

Employees' psychosocial career preoccupations in relation to their work-related commitment

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ABSTRACT

The shift in career conceptualisation and concomitant career mobility and flexibility characteristic of contemporary career behaviour have raised questions about working adults' commitment to their jobs and careers and whether their commitment is influenced by their career preoccupations. The study explored the association between working adults' psychosocial career preoccupations (measured by the psychosocial career preoccupations scale) and their work-related commitment (measured by the organisation-related commitment scale). One hundred and sixty predominantly early-career professional adults (67% black people; 59% females) who were employed in the human resource and financial fields participated in the study. The results suggested that addressing employees' career establishment preoccupations is likely to positively influence their commitment to the present organisational job and career. Career adaptation preoccupations were negatively related to work-related commitment and predicted attachment to external interests beyond the present job and career. Limitations, directions for future research and implications for organisational career-development practices are presented.

Key words: career preoccupations, career stages, career establishment, career adaptation, vocational developmental tasks, work/life adjustment, work-related commitment

Introduction

New conceptualisations of vocational behaviour increasingly focus on the flexibility demanded by rapidly changing labour markets and the obscurity of career paths resulting from the re-organisation and management of work in a globalised business

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economy (McMahon, Watson & Bimrose 2012; Savickas 2013a). With career challenges becoming increasingly complex and less controllable in the more volatile 21st century employment structures, adult workers' career preoccupations seem to shift to issues relating to the mobility and uncertainty of protean and boundaryless careers (Hall 2013; Savickas 2013a). Typical contemporary preoccupations relate to psychosocial aspects of adaptation, adjustment and redefining the identity or self as work–life roles and working contexts shift with more frequent work role transitions (Hall 2013; Savickas 2011; Verbruggen, Dries & Van Vianen 2013). In this regard, career theory, research and practice have witnessed a conceptual shift away from career development to career management, employability and adaptability concerns; rather than developing in a stable contextual employment structure, workers must now actively plan and implement self-management behaviors in a lifelong quest to construct their best possible future whilst adapting to the changing technologically driven labour market demands (Savickas 2011). Consequently, individuals become active agents who assume greater responsibility for understanding their own career needs, determining their goals and managing the construction of their careers and employability throughout the career life cycle (Hartung 2013; Savickas 2011, 2013a; Verbruggen et al. 2013). Research by Borgen, Butterfield and Amundson (2010) affirmed the belief that lifelong change and adjustment have become a reality for individuals and are regarded as important contemporary vocational developmental tasks.

Contemporary careers are regarded more as a series of transitions, decisions and adjustments throughout the lifespan and less as a single choice (Bland & Roberts-Pittman 2014; Fouad & Bynner 2008). The construction of the career changes throughout the lifespan and is constantly evolving (Savickas 2013a; Sharf 2010). Change and the concomitant transitions require adaptation and give rise to specific career concerns that preoccupy the minds of individuals at a specific point in time of the career life cycle (Coetzee 2014; Savickas 2005, 2013b; Sharf 2010). Career theory relates individuals' career concerns or preoccupations to the vocational developmental tasks they have to face and adapt to in the career life cycle (Cairo, Kritis & Myers 1996; Hall 2013; Savickas, Passen & Jarjoura 1988; Savickas 2013b; Sharf 2010; Super 2013). Adapting the self to lifespan developmental concerns is regarded as preparing individuals to more effectively manage the role of work in their lives (Hartung 2013). The career preoccupations that stem from the developmental tasks individuals have to face at different stages of the lifespan also appear to be non-age-related and more unpredictable because of a more volatile employment market (Hall 2013; Sharf 2010; Sullivan 2013).

