Organizational Commitment and Subjective Career Success: The Mediating Role of Career Commitment

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Abstract
Subjective career success involves individuals' self-assessment of their career accomplishments, covering aspects like career advancement and aspirations. Organizational commitment denotes the psychological attachment and perceived affiliation that employees develop towards their organization. This study investigates the relationship between organizational commitment and subjective career success among academics in Malaysian public universities. It employs a quantitative approach with a correlational design using cross-sectional data from 457 academics across 16 public universities. The research aims to establish this relationship and explore how career commitment acts as a mediator in this context. Key finding indicate that career commitment plays a mediating role in organizational commitment and subjective career success relationship. The study highlights implications for policymakers, leaders, and researchers interested in enhancing human resource management policies within public universities in emerging countries like Malaysia. However, the study is limited in scope as it focuses exclusively on public universities. Future research could broaden its scope to include private universities, polytechnics, community colleges, and foreign institutions. Additionally, enhancing the subjective career success model in higher education contexts through qualitative and longitudinal studies is recommended for further insights.
Keywords: Subjective Career Success, Organizational Commitment, Career Commitment, Higher Education, Emerging Countries.

Introduction

Subjective career success is defined as a person's subjective assessment of their career accomplishments (Haenggli and Hirschi, 2020; Schworm et al., 2017). It encompasses an individual's holistic evaluation of various aspects of career development, such as progression and aspirations (Spurk, Abele, et al., 2015). In 2021, Nature, a renowned scientific journal, conducted a career survey that garnered responses from over 3,200 participants globally. The survey revealed that while most respondents expressed passion for their work, they reported low levels of subjective career success. Nearly 80% of the participants held a Ph.D., with representation from various professions such as scientists (19%), professors and lecturers (32%), and postdoctoral researchers (22%). Many respondents indicated they were reassessing their career paths despite holding senior positions (Woolston, 2021). This study focuses on universities, as reports highlight a global trend of resignations among academics following closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Academics with tenured positions have resigned from university roles, citing reasons such as stagnant salaries and frustration with bureaucratic processes and administration (Wan et al., 2022).

The global issue of subjective career success is widespread, yet the focus of this study is on Malaysia, an emerging country where research on career success remains sparse. Recent reports by The Sun on January 15, 2024, highlight challenges faced by academics in Malaysian public universities, including overwork and inadequate compensation. These conditions are likely contributing to a diminished perception of career success among academics, potentially leading to high turnover rates. According to Prof Dr Ahmad Ismail from the Malaysian Academic Association Congress, more than 30,000 academics across 20 public universities are experiencing stress due to these factors (Utusan Malaysia, 2024). Prof Dr Nik Ahmad Kamal Nik Mahmood of the National Professors Council underscores the urgency for the government to address these issues promptly to prevent further attrition of academics to private or international sectors (Morhan, 2024). Additionally, concerns about promotion practices persist, such as inconsistent standards, favoritism towards research over teaching, and disparities in a unified compensation system (Azman et al., 2016).

Shah (2011) discovered positive and noteworthy associations between organizational commitment and subjective career success. Likewise, Shieh (2014) observed significant correlations between organizational commitment and career satisfaction among 167 catering employees in their study. Although organizational commitment was shown to significantly impact on employee, there is a scarcity of research investigating how organizational commitment affects subjective career success. Hence, this research was conducted, firstly, to investigate the influence of organizational commitment towards career commitment. Secondly, to determine the relationship between career commitment and subjective career success. Thirdly, to determine the mediating role of career commitment on the connection between organizational commitment and subjective career success.

Literature Review
Subjective Career Success

The concept of subjective career success has been examined across various contexts, with studies highlighting its causes and consequences. Spurk et al. (2019) noted a diversification in theoretical approaches used to predict subjective career success, with some emphasizing personal attributes that remain relatively constant over time. Agrawal and Singh

(2022) underscore the significance of organizational factors in promoting subjective career success among women employees. Their study highlights the critical role of organizational policies and practices that support work-life balance, emphasizing the need for family-friendly initiatives to mitigate work-family conflict effectively. Crisan (2021) identified organizational and individual factors that significantly contribute to subjective career success in his study, involving higher education institutions. Haenggli et al. (2021) examine subjective career success through career self-management behaviors and protean career orientation, focusing on private industry workers in Germany. Kammeyer-Mueller et al. (2008) linked subjective career success to self-esteem, while Guan et al. (2015), Spurk, Meinecke, et al. (2015), and Wei and Taormina (2014) explored its association with career management. Seibert et al. (1999) found that subjective career success relates to employees' achievements in career advancement and the fulfillment of organizational goals.

