

# **Organising career success. An exploratory study of individuals' configuration of objective and subjective career success.**

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## **SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The search for factors influencing career success is one of the most important themes in career research. Numerous contributions and models identify such factors and try to organise them into partly elaborate models (for overviews and comprehensive views see, e.g., Hughes, 1951a; Hughes, 1951b; Becker & Strauss, 1956a; Becker & Strauss, 1956b; Super, 1957; Glaser, 1968; Holland, 1973a; Holland, 1973b; Van Maanen, 1977a; Van Maanen, 1977b; Schein, 1978; Arthur et al., 1989a; Arthur et al., 1989b; Hall, 1987; Collin & Young, 2000a; Collin & Young, 2000b; Baruch, 2004). Career success is an integral part of these writings (for a recent overview of the field see Gunz & Heslin, 2005 and the contributions in the corresponding special issue of the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*). The distinction between objective and subjective career success belongs to the established body of knowledge of career research (see, e.g., Hughes, 1937a; Hughes, 1937b; Heron, 1954; Frieze et al., 1991; Judge et al., 1995a; Judge et al., 1995b).

Interestingly enough, though, the relationship between objective and subjective career success and factors determining specific patterns of this relationship have not been a main focus of career success research. Little is known about the link between individuals' subjective evaluation of career success and their objective career success as well as about the factors responsible for the respective configurations of objective and subjective career success. Previous studies see them as two distinct concepts with moderate overlapping (e.g., Bozionelos, 2004).

This paper deals with the issue of how individuals organise their career success. We integrate objective as well as subjective success and look at possible configurations of the two. Especially we deal with two questions:

First, we want find out if there is a relevant share of individuals that show low subjective success while being objectively successful and vice versa ('discrepancy') or if those two sides of success run parallel ('congruence').

Second, if there are indeed people that show configurations of high objective/low subjective or low objective/high subjective career success, we investigate if classical in-

fluencing factors on career success can also add to our understanding of different configurations of objective and subjective career success.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Objective and Subjective Career Success**

Despite the huge body of literature on factors influencing career success curiously little scholarly attention has been devoted to analyzing the nature of career success (Greenhaus, 2003; Heslin, 2003a; Sturges, 1999). One framework that is widely accepted in career research is Hughes' distinction between objective and subjective career success. The former is defined as directly observable, measurable, and verifiable by an impartial third party, while the latter is only experienced directly by the person engaged in her or his career. Thus, objective career success denotes verifiable attainments, such as pay, promotions, and occupational status. Subjective career success is defined by an individual's reactions to his or her unfolding career experiences (Hughes, 1937a; Hughes, 1951b). It heavily depends on individuals' (re-) construction of career success according to subjective and individualised patterns.

Variables of objective career success have long been considered the hallmarks of career success across a wide range of societies. Arthur and Rousseau found that more than 75 per cent of the career-related articles published in major interdisciplinary journals between 1980 and 1994 focused on objective perspectives (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Over the last decade, however, subjective criteria have increasingly been adopted (see e.g., literature review by Arthur et al., 2005). Objective and subjective view on careers constitute a 'two-sidedness' inherent in the career concept. The subjective-objective career duality expresses these two dimensions as unique, empirically distinct constructs (Arthur et al., 2005) showing different patterns of correlations with and different effect sizes for commonly used predictor variables (Ng et al., 2005).

Focusing on the relationship between these two constructs they are seen as two sides of career that are interdependent. Empirically unfolding as moderate correlation between the two (Ng et al., 2005) their relationship stays a complex one (Nicholson & DeWaal-Andrews, 2005: 142). Various possibilities of influencing directions have been formulated between objective and subjective career success. Historically it has been and still is most often assumed that objective success has a positive influence on subjective success

(e.g. Korman et al., 1981) but Arthur et al., 2005)) in their review also identify studies considering a two-way interdependence between the two. Individuals continually interpret and reinterpret the work experience and career success they have had. They experience objective reality, create understandings about what constitutes career success, and individually act on those understandings.

### **Configurations of Objective and Subjective Career Success**

As suggested above subjective and objective career success are two distinct constructs that show moderate correlation. This relationship is assumed to mainly stem from the positive influence objective success has on subjective success, i. e. individuals interpret their success on the basis of their objective accomplishments (Judge et al., 1995b). But the two concepts are not perfectly correlated. High objective success doesn't necessarily coexist with high subjective success and vice versa (e.g. Arthur et al., 2005). Figure 1 organises the two success-dimensions in a matrix<sup>1</sup> with possible values high and low. In this study we want to take a closer look at all four possible cases defined by Nicholson & DeWaal-Andrews, 2005: 142). Thereby we don't want to focus on the relationship between the two sides of career success itself but on the people that fall into the groups that exhibit: high objective and high subjective success ("dominant gratified"), low objective and low subjective success ("disappointed disconnected") as well as high objective/low subjective ("striving unfulfilled") and low objective/high subjective ("satisficing contented").

