environments bring about anxiety (Grupe & Nitschke, 2013), but employees have the essential psychosocial meta-capacities to deal with these issues. Performance can be strengthened (Ashford & Black, 1996) when employees are proactively engaging in their environment, and this also lessens uncertainty and anxiety (Saks & Ashforth, 1996). As a bonus, proactivity brings about perceived control (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), which effectively influences individual coping in times of

organisational change, and also condenses uncertainty (Ashford & Black, 1996). Intrinsic individual resources (like self-efficacy) are linked to changing outcomes considered to be adaptive for career development, by representing the common contribution of emotional intelligence and self-perceived employability, social and emotional competencies for career development and work success are highlighted (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2015). In a study conducted in Malaysia involving students, it was recognised that having diverse skills is significantly and positively associated with employability. Employability can be positively moulded if one has insight into the vital role of skills and emotional intelligence (Aziz, 2017).

#### **3.4.4. Emotional intelligence**

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is a skill that may or may not be exhibited in an individual's everyday functioning (Schutte *et al.*, 2008). Employees with greater stability (emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness) and general plasticity (extraverted persons, openness) have a higher level of EQ, and therefore better task performance (Hui-Hua & Schutte, 2015). EQ is confirmed to be related to higher levels of job satisfaction (Meisler, 2013; Schlaerth *et al.*, 2013) and desirable outcomes on work and career measures, including job performance (Joseph & Newman, 2010). Coetzee and Harry (2014) argue that emotional intelligence and career adaptability are crucial psychosocial meta-capacities for the effective coping with general life, including career and work success. Their investigation also underlined the importance of developing an individual's emotional intelligence, in order to strengthen their career adaptability which, as discussed below, assists individuals to regulate their behaviour in order to be successful in different spheres of their working environment.

#### **3.4.5. Career adaptability**

Research suggests that individuals have the inherent career resources or meta-capacities to impact socio-occupational environments and self-regulate behaviours, in order to accomplish career and work success in the contemporary world of work (Coetzee, 2008; Converse *et al.*, 2012; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Coetzee (2008) assumes that career meta-competencies assimilate career preferences, career

values, career drivers, career enablers and career harmonisers. Employees who preserve a wide range of psychological career resources have demonstrated adaptability to changeable career circumstances (Fugate *et al.*, 2004; McArdle, Waters, Briscoe & Hall, 2007; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), with improved work engagement and work commitment (Tladinyane *et al.*, 2013). Career adaptability is the self-regulatory psychosocial resources that individuals need to successfully achieve current and career transitions (Savickas, 2013).

The contemporary career is contained within an uncertain economy and erratic labour market (Savickas, 2012), which infers that adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> century may be anxious regarding their employability, training and development, continuous learning, coping strategies to deal with change, independence, self-awareness, and establishment of social ties (Savickas, 2013; Sullivan, 2013). Ferreira (2012) posits that employees need to rely on their personal resources and capacities, such as intrinsic motivation, values and coping capacities, to help them become more resilient and adaptable to their environments, especially in the turbulent employment context. Career meta-capacities are regarded as a toolbox of psychological resources used to aggressively plan and cope with career development, as well as to self-regulate behaviour, in an effort to realise career success in the contemporary world of work (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Coetzee and Harry (2014) postulate that managing one's own emotions contributes to overall career adaptability within its four spheres as follows:

- career concern denotes the capacity to be aware of, positively concerned with, and plan for a vocational future.
- career control echoes the capacity to take personal responsibility for one's career and work experiences, as well as to be clear about feelings of self-governing, determination and decisiveness regarding a vocational future.
- career curiosity mirrors a propensity to explore one's environment and, through information-seeking and risk-taking, acquire new knowledge and capabilities.

- career confidence reflects the tendency to sense self-efficaciousness relating to the capacity to master career-related challenges and effectively solve problems (De Guzman & Choi, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Career adaptability has become an important psychosocial meta-capacity for enduring the fast-paced world of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Johnston, Luciano, Maggiori, Ruch & Rossier, 2013; Porfeli & Savickas, 2012), and as such can be strengthened by developing employability capacities (Coetzee *et al.*, 2015).

### *Employability and career adaptability*

Employees who can boast openness, resilience and current technical knowledge are thought to be employable (Froehlich *et al.*, 2014). High levels of employability can result in active adaptability (Fugate *et al.*, 2004). Their hands-on efforts are indicators of employability, as they tweak their own cognitions and behaviours to intensify their position regarding facets such as job satisfaction and employment opportunities. The foundation of the psychosocial construct of employability is a synergistic collection of individual characteristics that is invigorated and directed by an employee's career identity. Finely polished employability capacities include cognitive (e.g., career identity), dispositional (e.g., propensity to learn), and market-interactive variables (e.g., social and human capital), as described by Fugate *et al.* (2014), which act as a tool to assist employees to successfully operate in an unremittingly changing work environment (Daniels & Brooker, 2014). These findings are to some extent consistent with the findings of Coetzee *et al.*, (2015), who preserve that employees with high levels of analytical skills (problem-solving and decision-making skills) and high levels of interactive skills in the 3 domains of career adaptability (career control, career curiosity, and career confidence) are able to successfully adapt.

Overall, in this contemporary world of work, the experiences of career transitions translate into a greater demand for adaptability (Rossier, Zecca, Stauffer, Maggiori & Dauwalder, 2012; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Therefore, employees are relying more on their psychological and social capacities (human capital), and less on organisational career provisions (Baruch, 2004). To be successful, employees must

display characteristics of transferable generic capacities (Rocha, 2012) and flexibility, as well as being proactive and engaging in lifelong learning, in order to acquire new skills to keep up with the pace of change (Del Corso, 2013).

### **3.5. Learning capacity development (LCD)**

It is necessary to conceptualise learning and capacity development as separate concepts, before being able to understand the concept of learning capacity development.

#### **3.5.1. Learning**

Lifelong learning plays a crucial role in society because it offers employability of adults, economic growth, personal and/or professional development and social inclusion (Kitiashvili & Tasker, 2016). Coetzee et al., (2015) contributed to the findings of Hall (2013), by stating that the view of lifelong learning has quickly become a vital player in career meta-capacity, in order to nourish employability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Learning is defined as a “persisting change in human performance or performance potential ...which must come about as a result of the learner’s experience and interaction with the world” (Driscoll, 2000, p.11). Kolb (1984) proposes that learning is a process whereby knowledge is produced through the transformation of experience, which highlights the process of adaptation, where knowledge is repeatedly produced and recreated, which in turn transforms experience into a subjective or objective form. Positive attitude (Ajzen, 2011) and intent to learn (Noe *et al.*, 2013) are also necessary.

#### **3.5.2. Formal and informal learning**

Informal learning is now a noteworthy feature of our learning experience, which materialises in a variety of ways, ranging from communities of practice and personal networks to the execution of work-related tasks (Siemens, 2014). It is important to note that informal learning is learner-initiated, transpires when required, and is motivated by the intent to develop oneself (Tannenbaum *et al.*, 2010). Both organisations and employees can benefit from information learning, especially in the

21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary world of work, which is fast-paced and volatile. For the organisation, it is a mechanism whereby employees constantly apprise their knowledge and skills to acclimatise to an ever-changing environment, including the use of new technologies. Brophy (1983) argues that self-efficacy is a variable of motivated learning, which is the motivation to acquire skills and knowledge, and not simply to complete tasks.

Siemens (2014) also argues that technology is rewiring our brains, hence the tools we use demarcate and shape our thinking. Employees must be able to think globally (Froehlich *et al.*, 2014), adapt to their changing environments, be prepared to embrace their new roles and acquire new skills in order to meet new organisational challenges (Pulakos *et al.*, 2000). Older employees may assume that their capacities are declining due to their age (Isaksson & Johansson, 2000). Age may have an adverse effect on their self-efficacy in learning, and they may not therefore be as willing to participate in learning activities (Maurer *et al.*, 2008). Kanfer and Ackerman (2005) posit that older employees are more hesitant to absorb themselves in new skills training because of the restrictions relevant to the biological changes associated with ageing. However, learning attitudes in older employees are varied (McEnrue, 1989). Van Vianen *et al.*, (2011) agree that for various reasons, certain older employees endure and remain interested in learning and development, whereas others do not. In such cases verbal encouragement may help employees with their learning.

