
The Italian Version of the *Subjective Career Success Scale*

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Abstract

This study presents the validation of the Italian version of the *Subjective Career Success Scale* (SCS) by Wiese et al. (2002). The increasing emphasis on personal meaning and self-defined achievements in contemporary careers has made the assessment of subjective career success essential. Despite its brevity and cross-cultural use, the 3-item SCS scale had not been validated in Italy. To address this gap, two complementary studies were conducted. Study 1 tested the construct and discriminant validity of the scale among 114 Italian employees through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Results confirmed the unifactorial structure of the scale, its distinction from objective career success (OCS), and adequate internal consistency. Study 2, involving 231 employees, examined the scale's convergent validity. SCS showed significant positive correlations with career adaptability, career insight, and career self-management, while maintaining only moderate correlation with OCS, thus confirming both convergent and discriminant validity. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the Italian version of the Wiese et al. (2002) scale is a reliable, valid, and parsimonious instrument for assessing subjective career success. This validation supports its applicability in research and practice, offering a concise measure suitable for use in organizational and counseling contexts.

Keywords

Subjective career success, Confirmatory factor analysis, Career adaptability, Career insight, Career self-management, Objective career success.

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La Versione Italiana della Scala sul Successo Soggettivo di Carriera

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Sommario

Questo studio presenta la validazione della versione italiana della *Subjective Career Success Scale* (SCS) di Wiese et al. (2002). Il crescente rilievo attribuito al significato personale e ai traguardi auto-definiti nelle carriere contemporanee ha reso essenziale la misurazione del successo soggettivo di carriera. Nonostante la sua brevità e l'uso transculturale, la scala SCS a 3 item non era ancora stata validata in Italia. Per colmare questa lacuna, sono stati condotti due studi complementari. Lo Studio 1 ha testato la validità di costruito e discriminante della scala su un campione di 114 lavoratori italiani mediante analisi fattoriale confermativa (CFA). I risultati hanno confermato la struttura monofattoriale della scala, la sua distinzione dal successo oggettivo di carriera (OCS) e un'adeguata coerenza interna. Lo Studio 2, condotto su 231 lavoratori, ha esaminato la validità convergente della scala. La SCS ha mostrato correlazioni positive e significative con l'adattabilità di carriera, l'insight di carriera e l'auto-gestione di carriera, mantenendo al contempo una correlazione moderata con l'OCS, confermando così sia la validità convergente sia quella discriminante. Nel complesso, i risultati dimostrano che la versione italiana della scala di Wiese et al. (2002) è uno strumento affidabile, valido e parsimonioso per la valutazione del successo soggettivo di carriera. Tale validazione ne supporta l'applicabilità nella ricerca e nella pratica, offrendo una misura sintetica idonea all'uso in contesti organizzativi e di orientamento professionale.

Parole chiave

Successo soggettivo di carriera; Analisi fattoriale confermativa; Adattabilità di carriera; Insight di carriera; Auto-gestione di carriera; Successo oggettivo di carriera.

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The Italian Version of the *Subjective Career Success Scale*

The labor market is facing a profound and unprecedented transformation. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, global phenomena like the «Great Resignation», the «Great Reshuffling», the «Quiet Quitting», and the «Return to Office» are not mere passing trends but reflect a fundamental rethinking of our relationship with professional life. In seeking greater flexibility and meaning, workers are redefining what constitutes *career success*, which is why studying this construct has become a crucial theme (Seibert et al., 2024).

Career success has been a fundamental and long-standing research topic in management and applied psychology; understanding this construct is crucial for both individual paths and for organizations. The empirical literature on this topic has historically focused on predicting success, «especially inferring best practices for achieving it» (Spurk et al., 2019, p. 36). To identify such «best practices», it is essential to define career success. This construct is generally understood as «positive psychological and work-related outcomes accumulated as a result of one's work experiences» (Seibert, & Kraimer, 2001, p. 2). As highlighted in meta-analyses, the literature tends to operationalize the construct of career success in two main ways: objective career success (hereafter, OCS) and subjective career success (hereafter, SCS) (Ng et al., 2005). OCS refers to tangible, external, and standardized measurable indicators of success, such as salary, hierarchical level, or promotions, evaluated according to prevailing societal norms. In contrast, SCS is defined as the individual's internal evaluation and personal experience of achieving career outcomes that they consider personally meaningful, such as career satisfaction, growth, or authenticity (Spurk et al., 2019). This distinction is empirically robust, as meta-analytic reviews have found that the correlation between objective and subjective measures of success is generally small to moderate (Spurk et al., 2019).

