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# The relationship between career commitment and career success among university staff: The mediating role of employability

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## Abstract

Across Europe, ongoing changes in higher education, such as the stagnating (even decreasing) percentage of permanent or tenure-track jobs, and the reduced government budgets impress on us the need to conduct empirical research on the dynamics of the careers in this sector. In this study, we focussed on career success in higher education, and specifically examined the relationship of career commitment with objective and subjective career success, and the mediating role of employability in this relationship. Participants were drawn from across occupational roles including academic and support staff ( $N = 354$ ) in a large Dutch university. Process macro's for SPSS were used to test our hypothesized model. We found that career commitment was particularly related to three out of the five dimensions of employability (i.e., anticipation and optimisation, personal flexibility, and corporate sense). There also was positive association between employability and objective and subjective career success. Furthermore, personal flexibility and corporate sense fully mediated the relationship between career commitment and objective career success. Corporate sense partially mediated the relationship between career commitment and subjective career success. Unexpectedly, staff status was not a moderator. Different explanatory mechanisms seem to operate between career commitment and forms of career success. Our study implies that for university staff, it is important to actively invest in their employability, with a special focus on one's corporate sense, and to be supported in this by their surrounding stakeholders (i.e., their family, friends, peers, direct supervisor, and employer). In this way, they will be able to increase their career success and add to the sustained competitive advantage of their employers.

## KEYWORDS

academic staff, career commitment, employability, objective career success, subjective career success, support staff, universities

## INTRODUCTION

In all occupational sectors, some people appear to be more successful in their career than others, achieving their desired occupational goals (e.g., type of job and status) more often or more quickly (Heslin, 2005; Heslin & Turban, 2016; Kraimer et al., 2019). In a

rapidly evolving job market, this implies that they succeed in flexibly adapting to changing circumstances and in directing themselves to new areas of expertise in response to new opportunities (Frie et al., 2019). It is of both scholarly and general interest to understand the mechanisms that lead to such individual differences in career outcomes. We argue that individuals who achieve

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career success do so, in part, because they are more committed to their careers, which, in turn, can yield advantages in terms of their employability (cf. Van der Heijden et al., 2009).

Previous scholars have called for greater differentiation in scientific research between the various facets or targets of commitment, for example, commitment to one's job, to one's organization, one's profession, and one's career (Iles et al., 1990), and to ensure that the target is clearly specified in scientific research (Iles et al., 1996). Although career commitment sits within the "commitment" literature, it has received less attention from scholars than other forms of commitment in the work context (Katz et al., 2019), having been studied mainly in the vocational psychology literature (Zhu et al., 2020). Nonetheless, as employees have shifted away from long-term commitment to a single organisation (Blau, 2009; Huang et al., 2019), career commitment is arguably more relevant to the contemporary work environment than traditional forms of work-related commitment, such as organisational commitment. Therefore, career commitment may be able to explain career-related outcomes, such as employability and career success, more comprehensively than traditional, albeit more extensively researched, forms of commitment. As such, the first objective of this empirical work is to add to the existing commitment literature by focusing on career commitment as a possible antecedent of employability, and through this, on career success.

Our second objective is to add to scholarly knowledge in the employability field by responding to calls for improved theoretical development and application (cf. Critical Issue 3 in Fugate et al., 2021). Employability, or the ability to find and maintain employment under a variety of situations (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), drives outcomes that are of interest to both employers and individual employees (Akkermans et al., 2019; De Cuyper et al., 2014; Forrier & Sels, 2003; Fugate et al., 2004, 2021; Rodrigues et al., 2020). For employers, performing optimally in competitive global markets depends on their employees' ability to develop, cultivate, and maintain knowledge and skills that enable them to cope with fast-changing work requirements. That is, employers are dependent on their workers being employable (Dello Russo et al., 2020; Fryczyńska & Ciecierski, 2020; Stoffers & Van der Heijden, 2018; Van der Heijden et al., 2016). For individuals, employability increases their chance of career success (Bozionelos et al., 2016; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden et al., 2009).

Although employability is a key factor in contemporary labour markets, there is limited knowledge about its antecedents. More specifically, while an interest in career commitment aligns with contemporary thinking about increased individual responsibility for career management (Huang et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2020), its

role as a potential determinant of employability remains underexplored. For example, sustaining employability over an extended time frame poses significant challenges. The knowledge and skills required to perform well in the current and future labour market are subject to continuous and nonlinear changes (Fugate et al., 2021), and increasingly, it is employees themselves who are held responsible for managing them (Groysberg et al., 2019; De Vos et al., 2020). Existing research suggests that employees who are exposed to competency and career development initiatives report higher levels of employability (De Vos et al., 2011; Van der Heijden et al., 2016; Lecat et al., 2018; Liu, 2018; Martini et al., 2019). However, in these studies, the career development initiatives were employer-led. In the context of greater individual responsibility for career development, it is important to know whether employees' self-interest and drive to develop their careers relates to their employability, and through it, to their career success.

In the present work, we develop and test the argument that career commitment, that is, the degree of identification with and active involvement in one's career development (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990), is related to higher employability and that, in turn, employability serves as a link in the relationship between career commitment and career success. We conceptualise and operationalise career success in objective as well as subjective terms, and we develop different hypotheses about the nature of the mediation for each of them.

Our third research objective is to respond to calls in the literature to consider underexplored mechanisms within the career success literature (cf. Spurk, Keller, et al., 2019) through explicit examination of the theoretical assumptions underlying different approaches to the study of career success.

Finally, we develop and test our hypothesis about whether the occupational status in higher education (academic vs. support staff) relates to (i.e., moderates) the nature of the relationships. Across Europe, a tightening of the higher education labour market is reflected in uncertain career prospects, fuelled by the 2008 global economic recession that cut government budgets for higher education (Aarnikoivu et al., 2019). Such developments have made employment in other occupational sectors more attractive, making in-depth knowledge of antecedents of career success in this sector of utmost importance (League of European Research Universities, 2020). Despite higher education's importance to both society (including being a major employer) and the broader economy (e.g., Doumet, 2018), empirical research about the sector is scarce, particularly in terms of comparative studies on academic versus support staff in higher education. With this scholarly work, we add a contribution to the literature on higher education as our final objective.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Career commitment and employability

Employability is defined as “the continuous fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through the optimal use of competencies” (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006, p. 453). Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden’s competence-based approach to employability builds on competency models used to unify individual capabilities with organisational core competences (Boyatzis, 1982; Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999). The competencies of a highly employable person encompass the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to excel in one’s current job, as well as those necessary to acquire or create new work or employment if needed (Bernhard-Oettel & Näswall, 2015). Workers with high employability are generally able to remain at the forefront of sector needs and are those best equipped to adapt to changes in the internal and external labour market (De Cuyper et al., 2008; De Vos et al., 2020; Semeijn et al., 2015; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) proposed a multi-dimensional conceptualisation of employability. First, *Occupational Expertise* is a domain-specific dimension that refers to a person’s knowledge and skills, including meta-cognitive abilities (Van der Heijden, 2000). High ratings on the dimension of occupational expertise indicate that a person has knowledge at expert level and is externally/socially recognised as an expert. That is, expertise must hold economic value. The remaining four dimensions refer to generic competences.

