

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAREER ADAPTABILITY AND EMPLOYEE  
ENGAGEMENT AMONGST EMPLOYEES IN AN INSURANCE COMPANY

by

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## DECLARATION

I, Marna Potgieter, student number 50774999, declare that this dissertation of limited scope entitled **“The relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement amongst employees in an insurance company”** is my own work, and that all the sources that I have used or have quoted from have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that ethical clearance to conduct the research has been obtained from the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, University of South Africa, as well as from the participating organisation.

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**MARNA POTGIETER**

**30 NOVEMBER 2013**

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*"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

Philippians 4:13

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## **SUMMARY**

### **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAREER ADAPTABILITY AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AMONGST EMPLOYEES IN AN INSURANCE COMPANY**

by

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The objectives of the study were (1) to determine the relationship between career adaptability (measured by the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale) and employee engagement (measured by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale), and (2) to determine whether age, race, gender and tenure groups differ significantly regarding career adaptability and employee engagement. A quantitative survey was conducted on a convenience sample (N = 131) of employees within a business unit of a large insurance company in South Africa.

Correlational and inferential statistical analyses revealed significant relationships between career adaptability and employee engagement as well as significant differences between age and race groups on some dimensions of the constructs.

These findings contribute valuable insight and knowledge to the field of Organisational Psychology and Career Psychology that can be applied in engagement strategies as well as in career guidance and counselling.

The study concluded with recommendations for future research and practice.

#### **KEY TERMS**

Career adaptability; employee engagement; personal resources; career psychology.

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## CHAPTER 1

### SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH

This dissertation focuses on the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement amongst employees in an insurance company. This chapter provides the background to and motivation for the research, particularly the research opportunity, aims and research methodology.

#### 1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

In recent years, the notion of the global workplace and the twenty-first century world of work have become increasingly prominent in describing the current business environment (Mendes & Stander, 2011). Characterised by instability, continuous change and renewal, the world of work is impacted by significant and rapid technological advances and global competition (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). Frequently, the resulting effect is seen in restructuring, downsizing and reduced workforces in an effort to improve organisational performance (Klehe, Zikic, Van Vianen & De Pater, 2011). The changes described above have significantly impacted the nature and complexity of careers, and the focus has shifted to employability, the way in which work is defined as well as the job structures which enable organisations to reach their goals (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2009; Klehe *et al.*, 2011).

The climate in the insurance industry has similarly reflected global changes (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). Since the nineteenth century, the insurance industry has seen immense growth and expansion, characterised by competitiveness and rivalry (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). These changes, along with world-wide economic conditions and demands, have forced organisations to rapid adaptation, including down-sizing, restructuring and outsourcing (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007).

Workers are consequently experiencing increased mobility which influences the psychological contract between employees and their employers (Mendes & Stander, 2011). The employee's agency in career decision-making is now emphasised, rather than organisational career arrangements. In turn, organisations are also shifting their focus to attracting, retaining, engaging and developing key employees (Coetzee,

Bergh & Schreuder, 2010). It is evident that a talent focus should be driving organisations to change and adapt their business model to empower and engage employees (Mendes & Stander, 2011).

This means an increasing awareness of the subjective career measures and subjective work experiences of employees, job satisfaction and workplace happiness within organisations (Coetzee *et al.*, 2010). The well-being of employees is critically important to organisational success and the focus of modern organisations should be on factors which foster development, vitality and flourishing employees (Coetzee *et al.*, 2010; Mendes & Stander, 2011). These factors facilitate employee engagement and ensure high performance within the organisation, reducing the risk of losing talent (Mendes & Stander, 2011). The subjective work experiences of employees are therefore considered as influencers of the employees' intention to leave or stay within the organisation (Coetzee *et al.*, 2010).

On an individual level, changes within the organisation impact on employees' job demands and obligations as well as reduced job control, and may even lead to feelings of stress and insecurity, to the extent that some employees experience burnout (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). However, some employees, regardless of these job demands and increased pressures, do not reach a point of burnout, but rather thrive on the pressure, finding pleasure in hard work and effectively dealing with high job demands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2001). Consequently, employee engagement as a construct emerged primarily as the antithesis of burnout (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007).

The construct of employee engagement stems from organisational commitment, motivation and employee involvement research (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). Kahn (1990) first defined *engagement* as being physically, cognitively and emotionally connected to work. It refers to focused energy, directed toward attaining organisational outcomes (Macey, Schneider, Barbera & Young, 2009). Employee engagement may be defined as a positive, gratifying, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigor, dedication and absorption (Bakker, 2011). It is further described as the meaning that employees find in their work, and the discretionary effort and time devoted to work (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008).

Increased employee engagement may benefit employers and employees alike (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). Engaged workers are less likely to be stressed, are more satisfied with their personal lives, are more productive and would probably stay longer in an organisation than less engaged counterparts (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). Positive affects amongst employees and good health are some of the employee benefits associated with high engagement (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). For the employer, the benefits of having an engaged workforce include higher productivity, increased profitability, stronger client relationships and longevity within their organisations (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). Employees who are engaged are likely to work harder through increased levels of discretionary effort (Bakker, 2011). Furthermore, relationships exist between organisational innovation and engagement, as well as between engagement and business outcomes, including operational metrics, revenue growth and customer orientation (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). Employee engagement, therefore, impacts on productivity and performance at individual, team and organisational levels (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008).

Given the array of benefits associated with employee engagement, it is fitting to investigate the factors which relate to and influence employee engagement. Past research has predominantly focused on organisational variables, such as opportunities to learn and develop new skills, improving capabilities, organisational reputation as a good employer, input in decision-making and perceptions of customer orientation and their influence on employee engagement (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). Individual variables such as personality type, emotional intelligence, resilience or adaptability have been relatively absent in literature in relation to employee engagement. It is important to acknowledge that both organisational variables and individual factors are constantly at play in influencing employee engagement (Rothmann & Joubert, 2007).

Employee engagement can be seen as a function of working conditions. This specifically relates to the job demands and job resources to which the employee is exposed as well as the control which an individual has over his or her work (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Engagement is also a function of personal resources. It

can, therefore, be influenced to some extent by adaptability, as is evident in the career adaptability and engagement models (Bakker, 2011).

Career adaptability refers to the individual's readiness to respond to change as well as the coping resources which enable them to cope with change through planning, exploring and guiding career decisions (Rossier, Zecca, Stauffer, Maggiori & Dauwalder, 2012). Career adaptability resources are multi-dimensional and hierarchical, and consist of four dimensions, namely concern, control, curiosity, and confidence which support self-regulation strategies (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

As a personal resource, career adaptability is seen to impact on various occupational outcomes, including job success, job satisfaction, tenure and engagement (Klehe *et al.*, 2011). Career adaptability enables employees to deal with changes in their work environment, such as redundancy, restructuring, outsourcing and job insecurity; all characteristics of the current business environment (Klehe *et al.*, 2011). This notion is further supported by literature which indicates that specific skills encapsulating adaptability, such as coping skills and self-regulation, also relate to outcomes such as engagement (Savickas, 1997).

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

It is clear that employee engagement is a construct which has received increased attention in modern organisations, based on the predictions of positive organisational outcomes associated with engagement (James, McKechnie & Swanberg, 2011). An important goal in many organisations has subsequently been to understand the drivers of employee engagement (James *et al.*, 2011). Increased attention should be given to the subjective definitions of career success and optimal fit between the individual and his or her work environment. This includes development opportunities, management support, need satisfaction and good working conditions (Coetzee *et al.*, 2010).

Positive organisational behaviours have been closely associated with employee engagement (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). Consistently, employee engagement is seen as a function of working conditions, specifically the job demands, job resources and the control which the employee has over his or her work (Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli &

Bakker, 2004) as well as a function of personal resources, such as self-efficacy. As suggested by career adaptability and engagement models, career adaptability may therefore influence engagement (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). Career adaptability as a personal resource relates specifically to the agency of the employee to manage his or her own career, make career decisions and to have the confidence to adapt to changing work environments (Bakker, 2011).

From a career perspective, the organisational changes in our current economy also imply career changes for employees in the form of career transition (Klehe *et al.*, 2011). In this constantly changing and unstable work environment, the ability of individuals to regulate and adapt their careers is critical for success (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, the lifespan theories and vocational maturity theories associated with slowly occurring environmental modifications do not sufficiently account for the modern career. In order to be successful, employees need to acquire skills which enable them to adapt (Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, Van Esbroeck & Van Vianen, 2009) and career transition. The way in which employees adapt to their changing world of work is becoming more prominent (Klehe *et al.*, 2011). Career adaptability is seen to impact work-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction, job tenure and employee engagement (Machin & Hoare, 2008; Rossier *et al.*, 2012).

Despite the prominence and relevance of employee engagement and career adaptability in the current world of work, very little empirical research has explored career change and transition of adults with most research focused on school- to-work-transition (Klehe *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, research on employee engagement has predominantly been focused on the organisational factors which may influence it, whilst the individual factors which may influence employee engagement have not received sufficient attention (Rothmann & Joubert, 2007). According to Rossier *et al.* (2012) little to no research has studied the relationship between occupational guidance variables and their impact on employee engagement which bears significant relevance in a workforce faced with career transition. Recent research by Rossier *et al.* (2012) has concluded that career adaptability is relatively unrelated to age – further indicating that a developmental model of careers may not be

appropriate for describing the development of careers within the changing world of work, supporting Super and Knasel's (1981) original notion that career adaptability may be an appropriate and sound alternative construct to describe careers in the changing world of work.

In the context and reality of the changing world of work, the important organisational outcomes associated with employee engagement and career adaptability as a personal resource to cope with changes and to facilitate engagement, the motivations for this study are to investigate the extent to which employee engagement is influenced by career adaptability and to assess whether there is a relationship between these two variables.

To address the above issues, this research was designed to answer the following literature questions:

- How is career adaptability conceptualised in the literature?
- How is employee engagement conceptualised in the literature?
- What are the theoretical linkages between career adaptability and employee engagement?
- What are the implications of the theoretical relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement in practice?

In terms of the empirical study, the following research questions will be answered:

- Does an empirical relationship exist between career adaptability and employee engagement as evident in a sample of respondents within an insurance company?
- Do age, race, gender and tenure groups differ significantly regarding career adaptability and employee engagement in a sample of respondents within an insurance company?



- What recommendations can be formulated for the practice of industrial and organisational psychology regarding career adaptability and employee engagement?

### **1.3 AIMS**

#### **1.3.1 General aim**

The general aims of this research study were to (a) establish if a relationship existed between career adaptability and employee engagement amongst employees within an insurance company, and (b) if individuals from different gender, age, race and tenure groups differed regarding these variables.

#### **1.3.2 Specific aims**

The following specific aims are formulated for the literature review and the empirical study:

##### *1.3.2.1 Literature review*

In terms of the literature review, the specific aims are to conceptualise:

- Career adaptability from a theoretical perspective, exploring definitions, theoretical models and dimensions
- Employee engagement from a theoretical perspective, exploring definitions, theoretical models and dimensions
- The theoretical relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement
- The implications of the theoretical relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement for Industrial and Organisational Psychology.

##### *1.3.2.2 Empirical study*

The specific aims of the empirical study are to:

- Investigate the empirical relationship dynamics between career adaptability and employee engagement
- Determine whether gender, age, race and tenure groups differ significantly regarding career adaptability and employee engagement
- Formulate recommendations for the discipline of Industrial and Organisational Psychology and further research.

#### **1.4 THE PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE**

The paradigm perspective refers to the worldview or basic set of beliefs which guides the research (Creswell, 2009). It consists of a variety of meta-theoretical assumptions which underly the theories and models, providing the context of the research as well as the intellectual climate (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). Furthermore, the paradigm perspective is considered the pattern, model or conceptual framework within which theories of a specific area of research are constructed. The paradigm perspective orientates both thinking as well as the research and acts as a map which guides the research process (Bogdan & Biklan, 1982).

For the purposes of this research, the term *paradigm* is used in its meta-theoretical sense to represent the conceptual framework that describes the implicit or explicit view of reality. The paradigm perspective, therefore, serves to clearly express the intellectual climate and the market of intellectual resources that form the boundary of the present study.

##### **1.4.1 The intellectual climate**

Thematically, the literature review of career adaptability and employee engagement is presented from the positive psychology paradigm. The empirical study of employee engagement is presented from the postpositivist research paradigm.

###### *1.4.1.1 Literature review*

In terms of behavioural paradigms, career adaptability and employee engagement are rooted in the positive psychology paradigm (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Positive psychology is based on the premise that human behaviour cannot only be described by means of an illness-centred framework (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It calls for psychology to expand and explore personal resources, such as personality characteristics, positive subjective experiences and institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Personal resources broadly refer to personality resilience (optimism, sense of coherence and self-esteem), well-being (job-related affective well-being, physical health and health behaviour) as well as job resources (job control and supportive organisational climate) (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Employee engagement is an important component of affective work-related well-being (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007).

The positive psychology paradigm is relevant to this study since it assumes that human behaviour can be described in terms of wellness and not only an illness-centred framework. Furthermore, it examines personal resources, such as career adaptability, as personal resources which influence subjective career experiences, such as employee engagement.

#### *1.4.1.2 Empirical study*

The empirical study of career adaptability and employee engagement is presented from the postpositivist research paradigm (Creswell, 2009). Philosophical assumptions or a theoretical paradigm about the nature of reality are crucial to understanding the overall perspective from which the study is designed and carried out (Krauss, 2005).

Postpositivism represents a more traditional form of research and its assumptions hold true, specifically for quantitative research (Creswell, 2009; Noor, 2008). Postpositivist thinking challenges traditional positivism and the notion of absolute truth or knowledge, specifically when studying human behaviour (Creswell, 2009). This research paradigm is a deterministic philosophy, based on the premise that cause largely results in outcomes. This means that the problem being studied reflects the researcher's need to identify and assess causes that influence outcomes (Creswell, 2009). It is reductionistic, breaking down ideas into discrete, small sets of

facts in the form of research questions and hypotheses (Creswell, 2009). It is the observation and measurement of an objective reality that exists (Creswell, 2009). The scientific method used in research starts with a theory; thereafter data is collected to support or refute the theory; thereafter revisions and additional tests are made (Creswell, 2009).

The key assumptions of the postpositivist approach include (Creswell, 2009):

- Knowledge is conjectural – evidence is always imperfect and fallible, hypotheses are not proven, but research indicates a failure to reject the hypothesis.
- Research is a process of making claims and refining or abandoning other claims.
- Data, rational considerations and evidence are shapers of knowledge.
- The aim of research is developing relevant, true statements to explain or describe the situation or causal relationships of interest.
- Objectivity is a key aspect, and methods and conclusions for bias have to be examined.

In this study, postpositivism, as research paradigm, guided and underpinned the research process. An extensive literature review was conducted, theories were identified, research questions and hypotheses were formulated, research questions were tested through quantitative measurement, and thereafter, conclusions and recommendations were made.

#### **1.4.2 The market of intellectual resources**

The beliefs that influence the epistemic status of the scientific statements are referred to as “the market of intellectual resources”. Mouton and Marais (1996) differentiate two major types, namely theoretical beliefs (concerned with the nature and structure of phenomena) and methodological beliefs (concerned with the nature and structure of the research process).

The subsequent section consequently presents the meta-theoretical statements, the theoretical models, the conceptual descriptions of career adaptability and employee

engagement, and the central hypothesis.

#### *1.4.2.1 Meta-theoretical statements*

Meta-theoretical statements are also referred to as “worldviews”, and include different schools of thought and different ways of approaching and studying a shared reality or view of the world (Morgan, 1980). In this study, the focus in the literature survey is on career adaptability and employee engagement. The meta-theoretical statements presented in the study include those on Industrial and Organisational Psychology within the context of the sub-fields of Organisational Psychology and Career Psychology.

Industrial and Organisational Psychology is a division of Applied Psychology, focused on the study of human behaviour as it relates to work, organisations and productivity (Cascio, 2001).

Within this study, employee engagement is explored within the context of Organisational Psychology. Organisational Psychology is concerned with the organisation’s responsiveness to psychological, socio-political and economic forces which focus on individual, group and system-level interventions (Watkins, 2001). This includes group dynamics, personal feelings of commitment to an organisation and patterns of communication within an organisation (Muchinsky, Kriek & Schreuder, 1998).

Career adaptability and its related dimensions are studied within the context of Career Psychology. Career Psychology is the study of career development and career behaviour as integral parts of human development. According to Greenhaus, Callanan and Godschalk (2000), career development refers to an ongoing process by which an individual progresses through a series of stages, each of which is characterised by a relatively unique set of issues, themes or tasks.

#### **1.4.3 The relevant theories**

Theories which relate to the constructs of career adaptability and employee engagement are covered within the literature review. In this context, theories are defined as an attempt to explain and/or predict a particular phenomenon (De Vos,

Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2009).

The literature review on employee engagement is presented in terms of Kahn's (1990) model of employee engagement, Saks' (2006) Social Exchange Theory (SET), and the job-demand-resource (JD-R) model of Bakker and Demerouti (2007). Furthermore, the literature review on career adaptability is presented in terms of the career construction theory of Savickas (2005).

#### **1.4.4 Conceptual descriptors**

The following conceptual descriptions serve as a point of departure for discussion in this research:

##### *1.4.4.1 Career adaptability*

Career adaptability is defined as the individual's readiness to respond to change and the coping resources which enable them to cope with change through planning, exploring and guiding career decisions (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). Career adaptability resources consist of four dimensions, namely concern, control, curiosity and confidence which support self-regulation strategies (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

##### *1.4.4.2 Employee engagement*

Employee engagement refers to the focused energy of an employee, directed toward attaining organisational outcomes (Macey *et al.*, 2009). It consists of the physical, cognitive and emotional connections which employees have to their work (Kahn, 1990). It is further defined as a positive, gratifying, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigor, dedication and absorption (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008).

