

# SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS IN THE MODERN CAREER: A PARALLEL MEDIATION OF PERCEIVED INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EMPLOYABILITY

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## Abstract:

**Background:** There has been a notable shift in career theory, whereby traditional career paths, which were largely determined by an employee's initial training and investment from the employer, have shifted towards modern career paths that are largely guided by the employee themselves. This shift is accompanied by a change in the contemporary workforce, where success is now characterised by a stronger focus on subjective aspects.

**Purpose:** This study investigates the impact of perceived organizational support and perceived employability on the subjective career success among independent workers in Hajj and Umrah travel companies in West Sumatra. It also explores the parallel mediating effects of perceived internal and external employability.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This quantitative investigation was conducted using a survey approach. The study involved 210 participants, and data collection was conducted through the utilisation of a questionnaire. To test the hypotheses, a quantitative approach incorporating structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed using SmartPLS 4.0.

**Findings/Result:** The research findings indicate that perceived organizational support has a positive influence on subjective career success. We also discovered that perceived external employability influenced subjective career success, whereas perceived internal employability did not. The results also show that perceived external employability plays a mediating role in the relationship between perceived organizational support and subjective career success.

**Conclusion:** The research findings indicate that individuals exhibit a higher level of sensitivity towards their subjective career success when it comes to external options, as opposed to internal ones.

**Originality/value (state of the art):** This study expands the existing literature by exploring parallel the mediation of perceived internal and external employability.

**Keywords:** independent workers, perceived internal employability, perceived external employability, perceived organizational support, subjective career success

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## INTRODUCTION

The changes occurring in the technology and economic sectors have impacted jobs and careers, rendering the concept of traditional work completely ineffective. It is evident that careers today are characterized by high levels of mobility and unpredictability (Coetzee et al. 2023). In the last three decades, there have been three significant changes identified in career theory: the transition from traditional careers to modern careers, the move from single careers to numerous careers, and the change in the notion of career success from objective to subjective (Hall, 2002). Success in the contemporary workforce is now characterized with a stronger focus on subjective aspects. The change in the definition of career success underscores the importance of conducting deeper research on this topic (Gaile et al. 2022).

Subjective career success is related to an individual's evaluation of their career, which is personally meaningful (Brown, 2002; Shockley et al. 2016). Subjective career success is determined by employees personal assessments of their work goals and achievements, which highlights the significance of their beliefs, attitudes, and objectives (Shockley et al. 2016). Subjective career success is a crucial component of employees professional life (Seibert et al. 2024). Due to the influence of postmodernism, career models have evolved. Success seems to have shifted from a traditional model of career development to a model of unlimited career growth (Defillippi & Arthur, 2006). Consequently, research on subjective career success has become increasingly important.

The organization offers a stable and predictable career path for employees in traditional career development (Brown & Lent, 2013). On the contrary, in an unlimited career development model, employee development opportunities are not just felt from one organization, employees are faced with several selections and low job stability. Changes in the career context make it impossible for individuals to rely on organizations alone to develop their (McDonald & Hite, 2023). Therefore, individuals are expected to have the ability to manage their own careers. Empirical researchers have identified that a higher proportion of workers evaluate their career success based on subjective perspectives rather than objective perspectives (Eith et al. 2011; Littler et al. 2003) Particularly in organizations that develop

boundaryless career models, subjective career success becomes more important for individuals (Defillippi & Arthur, 2006). Boundaryless organizations, protean careers, and even changes in the meaning of careers are primary triggers for the emergence of subjective career success.

Previous research has identified factors that can influence subjective career success, including perceived organizational support (Hamzah et al. 2022) and perceived employability (Diaa et al. 2024). According to Ng et al. (2005)'s meta-analysis, higher levels of subjective career success are positively correlated with organizational support. The concept of perceived organizational support is regarded as a pivotal factor in the attainment of career success. It is postulated that this construct fosters a range of beneficial outcomes, including enhanced job performance, satisfaction, and commitment (Ingarianti et al. 2022). Furthermore, perceived employability is an additional factor that has the potential to influence subjective career success (Van der Heijden et al. 2022). Throughout a person's career, employability are very important because they influence the choices available for changing careers, both within and outside the current role or profession (Clarke, 2008; Diaa et al. 2024; Vos et al. 2021). According to (Akkermans et al. 2019; Niu et al. 2019), there is a growing recognition of the significance of employability in determining career success. This is due to the fact that employability is viewed as a crucial element of job security in the modern employment landscape.