Given that linear careers have become less common, research attention has consequently shifted towards SCS, reflecting a growing desire among employees to pursue jobs that are personally meaningful to them, and indeed, it is increasingly the case that «employees define their career success in terms of subjective indicators rather than in terms of objective indicators» (Ng, & Feldman, 2014, p. 170).

For decades, the most widely used and disseminated measure in the literature to operationalize SCS has been the *Career Satisfaction Scale* (hereafter, CSS) (Briscoe et al., 2021). This scale, introduced by Greenhaus et al. (1990), assesses career satisfaction through five items that measure perceived progress towards one's overall career goals, income goals, advancement goals, and goals for the development of new skills. CSS demonstrates a notable international reach. Originally developed and applied within the United States context (Greenhaus et al., 1990), where it was also employed by Shockley et al. (2016) as a comparison measure, its influence has extended to other national contexts. In China, for exam-

ple, Pan & Zhou (2015) utilized the 5-item CSS to test the incremental validity of a new measurement instrument developed for the Chinese context. In the United Kingdom, the study by Rothwell & Arnold (2007) employed an 8-item scale derived from CSS and Nabi (1999). Finally, the scale was also adopted in Germany; Volmer & Spurk (2011) used a «German translation of the career satisfaction scale» (p. 211), and Abele et al. (2016) also referred to the German version of the instrument.

However, the literature is not limited to unidimensional instruments. Briscoe et al. (2021), for instance, developed their scale starting from a critique of the unidimensional approach, arguing that it aggregates responses into a «single score». They criticized this method, defining it as «objectivist», as it imposes standardized parameters decided by the researcher, rather than capturing what individuals personally define as success. In contrast, Briscoe et al. (2021) shifted the focus to a «subjectivist» approach. For this reason, they developed the *Dual Aspect Importance & Achievement Career Success Scale* (hereafter, DAIA-CSS), an intentionally multidimensional instrument featuring seven dimensions. While acknowledging that unidimensional measures offer the advantage of being «short» and «efficient», their DAIA-CSS is consequently more time-consuming to administer. This is because it requires a dual evaluation (Importance and Achievement) for all 23 items, making it far more detailed.

This level of detail creates a trade-off with participant burden. This high burden can be impractical if the overall survey is already long. In such cases, a more parsimonious measure might be preferable. For example, researchers seeking a robust, short-form scale might utilize the 3-item *Subjective Success in the Work Domain Scale* employed by Wiese et al. (2002). Although much shorter, this specific measure proved effective in their 3-year longitudinal study, successfully demonstrating the predictive power of Selection, Optimization, and Compensation (SOC) strategies on SCS. The utility of this concise measure, however, is not limited to its original context. Indeed, the scale has demonstrated its validity in other national contexts as well. For example, Pan & Zhou (2015), in their study conducted in China to develop a new measurement instrument, used the «3-item measure» by Wiese et al. (2002) as a comparison measure for validation. In the Chinese study, the Wiese scale demonstrated adequate internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$), confirming its robustness and applicability in a non-Western context.

However, despite its established use in German and Chinese samples, the psychometric properties and validity of this scale remain untested within the Italian context. Given the increasing shift towards a personal definition of success (i.e., SCS) and the need to measure it reliably, this contribution aims to validate the Italian version of the *Subjective Career Success Scale* by Wiese et al. (2002). To achieve this goal, two complementary studies were conducted. Study 1 investigated the scale's construct validity and discriminant validity through confirmatory factor analysis (hereafter, CFA), verifying its factorial structure and its clear distinction from OCS.

Study 2 tested the scale's convergent validity by examining its correlations with theoretically related constructs (i.e., career adaptability, career insight, and career self-management), and further reinforces its discriminant validity against OCS.

Study 1

The aim of this study is to test the construct and discriminant validity of the SCS scale on a group of Italian employees through confirmatory factor analysis. We expect that the scale's items will load on the SCS latent factor by also showing adequate factor loadings, as well as by being differentiated from the OCS latent factor (and its respective items). We also expect the scale to show adequate reliability values.

