

**SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS, AGE AND  
THEIR IMPACT ON TURNOVER INTENTION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Organizations of all sizes will need to rely on the efforts of older employees as they will form the majority of the workforce within the upcoming decades. That new dimension of age-diversity comes along a whole set of challenges, such as retention among older people. The thesis at hand approaches that topic from the angle of the central concept of subjective career success.

As part of the data collection for the Cross-Cultural Collaboration on Contemporary Careers (5C) project in Portugal 523 participants were surveyed upon their attitudes towards their careers, respectively their employment.

Our results showed a positive correlation between age and subjective career success as well as a negative correlation between the latter and turnover intention. Age was not found to moderate the relation between subjective career success and turnover intention.

Acknowledging the interplay of age, subjective career success and turnover intention, our findings suggest a need for flexible human resources policies and practices as they seem to promise a reduced risk of turnover intention.

**KEYWORDS:** Career Success, Turnover Intention, Age, Retention,

## **RESUMO**

Organizações de todas as dimensões terão de confiar nos esforços dos seus colaboradores mais velhos, uma vez que estes irão formar a maioria da força de trabalho das próximas décadas. Com esta nova dimensão de diversidade de idade, vem um conjunto de desafios, tais como a retenção da força de trabalho mais velha. Esta tese aborda o tópico através do conceito de percepção de sucesso na carreira.

Como parte da recolha de dados para o projecto de colaboração transcultural em carreiras contemporâneas (5c) em Portugal, 523 participantes responderam a um questionário acerca das suas atitudes sobre as suas carreiras, especificamente sobre o emprego.

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Os resultados mostram uma correlação positiva entre a idade e a percepção de sucesso na carreira, assim como uma correlação negativa entre a última e a intenção de turnover.

Reconhecer a existência de relação entre a idade, a percepção de sucesso na carreira e a intenção de turnover, sugere a necessidade para políticas e práticas de recursos humanos mais flexíveis, uma vez que permitem uma redução na intenção de turnover.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Carreira de sucesso, intenção de turnover/rotatividade, idade, retenção

Classifications according to the JEL Classification System:

JEL: J28 Safety, Job Satisfaction, Related Public Policy

JEL: J63 Turnover, Vacancies, Layoffs

*Für Mütter*

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## INTRODUCTION

We live in times full of change. The working world is no different. Birth rates decline<sup>1</sup> and legal retirement age is on the raise<sup>2</sup>, which results in a situation where workforce is currently comprising of four generations<sup>3</sup> with a greater proportion of older people than ever before<sup>4</sup>, implying two things. Firstly, employers will need to rely increasingly on the efforts and capabilities of older people. Secondly and consequently retention becomes a more age-driven issue for organizations. Needless to say that people of various age differ in attitudes, experiences, interests, and more.

This sets the stage for organizations of all sizes and any professional concerned with human resources practices or policies likewise to better understand how individuals of all ages experience their careers and how to address potential differences in needs, ambitions and preferences.

The thesis at hand contributes to this quest by looking specifically at a key concept which has gained increasing attention: subjectively perceived career success (e.g. Sullivan, 1999; Dany, 2003). It is so important, because organizational success can be highly influenced by personal success (Judge, Higgins, Thoreson, and Barrick, 1999).

In our study we test if age can explain subjective career success. Further we test how subjective career success influences employees turnover intention and how that might differ depending on the age of an employee, so that ensuring a high employee satisfaction across all ages might help to prevent individuals from leaving the organization and therein causing risks in e.g. recruiting, knowledge transfer, productivity and hence overall competitiveness.

It is with great pride that we contributed to the data collection process within the currently ongoing quantitative stage of the Cross-Cultural Collaboration on Contemporary Careers (5C) project (Briscoe, Hall, and Mayrhofer, 2011; [www.5c.careers.com](http://www.5c.careers.com)), which continues to play a major contributing role to the field of career sense making across cultures. In this stage the 5C project surveyed about 15.000 individuals in roughly thirty countries worldwide, Portugal as being one of them, which serves as our study sample.

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<sup>1</sup> Data for Portugal according to Eurostat (per 1000 persons): 10,4 (2005) to 8,3 (2015)

<sup>2</sup> Data for Portugal according to Eurostat: Based on the development of the life expectancy (per 1000 persons), which went up from 78,2 (2005) to 81,3 years (2015)

<sup>3</sup> 1: Silents (born between 1925 and 1946), 2: Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), 3: Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980), 4: Generation Y or Millennials (born after 1980)

<sup>4</sup> Data for Portugal according to Eurostat: employee aged until 44 years (2005: 61,4 % to 2015: 54,7 %), employees aged 45-65 years (2005: 33,1 % to 2015: 40 %)



## **1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter introduces the historical development of the theory of careers leading towards the construct of career success and its subjective dimension. Further, age among other predictors for subjective career success is explored. Turnover intention as an outcome of subjective career success is introduced and reviewed subsequently. Lastly, this chapter centres attention to the moderating role of age and therein underlines the fundamental importance of age in the workplace overall.

### **1.1. CAREER THEORY**

The way careers are understood has changed. While the ‘old’ way was characterised by looking at careers as *“a succession of related jobs in whose arranged hierarchies of prestige, through which persons move in an (more-or-less predictable) ordered sequence”* (Wilensky, 1961, p.523), today the definition of careers as *“evolving sequence of an individual’s work experiences over time”* (Arthur, Hall, and Lawrence 1989, p. 8) is established (Arthur, Khapova, and Wilderom, 2005).

