The Mediating Effect of Fit on the Relationship between Career Goals and Career Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the relationship between two types of career goals (i.e., those we select for ourselves and those to which we commit but that might be directed by our organizations), embeddedness-fit and two measures of career success (i.e., the objective and subjective). This research aims to augment organizational scholarship by demonstrating the mediating potential of embeddedness-fit on the relationship between goal setting and career satisfaction. The study tests hypotheses derived from data collected from 303 full-time working respondents in the southeastern United States. Analyses indicated that embeddedness-fit either fully or partially mediated the hypothesized relationship between goal setting and career success. The work includes a discussion of the study’s results, strengths, limitations and directions for future research.

JEL: M10, M12

Keywords: Goal Setting, Embeddedness, Career Success

INTRODUCTION

Most consider career outcomes to be of particular importance. These outcomes are more than just a sum of the total of their jobs. They are a succession of endeavors and assignments that individuals actively promote (Cascio, 2016; Royle, 2015). Career success is not wisely left purely to chance (Greenhaus, Callanan & Godshalk, 2010). Success is the oospecies of both companies and individuals. This means sometimes success comes from pursuing rank and promotion by, being loyal to the firm and by showing a willingness to accept assignments. As such, employees would wait for promotions provided they have some sort of assurance that they are imminent (Cascio, 2016; Royle, 2015). Increasingly, however, organizational boundaries are blurring, employees are tasked with additional training responsibilities and accepting more transfers without many assurances of retention (Greenhaus, Callanan & DiRezno, 2008). Concomitantly, employees are changing what it means to do well and be a success.

Traditionally, career success was narrowly defined by their performance evaluations (Cascio, 2016; Schermerhorn, Osborn, Uhl-Bien & Hunt, p. 63, 2012). That view is limited because individuals possess social attributes and connections that, over time, enhance their careers as well (Royle, 2016). Based on prior research, it is clear that career success also reflects individuals’ contemporaneous, work-related emotional reactions and the setting in which they perform their jobs (Ilies, Schwind-Wilson & Wagner, 2009). Because most will change jobs, occupations, and, perhaps, entire careers (e.g., Greenhaus et al., 2008) more than once, contemporary scholars should consider the relationships between several organizational variables. Specifically, this research attempts to describe how the kinds of employee career goals (i.e., self-set goals and goals which they commit) influence the degree to which employees fit in their organization and, ultimately, how it influences career success (i.e., both objective and subjective). Figure 1 demonstrates the model tested here.
Figure 1: The mediating effect of fit on the goal setting and commitment - career success relationship

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditionally, career success was defined by an “individual’s relationship to an employing organization” (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). This view of success is universalistic in that it prescribes upward, hierarchical, progression of individuals in firms in return for organizational loyalty. This type of employment relationship could be described as both psychological and relational (Herriot & Pemberton, 1966; Rousseau, 1995) in terms of its contracting. For decades employees sought firms that offered security and predictability, in exchange for their loyalty and patience (Baruch, 2004). The traditional model narrowly defines career success by continually emphasizing upward hierarchical mobility (Zaleska & Menezes, 2007). Furthermore, it defines achievement in terms of span control and high income (Zaleska & Menezes, 2007; Nicholson, 2000). This view of careers appealed greatly to members of the “Baby-Boomer” generation (Baruch, 2004; Royle, 2015). For most of the 20th century this model worked well and appealed to most employees in western industrialized countries. However, shifts in the global business environment, organizational structures and individuals’ work related values changed what employees want and expect (Greenhaus et al., 2010; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).

Contemporary career theory

Current research (e.g., Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Seibert, Kraimer, Holtom & Pierotti, 2013) noted that extrinsic and objective measures of career success are not the potent predictors of employee behaviors that they were a few decades ago. Contemporary conceptualizations of career success have shifted the emphasis away from advancement to that of psychological success (Hall & Foster, 1977; Greenhaus et al., 2010). That psychological perception is largely subjective and deemphasizes extrinsic measures of achievement and prioritizes individuals’ feelings and perceptions of success (Greenhaus et al., 2010; Royle, Fox & Gonzalez, 2016).