The conceptualization of subjective career success varies across studies. Seibert (2006) described it as employees' evaluation and experiences in attaining significant career objectives. Greenhaus et al. (1990) and Seibert et al. (2013) measured subjective career success as career satisfaction, considering it a unidimensional concept, whereas Gattiker and Larwood (1986) conceptualized subjective career success as a multifaceted construct. Moreover, Turban and Dougherty (1994); and Heslin (2003) defined it as a perception of career success. Studies by Rasdi et al. (2011), Tabiu & Nura (2013), and Tan & Khulida (2011) have operationalized subjective career success through constructs such as job satisfaction and career satisfaction. According to Spurk, Abele, et al., (2015), subjective career success involves an individual's comprehensive assessment of various facets of career progression, encompassing opportunities for advancement and personal career aspirations.

Scholarly attention on subjective career success has intensified, emphasizing its long-term significance and positive impact on employees' perceptions of their work (Dai & Song, 2016; Spurk et al., 2019). Subjective career success plays a pivotal role in both employee and organizational outcomes. Alvia et al. (2020) demonstrated in the banking sector in Pakistan, that career success measured by job satisfaction and career satisfaction serve as significant predictors of organizational performance. Moreover, Naseer et al. (2015) underscored the importance of diverse facets of career success such as career satisfaction, job and compensation satisfaction, and learning and development opportunities as critical determinants influencing organizational performance.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment pertains to employees' affiliation with their organization (Mowday et al., 1982; Lambert et al., 2020). It reflects the psychological bond employees have towards their company (Almutairi, 2016) and denotes how employees perceive their attachment to their workplace. Organizational commitment assesses the extent to which individuals align themselves with and actively engage in an organization (Mowday et al., 1979). According to Meyer and Allen (1991), organizational commitment measures the relationship strength of employees and their organization. Previous research has consistently shown that organizational commitment is important factor in that influence various critical organizational outcomes (e.g; employee motivation, turnover rates, absenteeism, and job performance. Previous studies have indicated that employees with high commitment generally perform better (Mowday et al., 1979; McMurray et al., 2004; Buitendach & De Witte, 2005; Vujiˇciˊc et al., 2015; Shoss, 2017). Thus, organizational commitment is a crucial

determinant that significantly impacts organizational productivity and success by shaping the contributions of employees (Hngoi et al., 2023).

Previous research has established a positive relationship between organizational commitment and career commitment. Organizational commitment, as defined by Blau (1985), reflects the emotional connection and engagement individuals feel toward their organization. In contrast, career commitment pertains to the level of attachment and involvement in one's chosen profession. According to social exchange theory (Homans, 1958), organizational commitment and career commitment are intertwined as employees develop these commitments based on perceived benefits and rewards from their organization and career. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that higher levels of organizational commitment predict stronger career commitment among employees (Blau, 1985; Zhu et al., 2020; Herachwati and Rachma, 2018; Ahmed, 2017). For example, Zhu et al. (2020) reported a positive and moderate correlation between organizational commitment and career commitment, supporting the notion that individuals who are more committed to their organization also tend to exhibit higher levels of commitment to their careers. A study on Turkish nurses (Dogan & Tepeci, 2013) confirmed that higher organizational commitment is associated with higher levels of career commitment in the profession.

Previous studies have empirically shown that organizational commitment significantly influences individuals' dedication to their chosen career paths. Therefore, this study predicts that in a university setting, academics who demonstrate a strong commitment to their institution are likely to also exhibit a commitment to their career. In light of this observation, the study posits the following:

H1: Organizational Commitment Positively Influences Career Commitment.

