

Gender and hardiness as predictors of career adaptability: an exploratory study among Black call centre agents

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Abstract

The call centre career poses developmental challenges that require high levels of hardiness and career adaptability. This article explores whether call centre agents' gender and hardiness significantly and positively predicted their career adaptability, and whether women and men differed significantly regarding their hardiness and career adaptability. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with a sample of 409 early-career Black African call centre agents (mean age = 32 years; 66% females). Correlations, stepwise hierarchical regression analysis and the Mann-Whitney U test for significant mean differences were performed to achieve the objective of the study. The results showed that gender significantly predicted career adaptability and that the females had significantly higher levels of career adaptability than their male counterparts. A high sense of hardy control and a low tolerance for unpredictability predicted higher levels of career adaptability. In the light of the paucity of research on the hardiness and career adaptability of Black women and men in the African context, the research contributed valuable new insights that may inform career development interventions for Black call centre agents. The results of the study emphasise the importance of developing call centre agents' hardiness in order to strengthen their career adaptability. The results further indicated that the diverse strengths and growth areas of women and men in terms of developing their career adaptability must be considered in career development interventions.

Keywords

Black call centre agents, call centre, career adaptability, gender, hardiness

Individuals' ability to adapt and resourcefully respond to the demands posed by pursuing a career in the current era of a more turbulent, uncertain, and ever-changing employment environment has become important (Maree, 2013; Tolentino et al., 2014; Zacher, 2014). Although employment equity and affirmative action mechanisms in Africa have increased access to education and employment opportunities for women and Black people, they are also confronted with the challenges of a changing work and career environment (Havenga, 2012). Recently, informal sector contract and casual work have increased with many seeking employment within call centres (Havenga, 2012).

Work in call centres is characterised by high routinisation with a lack of skills variety designed into the job, low pay and status, a high level of monitoring and little opportunity for progression (Harry, 2014). Call centres are mostly regarded as flat organisations where vocational development is rare (Choi, Cheong, & Feinberg, 2012). Consequently, many people employed in call centres will more frequently be changing jobs in the pursuit of new employment and career opportunities during the course of their lives (Harry, 2011). Career scholars are therefore increasingly interested in understanding the particular psychosocial attributes, dispositions, and capacities that especially women and Black people use in constructing a career in the contemporary African employment context (Harry & Coetzee, 2013; Havenga, 2012; Maree, 2013; Potgieter, 2012). In this regard, Ituma (2011) reports a dearth of knowledge on career dynamics in Africa and urges for expanded research on Western-based career concepts and theories in the African context. The current research focuses on two Western-based concepts that are regarded as important psychosocial career meta-capacities (Ferreira, 2012; Harry, 2014), namely, career adaptability and hardiness.

The construct of career adaptability as a set of psychosocial resources and transactional competencies individuals use to navigate career-related transitions and changes has gained prominence in the study of the 21st-century career (Savickas, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Porfeli & Savickas, 2012; Tolentino et al., 2014). However, research on career adaptability in the African context is sparse (Ferreira, 2012; Harry & Coetzee, 2013; Maree, 2012, 2013) and needs further investigation, especially in terms of how this construct relates to other psychosocial attributes such as hardiness. Maree (2012) urges for further research on the career adaptability resources of young people and employed adults in the African context in the light of the importance attached to individuals' career adaptability. Hirschi (2009) further points to the effects of career adaptability on positive career preparation and development and argues for more research regarding predictors of Savickas's (1997, 2013) construct of career adaptability. Similar to career adaptability, there seems to be a paucity of research on the construct of hardiness, especially in the African career context (Ferreira, 2012).

Latif (2010) posits that the high stress nature of a call centre work environment may negatively influence individuals' career development and overall career well-being as it is a challenging environment that requires a strong sense of hardiness. Hardiness, as a collection of stress-resilient personality characteristics, functions as a flexible resource during the encounter with demanding life events (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982; Sheppard & Kashani, 1991). In view of this, this research aimed to explore whether Black call centre agents' gender and hardiness significantly predicted their career adaptability and whether women and men differ significantly regarding their hardiness and career adaptability. The careers literature emphasises the importance of studying gender differences in the career context as the career needs and developmental patterns of women have been found to differ from those of men (Creager, 2011). In the African context, knowledge regarding the manifestation of psychosocial constructs such as hardiness and career adaptability among Black people and how men and women differ regarding these constructs is limited, especially in the call centre environment.

