

Chapter 9

Personal Attributes Framework for Talent Retention



Ingrid L. Potgieter

Abstract The 21st century world of work is characterised by exceptional levels of talent mobility as employees try to satisfy their own requirements, with a resultant growing concern among organisations about the retention of talented employees. Organisations in the 21st-century workplace are increasingly realising that employees are their most valuable asset, and as a result they are constantly trying to create an employment brand that is attractive to both existing employees and potential talent, while competing in a “war for talent”. Recent research emphasised that it is not only monetary awards or stability that influences an individuals’ decision to remain with an organisation, but that several personal attributes also play a role in the retention of valuable employees. These personal attributes include self-esteem, employability attributes, organisational commitment and career adaptability. Based on the relationship found between these personal attributes and retention, human resource practitioners and industrial psychologists should utilise interventions to assist individuals to enhance their personal attributes in order to enhance their intention to stay.

Keywords Talent retention • Personal attributes • Self-esteem • Employability attributes • Organisational commitment • Career adaptability

Introduction

Numerous changes took place in the 21st century workplace. Individuals are now faced with lower job security, limited employment opportunities, rapid changing technology, international pressures and competition, as well as increasing pressures to perform, to be adaptable and to become and remain employable (Ineson et al. 2013; Marock 2008). These fast-paced changes have created the question of

I. L. Potgieter (✉)

Department of Human Resource Management, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

e-mail: visseil@unisa.ac.za

whether individuals will be able to cope with these changes, be more adaptable and whether they will stay loyal to one organisation (Mclaggan et al. 2013). It is evident that in recent days, it is expected from employees to take control of their own career development and career management and constantly improve their knowledge, skills and competencies to remain employable (De Guzman and Choi 2013; Froehlich et al. 2014; Lent 2013; Savickas 2012). Strategies in order to increase employees' employability and personal attributes may contribute towards higher retention within organisations.

This chapter therefore focuses on the personal attributes important for the successful retention of valuable employees. The concept of personal attributes refers to a set of psychological career resources essential for the retention of employees. Although several definitions for this term can be found, for the purpose of this study, psychological career resources refer to personal attributes and abilities, such as career orientation awareness, sense of purpose, self-esteem, emotional intelligence, behavioural adaptability and self-knowledge. These attributes and abilities enables individuals to manage their own careers and to be self-sufficient learners (Briscoe and Hall 1999; Coetzee 2008; Coetzee and Roythorne-Jacobs 2012; Hall and Chandler 2005; Herr et al. 2004). Several research found that individuals with a high number of psychological career resources are able to adapt to changing career circumstances relatively easy and also demonstrates high levels of employability (Fugate et al. 2004; Griffen and Hesketh 2005). Given the evidence that personal attributes can be taught and learned (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Pool and Sewell 2007; Salovey and Meyer 1990) and that more emphasis are recently placed on developing an enhancing an individual's employability skills (Coetzee and Beukes 2010; Pool and Sewell 2007), a framework linking personal attributes variables together may be a useful tool in retention practices. This chapter discusses a psychological profile constituting the personal attributes required for effective retention of valuable employees.

Theoretical Support for Linking Self-esteem, Organisational Commitment, Career Adaptability and Employability to Retention

Self-esteem refers to an individual's general feeling of self-worth (Battle 1992; Coetzee 2005; Hewitt 2002; Maslow 1970; Potgieter 2012; Quick and Nelson 2013). It is defined by several components, namely, general, social or peer and personal self-esteem. Kim (2015) found that individuals with a high self-esteem are more likely to remain loyal to a company. Potgieter (2012) also pointed out that self-esteem is an important psychological factor to consider in retention strategies. It is thus evident that by enhancing self-esteem, employees will more likely remain with a company, thereby increasing retention of employees (De Cuyper et al. 2012).

Organisational commitment is a psychological situation that binds an employee to an organisation which will positively influence an employee to remain with an organisation (Allen and Meyer 1996; Meyer and Allen 1997). Tsai and Cheng (2011) included general interests, principles, values, objectives and goals (all related to emotional components) in their definition of organisational commitment. In this study, organisational commitment specifically includes the psychological state that exposes the level of an individual's commitment and emotional attachment towards the organisation (affective commitment), the pre-existing behaviours that are expected to result from this commitment (normative commitment) and the necessity to remain with an organisation as the cost of leaving will be too high (continuance commitment).

