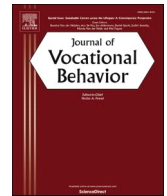




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Career transitions and career success from a lifespan developmental perspective: A 15-year longitudinal study

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ABSTRACT

We draw on the conservation of resources theory to examine how upward and horizontal career transitions contribute to both objective and subjective career success among a longitudinal sample, covering the first 10 to 15 years of their career. Further, we adopt socioemotional-selective theory to investigate how upward and horizontal career transitions contribute differently to career success from a lifespan perspective. Latent growth curve analysis revealed that increases in upward and horizontal career transitions over time were positively related to increases in objective career success and positively related to subjective career success. As expected, the positive effect of horizontal transitions on objective career success was stronger for younger individuals. Contrary to our expectations, upward transitions had a stronger effect on the objective career success of older individuals. We found no age effects on subjective career success. This study helps to further our understanding of how different types of career movements contribute to career success, and the types of transitions that are important for individuals of different ages.

1. Introduction

In the modern career landscape, characterized by being more boundaryless and self-directed (Arthur & Rousseau, 2001; Sullivan, 1999), career transitions, defined as career moves from one position to another, have become a more prominent part of individuals working life (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2019). Structural changes within organizations have led to fewer opportunities for vertical advancement, and individuals are increasingly building their careers by moving horizontally to obtain their career goals (Baruch, 2004b; Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). Concurrently, the attitudes of individuals towards their careers have changed, and they are now to a greater extent seeking work that is personally meaningful to them by choosing horizontal transitions in order to fulfil their career goals and personal needs (Shockley et al., 2016).

Despite evidence of changes in career patterns in recent decades (Chudzikowski, 2012; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), the main research focus in the field of careers is still on vertical mobility. Only a few studies have examined other types of transitions, such as horizontal transitions (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2019). Previous research has also often combined different types of transitions into an overall boundaryless concept (e.g., Colakoglu, 2011; Gerli et al., 2015), however, by distinguishing between different types of transitions, we can gain a better understanding of how each career transition uniquely contributes to career success (Guan et al., 2019; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Calls have thus been made for research that examines the effect of different types of career transitions (Guan et al.,

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2019; Inkson et al., 2012; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2019). In response to such calls, the first aim of this study is to examine the effect of career transitions in the vertical (upward) and the horizontal dimensions (job function) for both objective and subjective career success, using a longitudinal dataset of business school students, covering the first 15 years of their career.

We drew on the conservation of resource theory (COR; Hobfoll et al., 2018) when building our hypotheses, to explain how career transitions may affect objective and subjective career success through a resource accumulation process. COR theory was originally developed as a theory to explain stress, but it is increasingly used as a motivational theory, including within the field of careers (Haenggli & Hirschi, 2020; Spurk et al., 2019). In a nutshell, COR theory argues that individuals are motivated to protect and gain resources that help them achieve valuable outcomes (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Because career success can be considered a valuable outcome in itself, COR theory is a useful framework to explain the antecedents of both objective and subjective career success (Spurk et al., 2019). Accordingly, in alignment with COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), we suggest that career transitions can be considered a resource investment process that may help individuals to achieve success in their careers.

The importance of lifespan perspectives within the field of careers has been widely acknowledged, as age and careers are both long-term processes that develop over time (Zacher & Froidevaux, 2021), but there is a lack of theorization and empirical studies on how career transitions affect career success across the lifespan (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2019). Historically, career development has largely been explained using the career stage model, which proposes that individuals progress linearly through different career stages, with different responsibilities and challenges associated with each stage (Gunz et al., 2007; Super, 1980). Although Super's (1957) theory of career stages has provided useful insights into different needs and behavior associated with various stages, such models have largely been replaced by lifespan theories (Nagy et al., 2019; Zacher & Froidevaux, 2021). Indeed, while the "traditional" career context may have been characterized by linear transitions, the "new" career context has been argued to be more dynamic, complex, and fragmented (Arthur et al., 2005; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Calls have thus been made for more dynamic approaches when studying careers, and in particular, approaches that examine how resources accumulate over time and transfer throughout the lifespan (Spurk et al., 2019; Zacher & Froidevaux, 2021). In response to such calls, we examine how resource accumulation associated with upward and horizontal career transitions affects individuals' career success differently depending on age among early and mid-career individuals. Because COR theory does not explain how resources may contribute to valuable outcomes (e.g., career success) differentially across age, we adopt SST theory, a lifespan theory of motivation (Carstensen et al., 1999), which has been useful to explain how motivation for resource accumulation changes throughout life (Carstensen, 1995; Jung & Takeuchi, 2018). This theory may therefore be appropriate for explaining how age may moderate the relationship between career transitions and career success, because career transitions can be associated with different types and levels of resources (Chudzikowski, 2012; Rigotti et al., 2014).

We aim to contribute to the career literature in three ways. First, we contribute by improving our understanding of the effect of upward and horizontal career transitions for both objective and subjective career success. Previous research has mainly examined the effect of career transitions for objective career success, which limits our understanding of the experience of career transitions (Chen et al., 2011). Career scholars have emphasized the importance of clearly distinguishing between objective and subjective career success in hypotheses development, due to the conceptual and theoretical differences between the constructs (Briscoe et al., 2021; Spurk et al., 2019). Examining both objective and subjective career success is therefore important, since career transitions may relate differentially to objective and subjective career success (Ng et al., 2005; Spurk et al., 2019).

Secondly, by integrating COR and SST (Carstensen, 1992; Hobfoll et al., 2018), we aim to increase our knowledge of how career transitions contribute to career success through a resource accumulation process, and whether individuals at different ages benefit differentially from engaging in upward and horizontal career transitions. In this context, a lifespan perspective can help us to identify the opportunities that individuals are motivated to engage in at different ages, and how such opportunities transfer into career success among individuals during early and mid-career (Zacher & Froidevaux, 2021).

Thirdly, by employing longitudinal data and using latent growth curve analysis, we aim to advance current knowledge by examining how increases in career transitions over time may predict objective and subjective career success. It is of essence to incorporate the element of "time" within the field of careers (Mayrhofer & Gunz, 2019), because careers are defined as "the evolving sequence of a person's work experience over time" (Arthur et al., 1989, p. 8), and should be measured "as they are" (Vinkenburg & Weber, 2012, p. 602).