The shift in career conceptualisation and concomitant career mobility and flexibility characteristic of contemporary career behaviour (Hall 2013; Hess & Jepsen 2009) have also raised questions about working adults' commitment to their jobs and organisational-specific careers and whether their commitment is influenced by their career preoccupations (Tladinyane 2012). The present study is especially interested in the psychosocial career preoccupations associated with the vocational developmental tasks of the establishment, management and disengagement career stages (Sharf 2010; Savickas 2005) because of the focus on the working adult. These three stages of career-life also appear to provide ongoing, and often unforeseen, career adaptation challenges to the career development and general well-being of individuals (Lent 2013). Research has shown associations between life stage-related developmental task concerns and job and career satisfaction (Flaherty & Pappas 2002; Savickas et al. 1988). Conway's (2004) research points to differences in career commitment, job involvement and employability concerns between employees in the early, middle and late career stages. Research by Tladinyane (2012) also indicated significant associations between working adults' career-related behaviours, capacities and preferences and their job and career commitment.

Objective of the study

Verbruggen et al. (2013) emphasise the importance of studying careers in organisational context in the light of the employing organisation being a likely important source of career issues for individuals. Despite the growing body of literature to support the association between career-related behaviour and retention-related work outcomes such as job/work commitment (Tladinyane, Coetzee & Masenge 2013; Weng, McElroy, Morrow & Liu 2010), empirical studies considering the influence of developmental task-related career preoccupations on working adults' work-related commitment seem to be lacking, especially in the South African context. The present study aimed at addressing this gap in the research literature by exploring the association between an under-researched construct (psychosocial career preoccupations) and work-related commitment.

Psychosocial career preoccupations

The term 'psychosocial career preoccupation' refers to a mental state of having certain issues concerning one's career at the forefront of one's mind at a specific point of time (Coetzee 2014). These issues commonly pertain to concerns about certain vocational developmental tasks of adaptability that individuals have to face

in the career life cycle and that are predominant in the career life story (Savickas 2005; Sharf 2010).

Work is seen as providing a context for human development. Contemporary career theory (career construction theory) sees the career as a holding space for subjective choices that express the self-concept and substantiate individuals' goals in the social reality of work roles (Savickas 2005, 2012). Occupational choice is seen as the implementation of the self-concept, work as a manifestation of selfhood, and vocational development as a continuing process of improving the match between the self and the situation through active engagement in psychosocial developmental activities (Savickas 2005, 2013).

Drawing from Super's life stage theory (Super 1957, 1990), Savickas (2005, 2013b) broadly organises adult developmental tasks of adaptability around a period of exploration (15 to 25 years), establishment (25 to 45 years), management (45 to 65 years) and disengagement (around the age of 65 years). The vocational developmental tasks within the five principal career stages provide guidance in terms of how to reestablish stability and maintain continuity in a broader, uncertain social context (Savickas 2005). The five principal career stages are viewed as psychosocial activities of vocational development that compose a minicycle around each of the many transitions that individuals' face during the life span (Savickas 2005). The developmental tasks are therefore not necessarily restricted to these age frameworks because not all individuals encounter these tasks at the same age, and nor do they encounter all tasks (Sharf 2010).

From the perspective of career construction theory, individuals' career life stories will reflect predominant preoccupations relating to each of the developmental tasks of career adaptability (Sharf 2010), for example (1) *exploration* preoccupations are reflected in stories concerning clarification of what individuals may want to do, how they learn about entry-level jobs, how they did in their part-time positions and whether they want more education; (2) stories reflecting *establishment* preoccupations deal with concerns about advancing in one's work, feeling a sense of stability on the job, knowing the basic requirements of the job and thinking about the job on a long-term basis; (3) *management* preoccupations are reflected in stories about concerns of holding on to one's job while at the same time learning more about what is required in the job, improving one's performance and dealing with new technological advances; (4) stories reflecting *disengagement* preoccupations deal with concerns about losing a job due to health or physical limitations, slowing down one's work or working part-time, or retiring (Sharf 2010).

