ABSTRACT

Diversity characterizes Malaysian workforce not only in terms races, age, religion and gender. Diversity also comprises the minority group who are incapacitated due to some illness or perhaps an accident, known as the people with disabilities (PWDs). Based on the new economic model which focuses in generating skillful and high-income human capital, more attention and initiatives are now built for the PWDs as well. There is a built assumption that they would enjoy better career success. However, there is a strong need to complement such assumption with empirical investigations to soundly believe that there the world in general, and the working world in particular, have improved for the PWDS. Thus, based on a theoretical framework which integrated the sponsored mobility model of career success and person environment perspective, an empirical study has been conducted to identify the predictive potential of four key factors, inclusive of person-job fit perception, needs-supplies fit perception, core self-evaluation and universal work environment on PWD’s career success. A pilot study involving 30 respondents was conducted as part of the research procedure. It resulted in improvement of the instrument and showcased significant relationships between person-job fit perception, needs-supplies fit perception and core self-evaluation with subjective career success.

INTRODUCTION

The people with disabilities (PWDs) encompassed part of the minority groups in Malaysia. The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined disability as an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment refers to a problem in body function or structure. Meanwhile, an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action. A participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations. The United Nations (1976) defined disability distinctively from impairment and handicap. Disability is any restriction or lack (resulting from impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. Impairment is any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function. Handicap is a disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or a disability, that prevents the fulfillment of a role that is considered normal (depending on age, sex and social and cultural factors) for that individual. The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development of Malaysia defined PWDs as individuals who are characterized with long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sense impairment which restrict them from fully and effectively participating in the community. An acute scrutinization of these definitions echo the skewed perception of the mainstream society on low possibility of PWDs’ contributions in any nation building. This is because the above definitions on disability and PWDs fail to include the element of PWDs’ potential development within the definitions.

The scenario in Malaysia serves well in supporting such argument. Out of an estimated 1.3 million PWDs in Malaysia, only 233,939 of them have registered with the Department of Community Welfare (27 sept 2010, laman web KPWKM). There is no published statistics on employed statistics for both 2009 and 2010 yet. In 2003, only 5.24% of PWDs were employed (Serajul Haq, 2003). It has also been reported that until March 2007, a total of 6,799 out of 9,070 registered PWDs were employed (Rosmawati Sulaiman, 2008). Eventhough the Disability Act 2007 was established to address the rights of PWDs to (1) acknowledge and accept the principle that PWDs deserve equal right and opportunity to fully participate in the community; (2) ensure that the PWDs enjoy equitable rights, opportunity and access within the country law; (3) eradicate discrimination towards any individuals due to his or her disability; and lastly (4) educate and enhance societal awareness on PWDs’ rights, the current scenario showcased the need to answer several research
questions. First, what would be the person-job fit perception and core self evaluation of the PWDs who are often perceived as having low level of employability by the society? Second, what would be the needs-supplies fit perception, objective and subjective career success of the PWDs? Lastly, do any of the factors contribute significantly to objective and career success of the PWDs? Since there is limited studies that have looked into combined roles of person-job fit perception, needs-supplies fit perception, and core self-evaluation on objective and subjective career success, a study to look into their contributions is deemed significant. This paper shall discuss preliminary findings from the conducted pilot study, which is part of the study procedure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Career

In the early 20th century, career was regarded as occupation. In the 1950s and 1960s, career was related to the concept of occupation in individual’s life. Super, Tiedman and Borrow (1961) defined career as the sequence of occupations, jobs and the positions in life of an individual. Later on, leisure was integrated to career definition (McDaniel, 1965), thus giving it a broader perspective. Moving on to the 1970s and 1980s, the concept of career was continuously defined in a broader perspective. For instance, the National Vocational Guidance Association (NVGA) in 1973 defined career as a ‘time-extended working out of a purposeful life pattern through work undertaken by the individual’. Career started to incorporate almost all life activities, across individual’s lifespan, and is no longer occupational in manner. Thus, in the 1970s, developmental approach of career started to feature a shift from occupational to career criteria (Jordaan, 1974). The evolution of career theory has also imposed similar effect on the definition of career success. When the construct of career success was introduced Hughes and the Chicago School of Sociology (1937), early psychological career development theories focused on active role of organizations in individual’s career success. Career success was defined objectively and focus was placed on more visible aspects of individual’s career circumstances, such as profession, work role, salary, type of work, career progression, and status or prestige associated with a position or level on a hierarchy (Van Maanen, 1977). It is being measured in terms of society’s evaluation of achievement with reference to extrinsic measures such as salary, managerial level and number of promotions (Melamed, 1996; Whitely, Dougherty and Dreher, 1994).

