

Career success in a boundaryless career world[†]

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Summary

This paper compares contemporary career theory with the theory applied in recent career success research. The research makes inconsistent use of career theory, and in particular neglects the interdependence of the objective and subjective careers, and ‘boundaryless career’ issues of inter-organizational mobility and extra-organizational support. The paper offers new guidelines for bringing about a rapprochement between career theory and career success research. These guidelines cover adequacy of research designs, further dimensions of career success, broader peer group comparisons, deeper investigation of the subjectively driven person, and seeing new connections between boundaryless career theory and career success research. Copyright © 2005 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Introduction

In this paper we argue for rapprochement between career theory and career success research. On the one hand, career theorists speak increasingly of boundaryless careers, where career opportunities transcend any single employer (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), and of the personal meaning of career success (Hall, 2002). On the other hand, a number of researchers continue to focus on career success in terms of a person’s organizational position, or of attained promotions between positions. This contrast is sharpened by further reports that traditional vehicles for organizational career success, namely hierarchies, have been flattening (Littler, Wiesner, & Dunford, 2003), and that external labor markets have gained increasing influence over today’s employment landscape (Cappelli, 1999).

There are several reasons why rapprochement is important. First, there are grounds to beware of fragmentation of underlying theory. As this paper will show, one body of research relies on an argument that objective career success affects subjective career success (e.g., Poole, Langan-Fox, &

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Omodei, 1993). Another group of papers elevates the role of subjective career success over objective career success (e.g., Aryee, Chay, & Tan, 1994). A third group of papers insists that the subjective and objective sides of career success are interdependent (e.g., Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). In each body of research authors have often used cross-sectional designs and relied on what is statistically measurable. This selective emphasis on different phenomena makes it difficult to reconcile the results obtained, and leaves questions about how to develop established career theory.

A second reason for rapprochement concerns the interpretation of career success. Most studies of career success rely on key variables such as number of promotions, salary increases, or scales of career satisfaction (e.g., Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001; Turban & Dougherty, 1994). However, career theory suggests a broader range of interpretations, based not only on success within any organization but also on success within other, for example occupational or cultural, contexts. Career success may also be assessed by peer groups either within or outside the individual's present organization, or may be idiosyncratic to the person, not only in terms of personal preferences but also in terms of accommodating work and family or other issues of life-work balance (Clark, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999).

A third reason for rapprochement is that the employment context in which careers evolve is rapidly changing. Contemporary employment contexts call for careers to be more 'boundaryless' (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), to reflect a 'new deal' that has the career actor more concerned with independent rather than organizational goals (Cappelli, 1999), and to involve the kind of 'metacompetencies' that allow for easier mobility between successive employers (Hall, 2002). There is evidence that people who exhibit boundaryless career behavior report considerably higher levels of career success (e.g., Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003). However, much career success research, including some recent research, neglects boundaryless career theory. This calls into question the further utility of the results obtained.

In this paper we examine the degree of divergence between contemporary career theory and career success research. The argument is divided into three parts. The first part reviews key attributes of career theory that are relevant to career success. The second part looks at the extent to which these attributes have been included in a sample of studies covering 11 years of published career success research. The third part builds on the contrast between the first two parts, and offers guidelines for rapprochement between career theory and career success research. The guidelines cover a range of issues from the underlying theoretical adequacy of research designs to the incorporation of new challenges associated with a boundaryless career world.

Theory Underlying Career Success

Career success research draws on career theory, and therefore on the ideas—underlying definitions, concepts, relationships and assumptions—included in career theory. We note below six definitions and five attributes that are especially relevant to career success research. The definitions cover the key terms career, subjective career, objective career, and related definitions of career success. The first three attributes concern the duality of the subjective and objective sides of the career, the interdependence between these two sides, and the theoretical adequacy of the research model adopted. From a boundaryless career theory perspective we propose two further attributes related to career success concerned with (a) inter-organizational mobility and (b) extra-organizational career support.

Definitions

An established definition of *career* is the unfolding sequence of a person's work experiences over time (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989). This definition insists on the relevance of time, rather than adopting

any static view of work arrangements. It also avoids any constraining assumptions about where people work or what represents career success. It accommodates a view of career success based on an individual's upward mobility within a single organization, but only as a special case of broader possibilities. These can include upward, horizontal, or in some cases downward mobility within recognized organizational, occupational, industrial, or national contexts, or mobility between any of these contexts.

Careers can also be described in two fundamentally different ways. On the one hand there are *subjective careers*, reflecting the individual's own sense of his or her career and what it is becoming (Stebbins, 1970). On the other hand there are *objective careers*, reflecting the more or less publicly observable positions, situations, and status 'that serve as landmarks for gauging a person's movement through the social milieu' (Barley, 1989, p. 49).

Career success is an outcome of a person's career experiences. *Career success* may be defined as the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person's work experiences over time. This accommodates the definition of career provided above. It also accommodates two meanings of success suggested by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989), namely 'the attainment of an object according to one's desire,' and 'the prosperous achievement of something attempted.' The first meaning suggests a form of success that is personally (i.e., subjectively) desirable, while the second suggests a form of success—prosperity—that is likely to rely on (largely objective) social comparisons. These alternative meanings suggest that, as with careers, there are two distinct ways of viewing career success.

Subjective career success may be defined as the individual's internal apprehension and evaluation of his or her career, across any dimensions that are important to that individual (Van Maanen, 1977, p. 9). People have different career aspirations, and place different values on such factors as income, employment security, the location of work, status, progression through different jobs, access to learning, the importance of work versus personal and family time, and so on. The subjective careers of people in similar social and employment circumstances—such as women, minorities, white males, doctors, secretaries, construction workers—may overlap, but 'it would be a mistake . . . to assume that all members in a particular social category' would share the same subjective career orientations (Bailyn, 1989, p. 482).

In contrast, *objective career success* may be defined as an external perspective that delineates more or less tangible indicators of an individual's career situation. These may involve occupation, family situation, mobility, task attributes, income, and job level (Van Maanen, 1977, p. 9). The objective career is publicly accessible, and concerned with social role and official position. Writers who see career success from this perspective view it in structural terms (Wilensky, 1961) and emphasize people's propensity to organize around status differences (Nicholson, 1998). Objective career success reflects shared social understanding rather than distinctive individual understanding.

