



**Career insecurity and work
engagement among HR
professionals: The moderating role of
career crafting and perceived
organisational support**

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requirements for the degree *Master of Commerce in
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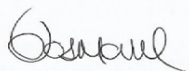
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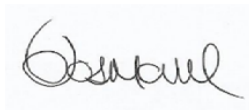
This research study was designed and executed by four researchers at North-West University. In the table below, the contributions of each researcher are indicated.

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Dr J. Bosman	Supervisor; co-conceptualiser responsible for data management and analysis and critical reviewer of the overall research study.
Mr S.L. Mnxuma	Co-supervisor, co-conceptualiser, and critical reviewer of the overall research study

Furthermore, with this statement, the authors declare and confirm their roles in this research study. This declaration also indicates that all authors are in agreement that the appropriate format was used for the submission of this mini-dissertation at the North-West University. All authors are also in agreement that the contents of this research study and any modified versions thereof may be used and published by the supervisor in peer-reviewed academic journals, books and/or presented at academic conferences.



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ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)** on, 12/06/2024 the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby **approves** your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-REC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: Career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals: The moderating role of career crafting and perceived organisational support

Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Dr J. Bosman

Student: P. Mtambo (22471707)

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Institution Study Number Year Status

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Application Type:

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SUMMARY

Title: Career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals: The moderating role of career crafting and perceived organisational support

Key Terms: Career insecurity, work engagement, career crafting, perceived organisational support, JD-R theory, HR professionals, South African.

The contemporary world of work is increasingly characterised by rapid technological advancement, globalisation, post-pandemic disruption, and ongoing organisational restructuring, all of which have intensified uncertainty regarding employees' long-term career prospects. Within this context, career insecurity refers to individuals' thoughts and worries that central aspects of their future career may develop in an undesired manner. Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling work-related state characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption, is widely recognised as a key indicator of motivation, well-being, and sustainable performance.

Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, this study conceptualised career insecurity as a career-level demand and examined whether access to personal and organisational resources reduces its potential impact on work engagement. Specifically, the study focused on career crafting, defined as proactive behaviours aimed at optimising person-career fit through reflection and career construction, and perceived organisational support (POS), defined as employees' belief that the organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Drawing on JD-R theory, career crafting was positioned as a bottom-up personal resource, while POS was framed as a top-down organisational resource that may buffer the effects of demanding conditions such as career insecurity.

The study focused on HR professionals in South Africa, an occupational group uniquely positioned at the centre of organisational change, yet increasingly exposed to uncertainty due to technological disruption, artificial intelligence adoption, outsourcing, and role redefinition. In the South African context, these challenges are compounded by macroeconomic instability, skills shortages, and ongoing organisational restructuring, making HR professionals particularly vulnerable to concerns about long-term career sustainability.

A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed. Data was collected from a sample of 212 HR professionals working across public and private sector organisations in

South Africa. Validated self-report instruments were used to measure career insecurity, work engagement, career crafting, and POS. Regression-based moderation analysis was conducted to examine direct and conditional relationships among the study variables, consistent with recommendations for testing interaction effects in cross-sectional designs.

The findings indicated that career insecurity was negatively associated with work engagement at the correlational level, suggesting that, in this sample, higher levels of career insecurity were linked to lower engagement among HR professionals. This finding aligns with a growing body of research demonstrating that career insecurity functions as a meaningful psychological demand that can undermine motivational outcomes such as work engagement. Empirical studies consistently showed that uncertainty related to future career prospects, employability, and skill relevance was associated with reduced energy, dedication, and absorption at work, particularly when such uncertainty is persistent. Similarly, evidence suggests that under conditions of heightened career uncertainty, employees are more likely to experience diminished engagement due to increased cognitive and emotional strain.

In addition, career crafting was positively associated with work engagement, confirming its role as an important motivational resource in this sample; however, career crafting did not reduce the impact of career insecurity on engagement among the participants in this study. This suggested that individual proactive behaviours, although beneficial for engagement generally, might have been insufficient to offset concerns about long-term career sustainability in structurally constrained contexts. In contrast, the findings indicated that POS significantly reduced the strength of the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement in this sample, demonstrating a buffering effect. This finding supported JD-R theory's proposition that organisational resources are particularly influential when demands are salient and persistent. Consistent with prior research, POS appeared to foster psychological safety and reciprocity, thereby protecting motivation and engagement under conditions of uncertainty.

Overall, this study highlighted that the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement was context-dependent rather than uniformly negative. By integrating a career-level demand into the JD-R framework, the study contributed to the growing literature on sustainable careers and engagement in uncertain work. Practically, the findings of this study underscored the critical role of organisational-level support in sustaining engagement among HR professionals, particularly in the South African context, where uncertainty related to employment, skills, and organisational change remained pronounced. In this study, the

results offered evidence-based guidance for organisations and HR leaders and recommendations for future research and practice were made.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to determine whether there is a relationship between career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals in South Africa. The study further examined whether career crafting and perceived organisational support (POS) reduce the impact of career insecurity on work engagement. This chapter provides a foundation for understanding the research problem by presenting the study background, outlining the problem statement, reviewing relevant literature, and describing the study's objectives and research methodology. The chapter further highlights the potential value of the research and outlines the organisation of the subsequent chapters.

1.2 Background

Organisations continually face new challenges arising from economic, political, technological, and social changes. The COVID-19 pandemic represented a profound global disruption, with far-reaching consequences for businesses, labour markets, and employees worldwide (Gartner, 2023a; Larralde, 2023). In the post-COVID-19 context, the nature of work has continued to evolve in ways that exceed earlier conceptions of volatility and uncertainty. Increasingly, contemporary work environments are described using the BANI framework: brittle, anxious, non-linear, and incomprehensible, which is highlighting the fragility of organisational systems and the difficulty of predicting or controlling outcomes in the face of rapid change (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Kruse, 2025). Within such environments, organisations are more susceptible to sudden disruption, while employees experience persistent anxiety and reduced predictability regarding career progression. Consequently, adaptability, resilience, and continuous learning have become essential capabilities, alongside the accelerated adoption of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) across organisational functions (Kulik, 2022; Roy, 2023).

Against this backdrop, the role of the HR profession has expanded significantly in scope and complexity. HR professionals are expected to support organisational recovery and workforce well-being while simultaneously leading hybrid work arrangements, digital transformation initiatives, and evolving talent management strategies (Deepa, 2021; Pan, 2023; Roy, 2023; Wickham, 2021). In addition, AI-enabled systems are increasingly integrated into HR practices, including recruitment, learning and development, performance management, and workforce analytics (Gartner, 2023a; Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2025). While these technologies offer opportunities to enhance efficiency and strategic decision-making, they have also heightened concerns regarding skill obsolescence, role redefinition, and long-term career sustainability within HR functions (Pagnotta, 2025;

Shahiduzzaman, 2025). Furthermore, these developments have occurred alongside enduring post-pandemic challenges, such as managing elevated turnover, supporting employee mental health, and responding to shifting expectations around leadership, flexibility, and inclusion (Dennerline, 2022; Rice, 2021). Collectively, these pressures have contributed to a fundamental transformation of the HR profession, reshaping traditional roles and increasing the emotional, cognitive, and strategic demands placed on HR professionals (Gigauri, 2020; Roy, 2023).

Anjum et al. (2022) suggest that navigating organisational complexity has grown increasingly difficult as global, systemic shifts continue to reshape career paths. In today's BANI-type environment, employees are increasingly worried about the sustainability and direction of their future careers (Kruse, 2025; Tshetshe, 2025). AI-driven transformation complicates this further: research in South Africa highlights how AI is shifting HR roles from administrative tasks to strategic, data-driven functions while simultaneously raising concerns about job displacement and the need for ethical oversight (HRSpot, 2024; Ncube et al., 2025). In response, HR professionals must adopt agile, flexible, and rapidly adaptable mindsets to balance uncertainty and technological disruption. Moreover, HR's strategic partnering role of helping organisations anticipate and respond effectively to brittle systems and technological evolution remains crucial. Failure to adapt swiftly could impede organisational performance and resilience (PwC, 2020). These compounded challenges have also led many HR professionals to reflect on their own career security, as AI, restructuring, and performance pressures reshape traditional HR roles (Roy, 2023). Consequently, organisations must cultivate highly engaged HR professionals who demonstrate adaptability, creativity, and innovation to thrive amid persistent uncertainty and complex technological change (Kruse, 2025; Lauenroth, 2022).

Career insecurity provides a useful lens through which to understand these experiences. Career insecurity is defined as "an individual's thoughts and worries that central content aspects of one's future career might possibly develop in an undesired manner" (Spurk et al., 2022, p. 257). Unlike job insecurity, which focuses on the continuity of one's current employment, career insecurity reflects broader, future-oriented concerns related to employability, career progression, and long-term relevance. In BANI-type environments, career insecurity has become a salient psychological demand that may undermine work engagement, a key driver of employee performance, motivation, and well-being (Kruse, 2025; Spurk et al., 2022).

Given the increasing complexity and fragility of HR roles in South Africa, shaped by post-COVID-19 realities, BANI-type conditions and the rapid integration of AI into people management practices, understanding how career insecurity relates to work engagement has become both timely and necessary. In environments characterised by heightened anxiety, non-linear change, and evolving skill demands, it is particularly important to examine whether personal and organisational resources such as career crafting and POS reduce the impact of career insecurity on engagement. Exploring these relationships may provide valuable insights into how HR professionals, more particularly in the South African context, can sustain engagement, adaptability, and resilience while navigating persistent uncertainty and ongoing technological transformation in the contemporary world of work.

1.3 Problem Statement

The global world of work is undergoing sustained and multi-layered transformation, driven by rapid advances in automation, AI, and digitalisation that continue to reshape organisational structures, job design, and people management practices (Gartner, 2023b; SAP SuccessFactors, 2024; SHRM, 2025). Rather than representing a short-lived technological disruption, these changes signal a structural reconfiguration of work, requiring continuous adaptation from both organisations and employees. Within this evolving landscape, HR professionals occupy a particularly exposed position, as they are simultaneously architects of workforce transformation and subjects of that transformation themselves. Their roles are expanding beyond traditional administrative and relational functions to include data-driven decision making, technology stewardship, workforce analytics, and AI governance, often without a commensurate expansion in resources or capability-building support (Academy to Innovate HR [AIHR], 2025; Bersin, 2025).

Contemporary global and regional evidence suggests that while AI adoption in HR continues to accelerate, it has also intensified uncertainty surrounding role relevance, skill obsolescence, and long-term career viability within the profession (Pagnotta, 2025; SHRM, 2025). HR professionals are increasingly expected to master technical, analytical, and strategic competencies, while simultaneously responding to heightened organisational expectations related to agility, speed, ethical oversight, and employee well-being. In South Africa specifically, these pressures are compounded by macroeconomic volatility, ongoing skills shortages, regulatory complexity, and uneven access to advanced digital infrastructure, all of which shape how technological change is experienced at work (HR Future, 2025; HRSpot, 2024). Consequently, HR professionals are required to constantly

reassess their employability, future progression, and professional identity in an environment where traditional, linear career paths are becoming increasingly fragmented.

In work contexts characterised by BANI-type conditions, career insecurity is no longer confined to periods of organisational restructuring or downsizing but has become a chronic psychological demand embedded in everyday work experiences (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Kruse, 2025). As AI-enabled systems increasingly automate, augment, or redefine HR tasks, perceptions of career insecurity are fuelled not only by fears of job loss, but also by concerns regarding diminished role meaning, skill relevance, and long-term professional sustainability. Emerging studies demonstrate that such insecurity undermines motivational states, weakens identification with work roles, and poses a direct threat to sustained work engagement, particularly in knowledge-intensive and change-driven professions (Pires, 2025).

At the same time, empirical evidence highlights a growing imbalance between the expanding demands placed on HR professionals and the resources available to support them. Latest international and regional surveys report persistent capacity constraints within HR departments, with professionals reporting excessive workloads, continual role expansion, limited development opportunities, and insufficient organisational support during digital transformation initiatives (Culture Amp, 2023; EBnet, 2025; SHRM, 2025). These conditions have been linked to elevated burnout risk, declining work engagement, and increasing intentions to exit the HR profession altogether (Mayer, 2022; Rozon, 2022). Ironically, those tasked with sustaining organisational engagement and well-being are themselves operating under conditions that threaten their own psychological sustainability.

Despite HR professionals' central role in enabling organisational resilience, engagement, and change capability, the academic literature continues to position them primarily as facilitators of others' well-being, rather than as employees whose own psychological experiences warrant investigation. While a growing body of research has examined digital HR transformation and Industry 4.0, there remains limited empirical focus on how contemporary work conditions affect HR professionals' career insecurity and work engagement, particularly in emerging economies. Within the South African context, research addressing HR professionals' subjective career experiences remains scarce, leaving critical questions about engagement, motivation, and career sustainability underexplored (Dhanpat et al., 2020; Mayer, 2022).

This gap points to the need for research that not only examines the negative consequences of career insecurity, but also identifies the resources that enable HR professionals to remain

engaged under persistent uncertainty. Drawing on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, career insecurity may be conceptualised as a salient psychological demand that depletes energy and undermines engagement when left unbuffered (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). However, the JD-R theory further suggests that personal and organisational resources can mitigate the detrimental effects of such demands by enhancing motivation, control, and adaptive capacity.

Within this framework, career crafting has emerged as a particularly relevant personal resource in digitally disrupted and uncertain career contexts. Emerging studies indicate that career crafting enables individuals to proactively reshape career goals, skill portfolios, learning trajectories, and professional identities in response to changing environmental demands, thereby restoring a sense of agency and future orientation (Chen et al., 2024; Fu et al., 2025). In AI-augmented work environments, career crafting has been linked to increased sense of control, stronger person - career fit, and higher levels of career and work engagement, even under conditions of heightened insecurity (Bankins et al., 2024; Fu et al., 2025). For HR professionals facing continuous role redefinition, career crafting may therefore represent a critical mechanism through which the negative impact of career insecurity on engagement can be attenuated.

In parallel, POS represents an important contextual resource that signals organisational commitment to employees' development, well-being, and long-term employability. Subsequent evidence suggests that when organisations actively support reskilling, career development, and psychological safety during digital transformation, the adverse effects of insecurity on engagement may be reduced (Rockstuhl et al., 2020; SHRM, 2025). For HR professionals, organisational support may not only enhance engagement directly, but also strengthen the effectiveness of proactive career behaviours such as career crafting.

Therefore, the current study sought to investigate the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals in South Africa, and to examine whether career crafting and POS buffer the impact of career insecurity on engagement. By highlighting HR professionals' own experiences within contemporary, technology-driven work environments, this study aims to contribute to the limited empirical literature on HR career sustainability and to generate contextually relevant insights into how engagement, adaptability, and resilience may be sustained in the face of ongoing uncertainty and transformation.

1.4 Literature Review

1.4.1 Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory

According to Bakker and Demerouti (2017), the JD-R theory suggests that each occupation exhibits unique job characteristics that are linked to work engagement. Specifically, job characteristics can be classified into two categories: job demands and job resources. Job demands encompass the persistent physical, emotional, or cognitive efforts required in a particular job role, while job resources encompass the physical, psychological, social, or organisational resources needed to effectively perform one's role (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001). The latest work by Bakker and Demerouti (2023) reiterates that the strength of the JD-R theory lies in its flexibility: demands and resources are not limited to fixed lists but can be tailored to the realities of specific roles and work contexts, making the model applicable across diverse occupations and changing environments (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Even though job demands matter for ill-being through the health-impairment process and job resources matter for well-being through the motivational process, the impact of demands on well-being is not inevitable or unidirectional. In line with earlier JD-R work, job resources may play a role in cushioning the impact of job demands on work engagement (Bakker et al., 2005; Dubois et al., 2014). Current JD-R developments further clarify that demands and resources can interact dynamically over time through loss and gain spirals, meaning that sustained demands may drain energy and reduce engagement unless resources are mobilised to interrupt this depletion cycle (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023).

