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Career Success Across The Globe – Insights From The 5C Project

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Cross-Cultural Collaboration on Contemporary Careers (5C Project) conducted in-depth qualitative research into what *career success* means to people in a diverse range of countries across all major culture clusters of the world, specifically: Austria and Spain (from the Western European region), China and Japan (from Confucian Asia), Malaysia (from South Asia region), Costa Rica and Mexico (from Latin American region), Serbia (from the Eastern European region), South Africa (from the Africa region), the USA (from the English-speaking region) and Israel (not assigned to a specific culture cluster). In addition, a quantitative survey about meanings of career success in 16 countries was conducted (Austria, Belgium Brazil, China, France, Greece, India, Italy, Malaysia, Nigeria, Norway, Philippines, Slovenia, South Korea, Turkey, USA). This paper presents the seven major meanings of career success that emerged across these cultural regions and thus may be deemed relevant all around the world. These are *financial security*, i.e. being able to consistently provide the basic necessities for living; *financial achievement* in terms of having a good income, wealth, incentives, and perks; *learning and development* via continuous informal learning on the job and/or formal training and education; *work-life-balance*, i.e. a good balance between work and non-work, relationships, activities and interests; *positive relationships* as signified by, for instance, enjoying working with people who you respect and admire; *positive impact* by helping others in one's immediate social environment and/or leaving some sort of legacy to a community, or society more broadly; and *entrepreneurship* through founding one's own enterprise or being able to invent and develop one's own projects within the work context. We describe examples of each from different cultures and offer practical implications of these meanings for the primary stakeholders of career research: individuals, organizations, as well as counselors, coaches and consultants.

For me a successful person is someone who fulfills all his goals, is responsible and likes his job a lot.
- José Luis, male Mexican blue collar worker, 24 years

Success is to realize not all dreams, but dreams that are really important. To work in a secure place, where you have chances to advance. Part of success is also to work surrounded by people you get along with.
- Abdullah, male Arab blue collar worker in Israel, 30 years

I think (that) career success … (is) the ability to – whether you're selling something to somebody either a commodity or a service – (have) the person appreciate it. I think for me, that's the finest career. Money is important but I don't think it can buy that.
- Cromwell, male black South African blue collar worker, 54 years

I would want to be in a reputable company, holding a good position, like when I give my business card, people say, "Oh, you're in this company, doing that." I value the pride that I have when people actually look at my card and look at me.
- That, female Malay business school graduate, 29 years

For decades the academic literature has nearly exclusively measured career success in terms of pay, promotions, and (job) satisfaction. Although these are obviously important indicators, such approaches do not capture the range and nuance of what people consider when they think about their career success. A recent and notable exception of the mainstream approach is the work of Kristen Shockley and colleagues. In a series of studies in the US, they found that people evaluate their career success in terms of recognition, quality work, meaningful work, influence, authenticity, personal life, growth and development, and satisfaction. Although insightful, this work, like much other research in the career success literature, has a built-in 'WEIRD perspective as a function of its focus is on *W*estern, *e*ducated, *i*ndustrialized, *r*ich, and *d*emocratic countries. Such research may miss the richness and diversity of meanings ascribed to career success in other economic, cultural, and institutional contexts around the globe.

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One aim of our ongoing Cross-Cultural Collaboration on Contemporary Careers (5C) project is to develop a more comprehensive view informed by different kinds of data from around the world (see the Box: *The 5C Research Team and Process* for more details). Our basis is an *emic* view, that is, a perspective and methodology whereby individuals from all major cultural regions of the world express their views regarding their careers in their own words without pre-formed categorizations. This contrasts with most existing standardized measures of career success that presume what people think is important. Instead, we painstakingly analyzed what career success means around the world – as drawn from across a wide range of national, cultural, and institutional contexts, as well as ages, genders, and professions – and then refined our findings by several iterations of quantitative testing in dozens of countries around the world. In doing so, we identify seven globally relevant meanings or *dimensions* of career success that people regularly consider when they evaluate their career: *financial security, financial achievement, learning and development, work-life balance, positive relationships, positive impact, and entrepreneurship*.