#### **1.4.5 The central hypothesis**

The central hypothesis for this study is formulated as follows:

A relationship exists between career adaptability and employee engagement. Moreover, individuals from different gender, age, race and tenure groups differ significantly in terms of career adaptability and employee engagement.

## **1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Research design refers to the framework for action which enables bridging of the research questions and the execution of research. It provides detailed information on the sampling process, data collection and analysis (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2007). Consequently, the research design used in this study is outlined in the section which follows, specifically focusing on the research approach and method.

### **1.5.1 Research approach**

A quantitative research approach has been followed in light of the research question at hand. A quantitative research approach allows for the measuring of data, and enables a comparison of the two variables to determine whether a relationship exists between career adaptability and employee engagement (Creswell, 2009). A cross-sectional study has been used to investigate the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement (Bless *et al.*, 2007). The advantage of the design is that it allows for the study of several variables simultaneously and data is easy to collect. The disadvantage is that, since all the data is collected at once, it will be difficult to demonstrate change over time (Bless *et al.*, 2007).

The research question investigates the relationship between two variables and the aim has been to describe the relationship which exists between employee engagement and career adaptability. To meet the demands of the research question, the research can be classified as descriptive.

Primary data was used in this study, gathered by the researcher through questionnaires completed by the sample. A correlational approach was followed in data analyses where the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement were “covary”. Change in one variable was accompanied by expected change in the other variable (Bless *et al.*, 2007).

### **1.5.2 Research variables**

For the purpose of this research, two variables are distinguished. A variable refers to an empirical property which can take on different values (Bless *et al.*, 2007). Career-adaptability is considered the independent variable in this study, as it is hypothesised

to influence another variable, namely employee engagement. This means that employee engagement is considered the dependent variable in the study, as it is subject to influence from the independent variable (Bless *et al.*, 2007).

### **1.5.3 Unit of analysis**

The unit of analysis describes the objects of investigation in the study (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). The units of analysis for this study are individuals from an insurance company within the financial services industry. Career adaptability and employee engagement are examined on an individual basis to establish the effect of career adaptability on employee engagement within the organisation.

### **1.5.4 Methods to ensure reliability and validity**

#### *1.5.4.1 Reliability*

Reliability refers to the extent to which the research findings can be replicated to produce similar findings. This refers to the outcomes of the study as a whole as well as the application of a valid measuring instrument to different groups under different conditions which yields similar observations (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). Reliability can be influenced by various factors, including the researcher, the participant, the measuring instrument and the research context or the circumstances under which the study is conducted (Mouton & Marais, 1996). To enhance the reliability of this study, the following control mechanisms have been implemented:

- *Intention*: The reason for the study as well as how results will be used had been explained explicitly to participants in a covering letter which accompanied the electronic questionnaires. The intention of the research and use of results were therefore clear.
- *Anonymity*: No identifying information was required from participants who completed the questionnaires; thus, ensuring anonymity of results.
- *Reliable measuring instruments*: Measuring instruments used in this study complied with validity and reliability requirements; thus, ensuring their suitability for use in the study.



- *Construct and measuring instrument replication*: Measuring instruments used in this study had been used successfully in previous studies to measure similar constructs; thus, ensuring further suitability for use in this study.

#### 1.5.4.2 Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which the conclusions drawn from the research findings are sound (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). Validity of the study includes internal and external validity. Internal validity is concerned with whether changes in the dependent variable actually relate to changes in the independent variable. It looks at the possibility that all other possible hypotheses, which could explain changes in the dependent variable, have been excluded (Bless *et al.*, 2007). External validity examines the extent to which the results obtained through the study can be generalised to the wider population from which the sample has been selected (Bless *et al.*, 2007).

The validity of this study will be ensured through the following:

- Effective planning and structure of the research design to ensure the validity of the research findings
- Extraneous variables of the sample, such as location, business unit and leadership exposure were purposefully contained.
- Models and theories chosen in a representative manner and presented in a standardised manner
- Measuring instruments chosen in a responsible and representative way and presented in a standardised manner
- Conducting appropriate and accurate data analyses
- Ensuring reliable data in order to facilitate the extraction of valid conclusions
- Generalisations that are based on the data and context of this study to broader populations and settings should be approached with caution, given the sample size and the manner in which the sample has been drawn.

#### 1.5.5 Research method

The research will be presented in two phases, namely, the literature review and the empirical study.

#### *1.5.5.1 Phase one: Conceptualisation and literature review*

The focus of the conceptualisation and literature review is on exploring the constructs of career adaptability and employee engagement from a theoretical perspective. The general aim of the literature study is to establish the theoretical link in the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement, using information obtained from international and South African sources, such as journals, textbooks, theses and dissertations. The implications of the relationship between the two constructs are also explored.

#### *1.5.5.2 Phase two: Empirical investigation*

- *Step 1: Population and sample*

The target population for this research study was employees within an insurance company, within one division and location. In order to restrict nuisance variables as far as possible, the sample was selected from this target population. Non-probability or convenience sampling was used (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). This is a sampling technique where the probability of each element of the population being included in the sample is not known (Terre Blanche *et al.*, 2006). The total population, as described above, consists of 298 employees who have all been invited to participate in this research.

- *Step 2: Choosing and motivating the psychometric battery*

Employee engagement was measured by using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), whilst career adaptability was measured using Savickas' Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) (Maree, 2012).

##### *(a) Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)*

The UWES is a self-rating questionnaire which measures three subscales of engagement, namely vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Respondents respond to 17 items on a seven-point rating scale, indicating frequency of feelings and experiences relative to work, varying from never (0) to always (6) (Rossier *et al.*, 2012; Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006). Internal consistencies

among the three subscales of the UWES have been established within South African samples, with alpha coefficients ranging between .78 and .89 (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Total score reliability typically exceeds .85 (Rossier *et al.*, 2012; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). The UWES has been validated and psychometric properties for a South African sample have been established (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

*(b) Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS)*

The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (international form) consists of 24 items which respondents are required to rate on a scale from 1 (not strong) to 5 (strongest). These items are divided equally to measure the four dimensions of career adaptability, namely concern, control, curiosity and confidence (Maree, 2012). The total score reliability for the CAAS is indicated as .92 for the international version of the questionnaire. The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) has demonstrated excellent cross-national measurement equivalence, although validity for use in South Africa needs further investigation (Maree, 2012). Initial construct validity evidence has been reported by Savickas and Porfeli (2012), and its practical use for researchers has been recommended.

- *Step 3: Administration of the psychometric battery*

Using a non-probability or convenience sampling method as described, participants were requested to complete an electronic questionnaire of the UWES as well as the CAAS. At institutional level, approval for this research was obtained from the Chief Operating Officer of the division. Informed consent was obtained from all participants who completed the survey. This was done through a compulsory section which had to be completed in the electronic survey, briefly explaining the purpose the study, confidentiality of data as well as the purposes for which the data was used. This meant that participants were not able to continue with the questionnaire if they had not given explicit informed consent. The questionnaire was anonymous (no name required) and data quantified for statistical analysis. No identifying characteristics (such as employee number, ID number, etc.) were included in the questionnaire to ensure anonymity.

- *Step 4: Scoring of the psychometric battery*

The questionnaires were collected and captured electronically using a survey tool. They were scored, and transformed through coding into a meaningful and usable format, compatible with the Statistical Package for the Social Science, version 19, 2010 (SPSS) program which was used for the statistical processing of the data.

- *Step 5: Statistical processing of data*

Descriptive statistics were used to describe and organise the characteristics of the sample data (Salkind, 2008). This was done using frequency, standard deviation, measures of central tendency (means) as well as variance (Salkind, 2008).

Inferential statistics were used to investigate the relationship between the two variables and to test the stated hypotheses (Salkind, 2008). The relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement was determined by computing the correlation coefficient using the Pearson product-moment correlation (Salkind, 2008). This method is appropriate, as the sample size is greater than 30; therefore, implying a normal distribution of scores and the use of a parametric statistical analysis (Salkind, 2008). To determine differences between groups, t-test for independent samples and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were performed for normally distributed data and the Mann-Whitney U-test and Kruskal Wallis Test for data not normally distributed.

- *Step 6: Formulation of research hypotheses*

To operationalise the research, hypotheses were formulated from the central hypothesis in order to test whether a relationship existed between career adaptability and employee engagement.

- *Step 7: Reporting and interpretation of the results*

The results derived from the statistical data processing have been analysed to facilitate inductive reasoning in order to draw meaningful conclusions from it. The results are reflected on graphs and tables from which interpretations can be made.

- *Step 8: Integration of the research findings*

The results of the empirical study were integrated into the findings of the literature review.

- *Step 9: Formulations of the research conclusions, limitations and recommendations*

The final step includes the formulation of conclusions, based on the results of the empirical study and the integration of findings with the aforementioned literature review. The limitations of the research are stated, and recommendations for future research and practice are made.

## **1.6 CHAPTER LAYOUT**

The chapters are presented in the following manner:

Chapter 1 provides the background and motivation for the study, the problem statement, aims, paradigm perspective, research design and method as well as the chapter layout.

Chapter 2 provides a theoretical review on career adaptability and employee engagement.

Chapter 3 provides the research article.

Chapter 4 provides the conclusions drawn, the limitations, and possible recommendations for the organisation and future research.

## **1.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter the scientific orientation to the research was discussed. This contained the background and motivation, the research problem, aims, the paradigm perspective and the research design. The chapter ended with the chapter layout.

Chapter 2 explores the literature on career adaptability and employee engagement in the context of this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW: CAREER ADAPTABILITY AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Chapter 2 conceptualises the constructs career adaptability and employee engagement. The practical implications of the theoretical relationship between these constructs are explained through relevant models.

#### 2.1 CAREER ADAPTABILITY

This section focuses on the conceptualisation of career adaptability, including the definition, theories and dimensions of which it comprises. Variables which may influence career adaptability are discussed as well as the association of career adaptability and employee engagement. The section will conclude with a summary of career adaptability as a construct.

##### 2.1.1 Conceptualisation of career adaptability

In the era post industrialisation, a diversity of occupations exploded in the job market (Savickas *et al.*, 2009). In this job market, employees were required to negotiate payment and the employment relationship was seen as relatively stable (Savickas *et al.*, 2009). The workforce was characterised by loyalty and dedication. An employee could aspire to a specific job for the duration of his or her life with the focus on the job occupant and not the actual job being performed and in return, loyal workers were assured of the organisation's loyalty (Savickas, 2005; Savickas *et al.*, 2009,). In this sense, the individual's career path was predetermined and the individual required to make fitting choices (Savickas *et al.*, 2009).

However, the introduction of the digital revolution and rapidly changing technologies has brought along a new social arrangement of work in the twenty-first century (Savickas, 2005; Savickas *et al.*, 2009). This environment requires organisations to restructure their workforce to enable production flexibility and it has resulted in work being organised differently (Savickas, 2005). The relatively stable employment

relationship which existed between employees and their employers is now characterised by a drive towards excellence in the new global economy (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2000; Savickas *et al.*, 2009). With a shift in emphasis to work as a project and not a full-time lifelong commitment, there is also a significant change in the social arrangement within organisations, specifically as it relates to the psychological contract which exists between employees and employers (Savickas, 2005). Employment is replaced by employability and the resulting psychological contract shifts its focus from a long-term relationship to a short-term transaction (Savickas, 2005). In this sense, employability then refers to the mastering of skills in order to complete assignments and being able to quickly apply these skills in a variety of assignments (Savickas, 2005). In light of this flexibility, it is expected of employees within the modern organisations to develop a range of skills and competencies while job transitions are experienced more frequently (Savickas *et al.*, 2009). The world of work has become less definable and the pressure is on individuals to keep abreast of technology, be flexible, create their own employment opportunities and maintain their employability (Savickas *et al.*, 2009). It is, therefore, clear that the employee's career no longer belongs to the organisation and that an individual is expected to take ownership of his or her own career path (Savickas *et al.*, 2009).

Traditional theories of careers, like Super's career life stages, view the career lifecycle as a predictable progression of career life stages. These career life stages are clearly differentiated and each stage of the cycle is characterised by distinct psychological tasks (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012).

Based on this shift in the world of work and the ownership of career development and career paths, it is clear that traditional theories about careers do not adequately account for uncertainties and changes that are experienced in the twenty-first century world of work (Savickas, 2005).

Scholars such as Hall (1996) and Savickas (2005) have criticised the appropriateness of the existence of the "career" and Super's conceptualisation of the career within clearly defined and predictable stages. Instead, the emergence of boundaryless careers (Arthur, 1994), the protean career (Hall, 1996) and the kaleidoscope career (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) address the reconceptualisation

required of careers. The new career is characterised by adaptation to the changing environment rather than maturation within a stable environment (Savickas, 2005).

From a career perspective, it is crucial to understand and deal with the employment transitions with which employees are faced. Concepts like *employability*, *lifelong learning*, *boundaryless careers* and *adaptability* are some emergent topics reflecting how employees deal with their changing environment (Savickas, 2005).

Savickas (1997) proposes career adaptability as a bridging construct which entwines the career life stages and essentially connects all perspectives of the career/life span theory. In reaction to the changing world of work, regulation skills, adaptation abilities and therefore, adaptability is regarded as critical for individuals to respond to and face the challenges associated by constantly changing work contexts (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

### **2.1.2 Definition of career adaptability**

Adaptability refers to the individual's ability to negotiate new or changing environments (Savickas, 1997). According to Hall and Chandler (2005), adaptability is defined as an individual's capacity, willingness and motivation to change. Against the backdrop of the changing world of work, adaptability and the individual's response to change are the keys to success (Hall & Chandler, 2005). In the world of work, adapting to these changes is described as career adaptability (Savickas, 1997).

Distinctly different to career maturity, which refers to the mastery of complex tasks throughout the stages of career development (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012), career adaptability can be defined as the individual's readiness responses and coping resources which are used by individuals to plan for, explore and inform decisions regarding the future possibilities of their careers (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). These responses and resources form part of the career orientation process and are effective in assisting the individual to meet his or her needs within the constraints of the environment (Rossier *et al.*, 2012).

Savickas (2005, p.45) defined career adaptability as "the attitudes, competencies,



and behaviours that individuals use in fitting themselves to work that suits them". Career adaptability is therefore seen as the skills which will enable the individual to adapt to a variety of and changing environments (Savickas, 2005).

Career adaptability also refers to the individual's readiness to cope with the predictable tasks (such as planning, preparing and participating in work) as well as the unpredictable demands of the organisation (such as changes in work and career) (Klehe *et al.*, 2011).

An inherent notion in most definitions of career adaptability is the need for individuals to make informed career decisions as well as the need to reasonably see themselves making these decisions or reaching their goals. In achieving this, career behaviours such as exploration and planning are seen as complementary (Savickas, 1997, 2005; Super, Savickas & Super, 1996).

### **2.1.3 The career construction theory of career adaptability**

The career construction theory integrates a contextual and cultural perspective on social adaptation and human development. It is driven by adaptation to the social environment, where the ultimate goal is to integrate into the environment (Savickas, 2005). Focused on the adaptation of individuals within the organisational context, the career construction theory concentrates on the manner in which individuals prepare for, enter and participate within their work role and the way in which they deal with career transition and workplace changes. Within this perspective, an occupation is thus seen as a way for individuals to sustain themselves within the society through social integration or connection (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

In the career construction theory, the word *adapt* means to change or fit in; however, it has been used in various ways to denote a sequence ranging from adaptive readiness, adaptability resources, adapting responses and finally adaptation results (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). This means that all individuals are prepared to change to a more or lesser extent, possess differing resources to assist in managing change and will change to a more or lesser extent when it is required, which results in them being more or less integrated into their life roles over a period of time (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). As the individual's environment changes, the individual adapts in an

effort to retain person-environment fit (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Adaptation refers to the individuals' attempt to implement their self-concept in work roles and indicates the sequence of school-to-work transitions, organisation-to-organisation transitions and occupation-to-occupation transitions. Adaptive strategies are used to construct careers by implementing personality into work roles. The goal of adaptation is goodness of fit – matching the individual's needs with the opportunities which the environment presents (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Goodness of fit is evident in success, satisfaction and development (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Adaptation is the result of performing the above adaptive behaviours in changing conditions. Adapting, therefore, revolves around mastering vocational development tasks, coping with occupational change, transition and adjusting to changes in the work context (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). Adapting is fostered by five sets of constructive activities in a periodical cycle, activated by environmental changes. These activities are orientation, exploration, establishment, management and disengagement (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Therefore, in order to effectively deal with change, individuals need to have increased awareness, seek information which leads to decision-making and commitment, enabling them to manage their roles actively and eventual disengagement (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Within career construction theory, *adaptivity* refers to a personality trait characterised by flexibility or the willingness to change. Adaptiveness refers to the individual's response and willingness to change to facilitate career transition. When an individual reaches his or her threshold to assimilate change and persevere in daily activities, it becomes necessary for the individual to change, change his or her context or both (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). The feelings of discomfort associated with this often ignite motivation to change (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). The extent to which individuals are willing to change is viewed as a stable trait or basic trait of the individual (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). This psychological trait in itself is not sufficient to support adaptive behaviours and the individual requires self-regulating resources to bear change on the situation (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

The resources into which an individual taps to deal with tasks and transitions within

the occupational context are referred to as their *career adaptability* (Savickas, 1997). These career adaptability resources are the strengths which an individual may draw on when faced with an unfamiliar or complex environment (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Career adaptability is a psycho-social construct, which resides at the intersection of person-in-environment. Career adaptability resources are viewed as human capital, referring to competencies and experiences of the individual gained through education and experience (Sullivan & Sheffrin, 2003). It is interchangeable, developed through the interactions between the individual's inner and outer worlds. It is strongly related to contextual contingencies (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). These adaptability resources are essential in forming strategies which direct adaptive behaviours (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

It is expected that individuals who are more willing (adaptive) and able (adaptability) to address and confront changing environments will have higher levels of adaptation (outcome) (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Four adaptability resources are subsequently discussed as dimensions of career adaptability.