The above definitions reflect mainstream ideas within contemporary career theory. They provide a point of departure for the various attributes of career theory that we discuss next.

Subjective–objective career duality

Career theory not only suggests that there are subjective and objective views of careers, but also proposes an inherent 'two-sidedness' of the career concept (Goffman, 1961). This two-sidedness stems from the observation that 'there is little reason to assume the [subjective and objective careers] coincide on any dimension,' and that the degree of coincidence is a crucial issue for careers research (Van Maanen, 1977, p. 9). For example, artists who perform 'art for art's sake' (Caves, 2000, p. 4) are likely to define success more in terms of the subjective gratification they receive from their work than in

terms of objective rewards from the sale of their work. In contrast, salespeople may be likely to define success more in terms of the money they earn rather than in terms of the intrinsic rewards of the work itself. More generally, career success may be expected to involve both subjective and objective aspects (Melamed, 1995).

Subjective–objective career duality has been a traditional concern of those who have studied the trade-offs between work and family or work and leisure activities. The depiction of ‘career success, personal failure’ (Korman & Korman, 1980) suggests a kind of career actor who pursues objective career success at the cost of subjective ends, such as the gratification from time spent with friends or family. Various approaches to the balance between work and family or work and leisure activities grapple with a similar trade-off between the objective career expectations of employing organizations and the subjective career preferences of the individual worker (Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002).

This is not to suggest that work only involves the objective career and non-work only the subjective career. It is to note that observing career success through either a purely objective lens or a purely subjective lens offers a limited picture. The depth of the career success construct can be better seen from looking through both lenses at the same time.

Interdependence between the subjective and objective sides

Not only are there both subjective and objective sides to the career, but these two sides are seen to be persistently *interdependent*. This reflects an important tenet behind Everett Hughes’ (1958) tutelage of Chicago School scholars that the concept of career could be broadly employed to explore the interdependence of individual roles and identities, on the one hand, and institutional positions and expectations, on the other. As Barley (1989) has emphasized, focusing on only one side of any career violates ‘the integrity of Hughes’s original conception’ that the two sides were inseparable. Only through conceiving both sides could the researcher grasp the social processes that lie behind careers, and behind career success. A classical example involves the adaptation of inner-city schoolteachers to relatively disadvantaged situations. Instead of seeing themselves as unsuccessful because of the low-status schools in which they were employed, the teachers found subjective career success by seeing their work as socially useful, and in turn found objective career success through ‘positions of influence and prestige in the informal colleague structure’ (Becker, 1952, p. 474).

An interdependent perspective sees individuals ‘are not mere puppets responding to the firm tug of social strings’ (Van Maanen, 1977, p. 18). Rather, they are continually interpreting and reinterpreting the work experiences and career success they have had. Objective career experience as both a scientist and a manager may generate a feeling of career success in one role but not the other. This may lead the individual to seek further career success in the same role (for example, as a scientist) but to forgo any further pursuit of career success in the other role (to continue the example, as a manager). More generally, the career success a person has experienced will influence further ‘enactment’ of that career in search of future success (Weick, 1996).

Finally, interdependence occurs over time. People experience objective reality, create understandings about what constitutes career success, and then individually act on those understandings, regardless of their predictive accuracy. For example, Lawrence (1984, 1996) reports on how organizational ‘age norms’—shared understandings among peers about the usual ages at which people get promoted to different job levels—unfold. The process whereby a person (a) joins an organization, (b) socializes with peers, (c) participates in developing a shared understanding about age norms, (d) internalizes that shared understanding in the subjective career, and (e) experiences the eventual objective career experience of either receiving a promotion or not is largely a sequential one. Steps in this sequence, or in the

sequence of events through which Chicago schoolteachers come to settle for what they have, or in the way people incrementally enact their careers based on past experience, can only be observed over time.

Theoretical adequacy

The duality and interdependence of subjective and objective career success described above offer a substantial theoretical platform for further research. However, as Bacharach (1989) notes, underlying theory must be both logically and empirically adequate. Regarding logical adequacy, which concerns us here, the previous discussion calls for (a) inclusion of both the objective and subjective sides of career success and (b) specification of the nature of the relationship between these two sides of career success.

It is straightforward to observe whether any research endeavor includes both the objective and subjective sides of career success, but it is more complicated to assess the adequacy of the relationship between the two sides. A popular approach in the literature has been to rely on cross-sectional designs, and within them on the analysis of correlation (Bray & Howard, 1980; Judge & Bretz, 1994). However, this kind of analysis neglects the role of time, and the interdependence between the subjective and objective careers expected to occur over time. Correlation analysis can be useful for certain kinds of inquiry, but to derive conclusions from cross-sectional research about relationships that unfold over time is clearly risky. Even the most sophisticated statistical techniques ‘cannot rectify for lack of theory, for poor logic or for inadequate research designs’ (Bozionelos, 2003).

Beyond the relationship between objective and subjective career success, career theory also raises questions about other outcome variables. For example, in one research project we witnessed ‘employment opportunities’ were included as a third dependent variable, distinct from both objective and subjective career success. Yet, it is reasonable to expect that employment opportunities will influence career outcomes, as will other contextual variables such as government policy and a person’s social situation. It is also reasonable to expect that these contextual variables will influence both the subjective career (if, for example, employment opportunities exist in the eye of the career actor) and the objective career (if, for example, actual employment opportunities exist in the outside world). It is therefore difficult to envision employment opportunities, or any other work-related variables, as independent of either subjective career success or objective career success.

Inter-organizational mobility

We turn now to two attributes of boundaryless career theory that have a particular significance in the study of career success. The first one, inter-organizational mobility, concerns the fundamental shift in the psychological contract at work. This shift undermines any assumption that an organization will be able to provide lifetime employment, and brings on a new deal where ‘both parties know that the [employment] relationship is unlikely to last forever’ (Cappelli, 1999, p. 3). Our focus here is on the *opportunity* for inter-organizational mobility rather than explicit changes of employer. This is consistent with views of boundaryless careers as involving ‘opportunities that go beyond any single employer’ (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996, p. 116) and reflecting greater ‘independence from, rather than dependence on, traditional organizational career arrangements’ (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 6). A person may take advantage of an opportunity to move without physically moving, for example by leveraging highly marketable skills to renegotiate his or her contract with the current employer.

