

# The relationship between the self-esteem and employability attributes of postgraduate business management students

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**Orientation:** The effects of challenges (like decreased employment opportunities, increased personal responsibility to keep up with changes, current skill shortages and of retaining talented and skilled staff) have led to an emphasis on career meta-competencies to improve employability attributes.

**Research purpose:** The objectives of the study were to determine the relationship between self-esteem (as the Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory measures it) and employability attributes (as the Employability Attributes Scale measures it); to determine whether people's biographical details significantly predict their self-esteem and employability attributes; and whether men and women differ significantly in their self-esteem and employability attributes.

**Motivation for the study:** There seems to be a paucity of studies that investigate how people's self-esteem relates to their employability attributes in South Africa's multi-cultural context.

**Research design, approach and method:** The researcher conducted a quantitative survey on a convenience sample of 304 employed adults enrolled for an honours degree in business management in a higher education institution. She used correlational statistics, multiple regression analyses, categorical regressions and independent *t*-tests to analyse the data.

**Main findings:** The researcher found a number of significant relationships between the participants' self-esteem and employability. The results showed that biographical details significantly predicted participants' employability attributes.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Career counsellors and human resource practitioners need to recognise how people's self-esteem and their biographical details influence their employability attributes.

**Contribution/value-add:** The findings add to the literature on the skills, abilities and biographical information that influence employability and give valuable information that organisations can use during career development support and career counselling practices in the contemporary world of work.

## Introduction

### Key focus of the study

In today's challenging world of work, technical skills and academic knowledge are no longer enough for a person to find work (Fallows & Steven, 2000; Savickas *et al.*, 2009).

The 21st century requires young adults, who are entering the world of work, to be employable and to sustain their employability (Marock, 2008; Pool & Sewell, 2007). Research has shown that career meta-competencies are important for sustained employability (Coetzee, 2008; Fugate, Kiniciki & Ashforth, 2004).

### Background to the study

This study focuses on the changing nature of careers that require people to take ownership of their careers and to develop and sustain their employability. Career counsellors and human resource practitioners have been concerned for a long time about employees' psychological career resources or career meta-competencies that enable them to take ownership of their careers and be proactive in managing their careers and improving their employability (Baruch, 2004; Coetzee, 2008; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Sinclair, 2009).

As a result, current research has focused on career meta-competencies, like self-esteem and emotional literacy, as important psychological career resources. Self-esteem can predict

employability significantly (Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Hewitt, 2002; Kerka, 1998). However, there seems to be a lack of research in South Africa on how people's self-esteem relates to their employability attributes, especially in South Africa's multi-cultural context.

Another trend is the increasing diversity in workplaces. It requires employers to understand how people's biographical characteristics (age, race, gender, marital status and employment status) influence their employability attributes (Sullivan, 1999).

Given the current skills shortages and concerns about attracting and retaining young talent in South African organisations, the secondary aim of this study was to investigate whether people's age, race, gender, marital status and employment status significantly predict their self-esteem and employability attributes.

Young adults entering the world of work for the first time deal with many challenges. Amongst them are unemployment, decreased employment opportunities, diminished job security and quickly changing technology. They also have an increasing personal responsibility to keep up with these changes, to improve their skills and to sustain their employability (Marock, 2008; Pool & Sewell, 2007). The increased concerns about the employability of young adults, especially in South Africa, has led to more emphasis on employability and helping people to increase their employability (Marock, 2008).

In the traditional career context, the organisation took responsibility for a person's career. However, in the new world of work, the responsibility shifted to individuals. They now had to market themselves and increase their employability skills (De Vos & Soens, 2008; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Hall, 2004; Raabe, Frese & Beehr, 2007). McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) also believe that the responsibility for employability has now shifted from the organisation to the employee. This means that the main responsibility now lies with employees for their growth and continued professional development.

The new relationship between the worker and the world of work has made it necessary to develop career counselling and development interventions. These will help people to take ownership of their careers and be proactive in managing them whilst reflecting on their career meta-competencies as key resources for sustaining their employability (Baruch, 2004; Coetzee, 2008; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Savickas *et al.*, 2009). Fugate *et al.* (2004) argue that it is the responsibility of employees to find information about careers. They also need to develop their skills and capabilities as well as other abilities, which current and potential employers require, in order to sustain their employability.

Employability refers to the ability of people to enter the workplace, adjust to it and be dynamic there. It also refers

to their ability to perform consistently, find or create work through the best possible use of occupation-related and career meta-competencies (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2007; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Herr, Cramer & Niles, 2004; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Therefore, people need a set of skills and abilities to make them more employable in the new world of work (ACCI, 2002).

Career meta-competencies refer to a set of psychological resources that are critical for career development (Coetzee, 2008). These psychological resources include attributes and abilities like behavioural adaptability, self-knowledge, career orientation awareness, sense of purpose, self-esteem and emotional literacy. They allow people to be self-sufficient learners and agents in managing their own careers (Coetzee, 2008; Briscoe & Hall, 1999; Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2007; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Herr *et al.*, 2004).

People who have a wide range of psychological career resources are generally more able to adapt to changing career circumstances and tend to have higher levels of employability attributes (Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Griffen & Hesketh, 2005). Therefore, self-esteem is a career meta-competency that influences people's employability (Baruch, 2004; Coetzee, 2008; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Sinclair, 2009).

## Trends from the research literature

### Employability attributes

The concept of employability has recently been emphasised as a key contributor to career satisfaction and success in an increasingly unstable and chaotic global business environment (Coetzee & Beukes, 2010).

According to Marock (2008), there is no agreement about how one should define employability. Hillage and Pollard (1998) suggest that employability is the ability to find and keep rewarding work and to move self-sufficiently in the labour market to realise one's potential through sustainable employment.

In the context of the present study, an employability attribute is a psychosocial construct that describes career-related characteristics. It promotes adaptive cognition, behaviour and affect. It also improves a person's suitability for appropriate and sustainable employment (Bezuidenhout, 2010; Coetzee, 2011; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Yorke & Knight, 2007).

Therefore, employability is an attribute that includes self-directedness or personal agency for retaining or securing a job or form of employment. It uses a range of personal career-related attributes that are generally regarded as alternatives to job security in an unstable world of work (Rothwell, Jewell & Hardie, 2009; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011). Various authors have found that self-perceived employability increases feelings of being in control of one's career and confident to secure a suitable position in the labour market (De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, Berntson, De Witte & Alarco, 2008).

Furthermore, employability is value- and identity-driven – it relates to a person's own attributes and biography (Tomlinson, 2007). McArdle, Waters, Briscoe and Hall (2007) suggest that career identity and adaptability are vital aspects of a person's self-perceived employability. According to Bandura (1997), Van der Velde and Van den Berg (2003), self-perceived employability depends on a person's self-efficacy. Kanfer, Warnberg and Kantrowitz (2001) found that self-efficacy has a positive relationship with employment outcomes. Employability is also beneficial for present performance on the job and for career and business outcomes (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

Bezuidenhout (2010) and Coetzee (2010) developed an employability attributes framework specifically for students in the South African higher education context. It consists of eight core career-related employability attributes that are important for increasing a person's chances of securing and sustaining employment (Bezuidenhout, 2010; Coetzee, 2011).

**Career self-management:** This refers to a person's ability to sustain employment through career planning, continuous learning and career management (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011).

