

Success at work requires hope and the ability to engage in an optimistic attitude

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Abstract

As working life is changing fast at the moment, new studies on psychosocial dimensions of work are needed to improve efficiency, productivity, and well-being in workplaces. This was a qualitative study employing a mixed-methods approach to study enterprise personnel's perceptions of success at work. Leaders and supervisors (N=15) in a northern Finnish mid-size enterprise were interviewed personally about how they understand success and the related factors. The data were complemented by open-ended questionnaires filled out by employees (N=29) of the enterprise. The data collection took place in 2014. The purpose was to find the key elements of success when analysed from a positive psychological viewpoint. The findings provide information about the means to promote productivity, well-being, and sense of meaning at work. Changes in work appeared the most important factor influencing success at work in the target enterprise. The attitude to and coping with changes were analysed through reported experiences. The analysis showed that to be successful, learning of new methods and positive attitudes at work are crucial.

Keywords: success at work; well-being; productivity; engagement; hope.

Introduction

Success was once defined as the fullest expression of mastery (Krueger 1990). People can achieve success in many areas of life, and work is one of these areas. But what do we talk about when we talk about success at work? The traditional understanding, presented frequently in the media, may include features such as power, leadership position, and high income. However, success at work can also be described differently. It can consist of expertise, competence, and successes that come from intrinsic motivation and interest in one's work (Uusiautti 2008; Uusiautti and Määttä 2015b). From this perspective, success is merely an employee's inner feeling, a very positive feeling.

When an employee becomes riveted by work and senses the greatest self-fulfillment, work provides the state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 2008), and work engagement and joy of work (Carver & Scheier, 2005; Hakanen, Perhoniemi & Toppinen-Tanner 2008). Intrinsic motivation is crucial as well when defining success from this positive perspective (Deci & Ryan 2008). The concept of competence (e.g., Kanfer & Ackerman 2005) is closely connected with motivation and performance at work. The path from a (maximal) performance at work to work competence illustrates a learning mechanism connected with work-related experiences that increase competence (see Stoltenberg 2005).

Overall, performing well at work, work motivation, work drive, and competence form a complex network of elements that all contribute to success at work (Uusiautti 2008). When this equation is added with the ever-changing work life, success can also necessitate quite a special kind of competence: the competence to face new challenges at work (Carver & Scheier 2005). According to Carver and Scheier (2005), this means that employees should be equipped with understanding of their own capability to reach new goals, address various challenges and opportunities. Success therefore means self-reflection as well; in other words, familiarisation with one's abilities, strengths, and weaknesses (see e.g., Linley, Willars & Biswas-Diener 2010).

I have defined the concept of a worker's personal success at work as the combination of three elements (Uusiautti 2013). First of all, success at work depends on certain individual features (such as competence, motivation, ability to select positive strategies) and on the context-bound features (such as opportunities and restrictions, expectations, and obligations). Secondly, success requires positively-focused proactivity at work: success does not happen without action. This kind of action consists of seizing opportunities, employing one's strengths, and pursuing personal development. Finally, success is manifested as a sense of meaningful doing, productivity, and perceived well-being at work (see also Uusiautti & Määttä 2015a). My previous studies among Finnish top workers (see e.g., Uusiautti 2008; Uusiautti & Määttä 2015b) confirmed that the positive experience of work is one of the most essential dimensions of success (cf. also Liden, Wayne & Sparrowe 2000), even though the outer features of work: the working conditions, should not be underestimated.

From the viewpoint of developing work, it is important to share experiences that show positive development, efficiency, productivity, and well-being (Alasoini 2015; Totterdill 2015). Although Alasoini (2015) points out that all local practices and experiences cannot be transferred as such from workplace to another, we still can learn about the success factors that are found in various work contexts. At its best, the improved understanding of realities at workplaces and organizations can be turned

into new designs of workplace structures and practices (see e.g., Johnsen 2015; Ramstad 2014). As mentioned, in the study at hand, the change in work brings an especially interesting viewpoint to the definition and manifestation of success. Therefore, it is relevant to discuss the chance of maintaining positive experience at work in these demanding situations (see also Twenge & Campbell 2013).

One of the recent career theories is Spencer G. Niles et al.'s (see Niles 2011; Niles, Amundson & Neault 2011) career flow theory, which can help analysing the 21st century's rapidly changing work life from an employee's perspective, especially if we want to understand how they not only cope with changes and challenges at work but also maintain their productivity and succeed at work. The Hope-Centered Model of Career Development (HCMCD) is based on six core concepts that are hope, self-reflection, self-clarity, visioning, goal-setting and planning, and implementing and adapting. Niles (2011, 175) explains that hope is needed to believe that one can manage any career flow experience effectively. The second concept, self-reflection, is necessary to understand a certain career flow experience accurately, while self-clarity is required to understand the personal and environmental resources necessary for coping effectively with the challenges encountered. In this model, visioning, goal setting, and planning are required tasks for imagining a successful outcome and identifying strategies for achieving it. However, successful outcome will not happen if the strategies are not implemented and adapted.

