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ORIGINAL PAPER

Examining subjective career success of knowledge workers

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Abstract

Subjective career success describes an individual's satisfaction with his/her professional life. We propose a novel model for evaluating the universal personal values as well as the behavioral and socio-demographic factors that lead to subjective career success. Data was collected from employees of organizations across 20 different industries in Latvia (with a sample size of N = 348). This study reveals that the personal values that have the most significant influence on a subjective career are self-direction and power. Behavioral factors explained nearly 30% of the variance, revealing that the most important career behaviors that lead to subjective career success are control and confidence behaviors as well as attitudes toward rewards and relationships. Curiosity behaviors and education levels had negative impact on subjective career success, and previous experience in managerial positions had the most significant positive impact on the subjective career success of the respondent included in the sample. The respondents' genders had no impact on subjective career success. The results of the study are applicable to both organizations and their human resource departments as well as individuals who aim at advancing their careers. For individuals, there is an important message to be had that, by practicing pro-active career behaviors, they can possibly compensate for some lack of education or previous managerial experience. On the organizational side, it is important to understand what personal, behavioral, and socio-demographic factors lead to the positive perception of a career path, as it would increase one's organizational commitment and drive him/her toward reaching their organizational goals.

Keywords Subjective career success · Personal values · Career behaviors

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1 Introduction

Today, the world is quite rapid and dynamic. Change is everywhere, and the level of uncertainty has increased dramatically (Klammer et al. 2017; Kaivo-oja et al. 2018). What was thought of only in science fiction has become everyday reality. The symbiotic relationships between science and technology impose speedy change (Foss 2020). While scientific discoveries boost technological progress, technologies allow science to spread and be adopted on an increasing scale (Oreg, Berson 2019); this speeds up the pace of the change. Although it is impossible to predict certain features of the future, it is possible to state that pace will continue to increase (Meyer, Davis 2000). Speed is the pre-requisite of current reality, and actors at all levels of the economy must create coping strategies in order to survive and strive in an ever-changing environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak blurred the boundaries between work and life, even further intensifying the question about the true meaning of a successful career (Carnevale, Hatak 2020; Foss 2020). Previous studies on career success expanded by including not just work-related dimensions (e.g., satisfaction with career, satisfaction with advancement, satisfaction with income levels (Greenhaus et al. 1990) but also those dimensions of living up to one's individual values (authenticity, meaningful work, quality work) and being socially active and recognized (influence, personal life, recognition) (Shockley et al. 2016).

The academic discourse on individual career management has moved from a paradigm that depicts the individual as a corporate citizen who relies on organizational opportunities for personal career enhancement to the notion of pro-active career crafting with protean and boundaryless careers that are self-driven and value-oriented without attachments to particular organizations. Economic uncertainty shifts our notions of stable and successful careers, as no organization can guarantee long-term employment and a linear career path anymore (Haenggli and Hirschi 2020). Thus, research questions regarding which factors contribute to a successful career have become even more topical from both the scholarly and practical perspectives.

Research on career success has become even more relevant for knowledge workers, as their work has become more complicated (requiring nuanced skills and the ability to manage complexities) (Jarlstrom et al. 2020; Bouncken et al. 2013). The meaning of a successful career rather resonates with being able to pursue personal goals and seek self-fulfillment that is characteristic of a protean career approach (Hall 1976) rather than following an organization's designed and predefined career path (Weick 1996). At the same time, career success remains as the one that fuels an individual's motivation and organizational commitment (Boshkov 2018). Maintaining a balance between individual desires and labor market realities is the key to career success.

There is a rich body of previous works on career success (Ng 2005; Heslin et al. 2019). This knowledge has built our understanding of the role of environmental (Ng et al. 2014), human capital (Zacher 2014; Poona et al. 2015; Jarlstrom

et al. 2020), social capital (Jarlstrom et al. 2020; Eby et al. 2003), and motivational factors (Judge et al. 1995) on the perception of career success and on objective measures of individual career success (such as salaries or increases in position levels). However, recent academic debate that was initiated by Hall (2004) and continued by several others (Haenggli and Hirschi 2020; Xin et al. 2020; Wilhelm, Hirchi 2019) has focused on the career self-management and pro-active roles that individuals should take in order to advance their careers. This branch of studies (centering on a self-directed career) is more interested in the proactive behaviors that individuals show in order to achieve their career goals than it is in motivational factors that focus on attitudes (Thomas et al. 2010). The notion of a self-directed career is depicted in the concept of protean career orientation (PCO). PCO can be defined as self-directed career development that is driven by personal values (Enache et al. 2011). Protean careerists do not define success in the traditional terms of status and money but as the attainment of personal goals, pride, and psychological success (Briscoe and Hall 2006).

Career management theory has developed along with the practice of how careers happen. There have always been people who believe that they can build their futures on their own and those who merely comply with the circumstances that are already in place (Maurer 2013). Following Lyubomirsky's (2007) research on happiness (which suggests that an individual's actions make up 40% of all of the elements that contribute to happiness), we propose that career success is also the product of an individual's behavior to large extent.

Career construction theory also argues that "careers do not unfold; they are constructed" (Savickas 2002: 154). An individual's activities toward designing his/her career by developing his/her resources, being active and decisive in a current job role, and preparing for the future are in the spotlight of career construction theory (Savickas and Porfeli 2012). People possess resources like their parents' socio-economic levels, educations, abilities, personality traits, self-concepts, and career adaptabilities, which they employ to exploit the opportunities that are available in an external environment. This notes the importance of socio-demographic factors like education, age, tenure, hierarchical position, etc. when building one's career success.

According to Gubler et al. (2014), current research on protean orientation has primarily focused on the role of self-direction (with limited attention to the role of intrinsic values). Indeed, the role that universal human values play when determining the factors of individual career success has yet to be explored in the existing career models. However, the role of a stable core inside a human personality becomes a guiding factor and important predictor of career success when the environment becomes more volatile and uncertain; this is in line with the notion of a boundaryless career that was developed by Weick (1996). Values are a stable part of a human's personality; in ambiguous situations, they serve as guiding lights for difficult decision-making (Schwartz 2012).

