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Exploring the "inner compass": How career strivings relate to career self-management and career success

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Abstract

This research investigates the relations between career strivings, career self-management behaviors, and career success. Examining 312 German workers with two measurement waves, Study 1 reveals that career strivings significantly positively relate to engagement in various career behaviors, extending beyond the scope of established motivational variables. Specifically, we observed that self-enhancement strivings correlate with self-promotion activities, self-transcendent strivings with helping behaviors, and personal growth strivings with continuous learning. In Study 2, incorporating three measurement waves and involving 299 German workers, examines how these career strivings differentially relate to objective career success and career satisfaction. Our findings indicate that self-enhancement strivings are associated with higher leadership positions and workplace status, while self-transcendent and personal growth strivings are linked to greater career satisfaction. Additionally, self-enhancement strivings indirectly relate to career satisfaction through increased recognition. In contrast, self-transcendent and personal growth strivings relate to satisfaction through experiences of meaningful work and personal development. This research underscores the significance of career

strivings in influencing career self-management behaviors and success, providing novel insights into the complex interplay between individual aspirations and professional outcomes.

KEYWORDS

career goals, career motivation, career self-management, career strivings, career success

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary career landscape is characterized by rapid changes and increasing uncertainty. According to representative data from workers in Germany (Hinz & Mielke, 2023), over a quarter of employees are actively or occasionally seeking new positions, with one third being open to new career opportunities, marking a significant increase from previous years and underscoring the heightened mobility and readiness for change in today's labor market. This dynamic underscores the salient role of personal values in managing one's career trajectory (Hall et al., 2018). Value-related goals serve as critical anchors and "inner compass," guiding careers in a self-directed manner and giving them direction and meaning (Hall et al., 2018; Savickas, 2013). Such objectives are conceptualized as "strivings," abstract, enduring goals that encapsulate people's aspirational accomplishments and the motives fueling those pursuits (Emmons, 1986). Career strivings thus represent the persistent, value-based objectives that reflect a person's aims in their professional life (Hirschi & Pang, 2023).

While extant literature has addressed the importance of a self-directed, values-driven approach to career management—especially in the context of protean careers (Hall et al., 2018; Hirschi & Koen, 2021; Li et al., 2022; Wiernik & Kostal, 2019)—it has predominantly focused on the "how" rather than the "why" of career behaviors. This research focused, for example, on how a protean career orientation is related to the extent of engagement in career management behaviors or outcomes of subjective career success. However, a noticeable gap remains in exploring why people enact certain behaviors, what underlying goals or "strivings" they are attempting to achieve, and how these strivings relate to their enacted behaviors and experienced success (Hirschi & Koen, 2021). Investigating the motivational drivers of career self-management (CSM) can unveil how individuals' personal values and career strivings influence their engagement in self-management behaviors, offering insights into how careers are not just managed but also envisioned and pursued with purpose. Such insights have practical implications, suggesting that career counseling and planning interventions should not only equip individuals with the "how" of managing their careers but also engage them in reflective processes that clarify the "why"—their core values and goals—thereby fostering more meaningful and satisfying careers.

Indeed, career strivings could be key to understanding career behaviors and outcomes. According to the social cognitive career theory of career self-management (Lent & Brown, 2013) and closely related models of self-regulation in the work context (Lord et al., 2010), we conceptualize career strivings as goals (i.e., desired objects or states) that motivate behaviors that help to attain these goals. Because career strivings give meaning and direction to careers, they could also be pivotal to understanding the attainment of objective career

success and career satisfaction, including the distinct ways people attain different forms of success. Therefore, examining career strivings extends our understanding beyond mere actions and strategies, illuminating the motivations and long-term objectives that people pursue to fulfill in their professional journeys.

To address these considerations, the present paper examines three basic career strivings as indicated by Hirschi and Pang (2023): (1) *self-enhancement (SE) career strivings*, characterized by a concentration on extrinsic objectives, such as power, prestige, and elevated income; (2) *self-transcendent (ST) career strivings*, encapsulating other-centered intrinsic aims, including aiding others and contributing to social welfare and the collective good; and (3) *personal growth (PG) career strivings*, embodying self-oriented intrinsic aspirations focused on individual growth, knowledge and skill development, and the pursuit of engaging work.

