

Career adaptability and employee engagement of adults employed in an insurance company: An exploratory study

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Dates:

Received: 25 Aug. 2015

Accepted: 23 Nov. 2015

Published: 16 May 2016

How to cite this article:

Tladinyane, R., & Van der Merwe, M. (2016). Career adaptability and employee engagement of adults employed in an insurance company: An exploratory study. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 14(1), a752. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v14i1.752>

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Orientation: As a resiliency resource, career adaptability relates to an individual's ability to adapt to new work demands and is seen to impact various occupational outcomes such as engagement.

Research purpose: The aim of the study was to determine the relationship dynamics between career adaptability (measured by Career Adapt-Abilities Scale) and employee engagement (measured by Utrecht Work Engagement Scale).

Motivation for the study: As a personal resource, career adaptability enables employees to deal with job demands, facilitating employee engagement. Limited research exists on the impact of career adaptability variables on employee engagement, bearing significant relevance in the current workforce.

Research design, approach and method: A quantitative survey was conducted with a convenience sample ($N = 131$) of employees in an insurance company within South Africa.

Main findings/results: Significant positive relationships were found between career adaptability and employee engagement. The results suggest that participants who have experienced higher employee engagement have better developed career adaptability skills.

Practical implications: Managers and human resource practitioners need to recognise how people's career adaptability influences their level of engagement in the organisation.

Contribution: This research is the first to investigate the construct of career adaptability in an insurance company and the findings add to the existing career literature and provide valuable information that can be used to inform career development and engagement strategies.

Introduction

Key focus of the study

In the current era of more diverse, global and boundary-less careers (Biemann, Zacher & Feldman, 2012; Briscoe, Hall & Frautschy DeMuth, 2006; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006), employee's ability to adapt to new work demands, diverse groups and different environments is becoming increasingly important. For organisations, this means that every effort should be made to remain relevant in this environment (Klehe, Zikic, Van Vianen & De Pater, 2011). This includes refocusing attention to attracting, retaining, engaging and developing key employees (Coetzee, Bergh & Schreuder, 2010). For employees, the changes in the world of work imply significant changes to the nature and complexity of their careers and their job demands (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2009; Klehe *et al.*, 2011).

The present study focused on the career adaptability variables that enable the individual to proactively adapt to the changing career circumstance and the way in which these attributes influence their engagement to the organisation. By identifying the relationship between these variables, recommendations can be made to enhance human resources practices, such as to inform engagement strategies, as well as in the career development setting.

The climate in the insurance industry has similarly reflected global changes (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). Since the 19th century, the insurance industry has seen immense growth and expansion, characterised by competitiveness and rivalry (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). These changes, along with world-wide economic conditions and demands, have forced organisations

Note: This article is based on the author's thesis of the degree of Master of Commerce in the subject Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa, South Africa, with supervisor: Dr R.T. Tladinyane, received June 2013, available here: http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/13742/dissertation_potgieter_m.pdf?sequence

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into rapid adaptation, including down-sizing, restructuring and outsourcing (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007).

From a human resources perspective today, employee engagement continues to be an important consideration. Because of the challenging economic climate, organisations now more than ever are deciding to restructure and resize, which has resulted in organisations investigating new approaches to maintain and increase engagement. Organisations need to strike the right balance between fostering and enhancing employee engagement levels whilst at the same time not compromising their competitive position (Knight, 2011).

The ability to attract, engage, develop and retain talent will become increasingly important for gaining competitive advantage. In the new economy, competition is global, capital is abundant, ideas are developed quickly and cheaply and people are willing to change jobs often (Sundaray, 2011). Organisations that do not provide good treatment for their employees will lose their talented people. In this situation, engaged employees may be a key to competitive advantage because, engaged employees have high levels of energy, are enthusiastic about their work and are often fully immersed in their jobs so that time flies (Macey & Schneider, 2008; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004).

Employee engagement is seen as a function of working conditions, specifically the job demands, job resources and the control that the employee has over his work (Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). It is also a function of personal resources; therefore, career adaptability may influence engagement, as suggested by career adaptability and engagement models (Rossier, Zecca, Stauffer, Maggiori & Dauwalder, 2012). Research on employee engagement has predominantly focused on the organisational factors that may influence it, whilst individual influence factors have not received sufficient attention (Rothmann & Joubert, 2007). Little to no research has studied the relationship between career adaptability and their impact on employee engagement in an insurance environment.