Following this line of thought, our study proposes a novel model for predicting career success within the theoretical boundaries that are suggested by protean career orientation. Our study addressed an existent gap in the previous studies of understanding the relationships and importance of universal human values, career

behaviors, and social-demographic factors in their combined role of shaping the career success of an individual.

In the literature review section, we will examine various career success models, the behavioral factors that lead to career success, and universal human values as personal factors and socio-demographic factors that are major determinants that lead to the successful perception of an individual's career.

2 Literature review

2.1 Career success models

"Career" is a term that is attributed to a person's lifelong professional activities. Career is the process, and it's success is the snapshot in the one given moment. Career success may be objective (supported by hard evidence like income level, hierarchy level, promotions, etc. (e.g., Spurk 2014; Restubog 2011) or subjective (referring to person's perception of his/her career success (e.g., Haengli and Hirschi 2020; Schwormal et al. 2017; Ng and Feldman 2014). Some authors claim career success to be the aggregate measure of both objective and subjective attributes (e.g., Converse 2014; Spurk et al. 2015).

At the same time, the objectivity of objective career success factors fade. Organizations align their business processes, reducing their hierarchy levels (Dibrell and Miller 2002), moving toward short-term management (Kleinknecht 2020) and project-based work (Goetz 2021), and limiting their numbers of promotions (Arthur and Rousseau 1996). The objectivity of income levels can also be questioned in regard to the globalization and the purchasing power differences in different places of the globe and the average salary levels across different industries (Statista 2020; Eurostat 2020).

The above-mentioned arguments contribute to the shift in research toward subjective career success (e.g., Haengli and Hirschi 2020; Zacher 2014). Subjective career success can be expressed as career satisfaction or job satisfaction. Career satisfaction refers to the progress that an individual experiences throughout his/her professional life; it can be expressed as an evaluation of different career facets (e.g., income, development, promotions), progress (e.g., Greenhaus et al. 1990; Spurk et al. 2014; Rodrigues et al. 2015; Maurer 2013; Baruch et al. 2014), or a comparison with the career success of others (Spurk et al., 2014). Job satisfaction refers to one's current employment and can be expressed as an index of different job aspects, such as job safety, income, promotions, etc. (e.g., Sousa-Poza and Sousa-Poza 2000). Other studies have measured job satisfaction as a perception of work and is operationalized with statements like the following: "I feel enthusiastic about my work" (Rodrigues et al. 2015), or "I like my work" (Maurer 2013; Converse 2014; Verbruggen 2015). Job satisfaction and career satisfaction are considered to be separate concepts (e.g., Fiori et al. 2015; Zacher 2015, Wassermann et al. 2017). Drabe et al. (2015) defined job satisfaction to be a part of career satisfaction. In this paper, we merge both concepts when referring to one's subjective career success.

Various prerequisites of career success have been explored in the literature. The prioritization of career over other life dimensions (Harrington et al. 2007), career competencies (e.g., Kuijpers and Scheerens 2006; Kong 2010), personality characteristics (Maurer 2013), professional identities (Weber 2011), entrepreneurial attitudes (Budig 2006; Zacher 2014), career adaptability (Zacher et al. 2015; Praskova 2014), career planning (Spurk et al. 2014), networking (Spurk et al. 2014), relationships (Restubog 2011; Ng and Feldman 2014; Colacoglu 2011), and previous career experience (income, promotions, hierarchy levels, unemployment) (Spurk et al. 2015). Different career success models are depicted in Table 1.

Despite the extended research on values at work (Rokeach 1973; Hofstede 2011; Schwartz 1992), the majority of the studies that concern career adaptability and career success focus on personality traits being the main determining factors (Ng et al. 2005; Zacher 2014; Lyons et al. 2015; Rudolph et al. 2017); on the other hand, there are very few studies that focus on individual values as prerequisites for successful careers (Blickle et al. 2018; Enache et al. 2008, 2011).

Continuing the academic research on factors that build subjective career success, the authors propose the following research model (Fig. 1).

Each factor group is described in the following chapters.

2.2 Behavioral factors that lead to career success

To achieve career success, one must try to fit in his/her work environment. Person-environment fit theory (Pervin 1968) outlines the necessity for "work personality and work environment" to be "mutually responsive" in order to fulfill requirements of person and environment (Rounds et al. 1987). The "environment" facet has been altered in many ways in the academic literature; for example, person-organization fit (e.g., Kristof 1996), person-job fit (e.g., Parsons, 1906 (in Rounds et al. 1987; Kristof-Brown 2005), person-vocation fit (e.g., Vogel et al. 2009), person-person fit (e.g., Safavi et al. 2020), and person-group fit (e.g., Ferris et al. 1985). To correspond to all of these facets is already a tough task for an individual to undertake; however, it is becoming even more challenging considering the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of the external environment (Barber 1992) that are being caused by globalization, technological disruption, and increased competitiveness (Kaivo-oja et al. 2018; Lahiri et al. 2008).