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. Career transitions

Career transitions involve job changes from one position to another throughout an individual's career (Gunz et al., 2007; Nicholson & West, 1988; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2019). Nicholson and West (1988) suggested that individuals could transition across three dimensions: vertical (upward, lateral, downward), functional (horizontal) and organization (same or changed). We chose to focus on upward and horizontal transitions in the current study, given their relevance for both objective and subjective career success. Upward transitions are defined as an increase in responsibility and status for business school graduates (Nicholson & West, 1988). We operationalize this concept as an increase in the number of subordinates. Career transitions across the horizontal dimension refer to changes in job function, division or department with a similar amount of subordinates (Nicholson & West, 1988; Schein, 1971). For example, moving from the sales to the purchase department, changing from road to construction engineering, or from academia to consulting, is defined as a change in job function. Horizontal and upward transitions can be made within or across organizations, industries, and countries (Ng et al., 2007; Nicholson & West, 1988).

2.2. Career success

Career success has been a vital research topic within the field of careers, given its importance for both individuals and organizations (Spurk et al., 2019). Career success has been defined as “the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person's work experiences over time” (Arthur et al., 2005, p. 179). Career success has usually been divided into objective and subjective factors, the former referring to outcomes that can be evaluated by others (e.g., level of salaries), and the latter referring to an individual's perception and experience of obtaining personally meaningful career outcomes (Briscoe et al., 2021; Spurk et al., 2019). Traditionally, career success was mainly measured through objective factors, however, a shift has occurred in recent decades, towards measuring both objective and subjective career success (Dries, 2019).

2.3. Upward transitions and objective career success

We draw on COR theory when developing our hypotheses, to explain the relationship between career transitions and objective and subjective career success. The theory argues that individuals strive to obtain and protect those resources that are of value to them (Hobfoll et al., 2018). *The resource investment principle* suggests that resource investment is necessary to achieve desirable outcomes, such as career success (Halbesleben et al., 2014). By investing resources (e.g., moving upward), individuals may thus obtain knowledge, skills and abilities, which, in turn, are rewarded in the career contest (Ng et al., 2005). Research has found that upward transitions contribute to career advancement (Chen et al., 2011; Guan et al., 2019). For example, using a survival analysis among 760 managers, Chen et al. (2011) found that the rate of career advancement positively affected salary growth. We thus hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1a. An increase in the slope of upward transitions is positively related to an increase in the slope of objective career success over time.

Further, we argue that growth in upward transitions can help individuals to reach personally meaningful career goals through resource accumulation (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Spurk et al., 2019). COR theory is a useful framework to explain resource accumulation processes towards subjective career success because it emphasizes that resources can be found within the person (Halbesleben et al., 2014), such as “feelings that I am accomplishing my goals” and “feeling that I am successful” (Hobfoll, 2001). Since upward moves are associated with greater financial resources and status (Ng et al., 2007), they may enhance feelings of accomplishment in goals related to salary progression and advancement (Judge et al., 1995; Stumpf & Tymon, 2012), which are among the most important factors that individuals consider when evaluating their success (Briscoe et al., 2021). Based on the above discussion and in alignment with COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), we suggest that accumulating upward transitions provides individuals with career-related resources that facilitate positive perceptions of career success. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1b. An increase in the slope of upward transitions is positively related to subjective career success.

2.4. Horizontal career transitions and objective career success

Building on COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), we propose that the accumulation of horizontal career transitions contributes to obtaining objective career success. First, through accumulating diverse functional experience, individuals can develop a broad set of skills and adaptability, which may be valuable resources in the modern career context (Nelissen et al., 2017; Rudolph et al., 2017). Such resources indicate an individual's productivity and abilities to current and future employers (Ng & Feldman, 2014a). While little research attention has been paid to horizontal transitions (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2019), the few existing studies indicate that horizontal movements contribute to objective career success. For example, Murrell et al. (1996) examined career transitions among MBA students and found that those who made more frequent horizontal moves were more likely to be promoted in the future. Accordingly, individuals with diverse functional experience may be rewarded in the career contest because employers may be more willing to retain such employees (Strober, 1990; Sturman et al., 2008). Given this reasoning, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2a. An increase in the slope of horizontal transitions is positively related to an increase in the slope of objective career success over time.

2.5. Horizontal transitions and subjective career success

For subjective career success, we propose that horizontal transitions can provide individuals with resources that may contribute to the attainment of personally meaningful career goals. One reason horizontal transitions have the potential to contribute to subjective career success is that they can facilitate growth and development (Baruch, 2003; Hall, 2002), which are important criteria for subjective career success (Briscoe et al., 2021; Dries et al., 2008; Shockley et al., 2016). Horizontal moves can be developmental because they provide individuals with new work experience and opportunities to learn new skills (McCauley et al., 1989; McCauley et al., 1994). Changes in work roles can also improve person-environment fit (Singh & Greenhaus, 2004; Tims et al., 2016), which is important for achieving subjective criteria of success (Ballout, 2007; Carstens et al., 2021; Tsabari et al., 2005). We therefore expect that the accumulation of horizontal transitions should contribute to the subjective evaluation of one's career success.

Hypothesis 2b. An increase in the slope of horizontal transitions is positively related to subjective career success.

2.6. The moderating role of age in the relationship between career transitions and objective career success

We draw upon SST theory (Carstensen, 1992), a lifespan theory of motivation, to understand how career transitions contribute to career success from a lifespan perspective. The theory has been useful to explain how motivation for resource accumulation and emotional experience changes with age (Jung & Takeuchi, 2018). The theory postulates that age-related changes in time perceptions elicit changes in behavioral goal orientation. Specifically, when time is perceived as long and open-ended (as is often the case for younger individuals), individuals have greater motivation to resource gains (Carstensen, 1995). For example, younger individuals are more motivated to expand their horizons, acquire knowledge, strive for achievement in occupational settings and develop skills that will benefit them in the future (Carstensen et al., 2003; Fung et al., 2001). Conversely, as individuals become older, “they realize that time in a sense, is ‘running out’, and begin to focus on the present as opposed to the future” (Carstensen et al., 2003, p. 107). Accordingly, goals related to emotional meaningfulness become more salient with increased age (Carstensen et al., 1999; Hicks et al., 2012).

