

WORK STRESS AND CAREER SUCCESS: THE MODERATING ROLE OF LEADER SUPPORT

Tika Rahma Yani Siregar
email: tikarahmayani@fe.unsri.ac.id
Management, Universitas Sriwijaya
Prabumulih, KM 32 Inderalaya, Kabupaten Ogan Ilir, Sumatera Selatan

Abstract

Career success has become an important topic in organizational research due to its relevance for employee retention, well-being, and organizational effectiveness. Drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study examines how work stress influences both objective and subjective career success, and investigates whether leader support moderates these relationships. A quantitative survey approach was applied, involving 250 employees from various startup companies in West Sumatera. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS. The findings reveal that work stress negatively and significantly affects both objective and subjective career success. Additionally, Leader support does not moderate the relationship between work stress and objective career success, but it significantly moderates the effect of work stress on subjective career success, reducing its negative impact. The study extends COR theory in the context of startups and highlights the importance of stress management programs and leadership development.

Keywords: Objective Career Success, Subjective Career Success, Work-Stress, Leader Support, Startup

1. Introduction

The study of career success in the workplace has attracted significant interest from the academic community. Researchers have emphasized that a thorough understanding of the factors affecting career success is essential for the development of a competent workforce and for contributing to organizational success [1], [2]. According to [3], career success represents the favorable psychological milestones or work-oriented achievements that an individual accrues as a consequence of their professional experiences, encompassing both objective and subjective dimensions. Objective career success is characterized by concrete and quantifiable metrics, including promotions, escalations in job hierarchy, and increases in remuneration [4]. Subjective career success refers to how a person evaluates and perceives the achievement of personally significant career outcomes, such as job satisfaction, career accomplishment, and career engagement (Seibert et al., 2024). Career success is crucial for retaining high-performing and dedicated employees within an organization [5].

Previous research shows that work stress can decrease employees' career success [6], [7]. According to [8], work-related stress arises

from a mismatch between an employee's abilities and their knowledge, skills, and approach to managing their work mechanisms. Employees who experience stress to a certain degree within an organization will see impacts on their productivity and performance, which, in turn, affects the organization's performance and achievement of its vision and mission [7]. This situation subsequently influences employees' rank, position, status, income, sense of pride, happiness, and satisfaction, thereby impacting their career success.

The social support derived from interpersonal relationships, particularly from supervisory figures, has been extensively acknowledged as an essential asset in alleviating stress [7], [9]. [10] posits that employees experiencing stress are those who have exhausted their emotional and cognitive resources. Thus, the provision of support to employees who are encountering work-related stress may be construed as a depletion of the supervisor's own resources, subsequently diminishing the quantity of support accessible to employees who are in need. Furthermore, material support, encompassing incentives and other financial benefits [11] is of paramount importance for employees to effectively manage and prevent work stress. This is in line with the findings of [12], which indicate that a

lack of workplace support is a significant contributing factor to work stress among employees. One such form of support is that provided by leaders within the organization. This is in line with the research by [13] which indicates that leadership support serves as a positive force that can enhance employees' resources, enabling them to overcome various difficulties encountered in their work and motivating them to perform well.

Leader support also plays a significant role in enhancing employees' career success by creating an environment that fosters growth and development [7]. Mentoring programs and career development support from supervisors provide valuable guidance and networking opportunities, which significantly contribute to employees' career advancement [14]. COR theory explains that individuals are motivated to acquire, maintain, and protect resources they consider valuable, such as time, energy, social support, and status [15]. In the context of COR theory, leadership support acts as a form of social resource. With leadership support, employees are more likely to feel they have adequate resources to cope with the stress they experience. This prevents further resource depletion that may result from prolonged stress, which can lead to decreased performance and career success. The study by [7] also shows that leadership support moderates the impact of work stress on employees' career success.

A substantial body of research has addressed the impact of work stress the performance and careers of doctors and healthcare professionals. Notable studies in this field include those conducted by [9], [12], [16], [17] The study by [18] highlights the need for further investigation into the outcomes of career success as a promising direction for future research. Additionally, [19], assert that numerous aspects of career success research remain unexplored, making studies in this field highly recommended for the future.

The present study contributes to the extant literature by drawing upon the COR theory. This study aims to examine the impact of work stress on both objective and subjective career success among employee of startup company in west sumatera. Furthermore, this research also investigates the moderating effect of leader support.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

2.1 Work Stress and Objective Career Success

Work stress can occur due to a mismatch between an employee's abilities, knowledge, skills, and how they respond to a

mechanism in their work. Based on the results of the study [20] when employees are unable to improve their skills, abilities, and roles in their work, then when the employee is faced with a higher workload, the employee will experience great stress, which can increase work errors, decrease productivity, increase absenteeism, decrease work enthusiasm, increase job insecurity, and decrease employee life balance. If employee productivity, work enthusiasm, and attendance have decreased, this can reduce employee work performance, which ultimately has an impact on the employee's career. In addition, employees will lose the opportunity to get a promotion and lose the opportunity to earn a higher income. This is in line with the finding by [7], where the finding showed that work stress will have a negative impact on objective career success.

