

**The experience of career success: An exploratory study among
South African executives**

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This mini-dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Magister Commercii in Industrial Psychology at the North-West University, Potchefstroom
Campus

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Potchefstroom

November 2012

COMMENTS

The following specifications reminds the reader of the strategy followed in this dissertation:

- This mini-dissertation followed the Publication Manual (6th edition) of the American Psychological Association's (APA) prescribed format as a framework for the editorial style and references. This practice corresponds with the policy requiring that all scientific documents must employing the APA style as from January 1999, as stipulated by the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus).
- The study is submitted by using the structure of a research article. The specified editorial style is used as set out by the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology (which is mainly in agreement with the APA style), but the constructing tables were designed following the APA framework and guidelines.
- Chapter 2 is quite extensive, due to the large number of themes that were extracted and due to the richness of these themes. In order to capture and contain the multi-faced data, the findings are discussed and reported on in detail and this could not be compressed any further. This extensive discussion of the findings and the study is however only for the purpose of this mini-dissertation. The findings will be divided into shorter articles to be submitted for publication.

Throughout this mini-dissertation the participants are referred to as 'executives' (which is also reflected in the title). This is because the researcher decided on this sample using objective criteria to gauge career success. It stands to reason that not all of the participants are employed as executives (some are managers, directors and partners). However, for the purpose of this study the population of this sample will be referred to as executives.

Author's Note

The material described in this mini-dissertation is based on work supported by the National Research Foundation under the reference number, TTK20110823000025405.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study to all the people that have supported and motivated me throughout this process. Without them this journey would not have been as enriching, and I wouldn't have been able to reach the goals that I set. Therefore, I thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many years of hard work and devotion signify this Master's dissertation. This is a process in which various individuals exerted an influence and played a role. I would, however, like to mention and give special thanks to the following persons:

- My parents, Dirk and Alta, who encouraged supported me and believed in me throughout this process.
- My friends and family for their wonderful contributions through their love, support and encouragement.
- To the Lord that has guided and strengthened me during this challenging time, providing me with the necessary skills and talents to successfully complete my research project.
- My supervisor, Dr Eileen Koekemoer, thank you for encouraging and supporting me and for investing so much of your time and energy to contribute to the value of this study.
- To both of the organisations that willingly participated in this study, thank you for your investment and your genuine interest in the value of this research, and more specifically in your employees' career success. This research will be beneficial to many future executives, thanks to you.
- To the participants, thank you so much for your willingness, cooperation, time and open attitude during the interview process. Sharing your unique experiences have made this research so much more enduring.
- To the editor of this dissertation, Rev. Claude Vosloo, thank you for the professional manner and high work standard with which this mini-dissertation was handled. Your assistance was quite valuable.

DECLARATION

I, Suné Visagie, hereby declare that ‘The experience of career success: An exploratory study among South African executives’ is my own work and that the views and opinions expressed in this study are those of the author and relevant literature references as shown in the references.

I further declare that the content of this research will not be submitted for any other qualification at any other tertiary institution.

SUNÉ VISAGIE

NOVEMBER 2012

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SUMMARY

Title: The experience of career success: An exploratory study among South African executives.

Key terms: career success; career development; contributing factors; hindering factors; role of organisation; South African executives; objective career success, subjective career success; qualitative.

Career success has become one of the most central issues in the 21st century as the nature of careers has undergone major changes over the past two decades. The change in perception that has taken place in terms of the nature of work has led to increased uncertainty about career development as a construct and as a practice. Career success has therefore become not only of interest and concern for individuals, but also a priority to organisations as the realisation of employees' personal goals and success can eventually contribute to the realisation of the organisation's goals and successes. Therefore the general objective of this study was to explore the experience and conceptualisation of career success among South African executives.

This study utilised a qualitative research design with an exploratory approach to investigate executives' conceptualisation and experience of career success. A non-probability purposive, voluntary sample of 24 participants was drawn from two separate international financial organisations with offices located in Johannesburg. The data collection process was performed through semi-structured individual interviews and the verbatim transcriptions that were captured from these interviews, were analysed using content analysis.

The twelve main themes that were extracted from the interviews are set out as follow: general conceptualisation of career success; executives' personal meaning associated with career success; transformation of perceptions; future goals of executives; factor's influencing executives' career success; personality attributes related to career success; contributing factors to the career success of executives; hindering factors in career success; potential for experiencing turnover intention; consequences of career success; role of the organisation; and prerequisites for career success.

It is crucial that organisations be made more aware of the significance of executives' conceptualisation and experience of career success (as highlighted within this research). This is especially the case when considering future career and succession planning and mapping. Organisations should be familiar with the potential influencing and hindering factors (e.g. lack of opportunities, lack of support, organisational culture, etc.). They should be prepared to address the adverse impact that these factors could have as obstacles to employees and particularly for executives to attain career success. If these hindrances are not addressed it could lead to increased job dissatisfaction and consequently increased turnover intention. They should also be alert to the contributing factors and other factors conducive to career development (e.g. support and buy-in from organisation, or being given challenges and opportunities) that facilitate career success. By providing an environment that helps career development along, the experience of career success is increased. This can lead to various positive outcomes, such as increased job performance, organisational commitment, employee engagement, career satisfaction and talent retention. Talent retention is particularly important as one can gather from the data collected among the executives. Thus, in order to retain them as valuable employees, it is crucial to address and fulfil their career needs accordingly.

OPSOMMING

Titel: Die ervaring van beroepsukses: 'n Onderzoekende studie onder Suid-Afrikaanse topbestuurslui.

Sleuteltermes: beroepsukses; beroepsontwikkeling; bydraende faktore; belemmerende faktore; rol van die organisasie; Suid-Afrikaanse topbestuurslui; objektiewe beroepsukses, subjektiewe beroepsukses; kwalitatief

Beroepsukses word as een van die mees sentrale kwessies in die 21ste eeu beskou, aangesien die aard van beroepe die afgelope twee dekades ingrypend verandering het. Die veranderde persepsie oor die aard van beroepe het gelei tot verhoogde onsekerheid rakende beroepsontwikkeling as konstruk en praktyk. Beroepsukses het daarom nie net vir individue 'n belangrike aangeleentheid geword nie. Dit het ook vir organisasies prioriteit geword. Die rede is dat realisering van individuele doelwitte en sukses mettertyd daartoe kan bydra dat die organisasie se doelwitte en sukses werklikheid word. Gevolglik was hierdie studie se algemene doelwit om te ondersoek hoe Suid-Afrikaanse topbestuurslui beroepsukses ervaar en konseptualiseer.

Hierdie studie het gebruik gemaak van 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp. 'n Verkennende benadering is ook gebruik om vas te stel hoe topbestuurslui oor beroepsukses nadink en dit ervaar. 'n Doelbewuste, vrywillige nawaarskynlikheidsteekproef is geneem van 24 deelnemers by twee onderskeie internasionale, finansiële instansies waarvan albei se kantore in Johannesburg geleë is. Die data-insamelingsproses is uitgevoer deur halfgestruktureerde onderhoude en die woordelike transkripsies wat uit hierdie onderhoude saamgestel is, is deur inhoudsanalise ontleed.

Die twaalf hoofemas wat uit die onderhoude verkry is, is soos volg uiteengesit: algemene konseptualisering van beroepsukses; persoonlike betekenis wat topbestuurslui aan beroepsukses heg; transformasie van persepsies; toekomstige doelwitte van topbestuurslui; faktore wat topbestuurslede se beroepsukses beïnvloed; persoonlikheidseienskappe wat met beroepsukses

verband hou; bydraende faktore tot die beroepsukses van topbestuurslede; belemmerende faktore wat beroepsukses beïnvloed; potensiaal om die intensie van werksomset te verhoog; gevolge van beroepsukses; rol van die organisasie; die voorvereistes vir beroepsukses.

Dit is wesenlik belangrik dat organisasies meer bewus gemaak word van die betekenis agter topbestuurslui se konseptualisering en ervaring van beroepsukses (soos in hierdie navorsing uiteengesit). Dit geld veral wanneer toekomstige beroeps- en opvolgbeplanning oorweeg word. Organisasies moet beter ingelig wees oor moontlike faktore wat sodanige sukses kan beïnvloed en belemmer (bv. gebrek aan geleenthede, gebrek aan ondersteuning, kultuur van die organisasie). Hulle moet ook bereid wees om hierdie hindernisse aan te spreek wat verhoed dat werknemers en veral topbestuurslui beroepsukses bereik. Indien sodanige hindernisse nie hanteer word nie, kan dit lei tot groter werksomsetvredigheid en intensies om die organisasie te verlaat. Organisasies moet ook bedag wees op die bydraende faktore en ander faktore wat beroep bevorder (bv. in-koop in en ondersteuning van die organisasie asook bied van uitdagings en geleenthede) wat beroepsukses help daarstel. Deur 'n omgewing te voorsien wat beroep help bevorder, word die ervaring van beroepsukses verhoog. Dit kan lei tot verskeie positiewe uitkomstes, soos verhoogde werkprestasie, die organisasie se verbintenis, die werknemer se verbintenis, beroepstevredigheid en behoud van talent. Die behoud van talent is veral belangrik as die populasie van topbestuurslui in hierdie ondersoek in ag geneem word. Om sodanige bestuurslui as waardevolle werknemers te behou, moet die organisasie elkeen se beroepsbehoefte volgens die vereistes aanspreek en bevredig.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This mini-dissertation's aim is to explore executives' conceptualisation and experience of career success within two South African organisations. In this chapter the problem statement and a discussion of the research objectives are presented, in which the research objectives are clearly divided into general and specific objectives. The methodology that was used in the research study is explained and a synopsis of chapters is expounded.

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The past two decades have been characterised by a rather turbulent world of work, which is mainly due to the significant changes that are continually taking place both in careers and organisations (McDonald & Hite, 2008). Some of these significant changes are especially seen where individuals currently have accepted greater accountability in the process of negotiating their work conditions and experiences. Therefore both researchers and practitioners feel the need to re-examine all of the aspects that are related to careers (McDonald & Hite, 2008). Another reason for the need to re-examine the nature of careers, is the change in the profile of careers. The traditional profile of careers was largely represented by a linear pathway of upward mobility, where individuals progress up the organisational hierarchy or up the corporate ladder (Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003). However, factors such as increasing job loss, lateral job mobility within and across organisational boundaries and career disruption, have the result that individuals are longer ensured of stable long term employment or steady upward mobility (Eby & DeMatteo, 2000).

Therefore a new career system has replaced the traditional career. This system entails careers that can be seen as being boundary less (Arthur & Rosseau, 1996; Nicholson, 1996). Considering the abovementioned, Adamson, Doherty and Viney (1998) stressed the need to acknowledge the adaptable and evolving quality that careers possess. In this sense careers should not be seen as a

stagnant or passive construct, but rather as a phenomenon that is transforming constantly. The current literature that supports this new career system is therefore based on the following premise: these significant changes that have been taking place are influencing careers, and consequently the construct about career success (Adamson, Doherty, & Viney, 1998; Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderdom, 2005; Dany, 2003; Dries, Pepermans, & Carlier, 2008; Sullivan, 1999).

This argument is substantiated by the changes in the social sciences during the late 1980s, where “jobs” were transformed into “experiences”. The subjective work arena (individuals’ perception and experience) rather than the objective work arena (progression, status, monetary compensation) also increasingly became the focal point (Savickas, 1995). The foregoing insight therefore suggests the understanding that a career has an objective and a subjective side (Haase, 2007). Hughes’ (1937, 1958) framework of career success draws a clear theoretical distinction between the objective and subjective side of career success. A more detailed distinction between objective and subjective career success is that of Arthur, Khapova and Wilderdom (2005). According to them objective career success is viewed as the external component of career success. This includes the observable, measurable and verifiable achievements of an individual’s career situation, and this situation manifests in factors such as pay, promotion and occupational level and status (Heslin, 2003).

Subjective career success on the other hand is based on the internal components that involve the individual’s personal internal interpretations, perspectives and evaluations of his/her career success (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderdom, 2005). The change that has taken place in the world of work is also represented in the way career success has been redefined. The more traditional definition of career success reflects hierarchical advancement together with factors such as increase in pay, recognition and respect from others within a single organisation (Miguel, 1993). Seibert and Kramer (2001), on the other hand, provide a more modern definition that is more representative of both objective and subjective career success. They define career success as: “the constructive and psychological work related outcomes or accomplishments that an individual receives through his/her work experiences”.

It is therefore crucial to measure both the objective and the subjective side of career success. According to Hall (2002) the external components of career success, such as pay, increase in income and advancement in the organisation are considered to be the most commonly used and easily accessible indicators of objective career success. The straightforward nature of objective measures makes the gathering of data from existing records quite easy, seeing that most organisations store the data in standardised form. This fact ensures an extremely efficient collection process (Heslin, 2005). Traditionally, subjective career success has been measured in terms of either personal job or career satisfaction. Career satisfaction can be conceptualised as someone's positive psychological attitude towards his/her work situation (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). It is highly unlikely for individuals to perceive their career to be successful, if they are not pleased with certain aspects of that career (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999). Therefore, job satisfaction seems to be the prominent indicator of subjective career success. Even though a high level of job satisfaction may facilitate the perception of a successful career, the multidimensional nature of subjective career success cannot be restricted only to the construct of personal job satisfaction (Heslin, 2003). Career success as a concept entails actual and conventional career-related achievements that must be measured across a broader time frame than job satisfaction. It also includes a wider range of outcomes, such as deriving a sense of meaning and purpose from one's work, the ability to balance work and one's personal life – to only name a few (Cochran, 1990; Finegold & Mohrman, 2001; Hall, 2002; Heslin, 2005; Wrzesniewski, 2002).

As have been mentioned career success was traditionally defined around objective career success measures, such as compensation and promotions, especially onto management level. Studies that were conducted on the careers of top executives substantiated this definition. These studies have shown that career success was perceived in terms of advancement up the organisational hierarchy, usually realised through a series of promotions (Forbes & Piercy, 1991). Promotions generally symbolise progression up the corporate ladder and are therefore perceived as a sure sign of success (Brett, 1997; Hall 1996a). Eddleston, Baldrige and Veiga, (2004) are of opinion that personnel promotions are usually accompanied by an increase in remuneration. Managerial advancement also are characterised by an increase in responsibility, which can be expected to lead to an increase in compensation. Career success on management level has in addition been

found to correlate significantly with forms of compensation, as have been found by previous studies (Kirchmeyer, 1998; Schneer & Reitman, 1995).

As a result, employees that are often associated with getting promotions and salary increases are the individuals who are typically viewed to have career success. Due to this, societies and more specifically organisations have the tendency to measure employees' career success against objective and external outcomes (Ng, Eby, Sorensem, & Feldman, 2005). The present business environment does still reflect the significance of compensation as one of the main indicators of a successful management career. Nevertheless, it may not be all that people seek from their careers, as have already been established (Eddleston, Baldrige, & Veiga, 2004; Gattiker & Larwood, 1988; Korman, Wittig-Berman, & Lang, 1981; Sturges, 1999). Thus, receiving promotions and pay increases does not necessarily make employees feel proud and successful in their careers (Hall, 2002; Korman, Wittig-Berman, & Lang, 1981). On the contrary, it can trigger negative emotional reactions (Bandura, 1997), as well as alienation from the work environment (Burke, 1999). Korman et al. (1981) confirmed that the opposite was indeed true, when it was found that managers felt alienated from their careers even in spite of their objective career success. The sole use of objective criteria to gauge career success is therefore incomplete capturing the multifaceted nature of the social construct of career success.

When the focus is only on an individual's objective career success it may lead to incompatibility between such an individual's career goals and strategies and his/her personal values and beliefs (Callanan, 2003).

Subjective career success has increasingly become a focal point where individuals have taken greater responsibility for their own careers. In the light of these facts the career anchor theory of Schein seems appropriate as the theoretical model that underpins the current concept of career success (Hall, 2002). According to Ituma and Simpson, (2006), Schein's career anchor theory functions as a foundational model that provides insight into the subjective side of individuals' careers. A career anchor is defined as the one element that forms an integral part of an individual's self-concept which will not be sacrificed or compromised, even when facing a difficult decision (Schein, 1987, p.158).

Schein's influential work revealed eight main types of career anchors that act as drivers behind individuals' career decisions. He categorised these career anchors as: (1) security and stability which represents the need for stable employment and benefits; (2) autonomy and independence that represents the need to pursue career interests freely without being concerned about organisational constraints; (3) technical/functional competence that involves an aspiration to import enhanced technical capability and reliability; (4) managerial competence based on the need to be involved in managerial responsibilities; (5) entrepreneurial creativity that involves the desire to be part of the designing process and developing new patents and services; (6) service and dedication to a cause that are focused on the need to participate in activities aimed at improving the wellbeing of the society and the world at large; (7) pure challenge based on the desire and the aspirations to overcome important obstacles and actively be involved in complicated problem-solving practices; and (8) life style, which represents the necessity to integrate personal needs with those of a career.

The alignment of an individual's career orientation with his/her work milieu can possible lead to job satisfaction, as well as increased work commitment, while miss-alignment on the other hand, will lead to possible job dissatisfaction and turnover, or the possibility to leave the company (Feldman & Bolino, 1996). This principle of alignment/miss-alignment forms the foundation for Schein's career theory. The key assumption of his theory is that an individual can and will only associate him-/herself with one essential career anchor, with a very little likelihood that this focus will change. Individuals will therefore only seek vocational or career opportunities that reinforce this anchor and not undermine it (Ituma & Simpson, 2006). Schein's career anchor theory is therefore believed to provide a supportive and sound theoretical foundation from which employees' conceptualisation and experience of the construct of career success can be explored. This especially entails individual career choices and the unique responses of employees to the different career development opportunities which the organisation has made available to him/her (Ituma & Simpson, 2006). In a study conducted by Dries, Peperman and Carlier (2008), the main findings revealed rather significant correlations between their career success model and the career anchors conceptualised by Schein's study (1978, 1990).

According to Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, and Barrick (1999), it is therefore crucial that career success should not only be an issue of interest to individuals. Organisations also need to consider this construct to be a priority, seeing that facilitating employees' personal goals and successes can eventually contribute to the realisation of the goals and successes of the organisation as a whole. This fact has encouraged researchers to keep on exploring and trying to identify both the individual and the organisational variables that facilitate employees' career success (Heslin, 2005). Subjective career success clearly highlights the fact that individuals are unique in the way each person conceptualise his/her career success (Heslin, 2005). In addition to this, the influencing factors that play a role in an individual's experience of career success have a tendency to change over time, as well as across such an individual's career cycle (Heslin, 2005). These changes are driven by various reasons and can be categorised as individual-level influences and organisation-level experiences.

Individual-level influences are subdivided by Ballout (2006) into personal factors, such as the following: one's career stage; career choices; career interruptions; cognitive ability; individual success criteria; parenting demands; family structures; dual-career; mobility influences; demographic, human capital and motivational variables (Childs & Klimoski, 1986; Dreher & Bretz, 1991; Gattiker & Larwood, 1988; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Heslin, 2005; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz., 1995; Korman, 1980; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Schneer & Reitman, 1993; Veiga, 1983; Whitely, Doherty, & Dreher, 1991).

Organisation-level experiences are based on elements of organisational change, sponsorship and influences, such as organisational/industrial characteristics, organisational restructuring, technological innovations, mentoring, behaviour influenced by political beliefs and organisational practices regarding alternative work schedules and family support (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Heslin, 2005; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Judge et al., 1995; Ng et al., 2005; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Tepper, 1995; Whitely et al., 1991). Individuals contribute to the employment situation through their unique skills, abilities, talents and expectations (Ballout, 2008). Career development and successes can be seen as the result of a process in which individuals compare their performance and contributions with their perceived career outcomes. Thus, only when their

prior expectations and perceptions of career-related activities that lead to career success, have been satisfied, do individuals view their careers as significant (Ballout, 2008).

The last two decades have been characterised by changes in perception in terms of career progression and the nature of work. Therefore uncertainty among employees about career development as a construct and as a practice has increased dramatically (McDonald & Hite, 2005). The concept of career development seems to be in sharp contrast with various other issues around the workplace, such as: inflated unemployment rates; increased job losses due to reductions in the workforce or advances in technology; constant inequities in job opportunities; an increasing gap in compensation between skilled and unskilled employees; and poor loyalty between employer and employee (McDonald & Hite, 2005). However, these challenges make career development more relevant than ever (Herr, 2001). Human resource development practitioners and other professionals play a crucial role in career development among employees. Their facilitation of career development initiatives has a positive effect on employees. . Efforts to help develop careers have been said to lead to various positive outcomes. Some of these outcomes are improved work performance, loyalty and commitment of employees, increased retention and efficient succession planning (Gilley, Egglund, & Gilley, 2002).