The contemporary career is situated in an unsettled economy and uncertain employment market (Savickas 2005, 2012). Other career preoccupations that may

therefore also be predominant in adults' career life stories may include concerns about employability, continuous learning, up-skilling, training and development, adaptability for more frequent transitions and coping with changes that are unexpected and traumatic, achieving greater work–life balance, career mobility, renewal and change, career agency and independence, greater self-awareness and developing closer ties with members of one's work and social community (Hall 2013; Savickas 2005, 2011, 2013b; Sullivan 2013).

Drawing from contemporary career theory, including Super's life stage theory (Super 1957, 1990) and Savickas's (2005, 2013b) theory of developmental career tasks of adaptability, Coetzee (2014) identifies three core dimensions of psychosocial career preoccupations that are non-age-related:

- *Career establishment preoccupations*, which involve concerns about fitting into a group, career and economic stability and security, establishing opportunities for self-expression and personal growth and development, and advancing in one's career in the present organisation;
- *Career adaptation preoccupations*, which involve employability-related concerns about adapting to changing contexts that might involve career changes and adjusting one's interests, talents and capabilities to fit with opportunities in the employment market; and
- *Work–life adjustment preoccupations*, which involve concerns about settling down, reducing one's workload and achieving greater harmony between one's work and personal life, and might also involve withdrawing from paid employment altogether.

These three dimensions of psychosocial career preoccupations are under-researched in the South African workplace context, especially in relation to retention outcomes such as employees' work-related commitment.

Work-related commitment

Research on enhancing employees' commitment has increased in importance in the light of global skills shortages and the drive to retain valuable talent in order to sustain business performance in a volatile economy (Weng et al. 2010). Concerns about employees' commitment to the organisation are compounded by the increased fluidity in employees' careers (Weng & McElroy 2010). The contemporary career emphasises more frequent job changes, career mobility, adaptability, employability and a quest for lifelong learning and growth opportunities as essential vocational developmental tasks (Hall 2013; Savickas 2005, 2011; Sullivan 2013). Individuals

who seek personal growth and advancement in their careers can do so across different organisations if such opportunities are lacking with their current employer (Weng et al. 2010). The changing nature of careers has also put lifetime employment within the same organisation under pressure, with potential dwindling loyalty towards the current employer (Savickas 2011; Verbruggen 2012). In the present study, in line with the reasoning of Savickas (2005, 2013b), it is proposed that the shifting reality of the contemporary career might potentially give rise to increased preoccupations with mastering the vocational developmental tasks expected from the societal structure in which the current career is pursued. Individuals who have high concerns about certain developmental tasks may therefore be likely to exhibit higher or lower levels of commitment to their work depending on the nature of their predominant career preoccupations.

Roodt (1997) views work-related commitment as the individual's level of involvement in his or her job and career in a particular organisational context, the importance the individual attaches to the job and career, and the willingness of the individual to dedicate the necessary time and energy to the job and career in support of organisational performance. High levels of work-related commitment reflect a positive psychological identification with the job and career as pursued in the specific organisational structure (Roodt 1997). High levels of job and career involvement have been related to lower absenteeism and resignation rates and higher levels of organisational commitment (Tladinyane 2012).

Commitment to and involvement in one's work, job and career revolve around an attitude of active engagement in the work, job and career areas because of the relative importance of the work, job and career to the individual and intentional goal-directed behaviour to achieve set goals in these areas (Ferreira, Coetzee & Masenge 2013; Puah & Ananthram 2006; Tladinyane et al. 2013). Research has shown that people's inner work lives, career goals, motivations and desires influence their attitudes toward their jobs, careers and the organisation (Bothma & Roodt 2012; Ferreira & Coetzee 2010; Hirschi 2012; Yuan, Lin, Shieh & Li 2012), because they appear to act as a motivating force that generates feelings of engagement and commitment (Coetzee & De Villiers 2010; Coetzee, Schreuder & Tladinyane 2014; Meyer, Stanley & Parfyonova 2012; Oyewobi, Suleiman & Jamil 2012; Roodt 1997).

