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NAVIGATING THE LABYRINTH OF SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract:

Subjective career success, an individual's own evaluation of their career achievement and satisfaction, is a critical yet immature construct in career research. The literature review addresses the lack of consensus regarding its measurement and conceptualization by synthesizing findings from 50 Scopus peer-reviewed articles (2010–2024). The study identifies determinants of subjective career success, including personal values, proactive behaviors, interpersonal relationships, and cultural contexts. Recognition, job satisfaction, and meaningful work are significant consequences. Despite these observations, gaps remain, including the creation of culturally responsive measures and addressing underrepresented populations, such as minorities and women. The overreliance on qualitative analysis, also indicate the need for longitudinal studies and mixed-methods research. The article integrates socio-emotional selectivity theory and the motivational theory of lifespan development to explain how subjective career success evolves across life stages. The findings provide action plans for organizations and individuals, emphasizing the importance of aligning personal values with career goals and establishing conducive work environment climates. Future research is suggested to focus on the refinement of measurement instruments, exploring diverse populations, and theory-practice gaps to enhance career satisfaction in dynamic working environments. This review contributes to both theoretical advancement and practice-based insights on subjective career success.

Keywords:

Subjective Career Success, Career Satisfaction, Personal Values, Proactive Behaviors, Interpersonal Relationship, Cultural Context

Introduction

In the 21st century, the definition of career success has evolved significantly. While objective career success remains important, subjective career success as defined by an individual's personal assessment of their career achievements and satisfaction (Shockley et al., 2016; Heslin, 2005), has been at the forefront of academic and organizational research. Traditional markers like salary, job title, and promotions, while still vital, no longer effectively represent the different objectives of today's worker. Instead, subjective factors such as personal contentment, work-life balance, autonomy, continuous learning, and alignment with personal values have become critical to how people define and view career success. This shift suggests a heightened sensitivity to individual's perceptions of their careers, which influencing their overall well-being, motivation, and work engagement.

Currently, the discussion on subjective career success focuses on identifying internal, psychological factors that contribute to an individual's sense of satisfaction. Compared to objective markers, which are quantifiable and externally verified, subjective career success is deeply personal and based on a complex interaction of individual values, behaviours, work environments, and cultural contexts (Gaile et al., 2022; Briscoe et al., 2021). However, despite its increasing prominence, there remains a lack of consensus on how to effectively measure and understand this multifaceted construct.

Past studies have explored various dimensions of subjective career success, including its antecedents and outcomes. For instance, research has highlighted the importance of proactive career behaviours, such as confidence and control, in fostering subjective career success (Gaile et al., 2024), as well as the critical role of interpersonal relationships and organizational support (Nexhip et al., 2023). Leaders' engagement was found to positively influences followers' subjective career success by fostering motivation and a supportive work environment (Chen et al. 2021). Additionally, demographic and socioeconomic factors, such as age, gender, and marital status, have been shown to influence individual's perception of success (Seema & Sujatha, 2016; Ellinas et al., 2018). According to Agrawal and Singh (2022), unmarried women report higher subjective career success from family support compared to married women, due to fewer role conflicts.

One research area that is most urgently prioritized is the development of stable and culture-sensitive measures for subjective career success. The Career Satisfaction Scale (CSS) is one example of an existing measure that has shown flaws, including problems with gender invariance (Hofmans et al., 2008). Furthermore, despite recent attempts to fill these gaps by developing new measures, like the Subjective Career Success Inventory (SCSI) by Shockley et al. (2016). Existing tools, such as SCSI face psychometric limitations and are often tested only in small samples Western which limit their cultural applicability (Olckers & Koekmoer, 2022). Thus, more testing and improvement are required to guarantee their efficacy in a variety of contexts.

Although research on subjective career success has expanded, several issues continue to challenge its development. First, there remain lacks of comprehensive and validate measures to fully capture the multidimensionality of subjective career success (Pan & Zhou, 2015; Shockley et al., 2016). Second, gaps persist in the understanding of how subjective career success varies across different populations and contexts, particularly in relation to measurement tools and cross-cultural applicability (Briscoe et al., 2021; Seema and Sujatha, 2016).

