SENSE OF COHERENCE, SELF-EFFICACY AND JOB PERFORMANCE IN THE RECRUITMENT INDUSTRY

by

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DECLARATION OF OWN WORK

I, Calum Bruce McComb (student number 3603-122-4), declare that "Sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance in the recruitment industry" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted from have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SUMMARY

Recruitment consultants today are faced with considerable stress and challenges as a result of their work. They must cope effectively with these challenges in order to deliver effective job performance, which is crucial to an organisation's survival. In this study the relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance amongst recruitment consultants was investigated.

The Orientation to Life Questionnaire, Generalised Self-efficacy Scale and a job performance measure comprising key performance indicators were used. The study was conducted with 99 recruitment consultants at a national recruitment organisation in South Africa.

While a theoretical relationship was determined, this was not supported by the empirical investigation. Relationships did, however, emerge for the comprehensibility component of sense of coherence to job performance total and for two of its dimensions (namely customer service and productivity). A regression model, comprising comprehensibility and meaningfulness, emerged as a significant predictor of total job performance.

Key words: Recruitment industry, job performance, positive psychology, sense of coherence, self-efficacy

CHAPTER 1: SCIENITIFIC ORIENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

This dissertation focuses on sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance in the recruitment industry. This first chapter contains the background to and motivation for the research, the problem statement, the aims, the paradigm perspective, the research design and method, and the chapter layout.

1.1   BACKGROUND TO AND MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

Turbulence and uncertainty in the international economic climate have been mirrored in South Africa over the past couple of years (Barnard, Peters & Muller, 2010). Towards the end of 2008, approximately a year after the start of the slump in the American economy and the implosion of other economies, the South African economy started to nose-dive at a breathtaking speed. The hyped up (fictitious) boom of recent years simply became unsustainable (Jacobs, 2009). On top of the economic recession, South Africa is experiencing a general skills crisis (especially with regard to the retention of top talent or "knowledge workers"). This "brain drain" leads to the depletion or loss of intellectual and technical personnel, and has a negative outcome for the economic and social growth of the country (Du Preez, 2002). The above challenges impact the recruitment industry in South Africa in a number of ways.

According to Mulenga and Van Lill (2007), a census of the recruitment and placement agency industry was last conducted in 1993 when registered organisations in the sector were surveyed by the Central Statistical Service (CSS). The report identified 677 registered agencies. Currently, it is difficult to ascertain the size of the recruitment agency industry as no empirical evidence of organisations is available from data sources at the Department of Trade and Industry, Statistics South Africa or the Department of Labour (Mulenga & Van Lill, 2007). Today newspapers and internet-based recruitment sites are littered with recruitment agency adverts. One can only speculate that the economic boom that was experienced in South Africa from the mid-1990s to around the mid-2000s might have fuelled the number of new recruitment agencies opening their doors; however, in the light of

today's economic climate, it seems obvious that the exponential mushrooming of this industry can only halt its growth – and then dry out, characterised by a fiercely competitive environment.

The work environment in which employees currently function demands more of them than it did in any previous period (Storm & Rothmann, 2003). The saturation of the recruitment industry in a time of economic recession, together with a shortage of skilled candidates associated with the trend of emigrating knowledge workers, contribute significantly to the challenges and stress of being a recruitment consultant in South Africa today. In an interview, S Alcock (personal communication, 16 June 2010), a recruitment specialist of 13 years, put forth her opinion that the abovementioned stressors may have a direct bearing on the job performance of recruitment consultants. She suggested that consultants who have the ability to cope with and manage the stresses associated with their job may perform better than those who do not.

Antonovsky (1979) presented the salutogenic paradigm in an effort to determine why some individuals remain in good health despite having to cope with ever-present challenges. Salutogenesis is the study of the origins of health – originating from "*salus*" (Latin, meaning "health") and "*genesis*" (Greek, meaning "origin") (Antonovsky, 1979). The presence of salutogenic constructs signifies a person's ability to cope with change – not only in the most effective way, but also simultaneously minimising stress (Antonovsky, 1979). Strümpfer (1995) broadened this paradigm to include sources of strength and named it fortigenesis – originating from "*forte*" (Latin for "strength") and "*genesis*". Wissing and Van Eeden (1997) developed these paradigms further to also focus on the nature, dynamics and enhancement of psychological wellbeing, and named it psychofortology (the science of psychological strengths). Today all of these paradigms fall under the umbrella of positive psychology, the movement towards acknowledging, understanding and enhancing the positive aspects of psychological functioning (Guse, 2010).

Many constructs have been proposed to conceptualise aspects of positive psychology, two of which are sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1979; 1987; 1993; 1996) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; 1999). According to Antonovsky (1996), the

sense of coherence construct represents a generalised orientation toward the world which perceives it, on a continuum, as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. Self-efficacy refers to individuals' belief that they can successfully perform the behaviour required for a specific task. It is a relatively enduring set of beliefs that one can cope effectively in a broad range of situations (Bandura, 1982).

The main objective of this study was to determine the relationship between the two positive psychology constructs (sense of coherence and self-efficacy) and job performance in the context of the recruitment industry. In pursuit of this objective, this study investigated the relationship between the two positive psychology constructs and job performance in order to pinpoint effective predictors of successful job performance for recruitment consultants. If a relationship between the positive psychology constructs and job performance was found, the results could be used for recruitment, selection and development purposes for recruitment consultants.

1.2   PROBLEM STATEMENT

The world of work is as dynamic as ever, with dramatic changes underway that will affect employees, managers and consumers for years to come. Whether publicly traded or privately held, large or small, domestic or global, the world of work is changing dramatically (Cascio, 2009). New technologies, the globalisation of markets, and the changing needs and values of today's employees require organisations to adapt in order to remain competitive (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Organisations need to recruit and select employees who are most likely to deliver on the performance levels required by the organisation to ensure the overall performance and thus competitiveness of the organisation as a whole.

Job performance has captured the interest of industrial psychologist for decades, with much research done on personality as a predictor of job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003; Sutherland, De Bruin & Crous, 2007; Tett, Jackson & Rothstein, 1991) as well as cognition (Kuncel, Hezlett & Ones, 2004; Schmidt & Hunter, 2004), situations (Lievens & Peeters, 2008; McDaniel, Finnegan, Morgeson, Campion & Braverman, 2001) and various other presupposed antecedents.

Foxcroft and Roodt (2005) distinguish between an input-based approach and an output-based approach to personnel selection. According to the in-put based approach, personality traits and personal characteristics are matched in terms of what is required for the job; according to the output-based approach, individuals are measured in terms of competencies that are required in relation to the output of a job. It is with the assumption that the stressors of being a recruitment consultant today may have a direct bearing on their job performance that, from an input-based approach to selection, measures of psychological strength may form the individual characteristics or personality traits required for the job. From an out-put based approach to selection, psychological strength may be viewed as a necessary competency of a recruitment consultant in today's business climate (with job performance being the output).

Regardless of the approach one takes to selection, in the light of the stressors imposed on recruitment consultants in the industry today, the question of how psychological strength relates to job performance is one that must be asked. In order to survive and even thrive in such a competitive working environment, surely some ability to cope and manage stressors is a prerequisite and necessity for effective job performance. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy (as positive psychology constructs) and job performance among a group of recruitment consultants.

Based on the problem described above, this research was aimed at investigating and reporting on the following questions:

- How is sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance conceptualised in the literature?
- What is the empirical relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance?
- Can sense of coherence predict job performance?
- Can self-efficacy predict job performance?
- What are the levels of sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance in the sample group?

- Do biographical variables such as age, gender, job type, length of service, and qualification determine different levels of sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance?

1.3 AIMS

1.3.1 General aim

The general aim of this research was to investigate the relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance.

1.3.2 Specific aims

The specific theoretical aims of the research were to:

1. conceptualise the constructs of sense of coherence and self-efficacy in the literature;
2. conceptualise job performance in the literature;
3. determine the theoretical relationship between the three constructs.

The specific empirical aims of the research were to:

1. determine the relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy (if any) and job performance;
2. establish whether sense of coherence and its components can be viewed as a predictor of job performance;
3. establish whether self-efficacy can be viewed as a predictor of job performance;
4. establish if biographical variables report different levels of sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance;
5. initiate recommendations on the basis of the research findings and to stimulate future research.

1.4   THE PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE

The paradigm perspective refers to the intellectual climate or variety of meta-theoretical, theoretical and methodological beliefs and assumptions underlying the theories and models that form the definitive context of a study (Mouton & Marais, 1990). What follows is a discussion on the relevant paradigms in the research as well as the metatheoretical statements, behavioural models and theories, applicable concepts and constructs, methodological convictions and the central hypothesis.

1.4.1   Relevant paradigms

The literature review on sense of coherence and self-efficacy is presented from the positive psychology paradigm, while the literature review on job performance is presented from the behaviourist paradigm. The empirical study is presented from the functionalist paradigm. The reader will find a brief discussion and the assumptions of each of the relevant paradigms below.

1.4.1.1 Positive psychology paradigm

Positive psychology is defined as the scientific study of ordinary, positive, subjective human strengths, virtues, experiences and functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The label "positive psychology" represents the efforts of professionals to help people to optimise human functioning by acknowledging strengths as well as deficiencies and environmental "resources" in addition to stressors (Wright & Lopez, 2009).

Any view of science can be described in terms of four points, namely: (1) the prescriptions it makes on the object that is studied, (2) the methods used, (3) the thinking that directs the theoretical explanation of the phenomena that are studied and (4) the goal of the scientific endeavour (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2003). Below are the applicable assumptions of positive psychology in the context of these four points:

- According to Peterson (2009), positive psychologists concern themselves with four major topics of study: (1) positive experiences like happiness, zest and flow; (2) more enduring psychological traits like talents, interests and strengths of character; (3) positive relationships between friends, family members and colleagues; and (4) positive institutions.

- Positive psychology is grounded in traditional science and tries to adapt what is best in the scientific method to the unique problems that human behaviour presents to those who wish to understand it in all its complexity (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

- A central thesis of positive psychology is that stressors are omnipresent in human existence and even with a high stressor load, many people survive and even cope well (Antonovsky, 1979).

- Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) present the idea of prevention as the foreground of positive psychology. It is assumed that human strengths act as buffers against stressors.

- Duckworth, Steen and Seligman (2005) point out an underlying assumption of positive psychology: that positive experiences and traits are not necessarily slave processes to some negative state or trait. Sometimes positive emotions and traits are simply the other end of some bipolar dimension, but often the positive is not yoked to the negative.

- The relief of suffering does not lead to well-being; it only removes one of the barriers to well-being. Well-being is a process over and above the absence of depression, anxiety and anger (Duckworth *et al.*, 2005).

- The goal of positive psychology is achieved through a science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits and positive institutions to improve quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

- Positive psychologists believe that one of the best ways to remedy problems is to help individuals identify what they do well and then to use these skills to address what they do not do well. Even if problems cannot be resolved, the perspective of positive psychology asserts that there are many routes to a good life. The positive psychology point is to write off no one (Peterson, 2009).

Strümpfer (2003) anchors four concepts which appear to form the backbone of positive psychology today: (1) an awareness of the need to focus not only on illness but also on health; (2) the study of health or human strength; (3) a focus on virtues and character (such as reason) as measures of strength; and (4) the idea of prevention of illness by building strength or resilience. He demonstrates that these are not new thoughts or ideas, but ones that can be traced back to ancient times and civilisations. Positive psychology today endeavours to create a science based on sound empirically-based research.

Sense of coherence and self-efficacy in this study are presented through the positive psychology paradigm.

1.4.1.2 Behaviourist paradigm

Meyer *et al.* (2003) present the assumptions of behaviourism in terms of four points: (1) the object of study, (2) the methods used for the study, (3) the thinking that directs the theoretical explanation of the phenomena that are studied, and (4) the goal of the study. The applicable assumptions are listed below.

- Behaviourism adopts a positivist (knowable matters) and empiricist (perceived with the senses) point of view and thus observable behaviour is the object of study.
- Behaviourism accepts that objective, sensory perception is the only reliable method of accumulating knowledge. Behaviourism is thus entirely objective.
- Behaviourism applies elementalist methods of explanation to psychology and views behaviour as consisting of two types of elements, namely stimuli and responses, which are combined with one another through the organism's learning experiences.
- Behaviourism is concerned with finding out what factors determine human behaviour, the goal being to use this knowledge to predict and control human behaviour.

Job performance in this study is presented through the behaviourist paradigm.

1.4.1.3 Functionalist paradigm

Burrell and Morgan (1979) introduced their typology of paradigms for analysing social and organisational theory. The functionalist paradigm was one of four in their typology. The functionalist paradigm is concerned with providing explanations of the status quo, social order, social integration, consensus, need satisfaction and rational choice. It seeks to explain how the individual elements of a social system interact to form an integrated whole. This has been the primary paradigm for organisational study (Goles & Hirscheim, 2000). Functionalism concentrates on the functions and dynamics of psychological processes rather than on the study of non-observable structural elements (Meyer *et al.*, 2003). According to Burrell and Morgan (1979), the functionalist paradigm is based on objective and regulative assumptions about the nature of social science and society. These assumptions are listed below.

- Reality is external to the individual. It is a "given" (realism).
- Researchers focus on empirical evidence and hypothesis testing, and look for fundamental laws and causal relationships (positivism).
- Human beings are products of their environments (determinism).
- Operationalising and measuring constructs, along with quantitative analysis techniques and hypothesis testing, will uncover universal laws that explain and govern reality (nomothetic).
- Society tends towards unity and cohesion.
- Society forces one to uphold the status quo.

The empirical investigation which forms part of this study is presented according to the functionalist paradigm.

1.4.2 Metatheoretical statements

Metatheoretical statements are an important category of the assumptions that underlie the theories, models and paradigms which form the context of the research. Metatheoretical values or beliefs create the intellectual climate of a particular

discipline in the social sciences (Mouton & Marais, 1990, p. 21). The meta-theoretical statements for this research are provided below.

1.4.2.1 Industrial psychology

According to Muchinsky, Kriek and Schreuder (2005, p. 2), industrial psychology as a speciality area has a more restricted definition than psychology as a whole. They define industrial psychology as "the scientific study of people within their work environment".

Industrial and organisational psychology as a science had its origins about a century ago when psychologists in the United States of America started to use their insight into human behaviour to address workplace-related problems, such as finding the right person for a job. The discipline has grown and expanded its initial problem-focused approach to embrace a broader domain of interest that currently comprises six widely acknowledged subfields: personnel psychology, organisational psychology, career psychology, consumer psychology, ergonomics and psychometrics (Barnard & Fourie, 2007). This research falls within the speciality area of industrial psychology.

1.4.2.2 Personnel psychology

Personnel psychology is a subfield within industrial and organisational psychology. It is an applied discipline that focuses on individual differences in behaviour and job performance and on methods of measuring and predicting such differences. Some of the major areas of interest to personnel psychologists include job analysis and job evaluation; recruitment, screening and selection; training and development; and performance management (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005, p. 4). Job performance, one of the three constructs measured in this research, falls within the personnel psychology subfield of industrial psychology.

1.4.2.3 Organisational behaviour

Organisational behaviour can be defined as the understanding, prediction and management of human behaviour in organisations (Luthans, 2008, p. 19). Job performance, the human behaviour investigated in this research, elicits organisational behaviour as a relevant subfield of industrial psychology in this study.

1.4.2.4 Psychometrics

In essence, tools are available to make it possible to assess (measure) human behaviour. To ensure that the measurement is valid and reliable, a body of theory and research regarding the scientific measurement principles that are applied to the measurement of psychological characteristics has evolved over time. This sub-field of psychology is known as psychometrics. Psychometrics refers to the systematic and scientific way in which psychological measures are developed and the technical standards (e.g. validity and reliability) required of measures (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2005, p. 3). Sense of coherence and self-efficacy, the positive psychology constructs in this research, are measured by means of psychometrics.

1.4.3 Theoretical models

The literature review on sense of coherence and self-efficacy is presented from the positive psychology perspective; however, more specifically and under the umbrella of positive psychology, Antonovsky's (1979) model of sense of coherence is presented from the salutogenic perspective and Bandura's (1977) model of self-efficacy is presented within the social cognitive perspective. Job performance in the literature review is discussed with regard to the models of Blumberg and Pringle (1982); Campbell, McCloy, Oppler and Sager (1993); and Johnson (2003).

1.4.4 Applicable concepts and constructs

The following concepts and constructs are applicable to the research.

1.4.4.1   Sense of coherence

Antonovsky (1987, p. 19) defines sense of coherence as a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring through dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli that derive from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable and explicable; (2) the resources are available for one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges that are worthy of investment and engagement.

Sense of coherence can be broken down into the following three components.