Actually, hope is an important human strength (see Seligman et al. 2005), which can be the key feature of those employees finding success at work. Hope differs from optimism, which means merely aptitude to wait for the best or good to happen. Optimism can be defined an important element of hope. It is important to understand that realistic, positive expectations are closely connected with the evaluations of the efficiency of one's own action. When this idea is contrasted with success at work, hope is especially important from the perspective of achieving goals, making plans about the future, and coping with various event in life, especially the negative ones. Positive expectations partly depend on the hopeful attitude.

Niles et al.'s theory is not the only one including hope and optimism to human beings' ability to cope in various areas of their lives. Also Snyder (2002) defines the skills of self-motivation and reaching goals with the concept of hope. In his theory, hope is defined as a positive motivational state that is based on the interaction between goals, planned actions, and agency (see also Snyder, Irving and Anderson 1991). Snyder (2002) has found that hope is connected with better performances and outcomes in academic skills, sports, physical health, and psychological adjustment to changing life situations. The concept of hope is interesting here because it can explain employees' abilities to survive in the riptide of modern work life. In addition, the idea of hope at work complements earlier theories, such as Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy or Mitchell's (1997) theory of work motivation, that have, for their part, helped explain the phenomenon of performance and success at work.

The purpose of this study is to describe success at work from the viewpoints of leaders and supervisors, as well as employees of the target enterprise participating in this study. Two research questions were set for this study:

- (1) How do the leaders and supervisors, and employees perceive success at work?
- (2) How do the leaders and supervisors, and employees describe factors that enhance success and well-being at work?

This part of the study leans on the earlier theoretical illustration of success at work (Uusiautti 2008; 2013; Uusiautti & Määttä 2015b) complemented with Niles et al.'s (2009) hope theory. The aim is to find out how similar or different these groups' opinions on success and its prerequisites are, and how to enhance productivity and well-being in enterprises, based on the findings of this study.

Method

This study employed a multi method approach that combined qualitative research methods within one study (Ivankova, Creswell & Stick 2006; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004). This kind of approach was considered the best, as the purpose was to obtain personal experiences and perceptions and analyse them qualitatively (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil 2002). The participants represent both leaders and supervisors, and employees of the target enterprise, and the combination of multi methods happened in the data collection phase: the leaders and supervisors were interviewed while employees participated by filling out an open-ended questionnaire.

The study was conducted in a mid-size banking enterprise located in northern Finland. The bank is a co-operative bank (quite similar to NCB in the USA), which is a part of a larger parent company in Finland. These independent subsidiaries are owned by their customers, and each bank operates in their own local market areas. The target enterprise of this study operates in the area of the province of Lapland with rough 180,000 inhabitants (1.98 pop per km²) in its 21 counties. It comprises 12 offices and is a very significant employer and provider of financing services in Lapland.

In addition to the chief executive officer, the enterprise has bank managers with their own areas of responsibility and offices across Lapland. The enterprise has about 130 employees in these banking services, financing, investments and legal advice. The services also include insurance products. Furthermore, the bank has a subsidiary, an estate agent company that has 12 agents as employees, who were also included in this study. The values of the target enterprise, as stated in their mission statement, are "reliable northern-Finnish bank, ringside expert, and enabler of success". These ambitious goals are realised in the wide, sparsely-populated area of Finnish Lapland above the Arctic Circle.

The data collection took place in 2014. First, the leaders and supervisors were interviewed with the qualitative themed interview method. This method was chosen because in this study, the participants were seen as subjects whose perceptions and experiences should be obtained. Themed interviews allow participants to express these in their own words, and interviews usually have the form of a conversation. The form and order of questions can vary, but each theme is discussed in every interview (Creswell 2009). In this study, the themes were mainly theory based: (1) the definition of success, (2) well-being and factors enhancing success at work, and (3) leadership practices that can enhance success and well-being and perception of oneself as a leader.

All leaders and supervisors were asked to participate in the study. Of 20 leaders and supervisors, 15 agreed (8 women and 7 men). They were personally interviewed at the main office in Rovaniemi or in offices located across Lapland. All interviews were recorded. The interviews provided useful information about the enterprise as a work place, basic function of each unit and office, and leadership principles and practices in the enterprise. I also received information about success factors and definitions as

well as possible problems and challenges. This knowledge was used when designing employee questionnaires.