### **3.5.3. Role of supervisors in the learning process**

Supervisors' support is critical to the learning attitudes of employees (Van Vianen *et al.*, 2011), and those who can access their psychosocial resources at work tend to have a greater sense of self-worth (Hobfoll, 2002). Higher levels of psychosocial resources may help employees to be more assertive in seeking feedback from their supervisors, which may assist them to access relevant information in the quest for career success (Vandenberghe & Panaccio, 2012). Supervisors have a critical role to play in emphasising behaviours that empower self-development (London & Smither, 1999), and can help employees to have positive experiences, which may result in enhanced creative self-efficacy (Gong, Huang & Farh, 2009).

### **3.5.4. Capacity development**

Morgan (1997) defines capacity development as a process whereby individuals, groups, organisations and societies increase their capacity to identify and meet development challenges in a sustainable manner. Horton (2002) highlights that Morgan's (1997) definition emphasises two key considerations: capacity development is fundamentally an internal process of growth and development, and capacity development efforts should be results-oriented. Fundamentally, this involves having an increased ability to utilise and increase current capabilities in an efficient and effective way, a process that recognises the dominance of learning by doing (Lavergne & Saxby, 2001). Learning by doing (Lavergne & Saxby, 2001) or experiential learning is at the centre of capacity development (Horton, 2002).

### **3.5.5. Factors influencing learning capacity development**

Horton (2002) concludes that there are tools that can be used for developing capacities, and this can be in the form of training, learning from experience, mentoring or general dissemination of information. While training is largely more effective than the promotion of learning, providing one-off training sessions seldom produces lasting changes in employees' behaviour (Kibel,1999). Experiential learning or reflection (learning from experience, an important facet of individual learning and its application) has become a powerful tool in the workplace (Reynolds, 2017). According to Wenger and Snyder (2000), learning capacity development can be inspired through the exchange of information and experiences amongst employees who are working on similar tasks in different contexts, which can be achieved through workshops or networks. Based on the literature, the researcher can now define *learning capacity development* as a process whereby employees continuously improve their capabilities through the utilisation of knowledge acquired through experience, in order to identify and effectively deal with developmental challenges.

### **3.5.6. Learning capacity development and change**

In a fast-paced environment, employees need to be encouraged and persuaded that they can embrace change by being flexible in learning new skills, thereby enabling them to develop and adapt. This directly imitates the definition of flexibility which relates to an employee's willingness to transform and develop themselves in challenging circumstances (Blustein, 1997). Openness is regarded as a fragment of flexibility, since it relates to receptiveness to change. Previous research (Blustein, 1997; Creed *et al.*, 2009; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Herr, 1992; Heslin, 2005; Morrison & Hall, 2002) posits that concepts of flexibility and openness are also engrained in the literature on career adaptability.

Van der Heijde (2014) contends that embracing technological change will assist employees in the advancement of their careers. However, employability is the guiding factor that ensures survival. Employees rely more heavily on career-related capabilities and characteristics because this allows them to effectively influence and regulate their behaviours, in order to ultimately survive in this turbulent work environment (Converse *et al.*, 2012). Employees have different coping strategies to deal with the associated changes (Vogt, Jenny & Bauer, 2013), as well as different learning approaches that enable them to function in the contemporary world. Van der Heijde (2014) suggests that globalisation, combined with technological advances, is essential, but that we need to consider how different employees view the use of technologies. Barnard *et al.*, (2013) focused on older employees and their use of technologies, and noted that the digitally excluded (no access to internet) are sometimes affected. Younger employees are born into an era where they are constantly exposed to computers, laptops, iPads, smartphones and other digital devices, starting in primary schools. Mitzner *et al.*, (2010) found that the main difference between the older and young employees was not really the knowledge of technology, but more in terms of their confidence. Training is not only about the skills, but also has a positive influence on both the attitudes towards technology and self-efficacy of the employees (Lagana *et al.*, 2011).

Fuller and Unwin (2006) and Felstead et al., (2011) infer that learning and development at work may be dependent partly on whether work offers a sprawling learning environment, and employers can play a supporting role in this regard. Learning, development and the application of newly acquired knowledge and skills in the workplace are connected to the employee's perception of subjective career success (Du Toit & Coetzee, 2012). Organisations will retain employees who perceive that they are being given career opportunities through learning, and afford them the opportunity to apply their newly acquired skills (Jiang & Klein, 2000). Bernaud and Loarer (2014) found that emotional intelligence based on emotional reaction has a positive effect on employees' resistance to change. Mindfulness (being aware of the present moment) (Hanh, 1976) is another characteristic associated with emotional intelligence, and this is regarded as a means to develop emotional intelligence (Schutte & Malouff, 2011). Coetzee et al. (2015) proposed that lifelong learning capacities (goal-directed behaviour and continuous learning orientation) is a significant factor in clarifying higher levels of career confidence, career curiosity and career control. These career capacities signify a sense of agency and responsibility (control), motivation and willingness (curiosity), and efficacy (confidence) to engage in career developmental tasks that enable employees to adjust proactively to unexpected demands that may arise from changes in the contemporary working world, environment, and working conditions (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

### **3.5.7. The theoretical relationship between psychosocial meta-capacities and learning capacity development**

People vary in terms of their psychosocial meta-capacities - their self-awareness about their goals, ambitions, motivation, personality, interpersonal skills and resilience (Bimrose *et al.*, 2011). Organisations must exploit these innate abilities of employees to help them succeed. As a performance-based measure of perceived capability, self-efficacy varies conceptually and psychometrically from correlated motivational constructs, such as outcome expectations, self-concept or even locus of control (Zimmerman, 2000). They also vary in their appreciation of learning opportunities, contextual understanding, and their capacity to encourage relationships and networks to support their learning and development (Shipton *et al.*,

2016). Brown (2009) implied that individual capabilities (critical analysis, critical reflection, visualisation and organisation, and the ability to switch between context and generalisation) wholly assist employees to make the most of their learning opportunities. As a result, career adaptability enables employees to take positive decisions and actions regarding their skills development (Shipton *et al.*, 2016).

### *Learning and self-efficacy*

Experiential learning is grounded in the psychosocial meta-capacity of self-efficacy, as founded by Bandura (1986), in which he argued that employees have a tendency to take on tasks which they believe they can complete successfully, and that they will avoid tasks that they perceive to be highly complex or beyond their capabilities. Employees will therefore choose the activities with which they engage (Manolis *et al.*, 2013). Having vast amounts of knowledge and information is insufficient to ensure learning, which means that employees who are reluctant to engage or unable to use this information, knowledge or skills in a productive manner (Manolis *et al.*, 2013) may face challenges. Experiential learning offers an opportunity for the practical application of acquired information.

Self-efficacy is important for learning, as it is related to motivation (Bandura, 1986), and it is important to appreciate that its belief can be predictive of two measures of effort; rate of performance and expenditure of energy (Zimmerman, 2000). Even self-rated mental effort can be positively associated with self-efficacy when a task is considered to be complex (Salmon, 1984). Bandura and Schunk (1981) also suggest that the choice of activities played a role in performance, as employees who were self-efficacious were more tolerant of challenging tasks, compared to those who were inefficacious. An employee's intrinsic interest in a motoric learning task is said to be positively correlated with self-efficacy (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1997). Self-efficacy (although not on its own) is an important psychosocial meta-capacity that can influence learning or achievement. However, an overindulgence of self-efficacy will not necessarily yield competent performance without the requisite knowledge and skills (Schunk & Meece, 2005). The employee's values also play a role in learning, as learners will select tasks which they believe are important (Eccles *et al.*, 1998). Self-efficacy has been proven to enhance effort and performance (Gist,

Stevens & Bavetta, 1991; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Employees who have higher levels of confidence are more likely to engage in a task, irrespective of their abilities, and generalised self-efficacy signifies whether an employee is confident that he or she is capable of achievement, irrespective of the task (Chen, Gully & Eden, 2004). Employees with high generalised self-efficacy should embark on informal learning, as they are expected to trust that it has value, and are confident that they have the ability to enhance their skills (Noe *et al.*, 2013).