Building upon SST (Carstensen, 1992), we suggest that upward and horizontal career transitions will have a stronger effect on the objective career success of younger individuals. “Because knowledge striving is so important from late adolescence to middle adulthood, it is pursued relentlessly even at the cost of emotional satisfaction” (Carstensen et al., 2003, p. 107). As such, when individuals are younger, they might be more willing to make personal sacrifices to obtain career success because of their goal orientation to accumulate knowledge. In turn, such ambition to accumulate resources might affect salary negotiations (Lam et al., 2012). Younger individuals should also be more likely to seek out opportunities in their pursuit of resource accumulation, which may increase their employability (Nelissen et al., 2017). Accordingly, younger individuals at the early career stages might be offered more attractive salaries because employers perceive them as having greater future potential (Lam et al., 2012; Lawrence, 1984). Indeed, empirical evidence shows that managers rate younger employees as more employable, which in turn positively affects their career success (Van der Heijden et al., 2009).

Another reason horizontal and upward transitions might have a stronger effect on career success for younger individuals is that individuals who are younger and earlier in their career are more likely to be in positions with a lower pay scale (Goldberg et al., 2004). Conversely, as individuals age, they are usually higher in rank and salary level. Making career transitions might therefore lead to lower increases in salary levels as individuals grow older. Although there is little research into age-related differences regarding the effect of career transitions on objective career success, current evidence suggests that career transitions may be more beneficial for younger individuals earlier in their careers. For example, Lam et al. (2012) examined whether the relationship between inter-organizational career transitions and salary level was equally strong across career stages. Their results showed that such transitions had the strongest effect on early-career employees. Groot and Verberne (1997) found that the decline in job mobility with age was simultaneously related to a reduction in salary levels. We thus hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3a. The positive relationship between an increase in the slope of upward transitions and an increase in the slope of objective career success is moderated by age, such that the relationship is stronger for younger individuals.

Hypothesis 3b. The positive relationship between an increase in the slope of horizontal transitions and an increase in the slope of objective career success is moderated by age, such that the relationship is stronger for younger individuals.

2.7. The moderating role of age in the relationship between career transitions and subjective career success

Because subjective career success involves an individual's evaluation of obtaining personally meaningful career goals (Briscoe et al., 2021; Spurk et al., 2019), it is reasonable to assume that goals that are perceived as meaningful may change across the lifespan. In alignment with SST (Carstensen, 1992), when individuals perceive future time as open-ended, they focus on goals that may improve their future. Making upward and horizontal transitions could therefore have a stronger effect on subjective career success for younger individuals because the resources associated with such transitions (e.g., knowledge, experience) are more in alignment with their goal orientation (Jung & Takeuchi, 2018). According to Abele and Spurk (2009), upward transitions should be more strongly related to the subjective evaluation of success for younger individuals because they have fewer criteria for evaluating their career success. In addition, as individuals age, they become more committed to their line of work (Katz et al., 2019), less open to experience (Schwaba et al., 2018) and prioritize job stability (Lam et al., 2012), which suggests that horizontal transitions might be perceived as less meaningful career goals with increased age. As individuals become older and perceive their future time as more limited, upward and horizontal transitions might contribute less to the subjective evaluation of career success because they “do not waste time on gradually diminishing future payoffs” (Carstensen et al., 1999, p. 165). Instead, their goal orientation gradually shifts towards pursuing emotionally meaningful goals, such as prioritizing close relationships (Hicks et al., 2012). Supporting this, Kooij et al. (2011) found that motivation for career advancement and financial resources decreased, while motivation for job enjoyment increased as individuals grow older. We therefore suggest that upward and horizontal transitions will have a stronger effect on subjective career success for younger individuals. Consequently, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4a. The positive relationship between an increase in the slope of upward transitions and subjective career success is moderated by age, such that the relationship is stronger for younger individuals.

Hypothesis 4b. The positive relationship between an increase in the slope of horizontal transitions and subjective career success is moderated by age, such that the relationship is stronger for younger individuals.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and procedure

This study is a part of a longitudinal career project (see Table 1), which started in 2005 with the approval of Norwegian Data Security (Datatilsynet and Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste, NSD). Data collection began in 2006–2010, at Time 1 (T1), where one cohort of business school students was assessed each year (five cohorts in total). Data collection was conducted when they were enrolled at the business school. Information about personality and background was obtained at T1. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary, and that the project had obtained ethical approval. At T1 (2006–2010) 5234 students participated. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 63 years, with an average age of 24.7 years, and 56 % were females.

Only the last two cohorts were invited to participate (2009–2010) at Time 2 (T2, 2012), because the project leader went abroad. In total, 915 individuals responded at T2 (18%). Their ages ranged from 22 to 70 years, with an average age of 29.6 years. At Time 3 (T3, 2017), all five cohorts (2006–2010) were invited to participate, and 1221 responses were obtained from the five cohorts (23 %). The average age at T3 was 33 years, ranging from 26 to 74 years. All five cohorts were again invited to participate at Time 4 (T4, 2021). The final sample consisted of 323 participants (7 %). Their ages ranged from 31 to 79 years, with an average of 37 years and 57 % were females. We were only able to contact most participants through their student email (when they were enrolled at the business school), which might explain the high dropout of participants.

We conducted several analyses to examine whether attrition resulted in demographic differences in our sample. We created dummy variables to classify participants based on their participation. Group 1 represents those who participated only at T1, Group 2 those who participated at T1 and T2, Group 3 represents those who participated at T1, T2 and T3, and Group 4 those who participated at all-time points. First, we analysed the variance (ANOVA) to examine whether these groups differed in our T1 demographic variables (age and gender). The results from ANOVA showed no significant difference between groups in terms of gender. There were significant age differences between the groups, however, such that those who participated at all-time points were two years younger on average compared to those who participated at T2 and T3 ($F = 6.13, p < .001$). Next, we examined whether there were group differences across the measures of salary level from T2 to T4. Specifically, we examined whether Groups 2, 3 and 4 differed on salary level at T2, and whether Groups 3 and 4 differed on salary level at T3. No significant differences were found for salary level at T2 or at T3. These results suggest that attrition does not appear to create considerable bias in this study.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Career transitions

A career history technique was developed for this study at T4, to measure career transitions, consistently with previous research that examined career movements (e.g., Colakoglu, 2011). Participants were asked a series of questions related to their career movements from their first job after graduation until the present day. For each career transition, participants were asked whether the movement involved a change in job function (i.e., horizontal transition) or whether it involved an increase in their number of subordinates (upward transition). The accumulation of both upward and horizontal career transitions over the course of the study was coded into three variables (three for upward, three for horizontal), so that they would match the timeframe of our repeated measures (i.e., salary level). Career transitions at T2 thus represent the accumulation of transitions from the first job after graduation until 2012 (T1–T2), career transitions at T3 represent the accumulation of transitions from 2013 until 2017 (T2–T3), and career transitions at T4 represent the accumulation of transitions from 2018 to 2021 (T3–T4).