This study contributes to the discipline of psychology by exploring the manifestation of two psychological constructs (hardiness and career adaptability) among a group of Black female and male call centre agents employed in the African career context. The call centre environment is a prime example of the 21st-century career with its characteristic uncertainty and frequent transitions (Coetzee & Harry, 2014; Harry & Coetzee, 2013). As noted previously, work in the call centre is characterised by short-term contracts, vulnerability to shifting markets, little opportunity for career progression and high stress levels compounded by client and supervision demands that erode the possibility of long-term employment (Choi et al., 2012). Dealing with these challenges requires the use of self-regulatory psychosocial resource capacities such as hardiness and career adaptability (Ferreira, 2012; Harry, 2014).

The relationship between gender, hardiness, and career adaptability

The concept of hardiness evolved from existential psychology (Ferreira, 2012). Hardiness is viewed in terms of humans in search for authenticity by creating personal meaning through self-reflection, decision making, and actions that promote growth (Kobasa, 1979; Maddi & Kobasa, 1984). Kobasa (1979) conceptualised hardiness in terms of three personality traits, namely, control versus powerlessness, commitment versus alienation, and challenge versus threat. Control relates to individuals' beliefs about their ability to influence or manage life events and a sense of having personal control over one's experiences (Sheppard & Kashani, 1991).

Hardy control enhances the motivation to engage in effortful coping because it predisposes the individual to view stressors as changeable and manageable. The opposite of control is powerlessness (Ferreira, 2012; Kobasa, 1982; Maddi, 2002; Maddi & Kobasa, 1984). Commitment refers to a sense of dedication to oneself and one's work, resulting in the active and purposeful engagement in daily living. Individuals with high levels of hardy commitment involve themselves fully and successfully in a number of life situations, including work, family, interpersonal relationships, and social institutions (Sheppard & Kashani, 1991). The opposite of commitment is alienation (Kobasa, 1987).

Challenge represents people's perception of change and the belief that change should be treated as an opportunity for growth rather than as a threat (Sheppard & Kashani, 1991). The opposite of challenge is threat. Hardy challenge generates a zest for facing up to (or even seeking out) difficult experiences because these are seen as opportunities for personal growth rather than as potential threats to security (Ferreira, 2012; Maddi et al., 2002). The three qualities of hardiness are seen as a combination of cognitive and affective orientations that constitute existential courage and motivation and an adaptive readiness reflected in a learned, growth-oriented personality style (Sheard & Golby, 2007).

High levels of hardiness promote authentic living; rather than looking for ways to avoid stressful events, individuals draw strength from difficulties previously faced and overcome them successfully (Carr, Kelley, Keaton, & Albrecht, 2011). The three qualities of hardiness promote the use of psychosocial resources so as to facilitate transformational coping which involves changing stressful life events by viewing them optimistically (Ferreira, 2012; Harry, 2014; Kobasa, 1979; Maddi & Kobasa, 1984).

Research conducted by Latif (2010) on call centre employees suggests high hardiness levels in call centre agents. Males also appear to be more hardy committed than their female counterparts (Latif, 2010). Black women reveal higher levels of hardy challenge than their white counterparts (Ferreira, 2012). Research also suggests that even though men tend to score higher on overall hardiness, women tend to score higher on hardy control (Hystad, 2012). The construct of career adaptability has its origins in career construction theory which is closely associated with the vocational psychology model of vocational development (Hartung, 2011; Maree, 2013; Savickas, 1997, 2005, 2013).

Career adaptability represents four psychosocial resources of individuals for managing specific developmental tasks associated with their career development: career concern (the capacity to be aware of and positively oriented to, and plan for a vocational future), career control (the capacity to take personal responsibility for one's career and work experiences, having feelings of self-governing, persistence, and decisiveness concerning a vocational future), career curiosity (a tendency to explore one's environment and through information-seeking and risk-taking, gain new knowledge and competencies) and career confidence (the tendency to feel self-efficacious concerning the ability to master career-related challenges and successfully solve problems) (De Guzman & Choi, 2013; Johnston, Luciano,

Maggiori, Ruch, & Rossier, 2013; Maree, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Zacher, 2014). Zacher (2014) identified the career adaptability tasks of career concern and career confidence as important prerequisites of subjective career success. Research indicates a negative relationship between career adaptability and work stress and a positive association with orientations to happiness (Johnston et al., 2013). Ferreira (2012) found positive associations between individuals' hardiness and their career adaptability. As in the case of career adaptability, this study sees hardiness as an important construct to consider in terms of career-related coping behaviour because it relates to call centre agents' resiliency and adaptivity in a highly stressful and turbulent work environment.