### *Learning and employability*

The individual difference standpoint highlights the importance of inherent individual characteristics that predispose employees to adaptability - this pronounces “who” is capable of adapting. The learning standpoint establishes the behaviours that employees authorise to become adaptive, or “how” employees become adaptive (Fugate *et al.*, 2004). In this light, the individual difference and learning perspectives are congruent with each other and demonstrate the co-operative and proactive nature of employability.

### *Learning and emotional intelligence*

Competence contributes to employees’ ability to cope and regulate emotions (Goleman, 1995). Zeidner (2013) therefore suggests that emotional intelligence is critical, and that training in schools, workplaces or psychiatric institutes can offer a valuable solution to the manifestations of personal problems at work. Researchers have supported the idea that the application of emotional intelligence by learners helps to achieve intellectual stability, develop the ability to interpret and conceptualise meaning, as well as to communicate and listen effectively (Jones & Abraham, 2008; Kavanagh *et al.*, 2009). In contrast, Goleman *et al.* (2013) contend that emotional intelligence is learnable and that the problem may be that some employees are lacking skills (personal competence; self-awareness and self-management, or social competence; social awareness or relationship management) in a particular domain of emotional intelligence.

Sheldon et al., (2014) found that some employees are unskilled, unaware or uninterested in learning, and this, related to their performance, may be due to their level of self-awareness about their own expertise and feedback. When given feedback, low performers disputed the accuracy of the feedback. Employees can learn, through the concept of self-awareness, that they can stimulate their emotional intelligence positively. Emmanuel et al., (2016) posit that by improving and developing individuals' capabilities (interpersonal skills, teamwork, communication and problem solving skills), employees' value to potential employers will increase, as it will enhance their intellectual capabilities, thereby making them more employable (Spowart, 2009). Seligman and Csikszentimihalyi (2000) argued that by encouraging positive emotional experiences, employees will learn to have more self-determination and independence in pursuing important goals. This can be achieved by considering personality traits directly related to emotional functioning (such as assertiveness and self-confidence), which we know can be adapted in some contexts.

### *Learning and career adaptability*

Research has revealed that employees have the inclination to learn and develop their competencies through career adaptability (Creed *et al.*, 2009; Cronshaw & Jethmalani, 2005; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; O'Connell *et al.*, 2008) and work engagement (Brown, 2009), and this can comprise of up-skilling, reskilling or perspective transition. On the other hand, Eraut (2009) suggests that it can encompass preparedness to engage in a wide range of activities, such as asking questions, getting information, finding key people to support you, listening and observing, learning from mistakes, giving and receiving feedback, trying things out, independent study, and working towards a qualification. Bimrose et al., (2011) argue that being self-directed in terms of taking advantage of learning opportunities is helpful for individual development.

## **3.6. RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **3.6.1. Research approach**

The researcher wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived work experiences of participants working in a foreign visa-processing unit that underwent significant change, as well as how they managed to cope. She also wanted to gain the participants' perspectives regarding how they believed they had improved their personal development. As a result, the study adopted a qualitative descriptive design from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, which was introduced by Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Exploratory studies are typically used when a researcher studies a new interest (Babbie, 2005). Although there is relevant literature on the study topic, there is a scarcity of qualitative research on the influence of psychosocial meta-capacities on learning capacity development. The use of qualitative research in this study was proposed to enable the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the knowledge and perceptions of the participants, who were part of organisational change (Polit & Beck, 2012).

A qualitative descriptive research design is an empirical method used to describe the participants' perceptions and experience of the world and its phenomena (Brink, 2009). Since there is sufficient quantitative research on one or more of the constructs of this study, a qualitative descriptive design was chosen, although one that is theoretical. It is limited in scope (e.g., sample size, data generation and analysis methods, and interpretation) to allow a clear description of a precise phenomenon or experience from the perspective of participants working in a foreign visa-processing unit. This design facilitates a comprehensive summary of the event in everyday terms (Sandelowski, 2000).

### **3.6.2. Research strategy**

This study was conducted to gain an in-depth understanding on an individual level in relation to the phenomenon under investigation. The research is based on identifying the experience of the individual as it is lived (subjective knowledge), which is acquired through subjective experience, and understanding the world from the

viewpoint of the individual. Therefore, the interpretivist approach was used in order to gain the necessary understanding and set the boundaries of this research (Thorne, 2000).

### **3.6.3. Research method**

In the next section, the setting of this study will be discussed.

#### *3.6.3.1. Research setting*

The research was conducted in a foreign visa-processing unit based in South Africa, which has undergone extensive organisational change over the last few years. The government invested hundreds of millions of dollars in order to transform its visa-processing offices into a convenient and paperless platform. Visa-processing staff were affected throughout the change process, as they had to adapt not only to the changes in terms of their individual roles, but also in terms of new systems, processes and procedures. Given the research objectives, the researcher targeted only those who had been exposed and had to adapt to the changes. This research setting was ideal, considering the objectives of the study. Both the researcher and participants are employed by the organisation, and this proved to be useful in terms of having insight into the significance of the change process, understanding the roles that were affected, and having generally observed the learning and flexibility that employees needed to display, in order to cope with the new ways of working.

#### *3.6.3.2. Entree and establishing researcher roles*

Informed consent was obtained from each participant. In addition, permission to conduct the research at the organisation was sought prior to the interviews. Since the researcher works for the organisation, she had easy access to the setting. The researcher was responsible for the research in its entirety, from conducting the interviews to transcribing and analysing the data, and reporting its findings, including limitations thereof.

#### *3.6.3.3. Sampling*

A convenience and purposeful sampling procedure was used in this study, which enabled the researcher to select participants according to pre-selected criteria (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). Participants who met the following criteria were included in the study: firstly, those who have worked for the organisation for at least five years between 2011 and 2016. The researcher chose this tenure because this is the period during which the change programme was implemented. Secondly, the participants are required to have a shared experience of the phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007). Lastly, only those who wished to participate in the study were selected.

Exclusion criteria included the following: firstly, those who were not affected by any of the changes, as it was noted that some positions remained the same. Secondly, anyone who has worked for the organisation for less than five years was excluded, as the researcher used her judgement to select participants who were exposed to the same level of change, as well as those who could potentially provide rich information about the phenomenon being studied (Babbie, 2010). Lastly, anyone who was not willing to participate in the study was also excluded.

A population of 15 persons met the criteria for this research study, and the researcher anticipated a population pool of 20 potential participants. She intended to interview 8 participants, but interviews ceased after 7 participants took part in this study. Nieuwenhuis (2010) proposed that a sample size can be relatively small (3), and the ultimate size will depend on the point of saturation (Holloway, 2005). This size was deemed to be acceptable (Morse, 1994), as the researcher wanted to gain a deeper understanding of participant experience and the factors that influence learning capacity development. Table 3.1 below provides an overview of the biographical data of the participants:

Table 3.1. Biographical data of participants

	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>
1	P1	Coloured	Male	31
2	P2	Black	Female	42
3	P3	White	Female	46

4	P4	Black	Female	37
5	P5	Black	Male	38
6	P6	White	Female	29
7	P7	Black	Female	51

#### 3.6.3.4. *Data collection and recording*

Conversational style, semi-structured interviews (Raworth *et al.*, 2012) were conducted. Data collection is an accurate, methodical gathering of information relevant to the research purpose (Burns & Grove, 2013). In this study, the researcher did some planning in preparation for the interviews. The interviews consisted of some standard questions, followed by probing and follow-up questions. An example of the questions asked is the following: “Can you tell me the story of how you experienced the change process?”