A related phenomenon is the reshaping of organizations into flatter, less hierarchical structures better suited for adaptation to a changing world (e.g., Littler et al., 2003), which may also turn people’s

attention to other employment opportunities. Accordingly, boundaryless career theory suggests that indicators of objective career success may be emerging as less significant to career actors than indicators of subjective career success. The latter may involve such things as experienced increases in competence, affirmations from respected others, and opportunities for new learning (Weick, 1996). In these situations, the overall significance of the subjective career is elevated (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999; Hall, 2002); so in turn, is the importance of alternative employment opportunities that the subjective career is likely to consider.

The increasing unpredictability of employment and career futures is likely to bring about an even more dynamic relationship between subjective and objective career success. Greater fluctuation in objective career circumstances will call for more frequent responses from the subjective career. These responses will not necessarily result in inter-organizational mobility, but they are likely to lead to more frequent consideration of opportunities that may involve such mobility.

Extra-organizational support

People develop their careers and seek career success by orienting themselves to certain relevant peer groups or work-related communities. These provide a natural vehicle for individuals to identify with, and find shared meaning through, overlapping work experiences (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). Such groups support people in their work roles, and help them make sense of what kind of career success they have attained (Van Maanen, 1980). Moreover, this sense-making need not refer to any advancement through formal positions. Through the eyes of comparable or knowledgeable peers, individual careers may be seen as 'careers of achievement' in terms of skills and behavior, rather than seen as 'careers of advancement' in terms of a person's hierarchical progression (Zabusky & Barley, 1996).

In the past, career support that contributes to career success has often been assumed to stem primarily from co-workers, mentors and bosses within the same organization (e.g., Ibarra, 1993). From a boundaryless career perspective this is unsatisfactory, since it suggests people go unprepared for the career mobility they are likely to experience. Some encouragement for the boundaryless career perspective comes from the work on communities of practice—communities that develop around overlapping work interests or activities. For instance, Brown and Duguid (1991, p. 49) see those communities frequently 'crossing the restrictive boundaries of the organization to incorporate people from outside.' Also, Wenger (1998, p. 6) suggests that 'at home, at work, at school, in our hobbies—we belong to several communities of practice at any given time.' Community-centered career support can be variously found through shared occupational, industry, alumni, family, ideological, or project-related attachments (Arthur & Parker, 2002). Recent work on mentoring relationships suggests those relationships can extend beyond the protégé's place of work, for example when the mentor is a member of the same ethnic or social group (Thomas & Higgins, 1996) or a respected professional in the protégé's adopted field (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

Greater inter-organizational mobility and greater extra-organizational support may both be seen as part of an overall 'weakening' of employer organizations' influence over individual careers. It has been suggested that such weakening is likely to continue in contemporary employment practice as rigid, bureaucratic organizations give way to more flexible, adaptive forms (Weick, 1996). If so, we may expect a greater degree of interdependence of subjective and objective career success over time, as career patterns become more unpredictable.

The lessons from our review of career theory may now be summarized. Careers unfold over time, and career success has both subjective and objective career components. The duality and interdependence of subjective career success and objective career success make each relevant to the other, and likely to influence the other over time. From a boundaryless career perspective, the increased prospects

for both inter-organizational mobility and extra-organizational career support need to be accommodated within career research designs, and both variables are likely to affect the relationship over time between objective and subjective career success. These lessons provide a template against which to consider the assumptions used within empirical career success research. We turn to that research in the next section of this paper.

Empirical Research on Career Success

How does existing research into career success measure up against the definitions and theoretical attributes previously described? In order to pursue this question we searched a range of established journals for articles concerned with career success over the period 1992–2002. We also searched for additional terms related to career success to provide a fuller picture of the research undertaken. The additional terms were career outcomes (e.g., Campion, Cheraskin, & Stevens, 1994), career advancement (e.g., Burlew & Johnson, 1992), career satisfaction (e.g., Nicholson, 1993), and managerial advancement (e.g., Tharenou, 2001).

Our search led to a set of 80 research articles representative of published work within a group of major, empirically oriented social science journals. The journals covered were *Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Career Development Quarterly*, *Human Relations*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Career Development*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Management Studies*, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Journal of Social Psychology*, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *Organization Science*, *Organization Studies* and *Personnel Psychology*. A subset of 68 articles was selected as having direct relevance to our task. The 12 articles left out of the original sample were either theoretical articles or research articles concerned with various sub-dimensions of career outcomes (e.g., organizational attachment or work–family conflict), but not with career success itself as an outcome. In the paragraphs below, we examine the theoretical assumptions made by these articles, and how they compare with the career theory we have already reviewed. Summary data from the articles are provided in Table 1.

Definitions

Most articles sampled use a definition of career success consistent with that suggested earlier in this paper ('Definitions') that is, of 'desirable work-related outcomes' at a given point in a person's unfolding career. Fifty-three articles (or 78 per cent) refer to the subjective career, for example, as a construct that 'exists only in people's minds' (Aryee et al., 1994, p. 488), and of these 49 articles (72 per cent) operationalize the subjective career in their research. In contrast, 61 articles (90 per cent) refer to the objective career, reflecting success through what Barley (1989, p. 48) has called 'advancement along a hierarchy of power or prestige,' and of these 58 articles (85 per cent) operationalize the objective career in their research.

Ten articles (15 per cent) focus only on subjective career success, while 19 articles (28 per cent) focus only on objective career success. A few articles suggest overlapping meanings of subjective career success and objective career success, for example when people were asked to offer a subjective career assessment of whether they were 'on schedule' in their objective career progression (e.g., Kirchmeyer, 1998).

