Mediating effect of self-esteem on the career self-management and career resilience of early-career staff in the business management field

M. Coetzee & I.L. Potgieter

A B S T R A C T

Companies striving to retain their competitive edge in a highly turbulent business environment are redirecting their performance and career management systems to develop and retain their talent pipeline. The study examines the mediating effect of general self-esteem on the link between the career self-management and career resilience of a non-probability sample of 304 early-career employees in the business management field. A cross-sectional quantitative survey design was followed, collecting primary data. Data analyses consisted of an analysis of correlations and a simple mediation model. The results revealed significant direct and indirect effects between the variables. General self-esteem partially mediated the relationship between career self-management and career resilience. These findings contribute new knowledge that informs organisational performance and career management practices for the retention of talented staff members.

Key words: self-esteem, organisational career management, career self-management, career resilience

Introduction

Staying abreast of international competition, technological advances, and the constant focus on efficiency and productivity while ensuring that talented human capital with scarce and critical skills are retained, are some of the challenges that today's organisations face (Farndale, Van Ruiten, Kelliher & Hope-Hailey 2011; Greenhaus,

Prof. M. Coetzee is in the Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, University of South Africa; Prof. I.L. Potgieter is in the Department of Human Resource Management, University of South Africa. E-mail: coetzm1@unisa.ac.za

Callanan & Godshalk 2010). Many companies are redirecting their performance and career management systems to develop and retain their talent pipeline (Brundage & Koziel 2010). These systems are recognised as key managerial mechanisms in building positive relations with, and desired organisational citizenship behaviours in, valuable staff members (Brundage & Koziel 2010; Greenhaus et al. 2010; Porter 2011). Research provides evidence that top talent values career growth, performance feedback and career guidance, and resources for developing the skills they need to advance their careers within the company (Brundage & Koziel 2011). Greenhaus et al. (2010) postulate that an organisation's ability to effectively retain and manage its human capital depends on how well it understands its employees' career needs and how well it helps them to engage in effective career management.

Effective career self-management has also become important from the employees' perspective in terms of the more complex, turbulent and uncertain socioeconomic and technological environments in which they have to pursue their careers (Bezuidenhout 2011; Converse, Pathak, DePaul-Haddock, Gotlib & Merdebone 2012; Greenhaus et al. 2010). Individuals are becoming increasingly responsible for navigating their own way in workplaces that do not offer clearly identifiable career paths to follow (Converse et al. 2012). Increasing emphasis is also being placed on individuals to keep up with the rapid changes in a complex work world, to continually improve their knowledge and skills, and to sustain their employability (De Guzman & Choi 2013; Marock 2008; Pool & Sewell 2007). Career self-management, career resilience and positive self-esteem have therefore emerged as important self-regulatory meta-capacities for proactive career agency in sustaining one's employability and achieving career success in the 21st century workplace (Bezuidenhout 2011; Converse et al. 2012). These meta-capacities are regarded as core employability attributes in helping individuals take action to influence their environments, set goals, scan for new opportunities, show initiative in career problem-solving and decision-making, and persevere until they bring about significant change in their lives and careers (Bezuidenhout 2011; Converse et al. 2012).

Employees' continued employability is also seen to be beneficial for present performance on the job, and for career and business outcomes (Coetzee & Schreuder 2011; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden 2006). Moreover, the employability attributes of career self-management, career resilience and positive self-esteem may benefit both the employee and the company by promoting positive organisational citizenship behaviours that contribute to the wellbeing of organisational members and the success of the organisation as a whole (Bezuidenhout 2011; Bowling, Wang & Li 2012). Employability attributes such as these have been related to positive individual outcomes (job and career satisfaction) and work-related outcomes such

as task-motivation and better job performance (Avey, Reichard, Luthans & Mhatre 2011; Bezuidenhout 2011; Bowling et al. 2012).

Aim of the study

The aim of the present study was to explore the relationship between employees' career self-management, career resilience and self-esteem, and whether self-esteem mediates the relationship between individuals' career self-management and career resilience.

Career self-management and career resilience represent feelings of autonomy and perceived controllability, which are primary components of positive career attitudes (Bezuidenhout 2011; Super 1990). Self-esteem represents an attribution belief (Janeiro 2010). The classical attribution theory (Weiner 1986) suggests that self-esteem relates strongly to the locus of causality underlying the motivational dynamics of human behaviour. Attribution theory postulates that the success attributed to internal causes, whether capacities or efforts, generates feelings of pride and positive self-esteem (Janeiro 2010; Weiner 1986; Weiner & Graham 1999). Limited empirical research has been conducted on how attribution beliefs (such as self-esteem) relate to contemporary vocational behaviour and career attitudes (Fugate & Kinicki 2008; Janeiro 2010; Potgieter 2012). Understanding how individuals' self-esteem influences the relationship between their career self-management and career resilience may potentially inform performance and career-management practices aimed at enhancing the employability and career satisfaction of talented staff.