Career Commitment

Career commitment, as defined by Zhu et al. (2020), refers to an individual's emotional investment and dedication to their chosen career path, rather than their current employing organization. It represents the psychological bond individuals form with their occupation, shaped by their emotional response to it (Jia et al., 2020). According to Huang et al. (2019), career commitment encompasses individuals' dedication to their career, profession, or job and has been a subject of study for nearly four decades. Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran (2005) describe career commitment as encompassing dedication to various work-related goals. Additionally, Lee et al. (2000) note that career commitment is often used interchangeably with professional and occupational commitment. According to Chen et al. (2021), career commitment is recognized as a crucial factor in vocational psychology for promoting the sustainability of a career. Empirical studies, such as those by Gebbels et al. (2020) and Lapointe et al. (2019), have consistently demonstrated that career commitment differs from measures of job involvement and organizational commitment. Career commitment falls within the broader scope of literature on commitment. Despite this, Katz et al. (2019) noted its comparatively limited exploration in academic research compared to other forms of commitment within the workplace.

Past literature, including studies by Zhu et al. (2020), Ng and Feldman (2014), Duffy et al. (2014), and Ballout (2009), has consistently demonstrated a direct relationship between career commitment and subjective career success. Bhawna et al. (2024) investigated the media industry in India and revealed that career commitment among journalists in both newspaper and television sectors significantly influences their subjective career success.

Similarly, Najam et al. (2020) found that career commitment positively contributes to the subjective career success of middle-management employees in Pakistan's service sector. Additionally, Ekmekcioglu et al. (2020) found a significant and positive impact of career commitment on subjective career success, applying the principles of social cognitive career theory.

The findings from past literature and recent studies consistently highlight the pivotal role of career commitment in shaping subjective career success. Thus, the current study hypothesizes that when academics demonstrate commitment to their chosen career, they are more motivated to pursue their career goals and achieve high subjective career success. Therefore, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Career Commitment Positively Influences Subjective Career Success.

Mediating Role of Career Commitment

Career commitment has been shown to mediate work-family conflicts in job satisfaction studies conducted in the construction industry among professionals (Cao et al., 2020). By contrast, Janib, Rasdi, Omar, Alias, Zaremohzzabieh, and Ahrari (2021) discovered that career commitment did not mediate the job workload and academic staff performance relationship. These studies have shown varying outcomes regarding the function of commitment as a mediating varible. Moreover, Sultana and Aldehayyat (2018), Pasha et al. (2017), and Zhang et al. (2014) presented varying results on career commitment as a mediating variable in relation to subjective career success. For instance, Zhang et al. (2014) found that career commitment fully mediated the relation between core self-evaluation and satisfaction. Conversely, Sultana and Aldehayyat found that career commitment partially mediates the link between emotional intelligence and subjective career success among academics in Pakistani universities. Additionally, Pasha et al. (2017) illustrated that career commitment mediates the positive relationship between promotional opportunities and career success among employees in the insurance sector. However, career commitment did not mediate the relationship between rewards and career success in their study. These variations suggest that while career commitment can mediate the relationship between various factors and career success, its effectiveness and impact can differ based on contextual variables, sample populations, and the specific factors being examined.

Hence, career commitment was employed as a mediator to examine its impact on the relationship between organizational commitment and subjective career success in this study. This is based on the premise that employees who exhibit a commitment to their organization are also likely to demonstrate commitment to their career, thereby indirectly impacting their subjective career success. Consequently, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: Career Commitment Mediates The Positive Relationship Between Organizational Commitment And Subjective Career Success.

Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative research approach with a correlational research design. A survey methodology was employed in a non-contrived study setting with minimal researcher intervention. The study adopted a cross-sectional design to assess the relationships at a single point in time. The study focused on Malaysian citizens employed at public universities, specifically those in grades DM/DS 45 to DM/DS 53/54, holding a master's

degree or above, and possessing a minimum of three years of academic experience. A sample of 457 academics was drawn from 16 public universities, representing a population of 17,084 academics. Purposive sampling was chosen, and participants were selected based on particular characteristics pertinent to the study's focus. Data were collected through online surveys using self-administered questionnaires. Responses were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Findings

The findings addressed descriptive statistics and evaluated both the reflective measurement and the structural models. The measurement model assessment involved examining indicator reliability (outer loadings), internal consistency, and discriminant validity. In the structural model, considerations included collinearity statistics (VIF), path coefficients, hypothesis testing, and coefficient of determination (R^2).