(1)   Comprehensibility

Comprehensibility refers to the idea that things make sense to a person (that is, things that happen make sense and the world is not just a mass of random happenings) (Antonovsky, 1987). Comprehensibility is the belief that challenges are understood (Antonovsky, 1996).

(2)   Manageability

Manageability refers to the belief that sufficient resources to cope are available (Antonovsky, 1996). It is the idea that things can be handled, no matter what happens (that is, people feel they can cope with the things that are happening in their lives) (Antonovsky, 1987).

(3)   Meaningfulness

Meaningfulness is the motivational component of sense of coherence. It refers to the idea that things generally have meaning for a person and the person is thus willing to invest time in and spend energy on any particular activity (Antonovsky, 1987). The person with a strong sense of coherence will wish to be motivated to cope (Antonovsky, 1996).

1.4.4.2 Self-efficacy

Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's judgments of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance. It is concerned not with the skills one has, but with judgements of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses (Bandura, 2002, p. 94). General self-efficacy reflects a generalisation across various domains of functioning in which people judge how efficacious they are. For the majority of applicants, perceived self-efficacy should be conceptualised in a situation-specific manner (Bandura, 1997).

General self-efficacy is the belief in one's competence to tackle novel tasks and to cope with adversity in a broad range of stressful or challenging encounters – as opposed to specific self-efficacy, which is constrained to a particular task at hand (Luszczynska, Gutiérez-Doña & Schwarzer, 2005). General self-efficacy is adopted in this research.

1.4.4.3 Job performance

Campbell *et al.* (1993) view performance as synonymous with behaviour. They describe performance as what people do that can be observed and measured in terms of each individual's proficiency or level of contribution. Rothman and Coetzer (2003, p. 68) define job performance as a multidimensional construct which indicates how well employees perform their tasks, the initiative they take and the resourcefulness they show in solving problems.

For this study, job performance was conceptualised as observable behaviour that can be measured using four performance dimensions or key performance indicators, namely: (1) financial performance, (2) breathe a brand, (3) customer-centric service, and (4) productivity in terms of the frequency of activities performed. The components of job performance are defined below:

(1)   Financial

This is the combination of a calculated score (which indicates how much of a person's individual sales budget was achieved) and a rating on the accuracy of invoice administration.

(2)   Breathe a brand

This is a rating which indicates participation in organisational culture and values as well as teamwork.

(3)   Customer-centric service

This is a rating received by both clients and candidates of the person's service delivery to them. It is a customer satisfaction index (CSI).

(4)   Productivity

This is a rating on productivity requirements in terms of the frequency of activities performed (activities may include client visits, telephone sales calls made, etc.). It also includes ratings on the quality of CVs sent, accurate pre-employment risk assessment screening, quality and frequency of interviews conducted with candidates, and maintenance of data systems to ensure information is always up to date on the computer system.

1.4.5 Methodological convictions

The methodological convictions applicable to this study are presented below.

According to Babbie and Mouton (2009), positivism is a meta-theory which is based on the key assumption that the social sciences should follow the lead of the natural sciences and model its own practices on that of the successful natural sciences. This translates into a practice of research which emphasises the search for universal laws of human behaviour, quantification in measurement, and a definition of "objectivity"

which requires a distance between the researcher and the research subjects. The ontology, epistemology and methodology of the positivist paradigm are discussed below.

(a)   Ontology

Ontology specifies the nature of reality that is to be studied and what can be known about it (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2007). As this study falls within the positivist paradigm, the nature of reality is

- stable and external
- law-like

(b)   Epistemology

Epistemology specifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher (knower) and what can be known (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2007). The epistemology of this research is described as

- objective
- detached observer

(c)   Methodology

Methodology specifies how researchers may go about practically by studying whatever they believe can be known (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2007). The following methodologies were used in this research.

- experimental
- quantitative
- hypothesis testing

1.4.6 Central hypothesis

The central hypothesis of the research is stated below:

There is a relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance among recruitment consultants in the recruitment organisation.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design addresses the planning of scientific inquiry – designing a strategy for finding something out. A research design is a plan or blueprint of how you intend to conduct research. Different research designs attempt to answer different types of research problems or questions. Because of this, researchers end up using different combinations of methods and procedures (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). The research design for this study is presented below.

1.5.1 Research approach

The social sciences canon tells us that quantitative research has primary strengths: the findings are generalisable and the data are objective (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2007). A quantitative approach to the study was proposed (using a correlational study and survey design) in order to determine the relationship between the two positive psychology constructs and job performance, to determine possible predictors of job performance, and to establish the differences between biographical groups on the positive psychology constructs and job performance. Surveys may be used for descriptive, explanatory and exploratory purposes. They are chiefly used in studies that have individual people as the unit of analysis (Babbie & Mouton, 2009).

1.5.2 The variables

An independent variable is presumed to cause or determine a dependent variable (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). The independent variables for this study were sense of coherence and self-efficacy

A dependent variable is a variable assumed to depend on or be caused by another (the independent variable) (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). The dependent variable in this research is job performance.

1.5.3 Unit of analysis

Units of analysis are the people or things and the characteristics which social researchers observe, describe and explain. Typically, the unit of analysis in social research is the individual person, but it may also be a group, social artefact, social action/event or intervention (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). The unit of analysis for this study was the individual. The organisation consisted of recruitment consultants who individually formed the units of analysis. Sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance were examined on an individual basis – and in biographical groups – to determine the relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance.

1.5.4 Methods to ensure reliability and validity

1.5.4.1 Reliability

Reliability is that quality of a measurement method that suggests that the same data will be collected each time in repeated observations of the same phenomenon (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). To enhance the reliability of this study, the following control mechanisms were implemented.

(a)   Informed consent and intention

The participants were informed about the methods and purpose of the study. In this way, it was assumed that an understanding of the research would prompt repeatable scores on the assessments.

(b)   Confidentiality

The participants were informed of their right to confidentiality and that the results of their assessments would remain completely confidential.

(c)   Reliability of the measuring instruments

The tools that were used to measure the positive psychology constructs complied with stringent validity and reliability requirements. Cronbach's alpha was conducted on the instruments and yielded acceptable levels of internal consistency.

(d)   Construct and measuring instrument replication

The positive psychology constructs in this study were measured with the same instruments that had been used successfully in previous studies.

(e)   Non-standardisation of the job performance measure

The score totals for three of the four job performance dimensions (breathe a brand, customer-centric service and productivity), were inconsistently distributed across the job performance measures used. Raw scores for the job performance dimensions were converted into percentages in order to use the data; however, it must be noted that reliability may be affected. According to Tredoux and Durrheim (2005), in order to obtain one score that represents the individual's attitude or opinion, the scores of the items have to be totalled or, alternatively, the average of the scores has to be found. Factor analysis was used to determine a scientifically valid weighting for each dimension of job performance in order to derive a total job performance score.

1.5.4.2 Validity

Validity is a term which describes a measure that accurately reflects the concept it is intended to measure. Though the ultimate validity of a measure can never be proven, we may agree to its relative validity on the basis of face validity, criterion validity, content validity, construct validity, internal validation and external validation

(Babbie & Mouton, 2009). In the broadest sense, validity refers to the degree to which the research conclusions are sound (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2007). The validity of this study was enhanced by the following:

- Effective planning of the research design.
- Selection of valid, appropriate and applicable constructs.
- The use of valid measuring instruments.
- The use of appropriate data analysis techniques.
- Ensuring reliable data in order to arrive at valid conclusions.
- The results of this study should not be generalised to broader populations.
- Given the small sample size (N = 99), findings should be viewed with caution.
- Inconsistency of the distribution of scores for three of the four performance dimensions (breathe a brand, customer-centric service and productivity) on the job performance measure commands caution when viewing these results.

1.6   REASEARCH METHOD

The research is presented in two phases: the literature review and the empirical study.

1.6.1 Phase 1: Conceptualisation and literature review

The following steps were taken in the literature review phase.

Step 1: Sense of coherence was defined and described.
Step 2: Self-efficacy was defined and described.
Step 3: Job performance was defined and described.
Step 4: A theoretical integration of sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance was presented.

1.6.2 Phase 2: Empirical investigation

The following steps were followed in the empirical phase.

Step 1: Population and sample

The sample was drawn from a recruitment organisation. Consent of the managing director of the organisation was obtained by explaining the potential value that the research may have for the organisation. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the research as well as iterating the consent of the managing director, together with the questionnaires, was sent electronically to all the employees. 132 employees responded to the questionnaire, while only 99 sets of performance data out of the 132 respondents were made available. The final sample consisted of 99 recruitment consultants (N = 99).

Step 2: Measuring instruments

Three instruments were used to collect the data. The Orientation to Life Questionnaire (OLQ) (Antonovsky, 1987) was used to measure sense of coherence, the Generalised Self-efficacy Scale (GSE) (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) was used to measure self-efficacy, and a performance appraisal measuring four key performance indicators (internally developed by the organisation) was used to measure job performance. A biographical questionnaire was also administered.

The OLQ measures sense of coherence by a series of 29 semantic differential items on a seven-point scale, with anchoring phrases at each end. High scores indicate a strong sense of coherence (Sagy & Antonovsky, 1992). 26 studies using the OLQ reported Cronbach alpha measures of internal consistency that ranged from 0,82 to 0,95. Test–retest correlations show considerable stability, for example 0,54 over a two-year period (Antonovsky, 1993). Strümpfer and Wissing (1998) report mean alpha values of 0,87 for 19 studies. According to Eriksson and Lindström (2005), findings prove the sense of coherence instrument to be reliable, valid, feasible and cross-culturally applicable.

The GSE measures general self-efficacy by a series of 10 items on a four-point scale. High scores indicate strong general self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). In samples from 23 nations, Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0,76 to 0,90, with the majority in the high 0,80s. Criterion-related validity is documented in numerous

correlation studies where positive coefficients were found for favourable emotions, dispositional optimism and work satisfaction. Negative coefficients were found for depression, anxiety, stress, burnout and health complaints (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). Roothman, Kirsten and Wissing (2003) reported a Cronbach alpha of 0,83 for a multicultural sample of 378 South Africans.

A performance measure consisting of four key performance indicators was used to assess job performance. High scores on the key performance indicators indicate better job performance. The performance measure was developed within the organisation by its own panel of experts. The key performance indicators were derived from and therefore directly linked to the corporate strategy of the organisation. They were aimed at driving specific behaviours which ultimately rolled up into movement towards the strategic objectives of the organisation. The key performance indicators had been in use for a number of years after replacing the previously used performance measure, a balanced score card approach. The performance measure is reviewed annually by the organisation's internal experts in order to ensure the validity of the measure as the organisation continually adapts and changes with the dynamics of the environment in which it operates.

Step 3: Administering the research procedure

A front page presenting instructions and information on the assessments and research, together with measuring instruments, were loaded onto an online survey facility. The research participants were each emailed a unique link to the online assessments. The participants were required to click on the link, which directed them to the cover page containing the instructions, purpose and ratification by the top management of the research. The respondents first answered the biographical questionnaire, followed by the OLQ and finally the GSE.

The branch managers, the appraisers of the participant's job performance, were requested by the head office administration to submit the available job performance scores of the recruitment consultants for a period of six months (the first two quarters of the financial year 2010/2011). The consultants are appraised on a monthly basis; however, to increase the validity of the scores, it was decided to use the average of

available scores for a period of six months. Due to the individual movements of the recruitment consultants (i.e. leave, etc.), as well as internal factors of the organisation (resignation of and change of management in various branches), it was impossible to acquire a full six months of scores for every participant. This influenced the decision to take an average of available scores over six months in order to maximise the sample size. Replacing the missing numbers with the average of the respondent's other scores is a common method of dealing with missing numbers (Finchilescu, 2005).

Step 4: Performing the statistical analysis

The questionnaires were captured electronically and coded into a meaningful, useable format. The IBM SPSS Statistics Version 19 package was used to analyse the data (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, 2010).

Descriptive statistics and alpha coefficients were used for all the questionnaires. Correlations between the positive psychology constructs scores and job performance scores were done to determine relationships and multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether sense of coherence and self-efficacy can predict job performance. Multiple regression analysis is a method of studying the separate and collective contributions of several independent variables to the variation of a dependent variable (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2007).

In order to derive a total score for job performance, factor analysis was conducted on its dimensions (namely finance, breathe the brand, customer service and productivity). According to Babbie and Mouton (2009), factor analysis is used to discover patterns among the variations in values of several variables. Factor loadings for each of the dimensions were then converted into percentages which were used to weight each dimension and calculate scientifically valid total job performance scores.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to establish differences between biographical groups on the constructs. ANOVA allows for the testing of differences between more than two groups of subjects and the influence of more than one

independent variable (Durrheim, 2005). Tukey HSD tests (Durrheim, 2005) were conducted in order to derive pairwise comparisons.

In order to determine the distribution of scores, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used as a non-parametric test to test for normal distribution. The non-parametric tests used in the case of non-normal distribution included the Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis test. The Kruskal-Wallis test is an extension of the Mann-Whitney for three or more independent samples. The Kruskal-Wallis test is an omnibus test, analogous to ANOVA, for the equality of independent population medians (Lachenicht, 2005).

Step 5: Reporting and interpretation of the results

The statistical data were examined and analysed to facilitate inductive reasoning and to draw conclusions from it with reference to the research hypothesis. The results were presented on tables, which were discussed and interpreted.

Step 6: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

Conclusions were drawn from the aims of the research, the limitations of the research were discussed and revealed, and recommendations were made based on the findings.

1.7   CHAPTER LAYOUT

The chapter layout of this dissertation is as follows:

Chapter 2: Literature review

The aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical background to the study as well as to conceptualise sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance. The constructs are examined in terms of their histories, definitions, underlying dimensions or components, application and underlying logic. A theoretical integration of sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance is also presented.

Chapter 3: Research article

In this chapter the results are presented in article format. The empirical procedure is presented in terms of the sample, measuring instruments, administration of the questionnaires, data collection and processing, statistical methods and formulation of the hypothesis. The results are discussed against the formulated hypothesis, and presented in tables and figures. Conclusions, recommendations and limitations are presented based on the research findings.

Chapter 4: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

Conclusions are drawn in terms of the specific aims of the research. The limitations of the research are discussed and revealed, and recommendations are made on the basis of the findings of the research.

1.8   CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter the background to and motivation for the research, the research problem, the aims, the paradigm perspective, and the research design and method were discussed. The chapter ended with the chapter layout. The next chapter focuses on the literature review and conceptualising sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance.

CHAPTER 2: SENSE OF COHERENCE, SELF-EFFICACY AND JOB PERFORMANCE CONCEPTUALISED FROM THE LITERATURE

This chapter focuses on the conceptualisation of sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance. Each of the constructs are discussed by making reference to their histories by means of a brief overview, their definitions, components, dimensions or sources, underlying logic and application in an organisational context. The chapter will end with a theoretical integration of sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance.

2.1   SENSE OF COHERENCE, SELF-EFFICACY AND JOB PERFORMANCE

Sense of coherence and self-efficacy are constructs that are interpreted and applied within the field of positive psychology. Positive psychology is defined as the scientific study of ordinary, positive, subjective human strengths, virtues, experiences and functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) present the idea of prevention as the foreground of positive psychology. Prevention researchers have discovered that there are human strengths that act as buffers against stress and mental illness: courage, future mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skill, faith, work ethic, hope, honesty, perseverance, and the capacity for flow and insight – to name several (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Antonovsky (1979) conceptualises the sense of coherence construct as a coping mechanism which is characterised by the tendency to see life as predictable, manageable and meaningful. A study by Oosthuizen and Van Lill (2008) confirms that individuals with a strong sense of coherence feel that they are able to manage their stress, while those with a weaker sense of coherence may not manage their stress as well. The person with a strong sense of coherence, who is able to manage stress well, will be more able to perform better at work. The implications of the concept for occupational health psychology and the management of stress at all levels of employment are obvious; however, personnel selection and assessment, training, performance appraisal, career development, executive development, succession planning and organisation development are all areas that could be enriched by consideration of this construct (Strümpfer, 1990).

Bandura (1977) conceptualises self-efficacy as a learnt cognition or belief. He explains that a person's belief in his or her capabilities to succeed at a goal despite the challenges will determine his or her choice of activities regarding which activities to engage in, effort expended and perseverance in dealing with stressful situations. Performance accomplishment is both an input in strengthening the efficacy belief and an outcome of strong self-efficacy. This construct is thus relevant and of interest to this study, which is aimed at exploring its relationship and the relationship between sense of coherence and job performance.

What follows is a discussion of sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance. Sense of coherence is discussed first.

2.2 SENSE OF COHERENCE

Below is the literary review on the construct of sense of coherence. It is aimed at exploring sense of coherence in terms of an overview, definition, components, underlying logic and application to the workplace.

