

Determinants of career success for Human Resource Professionals in South Africa

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Abstract: The main objective of this research was to investigate the role of dispositional employability as a determinant of the career success of South African human resource management (HRM) professionals. A quantitative research approach was followed with data collected from HRM professionals ($N=155$). The results showed that dispositional employability was significantly positively related to the career success of HRM professionals. Significant differences exist between the dispositional employability of the participants based on their age. The results furthermore showed significant differences between the career success of the participants based on their age, job level, home language, educational qualification, ethnicity and years employed in current job.

Keywords: Career success, Demographic characteristics, Dispositional employability, Human Resource Management, Professionalism

1 INTRODUCTION

The nature of human resources (HR) as a profession requires from human resource practitioners to add value to the organization on multiple levels. Schutte, Barkhuizen and van der Sluis (2015) advocate that HR professionals should acquire competence in three key domains such as Professional behavior and leadership, Service orientation and execution and Business intelligence to remain attractive hires. However the new world of work requires from employees to take responsibility for their own career development. Career advancement and the development of the 'new' human resource career are thus individually determined and HR professionals may adopt certain 'dispositions' to enhance their employability and career success (Maslić, Seršić, & Thomas, 2014).

The main objective of this research was to investigate the role of dispositional employability as a determinant of the career success of South African human resource management professionals. Many studies have use both the concepts career success and employability as key words but no one study has taken the meaning of career success in its pure form and tried to find a relationship with regard to dispositional employability. Calls have been made

in both disciplines to investigate both concepts more intense and in line with each other (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008). Thus finding a relationship between Dispositional Employability and Career Success could help organisations better understanding the need for investment in HR professional to gain sustained competitive advantage.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Dispositional Employability

Employability has frequently in the literature been equated with dispositions such as self-efficiency and self-evaluation (Berntson, 2008). This triggers the belief that a dispositional approach to employability as postulated by Fugate and Kinicki (2008) should be viable and lead to great insights into the concept of employability. Fugate and Kinicki (2008, p.504) define dispositional employability as:

“a constellation of individual differences that predispose employees to be (pro)actively adapt to their work and career environments. Employability facilitates the identification and realisation of job and career opportunities both within and between organisations. Conceived this way, employability is a disposition that captures individual

characteristics that foster adaptive behaviours and positive employment outcomes.”

Dispositional employability is conceptualised as a “latent multi-dimensional construct” meaning that there is a higher order scheme underlining its dimensions (Fugate & Kinicki (2008, p.506). The dimensions are shown in Table 1:

Table 1 Dimensions of Dispositional Employability

Dimension	Description
Openness to Change at work	Enhances personal adaptability and flexibility. Individuals with this trait are likely to perceive change as a challenge and not a threat.
Work and Career Resilience	This trait encompasses positive self-evaluations and the ability to attribute successes to personal ability and effort. Views career changes as opportunities for learning and the pursuit of new goals
Work and Career Proactively	This trait allows a person to actively seek information and create opportunities for success.
Career Motivation	This builds on the concepts of learning and goal orientation. It links to persistence in doing and a willingness to meet situational demands.
Work Identity	Entails the definition of oneself in the career context. Helps individuals compensate by replacing institutionalised career structures with individualised psychological structures.
Optimism/Other dimensions	Proactive personality, Personal initiative and proactive behaviours.

The main idea underlining dispositional employability is that of adaptability, which is becoming increasingly more important in today’s dynamic labour market and work conditions. Accordingly any individual dispositions or characteristics that predispose people to proactively adapt will be beneficial to them and increase their perceived and possibly their actual employability.

2.2 Career Success orientation

The definitions of career success incorporate many different aspects and show many views on career success as postulated by researchers over time. Table 2 gives a summary of the most prominent definitions of career success.