Interviews were scheduled with participants a few days in advance. Participants were informed about the research topic and assured that the information collected would be kept confidential and used for the sole purpose of this research. In an attempt to help participants to grasp the context of the research, a brief explanation of the background was provided. Participants were afforded an opportunity to ask questions. They were informed that the organisation had granted permission for the researcher to do the interviews on site, and were assured confidentiality (Babbie, 2005). Participants were also reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any point (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

The interviews were flexible, informal and conversational. In line with the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm, this interviewing technique allowed the researcher to explore the experiences (Van Manen, 1990) of the visa-processing staff during the change process. Questions were spontaneously generated in order to gain insight into the lived experience of the participants (Broom, 2005). Individual interviews were audio-recorded with permission of the participants. The interviews were later transcribed verbatim. Field notes were taken during the interview, in order

to capture the unique accounts of the participants' replies and reactions. This also enabled the researcher to validate their interpretations by referring back to their original responses (Botma, Greef, Mulaudzi & Wright, 2010). Each participant was assigned a response sheet, which was coded, so that the actual names of the participants were not recorded, in order to maintain confidentiality. The interviews were conducted in English in the office boardroom (the atmosphere was relaxed and free from interruptions). Interviews lasted from 45 to 75 minutes each. Sometimes, probing questions were asked to obtain further information. Overall, the participants were allowed sufficient latitude to relate their experiences in some depth. Participants were asked to sign a consent form and were again assured confidentially of the data collected during the interview. A digital voice recorder was used to collect the data, which was then transcribed verbatim. To limit the researcher's own bias and prejudice (Laverty, 2003), she sought clarity and understanding from the participants throughout the interviews. As such, the researcher became the key instrument for collecting and analysing the data (Terre Blanch *et al.*, 2007), and understood that her own prejudices could not be overlooked (Nieuwenhuis, 2010).

### *3.6.3.5. Data analysis and interpretation*

A simple thematic analysis approach (Krippendorff, 1980) was used in this study. This is a basic means of separating, organising and coding the information into thematic categories. This process involved identifying core themes or patterns and analysing and reporting on the themes (Polit & Beck, 2012). Thematic analysis is a means to identify, analyse and report patterns within the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). This information is considered to be rich data, which is further integrated into the various facets of the research topic. Qualitative data analysis is predominantly an inductive process, where the data is organised into categories and identifying patterns, and most categories and patterns materialise from the data prior to data collection (McMilan & Schumacher, 2001).

The researcher followed a simple data analysis procedure, as adopted by Krippendorff (1980):

- Verbatim transcription of individual interviews
- Initial reading of the transcripts, and loosely identifying any themes or patterns that emerge from the data
- Re-reading of the transcripts and annotation of any ideas
- Facilitating a micro analysis of the data
- Categorising any items, by grouping related items
- Scanning through the data to determine how information was grouped, and assigning a name to each theme that emerges
- Re-examining the transcripts: phase two process of scanning through the data and considering it based on the categories
- Constructing a formal name for each theme (focused on the underlying meaning of each theme)
- Reporting on each theme by illustrating with quotations from the original text, in order to assist in communicating meaning to the reader.

#### 3.6.3.6. *Strategies to ensure quality data*

Trustworthiness is a term used in the evaluation of qualitative research, when ensuring credibility, dependability and transferability. It is the level of confidence that qualitative researchers have in their data (Schreier, 2012). This research was predisposed towards ensuring scientific rigour and trustworthiness. Dependability is representative of reliability, a means to observe the same finding under similar circumstances (Polit & Beck, 2012). Therefore, the researcher clearly indicated exactly how the data was collected, analysed and interpreted (Kielhofner, 1982). It was not feasible to ensure the dependability of this research, purely because of the setting. However, the researcher provided an account of her decisions regarding the research design and methodology (Moretti *et al.*, 2011). She also used field notes to aid the interpretation of the data (Maree, 2010). Data records were stored in a locked cabinet, and were only accessible to the researcher. All electronic data was saved on a password-protected laptop, which only the researcher had access to. Credibility was ensured through the authorised participation of all parties (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Essentially, this is the extent to which the research is convincing and believable (Kelly, 2007). Throughout the interviews, the researcher checked with applicants to ensure that she understood them correctly, in order not to allow her

own interpretation to influence her understanding of what the participants were saying. Confirmability is representative of objectivity, and in this regard, the researcher clearly accounted for her own preconceptions, bias and the substantiation of findings, interpretations and recommendations through the use of theoretical data (Polit & Beck, 2012). Given the nature of the study, it will be difficult to generalise the findings of the research and guarantee transferability. However, the researcher has outlined the methodological approach followed in this study, from the setting to data collection and analysis.

#### *3.6.3.7. Ethics*

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the ethics review committee at UNISA. Thereafter, she obtained permission from the visa-processing office's Operations Manager to conduct research at the visa office. The participants were informed that they were free to participate in or withdraw from the interviews at any point in time. As indicated already, participants were briefed on the study and individual consent was obtained. The recordings and transcripts were saved on a personal password-protected laptop, and the researcher was the only one who could access the information. No assistant or transcriber was used. Data records were stored in a locked cabinet and were not accessible to anyone other than the researcher. All electronic data were saved on a password-protected laptop, which only the researcher had access to. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were completed. Given the nature of the study, confidentiality was assured and the researcher felt that the participants would speak more freely and openly about their experiences in the presence of only one person. The details of the participants were never recorded, in order to protect their identities and ensure confidentiality (Babie, 2005). Furthermore, each participant was treated with respect (Health Professions Act No.56 of 1974, 2006).

### **3.7. FINDINGS**

Participants provided insight into both negative and positive experiences during the change process, including the ways in which they felt they had adapted, and how

they learnt to cope with the changes. The findings were grouped into themes and categories, which are illustrated in Table 3.2 below, and were discussed afterwards. Some of the sub-themes implied more than one theme.

Table 3.2. Themes

Theme	Sub-theme
Self-efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doubting self</li> <li>• Beliefs about one's own ability to perform</li> </ul>
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning through social comparison</li> <li>• Lack of technical expertise</li> <li>• Selective tasks to manage anxiety</li> <li>• Taking the initiative to learn</li> </ul>
Exploration and experimentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning and using technology effectively</li> <li>• Taking the initiative to learn</li> </ul>
Procrastination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selective tasks to manage anxiety</li> <li>• Lack of technical expertise</li> </ul>
Emotional intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-awareness</li> <li>• Selective tasks to manage anxiety</li> </ul>
Supervisor and other support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervisor support system</li> <li>• Influence of others as a coping mechanism</li> </ul>

### 3.7.1. Lack of technical expertise

Participants found that they were able to absorb changes, depending on their level of expertise of the task or new process. They expressed feelings of doubt, difficulty and confidence when dealing with new processes of systems. It was clear that some participants found that their lack of personal expertise impacted their own confidence levels in terms of adjusting to the new process or system. On the other hand, some of the participants indicated that having some background information or knowledge on the system helped them become more accepting of the changes or processes, and boosted their confidence in dealing with the issue.

Participant (P2):

*“having knowledge on the subject matter is without a doubt important, otherwise I would not be confident that I could complete the task”*

From the statement above, it is clear that participant P2 inferred that she would have had the confidence to complete the task.

Participant (P4) suggested that not having any experience of the new systems created anxiety, and therefore lowered her confidence levels when attempting to work with the new system. The lack of knowledge about using the system meant that she doubted herself. This is what she said:

*“I was highly concerned that I did not know anything about the new system, if I had some experience using the system, I would understand how to use it and where to input the data. Since I did not know how to use the systems, I was setting myself up for failure”*

Participant (P5) confirmed that the lack of technical knowledge meant that he faced difficulty in dealing with some of the changes. He responded as follows:

*“I had no background knowledge on the visa processing of the different visa categories, therefore when the changes took place, I found it difficult to master the systems”*

Participant (P7) gave insight into her internal processes when dealing with the change, and it is evident that having some level of technical expertise, whether in terms of a process or the use of a new system, affected her confidence levels.

*“For me personally, I need to understand what I am required to do, I must know what systems to use and how to use the systems before I am confident that I will succeed. At times I prefer step by step instructions on what should be done”*

### **3.7.2. Influence of others**

At least half of the participants had strong coping abilities due to the forces that shaped their experience to date, including the influence of empowering figures in

their upbringing. One participant went as far as suggesting that the way in which she was brought up became part of her culture, which translated into the way in which she conducted herself at work. As a child, she was always encouraged to stretch herself and did her best to make her mother proud of her achievements. She has been applying this in her work environment successfully. Participant (P7) said:

*“We had a very strict up-bringing, especially my mother, she really encouraged me to stretch myself even as a child. I think it may be because I was the first born. I always did my best to do well so as not to disappoint her”*

Participant (P1) also suggested that the influence and support of his parents provided encouragement and gave him coping skills that he was able to apply successfully in his work. This is what he said:

*“I really have to say thanks to my parents. They went out of their way to give us the best that they could, even with my schooling, we went to the best of schools and they encouraged me to do well. When I struggled, they used to play games with me to help me understand different situations”*

One of the participants acknowledged her mother for the way in which she brought up her children. Participant (P6) also indicated that she appreciated the fact that her mother recognised that the children were not all the same, and not all of them were academics. However, she encouraged each of them to use their uniqueness to do their best to succeed in any situation.

