ON JOB SATISFACTION AND SUCCESS:

how Dutch and Belgian employees write new career chapters

PART 2

SUCCESS & GOALS

HOUSE OF HR

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PREFACE

OF LADDERS AND WINDING PATHS: CAREERS IN THE LAST 150 YEARS

What does your career look like?

Are you only just starting, or have you been on the payroll for several years, or even decades? Either way: careers have not always existed. And throughout history, they have gone through major shifts and incarnations.

In the first decades after World War II, a career consisted of spending 30 to 40 years working for the same company and then retiring. The defining symbol for companies was the corporate ladder: the only way is up, with clearly defined steps and a clear goal. Today, a career is neither linear nor predictable. Lifetime employment is an echo from the bygone era, while lifetime employability is now the norm, as people increasingly switch jobs and employers. A career in 2022 is therefore no longer a rigid corporate ladder, but a whimsical path that allows you to move in every direction.

And that calls for a new approach and a new set of challenges. Taking on more responsibility yourself, for instance. Becoming more flexible, too, because changes are coming at us at an increasingly rapid pace. Companies and recruiters have to be fully aware of this and respond cleverly.

In short: a career is not something that happens to you – you actively shape it. It is not a finished script, but a story you write yourself.

Guidance, balance, inspiration

In our first research paper on careers, we delved into their sustainability – here we take a closer look at success and goals.

It is a starting point for specific advice to anyone looking for a job, or guidance and balance on that whimsical career path, or to all those seeking inspiration for new chapters in that yet-to-be-written career story.

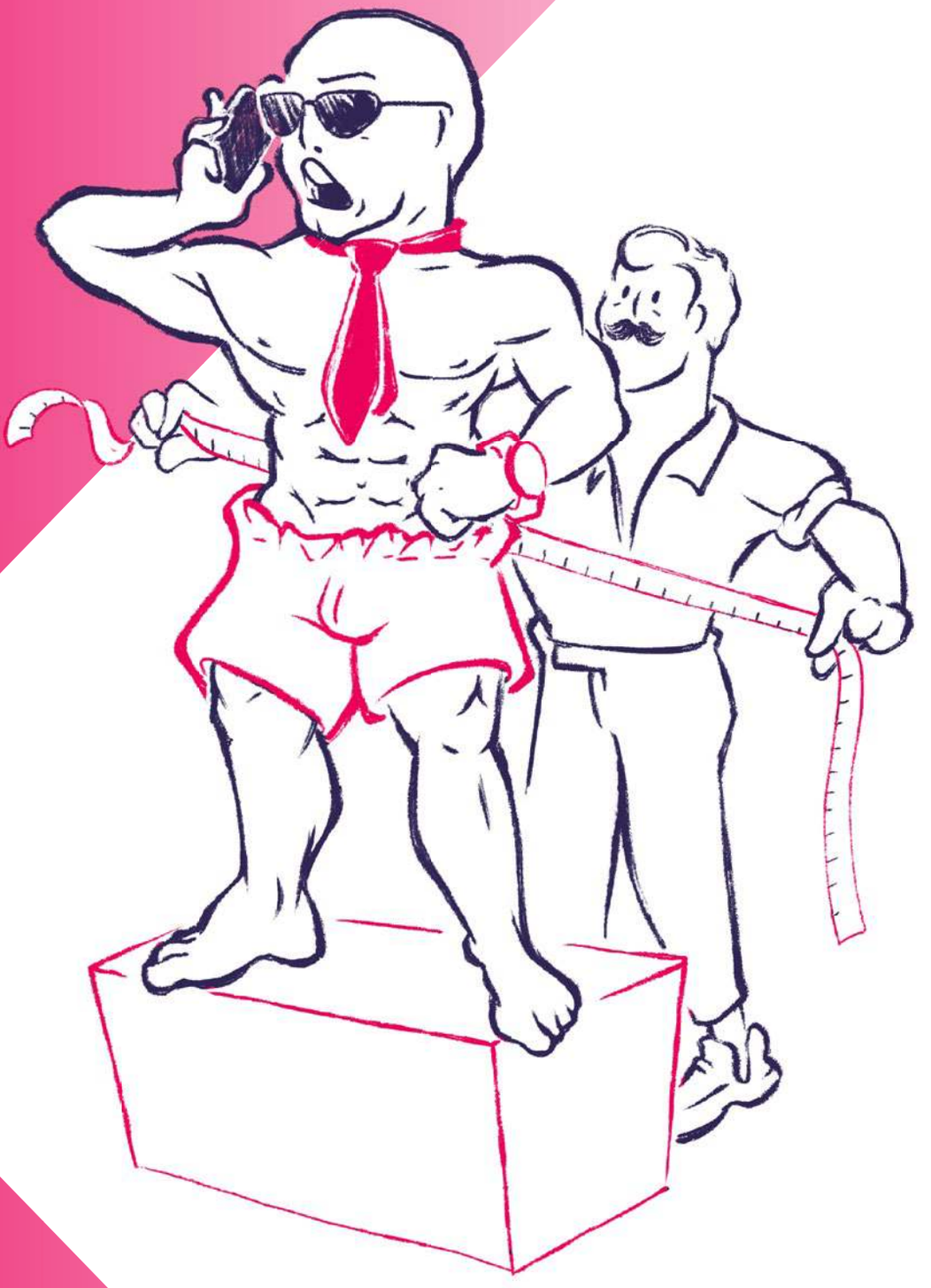
1 Career success

Measuring & knowing: How successful are we?

You could define 'career success' as follows: achieving desired work-related goals in your career.

Sounds fine, but it is by no means an airtight definition. Because those 'desired work-related goals' are far from universal: not only do they vary from person to person, but they also greatly depend on circumstances. In academic research on careers, we also have to make a distinction between objective 'hard' measures of success (e.g.: number of promotions, income) and subjective 'soft' measures (personal feelings about performance and values).

So, whether employees consider themselves to have a successful career depends on the extent to which they have achieved their personal, professional, and organizational goals.



OBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS

Is it possible to objectively measure career success? It is if you are going to use indicators like salary, salary growth, status and promotions, because apart from being tangible, they are also visible to the outside world. But there are some caveats:

- A career with clearly defined steps and easily identifiable positions hasn't been the only model for a while now.
- A big paycheck is always appreciated, but does it say anything about how successful your career is? So as an indicator, it is certainly not suitable for all jobs and industries.
- Objective criteria for career success usually apply to high-potential employees such as middle managers and executives easily, but unfortunately much less so to blue-collar and executive white-collar workers. Moreover, the latter typically have fewer growth opportunities (see research paper 1).

Subjective career success

How you as an individual assess your career, taking into account a set of criteria that are important to you: that's subjective career success. Because it is so individual, everyone looks at it through a different lens: there are differences between people, but also between jobs, age groups and cultures.

We once assumed that the subjective criteria for measuring career success were the same for everyone; today we know that reality is much more nuanced. As it happens, subjective career success is a multidimensional concept, with numerous fine-grained indicators. The impact someone has on both company and colleagues, for example, or how meaningful and socially rich one's career is. Or we look at how happy people are with their careers.

In this second part, we explore the insights related to career success. How successful are careers in Belgium and the Netherlands? What exactly does a successful career mean for employees? Which dimensions of success do they consider important and which do they actively pursue? And to what extent did they already achieve their goals?

Objective career success

To measure our respondents' objective career success, we polled them on their:

- → Wage (gross salary)
- → Number of promotions at their current employer
- → Number of promotions they got when they went from one organization to another (spanning their entire career)
- → Hierarchical status (do they lead a team, do they carry project responsibility and/or do they have the authority to delegate work?)

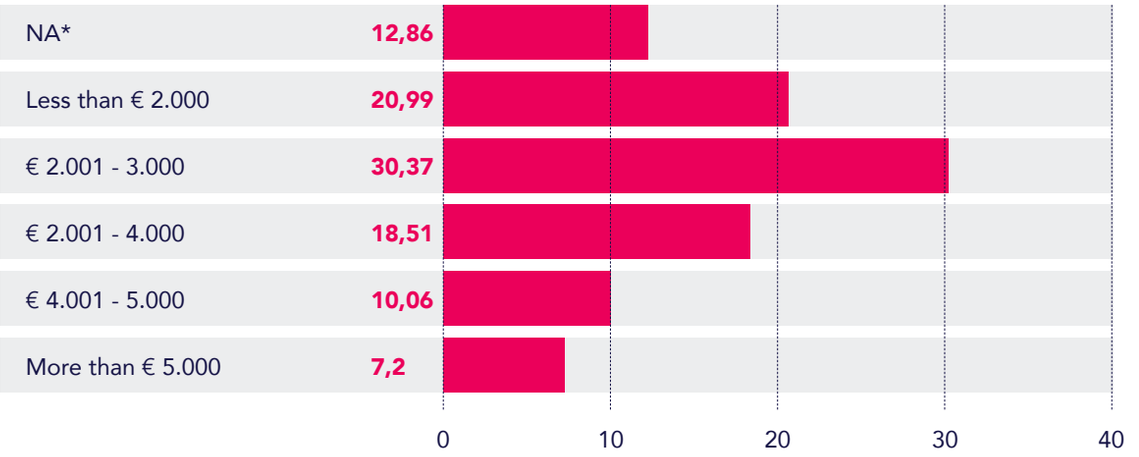
Objective career success and salary

There are no firm conclusions here, for two reasons: wages are calculated differently in the Netherlands than in Belgium, and many respondents work part-time (so they don't receive a complete gross wage).

Nevertheless, it is striking that most respondents receive a gross monthly salary between 2,000 and 3,000 euros - lower than the average gross salary in Belgium (3,758 euros); the Dutch gross salary amounts to 2,816 euros (excluding holiday allowance). Half of Belgian employees, for that matter, receive a gross wage of up to 3,486 euros per month.

Figure 1: GROSS MONTHLY SALARY

What is the gross salary of the respondents? (in %)



* Not available

In terms of gender and position, we do see some clear differences. For instance, men receive higher salaries more often than women, and salaries increase as the job requires more (management) responsibility and training (table 1).

Table 1: SALARY BY FUNCTION (IN %)

	Blue-collar worker	Administrative clerk	Middle mgmt	Board / senior management
Less than € 2.000	**39,6**	**25,30**	**12,50**	**0,00**
€ 2.001 - 3.000	**39,43**	**41,11**	**26,94**	**10,00**
€ 2.001 - 4.000	**15,93**	**20,55**	**27,16**	**14,00**
€ 4.001 - 5.000	**3,66**	**10,28**	**17,89**	**26,00**
More than € 5.000	**1,31**	**2,77**	**15,52**	**50,00**

OBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS AND PROMOTIONS

More pay, more promotions

Getting promoted is a thing for the happy few, or so it seems. Half of the respondents (50.62%) did not get promoted a single time at their current employer during their career, and a whopping 77.7% did not get promoted even when moving from one organization to another. These findings mirror the mobility figures from our previous research paper: 80% of respondents did not change jobs with their current employer in the past five years.

Remarkably, however, the higher the salary, the more promotions, both in-house and elsewhere. (Figures 3 and 4)

Of those earning more than 5,000 euros gross monthly, more than 3 in 4 were promoted at the same company, 1 in 4 even over three times. In terms of external promotions, things are also more than fine in that salary scale: almost half of the employees got promoted once, a quarter even at least twice.