Table 1. Empirical research on career success and related terms in management and other social science journals* (1992–2002)

N	Journal	Author(s) (year)	Criteria	Objective career factors	Subjective career factors	Duality conceptualized	Duality operationalized	Interdependence conceptualized	Interdependence operationalized	Theoretical adequacy	Career mobility	Extra-org. support concept/ operational.
1.	AMJ	Martins et al. (2002)	Career outcomes; career satisfaction	Financial outcomes, career advancement, autonomy, power	Career satisfaction, advancement satisfaction	Yes	Yes	O → S	O → S	Yes	No	Yes/Yes
2.	AMJ	Tharenou (2001)	Managerial advancement	Salary, position type, span of control, managerial promotions, years supervising others, less time without promotion	—	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O ^f	S ↔ O	Yes	No	Yes/No
3.	AMJ	Seibert, Kraimer and Liden (2001)	Career success	Promotions, salary	Career satisfaction	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	S ↔ O	Yes	Yes	Yes/Yes
4.	AMJ	Judiesch and Lyness (1999)	Career success	Hierarchical level, salary, promotion, % salary increase, performance rating	—	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
5.	AMJ	Campion et al. (1994)	Career outcomes	Career progression outcomes: promotion rate and salary growth	Career management outcomes, knowledge and skill outcomes (both perceptual)	Yes	Yes	O → S	O → S	Yes	No	No
6.	AMJ	Tharenou et al. (1994)	Managerial advancement	Level in managerial hierarchy, salary, number of subordinates	—	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes/Yes
7.	AMJ	Turban and Dougherty (1994)	Career success	Salary, promotions	Perceived career success	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	S ↔ O	Yes	Yes	No
8.	AMJ	Schneer and Reitman (1993)	Career path	Income, family structure	Career satisfaction	Yes	Yes	O → S	O → S	Yes	No	No
9.	ASQ	O'Reilly III and Chatman (1994)	Early career success	Selection success, number of job offers, current salary, salary increment, and number of promotions	—	Yes	Yes	S → O	S → O	Yes	Yes	No
10.	CDQ	Harris et al. (2001)	Career outcomes	Congruence, tenure	Job satisfaction, social support	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	S ↔ O	Yes	No	No

11.	CDQ	Burlew and Johnson (1992)	Career advancement	—	No	Barriers in career, peers support, opportunities for personal growth	No	O → S	Yes	No	No
12.	HR	Konard and Cannings (1997)	Managerial advancement	Hierarchical level, number of promotions	No	—	No	No	Yes	No	No
13.	HR	Friedman et al. (1998)	Career optimism	—	No	Employees' perceptions of their career progress	No	No	Yes	No	No
14.	HR	Tremblay et al. (1995)	Career plateau	Number of years in the current job	Yes	Perceived career plateau	Yes	O → S	Yes	No	No
15.	HR	Aryee et al. (1994)	Subjective career success	—	Yes	Career satisfaction, financial success, hierarchical success	No	O → S	Yes	No	No
16.	HR	Nicholson (1993)	Career satisfaction	Extrinsic career satisfaction	Yes	Intrinsic career satisfaction, future prospects	Yes	O → S	Yes	No	No
17.	JAP	Cable and DeRue (2002)	Career outcomes	Pay raise	No	Career satisfaction, job satisfaction, occupational commitment	Yes	S ↔ O	Yes	No	No
18.	JAP	Jansen and Stoop (2001)	Career success	Average salary growth	No	—	No	O → S	Yes	No	No
19.	JAP	Van Scotter et al. (2000)	Career outcomes	Rank, medals, promotability ratings, rewards	No	—	No	O → S	Yes	No	No
20.	JAP	Lyness and Thompson (2000)	Career success	Level, base salary, bonus, stock options	No	—	No	O → S	Yes	No	No
21.	JAP	Ragins and Cotton (1999)	Career outcomes	Promotion rate, compensation	No	—	No	S ↔ O	Yes	No	No
22.	JAP	Seibert et al. (1999)	Career success	Promotions, salary	Yes	Career satisfaction	Yes	S → O	Yes	Yes	No
23.	JAP	Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, and Welbourne (1999)	Career outcomes	Salary, job level, plateauing, job performance	Yes	Organizational commitment, job satisfaction	Yes	S ↔ O	Yes	No	No

Continues

Table 1. Continued

N	Journal	Author(s) (year)	Criteria	Objective career factors	Subjective career factors	Duality conceptualized	Duality operationalized	Interdependence conceptualized	Interdependence operationalized	Theoretical adequacy	Career mobility	Extra-org. support concept/ operational.
24.	JAP	Lyness and Thompson (1997)	Work outcomes	Organizational stature, compensation, developmen- tal opportunities	Satisfaction with career opportunities, satisfaction with compensation	No	Yes	O → S	O → S	Yes	Yes	No
25.	JAP	Dreher and Cox (1996)	Career outcomes	Total annual compensation	—	No	No	S ↔ O ^f	S ↔ O	Yes	Yes	No
26.	JAP	Chao et al. (1994)	Career effectiveness	Personal income	Career involvement, identity resolution, adaptability, job satisfaction	No	Yes	O → S	O → S	Yes	No	No
27.	JAP	Stroh et al. (1992)	Career advancement	Salary progression, promotion, geographic mobility	—	No	No	O → S ^f	O → S	Yes	Yes	No
28.	JCD	Murphy and Ensher (2001)	Perceived career success	—	Perceived career success, job satisfaction	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
29.	JCD	Blake-Beard (1999)	Career success	Compensation, promotion rate	Compensation satisfaction, career progress	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	S ↔ O	Yes	Yes	No
30.	JCD	Lee and Nolan (1998)	Career advancement	Status, resources	Emotion, self-concept	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	S ↔ O	Yes	No	No
31.	JM	Kirchmeyer (1998)	Career success	Income, level	Perceived career success	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	S ↔ O	Yes	No	Yes/Yes
32.	JM	Judge and Bretz (1994)	Career success	Salary, job level, number of promotions	Job satisfaction, life satisfaction	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	S → O	Yes	No	No
33.	JMS	Aryee et al. (1996)	Career success	Salary, number of promotions	Career satisfaction	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	S ↔ O	Yes	Yes	Yes/No
34.	JOOP	Melamed (1996)	Career success	Managerial grade, gross annual salary and managerial level	—	Yes	No	O → S ^f	O → S	Yes	Yes	No