Background to the study

The contemporary workplace witnesses a decrease in stability and security in careers (Ferreira, 2012). The emergence of protean and boundary-less careers implies an erosion of a career with a single employer and involves frequent career changes (Lent, 2013) that, in turn, require greater levels of career adaptability (Savickas, 2011). Career adaptability is an adaptive resource enabling individuals to cope with career traumas and transitions in stressful and uncertain times (Ferreira, 2012).

As a resiliency resource, career adaptability relates to positive behaviour and the individual's ability to adapt with greater ease to stress and uncertainty in the work environment (Harry & Coetzee, 2013). Individuals with high levels of career adaptability are generally both cognitively and emotionally

more ready to cope with more predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by changes in work and working roles (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Career adaptability is seen to impact various occupational outcomes, including job success, job satisfaction, tenure and engagement (Klehe *et al.*, 2011). It enables employees to deal with changes in their work environment, such as redundancy, restructuring, outsourcing and job insecurity, all characteristics of the current business environment (Klehe *et al.*, 2011). Specific skills encapsulating adaptability, such as coping skills and self-regulation, relate to outcomes like engagement (Savickas, 1997). Lower levels of career adaptability are associated with employees who have lower engagement (Rossier *et al.*, 2012).

Regardless of the job demands and increased pressures of the work environment, some employees do not reach a point of burnout, but rather thrive on the pressure, finding pleasure in hard work and effectively dealing with high job demands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2001). Employee engagement is a positive, gratifying, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). It is further described as the meaning that employees find in their work and the discretionary effort and time devoted to work (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008).

Increased employee engagement may benefit employers and employees alike (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). Engaged workers are less likely to be stressed, more satisfied with their personal lives and more productive. Engaged workers would probably stay longer in an organisation than less engaged counterparts would (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). For the employer, an engaged workforce displays higher productivity, innovation, increased profitability, stronger client relationships and longevity within the organisation (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008).

Individual variables, such as adaptability, have been relatively absent in literature in relation to employee engagement. It is important to acknowledge that both organisational variables and individual factors influence employee engagement (Rothmann & Joubert, 2007). As a personal resource, career adaptability may influence employee engagement, as evident in the career adaptability and engagement models (Bakker, 2011).

Trends from the literature

Career adaptability

According to Ferreira (2012), adaptability is a predisposition to consciously maintain an integration of person and the environment and constitutes the attitudes, competencies and behaviours that individuals use to fit into different professions. Career adaptability relates to the professional duties, traumas, events, situations and transitions that individuals find themselves having to deal with, as well as the psychosocial strategies needed to cope (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

In the career construction theory, adaptability resources help to inform the strategies that individuals use to direct their adaptive behaviours (Stoltz, 2014). Individuals need to self-regulate in order to accommodate employment-related change and to also acknowledge that change can be driven by individuals seeking new challenges or wishing to adopt new perspectives associated with engagement in substantive personal development (Brown, Bimrose, Barnes & Hughes, 2012).

Career adaptability, as a personal resource, relates specifically to the agency of the employees to manage their own careers, make career decisions and have the confidence to adapt to changing work environments (Bakker, 2011). Savickas (1997) proposes career adaptability as a bridging construct that entwines the career life stages and essentially connects all perspectives of the career or lifespan theory. In reaction to the changing world of work, regulation skills and adaptation abilities, adaptability is regarded as critical for individuals to respond to and face the challenges associated with constantly changing work contexts (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Career adaptability can be defined as the individual's readiness responses and coping resources, which are used by individuals to plan for, explore and inform decisions regarding the future possibilities of their careers (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). Career adaptability reflects a process through which people build their professional lives in a dynamic manner and at the same time demonstrate the ability to handle changes both proactively and effectively with regard to the particular sociocultural and socioeconomic context within which they live (Coetzee, 2008; Ferreira, 2012).

Adapting proactively to a changing career circumstance reflects the ability to handle constructively the stress of a new or challenging career context (Hirschi, 2012). It is the readiness of the individual to cope with predictable tasks, such as planning, preparing and participating in work, as well as unpredictable demands of the organisation, such as changes in work and career (Klehe *et al.*, 2011). In achieving this, career behaviours, such as exploration and planning, are seen as complementary (Super, Savickas & Super, 1996; Savickas, 1997, 2005).