Descriptive Statistic

The mean values of the variables are presented in Table 1. The average scores for subjective career success, organizational commitment, and career commitment, are 5.49, 5.16, and 5.45, respectively. Scores between 5 and 6 indicate a tendency towards agreement among respondents. Standard deviation (SD), a measure of data dispersion around the mean, is also provided. Subjective career success has the highest SD at 1.07, suggesting greater variability among data points. Followed by career commitment (SD=0.96) and organizational commitment (SD=0.82). This variability implies that subjective career success scores show more diverse responses within the sample.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Latent Construct

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Subjective career success	457	5.49	1.07
Organizational commitment	457	5.16	0.82
Career commitment	457	5.45	0.96

Measurement Model Assessment
Indicator Reliability

Table 2 illustrates the outer loadings in this measurement model. According to Ramayah et al. (2018), indicator reliability refers to the proportion of variance in an indicator that is explained by the latent variable. It is recommended that indicator loadings exceed 0.708, as this indicates that the construct accounts for more than 50 percent of the indicator's variance, demonstrating satisfactory indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2021). However, loadings in the range of 0.5 to 0.70 may also be acceptable if other indicators meet the critical values for composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair et al., 2017; Ramayah et al., 2018). Indicators with loadings below 0.40 should generally be excluded from the measurement model due to their low reliability (Hair et al., 2022). Therefore, the outer loading of E4 (0.340) and E5 (0.179) were deleted due to low loading.

Table 2
Reflective Measurement Model - Outer Loadings

Construct	Measurement Items	Loading
Subjective career success (SCS)	A1	0.873
	A2	0.914
	A3	0.849
	A4	0.927
	A5	0.796
Organizational commitment (OC)	E1	0.773
	E2	0.639
	E3	0.824
	E6	0.686
Career commitment (CC)	F1	0.797
	F2	0.827
	F3	0.822
	F4	0.634

Internal Consistency and Discriminant Validity

In this study, composite reliability values ranged from 0.737 to 0.925 (refer to Table 3), indicating that each measurement item demonstrated reliability and consistency. Composite reliability is considered appropriate with a minimum threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2011), and values below 0.60 are deemed unreliable (Hair et al., 2017). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE), should exceed 0.50 to indicate that a construct explains more than 50% of its indicators' variance (Hair et al., 2022; Ramayah et al., 2018). AVE for subjective career success, organizational commitment, and career commitment met this criterion, with values ranging from 0.539 to 0.762.

Table 3
Measures of Internal Consistency

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Subjective career success (SCS)	0.921	0.925	0.762
Organizational commitment (OC)	0.713	0.737	0.539
Career commitment (CC)	0.777	0.804	0.599

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the HTMT criterion introduced by Henseler et al. (2015). The HTMT results for all constructs were below 0.90, indicating that the criterion for discriminant validity was satisfactory. According to Hair et al. (2021), HTMT values below 0.90 are appropriate for assessing discriminant validity between conceptually similar constructs.

Structural Model Assessment

The collinearity statistics values in this study are below 3, which is considered acceptable. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values greater than 5 suggest possible collinearity

among predictor variables, although collinearity can also be a concern at lower VIF values ranging from 3 to 5 (Becker et al., 2015; Mason & Perreault, 1991).

Table 4
Path Coefficient and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Beta Coefficient (β)	Standard Error (SE)	t-value (t)	p-values (p)	Decision
H1: OC -> CC	0.497	0.037	13.441	0.000	Supported
H2: CC -> SCS	0.398	0.039	10.333	0.000	Supported
H3: OC -> CC -> SCS	0.198	0.027	7.253	0.000	Supported

Note: SCS-Subjective career success; OC-Organizational commitment; CC-Career commitment.