Early literatures highlight the lack of consistent measurement tools for career success, making it difficult to capture its multidimensional and culturally specific nature (Pan & Zhou, 2015; Shockley et al., 2016; Seema & Sujatha, 2016; Briscoe et al., 2021). Measurement tools remain limited, with most studies relying on the career satisfaction scale, which lack of contextual sensitivity across age, occupation, and culture (Supriatna et al., 2022). Subsequent research showed that socio-cultural and organizational contexts further complicate generalizations across profession and countries (Mokhtar et al., 2022; Gaile et al., 2022). Recent work has expanded the scope of subjective career success by incorporating factors such as adaptability, proactive behavior, sustainable career development, and sector-specific perspectives (Gaile et al., 2024; Jackson et al., 2024; Teow et al., 2024; Nexhip et al., 2023).

Recent research underscores the growing importance of personality, motivation, and socio-emotional factors in shaping subjective career success. For instance, Ekmekcioglu et al. (2025) demonstrated that core self-evaluation and intrinsic motivation significantly predict career success in engineering contexts. Similarly, Lee et al. (2025) highlight workplace loneliness as a barrier to career success in the hospitality sector but showed that grit and work-life balance can mitigate its negative effects. Agrawal and Singh (2022) found that proactive career behavior (PCB) to be a direct positive predictor of subjective career success, as women who demonstrated initiative, engage in networking, and pursue continuous learning report higher subjective career success. Likewise, Kundi et al. (2021) emphasized that employees with a protean career orientation, marked by self-directedness and value-driven choice, achieve greater subjective career success. Collectively, these findings highlight the necessity of integrating individual, organizational, and emotional dimensions when examining the dynamic of career success. Table 1 highlights the summary of factors influencing subjective career success.

Table 1: Summary of Subjective Career Success Factors

Factor Theme	Author(s)	Contribution
Individual/Behavioral Factors	Gaile et al. (2024)	Highlighted adaptability and proactive career behaviors as drivers of subjective career success.
	Ekmekcioglu et al. (2025)	Demonstrated the role of personality and intrinsic motivation in shaping career success.

Factor Theme	Author(s)	Contribution
	Lee et al. (2025)	Showed how grit and work–life balance influence subjective career success in hospitality.
	Agrawal & Singh (2022)	Found Proactive Career Behavior (PCB) to be a direct positive predictor of SCS
	Khundi et al. (2021)	Protean career orientation (PCO) is a direct positive predictor of subjective career success.
Organizational/Relational Factors	Teow et al. (2024)	Emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships and organizational support.
	Nexhip et al. (2023)	Identified organizational support and relationships as key contributors to career success.
	Chen et al. (2021)	Showed that leaders' work engagement influenced followers SCS
Demographic Factors	Seema & Sujatha (2016)	Showed that age and gender affect perceptions of career success.
	Ellinas et al. (2018)	Highlighted influence of marital status and demographics on career success perceptions.
	Agrawal & Singh (2022)	Highlighted influence of marital status on SCS

Supriatna et al. (2022) highlight several gaps in the career success literature. They noted that existing theories often emphasize work-related outcomes but overlook the lifelong and developmental nature of careers, suggesting the need to integrate broader career development concepts. They found that multiple theoretical frameworks, including social cognitive career theory, social capital theory, carer construction theory, and human capital theory, have been applied to explain subjective career success. However, no single theory adequately addresses the combine influence of culture, motivational, and emotional factors, underscoring the need for more holistic and inclusive approaches.

Thus, this literature review aims: (1) to review key factors influencing subjective career success, (2) to review the effectiveness of current measurement tools, (3) to examine the connection of key themes such as scale development, cross-cultural, outcomes, and antecedents. In doing so, this review adds to the continuing discussion on how subjective career success is optimally defined, measured and enhanced workforce that is becoming more dynamic and globalized.

This paper contribution goes beyond a summary of previous research; it provides useful advice for individuals looking to match their personal values with their career goals, and for companies aiming to establish a welcoming workplace that promotes employee satisfaction and retention (Pant & Jayant, 2024; Jackson et al., 2024). It also sets the basis for further research by highlighting questions yet to be answered and proposing areas for methodological growth.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: Section 1 reviews the definitions and core concepts relating to subjective career success. Followed by Section 2, which discusses on the methodology used in this review. Next, Section 3 is a discussion of the measures for this construct, noting their limitation and strengths, discussion of determinants of subjective career success that are categorized under personal, environmental, demographic, and cultural dimensions. Finally, Section 4 presents the practice implications of the results, followed by a conclusion that provides an overview of the main findings and some avenues for future research.