The questionnaire addressed all employees of the enterprise. The purpose was to find out their perceptions and experiences of the themes. The qualitative questionnaire method was chosen because the number of employees was relatively high. The questionnaire included 12 questions about themes of, for example, challenges and changes at work, work motivation, leadership practices, and work atmosphere. All employees (N=118) were emailed the request to participate in November 3, 2014. They could return the questionnaire by email or anonymously by regular mail. The deadline for replies was continued twice so that the final deadline was December 19, 2014. Only 29 employees (23 women, 6 men) participated. However, the questionnaire data appeared rich and useful. In addition, the participants represented relatively well the personnel of the company when compared the proportion of women and men, their age, and years of service. In December 2014, the whole personnel consisted of 82.4 % women and 17.2% men, while in this study women formed 79.3% and men 20.7% of participants. In the whole personnel, the average age of women was 46.1 years and men 41.1 years while in these data, women were 45.9 years and men 37.4 years.

Although the sets of data form a relatively small quantity of data, it is worth noticing that the study pursued understanding the specific workplace reality and learn from those functional practices and experiences that could be drawn from this specific case. For example, what kind of teamwork or decision-making structures appear relevant for the success in the context of the target enterprise (cf. e.g., Alasoini, Ramstad, Heikkilä, & Ylöstalo 2010). Enterprises and organisations with similar features may find the practical descriptions and findings useful when contemplating their own areas of development and chances of dealing successfully with the changing work. The advantage of qualitative studies like the one in hand is that it brings out the personnel's voices and experiences, and thus, can get deeper in the workplace reality than, for example, large surveys would do (see also deMarrais 2004).

The qualitative content analysis method was employed for data analyses (Mayring 2000). In this study, the data collection was led by theoretical framework, and therefore, also the data were initially analysed with these theoretical concepts, that formed categories for the initial analysis. However, the items in categories were found with data-based analyses because the purpose was to find factors that emerge from data. Both sets of data were analysed with the same principles. After this coding, the researcher can proceed to interpretations. The purpose of content analysis is to form a description of the target phenomenon in a general and concise form (Creswell 2009).

The analyses thus started by writing transcripts of the interview data and combining the questionnaire data into an electronic form. Excerpts of the data are included in Results sections. To ensure anonymity, no identification codes are used in interviews, because it would be relatively easy to identify each participant in such a small group of leaders and supervisors. Interview data quoted in the article are referred simply with L/S (= leaders / supervisors). The employees in questionnaire data were given random codes. For example, the code "Q1" refers to the participant number 1 in the questionnaire data.

Next, I will discuss the reliability of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) distinguish four criteria that help in assessing qualitative research. They are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (see also Shenton 2004). Credibility in this study was secured by selecting well-known research methods that were also previously familiar to the researcher. In addition, careful familiarisation with the target company was necessary in the form of meetings with the CEO and the enterprise contact person nominated for the study. On the other hand, the phenomenon under study was extremely familiar to the researcher, which made the designing and execution of the study fluent. A third way to improve credibility is related to participant selection. In this study, the goal was to recruit all leaders and supervisors, and employees, but, as any research involves, the participants are entitled to decline or draw from the study at any phase.

Transferability means the evaluation of how well the study can be transferred to another context. Qualitative research is always very context-bound, which makes this criterion difficult to assess. However, careful descriptions of research methods, participant selection, data collection and analyses help the task. Likewise, the description of the study context is crucial, in this case, especially the understanding of the location of the enterprise as well as the special nature of the co-operative banking. Thirdly, dependability assesses to what extent, the same methods used in the same conditions and with same participants can reach the same research results. The researcher's influence on data collection and interpretations can be critically viewed. Confirmability relates to objectivity. Like dependability, also confirmability can be improved with rigorous description of study procedures and solutions as well as reflection on the researcher's position and preconceptions. Here, my background with research on success has directed the selection of theme and theoretical viewpoints, and analyses as well. On the other hand, this knowledge combined with earlier research experience with workers from various fields may have provided with insight on the phenomena taking place at workplaces. The strong interest in positive development and possibilities of positive action is the fundamental basis of the study.

Results

Success as an outcome

First, success was described as a particular outcome that included three elements: sales, customer satisfaction, and quality of work. Nowadays, work at banking is directed by various goals for outcomes. Therefore, it was quite natural that the participants of this study mentioned first various goals as the definition of success. Success was, in other words, considered as the achievement of a certain goal:

“Pretty much you measure it [success] with the sales figures. - - So, it is the economic and sales success quite much in this business, it is a really important part of it.” (L/S)

“Sales” was the word to describe success. However, the bank has also units or departments that do not have sales but outcomes are measured differently (e.g., debt collection) or administrative services within the bank. Frequently, their success can be perceived as well-functioning operations and as the part of the entity of a bank:

“We have enormously information about our performance that we have to look at and analyse all the time.” (L/S)

In addition to achievements of goals, customer satisfaction was mentioned as an important criterion of success. Seven leaders and supervisors described how a bank cannot succeed without its customers' success:

“Customer satisfaction has to remain good. - - I certainly consider it very important that customer feedback would be good.” (L/S)

Customer satisfaction was described not only as their satisfaction with services provided by the bank but also as the manifestation of work quality and productivity. In sum, customer satisfaction tells about success also when evaluating work quality:

“We have to aim to an outcome that satisfies the bank and the customer. - - If you think of a successful outcome, it is mutual satisfaction.” (L/S)

Success as a positive and efficient process

Despite successful outcomes, a true success involves a positive process that takes place before the outcome is reached. When success is perceived as a process, efficient and quality work methods become part of the definition of success. Furthermore, they can be analysed from a singular employee's point of view as well as from the work unit's point of view, especially the nature of co-operation between co-workers. Next, I will introduce the promoters of the success process based on the leaders' and supervisors' interviews and employees' questionnaire data.

