



Research Paper

Subjective and Objective Career Success: A Gender Based Analysis of Career Outcomes

Dr. Megha Arya¹ and Devyani Jain²

¹Sr. Asst. Professor, Department of Psychology, IIS (deemed to be University), Jaipur

²Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, IIS (deemed to be University), Jaipur

¹Corresponding Author: megha.arya@iisuniv.ac.in

²Contributing Author: devyanijain31885@iisuniv.ac.in

Abstract

This study investigates gender differences in performance by examining subjective and objective success among IT professionals. Subjective success refers to an individual's internal evaluation of career satisfaction, purpose, and fulfilment based on personal values and goals. Objective success, on the other hand, is defined by external indicators such as salary, promotions, and occupational status. The research aims to understand whether gender differences exist in the perception and attainment of career success and to assess the relationship between subjective and objective measures. A purposive sample of 60 IT professionals (both male and female) aged 25 to 45 years, with at least five years of experience, participated in the study. The Subjective Career Success Inventory (SCSI) and a structured Objective Career Success questionnaire were used to assess the variables. Data were collected through Google Forms and analysed using SPSS, employing correlation analysis and independent samples t tests. Results revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = .582, p < .01$) between subjective and objective success. However, no significant gender differences were observed in either success measure. These findings suggest that while subjective and objective dimensions of success are interrelated, gender may not be a distinguishing factor in career performance within the IT sector. The study underscores the importance of acknowledging both personal satisfaction and external achievements when assessing career success. It also highlights the need for inclusive organizational strategies that address career development for all employees regardless of gender. Limitations include the small, sector specific sample and the reliance on self report data. Future research should consider larger, more diverse samples and include longitudinal designs to track success trajectories over time. The findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equality in professional settings and challenge persistent stereotypes about career success disparities.

Keywords: Gender Differences, Subjective Success, Objective Success, Career Performance, IT Professionals

I. Introduction

The discourse on gender differences in performance remains central to research in psychology, sociology, and organizational studies. These differences are often explored across professional, academic, and personal contexts to understand how gender based disparities impact individuals' experiences and outcomes. Within the workplace, these disparities may manifest as unequal pay, differential promotion rates, and varying levels of job satisfaction. Despite growing awareness and legislative interventions, gender related performance gaps continue to influence organizational structures and individual career trajectories.

One of the critical dimensions of performance evaluation lies in distinguishing between subjective and objective success. Subjective success is a deeply personal and introspective dimension of career and life achievement, encompassing an individual's perceived sense of accomplishment, emotional satisfaction, and alignment with a greater sense of life purpose. Unlike objective success, which is often measured through external markers such as income, job title, or social status, subjective success is shaped by a person's internal values, personal goals, and emotional well being. It reflects how individuals feel about their own progress, and whether their experiences resonate with what they genuinely consider meaningful.

At its core, subjective success theory challenges the conventional notion that success can be universally defined or uniformly applied across individuals. Rather than subscribing to standardized societal benchmarks such as wealth accumulation or corporate advancement this theory proposes that each person should define success on their own terms, based on what brings them a sense of fulfillment, integrity, and alignment with their

values. This theoretical perspective asserts that success is not a one size fits all concept, but a dynamic and individualized construct that can and should vary widely depending on one's life circumstances, cultural background, personal aspirations, and stage of life. Embracing subjective success allows individuals to pursue careers and lifestyles that are authentic to their own needs and identities, rather than feeling compelled to chase externally imposed ideals. For instance, one person may find success in building a high powered corporate career, while another may define it through community impact, artistic expression, or achieving work life harmony. By honoring these diverse pathways, subjective success empowers individuals to make intentional choices that foster greater psychological resilience, motivation, and long term satisfaction. Moreover, research has shown that individuals who experience a high degree of subjective success often report better mental health, lower levels of burnout, and stronger engagement with their work and relationships. This reinforces the idea that subjective success is not merely a softer, secondary aspect of achievement, but a vital component of overall well being and life satisfaction. Organizations and policymakers alike can benefit from recognizing the value of subjective success by creating environments that support personal growth, autonomy, and meaningful engagement, rather than narrowly focusing on traditional metrics of performance.