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<sup>1</sup> The orthogonality that the dimensions show in the matrix is only used for good readability and doesn't imply an orthogonal (completely independent) relationship between the two dimensions.

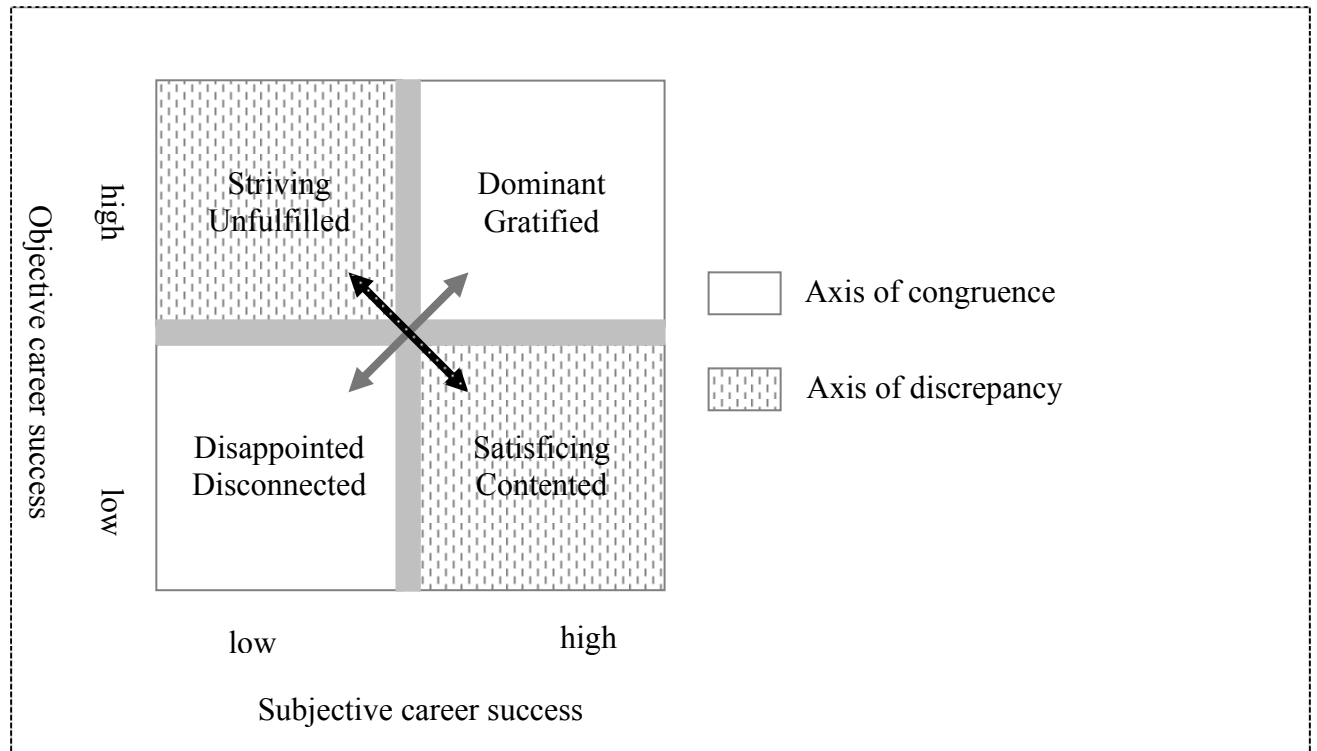


Figure 1: Configurations of Objective and Subjective Career Success (modified from Nicholson & DeWaal-Andrews, 2005: 142)

Following the traditional opinion that “subjective success follows objective success as a direct outcome of it—people who do well feel good” (Nicholson & DeWaal-Andrews, 2005) we refer to people in the groups high/high and low/low as positioned on the ‘axis of congruence’. Self-efficacy theory can serve as an explanation for these straightforward configurations. Self-efficacy refers to an individual’s belief about his or her ability to successfully perform a future task. This belief on the one hand is strongly associated with satisfaction and on the other hand is enhanced by successful performance on former tasks. This circular relationship results in moving into a self-reinforcing success spiral (Bandura, 1986; Hall, 2002). In a similar way, dissonance theories (Festinger, 1959) support the positioning on the axis of congruence.

As elucidated above the relationship between objective and subjective success is rather complex. Thus it is reasonable to assume that individuals do not only populate the configurations on the ‘axis of congruence’ but also the two remaining configurations on the ‘axis of discrepancy’. Nicholson and DeWaal-Andrews (2005) came up with theoretical explanations of what processes could be responsible for leaving people in one of the two configurations on the axis of discrepancy.