Methodology

This literature review adopts a systematic approach to integrate available research related to subjective career success, drawing on the Scopus database as its primary source of academic literature. Scopus was utilized due to its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals with high-quality and multidisciplinary research relevant to the objectives of this review.

The data for this study were retrieved from the Scopus database between 9 to 10 February 2025. To achieve such objectives, a comprehensive search strategy was conducted using a combination of keywords related to subjective career success, i.e., "subjective career success," "career satisfaction," "measurement tools," "antecedents," "outcomes," and "cross-cultural." Boolean operators ("AND," "OR") were used to limit the search and obtain inclusion of relevant studies. The search was limited to English-language articles published and indexed in Scopus without time constraints to gather a broad temporal span. However, recent publications within 2010–2024 were prioritized to include the latest information on the topic.

A vast number of articles were found during the initial search, and they were further filtered using predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies that specifically addressed subjective career success, investigated its cause or effects, or talked about the usefulness of measurement instruments were accepted. Articles that only address objective career success, lack empirical support, or have no direct bearing on the study's goals were excluded. Fifty peer-reviewed publications were chosen for further examination after titles, abstracts, and full texts were screened.

There were some problems encountered during this process. To begin with, the overlap of subjective and objective career success in numerous studies created hurdles in determining eligibility, which needed some level of discretion in the study filtering process. Next, the variations in terminology such as career satisfaction, perceived career success and psychological success posed problem in the search process. Additionally, limited access to certain full-text documents slowed the review process.

Figure 1 presents a mind map of the literature on subjective career success. The data in the mind map were systematically extracted from the reviewed studies, organized according to the study objectives and themes. For Objective 1, the figure shows the factors influencing

subjective career success, categorized into four main types: personal factors (e.g., values, behaviors), environmental factors (e.g., organizational support, relationships), demographic factors (e.g., age, gender), and cultural factors. For Objective 2, the figure highlights the available measurement tools, such as SCSI and CSS, along with their psychometric strength and weaknesses. Particular attention is drawn to issues such as gender invariance and cross-cultural applicability (Hofmans et al., 2008; Briscoe et al., 2021). Finally, for Objective 3, the figure depicts the thematic interconnections, including how the development of scales effects cross-cultural validity.

A narrative method served as the basis for the synthesis of findings, facilitating the integration of many viewpoints and the discovery of trends, gaps, and contradictions in the literature. This method made it easier to comprehend subjective career success holistically as a complex concept influenced by organizational, societal, and human influences. The review offers a strong basis for developing theoretical knowledge and real-world applications in the field of career studies by tackling the three goals using this methodological framework.

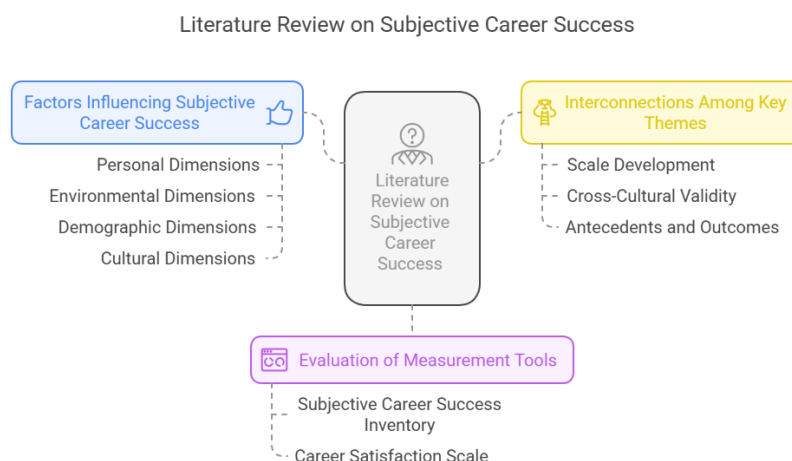


Figure 1. Literature Review for Subjective Career Success

Results and Discussion

The results are presented according to three main objectives. The primary determinants of subjective career success are reviewed in the first section. The effectiveness of the available measurement instruments is examined in the second section, which also evaluates their relevance and dependability. The final section highlights shortcomings in current methods and identifies areas that require improvement. Important topics like scale development, cross cultural considerations, and the cause and consequences of subjective career success are also examined. Table 2 illustrates ten out of fifty articles discussed in this review.