Once the ultimate microenvironment for individuals to build their careers, organizations are now struggling to survive and stay competitive. Technological disruption forces organizations to significantly change their production and distribution processes, followed by a greater demand for new skills and competencies (World Economic Forum 2018; Gerards et al. 2021). According to the World Economic Forum's "Future of the Jobs 2018" report, at least 54% of the workforce will require significant up- or re-skilling to meet the new requirements for their jobs by 2022 (World Economic Forum 2018; Deloitte Human Capital trends 2019). The top three strategies for covering this skills gap are the recruitment of new staff members who possess the new competencies that are required from the labor market, process

Table 1 Various models of career success depicted in previous studies *Source: authors*

Author	Career success	Factors defining career success
Ng et al. (2005)	Career success as objective career success (salary and promotion) and subjective career success (satisfaction with career)	Human capital predictors (number of hours worked, work centrality, job tenure, organization tenure, work experience, willingness to transfer, international work experience, education level, career planning, political knowledge and skills, and social capital), organizational sponsorship predictors (career sponsorship, supervisor support, training and skill-development opportunities, organizational resources), socio-demographic variables (marriage status, age, gender, race), stable individual difference variables (conscientiousness, extroversion, proactivity, internal locus of control, cognitive ability, neuroticism)
Dries et al. (2008)	Career success	Performance, advancement, self-development, creativity, security, satisfaction, recognition, cooperation, contribution
Enache et al. (2008)	Psychological career success (Greenhaus et al. 1990)	Self-direction in career management, value-driven predisposition, boundaryless mindset, organizational mobility preference
Enache et al. (2011)	Subjective career success (Greenhaus et al. 1990)	Self-direction, value-driven, boundaryless mindset, organizational mobility preference
Zhou et al. (2012)	Career success	Intrinsic fulfillment, external compensation, work-life balance

Table 1 (continued)

Author	Career success	Factors defining career success
Ng et al. (2014)	Subjective career success	Background-related hurdles (low socio-economic origins, being female, being non-Caucasian, being married, having employed spouse, having children, having high number of children); trait-related hurdles (low emotional stability, low extraversion, low conscientiousness, low openness to experience, low agreeableness, low core self-evaluations, external locus of control, and low proactivity); motivational hurdles (commitment, low work centrality, low job motivation, low job involvement, low work engagement); skill-related hurdles (low education level, weak university reputation, low grade point advantage, low participation in training and development activities, lack of international experiences, few job position changes, few employer changes); social- and network-related hurdles (poor leader-member exchange quality, low general supervisor support, low supervisor career-related support, low social integration at work, low social support at work, low social status and reputation, not having mentors, low number of mentors, low level of mentoring received, low networking behavior, small network size, low political knowledge and behaviors); organizational- and job-related hurdles (low general organizational support, low career-related organizational support, lack of promotion opportunities, low job importance, low job control, low job challenge, low skill utilization in job, role ambiguity, procedural unfairness, unmet expectations, job insecurity)
Zacher (2014)	Career success	Career adaptability, Big Five personality traits, core self-evaluation, demographic variables (age, gender, and education)
Poona (2015)	Career success	Objective factor (achievement, ability to support family, formal learning); subjective factor (making career, satisfaction, work-life balance, goal fulfillment, informal learning); internal factor (traits, hard work, personal history, ongoing learning, career management); external factor (work context, social context, societal context)

Table 1 (continued)

Author	Career success	Factors defining career success
Lyons et al. (2015)	Career satisfaction (Greenhaus et al. 1990)	Career resilience, personality factors (extraversion agreeableness conscientiousness, openness to experience, emotional stability); self-evaluation (external locus of control, self-efficacy); modern career attitudes (protean values-driven, protean self-directed boundaryless mindset, boundaryless organizational mobility preference)
Blickle et al. (2018)	Objective career success	Trait-reputation-identity model, self-serving, benevolent political will, altruism, management, creativity
Haenggli M., Hirschi A (2020)	Career success	Self-esteem, optimism, career adaptability, career resources
Jarlstrom et al. (2020)	Career success as subjective career success (Greenhaus et. al. 1990) and objective career success (number of promotions)	Human capital, social capital, psychological capital

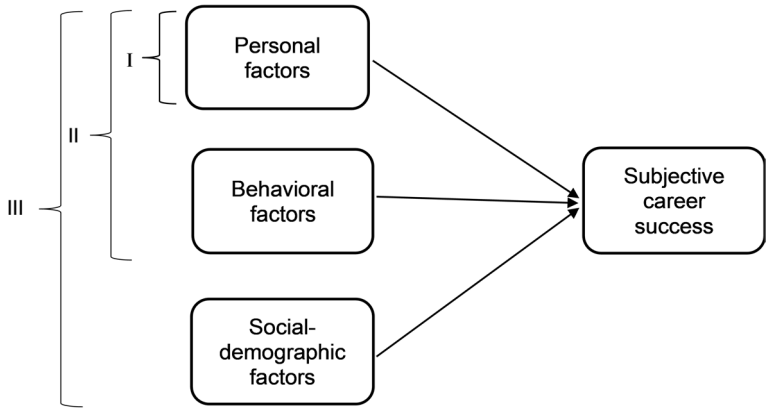

Fig. 1 Influence that personal, behavioral, and socio-demographic factors have on subjective career success (I–Model 1; II–Model 2; III–Model 3) Source: authors

automation, and the retraining of the current workforce. This results in a tremendous impact on individual career paths and future prospects (which subsequently calls for further career environment research) (Blokker et al. 2019).

To sustain their employability, people can adapt protean (Hall 1976) or boundaryless (Arthur and Rousseau 1996; Briscoe and Hall. 2006) career-management strategies. Both strategies follow the self-determination theory, which suggests that intrinsic motivation is a major driver of an individual's behavior (Ryan et al. 2000). Within career management, this means that people will construct their own careers (Savickas 2002), employ the resources that they possess, and adapt to the circumstances.

The career adapt-ability scale from Savickas and Porfeli (2012) has become a popular tool for evaluating people's behaviors in the career context (Rudolph et al. 2017). There are two streams of this research: (1) How career adapt-ability behaviors affect career outcomes (e.g., Fiori et al. 2015; Zacher 2015); and (2) The prerequisites for employing career adapt-ability behavior (e.g., Storme et al. 2020).

Career adaptability positively predicts career satisfaction and self-rated career performance (Zacher 2014), career identity, career calling, career/job/school satisfaction, organizational commitment, job stress, employability, promotability, turnover intentions, income, engagement, self-reported work performance, entrepreneurial outcomes, life satisfaction, (Rudolph et al. 2017), and career competency (Safavi et al. 2019). Career adaptability negatively predicts mental health problems (Xu et al. 2020) and turnover intentions (Rasheed et al. 2020).