For the group of satisficing contented, self-regulation theory offers one possible explanation. Individuals adjust psychologically in order to change their goal states through which they are able to tolerate suboptimal conditions. Coping with discrepancies by denial and retreat into self-protective illusion self-regulation enables people to sustain positive perceptions in situations of relative deprivation. One possibility for denial is choosing a reference group with whom people can compare themselves without being the 'loser'. Self-regulation theory is closely related to the feeling of control, that people strive to have even if they only build an "illusion of control" (Langer, 1982), suggesting that activities of denial and ex-post rationalization gain in importance when feeling of control decreases. (Fenton-O'Creevy et al., 2003). Career entry where individuals did not yet have a chance to prove themselves in professional life, have rather weak professional networks and little experience to evaluate potential jobs as well as career plateauing might represent such a phase of even reduced control (Ettington, 1998).

Feeling high subjective success although being relatively unsuccessful in objective terms can also be a result of having career aspirations fulfilled that are different from those variables that constitute objective success. This explanation is more likely for individuals that show a high degree auf autonomy and self-reference (Mayrhofer et al., 2005).

Another approach adding to the explanation of why individuals are found on the axis of discrepancy is to draw from game theory (Nicholson & DeWaal-Andrews, 2005). People in the labor market have to calculate costs, risks and benefits of alternative career strategies. When people realize that they only have limited endowment and opportunities they might settle for a – in game theory terms – suboptimal career outcome once costs and risks outweigh the benefits of further striving. Integrating this idea into self-regulation-processes suggests that in a situation where one has recognized the impossibility of altering personal gifts and opportunities and feels lacking control over uncertain outcomes one settles for the disadvantageous situation. People create a self-protective illusion and find satisfaction in what they are doing. The level at which individuals feel the costs and risks exceeding the benefit of striving will differ significantly among people (Baumann & Kuhl, 2002). Personality and social background are likely to be sources for those differences.

The group of striving unfulfilled always feels an urge for and benefit in further striving. Even if goals are attained they continue striving to surpass the achievements reached.

Like for the second group on the axis of discrepancy one possibility to justify their permanent striving for more success is choosing appropriate reference groups. In this case it will be a group compared to which their success appears minor. Individuals of this group can get caught in the already mentioned “upward spiral of success” (positively connoted by Hall, 2002: 152). They might in fact be trapped, having invested too much already to not further striving (Evans & Bartolome, 1980). Two other possible explanations put forth by Nicholson & DeWaal-Andrews, (2005) are that there are people trading their life satisfaction to accumulate the monetary manifestation of their abilities for others (e.g. giving their children best material base possible) and people who are already equipped with such a material backup. Those ‘rich kids’ might either continue striving because they have very successful persons in their family which they can’t resist using as a reference or they have always had advantageous opportunities because of their birth and don’t feel any connection between their own effort and their success. They suffer from low self-efficacy and dissatisfaction (Locke & Latham, 2002). The permanent drive striving unfulfilled feel can stem from the persons personality traits as well as from their social background (especially ‘rich kids’).

### **Influencing Factors on Career Success**

Finding factors that influence objective and later on also subjective career success is and has been a major topic in career research. Consequently a huge body of literature exists that identifies many different variables as influencing success. Since the study at hand is a rather exploratory one we draw on classical factors identified by the heavily researched field of linear influences on success. We assume that factors that show high correlations with career success are probably the ones that can also help explain different configurations of objective and subjective career success. Especially we expect to find some factors discriminating between the configurations at an early stage of career among those variables that explain career success.

In a recent meta-analysis Ng, Eby, Sorensen and Feldman (2005) identified personality features and social background as crucial classes of influencing factors. The status of personality and social background for predicting career can be deduced from the well established theories of contest- and sponsored mobility (Turner, 1960). The former suggests that people compete for career success in an open and fair contest, with the winner being the most skilled and eager worker (see, e. g., Rosenbaum, 1984, or Becker, 1964).

Examples for career success predictors within this framework are human capital factors like study-variables, as well as the spare-time parameters. The latter, in contrast, doesn't blame the individual for his/her success: it's the established elites, which select, and foster, the career success candidates. They help them to win the competition (Ng et al., 2005: 368). Socio-demographic variables like the parents' job prestige are examples for career success predictors within this approach. Personality traits are a heavily used class of predictors for career success (e.g. Bozionelos, 2004; Judge et al., 1995b; Judge et al., 1999; Lau & Shaffer, 1999). Both paradigms can add to the explanation of why stable personality should predict career success. Higher levels of initiative (e.g. achievement motivation) may endow individuals with extra resources for competing in the career contest. Also dispositional traits may attract or repel sponsorship (Ng et al., 2005: 370).