There are two categories of employability perception: perceived internal employability and perceived external employability. Perceived internal employability is defined as an employee's views regarding their chances of retaining their current job, while perceived external employability relates to employees' views on their ability to secure another job outside of their current organization (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). Although the theoretical aspect of distinguishing between internal and external employability has been extensively debated (Rothwell & Arnold, 2005; Tee et al. 2022a), few empirical investigations have been conducted that have evaluated the perception of employability in relation to these two components. Several researchers (Forrier & Cuyper, 2018; Nelissen et al. 2017) have highlighted that distinguishing between perceptions of external and internal employability is a critical

emphasis in employability studies. Nevertheless, there is a lack of conclusive scientific evidence establishing the relationship between perceived employability and career success (Presti & Elia, 2020; Tee et al. 2022a).

Furthermore, previous research has examined the associations between perceived employability and career success (Baluku et al. 2020; Tee et al. 2022a) and the relationship between perceived employability and subjective career success (Malik et al. 2019). However, there is very limited study on the relationship between perceived employability, both internal and external, and subjective career success, both directly and indirectly. Previous study (Harten et al. 2017) suggested identifying and assessing several types of employability (internal and external employability) rather of focusing just on the broad scope (or single concept) of employability. Furthermore, previous studies have also investigated the influence of organizational support on both internal and external perceptions of employability (Fontinha et al. 2018; Nelissen et al. 2017), but the results are still unclear. The predictors, outcomes, and processes associated with perceived internal and external employability are distinct (Nimmi et al. 2021; Vargas et al. 2018). The objective of this study is to gain a more profound understanding of the role of perceived employability (internal and external) in predicting subjective career success. This endeavor will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on this understudied topic. Furthermore, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature by exploring the potential new relationships between perceived organizational support and subjective career success, with the hypothesis that these relationships may be parallel mediated by perceived internal and external employability.

## METHODS

A survey approach was used to carry out this quantitative analysis. This study targeted independent worker at independent worker of travel and umrah companies in West Sumatra. Using the approach proposed by (Hair et al. 2019), the study multiplied the number of indicators of all variables by five to ten in order to determine the number of samples in non-probability sampling. Since there are 42 indicators out of all the variables,  $26 \times 5 = 210$  samples are employed. The sampling technique used in this study is non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling. The established

criteria require a minimum of one year of experience in the relevant field. Online questionnaires were sent as part of the data gathering process.

The data from this research were subjected to analysis using structural equation modeling with partial least squares. Structural equation modeling with partial least squares (SEM-PLS) was employed for the analysis. The scale used to evaluate subjective career success was created by (Zopiatis et al. 2017), which included five items. Perceived organizational support measurement was measured using a scale from (Caesens et al. 2016) and consisted of four items. Assessing perceived employability both internally and externally through the use of a scale created by (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007) and consisted of eleven items.

## Hypothesis

Perceived Organizational Supports and Subjective Career Success

The degree to which workers feel appreciated and taken care of by the company, which attends to their emotional and social needs, is known as perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al. 2001; Iman et al. 2023). According to (Ballout, 2007), job opportunities and satisfaction will increase if organizational support is felt through guidance, networking, and supportive work relationships. It has been demonstrated that employees who perceive a sense of support from their organization are more likely to achieve success in their professional roles. This is because organizational support fosters various factors that are believed to enhance employees' subjective career success, such as job performance, satisfaction, and commitment (Ingarianti et al. 2022). According to studies by (Hamzah et al. 2022; Ingarianti et al. 2022), there is a substantial correlation between subjective career success and perceived organizational support.

H1: Perceived organizational support positively affects subjective career success

Perceived Employability, and Subjective Career Success

Employability is a term that describes the capacity of various segments of the labor force to acquire and keep employment on their own accord (Nauta et al. 2009). Organizational support such as training activities

will enable individuals to acquire competence and knowledge that can improve their marketability and facilitate their in seeking rapid promotions and salary increases (Moreira et al. 2020). Perceived employability is an crucial element in employees' subjective career success. Research conducted by (Rino et al. 2023), where their findings indicate that organizational support for intrinsic and extrinsic work values influences perceived internal and external employability. Further research conducted by (Nelissen et al. 2017) found that organizational support for employee advancement influences perceived internal employability but does not influence perceived external employability.