Career adaptability is formed by career calling (Yang et al. 2020), psychological capital (Safavi et al. 2019), a proactive personality, core self-evaluations (Ma et al. 2020), emotional intelligence (Parmentier 2019), informational and emotional support (Ma et al. 2020), participation in an internship experience (Ocampo et al. 2020), within-person variability (Storme et al. 2020), family role models (Garcia et al. 2019), and self-reflection (Son 2018). A number of authors have explored how

Big Five personality traits help to condition career adaptability and career success (Ng et al. 2005; Zacher 2014; Lyons et al. 2015; Blickle et al. 2018; Storme et al. 2020).

The existing literature suggests that career adaptability is a powerful predictor of career success. In this study, we explore whether career adaptability affects subjective career success and whether an individual's values (personal factors) affect his/her career adaptability.

As Savickas (2002) put it, attitudes, beliefs, and competencies are the ABCs of career construction theory. Therefore, we include individual's attitudes toward rewards and relationships in the workplace along with the career adaptability scale (Savickas and Porfeli 2012) in our research. Relationships in the workplace (Rese et al. 2021; Bagdadli et al. 2019; Gattiker et al. 1986; Shockley et al. 2016; Ng et al. 2014) and rewards both serve as attributes and preconditions of career success (Arthur et al. 2005). Relationships are considered to be social capital (Jarlstrom et al. 2020), leader-member exchanges (Doden et al. 2018, Restubog et al. 2011), workplace friendships (Sias et al. 2004), being respected and accepted by one's peers (Gattiker et al. 1986), influence, and recognition (Shockley et al. 2016; Dries et al. 2008). The importance of relationships lies at the very core of human beings as social creatures. No one can survive if they are not accepted by the people around them. Being accepted, respected, and valued by one's peers and supervisors becomes a resource for determining one's career success.

Rewards are attributed to objective career success (e.g., Colakoglu 2011; Chudzikowsky 2012; Hirsch et al. 2015), but the perception of a reward is part of subjective career success. An individual's perception of reward is grounded in a comparison of his/her income with the incomes of others (Gattiker et al. 1986) or in achieving income goals (Greenhaus et al. 1990). An income that is higher or lower, more or less fair as related to the effort being made leads to lower job and career satisfaction. Low job satisfaction results in lower pay in one's future (Verbruggen 2015).

Several previous studies have explored which factors determine greater rewards. Building on Becker's human capital theory, Maurer (2013) posited that higher rewards depend on investments in education. Weber (2011) found a considerable correlation between work tenure and higher rewards, while Hirschi et al. (2015) found that narcissistic personalities are also positively related to higher salary levels. Several previous studies have shown that past reward increases have a positive relationship with future career success (e.g., Arthur et al. 2005).

2.3 Values as personal factors that determine career success

A protean career approach invites people to develop their careers based on their values (Hall 1976) – assuming that an individual's self-efficacy increases if the individual works for an organization that shares his/her values.

Values can be studied at all three levels of analysis: individual (Rokeach 1973; Schwartz 1992), organizational (Schein 2010; Hofstede 1994), and societal (Dawlabani 2013). The matching of values is considered to be proof of collaboration

success (Spencer and Spencer 1993). There is an interdependence of values across all levels of well-being (Sagiv and Schwartz 2000). Oishi et al. (1999) pointed out that satisfaction in life is dependent on income in developing countries and on family life in wealthy countries. A person's well-being will be low when his/her external environment does not support his/her individual values (Sortheix 2014). Individual values are not phenomena that are as fixed as personality traits; one's values change with age (Sagiv and Schwartz 2000, 2007; Barrett 2014), but they are relatively stable during adulthood. Thus, values can be considered to be another predictor of career success from the group of personal factors.

Values may be one of the most explored phenomena within an organization's culture and behavior (Schein 2010). Schein's organizational culture model clearly links basic assumptions, exposed values, and actions. Rokeach (1973) developed 18 instrumental and results values, and Hofstede's (1994) research of values in a workspace explored national differences on scales of individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, orientation toward result-orientation regarding humans, long-term orientation, self-indulgence, and self-restraint. Schwartz (1992) developed a universal individual values scale that identified the values that everyone around the globe possesses without drawing a line between work and life values – self direction, power, achievement, safety, traditions, benevolence, universalism, hedonism, conformism, and stimulation.

Following the self-determination theory, which states that there is a link between specific values and well-being (e.g., Bobowik et al. 2011; Sagiv and Schwartz 2007; Sortheix 2014) as well as work—life balance and job satisfaction being elements of well-being (Eurostat), the authors of this study aim to explore the effect of individual values on subjective career success.

There are few studies in the literature that establish the effect of individual values on career success (e.g., Enache et al. 2011; Blickle et al. 2018). Baruch et al. (2014) developed a professional vitality model that was comprised of the ability to live and work with one's values and concerns for a career. Within the career-management context, values have been explored as a cornerstone of a manager's development (London 1983; London and Noe 1997). Blickle et al. (2018) used the German version of the Work Values Inventory (WVI), which assesses different work values. A few previous studies have applied Schwartz's values in the work context (e.g., Sortheix 2014).

In the theory of values that was developed by Schwartz, values are responses to three universal requirements of human existence: (1) The biological needs of people; (2) Their social needs; and (3) Their needs for survival and the well-being of their groups (Schwartz 1992). According to this theory, there are ten basic individual values (conformity, tradition, security, power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, and benevolence). As values have certain motivations and goals, the content of any value is compatible with some other values and incompatible with others. Schwartz's model reduces these compatibility-incompatibility relationships to a two-dimensional structure. In this structure, there are such dimensions as conservation vs. openness (emphasizing the dichotomy of preservation and change of the status quo) and self-enhancement vs. self-transcendence (emphasizing

the dichotomy between personal- and other-related interests) (Schwartz and Boehnke 2004).

