

### Career Competencies - A New Approach to Successful Individual Career Development

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#### Content Summary

The study explored the relationship between career competencies and subjective career success (SCS) in a sample of 296 police officers. Different career competencies appear to be positively related to different aspects of SCS. Career competencies were also found to predict SCS over and above demographics, human capital and marital status. The implications of the findings for the application of general competency frameworks to the career context as well as individual career development are discussed.



#### Theoretical background and objectives

New career realities require individuals to take responsibility for their personal career development. One effective way of supporting individuals in this challenge is through competencies. Organisations have been using competency models with the overall aim to improve individual performance. However, competencies as currently used focus mainly on job-performance, neglecting other issues important for career development (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999).

This criticism was addressed by introducing the idea of career competencies as behavioural repertoires and knowledge that are instrumental in the delivery of desired career-related outcomes. A Career Competencies Indicator (CCI) was developed measuring seven areas of career competence:

Goal setting and career planning

Self-knowledge

Job-related performance effectiveness

Career-related skills

Knowledge of (office) politics

Networking and mentoring

Feedback seeking and self-presentation

The present study aimed to examine the criterion-related validity of the CCI by assessing its relationship with career success.

Career success, especially in the new career realities, is psychologically driven and aimed at psychological fulfilment (Carson & Carson, 1998). The individual's internal interpretation and evaluation of their careers, i.e. subjective career success (SCS) is of major importance (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005). Factors that have been found to predict SCS include human capital and marital status (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). The following hypotheses were tested:

**H1:** Career competencies will be positively related to perceived job success (H1a), financial success (H1b), hierarchical success (H1c) and overall career satisfaction (H1d).

**H2:** Career competencies will be positively associated with perceived job success (H2a), financial success (H2b), hierarchical success (H2c) and overall career satisfaction (H2d) over and above demographics, human capital and marital status. goal setting and career planning (5 items),

#### Method

An online questionnaire was developed and distributed to a random sample of 1000 police officers. 296 responses were received, 264 from men and 158 from women.

Career competencies were measured using the CCI. Cronbach alphas ranged from .71 to .85 with one exception of .65 for knowledge of (office) politics. All items were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree)

SCS was assessed using the job success, financial success and hierarchical success scales by (Gattiker & Larwood, 1986) and Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley's (1990) career satisfaction scale.

The set of control variables included years of work experience, tenure, rank and years in rank, level of education and marital status.

#### Analyses and Results

Correlation analysis showed that all seven career competencies were positively related to perceived job and hierarchical success, hence, H1a and H1c were supported.

Apart from feedback seeking and self-knowledge, career competencies were also positively related to perceived financial success.

However, overall career satisfaction was only positively correlated with self-knowledge, career skills, networking and knowledge of (office) politics. Hence, H1b and H1d were only partially supported.

To test H2, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. In order to control for demographics, years of work experience, rank, years in rank and tenure were entered in the first step, gender, educational level and marital status in the second and career competencies in the third step. Career competencies significantly increased the level of variance explained for

- overall career satisfaction (adjusted  $R^2=.136$ ,  $F(23, 261)=2.94$ ,  $p<.01$ ),
- job success (adjusted  $R^2=.251$ ,  $F(23, 261)=5.14$ ,  $p<.01$ ),
- hierarchical success (adjusted  $R^2=.243$ ,  $F(23, 261)=4.97$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and
- financial success (adjusted  $R^2=.129$ ,  $F(23, 261)=2.83$ ,  $p<.01$ )

over and above demographic variables, educational level and marital status supporting hypotheses H2.

#### Conclusions

Regarding the relationship of career competencies with SCS, the results largely concurred with the hypotheses. It is noteworthy that neither feedback seeking, knowledge of strengths and weaknesses nor job performance, issues often addressed in job-related training and development initiatives do not seem to be related to overall career satisfaction.

These findings support the general argument that competencies that only focus on job-performance might not be enough when looking at career development and challenge the application of competency frameworks as presently used in the career development context. Career development goes beyond the assessment of strengths and weaknesses and training to improve job-performance. In order to achieve SCS, competency-based development activities have to be wide ranging and take a holistic approach such as presented in the CCI.

The findings also indicate that career competencies predict SCS over and above demographics, human capital and marital status, suggesting that using the CCI as the basis of career development interventions should support individuals to successfully develop their careers.

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