

A Review of Career Success with Gender, Human Resource Policies and Cultural Diversity

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Abstract: Career success has always remained an important variable to study among human resource specialists. A number of researchers have tried to make sense of the term. Moreover, the importance of career success has been highlighted during the 2007-2012 financial crises that had a message for career pursuers. The crisis is known by economists as the worst since the great depression of the 1930's. Some of the best institutions collapsed and stock markets began to crash, resulting in bailout by the governments. In the wake of global economic turmoil, there is unemployment rampant which has made people to re-think about their careers and what it holds for them. It is, therefore, important to look into career success especially with regards to the various factors causing it. The present article has an emphasis on gender, human resource management policies and cross cultural comparisons from previous research done so as to get a better picture of the dependent variable, i.e. career success. These factors have been chosen as they are a representative of an individual, an organization and a nation respectively. The current article is especially beneficial for those who are new to the area of career studies and intend to research on the various factors responsible for career success.

Key words: Career Success • Human Resource Management • Gender • Culture Comparison

INTRODUCTION

Wilensky [1] defined career as: "A succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered, predictable sequence" (p. 554).

The word "career" is thus both descriptive and evaluative. It is descriptive for an individual, as it includes the life events unfolding in one's career such as job switches, transitions, joblessness, migrations and education. And it is also evaluative, meaning horizontal growth through an increase in stature, pay and rank.

The term "success" can also be described as both descriptive and evaluative. It is descriptive for progress made during a person's lifetime and evaluative for assessing the outcomes he or she has made during the course of their life.

However, professionals often overlook the real meaning of career success. They think of it in objective terms, like increase in one's pay, or rank, which may lead

to goals that are inconsistent with their personal values. Likewise, staying in sync with one's career preferences is not an easy task [2]. Every organization has its own demands, pressures and cultural requirements. The Enron case highlights the very predicament where personal values may go against the organizational norms. In the contemporary era, therefore, the employees are expected to have well laid out goals, with strategies that are consistent with one's ideals. In other words, those who remain true to their values, interests and lifestyle preferences will achieve success in the long run.

Moreover, career success has two off-shoots that correspond to the objective and subjective dimensions. Here, extrinsic career success includes salary, promotion and hierarchical status [3]. Whereas, intrinsic career success, on the other hand, there is an overriding feeling of satisfaction that comes through one's job performance [3]. Career success is, therefore, an individual outcome and depends upon and then pays back the organizational success.

It can also be said, thereby, that the success of an individual in his or her career is a result of outcomes that are desirable and dependent upon the human resource management, gender and cultural barriers [3]. According to Ng *et al.* [4],

“Human capital and socio-demographic predictors displayed stronger relationships with objective career success, whereas organizational sponsorship and stable individual differences were generally more related to subjective career success. Gender and time moderated the relationships.” (p. 400).

It is, however, important to have a closer examination of career success with gender, human resource management policies and cross cultural requirements.

Literature Review

Gender and Career Success: Women’s entry into the mainstream has called for greater attention to their career development and advancement. The percentage of women in the labor force has almost doubled in the span of forty years, according to Greenhaus, Callanan and Godshalk [5]. Moreover, the effects of locus of control and career patterns on career success are important when considering gender [6]. The combined effect of both locus and patterns result in four different career types, i.e. creating, achieving, navigating and adapting. The creating types have self-responsibility for career success and so does the achieving type. However, the navigating and adapting types put a premium on external factors such as networking to enable career success.

In various studies [7-9] confirm that the more a woman acquires human capital, i.e. knowledge, skills and experience, the more she feels satisfied with career success. The research has also showed that with children come organizational changes, job changes, while older women have greater changes in career, job and organization. The accommodator types, however, had lower contributions of human capital to success than the navigators and achievers. The results seem to support the notion that women desire continuous, long-term employment on a permanent basis. The number of women falling within the accommodator types had more objective measures of success in mind, while the navigating and achieving types had more subjective measures like work-life enjoyment and personal fulfillment. Also, it is seen in research that there is decreased satisfaction with career success with marriage and an increase with children for navigator types, while for the accommodators it was the opposite situation.

Likewise, in study on the effects of peer support on the career success of both men and women, peer support has been found to be a significant predictor of men’s career success rather than women’s [10]. Even though women received more peer support than men, it is men who receive more influential peer support than women. So, it can be said that the quality of support matters and not just the quantity. Similarly, personal support is more related to women’s feeling of success rather than that of men’s. By personal support it is meant support received from colleagues on career-related issues. It can also mean help received from career counselors within or outside of the organization. This support guides individuals to realize their aspirations and achieve higher levels of career success. Personal support is more influential for women rather than for men, since women are entangled in work-life issues and try to balance the two.

Human Resource Management Practices and Career Success: Performance management and professional development have been related to career success [11]. This relationship of career success with professional development has been stronger for international firms. This suggests that in international firms, career development is viewed as an essential ingredient to career success. Here, career success is taken as a subjective term perceived by the employee. And is thus the accrument of one’s achievements over the years.

Moreover, the human resource policies in the form of organizational support, as well as a proactive personality and career management behavior are positively related to career satisfaction, whereas career management behavior mediates the relationship between proactive personality and career satisfaction. This was found in a study by Barnett and Bradley [12] on ninety professionals of various public and private sector companies in Australia. Participants completed a survey including proactivity, organizational support, career management behavior and career satisfaction.

Career transitions, furthermore, are defined as inter-organizational or intra-organizational movement of employees or changes in their functional domain [13]. Career transitions provide opportunities for employees to develop new skills and competencies, thereby, contributing to a person’s employability and ultimate career success. In a study by Chudzikowski and Mayrhofer [13] on business alumni from an Austrian University, two cohorts of business alumni are selected, i.e. one cohort from 1970 and the other cohort from 1990.