The set of attributes that follows is associated with career self-management:

- the ability to reflect on one's career aspirations and have a clear sense of what one wants to achieve in one's career
- the ability to recognise the skills one needs to be successful in one's career and the actions one needs to take to achieve one's goals
- the confidence and determination to pursue and achieve one's career goals
- continuous engagement in development activities in order to achieve one's goals.

**Cultural competence:** This refers to a person's meta-cognitive ability to understand, act and interact effectively in diverse cultural environments.

The set of attributes that follows is associated with cultural competence:

- knowing the customs of other cultures and understanding their beliefs and values
- having the confidence to communicate with people from other cultures and finding it easy and enjoyable to do so
- being able to initiate and maintain relationships with people from diverse cultures.

**Self-efficacy:** This refers to people's perceptions of the level of difficulty of career-related or performance-related tasks that they believe they are going to attempt and their perceptions of how well they will be able to carry out the required actions. In addition, it refers to the extent to which their perceptions will persist despite obstacles (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011). Self-efficacy also refers to the estimate that people make of their ability to cope, perform and thrive (Bezuidenhout, 2010).

The set of attributes that follows is associated with self-efficacy:

- being able to function independently of others
- being able to make decisions
- having the confidence to achieve one's goals
- being persistent with challenges
- enjoying the discovery of creative new solutions
- keeping oneself up to date with the newest developments in one's job and career.

**Career resilience:** This refers to a person's ability to adapt to changing situations by accepting changes in one's job and organisation, looking forward to working with different and new people, the willingness to take risks as well as having self-confidence (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011).

Bezuidenhout (2010) described career resilience as a personal disposition that facilitates a high level of adaptability, self-confidence, competence and confidence, irrespective of difficult situations.

The set of attributes that follows is associated with career resilience:

- having a high regard for one's personal qualities
- being open to feedback from others about one's strengths and weaknesses
- being confident about one's accomplishments
- being open to, and being able to adapt to, changes in one's environment.

**Sociability:** This refers to the ability to be open to and to establish and maintain social contacts as well as to use formal and informal networks to advance one's career (Bezuidenhout, 2010).

The set of attributes that follows is associated with sociability:

- being able to build a network of friends that could advance one's career
- being able to use networks in order to search for and find new job opportunities
- being able to look for feedback from other people in order to progress in one's career
- being willing to take risks
- being self confident
- being able to adapt to various social situations by changing non-verbal behaviour in different socio-cultural situations.

**Entrepreneurial orientation:** This refers to a person's preference for innovation and creativity, a tendency to take risks, a need for achievement, a tolerance for uncertainty as well as a preference for autonomy when exploiting opportunities in the working environment and when creating something valuable (Bezuidenhout, 2010).

The set of attributes that follows is associated with entrepreneurial orientation:

- being interested in, and continuously undertaking, new business opportunities

- being open to new ideas
- having a positive attitude to the implications of change in one's workplace or studies
- being comfortable in unfamiliar situations
- being able to accept responsibility for the success or failure of one's career.

**Proactivity:** This refers to a person's willingness to engage in active roles that lead to future orientated and self-initiated action in order to change oneself and one's situation (Bezuidenhout, 2010).

The set of attributes that follows is associated with proactivity:

- being able to take accountability for one's decisions
- being able to set challenging targets for oneself
- being able to identify opportunities before others do
- being able to improve one's knowledge and skills in order to ensure career progress
- being able to adapt to changing situations
- being able to persist despite difficult career circumstances.

**Emotional literacy:** This refers to people's ability to use emotions adaptively and their ability to read, understand and control their own and other people's emotions (Bezuidenhout, 2010; Coetzee, 2010).

The set of attributes that follows is associated with emotional literacy:

- being able to understand one's emotions and feelings
- being able to manage one's moods and emotions
- being able to identify the emotions of others
- being able to defuse emotionally explosive situations
- being able to cheer up sad people.

### Self-esteem

Self-esteem (as a career meta-competency) is the central element of any person's daily experiences and is, therefore, an essential psychological construct. It refers to the way people feel about themselves. It reflects and affects their dealings with the environment and the people with whom they come into contact (Kernis, 2003).

Rosenberg (1965) described self-esteem as the positive or negative attitudes that people have about themselves. High self-esteem means that people feel that they are good enough whereas a low self-esteem means that they feel that they are not. Baumeister (1997) describes self-esteem as the evaluative dimension of the self-concept. Battle (2002) describes self-esteem as the perception that people have of their self-worth. It develops gradually and becomes more differentiated with adulthood and because of interaction with others. Gray-Little and Hafdahl (2000) refer to self-esteem as a predictor of human behaviour and an indication of how people could react to certain events. They also regard self-esteem as an indication of psychological wellbeing.

The self-esteem model of Battle (1992) is relevant to this study because its underlying principles allow researchers to study the self-esteem construct in a socially embedded

context (like the workplace). Furthermore, self-esteem is a multi-dimensional construct and Battle (1982; 1992) supports the multi-dimensional theoretical approach to defining the construct of self-esteem. He proposes that self-esteem consists of general self-esteem, social or peer self-esteem and personal self-esteem.

General self-esteem refers to people's overall perceptions of, and feelings about, their worth. Social self-esteem is the aspect of self-esteem that relates to people's perceptions of, and feelings about, the quality of their relationships with their peers. Personal self-esteem relates to people's most innate perceptions and feelings of self-worth. General self-esteem, social self-esteem and personal self-esteem combined make up people's overall self-esteem. In addition, each of these components of self-esteem consists of various factors. Battle (1982) focused on the cognitive factors (self-evaluations and sense of self-efficacy), the affective factors (subjective feelings and mood) and the interpersonal needs (social acceptance from others).

According to Maslow (1970), people need a positive self-esteem (feeling good about themselves), need esteem from others and need to belong (so that others also feel positive about them and that the group accepts them). To develop a positive self-esteem, people strive for achievement and mastery of their socio-cultural environment (Coetzee, 2005). In order for the group to accept them and to gain respect from others, they behave in ways that will lead to recognition, appreciation and prestige. People tend to feel confident, competent, strong, useful and needed when they have satisfied their needs for self-esteem. On the other hand, when people have not satisfied their need for self-esteem, they tend to feel inferior, anxious, worried, depressed, weak and helpless (Coetzee, 2005).

Therefore, identifying, measuring, improving and sustaining high self-esteem have become important issues for educators, teachers, trainers and career counsellors. Helping people to improve and sustain a healthy and positive self-esteem is a practical application of the knowledge currently available about it (Coetzee, 2005).

Brockner and Guare (1983) and Kerka (1998) found that people with low self-esteem are more likely to perform poorly and achieve less compared to people with high self-esteem. In addition, Baumeister (1997) found that people with low self-esteem do not seem to have a clear sense of who and what they are and are not confident that they will succeed in what they try. Therefore, it seems that people with low self-esteem are less likely to have well developed employability skills compared to people with high self-esteem.

Various authors found that one could improve low self-esteem through training (Brockner & Gaure, 1983; Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Smoll, Smit, Barnett & Everett, 1993). Therefore, one can conclude that training will help graduates and people who are looking for work to develop self-esteem.

Using these research findings, the researcher formulated the hypothesis that follows for objective 1:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Self-esteem has a significant positive relationship with employability attributes.

