

Linking Employee Resilience to Career Success: Empirical Evidence from the Workplace.

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Abstract

With the increasing turbulence of the work environment, employee resilience is emerging as a psychological resource that allows workers to respond to and adapt to workplace challenges. This study tested the relationship between employee resilience and career success using data from 200 employees working in public and private sectors. The study used a standardized four-item resilience scale (Sinclair and Wallston, 2004) and a standardized five-item career success scale (Greenhaus et al., 1990). The study found a significant and positive relationship between employee resilience and career success. The study also found that employee resilience accounted for 18.3% of the variance in career success. Overall, the study provided evidence of the link between employee resilience and career success and provides insights for practitioners who seek to enhance employee outcomes through the use of resilience-building interventions.

Keywords: Employee resilience, Career success, Workplace psychology, Human resource development, Empirical study

1. Introduction

Workplaces are becoming increasingly complex, unstable, and unpredictable due to the rapid rate of technological change, globalization, organizational restructuring and an increase in job insecurity. As a result, careers are now viewed as being more dynamic, uncertain and non-linear compared to previous generations (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 2004). Employees are expected to deal with constant change, high performance expectations and continuous updates to the skills they require to perform their jobs. Psychological resources that allow individuals to manage adversity and sustain long term career development are now critical to determining career success (Hobfoll, 2001; Luthans, 2002). Career success has traditionally been seen as a primary outcome of organizational and vocational research. Career success is typically defined objectively, e.g. salary increases, promotions and hierarchical advancement (Judge et al., 1995). However, recent career research acknowledges that subjective assessments of career progress, satisfaction and accomplishment are equally as important, especially in boundaryless and protean career contexts in which individuals are responsible for their own career management (Greenhaus et al., 1990; Hall, 2004).

Subjective career success measures employees' perception of how closely their careers align with their personal goals, values and aspirations. Therefore, subjective career success is particularly relevant in today's work place (Hall, 2004). In addition to the changes in career structures, there has also been a growing interest in positive organizational behaviour, which involves the study and application of

positively orientated psychological capacities that can be developed and managed to improve workplace outcomes (Luthans, 2002). Of these capacities, employee resilience is currently one of the most important psychologically resources that enable employees to endure, adapt to and recover from work related stress and adversity (Sinclair and Wallston, 2004). Employee resilience does not simply represent the absence of psychological distress, but an active and positive form of adaptation when faced. Resilient employees have been shown to have various benefits, such as higher job performance and work engagement, and lower levels of burn-out and psychological distress (Avey et al., 2009; Robertson et al., 2015). Resilient employees are also more likely to have good emotional regulation, are optimistic and will continue to pursue their goals despite obstacles and setbacks (Tugade and Fredrickson, 2004). These traits indicate that resilience is a key resource that will affect employees' careers and ultimately their long term success.

The relationship between resilience and career success can be theoretically explained through the conservation of resources (COR) model (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). According to the COR model, people will try to obtain, preserve and protect resources, and people with more resources will be more likely to obtain additional resources over time. Resilience is a major psychological resource that helps employees to adequately deal with the stresses associated with their employment, and therefore enables them to focus on career-orientated activities such as continuous learning, networking and proactive career planning (Hobfoll, 2001).

Despite the growing awareness of resilience as a beneficial psychological resource, empirical research on the relationship between employee resilience and career success is relatively underdeveloped. Most of the studies to date have focused on the relationships between resilience, well-being, stress management and performance outcomes (Avey et al., 2009; Robertson et al., 2015). Career success has often been researched independently of psychological resilience (Ng et al., 2005). Much of the career success research has investigated either the structural factors, such as human capital and organizational support, or the stable individual differences that determine career success, and less so the developing psychological capacities that will have an impact on career success (Ng et al., 2005). In addition, the lack of evidence for the relationship between resilience and career success using validated and efficient measurement tools in an organizational context is another gap in the existing research (Koekemoer et al., 2023). The four-item resilience scale (Sinclair and Wallston, 2004) and the five-item subjective career success scale (Greenhaus et al., 1990) are two well-established scales that assess employees perceived ability to cope with adversity and their overall assessment of their career progress and satisfaction, respectively. Using established scales strengthens the methodology and generalization of findings of this study relative to other studies. Addressing the identified gaps, the aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between employee resilience and subjective career success, using data collected from 200 employees from different organizational settings. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of positive organizational behaviour and the COR model, the study aims to contribute to the career development literature by demonstrating the potential of employee resilience as a psychological resource for supporting sustainable career success. Finally, the study provides some practical implications for organizations looking to encourage employee development, retention and long-term career sustainability in a rapidly changing work environment.