In this article, we present our major findings and provide examples of these seven globally relevant meanings along with insights regarding the cultural and occupational contexts in which they tend to be salient. We conclude by discussing practical implications for the stakeholders of careers research, including individuals, organizations, and counselors, coaches, and consultants.

The 5C Research Team and Process

Based on a common interest in a more in-depth and globally applicable view of how people understand their career, career success, and career transitions, we started in 2004 as a small group to explore the possibilities of conducting a global study. To avoid an unduly narrow view, we decided to begin by understanding how individuals in different countries and global culture

clusters view career success. Expanding to include academic experts from 11 countries reflecting Schwartz's seven culture clusters (Austria, China, Costa Rica, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Serbia/Montenegro, South Africa, Spain, USA), our team conducted the project's first qualitative stage using semi-structured interviews in the respective local languages. Over 200 people were interviewed from management, nursing, and blue-collar occupations, to gain a better understanding of how individuals in early and late career phases view career success and career transitions. In the project's second and ongoing quantitative stage, we are following up with a survey of about 15,000 individuals in approximately 30 countries. The findings reported in this article represent results obtained from over 4,400 individuals from 16 countries.

EXPLORING CAREER SUCCESS: SEVEN SHARED MEANINGS ACROSS THE GLOBE

Our research identifies seven major meanings of career success as outlined in Table 1 and discussed below. As you read through the following discussion of these meanings, reflect upon what career success means to you (or to those you manage, coach, or with whom you consult).

Table 1: Overarching Themes and Globally Relevant Meanings of Career Success

Overarching Themes	Meanings of Career Success
1. Material Concerns	◆ Financial Security
	◆ Financial Achievement
2. Learning	◆ Learning and Development
3. Social Relations	◆ Work-Life Balance
	◆ Positive Relationships
	◆ Positive Impact

4. Pursuing One's Own Projects	♦ Entrepreneurship

Material Concerns: Security and Achievement

Financial matters are a traditional topic when it comes to career success. However, our

interviewees suggest that this topic includes two elements: financial security and financial

achievement. Financial security, which pertains to a reliable supply of the material necessities for

survival, contrasts with financial achievement, which involves having enough money to provide a

level of comfort, affluence, and status.

Financial Security

> *A man can't get rich if he takes proper care of his family.*
> -   Native American Navajo Proverb

Financial security might not appear to be a form of career success insofar as it represents a

basic aspiration. Yet it is highly relevant to many people around the world, especially those of

lower levels of socio-economic status, or high family and other commitments that they require

their income to sustain. Evaluating one's career success in terms of financial security is illustrated

by Michael, a 55 year old male colored laborer in South Africa:

> *To me whether you give me a job and tell me to sweep the floors all day,*
> *I'm happy as long as I've got a job. It is very important to be successful*
> *for whatever you do, no matter what you do. Whether its management or*
> *whether it's just being a laborer or no matter what the duty, it is very*
> *important because if you can't work you can't eat. And if you can't eat*
> *you're going to go hungry. It's not about money, it's just about survival.*

Financial security includes three aspects. First, it is inseparably linked with being able to

provide the basic necessities for living. Second, financial security resonates strongly with the

notion of being a successful breadwinner who can financially provide for his or her family or

broader networks such as the clan. Third, for financial security to be considered career success, it

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needs to occur consistently for an extended, non-interrupted period of time, if possible for the whole course of a career.

As long as financial security is inadequate, it tends to loom large in people's overall sense of their career success. When the desired level of financial security is achieved, however, their conception of career success often evolves to make other success meanings more prominent. Nevertheless, financial security remains in the background and can return to salience if an individual's financial security is threatened.

Financial security has a stronger presence as a meaning of career success in economically less developed countries and among unskilled and low skilled workers, where it is frequently linked with job security. In the words of a Chinese male unskilled worker approaching retirement:

> Now I am old, without strong educational background and competences, I only want a stable job, with a certain amount of money.

The relative importance of financial security also depends on general economic conditions. The last global financial crisis has made financial security more salient again for people across occupations, especially in countries that were severely hit by the crisis.