Literature review

Career self-management

In the context of the present study, career self-management is described as a tendency to proactively manage one's own career by regularly collecting career-related information so as to enhance knowledge of the self and the external environment, including the world of work (Bezuidenhout 2011; Bezuidenhout & Coetzee 2010). Career self-management enables individuals to sustain their employability through constant learning as well as career planning and management efforts. Typical characteristics of the career attitude underpinning career self-management behaviour include having the confidence and determination to pursue and achieve set career goals and continually engage in development activities in order to achieve career goals (Bezuidenhout 2011; Schreuder & Coetzee 2011). As an internal motivational drive,

career self-management behaviour further represents the capacity to reflect on one's career aspirations as well as developing a clear sense of what one wants to achieve in one's career. It also entails a sense of autonomy and perceived controllability over one's life and situation. One easily recognises the skills needed to be successful in one's career and the actions necessary to achieve career goals (Schreuder & Coetzee 2011).

In the organisational context, sound performance and career management practices support the development of career self-management behaviours and capacities (Brundage & Koziel 2010; Greenhaus et al. 2010). Performance management allows employees to learn about short-term and long-term career options within the company. A performance management system that incorporates career management is seen as a valuable tool for retention because of the feedback and supportive interaction mechanisms built into such a system (Brundage & Koziel 2010). Employees learn to set realistic performance and career goals, engage in career exploration and problem-solving tasks, take ownership of their career development, and receive support and regular feedback from a mentor or career adviser who can help them to develop the job-related skills needed for career advancement (Brundage & Koziel 2010; Greenhaus et al. 2010). Constructive feedback and support have been shown to build positive self-esteem and strengthen employees' job embeddedness, which can be described as a sense of fitting in and belonging in the organisation or work team (Greenhaus et al. 2010; Mitchell, Holtom & Lee 2001).

Developing career self-management behaviours among employees can enhance perceptions of control over their career, leading to career satisfaction (Bridgstock 2009; King 2004). King (2004) furthermore emphasises that people want to believe that their careers are their own property, and efforts to shape the direction of their careers provide them with a means of asserting agency in their life course. Developing greater self-control over their vocational behaviours has become essential for individuals in order to construct a satisfactory life course (Janeiro 2010). Career agency and self-control are increasingly relevant given the changing nature of work. The blurring of clearly identifiable career paths in contemporary organisations, as well as limited organisational career management initiatives, oblige employees to proactively seek out opportunities, update their skills and market themselves in ways that are now suggested to be important in a changing organisational world (King 2004). If the nature of organisational life is becoming unpredictable or even chaotic, then career self-management may be the only way to navigate through a turbulent world (Potgieter 2012). King (2004) found that self-esteem influences the extent to which people engage in career self-management. People are likely to use career self-managing behaviours to a greater extent when they feel competent to do so.

Career resilience

Career resilience is seen as a personal disposition that facilitates a high degree of adaptability, self-confidence and self-reliance, openness to new opportunities and contacts, and a belief in one's control over events regardless of adverse career circumstances (Bezuidenhout 2011; Bezuidenhout & Coetzee 2010). Chiaburu, Baker and Pitariu (2006) found career resilience to be positively associated with proactive personality and self-management behaviours. Career-resilient individuals are able to adapt to changing situations by accepting job and organisational changes, looking forward to working with different and new people, being willing to take risks, as well as having self-confidence in mastering the challenges posed by a situation or event (Potgieter 2012). According to Bezuidenhout (2011), attributes such as a high self-regard for one's own personal qualities, being open to feedback from others with regard to strengths and weaknesses, having self-confidence in successfully identifying one's accomplishments and being open to (and able to proactively adapt to) changes in one's environment are essential to career-resilient behaviour.

Career resilience has also been associated with career success (Bezuidenhout 2011; Day & Allen 2004). Schreuder and Coetzee (2011) postulate that individuals who possess work and career resilience have a number of attributes, such as optimism about their career and career opportunities, a feeling that they have control over their future, and certainty about the direction their careers will take, including a feeling that they can make valuable contributions at work. Fugate and Kinicki (2008) found that individuals with high levels of career resilience tend to be optimistic about their work and careers and have a high self-evaluation and therefore tend to display high self-esteem. As an active career attitude, career resilience also fosters the identification and recognition of career opportunities in the uncertain world of work (Fugate 2006).

Self-esteem

Self-esteem refers to people's general perceptions of, and feelings about, their worth (Battle 1992). The self represents the result of a person's inherent make-up and life experiences. Although the self is vague and poorly integrated in childhood, it becomes increasingly differentiated as a child matures and interacts with significant others (Battle 1992). Various studies report variability in self-esteem development. Self-esteem in children and adolescents appears to decrease as they grow older due to previously unrealistically positive views about the self, and the emotional instability associated with conflicting role demands and relationship complexities (Robins & Trzesniewski 2005). More realistic self-views begin to form as young people develop

cognitively and start to base their self-evaluations on external feedback and social comparisons (Robins & Trzesniewski 2005). Once established, cognitive and affective self-evaluations of self-worth (general self-esteem) tend to be fairly stable and resistant to change (Battle 1992). These self-evaluations motivate the individual to choose objectives and goals that are consistent with or similar to the self-view (Battle 1992).

