

Psychological career resources as predictors of employees' job embeddedness: An exploratory study

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Abstract

Managers and human resource practitioners concerned about retaining valuable staff members need to recognise how people's psychological career resources relate to their perceptions of job embeddedness in the organisation. The aim of the study was to determine whether employees' psychological career resources (as measured by the Psychological Career Resources Inventory) significantly predict their job embeddedness (as measured by the Job Embeddedness Scale). A quantitative survey was conducted on a non-probability sample of employed black (92%) and female (71%) adults (N=355) at managerial and staff levels in the human resource management field. Correlational statistics and multiple regression analyses were used to analyse the data. The managerial career preference and self-esteem positively predicted the participants' perceptions of sacrifice and links. Self/other skills and career directedness positively predicted perceptions of fit, sacrifice and links. Sense of career purpose negatively predicted perceptions of fit, links and sacrifice and the need for career venturing negatively predicted perceptions of sacrifice. In the South African employment equity context, the findings provide valuable information that can be used to inform career development support practices for the retention of black females in the human resource management field. The practical implications of the findings also add new insights towards negotiating the psychological contract and managing the employment relationship.

Key words: *career drivers, career enablers, career harmonisers, career preferences, job embeddedness, fit, links, sacrifice*

1 Introduction

Increasing concerns about retaining valuable staff and reducing the personal and organisational costs associated with staff turnover have made it even more urgent to determine the reasons why people stay or leave an organisation (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski & Erez 2001b; Tanova & Holtom 2008; Van Dyk 2012). Representing the non-affective reasons for staying in an organisation (that is, individuals' cognitive beliefs about the fit between their personal values and those of the organisation, the links they have within the organisation and what they will have to sacrifice should they decide to leave), the construct of job embeddedness has gained prominence in the retention

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research literature (Mitchell et al 2011b). People's job embeddedness and overall psychological attachment to the organisation also appear to be influenced by their psychosocial self-regulatory capacities in managing their career development in a more turbulent, chaotic and uncertain occupational world (Avey, Reichard, Luthans & Mhatre 2011; Feldman & Ng 2007; Ferreira, Basson & Coetzee 2010; Raabe, Frese & Beehr 2007; Savickas & Porfeli 2012). Survival in the changing and boundaryless career environment requires people to take ownership of their careers and tap into their personal resources in adapting and negotiating the fit between their personal career needs and desires and those of the external environment (Savickas 2011; Schreuder & Coetzee 2011). Researchers in the field of careers and retention therefore emphasise the need for continued research in understanding the link between individuals' job embeddedness (perceptions of fit, links and sacrifice) and their psychosocial career capacities (Avey et al 2011; Çakmak-Otluoğlu 2012; Ferreira 2012; Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth 2004). Knowledge of the relationship between employees' psychological career resources (as an aspect of their psychosocial self-regulatory capacities) and their job embeddedness may potentially inform human resource retention practices in South African organisations.

Research has shown that from the individual's perspective, the turbulent career context has led to a growing desire to develop a range of psychosocial self-regulatory career meta-capacities that enable people to take ownership of their careers and be proactive, adaptive agents in managing their careers and enhancing their employability (Bezuidenhout 2011; Coetzee 2008; Converse, Pathak, DePaul-Haddock, Gotlib & Merbedone 2012; Savickas & Porfeli 2012). These capacities include aspects like individuals' career adaptability, self-knowledge, career preferences and values, career self-management competencies, self-esteem and emotional literacy, all of which allow individuals to be self-sufficient, adaptive learners in the management of their own careers (Bezuidenhout 2011; Coetzee 2008; Feldman & Ng 2007; Savickas & Porfeli 2012).

Psychosocial career meta-capacities act as transactional resources between the inner (psychological) and outer (social) worlds of a person and assist in the process of adapting to social expectations and work roles, and dealing with career transitions between occupational positions in an increasingly turbulent occupational world (Savickas & Porfeli 2012). Research has shown that people have a central tendency to adapt to their social and work environments by recrafting or reshaping their work roles, activities and relationships to achieve closer proximity with the self-concept (Olivier & Rothmann 2007; Van Zyl, Deacon & Rothmann 2010). Experiences of person-environment fit induce psychological meaningfulness and involvement or engagement with the job (Dik & Duffy 2008; Van Zyl et al 2010; Wrzesniewski 2003). People with a range of psychosocial career meta-capacities have been found to feel more positive about their career and work experiences (Çakmak-Otluoğlu 2012; Coetzee & Bergh 2009). Psychosocial capacities have also been related to desirable employee attitudes, affective commitment, embeddedness and engagement (Avey et al 2011; Ferreira et al 2010).