Besides being important for predicting career success above mentioned explanatory approaches for different career configurations also suggest personality features and social background as relevant for differentiating between the defined groups. Since we are looking at career configurations at the beginning of the career study variables have been included. We further include study variables. Study performance and side activities during study seem to be especially germane at the beginning of the professional career (Daniel, 1995).

### **Goals of this study**

This study builds on the work of Nicholson & DeWaal-Andrews (2005) and their definition and theoretical description of four configurations of objective and subjective career success. It further advances the field by pursuing two goals. First, the study wants to supply empirical evidence that the four configurations of objective and subjective career success are not 'only' theoretical categories but empirically observable phenomena. Second and assuming that the four configurations also can be found empirically, it wants to understand why individuals are positioned in different configurations of objective and subjective career success. Therefore, the importance of two classical influencing factors of both objective and subjective career success, i.e. personality and social origin, and their explanatory power for differentiating between individuals having different configurations of objective and subjective career success is analyzed



## METHODOLOGY

### Measures

*Career success.* We follow the most common operationalisations for the two career concepts. One of the most widely used and readily accessible indicators of objective career success is salary (Hall, 2002). “Subjective career success is most commonly operationalised as either job or career satisfaction” (Heslin, 2005: 116). Career satisfaction is seen as the most salient aspect of subjective career success (Judge et al., 1999). Thus we measure objective career success by annual entry job income. Subjective career success is measured by career satisfaction in the first job after graduation. It was rated on a twelve-point scale ranging from “very dissatisfied” to “very satisfied”.

*Personality.* To measure personality traits we used standardised scales. Figure 1 presents the scale names, internal consistency values (Cronbach  $\alpha$ ) as well as respective sources.

Scale name and internal consistency	Source
Emotional Stability ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ; n=2112; number of items: 12)	NEO-FFI (Borkenau & Ostendorf, 1993)
Conscientiousness ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ; n=2112; number of items: 12)	NEO-FFI
Achievement Motivation ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ; n=5354; number of items: 14)	BIP (Hossiep & Paschen, 1998)
Leadership Motivation ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ; n=5354; number of items: 15)	BIP
Flexibility ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ; n=5354; number of items: 14)	BIP
Openness for Social Contacts ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ; n=5354; number of items: 16)	BIP
Team Orientation ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ; n=5354; number of items: 13)	BIP
Self-Monitoring ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ; n=5354; number of items: 11)	SUeW (Snyder, 1974)

Table 1: Personality Traits - Scales

*Social Origin.* To capture social origin we measure the father’s and mother’s job prestige, according to the ISEI index. The ISEI index is based on the ISCO job classifications and ranges from 16 (e.g., farm-hands, labourers, helpers and cleaners) to 90 (e.g., judges),

with higher values representing higher prestige (Ganzeboom & Treiman, 1996). Two scales of leisure behaviour in childhood and youth (before 18) are included. The first scale measures cultural behaviour (e.g., going to the theatre, concerts, and the opera, reading classic and modern literature, listening to classic music). The second scale measures sports activities (attending sport events, playing tennis, cycling, running, playing soccer). The theoretical range of both scales goes from 1 to 4.

*Study Variables.* The included study variables are duration of study in semesters and the final diploma exam grade (lower values mean better results). Two more variables represent the share of time invested in job and studies respectively during the final five years of study. Additionally, we asked whether participants spent some time studying abroad.

## **Sample**

The sample consists of 286 business school graduates being part of the Vienna Career Panel Project (ViCaPP; see [www.vicapp.at](http://www.vicapp.at)), a longitudinal panel study of graduates' career patterns. They graduated around 2000 with an average age of 31.1 years ( $\pm 2.8$ ). The proportion of men is 54%, the mean age for men is 31.7 years ( $\pm 2.5$ ), mean age for women is 30.4 years ( $\pm 2.9$ ).

Data for psychological traits, social origin as well as study variables has been obtained at latest six month after graduation. Information about subjective and objective career success has been collected approximately 18 month after graduation asking participants about their success at their first job after graduation. Standardised questionnaires (mail and online) have been used for data gathering.

Based on this sample we constructed four groups of different success configurations. We chose the median as basis for separating into high and low success but excluded a corridor (as indicated by the grey area in Figure 1) in order to get individuals who clearly fall into one or the other group more. To exclude participants close to the median objective and subjective success we split the sample into top and bottom 40% for both subjective career success<sup>2</sup> and income, resulting in four groups with a total of 199 graduates. 87

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<sup>2</sup> For career satisfaction, it is actually top and bottom 43%, excluding the 14% of cases with the median value for career satisfaction (8). More finely graded alternatives with an additional satisfaction measure and different "exclusion corridors" (for income, too) were tested as well, yielding virtually the same results.

graduates showed values close to median values and have therefore been excluded. The resulting groups are described as follows:

- Disappointed disconnected: bottom 40% income, bottom 40% satisfaction (n = 58, 39% men)
- Satisficing contented: bottom 40% income, top 40% satisfaction, (n = 45, 49% men)
- Striving unfulfilled: top 40% income, bottom 40% satisfaction, (n = 40, 64% men)
- Dominant gratified: top 40% income, top 40% satisfaction, (n = 56, 71% men)

## RESULTS

### Importance of Different Configurations

As can be seen from the sample description as well as in Figure 2 all of the four quadrants are populated. The numbers of people in the four groups are rather similar with a small backlog of the groups on the axis of discrepancy.