Hewitt (2002) posits that self-esteem as a socially constructed syndrome of emotions is dependent upon the situation and its demands and therefore a variable psychological state. The socially constructed emotions that either increase or decrease self-esteem occur at predictable times and places under the influence of role requirements. These socially constructed emotions are embedded in a Western societal culture, with its particular notions about status relationships, success or failure in the achievement of socially prescribed goals, and the actual or imagined evaluative judgments of others (Coetzee 2005; Hewitt 2002). People can, within limits, lower or raise their self-esteem in response to role requirements, presenting a self with appropriate manifestations (Hewitt 2002).

Research provides evidence of fluctuations in self-esteem. Self-esteem in adults appears to decrease when individuals experience high levels of instability (e.g. life or career transitions, obsolete work skills), emotional upheaval caused by relationships (spousal death, decreased social support), impaired physical functioning (e.g. declining health) and job loss resulting in a drop in socioeconomic status (Orth, Robins & Trzesniewski 2010; Robins & Tzesniewski 2005; Tiggeman & Lynch 2001).

High self-esteem is apparent when individuals move into emotional maturity and the establishment phase of their lives and careers. Higher levels of emotional stability, stable working and family circumstances, established romantic and social supportive relationships, a peak in achievement and feelings of control over the self and the environment, all contribute to increased self-esteem (Orth et al. 2010). Positive self-esteem is indicative of a positive and integral personal and social identity, that is, 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 (Coetzee 2008; Garrety, Badham, Morrigan, Rifkin & Zanko 2003).

General self-esteem is a vital psychological attribution belief and a fundamental component of any person's daily experience (Janeiro 2010; Weiner 1986). It reflects and affects individuals' interpretations of, and dealings with, the environment and the people with whom they come into contact on a daily basis (Kernis 2003). Seen as an indication of psychological wellbeing and how people could react to certain events, self-esteem is considered to act as a predictor of human behaviour (Gray-Little & Hafdahl 2000). The understanding of self-esteem in the workplace forges the affective link between the self and others. Self-esteem is a measure of the person's expectations of positive events and therefore the person's motivation to approach

objects and other people. Discussion of self-esteem in the workplace encourages people to explore the nature and significance of the social bond and the affective link they have with other people (Coetzee 2005; Hewitt 2002; Kanfer & Klimoski 2002).

Maslow (1970) postulated that people need positive self-esteem (feeling good about themselves) and esteem from others to belong (perceiving that others also feel positive about them and that the group accepts them). In order to develop a positive self-esteem, people strive for achievement and mastery of their socio-cultural environment (Coetzee 2005). In order for the group to accept them and to gain respect from others, people tend to behave in ways that will result in recognition, appreciation and prestige. In addition, people feel confident, competent, strong, useful and needed when they have satisfied their need for self-esteem. When people have not satisfied their need for self-esteem, however, they tend to feel inferior, anxious, worried, depressed, weak and helpless (Coetzee 2005). A positive self-concept contributes to one's general level of initiative and beliefs about one's general level of competence. As a core self-evaluation, self-esteem has been positively related to job satisfaction and job performance (Bowling et al. 2012).

Self-esteem is considered to be vital to sustaining one's employability in the uncertain contemporary marketplace (Coetzee 2008; 2014). Salmela-Aro and Nurmi (2007) found that a high level of general self-esteem predicts permanent employment and higher levels of salary and work engagement over the long-term after graduating from university. Low levels of self-esteem predict lower levels of achievement at work, work engagement and job satisfaction (Bezuidenhout 2011). Low self-esteem has been related to low self-confidence, pessimism, inflexibility and indecisiveness, whereas high self-esteem has been linked to healthy psychological functioning and coping, resilience following failure, achievement, satisfaction and success (Mann, Hosman, Schaalma & De Vries 2004; Park, Crocker & Kiefer 2007).

Based on the literature review on career self-management and career resilience, it was expected that these two variables would be positively and significantly related because of the self-regulatory capacities and perceived controllability attitudes underpinning such behaviour. It was further expected that both variables would be positively related to self-esteem. Feelings of success attributed to career self-management capacities might generate feelings of positive worth and self-esteem which, in turn, might generate confidence in overcoming obstacles and taking risks to explore new opportunities (resilience). However, it is not clear from the research literature whether the positive relationship between career self-management and career resilience could be attributed to positive general self-esteem. The research therefore aimed to answer the following research question:

Does individuals' general self-esteem significantly mediate the relationship between their career self-management and career resilience?