35.	JOOP	Poole et al. (1993)	Perceived career success	Senior school attainment, college/university attainment, current professional status, income	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	No	No	No
36.	JOB	Higgins and Thomas (2001)	Career outcomes	Organizational retention, promotion to partner	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	Yes	Yes	Yes/Yes
37.	JOB	Spell and Blum (2000)	Career advancement	—	No	No	O → S†	Yes	Yes	No
38.	JOB	Tharenou (1999)	Managerial career advancement	Managerial level, salary, total managerial promotions	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
39.	JOB	Wayne et al. (1999)	Career success	Salary progression	Yes	Yes	O → S	Yes	No	No
40.	JOB	Schneer and Reitman (1994)	Career path	Current income, employment status, employment gaps	Yes	Yes	O → S	Yes	No	No
41.	JOB	Arvey and Debrah (1993)	Career planning	—	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
42.	JSP	Peluchette and Jeanquart (2000)	Career success	Research productivity	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	Yes	No	Yes/Yes

Continues

Table 1. Continued

N	Journal	Author(s) (year)	Criteria	Objective career factors	Subjective career factors	Duality conceptualized	Duality operationalized	Interdependence conceptualized	Interdependence operationalized	Theoretical adequacy	Career mobility	Extra-org. support concept./ operational.
43.	JSP	Oppen (1998)	Career success	Salary growth, promotions	—	No	No	S → O ^f	S → O	Yes	No	No
44.	JSP	Oppen (1995)	Career success	Promotions, salary growth	—	No	No	S ↔ O ^f	S ↔ O	Yes	No	No
45.	JSP	Chi-Ching (1992)	Career success	Mobility in relation to age, salary	Satisfaction with career development	Yes	Yes	O → S	O → S	Yes	No	No
46.	JVB	Johnson and Stokes (2002)	Career outcomes	Stability of occupational classification	Job involvement, career commitment	No	No	S → O ^f	S → O	No	Yes	No
47.	JVB	Wiese et al. (2002)	Subjective career success	—	Subjective success in the work domain, job satisfaction	Yes	No	O → S ^f	O → S	Yes	Yes	No
48.	JVB	De Fryt (2002)	Intrinsic career outcomes	—	Job satisfaction, skill development, work involvement,	No	No	O → S ^f	O → S	Yes	No	No
49.	JVB	Wallace (2001)	Career and emotional outcomes	Earnings	Perceived stress Perceived promotional opportunities, procedural justice, sense of social integration with fellow coworkers, career satisfaction, intent to stay in the profession, met expectations, work-nonwork conflict	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	S ↔ O	Yes	No	No
50.	JVB	Seibert and Kraimer (2001)	Career success	Promotions and salary	Career satisfaction	Yes	Yes	S → O	S → O	Yes	Yes	No

51.	JVB	Boudreau, Boswell, and Judge (2001)	Career success	Remuneration, ascendancy, CEO proximity, employability	Job satisfaction, life satisfaction, career satisfaction	Yes	Yes	S → O	S → O	Yes	Yes	No
52.	JVB	Brown et al. (2000)	Career decision-making self-efficacy	Objective measure of ego-identity status, athletic identity measurement	Career locus of control	Yes	Yes	S → O	S → O	Yes	No	No
53.	JVB	Dreher and Charoais (1998)	Career outcome	Total annual compensation	—	Yes	No	S → O ^f	S → O	Yes	No	No
54.	JVB	Hurley and Sonnenfeld (1998)	Managerial career attainment	Manager's career level	—	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
55.	JVB	Schneer and Reitman (1997)	Career success	Income, management level	Career satisfaction	Yes	Yes	O → S	O → S	Yes	No	No
56.	JVB	Chao (1997)	Career outcomes	Income	Career planning and career involvement, organizational socialization	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	S ↔ O	Yes	No	No
57.	JVB	Murrell et al. (1996)	Career outcomes	Salary, promotions	Job satisfaction, organizational commitment	Yes	Yes	O → S	O → S	Yes	Yes	No
58.	JVB	Aryee and Luk (1996)	Career satisfaction	Family circumstances, employment circumstances	Career satisfaction	Yes	Yes	O → S	O → S	Yes	No	No
59.	JVB	Mclamed (1995)	Career success	Relative salary, managerial level	—	Yes	No	S → O ^f	O → S	Yes	Yes	Yes/No
60.	JVB	Schneer and Reitman (1995)	Career path	Income, work hours, management level	Career satisfaction	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	S ↔ O	No	No	No
61.	JVB	Giannakos (1995)	Perceived importance of job outcomes	—	Perceived importance of job outcomes	No	No	S → O ^f	S → O	Yes	No	No
62.	JVB	Peluchette (1993)	Subjective career success	—	Work role, interpersonal, financial, hierarchical and life success	Yes	No	O → S ^f	O → S	Yes	No	Yes/Yes

Continues

Table 1. Continued

N	Journal	Author(s) (year)	Criteria	Objective career factors	Subjective career factors	Duality conceptualized	Duality operationalized	Interdependence conceptualized	Interdependence operationalized	Theoretical adequacy	Career mobility	Extra-org. support concept/ operational.
63.	OSc	Taylor et al. (1996)	Past career success	Number of organizational levels between manager and CEO	—	Yes	No	S ↔ O ^f	S ↔ O	Yes	No	No
64.	OSI	Whitley and Coetsier (1993)	Early career outcomes	Number of promotions, current total compensation	Career satisfaction, general work satisfaction Job satisfaction	Yes	Yes	S ↔ O	S ↔ O	Yes	Yes	No
65.	PP	Boudreau, Boswell, Judge, and Bretz (2001)	Career outcomes	Compensation	Job satisfaction	Yes	Yes	S → O	S → O	Yes	No	No
66.	PP	Seibert, Kraimer, and Crant (2001)	Career success	Career progression (self-reported)	Career satisfaction	Yes	Yes	S → O	S → O	Yes	Yes	No
67.	PP	Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, and Barrick (1999)	Career success	Annual pretax income (self-reported) occupational status (self-reported)	Job satisfaction	Yes	Yes	S → O	S → O	Yes	No	No
68.	PP	Judge et al. (1995)	Career success	Compensation, number of promotions	Job satisfaction, career satisfaction	Yes	Yes	O → S	O → S	Yes	Yes	No

*Key to journals:

- AMJ *Academy of Management Journal*
- ASQ *Administrative Science Quarterly*
- CDQ *Career Development Quarterly*
- HR *Human Relations*
- JAP *Journal of Applied Psychology*
- JCD *Journal of Career Development*
- JM *Journal of Management*
- JMS *Journal of Management Studies*
- JOOP *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*
- JOB *Journal of Organizational Behavior*
- JSP *Journal of Social Psychology*
- JVB *Journal of Vocational Behavior*
- OSc *Organization Science*
- OSI *Organization Studies*
- PP *Personnel Psychology*

^fItems marked are those cited in sub-sections of 'Empirical Research on Career Success' entitled 'Interdependence' and 'The developing, subjectively driven person,' where the underlying research approach can be interpreted as implying a relationship between the subjective and objective careers.