According to Ahmad and Oranye (2010), employees with a high level of organisational commitment identify with the organisational morals, goals and objectives, devote their energies to achieving organisational objectives and choose to remain with the organisation (Fisk and Friesen 2012). Nawab and Bhatti's (2011) research findings suggest that organisational commitment increases employee commitment, which in turn influences employees' intention to stay in a positive way. Several research found a positive and significant link between organisation commitment and retention (Chang et al. 2013; Dhar 2015; Döckel 2003, 2006; Guchait and Choi 2012; Khasawneh et al. 2012; Krüger and Rootman 2010; Srivastava 2013). It is therefore evident that if contemporary organisations keep their employees loyal and committed, they will be more likely to retain valuable skills and competencies (Ferreira et al. 2010; Lumley et al. 2011; Neiningner et al. 2010; Stoltz 2014).

Career adaptability as defined as the psychological ability to adapt to and cope with changing career circumstances (Savickas 1997; Savickas and Porfelli 2012). Tolentino et al. (2013) states that career adaptability include a range of attitudes, behaviours and competencies that employees need to have in order to successfully adapt to career transitions and change within the work context. Relevant to this study, career adaptability includes the elements of career concern, career control, career curiosity and career confidence. Several authors noted that career adaptability has become essential for employees in today's fast changing workplace (Coetzee and Harry 2014; Savickas and Porfelli 2012). This has led to career adaptability becoming a core construct in the field of vocational psychology and in career management (Brown and Lent 2016).

Employees with high levels of career adaptability has been found to cope better (both cognitively and emotionally) with unpredictable changes in tasks (Savickas and Porfelli 2012).

Lent (2013) also found that, in general, employees with high levels of career adaptability, proactively manage their personal lives and development and put an effort in promoting their own careers. Savickas (2013) further found that employees with high levels of career adaptability has more psychosocial career resources that assist them to adapt and manage career and work-related changes and demands. Several studies have now shown that career adaptability is positively related to subjective career success, career satisfaction and minimal work stress (Johnston

et al. 2013; Spurk and Volmer 2013; Zacher 2014; Zacher and Griffin 2015). Career success and satisfaction again has been positively linked to retention (Chan and Mai 2015). Ferreira et al. (2013) as well as Savickas et al. (2009) further supports these finding by providing empirical evidence of the link between career adaptability and retention. It is therefore seems evident that organisations should assist employees to continuously develop lifelong career strategies for individual career development, as well as to set and pursue their career goals (Chan and Mai 2015; Klehe et al. 2011).

Employability attributes refers to the set of skills, knowledge and attributes that all employees (and potential employees) should have in order to be effective in the workplace as well as to obtain, maintain and retain employment (Beukes 2010; McGrath 2009; Yorke and Knight 2007). Bezuidenhout and Coetzee (2011) view employability as a psychosocial construct consisting of various attributes. These attributes are values, dispositions and skills which promote proactive adaptability in changing environments. They enhance an individual's suitability for employment and the likelihood of career success. In this research, employability is viewed as a career meta-competency construct or a balance between the individual's competencies and skills and the labour market requirements (Nielsen 1999; Potgieter 2012).

According to Moore (2010), an employable worker demonstrates the following characteristics; flexible personality, willingness to learn, sufficient communicator, entrepreneur, employable, continuous learner, self-managed, innovator and independent thinker. Potgieter and Coetzee (2013) also found that employability is a personal attribute essential for employability. In the present study, employability is a psychosocial construct consisting of career related attributes which include career self-management; cultural competence; self-efficacy; career resilience; sociability; entrepreneurial orientation; proactivity and emotional literacy.

According to Sinha and Sinha (2012) employees need to enhance their employability on a continuous basis by focusing on their own professional development. According to Blackford (2013), career development, providing training opportunities for staff and continuous professional development can help an organisation to attract and retain highly talented employees. Training new employees and providing them with developmental opportunities diminishes their intention to leave the organisation (Khan et al. 2011; Singh 2013). Erasmus et al. (2015) also found a significant and positive relationship between employability and retention.