According to Schwartz (2012), multiple values guide one's actions; thus, it is the interplay of various complementary value groups that affects human behavior via the decision-making process. A similar notion is reflected in protean career orientation theory (PCO). PCO is value-driven "in the sense that a person's internal values provide the guidance and measure of success for the individual's career" (Briscoe and Hall 2006: 8). The tendency is to look for jobs that satisfy one's life needs and not just his/her work needs (Reitman and Schneer 2008), giving the term "career" a more comprehensive meaning of self-realization. (Cortellazzo 2020).

Previous studies have shown that education is positively related to self-direction and hedonism and negatively related to traditions and conformism values (Schwartz 2003; 2007). Women exhibit benevolence and universalism values, while men value achievement and power (Sagiv and Schwartz 2007).

In the previous studies, the values that are associated with the career success are power and achievement (London, 1983; London and Noe 1997; Goulet et al. 2002; Tartakovsky et al. 2014; Gandal et al. 2005; Sagiv and Schwartz 2000; Sortheix 2014) as well as self-direction (Dickson, Bucholz, 1979 in Tartakovsky and Cohen 2014). Managers with higher career motivations show lesser family and societal values (London, Noe 1997), leading to the assumption that benevolence, tradition, conformism, and universalism values negatively affect career success. However, whether there are some personal values that can hamper career success has not been fully explored in the literature.

2.4 Socio-demographic factors as determinants of career success

Another group of factors that has been widely examined in the literature of career success relates to formal factors such as age, gender, and educational level as well as to previous tenure in a managerial position, marital status, race, and nationality (Ng et al. 2005; Enache et al. 2008; Ng et al. 2014; Zacher 2014; Jarlstrom et al. 2020).

For example, a meta-analysis based on the career construction model of adaptation that was conducted by Rudolph et al. (2017) found that career adaptability and subjective success were associated with certain demographic characteristics (like age and education). Age and education were positively related to career adaptability, whereas the effects of gender and tenure were not statistically significant.

Gender, education, and age are widely used as moderators; however, we view them as having a direct impact on career success in our study.

Previous studies have found differences between career success constructs among men and women. For example, the relationships between education and salary and between hours worked and salary were stronger for women as compared to men according to a meta-study that was conducted by Ng et al. (2005). These findings showed discrimination in the work market, pointing to the need for women to be more educated and harder working in order to achieve career success. The same study showed another interesting result–job tenure was negatively (not positively)

related to promotion. The latest study in the domain of entrepreneurial career success has confirmed age as having a positive linear effect (Zhao et al. 2021).

A later study by the former author (Ng et al. 2014) showed that originating from low socio-economic circumstances, being female, being married, having an employed spouse, having children, and having a high number of children are all associated with lower subjective career success.

Another angle to view the determining factors of career success was provided by Chudzikowsky (2012). In this study, employment turnover had a positive impact on career success, as it was possible to raise one's salary level more significantly by external transitions than by internal growth within an organization. One's level of responsibility (measured as the number of direct reports) also had a positive effect on career success. Risk-taking as it was related to organizational mobility was rewarded by better employability and increased self-efficacy; both of these factors led to increasing one's satisfaction with his/her career development.

3 Methodology

The research model of our study is depicted in Fig. 1. An analysis of the results was conducted using OLS regression. During the first stage of the OLS regression, those personal factors that influenced subjective career success were assessed by self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, power, and achievement from Schwartz's (1992) "basic human values" measure. During the second stage, the influence of behavioral factors such as financial rewards and interpersonal behavior on subjective career success were assessed. Finally, the influence of social-demographic factors such as gender, education, and position as well as personal and behavioral factors on subjective career success were assessed during the third stage.

Different measures such as Schwartz's "basic human values" (1992), Savickas and Porfeli's "career adapt-abilities scale" (2012), Gattiker and Larwood's "perception of career success" (1986), and Gaile et al.'s "subjective career success" (2020) measures were used for collecting data from the respondents. For assessing the statements for all of the measures' factors, a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (to the greatest extent) was used.

Factors of personal characteristics self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, power, and achievement from Schwartz's "basic human values" (2012) were used, where each factor consisted of two statements. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted for these factors of personal characteristics with the following results: $\chi 2 = 56.995$; $df = 25$; $\chi 2/df = 2.28$; $p = 0.000$; $SRMR = 0.04$; $RMSEA = 0.06$; $GFI = 0.97$; $TLI = 0.94$; and $CFI = 0.96$. All of the CFA results met the benchmarks that were suggested by Schumacker and Lomax (2010), which were $\chi 2/df \leq 3$; $SRMR \leq 0.08$; $RMSEA \leq 0.08$; $GFI > 0.8$; $TLI > 0.9$; and $CFI > 0.9$. The internal consistency of the factors was calculated by Cronbach's alpha with a benchmark of $\alpha \geq 0.7$ (as suggested by Nunnally 1978). This benchmark was met for the stimulation, hedonism, and achievement factors (all between 0.70 and 0.79) but not for self-direction ($\alpha = 0.48$) nor for power ($\alpha = 0.55$). Therefore, the factor statement

of self-direction was split into "thought" and "action," while power was split into "resources" and "dominance" per Schwartz et al.'s suggestion (2012).

For the behavior characteristics, two factors were used: financial rewards (with three statements from Gattiker and Larwood's (1986) "perception of career success" measure), and interpersonal behavior (with four of their statements). A CFA was performed for this two-factor model; the results exceeded all of the benchmarks ($\chi 2 = 21.700$; df = 13; 2/df = 1.67; $p = 0.060$; SRMR = 0.03; RMSEA = 0.04; GFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.98; and CFI = 0.99). The career adapt-abilities scale (Savickas and Porfeli 2012) with its four factors (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) were used as well (with six statements in each factor). The internal consistency for all of the groups of six behavior factors were calculated by Cronbach's alpha; their values were within a range of 0.72–0.85 (satisfying the benchmarks).