Figure 3: CORRELATION GROSS SALARY AND NUMBER OF INTERNAL PROMOTIONS

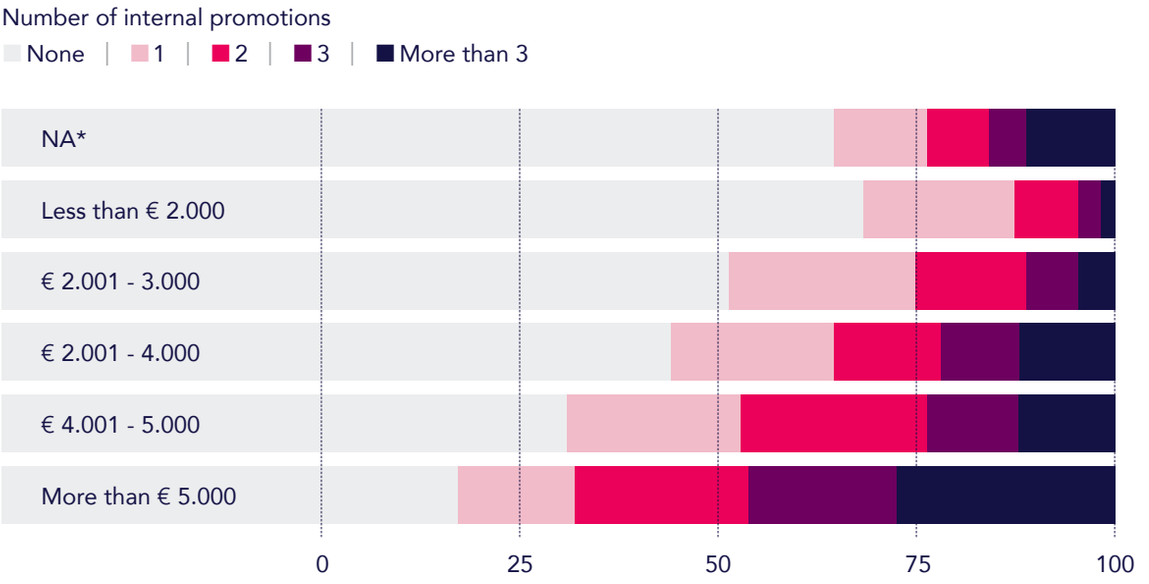
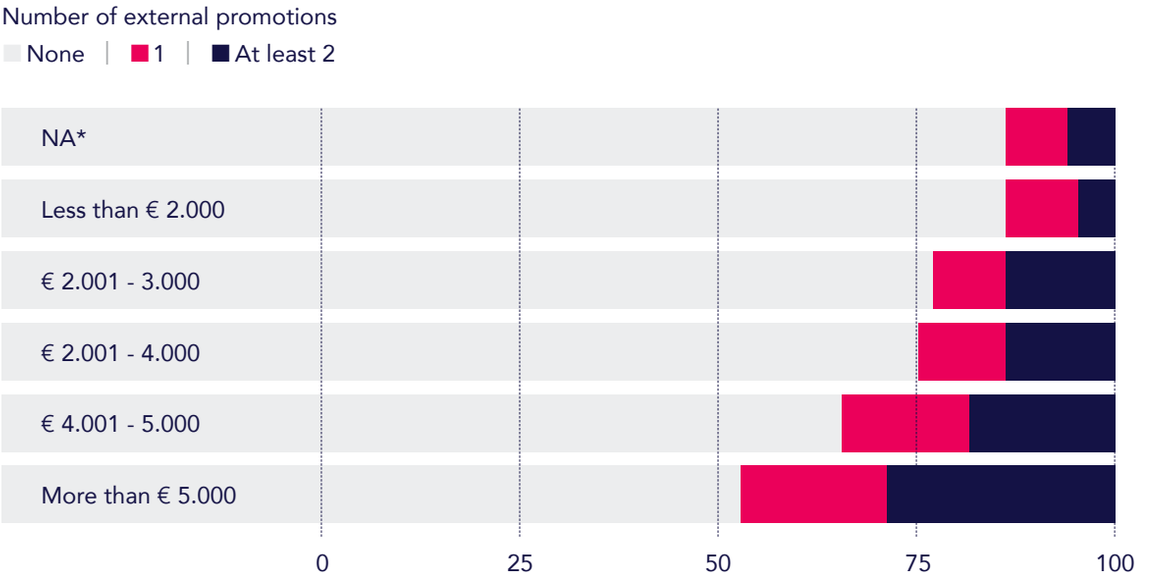


Figure 4: CORRELATION GROSS SALARY AND NUMBER OF EXTERNAL PROMOTIONS



Region

According to part 1 of our survey, Dutch people change employers more often than Belgians. And this trend shows up for external promotions as well. In the Netherlands, some 30% of respondents got at least one promotion when moving from one organization to another, in Belgium, it was just 14.5%.

Position

The higher the position people hold, the more internal and external promotions occur (figure 5 and 6).

Those with higher degrees are also more likely to be promoted (table 2). Respondents with a higher education degree (bachelor, master, or Ph.D.) get promoted at least once - mostly with their employer.