*“My father passed away when I was very young but my mother raised us single-handedly. I am really proud of my mum, I can honestly say she did a good job with us. She wanted the best for all of us but she knew that we were all different and she stimulated us accordingly”*

### **3.7.3. Supervisor support system**

The theme of supervisor support came through twice, and it was evident that the support system in place had a real impact on the participants, to such an extent that they were both seeking alternative employment at the time of the interviews. Furthermore, both participants became emotional when expressing themselves. It was clear that the manner in which the supervisor displayed support for the

employees affected the ease with which the employees accepted some of the changes, including the ability to learn new tasks or processes quickly. The rapport between the supervisor and the employee in this instance hindered the ability of the employee to learn by doing, and made the employee feel demoralised for not being able to grasp the changes and move on. Participant (P2) said the following:

*“I think my manager doesn’t really understand or support me during these difficult times. It is not always easy dealing with the changes but if he had showed that he cared ...he really makes me feel worthless because he focusses on the mistakes”*

Participant (P1) even went as far as comparing the current supervisor with the previous one, and was keen to suggest that he would have had a different response if asked the same questions when he had a different supervisor. The relationship between the employee and the supervisor appeared to be at the point of no repair, as the employee was already, at that stage, contemplating alternative employment. The responses also provided insight into the employee’s feelings and perceptions that all the good work he did went unnoticed. P1 said:

*“If you had asked me these questions two years ago, I would have had a different response. Currently, I am on the verge of seeking employment outside the organization because the atmosphere and environment is not what it used to be. I feel unappreciated and he never acknowledges the good work that I have been doing”*

From these responses, it can be deduced that the supervisor plays a vital role in assisting employees to deal with change, whether through nimble learning or verbal encouragement. The perception that the supervisor did not care for the employees also influenced their ability or willingness to try hard to succeed.

#### **3.7.4. Taking the initiative to learn**

Each participant expressed some form of relief when they realised that they were able to grasp and succeed in completing a new task, whether it was taking the initiative to learn a new process or work with a new system. The information provided

by the employees clearly suggested that taking time to master a new skill or use a new system was the only way to ensure that the changes were successfully implemented. All participants confirmed that taking the initiative to learn, in their own way, was without a doubt a useful tool to ensure success. Participant (P1) responded by saying:

*“I had to figure it out for myself. I spent some time learning how to use the system”*

The formal training provided by the organisation was not always sufficient to ensure that the changes were well received. This appears to be especially true when training is provided in a group setting. However, learning by doing was necessary as described by participant (P2):

*“after the training provided I must usually try to do it practically because I may think I know what was discussed in the training but in practice I sometimes find some challenges. What I do to ensure my understanding of the training is to invest some time in doing some self-training”*

Participant (P3) indicated that she needed to familiarise herself with the new system to ensure confidence in using it and this could only be achieved by working with the system. She said:

*“I need to take time to play with the system a bit before I can say I use it”*

### **3.7.5. Learning through social comparison**

Learning through social comparison was mentioned by some participants, who found some degree of confidence in the fact that their peers were able to deal successfully with some of the changes. The progress and success of colleagues with new tasks served as motivation for employees to do well. There was also an inference that some employees became more engaged with learning in an environment where others were doing well. The success of colleagues had a positive effect on attempting the task with more confidence. Participant (P6) found confidence in the fact that her colleague was able to master the new system, and her response was as follows:

*“ Learning how to use the new online system was a little daunting at first but then I saw that XX [name withheld to protect privacy] quickly grasped how to use navigate through the different functions I became confident that I would not have any trouble using it”*

Participant (P1) provided similar feedback by stating the following:

*“issuing the e-visas wasn’t so straightforward but ja when I saw that she could do it, I knew that it would not really be a problem for me and I now I can tell you I’m good at it”*

### **3.7.7. Selective tasks to manage learning anxiety**

When participants found tasks to be complex or did not have confidence in completing it, they would be selective regarding what they did or procrastinate. In an attempt to avoid dealing with a complex task, employees should select tasks which they are confident that they can complete, or which they are good at. Participant (P3) would make the excuse that the tasks chosen to complete were more important than the complex tasks. This meant that the complex tasks were left for later, and were in some cases overlooked. P3 said:

*“I always left some of the work for last and never actually got around to complete it. I choose the tasks that I consider are important and that I have to complete immediately”*

It was evident that participant (P4) preferred to complete the tasks in which she was confident, rather than attempting the complex work:

*“I stuck with the work that I knew how to do and left the harder stuff....”*

The information provided by participants (P3) and (P5) was similar, in that they each made an excuse as to why they chose the easier tasks first. However, at the same time, they knew that they were being selective because of the complexity of some of the work:

*“ I think that my role has changed a lot and requires me to do a lot more work within the same time. I usually leave things for last, I tell myself I will do it*

*later and then I never get around to doing it. The tasks are sometimes complex”*

### **3.7.8. Beliefs about one’s ability to perform**

Participants had different beliefs about their own competence and their level of confidence, and this affected their coping ability. These responses provided a clear indication that employees’ beliefs about whether or not they could complete a task were vital for success. Their levels of confidence affected their ability to perform successfully. Their beliefs about their own abilities also affected how quickly they would learn to complete the task. Participant (P1) also suggested that the interest in the task was a contributor, and the terminology that he used to explain some of the difficulties is indicative of his frustration.

*“I did very well with the first set of changes because I was excited and really believed that I can do well but with the second or third changes I felt trapped and found it difficult to cope with. I tried my best, asked for additional support and then I was able to adjust to it”*

Participant (P3) had confidence that she could do well, but her response suggested that she wanted confirmation from her supervisor that she was completing the task correctly. A form of verbal encouragement was sought in this instance:

*“ I know that I can do well and it helps when my manager reassures me with positive feedback before and after the task”*

### **3.7.9. Learning and using technology effectively**

Participants felt that using new technology was daunting, and they expressed different levels of confidence in this regard. In some cases, participants resisted the use of new technology, not only because they were concerned about their ability to use it, but also because they were under the impression that the technology would eventually take over their jobs. However, when the participants learnt that the new systems were actually meant to help them with their work, they took extra care in ensuring that they invested time in learning how to use them. Once participants

understood the benefits of technology, they no longer resisted learning. Participant (P5) responded as follows:

*“...for me personally, I need to understand what I would get out of the system before I was able to accept and use it with confidence. Yes, I had to go through the training and the e-learning which I thought was a bit of an over-kill but once I started learning that the new health system is going to make my task easier, I had no problems with it. Off-course, it also meant that I must be able to use the system effectively and that means learning how to master the use of the system”*

### **3.7.10. Self-awareness**

Participants felt that when they were made aware of where they were not performing at the expected standards, they would try twice as hard to excel. They would also be aware of errors they were making beforehand, and do their best to rectify them. Some of them were of the opinion that they were doing the right thing. However, it was only upon being made aware of the issue that they were compliant with the new process. Promoting psychosocial capacities (such as confidence / self-efficacy) appeared to lead to greater self-awareness and eagerness for self-development. Participant (P3) replied by saying:

*“I thought I was following the process correctly, however after a quality check was completed, the feedback I got was that I was making some procedural errors....afterwards I was doing what was expected of me and maybe more. I want to exceed and will take time to improve”*

### **3.7.11. Doubting self**

Most participants doubted their ability to perform well in the new working environment. The daunting task of change or working with a new process meant that employees were concerned about doing the right thing. Their confidence levels dropped, as they were uncertain about whether they would be able to complete the task at hand. In contrast, a couple of employees felt that as long as they did their best to complete the task, they would be able to identify if they were on the right

track. They questioned their abilities at least once during the change process, and some of them asked the following questions:

Participant (P1):

*“Will I be able to succeed in this role? Will I be able to perform as well as XXX [name withheld to protect privacy]”*

Participant (P2):

*“Can I actually do this work, I ask myself will I manage?”*

Participant (P3):

*“Yo! Is this for me, am I going to meet the objectives of the new role?”*

### **3.8. DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to deliver a qualitative account of the influence of psychosocial meta-capacities on the capacity development of individuals in a fast-paced visa processing unit. This research was intended to provide some insight into the means through which individuals used their inherent resources to learn to adapt (Vogt, Jenny & Bauer, 2013). The major themes will be discussed in this section.