Method

Participants

The participants comprised a non-probability sample of 304 early-career staff (26–40 years) pursuing careers in the business management field. The sample comprised blacks (70%) and whites (30%). Women comprised 64% and men 36% of the sample.

Measuring instruments

The Employability Attributes Scale (E0AS) developed by Bezuidenhout and Coetzee (2010) for the South African context was used to measure the participants' career self-management (11 items; e.g. "I regularly seek information regarding what a specific career involves"; "I know what I must do to make a success of my career") and career resilience (6 items; e.g. "I adapt easily to changes in my environment"; "I anticipate and take advantage of changes in my career environment"). Responses to these two subscales were measured on a six-point Likert-type scale. Bezuidenhout and Coetzee (2010) report internal consistency reliabilities of 0.88 for career self-management and 0.75 for career resilience. Cronbach's alpha (internal consistency reliability) coefficients of 0.80 for the career self-management subscale and 0.70 for the career resilience subscale were obtained in the present study.

The Culture-free Self-esteem Inventory for Adults (CFSEI 2-AD) developed by Battle (1992) was used to measure the participants' general self-esteem. Responses to the general self-esteem subscale (16 items; e.g. "Can you do most things as well as others?; "Would you change many things about yourself if you could?") were measured on a six-point Likert-type scale. Battle (1992) reports an internal consistency reliability coefficient of 0.81 for the general self-esteem scale. Similarly, a Cronbach's alpha (internal consistency reliability) coefficient of 0.80 was obtained in the present study.

Research procedure

Ethical clearance and permission for the research were obtained from the research institution. The total population of participants (N = 500) attended a three-day study school at the higher education institution at which the participants were enrolled as distance-learning students. Questionnaires were distributed to all the participants. Each questionnaire included a covering letter inviting respondents to participate voluntarily in the study and assuring them that their individual responses would remain anonymous and confidential. The covering letter also stated that

completing and returning the questionnaires constituted agreement to allow the results to be used for research purposes only. The research procedure yielded 304 usable questionnaires (response rate = 61%).

Statistical analyses

Preliminary analyses included examination of the internal consistency reliability of the subscales relevant to the three variables (career self-management, career resilience and general self-esteem) and the calculation of means and standard deviations and zero-order correlation coefficients among the three variables. A simple mediation model, with the more stringent bootstrapping approach, as described by Preacher and Hayes (2008), was then used to achieve the objective of the study. Simple mediation modelling uses the assumptions of linear regression by estimating three regression equations (MacKinnon 2011). The relationships between one independent variable, X (career self-management), one mediator, M (general self-esteem) and one outcome or dependent variable, Y (career resilience) are shown as path diagrams (Figure 1). The first regression equation assesses the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable ($X{\to}Y$). The second regression equation assesses the direct effect of the independent variable on the mediator ($X{\to}M$). Finally, the third regression equation assesses the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable when controlling for the mediator ($X{\to}M{\to}Y$) (MacKinnon 2011). The following three assumptions of simple mediation modelling were met: (1) the three measuring instruments had high levels of reliability, (2) the limitations of the cross-sectional mediated effect estimates of the $X{\to}M{\to}Y$ relationship were considered in the interpretation of the data, and (3) within the boundary and core focus of the present study, no other possible mediators were omitted from the relationship (MacKinnon 2011).

Since the cross-sectional nature of the research design does not allow for casual inferences from the data analyses (Wu & Zumbo 2008), correlational inferences were used to identify the extent to which the mediator variable (general self-esteem) accounted for the direct and indirect relationship between the independent variable (career self-management) and the dependent variable (career resilience). The focus was therefore on examining the magnitude of the direct and indirect effects (standardised path coefficients) between the variables. To establish the unique effect of the mediator (general self-esteem) on the dependent variable (career resilience), the independent variable (career self-management) was controlled for.

Results

Descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients and correlations

As shown in Table 1, the mean values for general self-esteem (M = 4.52; SD = 11.11) and career self-management (M = 4.75; SD = 8.14) were less than twice the value of the standard deviations, indicating that the data are skewed (Manikandan 2010). Table 1 shows that the skewness values ranged between -.36 and -.54, indicating that the data are negatively skewed. The kurtosis values ranged between .00 and -.38, indicating that the mean scores for the three scales are relatively high. Battle (1992) and Bezuidenhout and Coetzee (2010) also indicate mean scores above 4.00 on the six-point Likert-type scale used for the two measures as being relatively high. Table 1 shows that the participants obtained the highest mean score on the career self-management variable (M = 4.53; SD = 8.14) and the lowest mean score on the general self-esteem variable (M = 4.52; SD = 11.11).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients and zero-order correlation coefficients

Variables	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α	General self-esteem	Career resilience
General self-esteem	4.52	11.11	-.53	.00	0.80	–	
Career self-management	4.75	8.14	-.54	.21	0.80	0.32***++	0.71***+++
Career resilience	4.60	4.28	-.36	-.62	0.70	0.41***++	–

Note: n = 304. ***$p \leq 0.001$. $r \geq 0.30 \leq 0.49$ (medium practical effect size). +++ $r \geq 0.50$ (large practical effect size). M = mean. SD = standard deviation. α = Cronbach's alpha (internal consistency reliability) coefficient.

