

**Career management: Understanding corporate career success  
through effectuation theory**

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## **ABSTRACT**

There have been rigorous discussions in academic literature and business practice, on the most effective methods that can be deployed for individuals to manage their careers successfully. The aspect of corporate career management however has remained under-researched in the last two decades. The principles of effectuation theory – using your personal resources, the affordable loss principle, strategic alliances versus competition, leveraging contingencies, and controlling an unknown future versus predicting an uncertain one, have added value to the field of entrepreneurship. The purpose of this paper was to discover whether these principles add insights into understanding successful corporate career management.

A qualitative, exploratory research method using an abductive approach, was employed. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who hold Master's in Business Administration (MBA) degrees, and executive level positions within corporate organisations. Each of the interviews were examined using thematic and content analysis in an effort to address three research questions.

Key findings of this study surfaced that the definition of subjective career success is multifaceted and evolves throughout an individual's career journey. While recent literature placed employees at the centre of their career management decisions, this study showed that in corporate careers, the individuals' organisational attachment is a critical success factor. Effectuation theory adds significant value in understanding corporate career management, however, it has certain limitations in that some of its theoretical aspects require adaptation.

A corporate career management framework is provided as the main output for this research study. This model draws together the major findings of the research and outlines the approach that individuals should consider when pursuing successful corporate careers.

## **KEYWORDS**

Career management, career success, corporate careers, organisational attachment, effectuation theory

**DECLARATION**

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>KEYWORDS .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>DECLARATION .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PROBLEM.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM .....	1
1.2.1 Career management .....	2
1.2.2 Effectuation theory .....	2
1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND MOTIVATION.....	3
1.4 CONCLUSION .....	4
<b>CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	5
2.2 CAREER MANAGEMENT.....	5
2.2.1 Management education.....	7
2.2.2 Career success .....	8
2.2.3 Career growth .....	10
2.2.4 Career mobility.....	12
2.2.5 Corporate careers .....	13
2.3 THE ROLE OF THE ORGANISATION .....	14
2.3.1 Organisational commitment.....	14
2.3.2 Organisational attachment .....	15
2.4 EFFECTUATION THEORY .....	16
2.4.1 Effectuation theory and corporate careers.....	17
2.5 CONCLUSION .....	18
<b>CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4 : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>22</b>
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	22
4.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	22
4.2.1 Population .....	23
4.2.2 Unit of analysis.....	23
4.2.3 Sampling method and size .....	23

4.2.4 Measurement instrument.....	25
4.2.5 Data gathering.....	27
4.2.6 Data analysis.....	28
4.2.7 Quality assurance .....	31
4.2.7.1 Interview guide pre-testing .....	32
4.2.8 Limitations .....	32
4.2.9 Ethical considerations .....	33
4.3 CONCLUSION .....	34
<b>CHAPTER 5 : RESULTS .....</b>	<b>35</b>
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	35
5.2 THE SAMPLE DESCRIPTION .....	35
5.3 CAREER SUCCESS DEFINED .....	37
5.3.1 Definition of subjective career success .....	37
5.4 INDIVIDUAL & ORGANISATIONAL ROLES IN CAREER SUCCESS.....	40
5.4.1 The roles of the individual versus the organisation.....	41
5.4.2 The role of organisational attachment .....	44
5.5 EFFECTUATION THEORY AND CAREER MANAGEMENT .....	47
5.5.1 Starting with your personal resources .....	48
5.5.2 Affordable loss principle – influences to investments .....	49
5.5.3 Strategic alliances/partnerships versus competition .....	51
5.5.4 Leveraging contingencies (plan B) .....	54
5.5.5 Controlling an unknown future versus predicting an uncertain one (Long-term plan vs. short-term decisions) .....	56
5.5.6 Advice for current MBAs on career success.....	58
5.6 CONCLUSION .....	60
<b>CHAPTER 6 : DISCUSSION OF RESULTS .....</b>	<b>61</b>
6.1 INTRODUCTION.....	61
6.2 RQ 1 – CAREER SUCCESS DEFINED .....	61
6.2.1 Achieving goals/targets .....	63
6.2.2 Purpose and fulfilment.....	63
6.2.3 Adding value .....	63
6.2.4 Building relationships .....	64
6.2.5 Summary.....	64
6.3 RQ 2 – INDIVIDUAL & ORGANISATIONAL ROLES IN CAREER SUCCESS .....	65

6.3.1 Efforts that influence career success.....	66
6.3.1.1 The role of the individual - actions.....	66
6.3.1.2 The role of the individual – organisational attachment.....	67
6.3.1.3 The role of the organisation.....	68
6.3.2 Summary.....	70
6.4 RQ 3 – EFFECTUATION THEORY AND CAREER MANAGEMENT .....	71
6.4.1 Personal resources .....	72
6.4.2 Affordable-loss principle .....	73
6.4.3 Strategic alliances/partnerships versus competition .....	74
6.4.4 Leveraging contingencies (plan B) .....	75
6.4.5 Long-term plan vs. short-term decisions .....	76
6.4.6 A combination of the principles .....	77
6.4.7 Summary.....	78
6.5 CONCLUSION .....	80
<b>CHAPTER 7 : CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>81</b>
7.1 INTRODUCTION.....	81
7.2 PRINCIPAL OUTCOMES BY RESEARCH QUESTION.....	81
7.2.1 RQ 1 – Career success defined .....	81
7.2.2 RQ 2 – Individual & organisational roles in career success.....	82
7.2.3 RQ 3 – Effectuation theory and career management .....	83
7.2.3.1 Personal resources (Individual actions).....	83
7.2.3.2 Career investment influences .....	83
7.2.3.3 Strategic alliances vs competition .....	84
7.2.3.4 Long-term plans and points of inflection .....	85
7.3 THE CORPORATE CAREER MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK.....	86
7.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS.....	87
7.4.1 Recommendations for individuals in corporate careers .....	87
7.4.2 Recommendations for corporate organisations .....	89
7.5 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY .....	90
7.5.1 Academic contribution.....	90
7.5.2 Practical implications.....	91
7.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	91
7.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .....	92
7.8 CONCLUSION .....	92
<b>REFERENCE LIST .....</b>	<b>93</b>

<b>APPENDIX A : INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>APPENDIX B : INFORMED CONSENT LETTER .....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>APPENDIX C : ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL.....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>APPENDIX D : CODES PER INTERVIEW QUESTION .....</b>	<b>106</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 1: Sample – industry overview .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Figure 2: RQ1 - Career success thematic analysis.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Figure 3: Corporate career success themes .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Figure 4: Individual career success actions .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Figure 5: Organisational attachment linkages .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Figure 6: Organisational culture fosters career success .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Figure 7: RQ2 – Individual &amp; organisational actions for career success.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Figure 8: Personal resources .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Figure 9: RQ 3 – Effectuation principles for corporate career management..</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Figure 10: The corporate career management framework (CCMF) .....</b>	<b>86</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 1: Mapping research questions to the interview guide .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Table 2: The 6 phases of thematic analysis .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Table 3: Sample description.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Table 4: Career success constructs .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Table 5: Career success prior to the MBA .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Table 6: Percentage (%) split of own efforts vs organisational efforts (Org) ..</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Table 7: Individual efforts to manage the career .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Table 8: Organisations' career contributions .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Table 9: Organisational attachment rating.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Table 10: Organisational attachment factors.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Table 11: Personal resources used to advance career success .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Table 12: Influences to investments .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Table 13: Strategic partnerships vs competition.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Table 14: Leveraging contingencies (Plan B) .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Table 15: Long-term plan vs. Short-term decisions .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Table 16: Career success advice for MBAs .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Table 17: Career success themes .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Table 18: Affordable-loss influences vs. career influences.....</b>	<b>74</b>

## **CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PROBLEM**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

A research problem can be defined as a “set of conditions needing discussion, a solution and information” (Myers, 2020). It implies that there is an opportunity to conduct a verifiable examination into the set of conditions under consideration. The research problem identified, that will be investigated through this research is the factors that have contributed to the upward mobility of graduates within large corporate organisations. This study will seek to explore the concepts of career success, the relationship between the individual and the employee, and the presence, or absence of effectual behaviours in contributing to the upward career mobility of individuals.

The sections that follow will aim to position the problem as it has been researched in literature, highlighting key aspects of career management and effectuation theory. This chapter concludes with an outline of the key research objectives for this study, along with the expected contribution this research will make to the field of business management.

### **1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM**

Academic literature has developed rapidly over the past two decades and has shifted its perspective on where the responsibility for career management resides, and it is currently of the view that individuals are solely responsible for their career management decisions (Hirschi, 2020; Hirschi & Koen, 2021). In addition to this, the evolving nature of career research and the development of boundaryless and protean careers (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 2012; Donnelly, 2009; Serobe, 2013) has downgraded the role of the organisation in career literature and this has meant that the field of corporate careers has remained under researched.

In the entrepreneurship field of academic literature, the theory of effectuation and its principles (Sarasvathy, 2001) has proven to be a critical development within the field, however, while this theory exists, it has not yet been applied for individuals managing their corporate careers. The following section further elaborates on the background of these academic fields.

### **1.2.1 Career management**

The most recent body of knowledge positions a concept known as organisational career growth (OCG) which is a measure of an employee's perception of their advancement opportunities within an organisation (Spagnoli & Weng, 2019). While career management has historically been focused on the traditional career paths; boundaryless careers, and protean careers, (Serobe, 2013), OCG has advanced career management literature towards a perspective that represents career growth as both an individual's perceptions, and the actions of the organisation (Spagnoli & Weng, 2019).

Another factor that is explored by career researchers, is the concept of career success (Hall, 2002), and meta-analyses of both objective and subjective definitions of this concept (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005), as well as the development of the subjective career success inventory (SCSI) scale to measure subjective career success (Shockley, Ureksoy, Rodopman, Poteat, & Dullaghan, 2016). The third component under consideration in the career management literature, is the theory base covering career mobility, and career capitals. Existing literature positions career capitals that contribute to upward mobility. Career capitals were initially postulated as career competencies by DeFillippi & Arthur (1994), which introduced three capabilities that aid in the building of career competencies.

The study of career capital (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999) and its support of career mobility (Brown, Hooley, & Wond, 2020) are well documented concepts in the literature, with the outcomes of a theoretical model. All three facets of career management mentioned above, place the individual perceptions, behaviours, and their environment, at the centre of their career management. Some of the most pertinent literature regarding individual behaviours currently resides in the research field of entrepreneurship, looking at effectual behaviours. The next section describes the current state of this theory, and the potential research gap that has been identified for the purposes of this research paper.

### **1.2.2 Effectuation theory**

Formative research on effectuation was conducted by Sarasvathy (2001), focusing specifically on behaviours necessary to succeed in the field of entrepreneurship. This

research now has over 3,700 citations in existing literature. Adapted from the influential work of Sarasvathy (2001), Chen, Lui, & Chen (2021) describe effectuation as “a practical way of facing uncertainty by exercising control over the environment”. The principles of effectuation theory surface the types of behaviours that can be deployed, depending on the context, to enact some control over the environment by an individual, or organisation. This knowledge base has contributed to literature and entrepreneurship research by developing a model of behaviours that have been tested and found useful for entrepreneurs to practise.

These principles include the “affordable loss principle, strategic alliances over competitor analyses, start with your resources, exploitation of contingencies over existing knowledge, and controlling an unknown future rather than predicting an uncertain one.” The theory has not been tested on individual corporate careers; therefore, the research gap identified, is the applicability of the theory of effectuation in aiding the upward mobility of graduates within corporate careers.

### **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND MOTIVATION**

The key deliverable of this current research will focus solely on contributing to the existing career management literature, by applying the specific lenses of effectual behaviours (effectuation theory) on the field of career management, with the aim of unearthing the behaviours present for individuals who have successfully leveraged their career capitals, become successful in their careers through growth, and are graduates. The field of career management research has developed extensively in literature, initially focusing on organisation-driven support for career development (Hirschi & Koen, 2021). This has evolved from the traditional career as described, to a ‘new’ form of career management that places the individual at the centre of career management, development, growth and success (Wiernik & Kostal, 2019; Hirschi & Koen, 2021).

This ‘new’ form of career management, while placing the individual at the centre, does not completely negate the role of organisational support, but relegates its importance significantly (Spagnoli et al., 2019). With this paradigm shift in career management literature, there is a need to identify the individual behaviours necessary to attain corporate career success. When observing effectuation theory,

and the progress of career management literature, it is necessary to identify the behaviours needed for developing career success and growth. Therefore, this research will contribute to the evolving career management literature and extend the debate about the types of behaviours needed in career management by individuals who are seeking rapid career success. Furthermore, the research is important as it will evolve the debate within the following fields:

- **For career researchers**, it will advance the field of career management in literature, by highlighting a unique set of behaviours already proven as effective in the field of entrepreneurship, for practising business practitioners.
- **For business management leaders**, it will inform a new way of aiding in the development of careers within the corporate field, specifically by applying these behaviours.

#### **1.4 CONCLUSION**

For the past two decades, career management literature has advanced with the progression of career related research. The concept of the knowledge worker in various career types, has also become more prevalent in recent times and this has resulted in a shift in the focus of career research. This change has resulted in literature suggesting that career management is solely the responsibility of the individual and has relegated the organisation to an afterthought. This has also meant that corporate career success has been under-researched during this period. Additionally, effectuation theory has seen a rapid introduction into academic literature over this same two-decade period, but has never been applied to the field of corporate career success. This study aims to investigate the role of this theory in understanding career management and corporate career success.

## **CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The following section, the literature review, provides a necessary foundation that explores some of the existing literature as it relates to the concept of career management, effectuation theory and effectual behaviours, and what the identified gap is in the literature that this study aims to address. This chapter starts with addressing some of the existing factors that encompass career management research (career self-management, career success, and career capitals), concluding with the common theme of the employee being the focal point, who is responsible for career management.

With this in mind, this chapter also discusses the role and the importance of the organisation in the ever-developing field of career management. While seminal research initially placed the employer as the responsible party for employee career development, more recent literature has somewhat demoted the role of the organisation and shifted focus exclusively to the individual. The element of organisational career growth, organisational commitment and attachment are also covered in this section, as essential factors in the developing employee career management literature. The role of the organisation is further elaborated on within the context of the corporate career.

Following this is a review of the extant model of effectuation as it is described in recent literature. This review encompasses the model itself, as well as challenges to the theory in recent literature. This section concludes with the identified research gap of discovering whether the effectual behaviours from this extant model, are present at all in the career self-management actions of those who have achieved career success through the leveraging of existing, or the development of new career related capitals.

### **2.2 CAREER MANAGEMENT**

The area of career management has been thoroughly explored by career researchers, initially based on seminal research by Crites (1969; 1976), with a view on career development in early adulthood. It focused on three career self-

management (CSM) behaviours; positioning, influence, and the management of boundaries, and the definition of these behaviours as tasks undertaken as an adaptive response (King, 2004). This field of research further evolved in literature, by enhancing the initial model developed by Crites (1969; 1976) and categorizing the CSM behaviours by their nature (positioning, influence, boundary management), and causes – desire for career control, self-efficacy, anchors, satisfaction, helplessness, and responses (King, 2004).

More recent additions to this body of literature, further explore the adaptive and proactive behaviours involved in CSM, and the proactivity of individuals (Klehe, Pasbender, and van der Horst, 2021). This area of research also overlaps with the areas of career success, organisational career growth, and career capitals. The commonality being pursued through this paper is the types of behaviours that influence career advancement. The paper will aim to study the behaviours that inform the “new” form of career management for individuals in the corporate career.

An additional lens through which career management has been viewed in literature looks at career management practices and individual outcomes by Soares & Mosquera (2021). This discusses the role of career management behaviours at an individual level, as well as the activities undertaken by organisation to promote organisational career management. At the organisational level, these actions are intended to be utilised to sustain employees’ careers and career development goals (Soares & Mosquera, 2021).

At an individual level, the career management practices had initially been classified between 2 types of approaches, building relationships and self-appointment (Soares & Mosquera, 2021), as well as looking for career supervision and guidance, and developing critical proficiency in a specific field (Noe, 1996). These were further evolved by King (2004) across the paradigms of positioning, influence and boundary management. Positioning attributes are pointing towards to attainment of networks and relationship building, upskilling and experience to obtain the desired career outcomes (Soares & Mosquera, 2021). Influence actions seek to influence key decision makers that control the outputs of sought-after career outcomes. Finally, the management of boundaries refers to the balancing act of managing both work, and non-work related outcomes (King, 2004; Soares & Mosquera, 2021).

Another slant with which this topic can be examined, is through the personal agency that individuals adopt when dealing with their career management. This looks at the aptitude within an individual to marshal the essential capitals for their career development and to address any external challenges and limitations to achieving their career goals (Lam & de Campos, 2015). There is also a need to note that this mindset can be influenced by various factors and according to Brown, Hooley, & Wond (2021), this agency is cemented within the relationships that employees have with their organisations.

Principally, the study of career management is complex, and includes the individual and the organisation both playing a distinct role in enabling career management to take place. Moreover, there have been investigations conducted in relation to organisational career management practices and organisational commitment (Sturges, Guest, Conway, & Davey, 2002; Soares & Mosquera, 2021). Organisational commitment will be discussed in detail within this chapter.

### **2.2.1 Management education**

The role of business schools and the MBA qualification for management practitioners has been a long standing debate in academic literature, from debates about the effectiveness of business schools (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002), management education, the MBA and its contribution to career success (Grey, 2004), value of an MBA (Carmichael & Sutherland, 2005; Datar, Garvin, & Cullen, 2011), and the relevance of the qualification (Schlegelmilch & Thomas, 2011).

Additionally, Alajoutsijärvi, Juusola, & Siltaoja (2015) refer to the legitimacy of business schools and management education through the last three decades. In more recent literature in the field of management education, Dyllick (2015) posits that while students studying in this field are focused on the need to attain achievements in the field of business, gain success through positioning and salary earnings, there is a need for responsible management education that promotes sustainability. Gándara & Toutkoushian (2017) also provide key analyses on the return on investment for master's degree education in the United States. They conclude that there are significant monetary rewards for these students on average. There is a need to explore how the role of management education and the MBA,

impacts the career success of graduates, and while this has been researched from the aspect of career capitals (Lamb & Sutherland, 2010) and been expanded on in the South African context (Serobe, 2013), there is a need to explore how career management and career success are impacted by the behaviours that have proven efficacious in entrepreneurship development, and whether or not these behaviours are present in the management and development of career success for graduates in corporate careers.

### **2.2.2 Career success**

For the purposes of this study, a subjective definition of career success needs to be demarcated, this is because the objective definition of career success, as stated by Dries, Pepermans, Hofmans, Rypens (2009) has a limited scope which is only relevant to specific societal standards. These only consider earnings/salary, promotion history and career progression in a specific field of occupation (Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2011). Alternatively Spurk, Hofer & Kauffeld (2021) position the need to define career success with an aim to surface knowledge that is related to career competitiveness for career development programs and individual career management.

The subjective definition stated by career researchers in literature limits subjective career success to a definition that encompasses a person's career satisfaction, such as the achievement of career goals (Spurk, Abele & Volmer, 2015). When evaluating the definition of career success for the purposes of this study, the definition of career success to be applied will be that of a subjective nature, unpacking what choices and behaviours have resulted in a rapid promotion and reaching executive level positions, after the completion of an MBA qualification, solidifying the career mobility and factors that have been of an intentional nature in the management of an individual's career.

Another field of career management literature investigates the role of high potential individuals within organisations, and how this identification informs the actions of both the organisation and the individual where careers are concerned (Dries & Pepermans, 2008). With regards to the role of the organisation, decisions around development programs, funding for upskilling, promotions and fast-track streams are

set aside for the select few who are recognised under this high potential classification (Dries & Pepermans, 2008) and this has been seen to extend to individuals who are being funded for MBA education by organisations.

In this study, the candidates labelled as high potential are constantly identifying personal traits and characteristics that differentiate them, while organisations point out the autonomous behaviours that these individuals display, thus categorizing them as high potentials (Dries & Pepermans, 2008). Some more key traits that were highlighted by the work of Dries & Pepermans (2008) had identified these personal traits along the lines of intrapersonal associations such as networking, relationship building, coaching/mentorship as well as having a long-term focus and an ability to upskill oneself (Dries & Pepermans, 2008). The literature also extends to the fact that some of the individuals outline the need for contingencies regarding their career advancement, and having a short-term upward movement as a limited reward internal to organisations (Dries & Pepermans, 2008).

A more recent development in the research field of career management reviews the concept of career self-management (CSM) as a contemporary career orientation (Hirschi & Koen, 2021). CSM has been defined as the method by which an individual plans, implements and tracks the progress of career goals through specific behaviours such as the exploration of careers, networking and learning (Hirschi & Koen, 2021). These behaviours can assist as the predictors of career success. Additionally, career orientations relate to the approaches deployed by individuals and these approaches are the catalyst behind career choices and the CSM behaviours mentioned above (Tschopp, Grote & Gerber, 2014).