Table 4 presents the findings of this study. All relationships are statistically significant with t-values ≥ 1.645 and p ≤ 0.001. The relationship between organizational commitment and career commitment is significant (H1: β = 0.497, t = 13.441, p = 0.000). The findings also reveal a positive influence of career commitment on subjective career success (H2: β = 0.398, t = 10.333, p = 0.000). Moreover, career commitment mediates the relationship between organizational commitment and subjective career success, supporting H3 (β = 0.198, t = 7.253, p = 0.000). Therefore, hypotheses 1 to 3 are supported by the results.

Result and Discussion
The first finding shows organizational commitment positively influence career commitment. This finding is similar to a study involving university teachers in Pakistan by Sajjad et al., (2020). Employees characterized by high organizational commitment are inclined to remain within the organization and progress in their careers therein. Their profound allegiance to the organization catalyzes their persistence and development within its hierarchical structure. Consequently, organizations must identify supplementary factors that can bolster and fortify this commitment.

The second finding revealed that career commitment significantly contributes to the subjective career success of academics employed in public universities in Malaysia. The extent of dedication and attachment that academics exhibit towards their careers significantly influences their subjective perceptions of career success. This finding is corroborated by Van der Heijden, Davies, et al. (2022), who identified a direct relationship between career commitment and subjective career success.

This result is contradicted by a study by Van der Heijden, Veld, et al. (2022), where they found that there was no effect of academics' career commitment on their subjective career success. The researchers were surprised to find that the career commitment of academics did not appear to influence their subjective career success. However, subsequent analysis revealed an intriguing nuance: whereas younger academics did not report increased subjective career success as a result of their career commitment, older academics aged 50 and above seemed to derive significant benefits from it. Thus, it can be concluded that the findings can be different depending on the age of the respondents.

The last finding revealed that career commitment mediates the relationship between organizational commitment and subjective career success. It shows that strong organizational commitment can augment academics' motivation to excel in their careers within the

university, leading academics to perceive themselves as successful due to their proactive efforts and achievements. This motivation is propelled by their allegiance to the university and their career aspirations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides compelling insights into the relationships between organizational commitment, career commitment, and subjective career success among academics in public universities. The findings reveal several key points: Firstly, the study confirms that organizational commitment positively influences the career commitment of academics. Secondly, it was observed that career commitment significantly contributes to academics' subjective career success. Thirdly, the study highlights that career commitment plays a mediating role in the relationship between organizational commitment and subjective career success among academics.

Recommendation

The findings from this study can serve as directions for policy makers and leaders in drafting strategies to increase the employees' commitment and subjective career success. Human resources managers can utilize this information to refine their recruitment policies and employee retention programs, focusing on identifying individuals who are more likely to demonstrate a strong commitment to the organization. For instance, provide opportunities for career growth (Zhu et al., 2020) which include encouraging internal promotion, and providing comprehensive training and development programs. Moreover, Jones et al. (2006) advocate for improving remuneration, benefits, and creating a supportive work environment. Competitive salaries and comprehensive benefits positively impact commitment and subjective career success level.

Additionally, organizations need to cultivate stronger bonds between employees and their current roles, enhancing their dedication both to their careers and to the organization by fostering a supportive work environment that promotes collegiality, regular feedback, and support. Spurk et al. (2019) suggest that future research should explore innovative approaches to predict career success, such as focusing on resource management behaviors (i.e., stress and coping) and considering resource accumulation and dynamics (including career transitions over the lifespan).

Limitation

It is important to recognize several limitations of this study. Firstly, the study was restricted to public universities. Future research should broaden its scope to encompass a more diverse range of higher education institutions, including private universities, polytechnics, community colleges, and foreign universities.

Secondly, the data collection was conducted once using a cross-sectional study design. Cross-sectional studies are observational in nature and examine data collected from a population at a specific, singular time point (Wang & Cheng, 2020). Future research would benefit from employing longitudinal study design to capture changes and developments in the target population over time. Longitudinal studies enable researchers to establish sequences of events and better understand causal relationships.

Thirdly, this study employed a quantitative approach focused on systematically collecting and analyzing numerical data to describe, predict, or manipulate variables of interest. To gain deeper insights into the phenomenon (Moser & Korstjens, 2017), it is

recommended that future research incorporate qualitative methods. Qualitative research explores participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors, focusing on understanding the underlying reasons and contexts. This approach provides a richer understanding of the how and why, complementing the quantitative findings.

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