Financial Achievement

> If you've got a dollar and you spend 29 cents on a loaf of bread, you've got 71 cents left; But if you've got seventeen grand and you spend 29 cents on a loaf of bread, you've still got seventeen grand. There's a math lesson for you.
> - Steve Martin

The success criterion of financial achievement is exemplified by the following quotes:

Career success should always feature a relatively high income, a car and a house.
- N.N., Chinese male in his fifties

I probably would just measure it [career success] in terms of being financially independent by sort of age of 40, 45 or something like that. And that doesn't mean I want to have millions and millions. It's just I want to be able to sort of live.
- Chris, white South African Male, 35

Financial achievement is one of the most commonly valued meanings of career success, regardless of the country and cultural context, as long as financial security is not salient. It is characterized by three facets that are robust across various cultures and occupations. People experience financial achievement when they steadily make more money, achieve wealth, and more instrumentally, receive high incentives and perks. The notion of steadily making more money reminds us that it is not only the absolute numbers that matter, but also the rate of progress being made in financial terms during the career. This is nicely illustrated in the definition of career success provided by a Malay business woman in Malaysia in her twenties as "progression from one job to another and moving from one company to a better one, which offers better pay and more benefits." Financial achievement is also related to other dynamics such as promotions, outperforming others, and gaining a higher social status.

Financial achievement as a career success meaning is more salient for people working in industries that traditionally revolve around money such as banking, finance, and sales. On average, it is more central in achievement-oriented cultures/countries such as the USA and the UK. Financial achievement also seems to be a salient career success facet in transitional countries such as China or Serbia, where newly available economic opportunities fuel a desire for wealth that may not have been attainable in the past.

Although the prospect of getting rich fast might have lost some of its allure in light of

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growing global inequalities and their implications, financial achievement remains a widely held facet of career success. Many people still consider how much money they make to be a very important, visible signal of their career success.

Born to Grow: Learning and Development

Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel.
- Socrates

There can be more to life than the tangible aspects associated with financial resources. Our findings suggest that learning and development is also often an important meaning of career success. Learning is interesting as a form of career success for various reasons. For one thing it is frequently an ongoing, sustainable, and renewable form of career success. It brings satisfaction as it is "exercised" but can rarely be "checked off" as complete. Consider this definition of career success from a young American business woman in her late twenties:

> *It's a job or a position where it allows you to grow as a whole person. It allows you to grow in your personal skills, and working with other people. So it's not just you as a wonderful person, but there's the team synergy that you're growing and improving them as well.*

This quote illustrates one of two types of learning we encountered in participants' meanings of career success: *continuous informal learning* attained on-the-job as well as from change, failure, and enriched life experience. The second type, *formal learning,* involves the acquisition of professional skills via training and/or formal education. Along these lines, a female Austrian nurse in her early twenties expressed her view of career success this way:

> *Career Success? To me, of course, finishing this education means*
>
> *success.*

National culture affects the importance of learning and development as an element of career success. In the qualitative phase of our studies, learning and development was an important

dimension of career success in six countries: Austria, China, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Serbia, and the USA. Some research suggests that employees in collectivist countries expect more in-house training and development due to their intention to remain with a single organization. This is interesting in relation to our findings as five of the six countries in which learning and development was seen as important are collectivist – the exception being the USA. We considered whether skill development over time might be particularly important in countries with a long-term orientation. However, our empirical results were inconsistent.

We noticed that learning as a form of career success is in some ways a luxury, appreciated more by those whose basic economic needs are met. It was rare to encounter people without basic financial stability who reported learning as a form of career success. When they did, it was almost always introduced to them by a mentor. For example, in very different countries such as Malaysia, South Africa, and the United States, we encountered younger workers who, while trying to earn a living through adhering to the basic requirements of their role, adopted a more learning-oriented view of success when mentors (peer and/or traditional) challenged or taught them that they could learn and do more than merely fulfilling basic performance expectations.

Across age groups, no consistent pattern of differences emerges with regard to the importance of learning and development. For example, in Austria, Malaysia, and South Africa, both older and newer generations see learning and development as important, while in Israel, Mexico and Spain it is primarily older interviewees. In contrast, it is primarily the younger generation that emphasizes its importance in the USA. Likewise, no systematic differences could be observed with regard to gender or occupation.