The second and third dimensions, *Anticipation & Optimisation* and *Personal Flexibility*, refer to the proactive and reactive variants of flexibility, respectively. Rather than traditional predictable upward progression through stages, contemporary careers are characterised by subtle, fluid shifts and adaptations which occur in the prevailing context, making it challenging to charting a career path (Lent, 2013; Ng & Feldman, 2014; Tsaousides & Jome, 2008; Van der Horst & Van der Heijden, 2017). These two flexibility-oriented dimensions highlight the importance of individual developmental elasticity.

*Corporate Sense*, the fourth dimension, reflects a person’s ability to observe, navigate and negotiate through the organisational landscape and its politics. Understanding organisational dynamics allows people to realistically estimate their own value, thus allowing them to make appropriate judgements about the potential return on their career-related investments. Finally, *Balance* recognises the multi-dimensional nature of employability and reflects the level of skill that a person has in simultaneously accommodating both employer and individual-level goals (see Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006, for more details; also Bozionelos et al., 2016; Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011).

Career commitment refers to the identification with and active involvement in one’s own career progression (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Hall, 1971). Individuals who set personal career goals, and put effort and persistence into the pursuit of those goals, may be considered to have high levels of career commitment (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Goulet & Singh, 2002; Zhu et al., 2020). Career commitment is conceptually distinct from job involvement and organisational commitment (Aryee & Tan, 1992; Blau, 1985, 1989; Hall, 1976). Individuals may strongly identify with and be fully involved in a job (which typically comprises short-term task requirements) without necessarily be committed to their broader career (that is, not engage in long-term planning to upgrade the job or responsibilities) and vice versa.

For instance, an administrator may be committed to and derive high satisfaction from a specific job but not aspire to further career development in roles that involve undertaking more complex tasks or managerial responsibilities with the same or another employer. The career commitment construct is also conceptually distinct from organisational commitment in that it focuses on commitment to one’s personal goals and may require changing employers, rather than commitment to a single employing organisation (Arthur et al., 2005; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Hall, 1976; Koslowsky et al., 2012).

Career commitment is also related to but conceptually distinct from career competencies, which are the knowledge, skills and abilities central to career development, and that can be influenced by the individual (Akkermans et al., 2013). Akkermans and associates’ (2013) framework of career competencies distinguished between reflective, communicative, and behavioural career competencies, and these scholars have found support for its association with self-perceived employability (see also Presti et al., 2021). Career competencies have also been found to be important for career success (e.g., Eby et al., 2006; Kuijpers et al., 2006). As both career competencies and career commitment build upon Ulrich’s assertion (1998) that “Intellectual capital = Competence X Commitment” (p. 15), we posit that career commitment, too, is related to employability (cf. Brown et al., 2003).

Sustaining employability over time requires focus, effort and persistence (e.g., De Vos et al., 2020). Individuals who are committed to their careers are more likely to set career development goals and work towards the fulfilling them (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990). They are likely to be willing to make personal sacrifices to invest in acquiring new skills, engage in training, build networks, scan the job scene for new opportunities and participate in significant career-enhancing events (Aryee & Tan, 1992; Kim et al., 2016; Koslowsky et al., 2012; Vandenberghe & Basak Ok, 2013). Studies have found that employees who actively engage in competency and career development activities report higher levels of

employability (De Vos et al., 2011). Hence, the following hypothesis was posed:

**Hypothesis 1.** Career commitment is positively related to employability.

## Employability and career success

Career success refers to the accumulated outcomes from one's career trajectory at a particular point in time (Arthur et al., 2005; Baruch & Bozionelos, 2011), and can be viewed from objective and subjective perspectives (Gattiker & Larwood, 1986; Ng et al., 2005). Objective career success as an outcome has a long research tradition (Ng & Feldman, 2014) and is measured with indicators observable to third parties, typically salary, organisational position or attained promotions (Dries, 2019; Frederiksen & Kato, 2018). Subjective career success, on the other hand, refers to a person's own appraisal of their career accomplishments to date and prospects of future accomplishments (Dries, 2019; Greenhaus et al., 1990; Ng & Feldman, 2014; Stumpf & Tymon, 2012). By definition, subjective career success is judged by the individual themselves rather than by others, either within or outside the organisation (Gattiker & Larwood, 1986). Subjective career success can include reactions to actual and/or anticipated career-related attainments over a longer time frame, and derives from a wide range of outcomes such as a sense of identity (Law et al., 2002), purpose (Cochran, 1990) and work–life balance (Finegold & Mohrman, 2001).

Although objective success is operationally attractive to the extent that it is directly observable, as organisations have reduced layers of management and career trajectories have become less hierarchical, opportunities for enhanced salary or promotion have become less available (Smale et al., 2019). In this context of flatter, nonlinear careers, subjective career success is becoming increasingly relevant (e.g., Dries, 2019; Ng & Feldman, 2014; Shockley et al., 2016; Spurk, Keller, et al., 2019). Indeed, research has indicated that an increasing proportion of employees themselves define career success using subjective indicators rather than objective ones (Ng & Feldman, 2014). Though they have spawned from the same basic construct, objective and subjective career success are only moderately related, at best (Baruch & Bozionelos, 2011; Ng et al., 2005; Shockley et al., 2016). Furthermore, a causal relationship between the two (i.e., which or whether one of them causes the other) is difficult to conclude (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Spurk, Hofer, et al., 2019). Therefore, it seems prudent to refrain from assigning causal order between objective and subjective career success. There is evidence, albeit still limited, of a relationship between employability and both objective and subjective career success (see Bozionelos et al., 2016; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der

Heijden et al., 2009). Employability is seen as reflecting “career potential” (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006); hence, individuals who are more employable should be able to achieve better objective outcomes and possibly also feel more satisfied with their accomplishments. For example, expertise in a person's professional domain and their ability to achieve balance should, logically, be associated with greater job performance which should, in turn, lead to more chances of promotion or obtaining financial rewards, but also to greater satisfaction with their career accomplishments (Bozionelos et al., 2016). Hence, the following hypotheses were formulated.

