

Career Success of Knowledge Workers: The Effects of Perceived Organizational Support and Person-Job Fit

Yu Chen

Zhejiang Gongshang University, Hangzhou, China.
E-mail: yuchensf@163.com

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to review relevant literatures on career success and develop a theoretical framework and testable propositions concerning how person-job fit and perceived organizational support relate to career success.

Keywords: Knowledge Workers, Perceived Organizational Support, Person-Job Fit

1. Introduction

There has been more information produced in the last 60 years than during the previous 2000 years. Information is very important to everyone. We define the people who access and use significant portions of this exploding information resource as knowledge workers. Success for the organizations will be based not just on what the growing number of knowledge workers know, but on how fast they can learn and share their knowledge, the latter is related.

Knowledge workers are unlike previous generations of worker, not only because of their access to educational opportunities, but because they own the means of production, *i.e.*, knowledge that is located in brains, dialogue and symbols [1]. The most important contribution management needs to make in 21st century is to increase the productivity of knowledge work and knowledge workers [2]. As a consequence, productivity is dependent on the contributions of specialist knowledge workers [3].

Among the more widely-accepted conceptualizations of career is that of Hall [4] who defines a career as a sequence of related work experiences and activities, directed at personal and organizational goals, through which a person passes during his or her lifetime, that are partly under their control and partly under that of others.

We view knowledge workers' career as ongoing sequence of education and job activities that are meaningful to the individuals and that add value to the organizations in which the individuals participate. This is due to

the general recognition that these concepts have important implications for individual behaviors and work outcomes and both affect the implementation process of the psychological employment contract.

Career success is a way for individuals to fulfill their need for achievement and power. Because it improves people's quantity or quality of life, the study of who can get ahead and why is of interest and value. Career success has received significant attention in studies of the organizational behaviors. Research on career success benefits not only individuals but also organizations. At the individual level, career success refers to acquisition of materialistic advancement, power, happiness and satisfaction. Knowledge of career success helps individuals develop appropriate strategies for career development. At the organization level, knowledge of the predictors of career success helps human resource managers design effective career systems. A number of competing approaches have been identified to explain career success predictors. The three well-known approaches are the individual, the structural, and the behavioral perspectives [5,6].

2. Career Success and Person-Job Fit

Career success and person-environment fit have received significant attention in studies of the workplace.

Person-environment (PE) fit is defined as the compatibility that occurs when individual and work environment characteristics are well matched [7]. In light of the PE fit studies, multiple perspectives and constructs of fit have emerged to include person-job (PJ) fit, person-career (PC)

fit, person-person (PP) fit, person-group (PG) fit, person-organization (PO) fit and person-culture (PC) fit [7-11].

In particular, researchers have suggested that different types of fit that fall under the notion of PE fit play significant roles in job or career choice decisions and that each form of fit is considerably influential in areas such as job satisfaction, performance, commitment and career-related outcomes [7,12-14]. For example, Cennamo [15] investigated generational differences in person or organization values fit. They found a lack of P-O values fit may lead to reduced job satisfaction and commitment and increased leaving intentions. The values held by individuals were less important for outcomes than perceptions of what organizations supplied, at least for extrinsic and status values.

Person-job fit is defined as the fit between the abilities of a person and the demands of the job or the needs/desires of a person and the attributes of the job [16].

We view a person's career as an ongoing sequence of education and job activities that are meaningful to the individual and that add value to the organizations in which the individual participates. Therefore, our interest lies predominately with specific notions fit. We specially focus on person-job fit since it impacts job outcomes and relates to career success. This is also due to the general recognition that person-job fit has important implications for individual behaviors and work outcomes. Wheeler, A.R., [17] examined the relationship between person-job fit, job satisfaction, perceived job mobility, and intent to turnover. They found that decreases in person-job fit, which led to decreases in job satisfaction, were more likely to result in increases in intent to turnover if the individual also perceived alternative job opportunities.

Previous person-job fit literature has found that workers will establish an equilibrium state between their needs and the supplies within their job environment. This equilibrium results in certain levels of career satisfaction and performance. Therefore, we assume that the knowledge worker has achieved some sort of equilibrium prior to the implementation of a new technology. Now we ask: how is this equilibrium upset by a significant change in technology? The answer to this question provides insights to improve fit with respect to the job environment dimensions measured. If improvements in fit are made, then we would expect to see reduced strain levels and improved career performance.

Thus, based on past research, we propose:

P1. person-job fit is likely to be positively related to knowledge workers' career success.

3. Perceived Organizational Support and Career Success

Past research has suggested that organizational-level fac-

tors need to be taken into account when investigating the antecedents and correlates of career satisfaction. In this study we propose perceived organizational support is related to knowledge workers' career satisfaction.