Table 1
Timeline of measures among the cohorts.

	Cohorts	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
T1 (2006–2010)	Gender	x	x	x	x	x
	Socioeconomic status	x	x	x	x	x
	Conscientiousness	x	x	x	x	x
	Extraversion	x	x	x	x	x
	Emotional stability	x	x	x	x	x
T2 (2012)	Upward transitions				x	x
	Horizontal transitions				x	x
	External transitions				x	x
	Salary level				x	x
T3 (2017)	Upward transitions	x	x	x	x	x
	Horizontal transitions	x	x	x	x	x
	Salary level	x	x	x	x	x
	External transitions	x	x	x	x	x
T4 (2021)	Upward transitions	x	x	x	x	x
	Horizontal transitions	x	x	x	x	x
	External transitions	x	x	x	x	x
	Salary level	x	x	x	x	x
	Subjective career success	x	x	x	x	x

3.2.2. Age

In alignment with previous research on lifespan development, we treated age as a continuous variable (Kooij et al., 2013; Kooij & Zacher, 2016). According to SST theory, treating age as a continuous variable is important because a lifespan perspective considers lifespan development as flexible and continuous, rather than occurring in discrete stages (Nagy et al., 2019). Age was measured according to year born. We used age at T2 in the moderation analysis because we examined changes in salary level from T2 to T4. Because our sample mainly consisted of early and mid-career individuals, we examine how age (as a continuous variable) moderates the relationship between career transitions and career success among early and mid-career individuals.

3.2.3. Control variables

We decided to control for gender, socioeconomic status, personality, and external transitions in the analysis. First, gender is important in the context of career success because men and women experience their careers differently (Ng et al., 2005). Research shows that men have greater objective career success compared to women, and greater motivation to obtain objective criteria of success (Carlson & Swartz, 1988; Frear et al., 2019; Judge et al., 1995). The opposite relationship has been found for subjective career success, however, where women perceive themselves as more successful than men (Judge et al., 1995; Orser & Leck, 2010). One explanation for this is that women have lower expectations regarding career progression (Judge et al., 1995). Gender was coded as 1 = Female, 2 = Male.

Secondly, socioeconomic status is important in the context of career success, because individuals with higher socioeconomic status have access to more resources, which is important for success (Hu et al., 2022). Socioeconomic status was measured by yearly family income (1 = Less than 300,000 NOK, 2 = 301–780,000 NOK, 3 = 781,000 NOK or higher).

Thirdly, we controlled for personality traits, since personality is a predictor of objective and subjective career success (Ng et al., 2005; Ng & Feldman, 2014b; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001). We chose the personality traits that have been found to have the strongest effect on career success: conscientiousness, extraversion, and emotional stability (Brown & Hirschi, 2013; Ng et al., 2005; Ng & Feldman, 2014b). For example, research shows that conscientiousness is positively related to salary level (Sutin et al., 2009), occupational status (Kranefeld & Blickle, 2021) and subjective career success (Ng & Feldman, 2014b). Individuals who are outgoing and energetic are also more likely to be promoted, because such attributes are important for succeeding in a leadership role (Judge et al., 2002; Ng et al., 2005). Emotional stability has also been found to predict both subjective and objective career success (Rode et al., 2008). Extraversion, conscientiousness and emotional stability were measured using the Norwegian version of NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Martinsen et al., 2003) at T1.

Finally, we controlled for the accumulation of external career transitions, because research has found that career transitions across organizations lead to higher levels of career success (Amuedo-Dorantes & Serrano-Padial, 2007; Chudzikowski, 2012; Lam et al., 2012; Sturman et al., 2008). As for our other career transition variables, external transitions were coded into three variables (external transitions T2, T3 and T4). We created a growth curve of external transitions, and the slope was controlled for in the analysis. Finally, age was included as a covariate in all Latent growth curve analysis.

3.2.4. Subjective career success

In line with previous research (e.g. Colakoglu, 2011; Seibert et al., 1999; Spurk et al., 2016; Zacher, 2014), subjective career success was measured using the career satisfaction scale (Greenhaus et al., 1990), which is one of the most commonly applied measures of subjective career success (Ng et al., 2005; Ng & Feldman, 2014b; Zhou et al., 2013). The scale includes five items (e.g., “I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career” and “I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards my goals for development of new skills”), evaluated on a 5-point scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Subjective career success was measured at T4 (2021).

3.2.5. Objective career success

We measured objective career success using yearly salary level, coded as “1 = 250,000–400,000 NOK”, “2 = 400,001–500,000 NOK”, “3 = 500,001–700,000 NOK” and “4 = 700,001 or higher”. Salary level was measured at T2 (2012), T3 (2017) and T4 (2021) in this study. One NOK is 0.11 US dollars at the current exchange rate (2022).

3.2.6. Statistical analysis

We used latent growth curve analysis (LGCA), and Mplus version 8.3 to analyse the data (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017). LGCA is a useful approach, describing and explaining changes in developmental trajectories (Eggert et al., 2011). Indeed, LGCA is one of the most flexible approaches to study between-person differences in within-person changes (Curran et al., 2010). LGCA allows researchers to examine how individuals change or remain the same over time, and to examine whether different individuals change in different ways (Grimm et al., 2016). Adopting an LGCA approach means we were able to specify a linear growth trajectory for change over time in career transitions, and examine whether growth in career transitions over time predicts growth in objective career success and subjective career success, as well as to examine whether there are age-related differences for these relationships. Another advantage of LGCA is that it accounts for measurement errors. It is therefore possible to estimate unbiased trajectories of change for each participant (Abele & Spurk, 2009). LGCA provides average starting points (i.e., intercepts) and average change rates (i.e., slopes), which are based on the individual growth trajectories of the participants (Duncan et al., 2013).