The four dimensions of career adaptability resources are concern, control, curiosity and confidence. These dimensions are used by individuals to support self-regulation strategies (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Career concern consists of the ability of an individual to be aware of and plan for a vocational future. It involves a tendency to consider life within a time perspective anchored in hope and optimism (Stoltz, 2014). Control relates to the responsibility of individuals to shape themselves as well as the environment and to face challenges with effort, persistence and self-discipline (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Career control rests on the belief that it is an advantage for people to be able not to only use self-regulation strategies but also to exert some sort of influence over the context (Stoltz, 2014).

Curiosity encourages individuals to explore alternatives of themselves and their environment and to see themselves in different roles (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Curiosity about possible selves increases people's active exploration behaviours. To explore information builds confidence in individuals to actualise their decisions and implement these in their life designs. Career confidence is the self-confidence in one's ability to face and to solve concrete vocational and career problems. Even in the face of obstacles and barriers, individuals with career confidence are able to stand by their own aspirations and objectives.

An adaptable individual in the face of change is therefore seen as concerned about their future, takes control of preparing for it, explores alternatives through their curiosity and pursues aspirations through established confidence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Individuals with high levels of career adaptability generally take a proactive stance towards managing their personal life and promoting their own well-being (Lent, 2013).

There appears to be a paucity of research on the career adaptability in an insurance industry. According to Savickas and Porfeli (2012), adaptability is the coping responses or behaviours necessary for an individual to handle the career change tasks with which individuals may be faced. Broadly speaking, adaptability reflects the ability to adjust to change, especially in unpredictable situations like in insurance companies.

The resources or dimensions of career adaptability enable individuals to adjust their behaviours to the changing needs and demands of the environment and are mediating factors of job demands and job resources. Therefore, career adaptability is also associated with employee engagement (Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Career adaptability is therefore an important construct to consider in this study as it relates to employee engagement. Career adaptability contributes to factors such as work engagement, job satisfaction, career success, a stronger connection and a fit with the organisation and a stronger sense of responsibility towards the organisation (Ferreira, 2012; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Zacher, 2014). Organisations that develop career adaptability will most likely promote the management of engagement strategies.

Employee engagement

Employee engagement implies that the individual feels strongly involved and connected to their work, invests more discretionary effort in their work and is focused and concentrated on the work they are involved in (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). It is further viewed as a function of working conditions as well as the personal control that the individual has over their work (Rossier *et al.*, 2012; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Employee engagement has been linked to job satisfaction, organisational commitment, personal initiative, prosocial behaviour, motivation and life satisfaction (Vecina, Chacon, Sueiro & Barron, 2012). Employee engagement appears to be

dependent on job and personal resources (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter & Taris, 2008). Job resources represent the characteristics of the job that are functional in obtaining career-related objectives, whereas personal resources are associated with resiliency and positive self-evaluations that enable individuals to control and influence their environment (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli, 2001; Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis & Jackson, 2003; Tremblay & Messervay, 2011).

Truss *et al.* (2006) define employee engagement as a 'passion for work', which encompasses the physical, cognitive and emotional components. According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement is the result of being psychologically present when occupying and performing an organisational role. Kahn (1990) suggests that engagement is a multidimensional construct where employees can be emotionally engaged, physically engaged and cognitively engaged. Engaged employees become physically involved in their tasks, are cognitively alert and emotionally connected to their jobs and hide their true identity (Coetsee & De Villiers, 2010; Olivier & Rothmann, 2007).

Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) consider employee engagement to be a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind, characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption. Engagement does not refer to monetary and specific state but rather a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event individual or behaviour (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The following dimensions are considered relevant for employee engagement:

- Vigour refers to the willingness to invest effort, low fatigue, high levels of energy and resilience and persistence in the face of difficulties (Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Vigour also refers to employee's resilience when working (Bakker, 2011).
- Dedication refers to the sense of significance the individual derives from doing their job, a feeling of pride and enthusiasm about work, feeling challenged and inspired at work. Individuals with high dedication strongly identify with their work and experience it as meaningful, challenging and inspiring (Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).
- Absorption indicates the feeling of being totally and happily immersed in work, often finding it difficult to detach from work (Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Employees with high absorption are happily engrossed in their work and fully concentrate on the task at hand (Bakker, 2011).