At the centre of attention within the ‘new’ literature on careers lays the substantial change of the career success construct (Adamson, Doherty, and Viney, 1998; Dany, 2003; Sullivan, 1999). The evolution from ‘jobs’ towards ‘experiences’ can be seen as highly interconnected to the turning attention within the field of social sciences during the late 1980th (Savickas, 1995), moving from the objective towards the subjective aspects of work.

Underlining this development of career research by now career success is viewed as issue of great organizational importance, because it has been found to influence organizational success (Judge *et al.*, 1999). Let's take a deeper look into the development towards an understanding of modern careers.

### **TOWARDS MODERN CAREERS**

Looking at traditional careers, a close linkage to organizational hierarchies can be noted (e.g., Whyte, 1956; Wilensky, 1961). Employees competed for upward promotions (Rosenbaum, 1979). Climbing up the ladder was seen as true success indicator (Townsend,

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1970). The developments of the 1980er years brought market changes, mainly in overall increased competition, which contributed to the transformation of organizations (Baruch, 2006). Employment as secure as it has been before was no longer guaranteed (e.g. Rousseau, 1995), because boundaries inside and outside of organizations started to fade (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994). A higher flexibility and complexity are ever since the characteristics of modern careers (Baruch, 2006). Employees are meant to follow the idea of an intelligent career (Arthur, Claman, and DeFillippi, 1995), which centres around the qualities for successfully managing one's own career.

Further modern concepts of careers are described as boundaryless (DeFillippi *et al.*, 1994), protean (Hall, 1976; 1996; 2004), post-corporate (Peiperl and Baruch, 1997), chronically flexible (Iellatchitch, Mayrhofer, and Meyer, 2003), or kaleidoscope (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). They are all characterizing the development towards increasing autonomy in one's career beyond potential borders of an organization (Inkson, 2006).

Following the evolution of how careers are seen especially regarding their understanding of success today those concepts are shaped and defined in a much more individual way (Derr, 1986; Gunz and Heslin, 2005). Not limited to upward mobility, careers are rather seen holistically (Carlson and Rotondo, 2001) and beyond the employment sphere. That underlines the lifelong dimension of individual experiences due to their role (Arnold and Cohen, 2008; Hall, 2002) throughout all their different life-stages (Super, 1980).

This thinking also finds reflection in the definition of careers “*as a sequence of attitudes, activities or behaviours associated with work roles of individuals during the course of their lifetime*” (Gerber, Wittekind, Grote, and Staffelbach, 2009. p. 304). Self-fulfilment and perceived satisfaction through one's own career is therein seen as increasingly important (Baruch, 2006). While increased flexibility and variety of career options to choose from in today's work environment may be seen positively there are also negative aspects to it, such as anxieties and stress resulting from ambiguity and the less and less existing job security from centuries ago (Baruch, 2006; Cooper, Dewe, and O'Driscoll, 2001).

Scholars agree to radical changes in employment patterns coming up (Giesecke and Heisig, 2010) as the idea of physical mobility across jobs, functions and organisations, as described in e.g. the boundaryless (DeFillippi *et al.*, 1994) and protean career (Hall, 1976; 1996; 2004) concept become more common and prominent (Briscoe, Hall, and Frautschy Demuth, 2006; Sullivan and Baruch, 2009).

## **THE DYNAMIC, LIFELONG CAREER PROCESS**

As outlined above careers can be seen as evolutionary and changing over the course of one's life (Arthur *et al.*, 2005). Divided into exploratory and routine stages, Super (1957) described the age between 15 and 24 years as developmental stage to develop and establish occupational preferences. Further Hall (1986) summarizes this initial exploratory stage of early adulthood to be filled with trial activities about work life and one self, eventually leading to a subjectively perceived meaningful concept of one's working life.

According to Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) one is assumed to settle into a phase of certain routine, which can be confirmatory, contradictory, accepting, dislocating or evolutionary. Events or actions could change this routine and can be structural, such as graduating from educational program, incidental, such as events beyond one's direct control like a company shut-down; or deliberate, such as fully controllable events like resigning voluntarily. Those turning points contribute to a person's conceptual definition of one's career (Brousseau and Driver, 1996). Connecting this to the presented understanding of modern careers regarding achieving one's goals (Barnett and Bradley, 2007), managing one's career is understood as the self-responsibility rather than that of the employer (Crant, 2000; Hall and Chandler, 2005). Behaviours related to such an active management of one's career are described as context-specific proactive behaviours (Crant, 2000), career enhancing strategies (Nabi, 2003), and career goal-directed activities as proposed by Lent (2004). More concretely those activities span from exploring and planning of career opportunities, development of skills, networking and promoting of one's achievements (e.g., Nabi, 2003; Noe, 1996; Orpen, 1994).

Now that career success has been proven to be an important, yet rather complex construct it will be reviewed in more detail.

### **1.2. CAREER SUCCESS**

One prominent view is that a person's perception of her or his career accomplishments and future prospects can be understood as career success (Aryee, Chay, and Tan, 1994; Judge, Cable, Boudreau, and Bretz, 1995; Melamed, 1996; Nabi, 1999).

Adding to this let's take a look at two potentially opposing, but to our understanding rather beautifully complementing definitions of career success. While Hall in 1976 sees career

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success as goal and desired outcome of employment engagements by individuals, Greenhaus and Callanan (2006) forty years later regard career success as the positive material and psychological outcomes resulting from one's work-related activities and experiences. Those two definitions underline the change in view from a narrative of career success as objective goal everyone pursues towards a highly subjective consequence on a psychological level within individuals perception. What might be considered objectively as a successful career might not be a subjectively experienced or perceived successful career (Hall, 2002), which requires a deeper look into what both areas actually mean and how they potentially overlap or interfere with each other.