#### **3.8.1. Self-efficacy**

Every participant in this study referred to their beliefs about their projected performance, explaining how they think they would perform, and sometimes referring to how they felt. Most participants believed that they had the necessary abilities to perform well or learn a new task. They either felt excited about a new process or eager to learn something new, and importantly, when they had positive feelings, they had a tendency to do well in that particular task. In contrast, when they felt that the task was daunting or too complex to comprehend, they would not perform well. This is consistent with the seminal work by Bandura (1986), who posits that individuals are prone to anticipating outcomes based on their judgment of how well they will perform in a given context.

Participants also suggested that when they changed their mindset, took initiative and did their best to work hard at a particular task, and asked questions to ensure that they understood, then they would usually end up being capable of performing the task. Bandura (1981) argue that even if individuals doubt their capabilities to do well in a difficult task, and to work hard to meet the objectives of the task, they can actually build a strong sense of efficacy. This is because the more complex tasks provide much more information about one's ability to acquire skills and knowledge, compared to the less complex tasks. At least two participants displayed low levels of self-efficacy and a lack of ability regarding specific tasks. No matter how hard they tried or what additional support they received, they failed at the task. Locke et al., (1981) argues that the level of effort necessary to ensure success at a task will depend on the level of self-efficacy of the individual. For instance, if a task is seen to be difficult, extra effort will be required to achieve success, and this should therefore enhance self-efficacy. This implies that one's skills are not well developed. If the individual failed at the task, despite a high level of effort, this would indicate that the specific capabilities are lacking. Therefore, the effects of performance outcomes on self-efficacy can be curbed by the perceived difficulty of the task. Persuasive information, such as verbal encouragement, heightens the self-efficacy of the participants (Bandura, 1997), although this appears to be indicative of the age of the individual. For instance, millenials need encouragement to perform at high levels. Socioeconomic status also has an effect on an individual's ability to learn or develop their self-efficacy. In this regard, one of the participants reported that a colleague struggled endlessly, not only because of a lack of effort to embrace technology, such as using a smart phone or internet banking (Bandura, 1997), but also because she could not afford to buy all the new technologies (McLoyd, 1990).

### **3.8.2. Learning**

During the learning process, individuals acquire knowledge from others' performance through social comparison (Schunk & Meece, 2005). The individual who sees a colleague learning a specific task will believe that he/she can also learn it. This was evident in the response from participant 3, who thought that the changes to some of his work processes would be easy to master, after he witnessed his colleagues excelling. Participants felt that if they had prior knowledge or technical expertise with

regard to some of the new tasks, they would be able to do so much better at them. Requisite knowledge and skills are vital to ensure that individuals are performing at the required and expected levels (Schunk & Meece, 2005), as indicated by participants 3, 5 and 7.

Some of the participants wanted a step-by-step guide, so that they could understand exactly what needed to be done, have an overview of the technical skills required to complete the task, and be able to identify the appropriate methods for solving a complex task, in order to be highly successful in the workplace. Task complexity moderates the link between self-efficacy and performance in the workplace (Cherian & Jacobs, 2013). Participant 3 was not managing his work very well due to lack of prioritisation, and he believed that the tasks he chose were important (Eccles *et al.*, 1998). However, this may not necessarily be the correct way to prioritise tasks, which ultimately results in procrastination. While not all participants felt eagerness, some of them looked for a challenge and wanted to seek new ways to become more productive and improve their own abilities. Ames and Archer referred to this as individuals with learning orientation, who seek out challenges that offer them learning opportunities (Ames & Archer, 1988).

Furthermore, some of the participants concluded that the quality of the training material also influenced the ease of learning (Barnard *et al.*, 2013). Another sub-theme that emerged was informal learning. Each participant agreed that they could not be successful without going above and beyond the training provided by the organisation, which meant that in order to improve their skill set, they had to invest time in learning a particular task themselves (Briscoe, Hall & DeMuth, 2006). When participants understood and realised the benefits of technology for them personally, they became more accepting about learning how to use it (Barnard & Lloyd, 2010). The level of perceived task difficulty could be viewed differently once the individual established that given the opportunity to learn how to use the technology, their work would be so much easier to complete.

### **3.8.3. Exploration and experimentiaon**

All the participants explained that if they had difficulties understanding a new computer system, they had to take the initiative and invest their own time in learning how to navigate and use the system, even if it meant by trial and error. This is consistent with the findings of Barnard et al., (2013), who noted that exploration and experimentation is highly effective when learning how to use new technologies.

#### **3.8.4. Procrastination**

When the participants were aware that they needed to complete certain tasks, but were unable to find the self-motivation to do it (Ackerman & Gross, 2005), they procrastinated. They would find the task boring, unpleasant, difficult or not very stimulating. The effects of this could be poor performance (Downey & Stough, 2014). This behavior was mimicked by participant 3, when questioned about why she felt he was not doing so well with some of the changes.

#### **3.8.5. Supervisor and other support**

A few of the participants expressed the belief that their ability to learn to adapt was grounded in some of their upbringing, as supportive role models such as parents helped to build their confidence. As a result, they found it easier and were more confident during the change process, and their self-efficacy was developed and enhanced (Schunk & Miller, 2002). In contrast, two of the participants experienced difficulty, as they felt there was a lack of support from their manager, and therefore became demotivated. These results are in line with the research by Al-Eisa et al., (2009), who indicated that the motivation to learn was found to have a direct impact on the transfer of learning from the supervisor. These participants did not feel supported by their manager, and this affected their learning attitudes (Van Vianen *et al.*, 2011). They also demonstrated that they were not able to access their psychosocial resources (self-efficacy, emotional intelligence) at work, hence they did not have a high sense of self-worth (Hobfoll, 2002). If they had high levels of psychosocial resources, such as emotional intelligence, they may have been a little keener to seek feedback from their supervisors, which may have assisted them to

access relevant information in pursuit of personal and career success (Vandenberghe & Panaccio, 2012).

### **3.8.6. Emotional intelligence**

Participants who became more self-aware of their weaknesses were able to work on them to improve their performance (Di Fabio, 2011). This confirms the findings of Goleman (1998), who viewed emotional intelligence as a set of learned skills that could potentially result in success in the workplace or other social domains. One participant found creative ways to manage the new and challenging work, which signifies high levels of emotional intelligence (Bernaud & Loarer, 2014). Another participant indicated that he was not dealing with his new role effectively and always left complex tasks for last, but never actually got around to doing them (procrastination). This infers that low levels of emotional intelligence lead to poor performance (Downey & Stough, 2014).

## **3.9. CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that psychosocial meta-capacities such as self-efficacy and emotional intelligence can influence an individual's learning capacity development. This may not necessarily be able to be influenced directly, but the evidence suggests that there is a means to enhance capabilities, thereby ensuring improved performance.

The study further demonstrates that in order for individuals to perform well during change initiatives, they need to be confident about their abilities (Vakola, Oreg & Armenakis, 2013). It is also important to ensure that there is increased job satisfaction after organisational change (Nelson, Cooper & Jackson, 1995). Furthermore, these findings provided a qualitative perspective that has previously been confirmed quantitatively, in that individual beliefs, through the concept of self-efficacy, play an important role in an organisation's ability to manage change effectively (Vakola, 2014). The study seems to suggest that the **positive influences**

on learning capacity development include **self-efficacy** in the form of self beliefs about one's performance ability, the ability to take initiative, and learning orientation, for example, a sense of exploration, and **emotional intelligence** in the form of self-awareness in relation to what needs to happen, and the positive impact of social support systems, for example, supervisors, role models and fellow colleagues. **Negative influences** on learning capacity development seem to include the inability to manage **performance anxiety**, high levels of **self-doubt**, the lack of **technical expertise**, and **learning paralysis** in the form of procrastination and the lack of self motivation.