Ultimately, the concept of subjective success invites a more human centered approach to achievement, one that prioritizes inner fulfilment and the freedom to define one's own version of a meaningful and successful life.

In contrast, Objective success refers to the tangible, externally validated markers of achievement that are commonly recognized and valued within society. These indicators often include income level, job title or rank, number of promotions, educational attainment, and other quantifiable accomplishments that can be measured and compared across individuals. Unlike subjective success, which is based on personal perceptions and emotional fulfilment, objective success is rooted in external evaluations and socially constructed standards of achievement.

From the perspective of objective success theory, success is viewed as something that can be assessed through observable and verifiable metrics. This theoretical framework posits that certain outcomes such as earning a high salary, holding an executive position, publishing a number of academic papers, or receiving prestigious awards can serve as universal indicators of success, regardless of an individual's personal values or subjective experiences. In this view, success is not simply a matter of how one feels, but of what one has accomplished in concrete, socially recognized terms. Objective success theory is often grounded in the assumption that external benchmarks reflect merit and performance, making it a useful tool for evaluating individuals in competitive environments such as the workplace, academia, or public life. For example, in organizational settings, promotions and compensation packages are frequently used as proxies for capability and effectiveness. Similarly, in public discourse, an individual's material wealth or professional stature is often equated with their overall success. This framework aligns with broader cultural narratives that equate success with material prosperity, professional advancement, and social prestige. It appeals to institutions and systems that rely on standardized measures of performance for making decisions about hiring, compensation, and career progression. Furthermore, objective indicators are often easier to quantify and compare, making them attractive for empirical research, performance appraisals, and policy design.

However, while objective success provides clear and comparable standards, it may overlook the complex and individualized nature of human motivation and well being. A person may achieve high levels of objective success yet feel unfulfilled or disconnected from their personal goals. This limitation has led scholars and practitioners to argue that an exclusive focus on objective success may lead to narrow or incomplete understandings of career development and life satisfaction.

Therefore, although objective success offers valuable insights into externally measurable outcomes, it must be viewed as only one dimension of a broader, multidimensional concept of success. Integrating both objective and subjective perspectives allows for a more comprehensive understanding of what it means to truly succeed one that accounts for both external validation and internal fulfilment.

These two constructs, while distinct, often intersect and together provide a comprehensive picture of career success. This study focuses on the intersection of gender and career success by investigating whether men and women differ in their subjective and objective perceptions and achievements. The relevance of this inquiry is underscored by persistent assumptions that men achieve more tangible success, while women derive greater satisfaction from work life balance or interpersonal aspects. By studying a balanced sample of IT professionals, this research aims to provide empirical evidence that may either support or challenge these stereotypes.

II. Review of Literature

By synthesizing relevant studies, this review lays the groundwork for developing informed hypotheses and justifying the study's contribution to the evolving discourse on gender and performance in the workplace.

Ng and Feldman (2014) analyzed the predictors of subjective career success and highlighted how obstacles faced throughout a career can become significant stressors that negatively impact one's subjective sense of achievement. Drawing from a meta analysis of 216 samples spanning three decades, the study identified key

hindrances to subjective career success, including low motivation, limited social networks, dispositional traits, and inadequate organizational and job support. These findings emphasize the importance of internal and external resources in shaping individuals' subjective evaluations of their career trajectories.

Koekemoer, Olckers, and Nel (2020) investigated how subjective career success influences work related and personal well being outcomes such as job satisfaction, work engagement, and family enrichment. In a study involving 334 participants selected through convenience sampling, results revealed a positive relationship among these variables. Notably, work family enrichment emerged as a significant predictor of both subjective career success and broader job related outcomes, suggesting that successful integration of work and family life plays a vital role in individuals' perceptions of career fulfillment.