Contemporary careers also changed in terms of how individuals and organizations manage them (Arnold & Jackson, 1997; Royle, et al., 2016). It requires employees both keep their jobs and manage their careers as well (Cox, Rasmussen, & Conrad, 2007; Greenhaus, et al., 2010). This is a life-long process that drives job selection, occupational choice and, ultimately, careers (Hirschi & Freund, 2014). It requires that individuals take discretionary, proactive, actions to promote their careers (Hirschi & Freund, 2014). Employees must engage in planning, networking and independent exploration in order to enhance their career success (Zikic & Klehe, 2006).

The broad changes noted above lie at the heart of the boundaryless and protean career models. Boundaryless scholars suggested that three pillars, or competencies, predict success in contemporary organizations (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Arthur, Hall & Lawrence, 1997). De Fillipi and Aurthur (1994) contended that these pillars are the marketability of skills (knowing-how), the understanding one’s
reasons for entering a specific field (knowing-why) and career-related networking (knowing-whom). Furthermore, boundaryless careerists succeed when they are maximally flexible and when they choose assignment that they believe promote both their careers and values (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989). If individuals can do this, they are likely to find success (as they define it) across organizational contexts, between firms or perhaps even in the endeavors they create for themselves (e.g., starting their own firms). Boundaryless theorist contended that both organizations and individuals attempt to eliminate barriers like functional silos (e.g., the lack of cross training and communication between functions in a differentiated firm) and/or reduce the borders between the firm and its environment (Ashkenas, Ulrich, Jick & Kerr, 1995; Baruch, 2004).

The Protean career is conceptually similar to the boundaryless framework (Greenhaus et al., 2010). Protean careerists are those whose desires and values drive their employment decisions and reflect what they want in terms of a balance of work and life (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). They are both value sensitive and self-directed (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Essentially, they look for jobs that meet multiple internal needs. Typically, they value challenging work and the opportunity to develop their skills (Baruch, 2004). If successful, they hold themselves accountable for managing their own careers. This requires that they prepare themselves for multiple working engagements and adjust their value-driven actions accordingly (Hall & Mirvis, 1996). The protean careerists’ drives for self-fulfillment are paramount to psychological success. Accordingly, success comes from achievement in multiple organizations and across functional divides or constraints (Baruch, 2004). In this research, the author proposes a modest framework by which to evaluate goal setting and goal commitment’s influence on levels of fit and objective and subjective measures of success.

Career Goals

Career goals are important for employees, particularly those early in their working lives who are trying to establish themselves (Hu, Creed & Hood, 2017; Royle, 2015). Goals give direction, encourage employees to create plans of action and engage in proactive behaviors to meet those milestones (Brown, 2002). When establishing career goals, newer employees obtain and integrate feedback on their goal-related behaviors and, hopefully, contemplate how attainable their goals are (Bandura, 1991; Lord, Diefendorff, Schmidt & Hall, 2010). Appraisal of career goals can promote self-regulatory processes if progress towards them is lacking. Such self-regulatory changes might mean altering behaviors (e.g., staying later at work) or goal revision (bolstering, lowering, or discarding the goal entirely) ( Creed & Hood, 2014; Packard & Babineau, 2009). This research evaluates which career goals individuals select, the degree to which they are committed to those goals and how they ultimately relate to success.

The relationship between feedback and goal revision comes from the literature on goal-setting and self-regulation theories (cf. Bandura, 1991; Carver & Scheier, 1990). The literature is somewhat limited in that most studies focus on feedback related to specific, short-term goals (e.g., weight loss or learning to perform on a specific task) (Taing, Smith, Singla, Johnson & Chang, 2013). Relatively little research relates to long-term goal setting and revision processes like those which promote career success (either subjective or objective). Typically, scholars have not considered career domains or looked into how feedback relates to changing goals over time. (Anderson & Mounts, 2012; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012). Furthermore, existing scholarship is limited in terms of integrated theories that tie affect to goal-setting and self-regulation constructs to goal management (Iles, Judge & Wagner, 2010). In this respect, this work proposes that fit is a helpful because the construct involves both affect and career domains while viewing employment through a longer lens. Experience and reflection enhance the quality of goals and
outcomes for learning and progression provided those goals are not vague, unrealistic or are either too difficult or easy (McCardie, Webster, Haffey & Hadwin, 2017: Locke & Latham, 2002). The extent to which individuals choose successive goals and meet them, promotes subjective career success.

