Understanding Contemporary Career Success: A Critical Review

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Abstract

This article provides a critical review of developments in the literature on career success. We review work from both the organizational psychology (OP) and organizational behavior (OB) disciplines, highlighting the different perspectives, strengths, and weaknesses of each area, and attempt to reconcile these perspectives on career success to suggest productive new research directions. First, the article reflects on conceptualizations of objective and subjective career success and their relative value to the field. We then discuss several categories of career success predictors drawn from economic, sociological, and social-psychological perspectives used in OP and OB. These include human capital, internal and external labor markets, sponsorship and social capital, stable and malleable individual differences, and career self-management behaviors. We provide research suggestions within each of those sections as well as an integrative research agenda built around several emerging issues and theoretical perspectives, encouraging future research on the implications of sustainable careers, career shocks, marginalized group experiences, and alternative employment arrangements for career success.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a timely moment for scholars to think and write about career success. We continue to experience the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, manifest in the workforce through phenomena that have been variously termed the Great Resignation, the Great Reshuffling, Quiet Quitting, and the Return to the Office controversy. These labels reference unprecedented levels of withdrawal from the labor market and movement between organizations, occupations, and self-employment as workers seek greater compensation, benefits, flexibility, and meaning from their work lives. The effects are being felt across the occupational and geographic spectra, from lower-paying jobs in retail and hospitality, to nursing and other skilled jobs in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) member countries, to entry-level manufacturing jobs in China and Southeast Asia, to sought-after technical jobs across the globe (Fuller & Kerr 2022, Tharoor 2021). After decades of stagnation, wages among low-wage occupations have begun to grow even as labor productivity has begun to decline (Bureau Labor Stat. & US Dep. Labor 2022, Gould & Kandra 2022). The shock of the global pandemic may have brought us to an inflection point as individuals again reconsider their orientation toward work, reflect on their careers, and embrace the boundaryless nature of work and careers as fully as have their employers in previous decades. Such phenomena can only be fully understood from a career perspective, making this an opportune time for us to reflect on the progress and challenges in the research on career success.

In Section 2 below, we provide a brief overview of the source disciplines that have historically informed the study of career success to help define the scope of the present review. Section 3 reviews traditional and emerging conceptualizations of career success itself. Section 4 reviews predictors of career success organized around seven broad theoretical and disciplinary perspectives. Finally, Section 5 offers an agenda for future career success research, focusing on five promising perspectives. Throughout this review, we provide a critical perspective on the study of career success in hopes of prompting constructive progress.

2. SCOPE OF REVIEW

Organizational psychology[1] (OP) and organizational behavior (OB), the two related but distinct academic traditions that lend their name to this journal, are the primary homes for research on career success in the past 30 years. Although a strict delineation between these academic traditions cannot be drawn, these disciplines have their own distinct perspectives, constructs, theories, and methodological standards. For example, scholars who identify themselves as work and organizational psychologists typically draw from theories of work, occupational, and vocational psychology, whereas scholars who identify with OB tend to draw from management and source disciplines such as sociology and economics. In addition, OP focuses primarily on internal psychological processes, constructs specific to careers, and subjective career outcomes, whereas OB focuses more on workplace behaviors, general OB constructs, and objective work and career outcomes. Other distinctions include such seemingly arbitrary but important differences as geographic location (e.g., Europe or the United States) and preferred journal outlets (e.g., *Journal of Vocational Behavior* and *Career Development International* or *Journal of Applied Psychology* and *Personnel Psychology*). It is a theme of this review that these two "invisible colleges" (Crane 1972) have been working to understand the same phenomenon but progressing along parallel tracks, sometimes sharing theories, models, and constructs but other times duplicating each other's work or

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[1]The field of organizational psychology is also often referred to as work and organizational psychology, and it is in this literature where much of the interest in career success is shown. For the sake of consistency, we continue to refer to organizational psychology throughout this article.

pursuing separate lines of inquiry altogether. Each research tradition can benefit from knowing and understanding the other in greater depth, borrowing, refining, or refuting ideas where necessary, thereby moving toward a more coherent and comprehensive understanding of career success.

3. CONCEPTUALIZING AND RE-CONCEPTUALIZING CAREER SUCCESS

Although the construct of career success may seem intuitive—i.e., you will know it when you see it—many consider career success a social construction rather than an objective reality, embedded in understanding a particular historical time and place, and therefore there are multiple and dynamically changing perspectives on the construct (Dries et al. 2008).

A career has been defined as the "evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time" (Arthur et al. 1989, p. 8). Career success has been defined as the positive material and psychological outcomes or achievements resulting from those work activities and experiences (Judge et al. 1995). These definitions reflect both objective and subjective outcomes associated with careers. Objective career success (OCS) refers to outcomes that are quantitative and independently verifiable such as occupational status, income, number or speed of promotions, and the achievement of professional title or rank in an organizational hierarchy. They reflect an intersubjective standard that peers or the incumbent themselves can use to evaluate one's level of success relative to others (Gattiker & Larwood 1986). In that sense, OCS indicators implicitly reflect social comparisons with others. Subjective career success (SCS), however, refers to the individual's cognitive evaluation and affective reaction to all aspects of one's career, including objective outcomes as well as factors holding more idiosyncratic personal values and meanings. SCS reflects a self-referential frame of reference (Gattiker & Larwood 1986) and is therefore much less likely to be influenced by comparisons relative to peers.

Despite its relatively straightforward definition, the career success construct has been the subject of considerable debate over the past two decades. Changing ideas regarding the nature of career success emerged with changes in the nature of careers themselves, most famously identified by Arthur & Rousseau (1996) as the rise of the boundaryless or, perhaps more broadly, contemporary career (Arthur 2008). If the traditional career of vertical movement within a single organization was a thing of the past, these scholars argued, OCS might be less relevant and SCS might become a more central construct. Several scholars (e.g., Arthur et al. 2005, Heslin 2005) called for a more differentiated view on, and measurement of, SCS. Much of the emphasis on expanding the domain of career success that followed took place in the OP literature without explicit connections to issues in the wider OB literature. The critique of the relevance of traditional career theory continues to drive changes in the conceptualization and measurement of career success today. However, we believe that a continued exploration of the subjective meaning of career success will have diminishing returns relative to more pressing questions; fair warning as we offer a critical view in the hopes of forming a new consensus.

3.1. Objective Career Success: Critiques and Replies

In this section, we briefly review the well-established critiques of OCS and offer a number of reasons to value OCS as an important career outcome.

3.1.1. Critiques of objective career success. Considerable conceptual work has focused on the deficiencies of OCS indicators (e.g., Heslin 2005). According to this line of reasoning, objective indicators, such as salary attainment or hierarchical level, are contaminated as career success constructs because they are affected by factors outside the individual's control, such as occupational

wage structures, and deficient because they neglect individual subjective dimensions of career success, such as satisfaction and meaningful work. Furthermore, the new career structure would lead employees to place less value on objective outcomes and greater value on the subjective and sometimes idiosyncratic aspects of their work and careers.