It is evident from the literature that several personal factors are essential for the effective and successful retention of valuable employees. Figure 9.1 gives an overview of the variables (and sub-variables) of the various personal attributes relevant to the retention context.

Previous research provided support on the link between the variables. However, no integrated study could be found linking these variables as a set of personal attributes to retention. Pool and Sewell (2007) found that self-esteem relates positively and significantly to employability. Individuals who feel and think that they can achieve anything (therefore displaying a high self-esteem) are more likely to

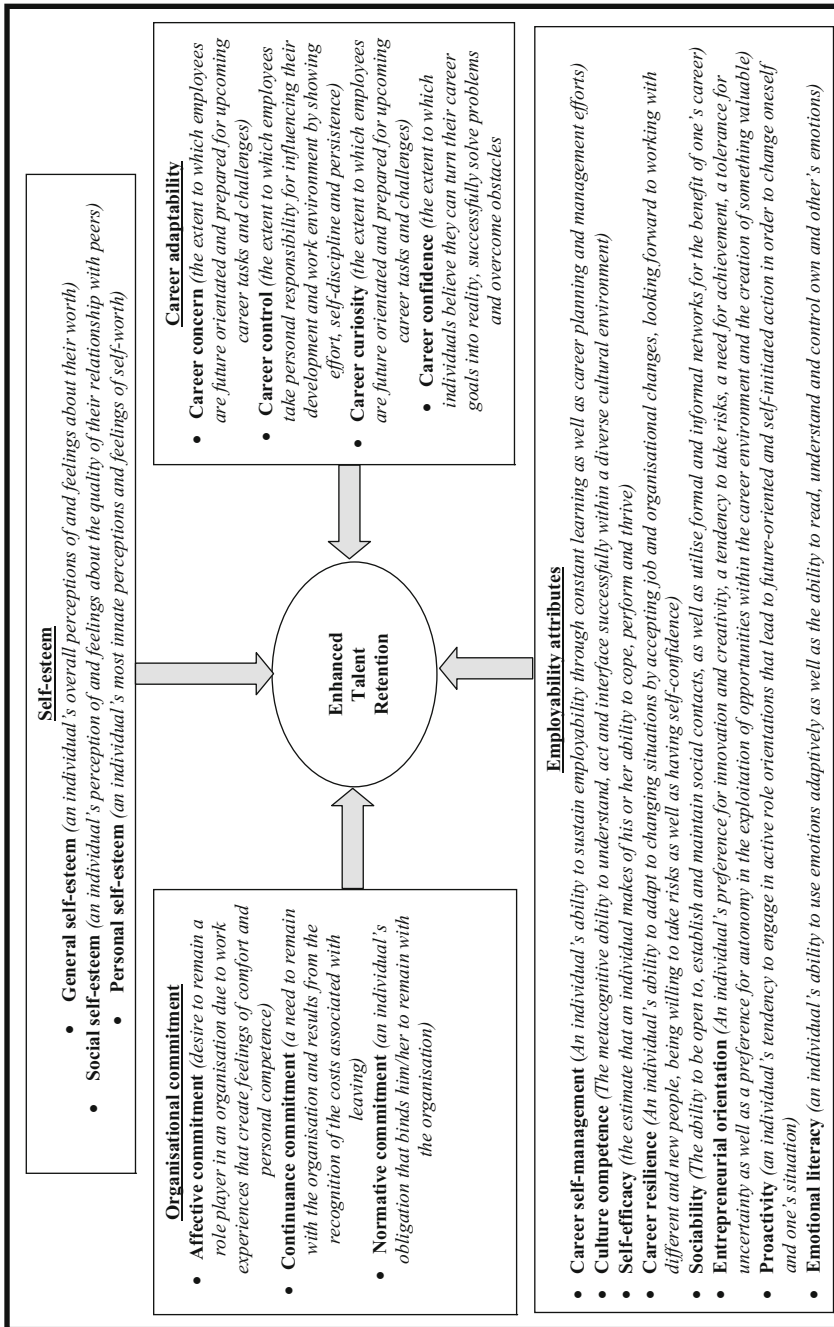


Fig. 9.1 Personal attributes relevant to retention

succeed in any occupation they choose as oppose to individuals with a lower self-esteem (Yorke and Knight 2004). The development of a healthy, high self-esteem therefore relates positively to employability (Coetzee 2008). These findings are in line with the findings of van Dyk (2011), Lane et al. (2004) and Potgieter (2012), who also found that individuals with higher self-esteem are more able to demonstrate employability attributes as opposed to individuals with low self-esteem.

