



UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA

Antecedents of career goals and their implications for career success across contexts

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Publications and Conference Contributions

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Summary

In this dissertation, I contribute to the literature that addresses why some people are more successful in their careers than others. Within this stream of research, scholars have increasingly examined the predictors of career success (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). Despite their relevance in career theorizing, little is known, however, about how career goals affect individuals' objective and subjective career success. Whereas objective career success refers to tangible indicators of career success such as status and salary, subjective career success makes reference to affective and attitudinal criteria like job and career satisfaction or turnover intentions (e.g., Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004). In this thesis, I examine how and when career goals relate to career success. Overall, I aimed to answer in this dissertation 1) whether career goals predict career success, 2) when they matter most for understanding career success, and 3) whether they mediate the relationship between personality traits and career success. These three research objectives are addressed in three related empirical studies.

In the first study, I draw on goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990a) to examine whether individuals with difficult and specific long-term career goals (i.e., career visions) are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs seven years later. For this purpose, I analyzed data of a time-lagged study with 74 MBA alumni. Confirming hypothesis of goal-setting theory, people with specific and difficult long-term career goals were more satisfied with their jobs seven years later, which explained why they reported fewer intentions to leave their jobs.

In the second study, I aimed to advance these findings by testing whether people with abstract ambition goals (i.e., self-enhancement values, Schwartz values theory,

1992) are also more likely to attain objective career success. Results from a cross-cultural study sampling approximately 35,000 participants across 29 countries show that ambition goals are positively associated with hierarchical status. In line with the tenet of the trait-activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000) that “strong situations” limit the influence of individual differences, the study’s finding indicate that the relationship between ambition goals and hierarchical status is most pronounced in “weak” situations, specifically in countries that do not highly encourage and reward ambition related behavior. On the contrary in countries with “strong” ambition cues, individuals’ ambition goals no longer explain who makes it to the top.

In the third study, I continued examining the boundary conditions of the relationship between career goals and career success. Specifically, I examined how the occupational context alters the relevance of short-term career goals for explaining career satisfaction. Based on self-verification theory (Swann, 1983), I hypothesized that positive goal emotions mediate the relationship between the personality trait of core self-evaluations (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997) and career satisfaction. Relying on the situational strength framework (Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida, 2010; Mischel, 1973), I expected that the relationship between positive goal emotions and career satisfaction is most pronounced when individuals are not highly embedded in their occupations. Results of a time-lagged study over 10 months with three measurement waves including responses from 140 MBA alumni support the hypothesized moderated mediation model. Core self-evaluations are both directly and indirectly related to career satisfaction through positive goal emotions. This indirect effect is moderated by occupational embeddedness such that a high level of occupational embeddedness substitutes positive goal emotions.

Taken together, these three empirical studies discuss the antecedents, boundary conditions, and implications of career goals for individuals' career success, providing important contributions to the careers and personal goals literatures. Specifically, the findings presented in this dissertation suggest that people who pursue ambitious, challenging, specific, and emotionally positive career goals are more likely to be successful in their careers. The results furthermore indicate that the appraisals of career goals can partly channel the effects of personality traits on career success. Although all three studies point to the benefits of pursuing career goals, the results of this dissertation also suggest that career goals are not equally relevant across contexts for understanding career success. In this sense, certain cultural and occupational contexts can alter the importance of career goal contents and appraisals, leaving career goals either important or negligible for predicting career success.

Resumen

En esta tesis doctoral, contribuyo a la investigación que busca responder por qué algunas personas son más exitosas que otras en sus carreras profesionales. Dentro de esta línea de investigación, los/las académicos/as frecuentemente han examinado cuáles son los predictores de éxito de la carrera (Ng, et al., 2005). Sin embargo, a pesar de su relevancia para la creación de teoría sobre carreras profesionales, poco es conocido sobre cómo los objetivos profesionales afectan el éxito laboral. Puntualmente, en esta tesis busco responder las siguientes cuestiones: 1) predicen los objetivos profesionales el éxito laboral, 2) cuándo son los objetivos más importantes para entender el éxito laboral, y 3) tienen los objetivos un rol mediador en la relación entre rasgos de personalidad y el éxito laboral. Abordo estas preguntas de investigación en tres estudios empíricos separados, pero conceptualmente vinculados.

En el primer estudio, me baso en la teoría *Goal-setting* (Locke & Latham, 1990a) para analizar si los individuos con objetivos difíciles y específicos, tienen mayores probabilidades de estar satisfechos con sus empleos siete años después. Con este propósito, analizo data longitudinal de 74 ex-alumnos de un programa MBA. Los resultados confirman las hipótesis de que las personas que plantearon objetivos específicos y difíciles, estuvieron más satisfechas con sus trabajos siete años después, lo que explica porqué reportaron menores intenciones de dejar sus empleos.

En el segundo estudio examiné si las personas con “objetivos ambiciosos” (valores *self-enhancement*, Schwartz, 1992) tienen también más probabilidades de conseguir estatus jerárquico (ascenso laboral). Los resultados de este estudio multinivel y transcultural, con aproximadamente 35.000 participantes de 29 países, muestran que los objetivos ambiciosos están positivamente asociados con el estatus jerárquico. En

línea con la teoría *Trait-activation* (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000), que plantea que las *situaciones fuertes* limitan la influencia de las características individuales, mis resultados indican que la relación entre objetivos ambiciosos y estatus jerárquico es más pronunciada en *situaciones débiles* específicamente en culturas que no incentivan ni recompensan las conductas relacionadas con el logro o la ambición.

En el tercer estudio continuó analizando las condiciones en las que los objetivos profesionales predicen el éxito laboral. Específicamente, pruebo cómo el contexto ocupacional modifica el impacto de los objetivos a corto plazo en la satisfacción con la carrera. Tomando la teoría *Situational strength* (Meyer, et al., 2010), planteo la hipótesis que la relación entre las emociones positivas asociadas a los objetivos y la satisfacción con la carrera sea más pronunciada cuando los individuos no están altamente involucrados con sus ocupaciones. Utilizando la teoría *Self-verification* (Swann, 1983), pruebo además que las emociones positivas asociadas a la consecución de objetivos, tienen un rol mediador en la relación entre el rasgo de personalidad *core-self evaluation* (Judge, et al., 1997) y la satisfacción con la carrera. Estas hipótesis fueron probadas en un estudio longitudinal de diez meses, con tres momentos de recogida de datos en 140 antiguos alumnos de MBA. Los resultados confirman el modelo de mediación moderación propuesto. Las *core self-evaluations* están directa e indirectamente ligadas a la satisfacción con la carrera a través de las emociones positivas vinculadas a los objetivos. Este efecto indirecto está moderado por el involucramiento ocupacional, de tal manera que un alto nivel de involucramiento compensa emociones positivas asociadas a los objetivos.

Tomados en conjunto, estos tres estudios empíricos discuten los antecedentes, condiciones contingentes e implicaciones de los objetivos profesionales en el éxito

laboral. Los resultados proveen nuevas e importantes contribuciones para la investigación en las áreas de carreras profesionales y en la de objetivos individuales. Específicamente, los resultados presentados en esta disertación, sugieren que las personas que tienen objetivos ambiciosos, retadores y específicos; así como emociones positivas asociadas a ellos, tienen más probabilidades de tener éxito laboral. Más aún, los resultados indican que los objetivos profesionales pueden explicar parcialmente los efectos de los rasgos de personalidad en el éxito laboral. Aún cuando los tres estudios señalan los beneficios de perseguir objetivos profesionales, también demuestro que para entender el éxito en la carrera, los objetivos no son igualmente relevantes en diferentes contextos. Algunos contextos culturales y ocupacionales pueden alterar la relevancia de los objetivos profesionales, dándoles o mucha importancia o quitándosela como predictores de éxito laboral.

Chapter 1: General Introduction

Why are some individuals more successful in their careers than others?

Researchers from a wide range of disciplines have addressed this question, concluding that career success can be explained by an array of individual and organizational factors (Ng, et al., 2005). Among the individual determinants of career success, scholars have singled out career goals to be one of the key determinants by which individuals can exert agency in their careers (Tams & Arthur, 2010). Career goals help individuals to achieve career success because they play a fundamental role in guiding career management behavior and in defining personal references of career success. In this respect, the construct of career goals has long been an integral part of theorizing in the careers field, specifically in research on career self-management processes (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2010) and career motivation theory (London, 1983). Despite the relevance of career goals for career theory, there is hardly any empirical research about the role of career goals in forming individual career success (Abele & Spurk, 2009b; Seibert, Kraimer, Holtom, & Pierotti, 2013).

This lack of empirical research is particularly surprising given that the implications of personal goals have been extensively studied in applied psychology and organizational behavior. In this sense, scholars have successfully related personal goals to work attitudes and job performance, concluding that individuals can become more satisfied with their jobs and improve their job performance by pursuing the “right” goals for the “right” reasons (e.g., Greguras & Diefendorff, 2010; Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2005; Maier & Brunstein, 2001). These findings raise the question whether people can also become more successful and satisfied with their careers when they pursue the “right” types of career goals.

Investigating the implications of career goals for career success provides a number of important theoretical contributions to the careers and personal goals literatures. More specifically, it contributes to research on career management (De Vos, De Clippeleer, & Dewilde, 2009; Gould, 1979; Greenhaus, et al., 2010), career motivation (London, 1983) and—more broadly speaking—career agency (Tams & Arthur, 2010). Furthermore, this line of research expands the existing literature on personal goals and their implications for life and work outcomes (e.g., Elliot, Sheldon, & Church, 1997; Emmons, 2003; Little, Salmela-Aro, & Phillips, 2007) by examining whether personal goals also influence career outcomes.

In addition to their theoretical importance, career goals are also of high practical relevance. In a career environment in which individuals increasingly have the primary responsibility for managing their careers (Briscoe, Hall, & Frautschy DeMuth, 2006; Hall, 2002), it is essential for individuals to learn to manage their careers and to effectively set career goals (e.g., Greenhaus, et al., 2010). The practical advantage of investigating career goals as a determinant of career success is that career goals are more tractable than other factors related to career success such as personality traits or contextual variables (Little, 1999). This means that individuals can learn to choose effective career goals, whereas it is more difficult to change personality traits or situational factors such as organizational career management practices. Besides offering practical implications for individual career actors, the research on career goals also helps career counselors, coaches, and managers to better understand the career success of their clients and employees. Specifically, findings of this research help career counselors to design career interventions and coaches to better consult and accompany their clients in achieving their career goals. The practical implications of this line of research can also support managers in making recruitment and development decisions.

The following work is structured as follows. First, the concepts of career success and career goals are defined and reviewed. In a second step, I describe how career goals can influence career success and how this relationship might be contingent upon contextual factors. Finally, I summarize the research objectives of this dissertation and given an outline of the following chapters.

Career Success

The concept of careers reflects the “evolving sequence of a persons’ work experiences over time” (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989, p. 8). Researchers traditionally describe career success as a two-sided concept that encompasses both objective and subjective components (Hughes, 1937; Hughes, 1958). In this respect, career success is commonly defined as “...the real and perceived achievements individuals have accumulated as a result of their work experiences” (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999, p. 621). Whereas objective career success refers to observable and verifiable hallmarks such as salary, number of promotions, and hierarchical status, subjective career success is based on individuals’ evaluations of their career attainments which are weighted, amongst others, against the progress towards career goals, age-related career expectations, or the careers of peers (Dries, Pepermans, & Carlier, 2008). The ‘subjective’ aspect of career success is commonly operationalized by the extent to which individuals are satisfied with their jobs and careers (Gattiker & Larwood, 1988; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995).

Career Goals

Personal goals are future-oriented representations that guide behavior in people’s lives (Brunstein, Dangelmayer, & Schultheiss, 1996). Like other personal action constructs — such as *personal projects* (Little, 1983), *strivings* (Emmons, 1986),

possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), and *life tasks* (Cantor, 1990)— they are considered to be second-level units of personality (e.g., McAdams, 1996; McAdams & Pals, 2006).¹ Second-level units of personality such as personal goals are at the interface of personality traits and situations, which means that they are shaped by stable dispositions and by contextual features (i.e., objective and subjectively perceived environment) (Little, et al., 2007). In comparison to first-tier units of personality (i.e., personality traits), they are thus more malleable and more proximal predictors of work and career outcomes (e.g., Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012).

Personal goals can refer to any possible life domain (e.g., academic, career, family goals) and can vary in time focus (e.g., short-term and long-term). Career goals reflect future-oriented representations of career outcomes that individuals intend to attain (Greenhaus, et al., 2010). More specifically, they refer to “...objectives, projects, and plans that are related to one’s job, career, and occupation” (Maier & Brunstein, 2001, p. 1036). This means that career goals can make reference to distinct areas of one’s work domains including the aspiration to a promotion, the development of competencies, or the successful completion of a project. Individuals typically possess multiple goals that are hierarchically arranged from short-term to long-term aspirations. Depending on their proximity and level in the goal hierarchy, goals can be classified into at least three groups: short-term goals, long-term goals, and peak goals (Masuda, Kane, Shoptaugh, & Minor, 2010). While short-term career goals commonly correspond to a time frame of 1 to 3 years, long-term career goals have a considerably longer time frame ranging approximately from 5 to 7 years (Greenhaus, et al., 2010). Goals that describe the career

¹ Several personality psychologists (e.g., Cantor, 1990; Little, 1996; McAdams, 1996; McAdams & Pals, 2006) have suggested that the construct of personality can best be represented in a general framework which differentiates between first-level units of personality (personality traits like Big Five), second-level units (goal variables such as values, personal goals, and personal projects), and third level-units (e.g., narratives).

status and activities at the peak of individuals' careers are defined as career visions (Holtschlag & Masuda, 2011). In comparison to career goals and career visions, values are higher up in the goal hierarchy and are more abstract and trans-situational in nature (Roberts & Robins, 2000). They are considered to be overarching goals that act as guiding principles across contexts, reflecting what individuals want in their lives (Schwartz, 1992). As such, individuals' overall values guide their cognitions and actions as they pursue their career goals. Specifically, they influence the types of career goals that individuals pursue and the strategies they apply to achieve these goals (Masuda, et al., 2010).

Goal functions. Personal goals do not only express human personality (Little, 1996), but they also represent individuals' proactive efforts to achieve their desired life outcomes. This capacity to set and pursue personal goals is called "conation" (Hershberger, 1988; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999) and the field that deals with the "explanation of the content, structure, and dynamics of personal goal-directed activity" is referred to as "conative psychology" (Little, 1993, p. 157). For individuals, there are several advantages associated with pursuing personal goals as these can serve distinct motivational functions that vary depending on the proximity of the goal.

Whereas more distal aspirations tend to inspire and give individuals a sense of purpose, short-term goals exert a self-regulatory function (Bandura, 1997). In this sense, career goals direct and energize career-related behavior (De Vos, De Clippeleer, et al., 2009; Gould, 1979). Specifically, they spur individuals to put effort into goal-related activities (Hall & Foster, 1977), help them to be persistent in their goal pursuit, and stimulate the development of effective goal strategies (Locke & Latham, 1990b). As career goals specify the career-related outcomes that a person aims to achieve

(Greenhaus, et al., 2010), they can also be beneficial in helping individuals to obtain goal-related feedback. The concrete representation that career goals provide of the desired career outcomes furthermore allows career actors to better reflect and measure their personal advancement (Wiese & Freund, 2005). Thus, consistent with the contest-mobility norm system of career success (Turner, 1960), which assumes that individuals compete for career success in an open and fair tournament, scholars have argued that career goal-setting facilitates individuals' career success (e.g., Abele & Wiese, 2008).

Goal characteristics. Even if career goal setting likely is beneficial in general, goal researchers have increasingly emphasized that not all goals are equally advantageous, admonishing that the pursuit of some goals can also have adverse repercussions (e.g., Sheldon & Elliot, 1998). In this respect, previous goal research has shown that the impact of goals on behavior, performance, and satisfaction depends on the contents and appraisals of personal goals (e.g., Greguras & Diefendorff, 2010; Judge, et al., 2005; Maier & Brunstein, 2001). Insights from this line of research evoke the question as of which career goals are most likely to lead to beneficial career outcomes and which goal content or appraisals might be harmful in obtaining subjective and objective career success.

The goal content, which describes the outcome individuals strive to attain, can be classified into discrete content categories, such as competence, finance, job change, job security, organization, progression, and well-being (Hyvönen, Feldt, Salmela-Aro, Kinnunen, & Mäkikangas, 2009). Other possibilities of content analyzing goals is to focus on the proportion of approach vs. avoidance goals (Elliot & Friedman, 2007), intrinsic vs. extrinsic goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Seibert, et al., 2013) or the quality of goals in terms of specificity and difficulty (Locke & Latham, 1990a). Goal appraisals,

on the other hand, focus on individuals' cognitive or affective evaluations of their personal goals, including the dimensions of self-efficacy, goal emotions, goal importance, goal support, or goal progress (Maier & Brunstein, 2001; Pomaki, Karoly, & Maes, 2009; Pomaki, Maes, & ter Doest, 2004).

Goal theories. Several goal theories provide useful vantage points for assessing which types of goals are most likely to lead to career success. Examples of these theories are self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and self-concordance theory (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999) which stipulate that intrinsic career goals pursued for self-concordant reasons are most likely to lead to subjective career success. Research on goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990a) posits that difficult and specific goals are most likely to lead to objective career success as well as—under certain conditions—to subjective career success. Furthermore, motivation systems theory (Ford, 1992), social cognitive career theory (Lent, 1994) and self-verification theory (Swann, 1983) suggest that goal characteristics such as goal-related self-efficacy, goal emotions, and goal support help individuals to become successful in their careers.

Career goals in context. Despite the likely benefits of career goals in promoting career success, current career management theories tend to implicitly assume that career actors have full control over their careers, neglecting that contextual factors might interact with career goals to explain individuals' career success (Seibert, et al., 2013). This almost exclusive focus on agency is in contrast to recent career research (e.g., Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012; Mayrhofer, Meyer, Iellatchitch, & Schiffinger, 2004; Tams & Arthur, 2010) which has emphasized that careers are determined not only by individual discretion, but also by contextual factors such as the sponsorship of powerful elites (cf. sponsorship-model, Turner, 1960) as well as the

broader organizational, occupational, and national context. In this respect, career scholars have increasingly claimed that career success can only be properly understood when it is placed within the interplay of personality and situation or agency and structure (Mayrhofer, Meyer, & Steyrer, 2007).

For the literature on career goals this means that a complete understanding of the relevance of career goals for promoting career success requires an understanding of the contextual factors that can alter the role of career goals in promoting career success. Psychological research provides useful theoretical frameworks for discussing how the context might augment, inhibit, or substitute the effect of career goals. The trait-activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000), which incorporates concepts of ‘situational strength’ and ‘trait relevance’, provides for instance an all-encompassing conceptual model for analyzing when personality matters for predicting work outcomes. The insights gained from trait-activation theory can furthermore be complemented by theorizing of the frog-pond model (Davis, 1966) and the corresponding ‘complementarity hypothesis’ (Pierro, Presaghi, Higgins, Klein, & Kruglanski, 2012).

Research Objectives

The first objective of this dissertation is to examine the potential benefits of career goals for career success. In three empirical studies, I examine how goal characteristics explain distinct facets of career success. In Study 1, I examine how the difficulty and specificity of MBAs students’ career visions predict their levels of job satisfaction and turnover intention seven years later. In Study 2, I examine whether ambition values predict hierarchical status. In Study 3, I examine how positive goal emotions relate to career satisfaction.

Besides examining the effects of career goals on career success, the second objective of this thesis is to examine how the relevance of career goals changes across contexts. More specifically, I examine how the relevance of self-enhancement values for understanding hierarchical status changes across different national cultures (Study 2) and how the importance of positive goal emotions for career satisfaction depends on individuals' occupational embeddedness (Study 3).

The third objective of this dissertation is to investigate whether career goals can account for the relationship between personality traits and career success. For this reason, I examined in Study 3 whether positive goal emotions mediate the relationship between core self-evaluations (Judge, et al., 1997) and subjective career success through positive goal emotions.