Figure 5: CORRELATION INTERNAL PROMOTIONS AND FUNCTION

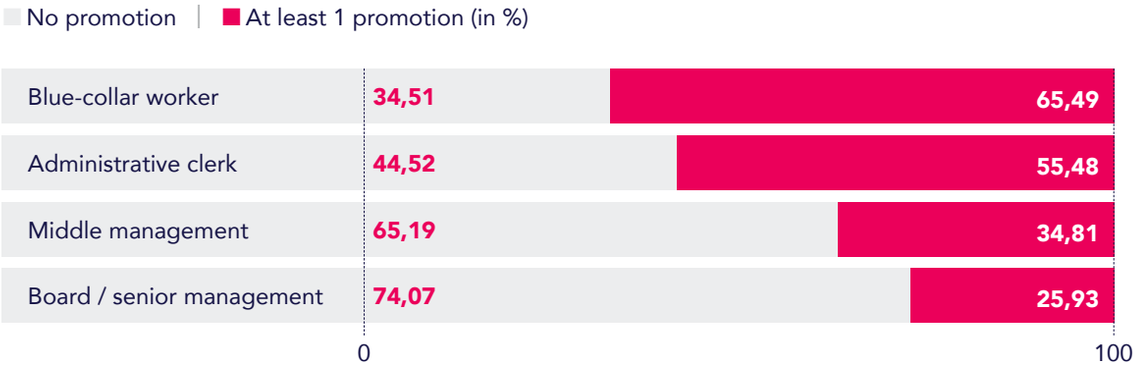


Figure 6: CORRELATION EXTERNAL PROMOTIONS AND FUNCTION

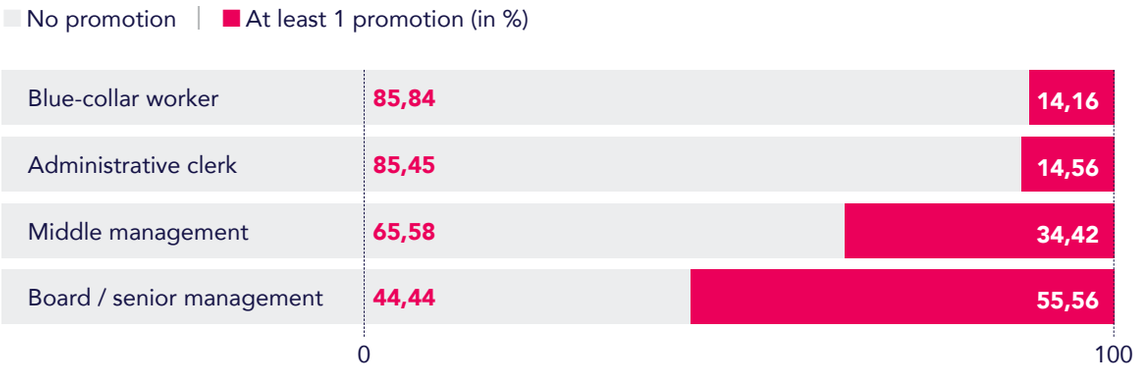
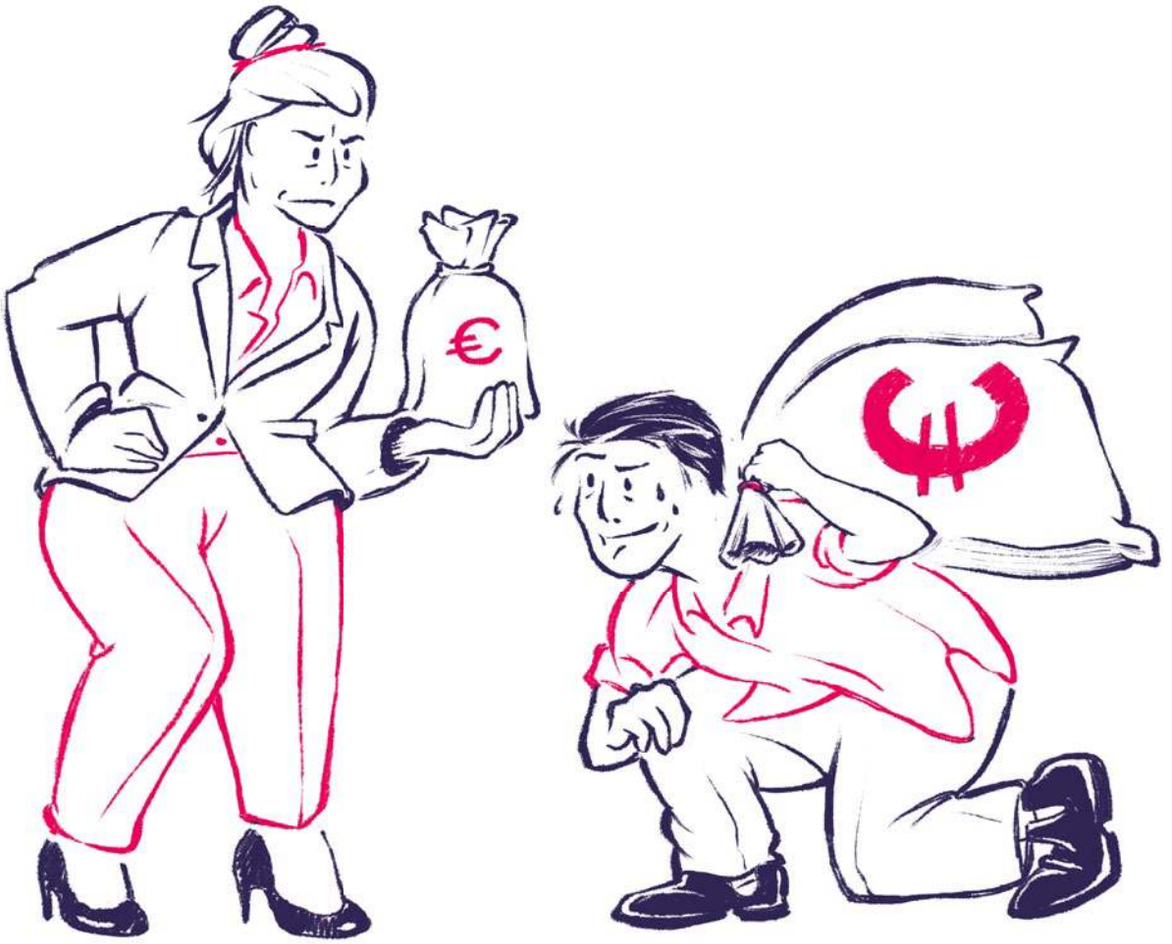


Table 2: CORRELATION INTERNAL/EXTERNEAL PROMOTION AND DEGREE (IN %)

	Primary education at most	Secundary education	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree or PhD
At least 1 internal promotion	**32,15**	**42,44**	**55,44**	**58,62**
At least 1 external promotion	**8,93**	**16,52**	**25,57**	**33,33**

Gender

There are no significant differences in terms of promotions and gender: women get promoted just as often as men. Quite remarkable, as they still earn less.



Mental health

Betting on internal mobility pays off. That is clear from the significant relationship between the number of promotions and respondents' mental health. Among those who got more than three internal promotions with the same employer, mental health is significantly better than among those who never did (or only once).

OBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS AND STATUS

Whether someone has objectively achieved a certain status during their career, we can derive from these three factors:

- having project responsibility
- being authorized to delegate work
- being in a managerial position.

Since the correlation between these three can be particularly interesting, we use an index indicating whether a respondent ticks none (low status), one (moderate), two (high), or all three (very high) of the indicators.

Position and degree also go hand in hand in this context. The higher the position that someone occupies (figure 8) and the higher the degree (figure 9), the greater the objective career success.