Heimpel, Elliot and Wood (2006) found that people with high self-esteem are more likely than those with a low self-esteem to engage in adaptive coping efforts. Literature provides a theoretical connection between career adaptability and utilising one's strength (Heimpel et al. 2006). Similarly, a study done by Ismail (2015) found a positive relationship between self-esteem and career adaptability. Having high levels of self-esteem results in individuals who is able to effectively adapt to changing contexts and situations. Individuals with a low level of self-esteem were found to be less likely to engage in adaptive behaviours. Employers require their employees to be able to adapt to changing situations, as well as to have a good self-concept, greater self-confidence and thus high self-esteem.

A positive and healthy self-esteem is an important work participation resource in that it enhances the individual's motivation to remain loyal to the company (Kim 2015). Focusing on individuals' positive self-esteem makes them content and remain loyal to the organisation (Kim 2015), resultantly influencing their organisational commitment (Stoltz 2014). This is in line with the findings of Shahid and Azhar (2013) who found that positive self-esteem is critical for long term commitment to the organisation by employees.

Several studies found a positive link between career adaptability and organisational commitment (Coetzee and Schreuder 2014; Ellison and Schreuder 2000; Ndzube 2013). According to these authors, employees who are not adaptable tend to seek for alternative careers outside of their current organisations (Kim 2015). It seems evident from the literature that when employees are provided with many opportunities for career development within their organisations, they are less likely to leave (Abdulkareem et al. 2015; A'yunnisa and Saptoto 2015; Chew and Chan 2008; Dardar et al. 2012; Juhdi et al. 2013; Samuel and Chipunza 2009; Yean and Yahya 2013).

Benson (2006) as well as De Cuyper et al. (2011) found a positive relationship between organisational commitment and employability. According to De Cuyper et al. (2011), employability may provide opportunities to enhance commitment among workers, and concern only rises when workers perceive better alternative employment opportunities outside of their current organisation. Potgieter et al. (2016) confirms this significant relationship as their study revealed that employability attributes provide security to employees. Employees with high employability attributes is likely to find a new job easily if required, and this allows them to develop a sense of commitment to their careers and occupations rather than to the organisation.

Career adaptability improves employability both within and separate from an organisation (Ito and Brotheridge 2005). De Guzman and Choi (2013) found that

adolescents who show high career adaptability levels showed high confidence in their employability attributes. This in turn emphasises that people with higher levels of adaptability have a greater possibility of finding a suitable job. Porfeldt and Savickas (2012) found that career adaptability was strongly associated with career identity (specifically with identification with career commitments as well as vocational exploration and) which emphasises that identity and career adaptability are fundamental in career construction (Savickas 2011). McArdle et al. (2007) supported these findings when they discovered that career adaptability predicted employability.

A Personal Attributes Framework for Talent Retention

Personal attributes (that is, self-esteem, organisational commitment, career adaptability and employability attributes) should theoretically be considered for a psychological framework to be used talent retention interventions and strategies.

It is important to explore the relationship between the sub elements of each of the four relevant constructs as this might guide organisations and human resource practitioners to develop and implement effective retention strategies. Such guidance can assist organisations to help individuals to increase and enhance their less developed personal attributes, which will positively influence retention. As a further aid to organisations and human resource practitioners, this research has attempted to develop a psychological framework consisting of personal attributes (self-esteem, organisational commitment, career adaptability and employability) in order to increase retention in the 21st century world of work.

