The role of career competencies on subjective well-being

Andrius Valickas a, Rasa Pilkauskaite-Valickiene a * 

a Mykolas Romeris University, Ateities str. 20, Vilnius, LT-08303, Lithuania

Abstract

The present study aimed at verifying how career competencies are related to subjective well-being in the population of public sector employees. The main questions of the study were: if different groups of employees according to their self-evaluated career competencies can be identified and, if yes, do they differ in subjective well-being? Cluster analyses procedure revealed four different groups of employees according to their perceived career competencies. Post hoc multiple comparisons indicated that subjective well-being of the employees from positive clusters was higher than the employees from negative clusters.

1. Introduction

The scientific study of subjective well-being has highly expanded in recent years. Various factors are investigated as possible correlates, causes or consequences of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 2011). Although job has always been central to most people’s identities and satisfaction with life, currently when economic situation in the world is uncertain and constantly changing, job related factors are gaining in importance in the studies of subjective well-being (Clark, 2010). The relationship between labour market status and subjective well-being is proposed and investigated (Strandh, 2000). Many scholars identify negative and lasting effects of job loss and unemployment on subjective well-being (Andersen, 2009; Lee, Yoon, 2011; Young, 2012). The researchers provide evidences that job satisfaction and mood at work impact or spill over to mood after work (Judge, Ilies, 2004). The findings are presented that well-being depends on the congruence between the worker and the work (Harter, Arora, 2010). Some investigations demonstrate that job attitudes influence subjective well-being (Heponiemi, 2010). Longitudinal research revealed substantial relationships between attitudes at work and health outcomes (Kivimaki et al., 2005).

In the context of rapidly changing world of work, when the person is made to take the responsibility for his/her career and the whole life, when pro-activity, willingness and ability to independently and operatively react to environmental changes is required from the employees, career competencies are growing in importance and becoming a factor which might influence subjective well-being of employees. There is a growing range of evidence (Bridgstock, 2009) and theoretical frameworks (Sampson et al., 2004) linking career competencies and various types of positive outcomes. Valickas and Pilkauskaitė Valickienė found that career competencies positively influence...
occupational identity construction (2012). However still there is a lack of studies investigating the role of interaction of the different categories of career competencies on subjective well-being.

The main purpose of the present study was to verify how career competencies are related to subjective well-being in public sector employees. The main questions of the study were: 1) If there are different groups of employees according to their self-evaluated career competencies, 2) If yes, do they differ in subjective well-being?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were drawn from civil service institutions in Lithuania (N=325, 80 men and 245 women), age 23-64 years (M=42.54, SD=10.68). Selection of the respondents for the research was carried out using probability cluster selection method.

2.2. Procedure

This research was a part of wider scientific investigation “Career development system in the Lithuanian civil service: integration of individual and organizational levels”, the general aim of which was to carry out theoretical and empirical analysis of career development system identifying the main factors on the individual and organizational levels, and determining the mechanisms of their interaction.

Questionnaires were submitted and completed during regular work hours of the respondents, having the permission of the heads of institutions to which the respondents belong. It took approximately 30 minutes to complete the whole questionnaire. This research was implemented in 2011.

2.3. Measures

To measure career competencies we used the Career competencies scale, developed by Valickas (2011), which consists of three subscales: Self-knowledge subscale. This subscale consists of 6 items (e.g., I know my values well). Cronbach’s α of the scale was 0.8; Occupational knowledge subscale. This subscale consists of 5 items (e.g., My experience shows that I know how to learn), Cronbach’s α of the scale was 0.74; Career planning subscale. This subscale consists of 5 items (e.g., I am able to plan my career taking into consideration to my personal needs and environmental changes). Cronbach’s α of the scale was 0.83).

To measure subjective well-being we used the Satisfaction with life scale (Diener et al., 1985). The Lithuanian version of this scale was prepared by the authors of this study. Cronbach’s α of the scale was 0.9.

2.4. Data analyses

Career competencies according to cluster analyses. The main task of cluster analyses was to find out how many different groups of career competencies could be there. Data for assigning participants into different “career competencies” groups by three variables, i.e. perceived self-knowledge; perceived occupational knowledge, and perceived career planning capabilities was prepared. To ensure that all included variables were allotted the same weight in the cluster analysis, the variables were standardized. These standardized variables were used as the input variables in a cluster analysis with the aim of empirically identifying groups with different profiles of career competencies. The cluster analysis was accomplished using a modified LICUR procedure from the statistical package SLEIPNER (Bergman et al., 2003). First of all, a residue of possible multivariate outliers was removed and then the remaining participants were cluster analyzed using Ward’s agglomerative hierarchical method. The size of EESS (estimated error sum of squares) for the cluster solution that was chosen should, preferably, reach about 67%, but no less than 50 % to ensure reasonably homogeneous clusters, where EESS = 100 × (total ESS − ESS of cluster solution) / total ESS (Bergman et al., 2003). In a satisfactory cluster solution, homogeneity coefficient (hc) should
be considerably smaller than 2 in each cluster; often an hc below 1 is considered as acceptable and more than 15 participants must be in each cluster (Bergman et al., 2003).