Dobrow (2017) sought to deepen the understanding of individuals who achieve extraordinary subjective success by exploring how the concept of "calling" relates to subjective career success. Constructs such as work preferences, work engagement, flow, work orientation, and a conscious sense of calling were examined, revealing that those who perceive their work as a calling often experience enhanced subjective success. This study underscores the role of intrinsic motivation and meaningful work in shaping personal career evaluations.

Lortie Lussier and Rinfret (2005) found that human capital factors such as salary and position level were significant predictors of objective career success for both men and women. However, the study also revealed gender specific predictors: age and family situation were more predictive for men, whereas interpersonal skills were more influential for women. These findings point to the nuanced pathways through which gender intersects with professional advancement.

Ng et al. (2005), through a comprehensive meta analysis, demonstrated that while human capital and demographic factors are strong predictors of objective career success, subjective success is more closely tied to individual differences and organizational sponsorship. This distinction reinforces the idea that although subjective and objective success may overlap, they are influenced by fundamentally different sets of variables.

Spurk et al. (2019) emphasized the complexity of career success by classifying its theoretical foundations into several domains withdrawal attitudes, well being, self concept, and environmental reactions. These multidimensional perspectives support the argument that career success should be viewed as a complex and multifaceted construct, influenced by a wide array of psychological and contextual factors.

Thomas, Eby, Sorensen, and Feldman (2005) examined four broad categories of predictors human capital, organizational sponsorship, stable individual differences, and sociodemographic status across both subjective and objective success outcomes. Their findings indicated that subjective success is more closely linked to stable individual characteristics and organizational support, while objective success is more strongly predicted by sociodemographic factors and human capital indicators like education and tenure.

Bagdadli and Gianecchini (2019) conducted a systematic review to examine how organizational career management practices influence objective career success and under what conditions this relationship is beneficial. They proposed a theoretical framework involving three mechanisms developmental, informational, and relational that mediate the relationship between career management and objective outcomes, thereby offering insight into how organizations can actively foster employee success.

Finally, Nabi (1999) observed that individuals with advanced educational qualifications in structured organizational environments tended to report higher levels of objective success. Meanwhile, subjective career success was more strongly linked to perceived job security and high work centrality, regardless of gender. This suggests that subjective success is influenced more by perceptions and values than by tangible career milestones.

This study hold value because in today's evolving professional landscape, understanding what constitutes career success has become increasingly complex. While traditional measures have focused on objective outcomes like salary and promotions, subjective dimensions such as personal satisfaction and perceived fulfillment are gaining equal importance. Despite this shift, limited research has explored how these two forms of success relate to each other across genders. Given the global push for workplace equity, this study aims to fill that gap by examining the relationship between subjective and objective career success and investigating whether gender plays a significant role in shaping these experiences. Insights from this study can contribute to more inclusive career development practices and a better understanding of how success is defined and experienced in contemporary work settings.

Objectives

- To study the relationship between subjective and objective success.
- To explore gender differences in subjective and objective success.

Hypotheses

H₁: There is a significant relationship between subjective and objective success.

H₂: There is a significant gender differences in subjective and/or objective success.

Sample

The sample comprised 60 IT professionals (30 male, 30 female) aged 25 to 45 years, with a minimum of five years of work experience. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants. Participants were selected based on the inclusion criteria of having a minimum of five years of experience in the IT sector and being currently employed within the industry. Those who didn't meet the inclusion criteria were excluded.

Measures used for the study were Subjective Career Success Inventory (SCSI) (Shockley et al., 2016)

A 24 item scale measuring eight dimensions: authenticity, quality work, growth, influence, recognition, satisfaction, meaningful work, and personal life. Responses are recorded on a 5 point Likert scale and Objective Career Success Scale. It was adopted for the study to assess salary, promotion rate, and salary growth. Participants rated these using a 5 point Likert scale.