Table 9.1 illustrates the psychological profile made up of an individual's personal attributes (self-esteem, organisational commitment, career adaptability and employability attributes). Because the psychological profile constitutes psychological career-related attributes, they are described in terms of personal and inter-personal behavioural attributes. This classification will also assist organisations and human resource practitioners to develop the personal attributes on the correct level.

Potgieter (2012), Jabaar (2017), Gani (2017) and Potgieter and Mawande (2017) recently conducted empirical investigations into the statistical interrelationship between the personal attributes construct variables (self-esteem, organisational commitment, career adaptability and employability attributes) and their implication on retention.

According to Potgieter and Mawande (2017), employees displaying high levels of self-esteem has sufficient confidence in their employability attributes. It is thus likely that individuals with high general, social and personal self-esteem are also likely to display high confidence in their career self-management, cultural competence, self-efficacy, career resilience, sociability, entrepreneurial orientation, proactivity, emotional literacy and overall employability attributes. This study also revealed that all sub elements of self-esteem and employability attributes are essential in the retention of valuable employees.

Table 9.1 Psychological profile reflecting personal attributes

Personal attributes	Personal level	Interpersonal level
Self-esteem	General self-esteem Social/peer self-esteem	Personal self-esteem
Organisational commitment	Normative commitment Continuance commitment	Affective commitment
Career adaptability	Concern Control Curiosity	Confidence
Employability	Career self-management Self-efficacy Career resilience Entrepreneurial orientation Proactivity	Emotional literacy Cultural competence Sociability

Jabaar (2017) found that employees who displayed high normative, affective as well as continuance commitment were highly adaptable and that all of these sub-variables were important for the retention of employees. Organisational commitment has shown significant positive correlations with all the career adaptability sub-variables as well (Jabaar 2017). Savickas (2013) notes that if employees are to feel concerned about their future career, they need to have a level of self-awareness, involvement and preparation. It is imperative for employees to be concerned, to demonstrate future orientated attitudes, to feel optimistic and to be future orientated about their careers (Hartung 2013). It is therefore important for retention interventions to focus on supporting employees with career-related decisions because most employees require guidance and support in planning and managing future careers (Maree 2015). In addition, employees need to be equipped with coping skills and assisted to find means to deal with career anxiety and career uncertainty as well as changes within the careers (Maree 2015). This may increase employees' ability to cope with and adapt to changing circumstances (such as changes in work tasks and work roles). In addition, it may assist employees to accept and embrace multi-tasking and job rotation (Spurk et al. 2016).

Employees who possess of high levels of organisational commitment react to the organisation with positive feelings (Ng 2015). According to Nayak and Sahoo (2015), highly committed employees have higher levels of career adaptability, have a high sense of responsibility and are likely less of a financial risk to the organisation. It is thus evident that employees with high career adaptability are more committed to the organisation (and thus have stronger feelings for, connection to and association with the organisation. Such employees are more likely to stay at the organisation for a longer period of time (Ferreira 2012). The results of this research therefore seem to be in line with several other studies that also found positive correlations between organisational commitment and career adaptability.

In the study done by Potgieter and Mawande (2017), all self-esteem variables positively correlated with all sub elements of employability. It seems evident that

employees with a high self-efficacy and emotional awareness may be more confident in displaying employability attributes. These employees may be more effective and successful in managing their own careers, have a high sense of self-efficacy, be culturally competent, display career resilience, be sociable and proactive, display an orientation towards entrepreneurship and have a high emotional literacy. Several authors also reported a significant relationship between self-esteem and employability (Briscoe and Hall 1999; Coetzee and Roythorne-Jacobs 2012; Hall and Chandler 2005; Herr et al. 2004; Van der Velde and Van den Berg 2003; Weng and McElroy 2010).

It is interesting to note that personal and interpersonal psychological dimensions are found to be significant and important in a psychological profile for retention strategies. It thus seems that organisations should assist individuals to develop their personal attributes on a personal and interpersonal level in order to positively influence retention.