**Hypothesis 2a.** Employability is positively related to objective career success.

**Hypothesis 2b.** Employability is positively related to subjective career success.

## Mediating relationships

Seen in combination, Hypotheses 1, 2a, and 2b point towards a mediating role for employability in the relationship between career commitment and objective and subjective career success (e.g., Aguinis et al., 2017; Rungtusanatham et al., 2014). To respond to calls to better account for conceptual and theoretical similarities and differences between objective and subjective career success (e.g., Mayrhofer et al., 2016), in developing our line of argumentation regarding the underlying mechanisms for the mediating relationships, we borrow from different theoretical backgrounds and propose that the mediating effect may differ as a result of the conceptual and empirical distinction between objective and subjective career success.

In relation to objective career success, in line with Spurk, Keller, et al. (2019), we propose Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018) as a valuable framework for understanding the phenomenon, including its process, antecedents and conditions. A basic assumption underlying COR theory is that resources, in the context of our study personal resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014), are critical in attaining valued outcomes. Additionally, COR theory assumes that resources protect against resource loss (Hobfoll et al., 2018) and facilitate people's ability to deal with career challenges and hindrances and to attain career success (Ng & Feldman, 2014). Moreover, COR theory states “that people develop resource management behaviours and attitudes to optimize the attainment of career success” (Spurk, Keller, et al., 2019, p. 39), highlighting individual agency in resource management.

We also draw on ideas from Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1962) which states that individual workers' competencies (in our case competence-based employability)

predict life and career outcomes, including objective career success, as differential investments in these competencies by these workers will be differentially rewarded (e.g., through higher salaries or promotions; Baruch & Lavi-Steiner, 2015). In other words, the external (i.e., organizational) awarding of career success to workers is based on their efforts to engage in employability-enhancing activities and achievements in terms of actually developing valuable competencies (cf. Spurk, Keller, et al., 2019).

Specifically, within the context of the study, we predict that the relationship between career commitment and objective career success will be partially mediated by employability. While objective career success will depend in part on external factors such as prevailing organisational context, HR policies, we argue that strong career commitment will motivate individuals to engage in beneficial activities that may directly enhance their opportunities for promotion, either within the organisation or beyond when circumstances arise. Moreover, we also expect that a strong commitment towards one's career will motivate engagement in key activities that will, following COR theory, increase their personal resources and, following Human Capital theory (Becker, 1962), strengthen their employability competencies which will make them more attractive and valuable to employers. As such, employability will partially mediate the relationship between career commitment and objective career success. Therefore, the following hypothesis was formulated:

**Hypothesis 3.** The relationship between career commitment and objective career success (Hypothesis 3a: organisational hierarchical success; Hypothesis 3b: overall hierarchical success) will be partially mediated (both direct and indirect effects) by employability.

In relation to subjective career success, building upon Spurk, Keller, et al. (2019), we posit that a theoretical perspective that focuses on personal fulfilment and career self-management (Hall & Chandler, 2005) is better suited to explain the mechanisms underlying the relationship between career commitment and subjective career success, and the partially mediating role of employability in this relationship. Such a perspective concentrates on internal processes that guide idiosyncratic, best-fit career decisions (Hall & Chandler, 2005), as “subjective career success is defined as a focal career actor's evaluation and experience of achieving personally meaningful career outcomes” (Spurk, Keller, et al., 2019, p. 41) (see also Seibert, 2006).

Constructs that pertain to career self-management, and that should include career commitment, are suited well for explaining subjective career success (Spurk, Keller, et al., 2019). Specifically, the arguments that relate to

the motivating properties of career commitment, that have been explained above, in favour of activities that result in employability enhancement, are still expected to apply when subjective career success is the outcome variable. However, it is also anticipated that individuals who attribute importance to their careers (i.e., more career commitment), are, consistent with the idiosyncratic nature of and internal drivers of career decisions (Spurk, Keller, et al., 2019), more likely to have positive evaluations of their own careers, irrespective of actual engagement in employability-enhancing activities. That is, we expect a direct as well as indirect relationship between career commitment and subjective career success.

The direct effect can be explained through the idea that achieving congruence between attitudes and behaviours, in this case reflected in career commitment, serves important psychological functions, such as maintenance of self-esteem, social consistency and social approval needs (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2012; Hosany & Martin, 2012; Roy & Rabbane, 2015). Moreover, even in case individuals are not outwardly successful in terms of objective success and do not engage in significant employability-enhancing behaviours, they may still feel satisfaction that their broad self-defined career goals (which might include intrinsic pleasure from work, good work/nonwork balance, comfortable salary and lifestyle) have been met (Hao et al., 2013). Hence, the following hypothesis was formulated:

**Hypothesis 4.** The relationship between career commitment and subjective career success will be partially mediated (both direct and indirect effects) by employability.

### Academic versus support staff as moderator

Finally, we consider it conceivable that the strength of the relationship between career commitment and employability differs for academic and support staff. Careers in universities are widely understood in terms of academic careers (people who primarily engage in teaching and/or research) and careers of support staff (who typically perform administrative and technical jobs).

As a sector, universities in most countries have undergone considerable upheaval as a result of globalisation, competition, and financial pressures that have led to increased workloads and reduced job security for academic staff (e.g., Courtois & O'Keefe, 2015; Fletcher, 2018; Kallio et al., 2015; Veld et al., 2016). Academic career paths are no longer predictable or steadily upwards. Instead, they have become highly competitive, uncertain and often precarious, where it is frequently necessary to move institution for promotion or for attaining a secure post (Baruch et al., 2014; Nikunen & Lempiäinen, 2020; Richardson et al., 2019; Sierkierski et al., 2018). As a consequence, contemporary academic

careers require strong dedication and effort to launch and maintain (Hu et al., 2015; Nikunen & Lempiäinen, 2020), which reinforces the importance of individual-level employability maintenance and enhancement to remain competitive (Hu et al., 2015; Van der Klink et al., 2014).