2.2.1 A brief overview of sense of coherence

Antonovsky (1987) describes a concrete experience he had in 1970. This experience led to a fundamental turning point in his work as a medical sociologist. The experiment led to a comparison between two groups of Israeli women on emotional health. One group consisted of concentration camp survivors and the other group, the control group, had not been in a concentration camp. Antonovsky (1987) was fascinated that 29% of the women who had been subjected to the most unimaginable horrors of the camp, followed by years of being displaced persons and then having to re-establish their lives in a country which witnessed three wars, could still be in good health. This set him on the road to what is today known as the salutogenic model.

According to Antonovsky (1987), a salutogenic orientation (which focuses on the origins of health) poses a radically different question to the pathological orientation: Why are people located toward the positive end of the health ease/dis-ease

continuum, or why do they move toward this end irrespective of their location at any given time?

He proposes that confronting a stressor results in a state of tension which one must then deal with. His tentative answer to the salutary question is the concept of generalised resistance resources, which he refers to as any phenomenon that is effective in combating a wide variety of stressors. The sense of coherence construct emerges then as a personality or coping construct which is strengthened by repeated experiences of sense making that are facilitated by generalised resistance resources. The answer to his salutogenic question is the sense of coherence construct (Antonovsky, 1987).

2.2.2 Sense of coherence defined

Antonovsky (1987, p. 19) defines sense of coherence as follows:

> The sense of coherence construct is a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring through dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement.

The *South African pocket Oxford dictionary* defines "sense" as "one of the five faculties of sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch, by which the body perceives things; a feeling that something is the case; awareness of or sensitivity to; a sensible and practical attitude; reason or purpose; a meaning or interpretation of a word or expression" (Soanes, 2002, p. 818). It defines "cohere" as "to hold firmly together; form a whole" (Soanes, 2002, p. 165). According to Soanes (2002, p. 165), the word "sense" has its origin in the Latin word "*sensus*", which translates into the "faculty of feeling, thought and meaning". Sense of coherence can therefore be defined as the ability, through the senses, to hold one's perceived world firmly together and making sense of it through feeling, thought and meaning.

According to Strümpfer (2003), sense of coherence is a coping resource that is presumed to mitigate life stress by affecting the overall quality of one's cognitive and emotional appraisal of the stimuli that impact on one, which is in turn presumed to engender, sustain and enhance health as well as strength at other end points. Rothmann, Jackson and Kruger (2003) also hinge their definition of sense of coherence on coping and stress. They define it as a coping mechanism that tends to moderate life stress by influencing one's cognitive and emotional stimuli.

Sense of coherence has been defined as a relatively stable dispositional orientation (Antonovsky, 1987). According to Antonovsky (1987), it develops along with experiences through childhood, adolescence and young adulthood, and could in favourable circumstances, reach a relatively stable level after the age of 30.

2.2.3 Components of sense of coherence

The three orientations termed comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, which are thought to be separate but highly interrelated, form the main components of sense of coherence (Feldt *et al.*, 2007). Coetzee, Viviers and Visser (2006) report intercorrelations between the three components which supports the notion that they are highly interrelated. The three components are discussed below.

2.2.3.1 Comprehensibility

Comprehensibility refers to the idea that things make sense to a person, that is things that happen make sense and the world is not just a mass of random happenings (Antonovsky, 1987). The person with a strong sense of coherence believes that the challenge is understood (Antonovsky, 1996). According to Rothmann, Steyn and Mostert (2005), comprehensibility refers to the extent to which persons find or structure their world to be understandable, meaningful, orderly and consistent instead of chaotic, random and unpredictable. Comprehensibility exists when stimuli from the environment are perceived to make cognitive sense (Strümpfer, 2003). The *South African pocket Oxford dictionary* defines "comprehend" as "to grasp mentally; understand" (Soanes, 2002, p. 176). Comprehensibility therefore refers to a structured cognition of the world.

2.2.3.2 Manageability

Manageability refers to the idea that things can be handled no matter what happens, that is people feel they can cope with the things that are happening in their lives (Antonovsky, 1987). The person with a strong sense of coherence will believe that resources to cope are available (Antonovsky, 1996). Manageability refers to the extent to which people experience events in life as situations that are endurable or manageable, and can even be seen as new challenges (Rothmann *et al.*, 2005). Manageability occurs when stimuli are perceived as being under the control of both the individual and the legitimate others (such as a spouse, friends, professionals, formal authorities or spiritual figures) (Strümpfer, 2003). The *South African pocket Oxford dictionary* defines "manage" as "be in charge; succeed in doing; be able to cope despite difficulties; control the use of (money or other resources); be free to attend" (Soanes, 2002, p. 546). Manageability therefore refers to the perception that adequate resources are available to the individual to control stimuli sufficiently in order to cope despite difficulties.

2.2.3.3 Meaningfulness

Meaningfulness is the motivational component of sense of coherence, and refers to the idea that things generally have meaning for a person and the person is thus willing to invest time in and spend energy on any particular activity (Antonovsky, 1987). The person with a strong sense of coherence will wish to be motivated to cope (Antonovsky, 1996). Meaningfulness refers to the extent to which one feels that life makes sense on an emotional and not just a cognitive level, and that life's demands are worthy of commitment. It is essentially seeing coping as desirable (Rothmann *et al.*, 2005). Meaningfulness is experienced when stimuli are perceived as motivationally relevant, in the form of welcome challenges that are worth engaging with, for investing oneself in (Strümpfer, 2003). The *South African pocket Oxford dictionary* defines "meaningful" as "having meaning; worthwhile; expressive" (Soanes, 2002, p. 557). Antonovsky (1987) sees the meaningfulness component of sense of coherence as representing the motivational element. Meaningfulness can therefore be referred to as the invocation of cognitions and emotion which motivates the worthiness of and commitment to perceived challenges.

2.2.4 The underlying logic of sense of coherence

The salutogenic orientation derives from the fundamental postulate that heterostasis, senescence and increasing entropy are core characteristics of all living organisms (Antonovsky, 1987). In salutogenesis stress is not necessarily viewed negatively in the workplace or in the private lives of people, but as an opportunity for optimisation which can lead to positive outcomes regarding stress and coping (Viviers & Cilliers, 1999). An orientation to work of an individual with a strong sense of coherence can only lead to productive performance, recognition, reward and promotion (Strümpfer, 1990). The logic and processes of sense of coherence and the strengthening thereof are discussed below.

Sense of coherence embraces components of perception, memory, information processing and affect into habitual patterns of appraisal on the basis of repeated experiences of sense making that have been facilitated by generalised resistance resources (GRRs) (Strümpfer, 1990). Antonovsky (1979) explains that the strength of sense of coherence relates to GRRs - characteristics of the individual, the group or the environment that can facilitate effective tension management. Antonovsky (1979, p. 187) defines GRRs as phenomena that provide one with sets of life experiences that are "characterised by consistency, participation in shaping outcome, and an under-overload balance". Strümpfer (2003) explains, however, that resistance resources are only potentially available; it is up to the person to actuate them in combating and overcoming pathogens and stressors. A person with a high sense of coherence is more likely to actuate the GRRs that they have at their disposal.

The stronger the sense of coherence a person has, the better his or her ability to use cognitive, affective and instrumental strategies that are likely to improve coping and, subsequently, well-being (Van der Colf & Rothmann, 2009). According to Antonovsky (1987), a strong sense of coherence is not a particular coping style; the stressors of life are diverse and thus require the choice of a repertoire of coping styles. What the person with a strong sense of coherence does is to select the particular coping strategy that seems most appropriate to deal with the stressor being confronted. The individual chooses from a repertoire of generalised and

specific resistance resources at his or her disposal which seems to be the most appropriate combination. He refers to this ability to select the most appropriate coping strategy from a repertoire of GRRs for the given situation as flexibility of choice and emphasises this rather than the particular coping strategies used.

Antonovsky (1987) explains the relationship between sense of coherence as a personality construct, GRRs and stressors. He explains that when an individual regularly experiences the availability of GRRs, personality constructs develop which prevent the individual from being subjected to some stressors. Subsequently, individuals view stressors as "welcome" inputs after which the personality construct will decisively determine the extent to which the individual will move on the health ease/dis-ease continuum. A feedback loop is formed from the GRRs to the salutogenic constructs. Depending on one's previous experience of overcoming stressors, the GRRs will enhance the strength of the salutogenic constructs – which in turn may increase available GRRs to the individual.

While Antonovsky (1987) describes the process and mechanics of forming a feedback loop from GRRs to sense of coherence, Strümpfer (2003) translates this process into a possible scenario of how an individual may experience and benefit from it.

Strümpfer (2003) points out that there may be specific circumstances where one's sense of coherence level could be reduced temporarily. Excessive work conditions could be one such circumstance. He goes on to say, however, that the individual will probably resile to his or her usual level, due to the confidence and behaviour inherent in the components of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. He explains that the strong sense of coherence person will, in the long term, probably benefit from such an experience. S(he) is likely to use the temporary condition of anguish as an opportunity for growth for resolving pre-existing and present problems, for reorganising life and work circumstances, and for going forward with newly discovered skills and perspectives on the self and life.

Confronted with a stressor, the person with a strong sense of coherence is more likely to feel a sense of engagement, of commitment and of willingness to cope with the stressor. One of the hallmarks of the person with a strong sense of coherence is

that the boundaries of what is meaningful are flexible and can be narrowed (or broadened) – always with the proviso that they cannot be so narrowed as to exclude the critical spheres in human existence: inner feelings, immediate personal relations, major activity and existential issues (Antonovsky, 1987).

The person with a weak sense of coherence (seeing the stressor only in its burdensome aspects) will tend to focus on the emotional parameters and on handling the anxiety and unhappiness brought into being by the stressor. The person with a strong sense of coherence, by contrast, will tend to focus on the instrumental parameters of the problem and will see the challenge as a question of what resources can be mobilised to meet the problem (Antonovsky, 1987, p. 139).

2.2.5   Application of sense of coherence in the workplace

Strümpfer (2003) suggests that meaning providing variables (particularly sense of coherence) may assist in warding off burnout, in recovering from it and probably strengthening engagement inclinations. Rothmann *et al.* (2005) show that sense of coherence is moderately related to work engagement. According to Fourie, Rothmann and Van de Vijver (2008), sense of coherence could also have a direct effect on individuals' work-related well-being. In their study of non-professional counsellors in South Africa, they found that sense of coherence had both a direct and indirect effect on burnout and work engagement.

Fourie *et al.* (2008) identify sense of coherence as a target for intervention to prevent and/or manage burnout. They make the following suggestions to target sense of coherence as a work wellness lever: appreciating the job role within the framework of the organisation and creating insight in the value of the individual's job; providing a degree of independence and freedom of choice in order to make the work meaningful; and participation in decision-making activities.

Research that was conducted by Feldt, Kivimäki, Rantals and Tolvanen (2004) suggests that sense of coherence, as a relatively stable disposition, is a major determinant of perceptions of supportive organisational climate in adulthood. They refer to organisational climate as help from co-workers, open and constructive

cooperation, an atmosphere of openness and solidarity, and free flowing communication. They go on to say that it is based on the constructive interpersonal relationships and communication in the workplace. In essence, their research supports the notion of sense of coherence as a predictor of perceptions of organisational climate.

Research by Oosthuizen and Van Lill (2008) indicates that individuals with a strong sense of coherence feel that they are able to manage stress, while those with a weaker sense of coherence do not manage as well. They recommend that organisations should create a work environment in which employees are allowed to function salutogenically and as a result succeed in managing their stress effectively.

Strümpfer (1990) points out that the majority of adults spend the largest portion of their waking hours in the workplace and that it is a dominant source of external, as well as internal, stimulation to be comprehended, managed and made meaningful. Strümpfer (1990, p. 270) goes on to suggest that a person with a strong sense of coherence would, in all likelihood, do the following:

- Make cognitive sense of the workplace and perceive its stimulation as clear, ordered, structured, consistent and predictable information.
- Perceive his or her work as consisting of experiences that are bearable, with which (s)he can cope and as challenges that (s)he can meet by availing himself or herself of personal resources or resources that are under the control of legitimate others.
- Make emotional and motivational sense of work demands as welcome challenges that are worth engaging in and investing his or her energies in.

An orientation to work of an individual with a strong sense of coherence can only lead to productive performance, recognition, reward and promotion (Strümpfer, 1990).

On the basis of the above discussion, it can be concluded that sense of coherence may find its application as both a target for managing stress, enhancing employee

engagement and preventing burnout and as a predictor (among adults for whom the construct is relatively stable) of perceptions of organisational climate, well-being and stress management.

2.3   SELF-EFFICACY

Self-efficacy is conceptualised from the literature below. The reader will find discussions on the birth of the construct, its definition, sources of efficacy information, underlying logic and applications in the work place.

2.3.1   The birth of self-efficacy

To make their way successfully through a complex world full of challenges, people have to make good judgments about their capabilities, anticipate the probable effects of different events and courses of action, size up sociocultural opportunities and constraints, and regulate their behaviour accordingly (Bandura, 2001a). The truth is that believing that you can accomplish what you want to accomplish is one of the most important ingredients – perhaps the most important ingredient – in the recipe for success (Maddux, 2009).

Bandura presented a theory of social development throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Grusec, 1992). Much of the early psychological theorising was founded on behaviourist principles which embraced an input–output model that was linked by an internal conduit that made behaviour possible but exerted no influence on own behaviour. In this view, human behaviour was shaped and controlled automatically and mechanically by environmental stimuli (Bandura, 2001a). For Bandura, it began with some influence from Skinner's radical behaviourism, although with added concepts such as modelling. His theory quickly evolved into a form of learning theory that was heavily informed by concepts from information-processing theory (Grusec, 1992).

Grusec (1992) explains that social learning theory was born out of an attempt to meld psychoanalytic and stimulus-response learning theories into a comprehensive explanation of human behaviour. Bandura (1989) abandoned the psychoanalytic and

drive features of the approach, emphasising instead cognitive and information processing capacities that mediate social behaviour. People are neither autonomous agents nor simple mechanical conveyers of animating environmental influences. Rather, they make causal contribution to their own motivation and action within a system of triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1989). Cognition, as opposed to psychodynamic drives, formed a major part of the third link – personal determinants – for Bandura (Grusec, 1992). Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory explains development in terms of personal, behavioural and environmental determinants.

Bandura's (1977, 1989) focus on cognition (as a personal determinant of development) led to the idea of self-belief in efficacy and the development of the self-efficacy construct. The self-efficacy construct seeks to explain how people regulate their behaviour by making good judgments about their capabilities, anticipating the effects of different events and courses of action, and sizing up sociocultural opportunities and constraints (Bandura, 1977).

2.3.2 Self-efficacy defined

A person's expectations of personal mastery affect both his or her initiation and persistence of coping behaviour. The strength of people's convictions in their own effectiveness is likely to affect whether they will even try to cope with given situations (Bandura, 1999). Self-efficacy is thought to reflect both an individual's self-perceived ability and a motivational component that is defined as "intentions for effort allocations" (Philips & Gully, 1997).

Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's judgments of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action that are required to attain designated types of performance. It is concerned not with the skills one has, but with judgements of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses (Bandura, 2002, p. 94).

General self-efficacy reflects a generalisation across various domains of functioning in which people judge how efficacious they are. For the majority of applications, perceived self-efficacy should be conceptualised in a situation-specific manner

(Bandura, 1997). General self-efficacy, however, may explain a broader range of human behaviours and coping outcomes when the context is less specific (Luszczynska, Scholz, & Schwarzer, 2005). General self-efficacy is the belief in one's competence to tackle novel tasks and to cope with adversity in a broad range of stressful or challenging encounters, as opposed to specific self-efficacy which is constrained to a particular task at hand (Luszczynska *et al.*, 2005). This research was concerned with general self-efficacy

2.3.3 Sources of self-efficacy information

Efficacy expectations are based on four major sources (Bandura, 1999; Betz, 2004). These sources of efficacy information are not only important in its initial development, but can also be used to guide the design of interventions capable of building or strengthening perceived self-efficacy (Betz, 2004). The four major sources of efficacy expectations are discussed below.

(1)   Performance accomplishments

These are also referred to as mastery experiences and refer to individuals' own experience of facing obstacles and overcoming them to create the experience of success. According to Bandura (1977), this source of efficacy information is especially influential because it is based on personal mastery experiences. It is seen as the "most authentic evidence of whether one can muster whatever it takes to succeed" (Bandura, 1999, p. 3).

(2)   Vicarious experience

Betz (2004) refers to vicarious experience as vicarious learning or modelling. Human beings have evolved an advanced capacity for observational learning that enables them to expand their knowledge and skills rapidly through information conveyed by a rich variety of models (Bandura, 2001b). Vicarious experiences as a source of self-efficacy can therefore be understood as the observation of how others, perceived as similar to oneself, experience success by persistent effort despite the challenges posed.

