

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL OF THE EFFECTS OF TRAINING ON LEARNING  
AND KEY OUTCOMES

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by

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To my family

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my family, especially to my father who has played an instrumental role in my life. I am in deep gratitude for the unconditional love and support from my mum and my sister, Karina, for her valuable comments on my work. I am so thankful to my husband, Patrick, for all the support that he has given me throughout the work on this thesis. He unselfishly gives me space and support when I am absorbed in working on this thesis. Without them, attaining this degree would not have been possible and my dream would never have come true. I love you all!

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## **ABSTRACT**

Over the past decades, substantial changes have taken place in the world of work such as fast changing (labour) market developments, new production concepts, new technology, and increased commercialization, to name but a few. These changes call for reconsidering the notion of careers, emphasizing the need for “sustainable careers” (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015). In so-called “new careers,” the promise of employment security has been replaced with the notion of employability (e.g., Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Hallier, 2009; Inkson & King, 2010). To remain competitive and sustain long-term employment, there is an increased need for improved employability, which is defined as work-centred adaptability that enhances the individual’s capacity to find and use job and career opportunities inside or outside the current workplace (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). In the *Handbook of Research on Sustainable Careers*, De Vos and Van der Heijden (2015) argue that employability is the key factor for workers who need to protect their added value in the modern career era. Training plays a significant role in the career development because training facilitates learning, which is a critical mechanism in employability development (Froehlich, Beusaert, Segers, & Gerken, 2014; Van der Heijden, Gorgievski, & De Lange, 2016; Van der Heijden, Boon, Van der Klink, & Meijs, 2009a) and in sustainable careers (Anseel, 2017; Asuquo & Inaja, 2013).

Employability is advantageous for both the individual and the organisation. On the one hand, employability is important for sustainable careers, in that it gives individuals confidence to deal with volatile labor markets and job insecurity (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Vanhercke, De Cuyper, Peeters, & De Witte, 2014). On the other hand, an employable workforce is an asset for organisations since employers rely on their employees’ knowledge, skills, motivation and other capacities so as to ensure sustainable

performance and thus, to survive and prosper in the long term (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Hence, it seems it is in the interests of both individuals and organisations to invest in employees' employability.

Given the new careers are characterised by self-steering, self-development, flexibility, proactivity and a continuous broadening of expertise of employees throughout their working life (e.g., Van der Heijde, 2014), individuals must now assume primary responsibility for managing their own careers to sustain their careers (Abele & Wiese, 2008; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009; Valcour, 2015; Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015). Yet, the responsibility of employers and organisations should not be overlooked (De Prins, De Vos, Van Beirendonck, & Segers, 2015; Newman, 2011; Semeijn, Van Dam, Van Vuuren, & Van der Heijden, 2015). While employability has predominantly been seen from the viewpoint of the individual (e.g., De Cuyper, Van den Broeck, & De Witte, 2015; Smith, 2010), an exhaustive account of employability cannot exist outside the context in which careers take place (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). In the employability literature, there is currently shortage of research that addresses how individuals and organisations can actively stimulate employees' employability development.

Social cognitive career theory focuses on the development of career interests, making career choices, and individual and contextual influences on career behavior (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Based on social cognitive theory (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 1994), this study aims to develop and test a learning-centred model that focuses on job performance and employability. The model includes personal factors, social contextual factors and organisational intervention, all of which are seen as contributing elements to employability (e.g. Ling, Qing, & Shen, 2014; Vanhercke et al., 2014; Veld, Semeijn, & Van Vuuren, 2015). It also includes learning, which takes place in a training context in the current study and is viewed as a critical mechanism in

employability development (Manuti, Pastore, Scardigno, Giancaspro, & Morciano, 2015; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a) and in sustainable careers (Anseel, 2017; Asuquo & Inaja, 2013). Given that employability primarily interests the individual whereas job performance primarily interests the employer, it follows that job performance should also be taken into account along with employability when career sustainability is considered (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Semeijn et al., 2015).

The design is quasi-experimental, including multisource measurement (supervisors and employees) with four measurement points (Time 1: assessment one month prior to the training; Time 2: assessment just before the training; Time 3: assessment immediately after the training; Time 4: six months after the training). Participants number 334 (158 males, 176 females) sales representatives working for a large retail organisation and 265 insurance agents (150 males, 115 females) working for an insurance company in Hong Kong.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) is the main data analysis method. The results show that individual factors and social contextual factors influence employability through learning. In particular, motivation to learn is positively related to employee learning in both companies and supervisor support is positively related to motivation to learn and employee learning in both companies. Openness to experience is positively related to motivation to learn and learning in the retail organization. The result also pinpoints that learning affect employability directly but also has indirect influence on job performance through employability. The full mediating role of employability in linking learning to job performance indicates that employability is an important mechanism through which learning exerts influence on job performance.

The current study makes several important contributions. First, it shows that training is an

important intervention to foster the development of employability and explains the important role of learning in the development of employability which are consistent with previous work (e.g., De Vos, De Hauw, & Van der Heijden, 2011; Froehlich et al., 2014; Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a). Learning as a result of training enables employees to acquire skills, knowledge, behaviour or other capacities to ensure sustainable performance. In other words, learning leads to a win-win situation for employees and their organizations. The win for employees lies in the feelings of job or employment security and hope for the future (Ghoshal, Bartlett, & Moran, 1999), whereas there is a win for organization in the form of increased job performance. Such a “mutual gain” outcomes warrant organizational intervention in developing employee’s employability by providing training opportunities, although it does not imply that informal learning activities are perceived as less important. Organisations should re-focus their training interventions, aiming at not only job performance, but also employability.

The current study demonstrates that individual factors, supervisor support as well as organizational intervention in training stimulates learning and thereby enhance employability. Thus, it supports the notion in the current career literature that employability development should be the joint responsibility between employers and employees (Clarke, 2008; Orpen, 1994). Both individuals and organisations need to perform their respective career management roles in employability development (Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005; Sturges, Guest, Conway & Davey, 2002). Employees are expected to participate in various career management behaviours such as training while employers are expected to provide career development opportunities such as training opportunities (Clarke, 2008; Eby, Allen, & Brinley, 2005).

Moreover, the current study confirms the role of individual agency together with social



contextual factors and organizational support in stimulating learning that drives employability. This is in line with social cognitive career theory (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 1994) which captures how individual characteristics and contextual factors affect work and career performance via learning process. This is also consistent with extant research which indicates that both individual and contextual factors have an influence on employability through learning (e.g., Van der Klink, Van der Heijden, Boon, & Van Rooij, 2014; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a). The current study demonstrates the important role individuals play in the employability development, implying that individuals have considerable control in employability development. Despite this, employability development cannot only rely on individual. Indeed, contextual factors can also play a significant role. In particular, agency-based intervention, such as training, remains a viable tool to foster employability, undermining the significant role of employers in employees' employability development. In fact, offering training opportunities and learning environment in which participation in training is supported by managers is simply not enough, employees must be more engaged in the learning activities. Organisations should also be aware of individual factors such as motivation to learn and openness to experience, which are significant antecedents to learning.

Finally, human resource practitioners should pay attention to cultural and institutional contexts when designing training intervention aimed at enhancing employability. The current study shows that supervisor support has important impacts on learning and employability development in Hong Kong organisations because of the impact of Chinese culture on employee's attitude and behavior. It is particularly critical for human resource practitioners to create a learning environment in which learning is strongly encouraged and supported by managers. To a wider perspective, the current study has managerial implications for organisations operating in Chinese culture to develop employee's employability.

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## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND**

Human resource management practices, labour market conditions and career patterns have evolved significantly in recent decades. A number of macro-level factors accounts for the aforementioned changes in careers, including an increasingly dynamic and globalised economy and rapid technological innovation, which are reflected in decreased stability of employment (Friedman, 2005; Kompier, 2006; Quinlan & Bohle, 2009). Management practices have also had a profound impact on career patterns. Most significant among these are organisational delayering (resulting in fewer opportunities for promotion), decreased emphasis on employer-driven career management programmes, increased focus on short-term financial results, the widespread use of reductions in force to influence those results, the use of off-shoring to countries with lower labour costs and externalisation of a greater proportion of the workforce into contract positions that do not offer security of employment (Cappelli & Keller, 2014). These changes are found in both Western and non-Western countries (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 2010; Huang, Niu, Lee, & Ashford, 2012; König, Probst, Staffen, & Graso, 2011; Ngo, Liu, & Cheung, 2017; Ngo, Loi, & Foley, 2013). Consequently, these create challenges for both employers and employees and have led to growing importance of employees' employability which is defined as work-centred adaptability that enhances the individual's capacity to find and use job and career opportunities inside or outside the current workplace (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

### **1.2 THE CONCEPT OF EMPLOYABILITY**

Employability has been studied from different perspectives (see chapter 2 for more in-depth information). In employability literature, there are numerous conceptual issues regarding employability, resulting in different approaches to and meanings of

employability. Harvey (2001) focuses on the employability of graduate students and argues that “employability is the ability of the graduate to get a satisfying job” (p. 100). Rothwell and Arnold (2007) focus on holding a job rather than getting a job and define employability as “the ability to keep the job one has or to get the job one desires” (p. 25) whereas Forrier and Sels (2003) focus on getting new employment within the organization or in another organization and define employability as “an individual’s chance of a job in the internal and/or external labour market” (p. 106). From psychological perspectives, employability can be interpreted through three dominant approaches: competence-based approach (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), dispositional approach (e.g., Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; Fugate & Kinicki, 2008) and perceived employability (e.g., De Cuyper & De Witte, 2008; De Cuyper, Van der Heijden, & De Witte, 2011). Competence-based approach is introduced by Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) who suggest that individual has to utilise his or her competences to get an employment and define employability as “the continuous fulfilling, acquiring or creating work through the optimal use of competences” (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijde, 2006, p. 453). Dispositional approach is developed by Fugate et al. (2004) who define employability as “a form of work specific active adaptability that enables workers to identify and realize career opportunities” (p.16), and therefore adaptability is important for obtaining new employability. De Cuyper and De Witte (2010) define employability as the “worker’s perception of available job opportunities, either with the current employer (i.e., on the internal labour market; internal perceived employability) or with another employer (i.e., on the external labour market)” (p. 2) and it is referred to as perceived employability.

Although there are a variety of definitions concerning employability in the employability literature, these definitions share some similarities. Employability refers to an

individual's ability and opportunity to find a job (e.g. "the ability of graduate to get a satisfying job" (Harvey, 2001, p. 100)), retain a job (e.g. "the ability to keep the job one has" (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007, p. 25) and move between jobs and/or industries should the need arise (e.g. "internal and/or external labour market" (Forrier & Sels, 2003, p. 106). As a result, employability consists of three core ideas: initial employability, which refers to the ability to make the leap from formal education or training to a first job; internal employability, which refers to the ability to move up the company ladder, acquiring positions of increasing power and responsibility within a single organisation over time; and external employability, which refers to the ability to consider the increasingly important disparities between companies.

The area of concern in employability research has changed over time (see chapter 2 for more in-depth information). The focus of recent employability research is on micro-level of individual and distinction is made between input-based and outcome-based approaches of employability (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Forrier, Sels, & Stynen, 2009; Vanhercke et al., 2014). The input-based approach lays the stress on factors (e.g. competencies or dispositions) that increase this opportunity (e.g., Fugate et al., 2004; Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen, 2013; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) and are antecedents of employability. These factors consists of dispositions, namely self-efficacy (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Moynihan, Roehling, LePine, & Boswell, 2003; Pinquart, Juang, & Silbereisen, 2003), self-esteem (Ellis & Taylor, 1983) and locus of control (Krause & Broderick, 2006), competences (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), knowledge and skills (Hillage & Pollard, 1998), attitudes, for example, adaptability and flexibility (Fugate et al., 2004; Garsten, 2004; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), social capital (Fugate et al., 2004; Kluytmans & Ott, 1999; McArdle, Waters, Briscoe, & Hall, 2007), movement capital (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994;

Forrier & Sels, 2003; Kluytmans & Ott, 1999; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005) and employability capital (Peeters et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, the outcome-based approach focuses on outcomes that are associated with this chance (e.g. perceived employability or labour market positions or transitions between positions) (Berntson, Sverke, & Marklund, 2006; De Cuyper, Mäkikangas, Kinnunen., Mauno, & De Witte, 2012; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Van den Broeck et al., 2014; Vanhercke et al., 2014; Wittekind, Reader , & Grote, 2010).

The focus of the current study is on input-based approach of employability (i.e., knowledge, skills and attitudes, or more general, competencies) and in particular competence-based employability. “The advantage of an input-based approach, compared to more output-oriented ones, is that it measures individuals' career potential and enables scholars to disentangle the importance of the different components to get more insight into their interrelatedness, and to examine how employees may make progress in their employability enhancement” (Van der Heijden et al., 2018, p.237). The advantage of a competence-based measurement approach is that “it measures potential that has already been converted (or that may be converted) into action” (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006, p. 452-453).

### **1.3 EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREER**

Due to the change in human resource management practices and labour market conditions, employability plays a special role in the new career climate in which job security is no longer guaranteed for majority of the labour force (Berglund, Furåker, & Vulkan, 2014; Muffels & Luijkx, 2008; Reich, 2008; Standing, 1999). Until the late 1980s, careers often occurred in a single organisation or a limited number of

organisations (Thijssen, Van der Heijden, & Rocco, 2008; Van Buren, 2003). This traditional organisational career was managed primarily through a paternalistic relationship between employer and employee and involved steady progress along well-defined career paths supported by organisation (Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Thijssen et al., 2008). In the old relational psychological contract, it implied that workers are loyal to the organization and work hard, while accepting a great deal of managerial control (Standing, 1999). In exchange, the employers provided job security and took the responsibility for managing the careers of their employees, providing company supported training and development and promotion opportunities in a hierarchical organizational structure.

In the last 30 years, and across all sectors, there has arguably been a move towards non-linear, self-managed careers, enacted in multiple organisations or industries (e.g., Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Baruch & Bozionelos, 2010; De Vos et al., 2011; Fugate & Ashforth, 2003; Hall, 2004a). In career literature, these emergent career forms are often referred to as the new career (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999). Over this period, and indicative of a more individualist approach, the employment contract in many cases has become less relational and more transactional which is oriented toward “specific, short-term, and monetizable obligations entailing limited involvement of the parties” (Morrison & Robinson, 1997, p. 229). Given the short-term orientation of this new psychological contract, and the more transitional nature of the labor markets in general, most employers are to a larger extent unable, and often unwilling to assume the responsibility for the careers of their employees. These changes have inevitable flow-on effects for career management and development as individuals are now to take more responsibility for their own situations (Baruch, 2004, Clarke & Patrickson, 2008; Thijssen et al., 2008). “Labour is being deregulated and the individual is increasingly expected to initiate, plan, control and take responsibility for her own career” (Allvin,

2004, p. 23). When individuals become responsible for their own careers, the need to be proactive, by seeking opportunities and initiating situations, increases (Crant, 2000; Hall, 1996; Hall & Moss, 1998; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001).

The individualisation of labour indicates that people are acting more self-sufficiently in the labour market. Individuals cannot rely on being employed in one organisation throughout their working career. Instead, employees are more likely to end up changing employment several times during their working lifetimes (Arnold, 1997; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Huang, 2006; Sullivan, 1999). Thus, it becomes increasingly necessary to be able to find new employment when and if needed. Indeed, in many situations, having to acquire new employment could be a necessary result of organisational change or environmental change. In this regard, finding security through employability, so-called employability security (Kanter, 1993; Oss, 2001), means that being able to find new employment when necessary is a mean of finding security in a flexible working life.

The rising uncertainty about long-term or even regular employment as a result of change in employer-employee relationship that has been underlined by fast-paced changes in technology, the society and the structure of competition is becoming increasingly challenging (Baruch, 2015; Callanan, Perri, & Tomkowicz, 2017; Lyons, Schweitzer, & Ng, 2015). These developments have rendered sustainability of utmost importance for careers, stressing the need for sustainable careers (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015).

Sustainable means being “able to last or continue for a long time” (Merriam-Webster, Def. 3), and “able to be maintained at a certain rate or level” (Oxford Dictionaries, Def. 1). Accordingly, a sustainable career is defined as “the sequence of an individual’s different career experiences, reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over

time, crossing several social spaces, and characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual” (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015, p. 7). Although the careers literature tends to lay more stress on the perspective of the individual (e.g., Tomlinson, Baird, Berg, & Cooper, 2018), it must be borne in mind that sustainable careers are also critical to employers who depend on their employees’ knowledge, skills, motivation and other capacities so as to ensure sustainable performance and, thus, to survive and prosper in the long term (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017).

For careers to take place individuals must be able to work on a continuous or regular basis. Thus, employability is important for career sustainability since employability is “the capacity to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment” (Hillage & Pollard, 1998, p.12). This definition highlights that employability concerns individuals and employers and indicates why enhancing employability has become of increasing interest to employers and employees.

Employability is advantageous for both the individual and the organisation. For the individual, employability can be viewed as “a form of work specific active adaptability that enables workers to identify and realise career opportunities” (Fugate et al., 2004, p. 16). Employability is associated with knowledge, skills and attitudes, how those assets are used and the context in which work will be experienced (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Importantly, employability enhances the chance of successful movement in and across the internal or external labour market and leads to job satisfaction and career success (Van Dam, 2004; Veld et al., 2015).

For organisations, employability, initially regarded as primarily a labour market instrument, is now seen much more as “an HR instrument to optimise deployment of staff

within companies” (Forrier & Sels, 2003, p. 104). The benefits of an employable workforce are multi-faceted. Highly employable workers are able to meet rapidly changing job requirements (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) and more easily adapt to new situations (Van Dam, 2004). Organisations that support employability are more likely to achieve greater workforce flexibility, adaptability and competitive advantage; thus, ensuring a positive return on investment (Veld et al., 2015).

Although employability is important for career sustainability, it is still not perfectly understood what fosters its development. In the employability literature, there lacks research that addresses how individuals and organisations can actively stimulate employees’ employability development. The aim of the current study is to fill these gaps by addressing the following two research questions:

1. Who is responsible for employability development?
2. How can employability be developed?

In the following sections, the concept of employability will be discussed so as to provide insight into the different notions of employability. Then, each research question will be discussed in more detail.

#### **1.4 WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR EMPLOYABILITY ENHANCEMENT?**

While it appears that the shift from job security to employability has been broadly accepted as part of the contemporary employment contract, this raises a critical question – who should bear primary responsibility for managing employability, the individual or the organisation? This question has been under a long debate in the recent employability literature.



Employability is considered by some researchers as primarily an individual attribute or a psycho-social construct embodying “individual characteristics that foster adaptive cognition, behavior, and affect, and enhance the individual-work interface” (Fugate et al., 2004, p. 15). Individual attributes, namely career identity, personal adaptability, competences, and social and human capital, lead to proactive and adaptable behaviours that facilitate ongoing career progress (Fugate & Ashforth, 2003; Fugate et al., 2004; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Hence, the employee should be responsible for their own employability and invest in further development in the context of their careers (e.g., Clarke & Patrickson, 2008). They argue that individuals need to participate in activities to enhance their potential in the labor market, while employers offer a job as long as the person is needed. The stress on individual responsibility is based on a tacit (and a rather heroic) assumption that workers are actually fully in control of their careers, unbridled by contextual factors (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010; Tholen, 2015; Van Buren, 2003).

At the same time, it is evident that employability is largely shaped by the work environment and the extent to which organisations share responsibility (Baruch, 2001; Clarke & Patrickson, 2008) through providing appropriate support systems (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Waterman, Waterman, & Collard, 1994). Therefore, employers also play an important role in enhancing individual employability, as organisations still form the context in which learning and careers occurs (e.g., Baruch, 2001; Clarke & Patrickson, 2008; Sturges, Conway, Guest, & Liefoghe, 2005). Consistent with the new psychological contract, it is expected that organisations provide chances for development, encourage career-self management of their employees and offer greater variation in tasks and jobs that may increase employees’ employability (Boom & Metselaar, 2001; Herriot, Manning, & Kidd, 1997; Rousseau, 1995; Thijssen et al., 2008; Van Harten, Knies, &

Leisink, 2016). The managerial literature suggests that companies may utilise a wide range of human resource and work design strategies and practices which aim to develop the skills, competences, knowledge and attitudes of employees and help them face fluctuating demands for numerical and functional flexibility; these practices typically consist of processes related to training activities, working experiences and personal relations (Swanson & Holton, 2009).

A number of studies have noted the importance of supervisor and organizational support and the combined effect of managers and employees working together to build and increase employability (e.g., De Vos et al., 2011; Van Dam, 2004; Wittekind et al., 2010). Where organisations provide this support, the benefits accrue not only to the individual but also to the employer through the creation of a more career resilient workforce. As Benson (2003, p. 173) notes “employability in practice means increased investments in company-financed employee development to guarantee that employees’ skills are up to date and marketable”. Consistent with human capital theory, these investments enhance an employee’s perceived employability with expected benefits for all stakeholders (Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003; Wittekind et al., 2010). As employability increases, an individual’s capacity to adapt to change as jobs and organisations change also increases, hence increasing the chance of career success (Van der Heijden, 2002).

The current employability literature acknowledges joint responsibility between employer and employee for employability enhancement (Clarke, 2008; Clarke & Patrickson, 2008; Veld et al., 2015). They argued that the new career is characterised by jointly managed careers, development to meet organisational and individual needs, and a career focus which is both internal and external to the organization (Clarke, 2012). Employees are expected to be responsible for investing in their employability, while employers are

expected to help their employees increase their employability. Yet, there is little empirical evidence on the role of both organisations and individuals for employability development (De Vos, Dewettinck, & Buyens, 2009; Sandberg, 2000; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). The model in current study incorporates individual factors, social contextual factors and organisational intervention, all of which are seen as contributing elements to employability (e.g., Ling et al., 2014; Vanhercke et al., 2014; Veld et al., 2015). By taking an integrative approach, the current study will improve understanding of how individuals and organisations can actively stimulate employability development.

### **1.5 HOW CAN EMPLOYABILITY BE DEVELOPED?**

There remains considerable doubt in research and practice about which employability development activities are effective in increasing stimulate employability. Employees can increase their perceived employability by taking part in various activities or practices namely training, networking and mentoring, which are positively associated with employability perceptions and attitudes (e.g., Bozionelos et al., 2016; Smith, 2010; Van Dam, 2004; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a). These activities can be initiated by the organisation or the employee. Organisations can, for example, increase employees' employability by offering employability-enhancing opportunities, such as training and networking opportunities, career counselling, providing feedback, self-assessments or performance management (Boom & Metselaar, 2001; De Vos et al., 2009; Nauta, Vianen, Van der Heijden, Van Dam, & Willemsen, 2009; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a). These initiatives, which are planned and managed by the organisation, have been labelled as organisation career management (OCM) (Sturges, Conway, & Liefoghe, 2010). In the employability literature, providing training opportunities is one of the most obvious ways for organisations to develop employees' skills, knowledge and attitudes (Arthur, Bennett, Edens, & Bell, 2003; Birdi, Allan, & Warr, 1997; De Grip & Sanders, 2004), which was

found to predict employability (De Grip & Sanders, 2004; Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a; Van der Klink et al., 2014; Wittekind et al., 2010).

Training develops, transforms and directs individuals' abilities to carry out specific activities. It is defined as the systematic development of competences needed by employees to perform their work (Vuković & Miglič, 2006). McDowall and Saunders (2010) define training as activities provided by an organisation to its employees to help the employees improve effectiveness in their current role. It usually comprises formal activities that entail a specific skill-building element. In line with McDowall and Saunders (2010), Noe (2013) defines training as a formal, planned and continuous effort to facilitate learning of skills, knowledge, job-related competences and behaviours of employees to improve their current job performance.

In an era of global competition, training is one of the functions of human resource management. Training is defined as a subsystem of long-term human resource development which helps employees develop useful competences not only to overcome daily job-related problems, but also to support the development and future growth of the organisation (DeSimone, Werner, & Harris, 2002; MacNeil, 2004). Training is the main way for the organisation to invest in human capital which can influence or change attitude, behaviour and skills of an employee to make him or her better qualified for the job or a higher position. In general, training itself serves two purposes simultaneously: to develop and improve attitude, behaviour and skills of employees to enable them to perform specific tasks in their daily work and meet the quality requirements of human resources for the future (Cagri & Osman, 2010). Therefore, through training, organization may maintain or even improve their competitive advantage.

Training is beneficial for both organisations and employees. According to human capital theory (Becker, 1993), organisational investments in training, on the one hand, can lead to a positive return on investment in terms of improved productivity and, on the other hand, to development of human capital. Individuals who have partaken in training are likely to benefit from such organisational investments by increasing positive individual attitudes and behaviours such as employability (Berntson et al., 2006; Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000; Van der Klink et al., 2014) and job performance (Chiaburu & Tekleab, 2005; Tsai & Tai, 2003). Training, given its job-oriented and direct nature, is a relatively effective way to develop competences of employees as human capital, which in turn helps improve organisational performance and ultimately achieves strategic goals (Crawshaw, Budhwar, & Davis, 2017; DeSimone et al., 2002; MacNeil, 2004; Tynjälä, 2008). Even today, instructor-led classroom training is still the most popular delivery method of formal learning as 51% of learning delivery is face-to-face instructor-led classroom training (Association for Talent Development State of the Industry Report, 2015).

Training will not lead to positive outcomes for employees and employers unless employees learn the skills and knowledge taught in the training programme. Training and learning, to a large extent, are highly related. Learning is a process that focuses on developing individual and organisational potential and building capabilities for the future, including career development (Sloman, 2005). Learning can comprise a range of formal and informal learning activities undertaken by individual employees. Formal learning generally refers to the structured acquisition of work-related knowledge that is conveyed through educational settings where the use of workshops or classes is emphasised for such knowledge acquisition (Beattie, 2006; Park & Jacobs, 2011). In formal learning, learning processes are planned and initiated by management efforts designed to equip employees with work-related skills and knowledge, whether new or

underlying, as competences (Noe, 2013). In contrast, informal learning mainly occurs in non-educational settings where social interactions are undertaken in the workplace to transfer and receive work-related knowledge and skills in a quite casual and unplanned manner (Callanan, Cervantes, & Loomis, 2011; Kyndt, Dochy, & Nijs, 2009). Learning can be further viewed as activity giving rise to a change in knowledge, skill or behaviour (McDowall & Saunders, 2010) and is an important endeavour for improving employability (e.g., De Grip & Sanders, 2004; De Vos et al., 2011; Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a; Van der Klink et al., 2014; Wittekind et al., 2010). Training, thus, is a learning experience that it pursues a relatively change in an individual's knowledge, skill or behaviour that underlies the individual's potential for competitive success in the marketplace (Arthur, Claman, & DeFillippi, 1995; DeCenzo & Robbins, 1995).

Training is a double-edged sword. On one hand, training improves employees' job performance, which is beneficial to the company; on the other hand, training increases employees' employability, which is beneficial to employees. Thus, the company will face a human capital investment risk, which is, "making wedding gowns for others". This conflicting perspectives of employees and employers are referred to as so-called management paradox; employers may be willing to invest in the development of employees at the risk of losing these workers to competing organisations before they can recoup their investment (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011; De Vos, Forrier, Van der Heijden, & De Cuyper, 2017; Martini & Cavenago, 2017). In order to reduce potential risk of talent loss as a result of training, Cappelli (2010) argues that hiring talent from the external labour market rather than developing employees internally has become so common that it essentially represents a core talent management strategy for many firms (Cappelli, 2010). Therefore, organisations face a dilemma about whether to provide training and support

employees to take part in training.

The current study aims to develop and test a learning-centred model that focuses on employability and job performance as a result of training intervention. Training, in the current study, refers to employer-provided classroom-based training. In particular, attention is given to the antecedents (i.e. individual factors and social contextual factors) and outcomes of learning (i.e. job performance and employability), given that learning is considered as a critical mechanism in employability development and career sustainability.

## **1.6 RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

Employability is an important topic for both work and careers. The term refers to chances and competences to obtain work and to continue to work in the future (see, e.g., Forrier & Sels, 2003; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). The importance of one's own responsibility for employability is emphasised in the literature (see, e.g., Clarke, 2008). Today's careers require a large amount of self-responsibility and compel individuals to act on this necessity, preferably to be pro-active on it (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010; Van Dam, 2004). People in general are expected to keep up with relevant developments in their work, make their own choices and maintain their own employability. Clarke and Patrickson (2008) discuss these assumptions and argue that employability should not be the responsibility of either the employee or the employer. Rather, they argue that employability should be a shared responsibility. Based on Clarke and Patrickson's arguments (2008), employees are expected to take individual responsibility to invest in their employability, while employers are expected to assist their employees in enhancing their employability.

Indeed, employability has predominantly been seen from the viewpoint of the individual and is primarily concerned with employees' perceived employability (e.g., De Cuyper et al., 2015; Smith, 2010). However, an exhaustive account of employability cannot exist outside the context in which careers take place (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Studies have shown the importance of factors at the level of the supervisor and the organisation in determining employability (e.g., Van Dam, 2004; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a; Wittekind et al., 2010). Little is known about how social contextual factors and organisational intervention actually integrate with the individual effort of employees in employability development.

One important contribution of the study is that an integrative perspective on employability is adopted. The current study uses individual factors, social contextual factors and organisational intervention, all of which are seen as contributing elements to employability (e.g., Ling et al., 2014; Vanhercke et al., 2014; Veld et al., 2015). This study builds on Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2006) conceptualisation of employability that focuses on developing competences to remain employable. These competences include professional expertise, anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense and balance and are open to contextual influence and may be subject to change through training intervention. In particular, the current study investigates personal factors and social contextual factors as antecedents of learning, which takes place in a training context and is viewed as a critical mechanism in employability development (Manuti et al., 2015; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a).

In recent years, research interest in employability has increased (e.g., De Grip & Sanders, 2004; Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a), particularly how different types of learning influence employability. However, the methodological



design in most employability studies raises concerns about the validity of the research findings.

First, longitudinal studies of employability are scarce. To our knowledge, only two previous studies have focused on the long-term development of employability (Bernston, Näswall, & Sverke, 2008; Mäkikangas, De Cuyper, Mauno, & Kinnunen, 2013). One study investigates the relationship between self-efficacy and employability with a one-year lag between each data collection (Bernston et al., 2008). Another study investigates the role of job insecurity in the individual development of employability, with a one-year lag between measurement of employability (Mäkikangas et al., 2013). Cross-sectional design is common in employability research (e.g., De Vos et al., 2011; Hennekam, 2016; Nauta et al., 2009; Van der Klink et al., 2014; Veld et al., 2015). Cross-sectional design means that measures of predictors and criterion variables are assessed at the same point in time. Hence, it is difficult to unravel the causal relationships between predictors and criterion variables.

The second methodological issue in the extant empirical employability research is the use of single-source and self-report design (e.g., De Vos et al., 2011; Hennekam, 2016; Nauta et al., 2009; Veld et al., 2015). The two longitudinal studies of Bernston et al. (2008) and Mäkikangas, et al. (2013) use self-reports as their primary and only data sources, which is another common practice in the existing employability research. Relying on self-reporting data may give rise to the problem of common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). When data are collected using the same data method, inflation of the relationships can potentially be caused by the bias connected with that specific method in the study.

The problem of common method bias should not be underestimated and it is plausible that a degree of bias has been introduced into the analyses of the existing employability studies. Previous research has found that employees always evaluate themselves better than their employers in employability, believing that they can convince employers that they possess the competences to succeed at their job (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). This shows that employees have the potential to bias their responses upwards based on social desirability. Social desirability refers to “the need for social approval and acceptance and the belief that it can be attained by means of culturally acceptable and appropriate behaviours” (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964, p. 109). It generally refers to individuals’ tendency to present themselves in a favourable light, in spite of their true feelings about an issue or topic (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In various situations, employees may be likely to inflate how they evaluate themselves to appear more competent or capable to their employer (Chiaburu, Sawyer, & Thoroughgood, 2010b).

Another methodological issue concerns the context of employability studies. Most of the existing employability studies have focused on a Western context (Kinnunen, Mäkikangas, Mauno, Siponen, & Nätti, 2011; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a; Wittekind et al., 2010). Specifically, the two longitudinal studies of Bernston et al. (2008) and Mäkikangas, et al. (2013) are conducted in European countries – Finland and Sweden. This gives rise to the concern of generalisability of research findings across national contexts. Different national contexts may influence employees’ perception of both learning and employability. Extensive employability studies in a Western context makes it difficult to obtain a bird’s-eye view of data, particularly how learning influences employability.

To close the methodology gaps in the existing employability research, the current study

utilises a quasi-experimental design, which is one of the major contributions of the current study. It incorporates multisource measurement (supervisors and employees) and multiple measurement points in two samples (a retail company and an insurance company) in Hong Kong. In particular, employability and job performance are measured one month before the training, personal factors (openness to experience, protean career orientation, job involvement and motivation to learn ) and social contextual factors (supervisor support and peer support) are measured just before the training (Time 2), learning as a result of training and extrinsic benefits are measured immediately after the training (Time 3), while employability and job performance are measured again six months after the training (Time 4).

Multisource measurement is employed to protect against common method bias. Data are collected from different sources, employees as well as their supervisors, in the current study, making it difficult or impossible for the mind-set of the rater to bias the observed relationship between the predictor and criterion variables.

Using multi-wave design removes the causality concern. Multi-wave design can provide more specific information about the stability and change in the variables and about cross-lagged (i.e. over time) relationships (De Lange, 2005; Taris & Kompier, 2003). In particular, in the current study, employability and job performance are assessed by supervisors one month prior to training and six months after training so that inferences about the casual relation between predictor and criterion variables are much more plausible.

The current study also includes two organisations that are located in a non-Western country - Hong Kong. This allows us to make statements that are more generalisable than

research conducted in a Western context. More importantly, given that the Hong Kong culture differs from Western cultures, the current research may provide new insights into the issues of employability in a non-Western work context. Chinese culture and recent changes in the labour market in Hong Kong (e.g. downsizing, restructuring, rise in the number of contract-based jobs) may shed light on employees' learning, which in turn may have great influence on employability. By investigating the relationship between learning and key learning outcomes such as employability, the study at hand contributes to our knowledge about how learning influences employability of employees in a different cultural context. The results of this study can be compared with those found in other countries and enrich our understanding in this regard.

Accordingly, the current study aims to develop and test a learning-centered model which focuses on employability and job performance. The current study utilises a quasi-experimental design. Data are collected from multiple sources (supervisors and employees) and multiple measurement points (Time 1: assessment one month prior to training; Time 2: assessment prior to the start of training; Time 3: assessment immediately after training and Time 4: assessment six months after training) in two samples (a retail company and an insurance company) in Hong Kong.

## **1.7 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE MODEL**

The current research model is based on social cognitive career theory, which is a well-established and comprehensive theory from the field of career development (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 1994). Social cognitive career theory draws on Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and the triadic-reciprocal model, which propose bidirectional influences between individual characteristics (e.g., abilities and beliefs), contextual characteristics (e.g., social support), and overt behaviors. Social cognitive

career theory focuses on the development of career interests, making career choices, and individual and contextual influences on career behavior (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 1994). The theory explains how person inputs (e.g., gender) and contextual factors (e.g., social support) affect work and career performance via a cognitive-behavioral process (Zacher, Rudolph, Todorovic, & Ammann, 2018). As noted by Lent, Brown and Hackett (2002), social cognitive career theory “attempts to trace some of the complex connections between persons and their career-related contexts, between cognitive and interpersonal factors, and between self-directed and externally imposed influences on career behavior” (p. 256). The current study is based on the social cognitive theory because it comprehensively captures both content and process aspects of career development (Brown & Lent, 2016; Lent & Brown, 2013).

Social cognitive theory proposes that individual characteristics and resources can affect people’s career development via learning processes and the psychological regulation of behavior (Lent et al., 2002). These characteristics and resources may consist of personality traits (e.g., extraversion), demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender), together with relatively stable abilities, beliefs, attitudes, and motivation.

Social cognitive career theory also suggests that individuals steer their career development within the context of environmental opportunities and constraints (Lent et al., 2002). These contextual factors may consist of more proximal factors (e.g., working conditions, social support and networks, career development programs) and more distal factors (e.g., specific academic disciplines, societal and cultural contexts).

In addition, the prediction of active career behaviors (e.g., making career choices, investing effort to achieve career goals) is a central component of social cognitive career

theory (Lent et al., 2002). Social cognitive tradition lays stress on the role of individual agency in shaping their own careers (e.g., Lent et al., 2002). Specific active career behaviours may consist of goal setting, long-term planning, use of specific strategies, and feedback seeking (Zacher & Frese, 2018).

Based on the social cognitive career theory (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 1994), career-related issues can be explained through interaction among individual-behaviour-environment ternary. The choices and behaviour of the individual depend on how the individual interprets the environment. In the current study, employee's perception of workplace setting such as supervisor support (environment) together with personal characteristics such as personality (individual) influence whether employee will take part in training (behaviour).