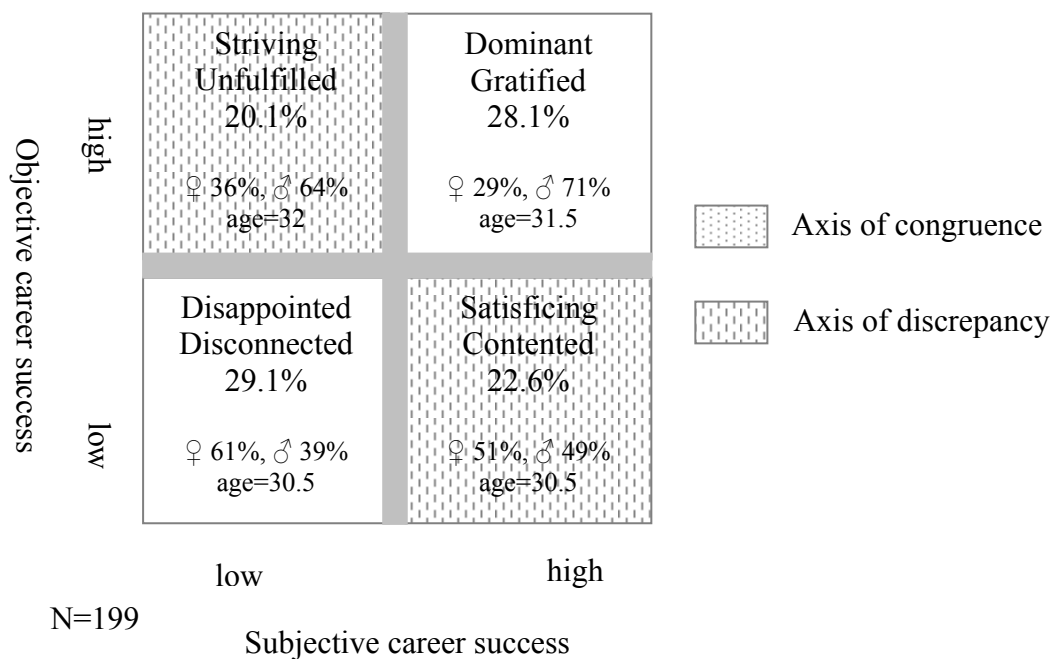


Figure 2: Group Sizes of Configurations of Objective and Subjective Career Success

### Influencing Factors on Configurations

Figure 2 shows rather different percentage rates of men and women in the four groups. The different gender-proportions in the groups are statistically significant ( $\chi^2(3) = 13.8, p < 0.01$ ) with the share of men being disproportionately high in the groups with high objective success. Mean age varies significantly ( $F(3,195) = 2.82, p < 0.05$ ) between the groups, too. The two groups with low objective success are almost identical (30.5 years), the striving unfulfilled have the highest mean age (32 years) and the dominant gratified lie in between (31.5 years).

We first describe mean values of included factors for each group. Then we use analysis of variance to test for any significant differences between the four groups. In case of ANOVA showing significant results post-hoc tests are conducted to find out between which of the groups exactly the significant difference exists.

*Personality.* Table 2 presents the mean values for the z-transformed personality scales. The results of the post-hoc tests can be found at the bottom of the table.

Among the personality traits we see highly significant differences between the groups' conscientiousness and achievement motivation. Their average emotional stability, leadership motivation and openness for social contacts are significantly different as well. Differences in levels of flexibility and team orientation ( $p < 0.1$ ) are also found. In sum personality traits seem to be crucial for differentiating between the four configurations of career success, since only one variable (self-monitoring) did not show a significant difference.