Figure 8: CORRELATION OBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS AND FUNCTION

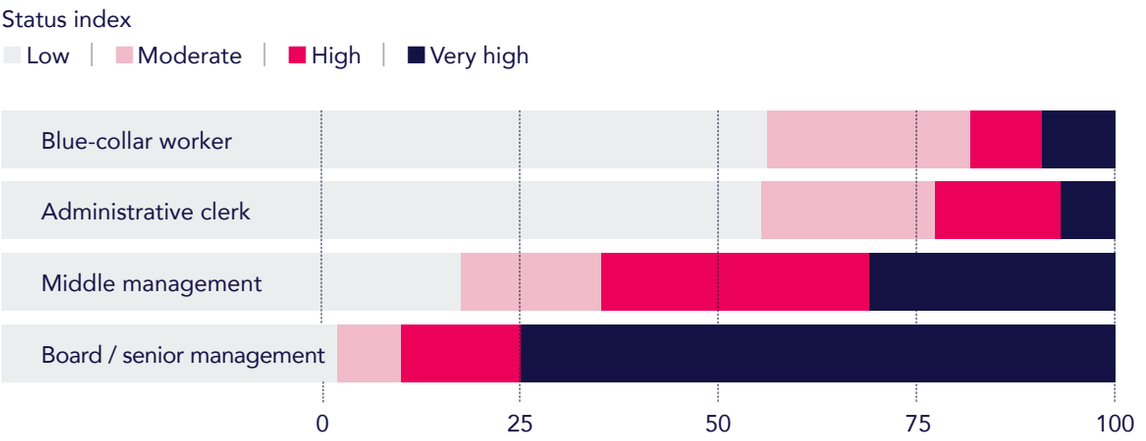
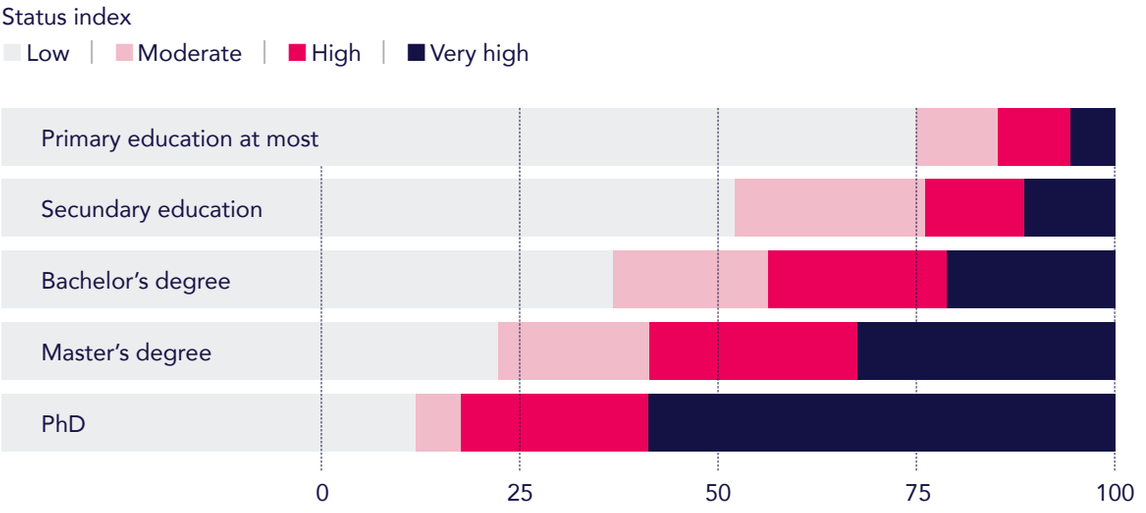


Figure 9: CORRELATION OBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS AND DEGREE



The proof? 17% of blue-collar workers and 22% of executive white-collar workers score high to very high on our status index. Among middle and upper management, the figures are 63% and 91% respectively. These results are in line with the classic view of career success, meaning that a career becomes more 'successful' as someone climbs the career ladder.

It's remarkable again to notice that objective career success is higher in the Netherlands than in Flanders and Wallonia.

Subjective career success

Subjective career success, as pointed out above, is a multidimensional concept. That is why we asked our respondents to indicate to what extent they

- **value the different dimensions (see below)**
- **feel that they achieved these specific dimensions.**

The 7 dimensions of subjective career success

1. Learning and development (upskilling, being challenged)
2. Work-life balance
3. Entrepreneurship (being self-employed and/or running your own business)
4. Positive work relations (getting positive feedback from colleagues and supervisors)
5. Positive impact (contributing to the development of others)
6. Financial security (being able to meet basic needs and provide for the family)
7. Financial success (making more money during a career and/or achieving a certain level of wealth)

THE RESULTS:

Importance and achievement

What is most striking: all employees value the same things. There are some slight differences correlated to position, degree, region, age, and work experience, but the order of dimensions is universal.

Financial security takes the top spot.
This dimension gets the highest score: 4.25 out of 5. Financial success, however, is rated a lot lower, only 3.48 out of 5. So according to our respondents, you are successful if you can provide for your basic needs; steadily earning more money is less important to them.

Employees also prioritize sustainable aspects of a career: work-life balance ranks second, followed by positive professional relationships and learning and development.

What is interesting here is that most respondents achieved the dimensions they consider important, as shown by the even order between importance and achievement. Only when it comes to financial security and work-life balance do they feel there is still work to be done.

Let's take a closer look …

Importance and gender

There are no significant differences when it comes to gender: women get promoted just as often as men, and they experience subjective career success just as often, even if they earn less (objective success).

Importance and region

The Dutch value the dimensions of subjective career success slightly less than Belgians, except for entrepreneurship (see table 4). Walloons care more about learning and development, having a positive impact, and entrepreneurship than their Flemish counterparts.

Table 4: IMPORTANCE OF DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS BY REGION

Aspect subjective career success	The overall average	Flanders	Wallonia	The Netherlands
Financial security	**4,25**	**4,34**	**4,29**	**4,18**
Work-life balance	**4,14**	**4,21**	**4,22**	**4,06**
Positive working relationships	**3,84**	**3,87**	**3,98**	**3,76**
Learning & development	**3,74**	**3,76**	**3,80**	**3,69**
Positive impact	**3,65**	**3,58**	**3,79**	**3,62**
Financial success	**3,48**	**3,56**	**3,63**	**3,37**
Entrepreneurship	**2,73**	**2,58**	**2,82**	**2,76**

Importance and position

Zooming in on functions (table 5), three things stand out:

- 'Higher' profiles (middle management, senior management, executive) attach more value to learning and development, positive impact and entrepreneurship than the others.
- Executive white-collar workers consider financial security and work-life balance just a bit more important than blue-collar workers and those with higher job profiles.
- The stereotype of practically-trained workers being more focused on money than theoretically-trained workers is not true: the scores of all respondents are fairly similar.

