

Changing priorities: Advancing towards Self-conservation

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Abstract

This study investigated the importance of specific career anchors and career enablers for different age groups. The participants were all employed within an open distance electronic learning (ODeL) higher education institution (HEI) where 54.5% of the 1392 participants were females and 45.5% males. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 65 years, with 79.7% representing professional and support staff and 20.3% representing academic staff. The employees were interviewed through a structured career anchor and career enabler framework. The responses were captured electronically and analysed to determine the mean differences in work life stages denoted by age. The research findings suggest that younger employees are motivated by a need to develop their technical/functional knowledge and they expect to be challenged on their abilities while older employees tend to concentrate more on the integration of work and family life. Younger (18-25 years) and middle aged (26-35 years) employees have a need to maintain and enhance their self-esteem whereas older employees, that are closer to retirement, focus more on the structuring of work motives and needs according to their personal desires (like growth, flexibility, work-life balance, etc.). The results give new insights on how employees' priorities changes in terms of their career anchors and career enablers as they advance towards self-conservation.

Key words: career anchors, career enablers, age, higher education

Introduction

The central elements of employees' internal sense of work are career anchors (Bezuidenhout, Rudolph & Grobler, 2013) and the alignment thereof with the work they do will portray their career success or failure. Career anchors represent certain career preferences that influence employees' career decisions at different stages of their lives (Bezuidenhout, Rudolph & Grobler, 2013). Career anchors guide career decisions made in relation to self-development and life experience to ensure employees' work participation. For instance, employees make decisions associated with their self-development, family or career as they become more aware of the values and motives that frame their choices (Ferreira & Coetzee, 2010). Thus we can assume that people are usually more fulfilled in their careers when they can satisfy their career anchors and seek roles that are aligned with these.

The career anchors used in this study were eight that were identified by Schein (1978) and are labelled as security, stability and organisational identity (SE), autonomy and independence (AU), entrepreneurship and creativity (EC), technical-/functional competence (TF), managerial competence (GM), sense of service or dedication to a cause (SV), pure challenge (PC) and life style integration (LS) (Schein, 1978).

Bezuidenhout, Grobler and Rudolph (2013) developed a career conversation framework to expand on Schein's career anchors and encourage structured and focussed interviews. Thereafter Grobler, Rudolph and Bezuidenhout (2014) expanded on this outline to include a preliminary career-enabler framework for use in higher education settings. Structural exploratory factor analysis yielded three career enablers (self-transcendence, self-enhancement and self-conservation) with Cronbach alpha coefficients ranging from 0.84 to 0.91 (Grobler, Rudolph & Bezuidenhout, 2014). These career enablers differentiated between Schein's (1978) eight career anchors which were unchallenged for 25 years until Feldman and Bolino published a theoretical and methodological critique in 1996 (Coetzee & Shreuder, 2008). This critique suggested that Schein's (1978) theory needed refining and reframing as it was underspecified theoretically and untested empirically (Feldman & Bolino, 1996). The career enabler framework developed by Grobler, Rudolph and Bezuidenhout (2014) defined career enablers as the factors that contribute to professional development and skills that assists employees to achievement the needs identified by the career anchors. The career enablers identified to complementing Schein's (1978) career anchors are self-transcendence, self-enhancement and self-conservation.

Career enablers are the transferable skills (the practical skills which are directly work related like technical competence and managerial abilities, and also the creative skills which relate more to the individual's positioning and attitude towards work for example the establishment of flexibility, work-life balance or even work security) that assist employees to succeed and these incorporate skills that empower employees to apply theoretical constructs in a realistic and creative manner (Ferreira, 2012; Ferreira & Coetzee, 2010). These skills develop over time and assist employees to find innovative ways to be more successful in their work environment (Ferreira, 2012; Ferreira & Coetzee, 2010). The knowledge of employees' career orientation is critically important because of its influence in career choices and the effect on shaping life goals. Organisations need to consider that some employees have multiple career anchors and furthermore can initiate focussed actions and/or interventions to enhance their employees' motivation and commitment.