On a **personal level**, individuals' general self-esteem (Bandura 1999; Coetzee 2008; Pool and Sewell 2007; Potgieter and Mawande 2017; Yorke and Knight 2004), normative commitment (Jabaar 2017; Kuo 2013; Ojaka et al. 2014), continuance commitment (Jabaar 2017; Mehta et al. 2014), career concern (Jabaar 2017; Šverko and Babarović 2016), career control (Jabaar 2017), career curiosity (Bezuidenhout and Coetzee 2011), career self-management (Bezuidenhout and Coetzee 2011; Coetzee and Beukes 2010), self-efficacy (Bezuidenhout and Coetzee 2011), career resilience, entrepreneurial orientation and proactivity (Bezuidenhout and Coetzee 2011; Coetzee 2012) may positively influence individuals intention to stay with an organisation (and therefore influence retention). Retention strategies should thus focus on creating self-awareness to make it possible to recognize (and improve) on underdeveloped personal attributes. By focusing on employability on a personal level may assist individuals to obtain employment and thereby enhance their employability as well as increase retention within an organisation. By increasing career concern, retention may also increase (Jabaar 2017). Furthermore, individuals should be assisted to enhance their general self-esteem and engage in managing their own careers. Such interventions could possibly increase the retention of valuable employees within an organisation. Retention strategies consisting of interventions to improve employees' confidence to become more willing to take risks and try creative solutions to problems when confronted with changing situations within the new world of work as well as to encourage employees to be inquisitive, may also increase retention within an organisation.

On an **interpersonal**, individuals' personal self-esteem (Coetzee 2008; Pool and Sewell 2007; Yorke and Knight 2004), social/peer-related self-esteem (Bandura 1999; Coetzee 2008; Pool and Sewell 2007; Yorke and Knight 2004), affective commitment (Gani 2017; Jabaar 2017), career confidence (Jabaar 2017), cultural competence and sociability (Bezuidenhout and Coetzee 2011; Coetzee 2012) and emotional literacy (Ashkanasy and Daus 2002; Brown et al. 2003; Bezuidenhout and Coetzee 2011; Coetzee and Beukes 2010; Jeager 2003; Yorke and Knight 2007) may influence the retention of valuable employees. Interventions on an interpersonal level may influence their ability to interact and network with others.

Effective interaction and networking may create employment opportunities for individuals and thereby enhance their employability and influencing an individual's willingness to stay within an organisation.

Retention strategies should help individuals to gain personal insight. This could enable individuals to improve on their personal self-esteem, display higher affective commitment and thus create a desire with employees to remain with an organisation. It could further enhance employees' career confidence and assist them to be able to manage and utilise emotions effectively. Furthermore, retention strategies on an interpersonal level could assist individuals to communicate and connect with people from other cultures or backgrounds. Positive and healthy relationships within the workplace positively influences retention. Such interventions could possibly influence the career success and satisfaction of employees and therefore increase the retention of valuable employees within an organisation.

Based on the literature review it seems as if all sub elements of the personal attributes (general self-esteem, social self-esteem, personal self-esteem, affective commitment, normative commitment, continuance commitment, career control, career concern, career curiosity, career self-management, self-efficacy, cultural competence, career resilience, sociability, entrepreneurial orientation, proactivity and emotional literacy) should be developed in order to increase the retention of valuable employees.

The following psychological profile for retention strategies (as shown in Table 9.2) are therefore included in the proposed personal attributes framework for retention.

Implications for Retention Theory and Practice

Jabaar (2017), Gani (2017), Harmsey (2017) and Potgieter and Mawande (2017) suggest that research on personal attributes (self-esteem, organisational commitment, career adaptability and employability) within the South African organisational context will provide valuable new insights to the body of knowledge relating to employee retention. Several research supports this notion by stating that employees are now more committed to their organisation if their psychological needs have been addressed (Ferreira and Coetzee 2013; Kim 2015).

Mercurio (2015) suggests that as human resource managers and practitioners seek to build organisational commitment and career adaptability, it is important to focus on what current practices are in place to address the psychological needs and personal attributes of employees.