Adjustment to changes

Modern work involves numerous changes, and banking has not avoided them either, quite the contrary. Work in Finnish banks has changed, from traditional cash and loan services to sales of various products and services. Employees are expected to contact customers and make them aware of new services; the sales of these services are directed by clear numeric goals.

Naturally, changes are a natural part of work, but often they are confronted with quite contradictory feelings and resistance (see e.g., Bunce & West 1994; Cascio 2013). Resistance for change can slow down adjustment and learning but, on the other hand, it is also a sign of caring whereas the lack of resistance can tell about indifference (Torppa 2012). In this study, many supervisors discussed profoundly how they could ensure that employees would face the changes positively and efficiently (cf. Twenge & Campbell 2013), and learn from their experiences (see also Billett 2004). They described their experiences of difficult change processes. From their perspective, it was the most crucial to be able to find such tasks for each employee that suited their skills the best: if this kind of planning was possible in the situation. Often, the

supervisors thought that reason for incongruity between employees' skills and tasks was the change in banking business. Eight supervisors described how employees had come to work in quite a different task in the bank:

“If you think about people who have come here 20-30 years ago. They did not come here to be salespersons. - - If you were not sales-oriented then, you will not automatically be like that now.” (L/S)

“It was probably still the 1970s—we have people who came here already then—that we recruited good girls with nice handwriting. But this is not what we expect in banking anymore, but you have to have those sales skills.” (L/S)

Employees in any field are expected to adjust to changes, keep up with the changes, and develop according to the new requirements (see e.g., Carver & Scheier 2005; Torppa 2012). Certainly, the supervisors admitted that the nature of work in banking has changed so drastically that it would almost necessitate a change in an employee's personality. However, the supervisors' opinions differed: while some emphasised employees' opportunities to adjust and learn new methods and attitudes, others questioned the chance of changing personality or whether it can be even expected. Even if changes were not always perceived fair or something employees could influence themselves, resistance would not be the answer. According to the supervisors, changes were an inevitable part of work:

“Work is painful sometimes. Waking up is painful. Everyone has trouble at home at some point too. - - At work, you have to face [the changes] without blaming your supervisor or employer for it.” (L/S)

However, most supervisors were optimistic about their employees' willingness and ability to learn and develop. They found it the most important to believe that you can cope with changes. Still, changes require hard work and willingness to challenge oneself at work. These situations were challenging the supervisors as well. Changes can be defined a sort of surf of one's career flow (see Niles 2011) that necessitate willingness to change and adjust but, more importantly, an optimistic attitude and hopefulness as described by one of the supervisors:

“You have to be ready and, on the other hand, bold to seize [them]. Indeed, this is a business where you have to educate yourself widely and extensively. There have been changes, and there will be changes.” (L/S)

The changing work was expressed quite systematically in the employees' questionnaires as well. According to their evaluations (N=9), the most challenging situations at work were changes, adjusting to them and being updated. Employees described changes and related challenges in various ways:

“Increasing changes (work methods, guidelines, demands, applications) are challenging.” (Q28)

76% of employees reported that the content of their work had changed a lot or extremely lot. Three ways of perceiving changes could be distinguished: (1) changes are opportunities, acceptable and even positive; (2) changes are inevitable, adjustment is the core; and (3) changes are clearly negatively experienced. Surprisingly, almost half of the participants (N=13) had perceived changes positively because they had led to better work methods, increased diversity of work tasks, and especially opportunities to develop as a worker. These employees appeared as active and ready to seize changes and even develop the content of their work. According to Niles, Amundson, and Neault (2009) this kind of attitude illustrates hopefulness at work, making active action possible so that employees keep believing in their opportunities to find and use positive strategies in changing situations:

“[Changes have required] in-service training and your own enthusiasm to seize new things.” (Q26)

Ten employees described changes as merely inevitable, but their attitude was also fundamentally positive and based on their own flexibility. Although the attitude to changes was more moderate than in the first group, it still seemed to support a positive image of oneself as a worker. Changes may not always be desired but coped with, also in the future:

“For me, it has required keeping up with changes. You take what you get. Sometimes you do it with ‘a little whining’ but mostly with a positive attitude.” (Q9)

All employees did not find changes good, but had had negative experiences. It could be interpreted that changes were perceived undesired because of their dramatic influence on the contents of work, or the way the changes were introduced in the workplace. In both occasions, the message is that employees’ voices have not been heard (see e.g., Dhondt & Van Hootegem 2015) and taken into account in the management of change (e.g., Luomala 2008). Although the ability to adjust to changes varies by person, positive attitudes can be enhanced by adopting a dialogue-based approach to management that emphasizes co-creation of solutions rather than dictation (Alasoini 2011).