The study employed the first fifteen working years of each cohort to see how the environment had an impact on each. The first cohort on average made 2.3 career transitions, while the second averaged 3.0 career transitions throughout the first fifteen years of their career. It was observed that the frequency and complexity with which the new cohort moved across the workplace spectrum seemed to provide some support for the assumptions about the so-called 'changing nature of careers'.

However, temporary employees tend to be less enthusiastic about networking and are less committed to their professional work, as compared to the permanently employed individuals [14]. In a study by Allen [14] on one hundred and eighty two temporary nurses and four hundred and seventy six permanent nurses working in Australia, it was found out that temporary nurses perceived lower career success as compared to permanent ones. Temporary nurses also reported lower affective and interactional commitments. Temporary nurses are thus those who work for no fixed hours and,

"...are not entitled to paid holiday, sick leave, public holidays, dismissal or redundancy payments" (Allen [14], p.198).

Furthermore, network resources have been found to be associated with intra-organizational career success over and above human capital, demographics and mentoring received, while, there is a fundamental difference found between instrumental and expressive network resources in the way they associate with career success [15]. Here, network resources include multiple relationships with other members who can be lower, higher or at the same rank as the individuals studied. The term, here, also refers to mentors and counselors whom the individual interacts with on a day-to-day basis.

There is thus, a difference between instrumental network resources and expressive network resources. The former relies on links with the upper echelons, so as to move up the job, while the latter is concerned with emotional support in the form of friendship, feedback and peer-support. In his study on employees working in British universities, Bozionelos [15] showed a relationship between extrinsic career success and instrumental network resources on one hand and intrinsic career success and expressive network resources on the other.

Networking, however, in terms of managerial position seems to have a limited effect when it moderates the relationship between networking and career success. In a study by Rasdi, Garavan and Ismail [16] on Malaysian

public servants working in managerial cadres, showed that indulging in external contacts, building professional activities, taking part in community activities and maintaining internal visibility, are correlated with subjective and objective career success. Maintaining external contacts are related to better promotions within and outside the organization. However, this did not lead to career satisfaction, which means that managers may have to spend some time out of the work environment.

Also, it has been observed that challenging tasks are related with better performance evaluations [15]. The higher the managerial rank, the more social he or she becomes. Also, it has been observed that the top brass tended to be more social and more internally visible. However, the managerial stance did not moderate the link between networking and the subjective aspect of success within one's career. There was an increased emphasis on balancing work and family, which resulted in low levels of satisfaction with networking.

The supervisors, therefore, are responsible for providing support and guidance to individuals in their careers who have a potential to excel [16]. Psychological contract breaches, according to Abele and Spurk [17], are feelings of violations, mistrust and job dissatisfaction on behalf of employees so they are not able to show organization commitment behaviors. In a study by Abele and Spurk [17], on the relationship between psychological contract breaches and career success, the researchers found the supervisor-subordinate relationship more essential than performance on the job.

Cross-Cultural Comparisons and Career Success:

There have been a number of cross-cultural studies on career success [18] [19] [20] [21]. Punnett *et al.* [18] interviewed individuals from different occupations, demography and lifestyles. The study included only women who had been successful in their careers. The nine countries chosen for the study included USA, Canada, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Barbados, Jamaica and St. Vincent. No clear difference was found in career satisfaction and success among the American states. Older and married individuals, however, had a more satisfied career than younger, single individuals.

Similarly, a study by Noordin *et al.* [19] also found no clear difference between a collective society like Malaysia and an individualistic society like Australia. Both scored almost the same in terms of career identity and planning, which shows that Malaysia is heading towards more individualistic lifestyles as economic changes sweep the

country. The study was carried out among managers in both countries. However, there is a difference in the approach towards career success when it comes to Caucasian, Chinese and South Asian and black employees working in Information Technology and financial sector jobs in Canada [19]. The black employees were the least satisfied, with 13 % less than Caucasian employees; Chinese were 8.3 % less happy with careers than the Caucasians, while the South Asians and Caucasians scored almost the same in career satisfaction.

Similarly, differences were found between Canadian and Chinese nationalities. In a study by Yu [21] on employees working in different occupations, like university teaching, consulting and technology firms, showed that Canadians like doing jobs that suit their taste and lifestyles and are more subjective about their success, while the Chinese prefer higher salaries and promotions coupled with power, which are objective measures of success. Similarly, proactive support by colleagues and one's organization is considered more important by Chinese than by Canadians [22-25].

In the same study, twelve predictors of career success were rated by the nationals of both countries. These twelve predictors included personality, age, family support, work experience, education, proactive colleagues, children, gender, organizational support, language, parents' salary and parents' career success. Among the twelve, three were rated as highly predictive of success. These were work experience, education and personality.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that career success is less of an objective phenomenon measured by pay or the number of promotions and more subjective in nature. It varies from profession to profession and gender. Career success is an important variable to study because by studying it one gets a better idea of what his or her standing is with respect to the goals, aspirations and competencies.

It is also evident from the above mentioned comparison that career success is an important variable to study especially with regards to not only gender but also human resource policies and cross cultural comparison. Most of research on career success has been from an Anglo-American perspective. More studies are needed in this regard that can have comparative review of career success in developing countries.

Moreover, it is important to know that career success is the key to better human resources equipped with the knowledge, skills and abilities. Nations that do not develop their human resources are dependent on others for exporting labor. Like, for example, in the United Arab Emirates, foreign labor force is estimated to have grown to around 8.2 million by end of 2010, with UAE nationals making only 11.47 percent [22].

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