There is abundant extant research on goal commitment (e.g., Hollenbeck& Klein, 1987; Latham, 2004). Usually, organizations have leverage over individuals when selecting the goals to which they want employees to commit (e.g., prioritizing safety, customer service, etc.) (Colquitt, LePine & Wesson, 2018). In fact, individual compliance figures prominently into how objectively successful their careers might be (Colquitt et al., 2018). Firms can provide several things that augment employees’ goal commitment. For example, providing acceptable rewards, publically acknowledging proper performance, providing training for performance decrements, giving acceptable supervision and jointly developing goals all enhance the probability of commitment (Hollenbeck & Klein, 1987; Latham, 2004). Given that some firms still manage the majority of employees’ careers (Greenhaus et al., 2010), this makes commitment more certain and, thus, promotes objective career success.

**Embeddedness-fit**

Job embeddedness encompasses several employee behaviors and spans multiple situations. It also has ramifications for both organizational centrality and both voluntary and involuntary turnover (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski & Erez, 2001). Embeddedness’s three primary components are: links (connections individuals have to others in their organizations), fit (the degree to which they feel similar to others in terms of values, ethicality and aspirations) and sacrifice (the sense of loss they would experience if they moved from one place to another. This notion of loss relates to both individuals’ places of work and their communities) (Mitchel et al., 2001). This research focuses on fit.

As noted before, upward, hierarchical, progression epitomizes objective career success whereas accumulating marketable skills, knowledge, and abilities indicates subjective career success. Fit is defined by individuals’ perceived similarities to other employees based on skills, priorities, values and organizational compatibility (Mallol, Holtom & Lee, 2007). Employees’ terminal goals (i.e., ultimate outcome) and intermediate career goals (i.e., sequential milestones) should be congruent with an organization’s culture if individuals can expect objective success (Mallol, et al, 2007; Greenhaus et al., 2010; Royle, 2015). The theory of job embeddedness postulates that greater levels of fit between individuals and their organizations reduces turnover and accelerates the departure of those who do not belong (O’Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). Contemporary scholars identified the relationship between involuntary turnover and fit. They demonstrated that misfits are much more likely to be terminated (Villanova, Bernardin, Johnson & Dahmus, 1994). As such, employee fit enhances career advancement because it helps one keep a job.

Mitchell et al. (2001) noted that fit also can also apply to a community. Individuals have several discrete criteria they use to evaluate the weather or cultural amenities in an area which they also apply to their jobs and organizations (Mallol, et al., 2007; Mitchell et al., 2001). Additionally, the prevailing political climate, lifestyle choices (e.g., easy access to valued attractions like the beach or mountains), opportunities for religious expression and entertainment options all matter to individuals but vary greatly by location (Mitchell et al., 2001; Callanan, 2003). Assessing one’s fit with the community might, however, exist independently of either person-job or person-environment fit (e.g., “I enjoy teaching and researching but I do not particularly enjoy living in a small town”). Employees are forced to confront this reality when they consider quitting and moving elsewhere.
Unsurprisingly, employees who are better liked and accepted are deemed to fit best in organizations (e.g., O’Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991). In fact, fit predicts some other important outcomes too. Those who fit get more organizational rewards than those who do not. These outcomes include enhanced training and earning opportunities, better opportunities for promotion and higher pay (Dulebohn, Wu & Liao, 2017). Patently, that enhances objective career success. Furthermore, those who fit are typically socially integrated and that augments subjective career success provided they want to remain members of the organization and keep the close personal relationships they have cultivated. It is also possible that individuals set a career goal for themselves to find a place like that to belong.

**Hypothesis 1:** Embeddedness-fit mediates the relationship between goal commitment and objective career success.

**Hypothesis 2:** Embeddedness-fit mediates the relationship between goal commitment and subjective career success.

**Hypothesis 3:** Embeddedness-fit mediates the relationship between self-set goals and objective career success.

**Hypothesis 4:** Embeddedness-fit mediates the relationship between self-set goals and subjective career success.

**METHODS**

This is a convenience sample collected in 2016 from volunteer respondents, in multiple organizations, all of whom had at least three years full-time working experience. Consequently, the author cannot rule out, entirely, for potential contaminating effects resulting from comparisons across differing organizational cultures and contexts (Schwab, 1999). Nonetheless, even in a time of unusually low unemployment, individuals’ interests in their own career mobility likely makes these findings applicable to a wide variety of employees (Baruch, 2004; Greenhaus et al., 2010).

**PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES**

The author collected these data in the spring and summer of 2016. He offered students in organizational behavior and human resource management classes extra credit to participate directly or enlist the help of others on their behalves. Only students employed full-time with three years of experience could answer questionnaires directly. Ineligible students could ask friends and family who met the criteria to respond on their behalves. The author collected contact information (including names, telephone numbers, place of employment and work history) from all respondents in order to reduce the risk of ineligible participation. The researcher reserved the right to contact employers if he suspected irregularities or wanted to confirm submitted information. At the end of the data collection period, 360 individuals began the survey. 303 (84%) respondents completed it. The sample included 180 female respondents (59%). The average respondent was 36 years of age and had worked for their employers for seven years. The occupations of participants included salespeople, nurses, managers and teachers.

**Measures**

The author first conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to verify scale dimensionality and factor loadings (Pallant, 2004). He did this to confirm the number of extracted factors and indicator
variables are consistent with parameters established in prior research (Pallant, 2004). CFA can also help address problems of multicollinearity (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). He used an oblique rotation and retained factors with eigenvalues over 1.0 (i.e., Kaiser’s rule) (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007; Kaiser, 1974). The author’s choice to use an oblique rather than orthogonal rotation presumes that the study’s variables are correlated.

The measures are as follow:

**Objective Career Success.** The author used Abele and Spurk’s (2009) three-item scale. It employs a five-point Likert type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Representative items include, “I have an official position of leadership,” and “I have permission to delegate project responsibility.”

**Subjective Career Success.** The author used a five-item scale developed by Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990). It uses a five-point Likert type response format (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Typical items included statements like, “I am satisfied with the progress I made toward meeting my goals for advancement,” and “I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for income.”

**Embeddedness.** The author used the five items related to fit in Mitchell, Holtom, Sablonski and Erez’s (2001) sixteen-item embeddedness scale. The scale uses a five-point Likert type response format (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Representative items included “my coworkers are similar to me”.

**Goal Setting.** The author used Erez and Judge’s (2001) three-item scale to measure work-related self-set goals. The scale uses a five-point Likert type response format (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Representative items included “over the past year, I set work related productivity goals” and “the goals I set for myself are difficult to achieve.”

**Goal Commitment.** The author used Hollenbeck, Williams and Klein’s (1989) nine-item scale to measure career goal commitment. The scale also employs a five-point like response format (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Representative items included “I am strongly committed to pursuing my career goal” and “frankly, I do not care if I achieve my career goal or not.”

**Control variables.** The author inserted several control in this research in order to reduce the potential for spurious effects and, thus, strengthen its findings. Due to their long-observed potential to contaminate findings in organizational science, the author controlled for age, gender, ethnicity and organizational tenure (Sheridan & Vredenburgh, 1978; Greenhaus et al., 2010).

The author found acceptable scale dimensionality as well as the necessary corresponding coefficient alpha values. The results of CFA indicated a single factor structure for subjective career success (eigenvalue = 3.63, proportion of explained variance = 0.73, α = 0.90) and objective career success (eigenvalue = 1.96, proportion of explained variance = 0.65, α = 0.73). The results of CFA for embeddedness-fit were (eigenvalue = 5.72, proportion of explained variance = 0.36, α = 0.91), goal setting success (eigenvalue = 1.63, proportion of explained variance = 0.54, α = 0.71) and goal commitment success (eigenvalue = 4.42 proportion of explained variance = 0.49, α = 0.84).