(3) Social persuasion

Betz (2004) refers to verbal or social persuasion as encouragement and support from others. According to Bandura (1977), people are led – through suggestion – into believing they can cope successfully with what has overwhelmed them in the past. In vicarious influence, observers have to rely solely on what they see in forming generalised perceptions of their coping capabilities (Bandura, 1982). "It is more difficult to instil high beliefs of personal efficacy by social persuasion alone than to undermine them" (Bandura, 1999, p. 4).

(4) Emotional arousal

Emotional arousal is another constituent source of information that can affect perceived self-efficacy in coping with threatening situations (Bandura, 1977). Betz (2004) promotes lower levels of emotional arousal (that is, less anxiety) in connection with behaviour as a source of self-efficacy. Because high arousal usually debilitates performance, people are more inclined to expect success when they are not beset by averse arousal than if they are tense and viscerally agitated (Bandura, 1982).

Initially, these sources of efficacy information are thought to originate in one's family of origin; background variables such as gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status; and the nature and quality of educational opportunities. These sources of efficacy information are not only important in its initial development, but can also be used as a guide to the design of interventions capable of building or strengthening perceived self-efficacy (Betz, 2004).

Self-efficacy expectations have at least three behavioural consequences (Bandura, 1997). These are shown on the right side of figure 1 below.
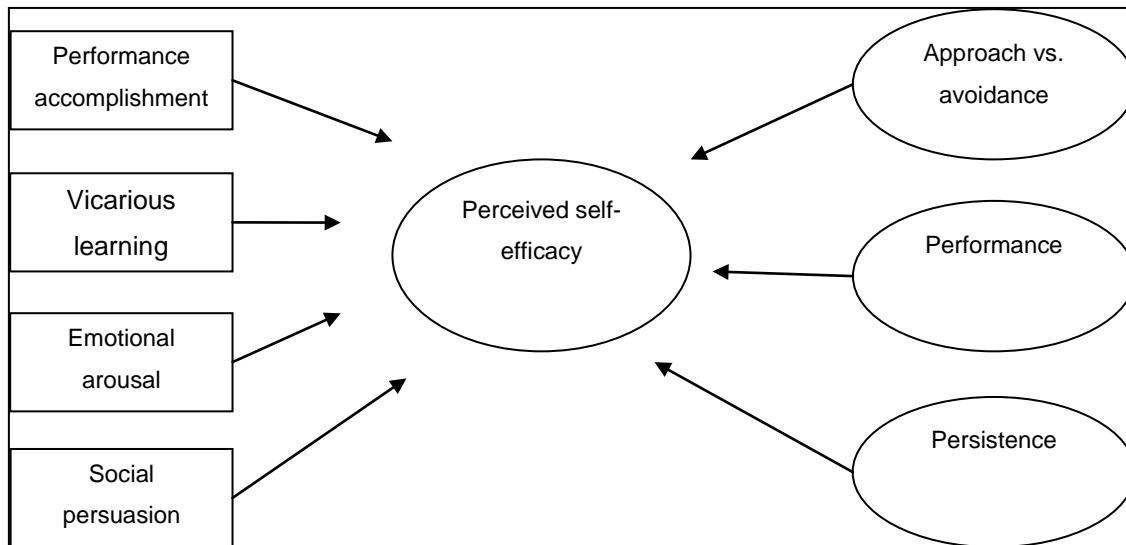
Figure 1: Graphical description of Bandura's (1997) model of self-efficacy expectations

The behavioural consequences of perceived self-efficacy are approach versus avoidance behaviour, quality of performance and persistence in working through challenges. High scores on perceived self-efficacy therefore theoretically indicate approach behaviours, quality performance and persistence, and endurance in stressful situations. The three consequences or outputs of self-efficacy are touched on below.

(1)   Self-efficacy effects approach versus avoidance behaviour

According to Betz (2004) approach behaviour describes what a person will try, whereas avoidance behaviour refers to things s(he) will not try.

(2)   Self-efficacy expectations affect performance

The effects of self-efficacy expectations on performance can refer to such situations as performance on tests that are necessary to complete college coursework or the requirements of a job training programme (Betz, 2004).

(3)   Self-efficacy expectations affect persistence

The effects of self-efficacy on persistence are essential for the long-term pursuit of one's goals in the face of obstacles, occasional failures and dissuading messages from the environment (Betz, 2004). A consequence of a strong sense of self-efficacy is perseverance through challenges or stressful situations.

2.3.4 The underlying logic of self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is understood within the social cognitive framework and operationalised by efficacy and outcome expectations. In this section social cognitive theory is explored, and efficacy expectations and outcome expectations are distinguished.

2.4.4.1 Social cognitive theory

Social cognitive theory adopts an agentic perspective in which individuals are producers of experience and shapers of events (Bandura, 2000). To be an agent is to influence one's functioning and life circumstances. In this view, people are producers of their life circumstances and not just products of them (Bandura, 2001a). From the perspective of social cognitive theory, people are considered to be self-organising, self-reflective, self-regulative and able to make judgments about themselves based on their own activity (Luszczynska *et al.*, 2005).

Social cognitive theory explains human functioning in terms of triadic reciprocal causation. In this transactional view of self and society, personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective and biological events; behavioural patterns; and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that influence one another bi-directionally (Bandura, 2001b). Figure 2 below shows the triadic reciprocal causation of human functioning.
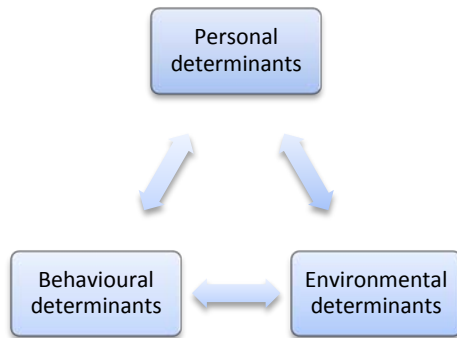
Figure 2: Graphical description of the triadic reciprocal causation model (Bandura, 1978)

Multicausality involves codetermination of behaviour by different sources of influence and not causal dependencies between levels (Bandura, 2001a). Seen from the socio-cognitive perspective, human nature is a vast potentiality that can be fashioned by direct and observational experiences into a variety of forms within biological limits (Bandura, 2001b).

Social cognitive theory is based on four basic premises, which are described below.

(1)   Intentionality

Bandura (2001a) explains an intention as a representation of a future course of action to be performed. It is not simply an expectation or prediction of future actions, but a proactive commitment to bring them about. Intentions and actions are different aspects of a functional relation separated in time. It is therefore meaningful to speak of intentions which are grounded in self-motivators that affect the likelihood of actions at a future point in time (Bandura, 2001a).

(2)   Forethought

Through cognition, we exercise control over our own behaviour, which influences not only the environment but also our cognitive, affective and biological states (Maddux, 2009). Through the exercise of forethought, people motivate themselves and guide their actions in anticipation of future events. The ability to bring anticipated outcomes to bear on current activities promotes behaviour that is influenced by foresight. It

enables people to transcend the dictates of their immediate environment and to shape and regulate the present to fit a desired future (Bandura, 2001a).

(3)   "Self" and "personality" are socially embedded

"Self" and "personality" are socially embedded. They are perceptions (accurate or not) of our own and others' patterns of social cognition, emotion and action as they occur in patterns of situations. Thus, self and personality are not simply what we bring to our interactions with others; they are created in these interactions and they change through these interactions (Maddux, 2009).

(4)   Self-regulation

According to Bandura (2001a), monitoring one's behaviour and the cognitive and environmental conditions under which it occurs is the first step towards doing something to affect it. Simply observing variations in one's performance yields some relevant information, but such data in themselves do not provide any basis for personal reactions. Behaviour produces self-reaction through a judgemental function that includes several subsidiary processes. Whether a given performance will be regarded as commendable or dissatisfying depends upon the personal standards against which it is evaluated. Actions that are measured up to internally are appraised favourably; those that fall short are judged unsatisfactory (Bandura, 1978).

2.4.4.2 Outcome expectancy and efficacy expectations

The "mechanism" of expectations in self-efficacy is discussed below. Expectations that influence behaviour are differentiated by outcome expectations and efficacy expectations.

According to Bandura (1977), an outcome expectancy is defined as a person's estimate that a given behaviour will lead to certain outcomes. An efficacy expectation is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behaviour required to produce the outcomes. Outcome and efficacy expectations are differentiated, because individuals can believe that a particular course of action will produce certain

outcomes but if s(he) entertains serious doubts about whether they can perform the necessary activities then such information will not influence his or her behaviour (Bandura, 1977).

Given appropriate skills and adequate incentives, efficacy expectations are a major determinant of people's choice of activities; how much effort they expend; and how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations (Bandura, 1977).

Efficacy expectations vary on three prominent dimensions (Bandura, 1977; 1999). These include magnitude, which refers to the number of tasks an individual expects to be able to master successfully and is often based on the perceived simpler tasks out of a collection (Bandura, 1999); generality, which refers to a more generalised sense of self-efficacy that extends well beyond the specific treatment situation (Bandura, 1977); and strength, expectations are easily extinguishable by disconfirming experiences, whereas individuals who possess strong expectations of mastery will persevere in their coping efforts despite disconfirming experiences (Bandura, 1977).

It can be concluded that efficacy beliefs are powered by expectation and that they can vary in terms of their magnitude, generality and strength. Efficacy beliefs and a sense of agency continue to develop throughout our life span as we continually integrate information from its primary sources (Maddux, 2009). The application of self-efficacy in the workplace is discussed in the next section.

2.4.5 Application of self-efficacy in the workplace

What people need is knowledge about how to regulate their behaviour and firm belief in their personal efficacy to turn concern about future maladies into effective preventive actions (Bandura, 2002). Efficacy beliefs are the foundation of human agency. Unless people believe they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. It is partly on the basis of efficacy beliefs that people choose what challenges to undertake, how much effort to expend on the endeavour, how

long to persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, and whether failures are motivating or demoralising (Bandura, 2001a).

According to Luszczynska *et al.* (2005), people with high self-efficacy choose to perform more challenging tasks. They set themselves higher goals and stick to them. Actions are pre-shaped in thought and once an action has been taken, highly self-efficacious people invest more effort and persist longer than those who are low in self-efficacy. When setbacks occur, they recover more quickly and remain committed to their goals. High self-efficacy also helps people to select challenging settings and explore their environment or create new ones.

From the above discussion about the behaviour of people with high self-efficacy, it is in both the interests of organisations and individuals to use the construct of self-efficacy as a lever and target for personal growth and development. According to Betz (2004), sources of efficacy information are not only important in its initial development but can also be used as a guide to the design of interventions capable of building or strengthening perceived self-efficacy. Training and development programmes that are aimed at the development and enhancement of employees' self-efficacy beliefs may take their form and direction from the sources of self-efficacy, performance accomplishment, vicarious learning, emotional arousal and social persuasion.

Figure 3 below presents the diverse influence procedures commonly used to reduce defensive behaviour and the principle source whereby each treatment operates to create expectations of mastery.
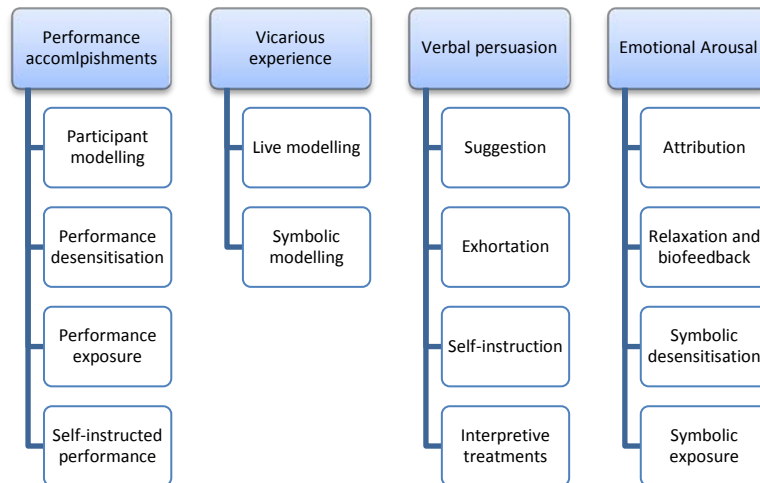
Figure 3: Major sources of efficacy information and the principal sources whereby different modes of treatment operate (adapted from Bandura, 1977)

Any given method, depending on how it is applied, may of course draw to a lesser extent on one or more other sources of efficacy information (Bandura, 1977).

Individual employees' efficacy can be enhanced or thwarted by the organisational context in which they work, or by their leaders or co-workers. In an organisational culture characterised by information sharing and cooperation, self-efficacy regarding one's areas of expertise can be integrated with that of others to create collective efficacy (Youssef & Luthans, 2009). According to Bandura (2000), perceived collective efficacy is not simply the sum of the efficacy beliefs of individual members but rather an emergent group level property. In such a positive organisational environment, interdependence is viewed as an opportunity to capitalise upon the work groups' combined strengths and psychological capabilities rather than a source of threat or vulnerability (Youssef & Luthans, 2009).

The next section of this chapter is a discussion on job performance.

2.4   JOB PERFORMANCE

Job performance is discussed below with reference to a window onto past ideas regarding it; its definition, dimensions or components in terms of key performance indicators; its underlying logic by exploring methods of measuring and appraising

performance; and its application as a construct to organisations in managing performance.

2.4.1 A window onto past ideas of job performance

Job performance and the nature and meaning of work in general have changed considerably over the past few centuries. In the pre-industrial era work was seen as drudgery and, from a Protestant outlook, as a means of serving God. With industrialisation and a focus on the mass production of objects in factories, work tasks became more fragmented and were reduced to mechanistic repetitive functions (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006). Traditionally in production-based organisations, performance could be viewed in terms of critical performance variables (such as the number of units produced) and as an outcome that was benchmarked against a predetermined standard (Foba & De Villiers, 2007).

In a post-industrial society the focus is on information rather than on industry. Production is associated with producing ideas in offices in addition to manufacturing objects in factories (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006). Rather than focus on the production and transformation of raw materials, as was the case in the past, new information and communication technologies and increasing globalisation allow "knowledge economies" to focus upon knowledge intensive activities – the production, processing and transfer of knowledge and information (Barnacle, 2004).

In modern society these knowledge intensive activities (including the production, processing and transfer of knowledge and information) are measured as indicators of job performance. According to Den Hartog, Boselie and Paauwe (2004), the process of measuring and subsequently actively managing organisational and employee performance in order to improve organisational effectiveness is currently seen as critical to the development and survival of organisations. Employees who can deliver effective job performance are crucial to organisations' survival in the 21st- century global economy.

2.4.2 Job performance defined

According to Campbell *et al.* (1993), performance is what people do that can be observed and measured in terms of each individual's proficiency or level of contribution. Muchinsky *et al.* (2005) view performance as synonymous with behaviour; it is what people actually do and it can be observed. Performance includes those actions that are relevant to the organisation's goals and can be measured in terms of each individual's proficiency (that is, level of contribution). Both views are in agreement in that they focus on observable individual behaviour and the level of the contribution the individual makes to the organisation.

Rothman and Coetzer (2003, p. 68) deepen this perspective on performance by illuminating the multidimensional nature of performance. They define job performance as a multidimensional construct which indicates how well employees perform their tasks, the initiative they take and the resourcefulness they show in solving problems. The *South African pocket Oxford dictionary* defines "initiative" as the ability to act independently and with a fresh approach, and the power or opportunity to act before others do (Soanes, 2002, p. 463). Soanes (2002, p. 764) defines "resourceful" as able to find quick and clever ways to overcome difficulties. The terms "initiative" and "resourcefulness" expand the view of performance significantly to include dimensions of independence; acting on one's own accord; creativity or adopting a fresh approach; opportunities to perform; the opportunity to act competitively (that is, to act before another acts); speedy or quickness to act; intelligence or cognitive ability to act; and employing one's resources to face difficulties as challenges to overcome.

The next section is aimed at guiding the reader through some prominent performance dimensions as they have evolved in recent times as well as components of job performance defined by key performance indicators.

2.4.3 Dimensions and components of job performance

Dimensions and components of job performance are discussed below.

2.4.3.1 Dimensions of job performance

In an attempt to understand and define performance, theorists over the years have broken the concept of performance down into different dimensions. It is interesting to note how these dimensions have changed with the times. Vroom (1964) viewed performance as a combination of ability and motivation. Blumberg and Pringle (1982) added to this equation by using a socio-cognitive point of view and included environmental factors as opportunities to perform. Today many more dimensions (such as citizenship performance and adaptive performance) form part of our understanding of work performance due to globalisation and the increasingly uncertain and unpredictable nature of organisations and work roles in the 21st century. Below is a brief summary of various taxonomies of performance that have evolved over the years.