#### **2.1.4 Dimensions of career adaptability**

Career adaptability resources are multi-dimensional and hierarchical – the multiple first-order dimensions shape problem-solving strategies and coping behaviours, and they combine to form a global indicator adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). In order for individuals to adapt to change, certain transitional approaches are required of the individual (Savickas, 2005). In order for the individual to adapt effectively, he/she would need to collect information which then informs the essential second step of the process – making a decision. Furthermore, varying behaviours are explored and the individual would be required to make a commitment for a period of time and manage the role being fulfilled until such time that he/she is required to disengage (Savickas, 2005). The dimensions of employee engagement accurately reflect the characteristics needed to facilitate career adaptability as described above.

According to Hirschi (2009), career adaptability as a construct is represented as an aggregate construct and not a latent construct. This means that, as an aggregate construct, career adaptability is formed by a combination of its single measure

indicators, namely dimensions, which indicate the unique and shared variance of the measures.

The four dimensions of career adaptability resources are concern, control, curiosity and confidence. These dimensions are used by individuals to support self-regulation strategies (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Control relates to the responsibility of individuals to shape themselves as well as the environment, and to face challenges with effort, persistence and self-discipline (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Curiosity encourages individuals to explore alternatives of themselves and their environment, and to see themselves in different roles (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). To explore information builds confidence of individuals to actualise their decisions and implement it in their life design. Adaptable individuals, in the face of change, are thus seen as concerned about their future, take control of preparing for it, explore alternatives through their curiosity and pursue aspirations through established confidence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

These resources or dimensions of career adaptability enable individuals to adjust their behaviours to the changing needs and demands of the environment. It is distinct and separated from adaptivity which refers to a stable personality trait related to flexibility (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). This personal resource which enables coping with the changing work environment is seen as a mediating factor of job demands and job resources, and is consequently associated with employee engagement (Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

### **2.1.5 Variables influencing career adaptability**

Studies by Rossier *et al.* (2012) have investigated how relatively stable dispositions, such as personality traits, may influence career adaptability and career orientation. The individual's employment situation, such as being unemployed, job-seeking, imminent career transitions, retirement or job loss is seen to influence career adaptability levels (Johnston, Broonen, Stauffer, Hamtiaux, Poyaud, Zecca, Houssemand & Rossier, 2013; Koena, Klehe, Van Vianen, Zikic & Nauta, 2010). Strong correlations have also been found between career adaptability, goal-decidedness and self-efficacy (Hirschi, 2009).

#### 2.1.5.1 Age

Studies by Rossier *et al.* (2012) have found that career adaptability seems to be uninfluenced by age in general. This is in contrast with the vocational maturity development models which suggest an increase in maturity with age, confirming the appropriateness of career adaptability as a construct in the changing world of work (Rossier *et al.*, 2012).

#### 2.1.5.2 Gender

Limited research has focused on gender differences in relation to career adaptability. Rossier *et al.* (2013) found that women scored higher on the control sub-scale than males which is possibly explained by the fact that women face more social barriers than men.

### 2.1.6 Implications for employee engagement and practice

In general, it is expected that individuals who have better developed career adaptability skills are more likely to be engaged in their work (Rossier *et al.*, 2013). Increased employee engagement is likely to result in positive organisational outcomes, such as reduced turnover, increased productivity as well as performance and overall wellness within the organisation (Rossier *et al.*, 2013). This relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement, therefore, has important implications for organisations.

In the reality of the changing world of work where retaining human capital is increasingly important to remain competitive in the global market, it is necessary to understand career adaptability and how it may impact employee engagement (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). Employees who have developed career adaptability skills are enabled to deal with the changing work environment and therefore, career adaptability becomes a key skill to develop in organisations (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). As employee engagement initiatives are primarily focused on organisational factors which influence engagement, focusing on career adaptability skills is likely to equip employees to effectively deal with changes and increased job demands. In turn, career adaptability is developed as a personal resource which can influence employee engagement (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

## **2.2 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

In this section, employee engagement is conceptualised and defined. Theories of employee engagement as well as dimensions of employee engagement will be discussed. Lastly, factors and antecedents associated with employee engagement, the consequences and the significance of employee engagement in the twenty-first century world of work will be considered.

### **2.2.1 Conceptualisation of employee engagement**

The twenty-first century world of work is characterised by instability, change and renewal (Mendes & Stander, 2011). Rapid changes in economic conditions worldwide have forced organisations to make rapid changes to their workforce (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). Downsizing, outsourcing and restructuring are just some of the ways in which organisations are dealing with competitive demands (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). In this changing organisational landscape, the organisation's competitive advantage is seen as key to its success (Sardar, Rehman, Yousaf & Aijaz, 2011). In order for organisations to remain relevant in this environment, a shift of focus is needed from mere profitability to an interest in the attraction, development and retention of talent (Mendes & Stander, 2011). This shift in focus to talent also has implications for the organisation's business model – the business model of competitive organisations is designed and shaped to empower and engage employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Within this setting, employee engagement is one of the most powerful ways for an organisation to gain its competitive advantage (Sardar *et al.*, 2011). In organisational context, employee engagement is central to continuous improvement, change and flexibility (Sardar *et al.*, 2011).

The characteristic changes within the twenty-first century work environment also impact employees directly in their work demands and obligations. Often, employees experience stress, misunderstanding, insecurity and alienation; they are faced with increased workloads and pressures as well as decreased job control (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). When all of these pressures leave an employee feeling overwhelmed with stress, he or she is likely to reach breaking point and experience

burnout (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). Regardless of high job demands and pressures, some employees find pleasure in hard work and dealing with these job demands. This has ignited various studies of employee engagement and is theoretically viewed as the antithesis of burnout (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007).

Modern organisations are focused on managing and harnessing human capital, emphasising human strengths, vitality and flourishing employees (Mendes & Stander, 2011). These organisations realise that these factors are essential to cultivating extraordinary performance within the organisation (Mendes & Stander, 2011). Engaged employees are the result of positive organisational behaviour and they are key to wellness within the organisation, increased and sustainable performance as well as high commitment and reduced turnover (Mendes & Stander, 2011).

Employee engagement has become a popular topic for researchers, academics and practitioners in organisations (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007). In its emergent state, varied views exist on how this construct has developed in organisations and gained practical footing (Macey & Schneider, 2008). In research and theory, the conceptualisation of engagement, the identification of psychological conditions and antecedents thereof as well as structural models of engagement have received the most attention (Olivier & Rothmann, 2007).

Fostering engagement as well as leveraging employee engagement to improve various organisational outcomes has been central to research on the construct of employee engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). According to Macey and Schneider (2008), various studies have indicated the existence of a relationship between employee engagement and profitability through increased sales, client satisfaction, productivity and retention of employees. Baskin (2007) states that employee engagement is one of the most powerful tools to reduce turnover intentions within the organisation. Employees who experience engagement also experience increased trust in their organisation which is seen in their positive attitudes towards the organisation, significantly mediating their intention to leave the organisation (Saks, 2006). Consequently, engagement is found to be a predictor of turnover intention within the organisation (Mendes & Stander, 2011).

The employee's intention to leave or turnover intention refers to the cognitive stage of decision-making where the employee reaches a decision to no longer stay with the organisation. He or she engages in related behaviours indicating intention to leave through resigning and actively searching for alternative employment (Kahumuza & Schlechter, 2008; Park & Kim, 2009). As the intention to leave is seen as the strongest predictor of actual turnover, which implicates millions of rands of losses for South African organisations each year, a proactive approach to decreasing turnover intention is essential to organisations (Taplin & Winterton, 2007).

Important links between employee engagement and performance have also been established. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) noted that engaged employees are better performers and their performance impacts on client satisfaction which, in turn, impacts profitability and important organisational outcomes. Within the modern organisation, employees are expected to foster a positive attitude, to develop their expertise and devote themselves to excellent performance standards. In turn, organisations which provide career progression or career advancement opportunities are likely to have engaged employees. The organisation's reputation as a 'good employer' as well as clear communication of the organisation's vision from leaders is seen as critical factors which influence engagement (Sardar *et al.*, 2011).

Macey and Schneider (2008) view employee engagement as an evolving concept, stemming from earlier research and findings on work attitudes. Employee engagement is seen to add a descriptive value to what is traditionally viewed as work attitudes (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Engagement, as a component of happiness, entails the employees' pursuit to gratification by applying their strengths (Peterson, Nansook & Seligman, 2005). Engagement, as the direct opposite of burnout, has received literary attention by many authors (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010).

The evolution of employee engagement is often viewed by practitioners as a 'bottom-up' process, quite familiar in the incremental evolution of most applied psychological constructs. This leads to varying definitions and meanings attached to this construct (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Theoretical and empirical evidence suggest that clear relationships between employee engagement, its potential antecedents and



consequences exist. However, the components of engagement have not been investigated sufficiently. The question is raised whether employee engagement is a unique concept or simply a repackaging of existing constructs (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Macey and Schneider (2008) explain that for academics and practitioners alike, it is critically important to have a solid understanding and conceptual framework in which to interpret employee engagement as a construct. If one does not understand the meaning, measurement becomes increasingly difficult as well as the operational consequences and antecedents associated with employee engagement. From an organisational perspective, surveys as well as interventions are of little value if not substantiated and grounded in a conceptual framework. With this in mind, it has become increasingly relevant to investigate employee engagement as a construct, its measurement in addition to empirical evidence of its consequences and antecedents (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Various definitions of *employee engagement* exist within literature as well as within organisations (Macey & Schneider, 2008). From an intuitive organisational perspective, employee engagement in practice fundamentally refers to a desirable condition of employees within the organisation which has organisational impact. It comprises attitudinal as well as behavioural elements, including involvement, passion, enthusiasm, focused efforts and energy. Organisational conditions are seen to influence these attitudes and behaviours. It is also seen to influence organisational effectiveness (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

According to Sardar *et al.* (2011), employee engagement refers to the obligation and aspiration of the employee within the organisation. It may include the intellectual and emotive pledge the employee has towards the organisation. This attachment drives behaviour which adds to the capacity of the organisation to deliver results (Sardar *et al.*, 2011).

Macey and Schneider (2008) observed a differentiating view of engagement in practice. Often employee engagement is viewed as a performance construct, thus referring to effort, organisational citizenship behaviour or observable behaviour. As a

psychological state, engagement has been used as a synonym for constructs such as commitment, attachment, mood and involvement. In some cases, employee engagement is seen as a disposition, such as positive affect or even a combination of all three views (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

The lack of precision in conceptualising employee engagement as a construct does, however, not imply a lack in its conceptual or practical use. It simply means that when operationalising this construct, it should be done within a clear conceptual framework and leave room for the psychological state as well as observable behaviours it implies (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

In conceptualising employee engagement, some researchers have suggested that engagement is an elusive force which has the power to motivate employees to perform (Macey & Schneider, 2008). It is also conceptualised as a high internal motivational state (Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt & Barrick, 2004) which is characterised by increased levels of activity, initiative and responsibility (Dvir, Eden, Avolio & Shamir, 2002). Although these definitions include attitudinal and behavioural dimensions, employee engagement can be conceptualised as a state, trait and behaviour (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

According to Mostert, Pienaar, Gauche and Jackson (2007), employee engagement can be conceptualised as an affective-motivational state that is both persistent and pervasive, and not focused on any particular object, event, individual or behaviour. According to this conceptualisation, employee engagement is characterised by three dimensions, namely vigor, dedication and absorption. Whilst vigor and dedication are considered core dimensions of employee engagement, absorption resembles a state of optimal experience, namely 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It is likely to play a less central role in employee engagement as a concept. According to studies (González-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker & Lloret, 2006; Schaufeli, 2005; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), absorption seems to act as a consequence of engagement (Mostert *et al.*, 2007).

On organisational level, maximising employees' inputs has also been a topic which has sparked interest amongst practitioners. Organisations are driven by intense

competition and for this reason require employees who are emotionally and cognitively committed to their organisation, clients and their work. The positive organisational outcomes predicted by employee engagement include increased productivity, job satisfaction, motivation, commitment, lower turnover intention, customer satisfaction and profits (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter & Taris, 2008). Research has shown that engagement fuels discretionary efforts and concerns for quality, whilst it affects the mindset of employees, and relates to initiative and personal learning (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010). Engaged workers are seen to perform much better than their less engaged counterparts (Bakker, 2011). Positive emotions associated with engagement are likely to broaden the individual's thought-action repertoire. This means that individuals work more consistently on their personal resources (Bakker, 2011). Engaged employees are often healthy employees, leaving more energy to dedicate to work and development of personal resources (Bakker, 2011). Engagement is frequently seen to transfer into the workplace; therefore, indirectly also influencing team performance (Bakker, 2011).

Highly engaged employees have increased energy and high self-efficacy. They have a sense of influence in their lives. They are able to create their own positive feedback, recognition, appreciation and success (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). These employees are seen to enjoy work and this drives them to put more effort into their work. Their colleagues describe them as people who radiate energy. They keep morale and motivation high in the workplace despite challenges they may experience (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

### **2.2.2 Definition of employee engagement**

Employee engagement is distinguishable from commitment, job involvement, job satisfaction and general work motivation (Meyer & Gagné, 2008). Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as the process through which the employee can harness himself to his work role and express himself physically, emotionally and cognitively through the performance of his role.

Employee engagement may be defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigor, dedication and absorption. It includes the

meaning that employees find in their work as well as the discretionary effort and time devoted to work (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008).

It is described as the employee's willingness and ability to contribute to organisational success by increasing discretionary effort put into work in the form of brainpower, time and energy (Towers Perrin, 2003). Engagement goes beyond satisfaction and commitment. It is an enhanced state of thinking and acting. It may bring personal fulfilment and a positive organisational contribution (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). Engagement is defined as the focused energy which is directed towards the attainment of organisational goals (Macey *et al.*, 2009).

Schaufeli and Bakker (2003, p. 4-5) provided the following definition for *employee engagement*:

*Engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behaviour. Vigor is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. Absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulty with detaching oneself from work.*

Based on the above definition, employee engagement implies that individuals feel strongly involved and connected to their work, invest more discretionary effort in their work, and are focused and concentrated on the work in which they are involved (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). Employee engagement is further viewed as a function of working conditions as well as the personal control which individuals have over their work (Rossier *et al.*, 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In this sense, employee engagement is negatively associated with burnout and exhaustion (Rossier *et al.*, 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

### 2.2.3 Theories of employee engagement

Kahn (1990) has defined *engagement* as psychological presence and *disengagement* as psychological absence from work. In his model of employee engagement, it is proposed that employees are likely to be more engaged when the psychological conditions of their work are purposeful, secure and accessible (Kahn, 1990). Purposefulness is predicted by factors such as job enrichment and job fit. Factors such as supportive superiors and rewarding peer workers are seen as predictors of security. Accessibility is largely predicted by resource availability (Kahn, 1990).

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) claims that mutual commitment develops through progressive interactions between entities under conditions of mutual interdependence (Saks, 2006). Therefore, employee engagement results from views of exchange as well as give-and-take between employees and organisations. For example, the extent to which employees experience engagement is aligned to their experience of economic and socio-economic resources received from their organisation. Equally, the organisation provides rewards and recognition in varying degrees aligned to perceived employee engagement (Saks, 2006).

Bakker and Demerouti (2007) proposed the job-demand-resource (JD-R) model as a theoretical model which explains employee engagement. This model highlights differences between job characteristics, namely job demands and job resources. Job demands refer to the elements of the job, such as work volumes and time frames; it may be a source of burnout. Job resources are the physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of the job which stimulate growth and engagement. This variance suggests that burnout and engagement are not inversely related concepts, but mutually exclusive concepts (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

International and national studies have focused on the effect of job demands and resources on employee engagement (Jackson, Rothmann & Van de Vijver, 2006; Rothmann & Joubert, 2007; Rothmann & Pieterse, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Research has shown that personal resources (positive self-evaluations linked to resilience) may predict goal-setting, motivation, performance, satisfaction,

engagement and ambition (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). In a sample of South African police officers, engaged employees used an active coping style – taking active steps towards their careers (Rothmann & Storm, 2003). Dutch technicians showed a relationship between engagement and self-efficacy, optimism and organisational-based self-esteem (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2007). Through these examples it is clear that engaged workers harness their personal resources to effectively adapt to changing environments (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

It is, therefore, clear that there is a need in South African organisations to investigate the factors associated with employee engagement. The objective of this study is to investigate specifically career adaptability as a personal resource. It is considered a factor associated with employee engagement from the perspective of the job-demands-resources model as well as the engagement model of Bakker and Demerouti (2008).