Accordingly, this study aims to develop and test a learning-centred model that focuses on employability and job performance. The model incorporates individual factors, social contextual factors and organisational intervention, all of which are seen as contributing elements to employability (e.g., Ling et al., 2014; Vanhercke et al., 2014; Veld et al., 2015). Learning, which takes place in a training context in this study, is viewed as a critical mechanism in employability development (e.g., Manuti et al., 2015; Van der Heijden et al. 2009a) and in sustainable careers (Anseel, 2017; Asuquo & Inaja, 2013). In line with social cognitive career theory, the current study consists of individual characteristics and contextual influences and examines how these individual characteristics and contextual influences may lead to change in people's career via the learning process. The conceptual framework of this study is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

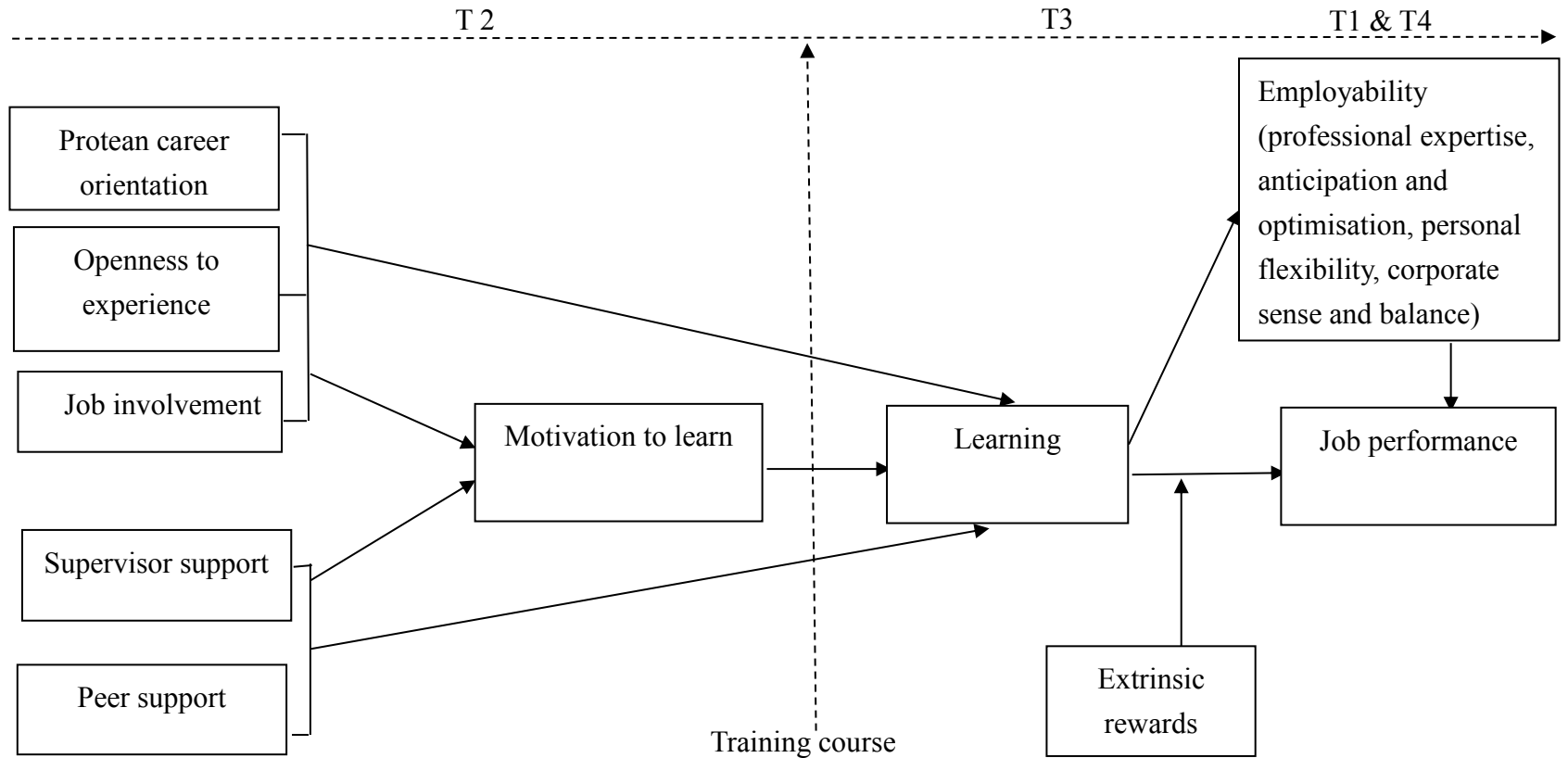


FIGURE 1.1. FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY.

Notes: T1: pre-training assessment one month prior to start of training programme; T2: pre-training assessment prior to start of training programme; T3: post-training assessment immediately after training programme; T4: post-training assessment six months after training programme.

Individual factors in the current study are captured by the personality traits of openness to experience, protean career orientation, job involvement and motivation to learn. Personality has an agentic character because it is reflected in motives and choices (Winter, John, Stewart, Klohn, & Duncan, 1998), and openness to experience is manifested as inquisitiveness, information and feedback seeking and tendency to engage in intellectual tasks and assimilate experiences (Arteche, Chamorro-Premuzic, Ackerman, & Furnham, 2009; Digman, 1990). These motives render openness to experience a characteristic that facilitates motivation to learn and individual learning (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2009). Protean career orientation facilitates self-directed career management to attain career goals, which in turn encourages motivation to learn and individual learning (Sanders, Oomens, Blonk, & Hazelzet, 2011). Job involvement is a cognitive state or belief that reflects an individual's psychological connection with his or her present job and the salience of the job to the individual's self-image (Kanungo, 1982a), and such psychological connection influences motivation to learn and individual learning. Motivation to learn is a predecessor to learning that can be influenced by individual characteristics (openness to experience, protean career orientation, job involvement) and social contextual factors (supervisor support and peer support).

Regarding the contextual factors, the social contextual elements are considered in terms of supervisor support and peer support, which are critical factors in individual employee outcomes (Edmondson & Boyer, 2013) and expected to play important roles in motivation and learning and in the extent to which learning is affected by training. The contribution of the employer to employability is represented by formal training intervention. Extrinsic rewards, which refer to tangible rewards such as increased salary, are considered a moderator in the relationship between learning and job performance.



Employability and job performance are included as outcomes of learning in the current study. It appears that to enjoy the privilege of sustainable career, individuals must achieve at least two goals simultaneously: first, to maintain, or sustain, their employability, and second to demonstrate at least adequate levels of job performance. Hence, employability is included as an outcome that represents mostly benefits for employees while job performance is included as an outcome that represents mostly benefits for employers.

With a perspective towards the future, employability is defined as work-centred adaptability that increases the individual's capacity to find and use job and career opportunities inside or outside the current workplace (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Fugate et al., 2004; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Considering its meaning, in the present era of constant, unpredictable and often asymmetrical change employability is essential if the individual is to achieve continuous or regular employment in the long-term, which is central to a sustainable career (Semeijn et al., 2015; Valcour, 2015; Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015). This is because career sustainability in such an environment requires a dynamic, resilience and long-term oriented approach (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017; Newman, 2011), qualities that are inherent into the idea of employability (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017).

Job performance pertains to the behaviours individuals engage at work together with the outcomes of these behaviours (Sonnentag, Volmer, & Spychala, 2008). It refers to the present and the past, but also serves as signal of what the person has the potential of doing in the future (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Sonnentag et al., 2008). Thus, insufficient job performance is likely to harm career sustainability by means of compromising future employment continuity and long term career progression. Job performance is, hence, a requirement for sustainable career and research on sustainable careers without

consideration given job performance would be incomplete. Moreover, a fundamental premise in the notion of sustainable careers is that sustainability is founded upon mutual benefits for individuals and employers (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017; Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015). Given that employability primarily interests the individual whereas job performance primarily interests the employer (Bozionelos et al., 2016), job performance should also be considered together with employability when career sustainability is taken into account.

Employability in the current study is “viewed through the lens of Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden’s (2006) comprehensive model” (Bozionelos et al., 2016. p.138). This model regards employability as a set of competences, with five dimensions including professional expertise, anticipation and optimisation, personal flexibility, corporate sense and balance. These competences are subject to development through training (Boyatzis, 2008).

The current study utilises a quasi-experimental design. Data are collected from multiple sources (supervisors and employees) and multiple measurement points (Time 1: assessment one month prior to training, Time 2: assessment prior to start of training, Time 3: assessment immediately after training and Time 4: assessment six months after training) in two samples (a retail company and an insurance company) in Hong Kong.

## **1.8 THE HONG KONG CONTEXT**

Hong Kong is a large cosmopolitan city under Chinese sovereignty. Citizens have been accustomed to western style administration, education, and rule of law and generally have a westernized outlook. According to the Hong Kong Government’s population census (Census & Statistics Department, 2016), the Hong Kong context is characterised by

Chinese (i.e. constituting 96% of the population). Local Chinese citizens still keep Chinese traditions and customs, with strong identification to the Chinese ethnicity and culture (Cheung & Arnold, 2010). In a culture characterized by Chinese traditionality, people typically stress respect for authority, social relationships, collectivistic value, etc (Chen, Tsui, & Farh, 2002; Farh, Zhong, & Organ, 2004; Yang, Yu, & Yeh, 1989). It is very likely that Chinese culture influences employees' orientation and perceptions in the workplace (Chen & Aryee, 2007; Hui, Wong, & Tjosvold, 2007; Lin & Ho, 2009; Ngo & Li, 2015; Rawwas, Swaidan, & Isakson, 2007).

Since the 1990s, Hong Kong experienced increasing economic uncertainty. Changes such as Asian Financial Crisis, global economic shocks, the structural change from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based and financial economy have come to the Hong Kong labour market (Tam & Ip, 2017). Some organisations have undergone downsizing and restructuring due to increasing competitive pressure. As a result, an increasing number of local workers has been hired as part-time, temporary or contract staff while there has been a decrease in job tenure (Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Chan, 2016; Tam & Ip, 2017). The total number of casual employees, part-time employees and self-employed persons in Hong Kong rose by 40% from 1999 to 2015 (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2016). The local working population has been exposed to more employment risks. The latest Hong Kong World Value Survey (Hong Kong World Value Survey, 2014), conducted in 2014, sheds light on anxiety relating to job loss (job security). A relatively high level of job insecurity is prevalent in every age group of workers (Chan, 2016; Ngo et al., 2013; Tam & Chiu, 2010; Tam & Ip, 2017). This may have an important influence on the career development of Hong Kong employees.

Due to the change in the labour conditions, the onus of responsibility to strengthen one's

position in the labour market falls increasingly on the individual. This is because, as organisations restructure to become flatter and lean so as to stay competitive, they cannot make promises to employees concerning career advancement, which may not be deliverable in the long term because of business uncertainties. Hence, individuals are compelled to take initiatives for maintaining their careers and this is consistent with the notion of modern, boundaryless and protean career. In the recent Global Workforce Study (Towers Watson, 2010), most Hong Kong employees state that they know that they are increasingly on their own for managing their careers. As a consequence, most Hong Kong employees regard training as one of the major career development practices that can help reduce employment risks (Tam & Ip, 2017).

## **1.9 DEFINITIONS**

Openness to experience is defined as “tolerance for the unfamiliar, interest in ideas and problems, and appreciation of experience involving actions, fantasy, values, feelings and aesthetics” (Tesch & Cameron, 1987, p. 617).

Protean career orientation refers to individual’s tendency to embark on a career with an aim to achieve personally perceived success through self-directed career management (Direnzo, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2015, p.36).

Job involvement is a cognitive state or belief that reflects an individual’s psychological connection with his or her present job and the salience of the job to the individual’s self-image (Kanungo, 1982a, 1982b).

Supervisor support is defined as “the extent to which supervisors behave in ways congruent with training objectives and optimise employee use of new learning on the job”

(Ng, 2015, p. 224).

Peer support refers to the extent to which peers behave in ways congruent with training objectives and optimise peers' application of new learning to the job (Baldwin, Ford, & Blume, 2009).

Motivation to learn is defined as a specific desire of a trainee to learn the content of the training program (Noe & Schmitt, 1986).

Training is planned, formal and continuous effort by management to improve competency levels of employees and organisational performance (Noe, 2013).

Learning is defined as trainees' perception of the extent to which their knowledge or skills has improved through training.

Employability is defined as "the continuous fulfilling, acquiring or creating work through the optimal use of competences" (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijde, 2006, p. 453).

Extrinsic rewards are defined as tangible rewards such as bonus and promotion (Sire, 1993).

## **1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter introduces the background and describes the concept of employability. It also explains research objectives and justifications and contributions of this research. This chapter also discusses the theoretical background, construction of the model and the conceptual framework of the study. Chapter 2 provides different meanings of and

approaches to employability. Various contemporary issues to its conceptualization will therefore be discussed. In particular, this chapter explains why the current study focuses on competence-based employability. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the antecedents of learning. In particular, how individual and social contextual factors influence motivation to learn and learning is discussed. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the outcomes of learning. Specifically, how learning influences employability and job performance is discussed. Chapter 5 describes methodological issues relating to the quantitative study. Chapter 6 presents the data analysis process and reports the results. Chapter 7 discusses the key findings, limitations, strengths and practical implications of the study.

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW I**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Although the concept of employability is not particularly new, it has been increasingly appearing in policy documents and in research and management literature since the mid-1990s. This development has resulted in a wide range of approaches to the phenomenon. The number of different approaches to and meanings of employability has made it quite difficult to comprehend. This chapter begins with a discussion of the definitions of employability. It is followed by discussion of various contemporary approaches to its conceptualisation, along with their related issues.

### **2.2. DEFINING EMPLOYABILITY**

Employability is derived from “employment” and “ability”; thus, it concerns the ability to be employed. The concept has attracted much attention from scholars, policy makers, and practitioners alike, and it has been studied in multiple disciplines, including education, psychology, management and career research. The use of the concept “employability” dates back to the beginning of the 20th century (Gazier, 2001). Since then, it has been used at different perspectives and approaches and resulted in multiple definitions and operationalisations for this concept, which Gazier (1998) described as being a “fuzzy notion, often ill-defined and sometimes not defined at all” (p. 298).

#### **2.2.1 EMPLOYABILITY IN PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE**

The employability literature describes different approaches to employability (e.g., Berntson et al., 2006; Bernston & Marklund, 2007; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Fugate, 2006; Nauta et al., 2009; Rothwell, Jewell, & Hardie, 2009). From psychological perspectives, employability can be interpreted through three dominant approaches: competence-based approach (e.g., Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), dispositional approach (e.g.,

Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Fugate et al., 2004) and perceived employability (e.g., De Cuyper et al., 2011; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). The psychological literature on employability takes the individual as the centre of attention, often very explicitly so by highlighting the importance of subjectivity through individuals' perceptions (Griffeth et al., 2005; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Van Dam, 2005; Van Emmerik, Schreurs, De Cuyper, Jawahar, & Peeters, 2012). The psychological approach is advantageous that it is the self-perception, but not the "objective" employability, that matters most, particularly in times of organizational change, as individuals act upon their perception instead of any objective reality. It is not the situation or reality itself, but the perception of a situation or reality, that affects behaviour, feelings, and thoughts (e.g., Katz & Kahn, 1978; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Magnusson, 1981; McLean Parks, Kidder, & Gallagher, 1998; Meyer & Allen, 1997). The sense of being employable is more relevant than actually getting a job (Berntson et al., 2006). In the following section, three different approaches will be discussed in detail.

#### **2.2.1.1 COMPETENCE-BASED APPROACH**

The competence-based approach focuses on the individual's perception of his or her capabilities, abilities, and skills that fosters employment opportunities. Competency, that is, "an individual's ability to act knowledgeably, effectively, deliberately, strategically, and reflectively in a situation" (Svensson, Ellström, & Åberg, 2004, p. 480), also refers to a core facet of human capital (Becker, 1964). These competences result from formal training as well as daily experiences and learning on the job. The amount and characteristics of the accumulated competences are important assets in building sustainable careers, which can entail a number of interruptions, changes or re-orientations across different jobs and career paths (Bernhard-Oettel & Näswall, 2015). In general, the competence-based approach to employability stresses the importance of continuous



learning and expertise development for two reasons: first, as a necessity to meet the changing needs of organisations and, second, to realise personal aspirations and potential in work (De Vos et al., 2011; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Thus, in the competence-based approach, the aim of employability should be to unify the individual capabilities with the organizational core competencies. In other words, competence-based employability is beneficial for both career and organizational outcomes. For the organization, employability leads to a sustained competitive advantage at the firm level. Therefore, it is important to invest in the development of human capital and workers' competences. For the individual, competence-based employability leads to objective (e.g., promotion and salary) and subjective career success (e.g., job satisfaction, career satisfaction and life satisfaction) (e.g., Bozionelos et al., 2016; De Vos et al., 2011; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden et al., 2009b). Although the aim of the authors is to provide resource management with a balance between organizational requirements and employees' career development, the competence-based view stresses the individual's responsibility and is in line with the boundaryless careers.

Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) suggest a conceptualisation of employability primarily based on numerous broad competences that consist of social and adaptive competences (Rodriguez, Patel, Bright, Gregory, & Gowing, 2002) on top of technical domain knowledge. Evidence from both strategic human resource management (Cappelli & Crocker-Hefter, 1996; Wright & Snell, 1998) and career theory (Miles & Snow, 1996) supports the importance of a broader competence package because being flexible and ready to adapt to new situations is regarded to be critical when organisations exercise more flexibility and reorganise more frequently and when working life becomes more turbulent. More specifically, the evidence suggests increased significance of adaptive and social competences (Rodriguez et al., 2002) alongside domain-related knowledge and

skills in jobs, following the evolution in organisational form. The competence-based employability dimensions relate to job-related matters as well as aspects of broader career development. They adopt a dual orientation by considering the interests of both employees and employers: towards development of human potential and towards development of the work process (Van der Krogt, 1998).

Competence-based employability consists of five competences, including occupational expertise, anticipation and optimisation, personal flexibility, corporate sense and balance. These competences refer to an individual's knowledge, skills and abilities needed to perform responsibilities within a job and adequately perform various tasks and to the individual's adaptability to changes in the internal and external labour market (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

The first dimension of employability is occupational expertise. It refers to skills and knowledge required to perform responsibilities within a job and adequately perform various tasks. Occupational expertise is a substantial element of employability (Boudreau, Boswell, & Judge, 2001; Onstenk & Kessels, 1999). Occupational expertise is also an important human capital factor for the vitality of organisations. Furthermore, due to the intensification of knowledge, the significance of occupation expertise is growing (Enders, 2002; Schein, 1996; Van der Heijden, 2005). People with occupational expertise usually gain greater benefits from inter-firm career opportunities (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996).

The second and third dimensions of employability concern adapting to changes and development. An important component of employability that Kluytmans and Ott (1999, p. 266) describe is the "willingness to adapt to changes in terms of employment, job

contents, conditions, or locations”. Future changes that might influence the work context of employees include, for example, mass unemployment and reorganisation. Hence, in the employability variables, two types of adaption are distinguished, the first being a self-initiating proactive variant that refers to anticipation and optimisation and the second being a more passive and reactive variant that refers to personal flexibility (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

Anticipation and optimisation refer to self-initiating proactive behaviour to “prepare for future work changes in a personal and creative manner in order to strive for the best possible job and career outcomes” (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006, p.454). In the contemporary and knowledge-intensive market, work complexity and difficulty make it challenging for employers to predict future work changes; thus, employees must enact their jobs and their professional life themselves (Weick, 1996). In the employability career approach that Fugate et al. (2004) adopt, “person centered active adaptation and proactivity conceptually underpin the construct of employability”. In today’s knowledge-intensive market, employees have opportunities to fulfill labour requirements by creating a future for themselves rather than passively expecting the organisation to act for them (Weick, 1996).

Personal flexibility refers to the ability to adapt easily to all kinds of changes in internal and external environments that are not related to one’s immediate job domain. Personal flexibility is not related to flexibility at the content level of a job. Besides creative adaptability, employees must passively adapt to changes taking place in their work and labour market environment that they did not choose. As well as referring to the capacity for smooth transitions between jobs and between organisations, the concept includes adapting easily to all kinds of changes in the internal and external labour market.

Numerous changes in organisations and their environments, such as mergers and reorganisations, call for flexible employees at multiple levels. These changes require employees who can cope easily with, and recover readily from, disappointment. As the spatial and temporal structures of organisations change, greater variation in working time and place occurs. An example is phenomena such as telework. Another source of variation is the employee's pool of colleagues or the peer group, which is often subject to changes (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

The dimension of personal flexibility is regarded as a crucial ingredient of employability (Boudreau et al., 2001; Fugate et al., 2004) and is often labelled adaptability. Employees with high scores for personal flexibility welcome changes; therefore, they gain greater benefit and further their career development from different experiences. Flexible employees “expose themselves more easily to changes and have a better understanding of how to take advantage of changes” (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006, p.455).

Corporate sense is defined as participation and performance in different work groups, which involves accepting and sharing responsibilities, knowledge, experiences, goals and feelings (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Employees today have to participate more as members of an integrated team, identifying and accepting collective responsibility for work tasks and group-based decision making (Chapman & Martin, 1995). In addition to working in a team, corporate sense extends the organisational citizenship behaviour to participation in different work groups such as working teams, the department, the organisation, the occupational community and other networks. In recent decades, the number of groups to which employees may belong has increased significantly (Frese, 2000; Seibert et al., 2001). Besides departmental and organisational collaboration, employees also participate in project networks, occupational networks,

industry networks and virtual networks. This creates a holistic awareness of corporate sense surrounding the employee from the team layer all the way to the intra-organisational network layer.

Balance is defined as the ability to make an efficient compromise between employees' opposing work and employers' opposing interests, career and private interests (Camps & Rodriguez, 2011; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Employability, indeed, is "an exchange relationship between [the] employer and employee, a relationship where both parties balance their investments and profits. Working life is characterised by strongly competing demands that are not easily balanced" (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006, p.456). Increasingly, organisations must cope with paradox (Handy, 1994). Organisations often refer to employability as the deployment of their personnel. Meanwhile, employability refers to highly self-managing and self-reliant employees. Moreover, organisations require highly flexible and at the same time highly committed employees. Bolweg and Maenhout (1995) call this development the management paradox. Another paradox that employees confront is the need to both specialise and de-specialise. According to Weick (1996), being able to alternate between these two is highly beneficial in present-day boundaryless careers.

These five competences can be specific or generic (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Occupational expertise reflects a specific competence, whereas anticipation and optimisation, personal flexibility, corporate sense and balance represent generic competences (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). A specific competence means that such competence is developed and applied specifically according to the nature of work tasks and position, whereas a generic competence is applied universally regardless of work position. Both specific and generic competences must work closely alongside

each other to create a holistic sense of employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). This differentiation between generic and specific competences is consistent with boundaryless careers which may extend to occupational transitions. In this sense, the operationalization of competence-based employability is based on the premise that in the boundaryless career environment, specific occupational expertise is not sufficient to have a positive work outcome, and thus, generic competencies are also needed.

Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) developed Fugate et al.'s (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Fugate et al., 2004) work into their conceptualization. Anticipation and optimisation and personal flexibility components which related to being proactive or self-initiated align with the notion of adaptation in the dispositional approach (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Fugate et al., 2004). Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) also develop an instrument including both types of competences. Previous research in various settings, among professionals working in different occupations, has supported the psychometric qualities of the measurement (Van der Heijden, 2005; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a).

Employability is defined as a critical condition for career success (Fugate et al., 2004; Hall, 2002; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), i.e. the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person's work experiences over time (Arthur et al., 2005). While objective career success is measured by indicators like organizational position or attained promotions (Arthur et al., 2005), subjective career success is measured as workers' individual perceptions of their own success, based on evaluations of personal accomplishments and future prospects (Dries, Pepermans, & Carlier, 2008). It has been shown by empirical studies that competence-based employability leads to objective success such as promotions (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Van

der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden, De Lange, Demerouti, & Van der Heijde, 2009b) and salary (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) as well as subjective career success such as job satisfaction (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), life satisfaction (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), perceived marketability (De Vos et al., 2011) and perceived marketability (De Vos et al., 2011).

### **2.2.1.2 DISPOSITIONAL APPROACH**

The dispositional approach derives from the multidimensional “psycho-social” conceptualisation of employability (Fugate et al., 2004). Fugate et al. (2004, p. 15) describe employability “as a psychosocial construct that embodies individual characteristics that foster adaptive cognition, behaviour, and affect, and enhance the individual-work interface”. Employability is conceived as “psychosocial in that it encompasses individual characteristics that bridge the individual–environment gap” (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008, p. 505). The psychosocial construct comprises three unique, though inter-related, dimensions: career identity, personal adaptability and social and human capital. Fugate et al. (2004) focus on person-centered dimensions as they believe that employability is a predisposition toward being employed more than about external criteria such as experience and specific job skills. Their three dimensions are regarded as influential in causing adaptive behavior. Each dimension has value independently but it is the synergy among the three that creates the construct of employability.

Career identity refers to how individuals define themselves within the career context and is likened to a “career compass” that can be used for direction throughout one's career (Fugate et al., 2004; Inkson, 2006; McArdle et al., 2007). Career identity includes beliefs, values, goals and personality traits and helps one make sense of the past while giving purpose to the future (Fugate et al., 2004). Probably, these authors propose that

employability depends on the clarity of one's career identity through a clear understanding of one's career values and goals. This identity is one of the many role identities an individual can possess. Individuals organize their role identities in a hierarchical manner, with reference to social identity theory. The identity at the top is most likely to be invoked and be the most salient, or strongest, influencer on behavior (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Turner, 1987). Situational characteristics can affect the salience, but the salience is primarily stable and results from past interactions (Stryker & Serpe, 1982) that are a function of the individual's values, attitudes, stereotypes, and past history (Randel, 2002). A difference between career identity and other role identity concepts such as occupational identity is that career identity is characterized as giving sense to an individual's past, present (experiences) and future career (aspirations). Hence, career identity is described as longitudinal and it is a component of a cognitive-affective nature.

Second, personal adaptability involves both the capacity and willingness to change thoughts, feelings and behaviours to meet the demands of environmental changes (Fugate et al., 2004; McArdle et al., 2007). As individuals frequently participate in short-term transactional contracts enacted across numerous work settings in a dynamic career context, individuals are highly concerned with work-related flexibility and their capacity to respond to changing environments and work demands (Rousseau, 1995). This component is related to optimism, propensity to learn, openness, internal locus of control and generalized self-efficacy which are individual characteristics that would indicate a proactive disposition.

Social capital is "the aggregate of resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual" (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005, p. 151). Networking itself is behavioral (Wolff & Moser, 2009) and is an important



activity for navigating a boundaryless career (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Wolff & Moser, 2009). As demonstrated in research over time, a large percentage of jobs are acquired through networking with family, friends, and acquaintances (Granovetter, 1995). Networking opens doors to job opportunities that may not be publicly advertised and extends across organizational boundaries, thus increasing opportunities for employment (Fugate et al., 2004; Seibert et al., 2001). Therefore, networking is thought to give individuals a strategic advantage in their careers as it can often result in promotions, job opportunities, business leads and venture capital (Forret & Sullivan, 2002). Social capital is in line with the idea of knowing-whom competencies from the career literature (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994).

Human capital refers to the individual's personal and professional experiences that improve one's career (Becker, 1964). A recent meta-analysis shows that various human capital factors such as education, experience and tenure are directly related to career success (Ng et al., 2005). Since individuals are in constant competition for limited opportunities and must continually improve to succeed, human capital is a highly valued resource and is critical to remaining employable in the face of persistent competition. Human capital is reflected in other person-centered typologies as occupational expertise (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), and in knowing-how competencies from the career literature (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994).

Later on, Fugate and colleagues (2004) advance their model on employability, considering the changes in the labour market especially in the employee-employer relation. Before these changes, the bounded career in the context of a paternalistic employer-employee contract was dominant. Thus, the lines of career building were set up for the employee. Nowadays, there has been a major change as it is more likely for an

individual to have multiple employers during his or her career span. This increases career mobility. Fugate and colleagues (2004) mention the ‘uprising’ of new career models such as protean or boundaryless careers in which the individual rather than the organization is the manager. Therefore, it is the individual who takes all the responsibility for his or her own career development. Fugate and colleagues (2004) also highlight the need for coping with a labour market which is characterised by rapid changes. Moreover, this coping should not be reactive but the individual has to be proactive in the management of his or her career, which again underlines the agency perspective and career self-management. Thus, the individual need to be proactive so as to develop a successful career and remain employed.

Fugate and Kinicki (2008) revise the psychosocial conceptualisation and introduce dispositional employability which is defined employability as “a form of work specific active adaptability that enables workers to identify and realize career opportunities” (Fugate et al., 2004, p. 16). They argue that self-awareness and proactivity are vital to the realisation of a sustainable career. Self-awareness refers to “the extent to which people are conscious of the components of their identities and the extent to which their self-perceptions are internally integrated and consistent with the way other people perceive them” (Hall, 2004b, p. 154). Self-awareness includes understanding one’s strengths, weaknesses, values, motives and optimal working conditions. It facilitates career self-management by increasing the individual’s ability to identify or create favourable opportunities, persuade career gatekeepers to facilitate opportunities and make sound career decisions.

Proactivity has a dispositional basis (commonly referred to as proactive personality) and is manifested through behaviours such as identifying new opportunities, taking initiative,

seeking feedback, challenging the status quo, issue selling, proactive socialisation (Crant, 2000) and creating favourable conditions in which one can perform well. Proactive people feel relatively unconstrained by situational forces; they seek opportunities, take action to make the most of them and persevere until meaningful changes occur (Bateman & Crant, 1993).

The dispositional approach focuses on a set of individual characteristics that predispose individuals for career success and well-being in various work settings. These characteristics enable workers to identify and realise career opportunities (Fugate et al., 2004; Fugate & Kinicki, 2008). Fugate and colleagues' (2004, 2008) conceptualisation suggests that employability does not represent one's capacity to realise career opportunities, but rather that it “enables” and “predisposes” individuals to the realisation of opportunities. The intensity and frequency of change inherent in the workplace is symptomatic of high levels of uncertainty. Such an ever-changing environment can be specified as a weak situation (Mischel, 1977) in which the domain-independent, generic concept of employability becomes more relevant. As a result, individual dispositions are more likely to come to the fore and significantly influence behaviours and performance in weak situations.

Fugate and Kinicki (2008) elaborate more extensively on employability as a latent multidimensional construct by developing dispositional measure of employability. They re-organize the three initial components into five key characteristics as individual predispositions for employability: openness to changes at work, work and career resilience, work and career proactivity, career motivation and work identity.

Openness to changes at work: Openness to changes is a dispositional flexibility (Digman, 1990) that fosters favourable individual attitudes towards change events at work (Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994). Miller et al. (1994) suggest that openness to changes facilitates cooperation and mitigates resistance, both necessary for effective change initiatives. Open individuals are willing and receptive to changes and/or feel that changes are generally positive once they occur (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008). Open people are also likely to perceive changes as a challenge rather than a threat (McCartt & Rohrbaugh, 1995). Moreover, open individuals tend to show flexibility when encountering challenges inherent in an uncertain situation (c.f. Digman, 1990). Openness to changes and new experiences supports continuous learning and enables one to identify and realise career opportunities, thereby enhancing one's personal adaptability. Therefore, people who are open to new experiences and changes are adaptable to dynamic work requirements, making them more employable.

Openness to changes is also similar to the concept of openness to experience, which demonstrates comfort in unfamiliar/uncertain situations, as well as increased training proficiency across a variety of occupations (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Costa & McCrae, 1992). This is relevant in that the business and career environments are highly uncertain and dealing effectively with uncertainty is important for success. Thus, training is a means for keeping one's skills current and one way to deal with uncertainty and rapid changes.

Work and career resilience: "Cognitive adaptation theory contends that resilient individuals have positive self-assessments and optimistic views of life" (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008, p. 507). People with positive self-evaluations are likely to attribute career

successes to personal ability and effort, rather than personalizing reasons for career missteps or failures (cf. Brockner & Chen, 1996).

Resilient individuals are also optimistic and have positive expectations about future events, and they show confidence in their ability to handle the objective and affective challenges associated with future experiences (cf. Peterson, 2000). Career resilience is part of the individual's work identity (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008), and is related to optimism and self-efficacy (Fleig-Palmer, Luthans, & Mandernach, 2009). Thus, individuals with high career optimism are likely to perceive numerous opportunities in the workplace, and they also are likely to view career changes as opportunities to learn and challenges (cf. Scheier & Carver, 1992). They will be open to engaging in new learning experiences through training and/or taking on new work roles (Fleig-Palmer et al., 2009). Interestingly, individuals with high career optimism tend not only to perceive numerous opportunities (i.e. view their careers in a positive light), but also to see their own opportunities as greater than those of their peers (cf. Taylor & Brown, 1988). Moreover, career optimists are likely to persist in pursuit of desired outcomes and goals (Scheier & Carver, 1992), especially when confronted with career obstacles or challenges. It is more likely that these individuals can resist career disruption and deal with a negative work situation more effectively (London, 1983).

**Work and career proactivity:** Work and career proactivity represents people's tendencies and actions to gain information potentially influencing their jobs and career, for example, information that one's current employer is considering downsizing, thus fostering identification and realisation of occupational opportunities (Fugate & Kinichi, 2008). Gathering information related to one's career interests (e.g. an individual job or employer) may serve as market feedback per se, informing the individual of the value of

his or her experience and current skill set in the eyes of the market. Thus, work and career proactivity has significant implications for learning (i.e. gathering information and training) (Fugate, 2006; Fugate & Kinicki, 2008).

Career motivation: Career motivation builds on the concepts of motivation control (Kanfer & Heggestad, 1997) and learning goal orientation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Kanfer and Heggestad (1997) describe the concept of motivation control as a constellation of motivational skills that individuals employ to manage affective, cognitive and behavioural elements while pursuing goals (cf. Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Kanfer and Heggestad (1997) argue that individuals with high motivation control are more motivated at work, persist during periods of frustration or boredom and sustain effort in the face of challenges by setting goals (Kuhl, 1985). Similarly, employees with a learning goal orientation report a higher motivation to participate in development activities or training and prefer work situations that challenge them or enhance their personal development (Cron, Slocum, Vandewalle, & Fu, 2005; Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007).

Moreover, employees who have learning goals engage more in goal setting, effort and planning (VandeWalle, Brown, Cron, & Slocum, 1999) and are more willing to seek feedback (VandeWalle, 2001), a self-regulatory strategy suggested to be essential for career adaptability (Callister, Kramer, & Turban, 1999). As a result, career motivation provides individuals with the self-regulatory and motivational skills necessary to remain productive and to acquire valued knowledge and skills in their current jobs. More directly, career motivation influences the force of action people assert when seeking out necessary information regarding other employment opportunities, engaging in (re)training necessary to maintain skills as current and coping with the emotional challenges inherent in work-role transitions.

Work identity: Work identity refers to the degree to which individuals define themselves in terms of a particular job, profession, organisation or industry. It usually refers to “who I am or want to be” in the work context. By addressing “who I am or want to be” in the work domain, career identity delineates possibilities for the self at work – “possible selves”, thus providing personal goals or aspirations (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989). Career identities direct, regulate and sustain behaviour. Due to the absence of well-prescribed career tracks in today’s environment, individuals need to manage their often boundaryless careers. Hence, career identity provides motivation – direction and purpose – for career-related endeavours and supports employability (Fugate et al., 2004).

Dispositional employability, thus, is “conceptualised as encompassing both reactive and proactive personal characteristics” (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008, p.505). This means that, employable individuals tend to have perpetual readiness for change in addition to the ability to adapt reactively to known demands (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008). As De Grip and Sanders (2004, p. 76) state, employability implies “the capacity and willingness to be and to remain attractive in the labour market, by anticipating changes in tasks and work environment and reacting to these changes in a proactive way”.

In the recent study, Maslić Seršić and Tomas (2014) found positive relationship between dispositional employability and subjective career success operationalised by variables such as general job satisfaction and perceived employability and objective career success operationalised by variables such as relative income.

#### **2.2.1.3 PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY APPROACH**

Another approach to employability focuses on individual’s perception of his or her possibilities of obtaining and maintaining employability (Berntson et al., 2006; De

Cuyper et al., 2011; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). In this case, employability is viewed in terms of subjective perceptions of employees' opportunities in the labour market and also referred to as self-rated employability or self-perceived employability (e.g., Berntson et al., 2006; De Cuyper et al., 2011). As De Cuyper et al. (2011) note, this conceptualisation of employability parallels previous theoretical and empirical developments concerning perceived ease of movement (March & Simon, 1958) and perceived job alternatives (Griffeth & Hom, 1988).

Perceived employability has been defined as first a one-dimensional and lately as a multidimensional concept. Initially, perceived employability was conceived as one-dimensional. The pioneer representative was Berntson and colleagues who defined employability as "an individual's perception of his or her possibilities to achieve a new job" (Berntson et al., 2006, p. 225). It refers to the perceived chances of getting a job and there is no clear differentiation between an internal or external labour market. Thus, this one-dimensional view might be classified as a global approach to the concept.

Later on, other authors developed a multidimensional approach (e.g., De Cuyper & De Witte, 2010; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). Rothwell and Arnold (2007) defined employability as the "ability to keep the job that one has or to get the job one desires" (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007, p. 25). Thus, not only does one concentrate on gaining a job, but also considers keeping the job. They developed a self-perceived employability scale, considering the internal vs. external labour market dimension and the personal vs. occupational attributes dimension. As a result, they theorized on four different types (or quadrants) of employability: (1) self-valuation in current organization; (2) perceived value of occupation in current organization; (3) self-valuation outside current organization; and (4) perceived value of occupation outside current organization.



De Cuyper and De Witte (2010) developed further the dimensional approach to self-perceived employability. They defined employability as the “worker’s perception of available job opportunities, either with the current employer (i.e., on the internal labour market; internal perceived employability) or with another employer (i.e., on the external labour market)” (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2010, p. 2). They developed a measure of perceived employability which not only included an internal vs. external dimension, but also differentiated a quantitative from a qualitative dimension. Quantitative employability refers to getting another job, while qualitative employability refers to getting a better job. Considering these dimensions, they established four types of perceived employability including (1) internal quantitative (another job in the same organization); (2) internal qualitative (a better job in the same organization); (3) external quantitative (another job in another organization); (3) external qualitative (a better job in another organization).

There are five important aspects in the perceived employability approach. First, perceived employability refers to employment possibilities, either “with the current employer (i.e. the internal labour market) or with another employer (i.e. the external labour market)” (Vanhercke et al., 2014, p.595). This distinction highlights the difference between perceived internal employability and perceived external employability (e.g., De Cuyper & De Witte, 2008, 2010; De Cuyper et al., 2015; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). The critical difference is that internal perceived employability concerns transfer of skills across jobs but within organisational boundaries and external perceived employability concerns transfers across organisational boundaries (De Cuyper et al., 2011) or across positions (e.g. from unemployment/student to employment). Such distinction is widely discussed in theoretical and conceptual papers (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Forrier et al, 2009; Kluytmans

& Ott, 1999; Van der Heijden, 2002) and has been successfully introduced in recent empirical papers (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2008, 2011).

Although they may share common ground, various authors argue that perceptions of job opportunities on the internal or external labour market are at least partly based on a different set and combination of individual and organisational factors (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Forrier et al., 2009). For example, internal perceived employability is mostly seen as a responsibility that is shared by employees and employers: Employers provide employees with training and opportunities for growth and development, and employees contribute by grasping such opportunities. Therefore, internal perceived employability is built on specific skills that increase the productivity of labour in a single company (Becker, 1965).

In contrast, employees carry most responsibility for being employable on the external labour market. External perceived employability is built on general skills that increase the productivity of labour across all companies. Developing general skills that are useful across a wide range of firms increase external job opportunities and the likelihood that employees will market their skills elsewhere (Benson, 2006). Employers are unlikely to invest in general skills because a return on such investments is less likely when employees' profiles are in demand (Benson, 2006).

Second, the term “employment” also concerns a focus on both quantity (i.e. the number of jobs available) and quality (i.e. the type of jobs available) (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011; De Cuyper et al., 2015). The quantitative aspect is often referred to as possible “other” jobs (i.e. lateral employability). The perception of similar job opportunities and thus the prospect for lateral career moves provides workers with employment security

that protects them from possible erosion of job quality. Quality of available jobs generally refers to better jobs (i.e. upward employability) (Berntson et al., 2008), thus implying an upward move in the perception of the employee. This upward move does not necessarily imply a move up the hierarchical ladder. Instead, it may concern an improvement in working conditions, for example, applying improved skills and knowledge from training to create efficiency and effectiveness at work.