Right person in right place—using one’s strengths at work

Overall, adjustment to changes at work greatly depends on how employees experience their abilities to respond to the new contents of their work. Changes can necessitate learning of new areas of work that employees may have not had to know before. The extent employees can develop, experience successes, and feel competent, is the sum of developmental opportunities and personal willingness to learn, adjust, and develop at work. In this connection, leaders and supervisors referred to successful selection of

employees: it was natural to assess that finding a right person to a right place was an important success factor not only for employees' personal success but also for the success of the whole company. Eight supervisors emphasised their ability to match persons with new tasks. In addition, twelve supervisors described the phenomenon from a negative perspective; as the lack of compatibility of tasks and employees. Therefore, practically all supervisors emphasised the fit either based on their positive or negative experiences, or both:

"We do it completely so that we use each employee's strengths and distribute work according to them." (L/S)

This viewpoint is important, and shows the connection with success as a process; being able to use one's strengths at work makes working seem meaningful. It also boosts engagement, satisfaction, and motivation at work (Stairs & Galpin 2013). Employees who use their strengths are likely to experience successes at work and are highly intrinsically motivated (see also Uusiautti 2008). These successes are important to the success process, because they produce joy of work, and strengthen the sense of capability and competence. This, on the other hand, leads to efficient and productive working, and makes it possible to reach success as an outcome. One of the supervisors stated quite felicitously:

"Surprisingly enough, those successes are rewarding in our work as well." (L/S)

The employees were asked what kind of strengths they perceived in themselves as workers. Their basic description was "diligent, conscientious, and thorough" as stated by 12 participants. These are characteristics that are typical of bank employees. Six employees mentioned customer service skills while only four mentioned sales skills and goal-orientation.

However, their most important strengths were long experience in banking, and commitment to one's work. They were mentioned by 14 employees. Moreover, ten described flexibility and collaboration skills as their strengths. These strengths illustrate well also the making of the participants: many of them had already long careers behind them in this workplace which also tells about commitment and experience. Flexibility and adaptability referred to this engagement, too, but also included the change that had taken place in banking work:

"I am committed and responsible – I have long work experience and I support newly recruited employees when they learn about their jobs." (Q28)

Deficient skills, unfitness with the task, and lack of experiences of success were described in leaders' and supervisors' interviews as the true problems inhibiting success at work. Decrease in motivation was manifested as unwillingness to take new tasks, dissatisfaction, and inability to co-operate with others even if the employee was otherwise a good worker:

“The work contents or tasks should be designed so that they produce successes to these people. I feel that some of them has the experience of never succeeding in their tasks. It is discouraging, and they are not bad employees.” (L/S)

In the questionnaire data, most of the employees (N=18) described whether they have a chance to use their strengths at work or not. The majority of them (N=15) stated that they could. Positive experience can occur when employees’ strengths match the employer’s expectations:

“In my opinion, I am flexible and I also consider my employer flexible. So, it is easy to face the challenges set by work tasks and show my strengths.” (Q15)

Some of the supervisors mentioned that, more often than not, employees tended to problematise their tasks too much. They could see the expertise and talents in employees, if they just had the courage to use their skills widely. Those employees who took new challenges open-mindedly had the chance to see the opportunity to use their strengths in new ways.

Atmosphere and collaboration in the work unit

Both the supervisors and leaders and employees emphasised the importance of good and supportive atmosphere and positive collaboration at work as the prerequisite of success. Nine of the supervisors talked about the good practices and mutual collaboration in their work units. On the other hand, four supervisors mentioned problems and competition among employees. Therefore, the phenomenon became described both from negative and positive viewpoints:

“Surely, it is important to keep up this good spirit at the unit as it provides the joy of work and that we can together cheer the good performances. - - So, that everyone would understand that we are doing more when we do it together; that together we are more productive than alone.” (L/S)

Likewise, employees in the questionnaire wrote about synergic strength, but also brought out how collaboration was not always unproblematic. The atmosphere could turn negative if the rules of collaboration are unclear. For example, competition over sales can lead to various interpretations of the foundations of collaboration. It was interesting to notice that the employees (N=20) described problems in collaboration and negative atmosphere when they were asked to evaluate their work units and atmosphere. However, when they were asked to describe the importance of mutual support and encouragement between co-workers, most of the participants (N=22) described the indisputable significance of the support and positive, open-minded collaboration in teams and work units:

“Lately, some people in our unit have expressed their dissatisfaction which influences the whole team. The team spirit has suffered from the negative atmosphere and collaboration has stepped aside from competition between co-workers.” (Q6)