Personality traits	Disappointed discontented	Satisficing contented	Striving unfulfilled	Dominant gratified	Sig.
Emotional stability	0.74 (0.86)	0.80 (0.96)	0.75 (0.92)	1.19 (1.01)	*
conscientiousness	0.76 (0.85)	0.98 (0.85)	0.94 (0.86)	1.29 (0.73)	**
achievement motivation	-0.4 (0.88)	0.03 (0.99)	-0.01 (1.07)	0.31 (1.01)	**
leadership motivation	-0.59 (0.86)	-0.21 (0.84)	-0.22 (0.97)	-0.02 (1.05)	*

flexibility	-0.36 (0.91)	-0.34 (1.03)	-0.25 (0.98)	0.06 (0.92)	+
openness for social contacts	-0.19 (0.89)	-0.01 (0.83)	-0.21 (0.83)	0.22 (0.82)	*
team orientation	-0.13 (0.80)	-0.12 (0.85)	0.03 (0.84)	0.23 (0.88)	+
self-monitoring	-0.05 (1.00)	0.02 (1.08)	-0.09 (1.00)	0.07 (0.95)	
Post-Hoc Tests					
Emotional stability	Dominant gratified > all others				
conscientiousness	Dominant gratified > disappointed discontented, striving unfulfilled				
achievement motivation	Disappointed discontented < all others				
leadership motivation	Disappointed discontented < satisficing contented, dominant gratified				
flexibility	Dominant gratified > disappointed discontented, satisficing contented				
openness for social contacts	Dominant gratified > disappointed discontented, satisficing contented				
team orientation	Dominant gratified > disappointed discontented, satisficing contented				
self-monitoring	--				

\*\* p< 0.01, \* p< 0.05, + p<0.1

*Table 2: Group-differences personality traits*

Post-hoc tests show that individuals in the dominant gratified group display much higher emotional stability than the average person in all the other groups. Emotional stability is the reverse of neuroticism that has frequently been found to show a negative relationship with career success (e.g., Bozionelos, 2004; Judge et al., 1999; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001). Conscientiousness, too, is highest among dominant gratified and it distinguishes them from the two groups with low subjective success. Dominant gratified show the highest levels of flexibility, openness and team orientation, too. Here, they are clearly different from the two groups with low objective success. Disappointed discontented are characterised by significantly low achievement and leadership motivation. This distinguishes them from all other and from the satisfied groups, respectively.

*Social origin.* The degree to which people spent leisure in their childhood with certain activities but not the prestige of parents' jobs discriminates between the groups. Dominant gratified exercised significantly more than people in the unsatisfied groups. It is the satisficing contented that were more engaged in cultural activities than all other groups.

Social Origin	Disappointed discontented	Satisficing contented	Striving unfulfilled	Dominant gratified	Sig.
ISEI father	53.1 (14.6)	54.5 (15.3)	50.3 (14.8)	53.7 (16.4)	
ISEI mother	33.7 (16.3)	35.9 (15.9)	39.1 (21.8)	35.2 (17.8)	
culture in childhood and youth	1.86 (0.46)	2.05 (0.54)	1.78 (0.43)	1.80 (0.48)	*
sports in childhood and youth	2.50 (0.70)	2.54 (0.61)	2.35 (0.57)	2.78 (0.70)	*
Post-Hoc Tests					
ISEI father	--				
ISEI mother	--				
culture in childhood and youth	satisficing contented > all others				
sports in childhood and youth	dominant gratified > disappointed discontented, striving unfulfilled				

\*\* p< 0.01, \* p< 0.05, + p<0.1

*Table 3: Group-differences Social Origin*

*Study Variables.* Duration of study and people's final grades do not differ significantly between the groups. It is the amount of time individuals invest in working besides their studies and the and if they have spent some time of their study abroad that is show highly significant differences between the four configurations. The time used for studying is significantly different as well. Dominant gratified spent significantly more time for working and significantly less time for studying than the two groups with low objective success.

Study variables	Disappointed discontented	Satisficing contented	Striving unfulfilled	Dominant gratified	Sig.
duration of study	11.6 (3.8)	12.8 (4.3)	12.7 (4.1)	12.8 (4.2)	
final grade	2.34 (0.54)	2.36 (0.52)	2.20 (0.49)	2.30 (0.53)	
% time for work	16.0 (13.7)	18.1 (11.3)	25.2 (14.8)	26.4 (20.5)	**
% time for studies	48.5 (17.9)	47.7 (12.3)	41.8 (16.6)	40.3 (17.3)	*
stay abroad	23%	47%	14%	54%	**

Post-Hoc Tests	
duration of study	--
final grade	--
% time for work	Dominant gratified > disappointed discontented, satisficing contented
% time for studies	Dominant gratified < disappointed discontented, satisficing contented

\*\* p< 0.01, \* p< 0.05, + p<0.1

Table 4: group-differences study variables

In a next step discriminant analysis is employed in order to investigate to which extent the whole group of predictor variables can distinguish between the four groups of different success configurations and how well group membership can be predicted. We also identify those variables that are most important for the discrimination reached.

A discriminant analysis with all the above mentioned variables (personality traits, social origin, study variables, gender, age) as predictors attains a correct prediction rate of 59%<sup>3</sup> (while a random assignment would result in about 25%). Table 5 shows the classification results. With the predictor variables used 72.2% of the individuals actually falling into the group of disappointed discontented have been predicted as such. 27.8% in contrast have been assigned incorrectly to other groups. 47.2% of the actual satisficing contented group, 48.1% of striving unfulfilled and 65.9% of the dominant gratified have been predicted correctly. It is apparent that the correct prediction rate is higher for the groups on the axis of congruence than for those on the axis of discrepancy.