Third, perceived employability is a subjective evaluation and thus fits the psychological notion of employability. The implication of subjectivity is that individuals may perceive the same objective situation differently (De Witte, 1999; Sverke, Hellgren, & Näswall, 2002). For example, individuals with similar profiles may differ in their perception of employability based on their knowledge of the labour market or their motivation to participate in employability-enhancing activities.

Fourth, in the broadest sense, perceived employability concerns “possibilities” of employment (Berntson & Marklund, 2007). The term “possibilities” is broad in that it implies the integration of personal factors, structural factors, and their interactions. Thus, the perception of employability could be understood as a process that is affected by situational factors as well as individual factors. It is likely that different individuals determine their possibilities in the labour market differently, and this could be due to both the situation they are in and the particular individual factors that give meaning and content to the situation.

Fifth, perceived employability refers to “obtaining and maintaining” employment. Thus, perceived employability is relevant for different groups on the labour market and throughout the career such as (graduate) students (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Rothwell et

al., 2009), the employed (Berntson & Marklund, 2007; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007), and the unemployed (Wanberg, Zhu, & Van Hooft, 2010; Westaby & Braithwaite, 2003).

Empirical studies consistently support that perceived employability is beneficial for both organizational and individual outcomes. Wittekind et al. (2010) believe that employability is necessary in coping effectively with organizational change. De Cuyper et al. (2011) regard employability an essential organizational asset to boost performance. Employees with high employability have more developmental competence and achievement motivation to make more effort to complete their work (Camps & Rodríguez, 2011). Regarding individual outcomes, there is empirical evidence for the positive relationship between perceived employability and engagement (De Cuyper et al., 2008), job satisfaction (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2008), life satisfaction (De Cuyper et al., 2008) and psychological well-being (Kinnunen et al., 2011).

### **2.3 AN INTEGRATION OF DIFFERENT PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO EMPLOYABILITY**

Recently, Vanhercke et al. (2014) propose a process model (Figure 2.1, adapted from Forrier et al., 2009) which demonstrates the four-fold relationships between the competence-based, the dispositional, and the perceived employability approaches.

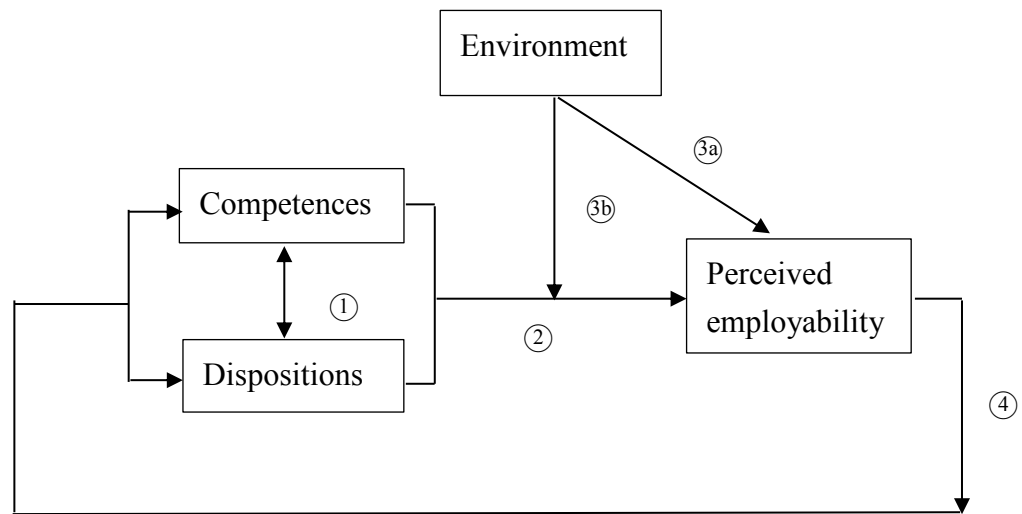


FIGURE 2.1. PROCESS MODEL (ADAPTED FROM FORRIER ET AL., 2009)

First, the psychological literature of employability focuses on the individual's perception. All perceptions are likely to form a coherent self-image. The implication is that perceptions of individual characteristics, such as competences and dispositions, are likely to be related to each other, and to the individual's perceived employability. This is represented by the arrows ① going from competences to dispositions and vice versa, and by the arrow ② going from competences and dispositions to perceived employability.

Second, distinction between input and output can be made. The abilities from the competence-based approach and the motivational attitudes from the dispositional approach can be seen as input to employability while perceived employability is an output. It implies that competences and dispositions should lead to perceived employability. It is more likely that individuals are more perceive themselves as employable by mastering competences. This is represented by arrow ② going from competences to perceived employability. Recent study by De Vos et al. (2017) found support for the relationship between competence and perceived employability. They

found that occupational expertise was positively related to perceived internal employability as well as perceived external employability.

Similarly, proactive attitudes that are central to the dispositional approach contribute to perceived employability. This is represented by arrow ② going from disposition to perceived employability. Knau and Knardahl (2008) and Kirves, Kinnunen and De Cuyper (2014) found support for the relationship between dispositional approach and perceived employability. They showed that optimism was positively related to perceived employability.

Third, all three approaches consider the internal and external labour market. This suggests that context is regarded as a crucial factor. First, context is an antecedent to perceived employability. It is represented by arrow ③a going from “environment” to perceived employability. Empirical evidence provided support for this relationship. Wittekind et al. (2010) found that organizational support for career and skill development predicted perceived employability. Second, contextual factors interact with personal factors in predicting perceived employability, which is represented by arrow ③b. Results from the study of Kirves et al. (2014) showed that perceived employability among permanent workers was predicted by perceived mobility (i.e. the employees’ perceived ability to move to another place because of new job) which was based on both structural and personal elements.

Fourth, the perceived employability approach accounts for both quantity and quality of employment possibilities. This may imply for an upward spiral in the process in terms of increasingly better employment possibilities. This is represented by arrow ④. For instance, employees who are relatively highly skilled, who are motivated to continuously

develop themselves, and who work in a supporting environment (e.g. easy access to training) are likely to perceive many employment possibilities (i.e. high perceived employability). This perception, in turn, stimulates and allows the employees to develop their skills and motivational attitudes even further, and thus the process continues.

## **2.4 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO EMPLOYABILITY**

These three approaches have similarities and differences. Regarding similarities, first, all three approaches are inherently subjective: similar to perceived employability, the competence-based approach and the dispositional approach emphasises individuals' perceptions even though each approach evaluates different aspects of employability. In the dispositional approach, individuals evaluate their motivation with regard to employability whereas in the competence-based approach, individuals evaluate their employability abilities. Perceived employability means that individuals evaluate their possibilities of obtaining employment.

Second, all three approaches account for personal factors, factors and their interaction. An example from the competence-based approach is Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2005, p. 144) definition of the dimension of "personal flexibility", namely, "the ability to adapt easily to all kinds of changes on the internal and the external labour market". Ability is tied to the person, while the internal and external labour markets are contextual factors. Both are vital to define a person's flexibility.

An example from the dispositional approach is Fugate and Kinicki's (2008) dimension of "work and career resilience", which refers to how well the individual keeps up with developments concerning his or her job, company and industry. Two elements are

important, namely the individual's attitude (a personal factor) and remaining up-to-date with developments in his or her work environment (a contextual factor).

However, this interaction view is more readily obvious in the perceived employability approach. In the broadest sense, perceived employability concerns "possibilities" of employment (Berntson & Marklund, 2007) and the term "possibilities" is broad in that it implies the integration of personal factors, structural factors and their interactions. Personal factors are tied to the person, whereas structural factors are at the level of the job (e.g. network: Eby et al., 2003; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Griffeth, Steel, Allen, & Bryan, 2005; Ng et al., 2005), the organisation (e.g. support for career development: London, 1993; Ng et al., 2005) or the society (e.g. the total number of available jobs: Forrier & Sels, 2003; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). The focus in the competence-based and the dispositional approaches is on personal factors: abilities in the competence-based approach and proactive attitudes in the dispositional approach" (Vanhercke et al., 2014, p.595).

Related to this, the third similarity is that, similar to perceived employability, the other approaches also refer to aspects of the internal and the external labour market. However, only perceived employability explicitly accounts for this distinction.

Regarding the differences, first, perceived employability and the competence-based approach describe what people do (i.e. behaviours) to establish a fit between themselves and their careers effectively such as achieving person–situation fit and skill–employer strategies fit, respectively. In contrast, dispositional employability is more akin to traits that facilitate competence development and contribute to career adaptability instead of describing the actual competences and behaviours.



Second, perceived employability warrants both the quality and quantity of employment opportunities (e.g., De Cuyper & De Witte, 2010). This distinction is less relevant for the competence-based and dispositional approaches: Their focus is on the individual, rather than job quality or available jobs.

## **2.5 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO EMPLOYABILITY**

Comparison of the three approaches suggests that each approach comes with specific advantages and disadvantages. Comparatively, the competence-based approach is advantageous for studying firm and career outcomes across occupational sectors and is advantageous for both current job performance and career outcomes (long-term performance implying the process of adaptation and training) (Van der Klink et al., 2014, p. 342). The competence-based approach can be particularly relevant when designing interventions, since competences are more malleable through training (Vanhercke et al., 2014). An assessment in terms of competences is meaningful, for example, in working up a personal development plan. In addition to adaptive behaviour, a competence-based approach can include personal elements such as ability, attitudes, motivation and personality and represent the combination of specific and more generic competences (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006, p. 468).

However, a disadvantage of the competence-based approach is that the interaction between personal and structural factors is less obvious since the focus in the competence-based approach is on personal factors (i.e. abilities) (Vanhercke et al., 2014). While knowledge, skills and abilities are important, they should be as fluid as the associated strategies that employees are hired to implement, which in turn should be as adaptable as the markets in which employing firms operate. As organisations alter

strategies to adapt to changing market demands, the required knowledge, skills and abilities of employees should change accordingly. The competence-based approach assumes that necessary knowledge, skills and abilities for a given job are static, which appears unrepresentative of today's turbulent employment landscape (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008).

Indeed, the dispositional and competence-based approaches to employability are complementary rather than contradictory. Both stress an individual's ability to identify, develop and realise career opportunities (i.e. employability). The competence-based approach conceptualises employability as a distinct outcome of individual competencies whereas the dispositional approach conceptualises employability as proactive behaviour. Both stress the necessity for personal flexibility and self-initiated proactive behaviour as characteristics needed for successful coping with fast-changing job requirements in an era of boundaryless careers (Briscoe, Hall, & Demuth, 2006; Van der Heijde, 2014) and flexible organisation (Valverde, Tregaskis, & Brewster, 2000).

There is some overlap between the dispositional approach and competence-based approach, particularly at the measurement level. For example, Fugate and Kinicki (2008) develop items concerning competences (e.g. "I am able to adapt to changing circumstances at work") and Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) develop items concerning dispositional attitudes (e.g. "I have a (very negative-very positive) attitude to changes in my function"). The dispositional approach seems to be appropriate to identify individual differences and to tailor interventions to specific groups. An assessment along the idea of dispositions can be used to detect personal strengths and weaknesses that should be accounted for in the future career and that may help to develop an individualised coaching trajectory. Similar to the competence-based approach, a

disadvantage of the dispositional approach is that the interaction between personal and structural factors is less obvious since the focus in the dispositional approach is on personal factors (i.e. proactive attitude) (Vanhercke et al., 2014).

The perceived employability approach provides an overall structure integrating all possible personal and structural factors and their interactions (Vanhercke et al., 2014). It may reflect a more general sense derived from the importance of one's stock of skills and competences compared to what is demanded in the labour market (De Cuyper et al., 2011). Moreover, a worker's attitude and actions are based on his or her perceptions rather than on any other kind of reality (McLean Parks et al., 1998). This may be particularly relevant when researchers aim to examine the individual's general feeling of perceived control over his or her career. However, a disadvantage of perceived employability is that it fails to provide information about why individuals perceive themselves as highly or less employable (Vanhercke et al., 2014).

The current study relies on the competence-based approach by Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006), who define employability as “the continuous fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through the optimal use of competencies” (p. 453). The competence-based approach is more suitable for the current study for the reasons discussed below.

First, changes in the labour market, including boundaryless careers (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009), deteriorating job security (De Witte, 2005; Ngo et al., 2017), and increased flexibility (Castells, 2000; Sundin & Wikman, 2004) have led to employees, to a greater extent than before, being responsible for their own career development and thus concerned about their employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). In

today's turbulent employment landscape, "what people do" to effectively establish a fit between themselves and their careers is of utmost importance. Employees must acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities valued by employers, which in turn enables workers to remain employed within the current organisation or to realise opportunities in other organisations (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). The amount and characteristics of accumulated competences resulting from formal training are important assets in building a sustainable career (Bernhard-Oettel & Näswall, 2015). The dimensions that comprise the construct of competence-based employability allow the individual to be malleable over time, "changeable" to meet the demands of the environmental changes (cf. Chan, 2000; Hall, 1996). Thus, the competence-based approach is more appropriate in today's dynamic work environment.

Second, the competence-based approach includes personal elements such as ability and motivation and represents the combination of specific and more generic competences (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). These competences are more malleable and subject to development. A number of employability studies also support the notion that competence-based employability can be developed through formal and informal learning (e.g., Froehlich et al., 2014; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a; Van der Klink et al., 2014). Thus, the operationalisation of such an employability construct is highly relevant in the current research setting since training intervention is provided to stimulate learning, which is a critical mechanism in employability development (Manuti, et al., 2015; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a). An assessment in terms of competences as a result of training intervention is meaningful in the current study.

Compared with dispositional employability and perceived employability, competence-based employability is deemed most suitable for the current study.

Components in dispositional employability that are advanced by Fugate and Kinicki (2008), by definition, are more akin to traits. Traits are relatively stable and not easily subject to change or they require a considerable time investment to change (Mäkikangas et al., 2013). Therefore, the competence-based approach is considered more appropriate. The perceived employability approach relies on self-assessment and may easily give rise to the problem of common method bias, which is a common limitation in the existing employability studies. Hence, the competence-based approach is considered more appropriate since competence-based employability can be assessed by the self (employees) and others (employers).

In short, employability is a multi-faced concept that has been analyzed from alternative perspectives. However, all definitions of employability are about work and people's ability to be employed (Arnold & Rothwell, 2007; De Grip & Sanders, 2004; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Fugate et al., 2004; Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Hence, employability refers simultaneously to the capability to gain initial employment, to maintain employment and to obtain new employment if required, both in the internal and external labour market. Most importantly, employability is not limited to the capability of a person to find and keep a job, but rather it implies the possibility of gaining and maintaining a satisfactory job and achieving an adequate level of employment continuity, having more working experiences, and realizing a sustainable career growth in the long term (Martini & Cavenago, 2017).

## **2.6 CONCEPTUAL ISSUES IN EMPLOYABILITY**

There are ongoing debate regarding the nature and the measure of employability. These issues are discussed more in-depth in the following sections.

### **2.6.1 LEVEL OF ANALYSIS**

#### Macro level perspective

Originally, employability was conceived at macro-level. At the macro level, employability has been included in different national level policy documents (Berntson, 2008), which aim to improve the workforce's overall employability so as to reduce the unemployment rates. Employability was primarily used as an employment policy concept. An economic conception of employability was then developed in order to achieve full employment through government measures designed to facilitate access to labour market (Duff, Ferguson, & Gilmore, 2007; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). The individual was viewed in terms of being more or less employable, and from this point of view, being employable was defined as having the individual skills and capacities that fit into the labour market. In the USA, the concept of employability was expanded to include disabled and disadvantaged people and groups and the term was at this point referred to as "socio-medical employability" or "manpower policy employability" as it focused on disabled and disadvantaged people (e.g., Feintuch, 1955; Gazier, 2001).

Other researchers (e.g., Andrews & Higson, 2008; Bridgstock, 2009; Moreland, 2006; Yorke, 2006; Yorke & Knight, 2003) have focused more specifically on the ability for higher education to offer graduates the skills required by the labor market, through dedicated programs or internships. Among these, Yorke (2006) defined employability as "a set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy" (p. 8). The four inter-related dimensions proposed are "a mix of personal qualities and beliefs, understandings, skillful practices and the ability to reflect productively on experience"

(Yorke & Knight, 2003, p. 13). Prokou (2008) also observed that European Union policies encourage universities to become more pragmatic and “market-driven” in order to increase their students’ employability. This translates into degrees that are more consistent with employers’ requirements and with the expectations of the world of work. It also leads to the development of transferable skills and the promotion of lifelong learning, so as to enhance flexibility with respect to the labor market.

During the last decades, employability has gradually gained more attention in policy-making forums and in research literature (e.g., Finn, 2000; Forrier & Sels, 2003). When the European Commission laid out a new employment strategy for the member states in 1997, employability was regarded as one of the four key areas for increasing employment in Europe (the other three were the strengthening of entrepreneurship, adaptability, and equal opportunities) (European Commission, 1997). Moreover, several European countries have made employability a central theme in their policy making, such as Great Britain (Finn, 2000; Garavan, 1999) and the Netherlands (Meager et al., 2001). In these countries, employability has become the focus in order to get different marginalised groups, such as young people and long-term unemployed, (back) into the labour market. In Denmark, employability is central to the so-called “flexicurity model” (Madsen, 2002). Flexicurity advances the idea of achieving equilibrium between the need for flexibility and security of employers and employees (Report of employment security and employability: A contribution to the flexicurity debate; European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2008). Employability is advanced as a critical element in establishing this equilibrium. Indeed, employable workers are flexible, since they find new jobs easily, and they find security in the many labour market opportunities they have access to. In short, government and educational policies play important roles in maintaining and developing employability.

### Meso level perspective

In the 1980s, employability was approached at the meso-level from the viewpoint of organizations. Globalization has put considerable strain on organizations to make profit and survive. Organizations needed to adapt faster to changes, thereby rendering functional flexibility a competitive advantage. Functional flexibility of the staff became a strategy to manage their number of employees according to the demands of a fluctuating and competitive environment. In this context, employability means gaining functional flexibility of the staff (Forrier & Sels, 2003). In this respect, employability research focuses on possibilities to enhance the workers' employability within the organization (Forrier & Sels, 2003), for instance, through job rotation (Berntson, 2008). Employability is seen as "an HR instrument to optimize deployment of staff within companies" (Forrier & Sels, 2003, p.104). In this perspective, organizations have been interested in enhancing employability of their staff so as to be prepared for flexibility demands and maintaining the business profitable (Forrier & Sels, 2003). Van Dam (2004) introduces the concept of employability orientation which refers to "attitudes of employees toward interventions aimed at increasing the organization's flexibility through developing and maintaining workers' employability for the organization" (p. 30). Van Dam (2004) takes into account that within the concept of employability orientation, the source of employees' employability development is the company's interventions. These interventions include changes in work content, job or department and participation in training/development programs. Van Dam (2004) stated that employees who have more positive attitudes toward employability interventions in general will understand more "employability activities" to develop and maintain their employability. These activities include development of work knowledge and experience, career management, keeping oneself up to date about internal job vacancies, an active search for opportunities to change one's work situation, engaging in development activities that are not directly necessary for



one's post, active attempts at enhancing one's employability, etc. Empirical studies also examined the role of employers' practices as predictors of employability by focusing on specific practices, such as formal and informal learning (Van der Heijden et al., 2009a), learning climate (Park, 2010), workplace learning (De Grip & Sanders, 2004 ; De Vries, Gründemann, & Van Vuuren, 2001; Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000), organizational sponsorship, job characteristics (De Vos et al., 2011; Van Emmerik et al., 2012) and managerial support (Knies & Leisink, 2014).

#### Individual level perspective

More recently, the employability literature has focused on the micro-level of the individual. In this view, the individual and no longer the employer carries most responsibility over his or her career (Arthur, 1994; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996; Nauta et al., 2009; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). This perspective also fits the idea of the “modern” career as opposed to the “traditional” career. In the “traditional” career, the individual ascends the hierarchical ladder of the organization. It is based on the implicit mutual expectation of loyalty and performance provided by the employee and job security provided by the employer (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). However, the “traditional” career was replaced in the past decades by the so-called “boundaryless” (Van Buren, 2003) and the “protean” career (Hall, 2004a) in which employers can no longer guarantee life-time employment due to greater competition (Berntson et al., 2006). In an attempt to stay competitive, employers need “employable employees” who can adapt their skills and knowledge consistent with the environmental change. Consequently, employees need to rely more on their individual ability to secure employment, implying that career development depends on the individual, rather than the employers. The fact that both the responsibility for career management and the risks associated with it are placed on the

individual shoulders is also consistent with the idea of individual agency (Forrier et al., 2009).

At the individual level, several authors have tried to understand which factors determine the level of employability and what it means for individuals' careers, security perceptions, and well-being (e.g., Berntson & Marklund, 2007; De Grip, Van Loo, & Sanders, 2004; Fugate et al., 2004; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Perceived employability focuses on individual's perceived chances of getting a job. Rothwell, Herbert and Rothwell (2008) defined perceived employability as the "perceived ability to attain sustainable employment appropriate to one's qualification level" (p. 2). They distinguished the external dimensions of state of the external labor market, reputation of the university, and field of study from the internal dimension of self belief. This definition is consistent with the definition of Bernston and Marklund (2007) who regarded employability as being the "individual's perception of his or her possibilities of getting new employment" (p. 281). The dimensions they considered were the "perceived skills, experience, network, personal traits, and knowledge of the labor market" (p. 283).

Meanwhile, Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) focused on skills and defined employability as "the continuous fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through the optimal use of competences" (p. 453). According to these authors, employability facilitates both the individuals' career results (current and long term) and the company's results. The occupational expertise dimension is complemented by four general competences: anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense, and balance (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

Several researchers studied employability as a trait, related to adaptability and career success (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Fugate et al., 2004; McArdle et al., 2007). Fugate (2006) developed dispositional employability which refers to “multidimensional constellation of individual characteristics that predispose employees to (pro)actively adapt to their work and career environments. Employability facilitates the identification and realization of job and career opportunities both within and between organizations” (p. 2). The dimensions that compose dispositional employability are “openness to changes at work, work and career resilience, work and career proactivity, career motivation, and work identity” (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008, p. 506).

Following these changes over time, different levels of objectives can be identified. Governments aim to achieve full employment. Employers seek the best match between the needs of the company and available skills, and individuals focus on optimizing their career trajectories. Even though employability has moved from a macro level to an individual level in the recent employability literature, employability is not solely determined by individual factors (Kovalenko & Mortelmans, 2016; Van der Heijden et al., 2018; Vanhercke et al., 2014). Employability is not a stable characteristic, but rather a process which builds up and evolves over time (Hofaidhllaoui, 2013). Hence, employability is not only about individual resources and attributes and it has been conceptualized as a process through which context related and external factors, together with personal resources, may affect an individual's chance of career progression in the labour market (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Green et al., 2013; Thijssen et al., 2008). It involves individual and their personal skills, attributes and competences (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007), while also depending on the context related (structural) factors such as education system (e.g., Blackwell, Bowes, Harvey, Hesketh, & Knight, 2001; Golovushkina & Milligan, 2013; Harvey, 2001), the employers' practices (e.g., De Grip & Sanders, 2004;

De Grip et al., 2004; Groot & Maassen van den Brink , 2000), the activities of labour market intermediaries (e.g., Clark, 2007; McArdle et al., 2007; Sultana & Watts, 2006) , labour market policies (e.g., Hodzic, Ripoll, Lira, & Zenasni, 2015; Lindsay & Mailand, 2009; Lindsay, McQuaid, & Dutton, 2007) and economic trends and labour market conditions(Hillage & Pollard,1998; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005).

Accordingly, several authors proposed a dynamic approach, considering both individual (agency-side) factors and contextual (structural-side) factors (e.g., Forrier & Sels, 2003; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). The degree to which a worker is employable on the labour market depends on the structure of internal and external job market and not solely on the individual's skills, attributes and competences. On the one hand, the literature dealing with flexibilizing employment relationships has primarily touted the agency-side factors as a means toward better employability (Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012; Tams & Arthur, 2010; Zeitz, Blau, & Fertig, 2009). It is assumed that workers hold the responsibility for their careers (King, 2004), with the implicit requirement of remaining adaptable to the shifting employment context (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008; Hall, 1996) and being proactive and self-directed in their labor market behavior (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Greenhaus, Callanan, & Drenzo, 2008). On the other hand, many scholars concern that some worker groups may be constrained by contextual factors to a larger extent (Forrier et al., 2009; Guest & Sturges, 2007; Inkson et al., 2012; King, Burke, & Pemberton, 2005; Van Buren, 2003; Standing, 2011), implying that contextual factors cannot be overlooked although individual agency is a strong antecedent of employability (Kovalenko & Mortelmans, 2016). Thus, a more balanced approach in terms of interaction between agency and structure must be adopted in the employability and new career research (Kovalenko & Mortelmans, 2016).

McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) suggest that employability “should be understood as being derived from, and affected by, individual characteristics and circumstances and broader, external (social, institutional and economic) factors that influence a person’s ability to get a job” (p. 206). They focused on interactive employability as a “dynamic interaction of individual attributes, personal circumstances, labor market conditions and other “context” factors” (p. 207). As a result, in their holistic structure of employability, they retained three main dimensions that interact: individual factors (employability skills and attributes, demographic characteristics, health and wellbeing, job seeking, adaptability and mobility), personal circumstances (household circumstances and caring responsibilities, work culture, access to resources of transport, financial and social capital), and external factors (demand factors in the labor market, macroeconomic, vacancy and recruitment factors, enabling support factors as part of employment policy).

Despite the importance of the other levels in many ways, the focus in the present thesis is on the individual level. The intention here is not to analyse how employability is used in policy documents on national or corporate levels, but to analyse how individuals actually perceive their situation and how this is related to different outcomes. Organisational changes manifested through change in external environment imply an increasing uncertainty among the different actors in and around organisations (Klandermans & Van Vuuren, 1999; Sverke et al., 2002). For the employee, this increasing uncertainty means that individual strategies for overcoming such uncertainty become more crucial. Consequently, the individual level is a necessary approach.

### **2.6.2 OBJECTIVE OR SUBJECTIVE**

This issue concerns whether employability should be looked at as actual employability or perceived employability. Actual employability, or objective employability, refers to an

absolute level of employability for the individual. Individuals with high levels of objective employability have few or no difficulties in getting a job. Perceived employability, on the other hand, refers to their believed level of employability. Individuals with high levels of perceived employability believe they have higher chance of getting employment.

Before the 90's, most studies focused on unemployed or vulnerable groups, and the objective perspective was the dominant one. In contemporary employability research, a number of literature focus on actual employability (e.g., Forrier & Sels, 2003; Fugate et al., 2004; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Objective measures include such indicators as the number of transitions and formal characteristics of the job like wage, position in the company, tenure, type of contract and educational level (Forrier & Sels, 2003). These "hard" indicators have some limitations. Objective indicators of employability such as education, occupational position or number of previous jobs may be criticized because the same measure can be used as an antecedent or as a consequence (Forrier & Sels, 2003; De Cuyper et al., 2008). In addition, when the labour environment is flexible and difficult to predict for the individual, the perception of being employable becomes even more important although being employable is undoubtedly important to start with. This is due to the fact that perceptions in general have an impact not only on behaviour but also on people's feelings, thoughts, and physical conditions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Magnusson, 1981). While actual employability often comes into play when the focus is on the need or desire to change jobs, the perception of employability may also affect the situations where job seeking would be plausible but no action has been taken. Feeling employable potentially provides a feeling of security and a feeling of independence towards environmental circumstances for the individual.

The subjective approach focuses on the individuals' experience in the labour market. For example, Forrier and Sels (2003) defined employability as "individual perception of the available alternatives in the internal and/or external labour market" (p. 111). The subjective approach emphasises the sense of being employable (Berntson et al., 2006). Berntson et al. (2006) state that the sense of being employable is more relevant than actually getting a job or not. Moreover, it places stress on individual as being responsible for his or her own employment which is in line with the new employee-employer relationship, and also consistent with the neoliberal Zeitgeist, in which individual agency is strongly stressed (Harvey, 2011). Moreover, it emphasizes the interplay between the individual and contextual factors. Even though the focus is on the individual, employee's perception may take into account the relation between the individual's characteristics and the labour context (De Cuyper et al., 2008). Hence, it may be argued that a subjective approach reflects the nature of employability better which "is not a static characteristic of individuals but takes on a time and place-related character that depends on the personal and labour market context" (Forrier & Sels, 2003, p. 107).

The focus of the current study is on subjective approach to employability. When labour is flexible and uncertain, the perception of being employable also becomes more significant. In the psychological literature, many scholars believe that individuals act on their perceptions but not actual events (e.g., James & Sells, 1981; McLean Parks et al., 1998; Meyer & Allen, 1997). It is generally believed that perceptions lead to cognitive and emotional and behavioural outcomes (e.g., Katz & Kahn, 1978; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Magnusson, 1981; McLean Parks et al., 1998; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Applied to the current study, employee's perception of workplace setting such as supervisor support (environment) together with personal characteristics such as personality (individual)

influence whether employee will take part in employability-enhancing activities such as training (behaviour).

### **2.6.3 EMPLOYED OR UNEMPLOYED**

Another issue is the question of whether the possibilities of getting new employment should be seen from the perspective of the employed or unemployed individual. Employability research and policies address different groups including the unemployed, vulnerable groups, the employed, to name but a few. This variety of groups is partly due to the historic evolution.

During the 1950's, employability was framed since the governmental aims at increasing the labour force supply in an attempt to meet the demands of a growing industry. Therefore, the focus was on the unemployed aiming at their incorporation to the labour force. In this perspective, it primarily concerns students or graduates trying to get established in the labour market. In the literature on this topic, the focus is on how to equip students with the qualities, skills, and knowledge that are useful in the labour market and how they can be made attractive to future employers (Blackwell et al., 2001; Harvey, 2001; Knight & Yorke, 2004). In recent years, more governments and universities have incorporated the term employability into their higher educational goals (e.g., European Commission, 1999; Mason, Williams, Cranmer, & Guile, 2003). Later on, in the 1960's and 1970's, there arised an interest for vulnerable groups such as the physical or mentally impaired and socially disadvantaged groups. Employability, in this respect, is essentially about how to make it possible for individuals with mental and/or physical disabilities to gain sustainable work (Bricout & Bentley, 2000). During the period of 1950's to 1970's, employability is about "the ability to gain initial employment" (Hillage & Pollard, 1998, p. 2).



During the 1980's, changes in the labour market took place. To remain competitive, organizations underwent mergers, downsizing and increased significantly their number of temporary contracts. By increasing the amount of temporary employees, an organisation finds it easier to regulate their number of employees so as to suit changing demands. The nature of temporary contracts also implies a more instable and uncertain relation between employer and employee (Reilly, 1998), and when uncertainty increases, the importance of being able to get new employment increases with it.

Meanwhile, organisations try to change the number of employees by enhancing the competency of the staff, which can be achieved through functional flexibility, which is when organisations optimize their workforce by allocating resources for competency training that would enable employees to perform assignments other than their usual if necessary (Atkinson, 1984; Reilly, 1998). When demands change, a multi-skilled workforce is better prepared to change production or services more rapidly. Such strategy entails placing higher demands on individuals, as they are asked to participate in competency development so as to be able to get new employment within the organisation (Hellgren, Sverke, & Näswall, 2008). In this context, the interest of employability was set upon the less flexible workers to gain functional flexibility (Forrier & Sels, 2003). An essential change is that employability is seen from a managerial view, as a human resource instrument to optimize deployment of staff within companies (Forrier & Sels, 2003). During the period of 1980's, employability concerns "the ability to maintain employment" (Hillage & Pollard, 1998, p. 2). This relates to those individuals who are trying to remain attractive concerning their employment (Garsten, 2004). It is also about making successful transitions (Finn, 2000; McArdle et al., 2007).

During the 1990's, the new organizational practices, such as increase of temporary contract because of the changing external environment, affected the employer-employee relationship. Employees found it more difficult to have "lifetime employment", that is, to remain employed in the same company through all their working life. Thus, the focus of employability was upon all workers. In the case of the unemployed or vulnerable groups, "it is not only important to stimulate entry into the labour market" (Forrier & Sels, 2003, p. 104), "but also to ensure career possibilities within and beyond the borders of organizations" (Forrier & Sels, 2003, p. 104). Recently, employability research places stress on agency perspective which consists concepts such as boundaryless and protean careers. The main premise is that individuals are responsible for building up their own careers which cross organizational boundaries as they desire to. In this view, the individual must have the competence and resources to acquire career mobility. In this perspective, employability concerns "the ability to obtain new employment" (Hillage & Pollard, 1998, p. 2), and refers to those individuals who hold a job but seek more independence in their career, and who want to be able to manage their career (Hillage & Pollard, 1998).

The persons in focus for this thesis are employed individuals. This is consistent with the latest trend in the employability research which stresses agency perspective. When people are exposed to a turbulent environment, it is necessary to understand employability from this view, and accordingly, the present thesis focuses on people who are employed.

#### **2.6.4 INPUT OR OUTPUT**

Input-based approach

Regarding input-based approach, a group of researchers take into account knowledge,

skills and attitudes, or more general competencies to assess employability (e.g., Fugate et al., 2004; Koen et al., 2013; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). The input approach may also consist of the antecedents of employability.

### Dispositions

Several researchers study employability as a trait, related to adaptability and career success (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Fugate et al., 2004; McArdle et al., 2007). Fugate (2006) developed dispositional employability which refers to “multidimensional constellation of individual characteristics that predispose employees to (pro)actively adapt to their work and career environments” (p.2). The dispositional employability consists of five components including “openness to changes at work, work and career resilience, work and career proactivity, career motivation, and work identity” (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008, p. 506). Moreover, research has found that self-efficacy (Kanfer et al., 2001; Moynihan et al., 2003; Pinquart et al., 2003), self-esteem (Ellis & Taylor, 1983) and locus of control (Krause & Broderick, 2006) are associated with better chances of getting employment.

### Attitudes

In the employability literature, adaptability and flexibility are important for employability (Fugate et al., 2004; Garsten, 2004; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). To be flexible and ready to adapt to new situations are regarded as more important when applying for a job, especially when working life becomes more turbulent and when organisations are exercising more flexibility and reorganising more frequently. It is also believed that proactive behaviour (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005) is relevant to the level of employability. In addition, it has been suggested that the attitudinal components of willingness to learn and willingness to change should be listed among the antecedents

of employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

### Knowledge and skills

In the literature, knowledge and skills are the most commonly referred to individual resources that are important to employability. It is supposed that those with higher formal education and a variety of generic skills and labour market experience have a higher chance of getting new employment. For instance, Hillage and Pollard (1998) maintain that employability assets consist of knowledge, skills and attitudes, and they distinguish between three types of assets, including baseline assets, intermediate assets and high level assets. Baseline assets, refers to one's basic skills and attributes, such as integrity, while intermediate assets include two kinds of occupational skills: those which are connected to the specific occupation, and generic skills, which are more general in nature. They also argue that all individuals possess high level assets, which is the kind of knowledge that contributes to organisational success, such as team working and self-managing. McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) regard transferable skills as important for the level of employability. They distinguish between basic, key, and high-level transferable skills. Basic skills refer to skills such as literacy and numeracy, while key transferable skills refer to, for example, problem-solving and communication. High-level transferable skills include, for instance, self-management and commercial awareness.

### Competences

Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) focused on competences that can be developed and enhanced and defined employability as “the continuous fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through the optimal use of competences” (Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006, p.453). This is referred to as competence-based employability. The competence-based employability consists of five dimensions

including occupational expertise, anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense, and balance. Occupational expertise is classified as specific competence while the other four dimensions are classified as generic competences (Van der Heijden et al., 2009a).

### Movement capital

Several researchers focus on the development of movement capital which is important for employability. Movement capital is described as “the set of individual characteristics that influence the chances of mobility in the labour markets” (Forrier et al., 2009, p.742). The movement capital consists of four dimensions: human capital, social capital, self-awareness and adaptability. The first dimension, human capital, refers to “an individual's ability to meet the performance expectations of a given occupation” (Fugate et al., 2004, p. 25). Human capital is reflected in other person-centered typologies as occupational expertise (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), and in knowing-how competencies from the career literature (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994).

The second dimension is social capital which reflects the value of social networks in shaping careers. Social capital occupies a central position also in other person-centered typologies, for instance, in the form of communicative career competencies (Akkermans, Brenninkmeijer, Huibers, & Blonk, 2013) or networking (Kuijpers, Schyns, & Scheerens, 2006), and it is in line with the idea of knowing-whom competencies from the career literature (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994).

The third dimension is self-awareness. Self-awareness concerns a reflection about the past and present careers in view of providing direction in future career opportunities (Fugate et al., 2004). It implies that individuals are aware of their strengths and

weaknesses and goals and values they want to achieve. Self-awareness helps individuals to develop towards a desired future career. Self-awareness is captured in other person-centered typologies as career identity (Fugate et al., 2004) or reflective career competencies (Akkermans et al., 2013). Moreover, self-awareness is central in the career literature: DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) regard it as knowing-why competencies, and Briscoe and Hall (2006) and Hall (2004a) advance self-awareness as an important metacompetency to become protean.

Finally, the fourth dimension is about adaptability, which is considered as the combination of willingness and ability “to change behaviours, feelings and thoughts in responses to environmental demands” (McArdle et al., 2007, p. 248): it is the dynamic component with a strong focus on individual progress. Willingness concerns the individuals' openness towards changes, which is consistent with the idea of employability orientation developed by Van Dam (2004) and Nauta, Van Vianen, Van der Heijden, Van Dam, & Willemsen, (2009). Ability refers to more generic competences, for example, workers are able to adapt to all kinds of changes, from relatively modest (e.g., changes in the content of work) to more profound changes (e.g., organizational restructuring or downsizing). The idea concerns the notion of personal flexibility, as stated by Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006). Adaptability has been regarded as another meta-competency to become protean (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Hall, 2004a).

### Employability capital

More recently, Peeters et al. (2017) introduce the notion of employability capital that can enhance employability. Employability capital, which is a variation on the term of movement capital, includes two types of distinctions: (1) an employability distinction, which differentiates between job-related, career-related, and development-related

employability capital, and (2) a capital distinction, which differentiates between human capital and social capital.

Regarding employability distinction, three types of competences are identified, namely job-related, career related and development-related. Job-related competencies are about the set of personal resources that enable individuals to perform a job, including job-specific and more generic resources (King et al., 2005; Thijssen, 2001; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Job-specific resources relate to the idea of professional employability advanced by Clarke and Patrickson (2008) which concerns the ability of employees to perform well in their current job and to comply with the current organizational needs and expectations and is thus a critical aspect of employability in terms of retaining the current job. Examples are possessing occupational expertise and technical competencies (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Generic competencies refer to transferable job-related competencies which are needed to make lateral job transitions, both within and across organizations. Hence, it is crucial to employability in terms of obtaining new employment (Becker, 1993; Thijssen et al., 2008; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Examples are communication, problem-solving, interactional skills, initiative, and efficiency (Clarke, 2008; Garavan & McGuire, 2001; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005).