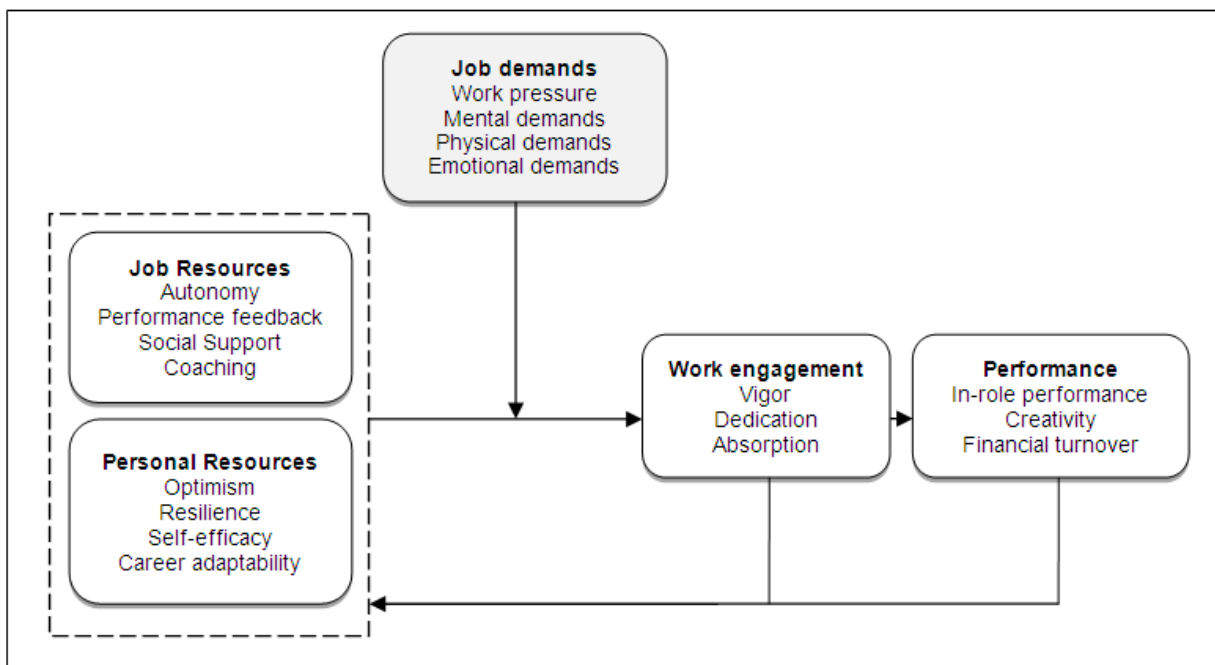


Figure 2.1 The job demands-resources (JD-R) model  
(Adapted from Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, p. 218)

## **2.2.4 Dimensions of employee engagement**

According to Rothmann and Rothmann (2010), there are three dimensions of engagement. The physical component includes being physically involved in the work, and displaying vigor and a positive emotional state. The cognitive component describes alertness, involvement and absorption at work. Lastly, the emotional component refers to feeling a connection to one's work, along with feelings of dedication and commitment (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010).

Vigor refers to the willingness to invest effort, low fatigue, high levels of energy in addition to resilience and persistence in the face of difficulties (Bakker, 2011). Employees with high vigor usually display energy, zest and stamina when working (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Vigor also refers to employees' resilience when working (Bakker, 2011).

Dedication refers to the sense of significance that one derives from doing one's job; a feeling of pride and enthusiasm about work; feeling challenged and inspired at work. Individuals with high dedication strongly identify with their work. They experience it as meaningful, challenging and inspiring (Bakker 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

Absorption indicates the feeling of being totally and happily immersed in work, often finding it difficult to detach from work (Bakker, 2011). Those with high absorption are carried away by their work, time passes quickly and everything else around them is forgotten (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Employees with high absorption are happily engrossed in their work and fully concentrate on the task at hand (Bakker, 2011).

Employee engagement is distinctly different from job satisfaction, work-related flow and motivation (Bakker, 2011). Where job satisfaction is a passive form of employee well-being, engagement combines pleasure (dedication) and activation (vigor and absorption) (Bakker, 2011). Work-related flow is also a shorter, peak experience whereas engagement is a longer performance episode (Bakker, 2011). Where motivation refers only to dedication, engagement encapsulates cognition (absorption) and affect (vigor), making engagement a much better predictor of job performance than any of these constructs in isolation (Bakker, 2011).

## **2.2.5 Factors and antecedents associated with employee engagement**

In the current world of work, organisations expect employees to be committed, engaged and to take responsibility for their own development. Therefore, it is crucial to create a clear understanding of what employee engagement entails as well as those factors associated with it (Mendes & Stander, 2011).

### *2.2.5.1 Leadership*

Leadership behaviours, as well as leadership perceptions influence stressors and workplace attitudes within organisations (Alarcon, Lyons & Tartaglia, 2010). Typically, transformational leadership is likely to facilitate engagement (Alarcon *et al.*, 2010). Mendes and Stander (2011) suggested that leader empowering behaviour might influence engagement. They stated that the extent to which a leader enhanced meaningfulness of work, participation in decision-making, facilitated the accomplishment of tasks, communicated confidence in high performance tasks and provided autonomy would enhance employee engagement.

### *2.2.5.2 Organisational culture and peer groups*

Organisational culture represents an active phenomenon by which employees in the organisation create shared meaning, beliefs and perceptions (Alarcon *et al.*, 2010). Positive shared beliefs about the work environment are likely to foster engagement (Alarcon *et al.*, 2010). Peer groups are often a source of social fulfilment amongst employees (Alarcon *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, engagement may be facilitated by commonalities amongst peer groups where shared experiences and goals heighten group cohesion (Alarcon *et al.*, 2010).

### *2.2.5.3 Role clarity*

Role clarity is defined as the extent to which individuals have adequate information and guidance about expected roles and behaviours to perform the job well (Alarcon *et al.*, 2010). When an employee understands what is expected in order for him or her to be successful, this will increase engagement (Alarcon *et al.*, 2010).

Role clarity, according to Mendes and Stander (2011), consists of role conflict and



role ambiguity. Role conflict occurs when conflicting job requirements arise, whilst job ambiguity refers to a lack of clarity and predictability of outcomes of behaviours. Low conflict and low ambiguity result in increased role clarity which enhances engagement (Mendes & Stander, 2011).

#### 2.2.5.4 *Psychological empowerment*

Psychological empowerment is considered as a factor which may influence employee engagement (Mendes & Stander, 2011). It manifests in four cognitions, namely meaning (value of a work goal in relation to own ideals), competence (belief in own capability to do the job), self-determination (sense of choice in initiating action) and impact (degree of influence in strategic, administrative or operating outcomes) (Mendes & Stander, 2011).

#### 2.2.5.5 *Age*

There are no conclusive research findings on the relationship between age and employee engagement (Peter, 2008). Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) found that older employees generally reported higher feelings of engagement than their younger counterparts. Similarly, Mostert and Rothmann (2006) found marginal differences in vigor and dedication, based on age. Pitt-Catsouphes and Matz-Costa (2008) proposed that older employees were no longer considered “dead wood” in organisations, as career development theory suggested that employees might make career and occupation changes at any age or life stage. However, some studies suggested that no significant differences existed in relation to age and employee engagement (Bakken & Holzemer, 2000; Salamonson, Andrew & Everett, 2009).

#### 2.2.5.6 *Race*

Despite the prominence of racial differences in South Africa, few studies have investigated racial differences in relation to employee engagement. Existing studies found no significant differences in the experience of employee engagement amongst different racial groups (Bakken & Holzemer, 2000; Salamonson *et al.*, 2009).

#### 2.2.5.7 *Gender*

Research suggests that gender differences in relation to employee engagement may exist. Studies investigating gender differences in work-related stress and coping found that females generally experience increased levels of anxiety and concurrent coping responses (Arntén, Jansson & Archer, 2008; Fernandes, Kumar & Mekoth, 2009). Research by Peter (2008) also suggests that employee engagement is gender-sensitive. It seems to be influenced by factors such as reward, relationships and child care. Bakker and Demerouti (2009) also found gender differences in the experience of employee engagement. Mostert and Rothmann (2006) found marginal differences in vigor and dedication between males and females, whilst Karlsson and Archer (2007) found higher levels of vigor among females than their male counterparts in their study of stress and energy. Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) found marginal differences in employee engagement among gender groups but declared little practical significance in the finding.

#### 2.2.5.8 *Tenure*

As suggested by the job-demand-resource model, engaged employees have accumulated the social, physical and organisational resources needed to enable them to deal with the demands of their jobs. Engaged employees invest energy and time in their jobs, alluding to the development of vigor and dedication over a period of time (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008). It can, therefore, be said that employees who have been employed in the organisation for longer periods have had more time to develop these resources and have more motivation to remain engaged. Longitudinal studies, however, suggest that employees who have been in the organisation for longer periods tend to show a decrease in engagement after a while, indicating the need for sustainable employee engagement (De Lange, De Witte & Notelaers, 2008).

### **2.2.6 Consequences of employee engagement and significance in the twenty-first century world of work**

Engaged employees share an array of characteristics. They are likely to be entrepreneurial, take responsibility for the direction of their lives, act self-supportive,

and align their values and norms to those of the organisation (Schaufeli, Taris, Le Blanc, Peters, Bakker & De Jonge, 2001). Furthermore, engaged employees are able to cope effectively with the demands of the job and experience a healthy attachment to their work (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2001).

Employee engagement has been associated with positive employee attitudes which influence job satisfaction, increased organisational commitment and decreased turnover intention (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Employee initiative and willingness to learn, a proactive work approach as well as organisation-based self-esteem are seen as consequences of employee engagement (Sonnentag, 2003).

It has been established that engaged workers show increased levels of performance (Engelbrecht, 2006; Salanova, Agut & Piero, 2005; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Engaged employees often excel in their in-role and extra-role performance, and are willing to go the extra mile (Bakker *et al.*, 2004). Studies by Schaufeli *et al.* (2006) as well as Bakker and Demerouti (2008) found that employee engagement is positively related to in-role performance. Engaged employees generally obtain higher performance scores than their disengaged counterparts, indicating greater influence on daily business. Further studies have indicated that performance expands to a service climate. In turn, it ensures customer loyalty and higher engagement results in higher objective financial returns.

Bakker (2011) attributes the link between engagement and performance to four distinct reasons. Firstly, engaged employees are more likely to experience positive emotions, such as happiness, joy and enthusiasm. Engaged employees are also more likely to experience good health. They are seen to create their own job and personal resources which enable them to deal with the demands and changes within the work environment. Lastly, engaged employees are likely to transfer their engagement to others, creating positive and high-performing teams (Bakker, 2011).

One of the key consequences of an engaged workforce is an active, positive and proactive orientation towards the world of work. These employees change and adapt to their work environment. They may even change the content or design of their jobs through choosing tasks, negotiating job content and assigning their own meaning to

the work in which they become involved (Bakker, 2011). This adaptation and change are referred to as “job crafting”, a prominent characteristic of the twenty-first century world of work (Bakker, 2011; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Job crafting enables employees to fit their jobs to their personal knowledge, skills and abilities as well as to their preferences and needs. Job crafting enables employees to increase their job and personal resources (Bakker, 2011).

### **2.3 INTEGRATION: THE THEORETICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAREER ADAPTABILITY AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

The various definitions of employee engagement imply that employees put energy into their work, feel involved in their work and concentrate on the task at hand (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Consequently, employee engagement can be viewed as a function of work conditions. This relates more specifically to the job demands, job resources available to the employee as well as the extent to which an individual has control over his work and career (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Guided by the job demands-resources model (JD-R), it is further proposed that employee engagement is a function of personal resources, such as intrapersonal resources of career adaptability, self-efficacy, optimism and career management (Bakker, 2011; Cotter & Fouad, 2012). Therefore, career adaptability may influence employee engagement (Bakker 2011; Cotter & Fouad, 2012).

Very little research has focused on occupational guidance variables and employee engagement, especially in a work-to-work-transition context (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). According to Cotter and Fouad (2012), few studies have taken into account personal strengths, such as career adaptability, when examining employee engagement. Previous studies have found links between career adaptability and positive outcomes, such as life satisfaction (Hirschi, 2009) as well as negative work-related outcomes, such as turnover intentions (Ito & Brotheridge, 2005). In terms of decision-making, exploration, confidence and planning increased career adaptability has been seen to assist in the successful mastery of vocational transitions promoting well-being and decreasing distress (Hirschi, 2009). Van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Bakker and Schaufeli (2013) view career adaptability as a crucial personal resource which enables employees to respond to the changing world of work and

consequently career transitions. Career adaptability is further seen as one of the most important factors to ensure commitment and motivation of employees amidst increased environmental pressure; thus, ensuring organisational success (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2013).

In their study of retrenched employees, Cotter and Fouad (2012) found no relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement despite the anticipated theoretical relationship. Contradictory to these findings, Rossier *et al.* (2012) found significant relationships between the two variables. Therefore, understanding the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement is increasingly relevant and important. It is consequently hypothesised that career adaptability may predict process-oriented constructs, such as performance, as well as occupational behaviours, such as engagement (Rossier *et al.*, 2012).

## **2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Chapter 2 presented a literature review of career adaptability and employee engagement. The constructs were conceptualised by summarising views and definitions obtained from the literature. The main concepts relevant to these constructs were identified and briefly explained. Variables which may influence the constructs were discussed as well as the antecedents and consequences. The implications for the twenty-first century world of work were discussed as well as a theoretical integration of the constructs.

## CHAPTER 3

### <sup>1</sup>RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### ABSTRACT

**Orientation:** Instability and change have significantly impacted the careers and employees' subjective work experiences. To gain competitive edge, organisations are emphasising the impact of these changes on human capital and performance.

**Research purpose:** The objectives of the study were to (1) determine the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement, (2) determine whether age, race, gender and tenure groups differ significantly regarding career adaptability and employee engagement and (3) formulate practical and future research recommendations.

**Motivation for the study:** As a personal resource, career adaptability enables employees to deal with job demands, facilitating employee engagement. Limited research exists on the impact of occupational guidance variables on employee engagement, bearing significant relevance in the current workforce.

**Research design, approach and method:** A quantitative survey was conducted with a convenience sample (N = 131) of employees in an insurance company within South Africa, using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) and the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) (Maree, 2012).

**Main findings:** Correlational and inferential statistical analyses reflected significant relationships between the variables as well as significant differences between age and race groups in relation to the constructs.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Organisations need to recognise the influence of career adaptability on employee engagement with reference to engagement interventions, and the career counselling and guidance setting.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note: The guidelines provided by the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology have been used as a general guideline for the framework of the research article.

**Contribution/value-add:** These findings contribute insight to the field of Organisational Psychology and Career Psychology applicable in engagement strategies, and career guidance and counselling.

**Key words:** Career psychology; personal resources; employee engagement; career adaptability, quantitative research.

## INTRODUCTION

The following section explains the focus and background of the study. This includes trends from literature pertaining to career adaptability and employee engagement, the research objectives as well as potential value-add of the study which will be identified.

### **Key focus of the study**

The global workplace is characterised by instability, continuous change and renewal as well as mobility (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). For organisations, this means that every effort should be made to improve organisational performance and to remain relevant in this environment (Klehe, Zikic, Van Vianen & De Pater, 2011). This includes refocusing attention to attracting, retaining, engaging and developing key employees (Coetzee, Bergh & Schreuder, 2010). For employees, the changes in the world of work imply significant changes to the nature and complexity of their careers and their job demands (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2009; Klehe *et al.*, 2011). Rather than traditional organisational career arrangements, the employees' capacity to make career decisions is now emphasised (Mendes & Stander, 2011).

Attention should be paid to subjective career measures and work experiences of employees, job satisfaction and workplace happiness which are important influencers of the employees' intention to leave or stay within the organisation (Coetzee *et al.*, 2010). Based on the various positive outcomes associated with employee engagement, the construct has received increased attention as a subjective work experience. Drivers of employee engagement have been investigated (James, McKechnie & Swanberg, 2011).

Employee engagement is seen as a function of working conditions, specifically the job demands, job resources and the control which the employee has over his work (Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). It is also a function of personal resources; therefore, career adaptability may influence engagement, as suggested by career adaptability and engagement models (Rossier, Zecca, Stauffer, Maggiori & Dauwalder, 2012). Career adaptability, as a personal resource, relates specifically to the agency of the employees to manage their own careers, make career decisions



and have the confidence to adapt to changing work environments (Bakker, 2011).

### **Background to the study**

Regardless of the job demands and increased pressures of the work environment, some employees do not reach a point of burnout, but rather thrive on the pressure, finding pleasure in hard work and effectively dealing with high job demands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2001). Employee engagement consequently emerged, primarily as the antithesis of burnout, stemming from organisational commitment, motivation and employee involvement research (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007).

Kahn (1990) defined engagement as being physically, cognitively and emotionally connected to work. It refers to focused energy, directed toward attaining organisational outcomes (Macey, Schneider, Barbera & Young, 2009). Employee engagement is a positive, gratifying, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigor, dedication and absorption (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). It is further described as the meaning that employees find in their work, and the discretionary effort and time devoted to work (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008).

Increased employee engagement may benefit employers and employees alike (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). Engaged workers are less likely to be stressed, are more satisfied with their personal lives and more productive. They would probably stay longer in an organisation than less engaged counterparts would (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). For the employer, an engaged workforce displays higher productivity, innovation, increased profitability, stronger client relationships and longevity within the organisation (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008).

Given the array of benefits associated with employee engagement, it is fitting to investigate the factors which relate to and influence employee engagement. Past research has predominantly focused on organisational variables and their influence on employee engagement (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). Individual variables, such as personality type, emotional intelligence, resilience or adaptability have been relatively absent in literature in relation to employee engagement. It is important to acknowledge that both organisational variables and individual factors influence employee engagement (Rothmann & Joubert, 2007). As a personal

resource, career adaptability may influence employee engagement, as evident in the career adaptability and engagement models (Bakker, 2011).

Career adaptability refers to the individual's readiness to respond to change as well as the coping resources which enable him to cope with change through planning, exploring and guiding career decisions (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). Career adaptability resources consist of four dimensions, namely concern, control, curiosity and confidence which support self-regulation strategies (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Career adaptability is seen to impact various occupational outcomes, including job success, job satisfaction, tenure and engagement (Klehe *et al.*, 2011). It enables employees to deal with changes in their work environment, such as redundancy, restructuring, outsourcing and job insecurity; all characteristics of the current business environment (Klehe *et al.*, 2011). Specific skills encapsulating adaptability, such as coping skills and self-regulation, relate to outcomes like engagement (Savickas, 1997). Lower levels of career adaptability are associated with employees who have lower engagement (Rossier *et al.*, 2012).