Simply put, job demands refer to the negative aspects of work that deplete energy, such as unfavourable work conditions, work pressure, and work overload (Schaufeli, 2017; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). On the other hand, job resources encompass the positive aspects of work, including autonomy, appreciation, skills utilisation, and task variety (Schaufeli, 2017; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Moreover, Bakker and Demerouti (2023) also highlight that the demand-resource distinction is not always rigid: a "resource" can function like a demand when it becomes excessive, and the meaning of certain demands can depend on how they are appraised (e.g., as hindrances or challenges). Furthermore, according to Schaufeli and Taris (2014, p. 49), "personal resources primarily represent an individual's ability to effectively control and influence their environment". Therefore, the preceding JD-R developments point to the importance of personal resources as self-regulatory mechanisms through which individuals manage demands and sustain engagement in uncertain conditions.

In this study, career insecurity was considered a “job” demand, as it reflects a perceived threat to one’s career prospects and can lead to psychological costs such as reduced work engagement (Chen et al., 2021). This conceptualisation is consistent with emerging empirical work showing that career insecurity undermines engagement and well-being, supporting its treatment as a demand within the JD-R framework (Cai et al., 2024; Pires, 2025). In addition, career insecurity can also be perceived as a challenge demand in certain circumstances, particularly when individuals appraise it as a manageable prompt for growth and development (Chen et al., 2021). Current JD-R theory developments reinforce that the impact of career insecurity depends on context and appraisal, and that the same demand may operate differently depending on available resources and perceived controllability (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023).

In addition, personal and organisational resources can be positioned as (“job”) resources that could play a pivotal role in moderating the negative effects of (“job”) demands, such as career insecurity, on work engagement. Specifically, career crafting can be considered a personal resource that enables individuals to proactively shape their career path, while perceived organisational support (POS) can be viewed as an organisational resource representing employees’ perception of the support and care provided by the organisation. In line with contemporary JD-R thinking, these resources are expected not only to foster engagement directly through the motivational process, but also to buffer the strain effects associated with persistent demands, helping to prevent loss spirals and sustain functioning over time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023).

Career crafting is also increasingly recognised in emerging literature as a proactive strategy that helps individuals regain a sense of control, adapt to changing requirements, and remain engaged with their career goals under uncertain conditions (Fu et al., 2025). Similarly, job insecurity has been shown to interact with adaptive career-related resources (e.g., career adaptability and person-organisation fit) in shaping work engagement, supporting the logic that resources can condition the strength of insecurity, engagement relationships (Chen et al., 2024). Therefore, by engaging in career crafting and perceiving organisational support, individuals could gain a sense of control over their work environment, enhancing their ability to cope with demands and thereby supporting work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Bakker et al., 2023).

Within the JD-R theory, work engagement is positioned as the central motivational outcome of the motivational process, through which resources energise employees and strengthen their willingness to invest themselves in their work. Latest developments in JD-R theory

continue to emphasise that engagement is shaped by the balance between demands and resources, and that job resources can sustain motivation and engagement, especially in demanding contexts (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023).

Therefore, this study adds to the existing theory by assuming that HR professionals who are experiencing career insecurity as a demand are more likely or prone to lower levels of engagement at work. This is consistent with newly reported evidence linking insecurity related to career trajectories to reduced engagement and motivational states (Cai et al., 2024; Pires, 2025). Conversely, when HR professionals have access to personal and organisational resources such as career crafting and POS, their engagement levels are less likely to be as negatively affected by career insecurity. This proposition aligns with JD-R's contemporary emphasis on how resources buffer demands and promotes engagement, particularly in volatile contexts characterised by rapid change (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Therefore, the JD-R theory is flexible and able to integrate a wide variety of job-related characteristics and considers organisational environment influences on employee well-being, making it a suitable theoretical lens for examining these relationships in dynamic work environments (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Bakker et al., 2023).

1.4.2 Career Insecurity

According to Tien et al. (2005), career insecurity is defined as “any factor that causes individuals to be uncertain about their career future” (p. 164). According to Colakoglu (2011), career insecurity refers to an individual's perception of being powerless to maintain continuous employment in their chosen career. According to De Cuyper et al. (2012) and Shoss (2017), career insecurity is divided into continuous improvement and low employability. Career insecurity is defined by Hoge et al. (2012) as a person's uncertainty about reaching mid-to long-term career objectives. According to Spurk et al. (2022), career insecurity has not been well defined or separated from related conceptions like work insecurity, leaving it mostly unexplored even though it is considered a basic experience throughout an individual's career. Spurk et al. (2022) define career insecurity as “an individual's thoughts and worries that central content aspects of one's future career will develop in an undesirable manner” (p. 257). This definition views career insecurity as a multidimensional construct distinct from related constructs such as job insecurity, perceived low employability, and perceived career barriers. According to Spurk et al. (2022), career insecurity has eight dimensions that capture employees' thoughts and worries: career opportunities, decreased prestige and qualification requirements of future employment, contractual employment conditions (e.g., salary and working hours), unemployment, change

of workplace (e.g., change of employer, position, or occupation), retirement (e.g., benefits and retirement age), work-nonwork interactions, and the discrepancy between individual resources and work demands. For the purposes of this study, career insecurity was conceptualised and operationalised using Spurk et al. (2022), given the construct's explicit definition, clear conceptual boundaries, and multidimensional structure that aligns with the complexity of contemporary career concerns. Furthermore, prior literature indicates that perceived career security is positively related to outcomes such as affective commitment and engagement (Weng et al., 2010), supporting the relevance of examining career insecurity as a meaningful antecedent of motivational states at work.

1.4.3 Work Engagement

The term 'employee engagement' was first coined by Kahn (1990), who defined it as "the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). Building on this foundation, Shuck and Wollard (2009) distinguished engagement from related employee-role constructs (e.g., job involvement, commitment, intrinsic motivation) by emphasising the *psychological conditions* that influence the extent to which individuals "bring themselves" into, or withdraw themselves from, their work roles, an emphasis consistent with Kahn's (1990) original framing.

Since then, scholars have defined engagement in various ways. According to Macey and Schneider (2008), work engagement is described as a positive attitude toward one's job, reflected in the motivation and effort employees invest in their work, suggesting that engagement extends beyond satisfaction and commitment. A widely used and theoretically influential definition is offered by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), who position work engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related psychological state comprising vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigour represents elevated levels of energy, mental resilience, and a consistent willingness to exert effort despite difficulties. Dedication signifies a strong sense of involvement in one's work, alongside feelings of meaning, enthusiasm, inspiration, and pride. Absorption describes a state of deep focus and full immersion in work, where individuals find it difficult to disengage and often lose track of time (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). For the purposes of this study, work engagement was conceptualised using the definition by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), given its multidimensional structure and widespread application in engagement research.

Within the JD-R theory, work engagement is positioned as the central motivational outcome of the motivational process, through which resources energise employees and strengthen their willingness to invest themselves in their work. New developments in the JD-R theory continue to emphasise that engagement is shaped by the balance between demands and resources, and that job resources can sustain motivation and engagement, especially in demanding contexts (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). In this view, job resources such as autonomy, performance feedback, social support, and skill variety are consistently associated with higher engagement in numerous empirical studies and meta-analytic work (Bakker, 2017; Knight et al., 2017). JD-R explains this relationship by proposing that job resources enhance both extrinsic motivation (e.g., interest in achieving work goals) and intrinsic motivation (e.g., desire for learning, growth, and development), which in turn strengthen engagement (Robledo et al., 2019). Recent JD-R clarifications also highlight that resources can play a dual role: they promote engagement directly and can also buffer the negative effects of demanding conditions, thereby supporting sustained engagement over time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023).

1.4.4 Perceived Organisational Support

Eisenberger et al. (1986, p. 501) stated that perceived organisational support (POS) is “a unidimensional construct encompassing employee beliefs or perceptions that their organisation values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing”. In this sense, POS influenced whether employees regarded the favourable or unfavourable treatment they received from the organisation as an indication that they were either valued or undervalued (Eisenberger et al., 2001). In addition, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) described POS as employees’ general perceptions of how much the organisation values their contributions and genuinely cares about their well-being. This perception of support develops over time as employees interpret organisational policies, practices, and procedures, as well as the actions and decisions of organisational agents. In particular, supervisors play a central role in shaping POS because they are viewed as representatives of the organisation in employees’ day-to-day work experiences. Through repeated observations of how the organisation and its representatives treat employees, individuals form judgements about the organisation’s commitment to them, which in turn influence their attitudes and behaviour at work. Furthermore, Edwards (2009) suggested that POS referred to the extent to which employees perceived the organisation’s support for their work and whether they believed the organisation aligned with their interests and values. Suazo and Turnley (2010) similarly indicated that employees’ psychological needs could be met through POS and that

employees often evaluated organisational support partly through their emotional experiences at work.

In the present study, the unidimensional definition of POS proposed by Eisenberger et al. (1997) was utilised due to its conceptual clarity and widespread application in organisational research. Furthermore, the roles of POS and career crafting were aligned with the JD-R theory: POS was positioned as a top-down organisational resource, while career crafting was positioned as a bottom-up personal resource. In this way, POS reflected an enabling organisational context that could strengthen employees' capacity to cope and remain motivated, while career crafting reflected a proactive, self-directed means through which employees shaped and managed their careers in response to changing demands.

1.4.5 Career Crafting

Career crafting has emerged as a relatively new area of study. In response to the growing demand for proactive employees, Akkermans and Tims (2017) introduced the concept, which De Vos et al. (2019) later defined as "individuals' proactive behaviour aimed at optimising career outcomes through improving person-career fit" (p. 129). A study conducted by Van Leeuwen et al. (2021) further expanded on the existing conceptualisations of career crafting (e.g., Akkermans & Tims, 2020; De Vos et al., 2019) by clarifying the types of proactive behaviours that are undertaken when individuals craft their careers. According to Van Leeuwen et al. (2021), career crafting can be refined and conceptualised as individuals' proactive behaviours to change their present and future work situations, aiming to optimise career outcomes.

Akkermans and Tims (2020) further argued that the literature on job crafting, career competencies, and career self-management has largely developed in isolation, despite all three contributing to a clearer understanding of proactive career development. They proposed that integrating these streams into one concept called career crafting makes theoretical and practical sense as each construct had a limited scope on its own. Following this integration, Akkermans and Tims (2020) defined career crafting as "proactive behaviours that individuals perform to self-manage their career and that are aimed at attaining optimal person-career fit" (p. 165). They further suggested that career crafting behaviours consist of two broad dimensions: proactive career reflection (focused on motivations and qualities) and proactive career construction (focused on networking and goal setting), which was also highlighted in later conceptual work (Van Leeuwen et al., 2021).

Recent empirical work continues to support the relevance of career crafting in contexts characterised by uncertainty and rapid change. Studies have shown that career crafting can strengthen individuals' sense of control and enhance career-related engagement outcomes, particularly in environments shaped by technological disruption and shifting skill requirements (Van Leeuwen et al., 2021). This is consistent with the broader argument in the career crafting literature that when individuals have greater clarity about what they want from their jobs and careers, they are more likely to engage in proactive behaviours to pursue those goals. As a result, individuals may benefit from actively creating the conditions that improve their person–career fit, while organisations may also benefit through higher levels of motivation and engagement in the workforce (Akkermans & Tims, 2020; De Vos et al., 2019). For the purposes of this study, the conceptualisation of career crafting proposed by Akkermans and Tims (2020) was used, as it provided an integrative and practically relevant framework for understanding proactive career behaviour in contemporary work contexts.

1.4.6 Career Insecurity and Work Engagement: The Role of Career Crafting

Research had shown that proactive behaviours such as crafting promote work engagement, well-being, and organisational benefits, and can improve work performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Kuijpers et al., 2020). Research studies have also found that crafting has the potential to moderate the levels and effects of insecurity (Mazzetti et al., 2018). In explaining why individuals do not respond to insecurity in the same way, Buonocore et al. (2020) suggested that individual characteristics, job characteristics, and organisational climate can influence how people experience career insecurity and the extent to which they engage in crafting behaviours. Furthermore, Lu et al. (2014) found that employees could buffer the impact of uncertain situations by actively improving their careers. Conversely, Oprea and Iliescu (2015) discovered that insecurity negatively affected proactive behaviours, although their work did not explicitly target career crafting.

In the context of this study, the role of career crafting in the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement was emphasised and explored more directly. The hypothesis was grounded in the idea that career crafting may act as a buffer, shaping how strongly career insecurity influences individuals' work engagement. In other words, career crafting was anticipated to play a crucial role in determining the direction and strength of the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement. Within the JD-R theory, career crafting can be positioned as a valuable resource, as it reflects proactive self-directed behaviours that may protect motivation and engagement when individuals are confronted

with job demands such as insecurity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Career crafting may therefore function as proactive strategy employees use to optimise their career experiences and person–career fit, which could lessen the negative effects of career insecurity and support higher levels of work engagement (Ge et al., 2023). Emerging evidence also supports this resource-based logic by showing that career crafting can strengthen employees' sense of control and enhance engagement-related outcomes in uncertain and changing environments (Fu et al., 2025).

Therefore, it became essential to explore how individuals actively shaping their careers could mitigate the negative impact of career insecurity and foster higher levels of work engagement. This research aimed to contribute to a more holistic understanding of the dynamics involved and to emphasise that the impact of career insecurity is not inherently or uniformly detrimental, but may be contingent on proactive interventions such as career crafting. This view is also consistent with contemporary work showing that crafting-related strategies can become especially meaningful in high-insecurity contexts by enabling employees to sustain motivation and adaptive functioning despite uncertainty (Liu et al., 2025).

1.4.7 Career Insecurity and Work Engagement: The Role of Perceived Organisational Support

Schaufeli (2013) conceptualised work engagement as inherently relational in nature, insofar as it reflects the quality of the employee's relationship with work and, by implication, the wider employment relationship within which work is performed. In this sense, an “engaged employee” is typically characterised by high levels of enthusiasm and absorption in their work and is more likely to invest discretionary effort that advances organisational goals and interests.

Drawing on the JD-R theory, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) proposed that job resources activate motivational processes that foster engagement. When employees experience sufficient resources in their work environment, they are more likely to demonstrate an incentive response to their work, expressed through sustained energy, dedication, and concentration (i.e., work engagement). Contemporary JD-R elaborations further emphasise that resources are not only motivational, but can also help maintain engagement under demanding conditions by counteracting depletion processes over time.

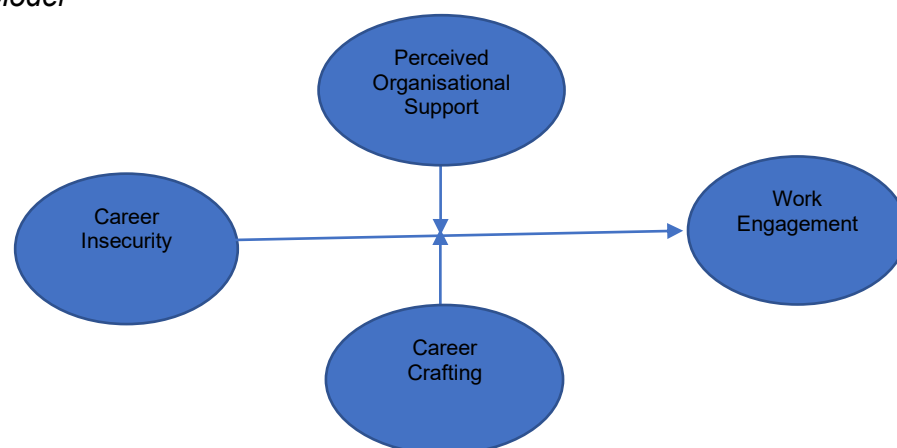
Within this framework, POS can be understood as a particularly salient resource because it signals to employees that the organisation appreciates their contributions and is concerned about their well-being, thereby strengthening confidence and psychological capacity to meet role demands (Shuck & Wollard, 2009). In the context of this study, the emphasis was therefore on whether POS reduced the impact of career insecurity on work engagement by providing employees with support, reassurance, and access to organisational resources that sustain motivation amid career uncertainty. Evidence aligned with this resource-based logic indicates that organisational support is associated with more favourable work-related outcomes, including engagement-related indicators such as enthusiasm and enjoyment, and may help lessen the adverse implications of demanding conditions (Shuck & Wollard, 2009).