Career-related competencies are personal resources that enable individuals to make transitions between jobs and organizations and to acquire a new labor market position. They are similar to Thijssen's (2001) mobility competencies and Clarke and Patrickson's (2008) transitional employability. Examples are career development ability, career control, career-related skills, and career identity (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Eby, et al., 2003; Kuijpers & Scheerens, 2006).

Development-related competencies are personal resources that enable growth over time. They are similar to the “learning competencies” defined by Thijssen (2001) and the need to engage in lifelong learning (Clarke, 2008). The focus is on long-term career development through continuous learning (Berntson et al., 2006; Clarke, 2008; Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Thijssen, 2001; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Development-related resources are important to individuals engage in different types of developmental activities and gain new professional competencies (Thijssen, 2001), so they can adapt to all kinds of changes with ease (Clarke, 2008; Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

Regarding capital distinction, two types of capital are identified, namely human capital and social capital. Human capital concerns KSA (e.g., Baartman & De Bruijn, 2011). Knowledge (I know) and skills (I can) relate to the “knowing-how” competencies advanced by DeFillippi and Arthur (1994), for instance, career relevant knowledge and skills. Knowledge and skills have been advanced under different labels, for example, occupational expertise (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) and job-related skills (Eby et al., 2003). Attitudes relate to the knowing-why competencies from DeFillippi and Arthur (1994), which entail different motivational components in particular aspects of willingness and individual preferences. Examples are the willingness to change jobs and to adapt to changing circumstances or the more general concept of employability orientation (Clarke, 2008; Gaspersz, 1999; Van Dam, 2004).

Social capital refers to capital derived from work- and career-related networks and relationships (Arthur et al., 1999; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Eby et al., 2003) and is similar to the “knowing-whom” competencies from DeFillippi and Arthur (1994). Social capital provides information about and access to job leads. Therefore, it is crucial in terms



of employability. This has strong implications in terms of the ability of individuals to find employment opportunities. Examples are formal (e.g., colleagues) and informal (e.g., friends) networks (Steel & Griffeth, 1989) from within and outside the organization (Eby et al., 2003).

#### Outcome-based approaches

The outcome-based approach can be grouped in two main categories. A group of researchers assesses employability in terms of the individual's perception of available employment opportunities. It refers to individuals' perceptions of the possibilities of obtaining and retaining a job, that is, the individual's beliefs about how easy it is to keep the current job or to find new a job. It is more recently regarded as perceived employability (Berntson et al., 2006; De Cuyper et al., 2012; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007, Van den Broeck et al., 2014; Vanhercke et al., 2014; Wittekind et al., 2010). Employment opportunities can be perceived with the current employer (i.e., internally; perceived internal employability) or with another employer (i.e. externally; perceived external employability). This distinction has been advanced frequently in conceptual papers (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Forrier et al., 2009; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Vanhercke et al., 2014) and has successfully been introduced in recent empirical work (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Van den Broeck et al., 2014).

Another group of researchers assesses employability in terms of transitions between positions (Forrier et al., 2009). Job transitions entail "any change in employment status and any major change in job content" (Nicholson, 1984, p. 173). These changes can be within the same organization (internal job transition) or across organizations (external job transitions). Indicators are, for instance, internal and external job changes (De Feyter, Smulders, & De Vroome, 2001); horizontal and vertical job transitions (Raemdonck,

Tillema, De Grip, Valcke, & Segers, 2012), upward and lateral job transition (Nelissen, Forrier, & Verbruggen, 2017) or the ratio between job and labor market tenure (De Grip et al., 2004).

The focus of the current study is on input-based approach to employability. It is because “it measures individuals' career potential and enables scholars to disentangle the importance of the different components to get more insight into their interrelatedness, and to examine how employees may make progress in their employability enhancement” (Van der Heijden et al., 2018, p.237).

## **2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter begins with a discussion of various perspectives and approaches of employability. Although there are numerous approaches to employability, several specific approaches are of more relevance to the studies and aims of this thesis. The focus of the present thesis is not on the national or organisational level, but on the individual. Employability is defined here as a subjective rather than an objective phenomenon in that it is based on the perceptions (and beliefs) that an individual has concerning his or her employment possibilities and not on any measure of actual employment possibilities. In general terms, persons in focus for this thesis are employed individuals and this is consistent with the trend in the employability research that places emphasis on individuals' responsibility to take control of their own career. Taken together, employability in the current study is viewed through the lens of competence-based employability. The competence-based employability is focused on for the following reasons: First, it reflects the emphasis on the individual level and subjectivity (i.e. perception), which is consistent with the psychological approach. Second, it reflects input-based approach that “measures individuals' career potential and enables scholars to

disentangle the importance of the different components to get more insight into their interrelatedness, and to examine how employees may make progress in their employability enhancement” (Van der Heijden et al., 2018, p.237). Third, the operationalisation of competence-based employability is highly relevant in the current study since training intervention is provided to stimulate learning which is an important mechanism in employability development. Hence, assessment of competences as a result of training intervention is more meaningful.

## **CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW II**

### **3.1 ANTECEDENTS OF LEARNING**

Training facilitates learning which enables individuals to enlarge and enrich their behavioural repertoire, complete tasks at hand and develop capacity for the future (Huber, 1991; Salas, Weaver, & Shuffler, 2012). Hence, learning is important in employability and career sustainability that demands individuals “to learn the key knowledge, skills and possess abilities that prepare them for the present and future” (Hall, & Arthur, 2015, p. 443; Newman, 2011). Learning is influenced by both individual characteristics and contextual factors (Noe, 2013).

Previous studies support the notion that learning in the training context is influenced by individual factors and social contextual factors (e.g., Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000; Mathieu, Tannenbaum, & Salas, 1992). Individual characteristics consist of a wide variety of personal characteristics, including general personality variables (i.e. self-esteem, optimism, need for control), motivational variables (i.e. motivation to learn, motivation to transfer) and demographic variables (i.e. age, occupation, job experience, position) (Rowold & Schilling, 2006). Among these variables, job- or career-related variables (i.e. job involvement and protean career orientation), personality variables (i.e. openness to experience) and motivational variables (i.e. motivation to learn) are particularly important (London & Smither, 1999; Maurer & Tarulli, 1994). Among the social contextual factors, supervisor support and peer support have been shown to strongly influence employees’ expectations from training, motivation to learn, and transfer of training (Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010; Chiaburu, 2010a; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Chiaburu & Marinova, 2005; Massenberg, Schulte, & Kauffeld, 2017).

To develop an in-depth understanding of the effect of individual factors and social contextual factors on learning, this chapter begins with discussion of the relationship between motivation to learn and learning, which provides a theoretical foundation for the current study. Attention is given to individual factors and social contextual factors as the antecedents of motivation to learn and learning. Hypotheses concerning relevant variables are also developed.

### **3.1.1 MOTIVATION TO LEARN AND LEARNING**

Motivation to learn has long been regarded as a critical precursor in the training context (e.g., Baldwin, Magjuka, & Loher, 1991; Colquitt et al., 2000; Mathieu et al., 1992; Noe & Wilk, 1993; Tannenbaum, Mathieu, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers, 1991). Motivation to learn is defined as a specific desire of a trainee to learn the content of the training program (Noe & Schmitt, 1986). In the context of training, motivation is self-determination in desiring to perform a learning activity (Sørensen, Halvari, Gulli, & Kristiansen, 2009). The emergence of motivation is driven by a self-perception about the consequences of performing such an activity, revealing the degree of personal learning aspirations (DeSimone et al., 2002; Nijman, 2004). The level of motivation is subject to the level of self-perception towards learning outcomes (DeSimone et al., 2002; Nijman, 2004). If consequences are personally perceived to be positive, manageable, beneficial and useful, the level of motivation is higher because such consequences can be translated into advantages or strengths that give an edge to a person (Cheng & Ho, 2001). In contrast, motivation is low or even absent if consequences are personally perceived to be negative and useless (Cheng & Ho, 2001). When motivation is propelled by a self-perception, the motivation is planned rather than unplanned (Wiethoff, 2004). The foundation of motivation is grounded in rational thinking, through which a person needs to consider the

pros and cons of learning and conclude that the pros outweigh the cons (Wiethoff, 2004). As a result, the person can develop aspirations (Sørenbø et al., 2009).

Indeed, Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory further explains what constitutes motivation. Expectancy theory has been well recognised and widely applied in learning motivation research (Mathieu & Martineau, 1997; Noe & Schmitt, 1986; Noe & Wilk, 1993; Salas, Cannon-Bowers, Rhodenizer, & Bowers, 1999; Salas & Cannon-Bowers 2001; Zaniboni, Fraccaroli, Truxillo, Bertolino, & Bauer, 2010). Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) rests on three pillars, expectancy, instrumentality and valence, and these three unique aspects contribute to motivation. Vroom (1964) has expressed expectancy theory in a formula ( $\text{Motivation forces} = \text{Expectancy} \times \text{Instrumentality} \times \text{Valence}$ ). Expectancy is the degree of an individual's perception of his or her own capabilities in performing a task. Expectancy considers an individual's effort as the primary means to an end result (Vroom, 1964). If a person invests more effort in a training programme (e.g. active participation in group exercises, discussions and practicing), he or she expects to master the training content. Instrumentality is a belief that a relationship exists between a change in the level of performance and rewards associated with that performance (Vroom, 1964). A person may expect that good performance derived from a training programme will lead to desirable intrinsic or extrinsic incentives (i.e. increased self-image, recognition from peers and promotion). The final concept involves perceptions of the value of a reward, usually referred to as reward valence (Vroom, 1964). A person may expect a link between increased effort in training and increased performance, which in turn can lead to a higher salary. If the reward has insufficient valence to justify the effort, the person may simply withdraw from the programme (Vroom, 1964).

Mathieu and Martineau (1997) advocate that the valence-instrumentality-expectancy approach is superior to other motivation approaches because it captures the context of learners' work roles and ties individuals' motivation to perceived rewards available in their organisations. Rather than simply explaining what motivates learners, expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964) defines how motivation comes about (Chiang, Jang, Canter, & Prince, 2008).

Noe and Schmitt (1986) conduct one of the first studies to explore the influence of pre-training motivation. These researchers report that a composite measure, including three distinct though related dimensions of motivation (i.e. effort-performance expectancies, performance-outcome expectancies and motivation to learn), is significantly related to learning and that learning has a significant influence on the measure of job performance. These results demonstrate the importance of pre-training motivation for training effectiveness and have been replicated in subsequent research efforts (e.g., Baldwin et al., 1991; Mathieu et al., 1992; Tannenbaum et al., 1991).

Empirical research has consistently shown that motivation to learn plays a critical role before, during and after training (e.g., Baldwin et al., 1991; Colquitt et al., 2000; Mathieu et al., 1992; Noe & Wilk, 1993; Tannenbaum et al., 1991). Motivation to learn affects the extent to which employees are willing to attend training sessions (Noe & Wilk, 1993; Tharenou, 2001), to expend effort to learn and benefit from training (Chuang, Liao, & Tai, 2005; Colquitt et al., 2000) and to apply the skills and knowledge to the workplace (Al-Eisa, Furayyan, & Alhemoud, 2009; Chiaburu & Marinova, 2005). A meta-analysis of training motivation studies shows that motivation to learn is a significant predictor of post-training outcomes, including learning, reactions and transfer (Colquitt et al., 2000). Bauer, Orvis, Ely and Surface (2016) found in a meta-analysis study of the impact of

different motivation type on training outcomes that motivation to learn was a significant predictor of declarative knowledge and initial skill acquisition.

Due to changes in the labour market (i.e. downsizing, restructuring and decline in job tenure), Hong Kong employees perceive a low level of job security (Chan, 2016; Ngo et al., 2013; Tam & Chiu, 2010; Tam & Ip, 2017). Hong Kong employees regard training, a popular way formal learning, as one of the critical means to face employment risks (Tam & Ip, 2017). Training facilitates learning, enabling them to acquire up-to-date knowledge and expertise needed for the current and future employment. Hence, Hong Kong employees are more likely to have a high level of motivation to learn in training programmes to increase their job security, leading to better learning performance. Therefore, it is hypothesised that

H1: Motivation to learn is positively related to learning.

## **3.2 INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUAL FACTORS ON MOTIVATION TO LEARN AND LEARNING**

### **3.2.1 OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE**

Openness to experience is defined as the degree to which a person can withstand unfamiliarity and problems and develop interest in ideas and aspirations of personal experience around actions, fantasies, values, feelings and aesthetics (Tesch & Cameron, 1987). Openness to experience is important in the modern workplace where organisational changes can be triggered by organisational downsizing, restructuring or technological advancement, requiring employees to be versatile at work or adaptive to changes (Hirsch & Sourcey, 2006). Arguably, openness to experience is an internal trait that has been developed since childhood and is associated with the concept of risk taking



(Soane & Chmiel, 2005). Risk takers are more likely to be influenced by the family or an education system that embraces creative or risk-taking activities (Little, 2010). Open individuals are curious, imaginative, cultured, open-minded, original, intelligent and artistically sensitive (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Therefore, open individuals are more likely to engage new settings with some level of curiosity and a willingness to assess where they need to adapt. In contrast, people who are low on openness are more conservative in decision making, which, for them, is familiar and conventional rather than novel and unique (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

In the workplace, individuals who score high on openness to experience are likely to have a broad width and depth of experience and an appreciation of adopting new ways of doing things to improve or change the status quo than those who are low on openness to experience. Their quest for risk taking in conjunction with their greater sensitivity to experience may encourage creative solutions to problem solving (Wanberg & Banas, 2000). In contrast, individuals who are low on openness to experience may be reluctant to change so they can avoid uncertainty (Wanberg & Banas, 2000).

Openness to experience can be meaningfully related to training because those who are open to new experiences tend to be more intellectually curious, creative and flexible (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae, 1996). It is also related to dopamine secretion, which is related to work memory, attention and learning (Jang et al., 2001). As a result, they are more likely to explore a variety of avenues to improve their knowledge and skill sets through training. Empirical studies have supported that openness to experience has important influences in training contexts (Bakker, Demerouti, & Ten Brummelhuis, 2012; Barrick & Mount, 1991; Colquitt et al., 2000; Major, Turner, & Fletcher, 2006; Noe, Tews, & Marand, 2013; Orvis & Leffler, 2011). Openness to experience is related to

motivation to learn (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Major et al., 2006; Naquin & Holton, 2002). Individuals with high score for openness to experience are, by definition, receptive to experiencing and learning new things. As a result, they are likely to maintain attention on learning and sustain motivation when learning becomes challenging. Barrick and Mount (1991) further explain that openness to experience may determine which individuals are “learning ready” or more willing to engage in learning experiences. In line with Barrick and Mount (1991), Major et al. (2006) find that openness to experiences is related to motivation to learn, which in turn is related to development activities.

Open individuals are far more oriented toward learning (Kaspi-Baruch, 2016). The nature of openness should be beneficial for learning as a result of training: open individuals would be more likely to approach new concepts, mental frameworks and behaviours with interest, together with willingness to engage, experiment, rehearse and assimilate them (Arteche et al., 2009; Goldberg, 1992; McCrae & John, 1992). For instance, those who score high on openness use a deep approach to learning (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2009; Zhang & Ziegler, 2016), meaning that they treat learning situations with intrinsic interest and with the intention to really understand and assimilate the material (Biggs, Kember, & Leung, 2001).

In addition, consistent findings in the training literature suggest that openness to experience is significantly related to learning performance (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001; Gully, Payne, Koles, & Whiteman, 2002; Herold, Davis, Fedor, & Parsons, 2002; Ziegler et al., 2014). Lievens, Harris, Van Keer and Bisqueret (2003) report that openness of European managers is related to cross-cultural learning performance in Japan. Barrick and Mount (1991) conduct a meta-analysis that uses several groups of professionals, including police, managers, sales representatives and

skilled and semi-skilled workers. The result shows that openness to experience is a significant predictor of learning proficiency across occupations. Similarly, in a study of the 15 prior meta-analysis studies on the relationship between the five-factor model personality traits and job performance, Barrick and Mount (2001) find that openness to experience predicts training performance especially well. In a longitude study of the effect of the big five personality facets on job learning performance, Ziegler et al. (2014) find that two facets of openness to experience, openness to ideas and openness to fantasy, are predictors of learning performance across four different jobs, including laboratory professionals, skilled production workers, metal/electronic technicians and skilled commercial workers.

The features of openness should facilitate adaptive performance, which encompasses quick adoption of new techniques, engagement in creative problem solving, and flexibility regarding physical, cultural and inter-personal aspects of work (Woo, Chernyshenko, Stark, & Conz, 2014). According to Hofstede Insights (2018), Hong Kong are low in uncertainty avoidance, meaning that Hong Kong people are adaptable, flexible and willing to adjust to every change. Hence, Hong Kong employees may also be flexible in adapting to changes in the labour market by taking part in training to acquire up-to-date knowledge and skills. Aligning the Hong Kong context with what has been discussed around openness to experience, it is reasonable to hypothesise that

H2: Openness to experience is positively related to motivation to learn.

H3: Openness to experience is positively related to learning.

### 3.2.2 PROTEAN CAREER ORIENTATION

Protean career orientation refers to an individual's tendency to embark on a career with an aim to achieve personally perceived success through self-directed career management (Direenzo et al., 2015). It is also generally referred to as the protean career "attitude" (Briscoe et al., 2006) or protean career "approach" (Baruch & Quick, 2007) in the career literature. Protean career orientation is an offspring of the protean career concept. Hall (1976) introduces "the protean career in his book *Careers in Organizations*, by describing the emergence of self-managed careers guided by the search for personal fulfillment" (Direenzo, 2010, p.16). Believing adaptability to be critical to the successful enactment of this career form, "Hall [draws] from Greek mythology, naming it after the god Proteus, who could change shape at will to meet the demands of any given situations" (Direenzo, 2010, p.16). Thus, the protean career is generally viewed as being highly adaptive and flexible, in addition to being self-directed in pursuit of psychological success (Greenhaus et al., 2008).

The emergence of a protean career can be attributed to changes in employment relationships or organisational structures driven by market pressures, such as globalisation and rapid technological advancement. Such pressures create challenges for both organisations and employees. For example, organisations have restructured their hierarchies by reducing managerial layers and outsourcing less essential business functions. These changes have resulted in fewer long-term employment opportunities as organisations become hesitant to invest in long-term relationships with employees due to the need to remain flexible in turbulent times (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Gubler, Arnold, & Coombs, 2014). Meanwhile, employees are less likely to work in a single or a few organisations under the notion of a protean career (Hall, 2004a) as workers today are forging careers through numerous organisations, divisions, locations and even industries

(Sullivan, 1999). The traditional career, once characterised by purely internal and vertical growth and guided by the organisation, is giving way to self-directed and independently created livelihoods. Hence, theorists emphasise the attribute of self-directedness as a way to understand individuals' attempts to manage their employability in the workplace (Taber & Briddick, 2011).

In the 21st century, the protean career is an emerging perspective of career research (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2010). Employees have continued to acquire and demonstrate the necessary skills and attend training to maintain career stability (e.g., employability) in the most recent past decade (Gubler et al., 2014). This has turned the spotlight on protean career development and it is now considered as a crucial career orientation to achieve employees' subjective career objectives. Empirical research broadly supports a positive correlation between protean career orientation and career satisfaction (e.g., Baruch, 2014; Baruch, Grimland, & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014; Briscoe, Henagan, Burton, & Murphy, 2012; De Vos & Soens, 2008; Grimland et al., 2012; Herrmann, Hirschi, & Baruch, 2015; Park, 2009; Rodrigues, Guest, Oliveira, & Alfes, 2015; Verbruggen & Sels, 2008; Volmer & Spurk, 2011). This is because it is assumed that people with high protean career orientation know what they want from their careers and have the adaptability and self-awareness to achieve their subjectively aspired career values (Waters, Hall, Wang, & Briscoe, 2015). Therefore, high protean career should be positively related to being self-directed and taking personal initiative to achieve personally valued career goals. In addition, as people with high protean career orientation are values-driven, it should be more likely that they achieve career goals that is in line with their values and thereby achieve success according to their own standards (Hall, 2004a).

A protean career is regarded as a career in which the individual bears greater responsibility for his or her career choices and opportunities. The individual values freedom and self-growth and defines career success in terms of psychological factors (e.g. job satisfaction, personal accomplishment, self-actualisation) as compared with a traditional career (Hall & Chandler, 2005). The protean career includes the core values of self-growth by focusing on identity changes and continuous learning in career development (Hall, 2004a; Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015).

A protean career is different from the traditional career. A protean career is managed by a person who takes more direct and personal responsibility in managing his or her career. It is driven by self-awareness, a desire to grow professionally and acquire self-perceived success (e.g. satisfaction of gaining more skills and knowledge or having achieved a dream) (Hall, 1996; Hall & Chandler, 2005; McDonald, Brown, & Bradley, 2005; Park & Rothwell, 2009). This means that a protean career does not focus on hierarchical or linear advancement in the organisation. Nowadays workers anticipate working with numerous organisations throughout their careers via short-term, transactional contracts in which individual productivity is exchanged for the opportunity to develop career competences and increase marketability (Hall & Moss, 1998; Mirvis & Hall, 1994; Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015). Under the notion of a traditional career, an employer would furnish job security for an individual in exchange for company loyalty in a relational contract. Hence, a significant portion of career development rests on the shoulders of the employer or those managed by the organisation (Granrose & Baccili, 2006). The necessity or pressure on individuals to manage their career actively is limited (Baruch & Bozionelos, 2011).

Given the increased need for autonomous career management because of a noticeable shift in the fundamental nature of careers, scholars have recognized that the protean

career concept can possibly be best captured by an individual-level orientation instead of the actual structure of a career (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Inkson, 2006; Sargent & Domberger, 2007). Though it is not clear if an orientation is an attitudinal, perceptual, cognitive, behavioural or emotional construct, it generally represents a predisposition towards specific behaviours.

Hence, some authors have adopted an expansive approach, describing an orientation as a framework that affects how the individual experiences and approaches different situations and activities (Kozlowski & Bell, 2006; Van Yperen & Janssen, 2002). Describing orientations in this way allows both personal factors (e.g. dispositions, perceptions) and context (e.g. activities, situations) to play a role in the formation and manifestation of individual orientations.

Protean career orientation demonstrates a framework of desires, beliefs and tendencies that predispose individuals to engage their career context in distinct ways. Specifically, the literature has reached consensus that protean career orientation is a two-dimensional framework that encompasses a value-driven orientation and self-directed approach. A value-driven orientation involves an individual pursuing personally meaningful values and goals that provide motivation behind career decisions and create standards for experiencing psychological career success (Direnzo et al., 2015). Intrinsic values are regarded as an internal motivator for protean career development. The protean careerist is more likely to use self-defined standards and values to determine subjective career success (e.g. recognition, self-fulfillment, satisfaction) rather than following external standards such as monetary-related recognition, raises in salary and number of promotions obtained (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). In particular, protean careerists have a tendency to have a learning and employability orientation instead of a performance and

job security orientation (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). To sum up, an individual with value-driven attitude should be more motivated by following his own internal compass, or, in other words, by upholding personal ideals or principles, but not extrinsic motivators such as money, status or promotion (Segers, Inceoglu, Vloeberghs, Bartram, & Henderickx, 2008).

A value-driven orientation creates the basis on which a self-directed approach lies. Self-directed individuals guide the direction of their careers consistent with their own values, rather than the organisation's values (Briscoe et al., 2006; Hall, 2002). This is in line with a person's own meaningful values and motivation behind career decisions and standards for experiencing psychological career success; a self-directed approach to career management means an individual "exerts personal control over career development by taking the initiative to explore career options and make career decisions" (Direnzo et al., 2015, p.538). It is consistent with the individual career management concept (Hall, 1976) as an on-going process of preparing, implementing and monitoring career plans undertaken by an individual. Similarly, employees must be able to serve as their own career manager, and their own futurist, constantly trying to discern trends that will influence their skills and employment, and keep themselves continually equipped with new knowledge and skills that make them attractive to employers (Hall & Moss, 1998). To sum up, a person with a self-directed attitude should be motivated by challenging targets and stretching one's abilities, that is, achievement. Being motivated by opportunities for further training and development (personal growth), whether it is through formal training or from people in the organization itself, will help people to adapt and to move through a career cycle (Segers et al., 2008).



Gubler et al. (2014, p. 34) redefine protean career concepts by including the two additional crucial aspects of identity and adaptability. Identity is “the simultaneous existence of stabilising forces” and adaptability is “[...] the capability to adapt easily to changes in the environment. Both newly defined dimensions are important as long as the individual has pursued a particular career path based on own identity, values, adaptability, and self-direction”.

While the role of the individual is critical in career success, the important role of organisations should not be overlooked. Organisational influences such as organisational culture, formal training and development programmes, cross-functional job assignment and peer socialization are also critical in influencing an employee’s career growth (Hall, 2004a). Previous studies (Ballout, 2009; Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, & Cardy, 2016; Reitman & Schneer, 2008) have found that individuals who gain organisational support for learning opportunities are more likely to achieve higher job satisfaction with their organisation and career growth. Gubler et al. (2014) suggest that the combination of employees’ protean career and organisational career support programmes is a win-win approach for both employees and employers. Employees work towards organisational goal attainment while pursuing their own career goals.

Studies have found that protean career orientation is positively related to continuous and team learning (Park, 2008) and learning performance (Gasteiger, 2007). Individuals high in protean career orientation tend to control the direction and development of their careers to achieve their own independently derived goals. As a result, a strong protean career orientation is manifested through proactive planning of one’s career that can lead to the acquisition of resources that enables the employee to achieve his or her goal. In this process, career goals can be established through the acquisition of skills and/or

knowledge, certifications, education and greater experience (Weng, McElroy, Morrow, & Liu, 2010).

Individuals high in protean career orientation proactively and independently manage their careers to achieve success. These people engage in career management in order to build career capital and gain leverage in an increasingly dynamic environment. Through participating in organisational training and development programmes, they can acquire and develop a demonstrable set of portable skills and knowledge, which facilitates adaptability in any environment, rather than depending on the traditional organisational career development practices (Park & Rothwell, 2009). Therefore, highly protean individuals are expected to engage in training activities to develop skills or knowledge that is necessary to achieve career goals. This claim is reinforced by Kyndt and Baert (2013), who argue that when employees consciously and strategically think about their careers, they have more motivation for future learning activities and learn better in these activities. In line with Kyndt and Baert (2013) and Kyndt, Govaerts, Dochy and Baert (2011) find that self-directedness in career processes is positively related to the intention of an employee to engage in formal learning activities. Sanders et al. (2011) report that career orientation is positively correlated with learning intention, indicating that the more employees work towards certain career goals in a proactive way, the more likely they develop motivation for learning. Therefore, people with protean career orientation are motivated to learn (Briscoe & Hall, 2006).

Empirical research consistently supports that there is a positive relationship between protean career orientation and motivation to learn. However, it is argued that motivation to learn may promote protean career orientation. Such argument is based on the ground that motivation to learn is associated with self-efficacy and self-efficacy is conceived as

enabler of a protean career and antecedent of protean career orientation (Hall, 2002; Inkson, 2006; Waters et al., 2015). Others have suggested that self-efficacy might be a consequence of protean career orientation instead of a precondition (Greenhaus et al., 2008). The literature is inconsistent about whether self-efficacy is a feature of protean career orientation or correlate, antecedent, or outcome of protean career orientation (Gubler et al., 2014). Since empirical studies consistently show that protean career orientation facilitates motivation to learn, it is predicted that there is a positive relationship between protean career orientation and motivation to learn in the current study.

Changes in the labour market in Hong Kong (i.e. downsizing, restructuring and decline in job tenure) increase employees' proactive involvement in career management and responsibility for their own careers. To be flexible and ready to adapt to the changes increase employees' orientation towards developing their capabilities and skills. The growth of part time, temporary or contract employees in Hong Kong can be seen as evidence of individuals recognizing responsibility for managing their own careers (Cappelli & Keller, 2013; Chan, 2016; Tam & Ip, 2017). Employees in Hong Kong believe that career development is their own business (Towers Watson, 2010). Hence, it is reasonable for Hong Kong employees to be more devoted to a protean career, through which they can have a better control of their career progress by proactively taking part in training activities to acquire skills and knowledge necessary to maintain career stability (Ngo et al., 2013; Tam & Chiu, 2010). Aligning the Hong Kong context with what has been discussed around protean career orientation, it is reasonable to hypothesise that

H4: A protean career orientation is positively related to motivation to learn.

H5: A protean career orientation is positively related to learning.

### **3.2.3 JOB INVOLVEMENT**

Job involvement is a key aspect influencing important organisational and individual variables. From an organisational perspective, job involvement is considered the key to activating employee motivation (Lawler, 1986; Lin, Wang, & Wang, 2013) and a fundamental basis for achieving competitive advantage in business markets (Lawler, 1992; Pfeffer, 1994). From an individual perspective, it has also been regarded as a key to goal-directed behaviour and motivation, as well as to satisfaction within the workplace and personal growth (Brown, 1996; Hackman & Lawler, 1971; Kahn, 1990; Lawler & Hall, 1970; Lin et al., 2013).

Different interpretations of job involvement have evolved in the literature since Lodahl and Kejner (1965) first introduced the concept of job involvement. Job involvement is a cognitive state or belief that reflects an individual's psychological connection with his or her present job and the salience of the job to the individual's self-image (Kanungo, 1982a, 1982b). In line with Kanungo (1982a, 1982b) and Elloy, Everett and Flynn (1991, p. 162) suggest that job involvement refers to "generalized cognitive state of psychological identification with the job". More recently, Shuck, Ghosh, Zigarmi and Nimon (2013) have suggested that job involvement refers to "cognitive judgement about the work or job itself which is connected to individual identity development. Research has generally supported that the focus of job involvement is on cognition (e.g., Lawler & Hall, 1970; Lodahl & Kejner, 1965; Kanungo, 1982a; Paullay, Alliger, & Stone-Romero, 1994). Job involvement is a cognitive judgment about the job itself, which is tied to self-image (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Saks, 2006). For employees with a high level of job involvement, the job is critical to their self-image (Kanungo, 1982a). These individuals identify with and care about their jobs. Consistent with this belief, Brown (1996) proposes that job involvement is the degree to which employees identify with their work, while Lawler and

Hall (1970) define job involvement as the degree of importance of one's job to one's self-image.

A state of high job involvement refers to as the degree to which an employee identifies with his or her work (Brown, 1996). With higher degrees of job involvement, individuals put more time and effort into their jobs. Research has revealed positive relationships between job involvement and the investment of resources, such as expending time and effort (Brown & Leigh, 1996; Patterson & O'Driscoll, 1990). People who are highly involved with their jobs experience an increased emotional investment in the job role. This increased emotional investment in the job role includes increased time and energy focusing on the job role (Janssen, 2003). It seems likely that high identification with one's work leads to greater interest in job-related improvement opportunities, such as training and development activities (Cheng & Ho, 2001).

Job involvement is understood as the degree to which a job situation is central to an individual's identity (Kanungo, 1982a; Lodahl & Kejner, 1965; Riipinen, 1997). Whether an individual is involved in a job depends on the extent to which the job satisfies his or her salient needs regarding prestige, self-respect, autonomy and self-regard (Allport, 1943). Hence, job involvement in this aspect is situationally determined (Elloy et al., 1991). Along the same line, Lawler and Hall (1970) define job involvement as the degree to which employees perceive their job to be an important part of their lives and central to their identities due to the opportunities it affords them to satisfy important needs.

Perceptions regarding the importance of a job have a significant effect on employees' career and skill development activities (Rowold & Schilling, 2006). The more employees care about their job and are aware of the importance of the job, the more they are

motivated to develop their skills and enhance their job performance. Researchers have suggested that individuals who have a high level of job involvement are more likely to be motivated in training because participation in job training can improve job performance, increase skill levels and increase feelings of self-worth (e.g., Mathieu et al., 1993; Martineau, 1996). Therefore, job involvement is related to training motivation because job-involved trainees have personal goals that are very much tied to work success (Colquitt et al., 2000). Recently, Lin, et al. (2013) have found that job involvement has a significant positive effect on extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for learning business skills.

The literature has consistently shown that employees' behaviour can be motivated by or based on an attitudinal state (Schleicher, Hansen, & Fox, 2011). According to Campbell (1990), Hackman and Oldham (1975), Kanungo (1982a) and Motowidlo (2003), an attitudinal state is a main antecedent to various behavioural outcomes. Individuals with positive job attitudes (job involvement being one of those) put forth an extra amount of effort to improve job performance to achieve organisational objectives (Rotenberry & Moberg, 2007). One way to improve job performance is to engage in training because individuals perceive it as an important means to improve job performance, increase their skill levels and elevate their feelings of self-worth (Noe, 1986).

Empirical evidence supports the notion that employees' job involvement has a positive impact on training and development activities (Maurer & Tarulli, 1994; Maurer, Weiss, & Barbeite, 2003). Rowold and Schilling (2006) find that employees' job involvement is positively related to employees' participation in career-related continuous learning activities. Employees with a high level of job involvement are more likely to be motivated to participate in learning and apply their learning in the workplace (Cheng &

Ho, 2001; Holton, 2005; Noe, 1986). These employees, high on job involvement, are more concerned about their jobs and their own performance and are constantly seeking ways for job-related improvements.

Job involvement is an important job-related variable affecting motivation to learn and learning in the training context. Empirical research generally has demonstrated that job involvement predicts employees' motivation to learn and consequently their subsequent learning and transfer of learning (Colquitt et al., 2000; Tracey, Hinkin, Tannenbaum, & Mathieu, 2001; Von Treuer, McHardy, & Earl, 2013). Von Treuer et al. (2013) report that job involvement is a significant predictor of motivation to learn in a study of learners who participate in a variety of learning courses, ranging from leadership and change management training to equal employment opportunity training. In a study of 250 managers who attend a basic managerial knowledge and skills training course, Tracey et al. (2001) find that job involvement is significantly related to pre-training motivation. In a study of school administrators concerning the relationship between trainees' attitude and training effectiveness, Noe and Schmitt (1986) find that trainees with high levels of job involvement display greater motivation to learn and more motivation to transfer the learned skills back to the job. Two studies investigating the influence of job involvement on the intention to engage in both formal and informal learning activities report that job involvement is statistically significantly related to learning intention (Maurer & Tarulli, 1994; Maurer et al., 2003).

Hong Kong employees, under the influence of Chinese tradition, tend to treat their organization as their family and develop a strong sense of belongingness to it (Liu, Lee, & Chen, 2012). Viewing themselves as members in the organisations, they are likely to get involved in the job. Changes in the labour market (i.e. downsizing, restructuring and

decline in job tenure) have caused Hong Kong employees to stay put in their current organisations. Those less advantaged workers generally have far fewer options because it is difficult for them to change job and switch to another industrial or occupational sector (Tam & Ip, 2017). Thus, employees may get more involved in their job to increase the probability of keeping the job. Highly involved employees are more likely to participate in learning activities to keep their current employment. Taken the influence of Chinese tradition and the changes in the labour market in Hong Kong together, it is hypothesised that

H6: Job involvement is positively related to motivation to learn.

H7: Job involvement is positively related to learning.

### **3.3 INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL CONTEXTUAL FACTORS ON MOTIVATION TO LEARN AND LEARNING**

Goldstein (1991) states that contextual factors may have a substantial influence on an individual's motivation to learn and subsequent performance during training. Indeed, studies have shown that work context may have a direct influence on motivation to learn, as well as knowledge and skill acquisition (e.g., Baldwin et al., 1991; Hicks & Klimoski, 1987). Within the work context, one of the most important factors that facilitates training participation and training transfer is the social support that trainees receive (Chiaburu, 2010a; Chiaburu, Dam, & Hutchins, 2010a; Massenberg, Spurk, & Kauffeld, 2015). Social support emphasises the importance of other people for employees' functioning. Social support can be provided in different ways (House, 1981): through instrumental support (doing something for the employee), emotional support (giving care and sympathy), informational support (giving relevant information) and appraisal support (feedback focused on enhancing the employee's self-esteem) (Semeijn et al., 2015).



Past research has identified supervisor support and peer support as major dimensions of social support, influencing participation in training as formal workplace learning and knowledge transfer (Chiaburu, 2010a; Chiaburu & Marinova, 2005; Chiaburu et al., 2010a; Homklin, Takahashi, & Techakanont, 2014; Lim & Morris, 2006; Martin, 2010; Massenberg et al., 2015; Nijman, Nijhof, Wognum, & Veldkamp, 2006; Van den Bossche, Segers, & Jansen, 2010). The importance of supervisor and peer support in training can be explained by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social identity theory suggests that groups are regarded as an important means to give a sense of belonging and worth (Tajfel, 1978). Social belonging and relatedness are related to training and transfer of knowledge and behaviour into workgroups (c.f. Reagans & McEvily, 2003). With newly acquired skills and knowledge, existing ones may no longer apply or be useful. Thus, learners apply what they have acquired from training, but they may risk their established social identification and habitual group membership because the existing organisational status quo might be broken (Weisweiler, Nikitopoulos, Netzel, & Frey, 2012). To determine whether an employee is suitable to participate in training and whether the application of newly acquired skills and knowledge is “proper” or “valid”, supervisors and peers can become important sources of information (Forsyth, 2000).

### **3.3.1 SUPERVISOR SUPPORT**

Recent career literature recognises the key role supervisor plays in organizational career development (e.g., Crawshaw & Game, 2015). While there is growing evidence that employers increasingly demand their employees to bear ultimate responsibility for their career development, most employees still want and expect significant organizational and supervisor support in this process (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008). As employees strive to plan and manage their careers, they value the advice and support from their supervisors. In the training literature, supervisor support is defined as “the extent to which supervisors

behave in ways congruent with training objectives and optimise employee application of new learning to the job” (Ng, 2015, p.224). Supervisor support is a multidimensional construct and can include many actions on the part of supervisors that influence the overall effectiveness of a training programme (Cromwell & Kolb, 2004; Lancaster, Milia, & Cameron, 2013; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Saks & Belcourt, 2006; Quinones, Ford, Sego, & Smith, 1995). The multiple dimensions of supervisor support reflect how supervisors can help in different stages of training. Indeed, what supervisors do before, during and after the training course is critical to learning and learning transfer (Lancaster et al., 2013).