On the other hand, support staff tend to experience or perceive more linear or traditional career trajectories (Gander et al., 2019; Rytberg & Geschwind, 2017; Veld et al., 2016), which should make the development of employability for career advancement and maintenance less of an imperative for them. Indeed, support staff feel less under pressure to develop their competencies than academic staff (Samad et al., 2015). Furthermore, support staff show limited interest in development of competencies that relate to the enhancement of their career prospects within their present or future employers (Renkema et al., 2009; Waller et al., 2015), and report limited motivation to dedicate personal time towards the further development of their careers (vs. spending time in non-work-related activities) (Ricketts & Pringle, 2014). On the basis of the above, we expect that career commitment will play a more salient role in the employability of academic staff; hence, the relationship between the two factors will be stronger for academic than for support staff.

**Hypothesis 5.** Staff status (academic vs. support staff) will moderate the relationship between career commitment and employability in such a way that the relationship will be stronger for academic staff.

## METHOD

### Participants and procedure

An electronic survey was distributed to academic and support staff of a large Dutch University. Regarding academic roles, in addition to temporary PhD positions, temporary and permanent positions for assistant, associate, and full professors were included, herewith representing all key positions in the academic sector. These respondents worked in faculties, at an educational research centre, and at a centre specialized in innovations in teacher education. The support staff comprised a sound representation of job categories in this occupational cluster including management support jobs, HR representatives, student support jobs, secretarial/clerical support, ICT professionals and communication specialists, among others. The survey used well-established and validated scales which were previously applied in a large international research project on employability in seven European countries, including the Netherlands (Van der Heijden et al., 2005).

In total, 710 employees were solicited for participation. Of those, 354 filled out the questionnaire (49.9%

response rate). Of the respondents, 139 (74 male and 65 female) were academic staff (“education and research”), and 215 (107 male and 108 female) were support staff. The average age for academic staff was 46.40 years ( $SD = 10.42$ ) and for support staff it was 46.16 years ( $SD = 8.34$ ). This age distribution is representative of the total population of the Dutch university that participated in our study, and of the conglomerate of Dutch universities (VSNU, 2015). The average tenure for academic staff was 9.61 years ( $SD = 6.06$ ) and for support staff it was 10.96 years ( $SD = 5.43$ ).

## Measures

*Career commitment* was measured with the scale developed by Van der Heijden and Bozionelos (Van der Heijden et al., 2005) that was inspired by job-level measures (e.g., Jaskolka et al., 1985). The scale contains four items in a five-point response format (1: *completely disagree* to 5: *completely agree*). A sample item was: “I am prepared to engage in any type of personal sacrifice in order to advance my career.” The scale has shown sound reliability and validity using samples from various European countries, ranging from 0.65 to 0.89 (Van der Heijden et al., 2005). The scale’s reliability (Cronbach  $\alpha$ ) was 0.74 in the current study.

*Employability* was assessed with the self-report employability instrument of Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006). Testing in various settings and cultures attests to its reliability and convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity (e.g., Bozionelos et al., 2016; Desmette & Gaillard, 2008; Notelaers et al., 2018; Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011). The instrument uses a 6-point response format and assesses the five dimensions of employability: *Occupational Expertise* (15 items,  $\alpha = 0.93$ ), *Anticipation & Optimisation* (eight items,  $\alpha = 0.82$ ), *Personal Flexibility* (eight items,  $\alpha = 0.81$ ), *Corporate Sense* (seven items,  $\alpha = 0.82$ ), and *Balance* (nine items,  $\alpha = 0.69$ ). Sample items included: “I consider myself ... competent to be of practical assistance to colleagues having questions about the approach to work” (ranging from *not at all* to *extremely*) (*Occupational Expertise*); “During the past year, I was actively engaged in investigating adjacent job areas to see where success could be achieved” (ranging from *not at all* to *a considerable degree*) (*Anticipation & Optimisation*); “I adapt to developments within my organisation ...” (ranging from *very badly* to *very well*) (*Personal Flexibility*); “I manage to exercise ... influence within my organisation” (ranging from *very little* to *a very great deal*) (*Corporate Sense*); and “I achieve a balance in alternating between reaching my own work goals and supporting my colleagues” (ranging from *not at all* to *a considerable degree*) (*Balance*).

*Objective career success* was measured by asking participants to report the number of promotions they had

achieved since they had joined their present employer (organisation-specific objective hierarchical success) and in their entire careers (overall objective hierarchical success). A promotion was defined as “any increase in hierarchical level and/or any significant increase in job responsibilities or job scope.” The specific items were formulated as follows: (1) Please indicate how many promotions you have experienced since joining your current organisation; and (2) Please indicate how many promotions you have experienced in your entire career (including your career in this organisation). Measures of financial success were not considered appropriate to utilise, as the university sector in the Netherlands operates using well-defined pay scales that are generally based on tenure.

*Subjective career success* was measured with seven items from Gattiker and Larwood (1986, 1988) that have gained acceptance as a comprehensive measure of subjective career success (Bozionelos, 2004; Bozionelos et al., 2011; Bozionelos et al., 2016). All items were scored using a five-point rating scale ranging from: (1) *does not apply at all*, to (5) *applies a great deal*. An example item was: “I am pleased with the promotions I have received so far.” Cronbach  $\alpha$  was 0.71.

*Staff status*, being the moderator variable, was measured with a single item (1: support staff, 2: academic staff).

*Controls*: Gender (1: male, 2: female), age (1: under 30 years old, 2: 30–34 years, 3: 35–39 years, 4: 40–44 years, 5: 45–49 years, 6: 50–54 years, and 7: 55 years and above) and tenure (in years) were controlled for, because these relate to career success (e.g., Ng et al., 2005).

## RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations are presented in Table 1. In our analysis, we did not assume a link between objective and subjective career success because, as discussed, the nature between the two types of career success is unclear.

To calculate the indirect effects of career commitment on career success via employability, mediation was tested, separately for each outcome variable, using the Process macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2012), applying Model 4 with 5000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples. In the mediation model for each outcome variable, career commitment was added as antecedent and the five dimensions of employability were included as mediators.