HR practitioners face a major ongoing challenge to enhance productivity in the workplace and must constantly strive to find ways of encouraging employees to be more committed to their employer and to increase the levels of employee engagement in the organisation. Sartain and Finney (2003) maintain that the reality is that HR needs to identify innovative and creative behaviours to build a dynamic, lively, exciting and profitable workplace where employees will love their jobs.

Those organisations that are not able to positively engage their employees in their work and in the organisation's values and objectives will not be able to realise their full potential. Investing in the conditions that foster employee engagement is vital for the growth and profitability of the organisation (Chughtai & Buckley, 2008).

The relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement

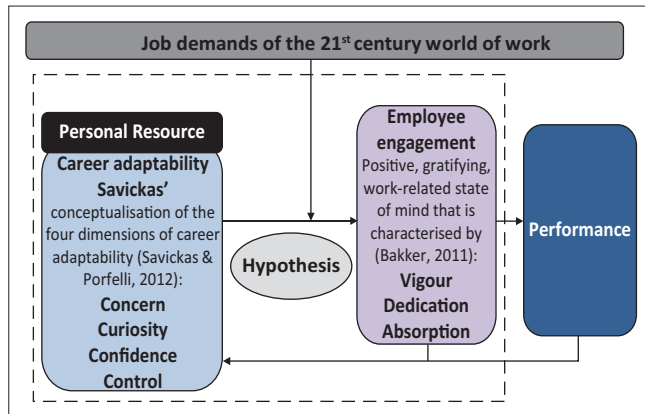
The various definitions of employee engagement imply that employees put energy into their work, feel involved in their work and concentrate on the task at hand (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Consequently, employee engagement can be viewed as a function of work conditions. This relates more specifically to the job demands, job resources available to the employee as well as the extent to which an individual has control over his work and career (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Guided by the job demands-resources model (JD-R), it is further proposed that employee engagement is a function of personal resources, such as intrapersonal resources of career adaptability, self-efficacy, optimism and career management (Bakker, 2011; Cotter & Fouad, 2012). Therefore, career adaptability may influence employee engagement (Bakker, 2011; Cotter & Fouad, 2012).

Very little research has focused on occupational guidance variables and employee engagement, especially in a work-to-work transition context (Rossier *et al.*, 2012). According to Cotter and Fouad (2012), few studies have taken into account personal strengths, such as career adaptability, when examining employee engagement. Previous studies have found links between career adaptability and positive outcomes, such as life satisfaction (Hirschi, 2009) as well as negative work-related outcomes, such as turnover intentions (Ito & Brotheridge, 2005).

In terms of decision-making, exploration, confidence, planning and increased career adaptability have been seen to assist in the successful mastery of vocational transitions promoting well-being and decreasing distress (Hirschi, 2009). Van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Bakker and Schaufeli (2013) view career adaptability as a crucial personal resource that enables employees to respond to the changing world of work and consequently career transitions. Career adaptability is further seen as one of the most important factors to ensure commitment and motivation of employees amidst increased environmental pressure, thus ensuring organisational success (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2013).

In their study of retrenched employees, Cotter and Fouad (2012) found no relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement despite the anticipated theoretical relationship. Contradictory to these findings, Rossier *et al.* (2012) found significant relationships between the two variables. Therefore, understanding the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement is increasingly relevant and important. Career adaptability may predict process-oriented constructs, such as performance, as well



Source: Adapted from Bakker, A.B., & Demerouti, E. (2008). Towards a model of work engagement. *Career Development International*, 13(3), 218

FIGURE 1: Theoretical relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement.

as occupational behaviours, such as engagement (Rossier *et al.*, 2012).

Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement:

- **Hypothesis 1 (H_1):** Career adaptability is significantly related to people's level of employee engagement.

Research objective

The present study aimed at empirically assessing whether career adaptability positively relates to employee engagement. The assessment of whether career adaptability is related to employee engagement may provide valuable information for human resource managers and practitioners to inform career development interventions and engagement strategies within organisations.

The next section of the article elaborates 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.

