

The Association between Job Positions, Work Experience and Career Satisfaction: The Case of Malaysian's Academic Staff

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate on the association between the human capital and the subjective career success among Malaysian's academic university staff. Career success is viewed as comprising two components; an objective career success and a subjective career success. Knowledge of career success helps individuals developed appropriate strategies for career development, whereas, at the organization levels, knowledge of the career success helps a manager to design and implement effective career systems. It was discovered that both dimensions of human capital (work experience and job position) were not significant to subjective career success (career satisfaction). Perhaps, there might be some reasons that can best explain on such phenomena that cause low career satisfaction, which is unarguably best known to the academician themselves. Future research should focus on the investigation into the causes which can possibly draw a full picture of the overall situations in the scope of research in career success.

Keywords: career success, human capital, job positions, work experience, career satisfaction

1. Introduction

The question on why some people are more successful in their careers than others is an interesting and important question to individuals as well as those who manage them. An understanding of the success factors will enable employees to have a clearer focus on their career management. Career success has emerged as an important concern for both employees and employers. Hence, this topic has become a major interest to each one of us who would like to be successful in their work (Erikson, 1980; Greenhaus, 1971; Super, 1990). By knowing the factors, it will be easy for employees and management in deriving better career success plans.

Career success carries a different meaning to each of the individual employees. What is perceived success to an employee is not necessarily similar to the others. Individual career management is the personal efforts made by individuals to enhance their own career goals which may coincide with those of their organization (Orpen, 1994). Nevertheless, employees are more successful in their career when they systematically plan their careers and their employers provide the necessary "infrastructure" which supports the development efforts of their employees (Orpen, 1994).

Past researches have shown distinct antecedents to the definition of career success. Traditionally, various factors have been utilized to explore the career success among employees such as individual characteristics (eg. education, age and gender), person-environment factors (eg. person-job fit and needs-supplies fit perceptions) and organizational factors (eg. work environment) (Shah, 2005; Ballout, 2007; Morley, 2007; Judge 2009). Similarly, Nabi (1999) has examined the career strategies variables related to career success. The variables are skill-development, self-promotion, consultation, networking and extended work. In addition, according to Nabi (2000), there are two conceptually distinct sets of predictors of career-enhancing strategies for individual; organizational experiences (e.g. organizational career prospects) and motivational attributes (e.g. advancement motivation).

In another study, Nabi (2003) found that job security and career progress were positively related to career success. In relation to this, career progress is viewed as critical to subjective career success because they provide an individual with a favorable evaluation of their success in terms of future outlook and past performance. Subsequently, Ng, Eby, Sorensen and Feldman (2005) classified factors of career success into four categories,

namely; human capital, organizational sponsorship, socio-demographic status and stable individual differences. In her latest study on career success, Nor Wahiza (2011) has proposed three main categories as the predictors of career success for groups of people with disabilities (PWDs). This includes the individual-related factors, person-environment fit and organizational factors as the potential key variables to predict the influence towards objective and subjective career success. Substantial studies also have been conducted to determine the antecedents of career success in Western managers such as Forret and Dougherty (2001); Judge, Cable, Boudreau and Bretz (1995); Ng et al. (2005); Seibert, Kraimer and Liden (2001) but unfortunately, similar research is still lacking and insufficient in the context of Asian environments. Moreover, the study by Tu, Forret and Sullivan (2006) has shown the inconsistencies in the antecedents for career success between the West and Asian, thereby seeking for further clarifications especially for the under-explored research in the Asian countries.

In view of the minimum studies conducted by taking into consideration of both objective and subjective career success in Malaysia, this study attempts to explore the above situation by investigating the phenomena where some individuals move up their career at a faster rate and to a higher level compared to their peers of similar capacity. Hence, this study aims to determine the association between the defined variable of human capital (work experience and job position) with the subjective career success (career satisfaction) among Malaysian's academic university staff.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Career Success

Career success can be defined as "the positive psychological or work-related outcomes or achievements one has accumulated as a result of one's work experiences" (Judge et al., 1995, p. 486). It can be viewed as an approach for individuals to obtain the achievement and power (Lau & Shaffer, 1999). This eventually could lead to the organizational success as a result of the individual's success (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen & Barrick, 1999).

