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# Career Success Investigation

Sue Mulhall

*Dublin Institute of Technology*, [sue.mulhall@dit.ie](mailto:sue.mulhall@dit.ie)

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# CSI: Career Success Investigation



SUE MULHALL\*

## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how researchers have responded to requests to encourage a broader definition of career success by conducting research with underrepresented groups. It investigates the sample populations that are researched, and the type of work experience that is studied, by reviewing 89 articles in journals concerned with the construct of career success from 1992 to 2009. The paper finds that such research principally focuses on managers, professionals and administrators, and the work-related experience considered is almost exclusively situated in the domain of paid employment, particularly full-time employment. It argues that the definition of career success tends to only relate to those in paid employment (predominantly full-time), and, by extension, those who are not in this realm do not have career success. Researchers are encouraged to incorporate those with non-traditional employment arrangements and those in non-paid work into studies, a call assisted by proffering a revised definition of career success.

**Key Words:** career success; paid employment; non-paid employment; non-traditional employment

## INTRODUCTION

Concentrate on what doesn't lie: the evidence.

Gil Grissom, from the TV series *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*

Career success research draws on career theory and, therefore, on the ideas included in career theory; that is, its underlying definitions, concepts, relationships and assumptions (Arthur et al., 2005). To take account of the change inherent in the conceptualisation of the contemporary career concept (e.g. Arnold and Cohen, 2008), and the resultant divergence in the way individuals enact their career patterns (e.g. Briscoe and Hall, 2006), there have been repeated calls to re-conceptualise career success to encourage a broader definition of the construct by conducting research with underrepresented groups (e.g. Sullivan and Baruch, 2009).

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\* Director of People Matters

This paper investigates how researchers have responded to these requests, investigating the sample populations that are researched, and the type of work experience that is studied when inquirers examine respondents' evaluations of their achievements during their work-related experiences, that is, their career success (Arthur et al., 2005). It begins by conceptualising the concept of career and its associated construct, career success. This is followed by a review of 89 articles in established journals concerned with the construct of career success over the period 1992 to 2009. It finds that such research predominantly focuses on managers, professionals and administrators, and the work-related experience that is studied is almost exclusively situated in the domain of paid employment, particularly the full-time variety of that realm. The paper discusses the implications of the inconsistent positions of scholars positing a conceptual inclusion of a broad church in the career success construct, whilst empirical researchers virtually exclude underexplored minorities from their studies, including those with non-traditional employment patterns and non-paid work experiences. It argues that the definition of career success, and associated research, to date tends to only relate to those in paid employment (predominantly full-time), and, by extension, those who are not in paid employment (predominantly full-time) do not have career success. A call is sounded for researchers to explicitly incorporate those with non-traditional employment arrangements, such as part-time employees, in addition to those in non-paid work, such as volunteers, into their studies. Their absence highlights a limitation in the empirical research, as it does not reflect the diversity of career patterns that individuals enact, thus not fully considering a person's evaluation of his or her achievements during his or her varied work-related experiences, regardless of status or context. A revised definition of career success is proffered to bridge this gap.

## CONCEPTUALISING CAREER AND CAREER SUCCESS

### Conceptualising Career

When considering the definitions given to career over the years, it is noticeable that in parallel with the changes occurring in society, there has been a shift in terminology: from jobs to experiences, and from organisational to post-organisational (Arthur et al., 2005; Dries, Pepermans and De Kerpel, 2008). Consequently, there has been a noticeable evolution in the way career has been defined. The Chicago School of Sociologists, epitomised by Hughes (1937), observe that a career consists, 'objectively, of a series of status and clearly defined offices' (Hughes, 1937: 409) and 'subjectively ... is the moving perspective in which the person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes, actions, and the things which happen to him' (Hughes, 1937: 411). Wilensky (1961) refers to career as 'a succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered (more-or-less predictable) sequence' (Wilensky, 1961: 523). Super (1980: 286) defines a career as 'a sequence of positions held during the course of a lifetime'. A consensus seems to have emerged that the established description of career emanates from Arthur et al. (1989: 8) as: 'the unfolding sequence of any person's work experiences over time' (e.g. Arnold and Cohen, 2008; Arthur et al., 2005; Dries, Pepermans and Carlier, 2008).