Subjective–objective career duality

Consistent with the above, 39 of the 68 articles (57 per cent) include either an explicit or implicit reference to the duality of the subjective and objective careers underlying career success. For example, one definition of career success cited by several authors is that of Judge, Cable, Boudreau, and Bretz (1995), which refers to ‘psychological and work-related outcomes,’ and where the further elaboration of these psychological and work-related outcomes closely parallels subjective versus objective career distinctions.

The remaining 29 articles (43 per cent) are principally concerned with one career success criterion, such as managerial career attainment (Hurley & Sonnenfeld, 1998), advancement (Tharenou, 1999), perceived career success (Murphy & Ensher, 2001) or subjective career success (Aryee et al., 1994). In doing so, 13 per cent acknowledged the existence of the other side of career success. For instance, the measurement of subjective career success by Aryee et al. (1994) includes measures of subjectively reported financial and hierarchical (that is, of objective) career success. Nevertheless, more than 35 per cent of sampled articles did not address, and more than 44 per cent did not operationalize, both subjective and objective career success.

Interdependence

Turning to the interdependence between the two sides of the career, 25 articles (37 per cent) consider a one-way influence of objective career success onto subjective career success. This is exemplified by articles suggesting career success is affected by income and job level (e.g., Schnerer & Reitman, 1997) or by experienced autonomy and power (e.g., Martins et al., 2002). The assumption here is that individuals interpret their success on the basis of their objective accomplishments (Judge et al., 1995). In contrast, 13 articles (or 19 per cent) consider the influence of subjective variables onto objective career success. These articles are mainly psychologically grounded studies, where the authors hypothesize relationships between personality (e.g., Boudreau, Boswell, & Judge, 2001), behaviors (e.g., Johnson & Stokes, 2002), or attitudes (e.g., Orpen, 1998) and objective career success.

Twenty-two articles (32 per cent) acknowledge the two-way interdependence between subjective and objective career success, and nearly all of them engage with this interdependence in their empirical work. However, 16 of the 22 articles are on the relationship between mentoring or social support and objective career success, which may be interpreted as a special case of interdependence between subjective and objective career success. The argument goes that the mentor or supporter offers the protégé a new insight into the objective career, for example about the importance of making oneself visible to key decision-makers. In turn, the mentor’s or supporter’s insight is absorbed by the protégé into his or her subjective career (e.g., Higgins & Thomas, 2001).

Only six of the above 22 articles (9 per cent overall) explore two-way interdependence in a theoretically more explicit way, such as in exploring employee turnover as a subjective career response to the objective career reality of the length of time employed on the same job (Taylor, Audia, & Gupta, 1996). The remaining eight articles (12 per cent) neither conceptualize nor operationalize any interdependence between the two sides of career success. These articles conceive of career success solely in terms of objective managerial advancement (e.g., Hurley & Sonnenfeld, 1998) or in terms of subjective career perception (e.g., Friedman et al., 1998). Thus, they overlook both the presence of another side to career success and the interdependence between the two sides, despite the contrary assertions of career theory.

Theoretical adequacy

As noted above, 57 per cent of all research articles we analyzed address both subjective and objective career success. However, more than half these articles focus only on a one-way relationship (56 per cent) rather than a two-way relationship (44 per cent). In turn, 12 of the 22 articles that examine a two-way relationship involve cross-sectional designs. The preponderance of cross-sectional designs suggests a risk of relying too heavily on the concept of correlation, and in the process losing sight of more subtle, longitudinal effects. To recall an earlier example, these effects may involve (a) accepting a job offer in an inner-city Chicago school, (b) finding subjective career satisfaction in helping city children, (c) becoming more involved with the school systems that serve those children, (d) gaining objective career recognition by those systems, and (e) having that recognition further influence a feeling of subjective career success. To observe these kinds of interdependencies seems vital to a fuller understanding of career success.

Only 10 of 22 articles make any attempt to examine how subjective career success can influence objective career success, or vice versa, over time. Six examine effects of mentoring relationships on career outcomes (e.g., Ragins & Cotton, 1999), three examine the impact of personal criteria on career success (e.g., Cable & DeRue, 2002), and one examines the effect of lengthening job tenure on managers' organizational commitment and turnover (Taylor et al., 1996). The larger picture of subjective and objective career interdependence over time needs to be built from diverse studies, where any one study can only be expected to focus on one particular aspect of this interdependence. However, there are evident gaps in the research coverage, for example about the influence of direct work experience or personal networks on subsequent career success.

We found only two other articles (3 per cent) not covered by the above discussion where theoretical adequacy was an issue. An article by Johnson and Stokes (2002) operationalizes both subjective and objective career outcomes, but offers no hypothesized relationship between the two. An article by Poole et al. (1993) explores 'subjective criteria' for career success through variables such as curiosity and interests in particular school subjects (that is, the authors explore personal characteristics that may predict success, rather than examining any subjective career outcome).

Inter-organizational mobility

As discussed above, inter-organizational mobility concerns not only actual career movement between employers, but also the opportunities for such movement. Out of 68 articles reviewed, only 18 examine in any way the links between inter-organizational mobility and career success. Six articles explicitly operationalize inter-organizational mobility (e.g., Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1992), four articles operationalize the idea of self-responsible career management (e.g., Murphy & Ensher, 2001), and eight articles operationalize promotions in a way that accommodates past inter-organizational mobility (e.g., Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Six further articles make reference to changing employment practices but do not examine any effects of those practices (e.g., Johnson & Stokes, 2002).