Blumberg and Pringle (1982) suggest three dimensions of performance:

(1) *Capacity to perform*: ability, age, health, knowledge skills, intelligence, level of education, stamina, energy level and motor skills.

(2) *Willingness to perform*: motivation, job satisfaction, job status, anxiety, legitimacy of participation, attitude, perceived task characteristics, job involvement, self-image, personality, norms, values, perceived role expectations and feelings of equity.

(3) *Opportunity to perform*: tools, equipment, material and supplies, working conditions, actions of co-workers, leader behaviour, mentorism, organisational policies, rules and procedures, information, time and pay.

Campbell *et al.* (1993) contribute a taxonomy of eight major performance components. These performance components are:

(1) Job-specific task proficiency
(2) Non-job-specific task proficiency
(3) Written and oral communication
(4) Demonstrating effort
(5) Maintaining personal discipline

(6) Maintaining peer and team performance

(7) Supervision/leadership

(8) Management/administration

10 years later, Johnson (2003) expanded on the above taxonomy to include the following:

- Task performance
  - Job-specific task proficiency
  - Non-job-specific task proficiency
  - Written and oral communication proficiency
  - Management and administration
  - Supervision
  - Conscientious initiative
- Citizenship performance
  - Conscientious initiative
  - Personal support
  - Organisational support
- Adaptive performance
  - Dealing with uncertain work situations

Pulakos, Arad, Donovan and Plamondon (2000) emphasise the concept of adaptive performance. They motivate the importance of adaptive performance in work environments due to the significant changes occurring in today's organisations. Pulakos *et al.* (2000) define adaptive performance in terms of six dimensions:

(1) *Solving problems creatively.* This aspect of performance requires the individual to bring complex matters or situations to their desired end or to develop creative solutions for novel, difficult problems.

(2) *Dealing with uncertain and unpredictable work situations.* Key aspects of performance that relate to such events are how easily workers adjust to and deal with the unpredictable nature of these situations, how efficiently and smoothly they can shift their orientation or focus when necessary, and

to what extent they take reasonable action despite inherent uncertainty and ambiguity in the situation.

(3) *Learning work task, technologies and procedures.* This involves learning new ways to perform a job or learning different skill sets or tasks for a job or new career.

(4) *Demonstrating interpersonal adaptability.* This includes aspects of demonstrating interpersonal flexibility; adjusting interpersonal style to achieve a goal; adapting interpersonal behaviour to work effectively with a new team, co-workers or customers; and being a flexible, responsive service provider who can effectively anticipate and fulfil customer needs.

(5) *Demonstrating cultural adaptability.* Beyond simply learning about a new culture or environment, the key aspect of this type of adaptive performance involves successfully integrating into a new culture or environment by fully understanding and willingly behaving in accordance with the accepted customs, values, rules and structures operating within it.

(6) *Demonstrating physically-oriented adaptability.* This aspect of adaptive performance involves adapting to various physical factors such as heat, noise, uncomfortable climates and difficult environments.

The above performance dimensions help to create an understanding of the multidimensional nature of the concept of performance suggested by Rothman and Coetzer (2003) and provide the building blocks with which to understand or conceptualise performance in the 21st century.

2.4.3.2 Components of job performance in terms of key performance indicators

While key performance indicators (KPIs) may also be referred to as performance measures (Walsh, 1996), they are discussed here as components of job performance because job performance in this study comprises four key performance indicators which represent the components of the construct.

The essential actions that really matter and drive the success of your business are your key performance indicators (KPIs) (Rauseo, 2010). Remember the old adage:

"If you can't measure it, you can't control it and if you can't control it, you can't manage it." Organisations these days prefer to use the term "performance indicators" instead of "performance measures". For organisations that develop strategic plans, planners will usually prepare a suite of key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure progress towards corporate objectives (Walsh, 1996).

Key performance indicators are defined in terms of meaningful measurements of progress towards identified corporate goals (Wolfskill, 2007). Walsh (1996) suggests that performance indicators should satisfy the following conditions:

1) *Alignment with corporate strategy*. At the very least, KPIs must have a strategic focus. They must measure progress towards corporate goals. During the process of developing the key performance indicators that were used in this research, the starting point for the team of experts was to assess their corporate strategy and develop the key performance indicators from this point, thus aligning them to the strategy.

2) *Traceable to key business processes*. Each key business process should have at least one KPI. A change in the KPI (a change in the average or variability) should be traceable to a change in the operation of the key process.

3) *Not too few and not too many*. There is no single best measure of performance. There is no "one size fits all" but at the same time, organisations should not attempt to measure everything. Typically, organisations aim for between six and 10 major corporate indicators.

4) *Avoidance of "turf protection"*. If departmental or business unit performance is made competitive, there will be temptation for managers to maximise their own performance at the expense of others. A win–lose situation can result when processes transgress functional boundaries. Such "turf protection" can be avoided by encouraging cross-functional management and aligning performance indicators with processes, not the functional units which contribute to processes.

5) *Relevant to all people*. Senior and middle managers use performance indicators for strategic and tactical decision making, while first line supervisors and the general workforce are concerned with operational decision making.

Performance measurement must therefore reflect the needs of people at different levels of the organisation. What is needed at the corporate level may not be relevant at the job level. People at all levels must be allowed to contribute ideas towards what should be measured.

Walsh (1996) distinguishes between two categories of KPIs: key performance outcomes (KPOs) and key performance drivers (KPDs). KPOs refer to the traditional outcome measures designed to measure progress towards corporate objectives. KPDs refer to the in-process measures that influence KPOs. KPOs are derived from the view that organisations see themselves in terms of sections, departments and business units.

Walsh (1996) motivates for the use of KPDs as opposed to KPOs because a KPD or process-based performance reporting system is able to show a clear link between measurement and process, thereby facilitating the progress of total quality management, business process redesign, re-engineering and benchmarking.

As mentioned before, the components of job performance for this research comprised four KPIs, namely: (1) financial, (2) breathe a brand, (3) customer-centric service and (4) productivity. They were aimed at fulfilling the role of key performance drivers (KPDs) in driving processes.

The financial component of job performance relates directly to sales and accurate invoice administration; the breath a brand component of job performance has to do with attitude in terms of willingness to embrace organisational values and teamwork; the customer-centric service component of job performance refers to the customer and candidate's experience of service from the consultant; and the productivity component of job performance relates to specific activities, such as the production of CVs, measured in terms of frequency performed.

2.4.4 Underlying logic of job performance and performance appraisal

The definition of job performance was given in section 2.4.2 of this chapter. The underlying logic of job performance is discussed in this section in terms of performance measurement and appraisal.

Job analysis identifies the components of a particular job. The goal with the performance appraisal, however, is not to make distinctions among jobs but rather to make distinctions among people – especially among people who are doing the same job. A performance appraisal is the actual process of gathering information about individuals on the basis of critical job requirements (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005).

2.4.4.1 Methods of performance measurement and appraisal

The performance appraisal should be based on the specific tasks the employee accomplishes or fails to accomplish and where appropriate, the behaviours identified as necessary to perform the job during the rating period (Martin & Bartol, 1998).

According to Tangen (2003), the choice of a suitable measurement technique or collection of techniques depends on a number of factors, including:

- the purpose of the measurement
- the level of detail required
- the time available for the measurement
- the existence of available predetermined data
- the cost of measurement

Possible methods of measuring and appraising performance include the graphic rating scale, critical incidents, the behavioural observation scale, employee comparison methods (Muchinsky *et al*, 2005), behaviourally anchored rating scales (Spangenberg, Esterhuyse, Visser, Briedenhann & Calitz, 1989) and 360-degree feedback (Garavan, Morley & Flynn, 1997) – to name some commonly used methods.

The methods applicable to this study include graphic rating scales, critical incidents and 360-degree feedback. The financial and breath the brand components of job performance are rated by the managers concerned; the customer service component comprises ratings from both clients and candidates and can be understood in terms of a 360-degree feedback methodology; and the last component of job performance, namely productivity, is measured from a critical incidents perspective. These three methods of measuring and appraising job performance are discussed briefly below.

(1)   Graphic rating scales

According to Muchinsky *et al.* (2005), graphic rating scales are the most commonly used system in performance appraisal. Individuals are rated on a number of traits or factors. The rater judges "how much" of each factor the individual deserves. On a graphic rating scale, each point is defined on a continuum. Hence, in order to make meaningful distinctions in performance within dimensions, scale points must be defined unambiguously for the rater. This process is called anchoring (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005).

(2)   Critical incidents

Critical incidents are behaviours (actions or attitudes) that result in good or poor job performance (Muchinsky *et al.*, 2005). In terms of the critical incident technique, experienced workers are asked to describe situations or incidents that are specifically indicative of or critical for effective job performance. The responses or solutions to critical incidents recommended by experienced job incumbents or their immediate supervisors constitute important employee competencies. Critical incident methods have been widely used to identify work performance factors (Hagner, Noll & Donovan, 2002).

(3)   360-degree feedback

360-degree feedback; multi-rater feedback; upward appraisal; co-worker feedback; multi-perspective ratings; and full-circle feedback are just a few of the names to

describe this type of feedback. Although the names are different, the process is essentially the same (Garavan *et al.*, 1997).

Multi-rater or 360-degree feedback systems are characterised by the evaluation of an individual's performance by multiple raters from multiple levels. Although procedures vary, typically the individual is rated by others who interact frequently with the individual, who are knowledgeable about the individual's performance and whose opinions are valued by the individual. The most common procedure is to include peers, subordinates and bosses (in addition to self-ratings), but raters outside the organisation (such as customers or suppliers) may also be included (Mount, Judge, Scullen, Sytsma & Hezlet, 1998).

2.4.5 Application of job performance in the workplace

Job performance as a measurable construct finds its application at both the organisational level and the individual level. Muchinsky *et al.* (2005) list the applications of performance assessments or measurements as personnel training, wage and salary administration, placements, promotions, discharge and personnel research. At the organisational level, job performance is used to drive organisational performance in the process of performance management.

Performance management is a continuous process of identifying, measuring and developing individual and group performance in organisations (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005). It deals with the challenge organisations face in defining, measuring and stimulating employee performance with the ultimate goal of improving organisational performance (Den Hartog *et al.*, 2004).

According to De Waal (2004), in theory, during the performance management process, efficient and effective steering and control of the organisation is achieved by:

- formulating the mission, strategy and objectives of the organisation
- translating the objectives to the various management levels of the company

- measuring the objectives with critical success factors (CSFs), key performance indicators (KPIs) and the balanced score card (BSC)

- taking corrective action based on regular reporting of the indicator results.

The organisation where this research was conducted first developed their corporate strategy, they then derived their KPIs from this strategy, they measured performance as defined by their KPIs and then finally took corrective action based on the KPI results in order to steer the organisation towards its strategic objectives. Performance management is ultimately the culmination of an organisation's definition of performance and the measurement and application thereof. The ultimate application of job performance, as in the case of the organisation in this research, is to drive the strategic objectives of the organisation.

The next section of this chapter is a discussion on the theoretical integration of sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance.

2.5 INTEGRATION OF SENSE OF COHERENCE, SELF-EFFICACY AND JOB PERFORMANCE

In this section of the chapter the similarities and differences between the constructs are explored with the aim of identifying how they relate to each other.

2.5.1 Sense of coherence and job performance

In his quest to answer the salutogenic question of why people remain healthy instead of becoming sick, Antonovsky (1979, 1987) presented the sense of coherence construct as an answer. In psychological terms, one might perceive sense of coherence to be a personality characteristic or coping style – an enduring tendency to see one's life space as more or less ordered, predictable and manageable. If these assumptions are true, the sense of coherence should have implications for the individual's response in various kinds of stress situations (Antonovsky & Sagy, 2001).

A working person with a strong sense of coherence will make cognitive sense of the workplace and will perceive its stimuli as clear, ordered, structured, consistent and predictable information. Such a person will perceive work as holding challenges which s(he) can meet by using both personal resources and those under the control of, for example, managers, co-workers and subordinates. In addition, such a person will make motivational sense of work demands as challenges that are worthy of engaging with and investing personal energy in (Strümpfer & De Bruin, 2009). This description of a working individual with a strong sense of coherence clearly suggests that such an individual may perform better at work than one with a weaker sense of coherence.

Research by Strümpfer and De Bruin (2009) provided evidence of a strong relationship between sense of coherence and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction remains a popular study area in industrial psychology, possibly because of the theoretical and practical attractiveness of a causal link between happiness on the job and improved work performance (Strümpfer & De Bruin, 2009). Rothmann *et al.* (2005) suggest that job stress leads to burnout and that a strong sense of coherence will mediate the relationship between job stress and work wellness (consisting of low burnout and high work engagement). In their study of two salutogenic constructs and stress, Oosthuizen and Van Lill (2008) found that sense of coherence significantly contributed to variance in stress. Their findings indicate that individuals with a strong sense of coherence feel that they are able to manage their stress, while those with a weaker sense of coherence do not manage it as well.

All of the above research suggests better job performance from an individual with a stronger sense of coherence.

2.5.2 Self-efficacy and job performance

Efficacy expectations are a major determinant of people's choice of activities, how much effort they will expend and how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations (Bandura, 1977). It makes sense that a greater capacity for job-related activities, more effort and persistence should result in better job performance.

Research by Judge and Bono (2001) demonstrated a high correlational value between generalised self-efficacy and job performance. They suggest that generalised self-efficacy, internal locus of control or self-esteem should be considered in selection decisions. A meta-analytical study that was conducted by Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) suggests that self-efficacy may even be a better predictor of work-related performance than personality trait based constructs. Karatepe, Arsasli and Khan (2007) found that self-efficacy was a significant determinant of job performance in their study of hotel employees. From the above evidence, it seems clear that an integral link between job performance and self-efficacy exists.

2.5.3 Sense of coherence and self-efficacy

2.5.3.1 Sense of coherence and self-efficacy are both coping constructs

General self-efficacy is the belief in one's competence to cope with a broad range of stressful or challenging demands (Luszczynska *et al.*, 2005). According to Antonovsky (1987) the person with a strong sense of coherence will choose from a repertoire of resistance resources which seems to be the most appropriate combination for the given situation. General self-efficacy is similar to sense of coherence in that both constructs not only refer to a person's ability to cope, but also to his or her ability to cope with a broad range of situations. Both constructs fall within the field of positive psychology. Coetzee and Cilliers (2001) refer to both constructs in their discussion of positive psychology constructs.

2.5.3.2 For both sense of coherence and self-efficacy, the individual is viewed as agentic

Self-efficacy is understood within Bandura's (2001a) social cognitive theory, which views the development of self-efficacy in individuals as a result of personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective and biological events; behavioural patterns; and environmental events operating as interacting determinants that influence one another bi-directionally. The individual, however, is not viewed as the victim of these forces at work, but rather as the agent or producer of his or her life experience while

taking these factors into account (Bandura, 2001a). The salutogenic viewpoint also views the person as the agent of his or her experience. According to Strümpfer (1990), resistance resources – whether generalised or specific – are only potentially available; it is up to the person to actuate them in combating and overcoming pathogens and stressors.

2.5.3.3 Influential factors in and the process of the development of sense of coherence and self-efficacy

Factors that influence the development of sense of coherence appear to be very similar to factors that influence the development of self-efficacy. The development of sense of coherence is influenced by environmental factors or stresses as is the development of self-efficacy. They are also influenced by GRRs some of which may be cognitive, affective or biological events but essentially those phenomena affecting the combat of stresses (Antonovsky, 1987) as in the development of self-efficacy.

The development of both of these constructs depends on repeated experiences of coping successfully. According to Strümpfer (1990), through repeated experiences of sense making, a person develops, over time, a strong sense of coherence After strong efficacy expectations are developed through repeated success (of personal mastery), the negative impact of occasional failures is likely to be reduced (Bandura, 1977).

According to Antonovsky (1979) a feedback loop is formed from the GRRs to sense of coherence during the development thereof. Depending on previous experience of overcoming stressors, the GRRs will enhance the strength of the sense of coherence, which in turn will enhance the strength of the GRRs. A very similar pattern of events or feedback loop is formed during the development of self-efficacy. If one may liken the sources of self-efficacy information to GRRs for a moment, it becomes evident that the sources of efficacy information (performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, emotional arousal and social persuasion) potentially enhance the strength of self-efficacy, which – depending on success in coping or combating stressors – enhances the strength of influence of the sources of self-efficacy information.