There have also been some developments in earlier literature in defence of the organisational career needing to be redefined instead of written off as no longer relevant (Clarke, 2013). This preceding work had received additional challenges in the literature through the work of Hirschi & Koen (2021). However, the argument stated was that while there is merit in the boundaryless and protean career, those definitions of careers can also be extended due to the nature of the career that can be developed internally in an organisation (Clarke, 2013). This is often predicated by decisions that individuals make regarding personal interests, effort and time away from family, and promotions and career opportunities for advancement within the

organisation, as well as the various environmental factors (political, institutional, national, social) that can inform these decisions (Clarke, 2013). According to Clarke (2013), career management has been a shared endeavour based on a supportive environment that exists between the organisation and the employee, and while the organisational career has been often seen as linear and stable progression through the organisational hierarchy, many careers in this century have been experienced within organisations going through rapid changes themselves. In contrast to this notion, it can be noted that individuals have been able to acquire skills and expertise across the organisation by moving laterally, and by moving to various geographical locations, essentially replicating the definition of boundaryless and protean careers within the structures of a traditional organisational/traditional career, aiding in career development and management (Clarke, 2013).

In the career self-management literature, there is a distinction that is surfaced between traditional and new forms of the career, where the traditional career form is characterized by the ascendent movement on the company hierarchy, where the employer steers the employee's career management and affords the employee job security (Hirschi & Koen, 2021). Conversely, the new form of the career is defined by employees being solely responsible for their own career management, which includes regular changes in occupations, often external to the organisation (Hirschi & Koen, 2021)

With this dissonance in mind, it is critical to note that this research study will be focusing on the new career forms, due to the dominant availability of literature by career researchers with a focus on career management, and mobility as it relates to protean, boundaryless and kaleidoscopic careers (Serobe, 2013). Additionally, the research will seek to uncover what can be defined as career success by the interviewees. The factors identified will be those of subjective career success as defined in the literature (Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2011).

### **2.2.3 Career growth**

The motives underpinning career management are rooted in the concept of career growth and its outcomes (Stumpf, 2014). A well-researched aspect that influences career growth, is an individuals' social capital (Kang, Gold, Kim & Kim, 2019). Social

capital (SC) can be categorized as the benefits extracted from interactions among individuals (Ben Hador, 2017), and recent literature focuses on three SC levels within organisations (individual, intra-organisational and external to the organisation) and their linkages with performance.

While there has been debate in the literature about SC and whether or not it is a capital, for the study on its relationship to performance, Ben Hador (2017) concludes that it cannot be classified as a capital, however, as a socially imperceptible factor, it does provide subsidy to the even-handedness of the company, as it relates to performance. Kang, Gold, Kim, & Kim (2019) further position the importance of social competence and intelligence for individuals as this enables them explore opportunities, read people well and be able to recognize danger. These are essential skills for employees seeking to advance their careers.

A different lens that can also be applied to career growth is surfaced in literature by Spagnoli, Lo Presti, & Buono (2019) when they elaborate on the concept of organisational career growth (OCG), and the work and family influences that can affect this concept. The debate regarding OCG is prudent as it highlights the role of promotions, salary increases and the possibility of career advancement, and juxtaposes these with the responsibilities of family duties, and dedicating long hours to work (Spagnoli et al., 2019).

While the obligation for career growth resides with the employee in the new form of the career (Hirschi & Koen, 2021), the support provided by organisations in terms of flexible working hours, paternal leave etc. plays a mediating role in the relationship between organisational work-family support and work-family conflict (Spagnoli et al., 2019). Preceding this view however, Weng, McElroy, Morrow, & Lui (2010) postulated that there are four factors of career growth; career goal progress, professional ability development, rate of promotion, and salary increases.

While those aspects influence career growth, an employee's perception and the organisation's human resource management actions also can influence OCG (Spagnoli et al., 2019). This study will seek to identify the aspects that are identified through the research as having an influence on the growth of careers, and whether these are in line with the new form of the career (individual responsibility &

organisational support), or with the traditional form of the career where responsibility remains solely with the organisation.

#### **2.2.4 Career mobility**

The antecedents for career mobility have been well researched in literature. Initially theorized as career competencies by DeFillippi & Arthur (1994), this phenomenon of career mobility has been explored by career researchers, with the contexts of academic and research careers in business schools (Ryazanova & McNamara, 2019), as well as the knowledge workers in the global economy (Lamb & Sutherland, 2010).

The evolution of this theory continues to be a necessary consideration for practising managers, regardless of context. Seminal research conducted by DeFillippi & Arthur (1994) introduced the career competencies framework, which stipulated three competencies that were determining factors of career mobility.

These were “know-why, know-how and know-whom” competencies introduced by DeFillippi & Arthur (1994). These competencies have been evolved, as stated above, by career researchers, and have now been instituted as career capitals. The most recent developments to these capitals, are identified as “must-have” competencies that are effective at the individual level, and “nice-to-have” (differentiating) competencies that equip knowledge workers with the ability to navigate the organisational and global estates (Lamb & Sutherland, 2010).

Once again, the context for this evolution focuses on knowledge workers within the organisational context, or career success. This model has evolved over time (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Jones & DeFillippi, 1996; Arthur et al., 1999; Lamb & Sutherland, 2010) and has been explored in conjunction with boundaryless careers (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994), mutable careers (Donnelly, 2009) and Kaleidoscopic careers (Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, & Mainiero, 2009; Serobe, 2013).

The common factors that relate to all three areas of career management (success, growth, and capitals) are related to the actions and behaviours of an individual, with

the influence of a variety of factors; organisational support, adaptability, social intelligence, to name a few, and their impact on an individual's career.

### **2.2.5 Corporate careers**

In the literature, seminal research regarding types of careers is well documented and has defined careers as boundaryless (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994), protean (Donnelly, 2009) or kaleidoscopic (Sullivan et al., 2009). The literature has since matured, with the development of technology (Hirschi, 2018), and with the shift from the traditional to the new form of the career (Hirschi & Koen, 2021). According to Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle (1999) the boundaryless career places the individual at the centre regarding the ownership of their career movement. Changing employers becomes an individual's choice, there is less focus on the normative organisational hierarchy and career progression, and this can be seen with individuals opting to focus on family-related activities rather than pursuing career advancement (Lazarova & Taylor, 2009).

In addition to this, there is research to indicate that boundaryless or protean careers are accompanied by a number of critical outcomes such as subjective career success, the ability to find employment as an individual, as well as career satisfaction (Lo Presti et al., 2019). However, an ambition for organisations in corporate careers, is a need to constantly recruit, encourage and hold onto talented employees (Dries & Pepermans, 2008).

Sullivan et al. (2009) also introduces a new perspective on the classification of careers by utilizing the kaleidoscope career model (KCM) and posits that career decisions can be viewed in a specific manner and that the decisions made by individuals affect other factors of an individuals' life (Sullivan et al., 2009). This lens of career management still places the individual at the centre of ownership for their career decisions.

While the above definitions have been adopted into literature, there has been an effort to do away with the traditional/organisational career since the definitions above seem to contradict what is stated in seminal literature. Even though career management has placed responsibility solely on the individual, there is also a need

to acknowledge the role of the organisation in career development (Clarke, 2013). Not to be forgotten is the main attraction of an organisational career – that employee development and upskilling are of tantamount importance to the employer-employee relationship, especially in larger organisations where vertical, and cross-functional career moves may take place (Clarke, 2013).

The above sections outline the context of individual responsibility for career management. Beyond Clarke (2013), there is very scarce, recent academic literature that discusses the influence of the organisation on career management, and the organisational activities that may be linked to promoting career success within organisations.

## **2.3 THE ROLE OF THE ORGANISATION**

Until recently, there had been extensive literature and research that covered the role of the organisation and its influence on career management, with literature also detailing organisational career management (OCM) and its activities (Clarke, 2013). Literature discusses actions such as management training, funding further education, offering coaching, and setting out career paths for employees who are identified as high potential (Clarke, 2013; Dries & Pepermans, 2008; Hirschi & Koen, 2021) . Some career researchers have linked these actions with the impacts that they have on employees within organisations, impacts such as organisational commitment (Brown et al., 2021).

### **2.3.1 Organisational commitment**

Organisational commitment refers to a psychological state that an employee holds regarding their relationship with the organisation (Brown et al., 2021). Such a state often informs whether or not a worker should remain within an organisation, or seek external employment (Soares & Mosquera, 2021). According to seminal work initially posited by Allen & Meyer (1990) organisational commitment exists as a combination of three paradigms; affective, continuance and normative commitment.

The affective commitment component looks at the “emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the organisation, while continuance commitments discusses the costs associated with leaving their current employ, and

finally the normative component is linked with the feelings of obligation to stay within an organisation” (Allen & Meyer, 1990). More recent literature has categorized these under components of desire, need and obligation (Soares & Mosquera, 2021).

The literature goes on to substantiate a relationship between OCM and the organisational commitment that individuals experience (Soares & Mosquera, 2021). Additionally, organisational practices such as colleague and management support, and organisational career support regarding available career opportunities also seem to impact the organisational commitment that employees have towards their organisations (Soares & Mosquera, 2021).

With the above discussion in mind, it is clear that the activities undertaken by organisations have an influence on individuals’ perceptions and influences their career management decisions. This study will aim to investigate the specific activities the organisation needs to embark on to encourage employee attachment and commitment, and how this informs employees’ corporate career management choices.

### **2.3.2 Organisational attachment**

In unison with organisational commitment, research and career literature also involves the topic of organisational attachment which exists as “a psychological bond between the employee and the organisation” (Brown et al., 2021). It is rooted in the organisational commitment literature and also has similar mechanisms as evidence, these are an emotional attachment (affective commitment), economic necessity (continuance commitment) and moral obligation (normative commitment) (Brown et al., 2021). The literature for this topic extends the importance of commitment beyond the relationship and also states that these factors have an impact on employee performance, employee behaviours of citizenship in an organisation, and the decision to leave or remain within an organisation (Brown et al., 2021).

Often manifested through psychological contracts between the employee and the organisation, this attachment is also influenced by the quality of relationships within and across teams, functions and levels in an organisation and can be nurtured or ruined by line management (Brown et al., 2021). In another contrasting body of

literature, organisational attachment is expanded beyond the above definition, to include the following organisational elements: commitment, trust, identification, fit, embeddedness, organisation-based self-esteem, psychological ownership, perceived insider status and relational psychological contracts (Ng & Allen, 2018).

According to Ng & Allen (2018), having positive organisational attachment can influence an employee's mental and physical health, and aid employee retention and decrease burnout, stress and strain. While it is not the primary focus of this study, it is worth noting that the mental and physical health of employees has a distinct effect on their ability to pursue career growth and career success, and displaying higher organisational attachment can have a positive impact on their career management related decisions (Ng & Allen, 2018). This study will seek to examine the elements of organisational attachment that influence the career management decisions of individuals and the contributions to corporate career success. The next section aims to surface specific behaviours that are currently dominant in the field of entrepreneurship through effectuation theory, and investigates the presence or absence of this theory in the careers of those who are successful in organisations.

## **2.4 EFFECTUATION THEORY**

Entrepreneurial success has been researched in literature to identify the types of behaviours necessary to succeed (Katre & Salipante, 2012), and while this field is still developing, a significant contribution to the literature of behaviours necessary to obtain entrepreneurial success, has been researched by Sarasvathy (2001), with an outcome of a model known as the theory of effectuation. At its ethos, effectuation is a method of decision-making logic that identifies a set of principles as 'given', and selects between various outcomes that can be created with that set of factors (Sarasvathy, 2001).

The original model of effectuation contains cognitive and behavioural aspects, and asks three questions; 'Who am I? What do I know? Whom do I know?' (Sarasvathy, 2001). This is in an effort to recognize any opportunities that can be created (Kerr & Coviello, 2020). This theory of effectuation can also be explained as a decision logic model. Initially developed by Sarasvathy (2001), it identifies behaviours that are obligatory in determining the success of entrepreneurial ventures.

These behaviours are; “the affordable loss principle, strategic alliances over competitor analyses, start with your means, exploitation of contingencies over existing knowledge, and controlling an unknown future rather than predicting an uncertain one” (Sarasvathy, 2001). There have been some more recent contestations to this theory and its decision logic when evaluating its impact on new venture creation (Kitching & Rouse, 2020). Additionally, Kitching & Rouse (2020) expand on the observations stated about business and management schools historically teaching causal decision-making logic instead of effectual decision-making logic (Sarasvathy, 2001).

The theory of effectuation has been well researched in the field of entrepreneurship (Alsos, Clausen, Mauer, Read, & Sarasvathy, 2020), and has been strongly critiqued as having a number of short-comings, such as under-theorising the context in which new ventures are created, and the status of ‘hero’ bestowed upon entrepreneurs who are under-socialised when starting new businesses (Kitching & Rouse, 2020). Additional applications for the theory of effectuation explore the effectual dynamics as they relate to network theory, and the need to effectively operate in uncertainty (Kerr & Coviello, 2020).

Research on corporate effectuation and intrapreneurship has also been conducted in recent years; however, this research has focused predominantly on the application of effectuation and/or causation behaviours, depending on the situational contexts that organisations may find themselves in (Futterer, Schmidt, & Heidenreich, 2018). Further research has also linked effectuation to positive firm performance, especially in older organisations and organisations in high-tech industries, as well as for organisations operating in emerging markets (Chen, Lui, & Chen, 2021).

#### **2.4.1 Effectuation theory and corporate careers**

When reviewing literature that relates effectuation to career management, to the knowledge of the researcher, this field seems rather under-researched. The current literature focuses on the application of career management practises on entrepreneurs to inform how best they can become successful entrepreneurs (Engel, van Burg, Kleijn, & Khapova, 2017). These researchers identify current career management practises such as planning, specifying goals, career trajectory

forecasting, and career visions as tools that are imperative in the foundational phase of any career, since these can become useful for those who pivot from traditional careers, to the field of entrepreneurship (Engel et al., 2017).

Another perspective that is currently linked to effectuation in the corporate field, is the element of how corporate organisations can display entrepreneurial effectual behaviours over causal behaviours in an effort to respond to the ever changing landscape in which they operate (Blekman, 2011; Kautschur, 2016). Additionally, the literature covers the role of effectuation in relation to research & development (R&D) budgeting within corporates (Brettel, Mauer, Engelen, & Kupper, 2012; Futterer et al., 2018).

This study seeks to understand the lived experiences of individuals in corporate careers, and unearth insights that have aided in the upward mobility of their careers, using data collected from participants. This philosophy and approach are appropriate to the study being conducted since the phenomenon of career success through effective career management exists in practice.

However, as indicated above, career management literature relates to the capitals, and career success factors to determine its effectiveness in current literature, while effectuation theory exists solely at the organisational level in literature, and only applies to entrepreneurs in practise. There is limited research on the application of effectuation theory in the corporate career management for individuals, and this study will seek to address this research gap.

## **2.5 CONCLUSION**

The above literature review clearly identifies a shift in the type of career, from traditional to the new form (Hirschi & Koen, 2021), and that career self-management (CSM) has been understood as being influenced solely by the employee through individual actions in the new career norm. Conversely, it is also worth noting that there is still valid support for the traditional/organisational career and that internal employability plays a critical role in this field along with cross-functional and upward mobility and the upskilling of individuals (Clarke, 2013). To add to the discussion on career growth, is the development of OCG in literature, which positions both

individual perceptions and behaviours, as well as organisational actions, as factors that influence this type of career growth (Spagnoli & Weng, 2019; Spagnoli et al., 2019; Spagnoli, 2020).

Even though the central theme of individual behaviours and actions is consistent in career literature, and this compliments the lens of effectual behaviours (Chen et al., 2021; Kerr & Coviello, 2020), this study will explore the factors that can be identified as defining career success, and examining the role of both the individual and the organisation in contributing to corporate career success. Finally, the study will examine the applicability of effectuation principles, on the decisions made by individuals in corporate careers.

### **CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The literature review covered above has indicated the development of the career management concept in literature over time, and the influence across a number of factors (CSM, career growth/OCG, career success and career capitals), with a central theme of individual perceptions and actions. Three research questions have been developed from the literature.

The constantly evolving nature of work/employment has surfaced multiple, subjective definitions of career success (Shockley et al., 2016). A focused definition of subjective career success is needed for the purposes of this study (Spurk, Hirschi, & Dries, 2019), since the study is researching career success in the corporate context, the first research question is then positioned:

#### **Research question 1:**

##### **What are the factors used to define individual career success?**

The evolution of the career capitals framework (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Jones & DeFillippi, 1996; Arthur et al., 1999; Lamb & Sutherland, 2010) has set a good foundation for understanding the career capitals needed in boundaryless and protean careers. The development of literature has focused its development on individual actions to encourage career management and career success. In doing so, academic literature has ignored the role of the organisation, in outlining the factors that contribute to career success (Clarke, 2013). Thus, there is a need to explore the role of the relationship between the organisation and the individual, as well as the actions of the individual and the organisation that contribute to corporate career success. So, the second research question posed is:

#### **Research question 2:**

##### **How does the relationship between the individual and the organisation influence career success?**

The theory of effectuation has been researched exclusively within the arena of entrepreneurship in academic literature, promoting behaviours that sustain

entrepreneurial success. It has not been applied to the field of career management; therefore, the third research question is stated as:

**Research question 3:**

**Can the principles of effectuation theory be of value in understanding corporate career management?**

## **CHAPTER 4 : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The chapter that follows discusses the research methodology adopted in this study. The approach applied for this study was a qualitative, exploratory research design approach. Non-probability, purposive sampling was the technique used, followed by the semi-structured interview as a data gathering tool, guided by the interview protocol (Appendix A). Quality control steps, and research methodology limitations are described at the end of this chapter.

### **4.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study under discussion followed an exploratory research design, this was due to existing literature on the theory of effectuation being focused in the field of entrepreneurship (Sarasvathy, 2001). This study was aiming to explore the prevalence of this model within the selected sample of MBA graduates who have achieved success within their corporate careers. A study of this nature seeks to gain new insights and assess the topic of career management and effectuation, under a different context of corporate careers (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This research study undertook the philosophy of Interpretivism. By definition, this is the analysis of societal phenomena in their natural environment (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), with an aim to gain insights into the phenomenon. According to Eatough & Smith (2017), a study that follows an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), seeks to investigate personal lived experiences, searching for in-depth insights on each case before looking for patterns of convergence and divergence across cases.

The study followed an abductive logic. This is an approach to theory development that encapsulates the following: collection of data to explore a phenomenon, thematic analysis, and an explanation of observed patterns in an aim to generate a new – or modify an existing theory (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). According to Braun & Clarke (2006), thematic analysis utilises a method of analysis to report identified patterns within sets of data. The research that was conducted, focused on individuals who had completed their MBAs in the last decade, and had achieved success in their corporate careers. The study was exploring the decisions and influences that have led to the career success achieved by these individuals.

The chosen methodology was qualitative in nature. This type of methodology seeks to gain in-depth insights into a particular or unique occurrence, such as an individuals' lived experience (Myers, 2021). This choice of data gathering can be categorised under the mono-method, where the researcher engaged with participants to gain in-depth insights into the causes and influences that informed decisions that contributed to the upward mobility within their corporate careers.

Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews, with the aid of a set of questions in an interview protocol contained in Appendix A. Interviews conducted over digital platforms (Zoom and Microsoft Teams) were used to uncover fresh insights into the efforts and resources used, along with the impact of organisational factors that contributed to the career success of participants. This aided in ensuring that the lived experiences were presented by participants, and that the researcher could gain useful insights from the participants (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

#### **4.2.1 Population**

The target population for the research was MBA graduates who had built successful corporate careers. This population was targeted as it would produce relevant and rich insights into the factors that determine the success of MBA graduates employed in corporates post their studies. This population was decided on in order to scope the focus of the research study and to introduce some homogeneity in the sample. As stated by Salkind (2010), the role of the population and the sample are to ensure that maximum variation is achieved when selecting the research sample.

#### **4.2.2 Unit of analysis**

The unit of analysis to be measured in the study were the factors that participants had identified as having aided in their upward mobility within their corporate careers.

#### **4.2.3 Sampling method and size**

Non-probability sampling was the sampling method used in this study. This was done with the aim that it would offer the most appropriate sampling for the research. Bryman (2016) posits that this type of sampling is conducted by the researcher with the express goal of sampling potential interview participants in a strategic way so the

sample selected is relevant to the topic being researched. In this study, the aim of sampling was to obtain participants with MBAs, that had achieved career success in their corporate careers. The researcher used personal networks and LinkedIn as the first attempt to gather relevant participants for the study.

As interviews were being conducted, the researcher then received referrals via snowball sampling from the participants being interviewed. This type of sampling method was also aligned with the non-probability sampling method. According to Bryman (2016) this method can be deployed once contact has been made with an initial group of participants who are relevant to the study, to make contact with other relevant people who meet the criteria for the study outlined in the inclusion criteria below. Using the judgement of the researcher, and a sampling frame, the sampling method was non-probability, and purposive in nature and was selected based on specific selection criteria:

- MBA graduate from a top business school in South Africa – context specific to South Africa as the study being undertaken would only engage with those participants who were employed in a corporate organisation in South Africa
- Recently graduated (<10 years since graduation) – for relevance of data gathered. As this was a cross-sectional study, the data was being collected at a point in time and the researcher appreciated that insights gained, along with the literature reviewed for the basis of this study needed to be more recent and appropriate.
- Successful in the upward mobility of their corporate careers after completing MBA qualification. This intimates that the researcher was seeking to uncover insights from participants who had achieved notable career success, and currently held executive-level positions within corporate organisations as this would denote a subjective definition of career success based on the categorisations by Dries et al. (2009)

The aim of sampling using the above mentioned approach, was to uncover the specific characteristics and attributes that would be explored in depth, and to surface any differences (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). While the target sample size was between 12 – 18 members of the population to ensure that saturation was obtained in the sample (Myers, 2021), the researcher conducted a total of 15 interviews. This

was limited to 15 interviews since saturation had been reached in the data collection. Table 3 contains the details of the sample.