Latent growth curve (LGC) models are traditionally estimated with fixed time points, however, our dataset included cohorts from 2006 to 2010, and therefore we had “individually varying times of observation”, which refers to circumstances in which individuals participate at different time points. LGCA can deal with individually varying times of observation by using the random option (Liu

Table 2
Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. AgeT2	24.72	6.58																		
2. Gender	1.44	0.50	-0.09**																	
3. EV	55.0	8.71	-0.07**	0.09**																
4. ES	49.0	7.23	-0.10**	-0.19**	-0.34**															
5. CS	53.8	9.58	0.11**	-0.14**	0.30**	-0.35**														
6. SES	2.47	0.58	-0.14**	0.09**	0.08**	-0.09**	-0.02													
7. ExtT2	0.35	0.06	0.19**	-0.13*	0.02	0.05	-0.05	0.00												
8. ExtT3	0.63	0.08	-0.03	-0.11*	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.01	0.06											
9. ExtT4	0.64	0.08	-0.17**	0.08	-0.01	0.01	-0.09	0.04	0.01	0.03										
10. UpT2	0.12	0.38	0.14*	-0.03	0.06	-0.01	-0.07	0.02	0.30**	-0.05	0.07									
11. UpT3	0.22	0.48	0.02	0.01	0.15**	-0.11	0.13*	0.01	0.05	0.42**	0.06	0.04								
12. UpT4	0.26	0.49	-0.11*	0.01	0.02	-0.04	0.05	0.08	-0.09	0.04	0.33**	0.18**	0.18**							
13. HorT2	0.29	0.58	0.21**	0.01	-0.01	-0.04	-0.06	0.05	0.69**	0.02	0.07	0.37**	0.04	-0.00						
14. HorT3	0.61	0.78	-0.04	-0.01	0.06	-0.02	0.05	0.07	0.00	0.57**	0.06	-0.02	0.48**	0.25**	0.09					
15. HorT4	0.65	0.82	-0.12*	0.05	0.01	0.00	-0.00	0.06	-0.01	-0.01	0.62**	0.06	0.09	0.50**	0.13*	0.23**				
16. SalaryT2	1.81	0.99	0.28**	0.20**	0.10*	-0.22**	0.16**	0.10*	-0.01	-0.06	0.05	0.06	0.04	0.02	0.13	-0.03	-0.02			
17. SalaryT3	2.72	0.94	0.13**	0.25**	0.12**	-0.23**	0.16**	0.13**	0.02	-0.01	-0.09	0.02	0.19**	0.06	0.07	0.07	-0.09	0.53**		
18. SalaryT4	3.37	0.71	-0.10	0.31**	0.12*	-0.27**	0.20**	0.19**	-0.08	0.00	0.06	0.03	0.15**	0.23**	0.02	0.14**	0.13*	0.33**	0.65**	
19. SCS	3.89	0.80	-0.10	0.03	0.09	-0.17**	0.13*	0.16**	-0.07	0.15**	0.09	0.06	0.21**	0.25**	0.05	0.29**	0.15**	0.15*	0.34**	0.51**

Note. EV = extraversion, ES = emotional stability, CS = conscientiousness, SES = socioeconomic status, Ext = external transitions, Hor = horizontal transitions, Up = upward transitions, SCS = subjective career success.

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

et al., 2015). In the current study, it was important to take individual varying times of observation into consideration, because the participants graduated at different time points and could therefore have different opportunities to engage in career transitions. In the case of individually varying times of observations, LGC models are estimated with variables that reflect differences in starting points instead of fixed time points. In the current study, we used years since graduation at T2 (2012), T3 (2017) and T4 (2021) to capture variability in starting points. When measurement occasion varies individually, only likelihood based fit statistics and unstandardized path coefficients are provided (Grimm et al., 2016). Model fit was therefore estimated by comparing nested models based on the -2 loglikelihood ($-2LL$), the Bayesian information criteria (BIC) and the Akaike information criteria (AIC). The AIC is equal to $-2LL + 2p$, (p = the number of estimated parameters) and BIC is equal to $-2LL + \ln(N) * p$, (N = the natural log of the sample size). BIC and AIC tend to favour simpler models, with lower values indicating a better fit (Vrieze, 2012). A difference in BIC values over ten is strong evidence in favour of the model with lower values (Kass & Raftery, 1995). Because the career transition variables were skewed, we used the robust maximum likelihood (MLR), which is robust to the non-normality of the variables (Gunzler et al., 2016).

3.3. Missing data analysis

We addressed missing data in our study by applying full information maximum likelihood (FIML), which assumes that the missing values occur randomly (MAR) and involves that all participants are retained in the analysis (Fung et al., 2001). The results from the attrition analysis showed that those who participated at T2 did not differ significantly from those who participated at T3 and T4 on salary level. This indicates that missing values do not depend on the values that are missing. MAR therefore seems to be a reasonable assumption for the data. FIML appeared to be the best solution for handling missing data in our study, because of its ability to estimate non-normal data (Shi et al., 2021). There is an emerging consensus among researchers that FIML is a superior method to deal with missing data in comparison with more strict approaches, such as listwise or pairwise deletion (Cham et al., 2017; Enders & Bandalos, 2001; Johnson & Young, 2011). For example, listwise deletion has been found to produce biased estimates under the MAR assumption (Tsikriktsis, 2005), and is problematic when there are missing observations for many participants (Musil et al., 2002).

4. Results

We present the mean and correlations for the variables in the study in Table 2.

4.1. Model specification

As recommended, we used a stepwise approach to building our LGC models. The first step involves estimating intra-individual change by testing an unconditional latent growth model that fits the intercept and the slope of the repeatedly measured variables (Lance et al., 2000). Accordingly, we modelled unconditional latent growth models for the repeated measures (career transition variables and salary level). Because we were able to demonstrate that our unconditional models had an adequate fit, and significant variability in intercept and slope (except for the intercept of upward transitions), we moved on to the next stage of analysis. This stage involves estimating inter-individual differences in change by adding explanatory variables (Eggert et al., 2011). We thus included the control variables, which were regressed on the intercepts and slopes of the growth curves. Next, the growth curves of the career transitions and objective career success were combined into a model, where the slopes of career transitions were regressed on the slope of objective career success, including the time invariant covariates (one model for horizontal and another for upward transitions). Another model was estimated for subjective career success, which was measured at the last time point. Because LGCs that includes individually varying times of observations are more difficult to estimate, and often lead to difficulties with convergence (Liu et al., 2015), we estimated our models of horizontal and upward transitions separately. The final step involved estimating the interaction between age and the slope of horizontal and upward transitions for objective and subjective career success. All covariates were grand mean centred in the moderation analysis to minimize biases due to multicollinearity (Aiken et al., 1991).

4.2. Unconditional latent growth models

As we had repeated measures at three time points, a linear model was estimated. Given that the slope of our repeated measures was positive, a linear model is also a reasonable option. As recommended, we compared our linear growth models estimated with years since graduation to models with no growth (Grimm et al., 2016). For the three LGC, a linear model resulted in a better fit compared to

Table 3
Model specification and comparison between no growth and a linear model.