Human resources development practitioners can utilise various initiatives to develop employees' careers. -Among these initiatives are input, such as providing appropriate career relevant training, implementing mentoring programmes and providing assistance with succession planning, which can benefit employees (Gilbreath, 2008). However, if these initiatives are to have strong, long-term effects, they need to be provided within a supportive work environment. Human resource development practitioners have a crucial role to play in creating such an environment by evaluating the working environment and transforming the organisation into a place that is conducive to developing careers environment (Gilbreath, 2008). Conducive in this sense means that the environment needs to enhance employees' careers (career contributive environments). In this sense conducive refers to a work milieu in which both employees and their careers can thrive and grow (Gilbreath, 2008). Creating a career-conducive organisation can be an essential strategic contribution that ensures long term employment, and improved adaptability and performance among employees. Organisations tend to exert a huge influence on their

employees, and therefore a career-conducive working environment also contributes to the overall quality of life of the employees (Gilbreath, 2008).

The research on career success that has been undertaken within the South African context has mainly been of a quantitative nature exploring various career related constructs. Some qualitative studies have already been done on a related topic. A number of these studies have focused on the challenges that women academics have been faced with and have to deal with in terms of achieving career success (Riordan, 2007; Riordan & Louw-Potgieter, 2011). South African studies that have already been conducted on this topic include investigations into the career nature of South African women. A study specifically conducted by Riordan (2007) explored the psychological factors influencing careers as possible antecedents of career success for women academics in South Africa. Significant correlations were found between career success and specific career psychology variables. Coetzee and Schreuder (2009) also conducted a study that focused on psychological career factors, however, they investigated these factors as possible predictors of career anchors, which also consequently relate to career success.

Another study, conducted by Coetzee, Schreuder and Bergh (2010), explored how career orientations influence individual's subjective work experiences in retaining valuable talented managerial potential. The study pointed to rather significant relationships between an individual's career orientations and subjective work experience variables. A study that was done focusing exclusively on women, in this case in the investment banking arena, examined the obstacles for career advancement or progression (Rowe & Crafford, 2003). The most significant barriers that were found to impede women's ability to achieve career advancement and success were mostly situated in the work environment. These obstacles included factors such as support structures, mentoring, networking and gender domination (Rowe & Crafford, 2003).

A majority of the studies that critically explore and investigate the concept of career success have been conducted in the international arena and therefore present findings from an entirely different context. It has been established previously that the literature on career success are quite limited, especially considering the unique nature of the proposed study. Therefore it makes the need and value of this study so much more evident. It thus stands to reason that the results may

be of great value to both practice and literature on the topic of career success. The contribution to the literature becomes even more important due to the limited or, if not complete lack of valid, reliable and standardised measuring instruments to gauge career success in South Africa. This was the main reason why the researcher opted for the study to be of a qualitative nature.

The specific focus of this study is on the career success attained mostly by executives within an organisation. Executives are generally perceived to enjoy career success based on their income, occupational level and status (Ng et al., 2005). Studies that prove or support the opposite viewpoint are quite limited. Therefore this study makes an essential contribution to help fill the gap that currently exists in South African literature on the said topic.

Considering the foregoing, it seems that the nature of individual conceptualisations is indeed diverse, fluid and multifaceted. It is therefore quite ironic that when investigating the significance of career success in the modern world of work and when investigating the future of career development, that an observation made nearly twenty years ago by Gattiker and Larwood (1988), still holds true (McDonald & Hite, 2008). They were of the opinion that career success is a concept designed and formulated in people's minds, without any distinctive boundaries. Although this study might not yield any definitive results on this matter, the exploratory nature of this study will endeavour to prompt new questions and launch significant challenges that will surely reinforce the exploration and action from the side of human resource development (McDonald & Hite, 2008).

The problem statement in essence

Considering that careers and related career success are quite significant constructs it has long been of considerable interest to career scholars, practitioners and especially individuals engaged in a career (Heslin, 2005). Little attention has been paid to the true nature of career success (Greenhaus, 2003; Heslin, 2003a; Heslin, 2005; Sturges, 1999). Therefore researchers from a wide variety of disciplines continue to explore the individual and the organisational variables that can either contribute to or hinder employees' career success (Ng & Feldman, 2010). A population that has been under-researched with regards to career success is the population of executives. That is mainly due to the fact that executives seemingly already have career success.

However that perception is solely based on objective career success criteria. Therefore it is critical to explore if it is indeed true. Additionally, the factors that lead some executives to be more successful than others are an interesting and important issue that have only partially been answered by prior research (Judge et al 1994). Research on career success, especially exploring executive samples is quite limited and only re-establishes the need and significance of this study.

From the overview of the literature and the abovementioned problem statement the following research questions arise:

- What is the experience of career success among South African executives?
- How do executives personally conceptualise and experience career success?
- Which factors influence executives' attainment of career success through either contributing to such success it or impeding it?
- What role does the organisation play in employees' and executives' attainment of career success?

1.2 EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

Objective and subjective career outputs are continually used in research to measure career success, presuming that individuals share a common definition of career success like for example their current salary, promotions and job satisfaction. However, very little attention has been paid to the different types of criteria that individuals utilise in their evaluations of their careers. In a study conducted by McDonald and Hite (2008), definitions of career success were indeed found to be multidimensional, individualistic and dynamic, which only re-establishes the strong need to recognise the diverse ways in which the concept is framed.

It is important for human resource development practitioners and researchers to gain more insight into the concept of career success, individuals' perceptions of career success. To achieve that, their perceptions of the aids and barriers that have played a role in their attainment of career success as well as their perception of the strategies that organisations utilise to facilitate career success, have to be explored. By identifying the organisational variables that facilitate

employees' career success and utilising it to create a career-conducive environment will make a valuable strategic contribution that will ensure long term employment, enhanced adaptability and performance and eventually contribute to the overall quality of life of employees (Gilbreath, 2008). Using a qualitative research framework to explore this might produce quite significant results that can be used in future quantitative research.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives are divided into a general objective and specific objectives.

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of this study is to explore conceptualisation and experience of career success among South African executives.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this research are:

- To determine the kind of experience of career success among South African executives
- To determine how executives conceptualise and experience career success
- To determine which factors influence executives' attainment of career success by either contributing to it or hindering it.
- To determine the role of organisations in employees' and executives' attainment of career success.

1.4 RESEARCH METHOD

The research method entails a literature review and a qualitative study. The findings of the research are presented in the form of a research article.

1.4.1 Literature review

The literature review contains a complete and thorough review of the constructs or concepts of career success, objective career success, subjective career success and career development. The virtual library of the North West University was first consulted, where entry was gained to search engines such as *Emerald*, *EbscoHost*, *ScienceDirect*, *S AePublications* and *Google Scholar*. Other journals that were used included: *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, *Journal of Career Assessment*, *Human Resource Development Review*, *Career Success Orientation*, *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, *Accounting, organizations and Society*, *Human Resource Management Review*, *Organizational Dynamics*, *Career Development International*, *Work-family Conflict* and *Career Success*.

The Ferdinand Postma Library (North West University, Potchefstroom) and the JS Gericke Library (University of Stellenbosch) were visited in order to access dissertations, theses, articles and books that were not available on the Internet. Popular media that included HR magazines and websites were also reviewed to gain recent and updated relevant information.

1.4.2 Research strategy

The sample that is included in this study consists of South African employees that are currently employed in positions of higher management level or executive level. Objective career success criteria were used as a framework for choosing the sample. These criteria include observable, measurable and verifiable attainments such as compensation, promotion and occupational level and status. These measures were used as they are typically associated with career success (Nicholson, 2000). There is currently either limited or a complete lack of significant information regarding South African executives' conceptualisation and experiences of career success. In order to ensure high quality data, in-depth interviews were conducted and provided quite valuable explanations of executive's experiences around the concept of career success. Careful analysis of the data gathered from the interviews provides a unique understanding of how South African executives define and experience career success.

1.4.3 Research setting

Prior to data collection a setting must be selected that is consistent with the topic being studied and directly linked with the research problem (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2005). The researcher must therefore recognise the most suitable and information-rich environment to conduct the study in (Polit & Beck, 2004). The profile of an ideal research setting is one in which (1) the researcher can gain entry; (2) there is a rich pool of people, relationships, and situations that all relate to the research questions; and (3) it is possible for the researcher to act as facilitator for the study participants (Polit & Beck, 2004). Keeping the influence and importance of this setting in mind, the study was conducted at two international financial institutions with offices located in Johannesburg. A private interview room was reserved that allowed participants convenient access according to their schedule availability. Comfort, quietness, temperate atmosphere and privacy were kept in mind when the interview room was selected and prepared (King & Horrocks, 2010). A 'do not disturb' sign was placed outside the door to ensure privacy and avoid possible occurrence of disturbances.

1.4.4 Entrée and establishing researcher roles

De Vos et al (2005) advise researchers to start the research process as unobtrusively as possible and ensure that their presence is not at all threatening to the participants. An employee is therefore identified to act as an inter-mediator (see Appendix A), introducing the researcher to the participants and consequently to the purpose of the research. This employee assists the researcher in the process by arranging a presentation of the planned research to the employees at their offices so that possible participants can be identified and the consequent interview dates and times can be scheduled. Fulfilling the role of the interviewer, the researcher is therefore also the facilitator. This means that the researcher is responsible for providing a non-threatening setting in which interviewees can feel free to explore their thoughts, perceptions, emotions and experiences (Ritchie & Lewis, 2005).

Nevertheless, active rather than passive participation is needed; the researcher needs to manage the interview process in order to ensure that essential and significant topics/themes are explored

in-depth without affecting the actual, individual perceptions expressed by the participants (Ritchie & Lewis, 2005). It is therefore implied that the researcher also acts as the research tool and can have a direct impact on the quality of data that is collected, which makes crucial for the researcher to manage his/her subjectivity (Ritchie & Lewis, 2005). In order for this to happen, the study needs to make use of reflexivity when striving toward neutrality and objectivity (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2005). In this context, reflexivity is a term that refers to critical self-examination of the nature of the roles that the researcher fulfils, as well as a reflection on the ways in which personal bias might come into play throughout the entire research process (Ritchie & Lewis, 2005; Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

1.4.5 Research participants

A non-probability purposive voluntary sample of 24 participants was used in order to ensure that the research objectives of this study could be achieved. According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008) the sampling used in qualitative research is mostly purposive as it is based on the researcher's knowledge and experience regarding the group to be sampled. As has already been stated, career success is usually measured in terms of objective career success criteria like pay, promotion and job level and status (Nicholson, 2000). Based on this, employees who seemingly adhered to these criteria were selected to be included in the sample. Although participation were voluntary, certain selection criteria were also used as a guideline or framework in selecting the participants to be included in the study. The following employees were considered as participants: (1) employees in a senior management position or higher, (2) employees with between five and ten years of senior management experience, (3) employees willing to participate in the research (willing to give written consent) after being informed about the purpose and procedures of the research, (4) employees willing to be interviewed by the researcher, and (5) employees who were prepared to have their interview tape recorded by the researcher. The interviews (data collection) continued up to the point where no new categories or themes emerged. This process was therefore characterised by a point in the process where data were saturated, where the researcher received a signal that the data collection process was complete (Kuzel in Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

1.4.6 Data collection methods

Data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews held at two separate international financial institutions, whose offices are both located in Johannesburg. In Semi-structured interviews the questions that are asked to the respondents are open-ended; multiple choice answers, or answers requiring yes/no, as well as Likert scales are not used. Some open-ended questions are designed in advance according to the interview schedule and some emerge while the interview is in process (Lunenberg & Irby, 2008).

During the interview, the researcher used certain communication techniques utilised by the researcher such as reflection, paraphrasing minimal verbal response, clarifying and summarising in order to encourage participants to elaborate on their experiences, thoughts, feelings and perspectives, (Neuman, 2003).

The availability of the participants determined the scheduling of the interviews. King and Horrocks (2010) are of the opinion that the physical interview space can have a significant effect on the results. In this study, therefore, three aspects related to the physical environment were taken into consideration were seen as important to manage the research efficiently, namely privacy, comfort and quietness. For this reason, the researcher secured a location with the least distraction and disruption. Additionally a 'do not disturb' sign was placed outside the room in order to establish the privacy of the interviews.

In order to facilitate the validity and success of the research outcomes it is important for the participant to be at ease with the process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). The researcher therefore started by welcoming the participant and introducing him-/herself to the participant in a warm and friendly manner, also reminding him/her about the context and the purpose of the interview. A consent (see Appendix A) form for a signature was provided. The issue of confidentiality was also discussed. It was then emphasised that even though a participant gave his/her written consent, this participant was allowed to withdraw from the study during any time, should he/she feel uncomfortable. The participants were then advised about the feedback that would be given to the participant's organisation. Participants were assured that their identity would remain anonymous. Still on the topic of anonymity, the use of a tape recorder for data analysis purposes

were explained and they were also assured that the tape recordings would be labelled according to the researcher's coding system in order to respect and uphold confidentiality. An interview schedule, prescribing the interview questions, was developed prior to data collection. All participants were asked the following standard questions:

- How do you view the overall concept of career success, or how would you conceptualise career success?
- What does career success mean to you personally?
- Do you feel that you experience career success? And please explain your answer
- What aspects do you think are necessary for each individual to achieve career success?
- What aspects are important for you or need to be in place for you to feel that you have career success?
- In terms of your career path, what are your goals for the future?
- What aspects have contributed to you reaching your career goals?
- What aspects might have hindered you in reaching some of your career goals?
- What role does your organisation play or what role do you think they play in your career development or attainment of your career goals?

Observation notes (see Appendix A) or field notes were taken down after each interview as these notes are considered to be a classic medium of documentation used in qualitative research (Flick, 2006). The essentials of the interviewee's thoughts and experiences, as well as the proceedings that took place during the interview were summarised in the field notes (Flick, 2006). Field notes should, however, only be used as an aid to make observations during the interview and should not make the participants feel uneasy or uncomfortable (Lunenberg & Irby, 2008).

1.3.7 Recording of data

During the data analysis, a high-quality digital tape recorder was used to record the data for the purpose of transcribing the interviews later on. It is important to keep in mind that during the interview process, the participants disclose intimate knowledge to the researcher, who is therefore ethically and morally obliged to adhere to the confidentiality of the data. A specific coding system was used to label the tape recordings as well as the corresponding transcripts. The interview schedule that reflects the order in which the interviews were conducted was also used as a guideline in this process. For the purpose of upholding anonymity, the tapes, transcripts and observation notes are stored in a secure place. This is crucial in order to guarantee that interviewees are not exposed or exploited by the data or the information they provided in confidentiality (Burns & Grove, 1987; Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2004). It is important to uphold the rights of research participants throughout the process and it includes their right to privacy, anonymity, fair treatment and to be protected from discomfort and harm (Burns & Grove, 1987).

1.4.8 Data analysis

The verbatim transcripts (see Appendix A) were analysed using the content analysis procedure. According to Flick (2009) content analysis is one of the established procedures used when analysing textual material, especially interview data. "Content" refers to any messages that can be communicated, for example words, pictures, meanings, symbols and themes (Mouton, 2011). The research process was facilitated by this method, where applicable and replicable inferences were made from the text, whilst the content and contextual meaning significant to the research were also considered (Struwig & Stead, 2001; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In order to start the process of analysis, the researcher thoroughly read the interviews several times, after which the responses of the participants were categorised into meaningful units that appeared as sentences or paragraphs. All of the meaningful units were then classified into categories of major themes. The co-coder (see Appendix A) later on assisted the researcher in reviewing and agreeing upon these themes. The researcher, with the help of the co-coder, carefully analysed the major themes, after which smaller and comparable sub-themes were recognised, explored and summarised.

1.4.9 Ethical considerations

The highest standard of ethics and fairness were upheld in this study as the researcher had committed herself to the code of ethics formulated to regulate the interactions of researchers with the people and fields they intend to study. Researchers are required to adhere to the principles of research ethics by respecting participants' needs and interests and avoiding any harm, influence or manipulation of participants.

The proposal was reviewed by the research committee of the North West University in order to guarantee that these principles would be followed (Devous, 2002; Flick, 2009). Informed consent is also one of the guidelines to be followed, as set out by the code of ethics. Murphy and Dingwall (2001) link ethical considerations to four issues, which were upheld throughout the research process:

1. Non-maleficence argues that researchers have a responsibility not to harm participants; the researcher has adhered to this by upholding confidentiality.
2. Beneficence is concerned with the principle that where human subjects are involved, research should yield beneficial outcomes, rather than be conducted for its own sake, which was upheld by the researcher by ensuring data and participant anonymity and providing answers to questions of value to participants.
3. Autonomy supports the importance of considering and respecting the research participants' values and decisions, which the researcher upheld by allowing participants the freedom to explore their thoughts and perceptions without bias.
4. Justice strongly supports the concept of treating all people equally, which has been upheld by allowing for equal opportunity (within selection criteria) to participate in the research and conducting the research without bias.

1.5 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 2 covers the findings of the research objectives and are discussed in the form of a research article. Chapter 3 presents the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of this research.

1.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The problem statement and the research objectives were described in this chapter, after which the research methodology was explained, and which was then followed by a short overview of the ensuing chapters.

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CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE EXPERIENCE OF CAREER SUCCESS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY AMONG SOUTH AFRICAN EXECUTIVES

ABSTRACT

The general objective of this study was to explore the concept of career success as it is experienced by South African executives. A non-probability voluntary sample of 24 participants, using objective career success criteria, was selected from two separate international financial institutions, situated in Johannesburg. A qualitative research design was utilised. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted and recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using content analysis. Twelve main themes emerged from the data. These themes related to general conceptualisations of career success, factors influencing (contributing to or impeding) executives' career success, personality attributes related to career success, the role of the organisation and prerequisites for attaining career success.

Based on these findings some recommendations were made to both the organisation and future research regarding executives' conceptualisation and experience of career success.

Keywords: career success; career development; contributing factors; hindering factors; role of organisation; South African executives; objective career success, subjective career success; qualitative.

INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have been characterised by considerable changes in the career landscape where social, technological, economic and organisational changes have been the major drivers for these changes (Castells, 2000). The traditional career that is commonly associated with quick upwards progression within a single organisational hierarchy, has increasingly been replaced by a career without boundaries, a protean career. The protean career can be seen as rather disorganised and unpredictable and is commonly associated with lateral mobility across organisational boundaries (Arthur, Inkson & Pringle, 1999; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Colakoglu, 2010; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996). Therefore it is evident that an evolution has taken place in the way careers and career success is defined. Miguel (1993) described the way career success has been conceptualised traditionally as the hierarchical advancement of an individual, accompanied by factors such as increase in pay, recognition and respect from others within a single organisation. A more modern definition of career success that reflects the change to a more protean type of career is that of Seibert and Kramer (2001). They view career success as constructive and psychological work-related outcomes or accomplishments that an individual achieves through his/her work experiences over time.

Career success encompasses both “extrinsic” objective success elements, such as pay, promotion and occupational level and status, and “intrinsic” subjective success elements, which are based on the individual’s own subjective evaluation or perception of his/her career attainments, such as career satisfaction (Abele & Wiese, 2008; Arnold & Cohen, 2008; Dette, Abele & Renner, 2004; Dries, Pepermans & Carlier, 2008; Heslin, 2003, 2005; Judge, Cable, Boudreau & Bretz, 1995; Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005; Nicholson & De Waal-Andrews, 2005). Generally career researchers are in agreement that it is important to consider both aspects, as the meaning of a career can only be understood if different criteria are taken into account (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom, 2005; Heslin, 2005). It is therefore possible that objective career success can have an influence on how an individual subjectively experiences his/her career success. It is thus also conceivable that the individual’s subjective experience of career success will have a direct influence on the development of his/her objective career success (Abele & Spurk, 2009).

Traditionally, career success has been defined in terms of objective measures such as promotions, compensation and management level positions. Research that was conducted on

top executives' careers revealed that the movement up the corporate ladder usually happens through succession (Forbes & Percy, 1991). Succession or upward mobility in the organisational hierarchy is considered to symbolise success (Brett, 1997; Hall, 1996a). A study conducted by Ng et al (2005) supported the argument that individuals who get promotions quite regularly, as well as regular salary increases, are the those who are typically viewed to possess career success. Therefore societies and, even more specifically, organisations have a tendency to measure employees' career success according to these objective measures, especially when it comes to employees who are in management positions such as executive positions. Considering the nature of the present business environment, compensation still seems to be one of the major indicators of a successful management career (Eddleston, Baldrige & Veiga, 2004). However, monetary compensation and promotions are not all that individuals seek from their careers (Gattiker & Larwood, 1988; Korman, Wittig-Berman & Lang, 1981; Sturges, 1999). Less substantial and less measurable subjective outcomes, such as a balance between personal life and working life and doing meaningful and purposeful work, are often more significant to individuals (Finegold & Mohrman, 2001; Hall, 2002).