Recognising that individuals' capabilities to effectively influence their environment and regulate their behaviour are critical to their extrinsic and intrinsic career success in contemporary work settings (Çakmak-Otluoğlu 2012), more research is required on how their self-regulatory career capacities influence their job embeddedness or cognitive beliefs about the fit between their personal values and those of the organisation, the links they have within the organisation and what they will have to sacrifice should they

decide to leave (Feldman & Ng 2007). Employees' job embeddedness reflects certain dispositional orientations that mediate the relationship between employees' work and personal lives and influence their cognitive (non-affective) and affective reasons for staying in an organisation or job, and hence their retention (Mitchell, Holtom & Lee 2001a). Job embeddedness has been indicated as a significant predictor of employees' turnover intentions, organisational commitment and satisfaction (Tanova & Holtom 2008; Van Dyk 2012). Research also suggests that employees' job embeddedness can be strengthened by career development support efforts that emphasise the fit between the individuals' career needs and the organisation (Tanova & Holtom 2008).

2 Research objectives

The present study aimed to empirically assess whether psychological career resources significantly and positively predict people's job embeddedness. The following research question was posed:

- Do individuals' psychological career resources significantly and positively predict their job embeddedness?

Assessing whether psychological career resources are related to job embeddedness may provide valuable information for human resource managers and practitioners concerned with career development support practices for the retention of valuable staff.

3 Psychological career resources

The psychological career resources framework of Coetzee (2008) is relevant to the present study. As a set of psychosocial self-regulatory career meta-capacities, people's psychological career resources enable them to adapt to changing career circumstances and to shape and select environments to attain success within a particular socio-cultural context (Coetzee 2008). Individuals' psychological career resources reflect their conscious, career-related cognitions (that is, perceptions, awareness and self-evaluations) of their career preferences, career values, career drivers, career enablers and career harmonisers that are understood and regarded by people as being helpful in realising their goals and achieving career success. A balanced, well-developed psychological career resources profile reflects conscious, self-directed career behaviour that is internally guided and pro-actively driven by the individual (Coetzee 2008). People's psychological career resources were found to be related to their affective commitment (Ferreira et al 2010), work and career commitment (Tladinyane 2012), their subjective experiences of their work, jobs and careers (Coetzee & Bergh 2009), and their coping resources (Coetzee & Esterhuizen 2010).

People's *career preferences and values* comprise their unique views about the paths their careers should follow and guide their career decisions. As shown in Table 1, Coetzee (2008) differentiates between four career preferences (stability/expertise, managerial, creativity/variety and autonomy/independence) and two sets of career values (growth/development and authority/influence). The *career drivers* comprise people's sense of career purpose, career directedness and career venturing attitudes. These attitudes energise people and motivate them towards experimenting with new or alternative career and employment possibilities that are based on their viewpoints of the possible selves they could become or the possible working roles they could fulfil. The *career enablers* comprise people's transferable skills such as their practical or creative skills, and personal and interpersonal management skills that help them to succeed in their careers. The *career harmonisers* comprise people's self-esteem,

behavioural adaptability, emotional literacy and social connectivity. These psychological attributes promote flexibility and resilience, and act as controls by keeping the career drivers in balance so that people do not go overboard (or burn themselves out) in the process of pursuing and reinventing their careers (Coetzee 2008).

4 Job embeddedness

Job embeddedness represents a broad set of on-the-job and off-the-job influences that attach or bind the employee to the organisation and thus influence the decision to stay on the job or in the organisation. These influences constitute individuals' dispositional orientations or perceptions of their fit with the organisation, job and environment, the formal or informal links between them and the organisation and/or people, and the sacrifice they might need to make when leaving the organisation or job (Mitchell et al 2001a). The construct of job embeddedness therefore consists of three dimensions: "fit" with the job, organisation and community; "links" to other people, teams and groups and the "sacrifice" associated with changing jobs (Mitchell et al 2001a).

- *Fit* refers to the perceived compatibility of one's personal values, career goals and plans for the future with the larger corporate culture and the demands of the immediate job (i.e. skills, abilities, job knowledge), the organisation and the environment. The better the fit, the higher the likelihood that the individual will feel professionally and personally tied to the organisation (Mitchell et al 2001b)
- *Links* refers to the extent of an individual's ties to other people and activities at work and to family, non-work and off-the-job interests. The higher the number of links between the person and the social, psychological and financial web (constituting work and non-work friends, groups, and the community and physical environment in which the person lives), the more closely the person is bound to the job and the organisation (Mitchell et al 2001b).
- *Sacrifice* refers to the ease with which a person feels that links can be broken, or people's perceptions of what they would have to give up if they were to leave their current position (Feldman & Ng 2007). The more aware an employee is of what he or she would have to give up (financially or psychologically) by leaving a job or organisation, the more difficult it would be for the individual to sever employment with the organisation (Mitchell et al 2001b; Shaw, Delery, Jenkins & Gupta 1998).