People as Social Beings: Relating to the World

Humans are social beings with a built-in tendency to relate to the outer world. In relation to

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career success, three facets emerged as particularly important: work-life balance, positive interpersonal relationships, and positive impact on the broader world. We detail them in turn.

Work-Life Balance

> *The only pride of her workday was not that it had been lived, but that it had been survived. It was wrong, she thought, it was viciously wrong that one should ever be forced to say that about any hour of one's life.*
>
> - Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*

Work-life balance means different things to different people. With regard to career success, three aspects emerged: achieving a satisfying balance between work and family life, achieving balance between work and non-work activities, and having time for non-work interests. This suggests that career success will be judged not only by the intrinsic factors associated with work, but also by the impact this work has on the broader aspects of life. Career success thus involves the interplay between work and life. Individuals strive to find their personal optimum in this balance and rate their career success by their ability to do so. Not achieving this balance, then, has an impact on their overall feeling of career success. Toni, a businessman in his 50s from Spain describes this notion:

> *It gets to a point where more responsibility would have conflicted with enjoying my spouse, my children, and other people. If I had wanted to go higher I should have to trade off either more hours at work or more hours with my family. A little more satisfaction in my work would have meant much less satisfaction in my family life.*

Although work-life balance is a central element to definitions of career success across the globe, we see a varying degree of importance placed on it by different groups. Factors such as age, career stage, family status and commitments, culture, and contextual or institutional factors affect its importance. As expected, younger individuals at early career stages and without family responsibilities place less emphasis on work-family balance, but more on having time for non-work interests. Cultural and contextual differences play a major role too. For example, in

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collectivist cultures such as China or South Africa, family represents the nucleus and work-family balance is a particularly salient aspect of career success. Participants from these cultures describe the greatest degree of conflict between balancing work demands with that of family or community expectations. Sibongale, a 24 year old black business woman from South Africa expresses this vividly:

> *My parents would like to see me married and having a family. That goes back to the whole community-family thing. For my parents that is more important — they feel it's great that I'm driven, but they also feel you're successful if you can balance your work life with your family.*

Another important aspect that affects the importance of work-life balance is the amount of significant contextual or institutional change that countries experience. For example, older Chinese participants having lived through the significant political and economic changes of the past decades report a greater emphasis on financial achievement and security than their younger counterparts when describing career success. This points to the sharp effect of context in shaping definitions of career success.

Our results support the literature emphasizing the increasing importance of work-life balance as an important feature in contemporary workplaces.

Positive Relationships

> *The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed.*
> - Carl G. Jung

We have known for decades that relationships can have motivating power, though the idea that relationships can be seen as a form of personal career success is a more recent and important insight. For many, career success is based upon the quality of the relationships with coworkers. In line with both learning and development and work-life balance, positive relationships as a facet of career success are not so much a destination but more an ongoing quest, and one that must be

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nurtured. Indicators of positive relationships include a "well-done" on a routine task, or being deeply invigorated from working with people whom you respect and admire.

We found people in all cultures who equated career success with simple appreciation and feedback. In the vein of simple feedback, one female Israeli research participant near the end of her career expresses the importance of recognition to career success:

> *To be appreciated by others is more important for me than to earn a*
> *thousand dollars more...*

Other people focus on relationships as having inherent importance in and of themselves, rather than as a source of recognition. Cromwell, a 54 year old black businessman in South Africa described the importance good relationships have to his definition of career success:

> *Career success to me is when you engage in an activity that you love best*
> *and, in doing it, you end up working with a team and not only a perfect*
> *team, but people you could relate to and almost pushing you to work in a*
> *field that you enjoy.*

Positive relationships as indicators of career success vary from person to person and culture to culture. Perhaps not surprisingly, fewer descriptions of career success in the United States reflect the importance of relationships in and of themselves, instead placing greater emphasis on the relationship outcome of recognition. Across cultures, most nurses acknowledged the social value of their work as they discussed success. However, the picture with blue collar employees varied widely. In some cultures such as Austria, success for a blue collar worker tends to involve more structure and certification, in addition to a healthy income and these may at times be at the expense of building positive relationships. In countries with fewer regulations or certifications, such as Malaysia or Mexico, rudimentary material success may require heavy informal networking. Additionally, Latin America and Spanish cultures seemed to infuse work with meaning tied to relationships, regardless of occupation.