3.1.2. Revaluing objective career success.

Although we acknowledge the validity of these issues, several of these critiques, especially coming from OP, exaggerate the deficiencies of OCS constructs and inhibit important research directions. First, that these indicators are indeed objective is an important attribute in itself that should not be discarded. After all, being able to objectively assess career success allows for comparisons between people and circumvents methodological issues of inflated effect sizes due to common method variance (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Second, the criterion deficiency and contamination critiques assume that OCS constructs, such as salary, are a measure of career performance (actions that are thought to lead to goal achievement) when they are, in fact, a direct measure of one specific career goal to be achieved (Campbell & Wiernik 2015). Finally, in terms of research, it is common practice for occupation to be included as a control variable, allowing researchers to draw conclusions about factors affecting career success that are valid across multiple occupations. In terms of practice, occupational differences in wage levels that derive from economic or social processes should be included as part of career decision making rather than viewed as extraneous factors.

In addition to these methodological critiques of OCS, since the 1990s scholars have taken on a prescriptive tone in their critique. Career scholars have argued that, because opportunities for vertical movement within organizations are less frequent in the contemporary career era, employees either will or should focus less on OCS outcomes and more on SCS outcomes. There are several problems with this view. First, although it does appear that average job tenure has gone down over the past 30 years, the evidence does not provide strong support for the proposition that there actually was a sudden and dramatic change in organizational tenure since the 1990s (Chudzikowski 2012, Rodrigues & Guest 2010). Second, to the extent that career progress within the firm has become rarer, competition for the more limited number of internal promotions may be more intense, and OCS may be a more valued outcome than ever. Third, the de-emphasis on OCS in the career literature may be less an empirical observation about employees than a rhetorical strategy normalizing the loss of stable organizational careers and organizational support for career development (Inkson et al. 2012). Finally, studies of OCS will always be appropriate since at least some individuals will want to know how to attain higher levels of these material outcomes. The emphasis on personal meaning in one's career may be a luxury of the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) (Henrich et al. 2010) samples often the focus of career research (Inkson et al. 2012). Recent qualitative work in the United States and across the globe shows that financial achievement and security remain important considerations for working adults (Mayrhofer et al. 2016, Seibert et al. 2013). Furthermore, OCS is likely to remain a keen interest from an equity perspective for employees in nontraditional work arrangements and for traditionally marginalized groups, such as women, racial and ethnic minorities, those with nontraditional sexual or gender orientations, people with disabilities, and displaced immigrants (Ashford et al. 2018, Blustein et al. 2019).

In sum, OCS remains relevant and important. The solution to the limitations of OCS is not to abandon this outcome but, rather, to broaden our assessment of the career success domain such that it includes both OCS and SCS. Research on career success that includes both OCS and SCS has been common for some time but, as a result of these critiques, may be on the decline. Arthur et al. (2005) showed that 65% of studies of career success appearing in management journals included both OCS and SCS measures, whereas Spurk et al. (2019) showed that less than half

of the career success studies they reviewed included both. We recommend, when possible, the inclusion of both types of outcomes for developing and testing career success models, unless there is a well-articulated theoretical reason to focus exclusively on one.

3.2. Subjective Career Success: Progress and Unresolved Issues

Considerable scholarly effort, especially in the OP area, has focused on broadening the domain of the SCS construct to better capture the changing nature of careers. In reviewing the literature between 2003 and 2014, Shockley et al. (2016) found that 74% of the included articles operationalized the construct as either career satisfaction or a global success evaluation. Here, we review the efforts to define a more comprehensive, multidimensional conceptualization of SCS. Following that, we examine numerous key issues that have emerged regarding the conceptualization of SCS that we believe need to be resolved to move research on SCS forward.

3.2.1. Advances in the subjective career success construct.
Considerable progress has been made toward identifying the full range of SCS facets or dimensions. The most popular measure of SCS has been Greenhaus et al.'s (1990) career satisfaction scale, which is conceptualized as a single dimension reflecting satisfaction with several objective and subjective dimensions as well as overall satisfaction associated with the achievement of one's career goals. Recently, however, research in the United States, in Europe, and in a cross-cultural context (Briscoe et al. 2021, Dries et al. 2008, Seibert et al. 2013, Shockley et al. 2016) has enhanced our understanding of the "meaning" of career success, i.e., the range of issues people think about when they assess their career success. **Table 1** provides an integration of the content domains of career success identified in a selection of these studies (see Dries et al. 2008 and Shockley et al. 2016 for more comprehensive reviews). Based on this integration of SCS conceptualizations, we see eight main dimensions emerging, which focus on people's satisfaction or experience of (*a*) financial concerns, (*b*) advancement in responsibility, status, and influence, (*c*) interpersonal relations, (*d*) challenge and mastery, (*e*) meaning and impact, (*f*) self-development, (*g*) career opportunities and control, and (*h*) the work-life interface. In addition, an overall assessment of one's SCS or satisfaction with one's career is also part of several frameworks.

Despite these significant advancements, to date, there has been little use of the new scales in empirical work. For example, the promising multidimensional views of SCS offered by Shockley et al. (2016) and the Cross-Cultural Collaboration on Contemporary Careers (5C) group (Briscoe et al. 2021) have, thus far, mostly been used as organizing schemes for literature reviews and conceptual papers (e.g., Spurk et al. 2019). In fact, most empirical studies citing Shockley et al.'s work still used Greenhaus et al.'s career satisfaction scale to measure SCS. Similarly, empirical studies using the 5C scale are starting to appear, although most have thus far focused primarily on the financial success facet (e.g., Bagdadli et al. 2021, Smale et al. 2019). Although this may be due to the newness of the scales, resolution of remaining issues may be necessary before scholars can make full use of these new conceptualizations, not least of which is the incremental value of these longer scales over the much shorter global career success scales.

3.2.2. Moving subjective career success research forward.
First, the conceptual and empirical overlap between existing constructs in the OB literature and the emerging career success constructs will need to be resolved. Ng & Feldman (2014) reported a corrected meta-analytic correlation of 0.61 between job satisfaction and career success based on previous SCS measures. Several of the dimensions emerging from more recent SCS scales suggest even greater overlap. For example, recognition, quality of work, meaningful work, and positive relationships at work are identified as career success dimensions (Briscoe et al. 2021, Shockley et al. 2016) but appear