To examine whether staff status moderated the indirect effects of career commitment on career success, through employability, a conditional indirect effects model was constructed (Process Model 7; Hayes & Preacher, 2013) and tested with 5000 bias-corrected bootstrap samples. In line with Hayes’ (2018) recommendations, unstandardized effects ( $b$ ) are reported. A 95%

confidence interval was set as the critical level for statistical significance. Conditional process modelling is an overarching term used by Hayes and Preacher (2013) to include moderated mediation and mediated moderation.

## Hypotheses testing

Results are shown in Table 2.

There was a significant positive association between career commitment and the following dimensions of employability: Anticipation & Optimisation ( $b = 0.44$ ,  $CI_{95\%}$ : 0.33, 0.54), Personal Flexibility ( $b = 0.12$ ,  $CI_{95\%}$ : 0.04, 0.20) and Corporate Sense ( $b = 0.24$ ,  $CI_{95\%}$ : 0.12, 0.35). The relationships of career commitment with Occupational Expertise and Balance were not significant. These results offered partial support to Hypothesis 1.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b predicted that employability would be positively related to objective and subjective career success, respectively. The results of their testing are presented in Table 3.

There was a significant positive association between Personal Flexibility and Overall Hierarchical Career Success ( $b = 0.71$ ,  $CI_{95\%}$ : 0.24, 1.19). Corporate Sense was significantly positively associated with Organisational Hierarchical Career Success ( $b = 0.61$ ,  $CI_{95\%}$ : 0.41, 0.81), Overall Hierarchical Career Success ( $b = 0.98$ ,  $CI_{95\%}$ : 0.66, 1.29), and Subjective Career Success ( $b = 0.22$ ,  $CI_{95\%}$ : 0.14, 0.31). Balance was significantly positively associated with Subjective Career Success ( $b = 0.19$ ,  $CI_{95\%}$ : 0.10, 0.29). Therefore, Hypotheses 2a and 2b were partially supported with our data.

We next tested Hypotheses 3a and 3b, which pertained to the mediating role of employability in the association between career commitment and objective career success. Specifically, Hypotheses 3a and 3b proposed both direct and indirect effects (partial mediation) between career commitment, on the one hand, and organisational hierarchical success and overall hierarchical success, on the other hand. Results (see Table 4) showed no direct effect of career commitment on either organisational hierarchical career success or overall hierarchical career success in the presence of the employability dimensions. However, significant indirect effects were observed by Career Commitment on Organisational Hierarchical Success, through Corporate Sense ( $b = 0.15$ ,  $CI_{95\%}$ : 0.05, 0.26), hence providing some support for Hypothesis 3a. Additionally, significant indirect effects were observed for Career Commitment and Overall Hierarchical Success, through Personal Flexibility ( $b = 0.08$ ,  $CI_{95\%}$ : 0.01, 0.18) and Corporate Sense ( $b = 0.23$ ,  $CI_{95\%}$ : 0.01, 0.40), providing some support for Hypothesis 3b.

Hypothesis 4 predicted both a direct and indirect effect (partial mediation) of career commitment on subjective career success, via employability. As predicted, a significant direct effect was observed ( $b = 0.19$ ,  $CI_{95\%}$ : 0.11, 0.27). Moreover, we found a significant indirect



TABLE 1 Means, standard deviation and bivariate correlations ( $N = 354$ )

	Mean	Std. dev	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 Tenure <sup>a</sup>	10.43	5.71													
2 Age group <sup>b</sup>	4.81	1.78	0.57**												
3 Gender <sup>c</sup>	1.49	0.50	-0.09	-0.17**											
4 Staff status <sup>d</sup>	0.55	0.50	-0.12*	0.00	-0.03										
5 Career commitment	2.45	0.67	-0.09	-0.07	-0.02	0.12*									
6 Occupational expertise	4.73	0.53	-0.02	0.06	-0.10	-0.01	0.09								
7 Anticipation & optimisation	3.57	0.74	-0.20**	-0.12*	-0.01	0.11*	0.41**	0.37**							
8 Corporate sense	3.75	0.76	-0.06	0.02	-0.12*	-0.07	0.22**	0.44**	0.44**						
9 Personal flexibility	4.34	0.54	-0.19**	-0.13*	0.08	-0.17**	0.16**	0.53**	0.48**	0.50**					
10 Balance	4.10	0.60	-0.09	-0.10	0.04	0.00	0.10	0.36**	0.29**	0.38**	0.40**				
11 Organisational hierarchical promotions	1.24	1.34	0.38**	0.09	-0.09	-0.16**	-0.02	0.06	0.02	0.29**	0.11*	0.04			
12 Overall hierarchical success	2.66	2.09	0.08	0.27**	-0.22**	-0.05	0.09	0.18**	0.17**	0.42**	0.26**	0.11*	0.51**		
13 Subjective career success	3.35	0.53	-0.09	-0.11*	-0.07	0.25**	0.28**	0.08	0.15**	0.32**	0.07	0.27**	0.25**	0.29**	0.29**

<sup>a</sup>Tenure was measured by the number of years that the respondent had in their current organisation.

<sup>b</sup>Age was measured by group (1 = <30, 2 = 30-34, 3 = 35-39, 4 = 40-44, 5 = 45-49, 6 = 50-54, 7 = 55+).

<sup>c</sup>Gender was measured 1 = male, 2 = female.

<sup>d</sup>Staff status: 1 = support roles, 2 = academic roles.

\* $p < 0.05$ .

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**TABLE 2** Model summary of predictor variable career commitment (*X*) on employability dimensions (*M*) (*N* = 354)

	Occupational expertise				Anticipation & Optimisation				Personal flexibility				Corporate sense				Balance			
	<i>b</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>p</i>	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	<i>b</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>p</i>	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	<i>b</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>p</i>	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	<i>b</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>p</i>	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	<i>b</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>p</i>	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
Constant	4.63	0.00	4.30	4.96	2.76	0.00	2.34	3.18	4.13	0.00	3.80	4.46	3.41	0.00	2.94	3.87	4.00	0.00	3.62	4.38
Career commitment	0.07	0.09	-0.01	0.15	0.44	0.00	0.33	0.54	0.12	0.01	0.04	0.20	0.24	0.00	0.12	0.35	0.08	0.08	-0.01	0.18
<i>Control variables</i>																				
Tenure	-0.01	0.29	-0.02	0.01	-0.02	0.01	-0.04	-0.01	-0.02	0.01	-0.03	0.00	-0.01	0.20	-0.03	0.01	-0.01	0.44	-0.02	0.01
Age group	0.03	0.17	-0.01	0.06	0.00	0.86	-0.05	0.04	0.00	0.87	-0.04	0.03	0.02	0.37	-0.03	0.08	-0.02	0.37	-0.06	0.02
Gender	-0.09	0.11	-0.20	0.02	-0.02	0.78	-0.16	0.12	0.07	0.20	-0.04	0.18	-0.16	0.04	-0.32	-0.01	0.03	0.61	-0.09	0.16

<sup>a</sup>*b* = unstandardized coefficients.

effect via Corporate Sense ( $b = 0.05$ ,  $CI_{95\%}$ : 0.02, 0.09), hence providing partial support for Hypothesis 4.