The aims of this article also cover differences in biographical details. Therefore, the researcher conducted a literature review of significant differences.

Orth, Robins and Trzesniewski (2010) found that middle-aged people have a slightly higher self-esteem than older adults do. However, other studies have failed to show any significant age differences (Brandstadter & Greve, 1994; Demo, 1992). Orth *et al.* (2010) suggest that gender moderates the trajectory of self-esteem across the lifespan. It seems that gender differences are larger in adolescents and young adults, but that the average trajectories of men and women converge in old age. However, Xu, Farver, Yu and Zhang (2009) reported no gender differences in self-esteem. Furthermore, Orth *et al.* (2010) found that Blacks have higher self-esteem than Whites do at younger ages. However, these trajectories cross at some point in adulthood and Blacks show a much steeper decline in self-esteem than Whites do in old age.

Van Rooy, Alonso and Viswesvaran (2005) found a positive relationship between age and employability. Many older employees find themselves in the same position as new job applicants because of rapid changes in the market environment. This results in retrenchments and job changes (Van Rooy *et al.*, 2005). De Armond *et al.* (2006) and Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) found that employability decreases with age, especially when a person moves into a new field or to a higher position. De Armond *et al.* (2006) found that older workers are less likely to search for new challenges, are less flexible, have less desire for variation in their work and are less motivated to learn new skills. These common stereotypes have a negative effect on their employability when they look for new employment. On the other hand, Lee (2001) argues that graduates face discrimination because of their age. Their lack of practical experience when applying for new positions leads to this perception.

Various authors have reported that women are less employable than men are. In other words, women tend to have lower employability compared to men (Clarke, 2008; Lee, 2001; Scandura & Lankau, 1997). They explained that many organisations discriminate against women because of gender stereotypes and family responsibilities. In addition, organisations tend to perceive women as less committed to their careers and organisations. Alfrassa (2001) confirms that men are more likely to find work than women are after graduating. Clarke (2008) reported that women still face the glass ceiling and are disadvantaged because of their gender.

There are contradictory findings about the influence of race on employability. Rothwell *et al.* (2009) found no significant

differences between self-perceived employability and ethnicity. Lee (2001) and Mancinelli, Massimiliano, Piva and Ponti (2010) reported that high levels of education have positive effects on the advancement of previously disadvantaged groups (Africans, Coloureds, Indians and women). As a result, they are more likely to find satisfying jobs, earn higher incomes and have better career prospects.

Using these research findings, the researcher formulated the hypotheses that follow:

- **Hypothesis 2:** Age, gender, race, marital status, job level, current employment status and employability satisfaction significantly predict self-esteem and employability attributes.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Men and women differ significantly in self-esteem and employability attributes.

## Research objectives

The present study aims to determine the relationship between people's self-esteem and employability attributes; to determine whether people's age, gender, race, marital status, job level and employment status significantly predict their self-esteem and employability attributes; and to determine whether men and women differ significantly in their self-esteem and employability attributes.

## Potential value-add of the study

Assessing whether people's self-esteem has a relationship with their employability attributes may provide valuable information for human resource managers and career counsellors concerned with career counselling and career development practices to improve employability attributes and skills.

In addition, the study could add new knowledge and insight that might help to improve career development support practices. It could also assist career-counselling practitioners to help young adults, who are entering the world of work, to improve their employability attributes.

## What will follow

The next section of the article will elaborate on the research design. It covers the research approach and method. A presentation of the results and a discussion of the findings follow. The article concludes with a brief synopsis of its main conclusions, its implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

## Research design

### Research approach

The researcher used a quantitative survey design (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister, 2003) to achieve the objectives of this study.

## Research method

### Research participants

The participants comprised a convenience sample of 304 adults who were studying for an honours degree in business management at a higher distance education institution. The participants attended a three-day study school. The sample comprised Blacks (48%), Whites (30%), Coloureds (8%) and Indians (14%). Furthermore, the sample comprised women (64%), whilst men comprised only 36%. The sample consisted of single (58%) and married (35%) participants. Most (84%) were in the early adulthood life stage (26–40 years). Most participants were middle managers (25%), first level supervisors (21%) or members of the general staff (28%). This corresponds to the profile of the sample, where 71% of the sample had full-time employment.

### Measuring instruments

The researcher used the Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory (CFSEI2-AD) (Battle, 1992) and the Employability Attributes Scale (EAS) (Bezuidenhout, 2010; Coetzee, 2010) to measure the variables that were relevant to this study.

**Culture Free Self-esteem inventory:** The CFSEI 2-AD (Battle, 1992) is a self-reporting inventory developed over a course of several years' work with students and adult clients. The CFSEI2-AD, which measures a person's perceptions of self-worth and achievement compared to those of others, has been valuable because it offers greater insights into clients' subjective feelings and their psychological states of wellbeing.

It consists of four sub-scales. They are general self-esteem (16 items), social or peer self-esteem (eight items), personal self-esteem (eight items) and lie or defensiveness items (eight items). The lie subtest measures defensiveness. People who respond defensively to self-esteem items refuse to admit that they have characteristics of a generally valid but socially unacceptable nature. For the purpose of this study, the researcher measured participants' responses using a six-point Likert-type scale.

Battle (1992) has found evidence of the validity of the CFSEI2-AD. The factor analysis of Battle (1992) confirms the construct validity of the CFSEI2-AD. In terms of reliability, Battle (1992) reports test-retest correlations of between .79 and .82. Internal consistency reliability coefficients ranged between .79 and .92 for all the subscales (Battle, 1992).

**Employability Attributes Scale:** The Employability Attributes Scale (Bezuidenhout, 2010; Coetzee, 2010) has been developed for the South African higher education context to measure students' self-perceived employability attributes.

The EAS (Bezuidenhout, 2010; Coetzee, 2010) is a self-rated, multi-factorial measure that contains 56 items and eight sub-scales. They are career self-management (11 items), cultural competence (five items), self-efficacy (six items), career resilience (six items), sociability (seven items),

entrepreneurial orientation (seven items), proactivity (seven items) and emotional literacy (seven items).

Respondents must rate each item on a six-point Likert-type scale. The higher the number, the more true that item is to the respondent. An exploratory factor analysis (Coetzee, 2010) and inter-item correlational analyses showed that the EAS items meet the psychometric criteria of construct validity. In terms of reliability (internal consistency), Cronbach's Alpha coefficients range between .78 and .90 for each subscale (Coetzee, 2010).

The biographical questionnaire contained an additional item that measured participants' perceptions of their level of 'employability satisfaction' on a four-point scale. It ranges from 'very dissatisfied' to 'highly satisfied'. In the context of the present study, employability satisfaction is the self-perceived levels of satisfaction people have in terms of their beliefs that they have the attributes, skills, knowledge, experience and occupational expertise to create or attract employment easily (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011).

### Research procedure

The researcher gave information about the aim of the study, the confidentiality of the responses and instructions for completing the questionnaire to the respondents during the study school after receiving ethical clearance from the managers of the higher education institution.

The researcher handed the CFSEI2-AD and EAS to all respondents who attended the study school. She administered the questionnaires in the group session and collected them as soon as the participants had completed them.