Research design

Research approach

For this exploratory study, a quantitative survey design was used to achieve the research objective.

Research method

Participants

The participants were a convenience sample of 131 employed adults within a financial institution (see Table 1).

Measuring instruments

Participants completed the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) and the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) (Maree, 2012).

TABLE 1: Characteristics and biographical distribution of the sample.

Characteristics of sample	Groups	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Gender	Male	36	27.48
	Female	95	72.52
Age	< 20 years	0	0
	20–25 years	9	6.87
	26–30 years	24	18.32
	31–35 years	32	24.43
	36–40 years	28	21.37
	41–45 years	18	13.74
	46–50 years	9	6.87
Race	Black people	30	22.9
	Mixed-race people	10	7.63
	Indian people	16	12.21
	White people	75	57.25
Tenure	1 year	11	8.4
	2 years	9	6.87
	3 years	12	9.16
	4 years	22	16.79
	5 years	16	12.21
	6 years	10	7.63
	7 years	6	4.58
	8 years	4	3.05
	9 years	3	2.29
	10 years	7	5.34
	11–15 years	17	12.98
	16–20 years	7	5.34
	> 20 years	7	5.34

The UWES is a self-rating questionnaire developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003), which measures three subscales of engagement, namely vigour, dedication and absorption. It comprises 17 items which include statements such as 'I am bursting with energy every day in my work' (vigour); 'My job inspires me' (dedication); and 'Time flies when I am at work' (absorption).

Respondents respond to items on a 7-point rating scale, indicating frequency of feelings and experiences relative to work, varying from never (0) to always (6) (Rossier *et al.*, 2012; Schaufeli, Bakker & Salanova, 2006). The UWES is scored by calculating the score obtained per question based on the response (7-point scale) per dimension (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).

The Cronbach's Alpha values of the UWES were also highly satisfactory with all scores between 0.80 and 0.91. The overall internal consistency of the UWES was high, at 0.94, indicating good reliability of the instrument.

The CAAS (International Form) consists of 24 items which the respondents rate on a scale from 1 (not strong) to 5 (strongest). The questionnaire includes items such as 'Preparing for the future' and 'Considering the consequences of my actions'. These items are divided equally to measure the four dimensions of career adaptability, namely concern, control, curiosity and confidence (Maree, 2012).

For this study, each of the subscales on the CAAS reflected adequately high Cronbach's Alpha values and displayed

high internal reliability (0.85–0.93). The CAAS had an overall Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.96, which indicates high internal reliability of the instrument.

Research procedure

Ethical clearance and permission to conduct the research were obtained from the University of South Africa and the participating organisation. Participants consented to voluntarily complete an electronic questionnaire of the UWES as well as the CAAS. Questionnaires were sent to participants via an electronic survey tool, accompanied by a covering letter explaining the purpose and voluntary nature of the research as well as confidentiality of information. Informed consent from participants was obtained by explaining the purpose of the study, confidentiality of data as well as the purposes for which the data will be used in a compulsory section to be completed in the electronic survey. Participants were not able to continue with the questionnaire if they have not given explicit informed consent.

Statistical analysis

A cross-sectional study (measuring all variables at a certain point in time) was employed to investigate the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. Pearson's product-moment correlations were performed to test the research hypothesis.

Results

Means, standard deviations and internal reliability for the variables of interest are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows the average mean score of the CAAS as $M = 41.93$; $SD = 6.10$. The highest means score obtained was on the curiosity subscale ($M = 43.51$; $SD = 6.93$), whilst control presented the lowest scores ($M = 39.51$; $SD = 6.64$).

Furthermore, Table 2 shows that the UWES had an average mean score of $M = 25.97$ and standard deviation of $SD = 5.44$. All subscales obtained similar mean scores, with the highest on the dedication scale ($M = 27.81$; $SD = 5.96$) and the lowest on both vigour and absorption ($M = 27.10$; $SD = 5.71$).

TABLE 2: Descriptive statistics: Career Adapt-Abilities Scale and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale.

Description	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's alpha coefficients (a)
Career adaptability	41.93	6.1	0.96
Concern	41.44	6.57	0.88
Control	39.51	6.64	0.85
Curiosity	43.51	6.93	0.93
Confidence	43.24	7.41	0.9
Employee engagement	25.97	5.44	0.94
Vigour	27.1	5.71	0.8
Dedication	27.81	5.96	0.89
Absorption	27.1	5.71	0.91

CAAS, Career Adapt-Abilities Scale; UWES, Utrecht Work Engagement Scale.