#### **4.2.4 Measurement instrument**

The selected measurement instrument employed in this study were semi-structured interviews. A set of questions contained in the interview protocol (Appendix A), were asked by the researcher to the participants as selected in the sampling above. This interview protocol was designed with questions that are based on the literature review and research questions from the preceding chapters. Eatough & Smith (2017) posit that semi-structured interviews employ the generation of a set of questions that are used to guide an interview, instead of dictating it.

While the aim of the interview guide (interview protocol) was not to be descriptive, it was useful to deploy in order to cover a set of themes that were identified in the literature and to conduct the interview with some structure. According to Qu & Dumay (2011), the purpose of the interview guide is to incorporate broad themes to be covered in the interview by the interviewer, with the use of probes that are designed to surface responses that are more elaborate in nature than those that would be obtained from a survey/questionnaire. The additional benefit to utilising an interview guide is to ensure a level of uniformity throughout the various interviews conducted and to ensure that the data gathered can also be compared and contrasted among the numerous interviews (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

The interview protocol was drawn up as a draft and then tested with an MBA graduate who had also conducted a qualitative study for completion of their MBA. Feedback from this test interview aided the researcher in properly structuring the flow of questions and ensuring that the interview would be guided more appropriately. Also, the researcher inspected the guide to ensure that the broad themes covered in chapter 2 (literature review) and chapter 3 (research questions) were all appropriately surfaced in the interview guide prior to beginning with the formal data gathering process.

The interviews conducted by the researcher aimed to uncover the various aspects that participants identified as their definitions of career success, as well as the

influences that contributed to their career management journeys. Research question one aimed to surface what career success entailed for the participants, with the second research question looking to identify the actions taken by the individual and the activities by the organisation that engendered enhanced organisational attachment and promoted corporate career success.

The third research question sought to find out whether or not the principles of effectuation theory were of value in understanding career management for participants and if these principles had influenced their career success at all. Below is a brief outline of the mapping of these research questions to specific questions contained in the interview protocol as shown in Appendix A:

**Table 1: Mapping research questions to the interview guide**

<b><u>Chapter 3: Research Questions</u></b>	<b><u>Interview Questions</u></b>
Research Question 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you define career success?</li> </ul>
What are the factors used to define individual career success?	
Research Question 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much of your career success do you attribute to your own efforts' vs the organisations efforts? (% of your efforts vs % of the organisation).               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Prompt: Could you name 3 things you did, and 3 things your organisation did to contribute to your success?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• On a scale of 1 – 10, how much organisational commitment have you displayed over the past 10 years?</li> </ul>
How does the relationship between the individual and the organisation influence career success?	
Research Question 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start with your resources – what are some of the personal resources you have used to advance your career?</li> <li>• Affordable-loss principle – based on the efforts you made mention of earlier on, what factors influenced how much on an investment (time, mental capacity and finances) you made in developing your career success</li> <li>• Strategic partnerships vs competition – were you in competition with your peers or was there</li> </ul>
Can the principles of effectuation theory be of value in understanding corporate career management?	

	<p>a focus for collaboration and building alliances among you and your colleagues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverage contingencies (Plan B) – did you always have a back-up plan for your career or were you only focused on progressing your chosen path?</li> <li>• Control an unknown future vs predicting an uncertain one – did you try and control your career with a long-term plan, or did this success happen with short-term events that happened?</li> <li>• What advice would you give to other MBA graduates that would assist them in managing their corporate careers?</li> </ul>
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While the aim of the interview guide was to create a systematic order in which to address the questions asked, the interview participants often tended to respond to questions as a thought sparked in the conversations, at times answering questions that appeared later in the interview guide. The researcher endeavoured to confirm some of these responses as the questions came up in the interviewing process, and to elicit a validation that while the responses to specific questions may have been uttered earlier in the interviews, these responses were also addressing questions that appeared later in the interview (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

#### **4.2.5 Data gathering**

The exploratory nature of this study intended to unearth the factors that had contributed to the upward mobility of participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via online platforms (Zoom, Microsoft Teams) with an estimated duration of 45 minutes – 60 minutes. The interviews were for a duration of 39 minutes on average, with the longest interview last one (1) full hour (60 minutes), while the shortest interview was for the duration of 27 minutes.

The first official interview was conducted on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and the last one was conducted on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021, thus over a period of six (6) weeks. The online method of data gathering via an online platform was as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the researcher, and in some cases, the participants reluctance to meet face-to-face. This imposed some limitations on this study, and these are outlined in detail towards the end of this chapter.

The interviews were scheduled via email and LinkedIn Direct Messaging, and in some cases over the use of telephone messaging services such as WhatsApp and Apple iMessage. As stated above, these interviews were be guided by the interview protocol (Appendix A), containing a set of questions. These questions were to be used for guidance in the interview, allowing for the lived experiences of participants to be voiced, and insights to be gained by the researcher, from participant responses (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

As contained in Appendix A, the interviewer would introduce themselves and outline the purpose of the research, before beginning with the interview itself. Additionally, it was ensured via the informed consent letter (Appendix B) that the participants were comfortable to proceed with the interview. Every interview was recorded via the online platform after asking for permission to record from the participant. In addition, the interviews were also recorded via an online transcription software known as Otter, in an effort to ensure that the data was recorded accurately and to more than one destination, should there have been any issues or interruptions experienced with the online platform, which did occur during 2 of the interviews.

As best as possible, interviews were conducted with interruptions kept to a minimum in both the researcher and the participants environments. This was done with the purpose of ensuring that there were no disturbances and to allow for both parties to focus on the conversation at hand (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Additionally this served the purpose of ensuring clarity in recording the conversation and for the interviewer to pay attention only to the participant and the process (Jacob & Furgerson, 2015).

The interviews were recorded and stored electronically, with password protection, to ensure the safety and confidentiality of the participants. According to Sanders (1982), it was necessary to ensure that interviews were recorded and later transcribed. This was critical to ensuring that analysis and probing of data could be conducted after the interviews were complete.

#### **4.2.6 Data analysis**

Data gathered from the semi-structured interviews was recorded electronically, and then transcribed into text using transcription software. The data gathered during the

study was analysed using the coding method. Saldaña (2013) states that a code in qualitative research, is often a word or short phrase that characteristically allocates a summative, salient, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. In this study, the data gathered was language-based in the form of recorded interviews, notes and transcripts of interviews.

Myers (2021) suggests that an appropriate coding method is to summarize a set of data using a short phrase, of five words or less, or a word, in an aim to fully encompass the data set being coded. It was critical to ensure that data was coded/categorised sufficiently in an effort to identify patterns, that could be used to either build or test propositions that will be derived through this data analysis (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). A systematic approach to the data coding process was then applied.

The development of codes was conducted *a posteriori* data collection (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014), even though this was an abductive research study. The data collected was analysed with the aid of excel spreadsheets and a manual coding exercise was undertaken because codes had emerged from the data itself. O’Gorman & MacIntosh (2014) outline three types of codes that exist in data coding for qualitative research; 1) Open codes, 2) Selective Codes and 3) Axial codes (Gilbert, 2008). The type of codes that occurred in this study were open codes which were surfaced through separating the data into parts and classifying, as well as refining the concepts that had been identified (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014). Refer to Appendix D.

The data analysis contained in Appendix D was conducted by revisiting the recordings of each interview, both video and audio, and listening to these recordings while reviewing the written notes and reading the transcripts of the interviews in order to adequately capture the codes that were corresponding to each interview question. This process was conducted in the sequence in which the interviews were conducted, and the analysis process was conducted over the period of 7 days. This was the process of content analysis as stated by Flick & Roulston (2014).

Once the collected data had been coded sufficiently, a review of the codes was conducted to certify that sufficient detail was contained in the captured codes. This

included multiple evaluations of the data gathered through repeatedly reading the interview notes and transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and by confirming with one of the participants where some additional clarity was needed. As stated by Saldana (2013), the process of coding data involves the practice of repeatedly reviewing the data collected and O’Gorman & MacIntosh (2014) reiterate the cyclical nature of data analysis when developing codes. This process was conducted multiple times throughout the data analysis phase of the study.

On completion of the coding exercise, the researcher endeavoured to identify themes and patterns through a thematic analysis of the codes generated. The thematic analysis was intended to identify, analyse and report themes (patterns) that existed within the data (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014; Braun & Clarke, 2006), and for these identified themes to address the research questions raised in chapter 3.

The researcher followed the 6 stages of thematic analysis initially developed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and adapted by O’Gorman & MacIntosh (2014) as outlined in the table below:

**Table 2: The 6 phases of thematic analysis**

<b><u>Phases of Thematic Analysis</u></b>	<b><u>Researcher actions</u></b>
1. Familiarisation with the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watching interviews</li> <li>• Repeated reading of transcripts and interviews notes</li> <li>• Revisiting some of the data gathered with participants</li> </ul>
2. Generating initial codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manual coding of responses offered by participants systematically</li> </ul>
3. Searching for themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying patterns in data to develop themes</li> </ul>
4. Reviewing themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing generated themes against generated codes for appropriateness</li> <li>• Comparing themes among one another where possible and necessary</li> </ul>
5. Defining and naming themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refining generated themes</li> <li>• Identifying a golden thread through the data</li> </ul>
6. Producing the report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing the analysis of results along with quotes</li> </ul>

[Adapted from (Braun & Clarke, 2006)]

#### 4.2.7 Quality assurance

It was necessary to ensure the quality assurance of the study being conducted was maintained. Quality assurance is the evaluation of the scientific rigour that the researcher has applied during the study (Myers, 2021). While it is still not clearly agreed in literature, exactly what the nature of quality assurance for qualitative research should entail, (Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman, & Marteau, 1997), there was still a need for the researcher to deploy certain levels of control over the research.

This was done by assessing the following measures: validity (an accurate measurement by the test), reliability (consistency & repeatability), bias (any effect the researcher has on the collection and interpretation of data), credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability and confirmability (Mamabolo, 2021). O’Gorman & MacIntosh (2014) state that when conducting qualitative studies, and analysing the data collected, it is crucial for the researcher to be conscious of the effects that they may have on the process of data collection and analysis.

Reliability has been defined by Bryman (2016) as the degree with which the measure of a concept is unchanging and whether or not the results of the study are trustworthy. In the case of the study being conducted, this was ensured through the standardisation of the data collection method by ensuring all interviews were booked for the same duration, on digital platforms, using the same interview protocol that was generated. In addition, the researcher ensured the documenting/note taking of every interaction with participants during the interviews conducted. It was essential to safeguard against any deviations from the process conducted as this was a crucial principle for the evaluation of the quality of the research conducted (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

An additional quality assurance vector that was pursued in this study was the validity of the study, pursuing the descriptive validity; this was undertaken by ensuring the saturation of data gathered, and accuracy of the data by recording and transcribing of the data gathered (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014). Additionally, interpretive validity was also pursued by ensuring the quality of the coding/categorising method followed when analysing data (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Biases were also encountered and noted while this study was being undertaken, and this was to be expected and while not completely addressed, measures were put in place to mitigate some of the inherent biases that the researcher carried. These included undertaking non-probability, purposive sampling that was applied to reduce the possibility of any sampling bias that may have occurred (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Additionally, the researcher attempted to avoid social desirability bias by ensuring no leading questions were obtained in the interview protocol that was used to conduct the data gathering.

However, it was noted by one interview participant that they were led towards an answer in the way a probing question had been asked by the researcher. Another element of bias that was noted and attempts were made to avoid, was observer bias, where the researcher intended to not get overly immersed in the process itself (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014; Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

#### **4.2.7.1 Interview guide pre-testing**

The researcher also tested the developed interview protocol by conducting an informal interview with a participant who had completed a qualitative study for their MBA in recent history, prior to engaging in any semi-structured interviews with participants identified in the sample. After conducting this “test interview”, the researcher updated the interview guide to address some of the challenges to the flow of the interview.

In addition, the researcher changed the structuring of questions and added prompts and follow up questions to ensure that the interview would elicit supplementary insights to the topic under discussion and produce a richer conversation. All the data gathered, was stored electronically, with password protection to ensure confidentiality and restricted access (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

#### **4.2.8 Limitations**

It should be noted that the qualitative methodology approach contains specific limitations for research. The researcher did not seek to obtain generalizability of the outcomes of this study. According to Mamabolo (2021), qualitative research strategies cannot be generalized from the research sample to the population. Also,

this method of researching is not quantifiable, and objectivity was, at times, difficult to maintain. Hence the identification and attempted mitigation against observer bias.

Additionally, while the researcher has prior experience conducting interviews with potential candidates from various backgrounds, professionally and personally, it was their first time conducting academic research for the purpose of a Master's level dissertation, and as such, the researcher was limited in their experience and inherent underlying biases. Secondly, the interviews were all conducted on digital platforms and this carried with it, the limitations of not being able to fully identify non-verbal cues during the data collection process, cues such as body, hand movements and other gestures that may point to confirmation or emphasis of what the interviewee was saying (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014). This was made more challenging in some interviews where the cameras were turned off due to connectivity/bandwidth challenges.

Another limitation of this study resides in the selected sample. The researcher only interviewed MBA graduates within South Africa, and while this may have been appropriate for the research study, it may have excluded additional participants, and was not a clear representation of the entire population of MBA graduates with successful corporate careers in the entire country. To add to this, the subjective nature of some of the questions that were contained in the interview protocol also limited the study.

The participants, having an MBA in common, are of diverse backgrounds, areas of expertise and environments, and these factors may have informed some of their responses to questions. There was no way to achieve total uniformity of the sample. As was stated in this chapter, the study undertaken was cross-sectional in nature, as such, this was data collected at a point in time, and not over an extended period of time. This could have limited the participants to respond based on their current states of mind, and environments, and may not represent all MBA graduates who have subjectively achieved career success in corporate.

#### **4.2.9 Ethical considerations**

This research study was conducted with clear guidelines regarding any ethical

considerations that needed to be addressed (Flick, 2013). Ahead of the commencement of the data collection process, ethical clearance was applied for and granted by the University of Pretoria, Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) Business School, as seen in Appendix C. Once ethical clearance was granted, the researcher made contact with potential interview participants, and requested they read, sign and return an informed consent letter (Appendix B), before conducting any interviews. No identifiers (names of participants, company names, personal details) were used during the interview process, and no personal descriptors were used in the storage of data that was collected. This was done to protect the confidentiality of participants.

### **4.3 CONCLUSION**

This chapter detailed the methodology that was followed for the research that was conducted. The section contained all of the required sub-sets of a research methodology. The proceeding chapter will detail the results that were gathered and analysed.

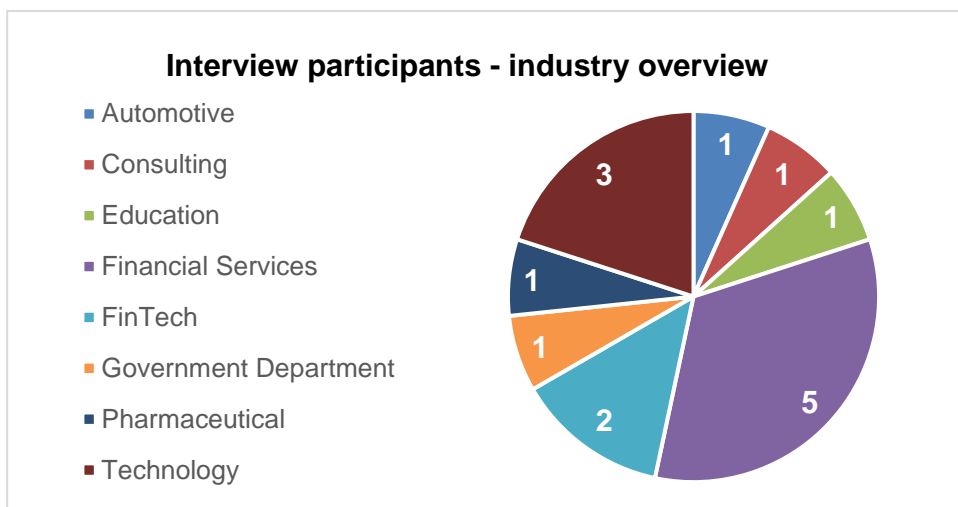
## CHAPTER 5 : RESULTS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The following results chapter details the outcomes of the semi-structured interviews that were conducted during the data gathering process. First, a description of the sample is discussed, followed by the outputs of the data analysis performed as outlined in chapter 4. The results are presented in conjunction with the structure of table 1 above that links the interview questions from the interview protocol (Appendix A) with the research questions contained in chapter 3. The quotes and views of participants are contained in this chapter to provide critical insights into the lived experiences of the interviewees, and all of the codes generated during the data analysis process, are contained in Appendix D, and are linked to specific themes in the current chapter under discussion.

### 5.2 THE SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The interview sample entailed fifteen (15) participants from corporate organisations, across various industries who held MBA degrees and had attained career success as outlined in sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.3. These participants all held Management Committee (MANCO) or Executive Committee (ExCo) roles within their organisations and had been notified that no identifiers would be reported as these were confidential interviews (Appendix B). The industries of participants, along with additional interview information is contained in figure 1 and table 3 below:



**Figure 1: Sample – industry overview**

**Table 3: Sample description**

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Industry</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Interview Platform</u>	<u>Interview Date</u>	<u>Interview Length</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Gender</u>
1	LinkedIn Platform	Technology	Chief Operating Officer	Zoom Video	19-Jul-21	35 minutes	White	Male
2	LinkedIn Platform	FinTech	Business Development Director	Zoom Video	06-Aug-21	40 minutes	White	Female
3	LinkedIn Platform	Pharmaceutical	Head of Clinical Operations	Zoom Video	26-Jul-21	28 minutes	African	Male
4	Personal Network	Financial Services	Head: Savings & Product Proposition	Zoom Video	26-Jul-21	34 minutes	African	Female
5	LinkedIn Platform	Automotive	Managing Director	Zoom Video	29-Jul-21	30 minutes	African	Male
6	Personal Network	Financial Services	Director: Strategic Digital Enablement	Zoom Video	06-Aug-21	33 minutes	Indian	Male
7	LinkedIn Platform	Government Department	Director: Exhibition	Zoom Video	06-Aug-21	37 minutes	African	Female
8	Personal Network	Financial Services	Head of Strategy	Zoom Video	13-Aug-21	39 minutes	African	Female
9	Referral - Network	Education	Executive Director: Faculty	Zoom Video	11-Aug-21	27 minutes	White	Female
10	Referral - Interviewee	Consulting	Head of Department: Business Development	Zoom Video	16-Aug-21	50 minutes	African	Male
11	LinkedIn Platform	Financial Services	Platform Lead: Markets Technology	Microsoft Teams	16-Aug-21	39 minutes	Indian	Female
12	Personal Network	Technology	Deputy Chief Technology Officer	Zoom Video	17-Aug-21	40 minutes	Indian	Female
13	Referral - Interviewee	Technology	ICT Executive	Zoom Video	14-Aug-21	54 minutes	White	Male
14	LinkedIn Platform	FinTech	Head: FinTech Unit	Microsoft Teams	19-Aug-21	60 minutes	African	Male
15	LinkedIn Platform	Financial Services	Platform Lead: Markets	Zoom Video & Microsoft Teams	24-Aug-21	48 minutes	African	Male

As can be seen from the table above, there is noteworthy diversity in the sample for this study. The interview participants spanned a total of 8 industries, across a number of role titles within their organisations, all with an MBA degree that had been completed in the last 10 years. It is also worth remarking on the types of functional roles each of the participants operated in, the sample covered a range of these, from generalist business unit (BU) and organisation/company heads, to those who specialized in the operations environment, as well as participants who led specialist functions within their respective organisations. This amount of sample diversity was in an effort to ensure that there was as little uniformity in the experiences and responses from participants as possible.

### **5.3 CAREER SUCCESS DEFINED**

Research question one dealt the construct of career success, and each participants' own definition of this construct as per interview question 1. Along with this was the exploration of how this career success had been obtained, as outlined by the second research question. In an effort to understand the lived realities of participants, codes were generated from their responses to interviews questions. This was followed by a thematic analysis of the codes to identify what the constructs were that emerged from the data.