Later, along with the development of career theories especially from the beginning of the 1970s, the definition of career success began to incorporate the aspect of subjectivity. Subjective career success describes a personal interpretation of one’s career and no longer includes the reflection of social norms towards one’s career (Heslin, 2005). According to Judge et al. (1995), Seibert et al. (2001), Heslin (2003), Ng et al. (2005) and Breland et al. (2007), career success is described as the positive psychological or work-related outcomes or personal and professional achievements one has gathered from their working experience. Similarly, career success was defined by Arthur et al. (2005) as “an outcome of a person’s career experiences … the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person’s work experiences over time”. Subjective career success can be measured in terms of individual’s feelings of success with reference to intrinsic indices such as perceptions of career accomplishments and future prospects (Aryee et al., 1994). It is now believed that an individual who is objectively successful by getting a very high pay, got promoted or empowered with supervision authority, may still be unhappy. This is due to the fact that individual’s perspective on success is actually affected by life situations such as family commitments, dual income and health (Gunz and Heslin, 2005).

As new definitions of career success incorporated both objective and subjective elements of career success, more studies have examined both interdependently (Arthur et al., 2005; Hall & Chandler, 2005). Besides, solely trying to explain objective career success or social career success, arising importance of subjective career success as a psychological career success involving hopes and desires, values and beliefs that imply individuals’ psychological well-being and quality of working life was highlighted (Peluchette, 1993; Nabi, 2003). Hand in hand, both are said to contribute to holistic individual growth at work (Ashforth, 2001; Hall, 2002; Hall & Chandler, 2005). Though literatures pointed out the predictive influence of objective success on subjective career success, more studies significantly found disassociation between the two. Such ongoing debate spelled the importance of more career success
studies. Studies on PWDs’ career success would help to enhance the understanding on the interaction between objective and subjective career success.

In the context of PWDs’ career success, Lysaght et al. (1994) argued that linear career progression characterized by full-time continuous working would not at all explain the total meaning of their career success. In contrast to the traditional meaning of career success, the PWD’s career success might be more achievable with the element of flexibility, such as flexible working hours and locality. However, special treatments to the PWDs would only mark their disabilities. As stated by Sutherland (1981), the more one’s career patterns conform to the societal norms, the lesser one’s disability is apparent to the society. Taking note of this, career success would then depend on the subjective meaning provided by PWDs themselves. Sonali Shah (2005) in her study on career success of disabled high-flyers, identified the essence of both internal and external career success for the PWDs. It was found that career success was not just defined conventionally by looking at hierarchical progression in career and salary by 31 disabled adults. Most are holding highly recognized positions in their organizations and society, as well define their career success by referring to internal criteria such as feelings of personal satisfaction or happiness with oneself, one’s work, one’s life; feelings of personal development, and equality. The subjectivity in defining career success is due to the physical and structural barriers faced by the PWDs imposed by mainstream society.

Individual-Related Factor

The person-environment perspective and sponsorship model of career success which serves as the theoretical framework theorize the joint influences of person-related factors with other factors on career success. Among the individual-related factors associated with career success is core self-evaluation (CSE). Core self-evaluation (CSE) as an appraisal of one’s self-worth is found to predict high level of job and life satisfaction (Judge, 2009). It is broader than self-esteem because it also reflects beliefs in one’s capabilities (to control one’s life) and one’s competence (to perform, cope, persevere, and succeed). It also covers the general sense that life will turn out well for oneself. CSE is indicated by four traits, which includes self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control and neuroticism. Thus, based on this arguments, we predict that:

H1: Core self-evaluation has a significant, positive relationship with PWDs’ objective and subjective career success.

Person-Environment Fit Factors

The person-environment perspective highlighted the role of person-job fit perception and needs-supplies fit perception in determining career success of the PWDs. The person-environment perspective posits that harmonious interactions between individuals and the environment (eg. work place) would lead to better work and career outcomes. Person-job fit perception and needs-supplies fit perception are among the person-environment variables that have been proven to have relationships with career success in past studies. The results of recent studies by Ballout (2007) and Morley (2007) suggested person-job fit and needs-supplies fit perceptions as important antecedents of career success. In other words, individuals with high levels of person-job and needs-supplies fit perceptions are predicted to have high levels of career success, and vice versa. Pertaining to the very marginal number of successful PWDs in Malaysia, there is a concern of PWDs compliance to societal attitudes and misconception on their abilities to perform well at workplaces. The compliance to the misfit perception may lead them to set career goals far from what they could actually achieved. It is intriguing to look at how the employed PWDs themselves perceive the compatibility of their knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) to the job and task demands. The role of PWDs’ person-job fit perception and needs-supplies fit perception on their objective and subjective career success in this context are yet to be determined. Thus, the author would like to propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Person-environment factors (person-job fit perception and needs-supplies fit perception) have significant, positive relationship with PWDs’ objective and subjective career success.