Aging employees have different needs and challenges than their younger counterparts (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004), to thrive and prosper. The thriving and prospering of aging employees is labelled as "successful aging" (Cheung & Wu, 2014). Supporting factors to successful aging need to be identified to attract and retain competent specialists, which is often a challenge for organisations (Cheung & Wu, 2014). Successful aging results in life satisfaction and job/career satisfaction, furthermore successful aging improves perceptions of general employability and employee's ability to deal resourcefully with life and career challenges (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2008; Fugate, Kinicki & Ashforth, 2004). Therefore, organisations need to provide sufficient support to the physical and psychological health of employees to ensure successful aging in the workplace. Armstrong-Stassen and Ursel (2009) reported that perceived organizational support is a salient factor in promoting career satisfaction and the intention to remain in an organisation.

Aging employees become more aware of the values and motives that govern their career-related decisions as their self-concept progresses (Schein, 1975). The premise of this article is based on Schein' career anchor model (1978) which identified eight career anchors and the career enablers identified by Grobler, Rudolph and Bezuidenhout (2014) that guide employees' when they make career decisions and that contribute to their professional development.

Age

Age is an indicator of a number of life circumstances: career stage, work life, family stage, maturity and biological aging (Moen & Yu, 2000). Sparrow (1996) reported that employees have different employment preferences as they age and the acknowledgement of these preferences impacts significantly on job satisfaction and motivation. Finegold, Mohrman, and Spreitzer (2002) furthermore identified age as one of the factors that may shape differences in what people want from their work environment and how they can be retained and how their commitment to the organisation can be improved. For instance, younger generations are more focussed on obtaining a job where they can express their personal values (Sullivan, Forret, Carraher & Mainiero, 2009). Acknowledgement of generational differences highlights the importance of various factors that guide workplace attitudes and behaviours (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008). This study sought to identify the career anchors and career enablers that are most pertinent to employees at different stages in their work life (denoted by age).

Super (1990) stated that individuals make occupational decisions by expressing their self-concept (understanding of self), which evolves over time and through experience. He furthermore highlighted that this is a lifelong process where individuals seek career satisfaction through work roles where they can express themselves and further implement and develop their self-concept.

The participants in this study were divided into age groups that relate to the career development stage theory of Super (1990) where 18-25 years relate to the early life stage/exploration, 26-35 years relate to the early life stage/establishment, 36-49 years relate to the middle life stage/maintenance and 50+ years relate to the middle/late life stage/maintenance/retirement.

Research question

This study investigated different career anchors and career enablers over different stages of employees work life (denoted by age) within a SA ODeL HEI.

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- What career anchors and career enablers are more relevant to younger as compared to older employees?
- What are the qualities of career anchors and career enablers over the age span of 18 to 65 years?

Knowledge of the career anchor and career enabler similarities and differences amongst different age groups can assist management to make informed decisions when formulating policies and practices. For example innovation and the maintenance of balance have been found to be the most common career anchors where innovation refers more to the creative anchor, with maintaining balance as the self-conservation enabler with its anchors security, life style integration, etc. (Grobler, Rudolph & Bezuidenhout, 2014). The understanding of career anchor and career enabler may guide organisations in the development of employee focussed interventions important for career development, participation and satisfaction.

Method

Participants

The participants were a convenience sample of 1392 employees of a South African ODeL HEI (54.5% females, 45.5% males, age range = 18 to 65 years, professional and support staff =79.7% and academic staff = 20.3%). Table 1 summarises the demographics of the participants.

Table 1: Participant demographics

Demographic variable	Value	Frequency	Percent
Age	18-25 years	363	26%
	26-35 years	643	46.2%
	36-49 years	328	23.6%
	50+ years	58	4.2%
Race	African	746	53.6%
	Coloured	55	4%
	Indian	49	3.5%
	White	542	38.9%
Gender	Male	633	45.5%
	Female	759	54.5%
Staff composition	Professional and Support	1109	79.7%
	Academic	283	20.3%

The age group that was best represented was the 26-35 years (46.2%) and the age group of 50+ years (4.2%) were the least represented, followed by 36-49 years (23.6%).

In terms of the race groups, the sample comprised of 53.6% African, 38.9% White, 4% Coloured and 3.5% Indian participants. The sample consisted of 54.5% female and 45.5% male participants respectively.