Therefore, in the era dominated by careers without boundaries, the consideration of subjective career success has become especially important, as researchers are of the belief that in the pursuit of highly diverse and unique career paths, it is individuals' sole responsibility to define and evaluate their own career success with reference to self-defined aspirations, values, needs, standards and career stages (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Gattiker & Larwood, 1986). Therefore, receiving pay increases and promotions that generally accompany an executive's career does not necessarily mean that these individuals feel successful. Different aspects need to be taken into consideration, especially their subjective perception of career success (Hall, 2002; Korman, Wittig-Berman & Lang, 1981).

For this reason career success has become a priority and is of interest both to individuals and organisations. Individuals have related their sense of career success to various positive career related outcomes, such as life satisfaction and general mental health (Hall, 2002). Organisations are of the view that facilitating the achievement of employees' personal goals and successes can eventually contribute to the attainment of the organisation's goals and successes (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen & Barrick, 1999; Hall, 2002). Consequently, researchers

continue to identify and explore the individual and organisational variables that facilitate and/or obstruct employees' career success (Boudreau, Boswell & Judge, 2001; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Ng et al., 2005; Seibert & Kramer, 2001; Wayne, Liden, Kraimer & Graf, 1999).

Various studies have aimed to investigate how different variables such as gender, education, personality, mentoring relationships and career tactics are empirically related to subsequent career success (Heslin, 2005; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Judge et al., 1995; Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Peluchette & Jeanquart, 2000; Seibert & Kramer, 2001). Ballout (2008) sees individual and organisational variables as suggested determinants of career success. The first type of determinant, which refers to variables on an individual level, incorporates personal influence factors, such as career stage (Heslin, 2005), career interruptions, career choices, parenting demands, dual-career (Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Childs & Klimoski, 1986), family or home structures and career mobility influences (Schneer & Reitman, 1993; Veiga, 1983), demographic realities, human capital and motivational variables (Judge & Bretz, 1994; Judge et al., 1995; Gattiker & Larwood, 1988; Greenhaus, Parasuraman & Wormley, 1990; Whitely, Dougherty & Dreher, 1991), cognitive ability (Dreher & Bretz, 1991), and individual success criteria (Korman, 1980).

Individuals usually bring their unique skills, abilities, talents, knowledge, experience and expectations to the employment situation. Therefore, career development and success are seen as the outcomes or results of a process where those individuals' level of performance and contributions are compared with their perceived career outcomes. Only when employees' prior expectations have been satisfied (based on what they perceive to be career-related activities that lead to career success), do they become attached and committed to their careers (Ballout, 2008). Organisation-level variables or characteristics are the second type of determinant and explains how career success is affected by organisational aspects such as organisational change, sponsorship, characteristics of organisations/industry, mentoring, organisational restructuring, technological innovations, political behaviour that has an influence, and organisational practices that have an impact on the balance between working life and personal life (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Heslin, 2005; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Judge et al., 1995; Ng et al., 2005; Powell and Mainiero, 1992; Tepper, 1995; Whitely et al., 1991).

Taking individual and organisational determinants into consideration, specific variables that have been found to facilitate career success are: career insight, pro-active personality,

networking and mentorship, and skills, knowledge and learning (Eby, Butts & Lockwood, 2003). A study conducted by Judge et al. (1995) explored the variables that specifically influenced executive career success. The variables could be divided into demographic factors, human capital and motivational factors, as well as factors related to organisation/industry/region. The demographic variables that were found to facilitate executive career success were factors like age and family structure (Cox & Nkomo, 1991; Gattiker & Larwood, 1988; Gutteridge, 1973; Harrell, 1969; Jaskolka, Beyer & Trice, 1985; Judge, Boudreau & Bretz, 1994; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Pfeffer & Ross, 1982). Level of education, qualification, level of experience, job tenure and level of accomplishment were some of the human capital variables that were found to facilitate career success. The motivational factors that were recorded were the number of hours dedicated to work, work centrality and ambition (England & Whitely, 1990; Judge & Bretz, 1994). Ambition, was found by Howard and Bray (1988) to be one of the best predictors of career success. Size of the organisation, organisational success and sectors were the most prominent variables related to organisation/industry/region which facilitated career success (Brown & Medoff, 1989; Dalton & Kesner, 1985; Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992, p. 169; Gomez-Mejia & Welbourne, 1989; Whitely et al., 1991).

The main factors that were found that could possibly impede career success were family structure and gender. Research has suggested that in the case of household responsibilities, time taken away from work and time spent on these responsibilities negatively affect career success (Bielby & Bielby, 1988). In terms of gender holding back career success, some research suggests that women are treated differently than men and may experience lower levels of career success than men (Cox & Nkomo, 1991; Gerhart & Milkovich, 1989; Tsui & Gutek, 1984). The absence of contributing factors, such as having support, opportunities, skills, knowledge and ambition, can also be considered to be impeding factors.

Taking the above mentioned into consideration, employees' perception of their career success and the factors that influence it by either contributing to or impeding its attainment are assumed to affect their work morale, and consequently their intention to stay at the organisation or leave the organisation (Anastasiadou, 2007; Kokou & Ierodiakonou, 2007; Martin & Roodt, 2008). Organisations should therefore assist their employees in experiencing increased subjective satisfaction within their professional careers. Organisations should

especially focus on those factors that facilitate such satisfaction (e.g. reaching goals, progression, monetary compensation, and developing professional skills and competence).

In a study conducted by Abele and Spurk (2009) certain activities that organisations could utilise to increase the subjective professional success of their employees were proposed. These activities entailed: offering positions with greater responsibility, giving the appropriate recognition for work well done (Peluchette, 1993), enriching work positions, delegating certain important functions, and recommending training aimed at the continuous development of competence and professional skills (Simo, Enache, Sallan Leyes & Fernandez Alarcon, 2010). Another kind of activity that organisations needed to consider in order to facilitate employees' subjective satisfaction was providing the appropriate career-development initiatives such as career-relevant training, mentoring programmes and succession planning. However, in order for these activities to be effective, they need to take place within a supportive work environment. Such an environment can be created by transforming the work environment to become workplaces that are conducive to career development (Gilbreath, 2008).

Therefore in support of the foregoing, organisations pay much more attention to individuals' inner subjective definitions and experiences of success (as defined by their career orientations). This is done as a means of predicting these employees' organisational commitment, career satisfaction, motivation and performance. Such a focus has become a prominent trend within the business environment today (Coetzee & De Villiers, 2010; Havran, Visser & Crous, 2003; Kanye & Crous, 2007; Lumley, 2010). Organisations have also increasingly been paying attention to attracting, engaging and retaining their key employees as potential organisational leaders (Arthur et al., 2005; Baruch, 2004; Kock & Burke, 2008).

If they endeavour to retain their valuable and key employees, they need to provide them with appropriate incentives and career paths that are in line with the career values, expectations and aspirations that underpin the career orientations of these employees (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2009a; Järlström, 2000; Schein, 1996; Suutari & Taka, 2004). Should they fail to create conditions where the work environment and the employee's inner subjective career orientation are compatible, the result may well be anxiety, stress, unhappiness, job and career dissatisfaction, and increased turnover (Coetzee & Bergh, 2009; Feldman & Bolino, 1996; Jiang & Klein, 2000; Jiang, Klein & Balloun, 2001).

Overview of literature on career success in South Africa

Most of the studies that explore the concept of career success have been conducted across international boundaries (Arthur et al., 2005; Dries et al., 2008; Eby, Butts & Lockwood, 2003; Eddleston et al., 2004; Heslin, 2003, 2005; Gunz & Heslin, 2005; McDonald & Hite, 2008; Ng et al., 2005). However, South African studies that explore the concept of career success are rather limited, especially in terms of capturing the subjective side of career success and including examples such as executives who are generally perceived to have successful careers based on their income, status and occupational level (Ng et al., 2005). The majority of studies that have been conducted in South Africa has been quantitative and focuses mainly on the following: psychological factors in career situations as antecedents of women academics' success in their careers in South Africa (Riordan, 2007), career success of women academics in South Africa (Riordan & Louw-Potgieter, 2011), psychological career resources as predictors of working adults' career anchors (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2009), and the influence of career orientations on subjective work experiences (Coetzee, Bergh & Schreuder, 2010). In a qualitative study on career success done by Rowe and Crafford (2003), the main focus was on the barriers of professional women's career advancement. Thus, most of the South African studies that have been done to explore the concept of career success, have been done on women, and not necessarily on populations that include executives with perceived objective career success.

Considering the foregoing, the main objective that was formulated was to explore the conceptualisation and experience of career success among South African executives, particularly focusing on how they define and attach personal meaning to career success, determining the factors that influence career success by either contributing to or impeding its attainment, and determining the role of the organisation in executives' attainment of career success.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research approach

A qualitative research design with an exploratory approach was used to describe and explore executives' experience regarding the concept of career success. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003) researchers use qualitative research so that the focus is on observing and describing events as they occur within the specific research setting, with the sole purpose of capturing the full richness of participants' experiences of these events. Researchers might use non-numerical data, such as extensive field notes, videotape and audiotape recordings, as well as other non-numerical artefacts to conduct data analysis where themes and sub-themes are identified and categorised (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This is done with the hope that previously unexplored multifaceted phenomena will be discovered and grasped. When the main purpose of the research is to provide preliminary exploration and insight into a previously unexplored field, then such an in-depth and comprehensive analysis becomes quite crucial (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). The multi-dimensional nature of the concept of career success will require the use of the exploratory nature of qualitative research. Through this research, critical dimensions, themes and relationships within the data are recognised during data analysis (Neuman, 2003).

Research Method

Sampling

In this study, a non-probability purposive, voluntary sample of 24 participants was drawn from two separate independent, internationally recognised financial institutions. The offices of both these institutions are located in Johannesburg. Due to the specific nature of the research topic of this study, participants were selected based on objective career success criteria [i.e. pay, promotion, occupational level and status (Heslin, 2003)], and consequently specific inclusion criteria were established for participants to partake in the study. The inclusion criteria were set out as follows: (1) Employees who are in a senior management position or higher. (2) Employees with between five and ten years of senior management experience. (3) Employees willing to participate in the research (willing to give written consent) after being informed about the purpose and procedures of the research. (4)

Employees willing to be interviewed by the researcher. (5) Employees who are prepared to have their interview tape recorded by the researcher. Willing participants who adhered to the inclusion criteria was included in the study. The interviews were conducted until the researcher experienced data saturation. Data saturation plays a role in determining the number of participants needed. This is one aspect that distinguishes qualitative research from a quantitative research approach (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2005). According to Bryman (2008) data saturation occurs when the emerging themes have been fully explored and no new insights are being generated from the interviews. However, it also represents the establishment of categories in terms of their properties and dimensions, including variations (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Table 1 below provides more information on the demographic characteristics of the participants in this study.

Table 1
Characteristics of the participants (n=24)

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	13	54,20
	Female	11	45,80
Age	25-35 years	7	29,20
	35-45 years	8	33,30
	45-55 years	8	33,30
	55-65 years	1	4,20
Language	English	14	58,30
	Afrikaans	5	20,80
	isiXhosa	1	4,20
	Multi-lingual	4	16,70

Table 1 continued

Home Profile	Married/With a partner with children living at home	15	62,50
	Married/With a partner with children no longer living at home	1	4,20
	Married/With a partner with no children	4	16,70
	Single with no children	3	12,50
	Single with children living at home	1	4,20
Number of children	No children	7	29,20
	1 child	6	25,0
	2 children	6	25,0
	3 children	5	20,80
Level of position	Assistant Manager	1	4,20
	Manager	5	20,80
	Senior Manager	4	16,70
	Associate Director	1	4,20
	Director	7	29,20
	Executive	5	20,80
	Partner	1	4,20
Total years of work experience	1-5 years	2	8,30
	5-10 years	9	37,50
	10-15years	5	20,80
	15-20 years	4	16,70
	20-25 years	2	8,30
	25-30 years	1	4,20
	30-35 years	1	4,20

Table 1 continued

Total years of experience in industry	1-5 years	3	12,50
	5-10 years	7	29,20
	10-15 years	9	37,50
	15-20 years	4	16,70
	20+ years	1	4,20
Total years of experience in industry	1-5 years	3	12,50
	5-10 years	7	29,20
	10-15 years	9	37,50
	15-20 years	4	16,70
	20+ years	1	4,20
Years of experience in current position	1-5 years	18	75,0
	5-10 years	4	16,70
	10-15 years	1	4,20
	15+ years	1	4,20

Table 1 shows that the sample was representative mostly of English-speaking (58,3%) male employees (54,2%) between the ages of 35 and 55 years (66,6%). Although the majority of the participants had children (70,8%), 29,2% of the participants did not have children. More than of half of the participants were married or living with a partner, with their children still living at home (62,5%). In terms of level of positions the sample was more representative of participants from the senior levels, as was required by the inclusion criteria such as director level (29,2%), executive level (20,8%), managerial level (20,8%), and senior management level (16,8%) with a small number at partner (4,2%) and associate manager (4,2%) and associate director level (4,2%). A more or less equal distribution of total years of experience by employees was found, with 37,5% between 5-10 years and 20,8% between 10-15 total years of experience. Also the years of experience in the industry were more or less equally distributed, with 37,5% between 10-15 total years of experience and 29,2% between 5-10 total years of experience in the industry.

Research setting and establishing researcher roles

The research setting refers to the research field. The researcher must select a setting that is consistent with the topic that is being studied. It is therefore crucial to identify the most appropriate and information-rich environment in which to conduct the study (Polit & Beck, 2004). For a qualitative researcher, the ideal profile of a research setting is one in which (1) entry is possible; (2) a rich variety of people, relationships, and situations all relating to the research questions are present; and (3) the researcher can assume and maintain the role of facilitator in relation to the participants in the study (Polit & Beck, 2004). Due to this profile and due to the nature, and objectives of the study, two separate research settings were identified and included. This offered a larger sampling pool which could meet the inclusion criteria. However, before entry into the research field could be established, the researcher had to gain the necessary clearance and consent from the organisation.

In order to do this, meetings were arranged with the relevant personnel of the selected organisations. This was done to consider and clarify the purpose and procedures related to the research, as well as to acquire the necessary written permission from the key decision-makers to conduct the research. In an attempt to avoid disturbing the participants' environment, and ultimately distorting the quality of the data gathered (De Vos et al., 2005), an employee was identified from within each of the organisations, familiar to most of the participants, to introduce them to both the researcher and the purpose of the research study. In addition, this employee was also responsible for identifying possible suitable participants, arranging interview dates and times, and setting up scheduled introductory meetings between the employees and the researcher.

In preparation for the interview process it is important to note that the interview as well as its outcomes is shaped by its 'gestalt', otherwise known as the whole interaction of a researcher and participant within a particular context or setting (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Whilst considering this important factor, the researcher made use of secluded and private interview rooms located at the offices of the organisations, seeing that the space in which the interview are held can have a strong influence on the results (King & Horrocks, 2010). During qualitative research, specifically interviews, three aspects of the physical environment are especially important to manage throughout the process, i.e. comfort, privacy and quietness (King & Horrocks, 2010). Great care was therefore taken to ensure that the interview room was comfortable, temperate and quiet. This was done by securing a location with minimal

disruption. A 'do not disturb' sign was also posted outside the door to ensure privacy and to inform staff that there were interviews in progress.

In addition to these measures mentioned above, it is important for the researcher to make the participant feel comfortable. The researcher must appear focused and interested in what the interviewee is saying. This can be ensured by using effective interviewing techniques. The researcher should therefore be appropriately trained in interviewing techniques in order to ensure quality data collection (Boyce & Neale, 2006). In light of this, the researcher attended a qualitative training programme that focused on interview skills, more specifically on communication techniques such as paraphrasing, reflection, minimal verbal response, clarifying and summarizing (Neuman, 2003). Interviews as a method of collecting qualitative data can be prone to bias, and it was therefore crucial for the researcher to remain aware of her personal perceptions and potential bias throughout the data collection process, and how it might influence the objectivity of the research findings (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This process is known as reflexivity and it is a critical form of self-awareness where the researcher formulates an integrated perspective of his/her own cognitive world (De Vos et al., 2005). For this reason, after each interview the researcher set aside time to reflect. These reflections were captured in the field notes or interview notes to be analysed and discussed with the co-coder during the data-analysis process.

Data collection

Reliability in qualitative research can be improved by conducting a pre-test or pilot test of the interviewing design (Neuman, 2003). As a result, prior to the data collection, the researcher conducted pilot interviews to test her own level of interviewing skills, as well as some of the practical aspects of establishing access, making contact, conducting the interviews and measuring the quality of the questions formulated for the interview (Seidman, 1998). During the pilot interviews a range of questions (the proposed interview schedule) were asked to all of the participants. After evaluating participants' responses on these questions, they were adjusted, and the interview schedule for the main investigation was prepared and finalised.

Semi-structured individual interviews were used to collect the data during the main investigation. According to Bryman (2008), semi-structured interviews typically refer to a context in which the researcher has prepared a series of questions in the form of an interview guide, but is able to vary the sequence of questions in response to what is seen as significant

responses. The validity and success of the research outcomes can be increased when participants are comfortable with the research process (Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2004). Keeping this in mind, the researcher started the interviews by welcoming the participants and making them feel at ease. Thereafter an overview was provided of the context and the purpose of the research study. Future procedures regarding the research were discussed briefly, such as data analysis and feedback. Special care was taken to assure interviewees that their anonymity would be upheld and respected throughout the entire process.

During the interviews a series of standard questions were asked to all of the participants. The *first question* was, ‘How do you view the overall concept of career success, or how would you conceptualise career success?’ Considering the answer to this question, the *second question* was asked, ‘What does career success mean to you personally?’ Based on this question the *third question* was, ‘Do you feel that you experience career success?’ Whether interviewees answered yes or no, they were asked to explain their answer. Then they were asked the *fourth question*, ‘What aspects do you think are essential for each individual to achieve career success?’ Related to this question the *fifth question* was the following, ‘What aspects are important for you or need to be in place for you to feel that you have career success? To elucidate the question, interviewees were given an example. The *sixth question* was: ‘In terms of your career path, what are your goals for the future?’ They were then asked the *seventh question*, ‘What aspects have contributed to you reaching your career goals?’ And related to this question the *eighth question* wanted to establish, ‘What aspects might have hindered you in reaching some of your career goals?’ Thereafter the last question, the *ninth question* concluded the interview, ‘What role does your organisation play or what role do you think they play in your career development or attainment of your career goals?’

The researcher utilised the communication skills and techniques that were gained during the qualitative training sessions, such as minimal verbal response, paraphrasing, reflection, clarification and summarising. This was done to encourage participants to elaborate on their thoughts, feelings, perspectives and experiences (Neuman, 2003).

Recording of data

Before the interviews commenced, the use of a digital recorder for capturing data was explained. Informed consent was obtained from all of the participants for such interviews. The researcher informed the participants that they could withdraw from the study during any

time, should they feel uncomfortable to continue, without fear of prosecution, even though they have given written consent. Each of the interviews was digitally recorded and the researcher also wrote comprehensive field notes after each interview was conducted. Field notes, also known as observation notes, are notes taken down immediately after the interview. In these notes the researcher writes down impressions that help him/her to remember and explore the process of the interview (De Vos et al., 2005). The researcher's notes were categorised according to three types: methodology notes, personal notes, and theoretical notes (Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2004).

- Methodology notes are used to reflect possible influences on the research process such as the environment, interruptions, comfort levels, etcetera (Du Plessis, Koen and Watson, 2011).
- Personal notes refer to the researcher's own experience during the interview, her emotional and physiological state included, as well her perception of the participant, which can be based on aspects such as body language or behaviour.
- Theoretical notes are compiled mainly from suggestions for future interviews, such as remarks on factors contributing to the content of the interview, questions that were adapted, as well as emerging themes/topics and reminders.

The field notes therefore gave more depth and detail to the research findings by providing a written account of the researcher's experience through sight and hearing, and thought during the interview.