As shown in Table 1, general self-esteem correlated significantly and positively with career self-management (r = 0.32; medium practical effect size, $p \leq 0.000$) and career resilience (r = 0.41; medium practical effect size, $p \leq 0.000$). In addition, career self-management correlated significantly and positively with career resilience (r = 0.71; large practical effect size, $p \leq 0.000$).

The zero-order correlations are all well below the level of multi-collinearity concerns ($r \geq 0.80$) (Field 2009). The correlation results and the high Cronbach's alpha internal consistency reliability coefficients (α $\geq$ 0.70) provide an initial indication that further analyses using a simple mediation model are warranted (MacKinnon 2011).

Mediation effects

To correct for skewness, the stringent bootstrapping approach, as described by Preacher and Hayes (2008), was used to assess the relationship between the three variables in the mediation modelling analysis. The bootstrap resampling method is considered accurate, as it distributes probability error between two-sided confidence intervals (Ewinyu 2012; MacKinnon 2011).

The direction of the mediating effect on the relationship between career self-management and career resilience is positive and significant (see Table 2 and Figure 1) and meets the four conditions suggested by Zhou, Hirst and Shipton (2012) for significant mediating effects. As seen in Table 2 and Figure 1, career self-management has significant direct paths to general self-esteem ($0.32; p \leq 0.05$) and career resilience ($0.65; p \leq 0.01$). General self-esteem has a significant direct path to career resilience ($0.20; p \leq 0.01$). Career self-management also has a significant indirect effect on career resilience as mediated through general self-esteem ($0.07; p \leq 0.01$). After accounting for general self-esteem, the strength of the relation of career self-management to career resilience is substantially diminished. Table 2 shows that the more reliable bootstrapping bias-corrected 95% confidence interval does not include zero within the range of the lower and upper limits of the confidence intervals (Shrout & Bolger 2002), suggesting that the indirect pathway between career self-management and career resilience via the mediating effect of general self-esteem is practically significant. The significance of the mediating effect further implies that general self-esteem only partially mediates the relationship between career self-management and career resilience.

Table 2: Standardised direct and indirect effects of career self-management on career resilience through general self-esteem

Variables	Career resilience	General self-esteem	Career resilience	General self-esteem	Bootstrapping (BC) 95% CI		
	Direct (BC)		Indirect (BC)			Lower	Upper
General self-esteem	0.20* (0.02)	0.00	0.00	0.00	GS-CR	0.13	0.27
Career self-management	0.65** (0.003)	0.32** (0.01)	0.07** (0.01)	0.00	CSM-GS	0.23	0.41
					CSM-CR	0.59	0.71

Note: BC = bias-corrected. CI = confidence interval. BC 95% CI does not include zero. ** $p \leq 0.01$. * $p \leq 0.05$. *n = 304*. GS = general self-esteem. CSM = career self-management. CR = career resilience.
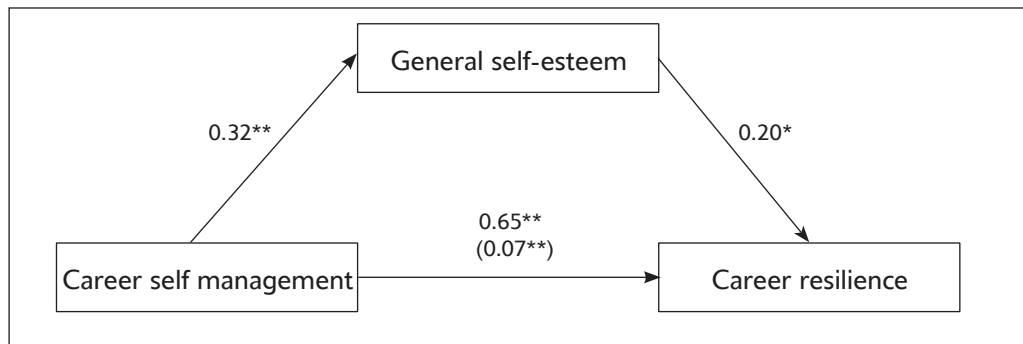
Note: Values in parentheses represent the indirect effect of career self-management via general self-esteem (mediator) on career resilience ($n = 304$). **Standardised path coefficients are significant at $p \leq 0.001$. *Standardised path coefficient is significant at $p \leq 0.05$.