In the context of this study, it was anticipated that POS would play an important role in reducing the impact of career insecurity on work engagement. It is assumed that when employees perceive higher organisational support, the link between career insecurity and lower engagement is expected to be less pronounced as organisational support provides a supportive context that helps sustain energy, dedication, and focus even on the presence of uncertainty.

Figure 1 below depicts the conceptual model, which contains the hypothesised relationships between the constructs of this study.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model



1.5 Research Questions

- What is the association between career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals in South Africa, and what role do career crafting and perceived organisational support play in this association?
- How are career insecurity, work engagement, perceived organisational support, career crafting, and their associations conceptualised in literature?
- Does career insecurity associate with work engagement among HR professionals?
- Does career crafting reduce the strength of the negative association between career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals?
- Does perceived organisational support reduce the strength of the negative association between career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals?

1.6 Research Objectives

1.6.1 General Objective

The study's general objective was to investigate the association between career insecurity and work engagement and the role of career crafting and perceived organisational support in this association among HR professionals in South Africa.

1.6.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this research study were:

- To determine how the study variables, career insecurity, work engagement, perceived organisational support, career crafting, and their associations are conceptualised in literature.
- To determine whether career insecurity is negatively associated with work engagement among HR professionals.
- To determine whether career crafting reduces the strength of the negative association between career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals.
- To determine whether perceived organisational support reduces the strength of the negative association between career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals.
- To make recommendations for future research and practice.

1.7 Research Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis 1:** Career insecurity is negatively associated with work engagement.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Career crafting reduces the strength of the negative association between career insecurity on work engagement.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Perceived organisational support reduces the strength of the negative association between career insecurity and work engagement.

1.8 Research Methodology

1.8.1 Research Approach

The research or scientific inquiry that was adopted in this study followed a post-positivism philosophical worldview. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), philosophical worldviews are general beliefs about the world and the researcher's theoretical perspective of research. According to Ansari et al. (2017), there are two philosophical assumptions grounded on objectivity: positivism and post-positivism. Post-positivism prioritises the establishment and pursuit of credible and reliable evidence regarding the reality of things, rather than generalisation. This contrasts with the positivist approach of establishing generalisations and laws to make claims about absolute truth (Ansari et al., 2017). For this study, the post-positivism research inquiry was applied as our observations cannot always be relied upon as they can also be subjected to error (Ansari et al., 2017). Therefore, the researcher focused on the impact career insecurity (independent variable) has on work engagement (dependent variable) and the role both career crafting and perceived organisation support (moderating variables) have on the relationship of the independent-dependent variables, specifically for HR professionals in this study. The researcher acknowledges that the conclusions drawn from this study would be prone to errors and are not infallible.

A good research methodology ensures that the data obtained assists the researcher in effectively answering the research questions (Coll & Chapman, 2000). The quantitative nature of this study informed the types of empirical methods that will be used to explain the phenomena through the collection of numerical data that will be analysed through statistical methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to research studies, quantitative techniques are essential when studying larger groups of people and generalising the phenomena from the sample group to larger, broader populations (Creswell, 1994). The current study followed this approach to examine the impact or effect of an independent variable on the dependent variable.

1.9 Research Design

1.9.1 Literature Review Design

For this study, a comprehensive scientific literature search was conducted on various electronic databases. The literature review was primarily focused on career insecurity from the perspective of the JD-R theory. As a result, the search included articles from various sources that conceptualised career insecurity and its associations, as well as literature reviews that explored the study's key constructs, such as work engagement, career crafting, and perceived organisational support. Relevant studies were reviewed, and independent searches on databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and EBSCOhost were conducted with advanced search functions being utilised. The researcher had access to the databases listed below via North-West University's online library.

To obtain information relevant to the study, the following search terms and keyword(s) combinations were used during the online search: "Career Insecurity", "Perceived Organisational Support", "POS", "Organisation Support", "HR employees", "HR professionals", "Career Crafting", "Job Crafting", "Job Insecurity", "Work Engagement". Furthermore, keywords associated with JD-R searched included "job demand" and "job resources", whereas keywords associated with the workplace context searched included "workplace", "organisation", "employee", "professionals", "company", "business", and "job". The following publications were consulted: *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, *South African Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Education and Psychology Measurement*, *European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology*, *Journal of Business and Psychology*, *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences*, *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, *Frontiers in Psychology*, *International Journal of Human Resource Management (IJHRM)*, *Human Resource Management Review (HRMR)*, *Human Resource Management (HRM)* and *Human Resource Development Quarterly*.

1.9.2 Quantitative Empirical Design

According to Guba and Lincoln (2005), a research design involves a research process that considers the intersection of philosophy, strategies of inquiry, and specific methods when conducting the research. Due to the quantitative nature of this research study, the appropriate design that was applied was the cross-sectional study design. According to

Creswell and Creswell (2018), this scientific method allows the researcher to study and compare multiple variables at the same time. It allowed the researcher to look at prevailing characteristics in a given population and provide information about what is happening in the current population at a single point in time (Creswell, 2014). According to Spector (2019), the cross-sectional design is appropriate for studies examining new variables where limited prior evidence exists, and it can be used to assess associations between variables as well as differences in the strength of these associations. Therefore, this approach did not involve the manipulation of an independent variable to determine the effects on the dependent variable. The focus was on determining the associations between the independent variable (career insecurity) and the dependent variable (work engagement), as well as examining the role of career crafting and perceived organisational support in this relationship.

In addition, the primary data was obtained and used from the participants' survey responses. Based on the nature of the research objectives, the descriptive research approach was applied. According to Kumar (1996), the descriptive design helps others to better understand the need for the research; it is a method that is created by gathering, analysing, and presenting collected data which will allow the researcher to provide insights into the why and how of the research.

1.9.3 Research Participants

Nathan (2015) describes human resources as a collective group responsible for overseeing various activities that benefit employees, such as talent management, compensation, performance management, training, culture, talent acquisition, and employee relations. Within the HR department, HR professionals are the employees who work in specific HR functions, providing strategic solutions and support services to drive performance (Nathan, 2015). This research study aimed to survey HR professionals working in small, medium, and large organisations in South Africa. HR professionals who were included in the study was anyone currently working in a South African organisation within a human resources and/or human capital business unit with a minimum of two years of working experience. According to the literature, it can take at least 2-3 years to gain a solid understanding of a particular role or industry before an individual can start to craft their job or career (Lewis, 2020). Participants were required to have a Grade 12 certificate to ensure a proper understanding of the questionnaires.

For regression-based analyses, including models examining associations and interaction effects, sample sizes of 200 participants are commonly regarded as sufficient to produce

stable estimates and adequate statistical power, depending on the number of predictors included (Cohen, 1988; Hayes, 2022). The final sample of 212 participants therefore met accepted guidelines for regression-based analysis and was considered sufficient for the analyses conducted in this study.

An online survey was designed and distributed utilising the QuestionPro on online social platforms. By advertising the survey on social media, it applied convenience sampling, and by requesting the participants to share and recommend the research to their networks who met the research criteria, the snowballing sampling method applied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Participant information was de-identified in line with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2013) principles. Table 1 below provides an overview of the demographic profile of the participants of this study.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Participants (n = 212)

Demographic			
Variable	Category	Total	%
Gender	Male	86	40.6
	Female	116	54.7
	Missing	10	4.7
Ethnicity	African	132	62.3
	Coloured	37	17.5
	White	27	12.7
	Indian	12	5.7
	Asian	-	-
	Other	-	-
	Missing	4	1.9
Education Level	Matric/National Senior Certificate	29	13.7
	Higher Certificate	15	7.1
	National Diploma/Advanced Certificate	38	17.9
	3-year Bachelor degree/Advanced diploma	42	19.8
	4-year Bachelor/Honours degree/ Postgraduate diploma	62	29.2
	Master' 's degree	21	9.9
	Doctoral degree	1	0.5
	Missing	4	1.9
Sector	Private Sector	26	12.3
	Public Sector	40	18.9

	Construction	15	7.10
	Agriculture	4	1.9
	Catering, accommodation and other trade	6	2.8
	Community, social and personal services	2	0.9
	Electricity, gas, and water	5	2.4
	Finance and business services	42	19.8
	Manufacturing	27	12.7
	Mining and quarrying	9	4.2
	Retail, Motor, Commercial and allied services	9	4.2
	Transport and storage	8	3.8
	Wholesale	3	1.4
	Telecommunications and technology	11	5.2
	Missing	5	2.4
Organisation Size	10-49 employees	25	11.8
	50-249 Employees	46	21.7
	More than 250 employees	140	66
	Missing	1	0.5

1.9.4 Measuring Instruments

The following measuring instruments were considered when measuring the constructs included in the objectives and hypotheses section.

A biographical questionnaire was developed and used to gather information such as age, gender, ethnicity, education level, work experience, years in current role and business sector/industry. This data helped assess the sample's representativeness and allow for controlling the impact of these variables on the relationships being examined, as recommended by Bernerth and Aguinis (2016). Section 26 of the Protection of Information Act [POPIA], Act 4 of 2013, designates ethnicity as special personal information and prohibits its processing. However, an exception to this prohibition is provided in Section 27 (1)(d) of POPIA, which allows for the processing of such information for research purposes, particularly when it serves the public interest and aligns with the intended purpose (Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, 2013). Therefore, for this study, information regarding ethnicity was collected solely for research purposes, specifically for describing the sample and including control variables. It was essential to ensure that the research findings and conclusions are appropriately limited to the specific sample (i.e., the respective ethnic group) to maintain internal validity and avoid inaccurate generalisations to a broader population (i.e., external validity). Biographical data contributed to a comprehensive

understanding of the participants' backgrounds and facilitated the analysis of variables' influences within the research study.

Career Insecurity was measured using the *Multidimensional Career Insecurity Scale (MU-CI-S)* by Spurk et al. (2022). This scale comprised eight distinct dimensions of career insecurity, each uniquely associated with outcomes that are important for employees' future career development. These dimensions included: Career opportunities, Decreased prestige & qualification requirements of future employment, Contractual employment conditions, Unemployment, Change of workplace, Retirement, Work non-work interactions and Discrepancy between individual resources/work demands (32 items). The scale asked participants to indicate the extent to which they agree with items on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). An example item for Career opportunities: "I am worried that the career opportunities in my occupational field could develop unfavourably"; for Decreased prestige and qualifications requirements for the future: "I fear that I might pursue a work with low prestige in the future"; for Contractual employment conditions: "I wonder if my salary could develop undesirably"; for Unemployment: "I fear that I might be unemployed at some point in the future"; for Change of workplace: "I wonder if I might have to involuntarily change my occupation in my future career"; for Retirement: "I wonder if my retirement age could increase undesirably"; for Work-nonwork interactions: "I wonder if my family and my career could be incompatible in the future" and for Discrepancy between individual resources/work demands: "I wonder if I might not any longer be up to the demands of my work in the future". Based on the study by Spurk et al. (2022), the scale showed a high internal consistency reliability of 0.92. In this study, the MU-CI-S also demonstrated high internal consistency reliability of 0.92.

Work Engagement was measured using the 17-item *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)* English version by Schaufeli et al. (2006). The UWES has been used in several studies and has proven reliable and valid (Tate et al., 2019). The UWES scale consisted of three dimensions, namely vigour (six items), for example "At my work, I feel bursting with energy", dedication (five items), for example, "My job inspires me" and absorption (six items), for example, "I feel happy when I am working intensely". The items were answered using a 6-point Likert scoring system, ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always). The higher scores of the respondents in the UWES indicated the higher employee work engagement of the respondents. The internal consistencies (Cronbach's Alpha) of the UWES-17 ranges between 0.70 and 0.90 within the South African context (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2006; Storm & Rothmann, 2003). The UWES-17 measure in this study demonstrated good internal consistency reliability of 0.95.

POS in this study was measured using the adapted nine-item *POS questionnaire* developed by Eisenberger et al. (1997) instead of the original 36 item scale. Each statement was rated on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The following is one of the sample items that were included “Help is available from my organisation when I have a problem”. Du toit et al. (2022) evaluated the reliability of the POS questionnaire in their study regarding organisational support and teachers’ performance in the South African context. A good internal consistency reliability (Cronbach Alpha) of 0.93 has been established for the scale (Dai & Qin, 2016). The POS scale in this study showed a high internal consistency reliability of 0.93.

Lastly, Career Crafting in this study was measured using the newly developed *Career Crafting Survey (CCS)* by Akkermans and Tims (2020). This survey was developed by integrating the literature and knowledge on job crafting, career competencies, and career self-management. It aimed to measure career crafting using two dimensions, proactive career reflection and proactive career construction, with eight items (four items per dimension). The items were measured on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 6 (Always). An example of proactive career reflection is “I explore the possibilities available to me to continue developing myself”. An example of proactive career construction is “I strengthen my career goals and make sure that they remain up to date”. Based on the study by Akkermans and Tims (2020), the reliability of the two dimensions in the survey was good: proactive career reflection’s reliability was 0.86, and proactive career construction’s reliability was 0.85. It was also distinct from the other variables (discriminant validity). CCS demonstrated a high internal consistency reliability of 0.94 for this study.

1.9.5 Research Procedure

Research procedure refers to the systematic steps undertaken from data collection through to data analysis. This process includes engaging and recruiting participants, distributing and completing questionnaires, and subsequently analysing the collected data. Prior to initiating these activities, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from the relevant committee of the North-West University with the following clearance number: NWU-00599-24-A4, ensuring adherence to principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and the protection of participants’ rights throughout the study.

In terms of the recruitment of participants, electronic social media platforms such as LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Facebook were utilised to advertise the research study. The

recruitment advertisements provided comprehensive information about the research, including its purpose, technical aspects, and the handling and storage of the collected data. For the distribution and completion of questionnaires, an online survey format was employed. Before participating in the survey, potential participants received clear and detailed information regarding various aspects of the research. This information covered the study's objectives, assurances of confidentiality, what was expected from participants, the availability of feedback, the anticipated duration, information about the publication of findings, and the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

The researcher merged the individual questionnaires into one comprehensive self-administered questionnaire using QuestionPro. Subsequently, the questionnaire was converted into an online survey and distributed through recruitment material containing an embedded link. Upon clicking the survey link, participants were redirected to a detailed information page. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to participation in the study, as the information page clearly stated that participants could only proceed to the questionnaire upon acknowledging and providing consent to take part in the study. Thereafter, participants could complete a biographical questionnaire; once completed, they responded to questions about the investigated constructs. It was projected that respondents would require approximately 20-25 minutes to complete the survey, which consisted of 74 items.

Participant information was de-identified in line with POPIA principles (RSA, 2013). De-identifying the data ensured that the participants remain unidentified, prevents any manipulation of data to identify the participants, and avoids the linkage of the provided information with other identifying data (RSA, 2013). After completing the survey, a separate page was displayed, allowing participants to choose group feedback. If they did opt for feedback, they were required to share their e-mail addresses. On the same page, those participants who opted for feedback were asked to provide their consent for the lawful processing of personal information in accordance with POPIA (RSA, 2013). Separating survey data and personal information ensured that the researcher, maintained anonymity within the research process. Towards the end, a thank you note was displayed, allowing the participants to share the link with other prospective individuals who met the research study's criteria. While participants had the option to skip this step, they were reminded to seek permission from the next person before sharing the survey link.