For this Nabi (1999) sets forth an interesting typology (see Figure 1). We can see two main dimensions: subjective and objective career success. Both divided into high or low levels, allowing four categories of career success: "Winner" with both subjective and objective career success being high, "Subjective winners" having high subjective and low objective career success. "Victims of success" being low in subjective and high in objective career success. Finally "Frustrated" is the category with low subjective and low objective career success. It seems to imply that subjective and objective career success are independent from each other, respectively two separated aspects. Following the illustrated typology by Nabi (1999) the most desirable state seems to be "Winners" with both high objective as well as subjective career success, followed by the second most desirable state "Subjective Winners" with low objective and high subjective career success. Also from the labels used by Nabi (1999) it seems he suggests subjective to be a substitute for objective career success.

		<b>Objective career success</b>	
		High	Low
<b>Subjective career success</b>	High	<b>Winners</b>	<b>Subjective winners</b>
	Low	<b>Victims of success</b>	<b>Frustrated</b>

**Figure 1** A typology of objective and subjective career success (Nabi, 1999)

While the illustrated distinction between objective and subjective elements of career success seems to be mainly supported (e.g., Abele-Brehmand Stief, 2004; Abele and Spurk, 2009b), some argue subjective career success to be solely a co-product of objective career success (e.g. Judge *et al.*, 1995; Ng, Sorensen, and Feldman, 2005; Nicholson and De Waal-Andrews, 2005). In agreement with Hall (2002) we support that achieving objective career success does not ultimately equal having achieved satisfaction with one's career, hence a closer look at how both differ from each other can contribute to the above discussed.

### 1.2.1. OBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS

Objective career success was initially believed to equalize career success overall as a consensually perceived variable by others evaluating one's career (Gattiker and Larwood, 1986). It was assumed to refer to a factual rather than to a dynamic and complex reality, consequently implying that it could not be interpreted in differing ways (Evetts, 1992). Defined as clearly measurable, observable as well as captured in verifiable elements (e.g. promotion, occupational status, pay) objective careers success used to be seen as the hallmarks of career advancement (Nicholson, 2000).

Economic trends like out- and downsizing or organizational delayering have diminished the desire for those upwardly mobile careers and with this, the experience of objective career success (Evans, Gunz, and Jalland, 1997; Hall, 2002, Reitman and Schnerer, 2003; Heslin, 2005). Furthermore people value challenges, work-life balance, development of new skills and other subjective outcomes (Gattiker *et al.*, 1986; Heslin, 2005).

Dries, Pepermans and Carlier (2008) define objective career success as “*mostly concerned with observable, measurable and verifiable attainments such as pay, promotion and occupational status*” (p. 254), hence measured in elements which are not biased in their empirical assessment as opposed to subjective career success (Dette, Abele and Renner, 2004). Operationalization of objective career success as in salary attainment, number of promotions, number of employees of one's team is rather straight forward compared to its subjective dimension (Judge *et al.*, 1995) as will be explained next.

### 1.2.2. SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS

While objective career success has been studied primarily and more extensively than subjective career success so far, the latter has been gaining more and more attention as it is evolving along its surrounding cultural and historical contexts (Young and Collin, 2004; Stead, 2004). Especially in today's work environment subjective career success is not to be ignored (Hall *et al.*, 2005), so let's take a look at its definitions.

Subjective career success can be understood as the satisfaction covering all individually depending career aspects (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, Wormley, 1990). It is characterized by depending on one's individual "*evaluation relative to one's own goals and expectations*" (Seibert and Kraimer, 2001, p. 2). Further subjective career success combines one's own evaluation with the one made by significant others of one's success compared to the one of others as well as compared to certain individual expectations about career (Betz and Fitzgerald, 1987) and captures to the perceived progress towards career goals defined by one self (Hall, 1976; Wiese, Freund, and Baltes, 2002). Rather than taking subjective career success as a static truth it should be understood as a dynamic concept (Savickas, 2005).

Researchers operationalize or measure subjective career success often in general job or career satisfaction (e.g. Greenhaus *et al.*, 1990; Judge *et al.*, 1995; Burke, 2001; Ng *et al.*, 2005).

### 1.3. AGE AND PREDICTOR FOR SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS

As previously outlined it becomes evident that career success is made of highly individual dimensions. Hence it can be just as diverse as people in their different characteristics, abilities, preferences, needs, views and more. It goes without a saying that those facets of people are not set in stone, but shall rather be understood as potentially dynamic impressions, which might change over the course of one's lifetime influenced by one's experience or exposure. Hence we are introducing explored predictors for career success by looking at motivation, career anchors, career management behaviour, organizational factors, human capital and socio-demographics.

### **MOTIVATION**

Consisting of career resilience, career insight, and career identity the term career motivation, respectively commitment (Day and Allen, 2004) can be characterised as one's interest and flexible behaviour to fulfil the job expectations and further engaging in activities like seeking training or new experiences and working towards accomplishing goals regarding one's career (Grzeda, 1999). Career resilient people are described to be willing to take risks, to have a need for achievement and to show occupational self-efficacy, which means to belief in one's capacity and motivation to get a job done according to the expectations set as well as to be able to pursue self-given career goals (Abele *et al.*, 2009b). While job self-efficacy was found to not have a positive relation with objective elements of career success such as hourly wage (Lubbers, Loughlin, and Zweig, 2005), a positive relation between self-efficacy and salary was found by Kim, Mone, and Kim (2008) on Korean employees. Longitudinally the influence of occupational self-efficacy on subjective career success has been confirmed by Higgins, Dobrow, and Chandler (2008); Saks (1995) as well as Abele *et al.* (2009b). The latter showed that seven years into employment measured from graduation individuals with high self-efficacy reported to be more satisfied than their former class mates with low occupational self-efficacy (Abele *et al.*, 2009b).