Finally, subjective career success was measured under Gaile et al. (2020) with the use of two sentences: "To what extent are you satisfied with your job?" (from Colakoglu 2011; Converse et al. 2014, and Verbruggen et al. 2015), and "I am satisfied with the success of my career" (from Greenhaus et. al. 1990). With a value of 0.78, the calculated Cronbach's alpha shows good internal consistency for the construct of this factor.

Data was collected from employees of organizations across 20 different industries in Latvia with a sample size of N = 348, where 50% of the respondents (N = 174) worked at small/medium companies, and 50% (N = 174) were from large organizations. The sample of the respondents was characterized by the following parameters:

- Age: 18–24 (2.0%); 25–39 (63.8%); 40–49 (22.7%); 50–59 (10.6%); 60 and above (0.9%);
- Gender: male (28.4%); female (71.6%);
- Education: up to bachelor (33.9%); master/doctor (66.1%);
- Position: specialists (44.8%); managers (55.2%).

The empirical research was conducted from May 1, 2016, through June 3, 2016. The questionnaire was distributed via social networks (Facebook and LinkedIn) and sent out to contacts from Riga Business School, the State Chancellery, the Latvian Human Resources association, and "Komercizglītības centrs" (leading leadership training provider in Latvia). We received 693 completed questionnaires; out of these, 473 were verified to be valid. For our calculations, 384 responses were used; these only included those respondents with salaries above 500 EUR per month and who held a position of specialist or manager.

4 Results

Our analysis was comprised of two parts: descriptive statistics of all of the variables (along with the Spearman's correlation for each pairing–see Table 2), and a hierarchical OLS regression (where subjective career success was the dependent variable–see Table 3).

Table 2 Spearman correlations among variables (n = 348) *Source: authors*

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	Education (0 = up to bachelor; 1 = master/doctor)																		
2	Position (0 = specialist; 1 = manager)			.09															
3	Gender (0 = female; 1 = male)			−.11*	.13*														
4	Self-direction Thought	7.87	1.87	.00	.20**	−.01													
5	Self-direction Action	8.39	1.38	.02	.21**	−.11*	.34**												
6	Power Resources	5.71	2.19	.02	.23**	.08	.06	.08											
7	Power Dominance	5.88	2.41	.01	.12*	−.03	.10	.09	.38*										
8	Achievement	7.42	1.81	−.05	.05	−.10	.26**	.19**	.39**	.49**									
9	Stimulation	6.96	1.86	−.05	.14**	.12*	.37**	.32**	.13*	.21**	.25**								
10	Hedonism	8.11	1.48	−.08	.00	−.14**	.07	.30**	.12*	.23**	.30**	.33**							
11	Interpersonal Behavior	7.67	1.43	−.03	.12*	.02	.20**	.11*	.10	−.02	.14**	.14*	.13*						
12	Financial Rewards	6.84	1.87	.06	.24**	.06	.10	.14*	.09	.06	.02	.10	.12*	.30**					
13	Concern	7.56	1.39	.13*	.13*	−.01	.20**	.16**	.17**	.25**	.30**	.29**	.00	.09	.09				
14	Control	7.99	1.09	−.04	.22**	.05	.33**	.45**	.09	.05	.15**	.31**	.15**	.37**	.25**	.42**			
15	Curiosity	7.94	1.12	.11*	.19**	−.03	.41**	.35**	.09	.18**	.22**	.32**	.06	.15**	.13*	.60**	.52**		
16	Confidence	8.03	1.08	−.01	.20**	−.14**	.38**	.32**	.14**	.16**	.31**	.32**	.16**	.29**	.19**	.44**	.58**	.62**	
17	Subjective Career Success	7.38	1.72	−.09	.31**	.06	.23**	.22**	.08	−.03	.08	.07	.07	.43**	.40**	.11*	.38**	.14**	.35**

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 3 Regression models with employees' subjective career success (n = 348) *Source: authors*

Variable	Model 1 (β)	Model 2 (β)	Model 3 (β)
Constant	4.59****	0.31	0.78
Self-direction thought	0.12*	0.07	0.05
Self-direction action	0.22***	0.12^{+}	0.11^{+}
Power recourses	0.11*	0.06	0.03
Power dominance	−0.10*	−0.03	−0.04
Achievement	−0.02	−0.03	−0.01
Stimulation	−0.00	−0.06	−0.07
Hedonism	−0.00	−0.07	−0.05
Interpersonal behavior		0.34****	0.34****
Financial rewards		0.23****	0.21****
Concern		−0.07	−0.06
Control		0.30***	0.25**
Curiosity		−0.27**	−0.26**
Confidence		0.33***	0.33****
Education			−0.34*
Gender			0.17
Position			0.57****
R^2	0.09	0.39	0.42
Adjust R^2	0.07	0.36	0.39
F-stat	4.51****	16.07****	14.88****

****$p \leq 0.001$; ***$p \leq 0.005$; **$p \leq 0.01$; *$p \leq 0.05$; $^{+}$ $p < 0.1$

Position: 0–specialist, and 1–manager; Education: 0–up to bachelor, and 1–master/doctor; Gender: 0–female, and 1–male

Table 1 introduces some important aspects of the sample. First, those employees will higher education levels behaved more toward concern ($\rho = 0.13$, $p = 0.016$) and curiosity ($\rho = 0.11$, $p = 0.036$). Second, when the female employees were more educated ($\rho = -0.11$, $p = 0.034$), their personal values tended to be more toward self-direction than action ($\rho = -0.11$, $p = 0.049$) and hedonism ($\rho = -0.14$, $p = 0.009$), they behaved more toward confidence ($\rho = -0.14$, $p = 0.009$) than their male counterparts ($\rho = 0.13$, $p = 0.013$), and their personal values leaned more toward stimulation ($\rho = 0.12$, $p = 0.023$). Third, those employees in managerial positions scored higher in career behaviors among all factors as well as personal values (except for achievement and hedonism), and they perceived their careers to be more successful.