2.5.3.4 Sense of coherence and self-efficacy are both universal constructs

General self-efficacy is a universal construct, which means that it characterises a basic belief that is inherent in all individuals (Bandura, 2002). Multicultural validation studies (Luszczynska *et al.*, 2005) support this. Sense of coherence is defined by Antonovsky (1979, 1987) as a global construct. According to Antonovsky (1996), the sense of coherence construct is not a culture-bound construct. Both sense of coherence and general self-efficacy are thus global or universal constructs that facilitate an understanding of the human condition and are not culturally or geographically bound concepts.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that sense of coherence and self-efficacy can both be viewed as universal coping constructs which have the power to mediate stress and improve an individual's performance in the world. Sense of coherence and self-efficacy measures of human strengths appear to have the power to influence job performance outcomes. Perseverance, confidence in oneself, a belief that the resources needed are available, a sense of meaning, an understanding of the challenges posed, a willingness to engage in a greater number of activities and greater effort expended - characteristics of sense of coherence and self-efficacy - must surely act as antecedents of job performance.

2.6   CHAPTER SUMMARY

A key challenge facing organisations is how they continue to deliver sustained competitive advantage in the short term while also preparing for longer-term success (Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles & Truss, 1999). Job performance is of enormous interest to industrial psychologists, human resources managers and business leaders. Effective and efficient job performance determines an organisation's survival in an unpredictable global economy and is thus validated in terms of the weight it carries.

The relationship between various variables and job performance is thus a pivotal research topic for business leaders and researchers. Previous studies (as discussed above) on the relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job

performance, together with consideration of the critical nature of job performance in organisational survival today, motivate this research.

This chapter focused on conceptualising sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance. Each of the constructs was investigated in terms of a brief overview and window onto the past, definitions, components, dimensions or sources, underlying logic and application in an organisational context. This chapter ended with a theoretical integration of the constructs and an investigation into the relationships between them. Chapter 3 contains the research article for this study and reports on the research process and findings.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH ARTICLE

SENSE OF COHERENCE, SELF-EFFICACY AND JOB PERFORMANCE IN THE RECRUITMENT INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the research was to investigate the relationship between two positive psychology constructs (namely sense of coherence and self-efficacy) and job performance in a group of 99 recruitment consultants. The study was conducted in the context of the recruitment industry, which is characterised by high levels of competition and stress as a result of socio-political and economic factors. No relationships were found between the constructs. The comprehensibility component of sense of coherence, however, did demonstrate a statistically significant relationship to job performance and to two of its dimensions, namely customer service and productivity. Multiple regression analyses indicated that the comprehensibility and meaningfulness components of sense of coherence contributed significantly to variance in total job performance scores. Statistically significant differences between age groups, gender groups, job type groups and length of service groups emerged for several of the variables measured.

Today's workplace is constantly changing. New technologies, the globalisation of markets, and the changing needs and values of today's employees require that organisations adapt in order to remain competitive (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). According to Cascio (2009), today the nature of change itself has changed. Competition is increasing and the global economy brings new international competition. In South Africa small organisations are being established due to the entrepreneurial explosion; large organisations are downsizing and contracting services out. Because of stiffer competition and a less stable business environment,

organisations are increasingly under pressure to do more with less and to be more flexible (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006).

The process of measuring and subsequently actively managing organisational and employee performance in order to improve organisational effectiveness is currently seen as critical to the development and survival of organisations (Den Hartog, Boselie & Paauwe, 2004). Research has shown that a multitude of situational and dispositional factors can influence an employee's performance (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003). Among the most studied antecedents of job performance have been job satisfaction, job attitudes, personality, motivation, leadership, and (to a lesser extent) group processes and organisational design (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982). Research about personality and job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Tett, Jackson & Rothstein, 1991) reports in the affirmative for the possibility of the use of personality measures (as dispositional factors) as predictors of job performance. Tett and Burnett (2003) stress the need for situational factors or appropriate cues for trait expression that lead to mutually valued outcomes.

Effective job performance that is aligned to corporate strategy is critical for the survival of any organisation, thus predictors thereof and related constructs have been and remain a key point for research by industrial psychologists over the years.

An interview with S Alcock (Personal communication, 16 June 2010), a recruitment specialist of 13 years, concerning the performance of recruitment consultants in the context of today's world of work revealed that the role of a recruitment consultant in today's business climate involves dealing with high levels of stress. It was suggested that a considerable amount of resilience is needed in order to survive as a recruitment consultant and perform well in today's business climate, and that staff turnover in the industry is generally quite high because of this. Upon asking about the causes of such high stress levels in the industry, the following reasons were given:

- The consultants work to sales budgets, which constantly places a demand on them to make placements.

- The pressure to bring in new clients every month is extreme. In order for the organisation to survive, the continual acquisition of new clients is crucial.

- Maintaining existing clients and keeping them from jumping ship to other agencies is a major challenge.

- The multiple roles that an employee must fulfil contribute significantly to the challenge of being a recruitment consultant. The recruitment consultant must be a salesperson, an industrial relations manager, an admin manager, a payroll clerk, a recruiter, an interviewer and a management consultant offering understanding of and solutions to human resources related issues to clients – to name but a few. This juggling act creates enormous stress in that the consultant feels increasingly split into many parts and must continually work at trying to maintain an integrated sense of self, while at the same time endeavouring to fulfil all these roles without neglecting any of them.

- The work is generally unstructured and unpredictable from day to day and the consultants are required to make huge adjustments to unexpected situations very quickly.

- The number of recruitment agencies at play in the market has mushroomed over the last decade. This translates into steep competition with regard to maintaining existing clients as well as securing new clients. It also means that there is more competition over skilled candidates to meet their clients' needs.

- There is not as much business available due to the economic recession.

- There is also an overall candidate shortage at the moment, which is suspected to be related to a phenomenon called the brain drain.

According to Sako (2002), the term "brain drain" refers to the loss of highly skilled professionals from a source country to a recipient country. For Africa, the brain drain represents a major development constraint. The continuous loss of skilled and experienced professionals is attributed to poor economic and political governance, socio-political instability, inappropriate economic policies and a declining economic growth rate, poor infrastructure and weak institutions (Sako, 2002). Much of the increase in immigration – legal and illegal – is a result of the baby boomers of the developing world reaching working age in countries where there are not enough jobs for all the new young workers to fill (Cascio, 2009). The brain drain contributes to the

challenges recruitment consultants face today by drastically limiting the numbers of skilled candidates available to be placed with clients. The economic recession has also hit the recruitment industry hard.

Towards the end of 2008, approximately a year after the start of the worsening slump of the American economy and the implosion of other imperialist economies, the South African economy started to nose-dive at a breathtaking speed. The hyped-up (fictitious) boom of recent years, based on the extravagant consumerism of the old *nouveau* rich (the black elite) and the mining export bonanza, simply became unsustainable (Jacobs, 2009). This fictitious boom of the economy contributed to a mushrooming of the recruitment industry, followed by recession which characterises the industry as highly competitive with possibly more game players and less business opportunities than ever before.

In view of the above challenges associated with the recruitment industry and the stressful nature of the work, the purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between employee's strengths, as operationalised by the positive psychology constructs sense of coherence and general self-efficacy, and job performance.

Positive psychology

Positive psychology is defined as the scientific study of ordinary, positive, subjective human strengths, virtues, experiences and functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) present the idea of prevention as the foreground of positive psychology. Prevention researchers have discovered that there are human strengths that act as buffers against mental illness: courage, future mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skill, faith, work ethic, hope, honesty, perseverance, and the capacity for flow and insight – to name several (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Strümpfer (2003) anchors four concepts which appear to form the backbone of positive psychology today: (1) awareness of the need for a balance between pathology and health; (2) the study of health; (3) a focus on virtues and character such as reason; and the idea of prevention through building resilience. He also

demonstrates that these are not new thoughts or ideas and can be traced back to ancient times and civilisations.

Wissing and Van Eeden (2002) list some positive psychology constructs that have been developed over the years as sense of coherence, self-efficacy, satisfaction with life, optimism, resourcefulness, constructive thinking, emotional intelligence, coping, social support, reality orientation, self-actualisation, resilience, fortitude and hope. These constructs, and their operationalisations, were inspired by different theoretical traditions and empirical observations (Wissing & Van Eeden, 2002). The positive psychology constructs in this research include sense of coherence and self-efficacy, which are described and motivated below.

Sense of coherence

The sense of coherence construct was developed by Antonovsky (1979) in response to his salutogenic question: Why do some people, despite the multiple of challenges and stressors associated with living, remain in good health? Antonovsky's (1979, 1987) salutogenic paradigm focuses on the origins of health as opposed to the traditional pathogenic orientation which focuses on illness. The salutogenic approach accepts the inevitability of stressors in daily life in general and the workplace specifically, and the fact that human beings have to cope with the ensuing stress in some way or another (Oosthuizen & Van Lill, 2008).

Antonovsky (1987, p. 19) defined sense of coherence as follows:

> The sense of coherence construct is a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring through dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement.

Sense of coherence consists of three subscales which are described in the above definition in points (1) to (3). The subscales are named comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness respectively (Antonovsky, 1987).

Strümpfer (1990, p. 270) suggests that a person in the workplace with a strong sense of coherence would in all likelihood:

- make cognitive sense of the workplace, perceiving its stimulation as clear, ordered, structured, consistent and predictable information (comprehensibility);
- perceive his or her work as consisting of experiences that are bearable, with which (s)he can cope, and as challenges that (s)he can meet by availing herself or himself of personal resources or resources that are under the control of legitimate others (manageability);
- be able to make emotional and motivational sense of work demands, as welcome challenges, worthy of engaging in and investing his or her energies in (meaningfulness).

An orientation to work of an individual with a strong sense of coherence can only lead to productive performance, recognition, reward and promotion (Strümpfer, 1990). The choice of sense of coherence as a construct in this study was motivated by both Strümpfer's (1990) suggestions above and the nature of the construct as a mediator of stress (Antonovsky, 1979).

Self-efficacy

The truth is that believing that you can accomplish what you want to accomplish is one of the most important ingredients – perhaps the most important ingredient – in the recipe for success (Maddux, 2009). People's self-efficacy beliefs determine their level of motivation, as is reflected in how much effort they will exert in an endeavour and how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1989).

Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people's judgments of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance. It is concerned not with the skills one has, but with judgements of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses (Bandura, 2002, p. 94). General self-efficacy is the belief in one's competence to tackle novel tasks and to cope with adversity in a broad range of stressful or challenging encounters – as opposed to specific self-efficacy, which is constrained to a particular task at hand (Luszczynska, Gutiérez-Doña & Schwarzer, 2005). Self-efficacy as a construct in this research was conceptualised as general self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is best understood in the context of social cognitive theory. From the perspective of social cognitive theory, people are considered to be self-organising, self-reflective, self-regulative and able to make judgments about themselves based on their own activity (Luszczynska *et al.*, 2005). Social cognitive theory explains human functioning in terms of triadic reciprocal causation. In this transactional view of the self and society, personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective and biological events; behavioural patterns; and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that influence one another bi-directionally (Bandura, 2001).

The outputs of strong self-efficacy include approach verses avoidance behaviour, effective performance and persistence in working through challenges (Betz, 2004). These outputs or consequences of strong self-efficacy, together with the suggestion of it being a coping construct, allowing the individual to cope with a broad range of stressful and challenging encounters (Luszczynska *et al.*, 2005) motivated the choice of self-efficacy as a construct in this study.

Job performance

Campbell, McCloy, Oppler and Sager (1993) view performance as synonymous with behaviour. They describe performance as what people do that can be observed and measured in terms of each individual's proficiency or level of contribution. Rothman and Coetzer (2003) deepen this perspective on performance by illuminating the multidimensional nature of performance. They (Rothman & Coetzer, 2003, p. 68) define job performance as a multidimensional construct which indicates how well

employees perform their tasks, the initiative they take and the resourcefulness they show in solving problems.

In this study job performance was defined in terms of key performance indicators (KPIs). Four KPIs (namely, financial, breathe a brand, customer-centric service and productivity) served as measures of performance. Total job performance formed a combination of the four KPIs.

The financial component of job performance relates directly to sales and accurate invoice administration; the breathe a brand component of job performance has to do with attitude in terms of willingness to embrace organisational values and teamwork; the customer-centric service component of job performance refers to the client and candidate's experience of service from the consultant; and the productivity component of job performance relates to specific activities, such as the production and sending of CVs, measured in terms of the frequency at which the activity is performed.

The increasing economic and socio-political pressures over the last few years have become a reality which impacts on various aspects of the recruitment industry. The work environment in which employees currently function demands more of them than it did in any previous period (Storm & Rothmann, 2003). The saturation of the recruitment industry market in a time of economic recession, together with a shortage of skilled candidates associated with the trend of emigrating knowledge workers amongst other difficulties, contribute to the challenges and stress of being a recruitment consultant in South Africa today.

It is crucial that organisations recruit, train and retain employees who can dance to the erratic and unpredictable rhythms of the current zeitgeist. Employees who can deliver effective job performance are crucial to organisations' survival in the 21st-century global economy. In the light of both the additional stressors placed on recruitment consultants today and the critical nature of job performance to organisational survival, this research aimed to investigate the relationship between two positive psychology constructs and job performance.

The objective of the study was to determine whether sense of coherence, and its components, and general self-efficacy may be considered possible predictors of job performance.

METHOD

Research approach

An exploratory non-experimental field study was conducted. A quantitative relational approach was followed, where the statistical relationships among the relevant variables were analysed (Durrheim, 2007). An attempt was made to predict variance in the criterion variable total job performance on the basis of positive psychology variables, namely sense of coherence and self-efficacy. Differences between biographical groups on the variables were also explored.

Participants

The population from which the sample was drawn comprised 152 recruitment consultants, all from one national recruitment organisation. The consent of the managing director of the organisation was obtained by explaining the potential value the research may have for the organisation. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the research and iterating the consent of the managing director was sent out electronically together with the questionnaires to all the employees. 132 employees responded to the questionnaire, while only 99 sets of performance data out of the 132 respondents were available. The final sample consisted of 99 recruitment consultants (N = 99).

Measuring instruments

Three instruments were used to collect the data. The orientation to life questionnaire (OLQ) (Antonovsky, 1987) was used to measure sense of coherence, the generalised self-efficacy scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) was used to measure self-efficacy and a performance appraisal measuring four key performance indicators

(internally developed by the organisation) was used to measure job performance. A biographical questionnaire was also administered.

Orientation to Life Questionnaire (OLQ)

The OLQ measures sense of coherence by a series of 29 semantic differential items on a seven-point scale, with anchoring phrases at each end. High scores indicate a strong sense of coherence (Sagy & Antonovsky, 1992). 26 studies using the OLQ reported Cronbach alpha measures of internal consistency that ranged from 0,82 to 0,95, while test-retest correlations showed considerable stability, for example 0,54 over a two-year period (Antonovsky, 1993). Strümpfer and Wissing (1998) reported mean alpha values of 0,87 for 19 studies. According to Eriksson and Lindström (2005), the findings prove the sense of coherence instrument to be reliable, valid, feasible and cross-culturally applicable.

Generalised Self-efficacy Scale (GSE)

Throughout the text, GSE refers to the instrument used while general self-efficacy refers to the construct it measures. The GSE measures general self-efficacy by a series of 10 items on a four-point scale. High scores indicate strong general self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). In samples from 23 nations, Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0,76 to 0,90, with the majority in the high 0,80s. Criterion-related validity is documented in numerous correlation studies where positive coefficients were found with favourable emotions, dispositional optimisms and work satisfaction. Negative coefficients were found with depression, anxiety, stress, burnout and health complaints (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). Roothman, Kirsten and Wissing, (2003) reported a Cronbach alpha of 0,83 for a multicultural sample of 378 South Africans.

Job performance

A performance measure consisting of four key performance indicators was used to assess job performance. The key performance indicators included financial, breathe

the brand, customer service and productivity. High scores on the key performance indicators indicate better performance on that indicator. The performance measure was developed within the organisation by its own panel of experts. The key performance indicators had been derived from and were therefore directly linked to the corporate strategy of the organisation; they were aimed at driving specific behaviours which ultimately rolled up towards the strategic objectives of the organisation. The key performance indicators had been in use for a number of years after replacing the previously used performance measure, a balanced score card approach. The performance measure is reviewed annually by the organisation's internal experts in order to ensure validity of the measure as the organisation continually adapts and changes with the dynamics of the environment in which it operates.

Procedure

A front page with the instructions and information on the assessments and research, together with the measuring instruments, was loaded onto an online survey facility. The research participants were each emailed a unique link to the online assessments. The participants were required to click on the link, which directed them to the cover page containing the instructions, purpose and ratification by top management of the research. The respondents first answered the biographical questionnaire, followed by the OLQ and finally the GSE.

The branch managers, the appraisers of the participants' job performance, were requested by the head office administration to submit the available job performance scores of the recruitment consultants for a period of six months (the first two quarters of the financial year 2010/2011). The consultants are appraised on a monthly basis; however, to increase the validity of the scores, it was decided to use the average of available scores for a period of six months. Due to the individual movements of the recruitment consultants (i.e. leave, etc.) as well as internal factors of the organisation (resignation of and change of management in various branches), it was impossible to acquire a full six months of scores for every participant. This influenced the decision to take an average of available scores over six months in order to maximise the sample size. Replacing the missing numbers with the average of the respondent's

other scores is a common method of dealing with missing numbers (Finchilescu, 2005). The assessment and job performance data was captured and stored in a format that would allow for statistical analyses to be performed.