In addition to competition, differences in measurements of performances could cause envy or other problems. As mentioned earlier, not all employees had clear numeric goals, which meant that their good performance could remain unnoticed if only the achievement of goals were followed. Even if you knew that you had worked well, and even if you understood the meaning of your work in the wider sense, you could have a feeling of being ignored or not appreciated due to the lack of clear goals. Those employees (N=9) who described the joy of working together and supportive atmosphere understood the importance of collaboration for reaching goals or working successfully otherwise. In addition, they mentioned the influence on well-being at work and coping:

“The good feeling of working and everyone is bearing their responsibility.” (Q18)

“The outcome tells the success in numbers but the work atmosphere tells even more.” (Q21)

75 % of employees agreed that colleagues’ support mattered for their own performances and success at work. This viewpoint was explained with various ways from benefitting each other’s areas of expertise to mutual spurring and feedback as well as positive attitude to work in general:

“Very important! In a good, goal-oriented, and positive team you perform also personally well!” (Q9)

Also those employees whose work did not have measurable goals had noticed the importance of support and good atmosphere:

“I do not have personal goals or means to measure my performances. The role of my own team is however big for me being able to do my job successfully.” (Q19)

The supervisors in this study also had noticed the employees’ responsibility to create and nurture good atmosphere:

“I argue that those people who have the courage can look in the mirror and ask themselves how I can influence this atmosphere. So, it starts by changing one’s own attitude.” (L/S)

Self-development and development of work

One of the special features supporting the process of success was development in employees themselves and the development of work methods and contents. The emphasis was greatly on the former because the change in banking business was reported to require plenty of ability and willingness to develop from employees. Most of the supervisors reported that they had developmental discussions with their employees on a monthly basis. These meetings helped to recognise employees' strengths and weaknesses:

“We have had development in this team that people have already started, or left their comfort zones, to learn new things. And there is lots of development in this team. - - These younger people who are still enthusiastic; they are happy to learn. - - They have plenty of potential left. - - Then there are these older people who have worked in this bank for a long time. - - I think they have potential too, and if they find it in themselves, they can develop.” (L/S)

In the questionnaire, employees were asked to describe how they developed or would like to develop their work methods, or whether they thought that they were supposed to develop work in the first place. Their expectations could be divided roughly in four categories. Ten of the employees described their own willingness to develop and advance their careers. Their answers illustrated a very active work attitude and future orientation:

“I expect to develop as a banking expert and to have more responsibility as a customer responsibility person. In the future, I would be interested in a possible supervisor position.” (Q22)

The second group (N=7) had a more moderate attitude toward the future. Their expectations were merely focused on life within the changes at work and coping with them. These answers did not emphasise their own activity in development, or any ideas of enhancing their careers:

“I take what I get. I have seen already so many ‘winds of change’ that nothing surprises me.” (Q23)

Seven employees reported that their work would stay the same. Their current expectation was to have the ability to do their work well in the future, and that their work would remain suitable and pleasant to them. When comparing to the earlier category, these employees did not mention the changes in their work:

“The ideal situation: I would have time to take care of the customers well. - - Nowadays, I do not have enough time.” (Q13)

“My expectation is that my work and work environment would stay meaningful” (Q9)

The remaining five employees said that they did not have any expectations concerning their work. Some of them were already close to their retirement age but some also referred to the current situation at work:

“I do not have any expectations. The prevailing atmosphere does not give any reason to cherish expectations.” (Q28)

One way of interpreting employees' expectations was to read their ideas about how to develop their work. The main impression was their uncertainty whether they are even supposed to develop their work, which is, from the viewpoint of workplace development, surprising or downright alarming (see e.g., Dhondt & Van Hootegem 2015). When connected with success, it is worth mentioning that development of work methods and contents was also perceived salient by the Finnish top workers (e.g., Uusiautti 2008; Uusiautti & Määttä 2015b). In this study, eight employees reported they should, while seven employees disagreed. The rest of the participants did not take a stand. Altogether about a half of the participants (N=14) compared development of work with reaching the goals. Therefore, developmental expectations were, in their opinion, targeted at their possibilities to develop as workers to reach the goals, and not so much to develop their work methods or contents. Encouragement to adopt a developing attitude at work did not appear in employees' answers, but they described goal achievement instead:

“Supervisors expect plenty of development and achievements from us, in other words, sales, sales. Our work methods have been actively developed in good and also in bad directions. The goal seems to be merely outcomes rather than well-being at work. I would like to develop work toward collaboration, not just individual performances, which does not motivate us in the long run.” (Q6)

“Perhaps, we have forgotten own thinking and own doing. - - We do not have this systematic development. - - There is not this culture that we would expect employees to develop their own work.” (L/S)