Table 2 Definitions of Career Success

Source	Definition
Khapova, Arthur, and Wilderom, (2007, p.179)	Career success is “the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person’s work experiences over time”.
Bozionelos (2004b, p.25)	Career success is the “real or objective and perceived or subjective achievements in individuals’ work lives”.
Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller (2007, p.60)	Career success is “the real or perceived achievements individuals have accumulated as a result of their work experiences”.
Seibert and Kraimer (2001, p.2)	Define career success in terms of “the positive psychological and work-related outcomes accumulated as a result of one’s work experiences”.
Guo, Niu, and Yang (2009, p.1)	Career success is “the accumulated positive working and psychological outcomes resulting from one’s work experience”.

From the definitions above clear concepts that make up the construct career success comes to light. The first is the continuous referral to the positive side in that career success is a positive outcome of one’s career path and in essence an accomplishment which is desirable to achieve (Athur, Khapova & Wilderom, 2005). The second most prominent reference made in these definitions refers to work life and confirms

the notion that career success is rooted in career theory and the organizational context as a whole. The last component speaks to the duality of career success in that it can be perceived as objective or subjective successes.

Kim (2005) argues that there are five types of orientations toward careers that are common to the most widely used labels and interpretations of career success. These dimensions are as postulated by Derr (in Kim, 2005):

- **Getting ahead:** These refer to the traditional and typically visible career success orientation. It is characterised by upward mobility, advancement in status, opportunities and increased authority. Individuals with this type of orientation seek wealth and prestige.
- **Getting free:** These individuals strive for freedom and avoid any restrictions. They tend to want to experience different things as well as create their own experiences. Autonomy and independence is place high on the agenda for these persons.
- **Getting secure:** This relates to Maslow’s motivational level of security. Individuals here seek stability and predictability. They are usually very loyal to organisations and see their organisation as being closely related to their personal meaning of career success.
- **Getting high:** These orientations provide for those people who want to pursue technical and functional expertise. These individuals want to develop their skills and talents and measure their CS in terms of their ability to do what they like and do it very well. They strive to be experts in their fields.
- **Getting balanced:** The conception of work-life balance comes into play and is very important to people with this orientation. These people view their career success in relation to other aspects of their lives.

These orientations are rooted in the needs individuals have in their lives and will drive them to eventual career success be it objective or subjective. The way people shape their future in terms of their career will drive what they do to accomplish their career outcomes. Employability, as will be defined in this next section, forms part of the preparation for eventual career success.

2.3 Relating Disposition Employability and Career Success

Most studies that incorporate dispositions are in most instances linked to career success. Judge (2007) found in his study titled *Personality and career*

success, that most dispositions in the five factor personality model have some form of correlation to career success. Furthermore Seibert and Kraimer (2001) found basically the same results in their study incorporating personality and career success. De Vos, Hauw and Van der Heijden (2011) aimed to find and explain the relationship between competency development, employability and career success. The overall findings showed that employability positively influenced perceived career success. Likewise Guo, Niu and Yang (2009) found that that employability is positively related to career success. It could therefore be said that if employability is indeed a disposition as proposed by Fugate and Kinicki (2008) and should have some form of relationship to career success.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research followed a quantitative research approach using surveys to collect the data. Quantitative research is also a means for testing objective theories by means of statistically analysing relationships amongst variables (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative research is done from a deductive approach involving the testing of theoretical propositions by the employment of a research strategy that is specifically designed for the purpose of the testing (Suanders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009).

3.1 Sampling

The sample group was chosen from HRM Practitioners in South Africa. From the 500 questionnaires distributed a sample of 155 responded which equates to a 31% response rate. The majority of the respondents were female (65.8%), white (74.2%) with Afrikaans as their home language (58.1%). The participants were predominantly under the age of 50 years, comprising 76.8% of the entire sample. Most of the participants were in possession of a post-graduate qualification (72.9%) and employed on either middle management (31.6%) or junior management level (21.9%). The participants were employed for more than 10 years in their current position (64.5%) and more than 10 years in their current organisation (80%).