Finally, we formally tested for differences in the indirect relationship between career commitment and career success outcomes via employability, comparing academic and support staff (Hypothesis 5). To test the conditional effect of staff status in this relationship, we used Hayes' (2018) Model 7. Like the bootstrapping method used to test for mediation, this procedure generates confidence intervals for indirect effects for each group of staff. Controlling for the presence of the other variables, no significant conditional indirect effects were observed. Table 5 presents the indirect effects and confidence intervals for support and academic staff along with the index of moderated mediation indicating the difference between the indirect effects and the corresponding confidence interval.

In all cases, the confidence interval for the index of moderated mediation contained zero for each of the outcome variables: for Organisational Hierarchical Success (Occupational Expertise [-0.05, 0.06], Anticipation & Optimisation [-0.03, 0.06], Corporate Sense [-0.09, 0.23], Personal Flexibility [-0.09, 0.04], and Balance [-0.02, 0.06]); for Overall Hierarchical Promotions (Occupational Expertise [-0.08, 0.08], Anticipation & Optimisation [-0.06, 0.09], Corporate Sense [-0.13, 0.37], Personal Flexibility [-0.20, 0.10] and Balance [-0.04, 0.08]); and for Subjective Career Success (Occupational Expertise [-0.01, 0.02], Anticipation & Optimisation [-0.01, 0.03], Corporate Sense [-0.03, 0.09], Personal Flexibility [-0.02, 0.05] and Balance [-0.07, 0.02]), indicating no differences in the association between career commitment and employability between support and academic staff. Hypothesis 5 was therefore not supported by our data.

## DISCUSSION

### Reflection upon the outcomes

The present study aimed to contribute to the career literature in two ways. First, by demonstrating that employees who are more actively committed to investing in their career also score higher on employability. Second, by testing whether employability acts as a mediator in the relationship between career commitment, on the one hand, and objective and subjective career success, on the other. More generally, being conducted within a higher education setting this study also adds to the literature on academic careers.

Given greater expectations of individual-level responsibility for career development, with university staff being no exception, it is important to know whether individual employees' own interest and drive to develop their career relates to their employability, and through it, to their career success. Our findings vindicate the motives behind

**TABLE 3** Effects of career commitment (*X*) and employability (*M*) on objective and subjective career success outcome variables (*Y*) (*N* = 354)

	Organisational hierarchical success				Overall hierarchical success				Subjective career success			
	<i>b</i> <sup>a</sup>	p	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	<i>b</i> <sup>a</sup>	p	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	<i>b</i> <sup>a</sup>	p	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
Constant	-0.36	0.61	-1.77	1.04	-2.42	0.03	-4.63	-0.21	2.64	0.00	2.06	3.23
Career Commitment	-0.11	0.28	-0.31	0.09	0.03	0.86	-0.28	0.34	0.19	0.00	0.11	0.27
<i>Employability dimensions</i>												
Occupational expertise	-0.25	0.09	-0.53	0.04	-0.35	0.13	-0.79	0.10	-0.05	0.44	-0.17	0.07
Anticipation & optimisation	-0.06	0.55	-0.27	0.15	-0.04	0.82	-0.37	0.29	-0.05	0.24	-0.14	0.04
Personal flexibility	0.28	0.08	-0.03	0.58	0.71	0.00	0.24	1.19	-0.17	0.01	-0.29	-0.04
Corporate sense	0.61	0.00	0.41	0.81	0.98	0.00	0.66	1.29	0.22	0.00	0.14	0.31
Balance	-0.11	0.33	-0.34	0.11	-0.11	0.53	-0.47	0.24	0.19	0.00	0.10	0.29
<i>Control variables</i>												
Tenure	0.12	0.00	0.10	0.15	-0.02	0.37	-0.06	0.02	0.00	0.64	-0.01	0.01
Age group	-0.16	0.00	-0.25	-0.08	0.34	0.00	0.21	0.47	-0.03	0.10	-0.06	0.01
Gender	-0.17	0.18	-0.42	0.08	-0.63	0.00	-1.02	-0.24	-0.05	0.35	-0.15	0.05

<sup>a</sup>*b* = unstandardized coefficients.**TABLE 4** Direct and indirect effects of mediation model for outcome variables

	Organisational hierarchical success				Overall hierarchical success				Subjective career success			
	<i>b</i> <sup>a</sup>	Boot se	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	<i>b</i> <sup>a</sup>	Boot se	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	<i>b</i> <sup>a</sup>	Boot se	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
Total effect	0.12	0.07	0.00	0.26	0.26	0.11	0.05	0.48	0.02	0.03	-0.03	0.08
Direct effect	-0.12	0.10	-0.31	0.09	0.03	0.16	-0.28	0.36	0.19	0.04	0.11	0.27
<i>Indirect effect via mediators</i>												
Occupational expertise	-0.02	0.02	-0.06	0.01	-0.02	0.03	-0.09	0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.02	0.01
Anticipation and optimisation	-0.03	0.05	-0.13	0.07	-0.02	0.09	-0.17	0.16	-0.02	0.02	-0.06	0.02
Personal flexibility	0.03	0.02	0.00	0.09	0.08	0.04	0.01	0.18	-0.02	0.01	-0.04	0.00
Corporate sense	0.15	0.05	0.05	0.26	0.23	0.08	0.10	0.40	0.05	0.02	0.02	0.09
Balance	-0.01	0.01	-0.04	0.01	-0.01	0.02	-0.05	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.04
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> ( <i>p</i> )	0.12 (<0.01)				0.34 (<0.01)				0.30 (<0.01)			

<sup>a</sup>*b* = unstandardized coefficients.