Many organisations and research only focus on retention factors (for example salaries, benefits, positions, and career advancement structures) as a manner of increasing organisational commitment and career adaptability, thus they may be overlooking more personal factors which may influence an employees' intention to remain with a company (Mercurio 2015). Mercurio (2015) further found that the positive emotional connection employees have with their organisation improves

Table 9.2 Personal attributes framework for retention

Psychological dimension	Personal Attributes			
	Self-esteem	Organisational Commitment	Career adaptability	Employability attributes
Personal level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase an individuals overall perceptions and feelings about themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase an employees sense of obligation to remain with the organisation. • Provide good benefits which will increase the perceived cost of leaving the organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist employees to be future orientated and help them to prepare for upcoming events and challenges • Assist employees to take personal responsibility for their own development. • Assist employees to be future orientated and help them to prepare for upcoming events and challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist employees to engage in constant learning. Boost employees' confidence and thus increasing their perception of their ability to perform and cope • Create a safe working environment so that employees feel safe to take risks; assist employees to adapt to changing work situations. • Create a space for employees to be creative • Create opportunities for employees to engage in active role orientations
Interpersonal level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase an employees feelings and perception about him/herself • Assist in increasing interpersonal relationship amongst colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a healthy and fun environment which will increase the employee's desire to stay with the organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a safe working environment to enable employees to turn their goals into reality, thereby boosting their confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist employees read, understand and control their own emotions • Create cultural awareness and make an effort to engage employees from different cultures to one another • Create opportunities for social interaction between colleagues

organisational commitment and career adaptability. A higher self-esteem and confidence in displaying employability attributes contributes towards affective commitment within an organisation. It is therefore recommended that HR practices should consider more personal attributes when developing possible retention strategies and practices, as it is critical component of the retention of skilled, talented and valuable employees.

Spurk et al. (2016) recommend that organisations should implement training and coaching interventions that directly focus on developing employees' career adaptability. These practical recommendations will also be beneficial for employees who want to improve their loyalty and commitment to the organisation and their future careers (Spurk et al. 2016). In addition, it will support employees to adjust or increase job responsibilities for the future (Chong and Leong 2015) and in turn enhance their skills and commitment. Maggiori et al. (2013) also suggest that career adaptability leads to positive effects in the organisation. Employees who are thus more satisfied with their job environments, has a higher feeling of empowerment, are able to cope better with their working environmental challenges and therefore positively influences employees' self-esteem (Fiori et al. 2015).

According to Beefink et al. (2012), emphasis should be placed on the development of self-esteem amongst individuals as a high self-esteem may foster faster and more effective task completion in order to meet organisational goals. Davis (2015) confirmed that it is essential to develop a supportive working environment that increases employee morale in order to retain talented employees.

Furthermore, Clarke (2008) emphasises that employability is partly dependent on the agency of the individual and the organisation. Therefore, organisations have a responsibility for supporting employees to manage their careers and employability. This benefits the organisation by creating a more employable workforce and succeeding in retaining them (Clarke 2008).

In conclusion, managers and human resource practitioners have the responsibility to provide employees with career development support, especially for talent retention and organisational success (Ferreira and Coetzee 2013). Other researchers agree that self-esteem, organisational commitment, employability and career adaptability have become essential ingredients for career success (Savickas and Porfeli 2012; Tolentino et al. 2014). It is therefore imperative that individuals develop a healthy self-esteem that will enhance their employability, career adaptability and organisational commitment (Coetzee and Potgieter 2014), which potentially could optimise individuals' intention to stay within an organisation (Coetzee et al. 2014).

In conclusion, it is evident that several personal attributes (which is self-esteem, organisational commitment, career adaptability and employability) should be considered during the design and implementation of retention strategies.

Summary

This chapter discussed self-esteem, organisational commitment, career adaptability and employability (as a set of composite personal attributes) and proposed a personal attributes framework that can be used for retention strategies focused on addressing the psychological needs of employees. It is concluded that these competencies and attributes need to be developed to help the individuals to stay committed to an organisation and therefore increase retention of valuable and knowledgeable employees in the contemporary world of work.

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Ingrid L. Potgieter (DCom) is an Associate Professor in Human Resource Management at the Department of Human Resource Management at the University of South Africa (Unisa), South Africa. She is a registered Psychologist (cat. Industrial) at the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) since 2009 and also a registered human resource practitioner and the South African board for people practices (SABPP). She is also an author and co-author of several published articles in local and international journals. In addition, she presented several papers at national and international conferences.