Job embeddedness is regarded as a key mediating construct between specific on-the-job (work-related) and off-the-job (personal) factors and employee retention (Mitchell et al 2001a; Tanova & Holtom 2008).

5 Psychological career resources in relation to job embeddedness

People's career development is in essence a social process requiring them to continuously negotiate the harmonics between their personal career preferences, values, needs and desires and the requirements of the job and the organisational, social or external environment (Savickas & Porfeli 2012). It is therefore proposed that individuals' career preferences, career values, career drivers, career enablers and career harmonisers may predict their perceptions of job-embedded fit (that is, their perceptions about the compatibility between their personal values, career goals and plans and the organisational culture, along with the demands of the job, organisation and environment). Well-developed psychological career resources might enhance perceptions of job-embedded fit, enable individuals to form strong organisational and

job-related links and enhance their perceptions of what they would have to sacrifice should they decide to leave the organisation.

Research has shown that employees' reasons for staying in an organisation relate more strongly to their desire to maintain a relationship with the organisation than with their actual behavioural intentions (Meyer, Hecht, Gill & Toplonysky 2010). Moreover, research has shown that psychologically, internally driven aspects of career self-management (i.e. proactive personality, self-control, and self-directed career management behaviour) are strongly related to positive career outcomes in a particular work setting (Converse, Pathak, DePaul-Haddock, Gotlib & Merbedone 2012). The following research hypothesis was therefore formulated:

H1: Psychological career resources are significant predictors of people's level of job embeddedness.

Table 1
The psychological career resources framework of Coetzee (2008)

Psychosocial self-regulatory career meta-capacities	Self-regulatory function	Core capacities
Career preferences	Enduring cognitive or conceptual structures underlying people's thoughts about their careers and defining the meaning of a career for them. Career preferences guide people's career moves and choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Stability/expertise</i> (occupations or jobs that offer stability, predictability and the opportunity to develop their expertise in a particular field) • <i>Managerial</i> (view that upward mobility to positions of successively greater responsibility, influence and authority represents career success) • <i>Creativity/variety</i> (need for a career that allows one to work on a variety of different tasks that require one to use and develop a wide range of skills, abilities and knowledge in innovative and creative ways) • <i>Autonomy/independence</i> (view that independence and freedom from external interruptions represent the ideal work situation)
Career values	Enduring cognitive or conceptual structures underlying people's thoughts about their careers and which define the meaning of a career to them. Career values represent the motivation for a particular career preference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Growth/development</i> (need for further growth and development opportunities) • <i>Authority/influence</i> (need for positions of authority and influence)
Career drivers	Attitudes that energise people and motivate them towards experimenting with career and employment possibilities that are based on their view-points of the possible selves they could become or the possible working roles they could fulfil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Career purpose</i> (sense of higher purpose or calling based on people's confidence and inner conviction that they are able to achieve their career goals, which include being of service to others and giving their best in what they do) • <i>Career directedness</i> (sense of clarity about future career directions and goals as well as clarity in terms of where and how to find support for achieving one's career goals or finding new job opportunities) • <i>Career venturing</i> (the willingness to take risks in finding and experimenting with new career opportunities)

continued/

Psychosocial self-regulatory career meta-capacities	Self-regulatory function	Core capacities
Career enablers	Transferable capacities that help people to succeed in their careers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Practical and creative skills</i> (skills used to implement career options and to make them work in innovative and creative ways) • <i>Self/other skills</i> (the ability to understand one's feelings and motivations and exert self-discipline in one's interactions, and the ability to understand, honour, empathise and interact effectively with others in the pursuit of one's career)
Career harmonisers	Psychological attributes that act as promoters of flexibility and resilience, and also exert control by keeping the career drivers in balance so that people do not go overboard (or burn themselves out) in the process of pursuing and reinventing their careers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Self-esteem</i> (the degree to which people feel worthy, capable, significant and effective in comparison with other members of their social group) • <i>Behavioural adaptability</i> (ability to identify those qualities that are critical for future performance and ability to make the necessary personal changes to meet career-related needs) • <i>Emotional literacy</i> (ability to accept and express a range of affect, based on the premise that a range of emotional responses facilitates career-adaptive behaviours in the career decision-making process) • <i>Social connectivity</i> (ability to connect with others, and establish and maintain mutually satisfying and supportive relationships)

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

6 Research design

6.1 Research approach

For this exploratory study, a quantitative survey design was used to achieve the research objective (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister 2003).