Table 1 Selected subjective career success conceptualizations

	Gattiker & Larwood 1986	Greenhaus et al. 1990	Dries et al. 2008 (conceptual only)	Seibert et al. 2013	Shockley et al. 2016	Briscoe et al. 2021
Financial	Financial	Income	Intrapersonal achievement ■ Security	Financial success	Not included	Material concerns ■ Financial security ■ Financial success
Career advancement	Hierarchical	Advancement	Interpersonal achievement ■ Advancement	Power and status	Influence	Not included
Interpersonal relations	Interpersonal	Not included	Interpersonal affect ■ Recognition ■ Cooperation	Not included	Recognition	Social relations ■ Positive relationships
Challenge and mastery	Job	Not included	Interpersonal achievement ■ Performance	Not included	Quality work	Not included
Meaning and impact	Not included	Not included	Interpersonal affect ■ Perceived contribution	Not included	Meaningful work	Social relations ■ Positive impact
Self-development	Not included	Skill development	Intrapersonal affect ■ Self-development ■ Creativity	Knowledge and skill development	Growth and development	Learning and development
Career control	Not included	Not included	Not included	Employability and desirable job opportunities	Authenticity	Entrepreneurship
Work-life interface	Not included	Not included	Not included	Not included	Personal life	Social relations ■ Work-life balance
Overall	Not included	Progress toward career goals Achievement of career goals	Intrapersonal achievement ■ Satisfaction	Not included	Satisfaction	Not included

to overlap with previously identified facets of job satisfaction (Weiss et al. 1967)[2] or intrinsic job characteristics (Hackman & Oldham 1975). Likewise, the work-life balance dimension of SCS is likely to overlap with existing work-family balance measures (Carlson et al. 2009). Although these SCS scales may provide a more fine-grained understanding of career success, they raise issues of contamination with other constructs. We argue it is critical that scholars are careful and consistent in how they conceptualize and operationalize these constructs and will need to focus on incremental validity above and beyond existing OB measures.

Second, the questions of multidimensionality and weighting of dimensions also become more significant as the number of SCS dimensions increases. Although distinct dimensions may be diagnostic for applied purposes (Briscoe et al. 2021), many researchers in the broader management field might prefer a shorter, unidimensional scale for theory development and testing. Since the dimensions are correlated, researchers will likely need to use structural equation modeling techniques to simultaneously model the independent SCS facets as well as one or two OCS indicators, a daunting prospect. If the dimensions are unique, can they be used alone or does one need to use them all and formulate separate hypotheses for each? Some of the SCS scales are conceptualized as unidimensional, even if items tap several distinct facets of one's career (e.g., Greenhaus et al. 1990, Turban & Dougherty 1994). Other measures are designed to assess multiple distinct dimensions, but the authors suggest the subfactors can be unit-weighted to provide a single career satisfaction measure (Seibert et al. 2013). Yet others, like Briscoe et al.'s (2021) scale, explicitly recommend using the dimensions as separate measures but include importance weights to construct an overall SCS scale. Hence, we believe some level of consensus will be necessary regarding the way different SCS measurements are to be used.

Previous work on job satisfaction may be instructive. For example, Ironson et al. (1989) found that specific job satisfaction facets predicted specific criteria better than a composite scale, but their global measure of job satisfaction explained variance in the specific criteria beyond the five specific facets and was particularly useful for predicting broad outcomes, such as intent to leave. The lesson here for career success research may be that specific dimensions of SCS are best for specific career predictors or interventions (see Spurk et al. 2019) but global measures of SCS may best be used to assess overall SCS or as a predictor of a broad subsequent career behavior, such as job or career turnover. In all, the OP (i.e., multidimensional preference) and OB (i.e., unidimensional preference) fields may learn from each other by adopting a customized approach to measuring SCS. More specifically, using fine-grained SCS measurement instruments is advised when scholars are interested in predictors, mechanisms, or interventions theoretically associated with only specific aspects of one's career. But when scholars use SCS as part of a broader research model aiming to build and test theory about the general notion of SCS, short unidimensional or global SCS measures like Greenhaus et al.'s (1990) are likely the most appropriate.

On a final note, there has been a great deal of research on the subjective meaning of career success. The similarity of the content dimensions that emerge suggests that we have reached what qualitative researchers call saturation. Given the abovementioned developments in uncovering the facets of SCS, it is unlikely that, at least for the foreseeable future, exploratory research on the subjective meaning of career success will yield previously unidentified dimensions of SCS general enough to apply to a range of occupations. As such, now is the time to consolidate what we know about SCS facets, pruning and refining through further empirical testing. On the other hand, there are many methodological questions regarding the conceptualization of the career success

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[2]The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire grows out of the theory of work adjustment (Dawis et al. 1964), which is itself a theory of career success, suggesting that a theoretical association between these dimensions and career success is already well established.

Table 2 Choices in the conceptualization and measurement of career success

Type of career outcome	Measurement strategy	Frame of reference	Dimensionality of measure

Nature of the career outcome
■ In principle, objective and verifiable
  □ Salary, number of promotions, rank, occupational status
■ Subjective, but relatively cognition-based
  □ Progress relative to peers or personal goals
■ Subjective, affective, idiosyncratic
  □ Sense of purpose in meaningful work
	Source of measurement
	■ Company archival data or objective rating
	  □ Occupational status
	■ Panel dataset
	  □ Job title
	■ Self-report
	  □ Salary, career satisfaction
		Comparative frame
		■ Progress relative to your own career goals
		  □ Presumably set at some previous time and not updated based on subsequent career events
		■ Evaluation relative to what your peers have achieved
		  □ Evaluation relative to the age/time standards of the profession
			Single dimension
			■ Global items designed to form a single latent construct
			  □ e.g., I am satisfied with my career
			■ Composite, made up of subdimensions
			  □ Unit weighting of items or subdimension scores
			  □ Dimensions combined based on individual importance weights

Motivational basis of outcome
■ Extrinsic
  □ Money, rank
■ Instrumental
  □ Status and influence
  □ Learning and growth
■ Intrinsic
  □ Meaningful work
	Measurement strategy for self-reports
	■ Descriptive
	  □ I have opportunities for promotions.
	■ Evaluative
	  □ How satisfied are you with your opportunities for promotions?
		Time frame
		■ Current state
		  □ How satisfied are you with your career?
		■ Past trajectory of your career
		  □ Looking back over the path of your career…
		■ The future trajectory of your career
		  □ This organization has career opportunities that are appealing to me.
		■ Longitudinal data collected at multiple points in time
		  □ Y1, Y2, Y3
			Multidimensional
			■ Include all dimensions or only specific dimensions
			■ Will specific hypotheses be formed for each dimension?

construct that have not yet been addressed. **Table 2** presents a preliminary guide for future work in this area. As this table suggests, these questions transcend issues of content and require researchers to think carefully about the nature of career success as a construct distinct from other outcomes in the OB literature. We next move to a discussion on several classes of predictors of career success that have been explored in the OP and OB literature.

4. PREDICTORS OF CAREER SUCCESS

In this section, we discuss several key categories of career success predictors. This review is organized according to the different source disciplines and the general theoretical perspectives to which they subscribe but is explicitly not organized according to one single overarching theoretical perspective, which we view as premature and unhelpful to the field at this time. Moreover, we included several categories that are leveraged less often in OP and OB career success research.

4.1. Human Capital

Scholars interested in career success have borrowed some key theoretical ideas from economics, chief of which is human capital theory (HCT) (Becker 1964). HCT was designed to explain the level of investment in education as a function of the rational expectation of the net financial and psychic benefits such investments would yield over the course of one's lifetime. It assumes that education, training, and work experience increase employee productivity, which the labor market rewards with higher earnings and higher status occupations, resulting in higher OCS. Spurk et al. (2019) found HCT the most frequently used theory in the career success literature prior to the year 2000, most often used to explain OCS. Career scholars, mostly in the OB traditions, have invoked HCT to justify the inclusion of variables such as educational level, work experience, employment gaps, and participation in training, although most often as control variables (Judge et al. 1995, Seibert et al. 1999, Wayne et al. 1999). Ng et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis found significant correlations of human capital variables with salary, though only small effects on promotions and mostly nonsignificant effects on career satisfaction.