In the present study, it was assumed that in the light of the changing nature of the work environment and the rate at which work and careers change in organisations, individuals' work-related commitment may be related to their career preoccupations with continued growth, renewal and employability, which could result in more frequent recycling patterns across the career stages. The current job could also be seen as a vehicle for gaining the skills and experience that support the career beyond

the scope of the organisation, which in turn could result in higher levels of work-related commitment. However, preoccupations with career change, adaptation and renewal could be negatively associated with work-related commitment due to the individual exploring options beyond the current job and career in the organisation.

Method

Participants and procedure

The study followed a cross-sectional quantitative research approach. A random sample of working adults ($N = 160$) participated in the study by means of a web survey. The sample comprised adults who were employed full-time in the human resources and financial fields and were enrolled for further studies at a distance learning higher education institution. Ethical clearance and permission to conduct the research were obtained from the management of the university. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent to use the data for research purposes was obtained from the participants. Black people (67%) and females (59%) were predominantly represented in the final sample. In terms of age, the participants were predominantly in the early-career stage (exploration and establishment) of their lives.

Measuring instruments

Two measuring instruments were administered to achieve the objective of the study, namely the psychosocial career preoccupations scale (Coetzee 2014) and the organisation-related commitment scale (Roodt 1997). Only the two work-related commitment foci subscales (job commitment and career commitment) of the organisation-related commitment scale were relevant to the present study. Since the study was exploratory in nature and research on the two scales is limited, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to ascertain the underlying factor structure and the internal consistency reliability of the psychosocial career preoccupations scale (Coetzee 2014) and the two work-related commitment foci subscales (Roodt 1997) for the purpose of the study. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was not considered appropriate due to the sample size ($N = 160$) being relatively smaller than the recommended $N = 300$ for CFA. Comrey and Lee (1992) suggest for CFA consideration that an N of 100 = poor, 200 = fair, 300 = good, 500 = very good, 1 000 or more = excellent.

The Psychosocial Career Preoccupations Scale (PCPS) is a brief self-report scale with 24 items that directly measure working adults' general degree of concern with

specific vocational developmental tasks across three dimensions regarded as being relevant to contemporary career theory: career establishment preoccupations (13 items, e.g. "To what extent are you concerned about establishing a degree of job security?"); career adaptation preoccupations (5 items, e.g. "To what extent are you concerned about changing your current career field?") and work-life adjustment preoccupations (6 items, e.g. "To what extent are you concerned about balancing work with family responsibilities?"). A five-point Likert-type scale format was used (1 = not concerned; 5 = extremely concerned). The 24 items of the PCPS were subjected to a principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation after evaluating the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (.93) and Bartlett's test of sphericity (approximate chi-square = 2878.64; $df = 276$; $p = .000$) values. Varimax rotation was used because the objective was merely to achieve a simple structure for interpretation purposes, for which varimax rotation is deemed to be appropriate (Brown 2009). Examination of the scree plot and factor interpretability revealed the presence of the three factors identified by Coetzee (2014). All 24 items were retained in the factor solution and loaded according to the scoring key suggested by Coetzee (2014). The overall subscale Cronbach's alpha (internal consistency coefficients) ranged between .72 and .95 (high internal consistency reliability).

The factor structure and the reliability of the two *work-related commitment foci subscales* (job commitment and career commitment) of the organisation-related commitment scale (OCS) developed by Roodt (1997) were also investigated before further statistical analyses (12 items). The OCS is a self-report scale. The job commitment and career commitment foci subscales each include 6 items, measuring responses on a five-point Likert-type scale (e.g. 1 = not at all; 5 = extremely). The 12 items of the two work-related commitment foci subscales (job commitment and career commitment) of the OCS were subjected to a principal axis factor analysis with varimax rotation after evaluating the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (.85) and Bartlett's test of sphericity (approximate chi-square = 1562.14; $df = 153$; $p = .000$) values. Examination of the scree plot and factor interpretability revealed the presence of two plausible factors with item-factor loadings of $\geq .40$ (thus retaining all 12 items). However, the items loaded differently than the scoring key suggested by Roodt (1997). The first factor contained 10 items related to both the job commitment and career commitment subscales and was labelled work-related commitment, because the job and career commitment items pertained to the job and career in a specific work context (e.g. "To what extent does your job have special personal value to you?" and "How much time and energy do you willingly devote to your career?"). The second factor (one item from the job commitment subscale and one item from the career commitment subscale) was labelled external interests (2