Table 2: List of Subjective Career Success Articles

Authors	Title	Year	Source title	Cited by
Pan, J. & Zhou, W.	How do employees construe their career success: An	2015	International Journal of	31

	improved measure of subjective career success		Selection and Assessment	
Shockley, K. M., Ureksoy, H., Rodopman O. B., Poteat, L. F., & Dullaghan, T. R.	Development of a new scale to measure subjective career success: A mixed-methods study	2016	Journal of Organizational Behavior	183
Seema, A. & Sujatha, S.	Individual variables on subjective career success - An empirical study from an Indian context	2016	International Journal of Applied Business and Economic Research	1
Briscoe, J. P., Kaše, R., Dries, N., Dysvik, A., Unite, J. A., Adeleye, I., Andresen, M., Apospori, E., Babalola, O., Bagdadli, S., Çakmak-Otluglu, K. Ö., Casado, T., Cerdin, J.-L., Cha, J.-S., Chudzikowski, K., Dello Russo, S., Eggenhofer-Rehart, P., Fei, Z., Gianecchini, M., ... Zikic, J.	Here, there, & everywhere: Development and validation of a cross-culturally representative measure of subjective career success	2021	Journal of Vocational Behavior	41
Mokhtar, W. N. B., Hamzah, A. S. B. & Bouchard, M. L.	The Convergence of Views on Career Success from Different Socio-cultural Backgrounds: Comparative Analysis	2022	Journal of Management World	0
Gaile, A., Baumanė-Vītolīņa, I., Kivipõld, K. & Stibe A.	Examining subjective career success of knowledge workers	2022	Review of Managerial Science	13
Gaile, A., Baumanė Vitolina, I., Stibe, A. & Kivipõld, K.	Expanding career adaptability: connections as a critical component of career success	2024	European Journal of Management and Business Economics	3
Jackson, D., Bridgstock, R., Lambert, C., Tofa, M., & Sibson, R.	Subjective career success among new graduates and the role of personal factors	2024	Education and Training	0
Teow, H. H., Au, W. C. & Ahmed, P. K.	Navigating sustainable careers: the role of subjective career success, career crafting, and social capital	2024	European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	0

Nexhip, A., Riley, M. & Robinson, K.	Defining career success: A cross-sectional analysis of health information managers' perceptions	2023	Health Information Management Journal	1
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To Review Key Factors Influencing Subjective Career Success

The analysis of the primary determinants of subjective career success reveals a multidimensional interaction of personal, environmental, demographic, and cultural factors. Personal values and behaviour are major drivers of subjective career success experienced by individuals. For instance, research evidence has consistently shown that self-direction and power are two of the primary personal values driving subjective career success (Gaile et al., 2022; Spurk et al., 2019). These values impact the career aspirations of people and govern the decision-making process, ultimately affecting the sense of fulfilment. In addition, positive career attitudes, such as confidence, flexibility, and control, play a major role in facilitating career success (Gaile et al., 2024). Individuals who have control over their careers by seeking development and advancement opportunities tend to report higher job satisfaction and perceived success.

Environmental determinants, particularly organizational support and interpersonal relationships, also affect subjective career success. Recognition from supervisors, job satisfaction, and a sense of achievement in the workplace are enumerated among the main factors in determining an individual's perception of success (Nexhip et al., 2023). Effective professional networks and mentorship have been found to instil a sense of belonging and meaning, which are the important drivers for career satisfaction (Gaile et al., 2024). Companies that create a positive work environment characterized by open communication, equal opportunities, and appreciation of employees' effort are more likely to enhance their employees' subjective career success. This review emphasized the necessity for a connection between organizational practice and the needs of the employers to provide satisfaction and retention.