We present two studies. Study 1, with a diverse employee sample and two measurement points, examines career strivings and the types of career behaviors they motivate (i.e., self-promotion, workplace helping, and continuous learning), beyond established personality and motivational variables. Study 2 focuses on career strivings' relation to objective career success and career satisfaction. With a diverse employee sample and three measurement points, it explores the distinct paths to objective success (via reputational, social, and human capital resources) for people with different career strivings, and how career strivings are linked with career satisfaction through attaining various facets of subjective success (recognition, meaningful work, PG, and development).

This paper contributes to the career management and life values/goals literature by (1) revealing how career strivings motivate engagement in career behaviors; (2) elucidating the relation between career strivings and attainment of objective career success and career satisfaction; and (3) offering insights into pathways to objective career success and career satisfaction for different career strivings. By systematically exploring the "why" behind CSM behaviors and their linkage to objective career success and career satisfaction, our study provides a comprehensive view of bridging the gap between motivational career strivings and tangible career outcomes. This approach responds to calls for a deeper exploration of the motivational underpinnings of career behaviors (Hirschi & Koen, 2021) and provides opportunities for revisiting and expanding existing career development theories to incorporate the diverse impacts of career strivings.

THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF CAREER STRIVINGS

Emmons (1986) posits that strivings constitute a unifying personal construct, which joins distinct goals and actions under a shared theme. Rather than representing a specific objective, strivings encompass a more abstract, long-term goal attainable through various means. Consequently, strivings are pivotal in career management, as goals guide career self-management behaviors, which are critical to attain personally valued outcomes (Lent & Brown, 2013; Lord et al., 2010). Value-related goals, in particular, can provide direction (i.e., functioning as an "inner compass") and impart meaning to self-directed careers (Hall & Mirvis, 1996). Personal career strivings are thus integral to comprehending self-directed career management, as they influence the specific objectives people establish for their careers, the manner and nature of the information sought to achieve these goals, the planning and execution of career behaviors, and the processing and evaluation of feedback garnered from career-related actions (Hirschi & Koen, 2021).

In the current paper, we examine SE, ST, and PG career strivings. As Hirschi and Pang (2023) outlined in more detail, these career strivings are closely related to extrinsic and intrinsic career goals (Seibert et al., 2013), work values (Cable & Edwards, 2004), and motivational work strivings (Barrick et al., 2013; Seibert et al., 2013). However, these constructs are conceptually distinct because career strivings focus more on the specific long-term goals that people aim to attain in their careers (Hirschi & Pang, 2023). Moreover, career strivings empirically showed incremental validity for career and life outcomes beyond existing measures of these closely related constructs; and career strivings (especially PG strivings) related positively to career commitment, career satisfaction, and life meaningfulness (Hirschi & Pang, 2023), supporting their importance for career and life outcomes. Existing research did, however, not examine how different career strivings relate to different career behaviors and the pathways by which they are linked with objective career success and career satisfaction.

STUDY 1: CAREER STRIVINGS AND ENGAGEMENT IN CAREER MANAGEMENT BEHAVIORS

In the first part of the current paper, we wanted to provide insights into the relevance of career strivings for career self-management, including how different types of career strivings are related to different career self-management behaviors. Goals act as precursors to career behaviors, and career management behaviors are essential to attaining career goals (Lent & Brown, 2013; Lord et al., 2010). Having strong career strivings should thus motivate to engage in more career management behaviors to realize career goals expressed in strivings. We thus expect a positive relation between career strivings and engagement in proactive career self-management behaviors.

We controlled for established personality and motivational variables for proactive career behaviors to establish incremental validity of career strivings for career management behaviors. We thereby can provide a more robust test of the incremental motivational utility of career strivings beyond established factors. First, we controlled for dispositional personal initiative, which is the general tendency to take action to influence one's environment (Fay & Frese, 2001; Frese et al., 1997). Research established that a proactive disposition (i.e., proactivity) is positively related to engagement in career self-management behaviors and a more self-directed and values-oriented approach to career management (Hirschi & Koen, 2021). We also controlled for proactive motivational states for career management (Parker et al., 2010) in terms of can-do (i.e., self-efficacy), reason-to (i.e., goals and outcome expectations), and energized-to (i.e., emotions towards one's career) motivational states.