2. Review of Literature and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Employee Resilience in the Workplace

Employee resilience has emerged as an important psychological resource that enables individuals to adapt to, cope with and recover from adversity in the workplace (Luthans, 2002). In the workplace, resilience is defined as employees' ability to deal with work-related stress and to remain emotionally balanced (Sinclair and Wallston, 2004). Due to the increased dynamism and uncertainty of workplaces, resilience is becoming an important resource to assist employees to maintain their performance and well-being in the workplace (Sinclair and Wallston, 2004). According to Sinclair and Wallston (2004), resilience should be viewed as an adaptive process and not as a passive reaction to adversity. Resilient employees are able to utilize proactive problem solving strategies and flexibility when dealing with stress, and are therefore more effective in dealing with job-related stressors (Sinclair and Wallston, 2004). There is empirical evidence to demonstrate that resilient employees are better able to deal with the demands of their job, are more engaged in their work and are more satisfied with their jobs than their less resilient counterparts (Robertson et al., 2015). Resilient employees are also less likely to report high levels of burnout and are more likely to have higher levels of engagement at work (Robertson et al., 2015). Ibrahim and Hussein (2024) found that resilience at work had a significant and positive effect on work engagement and job satisfaction for engineers. Breevaart and van Woerkom (2024) also found that strengths-based leadership helped build employee resilience which resulted in increased employee engagement and better psychological function. In the areas of healthcare and services, resilience has been found to lead to sustained professional motivation and career outcomes because it enables employees to effectively deal with the emotional and workload demands of their jobs (BMC Nursing, 2024). Collectively, the above studies show that employee resilience is a psychological resource that is capable of being developed and that it plays a critical role in assisting employees to manage the adversity of their work environment and to maintain their motivation and performance.

2.2 Career Success: Contemporary Perspectives

Career success is an important concept in the area of career research and is typically defined as the accumulation of positive work-related outcomes over time (Judge et al., 1995). Greenhaus et al. (1990) differentiated between objective and subjective career success. Objective career success includes promotions, salary increases, etc. (Greenhaus et al., 1990). Subjective career success is the employees' assessment of how close their career has progressed to meeting their personal objectives, values and goals (Greenhaus et al., 1990). Given the current trends in career structure and the individualized career paths that employees are creating for themselves, subjective career success has become a more relevant indicator of career success (Arthur et al., 2005). Subjective career success relates to intrinsic indicators of success, such as, career satisfaction, fulfillment and perceived success (Greenhaus et al., 1990). Subjective career success is influenced by the interaction between external opportunity and the employees' personal psychological resources (Ng et al., 2005). Research has indicated that individuals who possess strong self-regulatory and coping abilities will view their careers as successful regardless of the speed of their objective career advancement (Ng and Feldman, 2014). More recently, researchers have demonstrated that personal resources are playing an increasing role in predicting subjective career success. Koekemoer et al. (2023) demonstrated that personal resources, such as resilience and grit, are strong predictors of subjective career success by influencing employees' perception of their person-environment fit. Longitudinal research has also demonstrated that resilience leads to increased career adaptability and decision self efficacy, which are critical components of managing career transition and

achieving long term career satisfaction (Alkal, 2025). It appears that contemporary career research is increasingly recognizing that career success is not solely dependent on structural factors, but is heavily influenced by employees' internal psychological resources.