Hypothesis testing

The primary aim of the study was to empirically assess whether career adaptability relates to employee engagement. H_1 was analysed by performing Pearson's product-moment correlations. H_1 proposed that career adaptability (CAAS variables) would be significantly related to employee engagement (UWES variables).

Correlational statistics

The relationship between the variables was calculated by means of Pearson's product-moment correlations. Pearson's product-moment correlations allowed the researcher to identify the direction and strength of the relationship between each of the variables. As shown in Table 3, employee engagement correlated significantly with career adaptability ($r = 0.404$; $p \leq 0.01$) with medium practical effect size, indicating a strong positive relationship between the two constructs. Employee engagement also correlated positively with all the career adaptability variables with the exception of absorption. The correlations vary from $r = 0.22$ ($p \leq 0.05$) to $r = 0.476$ ($p \leq 0.01$).

The highest correlation was found between employee engagement and confidence as a dimension of career adaptability ($r = 0.458$; $p \leq 0.01$), indicating a significant positive relationship of medium practical effect size. Practical significant relationships were also established between employee engagement and both control ($r = 0.365$; $p \leq 0.01$) and curiosity ($r = 0.333$; $p \leq 0.01$) of medium effect size. A moderate relationship between concern and employee engagement was established ($r = 0.272$; $p \leq 0.05$; small practical effect size).

Confidence revealed the highest correlations with all dimensions of employee engagement, with vigour $r = 0.476$; $p \leq 0.01$; medium practical effect size, dedication on $r = 0.427$; $p \leq 0.01$; medium practical effect size and absorption $r = 0.371$; $p \leq 0.01$; medium practical effect size.

Overall, vigour had the strongest relationship with all dimensions of career adaptability. Career adaptability showed the weakest correlation with absorption ($r = 0.288$; $p \leq 0.05$; small practical effect size).

Overall, absorption yielded the weakest correlations with all dimensions, with correlations with curiosity significant on the 0.05 level ($r = 0.220$; $p \leq 0.05$; small practical effect size). Absorption and concern yielded no significant relationship ($r = 0.160$; $p \leq 0.05$; small practical effect size).

Based on the statistical results, H_1 (career adaptability is significantly related to people's level of employee engagement) is accepted.

Discussion

This study explored the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement. The correlational

TABLE 3: Pearson's product-moment correlations: Career Adapt-Abilities Scale and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale.

Variable	Analysis	Vigour	Dedication	Total employee engagement
Concern	Pearson correlation	0.295+	0.300++	0.160+
	Significance (2-tailed)	0.001†	0.001†	0.067
	N	131	131	131
Control	Pearson correlation	0.397++	0.348++	0.269+
	Significance (2-tailed)	0.000†	0.000†	0.002†
	N	131	131	131
Curiosity	Pearson correlation	0.349++	0.357++	0.220+
	Significance (2-tailed)	0.000†	0.000†	0.012‡
	N	131	131	131
Confidence	Pearson correlation	0.476++	0.427++	0.371++
	Significance (2-tailed)	0.000†	0.000†	0.000†
	N	131	131	131
Total Career Adaptability	Pearson correlation	0.429++	0.405++	0.288+
	Significance (2-tailed)	0.000†	0.000†	0.001†
	N	131	131	131

CAAS, Career Adapt-Abilities Scale; UWES, Utrecht Work Engagement Scale.

+, $r \leq 0.29$ (small practical effect size); ++, $r \geq 0.30 \leq 0.49$ (medium practical effect size); †, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed); ‡, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed).

analyses indicated a number of significant relationships between the variables that provide valuable pointers about the relationship between the variables of concern of the present study.

Overall, the results suggest that participants who have experienced higher employee engagement have better developed career adaptability skills. This relationship is in line with the theoretical relationship expected to exist between the constructs, as reported by previous research (Bakker, 2011; Cotter & Fouad, 2012; Hirschi, 2009; Ito & Brotheridge, 2005; Rossier *et al.*, 2012; Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2013).