Despite the prominence and relevance of employee engagement and career adaptability in the current world of work, very little empirical research has explored career change and transition of adults with most research focused on school-to-work-transition (Klehe *et al.*, 2011). Research on employee engagement has predominantly focused on the organisational factors which may influence it, whilst individual influence factors have not received sufficient attention (Rothmann & Joubert, 2007). Little to no research has studied the relationship between occupational guidance variables and their impact on employee engagement, bearing significant relevance in a workforce faced with career transition (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). Rossier *et al.* (2012) have concluded that career adaptability is relatively unrelated to age. These findings confirm that a developmental model of careers may not be appropriate for describing the development of careers within the changing world of work. This also supports Super and Knasel's (1981) original notion that career adaptability may be an appropriate and sound alternative construct to describe careers in the changing world of work.

In the context and reality of the changing world of work, the important organisational outcomes associated with employee engagement and career adaptability as a personal resource to cope with changes and to facilitate engagement, the motivation for this study is to assess whether a relationship exists between career adaptability and employee engagement.

### **Trends from the research literature**

The following section provides a brief outline of the dominant trends in the research literature on the constructs of career adaptability and employee engagement.

#### *Career adaptability*

The introduction of the digital revolution and rapidly changing technologies have brought along a new social arrangement of work (Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, Van Esbroeck & Van Vianen, 2009; Savickas, 2005). The relatively stable employment relationship which existed between employees and their employers is now characterised by a drive towards excellence in the new global economy (Savickas *et al.*, 2009; Greenhaus, Callanan & Godshalk, 2000). Employment is replaced by employability and the resulting psychological contract shifts its focus from a long-term relationship to a short-term transaction (Savickas, 2005). In light of this flexibility, it is expected of employees within the modern organisation to develop a range of skills and competencies while job transitions are experienced more frequently (Savickas *et al.*, 2009). The employees' careers no longer belong to the organisation, but ownership lies with the employees to manage their careers (Savickas *et al.*, 2009).

Traditional theories of careers, like Super's career life stages, viewed the career life cycle as a predictable progression of career life stages. These career life stages are clearly differentiated and each stage of the cycle is characterised by distinct psychological tasks (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012). Scholars like Hall (1996) and Savickas (2005) have criticised the appropriateness of the existence of the "career" and Super's conceptualisation of the career within clearly defined and predictable stages against the backdrop of the changing world of work. Instead, the emergence of boundaryless careers (Arthur, 1994), the protean career (Hall, 1996)

and the kaleidoscope career (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) address the reconceptualisation required of careers. The new career is characterised by adaptation to the changing environment rather than maturation within a stable environment (Savickas, 2005). Savickas (1997) proposes career adaptability as a bridging construct intertwining the career life stages. In reaction to the changing world of work, regulation skills, adaption abilities and therefore, adaptability is regarded as critical for individuals to respond to and face the challenges associated by constantly changing work contexts (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Adaptability refers to the individual's ability to negotiate new or changing environments (Savickas, 1997; Savickas, 2005), and their capacity, willingness and motivation to change (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Distinctly different to career maturity, which refers to the mastery of complex tasks throughout the stages of career development (Coetzee & Roythorne-Jacobs, 2012), career adaptability can be defined as the individual's readiness responses and coping resources which are used by individuals to plan for, explore and inform decisions regarding the future possibilities of their careers (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). It is readiness of the individual to cope with predictable tasks, such as planning, preparing and participating in work as well as unpredictable demands of the organisation, such as changes in work and career (Klehe *et al.*, 2011). In achieving this, career behaviours, such as exploration and planning, are seen as complementary (Savickas, 1997, 2005; Super, Savickas & Super, 1996).

Focused on the adaptation of individuals within the organisational context, the career construction theory concentrates on the manner in which individuals prepare for, enter and participate in their work role. It also looks at the way in which they deal with career transition and workplace changes. Within this perspective, an occupation is therefore, seen as a way for individuals to sustain themselves within society through social integration or connection (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

The four dimensions of career adaptability resources are concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. These dimensions are used by individuals to support self-regulation strategies (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Control relates to the responsibility of individuals to shape themselves as well as the environment, and to face challenges

with effort, persistence and self-discipline (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Curiosity encourages individuals to explore alternatives of themselves and their environment, and to see themselves in different roles (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). To explore information builds confidence in individuals to actualise their decisions and implement these in their life designs. An adaptable individual in the face of change is therefore, seen as concerned about their future, takes control of preparing for it, explores alternatives through their curiosity and pursues aspirations through established confidence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

These resources or dimensions of career adaptability enable individuals to adjust their behaviours to the changing needs and demands of the environment and is a mediating factor of job demands and job resources. Therefore career adaptability is also associated with employee engagement (Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

### *Employee engagement*

Macey and Schneider (2008) view employee engagement as an evolving concept, stemming from earlier research and findings on work attitudes. It is seen to add an interpretive value to what is traditionally viewed as work attitudes (Macey & Schneider, 2008) and as a component of happiness, entails the employee's pursuit to gratification by applying their strengths (Peterson, Nansook & Seligman, 2005).

Employee engagement implies that the individual feels strongly involved and connected to their work, invests more discretionary effort in their work and is focused and concentrated on the work they are involved in (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). It is further viewed as a function of working conditions, as well as the personal control which the individual has over their work (Rossier *et al.*, 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In this sense, employee engagement is negatively associated with burnout and exhaustion (Rossier *et al.*, 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Bakker and Demerouti (2007) proposed the job-demand-resource (JD-R) model as a theoretical model which explains employee engagement. This model highlights differences between job demands and job resources. Job demands refer to the elements of the job, such as work volumes and time frames and may be a source of

burnout. Job resources are the physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of the job which stimulate growth and engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

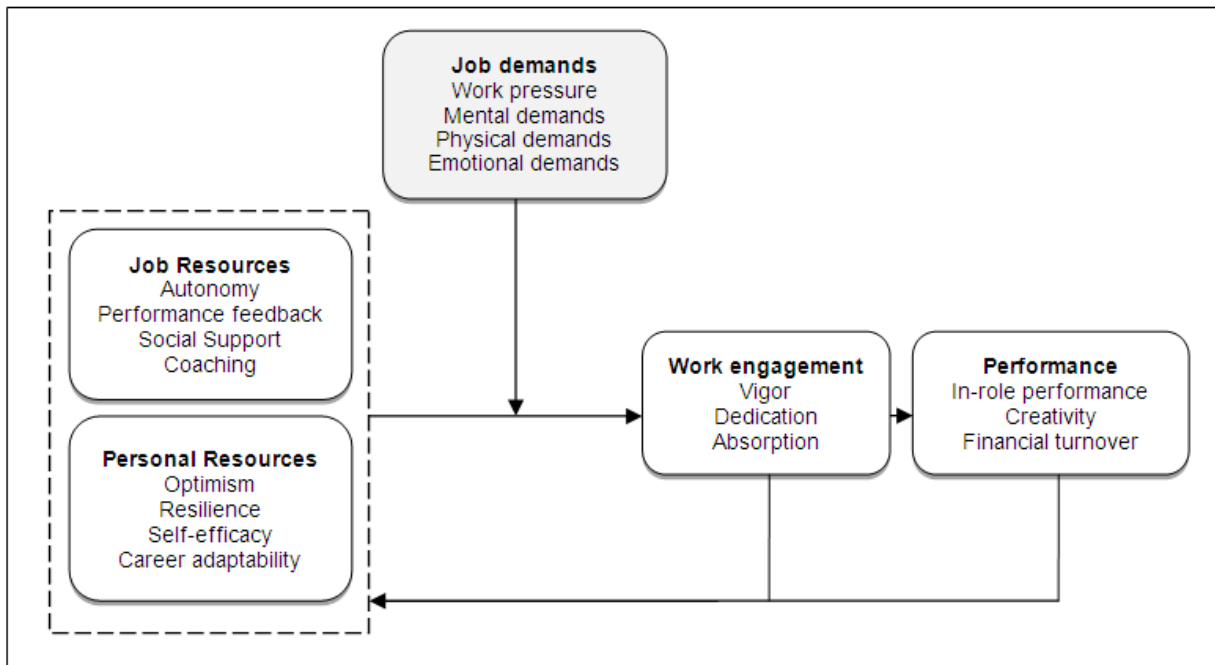
International and national studies have focused on the effect of job demands and resources on employee engagement (Jackson, Rothmann & Van de Vijver, 2006; Rothmann & Joubert, 2007; Rothmann & Pieterse, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Research has shown that personal resources (positive self-evaluations linked to resilience) may predict goal-setting, motivation, performance, satisfaction, engagement and ambition (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Engaged employees use an active coping style – taking active steps towards their careers (Rothmann & Storm, 2003).

A relationship also exists between engagement and self-efficacy, optimism and organisational-based self-esteem (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2007). It is clear that engaged workers harness their personal resources to effectively adapt to changing environment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Employee engagement is characterised by three dimensions, namely vigor, dedication and absorption. Vigor refers to the willingness to invest effort, low fatigue, high levels of energy and resilience and persistence in the face of difficulties (Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Vigor also refers to employee's resilience when working (Bakker, 2011).

Dedication refers to the sense of significance the individual derives from doing their job, a feeling of pride and enthusiasm about work, feeling challenged and inspired at work. Individuals with high dedication strongly identify with their work and experience it as meaningful, challenging and inspiring (Bakker 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

Absorption indicates the feeling of being totally and happily immersed in work, often finding it difficult to detach from work (Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Employees with high absorption are happily engrossed in their work and fully concentrate on the task at hand (Bakker, 2011).



*Figure 3.1* The job demands-resources model  
(Adapted from Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, p218).

One of the key consequences of an engaged workforce is an active, positive and proactive orientation towards the world of work (Bakker, 2011). These employees change and adapt to their work environment and may even change the content or design of their jobs through choosing tasks, negotiating job content and assigning their own meaning to the work in which they get involved in (Bakker, 2011). This adaption and change is referred to as job crafting, a prominent characteristic of the twenty-first century world of work (Bakker, 2011; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). It enables employees to fit their jobs to their knowledge, skills, abilities, preferences and needs. Job crafting enables employees to increase their job and personal resources (Bakker, 2011).

Little research has focused on occupational guidance variables and employee engagement, in a work-to-work-transition context. Research conducted by Rossier *et al.* (2012) has provided initial findings which indicate that there is a significant relationship between the constructs.

Figure 3.2 below illustrates the theoretical relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement. It is hypothesised that career adaptability, as a personal resource, enables employees to deal with the demands of the changing world of work. In addition, it is an occupational guidance variable which may influence employee engagement.

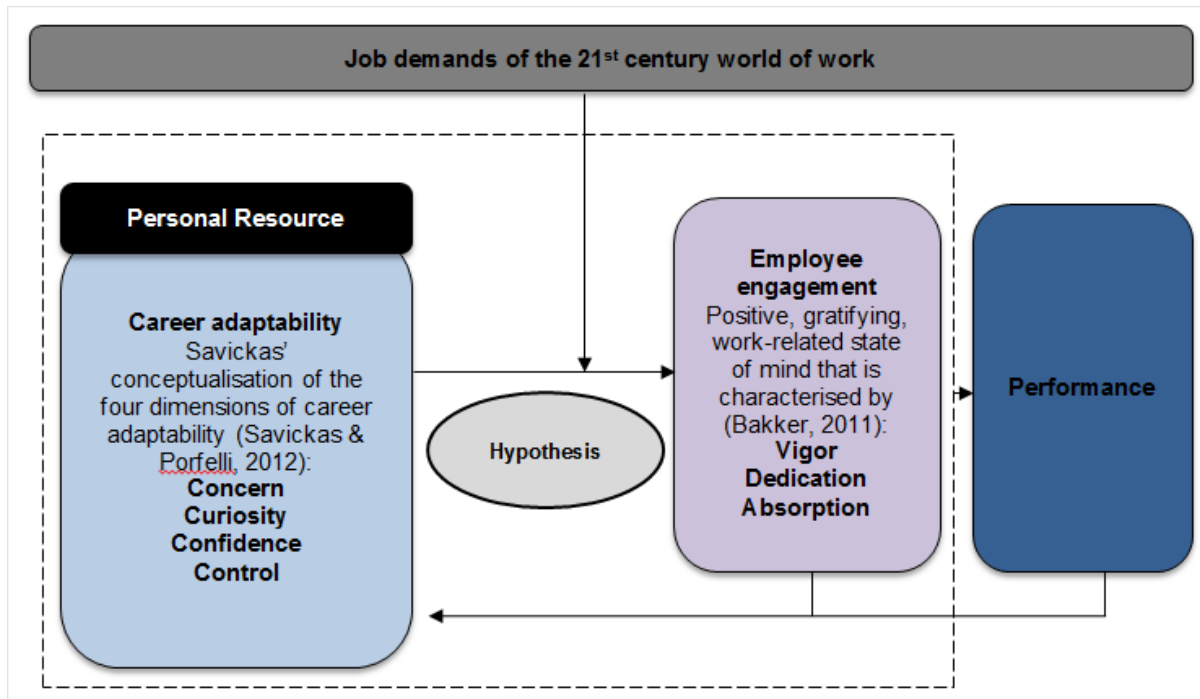


Figure 3.2 Theoretical relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement

### Research hypotheses

Based on the above theoretical relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement, the following hypotheses will be tested empirically:

H<sub>1</sub> : There is a significant positive relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement amongst employees in an insurance company.

H<sub>2</sub> : There are significant differences between employees from different age, race, gender and tenure groups in their levels of career adaptability and employee engagement.



## **Research objectives**

From existing literature, there seems to be a lack of research addressing career adaptability as a personal resource and occupational guidance variable which may impact employee engagement in the South African context.

In view of the above, the objectives of the study were to (1) determine the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement, (2) determine whether significant differences exist between age, race, gender and tenure groups regarding career adaptability and employee engagement and (3) formulate recommendations in terms of how organisations can address the above findings as well as discuss recommendations for future research directions in this field.

## **The potential value-add of the study**

The objective of this study was to explore the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement in order to inform engagement strategies within organisations as well as interventions within the career counselling and guidance setting. Further to this the purpose was to contribute to valuable insight and knowledge to the field of Organisational Psychology and Career Psychology.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

*Research design* refers to the framework for action which enables bridging of the research questions and the execution of research (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2007). Consequently, the research design used in this study is outlined in the section which follows, specifically focusing on the research approach and method.

### **Research approach**

The nature of the research is a quantitative research design. A cross-sectional study (measuring all variables at a certain point in time) is employed to investigate the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement. Primary data was utilised by collecting data from participants, using electronic questionnaires. Data was analysed, using a correlational approach, to determine the relationship which exists between career adaptability and employee engagement.

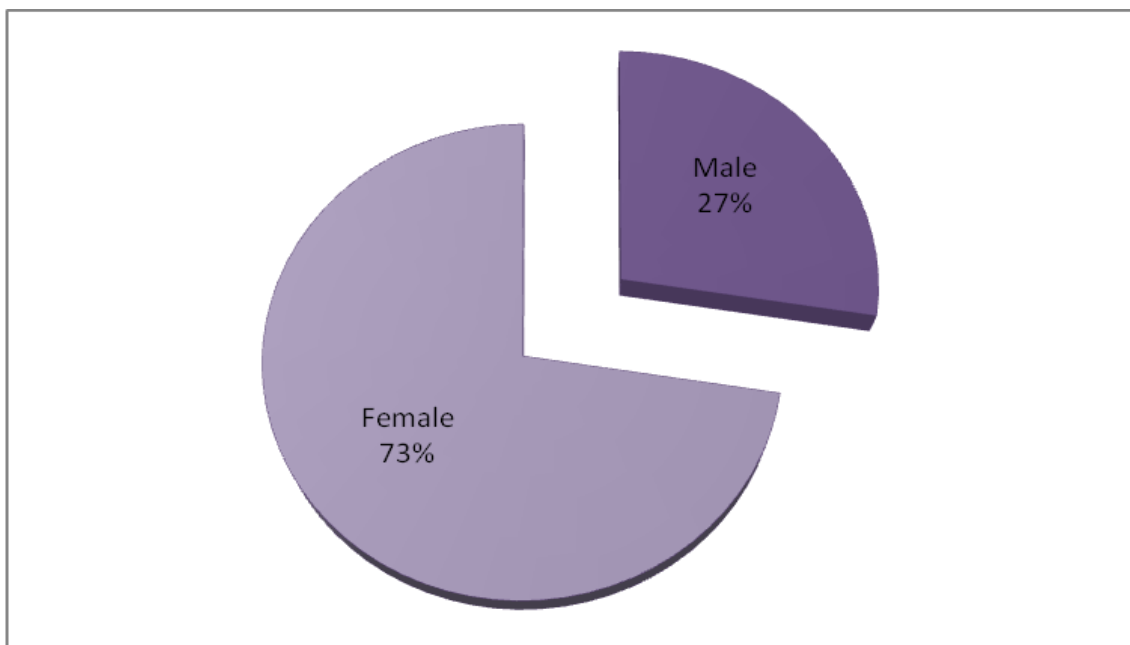
## Research method

This following section provides clarity on the research method followed in this study, specifically in terms of the research participants, measuring instruments, research procedure and statistical analysis in this study.

### *Research participants*

The population from which the sample was selected is from a business within a large financial institution based in Gauteng. The business unit consists of 298 employees in total from whom a non-probability or convenience sample was drawn. Electronic questionnaires were sent out to all elements within the population and 153 participants responded to the electronic questionnaire. However, only 131 participants completed both questionnaires, resulting in an overall response rate of 43.96%.

The final sample (N=131) consisted of predominantly females (75.52%) with only 27.48% males, as displayed below in Figure 3.3 and Table 3.1.



*Figure 3.3* Sample distribution by gender (N=131)

In terms of age, figure 3.4 illustrates that the majority of respondents were between the ages of 31 and 40 years, 45.80% of the total sample. There were no respondents younger than 20 years and only a minimal number (6.87%) of respondents were

younger than 25 years. Of the respondents, 18.32% were between 26 and 30 years old, whilst 13.74% were between the ages of 41 and 45 years. The remaining 15.27% of respondents were reported as older than 46 years.