Model specification	$-2LL$	Df	AIC	BIC	Adjusted BIC
Upward transitions (no growth)	-602.03	5	1214.06	1233.04	1217.18
Upward transitions (linear growth)	-590.76	8	1197.52	1227.89	1202.51
Horizontal transitions (no growth)	-1087.42	5	2184.84	2203.84	2187.98
Horizontal transitions (linear growth)	-1065.90	8	2147.80	2178.20	2152.82
Level of salary (no growth)	-3196.90	5	6403.80	6431.23	6415.34
Level of salary (linear growth)	-3167.82	8	6351.65	6395.53	6370.12

the no growth model based on lower $-2LL$, BIC and AIC values (see Table 3). Consequently, we can conclude that changes in career transitions and objective career success over the course of our study is reasonably represented by a linear growth model.

The average initial level (intercept) for upward transitions was 0.06 ($p = .68$) and the slope was 0.02 ($p < .001$). Participants therefore did not differ significantly in their starting point of upward transitions, however, there was a significant variability in growth of upward transitions over time. The model of horizontal transitions had an average initial level of 0.12 ($p < .05$) and a slope of 0.04 ($p < .001$). These results indicate that there was significant variability in the average starting point and the growth rate of horizontal transitions. Finally, the initial average level of salary was 1.04 ($p < .001$) and the slope was 0.18 ($p < .001$). The intercept and the slope growth factor for salary level was significantly negatively related ($r = -0.04$, $p < .05$). This indicates that those who had lower initial salary levels, had a steeper growth of salary level (see Table 4).

4.3. Hypotheses testing

First, we tested our hypothesis regarding relations between upward transitions and salary level (see Table 5). As expected, increases in the slope of upward transitions were positively related to increases in the slope of salary level ($B = 1.30$, $p < .01$), providing support for Hypothesis 1a. Participants who made more upward moves thus had a steeper growth curve in salary level. Supporting Hypothesis 1b (see Table 6), the slope of upward moves was also significantly related to subjective career success ($B = 1.95$, $p < .01$). As Table 7 shows, increases in the slope of horizontal transitions were positively related to increases in the slope of salary level ($B = 0.46$, $p < .01$), providing support for Hypothesis 2a. Accordingly, those who had a steeper growth curve in horizontal moves had a steeper growth in salary level over the course of this study. The slope of horizontal moves was also positively related to subjective career success (see Table 8), providing support for Hypothesis 2b ($B = 0.81$, $p < .01$).

Hypothesis 3a predicted that age would moderate the relationship between an increase in upward moves and an increase in salary level, such that the relationship would be stronger among younger individuals (Fig. 1). Contrary to our expectations, age significantly moderated the relationship so that the relationship was stronger for older individuals ($B = 0.09$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 3a was therefore rejected. We found support for Hypothesis 3b, which predicted that the relationship between increases in the slope of horizontal transitions and increases in the slope of salary level was moderated by age, such that the relationship would be stronger for younger individuals ($B = -0.71$, $p < .01$). We found no age effects for the relationship between upward transitions and subjective career success ($p > .05$), or for the relationship between horizontal transitions and subjective career success ($p > .05$). Hypotheses 4a and 4b were therefore not supported.

5. Discussion

The overall aim of this study was to examine how upward and horizontal career transitions may affect objective and subjective career success over time, and the moderating role of age in these relationships. In line with our expectations, we found that increases in upward and horizontal transitions were positively related to increases in objective career success over time, and positively related to subjective career success. Further, increases in horizontal transitions had a stronger effect on the objective career success of younger individuals over time. Contrary to our expectations, we found that upward transitions had a stronger effect on objective career success for older individuals across time. Finally, the results showed that upward and horizontal transitions were equally important for subjective career success across the lifespan. These findings have important implications for career research, which are discussed below.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

Two important conclusions can be drawn from our study. First, our findings indicate that increases in both upward mobility and functional changes over time are important means of reaching objective and subjective career success. Second, the findings indicated that individuals may benefit differently at different ages from moving upwardly and horizontally in their career.

Drawing on COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), we proposed that horizontal and upward career transitions may affect objective career success through a process of resource accumulation. COR theory suggests that individuals need to invest resources to gain desirable outcomes (e.g., career success). By investing resources through accumulating upward and horizontal career transitions over time, individuals have the opportunity to engage in continuous learning, and to gain transferable skills and knowledge (McCauley et al., 1989; Nelissen et al., 2017), which are important to achieve career progression (Ng et al., 2005). Indeed, previous research has

Table 4
Parameter estimates for unconditional latent growth curve models.

Latent growth curves	Intercept		Slope	
	Mean	Variance	Mean	Variance
Horizontal transitions	0.12*	0.02	0.04***	0.00
Upward transitions	0.06	0.01	0.02***	0.00
Objective career success	1.04***	0.94***	0.18***	0.00*

* $p < .05$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 5
Results of LGC regression analysis for upward transitions and salary level.

Predictor variables	Slope of salary level					
	Regression analysis			Regression analysis		
	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	SE	p-Value	β	SE	p-Value
Age	-0.005	0.001	0.000	-0.007	0.001	0.000
Gender	0.002	0.034	0.943	0.015	0.028	0.603
SES	0.005	0.011	0.681	0.002	0.011	0.823
Extraversion	-0.001	0.001	0.207	-0.001	0.001	0.449
Conscientiousness	-0.001	0.001	0.164	-0.001	0.001	0.182
Emotional stability	-0.001	0.001	0.439	0.000	0.001	0.886
External transitions	-0.063	1.18	0.591	-0.057	0.091	0.532
Upward transitions	1.30	0.473	0.008	1.47	0.531	0.006
Moderation analysis						
Upward transitions * age				0.088	0.032	0.005

Note. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. $-2LL = -4601.534$, $df = 55$, $AIC = 9313.068$, $BIC = 9614.149$.

Table 6
Results of LGC regression analysis for upward transitions and subjective career success.