Figure 1: Mediating model examining the direct and indirect relation of career self-management and career resilience through the mediating effect of general self-esteem

Discussion

The present study explored the relationship between career self-management and career resilience, and established evidence of the mediating effect of general self-esteem on this relationship. Although the cross-sectional design in the present study precludes causal inferences, the results suggest that higher levels of career self-management promote greater levels of self-worth, which in turn promote greater career resilience.

Overall, the results emphasise the importance of career self-management attributes and competencies in enhancing individuals' self-esteem and career resilience. Research points to the role of career self-management behaviours in enhancing individuals' employability and career adaptability (Bezuidenhout 2011; Potgieter 2012). Similarly, research provides evidence of career resilience being an important attribute of proactive career self-management behaviour (Bezuidenhout 2011; Chiaburu et al. 2006; Fugate & Kinicki 2008). The positive relationship between career self-management and self-esteem could be attributed to the positive attributes (such as proactiveness and confidence in organising, managing and realising one's personal career objectives) that career self-management represents (Bezuidenhout 2011; De Vos & Soens 2008). Hewitt (2002) posits in this regard that self-esteem is malleable and that, within limits, individuals can raise or lower their self-esteem in response to the role requirements posed by a situation. Individuals' self-management is also associated with their career identity. Career identity is considered to act as a motivational compass for realising personal goals and aspirations (Bezuidenhout

2011; Bridgstock 2009). Crocker, Brook, Niiya and Villacorta (2006) found that individuals with high levels of self-esteem have an enhanced ability to organise personal goals and achieve success.

The result, namely that general self-esteem partially mediates the career self-management and career resilience relationship, indicates that this relationship was due, in part, to the participants' perceptions of and feelings about their own worth. The results showed that the participants' self-esteem strengthened their career resilience. Self-esteem is regarded as a predictor of human behaviour, and research provides evidence that it influences the way in which individuals think, feel, motivate themselves, act and react to events and situations in their lives (Bandura 1999; Gray-Little & Hafdahl 2000; Kernis 2003). Positive self-esteem is indicative of feeling secure and confident in one's personal and social identity, and competent to meet the challenges posed by the social world (Garrety et al. 2003). These attributes of self-esteem could have raised the participants' career resilience. Research by Bezuidenhout (2011) also suggests that career resilience comprises attributes such as a high self-regard for one's personal qualities and accomplishments, and being open to change and feedback from others with regard to strengths and weaknesses. Self-esteem and adaptability (resilience) are seen as important career meta-capacities in enabling individuals to act with greater flexibility and resilience in the pursuit of their career-related goals (Coetzee 2008; 2014). Fugate and Kinicki (2008) found positive self-evaluations to be characteristic of resilient individuals who are also regarded as highly employable. Research further provides evidence that individuals with high levels of self-esteem are more able to demonstrate employability attributes than individuals with low self-esteem (Di Fabio & Kenny 2011; Puffer 2011; Weng & McElroy 2010).

Conclusions, implications and recommendations

Conclusions and implications

The results of the present study seem to corroborate the importance of developing career self-management attitudes and attributes in today's workplace, as the results show that these positively influence individuals' self-esteem and career resilience. Higher levels of positive self-esteem, in turn, appear to enhance individuals' ability to engage in proactive behaviours that enable them to be flexible, resilient and adaptable to changing and adverse career circumstances. The positive self-esteem developed through career self-management behavioural capacities appear, in turn, to further strengthen self-management and career-resilient attitudes.

The results have a number of practical implications for managers and human resource practitioners. Firstly, the results underscore the importance of developing employees' career self-management attitudes and capacities in order to enhance their self-esteem and career resilience. Research shows that self-esteem is a situation-dependent psychological state that may fluctuate (Hewitt 2002; Orth et al. 2010). Self-esteem increases when individuals have a sense of achievement and accomplishment, and experience positive interactions with others in the workplace, and decreases in times of emotional instability and uncertainty (Orth et al. 2010).

Career self-management capacities can be developed through mechanisms such as performance and career management (Brundage & Koziel 2010; Greenhaus et al. 2010). The research literature shows that career self-management is positively associated with organisational citizenship behaviour and positive career and job outcomes (Bezuidenhout 2011). The job and career discussions, goal-setting, support and feedback associated with effective performance management processes may help to build the confidence employees need to take ownership of their career development (Greenhaus et al. 2010).

Secondly, managing performance and development throughout the year through predetermined written job and career growth goals may help employees develop the accountability they desire to feel competent, employable and worthwhile (Brundage & Koziel 2010). Thirdly, positive self-esteem and confidence in managing one's own career development may help employees overcome the disappointments of career goals that are thwarted by organisational changes or adverse circumstances (Bezuidenhout 2011). Helping employees to develop their career-resilience capacities has become important in today's more uncertain workplaces (Converse et al. 2012) and contributes to employees' sense of job-embedded fit in the organisation and work group (Ferreira 2012).