Recent research into the relationship between gender and career adaptability is limited and inconclusive. O'Connell, McNeely, and Hall (2008), Havenga (2012), and Rocha (2012), for example, found career adaptability to be significantly related to gender, whereas Hirschi (2009) and Maggiori, Johnston, Krings, Massoudi, and Rossier (2013) found no significant relationship between gender and career adaptability. In terms of gender differences, research (Ferreira, 2012) indicates that women tend to be more adaptable than men. Women also tend to be more purposeful in the planning of their careers than men (Zhang, 2010). Hartung, Porfeli, and Vondracek (2008) found that adolescent girls scored higher on the construct 'career maturity/adaptability' than did their male counterparts.

Research further suggests that adolescent males tend to have greater uncertainty about their career aspirations than their female counterparts, with males depending more strongly on positive feedback and encouragement from their parents (Gutman & Schoon, 2012). Pazy (1987) also found personal adaptability to be related to differences in males' and females' responsiveness to organisational career management, with women responding more positively than men to organisational career management support. Based on the review of the research literature, it was expected that individuals' gender and hardiness would significantly predict their career adaptability and that women and men would differ significantly regarding their hardiness and career adaptability.

Method

Participants

The research reported in this study formed part of a larger research project on psychological variables that could potentially contribute to the career well-being of call centre agents (Harry, 2014). The participants constituted a non-probability purposive sample ($N = 409$) drawn from employees who were employed in three of the largest outsourced financial call centres in Africa (Gauteng, South Africa = 364; Lagos, Nigeria =

45). The total population of call centre agents employed by the three institutions was targeted for inclusion in the sample. The sample was predominantly (92%) represented by Black Africans (Statistics South Africa, 2014). The participants were represented by 66% women and 34% men. The participants were predominantly in the early career/life phase (25–40 years; mean age = 32 years).

Instruments

Hardiness. The participants' hardiness was measured by using Maddi's (1987) Personal Views Survey II (PVS-II). The PVS-II is a self-rated multi-factorial measure which contains 50 items measured on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all true*; 4 = *completely true*) for the following three subscales: commitment–alienation (e.g., 'I often wake up eager to take up my life where I left it off the day before'; 'Most of my life gets wasted doing things that don't mean anything'), control–powerlessness (e.g., 'Planning ahead can help avoid most future problems'; 'No matter how hard I try, my efforts will accomplish nothing'), and challenge–threat (e.g., 'I enjoy being with people who are unpredictable'; 'I want to be sure someone will take care of me when I get old'). Factor analysis by Maddi (1987) confirmed the construct validity of the PVS-II. In terms of internal consistency reliability, Maddi (1987) reports the following Cronbach's alpha coefficients: .70–.75 for commitment, .61–.84 for control, .60–.71 for challenge, and .80–.88 for total hardiness. Acceptable Cronbach's alpha coefficients (internal consistency reliability) for the five subscales were obtained for the present study: commitment–alienation (.83), control–powerlessness (.79), and challenge–threat (.65) and overall hardiness (.90).

Career adaptability

The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) Form 2.0 developed by Savickas and Porfeli (2012) was used to measure the participants' career adaptability. A 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = not strong; 5 = strongest) was used for subject responses to each of the items for the following four subscales: concern (6 items; e.g., 'Thinking about what my future will be like'), control (6 items; e.g., 'Taking responsibility for actions'), curiosity (6 items; e.g., 'Becoming curious about new opportunities'), and confidence (6 items; e.g., 'Performing tasks efficiently'). Maree (2012) reports acceptable internal consistency estimates for the CAAS in the South African context and found the CAAS to be a useful and reliable instrument in assessing the career adaptability of students. Acceptable internal consistency reliabilities were also obtained for this study: concern (.76), control (.70), curiosity (.81), confidence (.83), and overall career adaptability scale (.91).

Procedure

A cross-sectional, quantitative research approach was followed to achieve the research objective. Questionnaires were distributed to a non-probability purposive sample of 500 call centre agents. Data collection was conducted at the premises of the two call centre institutions situated in Gauteng, South Africa. Additional questionnaires were posted to the call centre institution situated in Lagos, Nigeria. A cover letter stated the purpose of the research and explained the nature of the data to be collected. The research procedure yielded 409 useable questionnaires (response rate = 82%).