Despite these findings, there are deficiencies in HCT as a model of career success. First, HCT has become something of a loose theoretical catch-all for constructs that don't fit the theory and fit other perspectives much better. For example, Ng et al. (2005) included career planning, political knowledge, and social capital under the HCT rubric. Second, OB theories of job performance specify mediating constructs linking individual attributes to productivity or performance (Campbell & Wiernik 2015), a critical link questioned by later human capital economists (Tan 2014) and missing in the careers literature. Recent meta-analytic evidence showing only a weak and inconsistent relationship of prehire work experience with job performance (Van Iddekinge et al. 2019) highlights the importance of testing these theoretical assumptions. Third, even assuming a link between HCT constructs and job performance, there is only weak evidence linking performance to the OCS constructs of promotions and pay increases (see Breaugh 2011). A more contextual understanding of managers' promotability judgements and the promotion process is necessary to fully understand the entire causal chain from HCT constructs to performance to promotion and pay increases. Overall, we believe HCT remains valuable, yet more research is required to understand the processes linking these constructs to career success.

4.2. Internal and External Labor Markets

The internal labor market (ILM) perspective suggests that to understand careers, one must understand the process of allocating promotions within organizations. Economists Doeringer & Piore (1971) defined an ILM as a bounded organization in which employee wages and promotions are governed by a set of organizational rules and procedures. Although careers unfolding in a single organization are now less common, internal promotions and lateral job moves continue to be an important aspect of most careers (Bidwell 2013). Thus, the economic and sociological approaches that emphasize the internal processes of making promotion decisions remain relevant.

Several perspectives consider the way competition, relative standing, and promotion history play a role in internal career mobility. For example, Rosenbaum's (1979) formulation of tournament theory showed that employees who experienced promotions early in their careers had higher probabilities of future promotion and reached higher levels overall, supporting a historical or path-dependent model of mobility. In fact, lingering too long at any level reduced the probability of future promotions. More recently, management scholars have found evidence that performance trajectories (Sturman 2003) and promotion trajectories (Alessandri et al. 2021) play a role in subsequent promotions. Again, senior managers' perceptions of employee promotability may play a

critical but to date little-explored role in linking job performance to promotion (Seibert et al. 2017, Wayne et al. 1999).

Another stream of research has more directly examined the way ILMs shape employee career paths and success. For example, Bidwell & Keller (2014) and Keller (2018) demonstrated the benefits of internal promotions for the firm in terms of employee performance and retention. Dlugos & Keller (2021) found that being passed over for promotion could lead an employee to leave the organization unless they received signals of future promotion opportunities. Other research has focused on the interplay between internal and external labor market moves. For instance, Bidwell & Briscoe (2010) showed that technology workers construct their own interorganizational career ladder by initially favoring employment in large organizations, presumably to benefit from training opportunities, but moving to organizations that concentrated on their occupational specialty later in their careers, to capitalize on their accumulated skills. Bidwell & Mollick (2015) found that upward mobility within a single organization was most likely to result in greater managerial responsibility, higher pay, and higher career satisfaction, whereas external moves tended to lead to higher pay relative to staying, but relatively smaller increases in responsibilities and career satisfaction than internal upward moves. Overall, studies in this area show that ILMs matter, with employees enacting their career strategies across internal and external labor markets with a mix of costs and benefits. The topic of organizational career systems once generated considerable interest (Sonnenfeld & Peiperl 1988). We urge OP and OB scholars to place greater (re)emphasis on ILMs and career systems as the context in which career success unfolds.

4.3. Sponsorship, Developmental Support, and Developmental Networks

During the early 1990s, organizational scholars began to recognize and incorporate social support and relationships at work as a determinant of career success. A primary perspective was the contest versus sponsored mobility framework used by Turner (1960) to describe different educational systems. Applied to careers, contest mobility describes a system where upward movement in the organization is based on merit or performance. Sponsored mobility, however, describes an organizational career system in which individuals are selected for success early and specialized efforts are made to induct them into elite status. In practice, the sponsorship perspective has been used to explain why a range of types of interpersonal support, including high-quality leader-member exchange relationships, supervisor support, and mentoring from senior managers, should be positively related to career success (e.g., Dreher & Bretz 1991, Wayne et al. 1999). Meta-analytic results (Ng et al. 2005) show that organizational support in the form of training and career development opportunities is associated with higher OCS and SCS. Likewise, having a high-quality exchange relationship with one's leader (leader-member exchange) is likely to have positive consequences for one's career (Wayne et al. 1999). Overall, the contest versus sponsored mobility perspective has been used as a framework for organizing constructs rather than a theory of the internal promotion system itself. Both contest and sponsorship constructs contribute to career success because both performance and support from influential members of the organization play a role in career success. As with HCT, the contest/sponsorship model is used more to legitimize certain variables and observed effects than it is to generate specific and unique hypotheses (Hambrick 2007). If we did want to explore this framework as a theory, we would need to work at the organizational or business unit level since that is where the theory is specified. We might ask questions such as, do organizations vary in the extent to which sponsorship matters? Has sponsorship become less important as competition from external hires has become more prevalent? Are differential sponsorship, investment, and cumulative advantage processes important for core versus peripheral members of the organization? These are just some examples of the research questions we believe could help OP and OB scholars better understand career success.

A large body of research examines the impact of workplace mentoring, defined as a developmental relationship between a more senior or experienced individual and a less experienced individual, on career success. We only briefly cover this area given the recent review on the topic in this journal by Eby & Robertson (2020). As those authors report, considerable early interest was focused on the idea that women and minorities were impaired in their careers because they lacked the mentor support received by their male counterparts, but subsequent research provided little evidence that gender or race are associated with being a protégé (O'Brien et al. 2010, Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge 2008). Overall, having a mentor has small effects on OCS and small to moderate positive effects on SCS (Allen et al. 2004, Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge 2008). Considerable heterogeneity exists regarding these findings, suggesting a role for moderators in future research. For example, characteristics of the protégé, such as personality, interpersonal skills, and positive self-concept, as well as deep-level similarity with the mentor are associated with more positive outcomes (Eby et al. 2013).

Subsequent work incorporates behaviors on the part of the employee to gain interpersonal support, such as networking and social networks. Networking focuses on activities to meet others that might be helpful in someone's career (see also Sections 4.5 and 4.6). Social network research focuses on the career consequences of developing an effective constellation of supportive relationships at work. For example, Higgins & Thomas (2001) examined the network of developmental relationships among lawyers and found that the average status of the constellation of developers predicted the probability of the junior lawyers' promotion to partner six years later. Seibert et al. (2001) examined structural properties of employees' developmental network, focusing on the strength of the developmental ties, the extent to which ties reached across otherwise disconnected social groups, and the social resources reached by those ties. They found that the prevalence of weak ties and ties that spanned structural holes was associated with a network that reached people in a diverse range of organizational functions and levels, which in turn led to greater OCS and SCS. Together, these studies suggest that it is not simply the amount of developmental support one receives, but also the extent to which the constellation of one's developmental ties spans diverse social worlds and reaches influential others that contributes to career success.