6.2 Research method

6.2.1 Participants

The participants were a non-probability sample of 355 employed adults out of a total population of N=370 (response rate=89.6%) who were enrolled for a human resource management programme at a distance learning higher education institution. The sample was represented by predominantly black (92%) and female (71%) participants in the exploration and establishment phases of their careers, namely 25–40 years (78%). The participants occupied positions at senior, middle management and staff level in the human resource management field.

6.2.2 Measuring instruments

The Psychological Career Resources Inventory (PCRI) (Coetzee 2008) and the Job Embeddedness Scale (JES) (Mitchell et al 2001a) were used to measure the variables of concern to this study.

The PCRI (Coetzee 2008) is a self-rated multifactorial measure containing 64 items and five subscales: career preferences (17 items), career values (6 items), career enablers (8 items), career drivers (11 items) and career harmonisers (22 items). The PCRI measures 15 constructs in total: career preferences (stability/expertise, managerial, variety/creativity, independence/autonomy); career values (growth/development; authority/influence); career drivers (career purpose, career directedness, career venturing); career enablers (practical/creative skills; self/other skills) and career harmonisers (self-esteem, behavioural adaptability, emotional literacy, social connectivity). A six-point Likert-type scale was used for subject responses to each of the 64 items. Cronbach's alpha coefficients (internal consistency reliabilities) for each subscale (as obtained for the sample of this study) were as follows: career preferences .86; career values .85; career enablers .83; career drivers .85; and career harmonisers .89.

The JES (Mitchell et al 2001a) measures three causal, not effect, indicators of the dimensions for job embeddedness: fit (7 items), sacrifice (10 items) and links (6 items) on a 6-point Likert type scale. The JES (Mitchell et al 2001a) comprises two dimensions, namely organisational and community dimensions. In the present study the examination was limited to the organisational dimension. Researchers have found that the organisational dimension better predicts employee performance than does the community dimension (Allen 2006; Halbesleben & Wheeler 2008; Lee, Mitchell, Sablinski, Burton & Holtom 2004). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients (internal consistency reliabilities) for the five subscales (as obtained for the sample used in this study) were as follows: fit .84, links .77 and sacrifice .87.

6.2.3 *Research procedure*

The participants attended a three-day study school at an open distance learning higher education institution. The aim of the study, the confidentiality of the responses and instructions for completing the questionnaire were discussed with the respondents on the first day of the study school. Each questionnaire included a covering letter inviting subjects to participate voluntarily in the study and assuring them that their individual responses would remain confidential. The covering letter also stated that completing the questionnaires and returning them constituted agreement to use the results for research purposes only. In terms of research ethics, permission for the research was obtained from the institution's research ethics committee.

6.2.4 *Statistical analysis*

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to determine the internal consistency reliability of the two measures. Three separate multiple regression analysis models were computed to test the research hypothesis, one model for each of the three JES-dependent variables: fit, links and sacrifice. According to Hill and Lewicki (2006:666), the purpose of multiple regression analysis is to analyse the relationship between several independent or predictor variables and a single dependent or criterion variable. In each of the three regression models, the value of adjusted R^2 was used to determine the proportion of the total variance of the dependent variables (JES) that is explained by the independent variables (PCRI). The F-test was used to test whether there was a significant regression ($F_p \leq .05$) between the independent and dependent variables. Prior to conducting the various regression analyses, collinearity diagnostics were examined to ensure that zero-order correlations were below the level of 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 2005).

7 Results

7.1 Descriptive statistics: Means, standard deviations and internal consistency reliabilities

The means, standard deviations and internal reliability coefficients for the PCRI and JES variables are shown in Table 2. The participants obtained the highest mean scores on the following PCRI subscales: stability/expertise career preference (M=5.28; SD=.11); growth/development career value (M=5.42; SD=.16); self/other skills career enablers (M=4.89; SD=.23); career purpose career driver (M=5.39; SD=.05); and self-esteem career harmoniser (M=5.09; SD=.10). In terms of the overall subscales, the highest mean scores were obtained on the career values scale (M=5.13; SD=1.39). As shown in Table 2, the sample of participants obtained the highest scores on the JES fit subscales (M=5.04; SD=1.57), and the lowest scores on the JES links (M=4.68; SD=1.05) and JES sacrifice (M=4.68; SD=1.05) subscales.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics: Means, standard deviations and internal consistency reliability summary statistics (PCRI and JES) (N=355)