### **CAREER ANCHORS, VALUES AND ORIENTATION**

Schein (1975; 1978; 1985; 1990; 1996) introduced the concept of eight career anchors (e.g. lifestyle, pure challenge, stability), which individuals develop over time as a result of life events resulting in an increasingly accurate career-self-concept, respectively one's individual definition of career success. The more one's work matches one's career anchor, the more likely it is to experience positive professional outcomes like job effectiveness or career satisfaction (Danziger, Rachman-Moore, and Valency, 2008). Also Kim *et al.* (2008) found one's career anchors to be related to subjective career success.

Personal goals are established not solely but to a big part by individual values (work-related e.g. achievement, financial prosperity), which are essential to the evaluation of one self and others (Brown, 2002): "*Work values are the values that individuals believe should be satisfied as a result of their participation in the work role*" (p. 49). Schein (1985) put forward that it takes minimum three to five years of practical experience to establish stable work values, which can manifest in a career concept. Such a concept or career orientation can be

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understood as a set of one's preferences regarding performance standards, employment or recognition types in the context of one's career (Gerpott, Domsch and Keller, 1988). Following Carlson and Rotondo (2001) that represents one's values as an interplay of one's self-development, environment and employment. Upon Schein's conception of career anchors in 1975 and 1978 it was Derr (1986) who proposed five internal orientations towards one's career: getting 1) ahead, 2) secure, 3) free, 4) high and 5) balanced. In opposition of Schein (1978; 1985), who proposes career orientation as stable over the course of one's employment history, Derr (1986) and also Igbaria, Kassicieh and Silver (1999) see them as modifiable (e.g. by major events both in private and professional life like marriage or job loss) and dynamically changing throughout one's various life-stages. Empirically results have been confirming that career orientations change as people age (Derr, 1986; Loughlin, and Barling, 2001). Interesting enough age was found to not have a strong effect on money orientation (Doorewaard, Hendrickx, and Verschuren, 2004). Kim (2004) found that the career success orientation of Korean women does differ as their working experience grows. A later study by Kim *et al.*, (2008) revealed the change in definition of subjective career success, so that job security was more important to employees with at least 10 years of experience compared to employees who have less than four years of working experience. For the less experienced individuals both private and professional life was more important than scored by the ones who have at least seven years of experience (Kim *et al.*, 2008).

## CAREER MANAGEMENT BEHAVIOUR

Employees who were actively managing their career (e.g. career planning, networking) were found more likely to report career satisfaction (Seibert *et al.* 2001; Ng *et al.*, 2005, Barnett *et al.*, 2007). Further empirical studies resulted in greater life and job satisfaction consistently reported by individuals across age groups, who engaging in career management strategies (e.g. Freund and Baltes, 1998; Wiese, Freund and Baltes, 2000). Longitudinally this also received empirical support (e.g. Wiese, Freund and Baltes, 2002). Examples for career management behaviour to influence career success also objectively are Gould (1979), who found career planning activities to predict monthly salary and position advancement; and Steffy and Jones (1988), who showed such a relation towards income level.



## **ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS**

Job security and career development support by the organization enhance progressive development of knowledge and skills, therein contribute to a higher level of psychological success and offer employees to satisfy their potential desire for career growth, hence influence subjective career success (Nabi, 2003). Internal labour market practices were empirically proven to increase subjective career success (Aryee *et al.*, 1994). Also training and development opportunities among other organization support opportunities confirmed to have a strong influence on subjective career success (Ng *et al.*, 2005). However some areas of corporate people policies (e.g. promotion, compensation) were still found to be evident to hinder women from top level positions (e.g. Oakley, 2000).

## **HUMAN CAPITAL AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS**

Human capital and socio-demographics were found to strongly influence career success in a meta-analysis by Ng *et al.* (2005). According to the results especially acquired skills and new knowledge predicted both objective and subjective career success (e.g. Boudreau, Boswell, and Judge, 2001; Judge *et al.*, 1995; Melamed, 1996). Gender wise it was longitudinally shown that women value subjective career success higher than objective career success (Hohner, Grote, and Hoff, 2003). Age was found to positively relate to job satisfaction (e.g. Allen and Meyer 1993; Conway, 2004). Another difference based on age was found to be the understanding of what career success is measured in. While older employees seem to view career success through advancement in status, compensation or authority (e.g. Gattiker *et al.*, 1986), younger ones weight more the subjectively perceived meaning and importance of success at work and life in balance (Judge *et al.*, 1995; Nabi, 1999.; Poole and Bornholt, 1998). That is interesting because it could imply that subjective career success might be influenced such that rated higher by solely valuing this dimension more. In opposition we argue that with increasing age individuals build up a clearer picture of what they want (Schein, 1985; Derr, 1986, Brown, 2002), gain the needed capabilities on how to get there, such as career management skills (Ng *et al.*, 2005), plus in that sense actually achieve more of what they want over time and therefore perceive their careers to be more successful compared to younger people.

Hence, we expect age to be positively related with reported subjective career success.

#### **1.4. TURNOVER INTENTION AS CONSEQUENCE OF SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS**

Among other consequences of subjective career success, such as organizational commitment (e.g. Dyke and Duxbury, 2011) the area of turnover intention has gained increasing attention by both practitioners and academics in the quest for a way to help better manage retention as critical risk factor for organizations due to sensitive implications for e.g. replacement and productivity costs or knowledge transfer questions (Greenhouse, Callanan, and DiRenzo, 2008). Turnover intention can be explained as plan of an employee to leave the current job or organization in the near future (Purani and Sahadev, 2007; Weisberg, 1994).