Predictor variables	Subjective career success					
	Regression analysis			Regression analysis		
	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	SE	p-Value	β	SE	p-Value
Age	-0.014	0.009	0.113	-0.018	0.017	0.263
Gender	-0.389	0.384	0.310	-0.372	0.379	0.326
SES	0.087	0.154	0.571	0.070	0.162	0.665
Extraversion	0.002	0.011	0.864	0.004	0.012	0.769
Conscientiousness	-0.009	0.012	0.459	-0.010	0.012	0.428
Emotional stability	-0.015	0.015	0.326	-0.013	0.015	0.403
External transitions	0.838	1.19	0.483	0.754	1.22	0.537
Upward transitions	1.95	0.703	0.005	2.01	0.750	0.007
Moderation analysis						
Upward transitions * age				0.029	0.067	0.662

Note. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. $2LL = -6524.432$, $df = 43$, $AIC = 13,134.864$, $BIC = 13,298.355$.

Table 7
Results of LGC regression analysis for horizontal transitions and salary level.

Predictor variables	Slope of salary level					
	Regression analysis			Regression analysis		
	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	SE	p-Value	β	SE	p-Value
Age	-0.005	0.001	0.000	-0.003	0.001	0.041
Gender	0.013	0.040	0.739	-0.008	0.032	0.810
SES	0.007	0.010	0.509	0.010	0.008	0.246
Extraversion	0.001	0.001	0.116	-0.001	0.001	0.113
Conscientiousness	0.000	0.001	0.660	0.000	0.001	0.182
Emotional stability	-0.001	0.001	0.308	-0.001	0.001	0.157
External transitions	-0.821	1.40	0.558	-0.054	1.09	0.961
Horizontal transitions	0.459	0.169	0.006	0.239	0.146	0.100
Moderation analysis						
Horizontal transitions * age				-0.071	0.024	0.004

Note. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. $2LL = -5085.673$, $df = 55$, $AIC = 10,281.346$, $BIC = 10,582.428$.

found that both upward and horizontal transitions are related to increased knowledge and skills (McCauley et al., 1994). The results from the LGCA supported our hypotheses, as increases in both upward and horizontal career transitions were positively related to increases in objective career success. We also suggested that accumulating upward and horizontal career transitions contributes to obtaining subjective criteria of career success. We proposed that by moving upward, individual's perceptions of progress towards their career goals are increased through a sense of accomplishment regarding financial achievement, advancement, and personal

Table 8
Results of LGC regression analysis for horizontal transitions and subjective career success.

Predictor variables	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	SE	p-Value	β	SE	p-Value
Regression analysis						
Age	-0.015	0.009	0.089	-0.025	0.018	0.177
Gender	-0.173	0.410	0.674	-0.126	0.348	0.716
SES	0.119	0.115	0.301	0.106	0.112	0.342
Extraversion	-0.002	0.008	0.813	-0.001	0.008	0.926
Conscientiousness	0.004	0.008	0.623	0.004	0.007	0.628
Emotional stability	-0.019	0.011	0.072	-0.018	0.010	0.073
External transitions	0.282	1.38	0.839	0.114	1.19	0.924
Horizontal transitions	0.806	0.302	0.008	0.816	0.304	0.007
Moderation analysis						
Horizontal transitions * age				0.025	0.033	0.448

Note. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. 2LL = -7057.428, *df* = 43, AIC = 14,200.856, BIC = 14,364.347.

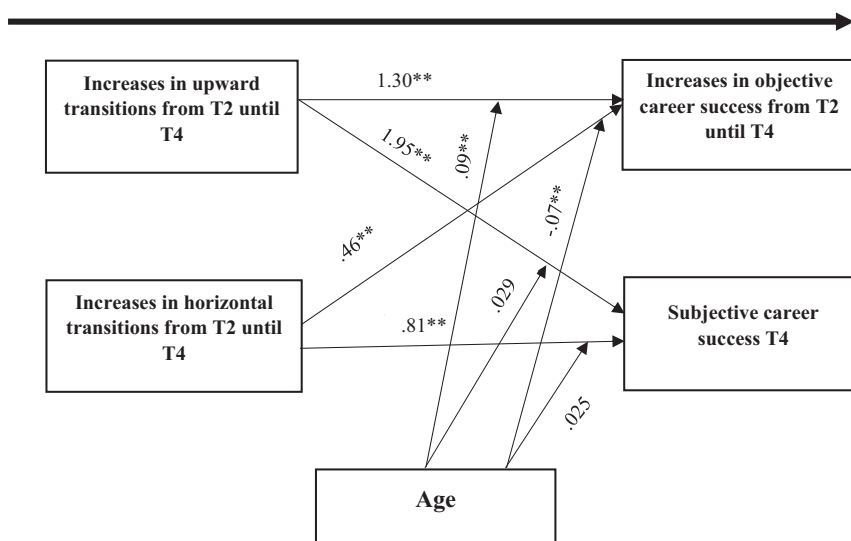


Fig. 1. Empirical results of the hypotheses.

development, which can be considered personal resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Moreover, we suggested that horizontal career transitions can facilitate subjective career success through person-environment fit, and growth and development. In support of our hypotheses, both increases in upward and horizontal career transitions were positively related to subjective career success.

These findings provide evidence for the importance of both upward and horizontal movements in the pursuit of career success. Accordingly, individuals are not only able to obtain success through “traditional” vertical means, but also through horizontal movement. This is important because in the contemporary career context, flatter organizational structures have led to decreased opportunities for vertical movement (Hall, 1996). While many individuals are still pursuing a traditional career (Rodrigues & Guest, 2010), some empirical evidence indicates that individual career patterns have become more complex (Chudzikowski, 2012), where horizontal career transitions have become more prominent (Peiperl & Baruch, 1997; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). In addition, the Norwegian economy does show a trend towards diversification and smaller organizations (Statistics Norway, 2022). Given that little research attention has been paid to horizontal career transitions (Guan et al., 2019), the first contribution of the study is clarifying the roles of upward and horizontal transitions for both objective and subjective career success based on COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018). A limitation with existing research has been that these relationships have mostly been examined cross-sectionally (e.g. Chen et al., 2011; Colakoglu, 2011). Our study goes beyond existing research by adopting a LGCA, which provides stronger evidence for estimating how these relationships relate to each other across time.

The second contribution of the study is the integration of resource accumulations related to career transitions and the lifespan perspective. We applied SST theory to examine how the relationship between career transitions and career success may change across age (Carstensen et al., 1999). As younger individuals are more goal oriented to accumulate resources for the future (Ebner et al., 2006), we suggested that upward and horizontal career transitions would have a stronger effect on the salary progression of younger individuals. As expected, we found that horizontal transitions had a stronger effect on the objective career success of younger individuals. Accordingly, these findings indicate that engaging in diverse experiences is particularly important for the salary progression

of younger individuals. As individuals age, they are often more established within their fields (Goldberg et al., 2004). Making functional changes could therefore be riskier and provide less payoff in their career progression.