The attention on perceived organizational supports has increased since 1980s. Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to employees' beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being [18]. We can use social exchange view to explain the reciprocal effect of commitment between the employee and the employer.

POS is not a unitary concept, but incorporates a hierarchy of perspectives that, not only include work-based factors, such as job support, but also factors that broadly reflect life support and general feelings of wellbeing, such as caring benefits and value fit.

This leads to the proposition that POS has three dimensions.

P2: POS has three dimensions: job support, value fit and caring benefit.

Riggle, R. J., Edmondson, D. R., & Hansen, J. D. [19] provided this clarification by examining the effects of POS on four employee outcome variables: organizational commitment, job satisfaction, performance, and intention to leave. They did this through a main-effect meta-analysis of studies addressing these relationships over the last twenty years. They found job satisfaction ($r = .61$, $p < .001$) exhibit strong positive relationships with POS.

Given the positive effect of POS on employee commitment and job satisfaction [20], it seems logical to suggest that perceived organizational support is related to career satisfaction as well. Rhoades and Eisenberger [20] found POS to be positively associated with opportunities for greater recognition and pay and promotion. Within the work field, POS may emanate either from the supervisor or other senior managers. Supportive supervisors affect individuals' willingness to engage in development activities [21] and are critical for subordinate performance and career success. In some organizations, for example, social support provided by supervisor may take the form of career guidance and information, learning opportunities and challenging work assignments that promote career advancement [22]. For example, Dreher and Ash [23] found mentorship to be related to both objective and subjective measures of career success. Kirchmeyer [24] found supervisor support significantly predicted men's and women's managerial perceived career success and Greenhaus *et al.* [22] found supervisor support to be significantly related to employees' career satisfaction. Whitely *et al.* [25] examined mentoring and socioeconomic origins as antecedents of early career outcomes for salaried managers and professional graduates working in various organizations. Other researchers

found that mentorship and supportive work relationships were related to career advancement as well as perceived career success [26]. Wallace [27] found that mentoring for female lawyers increased their career satisfaction. Nabi [28] suggested social support to fall into three categories: personal, peer, and network. He found peer support to be strongly related to men's subjective career success, whereas personal support to be strongly related to women's subjective career success.

Barnett *et al.* [29] examined the relationship between organizational support for career development and employees' career satisfaction. Based on an extended model of social cognitive career theory and an integrative model of proactive behaviors, their study proposed that career management behaviors would mediate the relationship between organizational supports career development and career satisfaction, and between proactive personality and career satisfaction.

It is reasonable that perceived social support at work in the form of mentorship, training, caring benefit and supportive work relationships would lead to greater career opportunities and enhanced career satisfaction. Hence, we propose that perceived organizational support at work would lead to greater career opportunities and enhanced career satisfaction.

We propose that the level of perceived organizational support will impact career satisfaction.

P3: There will be a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and career satisfaction. Knowledge workers who perceive high levels of organizational support will report greater career satisfaction than those who perceive low levels of support.

4. Discussion

Organizations are facing incredible pressures in multiple areas (economy, technology, structure, society in general) to adjust to the new, evolving demands of their constituencies and to become more efficient and competitive within their environments. These new demands will likely necessitate changes in planning and managing the careers of their employees [30]. The fit of person and job is a dominant force in employee selection and in explaining individuals' career satisfaction. PJ fit and career success should be related since both interact to affect employees' career decisions. This article has discussed promoting career success through a PJ fit and organizational support framework.

It is widely acknowledged that individuals and organizations are nowadays experiencing different models of careers as compared to previous decades, and both have to share responsibility in managing and controlling the process and the challenging nature of career success. Because careers are changing, and there is widespread

agreement among researchers and practitioners that career success is no longer solely determined by a set of well-defined variables.

The responsibility for career management lies both with individuals and with the organization which employs them. According to this notion of "joint responsibility", both parties are supposed to share various obligations in managing employee careers, rather than them being the sole responsibility of one or the other. Employee career effectiveness will be greater when the individual and organization carry out their respective career management roles. The effects of PJ fit may provide insight into how employees and employers can achieve a substantial fit in managing the process of career advancement.

However, in today's contemporary work environment, most employees are not only likely to need career guidance and support from their organizations but also likely to need career self-management. Even, central to the career management process is self-management, such as improving himself to fit the job. For example, John's job or career goals, described at the goal to achieve the position of general manager—John may decide to take MBA courses, he may attempt to learn more about the knowledge of the organization as a whole, and/or he may try to improve his communication and leadership skills. Therefore, knowledge workers (person)-job fit is equal to career self-management.