After the interviews were completed, all of the recordings were transcribed verbatim and prepared for data analysis at a later stage. The comprehensive field notes were also prepared to be used in later data analyses. Upholding confidentiality is critical and therefore related field notes, transcriptions and recordings were all labelled. This was done by a coding process that corresponded with the interview plan. This meant for example that one organisation was coded as A and another organisation was coded as B. In light of this the first interview that was conducted involving organisation A was coded as 1A and the second interview 2A; and the first interview that was conducted involving organisation B was coded as 1B and the second interview as 2B. These codes were known only to the researcher who handled the information gained from the interviews.

Anonymity of the tapes' content, as well as of the transcription and observation notes, was/will be upheld for this purpose and was/will be stored in a secure place. This is necessary to guarantee that interviewees are not exposed or exploited by the researcher revealing personal data or the information they provided in confidentiality (Burns & Grove, 1987; Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2004). Neuman (2003) emphasises the importance to uphold the rights of the participants to the research throughout the process and it includes their right to privacy, anonymity, fair treatment and to be protected from discomfort and harm.

Data analysis

After the collection and recording of data the verbatim transcripts were analysed using content analysis as a procedure. According to Flick (2009) content analysis is one of the established procedures for analysing textual material, particularly interviewing data. 'Content' refers to words, pictures, meanings, symbols and themes or any message that can be communicated (Mouton, 2001). This method facilitated the research process by making applicable and replicable assumptions from the text, while also considering the content and contextual meaning crucial to the research (Struwig & Stead, 2001). In the first step the researcher identifies a body of material to analyse and then creates a system to record specific aspects of it. This system might include counting the number of times certain words or themes that emerge during the interview. The last step entails reporting what was found in the material and the information that was subtracted from the content is presented in tables or graphs. This technique allows the researcher to explore the features of the content of large amounts of material that would otherwise go unnoticed (Neuman, 2003).

To start the analysis, the researcher thoroughly read the transcribed interviews, several times, after which the responses of the participants were categorised into meaningful units that were presented as sentences or paragraphs. The units were then divided into clusters of main themes. Carefully analysing the main themes, smaller comparable sub-themes were recognised and summarised. These sub-themes were presented in the tables to follow, highlighting the research findings.

The co-coder, considered as an expert in the field of qualitative research and in the relevant subject field, provided assistance throughout this process. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004) the co-coder or co-researcher's role is to contribute to the reliability and validity of the data, enhancing the overall quality of the data by collaborating with the

researcher on identifying and establishing the themes and sub-themes. Although the researcher took detailed field notes after each of the interviews to apply later in the data analysis process, no new significant meaning emerged. According to De Vos et al. (2005) field notes are not always used in the final report. The inclusion of these notes is rather justified on the basis of their content and the value that they add.

Strategies employed to ensure quality data

Qualitative research tends to assume that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study. Four criteria are applied to judge the validity and reliability of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

- Credibility is important in terms of whether participants can judge legitimately whether the results are credible and believable.
- Transferability is necessary in order to determine whether the results obtained can be generalised to other settings or contexts.
- Dependability is concerned with describing the changes that occurred in the research setting and how these changes influenced the way in which the researcher approached the study.
- Conformability refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed and substantiated by others (Appleton, 1995; Bryman, 2008; De Vos et al., 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The quality data principles mentioned above were upheld in the research. To ensure that these principles were maintained throughout the research process, particular methods were employed. (1) The researcher received pre-pilot interview training to enhance her interviewing skills and confidence; following the training, the pilot interviews were conducted to review the interview guide or schedule and to provide the researcher with exposure to interviews and practice in interviewing. (2) Every step in the research process was illustrated comprehensively, and the underlying rationale of everything was explained; this was done to ensure that objectivity was maintained throughout the data collection process. (3) The researcher took detailed field notes after each of the interviews, in order to add detail and depth, and to better the quality of the data. (4) An expert researcher was approached as an independent co-coder to assist the researcher in reviewing the main themes

and sub-themes that were captured and to corroborate agreement between researchers. (5) Finally, the results were discussed in a presentation of the research findings at a feedback session to management.

Reporting

Each one of the main themes that emerged from the data, as was agreed upon by the researcher and the co-coder, will be described separately in the findings that follow. Participants' perceptions captured in the main themes are portrayed and explained with the help of selected quotes (interview excerpts). In this way the classic responses were described, as well as the more multifaceted responses that require more detailed explanations. Some of the interview excerpts were modified, by adjusting some of the words, without affecting the meaning of the excerpts. This was done to achieve a more compressed statement and also to help readers understand the excerpts better (De Vos et al., 2005).

FINDINGS

Twelve main themes were identified and captured from the data analysis of the interviews, where the first few themes reflect the interviewees' conceptualisation and experience of career success. Themes on factors that influence, hinder or contribute to career success are also discussed. This is followed by themes related to personality attributes as factors determining career success. Other factors that are discussed are the potential to experience turnover intention (potential to consider leaving the organisation), consequences of career success and the role of the organisation. All these themes and their subsequent sub-themes are described below more thoroughly. For descriptive purposes the associated meaning and explanations are also presented in the following tables.

Theme 1: General Conceptualisation of career success

The first theme that was extracted from the interviews was the participants' general conceptualisation or view of success in their career. Participants' responses reflected various different viewpoints on the concept of career success, and these general conceptualisations/views are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2

General conceptualisation of career success

Sub-themes	Associated meaning/Explanation
<i>Achievement of personal goals</i>	The achievement of personal goals, objectives and aspirations; the establishment and achievement of different goals; the achievement of different personal goals for different individuals.
<i>Movement up the corporate ladder</i>	Moving from a junior role into a more senior role within the organisation; the achievement of certain organisational levels; having aspirations to move up in the organisational ranks and then obtaining those positions/ranks; progressing in organisational ranks/positions; getting promoted to a higher level in the organisation.
<i>Exceeding personal and organisational expectations</i>	Performing above and beyond organisational and personal expectations; achieving beyond of your set personal goals or aspirations; exceeding organisational expectations in terms of performance or productivity; achieving more than is expected.
<i>Contributing to the organisation (business goals)</i>	Contributing or adding value to the organisation; contributing to the organisation's success through achieving organisation's goals; providing the organisation with acceptable results.
<i>Experiencing satisfaction</i>	Gaining satisfaction from work; being happy in and enjoying your work; experiencing job satisfaction; experiencing personal fulfilment and achieving life fulfilling success.
<i>Growth and development</i>	Having opportunities for further growth and development; experiencing personal growth and development; having opportunities for career growth and personal growth within the organisation.
<i>Monetary compensation</i>	Having an increase in monetary benefits such as salary, bonuses, income and financial resources; afforded opportunities to make more money; provided opportunities to become financially more independent.
<i>Possessing professional titles or positions in the organisations</i>	Possessing a prominent title or position within the organisation (e.g. Managerial Director or Chief Executive Officer (MD or CEO); having the power to influence important decisions; being at the forefront of the organisation; having a widely acknowledged reputation within the organisation.

From the interviews it became clear that participants held certain views of what career success entails in general. One of the most prominent general views held by the majority of participants was the *achievement of personal goals*. Participants mentioned that setting and achieving personal goals and aspirations were crucial to achieving career success. Whilst

expressing this viewpoint, they also mentioned that individuals have different goals based on individual differences, and therefore career success would mean different things to different individuals. However, career success was not only conceptualised as the achievement of personal goals, but even more specifically, *to exceed both personal and organisational expectations* by performing above and beyond of what is expected. Participants stressed the importance of this by emphasising the *contribution one must make to the organisation*. In exceeding expectations, not only is the individual *contributing to the organisation*, but he/she is also adding value to the business. The following quotes illustrate some of these general views of career success:

I think that career success is an individual thing – so I think it’s not something that you can get out of a textbook; therefore it depends on the individual and his/her aspirations. (Participant 2A)

I think if you just do what you’re there for, or meant to do every day, you’re not really going to succeed or grow in your position – so it’s all about exceeding the expectations. That’s probably the word I’m after. (Participant 10A)

Some of the participants mentioned that career success to them, meant *moving up the corporate ladder* and progressing from junior positions into more senior positions in the organisation, while other participants saw having the opportunities to grow both in their career and personally as more significant than merely progressing through the organisational levels.

In addition, some participants also described the *experience of satisfaction* as important and argued that it’s about being happy in your job and experiencing personal and job satisfaction. Interestingly, only a small number of the participants mentioned *monetary compensation* to be viewed in terms of career success; however it is still significant as participants referred to it in the context of being able to provide financially for their families.

Although it became evident from the responses that each individual has a unique way of defining career success, general conceptualisations/views of career success do exist, however the specific meaning and views that executives attach to career success was also prominent. Therefore, it was categorised as theme two, executives’ personal meaning associated with career success.

Theme 2: The personal meaning executives attach to career success

As opposed to the more general conceptualisations of career success reflected in theme 1, executives do also attach unique personal views and meaning to their own career success, which are reflected in Table 3 below.

Table 3
The personal meaning executives' attach to career success

Sub-themes	Associated meaning/Explanation
<i>Being in a leadership position; opportunity to develop employees</i>	Being responsible for the effective management of employees; having the opportunity to build leadership into the organisation; having the autonomy to make and influence decisions; setting a good example for employees by behaving responsibly/ethically; being involved in the growth and development of employees; acting as an advisor or enabler for employees.
<i>Journey of progression</i>	Experiencing career success as a rewarding journey; seeing it as a long term vision/plan; viewing it as an ongoing process of progress towards achieving goals; not perceiving career success as the ultimate state or destination, but as a life-long journey.
<i>Alignment of personal goals with organisation's goals</i>	Experiencing an alignment of personal goals with the goals of the organisation; alignment of personal expectations with the expectations of the organisation; interaction between personal objectives and business objectives; balancing and integrating personal goals and business goals.
<i>Being known as an expert in your field of work</i>	Being the best in a particular sphere of expertise; being considered as an important source of information; having a reputable status in your work environment and field; it's more than a prominent title or position; having a reputable status based on unique skills and abilities.
<i>Receiving feedback and recognition</i>	Receiving appraisals for good performance; receiving acknowledgment for performance; being shown gratitude for your efforts and contribution; getting recognised for the contribution you make or value you add to the organisation.
<i>Association with successful brands</i>	Being able to work for or being associated with 'blue chip companies' ¹ ; working for organisations that offer international opportunities and exposure; being associated with companies that have well established brands.
<i>Adding value to the organisation</i>	Delivering work of a high standard; contributing to the growth and success of the organisation; making a meaningful contribution to both the business imperatives and the lives of employees; bringing new skills to the organisation.

Table 3 continued

<i>Personal growth/ development and growth through progression</i>	Achievement of personal growth and development through career growth and advancement; acquiring new skills and experience with each promotion; reaching fullest potential through progression; achieving personal maturation through career advancement.
<i>Satisfaction and balance in life</i>	Gaining purpose and meaning from work; experiencing job satisfaction and personal fulfilment in work; doing a job that makes you happy; being able to live a balanced life; acknowledging the importance of striking a balance between work and everyday life.
<i>Monetary compensation</i>	Monetary compensation, such as salary, increases or bonuses for performance; a monetary recognition component for effort and value; having a disposable income; money provides a sense of job security and stability.
<i>Moving up the corporate ladder (progression up to certain level)</i>	Moving forward with your career up to the point where you want to take it; progressing hierarchically only to a specific level within the organisation that's in line with your unique personal goal or career goal; achieving a desired level within the organisation.
<i>Achieving personal goals in set timeframe and exceeding expectations</i>	Achieving personal set goals within a certain age/stage (timeframe), and in the process achieving more than was set out to achieve; achieving above and beyond what was set out in the organisational timeframe.

Blue chip companies¹: The term is commonly used in the context of general equities, which refers to large and credit-worthy companies. It also refers to companies that are known for their quality and the wide acceptance of their products and services. These companies are characterised by an ability to make large profits and pay dividends (Harvey, 2012).

For the most, participants emphasised that success in their career is generally about achieving personal goals and exceeding expectations. However, for executives it is more about *achieving goals in a set timeframe*, in other words setting short term and long term goals to be achieved within a set timeframe. Short term goals would for example be set for the current year and long term goals would focus on the next three to five years. Closely related to this, participants referred to the importance of *aligning personal goals with business goals* even before considering the actual achievement of goals.

Some of the participants discussed *moving up the corporate ladder* as the personal meaning they attach to career success, but added that this was true only up to a certain point or level. That point or level will differ depending on an individual's unique goal. The following example clearly explains this tendency:

To me personally it would mean taking it to a senior management level and nothing higher, and that would be as far as I want to go. I think if I achieved that, I would feel successful, because that's something I've always aspired to get to. (Participant 5A)

In addition to moving up the corporate ladder, participants also referred to the *personal and professional growth and development that follow as a result of progression* and explained it as gaining new skills, knowledge and expertise with each promotion. Through continuous professional growth, executives are provided with the opportunity become experts in their field of work. Being known as an expert in one's field was also cited by interviewees as proof of career success as illustrated in the statements below:

Getting to manager level, suddenly it's not about one division. It's about being known across the firm and for example being known across the capital community and as an expert in your field. You have other individuals who contact you and say 'What do you think about this?' or 'What's your idea on that?' That to me is very indicative of being successful in your career. (Participant 1A)

I think in a professional environment, that is one of the most coveted positions to have, and that is to be an expert in your field. (Participant 11A)

Executives also referred to the importance of feedback and recognition and suggested good appraisals on performance as being their most favourable feedback method to help determine their level of value and contribution to the organisation. However, this was less significant to them than *being in a position of leadership, which* emerged as one of the most significant aspects related to personal meaning that participants attached to career success. They discussed this in terms of not only being in a position where they could make and influence decisions. But even more importantly, they emphasised having the opportunity to be actively involved in the growth and development of their staff and making a difference to their lives on a daily basis. The statement below clearly reflects this viewpoint:

I try every day to make a difference in the lives of the people I work with. I'm accountable for 13 000 people and every day I say to myself: 'Am I leading them well, am I making a difference in their lives, am I setting a good example for them, and am I leading them with the right principles and values?' (Participant 3B)

A quite unique reflection that emerged was participants' preference to *associate with successful brands*. They discussed working for 'blue chip' companies as well as working for organisations that offer international opportunities and exposure, such as upgrading the marketability of their CV's and as a result enhancing their sense of success.

Interestingly, considering all of the above mentioned notions, executives summarised their personal meaning of career success as being a journey. They do not see career success as an ultimate state or a destination. They rather experienced it as a long term vision or *journey of progression*, where the journey does not only mean hierarchical progression. It also represents personal and professional growth and development that will continually take place until the end of their career. The example below clearly illustrates this argument:

I feel that I do influence the company, I mean it's an ongoing evolution of course, it's never that you one day wake up and you think you're successful in your career. Every day you come to work and you build on your career, and you will continue doing so until the end of your career. So there's no point ever in time where you say that you've arrived or whatever you want to call it, and say I'm successful in my career, it's an ongoing process. (Participant 5B).

Considering that career success means different things to different individuals, it also became evident that in this journey (also referred to as a career path to career success) there is a level of personal and professional growth and development taking place in each individual on an ongoing basis. Therefore, a transformation of perceptions is prominent in the interviewees. Participants revealed that as they mature and grow older, their perceptions of their careers, and ultimately career success change from when they started out as young employees in an organisation. This is mainly due to the dynamics of their lives that change continually. This transformation process and the dynamics involved in it are discussed in more detail in theme three to follow.

Theme 3: Transformation of perceptions

This theme that has emerged from the interviews reflects how certain factors/influences play a role to transform the personal meaning that executives attach to career success. The participants described four interlinked categories as the main drivers that influenced the way they attached personal meaning to career success (stage of career lifecycle, age, job level, organisational and economic climate). *Stage of career lifecycle* emerged as the most significant cause that changed perceptions. According to participants as they progress through the different career lifecycles, their life and career change according to the specific career lifecycle in which they find themselves. As a consequence their priorities and values start to change, leading to a change in their perception of career success.

The second factor that was mentioned was *age*. Executives stated that as they moved through the different lifecycles of their career, they also grew older and became more mature. They mentioned that with maturity their value system changed, and as a result their viewpoint of what motivated them in terms of career success also changed. *Job level* emerged as the third factor. Participants explained that as they matured and moved through the different career lifecycles, they also attained different job levels. Seeing that there is an increase in responsibility and expectations related to that, it can cause a change in perception. For example, an individual can entertain a certain viewpoint of career success at a junior level and that viewpoint can change as he/she moves into more senior levels and up to top level.

Some participants cited this transformation quite aptly:

I've said growth and I've used that word growth and development in a broad sense, because I don't think my career success at this stage of my life and my career are the same as when I started out. When I was starting out, career success to me was reaching the top of the organisation, but that has since changed. I have another view and a far more realistic understanding of what motivates me, a better understanding of what motivates me than when I was younger. So with maturity, has come a change in what is important and what I prioritize in my career. (Participant 9B)

The fourth factor that was considered as a driver for executives' transformation of perception is the *organisational and economic climate*. This factor is not closely or directly linked to the other factors, but it can have an influence during any stage of the career, or age or job level. These are elements in the work environment or economic environment that could cause

changes in perception. One of the participants referred to the example of an economic recession where certain values are threatened and as a result leads to a changed perception, as illustrated by this statement:

I think it depends on economic climates as well, because if you look at the recession we went through, I think peoples' value on money might have shifted a little bit in a sense that not only job security was important. When you look at your Maslow's hierarchy of needs, sometimes you take a step down, because you know other things are being threatened, and you can only move to the next level if those are actually satisfied at the level that you're currently in, so I think that leaves us where we are. (Participant 6A)

It is clear that executives' perception of career success have changed throughout their careers. Nevertheless they have defined their future success around the goals that they have set for themselves to achieve in the future, something that they would measure as their pinnacle of success. These goals are explored in Theme 4.

Theme 4: Future goals of executives

Even though goals are time and future orientated (e.g. short, medium and long term), future goals emerged as a theme in how it relates to executives' conceptualisation of career success. From the previous themes it is clear that executives define their own personal success in terms of goals or aspirations that they set for themselves. Not only are these goals or aspirations different for each individual, but they will also change over the course of their career. The following table summarises some of these specific goals that participants mentioned.

Table 4

Future goals of executives

Sub-themes	Associated meaning/Explanation
<i>Owning a personal business venture</i>	Opening and running own business; being the owner of your own business; working for yourself and not for an organisation or employer.
<i>Moving up the corporate ladder</i>	Moving up to the next level in the organisation; obtaining a higher desired position in the organisation; hierarchical progression in the organisation; performing manager's role in the future; having a more advanced role with added responsibility.
<i>Expanding current role</i>	Lateral expansion of current role; growing the scope of your practice; diversify job specifications of current role; becoming a specialist or expert, rather than a generalist.
<i>Embracing new opportunities</i>	Having the opportunity to explore different arenas; being open minded about available opportunities; prepared and equipped for emergent opportunities; open to new challenges; having opportunities for relocation or international exposure.
<i>Achieving business goals</i>	Delivering on the goals and exceeding expectations set by the business within certain timeframe; contributing to building success of organisation by fulfilling your role; exceeding on key performance indicators set for a financial year; achieving mandates set by management of the organisation.
<i>Investing in the community</i>	Making a meaningful contribution to the community; adding value to society; investing in social responsibility; giving back to the community; creating sustainability in the community, such as job creation.

One of the most significant goals executives set for themselves to define their own future success was to be the *owner of a personal business venture*. They saw creating and running their own business, where one does not have to work for an employer and can regulate one's own working hours, as the ultimate pinnacle of success. Some participants, however, still valued the role they play within the organisation, and therefore defined their future success within the organisational framework.

While some executives attached value to *hierarchical progression*, others expressed a desire for progression more in a lateral sense. This last group explained it as *expanding or specialising their role*, and in a sense focusing on becoming experts in their field of work. A number of participants defined their future success in terms of the success of the business, meaning that their focus is on attaining and exceeding the goals, expectations and mandates

that were set out for the financial year. Interestingly, executives also revealed that one of the most important future goals for them was to *invest in the community* and to contribute in building sustainability within society. In practice this could mean being involved in job creation and being involved in non-profit organisations that focus on the welfare of the community.

The statements below reflect some of these goals:

I think going forward, I think it probably has got to be more of a lateral progression than upwards progression, so the next thing for me is to make sure that I grow in the scope of what I do in many contexts so that I can multiply the value that I add to the business. (Participant 10B)

You never know what opportunities might come out now, but I'd also love to have my own business with my own psychologists and psychometrists, reporting to me. I'd be happy with that. (Participant 3A)

The fact is that whatever the future holds for me, I need to make sure that I'm prepared for it, I need to constantly equip myself, and develop myself to be ready for those opportunities that emerge. (Participant 6B)

In addition to the unique personal meaning and perceptions that executives have on their own career success, it also became evident from the interviews that their career success is influenced by certain factors. These factors are discussed under theme 5.