### **3.9.1. Limitations**

This research is not without limitations and its findings cannot be generalised. The sample size was capped at seven participants in a very unique environment, namely a foreign government visa-processing unit based in South Africa, which limits the generalisability of the findings. It was difficult to source a widely accepted definition of learning capacity development in the context of individuals. In addition, the researcher would have liked to delve a bit deeper into the subtle inferences of stress related to change and / or learning, as well as resistance to change. She tried to focus on the learning side, and may have lost sight of how stress affects learning during organisational change.

### **3.9.2. Recommendations**

It is recommended that this information be utilised by industrial and organisational psychologists, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the psychosocial meta-capacities that influence an individual's learning capacity development. This can be used not only in a change context, but also in learning and development strategies. Experiential learning should be the foundation of any learning process.

### **Recommendations for Industrial and Organisational Psychology**

As self-efficacy is proven to be an efficient and valuable resource to help individuals cope, learn and manage their performance, the findings have broad implications for

coaches, administrators and organisations at large. Trainers and coaches could develop individual self-efficacy by integrating the strategies based on Bandura's (1989) four sources of self-efficacy: mastery of experiences, modeling, social persuasion, and managing psychological arousal (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). Hill et al., (1987) posit that employee self-efficacy is linked to performance, including the ability to adapt to advanced technologies and to acquire additional skills (Mitchell *et al.*, 1994). Performance is influenced by overall self-efficacy (Cherian & Jacob, 2013). Individuals can be positively influenced to learn how to use new technologies, including older individuals. Research suggests that as long as there is an intention to learn, the individual will start to explore the possibilities of acquiring skills (Barnard *et al.*, 2013). This is particularly true when learning to use new technologies, and it is also prudent to be aware that the social environment (encouragement or discouragement) plays an important role in fostering the intention. As indicated by Cullen et al., (2014), individuals form their own judgements of the organisational support provided by the organisation. It is therefore appropriate for change leaders to keep checking with individuals, in order to keep track of their perceptions, especially during any learning processes. As previously indicated, those individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence could easily find creative ways of doing their work, while those with low levels of emotional intelligence procrastinated, resulting in poor performance (Downey & Stough, 2014). Training and development strategies (not excluding change leads/agents) should consider the extent to which the enhancement of psychosocial meta-capacities should gain currency, and at which point in time, thereby ensuring sustained employee performance and the ability to keep abreast of changes, while still meeting the objectives of the organisation.

### **Recommendations for future research**

This research investigated the individual, and it is recommended that future research focus on group dynamics, and on determining if any system psychodynamic experiences could result in overall organisational success. Future research should also consider a network of psychosocial meta-capacities to identify and design a framework for learning and development strategies for organisations that are planning to implement a significant change programme. It may not be possible to predict exactly which psychosocial meta-capacities will be sufficient to sustain

employee performance or learning capacity development over time. However, given the speed of social and technological advancements, this cannot be ignored. Future research should continue to focus on the need to gain a deeper understanding of psychosocial meta-capacities, including its relevance to well-being, and how it can be manipulated to enhance learning capacity development during organisational change. Stress and resistance to change should also be considered.

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## **CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter deals with the conclusions, limitations and recommendations for future research.

### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

This section clarifies both the general and specific aims of this research. The general aim of this study was to explore the influence of psychosocial meta-capacities on the learning capacity development of employees in a foreign government agency.

The specific aims relating to the literature review were:

- To conceptualise the construct of psychosocial meta-capacities in the literature.
- To conceptualise the construct of learning capacity development in the literature.
- To explore the theoretical relationship between psychosocial meta-capacities and learning capacity development.

The specific aims relating to the empirical study were:

- To explore the influence of psychosocial meta-capacities on individual employees' learning capacity development.
- To make recommendations for the discipline of industrial and organisational psychology and for future research, based on the findings of this study.

This research reports that psychosocial meta-capacities have an influence on learning capacity development, with particular reference to self-efficacy and emotional intelligence, which have been found to influence an individual's learning capacity development. The setting for this study must be noted because it considered how individuals' psychosocial meta-capacities influenced learning capacity development in an organisational change environment. The evidence appears to suggest that learning can be influenced, sometimes not directly, but that capabilities can be enhanced to ensure improved performance. A key finding also

confirms that individuals can perform well if they are confident about their abilities, thereby ensuring increased job satisfaction, even after organisational change takes place.

#### **4.1.1. CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW**

##### *4.1.1.1. Specific aim 1: To conceptualise psychosocial meta-capacities in the literature.*

Psychosocial meta-capacities are the social skills that individuals possess that allow them to effectively construe and manage social interactions (Witt & Ferris, 2003), which can influence learning capacity development. It is recognised that changing environments translate into anxiety (Grupe & Nitschke, 2013), but individuals have the essential psychosocial meta-capacities to deal with these issues. Performance can be enhanced (Ashford & Black, 1996), proactivity can bring about perceived control (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), which positively influences individual coping in times of organisational change, and also reduces uncertainty (Ashford & Black, 1996).

Intrinsic individual resources (such as self-efficacy) are interconnected with changing outcomes considered to be adaptive for career development. By representing the common contribution of emotional intelligence and self-perceived employability, social and emotional competencies for career growth and work success are emphasised (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2015). Having diverse skills is strongly linked to employability, which can be positively shaped if one becomes aware of the vital role of skills and emotional intelligence (Aziz, 2017).

Those with a range of psychological career resources are able to adapt well to unpredictable career circumstances (Fugate *et al.*, 2004; McArdle, Waters, Briscoe & Hall, 2007; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), with developed work engagement and work commitment (Tladinyane *et al.*, 2013). Career adaptability is the self-regulatory psychosocial resources that individuals need to successfully achieve current and career transitions (Savickas, 2013).

Lifelong learning plays a vital role in society because it increases the employability of adults, economic growth, personal and/or professional development, and social inclusion (Kitiashvili & Tasker, 2016). Coetzee et al., (2015) supported the finding of Hall (2013) that the view of lifelong learning has quickly become a vital player in career meta-capacity for sustaining employability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both organisations and individuals can benefit from information learning, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary world, which is fast-paced and volatile. For the organisation, it is a mechanism whereby individuals constantly apprise their knowledge and skills to acclimatise to an ever-changing environment, including the use of new technologies. Brophy (1983) argues that self-efficacy is a variable of motivated learning, which is the impetus to procure skills and knowledge, and not simply to finalise tasks.

It is also important to recognise that, as indicated by Siemens (2014), technology is rewiring our brains. Therefore, the apparatuses that we use define and shape our thinking must be reviewed and considered. Older individuals may presume that their capacities are diminishing due to their age, as found by Isaksson and Johansson (2000). This could in turn have an adverse effect on their self-efficacy in learning, and they may therefore not be as eager to partake in learning actions (Maurer, Barbeite, Weiss & Lippstreu, 2008).

#### *4.1.1.2. Specific aim 2 : To conceptualise learning capacity development in the literature.*

Based on the literature, the researcher was able to define *learning capacity development* as a process whereby individuals unremittingly increase their capabilities, through the application of knowledge that they acquired through experience, in order to identify and effectively deal with developmental challenges. The literature defines capacity development as the process whereby individuals, groups or organisations can increase their capacity, an internal process of growth and development (Horton, 2002), to meet challenges in a sustainable manner (Morgan, 1997). Learning by doing appears to be a fundamentally effective means to increase the individual's ability to use their current capabilities (Lavergne & Saxby,

2001; Horton, 2002), which can become very powerful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world of work (Reynolds, 2017).

There are mechanisms that can be used for developing capacities, which can be in the form of training, learning from experience, mentoring or general dissemination of information (Horton, 2002). According to Wenger and Snyder (2000), capacity development can be stimulated through the exchange of information and experiences amongst individuals who are working on similar tasks in different contexts, which can be achieved through workshops or networks.