this study, and though not all hypotheses were fully supported, they present interesting implications. In line with our expectations, people who are more interested in and focused on their career development and progression score higher on their reported employability. It is noteworthy that not all five dimensions of employability were significantly explained by career commitment. While a positive association was found for Anticipation & Optimisation, Personal Flexibility, and Corporate Sense, the relationships with Occupational Expertise and Balance were not significant. With these outcomes, Hypothesis 1 is partly confirmed. These findings underline the

importance of considering employability as a multi-dimensional construct (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

Apparently, an individual's focus on their career may stimulate proactive (anticipation & optimisation) and reactive (personal flexibility) adaptability to labour market requirements, as well as their corporate sense. The latter outcome makes sense as well, because employees who have ambitions to broaden their knowledge and skills, to switch jobs or to ascend the hierarchical ladder within their occupational area (i.e., employees with a high level of career

**TABLE 5** Conditional indirect effects for support staff and academic staff and index of moderated mediation (difference between conditional indirect effects between support and academic staff)

	Organisational hierarchical success				Overall hierarchical success				Subjective career success			
	<i>b</i> <sup>a</sup>	Boot se	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	<i>b</i> <sup>a</sup>	Boot se	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	<i>b</i> <sup>a</sup>	Boot se	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
<b>Occupational expertise</b>												
Support staff	-0.02	0.02	-0.07	0.01	-0.03	0.03	-0.11	0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.02	0.01
Academic staff	-0.02	0.02	-0.07	0.02	-0.02	0.04	-0.11	0.03	0.00	0.01	-0.02	0.01
Difference	0.00	0.03	-0.05	0.06	0.00	0.04	-0.08	0.08	0.00	0.01	-0.01	0.02
<b>Anticipation &amp; optimisation</b>												
Support staff	-0.03	0.05	-0.14	0.07	0.02	0.09	-0.20	0.17	-0.03	0.02	-0.07	0.02
Academic staff	-0.02	0.04	-0.11	0.05	-0.01	0.07	-0.14	0.13	-0.02	0.02	-0.06	0.01
Difference	0.01	0.02	-0.03	0.06	0.01	0.03	-0.06	0.09	0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.03
<b>Personal flexibility</b>												
Support staff	0.04	0.03	0.00	0.11	0.11	0.06	0.02	0.23	-0.03	0.01	-0.06	0.00
Academic staff	0.03	0.03	-0.09	0.09	0.07	0.06	-0.05	0.20	-0.02	0.02	-0.05	0.01
Difference	-0.01	0.03	-0.09	0.04	-0.04	0.07	-0.20	0.10	0.01	0.02	-0.02	0.05
<b>Corporate sense</b>												
Support staff	0.13	0.06	0.02	0.28	0.20	0.09	0.04	0.40	0.05	0.02	0.01	0.09
Academic staff	0.20	0.07	0.07	0.35	0.32	0.11	0.12	0.55	0.07	0.03	0.03	0.13
Difference	0.07	0.08	-0.09	0.23	0.12	0.13	-0.13	0.37	0.03	0.03	-0.03	0.09
<b>Balance</b>												
Support staff	-0.01	0.02	-0.05	0.01	-0.01	0.03	-0.07	0.04	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.06
Academic staff	0.00	0.01	-0.03	0.03	0.00	0.02	-0.05	0.04	0.00	0.02	-0.03	0.04
Difference	0.01	0.02	-0.02	0.06	0.01	0.03	-0.04	0.08	-0.02	0.02	-0.07	0.02

<sup>a</sup>*b* = unstandardized coefficients.

commitment) are the ones who are better able to participate and perform well in a variety of work groups and roles by sharing their expertise, and hence to exercise influence in their organisation.

Acquiring job-specific expertise (i.e., occupational expertise), however, may not necessarily be based on the desire to achieve greater career success, but can be expected to be partly due to a genuine interest in one's occupation. Similarly, as regards the nonsignificant outcome for the balance dimension of employability, it can be argued that employees who are highly committed to their career might be less focused on balancing between opposing work, career and private interests (employee) and between employers' and employees' interests. Obviously, although this should not be detrimental per se, when this happens for a limited period (for instance during the final, usually quite stressful year of a PhD trajectory), it might have negative implications for an individual's career sustainability in the longer run (De Vos et al., 2020; Van der Heijden et al., 2020) (see also Sawhney et al., 2020; Spurk, Hirschi, et al., 2019), as one's health, happiness and performance might be affected (i.e., being the core indicators of sustainable careers; De Vos et al., 2020; Van der Heijden et al., 2020).

Next, we also found support for the importance of employability for objective (Hypothesis 2a) and subjective career outcomes (Hypothesis 2b), thereby further emphasizing its relevance for contemporary careers (Fugate et al., 2021; Peeters et al., 2019). However, not all employability dimensions appeared to be equally important in explaining career success. Corporate sense appeared to be the most consistent antecedent, as it was significantly associated with both types of objective career success (organisational and overall hierarchical career success) and with subjective career success. Interestingly, balance was the only other employability dimension that explained subjective career success. This adds to the notion that the subjective evaluation individuals make of their career cannot be separated from their broader life context (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014), and that achieving balance between opposing interests, both within and across different life domains, might be a critical employability competency in this regard.

In addition, only personal flexibility was the other employability dimension that was found to be associated with objective career success (specifically, with overall hierarchical career success). This finding could be explained by the importance of the capacity to adapt to

changes in the internal and external labour market in contemporary careers. Presumably, those employees who show a higher degree of personal flexibility in responding to changing roles and responsibilities might also be more likely to get promoted and/or attract the attention of other employers.

We found support for the assumption of employability as a mediator in the relationship between career commitment and objective career success. People who have an interest and drive in advancing their careers are indeed more likely to achieve promotions with their present employer (Hypothesis 3a) and to achieve a greater number of promotions in their careers overall (Hypothesis 3b), and this is accomplished exclusively through their elevated employability levels, in particular their personal flexibility and corporate sense. Contrary to our expectations, no direct relationship between career commitment and objective career success was found, pointing to a full mediation effect of employability. This validates the positioning of employability as one's "career potential" (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Consistent with COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), employability appears to be a personal resource (Halbesleben et al., 2014) that helps people in attaining career success (Spurk, Keller, et al., 2019). It also aligns with the basic premise of Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1962), stating that competencies (in this case: competence-based employability) are an important predictor of life and career outcomes, including career success. This finding also supports earlier research on the positive association between employability and objective career success (e.g., Bozionelos et al., 2016; Van der Heijden et al., 2009). Furthermore, it adds to this stream of research by explaining how an individual attitude reflecting personal engagement with one's career, that is, career commitment, affects career success through competencies that are critical for realising this in a given context. The latter is also in line with the basic premise of sustainable career literature, stressing the importance of considering both individual agency and the context in which careers unfold for understanding what makes a career sustainable over time (De Vos et al., 2020). From our research, we can conclude that employability competencies are a critical element in this process.