The evolution of research development related to the career theory has seen a major transformation in the definition of career success itself, from objective focus (Van Maanen, 1977) to subjective interpretation of career success (Heslin, 2005). Lately, the scenario has changed and the direction of career success assessment now is towards incorporation of both subjective and objective elements (Nor Wahiza, 2011). Nevertheless, there are many studies that have increasingly explored both elements interdependently (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom, 2005; Hall & Chandler, 2005). This is because both are totally different in concept with different causes although to a certain extent they are related (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Nabi, 1999).

Career success can be assessed either through objective and subjective elements. Objective here means the extrinsic measures with direct assessment such as salary and bonuses whereas subjective is more towards intrinsic measure of individual attitudes on their job (Gunz & Heslin, 2005; Heslin, 2005). It is likely to highlight that the past development of theory only focuses on single perspective of extrinsic outcome alone (Super, 1957; Super, Thompson & Lindeman, 1988). Nevertheless, the subsequent study revealed on the significant of subjective career success assessment from psychological achievements perspective (Judge et al., 1995; Seibert et al., 2001; Heslin, 2003; Ng et al., 2005; Breland, Treadway, Duke & Adams, 2007; Lau & Shaffer, 1999). Although both objective and subjective career success can be utilized, this study is interested to understand more on the cognitive part by measuring the antecedents towards the subjective career success only.

2.2 Human Capital

As a human being we are always dissatisfied with what we had. In competing with others for better remunerations, one might question on the reason why some people exceed others pertaining to the competition for a better career (Mehra, Kilduff & Brass, 2001). In work organizations, for example, why are some people get promoted faster than others? Human capital is always regarded as the main answers to this question. Through human capital, individuals with more investments could develop more professional expertise, increase productivity at work, and get positive compensations from organizations (Wayne, Liden, Kraimer & Graf, 1999).

In general, human capital refers to hours worked, job tenure, organization tenure, work experience, willingness to transfer, international work experience, education level, career planning, political knowledge and skills and social capital. Career choice (Gattiker & Larwood, 1990), success criteria (Poole, Langan-Fox and Omodei, 1990), or human capital (Judge et al., 1995) are some examples of more recent determinants of career success that have been investigated. Attributes of human capital reported have significantly influenced perceived success (Aryee, Chay & Tan 1994; Gattiker & Larwood, 1988).

Tu et al. (2006) have conducted an exploratory empirical examination to determine if factors (e.g. demographic, human capital, motivational and organization) are associated with career success. They discovered that a

middle-management position as compared with the management position was significantly related to career satisfaction. Moreover, in a similar way, Ballout (2007) has reviewed relevant literature on career success and develop a theoretical framework and testable propositions concerning how human capital, person-environment fit and organizational support relate to career outcome.

Human capital is considered movable and does not belong to organizations permanently. This is because the decision related to the development in human capital derived from the individual employee itself (Roos, Roos, Edvinsson & Dragonetti, 1997). In view of this, what is extremely important is their career outcome from the individual's investment. Through the investment, one could raise the level of productivity which later convinced their superior of the work produced. Devenport (1999) believed that the individual employee will be compensated through the extrinsic rewards from their superior as result of the investment possesses by him/her for the good quality work output. Hence, the more an individual has invested in their human capital, the more that individual should be compensated.

There are many ways on how human capital can develop the value through their investments. Roos et al. (1997) described that investments are catalyst to the individuals' knowledge, skills, talents and know-how. In this relation, two types of investment identified are work experience and job position. Job position and experience are forms of investment that can enhance an individual's human capital due to the possession of knowledge about the serving organization. By having a longer period of servicing and holding a higher post, an employee is in a better position to more understand, learn, nurturing capabilities in their position and obtain necessary experience for overall individual career development (Judge & Bretz, 1994). This is further supported by the previous research which discovered on the positive relationship between job position and tenure with the career outcomes (e.g. Mehra et al., 2001; Powell & Butterfield, 1994, 1997).

Further evaluations on the related theory revealed that in human capital theory, in the justification of investments, the workers normally make their own choice regarding whether or not to put more time, initiative, endeavor and money to obtain the necessary education, training and experience (Becker, 1975). In fact, they are deciding their own human capital investment for future career advancement. In making a decision, the employees need to balance up between the pros and cons of the investments decisions particularly on the costs and rewards of their action (Wayne et al., 1999).

2.2.1 Work Experience and Job Position

According to human capital theory, the longer working experience, the higher the possibility of age-earning profiles to the employees. This is absolutely true when an individual works more, the number of human capital shall increase as well. As times passes, the employees may develop skills and capabilities that increase their work quality and productivity. This can lead to possible monetary rewards in the form of salary increment for motivational purposes. Hence, work experience is one of the important criteria in increasing the future earnings. Such opportunity in earning a higher salary can be translated as achievements by alleviating the employee's standard of living. To support this statement, a study by Poon (2004) revealed that works experiences increasingly generated achievements (real or perceive) for the employees career success. In addition, Ng et al. (2005) in their study suggested salary as one of the constructs in determining a career success.