The contemporary world of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is fast-paced, and we need to remember that individuals have different coping strategies to deal with the associated changes (Vogt, Jenny & Bauer, 2013). The contemporary world requires individuals who are employable, self-regulating and enthusiastic about learning (Van der Heijde, 2014). Globalisation is combined with technological advances and is necessary. However, in some parts of the world, individuals may be digitally excluded or have limited exposure or experience (Barnard, Bradley, Hodgson & Lloyd, 2013).

*4.1.1.3. Specific aim 3: To explore the theoretical relationship between psychosocial meta-capacities and learning capacity development.*

Organisations have a responsibility to help individuals to utilise their innate abilities in order to succeed (Zimmerman, 2000). Shipton et al., (2016) contend that individuals differ in their appreciation of learning opportunities, contextual understanding, and their capacity to nurture relationships and networks to support their learning and development. As a performance-based measure of perceived capability, self-efficacy changes conceptually and psychometrically from correlated motivational constructs, such as outcome expectations, self-concept or even locus of control (Zimmerman, 2000).

Although self-efficacy is an essential psychosocial meta-capacity, it is not the only influence on learning or achievement. In this regard, an overdose of self-efficacy will not necessarily result in competent performance, without the requisite knowledge

and skills (Schunk & Meece, 2005). The research indicates that individuals who have more confidence are more likely to participate in a task, regardless of their abilities, and we know that self-efficacy can predict both effort and performance (Gist, Stevens & Bavetta, 1991; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

As noted by Goleman et al., (2013), emotional intelligence is also learnable, and can be developed by looking at either personal competence (self-awareness and self-management) or social competence (social awareness and relationship management). This will help individuals to be more effective in their roles and positively influence their emotional intelligence. What appears to be highlighted in the literature is that career adaptability is an important psychosocial career meta-capacity to increase during a change process. A key element of career adaptive behaviour is exploration, which is defined generally in terms of career exploration, self-exploration and environmental exploration (Blustein, 1997; Creed *et al.*, 2009; Duffy, 2010; Patton *et al.*, 2004; Super, 1988; Zikic & Klehe, 2006).

#### **4.1.2. CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE EMPIRICAL STUDY**

##### *4.1.2.1. Specific empirical aim 1: To explore the influence of psychosocial meta-capacities on individual employees' learning capacity development.*

This study confirms previous qualitative research and has provided a deeper understanding of how psychosocial meta-capacities can influence an individual's capacity development. As we move increasingly into the contemporary world of work, and as globalisation and technological advances take over, it is important that we know how to deal with the individuals who appear to be stuck in the traditional ways of working. It would appear that experiential learning should be the foundation of any learning process for this cohort of individuals. Hill et al., (1987) posit that employee self-efficacy is linked to performance, including the ability to adapt to advanced technologies and to acquire additional skills (Mitchell *et al.*, 1994). Performance is influenced by overall self-efficacy (Cherian & Jacob, 2013).

Individuals can be positively encouraged to learn how to use new technologies, including older individuals. Research suggests that as long as there is an intention to learn, the individual will start to explore the possibilities of acquiring the skills (Barnard *et al.*, 2013). This is particularly true when learning to use new technologies, and it is also prudent to be aware that the social environment (encouragement or discouragement) plays an important role in fostering the intention.

As indicated by Cullen *et al.*, (2014), individuals form their own judgements of the organisational support provided by the organisation. It is therefore appropriate for change leaders to keep checking with individuals to keep track of their perceptions, especially during any learning processes. As previously indicated, those individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence could easily find creative ways of doing their work, while those with low levels of emotional intelligence procrastinated, resulting in poor performance (Downey & Stough, 2014).

*4.1.2.2. Specific empirical aim 2: To make recommendations for the discipline of Industrial and Organisational Psychology and future research based on the findings of this study.*

The field of industrial and organisational psychology has a lot to offer in terms of aiding organisations and individual employees to maintain performance during and after any significant change. The focus of future investigations should be on tapping into the psychosocial meta-capacities that influence learning capacity development, not only to help individuals to maintain a certain level of productivity, but also to enable organisations to gain insight into what individuals experience, the factors that influence their learning, and their ability to adapt to ongoing change. This study should be repeated on a larger scale and in a different organisational setting, in order to determine if the same conclusions are reached. Given the ongoing changes in the way in which we work, this could add real value.

This study investigated the individual, and it is recommended that future research focuses on group dynamics, and on determining if any system psychodynamic experiences could result in overall organisational success. Future research should

also consider a network of psychosocial meta-capacities to identify and design a framework for learning and development strategies for organisations planning to implement a significant change programme.

As self-efficacy is proven to be an effective and valuable resource for assisting individuals to cope, learn and manage their performance, the findings have broad implications for coaches, administrators and organisations at large. Trainers and coaches could develop individual self-efficacy by integrating the strategies based on Bandura's (1989) four sources of self-efficacy: mastery of experiences, modeling, social persuasion, and managing psychological arousal (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013).

## **4.2. LIMITATIONS**

This research is not without limitations, and its findings cannot be generalised. The sample size was capped at seven participants in a very unique environment, namely a foreign government visa-processing unit based in South Africa, which limits the generalisability of the findings. This study was conducted at a very specific point of time during the change process, and this may have an effect on the consistency of the results. It is possible that if the study was conducted at a different point of time, the results may be different. It was difficult to source a widely accepted definition of learning capacity development in the context of individuals. The researcher would have liked to delve a bit deeper into the subtle inferences of stress related to change and / or learning, as well as resistance to change. She tried to focus on the learning side of things, and may have lost sight of how stress affects learning during organisational change.

## **4.3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the findings of this study be utilised by industrial and organisational psychologists to gain a deeper understanding of the psychosocial meta-capacities that influence an individual's learning capacity development. This

could be used not only in a change context, but also in learning and development strategies. Experiential learning should be the foundation of any learning process.

### **Recommendations for Industrial and Organisational Psychology**

As self-efficacy is proven to be an efficient and valuable resource for helping individuals cope, learn and manage their performance, the findings have broad implications for coaches, administrators and organisations at large. Trainers and coaches could develop individual self-efficacy by integrating strategies based on Bandura's (1989) four sources of self-efficacy: mastery of experiences, modeling, social persuasion, and managing psychological arousal (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). Hill et al., (1987) posit that employee self-efficacy is linked to performance, including the ability to adapt to advanced technologies and to acquire additional skills (Mitchell *et al.*, 1994). Performance is influenced by overall self-efficacy (Cherian & Jacob, 2013). Individuals can be positively encouraged to learn how to use new technologies, including older individuals. Research suggests that as long as there is an intention to learn, the individual will start to explore the possibilities of acquiring skills (Barnard *et al.*, 2013). This is particularly true when learning to use new technologies, and it is also prudent to be aware that the social environment (encouragement or discouragement) plays an important role in fostering the intention. As indicated by Cullen et al., (2014), individuals form their own judgements of the organisational support provided by the organisation. It is therefore appropriate for change leaders to keep checking with individuals, in order to keep track of their perceptions, especially during any learning processes. As previously indicated, those individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence could easily find creative ways of doing their work, while those with low levels of emotional intelligence procrastinated, leading to poor performance (Downey & Stough, 2014). Training and development strategies (not excluding change leads/agents) should consider the extent to which the enhancement of psychosocial meta-capacities should gain currency, and at which point in time. This will ensure sustained employee performance and the ability to keep abreast of changes, while still meeting the objectives of the organisation.

### **Recommendations for future research**

This research investigated the individual, and it is recommended that future research focus on group dynamics and on determining if any system psychodynamic experiences could result in overall organisational success. Future research should also consider a network of psychosocial meta-capacities to identify and design a framework for learning and development strategies for organisations planning to implement a significant change programme. It may not be possible to predict exactly which psychosocial meta-capacities will be sufficient to sustain employee performance or learning capacity development over time. However, given the speed of social and technological advancements, this cannot be ignored. Future research should continue to focus on the need to gain a deeper understanding of psychosocial meta-capacities, including its relevance to well-being, and how it can be manipulated to enhance learning capacity development during organisational change. Stress and resistance to change should also be considered.

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