Scale dimension	Mean (M)	Standard deviations (SD)	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
PCRI (psychological career resources)			
<i>Career preference</i>	4.89	1.52	.86
Stability/Expertise	5.28	.11	.74
Managerial	4.78	.94	.75
Variety/Creativity	4.95	.84	.72
Independence/Autonomy	4.32	.39	.74
<i>Career values</i>	5.13	1.39	.85
Growth/Development	5.42	.16	.74
Authority/Influence	4.84	.68	.64
<i>Career enablers</i>	4.70	1.14	.83
Practical/Creative skills	4.47	.29	.70
Self/Other skills	4.89	.23	.79
<i>Career drivers</i>	4.95	1.99	.85
Career purpose	5.39	.05	.83
Career directedness	4.69	.79	.81
Career venturing	4.75	.84	.71
<i>Career harmonisers</i>	4.68	1.14	.89
Self-esteem	5.09	.10	.82
Behavioural adaptability	4.66	.28	.81
Emotional literacy	4.22	.14	.71
Social connectivity	4.75	.34	.74
JES (job embeddedness)			
Fit	5.04	1.57	.84
Links	4.68	1.05	.77
Sacrifice	4.68	1.05	.87

7.2 Correlations

Table 3 shows that all the PCRI career preference variables correlated positively and significantly with the JES fit variables ($r \geq .14 \leq .17$; $p = .01$; small practical effect). The

managerial career preference correlated positively and significantly with the JES links ($r = .14$; $p = .05$; small practical effect) and sacrifice ($r = .13$; $p = .05$; small practical effect) variables. Only the PCRI growth/development variable correlated positively and significantly with the JES fit ($r = .12$; $p = .05$; small practical effect) variable. The PCRI career enabler variables correlated positively and significantly with the three JES variables ($r \geq .11 \leq .24$; $p \leq .05$; small practical effect). The overall career driver construct and career directedness variable correlated positively with the JES fit variable ($r \geq .19 \leq .25$; $p \leq .01$; small practical effect). The career directedness variable also correlated positively and significantly with the JES links ($r = .16$; $p = .01$; small practical effect) and sacrifice ($r = .14$; $p = .01$; small practical effect) variables. All the career harmoniser variables correlated positively with the JES fit variable ($r \geq .17 \leq .24$; $p \leq .01$; small practical effect). The overall career harmoniser construct and self-esteem correlated positively and significantly with the JES links ($r \geq .11 \leq .14$; $p \leq .05$; small practical effect) and sacrifice ($r = .11$; $p = .05$; small practical effect) variables. It was anticipated that multicollinearity would not pose a problem in the regression analyses as the Pearson product-moment coefficients (see Table 3) showed a small practical effect, and this is well below the level of concern for multicollinearity ($r \geq .80$) to be present (Field 2009).

Table 3
Pearson product-moment correlations: PCRI and JES (N=355)

PCRI	JES		
	Fit	Links	Sacrifice
Career preferences	.15**	.09	.10*
Stability/Expertise	.14**	.02	.04
Managerial	.17**	.14*	.13*
Variety/Creativity	.15**	.04	.04
Independence/Autonomy	.14	.07	.10
Career values	.10	-.01	-.01
Growth/Development	.12*	-.02	-.02
Authority/Influence	.05	.00	.01
Career enablers	.22**	.13*	.14**
Practical/Creative skills	.16**	.11*	.12*
Self/Other skills	.24**	.12*	.14*
Career Drivers	.19**	.07	.07
Career purpose	.10	-.01	-.01
Career directedness	.25**	.16**	.14**
Career venturing	.10	.03	.01
Career harmonisers	.24**	.11*	.11*
Self-esteem	.20**	.14**	.11*
Behavioural adaptability	.22**	.09	.11*
Emotional literacy	.17**	.07	.08
Social connectivity	.18**	.03	.02

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

7.3 Hypothesis testing: Multiple regression analyses

Table 4 summarises only the significant PCRI predictor variables in terms of the three multiple regression analysis models that were computed in order to test the research hypothesis. The VIF ($> 1.0 < 1.5$), tolerance (≤ 1.0) and condition index values (> 3

< 12) provided evidence that multicollinearity could be ruled out in all three regression models.