In tandem with the changing definition of career, new concepts have emerged, devised to reflect an altered environment, with increased globalisation, rapid technological advancements, growing workforce diversity and the expanding use of outsourcing and part-time and temporary employees (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). These events are said to have transformed traditional organisational structures, employer–employee relationships and the work context, creating divergence in how individuals enact their careers (Briscoe and Hall, 2006; Sullivan and Baruch, 2009).

The demise of the traditional, bureaucratic career has been oft mooted (e.g. Hall, 1976, 1996; Sullivan and Arthur, 2006), being replaced by more embracing notions of career, based on the accumulation of skills and knowledge and the integration of professional and personal life. Various concepts and metaphors have been developed to capture this shifting landscape. The protean career pertains to where the individual is able to rearrange and repackage his or her knowledge, skills and abilities to meet the demands of a changing workplace, in addition to his or her need for self-fulfilment (Hall, 1976, 1996). The boundaryless career describes a sequence of job opportunities that go beyond the borders of a single employer, so individuals are independent, rather than dependent on traditional organisational career arrangements (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994). The post-corporate career refers to careers taking place outside of large organisations, whereby individuals enact a multitude of alternative options (Peiperl and Baruch, 1997). Career profiles combine the two components of the boundaryless career (psychological and physical mobility), plus the two factors of the protean career (values-driven and self-directed career management attitudes), yielding sixteen potential career profiles (Briscoe and Hall, 2006). Finally, the Kaleidoscope Career Model explains how individuals focus on three parameters (authenticity, balance and challenge) when making career decisions (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005).

Both traditional and contemporary career theories propose an inherent two-sidedness of the career concept (Arthur et al., 2005). The objective element emulates the more or less publicly observable positions, situations and statuses that serve as benchmarks for gauging a person's movement through the social locale (Barley, 1989), comprising predictable stages and an ordered sequence of development. The subjective dimension reflects the individual's own sense of his or her career and what it is becoming (Stebbins, 1970), defined by the personal interpretations and values that identity bestows on them. These two sides, the objective and the subjective, are seen to be persistently dependent (Hughes, 1937) and this interdependence occurs over time (Lawrence, 1996).

### **Conceptualising Career Success**

Career success is an outcome of a person's career experiences and involves the individual's evaluation of desirable work-related outcomes at any point during these experiences (Arthur et al., 2005; Gattiker and Larwood, 1990; Hennequin, 2007; Judge and Bretz, 1994; Poon, 2004). There are two broad strands of research in the career success literature: different ways of construing career success and how they are (or are not) related to each other; and what predicts and influences career success (Arnold and Cohen, 2008).

With regard to the first element, conceptualising and measuring career success, as with careers, there are two distinct ways of viewing career success: objective and subjective positions. Objective career success may be characterised as an external perspective that delineates more or less tangible indicators of an individual's career situation (Van Maanen, 1977). It reflects shared social comprehension, rather than individual understanding (Nicholson and De Waal-Andrews, 2005). Measures of objective career success may, therefore, involve factors such as occupation, mobility, task attributes, income and job level (Van Maanen, 1977). Subjective career success may be described as a person's internal apprehension and evaluation of his or her career, across any dimensions that are important to that individual (Van Maanen, 1977). As people place different values on the same issues, subjective career success consists of utilities that are only identifiable by introspection, not by observation or consensual validation (Nicholson and De Waal-Andrews, 2005). Measures of subjective career success, consequently, may include a person's reactions to actual and anticipated career-related attainments across a wide range of outcomes, such as job and career satisfaction (Boudreau, Boswell and Judge, 2001). It has been suggested that the depth and breadth of the career success construct can be harnessed by looking through both lenses simultaneously, typifying the duality and interdependence between the objective and subjective sides of career (Abele and Spurk, 2009; Barley, 1989; Walton and Mallon, 2004).

Whether career attainments lead people to experience career success is likely to depend upon the standards against which they are appraised. Objective and subjective career outcomes may be assessed relative to personal standards (self-referent criteria) or the achievements and expectations of others (other-referent criteria) (Heslin, 2005). Self-referent factors reflect an individual's career-related standards and aspirations, whereas other-referent elements involve comparisons with others. Individuals can, therefore, evaluate their career success using self-referent and other-referent criteria drawn from both the objective and subjective domains (Heslin, 2005).