4.4. Gender and Women's Career Equality

We discuss gender here not as a purely demographic trait but as the joint influence of biological and sociocultural factors on the experience of women and men (Wood & Eagly 2010). Global industry surveys as well as numerous OB studies have shown that a gap in earnings and the attainment of leadership positions between men and women has persisted for decades (Joshi et al. 2015, Judge & Livingston 2008). Thus, the research on women's career equality focuses on the degree to which women, compared to men, have equal access to career opportunities and experience equal work, career, and nonwork outcomes (Kossek et al. 2017). Three broad theoretical perspectives are used to examine women's career (in)equality: career preferences, work-family conflict, and gender bias. A comprehensive review of this research is beyond the scope of our article, so we only briefly summarize the basic findings here.

The career preference perspective attributes some of the gap in women's career success to differences in career interests, goals, and needs between men and women (Kossek et al. 2017). For example, women have a greater preference for work-family balance and opportunities to work with people, which leads them to choose occupations with lower salaries (Barbulescu & Bidwell 2013). The work-family perspective attributes career inequality to the experience of greater work-family conflict among women. Although meta-analytic results show gender differences in work-family conflict to be negligible (Shockley et al. 2017), gendered differences in the division of domestic

labor, perceived work-family pressures, and the differential effects of family structure may have complex influences on women's career opportunities and outcomes (Kossek et al. 2017). For example, Mainiero & Sullivan's (2005) kaleidoscope model suggests that women's careers are less linear than men's, with issues of work-life balance taking precedence mid-career for women but not men. Consistent with the opting-out perspective, recent research shows that women work fewer hours, have lower career centrality, and accumulate less human capital (Frear et al. 2019). At the same time, reflecting the pushed-out perspective, there is considerable evidence showing that the work environment is disadvantageous to women's career success due to gendered role expectations, stereotypes, and organizational climates hostile to female leaders (Hebl et al. 2020). Women face more obstacles and barriers but receive less support and opportunities than men throughout their careers (Lyness & Thompson 2000). Joshi et al. (2015) provided meta-analytic evidence that gender differences in salary and promotions were considerably larger than gender differences in performance evaluation across numerous job sectors, although Frear et al. (2019) provided only mixed results regarding the unequal effects of women's career-related attributes on OCS. Sitzmann & Campbell (2021) found country-level religiosity associated with the extent of the gender pay gap across more than 100 countries worldwide, suggesting national culture is an important moderator. Regarding SCS, Ng & Feldman (2014) found that women did not report lower levels of career satisfaction than did men.

Although it is easy to contrast the opting-out and pushed-out perspectives, these are not mutually exclusive explanations of the women's OCS gap. Unequal division of domestic labor, a lack of workplace support, gender bias, and national culture may lead women to appear to choose to opt out when in fact that choice is driven by contextual factors outside of the individual's control. Still, given consistent findings regarding the opting-out perspective, career equity rather than equality might be a more appropriate framework for this research. Future research in this area may profitably focus on these complex interactions across levels of analysis and the effectiveness of theory-based practical interventions designed to break this linkage (Kossek et al. 2017). Career scholars might benefit from the research on women's careers by incorporating some of the important attributes and processes identified in this work into broader career success models. At the least, career scholars should check for gender differences in the models they test.

4.5. Stable Individual Differences

OP scholars have long seen personality and other individual difference constructs, such as interests and values, as central to career processes, such as occupational choice (Tokar et al. 1998). However, it is the OB scholars who typically view individual differences as determinants of career success, the subject of this review.

4.5.1. Personality. OB scholars linked a set of stable dispositional traits to both OCS and SCS (e.g., Judge et al. 1999, Seibert & Kraimer 2001). Meta-analytic evidence (Ng et al. 2005) supports the predictive role of personality traits in career success. For example, individuals who are more extroverted and conscientious and less neurotic tend to have a higher salary, receive more promotions, and experience higher levels of career satisfaction. Interestingly, agreeableness correlated positively with career satisfaction but negatively with salary and promotions, whereas openness to experience is only positively correlated with salary and career satisfaction. Overall, the Big Five personality traits have larger effects on SCS than on OCS (Ng et al. 2005).

In addition to the Big Five, several studies have identified proactive personality as a key determinant of career success, providing incremental explanatory power beyond a broad range of individual and occupational variables (Seibert et al. 1999). Seibert et al. (2001) showed that

proactive personality influenced career success through a set of proactive behaviors, including career self-management (CSM) behaviors, and Erdogan & Bauer (2005) showed that proactive personality predicted SCS only when person-organization or person-job fit was high. Ng et al. (2005) provided meta-analysis evidence showing proactive personality positively associated with salary, promotions, and career satisfaction. The core self-evaluation trait—a broad personality factor based on the shared variance among neuroticism, locus of control, generalized self-efficacy, and self-esteem and said to represent fundamental evaluations of the self—has also been reliably linked to career success (Ng & Feldman 2014). Judge & Hurst (2008) used archival data to show that core self-evaluations predict entry-level pay and occupational attainment as well as the rate of increase in pay and occupational status over a 25-year period, partially mediated by educational attainment.

We suggest some ways that scholars' understanding of personality traits as predictors of career success can be refined further. First, although research shows that personality traits correlate with OCS and SCS, more work is needed to establish when and how these traits lead to these outcomes (compare with Seibert et al. 2001). OB scholars have begun to develop theoretical models that include task and interpersonal behaviors and contextual features of the organization that link personality to career success (Heslin & Latzke 2019, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller 2007) that have to date not been tested. Second, the relationship of personality constructs to the recently expanded domain of SCS should be explored. Third, adopting a within-person perspective to study the effects of personality traits on career success would be valuable. Heslin et al. (2019) developed a framework illustrating the way situational cues and personality traits might interact to explain when and why traits predict career success. Continued theoretical development to better understand the role of personality in career success is a promising future direction.

4.5.2. Cognitive and emotional intelligence.

General mental ability (GMA) is another widely studied individual difference construct that has been linked to career success, especially OCS outcomes such as income, hierarchical level, and occupational prestige. A particularly strong aspect of this research is the role of longitudinal data and temporal dynamics. For example, Dreher & Bretz (1991) found that the effect of GMA on job level attainment is stronger for individuals who did not have early career success, suggesting that high merit, in the form of the ability to acquire job-relevant knowledge and skills, can make up for a lack of early sponsorship. Judge et al. (2010) showed that high-GMA individuals experienced more rapid growth in income and occupational prestige over a 28-year period, partially through the acquisition of more education and training. Recent work further demonstrates that GMA as well as specific cognitive abilities can predict occupation prestige even 50 years after school (Lang & Kell 2020). Research on GMA has gone furthest in linking individual differences to developmental behavior and subsequent career outcomes using temporal research designs, benefiting as it does from the inclusion of GMA in many large archival datasets. At the same time, the range of career behaviors and career success outcomes is somewhat limited by the datasets.