H1: Work stress is negatively affects objective career success

2.2 Work Stress and Subjective Career Success

Work stress is a situation that occurs due to workload, undue work pressure, unstructured work, disharmonious relationships with superiors and coworkers, and lack of time to spend with family [7]. If employees feel uncomfortable with their work environment, are unable to complete work with a structured rhythm, do not love their jobs, and feel that their work is a burden and makes things difficult for them, then employees will lose their enthusiasm and be unenthusiastic about their position/career. So that employees will be faced with the problem of feeling dissatisfied, not proud, uncomfortable, and unhappy with their work. This is in line with research by [21] (and research conducted by [22], where the findings show that work stress felt by employees from their work will have a negative effect on success related to employee career satisfaction.

H2: Work stress is negatively affects subjective career success

2.3 The Moderating Role of Leader Support

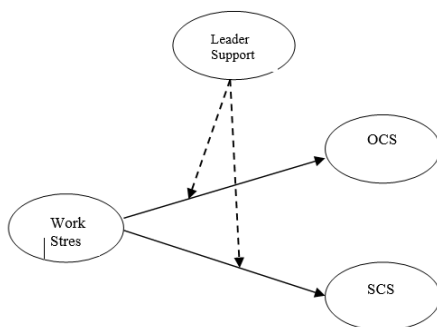
Leader support is very much needed by employees in carrying out their duties [23]. With the support of the leadership, it can reduce the tension and burden (stress) borne by employees. Leadership support can also motivate employees, thereby improving the performance and quality produced by the employee. In addition to having an impact on the organization, optimal work quality will also have an impact on individual employees, such as promotion (objective career success). This is supported by the findings of [13] that leadership support can reduce the negative effects of

problems in both the work environment and the employee's family environment. The negative impact of the problem in question is that it can trigger work stress.

H5: The association between work stress and objective career success moderated by leader support

The leaders who are most liked by employees are supportive and loving leaders [24]. This type of leader is one who can make employees feel safe, comfortable, and calm when doing their work. If employees feel safe, comfortable, and calm, then it is unlikely that employees will experience work stress. Supportive leaders have a strong emotional connection with employees, making employees enthusiastic and passionate in carrying out their duties. With the support of leaders, employees feel appreciated, thus creating a sense of pride and happiness, and even employees feel satisfaction in their careers. This is supported by studies by [7] that leadership support is a moderator variable between work stress and workers' career success and plays a significant role in workers' subjective career success.

H6: The association between work stress and subjective career success moderated by leader support



Picture 1. Research Model

3. Research Method

3.1 Participants and procedure

This study employs a survey-based quantitative research design. The total number of respondents for this study was 250, collected from an online survey. The respondents were employees of startup companies in West Sumatra. Based on this, 300 questionnaires were distributed. 250 questionnaires could be processed for data processing. In accordance with the general rules of sample size described by Sekaran & Bougie (2016), larger than 30 but

smaller than 500 sample sizes can be used in SEM data processing. As a result, 83% of respondents participated in this study.

The result showed that a significant majority of the respondents were males (53%) and fell within the age bracket of 25-30 years (48.4%). Furthermore, a substantial portion held bachelor's degrees (60.4%) had work experience ranging from 1-3 years (71.8%) and 32% of the total respondents work at startup companies in the education sector.

3.2 Measurement

The measurement of subjective career success was adapted from [26] and consists of fourteen items. Objective career success was adapted from [27] and includes three items. Work stress consists of eight items adapted from [28]. Leader support was adopted from (Yucel et al., 2021) and includes seven items.

3.3 Data Analysis

To assess the proposed research hypotheses, a comprehensive analytical evaluation of the data was conducted utilizing variance-based structural equation modeling (SEM) employing the partial least squares (PLS) methodology through the SmartPLS software application. The use of PLS-SEM is recommended for evaluating mediation relationships, as it allows for simultaneous analysis of multiple variables and testing of models with numerous indicators or constructs [29]. PLS-SEM evaluation is comprised of two components: the measurement model and the structural model, both of which are aligned with the objectives of this approach [30].

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Result

The measurement model is assessed with factor loadings exceeding 0.70, and items below this threshold are excluded [31]. Convergent validity ensures strong correlations between indicators and constructs, measured by AVE which should exceed 0.50 [31]. Composite reliability (CR) evaluates internal consistency, requiring scores above 0.70. Factor loadings, AVE, and CR results are displayed in Table 1.