Moving away from the first facet of career success research, the different ways of understanding the construct, to the second main area, predictors and influencers of career success (Arnold and Cohen, 2008), the meta-analysis conducted by Ng et al. (2005) is a key resource. The meta-analysis classifies the predictors of career success as four types: human capital (work centrality, hours worked, education level attained, international experience, political knowledge and skills); organisational sponsorship (supervisor support and organisational resources as a surrogate for organisational size); socio-demographics (gender, race, marital status and age); and stable individual differences (personality characteristics) (Ng et al., 2005). The study finds that there are discernible patterns: human capital and socio-demographic variables tend to correlate with salary; organisational sponsorship and individual difference variables are the better predictors of career satisfaction; promotion has few substantial correlates; and salary disadvantages emerge for women relative to men, and non-whites compared to whites (Ng et al., 2005).

### Calls to Re-Conceptualise Career Success

Recently there have been calls to re-conceptualise career success to encourage a broader definition of the construct (e.g. Arnold and Cohen, 2008; Arthur et al., 2005; Dries, Pepermans and De Kerpel, 2008; Gunz and Heslin, 2005; Hall and Harrington, 2004; Hennequin, 2007; Heslin, 2005; Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). Table 1 outlines the comments from the key contributors to the debate, dividing such requests into appeals to conduct research with underrepresented groups and invitations to inquire into a variety of work experiences.

**Table 1: Key Contributors to the Call to Re-Conceptualise Career Success**

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Comments Regarding Underrepresented Groups</b>	<b>Comments Regarding Variety of Work Experiences</b>
Arnold and Cohen (2008)	'The lived experience of less privileged career actors might provide a useful antidote to the existing, largely elitist discourse ... [such as] migrants.' (2008: 13)	'Career [success] research neglects a "whole person" perspective.' (2008: 19) 'The applicability of career theory in different contexts ... requires much more thorough examination.' (2008: 34)
Arthur et al. (2005)	Not applicable	'If career success is to be measured relative to one's peer group, and if it is accepted that this peer group will commonly go beyond the employing organization ... measure [it] ... without regard for employment status or boundaries.' (2005: 195)
Dries, Pepermans and De Kerpel (2008)	'A more diversified perception of what career success might mean to different groups of employees ... becomes inevitable.' (2008: 924)	Not applicable
Gunz and Heslin (2005)	'How do people with responsibilities for other people's lives – managers, parents, counsellors, teachers, policy-makers – frame what they say and do to affect those lives?' (2005: 109)	'How is [career] success defined in different social settings?' (2005: 109)

(Continued)

Table 1: (Continued)

Author(s)	Comments Regarding Underrepresented Groups	Comments Regarding Variety of Work Experiences
Hall and Harrington (2004)	Not applicable	'Career research should incorporate other, non-work related elements of a person's life.' (2004: 3)
Hennequin (2007)	'[The present study illustrates] the need to let blue-collar workers explain themselves in order to understand their career expectations.' (2007: 578)	Not applicable
Heslin (2005)	'More theory and research is needed on what career success means to people such as entrepreneurs, older workers, the self-employed, the physically and mentally challenged, migrant workers, expatriates, stigmatized workers (e.g. people living with HIV), teleworkers, the under-employed.' (2005: 128)	'More theory and research is needed on what career success means to people such as ... single parents, volunteers, etc.' (2005: 128)
Sullivan and Baruch (2009)	'More research is still needed on underrepresented populations, such as blue-collar workers, immigrant workers, the disabled, and minorities, as well as on those making major transitions.' (2009: 1563)	'Additional investigation of how nonpaid work (i.e. volunteerism) contributes to people's careers is also needed.' (2009: 1563)

To complement the evolution of concepts and the development of new ideas in career theory, Table 1 illustrates that there have been repeated requests from scholars to study the various types of careers in today's complex workplace. The next section investigates how career success researchers have responded to these calls.

## PRESENTING THE EVIDENCE

### Introduction

A total of 89 articles are examined in a continuous timeframe (1992–2009). Summary data, listed chronologically, are provided in Tables 2 and 3, referring to the time intervals of 1992–2002 and 2003–2009 respectively. The review is tabulated sequentially to reflect the evolution of the career concept. The first period (1992–2002) is based on the work of



Arthur et al. (2005) and covers 68 articles. The second period (2003–2009) is founded on this author's own analysis and comprises 21 articles. The initial timeline reflects a comprehensive examination of articles on career success by Arthur et al. (2005). The latter period expands upon the earlier review, encompassing the recent research on the construct, on a full year basis, since the conduct of the original inquiry.