#### **5.3.1 Definition of subjective career success**

The first interview question surfaced a large contingent of codes (90) during the analysis of the data, and while there were some converging views on the participants' definition of career success, there were some contrasting opinions. It was evident from this analysis that the definition of career success for participants was a very unique and personal one. A number of the participants had a very distinct definition of their career success, while others identified constructs that were narrow in their definition and frequency. The most significant construct identified was that of fulfilment and a greater purpose for the individual, the organisation, and society at large. An executive within the financial services industry noted the following:

*"I think that success for me is more around having a career that I feel is fulfilling, so has meaning right?! It enables me to kind of wake up every day and kind of give of my time and my energy into an exploit that I believe is actually making a meaningful difference in*

*the world. And then my role within that as well, is something that I feel kind of stimulates me intellectually, is challenging, and allows me to work with people that I respect.”*

In unearthing some of these career success definitions, one participant was quoted as saying:

*“I think the MBA had a lot to do with just my opinion and shaping my views of what I wanted out of life and what I wanted out of my career, just because of the conversations and, you know, the dialogue we had and the discussions we had in class.”*

While the interviewees all held differing views on this definition, it was consistently mentioned that it was important to have a goal in mind, or a target for what a person deems as their own career success. The most nascent constructs shared by the candidates were those of their current definition of career success, which would be after their completion of the MBA qualification. Table 4 below elucidates the insights gained from the interviewees:

**Table 4: Career success constructs**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Construct</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
1	Fulfilment through having a purpose and making a difference	13
2	Adding tangible value to people's lives	10
3	Having an end goal/target in mind and achieving it	9
3	Serving and developing those you work with through leadership	9
4	Achieving a common goal/vision with people you respect	7
5	Solving societal problems	5
5	Obtaining a work/life balance	5
6	Doing challenging work	4
7	Improving organisations outputs	3
7	Enjoying what you do with the people you work with	3
8	Adding value to stakeholders	2
8	Being an SME in a specific topic/field	2
8	Reaching executive management responsibility & exposure	2

There were a number of comments from candidates that focused, in one way or another, on adding value to the organisation, and its people, some of these points were captured as follows:

*“there's actually a tangible value, that there's a difference that I can look at and say, I know what I've been doing with my time”*

To further entrench the point of adding value, a participant contextualized their value-added to an organisation in the following rhetorical question:

*“Are the results you're seeing in an organization because of you or in spite of you?!”*

Additionally, this definition of career success had shifted throughout the interviewees career journey, as well being somewhat distinct before obtaining the MBA degree, and after having attained this qualification. While these were not the current definitions of career success by interviewees, the constructs did outline the converging views of career success by a limited number of participants (6). The table below outlines the constructs in relation to the definition of career success prior to commencing with the MBA

**Table 5: Career success prior to the MBA**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Construct</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
1	Position or title in an organisation	2
2	Monetary	1
2	Appearing successful	1
2	Getting the recognition that comes with the work you do	1
2	Ambition for importance	1

The paradigms that emerged from the analysis of the data indicate that the definition of career success is subjective, and while it may have a foundation in the academic literature definition of remuneration, title and recognition, there is a broader sense of purpose and fulfilment that is evident among those who have achieved notable career success. This was best explained by the following statement:

*“Money is great, obviously it's a means to an end but it's not the be all and end all, there is only a finite amount of money that will make you happy. After that, it's about purpose.”*

To further elaborate on the constructs of career success, an executive also mentioned the importance of adding value to the lives of people that are also progressing through their career journeys. This view was supported by another 10 participants in the data analysed and thus, expands career success beyond the rudimentary definitions that are currently understood. This construct was best illuminated as follows:

*“As I've sort of reached later stages in my career, certainly, especially, I would say post MBA, it's been a lot more about servant leadership, less about reaching the leadership position so much as it has been about bringing up the elevator for the people behind me”*

The researcher can confidently argue that the importance of fulfilment and adding value to others within and external to an organisation is critical to defining career success. While there is a need for the elementary factors of success, this evolution surfaced through the data confirms that this definition is essential to the phenomenon.

#### **5.4 INDIVIDUAL & ORGANISATIONAL ROLES IN CAREER SUCCESS**

The second research question sought to uncover the contributions made by the individual to their career success, as well as the role that their respective organisations played in contributing to the career success. This research question was covered under two (2) interview questions; Interview question 2 sought to identify what percentage split of their career success could be attributed to the individual efforts versus the organisation's efforts. Then examples of each party's efforts were solicited as a follow up/prompt question.

Interview question 3 focused on the element of organisational attachment and what this attachment meant where career success was concerned. Participants were asked to thoroughly discuss the organisational attachment they had displayed over the past decade, in comparison to their peers, and to then elaborate on exactly what factors drove their level of organisational attachment.

### 5.4.1 The roles of the individual versus the organisation

The first part of this interview question asked what percentage (%) of the interviewees' career success could be attributed to their own efforts and actions, versus what percentage (%) was as a result of an organisations efforts. While the majority of participants were confidently conveying their sentiments regarding their own efforts, some of the participants found it difficult to comfortably articulate their perspectives on what their own efforts were, versus those of their organisations along their career journeys. The table below, table 6, outlines the views of the entire sample set regarding this aspect:

**Table 6: Percentage (%) split of own efforts vs organisational efforts (Org)**

<u>% Split Own Efforts vs. Org</u>	45/55	50/50	65/35	70/30	80/20	95/5	100/0	Difficult to quantify
<u>Frequency</u>	1	6	1	1	2	1	1	2

The widely held view by interview participants was that their career success was as a result of both themselves and their organisation, but that they were the main driver of their success. Interview participant 1 made mention of the fact that while they had taken the initiative and driven their own career, there was a role that the organisation also contributed to, saying;

*"The organization definitely also did their part.....When I wanted to do my MBA, they supported me fully with that"*

In addition to unpacking how much of their efforts had been attributable to their own career success, participants were then asked to highlight what these efforts or actions were by themselves and their organisation in contributing to their career success and the below tables 7 and 8 outline these efforts:

**Table 7: Individual efforts to manage the career**

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Construct</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
1	Obtaining the qualifications - An MBA	8
1	Positioning oneself for relevance through upskilling (including soft skills)	8

2	Having resilience, grit, determination and a growth mindset	6
2	Having a plan/goal/target	6
2	Developing a personal brand	6
3	Identifying opportunities provided by the organisation	5
4	Adding tangible value to the organisation	4
4	Seeking mentorship and coaching	4
5	Nurturing stakeholder relationships & networks	3
5	Developing self-awareness	3
6	Measuring one's own performance through feedback and reflection	2

Even though there was a large focus on the upskilling and positioning of oneself in an effort to add to career success, there were some soft skills that were also identified as crucial to ensuring that career success was sustained. Interviewees were also cognisant of the need to develop a personal brand and differentiate oneself. While these were some of the focal themes from the individuals, there was an equally resounding voice of necessity for the organisation to provide an environment conducive to career progression and an enabling ecosystem for career success. A senior ExCo member within the financial services industry stated the following about the role of both the organisation and the individual:

*"Organizations have to give employees the opportunity to learn and they will promote it. But then the individual and the staff member has to make that effort to say right, I'm taking these opportunities and I actually just have a plan in place around which ones I want to pursue"*

The sense that there is a balance of both individual and organisational responsibility was further emphasized by some of the candidates. The most pertinent themes from the participants regarding the organisations' role, are captured below:

**Table 8: Organisations' career contributions**

<b><u>Rank</u></b>	<b><u>Construct</u></b>	<b><u>Frequency</u></b>
1	Implementing a culture that enables career progression	11
2	Funding development programs/career related training/education	10
3	Offering sponsorship, coaching and mentorship	5

3	Providing the right exposure and opportunities	5
4	Embedding a competent and strong leadership team	3
4	Providing managerial support	3
4	Creating and communicating a clear career path/succession plan	3
5	Ensuring good quality, technically skilled colleagues are employed	2
6	Offering exposure to diverse stakeholder groups and parts of the business	1
6	Having clear organisational goals and communicating them	1
6	Giving individuals autonomy to deliver on organisational goals	1

It is necessary to signal that some participants were also extremely vocal about the importance of organisational leadership and the cultural environment that encourages and enables growth for individual careers. Even though these were some of the more popular views, a few participants echoed the sentiments that a large portion of career success was influenced by managers, and stated the following:

*"People do not leave their organizations, they leave their managers so I think organizations, rise and fall on leadership"*

Additionally, the role of capable leadership and an enabling environment was further elaborated on by the statements made by another of the interviewees, asserting the following:

*"So, when you talk about an enabling environment, you need a leadership that's very strong at the top to be able to pierce through the many levels of management and look right down to the person who's the blue-collar worker, and say, how do I create an enabling environment for that individual?"*

In an effort to further expand on this role of an enabling environment, another of the candidates also added the following to the argument:

*"It is important to be investing in the kind of environment that supports overall personal growth. And this speaks to things that might be nuanced but like diversity and inclusion"*

*programs, race relations are all of the things that create an environment and a culture in which one is able to thrive."*

In the analysis of the interview data, it was clear to the researcher that there was a delicate balance between ensuring that individuals take charge of their own careers and not relinquish this responsibility solely to the organisation. They need to upskill them and position these skills to fill the gaps within the organisation to entrench their career growth. However, there is also the need for organisations to understand the impact and influence that they possess in stimulating or stifling individuals' careers.

This is specific to the kinds of environments and cultures that organisations entrench, and the quality of leadership and skills that they introduce to the organisation. The researcher can state that within the interviewed sample, the factors that each party influences need to work in unison to cement a career that can be successful for the member of staff, and beneficial to the organisation.

#### **5.4.2 The role of organisational attachment**

The third interview question focused on the element of organisational attachment, and the reasons why participants had high attachment or not, and what this attachment resulted in for their various career management decisions. The data analysis surfaced a total of sixty-nine (69) codes in total across the organisational attachment rating, and the factors that influenced this attachment. The table that follows encapsulates the overall organisational attachment ratings across the interview sample, using a Likert scale ranging from 1 – 10, where 1 was much less than peers, and 10 was a great deal more than peers:

**Table 9: Organisational attachment rating**

<b>Rating out of 10</b>	< 5	5 – 7	8 – 10	Difficult to quantify
<b>Frequency</b>	2	3	7	3

More than half of the people interviewed displayed very high levels of organisational attachment. There was a common principle that surfaced throughout the discussion regarding the reason for either a high, or a low organisational attachment. It is best clarified with the below account:

*"I probably have exhibited a higher level of commitment, sure, to the benefit of my employer, and, and it is directly correlated to the investments the business is willing to make in me."*

This concept of a “correlation” between an employee’s organisational attachment, and the organisation’s investment in them was a common theme that was identified through the construct of a symbiotic relationship of “give and take” which was one of the more prolific findings from this part of the interview. The factors that influence organisational attachment are contained in the below table:

**Table 10: Organisational attachment factors**

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Construct</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
1	Clearly aligned and articulated expectations/goals (MBA)	8
1	A transactional, symbiotic agreement, give and take - cultural influence	8
2	Alignment with goals, values, vision and mission of the organisation	6
3	Organisational fit	4
3	Adding value to the organisation	4
3	Valued skills within the organisation – recognition	4
3	Fostering personal development and career growth	4
3	Affected positively/negatively by retrenchments, change and disruption	4
4	Existence of a strong bond that exists through psychological contracts and autonomy	3
4	Influenced by colleagues, managers or leaders	3
5	Nurturing stakeholder relationships within the organisation	2
5	Influenced by the work done, projects, outputs	2
5	Personal investment into the organisation (i.e., sacrifices, time spent, personal cost)	2

The above articulation of the factors that influence organisational attachment surfaced some common insights regarding the need for a strong assertion of the expectations between both the organisation and the employee, which then leads into this interdependent relationship of give and take between the organisation and the individual. The aspect of clear expectations and give and take was best described by one of the participants in the below expressions:

*"I believe for any career, any career progression, there has to be a symbiotic relationship between yourself and the organization, it's always a give and take, you know, at one point, you maybe give me a little bit more. And another point is the organization giving you a little bit more, but there's always a give and take"*

Acknowledging the need for alignment of various aspects between the organisation and the individual, also surfaced the construct of an organisational fit as a fundamental need for there to be an organisational attachment. This construct was also appropriately explicated as follows:

*"As soon as you have a person who is an organizational fit, you tend to find there is a lot of that give and take, that enables the person to rise up as the company grows as well."*

Another important construct that solidified the organisational attachment was the existence and fragility of psychological contracts between the employee and the organisation and how the psychological contracts informed the level of commitment and the decisions individuals made regarding their careers. An executive within the financial services industry explained this fragility in the ensuing statement:

*"I think one of my mentors always said to me, you know, you kind of leave (the organisation) at the point that you feel like you're giving more than you're getting back"*

While another stated: *"The moment that psychological contract breaks, then it's over."*

A contrasting view was that the organisational attachment could be low since there was a transactional relationship that was borne out of necessity for both the individual and the organisation, and this was most accurately unpacked by a member of the sample as stated:

*"I am here to the extent that I'm useful to the organization. Right. And, and, if at some stage it became clear that I'm no longer as helpful to them, then they would let me go"*

Furthermore, some contrasting opinions also surfaced the construct of consistently checking on the mutually beneficial understanding between the organisation and the employee, since this relationship can be affected from time to time by the amount and consistency of value being added to the organisation. This was explained by a senior executive in the ICT industry:

*"I think it's healthier to be more, more open about what value are you currently adding right now to the company, and is this still a mutually beneficial relationship?"*

The aspect of organisational attachment is influenced by a number of variables. Where there are expressed expectations from both the individual and the organisation, and there is an embedded culture of reciprocity, organisational attachment can exist and be improved. Organisational fit, an opportunity to add value and receive recognition for such value and skills, are also driving factors to establishing and enhancing organisational attachment. These elements foster a sense of loyalty to the organisation and improve this attachment.

In some instances, this relationship can be damaged through the breakdown of psychological contracts and thus imbues a transactionality to the relationship between employee and organisation. These dissenting opinions are also synonymous with the aspects of change that an organisation can experience through organisational changes such as retrenchments. The researcher can state that having a high organisational attachment can improve the opportunities for career success.

## **5.5 EFFECTUATION THEORY AND CAREER MANAGEMENT**

Research question three, the final research question sought to recognise whether any of the principles of effectuation theory were present in the decisions that individuals had made with respect to their career management journeys. This research question was addressed through 5 interview questions (4, 5, 6, 7 & 8), each relating a specific principle of effectuation theory to the individual's career. These principles of effectuation are - starting with your personal resources, the affordable loss principle, strategic alliances versus competition, leveraging contingencies (plan B) and controlling and unknown future versus predicting an uncertain one (Long-term plan vs. short-term decisions).

Also discussed under this research question, is interview question 9, which required some practical advice that interview participants could offer to current MBA students looking to make a success of their corporate careers after completing their qualification. The results from this question are explored separately to the theory of effectuation and are discussed and captured towards the end of this current, and proceeding chapters.

### 5.5.1 Starting with your personal resources

An individual's personal resources are anything that they may possess, physically, mentally, emotionally or financially. These are resources that can be positioned to aid in career success. The interrogation of this interview question was captured across 69 codes, and was intended to grasp the various resources that each participant had within themselves to complement their career success journeys. While there was a consensus among some of the themes captured, there was also a noted distinction with some of the resources used by each of the participants. The constructs identified for these resources are contained in the table below:

**Table 11: Personal resources used to advance career success**

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Construct</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
1	Having a growth mindset	15
2	The ability to build/maintain good stakeholder and interpersonal relationships	11
3	Developing technical knowledge and expertise	9
4	Dedicating time to the career and organisation	8
5	Investing financially into education and skills development	6
5	Deploying mental capacity to career development	6
6	Developing soft skills (Communication, humility, good values, self-awareness)	5
6	Having a sense of curiosity	5
7	Building an independent brand	4

The most prevalent constructs within the list of resources deployed to influence career management were the concepts of a growth mindset, and the capacity to build relationships. A common theme that was best pronounced regarding the relationship building thematic was anchored in the element of trust within relationships, and was best voiced by the following statement:

*"Well, I think your professional network is part of it (career success) now so the people that you know and the people that trust you"*

The constructs of a growth mindset, financial investment, personal development and brand building were most accurately stated by an executive within the financial services industry when saying:

*"There's a need to grow myself and to grow my own value, my intrinsic value as an employee, in the particular context in which I'll be working."*

Another factor of dedicating time and mental capacity to the career and the organisation was expressed as follows:

*"I've always been one person who's always been committed to sort of giving that time and effort to my work, and also taking ownership of the work environment"*

The interview participants also stated a strong sense of curiosity as an additive to their career success. This resource seems to engender an inquisitiveness within each of the interviewees that drives their constant pursuit of growth, adoption of new skills (soft skills and technical knowledge) and the curiosity tends to be part of the "brand" that participants own about themselves within the workplace.

### **5.5.2 Affordable loss principle – influences to investments**

The affordable loss principle looks at the factors that are considered when making a decision to move in a specific direction, or make a certain decision. The fifth interview question was aimed at discovering what drives the decisions to invest in career development for participants, the influences that are present within each participants choice to contribute to their career success. This interview question surfaced a total of 28 themes that were further distilled into 9 constructs that detail these influences.

The consensus was heavily skewed towards the pursuit of a specific goal or target that had been set by the participants as the main influence that dictated the amount of investment made to career development and achieving success. Table 12 hereafter elaborates on the rest of the constructs that were expressed by the sample:

**Table 12: Influences to investments**

<b><u>Rank</u></b>	<b><u>Construct</u></b>	<b><u>Frequency</u></b>
1	Pursuing and achieving a goal/target	18
2	Building credibility/a personal brand	14
3	Becoming a subject matter expert	5
3	Developing skills through education for self-improvement	5
3	Financial rewards and recognition	5
4	Having fulfilment and a good quality of life	3
4	Contributing to society	3
5	Gaining autonomy in your career	2
6	Having a constant sense of curiosity	1

While not the most frequently mentioned construct, there seemed to be a focus by some participants on; the financial reward, and recognition from the organisation as some of the critical themes that influence the investments that are made towards careers, as stated:

*"I won't pretend that you know, earning a bit more cash wasn't an influencing factor"*

The above seemed to be a construct that, while not the most important factor, was also an aspect worth noting. Another of the participants spoke at length about the need to provide for their family, beyond the basics, and they stated:

*"What definitely drives my decision as well is to continue working to support my kids, to support my family, as well as to afford certain luxuries"*

A rather interesting construct centred around the facet of fulfilment and quality of life, as these were mentioned a few times. However, somewhat more significantly spoken about was the recognition from the organisation that could influence these investment decisions/personal efforts. This was best expressed as follows:

*"That strong sense of appreciation from your organization can then motivate you externally to do even better"*

A connector to the previous question is one of the constructs identified here is concerning the curiosity. While it has been listed as a resource in the preceding question, it also acts as a motivator to individuals to invest in their careers. Also worth noting is the pursuit of autonomy in ones' career, making decisions independently about how a participant obtains success. This was mentioned in the practical context of being in charge of what a person prioritizes as outputs for their organisation.

One of the definitions of career success mentioned in the first research and interview question had acknowledged the work/life balance as a key career success outcome, and this construct is raised again when discussing the motivators for investment into a career, under the attainment of fulfilment and a good quality of life. In addition, the development of a personal brand is also raised here, pointing to the fact that it is a resource from the previous interview question, a resource that is now being highlighted as influencing investment, thus emphasizing its need to be nurtured as a resource.

The researcher has the need to note at this point that there are a number of the career success definitions, individual efforts towards career success, and the resources used to contribute to career success. These also assume the role of influencer to the investments made in developing career success.

### **5.5.3 Strategic alliances/partnerships versus competition**

The interview question being expanded on below, sought to understand the perspectives of the participants where competition among peers was concerned, versus the building of strategic alliances, or relationships. The analysis surfaced numerous viewpoints from participants and these were then distilled into 6 themes. There was a very popular view regarding the need and value of strategic partnerships that was raised, as well as a theme that focused on internal alliances that can rally around a common goal and drive competition externally, between organisations. A participant started out by stating the following when posed with this interview question:

*"I think I really I associate the word competing with, you know, where people end up like backstabbing each other, stealing each other's ideas and that type of thing that I obviously, you can tell I don't find productive at all."*

With that being said, there was still a number of participants who valued the need for a competitive disposition in themselves and attributed some of their career success to this quality. It is also obligatory to mention the other type of competition that was uncovered, and this was competition with self, seeking to improve oneself from a previous point in their career. This can also point to the resources and efforts mentioned earlier that looked at the upskilling, education and curiosity as practices that had aided in career success. A participant best captured some of the views on competition versus alliances in the following manner:

*"No single individual rises on their own, it's through people. Right?! And people will appreciate your competitive nature as long as it's not infringing on their own ability to grow."*

The table below illuminates the various outlooks that were mentioned by the candidates regarding competition and alliances where career success is concerned:

**Table 13: Strategic partnerships vs competition**

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Construct</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
1	Strategic Partnerships/Collaboration	14
2	A balance between forming partnerships vs competing	7
3	Fostered by the environment	5
4	Competition with self	4
4	Compete as an organisation externally	4
5	Competition with others internally	3

Partakers in the interviews raised the concept of competition or partnerships not really being an individual's choice or preferred approach, rather a cultural reality that is adopted by an organisation, a participant went on to state:

*"I mean the environment will always dictate that (competitive culture)"*

This view was juxtaposed with the construct that pointed towards striking a balance between competing and collaborating, the below views were expressed by some of the participants who confirmed this construct:

*"So, I believe to succeed, you need both, right?! You need to have a competitive spirit. Just you need to have a spirit of wanting to be a winner. Right?!"*

While another said:

*"I only ever considered competition at the point of an interview when you are competing against other individuals for a particular role or for a particular promotion"*

This was further confirmed by the following statement which also surfaced the construct of external competition with internal collaboration within an organisation:

*"So, you have to collaborate and compete. So that means you'd have to form a team that will you collaborate with, and then you have to compete with those that are not in your team"*

In contrast to this, there were those participants voiced the need to focus solely on collaboration, partnerships and alliances as antecedents to career success, stating:

*"So, it's always been very clear for me that to be able to progress, I needed to build very strong, very mutually beneficial collaborations all along, and even before the MBA, so it's something that I've always appreciated."*

Another went on to expand on this:

*"I think my philosophy around progress in the workplace has always been around building really good and strong relationships, and that social capital and how important social capital is in enabling career progression. "*

A construct that was also supported by other participants was that of competition with self, while acknowledging the need to collaborate internally, best captured as follows:

*"You're competing with yourself as it were. And at the same time, you're willing to work with everyone else. So, in those strategic partnerships, you need the relationships, whether it be with organisations, different stakeholders, or even people in your own organization"*

A theme that was also noteworthy, came from an executive that has been managing teams for a number of years, they stated that collaborating with people tends to bring out the best in them. While there were a number of views expressed, the researcher can state that there is unique value in collaborating, more so than competing, depending on the type of competition.