For the data collection process, a specific timeline was established. For this study, the data collection deadline was extended, and data was collected over 12-months from July 2024 to

November 2025, as more participants were required, in which the researcher applied a targeted recruitment approach to ensure that an adequate sample size was obtained. This approach involved actively reaching out to potential participants through professional networks, industry associations, or HR-related forums. Subsequently, the gathered data was transferred to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that was securely stored in a password-protected folder. Access to this folder is limited to the researcher and relevant supervisors for three years. Once data was completed, the next phase was to conduct statistical analysis.

1.9.6 Statistical Analysis

SPSS version 29.0.1.0 was used to calculate the descriptive statistics (means and standard deviation) for this study (IBM SPSS, 2026). Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to assess reliability. Reliability coefficients should be greater than 0.70. (Hair et al., 2015). Pearson-product moment correlation coefficients (or Spearman in instances the data is not normally distributed) was used to provide information on the size and direction of the relationships between variables. When interpreting the correlations in the study, the cut-off values for the effect sizes were interpreted as low effect if the value of r varies around 0.10, medium effect if r varies around 0.30, and larger effect if r varies more than 0.50 (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

PROCESS Model 2, which is a moderation with two independent moderators as outlined by Hayes (2022), was utilised in SPSS 29.0.1.0, to examine the strength of the impact of career crafting and perceived organisational support on the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement. According to the guidelines of moderation analysis by Hayes (2022), the researcher undertook a two-step process. Firstly, the regression coefficient was calculated for the interaction effect to assess the relationship between changes in the buffering effect. Secondly, if the interaction effect is statistically significant, the nature of the interaction was probed by visually representing how the effect of the independent variable changes based on the moderator. In addition, inferential tests using the Johnson-Neyman (J-N) technique were used. This technique allows the researcher to identify a range of moderator values based on whether the association between the independent and outcome variables is statistically significant or not (Hayes, 2022).

1.10 Ethical and Protection of Personal Information Considerations

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), ethics within any research initiative is an aspect that may not be overlooked; thus, they contend that for any research practice, it is typical for ethical dilemmas to be encountered. Therefore, to ensure ethical behaviour was maintained

throughout the research process, the research ensured to comply with the ethical principles by Creswell and Creswell (2018) for each step of the research process before, during, and after the collection of data.

The selection of a research topic that is relevant and appropriate for the current study was the first step in the ethical consideration process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A systematic investigative process using standardised methods was used to define the problem statement. The researcher used reliable information from journals and articles that adhere to the requirements and standards of publishing committees in obtaining relevant literature.

The second step encompassed ethical considerations during data collection. When considering the ethical implications of this research study, the researcher followed the guidelines provided by the American Psychology Code of Ethics (American Psychology Association [APA], 2017). Ethical considerations are moral guidelines that ensured the researcher does not commit misconduct and instead conducts research following moral standards (Struwig & Stead, 2013). The collection of data was guided by ethical standards such as securing informed consent, promoting voluntary participation, and safeguarding confidentiality throughout the research process

Furthermore, concerning confidentiality, the collected data was stored in a password-protected folder and accessible only to the researcher and her supervisors. Storage on a reputable platform ensures that the researcher complies with POPIA Section 19. In addition, the data will be kept for three years and comply with the requirements of the university's record management system. To avoid causing harm or invading participants' privacy, the researcher identified measures that evaluate only the relevant components as defined by the study's objectives. The methodology, design, and procedure support a quantitative research approach and consider the research context and the researcher's capacity.

Thirdly, regarding ethics after data collection, the researcher has been trained in using data analysis software and applying basic quantitative research approaches, such as data collection, analysis, and result interpretation. Group-level feedback will be given to participants upon request. The results will be made available or published solely after peer review.

1.11 Expected Contributions of the Study

This research contributes to the limited body of literature on career insecurity, particularly within the context of HR professionals in South Africa, an occupational group that is uniquely positioned as an organisational stabiliser, yet increasingly exposed to uncertainty in contemporary work environments shaped by rapid digital and AI-driven transformation (Gartner, 2023a; SHRM, 2025; Spurk et al., 2022). Latest findings suggest that HR leaders are operating in conditions of escalating role complexity and capacity strain, with many managers overwhelmed and insufficiently equipped to lead change, conditions that could intensify perceived vulnerability and longer-horizon career concerns within HR functions (Deloitte, 2025; Gartner, 2023b). Furthermore, by examining the associations between career insecurity, work engagement, and the extent to which career crafting and POS reduced the impact of insecurity, this study provides timely insights into how individuals manage insecurities and uncertainties in workplaces marked by accelerated change, skills disruption, and AI adoption (PwC, 2024; SAP SuccessFactors, 2024; SHRM, 2025).

In addition, the study contributes to understanding how personal resources (career crafting) and organisational resources (POS) can reduce the impact of career insecurity on engagement, an outcome consistently positioned as central to performance and well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Contemporary JD-R theory emphasises that resources not only promote motivation and engagement, but also help protect employees from the adverse effects of demanding conditions by interrupting depletion processes and enabling gain cycles over time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). In this study, career crafting was treated as a proactive, self-directed resource because recent research showed that career crafting can strengthen individuals' sense of control and support engagement-related outcomes in uncertain and rapidly changing environments (Fu et al., 2025; Hofer, 2025). Similarly, POS is conceptualised as a contextual resource because current JD-R-aligned evidence indicates that organisational support can lessen the adverse effects of demanding conditions and contribute to healthier, more sustainable functioning at work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Ramaci et al., 2024). These findings therefore extend JD-R theory by incorporating career-level dynamics and proactive career behaviour into a resource-based explanation of engagement under uncertainty, offering a more nuanced perspective on how employees remain engaged despite persistent insecurity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Fu et al., 2025).

Moreover, the implications of this research go beyond theoretical advancement. They can directly inform HR leaders and organisational decision-makers in designing targeted

strategies to enhance resilience and engagement among HR professionals. Global workforce evidence indicates that employees are experiencing intensified change, heavier workloads, and uncertainty about job security, while also expressing a strong need for skills development and clear support during transformation (Deloitte, 2025; PwC, 2024). In such conditions, fostering supportive organisational climates and enabling proactive career behaviours provide an evidence-informed route for reducing insecurity-related strain, strengthening agility, and sustaining high engagement levels, factors repeatedly linked to organisational effectiveness in turbulent environments (Deloitte, 2025; Gartner, 2023b).

1.12 Chapter Division

The chapters in this (mini-)dissertation are presented as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction.

Chapter 2: Research article.

Chapter 3: Conclusions, limitations, and recommendations.

1.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the foundation for a study examining the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals in South Africa, with particular attention to the moderating roles of career crafting and perceived organisational support (POS). The study is grounded in the JD-R theory, which conceptualises career insecurity as a job demand that may undermine work engagement, while career crafting and POS are positioned as personal and organisational resources that may buffer this effect.

The chapter further situated the study within emerging post-pandemic workplace conditions characterised by increased uncertainty, accelerated organisational change, and the growing integration of artificial intelligence into HR practices and work design. These developments have contributed to heightened role complexity and evolving skill demands, particularly for HR professionals who are both subject to and responsible for managing organisational transformation.

In addition, the chapter outlined the research design, objectives, hypotheses, sampling strategy, and data collection procedures. A quantitative approach was adopted, using validated measurement instruments and appropriate statistical techniques to ensure reliability and validity of findings. Ethical considerations were also addressed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. Ethical clearance was obtained from the

relevant institutional ethics committee prior to data collection, and all participant information was de-identified and used solely for research purposes.

Finally, the chapter highlighted the expected theoretical and practical contributions of the study. Theoretically, the study contributed to JD-R-based research by examining career insecurity and proactive career behaviours within a contemporary, high-uncertainty work environment. Practically, the findings were expected to provide insights for HR professionals and organisational leaders on how to strengthen employee engagement through supportive organisational practices and the promotion of adaptive career behaviours. Positioned within the South African context, the study also responded to ongoing labour market transformation and skills development challenges.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of the study variables with particular attention to their interrelationships and theoretical foundations. It also shares the study findings, discuss limitations, aligns contribution with the results and offers recommendations for future research and practice.

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CHAPTER 2**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals: The moderating role of career crafting and perceived organisational support

Abstract

In an increasingly volatile and uncertain world of work, organisations are confronted with persistent economic, technological, and structural transformations that challenge employee motivation and performance. In South Africa, these pressures are intensified by post-pandemic instability, skills shortages, and accelerated digital and artificial intelligence (AI) adoption, which have heightened concerns about long-term career sustainability. Human resource (HR) professionals are particularly exposed to these dynamics, as they simultaneously facilitate organisational change while navigating uncertainty in their own career trajectories. Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory, this study investigated the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals in South Africa and examined whether career crafting and perceived organisational support (POS) reduce the impact of career insecurity on work engagement.

The study followed a quantitative, cross-sectional design and used validated self-report measures to examine career insecurity, work engagement, career crafting, and POS. Data was collected from a sample of 212 HR professionals employed across public and private sector organisations. Regression-based conditional effects analysis was conducted using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 2).

In this study, career insecurity was negatively associated with work engagement at the bivariate level; however, in this sample, this relationship did not remain significant in the multivariate model once organisational resources were considered. Career crafting was positively related to work engagement in this study but did not buffer the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement among the participants in this study. In contrast, POS significantly weakened the negative association between career insecurity and work engagement in this sample, consistent with a buffering pattern. Collectively, these findings point toward the possibility that, in this sample, work engagement under conditions of career uncertainty was more strongly associated with organisational-level resources than with individual proactive strategies alone.

By integrating a career-level demand into the JD-R framework, this study contributed to the growing literature on career insecurity and work engagement in contemporary, high-uncertainty work environments. Practically, the findings highlighted the critical role of organisational support in sustaining engagement among HR professionals and underscored

the need for organisations to take shared responsibility for managing career uncertainty through supportive climates, transparent communication, and development-oriented practices. These insights were particularly relevant for South African organisations navigating ongoing technological disruption and workforce transformations.

Introduction

South African organisations are operating in a context where post-pandemic disruption has not fully stabilised, and where uncertainty has become more continuous, layered and difficult to interpret. Contemporary global human capital research suggests that organisations are navigating persistent tensions between providing stability to workers and achieving the agility required to respond to accelerating change, placing pressure on both employees and managers (Deloitte, 2025). Within this broader climate, the shift from traditional volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) language toward BANI-type conditions (brittleness, anxiety, non-linearity and incomprehensibility) has gained prominence as a sense-making lens for post-COVID-19 workplace realities, emphasising the fragility of systems and the psychological intensity of modern uncertainty (Cascio, 2025; Tshetshe, 2025).

A defining characteristic of post-pandemic work is that disruption is now frequently experienced as ongoing rather than exceptional. Recent large-scale workforce studies indicate that employees report increased workloads and an intensified pace of change, alongside confusion about why change is happening and rising uncertainty about job security (Deloitte, 2025; PwC, 2024). In South Africa, these pressures are amplified by enduring structural constraints that influence organisational capacity and talent strategies, including skills shortages and labour market instability, which continue to shape HR priorities and retention challenges (EBnet, 2025; HR Future, 2025). As a result, sustaining employee motivation and performance is increasingly reliant on understanding the psychological consequences of prolonged uncertainty and the resources that enable employees to remain engaged.

At the same time, the current environment is being reshaped by accelerated artificial intelligence (AI) adoption and digital transformation, which are changing both how work is performed and how careers are developed and sustained (Shahiduzzaman, 2025). Evidence indicates that organisations are rapidly expanding the use of AI in HR activities and people processes, signalling a shift from experimentation to operational integration (SAP SuccessFactors, 2024; Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2025). This trend is reinforced by contemporary HR analyses arguing that AI is transforming HR technology ecosystems and increasing expectations for HR to redesign workflows, build digital capability, and demonstrate value through data-driven and automated services (AIHR, 2025; Pagnotta, 2025). In BANI-like conditions, such technology-driven change may intensify anxiety and perceived unpredictability because it simultaneously alters task

structures, skill requirements, and professional identity, making future career pathways feel less knowable and less controllable (Cascio, 2025; Hofer, 2025).

These trends are directly relevant to the present study because they shift the focus from short-term employment continuity to longer-term concerns about career sustainability and future prospects. Although job insecurity has been widely examined, emerging scholarship argues that career insecurity should be understood as a distinct, future-oriented construct that captures employees' worries that central aspects of their careers may develop in undesirable ways across multiple domains (e.g., opportunities, employment conditions, occupational changes, and mismatches between resources and future demands) (Hofer, 2025). Recently published evidence also suggests that career insecurity operates as a career-related stressor that is associated with perceived loss of control and can predict withdrawal and impaired mental health, mechanisms that are particularly important in ongoing uncertainty rather than episodic crisis contexts (Fu et al., 2025; Hofer, 2025).

The relevance of career insecurity is especially pronounced for HR professionals, who are positioned at the centre of organisational change. Most current HR trend work shows that HR functions are facing expanding strategic expectations, increased responsibility for change leadership, and intensified demands to adopt and enable AI, often under conditions of constrained capacity (Deloitte, 2025; Gartner, 2023). Industry-oriented analysis further highlights that HR teams are under pressure to automate services and redesign work, and that these shifts can create uncertainty about role relevance, capability gaps and career sustainability within HR itself (AIHR, 2025; Bersin, 2025). This presents a paradox: HR professionals are expected to protect employee experience and build organisational resilience, while simultaneously navigating the pressures and uncertainties generated by the transformation they are tasked to implement. Although growing research has examined job insecurity, digital HR transformation and work engagement separately, relatively little empirical research has investigated how career insecurity relates to work engagement among HR professionals, particularly within the South African context. Furthermore, limited research has examined whether career crafting and perceived organisational support (POS) reduce the impact of career insecurity on work engagement.

Against this background, work engagement becomes a critical outcome variable. Within the JD-R framework, engagement is understood as a motivational state that emerges from the interaction between job demands and available resources and is particularly salient during periods of heightened demands and disruption (Sheridan et al., 2025). Importantly,

contemporary scholarship calls for JD-R applications and interventions to remain context sensitive as work environments evolve, noting that changing conditions can alter how demands and resources function across roles, cultures, and sectors (Deloitte, 2025; Yavuz Serçekman et al., 2026). This is relevant for HR work, where the same digital transformation initiatives that may create efficiencies can also intensify role ambiguity and future-focused insecurity if not matched with adequate support and development resources.

In this study, the emphasis was therefore not only on whether career insecurity relates to work engagement, but also on the extent to which resources reduce the impact of career insecurity on engagement. Contemporary research on career insecurity increasingly emphasises resource-based intervention approaches, arguing that supporting individuals to protect, replenish and build transferable career resources is central to sustaining careers in technology-driven labour markets (Hofer, 2025). In addition, latest evidence suggests that supportive relational and developmental contexts (e.g., mentoring support) can reduce the downstream effects of career insecurity by protecting employees' sense of control, highlighting how organisational resources may be particularly important under uncertainty (Deloitte, 2025; Fu et al., 2025). These insights provide a strong conceptual basis for examining both career crafting (as a personal resource) and POS (as an organisational resource) as mechanisms through which organisations and individuals may help sustain work engagement under conditions of career uncertainty. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals in South Africa and to examine whether career crafting and POS reduce the impact of career insecurity on work engagement.