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Positive Impact

The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.
- Mahatma Gandhi

Finding meaning in work through serving others is a strong element of career success for many people. Positive impact manifests in two ways: in a more 'proximal' way, in the sense of helping others in one's immediate social environment like coworkers or clients; and in a more 'distal' way, in the sense of leaving some sort of legacy to a community, or society more broadly.

Hardly surprisingly, the theme of helping others is particularly pronounced in people more advanced in their career. When approaching the end of their careers, people often express a growing sense of fulfilment from helping and mentoring younger colleagues – a desire to leave something behind that would still be there after their retirement. The concept of positive impact implies transcending purely individualistic needs and aspirations to contribute something to the collective or the world. A 61 year old Chinese female managing director of a business training institute in Malaysia remarked:

> *If you think that money is important then find a career that gives you that, you know. In my life it was always, you know, people. How can I help to make it easier or better? … [If] I can do something to help out something or somebody, you know, I do it. So, to me I think I am successful, not in monetary terms but in other ways.*

For some helping others and contributing to something beyond oneself seem to be necessary preconditions in order to feel their career has had meaning and purpose. Looking at recent media coverage of high-profile entrepreneurs we cannot help but notice that making a social impact is increasingly a marker of success in the eyes of the world. This covers such different efforts as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 20-year old Dutch Boyan Slat's Ocean ambitious Cleanup initiative, or the Lighting Africa project by Senegalese-American

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recording artist Akon aiming at providing 600 million Africans with solar power by 2016.

The importance of impact not only varies for individuals over time as they mature and move through the early, mid, and late career stages, but it also depends on context. For example, one black South-African businessman in his fifties remarked that he felt it was significantly more difficult to experience impact and meaningfulness in the jobs he had held in multinational for-profit companies and consultancies than in the smaller companies and public service organizations where he had worked.

Some 50 years ago, Albert Einstein suggested that "It is high time the ideal of success should be replaced with the ideal of service. Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile." The widespread importance accorded to having a positive impact suggests that this may be becoming a norm by which the careers of those living and working in many cultures may be judged.

Doing it My Way: Entrepreneurship

Business opportunities are like buses, there's always another one coming.
- Richard Branson

Entrepreneurship is an important element of perceived career success across the globe. It consists of two prime elements: founding one's own enterprise and being able to pursue one's own 'projects' in the career.

Founding one's own enterprise is an important element of career success, albeit more so for individuals who are equipped for such an endeavor both in terms of motivation and competencies. Putting a lot of importance on this aspect in one's career is clearly demanding in terms of working time, as the experiences of a young Mexican business man around 30 illustrates:

> *I used to work until very late every day because I liked my job very much*
> *so I decided to better invest this extra time in starting to create my own*
> *graphic design company. ... I joined a business incubator which*

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> *enormously helped me to start developing a business plan for my own*
> *company.*

Entrepreneurial intentions and career activities aimed at founding a business are not independent of educational systems and culture. Yafa, a 62-year old female CEO in Israel, expresses this quite clearly:

> *I have a good basis due to the brainwashing I received during my studies*
> *in the US in the 60s. A wonderful period, I grew up in an atmosphere of*
> *'all is possible', and I still have many ideals. I was educated that in each*
> *period of life you have to learn and develop and the moment you*
> *exhausted this you leave. ... Also, I have no doubts that my education in*
> *Israel was less good than in the US, especially the interaction with*
> *people.*

Entrepreneurship as a career success meaning also has a second element, echoing the well-known 'entrepreneurial creativity' career anchor proposed by Edgar Schein. It emphasizes the importance of being able to invent and develop one's own projects within the work context, to be identified with a specific undertaking and to be responsible for it. Yasa, the Israeli CEO quoted above, expresses this nicely:

> *I left the company and then searched for the next 'baby'. I can't look for*
> *the next point as long as I'm in an old company, I'm very loyal, and find*
> *it not ethical, I have no fears of making the break. I create my flexibilities,*
> *I know I'll find something interesting, there are so many interesting*
> *things in the world, why not find them?*

LESSONS

Against the backdrop of what we know about career success and its various meanings around the globe, what does this mean in practical terms? We discuss consequences for individuals, organizations, and then counselors, coaches, and consultants.