#### 5.5.4 Leveraging contingencies (plan B)

The next section details the question posed to interviewees about their plan B, or leveraging of contingencies. Here the researcher desired to understand the perspectives of participants regarding a back-up plan for their careers should the current path have not worked out. The examination of responses for this question raised a variety of codes which were then refined into four distinct themes.

Essentially, there seems to have been an alternative path for nearly half of all participants, with some also mentioning the route to accessing that alternate journey. Below is a breakdown of the constructs uncovered when examining the responses from this question:

**Table 14: Leveraging contingencies (Plan B)**

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Construct</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
1	Yes - there was a plan B	7
2	Yes - corporate career is training ground for Plan B	6
2	No - Corporate career was the plan	6
3	Yes - In a broad sense (career direction)	2

There has been a general consensus on career success being the responsibility of the individual in some respects as stated in previous constructs above, while having the organisation being the role of an enabler to career success, once again, even with contingencies. There were some views raised which pointed towards this phenomenon of an organisation being an aid to career success, with a senior executive stating:

*"Finding a good company is a very good place to start. Because if you're in an environment where it's all over the place, it's very difficult for you to not be all over the*

*place. So, finding a good company with decent values....certainly plays a good foundation because then you really do see various different career paths that you might be able to pursue"*

A number of candidates also made the point regarding the existence of a back-up plan, and the use of the career as a launch pad into private, or entrepreneurial pursuits with some of them stating the following:

*"My backup plan is to say how can I learn and utilize what I've learned in the business world, to grow the family business. "*

One of the participants also made mention of their long-term plan and that there had already been an effort to kick-start that plan B, even though the career journey had been somewhat successful, they stated:

*"The plan was always to use the corporate experience to build towards a more independent career"*

Another of the participants contradicted the view of the organisational environment as an enabler, placing the impetus on the individual and their own lived experience with leveraging contingencies, affirming:

*"Always having an option fast-tracked me, not being beholden to an organisation's timelines for career growth, irrespective of my talent"*

Another of the participants gave a more holistic view on plan-Bs for the career, introducing the notion of multiple options in the broader sense, and articulated that in the following scenario:

*"I look at things in terms of maybe different paths and I understand like what is ideal for me at the time, and then see other options that one could pursue that also ultimately address some kind of interest from a career perspective that I have. And then let's see, you know which one materializes"*

All of the above affirmations and contradictions essentially confirm that there is a need for options regarding the career, and while there can be some differing views on what those options might be; from options within a corporate organisation, or

external to that organisation, the importance of having alternatives also enables career success. The researcher can state that while some participants had always had a back-up plan for their careers, there were those who only focused on ensuring their existing path would yield success.

### **5.5.5 Controlling an unknown future versus predicting an uncertain one (Long-term plan vs. short-term decisions)**

This penultimate interview question was exploring the long-term career plan, and whether there was any value in having one, versus the ability to depend on short-term decisions and the ability to sense inflection points in a career journey. The interviewees' responses were themed into 3 categories, either having and remaining focused on a long-term plan, depending on and sensing short-term decision points, or a combination of the two.

While there was a resounding voice of lived experiences pointing to a long-term plan, there were those interviewees who made the effort to develop the ability to sense decision points, or forks in the road regarding their careers. These insights are contained in the ensuing table:

**Table 15: Long-term plan vs. Short-term decisions**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Construct</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
1	Short-term sensing of career related inflection points	10
2	Had a long-term plan	6
3	Combination of following the plan, and recognizing opportunities	3

The varying number of responses also surfaced some rich insights, with the most contrarian view being voiced in the quote below:

*"Trying to predict the future is a futile exercise, instead, be good at understanding how well an opportunity fits with your strengths, and the ability for you to make an impact"*

The above sentiment was shared by a number of participants who had initially held a long-term plan for their careers, and had specific destinations, but changed these

plans as the journeys developed, with one participant upholding this notion with the below statement:

*"Look there's been certain roles I took because of the opportunity that existed at the point in time. But there's been specific roles and maybe even doing an MBA, where it was quite deliberate and I said this is what I want to do because I realised these are some of the skill sets I still need to develop. Right?!... And if you want to get somewhere in your career, you have to be deliberate about it"*

The ability to sense opportunities and make decisions based on them was also a key theme identified, even when it held some contrasting views, as was expressed by a participant that had recently completed their MBA, and had been promoted rapidly into an executive level role, stating:

*"I wanted to do my MBA, for as long as I can remember so it was always the plan to put myself on this path and then to move forward or higher up. I wanted to be ready and prepared for when the opportunity came and everything kind of coincided nicely, but I mean, is it really a coincidence because I did it with the intention of going down this road?!"*

Another participant who had focused solely on sensing and operating with the short-term view, surfaced the construct of purely sensing and inflection points in the following manner:

*"With necessity being the mother of invention. I just fell into something and made it work...mainly by asking what can I do that will make me happy? That will make me feel like I'm fulfilling my purpose?!"*

Pulling on the thread of decision points and having a career with purpose, the researcher also extracted the following lived experience:

*"The key decision points came out of saying I can't see how much further I can get and is this really where I want to be spending the rest of my life"*

A disparate experience that was mentioned, leaned on the theme of being deliberate as mentioned before, but being deliberate in action, and follow through, as well as ensuring that your long-term plan is known, the below quotes best articulated this:

*"So, it has always been very deliberate to say, I want this and I recognize it, everyone around me knows exactly what I want my next move to be. And then everything I'm doing, you know, centred around what that has to be"*

*"And I followed through with the plan, and I've got what I wanted, actually"*

Fundamentally, there does seem to be a keen appreciation for the ability to read the terrain when navigating the career journey and ensuring that decisions are made both in line with the broader goal, plan, or target, but also developing the ability to recognise when a decision needs to be made, or an opportunity needs to be embraced that might not be part of the plan, but could provide long-term success. Also surfaced from the insights in this question was the confirmatory phenomenon that having a long-term goal or target can be beneficial as it provides direction and an anchor for the career journey, no matter the route taken to obtain said success. However, striking a balance between these 2 paradigms seems to be the most beneficial approach.

#### **5.5.6 Advice for current MBAs on career success**

The final interview question was focusing on identifying any further key constructs that could be utilised by current and future MBA graduates to aid in achieving career success. The analysis initially surfaced 23 codes which were filtered into 8 constructs. These range from personality traits that should be engendered, to the development of skills and the ability to network and maintain relationships. Also, worth noting is the need for a career sponsor/mentor to aid in guiding one's career journey. The constructs are contained below, followed by an insight obtained from some of the interview participants:

**Table 16: Career success advice for MBAs**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Construct</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
1	Position your key skills within the organisation	22
2	Identify key relationships to build, maintain and nurture	14
3	Have a goal/target in mind	12
4	Find your own purpose	8
5	Develop a career plan with timelines	5
6	Identify a career sponsor and mentor	4

6	Identify your knowledge and skills gaps	4
7	Constantly practice humility	3

The table above is detailed again in the ensuing chapter (see figure 4), as it sets the foundation for the discussion of the results and development of a model (figure 10). In addition to the constructs captured above, some key insights were captured from the interview participants:

- 1) *"You're not going to get anywhere if you don't have the right relationships, with the right type of people"*
- 2) *"It is absolutely important to identify and connect with that sense of self and figure out what is going to bring you closest to feeling fulfilled....you're going to be bored so there's a part of you that really needs to think about 10, 20, 30 years from now, what's going to make you get up in the morning? Kill all of the illusions that you might have around what career success is, and redefine that with yourself once a year if you can"*
- 3) *"If I was to get to any point where I cannot do much, I feel I've done my bit if I've contributed some more to the continent (of Africa)"*
- 4) *"The (career) sponsor has vested interest in your development and of course they need to have the level of influence, to help and expose you (within the organisation)"*
- 5) *"Take your knowledge from your MBA, apply it to the real-world environment to generate results, that affirms why you have the MBA. The MBA doesn't affirm anything. It's just a tick box to say you've got the potential"*
- 6) *"One needs to be really objective about assessing the ability to communicate so that it is not a barrier"*
- 7) *"This is essentially about a humility of understanding how a particular space works, and taking the time to figure that out, rather than showing up thinking that you have all the answers"*
- 8) *"I think my advice to grads coming out of an MBA program is to think quite deeply about the purpose and where they want to have an impact. And, how do we have impact in a context that so desperately needs people with these kinds of skills"*

- 9) *"You have to be deliberate and intentional; you can't leave your career management to your manager; you have to be deliberate"*
- 10) *"But it really is like up to you to recognize and to see where you want to go and put the effort to get yourself here"*
- 11) *"Use it (the MBA) as an opportunity to learn something about yourself, and develop yourself"*
- 12) *"Be careful not to make any rash decisions"*
- 13) *"Your first step is to start again and ask yourself, this is what you set out to achieve when you undertook the MBA. But now, knowing the reality of where you are, and how things went this way, do a similar exercise of asking yourself what you want to do with your MBA. So, it's the same question in a different time"*

It is necessary to note that some of the key themes and insights gained from the above respondents were related in the table of constructs (table 16), but there were also some key perceptions that were equally as practical, but without the rousing affirmations from more than one participant. One such view was that of having an open-mind, and this is in unison with the construct of curiosity that has been surfaced more than once in previous questions.

## **5.6 CONCLUSION**

This chapter covered the various factors, contributors and detractors of career success. Three research questions were positioned to identify the role of the individual and that of the organisation in the career success journey. Some key influences were identified for the individual and the organisation in determining career success and there was some congruence and contradiction in the responses and themes that were identified across and within the research questions. In the next chapter, the above results will be discussed at length and a framework will be provided that seeks to depict the key influences to career success for graduates in the corporate environment, containing both individual and organisational aspects.

## **CHAPTER 6 : DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The following section discusses the results presented in the previous chapter. Chapter 6 is laid out as per the research questions contained in chapter 3 and sequenced in chapter 5. The aim of this chapter is to relate the findings discussed above, to the literature that was examined and detailed in chapter 2. Each section begins with a summary that provides context for what the research question aimed to address. In addition to this, there is a summation provided at the end of each research question, that indicates whether the results of this research validate, challenges or extends the literature.

This is coupled with a theoretical outline that will be added to throughout the sections, resulting in a final, conceptual framework as an output of this research. The discussions that follow recount the findings from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with 15 interview participants, and links these, by way of themes, to the literature review. It is to be noted that while a number of distinct themes were identified through the data gathering and analysis, only a select number of these themes will be discussed in this section.

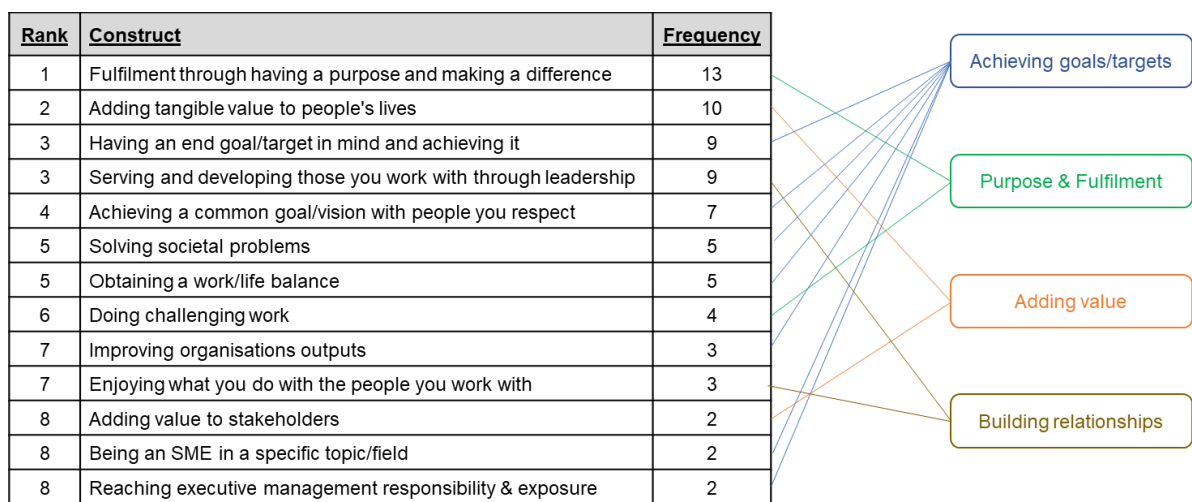
### **6.2 RQ 1 – CAREER SUCCESS DEFINED**

This research question sought to address the definition of career success through the lens of those who had achieved subjective corporate career success. The research question is deliberated using the themes that were identified through analysing the data gathered. The existing body of literature in some aspects is in lock-step with the findings that were gathered, and in other instances it is in stark opposition to the data. The data indicates that career success is multifaceted and has evolved based on the form of career an individual currently has, their career management decisions, as well as the plans that one may have for their careers in terms of goals.

It is worth noting that while career success was discussed as a standalone research question, there are linkages between this topic and that of career management, that is covered at length in career literature. The findings from chapter 5, section 5.3.1

indicate the various definitions of subjective career success that were captured through interviews and data analysis. These also can be seen as having evolved based on a comparison between table 4 and table 5, and this also indicates that the definition of career success evolves throughout an individual's career.

Table 4 shows the rank ordered factors that were identified by the interviewees. An analysis of these constructs suggests that they can be further combined to reveal 4 broad themes in career success. The figure below outlines the combination of these constructs and what the 4 themes were that have been surfaced:



**Figure 2: RQ1 - Career success thematic analysis**

Each of the identified themes are discussed in the section below in detail, linking these in some cases to existing theory, and extending some of the career success literature where necessary. The table below outlines the four themes identified in further analysing the constructs of career success shared by interview participants:

**Table 17: Career success themes**

Rank	Construct	Frequency
1	Achieving goals/targets	33
2	Purpose & fulfilment	17
3	Adding value	12
3	Building relationships	12

### **6.2.1 Achieving goals/targets**

Spurk et al. (2015) highlights in the literature, the factor of career success that looks at career satisfaction, such as goal attainment. One additional aspect of goal attainment that literature could extend on is the different types of goals/targets that individuals may have regarding their careers, including goals linked to an organisation's outputs, such as common goals that colleagues may have to solve company problems, or advance an organisation's agenda, as was mentioned by participants in the research data. Participants went on to list a few codes in the data that were linked to specific goals, such as obtaining a work/life balance, and solving societal issues. These were all under the theme of achieving a specific goal, whether it was career linked, or organisation focused.

### **6.2.2 Purpose and fulfilment**

This theme of fulfilment and a purpose was the most widely congruent theme among the interview participants, and is also rooted in career research literature. According to King (2004), one of the career self-management causes is under the guise of achieving satisfaction in any decisions taken regarding career management. In addition to this, is the element of career success that is currently existing in literature, only extends as far as salary/earnings, promotions and expertise in a specific field according to Gunz & Mayrhofer (2011). However, a resounding theme identified from the interviews relates to finding a level of fulfilment and having a purpose as an essential component of career success.

This definition is consistent with the literature by Spurk et al. (2015) and their assertion that subjective career success is anchored in the achievement of career goals and gaining satisfaction. Interview participants vehemently mentioned that their own definitions of career success had not only changed since the beginning of their career journeys, but had also shifted significantly since obtaining their MBA qualifications. Their initial perceptions of career success are supported by Gunz & Mayrhofer (2011).

### **6.2.3 Adding value**

Another overarching theme from the data gathered was that of adding value, whether

it be to the organisation, individual peoples' lives or stakeholders. The emphasis within this theme that links to existing literature revolves around the proactivity needed in career self-management behaviours and how these aid in obtaining career success (Klehe et al., 2021). While this theme traverses a number of codes from the data, it is also indispensable when relating it to the career literature of Dries & Pepermans (2008) who detailed that individuals who were identified as high potentials and had a career success outline, mentioned their proactivity and differentiators as key factors that set them apart from their peers in the pursuit of career success. Concurrently, there is also the notion of taking initiative and agency concerning an individual's career success as discussed by Brown et al. (2021) and this is where the pursuit to add value can be sufficiently surfaced as being somewhat present in literature but needing to be detailed through what some of these personal agency traits could be.

#### **6.2.4 Building relationships**

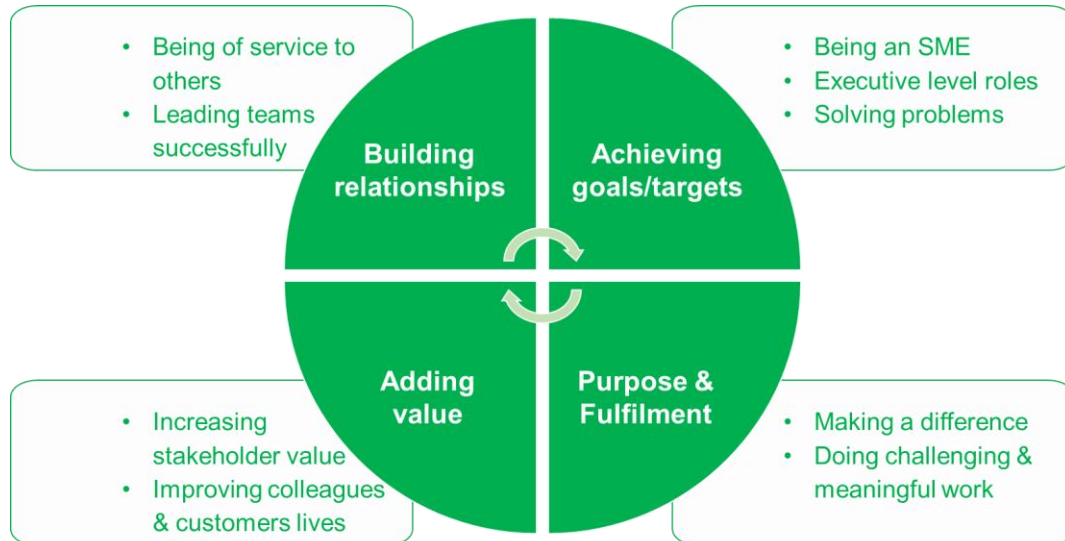
The relational aspect of career success was prominent through a number of codes that were surfaced in the data itself, and more so in the defining of constructs from the analysis. The literature speaks of positioning and influence (King, 2004) as career management levers that can lead to career success, and participants mentioned various aspects of relationships with peers, working with people that one respects, as well as being of service to others through leadership. All of these relationship-based aspects emphasize the influence and positioning aspects of career management and in turn career success.

#### **6.2.5 Summary**

Principally, the results contained above indicate that corporate career success is complex and multidimensional. Each of the highlighted components plays an important role in defining corporate career success, and these four major components are also inextricably linked to one another. For example, the achievement of individual career goals/targets can work in unison with the attainment of organisational outputs through an individual's specific role of adding value to the organisation and its stakeholders.

The figure contained below represents the four identified themes from the data

analysis when examining the career success definitions expressed by the interview participants. The diagram characterizes the interlinked nature of these metrics and the complementary traits of outcomes of each metric. The themes exist on a continuum and as has been stated already, these are the definitions for participants at a point in time. Based on the diagram below, it is clear that all four metrics are of equal importance. The corporate career success themes are depicted as follows:



**Figure 3: Corporate career success themes**

In summary, while there are a number of factors in career literature, that are utilised to define career success (both objective and subjective), these findings add to the extant literature on career success.

### **6.3 RQ 2 – INDIVIDUAL & ORGANISATIONAL ROLES IN CAREER SUCCESS**

The second research question focused on the actions taken by both the individual and the organisation in enabling career success. Covered under two interview questions that participants were asked, both with follow up prompts, the main aim of this research question was to uncover which constructs, from both employees and the organisation, assist in enabling career success, and what the role of employee organisational attachment is as a contributor to career success. This research question is discussed using the outcomes captured in tables 6 – 10. Here, high-level constructs were captured through analysis of the interview data, these constructs are filtered into themes in following section, where appropriate, and reproduced as captured when applicable.

Additional insights are given regarding the connections between these themes and the current literature in chapter 2, and insights gathered from participants interviewed in chapter 5. Each of the themes is discussed under the subsections that follow, subsequently a theoretical model is provided at the end of this research question to depict what these themes are that contribute to career success by individuals and organisations, as well as provide commentary on whether they validate, contract or extend the present body of knowledge.

