Holistic information behavior and the perceived success of work in organizations

Isto Huvila[a], Farhan Ahmad[b],*

[a] Uppsala University, Engelska parken, Thunbergsv. 3H, 751 26 Uppsala, Sweden
[b] Faculty of Social Sciences, Business and Economics, Åbo Akademi University, Tuomiokirkontori 3, FI-20500 Turku, Finland

A B S T R A C T

Surprisingly little is known about the relationship between perceived work success and information behavior. This study shows that holistic (versus organization-centric) information behavioral preferences are related to interaction and exchange oriented perceptions of the success of work. The findings were drawn from a partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) based analysis of the survey data ($N = 305$) collected from employees of a large multinational corporation. The findings suggest that holistic information behavior is more strongly related to social measures of success, whereas their association with quantitative measures tends to be lower. From the perspective of information behavior research, the findings suggest that holism seems to be a similar factor to, for instance, task complexity or personality, which influences human information behavior and, for instance, perceptions of relevance. From a practical perspective, the study suggests that the promotion of specific facets of measuring success and patterns of information behavior can be used to influence the orientation of working between centrifugality and openness.

1. Introduction

Employee perceptions of the success of their work are vital for employers to know because of the linkage between employee success and organizational performance (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). In contrast, if they are not realistic, individuals' beliefs regarding their own situation and success can also be counter-productive from the perspective of organization and its members (Martinko, Gundlach, & Douglas, 2002). A particular aspect of how well the personal and organizational situations converge is the extent to which employees consider their actions related to workplace alone or to their life in a broader sense. Questions about the convergence and boundaries between work and private life have become increasingly crucial in the increasing "intimacy" of work (Gregg, 2011), and the blurring of the boundaries between work and non-work. This blurring of the boundaries has an impact on how workers perceive and define the success of their undertakings and also has implications for information behavior (IB) when professional and non-professional information practices converge together with work and non-work, presumably, forming new constellations of professional, non-professional and holistic, combining both information behavioral preferences.

2. Problem statement

Even if earlier information science research has unfolded the complex relations of professional and non-professional information spheres (Case & Given, 2016), there is relatively little research on the perceptions of success and IB (Huvila, 2010), especially in relation to the convergence (and lack of it) of work-specific and lifeworld-wide behaviors. From a workplace perspective, this is striking, considering the critical importance of an effective exploitation of information and knowledge for organizational performance (Huotari & Wilson, 2001) and the link between individual informational behaviors, values and norms, and organizational performance (Abrahamson & Goodman-Delahunty, 2013; Bergeron et al., 2007; Choo, 1996; Ginman, 1988). From an individual perspective, the question is equally central considering the linkage of IB and well-being (Heinström, Huvila, Widén, & Ahmad, 2014; Widén-Wulff et al., 2008). The problem is that without a a proper understanding of how success perceptions that inevitably guide IBs and information behavioral preferences are interrelated, a major driver of how and why people interact with information is being disregarded. In a situation where the configurations of work and non-work are changing, a better understanding of the links between holistic and professionally oriented information-behavioral preferences and success perceptions help to make sense of making (and not making) a

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* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: isto.huvila@abm.uu.se (I. Huvila), farhan.ahmad@abo.fi (F. Ahmad).

difference between workplace information and non-workplace information, and consequently, of the informational dimension of the tension between the lifeworlds of individual employees and their organizations, and its consequences in a workplace.

3. Literature review

3.1. Perceived success

There is a relative abundance of earlier research relating to work success, especially in relation to personal and career success, motivation, and factors that employees and entrepreneurs link to their successes and failures (Benzing, Chu, & Kara, 2009; Erickson, Martinengo, & Hill, 2010). Much of the research has focused on the level of perceived success. Gender differences in perceived success is a classic question in this line of research (Dann, 1995; Orser & Dyke, 2005). Judge and colleagues have argued that integrative approaches would perform better than individual traits-based approaches (Judge, 2009; Judge & Hurst, 2008). In contrast to the investigations of career success (and failure), there is considerably less literature that focuses on the characteristics of career success as an issue that would take both self-experienced and social aspects into account (Dann, 1995; Heslin, 2005). Similar tendencies can be observed in the literature on work success in general. It has been common to contrast subjective and objective (Heslin, 2003), internal and external (Gerber, 2002; Porac, Nottenburg, & Eggert, 1981), and economic and non-economic dimensions of success and use them as a starting point for studying the issue (Cooper & Artz, 1995). The problem with commonly used (to an extent) objective measures (e.g., salary and promotions) is that they are influenced by multiple factors and may not necessarily correlate with the level of success experienced by an individual. Subjective measures tend to be similarly biased. They are dependent on individual assumptions of the organization of work. Further, people tend to compare their achievements to their personal goals instead of juxtaposing their performance with the achievements of others (Heslin, 2003). In spite of their evident shortcomings, salary and promotions are typically the most commonly used measures of success (Heslin, 2003). The variation in the popularity of subjective measures is greater. Multiple studies have used the Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley (1990) Career Satisfaction Scale (Boudreau, Boswell, & Judge, 2001; Heslin, 2003; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002). Others, including Peluchette and Jeanquart (2000) and Walker and Brown (2004) have developed alternative instruments with slightly different emphases. In contrast to trait-based measures, Judge (2009) has argued for an approach based on core self-evaluations (self-esteem, locus of control, generalized self-efficacy, and [low] neuroticism, i.e., high emotional stability). His findings show that people with higher core self-evaluations are more successful in their careers and more satisfied in their jobs.