Contradictory to our expectation that employability would partially mediate the relationship between career commitment and subjective career success (Hypothesis 4), our results only showed a direct, positive association between both, with employability playing no significant role in this relationship. This finding concurs with earlier research reporting that people who are more committed to their careers are more likely to perceive themselves as more successful (e.g., Ballout, 2009), thereby supporting the idea that achieving congruence between attitudes and behaviours is important (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2012; Hosany & Martin, 2012; Roy & Rabbane, 2015) and that this will lead individuals with

strong career commitment to maintain psychological congruence in evaluating their careers (Hao et al., 2013). Yet, it fails to support our assumption that employability would help to explain this relationship. One potential explanation for this unexpected finding is that subjective career success comprises an individual's personal satisfaction with their career achievements thus far. In other words, individuals who report a stronger commitment to their career might evaluate their career success more from an individual perspective, rather than considering what is needed for staying employable from a contextual perspective, that is, their employability competencies, which are more important for objective career success.

All in all, our findings add to the scarce literature on the predictive validity of career commitment as a determinant of positive career outcomes, for both objective and subjective indicators. The fact that we observed a different role for employability in the relationship between career commitment, on the one hand, and objective versus subjective career success, on the other, indicates that it is important to distinguish between both forms of career success, as each might be explained by different factors (see also Heslin, 2005).

Contrary to what we expected (Hypothesis 5), our results did not reveal a different pattern depending on the target group (academic versus support staff). This suggests, at least for the groups included in our study, that an individual's career commitment and their employability are important for understanding their career success, independent of the occupational group they belong to. The outcome of our specific empirical work might be due to the particular context in which our study took place. As the participating university is relatively more focused on educational than on (highly competitive) research tasks for their academic staff, the factors enabling their career progress may be more similar to those factors enabling the career progress of support staff than might have been the case in more strongly research-oriented universities. After all, in the latter, individual success in attracting research funding and publishing in top-tier journals is presumed to be relatively more important for career progress than quality of education. Future research is needed to provide further insight into whether this finding is specific to our context and the occupational groups involved in our specific study, or that the role of career commitment and employability in understanding career outcomes is indeed independent of occupation.

## Limitations and suggestions for future research

First, all data were cross-sectional, which means causality assertions cannot be made. Research using multiwave designs can provide more specific information about the stability and change of the variables, and about cross-lagged (i.e., over time) relationships compared with our cross-sectional approach (De Lange et al., 2004; Taris &

Kompier, 2003). For instance, as we have collected data on objective career success (promotions) in hindsight, it might also be possible that the history of promotions individuals have had (within their current organisation and over the entire course of their career) affects their career commitment and employability perceptions, which, in turn, might further enhance their prospects for future promotions. In other words, the relationships between career-related antecedents (such as career commitment and employability) and career outcomes (especially objective indicators of career success) might be more complex than one would think (Ng et al., 2005). To further unravel these complex relationships, we would like to call for more longitudinal research.

Second, all data were collected using survey research, thus opening up the possibility of response set consistencies. Career commitment, self-perceived employability and subjective career success are inherently subjective concepts (Bozionelos & Simmering, 2021), and this supports the approach of using self-report data, but future research might include external sources in order to cross-validate respondents' self-reports on objective career success outcomes (i.e., promotions and salary) with the ratings from external sources.

Third, further research is needed to investigate the extent to which our findings would generalise to other occupational settings. Our university staff sample with an average tenure of 10.43 years is representative for a university career environment but might be atypical for other industrial contexts. The finding that in our sample, which at the outset appears to deviate from the "new career" (Chudzikowski, 2012), career commitment is significantly associated with employability, and with objective and subjective career success factors, suggests that in more boundaryless career contexts these relationships might be even stronger (see also De Vos et al., 2011, p. 445). Fourth, although self-perceptions regarding one's employability are highly important in the light of career success, using multi-source ratings could also be useful in further research (Van der Heijden et al., 2009). Finally, research wherein the impact of internal and external labour market opportunities is taken into account might further enhance our understanding of the relationship between employability and actual career success, as this relationship might be moderated by the amount of employment opportunities actually available on the internal and external labour market.

## Practical implications

Despite these limitations, our study has some important implications. First, our findings stress the importance of actively investing in one's career development, and of being willing to provide major personal efforts aimed at enhancing one's knowledge and skills, not only for one's current job but also more generally, by building up

competencies that allow one to switch careers if necessary or desired. This investment supposes that university staff are supported both by their work environment as well as by their relatives, allowing them to invest energy in increasing their career potential and crafting their career, and in undertaking those learning activities that are needed for further career growth (De Vos et al., 2019). The benefit of doing this for the individual employee is clear, as employability enhancement is critical for objective career success, and thus, adds to one's sustained competitive advantage (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden et al., 2009), and that of their employers (Hogan et al., 2013).

Moreover, increased attention for stimulating one's subjective career success is important as the latter also appears to add to one's emotional well-being (Wiese et al., 2002). Special attention should be paid to the development of corporate sense, being the most important antecedent of career success outcomes in our university setting study. Corporate sense comprises the ability to successfully participate in and perform in different work groups, teams, occupational communities and other networks, and involves sharing responsibilities, knowledge, experiences, feelings, credits, failures, and goals (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). Notwithstanding the fear of employers of losing workers who are highly employable (the so-called management paradox), we argue, in line with De Cuyper and De Witte (2011) (who found empirical evidence against this paradox), that organisations that offer ample opportunities to fulfil career desires and needs, are the ones that are most attractive. Obviously, nobody can be forced to be highly committed to one's career and, given the pluriform working population, employers have to take into account differences in personal preferences regarding work-life balance, and career decisions. Yet as, nowadays, job qualifications are changing at an ever-increasing rate, the importance of employability enhancement should never be underestimated.

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