

## Networking Ability and Subjective Career Success: Moderating Role of Career Insight

Muhammad Usman <sup>\*1</sup>, Luo Fan<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Anwar ul Haq <sup>2</sup> and Saddam Hussain <sup>3</sup>

1. School of Management, Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan, P.R China.

2. Department of Management Sciences, University of Gujrat, Gujrat, Pakistan.

3. Department of Management Sciences, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sheringal, Pakistan.

### Abstract

The aim of the current study was to investigate the influence of networking ability on employees' subjective career success. Moderating role of career insight in the relationship between networking ability and subjective career success was also probed. Respondents of the study were the faculty members of the public sector universities in Pakistan (N= 335). The findings revealed that networking ability positively influences the subjective career success of the faculty members. Career insight proved to positively moderate the relationship between networking ability and subjective career success. Research implications, limitations of the study, and prospects for future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** Networking ability, Subjective career success, Career insight, academia and Pakistan.

### 1. Introduction

Career success has been a matter of interest to researchers, practitioners in the field, and individuals engaged in professional careers (Heslin, 2005; Super, Savickas, Super, Brown, & Brooks, 1990). Career researchers want to investigate and analyse the determinants of career success, practitioners want to know how to facilitate and assist individuals in career related matters, and employees want to experience success in their careers, as career success can serve as a base for other important outcomes in life. Career is a descriptive as well as an evaluative term. The descriptive term refers to an individual's occupational life course characterized by job changes, relocations, unemployment period, times of further development, and promotions etc. Career as an evaluative term refers to upward mobility and climbing up the organizational ladder. Career has also been defined as making sense of one's professional and occupational development (Michael B Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Michael Bernard Arthur & Rousseau, 2001; De Vos & Soens, 2008). The term "success" is also used to describe progress as well as to evaluate desirable outcomes in an individual's personal and professional life. Success is considered to be a subjective construction as well. People tend to evaluate the outcomes against a standard (Schwarz, Wdowiak, Almer-Jarz, & Breiteneker, 2009), and different people may have different standards to evaluate their career success. Thus, the composite term of career success can be defined as "the real or perceived achievements people have accumulated due to their work experiences" (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999).

The predictors of career success have been studied from different perspectives like human capital, structure and associated stages of careers. However, the strategic regulation of careers by individuals has been a core assumption in the conceptualization of contemporary career success related matters (Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001). Concepts like proactiveness (Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999), political skill (Ferris, Perrewé, Anthony, & Gilmore, 2000), self-monitoring (Kilduff & Day, 1994) and emotional intelligence (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004) have been investigated as individual level predictors of career success. Self-regulatory mechanisms and social influence processes have been major lenses for researchers to investigate career success (Abele & Wiese, 2008). The current paper intends to add in the said stream of career success literature by investigating networking ability as predictor of career success. Within a self-regulatory perspective the study also aims to probe into the moderating role of career insight in the relationship between networking ability and subjective career success. Networking ability has been mostly investigated as predictor of objective career success, thus the study aims to fill the void by studying its relationship with subjective career success.

In the remaining section of the article hypotheses are developed followed by methods adopted and findings of the study. Limitations of the study, implications for practice and future research directions are discussed.

## 2. Theory development and hypotheses

Career success is defined as “the positive psychological or work-related outcomes or achievements one accumulates as a result of work experiences” (Seibert et al., 1999). Career success has been conceptualized and operationalized from two major perspectives i-e, objective career success and subjective career success. The objective career success concerns with an external perspective or reference point, like salary, promotion etc (Gattiker & Larwood, 1988; Van Maanen & Schein, 1977), while subjective career success focuses on the overall reactions of individuals towards their careers.

