

Exploring Career Success Perceptions among Managers

Vikineswaran A. Maniam^{1,+} and Jegak Uli^{2,+}

¹Coordinator – Hospitality Degree Programme, School of Business, Nilai University College, Malaysia.

²Dept of Professional Dev & Cont Education, Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra, Malaysia

Abstract. The purpose of this research paper is to investigate managers' perception of their own career success in the organizations they work for. The questionnaire used by Van der Sluis to measure the career success perceptions was adapted, with 309 managers responding to the survey. Paired samples t-test were conducted in order to be able to compare the intrinsic and extrinsic factors of career success perception. Analysis revealed that the two key components that drive career success in the managers' head were subjective job performance and perceived career development; together known as intrinsic effects as they are hidden form of internal motivation or drive that resides implicitly in the manager. Although the perception of managers on the objective job performance (the extrinsic effect) was high, paired samples t-test showed that it was the intrinsic effect, as against the extrinsic effect that significantly contributed to the career success perception. The value of this research is that it has shown empirically that career success was very much an intrinsic outcome rather than an explicitly visible outcome that results from the managers' work experience. Organizations need to seek feedback by dialogue from managers on a regular interval in order to gauge their managers' job satisfaction and commitment.

Keyword(s): career success perception, intrinsic effects, extrinsic effects

1. Introduction

This study was carried out to investigate the career success perception (CSP) of managers who are the driving force in managing an organization strategically to achieve targeted performance goals. A manager who does not perceive that she or he is leading a successful career in her or his workplace can have detrimental effects on the performance of the organization in that the manager's motivation and capabilities are not oriented to organization development. Hence, the understanding of the importance of CSP among managers is inevitable in order for the organization to survive or thrive.

A career can be defined as "... the sequence of individually perceived work-related experiences and attitudes that occur over the span of a person's work life" (Hall, 1987 as in Ryan, 1993, p.264). According to Arthur *et al.* (1989), as in Smith (2004, p.3), a career was "the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time". The combination of two aspects of career, work and time, in Arthur *et al.*'s (1989) definition gives a notion of a "moving perspective" (Smith, 2004, p.3). According to Woodd (1999, p.219), Ashton & Field (1976) described that semi-skilled or unskilled jobs do not provide the kind of "lengthy training" and opportunities for advancement were limited hence affecting [job] "development over time", in

⁺ ¹Tel: +606 850 2338; Fax: +606 850 2339; vikines@hotmail.com; vikineswaran@nilai.edu.my

⁺ ²Tel: +603 8946 8234 (DID); Fax: +603 8945 0455; jegak@ace.upm.edu.my

other words there was an absence of the “moving perspective” rendering to a phenomena called “careerless”. Woodd (1999, p.218-219) mentioned that Herriot (1992) has “introduced a third idea [besides work and time] which was called ‘careers in the head’ as it introduces the internal perspective”...[giving a] ... “subjective approach”.

According to Woodd (1999, p.219) the concept of careers in head “recognizes that beliefs and values, expectations and aspirations, were just as important as sequences of positions held.... [despite the presence of] a conflict between personal life and work, and the differences in perceptions of “success” in life”. Hence, success in career was a matter of perception held in one’s mind which was further elaborated in the literature review section.

Based on problem identified, the three specific research objectives for this research are: (i) the level of managers’ perception about their career success and (ii) whether there are significant differences in mean scores among the factors within the CSP variables.

2. Study Population, Sampling and Unit of Analysis

For this research the selection of study population was from top two industries in each of manufacturing and services sectors consisting of 403 organizations. Through a multi-stage sampling technique, involving the industry selection, sample organization selection and sample respondent selection, a sample size of 600 was considered decided for this study. The researcher found it appropriate to seek at least 5 respondents from each randomly selected organization. From the random selection of 120 organizations out of the 403 organizations, with a sample size of 600 people, and 95% confidence in the results, the margin of error would be $\pm 1.96\%$.