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance and permission for the research was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa. The Human Resource managers of the call centres involved also provided permission for the research. Each questionnaire included a

cover letter inviting respondents to participate voluntarily in the study and assuring them that their individual responses would remain anonymous and confidential. The cover letter also stated that completing the questionnaires and returning them constituted agreement to use the results for research purposes only.

Statistical analysis

Bivariate correlation analyses were calculated to assess the pattern of relationships between the hardiness and career adaptability variables. Stepwise regression analyses and the Mann–Whitney U test for significant mean differences were performed to achieve the research objective. Prior to conducting the various regression analyses, collinearity diagnostics were examined to ensure that zero-order correlations were below the level of multi-collinearity concern ($r \geq 80$), that the variance inflation factors did not exceed 10, that the condition index was well below 15, and that the tolerance values were close to 1.0 (Field, 2009). In order to counter the probability of a type I error, the significance value was set at the 95% confidence interval level ($p \leq .05$). Cohen's (1992) effect sizes were calculated for establishing the practical significance of the R^2 and ΔR^2 .

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations.

		M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Gender	0.66	0.48	-	-								
2	Hardiness	2.78	0.41	.90	-.01	-							
3	Commitment-alienation	3.00	0.55	.83	.07	.93***	-						
4	Control - powerlessness	2.98	0.47	.79	-.06	.92***	.84***	-					
5	Challenge-threat	2.36	0.37	.65	-.06	.78***	.59***	.56***	-				
6	Career adaptability	4.08	0.51	.91	.12**	.12*	.15**	.23***	-.12*				
7	Career concern	4.19	0.57	.76	.15**	.12**	.14**	.21***	-.06	.78***	-		
8	Career Control	4.26	0.52	.70	.18**	.14**	.18***	.23***	-.09	.82***	.55***	-	
9	Career confidence	4.01	0.64	.83	.12	.17**	.20***	.26***	-.05	.84***	.50***	.59***	-
10	Career curiosity	4.16	0.60	.81	.11	.08	.12	.16**	.16	.87***	.56***	.61***	.66***

SD: standard deviation.

$N = 409$.

*** $p \leq .001$ – statistically significant; ** $p \leq .01$ – statistically significant; * $p \leq .05$ – statistically significant.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The means, standard deviations, internal consistency reliabilities, and bivariate correlations are reported in Table 1. The zero-order correlations between the hardiness and career adaptability variables ($r \geq .12 \leq .26$) are all well below the level of multi-collinearity concerns ($r \geq .80$) (Field, 2009). The correlations reported in Table 1 further show that gender did not significantly correlate with the hardiness variables and the career adaptability variables career confidence and career curiosity.

Regression analyses

To assess whether individuals' gender and hardiness positively and significantly predict their career adaptability, five stepwise regression models were performed. The first regression model explored gender and the three hardiness variables (commitment–alienation, control–powerlessness, and challenge–threat) as predictor variables of the overall career adaptability construct, while the other four models explored gender and the hardiness variables as predictors of the four career adaptability variables: career concern, career control, career confidence, and career curiosity.

Table 2. Results of regression analysis: gender and hardiness in relation to career adaptability.

Variables	Model 1 Career adaptability	Semi- Partial r^2	Model 2 Career concern	Semi- partial r^2	Model 3 Career control	Semi- partial r^2	Model 4 Career confidence	Semi- partial r^2	Model 5 Career curiosity	Semi- partial r^2
Gender	.17***	.02	.17***	.03	.14***	.02	.13***	.02	.06	.003
Commitment- alienation	.01	.001	-.003	.001	.07	-.001	.07	.001	-.02	.00
Control - powerlessness	.47***	.06	.42***	.05	.42** *	.05	-.43***	.05	.38***	.04
Challenge- threat	-.34***	.07	-.25***	.04	- .32** *	.06	-.30***	-.06	-.31***	.06
R ²	.16		.12		.15		.15		.10	
F	19.51***		13.77***		17.12* **		17.25***		11.53***	
ΔR^2	4.07		.04		.07		.06		.06	
ΔF	35.08***		18.15***		30.13 ***		25.96***		27.12***	

$N = 409$.

Standardised beta (β) weights are reported for the final step in each model.