Social capital theory (Law, Wong, Huang, & Li, 2008) has been widely used to explain the role of effective networking in determining career success. Coleman (Stein & Book, 2010) has defined social capital as “any aspect of social structure that creates value and facilitates the actions of individuals within that social structure”. Social capital is the result of the changes in human relations in a way that leads to favourable outcomes. Borrowing support from social capital theory, Blickel et al (G. Blickle, A. Witzki, & P. B. Schneider, 2009) conducted a survey on alumni of German business schools and found that self-initiated mentoring and networking ability positively influences employees’ career success. Similarly, Blickel et al (G. Blickle, A. H. Witzki, & P. B. Schneider, 2009) in their three year predictive field study found that networking proved to be a strong determinant of objective career success. Seibert et al, (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001) tested a social capital based model of career success in a sample of 448 employees from diverse organizations. They confirmed that network structure had a positive relationship with social resources, which in turn positively affected career success through access to resources, access to information and career sponsorship, and it is likely that such desirable outcomes will positively influence individuals’ overall perception about their careers. Fugate et al, (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004) introduced the construct of employability and argued that social capital was an important dimension of this construct besides human capital, adaptability and career identity. They further elaborated that, social capital plays a vital role in identifying and realizing employment opportunities at every level of one’s career. Wolff and Moser (Wolff & Moser, 2009) in their 3 years longitudinal study reported that networking was related to existing salary as well as with the growth rate in salary over time. They also found that networking was positively related to concurrent career satisfaction, thus the positive effect of networking on both objective and subjective career success was substantiated. Another theoretical base for explaining the networking ability-career success relationship is provided by social exchange theory (Cook, Cheshire, Rice, & Nakagawa, 2013). Social exchange theory’s main focus is the obligations and reciprocity among social entities. People good at networking always try to develop quality relationship with their supervisor and significant others in the workplace. The quality of these relationships and the benefits obtained by supervisors in the form of positive behaviours facilitates individuals in obtaining desirable career related outcomes. As objective career success has been proved to be positively correlated with subjective career success (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005), so we believe that success in objective indices of career success may result in improvement in the subjective measures of career success like career, job and life satisfaction. People good at networking are less likely to be frustrated in challenging and stressful situations as they have access to mentors who guide them and provide counselling to them. Generally, the empirical studies have proven a positive relationship between networking ability and both objective and subjective career success. The above mentioned theoretical arguments and empirical evidences lead us to formulate the following hypothesis.

### **Hypothesis 1: Networking ability positively influences employees’ subjective career success.**

Career insight is the ability to be realistic about one’s career and is an important dimension of career motivation. The career insight is the ability to know about one’s career and have a realistic approach towards it. Once an individual has a realistic attitude towards his/her career, this will ultimately result in setting realistic goals which are flexible and achievable. Hall and Foster (Hall & Foster, 1977) considers goals identification as an important component of individual career planning that can result in tangible outcomes. The basic notion of career insight is the realization of one’s strengths and weaknesses. After this realization an individual will strive to overcome the weaknesses and capitalize on strengths for better career outcomes. Realization of career goals in light of the strengths and weaknesses possessed by a person will make it easy to reach the desired goals. As career insight is about realistic goal setting so an individual is likely to get those goals and thus frustrations and dissatisfaction are the less likely outcomes. Improving one’s weaknesses can also result in increased career satisfaction as lack of skills and expertise is usually a big hindrance in successful task accomplishments. Thus, it is assumed that the networking ability along with higher level of career insight will result in higher level of subjective career success.

**Hypothesis 9: career insight will moderate the relationship between networking ability and subjective career success such that the relationship will be stronger at higher than at lower level of career insight.**

### 3. Method

#### Participants and procedure

The respondents of the study were the faculty members of the public sector universities in Pakistan. Data was collected both through self-administered and online web survey. Self-administered survey was carried out only in universities located in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan due to geographical closeness for the researcher. A total of 173 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 96 were returned. Among the five regions of Pakistan the response rate was quite good in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, as the survey was personally administered.

Similarly, an online version of the questionnaire was prepared to collect data from the other four strata of the population due to costs and time constraints. The questionnaire was emailed to a total of 875 faculty members, out of which 239 responses were recorded. Response rate of online survey was 27% percent while that of self-administered survey was 55.5%. The overall response rate turned out to be 34.5%.

The demographic profile of the respondents was such that average age was 32.5 years, 68.8% of them were males and 32.2% were females. Designation wise distribution of the sample was such that, 44.5% were lecturers, followed by assistant professors (32%), associate professors (16.6%) and professors (6.9%).

#### Measures

##### Career success

Career success was measured through Greenhaus et al's (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990) six items career satisfaction scale. Sample item for measuring subjective career success reads as "I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my overall career goals". Reliability coefficient for this scale turned out to be  $\alpha = .83$ .

##### Networking ability

Networking ability was measured through the networking ability dimension of the political skill inventory developed by Ferris et al (Ferris et al., 2007) for measuring individuals' political skill. Sample item from the said scale reads as "I spend a lot of time at work developing connections with others". Reliability coefficient for the networking ability scale was  $\alpha = .86$ .

### 4. Analysis and Discussion

Hypothesis 1 postulated that networking ability positively influences individuals' subjective career success. The hypothesized relationship was tested through regression. The regression coefficients are shown in table 2. The independent variable networking ability explains 30% variance in employees' subjective career success. Furthermore, the regression coefficients show that there is a positive effect of networking ability on career success as hypothesized. The effect of networking ability is also significant ( $b=.445$ ,  $T=1.52$ ).