2.3 Employee Resilience and Career Success

Conservation of Resource (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) provides a theoretical framework to understand the relationship between employee resilience and career success. COR theory argues that individuals will attempt to acquire and protect resources to facilitate the reduction of stress and the attainment of desirable outcomes (Hobfoll, 1989). Resilience represents a critical personal resource that enables employees to effectively buffer against the negative impacts of workplace stress and recovery from career setbacks to sustain motivation and performance (Hobfoll, 2001). Resilient employees will exhibit more adaptive career behaviors such as ongoing learning, persistence and proactive problem solving, which are necessary for career success (Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). Studies have demonstrated that resilience is positively related to employability, career adaptability and career satisfaction across a number of occupations (Shin et al., 2012). Resilient employees are more likely to regulate their emotions, view career challenges as opportunities for growth and are more likely to pursue their goals despite obstacles (Tugade and Fredrickson, 2004). Recent studies provide empirical support for the relationship between resilience and career success. Koekemoer et al. (2023) demonstrated that psychological resilience is a strong predictor of career success, as it facilitates employees' sense of professional purpose and adaptive functioning. Similarly, BMC Nursing (2024) found that resilience is a strong predictor of career success by facilitating employees' ability to cope with career-related stressors. Research has indicated that demographic variables such as age, gender and marital status affect career outcomes; however, research has also demonstrated that psychological resources, such as resilience, account for additional variance beyond demographic variables (Ng and Feldman, 2014). These studies collectively demonstrate that resilience is a critical determinant of career success in contemporary work environments.

2.4 Hypothesis Development

Based on the theoretical basis of COR theory and career construction theory, and based on the extensive empirical evidence from previous studies, it is anticipated that employee resilience will play a significant role in determining career success. Resilient employees will be better equipped to deal with work-related adversity, maintain motivation, and adapt to new and changing job demands, which will enhance their subjective assessment of their career progress and satisfaction (Greenhaus et al., 1990; Koekemoer et al., 2023). The current study anticipates the following hypothesis:

H1: Employee resilience has a positive and significant effect on career success

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Sample and Data Collection

Employees from public and private sector organizations formed the sample group for this study. To increase the generalisability of the study, the sample was drawn from various industrial sectors. A total of 200 valid responses were collected for inclusion in the final analysis, which satisfies the minimum recommended sample size for correlation and regression analysis in social sciences (Hair et al., 2019). The questionnaires were completed in English, and were divided into two sections. Section 1 contained demographic information regarding gender, age, marital status, and the type of industry that the participant worked in. Section 2 contained standardized scales assessing employee resilience and career

success. The surveys were distributed to participants via online and offline methods, depending on the accessibility of each participant. All participants were briefed regarding the purpose of the study and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity before completing the survey. Consent was obtained from all participants, and all aspects of the study were conducted in accordance with ethical principles, such as voluntary participation and data protection. Participation in the study was voluntary and respondents were informed that there were no correct or incorrect answers to reduce response bias and allow for honest responding. The study utilized a quantitative cross-sectional research design to evaluate the relationship between employee resilience and career success in the workplace.

Table 1.: Socio-demographic profile of the sample

Characteristics	Classification	Percentage
Gender		
	Male	54.5
	Female	43.5
	Transgender	2
Age		
	Less than 20 years	13.0
	From 21to 30 year	43.5
	31 to 40 years	34
	More than 40 years	9.5
Marital status		
	Married	53.5
	Unmarried	46.5
Type of industry		
	Public	70
	Private	30

Source: author's calculation

The sample consists mainly of male respondents (54.5%), followed by females (43.5%), with a small proportion of transgender participants (2%). Most respondents are young employees aged 21–30 years (43.5%), followed by those aged 31–40 years (34%). More than half of the respondents are married (53.5%). The majority of participants work in the public sector (70%), while 30% are from the private sector. Overall, the sample largely represents young and mid-career public sector employees.

3.2 Measures

Employee Resilience: Employee resilience was measured using a four-item scale developed by Sinclair and Wallston (2004). The scale assesses individuals' ability to cope with stress and adapt effectively to challenging situations.

Career Success: Career success was assessed using the five-item scale developed by Greenhaus et al. (1990), capturing respondents' subjective evaluation of their career achievements and satisfaction.

All constructs were assessed using a seven-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates Strongly Disagree and 7 indicates Strongly Agree. Likert-type scales are commonly utilized in behavioral research because of

their ease of use, dependability, and effectiveness in capturing the perceptions and attitudes of respondents (Joshi et al., 2015).

Control Variables

Demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, and industry type were included as control variables. Previous research has indicated that demographic traits may affect discretionary behaviors and innovative tendencies (Ng & Feldman, 2013; Huang et al., 2022). Considering these variables improves the internal validity of the results.

3.2 Assessment of Reliability and Validity

The reliability of the scales was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha while Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine construct validity and relationships among variables

3.2.1 Assessment of reliability

Employee resilience demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.846$), while career success also showed high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.884$), exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978) See table 2.