items, e.g. “How many of your real interests are outside your job?”). Overall subscale Cronbach’s alpha (internal consistency coefficients) ranged between .72 and .95 (high internal consistency reliability).

Exploring the association between the variables

Descriptive, correlation and hierarchical regression analysis were conducted to analyse the association between the variables. Age, gender and race were used as control variables in the hierarchical regression analysis based on previous research showing an association between age, gender and race and work-related commitment (Tladinyane 2012). Hierarchical regression analysis allowed the researcher to add the control variables (step 1) and the PCPS variables (step 2) cumulatively in a hierarchical order while controlling for the biographical variables in the second step. Coding of the biographical variables was as follows: age = ≤ 44 years: 0, ≥ 45 years: 1; gender = male: 0, female: 1; race = black: 0, white: 1.

Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables. Significant positive associations were observed between the career establishment ($r = .26$; $p = .00$; small practical effect) and work–life adjustment ($r = .17$; $p = .05$; small practical effect) preoccupations and work-related commitment only. In terms of the control variables, only race showed significant associations with the PCPS and work-related commitment variables. The zero-order correlations are all well below the level of multi-collinearity concerns ($r \geq .80$).

Although the three psychosocial career preoccupations are regarded as non-age-related (Coetzee 2014), it was interesting to explore the distribution of the highest career preoccupation scores across the career stage ages proposed by Savickas and Super (Sharf 2010) in order to assess whether Coetzee’s proposition holds true. Table 2 shows that 23 (58.98%) participants under the age of 25 years (career exploration career stage) and 17 (54.84%) participants aged between 45 and 60 years (management career stage) mostly reported preoccupations with career establishment-related vocational development tasks. The career preoccupations of the establishment career stage (25–44 years) reported an even spread of vocational development task concerns across the career establishment ($n = 31$, or 34.44%), career adaptation ($n = 31$, or 34.44%) and work–life adjustment ($n = 28$, or 31.12%) preoccupations. A Kruskal-Wallis test indicated no significant differences between the career preoccupation mean scores of the different age groups. The distributional trends observed in the sample therefore cannot be generalised.

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Table 1: Descriptive statistics: Means, standard deviations and zero order correlations

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Age										
2	Gender										
3	Race										
4	Career establishment preoccupations	4.05	.85	-.06	-.02	-.25**	–				
5	Career adaptation preoccupations	3.29	1.07	.06	.08	-.30***	.66***	–			
6	Work–life adjustment preoccupations	3.45	.82	.04	.01	-.26***	.64***	.53***	–		
7	Work-related commitment	3.79	.64	.14	-.09	-.04	.26***	.02	.17*	–	
8	External interests	2.40	.62	-.16*	.09	.22**	-.10	.10	-.11	-.22***	–

Notes: $N = 160$. Significant correlations are in boldface. *** $p \leq .001$ = statistically significant; ** $p \leq .01$ = statistically significant; * $p \leq .05$ = statistically significant.