Following the recommendation of Arthur et al. (2005), additional terms relating to career success, such as 'career outcomes' (Campion et al., 1994), 'career advancement' (Burlew and Johnson, 1992), 'career satisfaction' (Nicholson, 1993) and 'managerial advancement' (Tharenou, 2001), are incorporated to provide a fuller picture of the research undertaken. Given the chosen timescale of the review (1992–2009), studies such as Gattiker and Larwood's (1986, 1988, 1989, 1990) conceptualisation of career success (job success, interpersonal success, financial success, hierarchical success and life success), are necessarily precluded. Theoretical or research articles concerned with various sub-dimensions of career effects (such as organisational attachment, work–family conflict, career patterns and career development) but not with career success as an outcome per se are not considered. In addition, the meta-analysis by Ng et al. (2005) is not incorporated for two reasons. Firstly, some of the research would inevitably be duplicated because this review covers similar studies to Ng et al. (2005). Secondly, it is difficult to ascertain the detail contained in the studies referred to in the meta-analysis.

### Empirical Research on Career Success, 1992–2002

The first investigation of the empirical research on career success is based on an assessment of 68 articles by Arthur et al. (2005) from 1992 to 2002. Table 2 details the articles relating to objective and subjective career success in chronological order. It excludes studies pertaining to the predictors of career success, thus focusing on inquiries involving outcomes. The majority of the articles use the following definition of career success: 'The accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person's work experiences over time' (Arthur et al., 2005: 179).

**Table 2: Empirical Research on Career Success (1992–2002) in Chronological Order**

Number	Year	Authors	Criteria	Participants
1.	1992	Burlew and Johnson	Career advancement – subjective career factors only	Professionals
2.	1992	Chi-Ching	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Managers
3.	1992	Stroh et al.	Career advancement – objective career factors only	Managers

(Continued)



Table 2: (Continued)

Number	Year	Authors	Criteria	Participants
4.	1993	Aryee and Debrah	Career planning – subjective career factors only	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
5.	1993	Nicholson	Career satisfaction – objective and subjective career factors	Managers
6.	1993	Peluchette	Subjective career success – subjective career factors only	Faculty members of university
7.	1993	Poole et al.	Perceived career success – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
8.	1993	Schneer and Reitman	Career path – objective and subjective career factors	Managers
9.	1993	Whitely and Coetsier	Early career outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Managers and professionals
10.	1994	Aryee et al.	Subjective career success – subjective career factors only	Managers
11.	1994	Campion et al.	Career outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
12.	1994	Chao et al.	Career effectiveness – objective and subjective career factors	Professionals
13.	1994	Judge and Bretz	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
14.	1994	O'Reilly III and Chatman	Early career success – objective career factors only	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations

(Continued)

Table 2: (Continued)

Number	Year	Authors	Criteria	Participants
15.	1994	Schneer and Reitman	Career path – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
16.	1994	Tharenou et al.	Managerial advancement – objective career factors only	Managers
17.	1994	Turban and Dougherty	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Managers and professionals
18.	1995	Gianakos	Perceived importance of job outcomes – subjective career factors only	Students
19.	1995	Judge et al.	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Executives
20.	1995	Melamed	Career success – objective career factors only	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
21.	1995	Orpen	Career success – objective career factors only	Mixed hierarchical levels
22.	1995	Schneer and Reitman	Career path – objective and subjective career factors	Managers
23.	1995	Tremblay et al.	Career plateau – objective and subjective career factors	Managers
24.	1996	Aryee and Luk	Career satisfaction – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
25.	1996	Aryee et al.	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Managers

(Continued)

Table 2: (Continued)