Table 5: IMPORTANCE OF DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS BY FUNCTION

Aspect subjective career success	The overall average	Flanders	Wallonia	The Netherlands
Financial security	**4,25**	**4,15**	**4,34**	**4,16**
Work-life balance	**4,14**	**4,02**	**4,24**	**4,01**
Positive working relationships	**3,84**	**3,71**	**3,90**	**3,83**
Learning & development	**3,74**	**3,61**	**3,69**	**3,85**
Positive impact	**3,65**	**3,56**	**3,63**	**3,75**
Financial success	**3,48**	**3,49**	**3,50**	**3,45**
Entrepreneurship	**2,73**	**2,83**	**2,55**	**2,96**

Importance and degree

The trend continues here: the higher the degree, the more importance people attach to their work-life balance. On average, bachelors and masters want to learn more and continue to develop more than those with lower qualifications. The latter group gives a lower score to financial security, even though it also ranks number one here.

Importance and age/experience

If we take a look at age and work experience (table 6), the bottom line is clear: the older and more experienced, the more value people attach to financial security. We can even put an age on it: from 46 onwards, it becomes increasingly important. No big surprise: the closer someone is to retiring, the more questions they start asking about the retirement pay they will receive.

As we already concluded in the first research paper, this older age group maintains stable careers, and so people are less inclined to change jobs, whether external or internal. It is not entirely clear why: the relatively high importance they attach to financial security could keep them from moving. Or the opposite could be true: because they are less inclined to change jobs, they start focusing more on financial security.

As for financial success, it seems that it becomes less and less important the older people get and the longer they work. Employees over 55 don't even feel the need to earn a higher wage.

Tabel 6: IMPORTANCE OF DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS BY WORK EXPERIENCE

Aspect subjective career success	The overall average	Entry level (0-2y)	Early career (3-10y)	Mid-career (11-25y)	Senior career (26-35y)	Late career (+36y)
Financial security	**4,25**	**4,06**	**4,11**	**4,21**	**4,38**	**4,32**
Work-life balance	**4,14**	**3,97**	**3,96**	**4,07**	**4,32**	**4,22**
Positive working relationships	**3,84**	**3,84**	**3,75**	**3,81**	**3,92**	**3,85**
Learning & development	**3,74**	**3,60**	**3,75**	**3,73**	**3,72**	**3,80**
Positive impact	**3,65**	**3,61**	**3,66**	**3,63**	**3,62**	**3,74**
Financial success	**3,48**	**3,64**	**3,54**	**3,50**	**3,48**	**3,34**
Entrepreneurship	**2,73**	**3,20**	**3,01**	**2,79**	**2,54**	**2,48**

Some more conclusions:

- Older and more experienced employees value positive professional relationships and a steady work-life balance a lot more than their younger colleagues.
- Everyone wants to keep on learning and positively impact others, whatever their age or experience. Older and more experienced employees have achieved those dimensions more often and to a greater extent. They simply had more time to focus on achieving them.

A QUICK RECAP: OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS

Four conclusions emerge regarding career success:

1. White-collar workers do it better

No surprise, as it aligns with previous scientific research: white-collar workers get promotions more often, have higher salaries, and are mentally healthier than blue-collar workers. The latter are at risk of entering a vicious circle in terms of objective career success factors: because they are less likely to move up in their careers, their salary is lower and they are less often perceived as 'successful'. This, in turn, can harm their growth opportunities.

2. Sustainable career criteria at the forefront

Financial security is universal career priority number one, but in addition, people attach particular importance to sustainable criteria.

The top 4 goes as follows:

- work-life balance
- positive work relations
- learning and development
- positive impact

Surprisingly, this ranking applied to everyone, regardless of degree or position. So the myth of the practically educated focusing more on money and the theoretically educated on significance and value has been debunked.

3. Financial security is more important than success

Money is important to everyone, obviously, but there is a clear difference between financial security and financial success. Security is unanimously seen as the most important benchmark; additional financial success lingers somewhere at the back of the list, especially for those further down the career path.

4. Women and men alike

One final remarkable conclusion: women may already receive lower salaries than men - a finding that aligns with earlier scientific research - but in terms of promotions or achieving subjective career success factors, they are far from lagging behind. **Food for thought!**

2 CAREER GOALS

WHY DO WE WORK?

People don't just work for the sake of working. Everyone has a certain goal in mind, consciously or not. But one thing's for sure: they aspire to have a successful career.

We can measure that success using a few objective benchmarks, but there are also ways to indicate how you experience it yourself. Still, success is not the only goal. People want to grow. Whether it's more responsibilities or an improved skillset, they want to do more or get better at
their job.

But they might just as well do what they do with a specific focus: a job, a career, or even a vocation. Let us briefly zoom in on that.

Focus 1: job

Some employees are very formal: their job is just a job. Nothing more, nothing less. They are predominantly interested in the materialistic benefits of being employed. Their job is not a goal as such, but a transaction: their way to get money and the means they need to live and enjoy time off. Their most important ambitions and interests are not work-related.

Focus 2: career

But not all employees 'just do their job'. Some actively focus on pursuing a career. They think it's important to invest in their job and to progress in their professional life. That progress often comes with a higher social status, which in turn yields a higher sense of self-worth.

Career-oriented people invest in their work. They like to be in the driver's seat of the high-speed train that is their career. They continuously look for challenging tasks that help them climb the career ladder. In short, they actively focus on indicators of objective career success.

Focus 3: vocation

Finally, some work from a certain calling. They draw their satisfaction from the work itself, not from the salary it gets them or because it is a means of shaping their career. Not only do they strongly identify with their job, they also believe it defines them as a person: it's their opportunity to contribute to society. Naturally, they focus on the indicators of subjective career success.

Whichever orientation, or combination, suits you best – because they can co-exist – it impacts the way you experience your work every single day. But it can also affect your organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, retention intentions, and performance. And the emphasis on a particular orientation may also change over time.

In this second chapter, we discuss the results related to career goals and orientations. Are people mainly looking for more responsibility or expertise? And do they think of themselves as merely performing a job, pursuing a career, or fulfilling a vocation?