The procedure involved informing the participants about the study and they provided informed consent. Data were collected ensuring anonymity and ethical compliance. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS 25.0.

III. Result Analysis

Analysis involved Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation), Pearson correlation coefficient and Independent samples t test

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N=60)

Variable	Min	Max	Mean (M)	Std. Dev (SD)
Subjective career	46	106	84.33	13.58
Objective Career Success	3	15	9.35	2.78

Descriptive Statistics involved mean and standard deviation. The Subjective career had a mean score of 84.33 (SD = 13.58), with scores ranging from 46 to 106. The Objective Career Success (OCS) had a mean score of 9.35 (SD = 2.78), with a minimum score of 3 and a maximum of 15. These results indicate moderate to high levels of Subjective career and Objective Career Success among participants.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix for Subjective and Objective Career Success (N=60)

Variable	1	2
1. Subjective Success	1.00	
2. Objective Career Success	.582**	1.00

Note: $p < .01$

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between subjective career success and objective career success. As shown in Table , there was a significant positive correlation between subjective success and objective success, $r = .582$, $p < .01$, indicating that individuals who reported higher levels of subjective success also tended to have higher levels of objective career success.

Table 3: Independent Samples t Test Comparing Subjective and Objective Career Success by Gender

Variable	Gender	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Subjective Success	Male	84.32	13.61	0.006	58	.995
Objective Career Success	Male	9.68	2.69	0.949	58	.347

An independent samples t test was conducted to examine gender differences in subjective and objective career success. For subjective career success, the results revealed no significant difference between males ($M = 84.32$, $SD = 13.61$) and females, $t(58) = 0.006$, $p = .995$, indicating that both genders reported similar levels of subjective success.

Similarly, for objective career success, the difference between males ($M = 9.68$, $SD = 2.69$) and females was not statistically significant, $t(58) = 0.949$, $p = .347$. These findings suggest that gender does not significantly influence either subjective or objective career success in this sample.

IV. Discussion

The findings of the current study offer robust empirical support for **Hypothesis 1**, affirming a significant positive association between subjective and objective career success among IT professionals. Specifically, the data indicate that individuals who perceive themselves as successful reflected in feelings of personal growth, recognition, and effective work life integration also tend to achieve quantifiable indicators of career success, such as higher salaries, promotions, and enhanced job titles or positional status.

This relationship is not merely coincidental but echoes the conclusions of earlier studies, including those by Spurk et al. (2019). This body of work emphasizes the bidirectional nature of the link between subjective and objective success. The meta analysis highlighted that, while subjective and objective career outcomes are conceptually distinct, they often stem from overlapping antecedents such as job involvement, access to mentorship, and psychological empowerment. These shared antecedents contribute both to internal career satisfaction and to the attainment of external rewards, suggesting a mutually reinforcing dynamic.

This level of shared relation is meaningful and points to a critical insight: neither form of success should be considered in isolation. For example, a professional who experiences promotions and salary increases may simultaneously feel a heightened sense of purpose and accomplishment especially when those external rewards align with their personal values and long term aspirations. Conversely, individuals who find their work meaningful and aligned with their life goals may be more motivated, persistent, and visible thus improving their chances of achieving objective markers of success.

This dual reinforcement between the internal and external dimensions of success is consistent with findings by Valcour and Ladge (2008), who observed that income levels and career satisfaction were often intertwined, especially among professional women striving to balance career and personal life commitments. Their work, much like the present study, illustrates that career success is most holistically understood when both subjective experiences and objective outcomes are considered in tandem.

The relationship between subjective and objective career success can also be understood through several theoretical and psychological frameworks. One explanation is the reinforcement loop, wherein individuals who receive promotions, earn higher salaries, or gain professional recognition (objective success) often experience increased career satisfaction and fulfillment (subjective success). This sense of achievement is further supported by self efficacy and validation; tangible accomplishments boost confidence and reinforce personal worth, thereby enhancing subjective evaluations of success. Goal Attainment Theory also supports this interplay, positing that when individuals reach career goals aligned with both intrinsic values and extrinsic outcomes, their sense of overall success both subjective and objective tends to rise. Additionally, Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005) highlights that individuals shape their careers not just through measurable achievements but also through personal meaning making, thus reinforcing the interdependent nature of subjective and objective career success.