For the individual

Our findings raise two issues: (i) The need to reflect on your personal portfolio of career success meanings, and (ii) the importance of dealing with the tensions between various meanings

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of career success. Before doing so, it is useful to first clarify what career roles you ought to pursue. A good method for doing so, as used by Boston College theology professor Father Michael Himes, is to seriously ask yourself:

→ *What am I good at?*

→ *What gives me joy?*

→ *What does the world need?*

Pondering these universal questions, as well as the process of finding answers to them, may help you discover the paths for pursuing your personal definition of career success. Two related initiatives are to: (i) Reflect upon your personal portfolio of career success meanings, and (ii) Deal with the tensions between your various meanings of career success.

Reflecting upon your personal portfolio of career success meanings. Our results may facilitate reflection upon what career success means to you. Some guiding questions are:

→ *How prominent are the various meanings in my personal portfolio of career success meanings?*

→ *Are there large differences in the value I place on the various meanings with high peaks and deep valleys, or are they more or less equal?*

→ *How does my personal career success meaning portfolio influence my career decisions?*

→ *To what extent were my career success meanings chosen by myself as opposed to being inherited or imposed upon me by others?*

→ *Do I see them as sustainable?*

→ *What factors might change the current meanings and their relative importance?*

→ *What alternative, viable paths might allow me to achieve career success in a manner more congruent with my wishes?*

There are various concrete ways to tackle such questions. One approach is to conduct an annual inventory. Perhaps around the New Year, you might carefully reflect on what gives you

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joy, what you value, or what your goals might be. Then think seriously about whether you are getting there. If you aren't attaining your goals, consider whether you can be happy anyway or what you might do differently. Another approach is to work with a coach, whereby together you reflect on the importance of various meanings of career success and their consequences for the career decisions ahead. Still another approach is to use peer-groups where you can exchange views, discuss options, and get encouragement. For example, one of the authors meets with a group of trusted coworkers every two months or so to discuss issues relating to his own career. Given the insight the other group members have regarding their organization and academia generally, fruitful discussions often emerge.

When dealing with these issues, think deeply but be practical too. Two of the authors interviewed various unemployed workers in Australia, including actors and would-be entertainers. Many lived hand to mouth, full of hopes but with empty stomachs. One young man, however, had planned ahead and saved money to support himself for two years' while pursuing his dream of becoming a professional entertainer.

Dealing with the tensions between your various meanings of career success. The diverse meanings of career success can lead to stress, cognitive dissonance, and frustration when meanings are not fulfilled. You need to balance your career ideals with feeding your family and sustaining your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Robert Frost's poem of *The Road Not Taken* elegantly describes the problems people face when choosing between two diverging roads and dwelling on the potential of the road less traveled. Different meanings of career success point individuals into different directions. However, trying to vigorously pursue them simultaneously can lead to contradictory demands. The challenge may be to make peace with the road you are on.

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For organizations

The organizational implications of the multiple meanings of career success are substantial and involve (i) integrating individual career mastery with organizational career planning; and (ii) balancing the dualities of cross-border standardization and contextual responsiveness.

Integrate individual career mastery with organizational career planning. One finding in each of the countries where we explored career success was that people in greater numbers than in the past – particularly the younger and more educated – often regard themselves as directing their own career. Organizations need to strongly embrace this individualization of career planning, coaching, and development and opportunities. If opportunities to strive for and experience the most valued meanings of career success are missing, people tend to disengage and may even quit – a costly outcome for your organization in terms of lost resources and reputation.

By paying attention to the array of meanings that career success can have, organizations can set up more flexible employment conditions, opportunities, and career trajectories to appeal to people with different career success meanings. Offering choices in working conditions (e.g., flextime and carer's leave) and career development opportunities (e.g., job rotation and project-related, stretch-assignments), can lead to a more motivated, skilled, engaged, and flexible workforce.