In today's contemporary work environment, most knowledge workers are also likely to need organizational support in managing their careers. Information and career guidance and support from others are needed not just on particular jobs, which may well disappear, but on the direction of the economy, labor market, profession or sector, and therefore the kinds of skills and key competencies which will be relevant in the future. As argued by Peiperl and Baruch [31], careers in the 21st century require a new set of support structures and global links. Support structures incorporate different supporting elements such as social identities and social networks that enable individuals to engage in different career paths with different organizations including employment agencies, professional bodies, and communities-based organizations. Consequently, employees who receive more social support are likely to experience higher levels of perceived organizational support, which, in turn, enhance their opportunities for career advancement.

The study shows that organizational support and person-job fit predict subjective career success, in the form of career satisfaction.

In a word, organizational support and person-job fit could have a determinate effect on career success of knowledge worker. Contingent upon this finding, it is

crystal clear that knowledge workers' career success could be improved upon if the two investigated predictors are high level in their career experience.

Implications of the results

Knowledge of the antecedents to career success should provide certain advantages to organizations attempting to motivate knowledge worker. The study of PJ fit is particularly useful since some [32] have observed that individuals' commitment to organizations has diminished over recent years. The fit between knowledge workers and specific jobs could play a particularly important role under these circumstances.

Another implication of the current research pertains to knowledge workers. The importance of this is supported by the coming of knowledge economy.

Organizations that seek to attract and retain the best possible knowledge employees should benefit from an understanding of what leads to their career satisfaction.

An understanding of the process by which career success is created could therefore allow organizations to attract applicants who are likely to perceive higher levels of JP fit and, in turn, to be satisfied and committed to their job and career.

Those who argue that individuals not only should take responsibility for their own careers, but that they stand to benefit from so doing, even if their plans sometimes fail to be realized and their tactics do not always work.

The results suggest that career management on the part of organizations is not the waste of time, but that it can lead to more successful careers for employers, from which the organization itself can benefit, in the form of harder working and higher job performance.

5. Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

Limitations

As with any study, the propositions should have certain limitations. This study was limited by the set of factors that were proposed to be linked to career success. Although there are many predictors that have been examined in previous models of career success, the study was just a literature review and proposed the impact of person-job fit and perceived organizational support on career success.

Theory and research on person-job fit tend to focus on the outcomes of fit, while antecedents have received less attention. This study did not pay attention to the antecedents of person-job fit.

Another major limitation of the study is it focused on just one occupational group, knowledge staff. The replicability of the current findings with other populations in other occupations remains an open question.

Recent models of career success have included a

number of personality variables. While this study did not utilize the types of personality to influence career satisfaction. Seibert *et al.* [33] suggest that "career success is a cumulative outcome, the product of behaviors aggregated over a relatively long period of time." They argue that proactive individuals receive greater career success and are more effective in shaping their own work environments than less proactive individuals.

Person-job fit can be evaluated subjectively or objectively [8]. Subjective P-J fit refers to individuals' perceptions regarding how well they fit with a particular job. Objective P-J fit pertains to how well individuals' reported preferences or characteristics correspond to a job's characteristics. Finally, the study did not identify what are the different types of PJ fit what are the most related to components of career success and whether the effect is direct or indirect.

Future research

One area of future research concerns the influence of various levels of PE fit on career success. Kristof-Brown *et al.* [7] found that employees' work attitudes were differentially predicted by different forms of PE fit. While this study utilized one type of PE fit proposed to influence career satisfaction, these need to be empirically tested along and/or with other forms. Future research is needed to expand the various levels of PE fit (self-concept-job fit, person-group, person-department, person-supervisor, person-team, person-organizational culture) for a more complete understanding of the proposed relationships between levels of PE fit and components of career success.

Future research can provide additional information and extensions to these propositions. For example, more information is needed on the mechanisms through which organizational and JP fit translates into career satisfaction.

We focused mainly on the organizational support and person-job fit as the main predictor of career satisfaction. However, as indicated in other studies [30,34], career satisfaction are sometimes influenced by environment factors, personality, and human capital, so, future studies should capture their influence.

6. Conclusions

This study proposed that organizations may potentially enhance knowledge workers' career satisfaction by supporting their career development. There was a positive relationship between person-job fit and perceived organizational support and career success. The results indicated that knowledge workers who fulfill high levels of career self management will report greater career success than employee who do not. These results suggest that organizational support initiatives promoting the benefits associated with career management behaviors and sup-

porting employees to participate in these behaviors may experience the most success in facilitating knowledge employee career satisfaction.

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