Table 4
Multiple regression analyses: Summary of the significant PCRI predictor variables in terms of the JES criterion variables fit, links and sacrifice (N=355)

Variable		Unstandardised coefficient		Standardised coefficient	t	p	F	Adjusted R ²	R
		B	SE B	β					
Model 1	Constant (Fit)	2.55	3.44		5.98	.00	3.26***	.09+	.35
	Self/Other skills	.35	.15	.19	2.27	.02			
	Career purpose	-.48	.19	-.19	2.42	.02			
	Career directedness	.38	.16	.17	2.47	.01			
Model 2	Constant (Links)	23.68	3.35		7.07	.00	2.62***	.06+	.32
	Managerial	.27	.12	.15	2.23	.03			
	Self/Other skills	.34	.15	.19	2.25	.03			
	Career purpose	-.45	.19	-.19	2.31	.02			
	Career directedness	.39	.15	.18	2.55	.01			
	Self-esteem	.29	.11	.19	2.67	.01			
Model 3	Constant (Sacrifice)	38.18	5.66		6.75	.00	2.56***	.06+	.32
	Managerial	.40	.21	.13	1.95	.05			
	Self/Other skills	.62	.25	.21	2.47	.01			
	Career purpose	-.67	.33	-.17	2.04	.04			
	Career directedness	.57	.26	.16	2.23	.03			
	Career venturing	-.54	.27	-.14	1.99	.05			
	Self-esteem	.37	.18	.15	2.03	.04			

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

+ $R^2 \leq .12$ (small practical effect size) ++ $R^2 \geq .13 \leq .25$ (medium practical effect size) +++ $R^2 \geq .26$ (large practical effect size)

In model 1, Table 4 indicates that the regression of the PCRI variables upon the JES fit variable produced a statistically significant model ($F_p(134.55; 41.28) = 3.26; p \leq .001$), accounting for 9% ($R^2 = .09$; small practical effect) of the variance in the JES fit variable. The self/other skills ($\beta = .19; p = .02$) and career directedness ($\beta = .17; p = .01$) variables positively predicted the JES fit variable, while the career purpose variable negatively predicted the JES fit variable ($\beta = -.19; p = .02$).

In model 2, the regression of the PCRI variables upon the JES links variable produced a statistically significant model ($F_p(103.09; 39.29) = 2.62; p \leq .001$), accounting for 6% ($R^2 = .06$; small practical effect) of the variance in the JES links variable. The PCRI managerial career preference ($\beta = .15; p = .03$), self/other skills ($\beta = .19; p = .03$), career directedness ($\beta = .18; p = .01$), and self-esteem ($\beta = .19; p = .01$) variables positively predicted the JES sacrifice variable, while the career purpose variable negatively predicted the JES links variable ($\beta = -.19; p = .02$).

In model 3, the PCRI variables regressed upon the JES sacrifice variable produced a statistically significant model ($F_p(286.96; 111.96) = 2.56; p \leq .001$), accounting for 6%

($R^2 = .06$; small practical effect) of the variance in the sacrifice variable. The PCRI managerial career preference ($\beta = .13$; $p = .05$), self/other skills ($\beta = .21$; $p = .01$), career directedness ($\beta = .16$; $p = .03$), and self-esteem ($\beta = .15$; $p = .04$) variables positively predicted the JES sacrifice variable. The career purpose ($\beta = -.17$; $p = .04$) and career venturing ($\beta = -.14$; $p = .05$) variables negatively predicted the sacrifice variable.

The results provided supportive evidence for the research hypothesis *H1*: Psychological career resources are significant predictors of people's level of job embeddedness.

8 Discussion

The study explored whether individuals' psychological career resources significantly predicted their job embeddedness. Overall, the results provided supportive evidence for the research hypothesis.

8.1 Psychological career resources and job embeddedness profile

The overall psychological career resources profile of the participants suggests that they mostly prefer occupations or jobs that offer stability, predictability and the opportunity to develop one's expertise in a particular field. Research by Coetzee (2008) also indicated the stability/expertise career preference to be strongly associated with the growth/development career value. Ferreira et al (2010) found that further growth and development opportunities are important to individuals in the early adulthood (entry and establishment) career stage. Research has also indicated career growth and development opportunities as a significant retention factor that increases employees' psychological attachment and commitment to the organisation (Döckel, Basson & Coetzee 2006).

The psychological career resources profile of the participants further suggests that they feel confident about their self-management and interpersonal relations management skills (career enabler), have a strong sense of having a career calling and a higher purpose of being of service to society at large (career purpose-career driver) and well-developed self-esteem (career harmoniser). According to Weiss, Skelley, Freund, Haughey and Hall (2004), people's sense of purpose is expressed through the use of their strengths and aptitudes (for example, those represented by their career enablers and their career harmonisers).

The participants' job embeddedness profile suggests strong perceptions of congruence between their personal values and career goals and plans and the organisation and job (job embedded-fit). However, their perceptions of links and sacrifice seem relatively lower than their perceptions of fit. These results suggest that the participants may not feel strongly bound by the organisation or job as a result of their ties to other people, teams and groups in the organisation and also may not feel that they would have to sacrifice numerous psychological or material benefits should they decide to leave the organisation (Mitchell et al 2001a). The lower perceptions of links and sacrifice may be attributed to the participants' being in the early stages of their careers. Super's (1995) career/life stage theory describes the early adulthood (entry and establishment) career stage as the stage during which individuals are preoccupied with fitting in, learning to relate to other individuals and developing a realistic career self-concept.