Measuring instruments

Data was collected and recorded through a structured interview (with clear guidelines) utilising a career conversation framework that was developed and standardised by Bezuidenhout, Rudolph and Grobler (2013). Adequate internal consistency reliabilities were reported with Cronbach alpha coefficients for each of the different career anchors at $\alpha = .76$ for security, stability and organisational identity (SE); $\alpha = .92$ for autonomy and independence (AU); $\alpha = .91$ for entrepreneurship and creativity (EC); $\alpha = .80$ for technical-/functional competence (TF); $\alpha = .92$ for managerial competence (GM); $\alpha = .93$ for sense of service or dedication to a cause (SV); $\alpha = .92$ for pure challenge (PC) and $\alpha = .85$ for life style integration (LS) (Bezuidenhout, Rudolph & Grobler, 2013).

The career enabler model, developed and standardised by Grobler, Bezuidenhout and Rudolph (2014) consists of three factors namely self-transcendence ($\alpha = .84$), self-enhancement ($\alpha = .91$) and self-conservation ($\alpha = .89$).

The structured interview provided employees with an opportunity to identify career preferences (career anchors) and to rank career enablers in order of importance.

Permission from the HEI management to conduct the study and consent from each participant was obtained. The structured interview formed part of the performance management process and therefore participation was non voluntary. The objectives of data gathering were explained as part of the interview and the responses were captured and consolidated on an electronic system, administered by the organisation's development directorate via personalised e-mail messages. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by not attaching personal identifiers to the responses captured.

Data analysis

The statistical analysis was done by means of a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 23). Correlation matrices highlighted the correlations between the various variables. The participants were divided into four groups according to their age (18-25, 26-35, 36-49 and 50+ years). As more than two groups were used a t-test was not performed but rather the ANOVA test with a post hoc test to determine whether there are significant differences between and within the different age groups for the career anchors and career enablers. Thereafter the Scheffé post hoc test was administered to indicate where the exact differences are. Scheffé's method is a single-step multiple comparison procedure which applies to the set of estimates of all possible contrasts among the factor level means.

Scheffé's method was chosen rather than Tukey's least significant method as Tukey's method was designed for a situation with equal sample sizes per group, which is not necessarily the case in this study. Scheffé was used because it is a more flexible method and is not sensitive towards unequal sample sizes of the groups. Overall, results for less complex analysis when Tukey and Scheffé are very similar and the choice of post hoc technique does not have a serious impact on the statistical outcome.

Results

Table 2 presents the correlation statistics for the career anchors and age while Table 3 presents the correlation statistics for the career enablers and age.

Table 2: Correlation matrix for career anchors

	TF	GM	AU	SE	EC	SV	PC	LS	Age
TF	1								
GM	-.18**	1							
AU	-.14**	-.14**	1						
SE	-.18**	-.18**	.01	1					
EC	-.18**	-.01	-.07**	-.10**	1				
SV	-.21**	-.05	-.11**	-.01	-.02	1			
PC	-.17**	-.11**	-.06	-.11**	.05	.02	1		
LS	-.17**	-.16**	.04	.11	-.03	-.06	-.03	1	
Age	-.13**	-.13**	.05	.07	.00	-.00	-.04	.08**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

With: SE=Security, stability and organisational identity; AU=Autonomy and independence; EC=Entrepreneurship and creativity; TF=Technical-/functional competence; GM=Managerial

competence; SV=Sense of service or dedication to a cause; PC=Pure challenge (PC) and LS=Life style integration.

The most significant correlation was a negative correlation between the technical/functional (TF) competence and a sense of service or dedication to a cause (SV) (-.21). This is an indication that higher motivation to develop functional knowledge and expert skills (TF) results in a lower need to align work activities with personal values and skills related to helping society and improve the world (SV). In terms of correlations with age, technical/functional (TF) competence and need to obtain managerial competence (GM) declined significantly as employees grow older.

Table 3: Correlation matrix for career enablers

	ST	SE	SC	Age
ST	1			
SE	.48**	1		
SC	.44**	.56**	1	
Age	-.25**	-.32**	-.16**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

With: ST=Self-transcendence, SE=Self-enhancement and SC=Self-conservation.