**Data Analysis and Results**

The author used Baron and Kenny’s (1986) procedure to test for mediation. This technique uses a three-step, sequential, procedure. In order to test for mediation, the independent variable must first be statistically significantly relate to the mediator variable (i.e., embeddedness-fit, goal setting and control variables). If that condition is met, one can proceed to the second step. Here the independent variable
must be significantly related to the dependent variable (i.e., objective and subjective career success regressed on goal setting/commitment and controls). Again, one must find significance to move forward. In the final step, the mediator should be related to the dependent variable even when the independent variable is included in the equation (i.e., fit added back into the regression equation). If these conditions occur, the relationship is at least partially mediated. Specifically, some of the variance in career success caused by goal setting/commitment flows through fit. If, in the third step, the independent variable remains significant but the standardized beta weight drops (significance levels drop notably), and the mediator remains significant, a case of partial mediation exists. However, if in the last step, the independent variable (i.e., self-set goals or commitment) has an insignificant standardized beta weight yet the mediator (i.e., fit) remains significant, the model is fully mediated.

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations and correlations between variables. The strongest correlation between variables in this study is, unsurprisingly, between age and tenure ($r = 0.64, p < 0.001$). The associations in these data do not strongly suggest issues of multicollinearity because no correlation (besides that noted above) exceeds the 0.60 benchmark noted by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<td>2. Gender</td>
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<td>3. Ethnicity</td>
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<td>4. Tenure</td>
<td>7.37</td>
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<td>-0.06</td>
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<td>5. Embed (Fit)</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.91</td>
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<td>0.16</td>
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<td>6. Sub. Success</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.51</td>
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<td>7. Ob. Success</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.41</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Goal Setting</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Goal Commit</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.06</td>
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<td>0.12</td>
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*All bolded correlations are significant at least at the 0.05 (two-tailed) level*  

The author included all control variables (i.e., age, organizational tenure, ethnicity and gender) at each step due to their potentially contaminating impact on embeddedness and to enhance the tests of the relationships. Overall, age was significantly related to fit, self-set goals, and both objective and subjective career success. Gender was negatively, significantly, related to objective success. Ethnicity also negatively, significantly, related to objective success.

The regression results for Hypothesis 1 (the goal commitment, fit and objective career success relationship) follow. The first step indicated that the mediating variable, fit, was significantly related to goal commitment ($b = 0.28, p < 0.001$). Therefore, one can proceed to the second step. The second step indicated that goal commitment is significantly related to objective career success ($b = 0.12, p < 0.05$). Goal commitment explained 10% of the variance in objective career success. Finally, fit related to the objective career success with the independent variables (i.e., goal commitment and the control variables included in the equation). Goal commitment ($b = 0.08, p < n/s$) failed to show significance but fit ($b = 0.32, p < 0.01$) did not, thus, full mediation occurred.

The regression results for Hypothesis 2 (the goal commitment, fit and subjective career success relationship) follow. The first step indicated that fit was significantly related to goal commitment ($b = 0.28, p < 0.001$). In step 2, goal commitment significantly related to subjective career success ($b = 0.24, p < 0.001$). Goal commitment explained 5% of the variance in subjective career success. Fit still related to subjective career success with goal commitment and the control variables included in the equation. In the
third step, goal commitment ($b = 0.06, p < n/s$), failed to show significance but fit ($b = 0.48, p < 0.001$) did, thus, full mediation occurred.

The regression results for Hypothesis 3 (the self-set goals, fit and objective career success relationship) follow. The first step indicated that the mediator, fit, was significantly related to self-set goals ($b = 0.10, p < 0.10$). The second step indicated that self-set goals are significantly related to objective career success ($b = 0.24, p < 0.001$). Self-set goals explained 9% of the variance in objective career success. Lastly, the fit related to objective career success with self-set goals and the control variables included in the equation. Self-set goals remained significant ($b = 0.15, p < 0.01$) and fit did as well ($b = 0.33, p < 0.001$). This indicates that fit partially mediated the relationship between self-set goals and objective career success.

The regression results for Hypothesis 4 (the self-set goals, fit and subjective career success relationship) follow. The first step indicated that fit was significantly related to self-set goals ($b = 0.10, p < 0.10$). In step two, self-set goals significantly related to the dependent variable (i.e., subjective career success) ($b = 0.12, p < 0.05$). Self-set goals explained 5% of the variance in subjective career success. In the third step, fit still related to subjective career success with the self-set goals and the control variables included. Self-set goals ($b = 0.07, p < n/s$), fell from significance but fit ($b = 0.50, p < 0.001$) did not, thus, the relationship between self-set goals, fit and subjective career success is fully mediated.