Dissertation Outline

The dissertation is composed of three empirical studies that examine the roles of career goals and values on career success. These studies, which I present in Chapter 2 to 4, can be read independently.

In Study 1, I examine how the quality of career visions (i.e. specificity and difficulty) relates to job satisfaction and turnover intention seven years after the vision was conceptualized. Based on goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990a), I hypothesize that the specificity and difficulty of individuals' career visions is positively associated with their job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Furthermore, I test whether job satisfaction mediates the relationship between the quality of career visions and turnover intentions. The postulated mediation model is tested with data from a seven year time-lagged study including responses of 74 MBA students.

Based on Study 1, I test in Study 2 whether and when ambition values (i.e., self-enhancement values, Schwartz, 1992) predict objective career success, specifically hierarchical status. In line with Schwartz' values theory (1992) and trait-activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000), I argue that ambition values are on average positively associated to hierarchical status, but that this relationship depends on the cultural context. Specifically, I hypothesize that the relationship is most pronounced in countries that do not provide strong cues for ambition related behavior. The hypotheses were tested with approximately 35,000 individuals from 29 countries.

In study 3, I examine whether and when the positive emotions associated with individuals' career goals mediate the relationship between core self-evaluations and career satisfaction. Based on self-verification theory (Swann, 1983) and the situational strength construct (Meyer, et al., 2010; Mischel, 1973), I hypothesized that individuals with positive core self-evaluations are more satisfied with their careers because they associate positive emotions with their goals. I furthermore argue that core self-evaluations and positive goal emotions are particularly relevant for understanding subjective career success when individuals are not highly embedded in their occupations. I conducted a time-lagged study over 10 months, with three measurement waves, including responses from 140 MBA alumni to test the research model.

In the last chapter (Chapter 5), I summarize and integrate the findings of these studies, discuss the resulting theoretical and practical implications and provide conclusions and directions for future research.

Chapter 2: The impact of career visions on work attitudes: A longitudinal approach

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of difficult and specific career visions on job satisfaction and turnover intentions 7 years after students reported their visions.

Design/methodology/approach: Data for this study was collected in two waves, seven years apart, from the same cohort. At time 1 the career visions of MBA students were measured in terms of difficulty and specificity. At time 2 MBA students reported their job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

Findings: Results showed that MBA students with a specific and challenging career vision were less likely to report intentions to leave their work 7 years after reporting their visions. Further, job satisfaction mediated this relationship.

Research limitations/ implications: The study was limited due to the small sample size used ($n=74$). Future studies should also test whether goal progress and job performance could be mediators between the quality of career vision and job satisfaction.

Practical implications: Results of this study indicate that individuals who formulated more specific career visions were more satisfied with their jobs seven years after reporting their visions. This finding has implications for career counselors, coaches and managers who care for the development of their subordinates.

Originality/value: This is the first study that examined the impact of the quality of career visions (i.e., specificity and difficulty) on future job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

Keywords: Career goal; Job satisfaction; Turnover intention; Goal-setting theory

Article Type: Research Paper

Introduction

Researchers have argued that the study of career goals can bring a new perspective to the understanding of work attitudes, such as job satisfaction and turnover intention (Pomaki, et al., 2004). This is because employees' attitudes are developed based on the experience gained in goal pursuit (Hülshager & Maier, 2010). For instance, job satisfaction increases when individuals are able to accomplish their valued goals (Locke, 1976). Further, it has been argued that employees can become more satisfied with their jobs by pursuing the "right" career goals (Judge, et al., 2005).

In identifying the "right" type of career goals, most researchers have focused on goal appraisals. Until now the following goal appraisals have been linked to job satisfaction: perceived goal clarity (O'Neill & Mone, 1998), goal support beliefs (Duffy & Lent, 2009; Pomaki, et al., 2004), perceived goal conflict, goal-related positive emotions (Pomaki, et al., 2004), goal attainability (Maier & Brunstein, 2001), perceived goal difficulty (Wiese & Freund, 2005), and reasons for goal pursuit (Judge, et al., 2005). That is, pursuing goals that are perceived to be clear, are supported by the employer, generate little goal conflict and evoke many positive goal-related emotions tend to be related with job satisfaction. People are also more satisfied with their jobs when they progress towards goals that they perceive to be difficult (Wiese & Freund, 2005) and when they are committed to attainable goals (Maier & Brunstein, 2001). Moreover, individuals who pursue goals for autonomous reasons tend to be more satisfied with their jobs than individuals who pursue goals for external or introjected reasons (Judge, et al., 2005).

Despite the increasing number of studies linking goals with employee attitudes, researchers have not yet objectively measured the difficulty and specificity of personal goals even though there is reason to believe that these qualities could predict job satisfaction. Further, most studies have focused on short-term task or career goals (Judge, et al., 2005; O'Neill & Mone, 1998) while some studies have asked participants to name goals without specifying a time frame (Wiese & Freund, 2005). In understanding the role of career goals in the work context, it is useful to differentiate between goals according to their proximity because distal and short-term goals serve different functions. Individual's long-term goals inspire the setting of short-term goals (Bandura, 1997) and define abstract values which guide activities and plans (Cropanzano, James, & Citera, 1993). Short-term goals, on the other hand, regulate immediate motivation and action and provide immediate feedback and a sense of personal mastery. Considering the relevancy of the topic and the scarcity of studies addressing it, researchers have argued that future studies are necessary to further identify what types of career goals might lead to favourable work attitudes (Singley, Lent, & Sheu, 2010).

In this paper, we report a 7-year longitudinal study to examine the effects of having difficult and specific long-term career goals, defined here as career vision (Masuda, et al., 2010), on job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Specifically, we argue based on goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990a) that the objective level of specificity and difficulty in one's career vision can lead to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover intentions 7 years after the vision was conceptualized. Further, we also argue that job satisfaction will mediate the effect of vision specificity and difficulty on turnover intentions (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2). Below we develop our hypotheses.

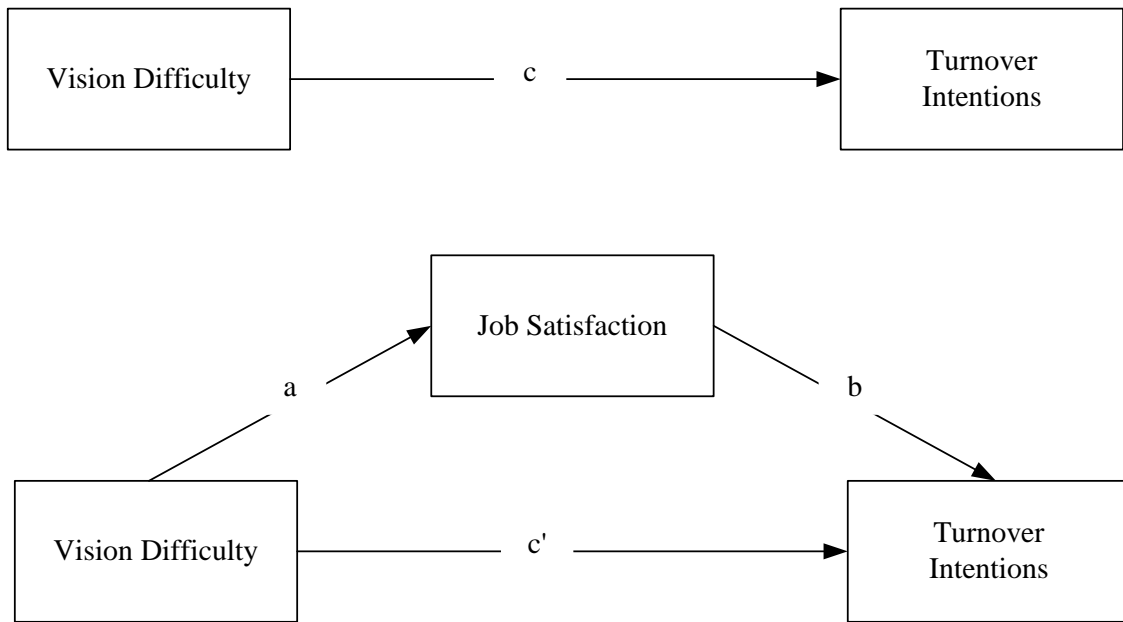


Figure 2.1. Proposed conceptual scheme (including vision difficulty). The total effect of vision difficulty on turnover intentions (weight c) is composed of the direct effect (weight c') and the indirect effect (weight $a \times b$).

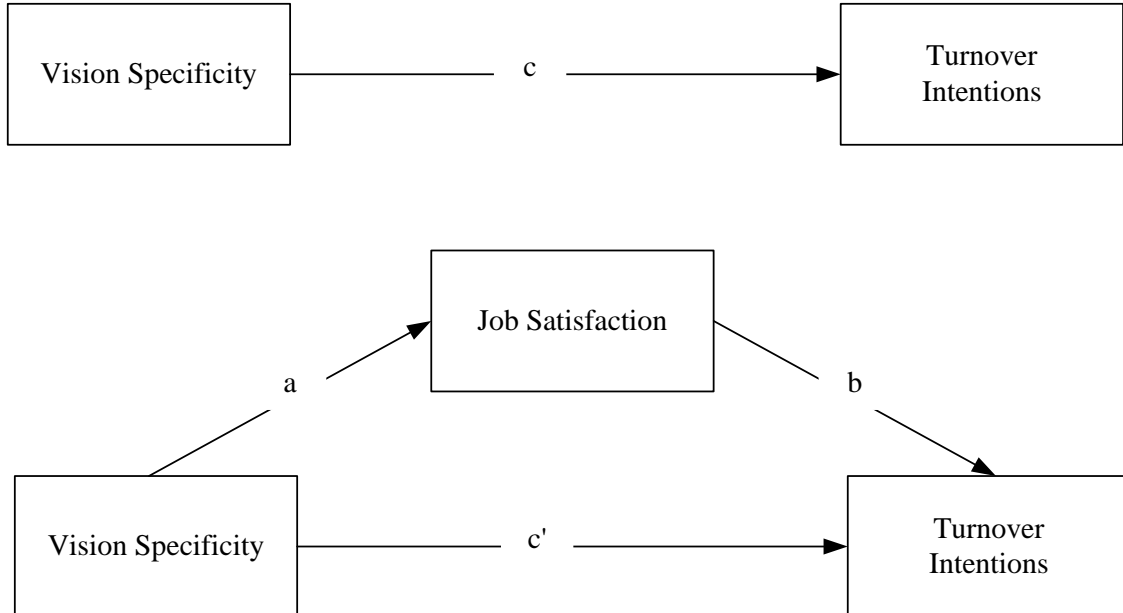


Figure 2.2 Proposed conceptual scheme (including vision specificity). The total effect of vision specificity on turnover intentions (weight c) is composed of the direct effect (weight c') and the indirect effect (weight $a \times b$).

Rationale for the Present Conceptual Schemes

Several goal researchers have argued that the pursuit of goals leads to individual well-being and satisfaction (Brunstein, Schultheiss, & Grässman, 1998; Carver, 1998; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Lent & Brown, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Based on goal-setting theory, Locke and Latham (1990a) further specify that particularly specific and difficult goals serve a motivating function and promote work performance and satisfaction.

Vision difficulty with Job Satisfaction

In fact, more than 500 studies have shown that difficult goals lead to higher performance than easy goals (Locke & Latham, 1990a). In line with expectancy theory, “good performance may lead to rewards, which in turn lead to satisfaction” (Lawler & Porter, 1967, p. 26). Locke (1970) also regards performance as an antecedent of job satisfaction and specifies that “the effect of performance on satisfaction is viewed as a function of the degree to which performance entails or leads to the attainment of the individual’s important job values” (p. 485). In their meta-analysis Judge, Thoresen, Bono and Patton (2001) report that the population value of the correlation between job satisfaction and job performance is about .30. Based on these assumptions, individuals with difficult visions should perform more effectively in their jobs which in turn should lead to higher job satisfaction.

The pursuit of difficult goals does not only lead to higher achievement, but also influences the affective evaluation of job success (Wiese & Freund, 2005). The pursuit of difficult goals evokes positive emotional reactions such as pride, self-respect and a sense of achievement (Mento, Locke, & Klein, 1992). Thus, individuals are more likely to be satisfied with pursuing goals that require high personal investment than goals that

are easily attainable. This argumentation is in line with Wiese and Freund's (2005) finding that goal progress only leads to job satisfaction for individuals who perceive their goals to be difficult. Based on the aforementioned arguments we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1. Vision difficulty predicts job satisfaction, with those individuals holding more difficult career visions being more satisfied with their jobs 7 years later.

Vision Specificity with Job Satisfaction

Several goal-setting studies have shown that individuals who are given specific and clear task goals tend to be more satisfied with their jobs than individuals who are given vague task goals (Lee, Bobko, Earley, & Locke, 1991). Specific goals are more effective than "do your best" goals because they reduce ambiguity about the desired outcome (Locke, Chah, Harrison, & Lustgarten, 1989), facilitate the direction of attention and effort toward goal-relevant activities, increase enthusiasm about goals and the persistence during goal pursuit and stimulate strategy generation (Locke & Latham, 2002; Morisano, Hirsh, Peterson, Pihl, & Shore, 2010; Smith, Locke, & Barry, 1990). However, as previously stated most of these studies have been done with assigned proximal goals and not with personal career visions.

We believe that the same arguments could be applied to specific career visions because vision specificity is related with the setting of specific task goals (Masuda, et al., 2010). Based on this finding and considering the benefits of pursuing a specific task goal, it is likely that individuals who have more specific visions are more successful in progressing towards their vision than individuals with less specific visions. Goal progress, in turn, has predominantly been linked to job satisfaction (Alliger & Williams,

1993; Harris, Daniels, & Briner, 2003; Hülshager & Maier, 2010; Lent & Brown, 2006; Maier & Brunstein, 2001), albeit not consistently (Duffy & Lent, 2009; Judge, et al., 2005; Wiese & Freund, 2005).

Hypothesis 2. Vision specificity predicts job satisfaction, with those individuals holding more specific career visions being more satisfied with their jobs 7 years later.

Job Satisfaction with Turnover Intentions

In many empirical studies, job satisfaction has been shown to predict turnover intention (Eby, Freeman, Rush, & Lance, 1999; Randsley De Moura, Abrams, Retter, Gunnarsdottir, & Ando, 2009; Rosse & Hulin, 1985). Job dissatisfaction generates several withdrawal cognitions. For instance, dissatisfied employees appraise the costs and benefits about leaving their job (Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Prussia, & Griffeth, 1992; Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978) and compare the job reality with their desired work conditions (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 1992). Further, theoretical studies support the view that job satisfaction has direct (Bem, 1967; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) or indirect (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974) effects on turnover intention. According to the meta-analysis conducted by Hellman (1997) the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention is $r=-.47$. Based on this, we hypothesize the following.

Hypothesis 3. Job satisfaction predicts turnover intention such that individuals who are more satisfied with their jobs report lower turnover intentions.

Based on the before mentioned hypotheses stating that vision specificity and difficulty lead to higher job satisfaction and that job satisfaction leads to less turnover

intention, we argue that career vision will indirectly influence turnover intentions by influencing satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4a. Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between vision difficulty and turnover intention.

Hypothesis 4b. Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between vision specificity and turnover intention.

Methodology

This study used a seven-year longitudinal design in order to examine whether vision specificity and vision difficulty can predict job satisfaction and turnover intention. Data were collected in two waves, seven years apart, from the same cohort. Vision difficulty and specificity were measured at Time 1, whereas job satisfaction, turnover intention and the control variables were measured at time 2.

Sample

Participants for this study were Master in Business Administration (MBA) students from six universities from the U.S.A. The universities were spread across the U.S.A. (3 from East Coast, 1 from Midwest and 2 from West Coast). In the first wave, a total of 1800 students were asked via email to participate. Two hundred and three students agreed to participate in this study, which is an 11% response rate. The average age of participants was 28 (SD= 6.4), 47.8% were female and 52.2% were male, 37.5% were part-time students and 62.5% were full-time students. Also, 46.3% were full-time employees, 33.3% were part-time employees and 20.4% were unemployed. Eighty-nine persons participated in the second part of the study, of which 7.9% were unemployed, 5.6% self-employed, 1.1% worked part-time (not self-employed) and 85.4% full-time

(not self-employed). In line with Allison's suggestion (2001) we deleted 15 cases with missing values on the dependent variable in order to get unbiased estimates. The final sample is thus comprised of 74 participants, all but one of them was employed full-time (i.e., work at least 40 hours/week). Considering that we received 74 usable questionnaires, the follow-up response rate between Time 1 and Time 2 was 36%.

We conducted t-tests in order to investigate whether respondents of both questionnaires differed from respondents who only filled out the questionnaire at Time 1. The results of the t-tests did not reveal any statistically significant differences in the means and variances of the demographic and goal-setting variables. Further, the results of the one-way analysis of variance indicate that participants from different universities did not significantly differ with regard to vision specificity ($F(5,68) = 1.56, p = .18$) and vision difficulty ($F(5,68) = 1.57, p = .18$).

Procedures

This study is part of a larger study about personal goals and career success. During the first wave, the MBA directors of six major universities volunteered to send emails to their MBA students informing them about the opportunity to participate in this study. A multiple contact strategy was used in order to improve response rate (Dillman, 2000). Participants were sent emails by their MBA directors alerting them that they would be contacted to collaborate in a research study. A last email telling that those who participated would have the opportunity to win a prize was included to boost response rate. The winners were contacted via email and received the money via personal checks. Seven years after the first wave, the participants were contacted again via email, letters and social networks such as LinkedIn and asked to participate in the

second wave study. To encourage responses, all respondents entered into a drawing for 10 prizes valued at \$25 each.

Measures

Career Vision. Participants were asked to think of what they will be doing or what they will have achieved at the peak of their career. Then, participants were asked to write down their personal career vision. These statements were subsequently rated for the attributes of specificity and difficulty. Researchers agreed firstly on the definition of vision difficulty and specificity and secondly on prototypes for extremely specific, unspecific, easy and difficult vision statements. Afterwards, the two raters evaluated the visions statements according to their specificity and difficulty. Vision specificity and difficulty were measured on an 8-point scale from 0 (attribute absent) to 7 (attribute present at a very high level). Participants, who indicated not to have a vision, received a rating of “0” for both attributes. This method of rating has been successfully implemented by Baum et al. (1998) and Masuda et al. (2010).

Vision specificity was assessed based on Locke et al.’s (1989) definition that goal specificity is evident by the range and clarity of outcomes that potentially satisfy goal accomplishment. Two raters assessed the vision specificity on a scale ranging from 0 (attribute absent) to 7 (goal defines a concrete single outcome, behaviors required for attainment are clear). Interrater reliability for vision specificity as assessed using an Intraclass Correlation Coefficient was .90.

An example of a very specific vision statement (7) is:

Being Vice President of the largest pharmaceutical company helping to produce the best drugs to help AIDS in South Africa.

An example of a very unspecific vision statement (0) is:

Hopefully make more money and be in a position where I'm respected and not treated as a drone.

In order to rate vision difficulty, the same approach was used so that vision difficulty was rated against prototypical difficult and easy career visions. This approach has been used for rating self-set goals in a variety of settings (Kane, Loughran, Shoptaugh, Nelson, & Reichard, 2002; Wright, 1990). A vision statement received a rating of "0" if it was determined that it was easily obtained by anyone. More difficult vision statements made, amongst others, reference to higher job positions, larger company size and higher number of activities. Interrater reliability for vision difficulty as assessed using an Intraclass Correlation Coefficient was .84.

An example of a very difficult vision statement (7) is:

I will be the head of the largest company in the world. I will be recognized as being a great leader.

An example of a very easy vision statement (0) is:

Whatever it is that I do after 15 years, I will definitely be happy with that.

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was measured by the three-item Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979). A sample item is "All in all I am satisfied with my job". Responses were made on a 5-point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .87.