Leadership as a part of the success process

Success in enterprises and organisations always requires leadership and management. It has also been proven that top managers' leadership styles affect widely their companies' innovation capability (see e.g., Jung, Chow & Wu 2003). In the target enterprise of this study, the idea of coaching leadership was adopted as the main leadership ideology. Some of the interviewees did mention it as an important means behind success. However, supervisors' opinions did differ from each other, but mainly these differences could be explained by their leadership styles and differences between the units or offices they supervised. In general, coaching was seen to support

employees' development as workers (see also Grant & Spence 2013), as it appeared to be an important tool to teach and learn about sales skills:

“The immediate supervisor’s role in sales, sales coaching is incredibly important. And quite often the problem we have perhaps is that we use the same template to everyone when aiming at success. When there are many paths to reach it.” (L/S)

Employees were also asked to describe how the supervisors could best enhance their success, and what kind of leadership practices they perceived as the most positive and beneficial. The most important means to support employees' success as described by the participants (N=10) was the supervisor's expertise and substantial knowledge. The employees reported that they expected their supervisors to have wide knowledge and expertise, so that they could help employees in problem situations and self-development:

“A great person. The supervisor has been doing these grass-root tasks and thus understands us employees and knows what we do. The supervisor can guide, keep us up-dated.” (Q3)

Seven employees described the supervisor as an enabler and creator of benign working conditions. According to the participants, this was an important factor in success. Instead of supervisors' substantial knowledge, these participants highlighted the supervisors' abilities to pay attention to best work methods and work atmosphere, notice employees' suggestions, and take care of employees' in-service education:

“The supervisor has created such work conditions that I find it easy and fluent to do my job.” (Q4)

According to the employees, other good and efficient leadership practices were positive feedback (N=6) and support and spurring (N=5). Employees would like to get more positive feedback after accomplishments and good performances and through coaching. The supervisor's spurring was considered especially important when the supervisor's expertise was not considered as high as the employee's own, but was described as presence and aspiration to understand the employees' work in general. According to the employees' answers (N=20), they received most of their feedback at work from their supervisors. Positive feedback was perceived as supportive and important for work motivation:

“My supervisor gives me feedback. Positive feedback encourages and help you cope during bad times as well.” (Q1)

Furthermore, the employees appreciated the supervisor's knowledge of the work in practice. This was closely related to the supervisor's substance knowledge and

expertise. Indeed, the current viewpoint of workplace development principles includes that co-operation between leaders and employees is important because open interaction create shared understanding of the state in the workplace (see Alasoini 2015). Support from this kind of supervisor who is aware of the work reality also from the employee's point of view was concrete and beneficial:

“What is especially good in my supervisor is the expertise and ability to help in problems when necessary.” (Q22)

In sum, employees expected the supervisors to have balance between human management skills and strong substantial knowledge. The same appeared in the supervisors' interviews as they reported how they were balancing between these two dimensions trying to find the golden mid-way. The success of leadership and the coaching ideology described by the supervisors requires an open and unreserved relationship between supervisors and employees—“management as a shared activity” as Alasoini (2015, p. 44) puts it.

“If there is something, act immediately; can we talk right now? I think we have open and good relationships. They do not have to worry whether they could dare to come to say something or whether some issue is too a minor matter.” (L/S)