Surprisingly, we found that upward transitions had a stronger effect on the objective career success of older individuals. One explanation for this may be that as individuals become more experienced as they grow older, they are more likely to be promoted into leadership positions that provide greater financial rewards (Becker, 1964; Ng et al., 2005). Human capital theory (Becker, 1964) suggests that individual investment in human capital (e.g., work experience, education, number of hours worked) will be rewarded by the labour market. Indeed, the results from the meta-analysis by Ng et al. (2005) showed that human capital, such as work experience and level of education, were among the strongest predictors of objective criteria of career success. It is also important to note that our sample consists of early and mid-career individuals, which might explain the unexpected findings. That is, we might have observed different findings among a more age diverse sample. Future studies should thus compare how these relationships unfold among early, mid-, and late-career workers. Nonetheless, the present study is a step in improving our knowledge of how resources transfer into career success across age (Zacher & Froidevaux, 2021).

Finally, we found no age effect in the relationship between upward and horizontal transitions and subjective career success. Therefore, such findings suggest that both upward and horizontal transitions contribute to obtaining subjective criteria of career success throughout the lifespan. One possible explanation for this may be that upward and horizontal transitions can contribute to different career goals depending on age. For younger individuals, upward or horizontal movement might be important with respect to obtaining financial success and career advancement (Kooij et al., 2011). As individuals grow older, however, they might move to a job that increases their satisfaction in the present (Carstensen et al., 2003). For example, mid-career individuals might pursue horizontal and upward transitions to reach more meaningfulness, and an improved person-job fit (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2019). Accordingly, upward, and horizontal transitions might be important for different subjective criteria for success for individuals at different ages. Here again our sample may be the cause of this result, as it lacked older employees. Thus, future studies could examine whether horizontal and upward transitions contribute to different facets of subjective career success, as well as the reasons for making career transitions at different ages.

5.2. Practical implications

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of horizontal transitions to facilitate future career success. This is important given that organizations are increasingly employing horizontal transitions as a part of their career management (Baruch, 2004b), both to improve learning throughout the organization, as well as to help employees build their career (Bagdadli & Gianecchini, 2019). Although career management has been argued to be primarily the responsibility of the individual (Arthur, 1994), employees still expect the organization to offer them opportunities for career development (Clarke, 2013; De Vos & Dries, 2013). Moreover, upward transitions may not be desirable for all employees, since individuals differ in their motivations for upward mobility (Chan & Drasgow, 2001), and career advancement may not be equally important criteria for all individuals (Heslin, 2005). As such, organizations should be aware of an employee's criteria for their career success, which may involve building their career horizontally.

The findings emphasize the need to incorporate the age of employees into the design of career management. Organizations should be aware of the need that younger employees have to move horizontally in their careers, and offer them internal career opportunities to minimize the risk of losing them to other organizations. Similarly, middle-aged employees might be more likely to pursue their career elsewhere by moving upward. Accordingly, organizations need to be mindful of the different needs employees may have regarding career development across the lifespan.

5.3. Limitations and future research

Although our study provides several theoretical contributions, there are a few limitations that should be noted. First, there was sample attrition, as inevitably occurs in longitudinal research. We were only able to contact participants through the student email addresses they had when they were enrolled at the business school. As time went by, they were probably less likely to use their student emails. As a result, we were only able to invite part of the sample to participate in the follow-up surveys, resulting in large amounts of missing data. The results from the attrition analysis indicated that attrition bias was not a serious concern in our study, however.

Secondly, although we used a longitudinal design, which minimizes concerns about common-method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), our measure of upward and horizontal transitions was collected retrospectively. It therefore might raise concerns about biases in memory (Golden, 1992). Career transitions are significant events in an individual's life, however, and are therefore likely to be accurately recalled and less susceptible to common method bias (Chen et al., 2011). We also tried to minimize recollection bias by asking participants about all previous jobs and the type of changes they made between jobs (instead of asking about overall career moves).

Thirdly, our sample contained graduates from a business school, who were mainly in their early and mid-career stages. This raises questions about whether we would observe similar findings among those working within different job sectors, those who are older, or those who are at a later career stage. For example, it could be that upward movement has a strong effect on objective career success when individuals are in the middle-stages of their career and have obtained resources that are rewarded in the career contest. When individuals become older and reach later stages in their career, they are more likely to experience career plateau (Stout et al., 1988), and could experience diminished returns for moving into leadership positions. We therefore encourage future research to replicate the findings in other industries and among older individuals.

Fourthly, it should be noted that our operationalization of upward transitions may be industry specific. While an upward transition

usually involves changes in the number of subordinates, it is not always the case. For example, in academia, an upward transition from associate professor to full professor involves increases in rank rather than increases in the number of subordinates. However, we argue that our operationalization of upward transition as the number of subordinates is appropriate for individuals working within the context of business.

Beyond replicating the findings among different samples, an interesting avenue for future studies is to examine the effect of other types of career transitions for objective and subjective career success. For example, downward transitions have been suggested as a way to reduce work-related demands and facilitate work-life balance (Baruch, 2004a). Wolf (2019) found that individuals moved downward in their pursuit of a meaningful career that aligns with their goals and values. As such, although downward moves might be considered a step backward in the context of objective career success (Nicholson & West, 1988), such transitions could be positively related to subjective criteria of success, such as improved work-life balance and meaningfulness (Briscoe et al., 2021). Moreover, future studies could examine whether downward moves are more likely at certain ages. In alignment with SST theory (Carstensen et al., 1999), older individuals have greater focus on enjoyment in the present, and emotional satisfaction (Carstensen et al., 2003), which indicates that downward transitions might be perceived more positively by older adults. Conversely, younger individuals may perceive downward transitions as obstacles towards obtaining the necessary resources for their future.

5.4. Conclusions

The current study offers insights, from the perspectives of COR and SST, into how upward and horizontal movement contribute to both objective and subjective career success. While upward mobility is still a relevant means of obtaining career success for many individuals, our findings highlight the importance of reaching career success horizontally. Finally, our results emphasize the importance of examining age as a moderator for the relationship between career transitions and objective career success.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Bryndís D. Steindórsdóttir: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Project administration. **Karin Sanders:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing. **Jan Ketil Arnulf:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing. **Anders Dysvik:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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