We made the further point in the section on 'Inter-organization mobility' that the greater significance of inter-organizational mobility elevated the importance of subjective career success and predicted a more dynamic relationship between subjective career success and objective career success. However, the evidence presented in the two previous sections ('Interdependence' and 'Theoretical adequacy') indicates that this relationship has been lightly studied. The overall evidence is that a basic attribute of boundaryless career theory, that is, to envision inter-organizational mobility in some way, has frequently been neglected in career success research.

Extra-organizational support

Fifty-eight (85 per cent) of the total of 68 articles reviewed make no reference to the relevance of career support that stems from outside the employing organization. Among these, 11 (16 per cent of all articles) examine career success within a single organization. Of the remaining articles, 21 (31 per cent) focus on a general sample of managers or workers, and 26 (38 per cent) examine the career success of MBAs. There is a long history of MBA alumni, in particular, networking with and finding support from others having the same alma mater. It therefore seems likely that some of these subjects would have found a degree of career support through their fellow alumni. Yet the research did not examine the existence of any such support.

The remaining 10 articles (15 per cent) make some reference to extra-organizational support. However, only seven of them (10 per cent) explicitly study this increasingly relevant phenomenon. Among these seven articles, two focus on implications and influences of extra-organizational sources of mentorship on career success (Peluchette & Jeanquart, 2000; Peluchette, 1993). One article studies community ties as a moderator of the relationship between work–family conflict and career success (Martins et al., 2002). Another three articles examine the effects of both intra- and extra-organizational developmental relationships and/or social support on career success (e.g., Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). The remaining article (Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994) studies career encouragement, from colleagues and senior staff members both within and outside the subjects' organizations, as an influence on objective career success. Like inter-organizational mobility, extra-organizational career support has not yet been widely studied.

Let us summarize the evidence from this 11-year review of career success research. Fifty-seven per cent of the articles summarized in Table 1 acknowledge the duality of objective and subjective career success. However, only one-third of the set of articles indicate any two-way interdependence between subjective and objective career success. Most of these articles do not study interdependence over time in any direct way. Turning to more recent boundaryless career theory, few articles conceptualize, and even fewer operationalize, the likely influence of either inter-organizational mobility or extra-organizational support on career success, although the more recent articles in our sample are more likely to do so. Examination of both of these attributes appears crucial if we are to better understand how career success unfolds in a dynamic and uncertain world.

Guidelines for Future Research

The preceding evidence attests that career theory and career success research are considerably out of step with one another. How can they be reunited? What rapprochement between theory and research can be attained, and with what advantages? In this section we offer a series of guidelines intended to satisfy both theoretical and empirical positions, thereby encouraging more progress across future studies. Our guidelines cover the adequacy of future research designs, missing dimensions of career success, the broadening of assumptions about relevant peer groups, examining career-relevant ability, recognizing the developing, subjectively driven person, and expanding the career success agenda.

Adequacy of research designs

A straightforward response to the above evidence is to assure the theoretical or 'logical' adequacy (Bacharach, 1989) of future research designs into career success. That is, researchers can take care

that their new designs incorporate relevant definitions of both objective and subjective career success, and better acknowledge the two-way, time-dependent interaction between the two sides of career success. Researchers can also arrange that boundaryless career theory's concerns about inter-organizational mobility and extra-organizational support are accommodated in the work that gets done. Paying attention to these contributions from career theory can, we submit, sharpen the career success research models, questions, and methodologies that are applied in future empirical studies.

There are two further forms of adequacy that complement logical adequacy (Bacharach, 1989): empirical and predictive accuracy. Empirical adequacy is concerned with whether a theory is subject to falsification; predictive adequacy is concerned with whether a theory can be used to anticipate future outcomes. There is no space here to dig deeper into these additional forms of adequacy. However, one interpretation of the evidence from the career success literature sampled is that concern about empirical and predictive adequacy may frequently have led to compromises in underlying theoretical adequacy. Greater consideration of the links among these forms of adequacy at the outset, and in particular greater consideration of underlying theory, can be helpful in future research.

Missing dimensions?

Various social-psychological approaches suggest the possibility of multiple dimensions of the subjective career, and in turn of subjective career success. Career actors frequently describe managing different aspects of their careers, such as maintaining a satisfactory income, finding time for their families, and pursuing new learning in a way that suggests they are thinking in terms of multiple dimensions of career success (Arthur et al., 1999). Research into 'career anchors' suggests that people often align themselves with one of eight primary career anchors—concerned, for example, with security, autonomy, or lifestyle—and also selectively fulfill 'several of the needs that underlie different anchors' (Schein, 1996). Recent evidence suggests there are various coexisting but interdependent dimensions of the subjective career (Parker & Arthur, 2002; Eby et al., 2003). However, the career satisfaction scales of Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990) (which has been used in 14 career success studies in our sample) and DeVanna (1984) (used in the studies of Schneer & Reitman, 1994, 1995) are one-dimensional scales. This one-dimensional view is supported by reports of high 'alpha' values for the correlations among the items included in each scale.

We wonder why this situation prevails. Did the developers of the scales drop further items that did not correlate with the ones they retained? Did they conform to an established orthodoxy for developing uni-dimensional scales? Were aspects of subjective career success only important to some subjects neglected in the search for aspects that were more broadly applicable? Do sharp, and some would say divisive, distinctions across the social and behavioral sciences affect our ability to envision a greater range of career success dimensions (e.g., Greller & Simpson, 1999)? Whatever the cause of this situation, it demands closer examination. Subjective careers and subjective career success seem too important to be prematurely constrained to any one-dimensional interpretation.

Broadening peer group assumptions

With some of the research instruments used, there was a clear constraint in the peer groups relevant to career success that were considered. That is, respondents were invited to 'Describe your satisfaction with your career development to date with the company' (Nicholson, 1993) or asked 'Compared to your co-workers how successful is your career?' (Turban & Dougherty, 1994). These questions clearly guide the respondent to answer in terms only of organizational peers. However, other instruments were

more open-ended. The Greenhaus et al. (1990) five-item scale carries no such restrictive language, but on the other hand does not include any item about peer comparison. Kirchmeyer's (1998) modification of Turban and Dougherty's scale refers to 'peers' rather than 'co-workers,' thereby providing an opportunity for respondents to compare themselves against peers in other employment settings if they wish.