In relation to **Hypothesis 2**, the analysis revealed no statistically significant gender differences in either subjective or objective success scores among IT professionals. This finding directly challenges long standing assumptions that men and women systematically experience divergent outcomes in professional achievement and self perceived success. The absence of measurable disparity suggests that, at least within the sampled IT workforce, traditional gender based performance evaluations may be losing their influence a noteworthy development in a field historically marked by pronounced gender imbalances in areas such as leadership representation, compensation, and career progression.

The implications of this finding are particularly significant given the context of the IT sector, which has long grappled with structural and cultural barriers limiting women's advancement. The current results may indicate a shift toward more performance driven and meritocratic workplace cultures, where career success whether evaluated through promotions, salary levels, or personal fulfillment is increasingly determined by individual contributions and outcomes rather than by gendered expectations or biases.

This interpretation finds support in prior research. For example, Ali et al. (2020) observed that both perceived job autonomy and psychological empowerment were equally strong predictors of subjective success across genders in technology settings. Their findings suggest that when individuals are given control over their work and the opportunity to develop professionally, both men and women can experience comparable levels of career satisfaction and perceived success. Similarly, Cech (2021) documented the impact of institutional reforms, such as flexible work policies, pay transparency initiatives, and targeted diversity and inclusion strategies, which have begun to narrow gender gaps in high skill, knowledge intensive industries like IT.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while historical inequalities have not been entirely eradicated, progress is being made. The lack of gender disparity in the current study may reflect early evidence of cultural and structural shifts within the IT profession shifts that prioritize equity, inclusivity, and the dismantling of systemic barriers. It also points to the possibility that success, both subjective and objective is becoming more equally accessible to professionals regardless of gender, provided that enabling workplace conditions are in place.

It is also possible that the emphasis on flexible work environments, virtual collaboration, and individual performance tracking especially in post pandemic settings has contributed to a more equitable distribution of opportunities and outcomes across genders. However, it is essential to interpret these findings with caution. The lack of gender differences in this sample does not negate the existence of broader systemic issues such as occupational segregation, gender pay gaps at organizational or national levels, or subtle biases in promotion criteria. Rather, it highlights the possibility that gender equality in performance outcomes may be more attainable under specific workplace conditions that emphasize meritocracy, transparency, and inclusion.

Additionally, while no gender difference was observed in this sample, prior research still points to important nuances. For instance, Lortie Lussier and Rinfret (2005) found that different predictors influenced male

and female career success: men benefitted more from traditional career capital such as age and hierarchical position, while women leveraged interpersonal competencies. This raises the possibility that men and women may achieve similar outcomes through different pathways a hypothesis that merits further exploration in future research.

Taken together, the findings of the current study reinforce the multidimensional nature of career success, highlighting the intricate interplay between subjective experiences (such as personal growth, recognition, and work life balance) and objective indicators (such as salary, promotions, and professional status). This nuanced understanding underscores that career success cannot be fully captured by any single metric, but rather emerges from a convergence of internal satisfaction and external achievements.

Moreover, the results suggest that well structured and inclusive work environments have the potential to diminish the influence of gender on career outcomes. The absence of significant gender differences in both subjective and objective success among IT professionals points to a promising shift in workplace culture one where merit, autonomy, and empowerment are increasingly prioritized over traditional biases or stereotypes. This has important implications for talent management in high skill industries, where leveraging diverse perspectives is crucial for innovation and competitiveness.