Theme 5: Factors influencing executives' career success

From the interviews the following factors that have an influence on executives' attainment of career success are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Factors influencing executives' attainment of career success

Sub-themes	Associated meaning/Explanation
<i>Work environment</i>	Nature of the work environment (e.g. organisational culture, manager's management style, team members influence and performance, nature of relationship with colleagues, nature of support from the organisation, organisational policies and procedures, the organisation's perception of career success, colleagues' perception of career success, position in the organisation at that specific point in time).
<i>Profession</i>	Type of profession determines the rate of progression; type of professional environment; different environments apply different measurements for success; type of industry; type of sector; type of qualifications and number of qualifications.
<i>Experience obtained</i>	Nature of previous experience; type of organisation that experience was gained from: experience gained from organisation with successful brand; experience gained from internationally well-established organisations; experience gained from reputable organisations; nature of exposure.
<i>Economic climate</i>	The state of the international and national economic climate; legislation; position of the organisation in the life cycle of the economy; economic situations such as economic recessions or depressions.
<i>Individual Attributes</i>	Personal attitude and mind set in terms of career success; personal values; personality; problem-solving skills; interpersonal skills.
<i>Different Viewpoints</i>	Different race groups have different perceptions of success; different generations such as so-called Baby boomers and Generation Y's have different viewpoints of career success; based on individual differences there are different definitions of career success.

From the responses it became clear that there were internal as well as external factors that influenced executives' career successes. The most significant internal factor that influences executives' career successes are their *individual attributes*. Executives' personal attitude and mind set towards their career and career success were probably one of the largest influences on their attainment of career success.

The *experience* that was obtained was classified as both an internal and external factor as individuals could choose the type of experience that they wanted to gain. However the type of organisation has an influence on the type of experience executives gain.

Profession, work environment and economic climate were the major external influences that executives discussed. These factors were classified as external factors, seeing that executives have less control over the influence that external factors have on their career, than their control over internal factors. Executives have, for example limited control over the organisational culture, or changes in the economic environment that spill over into their work environment and consequently influence their career and whether they attain career success. They also have limited control over the influence that a specific industry sector and type of profession have on the timeframe in which they achieve career success. The influence of these external factors is illustrated by the statements below:

I think that there are certain professions that you progress more, for example if you're an accountant you move much further ahead, because of your qualification, but in certain professions you don't move as much, for example in finance or human capital it's a longer period to progress. (Participant 1A)

Unfortunately as much as I'm influenced by the partners, the partners are influenced by the business, and the business is influenced by what's happening in the markets. So, it's a ripple effect. Unfortunately it depends on where you are in the pipeline, and I think that determines pretty much how effective you're going to be. (Participant 4A)

Executives continuously referred to factors that could lead to *different viewpoints* on career success and would, therefore, also influence the attainment of career success. These were factors such as race, generation and individual differences. These factors contribute to the development of different norms and values that consequently lead to different viewpoints. This means that what one individual sees as career success will not necessarily be seen by others as such.

The most significant factor that had an influence on executives' career success was probably personality attributes. Seeing that it was emphasised to such an extent, it was captured as a strong and unique, individual theme. Certain personality attributes were associated with career success throughout the interviews, and these were categorised as set out in theme 6, personality attributes related to career success.

Theme 6: Personality attributes related to career success

From the interviews it became clear that personality is largely related to career success. Not only is personality a factor that influences executives' perception of career success and the meaning attached to it, but personality has also in some instances contributed to the achievement of career goals. It was also found that certain personality attributes are associated with the career success to which some participants seem to strive. These attributes are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6

Personality attributes related to career success

Personality attribute	Personality trait
<i>Dedication</i>	Being driven; being ambitious; perseverance; tenacity; self-discipline; punctuality; focuses on detail; hard working; showing determination; personal self-achievement; goal setting.
<i>Ego-strength</i>	Having strong self-worth; thick skinned; tough; strong emotional stability; optimistic; enthusiastic; locus of control (internal and external).
<i>Social relations</i>	Team Player; possesses interpersonal skills; active participation; talkative; assertiveness; show humility; ability to lead; ability to guide; understanding; ability to listen; leadership.
<i>Adaptability</i>	Adaptability; flexibility; resilience.
<i>Authenticity</i>	Loyalty; authenticity (not pretentious); reliability; credibility; integrity; responsibility; accountability; fairness.
<i>Resourceful-thinking</i>	Innovative; creative; willing to learn; entrepreneurial; skilfulness; knowledgeable; progressive thinker; future orientated; big picture thinker.

Executives continually referred to the personality traits in their discussion of career success. For description purposes these traits were categorised into main personality attributes or clusters. Participants associated being hard working and ambitious and having perseverance and self-discipline with career success. These traits were thus categorised as having the personality attribute of *dedication*. In terms of career success, executives also referred to progression, which could mean being in a position of leadership. Being in such a position meant that one has to lead and guide other individuals in a team. In order to lead and guide people, one needs to be assertive and you need interpersonal skills to connect with your team. These traits were sorted under the attribute of *social relations*. Experiencing progression and moving into a position of leadership can also lead to greater responsibility and accountability; therefore being reliable and credible is considered as key traits.

Some executives mentioned that they needed to set a good example to their staff by having integrity and acting fair. The attribute of *authenticity* was used to group these traits. Executives pointed to the stress and obstacles that represented the nature of their work as managers on a daily basis and emphasised the importance of being able to cope with stress. This included being tough and thick skinned; and the ability to express optimism in the face of adversity. These traits were listed under the attribute of *ego-strength*. Emotional stability and an internal locus of control also emerged as important traits that were listed under the *ego-strength* attribute. Considering this attribute, participants also highlighted the significance of being flexible and having resilience in order to deal with the challenges and obstacles that continually face them in their work. Flexibility and resilience were grouped under the attribute of *adaptability*. *Resourceful thinking* describes being innovative and creative and also being willing to learn, which executives cited as being quite significant in achieving career success. The personality attributes that executives associate with career success are illustrated below.

Personality does play a big role, because I think an individual who is complacent is not going to get very far. But individuals that are driven, who have that hunger, who wants to succeed, those are the individuals that you will find are actually quite positive and quite strong in their career; and it's simply because they're not going to take things lying down. They are always willing to challenge. They're always willing to question, willing to drive and implement new ideas and that's what makes a successful person, as well, as that those individuals have that type of mentality. So they have those characteristics. (Participant 4A)

To be successful you have to have, in terms of characteristics, firstly you have to have a creative mind, secondly you have to have tons of passion and drive and you've got to be able to be resilient in things. (Participant 11B)

Most important, you've got to know what is it that will get you up in the morning every day for many years, and then you've got to be dedicated to that and you've got to be determined, and you've got to be enthusiastic, and you've got to work really, really hard. (Participant 6B)

Participants referred to the various factors that had an influence on their career success. While pointing out these factors, it also became clearer to them which elements have already contributed to their career success and have assisted them in their career path to career success to date. These factors are categorised as theme 7: contributing factors to the career success of executives.

Theme 7: Contributing factors to the career success of executives

Table 7 below illustrates the various factors contributing to the career success of executives.

Table 7
Contributing factors to the career success of executives

Sub-themes	Associated meaning/Explanation
<i>Interaction/relationships with successful individuals</i>	Interacting with successful individuals to measure yourself against; displaying and emulating the attributes reflected by successful individuals; being mentored, coached or guided by successful individuals; having role-models with a successful image to measure up against.
<i>Good interpersonal relationships</i>	Focus on establishing good interpersonal relationships; building good business relationships; establishing trusting relationships and credibility in the organisation; being accommodating and approachable towards colleagues.
<i>Support from managers and colleagues</i>	Receiving support from managers and colleagues for both work and personal issues; having a supportive network at work; 'buy-in' from the organisation into employees' ideas and concepts; receiving executive sponsorship from key decision makers within the organisation; working with a strong and supportive team.
<i>Given opportunities</i>	Being given opportunities and challenges to test and prove capability; given opportunities for personal and career growth; given opportunities for hierarchical and lateral progression; given opportunities for international exposure; given opportunities to work in multiple disciplines.

Table 7 continued

<i>Feedback</i>	Being open to and receiving feedback and constructive criticism for self-development; receiving feedback on Key Performance Indicators (KPI's); receiving good performance appraisals form managers; receiving guidance and encouragement for development.
<i>Organisational culture</i>	Experiencing that you fit in well with the organisational culture; working in an organisational culture of shared knowledge and skills development; working for an organisation with a reputable organisational culture; working for an organisation with a culture that is conducive to the development of a career.
<i>Good performance record</i>	Being associated with a good performance record; having a record of constantly delivering work of a high standard; being recognised for good work output; having a reputation for delivering above and beyond promises made; having a good track record in terms of performance in the organisation.
<i>Education</i>	Having certain levels of education or a specific qualification; having the appropriate educational background; possessing the theoretical foundation provided by education.
<i>Element of luck</i>	Perception of being at the right place at the right time; fortunate in terms of joining a growing organisation; fortunate with being given the right opportunities at the right time; fortunate to have skilful managers.

The most significant factor that executives discussed as having contributed to their career success was the nature of work relationships. The majority of the participants mentioned that a key to their career success was establishing, building and maintaining *good business relationships* within their careers. They added that being credible and approachable helped them to build trusting relationships, which enhanced their access to opportunities. However, participants mentioned that in order to build *good work relationships* it was necessary to have a *good performance record*, where one not only constantly delivers on what you promise to deliver, but also have to deliver work of a high standard that exceeds expectations. This is illustrated in the citation below:

I think, very important is being reliable, and building credibility, because once you've proven that other people can depend on you, that you will deliver, people will have more faith in you in giving you stuff, giving you more challenging stuff. That for me is what has been vital. (Participant 1A)

So, having an education is not the end door and beyond, it's just a gateway. Thereafter it's your delivery that's important, because you have to deliver as well. If you promise to do something you have to deliver on it and if you're delivering consistently, nobody has to follow up and then people start to build trust. So when people build trust, you start to get your sponsors and you start to get more responsibility and take on more responsibility. (Participant 2B)

Another factor that was related to building good work relationships, was *receiving support from managers and colleagues*. Participants stated that having a supportive network at work where one receives support for both work and personal issues, played an important role in building and sustaining work relationships. They also referred to how important it is that the key decision makers in the organisation buy into their careers through executive sponsorship. In this sense participants mentioned in particular the role of senior managers or directors (heads of departments) to identify talent among junior colleges and to invest in and support their careers. It is interesting to note that executives mentioned the significance of having a role-model for career success against whom they could measure their own career success. Participants mentioned that, through the *interaction with successful individuals*, such as mentors or coaches they found a guideline to measure up against. They could, by displaying the role-model's attributes, contribute to their own success. This notion is illustrated in the response below:

There could be multiple contributions. I think one that springs to mind is, I think, role models. I think that something that a lot of people that I know that have succeeded, you've always got somebody that you measure up against. It doesn't have to be your direct boss or somebody, but somebody involved in the company that you see is achieving success or displaying the attributes and you're using them as role models and as guidance on how to handle situations. (Participant 10A)

A unique and interesting contributing factor that was mentioned by a majority of the participants was the *element of luck*. Even though not a very quantifiable element, luck was said to play a huge role in an executive's career success. They referred to elements of luck in terms of them being at the right place at the right time, for example entering the organisation during a growth phase and also receiving the right opportunities at the right time, such as promotions or international opportunities:

I'll add that timing plays such a key role, so it's also a matter of luck: being at the right place at the right time, because as organisations grow and I guess if you look at a new product, life cycle, etcetera, it follows pretty much the same pattern. There is an introductory phase and then rapid growth and stuff like that and if you happen to be part of that then you can benefit from the success. (Participant 1B)

Working within an organisational culture that was ruled by a *work culture of knowledge sharing, skills development and career development* was also mentioned as a huge contributing factor to career success. A mind-set of knowledge sharing, skills development and career development not only needs to be present within the organisation, but it has to be adopted as a culture within the organisation.

Participants also reflected the opposite of contributing factors to career success, i.e. the hindering factors that obstructed their career success. These hindering factors are thoroughly explored in the following theme: theme 8.

Theme 8: Factors hindering career success

This theme supports the fact that there are not only factors that have contributed to executives' career success. There were/are also some factors that might have either impeded their attainment of career success or influenced the timeframe in which it was achieved negatively. These factors are listed below in Table 8.

Table 8
Factors hindering career success

Sub-themes	Associated meaning/Explanation
<i>Reaching a ceiling in one's career</i>	In terms of hierarchy you reach a ceiling; limited opportunities as you progress in the hierarchy; fixed positions in the organisation, means there needs to be a vacancy before you can move up; managers need to make justifications for promotions.
<i>Glass ceiling for women</i>	There is still a glass ceiling that exists for women in the modern workplace; women are constantly fighting to prove their worth; they feel that they are prevented from pursuing a career actively; women still experience barriers within their careers that impact negatively on their career success.

Table 8 continued

<i>Lack of support from organisation</i>	<p>Lack of support from organisation in work and personal issues; lack of support and involvement in career planning and development; lack of support for balance between work and everyday life; insufficient resources for professional development; lack of support and willingness from managers to buy into one's career.</p>
<i>Miss-alignment of personal goals and values with organisational goals and values</i>	<p>Personal goals and values conflict with organisational goals and values; a clash of value systems between yourself and the organisation; when the organisation pushes you in a direction, you do not want or did not intend to go; personally finding it difficult to fit in the work environment.</p>
<i>Nature of political and economic climate</i>	<p>The transitions that has taken place locally and in the world, especially political transitions (e.g. transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa); challenges related to certain political eras (e.g. lack of educational and career opportunities during apartheid era); changes in the economic climate, such as recession, euro-zone crisis; political influences in the economic climate, such as transformation, BEE, affirmative action, uprisings and strikes.</p>
<i>Challenges in business environment</i>	<p>Lack of direction and structure within the business environment; confusion around organisational structure and culture; ineffective management or leadership; changes in political hierarchy, leadership or business models; working in a tough controlled business environment; working in an extremely competitive and complex business environment; having strict budgets that limits opportunities for development.</p>
<i>Lack of education or experience</i>	<p>Below a certain level of qualification; failure to pass a board examination crucial to role requirements or certain positions; with limited or no experience, the available opportunities are also limited; lack of exposure needed for specific positions.</p>
<i>Lack of skills</i>	<p>Lack of competence; lack of ability; insufficient know-how; not enough interpersonal skills; unable to execute ideas.</p>
<i>Personal-Work Life Interference (PWI)</i>	<p>Personal life interfering with work; having children and wanting to work in a more flexible manner; personal circumstances or issues interfering with work responsibilities; inability to balancing work duties and family or personal duties; bringing personal problems to work, where these problems interfere with performance.</p>

Table 8 continued

<i>Dependent on others</i>	Own performance is dependent on other employees' decisions, feedback and performance; success of plans and ideas depend on whether senior managers in the organisation buy into new plans and ideas; the nature of the relationship you have with the employees you are dependent on (e.g. conflict in relationships can complicate things); the diversity of the employees you work with, seeing that individuals have different mind-sets and viewpoints.
<i>Individual factors</i>	Mind-set and attitude towards career success; lack of motivation; insufficient effort or performance; lack of self-insight and self-development; unwilling to take responsibility for their own career development; getting stuck in a career comfort zone; working in isolation, because of personality traits; having unrealistic aspirations.

From the interviews it emerged that the same factors that contributed to an executive's career success can also hinder career success when these factors are present in a limited sense or when they are completely absent. A majority of the participants argued that *reaching a ceiling* in their careers was probably the most common hindering factor. They explained it in the following way: the more that you progress hierarchically in the organisation, the fewer opportunities and positions would be available to you. Once you have reached your peak in the organisation, you may get stuck in that position. This may impede any further progress, and consequently career success. The following statements of participants clearly reflect this notion:

Absolutely, so the main hindrance can be that the opportunities get limited the more you move up.
(Participant 10B)

You sort of reach a ceiling where you think, well I'm not going to go anywhere beyond here unless X, Y, Z retire or leave. Something that's always seen in business is that you get to a point and you can't move any further until the next person moves on, and then you can move into their position. (Participant 10A)

It is worth to note that some of the female participants still experienced a *glass ceiling effect* in their careers. They stated that the management sphere of the organisation was still being dominated by males and that they constantly had to fight to prove their worth, as illustrated by the quote below:

With all our gender issues that we have in the country, a lot of women are prevented from actively pursuing a career. There's a glass ceiling in place, so there are many barriers, especially for women to overcome in their career progression and those are big hindrances in your career success. (Participant 6B)

Another interesting observation that was made was that for some participants *political influences* like apartheid was perceived as an obstacle in their careers, and since the transition has taken place from the apartheid era to the democratic era, other participants mentioned political influences, such as legislation, particularly in terms of BEE and affirmative action to be an obstacle in their career. The quotes below reflect this observation:

Those are like limitations, being female and being black, and your education from the previous apartheid system. (Participant 2B)

I think it definitely restricts career success, because when you have a look at it from any angle on all the different seven levels of transformation you're looking at your percentages of what you've got to have at the different levels. For example, if you have too many white people at a certain level, and that's the level you want to aspire to get to, you're just going to have to sit back and wait until the percentages are sorted out. So that can hinder you by however long it takes to come right. So yes it definitely does hinder you. (Participant 5A)

Lack of support from the organisation was mentioned as a rather significant factor hindering career success. Participants claimed that not receiving support for work and personal issues and not receiving assistance and opportunities for career development can be major hindrances to one's career success. They also mentioned that without the organisation buying into their career, especially in terms of new ideas, plans and strategies, the growth and development of their career will be very limited.

I think that's very important, because if you're not given the opportunities, you know it's difficult to excel or to be successful. (Participant 11A)

However, not only did executives' state that their career success was dependent on support from the organisation's side. They also indicated that their career success was *dependent on other employees*. The executives explained this factor in terms of their performance being dependent on the decisions, feedback and performance of others as most tasks were

performed in team formation. In addition to this, they mentioned that the diversity of the team, as well as the nature of the relationships within such teams, influences performance outcomes. These factors, more importantly, influence the timeframe in which the goals, and consequently success, are achieved – as reflected by the citation below:

So whatever goals you set for yourself, unfortunately you do get instances where you are dependent on other people and that's one of the reasons that you might not attain success in the timeframe that you set for yourself. (Participant 4A)

Executives expressed the view that one of the biggest hindrances in their path to success could be themselves. This could happen if they did not take *own responsibility in their career development* and career success. They also claimed that if they did not put sufficient effort and hard work into their careers, they would not be able to achieve success in those careers.

I personally feel that if I really made an effort I could have probably moved much further in my career. (Participant 9A)

The extent to which participants discussed certain factors hindering career success, also showed the potential for participants to experience turnover intention, which was classified as theme 9. This theme remains closely related to theme 8.

Theme 9: Potential for experiencing turnover intention

The previous theme mentioned was the factors that might either hinder individuals directly from achieving career success or might influence the timeframe in which they achieve such success. This theme is linked closely to the theme of hindering factors, seeing that as certain hindering factors may potentially lead to the experience of turnover intention (potential to consider leaving the organisation to pursue new opportunities or a new career). There exist a thin line between experiencing turnover intention as such, and the potential for experiencing such an intention. This can be inferred from the fact that the participants reflected only the potential to experience turnover intention soon, although they are currently not considering leaving the organisation. Participants discussed the following factors that potentially may lead to the experience of turnover intention: *miss-alignment of personal goals and values with business goals and values or lack of person-environment fit* (inability to fit or adapt to

the work environment); *lack of opportunities; better opportunities offered by external organisations; factors in the work environment; nature of work; and individual factors.*

Participants stated that whenever they experienced a miss-alignment between their goals and values and that of the organisation, they strongly reconsidered to remain working at that particular organisation. Also if they experience a lack of person-environment fit it might potentially lead to the intention to turn over employment. In terms of lack of opportunities, executives cited a lack of progression, growth or learning opportunities or not enough challenges. Participants mentioned in this regard that they will re-evaluate their position in the organisation, which reflects the potential for turnover intention.

Related to turnover intention is the experience of limited opportunities at their current organisation while an external organisation offers better opportunities. This in turn increases the potential to experience turnover intention. Participants referred to some factors in the work environment that may cause potential for turnover intention. These factors include political influences, legislation, and lack of resources, organisational culture, conflict, bad business relationships or restrictive working hours. The participants added that if these factors impacted negatively on their career development or on whether they achieved career success, it might cause them to rethink their future at the organisation. Another factor that was mentioned in relation to turnover intention is the nature of the work. This could happen when executives' work becomes too stressful and causes health risks, burnout and demands other sacrifices, such as their family. Participants claimed that in such a case they will start to consider changing the nature of their work. That might mean changing their work environment, which may cause potential for turnover intention.