*** $p \leq .001$ – statistically significant.

As shown in Table 2, the first model explained 16% ($R^2 \geq 0.16$; moderate practical effect; $F_p \leq .001$) of the variance in the overall career adaptability variable. In terms of the career adaptability variables, the other four models explained, respectively, 12% ($R^2 \geq .12$; small practical effect; $F_p \leq .001$ – career concern), 15% ($R^2 \geq .15$; moderate practical effect; $F_p \leq .001$ – career control), 15% ($R^2 \geq .15$; moderate practical effect; $F_p \leq .001$ – career confidence), and 10% ($R^2 \geq .10$; small practical effect; $F_p \leq .001$ – career curiosity) of the variance in the career adaptability variables. The ΔR^2 in each model was significant ($F_p \leq .001$; small practical effect). Overall, the beta coefficients showed that commitment–alienation did not significantly predict the variance in the career adaptability variables and that gender did not significantly predict career curiosity. Control–powerlessness contributed the most in explaining the variance in the career adaptability variables, while challenge–threat contributed negatively in explaining the variance in the career adaptability variables.

Apart from the standardised beta coefficients, Table 2 also reports the semi-partial r^2 s, which can be interpreted as the incremental variance explained by gender and each of the hardiness variables separately and in combination with each variable. The semi-partial r^2 s explain the general dominance weight and relative importance of each variable (Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2011). The semi-partial correlations in all five models are small in practical effect ($r^2 \leq .08$). It is interesting to observe that challenge–threat contributed more than control–powerlessness in explaining incremental variance in overall career adaptability ($r^2 = .08$), career control ($r^2 = .07$), career confidence ($r^2 = .06$), and career curiosity ($r^2 = .04$). The incremental variance explained by gender is the smallest in terms of practical effect ($r^2 = .01$).

Test for significant mean differences

The Mann–Whitney U test was performed to assess whether women and men differ significantly regarding their hardiness and career adaptability. The test revealed that the female and male participants did not differ significantly regarding their hardiness. These results are therefore not reported in the Table. Table 3 shows that the female and male participants differed significantly regarding their career adaptability, with the females scoring significantly higher than their male counterparts on all the career adaptability variables. Both the female and male participants obtained the highest mean scores on career concern (females mean = 4.38; males mean = 4.20) and the lowest on career confidence (females mean = 4.02; males mean = 3.98).

Discussion

In light of the unpredictability of individuals' careers in the call centre environment, the hardiness and career adaptability of call centre agents are regarded as important psychological constructs to consider in terms of career-related coping behaviour (Ferreira, 2012). The aim of this research was to explore whether call centre agents' gender and hardiness significantly and positively predicted their career adaptability and whether women and men differed significantly regarding their hardiness and career adaptability. Overall, the results showed that gender significantly predicted the participants' career adaptability and that the female participants had significantly higher levels of career adaptability than their male counterparts. A strong sense of hardy control and a low tolerance for unpredictability predicted higher levels of career adaptability.

Table 3. Results of Mann–Whitney U test showing significant mean differences between females and males regarding career adaptability.

Variables	Mann–Whitney U	Z	p	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	
				Females	Males
Career adaptability	14,879.50	−3.02	**	4.20 (.51)	4.07
Career concern	14,964.50	−3.26	**	4.38 (.59)	4.20
Career control	15,627.50	−2.78	**	4.26 (.54)	4.05
Career confidence	16,183.50	−2.34	*	4.02 (.70)	3.98
Career curiosity	16,095.50	−2.14	*	4.15 (.64)	4.05 (.66)

SD: standard deviation.

Females n = 268. Males n = 140.

*** p ≤ .001 – statistically significant; **p ≤ .01 – statistically significant;

*p ≤ .05 – statistically significant.

Contrary to research by Latif (2010), this research indicated no significant relationship between gender and hardiness in the call centre environment. The results of this study seem to corroborate research findings reported by Ferreira (2012) and Havenga (2012) which also indicate women to display higher levels of career adaptability than their male counterparts. Zhang (2010) also found women to be more purposeful than men when engaging in career planning efforts. In this study, the female participants had especially higher levels of career concern (i.e., being positively oriented to, and planning for a vocational future) than the males. This could be attributed to the employment equity legislation opening new opportunities for women. Both female and male participants had relatively low levels of career confidence (i.e., feeling self-efficacious concerning the ability to master career-related challenges and successfully solve problems), with the male participants showing significantly lower levels than the females. The relatively low levels of career confidence could be attributed to the unpredictability of the call centre career. Latif (2010) posits in this regard that the call centre environment may negatively influence individuals' career development and well-being.