H2a: Perceived organizational support positively affects perceived internal employability

H2b: Perceived organizational support positively affects perceived external employability

### Perceived Employability and Subjective Career Success

The concept of perceived employability can be defined as an employee's confidence in their capacity to preserve their current position and secure more advantageous employment opportunities outside of their current organization (Vanhercke et al. 2014). Perceived employability suggests that individuals are mainly responsive and central figures in their employment and career advancement. Perceived employability serves as a motivating and guiding factor that helps individuals navigate their career paths effectively (Diaa et al. 2024). When employees have higher levels of perceived employability, they tend to feel more confident about their skills, qualifications, and ability to find new job opportunities if needed. This increased confidence can lead to greater career security, contributing to higher career satisfaction. Successful careers and job searching are influenced by one's perception of employability (Baluku et al. 2020; Tee et al. 2022b). The study conducted by (Tee et al. 2022a) revealed that perceived external employability has a positive association with career success, while perceived internal employability was found to have no association with career success.

H3a: Perceived internal employability positively affects subjective career success

H3b: Perceived external employability positively affects subjective career success

### Mediating Role of Perceived Employability

Perceived organizational support is formed by exchanges between individuals and the way employees are handled, considered, and treated inside the organization (Dose et al. 2019). Organizational assistance in enhancing career skills fosters a sense of efficacy among individuals within their professional setting. If an organization lacks an appropriate sense of organizational support, employees will experience career unhappiness due to the challenges they have in acquiring new skills and achieving their professional goals (Kirkbesoglu & Ozder, 2015). Employees who have good job prospects both within and outside the organization are likely to attain higher levels of subjective career success (Heijden et al. 2022). By estimating the direct and indirect (mediating) impacts of various constructs within a single model, researchers attempt to understand how career management practices influence behavioral outcomes. For example, (Soares & Mosquera, 2020) and (Akkermans et al. 2019) demonstrated that the relationship between career management practices and individual outcomes is mediated by perceived employability. Moreover, a study conducted by (Cortellazzo et al. 2020) demonstrates that the perception of employability significantly influences one's career success.

H4a: The association between perceived organizational support and subjective career success is mediated by perceived internal employability.

H4b: The association between perceived organizational support and subjective career success is mediated by perceived external employability.

This research is based on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). This theory is adapted to facilitate the explanation and prediction of an individual's occupational interests, the occupations they pursue, their performance, and the satisfaction they experience in the workplace (Lent et al. 2008). Based on the conceptual framework (Figure 1), perceived organizational support can influence perceived external and internal employability, which ultimately enhances subjective career success.

## RESULTS

The data for this study was collected from Independent workers of a travel agency specialising in Hajj and Umrah in West Sumatra. To substantiate our theories with empirical evidence, we developed a survey instrument to gather data directly from primary sources. Of the 300 people contacted, 210 completed the survey, representing a response rate of 70%. The majority of the respondents were female (56,7%), aged 23–28 (67,6%), holding a bachelor’s degree (62,4%), and had 1 to 5 years of experience (70,5%). The measurement model was first examined to test the reliability and validity of the proposed model, as shown in Table 1.

Based on the SmartPLS output in Table 1, a validity test has been produced that all outer loadings for each variable are declared valid because they have a value more than 0.6. Convergent validity is evaluated based on the values of average variance extracted (AVE) and outer loadings. It is clear that all reflective constructs have an AVE value exceeding 0.5. Furthermore, the reliability test demonstrated that all variables have a Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.7 and a composite reliability (CR) value greater than 0.7, which indicates that the reliability criteria have been met (Hair, et al. 2019).