While our questionnaire did measure the intention rather than the actual behaviour, it does not guarantee that individuals will actually leave their organizations. However one's turnover intention has been found to be the biggest factor predicting employees actually leaving the organization (Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner, 2000; Porter and Steers, 1973; Rizwan, Shahid, Shafiq, Tabassum, Bari, Umer, 2013; Rizwan, Shahzad, Sheikh, Batool, Riaz, Saddique, 2013). Hence it is an important variable to take into account for the presented practical relevance.

An overall positive relation of job satisfaction with intentions to stay rather than to leave one's employer have been empirically proven (Warr, 1994; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, and Topolnytsky, 2002; Tett and Meyer, 1993). Subjective career success was also found to positively correlate to employee's loyalty towards the employer (Aryee and Chay, 1994; Joiner, Bartram, Garreffa, 2004; Bozionelos, 2008).

Yeatts, Folts, and Knapp (2000) confirmed this in their study among older employees as well. Older employees, who reported higher job satisfaction indicated also higher intentions to stay at their current employer, hence reported lower turnover in opposition of their counterparts who reported low job satisfaction.

Nauta, van Vianen, van der Heijden, van Dam, and Willemsen (2009) found career satisfaction to be significantly negatively correlated with turnover intention ( $\beta = -.32$ ). Also, age as his control variable was significantly correlated with turnover intention ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

According to Simo, Enache, Sallan Leyes, and Fernández Alarcón (2010) professional success (combining both: objective and subjective dimensions) show significant correlation with one's turnover intention ( $r = -.21$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Also, Jang and George (2012) confirm the negative correlation between job satisfaction and turnover intention ( $\beta = -.43, p < .01$ ).

Most recently Chan and Mai (2015) found subjectively reported career success to have a negative relation to turnover intention ( $\beta = -.30, p < .001$ ).

Based on the reviewed empirical evidence we expect subjective career success to be negatively related with turnover intention, meaning subjectively successful individuals show weaker intention to leave the organization than their not or less subjectively successful counterparts.

### **1.5. THE MODERATING ROLE OF AGE**

Attempting to draw a comprehensive picture around the complexity of age as organizational dimension of interest we introduce a few not yet mentioned, yet important overall effects of age in the working world. Subsequently are outlined the Selection-Optimization-Compensation-Theory, Socio-Emotional Selectivity-Theory and age stereotypes, which will help to explain the moderating role of age in our study context.

#### **SELECTION-OPTIMIZATION-COMPENSATION THEORY**

Suggesting a compass for individuals on how to spend their limited resources to achieve well-being, goals and other positive outcomes (Baltes and Dickson, 2001; Freund and Baltes, 2000, 2002) the theory of selection, optimization and compensation (SOC) gives out the overall aim of minimizing losses and maximizing gains (Baltes, 1997). Setting priorities of goals (selection), optimizing one's resources accordingly and compensating for potential losses of required means (Baltes, Staudinger, and Lindenberger, 1999) are described to initiate a phase of motivation which individuals use to focus on goals, plan their resources accordingly and ultimately activate not used ones respectively acquire new ones to successfully work towards goal achievement (Baltes *et al.*, 2001; Zacher and Frese, 2011). The lifespan goals suggested by the SOC theory can be summarized in an orientation towards either promotion or prevention (Ebner, Freund, and Baltes, 2006).

This fits the proposed differentiation by the regulatory focus theory by Higgins (1997), which addresses how individuals avoid pain while maximizing their pleasure experience and therefore can be seen similarly to the SOC theory. Higgins sets apart self-regulation with a

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focus on promotions, such in the desire for accomplishments, growth and development from the self-regulation with a focus on prevention, such as responsibility and security (Brockner and Higgins, 2001; Kluger, Stephan, Ganzach, and Hershkovitz, 2004).

The behaviours suggested by SOC theory has been empirically proven to result in e.g. well-being and performance (Bajor and Baltes, 2003; Baltes and Heydens-Gahir, 2003; Weigl, Müller, Hornung, Zacher, and Angerer, 2013).

Interesting for our study is that over one's lifespan people gain e.g. general knowledge and compromise in e.g. physical or cognitive abilities (Warr, 2001; Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004), hence SOC suggests that with increasing age the focus shifts from growth (optimization) in young ages towards a focus of maintenance and regulation (compensation) in higher ages (Baltes *et al.*, 1999).

Empirically this finds support by Freund (2006). In his study he showed that individuals of young ages are rather concerned with promotions compared to their older counterparts who were rather concerned with prevention respectively maintenance (Kanfer *et al.*, 2004; Ebner *et al.*, 2006), implying that the need for security might increase over the course of one's life while the need for growth might decrease.

Further the explanatory importance of the behavioural strategies as outlined by the SOC theory in predicting outcomes like job performance, occupational well-being and work ability is given shall be recognized (Abraham and Hansson, 1995; Wiese, Freund and Baltes, 2002; Bajor *et al.*, 2003; Baltes *et al.*, 2003; Weigl *et al.*, 2013).

### **SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SELECTIVITY THEORY**

Based on the SOC theory as introduced above the Socio-Emotional Selectivity theory (SES) proposes the individual perception of time to be of elementary importance in the motivation, selection and pursuance of goals, which are distinguished between knowledge acquisition and emotional regulation (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, and Charles, 1999). One's perception of time, which differs across the lifespan, influences the choice of what direction of goals to follow. While an open ended perspective to one's remaining lifetime in younger employees is said to favour the pursuit of future-oriented goals with knowledge- and growth-relation at the cost of emotional rewards, a limited time perception in older employees is said to favour short-term, respectively present-oriented goals related to emotional satisfaction (Carstensen *et al.*, 1999). The preference in importance for emotional satisfaction in the

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present over knowledge- or growth-related goals can be seen as form of compensation behaviour for lost abilities, be it physically or cognitively as described in the SOC theory.