Turnover Intentions. Colarelli's (1984) three-item scale of intention to quit the job was used to measure turnover intentions. A sample item is "I frequently think of quitting my job". Responses were made on a 5-point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .78.

Controls. In this study we controlled for demographic variables which have previously been identified as predictors of turnover (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). Specifically, we included respondents' age, gender, number of children and marital status. Gender was coded as 1 (female), 2 (male), and marital status as 0 (not married), 1 (married).

Analyses

The hypotheses responding to the simple mediation models outlined in Figure 2.1 and 2.2 were tested using regression analyses and a MACRO provided by Preacher and Hayes (2008) which allows controlling for covariates. Because none of the control variables were significantly related with the dependent variables, we did not include them in our analyses.

Using the non-parametric bootstrapping procedure (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) we examined whether job satisfaction mediates the effect of vision specificity and respectively vision difficulty on turnover intentions (H4). Bootstrapping is preferable to the causal mediation model (Baron, 1986) and the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) because it has higher power and is more likely to avoid type I error (MacKinnon, 2004). Further, bootstrapping does not require the assumption of a normal sampling distribution of the indirect effect (Hayes, 2009). The following analyses and bootstrap estimates are based on 5,000 bootstrap samples.

Results

Means, standard deviations and correlations of all study variables are shown in Table 2.1. An inspection of the correlations reveals that vision difficulty and vision specificity are highly positively correlated ($r = .76, p < .001$). The correlation between vision difficulty and job satisfaction is nonsignificant ($r = .22, p = .06$), whereas the correlation between vision specificity and job satisfaction is significantly positive ($r = .26, p = .03$). Although the correlation between vision difficulty and job satisfaction is nonsignificant, it was in the hypothesized direction. As indicated by the significance value, there is also only a probability of .06 that this result occurred simply by chance. The results further indicate a negative correlation between turnover intentions and vision difficulty ($r = -.24, p = .03$) and a negative correlation between turnover intentions and vision specificity ($r = -.33, p = .01$). Results also indicate a relative lack of association between the control variables and job satisfaction and turnover intention. Following Becker's (2005) recommendation, we therefore exclude the control variables from further analyses.

Regression Analyses

The results of the simple regression indicate that vision difficulty does not significantly predict job satisfaction ($\beta = .22, B = .10, t(73) = 1.89, p = .06, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.01; .19], R^2 = .05, \text{ power} = .5$). Thus, H1 was not supported. As posited in H2, vision specificity predicts job satisfaction ($\beta = .26, B = .11, t(73) = 2.25, p = .03, 95\% \text{ CI } [.01; .20], R^2 = .07$). Further, supporting H3, job satisfaction significantly predicts turnover intentions ($\beta = -.49, B = -.26, t(73) = -4.74, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.37; -.15], R^2 = .29$).

Table 2.1

Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations of Study Variables

	Means	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Vision difficulty	4.15	3.55	1.00							
2 Vision specificity	3.55	1.73	.76**	1.00						
3 Job satisfaction	3.92	.72	.22	.26*	1.00					
4 Turnover intentions	2.69	.39	-.27*	-.36**	-.49**	1.00				
5 Age	34.42	5.64	.06	.03	.02	-.08	1.00			
6 Gender	1.56	.5	.06	.10	-.03	-.02	.13	1.00		
7 Marital status	.69	.46	-.03	-.01	-.09	.14	-.02	.04	1.00	
8 Number of children	.77	.94	-.01	.03	.04	-.02	.21	.33**	.57**	1.00

Note. $N = 74$. Vision difficulty and specificity measured at Time 1; remaining variables refer to Time 2

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$;

Mediation Analyses

The model as pictured in Figure 2.3 can explain 26.5% of the variance in turnover intention ($F(2,71) = 12.8, p < .001$). As in the regression analysis reported above, vision difficulty does not significantly predict job satisfaction ($B = .09, t(71) = 1.89, p = .06$). If we applied the criteria of the causal mediation model (Baron, 1986), this result would suggest that job satisfaction does not significantly mediate the relationship between vision difficulty and turnover intention. However, Preacher and Hayes (2004) argue that a significance test associated with ab (product of the $X \rightarrow M$ and $M \rightarrow Y$ paths) addresses mediation more directly than the separate significance test required in causal mediation model (Baron, 1986). Even if one of the constituent paths in the mediating models is nonsignificant, the indirect effect can be detectably different from zero (Hayes, 2009). Indeed, the bootstrapping results indicate that the specific indirect effect of vision difficulty on turnover intentions through job satisfaction is significant, with a point estimate of $-.023$ and a 95% BCa (bias-corrected and accelerated, see Efron, 1987) bootstrap confidence interval of $-.0559$ to $-.0018$. The total effect of vision difficulty on turnover intention (total effect: $c = -.06, t(71) = -2.36, p = .02$) becomes nonsignificant when the mediator job satisfaction is included in the model (direct effect: $c' = -.04, t(71) = -1.63, p = .11$). Thus, despite the nonsignificant association between vision difficulty and job satisfaction, the bootstrapping results suggest that job satisfaction mediates the relationship, thus supporting H4a.

The overall model as pictured in 2.4 can explain 29% of the variance in turnover intention ($F(2,71) = 14.99, p < .001$). The bootstrap results indicate that the total effect of vision specificity on turnover intention (total effect: $c = -.08, t(71) = -3.28, p = .001$) decreases when the mediator job satisfaction is included in the model (direct effect: $c' = -.06, t(71) = -2.45, p = .02$). The specific indirect effect of vision

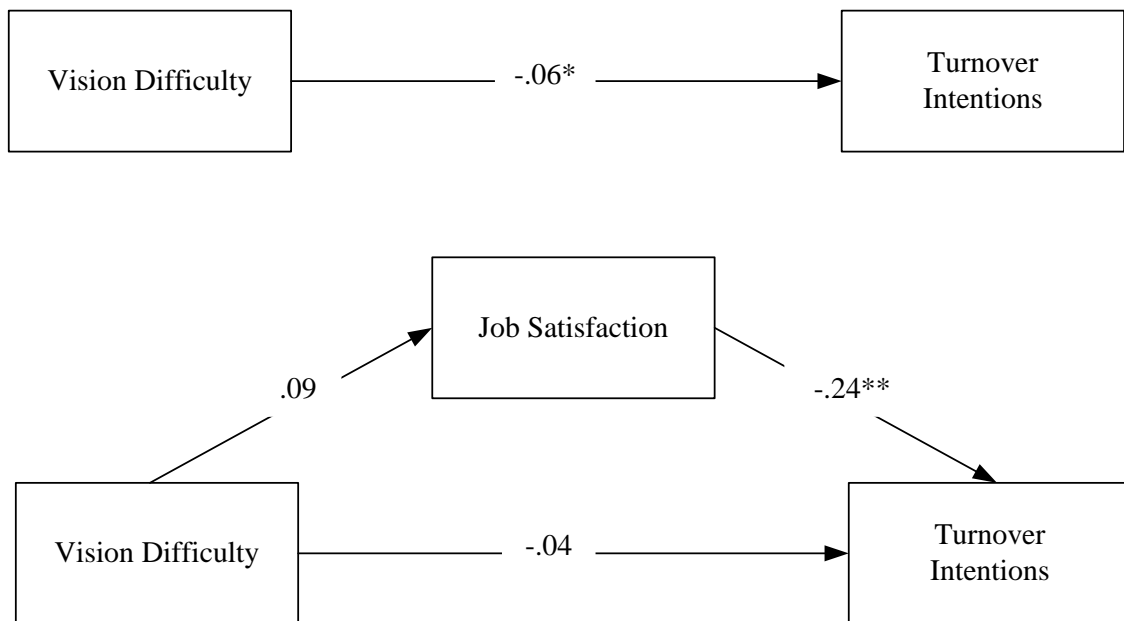


Figure 2.3. Results of the research model (including vision difficulty); Note: Path values represent unstandardized regression coefficients, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

specificity on turnover intentions through The specific indirect effect of vision specificity on turnover intentions through job satisfaction is significant, with a point estimate of $-.025$ and 95% BCa (Efron, 1987) bootstrap confidence interval of $-.056$ to $-.0053$. The results suggest that job satisfaction is a partial mediator of the effect of vision specificity on turnover intention, thus supporting H4b.

Discussion

Our study was the first study to empirically examine how the quality of career visions (i.e., specificity and difficulty) relates with job satisfaction and turnover intentions 7 years after the vision was conceptualized. Specifically, our study showed that individuals who conceptualize specific career visions were less likely to report intentions to leave their job 7 years after they reported their vision. Our results also showed that job satisfaction mediated this relationship. That is, those who

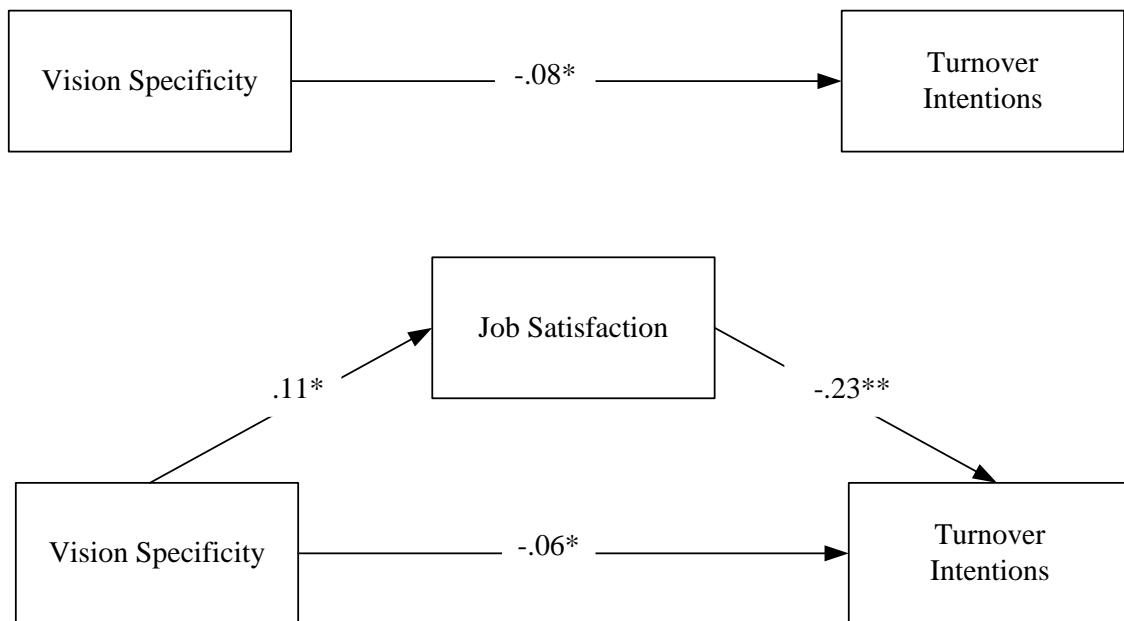


Figure 2.4. Results of the research model (including vision specificity); Note: Path values represent unstandardized regression coefficients, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

conceptualized specific career visions were also more likely to be satisfied in their jobs which in turn led to lower intentions to leave their job. Our findings are consistent with goal-setting theory, which shows that specific goals reduce ambiguity as to what a person desires, which directs attention towards goal-relevant activities, and increases enthusiasm and persistence during goal pursuit (Locke & Latham, 2002; Morisano, et al., 2010; Smith, et al., 1990). However, this is the first study that examined more abstract distal goals such as career visions. We argue that a specific vision has similar and durable effects on job satisfaction. This is in line with previous findings showing that those who conceptualize specific career visions are also more likely to set specific task goals and to be committed to goals that, if attained, lead to the realization of such vision (Masuda, et al., 2010).

We also argue that people who report a challenging vision would report higher job satisfaction, which in turn would lead to lower turnover intentions. As Judge et al.

(2005) argued, whereas the pursuit of difficult goals may be dissatisfying in the short term because individuals may have low expectations for goal attainment (Mento, et al., 1992), the attainment of those goals is considered to lead to satisfaction in the long term (Locke & Latham, 1990a). It appears there is likely a positive relationship between vision difficulty and job satisfaction. The relationship failed to reach statistical significance in this study ($p = .06$) but this was likely a function of low power resulting from limited sample size. The recommended power level is 80% (Cohen, 1988) but the observed power for testing this relationship in the current study only reached 50%. Thus, we encourage other longitudinal studies to examine the relationship between challenging career vision and job satisfaction.

Although vision difficulty did not significantly predict job satisfaction in our regression, results from our bootstrapping analyses showed that challenging career vision has an indirect effect on turnover intentions via job satisfaction. Specifically, people who conceptualized challenging visions were less likely to report intentions to leave their work. This effect was mediated by job satisfaction. As the relationship between challenging vision and job satisfaction was not significantly strong, we suggest other possible explanatory mechanisms for the relationship between challenging vision and turnover intention such as implementation strategies and subjective career success.

Limitations

The limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The sample in this study may not be representative of the general population. First, only 11% of participants who were contacted by email answered the survey in the first wave of our study. Second, as any longitudinal design, our study suffered from attrition. In total, 74 of the 89 returned questionnaires at Time 2 could be used, which makes an overall response

rate of 4.11%. Despite the low response rate, it is important to note that there were no significant differences with regards to the sample variables between those who responded to both questionnaires and those who only responded to the Time 1 questionnaire. Hence, attrition bias may not be a substantial problem with this sample. Nevertheless, we cannot generalize our findings to other populations due to the low overall response rate. We, therefore, encourage future studies to replicate these findings using different populations (i.e., not MBA students).

Besides having a low response rate, another limitation is the small sample size which led to low power. Given that the significance value of the relationship between vision difficulty and job satisfaction was .06, it is possible that there is a link between the two variables which we could not detect due to the low power of our study. Hence, we encourage future studies to replicate this finding using a larger sample size.

Moreover, the design of our study was correlational in nature. Hence, we cannot draw any casual inferences. For instance, it is possible that potential unmeasured antecedents of job satisfaction are also antecedents of quality of career visions. For example, we did not measure whether visions were intrinsically or extrinsically motivated (Sheldon & Elliot, 1998). Previous studies have shown that individuals who pursue goals for intrinsic reasons (i.e., because these goals are congruent with their values and not because they are obliged to do so) are more satisfied with their job and with their lives (Judge, et al., 2005). It is possible that those who pursued their visions for intrinsic reasons tended to report more specific and difficult visions which could have lead to future job satisfaction. To rule out these other explanations we encourage future studies that examine personality factors, motives, and values in relation with career visions.

Further, another antecedent that we did not take into account is the role of contextual factors on the quality of career visions. For example, it is possible that mentors, coaches, or role models could help others clarify their personal visions. To test possible causal influences of these contextual factors, we encourage field experiments examining the impact of mentoring or coaching on the quality of individual's career vision and level of job satisfaction.

Lastly, although we argue that the quality of one's vision is related with job satisfaction because it relates with higher job performance and goal progress, we did not measure these variables. Future studies should test whether goal progress and job performance could be mediators between vision quality and job satisfaction.

Conclusions and Future Directions for Research

This is the first study that examined the relationship of the quality of distal career goals (i.e., career visions) with future job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Our findings show the importance of having clear career visions to future job satisfaction. This has important implications to coaches, career counselors and even managers who care for the development of their subordinates. Helping others to clarify their vision could possibly be an important exercise to help them to be satisfied in their jobs in the future. This research also shows the benefits of studying career goals to predict work attitudes such as job satisfaction and turnover intention. We hope that with this study we could motivate others to include the quality of career goals in the study of other work attitudes such as commitment and engagement.

Chapter 3: Complementary Person-Culture Values Fit and Hierarchical Career Status

Abstract

Although career success is an issue of global concern, few studies have examined the antecedents of career success across cultures. In this study we test whether the relationship between individuals' self-enhancement values (achievement and power) and hierarchical status differs across 29 countries and whether this variation depends on countries' cultural value orientations. The results of the multilevel regressions indicate that the relationship between self-enhancement values and hierarchical status varies across the 29 countries and that the cultural value orientations of egalitarianism and hierarchy moderate this relationship. In line with trait-activation theory, individuals with high self-enhancement values were most likely to obtain hierarchical status if their values differentiated them from the other members of the culture.

Introduction

Are ambitious and achievement-seeking individuals generally more likely to make it to the top—or does their career advancement depend on the national culture in which they live? Until now, most career research has implicitly assumed that there are universally applicable predictors of career success (Briscoe, Hall, & Mayrhofer, 2012). In this respect, the fact that ambitious career goals and aspirations were shown to predict career advancement in the US (Howard & Bray, 1988), Australia (Tharenou, 2001) and Germany (Abele & Spurk, 2009b; Spurk & Abele, 2011) would indicate that ambition is also a predictor of objective career success in other cultures. This implicit assumption, however, not only lacks theoretical and empirical evidence (Briscoe, et al., 2012), but also contrasts with a substantial amount of research that has emphasized the contextual nature of careers (e.g., Mayrhofer & Schneidhofer, 2009). Further, despite the fact that culture is singled out as uniquely important to career research (Thomas & Inkson, 2007), no study so far has looked into whether the relationship between individual differences and objective career success may be contingent on national culture.

The joint analysis of individual and contextual variables is, however, particularly important for advancing our knowledge of career success because careers are shaped not only by individuals' characteristics and actions, but also by the organizational and societal contexts in which they are embedded (Grandjean, 1981). For advancing career theory, it is therefore necessary to build more culturally sensitive theoretical models that can better explain when and where individual differences affect objective career success across diverse cultural contexts.

The present study addresses the call for multilevel career research that analyzes careers across cultural contexts (Khapova, Vinkenbunrg, & Arnold, 2009). Using data from individuals in 29 countries, we examine how the match between individual (Schwartz, 1992) and cultural values (Schwartz, 1999) affects objective career success. Specifically, in line with the abovementioned research about aspirations and career success, we examine in which cultures individuals with pronounced achievement and power values are most likely to attain hierarchical status. Based on trait-activation theory (Tett & Guterman, 2000), we argue that if the national culture does not encourage and reward ambition-related behavior, these values are more important for understanding hierarchical status. Adopting a cross-cultural approach to objective career success makes a number of contributions to the career literature. Theoretically, it allows us to examine culture as a national boundary condition that influences the value-career success relationship. Practically, it draws attention to the cultural differences that influence career outcomes across countries, providing implications for individuals' career management and organizations' global HR practices.

Career Success across Cultures

Career success is widely conceived as a multi-faceted concept that comprises both subjective (e.g., career satisfaction) and objective components (e.g., pay, hierarchical status and promotions) (Gunz & Heslin, 2005). In cross-cultural research, measures of career success need to fulfill additional methodological criteria that do not arise in non-comparative research. The main challenge in cross-cultural research is that the indicators of career success need to assure measurement equivalence, which requires that the concept under investigation is equally understood across cultures (Thomas & Inkson, 2007). In this respect, previous research has outlined that people of different

countries ascribe varying meanings to the notion of careers and also differ in their conceptualizations of career success (Briscoe, et al., 2012). This, in turn, suggests that indicators of subjective career success, which are commonly derived from individuals' level of satisfaction with the success in their careers, are likely to lack the conceptual equivalence that is an essential assumption in cross-cultural research. Thus, although we acknowledge that career success is a multi-faceted concept, we focus in this study on objective career success, particularly hierarchical status.

Hierarchical status, which is a commonly used indicator of objective career success (Abele & Spurk, 2009a; Judge, et al., 1999), refers to individuals' career achievements with respect to their managerial level and managerial responsibilities (Abele & Spurk, 2009b; Abele & Wiese, 2008). The use of hierarchical status has the advantage that its dimensions are objectively defined, facilitating the measurement equivalence across countries that is required for conducting cross-cultural research. Additionally, hierarchical status is an adequate cross-cultural indicator of career success because status is considered to be one of the most universal features of career success across national contexts (Nicholson & De Waal-Andrews, 2005).