High significant correlations were found amongst the three career enablers (.48; .44 and .56). The employees' need to improve themselves motivates them to structure their work and to set challenging goals and objectives. In terms of correlations with age the need to maintain and enhance their self-esteem (self-enhancement) through setting challenging goals and objectives declines significantly as employees grow older.

The mean differences between the age groups for the various career anchors were analysed by means of ANOVA. The participants were divided into four groups according to their age, namely:

- 18-25years: early life stage/exploration
- 26-35years: early life stage/establishment
- 36-49years: middle life stage/maintenance
- 50+years: middle/late life stage/maintenance/retirement

The mean score differences for the career anchors amongst the age groups are reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Mean differences of career anchors amongst different age groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TF	Between Groups	46.848	3	15.616	8.46	.000
	Within Groups	2561.072	1388	1.845		
	Total	2607.920	1391			
GM	Between Groups	65.694	3	21.898	14.13	.000
	Within Groups	2150.984	1388	1.550		
	Total	2216.678	1391			
AU	Between Groups	4.627	3	1.542	1.72	.160
	Within Groups	1242.148	1388	.895		
	Total	1246.775	1391			
SE	Between Groups	8.295	3	2.765	3.12	.025
	Within Groups	1230.498	1388	.887		

	Total	1238.792	1391			
EC	Between Groups	1.402	3	.467	.93	.426
	Within Groups	697.837	1388	.503		
	Total	699.239	1391			
SV	Between Groups	1.027	3	.342	.39	.758
	Within Groups	1207.039	1388	.870		
	Total	1208.066	1391			
PC	Between Groups	3.387	3	1.129	1.82	.142
	Within Groups	862.128	1388	.621		
	Total	865.514	1391			
LS	Between Groups	4.058	3	1.353	3.40	.017
	Within Groups	551.801	1388	.398		
	Total	555.859	1391			

With: SE=Security, stability and organisational identity; AU=Autonomy and independence; EC=Entrepreneurship and creativity; TF=Technical-/functional competence; GM=Managerial competence; SV=Sense of service or dedication to a cause; PC=Pure challenge and LS=Life style integration

A one way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the difference of career anchors for the age groups. A significant difference for the age groups was reported on the career anchor technical/functional (TF) competence, $F(3,1388)=8.46$, $p<.05$. A statistically significant difference for age groups on the career anchor managerial (GM) competence, $F(3,1388)=14.13$, $p<.05$, was reported as well as on security, stability and organisational identity (SE), $F(3,1388)=3.12$, $p<.05$ and $F(3,138)=3.40$, $p<.05$ on lifestyle integration (LS).

The presence of mean score differences for the career enablers amongst the different age groups (ANOVA) are reported in Table 5.

Table 5: Mean differences of career enablers amongst different age groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Self-transcendence	Between Groups	11.846	3	3.949	38.22	.000
	Within Groups	143.386	1388	.103		
	Total	155.233	1391			
Self-enhancement	Between Groups	19.174	3	6.391	59.55	.000
	Within Groups	148.974	1388	.107		
	Total	168.148	1391			
Self-conservation	Between Groups	5.085	3	1.695	16.31	.000
	Within Groups	144.119	1387	.104		
	Total	149.204	1390			

A one way between groups analysis of variance was also conducted to explore the importance of the career enablers for different age groups. Significant difference for age on self-transcendence, $F(3,1388)=38.22$, $p<.05$; on self-enhancement, $F(3,1388)=59.55$, $p<.05$ and on self-conservation, $F(3,1388)=16.31$, $p<.05$ were reported.

In order to determine the specific differences between the age groups, a Scheffé post hoc test was performed. The results as well as the effect size in terms of Cohen's d (practical significance) are reported in Table 6 for the career anchors and in Table 7 for the career enablers.