For assessing the influence of the employees' personal, behavioral, and formal characteristic factors on their subjective career success, a hierarchical OLS regression analysis was employed. The first regression (Model 1) assessed the influence of the employees' personal characteristics on their subjective career success, the second (Model 2) added behavioral characteristics into the regression, and the third (Model 3) added formal characteristics as well. A hierarchical regression analysis (see Table 2) revealed that the influence of the factors of

the personal values on the employees' perceptions of their career success was at a level of 9% (R2 = 0.09); however, the factors of the behavioral characteristics were much higher at 29% (ΔR2 = 0.29), while the factors of the formal characteristics were only at 3% (ΔR2 = 0.03).

Model 1 showed that, from the personal characteristics that influence the employees' perceptions about their career success, only the two self-direction traits (thought [β = 0.12, p = 0.024], and action [β = 0.22, p = 0.002]) and the two power traits (recourses [β = 0.11, p = 0.026], and dominance [β = − 0.10, p = 0.026]) were below average. What is important is that the power-dominance expressed by Schwartz et al. (2012) as "… wants people to do what he/she says" had a decreasing effect, while the self-direction-action expressed by Schwartz et al. (2012) as "…important to make own decisions about his/her life" had a significant effect in Model 2 (β = 0.12, p = 0.076) and Model 3 (β = 0.11, p = 0.092). Others personal characteristics–achievement, stimulation, and hedonism–had no influence on the subjective career success of the employees in the three models.

Model 2 showed that behavioral characteristics such as interpersonal behavior (β = 0.34, p = 0.000), financial rewards (β = 0.23, p = 0.000), control (β = 0.30, p = 0.003), and confidence (β = 0.33, p = 0.002) had a positive impact, while curiosity (β = − 0.27, p = 0.011) had a negative impact and concern had no influence at all on the employees' perceived career advancement. All of these behavioral characteristics have basically the same values in Model 3 except for control, which decreased to up to β = 0.25 (p = 0.015). Model 3 showed that adding three formal characteristics where two of them (education [β = − 0.34, p = 0.033] and position [β = 0.57, p = 0.000]) had an impact on the employees' perception of their career success when gender had no influence. Thus, it may be concluded that employees with higher formal educations (knowledge focus) are less satisfied with their careers, while employees with managerial experiences (skills focus) are on the opposite (more satisfied with their career-advancement dynamics). Finally, we found that self-direction through action from the personal characteristics, interpersonal behavior, financial rewards, control, confidence, and curiosity from the behavioral characteristics, and education with position from the formal characteristics predicted the subjective career success of the employees.

5 Discussion and conclusion

The current study proposes viewing career success as being dependent on employees' universal personal values, career behaviors, educations, and previous job experiences. Career behaviors could explain the largest part of the variance, showing that confidence and control behaviors are the key drivers of subjective career success. This is in line with the main body of the contemporary research on the role of career behaviors (Zacher 2014; Haenggli and Hirschi 2020; Akkermans et al. 2017).

There is a lack of studies that connect universal human values with career success. Previous research has shown that the power and achievement (as well as self-direction) values are those that are relevant to some of the career success dimensions (London 1983; London and Noe. 1997; Goulet et al. 2002; Tartakovsky and

Coen 2014; Gandal et al. 2005; Sagiv and Schwartz 2000; Fulop, 2009 in Sortheix 2014) Our study has shown that values have a marginal impact on subjective career success and that there is a positive relationship between power-dominance and self-direction-action values. Power could be the one value that is strongly related to inner motivation and striving for achievements. Interestingly, there were some differences between men and women in terms of their value orientations as they related to career success. Namely, we found that the values of female employees with higher educations are inclined toward self-direction from action as well as to hedonism, and they behave more toward confidence behaviors. On the other hand, male employees value being in managerial positions, and their personal values lean more toward stimulation.

The negative roles of the curiosity behaviors and the negative impact of education on subjective career success are counterintuitive findings. In our sample, education was related to the curiosity behaviors. As a sub-form of human capital, education has been connected to career success in many of the previous studies. For example, meta-analyses by Heslin et al. (2019), Ng et al. (2005), and Guan et al. (2019) found a positive relationship between education and subjective career success. A recent study by Jarlstrom et al. (2020) found no relationship between human capital and the career success of Finnish knowledge workers. It should be noted here that education is only one component of the human capital concept; the other components are related to training and experience (Becker 1964). Our study provides evidence that education by itself might be even harmful for career success if it is not based on relevant training and work experience (at least for the subjective perception of it). As another component of human capital concept, previous experience in managerial positions has shown a significant positive relationship to the successful subjective career construct (Brullebaut et al. 2021).

This might be related to the fact that the sample was comprised of highly educated respondents (66.1% of the respondents reported having a master's degree or PhD); for them, having extra years of education did not result in their expected career success. It might also be speculated that a higher-educated workforce has greater expectations for faster career development; when this does not happen, it results in lower career satisfaction. This opens avenues for future research on education versus practical experience within a model of subjective career success predictions.

Previous years spent in managerial positions have a significant positive impact on subjective career success; this shows that experience matters more than extensive education for the perception of career success. However, it should be also noted that the high average education level of our sample may have played a role, as a university degree might serve as a threshold for developing any career. Despite this fact, additional years of higher education (as after obtaining a master's or doctoral degree) do not add expected value. Contrarily, more education causes disappointment in one's career development if not backed up with relative experience and the skills that are gained in the workplace.