Literature Review

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory

The JD-R theory remains one of the most widely applied frameworks for explaining employee well-being, motivation and performance across diverse roles and sectors (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). In recent updates, the developers of the theory reaffirm that JD-R is fundamentally a job design theory that can accommodate changing work conditions (e.g., digitalisation, hybrid work, AI adoption), making it well suited for contemporary environments where demands and resources shift rapidly (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). This flexibility is increasingly important because post-pandemic work has normalised heightened work intensity and persistent change pressures, and organisations are actively redesigning roles and workflows as part of transformation initiatives (Deloitte, 2025).

At its core, JD-R proposes that every job includes job demands and job resources. Job demands are aspects of work that require sustained physical, cognitive, or emotional effort and are therefore associated with costs (e.g., stress, exhaustion), particularly when demands are chronic or excessive (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Job resources, in contrast, are aspects of work that (a) support goal achievement, (b) reduce demands and their costs, and/or (c) stimulate learning, growth and development, thereby strengthening motivation and sustainable functioning (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Modern JD-R work also clarifies important nuances relevant to contemporary work: a “resource” can become a “demand” when it is excessive or poorly designed (e.g., increased responsibility without autonomy), and the same characteristic may function differently depending on context and appraisal (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023).

Current JD-R literature continues to emphasise two interconnected processes through which demands and resources influence outcomes:

- *Health-impairment process*: High or prolonged job demands drain energy, contributing to strain and potential burnout, with downstream implications for functioning and performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). The renewed attention to burnout research, especially after intensified post-pandemic strain, reinforces the importance of understanding workplace-driven stress processes and not treating burnout as a vague or purely individual issue (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023).
- *Motivational process*: Job resources strengthen engagement and positive work outcomes by enabling goal attainment and supporting psychological functioning, especially under conditions of demanding work (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). New empirical research continues to support the JD-R proposition that job and personal resources are key predictors of engagement, particularly during disruptive periods where demands intensify (Sheridan et al., 2025).

Crucially, JD-R theory asserts that these processes interact dynamically: resources can protect employees when demands are high, and demanding contexts can increase the *importance* of resources for maintaining motivation and engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Sheridan et al., 2025). This interaction is central for your study because it provides the theoretical logic for examining whether career crafting (personal resource) and perceived organisational support (organisational resource) reduce the impact of career insecurity (demand) on work engagement (motivational outcome).

Recently published literature has strengthened and refined JD-R theory in ways directly relevant to uncertainty, transformation and technology-driven work redesign. Firstly, Bakker

and Demerouti (2024), stated that JD-R highlights that demands and resources can accumulate; high demands may initiate a loss spiral (depletion), whereas strong resources can initiate a gain spiral (increased motivation and capability) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Furthermore, a review of JD-R interventions by Yavuz Serçekman et al. (2026) argues that demands/resources are often treated as universal and stable and calls for more context sensitive applications that reflect changing work realities and cross-level influences. Recent extensions of the JD-R framework have also highlighted the importance of examining individual differences and dynamic patterns of motivation and stress, including the value of person-centred approaches (Tóth-Király et al., 2024; Van den Broeck et al., 2025).

In addition, contemporary JD-R applications increasingly focus on work intensification and ongoing change as core demands and emphasise the role of recovery and adaptive resources in sustaining functioning under constant disruption (Zajc et al., 2026). These developments reinforce and exemplify the complexity JD-R is designed to explain about HR professionals because they often work at the intersection of high demands (e.g., transformation delivery, policy changes, workforce constraints, emotional labour) and shifting resources (e.g., varying support, autonomy, capacity and development opportunities). Contemporary trend evidence shows that HR functions are expected to lead change while managers' report being overwhelmed and not sufficiently equipped to lead transformation, conditions that can intensify pressures experienced within HR itself (Gartner, 2023).

Therefore, this study addressed these gaps by applying JD-R theory to examine how career insecurity (demand) influences work engagement (outcome) and whether career crafting and POS (resources) buffer this relationship among HR professionals in South Africa. By doing so, it extends JD-R theory to career-level constructs and can offer actionable insights for organisations seeking to sustain engagement during times of uncertainty and insecurity.

Career Insecurity

Career insecurity refers to perceived threats to the future development and quality of one's career and is conceptually broader than job insecurity, which primarily concerns the continuity of one's current job (Spurk et al., 2022). These concerns are also associated with broader psychological outcomes, including anxiety and reduced well-being, as individuals struggle to maintain a sense of stability in uncertain environments (Mjojeli, 2019). In contemporary work settings shaped by post-pandemic disruption and rapid technological change, career insecurity captures a future-oriented form of uncertainty including anticipatory anxiety about employability, progression, role relevance and longer-term career sustainability. Contemporary work aimed at practitioners further emphasises that career

insecurity is increasingly influenced by structural shifts such as STARA-related change (smart technology, AI, robotics and algorithms), which can alter perceived career prospects beyond organisational boundaries (Hofer, 2025). In this sense, career insecurity reflects not only fear of job loss but also concerns about what one's career will become as roles, skills and occupational pathways evolve.

A key contribution of the contemporary literature is the clarification that career insecurity is multidimensional rather than a single general concern. Spurk et al. (2022, p. 253) defined career insecurity as employees' "thoughts and worries that central content aspects of one's future career might possibly develop in an undesired manner" and operationalise it through the Multidimensional Career Insecurity Scale (MU-CI-S). This measure captures domain-specific worries including future career opportunities, declining prestige and qualification requirements, contractual conditions, unemployment risk, involuntary workplace change, retirement concerns, work–nonwork interference and perceived discrepancies between individual resources and future work demands (Spurk et al., 2022). Importantly for survey-based research, measurement work has progressed through the validation of more efficient instruments such as the Career Insecurity Scale – Short Form (CI-S), supporting broader empirical application while maintaining satisfactory psychometric quality (Cai et al., 2024). Together, these developments address earlier measurement limitations where career-related uncertainty was often inferred indirectly from job insecurity scales.

Although career insecurity has been conceptualised as a general feature of modern careers, its salience is amplified in settings where macroeconomic constraints and transformation pressures are persistent. Current South African evidence highlights that organisations are navigating shifting workforce realities, including intensified demands for skills adaptation and ongoing transformation pressures that influence employability and career confidence (HR Future, 2025). In addition, local and regional discussions increasingly recognise that AI adoption may reshape labour markets and shift skill requirements in ways that elevate uncertainty for workers, particularly where reskilling opportunities are uneven (Western Cape Government, 2025). This broader context reinforces why a future-oriented construct such as career insecurity is especially relevant for South African professionals, including HR practitioners, who must sustain employability within dynamic labour market conditions.

New empirical evidence also clarifies how career insecurity affects employee functioning. For example, longitudinal research indicates that career insecurity can trigger perceived loss of control, which is associated with higher withdrawal and poorer mental health; notably, supportive developmental contexts (e.g., mentoring support) can reduce these indirect

effects by protecting perceived control (Fu et al., 2025). Complementing this, emerging research introduces contemporary resource-related anxieties such as fear of missing out at work on career-relevant information and relational opportunities, showing that changes in career insecurity can increase fears of exclusion and elevate stress (Ebner et al., 2025). These mechanisms are consistent with the idea that career insecurity is not merely cognitive uncertainty; it is an emotionally laden experience that can undermine well-being and sustained functioning.

Within the JD-R framework, career insecurity can be positioned as a psychological demand because it requires sustained cognitive and emotional effort to manage uncertainty and adapt to change, potentially initiating depletion processes when persistent (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). This positioning is supported by evidence showing that insecurity perceptions are consequential for mental health and work-related outcomes. Large population research indicates that greater perceived job security is associated with reduced odds of serious psychological distress and anxiety, reinforcing the well-being relevance of security perceptions more broadly (Chen et al., 2024).

Work Engagement

Work engagement is widely conceptualised in contemporary occupational research as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state typically reflected in vigour, dedication and absorption (Sheridan et al., 2025). Although the construct has long-standing theoretical roots, modern studies continue to apply this three-component view because it captures the energetic, affective and attentional investment that employees bring to their work (Sheridan et al., 2025).

- **Vigour** refers to high energy, persistence, and resilience while working, especially when facing difficulties.
- **Dedication** reflects strong involvement in work, including enthusiasm, pride, and a sense of significance.
- **Absorption** refers to a state of deep focus and full involvement in tasks, where time appears to pass quickly and disengaging becomes challenging (Sheridan et al., 2025).

In the JD-R framework, work engagement is commonly positioned as the central motivational outcome through which job and personal resources translate into desirable work attitudes and behaviours (Sheridan et al., 2025). contemporary scholarship also highlights that demands and resources do not operate in isolation: engagement is shaped by the *balance* and *interaction* between demands and resources, and it can change as work

conditions shift (Yavuz Serçekman et al., 2026). In addition, renewed theoretical attention to workplace strain processes emphasises that sustained, high demands can erode energy and functioning, reinforcing why engagement should be considered alongside depletion risks in contemporary workplaces (Bakker & Demerouti, 2025).

Empirical research continues to show that engagement matters because it is associated with positive work outcomes, and because resources play a key role in sustaining engagement under challenging conditions. For example, current JD-R-based findings demonstrate that personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy, resilience, adaptability) and job resources (e.g., supportive climates) contribute to higher levels of engagement during disruption, underscoring the practical value of resource-building for sustaining motivational functioning (Sheridan et al., 2025; Yavuz Serçekman et al., 2026). Complementary evidence also shows that organisational support and autonomy-supportive environments predict positive work-related states (e.g., enthusiasm, enjoyment, job satisfaction) and reduce turnover intentions, outcomes that align closely with engaged functioning (DeHaan et al., 2024).

Work engagement is not static. A newly reported 2026 review argues that JD-R constructs (demands and resources) are often treated as stable and universally applicable, but evolving work environments require more context sensitive interpretations because the same demand or resource may function differently across roles, cultures and change conditions (Yavuz Serçekman et al., 2026). This is particularly important in settings where continuous change is normalised, as shifts in workload, support, development access and recovery opportunities can shape engagement over time (Zajc et al., 2026).

Therefore, for HR professionals, engagement is strategically important because HR roles are closely tied to sustaining organisational performance, employee experience and resilience, yet the HR function itself is increasingly exposed to demand escalation and resource strain. Current global evidence indicates that organisations are navigating significant tensions in the workforce–employer relationship, including the need to create stability while moving at speed, which increases pressure on those enabling change (Deloitte, 2025). At the same time, HR work is being reshaped by accelerated AI adoption: latest HR research reports a rapid rise in AI use within HR tasks, which contributes to changing role requirements and capability expectations (SHRM, 2025). Industry commentary further suggests that AI-driven automation and redesign pressures are increasing expectations for HR to deliver productivity improvements, which can elevate work demands and make engagement more difficult to sustain without adequate resources (Bersin, 2025; Deloitte, 2025).

Career Crafting

Career crafting refers to proactive behaviours aimed at shaping career trajectories and enhancing person-career fit (Akkermans & Tims, 2020; Ge et al., 2023). It builds on job crafting principles (task, relational and cognitive changes), but extends these proactive adjustments to the career level, including redefining longer-term goals, acquiring new competencies to remain employable, and leveraging networks and developmental relationships to expand future opportunities (Akkermans & Tims, 2020; Ge et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025). In contemporary labour markets characterised by rapid digitalisation and AI-enabled work redesign, career crafting is increasingly positioned as an adaptive response that supports career sustainability and proactive employability management (Bakker & Slemp, 2026; Fu et al., 2025).

Contemporary empirical evidence supports career crafting as a resource-generating behaviour that strengthens motivational functioning. Fu et al. (2025), for example, show that career crafting enhances employees' sense of control, which subsequently improves career engagement and reduces turnover intentions, supporting the view that career crafting functions as a personal resource in uncertain environments. Similarly, longitudinal evidence demonstrates that increases in career crafting are associated with higher work engagement and lower burnout, partly through strengthened professional and organisational identification, indicating that career crafting can foster engagement through both competence development and greater meaning/attachment to work-relevant groups (Li et al., 2025).

Importantly, the broader crafting literature continues to strengthen the theoretical grounding for career crafting within JD-R logic. Volderauer et al. (2024) explicitly expand the JD-R theory by incorporating job crafting as a strategic response to employee well-being challenges in VUCA conditions, highlighting that proactive redesign behaviours, supported by adaptive leadership and resource-oriented cultures are critical for protecting well-being and sustaining performance in dynamic, digitally transforming contexts. Although their focus is on job crafting, the logic extends directly to career crafting, since both represent bottom-up proactive strategies through which individuals build and mobilise resources to manage demands, maintain health, and sustain motivational outcomes under uncertainty.

Career crafting is also increasingly discussed as a practical intervention lever. In increasingly digital and AI-driven work environments, developmental HR practices and technology awareness further influence employees' ability to engage in career crafting

behaviours (Yang et al., 2024). Practitioner-oriented work on career insecurity emphasises resource-based interventions that protect, replenish and build transferable resources (skills, networks and agency), aligning closely with the intent of career crafting as proactive career self-management (Hofer, 2025). While earlier intervention evidence showed that structured career crafting training can increase proactive behaviours (especially protective forms such as reducing hindering demands) (Van Leeuwen et al., 2021), more current findings encourage organisations to invest in conditions that enable career crafting (e.g., developmental support and mentoring) to strengthen engagement and reduce burnout risk (Fu et al., 2025; Li et al., 2025).

However, current scholarship cautions that boundary conditions matter and that crafting strategies may not be uniformly beneficial across contexts or time horizons. In high-change environments, overly aggressive “challenge-increasing” strategies may intensify strain if not matched with adequate recovery and support, whereas balanced strategies that prioritise resource building and management of hindering demands are more protective (Bakker & Slemp, 2026; Yavuz Serçekman et al., 2026). Evidence from high-uncertainty contexts similarly shows that crafting-related processes are meaningfully implicated in well-being pathways (e.g., burnout and engagement dynamics), reinforcing the need for balanced crafting strategies (Shabangu & Jonck, 2026).

Overall, career crafting is increasingly positioned as a bottom-up personal resource that supports engagement and sustainable careers in uncertain labour markets. Emerging studies strengthen the argument that career crafting supports engagement by increasing perceived control and strengthening work-related identification, while also emphasising the need for balanced strategies that build resources sustainably rather than escalating demands without sufficient support (Bakker & Slemp, 2026; Fu et al., 2025; Li et al., 2025; Volderauer et al., 2024).

Perceived Organisational Support

POS reflects employees’ general belief that the organisation values their contribution and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). While POS is typically treated as a global perception, contemporary research continues to show that employees form these perceptions through multiple signals, including organisation-wide practices (e.g., fairness, development opportunities, resourcing) and the day-to-day behaviour of supervisors and line leaders who represent the organisation in employees’ everyday experience (Ma et al., 2026; Mori et al., 2024). In other words, POS is shaped both by “top-down” organisational systems

and by relational experiences that communicate care, recognition and support at work (Mori et al., 2024; Zhang & Zhang, 2025).

Current studies continue to support POS as a meaningful predictor of work engagement and related motivational outcomes. For example, Mori et al. (2024) found that POS is positively associated with work engagement and learning motivation, with “focus on opportunity” partially mediating these relationships, suggesting that POS contributes to engagement partly by strengthening employees’ future orientation and perceived opportunities at work. Similarly, Ma et al. (2026) reported that POS mediates the relationship between role clarity and work engagement among specialist nurses, reinforcing the view that supportive organisational climates enhance engagement by shaping how employees interpret and respond to work conditions. Further evidence shows that leadership behaviour can enhance work engagement through POS and identity-related mechanisms: Zhang and Zhang (2025) found that leader tolerance increased employees’ work engagement through POS and organisational identification, highlighting POS as an important pathway through which leadership and organisational climate translate into engagement.