Table 2.: Assessment of Reliability

Variable	Cronbach alpha
Employee resilience	0.846
Career success	0.884

Source: authors calculation

3.2.2 Assessment of validity

Correlation Analysis

3.2.2.1. Correlation Analysis of employee resilience and career success with Demographic Variables

By performing correlation analysis with demographic variables, the study found a moderate correlation between demographic characteristics (marital status, age, gender and type of industry).

Table 3.

Variables	ER	Age	Gender	Marital status	Type of ind.
ER	1				
Age	.482**				
Gender	-.207**	-.147*			
Marital status	.167*	.067	-.078		
Type of industry	-.068	-.131	.046	-.030	1

Note. : *p < .05; **p < .01 (two-tailed).

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between employee resilience and age ($r = 0.482, p < 0.01$). resilience were also significantly related to gender ($r = -.207, p < .01$) and marital status ($r = .167, p < .05$). However, the relationship between employee resilience and industry type was not significant ($r = -.068, p > .05$). Among the demographic variables, age was weakly and negatively correlated with gender ($r = -.147, p < .05$), while other correlations were non-significant.

3.2.2.2. Correlation Analysis of Career Success with Demographic Variables

Table 4.

Variables	Age	Gender	Marital status	Type of industry	CS
Age	1				
Gender	-.147*	1			
Marital status	.067	-.078	1		
Type of industry	-.131	.046	-.030	1	
CS	.412**	-.170*	.160*	-.038	1

Note. Values represent Pearson’s correlation coefficients (r). *p < .05, ** p < .01 (two-tailed).

Table 4. presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among demographic variables and career success. Age demonstrated a moderate and statistically significant positive relationship with career success (r = .412, p < .01), indicating that career success tends to increase with age. Gender was weakly and negatively correlated with career success (r = -.170, p < .05), suggesting differences in career success across gender categories. Marital status showed a weak but significant positive association with career success (r = .160, p < .05). In contrast, industry type was not significantly related to career success (r = -.038, p > .05). Among the demographic variables, age was weakly and negatively correlated with gender (r = -.147, p < .05), while all other intercorrelations were non-significant. None of the correlation coefficients exceeded the recommended threshold of .80, indicating no multicollinearity concerns.

3.2.2.3 Pearson correlation analysis between employee resilience and career success

Pearson correlation of employee resilience and career success was found to be positively significant (r=.427, p<.001. hence, the hypotheses were supported. This shows that an increase in resilience would lead to higher career success in the industry.

Table 5.

Correlations			
		CS	Opp.
CS	Pearson Correlation	1	.427**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	200	200
ER	Pearson Correlation	.427**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	200	200

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table presents the results of a Pearson correlation analysis examining the relationship between Career Success (CS) and Employee Resilience (ER) based on a sample of 200 respondents. The findings indicate a moderate and positive correlation between employee resilience and career success (r = .427, p < .01). This suggests that individuals with higher levels of resilience tend to report higher levels of career success. The relationship is statistically significant at the 1% level (two-tailed), indicating that the

observed association is unlikely to have occurred by chance. The strength of the correlation (.427) reflects a moderate effect size, implying that resilience is an important, though not exclusive, factor contributing to career success.

3.4 Regression analysis between Employee resilience and Career success

Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesized relationship between employee resilience and career success. In this study, we use employee resilience as an independent variable while career success is used as a dependent variable.

Table 6.

Hypothesis	Regression weight	Beta Coeff.	R ²	F- value	p- value	Result
H1	ER→CS	0.462	.183	44.274	.000	yes

The results indicate that employee resilience has a positive and statistically significant effect on career success ($\beta = 0.462, p < .001$). This suggests that an increase in employee resilience leads to a corresponding increase in career success. The model explains 18.3% of the variance in career success ($R^2 = .183$), indicating a moderate explanatory power for a single predictor model in behavioral research. The F-statistic is significant ($F = 44.274, p < .001$), confirming that the overall regression model is a good fit and that employee resilience significantly predicts career success. Based on these findings, Hypothesis H1 (ER → CS) is supported.

4. Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to examine the relationship between employee resilience and career success in the workplace. The empirical findings provide strong support for the proposed hypothesis, demonstrating that employee resilience has a positive and statistically significant effect on career success. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive association between resilience and career success ($r = .427, p < .01$), while regression results indicated that resilience significantly predicts career success ($\beta = .462, p < .001$), explaining 18.3% of the variance in career success. These findings highlight resilience as a meaningful psychological resource contributing to employees' perceptions of career achievement and satisfaction. The results are consistent with Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which posits that individuals possessing greater personal resources are better equipped to cope with stress and achieve favourable outcomes. Resilient employees are more capable of managing workplace adversity, sustaining motivation, and maintaining emotional stability, all of which enhance their ability to pursue and attain career goals. The observed effect size suggests that while resilience is not the sole determinant of career success, it plays a substantial role alongside other individual and contextual factors. The findings also align with prior empirical research that links resilience to positive work-related outcomes such as work engagement, employability, and career satisfaction (Shin et al., 2012; Koekemoer et al., 2023). By extending this body of literature, the present study provides direct empirical evidence that resilience contributes to subjective career success within both public and private sector contexts. The significant relationships observed between demographic variables (such as age and marital status) and career success further

suggest that career outcomes are shaped by a combination of life-stage factors and psychological resources, reinforcing the need for a holistic understanding of career development.

5. Implications

5.1 Theoretical Implications

Firstly, career success research is extended by this study through an empirical validation of employee resilience as an important predecessor of subjective career success. Previous research has mostly focused on objective career indicators (e.g., promotions, salary increases) and personality characteristics (e.g., extraversion), while this study indicates that resilience is a dynamic psychological asset that leads to employees' subjective evaluation of career achievements.

Secondly, the findings give empirical evidence for the application of Conservation of Resources Theory in the area of career development. Resilience as a core personal resource being related to career success, supports the idea that psychological resources significantly affect career outcomes and therefore supports the growing amount of research on integration between Positive Organisational Behaviour and Career Development Theory.

Thirdly, the study answers recent calls for additional research on internal psychological drivers of career success in non-Western and diverse organisational contexts. Through investigating resilience in employees in public and private organisations across various sectors, the study increases the generalizability of resilience–career success relations and creates a base for cross-cultural research in the future.

5.2 Practical Implications

Findings have practical applications for organizations, HR Professionals, and Policymakers. Organizations should develop and implement interventions to develop resilience of employees, since the effect of employee resilience on career success was shown to be highly significant. Such interventions can be based on resilience training programmes, stress management workshops and coaching initiatives to develop adaptive coping skills and build psychological strength of employees. Managers/Leaders are responsible for developing and maintaining a work environment where employees feel safe to learn from failures, receive constructive feedback and psychologically safe. Leadership styles based on strengths and supervisory styles which are supportive for employees increase resilience and ultimately lead to better career outcomes and longer term organisational effectiveness. From a career management point of view, organisations need to assess and develop resilience within their career planning and talent management systems. Employees with a high level of resilience are more able to maintain their performance over time, respond to change in the organisation and experience greater career satisfaction than those who do not, and they are less likely to intend to leave the organisation. In addition to this, at the individual level, employees should be aware of resilience as a career competency. By developing coping skills, regulating emotions and developing flexibility, employees can take proactive steps to deal with career challenges and improve their own subjective sense of career success

6. Conclusion

This study provides strong empirical evidence that resilience is an important predictor of career success. Data collected from 200 employees in public and private sector organisations shows that employees with higher levels of resilience perceive their careers as successful, even when working in difficult circumstances. The findings of the study demonstrate the importance of psychological resources in

determining career success and that resilience is a fundamental component of sustainable career development. By linking the concept of resilience to existing research on career success, this study adds to both theoretical knowledge and practical applications. Therefore, the findings of this study confirm that building resilience in employees is not only beneficial for their wellbeing, but also a means to achieve long-term career success. Given the ongoing changes and uncertainties faced by organisations today, investing in building resilience in employees will become increasingly important for employee career development and organisational sustainability.

7. Limitations and Future Research

Although this study presents many advantages, there are some limitations. A cross-sectional research approach restricts possible causal conclusions. Hence, future research may use longitudinal research approaches to show how changes in resilience and career success occur over time. In addition, the resilience–career success relationship can be further explained using future research by exploring mediator and moderator variables (e.g. employee wellbeing, organisational support, career adaptability).

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