Method

Participants

One hundred and fourteen Italian employees from various professional contexts participated in this study. As for gender, there were 70 (61.40%) men and 44 (38.60%) women with a mean age of 45.82 years ($SD = 13.09$). Participants reported an average of 17.40 years of education ($SD = 5.23$). At the moment of the study, participants' average organizational tenure was 14.97 years ($SD = 11.91$), with a general tenure of 20.93 years ($SD = 13.26$). Regarding employment contracts, 93 participants (81.60%) held a permanent contract, while the remaining 21 participants (18.40%) held a fixed-term contract. Concerning professional profiles, 91 participants (79.80%) were white-collar workers or technicians, 10 (8.80%) were middle managers, 7 (6.10%) were blue-collar workers, and 6 (5.30%) were top managers. Eighty-seven participants (76.30%) were employed in the tertiary sector, with 26 (22.80%) in the secondary sector, and only one (0.90%) in the primary sector. Finally, 82 participants (71.90%) were employed in the public sector and 32 (28.10%) were employed in the private sector.

Measures

Subjective career success. We used the scale developed by Wiese et al. (2002). The scale consists of three items (i.e., «I came closer to achieving my goals in the occupational domain this past year», «I have been successful so far in pursuing my occupational goals», «I am satisfied with my life management in the occupational domain»). Responses were assessed through a 5-point Likert scale (1 = «completely disagree», 5 = «completely agree»).

Objective career success. We used the scale developed by Lo Presti and Elia (2020). The scale consists of three items (i.e., «I had career advancements», «I increased my income», «I reached senior, or in any case relevant, hierarchical positions»), assessing the extent to which respondents, in the last three months, reached these objectives comparatively lower or higher than their colleagues did. Responses were assessed through a 5-point scale, from «well below my colleagues» (1) to «well above my colleagues» (5). Cronbach's alpha was: 0.89.

Procedure

Participants were recruited within public and private organizations that had agreed to participate in our study. A weblink to an online questionnaire was sent to HR offices, who then shared it with their employees. In the instructions to the questionnaire, it was clearly stated that participation was voluntary and that respondents may quit the study at any moment.

Data analysis

Before data collection, the scale was translated following the back-translation procedure outlined by Brislin (1980). After checking for multi-collinearity (i.e., correlations higher than $r = 0.85$) and non-normality (i.e., skewness > 3 ; kurtosis > 10) (Weston and Gore, 2006), structural equation modelling analyses (Lisrel 9.30) using maximum likelihood estimation methods were used for computing confirmatory factor analyses (hereafter, CFA). Different factorial models were compared, first of all, by means of χ^2 and degrees of freedom (despite highly negatively affected by sample size) and recurring to the following goodness of fit indices: RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation), and SRMR (standardized root mean square residual) for whom scores lower than 0.05 mean excellent fit, and scores between 0.05 and 0.08 good fit (Ullman, 1996); CFI (comparative fit index), and NNFI (non-normed fit index) for whom scores higher than 0.90 mean good fit (Hoyle, 1995); finally, AIC (Akaike information criteria; Browne & Cudeck, 1993) for whom smaller values can be considered as indicating higher potential for replication of the model. Cronbach's alphas and McDonald's omegas were used for calculating the scale's reliability.

Results

Asymmetry scores ranged between -0.76 and -0.35, while Kurtosis scores ranged between -0.53 and 0.49. Then, we contrasted two different factorial solutions through CFA: M1 encompassed all SCS' and OCS' items loading on one

single factor, while M2 encompassed two correlated latent variables, one for SCS and one for OCS, each one with its respective indicators (i.e., items).

As it can be seen from Table 1, M1 showed poor goodness of fit indexes, while M2 showed a significant improvement with excellent goodness of fit indexes, indicating that SCS has solid construct validity and that it is clearly differentiated from OCS (i.e., solid discriminant validity).

Table 1

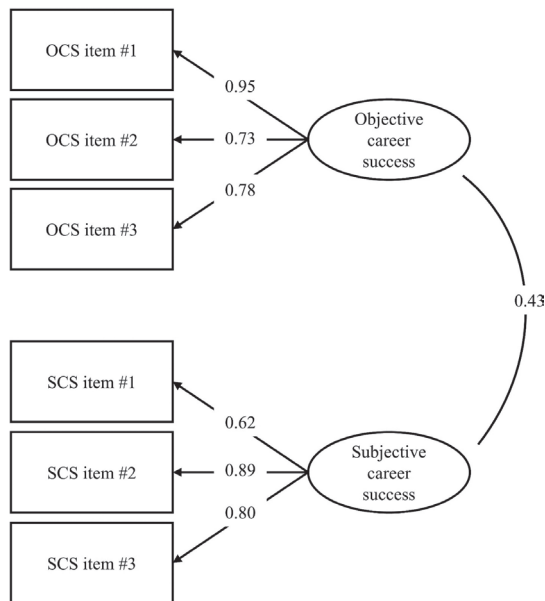
Comparison between alternative factorial models.

| Model | χ^2 | df | RMSEA | CFI | NNFI | SRMR | AIC |
|-------|----------|----|-------|------|------|------|--------|
| M1 | 133.44 | 9 | 0.35 | 0.68 | 0.47 | 0.18 | 396.10 |
| M2 | 9.50 | 8 | 0.04 | 1.00 | 0.99 | 0.04 | 274.16 |

Note: M1 = one-factor model; M2 = two-factor model.