Furthermore, in the context of uncertainty and external shocks, POS is also consistently linked to lower insecurity and more favourable work attitudes. Hngoi et al. (2024) found that POS negatively predicts job insecurity and contributes to organisational commitment, with job insecurity partially mediating the POS-commitment relationship. This pattern aligns with the broader argument that organisational support provides reassurance and stabilising signals that reduce insecurity-related concerns, thereby sustaining attachment and positive attitudes at work (Hngoi et al., 2024). In addition, context-specific evidence indicates that POS can reduce the negative outcomes of insecurity: Gunarto et al. (2024) found that POS weakened the adverse links between job insecurity and outcomes such as turnover intention and job satisfaction in private higher education, illustrating POS as a protective factor under insecurity conditions.

These findings are directly relevant to the present study because they support positioning POS as an organisational resource that can reduce the impact of insecurity on motivational outcomes. In JD-R terms, career insecurity can operate as a psychologically demanding condition that undermines motivation and engagement, particularly when uncertainty is sustained; POS provides a resource signal that can stabilise employees’ experience and support engagement under demanding conditions (Ma et al., 2026; Ramaci et al., 2024). Moreover, because empirical evidence shows that POS is positively linked to engagement and can weaken demand-related negative outcomes (e.g., burnout), it provides a strong

basis for examining whether POS reduces the adverse effect of career insecurity on work engagement among HR professionals (Ramaci et al., 2024; Zhang & Zhang, 2025).

Therefore, for this study POS was treated as a key organisational resource that is expected to reduce the negative impact of career insecurity on work engagement by strengthening employees' perception that the organisation values them, supports them, and provides enabling conditions to sustain motivation despite uncertainty (Hngoi et al., 2024; Ma et al., 2026).

Career Insecurity and Work Engagement: The Role of Career Crafting

The relationship between career insecurity and work engagement is conceptualised as resource-depleting and motivationally undermining, particularly in contexts where uncertainty is persistent rather than episodic. Career insecurity captures future-oriented worries that central aspects of one's career (e.g., opportunities, employment conditions, occupational change, and mismatches between personal resources and future work demands) may develop in an undesirable manner (Spurk et al., 2022). Evidence further indicates that career insecurity operates as a career-related stressor that can trigger perceived loss of control, which is associated with withdrawal responses and poorer mental health mechanisms consistent with the JD-R health-impairment process when demands remain high over time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Fu et al., 2025). In addition, post-pandemic systematic review evidence suggests that insecurity perceptions are frequently activated by health risks, economic shocks and organisational restructuring, with downstream implications for well-being and work-related functioning (Gupta & Dhar, 2024).

Within the JD-R theory, work engagement is positioned as the central motivational outcome of the motivational process, and it is sustained when employees have access to sufficient job and personal resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Sheridan et al., 2025). Latest work also emphasises that engagement is dynamic and can fluctuate as demands and resources change, reinforcing the value of examining context-sensitive resource mechanisms in evolving environments (Yavuz Serçekman et al., 2026). This is directly relevant for career insecurity because it functions as a psychologically demanding condition that may undermine engagement unless individuals can mobilise resources that restore control, meaning and coping capacity (Fu et al., 2025; Sheridan et al., 2025).

In this context, career crafting is increasingly framed as a proactive, self-directed strategy through which individuals shape their longer-term career trajectories and strengthen person–career fit. Empirical findings provide growing support for career crafting as a

resource-building mechanism. For example, Diaa et al. (2024) found that career crafting positively predicts perceived employability and subjective career success, suggesting that proactive career actions can strengthen future career confidence and capability perceptions. Fu et al. (2025) similarly reported that career crafting enhances employees' sense of control, which supports greater career engagement and reduces turnover intentions, reinforcing the view that career crafting can enable adaptive functioning in uncertain career contexts. In addition, Li et al. (2025) found that increases in career crafting were associated with higher work engagement and lower burnout, partly through strengthened professional and organisational identification, indicating that career crafting may support engagement not only by developing competence but also by enhancing work-related meaning and attachment (Li et al., 2025).

While career crafting is a relatively newer construct, the broader “crafting as coping” argument is supported by evidence from job crafting research, particularly under uncertainty. In South Africa, Marx et al. (2025) demonstrate that employees used job crafting strategies during the COVID-19 period to adapt to remote and hybrid work, including task crafting (redefining roles for new constraints), relational crafting (strengthening virtual connections) and cognitive crafting (maintaining purpose), with reported benefits such as improved productivity and work–life balance. Although this evidence focuses on job crafting, the underlying logic aligns with career crafting because both involve proactive adaptation aimed at improving fit and sustaining functioning in uncertain conditions (Li et al., 2025).

Internationally, Volderauer et al. (2024) provide additional support for placing crafting inside JD-R logic under turbulent conditions. They expand JD-R by explicitly integrating job crafting into strategic responses to employee well-being challenges in VUCA contexts, arguing that proactive redesign behaviours supported by adaptive leadership and resource-oriented climates are important for safeguarding employee health and effectiveness during digital transformation (Dubey & Prabhakar, 2024). This perspective strengthens the rationale for examining career crafting as a resource-building strategy that may reduce the impact of career insecurity on engagement in high-uncertainty environments (Volderauer et al., 2024).

Despite the emerging evidence base, notable gaps remain. First, relatively few studies directly test whether career crafting reduces the impact of career insecurity on work engagement within a resource–demand framework, rather than treating career crafting only as a direct predictor of positive outcomes (Diaa et al., 2024; Li et al., 2025). Second, research focusing on HR professionals, particularly in developing economy contexts such as

South Africa, remains limited, even though HR roles are increasingly reshaped by ongoing transformation pressures.

Accordingly, this study aimed to address these gaps by examining whether career crafting reduces the negative effect of career insecurity on work engagement among South African HR professionals. In doing so, it extended JD-R applications by integrating a career-level demand (career insecurity) with a proactive personal resource (career crafting) and contributes evidence that can guide organisations in developing interventions that strengthen resilience and sustain engagement during uncertainty and transformation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Fu et al., 2025; Volderauer et al., 2024).

Career Insecurity and Work Engagement: The Role of Perceived Organisational Support

POS refers to employees' belief that their organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). In the context of this study, POS is important because it represents a top-down organisational resource that can reduce the negative impact of career insecurity on work engagement by strengthening employees' confidence that the organisation will support them through uncertainty.

Within the JD-R theory, job resources are central to sustaining motivation and well-being, particularly under high demands. Contemporary JD-R studies emphasises that resources do not merely enhance engagement directly; they can also protect employees when demands remain high by weakening depletion processes and supporting continued functioning (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). In this sense, POS can be positioned as a job/organisational resource that helps employees interpret uncertainty as more manageable because support signals organisational care, stability and access to assistance. This reduces threat appraisals and supports engagement-related functioning even when career insecurity is present.

Newly published evidence supports this protective role of POS in demanding contexts. For example, in a JD-R test among healthcare workers, higher POS weakened the association between job demands and burnout, indicating that organisational support can reduce the harmful effects of demanding work conditions (Ramaci et al., 2024). Although this study examined demands broadly (rather than career insecurity specifically), the implication aligns with JD-R logic: when employees perceive stronger organisational support, adverse outcomes linked to high demands are less pronounced, and motivational states are more sustainable. Similarly, Ma et al. (2026) show that POS mediated the relationship between

role clarity and work engagement, suggesting that organisational support can strengthen engagement by shaping how employees experience and interpret work conditions (Ma et al., 2026).

Evidence from latest engagement research also highlights POS as a key pathway through which organisational conditions translate into sustained motivation. Mori et al. (2024) found POS to be positively related to work engagement and learning motivation, with “focus on opportunity” partially explaining these effects, implying that organisational support may sustain engagement partly by strengthening employees’ future orientation and perceived opportunities (Mori et al., 2024). In addition, Zhang and Zhang (2025) show that POS is a mechanism linking leadership to work engagement, with POS and organisational identification jointly explaining how supportive leadership behaviours translate into higher engagement (Zhang & Zhang, 2025). Taken together, these findings reinforce that POS is not only an “extra benefit,” but a psychologically meaningful resource that enables employees to remain energetically and emotionally invested in their work.

Importantly, POS could be conceptualised as a buffering resource that mitigated insecurity-related perceptions and their negative consequences. Hngoi et al. (2024) found that POS negatively predicted job insecurity and enhanced organisational commitment, suggesting that supportive organisational signals alleviated employees’ uncertainty and reinforced their psychological attachment to the organisation. While this evidence focused on job insecurity, it supported the broader argument that POS functioned as a protective resource that dampened the adverse effects of insecurity. Extending this logic, POS may similarly buffer the impact of career insecurity, an inherently future-oriented and often more pervasive form of uncertainty by reducing employees’ vulnerability to sustained organisational change and preserving their engagement and stability (Hngoi et al., 2024).

Accordingly, in the present study, POS was positioned as a critical organisational resource expected to reduce the negative impact of career insecurity on work engagement. When HR professionals perceive their organisation as supportive, they may feel safer, more valued, and more confident in their ability to cope with change. This supportive context can help sustain vigour, dedication and absorption even when career insecurity is elevated, consistent with contemporary JD-R framework that resources protect motivation under persistent demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2025; Ramaci et al., 2024).

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that the POS literature has predominantly examined organisational support as a direct antecedent of engagement or as a mediating

mechanism through which leadership behaviours and job conditions influence engagement outcomes, rather than explicitly testing its potential to buffer the negative effects of career insecurity (Ma et al., 2026; Mori et al., 2024; Zhang & Zhang, 2025). As a result, there is a notable gap in integrating POS with career-level demands, such as career insecurity within a resource–demand framework, with limited evidence particularly in developing economy contexts and HR-specific professional populations where role redesign and uncertainty are increasingly prominent (Hngoi et al., 2024; Ramaci et al., 2024).

Against this backdrop, the present study extends prior research by conceptualising POS as a context-sensitive buffering resource that sustains employee engagement under conditions of career uncertainty, rather than merely as a direct predictor of engagement. By doing so, it advances understanding of how employees remain engaged in the face of evolving career threats, highlighting the interaction between organisational support and broader career-level demands. This extends the JD-R model by incorporating career insecurity as a salient demand and demonstrating how organisational resources operate across multiple levels to preserve motivation (Bakker & Demerouti, 2025; DeHaan et al., 2024). Practically, it underscores the importance of strengthening POS as a targeted intervention to buffer the destabilising effects of uncertainty, thereby supporting sustained engagement and workforce resilience in increasingly volatile work environments (Mori et al., 2024; Ma et al., 2026).

Therefore, against this background it was hypothesised that:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Career insecurity is negatively associated with work engagement.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Career crafting reduces the strength of the negative association between career insecurity on work engagement
- **Hypothesis 3:** Perceived organisational support reduces the strength of the negative association between career insecurity and work engagement.

Research Method

Research Design

This study applied a cross-sectional survey design, which involved collecting data from the target population at a single point in time to measure the study variables simultaneously (Wang & Cheng, 2020). The analysis focused on examining the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement, as well as assessing the moderating influence of career crafting and perceived organisational support on this association. Although cross-sectional designs present certain limitations, they are considered appropriate for exploratory research involving relatively new variables, particularly when limited empirical evidence exists regarding the interplay among these variables (Spector, 2019).

Measures

The following instruments were used to measure the constructs in this study. A biographical questionnaire was administered to the participants to obtain demographic and background information. This included age, gender, race, educational level, years of employment, years working in current role, and the sector or industry in which they worked.

Career Insecurity was measured using the Multidimensional Career Insecurity Scale (MU-CI-S) by Spurk et al. (2022). The scale consists of 32 items across eight dimensions: career opportunities, decreased prestige and qualification requirements of future employment, contractual employment conditions, unemployment, change of workplace, retirement, work–non-work interactions, and discrepancy between individual resources and work demands. Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Example items include “I am worried that the career opportunities in my occupational field could develop unfavourably” and “I wonder if I might not any longer be up to the demands of my work in the future”. In this study, the MU-CI-S demonstrated high internal consistency reliability of 0.92, supporting the reliability of the measure.

Work Engagement was measured using the 17-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) English version by Schaufeli et al. (2006). The UWES measures vigour, dedication, and absorption. Participants responded on a six-point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (always), with higher scores indicating greater work engagement. Example items include “At my work, I feel bursting with energy”, “My job inspires me” and “I feel happy when I am working intensely”. The UWES-17 measure in this study demonstrated high internal consistency reliability of 0.95.

Perceived Organisational Support was measured using the adapted nine-item POS questionnaire developed by Eisenberger et al. (1997). Items were rated on a scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). A sample item is “Help is available from my organisation when I have a problem”. The POS scale in this study demonstrated high internal consistency reliability of 0.93. Higher scores reflected lower POS; this inverse scoring is noted in the Results section to support interpretation of the correlations.

Lastly, *Career Crafting* was measured using the Career Crafting Survey (CCS) by Akkermans and Tims (2020). The scale consists of eight items across two dimensions, namely proactive career reflection and proactive career construction. Participants responded on a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (always). Example items include

“I explore the possibilities available to me to continue developing myself” and “I strengthen my career goals and make sure that they remain up to date”. The CCS measure demonstrated high internal consistency reliability of 0.94 in this study.

Research Procedures and participants

Before initiating the research process, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant ethics committee of North-West University (NWU-00599-24-A4). A sample of South African HR employees from both private and public sectors participated in the study through convenience and snowball sampling. As no comprehensive sampling frame of HR professionals in South Africa exists, convenience and snowball sampling were deemed appropriate methods for recruiting a geographically dispersed professional population. Participants were required to (a) be between the ages of 18 and 64 years, (b) have been employed in their current role for more than two years, and (c) possess a Grade 12 certificate. Participants were recruited through electronic and social media platforms, including LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The recruitment advertisement outlined the purpose of the study, the inclusion criteria, and the estimated completion time of 20 to 25 minutes. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

The questionnaire was hosted on QuestionPro and accessed through the recruitment link. Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants provided informed electronic consent after reading the participant information sheet. The questionnaire first requested biographical information, which was not compulsory, followed by items measuring the study constructs. The researcher ensured that personal data that could identify participants was de-identified. Data was stored securely in a password-protected electronic folder, with access limited to the researcher and relevant supervisors in accordance with ethical and POPIA requirements.

Out of 223 employees who participated in the study, 11 did not meet the inclusion criteria, leaving a final sample of 212. The final sample exceeded the minimum sample size recommended for moderation analysis and multiple regression, thereby providing adequate statistical power to detect medium-sized effects (Cohen, 1988; Hayes, 2022). The average age among these participants was 36.61 years (SD = 9.33). Participants had an average work experience of 12.76 years (SD = 9.75) and had been in their current roles for an average of 5.79 years (SD = 4.81). The sample predominantly consisted of African (62.3%) females (54.7%), with the most common level of education being a 4-year degree (29.2%). Participants were employed across various sectors, with the finance and business services

sector being the most represented (19.8%). An overview of the demographic profile of the participants of this study is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Participants (n = 212)

Demographic			
Variable	Category	Total	%
Gender	Male	86	40.6
	Female	116	54.7
	Missing	10	4.7
Ethnicity	African	132	62.3
	Coloured	37	17.5
	White	27	12.7
	Indian	12	5.7
	Asian	-	-
	Other	-	-
	Missing	4	1.9
Education Level	Matric/National Senior Certificate	29	13.7
	Higher Certificate	15	7.1
	National Diploma/Advanced Certificate	38	17.9
	3-year Bachelor degree/Advanced diploma	42	19.8
	4-year Bachelor/Honours degree/ Postgraduate diploma	62	29.2
	Master' 's degree	21	9.9
	Doctoral degree	1	0.5
	Missing	4	1.9
Sector	Private Sector	26	12.3
	Public Sector	40	18.9
	Construction	15	7.10
	Agriculture	4	1.9
	Catering, accommodation and other trade	6	2.8
	Community, social and personal services	2	0.9
	Electricity, gas, and water	5	2.4
	Finance and business services	42	19.8
	Manufacturing	27	12.7
	Mining and quarrying	9	4.2
	Retail, Motor, Commercial and allied services	9	4.2
	Transport and storage	8	3.8
	Wholesale	3	1.4

	Telecommunications and technology	11	5.2
	Missing	5	2.4
Organisation Size	10-49 employees	25	11.8
	50-249 Employees	46	21.7
	More than 250 employees	140	66
	Missing	1	0.5

Statistical Analysis Strategy

SPSS version 29.0.1.0 was used to calculate the descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations (IBM SPSS, 2026). Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients of 0.70 or higher indicating acceptable reliability (Hair et al., 2015).