Subjective career success is also influenced by demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, and work experience. Research indicates that older employees are more likely to have higher subjective career success with experience and stability (Seema & Sujatha, 2016). Nonetheless, gender disparities still exist, with women usually facing difficulties regarding work-life balance and structural impediments to career progression (Ellinas et al., 2018). Literatures also highlight that women often encounter numerous challenges and obstacles in their careers, which can lead to a lower level of subjective career success (Santos, 2016). Family responsibilities and marital status also influence subjective career success, particularly for career professionals who have professional and personal responsibilities to fulfil. This review underscores the need for specific context intervention that meets the different needs of different demographic groups.

The cultural and contextual variations bring another layer of complexity in determining subjective career success. Cross-cultural studies confirm that societal values, norms, and expectations also play a key role in shaping the way individuals define and achieve success (Briscoe et al., 2021). Collectivist societies can emphasize group harmony and contributions to society over individual success, whereas individualist societies emphasize individual

achievement and self-reliance (Mokhtar et al., 2022). These distinctions necessitate culture-sensitive measures and frameworks that can accurately measure subjective career success. Lack of cross-culturally validated measures remains a significant limitation in current research, and hence a need for further research.

It is apparent that subjective career success is a multifaceted construct influenced by an interplay of dynamic factors. Personal values and proactive behavior function as internal drivers, while environmental support and cultures provide external scaffolding to individuals' views of success. Demographic variables further complicate the view, highlighting the need for adjusting strategies to match populations. By combining evidence across various studies, this review deepens the understanding of determinants of subjective career success and lays the foundation for future research. Future studies need to focus on developing robust, culture resistance measurement tools and investigating those groups that are underrepresented, so a clearer idea about this evolving concept can be developed.

To Review The Effectiveness Of Current Measurement Tools.

Measuring subjective career success continues to be a challenging task because it is a multidimensional construct that requires strong and valid measurements. In the past, researchers created different tools to measure what people feel about their career success, including two of the most applied measures, the SCSi and the CSS. The effectiveness of these instruments, which seeks to measure various aspects of subjective career success, differs according to their psychometrics qualities, suitability for use with various demographic and cultural settings (Shockley et al., 2016; Briscoe et al., 2021).

The SCSi, constructed by Shockley et al. (2016), is one of the most widely used and comprehensive measures currently available. It measures subjective career success in eight dimensions: recognition, quality work, meaningful work, influence, authenticity, growth and development, satisfaction, and work-life balance. SCSi is shown to have high reliability and validity across occupational groups, and it is a useful tool for career practitioners and researchers. According to some research, its length and complexity may prevent it from being widely used in corporate environments where shorter assessment is preferred (Seema & Sujatha, 2016). Furthermore, the use of SCSis in non-Western cultures remains lacking in research, as career success perceptions may differ significantly across cultural contexts (Briscoe et al., 2021).

On the other hand, Greenhaus et al. (1990) created the CSS, another popular tool that measures people's general happiness with their professional development. The CSS is a useful tool for researchers and human resource professional development because of its simplicity and convenience of use. However, its capacity to adequately represent the complex and multifaceted nature of subjective career success has been questioned. According to research by Hofmans et al. (2008), there may be a gender invariance problem with CSS, which could cause men and women to interpret or react to the scale in different ways. This drawback indicates that more work needs to be done to improve its accuracy and inclusivity across a range of demographics.

A second important issue with respect to the available measurement instruments is cross-cultural validity. Although subjective career success is a concept with worldwide application, its meaning and interpretation will differ within cultural and socioeconomic contexts (Briscoe

et al., 2021). Individualistic culture, for example, may value autonomy and personal success more than collectivist cultures, which may value social contribution and collective appreciation. In recent years, attempts to develop cross-culturally equivalent measures, such as those of Briscoe et al. (2021), show the need for the development of adapted and validated measures of career success that can be transferred across settings. Hence, the need for culturally responsive tools calls for further empirical investigation.

In conclusion, instrumental innovations such as SCSi and CSS would be said to have contributed significantly to advancing the tool for measuring subjective career success, the length of the scales, invariance across genders, and applicability across cultures point to future refinement. Future work should aim to evolve newer instruments that are concise, culturally adaptable, and might also guarantee timely comparisons because careers are successful if pursued meaningfully. Addressing these challenges will enhance theoretical understanding and improve practical applications in career development, HR management, and organizational development.