Prior to training, supervisors can provide learners with support by meeting with them to discuss training materials, set training goals, assist in time management and encourage their attendance and participation (Blanchard & Thackers, 2007; Ismail, Mohamed, Sulaiman, & Sabbi, 2010a; Saks & Belcourt, 2006). During the course, supervisors can provide support by helping learners find information and discussing ideas with them (Lancaster et al., 2013). Supervisors also play a key role in post-training intervention by prompting and encouraging learners to transfer and apply knowledge in the workplace, sharing information and giving direct feedback to learners and providing opportunities to learners who practice and apply what has been learned on the job (Ismail et al., 2010a; Lancaster et al., 2013; Pham, Segers, & Gijssels, 2012; Saks & Belcourt, 2006; Taylor, Russ-Eft, & Chan, 2005; Van den Bossche et al., 2010).

Studies have shown that the attitude of supervisors also has a substantial influence on employees’ development of the ability and confidence required for specific tasks through training (Axtell & Parker, 2003; Bandura 1977). In particular, supervisors’ attitudes in three different phases-namely, before, during, and after a training session will have

significant influence on the training performance of employees. For example, some supervisors may feel his position may be jeopardized if his subordinates' working abilities are improved through training. If the supervisor's attitude is negative, for instance, not giving the full support the employees need during training, the learning effect may be compromised. In contrast, if the supervisor's attitude is positive, for instance, encouraging employees to involve in training or appointing someone as trainees' deputy during training, the effect of employees' training may be more significant (Liang, Kao, Tu, Chin, & Chung, 2014).

The role of supervisor support in employee training has been widely supported. For example, in examining employees who have attended training programmes in a state public work agency in Malaysia, Ismail et al. (2010a) reveal that supervisors' ability to provide sufficient support and use a comfortable communication style are significantly related to motivation to learn. In another study of technical employees in a city-based local authority in Malaysia, Ismail et al. (2009) find that supervisor communication indirectly affects the transfer of competences and job performance via motivation to learn. In the recent study, Park, Kang and Kim (2018) found that supervisor support for training not only relates to motivation to learn but also influences training participation and job performance.

Chinese society is characterized by the hierarchical authority of 'respectful superior and inferior subordinate', that is high power distance (Cheng, Chou, Huang, Wu, & Farh, 2004; Yang, 1981). Subordinates are highly obedient and unquestioningly follow the supervisors' command (Chen & Aryee, 2007; Chen et al., 2002; Hui et al., 2007; Redding, 1990; Wang, 2008). Hence, subordinates may be more submissive and therefore influenced more by their supervisors (Cheng et al., 2004; Farh & Cheng, 2000; Liang et

al., 2014). According to Hofstede Insights (2018), Hong Kong is high in power distance. This indicates that Hong Kong society tend to be hierarchical. When Hong Kong employees are thinking about their career, they are more likely to seek advice from their supervisors and take their suggestions. In this regard, supervisors play an important role in motivating and supporting employee training in the Hong Kong context. Thus, it is hypothesised that

H8: Supervisor support is positively related to motivation to learn.

H9: Supervisor support is positively related to learning.

### **3.3.2 PEER SUPPORT**

In the training literature, peer support is defined as the extent to which peers behave in ways consistent with training objectives and optimise peers' application of new learning to the job (Baldwin et al., 2009; Holton, Bastes, & Ruona, 2000). In the current study, peers refer to members in the same team who interact during their daily work (Schneider & Reichers, 1983). They have the same supervisor and the same colleagues, together with similar objective structural characteristics of their work such as regular meetings or discussions with their supervisors (Holton, Bates, Seyler, & Carvalho, 1997). Although less attention has been devoted to this form of support, the results from research consistently show a positive impact of peer support on training participation rates (Noe & Wilk, 1993; Tharenou, 1997) and training transfer (Fecteau, Dobbins, Russell, Ladd, & Kudisch, 1995; Hawley & Barnard, 2005).

Recent studies have found that support from peers is even more important than supervisory support in the training context. The relative importance of peer support versus supervisor support is due to an increase in the use of teamwork on the job.

Employees develop a sense of ties within the workgroup (Chiaburu, 2010a; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Chiaburu & Marinova, 2005; Homklin et al., 2014; Leidl & Zempel-Dohmen, 2006; Van der Klink, Gielen, & Nauta, 2001). For example, Chiaburu and Marinova (2005) examine the influence of individual (goal orientation and self-efficacy) and contextual factors (supervisor and peer support) on learning transfer among learners who attend a one-day corporate training programme. They find that peer support is related to both pre-training motivation and skill transfer, with a stronger relationship with the latter. Surprisingly, supervisor support is unrelated to both motivation to learn and skill transfer. This might be because employees in the focal organisation depend more on team-level support from peers for training outcomes.

The growing importance of peer support with respect to training is in line with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In comparison to supervisors, peers represent the so-called in group due to a closer relatedness and a comparable level in the hierarchy. Learners' willingness to participate in learning and to transfer what is learned to the job tends to respond to a proximal source (such as one's colleagues) rather than a larger context (such as one's supervisor). That is, even when learners perceive support and rewards from the supervisor that are already tied to training and learning transfer, they may need direct or additional reinforcement from colleagues (a source close to them) to influence training and transfer. It is possible that team members in the workplace influence trainees' willingness to participate in training and transfer more than supervisors do. This is because co-workers are proximal to their colleagues, in immediate contact with them and of equal status and therefore more influential in training and learning transfer (Chiaburu, 2010a).

Social orientation is one of the important characteristics of Chinese culture (Hofstede, 1984; Yang, 1981). As social relationship is greatly emphasized in Chinese culture, a closer relationship between co-workers is developed than their western counterparts (Bond, 1981; Chen, Chen, & Portnoy, 2009; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Thams, Liu, & Von Glinow, 2013). The collectivistic value contexts also strengthen other-oriented reciprocal acts (e.g. helping others) (Tian, Corder, & Gamble, 2016). In this regard, such a personalized relationship encourages co-workers to support each other's learning in the workplace in Hong Kong (Newman, Thanacoody, & Hui, 2011; Wang, 2008). Thus, it is hypothesised that

H10: Peer support is positively related to motivation to learn.

H11: Peer support is positively related to learning.

### **3.4 MOTIVATION TO LEARN AS A MEDIATOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL FACTORS AND SOCIAL CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AND LEARNING**

Studies have found that motivation to learn is influenced by individual factors such as personality and job involvement (Colquitt et al., 2000; Tracey et al., 2001; Von Treuer et al., 2013) and factors such as social support and organisational climate (Chiaburu & Marinova, 2005; Colquitt et al., 2000; Ismail et al., 2010b). Research has also confirmed that individual factors and social contextual factors predict motivation to learn and motivation to learn further predicts knowledge acquisition, learner reactions and learning transfer (Colquitt et al., 2000; Sitzmann, Brown, Casper, & Zimmerman, 2008). Several studies have revealed the indirect relationship between supervisor support and learning transfer, mediated by motivation to learn (e.g., Bhatti, Battour, Sundram, & Othman, 2013; Clark, Dobbins, & Ladd, 1993; Fecteau et al., 1995; Ng, 2015). Thus, prior

research offers a relatively clear picture of the importance of motivation serving as a mediating variable between individual and social contextual factors and training outcomes (e.g., Al-Eisa et al., 2009; Beier & Kanfer, 2010; Brophy, 2010; Chiaburu, 2010a; Elangovan & Karakowsky, 1999; Fecteau et al., 1995; Goldstein & Ford, 2002; Ismail et al., 2009; Mathieu et al., 1992; Ng, 2015).

Regarding the link between individual characteristics and learning mediated by motivation to learn, empirical studies have found that openness to experience is related to motivation to learn (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Major et al., 2006) and motivation to learn in turn contributes to learning (e.g., Chuang et al., 2005; Colquitt et al., 2000). Combining H1 and H2 with the empirical evidence discussed in this paragraph, this study posits that motivation to learn acts as a mediator between openness to experience and learning. Therefore, it is hypothesised that

H12: Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between openness to experience and learning.

Although no empirical study has investigated the relationship between protean career orientation and motivation to learn, Kyndt et al. (2013) report that self-directedness in career processes is positively related to the intention of an employee to engage in formal learning activities. Taking H1 and H4 into account, this study posits that motivation to learn acts as a mediator between protean career orientation and learning. Therefore, it is hypothesised that

H13: Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between protean career orientation and learning.

Empirical research has found that job involvement is related to motivation to learn (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2000; Von Treuer et al., 2013) and motivation to learn in turn contributes to learning (e.g., Chuang et al., 2005; Colquitt et al., 2000). Combined with H1 and H6, this study posits that motivation to learn acts as a mediator between job involvement and learning. Therefore, it is hypothesised that

H14: Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between job involvement and learning.

Regarding the link between social contextual factors and learning mediated by motivation to learn, empirical research has found that supervisor support is related to motivation to learn (e.g., Ismail et al., 2010a) and motivation to learn in turn contributes to learning (e.g., Chuang et al., 2005; Colquitt et al., 2000). Combining H1 and H8, this study posits that motivation to learn acts as a mediator between supervisor support and learning. Therefore, it is hypothesised that

H15: Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between supervisor support and learning.

Meanwhile, empirical studies have also found that peer support is related to motivation to learn (e.g., Chiaburu & Marinova, 2005) and motivation to learn in turn contributes to learning (e.g., Chuang et al., 2005; Colquitt et al., 2000). Combining H1 and H10, this study posits that motivation to learn acts as a mediator between peer support and learning. Therefore, it is hypothesised that

H16: Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between peer support and learning.



### **3.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter begins with a discussion of the relationship between motivation to learn and learning. Then, the influence of individual factors (i.e. openness to experience, protean career orientation and job involvement) and social contextual factors (i.e. supervisor support and peer support) on motivation to learn and learning are also discussed. It is followed by discussion of motivation to learn as a mediator between individual factors and social contextual factors. Hypotheses concerning the study are developed following the discussion.

## **CHAPTER 4 LITERATURE REVIEW III**

### **4.1 OUTCOMES OF LEARNING**

To sustain one's career in the highly volatile environment of nowadays requires adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Van Dam, Bipp, & Van Ruysseveldt, 2015), which is strongly related to learning in general and within the career context in particular (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Baruch & Bozionelos, 2011; Eby et al., 2003; Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Indeed, prominent career development practices, such as training (Chen & Klimoski, 2007) and mentoring (Laud & Johnson, 2012), are premised on the belief that such practices influence learning, which in turn enhances career-related outcomes (Chen & Klimoski, 2007; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Radu Lefebvre & Redien-Collot, 2013). The fundamental premise in the notion of sustainable careers is that sustainability is built on mutual benefits for individuals and employers (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015). Given that employability primarily interests the individual whereas job performance primarily interests the employer (Bozionelos et al., 2016), it follows that job performance should also be considered together with employability when career sustainability is taken into account. The following sections discuss the relationship between learning, employability and job performance.

### **4.2 LEARNING AND EMPLOYABILITY**

Intensifying global competition, frequent organisational downsizing and the emergence of new technologies have drawn the attention of employees to the need to improve employability (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Kompier, 2006; Quinlan & Bohle, 2009). Development and sustainability of employability depend on continuous learning, adaptability to new job demands or shifts in expertise and the ability to acquire skills through lateral rather than upward career moves in varied organisational contexts

(Scholarios et al., 2008). Thus, learning becomes an important endeavour for all employees throughout their work lives (Van der Heijden et al., 2009a).

Employee learning is committed to improving employees' occupational expertise by acquiring and developing employees' new knowledge and skills (Lei, Slocum, & Pitts, 1999). Individuals who seek up-to-date knowledge and expertise in job-related areas may have more confidence in completing assignments and may perceive that they have higher employability (Kim, Liden, Kim, & Lee, 2015).

Empirical research has found that undertaking formal learning activities contributes to one's employability (e.g., Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995; Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a). For instance, Groot and Maassen van den Brink (2000) report positive effects of training on employability among Dutch employees. De Grip and Sanders (2004) find that participation in training contributes to the firm internal employability of low-skill workers. Van der Heijden et al. (2009a) find a positive relationship between job-related formal learning and three dimensions of employability: occupational expertise, anticipation and optimization and corporate sense. Van der Klink et al. (2014) find that formal job-related training is a strong predictor of anticipation and optimisation. In line with Van der Klink et al. (2014), Froehlich et al. (2014) find that formal learning positively affects anticipation and optimisation in a study of three Dutch and Austrian organisations. Ling et al. (2014) report that training is positively related to both internal and external employability of employees.

Moreover, employees who proactively participate in learning activities to improve their knowledge, skills and communication with their supervisors make a proactive and aspirant expression. These learning behaviors enhance the supervisors' assessments of

their employees' competence in adapting to changes within the internal or external labour markets. Liu (2018) finds that employee learning has a significantly positive impact on both self-ratings of employability and supervisor-ratings of employability.

Learning underpins competence development and therefore, employability enhancement, particularly when learning is facilitated to be transferred to different contexts (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Individual competence can be developed as a result of various learning activities, participation in formally organized training being a prominent such activity (Arthur et al., 2003; Grossman & Salas, 2011; Paloniemi, 2006; Sartori & Tacconi, 2017). Organizational training enables individuals to acquire domain-related knowledge and skills (Arthur et al., 2003). If proper conditions for transfer exist, the newly acquired knowledge and skills can be generalized to multiple contexts (Grossman & Salas, 2011), which is expected to prepare employees for proactive or reactive adaptation to changes, both at the job content level and more general levels. Moreover, with developed competence, employees might be at better position to balance competing demands from their job. Finally, formally organized training also signals that organizations value employees (Memon, Salleh, & Baharom, 2016; Robinson & Morrison, 1995). Hence, it is more likely that employees try to take into account the interests of the employer along with their own and employers' interests, which can potentially increase employee's corporate sense.

In response to the changes in the labour market (i.e. downsizing, restructuring and decline in job tenure), employees in Hong Kong need to continually update and enrich their knowledge to gain work-related competencies to safeguard the current and future employment. Training is considered to be one of the effective ways to cope with employment risks (Tam & Ip, 2017). Thus, it is likely that Hong Kong employees will

enhance their employability by active participation in learning activities such as training (Chan, 2016; Ngo et al., 2013; Tam & Chiu, 2010; Tam & Ip, 2017). Therefore, it is hypothesized that

H17: Learning is positively related to employability.

#### **4.3 LEARNING AND JOB PERFORMANCE**

According to Kirkpatrick (1959, 1998), a change in job behaviour due to training is only possible if trainees acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes. In other words, the main antecedent of job performance is the learning gained during the training. Depending on the aim of the training course, learning can be a measure of knowledge acquisition, skills improvement or attitude change (Velada, Caetano, Michel, Lyons, & Kavanagh, 2007). For the purpose of this study, learning is defined as the trainees' perception of the extent to which their knowledge and skills have improved through training.

The effect of learning on job performance has long been a central interest (e.g., Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009; McCarty & Skibniewski, 2015). Kirkpatrick's (1959, 1976) four level model of training evaluation which consists of four types of criteria – reaction criteria, learning criteria, behavioural criteria and results criteria – has often been used to evaluate the effectiveness of training. Learning criteria are measures of the learning outcomes and behavioural criteria are measures of on-the-job performance. The comprehensive meta-analysis of Arthur et al. (2003) showed that training indeed results in improvement in all four criteria, even though there was a decline in effect size as the criteria moved away from learning to behavioural and results criteria.

Empirical studies have supported that knowledge gained in training is positively related to job performance. For example, in a longitudinal study of 106 managers, Warr and Bunce (1995) demonstrated that learning was a significant predictor of the learners' performance on the job. Mathieu et al. (1992) also observed that learning was positively related to performance improvements. In the study of call center employees, Rowold, Hochholdinger and Schilling (2008) found that employees who participated in formal career-related continuous learning had higher subsequent job performance than employees who refrained from such activities, while controlling for initial job performance.

Changes in the labour market (i.e. downsizing, restructuring and decline in job tenure) lead to high level of perceived job insecurity among Hong Kong employees (Chan, 2016; Ngo et al., 2013; Tam & Chiu, 2010; Tam & Ip, 2017). It is likely that Hong Kong employees will use the skills and knowledge learnt from training to the job to improve job performance, which in turn may help them keep their current job. Thus, it is hypothesised that

H18: Learning is positively related to job performance.

#### **4.4 EMPLOYABILITY AND JOB PERFORMANCE**

According to Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, employability can boost the employee's job performance (e.g., De Cuyper et al., 2011). COR states that individuals strive to foster and protect existing resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Employability is considered to be a personal resource (De Cuyper et al., 2011). Subsequently, employees with high employability will try to foster, protect, and build on their sense of being employable (Philippaers, De Cuyper, Forrier, Vander Elst, & De Witte, 2016). The impact

of employability on job performance may be understood with two COR-principles (Hobfoll, 1989). The first principle suggests that employees with high employability will strive to develop their resource, for instance, by performing well. The second principle is that resource-endowed persons can and will invest available resources to obtain even more resources, so as to form ‘resource caravans’ that are less vulnerable to loss (Hobfoll, 1989). Subsequently, employability may lead employees to invest these resources in performing well on the job so as to get other valuable resources, such as good performance records. These records may be particularly valuable for those with high employability since they have a higher need for demonstrating competence through work (Dries, Forrier, De Vos, & Pepermans, 2014).

Empirical studies demonstrated that the positive relationship between employability and job performance can be explained by COR principles. Highly employable workers have up-to-date knowledge and a broader set of skills and in turn can outperform others (Camps & Rodriguez, 2011; De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011; Sandberg, 2000). Moreover, people who perceive themselves as highly employable tend to display a higher need to demonstrate competences through work than “average” employees (Spindler, 1994). Similar reasoning is expressed in the study of Arocena, Núñez and Villanueva (2007), which argues that employees with higher employability are more capable of doing their tasks and more motivated to make extra effort; thus, they receive a better task performance appraisal.

The positive relationship between employability and job performance can also be explained by the human capital theory (Becker, 1993). A primary principle in human capital theory is that investments made in human capital produce economic value, for instance, in the form of in-role performance. Organizations which have made investments

in employability by attracting highly employable workers or by providing training may expect a return in the form of increased performance and ultimately increased productivity.

Empirical research has provided consistent support for the positive relationship between employability and job performance. De Cuyper et al. (2011) find that perceived employability is positively related to self-rated performance of employees. In a study of information technology professionals employed in small and medium-sized enterprises in three European countries, Bozionelos et al. (2016) find that employability is positively related to job performance. Similarly, a recent study of the baby boomer generation and veterans in the Netherlands reports that self-perceived employability is positively related to self-reported job performance (Hennekam, 2016). Recently, Hahn and Kim (2018) find that perceived employability is positively related to performance review ratings and supervisor-rated in-role performance.

There is good reason to consider that employability is reflected in job performance. First, professional expertise intuitively translates into work output (e.g., McKnight & Wright, 2011). Personal flexibility should also benefit job performance because those who can acclimatize themselves to changing conditions should be able to reestablish their performance levels after planned or unplanned changes. An action or proactive orientation brings many benefits to employees, such as increased job performance (Crant, 1995) and better career outcomes (Seibert et al., 1999). Moreover, corporate sense and balance should also contribute to job performance. Those who are involved in organizational activities and consider organizational and personal interests should reach greater outputs by recognizing organizational needs and focusing their efforts accordingly. Involvement in organizational activities should also increase an individual's



tacit knowledge through interaction with other employees (Ling, Hong, & Zhang, 2011). This in turn should be reflected in job performance since tacit knowledge represents most of the knowledge that flows within organizations (Polanyi, 1966) and, thus, it is important for task and job accomplishment (Nonaka & von Krogh, 2009).

Based on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), it is likely that employees with up-to-date competences would outperform other colleagues. In addition, according to the human capital theory (Becker, 1993), organisation's investment in employability by offering training may expect a return of investment in form of increased job performance. Taken together, it is likely that Hong Kong employees will utilize the newly acquired competences from training to outperform other colleagues so as to keep their current job, because of a high level of perceived job insecurity among Hong Kong employees as a result of changes in the labour market (i.e. downsizing, restructuring and decline in job tenure) (Chan, 2016; Ngo et al., 2013; Tam & Chiu, 2010; Tam & Ip, 2017). Hence, it is hypothesised that

H19: Employability is positively related to job performance.

#### **4.5 EMPLOYABILITY AS A MEDIATOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNING AND JOB PERFORMANCE**

The direct relationship between learning and job performance is unquestionable (e.g., Mathieu et al., 1992; Warr & Bunce, 1995). Inspired by previous employability studies, this study suggests that learning can influence job performance indirectly via employability (De Vos et al., 2011; Froehlich et al., 2014; Van der Heijden, 2009a; Van der Klink et al., 2014). The rationale behind the mediation is that learning can enhance the competences of employees, which in turn may help employees perform better than their

counterparts based on the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989). Empirical evidence suggests and supports an indirect effect of employability on the relationship between learning and job performance. Previous studies have found that training is related to employability (De Vos et al., 2011; Froehlich et al., 2014; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a; Van der Klink et al., 2014) and employability in turn contributes to job performance (Bozionelos et al., 2016; De Cuyper et al., 2011). Therefore, employability can act as a mediator between learning and job performance. Thus, it is hypothesised that

H20: Employability mediates the relationship between learning and job performance.

#### **4.6 EXTRINSIC REWARDS AS A MODERATOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNING AND JOB PERFORMANCE**

Arguably, extrinsic rewards may moderate the relationship between learning and job performance. According to Sire (1993), learners expect two types of rewards for their learning efforts, known as intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Intrinsic rewards are defined as intangible rewards. A sense of accomplishment and self-satisfaction are considered intrinsic rewards because these come from internal aspirations that doing and achieving something is personally rewarding for oneself rather than for others in the social circle (Coon & Mitterer, 2011). Upon successful completion of training, the reward is about fulfilling internal obligations of a person, through which that person feels a sense of accomplishment and self-satisfaction (Mitlacher & Paul, 2009). In contrast, extrinsic rewards are defined as tangible rewards such as an increased salary, incentive or bonus (Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 2001). The pursuit of extrinsic rewards is compelled by fulfilling external obligations such as gaining tangible benefits as a result of achieving something (Deci et al., 2001). An example is getting a promotion upon the successful completion of training.

Arguably, intrinsic rewards among employees can be small or even absent amid organisational downsizing and restructuring. The low level of job security can cause dismay and fear of losing a job among employees (Datta, Guthrie, Basuil, & Pandey, 2010; Reisel, Probst, Chia, Maloles, & König, 2010). This restlessness can create pessimistic perceptions about work that outweigh optimistic perceptions, which cannot induce self-interest in doing and achieving something at work full heartedly (De Cuyper, Notelaers, & De Witte, 2009). In this sense, it can reduce the level of work fulfillment or intrinsic satisfaction (Pienaar, De Witte, Hellgren, & Sverke, 2013). Indeed, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), the pursuit of intrinsic rewards is premised on a condition where basic security needs, such as finding a secure job and feeling safe about one's own livelihood, must be satisfied at the outset for people to proceed to other advanced needs (Maslow, 1943). When they perceive the environment to be safe and their basic security needs to be met, people start to develop internal needs to make their lives meaningful and enjoyable (Maslow, 1943; Udechukwu, 2009). Job insecurity can hamper perceived safety of livelihood, and the usefulness of intrinsic rewards during this troubled time from the perspective of employees is questionable (Barling & Kelloway, 1996; Chirumbolo & Hellgren, 2003; Pienaar et al., 2013). Extrinsic rewards instead of intrinsic rewards can be relatively effective in influencing the job performance when employees face job insecurity.

Changes in the labour market (i.e. downsizing, restructuring and decline in job tenure) lead to a higher level of perceived job insecurity among Hong Kong employees (Chan, 2016; Ngo et al., 2013; Tam & Chiu, 2010; Tam & Ip, 2017). Since the lower level of safety need is not satisfied, employees may no longer be intrinsically motivated to transfer what they have learnt from training to the job. In other words, extrinsic rewards instead of intrinsic rewards are more attractive to Hong Kong employees. Hence, it is

likely that extrinsic rewards will encourage Hong Kong employees to transfer what has been acquired from training to job performance so as to keep the current job. Thus, it is hypothesised that

H21: Extrinsic rewards moderate the relationship between learning and job performance, such that when extrinsic rewards are high, the relationship between learning and job performance is stronger than when extrinsic rewards are low.

#### **4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The chapter discusses how learning, as a result of training, affects employability and job performance that are critical for career sustainability. In order to enjoy the privilege of sustainable careers individuals must maintain, or sustain, their employability, and to demonstrate at least adequate levels of job performance. Hypotheses concerning the relevant variables are also developed.

## CHAPTER 5 METHODOLOGY

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The chapter begins with an overview of the research design, including the conceptual model and hypotheses of the research study. This is followed by an evaluation of the sample profile. Then, the chapter discusses the research setting of the study, including the background of the training programme and the two participating companies. Furthermore, a discussion on the questionnaire design, including the operationalisation of measurement scales, is included. Finally, sampling and data collection procedures are discussed. Figure 5.1 shows the conceptual model of the current study.

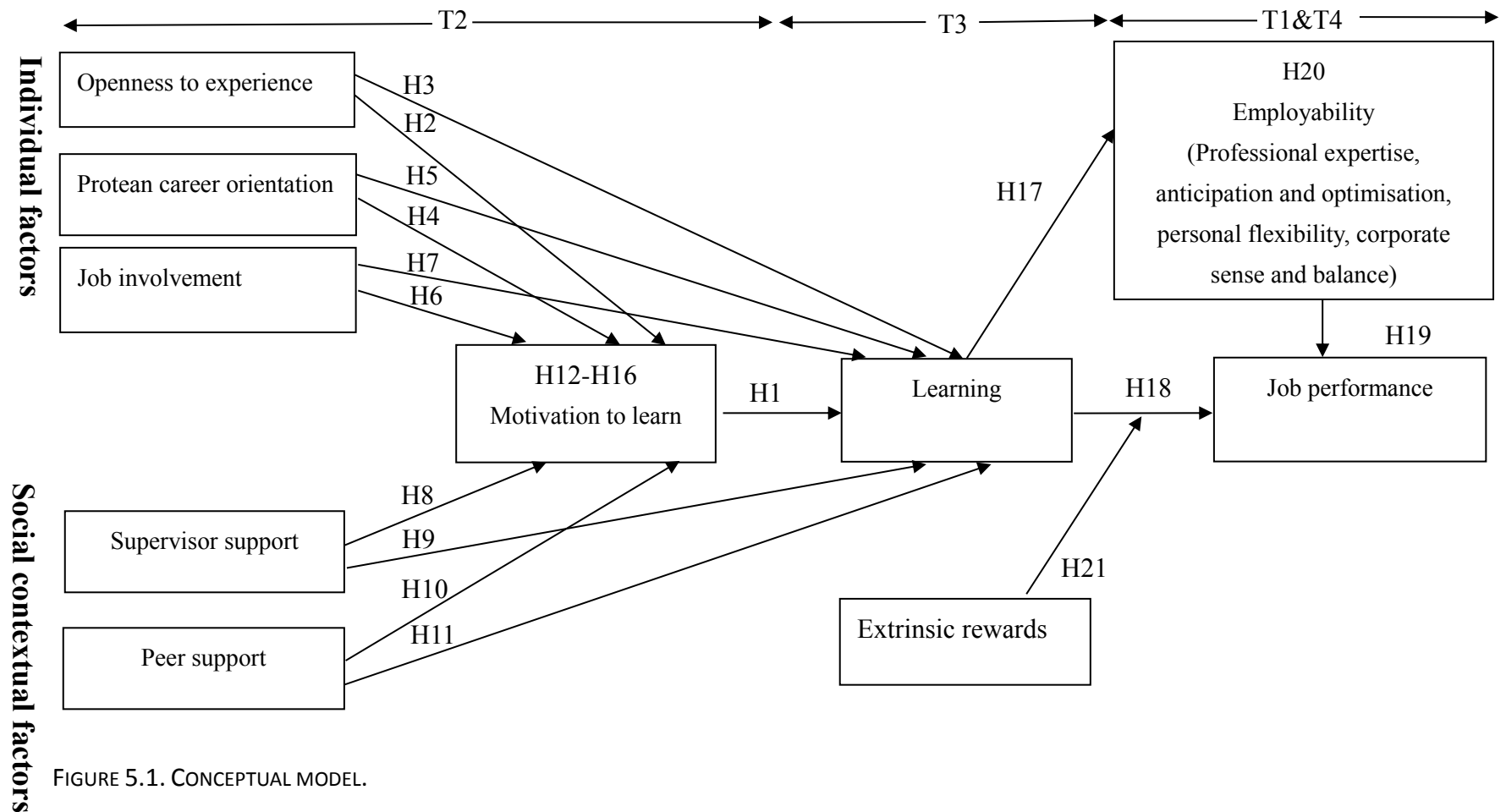


FIGURE 5.1. CONCEPTUAL MODEL.

Notes: T1: pre-training assessment one month prior to start of training program; T2: pre-training assessment prior to start of training program; T3: post-training assessment immediately after training program; T4: post-training assessment six months after training program.

## 5.2 HYPOTHESES

To address the research questions, the following hypotheses are formed:

1. Motivation to learn is positively related to learning.
2. Openness to experience is positively related to motivation to learn.
3. Openness to experience is positively related to learning.
4. Protean career orientation is positively related to motivation to learn.
5. Protean career orientation is positively related to learning.
6. Job involvement is positively related to motivation to learn.
7. Job involvement is positively related to learning.
8. Supervisor support is positively related to motivation to learn.
9. Supervisor support is positively related to learning.
10. Peer support is positively related to motivation to learn.
11. Peer support is positively related to learning.
12. Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between openness to experience and learning.
13. Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between protean career orientation and learning.
14. Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between job involvement and learning.
15. Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between supervisor support and learning.
16. Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between peer support and learning.
17. Learning is positively related to employability.
18. Learning is positively related to job performance.
19. Employability is positively related to job performance.
20. Employability mediates the relationship between learning and job performance.
21. Extrinsic rewards moderate the relationship between learning and job performance.

### 5.3 SAMPLE PROFILE

Participants in the study are employees and their responding supervisors from two companies (company A and company B) in Hong Kong. At each measurement point, the participants are asked to fill in a questionnaire. Over time, more and more people drop out of the study, possibly due to its longitudinal design.

In company A, at time 1, 180 supervisors participate in the study. At time 2 and time 3, 435 and 418 employees, respectively, participate in the study. At time 4, 150 supervisors participate in the study. Of these, 365 employee-supervisor pairs are usable. According to the rule of thumb, cases with more than 10% of the variables missing in each part are not included (Byrne, 2010; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Kline, 2011), bringing the final research sample from 365 to 334 employee-supervisor pairs in company A.

The drop out analyses shows that there are no significant differences between groups in company A. Regarding the employees, there are no significant differences between groups with regard to age (participants:  $M=28.14$ ,  $SD=4.92$ ; non-respondents:  $M=28.78$ ,  $SD=5.80$ ;  $t[433]=1.11$ ,  $p>.05$ ), tenure with the company (participants:  $M=3.48$ ,  $SD=2.42$ ; non-respondents:  $M=3.87$ ,  $SD=2.88$ ;  $t[433]=1.37$ ,  $p>.05$ ), gender (participants: 158 males and 176 females; non-respondents: 45 males and 56 females;  $\chi^2[1]=.24$ ,  $p>.05$ ) and educational level ( $\chi^2[3]=3.35$ ,  $p>.05$ ).

Regarding supervisors, there were no significant differences between groups with regard to age (participants:  $M=31.17$ ,  $SD=4.61$ ; non-respondents:  $M=31.98$ ,  $SD=5.21$ ;  $t[178]=1.08$ ,  $p>.05$ ), tenure with the company (participants:  $M=4.98$ ,  $SD=2.97$ ; non-respondents:  $M=5.50$ ,  $SD=3.26$ ;  $t[178]=1.07$ ,  $p>.05$ ), gender (participants: 54 males and 61 females; non-respondents: 27 males and 38 females;  $\chi^2[1]=.49$ ,  $p>.05$ ) and



educational level ( $\chi^2 [4] = 1.86, p > .05$ ).

In company B, at time 1, 167 supervisors participate in the study. At time 2 and time 3, 379 and 365 employees, respectively, participate in the study. At time 4, 138 supervisors participate in the study. Of these, 284 employee-supervisor pairs are usable. According to rule of thumb, cases with more than 10% of the variables missing in each part are not included (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2011), bringing the final research sample from 284 to 265 employee-supervisor pairs in company B.

The drop out analyses shows that there is no significant differences between groups in company B. Regarding the employees, there are no significant differences between groups with regard to age (participants:  $M=29, SD=5.77$ ; non-respondents:  $M=29.87, SD=6.68$  ;  $t[377]=1.28, p > .05$ ), tenure with the company (participants:  $M=3.81, SD=2.90$ ; non-respondents:  $M=4.26, SD=3.41$  ;  $t[377]=1.33, p > .05$ ), gender (participants: 150 males and 115 females; non-respondents: 65 males and 49 females;  $\chi^2[1]=.01, p > .05$ ) and educational level ( $\chi^2 [4]=3.20, p > .05$ ).

Regarding supervisors, there are no significant differences between groups with regard to age (participants:  $M=31.87, SD=5.13$ ; non-respondents:  $M=32.40, SD=5.45$ ;  $t [165] = .64, p > .05$ ), tenure with the company (participants:  $M=5.55, SD=3.77$ ; non-respondents:  $M=5.88, SD=4.08$ ;  $t [165] = .55, p > .05$ ), gender (participants: 57 males and 43 females; non-respondents: 40 males and 27 females;  $\chi^2 [1] = .12, p > .05$ ) and educational level ( $\chi^2 [4] = .69, p > .05$ ).

Table 5.1 shows the demographic information of the participants. In company A, 334 employees attend training. One hundred and fifty eight participants (47.3%) are males

Table 5.1. Demographic information of the participants.

Demographic	Company A				Company B			
	Employees (n= 334)		Supervisors (n= 115)		Employees (n= 265)		Supervisors (n=100)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender								
Male	158	47.3	54	47	150	56.6	57	57
Female	176	52.7	61	53	115	43.4	43	43
Age ( years)								
18-25	101	30.2	8	7	77	29.1	7	7
26-35	203	60.8	89	77.3	145	54.7	71	71
36-45	30	9	17	14.8	42	15.8	20	20
46 or older	0	0	1	.1	1	.4	2	2
Educational level								
Secondary or below	96	28.7	23	20	71	26.8	19	19
Diploma or higher diploma	88	26.3	27	23.5	73	27.5	27	27
Associate degree	73	21.9	35	30.4	53	20	11	11
Undergraduate degree	77	23.1	28	24.3	66	24.9	37	37
Master's degree or above	0	0	2	1.7	2	.8	6	6
Tenure with the present company (years)								
Less than 5	264	79	70	60.9	205	77.4	54	54
5-10	62	18.6	37	32.1	48	18.1	36	36
More than 10	8	2.4	8	7	12	4.5	10	10

while 176 (n=176, 52.7%) are females. Participants' ages range from 18 to 45, with an average age of 28. They have been with the company an average of 3.5 years. As for the educational level, participants with secondary education or below comprises the largest category (n= 96, 28.7%), while participants with associate degrees represent the smallest group (n=73, 21.9%). Moreover, 115 supervisors participate in the study, of which 54 (47%) are males and 61 (53%) are females. Participants' ages range from 23 to 46, with an average age of 31. The majority holds an associate degree (n=35, 30.4%). Most respondents (n= 70, 60.9%) report a tenure of less than 5 years with the company.

In company B, 265 employees participate in the study. One hundred and fifty (56.6%) of the participants are males while 115 (43.4%) are females. Participants' ages range from 18 to 46, with an average age of 29. They have been with the company an average of 4 years. As for the educational level, participants with a diploma and higher diploma represent the largest category (n= 73, 27.5%), while participants with a master's degree or above comprise the smallest group (n=2, .8%). In addition, 100 supervisors participate in the study, of which 57 (57%) are males and 43 (43%) are females. Participants' ages range from 24 to 47, with an average age of 32. The majority holds an undergraduate degree (n=37, 37%). Most supervisors (n= 54, 54%) report a tenure of less than 5 years with the company.

#### **5.4 RESEARCH SETTING**

In both organisations, employees (salespersons in company A and insurance agents in company B) attend a training course which is instructor led and classroom based. Participation is voluntary. Trainers from the human resource department from these two companies provide these in-house training courses, which are based on presentations and role-play exercises. These training programmes provide opportunities for trainees to

practice and receive feedback on their use of newly learned skills. Practicing skills is necessary to achieve overlearning, which is associated with skill retention, and practice is a central component of achieving training transfer (Hutchins & Burke, 2007).

#### **5.4.1 TRAINING PROGRAMME**

In company A, salespersons attend a one-and-a-half-day training course (12 hours) entitled Quality Excellence Training. The aim of the training programme is to enhance the service quality of employees. The training course includes three sessions. Session 1 covers the new company policy. Session 2 covers specific behaviour needed to provide quality service. Session 3 includes role-play exercises to give trainees practice in serving customers (e.g. how to handle customer complaints).

In company B, insurance agents attend a one-day training course (8 hours) called Advanced Customer Service Training. Basic customer service skills are the focus of the training programme. Customer-oriented behaviours such as appropriate intonation, specific phrases and rules of courtesy are included in the training modules. Role-play exercises provide opportunities for trainees to practice their use of newly learned skills (e.g. how to recommend an insurance plan based on customer needs).

#### **5.4.2 COMPANY BACKGROUND**

##### **Company A**

Company A is a retail company, specialising in wholesale and retail business in athletic and leisure footwear, apparel and accessories. It operates more than 100 retail outlets in Hong Kong. In company A, service delivery is mainly undertaken by frontline staff – the salespersons who are participating in the current study. The major job duties of the sales staff are to sell merchandise and provide customer service. Sales staff are required to

possess relevant skills such as communication skills, interpersonal skills and customer service skills. These skills are particularly important to salespersons for providing quality service since they are involved in dealing with customers.

There has been a considerable rise in the number of employees, particularly salespersons, in company A in recent years. Sales staff are young people with little training. Company A creates worker loyalty through training. A wide range of training programmes, including the training programme in the current study, is provided to employees. Enrolment is voluntary. The aim of the training courses is to allow employees to acquire the skills necessary for their job and to understand the day-to-day workings of their position. Those who complete the training courses are awarded certificates.

In company A, empowerment and autonomy at work are emphasised. Employees are empowered to deal with varied and changing situations even though company policy and procedures are provided as guidelines. They can “offer something of themselves” to the customers. Autonomy at work is encouraged via giving employees freedom to choose their working methods. These are of particular importance since employees working in direct contact with customers are less constrained than others in how they operate and are more likely to sort things out by themselves in difficult situations.

To boost employee performance, incentives (i.e. monthly bonus) are given to employees based on the sales performance of each store. Staff meetings are held by the store manager every week. The store manager discusses the company policies and market information and establishes sales goals with employees. Employees are free to give opinions and suggestions. Performance evaluation is done twice a year. The store manager is responsible for providing constructive feedback to each employee.