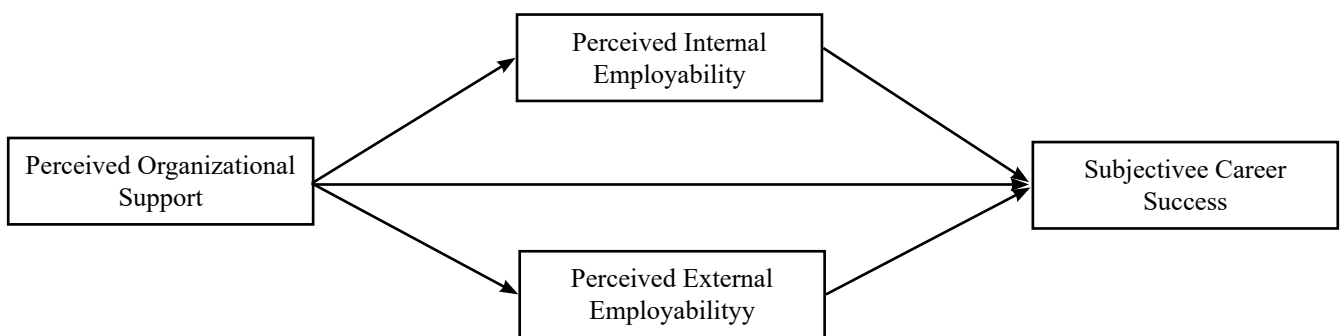


Figure 1. Research Framework

Table 1. Reliability and Validity test

Variable	Items	Outer Loading	AVE	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability
Perceived Organizational Supports	PO1	0.864	0.817	0.925	0.947
	PO2	0.875			
	PO3	0.953			
	PO4	0.920			
Perceived Internals Employability	PIn1	0.858	0.651	0.821	0.881
	PIn2	0.869			
	PIn3	0.766			
	PIn4	0.727			
Perceived Externals Employability	PEx1	0.878	0.565	0.875	0.899
	PEx2	0.762			
	PEx3	0.652			
	PEx4	0.748			
	PEx5	0.642			
	PEx6	0.651			
	PEx7	0.886			
Subjective Career' Success	SCS1	0.739	0.630	0.853	0.895
	SCS2	0.824			
	SCS3	0.828			
	SCS4	0.787			
	SCS5	0.787			

Table 2 shows that perceived organizational support in perceived internal employability provide an R Square value of 0.474, which means that perceived organizational support variables can explain the perceived internal employability variable by 47.4%. Furthermore, the R Square value on perceived external employability is 0.263, which means that perceived organizational support can explain the perceived external employability by 26.3%. The R Square value on subjective career success is 0.441, which means that perceived organizational support can explain the subjective career success by 44.1%. After testing the outer and inner models, the hypothesis of the cause-and-effect relationship of the research variables was then carried out, as shown in Table 3.

Table 2. R Square (R<sup>2</sup>)

Variable	R Square (R <sup>2</sup> )
Subjective Career Success	0.441
Perceived Internal Employability	0.474
Perceived External Employability	0.263

Table 3 shows that all hypotheses for direct effects are accepted, except for the effect of perceived internal employability on subjective career success. The results of the indirect effects test indicate that perceived external employability mediates the influence of perceived organizational support on subjective career success, while perceived internal employability does not mediate this relationship.

Perceived organizational support has a significant positive effect on subjective career success. This finding indicates that employees' subjective career success increases with the level of support provided by the organization. Organizational support creates a supportive work environment and makes employees feel valued. When individuals feel that the organization pays attention to and supports their career development, it can enhance their job and career success. According to Armstrong-Stassen & Ursel (2009), employees who receive more organizational support will feel more satisfied with their careers compared to those who receive less organizational support. The results of this study align with those of previous research conducted by (Ingarianti et al. 2022) and (Siti et al. 2022). These studies found that perceived organizational support has a positive and significant impact on subjective career success.

Moreover, the study revealed that perceived organizational support has a positive and significant impact on perceived external employability and perceived internal employability. This indicates that the perception of both internal and external employability rises in line with the level of perceived organizational support. Organizations that offer learning and development opportunities tend to exemplify a form of exchange where the organization provides support for skill development, and employees reciprocate by enhancing their performance. This can help enhance perceived employability as employees feel they have opportunities to enhance their abilities, thus feeling more confident in their ability to seek and retain employment. According to Rino et al. (2023), employee perceptions of both internal and external employability are impacted by organizational support for intrinsic and extrinsic work values.

The findings of the study show a strong and favorable relationship between subjective career success and perceived external internal employability. However, it was found that perceived internal employability does not influence subjective career success. A study conducted by Baluku et al. (2020) may support this finding, as their research found that perceived external employability influences career satisfaction (i.e., subjective career success), while perceived internal employability does not influence career satisfaction. In the concepts of boundaryless and protean career, individuals engage in multiple jobs, constantly acquire new skills, and frequently transition to new tasks and different locations. This makes individuals more reliant on external opportunities in perceiving their career success (Tee et al. 2022b). In modern career development, individuals are increasingly adopting a proactive approach to managing their career behavior. This involves acquiring transferable career competencies to enhance their prospects of securing external employment opportunities as opposed to internal job opportunities within the labor market (Lin, 2015).