Substantial studies have been conducted in the past with the development of items and constructs to test the relevancy in the context theory in human capital. For example, in a research by Sulis (2009) who discovered that white collars workers enjoyed higher pay for their experience and longer service period. Similar results also were surfaced by Cingano (2003) who did the study in two provinces in the North of Italy. Mincer (1962) found the same outcome of positive association between experience and tenure to salary. Lin and Huang (2005) in their research have substantiated the reason for the growth of individual development potential. According to them, the longer an employee serves a company, the higher he/she could understand the nature of the work. This will turn he/she to be an informal reference or counselor. In addition, those who are in the managerial post and longer duration of service will be regarded as an advisor. These people, either counselor or advisor are capable to solve work related problems and influence the social network which eventually supports his/her self development and capabilities. Staff who serves longer in the managerial post are assumed to have plentiful of knowledge and in a better position to solve the problem at work (Friedman & Krackhardt, 1997).

Nevertheless, the study by Tu et al. (2006) among Chinese managers found that the superiority in holding a post has nothing to do with the career satisfaction. In their study, only middle-management level was significantly related with career satisfaction, denoting of the emphasis put by the top management people not within the scope of their career alone. Besides the culture, factors such time and stress that affected the top post holder's family lives may have distracted the attention towards their career satisfaction at the work place.

From the review of literature, Figure 1 depicted the proposed theoretical framework of the study.

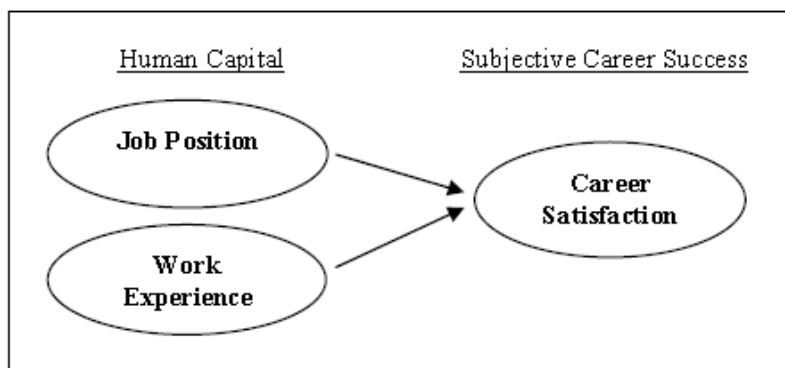


Figure 1. Proposed theoretical framework

Given the preceding discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between job position and career satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between work experience and career satisfaction.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study is interested in describing the characteristics of a population or phenomenon, thus the study is a descriptive study. In addition, the study also used hypotheses testing to determine the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. The variables used in this study have been utilized by the previous researchers in the field. Data were collected using questionnaires distributed to respondents.

3.2 Data Analysis Method

The unit of analysis was focused on the individual lecturer. They consist of full-time lecturer at selected institutions of higher learning. The type of sampling is probability sampling.

A random sampling of probability design was used to distribute the questionnaires. Data collected were based on stratified sampling focused only to the academic staff in the public university in Northern region of Peninsular Malaysia. In this study, only samples with full time job status were considered in order to gain more meaningful insights when conducting the study. It is estimated that a minimum of 150 lecturers were forecasted to respond from a population sample of 1,000 lecturers. The sample is sufficient and fit based on the rule of thumb of more than 30 and less than 500, which are already considered appropriate for most researches (Sekaran, 2003).

As for the data analysis, the descriptive statistics and One-Way ANOVA were used to sum up the data collected as follows:

3.2.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics transforms raw data into a form that describes a set of factors in a situation through ordering and manipulation of raw data collected. This technique is particularly useful to make some general observations about the data collected. Descriptive statistics are provided by frequencies, measures of central tendency, and dispersion. Demographic variables were analyzed using frequency distribution, which included gender, race, age, working status and income. Descriptive statistics such as maximum, minimum, means, standard deviations, and variance will be obtained for interval-scaled independent and dependent variables. The mean or the average is a measure of central tendency that offer a general picture of the data without unnecessarily inundating one with each of the observations in a data set.