As for SCS' factor loadings, they ranged from 0.62 to 0.89, being statistically significant. Subjective and objective career success showed a significant and positive zero-order correlation ($r = 0.43, p < 0.001$). Finally, testing for the scale's reliability, it showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 (Figure 1).

Figure 1



Confirmatory factor analysis.

Discussion

The aim of Study 1 was to test the psychometric properties, specifically the construct and discriminant validity, of the Italian version of the *Subjective Career Success Scale* by Wiese et al. (2002). The results provided solid empirical evidence supporting the adequacy of the Italian version of the scale, confirming its unifactorial structure and its clear distinction from OCS. The most significant finding emerged from the CFA. The model comparison showed that the two-factor model (M2), distinguishing the SCS and OCS latent factors, showed excellent fit indices and was significantly superior to the one-factor model (M1). This result confirms the scale's construct validity, as its three items converge on a single construct, while also establishing its clear discriminant validity from OCS. Furthermore, the results regarding the scale's internal consistency were very good. The scale showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82, indicating adequate reliability. This is complemented by the factor loadings of the items on the SCS factor, which confirm that each item validly contributes to the measurement of the construct. Overall, these results confirm the robustness of the scale in the Italian context.

Study 2

The aim of this study is to test the convergent validity of the Italian version of the SCS scale by examining its zero-order correlations with similar constructs, namely career adaptability (Porfeli & Savickas, 2012), career insight (Day & Allen, 2004), and career self-management (Sturges et al., 2010). Once more, we also tested its discriminant validity against the measure of objective career success (Lo Presti & Elia, 2020) used in Study 1.

Method

Participants

Two hundred thirty-one Italian employees working in various professional contexts were recruited. As for gender, 140 participants (60.60%) were women, while 91 (39.40%) were men, with a mean age of 40.63 years ($SD = 12.83$). On average, participants reported 17.54 years of education ($SD = 3.68$). Their average organizational tenure was of 10.80 years ($SD = 10.73$), while their general tenure was of 16.85 years ($SD = 12.13$). Regarding employment contracts, 175 participants

(75.80%) held a permanent contract, 47 (20.30%) held a fixed-term contract, and 9 (3.90%) held a precarious form of employment. Concerning participants' professional profiles, 22 (9.50%) were blue-collar workers, 156 (67.50%) were white-collar workers or technicians, 37 (16.00%) were middle managers, and 16 (6.90%) were top managers. Three participants (1.30%) worked in the primary sector, 42 (18.20%) in the secondary sector, and the majority, 186 (80.50%), in the tertiary sector. Finally, 139 participants (60.20%) were employed in the public sector, with 92 (39.80%) in the private sector.

Measures

Subjective career success. We used the same scale (Wiese et al., 2002) used in Study 1. Cronbach's alpha was: 0.82.

Objective career success. We used the same scale (Lo Presti & Elia, 2020) used in Study 1. Cronbach's alpha was: 0.87.

Career adaptability was assessed by means of the 24-item *Career Adapt-Abilities Scale* (Porfeli & Savickas, 2012; Italian version by Di Fabio, 2016), which included four sub-dimensions: concern (e.g., «Thinking about what my future will be like»), control (e.g., «Taking responsibility for my actions»), curiosity (e.g., «Looking for opportunities to grow as a person»), and confidence (e.g., «Learning new skills»). Responses were assessed through a 5-point scale (1 = «not strong», 5 = «strongest»). Cronbach's α was 0.94.

Career insight was assessed through the 7-item scale (e.g., «I have a specific plan for achieving my career goal») developed by Day & Allen (2004) (Italian version by Lo Presti et al., 2022). Responses were assessed through a 5-point Likert scale (1 = «completely disagree», 5 = «completely agree»). Cronbach's α was 0.74.