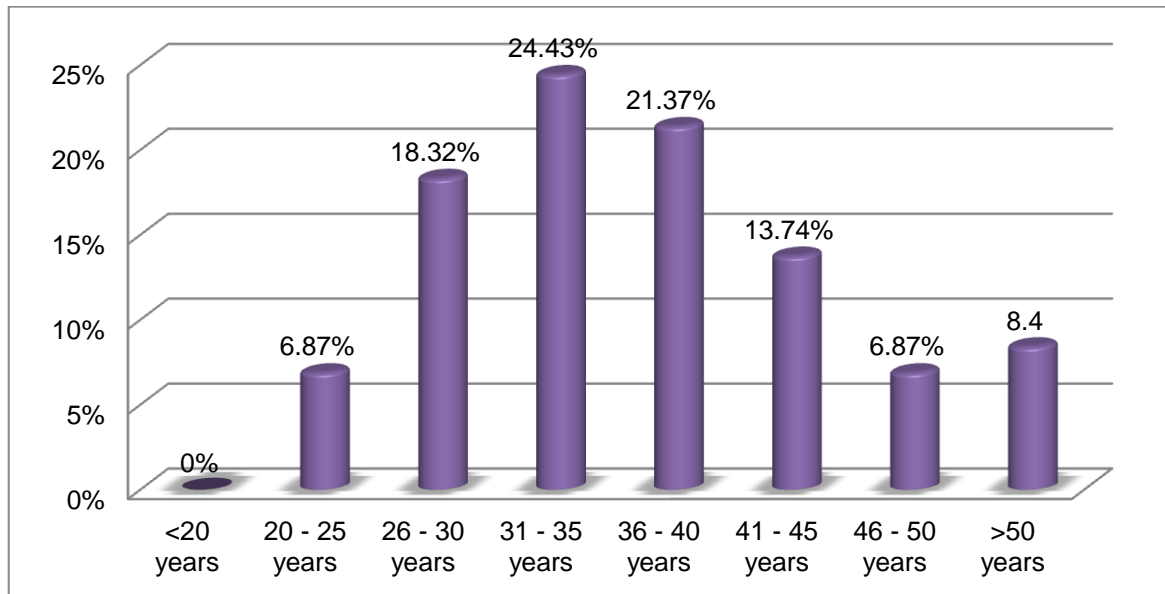


Figure 3.4 Sample distribution by age (N=131)

In terms of race (Figure 3.4 and Table 3.1), more than half of the sample consisted of white respondents (57.25%) with 22.90% African respondents. A minority of 7.63% respondents were Coloured, with 12.21% Indian respondents.

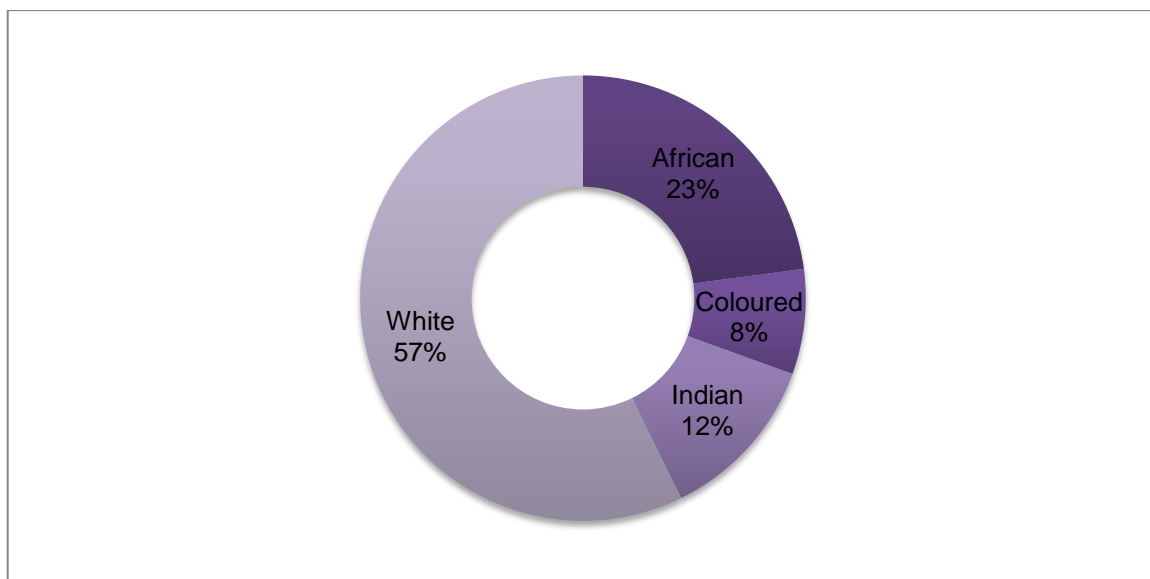


Figure 3.5 Sample distribution by race (N=131)

As displayed in Figure 3.5 as well as Table 3.1, the majority of respondents have been employed in the organisation for 10 years or less (89.31%). 12.98% of respondents have been in the organisation for between 11 and 15 years, whilst 10.69% have been in the organisation for more than 16 years.

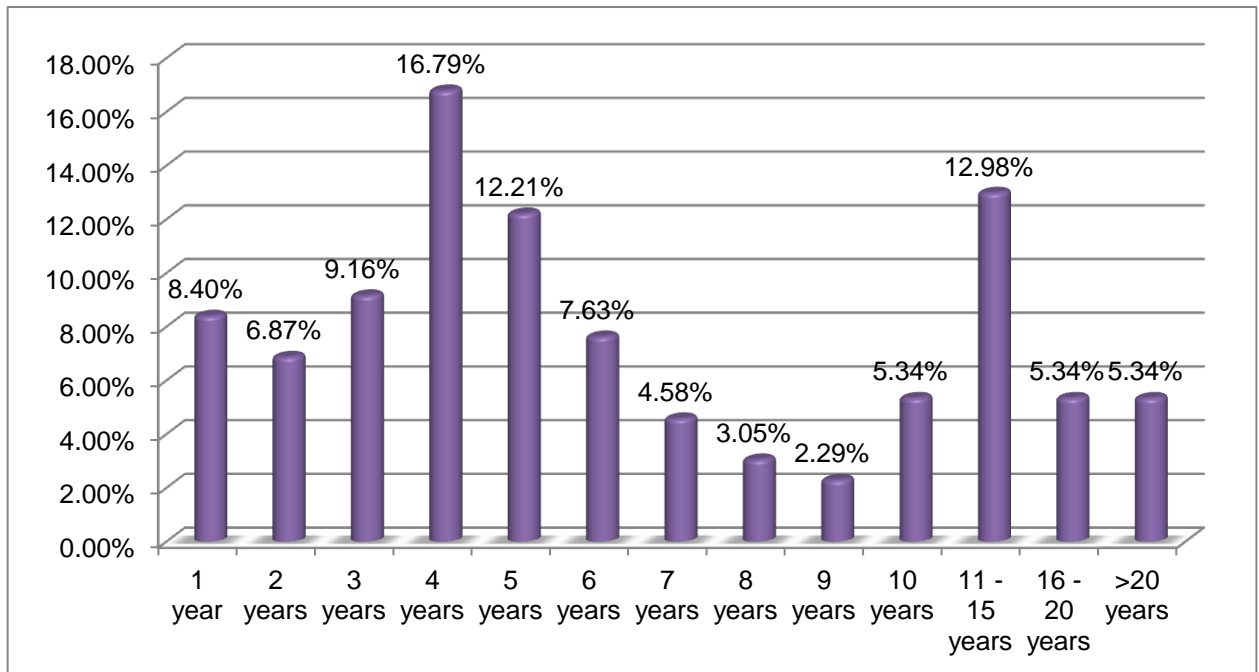


Figure 3.6 Sample distribution by tenure (N=131)

Table 3.1

*Characteristics and biographical distribution of the sample*

<i>Characteristics of sample</i>		<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Percentage (%) of respondents</i>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	36	27.48
	<b>Female</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>72.52</b>
<b>Age</b>	<20 years	0	0
	20 - 25 years	9	6.87
	26 - 30 years	24	18.32
	<b>31 - 35 years</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>24.43</b>
	36 - 40 years	28	21.37
	41 - 45 years	18	13.74
	46 - 50 years	9	6.87
	>50 years	11	8.4
<b>Race</b>	African	30	22.9
	Coloured	10	7.63
	Indian	16	12.21
	<b>White</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>57.25</b>
<b>Tenure</b>	1 year	11	8.4
	2 years	9	6.87
	3 years	12	9.16
	<b>4 years</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>16.79</b>
	5 years	16	12.21
	6 years	10	7.63
	7 years	6	4.58
	8 years	4	3.05
	9 years	3	2.29
	10 years	7	5.34
	11 - 15 years	17	12.98
	16 - 20 years	7	5.34
	>20 years	7	5.34

### *Measuring instruments*

A biographical questionnaire was used to obtain data on gender, age, race and tenure of participants. Employee engagement was measured by using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), whilst career adaptability was measured using Savickas' Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) (Maree, 2012).

#### *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)*

The UWES is a self-rating questionnaire developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) which measures three subscales of engagement, namely vigor, dedication and absorption. It comprises 17 items which include statements such as 'I am bursting with energy every day in my work' (vigor); 'My job inspires me' (dedication); and 'Time flies when I am at work' (absorption). Respondents respond to items on a seven-point rating scale, indicating frequency of feelings and experiences relative to work, varying from never (0) to always (6) (Rossier *et al.*, 2012; Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006). The UWES is scored by calculating the score obtained per question based on the response (7-point scale) per dimension (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

Internal consistencies of the UWES have been established. Studies conducted in South Africa have indicated the following Cronbach's Alpha coefficients: vigor: .78, dedication: .89 and absorption: .78 (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Total score reliability typically exceeds .85, indicating good reliability of the UWES (Rossier *et al.*, 2012; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006).

Several correlation studies between burnout and employee engagement have been concluded, and indicate an overall negative correlation between these two constructs. The UWES has been re-validated and psychometric properties for a South African sample have been established, indicating its suitability for use within the South African population (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

#### *Career Adapt-abilities Scale (CAAS).*

The Career Adapt-abilities Scale (International Form) consists of 24 items which

respondents are required to rate on a scale from 1 (not strong) to 5 (strongest). The questionnaire includes items such as “Preparing for the future” and “Considering the consequences of my actions”. These items are divided equally to measure the four dimensions of career adaptability, namely concern, control, curiosity and confidence (Maree, 2012).

The total score reliability for the CAAS is indicated as .92 for the international version of the questionnaire, while the reliability scores of the four subscales were reported as .83 for concern, .74 for control, .79 for curiosity and .85 for confidence (Maree, 2012).

The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) has demonstrated excellent cross-national measurement equivalence, although validity for use in South Africa needs further investigation (Maree, 2012). Initial construct validity evidence has been reported by Savickas and Porfeli (2012).

### **Research procedure**

Ethical clearance and permission to conduct the research were obtained from both the higher education research institution and the participating organisation. Using a non-probability or convenience sampling method, participants were requested to voluntarily complete an electronic questionnaire of the UWES as well as the CAAS. Questionnaires were sent to participants via an electronic survey tool, accompanied by a covering letter explaining the purpose and voluntary nature of the research as well as confidentiality of information. Informed consent from participants was obtained by explaining the purpose of the study, confidentiality of data as well as the purposes for which the data will be used in a compulsory section to be completed in the electronic survey. Participants were not able to continue with the questionnaire if they have not given explicit informed consent.

Completed questionnaires were returned to the researcher via the electronic survey tool. The confidentiality of the participants was maintained. Completed questionnaires were kept secure and the raw data was captured and converted to a Statistical Programme for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 19, 2010) dataset.

## **Statistical analyses**

Data was analysed using the Statistical Programme for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 19, 2010). Descriptive statistics, correlational statistics and inferential statistics were calculated. The internal consistency of the measuring instruments was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients.

Means were calculated by using descriptive statistics to identify the central tendency of the scores. Standard deviations were calculated to identify the dispersion of scores (Salkind, 2008). To determine the direction and strength of the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement, Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests for the CAS and UWES were not significant for the majority of dimensions (significance values of between .078 and .865;  $p > .05$  were obtained). It was therefore concluded that the samples were normally distributed. In terms of homogeneity of variance, the Levene's test for equal variances indicated that the variables showed homogeneity of variance (significance values of between .061 and .979;  $p > .05$  were obtained).

In order to counter the probability of a Type I error, the significance value was set at a 95% confidence interval level ( $p \leq .05$ ). For the purposes of this study,  $r$  values larger than .30 (medium effect) were regarded as practically significant (Cohen, 1992).

## **RESULTS**

This section reviews the descriptive and correlational statistics of significant value for each scale applied.

### **Descriptive statistics**

The descriptive statistics and Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for the subscales of the measuring instruments are depicted in Table 4.2. Internal consistency reliability of the measuring instruments was determined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients.



Each of the subscales on the CAAS reflected adequately high Cronbach's Alpha values and displayed high internal reliability (.85 - .93). The CAAS had an overall Cronbach Alpha value of .96 which indicates high internal reliability of the instrument. The Cronbach's Alpha values of the UWES were also highly satisfactory with all scores between .80 and .91. The overall internal consistency of the UWES was high, at .94, indicating good reliability of the instrument.

Table 3.2

*Descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations and Cronbach's Alpha coefficients (n=131)*

	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean (M)</i>	<i>Std. Deviation (SD)</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients (α)</i>
<b>Career Adaptability</b>	<b>24.75</b>	<b>54.25</b>	<b>41.93</b>	<b>6.10</b>	<b>.96</b>
Concern	19.00	54.00	41.44	6.57	.88
Control	20.00	55.00	39.51	6.64	.85
Curiosity	25.00	55.00	43.51	6.93	.93
Confidence	20.00	60.00	43.24	7.41	.90
<b>Employee Engagement</b>	<b>11.00</b>	<b>34.00</b>	<b>25.97</b>	<b>5.44</b>	<b>.94</b>
Vigor	10.00	36.00	27.10	5.71	.80
Dedication	11.00	36.00	27.81	5.96	.89
Absorption	10.00	36.00	27.10	5.71	.91

*Descriptive statistics: career adaptability*

In terms of means and standard deviations, Table 3.2 indicates the average mean score of the CAAS as  $M = 41.93$ ;  $SD = 6.10$ . The highest means score obtained was on the curiosity subscale ( $M = 43.51$ ;  $SD = 6.93$ ), whilst control presented the lowest scores ( $M = 39.51$ ;  $SD = 6.64$ ).

*Descriptive statistics: employee engagement*

Table 3.2 shows that the UWES had an average mean score of  $M = 25.97$  and standard deviation of  $SD = 5.44$ . All subscales obtained similar mean scores, with

the highest on the dedication scale ( $M = 27.81$ ;  $SD = 5.96$ ), and the lowest on both vigor and absorption ( $M = 27.10$ ;  $SD = 5.71$ ).

### **Correlational statistics**

As illustrated in Table 3.3, employee engagement correlated significantly with career adaptability ( $r = .404$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ; medium practical effect size) indicating a strong positive relationship between the two constructs. Employee engagement correlated positively with all career adaptability variables, correlations varying from  $r = .272$  ( $p \leq .05$ ) to  $r = .458$  ( $p \leq .01$ ). Career adaptability correlated positively with all employee engagement variables, correlations varying from  $r = .288$  ( $p \leq .05$ ) to  $r = .429$  ( $p \leq .01$ ).

A moderate relationship exists between employee engagement and *concern* ( $r = .272$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ; small practical effect size). The highest correlations were found with dedication ( $r = .300$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ; medium practical effect size), and vigor ( $r = .295$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ; small practical effect size). Absorption and concern yielded no significant relationship.

A practical significant relationship of medium effect size was established between employee engagement and *control* ( $r = .365$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ). Control correlated highest with vigor ( $r = .397$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ), and dedication ( $r = .348$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ), and showed a weaker correlation with absorption ( $r = .269$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ; small practical effect size).

A practical significant relationship exists between employee engagement and *curiosity* ( $r = .333$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ; medium effect size). Correlations were found with dedication ( $r = .357$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ), as well as vigor ( $r = .349$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ). The weakest correlation existed with absorption ( $r = .220$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ; small practical effect size).

Employee engagement and *confidence* yielded the highest overall correlation ( $r = .458$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ; medium practical effect size), as well as on dimension level, with vigor  $r = .476$ ;  $p \leq .01$ , dedication  $r = .427$ ;  $p \leq .01$  and absorption  $r = .371$ ;  $p \leq .01$ .

Overall, vigor had the strongest relationship with all dimensions of career adaptability, whilst absorption yielded the weakest correlation with the dimensions of career adaptability.