Empirically the SES theory received support in several studies (Lang and Carstensen, 2002; Carstensen, Turan, Scheibe, Ram, Ersner-Hershfield, Samanez-Larkin, Brooks, and Nesselrode (2011). Also, in regards to mobility older manager were found to be less willing to start into uncertainty than their younger counterparts (Nicholson and West, 1988; Groot and Verberne, 1997; O'Brien, 2007; Ng and Feldman, 2009; Biemann, Zacher, and Feldman, 2012).

Accordingly we conclude that with increasing age the focus lays rather on minimizing losses, such as maintaining status quo, e.g. healthy relationships with known people, physically fitness to stay in control of one's own activities, as opposed to cutting off ties and leaving the established status behind to pursue growth somewhere else, which comes with risk and potential emotional costs.

Concluding age has proven to be of explanatory importance for work-related attitudes. Since older employees are said to value more stability and are less mobile for transitions, we propose age to be moderating the negative relation between subjective career success and turnover intention, so that the association between both variables will be stronger for older employees, meaning if equally satisfied older employees show less turnover intention than their younger counterparts.

## 2. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

This chapter focuses on the empirical part of the thesis. We try to answer the main questions of the research: How much can age be a predictor for subjective career success? How much is subjective career success a predictor for turnover intention and how much does age moderate the latter relation? The Hypothesis are introduced, explained and summarized in a conceptualized model. Further on the methodology used in this research is specified, i.e., the chosen sample, how it was collected, the applied measures, the taken procedure steps and how the data was analysed. The main findings will sum up this chapter and set the stage for the conclusions to come to wrap up this piece of research.

### 2.1. HYPOTHESIS

We want to show that age can (partly) explain reported subjective career success, as empirically shown by e.g. Allen and Meyer (1993) or Conway (2004). Over time individuals gain a clearer picture of what they want (e.g. Schein, 1985) and gain the needed capabilities on how to get there, hence we expect older people to report higher subjective career success than their younger counterparts.

**Hypothesis 1 - Age is positively related to subjective career success, such that higher age leads to higher subjective career success.**

Based on strong empirical evidence in several studies Nauta *et al.* (2009), Simo *et al.* (2010), Jang *et al.* (2012), Chan *et al.* (2015) we expect subjective career success to negatively impact individual's intention to leave the organization. When experiencing a high subjective satisfaction with one's career individuals do not have a strong need for change.

**Hypothesis 2 - Subjective career success is negatively related to turnover intention, such that higher subjective career success leads to lower turnover intention.**

Based on the change of views, preferences and needs elder employees are said to value more stability and are said to be more focused on routine and avoidance of losses, while in younger ages one is said to favour growth-orientation (e.g. Baltes *et al.*, 1999; Freund, 2006),

which might require a change of employer. Further elderly were found to be less mobile and hence open for change of employer (Ng & Feldman, 2009; Biemann *et al.*, 2012). Given this we expect older employees to report a lower turnover intention compared to their younger counterparts, if equal subjective career satisfaction is given.

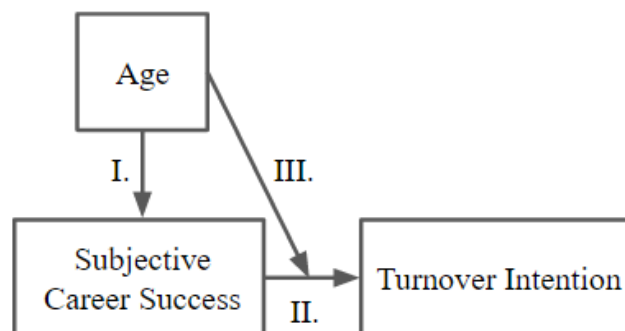
**Hypothesis 3 - The negative relation between subjective career success and turnover intention will strengthen in older age.**

## 2.2. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Figure 2 visualizes our hypotheses. We can see our three study variables age, subjective career success and turnover intention and their hypothesized relations illustrated through arrows. The arrow labelled with I. connects age with subjective career success and shows the positive linear relation between both variables (Hypothesis 1).

Subjective career success and turnover intention are connected via the arrow labelled with II. as illustration of the positive linear relation between them (Hypothesis 2).

The arrow labelled with III. starts from age and points towards the connection arrow between subjective career success and turnover intention, representing the moderation of this relation. Age is hypothesized to moderate the negative relation between subjective career success and turnover intention, such that this relation will be stronger for older people (Hypothesis 3).



**Figure 2** Hypothesized Model

## **2.3. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.3.1. SAMPLE**

The participants of the present study were Portuguese or people who have been working in Portugal for at least 5 years as well as speak Portuguese. 523 respondents took part in the study, out of who 48,2% were female and 34,4% were male, 17,4% left the question unanswered. The mean age of the participants was 37 years (SD = 11.1), with the minimum of 20 years and maximum of 74 years. Regarding the sector their employer operates in, most of the respondents work in the private sector (71,7%), followed by public sector (19,5%). 3,4% work in mixed, both public and private companies, 2,3% work in non-profit companies and 2,3% in other sectors. A few people left this question unanswered (0,8%). When asked about the industry they are operating in 20,1% percent reported that they work in Professional/Scientific/Technical Services industry, 15,1% indicated that they work in different sectors than the options offered in the questionnaire, and 10,5% worked in Educational Services. All the other sectors offered in the survey were employed less than 6%. Most of the respondents are employed on full-time base (86,8%), followed by part-time (8,2% percent) and unemployed or not working (4,6%), the remaining percentage of 0,4% left this question unanswered.