8.2 Psychological career resources as a predictor of job embeddedness

8.2.1 Career preferences as predictors of job embeddedness

The results indicated that the managerial career preference positively predicted the participants' perceptions of sacrifice and links. These results suggest that those participants who have a strong need for upward mobility to positions of successively greater responsibility also have strong feelings of being bound to the organisation due to the perceived links they have with others in the organisation and the perceived cost of material or psychological benefits that may be forfeited by leaving the job. Important potential sacrifices that may be suffered by leaving an organisation include opportunities for further advancement (Mitchell et al 2001b). According to Mitchell et al (2001b), the higher the number of links between the individual and the work, the more closely he or she feels bound to the job and the organisation. Research by Ferreira et al (2010) and Meyer and Allen (1997) also indicates that having the authority to influence the goals of the organisation seems to increase individuals' sense of responsibility for continuing their employment with the organisation. Individuals who prefer managerial positions also appear to have strong feelings of emotional attachment to the organisation (Ferreira 2012).

8.2.2 Career values as predictors of job embeddedness

Although the results indicated the growth/development career value to be significant and positively related to job-embedded fit, the career values were not indicated as significant predictors of job embeddedness. Fitting-in and gaining membership in the organisation and being exposed to further growth and development opportunities are regarded as important preoccupations in the early adulthood life-career stage (Super 1995).

8.2.3 Career enablers as predictors of job embeddedness

The results indicated that the ability to understand one's feelings and motivations and exert self-discipline in one's interactions, and to understand, honour, and empathise and interact effectively with others (self/other skills) significantly predict perceptions of job-embedded fit, links and sacrifice. Coetzee (2008) and Higgins (2001) posit that career decision making takes place in a social-relational context. It is within this social-relational context that individuals develop their sense of self, which creates the balance that they strike between their personal career preferences, values, needs, goals and plans and the expectations of others and the perceived opportunities provided in the external environment (Coetzee 2008). Research by Tladinyane (2012) shows that people's commitment to and involvement in their careers, occupations and organisations are significantly enhanced by strong career enablers such as self/other skills. High levels of commitment and involvement lead to strong feelings of emotional attachment (Tladinyane 2012), which might increase perceptions of what one would have to sacrifice in terms of psychological links with other people in the organisation should one decide to leave the organisation.

8.2.4 Career drivers as predictors of job embeddedness

Career directedness positively predicted perceptions of fit, sacrifice and links. It appears that having clarity about one's future career path and goals and how to find support for achieving one's career goals or finding new job opportunities (Coetzee 2008) significantly increased the participants' job embeddedness. Fit relates to

individuals' perceptions of congruence between their personal career needs, goals and plans and those provided by the organisation, while "links" relates to interpersonal ties with others that might help to strengthen one's career advancement and growth opportunities (Mitchell et al 2001a), all factors that could be perceived as aspects that would have to be sacrificed should one change jobs. An employee might experience personal loss such as giving up colleagues or interesting projects when leaving an organisation (Mitchell et al 2001b).

Ng and Feldman (2009) posit that high levels of embeddedness may indicate that the individual's career has been progressing well in the organisation, but embeddedness can also mean a lower likelihood of discovering and taking advantage of other career opportunities. The results of the present study indicate that a sense of having a career calling and a higher purpose, namely service to society at large predict less strong perceptions of fit, links and sacrifice. Similarly, a strong career venturing orientation seems to lead to lower perceptions of sacrifice. Hall and Chandler (2005) posit in this regard that individuals with a sense of purpose are more likely to venture out in search of new opportunities because they tend to believe that they will ultimately succeed. The meaningfulness of their jobs and careers is viewed as more important than the psychological ties that bind them to an organisation, job or relationship. Research also indicates that people who view work as a mere job, rather than as a calling associated with a higher purpose, are more likely to be ensnared by the allure of the material rewards they receive from work, hence they might be more cautious about sacrificing the material and psychological benefits they receive from the organisation (Parry 2006; Van Zyl et al 2010).

8.2.5 Career harmonisers as predictors of job embeddedness

The results showed that a positive self-esteem significantly increased the participants' job embeddedness in terms of the perceived links that bound them and the material and psychological benefits they would have to sacrifice should they decide to break their link with the organisation. Coetzee and Esterhuizen (2010) found positive self-esteem to be related to people's optimism about life in general. A positive self-esteem reflects a sense that one is located securely in the social world, competent to meet its challenges, ready to participate in life with others, and able to balance social demands and personal desires in a particular social-relational context (Garrety, Badham, Murrigan, Rifkin & Zanko 2003).