### **6.3.1 Efforts that influence career success**

Clarke (2013) strongly emphasises the fact that organisations still have a part to play in career management literature, even though career researchers have somewhat shifted the responsibility of career management solely to the individual (Arthur et al., 1999; Lazarova & Taylor, 2009; Sullivan et al., 2009), as well as highlighting the factor of self-efficacy in informing career management decisions (King, 2004). This perspective has been surfaced in more recent literature by Hirschi & Koen (2021) with the evolution of career self-management (CSM).

What can be seen from table 6 with the interviewees is that while a number of participants (9) felt that a majority of their corporate career success came from their own efforts, none in this majority could identify exactly how much of their career success was a result of their own effort. Conversely, nearly half of the participants (6) clearly indicated that the efforts/actions taken that influenced their corporate career success are mostly at an even split between the organisation and the individual.

This indicates a valid interdependency between these two entities in driving career success for employees. This is in line with the literature by Clarke (2013) about the shared responsibility of career success between the organisation and the employee, as well as being in lock-step with Dries & Pepermans (2008) about both individual and organisational actions determining career success.

#### **6.3.1.1 The role of the individual - actions**

Hirschi & Koen (2021) have stated in literature that the career management of an individual is solely their responsibility to plan and execute actions in order to achieve

their goals. This is congruous with the data analysed and consolidated from table 7 to provide the below themes. The aspects of an employee taking initiative and being proactive regarding their career development is the most pertinent theme regarding the employee's actions, and this is supported by the career literature of Klehe et al. (2021) as well as Soares & Mosquera (2021) who place the antecedent actions of career success firmly under the accountability of the individual. The below figure, listed as table 16 above, summarizes the constructs (actions) that should be deployed by individuals in managing their careers and obtaining corporate career success:



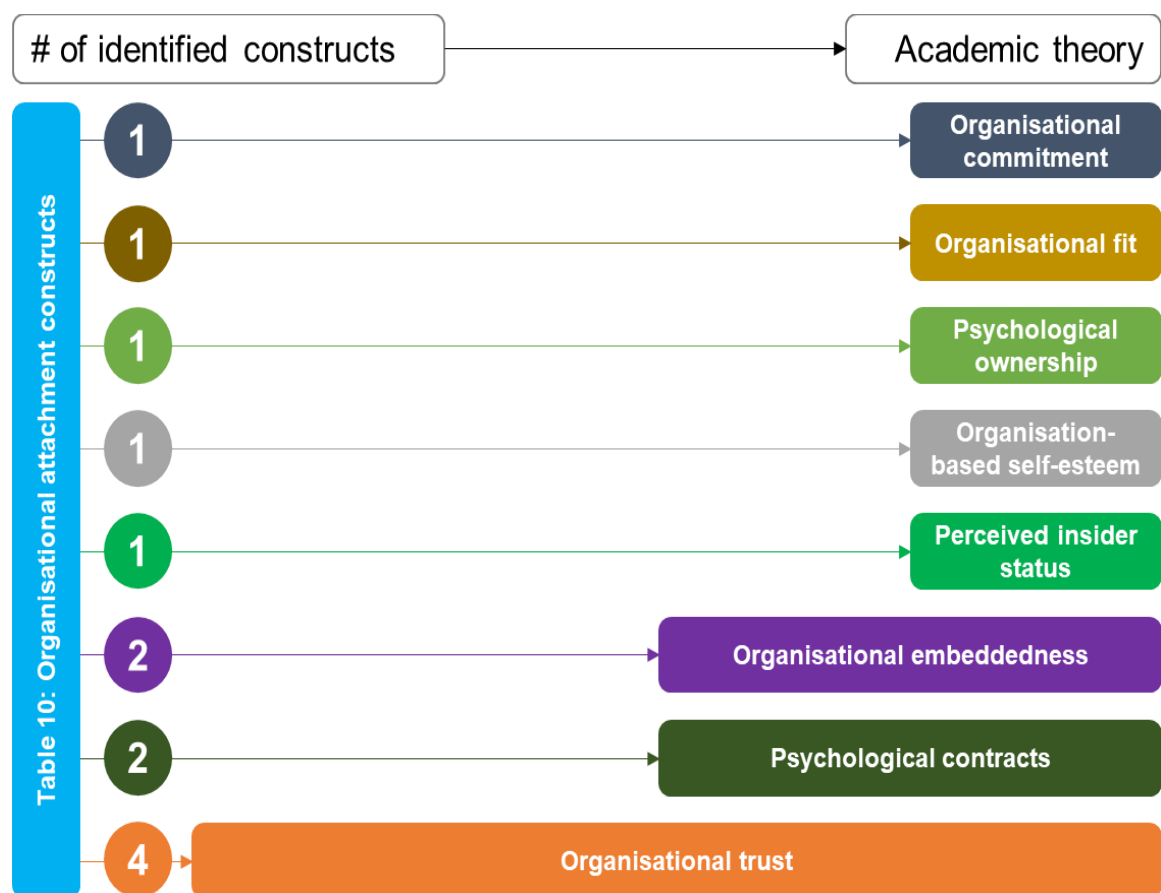
**Figure 4: Individual career success actions**

### 6.3.1.2 The role of the individual – organisational attachment

Another key factor in determining the corporate career success of individuals is the level of organisational attachment that they hold. Soares & Mosquera (2021) initially embed this concept through the lens of organisational commitment and then Brown et al. (2021) further elaborate on the tacit relationship that needs to be in place and the effect this relationship can have on how the employee performs within the organisation and influences their own career management decisions. Nearly half of the interview participants explained in table 9, that they held higher levels of organisational attachment, when compared to their peers, and this had supported their career management decisions and career success outcomes.

Interviewees made mention of the most pertinent elements of organisational attachment, and these were supported by academic literature according to Ng & Allen (2018), when detailing the 9 factors that are present within organisational attachment. The figure below demonstrates the link between the constructs identified through the research from table 10, with the theory contained in chapter 2.

The numerical values depicted below indicate the number of constructs from table 10, that support the theoretical organisational attachment pillars from academic literature. It should be noted that not all 9 of the theoretical attachment factors were supported by the data gathered and analysed in chapter 5, the organisational identification factor was not supported. Therefore, the findings captured in the study add to the existing literature on this topic by uncovering the elements of organisational attachment that are congruous with the extant literature, and the finding that existing literature needs to evolve to include these factors. These aspects are portrayed below:



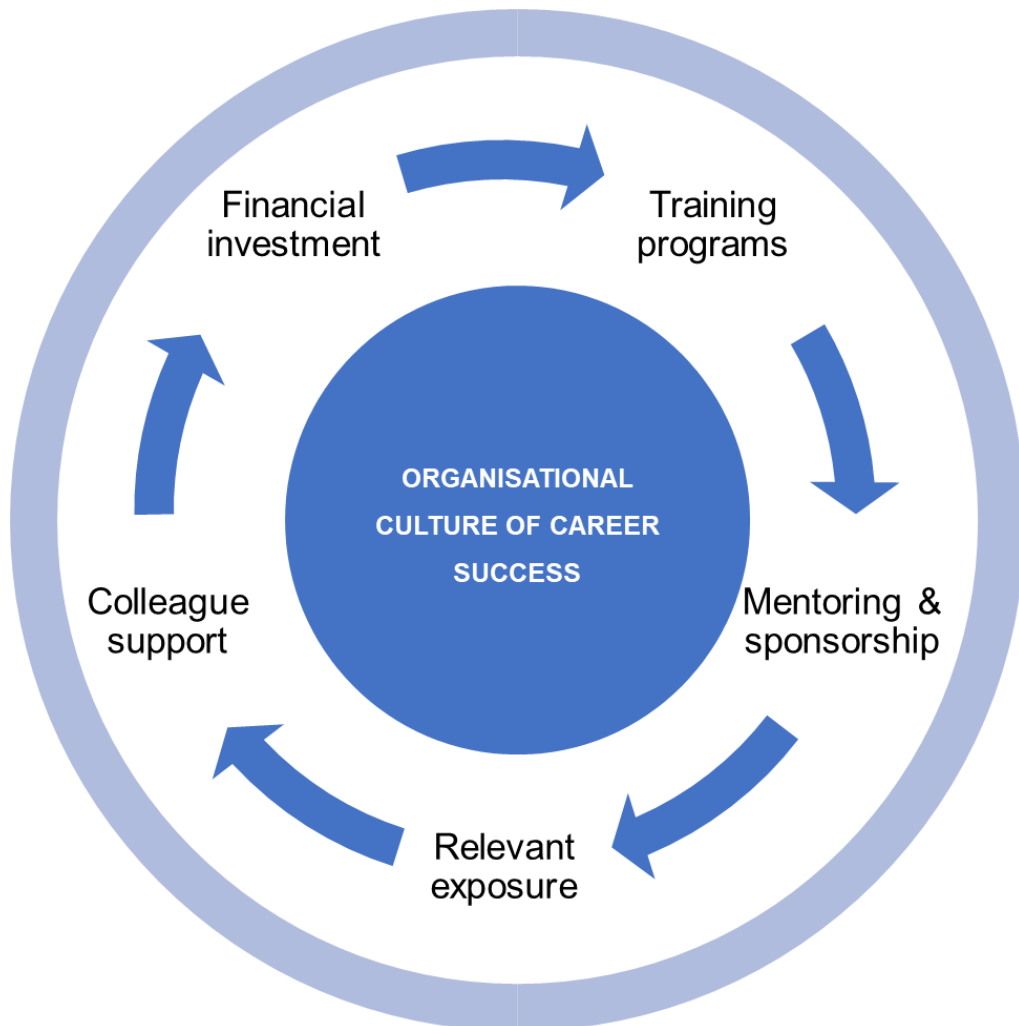
**Figure 5: Organisational attachment linkages**

### 6.3.1.3 The role of the organisation

The final aspect that addresses the factors that inform corporate career success is the role of the organisation and how it influences the career management decisions of its employees. Clarke (2013) clearly articulates the fact that career management can be influenced by the organisation, and that there are certain activities that the

organisation needs to undertake in promoting career management, these are detailed under the guise of organisational career management (OCM) activities according to Soares & Mosquera (2021).

While interview participants listed a number of contributors by the organisation to career success as listed in table 8, the main outcomes for the researcher are depicted using the image below that essentially states that, above all else, the organisation needs to instil a culture that supports career success. The culture within the organisation that promotes organisational attachment is driven by the factors displayed in the figure below:



**Figure 6: Organisational culture fosters career success**

The academic literature explored in chapter 2, held two juxtaposed perspectives; firstly, individual actions are at the centre of career management, and secondly that

the organisation also has a role to play in promoting career management practices. The findings from this chapter, however, denote that in addition to individual and organisational actions, there is a need for individual embeddedness within the organisation.

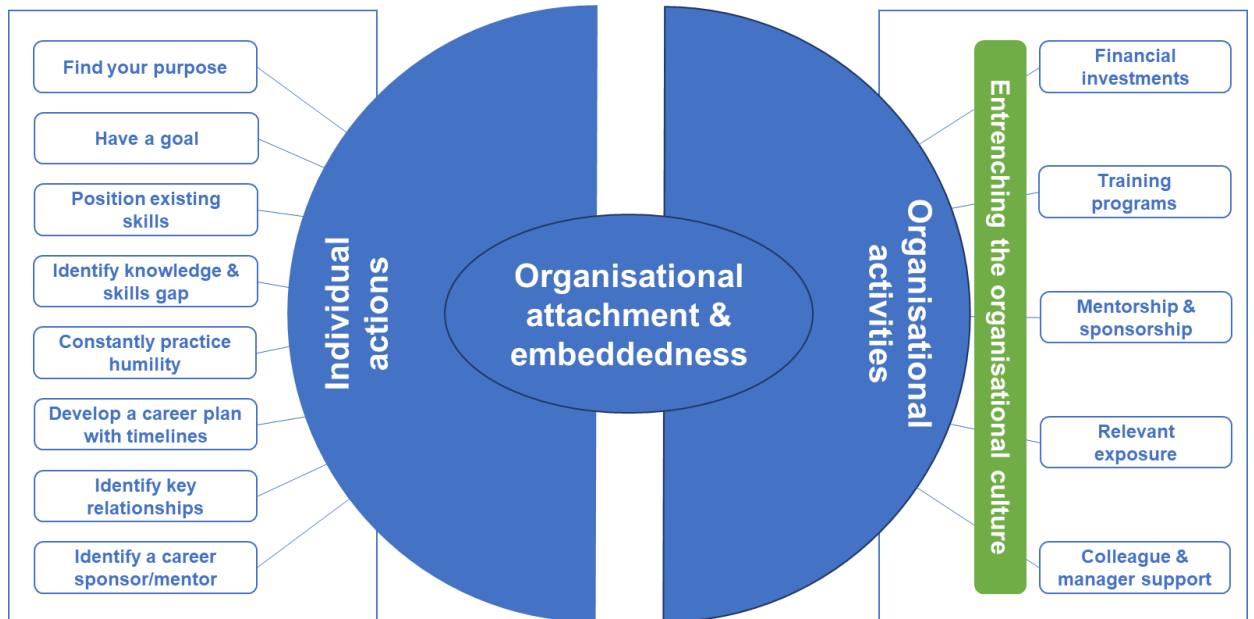
This is most prevalent when individuals embed themselves by applying their existing skills to the opportunities that exist within the organisation, and by pursuing organisational goals in an effort to maximise their own career aspirations. These further cements the reciprocal nature of this intricate relationship between an individual and the organisation.

### **6.3.2 Summary**

Based on the above discussion, there are a number of noteworthy considerations that have been raised. Firstly, there is a complex link between both the organisation and the employee regarding corporate career success actions and efforts. Even though some employees acknowledge the role of the organisation as minor, others are adamant that their career success would not have been possible without the organisation's efforts.

Also worth noting are the various levers that organisations have to embed a high sense of organisational attachment within employees, so as to enable their career management goals and decisions. In addition to this, is the resourcefulness and proactivity that needs to be displayed by employees in taking responsibility and accountability for their own actions regarding their career management. Finally, there is a cultural aspect that is the responsibility of the organisation.

Here, the organisation is required to ensure an environment that encourages career growth and allows employees the autonomy needed to align their own skills and goals with the opportunities that exist within the organisation. Depicted below is a framework that consolidates all of these aspects into a theoretical model for the roles of the individual and the organisation. As can be seen, there is a symbiotic relationship between the individual actions and organisational activities (table 8 & 16), connected through the influence of organisational attachment & embeddedness:



**Figure 7: RQ2 – Individual & organisational actions for career success**

#### **6.4 RQ 3 – EFFECTUATION THEORY AND CAREER MANAGEMENT**

Research question three focused solely on the theory and principles of effectuation, and what the impact of these principles was on career management and career success through the lived experiences of the participants. According to formative research by Sarasvathy (2001), the role of effectuation is described as the set of behaviours, or actions that can be taken by entrepreneurs to create entrepreneurial success.

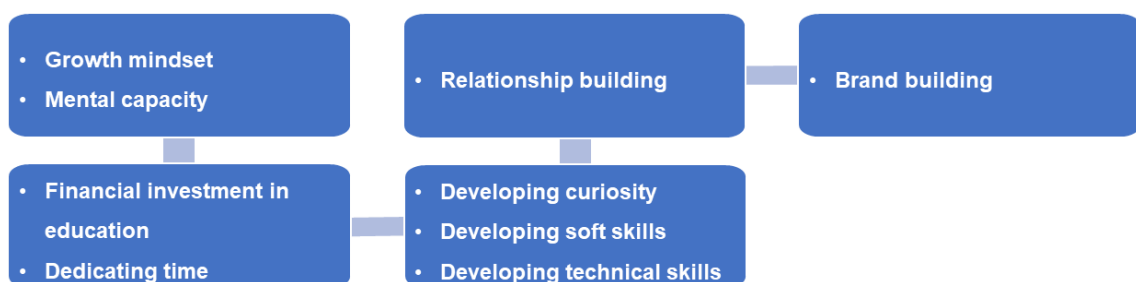
From the data gathered and analysed in chapter 5, this research question is addressed by discussing each one of the effectuation principles, and contrasting these against the research literature with the aim of finding congruencies, contradictions or confirmation between the findings and the theory. It is worth noting that this theory currently resides within the ambit of entrepreneurship and has been studied at length by researchers in that field (Alsos et al., 2020; Katre & Salipante, 2012; Kerr & Coviello, 2020; Kitching & Rouse, 2020; Sarasvathy, 2001). This section of chapter 6 is concluded with a model adapted from the theory of effectuation, and its application in career management.

### 6.4.1 Personal resources

The first of these principles is the aspect of starting with ones' own resources, or colloquially known as "bird in hand". This factor seeks to identify what the individual currently holds as resources that can be deployed for a given purpose. The data gathered points to the fact that using one's personal resources is of critical importance in the pursuit of corporate career success and table 11 in the previous chapter outlines what interview participants had raised as the resources that they personally positioned in their pursuit for career success. The constructs in table 11 such as "the ability to build/maintain good stakeholder and interpersonal relationships" are linked between the personal resources' employees have, and the definition of career success identified from figure 3 above. Therefore, this principle is of value to career success.

While there is limited literature regarding career management and effectuation theory, Engel et al. (2017) point to some key actions and tools for entrepreneurs looking to pivot their careers. These tools are planning, specifying goals, career growth forecasting and a vision for ones' career management. When comparing these to the data collected and analysed, the capitals mentioned by participants focused on 9 total constructs (table 11).

The detailed constructs and their resultant classifications all address the foundational aspects of effectuation theory initially posited by Kerr & Coviello (2020) in effectuation literature. In addition to this, they are also linked to the ever evolving theory of career capitals, specifically those capitals that are the deemed as essential in developing career management (Arthur et al., 2012; Lamb & Sutherland, 2010; Serobe, 2013). The figure below collates the constructs from table 11 in chapter 5 into resource groupings as identified by interview participants:



**Figure 8: Personal resources**

Entrepreneurship literature focuses this aspect of effectuation theory on the resources available to entrepreneurs in their operating environment (Alsos et al., 2020; Sarasvathy, 2001). In the context of career management decisions, the focus is on understanding what is at the disposal of the individual that can be used in the pursuit of corporate career success as these resources can then inform their career management decisions regarding corporate career success.

#### **6.4.2 Affordable-loss principle**

The aspect of affordable loss in effectuation theory draws attention to the ability to identify, from one's personal resources, what investments they can make, and would not mind losing. In academic literature, this principle is known as that of "investing only that which one can afford to lose" (Sarasvathy, 2001). However, the lens applied to this topic of career management actually elicited the influences of the investments that individuals make regarding their career success.

The subsequent outcome of this investigation was a list of drivers (constructs) that interview participants listed as the influences to their career decisions. It is thus worth noting that individuals identified the fact that investments into their careers is critical in pursuit of their career success, however, the affordable loss is not a concern to careerists. This is because there can be no identifiable downside to developing one's own skills, and making an investment in the career can yield the desired outputs.

Some key linkages to the career literature are raised by career growth researchers who state that career growth is obtained by the following; achieving career goals, developing oneself professionally, getting promoted (recognition) and earning potential (Weng et al., 2010; Weng & McElroy, 2012). In more recent literature, the work and family duty dynamic have also been raised as key influences to career growth (Spagnoli, 2020; Spagnoli et al., 2019). In the results of this study, candidates highlighted a few of the factors which were consistent with the above-mentioned literature. The researcher views the following as synonymous between data gathered (table 12), and academic literature:

**Table 18: Affordable-loss influences vs. career influences**

<b>Table 12 - Data gathered</b>	<b>Academic literature categories</b>
Pursuing and achieving a goal/target	Achieving career goals
Building credibility	Professional development
Becoming an SME	Professional development
Developing skills	Professional development
Financial reward	Earning potential
Fulfilment and good quality of life	Work-family dynamic
Contributing to society	No theoretical link
Gaining autonomy	No theoretical link
Sense of curiosity	Professional development

Where possible, academic literature regarding the affordable-loss principle has a need to evolve past its current definitions, to understand the underlying factors that influence the decisions to invest in a career. Additionally, career growth research is now needing to be more robust in its categorisation of the various factors that add to it, to include the aspect of a societal contribution, and gaining individual career autonomy. Essentially, this principle requires re-examining and renaming for it to be holistically applied to corporate career management.

#### **6.4.3 Strategic alliances/partnerships versus competition**

When unpacking the third pillar of effectuation theory, the concept of strategic alliances/partnerships versus competition, the effectuation related literature stresses the importance of looking for strategic partnerships that can aid in an endeavour instead of seeking out competition, when operating in the realm of entrepreneurship (Sarasvathy, 2001). When examining the data gathered and analysed, participants emphatically made the case for the need to focus on partnerships and collaboration within their career management journeys and decisions taken to inform their career development (table 13). In addition, there were a select few who made mention of the ability to strike a balance between collaborating and competing. The findings from this study also reiterate the focus on building relationships that was surfaced in research question 1 (RQ1).