Table 3.3

*Correlational analysis between career adaptability (CAAS) and employee engagement (UWES).*

		<i>Vigor</i>	<i>Dedication</i>	<i>Absorption</i>	<i>Total Employee Engagement</i>
<b>Concern</b>	Pearson Correlation	.295 <sup>+</sup>	.300 <sup>++</sup>	.160 <sup>+</sup>	.272 <sup>+</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001 <sup>**</sup>	.001 <sup>**</sup>	.067	.002 <sup>**</sup>
	N	131	131	131	131
<b>Control</b>	Pearson Correlation	.397 <sup>++</sup>	.348 <sup>++</sup>	.269 <sup>+</sup>	.365 <sup>++</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000 <sup>**</sup>	.000 <sup>**</sup>	.002 <sup>**</sup>	.000 <sup>**</sup>
	N	131	131	131	131
<b>Curiosity</b>	Pearson Correlation	.349 <sup>++</sup>	.357 <sup>++</sup>	.220 <sup>+</sup>	.333 <sup>++</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000 <sup>**</sup>	.000 <sup>**</sup>	.012 <sup>*</sup>	.000 <sup>**</sup>
	N	131	131	131	131
<b>Confidence</b>	Pearson Correlation	.476 <sup>++</sup>	.427 <sup>++</sup>	.371 <sup>++</sup>	.458 <sup>++</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000 <sup>**</sup>	.000 <sup>**</sup>	.000 <sup>**</sup>	.000 <sup>**</sup>
	N	131	131	131	131
<b>Total Career Adaptability</b>	Pearson Correlation	.429 <sup>++</sup>	.405 <sup>++</sup>	.288 <sup>+</sup>	.404 <sup>++</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000 <sup>**</sup>	.000 <sup>**</sup>	.001 <sup>**</sup>	.000 <sup>**</sup>
	N	131	131	131	131

\*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

<sup>+</sup>  $r \leq .29$  (small practical effect size) <sup>++</sup>  $r \geq .30 \leq .49$  (medium practical effect size)

<sup>+++</sup>  $r \geq .50$  (large practical effect size)

### Inferential statistics: tests for significant mean differences

The differences between gender groups were tested by means of the independent samples t-test. In terms of the means and standard deviations, significant differences were identified within and between the gender groups at the  $p \leq .05$  level.

#### *Gender*

No significant differences were found between males and females in relation to career adaptability and employee engagement. This means that mean scores and standard deviations on all dimensions of the two groups were similar.

Table 3.4

*Results summary of significance test statistics for differences between gender groups*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Sig. level (2-tailed)</b>	<b>Partial Eta Squared <math>\eta^2</math></b>
Concern	.586	.002
Control	.737	.001
Curiosity	.632	.002
Confidence	.099	.021
Total career adaptability	.935	.000
Vigor	.944	.000
Dedication	.578	.001
Absorption	.482	.004
Total employee engagement	.757	.002

#### *Age*

The differences in mean scores on the measurement scales between age groups were tested by means of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) (for normally distributed data) and the Kruskal Wallis Test (for data not normally distributed). As indicated in Table 3.5, the age group 41-45 years scored significantly higher than other age

groups on concern. For this age group  $M = 42.72$  versus  $M = 33.44$  for the lowest age group 46-50 years. However, the effect size of the differences between the groups are of a small magnitude ( $\eta^2 = 11.7\%$ ).

Table 3.6 indicates that the age group 46-50 years scored significantly higher than the other age groups on vigor as a dimension of employee engagement. The effect size of the differences between the groups are of moderate magnitude ( $\eta^2 = 32.2\%$ ).

Table 3.5

*Significant differences between age groups (ANOVA)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Age group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Sig. level (2-tailed)</b>	<b>Partial Eta Squared <math>\eta^2</math></b>
Concern	20 - 25 years	9	39.33	4.50	.016*	.117
	26 - 30 years	24	41.21	7.02		
	31 - 35 years	32	39.91	6.02		
	36 - 40 years	28	38.00	6.52		
	<b>41 - 45 years</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>42.72<sup>+</sup></b>	<b>5.53</b>		
	46 - 50 years	9	33.44	8.68		
	> 50 years	11	38.36	6.04		

\*  $p \leq .05$ ; <sup>+</sup> Higher mean

Table 3.6

*Significant differences between age groups (Kruskal Wallis)*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Age group</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean rank</i>	<i>Sig. level (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Partial Eta Squared <math>\eta^2</math></i>
Vigor	20 - 25 years	9	32.83	.030*	.322
	26 - 30 years	24	60.90		
	31 - 35 years	32	59.86		
	36 - 40 years	28	69.59		
	41 - 45 years	18	75.08		
	<b>46 - 50 years</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>86.56<sup>+</sup></b>		
	> 50 years	11	81.32		

\*  $p \leq .05$ ; <sup>+</sup> Higher mean

### *Race*

The differences in mean scores on the measurement scales between race groups were tested by means of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) (for normally distributed data) and the Kruskal Wallis Test (for data not normally distributed). Results in Table 3.7 indicate that significant differences were found between race groups on the dimension of concern only. The African race group scored highest on this dimension, with a mean score of  $M = 42.13$ . The white race group had the lowest mean score ( $M = 38.14$ ), however the effect size of the differences are of a small magnitude ( $\eta^2 = 6.6\%$ ).

Table 3.7

*Significant differences between race groups (ANOVA)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Race group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Sig. level (2-tailed)</b>	<b>Partial Eta Squared <math>\eta^2</math></b>
Concern	<b>African</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>42.13<sup>+</sup></b>	5.39	.033*	.066
	Coloured	10	41.10	8.54		
	Indian	15	40.13	5.54		
	White	76	38.14	6.75		

\*  $p \leq .05$ ; <sup>+</sup> Higher mean*Tenure*

As displayed in Table 3.8, no significant differences were found between the different groups, based on their tenure within the organisation. It would, therefore, seem that mean scores and standard deviations on all dimensions of the two groups were similar.

Table 3.8

*Results summary of significance test statistics for differences between tenure groups*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Sig. level (2-tailed)</b>	<b>Partial Eta Squared <math>\eta^2</math></b>
Concern	.159	.040
Control	.842	.006
Curiosity	.612	.014
Confidence	.905	.004
<b>Total career adaptability</b>	<b>.718</b>	<b>.011</b>
Vigor	.089	.037
Dedication	.118	.040
Absorption	.188	.037
<b>Total employee engagement</b>	<b>.075</b>	<b>.043</b>

## Decisions regarding the research hypotheses

Based on the results described above, the following decisions were made with regard to the hypotheses of the study. The  $p \leq .05$  (5% level) confidence level was used as a criterion for accepting the hypotheses or rejecting the null hypotheses. As indicated in Table 3.9, the null hypotheses ( $H_{01}$ ): There is no significant relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement amongst employees in an insurance company; and ( $H_{02}$ ): There are no significant differences between employees from different age and race groups in their levels of career adaptability and employee engagement are rejected in instances where the criterion cut-off (significant at the  $p \leq .05$  confidence level) was not met and the alternative hypotheses are accepted where the cut-off has been met.

Overall, the results provide support for the hypothesis that there is a significant positive relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement. Overall, the results provided some support for the hypothesis that there are significant differences between employees from different age, race, gender and tenure groups in their levels of career adaptability and employee engagement.

Table 3.9

*Summary of decisions regarding the research hypothesis*

	<b><i>Hypothesis</i></b>	<b><i>Decision</i></b>
$H_{01}$	There is no significant relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement amongst employees in an insurance company.	Rejected
$H_1$	There is a significant positive relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement amongst employees in an insurance company.	Accepted
$H_{02}$	There are no significant differences between employees from different age and race groups in their levels of career adaptability and employee engagement.	Rejected
$H_2$	There are significant differences between employees from different age, race, gender and tenure groups in their levels of career adaptability and employee engagement.	Accepted



## DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to explore the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement of employees within an insurance company. In this section, the biographical profile of the sample will be discussed, the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement as well as conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the study.

### **The biographical profile of the sample**

The sample consisted of predominantly white females, between the ages of 31 and 40 who had been employed with the organisation for 10 years or less.

There were no respondents under the age of 20 years, with only 6.87% of respondents younger than 25 years. Based on tenure, it seems that the majority of respondents have joined the organisation within the last ten years and are between 31 and 40 years old – this further indicates that the existing sample group has most likely started their careers at this organisation. More than half of the respondents were white, also reflecting the biographical demographics of the physical location of this division.

### **The relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement**

The results indicate that participants who have experienced higher employee engagement have better developed career adaptability skills. This relationship is in line with the theoretical relationship expected to exist between the constructs, as reported by previous research (Bakker, 2011; Cotter & Fouad, 2012; Hirshi, 2009; Ito & Brotheridge, 2005; Rossier *et al.*, 2012; Van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2013).

The results indicated that respondents had experienced higher employee engagement when they were more concerned about their careers, had a sense of control over their careers, were curious about their careers and had confidence in their ability to manage their careers. These findings are consistent with similar findings by Rossier *et al.* (2012) in a Swiss sample where career adaptability was found to have a significant impact on employee engagement, mediating the

relationship between intrinsic dispositions and work-related outcomes. The findings are supported by Savickas and Porfeli (2012) who state that the dimensions of career adaptability are utilised to support employees' self-regulation strategies. Consequently, career adaptability can be linked to positive organisational outcomes, such as employee engagement, as proposed by Hirschi (2009).

Confidence has the most significant meaningful relationship with employee engagement. This means that the extent to which individuals feel they are able to implement and actualise their choices, and have the confidence to deal with their career-related changes (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), is likely to lead to increased engagement. Control (the ability of individuals to own their future) is seen to influence engagement significantly. Control enables employees to take charge of their future, to shape themselves and the environment, and to meet changes head-on through effort, discipline and persistence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Employee engagement is further seen to be influenced by the extent to which individuals direct energy towards exploring possibilities, their future selves and possible scenarios (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). To a lesser extent, the findings indicate that engagement is influenced by the individual's concern for the future, planning ahead and looking ahead to what may come next (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

The four adaptability resources calls for individuals to be concerned about their future, take control over preparing for their future, explore different future scenarios and strengthen their confidence to pursue their careers (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). In relation to the initial definitions of employee engagement that were proposed, engagement is seen to be the meaning that individuals find in their work and the discretionary effort invested in work (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). It is seen as the energy which employees apply to their work, the feeling of being involved in their work and the focus which they have on the task at hand (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Rossier *et al.*, 2012).

Based on the findings discussed above as well as the aforementioned definitions of *employee engagement*, it is clear that the ability of individuals to adapt their careers to a changing work environment may well translate into discretionary effort and energy invested in their work, which is likely to influence employee engagement

(Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Rossier *et al.*, 2012).

These findings are consistent with similar research which has found that increased career adaptability has assisted in the successful mastery of vocational transitions which, in turn, promotes well-being and decreased distress (Hirschi, 2009). The findings also support the view that career adaptability is one of the most important factors to ensure commitment and motivation of employees amidst increased environmental pressure; thus, ensuring organisational success (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2013).

In conclusion, results from this study indicate that career adaptability, as a personal resource, enables individuals to deal with the changing work environment and subsequent job demands which, in turn, influence employee engagement, as suggested by Bakker (2011) along with Cotter and Fouad (2012), and illustrated in Figure 3.7.

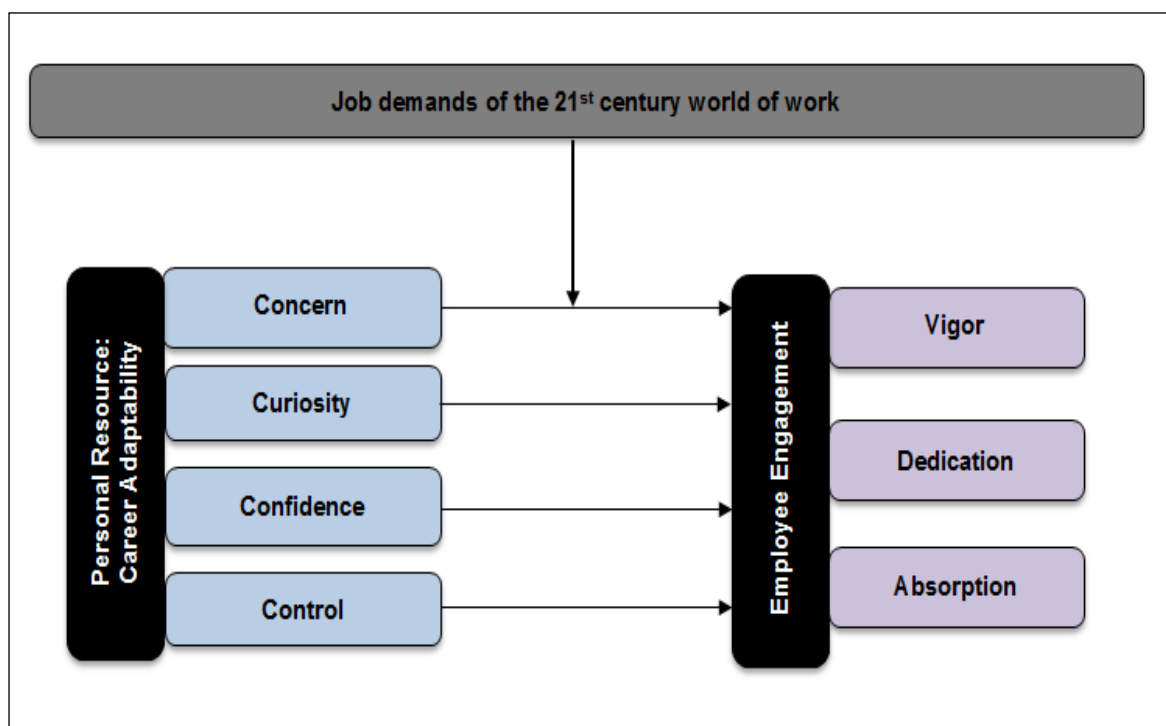


Figure 3.7 The relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement

## **Significant differences between biographical variables**

The study explored broad trends regarding differences between various age, race, gender and tenure groups in terms of their career adaptability and employee engagement. In relation to this, results indicated these differences to be practically small to moderate in magnitude for two biographical groups, namely age and race. The differences in these two groups are discussed below.

### *Age*

The majority of respondents were in the age group 31-35, whilst the minority of respondents were in the 41-50 age group. Findings indicated differences between groups, specifically relating to the latter minority age groups. Results from this study showed that respondents between the ages of 41 and 45 years were concerned with the future of their careers, planning and looking ahead to what might come next (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

These results are contradictory to previous research, where age has been found to have no significant impact on career adaptability (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). It may be said, however, that these differences are not as a direct result of age only, as the differences are of small magnitude.

As found by Brown, Bimrose, Barnes and Huges (2012), career adaptability is influenced significantly by the employees' exposure to challenging work. By engaging with progressively more challenging work, these older workers can be seen to develop a positive and optimistic attitude to the future of their careers (concern) alongside an evolving sense of career development (Brown *et al.*, 2012).

Older respondents between the ages of 46 and 50 years indicated significantly higher scores on vigor. This means that older workers are likely to invest more effort in their work, have lower fatigue, higher levels of energy as well as resilience and persistence in the face of difficulties (Bakker, 2011). These employees are also likely to display energy, zest and stamina when working (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

These findings are consistent with research which has found differences in vigor based on age (Mostert & Rothman, 2006). It shows that younger employees are in

general less engaged than their older counterparts (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

### *Race*

Results indicate that different race groups differ significantly in terms of their career concern. African respondents have indicated the highest concern in contrast to white respondents who have obtained the lowest scores on concern. Very little to no research has focused on differences between race groups in relation to career adaptability. Within the South African context, very little focus has also been given to career guidance variables such as career adaptability in general (Maree, 2012).

Against the backdrop of South Africa's unique history and the career guidance context, it can be expected that different groups may differ in relation to career adaptability. Very little career guidance is provided to the majority of South Africans, specifically disadvantaged learners entering tertiary institutions. These learners end up in careers without having adequate knowledge of exactly what it entails (Maree, 2012). It is, therefore, expected that concern for the future may be experienced differently among different groups, depending on their exposure to career guidance.

### **Conclusions: implications for practice**

It can be concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement as well as the four dimensions of career adaptability, namely concern, confidence, curiosity and control, and employee engagement.

These findings contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the relationship between occupational guidance variables and employee engagement which has not been greatly explored. The research also adds to the existing body of knowledge on employee engagement and engagement models. In terms of the job demands-resources model (JD-R), career adaptability, as a personal resource, is discussed as another intrapersonal resource which enables employees to deal with the demands of their jobs, in turn fostering engagement and a high performing workforce. This adds another dimension to existing literature on personal resources within this engagement model.

In terms of career adaptability as a construct, the findings indicate that there is a unique and shared variance between the dimensions of career adaptability – the higher the dimensions of career adaptability, the higher overall career adaptability is experienced. This confirms the representation of career adaptability as an aggregate construct and not a latent construct reflecting its dimensions (Hirschi, 2009). Career adaptability is, therefore, confirmed as a combination of the four dimensions of which it consists (Hirschi, 2009).

In practice, this research emphasises the significance of career adaptability in the twenty-first century world of work which enables employees to deal with the changes and environmental pressures which they face. Furthermore, employee engagement, as an organisational outcome associated with career adaptability, has implications for practice, as career adaptability has been viewed predominantly within career counselling and guidance settings and not necessarily as facilitating engagement. In practice, facilitating career adaptability skills can be seen to equip and enable individuals to deal with the changing world of work, whilst simultaneously fostering employee engagement within the organisation.

The conclusions derived from these findings indicate that practitioners can benefit greatly from understanding the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement in order to inform engagement and performance strategies as well as in the career counselling and guidance setting.

### **Limitations of the study**

The first limitation of this study is its generalisability. The sample used in this study was quite homogenous and not representative of the South African population in terms of gender, age, race and tenure. The sample was also drawn from a specific industry only. This reduces the power of this study and the potential to generalise the results to the diverse South African population. By expanding the population group from which the sample is drawn to other regions within South Africa and different divisions within the organisation, more generalisable results may have been rendered.

In terms of measurement instruments, the CAAS has not been validated extensively

and psychometric properties established for the South African population in particular. Whilst initial suitability for research has been established, using an instrument which has been validated for use in South Africa will add to the value of this study.

A further limitation of this study is that personal dispositions as well as situational and environmental influences have not been accounted for. This means that there may have been other influencing factors at play which may have impacted the results of this study.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study show potential for the analysis of the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement. This study may be utilised as a basis for understanding these relationships in order to inform the formulation of effective engagement and career guidance and counselling strategies.

### **Recommendations for future research**

Practical recommendations are made on the basis of the argument that employees who have developed career adaptabilities, namely concern, control, curiosity and confidence, are more likely to be engaged in their work, resulting in increased performance and lower turnover intention.