The unit of analysis was anyone with managerial role as determined by the organization s/he works for. It includes those with who had been given the responsibility of carrying out management function by the management of the organization; with at least one subordinate reporting directly to him/her.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Definitions of Career Success and Career Success Perceptions

According to Judge *et al.* (1995, p.486) career success was defined as “the positive psychological outcomes or achievements one has accumulated as a result of experiences over the span of working life”. Career success was distinguished as being composed of “intrinsic and extrinsic” factors based on the works of Gattiker & Larwood (1988, p.571-572) and Judge *et al.* (1995, p.487). The extrinsic career success was also referred to as “objective measures of career success” whereas the intrinsic career success was referred to as “subjective measures of career success” (Van der Sluis, 2000, p.14). Objective career success refers to “success that is directly observable, measurable, and verifiable by a third party” (Hughes, 1937 as in Sutton, 2006, p.63). The subjective career success, on the other hand, was defined “by an individual’s reactions (across any dimensions that are important to that individual) to their career experiences” (Hughes, 1937, as in Sutton, 2006, p.64), usually expressed or measured in terms of job/career “satisfaction” (Van der Sluis, 2000, p.14).

According to Nabi (1999, p.212), based on the works of Aryee *et al.* (1994) and Gattiker & Larwood (1988), as subjective career success was measured by an individual’s [or manager’s] intrinsic feelings over what constitutes career accomplishment, “... career success [is] a conceptually distinct construct referring to an ‘individual’s judgment’ of their own success evaluated against personal standards, age, aspirations and views...”. Despite the presence of favourable objective career success in the eyes of society or organizations, managers can still feel “alienated from their careers” if their perception on subjective career success was low (Korman *et al.*, 1981, as in Nabi, 1999, p.212).

It can be deduced that CSP must involve the measures of both subjective and objective evaluations of career success. Hence, based on the works of Van der Sluis (2000, p.14-17, 49-51) and for the purpose of this investigation, CSP can be defined as an individual’s conception on the level of accomplishment as a result of work related experiences or outcomes that considers both objective and subjective measures. It also includes feelings and thoughts on one’s progress at work. The conception of career success keeps changing

in the span of one's working life as s/he experiences various challenges and routines at work. The items used to measure both extrinsic/objective and intrinsic/subjective evaluations of career success were discussed in the next section.

As a result of the above literature reviewed above, the definition of CSP for the purpose of this research was given as an individual's conception on the level of accomplishment as a result of work related experiences or outcomes that considers both objective and subjective measures. It also includes feelings and thoughts on one's progress at work.

3.2. Intrinsic or Subjective Career Success Measures

According to Van der Sluis (2000, p.16) the two main subjective measures of CSP are:

Subjective job performance (SJP). According to Van der Sluis (2000, p.169), a manager's own assessment and perception of job performance was indicated by the following intrinsic measures: (i) the strength of references if the manager "were to leave the organization", (ii) ability to "get along with" colleagues at workplace, (iii) the frequency at which colleagues seek for the manager's "advice", (iv) the value placed on the job being carried out as a manager, and (v) the individual's contribution "to the realization of organizational goals".

Perceived career development (PCD). Van der Sluis & Poell (2003, p.162) viewed career development as "a process of professional growth brought about by work-related learning". Since perception was a subjective part of career development, Van der Sluis & Poell (2003, p.163-164) derived the concept of "perceived career development", which in other words can refer to career or job satisfaction. Hence, according to Van der Sluis & Poell (2003, p.163) perceived career development measures whether there was: (i) personal pride with one's work, (ii) presence of superior's satisfaction with the manager's work, (iii) a feeling of comfort with the job being performed.

3.3. Extrinsic or Objective Career Success Measures

Based on the works of Peiperl & Van der Sluis, (1999a) and Ashford & Black (1996), the objective aspect of CSP was measured by income and objective job performance as mentioned below.

Objective Job Performance (OJP). To measure objective job performance with relevance to performance appraisal, Van der Sluis sought responses from managers on their: (i) "overall performance", (ii) "ability to get along with others", (iii) "ability to get the task done on time", (iv) "quality of ... performance", and (v) "work goal" achievements (Van der Sluis, 2000, p.15).

Income. According to Van der Sluis (2000, p.15) income was "defined as the annual income each year", albeit other "secondary rewards", like e.g. promotions, bonuses, performance based rewards, and share options, may also contribute largely to "annual income". Hence, it was deduced that this item can be included as an additional item to measure objective career success.

4. Research Design and Instrumentation

4.1. Research Design.

This study was a one-shot study design incorporating a cross-sectional survey using quantitative techniques. The descriptive research approach was used to explore the current status of the subjects' perceptions on quantitative variables in this study without manipulating or influencing any variable components of CSP measurement forwarded by Van der Sluis (2000). For this research the selection of study population was based on top two industries in manufacturing and services sectors each in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, as per reports by Malaysia Productivity Corporation, Malaysia Industrial Development Authority and Bank Negara Malaysia. A target sample of 600 managers, involving a total of 120 organizations selected to seek these respondents. From the stratified random selection of 120 out of 403 organizations, with a sample size of 600 people, and 95% confidence in the results, the margin of error would be $\pm 1.96\%$.