Individual Values

In the last few decades, a wide range of variables has been discussed as antecedents of objective career success. These predictors can be classified into four categories: namely, human capital, organizational sponsorship, socio-demographics, and individual differences (Ng, et al., 2005). Individual values belong to the last category; they are overarching goals that act as guiding principles across contexts, reflecting what individuals want in their lives (Schwartz, 1992). According to Schwartz's value theory (1992), human values can be categorized into a circular system organized into two

poles. The first pole consists of *self-enhancement values* (power, achievement), which support the pursuit of individual interests, as opposed to *self-transcendence values* (universalism, benevolence) that encourage the well-being of others. The second pole consists of *openness values* (e.g., self-direction, stimulation, hedonism), which encourage change and the pursuit of new experiences and ideas, as opposed to *conservation values* (security, conformity, tradition), which emphasize the maintenance of the status quo (Schwartz, 2011).

In the current study we focus on self-enhancement values, which comprise achievement and power values, because previous studies have shown that these values are particularly conclusive for understanding objective career success (e.g., Frieze, Olson, Murrell, & Selvan, 2006). People with high self-enhancement values greatly appreciate the attainment of social status, prestige, and domination over people and resources; they generally aim for social power, authority, and wealth, and find it important to demonstrate competences according to social standards. Individuals who value self-enhancement are also described as ambitious, capable, successful, and influential. Schwartz (1992) has shown that individuals generally seek out work environments that support their individual values. Thus, based on Schwartz's values theory, we expect self-enhancement values to predict hierarchical status because individuals with high self-enhancement values are likely to seek managerial jobs that allow them to exercise power and to demonstrate their competencies. In fact, several empirical studies have shown that power and achievement values are positively related with indicators of career advancement. In a longitudinal study of MBA graduates, Frieze et al. (2006) showed that individuals with high power values were more likely to be promoted to higher-level positions. Further, several studies have shown that ambitious people tend to be more successful in their careers in terms of salary, job

position, and occupational prestige (Howard & Bray, 1988; Jansen & Vinkenbunrg, 2006; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). These findings are also consistent with research showing that graduates who found it important to advance in their careers were more likely to attain an elevated hierarchical status in their early and mid careers (Abele & Spurk, 2009b; Spurk & Abele, 2011).

Hypothesis 1. Self-enhancement values are positively associated with individuals' hierarchical status.

Cross-Moderated Effects of Cultural Values

Despite the increasing number of studies on individual differences as antecedents of career success, current research falls short of testing the generalizability of these relationships across cultures, neglecting the idea that country-level variables such as national culture may explain variation in the individual differences-objective career success relationship. Although cross-cultural differences have been examined across a wide range of fields in organizational behavior, they still need to be systematically examined within the career literature (Thomas & Inkson, 2007).

The values a society emphasizes are the most central characteristic of culture (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1999). Cultural values express what is considered to be good and desired in a culture. Cultural values influence not only societies' policies, norms, and social beliefs, but also individuals' beliefs, actions, and goals. This effect happens because cultures act like a press to which people are exposed by living in a certain society (Schwartz, 2011). The "cultural press" refers to stimuli that draw attention to the underlying cultural values through either language patterns (Kashima & Kashima, 1998), social expectations, or taken-for-granted practices. Cultural values thus encourage those behaviors and attitudes that are most legitimate in the societal

context. In fact, culture can also influence individuals' career management through its impact on personal attitudes and societal norms (Thomas & Inkson, 2007). Most individuals internalize the beliefs, behaviors, and value priorities that are congruent with the society's cultural values because doing so allows them to feel comfortable and to function effectively in their societal environment (Schwartz, 2011). The "cultural press," therefore, provides external rewards for behavior that is congruent with the cultural values.

Personality researchers describe situations in which informal or formal norms provide high external rewards for certain behaviors as "strong" situations. Situational strength can best be understood as a "multifaceted force that homogenizes behavior by providing information about the most appropriate course(s) of action" (Meyer, Dalal, & Bonaccio, 2009, p. 1078). The trait-activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000) posits that strong situations are likely to restrict or even override the effects of individual differences because they clearly define appropriate behavior and provide great external rewards for enacting these behaviors. As a consequence, strong situations tend to evoke homogenous responses from most individuals in the situation, irrespective of individuals' value priorities.

Matching Individual and Cultural Values

Although there are various useful measures for conceptualizing culture (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004), Schwartz's (1999) cultural values have particular validity for the purpose of this study. The main advantage of using Schwartz's conceptualization of cultural values is that it allows us to examine directly which cultural values encourage and reward self-enhancement related behavior. In fact, Schwartz (2011) has already discussed the conceptual and empirical correspondence of individual and cultural values, which permits us to systematically

test the tenet of trait-activation theory that the relationship between self-enhancement values and hierarchical status is more pronounced in “weak situations”—that is, in cultures that do not provide high external rewards for value-related behavior.

Schwartz’s (1999) theory of cultural values identifies three bipolar cultural orientations: autonomy vs. embeddedness, egalitarianism vs. hierarchy, and harmony vs. mastery. These cultural orientations provide normative responses that prescribe how institutions should function and how individuals should behave. A cultural emphasis on one pole usually goes hand in hand with a de-emphasis of the opposing pole. For instance, countries with a high emphasis on hierarchy commonly deemphasize egalitarianism (Schwartz, 2011). For the present study, we focus on those four cultural values that conceptually match with self-enhancement values. In the following we demonstrate how these cultural values match with self-enhancement values.

Hierarchy and Egalitarianism. Exercising social power, demonstrating competencies, and seeking authority is characteristic of cultures that highly value hierarchy. In hierarchy cultures, the unequal distribution of power and resources is considered to be legitimate and even desirable. Hierarchy cultures therefore allow and support, to a certain extent, actions that seek the fulfillment of power, authority, and wealth. On the contrary, egalitarian cultures encourage individuals to internalize cooperation and concern for the community’s welfare. The exploitation of people and resources, which can go along with the pursuit of self-enhancement (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001), is in contrast to the idea of cooperation. Because exercising power and authority is not congruent with the social norms of these cultures, egalitarian cultures are less likely to support self-enhancement values.

Mastery and Harmony. Like hierarchy values, the cultural value orientation of mastery encourages the pursuit of self-enhancement. In mastery cultures, individuals are rewarded for being self-assertive and for managing the social environment in order to attain individual or group goals. Likewise, active problem solving and achieving progress are highly valued (Schwartz, 2011). This value emphasis encourages individuals to be ambitious and successful, and to pursue their own goals independently. In contrast, harmony cultures place a low importance on individuals' self-enhancement. In fact, in these countries it is considered important to accept and preserve the status quo; change and conflict are contrary with their harmony value orientation.

According to the tenet of the trait-activation theory, weak or moderate situations are required in order to observe variance in individual differences (Tett & Burnett, 2003). Therefore, a condition for the association between self-enhancement values and hierarchical status is that societies do not strongly induce behavior related to power and achievement values. We consequently expect self-enhancement values to be more strongly associated with hierarchical status in countries that value hierarchy and mastery less and egalitarian and harmony values more. Thus, based on trait-activation theory, we argue that it is beneficial for people's self-enhancement values to be dissimilar to their countries' cultural values. In contrast to the common emphasis on value congruence that prevails in career and general organizational behavior research (e.g., Edwards & Cable, 2009), we thus expect individuals' chances for attaining hierarchical status to be higher in countries with non-matching cultural values. Considering that the person-environment paradigm comprises both a similarity (supplementary fit) and a dissimilarity (complementary fit) perspective, our research draws on the latter category, arguing in favor of the benefits associated with a complementary person-culture fit for individuals' objective career success. A complementary fit indicates that individuals fit,

not because they are similar to everyone else, but rather “because they bring something unique to the collective” (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987, p. 271).

Hypothesis 2. Hierarchy (mastery) values moderate the relationship between self-enhancement values and hierarchical status, so that the association between individuals’ self-enhancement values and hierarchical status is stronger when countries’ hierarchy (mastery) values are lower.

Hypothesis 3. Egalitarian (harmony) values moderate the relationship between self-enhancement values and hierarchical status, so that the association between individuals’ self-enhancement values and hierarchical status is stronger when countries’ egalitarian (harmony) values are higher.

Method

Participants

We used data from the European Social Survey (ESS), Round 4, collected in 2008. Because of the cultural diversity within Europe, the European landscape is particularly useful for conducting cross-cultural research (Mayrhofer & Schneidhofer, 2009). In this respect, the ESS is especially suited to addressing our cross-level hypotheses because it provides data of representative national samples in 29 countries². The European Social Survey involves strict random probability sampling with a minimum target response rate of 70% (European Social Survey, 2011). For the purpose of this study, we selected participants who were employed and who were aged 18 to 67. In total, the sample included 35,463 participants coming from a wide range of occupations and industries.

Measures

² Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Finland, France, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Rumania, Russian Federation, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and Ukraine

Individual values. Respondents completed a version of the Portrait Values Questionnaire (Schwartz et al., 2001) which was revised for the ESS (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005). The questionnaire includes portraits of peoples' goals and aspirations, which were gender matched with the respondent. On a response scale from 1 (*very much like me*) to 6 (*not like me at all*), participants indicated how much like them the person in each of the portraits was. We reverse coded the variables so that a higher score suggests a stronger similarity. Self-enhancement values were represented by four items (sample item: "Being very successful is important to her/him. She/he likes to impress other people," $\alpha = .75$). We ipsatized the value scores by centering participants' responses on their means and thereby eliminated individual differences in response scales (Schwartz & Rubel-Lifschitz, 2009). The value scores thus indicate the relative importance a person places on a specific value (Schwartz, 1992).

Hierarchical status. In line with Abele and Wiese (2008) and Abele and Spurk (2009b), we measure hierarchical status by combining information about individuals' managerial level and responsibilities: supervision responsibility, which is defined in terms of monitoring and being responsible for the work of other employees (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*); number of subordinates (0 = *no subordinates*; 1 = *1 – 3 subordinates*; 2 = *4 – 6 subordinates*; 3 = *7 – 14 subordinates*; 4 = *over 15 subordinates*); and official management position (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*) based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations (International Labor Organization, 2012). The composite index could thus range from 0 to 6 with higher scores representing a higher level of hierarchical status.

Cultural values. The assessment of the cultural values was obtained from a dataset released in 2007, which consists of teacher and student samples who responded

to the 57-item Schwartz value survey. In total, the survey was filled out by 55,022 respondents in 72 countries (Schwartz, 2011). Several advantages make Schwartz's cultural values survey a promising approach for studying country-differences in culture (Khapova, Briscoe, & Dickmann, 2012). One of these advantages is that all items were tested for cross-cultural equivalence of meaning. Additionally, there is empirical evidence showing that the order of countries on each of the cultural values is robust across different samples from many countries around the globe (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2007). The students' and teachers' scores were equally weighted in order to obtain the cultural value scores. The mean rating of the cultural value orientations was calculated for each of the 29 countries included in this study. In this way, the country constituted the unit of analysis. The culture value scores of each country thus represent the mean importance rating for the value items. For further details about the data collection, see previous work by Schwartz (2006, 2008; 2009).

Controls. We included age, gender (0 = *male*; 1 = *female*), years of education, and number of contract work hours per week as covariates because these variables have previously been shown to predict objective career success (Ng, et al., 2005). Given that previous research has shown that certain study disciplines are associated with objective career success (Abele & Spurk, 2009b), we also controlled for participants' field or subject of highest qualification. The variable differentiates between the following disciplines: Safety, arts, humanities, engineering, agriculture, education, science, medical, economics, social studies, law, personal care, public order, transport, and general/no specific field. We dummy-coded the variable such that "general/no specific field" was the comparison category. Rather than include every dummy-coded variable in the hypothesized model, we ran ANOVAs using hierarchical status as the dependent

variable and study majors as the independent variables. We then included only those disciplines that were statistically significant in the ANOVA and regression analyses. Considering that careers are embedded in economic contexts (Mayrhofer, et al., 2007), we controlled for the standardized values of countries' GDP per capita for the year 2008, which we obtained from the dataset of the World Bank survey (2012).

Analyses

Because of the nested structure of our data with individuals nested within countries, we first examined which proportion of variance in hierarchical status is attributable to the grouping structure. The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) for hierarchical status was $\rho = .04$, which indicates that only a small proportion (4%) of the variance in hierarchical status resides at the country level. We tested our hypotheses with a series of multilevel linear regressions using Mplus 6.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 1988-2010). In line with Ganninger's recommendation (2011), we weighted the data, controlling for the design effect. The design weight corrects for unequal selection probabilities and thus makes the sample more representative. The hypotheses were tested with maximum likelihood with robust standard errors (MLR) because this estimator is recommended when sampling weights are applied. In order to improve the interpretability of the intercepts, we mean-centered all continuous variables. In the first model, we tested the fixed and random effect of self-enhancement values on hierarchical status across the 29 countries. In the following models, we subsequently tested whether the random slopes can be explained by cultural values. Using Preacher, Curran and Bauer's (2006) online application, we calculated the region of significance and graphed the cross-level interactions for the lower- and upper-observed values of the moderators.

Table 3.1

Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations of Study Variables

	Means	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Self-enhancement	-.55	.72	1.00										
2 Hierarchial status	.89	1.66	.02**	1.00									
3 Hierarchy values	2.10	.34	.11**	-.04**	1.00								
4 Egalitarianism values	4.76	.31	-.21**	.09**	-.53**	1.00							
5 Mastery values	3.89	.13	.16**	-.02**	.32**	-.02**	1.00						
6 Harmony values	4.21	.22	-.06**	-.04**	-.61**	.28**	-.43**	1.00					
7 Age	43.34	13.53	-.20**	.09**	.01	-.05**	-.01	.01	1.00				
8 Gender	.54	.50	-.12**	-.13**	.01	-.04**	.02**	-.03**	.03**	1.00			
9 Education	12.85	3.72	.03**	.22**	-.10**	.04**	-.08**	-.02**	-.17**	.03**	1.00		
10 Working hours	37.35	9.66	.09**	.07**	.15**	-.22**	.02**	.01**	.06**	-.17**	-.09**	1.00	
11 GDP per capita	33398.74	21463.30	-.22**	.13**	-.55**	.76**	-.16**	.17**	-.03**	-.03**	.15**	-.26**	1.00

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Table 3.2

Results of Multilevel Regressions

	Model 1 (Random slope model)		Model 2 (Hierarchy)		Model 3 (Egalitar- ianism)		Model 4 (Mastery)		Model 5 (Harmony)	
Fixed Part	Coefficient (s.e.)		Coefficient (s.e.)		Coefficient (s.e.)		Coefficient (s.e.)		Coefficient (s.e.)	
Intercept	1.13**	(.07)	1.13**	(.05)	1.13**	(.05)	1.13**	(.05)	1.13**	(.05)
Gender ^a	-.40**	(.04)	-.40**	(.04)	-.40**	(.04)	-.40**	(.04)	-.40**	(.04)
Age	.02**	(.00)	.02**	(.00)	.02**	(.00)	.02**	(.00)	.02**	(.00)
Education	.10**	(.01)	.10**	(.01)	.10**	(.01)	.10**	(.01)	.10**	(.01)
Working hours	.02**	(.00)	.02**	(.00)	.02**	(.00)	.02**	(.00)	.02**	(.00)
Self-enhancement	.13**	(.02)	.13**	(.02)	.13**	(.02)	.13**	(.02)	.13**	(.02)
GDP per capita	.24**	(.05)	.24**	(.06)	.17**	(.06)	.21**	(.05)	.22**	(.04)
Hierarchy			.17	(.15)						
Egalitarianism					.14	(.18)				
Mastery							.13	(.36)		
Harmony									-.48*	(.20)
Self-enhancement*Hierarchy			-.16*	(.07)						
Self-enhancement*Egalitarianism					.15*	(.07)				
Self-enhancement*Mastery							-.28*	(.15)		
Self-enhancement*Harmony									.11	(.10)
Random Part										
Random intercept	.10**	(.01)	.05**	(.01)	.06**	(.01)	.06**	(.01)	.04**	(.01)
Random slope SE	.01*	(.00)	.01*	(.00)	.01*	(.00)	.01*	(.00)	.01*	(.00)
R ² at country level			48%		46%		46%		56%	

^a Reference category was male; * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .001$; Regression coefficients are all unstandardized.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables are presented in Table 3.1, and Table 3.2 shows the results of the multilevel regressions. In support of Hypothesis 1, self-enhancement values are positively associated with hierarchical status, holding the control variables constant (self-enhancement: $B = .13$, $p < .001$). The model can account for 8% of variance in hierarchical status at the individual level. Furthermore, the results indicate that the relationship between self-enhancement values and hierarchical status varies across the 29 countries. The variance of the regression coefficients for self-enhancement is estimated as .01, which is significant at $p < .05$.

As hypothesized, the cross-level interactions of hierarchy and mastery values are negative. Whereas the interaction with hierarchy values is statistically significant, the interaction including mastery does not significantly predict hierarchical status beyond the main effects (hierarchy: $B = -.13$, $p = .05$, mastery: $B = -.22$, $p = .16$). As an insignificant interaction coefficient cannot always be taken as evidence for the absence of a substantively meaningful moderation effect (e.g., Brambor, Clark, & Golder, 2006), we additionally estimated over what range of the moderator the effect of self-enhancement is significantly different from zero. The region of significance for the self-enhancement slope indicates that self-enhancement was positively associated with hierarchical status in most countries, except in those cultures that greatly value hierarchy (i.e., Bulgaria, Russian Federation, Turkey, and Ukraine) and mastery (Greece). The model including hierarchy accounts for 27% of the variance in the self-enhancement slope. Thus, we find partial support for H2 (see Figure 3.1).

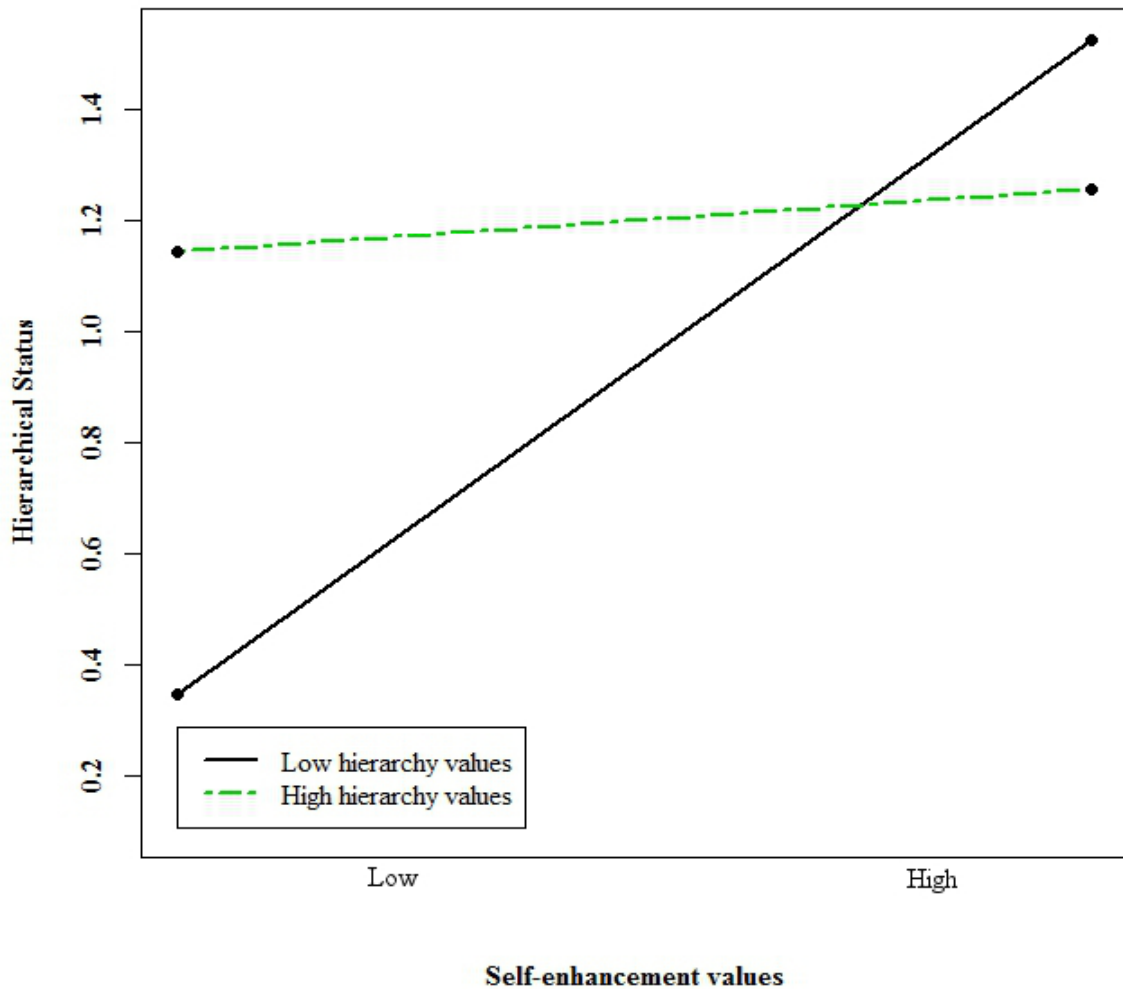


Figure 3.1. Regression Lines for Hierarchical Status by Self-enhancement for Two Levels of Hierarchy Values

The cross-level interaction of egalitarianism values was estimated as .15 and is significant at $p = .02$. The region of significance for the self-enhancement slope indicates that self-enhancement does not significantly predict hierarchical status in countries with very low egalitarianism values (Bulgaria, Latvia, Ukraine; see also Figure 3.2). This model accounts for 18% of the variance in the self-enhancement slope. In contrast to our hypothesis, harmony does not significantly moderate the relationship between self-enhancement and hierarchical status ($B = .03$, $p = .76$). Thus, H3 is partially supported.