The total canonical correlation coefficient for the three discriminant equations<sup>4</sup> is 0.72 which is highly significant (Wilks' lambda = 0.48;  $p < 0.01$ ). Looking at the prediction rates above as well as the canonical correlation coefficient we get the picture that the discriminant analysis with all predictor variables included can moderately well predict group membership.

predicted	Disappointed discontented	Satisficing contented	Striving unfulfilled	Dominant gratified
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<sup>3</sup> The classification function is based on the assumption of equal data dispersion in all groups (Backhaus et al., 2003: 212) which can be retained here (Box's M = 802.4,  $p = 0.26$ ).

<sup>4</sup> We decided against limiting the number of discriminant functions here, as the third discriminant function still has an eigenvalue of 0.13 (canonical correlation coefficient: 0.34).

observed				
Disappointed discontented	26 (72.2%)	3 (8.3%)	1 (2.8%)	6 (16.7%)
Satisficing contented	7 (19.4%)	17 (47.2%)	3 (8.3%)	9 (25.0%)
Striving unfulfilled	3 (11.1%)	4 (14.8%)	13 (48.1%)	7 (25.9%)
Dominant gratified	4 (9.8%)	7 (17.1%)	3 (7.3%)	27 (65.9%)

Table 5: Discriminant analysis: group prediction

Table 6 shows the mean standardized canonical discriminant coefficients<sup>5</sup>. These numbers indicate how important single variables are for discrimination. Higher values mean higher importance. The personality traits self-monitoring, achievement motivation and openness for social contacts followed by having completed a stay abroad have the largest values, while father's ISEI, duration of study and flexibility are at the end of the list.

In the case of self-monitoring in fact the large value of the coefficient does not represent importance for discrimination. Analysis of variance has shown that the mean value of self-monitoring in the four groups is equal ( $F(3,195)=0.26, p > 0.8$ ). The large coefficient is apparently due to (negative) suppressor effects, as self-monitoring is not at all related to the grouping variable but quite strongly related to some of the predictor variables with higher discriminatory power<sup>6</sup>.

To be able to better control for such effects an additional stepwise discriminant analysis has been conducted<sup>7</sup>. The following three variables remain in the stepwise model: achievement motivation, having spent a stay abroad, and share of time for work. However, the percentage of correctly predicted cases drops to 42% with all three functions

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<sup>5</sup> Calculated by summing up the discriminant coefficients of each function times the function's share of explained variance (Backhaus et al., 2003: 206).

<sup>6</sup> Pearson r with, e.g., emotional stability: 0.40, leadership motivation: 0.56, openness for social contacts: 0.69.

<sup>7</sup> The results are based on a stepwise procedure with a minimum partial F-value of 2.71 and the Rao-V maximisation criterion, which is particularly suitable for identifying relevant predictors (Backhaus et al., 2003: 218).



included, and 37% with one function.<sup>8</sup> The standardized canonical discriminant coefficients (first function only) are 0.66 for achievement motivation, 0.62 for the stay abroad, and 0.44 for share of time for work.

variable	mean discriminant coefficient
self-monitoring	0.442
achievement motivation	0.439
openness for social contacts	0.396
stay abroad	0.354
conscientiousness	0.339
ISEI mother	0.338
gender	0.260
% time for work	0.253
emotional stability	0.247
culture in childhood and youth	0.246
team orientation	0.224
age	0.211
sports in childhood and youth	0.205
final grade	0.204
leadership motivation	0.193
flexibility	0.181
% time for studies	0.173
ISEI father	0.166
duration of study	0.145

*Table 6: Mean standardized canonical discriminant coefficients*

## DISCUSSION

Regarding our first research question the results show that the four configurations of objective and subjective career success postulated in the literature also can be found empirically. Individuals from the sample were positioned on both axes, i.e. the axis of congruence as well as the axis of discrepancy. In our sample with rather ‘extreme’ cases of high and low objective and subjective success, noticeable 42.7% fall in the groups of striving unfulfilled and satisficing contented, i.e. the axis of discrepancy.

Our second question pertains to the differentiating power of classical influencing factors of career success for different configurations of career success. Despite moderate

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<sup>8</sup> The first discriminant function explains 87.4% of the variance for this solution and is the only significant one. Therefore, omitting the other two functions would appear appropriate here. Wilks’ lambda is 0.75 for all three functions and 0.78 for the first function.

group sizes, analysis of variance revealed significant differences for most of the variables included. The most important results for single variables and factors are discussed below.