## Company B

Company B is an insurance firm in Hong Kong which provides a broad range of insurance and financial services products. In company B, insurance service delivery is mainly undertaken by the insurance agents who are the participants in the current study. The major job duties of the insurance agents are to identify prospective clients to acquire new business and to serve existing policyholders. It is of utmost importance for the insurance agents to thoroughly understand the needs of the customer to propose a suitable insurance product. To strengthen the relationship with clients and build up mutual trust, knowledge about the use of effective body language, knowledge about the power of language and knowledge about good questioning techniques, to name but a few, are important attributes for insurance agents to possess.

The move towards a performance-related pay system in company B in recent years has shifted a significant amount of competition pressure from the company to the employees, who are under growing pressure to compete to meet their performance targets. Since the commission and year-end bonus are based on individual performance, the working environment is highly competitive. The company organises an annual prize ceremony to reward those insurance agents who have high productivity.

In company B, employees are required to follow strict policy and procedures to fulfill the government regulations (e.g. Insurance Companies (Amendment) Ordinance 2015). Thus, employees are required to fully document all decisions.

## 5.5 MEASURES

Existing scales, except job performance in company B, are used for all the constructs in this study. Some scales are adapted to fit the present context where necessary. Each of the

measurement scales is discussed in more detail below. Unless stated otherwise, a 7-point Likert-type measurement format (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree) is employed. The individual scales are shown in Appendix 1.

### **5.5.1 MOTIVATION TO LEARN**

An 8-item scale is used to assess trainees' motivation to learn. The scale is adapted from Noe and Schmitt (1986). The instrument has been widely used in previous research (e.g., Chiaburu & Lindsay, 2008; Fecteau et al., 1995; Ismail et al., 2010a, 2010b; Loch, Dam, & Chiaburu, 2011; Noe & Schmitt, 1993) and its psychometric qualities are good. A sample item is "I will try to learn as much as I can from the training course". Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is .93 in company A and .92 in company B.

### **5.5.2 OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE**

Openness to experience is assessed using 2 items from the 10-item short version of the Big Five Inventory (BFI-10) (Rammstedt & John, 2007) due to limited assessment time. The BFI-10 is an abbreviated 10-item version of the well-established Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991; Rammstedt, 1997). The 10 items represent the five dimensions (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness), including two balanced-keyed items per dimension. Results from several studies show that the BFI-10 retains the substantial pattern of reliability and validity of the original BFI-44, making it an accepted and frequently used short measure for assessment of the Big Five (Rammstedt, 2007a, 2007b; Rammstedt & John, 2007; Rammstedt & Kemper, 2011). An example item is "I see myself as someone who has few artistic interests". A high score on this scale reflects a high degree of openness to experience. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is .92 in company A and .85 in company B.

### **5.5.3 PROTEAN CAREER ORIENTATION**

Protean career orientation is measured with a 7-item scale adapted from Baruch and Quick (2007). Baruch and Quick (2007) develop the measure via correspondence with the originator of the protean career concept, Hall (1976). Items are scored on a 7-point scale ranging from “1=not at all” to “7=completely”. A sample item is “I navigate my own career, according to my plans”. The instrument has been carefully tested in previous research and its psychometric qualities are good (Baruch et al., 2014; Grimland, Vigoda-Gadot, & Baruch; 2012; Herrmann et al., 2015). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  is .87 in company A and .89 in company B.

### **5.5.4 JOB INVOLVEMENT**

Job involvement is measured with a 4-item scale adapted from Lodahl and Kenjner (1965). The scale is supported by past research (e.g., Cheng & Ho, 2001; Jaskolka, Beyer, & Trice, 1985). Two samples items from the scale are “I am very much personally involved in my job” and “I live, eat and breathe my job”. Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  is .90 in company A and .87 in company B.

### **5.5.5 SUPERVISOR SUPPORT**

Supervisor support is measured using an 11-item scale adapted from Maurer et al. (2003). A sample item is “My supervisor helps me to develop career plans”. Results of research on the psychometric qualities of the instrument provide good evidence of its construct validity and scale reliability (Maurer & Lippstreu, 2008; Maurer et al., 2008). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  is .91 in both company A and company B.

### **5.5.6 PEER SUPPORT**

A 7-item scale is used to assess peer support. The scale is adapted from Maurer et al.



(2003). A sample item is “My co-workers are supportive of training activities”. This scale has been used in subsequent research such as Maurer, Lippstrea and Judge (2008) and shows good scale reliability. Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  is .81 in company A and .94 in company B.

#### **5.5.7 EXTRINSIC REWARDS**

A 3-item scale is used to assess extrinsic rewards. The scale is adapted from Maurer and Tarulli (1994). A sample item is “Use of newly learned skills on the job will help me get promotions into higher level jobs with better pay and rewards”. This scale has been used in subsequent research such as Maurer et al. (2003) and Sankey and Machin (2014) and shows good scale reliability. Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  is .89 in both company A and company B.

#### **5.5.8 LEARNING**

Learning is assessed with a 5-item scale which assesses the extent to which employees perceive that their knowledge or skill has been improved through training. The scale is adapted from Hoegl and Gemuenden (2001). A sample item is “I was able to acquire important knowledge through this training”. The instrument has been used in other research (e.g., Yoon & Kayes, 2016) and shows good scale reliability. Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  is .93 in company A and .86 in company B.

#### **5.5.9 JOB PERFORMANCE**

Job performance is measured at two points in time, pre-training and post-training, in the current study. In company A, job performance is measured with a 4-item customer service ability scale adapted from Bush, Bush, Ortinau and Hair (1990). The scale asks the supervisors to rate their subordinates’ performance on the job. A sample item is “Provides courteous service to customers”. Items are scored on a 7-point scale ranging from “1= not at all” to “7 = most of the time”. Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  is .87 for the pre-training measure and .92

for the post-training measure.

In company B, job performance is measured with 3 items that are specifically designed for the study because the researcher could not find a suitable scale in the existing literature. To align the learning outcomes with the training content, the items are jointly designed by the researcher and the trainer. The scale asks the supervisors to rate their subordinates' performance. Result from a pilot test shows that the 3-item scale has acceptable reliability ( $\alpha=.93$ ). A sample item is "Able to break the ice with customers". Items are scored on a 7-point scale ranging from "1= not at all" to "7 = most of the time". Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is .84 for the pre-training measure and .88 for the post-training measure.

#### **5.5.10 EMPLOYABILITY**

Employability is measured with Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden's (2006) employability instrument. Employability is measured at two points in time, pre-training and post-training. The scale asks the supervisors to rate their subordinates' employability. The employability scale consists of five sub-scales: professional expertise (5 items), anticipation and optimization (4 items), personal flexibility (5 items), corporate sense (4 items) and balance (4 items). Sample items include "During the past year, this employee, in general, competent to perform my work accurately and with few mistakes", "During the past year, this employee associated himself/herself with the latest developments in his/her job domain", "This employee adapt to developments within his/her organization", "This employee shares his/her experience and knowledge with others" and "The work and private life of this employee are evenly balanced". Items are scored on a 7-point scale ranging from "1= not at all" to "7 = to an absolute degree".

Results of research on the psychometric qualities of the instrument provide good scale

reliability and support that the five dimensions of employability are valid and reliable (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a; Van der Klink et al., 2014). Cross-cultural research in seven European countries showed that, depending upon country, Cronbach's  $\alpha$ 's ranged from .82 to .96 for occupational expertise, from .67 to .91 for anticipation and optimization, from .68 to .89 for personal flexibility, from .83 to .92 for corporate sense and from .82 to .96 for balance (Van der Heijden et al., 2005). In the current study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is .85 for pre-training employability and .93 for post-training employability in company A and .93 for pre-training employability and .82 for post-training employability in company B.

The rating scale of employability has been changed from a six-point to seven point scale in the current study, despite the risk of criticising the psychometric qualities of the instrument. It is because the researcher believes that it is necessary to include a neutral midpoint. Previous studies had shown that middle point can reduce some response bias (e.g., Garland, 1991; Weijters, Cabooter, & Schillewaert, 2010). For instance, Chen, Yu and Yu (2015) found that social desirability bias can be minimized by adding the mid-point response alternative in rating scales. Including a neutral mid-point in the current study can avoid the potential risk of social desirability bias due to supervisor's rating on employability in the current study. In order to justify that seven-point rating scale is appropriate, respondents in the pilot test were asked to fill in questionnaires with varying numbers of response categories relating to employability. Half of them were asked to rate employability on a six-point scale while half of them were asked to rate employability on a seven-point scale. The results showed that the test-retest reliability, internal consistency and criterion validity increased from scales with six items to seven items.

### **5.5.11 SUPERVISORS' DEMOGRAPHICS**

Supervisors' demographics include gender (1= male, 2= female), age (as measured in years), educational level of the trainees (1= secondary or below, 2= diploma or higher diploma, 3= associate degree, 4= undergraduate degree, 5= master's degree or above) and tenure with the current organisation (as measured in years).

### **5.5.12 CONTROL MEASURES**

Several trainee demographic variables in the current study are controlled for, including gender of trainees (1= male, 2= female), age of trainees (as measured in years), educational level of trainees (1= secondary or below, 2= diploma or higher diploma, 3= associate degree, 4= undergraduate degree, 5= master's degree or above) and tenure with the current organisation of the trainee (as measured in years). Previous studies have shown that demographic factors of trainees potentially affect learning (e.g., Van der Heijden et al., 2009a) and employability (Van der Heijden, 2002; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden & De Lange, 2010).

## **5.6 QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN AND PILOT TEST**

Having discussed the operationalisation of constructs and measurement scales, the following describes how the questionnaire is drafted and pretested prior to launch. The questionnaire is developed according to guidelines of the total design method (TDM) (Fahy, 1998). The main principle of TDM is to achieve good response rates by maximising reward, minimising cost and establishing trust. Special care is taken in drafting the questionnaire to reflect this principle of TDM. The guidelines for TDM and the steps taken to fulfill these guidelines are outlined in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2. Instructions of TDM and procedures in this study.

Objectives	Guidelines	Procedures in the current research
Maximise reward	(1) Show positive regard	Respondents are told that their participation is crucial to the success of the research.
	(2) Provide verbal appreciation	Verbal appreciation is expressed on the phone, questionnaire and invitation letter.
	(3) Provide tangible rewards	Respondents are provided with access to study results.
Minimise cost	(1) Make the task appear brief	The time needed to complete each questionnaire ranges from 5 to 15 minutes.
	(2) Reduce physical and mental effort required	All the questions involve selecting from a range of responses, thus reducing the mental and physical effort required.
Establish trust	(1) Provide token of appreciation	Respondents are provided with access to study results.
	(2) Identify with a known organisation that has legitimacy	Every page of the questionnaire shows the name and logo of the university.

In addition to TDM, to reduce the likelihood of self-generated response bias, which refers to the possibility that the form and structure of the questionnaire (e.g. the order of measures) induce participants to respond in ways that are in line with the relationships and causal ordering that the researchers have in mind, a number of measures are adopted (e.g., Chandon, Morwitz, & Reinartz, 2005; Feldman & Lynch, 1988; Podsakoff,

MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2012). This includes reassuring respondents about anonymity, stressing in the instructions that “there are no right or wrong answers” and placing the scales in a different order from the one we have in mind for the model (e.g., the scale of motivation to learn is placed at the start of the questionnaire while the scale of protean career orientation is placed at the end of the questionnaire).

Questionnaires are delivered in Chinese. The forward translation/back translation procedure (e.g., Behling & Law, 2000; Brislin, 1986) is utilised to ensure semantic equivalence with the original English versions. The questionnaires are first translated into Chinese (forward translation) by a master’s degree student majoring in linguistics. The Chinese version of the questionnaires is then back translated into English (backward translation) by another master’s degree student majoring in English linguistics. To ensure that the item meanings are equivalent in the original version and the re-translated version, the questionnaires are then sent to a group of eight bilingual university academic staff for review. Based on their suggestions, the questionnaires are finalised before launch.

Prior to the main study, the questionnaire is piloted with 20 respondents (10 employees from company A and 10 from company B), who are asked to complete the scales and verbally transfer their comments to the researchers. The pilot test is used to investigate the following issues:

- The respondents’ understanding of the questions
- Any difficulties in answering the questions and completing the questionnaire
- The flow of questions (i.e. the sequence of questions and the time respondents takes to complete the questionnaire)

The pilot test reveals that the respondents utilise the full range of the response scale in all measures. In addition, it suggests that the instructions are clear and the items are intelligible and have unambiguous meanings; thus, no changes to the wording of the questionnaires are made.

Questionnaires are limited to a maximum of three employees per supervisor in order to avoid the collection of unreliable data as an influence of training or fatigue due to the overloading of supervisors, and to protect the independence of the data points. (Van der Heijden et al., 2016).

## **5.7 SAMPLING**

For survey research, it is essential to clearly define a specific population to be studied as this sets a boundary to which research findings may be generalised outside the sample population. The target sample of the current study is employees who participate in in-house training provided by the company.

In spite of the researcher's effort to identify and recruit respondents, such as using different Hong Kong business-to-business databases and cold-calling, gaining access to respondents in the current study proves to be highly difficult. This may be because only large organisations in Hong Kong have sufficient resources to provide in-house training to employees, while small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) constitute almost 98% of the business sector in Hong Kong (Trade and Industry Department, 2017). Fortunately, with the help of colleagues, the researcher obtained access to two organisations in Hong Kong that provide in-house training to employees. The disadvantage of such convenience sampling is that respondents may not represent the population of interest and there is potential for self-selection bias, thus reducing the generalisability of the findings

(Zikmund, Steve, Hume, Ben, & Barry, 2014).

## **5.8 PROCEDURE OF DATA COLLECTION**

Prior to the study, an invitation letter (Appendix 2) is sent to each company, asking permission to conduct research at the company. Once the letters of approval are received from the companies, the researcher arranges several meetings with human resource managers to discuss matters concerning the research study, such as choosing appropriate training programmes for the study and designing the best ways to administer the questionnaires.

The design of the current study is longitudinal. Data are gathered between June 2011 and January 2013. In each organisation, four questionnaires, as shown in Appendixes 7 (for company A only), 9 (for company B only), 11, 13, 15 (for company A only) and 17 (for company B only), are distributed to two groups of respondents, employees and their responding supervisors, at four points in time, including Time 1 (pre-training assessment one month prior to start of training programme), Time 2 (pre-training assessment prior to start of training programme), Time 3 (post-training assessment immediately after training programme) and Time 4 (post-training assessment six months after training programme). Data on openness to experience, job involvement, protean career orientation, supervisor support, peer support, extrinsic rewards, learning and motivation to learn are collected via self-reporting from the employees while data on pre-training and post-training employability and pre-training and post-training job performance are collected from the supervisors. Although collecting data from multiple sources and interpretation of results presents practical difficulties, the generalisability of the studied sample can be estimated more appropriately (Franke & Felfe, 2012; Taylor, Russ-Eft, & Taylor, 2009). Moreover, this time-separated, multi-source measurement procedure mitigates the potential for



common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

The learning outcomes (i.e. employability and work performance) in the current study were measured one month before training (T1) and six months following training (T4). Although the ideal time gap between T1 and T4 is hard to specify, soft-skills, which are taught in the training programmes in the current study, need longer time to provide enough opportunities for learning, reflecting and thinking about transfer challenges (Blume et al., 2010) as trainees “need to practice and learn more in their job context to internalize what they have learned” (Vermeulen, 2002, p.369). Moreover, the notion of sustainable careers has long-term connotations (e.g., De Prins et al., 2015; De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017); therefore, post-training measurement which takes place six months after the training is appropriate. Time lag with a minimum duration of six months between T1 and T4 is ideal for the current longitudinal study. As suggested by Zapf, Dormann and Frese (1996, p.158), “Time lags that are too short may lead to the conclusion that no causal effects exist, whereas a time lag that is too long solely leads to an underestimation of the true causal impact”.

Table 5.3 provides a data collection chart indicating the variables measured, questionnaire number, measurement source and time of measurement.

Table 5.3. Data collection chart of the current study.

Variables	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3	Time 4	Measurement source
Openness to experience		✓			Trainees
Protean career orientation		✓			Trainees
Job involvement		✓			Trainees
Motivation to learn		✓			Trainees
Peer support		✓			Trainees
Supervisor support		✓			Trainees
Extrinsic rewards			✓		Trainees
Learning			✓		Trainees
Job performance	✓			✓	Supervisors
Employability	✓			✓	Supervisors

Notes: Time 1: pre-training assessment one month prior to start of training programme; Time 2: pre-training assessment prior to start of training programme; Time 3: post-training assessment immediately after training programme; Time 4: post-training assessment six months after training programme.

### **5.8.1 PROCEDURE**

Course instructors are contacted by mail approximately one month prior to commencement of their scheduled training course. The instructors receive a memo which introduces them to the research study, outlines the procedures to be followed and asks for their support and assistance in some of the administrative aspects of data collection. The letter alerts instructors that they will be contacted by the researcher prior to the scheduled training course with more detailed information.

Approximately one week prior to their training courses, the researcher contacts the course instructors by telephone. They are reminded that they will receive an instructor packet one or two days before the training with instructions on how to proceed. Approximately two days prior to the training course, the instructors receive the instructor packet. The packet contains the following items:

1. A letter that asks the instructors to assist in distributing the pre-training trainee survey and collecting the completed pre-training trainee survey at the beginning of the training course.
2. A pre-training trainee survey packet.
3. A letter that asks the instructors to assist in distributing the post-training trainee survey and collecting the completed post-training trainee survey at the conclusion of the training course.
4. A post-training trainee survey packet.

#### **5.8.1.1 PRE-TRAINING DATA COLLECTION**

*Pre-training supervisor packet.* For the two training courses included in the study, a list of names and office locations of the supervisors of employees who enroll in the courses is provided to the researcher approximately six weeks prior to each of the courses. A

pre-training supervisor packet is mailed to each supervisor one month before the start of the training course. The packet contains the following items:

1. An invitation letter (Appendix 4) from the researcher explaining the rationale behind the research study, asking supervisors for their assistance by completing questionnaires.
2. An informed consent form stating the supervisors' role as volunteers in the study.
3. A pre-training supervisor survey (Questionnaire 1A for company A or 1B for company B).
4. An anonymous code.
5. A pre-addressed stamped envelope for returning the completed survey and informed consent form.

Supervisors are required to review and sign the consent form (Appendix 5) to participate in the study. They are asked to place the signed consent form and completed survey in the envelope provided.

*Pre-training trainee packet.* At the beginning of the training course, the instructors distribute the pre-training trainee packet to each trainee. The packet contains the following items:

1. An invitation letter (Appendix 3) from the researcher explaining the rationale behind the research study, asking trainees for their assistance by completing the questionnaires.
2. An informed consent form stating the trainees' role as volunteers in the study.
3. A pre-training trainee survey (Questionnaire 2).
4. An anonymous code.
5. An envelope for returning the completed survey and informed consent form.

Trainees are required to review and sign the consent form (Appendix 5) to participate in the study. They are asked to place the signed consent form and completed survey in the envelope provided.

#### **5.8.1.2 POST-TRAINING DATA COLLECTION**

*Post-training trainee packet.* At the end of the training course, the instructors distribute the post-training trainee packet to each trainee. The packet includes the following items:

1. A post-training trainee survey (Questionnaire 3).
2. An envelope for returning the completed survey.

*Post-training supervisor packet.* The post-training supervisor packet is mailed to each supervisor six months after completion of the training course. The packet includes the following items:

1. A post-training supervisor survey (Questionnaire 4A for company A or 4B for company B).
2. A pre-addressed stamped envelope for returning the completed survey.

Approximately two weeks following distribution of the post-training supervisor survey, a follow-up telephone call is placed to supervisors who had returned a completed pre-training survey but not yet a completed post-training survey. A thank-you letter is mailed to each participant following receipt of the pre-training and post-training surveys expressing appreciation for their assistance.

A detailed participant tracking system is implemented at the commencement of the research project to keep track of the status of the survey returns for trainees in each course. This helps to assure that each trainee attends only one of the training courses included in

the study. In addition, each trainee and supervisor is assigned an anonymous code which he or she had to remember and use in each questionnaire. The anonymous code is important since it helps match different questionnaires which are completed at different points in time while also assuring participants of their anonymity.

## **5.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter addresses the methodological issues relating to the quantitative study. The chapter begins with a description of the conceptual model and hypotheses of the study. Participants are employees who participate in an in-house training programme and their corresponding supervisors from two companies in Hong Kong (i.e. a local retail company and a local insurance company). The sample consists of 334 employee-supervisor pairs in the retail company and 265 employee-supervisor pairs in the local insurance company. The sample profile and the research setting, including the background of the training programme and the two participating companies, are then elaborated. The operationalisation of measurement scales is then discussed, which is followed by discussion of the questionnaire design. The chapter concludes by describing the data collection procedure.

## **CHAPTER 6 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter describes the data analysis process and reports the results of structural equation modelling (SEM). It begins with data examination which involves a number of steps to ensure that the statistical assumptions of multivariate analysis are met. It then describes the procedures relating to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure that well-fitting measurement models are included in the overall measurement model and structural model. The construct reliability and validity of measurement instruments are also examined. The final part of this chapter focuses on hypothesis testing by analysing the structural model. The results relating to each hypothesis are reported.

### **6.2 DATA EXAMINATION**

To ensure that the statistical assumptions of multivariate analysis are met, examining characteristics of the data prior to data analysis is very important (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2011). If these assumptions are violated, biases or non-significance may mask the true results and thus prevent the researcher from drawing any meaningful conclusions based on the results. First of all, the researcher reverses all the negatively worded items in SPSS20. Then missing data and outliers are identified and the data checked for normality and multicollinearity in accordance with guidelines provided by Osborne (2013) and Hair et al. (2010). Each of these steps is described below.

#### **6.2.1 MISSING DATA**

The initial sample in company A and company B consists of 365 employee-supervisor pairs and 284 employee-supervisor pairs, respectively. Consistent with the rule of thumb cases with more than 10% of the variables missing in each part are not included (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2011), bringing the total number of responses to 334

employee-supervisor pairs in company A and 265 employee-supervisor pairs in company B.

### **6.2.2 OUTLIERS**

Outliers can significantly influence or even distort statistical analysis and hence they should be identified prior to analysis (Hair et al., 2010). Osborne (2013) and Hair et al. (2010) suggest, multiple methods, including univariate, bivariate and multivariate, should be used to identify outliers. In the current study, standardised values (univariate method) and Mahalanobis  $D^2$  (multivariate method) are used simultaneously to identify outliers.

Preliminary analyses suggest that four variables in company A and company B (i.e. age of supervisor, length of employment of supervisor, age of trainee and length of employment of trainee) have a large range and standard deviation. The univariate method requires the researcher to convert the values across these four variables to standardised values which have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 (Hair et al., 2010; Osborne, 2013). As a rule of thumb, outliers are defined as cases with standardised values greater than 4 for a larger sample size (80 or above). Using this measure, the standardised value of length of employment of trainee (case 242) in company A and the standardised value of length of employment of supervisor (case 238) in company B are greater than 4. However, these cases are retained in the analyses because their effects on the mean and standard deviation are minor and they are not outliers using the multivariate method, which will be discussed below.

Multivariate method is more accurate in detecting outliers. For instance, an observation may not be identified as an outlier in the standardised value test (univariate method) but it may be flagged in the Mahalanobis  $D^2$  measure (multivariate method) because the



combination of the values across the variables is unusual. The Mahalanobis  $D^2$  measure assesses each observation's distance to the mean centre of all observations in standard deviation units and can be used for significance testing. As Gaskin (2011) suggests, a p1 value less than .05 is identified as a potential outlier. Using this measure, 38 cases in company A and 19 in company B are identified as potential outliers. Table 6.1 shows the cases with multivariate outliers.

Table 6.1. Cases with multivariate outliers.

Company A			Company B		
Cases	Mahalanobis d-squared	p1	Cases	Mahalanobis d squared	p1
279	87.563	.000	26	82.205	.000
25	87.386	.000	102	72.568	.002
55	85.571	.001	171	67.872	.005
5	84.541	.001	21	66.454	.007
283	84.274	.001	67	65.911	.008
330	83.073	.001	51	65.668	.009
216	79.017	.003	191	63.881	.013
310	78.416	.004	2	62.555	.017
253	77.322	.005	181	62.534	.017
230	76.755	.005	39	61.982	.019
295	76.177	.006	86	61.398	.021
115	76.128	.006	100	60.473	.025
306	73.618	.010	138	59.472	.031
304	72.316	.013	33	59.309	.032
334	72.310	.013	34	59.055	.034
317	72.167	.014	255	58.608	.037
252	70.789	.018	153	58.107	.040
332	70.296	.020	110	57.574	.044
243	69.056	.025	30	57.227	.047
231	69.028	.025			

263	68.897	.026			
259	68.853	.026			
156	68.714	.026			
223	68.465	.028			
309	68.402	.028			
220	68.312	.029			
26	68.163	.029			
327	67.710	.032			
189	67.571	.033			
14	67.111	.036			
321	66.713	.038			
134	66.209	.042			
285	66.197	.042			
200	66.151	.042			
265	65.944	.044			
307	65.662	.046			
86	65.498	.047			
37	65.434	.048			

After removing the cases with outliers, the measurement model and the structural model in both companies yield a poorer fit. Table 6.2 shows the fit indexes for the measurement model and the structural model in both companies prior to and after the removal of cases with outliers.

Table 6.2. Model fit for the measurement model and structural model prior to and after the removal of cases with outliers in company A and company B.

	Prior to removal of cases with outliers					After removal of cases with outliers				
	Model $\chi^2$	df	CFI	IFI	RMSEA	Model $\chi^2$	df	CFI	IFI	RMSEA
Company A (N=334)										
Measurement model	2315.68	1415	.931	.931	.044	2407.72	1415	.917	.918	.049
Structural model	1679.99	1015	.934	.935	.044	1822.85	1015	.914	.915	.052
Company B (N=265)										
Measurement model	1301.14	1014	.957	.958	.033	1339.75	1014	.950	.951	.036
Structural model	940.70	715	.962	.962	.035	976.68	715	.954	.955	.039

To assess model fit across the measurement (CFA) and structural models, the chi-squared ( $\chi^2$ ) test and two widely used goodness-of-fit criteria are employed: the comparative fit index (CFI) and the incremental fit index (IFI). The  $\chi^2$  is the most fundamental measure of overall fit. Low chi-squared values indicate that the proposed model fits the sample data. However, the chi-squared measure is heavily influenced by sample size. A chi-squared value cannot be the only determinant in the model fit (Hair et al., 2010). CFI represents comparisons between the estimated model and an independent model. IFI assesses how well the estimated model fits relative to an alternative baseline model. Values of .90 or higher for these two criteria suggest an adequate fit (Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Hair et al., 2010; Martínez- López, Gázquez-Abad, & Sousa, 2013). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), which estimates the discrepancy between the original and reproduced covariance matrixes in the population, is also used. An RMSEA of 0.08 or lower shows a good data fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Hair et al., 2010).

Consequently, these cases are retained to preserve the statistical power. As Gaskin (2011) suggests, cases with outliers will always exist; even if one removes some, more will appear. Finally, the sample size of 334 pairs in company A and 265 pairs in company B is retained.

### **6.2.3 FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS IN MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS**

The researcher further assesses the data to see if the basic assumptions underlying multivariate analysis are met. These include checking for normality and multicollinearity.

The assessment of normality of variables involves checking the shape (i.e. skewness and kurtosis) of the distribution. When the distribution is normal, the mean scores of skewness and kurtosis are 0. A skew index greater than 3 and a kurtosis index greater than 10 indicate serious non-normality. In the current study, skewness and kurtosis of the items are well below 3 and 10, respectively.

Finally, the researcher checks for multicollinearity, which refers to a strong correlation between two or more predictors in multiple regression (Field, 2005). When two predictors are strongly correlated, the variance in the outcome that they account for is smaller than when they are uncorrelated; therefore, multicollinearity limits the size of R. To check for multicollinearity, the researcher uses the variance inflation factor (VIF) in SPSS, which indicates whether a predictor has a strong relationship with other predictors. Field (2005) suggests that multicollinearity is tolerable as long as VIF is less than 10. In this study, all the VIFs are below 10 and therefore it is assumed that multicollinearity is not a concern.

### **6.3 ANALYTICAL STRATEGY**

To test causal relationships among constructs, a two-step approach is utilised (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hair et al., 2010). The measurement model testing is first, followed by the full structural model testing. At the first step, the measurement model analyses evaluate the contribution of each item to the construct (latent variables) being assessed. Then, at the second step, the structural model is tested to determine the strength of the hypothesised relationships between constructs. To preserve statistical power, control variables, which are age of trainee, educational level of trainee, gender of trainee and tenure with the company of trainee, are included in the final structural model only (Wu, Tsui, & Kinicki, 2010). In the calculation of interaction terms (i.e. learning  $\times$  extrinsic rewards), the variables are mean-centered to reduce multicollinearity and produce less biased parameter estimates. To test the mediator hypotheses, direct and indirect effects in the SEM tests are calculated (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002).

#### **6.3.1 CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS**

Before testing the structural model, confirmatory factor analysis is used to test the measurement theory, that is, how well the theoretical specification of the constructs matches the actual data (Hair et al., 2010). Structural equation modelling, which combines confirmatory factor analysis and multiple regression analysis, is chosen because it can represent latent constructs in multiple dependence relationships while accounting for measurement error at the same time. All SEM is performed in AMOS 23 using the maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) method. MLE is chosen because it is fairly robust to violations of normality. Moreover, compared with other techniques, it produces reliable results (Hair et al., 2010).

SEM generally requires large samples to generate more stable results. A sample size of

200 is needed for models with lower commonalities for some constructs, a large number of constructs and/or fewer than 3 measured items for a construct (Boomsma, 1983). Another rule of thumb is that there should be five respondents for every parameter to be estimated (Hair et al., 2010; Martínez- López et al., 2013). Taking these rules into consideration, a sample size of 334 in company A and 265 in company B is deemed sufficient for SEM applications.

### **6.3.2 EMPLOYABILITY AS A FIVE-FACTOR CONSTRUCT**

Before testing the overall measurement model, CFA is performed on the responses of 334 pairs and 265 pairs (employee-supervisor) in the sample from company A and company B, respectively. Pre-training employability and post-training employability are modelled as a second-order latent factor with five first-order factors representing its constituent dimensions. In company A, this procedure dictates the retention of 20 items from the initial pool for both pre-training employability and post-training employability: 5 items for professional expertise, 4 for personal flexibility, 4 for anticipation and optimisation, 3 for corporate sense and 4 for balance. For pre-training employability, 2 items (PREPF3 for personal flexibility and PRECS2 for corporate sense) which had less than satisfactory (i.e. low or non-significant) factor loadings are not retained. For the pre-training employability, the second-order factor model with these 20 items has an acceptable fit,  $\chi^2$  (163, N=334) = 593.65,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = .923; IFI = .923; RMSEA = .089, with all first- and second-order factor loadings significant at the .001 level. For the post-training employability, 2 items (POSTPF3 for personal flexibility and POSTCS2 for corporate sense) which had less than satisfactory (i.e. low or non-significant) factor loadings are not retained. For the post-training employability, the second-order factor model with these 20 items has an acceptable fit,  $\chi^2$  (165, N=334) = 392.63,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = .963; IFI = .963; RMSEA = .064, with all first- and second-order factor loadings significant at the .001

level.

In company B, 20 items from the initial pool are retained for both pre-training employability and post-training employability: 5 items for professional expertise, 4 for personal flexibility, 4 for anticipation and optimisation, 3 for corporate sense and 4 for balance. For pre-training employability, 2 items (PREPF3 for personal flexibility and PRECS2 for corporate sense) with less than satisfactory (i.e. low or non-significant) factor loadings are not retained. For the pre-training employability, the second-order factor model with these 20 items has an acceptable fit,  $\chi^2$  (165, N=265) =287.28,  $p < .01$ ; CFI = .962; IFI= .962; RMSEA= .053, with all first- and second-order factor loadings significant at the .001 level. For post-training employability, 2 items (POSTPF3 for personal flexibility and POSTCS2 for corporate sense) with less than satisfactory (i.e. low or non-significant) factor loadings are not retained. For the post-training employability, the second-order factor model with these 20 items has an acceptable fit,  $\chi^2$  (165, N=265) =325.46,  $p < .001$ ; CFI=.930; IFI=.931; RMSEA=.061.

Following Bozionelos et al. (2016), alternative models are also tested. These include “a model with all items loading on one factor and a number of other models that are conceived using logical reasoning (e.g. both corporate sense and balance have the employer as a point of reference); other models of employability (e.g., Van Dam, 2004) view technical competence and career interests and preferences as forming a single employability factor which dictates towards merging professional expertise and balance into a single factor: a two-factor model (Factor 1: professional expertise, anticipation and optimisation, personal flexibility; Factor 2: corporate sense, balance), a three-factor model (Factor 1: professional expertise; Factor 2: anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility; Factor 3: corporate sense, balance) and a four-factor model in which corporate

sense and balance form a single factor while the rest of the items load on their intended dimensions” (Bozionelos et al., 2016, p.148-149). All these alternative factor structures demonstrate a poor fit to the data (see Tables 6.3 and 6.4) and we thus rely on our original measurement model of employability. “To satisfy power concerns, the multi-item scales for the five dimensions of employability [are] averaged (by calculating the arithmetic mean) and treated as observed indicators (i.e. manifest variables) in the structural model” (Bozionelos et al., 2016, p. 149).



Table 6.3. Second-order confirmatory factor analysis results of the measurement models of post-training employability in company A and company B.

	Company A (N=334 employee-supervisor pairs)						Company B (N=265 employee-supervisor pairs)					
	Model $\chi^2$ <sup>a</sup>	df	$\Delta\chi^2$ <sup>b</sup>	CFI	IFI	RMSEA	Model $\chi^2$ <sup>a</sup>	df	$\Delta\chi^2$ <sup>b</sup>	CFI	IFI	RMSEA
Baseline five-factor model	392.63	165	-	.963	.963	.064	325.46	165	-	.930	.931	.061
Single-factor model	3039.63	170	2647**	.530	.531	.225	926.56	168	601.1**	.671	.674	.131
Two-factor model (Factor 1: professional expertise, anticipation and optimisation, personal flexibility; Factor 2: corporate sense, balance)	2405.16	169	2012.53**	.634	.635	.199	907.13	169	581.67**	.662	.665	.129
Three-factor model (Factor 1: professional expertise; Factor 2: anticipation and optimisation, personal flexibility; Factor 3: corporate sense, balance)	1873.06	167	1480.43**	.720	.722	.175	886.68	167	561.22**	.687	.691	.128
Four-factor model (Factor 1: professional expertise; Factor 2: anticipation and optimisation; Factor 3: personal flexibility; Factor 4: corporate sense, balance)	979.81	166	587.18**	.867	.867	.121	639.18	166	313.72**	.795	.797	.104

Note: CFI= comparative fit index; IFI= incremental fit index; RMSEA= root mean square error of approximation.

a Model  $\chi^2$  is the Satorra-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$  of each model.

b $\Delta\chi^2$  is the change of Satorra-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$  compared with our original (baseline) measurement model.

\*\*p<.01

Table 6.4. Second-order confirmatory factor analysis results of the measurement models of pre-training employability in company A and company B.

	Company A (N= 334 employee-supervisor pairs)						Company B (N= 265 employee-supervisor pairs)					
	Model $\chi^2$ <sup>a</sup>	df	$\Delta\chi^2$ <sup>b</sup>	CFI	IFI	RMSEA	Model $\chi^2$ <sup>a</sup>	df	$\Delta\chi^2$ <sup>b</sup>	CFI	IFI	RMSEA
Baseline five-factor model	593.65	163	-	.923	.923	.089	287.28	165	-	.962	.962	.053
Single-factor model	1402.14	170	808.49**	.778	.779	.148	2213.20	170	1925.92**	.362	.366	.213
Two-factor model (Factor 1: professional expertise, anticipation and optimisation, personal flexibility; Factor 2: corporate sense, balance)	1366.95	169	773.3**	.784	.785	.146	1247.80	168	960.52**	.663	.665	.156
Three-factor model (Factor 1: professional expertise; Factor 2: anticipation and optimisation, personal flexibility; Factor 3: corporate sense, balance)	1284.83	167	691.18**	.799	.800	.142	1218.56	167	931.28**	.672	.674	.154
Four-factor model (Factor 1: professional expertise; Factor 2: anticipation and optimisation; Factor 3: personal flexibility; Factor 4: corporate sense, balance)	1249.5	166	655.85**	.805	.806	.140	998.50	166	711.22**	.740	.742	.138

Note: CFI= comparative fit index; IFI= incremental fit index; RMSEA= root mean square error of approximation.

a Model  $\chi^2$  is the Satorra-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$  of each model.

b $\Delta\chi^2$  is the change of Satorra-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$  compared with the original (baseline) measurement model.

\*\*p<.01

### **6.3.3 OVERALL MEASUREMENT MODEL**

The overall measurement model contains 12 latent constructs, including openness to experience, protean career orientation, job involvement, peer support, supervisor support, extrinsic rewards, motivation to learn, learning, pre-training job performance, post-training job performance, pre-training employability and post-training employability. The fit indexes for the overall measurement model in both company A (Satorra-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$  (1415, N=334) =2315.68,  $p<.001$ ; CFI=.931; IFI=.931; RMSEA=.044) and company B (Satorra-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$  (1014, N=265) =1301.14,  $p<.001$ ; CFI=.957; IFI=.958; RMSEA=.033) are deemed satisfactory.

### **6.3.4 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY ANALYSES**

The measurement instruments are further assessed in terms of reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the degree to which the scale consistently reflects the construct it measures (Field, 2005). To show correctly the reliability of the scales, the researcher checks the indicators' factor loadings for each construct and Cronbach's alpha. Descriptive statistics, including the means, standard deviations (SDs) and intercorrelations of variables in company A and company B are presented in Table 6.5 and 6.6, respectively.

Hair et al. (2010) suggest that a Cronbach's alpha value of .60 to .70 is in the lower limits of acceptability. The Cronbach's alpha values range from .81 to .93 and from .82 to .94 in company A and company B, respectively. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of variables in company A and company B are provided along the diagonal parentheses in Tables 6.5 and 6.6, respectively.

Table 6.5. Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of variables and scale reliability estimates of measures in company A (n=334 employee-supervisor pairs).

	Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	Openness to experience	4.18	1.19	(.92)											
2	Protean career orientation	4.71	1.22	-.133*	(.87)										
3	Job involvement	4.57	1.12	-.076	-.016	(.90)									
4	Peer support	2.71	0.59	-.024	-.043	-.206**	(.81)								
5	Supervisor support	4.43	1.11	.448**	-.127*	-.026	-.087	(.91)							
6	Extrinsic rewards	3.45	1.29	.133**	-.017	-.456**	.268**	.052	(.89)						
7	Motivation to learn	4.22	1.09	.431**	-.060	-.061	-.039	.487**	0.019	(.93)					
8	Learning	4.32	1.26	.359**	-.026	-.025	-.028	.428**	-.002	.469**	(.93)				
9	Pre-training job performance	3.13	1.16	0.056	0.015	.009	-.040	-.019	-.012	.121*	.114*	(.87)			
10	Post-training job performance	4.43	1.27	.224**	.115*	-.012	-.061	.354**	-.007	.458**	.386**	.038	(.92)		
11	Pre-training employability	3.47	1.03	.191**	-.016	-.001	-.073	.199**	-.021	.144**	.183**	.021	.118*	(.85)	
12	Post-training employability	4.35	0.91	.393**	0.004	-.083	-.100	.453**	.039	.623**	.675**	.127*	.603**	.233**	(.93)

Note: \*\* correlations are significant at the .01 level; \* correlations are significant at the .05 level.

Table 6.6. Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of variables and scale reliability estimates of measures in company B (n=265 employee-supervisor pairs).

	Variables	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	Openness to experience	4.46	1.15	(.85)											
2	Protean career orientation	4.18	1.01	.259**	(.89)										
3	Job involvement	4.75	1.14	.005	-.009	(.87)									
4	Peer support	4.64	1.26	.294**	.143*	-.099	(.94)								
5	Supervisor support	4.6	1.17	.184**	.176**	-.007	.264**	(.91)							
6	Extrinsic rewards	3.6	1.29	.061	.015	-.339**	-.004	.050	(.89)						
7	Motivation to learn	4.49	1.12	.209**	.225**	-.008	.199**	.328**	-.069	(.92)					
8	Learning	4.61	0.91	.188**	.154*	-.027	.111	.353**	-.015	.539**	(.86)				
9	Pre-training job performance	3.21	1.36	-.039	-.070	.015	.047	-.061	-.078	.050	.094	(.84)			
10	Post-training job performance	4.85	1.15	.148*	.149*	.032	-.016	.181**	.048	.194**	.266**	.054	(.88)		
11	Pre-training employability	3.73	0.6	-.101	-.063	0.06	-.012	-.053	.019	-.137*	-.041	.028	-.105	(.93)	
12	Post-training employability	4.64	0.76	.025	.002	.017	-.056	.182**	.111	.062	.001	-.039	.155*	.057	(.82)

Note: \*\* correlations are significant at the .01 level; \* correlations are significant at the .05 level.

In addition, Hair et al. (2010) suggest that all the indicators' factor loadings should be at least .40 for sample size of 200 or greater. In both companies, items with less than satisfactory (i.e. low or non-significant factor loadings) are not retained. In company A, factor loadings for the items are greater than .40 except for 9 items: PCO3 for protean career orientation, PS1 and PS7 for peer support, SS5, SS7 and SS11 for supervisor support, MTL6 for motivation to learn and L4 and L5 for learning. In company B, factor loadings for the items are greater than .50 except for 15 items: PCO1 and PCO7 for protean career orientation, J1 for job involvement, PS1 and PS7 for peer support, SS1, SS5, SS7, SS8, SS10 and SS11 for supervisor support, MTL6 and MTL 7 for motivation to learn and L4 and L5 for learning. As a result, these items are not retained. Tables 6.7 and 6.8 show the factor loadings of the deleted items and construct reliability prior to and after item deletion in company A and company B, respectively. Hence, the factor loading of the remaining items in company A range from .52 to .95, whereas the factor loadings of the remaining items range from .51 to .94 in company B. Appendixes 18 and 19 illustrate the standardised factor loadings for each latent construct in company A and company B, respectively.

Table 6.7. Factor loadings for the deleted items and construct reliability prior to and after item deletion in company A.

Construct and indicators	Standardised factor loadings	Construct reliability prior to item deletion	Construct reliability after item deletion
Protean career orientation		.79	.87
PCO3	-.05		
Peer support		.47	.81

PS1	.03		
PS7	-.03		
Supervisor support		.79	.91
SS5	-.03		
SS7	.03		
SS11	-.03		
Motivation to learn		.87	.93
MTL6	.04		
Learning		.53	.93
L4	.01		
L5	-.07		

Table 6.8. Factor loadings for the deleted items and construct reliability prior to and after item deletion in company B.

Construct and indicators	Standardised factor loadings	Construct reliability prior to item deletion	Construct reliability after item deletion
Protean career orientation		.68	.89
PCO1	-.02		
PCO7	.02		
Job involvement		.64	.87
JII	.03		

Peer support		.78	.94
PS1	.03		
PS7	.01		
Supervisor support		.56	.91
SS1	.07		
SS5	.02		
SS7	-.08		
SS8	-.07		
SS10	-.10		
SS11	.05		
Motivation to learn		.79	.92
MTL6	.04		
MTL7	.07		
Learning		.43	.86
L4	.02		
L5	.04		

Having established construct reliability, the researcher then assesses the construct validity, which refers to how accurately the measured items reflect the theoretical latent construct (Kline, 2011) by examining the convergent validity. Convergent validity is examined by observing the values of composite or construct reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). As Hair et al. (2010) note, the threshold value for CR should be



at least .60. A CR value that is lower than .60 indicates that the items do not consistently measure the hypothesised latent factor (Hair et al., 2010). CR is calculated by dividing the squared sum of factor loadings by the squared sum of the factor loadings plus the sum of the error variance. In the current study, all the values are above the cutoff point of .60 for composite reliability. The composite reliability ranges in company A from .81 to .96 and in company B from .74 to .94. Appendixes 18 and 19, respectively, illustrate the construct/composite reliability for each latent construct in company A and company B.

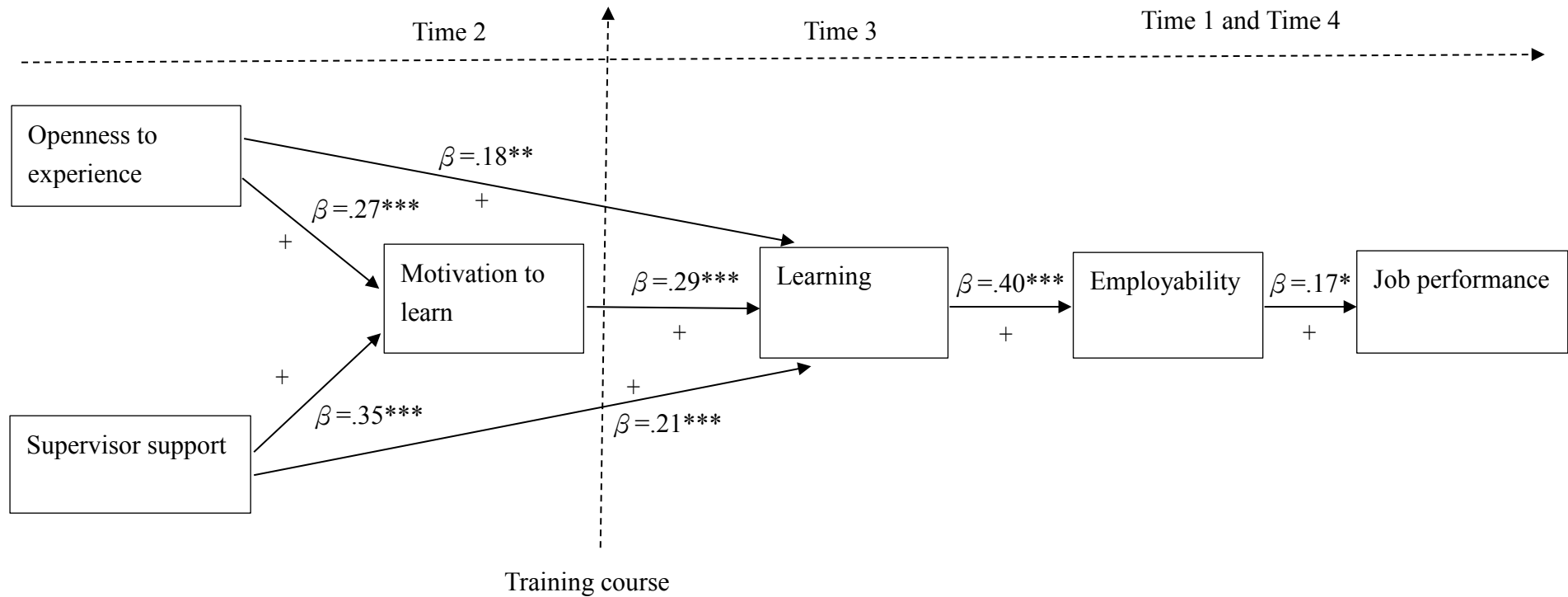
AVE should be at least .50 and the value is computed by dividing the total of all squared standardised factor loadings (i.e. squared multiple correlations) by the number of items. An AVE value less than .50 indicates that more error remains in the items than the variance explained by the latent factor structure imposed on the measure. Convergent validity is established based on the values of composite reliability and average variance extracted for all the variables. Since the AVE for peer support in company A is just below .50 and the overall measurement model has an acceptable fit, it is deemed acceptable. The pre-training anticipation and optimisation in company B is below .50. However, second-order CFA of pre-employability has an acceptable fit, so it is deemed acceptable. As a result, the AVE in company A ranges from .46 to .87 and in company B from .42 to .75. In conclusion, the results lend support for convergent validity of all the items in each factor. Appendixes 18 and 19, respectively, illustrate the average variance extracted for each construct in company A and company B.

#### **6.4 EVALUATION OF HYPOTHESISED STRUCTURAL MODEL (COMPANY A)**

In the hypothesised structural model, employability is calculated by the difference between post-training employability and pre-training employability and job performance

is calculated by the difference between post-training job performance and pre-training job performance. The hypothesised model demonstrates a good data fit,  $\chi^2$  (1015, N=334) = 1679.99,  $p < .01$ ; CFI = .934; IFI = .935 and RMSEA = .044. The final structural model is shown in Figure 6.1.

FIGURE 6.1. FINAL STRUCTURAL MODEL OF COMPANY A (N=334 EMPLOYEE-SUPERVISOR PAIRS).



Note: For reasons of simplicity, the control variables and all paths with insignificant path coefficients are not shown in this path diagram. Only paths with significant path coefficients are shown. Standardised path coefficients are reported. All factor loadings of the indicators of the latent constructs are significant at the .001 level.  $\chi^2$  (1015, N=334) = 1679.99;  $p < .01$ ; IFI=.935; CFI=.934; RMSEA= .044. IFI= incremental fit index; CFI= comparative fit index; RMSEA= root mean square error of approximation.

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

H1 is supported as motivation to learn is positively related to learning ( $\beta=.29$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

H2 and H3 are supported as openness to experience is positively related to motivation to learn ( $\beta=.27$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and learning ( $\beta=.18$ ,  $p<.01$ )

H4 and H5 are rejected as protean career orientation is unrelated to motivation to learn ( $\beta=.04$ , ns) and learning ( $\beta=.03$ , ns).

H6 and H7 are rejected as job involvement is unrelated to motivation to learn ( $\beta= -.03$ , ns) and learning ( $\beta=.00$ , ns).

H8 and H9 are supported as supervisor support is positively related to motivation to learn ( $\beta=.35$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and learning ( $\beta=.21$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

H10 and H11 are rejected as peer support is unrelated to motivation to learn ( $\beta= -.02$ , ns) and learning ( $\beta=.01$ , ns).

H12 is supported as motivation to learn mediates the relationship between openness to experience and learning. Both the direct and indirect effect of openness to experience on learning are significant ( $\beta=.18$ ,  $p<.01$ ;  $\beta=.08$ ,  $p<.001$ , respectively). Thus, the effect of openness to experience on learning through motivation to learn is significant, leading to support for H12 ( $Z=3.31$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Mediation is partial because openness to experience is significantly related to learning (as per the testing of H3).

H13 and H14 are rejected since the relationship of protean career orientation and job involvement with motivation to learn is not significant (as per the testing of H4 and H6

above), which renders further testing for mediation redundant (Kenny et al., 1998).

H15 is supported as motivation to learn mediates the relationship between supervisor support and learning. Both the direct and indirect effect of supervisor support on learning are significant ( $\beta=.21$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $\beta=.10$ ,  $p<.001$ , respectively). Thus, the effect of supervisor support on learning through motivation to learn is significant, leading to support of H15 ( $Z=3.43$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Mediation is partial because supervisor support is significantly related to learning (as per the testing of H9).

H16 is rejected since the relationship of peer support and motivation to learn is not significant (as per the testing of H10), which renders further testing for mediation redundant (Kenny et al., 1998).

H17 is supported as learning is positively related to employability ( $\beta=.40$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

H18 is rejected as learning is unrelated to job performance ( $\beta=.08$ , ns).

H19 is supported as employability is positively related to job performance ( $\beta=.17$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

H20 is supported as employability mediates the relationship between learning and job performance. The indirect effect of learning on job performance is significant ( $\beta=.07$ ,  $p<.05$ ), while the corresponding direct effect is not ( $\beta=.08$ , ns). Employability thus fully mediates the relationship between learning and job performance ( $Z=2.30$ ,  $p<.05$ ), leading to support of H20.

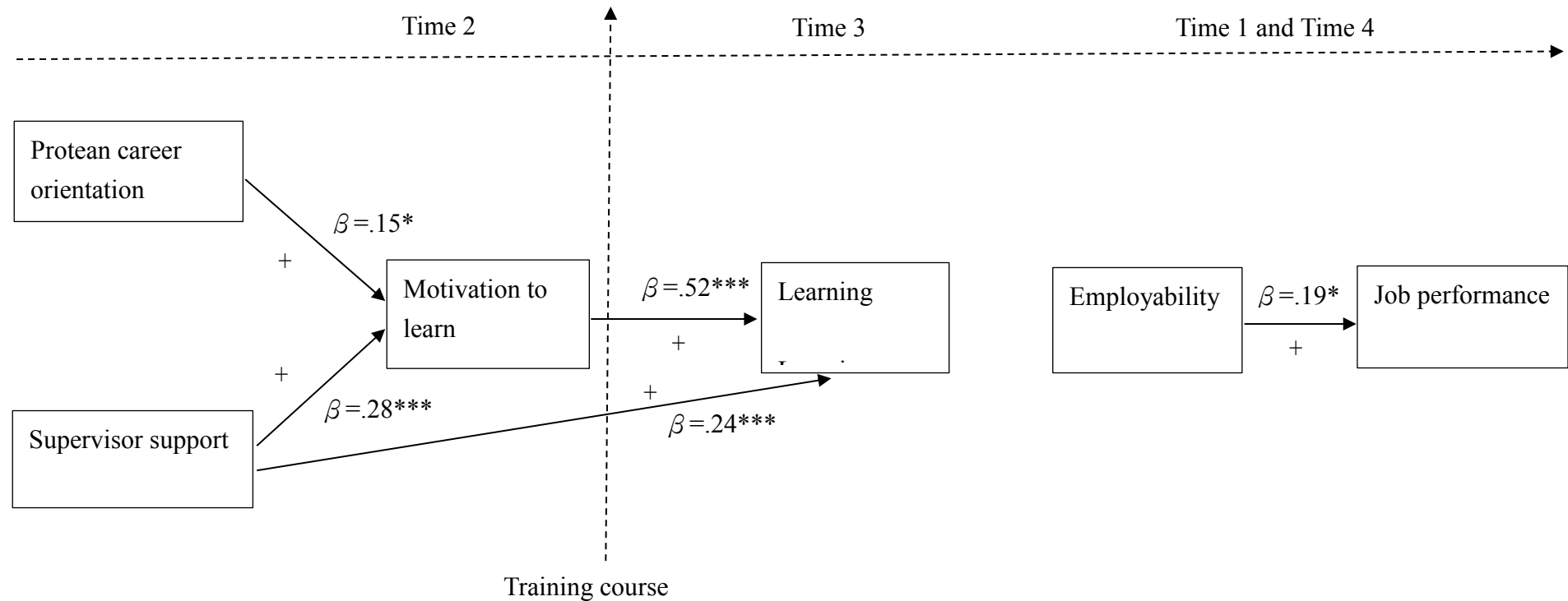
H21 is rejected as extrinsic rewards do not moderate the relationship between learning

and job performance. The interaction of learning and extrinsic rewards is not related to job performance ( $\beta = -.03$ , ns), leading to rejection of H21.

## **6.5 EVALUATION OF HYPOTHESISED STRUCTURAL MODEL (COMPANY B)**

In the hypothesised structural model, employability is calculated by the difference between post-training employability and pre-training employability and job performance is calculated by the difference between post-training job performance and pre-training job performance. The hypothesised model demonstrates a good data fit,  $\chi^2$  (715, N=265) = 940.70,  $p < .001$ ; IFI=.962; CFI = .962; RMSEA = .035. The final structural model is shown in Figure 6.2.

FIGURE 6.2. FINAL STRUCTURAL MODEL OF COMPANY B (N=265 EMPLOYEE-SUPERVISOR PAIRS)



Note: For reasons of simplicity, the control variables and paths with insignificant path coefficients are not shown in this path diagram. Only paths with significant path coefficients are shown. Standardised path coefficients are reported. All factor loadings of the indicators of the latent constructs are significant at the .001 level.  $\chi^2 (715, N=265) = 940.70$ ;  $p < .001$ ; IFI=.962; CFI=.962; RMSEA=.035. IFI= incremental fit index; CFI= comparative fit index; RMSEA= root mean square error of approximation.

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

H1 is supported as motivation to learn is positively related to learning ( $\beta=.52$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

H2 and H3 are rejected as openness to experience is unrelated to motivation to learn ( $\beta=.09$ , ns) and learning ( $\beta=.07$ , ns).

H4 is supported as protean career orientation is positively related to motivation to learn ( $\beta=.15$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

H5 is rejected as protean career orientation is unrelated to learning ( $\beta=.01$ , ns).

H6 and H7 are rejected as job involvement is unrelated to motivation to learn ( $\beta=-.00$ , ns) and learning ( $\beta=-.03$ , ns).

H8 and H9 are supported as supervisor support is significantly positively related to motivation to learn ( $\beta=.28$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and learning ( $\beta=.24$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

H10 and H11 are rejected as peer support is unrelated to motivation to learn ( $\beta=.09$ , ns) and learning ( $\beta=-.11$ , ns).

H12 is rejected as motivation to learn does not mediate the relationship between openness to experience and learning. The relationship between openness to experience and motivation to learn is not significant (as per the testing of H2), which renders further testing for mediation redundant (Kenny et al., 1998).

H13 is supported as motivation to learn mediates the relationship between protean career orientation and learning. The indirect effect of protean career orientation on learning is



significant ( $\beta=.08$ ,  $p<.01$ ), while the corresponding direct effect is not ( $\beta=.01$ , ns). Motivation to learn thus fully mediates the relationship of protean career orientation and learning ( $Z=2.17$ ,  $p<.01$ ), leading to support of H13.

H14 is rejected as motivation to learn does not mediate the relationship between job involvement and learning. The relationship between job involvement and motivation to learn is not significant (as per the testing of H6), which renders further testing for mediation redundant (Kenny et al., 1998).

H15 is supported as motivation to learn mediates the relationship between supervisor support and learning. Both the direct and indirect effects of supervisor support on learning are significant ( $\beta=.24$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $\beta=.15$ ,  $p<.001$ , respectively). Thus, the effect of supervisor support on learning through motivation to learn is significant, leading to support of H15 ( $Z=3.63$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Mediation is partial because supervisor support is significantly related to learning (as per the testing of H9).

H16 is rejected as motivation to learn mediates the relationship between peer support and learning. The relationship between peer support and motivation to learn is not significant (as per the testing of H10), which renders further testing for mediation redundant (Kenny et al., 1998).

H17 and H18 are rejected as learning is unrelated to employability ( $\beta=.05$ , ns) and job performance ( $\beta=.02$ , ns).

H19 is supported as employability is significantly positively related to job performance ( $\beta=.19$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

H20 is rejected as employability does not mediate the relationship between learning and job performance. Both the relationship between learning and employability (as per testing of H17) and the relationship between employability and job performance (as per testing of H18) are unrelated, leading to rejection of H20.

H21 is rejected as extrinsic rewards do not moderate the relationship between learning and job performance. The interaction of learning and extrinsic rewards is not related to job performance ( $\beta = -.03$ , ns). Therefore, extrinsic rewards do not moderate the relationship between learning and job performance, leading to rejection of H21.

## 6.6 SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES TESTING IN COMPANY A AND COMPANY B

Table 6.9 summarises the results of hypotheses testing in company A and company B.

Table 6.9. Results of hypotheses testing in company A and company B.

Hypothesis	Results	
	Company A	Company B
H1: Motivation to learn is positively related to learning.	Supported	Supported
H2: Openness to experience is positively related to motivation to learn.	Supported	Rejected
H3: Openness to experience is positively related to learning.	Supported	Rejected
H4: Protean career orientation is positively related to motivation to learn.	Rejected	Supported
H5: Protean career orientation is positively related to learning.	Rejected	Rejected
H6: Job involvement is positively related to motivation to learn.	Rejected	Rejected
H7: Job involvement is positively related to learning.	Rejected	Rejected
H8: Supervisor support is positively related to	Supported	Supported

motivation to learn.		
H9: Supervisor support is positively related to learning.	Supported	Supported
H10: Peer support is positively related to motivation to learn.	Rejected	Rejected
H11: Peer support is positively related to learning.	Rejected	Rejected
H12: Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between openness to experience and learning.	Supported	Rejected
H13: Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between protean career orientation and learning	Rejected	Supported
H14: Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between job involvement and learning.	Rejected	Rejected
H15: Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between supervisor support and learning.	Supported	Supported
H16: Motivation to learn mediates the relationship between peer support and learning.	Rejected	Rejected
H17: Learning is positively related to employability.	Supported	Rejected
H18: Learning is positively related to job performance.	Rejected	Rejected
H19: Employability is positively related to job performance.	Supported	Supported
H20: Employability mediates the relationship between learning and job performance.	Supported	Rejected
H21: Extrinsic rewards moderate the relationship between learning and job performance.	Rejected	Rejected

## 6.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Both similarities and differences exist in the research findings in the two companies. Regarding similarities, the research results from both companies support that motivation to learn is positively related to learning. Moreover, the research results indicate that supervisor support is positively related to motivation to learn and learning, whereas the results show that peer support is unrelated to motivation to learn and learning. Subsequently, the results support the mediating role of motivation to learn on supervisor support and learning, whereas the results fail to support the mediating role of motivation

to learn on peer support and learning. In addition, the results show that job involvement is unrelated to motivation to learn and learning. Subsequently, the results fail to support the mediating role of motivation to learn on job involvement and learning. Results show that learning is unrelated to job performance. Results also suggest that extrinsic rewards do not moderate the relationship between learning and job performance. Results indicate that employability is positively related to job performance.

Regarding differences, openness to experience is positively related to motivation to learn and learning in company A but non-significant relationship is found in company B. Subsequently, the results support that motivation to learn mediates the relationship between openness to experience and learning in company A but fails to support such mediating relationship in company B. Moreover, protean career orientation is positively related to motivation to learn in company B but a non-significant relationship is found in company A. Subsequently, the results support the mediating role of motivation to learn in the relationship between protean career orientation and learning in company B but fail to support such mediating relationship in company A. In addition, learning is positively related to employability in company A but a non-significant relationship is found in company B. Subsequently, the results support the mediating role of employability in the relationship between learning and job performance in company A but fails to support such mediating relationship in company B.

## CHPATER 7 DISCUSSION

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the final chapter, the findings are discussed, providing insights into how this research advances existing knowledge in the literature. While most of the findings are consistent with hypotheses, there are unexpected results. Explanations are provided for these results. Moreover, answers to the two research questions - Who is responsible for employability development? How can employability be developed? - are also provided. Last, but not least, practical implications for both employees and employers, limitations and strengths of the study are discussed.

### **7.2. ANTECEDENTS OF LEARNING**

#### **7.2.1 MOTIVATION TO LEARN AND LEARNING**

The current study finds that motivation to learn is positively related to learning in both companies. The result is in line with findings of traditional motivational studies (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2000; Mathieu et al., 1992; Ryman & Biesner, 1975). Such similarity may be due to the recent significant changes in the retail and insurance industries in Hong Kong. Increasing competition from neighbouring cities such as Seoul and Taipei (as trendy destinations for wealthy Chinese travelers) discourages tourists from coming to Hong Kong and leads to weakening sales and dwindling profits in the retail sectors. Meanwhile, the insurance industry suffers significantly from the maturity of the local insurance market. To remain competitive, employees must have strong motivation to participate in training for both current and future employment.

#### **7.2.2 INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUAL FACTORS ON MOTIVATION TO LEARN AND LEARNING**

Regarding individual factors, openness to experience is significantly related only to

motivation to learn and learning in company A. This is in line with the findings of previous studies (Barrick et al., 2001; Ziegler et al., 2014), which report that openness to experience is an important predictor for learning activities. Unexpectedly, however, it is not significantly related to motivation to learn and learning in company B. Subsequently, the result supports the mediating role of openness to experience in motivation to learn and learning in company A but fails to support such mediating relationship in company B. Interestingly, employees in company B (mean=4.46) are higher on openness to experience than those in company A (mean=4.18), but non-significant positive relationship between openness to experience and motivation to learn and learning is found in company B. This means that simply employees' eagerness to learn is not translated into learning as a result of the training programme. Reasons can vary, including the possibility that the training course is not effective or that employees are so stressed from their work that they are not able to benefit from the course.

Protean career orientation is significantly related to motivation to learn in company B. This is in line with the findings of Kyndt and Baert (2013), Kyndt et al. (2011), Park (2008) and Weng and McElroy (2010). Contradicting our expectation, protean career orientation is not significantly related to motivation to learn in company A. Subsequently, the result supports the mediating role of motivation to learn in the relationship between protean career orientation and learning in company B but fails to support such mediating relationship in company A. Motivation to learn fully mediates the relationship between protean career orientation and learning in company B. This indicates that protean career orientation affects learning indirectly via motivation to learn. A difference in management style may explain this difference. Based on the author's observation, company A uses a paternalistic style of management, taking good care of its employees, which is the traditional management style in Hong Kong. Training is offered to

employees in exchange for their loyalty and effort. As a result, some employees in company A may think that their career management rests on the shoulders of the employer or is managed by the organisation rather than themselves. The pressure on employees to actively manage their career is limited; hence, they pay less attention at training, with the consequence of reaping fewer benefits from it.

Further contradicting our expectation, the current study does not find job involvement to be significantly related to motivation to learn and learning in either company. To the contrary, results show a negative relationship between job involvement and motivation to learn and learning in both companies. The changing labour market in Hong Kong provides a possible explanation. According to Hong Kong Salary & Employment Outlook in 2017 (Hong Kong Salary & Employment Outlook, 2017), the environment offers an increasing number of contract-based, temporary and part-part jobs instead of permanent employment. As a result, employees may not prepare themselves for long-term engagement with the organisations in which they work (Chan, 2016; Ngo et al., 2013; Tam & Chiu, 2010; Tam & Ip, 2017). They are more concerned about their own personal development to prepare for their future. Even though employees have a low level of job involvement with the current employment, they have strong motivation to learn in the training programme to improve their skills, knowledge and abilities for future employment in case they lose their current job.

### **7.2.3 INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL CONTEXTUAL FACTORS ON MOTIVATION TO LEARNING AND LEARNING**

In terms of social contextual factors, as expected, supervisor support is significantly related to motivation to learn and learning. On the other hand, peer support, unexpectedly, is not significantly related to motivation to learn or learning in either company. This

result is consistent with findings of previous studies (Blume et al., 2010; Chiaburu et al., 2010a; Ismail et al., 2010b; Quinones et al., 1995) which show that supervisor support plays an important role in training; the result is also consistent with social identity theory and the hierarchical nature of Chinese society (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Most likely, supervisors in both companies are knowledgeable and helpful in identifying training needs of the employees, encouraging them to learn before training and facilitating them during training. Therefore, the employees of both companies depend more on supervisor support than team-level support from peers for learning.

The lack of support for the hypothesised positive effect of peer support on motivation to learn and learning can be explained as follows: Employees perceive their supervisor as a more proximal figure than peers (having the closest relationship to employees). Also, they think that peers do not possess any power to determine the quality and quantity of training (Dermol & Čater, 2013). As a result, employees are able to benefit from supervisors with regard to advice and feedback about training.

#### **7.2.4 MOTIVATION TO LEARN AS A MEDIATOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL FACTORS AND SOCIAL CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AND LEARNING**

The study also finds support for the mediating role of motivation to learn in the relationship between supervisor support (both companies), openness to experience (company A), protean career orientation (company B) and learning. This is consistent with the majority of the studies in the training literature, which demonstrate that individual or social contextual factors influence learning outcomes both directly and indirectly through motivation to learn (Colquitt et al., 2000; Fecteau et al., 1995; Mathieu et al., 1992; Quinones, 1995). This indicates that motivation to learn is an important



mechanism through which supervisor support, openness to experience and protean career orientation influence learning. However, the mediating role of motivation to learn in the relationship between peer support (both companies) and job involvement (both companies) and learning is not significant because the direct relationships between peer support and job involvement and motivation to learn are not significant in either company, as discussed in the previous paragraphs.

### **7.3 OUTCOMES OF LEARNING**

#### **7.3.1 LEARNING AND EMPLOYABILITY**

The study reports a positive relationship between learning and employability in company A. This is consistent with earlier work, such as that of Van der Heijden et al. (2009a) and Van der Klink et al. (2014), and indicates that training is an effective way to enhance employability for the employees of company A. The results also support that learning not only relates to domain-specific knowledge or skills but also to competences that are more general. Contrary to expectation, the study does not find support for the relationship between learning and employability in company B. This may be due to the non-significant effects of learning on the dimensions of employability, which may have weakened the influence of learning on overall employability. In particular, the effect of learning on professional expertise ( $\alpha=.04$ , ns), personal flexibility ( $\alpha=-.18$ , ns), balance ( $\alpha=.16$ , ns), anticipation and optimization ( $\alpha=.06$ , ns) and corporate sense ( $\alpha=.07$ , ns) are insignificant. Although training affects employability in the current study, this does not imply that informal learning like networking is less important. Empirical studies found that informal learning such as networking and the learning value of the job appeared to be solid contributors to employability (e.g., Bozionelos et al., 2016; Van der Klink et al., 2014; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a).

### **7.3.2 LEARNING AND JOB PERFORMANCE**

Learning is not directly related to job performance in either company, unlike other findings of the training literature (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Garaveglia, 2000; Mathieu et al., 1992; Velada et al., 2007; Warr & Bunce, 1995). However, learning is related to performance in an indirect way, as there is full mediation of the relationship by employability in company A.

### **7.3.3 EMPLOYABILITY AND JOB PERFORMANCE**

The study finds support for the effect of employability on job performance in both companies and is consistent with the findings in the literature (e.g., Bozionelos et al., 2016; De Cuyper et al., 2011). In general, highly employable employees have up-to-date knowledge and a broader set of skills and are more capable of doing their tasks, resulting in better job performance. The result supports the COR theory that employees with high employability will try to foster their resource by performing well or to get other valued resources such as performance records by performing well (Hobfoll, 1989). The finding also supports the human resource theory (Becker, 1993) that organisational's investment in employability by providing training will lead to a return of investment in form of increased performance.

### **7.3.4 EMPLOYABILITY AS A MEDIATOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNING AND JOB PERFORMANCE**

As discussed earlier, employability fully mediates the relationship between learning and job performance in company A. This finding suggests a pivotal role for employability. It indicates that employability is an important mechanism through which learning exerts effects on job performance. However, the mediating effect of employability in the relationship between learning and job performance is non-significant due to the

non-significant effect of learning on employability in company B, as discussed in the previous section. The mediating role of employability in the relationship between learning and job performance implies that learning may be connected to other career outcomes via employability. In addition, the mediating role of employability also indicates that some components of employability may be particularly significant to job performance. For instance, learning can enhance the occupational expertise of employees which in turn translates into work output (McKnight & Wright, 2011; Van der Heijden et al., 2009b).

### **7.3.5 EXTRINSIC REWARDS AS A MODERATOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEARNING AND JOB PERFORMANCE**

Contrary to expectation, extrinsic rewards do not moderate the relationship between learning and job performance in either company. One possible explanation for such similarity is that the extrinsic rewards come too late, which suppresses the moderating effect of extrinsic rewards in the relationship between learning and job performance in both companies. Employees in both companies may perceive that extrinsic rewards will arrive long after the training is completed, which may suppress the training's moderating effect in the relationship between learning and job performance. As Kanungo (1990, p. 807) suggests, "An outcome or reward that immediately follows high performance is more effective in maintaining the performance, than a reward that is delayed. Recognition of one's work immediately after its accomplishment is more motivating than its recognition two years later when the employee has already forgotten that for which he is being rewarded".

## **7.4. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.4.1 WHO IS RESPONSIBILITY FOR EMPLOYABILITY DEVELOPMENT?**

The current study shows that increasing employability is a matter of shared responsibility and action of organisations and employees. It illustrates the important role of the employer, in terms of formal training sponsored by the organisation, in employability development. However, it is not sufficient for organizations to purely provide training opportunities of which employees can make use. The role of individual in employability development should not be overlooked. Both the opportunities offered by organisations and employees' involvement in training have an influence on learning, which is a central mechanism in employability development. Such mutual interactions and investments bring a return on investment for both parties. The return on investment for organisations is a high level of job performance among employees, while the return on investment for employees lies in the feelings of job or employment security and a positive future perspective (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2011). At theoretical level, this finding implies that it is relevant to include both the individual and organizational perspectives when studying employability, instead of addressing only one of both. This is also in line with the growing consensus in the career literature that both individual and organizational initiatives are critical for employability development (e.g., Van der Heijden et al., 2009a; Veld et al., 2015). Employability scholars should acknowledge the importance of training intervention for individual's employability encompassing an integrative approach from both organizational and individual employee (De Vos et al., 2011). The outcomes of the current study imply that employers should facilitate learning and emphasize the need for employees to continue learning. Furthermore, employees themselves should be willing to spend time on employability enhancing activities so as to "stay in the race".

#### **7.4.2 HOW CAN EMPLOYABILITY BE DEVELOPED?**

The current study shows that training is a critical intervention to foster the development of employability and confirms the important role of learning in employability development which is in line with previous empirical work in Western contexts (e.g., De Vos et al., 2011; Scholarios et al., 2008; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Klink et al., 2014). Learning is pivotal in the development of capacities, for example, mental schemas and behavioural repertoire, that are required in successful execution of work behaviours and in building capacities for the future (Huber, 1991; Salas et al., 2012). Learning as a result of organisational training programme benefits both individual job performance and employability. The findings add to the scarce body of research examining either the relationship between learning and employability (Van der Heijden et al., 2009a; Van der Heijden et al., 2009b) or the relationship between career management and employability (De Vos et al., 2009) by taking an integrative approach, including both individual and social contextual factors as antecedents of learning, on employability development.

The full mediation effect of employability in the relationship between learning and job performance reflects that employability is a critical mechanism through which learning exerts its influence on job performance. Learning affects employability directly but also has indirect influence on job performance through employability. This highlights the significant effect of increasing employee employability on job performance. Learning increases the competences of employees, which in turn enhance the job performance of employees. Given that both job performance and employability are essential for sustainable career, these results shed new light on how organizations can affect employees' career sustainability by providing training intervention, aiming at not only employability but also job performance.

The current study shows the impact of individual and social contextual factors on learning that drives employability. These findings are consistent with the existing research on the subject (Van der Klink et al., 2014; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a). Employability development cannot rely only on individual agency. Contextual factors that cannot be changed by individual can also play a significant role, undermining the importance of employers in employees' employability development.

Concerning individual agency, the finding demonstrates the important role of individuals in employability development, by being connected openness to experience and motivation to learn with learning, which help facilitate employability development. It illustrates that individuals themselves have considerable control in employability development. Individuals who receive high scores on openness to experience are more likely to have a positive attitude towards learning experiences in general. Motivation to learn also plays a significant role in the learning process.

Concerning social contextual factors, the current study demonstrates the important role of the supervisor for employees' further career development by means of support. This is consistent with previous literature in which employability is studied from an organisational perspective and implies that a supportive context promotes employability (Nauta et al., 2009). The supervisor is considered to be the specific representative of the organisation who manages and evaluates employees' behaviour and performance (Levinson, 1965). As a result, supervisor support for training is more direct and specific, such as helping employees resolve work-related problems, providing and sharing information related to position and encouraging employees to develop job skills and use new approaches to complete tasks (De Grip et al., 2004). If an employee receives support from the supervisor, he or she will be more engaged in the training activities. Support

from supervisor actually is a factor that is partly under control of the employer; thus, the finding further underlines the role of the employer as a stakeholder in employability development.

Overall, the current study confirms the role of individual agency together with social contextual factors and organizational support in stimulating learning that drives employability. This is in line with social cognitive career theory (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 1994) which captures how individual characteristics and contextual factors affect work and career performance via learning process. By offering learning opportunities and a supportive learning environment within the organization, employees may be more devoted to the learning activities at work, leading to positive career outcomes such as improvement in job performance and enhanced employability.

## **7.5 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.5.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYEES**

Individuals play an important role in developing employability, which is crucial for sustainable career. Individuals should take an active role and bear independent responsibility in increasing their employability via training programs which are introduced by the organization. To do so, it is essential for individuals to establish a better self-awareness, including understanding one's strengths, weaknesses, values, motives and optimal working conditions. Self-awareness facilitates 'career-management by increasing the individual's ability to identify or create favourable opportunities, persuade career gatekeepers to facilitate opportunities, and make sound career decisions' (Valcour, 2015).

### **7.5.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS**

Organisations play an important role in increasing employees' employability. The organisational viewpoint is critical in understanding employability enhancement, as organisations still form the context in which most careers take place (Eby, et al., 2005; Sturges et al., 2002). It is of particular significance for organisations to make training investment in employability development. In addition, the full mediation effect of employability in the relationship between learning and job performance indicates organisations may have to re-focus on the objectives of training intervention. Such an indirect effect demonstrates that employability is a significant mechanism through which learning exerts impact on job performance. It also implies that several factors such as personal flexibility and anticipation and optimization also affect job performance. Hence, organisations should offer training intervention, aiming at not only job performance but also employability, given that both job performance and employability are important essentials for sustainable career (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017; Semeijn et al., 2015).

The present findings show the value of formal learning which is represented by training in the current study. However, our findings should be not interpreted as a plea to restrict HRD strategies to encourage only formal learning. A HRD strategy which includes a mix of challenging formal and informal learning opportunities is essentially the best way to increase employability. Studies by Hodkinson and Taylor (2002) found in their study of induction experiences of new university lectures that a blend of formal and informal learning activities is the ideal combination that encourages a broad range of learning experiences on a wide range of topics.