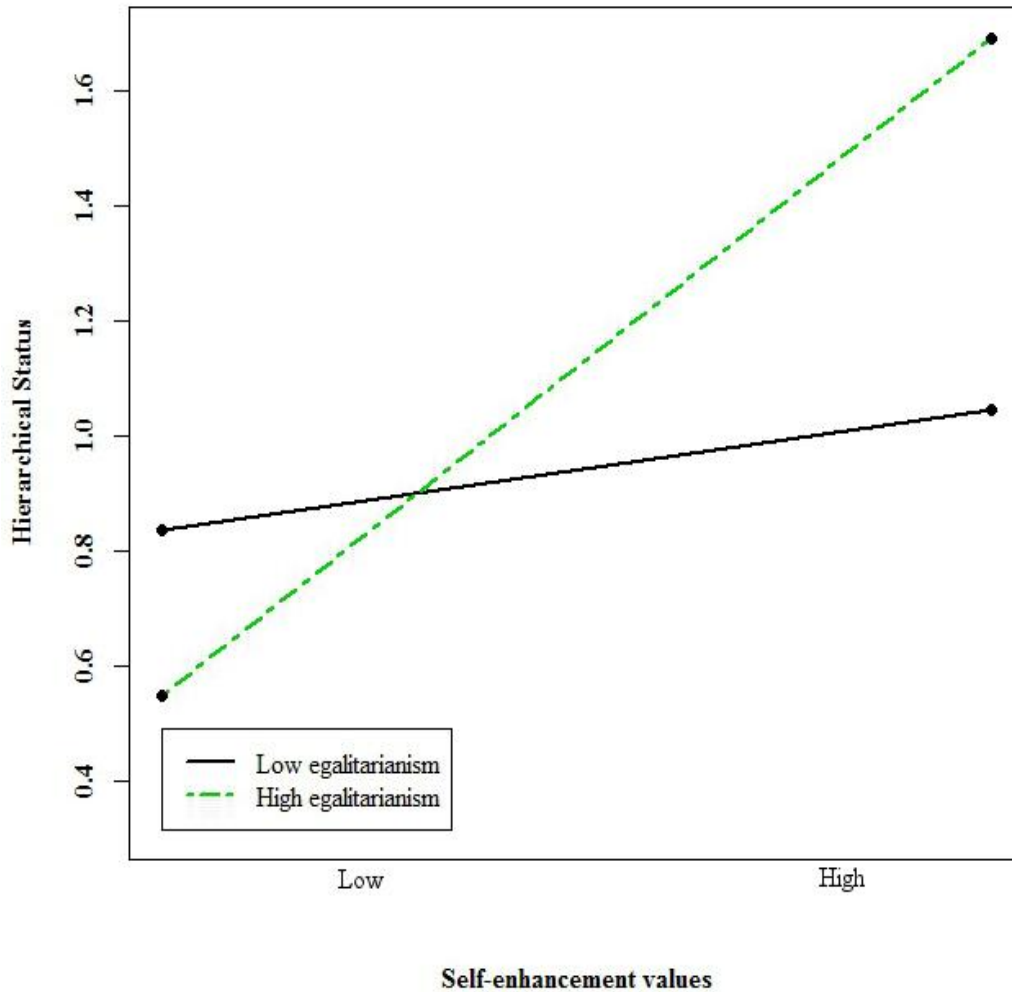


Figure 3.2. Regression Lines for Hierarchical Status by Self-enhancement for Two Levels of Egalitarianism

Discussion

The results of this study advance our knowledge about the role of individual differences in shaping objective career success across countries. In line with previous research on values and objective career success (e.g., Frieze, et al., 2006), self-enhancement values were positively associated with hierarchical status. Confirming our hypotheses derived from trait-activation theory, our results showed that if the culture did not provide strong cues for self-enhancement related behavior, self-enhancement values mattered most for understanding variations in hierarchical status.

In this respect, the relationship between self-enhancement values and hierarchical status was strongest in countries that are low in hierarchy (e.g., Finland) and high in egalitarianism (e.g., Belgium).

Although the positive relationship held for most of the 29 countries included in this article, it was non-significant in countries whose cultural values provided very high external rewards for self-enhancement related behavior—namely, in countries with a very high emphasis on hierarchy and mastery, and a low emphasis on egalitarianism. Within Europe, Greece places the highest importance on mastery, and according to our results, it is in this country where self-enhancement values do not predict who makes it to the top (for an overview of cultural values within Europe, consult Sagiv & Schwartz, 2007). In countries such as the UK—with a lower but nevertheless high emphasis on mastery—self-enhancement values were still significantly related to hierarchical status. Consequently, our results are in line with previous research showing that ambitious career aspirations predict objective career success in Anglo-Saxon countries (Howard & Bray, 1988; Tharenou, 2001). In addition, self-enhancement values did not explain variation in hierarchical status in countries with a very high emphasis on hierarchy—like Turkey or some Eastern European countries. Given that both hierarchy and mastery cultures induce self-enhancement, the advantage of individuals who personally value self-enhancement vanishes because most other members of the culture display such a behavior owing to the cultural cues present in the society. Thus in these countries, self-enhancement values explained no variation in hierarchical status.

In contrast to the negative cross-level interaction of hierarchy values, egalitarianism synergistically interacted with self-enhancement values to predict hierarchical status. Thus, the advantage of having high self-enhancement values

increases the more countries value egalitarianism. Countries that greatly emphasize egalitarianism do not induce people to pursue self-enhancement related behavior because the exercising of power and authority is not congruent with its norms. Consequently, people with high self-enhancement values—that is, whose overarching goal is to achieve authority and power in their lives—have more opportunities to climb up the corporate ladder if the remaining members of the culture have lower aspirations for power and authority. In egalitarian cultures, they are more likely to stand out from the remaining members of the culture, and their self-enhancement values are more likely to present a comparative advantage, which helps them to achieve hierarchical status.

In contrast to our hypothesis, harmony values did not moderate the relationship between self-enhancement and hierarchical status. A potential explanation is that harmony values present only a small negative relationship with self-enhancement values. This suggests that cultures that highly value harmony do not substantially differ from low harmony cultures to the extent that they dissuade citizens to demonstrate self-enhancement behavior. In this respect, low harmony cultures are unlikely to provide a sufficiently “strong situation” to reduce the impact of individual values.

Although the results obtained from the region of significance analysis suggest that self-enhancement is only positively associated with hierarchical status as long as countries’ mastery values are not very high, the omnibus test of the interaction term was non-significant. It is possible that high mastery values do not create a sufficiently strong situation to restrict the effect of self-enhancement on hierarchical status. In mastery cultures, achievement is more highly valued than power and authority. It is hence conceivable that citizens of mastery cultures are less encouraged to attain hierarchical status in their careers than citizens of hierarchy cultures. In mastery

cultures, individuals might express their desire for achievement, not necessarily by climbing up the corporate ladder, but by pursuing less hierarchical career paths—for instance, by becoming scientists or professors. For this reason, future research is necessary to examine the moderating role of mastery values on the relationship between personality and other indicators of career success, such as occupational status. Additionally, it is also conceivable that there are further macro variables that explain career success across cultures. In this respect, the impact of self-enhancement values might also depend on the career opportunities available in a country and on the extent to which a culture allows for social mobility. Besides analyzing cultural values, future research might want to look at the moderating role of national institutions (e.g., economic, legal, and political) to improve our understanding of when individual values matter for explaining variations in hierarchical status.

Theoretical Contributions

Our findings extend the related theory in several ways. First, our results showed that the cultural context matters for understanding where individual values are associated with hierarchical status. In line with trait-activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000), self-enhancement values predicted hierarchical status only in countries that did not provide very high external rewards for self-enhancement. In this respect, our study showed that the national culture is a boundary condition that affects the relationship between individual values and hierarchical status.

Second, our results suggest that it was the complementary person-culture fit that explained wherein self-enhancement values were most important for predicting individual differences in hierarchical status. This finding is in contrast to the common tenet in the career literature that stresses the advantages of a supplementary person-

environment fit. Although we are not aware of any research that analyzes a complementary person-culture fit at the country level, research has started to examine the relative advantages of individuals who have opposite personality characteristics in teams and in supervisor-subordinate dyads (Glomb & Welsh, 2005; Pierro, et al., 2012). Future research will be required to further elucidate when dissimilarity provides advantages to individuals' careers. The complementary person-culture fit also points to the frog-pond effect (Davis, 1966), which refers to the relative advantage that individuals have if they stand out from the remaining people in their environment. Specifically, the frog pond model posits that a large frog is perceived to be larger if it lives in a pond with small frogs than if it lives in a pond with large frogs. Although the frog-pond model initially referred to academic performance in educational settings, the model has recently also been applied to cross-cultural research (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). The cultural frog pond effect describes the "difference between an individual's values, attitudes, and beliefs and the dominant [cultural] group" (Gelfand, Leslie, & Fehr, 2008, p. 502). A more thorough focus on the cultural frog pond model might provide intriguing insights into the literature of career success in that it can improve our understanding of the absolute and relative advantages that people with certain individual differences experience in their careers.

Third, this study makes a theoretical contribution to cross-cultural career research by discussing and empirically testing the trait-activation theory as a framework that can link individual and country-level variables to career success. This study therefore goes beyond previous career studies that have only described rather than predicted intercultural differences in career phenomena (Thomas & Inkson, 2007).

Practical Implications

This study offers practical implications both for individuals' career management and for the recruitment and development policies of global companies. The results suggest that individuals should be aware that the decision to remain or leave their home countries is likely to have an impact on their objective career success. In this respect, individuals living in countries with elevated hierarchy values might not experience career advantages resulting from high self-enhancement values. In countries with a low emphasis on hierarchy values, their self-enhancement values would provide a comparative advantage, resulting in higher probabilities of obtaining hierarchical status. The findings of this study also have practical implications for organizations' global HR practices. Expatriates or employees in global subsidiaries could be selected depending on whether their values tend to be highly rewarded in the specific cultural context. Furthermore, global companies that design development programs for their employees could take into account that individuals are more likely to be successful in certain cultures than in others.

Limitations

As with most studies, the limitations must be acknowledged. Despite the strengths of the ESS for conducting cross-cultural research in terms of its multi-national sample and strict probability sampling, the study also suffers from a number of limitations. First, our study is limited to the extent that it analyzes only one indicator of objective career success. We therefore recommend that future studies extend this research by examining the joint effects of individual and cultural values on other indicators of objective career success, such as occupational status and salary. As with all cross-sectional surveys, we cannot infer causality. Specifically, we cannot infer that

values caused career advancement. However, it is important to note that value research assumes that values cause behavior and work outcomes (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Schwartz, 1992) and that values are relatively stable and do not change much over time (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 2011). Although we used multisource data, this study may suffer from common method bias because the individual values and the composite measure of hierarchical status were extracted from the same data source. Furthermore, we could not control for other personality variables that have previously been related to objective career success, such as the Big Five traits. Although personality traits and values are conceived as distinct concepts (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002) that explain a unique part of variation in work outcomes (Arthaud-Day, Rode, & Turnley, 2012), it remains to be examined how much variance values can explain beyond personality traits. In this respect, research has shown that ambition—a concept closely related to self-enhancement values—is a more proximal predictor of career success than personality traits and that it partially mediates the effect of the Big Five on career success (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012).

Conclusions

This study points out that both individual and cultural values are important for understanding individual differences in hierarchical status. Whereas individuals with high self-enhancement values in most of the 29 countries were more likely to attain hierarchical status, this effect varied across countries and could partially be explained by cultural value orientations. Individuals valuing self-enhancement values were more likely to report hierarchical status in egalitarian countries and in countries with a low emphasis on hierarchy values.

Chapter 4: How and when do core self-evaluations predict career satisfaction?

The roles of positive goal emotions and occupational embeddedness

Abstract

Responding to calls for analyzing the boundary conditions of the relationship between core self-evaluations (CSE) and subjective career success, we examined how CSE interacts with occupational embeddedness to predict career satisfaction. Based on self-verification theory and the concept of situational strength, we proposed a contingent path model in which CSE relates to subjective career success through positive goal emotions. Using a sample of 140 alumni of two business schools, we further examined whether the direct and indirect effects of CSE on career satisfaction are weakest when individuals are highly enmeshed with their occupations. A time-lagged study with three measurement waves largely supported our hypotheses showing that high-CSE individuals were more satisfied with their careers because they associate more positive emotions with their career goals. However, a high degree of occupational embeddedness attenuated the indirect effect of the CSE-career satisfaction relationship through positive goal emotions and compensated for low levels of positive goal emotions. We discuss theoretical implications for research on CSE, career goals, and career success.

Keywords: Core self-evaluations; career goals; goal emotions; career success; occupational embeddedness

Introduction

Considerable research has shown that individuals with positive core self-evaluations (CSE) are more successful in their careers than people with a negative self-concept (e.g., Judge, Hurst, & Simon, 2009; Stumpp, Muck, Hülshager, Judge, & Maier, 2010). Within this line of research, scholars have made notable progress in explaining why individuals with high levels of CSE—who are described as well-adjusted, self-confident, and efficacious (Judge, et al., 1997)—obtain higher objective career success than their low-CSE counterparts. For example, studies have shown that high CSE individuals reach a higher income and status as a result of a higher human capital, a better health, and a more effective capitalization of family socioeconomic status and academic achievement (Judge & Hurst, 2007, 2008) than individuals with lower CSE. However, despite the interest in CSE as an antecedent of career success, there is still a lack of research explaining how and under which conditions individuals with favorable and less favorable self-concepts can maximize their subjective career success such as career satisfaction.

Understanding in which career situations CSE is most relevant for understanding career satisfaction is, however, crucial to advance both the literatures on CSE and careers. In this respect, several scholars have called for more studies examining the boundary conditions and explanatory mechanisms that link CSE—and personality traits in general—to subjective career success (Chang, Ferris, Johnson, Rosen, & Tan, 2012; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2007; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2011). Similarly, several researchers have claimed that it is not sufficient to merely link individual differences to career success without considering the context in which individual careers take place (Gunz, Mayrhofer, & Tolbert, 2011). Further, learning about the explanatory mechanisms and contingencies of the CSE-career satisfaction relationship is essential

for designing interventions to reduce the disadvantages that people with low CSEs typically face in their careers.

In this paper, we use self-verification theory (Swann, 1983) to argue that positive goal emotions serve as an explanatory variable that links CSE with subjective career success, even when high-CSE individuals have equal levels of objective career success compared to their low-CSE counterparts. Further, based on the concept of situational strength (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989; Meyer, et al., 2010; Mischel, 1977), we expect that occupational embeddedness, which is an employment situation in which individuals are highly enmeshed with their career paths (Ng & Feldman, 2009), serves as a boundary condition for the CSE-career satisfaction relationship by attenuating the mediating effect of positive goal emotions.

This study provides a number of important contributions to the CSE and careers literatures. First, this article advances the CSE literature by contributing to a better understanding of the explanatory mechanisms and boundary conditions under which CSE matters (e.g., Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2011). Second, it contributes to the careers literature by responding to research calls for investigating the role of career goals on career success (Greenhaus, et al., 2010; Seibert, et al., 2013). Third, considering that recent career research has emphasized the importance of studying the subjective, idiosyncratic nature of career success (e.g., Heslin, 2005), we contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of subjective career success by testing how individuals' career attitudes are shaped by the interplay of personality and situations. In this respect, our study expands research on the compensatory interactions between personality and situational variables (Li, Harris, Boswell, & Xie, 2011; Ng & Feldman, 2010; Tasa, Sears, & Schat, 2011), suggesting that career satisfaction does not

necessarily require “optimal” dispositions but that contextual variables can partly compensate for the negative effect of low CSE on subjective career success.

Theory and Hypotheses

CSE and Career Success

The construct of CSE (Judge, et al., 1997) describes people’s generalized evaluations of their self-worth, reflecting the fundamental appraisals that individuals make about their own effectiveness, worthiness, and capability. CSE is conceived as a broad concept consisting of four lower-order traits: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, internal locus of control, and low neuroticism (Judge, Bono, & Locke, 2000). Over the last few years, a growing line of research has shown that individuals with positive CSEs tend to achieve a particularly high level of objective career success (i.e., observable attainments that individuals have accomplished in their careers, such as status and salary) (Judge & Hurst, 2007, 2008; Judge, et al., 2009; Judge, Klinger, & Simon, 2010). Although the concept of CSE was initially designed as a dispositional basis of job and life satisfaction (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998), few studies thus far have focused on the role of CSE in explaining career satisfaction, which is one of the most prevalent indicators of subjective career success (i.e., individuals’ subjective judgements of their career accomplishments) (for an exception, see Stumpp, et al., 2010).

The relationship between CSE and career success can be explained with self-verification theory (Swann, 1983), which postulates that individuals with a positive self-concept expose themselves to environments that facilitate satisfaction and career growth opportunities (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2011). According to self-verification theory, people engage in self-verification strategies, such as creating social

environments or biasing information processing because it provides them with a sense of coherence, organizes their experiences, and facilitates their social interactions (Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2003). For people with a positive CSE, this means that they verify their positive self-concept at the workplace by choosing opportunity structures that allow them to verify their self-worth, such as by selecting enriching jobs or searching for mentors. If the selection of an appropriate environment does not evoke the desired reactions, high-CSE individuals can obtain self-verification by perceiving their environment more favorably and by interpreting their experiences in a more positive manner (Swann, Polzer, Seyle, & Ko, 2004). For people with a negative self-concept, this self-verification process can thwart positive career experiences. Specifically, people with a negative self-regard tend to prefer interactions and evaluations that support their negative self-concept, quit their jobs when receiving a pay increase and decrease their productivity when given positive expectancies about their pay (for an overview, see Swann, 2012).

Mediating Role of Career Goals

To examine the self-verification processes that individuals with certain levels of CSE adopt in their career management, we focus on individuals' career goals, which are defined as future-oriented representations of career outcomes that guide behavior and personal development (Greenhaus, et al., 2010; Maier & Brunstein, 2001). Career goals—like other personal action constructs such as personal projects (Little, 1983) and life tasks (Cantor, 1990)—are second-level units of personality (e.g., McAdams & Pals, 2006), which do not only reflect features of the person, but also of the contexts in which careers take place (Grant, Little, & Phillips, 2007). Personal goals are considered a psychological mechanism through which personality traits affect attitudes and behavior (Barrick, Mount, & Li, 2013).