To Examine The Connection Of Key Themes Such As Scale Development, Cross-Cultural, Outcomes, And Antecedents.

Figure 2 provides a structured diagram of key themes related to subjective career success, which discusses and recognizes key areas of consideration. The concept map divides the subjective career success elements into four broad branches: Scale Development, Cross-Cultural Factors, Outcomes, and Antecedents. These topics are then further divided into individualized subtopics that serve to provide a better grasp on career success as a subjective factor.

The first branch: Scale development discusses how subjective career success is measured, and the impact of career development curricula on graduate outcomes. The importance of creating effective measuring tools to measure individuals' perceptions of career success is accurately revealed through this theme.

Secondly, cross-cultural issues address the career equality factor and the use of qualitative analysis in studying career success differences across cultures. These factors stress the need for culturally sensitive models that acknowledge different career expectations and definitions of success.

Thirdly, the outcome examines the broader implications of subjective career success, underscoring its link with meaningful work and career satisfaction. The latter are predictors of how subjective career success perception influences work engagement, productivity, and overall well-being.

Lastly, antecedents investigate underlying theories which influence an individual's subjective career achievement. Socio-emotionally selectivity theory and the motivational theory of lifespan development are on the graph and provide psychological understanding regarding how a person's career achievement in the lifespan is created through personal motivations and transitions through the lifespan.

This visualization offers a complete image of the complex and multi-faceted nature of subjective career success. It highlights the interplay between theoretical concepts, measurement strategies, and applied applications, and offers a valuable reference point for researchers, Human Resource professionals, and policymakers regarding career development.

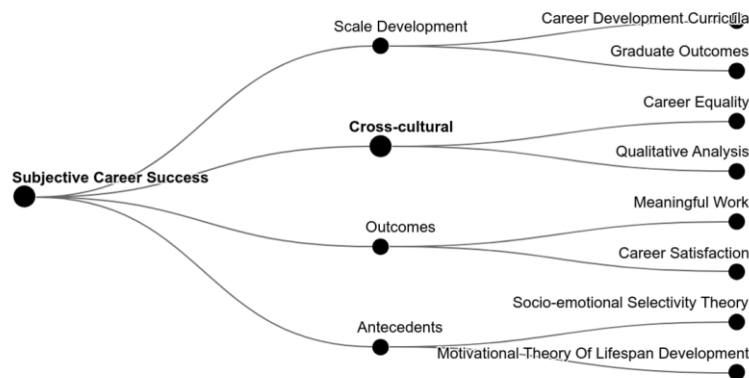


Figure 2. Subjective Career Success Concept Map

Linkages Between Subjective Career Success And Scale Development.

The relationship between subjective career success and the development of measurement scales bears a deep implication with career development curricula design and effectiveness and their influence on graduate outcomes. Subjective career success refers to a measure of career success by the person himself or herself, such as job satisfaction, promotion, and congruence with personal goals (Shockley et al., 2016). It is necessary to measure this construct appropriately to develop programs in enhancing the employability and satisfaction of graduates.

The SCSi captures significant dimensions such as recognition, sense of value at work, influence, authenticity, development, satisfaction, and work-life balance. Comprehensive assessment tools enable educators to measure the degree to which career development courses support these aspects, enabling institutions to rationalize program design and delivery.

Bridgstock et al. (2019) observe that embedding career development learning in curricula rather than treating it as an add-on leads to better graduate outcomes. Tools like the SCSi provide measurable feedback on students' perception of being career-ready, making it easier to evaluate such embedded curricula.

Moreover, these measurement scales help to direct continuous curriculum development by highlighting areas that students feel less well-prepared for, thus allowing targeted improvement. For instance, if low confidence in balancing work and life is reported by students, curricula can be modified to include time management and self-care.

In summary, subjective career success and measurement scale construction are required in shaping effective, responsive career development curricula. Tools like SCSi allow educators to design programs that not only educate students but also equip them with successful careers (Shockley et al., 2016; Bridgstock et al., 2019).

The Linkages Between Subjective Career Success And Cross-Cultural.