Limitations and recommendations for further study

The conclusions about the findings of the study need to be considered in terms of a number of limitations, each suggestive of promising directions for research on enhancing employees' career self-management, career resilience and self-esteem in the workplace.

Firstly, the study was cross-sectional in nature and thus the causal direction of relations between the variables cannot be ascertained. Longitudinal studies are needed to understand how individuals' self-esteem evolves throughout the lifespan and how this influences their career self-management and career resilience. The structure of individuals' career self-management and career resilience may also be

non-linear and activated according to specific challenges an individual may be facing. Secondly, the potential risk of common method bias should be considered, because of the self-reporting methodology that was used. However, acceptable internal consistency reliabilities were reported for the three measuring instruments.

Thirdly, the participants in this study were employed in the business management field. They were mostly early-career black and female professionals. The findings can therefore not be generalised to other occupational, age, race and gender contexts. Replication studies, using independent samples drawn from other contexts, are recommended. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study contributed valuable information in the light of the paucity of research on the influencing role of self-esteem on the career self-management and career resilience of early-career staff in the business management field.

References

Avey, J.B., Reichard, R.J., Luthans, F. & Mhatre, K.H. 2011. 'Meta-analysis of the impact of positive psychological capital on employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance', *Human Resource Development Quarterly,* 22(2): 127–152.

Bandura, A. 1999. 'Social cognitive theory of personality', In Pervin, L.A. & John, O.P. (Eds), *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research*. New York: Guilford Press.

Battle, J. 1992. *Culture-free Self-esteem Inventories for Children and Adults*. Texas: Pro-Ed.

Bezuidenhout, M. 2011. The development and evaluation of a measure of graduate employability in the context of the new world of work. Unpublished master's dissertation. University of Pretoria, Pretoria.

Bezuidenhout, M. & Coetzee, M. 2010. Preliminary exploratory factor analysis: Student Employability Scale. Unpublished research report, Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Bowling, N.A., Wang, Q. & Li, H.Y. 2012. 'The moderating effect of core self-evaluations on the relationship between job attitudes and organizational citizenship behaviour', *Applied Psychology: an International Review,* 61(1): 97–113.

Bridgstock, R. 2009. 'The graduate attributes we've overlooked: enhancing graduate employability through career management skills', *Higher Education Research and Development*, 28(1): 31–44.

Brundage, H. & Koziel, M. 2010. 'Retaining top talent', *Journal of Accountancy,* May: 38–44.

Chiaburu, D.S., Baker, .L. & Pitariu, A.H. 2006. 'Beyond proactive: what else matters for career self-management behaviours?', *Career Development International*, 11(7): 619–632.

Coetzee, M. 2005. The relationship between personality preferences, self-esteem and emotional competence. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Coetzee, M. 2008. 'Psychological career resources and subjective work experiences of working adults: a South African survey', *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology,* 34(2): 32–41.

Coetzee, M. 2014. 'A psychological career resources framework for contemporary career development', In Coetzee, M. (Ed.), *Psychosocial Career Meta-Capacities: Dynamics of Contemporary Career Development*. Dordrecht: Springer International.

Coetzee, M & Schreuder, D. 2011. 'The relation between career anchors, emotional intelligence and employability satisfaction among workers in the service industry', *Southern African Business Review,* 15(3): 76–97.

Converse, P.D., Pathak, J., DePaul-Haddock, A.M., Gotlib, T. & Merbedone, M. 2012. 'Controlling your environment and yourself: Implications for career success', *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 80: 148–159.

Day, R. & Allen, T.D. 2004. 'The relationship between career motivation and self-efficacy with protégé career success', *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 64(1): 72–91.

De Guzman, A.B. & Choi, K.O. 2013. 'The relations of employability skills to career adaptability among technical school students', *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 82: 199–207.

De Vos, A. & Soens, N. 2008. 'Protean attitude and career success: the mediating role of self-management', *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 73: 449–456.

Di Fabio, A. & Kenny, M.E. 2011. 'Promoting emotional intelligence and career decision making among Italian high school students', *Journal of Career Assessment,* 19(1): 21–34.

Ewinyu, A. 2012. The correction of skewness of a task performance measure. Unpublished master's dissertation. University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Farndale, E., Van Ruiten, J., Kelliher, C. & Hope-Hailey, V. 2011. 'The influence of perceived employee voice on organizational commitment', *Human Resource Management*, 50(1): 113–129.

Ferreira, N. 2012. Constructing a psychological profile for staff retention. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Field, A. 2009. *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS* (3rd edition). Thousand Oaks: Sage

Fugate, M. 2006. 'New perspectives on employability', In Greenhaus, J. & Callanan, G. (Eds), *Encyclopedia of Career Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fugate, M. & Kinicki, A. 2008. 'A dispositional approach to employability: Development of a measure and test of implications for employee reactions to organisational change', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology,* 81: 503–527.