Providing employability-enhancing activities, nevertheless, is not sufficient for organisations to enhance their employees' employability. Organisations need employees



that are willing and motivated to take part in these activities (Van Dam, 2004). Hence, organisations should be aware of individual factors such as motivation to learn and openness to experience, which are important antecedents to learning, given that learning is a significant mechanism in employability development. Human resource practitioners should acknowledge that motivation to learn is an important factor that needs to be considered when working to create effective learning. Learning can be potentially increased when interventions designed to improve motivation to learn are implemented. Goal setting, in particular, is a well-established method for enhancing motivation (Robbins & Judge, 2009).

Human resource practitioners should also be aware of the attitude of the individual when he or she enters the training programme. Hence, “measures of openness to experience can identify which individuals are “training ready” – those who are most willing to engage in learning experiences” (Barrick & Mount, 1991, p.19) and, consequently, may be useful in identifying those who are most likely to increased employability as a result of learning.

Human resource practitioners should acknowledge the employee in his or her role of “career owner” instead of adopting a “taking care” policy (Greenhaus et al., 2010; Hall, 2002). Human resource practitioners should facilitate employees to take individual responsibility in managing their own career by providing career-relevant materials and counseling and by encouraging exploration of career plans so that each employee can develop a big picture of his or her career situation. Moreover, there may also be value in including a self-awareness inventory in selection testing and in communicating the importance of self-management in recruitment communication, especially in companies with a clearly articulated expectation of employee career self-management (Thompson, 2014).

Furthermore, the significance role of supervisor support has implications for selection and training of managers, who should be chosen and developed in a way that they value and facilitate subordinates' learning. Human resource practitioners are encouraged to intensify effort in enhancing the role of supervisors in training programmes. Planned formal training should be implemented for supervisors to increase their ability in training need analysis and their ability to conduct training for subordinates. In addition, supervisors should be given more responsibilities in terms of supporting, communicating and making assignment decisions particularly before and after training programmes.

Organizations should acknowledge the organizational culture in employability development. There are significant differences in the research results although the two research studies are carried out in Hong Kong. Differences in organisational culture between the two companies may account for such differences. It is probable that the organisational culture exerts a considerable impact on learning and hence employability. Organizational culture is described as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems that has worked well enough to be considered valid and is passed on to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 2004, p. 17). Organisational culture often guides the behaviour and attitudes within the organisation (Schneider, Brief, & Guzzo, 1996). More specifically, a strong organizational learning culture has a positive influence on employees' employability (Egan, Yang, & Barlett, 2004).

### **7.5.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS IN HONG KONG**

As a result of the changing labour market conditions in Hong Kong, employees may not prepare themselves for long-term engagement with the organisations in which they work (Chan, 2016; Ngo et al., 2013; Tam & Chiu, 2010; Tam & Ip, 2017). They are more

concerned about their own personal development to prepare for their future. The onus of responsibility for career development falls increasingly on the employees (Towers Watson, 2010). Hong Kong employees need to be their own “career coach”, actively utilizing training opportunities offered by the organisations to enhance employability which is important for sustainable careers. To be able to identify and capture the opportunities, employees themselves need to have a good assessment of their own strengths and career interests and understanding of the changing needs of the business environment (Lau & Pang, 2000).

Given the change in the labour market conditions, Hong Kong employees consider training to be a significant way to face employment risks (Tam & Ip, 2017). It is of particular significance for Hong Kong employers to offer more training opportunities to their employees to increase the employees’ employability. However, offering more training opportunities is not sufficient for employability development. Obviously, in the Hong Kong context, organisations should be aware of the culture values held by their employees. The impact of supervisor on employee learning is critical in Chinese culture where supervisors are often regarded as exemplars or people with authority. Supervisors may play an important role in shaping employees’ behaviour in learning by offering advice and support. Therefore, it is of particular importance for human resource practitioners in Hong Kong to create a stimulating learning environment in which participation in learning is strongly encouraged by supervisors. Furthermore, human resource practitioners “should actively intervene in the process of staff development by assisting the supervisors to acknowledge responsibility and take up the role of career guidance. The intervention may involve providing training to supervisors in terms of coaching, counselling and feedback skills, all of which are necessary to enhance the quality of career discussions” (Lau & Pang, 2000, p.146). To a wider perspective, the

current study has managerial implications for organisations operating in Chinese culture.

## **7.6 LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS**

The study offers new and interesting insights into learning as a result of training intervention that focuses on employability and job performance. Nevertheless, the study also has some limitations. First of all, multisource measurement is used to avoid common method bias. Beyond protecting against common method bias, the use of the supervisor's ratings of employability is a minor contribution of the study as self-report measures of employability dominate the extant empirical employability research. However, the use of a supervisor-based measure of employability is not without potential problems. Supervisory evaluations may "be biased in different ways" due to supervisory or social contextual characteristics, including "personality traits, their personal and professional relationship with employee, power struggles in the organisation, conflicts, differing interest, etc" (Tziner, Fisher, Senior, & Weisberg, 2007, p. 173).

Overgeneralisation or underestimation is likely to occur when supervisors rate subordinates (Chiaburu et al., 2010b). In some cases, supervisors rate subordinates more generously due to a need to enhance the appearance of those they supervise directly (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Nevertheless, in other cases, underestimation may occur in situations where supervisors maintain a dislike for certain subordinates and consequently rate them lower than they deserve. Future studies may use a dual assessment, from the point of view of both employees and supervisors, to measure employability. This is because supervisors and employees differ regarding facets of employability (Van der Heijden, 2000; Van der Heijden & Van der Heijden, 2006). A few studies have reported that supervisor-ratings together with self-ratings should have been optimized to better evaluate the possibility that the employees may get a similar job (Van der Heijde &

Heijden, 2006; Pafe & Tremblay, 2007).

Another limitation concerns the causal relationships between predictors and criterion (i.e. the relationship between learning and employability). The longitudinal study design is used in the current study to remove the causality concern. In particular, use of the supervisor's assessment of employability at two points in time (i.e. one month prior to the start of training and six months after training) is another minor contribution of the current study as cross-sectional designs have dominated the employability literature. One way to obtain a better understanding of the relationship between learning and employability is to utilise more frequent data collections. With more measurement opportunities, it is easier to see how the effect develops. Alternatively, pre- and post-training with a control group design can be used. It is well known that time, budget and complexity constraints limit the design options of evaluators (Bamberger, Rugh, Church, & Fort, 2004). Due to the restrictions imposed by the companies in the current study, a control group could not be utilised. However, a control group should be included in future studies.

Attrition is another potential limitation of this thesis. First, it should be noted that any type of missing data, no matter whether it was due to internal missing values, non-participation or attrition is not ideal in the social sciences, even though it is a reality. In the current study, missing data due to attrition in the longitudinal study design are inevitable, despite the researcher's effort to ensure the response rate by giving follow-up telephone calls to supervisors who had returned a completed pre-training survey at Time 1 but had not returned a completed post-training survey at Time 4. However, the drop out analyses in both companies show that those who drop out from the study do not differ from those who take part in the study with regard to age, gender, educational level and tenure with the company. Thus, attrition is not a major concern in the current study.

Future research should ensure a higher response rate to minimise selection bias.

The current study supports that undertaking training facilitates learning, which in turn increases employees' employability. However, learning is a broad concept and is not limited to training. Future studies can extend the model to include other forms of learning, such as learning the value of the job itself (Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011; Van der Heijden et al., 2009a). Further research can explore the influence of different types of learning activities on the components of employability. Evidence shows that different types of learning contribute to different components of employability. For instance, Froehlich et al. (2014) find that formal learning influences anticipation and optimisation only, while informal learning influences anticipation and optimisation, occupational expertise, and personal flexibility.

Another limitation concerns the approach of employability. The focus of the current study is on competence-based employability; however, we acknowledge that employability is a much broader concept. If different approaches to employability are used, some of the results may have been different. Let's take the influence of learning on job performance as an example. Learning as a result of training may increase the perceived internal employability and thus, it may improve the job performance (Nelissen et al., 2017). Employees interpret the fact that they can take part in development activities as a sign that the employers value them and care about their employability and want to invest in them, which is likely to increase the job opportunities they perceive in their organization (Lee & Bruvold, 2003; Kuvaas, 2008; Van de Voorde & Beijer, 2014). Moreover, when employers provide employees with the opportunity to develop skills that make them broadly employable, employees may interpret such investments as a signal that the employer intends to establish a long-term employment relationship (Lee & Bruvold,

2003; Eby et al., 2005; Kuvaas, 2008). Employees may feel obligated to return such investments. One way of doing so is to express loyalty to the organisation in the form of organisational commitment or outstanding performance. Such dynamics were supported in the studies by Benson (2006), Sieben (2007) and Ling et al. (2014).

On the other hand, learning as a result of training may enhance the perceived external employability and thus, it may decrease the job performance (Benson, 2006; Nelissen et al., 2017; Philippaers et al., 2016). Learning as a result of training may enhance the perceived external employability since they can be put on employees' resumes and are generally seen as signs of employee competences (Nelissen et al., 2017). Perceiving high chances of a job elsewhere may reduce the desire to remain with the employer and reduce commitment to the organisation, which in turn may decrease job performance. This has been confirmed by empirical studies (e.g., De Cuyper et al., 2011; Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992; Steel & Griffeth, 1989). Hence, a differentiation between internal and external employability can be made in future studies so as to have a better understanding of the relationship between learning, employability and job performance.

The current study shows that learning can lead to increased job performance directly and indirectly through employability. Given narrow measure on job performance is used in the current study, future studies should examine the multidimensional job performance domains of in-role, adaptive, and extra-role performance (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007; Johnson 2003; Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). This comprehensive view on job performance captures the productive and effective behaviours of employees that directly or indirectly contribute to organizational effectiveness (Griffin et al., 2007; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000) and can provide a more comprehensive view on how learning affect job

performance which is considered to be a significant element in career sustainability. In addition, considering the critical role employability played in the relationship of learning to job performance, future work should also focus on whether learning is connected to other career outcomes such as career satisfaction and perceived marketability via employability (De Vos et al., 2011). Indeed, a wide range of outcomes that have been noted as important career success can be found across the employability literature (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden et al., 2009b).

The current study shows that a combination of both individual and social contextual factors play important roles in predicting learning that drives employability development. It would be interesting to look more closely at the importance of individual factors and contextual factors in affecting learning and employability. This could be done in two ways. One would be to widen the sphere of individual and contextual variables in the study. It is possible that other individual factors are significant in affecting learning and employability. For instance, demographic factors such as age and gender were found to influence learning and employability (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2005). Besides, the relative importance of dispositions could be scrutinized more in-depth. Future studies should other dispositional factors like self-efficacy, which has been regarded as a relevant factor in learning (Colquitt et al., 2000; Gist et al., 1991; Phillips & Gully, 1977) and employability (Berntson et al., 2006; Spector, Zapf, Chen, & Frese, 2000). Among contextual factors, closer empirical investigations of how social support affects learning and employability should be undertaken. Although the current study supports that supervisor support play an important role in learning that drives employability development, the study did not include other sources of social support within organizations such as subordinate support. While our conceptualization of social



support (supervisor and peer support) is in line with the categorization used in the training transfer literature (e.g., Bates, Holton, Seyler, & Carvalho, 2000; Holton & Baldwin, 2003; Holton et al., 2000; Holton et al., 2003), future research should consider including support from all sources at the workplace, namely subordinate support and organizational support, to form a more comprehensive social support construct (Tian et al., 2016). Another possible research area is to focus on the interaction effects of contextual and individual factors, because it could help us better understand what lies behind the formation of employability. It has been suggested that perceived situations influence people's behavior (e.g., Katz & Kahn, 1978; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Magnusson, 1981) and it could be interesting to see how people's perception of the environment (e.g. organizational support) influence their actions within the organisations.

Another limitation of the current study is that 2-item measures of openness to experience are used. Although multi-item scales are preferred above single-item measures, in some studies they are less feasible (e.g., Ferrin, Dirks, & Shah, 2006). Faced with limited assessment time, a 2-item measure is sufficient for the current study. Note that ultra-short measures should not and cannot be substitutes for regular personality assessments (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003). Future research should use the full-length Big Five Inventory to assess openness to experience if the testing time is not relatively limited.

Another methodological issue to consider concerns the use of representative samples. The current study was conducted in two organisations, a retail company and an insurance company in Hong Kong, which is a minor contribution since this can enhance the generalisability of findings across different occupations, organisations and nations. Nevertheless, the generalisability of the findings would be further strengthened by replicating the current study with different types of training (e.g. leadership skills),

organisations (e.g. SMEs or multinational corporations) and national contexts. Moreover, qualitative studies could also have been used, as they can provide a deeper insight into how people in organisations relate to employability via learning activities.

Finally, the time horizon of our study was rather limited, as post-training measurement took place six months after the training. Although that was appropriate for the aims of the study, the notion of sustainable careers has long-term connotations (e.g., De Prins et al., 2015; De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017). Thus, future research may attempt to look at more distal outcomes. For instance, to investigate whether and the conditions under which the gains in employability and job performance are relatively permanent. Or to look at other sustainability related outcomes that acquire meaning in the longer term, namely employment continuity and ability to minimize career disruptions (London, 1983).

## **7.7 STRENGTHS**

Despite these potential drawbacks, the strengths associated with the present study outweigh the limitations. From the theoretical point of view, many organizations still appear to be unwilling to make such an investment because of the fear of losing capable employees if they become highly employable (Baruch 2001; Carbery & Garavan, 2005). This fear may prevail since there is not enough evidence for the positive role of employees' employability within organizations. The current study shows the benefits of employees' employability for organizations. Learning as a result of training improves the skills and knowledge of employees, which in turn improves job performance. In other words, learning benefits not only employability which primarily interests the individual, but also job performance which primarily interests the employer.

The current study confirms that both individual and social contextual factors are significant for employability development through learning activities and is consistent with social cognitive career theory that captures how individual characteristics and contextual factors affect career outcomes via learning process (Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 1994). In addition, the current study shows that a combination of both social contextual and individual factors play important roles in predicting employees' employability and is consistent with the existing research on the subject (Van der Klink et al., 2014; Van der Heijden, 2009a). On one hand, the impact of individual factors on employability through learning supports the major shared claim of the new employment relationship theories that modern workers have the potential to effectively deal with the inherent uncertainties of the flexible labour markets. At the same time, the current study clearly shows that the contextual factors also influence employability through learning and is in line with the extant research (Van der Klink et al., 2014; Van der Heijden, 2009a). This demonstrates that although individual agency is a strong antecedent of employability, contextual factors can also play a significant role, undermining the significance of employers in employability development.

The current study demonstrates the significance of organisational intervention in training and learning in employability development. It explicates the role of learning in employability and career sustainability. The return on investment of training is clear: learning which occurs in the training context increases employees' competences, which in turn improves employees' job performance. Such mutual benefits should never be taken for granted; both organisations and individuals should be actively encouraged to bear their responsibility for their employability as leverage for a sustainable career. Organisations should create a learning environment in which participation in training is supported by managers and stimulate individuals to actively utilize the training

opportunities within the organisation. Thus, the current study also supports the notion in the current career literature that career management within organisations should be a joint responsibility between employees and employers (Clarke, 2008; Orpen, 1994). Employability development involves both individuals and organisations to carry out their respective career management roles (Ng et al., 2005; Sturges et al., 2002). Employees are expected to participate in various career self-management behaviours aimed at managing their career within the current organisations such as training and organisations by providing career-development opportunities such as training opportunities (Clarke, 2008; Eby et al., 2005).

The current study has several strengths from the methodological point of view. The use of a quasi-experimental design, unlike most other research designs and despite its inherent limitations, allows some faith in the validity of the assumed causal order (e.g., Graziano & Raulin, 2014). According to Bollen (1989), three conditions must be met to conclude that there is a causal relationship between two variables. First, the two variables must be associated. It can be done in any correlational study. Second, the direction of the association must be established. Although this is much more complicated, it is possible to establish with longitudinal studies. Third, the association must be isolated; that is, the researcher must conclude that no other factor has the potential to influence the relationship, which, according to Bollen (1989), is an ideal impossible to achieve. The only way to ensure this is to control for all potential biasing variables. The present study is a quasi-experimental study including multiple sources and multiple measurement points; therefore, it meets the first two conditions. Although it is impossible to guarantee that the relationships are isolated from spurious influence, we include four control variables (trainees' sex, age, education and tenure with the company) that may have influenced the investigated association. Hence, the study provides more certainty about

the direction of relationships and rules out alternative explanations by controlling for autoregressive effects (Cole & Maxwell, 2003).

Employability was measured from the perspective of a third party rather than of the career actor oneself. This could be seen as a minor contribution, given that measurement of employability through self-reports, or self-perceived employability (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007) has dominated relevant research thus far (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Guilbert, Bernaud, Gouvernet, & Rossier, 2016). Although individuals' own perceptions of their own employability is certainly a critical viewpoint with practical use (for example, it can serve as predictor of job search behaviours, De Battisti, Gilardi, Gugliemetti & Seletti, 2016), the perspectives of third parties who are knowledgeable of the individual is also of value (Guilbert et al., 2016).

Another strength of the current research is that it allows putting to the test the strength of our concepts by applying the study in a non-European context. Even though our concepts arise from a European perspective, the findings replicate the empirical results of previous research such as the positive relationship between learning and employability. At the same time, this represents an initial bridge between the European theoretical and empirical advances towards the Chinese context. To a wider perspective, the current study has managerial implications for organisations operating in Chinese culture to develop employee's employability.

## **7.8 CONCLUSIONS**

Employability has become increasingly significant for both workers and employers because of change in the labour market. The working environment becomes more volatile and less predictable for the individual, which increases the need for individual strategies

for coping with it. As a result, employees have to be responsible for their own careers and the need for individual strategies increases more intensely. It is in this context that employability has become so critical for contemporary employees –being able to maintain and find employment is a way of securing the continuance of one’s career. On the other hand, employers rely on employable employees so as to ensure sustainable performance and thus, to survive and prosper in the long term (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

In the present thesis, it demonstrates the importance of organisational intervention in training and resultant learning in employability development. The return on investment of training is clear: learning which occurs in the training context increases employees’ competences, which in turn improves employees’ job performance. Such a “mutual gain” outcomes warrants organizational intervention in developing employee’s employability by providing training opportunities, although it does not imply that informal learning activities are perceived as less important. Organisations should re-focus their training interventions, aiming at not only job performance, but also employability. To survive and to stay competitive, the only way to excel is through attaining better organisational performance which could only achieve with the help of employable workers who are able to deal with the changing needs of the company and the business environment; qualities that are inherent into the idea of employability (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017).

Results of the current study show that both individual and social contextual factors affect employability through learning. Organisations should create a learning environment in which participation in training is supported by managers and stimulate individuals to actively utilize the training opportunities within the organisation. Moreover, employability development cannot only rest on individual agency; indeed, contextual

factors can also play a significant role. The present study shows that agency-based intervention, such as training, remains a viable tool to foster employability, suggesting that employer also play an important role in employability development. Thus, it confirms that both career management should be the joint responsibility between employees and employers in the current career literature.

Moreover, it is of utmost significant that, when designing training intervention for employability enhancement, human resource practitioners should be aware of cultural and institutional contexts. A better understanding of these differences will increase the possibilities of coming up with tailor-made practices (Ehnert, 2009). In particular, in the Hong Kong context, the impact of cultural values on employees' attitude and behaviour should be not overlooked. Human resource practitioners should be aware of the role of supervisors on employees' learning which drives employability development.

Despite the limitations of the current study, the current study has some significant implications for practitioners who are interested in finding ways to foster employability and career sustainability and who want to capitalize on the benefits of employability for both the organization and individual employee. Scholars in both western and non-western contexts should continue to strive towards a better comprehensive conceptual model.

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## APPENDIX 1 MEASURES

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## **APPENDIX 2 INVITATION LETTER TO THE COMPANY**

Dear Sir/Madam,

### Introduction

I would like to invite your company to participate in a research survey concerning the effects of training on learning. Its purpose is to better understand the attitudes of working individuals towards training.

### Procedures

Four questionnaires will be used to collect data at different points in time.

The first questionnaire will be mailed to supervisors of participating trainees one month prior to the start of training. A postage-paid envelope will be enclosed for returning the questionnaire to the researcher. The first questionnaire aims to collect supervisors' ratings on job performance and employability of trainees before training.

The second questionnaire will be distributed to trainees right before training. The second questionnaire is designed to collect data concerning individual characteristics and work environment.

The third questionnaire will be distributed to trainees immediately after training. The third questionnaire aims to gather data concerning views about training and work environment.

The fourth questionnaire will be mailed to supervisors six months after completion of the training programme. A postage-paid envelope will be enclosed for returning the questionnaire to the researcher. The fourth questionnaire will be used to collect data concerning job performance and employability of trainees after training.

All questionnaires will include a cover letter providing important information concerning each questionnaire. The consent form will be sent with the first and the second questionnaire, requesting permission from supervisors and trainees to participate in the research study.

## Confidentiality

The study is completely anonymous. A code will be used to link the different questionnaires that participants are asked to complete at different points in time. The research complies with Durham Business School ethical guidelines.

## Voluntary Participation

Participation in the study is voluntary. Employees may choose not to participate in the study. Even if an employee decides to participate in the study, he/she is free to withdraw from the study at any time. If an employee decides not to participate in the study or if an employee decides to withdraw from the study, he/she will not suffer from any adverse result of any kind.

## Benefits

A summary of research results will be made available to each participant and company. It is strongly believed that the results can help your company improve practices in the management of people.

I would appreciate the opportunity to develop this research at your company and thank the company for supporting this research study. If you have any queries concerning the research, please feel free to contact me at [kin.lee@durham.ac.uk](mailto:kin.lee@durham.ac.uk).

Yours faithfully,

Lee Kin Yi  
PhD candidate

### **APPENDIX 3 INVITATION LETTER TO THE TRAINEES**

Dear Sir/Madam,

#### Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study concerning the effects of training on learning. Its purpose is to better understand the attitudes of working individuals towards training.

#### Procedures

In this study, you will be asked to complete two questionnaires at different points in time. These questionnaires aim to collect data concerning individual characteristics, work environment and views about training.

#### Confidentiality

The study is completely anonymous. A code will be used to link the different questionnaires that you are asked to complete at different points in time. The research complies with Durham Business School ethical guidelines.

#### Voluntary Participation

Participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate in the study. Even if you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide not to participate in the study or if you decide to withdraw from the study, you will not suffer from any adverse result of any kind.

#### Benefits

A summary of research results will be made available to you. It is strongly believed that the results can help you plan your future individual development.

Your time and effort in participating in this research is sincerely appreciated. If you have any queries concerning the research, please feel free to contact me at [kin.lee@durham.ac.uk](mailto:kin.lee@durham.ac.uk).

Yours faithfully,

Lee Kin Yi

PhD candidate

## **APPENDIX 4 INVITATION LETTER TO THE SUPERVISORS**

Dear Sir/Madam,

### Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research survey concerning the effects of training on learning. Its purpose is to better understand the attitudes of working individuals towards training.

### Procedures

In this study, you will be asked to complete two questionnaires at different points in time. These questionnaires aim to collect data concerning job performance and employability of trainees.

### Confidentiality

The study is completely anonymous. A code will be used to link the different questionnaires that you are asked to complete at different points in time. The research complies with Durham Business School ethical guidelines.

### Voluntary Participation

Participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate in the study. Even if you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide not to participate in the study or if you decide to withdraw from the study, you will not suffer from any adverse result of any kind.

### Benefits

A summary of research results will be made available to you. It is strongly believed that the results can help you improve practices in the management of people.

Your time and effort in participating in this research is sincerely appreciated. If you have any queries concerning the research, please feel free to contact me at [kin.lee@durham.ac.uk](mailto:kin.lee@durham.ac.uk).

Yours faithfully,

Lee Kin Yi

PhD candidate

## **APPENDIX 5 CONSENT FORM**

TITLE OF PROJECT: A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL OF THE EFFECTS OF  
TRAINING ON LEARNING AND KEY OUTCOMES

(The participant should complete this sheet himself/herself.)

PLEASE CROSS OUT AS NECESSARY

1. Have you read the invitation letter? Yes/No
2. Have you had an appropriate opportunity to ask questions and discuss  
the study? Yes/No
3. Have you received satisfactory answers to the questions  
you asked? Yes/No/Not Applicable
4. Have you received enough information about the study and the intended use  
of, and access arrangements to, any data which you supply? Yes/No
5. Were you given enough time to consider whether you want to participate? Yes/No
6. Do you consent to participate in the study? Yes/No
7. Do understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at  
\*at any time;  
\*without having to give a reason for withdrawing; and  
\*without any adverse result of any kind? Yes/No

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

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

## APPENDIX 6 COVER LETTER 1A

Dear Sir/Madam,

### A comprehensive model of the effects of training on learning and key outcomes

As a participant in this study, you need to complete the enclosed consent form and questionnaire and return them to me at your earliest convenience in the enclosed postage-paid envelope. Participation in this study is VOLUNTARY. All responses are strictly confidential.

Below is important information related to the attached questionnaire.

1. Please fill in the anonymous code.
2. The questionnaire includes 3 parts, consisting of 36 items.
3. The time needed to answer all 36 items is about 10 minutes.
4. Please answer all 36 items with honesty and truth, even if they seem identical.
5. You only have to provide a suitable rating on each item. There are no right or wrong answers. Your opinion is all that matters.

Your time and effort in participating in this research is sincerely appreciated. If you have any queries concerning the research, please feel free to contact me at [kin.lee@durham.ac.uk](mailto:kin.lee@durham.ac.uk).

Yours faithfully,

Lee Kin Yi  
PhD candidate

## **APPENDIX 7 QUESTIONNAIRE (1A)**

Please fill in the anonymous code:

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Part III Demographic Information

1. Gender: ☐ Male  
☐ Female

2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years

3. Educational Level: ☐ Secondary or below  
☐ Diploma or higher diploma  
☐ Associate degree  
☐ Undergraduate degree  
☐ Master's degree or above

4. Length of employment with present company: \_\_\_\_\_ year(s) \_\_\_\_\_ month (s)

<END>

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

## **APPENDIX 8 COVER LETTER (1B)**

Dear Sir/Madam,

### A comprehensive model of the effects of training on learning and key outcomes

As a participant in this study, you need to complete the enclosed consent form and questionnaire and return them to me at your earliest convenience in the enclosed postage-paid envelope. Participation in this study is VOLUNTARY. All responses are strictly confidential.

Below is important information related to the attached questionnaire.

1. Please fill in the anonymous code.
2. The questionnaire includes 3 parts, consisting of 35 items.
3. The time needed to answer all 35 items is about 10 minutes.
4. Please answer all 35 items with honesty and truth, even if they seem identical.
5. You only have to provide a suitable rating on each item. There are no right or wrong answers. Your opinion is all that matters.

Your time and effort in participating in this research is sincerely appreciated. If you have any queries concerning the research, please feel free to contact me at [kin.lee@durham.ac.uk](mailto:kin.lee@durham.ac.uk).

Yours faithfully,

Lee Kin Yi  
PhD candidate

**APPENDIX 9 QUESTIONNAIRE (1B)**

Please fill in the anonymous code:

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Part III Demographic Information

1. Gender: ☐ Male  
☐ Female
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years
3. Educational Level: ☐ Secondary or below  
☐ Diploma or higher diploma  
☐ Associate degree  
☐ Undergraduate degree  
☐ Master's degree or above
4. Length of employment with present company: \_\_\_\_\_ year(s) \_\_\_\_\_ month (s)

<END>

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

## **APPENDIX 10 COVER LETTER (2)**

Dear Sir/Madam,

### A comprehensive model of the effects of training on learning and key outcomes

As a participant in this study, you need to complete the enclosed consent form and the questionnaire prior to the start of the training program and return them to me in the enclosed envelope. Participation in this study is VOLUNTARY. All responses are strictly confidential.

Below is important information related to the attached questionnaire.

1. Please fill in the anonymous code.
2. The questionnaire includes 6 parts, consisting of 43 items.
3. The time needed to answer all 43 items is about 15 minutes.
4. Please answer all 43 items with honesty and truth, even if they seem identical.
5. You only have to provide a suitable rating on each item. There are no right or wrong answers. Your opinion is all that matters.

Your time and effort in participating in this research is sincerely appreciated. If you have any queries concerning the research, please feel free to contact me at [kin.lee@durham.ac.uk](mailto:kin.lee@durham.ac.uk).

Yours faithfully,

Lee Kin Yi  
PhD candidate



## **APPENDIX 11 QUESTIONNAIRE (2)**

Please fill in the anonymous code:

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Part VI Demographic Information

1. Gender: ☐ Male  
☐ Female
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years
3. Educational Level: ☐ Secondary or below  
☐ Diploma or higher diploma  
☐ Associate degree  
☐ Undergraduate degree  
☐ Master's degree or above
4. Length of employment with present company: \_\_\_\_\_ year(s) \_\_\_\_\_ month(s)

<END>

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

### **APPENDIX 12 COVER LETTER (3)**

Dear Sir/Madam,

A comprehensive model of the effects of training on learning and key outcomes

As a participant in this study, you need to complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to me in the enclosed envelope. Participation in this study is VOLUNTARY. All responses are strictly confidential.

Below is important information related to the attached questionnaire.

1. Please fill in the anonymous code.
2. The questionnaire includes 3 parts, consisting of 12 items.
3. The time needed to answer all 12 items is about 5 minutes.
4. Please answer all 12 items with honesty and truth, even if they seem identical.
5. You only have to provide a suitable rating on each item. There are no right or wrong answers. Your opinion is all that matters.

Your time and effort in participating in this research is sincerely appreciated. If you have any queries concerning the research, please feel free to contact me at [kin.lee@durham.ac.uk](mailto:kin.lee@durham.ac.uk).

Yours faithfully,

Lee Kin Yi  
PhD candidate

### **APPENDIX 13 QUESTIONNAIRE (3)**

Please fill in the anonymous code:

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Part III Demographic Information

1. Gender: ☐ Male  
☐ Female
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years
3. Educational Level: ☐ Secondary or below  
☐ Diploma or higher diploma  
☐ Associate degree  
☐ Undergraduate degree  
☐ Master's degree or above
4. Length of employment with present company: \_\_\_\_\_ year(s) \_\_\_\_\_ month(s)

<END>

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!



#### **APPENDIX 14 COVER LETTER (4A)**

Dear Sir/Madam,

A comprehensive model of the effects of training on learning and key outcomes

As a participant in this study, you need to complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to me at your earliest convenience in the enclosed postage-paid envelope. Participation in this study is VOLUNTARY. All responses are strictly confidential.

Below is important information related to the attached questionnaire.

1. Please fill in the anonymous code.
2. The questionnaire includes 3 parts, consisting of 36 items.
3. The time needed to answer all 36 items is about 10 minutes.
4. Please answer all 36 items with honesty and truth, even if they seem identical.
5. You only have to provide a suitable rating on each item. There are no right or wrong answers. Your opinion is all that matters.

Your time and effort in participating in this research is sincerely appreciated. If you have any queries concerning the research, please feel free to contact me at [kin.lee@durham.ac.uk](mailto:kin.lee@durham.ac.uk).

Yours faithfully,

Lee Kin Yi  
PhD candidate

## **APPENDIX 15 QUESTIONNAIRE (4A)**

Please fill in the anonymous code:

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Part III Demographic Information

1. Gender: ☐ Male  
☐ Female
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years
3. Educational Level: ☐ Secondary or below  
☐ Diploma or higher diploma  
☐ Associate degree  
☐ Undergraduate degree  
☐ Master's degree or above
4. Length of employment with present company: \_\_\_\_\_ year(s) \_\_\_\_\_ month(s)

<END>

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

## **APPENDIX 16 COVER LETTER (4B)**

Dear Sir/Madam,

### A comprehensive model of the effects of training on learning and key outcomes

As a participant in this study, you need to complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to me at your earliest convenience in the enclosed postage-paid envelope. Participation in this study is VOLUNTARY. All responses are strictly confidential.

Below is important information related to the attached questionnaire.

1. Please fill in the anonymous code.
2. The questionnaire includes 3 parts, consisting of 35 items.
3. The time needed to answer all 35 items is about 10 minutes.
4. Please answer all 35 items with honesty and truth, even if they seem identical.
5. You only have to provide a suitable rating on each item. There are no right or wrong answers. Your opinion is all that matters.

Your time and effort in participating in this research is sincerely appreciated. If you have any queries concerning the research, please feel free to contact me at [kin.lee@durham.ac.uk](mailto:kin.lee@durham.ac.uk).

Yours faithfully,

Lee Kin Yi  
PhD candidate

## **APPENDIX 17 QUESTIONNAIRE (4B)**

Please fill in the anonymous code:

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Part III Demographic Information

1. Gender: ☐ Male  
☐ Female
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ years
3. Educational Level: ☐ Secondary or below  
☐ Diploma or higher diploma  
☐ Associate degree  
☐ Undergraduate degree  
☐ Master's degree or above
4. Length of employment with present company: \_\_\_\_\_ year(s) \_\_\_\_\_ month(s)

<END>

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!



**APPENDIX 18 STANDARDISED FACTOR LOADINGS, CONSTRUCT/  
COMPOSITE RELIABILITY AND THE AVERAGE VARIANCE EXTRACTED  
ESTIMATES OF MEASUREMENT MODEL IN COMPANY A (N= 334  
EMPLOYEE-SUPERVISOR PAIRS)**

	OTE	PCO	JI	PS	SS	MTL	L	EXT	PREJP	POSTJP
OTE1	.91									
OTE2	.95									
PCO1		.52								
PCO2		.75								
PCO4		.72								
PCO5		.91								
PCO6		.85								
PCO7		.54								
JI1			.68							
JI2			.83							
JI3			.87							
JI4			.91							
PS2				.66						
PS3				.56						
PS4				.60						
PS5				.83						
PS6				.72						
SS1					.54					
SS2					.88					
SS3					.86					
SS4					.84					
SS6					.87					
SS8					.52					
SS9					.89					
SS10					.57					
MTL1						.89				
MTL2						.77				
MTL3						.61				
MTL4						.90				
MTL5						.91				
MTL7						.65				
MTL8						.87				
L1							.90			
L2							.94			
L3							.87			
EXT1								.89		
EXT2								.91		
EXT3								.77		
PREJP1									.72	
PREJP2									.82	
PREJP3									.85	
PREJP4									.76	
POSTPJ1										.86
POSTPJ2										.86
POSTPJ3										.87
POSTPJ4										.87
<hr/>										
AVE	.87	.53	.68	.46	.65	.71	.82	.74	.63	.75
Construct reliability	.92	.87	.90	.81	.91	.93	.93	.89	.87	.92

	PREPE	PREPF	PREB	PREAO	PRECS	POSTPE	POSTPF	POSTB	POSTAO	POSTCS
PREPE1	.75									
PREPE2	.70									
PREPE3	.73									
PREPE4	.83									
PREPE5	.60									
PREPF1		.87								
PREPF2		.75								
PREPF4		.87								
PREPF5		.57								
PREB1			.77							
PREB2			.80							
PREB3			.93							
PREB4			.94							
PREAO1				.86						
PREAO2				.75						
PREAO3				.62						
PREAO4				.70						
PRECS1					.68					
PRECS3					.91					
PRECS4					.93					
POSTPE1						.77				
POSTPE2						.89				
POSTPE3						.92				
POSTPE4						.78				
POSTPE5						.89				
POSTPF1							.78			
POSTPF2							.88			
POSTPF4							.86			
POSTPF5							.90			
POSTB1								.91		
POSTB2								.89		
POSTB3								.55		
POSTB4								.91		
POSTAO1									.92	
POSTAO2									.94	
POSTAO3									.90	
POSTAO4									.92	
POSTCS1										.88
POSTCS3										.90
POSTCS4										.87
AVE	.53	.60	.75	.54	.72	.73	.73	.69	.85	.78
Construct reliability	.85	.85	.92	.83	.88	.93	.92	.90	.96	.91

**APPENDIX 19. STANDARDISED FACTOR LOADINGS, CONSTRUCT /**  
**COMPOSITE RELIABILITY AND AVERAGE VARIANCE EXTRACTED OF**  
**THE MEASUREMENT MODEL IN COMPANY B (N=265 EMPLOYEE-**  
**SUPERVISOR PAIRS)**

	OTE	PCO	JI	PS	SS	MTL	L	EXT	PREJP	POSTJP
OTE1	.86									
OTE2	.86									
PCO2		.86								
PCO3		.78								
PCO4		.67								
PCO5		.84								
PCO6		.79								
JI2			.70							
JI3			.86							
JI4			.94							
PS2				.88						
PS3				.86						
PS4				.86						
PS5				.85						
PS6				.88						
SS2					.86					
SS3					.74					
SS4					.80					
SS6					.77					
SS9					.87					
MTL1						.73				
MTL2						.76				
MTL3						.89				
MTL4						.94				
MTL5						.67				
MTL8						.80				
L1							.72			
L2							.81			
L3							.92			
EXT1								.89		
EXT2								.92		
EXT3								.73		
PREJP1									.77	
PREJP2									.85	
PREJP3									.76	
POSTPJ1										.84
POSTPJ2										.85
POSTPJ3										.84
AVE	.74	.63	.70	.75	.66	.65	.67	.72	.63	.71
Construct reliability	.85	.89	.87	.94	.91	.92	.86	.89	.84	.88

	PREPE	PREPF	PREB	PREAO	PRECS	POSTPE	POSTPF	POSTB	POSTAO	POSTCS
PREPE1	.89									
PREPE2	.92									
PREPE3	.80									
PREPE4	.92									
PREPE5	.77									
PREPF1		.68								
PREPF2		.88								
PREPF4		.93								
PREPF5		.83								
PREB1			.79							
PREB2			.85							
PREB3			.83							
PREB4			.91							
PREAO1				.57						
PREAO2				.67						
PREAO3				.71						
PREAO4				.63						
PRECS1					.78					
PRECS3					.83					
PRECS4					.82					
POSTPE1						.64				
POSTPE2						.66				
POSTPE3						.72				
POSTPE4						.91				
POSTPE5						.60				
POSTPF1							.63			
POSTPF2							.65			
POSTPF4							.64			
POSTPF5							.87			
POSTB1								.70		
POSTB2								.78		
POSTB3								.71		
POSTB4								.62		
POSTAO1									.82	
POSTAO2									.73	
POSTAO3									.93	
POSTAO4									.51	
POSTCS1										.84
POSTCS3										.66
POSTCS4										.89
AVE	.74	.70	.72	.42	.66	.51	.50	.50	.58	.64
Construct reliability	.94	.90	.91	.74	.85	.84	.79	.79	.84	.84