Theoretical Framework: Person-Environment Perspective

The person-environment perspective and sponsorship mobility of career success model is applied to explain the phenomenon of PWDs’ career success. The person-environment perspective emphasizes on positive, significant
individual and organizational outcomes due to harmonious interactions between the two (Schneider et al. 2000). This perspective was first introduced by Parsons (1909). Chatman’s (1989) Behavioural Interaction Theory and Lewin’s (1939) view that individual’s behavior resulted from individual-organization interaction were nested in the perspective. In other words, the perspective proposes that it is not sufficient to explain individual’s work behavior by focusing on either individual’s characteristics or work situation alone. Rather, a comprehensive understanding would be possible by looking at the interactions between the two parties. The concept of person-environment fit (PE fit) could be claimed as an all-encompassing concept in the field of psychology as it has been studied in relation to personality theory, vocational psychology, personnel selection, social psychology and various aspects of work behaviour as well as environment. Complementary fit is one of the main dimensions in the person-environment perspective. It occurs when the individual’s characteristics complements what is yet to be completed in a work environment to ensure satisfaction and satisfactoriness. Under the umbrella of this dimension, lies two types of fitness, which are the needs-supplies and person-job fitness. The needs-supplies fitness refers to environmental role in providing financial, physical, psychological, developmental and other types of sources needed by individuals in their work place. Such fitness would result in individual’s satisfaction (Kristoff, 1996). Meanwhile, the person-job fitness describes the work environment’s requirement towards individual’s time, energy, commitment, knowledge, skills and abilities (Wilk & Sackett, 1996). The fitness is achieved when the individual is able to perform what the job or work environment demands. It has been reported that harmonious adjustments between an individual and his or her work place lead to positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, low turnover intention (Sekiguchi, 2004).

**METHODOLOGY**

The pilot study was a portion of a large cross-sectional career success study on PWDs in Malaysia. Prior to the pilot study, a pre-test involving ten PWDs trainees of a vocational rehabilitation centre was conducted. The purpose of the pre-test was to improve the design and sentence structure of the items. A total of thirty respondents who participated in the pilot study were ex-trainees of a vocational rehabilitation centre in Selangor Darul Ehsan, who are currently employed. A quantitative survey was designed to answer the research questions. Respondents were asked to self-administer a 51-item questionnaire comprising five sections which included items to examine PWDs’ objective and subjective career success, person-job fit perception, needs-supplies fit perception, core self-evaluation, universal work environment and their socio-demographic details. The variable of universal work environment is not discussed in this article. The objective career success composes of tangible or extrinsic career outcomes such as monthly gross income, number of promotions and number of subordinates within respondents’ supervision. The monthly gross income was measured from the total amount of income, including basic salary, allowances, over-time payment and income of part-time job. Number of promotions was calculated from the total of job hierarchical movement within their service in the same organization. All were based on self-reported data. Meanwhile, subjective career success concerns with PWDs’ career satisfaction and it was measured using the Career Satisfaction Scale by Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (Greenhaus et al., 1990). The 5-items instrument was rated on a five Likert-scale. Example of the item is “I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career”. The person-job fit perception of the PWDs concerns with the perceptions on their capability’s and skill’s fitness with their job demands and it was measured using the Person-Job Fit Perception Scale. The 9-items instrument were taken from a doctoral dissertation by Michael Kennedy (1995). Example of the item is “my capability matches my job demands”. The 8-items needs-supplies fit perception scale was taken from also taken from the same doctoral dissertation in order to venture a new scale other than the mostly used scale by Cable and DeRue (2002). Example of the item is “my organization facilitates the needs that I am longing for”. The 12-items Core Self-Evaluation Scale by Judge, Erez, Bono and Thoresen (2003) was used to measure perceived self evaluation of the respondents. Example of the item is “I do not feel in control of my success in my career”. All scales were rated on a five Likert-scale.