In career research, second-level units of personality have also been proposed as a relevant mediator of the personality trait-career success relationship (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). In a career environment, in which individuals increasingly take responsibility to self-manage their careers (e.g., Hall, 2002), the types of career goals that individuals pursue likely play a fundamental role in understanding individuals' work experiences, such as the subjective evaluations of their career attainments. In this respect, several studies have related job satisfaction to favorable goal characteristics, such as positive goal emotions or self-concordant goal motives (e.g., Judge, et al., 2005; Pomaki, et al., 2004). Given that personality is considered to impact job satisfaction mainly through affective processes (Judge & Larsen, 2001), in this study we examine the mediating role of positive goal emotions, which reflect individuals' positive emotions that accompany their career goal pursuit (Louro, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2007; Pomaki, et al., 2004).

CSE and Positive Goal Emotions. Based on self-verification theory, we expect that individuals with higher CSEs are likely to experience higher levels of positive goal emotions for two reasons. Firstly, high-CSE individuals tend to select satisfying and enriching career paths that are congruent with their positive self-concept. In this respect, previous research has shown that people with positive CSEs predominantly adopt 'approach motivation' orientations (Ferris et al., 2013) and pursue self-concordant goals (Judge, et al., 2005), both of which are conducive to positive emotions (Pekrun, Elliot, & Maier, 2009; Sheldon et al., 2004). Secondly, high-CSE individuals are also more prone to interpreting their career goals in a favorable manner due to their underlying tendency to pay more attention to the positive aspects of their environment and experiences (Judge, et al., 1997). In support of this argument, previous research has

shown that high-CSE individuals perceive their jobs to be more enriching than low-CSE individuals, even if they hold equally complex jobs (Judge, et al., 2000).

Hypothesis 1: CSE is positively associated with positive goal emotions.

Positive Goal Emotions and Career Satisfaction. In line with self-verification theory, we postulate that, compared to low-CSE individuals, high-CSE individuals are more satisfied with their careers because they associate positive emotions with their career goals. People who experience positive emotions during goal pursuit are more likely to become satisfied with their careers (e.g., Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005) because positive emotions broaden one's scope of attention and cognition (Aspinwall, 1998; Fredrickson, 1998, 2001) increasing the likelihood of finding positive meaning in subsequent events, including one's career. For example, a person that is feeling positive about her goal to be promoted to manager will be more satisfied with her career, even if her promotion has not yet materialized. Goal-related positive emotions also serve individuals as a source of information for evaluating their career attainments. Specifically, the experience of positive goal emotions signals that the goal pursuit is going well and that the individual encounters favorable circumstances and sufficient resources to achieve his or her goals (Louro, et al., 2007). In this respect, empirical research has shown that people who associate positive emotions with their personal work goals, or more generally, who frequently experience positive affect are more satisfied with their jobs and have a higher sense of personal accomplishment (Pomaki, et al., 2004; Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003). Based on the aforementioned, we argue that high CSE-individuals will be more satisfied with their careers, even if they have equal levels of objective career success than their low-CSE counterparts, because they pursue career goals that instill positive emotions.

Hypothesis 2: Positive goal emotions are positively associated with career satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3: Positive goal emotions mediate the positive relationship between CSE and career satisfaction.

Moderating Role of Occupational Embeddedness

Although we expect a positive relationship between CSE and career satisfaction, the strength of this association likely varies across contexts. Indeed, research has long acknowledged that career success is not only a function of individual, but also of situational factors (e.g., Hall, 2002) and that contextual variables can either constrain or enable the influence of CSE (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2007). The “situational strength” concept (Mischel, 1977) provides one of the most important theoretical frameworks for analyzing the varying impact of personality on work outcomes (Meyer, et al., 2009). The situational strength construct refers to implicit and explicit norms that provide cues for the desirability of a certain range of behaviors and attitudes. Specifically, it posits that contexts which are characterized by a high degree of structure (i.e., “strong situations”) reduce the salience of personality because they either provide clear and consistent cues, restrict individuals’ freedom of action, or provide an environment in which specific behaviors and attitudes have important consequences for the individual (Meyer, et al., 2010).

Drawing on the concept of situational strength, Davis-Blake and Pfeffer (1989) argue that personality has limited relevance for understanding work attitudes because most organizational settings represent a “strong situation” in that they create homogeneous attitudes in their employees. In this sense, these authors propose that individuals’ attitudes within an organization tend to converge because the organizational context makes certain environmental cues more salient, provides pressure for

conformity and influences interpretations of external events and individuals' own needs, values, and expectations (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Although Davis-Blake and Pfeffer did not explicitly state that personality and situational variables interact to explain individuals' attitudes, they mention that not all organizational situations equally restrict the effect of personality, but that the convergence of attitudes depends on organizational norms and relationships with colleagues.

Motivated by this interactionist perspective, several studies have examined how situational strength, conceptualized as ambiguity (Barrick, Mount, & Strauss, 1993; Grant & Rothbard, 2013) or task structure (Fleeson, 2007), mitigates the role of individual differences. At the occupational level, situational strength can best be understood as the absence of autonomy or latitude an individual encounters in his/her occupation (Meyer, et al., 2009). The concept of occupational embeddedness captures the latitude an employee experiences in his or her career, describing the forces that tie individuals to their occupations (Ng & Feldman, 2009). The three subdimensions of an individual's occupational embeddedness (links, fit, sacrifices) reflect the desirability, ease, and probability of being influenced by one's peers and occupational norms. The strong *links* that characterize a high level of embeddedness will make people more likely to adopt the common attitudes of the colleagues in their profession. Further, the more people identify with their occupation—that is, the higher they consider their level of person-occupation *fit*—the more open they will be about being influenced by the occupational norms and prevalent attitudes of their peers. Similarly, individuals who have accrued more benefits and side-bets in their occupations, which they would have to *sacrifice* when changing occupations, are more likely to adapt their attitudes because they have been more socialized and influenced by occupational norms over the course

of their careers (e.g., Hackman, 1992; Loi, Hang-yue, & Foley, 2004; Lui, Ngo, & Tsang, 2003).

CSE and Occupational Embeddedness. Based on the aforementioned, we would expect that a high level of occupational embeddedness reduces the importance of CSE in explaining career satisfaction. This is because a high level of occupational embeddedness constitutes a “strong” situation that leads individuals to construe their career experiences in similar ways, irrespective of their degree of CSE (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989). Similarly, contextual factors that represent a “strong” situation can also be directly satisfying (Hackman, 1992). In this sense, a high level of occupational embeddedness also represents a positive career situation (Ng & Feldman, 2009), which itself provides cues for career satisfaction, irrespective of an individual’s level of CSE. Specifically, people who are highly embedded in their occupations are likely to derive satisfaction from the financial benefits and security typically associated with the “sacrifice” dimension (Feldman & Ng, 2007), the positive evaluations of their person-occupation fit (Feldman, 2003) and their extensive network (Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003). Drawing on the situational strength we therefore argue that the presence of strong links, high person-occupation fit and high benefits reduce the differences between low- and high-CSE individuals in career satisfaction. By contrast, at low levels of occupational embeddedness positive CSEs will be more relevant for attaining career satisfaction. This is because in ambiguous situations individuals are more likely to interpret their career attainments in line with their personal dispositions and, according to self-verification theory (Swann, 1983), individuals with a positive self-concept are more likely to construe their career experiences in a positive way. In sum, we hypothesize that occupational embeddedness compensates for low CSE in explaining career satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4: Occupational embeddedness moderates the positive relationship between CSE and career satisfaction in a compensatory fashion, such that the relationship between CSE and career satisfaction is weaker when occupational embeddedness is high.

Positive Goal Emotions and Occupational Embeddedness. Given that CSE is a distal trait, its contingent role on subjective career success might be best understood through more proximal appraisals such as affective goal evaluations (Chang, et al., 2012). In this respect, we expect high levels of occupational embeddedness to attenuate the indirect effect of CSE on subjective career success by restricting the mediating role of positive goal emotions. Positive goal emotions will be more strongly related with career satisfaction when people are less entrenched in their careers. The more environmental turbulences and situational ambiguity individuals face in their careers, the more useful career goals are as a reference point that provides structure and helps individuals to interpret their experiences (e.g., Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). As occupations provide a stimuli-rich context for individual attitudes, individuals who are highly embedded in their occupations are, on the contrary, less dependent on goals for structuring and interpreting their career experiences. For example, consultants who are strongly embedded in their occupations will derive career satisfaction from the visibility and reputation they have gained in past projects, their identification with the consulting profession, and their social network of colleagues and clients, rather than from particular goals they define.

In line with the situational strength framework, we therefore expect occupational embeddedness to reduce the benefits of positive goal emotions on career satisfaction. Considering that “strong” situations of high levels of occupational embeddedness provide clear and specific cues for sense making and for interpreting career attainments,

they limit the room for individual discretion. In such contexts, individuals are likely to respond similarly to the contextual cues provided by high levels of embeddedness, regardless of their levels of positive goal emotions. Thus, the more enmeshed individuals are in their careers, the less important positive goal emotions become because the social context increases in importance as a reference point for one's attitudes. In other words, situations of high occupational embeddedness limit the scope of the self-verification processes that individuals engage in. We therefore hypothesize that situations of high embeddedness reduce the mediating role of positive goal emotions for the CSE-career satisfaction relationship. See Figure 4.1 for an overview of our postulated model.

Hypothesis 5: Occupational embeddedness moderates the positive and indirect relationship between CSE and career satisfaction through positive goal emotions. Specifically, the mediation of positive goal emotions is weaker when individuals are more embedded in their careers.

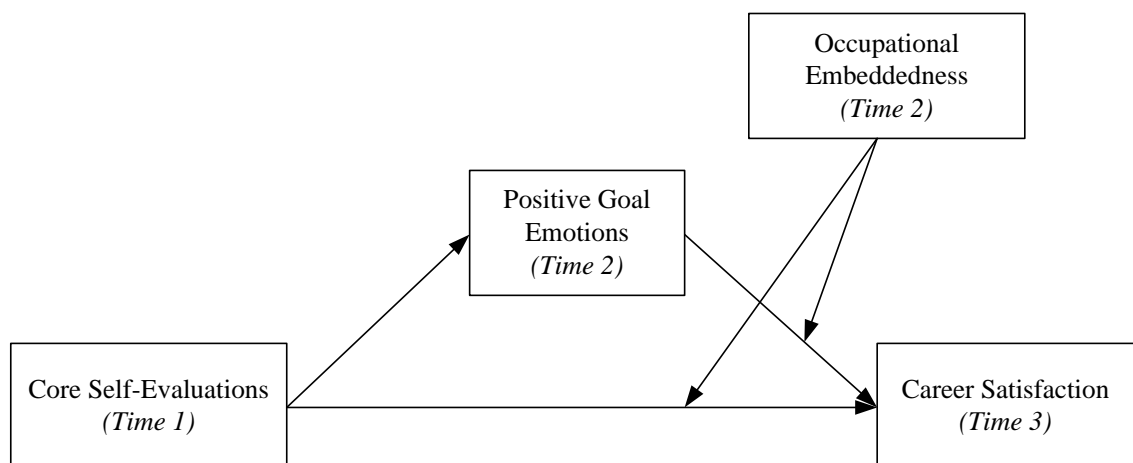


Figure 4.1. Hypothesized research model

Method

Sample and Procedure

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a time-lagged study with three measurement waves, each three months apart. We invited alumni of two Spanish business schools to our longitudinal study, which started in June 2011, offering them an individual report in return. In total, 349 alumni accepted our invitation to participate in the longitudinal study. In the first measurement wave, we assessed individuals' CSEs. Seven participants had missing data, leaving 342 respondents to be eligible for the Time 2 and Time 3 questionnaires. In the second measurement wave, we assessed individuals' positive goal emotions and occupational embeddedness, and in the final data collection, we asked for individuals' assessments of their career satisfaction. In total, 176 participants responded to all three surveys (a 51% response rate), of which 141 individuals had complete data on our key study variables. Although we asked the participants only to respond to the questionnaires when they were employed, one individual who was unemployed at Time 3 participated in the last measurement wave and was, therefore, eliminated from our database, leaving a final sample size of 140 participants.

Following Goodman and Blum's (1996) recommendations, we assessed attrition bias by comparing individuals that responded to all three questionnaires with those that only responded to the first measurement wave. Results of the attrition analyses showed that the missing respondents are missing at random, at least with respect to demographics and the variables of interest to this study (F-ratios range from .06 to 1.30). On average, the participants of our sample were 31 years old, 29% were female. Most of the study participants hold a managerial position (83%) and worked full time

(97%). Participants had an average work experience of 7.3 years and an organizational tenure of 2.7 years.

Measures

CSE. In the first measurement wave, participants responded to the 12-item CSE scale (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003), using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The scale includes items such as “When I try, I generally succeed”. The items were then averaged to form a scale score ($\alpha = .84$).

Positive Goal Emotions. In the second measurement wave, we assessed the positive emotions individuals associated with their career goals. First, we asked respondents to think of the changes they would like to see happen regarding their personal work situation in the following two years. Next, respondents were asked to write down their most important personal career goal—defined as “objectives, projects and plans related to your job, career and occupation” (Maier & Brunstein, 2001, p. 1036)—that they wanted to achieve in the next two years. We focused on a two-year time frame to capture individuals’ short-term career goals, which typically range from one to three years (Greenhaus, et al., 2010). We asked participants to indicate the positive goal emotions associated with their career goals using the four-item scale of goal-related positive emotions (Pomaki, et al., 2004). A sample item is: “I find it pleasant to work toward this goal.” Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). We averaged the items to form a scale score ($\alpha = .84$).

Occupational Embeddedness. In the second measurement wave, we also assessed individuals’ occupational embeddedness with the 14-item scale developed by Ng and Feldman (2009). Occupational embeddedness is conceptualized as a formative

construct that is comprised of three subdimensions – fit, links, and sacrifices. The dimension of fit is measured by five items, such as “I fit with this occupation’s culture” ($\alpha = .84$). The sacrifice dimension also consists of five Likert items. An example is: “I feel that people in this occupation respect me a lot” ($\alpha = .79$). The dimension of links is measured with four open-ended questions, such as “How many professional colleagues do you interact with regularly?” (The “link” score is a summed index and therefore has no internal consistency estimate.) Because response options differed across items, we standardized the item responses before combining them into the respective scales and the aggregated measure of occupational embeddedness ($\alpha = .80$).

Career Satisfaction. In the last round of data collection, respondents indicated on a five-item scale their level of career satisfaction (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990), using a response scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A sample item is: “I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career.” We averaged the items to form a scale score ($\alpha = .84$).

Control Variables. To establish incremental validity of CSE and positive goal emotions, we measured a number of covariates that could affect the relationship postulated in our research model. Besides controlling for a dummy variable that specified the type of business school the participants attended, we controlled for age, gender (0 = *male*; 1 = *female*), and work experience because these variables might affect subjective career success (Ng, et al., 2005). Even though previous research has not yet examined the mediating mechanisms of the CSE-career satisfaction relationship, it is possible that high-CSE individuals are more satisfied with their careers because they have attained higher levels of objective career success (Stumpp, et al., 2010). Following previous calls to account for multiple mediating mechanisms that could link CSE to work outcomes (Chang, et al., 2012), we controlled for the mediation mechanism of

objective career success, specifically monthly salary before taxes (measured in 22 steps from “no salary” to” more than € 20.000”) and hierarchical status using Abele and Spurk’s (2009b) three-item measure. All covariates were assessed at Time 1 with the exception of objective career success, which was measured at Time 3.

Confirmatory Factor Analyses. To test the distinctiveness of our variables, we conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses with Mplus. The measurement model included four constructs: CSE, positive goal emotions, occupational embeddedness, and career satisfaction. We measured occupational embeddedness by three item parcels representing each of the dimensions (fit, links, and sacrifice). To maintain a favorable indicator-to-sample size ratio, we also modeled CSE with four item parcels. The fit of the four-factor model was acceptable ($\chi(98) = 149.74, p < .01$; CFI = .95; RMSEA = .06) and superior to alternative three-factor and one-factor models (see Table 4.1).

Data Analysis

We tested the hypothesized path analytic moderation model (see Figure 4.1.) with Mplus macro codes provided by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007). In line with recommendations of Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003), we mean-centered the independent variables and moderator variables before creating interaction terms and plotted the interactions at three values of the moderator (mean and ± 1 SD). Analyses were conducted including the covariates of age, gender, work experience, and university, but the results were essentially the same. We therefore excluded these covariates from the analyses and report below the results without covariates (Becker, 2005). We subsequently tested the hypotheses of our model, first by conducting a simple mediation analysis with positive goal emotions as a mediator. Second, we introduced the interaction term of CSE and occupational embeddedness. Third, we

additionally modeled the interaction of positive goal emotions and occupational embeddedness. Finally, we examined whether the moderated path model holds after controlling for the potential mediation effects of objective career success (salary and hierarchical status).

Table 4.1

Confirmatory Factor Analyses Comparing Alternative Measurement Models

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	$\Delta \chi^2$	CFI	RMSEA
M0: Hypothesized Four-Factor Model	143.49	98		.95	.06
M1: Three-Factor model combining CSE and positive goal emotions	342.92	101	199.43**	.75	.13
M2: Three-Factor model combining CSE and occupational embeddedness	204.43	101	60.94**	.89	.09
M3: Three-Factor model combining CSE and career satisfaction	363.15	101	219.66**	.72	.14
M5: Three-Factor model combining occupational embeddedness and positive goal emotions	218.92	101	75.43**	.88	.09
M6: Three-Factor model combining positive goal emotions and career satisfaction	333.86	101	190.37**	.76	.13
M7: Three-Factor model combining occupational embeddedness and career satisfaction	202.62	101	59.13**	.89	.09
M8: One-Factor Model	579.61	104	436.12**	.50	.18

Note. *N* =140. *df* =degrees of freedom; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; CFI = comparative fit index;

** *p* < .01.

Results

Table 4.2 shows the descriptives and correlations of all study variables. The results of our hypothesis tests are presented in Table 4.3. Hypothesis 1 predicts that CSE is positively associated with positive goal emotions. Supporting H1, our results show that CSE is positively associated with positive goal emotions ($B = .18, p < .01$). Our results also support H2, which postulates that positive goal emotions are positively related with career satisfaction ($B = .23, p = .03$) (see Step 1, Table 4.3). Consistent with H3, CSE partly leads to career satisfaction through positive goal emotions ($B = .04$; 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval [.01; .11]).

Hypothesis 4 proposes that CSE and occupational embeddedness predict career satisfaction in a compensatory fashion. Although the interaction is, as proposed, negative, it is not significant ($B = -.17, p = .11$) (see Step 2, Table 4.3). Hypothesis 4 is, therefore, not supported. The conditional direct effect analysis showed, nevertheless, that the CSE-career satisfaction relationship is only significantly positive when individuals' level of occupational embeddedness is low ($B = .36, p < .01$) and average ($B = .23, p < .01$), but not when it is high ($B = .10, p = .36$).

In Hypothesis 5, we proposed that occupational embeddedness attenuates the indirect effect from CSE to career satisfaction through positive goal emotions. Our results show that occupational embeddedness moderates the relationship between positive goal emotions and career satisfaction ($B = -.35, p = .01$) (see Step 3, Table 4.3). Whereas for people with low levels of occupational embeddedness positive goal emotions is positively associated with career satisfaction ($B = .41, p < .01$), the relationship becomes non-significant for people with medium or high levels of occupational embeddedness (medium: $B = .14, p = .15$; high: $B = -.13, p = .36$) (see

also Figure 4.2). Consistent with H5, the conditional indirect effect analysis furthermore indicates that positive goal emotions only mediates the CSE-career satisfaction relationship at low levels of occupational embeddedness, but not at average or high values of occupational embeddedness (see Table 4.4). Once the interaction term of positive goal emotions and occupational embeddedness is included in the model, the interaction term of CSE and occupational embeddedness decreases from $-.17$ ($p = .11$) to $-.04$ ($p = .70$). According to the Freedman-Schatzkin test (1992), this decrease is statistically significant ($t = -15.28$), indicating that the interaction of positive goal emotions and occupational embeddedness accounts for the interactive term of CSE and occupational embeddedness.