3.2.2 One-Way Anova Analysis

A One-Way Analysis of Variance is a way to test the equality of three or more means at one time by using variances. In One-Way ANOVA, there is only one treatment factor variable. It assumes that all the samples are drawn from normally distributed populations with equal variance. One-way ANOVA is an extension of the two-sample t-test, which yields the same result when the factor variable has only two levels.

3.3 Measures

The questionnaires used were adopted from the questionnaires developed by the past researchers. In Section A, all the study variable scales were measured using Likert scale. To assess career satisfaction, 5 items were selected with each items consist of 5-point scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

In order to help to describe the sample characteristics in the data analysis report, demographic data (Section B) such as age, gender, ethnicity, working experience and job tenure were included in the questionnaire. These data were structured in a range of response option, rather than seeking exact figures.

3.4 Pilot Test

The questionnaire was tested on a group of 10 lecturers prior to the research data collection. The respondents generally found the questionnaire too long to complete and one or two questions repetitive. However, in order to obtain a precise and valid data, none of the questions were omitted.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Pilot Study

There was no improvement required to the questionnaires as the respondents' feedbacks were satisfactory and appropriate.

4.2 Response Rate

In this study, 100 responses were received from 400 questionnaires distributed. According to Hussey and Hussey (1997), for mail distribution method, in order to avoid sample bias, response rate should be more than 10 percent. In this relation, the response rate for this study of 25 percent means that the sample bias was avoided and the responses received represent the population adequately and appropriately.

4.3 Descriptive Analysis

From the table 1, it is clearly shown that the number of female respondents is higher than male respondents sampled. The percentage of female respondents was 64.0 percent while the percentage of male respondents was 36.0 percent. In terms of race, the majority of respondents were Malay (94.0%), followed by the Chinese (4.0%), and Indians (2.0%). About 82 percent of the respondents were married. A majority of respondents hold a Master's Degree (96%), while 2 % with Doctoral degree/PhD. In term of academic rank, 74% were lecturer, 20% senior lecturer, and 6% were associate professor. The respondents age range from 26 years old to 59 years old.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

	Variable	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	36	36
	Female	64	64
Race	Malay	94	94
	Chinese	4	4
	Indian	2	2
Marital Status	Married	82	82
	Single	18	18
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	2	2
	Master's Degree	96	96
	Doctoral Degree/PhD	2	2
Academic Rank (Job Position)	Senior Lecturer	26	26
	Lecturer	74	74

Further descriptive analysis was done to evaluate the mean score of job positions (table 2) and working experience (table 3). In table 2, the descriptive illustrated the career satisfaction level among academic positions in the university. The result can be translated as lecturers who have the highest level of career satisfaction (6.79) as compared with senior lecturers (6.72).

Table 2. Mean score for job positions

No.	Job Positions	Mean Score	N
1.	Senior Lecturer	6.7200	26
2.	Lecturer	6.7973	74
	Total	6.7840	100

The table 3 showed the career satisfaction level for the different period of working experience. The result can be interpreted as working experience for several years (3, 4, 7, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 22, 24, 27, 30 years) have the highest level of career satisfaction (7.00) as compared with the lowest mean level of 21 years of working experience (6.00).

Table 3. Mean score for working experience

No.	Working Experience (Year)	Mean Score	N
1.	1	6.6143	7
2.	2	6.8667	3
3.	2	6.7143	7
4.	3	7.0000	9
5.	4	7.0000	1
6.	5	6.6667	6
7.	6	6.6714	7
8.	7	7.0000	8
9.	8	6.7750	8
10.	9	6.8000	3
11.	10	6.7500	4
12.	11	6.8000	2
13.	12	6.7000	6
14.	13	7.0000	1
15.	14	7.0000	3
16.	15	6.7500	4
17.	16	7.0000	1
18.	17	7.0000	1
19.	18	7.0000	5
20.	20	6.5500	4
21.	21	6.0000	1
22.	22	7.0000	2
23.	23	6.5000	2
24.	24	7.0000	2
25.	27	7.0000	1
26.	30	7.0000	1
	Total	6.7840	100

4.4 One-Way Analysis of Variance

4.4.1 Academic Rank and Career Satisfaction

Levene's test was used to assess the Variance homogeneity, which is a precondition for parametric tests such as ANOVA. The significance result for homogeneity of variance as shown in table 4 is 0.248 (insignificant with

$p > 0.05$). This has clearly indicated that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across the groups, hence, the assumption of the ANOVA test has been met.