4.2. Instrumentation.

The validity of the instrument with the 16 statements was ascertained by specialists in the field of human resource development prior to testing for reliability. The responses were measured against Likert-type scale of 1 to 10, with 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 10 = 'strongly agree'. From the reliability test, using SPSS, the instrument was found to be reliable for the purpose of the research with $\alpha = .7803$. All of the reliability tests for the various variable components showed the Cronbach's α value exceeding 0.7, being the convention recommended by Nunnally & Bernstein (1994).

5. Findings and Discussions

5.1. Research Objective 1: The Level of Managers' Perception about their Career Success

This appraisal consists of relevant procedures to examine the descriptive statistics to identify the level of managers' perception towards their career success. By determining the level of career success, the researcher can get an early feel of how managers perceive their career progression based on the instrument used to measure it. Also, the researcher can compare the level of career success in this study with that of previous research by Van der Sluis (2000) to indicate any differences that may create cause for concern prior to further in-depth analysis to satisfy other research objectives.

Findings: Based on the ten-point Likert's scale used, followed by exploratory data analysis the minimum rating for CSP was 3.57 and a maximum of 10.00 and this gives a range of 6.43. The median rating value for CSP was 7.36 with a standard deviation of 1.14. The mean rating for CSP was 7.41 implying that overall the level of CSP was high.

Discussions: In Van der Sluis' (2000, p.97) study, based on the mean score of 8.43 for 63 managers, the percentage of actual score against possible maximum score was 84.3% (measure adjusted to a 10 point Likert's scale). The mean score of 8.43 in Van der Sluis' (2000) research, showed that the CSP level was very high. In this research the percentage of actual score against possible score for CSP was 74.06%, which also showed a very high level of CSP among the 309 managers. Hence, the perception on the level of CSP by the samples being tested in this research was quite similar to previous research by Van der Sluis (2000).

5.2. Research Objective 2: Whether there are significant differences in mean scores among the factors within the career success perception variables

Separate factor analysis of CSP variables resulted in the reduction of four factors to three factors viz.: (i) intrinsic effects (consisting of subjective job performance, and perceived career development), (ii) OJP, and (iii) income. As the income factor was measured by only one item, it may not measure the income component adequately. It was assumed that the intrinsic effects and OJP were the main contributors to the measures of CSP. To know whether the CSP that takes place was impacted by the intrinsic effects or OJP on the managers in the organization they work for, a paired samples *t*-test was necessary.

Findings: The results of the tests showed that there was a statistically significant difference in the intrinsic effects scores ($M = 7.86$, $SD = 1.21$) to OJP scores ($M = 7.13$, $SD = 1.36$), $t(308) = 10.11$, $p = .0001$. Additionally, the Eta-squared value of .25 indicated that this result suggests a very large effect size, indicating a substantial difference in the intrinsic effects and OJP scores obtained for the same group of respondents.

Discussions: Similar to previous results of Van der Sluis's (1998d) current research showed as managers perceiving SJP and PCD contributing mostly to their CSP significantly higher than OJP. As the difference between intrinsic effects and OJP had a very large effect size, intrinsic effects was more important for measuring CSP.

It can be said that the perception of managers over their career success was depicted by: (i) their feeling that they were performing well to the satisfaction of their bosses, (ii) forging good relationship with their colleagues, (iii) contributing substantially in achieving organizational goals, and (iv) feeling comfortable in current job, all of which indicated "intrinsic outcomes" (Van der Sluis, 2000) of managerial work experience.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations for Practice

It can be concluded from this investigation on CSP of managers that it is indeed a measure on the state of

the mind held by the managers as to the level of happiness on the job they are currently engaged in. Despite the mean score for objective job performance (extrinsic effect) being high, statistically it was the intrinsic effects that had significant impact on CSP. This indicates that managers define their career success by evaluating intrinsic components rather than extrinsic ones. Hence, HRD practitioners need to identify the intrinsic variables that can be influenced for maintaining and improving managers' job satisfaction, as it ultimately affects organization goal achievement.