Table 4.2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Study Variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Age	31.24	4.13	1.00									
2 Gender	.29	.46	-.17*	1.00								
3 Work experience	7.26	6.46	.57**	-.11	1.00							
4 Business school (0/1)	.27	.72	-.23**	.19*	-.08	1.00						
5 Core self-evaluations	5.33	.78	-.10	-.07	-.11	.17*	1.00					
6 Positive goal emotions	4.34	.57	.01	.00	.00	.23**	.25**	1.00				
7 Occupational embeddedness	.02	.77	.14	-.15	.15	-.02	.28**	.25**	1.00			
8 Career satisfaction	3.70	.71	.09	-.12	.12	.14	.35**	.26**	.33**	1.00		
9 Hierarchical status	.23	.91	.28**	-.06	.16	-.11	.22*	.16	.23**	.30**	1.00	
10 Salary	5.91	4.09	.33**	-.17	.22*	-.03	.24**	.10	.27**	.17*	.05	1.00

Note: $N = 140$.

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Table 4.3.

Moderated Mediation Regression Analyses of Career Satisfaction

	Step 1					Step 2					Step 3				
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Mediator: Positive Goal Emotions					.07*					.06*					.06*
Core self-evaluations	.18	.06	.25	3.09*		.18	.06	.25	3.09*		.18	.06	.25	3.09**	
Dependent Variable: Career satisfaction					.18**					.22**					.26**
Core self-evaluations	.28	.07	.31	3.84*		.23	.07	.25	3.14**		.22	.07	.25	3.17**	
Positive goal emotions	.23	.10	.18	2.29*		.18	.10	.15	1.86~		.14	.10	.11	1.45	
Occup. embeddedness						.22	.07	.23	2.94*		.27	.08	.32	3.54**	
Core self-evaluations* Occup. embeddedness						-.17	.11	-.12	-1.61		-.04	.11	-.03	-.36	
Positive goal emotions* Occup. embeddedness											-.35	.13	-.24	-2.82*	

Note. *N* = 140. Statistics appearing in bold represent tests of our hypotheses.

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$, ~ $p < .10$

Table 4.4

Conditional Indirect Effect of CSE on Career Satisfaction at Values of Occupational Embeddedness

Mediator	Occupational Embeddedness	Effect	SE	Bootstrap CI
Positive goal emotions	Low	.08	.03	[.02; .16]
Positive goal emotions	Medium	.03	.02	[.00; .07]
Positive goal emotions	High	-.02	.03	[-.11; .02]

To test the robustness of the hypothesized moderated mediation model, we ran another model controlling for the potential mediating mechanisms of objective career success (salary and hierarchical status). The results of our hypothesized moderated mediation model did not substantially change. Specifically, there was a positive indirect effect through positive goal emotions when occupational embeddedness is low [$B = .07$, $SE = .03$, 95 CI [.02; .15]), but not at medium or high levels of occupational embeddedness (medium: $B = .02$, $SE = .02$, 95 CI [-.01; .07]; high: $B = -.02$, $SE = .03$, 95 CI [-.11; .02]). As expected, CSE was positively associated with salary and hierarchical status. However, neither salary nor hierarchical status significantly predicted career satisfaction holding the other study variables constant (see Table 4.5).

Discussion

Following research calls for better contextualizing career outcomes (Gunz, et al., 2011), our study demonstrated how and under which occupational situations CSE predicts career satisfaction. The results of our time-lagged research provide a number of

Table 4.5

Multiple Mediation Regression Results

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Mediator: Positive goal emotions					.06*
Core self-evaluations	.18	.06	.25	3.14**	
Mediator: Salary					.06*
Core self-evaluations	1.25	.49	.24	2.43*	
Mediator: Hierarchical status					.05*
Core self-evaluations	.26	.11	.22	3.79*	
Dependent Variable: Career satisfaction					.28**
Core self-evaluations	.19	.07	.21	2.92**	
Positive goal emotions	.12	.10	.10	1.29	
Salary	.01	.01	.06	.76	
Hierarchical status	.13	.10	.16	1.26	
Occupational embeddedness	.25	.10	.27	2.66*	
Core self-evaluations*	-.01	.01	.00	-.05	
Occup. Embeddedness					
Positive goal emotions*	-.33	.14	-.22	-2.34*	
Occup. embeddedness					

Note. *N* = 140.

** *p* < .01, * *p* < .05, ~ *p* < .10;

important contributions to the CSE and careers literatures. Firstly, our study contributes to the CSE literature by examining how people with a positive self-regard achieve higher levels of subjective career success. In line with self-verification theory and previous research that has emphasized the relevance of emotions at the workplace (e.g., Fisher, Minbashian, Beckmann, & Wood, 2013), our results suggest that the experience of positive goal emotions makes people more satisfied with their careers and that these affective processes help high-CSE individuals to translate their positive self-regard into satisfaction with their career attainments. Furthermore, our findings demonstrate that high-CSE individuals were more satisfied with their careers than their low-CSE counterparts even when they were “objectively” equally successful in their careers, which parallels previous research showing that high-CSE individuals are more satisfied with their jobs partly because they perceive equally complex jobs to be more enriching (Judge, et al., 2000).

In addition to demonstrating the mediating role of positive goal emotions, our results shed light on the boundary conditions of the relationship between CSE and subjective career success. Although scholars have long called for testing Davis-Blake and Pfeffer’s (1989) contention that personality only matters in “weak” situation (e.g., Judge & Hulin, 1993), to our knowledge this study is the first to examine the interplay of personality and situational variables on career satisfaction. In line with an interactionist perspective towards career attitudes, our results indicate that CSE is not equally important across contexts. Specifically, we provided empirical support for Kacmar, Collins, Harris, and Judge’s (2009) proposition that the advantage of high CSE is maximized in environments that require people to independently set and pursue their goals. Consistent with the concept of situational strength (Mischel, 1977), “weak” situations of low occupational embeddedness increased the salience of CSE by

augmenting the indirect effect from CSE to career satisfaction through positive goal emotions. The “weaker” the situational cues, the more personality variables, such as CSE and positive goal emotions, have a relevant effect on career satisfaction. In this sense, low occupational embeddedness facilitated the indirect effect of CSE through positive goal emotions by weakening the influence of potentially competing, non-personality specific situational cues for career satisfaction. On the contrary, a situation of high occupational embeddedness makes situational stimuli more salient and thus constrains the influence of personality variables (see also Bowles, Babcock, & McGinn, 2005). Even if the “strong” situation of high occupational embeddedness did not wash out the positive direct effect of CSE on career satisfaction, it reduced the importance of CSE for career satisfaction by overwhelming the indirect effect of CSE on career satisfaction through positive goal emotions. This finding suggests that “strong” situations limit the scope of self-verification processes that career actors engage in.

Second, we advance career research by examining the role of career goals in predicting career satisfaction. Although career goals are a central construct in career theorizing such as career motivation theory (London, 1983), career self-management processes (Greenhaus, et al., 2010) and career agency (Tams & Arthur, 2010), little is known about its role in shaping individuals’ careers experiences. This leaves the question open as to whether and when career goals are most helpful for individuals’ careers (Greenhaus, et al., 2010; Seibert, et al., 2013). In this respect, our findings suggest that people can become more satisfied with their careers if they pursue career goals that evoke positive emotions, complementing an increasing body of research that demonstrates the relevance of personal goals for understanding individuals’ work outcomes, such as job satisfaction (e.g., Judge, et al., 2005; Maier & Brunstein, 2001), performance, and organizational citizenship behavior (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2010).

In light of the dearth of studies that examine the boundary conditions of the role of personal or assigned goals, our results also make a first step towards understanding the contingencies of the relationship between career goals and subjective career success. Even though positive goal emotions were, on average, positively associated with career satisfaction, this relationship was not uniform. In fact, positive goal emotions led to higher subjective career success only when people experienced high latitude in their careers— that is, when they had a low degree of occupational embeddedness. Our results imply that the affective appraisals of career goals are most important for understanding subjective career success in ambiguous career contexts because it is in these “weak” situations that career goals and the positive emotions associated with them are relevant for providing feedback about how individuals’ careers are advancing.

Third, our study also responds to previous research calls for better contextualizing career success. With few exceptions, most research to date has focused on the main effects of individuals’ traits without considering the interplay with situational characteristics at the organizational, occupational, or national levels (e.g., Gunz, et al., 2011). Our study indicates that the impact of career goals can be substituted by contextual variables at the occupational level. Consistent with our findings, a study among Belgian companies revealed that individuals’ career self-management behaviors (e.g., networking and self-nomination) are most important for understanding career satisfaction when companies provide little organizational career management (De Vos, Dewettinck, & Buyens, 2009). Likewise, individuals’ ambition values were found to be most strongly related with hierarchical status when countries’ cultural values do not encourage ambition-related behavior (Holtschlag, Morales, Masuda, & Maydeu-Olivares, 2013). Together, these studies suggest that careers do not occur in a vacuum and that contextual variables at distinct levels of analyses might

partly compensate for the influence of individuals' career management processes.

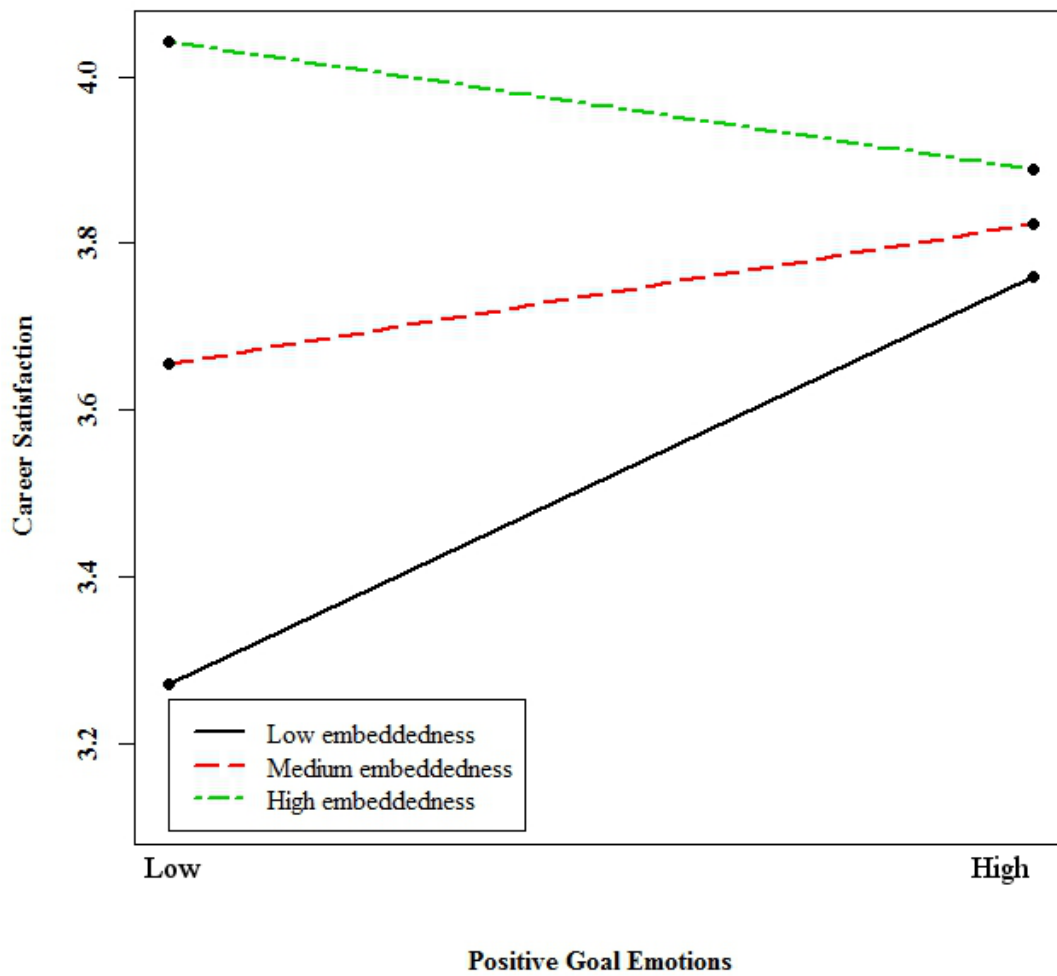


Figure 4.2. Interaction of Positive Goal Emotions and Occupational Embeddedness

Practical Implications

Our results indicate that low-CSE individuals benefitted most from situations of high occupational embeddedness. Whereas a high level of occupational embeddedness did not augment the CSE-career satisfaction relationship, it could partially compensate for low levels of CSE. Specifically, our findings suggest that individuals low on CSE might curb the negative career consequences by selecting themselves into more structured career paths and by actively participating in their occupational network.

Considering that high levels of occupational embeddedness promote performance and creativity (Ng & Feldman, 2009) and provide an opportunity for people low on CSE to become satisfied with their careers, companies would be well advised to encourage their employees to invest in their occupational networks, such as by rewarding the participation in professional associations and the development of transferable skills that are valued in their occupational community. Further, it is often not feasible and maybe not even desirable for companies to exclusively recruit people with high CSE (e.g., there might be benefits in having variance in CSE among team members). Our results, therefore, provide a first recommendation about how companies can manage the careers of people with lower CSEs.

In volatile labor markets, in which people increasingly face voluntary or involuntary career transitions (Feldman & Ng, 2007), low-CSE individuals might not always have the choice to pursue structured career paths. Another strategy that low-CSE individuals can adopt is to learn how to set career goals that are conducive to subjective career success. In this respect, career goals and the positive emotions attached with them are malleable and are consequently amenable to career interventions. The affective appraisals associated with career goals are not only influenced by personality traits like CSE, but are also shaped by the extent to which the goal pursuit is controllable and the goal outcome is desirable (Pekrun, et al., 2009). Low-CSE individuals can thus learn to select career goals that make their goal pursuit more controllable and enjoyable by setting self-concordant or intrinsic goals or by seeking support in their environment.

Limitations and Future Research

Our research is subject to a number of limitations. First, the variables used in our study were all self-reported, raising the question of common-method bias. Considering

that employees themselves have the clearest idea about their self-concept, goal appraisals, and career satisfaction, it would have been difficult to obtain accurate information with any other method than self-report (Spector, 2006). Future research could, however, obtain multi-source data by asking colleagues or “significant others” to assess individuals’ occupational embeddedness. Although we cannot completely eliminate the possibility for common-method bias, we aimed to minimize it by temporally separating the measurement of the independent, mediator, and dependent variable (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012).

Second, despite our time-lagged research design, we cannot infer causality and cannot argue that CSE and positive goal emotions cause career satisfaction. Future research could overcome this shortcoming by testing interventions that experimentally manipulate positive goal emotions. Longitudinal studies with a repeated measures design can further elucidate whether high-CSE individuals experience increases in career success over time because CSE, positive goal emotions, and career satisfaction reciprocally relate to each other, leading to an “upward spiral” of career success.

Third, in line with previous goal research (e.g., Louro, et al., 2007; Pomaki, et al., 2004), we discussed the broad dimension of positive goal emotions and did not theorize and empirically address the role of discrete emotions. Considering that previous research has emphasized the utility of distinguishing between discrete emotions (e.g., Brief & Weiss, 2002), we encourage researchers to examine which positive goal emotions are most strongly related with career satisfaction and which associations are contingent on individuals’ occupational embeddedness.

Fourth, although we hypothesized that high levels of occupational embeddedness compensate for low levels of CSE and positive goal emotions, there

might also be situations in which occupational embeddedness provides a risk for individuals' long-term career success and for a company's profits. Being highly enmeshed with one's occupation might imply long-term costs, especially if high embeddedness prevents individuals to transition to more fulfilling or promising occupations that might have a better "pay-off" in the long term. For companies, occupational embeddedness could also represent a "double-edged sword" that, on the one hand, promotes employees' performance, creativity, and career satisfaction, but that on the other hand might lead to higher voluntary turnover when accompanied with lower organizational embeddedness. We, therefore, encourage future studies to look at potential downsides of occupational embeddedness and to examine whether the compensatory interactions postulated in this study are themselves contingent upon other contextual characteristics.

Fifth, given our research focuses on the compensatory interplay of personality and embeddedness, we did not explain the situations that might augment the subjective career success of high-CSE individuals. In this respect, we encourage future research to examine whether the benefits of CSE are magnified in contexts that a) provide a high degree of latitude in how careers are constructed and interpreted, b) do not provide clear and direct cues for subjective career success, and c) provide resources or opportunities that high-CSE can capitalize on in the medium or long term.

In conclusion, our research shows the relevance of considering the interplay of personality traits, career goals, and situational variables to obtain a comprehensive understanding of subjective career success. We hope that this study encourages researchers to examine in more detail the contextual nature of subjective career success

and investigate how situational variables can either compensate for low CSE or magnify the career satisfaction of high-CSE individuals.

Chapter 5: General Discussion

The results from the present studies support the primary hypothesis that career goals play a role in promoting career success. In three studies, the potential benefits of career goals and values for subjective and objective career success were examined. In the following, I discuss how the findings of these studies answer the research objectives set out in this dissertation and how they contribute to career theory and to the personal goals literature. Finally, I outline the limitations of this dissertation and provide recommendations for future research and discuss practical career management implications.

Discussion of Research Objectives

Career Goals and Career Success. In this thesis, I set out to examine which careers goals are advantageous for one's career. The findings of this dissertation demonstrate that both distal goal units—like values (Study 2) and career visions (Study 1)—as well as more proximal career goals (Study 3) explain individuals' career success. Specifically, Study 1 showed that career visions predict the level of job satisfaction and turnover intentions seven years later. The results of Study 2 furthermore indicate that self-enhancement values, which represent abstract goals of achievement and power, are positively associated with hierarchical status. Study 3 suggests that not only abstract career visions influence subjective career success but that short-term goals can also play a role in promoting career satisfaction. Hence, together these findings suggest that goals of different levels of abstraction play a role in directing careers and in promoting individuals' career success. Abstract and long-term goals such as values and career visions are likely to exert a distal effect by providing inspiration and a sense of purpose and by stimulating the setting of short-term goals. In contrast, career goals with a

shorter time focus are likely to have more immediate effects on career success in exerting a self-regulatory functions (Bandura, 1997) by energizing goal-directed behavior, stimulating career strategy development, and permitting individuals to measure how their goal pursuit is going (Greenhaus, et al., 2010; Hall & Foster, 1977; Wiese & Freund, 2005).

In line with previous goal research that has outlined that not all goals are equally beneficial (Greenhaus, et al., 2010; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998), the present findings help answering the question as of what types of career goals are most instrumental in promoting career success. Specifically, the results indicate that both the content and the appraisals of career goals matter. In line with goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990a), the research findings of Study 1 suggest that a clear and difficult vision of one's career can help individuals to achieve subjective career success in the long term. The results showed that individuals with specific visions were more satisfied with their jobs seven years later and that people who had difficult career visions reported lower turnover intentions because they were more satisfied with the jobs they held seven years after graduation. Similarly, Study 2 taps into the implications of ambition values (i.e., self-enhancement values) by examining whether individuals who highly value achievement and power are more likely to report a higher status than individuals who place less emphasis on ambition. In line with research that has documented the importance of ambition for getting ahead (Abele & Spurk, 2009b; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012), our results suggest that in many, albeit not all countries individuals with pronounced ambition values are likely to report a high level of hierarchical status.