### **2.3.2. PROCEDURE**

First of all the focus was to identify employed individuals who either are Portuguese or have been living in Portugal for at least the past five years and speaks Portuguese, since only then it was assumed to ensure the relevant cultural impressions for the bigger picture of the 5C project outlines to draw up a world map of cultural differences. The survey was carried out in Portuguese language and hence had to be translated from the original English survey.

Potential participants were invited to participate in the survey through the personal networks of the research team. Flyers were handed out and a promotion booth was used to introduce the 5C Project at an ISCTE alumni event and interested people were invited to sign up with their e-mail address to a list for potential participation. Regarding social media LinkedIn, Facebook and HR-related websites were used to raise awareness of the 5C Project overall and the specific call for participation in the survey. The goal was to possibly reach a



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wide range of respondents from diverse regions in Portugal either via personal message or posting in respective groups, e. g. the alumni group of ISCTE to make use of potential snowball effects of participants inviting other participants from their personal and professional network. Beside this digital way of sending around the link to directly participate in the online survey, company presentations were held and hard cover surveys distributed. Participants could indicate at the beginning of the survey if they wish to receive a summary of the research results once it becomes available. At the end of the survey participants were asked to indicate their potential interest and availability in a shorter follow up survey several months after the research was conducted.

### **2.3.3. MEASURES**

The survey as being part of the global 5C Project has been provided by the 5C Project team and was not modified or adjusted besides being translated from English into Portuguese language. The two dimensions relevant for this thesis are described as follows.

#### **SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS**

Participants were asked the single item question “Overall, how successful do you feel your career has been to date?” offering a 7-point Likert scale (1 - “Not at all successful” to 7 - “Very successful”) as reply option. The question was produced by the 5C project team.

#### **TURNOVER INTENTION**

This dimension was measured in the three item question “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the three following statements” in accordance with the intention to turnover measure of the MOAQ-Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh, 1979; as cited in Cook, Hepworth, Wall, Warr, 1981). Those three statements were “I often think about quitting this organization”; “I will probably look for a new job in the next year” and “I intend to change employer in the next year”. Same as for subjective career success a 7-point Likert type scale (1 - “Strongly disagree” to 7 - “Strongly agree”) was offered to the participants as option to reply.

## CONTROL VARIABLE

Gender was found to affect career success in previous studies (e.g. Aryee *et al.*, 1994; Judge and Bretz, 1994; Judge *et al.*, 1995; Nabi, 1999). Therefore, it was included as control variables in our analyses as well.

### 2.3.4. DATA ANALYSIS

First the multi item question measuring one's tendency to leave was computed to a new variable after checking for reliability ( $\alpha=.929$ ). The three items mentioned were summed by mean to create a turnover intention composite, which ensures a one-factor dimension. Subsequently descriptive statistics (means, standard deviation) and association among the relevant study variables were computed using bivariate correlation analyses.

For testing the first two hypotheses hierarchical multiple regression analyses (control variable gender in Step 1 and the respective predicting variable in Step 2) were used to detect linear correlation between the respective predictor and outcome variable as proposed.

Hypothesis three proposed a moderation of age for the correlation between subjective career success and one's tendency to quit (as outlined in hypothesis two), for which the MACRO by Hayes (2012) was used including functionality of centring of the predicting variable and computing the respective interaction variable (subjective career success x age).

## 2.4. RESULTS

Means, standard deviations and Pearson's correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 1. According to our expectations age was positively correlated with subjective career success ( $r = .204, p < .001$ ) and subjective career success was negatively related with turnover intention ( $r = -.331, p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore subjective career success showed negative correlation with gender ( $r = -.103, p < 0.5$ ). Also Age was negatively correlated with turnover intention ( $r = -.345, p < 0.01$ ).

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**Table 1** Mean, standard deviation and Pearson's correlations of the study variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3
<b>1. Age</b>	36,80	11,135			
<b>2. Gender</b>			-.084		
<b>3. Subjective Career Success</b>	4,653	1,169	.204**	-.103*	
<b>4. Turnover Intention</b>	3,390	2,077	-.345**	.068	-.331**

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .001$

Hypothesis 1 proposed that age would positively predict subjective career success, which was supported by the results presented in Table 2. Introducing age as variable in step 2 of the regression explained additional 3,9 % of variance in subjective career success and this change in R Square was significant,  $F_{(2,420)} = 10.237$ ,  $p < .001$ . Hypothesis 1 received full support.

**Table 2** Regression analysis for age as predictor for subjective career success

	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	B	SE	$\beta$	$t$	p
<b>Step 1</b>							
<b>Constant</b>			4.948	.190		26.057	.000
<b>Gender</b>			-.208	.115	-.088	-1.811	.071
<b>Step 2</b>							
<b>Constant</b>			4.114	.275		14.972	.000
<b>Gender</b>		.008	-.163	.113	-.069	-1.445	.149
<b>Age</b>	.046	.039**	.021	.005	.198	4.131	.000

\*\*  $p < .001$ ; Gender included as control variable

Hypothesis 2 proposed that subjective career success would positively predict a lower turnover intention, which was supported by the results presented in Table 3,  $F_{(4, 414)} = 26.020$ ,  $p < .001$ . Accordingly Hypothesis 2 received full support.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that age would moderate the relation between subjective career success and turnover intention, so that the relationship will be stronger for older than for younger people. The result of testing the interaction between age and subjective career success on turnover intention revealed no significant change in R Square for turnover intention, which means there is no significant interaction on turnover intention (see Table 3).