As was already mentioned in section 6.3.1.3 above, there is a critical role played by the organisation in contributing to career success, this resides in the organisational

culture (figure 6) and this is further underscored by some of the respondents who mentioned the nature of competitiveness versus collaboration being caused by the organisational environment itself (table 13 – construct rank #3). This is supplemented by the career literature of Clarke (2013) who highlights that the organisation still has a crucial position of influence regarding career management. Some final points worth noting regarding this pillar of effectuation in relation to career management, are those of the three types of competing that should exist in career management decisions, namely:

- Collaborating internally, so as to successfully compete externally as an organisation
- Competition with oneself (this relates to self-improvement)
- Competing internally to organisations only when necessary (interviews, promotion opportunities, etc)

When relating this principle more closely to career management literature, the findings from this study support the findings from the previous research question (RQ2) by connecting these to the career success field of career management, where there is a large focus on the relationship building aspect which is mentioned under positioning & influence (King, 2004) and the importance of maintaining relationships, influencing key decision makers (Soares & Mosquera, 2021), and networking and learning from peers (Hirschi & Koen, 2021).

This can then challenge the existing effectuation literature once again, as it relates to career management, to be more explicit about the type of competition it refers to when discussing this principle, since the study has surfaced at least 3 different types that tie in to career management decisions. In addition to this, it has been seen from the data provided, that there is far more value in collaborating and forming strategic alliances, than there is in competing in the workplace.

#### **6.4.4 Leveraging contingencies (plan B)**

The facet of leveraging contingencies, or having a plan B, is the fourth pillar of effectuation, and aims to encourage the ability to pivot when a specific direction is no longer yielding the required results. In the entrepreneurship literature for

effectuation, this focuses on the ability to rely on contingencies, instead of relying on existing knowledge (Alsos et al., 2020). In the career management field, the aspect of having back up plans is not widely discussed by career researchers.

When investigating the outcomes from the data, the point of continuous development and a long-term outlook, are emphasized by participants having an endpoint of sort in mind, but not a back-up plan in the traditional sense, rather a plan that entailed something to completely switch to, not when their path was not producing successful outcomes, rather as an act of intention to remain in corporate careers until a certain point, and then start something new once they felt that their time in corporate/organisational careers had come to an end. This is not the pursuit of an alternate journey due to the circumstances in the current environment, but an intentional decision to stay where they are, until they feel ready to pursue another path (see table 14).

To the researcher's knowledge, there is no career management literature that focuses on pivoting when a set course of action is not proving to be successful. Instead, there is a focus on the aspect of positioning oneself in certain instances so as to meet the needs of the organisation (King, 2004), also see figure 7 above. Where this effectuation pillar lacks value for career research is that individuals are encouraged to continuously develop their skills (Dries & Pepermans, 2008; Hirschi & Koen, 2021; Lam & de Campos, 2015; Soares & Mosquera, 2021), and there is no real place for these individuals to be narrowly focused on only one route to success for their careers. Therefore, this principle, in its current form is not directly applicable to career management, and requires re-evaluating.

#### **6.4.5 Long-term plan vs. short-term decisions**

The final pillar of effectuation theory identifies the extent to which individuals can control an unknown future with a long-term plan, versus attempting to predict an uncertain future with short-term decision points. Results from this study around this aspect underscore the aspect of individual accountability and decision-making responsibility by sensing the inflection points in a career journey and making decisions that suit the shifts being experienced (table 15). Here, the focus is to ensure that as best as possible, one is making the best decisions with the information

at hand. Also, partnering with and expressing one's goals to the organisation is crucial so as to ensure the alignment of desired outcomes for both the individual and the organisation. The effectuation theory expands this pillar by way of stating that individuals in entrepreneurship can attempt to focus on the controllable aspects of the future instead of trying to predict all the aspects of the future (Sarasvathy, 2001). The impact on career management theory is that this principle of long-term plans might not be best placed, instead there is more value in having the ability to sense the organisational and environmental shifts that impact one's career journey, and find the best ways to respond to these changes.

What this means for career management practices is that individuals need to have a set of actions that they can take, or decisions they are in charge of, that aid in their career success and development, and follow these through, and those out of their control, can be left without action. This aspect relates back to the career research literature on individuals being at the centre of their career development, and taking responsibility and accountability for their own journeys instead of relinquishing these responsibilities to their organisation, human resources (HR) or line management. This is in line with the most recently developed work of Hirschi & Koen (2021) which places the individual at the centre of their own career development. This principle of effectuation is more closely aligned with the previous principle in that it requires that individuals have a long-term view regarding their careers.

#### **6.4.6 A combination of the principles**

The fourth and fifth principles of effectuation currently exist as separate and equally necessary considerations to be made for entrepreneurs. However, the data analysis surfaced a need to combine these two principles into a singular principle where corporate career management is concerned. The reason for this is that there was no data directly suggesting the approach of having a plan B (leveraging contingencies) regarding career success. Instead, participants had one of two distinct perspectives on this aspect; they were either pursuing their current career path, or had the definite goal of pursuing their career until the point where they felt comfortable or ready to pursue another path. This meant that there was no back-up plan, but rather a clear target, which, when achieved, would pivot to a different goal.

Secondly there seemed to be an expressed intention to continuously develop the ability to sense points of inflection within their career journeys while heading towards a pre-determined goal. Therefore, there was a need to balance the desire for a long-term plan towards their goals/targets, while having the capability to sense and make decisions based on the information and opportunities available within their career development journeys. With that in mind, these two principles needed to be re-examined for their value as standalone principles, and there was greater benefit in expressing them as a single principle that is classified as the ability to have long-term plans, and leveraging inflection points.

#### **6.4.7 Summary**

The principles of effectuation make a significant contribution to the career management field according to the discussion comprehensively captured above. The need to evaluate distinct resources at the disposal of an individual and assess their role and the potential effect they can have on a career journey, then deploying these resources, adds crucial value to the approach of career management currently existing in academic literature.

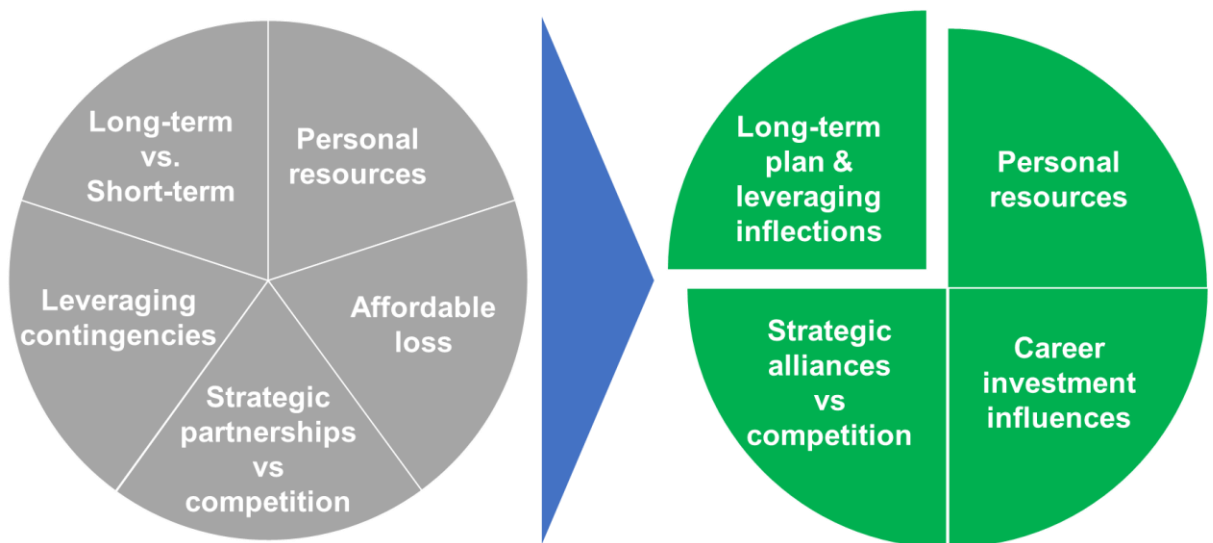
The affordable-loss principle has the inadequacy of not detailing its antecedents sufficiently. Additionally, this principle needs to broaden its definition to identify the underlying influences of affordable loss, one of them being the attainment of set goals and targets, and not merely focus on what investments can be made and lost. There is an additional need to constantly be aware of the value of building strategic alliances/partnerships/relationships in career development. This is currently underscored by the work of King (2004) and seeks to surface the need for influential relationships within career management. These may come by way of mentorship and coaching, career sponsorship, or collaboration with influential people within organisations. Fundamentally, one cannot build a successful career in isolation.

With that being said, there is also a need to place some value on the aspect of competition within the workplace, under career management. The existing literature needs to broaden its reach to define the acceptable types of competition that add value to career management decisions and practices. While discussing existing literature shortcomings, there is a need highlight the short-sightedness of

effectuation literature when evaluating the need for contingencies. The data contained above has stressed the value of career goals/targets (section 6.2.1 and 6.4.2), and this is where the current literature needs to be challenged to expand.

Finally, the two remaining principles; leveraging contingencies and controlling an unknown future vs. predicting and uncertain one, can be filtered into one principle that looks at having a long-term goal, and making short-term decisions. This is because there is no stated alternate plan (back-up plan/plan B) according to the data gathered and analysed, instead there is a clear goal, that when achieved, will evolve into something different. With this in mind, there is limited value in enforcing the need for a plan B in career literature. In addition to this, is the existing literature that looks at careerists constantly improving themselves and their skills, and positioning these skills in an effort to respond to the career and organisational environment. This aspect silences the importance of controlling an unknown future vs. predicting an uncertain one. What it signifies instead, is the value of constant self-improvement in an effort to complement the organisational needs, i.e., positioning. Therefore, these two principles can be collapsed into one: having a long-term plan, and leveraging inflections to achieve it.

Therefore, the figure below represents the 5 original theory of effectuation principles that have been shown as crucial in the field of entrepreneurship, and their adaptation into the 4 principles needed within the field of corporate career management:



**Figure 9: RQ 3 – Effectuation principles for corporate career management**

## **6.5 CONCLUSION**

As has been stated in the above section, the definition of career success is a constantly evolving one, along an individual's career journey. Career success contains a delicate balance of individual and organisational actions, in order to achieve it, and while effectuation in its entirety has a critical role to play in better understanding the career management of individuals, two of its pillars are not extremely useful as standalone principles and would be better served by being combined into a single aspect that involves a long-term plan, and leveraging inflections points to achieve the plan.

## **CHAPTER 7 : CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

The concluding chapter of this paper discusses the principal outcomes of the study. This will be followed by implications for individuals and business practitioners, the research limitations, and recommendations for future research. The focal point of this study was to gather a richer understanding of corporate career management through the lens of effectuation theory. In addition to this, there have been insights revealed that point towards the actions needed for individuals to encourage career success, as well as the crucial role of organisations in the development of employee careers.

### **7.2 PRINCIPAL OUTCOMES BY RESEARCH QUESTION**

The next section of the paper discusses these key findings, by research question, and a framework is provided that encompasses the aspects of career management that can be leveraged to attain corporate career success. These levers include the actions that can be taken by individuals to better position themselves for corporate career success, and to use the applicable principles of effectuation theory to better deploy their individual capitals in an effort to obtain career success. Finally, the model presents the activities that organisations need to undertake to promote a culture of corporate career success.

#### **7.2.1 RQ 1 – Career success defined**

As has been stated in previous sections, the fundamental definition of subjective career success is multifaceted and findings from this study identify the four main aspects as the most appropriate definition of career success: 1) Achieving goals/targets, 2) Finding purpose and fulfilment, 3) Adding value to stakeholders, & 4) Building relationships. While extant literature has not been clear on one definition of career success, the identified aspects of career success uncovered in this study expand the existing categories of the definition to include the above four, especially when evaluating corporate careers. Worth remarking on is the fact that these four elements can work together, and it should be noted that these four elements further entrench the complexity of career success.

### **7.2.2 RQ 2 – Individual & organisational roles in career success**

According to the findings of this study, corporate career success is achieved by a balance of individual actions, and organisational activities that entrench a culture of career growth as seen in the analysis provided in section 6.3.1 (figures 4 – 7). The findings of importance under the second research question focus specifically on the actions that individuals should partake in, in order to advance their careers (Klehe et al., 2021; Lamb & Sutherland, 2010; Soares & Mosquera, 2021), and the influences that inform their individual organisational attachment (Brown et al., 2021). Both of these elements play a key role in ensuring that employees make informed decisions about how to address their career management, and what the role of the organisation is in promoting organisational career management (OCG).

The actions of both parties are further solidified through a high level of organisational attachment that the employee has with the organisation. A critical individual action worth noting here is; the embedding of an individual's skills within the organisation, to drive organisational outcomes. This is a key contribution to the career management field as it introduces a new component, embeddedness within the organisation. This organisational attachment informs a large contingent of participants behaviours, personal investments and how these are deployed (Brown et al., 2021; Ng & Allen, 2018).

When considering the organisation's perspective, figure 5 above outlines some critical levers that organisations can lean on in order to engender a culture of career growth and career success for its employees. When observing the literature, Clarke (2013) had made the point that the organisation has a crucial position to play in ensuring it fosters a culture of career progression for its employees.

This is validated by figure 7 which outlines the connection between individual actions, and organisational activities that entrench a culture of career success, and how these elements are linked together by embeddedness and organisational attachment. These are the factors that influence an individual's career management decisions. Also, these findings contribute to existing literature by juxtaposing the lived experiences of participants in the study, with the most recent developments in career management literature by Hirschi & Koen (2021).

### **7.2.3 RQ 3 – Effectuation theory and career management**

The third aspect under evaluation looks at the role of effectuation theory for a more comprehensive understanding of career management and whether the aspects of the theory can be utilised in further comprehending how researchers, employees and business practitioners approach career management. The insights gained from the data and analysis strongly suggest that there is value in applying the lens of effectuation to career management, and even though some of the principles require broadening of their definitions, they are applicable.

#### **7.2.3.1 Personal resources (Individual actions)**

Of the five principles within this theory, the findings emphasize the need to obtain, manage and deploy personal resources toward attaining corporate career success as an inclusion of the first pillar. This is also highlighted through figures 7 & 8 above as it highlights the personal resources that need to be deployed toward the pursuit of career success. It is in line with the actions that are required by the individual to position their skills to meet the needs of the organisation.

Also, this aspect extends the conversation of career capitals and links it to the fact that individuals firstly have intrinsic resources, and these are resources that can be positioned in an effort to further increase a person's skill set and technical knowledge through training and further education. The responsibility is with the individual to continuously, and consciously grow their personal resources and harness these in pursuit of their career success within corporates. Once again also cementing the research literature that looks at constant self-improvement through personal development (Hirschi & Koen, 2021).

#### **7.2.3.2 Career investment influences**

The most prescient finding for the affordable loss principle of effectuation is that individuals are not concerned with encountering any loss. Instead, their main focus is the need consistently invest in their careers, and in doing so, realise the driving forces behind these investments. This affordable loss principle as it currently exists needs to be redefined where career success is concerned. The main focus is that career pursuits are underpinned by the factors introduced in literature regarding the

achievement of career goals, professional development, and increasing ones' earning potential (Spagnoli, 2020; Spagnoli et al., 2019). The key differentiator between this principle of effectuation in entrepreneurship literature versus the field of career management, is that entrepreneurs follow a number of avenues when pursuing growth for their endeavours, and this principle suggests that the investment made toward each of these endeavours should be guided by how much of that investment an entrepreneur is willing to lose. Therefore, hedging their bets within an array of potential outcomes (Alsos et al., 2020).

However, in career literature, the driving force is not determined by the pursuit of multiple options, instead, individuals are not concerned with potential loss, rather their main focuses revolve around the influences behind continuing to develop their careers as seen from table 12 and 18 above. This also ties in with the findings from research question 2 where the key outcome is that individual actions such as continuous personal development, are needed in career success pursuits.

### **7.2.3.3 Strategic alliances vs competition**

When evaluating the third principle of effectuation, strategic alliances vs competition, again the literature may require a greater definition, especially when related to the competitive aspect. The data analysed clearly emphasizes the fact that there is far more value in collaboration and building strategic alliances, as opposed to competition. There is rarely ever a need for competition along the career journey, but where it can be of value is when facing explicit competition for a particular job/role, a promotion or within the interviewing process.

The findings surfaced here are not specific about the definition of competition. Dries & Pepermans (2008) had made some advances to career literature by surfacing the fact that there is a type of indirect competition that exists within career management when looking at high potential individuals, and this competitiveness is expressed through attributes of differentiation by certain people which sets them apart from other employees in the workplace.

This is later supported by Hirschi & Spurk (2021) when discussing the aspect of ambition, and then again with Hirschi & Koen (2021) when placing reliance on

individuals for career management and progression. The data additionally finds value in building and maintaining relationships with key individuals in organisations, and this is supported by literature through the debate on what actions contribute to career management from the individuals perspective (Brown et al., 2021; Clarke, 2013; King, 2004; Soares & Mosquera, 2021).

Inherently, the value of strategic alliances is crucial, and so is the ability to compete when necessary. This further progresses the debate when considering collective competition from an internal team, or company perspective, as well finding a balance between knowing when to collaborate, and when it is appropriate to compete.

#### **7.2.3.4 Long-term plans and points of inflection**

While the fourth and fifth principles of effectuation exist as two separate concepts in the original theory (Sarasvathy, 2001). It was surfaced through the data gathering and analysis process, that there is a need to combine these principles into one in terms of career management. This is because there is no express declaration from participants that having contingencies is a practice that has been present in their career management journeys, instead there is a defined goal, which then changes once it is reached.

Moreover, in an effort to achieve the goal/s, there are numerous moments, or key decision points which require individuals to sense and evaluate the available options, and then make the choice most suited to achieving the desired career outcomes. This is done in place of trying to plan out a long-term goal, and an accompanying path to success. Of the five existing principles of effectuation theory, career management benefits from adopting 2 directly from the theory as is, while adapting a third principle, along with a reimagined combination of the fourth and fifth pillar. Thus, the four new principles to be adopted from the theory of effectuation are:

- Personal resources
- Career investment influences (formerly affordable-loss)
- Strategic alliances & competition
- Long-term plans & leveraging inflections

### 7.3 THE CORPORATE CAREER MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The corporate career management framework (CCMF) presented below is provided to draw together and depict the various factors that aid in corporate career management. Firstly, the role of how one defines subjective career success and its evolution needs to be considered in the career management literature. There are essential aspects to that definition that inform a large part of the career management decisions that individuals make when managing their corporate careers. Supporting this aspect are the complementary roles that both the individual and the organisation take on in an effort to promote career management. This is further cemented by the adapted principles of effectuation theory that add value to understanding and enacting career management characteristics. Below is the framework presented with the various career management aspects:



**Figure 10: The corporate career management framework (CCMF)**

The critical aspects and value of the above framework rest in their extension to the existing literature across both the extant career management research, as well as the existing literature on effectuation. The identified gap in the literature was examined to understand whether existing research was sufficient, or whether the

theory of effectuation could be utilised to gather an in-depth understanding of career management. This framework has been developed for the purposes of corporate career management. It endeavours to provide a set of factors, and actions that individuals should consider when seeking out successful corporate careers.

## **7.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS**

At the onset, the researcher aimed to identify whether career management could be more deeply understood by applying the theory of effectuation to existing career management aspects. There was a need to identify the applicable categories that define corporate career success, followed by the opportunity to acknowledge the role of the individual and the organisation in pursuing and obtaining career success – an outcome of career management decision-making. It should be stated that career success cannot be singularly defined, it is an evolving phenomenon. The categories identified in this study should also be expanded into the field of the corporate career since this is not sufficiently covered in the career literature that the researcher had uncovered in chapter 2.

### **7.4.1 Recommendations for individuals in corporate careers**

Where individuals are concerned, there are a number of factors that should be considered regarding their career management decisions. Firstly, it is essential to fully understand their own subjective career success definitions, whether they be goal, position, title, or fulfilment driven. In addition to this, there is a need to understand that a number of factors influence individual definitions of career success and that the evolution of career success tends to happen as career journeys progress.

Secondly, there are a number of key actions and activities that employees in corporate organisations need to take on in their career management endeavours, understanding their own skillsets and positioning oneself to match their existing skills with the organisational needs, and continuously developing their skills to become more valuable to the organisation, while also consistently seeking out opportunities to add value to the organisation and various stakeholders is key. There is also the aspect of organisational attachment that is critical in further embedding an employee within their organisation and ensuring they perform and their career management

related decisions are influenced for the better within the organisation. While organisational attachment is an individual outcome, it is widely impacted by the organisation itself. This is further elaborated on in the next section.

Thirdly, employees should closely examine the principles of effectuation theory in order to inform their corporate careers. The aspect of personal resources currently available to individuals is critical to their career development within corporate organisations. In understanding their inherent resources to be deployed towards their careers, there is an opportunity to differentiate oneself from their peers and position their skills in a manner which meets existing needs, or situates them for future opportunities. Still under the guise of effectuation, there is also the need to understand the driving force behind any investments made, or opportunities taken or foregone when dealing with one's career. This aspect is contained within the affordable-loss principle and there is a need for it to evolve and to look beyond the trade-offs that currently exist, and consider the influences of those trade-offs.

Another factor worth considering is that of knowing when it is appropriate to compete with peers in the workplace, and when it is important to seek strategic partnerships/alliances in an effort to collaborate. The resounding finding is that there is greater benefit in collaboration within the workplace. Also, there are a number of types of competition that are necessary at specific points in one's career and during these times, it is necessary to assume the role of competitor within the workplace (job opportunities, interviews, promotions).