Content validity of the instrument was conducted in order to determine the extent to which the instrument tap every dimension of the constructs and have enough questions to provide an adequate sampling of questions from each of the content areas (Mitchell & Jolley, 2008). The Cronbach α value for the subjective career success scale is .788.
Meanwhile, initial reliability analysis results for nine-items person-job fit scale showed a Cronbach α value of .721. Although the value is acceptable (Field, 2005), it was found that the values of items 4 and 6 in the corrected item-total correlation column are lesser than .3. This usually signalled potential problems. Since the cronbach α of the total scale after the deletion of the two items is .817, the researcher decided to drop the two items from the final questionnaire. Initially, the Cronbach α values for the needs-supplies fit perception was .780. Since the value of item 5 in the corrected item-total correlation column was lesser than three and its deletion led to the Cronbach α value of .803, only 7 items were maintained for the needs-supplies fit perception scale in the final questionnaire. The Cronbach α value for the core self-evaluation scale is .720, after four items (1,3, 5 and 9) were deleted due to low values in the corrected item-total correlation column.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Socio-Demographic Profile Of Respondents

A total of 78% male (39) and 22% female (11) PWDs participated in the pilot study. Average age of the respondents is 29.2 (s.d=5.897). The youngest is 21 years old and the oldest is 54 years old. Majority of them (90%) went for normal educational system during the primary and secondary years of schooling. Only five (10%) of them went for special education stream. The highest percentage (36%) showed that the PWDs finished their secondary education and did not enroll into any further degree other than the vocational training in the rehabilitation centre. The second highest percentage (30%) showcased the PWDs earning certificate qualification. Only 4%, 6% and 4% earned diploma, bachelor and masters degree. Others did not complete either their primary or secondary education. Nine two percent of them are fully employed and only 8% are working part-time. The average monthly salary is RM1219 (s.d=936.7). In terms of disability, 80% of them are physically disabled, 16% are blind and others fall within other categories such as learning disability. Since most of them were born normal and enrolled into the vocational rehabilitation centre after they encountered sickness or accidents, it explained why most of the respondents are physically disabled rather than having other types of disabilities.

Relationships Between Fit Perceptions, Core Self-Evaluation And Career Success

Interestingly, results of descriptive analysis showcased that none of the respondents exhibit low level of person-job fit perception. Approximately 63.8% possessed high level of person-job fit perception, and 36.2% exhibited moderate level of person-job fit perception. Only 5% demonstrated low needs-supplies fit perception. Forty eight percent and 44% possessed high as well as moderate level of needs-supplies fit perception. Again, it was reported that none of the respondents have low level of core self-evaluation. Half of them (50%) and another half (50%) demonstrated moderate and high levels of core self-evaluation. In terms of subjective career success, majority showcased moderate level (62%). The rest (38%) demonstrated high level of subjective career success. However, it was found that majority of the respondents have low monthly salary (75.5%). Only 20.4% and 4.1% were earning moderate and high levels of monthly salary.

The Pearson product moment correlation analysis was run to test hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 of the study. Results showed that there is no significant relationship between core self evaluation of the respondents with objective career success, namely monthly salary (r=.195,p<.090), promotion (r=.216,p<.077) and number of subordinates supervised (r=.111,p<.231). However, it has a positive, significant relationship with subjective career success of the respondents (r=.420,p<.001). Thus, hypothesis 1 is partially supported. Such result supported previous literature that suggested core self-evaluation’s (CSE) association with life satisfaction (Judge, 2009). Please refer to Table 1.
Hypothesis 2 proposes a significant relationship between person-job fit perception and needs-supplies fit perception with objective and subjective career success. Results showed that person-job fit perception of the respondents significantly correlated with their subjective career success ($r=.550, p<.000$). It has no significant relationship with the objective career success. Hence, such result suggested that the PWDs’ perceptions on the capability to fulfill their job demands relate to their career satisfaction. Nevertheless, such perception has no association at all to other factors which are beyond their control, such as salary, promotion and supervisory authority. However, their needs-supplies fit perception significantly correlated with subjective career success ($r=.430, p<.001$), monthly salary ($r=.369, p<.005$) and number of subordinates supervised ($r=.256, p<.043$). Thus, hypothesis 2 was also partially supported. All the results are also illustrated in Table 1.

These results suggested that the PWDs’ perceptions towards the ability of the organizations to fulfill their needs played a role not only in their career satisfaction. It also associated with their salary and supervisory authority. It could be concluded that their salary and supervisory authority offered by the organizations meets their expectations as PWDs. Eventhough majority of them are receiving low level of monthly salary, perhaps the fact of being employed itself has provided them a meaningful fulfillment in their lives.

**CONCLUSION**

The result of the pilot study implied that majority of the respondents are still receiving low monthly salary. It reflected the current concerns on the need to improve objective career success of the PWDs. The result which showed that majority of the respondents exhibited moderate and high levels of subjective career success. It echoed previous literature which suggested PWDs’ concerns with career and life satisfaction since it is within their locus of control (Sonali, 2005). These preliminary findings strengthened the call to conduct a larger study on career success of PWDs in Malaysia. The results of this pilot study lead a larger scale study using the improved version of questionnaire.

**REFERENCES**