Whereas cognitive intelligence enables learning and problem solving, emotional intelligence (EQ) enables interpersonal effectiveness. Garcia & Costa (2014) showed that EQ added significant variance to the prediction of salary and career satisfaction above and beyond GMA and the Big Five personality traits. Rode et al. (2017) found that emotionally intelligent individuals are more likely to have higher salary levels because they can develop strong interpersonal relationships. EQ research is in a relatively early stage. As with personality, research on GMA and EQ would benefit from greater integration with career choice and other process models to better understand how the full range of career success outcomes are produced.

4.6. Career Self-Management Behaviors

The CSM literature focuses on the behaviors individuals use to shape their careers. Although vocational psychologists have long been interested in theories of occupational choice and development, OB scholars have focused on strategies individuals use to achieve their career goals once they are in paid employment. Models of CSM are often conceptualized within a more general dynamic self-regulatory framework that includes setting goals, developing and implementing plans and strategies, monitoring progress toward goal accomplishment, and modifying goals (Lord et al. 2010).

Several CSM frameworks have been proposed. Although specific labels differ across frameworks, they typically include behaviors such as planning and goal setting, skill development, feedback seeking, networking, self-nomination for opportunities, and job mobility–related activities (e.g., Gould & Penley 1984, Kossek et al. 1998, Noe 1996, Strauss et al. 2012, Sturges et al. 2002). Although these CSM models are intuitively appealing, the empirical evidence for their role as predictors of career success is inconsistent. Several studies found positive effects of CSM behaviors on OCS and SCS (e.g., Abele & Wiese 2008). However, other studies found CSM related only to SCS or even only some facets of it (De Vos et al. 2009, Smale et al. 2019). Overall, there is no conclusive evidence relating CSM to career success. The reasons for this are unclear. One possibility is that the lack of construct clarity and validity regarding the specific dimensions of CSM is hindering reliable cumulation of results. Furthermore, although some quasi-experimental (Kossek et al. 1998) and longitudinal (Sturges et al. 2002) methods were employed, samples were often ad hoc, data cross-sectional self-reports, sample sizes small, and analytic techniques unsophisticated. Finally, CSM models often fail to incorporate aspects of the organizational or occupational context, focusing instead on simple direct effects for specific behaviors. Recently, OP scholars have proposed theoretical models that integrate CSM behaviors with contemporary career orientations (Hirschi & Koen 2021) or with career decision-making competencies (Klehe et al. 2021). Overall, more clarity is needed about why and how CSM may enhance career success.

4.7. Malleable Individual Differences

OP scholars have shown the greatest interest in malleable individual differences precisely because these constructs are amenable to change through training and intervention, a core mission derived from the field's vocational psychology roots. These constructs represent perhaps the greatest potential for the integration of OP and OB perspectives on career success, but many critical questions remain before such a fruitful synthesis can be achieved.

4.7.1. Contemporary career attitudes.
The protean (Hall 1996) and boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau 1996) career perspectives suggest that employees would or should adopt a new set of expectations and attitudes to attain career success in the contemporary career era. As operationalized by Briscoe et al. (2006), the protean career attitude consists of two dimensions, being values-driven and self-directed, whereas the boundaryless career attitude encompasses positive attitudes toward psychological mobility and physical mobility. Overall, empirical research has established the value of these contemporary career orientations. However, the different dimensions do not appear to consistently predict career success. To illustrate, meta-analytic results show that the self-directed dimension of the protean career attitude is reliably related to several dimensions of SCS, including career satisfaction, work-life balance, and overall well-being. However, there is much less consistency in the relationship of other dimensions with SCS outcomes. Moreover, they seem weakly or not related to OCS. For example, although physical mobility preference is related to turnover intentions, it is not reliably related to salary or promotions, and is even negatively related to career satisfaction (Li et al. 2022, Wiernik & Kostal 2019).

Despite the positive results, we see a need for both conceptual and empirical developments if these constructs are to be truly valuable. Gubler et al.'s (2014) call for greater consistency and conceptual clarity regarding the nature of these constructs is consistent with Wiernik & Kostal's (2019) meta-analytic finding of a two-factor structure rather than the four-factor structure specified by Briscoe et al. (2006). Construct validity is also a concern given the strong correlations between career attitudes and personality traits such as self-efficacy and proactive personality (Wiernik & Kostal 2019). There are also calls for better specified theoretical models that might include, for example, certain career meta-competencies necessary to enact contemporary career attitudes effectively (Gubler et al. 2014, Hall et al. 2018). Stronger theoretical linkage from career attitudes to CSM behaviors as well as greater specification regarding the match with the employment context might also enhance their strength as predictors of career success (Li et al. 2022).

4.7.2. Career competencies and resources. Research on career competency frameworks originated mainly from OB but has recently been conducted by OP scholars. One line of research growing directly out of counseling psychology (Super et al. 1996) focuses on career adaptability, a psychosocial resource that helps individuals deal with career-related challenges. Savickas & Porfeli (2012) highlighted four career adaptability resources: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Empirical studies have connected career adaptability to a wide range of career behaviors and outcomes (Johnston 2018). Rudolph et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis showed career adaptability relates to objective (e.g., income) and subjective (e.g., career satisfaction, employability, promotability) career success.

A second line of research concerns employability, a construct that emerged almost simultaneously in the OB and OP disciplines (Fugate et al. 2004, Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden 2006) and is defined as one's ability to realize job opportunities within and between employers over time (Forrier & Sels 2003, Fugate et al. 2021). Although definitions vary, the dimensions of the construct most often include a proactive component that involves preparing oneself for change and a reactive component that involves flexibly adapting to changes that occur, including openness to change, proactivity, work identity, and career motivation (Fugate & Kinicki 2008, Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden 2006). Empirical research indicates that employability competencies can enhance OCS and SCS (e.g., Bozionelos et al. 2016, Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden 2006).

The political skills construct is a third stand-alone competency growing out of the OB literature that, although not specifically designed as a career competency, is an important predictor of career success. Ferris et al. (2005, p. 127) defined political skill as "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives," reflected in the four dimensions of apparent sincerity, social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and networking ability (Ferris et al. 2007). Meta-analytic results show that political knowledge and skills are related to salary attainment, hierarchical position, and career satisfaction (Munyon et al. 2015, Ng et al. 2005), and Chen et al.'s (2022) cross-cultural meta-analysis shows that the effects are stronger in eastern than western cultures and stronger at management than employee levels. The political skills perspectives fit well with an organizational context understanding of careers, and more refined understanding of the mediators, such as reputation and self-efficacy, continues to develop.