Pearson-product moment correlation coefficients were used to examine the direction and strength of relationships between variables. Where the assumption of normality was not met, Spearman's rank-order correlation was applied. Correlation effect sizes were interpreted according to Cohen (1988), where values of approximately 0.10 indicate a small effect, around 0.30 indicate a medium effect, and 0.50 or higher indicate a large effect.

PROCESS Model 2 (Hayes, 2022) was employed in SPSS to test the moderating effects of career crafting and perceived organisational support on the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement. The analysis examined whether these variables moderated the strength of the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement. Interaction effects were evaluated and significant, moderation effects were further probed using conditional effects. The Johnson–Neyman technique was applied to identify regions of significance where the moderation effects were statistically meaningful (Hayes, 2022).

Results

Table 2 below presents the means, standard deviations, Pearson correlation and reliability coefficients among the study variables. All correlations were statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level, with effect sizes ranging from medium to large. Furthermore, all scales exceeded the recommended reliability coefficient of 0.70, indicating that the instruments used in this study were reliable and appropriate for further statistical analysis.

Table 2*Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Reliability Coefficients (n = 212)*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	α
Career insecurity	2.96	0.8					0.92
Work engagement	5.29	1.04	-0.50*				0.95
Perceived organisational support	2.32	0.81	0.55**	-0.71**			0.93
Career crafting	4.59	1.08	-0.44**	0.62**	-0.39**		0.94

Note. ** Correlations significant at $p < .01$. The POS scale was inversely scored; therefore, higher POS scores indicate lower POS.

At the bivariate level, career insecurity was negatively associated with work engagement ($r = -.50$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher levels of career insecurity were associated with lower engagement. Work engagement was also strongly associated with POS ($r = -.71$, $p < .01$). In line with the inverse scoring of the POS scale, this indicates that higher POS was associated with higher work engagement. Work engagement was positively associated with career crafting ($r = .62$, $p < .01$), suggesting that greater engagement in proactive career behaviours was linked to higher work engagement. Career insecurity was positively related to POS scores ($r = .55$, $p < .01$), indicating lower POS at higher levels of career insecurity, and negatively related to career crafting ($r = -.44$, $p < .01$). POS scores were also negatively associated with career crafting ($r = -.39$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher POS was associated with higher career crafting.

Moderation Analysis

To test the study hypotheses, a regression-based moderation analysis was conducted using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 2). The moderating effect of career crafting and POS were examined. Career insecurity was specified as the independent variable, work engagement as the outcome variable, and career crafting and POS as moderators. Unstandardised regression coefficients were estimated, and statistical significance was assessed using 95% confidence intervals. Significant interaction effects were further probed using conditional effects and the Johnson–Neyman technique.

The regression-based moderation analysis results indicated that career insecurity did not have a significant direct effect on work engagement ($B = -0.04$, $p = .54$). No significant unique direct effect of career insecurity on work engagement when moderators and interactions are included. Although career insecurity was significantly negatively associated with work engagement at the bivariate level, this relationship did not remain significant in the multivariate model. However, the moderation analyses indicated that POS significantly reduced the negative relationship between career insecurity and work engagement, suggesting that the impact of career insecurity on work engagement was conditional rather than uniform across contexts. In practical terms, while the bivariate findings suggested that career insecurity is associated with lower engagement, the moderation results demonstrated that this negative effect was primarily evident under conditions of low POS. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported only at bivariate level as there was a direct negative association between career insecurity and work engagement and is therefore only partially accepted.

Career crafting was positively and significantly associated with work engagement ($B = 0.39$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of proactive career behaviour were related to higher work engagement. POS demonstrated a significant negative main effect on work engagement ($B = -0.69$, $p < .001$), which reflects the reverse-coded nature of the scale, where higher scores indicate lower perceived support. The interaction between career insecurity and career crafting was not statistically significant ($B = -0.01$, $p = 0.85$), indicating that career crafting did not moderate the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

In contrast, the interaction between career insecurity and POS was statistically significant ($B = -0.19$, $p = 0.01$), indicating that POS moderates the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement. This finding indicates that POS reduced the negative association between career insecurity and work engagement. Specifically, POS reduced the impact of career insecurity on work engagement. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

The overall moderation model explained a substantial proportion of variance in work engagement ($R^2 = 0.54$). The inclusion of both interaction terms resulted in a statistically significant increase in explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.01$, $p = 0.01$). The detailed regression coefficients are presented in Table 3, and tests of the highest order unconditional interaction effects are provided in Table 4.

Table 3*Regression-Based Moderation Analysis (n = 212)*

	B	SE	t	p	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
Constant	5.36	0.05	108.35	0.00	5.26	5.45
Career insecurity	-0.04	0.07	-0.61	0.54	-0.19	0.10
Career crafting	0.39	0.05	7.60	0.00	0.29	0.49
POS	-0.69	0.06	-10.67	0.00	-0.81	-0.56
Career insecurity × Career crafting	-0.01	0.06	-0.20	0.85	-0.13	0.10
Career insecurity × POS	-0.19	0.07	-2.81	0.01	-0.33	-0.06

Note. B = unstandardised regression coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. Results are based on Hayes' PROCESS Model 2. Career insecurity was specified as the focal predictor, work engagement as the outcome variable, and career crafting and POS as moderators. Interaction terms represent moderation effects.

Table 4*Tests of moderation effects (highest-order unconditional interactions) (n=212)*

Moderation Effect	ΔR^2	F	df1	df2	P
Career insecurity × Career crafting	0.00	0.04	1.00	206.00	0.85
Career insecurity × POS	0.01	7.90	1.00	206.00	0.01
Both moderation effects	0.01	4.37	2.00	206.00	0.01

Note. ΔR^2 reflects the incremental variance explained by the moderation effects.

Furthermore, to aid interpretation of the significant moderation effect reported above, the conditional relationship between career insecurity and work engagement across levels of perceived organisational support (POS) are presented visually below as per Figure 1.

Figure 1

Moderating effect of perceived organisational support on the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement.

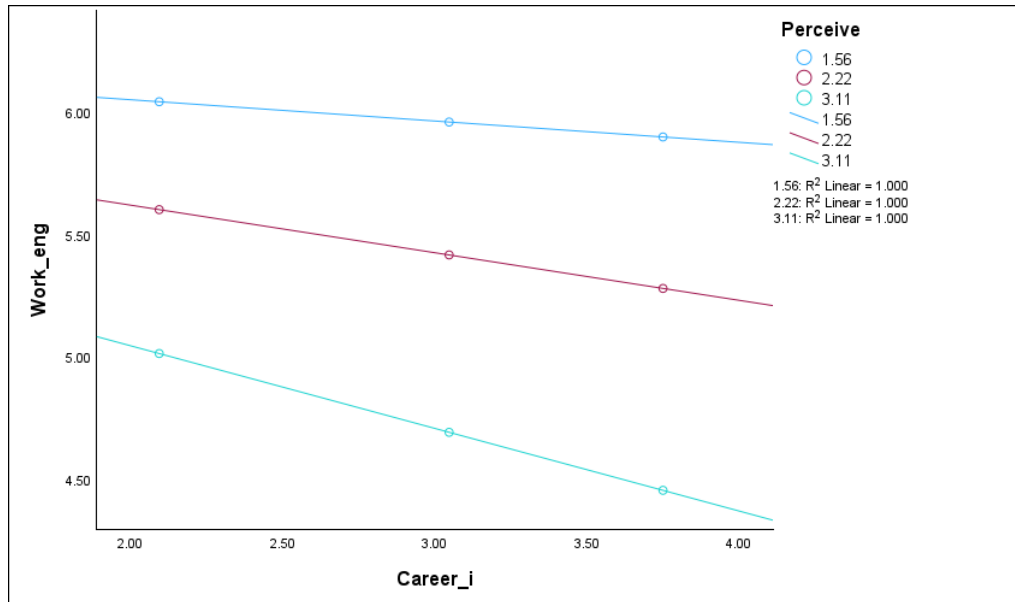


Figure 1 illustrates the moderating effect of POS on the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement. The horizontal axis represents career insecurity, while the vertical axis reflects work engagement, with three lines indicating low (-1 SD), mean, and high ($+1$ SD) levels of POS.

Overall, the figure shows a negative relationship between career insecurity and work engagement, as indicated by the downward slopes across all levels of POS. However, the strength of this relationship varied across levels of POS, demonstrating a clear moderation effect. Specifically, the relationship was strongest at low levels of POS (lowest line), where increases in career insecurity are associated with substantial decreases in work engagement. At average levels of POS, this negative relationship was less pronounced suggesting a moderate buffering effect, while at high levels of POS (top line), the slope became relatively flat, indicating a weaker negative association between career insecurity and work engagement.

Therefore, these findings suggested that high POS substantially reduced the detrimental effect of career insecurity on work engagement. This visual pattern aligns with the regression results, providing further support for Hypothesis 3.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement and to assess whether career crafting and POS reduced the impact of career insecurity on engagement among HR professionals in South Africa. Overall, the findings showed that career insecurity was negatively associated with work engagement at the bivariate level, but this relationship did not remain significant in the multivariate model once resources and interaction effects were included. The results therefore suggest that, in this sample, the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement was conditional rather than uniform. Career crafting was positively associated with work engagement but did not buffer the effect of career insecurity, while POS emerged as the only significant moderator.

The non-significant direct effect of career insecurity in the regression model should be interpreted cautiously. In moderation models, a non-significant main effect does not necessarily indicate that the predictor is unimportant, as the association may differ across levels of the moderator or be absorbed by interaction terms (Baranger et al., 2023). In this study, the bivariate findings supported the expected negative association between career insecurity and work engagement, while the moderation results clarified that this association was weaker when POS was higher. From a JD-R perspective, this supports the view that the impact of demands is shaped by the availability of resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Career insecurity may therefore function as a career-level demand, but its impact on engagement appears to depend on whether employees perceive sufficient organisational support to manage uncertainty.

From a JD-R perspective, these findings provide context-specific support for the proposition that demands do not necessarily relate to disengagement unless they outweigh available resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Within this sample, career insecurity appeared to represent a career-level demand that may be associated with lower engagement; however, its effects were not evident once organisational resources were taken into account. One possible explanation is that HR professionals, due to frequent exposure to organisational change and restructuring, may become more accustomed to career uncertainty over time (Jiang, 2024). As such, career insecurity alone may not have been sufficient, in this context, to relate to lower work engagement in the presence of supportive organisational conditions.

The findings further showed that career crafting did not significantly moderate the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement. Although career crafting was positively associated with engagement, it did not reduce the impact of career insecurity in

this sample. This suggests that proactive career behaviours may support engagement generally, but may be insufficient to offset broader, structurally driven career concerns when uncertainty is shaped by organisational change, labour market instability or limited control over future opportunities. This interpretation is consistent with emerging research cautioning against an overly individualised understanding of career sustainability, particularly where proactive behaviours require enabling organisational conditions such as development opportunities, role clarity and supervisor support (Fu et al., 2025; Ge et al., 2023).

In contrast, pPOS significantly moderated the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement. The negative association between career insecurity and engagement was strongest when POS was low, and weaker when POS was high. This suggests that organisational support may provide a stabilising resource that helps employees interpret career uncertainty as more manageable, thereby sustaining energy, dedication and absorption under demanding conditions. This finding aligns with JD-R theory, which proposes that resources become especially important when demands are salient, and with prior evidence showing that supportive organisational contexts are associated with psychological safety, reduced threat appraisals and sustained motivation during periods of uncertainty (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Ramaci et al., 2024; Rockstuhl et al., 2020).

In summary, the findings suggest that sustaining work engagement under conditions of career insecurity depends less on eliminating uncertainty entirely and more on ensuring that employees have access to credible and visible organisational support. For HR professionals, who are both exposed to and responsible for enabling organisational change, this finding highlights the importance of organisational resources in protecting engagement in contemporary, high-uncertainty work environments.

Implication for practice

The findings of this study highlight POS as a central practical lever for sustaining work engagement under conditions of career insecurity. Although career insecurity was negatively associated with engagement at the bivariate level, the moderation findings suggest that its impact was weaker when employees perceived stronger organisational support. Organisations should therefore prioritise visible and credible support practices, including transparent communication about change, access to development and reskilling opportunities, fair and consistent HR processes, and supportive leadership behaviours that signal care, recognition and commitment. These practices may help employees interpret career uncertainty as more manageable and reduce the likelihood that insecurity undermines engagement.

From a practical perspective, the results underscored POS as a key mechanism through which organisations can sustain work engagement under conditions of career uncertainty. Consistent with the JD-R model, POS functioned as a buffering resource that reduced threat appraisals and stabilised motivational outcomes when employees faced uncertainty about their future careers (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Bakker et al., 2023; Ramaci et al., 2024). Organisations are therefore encouraged to prioritise practices that strengthen employees' perceptions of support, including transparent communication, access to development opportunities, and supportive leadership behaviours that reinforced organisational care and commitment (Rockstuhl et al., 2020). Importantly, the findings indicated that POS was particularly influential when career insecurity was high. This suggests that organisational interventions should not only aim to enhance engagement directly, but also explicitly target how employees experience and interpret career uncertainty. By fostering a supportive environment, organisations could reduce the extent to which career insecurity is perceived as a threat, thereby maintaining higher levels of work engagement.

The findings also suggest that career crafting should be encouraged, but not positioned as a substitute for organisational responsibility. Career crafting was positively associated with work engagement, indicating that reflective career planning, skills development, goal updating and networking remain valuable for sustaining motivation. However, because career crafting did not buffer the impact of career insecurity, organisations should create enabling conditions that make proactive career behaviour realistic and effective. This includes providing career conversations, mentoring, learning pathways, role clarity and opportunities to apply new skills, particularly for HR professionals whose roles are continuously reshaped by digital transformation and organisational change.

Overall, the practical implication is that managing career insecurity requires a shared approach. Employees can strengthen their employability through proactive career behaviours, but organisations must provide the supportive conditions that allow such behaviours to translate into sustained engagement. For HR professionals, this is particularly important because they are expected to support organisational resilience while also navigating uncertainty in their own roles. Organisations that invest in POS are therefore better positioned to maintain engagement, even when long-term career certainty cannot be fully guaranteed.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

While the findings of this study advanced understanding of how career insecurity, career crafting, and POS relate to work engagement, several methodological and theoretical limitations should be acknowledged.

Firstly, the study relied on self-reported, cross-sectional survey data, which may have been subject to common method variance and social desirability bias. Although validated instruments and procedural precautions were applied, shared measurement sources may have inflated observed relationships among variables (Podsakoff et al., 2024). Future research could strengthen validity by incorporating multi-source data, such as supervisor-rated work engagement or objective organisational indicators.

Secondly, the cross-sectional research design limited the ability to draw causal inferences or establish temporal relationships among the variables. As such, the conditional relationships observed in this study should be interpreted as associations rather than causal effects (Spector, 2019). Given that career insecurity is inherently dynamic and future-oriented, longitudinal or multi-wave research designs are recommended to examine how these relationships unfold over time (Demerouti & Bakker, 2023).