Even if career success scales themselves are independent of the employment setting, there remains a question about the process of data collection. In some cases, this was done with the sponsorship of a particular organization. As a result, the researcher or a company spokesperson could have offered covering remarks encouraging respondents to think about their career circumstances inside, rather than outside, the organization where the study took place. Or, questions about careers could have been included immediately after questions about, for example, organizational climate, again encouraging respondents to limit their responses to their immediate organizational setting.

Our earlier discussion on extra-organizational support suggests that relevant career success comparison groups may often lie outside the boundaries of the research participant's present employer. A challenge for future research is therefore to encourage that these groups are included in, rather than excluded from, the respondent's frame of reference.

Examining ability

A number of articles in our sample refer to career success only in terms of advancement. One set examines advancement in purely objective career terms, concerned with the attainment of rank (e.g., Tharenou, 2001) or of salary (e.g., Dreher & Chargois, 1998). Another set of articles refers to the person's subjective career success through the interpretation of his or her objective progression, for example in Kirchmeyer's (1998) and Turban and Dougherty's (1994) examination of whether individuals reported they were 'on schedule' in their career advancement. These studies relate to three underlying ideas in the careers literature. One is the contrast Rosenbaum (1986, 1989) draws between 'attained status' and 'ability status,' where the former refers to the position a person has already gained, the latter to a person's potential for gaining future positions. Another idea is Lawrence's (1984, 1990) distinction between whether people felt they were 'on time' or 'off time' in their career progress compared to relevant others. A third idea is that of peer group-defined 'careers of achievement' (Zabusky & Barley, 1996) discussed earlier, and concerned with peer-assessed occupational expertise rather than formal position.

If career success is to be measured relative to one's peer group, and if it is accepted that this peer group will commonly go beyond the employing organization, then the above three ideas converge. The challenge is to measure ability (Rosenbaum, 1984, 1989), or the similar notion of occupational achievement (Zabusky & Barley, 1996) by reference to the career actor's peer group, and without regard for employment status or boundaries. This may be done from both objective career and subjective career perspectives. The former involves gathering outside assessments about the individual's ability, for example as Boudreau, Boswell, & Judge (2001) did in gathering such assessments from external search firms. The latter involves gathering an individual's own assessment, which may be related, for example, to a group of graduates from the same academic program (e.g., Eby et al., 2003).

The developing, subjectively driven person

Earlier, we argued that in an unpredictable world responsibility for both career development and the interpretation of career success rests with the individual. This in turn heightens the significance of the

subjective career. It is the individual who interprets and acts upon career stimuli. It is individuals' perceptions of how they (and their career progress) are viewed that 'have the strongest impact on individuals' self-concepts' which in turn influence future career behavior (Tice & Wallace, 2003). This suggests that the criteria for subjective career success ought to be the person's own, and—to reconnect with the quotation used earlier—'it would be a mistake' to make any other assumption (Bailyn, 1989, p. 482). (It would also be a mistake to place false trust in subjective career data on its own. As one of our colleagues has pointed out, people with the least skills may be the most prone to exaggerate them!)

However, not one of the 68 articles we examined involved listening directly to the research subjects, or even allowing them to elaborate on their own criteria for career success. While the purpose and design of any one paper may be worthy, the overall body of empirical work on career success seems to be clearly lacking in such qualitative input. How can subjective careers be adequately researched when the subjective interpretations of the career actors themselves—apart from their non-verbal responses to a limited set of questionnaire items—are not allowed expression? The answer lies in more qualitative research into the subjective criteria that people bring to their own career situations.

Expanding the boundaryless career agenda

We have argued that career success research can do more to accommodate boundaryless careers as well as organizational careers. Recent work, published after the period from which our sample of journal articles was drawn, offers some interesting progress. Of particular note is an article by Eby et al. (2003) focusing on predictors of career success in the era of the boundaryless career. The authors report powerful evidence that people's investments in 'boundaryless' (that is, employer-independent) career competencies lead to greater self-reported career success across a large, diverse sample of university alumni. Related evidence comes from Nabi's (2003) observations of the effects of 'career enhancing strategies' on career success. An interesting contrast about objective versus subjective career success comes from a study of women with children, who are reported to experience more inter-organizational mobility and lower objective career success, but who still report high subjective career success (Valcour & Tolbert, 2003). A further contrast relates to social background, and the opportunities or constraints that background brings to boundaryless career experiences (Pang, 2003).

A new line of research addresses ethical dilemmas associated with career success. One issue concerns the 'ethical lapses' of high-level managers engaging in legally questionable practices, and of the aspirations for career success that lay behind those practices (Callanan, 2003). Another issue concerns people whose organizational careers have been adversely affected by senior management practices, and whose further career success may be seen as an ethical responsibility of the organization involved, or society at large, or both (Van Buren, 2003). These issues point to a convergence between the broad arena of boundaryless career research and the more particular arena of career success research. For example, how much do a company's seniority privileges or pension vesting arrangements discourage volitional career mobility? Or, seen from the other side, how much do hiring company practices favor internal rather than external job candidates? Or, putting both sides together, how much does the rhetoric of a free society cloud a lack of support for the self-directed career actor? As we see career success through a wider boundaryless career lens, these and further questions invite our attention.

In summary, we suggest new guidelines for career success research covering the adequacy of research designs, the exploration of further dimensions of career success, the broadening of peer group comparisons, focusing on individual ability rather than position, paying attention to the developing

subjectively driven person, and seeing new connections between boundaryless career theory and career success research.

Conclusion

This paper began by describing a series of underlying ideas in contemporary career theory, and proceeded to examine the extent to which that theory was applied in a broad sample of empirical career success research. Career success research makes inconsistent use of contemporary career theory, particularly regarding the interdependence of subjective and objective career success and how this interdependence unfolds over time. Boundaryless career attributes of inter-organizational career mobility and extra-organizational career support have often been neglected.

The last part of this paper proposes guidelines for rapprochement between career theory and career success research. This rapprochement can enhance our understanding of contemporary careers, and in turn enhance future employment practice. From a subjective career perspective, this seems worth doing. From an objective career perspective, it seems too important to neglect. Career success is an important topic for researchers, working people, and host societies alike. Greater understanding of the topic can stem from greater understanding between the theorists and researchers concerned with it.

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