Based on the limited scope of the study, it is strongly recommended that further studies be undertaken in order to address this limitation. In addition, it is recommended that further studies be undertaken to investigate the psychometric properties of the CAAS and its appropriateness for use in the South African population. It is also recommended that intrinsic dispositions, such as personality and locus of control be investigated as mediators of the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement, providing a more holistic view of the relationship between these two variables.

## **SUMMARY**

In this article, core aspects of the literature and empirical study were discussed and the results of the study interpreted by analysing the findings. This was followed by a

discussion of the conclusions drawn, the limitations of the study and the recommendations for practical application of the findings.



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## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 4 focuses on the conclusions which were drawn from this study as well as the limitations of the literature review and the empirical results derived from the study. It further highlights recommendations and practical application of the research findings for future research.

#### 4.1 CONCLUSIONS

This section focuses on the conclusions drawn from this study, based on the literature review and empirical study.

##### 4.1.1 Conclusions regarding the literature review

The general aim of this research study was to explore and establish if a relationship exists between career adaptability and employee engagement amongst employees within an insurance company. The general aim was achieved by addressing and achieving the specific aims of the research.

Conclusions were drawn about each of the specific objectives regarding the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement.

##### *4.1.1.1 First objective: Conceptualising career adaptability from a theoretical perspective*

Savickas' (1997) career construction theory was used as a theoretical framework to conceptualise career adaptability. Focused on the adaptation of individuals within the organisational context, the career construction theory is focused on the manner in which individuals prepare for, enter and participate in their work role, and the way in which they deal with career transitions and changes within the workplace (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Within this perspective, people's occupations or careers are seen as a way for the individuals to sustain themselves within society through social integration and connection (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). The resources which individuals tap into to deal with transitions and changes within their careers are referred to as their "career adaptability" (Savickas, 1997).



Career adaptability can be viewed as the readiness of an individual to deal with the predictable and unpredictable changes in his work and career (Savickas, 1997). It is defined as the capacity, willingness and motivation of an individual to change (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Career adaptability is viewed as an aggregate construct, consisting of four adaptability resources, namely concern, control, curiosity and confidence (Savickas, 1997). Within the context of the JD-R model, career adaptability is a personal resource which enables employees to deal with the increasing demands of the world of work. It is distinctly different from adaptivity, which refers to a stable personality trait related to flexibility. As a personal resource, career adaptability enables employees to deal with the changing work environment. It is seen as a mediating actor of job demands and job resources; thus, facilitating engagement and organisational success (Bakker, 2011).

#### *4.1.1.2 Second objective: Conceptualising employee engagement from a theoretical perspective*

For the purposes of this study, the job demands-resources (JD-R) model of engagement was used as a framework. Employee engagement was defined as a strong involvement in one's work where one feels connected to one's work and invests more discretionary effort in one's work. It is focused and concentrated on the work in which one is involved (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). Employee engagement is further viewed as a function of working conditions as well as the personal control which the individual has over his work (Rossier *et al.*, 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Employee engagement consists of three dimensions, namely vigor, dedication and absorption (Bakker, 2004).

Various factors and antecedents are associated with employee engagement. Organisational factors, such as organisational culture and leadership, are seen to influence employee engagement significantly (Alarcon *et al.*, 2010). Mendes and Stander (2011) suggested that role clarity, role conflict and role ambiguity may also be seen to influence engagement. Within the framework of the job-demands-resources model and personal resources, such as resilience, self-efficacy, optimism career adaptability is seen to influence employee engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

The importance of an engaged workforce in the twenty-first century world of work is further emphasised by exploring the consequences of employee engagement. Engaged employees are likely to be entrepreneurial, self-supportive and take responsibility for the direction of their careers (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2001). They are also likely to deal with the demands of their jobs effectively and experience a healthy attachment to their work (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2001). Engagement is associated with positive attitudes, such as satisfaction, commitment and reduced turnover intentions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Strong links have been made between employee engagement and performance (Salanova *et al.*, 2005; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

Another key consequence of employee engagement is an active and positive, proactive orientation towards the world of work. Engaged employees adapt easily to changes within their work environment. They may change the content of their jobs by choosing tasks and getting involved in job content which they choose. In the twenty-first century world of work, adaptation and change are key to success (Bakker, 2011; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

#### *4.1.1.3 Third objective: Conceptualising the theoretical relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement*

Employee engagement can be viewed as a function of work conditions. This relates more specifically to the job demands, job resources available to the employee as well as the extent to which an employee has control over his work and career (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Employee engagement is also a function of personal resources, such as intrapersonal resources of career adaptability, self-efficacy, optimism and career management (Bakker, 2011; Cotter & Fouad, 2012). Therefore, career adaptability may influence employee engagement (Bakker 2011; Cotter & Fouad, 2012).

Very little research has focused on occupational guidance variables and employee engagement, especially in a work-to-work-transition context (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). According to Cotter and Fouad (2012), few studies have taken personal strengths, such as career adaptability, into account when examining employee engagement. Previous studies have found links between career adaptability and positive

outcomes, such as life satisfaction (Hirschi, 2009) as well as negative work-related outcomes, such as turnover intentions (Ito & Brotheridge, 2005). In terms of decision-making, exploration, confidence and planning increased career adaptability assists in the successful mastery of vocational transitions promoting well-being and decreasing distress (Hirschi, 2009). Van den Heuvel *et al.* (2013) view career adaptability as a crucial personal resource which enables employees to respond to the changing world of work and consequently career transitions. Career adaptability is further seen as one of the most important factors to ensure commitment and motivation of employees amidst increased environmental pressure; thus, ensuring organisational success (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2013).

In their study of retrenched employees, Cotter and Fouad (2012) found no relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement despite the anticipated theoretical relationship. Contradictory to these findings, Rossier *et al.* (2012) found significant relationships between the two variables. Therefore, understanding the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement is increasingly relevant and important. Consequently, an integration of the literature suggests that career adaptability may influence process-oriented constructs, such as performance, as well as occupational behaviours, such as engagement (Rossier *et al.*, 2012).

#### *4.1.1.4 Fourth objective: Conceptualising the implications of the theoretical relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement for Industrial and Organisational Psychology*

From the literature review it was found that individuals who have better developed career adaptability skills are more likely to be engaged in their work, resulting in positive organisational outcomes, such as reduced turnover, increased productivity and performance, and overall wellness within the organisation. This relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement has important implications for organisations.

Firstly, understanding the relationship which exists between career adaptability and employee engagement is important in the twenty-first century world of work because the latter is characterised by change and transition where retaining human capital is

increasingly important to remain competitive in the global market (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007).

Insight into how career adaptability may influence employee engagement can be useful for implementing career guidance and counselling practices, as facilitating career adaptability skills enables employees to deal with the changing work environment (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

It may be useful to influence employee engagement initiatives which are primarily focused on organisational factors which, in turn, influence engagement. By focusing on career adaptability skills as an occupational guidance variable within these strategies, employees are not only equipped to deal with changes and increased job demands effectively, but career adaptability is also developed as a personal resource which can influence employee engagement (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Leveraging of this relationship holds value and positive outcomes for both employees and organisations alike. The ability to deal with changes and transitions in a turbulent work environment enables employees to manage their careers proactively, increase their employability and craft their own jobs. For organisations, these employees are likely to be motivated, engaged and able to deal with the demands of their jobs, resulting in an engaged workforce which performs and has less intention to leave. A healthy organisation and a workforce which are able to deal with transition and change are key to success and relevance in a competitive economy.

#### **4.1.2 Conclusions regarding the empirical study**

Three main aims relating to the empirical study of this research were identified:

- (1) To investigate the empirical relationship dynamics between career adaptability and employee engagement
- (2) To determine whether age, race, gender and tenure groups differ significantly regarding career adaptability and employee engagement

(3) To formulate recommendations for application and future research in the discipline of Industrial and Organisational Psychology.

Based on the empirical findings, the null hypothesis  $H_{01}$  was rejected, given that a statistically significant positive relationship exists between career adaptability and employee engagement. Similarly, the null hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ ) was partially rejected on the basis of statistically significant differences between two of the groups in terms of career adaptability and employee engagement.

Findings for each of the research objectives and the hypotheses that deserve discussion will be presented as conclusions of the empirical study.

#### *4.1.2.1 First objective: Investigate the empirical relationship dynamics between career adaptability and employee engagement.*

Participants who indicated higher levels of engagement also indicated higher levels of career adaptability skills. The findings indicate that career adaptability influences employee engagement. These findings are consistent with findings from Rossier *et al.* (2012) who found significant relationships between career adaptability and employee engagement. Therefore, it can be concluded that career adaptability skills are crucial in order to deal with the changing world of work and as a personal resource, influences employee engagement.

Findings indicated that respondents had experienced higher employee engagement when they were more concerned about their careers, had a sense of control over their careers, were curious about their careers and had confidence in their ability to manage their careers. These findings are consistent with similar findings by Rossier *et al.* (2012) in a Swiss sample where career adaptability was found to have had a significant impact on employee engagement as a work-related outcome. It was seen to mediate the relationship between intrinsic dispositions and work-related outcomes.

The findings are further supported by Savickas and Porfeli (2012) who state that the dimensions of career adaptability are utilised to support employees' self-regulation strategies. Consequently, career adaptability can be linked to positive organisational outcomes, such as employee engagement, as proposed by Hirschi (2009).

On dimensional level, the findings indicate that confidence has the most significant meaningful relationship with employee engagement. This means that the extent to which individuals feel they are able to implement and actualise their choices, and have the confidence to deal with their career-related changes (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), is likely to lead to increased engagement. Control, meaning the ability of individuals to own their future, enables the employees to take charge of their future, shape themselves and the environment, and meet changes head-on through effort, discipline and persistence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). It is also seen to influence engagement significantly.

According to the findings of this study, employee engagement is further seen to be influenced by the extent to which individuals direct energy towards exploring possibilities, their future selves and possible scenarios (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). To a lesser extent, the findings indicate that engagement is influenced by the individual's concern for the future as well as planning and looking ahead to what may come next (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

The dimensions or four adaptability resources call for individuals to be concerned about their future, take control over preparing for their future, explore different future scenarios and strengthen their confidence to pursue their careers (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). In relation to the initial definitions of employee engagement that were proposed, engagement is seen to be the meaning that individuals find in their work and the discretionary effort invested in work (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). It is seen as the energy which employees apply to their work, the feeling of being involved in their work and the focus which they have on the task at hand (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Rossier *et al.*, 2012).

Based on the findings discussed above, as well as the aforementioned definitions of *employee engagement*, it is clear that the ability of individuals to adapt their careers to a changing work environment may well translate into discretionary effort and energy invested in their work which is likely to influence employee engagement.

*4.1.2.2 Second objective: Determine whether age, race, gender and tenure groups differ significantly regarding career adaptability and employee engagement*

Findings indicate that differences exist between age and race groups in relation to their vigor and concern respectively. Contrary to previous research (Rossier *et al.*, 2012) older respondents between the ages of 41 and 45 indicated increased concern for their careers. They are more inclined to plan for their careers and look ahead to the future to what may come next (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

It may be said, however, that these differences are not a direct result of age only. As found by Brown, Bimrose, Barnes and Huges (2012), career adaptability is influenced significantly by the employees' exposure to challenging work. By engaging with progressively more challenging work, these older workers could be seen to develop a positive and optimistic attitude to the future of their careers (concern) alongside an evolving sense of career development (Brown *et al.*, 2012).

Results further indicate that older respondents between the ages of 46 and 50 have indicated significantly higher vigor as a dimension of employee engagement. This means that older workers are likely to invest more effort in their work, have lower fatigue, higher levels of energy, resilience and persistence in the face of difficulties (Bakker, 2011). These employees are also likely to display energy, zest and stamina when working (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). These findings are consistent with research which has found differences in vigor based on age (Mostert & Rothman, 2006) and that younger employees are in general less engaged than their younger counterparts (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

Results indicate that different race groups differed significantly in terms of their career concern. African respondents indicated the highest concern in contrast to white respondents who obtained the lowest scores on concern. Very little to no research has focused on differences between race groups in relation to career adaptability. In the South African context, very little focus has been given to career guidance variables, such as career adaptability in general (Maree, 2012).

Against the backdrop of South Africa's unique history and the career guidance context, it can be expected that different groups may differ in relation to career

adaptability. Very little career guidance is provided to the majority of South Africans, specifically disadvantaged learners entering tertiary institutions. These individuals end up in careers without having adequate knowledge of exactly what it entails (Maree, 2012). It is, therefore, expected that career adaptability and career concern for the future may be experienced differently among different groups, depending on their exposure to career guidance.

#### **4.1.3 Conclusions regarding the central hypothesis**

Regarding the central hypothesis of this study, it can be concluded that individuals' career adaptability skills relate significantly and positively to their feelings of engagement. Furthermore, all four dimensions of career adaptability significantly relate to employee engagement. Differences exist between age and race groups in relation to their career adaptability and employee engagement. The empirical study has yielded statistically significant evidence to support the central hypothesis.

#### **4.1.4 Conclusions regarding contributions to the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology**

The findings of the literature review and the empirical study have contributed to the existing body of knowledge on employee engagement as well as career adaptability. It adds a unique dimension to the understanding of employee engagement regarding the relationship between occupational guidance variables and employee engagement within the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, with particular focus on informing employee engagement strategies.

The research also adds to the existing body of knowledge on employee engagement and engagement models. In terms of the job demands-resources model (JD-R), career adaptability, as a personal resource, is discussed as another intrapersonal resource which enables employees to deal with the demands of their jobs, in turn fostering engagement and a high-performing workforce.

In terms of career adaptability as a construct, the findings indicate that there is a unique and shared variance between the dimensions of career adaptability – the higher the dimensions of career adaptability, the higher overall career adaptability is



experienced. This confirms the representation of career adaptability as an aggregate construct and not a latent construct reflecting its dimensions (Hirschi, 2009). Career adaptability is, therefore, confirmed as a combination of the four dimensions of which it consists (Hirschi, 2009).

In practice, this research emphasises the significance of career adaptability in the twenty-first century world of work which enables employees to deal with the changes and environmental pressures they face. Furthermore, employee engagement, as an organisational outcome associated with career adaptability, has implications for practice, as career adaptability has been viewed predominantly within career counselling and guidance settings, and not necessarily as facilitating engagement. In practice, facilitating career adaptability skills through various career interventions can be seen to equip and enable individuals to deal with the changing world of work, whilst simultaneously fostering employee engagement within the organisation.

The conclusions derived from these findings indicate that practitioners can greatly benefit from understanding the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement in order to inform engagement and performance strategies as well as in the career counselling and guidance setting.

## **4.2 LIMITATIONS**

The limitations identified in terms of the literature review and empirical study will be discussed in the following section.

### **4.2.1 Limitations of the literature review**

In terms of the literature review, there is a lack of research within the South African context as well as internationally on the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement. Although both concepts are emergent in current research, few studies have linked occupational guidance variables and employee engagement.

Furthermore, research on career adaptability has focused predominantly on the school-to-work transition context and within academic contexts. Little research has explored career adaptability in working adults.

An all-encompassing view of the personal factors influencing employee engagement could not be provided practically, as only career adaptability as a personal resource was considered. Accordingly, several additional intrapersonal and personal dispositions may need to be considered in developing engagement strategies along with job resources which foster engagement.

#### **4.2.2 Limitations of the empirical study**

Some limitations which apply specifically to the empirical study will consequently be discussed. Firstly, as mentioned in previous chapters, the exclusion of various other environmental and individual factors in this study is seen as a limitation of the research, as only career adaptability and its dimensions have been measured in order to inform engagement strategies.

The results of the study also represented quite a small, homogenous sample in a particular organisation within the insurance industry. In terms of generalisability, caution should be exercised to generalise the findings to the broader population across different biographical groupings, and occupational and industry contexts.

As the sampling method used was a convenience sampling method, results are also not generalisable – a random sampling method may have improved the generalisability of the findings.

Given the descriptive nature of the research design, this study can yield no statements about causation. The relationship between variables have been described rather than established. To gain a better understanding of causality of the relationships, the study needs to be replicated with broader samples across various occupational, age, race, economic and gender groups.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the findings of this study hold prospects for the analysis of the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement. Therefore, the study can be used as a basis for understanding the relationship between the measured variables.

### **4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICAL USE AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations are made regarding career adaptability and employee engagement within organisations and for future research.

Practical recommendations are made on the basis of the argument that employees who have developed career adaptabilities, namely concern, control, curiosity and confidence, are more likely to be engaged in their work, resulting in increased performance and lower turnover intention. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the four adaptability resources as factors which may impact employee engagement to inform engagement strategies.

From a career intervention perspective, a focus on career adaptability skills and competencies should receive increased attention. Not only does this allow the individual to deal with career transitions, but fostering these essential competencies may also benefit the organisation. It is argued that career adaptability competencies are developed most effectively through learning (Brown *et al.*, 2012). Challenging work, mastering new knowledge and becoming more self-directed are all seen to impact the development of career adaptability competencies (Brown *et al.*, 2012). It is critical for career counsellors to equip individuals to implement effective decision-making strategies, as this enables the development of control (Brown *et al.*, 2012).

Based on the limited scope of the study, it is strongly recommended that further studies be undertaken in order to address this limitation. In addition, it is recommended that further studies be undertaken to investigate the psychometric properties of the CAAS and its appropriateness for use in the South African population. It is also recommended that intrinsic dispositions, such as personality and locus of control, be investigated as mediators of the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement, providing a more holistic view of the relationship between these two variables.

### **4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Chapter 4 discussed the conclusions which were drawn from the study as well as the possible limitations of the study which were detected. Limitations focused on both

the literature review and the empirical study. Lastly, recommendations for practical use as well as future research were offered.

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