The results of this study further suggested that the participants' career adaptability is positively predicted by their sense of hardy control. It appears that being highly motivated to engage in effortful coping (hardy control) strengthened their career adaptability capacities. Challenge–threat was indicated as a negative predictor of career adaptability, suggesting that a low tolerance for unpredictability may also have increased the participants' career adaptability (i.e., their capacity to draw on their career-related psychosocial resources for managing the specific developmental tasks associated with their career development). Contrary to the findings of Latif (2010), the sample of participants had relatively low levels of hardy challenge which suggests that they might currently be more prone to perceive the unpredictability associated with the call centre environment as threats to personal security rather than as opportunities for personal growth and development (Ferreira, 2012; Maddi et al., 2002).

This could be attributed by the participants' current career/life-stage preoccupations. Individuals in the early life/career stage are typically preoccupied with job stability and career advancement opportunities (Savickas, 2005; Super, 1990). This could explain the high need to engage in the developmental tasks associated with the psychosocial resources of career concern, career control, career confidence, and career curiosity. Savickas and Porfeli (2012) found a positive association between individuals' career adaptability and their vocational identity, in-depth career exploration behaviour, and career commitment. Research also suggests that the qualities of hardiness help people to gravitate towards active coping strategies which include problem-focused coping and support seeking (Maddi & Hightower, 1999; Mills, 2000) and strengthen their career adaptability (Ferreira, 2012).

Implications for psychological theory and practice

As an existential construct, hardiness is a combination of action readiness and adaptive cognition and emotion targeted at the enrichment of life through development, adaptation, and survival (Ferreira, 2012). Aligned with the theory of career construction (Savickas, 2013), the results of this study further appear to corroborate research by Tolentino et al. (2014), which suggests that adaptive readiness in individuals enhances their willingness to develop essential career capacities in the form of the career adaptabilities of concern, control, confidence, and curiosity. Tolentino et al. (2014) postulate that adaptability (resources) is essentially fostered by adaptivity (willingness) which, according to Savickas and Porfeli (2012), denotes readiness to respond to changing vocational tasks and conditions. In this regard, this study indicated the hardiness qualities of control and challenge as important adaptivity traits for enhancing individuals' career adaptability.

Searching for new or alternative job opportunities has become imperative in today's unpredictable and dynamically changing career context. Career adaptability has therefore become a vital component of career development as it facilitates successful adjustment and proactive career behaviour (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Tolentino et al., 2014). This study showed that individuals' career adaptability can be fostered by strengthening their hardiness. Raising call centre agents' awareness of how their hardiness relates to their ability to manage their career development in the call centre environment may contribute to an enhanced sense of career well-being and satisfaction (Harry, 2014).

Study limitations and future studies

The conclusions about the findings of the study need to be considered in light of a number of limitations, each suggestive of promising directions in the area of research on enhancing call centre agents' career development and well-being. First, the study was cross-sectional in nature, and thus, the causal direction of relations between the variables cannot be ascertained. Second, the study was limited to the call centre environment and to a predominant sample of early-career Black African and female participants. The findings can therefore not be generalised to other occupational, age, race, and gender contexts.

Replication studies, using independent samples drawn from other occupational contexts are recommended. Given the theoretical and practical importance of psychosocial resources in contemporary career development, and especially the African call centre environment, further research in this area is recommended. Future research may also consider the relationship between age and the construct of career adaptability. Such research initiatives may consider longitudinal studies in order to deepen understanding of how call centre agents' hardiness and career adaptability evolve over time. Such studies also need to consider the role of life/career stage variables relating to individuals' evolving career self-concept, their career needs, and interests and how these influence their sense of hardiness and career adaptability.

Concluding remarks

In light of the paucity of research on the hardiness and career adaptability of Black women and men in the African career context, the research added to the extant career literature on predictors of individuals' career adaptability and gender differences in the career context. The findings may potentially inform career development interventions for call centre agents. The results of the study emphasise the importance of developing call centre agents' hardiness in order to strengthen their career adaptability and of considering the diverse strengths and growth areas of women and men in terms of developing their career adaptability.

Declaration of conflicting interests

We hereby declare that we have no conflict of interest and that the manuscript has not been submitted elsewhere for either review or publication.

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