Looking at the combined results of personality traits from ANOVA and discriminant analysis the significance of achievement motivation is striking. The difference between groups is highly significant and discriminant analysis identifies it as the most important<sup>9</sup> variable for group discrimination. It also is the most relevant variable for predicting objective as well as subjective career success. Achievement motivation is likely to influence the degree of striving a person exhibits, thus striving unfulfilled should display high levels of achievement motivation. The results however only show a moderate value in this group. With dominant gratified – not surprisingly – showing the highest values, striving unfulfilled even fall behind satisficing contented. Conscientiousness might as well have a little influence on striving but here we have a similar situation with the value of the dominant gratified standing out, followed by very similar numbers for satisficing contented and striving unfulfilled. The same picture occurs for openness to social contacts. Openness doesn't only show quite different (with the value for dominant gratified being much higher than for all others) it is also a very important factor in discriminating between groups. Emotional stability (more precisely its reverse neuroticism) as a classical influencing factor on success (e.g., Judge et al., 1999) also shows significant differences between groups. Again it is the dominant gratified that are on average much more emotional stable than individuals in the other groups.

Looking at the variables of social origin, there is some evidence for the 'rich kid'-idea that predicts very prestigious background for the striving unfulfilled. No significant group differences between the levels of prestige of parents' jobs exist. Fathers' ISEI is lowest for the striving unfulfilled; however, mothers' ISEI has the highest value in the group of striving unfulfilled which is line with the 'rich-kid' idea. What differs between groups is the way people spent their spare time in childhood and youth. Dominant gratified did more sports than both groups with low satisfaction whereas satisficing contented found their pleasure in cultural activities. This might be a little hint that being engaged in satisfying activities outside work makes people more satisfied with their career situation.

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<sup>9</sup> The result for self-monitoring in the discriminant analysis was found to be a product of a negative suppressor effect.

Turning to study variables dominant gratified invest more time in working and less time in studying than all others – accordingly they also show a significantly higher age when graduating. From the study variables the percentage of time people invested into work during their studies seems especially relevant for objective career success whereas studying abroad clearly differentiates between high and low subjective career success. The irrelevance of study grades for success seems surprising – especially when looking at the first job after graduation – but has been shown in previous studies (e.g., Waldmann & Korbar, 2004; Mayrhofer et al., 2005) The stepwise regression analysis reveals achievement motivation, age and time share invested in work as having the biggest influence (out of all explanatory variables) on income and achievement motivation and stay abroad as having the closest linear relationship with career satisfaction. These results in part confirm the assumption made when choosing the variable pool: Those variables showing a high influence on career success are also relevant for discrimination between groups<sup>10</sup>.

Regarding gender, no surprises are found when looking at the proportions of men and women in the different groups. Beyond the significant difference in the share of men and women and the importance of gender in discriminating between groups we find disproportionately high appearance of men in the two groups with high income. This is in line with previous research. It is a well known and highly disturbing fact that women simply earn less even if they have the same education and the same amount of time in parental leave (Strunk et al., 2005).

Looking at the overall pictures we see that the two groups on the axis of congruence show clear differences in almost all of the variables considered. This indicates that there is indeed an important relationship between objective and subjective success. The groups on the axis of discrepancy in contrast show no clear picture as their values mostly lay somewhere in between. They rarely can be distinguished from each other, mostly only show significant differences compared to dominant gratified. With the variables used in this study, a prototypical individual for the groups of disappointed discontented and dominant gratified can be described. However, this is not possible for the groups on the axis of discrepancy. Here, no clear pattern is visible.

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<sup>10</sup> Linear regression and discriminant analysis are also similar statistical procedures (Backhaus et al., 2003).

## LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

We have shown that there is a significant share of people that are satisfied with little objective success or not satisfied although they have achieved a lot objectively. We have also identified many variables that are different between the four configurations but most of them rather distinguish dominant gratified from all others not differentiating within the axis of discrepancy or between the axes of discrepancy and congruence. Thus, with this study we made a first step to comprehend individuals located on the axis of discrepancy but much work has to be done for better understanding.

One important point is considering time. Scholars are united in their view that time is most relevant to career. It is a sequence of position and this sequence occurs over time (e.g. Arthur et al., 1989b). Nevertheless empirical studies mostly rely on cross-sectional studies (Arthur et al., 2005) We, too, didn't explicitly include time. We focus on the the earliest stage of career – the first job people have after graduation. We assume that for this short career period not including time does not distort results as it does for longer periods. For getting a deeper insight into career configurations tracking developments of those configurations within individuals over time is inevitable.

Another issue critically noted in the literature is the insufficient coverage of the complex constructs of career success. For the study at hand in order to keep the matrix of the four groups manageable we decided on to use one-dimensional operationalisations of subjective and objective career success. To make results comparable we used the most common variables. One possibility for measuring career success would be working factors including variables covering various aspects of objective and subjective career success.

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