Balance the dualities of cross-border standardization and contextual responsiveness. Legal and cultural components emerge as having a substantial impact on what individuals expect from their career and, consequently, on both individual and organizational career decisions. For instance, individuals in countries such as the USA and UK with more generalist career patterns are more likely to pursue broader career opportunities beyond organizational silos. In contrast, multinational corporations (MNCs) that promote cross-functional moves are likely to face

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guarded reactions in countries such as in Germany in which deep expertise and experience is valued. These different country career patterns become a challenge in MNCs that pursue a high degree of integration of their human resource practices. Highly integrated MNCs risk undermining notions of career success dictated by employees' home culture. To create rich and well-suited career success experiences for your employees, HR practitioners and consultants need extensive cultural understanding and the expertise to assess both local themes and each individual's unique career preferences in order to find the right balance of integration and responsiveness.

The career success meanings identified through our research can be useful in understanding workforce dynamics. Consider the challenging virtual team where a manager is working to coordinate the successful international launch of a new product line. The team is diverse with young innovators in South Africa, older experienced managers from the US, young engineers in China, and production specialists in Serbia. The manager is inexperienced working with such a diverse group and the team is not working effectively. Examining the seven career success factors through conversations with each individual or via a group discussion can help the manager better appreciate the different vantage points through which team members seek to experience success in this organization. Questions for the manager to consider are:

→ *What is the cultural context of each country?*

→ *What is its social and economic history?*

→ *Is there a heavy emphasis on family and community that will influence work-life balance demands?*

Each of the career success factors could be discussed in order to help build cohesion and better tolerance of the diversity within the team.

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For counselors, coaches, and consultants

Our findings provide a new mechanism whereby career practitioners can help develop awareness of what career success means to individuals. For example, counselors can explore how each of the career success factors differ in importance or motivation within individuals and how this emphasis may have changed over time or life stages. These can be useful exercises to do in one-to-one contexts as well as group settings, exploring individual differences and similarities alike. Teams can go through these exercises too and comparison between career success motivators can help build a team's cohesion, in a similar way to other team building tools. Such awareness can be an input into initiatives aimed at enhancing outcomes such as confidence, motivation, identity, career decision-making, and ultimately performance. Although similar frameworks for measuring career success are available, they have not been validated globally.

Knowing that an individual's portfolio of career success meanings are driven in part by culture, in part by organizational context, from one's family socialization and in part by idiosyncratic individual factors, counselors and coaches can help employees tease out the possible genesis of their success meanings and help them to arrive at a more informed and self-selected representation of what career success *truly* means to them. Helping people to clarify their values can build authenticity, congruence, and resulting gains in satisfaction, engagement, and performance.

On a collective level, career success dimensions might be used by consultants to assess the diversity of career values within an organization's culture or between potential merger partners. Certain consultancies already specialize in not only assessing the values of individuals and their organizations, but also brokering conversations between these counterparts before major strategic initiatives are undertaken. This process is an important strategic tool that speaks to the context of

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modern organizations with more evolved psychological contracts. This already complex feat is complicated by the myriad of cultural and individual values that might be present, even if not manifested in a given organization. Use of our global relevant understanding of career success will hopefully help such efforts.

CONCLUSION

There is *no one best way* to define career success, in any country. We suspect that organizations that embrace narrow, traditional conceptions of career success will nonetheless suffer from failing to attract and retain the most engaged available talent required to adapt to a diverse and changing world. The seven meanings of career success with their respective individualized shape and the differences we find in career success meanings with regard to age, profession, and cultural and institutional context may enable responding to the call for more creativity, individualization, and flexibility in the design and implementation of organizational career systems.

Likewise, for individuals our results might support adopting an active and courageous approach to shaping of your own career. Indeed, our results echo a fundamental question regarding career success, that is, whether career success is a destination or an ongoing process always in the making. We hope that personal reflection upon your aspirations and career initiatives in relation to the seven meanings of career success will help guide your personal quest for career success – whatever it means to you.

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