3.2 Measuring instruments

The Dispositional Measure of Employability, developed by Fugate and Kinicki (2008), was used to measure the respondents' orientation towards their work and their employability. The questionnaire consisted of 26 items and measured six dimensions: *Openness to change*, *Career proactivity*, *Career*

resilience, *Career motivation*, *Optimism* and *Work Identity*. Responses were measured on a six-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly disagree* (1) to *Strongly agree* (6). This questionnaire showed acceptable reliabilities in the South African context (Molefi, 2015).

A career success measure was developed based on the theory of Derr (cited in Kim, 2005). The questionnaire consisted of 20 items and measured five dimensions of career success: *Getting Ahead*, *Getting Free*, *Getting Secure*, *Getting High* and *Getting Balanced*. The respondents were asked to rate their respondents on a four point likert scale ranging from *Insignificant* (1) to *Very Important* (4). The questionnaire was piloted among subject matter experts to ensure its content and face validity.

3.3 Statistical analyses

Statistical analysis was carried out using the SPSS Program (SPSS, 2016). The reliability and validity of the measures were determined by Cronbach alpha coefficients, as well as exploratory factor analysis. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to specify the relationship between dispositional employability and work career success. A cut-off point of 0,30 (medium effect, Cohen, 1988) was set for the practical significance of correlation coefficients. Manova analyses were applied to test for significant differences between the dispositional employability and career success of participants based on their demographic characteristics.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Factor and reliability analyses

Dispositional Employability: Exploratory factor analysis using principal component method was conducted on the 26 items of the Dispositional Employability Measure. The results showed four underlying factors for the scale that explained 48.771% of the variance after application of Varimax rotation. The factors were labelled *Openness to change* (Factor 1), *Career Resilience* (Factor 2), *Career Proactivity* (Factor 3) and *Work Identity* (Factor 4). One item was deleted because of problematic loadings. All items show acceptable loadings of above 0.40.

Career Success: Exploratory factor analysis using principal component method was conducted on the 20 items of the Career Success Measure. The results showed four underlying factors for the scale that explained 51.231% of the variance after application

of Varimax rotation. The factors were labelled Getting Ahead (Factor 1), Getting Secure (Factor 2), Getting Free (Factor 3) and Getting High (Factor 4). One item was deleted because of problematic loadings. All items show acceptable loadings of above 0.40. The descriptive statistics of the measurements are reported in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of the measurements

Dispositional Employability	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
Openness to change	3,9565	,54627	-,107	-,296	,845
Career Resilience	4,0298	,54208	-,378	-,072	,721
Career Proactivity	4,1032	,65638	-1,025	2,168	,772
Work Identity	4,2942	,48687	-,376	-,373	,567
Career Success					
Getting Ahead	3,2222	,49577	-,543	-,137	,779
Getting Secure	2,9398	,64070	-,284	-,210	,666
Getting Free	3,5639	,44807	-,929	,274	,762
Getting High	3,2667	,70394	-,726	-,234	,764

The results in Table 3 show that more than about 60% of the participants display high levels of dispositional employability relating to openness to change, career resilience, career proactivity and work identity. The participants also showed high levels of career success relating to getting ahead, getting secure, getting free and getting high. All dimensions showed acceptable reliabilities except for the work identity dimension of dispositional employability. Work identity was omitted from further analyses in this research.

The results of the correlation analyses between dispositional employability and career success are reported in Table 4 below.

Table 4 Correlation analyses between Dispositional Employability and Career Success

	Getting Ahead	Getting Secure	Getting Free	Getting High
Openness to Change	.180*	0,054	.261**	0,065
	0,025	0,502	0,001	0,423
Career Resilience	.265**	.229**	.228**	0,113
	0,001	0,004	0,004	0,161
Career Proactivity	0,030	0,005	.207**	0,062
	0,715	0,955	0,010	0,445

The results in Table 4 show that Openness to change is significantly positively related to the getting ahead and getting free dimensions of career success. Career Resilience were significantly positively related to the Getting Ahead, Getting Secure and Getting Free dimensions of career success. Career proactivity was significantly positively related to the getting free dimension of career success.