Each questionnaire included a covering letter inviting subjects to participate in the study voluntarily. It assured them that their responses would remain confidential. The covering letter stated that completing the questionnaires and returning them meant that the participants agreed that the researcher could use the results for research purposes only. Five-hundred respondents attended the study school and they returned 304 usable questionnaires. This is a response rate of 61%.

### Statistical analysis

The researcher chose the data analysis procedures for this research because of their applicability to the exploratory nature of the research design.

The researcher conducted a Rasch analysis to determine the item and person reliability of the two measuring instruments. She also used the Rasch analysis to evaluate the one-dimensionality of the two scales by calculating the infit and outfit chi-square statistics to get an indication of how well the items measure the underlying constructs.

The researcher also calculated Cronbach's Alpha coefficients to determine the internal consistency reliability of the two

measures. Both person and item separation indices should be at least 2.00 for an instrument to be useful (Fox & Jones, 1998).

The researcher used descriptive and inferential statistics to analyse the data. She computed Pearson product-moment correlations and conducted categorical regression, stepwise multiple regression analysis and independent *t*-tests to test the research hypotheses.

Although the researcher set a cut-off point of  $p \leq .05$ , she also considered a practical effect size of  $r \geq .30$  (medium effect, see Cohen, 1992) for the correlational analyses in order to interpret the practical significance of the findings. In terms of the multiple regression analyses, she used the adjusted  $R^2$  to determine the proportion of the total variance of the dependent variable (EAS) that the independent variable (CFSEI2-AD) explains. She used the *F*-test to test whether there was a significant regression ( $p \leq .05$ ) between the independent and dependent variables.

## Results

Table 1 gives the internal consistency of the measurements for the item separation index and reliability, the person separation index and reliability, the person reliability in terms of Cronbach's alpha coefficients, the average measure

of each dimension per person and item as well as the infit and outfit statistics for each dimension.

Table 1 shows acceptable item reliability ( $\geq .80$ ) for all dimensions. This indicates that these items are well differentiated amongst the variables. The item separation for most dimensions was sufficient compared to the guideline of  $> 2.00$  (Fox & Jones, 1998). The person fit for most of the self-esteem variables was lower than the proposed guideline ( $> 2.00$ ). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all the dimensions were acceptable (cut-off point of .70). However, social or peer self-esteem (.66) and the lie items (.63) were lower. The proactivity dimension showed the highest person average (1.67,  $SD = 1.14$ ) and the items of self-esteem showed the lowest average measure (-.24,  $SD = .46$ ). It is clear that the mean item and person fit were acceptable and that the responses do not underfit or overfit.

In general, the researcher regarded the two measuring instruments as useful and reliable for interpreting the results.

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis for the variables of interest.

In terms of self-esteem, participants obtained the highest mean scores on the CFSEI2-AD variable of general self-esteem ( $M = 5.52$ ;  $SD = 11.11$ ) and the lowest mean score on

**TABLE 1:** Person and item reliability – Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory and Employability Attributes Scale.

Dimension	Constructs	Fit indices	Average measure		InItem		OutItem		Separation	Reliability	Alpha
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Self-esteem (CFSEI2-AD)	General self-esteem	Person	.65	.52	1.10	-.10	1.08	-.10	2.00	.80	.80
		Item	.00	.42	1.05	.20	1.08	.80	8.16	.99	-
	Social or peer self-esteem	Person	.44	.56	1.03	.10	1.04	-.10	1.38	.66	.57
		Item	.00	.40	.98	-.40	1.05	.50	8.03	.98	-
	Personal self-esteem	Person	.44	.74	1.05	-.10	1.04	-.10	1.93	.79	.77
		Item	.00	.32	1.01	.01	1.04	.40	6.28	.98	-
	Lie items	Person	-.24	.46	1.02	-.10	1.03	-.10	1.29	.63	.58
		Item	.00	.36	1.02	-.10	1.03	.10	7.84	.98	-
	<b>Total scale</b>	<b>Person</b>	<b>.31</b>	<b>.26</b>	<b>1.03</b>	<b>-.20</b>	<b>1.04</b>	<b>-.10</b>	<b>1.89</b>	<b>.78</b>	<b>.78</b>
		<b>Item</b>	<b>.00</b>	<b>.42</b>	<b>1.03</b>	<b>.00</b>	<b>1.04</b>	<b>.20</b>	<b>9.20</b>	<b>.99</b>	<b>-</b>
Employability attributes (EAS)	Career self-management	Person	1.39	1.14	1.05	-.10	1.04	-.10	2.50	.86	.88
		Item	.00	.27	.99	-.10	1.04	.40	3.71	.93	-
	Cultural competence	Person	1.26	1.80	.98	-.40	.99	-.40	2.50	.86	.87
		Item	.00	.58	1.00	-.20	1.00	-.30	6.76	.98	-
	Self-efficacy	Person	1.40	1.10	1.03	-.10	1.04	-.10	1.67	.74	.73
		Item	.00	.24	1.00	-.10	1.04	.30	3.08	.90	-
	Entrepreneurial orientation	Person	1.57	1.14	1.04	-.10	1.01	-.10	1.93	.79	.80
		Item	.00	.66	1.00	-.20	1.01	-.10	8.68	.99	-
	Proactivity	Person	1.67	1.27	1.03	-.10	1.02	-.10	2.09	.81	.82
		Item	.00	.53	1.02	.00	1.02	.00	6.70	.98	-
	Sociability	Person	.55	.93	1.02	-.10	1.03	-.10	1.99	.80	.75
		Item	.00	.38	1.00	-.20	1.03	.20	6.54	.98	-
	Emotional literacy	Person	1.23	1.18	1.03	-.30	1.02	-.30	2.13	.82	.82
		Item	.00	.27	.99	-.20	1.02	.10	3.64	.93	-
	Career resilience	Person	1.13	1.00	1.09	.00	1.02	-.10	1.64	.73	.70
		Item	.00	.56	.97	-.50	1.02	.00	8.12	.99	-
	<b>Total scale</b>	<b>Person</b>	<b>.98</b>	<b>.78</b>	<b>1.09</b>	<b>-.10</b>	<b>1.05</b>	<b>-.20</b>	<b>4.83</b>	<b>.96</b>	<b>.96</b>
		<b>Item</b>	<b>.00</b>	<b>.41</b>	<b>.99</b>	<b>-.20</b>	<b>1.05</b>	<b>.40</b>	<b>6.55</b>	<b>.98</b>	<b>-</b>

*N* = 304, sample size of employed adults.

SD, standard deviation; CFSEI2-AD, Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory; EAS, Employability Attributes Scale.

**TABLE 2:** Descriptive statistics – Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory and Employability Attributes Scale.