As intrinsic effect was identified to be significantly different from objective job performance, it would be of immense strategic value for HRD practitioners to pay particular attention in planning and implementing effective feedback system that continuously evaluate or appraise to inform top management on subjective job performance and perceived career development factors that keep managers happy in their work. This would result in higher retention of managers who increase their capabilities in contributing to their organization's goal attainment. Frequent dialogues between managers and their bosses on career advancement or progression need to be in place to identify the appropriate intervention to develop managers in their career direction.

Needless to say that as objective job performance was scored with a high mean score, it has its relevance in supporting intrinsic growth effect by way of creating conducive work environment that encourages and nurtures team learning, and promote positive peer evaluation culture.

7. References

- [1] Arthur, M., Hall, D. and Lawrence, B. (1989). *Handbook of Career Theory*. Cambridge:Cambridge, University Press.
- [2] Aryee, S., Chay, Y.W. and Tan, H.H. (1994). An examination of the antecedent of subjective career success among a managerial sample in Singapore. *Human Relations*. 47:487-509.
- [3] Ashford, S.J. and Black, J.S. (1996). Proactivity during organizational entry: The role of desire for control. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 81(2): 199-214.
- [4] Ashton, D. and Field, D. (1976). *Young Workers*. London: Hutchinson.
- [5] Gattiker, U.E. and Larwood, L. (1988). Predictors for managers' career mobility, success, and satisfaction. *Human Relations*, 41, 569-91.
- [6] Hall, D.T. (1987). Introduction: An Overview of Current Career Development Theory, Research, and Practice. In D.T. Hall and Associates. *Career Development in Organizations*. (pp. 1-20). Jossey-Bass Ltd.
- [7] Herriot, P. (1992). *The Career Management Challenge*. London: Sage.
- [8] Hughes, E.C. (1937). Institutional office and the person. *American Journal of Sociology*. 43:404-413.
- [9] Judge, T.A., Cable, D.M., Boudreau, J.W. and Bertz, R.D. (1995). An empirical investigation of the predictors of executive career success. *Personnel Psychology*. 48:485-519.
- [10] Korman, A.K., Wittig-Berman, U. and Lang, D. (1981). Career success and personal failure: alienation in professionals and managers. *Academy of Management Journal*. 24, 342-60.
- [11] Nabi, G. (1999). An investigation into the differential profile of predictors of objective and subjective career success. *Career Development International*. 4(4):212-224.
- [12] Nunnally, J.C. and Bernstein, I.H. (1994). *Psychometric Theory*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill
- [13] Peiperl, M.A. and Van der Sluis, L.E.C. (1999a). The experience of boundarylessness: Job change, extrinsic and intrinsic career success among early-career MBAs. Revised version of Working Paper series, 99: 02, London Business School.
- [14] Ryan, A.M. (1993). *A Career Theory for Technical Communicators: How Career Theory Informs Training and Education*. Retrieved 27 July 2007 from <http://www.stc.org/confproceed/1993/PDFs/PG264265.PDF>. Society for Technical Communication. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University.
- [15] Smith, T. (2004). *Climbing the Career Ladder: Exploring the Career Experience of Male & Female Business Professionals in Australia*. Retrieved 8 June 2007 from <http://www.handels.gu.se/ifsam/Streams/>

dc/DC31%20PAPER.pdf. Doctoral Colloquium of The Scandinavian Academy of Management (SAM) and the International Federation of Scholarly Associations of Management (IFSAM) SAM/IFSAM VIIth World Congress in Goteborg, Sweden July 5 - 7, 2004.

- [16] Sutton, K.L. (2006). Parenthood and Organizational Networks: A Relational View of the Career Mobility of Working Parents. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Ohio State University, USA.
- [17] Van der Sluis, L.E.C. (1998d). Results of the RSM-surveys among MBA students graduated in '96 and '97. Rotterdam School of Management Newsletter, Summer, 10:11-13.
- [18] Van der Sluis, L.E.C. (2000). Management learning and development: The role of learning opportunities and learning behavior in management development and career success. Erasmus University Rotterdam, Dissertation: Thela Thesis/Tinbergen Institute.
- [19] Van der Sluis, L.E.C. and Poell, R.F. (2003). The impact on career development of learning opportunities and learning behavior at work. Human Resource Development Quarterly. Volume 14 , No. 2, 159-179.
- [20] Woodd, M. (1999). The psychology of career theory - a new perspective? Journal of European Industrial Training. 23(4/5):218-223.