Summary of results

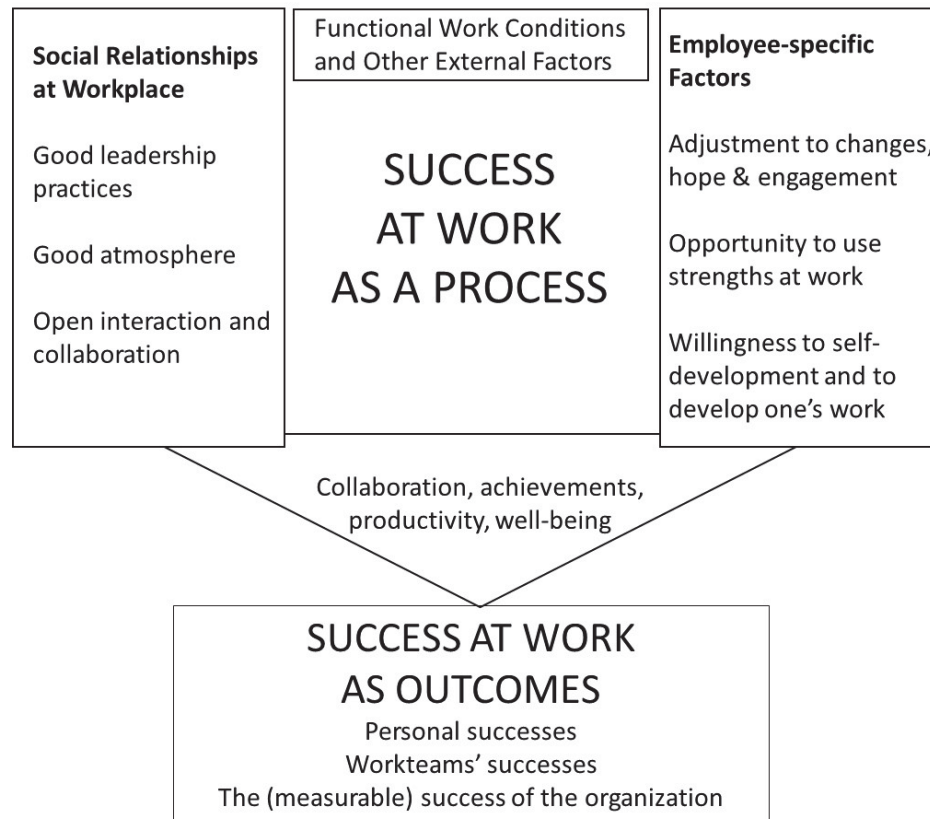


Figure 1: Success at work as a process and as outcomes

I have illustrated the findings in Figure 1, which combines the elements of success and shows their interconnectedness. Although the role of work conditions (e.g., workplace premises, equipment, etc.) did not get a big role in this study, they certainly influence the success process. Based on the findings from this research, other factors influencing the process included social relationships at workplace and, then again, employee-specific factors. Social relationships cover elements such as good leadership practices, positive feedback and support, good work atmosphere and open interaction and collaboration. The latter was pronounced by both leaders and supervisors, and employees of the target enterprise. The individual employee brings in the process his or her ability to adjust to changes at work. What is crucial, however, is that the employees can use their strengths at work; this influence also their engagement and willingness to develop themselves and their work.

When the process is good, positive action and phenomena occur, such as collaboration, achievements, productivity, and well-being, leading to the success at work as outcomes. Outcomes cover not only employees' personal successes, but those of work teams as well, and finally, the measurable success of the organisation these people work for. This is how people are the keys to success.

Discussion

As the results suggested, success at work in the target enterprise was defined not only as the successful outcome of reaching goals, but also as a successful process. This process was profoundly determined by the recent changes having taken place in banking business, changing the daily work of the employees dramatically. Actually, the case of this target enterprise was not particularly unusual since the same kind of changes have been ongoing in the banking field in Finland in general. However, it seemed that the northern location of the bank probably influenced on the employees' and leaders' success in many ways. On the one hand, the special features of Lapland and the pursuit of providing well-being and serving people in remote areas made leaders and employees feel proud of their work—they were coping with the challenges the sparse population, harsh climate, and long distances presented to their work. Actually, the positive sense of finding one's work meaningful and enjoyable is the cornerstone of success as well (Achor 2010). On the other hand, these challenged their success, and sometimes, reaching the basic level and goals in sales and customer service seemed overwhelming. In order to keep up with the modernization and digitalization development, in other words the efficiency pressures in the banking field, the nature of daily work had to be changed and was still changing, which necessitated prompt action and boldness from leaders and supervisors, and positive learning abilities from employees, as well.

Hope is manifested in success at work as a positive attitude, and active dealing with problem situations. The phenomenon entails that challenges and adversities are merely considered as chances and opportunities for learning (see also Uusiautti 2008). Perseverance in these situations appears as willpower but also as attitude: successful employees think that they can solve the situations, learn new skills and knowledge when needed, and make positive progress. Hope as a part of success at work as was discovered among top workers (see Uusiautti 2016), therefore, appears at least as (1) the ability to seize challenges and daring to indulge in one's work; (2) being prepared to work hard and finding pleasure from accomplishing the most tedious parts of one's work; (3) believing in oneself and one's accomplishments (see also Maddux 2002); and (4) searching for meaning and finding hope at work. All this means that today's employees have to be ready to engage in continuous professional development, which means life-long learning at work (see e.g., Hemmington 1999). However, this engagement is not likely to be successful without an optimistic attitude that opens mind for new perspectives, new work methods, and development.

Multidimensional positive experiences at work enhance people's productivity, engagement, problem-solving skills, and well-being (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes 2003; see also Hakanen, Perhoniemi & Toppinen-Tanner 2008; Stairs & Galpin 2013). This finding should not be underestimated as today's work and organisational psychological research connects well-being at work as a crucial element of productivity (Ramstad 2014; see also e.g., Syväjärvi et al. 2012). According to Perttula (2011), every employee should aim at as good being at work as possible: being at work can be both negative and positive, but not limited to just well-being. Perttula (2011) also connected being at work with the sense of meaning at work. Both meaning and well-being are personal evaluations that are based on each employee's personal experiences. However, their importance should be better recognised from the perspective of success at work (see also Uusiautti 2015; Uusiautti & Määttä 2015a, 2015b). The study at hand showed that success at work is more than finding meaning,

more than using one's strengths, more than reaching goals and performing well, and more than being optimistic. Success at work includes all of them, as well as the active willingness to develop and learn within the new demands of ever-changing work life.

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