WHAT DO WE FOCUS ON?

People prioritize getting better at their job over moving up the ladder, the figures clearly show. Over 40% of employees in Belgium and the Netherlands want to put a great deal of effort into growing their skills (figure 12), while only 22% aim to take on more responsibilities (figure 11).

Figure 11: GAINING RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN THE CAREER

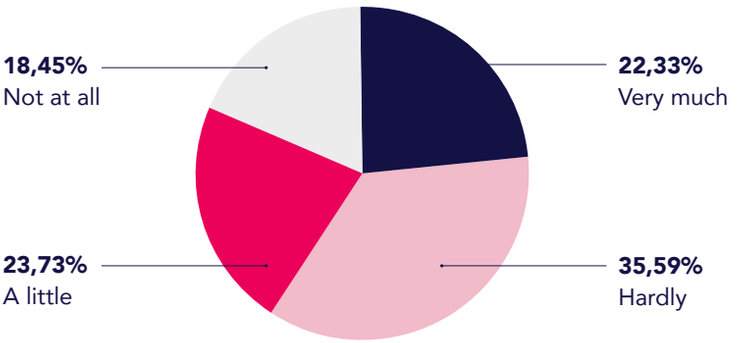
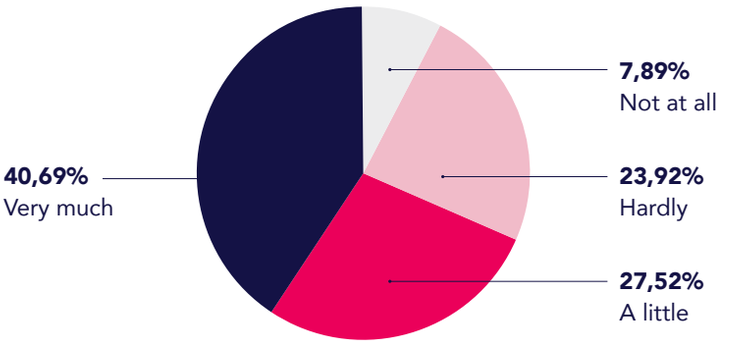


Figure 12: GAINING EXPERTISE WITHIN THE CAREER



When looking into the 3 different career orientations, it's remarkable that

- 36% of employees welcome the idea of 'just doing a job'
- 21,18% feel like they fulfill a vocation
- a mere 19% are very focused on a career

Rather surprising, since our society greatly values impact and job satisfaction. You would expect employees to identify themselves more based on a career or vocation.

Do we all have different career goals?

Flemish, Walloon and Dutch men and women are on the same page when it comes to **career goals**: the numbers show hardly any differences between genders and regions.

But there are differences in positions: compared to blue-collar workers, more white-collar workers want to improve their skills and take on more responsibilities. (Table 7) For instance, 67% of executives and senior management aim to become better at their jobs, while only 28% of blue-collar workers do. These same differences also occur when we take into account the qualifications of our respondents.

Table 7: GAINING EXPERTISE AND RESPONSIBILITIES BY FUNCTION (IN %)

Gaining…	Blue-collar worker	Administrative clerk	Middle management	Board / senior management
Expertise	**27,88**	**35,96**	**54,42**	**66,66**
Responsibilities	**16,15**	**15,58**	**31,15**	**59,26**

When it comes to **career orientation**, there are also differences between positions. (Table 8) For example, blue-collar workers (42%) are most inclined towards job orientation, and a focus on career and vocation is more prominent among senior management and executive employees. Although the fact that employees in higher positions also prioritize job orientation (37%), puts things into perspective.

Table 8: CAREER ORIENTATIONS BY FUNCTION (IN %)

	Blue-collar worker	Administrative clerk	Middle management	Board / senior management
Job	**42,04**	**35,05**	**34,04**	**37,04**
Career	**19,25**	**16,96**	**19,61**	**27,78**
Vocation	**21,46**	**19,18**	**21,73**	**35,19**

What about differences between age groups?

In general: the older the employees, the less they feel like taking on more responsibility. Most people want to improve their skills up until the age of 45. Once they are past that mark, the desire fades (table 9). Young people are facing longer careers, and that is precisely why they may be eager to grow and move up.

Taking a closer look at career orientations, it is striking that the younger age group (18-25) scores higher on all three: they consider 'job' and 'career' and 'vocation' more important than the older age groups (table 10). As such, they seem more willing to work harder, although they may expect that will land them a better position.

Table 9: GAINING EXPERTISE AND RESPONSIBILITY BY AGE (IN %)

Gaining in...	18-25y	26-35y	36-45y	46-55y	+55y
Expertise	**40,00**	**42,69**	**45,88**	**36,41**	**39,10**
Responsibility	**33,69**	**28,37**	**26,37**	**15,79**	**22,23**

Table 10: CAREER ORIENTATIONS BY AGE (IN %)

	18-25y	26-35y	36-45y	46-55y	+55y
Job	**42,10**	**34,51**	**35,99**	**36,85**	**34,85**
Career	**32,63**	**26,02**	**21,16**	**12,50**	**13,88**
Vocation	**30,53**	**15,79**	**25,28**	**19,30**	**22,10**

WHO IS THE MOST SUCCESSFUL?

If we compare the findings on career goals to those on career success from the first chapter of this research paper, some interesting facts emerge.

1. Objective career success & goals

Employees who state that they work to build a career or fulfill a vocation, score a lot higher on the status index for objective career success - they are therefore more likely to be authorized to delegate work, lead and have more project responsibility. People with lower scores on objective career success, often focus only on doing their job. (Table 11)

Table 11: CAREER ORIENTATIONS BY STATUS INDEX OBJECTIVE SUCCESS (IN %)

	Low	Moderate	High	Very high
Job	**37,85**	**37,47**	**31,12**	**35,11**
Career	**13,55**	**20,46**	**18,21**	**30,14**
Vocation	**16,79**	**20,75**	**22,52**	**30,85**

2. Subjective career success & goals

It turns out that some dimensions of subjective career success are more often linked to specific orientations. (Figure 16)

- For those who focus mainly on executing a job, financial security and work-life balance are most important.
- Those who focus on their career prioritize learning and development, making a positive impact, entrepreneurship, and financial success. Bonus: many respondents say they have achieved that financial success.
- Those who treat their job as a vocation mainly value a good work-life balance, a positive impact, as well as learning and development. They are also more likely to have achieved the latter in their career.