Scholars have also focused a considerable amount of research on integrative models built on career-related competencies or resources. Several career competency frameworks have been built around the knowledge, skills, and abilities thought to allow individuals to develop their careers successfully (Eby et al. 2003, Hall 2002, Parker et al. 2009). Akkermans et al. (2013) presented an

integrative model and measurement scale assessing the extent to which individuals reflect upon their career motivation and strengths, know how to network and promote themselves, and are able to explore work opportunities and develop career plans. Research has provided empirical evidence linking these career competencies to SCS and, to a lesser extent, OCS (e.g., Akkermans & Tims 2017, Blokker et al. 2019). An even broader integrative model developed by Hirschi et al. (2018) focuses on career resources. They define career resources as anything that helps an individual attain their career goals. The career resources framework identifies four broad types of resources—human capital, environmental, motivational, and CSM resources—represented by 13 distinct factors, also assessed by a questionnaire they developed. Hirschi et al. (2018) found evidence for the predictive role of career resources in SCS and OCS.

Career scholars' attempt to organize career constructs around key sets of competencies is a compelling and useful exercise. However, considerable theoretical and empirical confusion remains. For example, all the competency models identify multiple dimensions but don't offer a strong theoretical explanation as to why these and only these dimensions impact career success. Neither do they specify if the factors operate only as main effects or must be present simultaneously (i.e., interact) to produce positive outcomes. Furthermore, none of the models explicitly incorporate contextual contingencies in their predictions. There is also a lack of clarity concerning the very nature of the constructs. For example, employability has, unhelpfully, been conceived as a psychosocial construct, a disposition, a personal resource, a competency, and a perception. These distinctions are important because the nature of the construct has implications for theory specification, research design, measurement, and intervention strategy. Furthermore, there is overlap between these competency frameworks and other models, such as CSM. For example, career exploration and planning, networking, and self-nomination, already reviewed as CSM constructs, appear in most of these competency models. This is problematic because it causes confusion about exactly what the differences are between, for example, networking as a competency, resource, and CSM strategy. To illustrate further, proactive personality has been positioned as a "knowing why" competency (Eby et al. 2003), a dimension of employability (Fugate & Kinicki 2008), a psychological resource (Hirschi et al. 2018), and an adaptivity factor (Rudolph et al. 2017). Scholars should compare these competency models to establish a more parsimonious set of constructs, at least at the level of meta-competencies, defined as overarching competencies that facilitate the acquisition of more domain-specific work competencies (Akkermans et al. 2013). Considerable research needs to be done in this area to develop specific, accurate, and parsimonious models of competency and career success.

5. CONTEMPORARY CAREER SUCCESS: A FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

In this article, we reviewed the progress on career success, formulated critiques, and provided guidance on how we believe scholars can move the field forward. Throughout, we noted differences in the OP and OB perspectives and highlighted where they could strengthen each other. We wrap up our article with five areas for future research that could strengthen the connections between OP and OB research and advance our understanding of career success even further, as summarized in **Table 3**.

5.1. Expanding Career Success Research Through the Lens of Career Sustainability

One emerging research paradigm that may be helpful in achieving greater integration between the OP and OB fields is that of career sustainability. The emerging consensus in this rapidly

Table 3   Suggestions for future research

Topic area	Key points
Career sustainability	■ Career sustainability refers to a dynamic balance of happiness, health, and productivity over the life course. ■ The sustainable career perspective allows for the inclusion of both objective and subjective elements of career success, as well as the importance of health in career development and success. ■ This perspective emphasizes the interplay between individual and contextual factors and the importance of adopting a temporal perspective on career success.
Career shocks	■ Career success research has typically focused on planned and agentic perspectives, but sudden disruptions in career paths, known as career shocks, can also have an impact on career success. ■ The career shocks perspective integrates theoretical frameworks from different disciplines and can be connected with the notion of career sustainability. ■ More research is needed to clarify the role of event characteristics, how shocks impact career success, and which types of shocks relate to different facets of objective and subjective career success.
Socially marginalized and underrepresented groups	■ Considering the career success of socially marginalized groups through a sustainable career lens is important but has been overlooked in the literature. ■ Future research should examine how intersectionality—the interaction between race and gender—impacts career success among marginalized groups. ■ Stigma theory could help identify different characteristics of stigma, stigma management strategies, and social contexts that influence career success for marginalized groups.
Alternative employment/work arrangements	■ Alternative work arrangements, such as self-employment and gig work, have received limited attention in career research despite their increasing prevalence. ■ The choice or necessity of entering into these arrangements can impact the career success of employees. ■ Important questions to investigate include the factors that impact OCS and SCS for entrepreneurs (and other nonstandard workers such as agency and gig workers), the career trajectories of individuals who transition between paid employment and self-employment, and how career success is affected by time spent in entrepreneurship.
Theoretical clean-up time	■ Career scholars have generated a broad range of constructs but have often been vague regarding their nature, leading to construct proliferation and redundancy. ■ Future research should focus on empirical studies designed to test the untested theoretical mechanisms, prune unnecessary complexity and redundancy, and conduct comparative theory testing to eliminate weak or redundant theories of career success.

expanding literature is that a career is sustainable to the extent that it allows the individual to be happy, healthy, and productive over the life course (De Vos et al. 2020). That is, for a career to be sustainable over time, people need to find a fit of the career with their current mental and physical capacities to allow a dynamic balance among happiness (e.g., various facets of SCS), health (e.g., physical and mental health), and productivity (e.g., performance, citizenship behavior, and OCS) (Greenhaus & Callanan 2022, Van der Heijden et al. 2020). To illustrate, if someone has made several promotions in recent years (i.e., high productivity) but their work becomes overwhelming and too demanding, it may harm their overall satisfaction and engagement (i.e., low happiness) and even their mental and physical health (i.e., low health), suggesting a lack of long-term sustainability. Conversely, if someone highly enjoys their work and they feel healthy, yet they consistently underperform, they will likely lose their job, hence diminishing the sustainability of their career.

    This perspective is promising for many reasons. First, the sustainable career perspective allows scholars to include both objective and subjective elements of career success, reconciling OP

research that predominantly focused on happiness-related factors and OB research that mainly focused on productivity-related factors. Furthermore, it brings in the perspective of health. Although there is a great deal of research on mental and physical health in the fields of OP and OB, it has rarely been linked to career development and success apart from the work-life perspective. Second, the sustainable career perspective explicitly acknowledges an active interplay between individual and contextual antecedents and possible moderators of career success, a recommendation for future research we've made in several areas. For example, it encourages scholars to examine how individual career meta-competencies and self-management behaviors may interact with externally valued aspects of human and social capital to impact people's career success. Third, the sustainable career paradigm stresses the importance of adopting a temporal perspective on career success. As we have noted several times before, many career success studies are still cross-sectional. Although these studies can still add value to our understanding of career success, they fail to capture dynamic fluctuations in the importance of specific career concerns and how they impact career success. Examining both short-term dynamics and long-term change is a promising way forward.

5.2. Incorporating the Role of Career Shocks in Career Success Research

Career success research has taken a predominantly agentic and planned perspective in recent years (Inkson et al. 2012). However, career success is likely also influenced by sudden disruptions in people's career paths. Building on the unfolding model of turnover (Lee & Mitchell 1994), Seibert et al. (2013) introduced the notion of career shocks, defined as disruptive events, whether positive or negative, that trigger deliberation about change in one's career behavior or career path (see also Akkermans et al. 2018). Emerging empirical findings show that shocks may play a critical role in career transitions, such as school to work or work back to school, and in entrepreneurship (Blokker et al. 2019; Rummel et al. 2021; Seibert et al. 2013, 2021). Kraimer et al. (2019) linked career shocks to career success. Overall, the career shock perspective emphasizes the way external events can precipitate relatively sudden career decision making that alters the trajectory of one's career and ultimately career success.