All of the above mentioned factors can lead to executives experiencing limited job satisfaction and a lack of fulfilment. This experience could awaken the intention to leave the organisation. It is clear that if employees are not happy in their work environment they will consider leaving that environment. This is illustrated by the following citation:

I think in any person's work environment, if you're not happy within your environment, then your chance of leaving that environment is quite considerable. (Participant 4A)

Theme 10: Consequences of career success

While discussing the concept of career success and the factors related to it, participants highlighted the fact that career success to them also meant the willingness to make sacrifices. These sacrifices most of the time affected their personal and family domains. Also by making sacrifices for their career success, they understood that such success could have certain consequences that they had to accept throughout their careers. Participants claimed that the two most significant consequences related to career success were *health risks and work-personal life interference* (work or work responsibilities interfering with personal life and responsibilities). When mentioning health risks, participants referred to career success as a lifestyle that demands 24 hours of their day. They associated this style with working long hours and experiencing high levels of stress. Some participants also mentioned that they have observed and experienced the effect of failing to live a balanced lifestyle, while experiencing extended levels of stress. They found that this could lead to illness or compromised health, which may manifest in heart attacks, fatigue and burnout. When work interferes with one's personal life, this can also be considered a significant consequence of career success. This is because sacrificing personal and family time for work can lead to broken relationships. Such relationships may end up in divorce or parents that are alienated from their children. The following statements clearly reflect participants' experience of the consequences of career success in this regard:

When you look at successful businessmen, some of them have been extremely successful in the context of their work, but if you look through that, their family life and their health are shocking, like for example, they've had heart attacks at 40 years or they've had 3 wives. (Participant 11A)

Career success comes through the most brutal sacrifices and you normally sacrifice family, health, and everything else and you work 14 to 16 hours a day, which is just a standard work day that you function within. (Participant 4B)

Executives indicated that there are certain consequences associated with career success. In light of this it was evident from their reflections that the organisation as such has quite an extensive role to play in developing executives' careers and ensuring career success. This in particular means helping to prevent the consequences from impacting negatively on the

employees' lives and careers. The nature of the role that the organisation plays with regard to executives' career success is explored in theme 11.

Theme 11: Role of the organisation

A theme that emerged from of the interviews reflects individuals' opinion that the organisation plays a crucial role in career development, and more importantly in career success. Therefore, certain elements need to be in place from the organisation's side in order to help further the development of a career and achieving success in that career. These elements are illustrated by the table below.

Table 9
Role of the organisation

Sub-themes	Associated meaning/Explanation
<i>Provide a career conducive environment</i>	Provide a work environment where employees want to come to work; create an environment where employees are happy and feel supported; endorse a knowledge sharing, networking and coaching culture that contributes to employees' career development; endeavour to be a reputable company that reflects an authentic image as a place where employees are valued and cared for.
<i>Endorse awareness of the need for holistic wellness</i>	Adopt a holistic culture of wellness awareness to prevent health risks associated with stress and burnout as well as negative interference between the work and home; promote balanced lifestyle initiatives; endorse efficient guidelines measures and policies to balance the work with everyday life; promote awareness of the need for wellness through interventions targeting the spheres of physical, emotional and social wellbeing.
<i>Build supportive and sustainable relationships with staff</i>	1. Building good relationships with employees by providing support for their work and personal issues; providing support for career aspirations, plans and decisions; expressing a vote of confidence in their capabilities through executive sponsorship.
<i>Provide opportunities and challenges</i>	2. Providing opportunities for progression; providing international opportunities and exposure; ensuring a variety of opportunities available; providing opportunities for networking by organising networking events; providing graduates with opportunities for internship and learnership; giving employees challenging assignments to prove their capability.
	3.

Table 9 continued

<i>Initiate effective talent management strategies</i>	Initiate effective talent management and mapping; initiate effective succession planning; groom successors of certain key positions; look after key individuals in the organisation; have effective retainment strategies in place; build sustainable relationships with talented individuals.
<i>Have appropriate career development measures in place</i>	Provide appropriate career development through: investing in training and development and providing training that is relevant to the employees' careers (e.g. courses, conferences, formal training programmes); investing in the development of certain skills; providing career planning and having regular meetings discussing career aspirations; providing mentoring and coaching opportunities; supporting continuous learning and on-going professional development (e.g. further studies, qualification, certification); provide effective performance management and feedback systems; recognising employees' value through monetary and non-monetary incentives.

Participants revealed that the most common role that the organisation plays in their career success is *providing an environment that is conducive to their careers* and the development of these careers. This entails an environment where they feel happy to come to work every day. They also mentioned that to them it meant working for a reputable organisation that displays an authentic image and is represented by good leadership, where they feel valued and cared for, as illustrated by the statement below:

So, you've got to build an environment that is exciting for people; that gives people a decent value proposition; that pays people well, or at least market related salaries. That is a place where people feel they can grow and thrive and be proud of. (Participant 6B)

Another common role of the organisation is providing opportunities to develop employees' careers and thus having the *appropriate career development measures* in place. Participants mentioned having access to continuous training and development, mentoring and coaching and being provided with guidelines to plan their careers. They also mentioned the importance of being afforded various opportunities to develop their career, such as progression opportunities, networking opportunities, international opportunities and especially being

given challenges to prove their capabilities. The following citation captures this role that an organisation can play:

That is quite a key contribution that organisations like this make to individuals like myself and others, where they invest and they believe in the investment of their people's development. Where they have proper career plans in place and where they have conversations with individuals about what their aspirations are and what their developmental needs are. Where you have succession plans that are formalised, so individuals know more or less what their career path could be if they continue to perform. (Participant 6B)

A majority of the executives discussed the significance of *effective talent management* in the organisation and how it is crucial to career development and consequently career success. They referred to the importance of talent mapping and succession planning and that the organisation had a huge responsibility to look after key individuals in their organisation. This should be done by deploying effective strategies to retain existing employees. They added that it was important for the organisation to consider grooming successors for certain key positions within the organisation, especially the position of CEO. Related to this, they mentioned building sustainable relationships with staff, but even more specifically focus on talent. Thus by adopting a revolving door concept, as talent gets lost when they move on, these members can be recruited in the future into the organisation as even better talented individuals. The following quotes reflect this strategy:

So in my mind you identify your talent and you sit them down and you say, "We're going to groom and develop you and we're going to give you these exposure levels." (Participant 4B)

Looking after these key individuals sitting around your organisational structure is the difference between running a good business and running an amazing organisation. (Participant 4B)

It requires a significant mind-set shift, because it would mean that you are prepared to let go of your best people so that they can maybe perhaps go grow and maybe come back. The concept of the revolving door on talent, I think, must be looked at quite significantly to say, "You're welcome to go and explore and should you find what you're looking for, great, and when you want to come back, even better, because you are a much more capable and better individual than you were." (Participant 10B)

Only a small number of the participants discussed the role of the organisation in terms of the balance between work and everyday life. Nevertheless the need for such a balance still remains significant. The consequences of career success indeed reflected the stress, burnout and interference between the work and home environment, all of which are associated with career success. Therefore, considering these consequences it remains one of the most important responsibilities of the organisation to promote awareness for wellness and the need to balance work and normal everyday life.

Considering all of the elements related to the concept of career success, participants summarised the factors that they deemed necessary to achieve career success. These factors are categorised as Theme 12: prerequisites for career success.

Theme 12: Prerequisites for career success

This theme that was captured from the interviews is related to the previous themes. This connects with the themes of considering personal meaning, factors that might influence one’s attainment of career success and factors that have contributed to career success, as well as those that have hindered success. From the factors mentioned above it is evident that certain elements are necessary to achieve career success. These elements are summarised in the table below.

Table 10
Prerequisites for career success

Sub-themes	Associated meaning/Explanation
<i>Building good relationships and networking</i>	Establishing sound and stable business relationships; enjoy a healthy working relationship with colleagues; having the ability to work well with others; having well established interpersonal skills that help to build satisfying relationships; paying respect and showing gratitude to individuals; having emotional intelligence that help to foster lucrative business relationships; managing other individuals in a team appropriately; building a sustainable network; collaborating and networking with others; having a widespread network.
<i>Delivering on promises</i>	Delivering on what you promise to deliver; follow-through on promises; establishing a track record of service delivery and performance; continuously delivering tangible business results; having a success model for delivery.

Table 10 continued

<i>Knowing the business</i>	<p>Knowing and understanding the business model; having the knowledge, experience and expertise in your field of operation; acquiring the relevant skills and knowledge to be considered a source of information or expert in the field; continuously keeping up to date through reading and learning; being an astute professional within the business.</p>
<i>Responsible for own career development</i>	<p>Taking responsibility and accountability for your own career and career development; make a principled decision to be successful; set your own developmental goals; take the responsibility to seize available opportunities; accept personal accountability to develop your own career; hold the timeframe of achievement and success in your own hands.</p>
<i>Vision</i>	<p>Having a clear vision of your career and career path; choosing a clear direction to move in; setting clear and defined personal and business goals; keeping a clear focus of the objectives; maintaining a clear personal vision of what you want to achieve.</p>
<i>Mentorship, coaching and sharing knowledge</i>	<p>Being involved in a formal mentorship or coaching programme where knowledge, experience and opportunities are shared; having a credible mentor or coach who is insightful and resourceful; receiving the right guidance and mentorship; having a facilitative manager who shares his knowledge and experience; being surrounded by knowledgeable individuals.</p>
<i>Working in a team</i>	<p>Working in a team that strives towards a common goal; team achievement contributing to business's success; working within a strong and capable team; experiencing a shared sense of success through the team's recognition for individual performance.</p>
<i>Support</i>	<p>Having a support structure and network at work; finding support from managers and colleagues; enjoying support and 'buy-in' from team members to execute ideas and concepts; getting support and 'buy-in' from managers about your ideas, concepts and career; provided support for development; having executive sponsorship in your career.</p>
<i>Person-environment fit</i>	<p>Organisation that meets objectives; organisation helps to meet life expectations; alignment of personal goals and business goals; alignment of personal values and values of organisation; personality fits into the organisational culture; experiencing a satisfying work culture where you are happy and fulfilled.</p>
<i>Self- insight</i>	<p>Knowing yourself and understanding your strengths and limitations; being aware of your blind spots and weaknesses; acknowledging your developmental areas of expertise; understanding your own dynamics; achieving mastery over yourself.</p>

Table 10 continued

<i>Working for reputable company</i>	Working for a reputable organisation with an authentic image; working for a well-established organisation that is secure, stable and with a sustainable future; working in key environments with a respected track record with society; working for an organisation with a focus on credible leadership, environmental awareness, and wellness of the staff.
<i>Competence</i>	Having a basic skill set; having the intellectual capability; being technically competent; having the right level of education, qualification or certification; being talented in your role and knowing the abilities that make you an expert.
<i>Passion</i>	Being passionate about your work; doing something that lets you rise every morning; doing work that you love and enjoy; partaking in something that excites and ignites your soul.
<i>Compromises</i>	Prepared to make compromises and sacrifices for success, at the expense of e.g. personal and family life and wellness; willing to make trade-off decisions; prepared to relocate nationally or internationally for long periods of time.

First and foremost, participants indicated that the most important prerequisite of career success was to have a *vision*. This means having a clear direction of where they were going (career path) and what they wanted to achieve (career goals). These aspects were essential to them in order to achieve career success. Reflections on such a viewpoint are cited below:

You have to understand what are your personal vision and your personal goals. So that's the first thing that will help you. (Participant 2B)

One as I said, fundamentally important, you must have a vision, you need to know where you want to be. (Participant 10B)

Secondly, they regarded *passion and self-insight* as necessary requirements. Participants emphasised the need to have a deep passion for their work and to be doing something that they loved and enjoyed. They claimed that such a passion enabled them to put in the hard work and concerted effort to achieve career success. Participants have shown that self-insight was necessary to them. This entails knowing themselves and acknowledging their strengths and limitations or certain areas from which they could develop themselves. In knowing themselves they could set themselves realistic goals and expectations to be achieved. References to passion and self-insight are illustrated by the excerpts below:

The first thing that you require from where I sit is that you've got to love what you do, because it's very difficult to succeed in something that you don't like doing. Second thing is, you've got to be passionate about what you do, whatever it is that you do, you've got to be passionate about it. (Participant 3B)

So you need to understand what your limitations are, play to your strengths, acknowledge your limitations, and make sure you're always developing your developmental areas. (Participant 2B)

Taking own responsibility for career development also emerged as one of the most popular prerequisites for career success. Participants stated that career success begins with a principled decision to be successful. They mentioned that the organisation could provide everything they needed to develop their career, as well as the means to become successful in such a career. However, the onus rests on them to take those opportunities and turn it into career success. The quotes below support the decision of taking responsibility for one's own career and the development of that career:

I think in terms of development goals, it's something that I need to set upfront for myself. Obviously I'll discuss it with my manager and my coaches, but ultimately it's on me to do the training and to actually perform and do the work in order to reach those goals. (Participant 12A)

What you need to do is to actually change and challenge what other opportunities there are and where your career is going and so forth. (Participant 5B)

Another significant factor that participants lifted out as necessary to achieve career success was *building good business relationships and networking*. They mentioned that key to achieving career success for them was having and maintaining satisfying relationships with the individuals whom they worked with throughout their careers, as well as building sustainable networks with these people. They found, however, that lucrative business relationships could not be established without *delivering on promises*. Therefore, by continually delivering tangible business results they were able to sustain sound business relationships and move ahead in their career. In addition, they stated that no person can work in isolation. Therefore they depended on capable individuals within their teams to help them

achieve business goals, and consequently business success. In this sense they made it clear that other people and the nature of their relationships with their co-workers are critical in achieving career success. This attitude is reflected by the following quotations:

So I think the key to success is collaboration and networking with people, and also delivering on what you say you're going to deliver. (Participant 2A)

In fact we cannot build this business's success without the people. (Participant 11B)

Knowing the business also emerged as a significant prerequisite to achieve career success. However, it is not sufficient only to know and understand the business model. Factors that influence the nature of work change and evolve constantly. In light of this participants argued that it was crucial to stay up to date with the latest trends by reading and learning, as well as by updating their skills and levels of competence. They also mentioned that they were able to become experts in their field of operation through continuous learning and development of their skills. Because of this they are regarded as astute professionals within the organisation. Keeping up to date as a requirement for career success is expressed in the statement below:

Especially in today's kind of world and the way the world's moving at the fast rate, you need to keep up with that, because if you're not able to do that, you will not be able to achieve career success. (Participant 5A)

Finally, to conclude: the abovementioned research has explored the factors that cause some executives and individuals to be more successful than others. However, this might only be how they appear as it has been argued that career success is a multifaceted concept that is formulated in people's own minds. These results therefore reflect how the concept of career success manifests in the minds and lives of South African executives and especially the significance of career success to both practice and research.

DISCUSSION

Definitions of career success are characterised as multi-dimensional, dynamic and individualistic, which re-establishes the need to understand the diverse ways in which the concept is being formulated and experienced (McDonald & Hite, 2008). It is crucial for human resource development practitioners and researchers to explore individuals' conceptualisation of career success, their perceptions of factors that contribute to or impede the attainment of their goals, and their perception of the role of the organisation in facilitating their career success. As a result, the general objective of this study was to investigate the nature of executives' unique conceptualisations and experiences of career success. This was reflected in 12 main themes.

The first four themes are general conceptualisation of career success, executives' personal meaning associated with career success, transformation of perceptions and future goals of executives reflected by how they described and experienced career success. From the findings it became evident that executives' conceptualisations of career success are multi-dimensional, individualistic and dynamic. This was also found to be true in a study done by McDonald and Hite (2008) where the nature of individuals' conceptualisations were found to be multifaceted, diverse and fluid, and something that people designed and developed in their own minds, without any clear boundaries.

Due to careers that have become less definable, executives seem to view career success to be the achievement of personal goals and attach very specific personal meanings to career success. This is very much representative of the nature of a career without boundaries where the individual is more concerned with independent rather than organisational goals (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderdom, 2005; Cappelli, 1999). Executives' other more common general conceptualisations of career success revolved around moving up the corporate ladder, experiencing satisfaction, possessing professional titles or positions, and monetary compensation. These conceptualisations seem to be still in line with the traditional, objective world view of career success. This is supported by Ng et al. (2005) who argue that the individuals who are often promoted and granted salary increases are those who are typically viewed to possess career success. As a result societies, and more specifically organisations, tend to evaluate their employees' career success according to objective external measures. Even though in the present business environment it is evident that compensation still remains

one of the main indicators of a successful management career (Eddleston, Baldrige, & Veiga, 2004), pay and promotions are not all that people seek from their career (Gattiker & Larwood, 1988; Korman, Wittig-Berman & Lang, 1981; Sturges, 1999).

This was clearly reflected by the personal meaning executives attached to career success when stating that to them career success was not merely about money, fancy titles or status. It was mainly about being in a meaningful and fulfilling role and position where they constantly influenced other people's lives, and consequently contributed and added value to the organisation. According to Finegold and Mohrman (2001) and Hall (2002), individuals want to derive a sense of meaning and purpose from their work. Therefore it was clear that executives' general conceptualisation captured mostly the objective side of career success while the personal meaning that executives derived from their careers brought in the more subjective side of career success. This is supported by Heslin's (2003) argument that objective career success criteria alone are insufficient in terms of exploring and explaining all of the essential facets that are related to the career success construct. In fact, when focusing exclusively on individuals' objective career success, it could lead to incompatibility of their career goals and strategies with their personal values and beliefs (Callanan, 2003). This was evident in the research, as executives saw the alignment of their personal goals with those of the organisation as significant in attaining personal meaning and concomitant career success.

Additional interesting and unique personal meanings that executives held with regard to their career success included to be associated with successful brands. This happened, executives explained, when they worked for well-established brand companies, which enhanced the marketability of their CVs. Another personal meaning mentioned by executives was the concept that career success was seen as a journey of progression rather than an end state or destination. These perceptions seem to be unique and more subjective and could not be substantiated by previous research.

Very representative of this journey of progression was executives' maturation and movement through different stages of a career lifecycle and job levels. During this process their priorities and values changed, which caused them to experience transformations in their perceptions of career success. This is supported by most theorists who are in agreement that the mid-life career stage is characterised by a time where "the dream" of career success that was formulated during young adulthood, is critically re-evaluated, therefore leading to a

transformation in the perception of career success (Erikson, 1963; Levinson, 1978; Schein, 1978). However, executives also referred to the influence of the organisational and economic climate in transforming perceptions. They explained how something like a recession could cause values to change, leading to changes in people's perception on career success. A study conducted by Heslin (2005) found organisational change to be a driver in the transformation of perceptions on career success.

Related to the personal meaning executives attached to career success, they also discussed their visions for success in terms of their futures. Some executives saw their future career success within the organisation as a hierarchical progression or a lateral progression: moving up into the next available position or moving into a more specialised role, and achieving the business goals that were set to be achieved within a set time-frame. Others saw their future success outside their current organisations: owning a personal business venture and investing in the community by creating sustainable jobs. Some executives considered their future goals such as owning their own business as the pinnacle of their success. This theme emerged as a unique theme in exploring executives' subjective future career success and it could therefore not be substantiated by previous literature; previous research studies focused on current subjective career success and not on future subjective career success.

Factors influencing executives' conceptualisation and experience of career success were grouped into two general categories, namely contributing factors and impeding factors. These two general categories of influence were divided into individual variables and organisational variables. The individual variables include variables such as experience and individual attributes, whereas organisational variables include variables such as nature of experience, work environment, economic climate and profession. Some of these correspond with the personal factors identified by Ballout (2008), such as career decisions, individual success criteria, demographic and motivational variables, and organisational variables, such as elements of organisational change, organisational/industrial characteristics and the impact of political behaviours. According to Heslin (2005) these factors tend to evolve over the course of time, as well as over the course of an individual's career cycle.

The evolution of these factors over time also lead to individuals developing different viewpoints of career success. Individual differences that have an impact on career success were categorised as the personality attributes associated with career success. Some of the

attributes that were mentioned were dedication, ambition, tenacity, resilience, accountability, creativity, optimism, assertiveness and adaptability. Personality is viewed as the stable individual predispositions that are either directly linked with career outcomes or which lead individuals to seek out experiences that are associated with positive career outcomes (Tharenou, 1997; Tokar, Fischer & Subich, 1998). Previous studies exploring personality's relation to career success focused mostly on the Big-Five factor model (Extroversion, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, Openness, Agreeableness) of personality, which meant the studies were basically restricted to only five personality clusters relating to career success (Boudreau et al., 2001; Seibert & Kramer, 2001). Executives' unique experience of individual attributes relating to career success could therefore not be supported by previous literature and emerged as a unique and original theme. Some of the unique attributes that emerged were social relations, adaptability, authenticity and resourceful-thinking under which the traits of assertiveness, flexibility, accountability and innovation were classified.