HTMT is a contemporary method providing enhanced sensitivity and power for discriminating constructs in the measurement model assessment [31]. A valid discrimination between constructs is established if the HTMT value is below 0.90, as indicated in Table 2.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability

Variable	AVE	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability
Work-Stress	0.691	0.936	0.937
Leader Support	0.699	0.928	0.934
Objective Career Success	0.788	0.866	0.879
Subjective Career Success	0.549	0.937	0.938

The hypothesis testing use the rule of thumb for t-statistics (higher than 1.96) and p-values with a significance threshold of 5% are utilized for

Table 3. Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Path	Original sample (O)	T statistics	P values	Decision
H1	Work-Stress -> Objective Career Success	-0.219	3.150	0.002	Accepted
H2	Work-Stress -> Subjective Career Success	-0.240	3.319	0.001	Accepted
H3	Leader support x Work-Stress -> Objective Career Success	-0.011	0.184	0.854	Rejected
H4	Leader Support x Work-Stress -> Subjective Career Success	0.131	1.983	0.047	Accepted

4.2 Discussion

The research findings show that work stress has a negative effect on employee objective career success. These results imply that as the level of work stress experienced by employees rises, their objective career success levels decrease. High work stress can lead to decreased productivity, quality of work, and the employee’s ability to achieve expected outcomes. In such situations, employees may struggle to maintain or improve their performance, directly affecting promotion opportunities, positive performance evaluations, and salary increases, which are indicators of objective career success. According to the principles of Conservation of Resource (COR) theory, individuals are motivated to acquire, retain, and protect resources they deem valuable. These resources may include time, energy, social support, and status [34]. This theory posits that stress arises when an individual's resources feel threatened or diminished, particularly when they perceive insufficient resources to meet existing demands. Work stress depletes the physical and mental resources of employee, leaving them with little energy to pursue objective career goals, such as seeking promotion opportunities or meeting high performance standards. These findings are consistent with prior research by [7], which found that work stress experienced by employees negatively impacts career success related to promotion levels.

Table 2. HTMT

	LS	OCS	SCS	WS	LS x WS
LS					
OCS	0.375				
SCS	0.462	0.566			
WS	0.525	0.456	0.459		
LS x WS	0.048	0.053	0.047	0.121	

assessment when the bootstrap approach is applied in conjunction with structural equation modeling (Tabel 3).

The findings of the research study indicate that work stress has a negative and significant effect on the subjective career success of startup employee. The results indicate that elevated levels of work stress are associated with a decline in subjective career success among employees. Subjective career success can be defined as the evaluation and satisfaction with one's own career achievements, including factors such as career satisfaction or a sense of personal accomplishment [35]. High work stress frequently results in depleted energy, reduced motivation, and disrupted work-life balance, which can lead employees to experience diminished satisfaction with their achievements. When an individual feels fatigued or pressured, they may encounter difficulties in meeting the standards or expectations they have set, ultimately affecting their personal career satisfaction. These findings are consistent with those of previous research by [21], whose results demonstrated that job-related stress negatively affects career satisfaction (subjective career success).

Furthermore, the results indicate that leader support does not moderate the effects of work stress on the objective career success of startup employees in west sumatera. This suggests that leader support does not play a role in reducing the impact of work stress on the objective career success of these employees. Although leaders may provide work-related support, this support is not strong or relevant enough to mitigate the effects of work stress on employees' objective career success. In other words, high levels of work stress continue to impact objective career success, regardless of leader support.

Leader support was found to moderate the effect of work stress on the subjective career success of startup employee. The findings indicate that the impact of work stress on subjective career success, with the presence of leader support as a moderating factor, is positive and significant. This suggests that leader support can help alleviate the negative effects of work stress on the subjective career success of these officers. When leaders provide support, employees are more likely to engage and commit to their work. This can foster a more positive work

environment, where employees feel motivated to strive harder and achieve success in their careers. Effective leader support can help reduce the levels of stress experienced by employees. The findings by

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study is based on COR Theory and aims to examine the effect of work stress on the career success of startup employee in west sumatera, with the moderating role of leader support. The findings indicate that work-related stress have a negative and significant impact on the objective and subjective career success of startup employee in West Sumatera. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that leader support serves to moderate the impact of work-related stress on subjective career success, yet does not exert a moderating influence on objective career success. These findings highlight the importance of organizational initiatives to manage employee stress and strengthen leadership support. Implementing stress management training, improving communication, and enhancing supervisory leadership skills can help employees

[7] demonstrated that leader support moderates the influence of work stress on employee career success.

maintain career satisfaction and performance. Ultimately, fostering career success is essential not only for employee well-being but also for sustaining organizational effectiveness.

This study has several limitations. First, the data were collected through self-administered questionnaires completed by employees of startup companies in west sumatera. Participants filled out the questionnaires independently without direct involvement from the researchers, which may lead to method variance issues. Additionally, future research should study more deeply and focus on subjective career success variables, because subjective career success is more difficult to measure compared to objective career success. Therefore, it is hoped that the results of future research will provide a more complete picture of the variables and indicators of subjective career success.

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