The research carried out in small- and medium-sized enterprises has special relevance from the perspective of a general notion of work success, because in smaller organizations, organizational goals can be assumed to be more closely aligned with the personal preferences of the entrepreneurs (Walker & Brown, 2004). From a business performance point of view, Hudson, Smart, and Bourne (2001) identified performance-to-quality ratio, time, flexibility, finance, customer satisfaction and human resources as critical dimensions of work success. In another study, Orser and Dyke (2005) investigated Canadian business owners and corporate managers' perceived success based on a definition reminiscent of that of Walker and Brown (2004) and Hudson et al. (2001) in its breadth. The survey on corporate managers was based on success criteria incorporating the factors of working with competent people, financial security, employment flexibility, supportive workplace culture, and opportunities to participate in community activities. The second survey, conducted with small business owners, incorporated questions on company profitability, product and service quality, operating performance, and market acceptance.

The most common factors that have been related to different perceptions of success are personality, gender, education, mentoring relationships, and career tactics (Heslin, 2003), even if not all of these factors, like personality, necessarily have an enduring impact on work satisfaction or quantitative indicators of work success such as income (Sutin, Costa, Miech, & Eaton, 2009). Furnham, Trickey, and Hyde (2012) found that personality disorders are related to work success and failure. In a qualitative investigation of male and female managers, Sturges (1999) identified seven internal (accomplishment, achievement, enjoyment, integrity, balance, personal recognition and influence) and two external (grade and reward) success criteria. Parker and Chusmir (1992) studied six different success measures and their importance for female and male managers. In the findings, personal fulfillment and security seemed to be more important to females than males. Among non-managers, women put more emphasis on family relations and personal fulfillment, whereas males were more inclined to appreciate status and wealth. According to the findings of Fenwick and Hutton (2000) women's success perceptions were broader than business success (i.e., profit, size and growth). The participants in their study referred to issues such as personal sense of satisfaction, children, and reputation, and commented explicitly on the secondary importance of economic rewards. The findings of Justo, Castro, Coduras, and Cruz (2006) were similar to those of Fenwick and Hutton (2000).

3.2. Information behavior and success

Earlier information studies research has unfolded the complexity and situatedness of human IB and information practices. As a factor influencing the totality of human pursuits, it has been relatively recently picked up by several neighboring disciplines even if the proposed approaches sometimes lack a certain sophistication (Browne, Cheung, Heinzl, & Riedl, 2017; Case & Given, 2016). Both individual and contextual factors influence how information is sought, shared, managed and used (Case & Given, 2016) and as Krampen (2011) suggests, it is rather apparent that there is no one and only professional, or any other, information-seeking behavior. Demographic factors, such as age and gender, technology experience, domain knowledge, and cognitive abilities and styles have been found to affect IB (O'Brien, Dickinson, & Askin, 2017). Other researchers have shown that different cognitive styles have influence on information searching (Bak & Meyer, 2011; Bowen, Ferguson, Lehmann, & Rohde, 2003; Goodale, Clough, Fernando, Ford, & Stevenson, 2014). The preference between two major patterns of interacting with information, broader (including browsing and scanning, passive monitoring and incidental acquisition, Bates, 2002) and focused modes of information seeking have been suggested to depend on many factors. Heinström (2006a) found that with graduate students, personal traits were a more powerful predictor of their approach than study discipline. Orientation towards breadth or specificity can also be influenced by, for instance, time (Wilkinson, Reader, & Payne, 2012), the task at hand and its complexity (Byström, 2000), as well as the situation and other contextual factors. Byström (1999) found that an increased task complexity pushed people to use people as information sources, but was not related to the use of external information. Focused information seeking manifests often in targeted searching, whereas broad IB may include preference for browsing and serendipitous discoveries.

Heinström (2005) identified three information-seeking styles: fast surfing (speed), broad scanning (wide and thorough information seeking) and deep diving (high effort and focus on quality). Further, their information seeking approaches could be divided into three categories: deep, surface, and strategic. A combination of deep and strategic approaches was likely to be related to deep diving, whereas surface strategy tended to relate to fast surfing (Heinström, 2006b). Traces of similar orientations have been found also in other studies (Foster & Urquhart, 2012). Fast surfing was related to neuroticism, cautiousness (a low level of openness to experience) and carelessness (low