Dimension	Construct	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Self-esteem (CFSEI2-AD)	General self-esteem	3.50	5.52	4.52	11.11	-.53	.00
	Social or peer self-esteem	3.00	4.88	4.31	5.57	-.26	.23
	Personal self-esteem	3.30	4.59	4.07	7.35	-.30	-.38
	Lie items	2.44	4.27	3.20	5.95	.08	-.16
	<b>Total self-esteem</b>	<b>2.44</b>	<b>5.52</b>	<b>4.13</b>	<b>18.46</b>	-	-
Employability attributes (EAS)	Career self-management	4.38	5.01	4.75	8.14	-.54	.21
	Cultural competence	3.90	4.67	4.30	4.70	-.23	-.12
	Self-efficacy	4.54	4.94	4.75	4.07	-.19	-.13
	Career resilience	3.66	5.09	4.60	4.28	-.36	-.62
	Sociability	3.66	4.82	4.14	5.90	-.03	-.62
	Entrepreneurial orientation	3.97	5.26	4.63	5.68	-.54	.07
	Proactivity	4.26	5.27	4.72	5.08	-.53	-.20
	Emotional literacy	4.11	4.66	4.43	5.26	-.41	.10
	<b>Total emotional intelligence</b>	<b>3.66</b>	<b>5.27</b>	<b>4.57</b>	<b>34.09</b>	-	-

*N* = 304, sample size of employed adults.

SD, standard deviation; CFSEI2-AD, Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory; EAS, Employability Attributes Scale.

the lie items ( $M = 3.20$ ;  $SD = 5.95$ ). In terms of employability attributes, participants obtained the highest mean scores on the EAS variables of career self-management ( $M = 4.75$ ;  $SD = 8.14$ ) and self-efficacy ( $M = 4.75$ ;  $SD = 4.07$ ) and the lowest mean score on sociability ( $M = 4.14$ ;  $SD = 5.90$ ).

All variables (except for the lie items in the CFSEI2-AD) have a distribution that skews to the left. Most values concentrate on the right of the mean with extreme values to the left (skewness < 0). The lie items have a distribution that skews to the right. Most values concentrate on the left of the mean, with extreme values to the right (skewness > 0).

All the variables have a platykurtic distribution, where the values have a wider spread around the mean.

Table 3 shows that approximately 19% of the respondents were 'highly satisfied' with their current employability levels, whilst approximately 64% of the respondents were 'satisfied' with their current employability levels.

## Testing the hypotheses

The primary aim of this study was to assess empirically whether people's self-esteem has a relationship with their employability attributes.

The researcher analysed hypothesis 1 firstly by computing Pearson product-moment correlations and, secondly, by conducting standard multiple regressions. Hypothesis 1 proposed that self-esteem (the CFSEI2-AD variables) had a significant positive relationship with employability attributes (the EAS variables).

The second aim of this study was to assess empirically whether age, gender, race, marital status, job level, employment status and employability satisfaction significantly predict the participants' self-esteem and employability attributes.

The researcher analysed hypothesis 2 by using categorical regressions and hypothesis 3 by using independent *t*-tests to test for differences.

## Correlational statistics

The Pearson product-moment correlations allowed the researcher to identify the direction and strength of the relationships between each of the variables.

Table 4 shows that the researcher observed a number of significantly positive relationships between the CFSEI2-AD and EAS variables. The significant correlations range between  $r = .12$  and  $.41$  ( $p \leq .05$ ;  $r \leq .30$ ,  $\leq .49$  – medium practical effect).

Table 4 shows significant positive relationships between all subscales of the two variables.

General self-esteem had a significant relationship with:

- career self-management ( $r = .32$ , medium effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- cultural competence ( $r = .16$ ; small effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- self-efficacy ( $r = .22$ ; small effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- career resilience ( $r = .41$ ; medium effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- sociability ( $r = .31$ , medium effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- entrepreneurial orientation ( $r = .28$ , small practical effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- proactivity ( $r = .36$ , medium effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- emotional literacy ( $r = .32$ , medium effect,  $p \leq .05$ ).

Social or peer self-esteem had a significant relationship with:

- career self-management ( $r = .23$ , small effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- cultural competence ( $r = .18$ , small effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- self-efficacy ( $r = .12$ , small effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- career resilience ( $r = .32$ , medium effect,  $p \leq .05$ )

**TABLE 3:** Frequency distribution – employability satisfaction.

Frequency distribution	Scale	Employability satisfaction	
		Frequency	Percentage
Valid	Very dissatisfied	10	3.3
	Dissatisfied	41	13.5
	Satisfied	193	63.5
	Highly satisfied	58	19.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>99.3</b>
Missing	Missing	2	.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*N* = 304, sample size of employed adults.



- sociability ( $r = .27$ , small effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- entrepreneurial orientation ( $r = .17$ , small effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- proactivity ( $r = .28$ , small effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- emotional literacy ( $r = .24$ , small effect,  $p \leq .05$ ).

Personal self-esteem had a positive correlation with:

- career self-management ( $r = .21$ , small effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- cultural competence ( $r = .15$ , small effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- career resilience ( $r = .33$ , medium effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- sociability ( $r = .24$ , small effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- entrepreneurial orientation ( $r = .24$ , small effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- proactivity ( $r = .28$ , small effect,  $p \leq .05$ )
- emotional literacy ( $r = .29$ , small effect,  $p \leq .05$ ).

It is interesting to note that personal self-esteem was the only variable that did not correlate significantly with self-efficacy. The lie items (as measured by the CFSEI2-AD) revealed a negative significant relationship between all variables of the employability attributes.

Therefore, the lie items had negative relationships with:

- career self-management ( $r = -.15$ , small effect,  $p \leq .01$ )
- cultural competence ( $r = -.16$ ,  $p \leq .01$ , small effect)
- self-efficacy ( $r = -.16$ ,  $p \leq .01$ , small effect)
- career resilience ( $r = -.28$ ,  $p \leq .00$ , small effect)
- sociability ( $r = -.27$ ,  $p \leq .00$ , small effect)
- entrepreneurial orientation ( $r = -.21$ ,  $p \leq .00$ , small effect)
- proactivity ( $r = -.23$ ,  $p \leq .00$ , small effect)
- emotional literacy ( $r = -.24$ ,  $p \leq .00$ , small effect).

#### Multiple regression analysis: Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory and Employability Attributes Scale

Table 5 shows that the regression model explained a small ( $R^2 \leq .12$ ) and medium ( $.13 \geq R^2 \leq .25$ ) practical percentage of variance (Cohen, 1992). The regression of the self-esteem variable on the career self-management variable produced a statistically significant model [ $F(545.98; 59.84) = 9.12$ ;  $p \leq .001$ ] and accounts for 10% (small practical effect) of the variance. General self-esteem ( $\beta = .31$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ) contributed significantly to explaining the percentage of variance in career self-management ( $R^2 = 10\%$ , small practical effect). The regression of the self-esteem variable on the cultural competence variable produced a statistically significant model [ $F(83.09; 21.30) = 3.90$ ;  $p \leq .001$ ] and accounts for 4% of the variance. Social self-esteem ( $\beta = .14$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ) contributed significantly to explaining the percentage of variance in cultural competence ( $R^2 = 4\%$ , small practical effect).

The regression of the self-esteem variable on the self-efficacy variable produced a statistically significant model [ $F(86.07; 15.66) = 5.50$ ;  $p \leq .000$ ] and accounts for 6% (small practical effect) of the variance. The variables that follow contributed significantly to explaining the percentage of variance in self-efficacy (6%, small practical effect): general self-esteem ( $\beta = .32$ ;  $p \leq .001$ ) and personal self-esteem ( $\beta = -.19$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ). The beta-weights showed that general self-esteem makes the biggest contribution to explaining the variance in the self-efficacy variable.