9 Conclusions, implications, limitations and recommendations

9.1 Conclusions and implications for practice

Based on the findings of the present study, it may be concluded that the study contributes valuable new knowledge and insights to the extant literature on staff retention. The findings confirm the need to assess the psychological career resources of employees as these provide valuable information regarding the motives and values and psychological attributes that drive individuals' career decisions and significantly influence their perceptions of job embeddedness.

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for managers and employment relations practitioners in negotiating the psychological contract. First, the findings suggest that the career development expectations and needs of employees are likely to influence their job embeddedness, which in turn relates to their beliefs and attitudes about the mutual obligations between them and the organisation. These

beliefs and attitudes underpin the psychological contract which holds the organisation together and binds the individual to the organisation (Tallman & Bruning 2008). Employees with realistic job and career expectations and high levels of job embeddedness have more positive views about the psychological contract and are less likely to want to leave the employment relationship (Ferreira 2012; Linde & Gresse 2013; Scott, Eau & Jill 2001). Research shows that, among other employment practices, employees regard career development, promotional opportunities, job-related training, and fair and equitable pay and benefits as important entitlements if they are to fulfil their obligations to the organisation (Botha 2007). A perceived breach of the psychological contract may result in lower levels of trust and job embeddedness (Mitchell et al 2001a). The findings of the present study suggest that organisations that want to invest in their managerial potential need to consider how the need for upward mobility to positions of successively greater responsibility (managerial career preference) relates to employees' perceptions of job-embedded links and sacrifice. Managers and employment relations practitioners could consider creating opportunities that will assist individuals with a strong managerial career preference to develop strong formal or informal connections within the organisation and provide incentives (i.e. advancement opportunities, higher levels of responsibility and authority, compensation and reward benefits) that employees would perceive as important benefits that would have to be forfeited when leaving the job. Perceived fairness and justice in the administration of these employment relations practices may contribute to more positive perceptions of the psychological contract and higher levels of commitment, satisfaction and job embeddedness (Botha 2007).

Second, managers need to recognise the importance of providing clear career paths and goals as part of organisational career development support practices in the organisation. Assisting individuals to set clear career goals and formulate plans and helping them to align their personal career goals and plans with the opportunities available in the organisation are important steps in enhancing individuals' perceptions of job-embedded fit, links and sacrifice. Third, managers also need to consider the needs of those employees with a strong sense of career purpose and career venturing when designing retention strategies. These individuals may be less inclined to stay because of the need to explore opportunities to serve and venture out. Fourth, helping individuals to develop their self-management and interpersonal relations skills as part of their career development might help to enhance their job embeddedness. Research by Botha (2007) indicates that good relationships between employees and supervisors and managers are important perceived employee entitlements. Managers could provide employees with training and development opportunities in self-management and interpersonal relations. Finally, using constructive feedback and mentoring in career development discussions may help to enhance individuals' self-esteem. Positive communication between managers and employees has also been shown to benefit employment relations by increasing trust between managers and employees (Bernthal 1993; Brundage & Koziel 2010). The results of the present study showed that positive self-esteem significantly enhances individuals' job-embedded links and sacrifice.

9.2 Methodological limitations and recommendations

Since the present study was limited to early career black and female participants predominantly employed in the human resources management field in the South African organisational context, the findings cannot be generalised to other occupational, race and gender contexts. Furthermore, given the exploratory and cross-sectional

nature of the research design, this study can yield no conclusions about causation. Associations between the variables have therefore been interpreted rather than established. These findings would need to be replicated with broader samples across different occupational groups and economic sectors before more comprehensive conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between employees' psychological career resources and their job embeddedness. Moreover, the potential risk of common method bias should be considered because of the self-report methodology that was used. However, acceptable internal consistency reliabilities were reported for the two measuring instruments. It is recommended that the study be replicated with broader samples across various occupational, age and race groups and economic sectors before more extensive conclusions can be drawn about the relationship between the constructs of concern to this study. The present study did not control for any demographic variables. Future studies therefore also need to control for demographic variables in the research design. Future research also needs to consider how people's psychological career resources and job embeddedness change over time as their career self-concept evolves.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the findings provide valuable information that can be used to inform career development support practices for the retention of black females in the human resource management field in the South African employment equity context. The practical implications of the findings also add new insights that will be valuable in the negotiation of the psychological contract and the management of the employment relationship.

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