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Accordingly age does not moderate the relation between subjective career success and turnover intention. Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

**Table 3** Summary of regression and moderation analysis: age to moderate subjective career success predicting turnover intention

<b>Tendency to Quit</b>						
	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<i>t</i>	<b>p</b>
	.181**	.000				
<b>Constant</b>			3.305	.320	10.317	.000
<b>Age</b>			-.055	.009	-6.355	.000
<b>Subjective Career Success</b>			-.472	.089	-5.282	.000
<b>Subjective Career Success x Age</b>			.003	.008	.435	.665
<b>Gender</b>			.045	.191	.237	.813

\*\*  $p < .001$ ; Gender included as control variable

### 3. DISCUSSION

The thesis at hand tested age for its predictive effect of subjective career success, respectively subjective career success for its predictive effect on turnover intention as well as the moderating role of age on the relation between the latter.

The first hypothesis, proposing that age would positively predict subjective career success was confirmed by the results. This means that age plays an explanatory role in the perception of subjective career success, which is in accordance with previous studies (e.g. Allen *et al.* (1993) or Conway (2004).

Testing the second hypothesis, asserting subjective career success is negatively related with turnover intention, our results also confirmed this one. This finds confirmation for previous research (e.g. Nauta *et al.*, 2009; Simo *et al.*, 2010; Jang *et al.*, 2012; Chan *et al.*, 2015), which also found subjective career success to lower employees intentions to leave their employer.

Hypothesis 3 proposed age to moderate the negative relation between subjective career success and turnover intention, such that the relation gets stronger for higher age. Our results did not support this hypothesis. Based on our literature review regarding the selection-optimization-compensation theory (Baltes, 1997), respectively the socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen *et al.*, 1999) we expected a different result, so that older individuals would show a stronger orientation towards stability and security, meaning staying with their current employer compared to younger employees, who would not necessary report similar low turnover intentions given equal subjective career satisfaction. Potentially our results were not able to reveal the expected moderating effect due to the under-representation of older participants in our sample. While 80 % of respondents were aged between 20 and 48 years, only 20 % were aged between 49 and 74 years, meaning we did have a good variance though.

#### 3.1. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

First of all our study supports the existence of age-related differences in the perception and attitudes towards one career respectively one's employment. With this organizations of all sizes are tasked to find solutions for the challenges connected to an increasingly age-diverse workforce.

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Our results revealed that turnover intentions are negatively influenced by subjective career success, meaning if employees experience satisfaction according to their own definitions, the risk of turnover can actually be reduced.

Further our study showed that subjective career satisfaction does partly depend on age. This suggests a couple of practical points.

Firstly it should be understood as a mandatory focus for organizations of all sizes to find out what actually contributes to subjective satisfaction within their workforce in respect to age-diversity, e. g. via surveys or interviews; and ultimately act upon the results and implement the respective elements. Kooij, Jansen, Dijkers, and de Lange (2010) suggest e.g. teamwork or mentoring opportunities and highly flexible work schedules were shown to stimulate positive work-related attitudes among older employees.

Secondly sensitizing the entire organization for a higher acceptance of age-diversity, especially employees with responsibility for leading others as well as recruiting staff should be challenged to let go off age-related stereotypes, such as older employees are unable or unwilling to learn new skills (Kooij, de Lange, Jansen, and Dijkers, 2008).

Thirdly an age-tailored physical work environment should not be underestimated in its value to promote performance, health and also the desired working culture.

### **3.2. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Our study contributes to the existing research on the interplay of the three variables age, subjective career success and turnover intention. However, the findings of the research at hand should be treated with some degree of caution because of the following limitations.

Limitation number one is the under-representation of older respondents, making it hard to prove a potential moderation effects. While overall good variance (min 20, max 74 years) was given, 80 % are aged 48 years or younger. Future research should aim for more older participants.

The second limitation is the selection bias on the availability of respondents in regards to their openness to use social media (mainly used) to fill out the questionnaire.

Potentially the third limitation is that we did not consider any other organizational factor that might have (partly or fully) impacted the participants' turnover intention.

While we decided to stick with measuring subjective carer success in the one-item question as it has been more common in previous research, future studies should follow more

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recent developments and be looking at differentiated dimensions of subjective career success to be able to examine in more detail what elements drive individuals perception on this.

Also, it is desirable to undertake longitudinal studies about the topic discussed to be able to draw firm conclusions on causality of subjective viewpoints and attitudes, especially in the light of the upcoming demographic developments this will be of high value and relevance.

## CONCLUSION

Organizations of all sizes will need to rely on the efforts of older employees as they will form the majority of the workforce within the upcoming decades. That new dimension of age-diversity comes along a whole set of challenges, such as retention. Our thesis contributes to the acknowledgement of age differences in the subjective perception of career success. The latter was supported by our results to be a predictor for intention to stay at one's employer.

Taking the mentioned limitations into account, more research will contribute to a deeper understanding of how age impacts the construct of subjective career success and one's turnover intention.

Among other suggestions we call out for the necessity of organizations to be open to learn more in detail of what human resource policies and practices drive subjective career success, so that age-tailored measures can be taken as they seem to promise a reduced turnover risk.

Furthermore age-related stereotypes, such as older employees might not be interested in new tasks, shall be challenged, as they might turn out to unnecessarily hinder productivity. Individuals with a diverse life experience shall rather be understood as enrichment for any team or organization.

We do not only live in times full of change, more so we live in times of chances.



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