The regression of the self-esteem variable on the career resilience variable produced a statistically significant model [ $F(262.18; 15.04) = 17.44$ ;  $p \leq .000$ ] and accounts for 18% (medium practical effect) of the variance. General self-esteem ( $\beta = .26$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ) and social or peer self-esteem ( $\beta = .15$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ) are variables that significantly contribute to explaining the percentage of variance of career resilience ( $R^2 = 18\%$ , medium practical effect).

According to the beta-weights, general self-esteem was the variable that contributed most towards explaining the career resilience construct. The regression of the self-esteem variable on the sociability variable produced a statistically significant model [ $F(347.31; 30.58) = 11.36$ ;  $p \leq .000$ ] and accounts for 12% (small practical effect) of the variance. Social or peer self-esteem ( $\beta = .15$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ) and the lie items ( $\beta = -.17$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ) contributed significantly towards explaining the percentage of variance in sociability ( $R^2 = 12\%$ , small practical effect).

The regression of the self-esteem variable on the entrepreneurial orientation variable produced a statistically significant model [ $F(171.09; 23.28) = 7.32$ ;  $p \leq .000$ ] and accounts for 8% (small practical effect) of the variance. General self-esteem ( $\beta = .19$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ) explains the percentage of variance for entrepreneurial orientation ( $R^2 = 8\%$ , small practical effect).

Finally, the regression of the self-esteem variable on the proactivity variable produced a statistically significant model [ $F(280.77; 22.43) = 12.52$ ;  $p \leq .000$ ] and accounts for 13% (medium practical effect) of the variance. General self-esteem ( $\beta = .23$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ) and social or peer self-esteem ( $\beta = .12$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ) contribute significantly to explaining the percentage of variance of proactivity ( $R^2 = 13\%$ , medium practical effect). The beta-weights indicate that general self-esteem is the biggest contributor to explaining the variance in the proactivity variable.

**TABLE 4:** Pearson-product moment correlations – Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory and Employability Attributes Scale.

Dimension	Construct	Employability Attributes Scale							
		Career self-management	Cultural competence	Self-efficacy	Career resilience	Sociability	Entrepreneurial orientation	Proactivity	Emotional literacy
CFSEI2-AD	General self-esteem	.32***	.16***	.22***	.41***	.31***	.28***	.36***	.32***
	Social or peer self-esteem	.23***	.18***	.12**	.32***	.27***	.17***	.28***	.24***
	Personal self-esteem	.21***	.15***	–	.33***	.24***	.24***	.28***	.29***
	Lie items	-.15**	-.16***	-.16***	-.28***	-.27***	-.21***	-.23***	-.24***

$N = 304$ , sample size of employed adults.

CFSEI2-AD, Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory.

+,  $r \leq .30$  (small practical effect size); ++,  $r \geq .30 \leq .49$  (medium practical effect size).

\*,  $p \leq .05$  (two-tailed); \*\*,  $p \leq .01$

In terms of the collinearity statistics, the variance inflation factor (VIF) values were lower than the cut-off of  $> 4.0$  for multi-collinearity concerns. These values suggest that the researcher could rule out multi-collinearity when she interpreted the results.

The results showed that the relationships the researcher measured were statistically significant in most of the relationships she tested. Therefore, it supports hypothesis 1 that self-esteem has a significant positive relationship with employability attributes.

### Categorical regression analysis: Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory and Employability Attributes Scale

Table 6 shows that the regression models explained a small ( $R^2 \leq .12$ ) practical effect percentage of variance (Cohen, 1992). The regression of biographical information on the career self-management variable produced a statistically significant model [ $F(2.15; .93) = 2.32; p \leq .002$ ] and accounts for 8% (small practical effect) of the variance.

The variables that follow contributed significantly to explaining the percentage of variance in career self-management ( $R^2 = 8\%$ , small practical effect): race ( $\beta = .22; p \leq .001$ ), marital status ( $\beta = .13; p \leq .01$ ), job level ( $\beta = .17; p \leq .001$ ), employability satisfaction ( $\beta = .15; p \leq .01$ ) and current employment status ( $\beta = .18; p \leq .001$ ). The beta-weights showed that race contributed the most to explaining the variance in the career self-management variable.

The regression of biographical information on the sociability variable produced a statistically significant model [ $F(2.26; .92) = 2.46; p \leq .001$ ] and accounts for 9% (small practical effect) of the variance.

The variables that follow contributed significantly to explaining the percentage of variance in sociability ( $R^2 = 9\%$ , small practical effect): race ( $\beta = .20; p \leq .001$ ), age ( $\beta = -.21; p \leq .05$ ), marital status ( $\beta = .16; p \leq .001$ ), job level ( $\beta = .22; p \leq .001$ ), employability satisfaction ( $\beta = .22; p \leq .001$ ) and current employment status ( $\beta = .16; p \leq .001$ ). The beta-weights showed that the participants' own employability satisfaction ('satisfied' or 'not satisfied') contributed most to explaining the variance in the sociability construct.

The regression of biographical information on the entrepreneurial orientation variable produced a statistically significant model [ $F(1.82; .95) = 1.91; p \leq .03$ ] and accounts for 6% (small practical effect) of the variance.

The variables that follow contributed significantly to explaining the percentage of variance in entrepreneurial orientation ( $R^2 = 6\%$ , small practical effect): race ( $\beta = .19; p \leq .001$ ), job level ( $\beta = .23; p \leq .001$ ) and current employment status ( $\beta = .20; p \leq .001$ ). Job level is the most significant contributor to entrepreneurial orientation.

The regression of biographical information on the proactivity variable produced a statistically significant model [ $F(2.48; .90) = 2.75; p \leq .000$ ] and accounts for 10% (small practical effect) of the variance.

The variables that follow contributed significantly to explaining the percentage of variance in proactivity ( $R^2 = 10\%$ , small practical effect): race ( $\beta = .25; p \leq .001$ ), gender ( $\beta = .10; p \leq .05$ ), marital status ( $\beta = .16; p \leq .05$ ), job level ( $\beta = .22; p \leq .001$ ) and current employment status ( $\beta = .17; p \leq .001$ ). The beta-weights showed that race contributed most to explaining the variance in proactivity.

**TABLE 5:** Multiple regression analyses – Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory and Employability Attributes Scale.