Number	Year	Authors	Criteria	Participants
26.	1996	Dreher and Cox	Career outcomes – objective career factors only	Mixed hierarchical levels and self-employed in a range of occupations
27.	1996	Melamed	Career success – objective career factors only	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
28.	1996	Murrell et al.	Career outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Managers
29.	1996	Taylor et al.	Past career success – objective career factors only	Managers
30.	1997	Chao	Career outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
31.	1997	Konrad and Cannings	Managerial advancement – objective career factors only	Middle level managers
32.	1997	Lyness and Thompson	Work outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Executives
33.	1997	Schneer and Reitman	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Managers
34.	1998	Dreher and Chargois	Career outcome – objective career factors only	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
35.	1998	Friedman et al.	Career optimism – subjective career factors only	Managers and non-managerial staff
36.	1998	Hurley and Sonnenfeld	Managerial career attainment – objective career factors only	Managers

(Continued)

Table 2: (Continued)

Number	Year	Authors	Criteria	Participants
37.	1998	Kirchmeyer	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Managers
38.	1998	Lee and Nolan	Career advancement – objective and subjective career factors	Administrators
39.	1998	Orpen	Career success – objective career factors only	Employees in financial services – mixed hierarchical levels
40.	1999	Blake-Beard	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
41.	1999	Judge, Higgins, Thoresen and Barrick	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
42.	1999	Judge, Thoresen, Pucik and Welbourne	Career outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Managers
43.	1999	Judiesch and Lyness	Career success – objective career factors only	Managers
44.	1999	Ragins and Cotton	Career outcomes – objective career factors only	Professionals
45.	1999	Seibert et al.	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
46.	1999	Tharenou	Managerial career advancement – objective career factors only	Managers
47.	1999	Wayne et al.	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels

(Continued)

Table 2: (Continued)

Number	Year	Authors	Criteria	Participants
48.	2000	Brown et al.	Career decision-making self-efficacy – objective and subjective career factors	Student athletes
49.	2000	Lyness and Thompson	Career success – objective career factors only	Executives
50.	2000	Peluchette and Jeanquart	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Professionals
51.	2000	Spell and Blum	Career advancement – subjective career factors only	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
52.	2000	Van Scotter et al.	Career outcomes – objective career factors only	Air force mechanics
53.	2001	Boudreau, Boswell and Judge	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Managers
54.	2001	Boudreau, Boswell, Judge and Bretz	Career outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Managers
55.	2001	Harris et al.	Career outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
56.	2001	Higgins and Thomas	Career outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Lawyers
57.	2001	Jansen and Stoop	Career success – objective career factors only	Managers
58.	2001	Murphy and Ensher	Perceived career success – subjective career factors only	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
59.	2001	Seibert and Kraimer	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations

(Continued)

Table 2: (Continued)

Number	Year	Authors	Criteria	Participants
60.	2001	Seibert, Kraimer and Crant	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
61.	2001	Seibert, Kraimer and Liden	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Engineers
62.	2001	Tharenou	Managerial advancement – objective career factors only	Managers
63.	2001	Wallace	Career and emotional outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Lawyers
64.	2002	Cable and DeRue	Career outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Managers
65.	2002	De Fruyt	Intrinsic career outcomes – subjective career factors only	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
66.	2002	Johnson and Stokes	Career outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
67.	2002	Martins et al.	Career outcomes, career satisfaction – objective and subjective career factors	Managers and professionals
68.	2002	Wiese et al.	Subjective career success – subjective career factors only	Professionals

Source: Adapted from Arthur et al. (2005: 184–190). Table adapted with permission, © *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, John Wiley and Sons

As illustrated in Table 2, out of 68 studies, a total of 66 (97 per cent) concern employees in paid employment. The two remaining studies survey students. Regardless of the theoretical paradigm, research strategy or research method utilised, not one analysis considers those outside either paid employment or education. Focusing on the 66 studies directly oriented to the world of paid work, 36 inquiries (55 per cent) survey managers, professionals and executives only; 27 studies (41 per cent) refer to mixed hierarchical levels including managerial, administrative, front-line and operative grades across a variety of occupations;

2 studies (3 per cent) concentrate on non-managerial employees only and 1 (1 per cent) on faculty members. Taking all of the research together, the participants work in a range of industries (academic, financial services, information and communication technologies, insurance, pharmaceutical and healthcare, professional services, public administration and retail) and are employed in diverse organisational settings (private and public sector, large, medium-sized and small organisations, indigenous and foreign-owned).