Table 6: Scheffe post hoc test and Cohen's d effect size on career anchors amongst different age groups

CAREER ANCHORS	Age group	Comparison Age group	Mean difference	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval		Cohen's d
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	

TF	18-25yrs; <i>n</i> =363; <i>M</i> =.95; <i>SD</i> =1.27	50+yrs <i>n</i> =58; <i>M</i> =.26 <i>SD</i> =.85	.69*	.17	.20	1.17	<i>d</i> =.57 Large
	26-35yrs; <i>n</i> =643; <i>M</i> =.88; <i>SD</i> =1.24	50+ <i>n</i> =58; <i>M</i> =.26 <i>SD</i> =.85	.62*	.17	.16	1.09	<i>d</i> =.51 Large
GM	18-25yrs; <i>n</i> =363; <i>M</i> =1.54; <i>SD</i> =1.37	26-35yrs <i>n</i> =643; <i>M</i> =1.23 <i>SD</i> =1.37	.31*	.08	.07	.54	<i>d</i> =.23 Small
		36-49 yrs <i>n</i> =328; <i>M</i> =.56 <i>SD</i> =1.11	.98*	.10	.70	1.25	<i>d</i> =.78 Large
		50+yrs <i>n</i> =58; <i>M</i> =.00 <i>SD</i> =.00	1.54*	.18	1.03	2.05	<i>d</i> =1.21 Large
	26-35yrs <i>n</i> =643; <i>M</i> =1.23 <i>SD</i> =1.37	36-49 yrs <i>n</i> =328; <i>M</i> =.56 <i>SD</i> =1.11	.67*	.09	.43	.91	<i>d</i> =.52 Large
		50+yrs <i>n</i> =58; <i>M</i> =.00 <i>SD</i> =.00	1.23*	.18	.74	1.73	<i>d</i> =.94 Large
EC	18-25yrs <i>n</i> =363; <i>M</i> =.58 <i>SD</i> =1.01	36-49 yrs <i>n</i> =328; <i>M</i> =.32 <i>SD</i> =.78	.26*	.07	.08	.45	<i>d</i> =.29 Small
PC	18-25yrs <i>n</i> =363; <i>M</i> =.49 <i>SD</i> =.86	50+yrs <i>n</i> =58; <i>M</i> =.07 <i>SD</i> =.32	.42*	.11	.10	.74	<i>d</i> =.52 Large

Significance at the $p < .05$ level

With: SE=Security, stability and organisational identity; AU=Autonomy and independence; EC=Entrepreneurship and creativity; TF=Technical-/functional competence; GM=Managerial competence; SV=Sense of service or dedication to a cause; PC=Pure challenge and LS=Life style integration

Even though statistically significant differences at the $p < .05$ level were reported, the actual differences in terms of effect sizes were also calculated. Only statistically significant differences with large effect sizes are discussed. The Scheffe post hoc test indicated the exact age groups where the career anchors differed significantly.

The age group 18-25 years ($M=.95$, $SD=1.27$) differed significantly and with a large effect size from the group 50+ years ($M=.26$, $SD=.85$) with a mean score difference of .69 ($d=.57$) on technical/functional (TF) competence. Furthermore, the age group 18-25 years ($M=1.54$, $SD=.86$) also differed significantly and with a large effect size from the age group 50+ years ($M=.07$, $SD=.32$) with a mean score difference of .42 ($d=.52$) on their need for pure challenge (PC). On the general/managerial (GM) career anchor the age group 18-25 years ($M=1.54$, $SD=1.37$) has a significantly higher (with large effect size) mean score (.98 difference) than the age group 36-49 years ($M=.56$, $SD=1.11$; $d=.78$) and 1.54 mean score difference with the 50+ years age group ($M=.0$, $SD=.0$; $d=1.21$).

The age group 26-35 years ($M=.88$, $SD=1.24$) differed significantly and with a large effect size from the group 50+ years ($M=.26$, $SD=.85$) with a mean score difference of .62 ($d=.51$) on technical/functional (TF) competence. This age group (26-35 years) ($M=1.23$, $SD=1.37$) had a significant and large effect size mean score difference of .67 ($d=.52$) from the 36-49 years' age group ($M=.56$, $SD=1.11$) as well as a significant and large effect size mean score difference of 1.23 ($d=.94$) from the 50+ years age group ($M=.0$, $SD=.0$) on their general/managerial competence (GM).