**Table 1: Regression Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
1 (Constant)	9.13	7.97		1.145
Networking ability	.523	.342	.445	1.52
a. Dependent Variable: Subjective career success			Adjusted R Square=0.300	F=3.534
			Significance=.002	

Hypothesis 2 postulated that career insight moderates the relationship between networking ability and subjective career success, such that the relationship will be stronger at higher than at lower level of career insight. For testing the said hypothesis moderation analysis for the relationship between networking ability and subjective

career success was performed. First the variables of interest went through standardization, as the interpretation of coefficients is made simpler and convenient through standardized variables (Dawson, 2014). An interaction term was produced by the product career insight and networking ability. Networking ability along with the interaction term was entered into the model. Results of the moderation analysis are presented in the following table (see table 2). The moderation effect of career insight turned out to be significant for the relationship between networking ability and subjective career success (unstandardized  $\beta=0.345$ ,  $p=.007$ ).

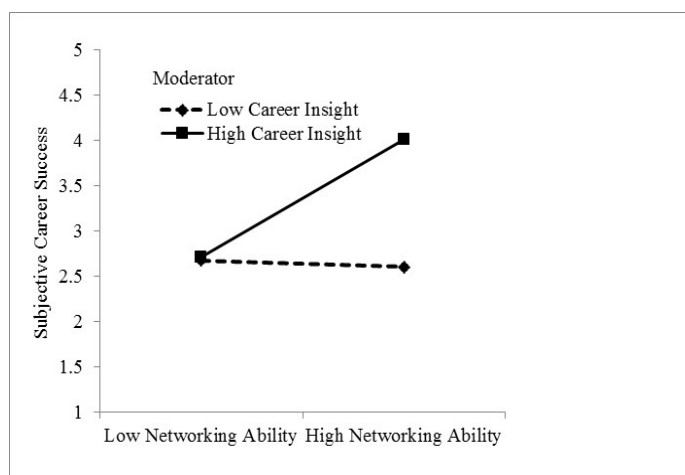
**Table 2: Moderating effect of career insight**

Model	Unstandardized coefficient	p-value
SCS-dependent variable		
Interpersonal influence $\times$ career insight	0.296	0.003
Networking ability	0.309	0.000
Career insight	0.361	0.004
Networking ability $\times$ career insight	0.345	0.007

Note: Unstandardized regression weights for control variables (age, gender, qualification, experience) were non-significant ( $p>.05$ ).

Statistical depiction of moderation:  $Y = b_0 + b_1X + b_2M + b_3XM$ , where M=moderator, XM=interaction

The graphical representation of moderating effect of career insight is depicted in figure 1. Networking ability affects more positively the subjective career success of employees having high career insight as compared to employees having low career insight. As networking ability shifts from lower level to higher level, the effect on the subjective career success of employees also escalates in a linear fashion, and the same happens as the career insight increases. The solid line portraying higher career insight shows an upward movement such that the gap between solid line and dotted line (low career insight) starts increasing in the region of higher networking ability. This may be surely concluded that with higher level of career insight the strength of the effect of networking ability on employee's subjective career success increases. Thus, career insight moderates the relationship in a positive way.



**Figure 1:** Moderating effect of career insight on the relationship between networking ability and subjective career success

*Research implications*

The findings of the study revealed that networking ability positively influences employees' subjective career success, and career insight has a positive moderating effect on the said relationship. The study has implications for theory as well as practice. The study offers a worthy addition to the determinants of career success literature, as networking ability has mostly been investigated in relationship with objective measures of career success. Most of the previous studies have highlighted the importance of networking in the corporate sector, this study has been conducted in an academic setting which has rarely been explored before. Besides this, investigating the moderating role of career insight between networking ability and subjective career success for the first time further adds to the theoretical significance of the study.

The study also offers implications for practice. Management of the public sector universities can gain valuable

insights from the findings of our study. They should emphasize the importance of networking for career related wellbeing of their faculty members. Networking opportunities should be provided for junior and female faculty members. Senior faculty should be motivated to adopt a welcoming attitude when someone tries to be part of their network. Individual faculty members should also be proactive in developing their professional networks within the organization as well as outside the organization. Having senior and expert organizational members in their network will assist them in coping with organizational as well as personal challenges in life.

#### *Limitations and future research directions*

The study is not without its limitations, which need to be highlighted. The study is based on the self-reported data gathered from the faculty members of the public sector universities at one point in time. This can limit us in the generalization of our findings. In an ideal situation, samples for future studies may include diverse services sectors like health, banking, hospitality, and insurance etc. Longitudinal design will be more appropriate to confirm the causal relationships. Within the academic sector only public sector universities were chosen for data collection, thus future studies should include the private sector universities as well. Future studies can also explore the underlying mechanisms in the association between networking ability and subjective career success. For example, mediating variables like mentoring and coaching can be explored to know the “how” of the relationship between networking ability and subjective career success.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The study confirmed the positive influence of networking ability on individuals' subjective career success. The moderating role of career insight for the relationship between networking ability and subjective career success was also confirmed. Subjective career success is not only important for individuals, but is also desirable for organizations. Subjectively successful people are more likely to succeed objectively as well, which may prove beneficial for both the individual and the organization.

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