Garrety, K., Badham, R., Morrigan, V., Rifkin, S. & Zanko, M. 2003. 'The use of personality typing in organizational change: discourse, emotions and the reflective subject', *Human Relations,* 56(2): 211–235.

Gray-Little, B. & Hafdahl, A. 2000. 'Factors influencing racial comparisons of self-esteem: a quantitative review', *Psychological Bulletin,* 126(1): 26–54.

Greenhaus, J.H., Callanan, G.A. & Godshalk, V.M. 2010. *Career Management* (4th edition). London: Sage.

Hewitt, J. 2002. 'The social construction of self-esteem', In Snyder, C.R. (ed), *Handbook of Positive Psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Janeiro, I.N. 2010. 'Motivational dynamics in the development of career attitudes among adolescents', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 76: 170–177.

Kanfer, R. & Klimoski, R. 2002. *Looking Back to the Future*. New York: Jossey-Bass.

Kernis, M. 2003. 'Toward a conceptualization of optimal self-esteem', *Psychological Inquiry,* 14(1): 1–26.

King, Z. 2004. 'Career self-management: its nature, causes and consequences', *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 65: 112–133.

MacKinnon, D.P. 2011. 'Guidelines for the investigation of mediating variables in business research', *Journal of Business and Psychology*, November: 1–35.

Manikandan, S. 2010. 'Data transformation', *Journal of Pharmacology and Phamarcotherapeutics*, 1(2): 126–127.

Mann, M., Hosman, C.M.H., Schaalma, H.P. & De Vries, N.K. 2004. 'Self-esteem in a broad-spectrum approach for mental health-promotion', *Health Education Research,* 19(4): 357–372.

Marock, C. 2008. *Grappling with your Employability in South Africa*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.

Maslow, A. 1970. *Motivation and Personality.* New York: Harper and Row.

Mitchell, T.R., Holtom, B.C. & Lee, T.W. 2001. 'How to keep your best employees: developing an effective retention policy', *Academy of Management Executive*, 15(4): 96–109.

Orth, U., Robins, R. & Trzesniewski, K. 2010. 'Self-esteem development from young adulthood to old age: a cohort-sequential longitudinal study', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 98(4): 645–658.

Park, L.E., Crocker, J. & Kiefer, A.K. 2007. 'Contingencies of self-worth, academic failure, and goal pursuit', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 33: 1503–1517.

Pool, L. & Sewell, P. 2007. 'The key to employability: developing a practical model of graduate employability', *Education and Training,* 49(4): 227–289.

Porter, J.H. 2011. 'Attract and retain top talent', *Strategic Finance,* June: 56–61.

Potgieter, I.L. 2012. The development of a career meta-competency model for sustained employability. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Preacher, K.J. & Hayes, A.F. 2008. 'Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models', *Behavior Research Methods*, 40: 879–891.

Puffer, K.A. 2011. 'Emotional intelligence as a salient predictor for collegians' career decision making', *Journal of Career Assessment*, 19(2): 130–150.

Robins, R. & Trzesniewski, K. 2005. 'Self-esteem development across the lifespan', *Current Directions in Psychological Science,* 14(3): 158–162.

Salmela-Aro, K. & Nurmi, J.E. 2007. 'Self-esteem during university studies predict careers 10 years later', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 70: 463–477.

Schreuder, A.M.G. & Coetzee, M. 2011. *Careers: an Organisational Perspective* (4th edition). Cape Town: Juta.

Shrout, P.E. & Bolger, N. 2002. 'Mediation in experimental and nonexperimental studies: new procedures and recommendations', *Psychological Methods*, 7(4): 422–445.

Super, D.E. 1990. 'A life-span, life-space approach to career development', In Brown, D. & Brooks, L. (Eds), *Career Choice and Development* (2nd edition). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Tiggeman, M. & Lynch, J. 2001. 'Body image across the life span in adult woman: the role of self-objectification', *Developmental Psychology,* 37: 243–254.

Van der Heijde, C. & Van der Heijden, B. 2006. 'A competence-based and multidimensional operationalisation of employability', *Human Resource Management,* 45(3): 449–476.

Weiner, B. 1986. *An Attributional Theory of Motivation and Emotion*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Weiner, B. & Graham, S. 1999. 'Attribution in personality psychology', In Pervin, L.A. & John, O.P. (eds), *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research* (2nd edition). New York: Guilford Press.

Weng, Q. & McElroy, J.C. 2010. 'Vocational self-concept crystallization as a mediator of the relationship between career self-management and job decision effectiveness', *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 76: 234–243.

Wu, A.D. & Zumbo, B.D. 2008. 'Understanding and using mediators and moderators', *Social Indicators Research,* 87: 367–392.

Zhou, Q., Hirst, G. & Shipton, H. 2012. 'Promoting creativity at work: the role of problem-solving demand', *Applied Psychology: an International Review,* 61(1): 56–80.