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Employees' satisfaction with retention factors: Exploring the role of career adaptability ☆

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ABSTRACT

Given the rising concerns about staff retention and the increased importance attached to individuals' career adaptability, the present paper explored how career adaptability relates to employees' satisfaction with factors that organizations regard important for their retention. A canonical correlation analysis was conducted on a sample of 321 employees in a South African automotive industry. The results showed that career adaptability, especially career concern, significantly explained the participants' level of satisfaction with their experiences of the career opportunities, work–life balance, training and development opportunities and characteristics of the jobs offered by the company. The study findings suggest that employees' career concerns, goals and plans and how these relate to retention practices are important for retaining them. Black and white participants also differed significantly regarding the variables. This study extends prior research on career adaptability by adding insights about the usefulness of the construct in the retention context.

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1. Introduction

Career adaptability, or the capacity to adapt, has become a central construct in vocational psychology to denote individuals' capacity to proactively construct their own careers in an increasingly more volatile employment context (Öncel, 2014; Savickas, 2013). Career adaptability capacities function as a source of resilience for individuals in the construction of their careers (Guan et al., 2014; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) and may potentially influence their attraction, retention and intention to leave (Ferreira, 2012). Research into career adaptability has increased markedly since the groundbreaking work of Savickas (1997, 2005, 2013) and Savickas and Porfeli (2012) which has been stimulated by the changing nature of careers in more turbulent employment contexts in which career paths have become more blurred and uncertain. Similarly, research into staff retention has increased in importance in the light of global skills scarcity concerns, an aging workforce, increased career mobility opportunities for knowledge workers, rapidly changing technologies and the need for survival in a highly competitive business environment (Dietrich, 2000; João & Coetzee, 2012; Mohlala, Goldman, & Goosen, 2012; Samuel & Chipunza, 2009; Van Dyk & Coetzee, 2012).

Research shows significant associations between career adaptability and career- and work-related outcomes, such as success in the workplace, work engagement, job satisfaction, job embeddedness and organizational commitment (Ferreira, 2012; Rossier, Zecca, Stauffer, Maggiori, & Dauwalder, 2012). However, despite the growing interest in career adaptability, more research is needed to understand the intricate relationship between individual career agency and the structures within which the career unfolds (Dany, 2014). People's careers are contextually specific and socially embedded (Dany, 2014) and influenced by their perceptions and feelings

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☆ Declaration: We declare that the article has not been published before in its current or substantially similar form, or is not under consideration for publication with another journal.
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of career success and satisfaction (Fleisher, Khapova, & Jansen, 2014). Research highlights the interdependency between individuals and organizations (Fleisher et al., 2014; Tams & Arthur, 2010) and that organizational business needs for success are achieved through addressing employees' career satisfaction and by balancing business needs with employees' career goals (Fleisher et al., 2014; Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007). In this regard, retention research often focuses on the organizational factors and practices that relate to employees' job satisfaction, commitment and engagement (Döckel, 2003; Lumley, Coetzee, Tladinyane, & Ferreira, 2011; Van Dyk & Coetzee, 2012). However, at present there is limited research on the link between individuals' career adaptability and specific retention-related organizational practices that influence individuals' job and career satisfaction. The goal of the present study was therefore to explore multivariate relationships of the career adaptability and retention factor satisfaction constructs.

Afiouni and Karam (2014) postulate that individuals' perception of career success and satisfaction is constructed through the interaction of individuals' agency with their context and the agentic processes by means of which individuals adapt to facilitate better alignment between personal preferences and needs and the structural contexts in which they pursue the career. In line with this reasoning, career adaptability is seen as the self-regulatory meta-capacities or resources employed to facilitate person-structural alignment in order to enhance career success and satisfaction (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Research by Zacher (2014) indicated positive associations between career adaptability and perceived career success. Retention factors are seen to represent certain characteristics of the structure within which the career is pursued and that relate to measures of career success or satisfaction.

The paper makes several contributions to the career and retention literature. First, empirical evidence is provided supporting the growing, yet to date limited, research on the potential positive implications of individuals' career adaptability for the organization that employs them (e.g., Ferreira, 2012; Rossier et al., 2012). Second, given that career adaptability and retention factor satisfaction are multi-factorial constructs, we test multivariate relationships between the career adaptability and retention factor constructs. By doing so, our research highlights the core career adaptability capacities that play an important role in explaining individuals' satisfaction with key retention factors. This approach may potentially contribute to a deeper understanding of how to achieve better alignment between individuals' sense of career agency (embedded in their career adaptability) and the structural context in which the career is pursued (as represented by the specific retention factors).

2. Career adaptability

The construct of career adaptability denotes a multidimensional, hierarchical structure of four key resources or adapt-abilities (Maggiori, Johnston, Krings, Massoudi, & Rossier, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012): career concern, career control, career curiosity and career confidence. These dimensions reflect the ability to look ahead to one's future, considering and preparing for future career possibilities (concern), to know what career to pursue and making deliberate decisions and taking conscientious action (control), to look around at options, exploring various situations and potential roles (curiosity), and to have the self-efficacy to undertake activities needed to achieve career goals (confidence) (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). In contrast to individual adaptability (an individual's general ability, skill, dispositions, willingness and/or motivation to change or fit different task, social and environmental features), career adaptability appears to denote situation-specific evaluation goals (Hamtiaux, Houssemand, & Vrignaud, 2013). In this regard, career concern is seen as the fundamental dimension of career adaptability given the elements of future time perspective, active involvement in, planfulness, awareness and optimism about the achievability of future goals embedded in the construct (Perera & McIlveen, 2014). Career control reflects the perceived personal control over the vocational future and the belief about personal responsibility for constructing one's career. Curiosity about possible selves and social opportunities increases people's active exploration behaviors. Career confidence includes the capacity to stand by one's own aspirations and objectives, even in the face of obstacles and barriers (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Stoltz, 2014).

Career adaptability presumes meaningful adaptation through agentic processes within a specific work environment (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). These processes refer to individuals' capacity to act and to make their own choices (agency) within, or in interacting with, the constraints of a structure such as for example those associated with a particular organizational or social environment. Agentic processes lead to response choices that facilitate career choices and behavior which influence individuals' career success and satisfaction (Afiouni & Karam, 2014) and potentially their turnover behavior (Ferreira, 2012). Research indicates career adaptability to be positively associated with future job search self-efficacy, employment status, perceptions of the future work self and person–environment fit (Guan et al., 2014). High levels of career adaptability are also seen to positively predict levels of career satisfaction (Zacher, 2014), work engagement (Rossier et al., 2012) and perceived well-being and of control over one's own life (Hirschi, 2009; Öncel, 2014). Career adaptability resources are presumed to help prevent person–job mismatch and underemployment and positively influence career satisfaction and retention (Gutman & Schoon, 2012; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011; Takase, Nakayoshi, & Teraoka, 2012).

3. Retention factors

Retention research increasingly focuses on identifying organizational practices as key factors that may contribute to the retention of staff. The research of Döckel (2003) identified a set of specific factors that may influence staff retention. These include factors such as compensation (monetary and non-monetary rewards); job characteristics (skill variety and job autonomy); training and development opportunities (formal development activities provided by the organization); supervisor support (recognition by and feedback from supervisors to employees); career opportunities (internal and external career options an employee may have); work–life balance (employee's ability to meet both work and family commitments); and organizational commitment (employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization). Research has provided evidence that these retention factors