Although most of the previous studies have outlined curiosity behaviors as being crucial for career success (Zacher 2014), our study shows the contrary. According to Savickas and Porfeli (2012), curiosity behaviors were operationalized as exploring one's surroundings, looking for opportunities to grow as a person, investigating

options before making choices, observing different ways of doing things, probing deeper into questions one might have, and becoming curious about new opportunities. In our study, curiosity behaviors correlated positively with the education level of the respondents–those respondents who exhibited increased curiosity behavior were also more educated. This finding is in line with the longstanding research on curiosity, which defines curiosity as a desire for knowledge–either about abstract concepts, or regarding concrete and applicable situations (Loewenstein 1994; Celik et al. 2016). According to Mussel (2011), curious people enjoy the process of discovery, learning, and thinking. Thus, it is not surprising that the operationalization of curiosity behavior in career adaptability shows a correlation with higher levels of education. What is surprising is the fact that curiosity career behaviors lead to lower satisfaction levels with subjective careers (which was revealed in our study).

At the same time, these findings (as well as the fact that concern behaviors were shown to be insignificant to career success in our study) are in line with the arguments and empirical study that were developed by Hirschi et al. (2015), which claimed that "behaviors such as career planning and career exploration represent instances of adapting because people use these behaviors to address career development tasks and change their work and career conditions." According to these authors, the career adaptability scale that was developed by Savickas is related to (but empirically distant from) adapting, which includes career planning and career exploitation. Their study (which was conducted on German students) revealed that being curious can even inhibit career planning. Thus, more research is needed to reveal the relationships that curiosity behaviors have with career success and other career-related study constructs.

Concerning the working population, a possible explanation of the negative relationship between curiosity and career success might be that curiosity behaviors drive people to pursue extra years of education; however, if they do not receive signals from the job market that these efforts are being evaluated, they become less satisfied with their career development. Some other explanations could be related to the fact that individuals who are satisfied with their careers are less likely to explore their surroundings, observe different ways of doing things, and probe other curiosity concept-related behaviors because they are too busy with those actions that are related to fulfilling their current careers. Engagement in curiosity behaviors might show inner dissatisfaction with one's career path, and exploring new opportunities could indicate a starting point in his/her career-transformation process (which is usually predetermined by disappointment in their current situation).

Another counterintuitive finding is that the concern behaviors had no impact on subjective career success. The concern behaviors were operationalized as thinking about what one's future will be like, realizing that today's choices will shape one's future, preparing for the future, realizing the educational and vocational choices that one must make, and planning how to achieve one's goals. These behaviors show that the individual first prioritizes his/her career. This dimension received the lowest scoring within the adaptability scale questionnaire among the respondents in our sample; this shows that career-planning behaviors are generally not commonly practiced. It was expected that concern behaviors would play a positive role in predicting career success, as planning behaviors could lead to a more balanced career

development. This finding may be related to the post-Soviet context of the study and the fact that the inhabitants have experienced various environmental changes that were forced upon them. Planning is considered to be useless behavior that had not previously led to a successful outcome.

Although various studies have highlighted the discrimination of women in their career endeavors (Orser, Leck 2010; Mayrhofer et al. 2008; Overall, Hammond 2018), our results suggest that gender does not play any role in subjective career success assessment. This requires further investigation, but a tentative interpretation could be related to the geography of the sample, as Latvia is considered to be an egalitarian and feminine culture (Hofstede 2011) as well as the fact that the number of women in managerial positions in Latvia ranks highest in the EU (Eurostat 2020).

In this study, we have proposed a novel model that helps predict career success based on universal human values, career behaviors and attitudes, and personal factors (such as education and experience in managerial positions). The model has reasonable predictive validity; it can be explored further in future studies. We found that self-direction through actions from personal characteristics, interpersonal behavior, financial rewards, control, confidence, curiosity from behavioral characteristics, and education with positions from formal characteristics predict the subjective career success of employees.

The results of our study apply to organizations and their human resource departments as well as to individuals who aim at advancing their careers. For individuals, there is an important message that, by practicing confidence and control career behaviors, they can compensate for a lack of education or previous managerial experience. The results of our study encourage those who prioritize their careers in order to take managerial positions to increase their subjective career satisfaction. On the organizational side, it is important to understand which individual, behavioral, and formal factors lead to a positive perception of one's career path, as it would increase organizational commitment and drive one toward reaching their organizational goals. The value of self-direction through action could be emboldened in organizations along with control and confidence behaviors. These findings are also quite relevant for career coaching practitioners, as training certain career behaviors along with developing self-direction values could increase the career success perceptions of their clients.

The research focuses on an individual's perspective on career management and does not consider the effect of the external environment (both within an organization and in the societal and macroeconomic contexts).

All self-reported studies contain limitations, and this study is no exception (as it relied solely on a survey method). It is possible that the study suffers from a self-selection bias, as the respondents who took part and completed the questionnaire might have been primarily those who considered their careers to be more successful, while those who were dissatisfied with their careers might have been reluctant to take part in the study.

Another limitation is rooted in the geographical distribution of the respondents, as the study took place in Latvia. However, we assume that the results could be generalized to the Baltic region (whose inhabitants have similar socio-cultural backgrounds). In future studies, it would be beneficial to contrast the results with

a comparison of other geographical areas in the region (or beyond), as previous research has shown significant differences among national backgrounds (Bagdadli et al. 2019).

As the focus of the current study was knowledge workers, it could be beneficial to analyze whether the same factors that contribute to a successful career also apply to less-qualified respondents in future studies. Further research could explore more relationships between curiosity/concern behaviors and career success, as our study (along with some other previous studies–see Hirschi et al. 2015) has shown that these individuals might be empirically resistant to adapting such behaviors. More clarity would be needed for the better adjustment of the Savickas scale for any future studies. Another interesting avenue for future research would be to explore our model on more-heterogeneous samples in other socio-economic contexts. The negative relationship between education and career success also needs more empirical testing in the future. In future studies, it would be advisable to look at the cross effect between individual factors and the group of factors that were analyzed within the current article.

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