Table 7: Scheffe post hoc test and Cohen's d effect size on career enablers amongst different age groups

CAREER ENABLERS	Age group	Age group	Mean difference	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval		Cohen's d
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
ST	18-25yrs n=363; M=.78 SD=.28	26-35yrs n=643; M=.72 SD=.32	.06*	.02	.00	.12	d=.196 Small
		36-49 yrs n=328; M=.62 SD=.35	.16*	.02	.09	.23	d=.508 Large
		50+yrs n=58; M=.23 SD=.32	.43*	.05	.30	.56	d=1.929 Large
	26-35yrs n=643; M=.72 SD=.32	36-49 yrs n=328; M=.62 SD=.35	.10*	.02	.04	.16	d=.303 Moderate
		50+yrs n=58; M=.23 SD=.32	.37*	.04	.25	.49	d=1.533 Large
	36-49 yrs n=328; M=.62 SD=.35	50+yrs n=58; M=.23 SD=.32	.27*	.05	.14	.40	d=1.131 Large
SE	18-25yrs n=363; M=.73 SD=.303	26-35yrs n=643; M=.65 SD=.33	.08*	.02	.02	.14	d=.250 Small
		36-49 yrs n=328; M=.50 SD=.36	.24*	.02	.17	.31	d=.695 Large
		50+yrs n=58; M=.23 SD=.32	.50*	.05	.37	.63	d=1.641 Large
	26-35yrs n=643; M=.65 SD=.33	36-49 yrs n=328; M=.50 SD=.36	.16*	.02	.10	.22	d=.441 Moderate
		50+yrs n=58; M=.23 SD=.32	.42*	.04	.30	.55	d=1.278 Large
	36-49 yrs n=328; M=.50 SD=.36	50+yrs n=58; M=.23 SD=.32	.26*	.05	.13	.40	d=.764 Large
SC	18-25yrs n=363; M=.70 SD=.32	36-49 yrs n=328; M=.61 SD=.33	.09*	.02	.02	.16	d=.278 Small
		50+yrs n=58; M=.40 SD=.34	.30*	.05	.17	.43	d=.932 Large
	26-35yrs n=643; M=.66 SD=.32	50+yrs n=58; M=.40 SD=.34	.26*	.04	.14	.38	d=.809 Large
	36-49 yrs n=328; M=.61 SD=.33	50+yrs n=58; M=.40 SD=.34	.21*	.05	.08	.34	d=.635 Large

Significance at the p<.05 level

With: ST=Self-transcendence, SE=Self-enhancement and SC=Self-conservation.

Statistically significant differences at the p<.05 level were reported for age on all the career enablers and therefore the actual differences in terms of effect sizes were also calculated. Only

statistically significant differences with large effect sizes are discussed below. The Scheffé post hoc test indicated the exact age groups where the career enablers differed significantly.

In terms of the career enablers the age group 18-25 years ($M=.78$, $SD=.28$) had a significant mean score difference (with a large effect size) with the 36-49 years' age group ($M=.62$, $SD=.35$) of .16 ($d=.508$) and the 50+ years age group ($M=.23$, $SD=.32$) of .43 ($d=1.93$) on self-transcendence (ST). This age group (18-25 years) ($M=.73$, $SD=.30$) also had significant mean differences (with a large effect size) with the same age groups (36-49 years and 50+ years) (.24; $M=.50$, $SD=.36$; $d=.695$) and (.50; $M=.23$, $SD=.32$; $d=1.64$) respectively on self-enhancement (SE). The age group 18-25 years ($M=.70$, $SD=.32$) only had a significant difference (with a large effect) on the mean scores with the 50+ years age group ($M=.40$, $SD=.34$; $d=.93$) of .30 on the self-conservation (SC) career enabler.

The age group 26-35 years ($M=.72$, $SD=.32$) had a significant mean score difference of .37 ($d=1.53$) with the age group 50+ years ($M=.23$, $SD=.32$) on the career enabler self-transcendence (ST) and a mean score difference of .42 (26-35 years $M=.65$, $SD=.33$) (50+ years $M=.23$, $SD=.32$) with a large effect size ($d=1.278$) on the career enabler self-enhancement (SE). A mean score difference of .26 ($d=.809$) was computed between the 26-35 years' age group ($M=.66$, $SD=.32$) and the 50+ years age group ($M=.40$, $SD=.34$) on the self-conservation (SC) career enabler.