The results indicated that respondents had experienced higher employee engagement when they were more concerned about their careers, had a sense of control over their careers, were curious about their careers and had confidence in their ability to manage their careers. These findings are consistent with similar findings by Rossier *et al.* (2012) in a Swiss sample where career adaptability was found to have a significant impact on employee engagement, mediating the relationship between intrinsic dispositions and work-related outcomes. The findings are supported by Savickas and Porfeli (2012) who state that the dimensions of career adaptability are utilised to support employees' self-regulation strategies. Consequently, career adaptability can be linked to positive organisational outcomes, such as employee engagement, as proposed by Hirschi (2009).

Confidence had the most significant meaningful relationship with employee engagement. This means that the extent to which individuals feel they are able to implement and actualise their choices and have the confidence to deal with their career-related changes (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) is likely to lead to increased engagement. Control (the ability of individuals to own their future) is seen to influence engagement significantly. Control enables employees to take charge of their future, to shape themselves and the environment and to meet changes head-on through effort, discipline and persistence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Employee engagement is further seen to be influenced by the extent to which individuals' direct energy towards exploring possibilities, their future selves and possible scenarios (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). To a lesser extent, the findings indicate that engagement is influenced by the individual's concern for the future, planning ahead and looking ahead to what may come next (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

The four adaptability resources call for individuals to be concerned about their future, take control over preparing for their future, explore different future scenarios and strengthen their confidence to pursue their careers (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). In relation to the initial definitions of employee engagement that were proposed, engagement is seen to be the meaning that individuals find in their work and the discretionary effort invested in work (Pitt-Catsouphe & Matz-Costa, 2008). It is seen as the energy that employees apply to their work, the feeling of being involved in their work and the focus which they have on the task at hand (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Rossier *et al.*, 2012).

Based on the findings discussed above as well as the aforementioned definitions of employee engagement, it is clear that the ability of individuals to adapt their careers to a changing work environment may well translate into discretionary effort and energy invested in their work, which is likely to influence employee engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Rossier *et al.*, 2012).

These findings are consistent with similar research which has found that increased career adaptability has assisted in the successful mastery of vocational transitions which, in turn, promote well-being and decrease distress (Hirschi, 2009). The findings also support the view that career adaptability is one of the most important factors to ensure commitment and motivation of employees amidst increased environmental pressure, thus ensuring organisational success (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Van den Heuvel *et al.*, 2013).

Conclusion

Implications for practice

The findings of this study have implications for managers and human resource practitioners who are responsible for providing career development and engagement interventions. It can be concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between the four dimensions of career adaptability, namely concern, confidence, curiosity and control, and employee engagement.

These findings contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the relationship between career adaptability variables and employee engagement, which have not been greatly explored in an insurance environment. The research also adds to the existing body of knowledge on employee engagement and engagement models. In terms of the JD-R model, career adaptability, as a personal resource, is discussed as another intrapersonal resource that enables employees to deal with the demands of their jobs, in turn fostering engagement and a high-performing workforce. This adds another dimension to existing literature on personal resources within this engagement model.

In practice, this research emphasised the significance of career adaptability in the 21st century world of work, which enables employees to deal with the changes and environmental pressures that they face. In practice, facilitating career adaptability skills can be seen to equip and enable individuals to deal with the changing world of work, whilst simultaneously fostering employee engagement within the organisation. Human resources and career development practitioners should ensure that career adaptability skills of employees employed in the insurance company are enhanced so that they can continue to be engaged.

The conclusions derived from these findings indicate that practitioners can benefit greatly from understanding the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement in order to inform career development and engagement interventions in insurance companies. Career development interventions should focus on developing career adaptability skills to enhance engagement levels.

Methodological limitations and for future directions in research

The sample was also drawn from a specific industry only. This reduces the power of this study and the potential to generalise the results to the diverse South African population. Given the exploratory nature of the research design, this study cannot yield any statements about causation. Associations between the variables have therefore been interpreted rather than established. By expanding the population group from which the sample is drawn to other regions within South Africa and different divisions within the organisation, more generalisable results and conclusions about the relationship between career adaptability and employee engagement can be rendered.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

R.T. supervised the research, assisted with the writing up of the article and submitted the article for publication. M.v.d.M. was responsible for data collection and assisted with the literature review.

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