In addition to having personal attributes linked to career success, executives maintained throughout that their relationships with others within the work context had been a main contributor to their success. This is supported by Igbaria and Wormley (1992) who state that superiors who have supportive relationship with employees can be considered as important contributors to employees' career advancement. Social capital and the networks of connections and alliances that are formed with others can be leveraged to maximize career success (Ferris, Perrewé, Anthony & Gilmore, 2000). *Interaction with successful people* and attempting to display their attributes or characteristics were also significant and unique contributing factors which were found in this research, although not present in literature. The element of luck, which executives explained as being at the right place at the right time and which facilitated their career success, could also not be substantiated by previous research, but it is an interesting finding.

Reaching a ceiling in your career was reported to be the most popular factor impeding executives' attainment of career success. This fact was supported by Judge et al., (1994) who found that executives in higher level posts had fewer prospective opportunities due to their senior position in the organisation. There still appears to be a glass ceiling in place for female managers, as reflected by the female participants of this study. These participants stated that they had to put in more effort compared to their male counterparts in order to prove their worth. This is substantiated by Rowe & Crafford (2003), who see the number of women in

senior executive management positions as minimal compared to that of men. They believe the reasons for the difference are varied. These reasons are often referred to as obstacles in women's career advancement.

Executives also referred to the miss-alignment of personal goals and values with the organisation's goals and values or that the person does not fit into the work environment. This is an impeding factor where employees may start thinking of leaving the organisation (potential for experiencing turnover intention). Previous studies highlight the fact that if an individual's inner career orientation is not compatible with the job environment, the result can be stress, anxiety, job and career dissatisfaction, unhappiness and high turnover (Coetzee & Bergh, 2009; Coetzee, Bergh & Schreuder, 2010; Feldman & Bolino, 1996; Jiang & Klein, 2000; Jiang, Klein & Balloun, 2001). Other hindering factors relevant to this study are lack of career development opportunities, lack of support from line managers and the unpleasant nature of working conditions or job stress. These are some of the major drivers that can lead to unwanted staff turnover (Aamodt, 2010; Marchington & Wilkinson, 2008). It can therefore be said that executives' subjective work experiences are increasingly being seen as important determinants of executives' work morale, and consequently they affect the have on their intention to stay or leave an organisation (Anastasiadou, 2007; Kokou & Ierodiakonou, 2007; Martin & Roodt, 2008)

Also relating to exploring executives' experience of career success, executives revealed that certain sacrifices and compromises had to be made for career success. They claimed these sacrifices and compromises usually involved their health and their family. Health matters specifically mentioned were health risks, ill health or compromised health, fatigue, heart attacks and burnout. The interference of work in one's personal life and family time, which could lead to broken family relationships, was also considered a significant consequence of striving to achieve success in one's career. Research conducted by Tu, Forret and Sullivan (2006) supports this. In their research it was found that success in top level management positions was associated with stress and long hours of work, which may detract from managers' family and personal lives.

Executives discussed the role of the organisation in their careers. The organisation had to play a collaborative role in helping executives achieve success in their careers. This role was defined around providing appropriate career development measures. Executives specifically

referred to the responsibility of the organisation to utilise career-development initiatives such as implementing mentoring programmes, providing career relevant training, and providing assistance in succession planning. In order for these career-development initiatives to have long term effects they had to happen within a supportive environment, a finding that was in line with research conducted by Gilbreath (2008). Gilbreath saw the necessity of a career-conducive environment in order to ensure long-term employment, and enhanced adaptability and performance. This ties in with the executives' perception that a strategic contribution an organisation could make to the development of their executives' careers was to create a work environment where executives would be happy, would want to come to work, and where they would be provided with opportunities to develop their careers freely.

Executives' unique experiences of career success highlight the crucial role the organisation has to play in retaining its key individuals (executives), especially considering the high potential for turnover intention (i.e. that executives consider leaving the organisation) that emerged from the interviews. Lack of opportunities, poor balance between work and personal life and the stressful nature of the work are the major causal factors that could lead to executives experiencing turnover intention. Organisations have a huge responsibility to recognise and address these factors in order to retain executives within the organisation.

Another important theme that emerged from the findings was a focus on prerequisites to career success. They provide an overview of the concept of career success in the light of what is needed to attain such success. These factors can also be divided into organisational and individual prerequisites. The main individual prerequisites which emerged were taking own responsibility for career development, working in a team and having the right attitude, passion, self-insight and skills, especially those skills that allow one to work effectively with other people (interpersonal skills).

Executives taking responsibility for their own career development is very much representative of the attitude found among executives working in the new careers without boundaries. According to Hall (2002) this attitude is characterised by an individual who manages his or her career in a proactive, self-directed manner, who is mainly driven by personal values and evaluates his or her career success based on subjective research criteria. Executives explained that because their work required working in teams and having to interact constantly with others, they needed to have well-established interpersonal skills.

Poon (2004) substantiated this by stating that in order to work well with other people, an individual needs to have interpersonal perceptiveness and skills. Participants also mentioned that you needed to have a passion for your work, because it acts as a crucial driver for your performance.

They additionally added that you also need to have self-insight as it enables you to better assess your strengths, developmental areas, job skills and interests. Self-insight also helps one to set appropriate career objectives and realistic career plans, and to obtain the developmental experiences needed to utilise career opportunities. This was also supported by Poon (2004). The unique individual prerequisite that emerged was building a good track record of delivery and performance. This could not be substantiated by previous research findings.

The organisational prerequisites were less prevalent, but they are still considered as rather important. The most common organisational prerequisite mentioned was support, which Gilbreath (2008) regarded as being crucial. Working for a reputable organisation, which had a respected track record within society, emerged as an original and unique prerequisite.

In conclusion, this study explored South African executives' conceptualisation and experience of career success. This was done in 12 critical main themes, where some findings were substantiated by previous literature and some findings provided new and unique insights.

Even though the study made significant contributions to the understanding of career success for executives, some important limitations are evident in this study and should be discussed. One of the limitations concerns the sector in which the two organisations in this study operate. Both organisations are from a particular sector (private sector) and a particular industry (financial industry). The themes that were recognised and explored in this study could therefore possibly be only specific to the particular sector, industry or organisation.

Broadening the sample by including organisations from different sectors or industries could have provided more unique insights into executives' conceptualisation and experience of career success. Consequently special care should be taken when generalising the research findings. Conclusions about how executives work in other sectors or industries and how they conceptualise and experience career success within their particular settings cannot merely be

made on the basis of the research findings in this study. The composition of the sample also implies a limitation. Even though the sample is continually referred to as ‘executives’ throughout the study, the study is represented by different management levels, ranging from assistant manager level to partner level. However, executives still represented 75, 10% of the sample. Considering cross-cultural differences in terms of the conceptualisation and experience of career success (Ng & Feldman, 2010), another limitation would be that the sample was not language representative in terms of the different cultural groups; the majority of the sample was English-speaking.

Therefore it would be recommended for future research on career success and employees’ conceptualisation and experience of career success to use a sample of employees from across different cultures, especially considering the languages related to the specific cultural groups found in South Africa. Employees from across different sectors and industries should also be included in the sample. This will provide a much bigger scope in which employees’ conceptualisation and experience of career success within the diverse South African context would be understood.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that organisations recognise employees’ personal viewpoint on career success and help to create a situation where there is compatibility between employees’ personal perception of career success and the organisation’s perception of career success. Organisations also need to focus on the significant factors that facilitate career success and actively address the factors that impede career success and could therefore cause turnover intention. Considering the important value that executives add to an organisation, organisations need to have good relationships with their key role players (executives). This can be done by evaluating executives’ future goals and making sure there are available opportunities for them within the organisation.

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CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter's aim is to discuss conclusions captured from this study according to the general and specific objectives that were defined in chapter 1. Thereafter the limitations of this study are discussed, followed by recommendations made regarding the organisation, as well as for future research.

3.1 CONCLUSIONS

Considering the multi-dimensional nature of the concept of career success (McDonald & Hite, 2008) and the limited nature of in-depth South African research on this topic (Coetzee, Bergh, & Schreuder, 2010), the main objective of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences and conceptualisations of career success among South African executives. Twelve main themes were extracted from the data. The first four themes explored the following aspects: general conceptualisations and personal meaning that executives attach to the concept of career success; how their conceptualisation has changed throughout their careers due to the influence of various factors; how they define career success for their future. The subsequent six themes that emerged from the data reflected factors that a dual influence executives' career success, by either contributing to their attainment of career success, or hindering such attainment. (When career success is not achieved, it could cause a potential for experiencing turnover intention.) An additional theme was also extracted from the data regarding the personality attributes associated with career success. Finally the last three themes reflected the consequences linked to career success, the role that the organisation plays in executives' experience of career success, and the prerequisites for attaining career success.

Conclusions regarding executives' perceptions and experiences of career success correspond to the first two objectives, to ascertain how South African executives conceptualise career success and how they experience such success. In view of the general conceptualisations of career success, some notions still were in line with the more objective worldview of career success in which money, progression and status play a role. These factors also were reflected

in the study by Ng, Eby, Sorensen, and Feldman's (2005). However, *contributing and adding value to the organisation* and *exceeding both personal and organisational expectations* emerged as the more subjective conceptualisations on career success that were unique and not represented in previous research findings. The correlation between the meaning executives' personally attach to career success and their conceptualisation (e.g. adding value to the organisation by moving up the corporate ladder, satisfaction and monetary compensation), reflect the possibility of establishing a relationship between their objective conceptualisation and their subjective experience of career success. However, more unique subjective perceptions on career success came forth that were not related to their objective conceptualisation of it. This proves that objective measures alone are not sufficient to explain executives' conceptualisation and their experience of career success (Heslin, 2003).

The most significant personal meaning that executives pointed out was being in a position of leadership and having the opportunity to develop people and influence their lives. This is reflective of individuals' need to draw on a sense of meaning and purpose from their work (Finegold & Mohrman, 2001; Hall, 2002). To be known as an expert in their field of work, as well as being associated with successful brands by working for 'blue-chip' companies were considered as more original and unique experiences. In addition, career success is not experienced as an end state or a destination, but as a life-long journey of progression, development and growth. It is interesting that objective measures to help facilitate career success, such as promotions and salary increases, are still considered in the current business environment to be the main indicators of a successful management career (Eddleston, Baldrige, & Veiga, 2004). This experience was reflected by individuals who seemingly already had career success based on objective criteria and external judgements.

Considering the fact that executives experience their career success as a journey, the elements that lead them to experience career success tend to evolve over the course of time. These changes cause a transformation in their perception of career success and may be driven by the following factors: personal developments (changes in family structures), the individual's career stage (moving from one stage into the next), or organisational change (technological innovations or organisational restructuring; Heslin, 2005). Participants supported this argument in their reflections on the factors that have led to a change in their perceptions and the meaning they attach to career success.

Executives' future goals also form a significant and unique part of their experience of career success. Participants defined future goals for their success within their current organisational boundaries, as well as outside of these boundaries. From within the organisation boundaries career success were defined in terms of hierarchical and lateral progression. This means to achieve business goals and to embrace the available opportunities offered within the organisation. Their goals outside of the organisation's boundaries were defined in terms of having their own business, investing in the community by creating sustainable jobs and by embracing the available opportunities in the external environment. Seeing that executives' future goals are unique reflections of their subjective experience of career success, sufficient literature could not be found to capture the unique nature of this theme.

Specific themes explore the factors that play a role in executives' achievement of career success. These themes express the objective of determining which factors have an influence on executives' attainment of career success. Such factors include general influencing factors, contributing and hindering factors to career success, as well as linked sub-factors, such as personality attributes and potential for experiencing turnover intention. In the process of attaining career success certain factors may influence either the attainment of career success or the timeframe in which it is achieved. Certain organisational factors influence career success. These factors which include aspects such as the organisational culture, the organisation's perception of career success and organisation influences (e.g. organisational characteristics) was supported by Judge, Cable, Boudreau and Bretz (1995) to be determinants that affect career success. The nature of the profession was also considered by executives to be a significant influencing factor. The reason is that different professions utilise different metric systems to measure career success. However, literature could not be found to support this specific argument. Nevertheless, a study conducted by Brooks, Grauer, Thornbury, and Highhouse (2003) found that the career context can cause differences in formulating criteria for career success. There are different viewpoints on career success based on race and generations (Dries, Pepermans, & De Kerpel, 2008; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002), as well as on individual attributes in cases where such attributes showed up in personality traits related to career success.

Previous research does reflect some of the recent findings on career success and personality (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Ballout, 2009; Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Boudreau, Boswell, & Judge, 2001; De Vos & Soens, 2008; Poon, 2004; Seibert & Kramer, 2001; Wu, Foo, &

Turban, 2008). However, executives indicated very specific personality attributes that they linked to career success. These attributes include traits that people mainly associate with career success (e.g. ambition, optimism, assertiveness, resilience, accountability, creativity). Certain factors do influence career success by contributing to or facilitating such success. The main contributors that were mentioned were well established interpersonal relationships with colleagues, managers and networks, as well as support from the organisation by being provided opportunities and challenges. These factors are supported in previous findings (Ferris, Perrewé, Anthony, & Gilmore, 2000; Gilbreath, 2008). More unique contributors came to the fore that was not represented in previous literature. These include interaction/relationships with successful people and the element of luck. Interaction/relationship with successful people implies having a role model that portrays the attributes of success against which executives could measure themselves in terms of their progress towards career success. The element of luck is about being in the right place at the right time.

In contrast to contributing factors or factors enhancing career success, are the naturally, hindering factors or obstructions/impediments to career success. The most relevant hindering factors were indicated as ceilings to progression that executives' experienced in their careers. Male participants experienced this situation as reaching a ceiling in their career. Due to hierarchical progression the opportunities for upwards mobility become limited. This was also found to be true in a study conducted by Judge et al. (1994). In addition, female participants still experienced a glass ceiling in place that acted as a barrier to their careers. Such a ceiling prevented them from actively pursuing a successful career. A study conducted by Rowe and Crafford (2003), supported the presence of such a glass ceiling that acts as a barrier to the advancement of women's business careers. Other hindering factors include those in the work environment, such as lack of support, lack of an environment that is conducive to a certain career and lack of person-environment fit. Executives also highlighted the hindering factors mentioned as the main drivers behind the potential for experiencing turnover intention. Previous researchers also found this to be the case (Aamodt, 2010; Coetzee & Bergh, 2009; Feldman & Bolino, 1996; Jiang & Klein, 2000; Jiang, Klein & Balloun, 2001; Marchington & Wilkinson, 2008).

Career success can be linked to certain positive career related outcomes, such as life satisfaction, general mental health (Hall, 2002), job or career satisfaction, organisational

commitment, talent retention, employee engagement and job performance (Coetzee, Bergh, & Schreuder, 2010). Therefore, career success is also linked to certain negative career related outcomes that manifests mainly in consequences associated with such success. Executives considered these consequences to be the sacrifices and compromises that they had to make in order to achieve career success. They defined these mainly in terms of health risks and the interference of their work in their personal life. The findings of Tu, Forret and Sullivan (2006) supported the fact that these consequences are related to executives' career success.

Conclusions aim to determine and explore the role the organisation plays in enabling its executives to attain career success. The organisation has a collaborative role to play in the careers of employees, and even more particularly those of executives', by facilitating instead of hindering their career success. To facilitate career success organisations need to ensure that they provide an environment that is conducive to employees' careers. This implies an environment where employees feel contented and fulfilled; also where they feel they can grow and thrive by being provided with the appropriate challenges, opportunities and career development measures and where they feel that they are contributing and adding value to the organisation by making a difference in other people's lives. The necessity of such an environment that is conducive to pursuing careers is also supported by Gilbreath (2008). Considering the high prevalence of potential to experience turnover intention, the organisation has an extremely important and unique role to play in retaining their key individuals (executives). This can be done by re-evaluating executives' career goals and aspirations, as well as the career paths and opportunities within the organisation available to them.

The above mentioned pre-requisites for success in one's career could be drawn from executives' experiences and could be divided into factors specific to the individual , as well as those specific to the organisation.. Individual specific factors that needs to be in place for such success entail having a clear definition of career and career success (work orientation), as well as a vision of where one is going. It's also important to have a passion for what one is doing and having self-insight into one's strengths and developmental areas. The following aspects must also be a priority: continual learning and development, as well as and taking full responsibility to drive one's own career. The factors specific to organisations needed to secure success in one's career include the following: person-environment fit, support, teamwork, mentoring and coaching and working for a reputable company reflecting an

authentic image and represented by good leadership. The research of Heslin (2005) has supported some of the pre-requisites to increase the experience of success. He recommends discovering a work orientation, finding a good fit with the work environment and developing adaptability to career changes.

Schein's career anchor theory formed the theoretical foundation for this study (Schein, 1978, 1990). Accordingly some results in this study highlight the significance of this theory regarding executives' conceptualisation and experience of career success. The most significant correlations that could be established between the results and Schein's career anchors were the meaning executives' personally attached to being in a position of leadership and influencing other people's lives. This personal perception correlated with the fourth career anchor of managerial competence. Investing in the community that represent some executives' future goals correlate with the sixth anchor of service and dedication. Having opportunities and challenges were regarded as an important contributing factor to the attainment of career success. This correlates with the seventh career anchor of pure challenge. And the constant reference to maintain a balance between work and general life, especially from female executives, correlates with the eight career anchor of lifestyle. Additional references were made that correlate with Schein's career anchors, but they are less relevant and significant to this study. These correlations, therefore, highlights the significance of Schein's career anchor theory and confirms it as the theoretical foundation for this study.

3.2 LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

Even though this research study provided significant information on the concept of career success and the factors related to it, it is also imperative to indicate the limitations of such a study. One of the main limitations of this study concerns the research field with regard to the specific industry or sector that was utilised in the research. This is especially important considering the fact that the specific industry, sector or profession were shown as factors that influence executives' conceptualisation and experience of career success. This might suggest that the themes that were captured from the data are industry and sector specific (i.e limited to the financial sector). A sample that included more sectors or industries could have provided a broader understanding of the conceptualisation and experience of career success among those executives. However, for the purpose of this study the focus was rather kept on the experiences of executives as sample participants and not on the sector as a whole.

Therefore the sample is still considered as valuable and relevant. For this reason special care should still be taken when generalising the research findings by applying it to other industries and sectors. Even though the major themes were consistent with themes found in previous literature, some unique sub-themes did emerge (e.g. *Being in a position of leadership and having the opportunity to develop employees; Journey of progression; Being associated with successful brands; Investing in the Community; Different Viewpoints; Interaction/relationships with successful people; Element of luck; Reaching a ceiling in career; and Compromises*). These unique sub-themes are a valuable contribution to the existing literature on career success, especially within South Africa.

Another limitation of this study is reflected in the population's language and cultural diversity. This study's objective was not to determine the different conceptualisations and experiences of career success across various cultural groups that represent the whole spectrum of the South African context. However results from samples that are more inclusive in terms of cultural or language groups might therefore yield broader significant results. The sample in this study consisted of predominantly white males, even though the sample was representative in terms of gender. The majority of the participants were also English-speaking, which reflects a lack of diversity in language representation.

Other limitations relate to qualitative research in as far as data collection and analysis could be time consuming. The collection of data required a lot of time, effort, concentration and skill from the researcher in order to ensure the efficiency and the quality of the analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher did receive the appropriate and relevant qualitative research training to equip her with the necessary skills that could extract detail and richness from the interviews as required for explorative research. However, the level of skills that was obtained by the researcher can still be considered a limitation. The reason is that the level of human capability, skill and knowledge utilised during the research process, as well as the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies, could influence the results (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006).

If one takes in consideration that career success is such a multifaceted concept, another limitation would be that only certain areas of the concept were explored. Other facets related to career success, such as career orientations, career anchors and career psychology – to name but only a few – were merely touched on in some instances, and not investigated thoroughly.

Also the unique sample of mainly executives makes the study quite specific. Therefore, including individuals from across all organisational levels might yield more extensive results about career success of employees.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite these limitations, the study has shown up significant implications that could be considered for implementation in organisations or for future research.