DISCUSSION

In general, these data suggested that both goal commitment and self-set career goals are potent predictors of fit, and ultimately that promotes subjective and objective career success. These findings are important, particularly when considering that they come from a range of occupations and organizational contexts. Of the four hypotheses analyzed in this research, three were fully substantiated and one was partially confirmed. Further discussion of these findings is in order.

A potential explanation for the linkages between goals, embeddedness-fit and career success lies in management by objectives (MBO). MBO starts with the assumption that firms clearly state and roll out strategic priorities down through the organization, typically along functional lines (Rogers, 2005). Additionally, individuals’ goals are derived from departmental goals. Nevertheless, MBO is not entirely a case of one-way communication from supervisors to subordinates. Meetings between managers and their employees constitute two-way, open-ended communications (Rogers, 2005). Although employees might not go into these meetings with a clear understanding of outputs and behavioral expectations, they often then co-develop expectations when there (Rogers, 2005). MBO is best suited for managing performance when objective measures of performance can be quantified (Cohen, 2014; Drucker, 1954). Quantification (e.g., salary increases) is a defining attribute of objective career success (Geenhaus et al., 2010). MBO promotes objective career success because both making and meeting the agreed upon benchmarks enhances commitment to the objectives and provides a relevant metric for assessment. Furthermore, the feedback that comes with MBO augments employee self-efficacy, enhances goal commitment and along with self-set personal goals creates the “motivational hub” (Locke, 1991; Erez, Kleinbeck & Thierry, 2001). Locke (1991) demonstrated how potent those preconditions are to job performance. Over time, successful job performance strongly enhances objective career success. Furthermore, developing work-related goals, getting feedback and achieving them, promotes fit with supervisors, enhances cross-training opportunities (i.e., adds linkages) and, ultimately promotes both
objective and subjective success (Wayne & Liden, 1995; Lee, Mitchell, Sablyski, Burton & Holtom, 2004). The data in this work help confirm that assertion.

With respect to self-set goals, fit and objective career success, it is likely that the partial mediation occurs because individuals are pursuing their goals primarily and finding out only later if they actually translate into pay raises, promotions etc. This is not entirely unexpected due to the fact that those who prioritize their own goals (e.g., Protean careerists) are not as likely to care about the pay or prestige of their work as much as what they think it does to promote their own values (Seibert et al., 2013; Briscoe & Hall, 2006).

Strengths and Weaknesses

This research has both strengths and limitations. A common criticism in organizational studies is a lack of realism and, thus, a concomitant lack external validity (Frink & Klimoski, 1998, 2004). Frink and Klimoski (1998; 2004) lamented that too much research is conducted without properly querying working employees in their actual jobs. The primary strength of these data is that they come from real employees in varied organizations. Furthermore, this research draws from a wide range of individuals whose survey responses related to changes in employers and occupations over time. This element of the research is crucial for evaluating career success in terms of both chronological and career age (Greenhaus et al., 2010).

Researchers (e.g., Campbell & Stanley, 1963) criticized the lack of generalizability of student samples due to the potential that they meaningfully differ from the general population. Accordingly, they question any findings derived from such respondents. Nevertheless, the need to collect multiple samples and publish the results is ubiquitous in organizational sciences. Currently, about 75% of studies done in this area come, either wholly or in part, from student samples (Steelman, Hammer & Limayen, 2014; Gordon, Slade & Schmitt, 1986). A careful sort of the data indicated that only 12 of the 303 (0.3%) respondents were students and they had at least three years of full-time work experience. That likely reduces threats to generalizability. Nevertheless, because this is a convenience sample, abstracting results to the population is always tenuous. Furthermore, the author cannot rule out the potential that selection bias occurred due to students’ over-reliance on the friends and family. Students who recruited others to participate on their behalves might have asked as a favor in order to get their extra credit. It is possible under those circumstances that friends and family gave the survey only surface-level consideration, did not really want to answer but did so to appease the students.