A two way between groups analysis of variance. A two way between groups analysis of variance was performed in order to establish differences in subjective well-being among career competencies clusters.

3. Results

3.1. Cluster analysis of career competencies

The LICUR procedure enabled all participants to be placed in a cluster regarding three career competencies – perceived self-knowledge, perceived occupational knowledge, and career planning (i.e., no participants were needed to be removed as outliers). Cluster analyses results for the last ten iterations according to the cluster size (n interval in cluster), ESS size, and homogeneity coefficient (interval and n above 1.00) are presented in Table 1. The main criteria in finding an appropriate number of clusters to extract indicated that a four-cluster solution was acceptable. For that solution, the cluster analysis explained 68.95 % of the total error sum of squares, which is enough to ensure fairly homogeneous clusters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster solution</th>
<th>Cluster size, n variation</th>
<th>ESS size</th>
<th>Homogeneity coefficient, variation</th>
<th>Homogeneity coefficient, n&gt;1.00</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>18-47</td>
<td>83.36</td>
<td>0.2-0.71</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>22-56</td>
<td>81.96</td>
<td>0.21-0.71</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>22-56</td>
<td>80.44</td>
<td>0.21-0.71</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>22-67</td>
<td>78.54</td>
<td>0.21-0.71</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>22-103</td>
<td>75.77</td>
<td>0.21-0.71</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>32-103</td>
<td>72.76</td>
<td>0.21-0.71</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>32-145</strong></td>
<td><strong>68.95</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.21-0.79</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>32-149</td>
<td>62.11</td>
<td>0.71-0.79</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>149-177</td>
<td>50.41</td>
<td>0.75-1.2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below the clusters are described by number of participants and homogeneity coefficient. The standardized cluster mean profiles (centroids) are presented in Figure 1. The inspection of the profiles (see Figure 1) provided a meaningful and distinct classification for the four-cluster solution, because all patterns differed from each other in magnitude.

Cluster 1: „Average negative cluster“ (n=145, hc=0.79);
Cluster 2: „Average positive cluster“ (n=103, hc=0.55);
Cluster 3: „Negative“ (n=32, hc=0.71);
Cluster 4: „Positive“ (n=46, hc=0.21).

The Chi-square test indicated that proportion of males assigned to different career competencies clusters is the same as the proportion of females (F(3,325)=5.672, p=0.129).
3.2. Comparison of subjective well being among four career competencies clusters

A two-way between groups’ analyses of variance was conducted to explore the impact of gender and cluster assignment on levels on subjective well-being, as measured by the Satisfaction with Life scale. There was a statistically significant main effect for cluster assignment (F(3,308)=19.449, p=0.000), and the effect size was large (eta squared=0.16) (see Figure 2).

Post hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test indicated that the mean score for the “Positive” cluster (M=4.19, SD=0.6) was significantly different from the “Average negative” cluster (M=3.56, SD=0.6, p=0.000), the “Average positive” cluster (M=3.86, SD=0.64, p=0.016), and the “Negative” cluster (M=3.1, SD=0.56, p=0.000). The “Average positive” cluster was significantly different from the “Average negative” cluster (p=0.001), and the “Negative” cluster (p=0.000) also, and the “Average negative” cluster was significantly different from the “Negative” cluster (p=0.001). The main effect for gender (F(1,308)=0.362, p=0.548) and the interaction effect (F(3, 308)=1.616, p=0.186) did not reach statistical significance.

4. Discussion and conclusions

On the basis of person oriented approach (Bergman, 2001) we raised the assumption that several different career competencies profiles could be distinguished. The results revealed four different clusters of career competencies,
and the profiles are differing among themselves in their level of expression. It can be concluded that the employees highly evaluating all three categories of their career competencies achieve higher levels of subjective well-being. These findings are in line with theoretical assumptions we made, that capacity to manage individual career is becoming a strategic ability of the worker of the competitive and dynamic knowledge economics, and in the context of work environments career competencies assure the ability to proactively navigate the world of work and self-manage the career building process (Bridgstock, 2009). The latter outcomes, as the results of our research indicate, subsequently might lead to higher levels of subjective well-being, which is one of the main indicators of social progress (OECD, 2011). Possession of career competencies can also guarantee a better fit between the person, job (Harter, Arora, 2010), and profession (Graham, Shier, 2010) in the long term perspective, which is also related to subjective well-being. In a continuously changing world, citizens should be equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to understand and deal with the challenges and complexities of modern day life, whilst taking due account of the environmental, social, cultural and economic implications, as well as to assume their global responsibilities (Council of the European Union, 2010). In this context career competencies and subjective well-being of contemporary responsible citizens are inseparable. Therefore more attention should be paid towards career competencies in adults’ education seeking to increase the overall well-being and social progress of the society.

References