Table 2: Number and percentage of sample in career stage age groups and highest career preoccupations score

	Total sample (N = 160)		Career establishment preoccupations		Career adaptation preoccupations		Work/life adjustment preoccupations	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
< 25 years	39	24.38%	23	58.98%	8	20.51%	8	20.51%
25–44 years	90	56.25%	31	34.44%	31	34.44%	28	31.12%
45–60 years	31	19.37%	17	54.84%	7	22.58%	7	22.58%

Hierarchical regression analysis (see Table 3) was used to evaluate the effect of age, gender, race (step 1) and the three psychosocial career preoccupations (independent) variables (step 2) on the dependent variables work-related commitment and external interests. Two separate regression models were performed, one for each of the two dependent variables. The control variables age, gender and age were entered in step 1, followed by the three career preoccupation variables in step 2, while controlling for the biographic variables. Age significantly contributed to explaining the variance in work-related commitment ($\beta = .21$; $p \leq .02$) and external interests ($\beta = -.17$; p

$\leq .05$). Race contributed significantly to explaining the variance in external interests ($\beta = .23; p \leq .02$).

Over and above the control variables, the career preoccupation variables explained 15% ($\Delta R^2 = .15$; moderate practical effect) of the variance in work-related commitment (overall model: $R^2 = .17$), and 9% ($\Delta R^2 = .09$; small practical effect) of the variance in external interests (overall model: $R^2 = .12$). When controlling for the biographical variables and the other two career preoccupation variables, career establishment preoccupations contributed significantly to explaining unique variance in work-related commitment ($\beta = .44; sr^2 = .07; p \leq .001$; small practical effect) and to explaining unique variance in external interests ($\beta = -.28; sr^2 = .03; p \leq .05$; small practical effect).

Career adaptation preoccupations contributed to explaining unique variance in work-related commitment ($\beta = -.35; sr^2 = .06; p \leq .001$; small practical effect) and to explaining unique variance in external interests ($\beta = .43; sr^2 = .09; p \leq .001$; moderate practical effect) when controlling for the biographical variables and the other two career preoccupation variables. Work-life adjustment preoccupations did not account for explained variance in both work-related commitment and external interests.

An investigation of the semi-partial r^2 coefficients (unique incremental variance of each of the independent variables separately when controlling for the biographic variables) showed that career establishment preoccupations ($r^2 = .07$; small practical effect) accounted for more explained incremental variance in work-related commitment than career adaptation preoccupations ($r^2 = .06$; small practical effect) and age ($r^2 = .04$; small practical effect). Career adaptation preoccupations ($r^2 = .09$; moderate practical effect) accounted for more explained incremental variance in external interests than career establishment preoccupations ($r^2 = .03$; small practical effect), race ($r^2 = .04$; small practical effect) and age ($r^2 = .03$; small practical effect).

Discussion

The study measured individuals' psychosocial career preoccupations in relation to their work-related commitment, including their job/career commitment (involvement in and attachment to the job and career in the present organisation) and external interests (attachment to interests outside the job and career). The lack of significant differences observed between the career preoccupations of the three career-stage related age groups suggested by Savickas (2005, 2013b) and Super (1957, 1990) suggests that the career preoccupations measured in the present study

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Table 3: Results of hierarchical regression analysis of psychosocial career preoccupations on work-related commitment and external interests

Predictor variables	Work-related commitment		External interests	
	β	Semi-partial r^2	β	Semi-partial r^2
<i>Step 1</i>				
Age	.21**	.04	-.17*	.03
Gender	.001	.00	.00	.00
Race	.04	.001	.23**	.04
<i>Step 2</i>				
Career establishment preoccupations	.44***	.07	-.28*	.03
Career adaptation preoccupations	-.35***	.06	.43***	.09
Work/life adjustment preoccupations	.14	.01	-.06	.001
Model statistics				
R	.42		.39	
R ²	.17		.12	
R ² Δ	.15		.09	
F	5.35***		4.61***	
F Δ	9.25***		5.33**	

Notes: N = 160 Significant correlations are in boldface. *** $p \leq .001$ = statistically significant; ** $p \leq .01$ = statistically significant; * $p \leq .05$ = statistically significant.