The career shocks perspective can be a valuable addition to career success research in OP and OB as it uses a range of theoretical frameworks from different disciplines (Akkermans et al. 2021a). Scholars have begun to connect career shocks with the notion of career sustainability theoretically and empirically (e.g., Blokker et al. 2019, Greenhaus & Callanan 2022, Pak et al. 2021). Yet, more research is needed to enhance conceptual clarity (e.g., the role of event characteristics), theoretical mechanisms (e.g., how do shocks impact career success), and career outcomes (e.g., which types of shocks relate to different facets of OCS and SCS) (Akkermans et al. 2021b). Overall, the integration of the career shocks perspective with the long-term balance of satisfaction, health, and productivity identified by the sustainable career perspective holds considerable future promise.

5.3. Career Success Among Socially Marginalized and Underrepresented Groups

Studying career success through a sustainable career lens also implies considering various groups and their unique career trajectories and contexts. Here, we turn to suggestions regarding future research on racial and ethnic minorities and other socially marginalized groups that have received limited attention in the career success literature. Like women (as discussed in Section 4.4.3), minorities experience disadvantages throughout their careers due to stereotypes and biases, leading to lower OCS and SCS (Greenhaus et al. 1990, Landau 1995). To date, little research in the careers field has specifically focused on the unique theoretical mechanisms that may affect the careers of

these marginalized group members. We focus on two promising theoretical perspectives for future research here: identity theory and stigma theory.

First, although identity theory has been used extensively in the career success literature (Ashforth & Schinoff 2016), the role of identity in achieving career success among marginalized groups has received less attention. As multiple identities can lead to intensification or reduction of stereotypes (Kang & Bodenhausen 2015), future research should consider how intersectionality—the way race and gender interact—may impact career success (Galinsky et al. 2013, Johnson et al. 2012). Scholars should examine the unique challenges facing distinct identity-related clusters and the contextual factors that influence their career success. Second, stigma theory (Crocker et al. 1998) may be a useful perspective. Stigmatized individuals are people who "possess (or are believed to possess) some attribute or characteristic that conveys a social identity that is devalued in some particular context" (Crocker et al. 1998, p. 505). OB scholars have examined stigma across levels (i.e., individual, occupational) (Ashforth & Kreiner 1999, Zhang et al. 2021). A recent review showed stigma has various characteristics (e.g., controllability, malleability) and can be managed differently (Zhang et al. 2021). Moreover, since stigmas are socially constructed, context plays a major role. For instance, organizational support for inclusion can remove the stigma associated with women and marginalized groups, helping reduce any biases and barriers for these groups (Kossek et al. 2017). Overall, future research could examine how different characteristics of stigma, stigma management strategies, and social context influence the career success of socially marginalized group members.

5.4. Career Success and Alternative Employment Arrangements

Despite the focus on the nature of contemporary employment relationships, contemporary career perspectives have remained somewhat disconnected from the range of specific forms alternative work arrangements take in the modern world of work. In a recent review, Spreitzer et al. (2017) described these arrangements, including standard workers with flexible schedules or locations, to part-time and on-call workers, to contract, temporary, and platform-mediated (gig) workers, in terms of three underlying dimensions of flexibility: employment relationship, work scheduling, and location. The extent to which employees enter into these arrangements through choice or necessity is likely to determine the extent to which they result in increased or decreased career success. Ashford et al. (2018) suggest a set of necessary CSM behaviors that, although not entirely unfamiliar, take on new meaning and criticality when enacted outside an existing organization. They further suggest unique indicators of career success for such workers, including the enhanced importance of psychological well-being, vitality, and learning. Given the proactive career and relational behaviors Ashford et al. (2018) identify in their model, OP and OB career scholars are uniquely positioned to explore how alternative work arrangements impact the happiness, health, and productivity (i.e., career sustainability) of these employees. Testing the structural and psychological relationships specified in these models constitutes a major research agenda on career success.

Related to alternative forms of employment, career scholars have paid relatively little attention to self-employment as a phase in individuals' career trajectories (Burton et al. 2016). Contrary to common misperceptions, most entrepreneurs have substantial work experience in a particular industry before they start their own new venture (Sørensen & Fassiotto 2011) and many individuals may cycle through periods in paid employment and self-employment, entering, leaving, and re-entering entrepreneurship over the course of their careers (Feng et al. 2022). There are many questions that those interested in career transitions and career success can explore. For example, how do the careers of entrepreneurs and those employed in family businesses differ from those

in traditional employment? Given that previous experience as an entrepreneur is likely to reduce career opportunities in paid employment (Waddingham et al. 2023), how is career success likely to be influenced by time in entrepreneurship? How do entrepreneurial careers evolve over time and which factors critically impact entrepreneurs' OCS and SCS? In all, we encourage scholars to more often focus their research on workers in various employment arrangements.

5.5. Theoretical Clean-Up Time

Recently, Spurk et al. (2019) examined the prevalence of different theories used to predict career success. They identified at least 44 theories categorized within 14 more general theoretical approaches. Of the 266 studies they reviewed, only 23 (or 8.6%) directly compared different theoretical approaches. Spurk et al. note that such heterogeneity of approaches is likely to hamper the accumulation of knowledge in a field, a point made by others (Cronin et al. 2021, Le et al. 2010). As we have highlighted in previous sections, career scholars have generated a broad range of constructs but have often been quite vague regarding the nature of those constructs, whether they are stable traits, attitudes, orientations, career (meta-)competencies, career capital, career resources, or CSM behaviors. Too often, these same variables show up as operationalizations of different constructs playing a role in different theoretical models, a jingle-jangle of construct proliferation that has been addressed but not solved in the OB literature (Le et al. 2010). In addition, broad frameworks such as contest versus sponsored mobility or conservation of resources theory, perhaps useful as organizing schemes, may be used to provide a veneer of theoretical legitimacy rather than useful theoretical insight (Hambrick 2007). Our final suggestion for future research is therefore to encourage empirical studies designed to test the untested theoretical mechanisms in broad frameworks, to prune unnecessary complexity and redundancy from specific unit-level theories, and to conduct comparative theory testing to eliminate weak or redundant theories of career success where direct comparability is possible (Leavitt et al. 2010). Our hope is that, once the confusion of overlapping constructs and redundant theoretical frameworks is addressed, we can begin to develop more nuanced models that detail the mediating processes and moderating conditions producing career success.

6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this critical review, we set out to formulate opportunities for OP and OB scholars, and beyond, to learn from each other and enhance our understanding of career success in future research. We have offered many directions for future career success research related to, for example, its conceptualization, nomological net, and role across different target groups. In the end, perhaps our most important call for research is this: Let's move beyond disciplinary silos and learn from each other's expertise and knowledge to advance career success research even further.

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