Subjective career success, defined as the individual's own assessment of career achievement, is different across cultures due to divergent society values, work norms, and opportunity access. Cross-cultural research emphasizes that career equity, that is gender and socioeconomic status-based on career equity, is the primary driver of such perceptions (Briscoe et al., 2021). Long-term career outcome disparities typically stem from systemic discrimination and cultural norms, and therefore equal access to career achievement is an important component in the definition of subjective career success (Mokhtar et al., 2022).

Personal and behavioral traits such as self-direction, confidence, and flexibility work differently in cultural settings (Gaile et al., 2022). Professional achievement in collectivist cultures is typically aligned with family obligations and social cohesion, while in an individualistic culture, personal achievement and financial compensation take center stage. Additionally, proactive behaviors such as networking and skill upgrade are very essential in cultures focusing on personal agency, which is the ability of individuals to make decisions and perform acts that impact their surroundings and way of life (Smale et al., 2019).

The subjective career success situation is further complicated by gender and cultural considerations, as women around the world struggle to balance work and family or advance in their jobs despite variations in law and customs (Mokhtar et al., 2022). Some cultures support women's development through formal systems, while others rely on word-of-mouth networks. This shows the importance of having inclusive organizational policies. These analyses suggest that most individuals value intrinsic constructs, such as meaningful work, and extrinsic constructs, such as recognition and security (Gaile et al., 2024). Such information is vital in establishing culturally appropriate and inclusive models of careers.

Overall, subjective career success is strongly shaped by fairness in career opportunities, career equity and cultural values. Inclusive career development strategies are important for supporting diverse career paths and goals.

The Linkages Between Subjective Career Success With Outcomes.

Work that is congruent with personal values and aspirations, or meaningful work, is strongly associated with subjective career success (Shockley et al., 2016). Literature shows that individuals who are content with meaningful work have higher satisfaction and success (Gaile et al., 2022). Personal values such as self-direction and power impact the congruence and career decision-making and satisfaction. People's perception of success is enhanced when they feel appreciated and fulfilled, underscoring the significance of encouraging work setting.

Variables like fulfilment, satisfaction at work, and appreciation not only have their root in subjective accomplishment but also sustain it, and there exists a mutualism among them (Gaile et al., 2024). If an individual feels valuable and significant in his profession, then career success by his own perception significantly enhanced.

Career adaptability and interpersonal relations also support subjective career success by facilitating a sense of belonging and the ability to adapt to career change (Gaile et al., 2024). These facilitate people to manage adversity and create meaning, and hence maintain career satisfaction.

Objective indicators, like promotions, can validate career success and induce subjective success, but their impact is based on values (Stumpf & Tymon, 2012). Despite advancements, more holistic, culture-balanced measures are required to measure subjective career success and its impact (Shockley et al., 2016). Subsequent research should bridge this gap to provide more representative and insightful results.

The Linkages Between Subjective Career Success With Antecedents.

While much of the existing research on subjective career success has drawn on theories such as social cognitive career theory, career construction theory, and human capital theory (Supriatna et al., 2022), there remains room to incorporate broader lifespan perspectives. Subjective career success is influenced by several antecedents, and it can be understood better from the perspective of socio-emotional selectivity theory (SST) and motivational theory of lifespan development (MTLD). SST indicates that when people get older and view time as limited, they begin to prioritize emotionally significant goals and relationships at the expense of long-term future-oriented ones (Carstensen et al., 2011). This transformation impacts what more mature workers define as career success, usually prioritizing relationships and legacy over advancement. As individuals reach middle and later stages of life, subjective career success tends to be closely linked to emotional fulfilment and aligned with their personal values.

MTLD fills the gap by highlighting the dynamics through which intrinsic and extrinsic motivation develop across the lifespan (Heckhausen et al., 2010). In early careers, people tend to be driven by growth, learning, and achieving objectives. With time, motivation moves towards sustaining stability, developing significant relationships, and pursuing autonomy and purpose. These dynamics affect how people define career success, with intrinsic satisfaction gaining importance over external achievement (Gaile et al., 2022).

Interpersonal relationships, such as mentorship and strong professional networks, play an important role in supporting career adaptability, emotional well-being, and a sense of belonging, which contribute to subjective career success (Gaile et al., 2024). As individuals mature, they grow more selective with their high-quality, emotionally rich relationships, mirroring SST's core principles.