Thirdly, the study focused on HR professionals within the South African context, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other occupational groups or contexts. HR professionals are uniquely positioned at the centre of organisational change, and their experiences of career insecurity may differ from those in other professions. Future research could conduct comparative studies across occupational groups, industries, or national contexts to determine whether the observed buffering role of POS holds more broadly (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2024).

Fourthly, an additional limitation relates to the sampling strategy and representativeness of the study. The use of a non-probability sampling approach, specifically targeting HR professionals, may limit the generalisability of the findings beyond the specific organisational and professional context examined. Although this approach enabled access to participants with relevant experience of organisational change and career uncertainty, it may not fully reflect the diversity of experiences across industries, occupational groups, or organisational levels (Etikan et al., 2016; Saunders et al., 2019). As such, the findings should be interpreted as context specific. Future research could enhance external validity by employing probability sampling methods or including more diverse samples across sectors and job

roles to assess whether the observed relationships hold in broader populations (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

From a theoretical perspective, the study focused specifically on career crafting and POS as resources within the JD-R framework. However, other personal and contextual resources may also influence how employees experience and respond to career insecurity. For example, constructs such as career adaptability, perceived employability, and psychological safety have been identified as important resources in uncertain work environments (Chen et al., 2024; Fu et al., 2025). Future research could incorporate these variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of resource-based mechanisms.

In addition, career insecurity was treated as a global construct, despite increasing evidence suggesting that its multidimensional nature may have differential effects on work outcomes (Spurk et al., 2022). Future studies could examine specific dimensions of career insecurity to provide more nuanced insights into how different aspects of career-related uncertainty influence work engagement.

Finally, the findings suggested that POS played a more substantial role in shaping work engagement under career insecurity than individual proactive strategies such as career crafting. Future research could further explore the interplay between personal and organisational resources by examining whether these resources operate interactively or under specific conditions, particularly in environments characterised by varying levels of organisational support.

Conclusion

Overall, the literature underscores the importance of organisational and personal resources in shaping how career insecurity influences work engagement within contemporary work contexts. Drawing on the JD-R framework, career insecurity is conceptualised as a demand that may undermine engagement, particularly in the absence of sufficient organisational support (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023).

While career crafting emerges as a proactive personal resource associated with higher levels of work engagement, its role in buffering the effects of career insecurity appears to be conditional and context-dependent (Fu et al., 2025; Ge et al., 2023). In contrast, POS is consistently identified as a critical organisational resource that reduces uncertainty and sustains employee motivation and well-being (Ramaci et al., 2024; Rockstuhl et al., 2020). Taken together, the literature suggests that the impact of career insecurity on work

engagement is not uniformly negative but is shaped by the availability and interaction of key resources. In particular, organisational support is expected to play a central and enabling role, while individual proactive strategies may operate through more nuanced and limited pathways. These insights provide the theoretical basis for the hypotheses tested in this study.

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CHAPTER 3**CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter was presented in an article format and provided a comprehensive account of the study, including the literature review, methodology, results, and discussion. It also established the necessity of the study by addressing contemporary challenges associated with career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals.

This chapter presents the conclusions of the study and further elaborates on the limitations and recommendations arising from the research. The conclusions synthesise the key findings in relation to the study's research objectives and overarching aim. The limitations section addresses both methodological and theoretical constraints that may have influenced the findings and their interpretation. Finally, the recommendations are offered at multiple levels, individual, group, leader, and organisational in order to translate the study's findings into actionable guidance and to inform future research and practice within the field of human resource management.

3.2 Conclusions

In contemporary organisations characterised by rapid change, technological disruption, and non-linear career trajectories, understanding how employees remained engaged in the face of career uncertainty had become increasingly important. As highlighted in the background and problem statement of this study, career insecurity had emerged as a salient challenge, particularly for HR professionals who were both recipients and facilitators of organisational change (Hofer, 2025; Spurk et al., 2022). In response to these conditions, the general objective of the study was to investigate the association between career insecurity and work engagement and the role of career crafting and POS in this association among HR professionals in South Africa.

The first objective of the study was to determine how career insecurity, work engagement, POS, career crafting, and their associations were conceptualised in the literature. The literature review highlighted that career insecurity was best understood as a career-related demand whose effect on engagement was not necessarily direct or uniform, but contingent on the resources available to employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Chen et al., 2024). From a JD-R perspective, this supported the view that career insecurity should be interpreted in relation to the broader organisational and personal resource context within which employees operated rather than as an isolated predictor of motivational outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Ghaffaripour et al., 2026).

The second objective was to determine whether career insecurity was negatively associated with work engagement among HR professionals. The findings demonstrated that career insecurity was negatively related to work engagement at the bivariate level, thereby supporting the expected negative association between the two variables. However, career insecurity did not demonstrate a statistically significant independent relationship with work engagement in the multivariate model. This suggested that the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement was conditional rather than uniform, and that its influence was better understood in relation to the presence of other contextual and organisational factors (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Chen et al., 2024).

The third objective was to determine whether career crafting reduced the strength of the negative association between career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals. The results showed that career crafting was positively related to work engagement, confirming its value as a personal resource. However, it did not significantly reduce the impact of career insecurity on work engagement. This indicated that although proactive career behaviours may have enhanced engagement generally, they were insufficient on their own to buffer the effects of uncertainty in highly structured organisational contexts. The finding further suggested that the buffering capacity of career crafting may have been limited when uncertainty was driven by broader structural or organisational conditions beyond individual control (Fu et al., 2025; Ge et al., 2023).

The fourth objective was to determine whether POS reduced the strength of the negative association between career insecurity and work engagement among HR professionals. In contrast to career crafting, POS significantly reduced the strength of the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement. This finding underscored the importance of organisational-level resources in sustaining engagement and supported evidence demonstrating the buffering role of POS under conditions of uncertainty and strain (Gunarto et al., 2024; Ramaci et al., 2024). Furthermore, this result highlighted that organisational support did not merely influence engagement directly but became particularly salient in contexts where employees were confronted with persistent uncertainty, thereby reinforcing its role as a critical protective resource (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023).

Overall, this study highlighted that the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement was context dependent rather than linear. The findings suggested that engagement in uncertain career environments was shaped more strongly by organisational conditions than by individual proactive behaviour alone. Consequently, sustaining work engagement in contemporary organisations might have depended less on eliminating

uncertainty and more on ensuring that sufficient organisational support was provided to buffer its potential impact (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023; Bakker et al., 2023).

3.3 Limitations

The limitations of this study should be interpreted with consideration of both methodological and theoretical aspects. Recognising these constraints is essential for accurately interpreting the findings and assessing the study's overall contribution. Methodological limitations arise from the research design, data collection procedures, and sampling approach employed. In contrast, theoretical limitations pertain to the scope and selection of variables included in the study.

3.3.1 Methodological Limitations

The findings of this study should be interpreted with consideration of several methodological limitations. These limitations are associated with the research design, data collection approach, measurement strategy, and sampling procedures.

The study relied on self-report survey data, which may increase the risk of common method variance and social desirability bias. Although self-report measures are appropriate for capturing subjective perceptions such as career insecurity and POS, shared measurement sources may influence observed relationships (Podsakoff et al., 2024).

The cross-sectional design restricts the ability to draw causal conclusions or account for changes over time. The relationships observed in this study should therefore be interpreted as associations rather than causal effects (Spector, 2019). This is particularly relevant given that career insecurity is inherently future-oriented and may fluctuate over time depending on organisational and environmental conditions (Spurk et al., 2022).

An additional limitation relates to the sampling strategy and representativeness of the study. The use of a non-probability sampling approach, with a specific focus on HR professionals, may constrain the generalisability of the findings to broader organisational and occupational contexts. Although this approach enabled access to participants with relevant experience of organisational change and career uncertainty, it may not fully reflect the diversity of experiences across industries, occupational groups, or organisational levels (Etikan et al., 2016; Saunders et al., 2019). As such, the findings should be interpreted in a context-specific manner.

Although the sample size met accepted guidelines for regression-based analyses, detecting moderation effects remains methodologically challenging and typically requires greater statistical power (Aguinis et al., 2024). The non-significant moderating effect of career crafting should therefore be interpreted with caution, as it may reflect the difficulty of detecting interaction effects rather than the complete absence of such relationships.

Furthermore, the study focused on HR professionals across multiple organisations, which may limit generalisability to other occupational groups. HR roles are uniquely positioned within organisations and may experience career insecurity differently from employees in other functions, particularly given their dual role as both facilitators and recipients of organisational change (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2024; Dhanpat et al., 2020).

3.3.2 Theoretical Limitations

From a theoretical perspective, the study focused specifically on career crafting and POS as resources within the JD-R framework. However, other personal and contextual resources may also influence how employees experience and respond to career insecurity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Including a broader range of resources may therefore provide a more comprehensive understanding of how employees sustain engagement under conditions of uncertainty (Chen et al., 2024; Fu et al., 2025).

In addition, career insecurity was treated as a global construct, despite evidence suggesting that its multidimensional nature may have differential effects on work outcomes (Spurk et al., 2022). Examining specific dimensions of career insecurity may reveal more nuanced relationships and provide deeper insight into which aspects of uncertainty are most influential in shaping work engagement.

3.4 Recommendations

The final specific objective of this study was to formulate recommendations for future research and practical application. Informed by the study's findings, the recommendations are grouped into methodological and theoretical directions, as well as recommendations for practice.

3.4.1 Methodological Recommendations for Future Research

In response to the methodological limitations identified, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen future research designs and improve the robustness of findings.

Firstly, to address the limitation related to the use of self-report data and the associated risk of common method variance, future research should incorporate multi-source data collection strategies. This may include obtaining supervisor-rated or peer-rated assessments of work engagement, as well as integrating objective organisational indicators where possible. The use of multiple data sources may reduce potential response bias and strengthen the validity of observed relationships (Podsakoff et al., 2024).

Secondly, given the constraints of the cross-sectional design, future studies are encouraged to employ longitudinal or multi-wave research designs. Such approaches would enable researchers to examine temporal relationships and better understand how career insecurity evolves over time and influences work engagement. This is particularly important considering that career insecurity is a dynamic and future-oriented construct that may fluctuate in response to changing organisational and labour market conditions (Spector, 2019; Spurk et al., 2022).

Thirdly, to address the difficulty in detecting interaction effects, particularly the non-significant moderation of career crafting, future research should utilise larger sample sizes and more advanced statistical techniques, such as structural equation modelling or latent variable approaches. These methods may improve statistical power and provide more precise estimates of interaction effects within complex models (Aguinis et al., 2024).

Finally, to further strengthen generalisability, future research should consider broadening the sample beyond HR professionals to include a broader range of occupational groups and industries. Comparative studies across professions may provide valuable insights into whether the relationships observed in this study are consistent across different work contexts, particularly given the unique positioning of HR professionals within organisations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Dhanpat et al., 2020).

3.4.2 Theoretical Recommendations for Future Research

In response to the theoretical limitations identified in this study, several recommendations are proposed to guide future research and theoretical development.

Future research should broaden the conceptual model to include additional personal and organisational resources that may influence the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement. Constructs such as career adaptability, perceived employability, and

psychological safety have been identified as particularly important in shaping how employees interpret and respond to uncertainty, and their inclusion may provide a more comprehensive understanding of engagement processes under conditions of insecurity (Chen et al., 2024; Fu et al., 2025).

In addition, given that career insecurity was treated as a global construct in this study, future research should adopt a multidimensional perspective by examining specific dimensions of career insecurity. Disaggregating the construct into facets such as employability concerns, career progression, and long-term sustainability may reveal more nuanced relationships and provide deeper insight into which aspects of insecurity are most influential in shaping work engagement (Spurk et al., 2022).

3.4.3 Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings of this study, practical recommendations are proposed at the individual, group, leader, and organisational (IGLO) levels. These recommendations aim to translate the study's insights into actionable strategies for managing career insecurity and sustaining work engagement, particularly among HR professionals.

Individuals (I):

At the individual level, the findings indicate that while career crafting is positively associated with work engagement, it does not significantly buffer the effects of career insecurity. This suggests that employees should be encouraged to engage in proactive career behaviours, but with realistic expectations regarding their capacity to offset structurally driven uncertainty. In line with this, individuals should focus on adaptive career self-management strategies, including continuous skills development, reflective career planning, and the cultivation of transferable capabilities, all of which strengthen perceived employability and long-term career sustainability (Akkermans & De Vos, 2024; Fu et al., 2025). Practices such as lifelong learning, seeking developmental feedback, and building professional networks may help sustain engagement under conditions of uncertainty. However, these strategies should be positioned as complementary to, rather than substitutes for, organisational support.

Groups (G):

At the group level, the findings highlight the importance of supportive relational contexts in shaping how employees experience career insecurity. Teams and departments play a critical role in influencing day-to-day work experiences and reinforcing perceptions of organisational

support. Consistent with this, groups should foster climates characterised by trust, knowledge sharing, and peer support, which are associated with higher levels of engagement and psychological safety under uncertain conditions (Slomp et al., 2024). In practice, this may involve regular team check-ins, collaborative problem-solving, and open career-related discussions that normalise uncertainty. Such practices can help buffer the effects of career insecurity by strengthening a sense of belonging and collective efficacy.

Leaders (L):

At the leadership level, the findings underscore the central role of POS as enacted through leader behaviours. Leaders are key agents in shaping how employees interpret and respond to career-related uncertainty. As such, they should prioritise transparent communication, procedural fairness, and consistent support, particularly during periods of organisational change such as restructuring or role reconfiguration. Furthermore, supportive leadership practices, including acknowledging employee concerns, providing timely and accurate information, and offering developmental guidance, have been shown to sustain engagement in the presence of uncertainty (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2024; Ghaffaripour et al., 2026). Leaders are therefore encouraged to engage in ongoing career-focused dialogue and adopt a coaching orientation that helps employees navigate uncertainty constructively without minimising its impact. Investing in leadership development that emphasises supportive, people-centred behaviours may further strengthen these outcomes.

Organisations (O):

At the organisational level, the findings clearly demonstrate that systemic support plays a critical role in sustaining work engagement under conditions of career insecurity. Organisations should avoid overemphasising individual responsibility and instead strengthen structural and institutional support mechanisms aligned with JD-R principles. This includes providing transparent communication about career pathways, offering reskilling and upskilling opportunities, and ensuring that HR practices are perceived as fair, consistent, and supportive. Evidence suggests that high levels of POS enhance employee engagement and resilience, even when long-term career certainty cannot be guaranteed (Ghaffaripour et al., 2026; Pires, 2025). Furthermore, organisations should recognise HR professionals as a distinct group exposed to heightened career ambiguity due to their central role in organisational change processes. Providing targeted support such as tailored development initiatives, role clarity interventions, and visible organisational recognition, may not only enhance HR professionals' engagement but also strengthen their capacity to support the broader workforce effectively.

3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter consolidated the key findings of the study by presenting the conclusions, limitations, and recommendations arising from the investigation into the relationship between career insecurity and work engagement, as well as the role of career crafting and POS within this relationship. In doing so, the chapter addressed the final research objectives by reflecting on both the theoretical and empirical contributions of the study, critically acknowledging its methodological and theoretical limitations, and outlining directions for future research.

Furthermore, the chapter provided practice-oriented recommendations structured across the IGLO levels. These recommendations emphasised the importance of managing career insecurity through a balanced approach that recognises the value of individual proactive behaviours while highlighting the central role of organisational support in sustaining work engagement. Particular attention was given to HR professionals operating in dynamic and uncertain organisational environments.

While the findings offer important insights into the conditional role of organisational resources and the limitations of individual strategies in buffering career insecurity, they should be interpreted considering the study's identified constraints. Nonetheless, the study provides deeper insight into how work engagement can be maintained in an environment characterised by increasing career uncertainty.

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