Significant mean score differences (with large effect sizes) were computed between the 36-49 years' age group ($M=.62$, $SD=.35$) and the 50+ years age group ($M=.23$, $SD=.32$) as .27 ($d=1.13$) on self-transcendence (ST); the 36-49 years' age group ($M=.50$, $SD=.36$) and the 50+ years age group ($M=.23$, $SD=.32$) as .26 ($d=.764$) on self-enhancement (SE) and the 36-49 years' age group ($M=.61$, $SD=.33$) and the 50+ years age group ($M=.40$, $SD=.34$) as .21 ($d=.635$) on the career enabler self-conservation (SC).

Conclusion

The employees within a South African ODeL HEI from different age groups have different career anchors that guide their career decisions. Statistically significant differences were identified for the following career anchors between the different age groups: technical/functional (TF), general managerial (GM), entrepreneurial creativity (EC), sense of service/dedication to a cause (SV), pure challenge (PC) and lifestyle integration (LS).

Younger (18-25 years) and middle aged (26-35 years) employees have a significantly higher motivation and need to develop their technical/functional knowledge and expert skill (technical/functional career anchor) than older (50+years) employees. They also aspire to attain a position that requires the application of interpersonal, political, analytical and financial skills associated with management in the organisation. Younger (18-25 years) employees appreciate and expect to be tested on their abilities through competing with others and they want to solve a variety of challenging problems (pure challenge career anchor).

Most young (18-25 years) and middle aged (26-35 years) employees have the desire to improve or better themselves technically by participating in specialised projects, attending specialised training or conferences and by specialising in areas of work (self-transcendence through technical self-affirmation). They furthermore have a need to maintain and enhance their self-esteem through setting personal challenging goals and objectives and therefore they appreciate

opportunities to attend leadership development programmes and conferences in preparation for managerial positions they aspire to fill (self-enhancement). These employees want to empower themselves by performing a variety of tasks to learn and to expose themselves to stimulating challenges. Older (50+ years) employees might feel that they have reached their goals and objectives and do not have the same aspiration for power (wealth, authority, social power and social recognition) and achievement (success, influence).

This research was focused on employees of an ODeL HEI and similar research should be repeated within other organisations to confirm the identified trends. It is clear that the motives and needs of employees in different age groups differ significantly and therefore managers and HR specialists need to acknowledge the differences in terms of security, conformity and tradition. Adjustments to the job (job enlargement/enrichment, managing and monitoring own performance in terms of projects and by objectives) will firstly ensure a better person–job fit, and secondly, establish a better work–life balance (flexible working arrangements, emphasis on lifestyle rather than career, and limited disruptions and uncertainty). Bezuidenhout, Grobler and Rudolph (2013) stated that self-conservation through work motives and values refer to a type of stimulus that encourages people to structure their work according to their basic personal needs and their roles and responsibilities. This career enabler is linked to Schein's autonomy/independence, security and lifestyle career orientations.

Recommendations to managers and HR functionaries, specifically in terms of the institutionalisation of frequent structured career interviews are made based on the results of this study. The results should be interpreted within a dynamic work environment, as well as acknowledging the changing demographics (often aging) of the workforce. The training and development of managers in the identifying and managing of career preferences, within the ambit of the organisational policies should be prioritised by the HR functionaries. Lastly, HR policies and processes should be aligned with career preferences, especially regarding the employees in the higher age category. Examples of these alignments are the alternative employment rules, like contract appointments after retirement (extending the employee's work life) and more flexible working arrangements (working from home or virtual working arrangements).

Limitations

A limitation of this study on different age groups is that cross-sectional design was used to capture the differences in career anchors and career enablers and that this type of research fails to capture the influence of the aging process. A longitudinal, multi-survey design would have enabled the researcher to capture differences within the same employee as their self-concept develops. This would permit a better understanding of whether the differences are in fact due to self-knowledge or ageing.

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