Table 4. Test of homogeneity of variances

Levene Statistic	Sig.
1.416	.248

The subsequent test of ANOVA as depicted in table 5 revealed the significance value comparing the groups (job position) is 0.703 (insignificant difference with $p > 0.05$), hence, the null hypothesis of Hypothesis 1 can be accepted. (Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between job position and career satisfaction).

Table 5. ANOVA test

	Sum of Squares	F	Sig
Between Groups	.110	.353	.703
Within Groups	15.045		
Total	15.154		

4.4.2 Work Experience and Career Satisfaction

The significance result for homogeneity of variance as shown in Table 6 is 0.215 (insignificant with $p > 0.05$). This has clearly indicated that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across the groups, hence, the assumption of the ANOVA test has been met.

Table 6. Test of homogeneity of variances

Levene Statistic	Sig.
1.509	.215

The subsequent test of ANOVA as depicted in table 7 revealed the significance value comparing the groups (work experience) is 0.905 (insignificant difference with $p > 0.05$), hence, the null hypothesis of Hypothesis 2 can be accepted. (Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between work experience and career satisfaction).

Table 7. ANOVA test

	Sum of Squares	F	Sig
Between Groups	2.783	.632	.905
Within Groups	12.371		
Total	15.154		

4.5 Discussion

From the statistical results, it was discovered that both dimensions of human capital (work experience and job position) were not significant to subjective career success (career satisfaction). Academicians serving the government-sponsored universities with longer working experience have demonstrated lower career satisfaction due to a variety of reasons. One of the reasons might be the increased number of workload as a result of the growing number of students especially to the teaching-status university. In addition, the stringent performance assessment in the job promotion could be one of the reasons that have affected the academicians' career satisfactions. The eligibility for promotion is getting tougher especially when the universities are changing the directions to meet the challenges for renowned-status in the country. The lower career satisfaction is also expected among the senior academicians without PhD (since most of them holding Master's degree) qualification who received less reward and tough promotion battle in their organizations. However, the result of the study contradicts with the outcome of the past researches. Several studies discovered the significant association between the overall job satisfaction with the increased years of job experience as discovered by Bowen, Radhakrishna and Keyser (1994); McCaslin and Mwangi (1994); Boltes, Lippke and Gregory (1995); Bertz and Judge (1994).

Another surprising study outcome is the insignificance of holding a higher job position with career success. Here, holding a higher post does not mean that the employees are satisfied with their career. This happens probably due to the lack of recognition given by top management to exercise a certain level of appropriate authority in the university. Furthermore, they are not given any special platform to voice out their concern such as special committee member among the senior lecturers. In the university, the treatment of the young and senior lecturers

are almost similar. In fact, young lecturers are given a level playing field with the seniors in all matters pertaining to their work including teaching, research, collaboration and etc. They also will have a chance to hold the faculty administration post such as Head of Program, Coordinator and etc. As a consequent, the level of satisfaction is expected to be affected as the result of study clearly indicates that the ordinary lecturers have the highest level of career satisfaction as compared with senior lecturers. The result is consistent with the study done by Tu et al. (2006) by which the middle-management level post of employees were more satisfied in their career as compared to line management position. Such phenomena might be explained by some reasons that might reduce their career satisfaction such as stress, time barriers, family-oriented and etc.

5. Conclusion

As a conclusion, the results have shown that there is no association between the human capital (dimension of work experience and job position) with the subjective career success (career satisfaction). In other words, there are no linkages between the work experiences, job position with the career satisfaction among academicians in public universities in the northern region of Malaysia. Perhaps, there might be some reasons that can best explain on such phenomena that causes the low career satisfaction. Although the results are contradictory with previous researches, little is known on the causes as the research in the area is still lacking and insufficient. Future researches can be expanded to include the investigation into the causes which can possibly draw a full picture of the overall situations in the scope of research in career success.

Therefore, this study hopes to contribute to an understanding of the factors that influence the subjective career success. The study outcome has definitely derived a better knowledge and understanding in this field particularly in addressing the current problems of career success among Malaysian academicians. From the practical perspective, findings of this study will help employees and management in deriving better career success plans.

5.1 Recommendations for Future Research

For the future research, it is suggested to extend the scope of the study to a wider perspective including private universities so that the result will be more accurate with the increased in scope, sampling size and population of the study. In addition, the future research should also focus on the possible causes that hinder the career satisfaction among employees (including non-academician) working in the university. With such a complete research, it is hoped that the findings could be used as a reference and benchmark to the career success of employees in Malaysia education sector as a whole.

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