Furthermore, regarding the indirect effect of perceived internal and external employability, we found that only perceived external employability mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and subjective career success, while perceived internal employability does not. HR practices that support employee development increase their sense of employability and enhance employees perceptions

of their career success (Giancaspro et al. 2021). These results can be explained by the current state of careers, which has shifted towards protean and boundaryless careers, making employees feel less bound to just one organization. Therefore, perceived organizational support to enhance perceived internal employability does not significantly influence employees' subjective career success. Tee et al. (2022a) discovered that employees with a protean attitude exhibit disparate responses to perceptions of internal and external employability. Individuals with a protean attitude demonstrate a greater proclivity for exploring opportunities in the external labor market relative to those within their current organizational context. This disposition can influence the trajectory of their career development endeavors. Individuals who adopt a protean attitude tend to prioritize external employability as a primary determinant of well-being and career success. They believe that career success encompasses not only having a stable position inside a single company but also the ability to continue working outside their current company (Hall et al. 2018). These research findings also expand on the findings of Giancaspro et al. (2021) where perceived employability mediates the associations between organizational support in the form of management practices and career success.

### Managerial Implications

This study offers useful insights and practical applications in employee career management, particularly in today's modern career advancement. According to study findings, employees' subjective career success are influenced by perceived organizational support. It's critical to offer employees opportunities for career growth and pertinent training so they can advance their skills and abilities. Moreover, the study's findings indicate that worker are more sensitive to their subjective career success when it comes to external options as opposed to internal ones. Managers must acknowledge that employees are more perceptive to outside career alternatives. Managers need to understand that employees tend to pay more attention to career opportunities outside the organization than within it. Therefore, managers should provide clear and transparent career paths so that employees can see opportunities for career advancement within the organization, adopt a more flexible approach to managing employees' careers, including providing support for professional development. In addition, managers should ensure open and transparent communication between management and employees regarding policies, opportunities, and changes taking place within the organization. This approach can enhance employees' subjective career success. Thus, by giving employees a clear understanding of their career possibilities within the company, they may decide to stay rather than pursue outside employment opportunities.

Table 3. Direct and indirect effects of the hypothesis test results

Hypothesis	Path	Effect Size	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	Perceived Organizational Support → Subjective Career Success	0.309	3.924	0.000	Supported
H2a	Perceived Organizational Support → Perceived Internal Employability	0.689	17.767	0.000	Supported
H2b	Perceived Organizational Support → Perceived External Employability	0.513	8.016	0.000	Supported
H3a	Perceived Internal Employability → Subjective Career Success	0.084	1.177	0.239	Not Supported
H3b	Perceived External Employability → Subjective Career Success	0.370	5.100	0.000	Supported
H4a	Perceived Organizational Support → Perceived Internal Employability → Subjective Career Success	0.058	1.142	0.253	Not Supported
H4b	Perceived Organizational Support → Perceived External Employability → Subjective Career Success	0.190	4.109	0.000	Supported

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

The study findings show that subjective career success is positively influenced by perceived organizational support. Additionally, we found that, in contrast to perceived internal employability, perceived external employability had an impact on subjective career success. The findings further demonstrate that the association between subjective career success and perceived organizational support is mediated by perceived external employability. The research findings indicate that individuals exhibit a higher level of sensitivity towards their subjective career success when it comes to external options, as opposed to internal ones. This finding aligns with the emerging contemporary career theories of “boundaryless career” and “protean career,” which advocate for individuals to become less devoted to a single organization. Instead, there is a tendency to look beyond the organization in pursuit of professional advancement.

Based on this study, employees are more receptive to external career prospects than internal ones, which is consistent with modern career ideas like the boundaryless and the protean career. This study highlights the significance of organizational support in enhancing employees’ subjective career success. It was found that employees are more sensitive to external career opportunities compared to internal ones. Therefore, managers should provide clear career paths, support professional development, and maintain open communication to prevent employees from seeking opportunities outside the organization

### Recommendations

The present investigation has few limitations. First, the cross-sectional design of this study limits the ability to draw causal correlations. To achieve a more nuanced understanding of causation, future research should adopt a longitudinal approach. Second, the results of this investigation might have been impacted by common method variance because information for all study variables was solely gathered from employee self-reports. Future studies should collect data from additional sources to lessen the negative impacts connected to this issue. Third, because the study’s sample came from the tourist industry, more research should examine various sector.

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