In order to derive a total score for job performance, factor analysis was conducted on its dimensions, namely finance, breathe the brand, customer service and productivity. According to Babbie and Mouton (2009), factor analysis is used to discover patterns among the variations in values of several variables. Factor loadings for each of the dimensions were then converted into percentages which were used to weight each dimension and calculate scientifically valid total job performance scores.

RESULTS

The biographical properties of the respondents who were included in the study are presented in table 1 and serve to describe the sampled population.

Table 1: Sample characteristics (n = 99)

| | Category | Frequency | % | Cumulative | |
				Frequency	%
Age	</=27	25	25,3	25	25,3
	28–32	29	29,3	54	54,5
	33–37	21	21,2	75	75,8
	38+	24	24,2	99	100,0
Gender	Female	84	84,8	84	84,8
	Male	15	15,2	99	100,0
Race	Black	15	15,2	15	15,2
	White	37	37,4	52	52,5
	Indian	20	20,2	72	72,7
	Coloured	27	27,3	99	100,0
Job group	Permanent	27	27,3	27	27,3
	Contingent	16	16,2	43	43,4
	Project	56	56,6	99	100,0
Education	Postgraduate degree	6	6,1	6	6,1
	Bachelor's degree	16	16,2	22	22,2
	National diploma	21	21,2	43	43,3
	National certificate	16	16,2	59	59,6
	Grade 12	39	39,4	98	99,0
	Grade 10	1	1,0	99	100,0

The age of the respondents was distributed as follows: 25% of the respondents fell into the </=27 year old age category, the largest portion of 29% in the 28 to 32 year old age category, 21% in the 33 to 37 year old age category and 24% in the 38+ year old age category. There were far more females than males, with females comprising 85% of the respondents and males 15%. White people made up the largest race group at 37% of the respondents, followed by coloured people at 27%, then Indians at 20%, and the smallest group was black people at 15%. The project type employees made up the largest group of job type and comprised 57% of the respondents, followed by the permanent employees at 27% and then the contingent employees at 16%. In terms of education level, 6% of the respondents had a postgraduate degree, 16% had a bachelor's degree, 21% was in possession of a national diploma, 16% had a national certificate, 39% had reached as far as grade 12 and 1% obtained a grade 10 level of education.

The descriptive statistics and alpha coefficients of the OLQ and its components, as well as the GSE, are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the orientation to life questionnaire (OLQ) and the generalised self-efficacy scale (GSE)

Item	Mean	SD	α
Orientation to Life Questionnaire (29 items)	149,65	17,79	0,86*
Comprehensibility (11 items)	50,97	8,24	0,73*
Manageability (10 items)	52,99	7,01	0,69
Meaningfulness (8 items)	45,69	5,99	0,75*
General SE Scale (10 items)	33,82	3,42	0,82*

* Indicates α values of higher than 0,70

According to table 2, both the OLQ and the GSE presented satisfactory levels of internal consistency (OLQ α = 0,86; GSE α = 0,82), with the Cronbach alpha coefficient being greater than 0,70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). These findings are in line with previous research done by Söderhamn and Holmgren (2004) who reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0,92 for the OLQ and Luszczynska, *et al.* (2005) who reported Cronbach alpha coefficients ranging from 0,79 to 0,90 for the GSE. Rothmann, Steyn and Mostert (2005) reported an alpha coefficient of 0,86 for the OLQ. Roothman *et al.* (2003) reported a Cronbach alpha of 0,83 for the GSE for a multicultural sample of 378 South Africans. The components of sense of coherence also presented satisfactory levels of internal consistency (comprehensibility α = 0,73; meaningfulness α = 0,75, except for manageability where the Cronbach alpha coefficient was slightly lower than 0,70 (i.e. 0,69). None of the manageability items, if deleted, would have raised the Cronbach alpha over the 0,70 level.

The relationships between sense of coherence, the components of sense of coherence, general self-efficacy, and job performance and its dimensions were investigated. The matrix of intercorrelations is reported in table 3.

Table 3: Intercorrelations between the constructs of sense of coherence, general self-efficacy and job performance

Variable	Sense of coherence (SOC)				Self-efficacy (SE)		Job performance (JP)			
	Comp	Manag	Mean	Total	SE	Finan	BB	CS	Prod	Total
SOC										
Comprehensibility	1,00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Manageability	0,60**	1,00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Meaningfulness	0,42**	0,63**	1,00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SOC total	0,84**	0,88**	0,78**	1,00	-	-	-	-	-	-
SE										
General SE	0,46**	0.60**	0,52**	0,63**	1,00	-	-	-	-	-
Job performance										
Finance	0,10	-0,00	-0,13	0,00	0,04	1,00	-	-	-	-
Breathe a brand	0,11	0,07	-0,10	0,04	0,04	0,31**	1,00	-	-	-
Customer service	0,24*	0,05	0,06	0,15	0,14	0,15	0,18	1,00	-	-
Productivity	0,24*	0,14	-0,17	0,11	0,12	0,45**	0,61**	0,27**	1,00	-
Job performance total	0,22*	0,09	-0,16	0,08	0,10	0,74**	0,76**	0,35**	0,88**	1,00

** Correlation is significant at the 0,01 level (two-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0,05 level (two-tailed).

As with previous research (Frenz, Carey & Jorgensen, 1993; Gropp, Geldenhuys & Visser, 2007), the components of sense of coherence and the total sense of coherence score all showed significant correlations to each other at the p ≤ 0,01 level. Sense of coherence and its components also showed significant relationships with general self-efficacy. The dimensions of job performance and the total job performance score showed significant correlations to each other, except for customer service which showed no significant relationship to the finance and breathe the brand variables. No significant relationships emerged between sense of coherence and the job performance total, nor general self-efficacy and the job performance total. Studies by Moerane (2005), Rothmann and Van Rensberg (2002), and Strydom (2000) also reported no significant relationships between sense of coherence and job performance. Rothmann and Van Rensberg (2002) reported no

statistically significant relationship between general self-efficacy and performance. The comprehensibility component of sense of coherence showed a statistically significant ($p \leq 0,05$), however weak, relationship to customer service, productivity and job performance total (customer service 0,24; productivity 0,24; job performance total 0,22). It was not possible to find previous research that yielded similar results to the comprehensibility relationships due to the organisation-specific job performance construct which is not generalisable across other organisations.

The ability of sense of coherence, and its components, and general self-efficacy to predict job performance was investigated by means of multiple regression analysis. The statistically significant models that were found are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Multiple regression analysis with job performance as the dependent variable and comprehensibility and meaningfulness as the independent variables

Model		Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients						
1	(Constant)	67,64	6,73	-		10,05	0,000*	4,76	0,22	0,05
	Comprehensibility	0,29	0,13	0,22		2,19	0,031*			
2	(Constant)	84,18	8,64	-		9,74	0,000*	6,76	0,35	0,12
	Comprehensibility	0,46	0,14	0,35		3,29	0,001*			
	Meaningfulness	-0,49	0,19	-0,30		-2,90	0,005*			

* $p < 0,05$

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess whether sense of coherence, and its components, and self-efficacy could predict job performance as a total. Sense of coherence and self-efficacy did not emerge as significant predictors of job performance as a total. The components of sense of coherence (comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness) were then assessed as possible predictors of total job performance, which resulted in two significant models of prediction. Table 4 shows the results of multiple regression analysis, with the job performance total as the dependent variable and comprehensibility and meaningfulness (as measured by the OLQ) as the independent variables.

According to table 4, comprehensibility is a significant predictor (p = 0,031*) and explains 5% of the variance of total job performance (= 0,05). Adding meaningfulness as an independent variable (in model 2) resulted in a statistically significant increase in the prediction of the variance by a further 7% in total job performance (= 0,12). It must be noted though that meaningfulness showed a negative regression to job performance (= -0,49; = -0,30). In sum, comprehensibility and meaningfulness predicted 12% of the variance in total job performance. Although it was not possible to find previous research to substantiate these results, a study by Feldt, Kivimäki, Rantala and Tolvanen (2004) reported sense of coherence as a predictor of increasingly favourable perceptions of organisational climate. Another study by Breed, Cilliers and Visser (2006) yielded a two-factor solution for sense of coherence; the factors were labelled meaningfulness and comprehensibility. The manageability sub-scale loaded on either of the two factors. Perhaps this helps to explain these results in terms of the components which emerged as predictors.

Another sub-aim of the research was to establish the statistically significant differences between biographical groups for sense of coherence, the components of sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance constructs. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to establish differences between biographical groups on the constructs. The statistically significant differences that were found are presented in table 5.

Table 5: Analysis of variance between biographical groups on the variables

Source	Variable					Mean			
						</=27	**28–32**	**33–37**	**38+**
						(n=25)	**(n=29)**	**(n=21)**	**(n=24)**
Age (yrs)	Breathe the brand	1994,55	3	4,92	0,003*	95,96	93,97	89,62	84,27
						F	**M**		
						(n=84)	**(n=15)**		
Gender	Meaningfulness	156,97	1	4,51	0,036*	45,15	48,67		
	Customer service	456,05	1	9,38	0,003*	83,,7	77.38		
						Perman	**Cont**	**Proj**	
						(n=27)	**(n=16)**	**(n=56)**	
Job type	Finance	5294,41	2	8,81	0,000*	62,40	76,76	79,25	
	Customer service	731,75	2	7,90	0,001*	86,90	80,50	82,46	
	JP total	931,40	2	4,23	0,017*	77,30	82,27	84,45	
						</=1	**>1/=3**	**>3/=5**	**>5**
						(n=16)	**(n=26)**	**(n=23)**	**(n=34)**
LOS (yrs)	GSE	98,44	3	3,00	0,036*	34,50	32,15	34,26	34,47

* $p < 0,05$ total variance – small effect

LOS = length of service

Statistically significant differences which emerged between biographical groups in terms of the constructs are presented in table 5. By using 0,05 as the significance level, seven comparisons emerged as statistically significant. It was not possible to find previous research that yielded findings comparable with all these results since six of the differences were found on job performance variables that were unique to the organisation studied and the sizes of the gender groups were extremely disproportionate.

Scores on breathe the brand differed significantly among the age groups, with the </=27 group scoring the highest (95,96), followed by the 28 to 32 year old category (93,97) and then the 33 to 37 year old category (89,62). The oldest age category of 38+ scored the lowest (84,27). Tukey HSD tests (Durrheim, 2005) revealed that the 38+ year old category scored significantly lower than the 28 to 32 and the <27 year old categories, while the 33 to 37 year old category showed no difference to any of the other age categories. According to Durrheim (2005) Tukey's HSD is a more conservative pairwise comparison test which is best suited to research where no

prior expectations about the nature of the group mean differences exist. Stoline (1981) explains that the Games-Howell test is also a recommended method, but at the risk of being somewhat liberal. It was this decided to use the Tukey HSD method to conduct pairwise comparisons. Breathe the brand is an organisation-specific variable, it was therefore not possible to obtain comparable research to these findings.

Two differences emerged within the gender category: differences in meaningfulness and customer service. The males scored higher on meaningfulness (48,67) than the females (45,15), while the females scored higher on customer service (83,37) than the males (77,38). It must be noted with gender though, that there were 84 females and only 15 males in the respondent group. In a similarly gender distributed sample (83% females), Mtsweni (2007) reported no difference between males and females on sense of coherence or any of its components.

Differences in finance, customer service and job performance total emerged between job type groups. Project consultants scored the highest on finance (79,25), followed by contingent consultants (76,76) and permanent consultants scored the lowest on finance (62,40). Tukey HSD tests revealed that contingent and project consultants differed from permanent consultants on finance. Permanent consultants scored the highest on customer service (86,90), followed by project consultants (82,46) and contingent consultant scored the lowest (80,50). Tukey HSD tests grouped contingent and project consultants as scoring lower than permanent consultants. With regard to job performance total, project consultants took the lead on total job performance (84,45), followed by contingent consultants (82,29) and permanent consultants scored the lowest (77,30).

One statistically significant difference emerged for the time employed or length of service category, which was on the general self-efficacy scores. The respondents in the >1/=3 year category scored significantly lower (32,15) than the other three categories. This was confirmed with a Tukey HSD test. It was not possible to find similar research that reported differences on general self-efficacy between the length of service/employment groups.

No statistically significant difference between biographical groups of race and qualification level emerged on any of the constructs measured.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance among a group of recruitment consultants. The objectives were to determine predictors of job performance and to establish differences between biographical groups on the constructs measured.

Before the principal aims of the study were investigated, the reliability of the measuring instruments was assessed and total job performance scores were calculated by means of factor analysis. All of the Cronbach alpha coefficients that were obtained were satisfactory, except for the manageability component of sense of coherence where a Cronbach alpha of 0,69 was obtained. Nunnally (1978) suggests that a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0,60 or greater is acceptable for exploratory research such as this one. These results support the findings obtained by Antonovsky (1993) for the OLQ (29 items) and Luszczynska *et al.* (2005) for the GSE. It was concluded that the measures used passed the test and they were therefore regarded as reliable for use in this study.

With regard to sense of coherence, the three subscales were highly interrelated, which indicates that sense of coherence may be regarded as a one-dimensional construct. The intercorrelations ranged from 0,42 to 0,88. It was not possible to calculate intercorrelations for general self-efficacy as it is a one-dimensional construct. Overall, it was concluded that the OLQ and the GSE met the reliability and validity requirements needed for the present study.

The main aim of the study, namely to assess whether there were any statistically significant relationships between sense of coherence, and its components, and general self-efficacy and job performance yielded mixed results. Neither sense of coherence nor general self-efficacy showed a statistically significant relationship to job performance or any of the dimensions of job performance. Research by Moerane (2005) reported no significant correlations between sense of coherence and its components and work performance. While results for this research are similar to

those of Moerane's (2005), relationships were found for the comprehensibility component of sense of coherence. Comprehensibility showed significant relationships to total job performance as well as to two of the dimensions of job performance, namely customer service and productivity.

It is concluded for this study, that there is no statistically significant relationship between either sense of coherence or general self-efficacy and job performance. A weak positive relationship between comprehensibility and customer service, productivity and job performance did however emerge. The relationships to comprehensibility are discussed below.

Antonovsky (1996) refers to comprehensibility as believing that a challenge is understood. Comprehensibility refers to the extent to which persons find or structure their world to be understandable, meaningful, orderly and consistent instead of chaotic, random and unpredictable (Rothmann *et al.*, 2005). Comprehensibility exists when stimuli from the environment are perceived to make cognitive sense (Strümpfer, 2003).

When interpreting the relationship between comprehensibility and customer service, an explanation may be that individuals who structure their world to be understandable and orderly are favoured by clients and candidates because their dealings with these customers may reflect this sense of order and structure. This possibly provides the customer with a sense of confidence in the consultant who is portrayed as systematic, reliable and able to meet the client's needs. Productivity, as measured by the frequency with which specific outcome-related activities are performed, also showed a positive relationship to comprehensibility. It makes sense that individuals who structure their world to be orderly will be better at systematically working through prescribed sets of activities than individuals who view their world as chaotic, random and unpredictable.

A sub-aim of the study was to establish whether sense of coherence (and its components) and general self-efficacy could be viewed as predictors of job performance. Multiple regression analysis was conducted first with sense of coherence and general self-efficacy as the independent variables and job

performance as the dependent variable. No significant model of regression emerged for this combination of variables, which indicates that sense of coherence as a total score and general self-efficacy cannot be considered as predictors of job performance in the case of this research. The components of sense of coherence (namely comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness) were then entered as independent variables and total job performance as the dependent variable. Multiple regression analysis yielded interesting results in that comprehensibility emerged as a significant predictor of total job performance in model 1 and was able to predict 5% of the variance of the total job performance score. Meaningfulness, when included with comprehensibility as predictors of total job performance, strengthened the regression model significantly by improving the predicted variance of the total job performance score by a further 7%. While comprehensibility showed a positive regression to job performance, meaningfulness showed a negative regression. The model says that a high score on comprehensibility, together with a low score on meaningfulness, is a good predictor of total job performance.

Comprehensibility, believing that the challenge is understood (Antonovsky, 1996), as a predictor of job performance may be interpreted with relative ease as it makes logical sense that believing the challenge is understood is key to succeeding at it. Questions must, however, be raised about the results pertaining to the meaningfulness component.