were not age-related as proposed by Coetzee (2014). Mahoney (1987) also found that although chronological age was somewhat related to concerns associated with the career stage-related vocational developmental tasks postulated by Super (1957), the career concerns were not limited to any one age group. In the present study, the career establishment preoccupations were predominant for the participants who were < 25 years (exploration stage), 25–44 years (establishment stage) and 45–60 years (maintenance stage). The findings seem to support Savickas's (2005, 2013b) and Super's (1957, 1990) proposition of career recycling through minicycles within or across the maxicycle of career stages. The participants aged 25–44 years had a relatively similar pattern of concerns relating to the vocational developmental tasks of career establishment, career adaptation and work/life adjustment, which

could suggest that this age group could be potential recyclers. The predominant preoccupation with vocational developmental tasks relating to career establishment identified for the participants in the 45–60 years career stage of maintenance also suggests that this age group was potentially engaged in career recycling. Hall and Mirvis (1996) also suggest multiple shorter learning cycles over the life span, which could result in more frequent recycling patterns for adults of all ages.

The present research suggests that employees' career establishment preoccupations are likely to be positively associated with their work-related commitment and negatively with their attachment to interests external to the organisational job and career, which could potentially influence their retention. This finding could be attributed to the nature of the vocational developmental tasks associated with the measured career establishment preoccupations, which involve concerns about stability, security and personal growth, development and advancement opportunities in the present organisation. The present research affirmed findings that showed associations between employees' need for career growth and advancement opportunities, challenging work, learning, developing and applying new knowledge and skills in the workplace and their organisational commitment and retention (Döckel, Basson & Coetzee 2006; João & Coetzee 2012; Ng, Butts, Vandenberg, DeJoy & Wilson 2006; Wang, Weng, McElroy, Ashkanasy & Lievens 2014).

The findings further support theoretical accounts that emphasise career adaptability and employability as important contemporary vocational developmental tasks that could influence individuals' work-related attitudes (Hall 2013; Savickas 2013a; Sullivan 2013). Providing evidence that individuals' preoccupations with career adaptation, career renewal and employability are significantly associated with lowered commitment to the job and career in the present organisation, the findings extended research on contemporary careers and organisational commitment. The findings demonstrated that employability-related concerns about adapting to changing contexts and new opportunities in the employment market (career adaptation preoccupations) are likely to be significantly associated with increased attachment by individuals to interests external to the current organisational job and career. Organisations that do not address the career adaptation, career renewal and employability concerns of employees could potentially face challenges in retaining them. Career adaptation preoccupations relate to individuals' future orientation (Gunz 2013) and proactive career management behaviour in ensuring their employability in an increasingly demanding, volatile and complex employment environment (Hall 2013; Savickas 2011, 2013a). Organisational career support in addressing these concerns could assist in enhancing employees' commitment and performance and potentially reducing employee turnover (Verbruggen et al. 2013).

Limitations and future research

Several limitations need to be considered in interpreting the results of the study. Firstly, the results are based on a relatively small sample of predominantly early-career working adults employed in the human resource and financial fields. The small sample implies that the generalisability of the results needs to be confirmed with diverse samples across various career stages in various occupational contexts. Secondly, the data were self-reported, which potentially introduces shared-method variance that might affect the observed relations between the measures. Future studies should test for common method bias. Thirdly, due to the cross-sectional nature of the research design, no cause-effect relations could be established. The study focused on establishing the magnitude and direction of the association between working adults' career preoccupations and their work-related commitment. Longitudinal studies that assess the effect of changing psychosocial career preoccupations over the lifespan in relation to work-related commitment and other related constructs such as organisational commitment, retention factors and psychological contract perceptions are recommended.

Despite these limitations, it is hoped that the study might stimulate further research on the shifting nature of individuals' vocational developmental tasks across the lifespan in relation to other career-related constructs that are appropriate to the changing career environment. The findings reported here also appear promising for organisational human resource career-development practices for employee retention. Employers need to take cognisance of how the changing career environment influences employees' career needs and concerns and how these affect their commitment to the present job and career in the organisation. Organisational career management practices should focus on providing support for career establishment needs and employees' needs to sustain their employability and career growth in the new career environment.

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