Variable	Unstandardised coefficient		Standardised coefficient ( $\beta$ )	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>R</i>	Adjusted $R^2$	Collinearity stats	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>							Tolerance	VIF
Career self-management (EAS)	33.98	4.92	-	6.91	.000***	9.12†	.33	.10+	-	-
General self-esteem (CFSEI2-AD)	.23	.07	.31	3.45	.004**	-	-	-	.36	2.79
Cultural competence (EAS)	18.27	2.93	-	6.23	.000***	3.90†	.22	.04+	-	-
Social self-esteem (CFSEI2-AD)	.12	.06	.14	2.14	.030*	-	-	-	.71	1.42
Self-efficacy (EAS)	25.78	2.51	-	10.25	.000***	5.50†	.26	.06+	-	-
General self-esteem (CFSEI2-AD)	.12	.03	.32	3.40	.001***	-	-	-	.36	2.79
Personal self-esteem (CFSEI2-AD)	-.10	.05	-.19	-2.19	.030*	-	-	-	.43	2.30
Career resilience (EAS)	16.24	2.46	-	6.59	.000***	17.44†	.44	.18++	-	-
General self-esteem (CFSEI2-AD)	.10	.03	.26	3.03	.003**	-	-	-	.36	2.79
Social or peer self-esteem (CFSEI2-AD)	.12	.05	.15	2.44	.015*	-	-	-	.71	1.42
Sociability (EAS)	21.93	3.51	-	6.24	.000***	11.36†	.36	.12+	-	-
Social or peer self-esteem (CFSEI2-AD)	.16	.07	.15	2.29	.023*	-	-	-	.71	1.42
Lie items (CFSEI2-AD)	-.16	.06	-.17	-2.67	.008**	-	-	-	.75	1.33
Entrepreneurial orientation (EAS)	27.01	3.07	-	8.79	.000***	7.32†	.30	.08+	-	-
General self-esteem (CFSEI2-AD)	.09	.04	.19	2.11	.040*	-	-	-	.36	2.79
Proactivity (EAS)	22.50	3.01	-	7.48	.000***	12.52†	.38	.13++	-	-
General self-esteem (CFSEI2-AD)	.11	.04	.23	2.61	.010**	-	-	-	.36	2.79
Social self-esteem (CFSEI2-AD)	.11	.06	.12	1.92	.050*	-	-	-	.71	1.42

*N* = 304, sample size of employed adults.

*B*, xxx; *SE B*, standard error xxx;  $\beta$ , beta; *t*, *t*-test; *p*, probability value; *F*, frequency; *R*, correlation coefficient;  $R^2$ , coefficient of determination; VIF, variance inflation factor; CFSEI2-AD, Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory; EAS, Employability Attributes Scale.

†, Constant, (4; 299).

+,  $R^2 \leq .12$  (small practical effect size); ++,  $R^2 \geq .13 \leq .25$  (medium practical effect size).

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

The categorical regression analysis for self-esteem revealed no statistically significant positive relationships with race, gender, age, marital status, job level, employability satisfaction or current employment status. Therefore, it did not provide sufficient support for hypothesis 2 (that age, gender, race, marital status, job level, current employment status and employability satisfaction predict self-esteem).

### Independent *t*-test: Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory and Employability Attributes Scale

The independent *t*-test results and mean scores (see Table 7) showed that the men participants obtained a significantly higher mean score than did their women counterparts on the EAS career self-management variable ( $M = 453.41$ ;  $SD = 7.97$ ). The women participants obtained slightly higher mean scores on the lie items of the self-esteem construct ( $M = 26.32$ ;  $SD = 5.95$ ).

The researcher observed no other significant gender differences for any of the other self-esteem and employability attributes variables. The results provided some support for hypothesis 3 (men and women differ significantly in self-esteem and employability attributes).

## Discussion

The effect of challenges, like fewer employment opportunities and reduced job security, increased personal responsibility to keep up with changes, current skill shortages and demands for retaining talented and skilled staff, have led to an emphasis on career meta-competencies to improve employability attributes (Coetzee, 2008; Fugate *et al.*, 2004).

Career counsellors and human resource practitioners have been concerned for a long time about employees' psychological career resources or career meta-competencies that enable them to take ownership of their careers and be proactive in managing their careers and improving their employability (Coetzee, 2008; Fugate *et al.*, 2004).

The significant relationship the researcher observed between self-esteem and employability attributes suggests that people with higher self-esteem will have higher employability attributes. These findings agree with those of Fugate *et al.* (2004) and those of Griffen and Hesketh (2005).

The significant relationship the researcher observed between general self-esteem, social or peer self-esteem, personal self-esteem and career self-management showed that people who believe in themselves and feel good about themselves are more likely to take proactive steps to develop and manage their own careers. Marock (2008) suggested that people should take responsibility for managing their careers and posits that people who have higher levels of psychological career resources are generally more able to manage their careers and adapt to changing circumstances. As a result, they showed higher levels of employability (Fugate, *et al.*, 2004; Griffen & Hesketh, 2005). Bezuidenhout (2010) associates confidence with achieving one's career goals, and persistence in doing so, with efficient levels of career self-management. Any person who has high confidence should have a high level of general, social or peer and personal self-esteem. Therefore, people with high self-esteem should be able to manage their careers efficiently.

**TABLE 6:** Categorical regression analysis – Employability Attributes Scale.

Dimension	Variable	Standardised coefficient		<i>p</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
		B	SE B				
Career self-management (EAS) (Constant)		-	-	.002	-	-	.08+
	Race	.22	.06	.00***	4	13.18	-
	Marital status	.13	.06	.01**	2	4.62	-
	Job level	.17	.07	.00***	5	6.39	-
	Employability satisfaction	.15	.07	.01**	2	4.82	-
	Current employment status	.18	.08	.00***	4	4.47	-
Sociability (EAS) (constant)		-	-	.001	-	-	.09+
	Race	.20	.06	.00***	4	12.31	-
	Age	-.21	.09	.02*	1	5.41	-
	Marital status	.16	.06	.00***	2	7.15	-
	Job level	.22	.08	.00***	5	7.74	-
	Employability satisfaction	.22	.06	.00***	2	13.47	-
Entrepreneurial orientation (EAS) (constant)		-	-	.013	-	-	.06+
	Race	.19	.06	.00***	4	10.54	-
	Job level	.23	.08	.00***	5	9.72	-
	Current employment status	.20	.09	.00***	4	5.59	-
Proactivity (EAS) (constant)		-	-	.000	-	-	.10+
	Race	.25	.05	.00***	4	27.07	-
	Gender	.10	.05	.05*	1	3.70	-
	Marital status	.16	.06	.00***	2	7.21	-
	Job level	.22	.07	.00***	5	11.08	-
	Current employment status	.17	.08	.00***	4	4.16	-

B, xxx; SE B, standard error xxx; *p*, probability value; *df*, degree of freedom; *F*, frequency; *R*<sup>2</sup>, coefficient of determination; EAS, Employability Attributes Scale.

+, *R*<sup>2</sup> ≤ .12 (small practical effect size).

\*, *p* ≤ .05; \*\*, *p* ≤ .01; \*\*\*, *p* ≤ .001

**TABLE 7:** Independent *t*-test – differences in gender scores on the measurement dimensions.

Dimensions	Constructs	Group	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	Levene's equality of <i>F</i>	Test for variances Sig.	<i>t</i> -test	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Employability attributes (EAS)	Career self-management	Men	111	53.41	7.97	.03–	.86–	1.89	302	.06*
		Women	193	51.59	8.18	-	-	-	-	-
Self-esteem (CFSEI2-AD)	Lie items	Men	111	24.47	5.80	.39	.53	-2.64	302	.01**
		Women	193	26.32	5.95	-	-	-	-	-

*N*, number; SD, standard deviation; *F*, frequency; Sig., significance; *t*, *t*-test; *df*, degree of freedom; EAS, Employability Attributes Scale; CFSEI2-AD, Culture Free Self-esteem Inventory. \*,  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*,  $p \leq .01$

Similarly, the significant relationship the researcher found between general, social or peer and personal self-esteem as well as cultural competence seems to suggest that people with high levels of self-esteem will be able to understand, act and interact effectively with diverse cultural environments.

This study confirms Bezuidenhout's (2010) view of cultural competence, where confident people find it easy (and enjoyable) to communicate inter-culturally and are able to initiate, interact and maintain relationships with people from diverse cultures. Baumeister (2005) confirms that people who are able to initiate and maintain relationships generally have higher levels of self-esteem.