Individual proactive behavior and agency are also fundamental connecting bridges of these theories to career success. The motivational theory relies on goal-directed action and self-regulation, whereas SST hinges on adaptability under the condition of shifting temporal horizons. Proactive activities, e.g. seeking advocacy, professional development, and self-advocacy, which are core drivers of subjective career success (Shockley et al., 2016), enabling individuals to fit their careers into shifting goals and emotional demands.

Besides the merit of SST and MTLD theory, there is still a need to carry out further research to apply these paradigms in different populations and cultures. Cultural assumptions and demographic characteristics, such as those affecting women, minorities, and aging workers, might influence subjective career achievement experience (Briscoe et al., 2021). Future studies need to explore these differences to promote more universal and efficient career development strategies.

Conclusion

This literature review has delved into the complex construct of subjective career success, its most significant antecedents, outcomes, and measurement difficulties. Thus, this review has achieved all three objectives mentioned earlier. It is evident through the findings that subjective career success is influenced by an interactive dynamic mix of personal, environmental, demographic, and cultural factors. Personal values, proactive behaviors, and interpersonal relationships become key drivers of people's definitions of success, while rewards, job satisfaction, and meaningful work become reinforcing consequences. Cross-cultural and demographic variance also map the complexity of this construct, emphasizing context-dependent ways of comprehending and facilitating subjective career success. These results contribute to a more profound theoretical understanding of the way individuals think about and achieve success in their professions.

This review has theoretical implications that are significant as they extend existing frameworks by integrating socio-emotional selectivity theory and the theory of lifespan development motivation within the subjective career success discourse. The theories enhance the knowledge on how individuals' subjective career success evolves over time. The review also emphasizes the worth of connecting personal values and career goals and developing flexibility to transition effectively. These additions not only improve academic discourse but also pave the way for the subsequent theoretical waves in career research,

In practice, the results offer valuable suggestions to individuals and organizations seeking to raise subjective career success and fulfilment. For individuals, the alignment of personal values with career aspirations and activation of proactive behaviors can enhance success perceptions. For organizations, creating facilitative environments that appreciate recognition, mentorship, and meaningful work can enhance staff engagement and retention. In addition, flexible work options and tailored career development initiatives will be able to meet the diverse needs of employees at different stages of their lives and cultural backgrounds. These can optimize personal well-being and organizational performance and are therefore invaluable resources for practitioners.

Despite its value addition, this review acknowledges some limitations. First, reliance on published literature accessible by databases like Scopus may have excluded studies in non-indexed journals or other forms that would otherwise be included, and hence, the extent of the findings may be reduced. Second, the exclusion of peer-reviewed empirical research may have dismissed high-quality qualitative research or emerging trends in subjective career success. Third, the review does recognize research gaps in relation to underrepresented populations, such as women, minorities, and older workers, whose unique experiences are still inadequately addressed. Finally, the absence of longitudinal studies and cross-cultural support for measurement tools underscores a necessity to build methodological advances in the field.

Recommendation

Firstly, the review process faced challenges related to overlapping definitions of career success, inconsistent terminology, limited access to certain sources, and the need for consistency in inclusion and exclusion decisions. While these challenges did not undermine the rigor of the study, they highlight areas where the review process could be strengthened and serve as a basis for methodological improvements. Difficulties in distinguishing between subjective and objective career success could be improved by applying clearer operational definitions and

inter-rater reliability checks. Variations in terminology may be mitigated through expanded keyword strategies, controlled vocabularies, and piloted search strings. Access limitations can be addressed by broadening database coverage, using institutional repositories, and requesting articles directly from authors.

Secondly, to resolve these reviews' limitations and build on current knowledge, future studies can pursue several promising directions. First, there is a pressing need to develop culturally sensitive and psychometrically adequate measures to evaluate subjective career success with equitable representation across groups. Second, mixed-method and longitudinal designs could further illuminate the way subjective career success evolves longitudinally and varies by context. Third, underrepresented populations must be studied to uncover context-specific insight and design more targeted interventions. Finally, researchers and practitioners can join force to turn research findings into real world strategies that help meets the demands of modern work environments.

In conclusion, this review calls for the uptake of a contextual and integrated perspective towards conceptualizing subjective career success. Future research can further expand this critical construct and help promote meaningful and lasting careers for people across contexts.

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