The Manovas between Disposition Employability and demographic variables in this study are reported in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Manovas Dispositional Employability and Demographical variables

	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Age	,859	2,594	9,000	362,777	,007	,049
Gender	,952	2,523 ^b	3,000	151,000	,060	,048
Job level	,901	1,765	9,000	362,777	,074	,034
Home Language	,973	,677 ^b	6,000	300,000	,668	,013
Educational Qualification	,943	1,484 ^b	6,000	300,000	,183	,029
Ethnicity	,960	,683	9,000	362,777	,724	,014
Years employed in current job	,975	,648 ^b	6,000	300,000	,692	,013
Years employed in current organisation	,892	2,944 ^b	6,000	300,000	,008	,056

The results in Table 5 show that significant differences exist between the dispositional employability levels of the participants based on their age and years employed in the organisation. Post-hoc analyses revealed that participants aged above 40 years showed higher levels of resilience than those aged between 20 to 29 years. The effect was medium. Further post-hoc analyses showed no significant differences for years employed in current organisational and dispositional employability.

The results of the Manovas for Career Success and demographic variables are reported in Table 6 below.

Table 6 Manovas Career Success and Demographic variables

	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Age	,832	3,154	9,000	362,777	,001	,059
Gender	,988	,606 ^b	3,000	151,000	,612	,012
Job level	,784	4,244	9,000	362,777	,000	,078
Home Language	,901	2,674 ^b	6,000	300,000	,015	,051
Educational Qualification	,836	4,670 ^b	6,000	300,000	,000	,085
Ethnicity	,875	2,264	9,000	362,777	,018	,043
Years employed in current job	,921	2,099 ^b	6,000	300,000	,053	,040
Years employed in current organisation	,957	1,119 ^b	6,000	300,000	,351	,022

The results in Table 6 show significant differences between the career success levels of the participants based on their age, job level, home language, educational qualification, ethnicity and years employed in their jobs. Post-hoc analyses showed higher levels for getting ahead for participants aged between 20 to 29 years old than those aged above 40 years. Participants employed on operational levels reported higher levels of getting ahead and getting free compared to those employed on junior management level. Senior management reported higher levels of getting free compared to those participants employed as junior managers. In this study, participants having indigenous languages as their mother tongue scored higher on getting ahead compared to those speaking English as their home language. Coloured ethnic groups reported higher

levels of getting ahead than Black ethnic groups. As regards job level, those employed more than 20 years in their current job displayed higher levels of getting free than those employed between 0 to 10 years in the company. Finally the results showed that participants in possession of a postgraduate qualification reported higher levels of getting free than those with grade 12 as their highest level of qualification. All the above effects were medium.

5 DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this research was to investigate the role of dispositional employability as a determinant of the career success of South African human resource management professionals. The overall findings indicate that HRM Practitioners view themselves as having dispositional employability. This analysis showed that most HRM Practitioners define their career as successful in a more subjective than objective way (see Guo et al., 2009). Rather than viewing career success in terms of tangibles such as salary and number of promotions over a career path, HRM Practitioners see career success in terms of individual and internal criteria that is important to the individual (Arthur et al., 2005).

The results further showed that dispositional employability in particular enhanced the "Getting Free" dimension of career success. One can therefore assume that individual dispositions such as openness to change, career resilience and career proactivity will enhance the ability of human resource practitioners to overcome career restrictions and make their own decisions regarding their career progress (De Vos et al., 2011). This results of this study showed that participants differ significantly in terms of their dispositional employability and career success based on their demographic characteristics. More research is needed to explain the results as it can have a significant impact on the talent management of diverse groups in the workplace.

In conclusion, this study makes a contribution to the field of Human Resources by allowing practitioners in this field to manage their careers in line with the principles of dispositional employability and career success. Furthermore in practice the findings of this study could enable practitioners to make informed decisions regarding talent management and strategic human resources. This in turn leads to taking an

investment perspective on human resources that spirals up into the gaining of competitive advantage for the organisation.

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