

Subjective Career Success and Emotional Well-Being: Longitudinal Predictive Power of Selection, Optimization, and Compensation

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In a 3-year longitudinal study, we found in a sample of young professionals ($N = 82$; 44% male; age range: 28 to 39 years) that self-reported behaviors reflecting selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) predicted global and work-specific subjective well-being (multiple correlations ranged from $R = .22$ to $R = .44$). In addition to optimization (i.e., implementing goal-relevant means), it was especially the degree of compensation (i.e., investing goal-relevant means to counteract losses) that predicted how emotionally balanced individuals felt and how satisfied they were with their work situation 3 years later. These longitudinal predictions were quite robust when controlling for personality variables (NEO). Results are consistent with previous cross-sectional findings and demonstrate how the SOC framework might be successfully applied to the domain of vocational behavior. © 2002 Elsevier Science (USA)

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In current Western societies, many people view high achievement in the work domain as a key factor for successful life management. To foster career development, processes of lifelong learning and the development of problem-solving strategies are considered to be of prime importance (Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Super, 1980). This is particularly true in times where advancing globalization and fast technical progress quickly change professional affordances (Fay & Frese, 2000; Howard, 1995). The investigation of effective self-regulatory and proactive strategies to support career development (e.g., Kanfer & Heggestad, 1999; Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999), therefore, seems to be a promising research field for the next decades.

The present study represents the longitudinal extension of a previously published cross-sectional study (Wiese, Freund, & Baltes, 2000). In that earlier study, positive cross-sectional associations were found between strategies of proactive life management and success in work and partnership. For a subsample of this

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cross-sectional investigation, the present study tested the longitudinal prediction of this association. The key outcome, subjective career success, was measured 3 years later. The next section briefly describes the theory of adaptive development, SOC, on which this study is based.

SELECTION, OPTIMIZATION, AND COMPENSATION: AN APPLICATION TO THE CAREER DOMAIN

Taking a life-span approach, the SOC model proposes that there are three fundamental processes contributing to successful life management: selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC; M. Baltes & Carstensen, 1996, 1998; P. Baltes, 1997; P. Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Freund & Baltes, 2000; Marsiske, Lang, Baltes, & Baltes, 1995; Wiese, 2000; Wiese et al., 2000).

Embedded in an action-theoretical framework that stresses the active role of the individual for shaping his or her life, the SOC model postulates that *selection* (i.e., developing, elaborating, and committing oneself to personal goals) provides the basis for focusing resources on a delineated number of life domains in which to achieve one's goals (*optimization*; i.e., the acquisition, refinement, and application of goal-relevant skills or resources) or in which to maintain one's goals in the face of losses in goal-relevant means (i.e., *compensation*). As Savickas (2001) elaborated, the SOC model might be especially useful in the domain of career development by presenting a conceptual framework of how choices are made and implemented. Super (1980; Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996), for instance, pointed out that recognizing decision questions, exploring possibilities for improving one's occupational situation, committing oneself to action plans, and evaluating outcomes to modify or maintain career plans are central strategies for fostering successful career development.

Recently, another attempt to apply the SOC framework to work settings has been undertaken by B. Baltes and Dickson (2001). They demonstrated the applicability of SOC in the domains of organizational leadership and work-family conflict. As one example of how SOC can be applied to the domain of organizational leadership, B. Baltes and Dickson (2001) pointed out that—in the face of resource restrictions—successful managers clearly select and reward the most valued subordinates, which can be interpreted as a way of selective optimization of working power. Moreover, they argued that the SOC model is applicable on the individual and the organizational levels. In a situation of changing market affordances, for instance, new organizational and marketing means have to be found to achieve selected organizational goals.

Similarly, concerning research on work-family conflict (for a summary see Kossek & Ozeki, 1998), there is a lack of models focusing on how individuals successfully manage these conflicts in everyday life. As the conflicts between the work and the family domain are mainly resource-based (Wiese & Freund, 2000), using behaviors that are geared toward focusing limited resources on selected goals should promote the successful management of work-family conflicts. Supporting this view, Wiese (2000) found that (so-far-childless) young adults, who

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