When researchers have to make a choice about who to include and who to exclude from their research, for example, with participants in longitudinal studies or non-identifiable respondents, those who fall outside the scope of paid employment (predominantly full-time) are precluded. Four such situations are identified in the review (Blake-Beard, 1999; O'Reilly III and Chatman, 1994; Schneer and Reitman, 1994; Seibert, Kraimer and Crant, 2001). In Blake-Beard's (1999) research, respondents who are self-employed or worked for relatives are excluded because, it is argued, their mentoring experiences is expected to be significantly different from those respondents employed in traditional organisational settings. With regard to O'Reilly III and Chatman (1994), no reason is offered for the omission of those who are working part-time. In relation to Schneer and Reitman (1994), only those participants who report working full-time in the two timeframes of their longitudinal research are incorporated because, it is contended, current employment is necessary for the purpose of comparing career factors. The rationale for solely focusing on full-time employment in the Seibert, Kraimer and Crant (2001) inquiry is that the study expands on the findings of previous research by using longitudinal data to explore the intervening processes by which proactive personality is associated with career outcomes.

### **Empirical Research on Career Success, 2003–2009**

After conducting a parallel analysis on journal articles connected with career success over the period 2003–2009, findings similar to the prior investigation are uncovered: the non-traditional employee and those with non-paid work experiences are largely excluded in the operationalisation of the construct of career success. Table 3 details the 21 articles, listed chronologically, that this author sourced and examined. To ensure consistency with the previous review, the focus of the assessment relates to objective and subjective career success, but precludes studies associated with the predictors of career success. Research conducted on periods of employment, unemployment and acting as a care-giver, but carried out in the career development not career success field (Huang et al., 2007) is also not integrated into the review. As with the preceding perusal, the preponderance of articles use the following definition of career success: 'The accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person's work experiences over time' (Arthur et al., 2005: 179).



**Table 3: Empirical Research on Career Success (2003–2009) in Chronological Order**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Participants</b>
1.	2003	Eby et al.	Career satisfaction, internal and external marketability – subjective career factors only	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
2.	2003	Heslin	Career success – subjective career factors only	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
3.	2003	Nabi	Job success – objective and subjective career factors	Support personnel
4.	2004	Bozionelos	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Blue-collar workers
5.	2004	Judge et al.	Career success and sponsorship – objective and subjective career factors	Organisational psychologists
6.	2004	Poon	Career commitment and career success – objective and subjective career factors	Managerial, professional and technical
7.	2004	Walton and Mallon	Career development – objective and subjective factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
8.	2005	Reitman and Schneer	Career satisfaction – objective and subjective career factors	Managers
9.	2006	Dyke and Murphy	Career outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
10.	2006	Gelissen and de Graaf	Career success and personality – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
11.	2006	Harris and Ogbonna	Career success strategies – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations
12.	2006	Kirchmeyer	Career success – objective career factors only	Faculty members
13.	2006	Lee et al.	Personal outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Professionals (part-time)

*(Continued)*

Table 3: (Continued)

Number	Year	Authors	Criteria	Participants
14.	2007	Hennequin	Career and emotional outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Blue-collar workers
15.	2007	Lau et al.	Entrepreneurial career success – objective and subjective career factors	Entrepreneurs and their employees
16.	2008	Dries, Pepermans and De Kerpel	Perception of others' career success – objective and subjective career factors	Mixed hierarchical levels in a range of occupations in a university and students
17.	2008	Dries, Pepermans and Carlier	Interpersonal and intrapersonal career outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Managers
18.	2009	Abele and Spurk	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Professionally qualified graduates in a range of managerial positions
19.	2009	Blickle et al.	Career outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Recently qualified business graduates in a range of managerial positions
20.	2009	De Vos et al.	Career outcomes – objective and subjective career factors	Recent graduates from diverse disciplines in managerial positions
21.	2009	Dries et al.	Career success – objective and subjective career factors	Managers

The 2003–2009 investigation, depicted in Table 3, indicates that managerial, professional and technical staff participated in 43 per cent of the studies (9 out of 21 articles), whereas

employees from mixed hierarchical levels including managerial, administrative, front-line and operative roles comprised 38 per cent of the respondents (8 out of 21). (One of the mixed hierarchical level studies also includes students, but it is not possible to glean the percentage breakdown of employees and students participating in the research.) Of the remaining 4 (19 per cent), 3 concentrate on non-managerial grades only and 1 on faculty members.