3.1.1 Recommendations for the organisation

Organisations with the aim to facilitate employees' career success effectively can utilise the information and recommendations provided by this research. Firstly, before organisations can provide the appropriate career development measures, they have to be aware and understand the individual's unique conceptualisation and the personal meaning he/she attaches to career success. Additionally organisations need to understand how this meaning is changed and influenced by the stages of career lifecycle, age, and job level and how it guides individual's specific and unique aspirations. Then organisations need to evaluate whether this aspirations is in line with opportunities that the organisation can offer its members.

During individuals' early careers, their own personal definitions of career success are confronted with that of the organisation they are employed in. This often causes a re-definition of their own goals and roles (Duxberry, Dyke, & Lam, 1999). If these are not established, it could lead to incompatibility between personal orientatiton and the work environment, or miss-alignment of personal goals with the goals of the organisation. As a result employees could consider leaving the organisation. Therefore organisations should monitor these issues on a regular basis by having career discussions, career aspiration meetings and career planning and mapping. It is therefore suggested that organisations and those managers that drives career development consider the significance of more effective career matching. This can be established by providing different rewards and other ways of recognition. These can include opportunities to follow a career path that will address the diverse interests and requirements of a multi-dimensional and multi-cultural workforce

(Coetzee, Bergh, & Schreuder, 2010). Furthermore the aim should be to establish practices that support career development and promote positive work experiences for all race, age and gender groups. Such practices might boost individuals' intrinsic or subjective experiences of career success. It might also enrich their life and build career satisfaction and help create a general sense of wellbeing (Coetzee & Bergh, 2009)

Secondly, organisations need to be aware of the factors that influence executives' attainment of career success. They should also consider how many of these factors can be categorised as organisational variables. It is beneficial to the organisation to focus on organisational variables (*Support and buy-in from the organisation like executive sponsorship; being given challenges and opportunities to grow and develop; having a career conducive to career success and reputable organisational culture*) that have facilitated executives' career success or contributed to such success. However, it is also important to address the organisational variables (*Lack of support and buy-in from the organisation in career plan; lack of development and progression opportunities; challenges in the business environment like lack of structure or direction*) that have impeded their career success. It is the organisation's main responsibility to provide an environment conducive to pursuing careers and in which proactive and effective career development and management is promoted. This could possibly lead to increased levels of subjective and objective experiences of career success, and consequently to other significant outcomes, such as job performance, organisational commitment, employee engagement, talent retention and job or career satisfaction (Coetzee, Bergh, & Schreuder, 2010).

If organisations are not aware of such factors and do not address those factors that could impact negatively on how executives experience and achieve career success, it could lead to the potential for turnover intention (as was recorded from the interviews). One of the factors that were found to increase the potential to experience turnover intention was *lack of opportunities*, which causes stagnation at specific levels within an organisation. Other factors that emerged were *lack of person-environment fit or miss-alignment of personal goals and values with organisation's goals and values*, and *nature of work*. *Lack of person-environment fit* causes lack of fulfilment and job dissatisfaction. Such a situation may result in the potential to experience turnover intention. *Nature of the work* is concerned with negative work-related outcomes, such as stress, burnout and interference between work and

the executive's personal life. All of these outcomes can cause the potential to experience turnover intention.

The aim is to limit the potential for experiencing turnover intention and consequently to keep employees, and especially executives, from leaving the organisation. In order to do that organisations should focus their efforts on increasing executives' subjective career satisfaction, particularly concentrating on the factors that help provide this satisfaction (Abele & Spurk, 2009). One of the activities that organisations can undertake to increase executives' subjective career satisfaction is by paying attention to employees' unique career needs. This can be done by having career aspiration meetings and discussing future goals and the available opportunities within the organisation. They can also utilise executives' full potential and tap into their resourcefulness by involving them in succession planning and management of talent in the organisation. Additionally they can develop executives' personal efficacy through proposing and presenting training directed at increasing and continually improving competence and professional skills (Simo, Enache, Sallan Leyes, & Fernandez Alarcon, 2010). It should also be a priority to give appropriate recognition for work that is well done (Peluchette, 1993).

It is also the organisation's responsibility to assist employees in addressing the consequences associated with career success. According to Baruch (2006), realising career success means battling career related stress, which has been acknowledged as being one of the most common obstacles to individual and organisational performance. He also suggested that organisational and individual career management needs focus on achieving a balance between work and life (Quick & Tetrick, 2002). It is therefore crucial for organisations to deploy initiatives and interventions focusing on effective health and wellness, as well as maintaining balance between work and daily lives. Such initiatives will help employees to handle the negative consequences of career success.

In conclusion, the findings add significant new insight that can be used as guidelines for organisational practices that support career development, especially those practices that focus on the attraction, engagement, development and retention of managerial potential. Career support practices have been found to influence employees' ability behaviour and motivation to develop their careers, of (Kuijpers & Scheerens, 2006). For this reason, if an organisation aims to retain their managerial potential (executives), they need to provide incentives and

career paths that are in line with those career values, expectations, and aspirations that form the foundation for individuals' career orientations (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2009a; Järnlström, 2000; Schein, 1996; Suutari & Taka, 2004). If this strategy is not considered, it could lead to negative outcomes, such as anxiety, stress, dissatisfaction with the job and career, unhappiness and unwanted turnover (Coetzee & Bergh, 2009; Feldman & Bolino, 1996; Jiang & Klein, 2000; Jiang, Klein & Balloun, 2001) leaving a huge skills shortage and knowledge gap at very crucial levels within the organisation.

3.1.2 Recommendations for future research

Considering the significant amount of information that was gained from this research, continued research on executives' conceptualisation and experience of career success is highly recommended. A more specific recommendation would be to explore how career success manifests among other specific employee levels (samples) and organisations in South African. Special consideration should be given to replicate the findings to broader samples across various occupational groups, as well as economic sectors. Before specific conclusions can be drawn from the interaction and relationships between the constructs of career success (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2009), the definition of career success among different cultural and language groups needs to be explored. Conducting an in-depth analysis on how these differences influence employees' conceptualisation and experience of career success can provide deeper insight into understanding the diverse nature of career success within the South African context.

Furthermore, the factors that play a role in career success needs to be explored across organisational boundaries and sectors in order to determine whether some factors are organisation or sector specific. This will allow Human Resource Professionals to gain a greater understanding of how career success and its facets manifest within their unique organisation/industry/sector. Consequently it will help such professionals to create more accurately and efficiently an environment that is conducive to career development.

There has been quite limited research that explores the effects of individual traits on career success. Researchers have only recently begun to understand the role of personality in career success (Seibert & Kramer, 2001). This understanding, however, is even more limited in light

of the diverse nature of the South African context. Therefore it is recommended not only to explore the personality attributes associated with career success, but also the relation between personality, career success and different culture and language groups. This would contribute significantly to the research on personality and how personality helps to elucidate the concept of career success within the South African context.

Quantitative research can also be recommended for future research in which South African employees' unique conceptualisation and experience of career success can be measured. However, a measuring instrument for the unique constructs of career success that is standardised for the diverse South African context is yet to be developed. The complex nature of how individuals conceive of subjective career success might also be an obstacle in this regard. The consequences related to career success such as stress, burnout, ill health and interference between personal and work-life can also be measured using quantitative research, which will provide a more comprehensive exploration on the subjective side of career success (Park, 2010). However, a measuring instrument for career success will have to be developed first, before more extensive quantitative studies can be considered on this topic.

So even though South African research do exist on the topic of career success (Coetzee, Schreuder, & Bergh, 2010; Coetzee & Schreuder, 2009; Riordan, 2007; Riordan & Louw-Potgieter, 2011; Rowe & Crafford, 2003), there still are some major gaps regarding this topic. This makes it attempting to understand how South African employees from various backgrounds and who are employed in various sectors, conceptualise and experience career success. Therefore it is crucial to start addressing these gaps that exist in literature in order to provide the practice with an in-depth insight and relevant recommendations on how to promote positive career outcomes and experiences related to career success in South African organisations.

Finally, in conclusion, even though certain limitations are linked to the research (e.g. researcher's skills, demographics of sample, industry/sector), very valuable insight and information could be captured. The value of the information manifests in crucial recommendations for both research and practice. The researcher has utilised her unique qualitative research knowledge and skills and have made an important contribution to existing research by providing a framework for future research. Even though existing lines could be drawn between previous career success research and this particular study, unique

and interesting themes emerged. This has provided strong research opportunities of exploration for future career success researchers. The significance of careers and career success will always ignite curiosity within researchers and motivate investigation into these constructs as they relate to human resource management and industrial psychology.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

Extraction of Transcription

Work Protocol for Data analysis with assistance of a Co-Coder

Example of Observation Notes

Role of the Inter-Mediator



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January 2012

Dear Manager

Invitation to participate in research

I am currently conducting research on 'the experience on career success amongst South African executives', which forms an integral part of my Master's research programme in Industrial Psychology. The necessary ethical clearance has been obtained from the North West University's Ethics Committee to perform this research.

The main purpose of this research is to explore how South African executives understand and experience career success. As a senior manager or executive you have been identified, based on specific criteria, as a possible candidate for this research and are therefore invited to participate. The criteria is set out as follows: (1) employees who are in a position of senior management; (2) employees with senior management experience from between 5-10 years; (3) employees willing to participate in the research (who give their written consent) after being informed about the purpose and procedures of the research; (4) employees willing to be interviewed by the researcher; (5) employees who are prepared to have their interview tape-

recorded by the researcher. Participation is voluntary, which means that you will be able to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions. The data that will be gathered during the process will be kept confidential and anonymous. A research report will be compiled based on this data, but no identifying information of participants will be included in the report.

Data-gathering will take place by means of semi-structured interviews. An interview schedule will be used to put forward a couple of questions to the participants. . The duration of the interviews will depend on the amount of information given by the participants. The total time is estimated to take approximately 30-60 minutes.

In order to ensure the scientific value of the research, the interviews will be voice-recorded, for which participants' consent will be required. The results of the research will also help to enrich the description of South African executives' experience of career success. Your participation is of utmost value to research and practice, seeing that a greater understanding of the concept of career success will be gained, as well as the role it plays in organisations. These research findings will also provide a sound theoretical basis for future research on this topic.

If you decide to participate in the research please contact the researcher, Suné Visagie, at 084 505 8513/20265808@student.nwu.ac.za

If you give your consent that the data may be used for the purpose of the mentioned research, please sign the attached consent form.

Yours sincerely

Ms S. Visagie
Master's Student
Industrial Psychology

Dr E. Koekemoer
Supervisor
Industrial Psychology

I (full name(s), surname in capital letters) _____
hereby agree to participate in the research project ‘The experience of career success: An exploratory study amongst South African executives’ and give my full consent that the information that I provide (interview) may be used as data in this research project. I also give my permission to the researcher to make use of a digital voice recorder to record the interview. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study/research at any stage without repercussions. I also understand that the data will be included in a research report, in which confidentiality and anonymity of data and participant will be upheld.

Signature of participant:

Date:

Signature of researcher:

Date:

EXTRACTION OF TRANSCRIPTION

The digital voice recordings of the interviews were all transcribed verbatim. The following represents an example of an extraction from one of the transcripts of an interview conducted with an executive.

Researcher: First Question, how do you view the overall concept of career success or how would you conceptualise the concept of career success?

Participant: It's actually how you as an individual, so somebody that only wants to remain as a middle manager and had that ambition from day one and achieves that then they have been successful in their career, you as an individual where you perceive it, so me as an individual where after matric I knew I wanna probably get to a CEO level, so where I am in my career I wouldn't say I've achieved where I want to be, but I'm on the path to, I'm on the right path and the right level and the right time

Researcher: Ok, so you're still in the process of getting to that?

Participant: Yes

Researcher: Ok, so for you it's more of a subjective type of thing, so it will depend on the individual, what they would like to achieve, so it depends on their personal goals?

Participant: Exactly, it's personal goals

Researcher: So if you can just maybe speak more about what it is to you personally?

Participant: So personally, career success means not just fulfilling your dreams and getting to a position, so career is not about a position, it's about your learning, so your development and what you want to do, so my objective was to what I defined as a CEO, and you can so I got it now, because I do run a business and I am sort of the CEO of the business, but I saw it in the context of being the CEO of a broader business, so I'm still away from that and that's why I say that I haven't achieved what I want to, but from a learning point of view, your career

success goes to the leadership, to your personal development, to your learning, so the biggest one is leadership, so have you made sure that you acquired knowledge and you pass it on to grow others as well and you know growing the economic environment and then I would say I've done that, because I've you know brand many teams and I've been successful in developing them, so in that piece of leadership, leadership is more than just people, it's how you take your vision and grow your business, so I've also you know learnt a lot and I've also delivered a lot, but I've never, I would not say that's, I think even (CEO of Organisation B) if he has to say that he has attained all then it means he's dead, because learning is a continuous process, every day you learn new things, you, the environment is changing, it's so dynamic, it's globalised , so to me that's all the things to go together, it's not you know from a leadership, from a personal development, you know from a learning and growth point of view how to do it and how do you then pull these things together to grow your business, and I've grown, I've been successful in portfolios where I've grown the business, though previously in my career and outside Organisation B and here, in my portfolio, I've shown huge growth in business as well

Researcher: Ok, now keeping in mind what you just said, do you feel that you experience, or are currently experiencing career success and please explain your answer?

Participant: Yes, I do believe I'm achieving career success, if I look at how I've grown my business, you know the numbers talk for itself, I'm definitely doing success there, but over and above that, each time you're given more responsibility, you know you're being empowered, you learn bigger mandates, then you know you're on the right track, because you're ultimately making, you're getting on to the top, where you're strategizing and making the final decisions and yes I am at the level that, so I am on PPBE Ebsco and there's about 3 of us out of the 20 of us that drive the vision, the strategy, the leadership, to build leadership into the organisation, so I'm in that top notch group, that's helping to drive that so I would measure my success based on those things, and I've said yea I am achieving career success

Researcher: Ok, so you are quite satisfied with what you've achieved as yet?

Participant: Yes

Researcher: Ok now, what aspects do you think are necessary for each individual to achieve career success? When you think about it broad things for each individual, what do you think are necessary?

Participant: So the big thing is self-drive, your motivation your vision, your goals, if each individual, if they just think that it's going to happen to them and their manager is going to help them to get to a successful career, that's not gonna happen, you need to be self-motivated, you have to understand what's your personal vision, your personal goal and you must do that, so that's the first thing that will help you, and then it doesn't come easy, you have to have people that know more than you, surrounded and giving good advice, so I'm very lucky to have lots of good mentors that help me and you draw from mentorship, and your mentors are not just internally, their external people, they're not necessarily in the same field, because different people have different strengths and ja, so I would say I'm career successful in a particular way, I'm not one that can do any job, so you need to understand what your limitations are, play to your strengths, acknowledge your limitations, and make sure you also always developing your what your areas for development are, you know your limitations, your weakness or whatever they call it, I don't like to call them weaknesses

Researcher: hmm, developmental areas

Participant: Yes, developmental areas

Researcher: Ja, ja, ok, now what aspects are important for you or need to be in place in your environment or your personal life for you to feel that you have career success?

Participant: (laughing in background) what has to be in place?

Researcher: Yes

Participant: So to me you have to have measures, if you don't have a measurable outcome, so you would know, so when you go to your personal goals and your vision in there, setting that to say ok I wanna be a CEO, what does a CEO do, you know, so you have to unpack that and put measures against it to say ok I'm going to be the ultimate person that drives the vision and the strategy and I'm going to be running it, you know teams of people developing and

helping, so sometimes somebody can have career success without having, uhm, managed one person, because they don't wanna manage people, so if that's under your measurement and saying that I want to achieve a position where I manage people, so I wouldn't say leadership, because you can be a leader without managing people, you know all of us are leaders in their own, you know leadership is situational or it depends on what, who's taking the lead in a direction, so when you, uhm, put down your personal goal, your personal vision plan, you have to unpack that and then put measurable things next to it to know whether you're going to do it or not, so in my, when I started at you know 18, I knew by 30 I will have an MBA, I knew I, I set out a goal by 18, by, by, before 35 (people laughing in background) I'd be a financial director of a company and doing you know a financial director's job description and then when you got to 35, what did I achieve that or didn't I achieve that, you can tick and say yes or no, so you have to have measurable outcomes to understand if you've been successful or not

Researcher: Ok, so you would need that plan in terms of you need that goals and then direction in terms of how to reach those goals?

Participant: Yeah

WORK PROTOCOL FOR DATA ANALYSIS WITH ASSISTANCE OF CO-CODER

During the analytical stage of the research the co-coder assisted the researcher in analysing the data and thereby capturing the themes and sub-themes.

Data analysis was conducted based on the following facets of the research:

- Field notes for each interview
- Transcriptions of each interview

Protocol of data analysis

As part of data analysis the following is done during the coding process:

- The interviews are read thoroughly, several times in order to obtain a bigger picture of the context.
- The responses of the participants regarding their experiences are then compressed or summarised into meaningful units, which appear as sentences or paragraphs.
- The meaningful units that were identified are then classified or categorised into the main or major themes.
- Out of the major themes, similar derived themes are explored and condensed to form sub-themes.

During the data analysis and coding process the following steps are also used:

- Testing the coding method on a text sample
- Evaluating the efficiency of the sample coding
- Revising the coding rules if and where necessary
- Coding of the text as a whole
- Defining the meaningful units related to the research problem
- Defining the coding categories to establish the main themes and the derived sub-themes

EXAMPLE OF OBSERVATION NOTES



Master's Research Study in Industrial Psychology
The experience of Career Success: An exploratory study among South African executives
Field notes
Participant name:
Code: 1A
Date of interview: 28 August 2011
Time: 14:00
Place: Offices in Sunninghill, Johannesburg, South Africa
Organisation Code: A

The research questions were asked and any particular response to these questions was recorded, as well as the usefulness of the question to extract meaningful responses.

Question 1: How do you view the overall concept of career success? How would you conceptualise career success?

Question 2: What does career success mean to you personally?

Question 3: Do you feel that you experience, or currently are experiencing career success?
Please explain your answer

Question 4: What aspects do you believe are necessary for each individual to achieve career success?

Question 5: What aspects are important for you, or need to be in place in order for you to feel that you have career success?

Question 6: In terms of your career path, what are your goals for the future?

Question 7: What aspects have contributed to you reaching your career goals?

Question 8: What aspects have hindered you from reaching your career goals?

Question 9: What role does your organisation play in your career development or attainment of your career goals?

Overall impression of the interview:

Methodology: The interview was conducted in a private and reserved meeting room with comfortable chairs placed around a central table. The air conditioner could be heard, as well as construction vehicles operating in the background. The participant signed the consent form in a relaxed manner. From observing body language, facial expressions and responses the participant seemed calm and relaxed and eager to share even when the digital recorder was on. In some instances the participant lost the thread of his story, but was guided back on track by the researcher. The interview was not interrupted and lasted 23 minutes.

Personal: Seeing that it was the first interview, the researcher felt somewhat nervous. However, observing that the participant was calm, open and friendly put her at ease. The interview started out erratically as the researcher attempted to find her feet and to adapt to the flow of the interview. However, as the researcher gained more confidence in her interview skills and she relaxed, the interview proceeded more smoothly. Sometimes when the interview veered off the topic the researcher became frustrated and struggled to guide the participants back on track to provide the required information. Nevertheless the researcher fell back on her interview skills to guide the participants back to the topic on hand to the best of her ability.

Theoretical: Throughout the interviews the researcher kept in mind the research problem that was identified. On this basis the researcher could effectively identify the themes related to the research problem from the participant's responses. This applied particularly to the themes regarding executives' conceptualization of career success, as well as the factors that influence such success.

ROLE OF THE INTER-MEDIATOR

An inter-mediator was called in to assist the researcher gain access to the research field. From this can be deduced that an inter-mediator's role also entails helping the researcher to identify possible research candidates and to co-ordinate the logistics of the interviews, such as date, time, and location together with the consenting participants. It is also the inter-mediator's responsibility to introduce to the possible participants the researcher, as well as the objective and purpose of the research at large.

The inclusion criteria were applied by the inter-mediator as a guideline to focus on participants that:

1. were in a position of senior management;
2. had senior management experience between 5-10 years;
3. were willing to participate in the research (giving written consent) after being informed about the purpose and procedures of the research;
4. were willing to be interviewed by the researcher;
5. were prepared to have their interview tape recorded by the researcher.

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I hereby confirm that this dissertation by me Suné Visagie was edited, proofread and groomed to the best of my ability, including some recommendations for stylistic modifications and rephrasing.

Rev Claude Vosloo
Language and knowledge practitioner and consultant

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Home of Creativity ULTD 

Don't think outside the box, reinvent the box