Career self-management (Sturges et al., 2010; Italian version by Lo Presti & de Angelis, 2025) was assessed through the 8-item scale (e.g., «I have built contacts with people in areas where I would like to work»). Responses were assessed through a 5-point Likert scale (1 = «completely disagree», 5 = «completely agree»). Cronbach's α was 0.84.

Procedure

The same procedure as in Study 1 was followed in Study 2.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations were used to describe study variables and their inter-associations.

Results

Table 2 depicts the descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between study variables.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between study variables.

| | M(SD) | SCS | OCS | CA | CI |
|-----|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| SCS | 3.73 (0.90) | – | | | |
| OCS | 3.14 (0.92) | 0.51*** | – | | |
| CA | 4.22 (0.54) | 0.28*** | 0.21** | – | |
| CI | 4.00 (0.55) | 0.41*** | 0.36*** | 0.52*** | – |
| CSM | 3.28 (0.86) | 0.21** | 0.22** | 0.29*** | 0.30*** |

Note: SCS = subjective career success; OCS = objective career success; CA = career adaptability; CI = career insight; CSM = career self-management; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Subjective career success positively correlated with objective career success ($r = 0.51, p < 0.001$), career adaptability ($r = 0.28, p < 0.001$), career insight ($r = 0.41, p < 0.001$), and career self-management ($r = 0.21, p = 0.001$). All the study's variables showed positive inter-correlations.

Discussion

The aim of Study 2 was to test the convergent validity of the Italian version of the SCS scale by examining its zero-order correlations with theoretically related constructs (i.e., career adaptability, career insight, and career self-management). Furthermore, this study aimed to reinforce the scale's discriminant validity against a measure of OCS. The most significant finding that emerged is the full support for the scale's convergent validity. SCS showed positive and statistically significant correlations with career adaptability, career insight, and career self-management. These associations confirm that the *Subjective Career Success Scale* measures a construct that fits coherently within its theoretical framework. Furthermore, the results provided additional confirmation of discriminant validity. The zero-order correlation between SCS and OCS, being moderate, is sufficiently far from indicating an overlap. This result reinforces the findings of Study 1, confirming that the *Subjective Career Success Scale* detects a construct clearly distinct from objective indicators (e.g., income, advancements).

General discussion

Although SCS is a fundamental construct in contemporary labor markets, its measurement implies a trade-off between completeness and parsimony. Multidimensional instruments offer high granularity, but at the cost of excessive participant burden. Conversely, short (parsimonious) scales, such as the 3-item scale by Wiese et al. (2002), provide an efficient alternative. Despite this scale's robustness being confirmed in its original context (Germany) and in China, its psychometric properties had not been tested within the Italian context. This study addresses this empirical and cultural gap by providing the first systematic validation of the Wiese et al. (2002) scale in Italy.

The present study aimed to examine the validity and psychometric properties of the *Subjective Career Success Scale* among Italian employees through two complementary studies. Study 1 tested the construct validity and discriminant validity of the scale using CFA, verifying its factorial structure and its clear distinction from OCS. Study 2 examined the scale's convergent validity by analyzing its correlations with theoretically related constructs (i.e., career adaptability, career insight, and career self-management) and further reinforced its discriminant validity against OCS.

The finding of Study 1 confirmed that the Italian version of the scale replicates the unifactorial structure of the original instrument, showing adequate model fit indices and high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$). Notably, the two-factor model (M2) was significantly superior to the one-factor model (M1), confirming the scale's clear discriminant validity from OCS. In Study 2, SCS showed positive and significant correlations with career adaptability, career insight, and career self-management, confirming convergent validity. Furthermore, the moderate correlation with OCS ($r = 0.51$) reinforced its discriminant validity. Overall, the Italian version of the scale proved to be a reliable and valid measure for assessing subjective career success.

This validation supports the cross-national robustness of the construct measured by the Wiese et al. (2002) scale. It confirms that this concise 3-item measure maintains its structural coherence and psychometric properties across diverse cultural and organizational contexts.

In terms of practical implications, this validated Italian version offers researchers and practitioners a parsimonious tool. It can be used in organizational surveys to assess employee perceptions of success without causing excessive participation burden, or in career counseling and vocational interventions to support clients in gaining awareness of their subjective career success levels.

As for the study's limitations, this research utilized self-report questionnaires for all scales, so measurement may be subject to biases, such as social desirability or common method variance. Secondly, this study focused on construct, discriminant, and convergent validity; predictive validity was not tested and remains a key avenue for future longitudinal research.

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