Comparing the 1992–2002 review with the 2003–2009 analysis, there has been a general broadening of the construct of career success by incorporating wider issues into the research. For example, Kirchmeyer (2006) explores the impact of the family on objective career success and Lee et al. (2006) report research findings based on studies focused on the experiences of professionals and managers in reduced-load work arrangements. Similar to the initial examination, however, when career researchers in the 2003–2009 review period have a choice to make about whether those outside of non-traditional employment patterns and/or non-paid work arrangements are to be included or excluded, they opt to omit them (Abele and Spurk, 2009; De Vos et al., 2009; Reitman and Schneer, 2005). Participants with interrupted career paths, for reasons of parental leave, are excluded in the Abele and Spurk (2009) study because, it is claimed, the respondents cannot provide career success data for their parental leave time(s), thus the researchers are unable to estimate this missing data, as it is not random. The De Vos et al. (2009) analysis leaves out part-time employees, but no explanation is offered for this decision. The Reitman and Schneer (2005) study seeks to determine the long-term impact of career interruptions on income and career satisfaction, and focuses on full-time employment because, it is maintained, the respondents need to be fully engaged in their careers to compare the effects of the gaps on later career success measures.

### **Comments on the Empirical Research on Career Success (1992–2009)**

This review reinforces the comment by Arthur et al. (2005: 193) that ‘career theory and career success research are considerably out of step with one another’. Scholars have called on those researching the construct of career success to conduct studies with underrepresented groups and to inquire into a variety of work experiences. Despite such requests, an examination of empirical studies over an eighteen-year period illustrates that the operationalisation of the construct is situated within the paid employment environment, particularly focused on managers, professionals and administrators working in a full-time capacity, to the virtual exclusion of those outside that milieu. Of the 89 articles considered between 1992 and 2009, 45 (51 per cent) focus on managers, professionals and executives and 35 (39 per cent) survey mixed hierarchical levels, including managers and administrators. The remaining 9 articles (10 per cent) concentrate on non-managerial grades (5 articles), university faculty members (2 articles) and students (2 articles). In addition, the non-traditional employee and/or those with non-paid work experiences are excluded in 7 articles (8 per cent). The rationale for their omission is explained in five of the studies; explanations this author questions in the next section.

## QUESTIONING THE EVIDENCE AND RE-FRAMING THE CASE

**Questioning the Evidence**

Appeals to encourage a diversification of research sites and subjects in the career success field appear to have gone unheeded. The established definition of career refers to 'work experiences' (Arthur et al., 1989: 8), and the description of career success used in the majority of the articles reviewed also concerns 'work experiences' (Arthur et al., 2005: 179). Neither of these definitions delineates the status or the context of this work experience. Notwithstanding this, researchers have largely focused on those inhabiting the realm of paid employment (predominantly full-time). This author raises four issues regarding this concentration.

Firstly, scholars have realised that long-held theories of the traditional, linear career no longer adequately explain reality for many people, so new, more dynamic models have emerged (e.g. protean and boundaryless careers). These concepts reflect the change from individuals relying on organisations for career development to assuming responsibility for their own career management and employability. Acquiring a portfolio of competencies and displaying resilience, flexibility and adaptability are hallmarks of this new existence (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). This upskilling, the paper contends, can be achieved regardless of employment status (full-time or part-time, non-paid worker or self-employed), or organisational environment (private, public or not-for-profit sectors).

Secondly, the current operationalisation of the construct of career success disregards the inseparability of work and life, as it neglects a 'whole person' perspective (Arnold and Cohen, 2008: 19). The evolving relationship between one's career and one's life is recognised in the Kaleidoscope Career Model (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). Activities such as the pursuit of personal interests, spousal relations, parenting and community involvement (Hall and Harrington, 2004) influence the evaluation of one's 'accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes' (Arthur et al., 2005: 179), and, in turn, this assessment shapes a person's participation in such endeavours. By explicitly acknowledging this duality, the construct of career success, and its associated research, would, therefore, this paper argues, be located in the ever-changing contexts of a person's life, a central tenet of contemporary career theory.