Therefore, one can conclude that people with high self-esteem will show higher levels of cultural competence.

The relationship the researcher observed between general self-esteem and social self-esteem with self-efficacy showed that people with high self-esteem keep up to date with the latest developments in their jobs and careers. In addition, the findings showed that people with high self-esteem are able to function independently, make their own decisions and are confident about accomplishing their career goals. Kerka (1998) confirms these findings. He states that people with high self-esteem are generally more able to make career decisions and achieve their goals. Therefore, participants with high self-esteem showed higher levels of self-efficacy.

The results showed that people with high general, social or peer and personal self-esteem have significantly higher levels of career resilience. According to Schreuder and Coetzee (2011), career resilience refers to the ability to adapt to changing circumstances by welcoming job and organisational changes, looking forward to working with new and different people, having self-confidence and being willing to take risks. The researcher found that people with high levels of self-confidence and high self-esteem influence each other significantly. Therefore, participants with high self-esteem may have higher career resilience.

The significant relationship the researcher observed between general, social or peer and personal self-esteem with sociability suggest that people with high self-esteem will be open to establishing and maintaining social contacts and using formal and informal networks to advance their careers. Bezuidenhout (2010) also noted that sociability implies having self-confidence and that high self-confidence also suggests high overall self-esteem. Participants with high self-esteem may appear more sociable.

Similarly, the relationship the researcher found between general, social or peer and personal self-esteem and entrepreneurial orientation showed that people with high self-esteem would exploit career opportunities in the career environment. Bezuidenhout (2010) noted that entrepreneurial orientation includes a positive feeling about the implications of change in the workplace and feeling comfortable in uncertain situations. One generally measures self-esteem against positive or negative feelings (Maslow, 1970). Therefore, participants with high self-esteem will be more orientated towards becoming entrepreneurs as they feel positive about themselves and will show high levels of self-confidence and ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

The researcher also found that general, social and personal self-esteem have significant relationships with proactivity. According to Bezuidenhout (2010), people with high proactivity will typically initiate self-improvement and accept responsibility for their decisions. People who have high career meta-competencies (like self-esteem) are generally more able to adapt to changing circumstances, take risks, initiate self-development and make career decisions more easily (Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Griffen & Hesketh, 2005). Participants with high self-esteem seem more proactive compared to participants with low self-esteem.

General, social or peer and personal self-esteem have significant relationships with emotional literacy. People with high emotional literacy are able to use emotions adaptively, read, understand and manage their own emotions as well as the emotions of others. Several authors suggest that emotional literacy and self-esteem have close relationships with each other and that people with high self-esteem and emotional literacy show high levels of overall employability (Briscoe & Hall, 1999; Coetzee, 2008; Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2007; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Herr *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, participants with high self-esteem are more emotionally literate than are those with low self-esteem.

The researcher found no significant relationships between age, gender, race, marital status, job level, current employment status and employability satisfaction or self-esteem. Therefore, it is not necessary to consider these variables during career development support practices and career counselling sessions that aim to improve self-esteem. However, these findings contradict those of Brandstadter and Greve (1994), Demo (1992), Orth *et al.* (2010) and Xu *et al.* (2009).

The significant relationships the researcher observed between age, gender, race, marital status, job level, current employment status and employability satisfaction showed that one should consider these variables during career development support practices and career counselling interventions that aim to improve employability attributes.

The study revealed that the men participants seem to be slightly better at managing their careers than the women participants are. Therefore, they showed slightly higher employability attributes. These results agree with the studies of Clarke (2008), Lee (2001) as well as those of Scandura and Lankau (1997). They also found that men are slightly more employable than women are. One needs to consider these differences during career development support practices and career counselling interventions that aim to improve employability attributes. Therefore, one should introduce interventions that are more extensive to improve the employability attributes of women.

Race, marital status, job level, current employment status and employability satisfaction showed a significant relationship with career self-management. However, researchers need to conduct further studies on which race, marital status and job level groups display higher levels of career self-management. The results showed that race, age, marital status, job level, current employment status as well as employability satisfaction have significant relationships with sociability. It seems that these factors predict the level of sociability of a person. Race, job level and current employment status significantly influence entrepreneurial orientation, whilst race, marital status, job level and current employment status influence proactivity.

It is clear that race, job level and current employment status are the most important factors that influence employability attributes. However, researchers need to conduct further research to determine which race, job level and employment status levels most significantly influence employability attributes.

One should consider all the influencing factors during career development support practices and career-counselling interventions that aim to improve the employability attributes of people.

## Conclusions

The world of work and work contexts have changed dramatically during the 21st century (Amundson, 2006; Blickle & Witzki, 2008; Burke & Ng, 2006; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Jones & DeFillipi, 1996; Luthans, Luthans & Luthans, 2004; Richardson, 2002). As a result, careers have also changed and moved away from the traditional career context to boundaryless careers. The skills and abilities required from young adults who are entering the world of work have also changed.

Several essential factors determine a person's occupational interests and abilities. They include a person's background

and social demographic status (like age, gender and race), personal characteristics (like self-esteem, self-awareness, decision-making ability, personality preferences, emotional intelligence and employability attributes), experience (like work, academic experience and hobbies) and initial skill levels (like cognitive abilities, technical skills and interpersonal skills) (Beukes, 2010; Feldman, 2002). Current career-counselling practices face challenges because of the radical changes in lifestyles, the technological advancement and information explosion of the 21st century (Maree & Beck, 2004).

For people to stand the best chance of finding jobs in which they will be satisfied and successful, education in career self-management and career development learning is important (Coetzee & Beukes, 2010; Pool & Sewell, 2007). Career development learning typically includes activities to help people become more self-aware. It allows them to do the things that they are interested in, enjoy doing and that motivate them.

In addition, people need to learn how best to present themselves to prospective employers, how to behave in interviews and in jobs and how to make careful decisions about their careers (Coetzee & Beukes, 2010). Therefore, it is important to help people to improve their employability skills.

The findings of this study confirmed that career meta-competencies (like self-esteem) do influence employability attributes significantly. Therefore, one should address them during career development support practices and career-counselling interventions that aim to improve employability attributes.

In addition, this study confirmed that biographical details (like age, gender, race, marital status, job level, current employment status and employability satisfaction levels) also predict employability attributes. One needs to consider these differences when one aims to improve employability attributes.

The findings highlight the need for further research to explore the relationships between career meta-competencies, biographical predictors and employability attributes. The practical value of the findings is the new knowledge they yielded about the relationships between these variables and the factors they highlight as contributors to improving self-esteem, acknowledging diversity and improving employability attributes.

## Possible limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

The researcher limited the present study to participants who were studying for an honours degree in business management in a South African higher education institution. Therefore, one cannot generalise the findings to other occupational contexts.

Furthermore, given the exploratory nature of the research design, this study can make no statements about causation. Therefore, the researcher has only inferred that there are associations between the variables but has not established any. Consequently, one needs to replicate these findings with broader samples in different occupational groups and economic sectors before one can draw comprehensive conclusions about the relationships between people's self-esteem and their employability attributes.

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### Competing interests

The author declares that she has no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced her when she wrote this paper.

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