Antonovsky (1996) refers to the meaningfulness component of sense of coherence as a wish to – be motivated to – cope. Meaningfulness is experienced when stimuli are perceived as motivationally relevant, in the form of welcome challenges that are worth engaging in, and investing oneself in (Strümpfer, 2003). Strümpfer (1990) refers to meaningfulness in the work context as making emotional and motivational sense of work demands, as welcome challenges, worthy of engaging in and investing one's energies in. He goes on to agree that such an orientation of the individual to work can only lead to productive performance. The results of this study, low scores on the meaningfulness component of sense of coherence predict high scores on job performance, thus contradict the literature.

The results may be interpreted as that individuals who are more able to make cognitive sense of their worlds (although they view their challenges with little worth and make less emotional sense of their work) perform better than individuals who are less able to make cognitive sense of their challenges, even though they view their challenges as worthy of engaging in and emotionally relevant.

Meaningfulness looks at the motivational content of sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987). A possible explanation for the results may be that high performing employees do not feel motivated to invest their energies in their work, even though they demonstrate high performance as they believe they are able to understand the challenges. This beckons one to investigate the effectiveness of motivation strategies, such as reward and recognition, offered by the organisation to high performing employees and the things that provide meaning to work. Antonovsky (1987) asserts that an individual's job shapes his or her sense of coherence or a positive health outcome. This means that the things that are offered by the job which makes it worthy of investing ones energies in may be lacking. An invitation to explore organisational and work-related factors which influence one's sense of meaningful attachment to work appears to be issued by these results. High performing employees may feel they are not being adequately rewarded. It may also be possible that high performing employees feel that they have outgrown their current work role and find the idea of an alternate work role or career more meaningful.

High performing employees may also consider their work to be repetitive and less stimulating than desired. This may be the case for project and contingent consultants who perform more repetitive work than permanent consultants. Their work entails capturing time sheets on a weekly basis for the temporary staff contracted by the organisation, which is extremely repetitive and essentially not very meaningful work. The contingent and project consultants did perform significantly better than the permanent consultants on job performance.

Antonovsky (1987) viewed meaningfulness, the emotional component of sense of coherence, as the most important of the three components because it provides the individual with the motivation to search for order in the world, to use the resources available and to seek out new resources for managing a demand. Without a sense of

meaning, even though the consultants are performing well, the emotionally disconnected consultants may be in danger of burning out or moving on to find greener and more emotionally enriching pastures which motivate their engagement. Another sub-aim of the study was to determine the differences between biographical groups on the variables measured. Analysis of variance was performed on all the biographical groups to determine the differences between them on the variables measured. Differences in six variables emerged for four of the biographical groups. These differences are discussed below.

Breathe the brand differed significantly between age categories. The younger consultants scored higher than the older consultants did on breathe the brand. A possible explanation may be that the younger consultants were more eager to please management and gain affirmation than the older consultants were.

Males scored significantly higher on meaningfulness than the females did. This may be interpreted that the males in this organisation were more emotionally connected to their work and perceived their jobs as more worthy of investing their energies in than the females. The females, on the other hand, scored significantly higher than the males on customer service. This may be interpreted that clients generally prefer to deal with females than with males and react more positively to females than they do to males. It must be noted, however, that there were only 15 males in the group of respondents while the females comprised 84.

Job type groups yielded differences in three of the measured variables, namely finance, customer service and job performance total. Project and contingent consultants scored higher on finance than the permanent consultants. These results may be explained by the fact that project employees primarily manage existing projects with a relatively steady cash turnover while permanent consultants need to continually hunt for new business as their finance score depends on making individual placements. Given the nature of the finance component of job performance for the consultants, the contingent consultants (who also had to hunt for new business and identify markets for temporary contingent staff) appeared to be performing best overall in the organisation with regard to finance. This may be an indication of the current business climate in which many organisations have cut back

on permanent staff and fill in with temps as and when they need to, thus increasing the demand for temporary contingent staffing plans.

With regard to customer service, the permanent consultants scored higher than the project and contingent consultants. These results make sense in that the permanent consultants have to work harder to establish and maintain relationships with their clients in order to secure new business and gain access to top talented candidates than the project consultants. The nature of the contingent consultants' job is such that it mainly consists of crisis management on behalf of the client. This higher stress scenario contributes to possibly less appropriate client–candidate matches and association of the consultant with stress may be a possible reason for contingent consultants' lower scores on customer service.

Project consultants scored the highest on total job performance, closely followed by contingent consultants and lastly permanent consultants. A possible explanation may be the financial component of job performance which showed the same differences between job types as total performance.

Length of service groups revealed one statistically significant difference out of the variables measured, namely general self-efficacy. Recruitment consultants in the >1/=3 years scored significantly lower on general self-efficacy than the other three groups (<=1 year; >3=5 years; >5 years). Self-efficacy refers to individuals' belief that they can successfully perform the behaviour required for a specific task. It is a relatively enduring set of beliefs that one can cope effectively in a broad range of situations (Bandura, 1982).

One way of understanding these results is that perhaps the consultant enters the job in year one with a strong belief in his or her ability to cope with the broad range of challenges. By year two, the consultant has fully realised the challenging nature of the recruitment industry and is less confident in his or her abilities to cope with the associated challenges. By year three, the consultant may feel that having coped for two years through both episodes of self-confidence and self-doubt, belief in his or her abilities to cope is now strengthened and reinforced. Consultants who have made it through five years in the industry have a sure sense of their ability to cope

with a broad range of stressful situations; they have become veterans in the recruitment industry. A longitudinal study, however, would be needed to explore this interpretation of the results further in order to verify it.

An alternative explanation may be that consultants with a low sense of self-efficacy do not make it for more than two years in the organisation and by year three, the only consultants that remain in the organisation are those with a greater belief in their ability to cope with the situations presented to them.

A major shortcoming of this research was the fact that it was conducted in one nationwide organisation which used a specific job performance measure. The results of the study are therefore not generalisable across other organisations. Another shortcoming of the study was the availability of performance data. Job performance was rated on a monthly basis in the organisation studied. It was decided, however, to use the average of six months of performance data to bolster the validity of the final performance scores. Due to internal movements in the organisation, it was not possible to obtain a full six months of performance scores for every respondent; this was addressed by replacing the missing scores with the average of the scores available. A final major shortcoming of the research was the massive disproportion between numbers of males and females who formed the respondent group, with females comprising 85% of the sample and males only 15%.

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that when employing new consultants, it would be wise for this organisation to include a measure of the individual's comprehensibility when making a selection decision. Comprehensibility, a belief that one understands the challenges posed and that one structures one's world to be ordered and predictable, as contained in a measure such as the OLQ that measures sense of coherence is a good predictor of job performance.

It is also recommended that the organisation launch an investigation into the things that high performing consultants may find meaningful about their work. The organisation can then use the results of this meaningfulness investigation to illuminate this meaning and assist the high performers to become more emotionally connected to what they do on a day to day basis. The combination of high scores on

comprehensibility and low scores on meaningfulness as a predictor of total job performance sounds the alarm bells which motivate the above recommendation.

As no statistically significant differences emerged for qualification groups, it is recommended that the organisation not include qualification level as a criterion for job performance in this organisation. Highly qualified consultants come at a price and the bottom line may thus be improved by hiring less qualified individuals at operational level.

The differing levels of general self-efficacy over the length of service categories warrants a longitudinal study into the levels of general self-efficacy that consultants experience as they grow with the organisation over time. Sources of self-efficacy information are recommended as levers to enhance the self-efficacy of consultants who are in their second year of service to the organisation. The organisation may also want to look into length of service and self-efficacy as retention factors for consultants.

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CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous chapter presented the results of the research in the form of an article. This chapter provides an overview of the research. Conclusions will first be drawn, followed by a discussion of the limitations. Finally, certain recommendations will be made.

4.1   CONCLUSIONS

The research focused on investigating the relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance. Research conclusions stemming from the literature review and the empirical study for each of the research aims, as stated in section 1.3 in chapter 1, will be formulated below.

4.1.1 Literature review

The specific literature aims were to conceptualise the constructs (sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance) which formed part of the study and to investigate the theoretical relationship between them. This aim was achieved by means of the literature review in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Sense of coherence was defined as "a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring through dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement" (Antonovsky, 1987, P. 19)". Points (1) to (3) refer to the comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness components of the construct respectively.

The comprehensibility component refers to structured cognition of the world, manageability refers to the perception that adequate resources are available for the individual to control stimuli sufficiently in order to cope despite difficulties, and meaningfulness may be viewed as the tendency to evoke cognitions and emotions

which motivate the worthiness of and commitment to perceived challenges. Sense of coherence as a construct was conceptualised as the ability, through the senses, to hold one's perceived world firmly together by making sense of it through feeling, thought and meaning.

When confronted with a stressor, the person with a strong sense of coherence is more likely to feel a sense of engagement, of commitment and of willingness to cope with the stressor. One of the hallmarks of the person with a strong sense of coherence is that the boundaries of what is meaningful are flexible and can be narrowed (or broadened) – always with the proviso that they cannot be so narrowed as to exclude the critical spheres in human existence: inner feelings, immediate personal relations, major activity and existential issues (Antonovsky, 1987).

Strümpfer (1990, p. 270) suggests that a person with a strong sense of coherence in the workplace will in all likelihood:

- make cognitive sense of the workplace, perceiving its stimulation as clear, ordered, structured, consistent and predictable information;
- perceive his or her work as consisting of experiences that are bearable, with which (s)he can cope, and as challenges that (s)he can meet by availing himself or herself of personal resources or resources that are under the control of legitimate others;
- make emotional and motivational sense of work demands, as welcome challenges, worthy of engaging in and investing his or her energies in.

Perceived self-efficacy was defined as people's judgments of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action that are required to attain designated types of performance. It is concerned not with the skills one has, but with judgements of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses (Bandura, 2002, p. 94). General self-efficacy was described as the belief in one's competence to tackle novel tasks and to cope with adversity in a broad range of stressful or challenging encounters, as opposed to specific self-efficacy which is constrained to a particular task at hand

(Luszczynska *et al.*, 2005). This research conceptualised self-efficacy as general self-efficacy

Job performance was conceptualised by the literature as a multidimensional construct which involves observable and measureable behaviour, indicating how well employees perform at their tasks, the initiative they take and the resourcefulness they display in solving problems (Campbell *et al*, 1993; Muchinsky *et al*, 2005; Rothman & Coetzer, 2003).

Job performance was discussed in detail as a multidimensional construct and how these dimensions have evolved over the years. The components of job performance were specifically discussed in terms of KPIs. The KPIs financial, breathe a brand, customer service and productivity, which formed the components of job performance for this study, were discussed. The financial component of job performance relates directly to sales and accurate invoice administration; the breathe a brand component of job performance has to do with attitude in terms of willingness to embrace organisational values and teamwork; the customer-centric service component of job performance refers to the customer and candidate's experience of service from the consultant; and the productivity component of job performance relates to specific activities, such as the production of CVs, measured in terms of frequency performed.

The literature supported the notion of a relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance. According to Strümpfer (1990), an orientation to work of an individual with a strong sense of coherence can only lead to productive performance, recognition, reward and promotion. Bandura's (1997) model of sources and outputs of self-efficacy showed performance as an output of self-efficacy. The conclusion in the literature is that both sense of coherence and self-efficacy are related to job performance.

4.1.2 Empirical study

The objective of the study was to determine the relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance. The additional empirical aims of the study included to establish whether sense of coherence and its components could

predict job performance; to establish whether self-efficacy could predict job performance; and to establish differences between biographical variables on the constructs measured. This was achieved in chapter 3 by means of reporting and discussing the results in the article. The following conclusions can be drawn from the results and can be regarded as specific to the recruitment industry, particularly the organisation that was studied.

- Sense of coherence did not correlate with job performance and self-efficacy did not correlate with job performance.
- Comprehensibility is the only component of sense of coherence which correlated with job performance. Comprehensibility correlated positively with total job performance as well as with customer service and productivity.
- Sense of coherence and self-efficacy did not show any regression to job performance.
- Comprehensibility showed a positive regression to job performance, indicating its ability to predict job performance. When meaningfulness was added to the regression model, the combination of the two components showed a statistically significant regression to job performance.
- In the regression model, including both comprehensibility and meaningfulness, comprehensibility was positively regressed to job performance while meaningfulness was negatively regressed.
- Age groups differed significantly on the breathe the brand dimension of job performance, with the youngest group scoring the highest and the older groups progressively scoring lower.
- Gender groups differed on scores of meaningfulness and customer service. Males scored higher than females on meaningfulness, while females scored higher than males on customer service.
- Job type groups differed significantly on scores on financial, customer service and job performance. Project consultants scored the highest on financial, followed by contingent and then permanent consultants. The permanent consultants scored the highest on customer service, followed by project and then contingent consultants. Project consultants scored the highest on total job performance, followed by contingent and then permanent consultants.

- Length of service to the organisation groups differed on scores In terms of self-efficacy. The >1/=3 years of service group scored lower on self-efficacy than the other three groups.
- Race groups and qualification groups did not differ on any of the constructs measured.

It is evident that no relationship exists between sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance, although comprehensibility is related to total job performance and two of its components. Comprehensibility together with meaningfulness can predict job performance. The biographical variables of age, gender, job type and length of service differed on several of the constructs that were measured.

The central hypothesis of the research (as stated in section 1.4.6, that there is a relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance among recruitment consultants in the recruitment organisation) must be rejected as no relationships were found.

4.2   LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The limitations of the research are discussed with regard to the literature review and the empirical study.

4.2.1 Literature review

- Studies on the relationship between sense of coherence and job performance appear to be few. The lack of such information limited the researcher in determining a theoretical relationship beyond the speculation of the forefathers, Antonovsky and Strümpfer, of the construct.
- A wide variety of job performance models and dimensions exists in the literature, which added to the complexity of conceptualising the job performance construct in this study.
- No other studies were found which examined the relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance.

4.2.2 Empirical study

- The study was conducted within one organisation, which means the results of the study are not generalisable across other organisations in South Africa.
- The sample was limited in that it consisted of 85% women and only 15% men. Gender difference should therefore be viewed with caution.
- A major limitation of the study was the reliance on cross-sectional perceptual measures for sense of coherence and self-efficacy. This may have had an effect on the validity of the results.
- It was not possible to obtain a full set of six months of job performance data for every consultant in the sample. This was addressed by replacing the missing numbers with averages of the individual's scores – an acceptable method of dealing with missing numbers.
- Only two out of a vast quantity of positive psychology constructs were selected for the study. These two positive psychology constructs therefore do not represent all aspects of the field of positive psychology.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions as well as the limitations discussed in previous sections provide a basis for the recommendations for further research. These are discussed below.

- The relationship between sense of coherence, self-efficacy and job performance should be further researched in other contexts and recruitment organisations using different job performance measures.
- The comprehensibility component of sense of coherence should be further researched in relation to job performance in the organisation. This could be done through a qualitative approach such as focus groups and individual interviews.
- Other positive psychology constructs should be considered as possible antecedents of job performance in the organisation, and researched.

- Further research to explain why high scores on comprehensibility combined with low scores on meaningfulness predict job performance in the organisation should be conducted.

- Possible research that would be wise for the organisation to conduct may involve investigating what would make work meaningful to high performing consultants who also scored high on comprehensibility. The results may then be used to illuminate the worthiness of the work for high performing employees, which may serve to both retain and energise these valuable human resources.

- Attention has to be paid to older employees as they scored lower on breathe the brand. An investigation into perceptions of teamwork and organisational values may be launched and directed at older employees in the organisation.

- The females scored lower on meaningfulness than the males. As females generally take on more family roles than males, an investigation into the work/life balance of female employees is recommended.

- The females scored higher on customer service than the males. It is recommended that the organisation conduct further research into customer preferences in terms of preferred gender groups to deal with. The organisation may wish to strategically use females more than males in developing customer relationships.

- Project and contingent consultants scored higher on financial than the permanent consultants. This may indicate that the current business market demands more temporary staffing solutions and less permanent placements. The organisation may want to look into researching this trend and capitalising on these markets during this time.

- Permanent consultants scored higher on customer service than the project and contingent consultants. It is recommended that the organisation investigate how to improve customer service from project and contingent consultants, and provide some form of training to accomplish this.

- Consultants in the >1/=3 years length of service category scored significantly lower on self-efficacy. It is recommended that the organisation investigate ways to offer additional support to this group to improve their belief in their capabilities to execute the tasks at hand.

- A longitudinal study over five years with regard to self-efficacy is recommended at the organisation to investigate the effect of exposure time to the work and industry on perceptions of self-efficacy.

- Due to the fact that neither race nor qualification groups differed on any of the job performance dimensions, it is recommended that neither of these variables should be considered to distinguish consultants on performance.

4.4   CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the research were presented on the basis of the aims of the study as presented in section 1.3 of chapter 1. The literature aims as well as the empirical aims of the study were addressed in terms of conclusions drawn and limitations observed. Recommendations were made for further research based on the findings.

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