Thirdly, the identification of the work experience with paid work has been observed by a number of commentators (e.g. Bauman, 1999; Taylor-Gooby, 1991), which results in portraying non-paid activities, such as care-giving and volunteering, as enterprises that do not possess social and economic value (Collins et al., 2010; Lister, 2002). Research indicates that societies that cherish such efforts are more equal and have fewer health and social problems (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). The need to recognise voluntary work and caring duties has indeed been acknowledged by the Irish government (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000; Department of the Taoiseach, 2006) and by organisations such as Social Justice Ireland (Collins et al., 2010). This paper maintains that incorporating non-paid work experiences in career success research would demonstrate appreciation for the estimated 350,000 people providing non-paid care (Central Statistics Office, 2010a) and the 475,000 volunteers working for charitable organisations (Collins et al., 2010) in Ireland.

Fourthly, and finally, individuals differ in the types of criteria they emphasise when evaluating their career outcomes, particularly regarding the subjective domain (Heslin, 2005). There may be gender differences (Dyke and Murphy, 2006) and occupational and sectoral variations (Judge and Cable, 2004) when people assess their career success. The current operationalisation of the construct, this paper claims, potentially does not reflect the dissimilar preferences in personal styles, values and life goals of, for example, the 410,200 part-time workers in Ireland, of which 72 per cent are women (Central Statistics Office 2010b), and workers in underexplored industries, such as construction, with 125,300 workers, and transportation and storage, with 89,700 employees (Central Statistics Office, 2010b).

### Re-Framing the Case

Combining these four observations with the analysis of articles on career success directs our attention to what is assumed and accepted. By not fully considering people with non-traditional employment patterns and those in non-paid employment in career success research, they are de facto excluded. How can we re-frame research into the construct of career success? How can a new chapter be composed? This author suggests that the scholars who study and research the construct write on one side of the page only; they concentrate on the meaning of the phrase, the synonym, obscuring its antithesis, the antonym. There is an obvious twist to the tale that seems to have been ignored: does the virtual exclusion of these groups from the research imply that they have career failure? To stimulate a conversation around this issue, a list of questions is proffered in Table 4, which could possibly pave the way to re-conceptualise research into the construct of career success.

**Table 4: Questions to Re-Conceptualise Research into Career Success**

Who has a career?
Who has career success?
Who does not have a career?
Who does not have career success?
Why do some groups have a career and have career success?
Why do some groups not have a career and not have career success?
What experiences are included in the current conceptualisation of career success?
What experiences are not included, i.e. excluded?
What experiences should be included in a revised conceptualisation of career success?
What experiences should not be included, i.e. excluded?
When is a career considered successful?
When is a career not considered successful, i.e. a failure?
How does a career become successful?

A debate on these questions could provoke a discussion on what the work experience comprises. This, in turn, could possibly promote a re-formulation of the definition of career success to: 'The accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person's work experiences (*paid or non-paid, full-time or part-time*) over time.' Such a revised description could facilitate a 'rapprochement between career theory and career success research' (Arthur et al., 2005: 197), by encouraging researchers to incorporate those with non-traditional employment arrangements, such as part-time employees, in addition to those in non-paid work, such as care-givers and volunteers, into their studies. This could, therefore, enhance our understanding of contemporary careers by reflecting the diversity of patterns that individuals enact, and allow for a more complete consideration of a person's evaluation of his or her achievements – using self-referent and other referent criteria drawn from the objective and subjective domains (Heslin, 2005) – during his or her varied work-related experiences, regardless of status or context.

#### CONCLUSION

The response to the question 'Why include those with non-traditional employment patterns and those in non-paid employment in the operationalisation of career success?' should evoke George Mallory, an English mountaineer who climbed Mount Everest in the early 1920s. Mallory is said to have replied to the query, 'Why do you want to climb Mount Everest?' with the retort, 'Because it is there.' Why embrace these groups in the operationalisation of the construct of career success? Because they are there; they are part of society. Everyone should have an opportunity to assess the outcome of their work experiences; it should not be an activity confined to those in paid (predominantly full-time) employment. Work experiences, whether paid or non-paid, full-time or part-time, influence a person's identity, affect his or her perception of the future and contribute to his or her positioning in the social and cultural world. Such experiences may also impact on a person's next role by facilitating him or her to revise his or her view as to what is important in life, and how work fits into his or her new value system.

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