In addition to this is the points where internal competition is also needed among teams within organisations, where this is practised through collaboration in an attempt to then adequately compete externally as an organisation. With the building of key relationships, there is a need to identify key relationships that can be of value to career pursuits. These might come in the form of formal and informal mentorship, career sponsorship, or coaching and giving of advice. The benefit of this is that career pursuits are then cemented through actions and knowledge from multiple sources.

Additionally, when considering the aspect of long-term career views, it is important to have a goal in mind that can inform the direction in which the corporate career

should develop. With this in mind, however, it is critical to develop the ability to sense points of inflection within the career journey and the capability to then make the most appropriate decisions that are well aligned to the end goal. Finally, it is worth stating that goals can be modified over time to complement the environmental career shifts that happen along the journey.

These can take the form of decisions between remaining in a technical role, or shifting to roles that encompass a portfolio of knowledge, enrolling for educational endeavours, or even leadership roles within corporate organisations. Current literature regarding career management and career success is siloed and dependent on the individual applications, and perspectives each individual applies (Hirschi, 2020; Hirschi & Koen, 2021).

However, the framework provided by the researcher aims to connect the aspect of career success, and career management through effectuation, together. Finally, it is recommended that individuals apply the adapted principles of effectuation theory in understanding their current and future career management decisions, resources and levers to further aid in their corporate career development. This theory has had numerous applications in isolation and is being adapted to further grasp the multifaceted nature of career management.

#### **7.4.2 Recommendations for corporate organisations**

Employees within organisations are required to take ownership of their own careers, and the pursuit of career success through career management related decisions, using the tools and metrics uncovered during this study. In conjunction with this however, the organisation has to invest in a culture that encourages career development for its employees. These investments (funding, training, exposure etc) enhance employee embeddedness and strengthen organisational attachment for the employees. While there have been rapid developments within career management literature, and the role of the organisation (Brown et al., 2020; Hirschi, 2020; Hirschi & Koen, 2021), this research study has surfaced a perspective that requires re-examining.

Additionally, some historical literature had highlighted the role of the organisational

career (Brown et al., 2020, 2021; Clarke, 2013; Lamb & Sutherland, 2010; Soares & Mosquera, 2021) and had laboured the debate for the importance of the organisation, for career development. While the academic literature has since shifted, the findings of this research study further re-emphasize the fact that organisations still have to play their part in supporting employee career development.

Finally, it is critical for organisations to recognize the importance of their role in creating a culture that encourages the embeddedness vector of organisational attachment. This culture has roots in an environment that inspires employee development within the organisation. From an individual's perspective, it is essential to continuously develop one's skills, and actively pursue opportunities to use these skills to drive organisational outcomes.

## **7.5 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY**

### **7.5.1 Academic contribution**

The literature review discussed in chapter 2 outlines the multifaceted nature of career management with a wide range of approaches and contexts that contribute to its development in academic theory, and its evolution throughout the decades (Arthur et al., 1999, 2012; Brown et al., 2020a, 2021; Crites, 1976; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Dries et al., 2009; Jones & DeFillippi, 1996; King, 2004; Klehe et al., 2021; Lam & de Campos, 2015; Lamb & Sutherland, 2010; Soares & Mosquera, 2021). The contribution made by this study is multi-layered.

Firstly; the concept of career success within the career management literature has been expanded to provide for a more robust explanation, as career success evolves for individuals throughout their careers. The factors of career success that are of relevance are; achieving goals/targets, finding purpose and fulfilment, adding value to stakeholders, building relationships. Not only are these factors additions to extant literature, but their interdependent nature is also of importance to the career management literature. Additionally, the concept of corporate career success has been surfaced through the discussion of this paper and this concept requires further examination.

Moreover, the research contained here has outlined and expanded the role of both

individuals and organisations, when evaluating career success, through the actions and activities undertaken by both parties. This has further been expounded on through introducing the role of organisational attachment to the body of knowledge, and the role that this plays in improving employee embeddedness, through skills alignment to meet organisational needs and drive outcomes. This is a material contribution to the academic literature since it highlights the interlinks between the employee, and the employer, underpinned by an enhanced organisational attachment.

Finally, the introduction and evaluation of effectuation theory into career management has broadened the application of the theory itself, and while not holistically applicable in its current form, there have been recommendations made to reframe the affordable-loss principle, and combine the leveraging of contingencies and long-term plans vs short-term decisions into a single pillar that focuses on having a long-term plan and leveraging inflection points.

### **7.5.2 Practical implications**

There is a need for individuals to comprehensively understand the career management decisions they undertake. Practically, employees should take the necessary actions to firstly define for themselves what career success entails. This not only sets a goal for their career pursuits, but gives ownership to them regarding their career journeys. In addition to this is the need to understand what they need to do to achieve their desired career success definitions, and work towards those actions. Additionally, there is a requirement that they identify organisations within which they can find levers and use them to promote organisational attachment, which further influences how they conduct their career management activities. Employees should also apply the theory of effectuation to their career management activities.

### **7.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This research being discussed, had been conducted as a qualitative study, with the unearthing of individual lived experiences of participants as captured under chapter 5. This type of study was idiosyncratic in nature and was subject to a variety of biases that influenced it. In addition to this, was the cross-sectional element of the research, and thus the career success of participants could not be objectively measured as

having been achieved.

The method of sampling applied to the study could be restricted to MBA graduates within corporate careers in South Africa. The results may differ for other samples. The interviews were all conducted via online platforms and this could have been a limiting factor by not having the opportunity to sufficiently connect to and engage with interview participants. All of the data was transcribed with software; however, all of the analysis was conducted manually, without the aid of any software and this could also have been a limiting factor.

## **7.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

It is recommended that future research be conducted under similar parameters within other countries to confirm or contradict the findings of this study. The study focused heavily on seasoned employees within executive level positions in large corporate organisations within the country. Future research should consider interviewing participants at multiple levels within organisations and consider participants from small, medium and large corporate enterprises. Investigating career success for highly successful non-graduates may uncover interesting findings. It is also recommended that a quantitative study be conducted to further investigate the role of organisational attachment and embeddedness in the employer-employee dynamic as the world of work is changing rapidly. To further expand on this study, there should be quantitative analysis conducted, for the various factors of the Corporate Career Management Framework, and its relationship to improved career management.

## **7.8 CONCLUSION**

The field of career research has continued to evolve within the past two decades and this study further confirms the ever-changing nature of the careers. Additionally, academic research has tilted in the direction of boundaryless and protean careers in recent times as the main focus, leaving the field of corporate careers extremely under-researched. The theory of effectuation should be considered in this revised form when evaluating corporate careers. The researcher hopes that this study contributes to the academic knowledge base that informs the most appropriate methods that can be utilized to manage corporate careers.

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## **APPENDIX A : INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### Interview Guide (July 2021 – September 2021)

Interviewer introduction:

- Interviewer – Explain the informed consent & confidentiality of participant, along with the duration of the interview
- Interviewer – Mention the purpose of the research and the data capturing method.

The research is focusing on the field of career management, and some of the factors that influence individual careers. While this field has been widely researched in academic literature, the element of corporate careers is still a field that is not yet well developed, hence the need for this study and the gap that has been identified.

#### **Introductory interview question 1:**

- How do you define career success?

#### **Interview question 2:**

- How much of your career success do you attribute to your own efforts vs the organisations efforts? (% of your efforts vs % of the organisation)
  - Follow up/prompt – Could you name 3 things you did, and 3 things your organisation did to contribute to your success?

#### **Interview question 3:**

- On a scale of 1 – 10, how much organisational commitment have you displayed over the past 10 years?
  - Likert Scale :  
Much Less than peers 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great deal more than peers
  - And why would you say that?

Organisational attachment can be best described as the psychological bond that exists between an employee and their organisation. It is generally broken down in three forms; emotional attachment, economic necessity and a moral obligation.

#### **Interview question 4:**

- Start with your resources – what are some of the personal resources you have used to advance your career?

**Interview question 5:**

- Affordable-loss principle – based on the efforts you made mention of earlier on, what factors influenced how much on an investment (time, mental capacity and finances) you made in developing your career success?

**Interview question 6:**

- Strategic partnerships vs competition – were you in competition with your peers or was there a focus for collaboration and building alliances among you and your colleagues?

**Interview question 7:**

- Leverage contingencies (Plan B) – did you always have a back-up plan for your career or were you only focused on progressing your chosen path?

**Interview question 8:**

- Control an unknown future vs predicting an uncertain one – did you try and control your career with a long-term plan, or did this success happen with short-term events that transpired?

**Interview question 9:**

- What advice would you give to other MBA graduates that would assist them in managing their corporate careers?

In addition to the questions above, the following probing questions will be used as needed during the interviews, to solicit further information for interviewees:

- i. Please can you elaborate on that point?
- ii. Please could you provide an example?
- iii. Can you please tell me more about that?
- iv. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

**Conclusion:**

Thank the interviewee for participating in the study, and for the time spent in

discussion about themselves and their career. Inform them again, that their information will be kept confidential and only insights from the interview will be used in the data analysis.

**APPENDIX B : INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

*I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and I am completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.*

*I am conducting research regarding the exploration of factors that are related to corporate career management for MBA graduates. The purpose of the interview to be conducted, is to obtain insights from your individual lived experience related to the above-mentioned topic, with the interview expected to last for approximately an hour.*

*Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be reported without identifiers. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or myself. Our details are provided below.*

*Researcher Name:* Nande Nqoloba  
*Email:* **20803673@mygibs.co.za**  
*Phone :* +27 73 682 5842

*Researcher Supervisor Name:* Professor Margie Sutherland  
*Email:* **sutherlandm@gibs.co.za**  
*Phone :* +27 73 170 6917

*Signature of participant:* \_\_\_\_\_


*Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Signature of researcher:* \_\_\_\_\_


*Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C : ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL

### Ethical Clearance Approved

 Masters Research <MastersResearch@gibs.co.za>  
10:48

To: 20803673@mygibs.co.za Cc: Masters Research

 EthicalClearanceReport.pdf  
572.07 KB

**Master's programme in Change Leadership**

Launching in 2021

[More Info >>](#)



**Gordon Institute of Business Science**  
University of Pretoria

**Gordon Institute of Business Science**  
University of Pretoria

**Ethical Clearance Approved**

Dear Nande Nqoloba,

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved. You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data. We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS Research Admin team.











			<p>Developing one's maturity &amp; ability to work with people</p> <p>Skills development (communication skills, strategic thinking)</p> <p>Exposing one to specific opportunities</p>	<p>Offering skills training to line management</p> <p>Diversity &amp; Inclusion programs</p>
<b>5</b>	50%	50%		<p>Having strong leadership that is aware of the operating environment</p> <p>Clarity of organisational goals</p> <p>Clarifying the needs of the various layers within an organisation</p> <p>Culture that has direction to enable growth</p>
<b>6</b>	50%	50%	<p>Pushing oneself</p> <p>Having a growth/learning mindset</p> <p>Upskilling oneself with technical skills</p> <p>Having a plan/goal and track it</p>	<p>Providing opportunities for learning</p> <p>Soft skills training</p>
<b>7</b>	50%	50%	<p>Identify where you want to be in your career</p> <p>Seeking and having mentorship for your career</p> <p>Eliciting honest feedback about your outputs &amp; performance</p> <p>Personal reflection on your progress</p>	<p>Having an enabling platform</p> <p>Providing sponsorships for employees</p>
<b>8</b>	50%	50%	<p>Working hard &amp; standing out</p> <p>Developing your own personal brand</p> <p>Building your own capabilities</p>	<p>Providing sponsorship -</p> <p>Career development advisor</p> <p>Providing the right opportunities</p> <p>Clear metrics on performance measurement</p> <p>Developing a culture that enables support</p>

9	65%	35%	<p>Clear on where one wants to be within an organisation (Clear vision &amp; goal)</p> <p>Identifying where to add value and have the biggest impact</p> <p>Having grit &amp; determination and putting in the time/hours</p> <p>Working hard</p> <p>Developing resilience in challenges</p>	<p>Providing opportunities to individuals</p> <p>Create a developmental path/career plan for talented individuals</p> <p>Harness talent with talent pools</p> <p>Enable people to feel valued</p>
10	80%	20%	<p>Speaking up about what you do/don't want to do</p> <p>Knowing when you've outgrown a role/company/environment</p> <p>Developing self-awareness/personal mastery</p> <p>Seeking guidance and help when needed - mentorship</p>	<p>Effective leadership/management</p> <p>Enabling culture</p> <p>Ensuring good quality colleagues/peers that drive and challenge one another</p> <p>Providing individuals with autonomy</p>
11	70%	30%	<p>Doing an MBA</p> <p>Developing soft skills</p> <p>Identifying your own strengths and leveraging these</p> <p>Grit &amp; determination</p>	<p>Enabling employee development through opportunities</p> <p>Recognition of employee outputs &amp; efforts</p> <p>Good leadership that enables</p>
12	50%	50%	<p>Drive &amp; determination</p> <p>Identifying opportunities</p> <p>Having own goals &amp; vision</p>	<p>Providing mentorship/sponsorship</p> <p>Encouraging employees to develop themselves</p> <p>Funding MBA studies (provide study leave)</p> <p>Plotting out career path</p>
13	Tough to quantify		<p>Taking pride in your work</p> <p>Developing your own personal work ethic</p> <p>Honing your skills through education</p> <p>Developing your personal brand</p> <p>Positioning yourself to see opportunities in the organisation</p>	<p>Funding the MBA</p> <p>Promoting good employees - recognition</p> <p>Financial rewards</p>

			Be valuable	
14	95%	5%	Having self-awareness Being deliberate about how to manage your career journey Doing an MBA Having a target/goal of where you want to go Leveraging opportunities that were presented	Create opportunities and experiences
15	Tough to quantify		Doing an MBA Seeking mentorship & coaching Career training Internal conversations & guidance from managers - mentorship	Providing projects to grow individuals Internal training opportunities Providing coaches for individual career development

**Interview question 3:** On a scale of 1 – 10, how much organisational commitment have you displayed over the past 10 years?

**Likert Scale:** Much Less than peers 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great deal more than peers

**Prompt:** And why would you say that?

Participants	Codes	
	Lickert Scale Score	Reasons
1	9	There has been a strong commitment to career growth from the organisation Established relationships with key people within the organisation
2	Difficult to quantify	Psychological contract is the most important determining factor Influenced by colleagues, managers and organisational culture Commitment/attachment has fluctuated based on the organisational values being lived vs just expressed on a piece of paper
3	3	This is a transactional relationship driven by self-interest Enabling you to learn skills to add to your toolbox Adding value for as long as I can Informed by the psychological contract, if it breaks in any way, the attachment breaks

4	10	<p>Having clarity of expectations</p> <p>Access to the resources that are necessary for individual growth</p> <p>Having your skill set valued in a specific environment is crucial</p> <p>Matching your skill set with the desired skills in an organisation</p>
5	7	<p>Culture is key, through <b>organisational fit</b></p> <p>Always a give and take - a symbiotic relationship</p> <p>Aligned expectations between the employee and the organisation</p>
6	10	<p>Informed by really good line managers</p> <p>Clear expectations between employee and organisation and having alignment</p> <p>Ruined by retrenchments and restructures</p> <p>Improved by offering challenging projects</p> <p>Attachment has been strengthened by funding the MBA</p>
7	5	<p>Clarity on personal goals</p> <p>The organisation sometimes has pre-defined targets/goals for employees</p> <p>Key to have good stakeholder relationships</p>
8	Difficult to quantify	<p>Informed by clear personal goals</p> <p>Fluctuates based on the dynamic of the relationship with the organisation - culture</p> <p>Aligning it to what the environment offers vs what you want to do</p>
9	9	<p>Difficult to leave an organisation where a lot of personal investment has been made</p> <p>Can be linked to commitment/attachment to a leader or manager</p> <p>Resilient to organisational change and disruption</p> <p>Enhanced by recognition and reward for value-adding work/outputs</p>
10	3	<p>Very fluid and transactional relationship</p> <p>Obligations to be met by both the employee and the employer</p> <p>Influenced by retrenchments</p> <p>Only attached for as long as I am useful and adding value</p>
11	9	<p>Opportunity to move within an organisation</p> <p>Start new challenges and projects</p>
12	10	<p>Passionate about the mission &amp; vision of the organisation</p> <p>Alignment of personal values to organisational values</p> <p>Making an impact in people's lives</p> <p>Driving and defining the strategy and innovating</p> <p>Having autonomy to inform direction and execution of strategy</p> <p>Support in terms of personal &amp; professional development</p>
13	7	<p>Being aware of the organisational fit</p> <p>Influenced by retrenchments</p> <p>Making sacrifices</p> <p>Psychological contracts can go bad and ruin the attachment</p> <p>What value are you adding</p>

14	Difficult to quantify	There needs to be an ability to differentiate oneself People want to grow inherently, inability to execute the "HOW" People attempt to move, without the ability and information to inform the know-how
15	8	Having the opportunity to add value to specific projects Skills development to match the need in an organisation Aligning your skills with the needs in an organisation

<b>Interview question 4:</b> Start with your resources – what are some of the personal resources you have used to advance your career?															
Codes	Participants														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Understanding and connecting with people	X	X													
Having an appreciation for the operating environment	X							X							
Technical capability and experience	X												X		
Being an SME	X														
Building credibility and a personal brand	X									X					
Financial investment in funding education			X	X		X	X				X			X	
Constantly seeking differentiation			X			X									
Seeking challenges			X			X				X	X				
Time spent building/maintaining stakeholder relationships				X									X		
Seeking technical expertise				X											
Personal costs, trade-off the time				X											
Time dedicated to the organisation					X	X			X						
Energy/effort dedicated to working					X				X						
Mentally and emotionally present					X										
Mental capacity						X									
Having a growth mindset						X				X					
An inherent sense of motivation						X									
Wanting to add value to society, the family and your organisation						X									
Having a sense of curiosity		X						X	X		X		X		
A willingness to learn and		X						X						X	

improve oneself																	
Having a sense of personal agency and responsibility	X																
Independence and self-belief	X																
Analytical thinker	X																
Having a creative and unique approach	X															X	
Talkative - loquacious with people (stakeholders)	X																
Hard working and going above & beyond	X							X	X								
Good communicator	X														X		
Seeking good leadership/management/mentors								X			X					X	X
Having a sense of humility								X									
Having a good set of values									X								
Developing a sense of self-awareness										X							
Keeping the mind stimulated										X							
Having a resilience, grit & determination											X	X					
A support system (family, friends)											X	X					
Planning and setting goals/targets and taking action																	X

**Interview question 5:** Affordable-loss principle – based on the efforts you made mention of earlier on, what factors influenced how much on an investment (time, mental capacity and finances) you made in developing your career success?

Codes	Participants															
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Achieving my goal/target	X		X					X	X	X	X				X	
Building credibility and a personal brand	X				X				X		X				X	
Being an SME in a specific field	X															
Wanting to upskill oneself	X														X	X
Financial reward linked with career progress		X		X	X							X				

Building networks and stakeholder relationships		X					X	X							
Gaining autonomy in the career			X												
Having personal control over the direction one's career takes			X												
Obtaining the MBA qualification			X												
Seeking a return on the investment				X											
One's own internal values, work ethic and integrity					X										
Wanting to go the extra mile					X										X
Organisational appreciation for employee outputs - recognition					X										
Having an internal motivation and drive to show up				X	X	X			X		X				
Having a good quality of life						X									
The time spent with family						X									
Being a contributor to people's lives and society at large						X	X			X					
Wanting to constantly improve oneself through learning							X								X
Having a sense of curiosity							X								
Working with interesting people							X								
Finding purpose, happiness and fulfilment								X							
Developing a sound work environment								X							

Setting an example for others										X					
Seeking challenges and stretching oneself										X					X
Developing resilience										X					
Playing an influential role within an organisation												X		X	
Being a valuable resource within an organisation													X	X	
Wanting to solve complex problems															X

**Interview question 6:** Strategic partnerships vs competition – were you in competition with your peers or was there a focus for collaboration and building alliances among you and your colleagues?

Participants	Codes					
	Fostered by the environment	Strategic Partnerships/Collaboration	Competition with self	Compete as an organisation externally	Competition with others internally	Striking a balance between the two
1		X				
2	X	X				
3		X				
4		X				
5			X			X
6	X	X	X			
7		X				
8		X		X		
9		X				X
10	X	X				
11	X	X	X	X		X
12		X			X	X
13	X	X		X	X	X
14		X	X		X	X
15		X		X		X

**Interview question 7:** Leverage contingencies (Plan B) – did you always have a back-up plan for your career or were you only focused on progressing your chosen path?

Participants	Codes
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	Yes, there was a plan B	In the broad sense, yes	Using the corporate career as a training ground for private/entrepreneurial pursuits	No, the career was always the plan
1	X		X	
2				X
3	X		X	
4	X		X	
5		X		
6	X		X	
7	X		X	
8				
9				X
10				X
11				X
12				X
13	X		X	
14	X	X		
15				X

**Interview question 8:** Control an unknown future vs predicting an uncertain one – did you try and control your career with a long-term plan, or did this success happen with short-term events that transpired?

Participants	Codes		
	Had a long-term plan	Short-term sensing of career related inflection points	A combination of following the plan, and recognizing opportunities
1	X		
2		X	
3	X		
4		X	
5		X	
6	X		
7		X	
8		X	
9		X	
10	X		X
11	X		X
12	X	X	X
13		X	
14		X	
15		X	