Figure 16: CAREER ORIENTATIONS AND SUBJECTIVE SUCCESS

Job	Career	Calling
Financial security	Financial success (reached)	Work-life balance
Work-life balance	Learning & development	Positive impact
	Positive impact	Learning & development (reached)

WHAT ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY?

Having a clear goal in mind is one thing, but what about the sustainability of your career? Are you automatically happier if you pursue a vocation in your professional day job? Are you mentally healthier if you just focus on doing your job? Or are you perhaps more employable if you do everything with your career in mind? To find out, we zoom in on mental health, employability, and job satisfaction, and we look at how satisfied employees are overall.

ZOOM 1

In short: employees who pursue a vocation score better on mental health, job satisfaction, and employability.

- If your work is your vocation, you would – on average – rank your own **mental health** higher than when you identify with 'job' or 'career': 3.47 out of 5 versus 2.75. Among employees who say their mental health is 'not good at all', the highest score comes from those with a pure job focus: 3.95 out of 5.
- The same applies to **job satisfaction**: those who work with a certain vocation are significantly happier than those who are focused purely on a job or career. The scores were 4.34 versus 3.13 and 3.92 out of 5, respectively.
- Employees looking to build a career or pursue a calling also consider themselves more **employable** than others.

ZOOM 2

Overall, how satisfied are people now with their careers?

More than one in three employees with a vocation focus are very satisfied. Of those with a career focus, it is only one in four. Employees with a pure job focus are the least happy, with 47.35% showing the lowest satisfaction score.

And yet, career satisfaction among respondents with a focus on 'career' or 'vocation' is not on the high side anyway. Possibly it is harder for them to achieve this, or they keep wanting more, in case they mainly focus on a 'career'. Research shows that people with very strong vocations sometimes have trouble living up to them. Or their bar is set much higher, making satisfaction harder to achieve.

To recap: career goals

As far as career goals go, four things stand out:

1. More expertise over responsibility

To perceive a career as successful, career goals and orientations are crucial. Our research shows that most employees simply want to get better at their jobs: they want to deepen and develop their expertise rather than crave more responsibility. This conclusion fits the shift in focus among many employees perfectly: they increasingly consider subjective career success (meaningful and impactful work) more important than objective accomplishments (promotions and growing wages).

2. Job, vocation, or career?

Some employees think of their day job as a career or even a vocation. And yet, the majority of people simply tick 'job' when you ask them about their career orientation. For them, work is not a purpose as such, but a transaction - a means of earning money, for example, with which they give meaning to their lives outside work.

But the story is less clear-cut than it seems. If we dig a little deeper into the results, it turns out that people do not necessarily choose one orientation, but rather a mix: they obviously want to earn money doing their job, but they may also want to have a career or pursue their vocation at the same time - anything goes. Moreover, it also depends on the type of position a person holds, or the degree they have in their pocket.

3. Blue-collar workers have less sustainable careers

White-collar workers want to grow their expertise more often than their blue-collar counterparts. Executives and senior managers also tick off 'vocation' and 'career' more often in terms of orientation. For them, objective career success is more often just around the corner.

Blue-collar workers also gravitate more towards 'job' as their primary career orientation, which affects their career's sustainability. Their mental health, job satisfaction, internal employability (the 3 indicators of a sustainable career), and their overall career satisfaction are lower, compared to the other two career orientations.

CONCLUSION: HOW TO ACHIEVE SUCCESSFUL CAREERS?

FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

Everyone wants a successful career, that much is clear. But each of us defines the word 'successful' differently. On the one hand, through objective 'hard' measures (for example salary and promotions), and on the other, through subjective 'soft' measures (for instance: impact and meaning). And people also do their job from a certain perspective that determines how they experience it day to day but also influences their organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and performance. And that approach can change several times during their careers.

So how do you approach that reality?

#1: Believe the clichés (but not all of them)

Those who have a higher degree and hold a higher position are more likely to get promoted and earn higher wages: in our research, this cliché remains intact. But the cliché that everyone can walk the same smooth path towards success (see research paper 3 on proactive behavior) is a lot further from reality. After all, most employees see work as a means to an end, not an end in itself. So a job can simply be what it is: a job.

#2: Emphasize sustainability

This paper leaves no doubt: people are united in their desire for financial security - it is a basic need that is crucial if one is to experience a successful career. Other than that, they aim for a healthy work-life balance, positive working relationships, learning and development, and making a positive impact. The order of these dimensions is almost universal and hardly differs for different demographics. That, too, aligns with international scientific research.

#3: Focus more on subjective dimensions of success

Blue-collar workers are mostly in it for the money, while white-collar workers are always on the lookout for meaningful work: another cliché that is hard to shake. However, reality is a lot more nuanced: both groups do care about the two types of career success. The difference lies in the degree of accessibility: not everyone can benefit from all dimensions with as much ease. Making sure subjective and objective career elements blend in seamlessly: it's the key challenge for policymakers, employers, HR, and career coaches.

#4: Give blue-collars a boost

Blue-collar workers do not get promoted as often, generally have lower salaries, and are as a result less often perceived as 'successful' in their careers - by themselves and others.

Because they also shift more towards the 'job' orientation than others, they risk ending up in a vicious circle that undermines the sustainability of their careers. Because for those who focus strongly on 'job', both mental health, job satisfaction, internal employability, and overall career satisfaction are lower.

Just as in research paper 1, we argue in favor of a more inclusive career policy for all job groups on the labor market and encourage blue-collar workers to be given a nudge in the right direction.

#5: Give women equal pay (at last)

Good news on the gender front: women are as likely to be promoted as men, and they score just as high on all subjective success factors. In terms of career goals and orientations, there is no difference either, so there seems to be increasing gender equality. But appearances can be deceiving, as women still get lower salaries. There is an urgent need for a catch-up, if they are to achieve as much objective career success.

"When I was 5 years old, my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down "happy." They told me I didn't understand the assignment, and I told them they didn't understand life."

- John Lennon

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