Another potential drawback to this research is that it relies on a single source, self-reported, metric. The author used mediated regression not a structural equation model in this research. As such, the analyses generated no estimate of a common method factor making it impossible to estimate the extent to which common method variance (CMV) might have impacted the data (Widaman, 1985; Williams, Cote & Buckley, 1989). Although CMV presents a potential threat to the study’s validity and the possibility that external artifacts contributed to observed effects exists (Cohen et al., 2003), CMV was not likely a problem in these data because Table 1 does not suggest spurious relationships between variables based on the magnitude of their correlations (Cohen et al., 2003).

Contributions to theory and practice

These data both support current theory and expand upon it. For example, Zikic and Klehe (2006) noted that employees plan, network and independently explore career options. This research operationalized embeddedness to show that it promotes employee interactions with others and congruity
between their jobs and organizations which, ultimately, promotes career success. This research also reconfirmed that commitment to organizational goals which augments objective career success (Locke 2001; Latham 2004; Iaffadano & Muchinsky, 1985). The current study added to the field’s understanding by demonstrating that self-selected goals, especially for Protean careerists, also bolstered objective career success. These findings also align with Greenhaus et al. (2010)’s contention that for Proteans, selecting career goals promoted a positive psychological appraisal of subjective career success. This research corroborated Seibert et al., (2013)’s assertion that younger employees differentially value non-compensatory work factors.

There are also some important implications for practicing managers and employees in these findings. Because systems like MBO, clearly help define organizational goals, they enhance the chances of employee commitment to them and that bolsters their career prospects. Specifically, as employee goal commitment increases, organizational fit increase, as does the potential for higher wages, more promotions, more authority and more opportunities to achieve. Additionally, if employees are Protean/boundaryless careerists, they could select concrete career goals that provide feedback (both from organizations and from within themselves) and still be objectively successful as well as bolster their subjective sense of career accomplishment.

Directions for further research

Future research might consider how national culture might cause goals to operate differently in traditionally collectivist (e.g., Israel or Japan) as opposed to individualistic (e.g., the USA where this study was conducted) societies and how that might, ultimately, lead to differing levels of embeddedness and expectations of career success (Hofstede, 1980). Collectivist cultures are those that value group interests over those of individuals, whereas individualistic cultures prioritize the economic and political freedom one wishes (Hofstede, 1980). The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) project introduced a subset of collectivism called collectivism- II (also sometimes called collectivism- participation) that might be of particular importance. It is defined as the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, solidarity in their organizations and families (Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian & House, 2012). Prior studies of goal setting (e.g., French, Israel, &As, 1960; Early, 1986; Erez & Early, 1987) noted that this kind of collectivism has strong implications for goal commitment. In studies of Norwegian, British and Israeli employees, researchers found that the group itself (e.g., the employees’ union) had to help create goals and then recommend them to individual members before they would commit to them. Employees in these countries neither created the goals themselves nor did they simply accept top management’s objectives. Given that MBO is positioned in this research as a driver of commitment, one might expect things to differ in a collectivist context (e.g., Erez & Earley, 1987). In fact, it is possible that the model proffered here might be out of sequence in countries like those noted above. For example, if membership in an organization (e.g., the labor union) means that one already fits, goals might be derived from embeddedness-fit as opposed to predicting it.

Another possibility is to collect a sample from a single organization that is large enough to ensure proper power and effect size. This would allow the researcher to replicate his findings as well as examine other potential mediators and moderators. Provided he could find such a sample, future research would benefit from supervisor/subordinate dyadic data on job performance and how that could relate to objective and subjective career success (e.g., Royle, 2016). With these data one could better determine if respondents are really as objectively skilled and successful as they report. These data do not include self-reports of job performance due to possible misreporting and/or the effects of the self-serving bias (i.e.,
individuals’ beliefs that supervisor bias rather than performance decrements are to blame for poor evaluations) (Ferris, Bwawuk, Fedor & Judge, 1995).

CONCLUSION

The objective of this research was to test the mediating potential of fit on the relationship between the career goals (i.e., goal commitment and self-set goals) and both objective and subjective metrics of career success. The results suggested that fit fully mediated three of the hypothesized relationships including both of those that involved goal commitment and career success. Furthermore, fit fully mediated the relationship between self-set goals and subjective career success. Finally, the data indicated that fit partially mediated the relationship between self-set goals and subjective career success.

REFERENCES