Given these insights, organizations are encouraged to adopt holistic evaluation and development frameworks that recognize and reward both personal fulfilment and tangible performance outcomes. Such frameworks might include flexible career paths, opportunities for meaningful work, access to mentorship, and equitable performance appraisals that go beyond conventional metrics. By fostering an environment where all employees regardless of gender have the opportunity to thrive both professionally and personally, companies can not only enhance individual career trajectories but also strengthen organizational effectiveness and promote a more inclusive workplace culture.

Ultimately, the findings advocate for a paradigm shift in how career success is conceptualized and supported within organizations. Success should be seen not solely as an individual accomplishment, but as an outcome shaped by systemic conditions, organizational practices, and inclusive leadership. Supporting diverse talent through equitable structures is not just a moral imperative it is a strategic necessity in today's evolving workforce

This study addresses a critical gap in the existing literature by examining the relationship between subjective and objective career success through the lens of gender a perspective that remains underexplored, particularly in the Indian professional context. By revealing no significant gender differences in either domain of success, the findings challenge traditional assumptions about gender based disparities in career outcomes. This contributes to a growing body of evidence suggesting that modern workplaces may be gradually moving toward more equitable career experiences.

The significant correlation between subjective and objective success further reinforces the interconnectedness of internal fulfillment and external achievement, offering empirical support to integrated models of career development such as Goal Attainment Theory and Career Construction Theory. In doing so, the study advances a more nuanced understanding of career success as a multidimensional and dynamic construct.

The implications of these findings are both practical and policy relevant. Organizations should recognize that fostering subjective success through mentoring, meaningful work, and recognition can be just as crucial as enabling objective advancements. Moreover, the findings encourage HR professionals and career counselors to adopt gender neutral development frameworks that prioritize individual values, strengths, and goals over demographic assumptions.

Future research should build on this foundation by employing longitudinal designs and larger, more diverse samples to explore how factors such as work life balance, personality traits, organizational culture, and intersectional identities influence the evolving definitions and experiences of success. Such studies will be vital for shaping inclusive workplace policies and career development programs that reflect the realities of an increasingly diverse and dynamic workforce.

References

- [1]. Bagdadli, S. & Gianecchini, M. (2019, September). Organizational career management practices and objective career success: A systematic review and framework. *Human Resource Management Review*, 29(3), 353-370. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2018.08.001>
- [2]. Dobrow, S. (2017, December). Extreme subjective career success: A new integrated view of having a calling. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 1, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2004.13863838>
- [3]. Koekemoer, E., Olckers, C., & Nel, C. (2020). Work-family enrichment, job satisfaction, and work engagement: The mediating role of subjective career success. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 72(4), 347-358. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajpy.12290>
- [4]. Lortie Lussier, M., & Rinfret, N. (2005). Determinants of objective and subjective success of men and women. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 71(4), 607-624. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852305059601>
- [5]. Nabi, G. R. (1999). An investigation into the differential profile of predictors of objective and subjective career success. *Career Development International*, 4(4), 212-225. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620439910270599>
- [6]. Ng, T. W. H., Eby, L. T., Sorensen, K. L., & Feldman, D. C. (2005). Predictors of objective and subjective career success: A meta analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, 58(2), 367-408. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2005.00515.x>

- [7]. Ng, T. W. H., & Feldman, D. C. (2014). Subjective career success: A meta analytic review. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 85(2), 169–179. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2014.06.001>
- [8]. Spurk, D., Hirschi, A., & Dries, N. (2019). Antecedents and outcomes of objective versus subjective career success. *Journal of Management*, 45(1), 35–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318786563>
- [9]. Spurk, D., Keller, A. C., & Hirschi, A. (2016). Do bad guys get ahead or fall behind? *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 7(2), 113–121. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550615609735>
- [10]. Thomas, W. H. NG, Eby, L. T., Sorensen, K. L., Feldman, D. C. (2005, May). Predictors of objective and subjective career success: A meta analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, 58(2), 367–408. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2005.00515.x>
- [11]. Valcour, M., & Ladge, J. J. (2008). Family and career path characteristics as predictors of women's objective and subjective career success. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 73(2), 300–309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2008.06.002>