Study 3, furthermore, points out that individuals' affective goal appraisals influence their level of career satisfaction. In line with research that has shown that

positive emotions generate an “upward spiral” to optimal functioning (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001), results of Study 3 point out that the experience of positive goal emotions makes people, on average, more satisfied with their careers. In total, these three studies provide distinct vantage points for understanding the relationship between career goals and career success. They indicate that career success depends on the quality of career visions (Study 1), individuals’ value priorities (Study 2), and the affective appraisals of short-term career goals (Study 3). They, furthermore, suggest that career success can be explained by external ratings of career visions (Study 1), by individuals’ self-reported value priorities (Study 2), and by individuals’ appraisals of their career goals (Study 3).

Contextualizing Career Goals. In addition to understanding which career goals lead to career success, I set out to examine when career goals matter most for predicting individuals’ success in their careers. Even if there is still a dearth of research contextualizing personal goals and career success, both personal goal researchers and career scholars coincide that a multilevel, contextualized perspective is essential for understanding human behavior and individuals’ careers in their entire complexity and intricacy (e.g., Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Gunz, et al., 2011). Following these research calls, the second research objective of this dissertation was to contextualize career goals discussing how their relevance for career success is contingent upon the environment. In this thesis, I define context as “situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of [individual and] organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables” (Johns, 2006, p. 386). Contextual factors can refer to micro, meso, or macro levels (Mayrhofer, et al., 2007). They can be described as either omnibus context (e.g., “Who?”; “Where?”; “When?”) or as specific situational variables (e.g., social structure and resources) (Johns, 2006). In the prior chapters, I focused on both a macro (national culture; Study 2) and a meso context

(occupational embeddedness, Study 3) to examine how the location (“Where?”) and occupation (“Who?”) might alter the relationship between career goals and career success.

In order to conceptualize the interplay of these contextual factors and career goals on career success I predominantly drew on the “situational strength” concept (Mischel, 1973; Mischel, 1977)—one of the most long-lasting concept in psychology for contextualizing individual and organizational behavior (Meyer, et al., 2009; Meyer, et al., 2010). In the 70s, Mischel coined the concept of “situational strength” in order to discuss under which situations individual differences are most likely to predict behavior. More specifically, he puts forth that personality is most relevant when situations are ambiguously structured, i.e. when they lack clear cues about how to interpret events and do not provide specific guidelines about the most appropriate behavioral response. The situational strength construct, thus, refers to implicit and explicit norms that provide cues for the desirability of a certain range of behaviors and attitudes.

In line with recent research that has shown that “situational strength” reduces or washes out the personality-outcome relationship (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1993; Bowles, et al., 2005; Grant & Rothbard, 2013; Meyer, et al., 2009), the findings of this research show that “situational strength” restricts the influence of career goals on career success. Study 2 shows that in cultures that provide strong cues for self-enhancement related behavior—as present in countries that emphasize mastery and hierarchy cultural values—individuals’ self-enhancement values did not explain who made it to the top. On the contrary, when countries encouraged and rewarded self-enhancement to a low extent, peoples’ self-enhancement values were most important for predicting

hierarchical status. Study 3, additionally indicates that the “situational strength” concept explains how contextual and individual difference variables interact to explain subjective career outcomes. In this respect, the results coincide with Mischel’s suggestion in that positive goal emotions are most strongly associated with career satisfaction when individuals are loosely embedded in their occupations. If people were highly entrenched in their career paths, positive goal emotions did not matter any longer for explaining subjective career success.

In both studies we thus observed that individual characteristics and environmental factors may compensate each other in predicting career success. Study 2 suggests that a complementary person-culture fit (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987) describes best when individuals with ambition values achieve a high hierarchical status, which means that ambition values were most important for predicting objective career success when they helped individuals to differentiate themselves from the remaining people in their environment. Likewise, the findings of Study 3 indicate that contextual factors moderated the relationship between individual differences and subjective career success. If people were already highly embedded in their careers, it was no longer essential for them to associate positive emotions with their career goals. If people lacked, however, a high occupational embeddedness, positive goal emotions had positive repercussions on career satisfaction. In this respect, both studies suggest that “more is not necessarily better” such that positive individual differences and favorable environmental characteristics may not necessarily result in more career success. Instead, our results suggest that these two factors may compensate each other in that a favorable situation reduces the importance of positive personality characteristics.

Career Goals as Mediator of Personality-Career Success Relationship.

The third objective of this dissertation is to examine whether career goals mediate the relationship between personality traits and career success. Although traits and goals are one of the most fundamental units in personality psychology (Chulef, Read, & Walsh, 2001; Lewin, 1935; McClelland, 1951) and although early conceptual research emphasized that both constructs are closely intertwined (e.g., Alston, 1975; Allport, 1937), the lines of research that discuss who people are (traits) and what people aspire (goals) have traditionally been largely separated (Roberts & Robins, 2000). In the last two decades, an increasing number of articles has, however, empirically demonstrated that both goals and traits are correlated with each other (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; King, 1995; Little, Lecci, & Watkinson, 1992; Roberts, O'Donnell, & Robins, 2004; Roberts & Robins, 2000). In general, findings of these studies show that people select goals that reinforce their personality traits, a tendency that Caspi and Roberts (2001) describe as “proactive person-environment transformation” and that Little et al. (1992) label as the “instrumental effect” of personality traits. In this respect, research of Roberts and Robins (2000) has shown, for instance, that economic goals are related to conscientiousness, extraversion, low agreeableness, and low openness-to-change.

Despite these advances, there is still little consensus on how traits and goals conjointly predict behavior and outcomes. Whereas some researchers argue that goals and personality traits independently explain life outcomes (e.g., Winter, John, Stewart, Klohnen, & Duncan, 1998), others suggest that goal units mediate the relationship between personality traits and behavior or life outcomes (Cantor, 1990; Little, et al., 1992). In this dissertation, I joined this debate by examining whether career goals mediate the relationship between CSE and career satisfaction. In Study 3, I found that career goals, specifically the affective evaluations of career goals, partly mediate the

CSE-career satisfaction relationship. This means that people with a positive self-regard are to a certain extent satisfied with their career achievements because they pursue career goals with which they associate positive goals. In this respect, the findings support theorizing that indicates that personal goals might channel the effects of traits (Cantor, 1990; Little, et al., 2007) because individuals choose and interpret their career goals in line with their personality traits (cf. proactive and reactive person-environment transactions, Caspi & Roberts, 2001).

On the other hand, the results of this study also suggest that the distal trait of CSE affects career satisfaction beyond its indirect effect via career goals. Specifically, this means that even if two individuals equally associate positive emotions with their goals, the person with a more positive self-regard is still more likely to report higher subjective career success. This result can likely be explained by the broad nature of traits like CSE, which might not only affect career success via cognitive and affective paths, but also via behavioral paths such as networking or job performance (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2007). In this sense, the results of Study 3 are in line with previous research of Judge, Bono, Erez, and Locke (2005) which shows that self-concordant personal work goals only partly account for the CSE-job satisfaction relationship.

Theoretical Contribution to Personal Goals Research

In total, the findings of this dissertation contribute to the personal goals literature in three ways. First of all, the studies included in this thesis expand existing research on personal goals by discussing their implications for individuals' careers. To date, personal goal research has predominantly been concerned with the implications of personal goals for individuals' subjective well-being (Brunstein, 1993; Brunstein, et al., 1998; Diener & Fujita, 1995; Elliot, et al., 1997; Emmons, 1986). Recently, scholars

have begun, however, to examine the consequences of personal goal pursuit for work attitudes and job outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Judge, et al., 2005; Wiese & Freund, 2005), organizational commitment (Maier & Brunstein, 2001), burnout (Pomaki, et al., 2004), engagement (Hyvönen, et al., 2009; Wiese & Salmela-Aro, 2008), performance, and citizenship behavior (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2010). Despite the increasing interest in personal goals for the work context, none of these studies has addressed whether career goals can help individuals to become more successful in their careers. By discussing how individuals' personal career goals predict career success, we therefore extend the nomological network of personal goals, examining their theoretical and practical relevance for the careers field.

Secondly, the studies included in this dissertation aimed to break new ground in the personal goal literature by challenging the often implicit assumption that the effects of personal goals are “universal” and “invariant” across contexts. To my knowledge, this dissertation is among the few studies that empirically tests how contextual factors interact with personal goals. Notable exceptions are, for example, the cross-cultural study of Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, and Sheldon (2001), in which the authors argue that avoidance goals are only a negative predictor of subjective well-being in individualistic, but not in collectives countries. Similarly, Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, and Deci (2004) shows that intrinsic goals synergistically interact with autonomy-supportive contexts for predicting learning and academic performance.

Thirdly, this thesis contributes to the personal goals literature by helping address the “persistent and nagging problem” (Emmons, 1995, p. 343) of personality psychology to integrate distinct units of analysis into a coherent theoretical framework of personality (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). In this sense, Study 3 represents an important step toward better understanding the link between CSE and affective goal appraisals

extending previous research that has looked at the association between the Big Five and appraisals of personal projects (Little, et al., 1992).

Theoretical Contributions to Careers Research

The results of this research, furthermore, provide several theoretical implications for the careers literature. Specifically, it contributes to the realms of career research that discuss the role of ambition, positive emotions, and context in achieving career success.

Ambition and Career Success. Firstly, the work presented in this dissertation joins the debate as of how and when ambitious career goals relate to career success (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Although several studies have shown that ambitious career aspirations are one of the best predictors of objective career success (e.g., Abele & Spurk, 2009b; Howard & Bray, 1988; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012), it is less clear whether and under which circumstances they can help individuals to achieve subjective career success. Whereas ambition during young adulthood can translate into life satisfaction in later career stages, the pursuit of ambitious career goals can also come at a cost (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). In this respect, studies have shown that people with ambitious goals are less satisfied with their jobs and careers, even if they are objectively more successful (Abele & Spurk, 2009b; Judge, et al., 1995; Judge & Locke, 1993).

In line with previous research on ambition, we measured ambitious goals by examining the difficulty of career goals (Study 1, cf. Mento, et al., 1992) and the extent to which individuals pursue goals of achievement and power (Study 2, cf. Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Our results expand the current knowledge of ambition by examining the relevance of ambition values across cultures, discussing how the national culture can inhibit the relationship between self-enhancement values and hierarchical

status (see Study 2). In this sense, our results show that self-enhancement values are associated with hierarchical status only as long as countries do not highly encourage and reward ambition-related behavior.

Additionally, results of Study 1 provide initial insight into the benefits of ambition for subjective career success. Specifically, we saw that individuals with difficult career visions tended to be more satisfied with their jobs seven years later³. This finding supported our rationale based on goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990a) that difficult career visions can lead to job satisfaction in the long run because they positively influence job performance and evoke positive emotions when individuals progress toward their goals. Further research is necessary to address the boundary conditions and mediating mechanisms that might explain why ambitious career goals are conducive to subjective career success in some situations, but are detrimental in others. In addition to measuring job performance, we would encourage research to measure goal progress (Holtzschlag & Masuda, 2013) and need satisfaction (Deci et al., 2001) as explanatory mechanisms that could account for the relationship between ambitious goals and subjective career success.

Positive Emotions and Career Success. Findings from this dissertation also contribute to the Positive Organizational Scholarship perspective to careers. Specifically, the research question addressed in Study 3 follows calls to examine how and when positive emotions relate to positive career outcomes (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Dutton, Glynn, & Spreitzer, 2006; Lyubomirsky, et al., 2005). Building upon the increasing line of research that documents the relevance of emotions in applied psychology and organizational behavior (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Fisher, et al., 2013), the

³ The relationship between vision difficulty and job satisfaction was only marginally significant at $p = .06$ (see Chapter 2)

results of Study 3 indicate that positive goal emotions are, on average, positively related with career satisfaction, extending previous research which has shown that persons who regularly feel positive emotions are objectively more successful (e.g., Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994) and report higher levels of job satisfaction (e.g., Thoresen, et al., 2003).

The experience of positive goal emotions was, however, not an imperative resource for achieving subjective career success but could be substituted by a high level of occupational embeddedness. In line with the “situational strength” framework this result, therefore, suggest that situations that are most ambiguous might make positive goal emotions most relevant for subjective career success. This finding contributes to the literature on positive emotions that to date has, to the best of my knowledge, not examined how the effects of positive emotions are moderated by contextual factors. Our results link, however, to the broader literature on positive affect connecting amongst others to research of Forgas (1992, 1994) who suggests that the effects of mood are augmented when the information is ambiguous and complex (Forgas & George, 2001).

Career Success in Context. Thirdly, this study makes advances in better understanding career success across context. In this dissertation, I aimed to contribute to a long-last debate in the careers field that discusses how careers are a function of individual agency and the institutional context (Inkson, et al., 2012; Mayrhofer, et al., 2004). Considering that career agency can only be properly understood within the wider contextual environment (e.g., company, industry, occupation, or country) (Mayrhofer, et al., 2007; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009; Tams & Arthur, 2010), I examined how the influence of values and career goals is contingent upon national culture (Study 2) and individuals’ occupational embeddedness (Study 3).

Besides outlining that context has main effects on career success, Study 2 and Study 3 show that the relevance of individual differences changes across contexts. These two studies address the interactive nature of career success from a psychological perspective, namely by discussing how “situational strength” can help framing when individuals’ goals matter. In this respect, we saw that both occupational and national context can leave the role of values and short-term career goals negligible. Future research is required that further examines the boundary conditions of the relationship between career goals and career success at the organizational level in order to better understand when situations overwhelm the importance of agency, and on the contrary, when they provide unique opportunities for individuals to exert their agency through the setting of career goals. To properly understand when situations may inhibit, compensate, or complement individual agency, I propose merging insights from psychology (situational strength, trait-activation theory, frog-pond model) with more meso or macro theories like institutional theory (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The limitations of the present research studies need to be acknowledged. First of all, almost all variables used in the studies were based on self-report measures (with the exception of vision specificity and difficulty, Study 1), which raises questions of common-method bias and of alternative causal paths. Instead of the survey methodology used in this dissertation, experimental research could overcome this shortcoming by manipulating career goal appraisals through goal interventions (see for example, Masuda, et al., 2010; Salmela-Aro, Mutanen, & Vuori, 2012). Although I separated the measurement of our independent and dependent variables whenever possible (Study 1 and Study 3) to reduce problems associated with common-method

bias (Podsakoff, et al., 2012), the time-lagged measurement still does not allow examining how the effects of career goals play out over time. Future research could extend the present studies by incorporating external ratings of supervisors, colleagues, or “significant others” about individuals’ career success about goal progress. With the present study designs, I was also not able to address longitudinal research questions such as whether career goals are more important at initial career phases and during career transitions or whether career goals and career success reciprocally relate to each other. To better understand the longitudinal effect of career goals, I therefore encourage future research to apply a repeated measures design and to conduct data analytic techniques like latent growth modeling or cross-lagged structural equation modeling.

Another limitation of this study is that it does not empirically address the mediating mechanisms that link career goals to career success. Studies could test why certain career goals are advantageous for career success by measuring multiple potential mediators that tap into various behavioral, cognitive, and affective channels through which career goals might affect subjective and objective career success.

A further shortcoming of this dissertation is that each study only focused on one or two aspects of career success: job satisfaction and turnover intention (Study 1), hierarchical status (Study 2), and career satisfaction (Study 3). Previous research has, however, shown that distinct criteria of career success are only weakly or moderately correlated with each other, which raises the question concerning the generalizability to other indicators of subjective or objective career success (Ng, et al., 2005). For an exhaustive understanding of how career goals predict career success across contexts, it would be essential to extend these findings to other criteria of career success such as number of promotions, occupational status, salary, and calling. Similarly, each of the

presented study focuses on one type of career goals (values, career visions, or short-term career goals). The exclusive focus on one goal unit does not allow analyzing how distal and proximal goals conjointly predict career success. We, therefore, cannot examine whether abstract goal units are only relevant for career success through their impact on short-term goals or whether they provide additional benefits beyond short-term goals. Furthermore, the question as of whether short-term goals make abstract career goal units redundant (or vice versa) remains unanswered.

Additionally, in focusing on how contextual factors might compensate for career goals and values, I did not investigate which conditions might augment the impact of career goals on career success. A complete understanding of how career goals interact with environments would, however, be highly relevant for career theory and for the personal goals research. For this reason, I recommend researchers to further tap into how person and situational variables can be complementary (Schmitt, Eid, & Maes, 2003) and how the context can provide barriers for career goals (Holtschlag, Masuda, & Maydeu-Olivares, 2012).

Finally, although I gathered data from two continents and several business schools, all the participants consisted of alumni from business schools. To test the generalizability of my findings, it would be useful to discuss the relevance of career goals for other occupational groups. Another intriguing research question would be to explicitly test how characteristics across occupations, industries, or countries might modify the relevance of career goals, thus expanding existing research on the interactive nature of career goals and career success.

Practical Implications

The research presented in this dissertation provides a number of practical career management implications that are of use for individuals, organizations, coaches, and career consultants. The advantage of career goals is that they are tractable and a useful unit of analysis for constructively changing how individuals manage their careers. With the help of supervisors, colleagues, or career counselors, individuals can learn to revise, reconstrue, and reformulate career goals in order to maximize their chances for career success (cf. Little, et al., 1992). In this respect, the results of this dissertation show that individuals benefit from constructing specific and challenging career visions. Besides the quality of career visions, positive affective evaluations of short-term career goals can also help individuals to be more satisfied with their careers. Career counselors, coaches, and companies can build on these findings to design career interventions that are targeted towards learning favorable goal setting (Masuda, et al., 2010; Salmela-Aro, et al., 2012). Besides helping individuals to achieve career success, these interventions can help companies to keep an adaptable and employable workforce that can self-direct its careers even in the face of volatile labor markets (Kossek, Roberts, Fisher, & Demarr, 1998).

Goal interventions might also help individuals to partly override the effects of personality traits that have often shown to be disadvantageous for individuals' careers such as such as low CSE or high neuroticism (e.g., Judge, et al., 1999; Judge & Hurst, 2008). Career goals might thus provide a pathway for overcoming the costs associated with these stable traits. Through socialization, reflection, and personal growth, individuals might learn how to manage their general behavioral proclivities by strategically setting career goals (cf. Elliot & Thrash, 2002). In this sense, people that have negative core self-evaluations might be predisposed to choose dysfunctional career

goals – e.g., avoidance goals (Ferris, et al., 2013), goals that are pursued for controlled reasons (Judge, et al., 2005), are too unchallenging (Holtzschlag, 2010), and evoke few positive emotions (Study 3). Nevertheless, the low CSE-individuals who learn to set challenging and emotionally positive career goals may be more likely to reap career success. Unlike demographic variables, socio-economic status, or stable personality traits, career goals are, thus, one of the few individual characteristics units that allow individuals to exert agency in their careers.

The contextualization of career goals and values (Study 2 and Study 3) furthermore allows to better convey the practical applications of goal and careers research (Johns, 2006). Although ambitious goals tend to be favorable for attaining objective career success, our study points out that the importance and meaning of certain goals might be more or less relevant depending on the context. In this respect, a contextualized career counseling approach can take into consideration that ambitious goals only lead to objective career success when they help individuals to stand out from their environment. The results presented in this dissertation furthermore indicate that a person who has worked for decades in the same occupation and is highly entrenched with her occupation might not benefit as much from goal intervention as a person that seeks a career transition.

Considering these contingencies, the results point out that a “one-size-fit-all” career management approach might be suboptimal, suggesting that career management programs should better be tailored to the individual, occupational, organizational, and cultural context. For companies this means that HR development policies targeted to keeping employees employable might need to be adapted across cultural and occupational borders. Considering that career success predictors vary across contexts, companies also need to be wary when selecting job candidates or “high potentials”.

General Conclusion

Findings of this dissertation show that the content and appraisals of career goals matter for understanding career success. In this sense, the results of this dissertations show that career goals are, amongst, others, advantageous for achieving career success when they evoke positive emotions, are specific, challenging, and ambitious. Despite the possibility to actively invest into career success via goal setting, the research shows that certain contexts, such as occupational embeddedness or national culture, can inhibit or substitute the relevance of career goals limiting individuals' agency to plan their careers via goal setting.

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