> **H1.** SE, ST, and PG career strivings are positively related to engagement in career self-management behaviors beyond dispositional personal initiative and proactive motivational states (i.e., career self-efficacy, career outcome expectations, and emotions towards career).

We also investigated how different strivings are related to different career behaviors. This examination helps to further our understanding of how different career strivings affect career self-management. Depending on the type of career goal, different behaviors can be expected to be valuable to attain the respective goal. For example, a striving for status and financial success might lead an employee to focus on gaining markable skills, while a striving for social

contributions might incline another employee to engage in more prosocial work behaviors. Hence, people with different career strivings might engage in different career behaviors to attain different career goals reflecting different career strivings. For example, Seibert et al. (2013) showed that university alumni with more extrinsic career goals were less likely to enroll in a graduate program, while those with more intrinsic career goals had a stronger intention of enrolling in graduate education.

However, to what extent different career strivings are related to engagement in distinct career behaviors has yet to be investigated. For example, in her theoretical model of career self-management, King (2004) proposed that people would use different career self-management behaviors (e.g., positioning and influence) to attain desired career outcomes. However, to what extent personal career strivings might induce people to engage more in some rather than other types of behaviors has yet to be addressed. Similarly, research on the protean career (Hall et al., 2018) suggests that people with a stronger protean career orientation engage in more career management behaviors. However, to what extent different career value orientations, as expressed in different career strivings, lead to different career behaviors has yet to be investigated. Supporting the relevance of distinct motivations to explain differences in career behaviors, Porter et al. (2023) showed that different professional networking motives relate to different networking behaviors. For example, employees whose network motives focused on helping others engaged in more behaviors to maintain connections within their organization, while those motivated for networking to enhance their status engaged more in building new relationships.

Our study focuses on more general career strivings and their relation to different career self-management behaviors. Regarding SE career strivings, people with these strivings are, by definition, motivated to attain extrinsic career goals, such as influence or a high income. The attainment of such extrinsic goals is largely contingent on the evaluation and recognition by others (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Conversely, intrinsic goals such as contributing to the greater good or PG are largely independent of external evaluations and more directly aim to satisfy internal needs (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). As such, we can expect that people with strong SE strivings should be especially prone to engage in influence behaviors in their career self-management because such behaviors can create favorable impressions and sponsorship (King, 2004), which are conducive to attaining extrinsic goals (e.g., by being awarded a higher salary or hierarchical position) (Ng et al., 2005). In the current study, we focus on self-promotion, a typical influence behavior in career self-management aiming to present oneself in the most favorable and competent light to obtain a positive evaluation of competence by others (King, 2004). We expect that SE career strivings are positively related to engagement in self-promotion. To provide a stronger test of how career strivings are linked to specific career management behaviors, we controlled for the general degree of proactive career self-management behaviors in all analyses. This allows to focus more clearly on the specific career behavior under investigation, irrespective of the general extent to which a person is engaged in career self-management behaviors more generally (Hirschi et al., 2014).

> **H2.** SE career strivings are positively related to self-promotion beyond ST and PG career strivings and controlling for general career self-management behaviors.

ST strivings are, by definition, aimed at attaining career goals that contribute to others' welfare and the common good. In this study, we specifically focus on interpersonal helping at work, a subfacet of organizational citizenship behavior (Organ et al., 2006). Because helping

others is a specific way to realize ST career strivings, we can expect that people with stronger ST career strivings should be more engaged in helping behaviors at work. Helping behaviors at work can be regarded as a work behavior which is also relevant for career self-management because they can bring career benefits to the helper through social exchange mechanisms, building social capital, increasing status, or increasing learning on the job (Bolino & Grant, 2016).

> **H3.** ST career strivings are positively related to helping behaviors at work beyond SE and PG career strivings and controlling for general career self-management behaviors.

Finally, PG career strivings, by definition, aim to develop own capabilities and gain new career experiences. We herein specifically focus on engagement in continuous learning as a critical career self-management behavior in today's dynamic work environments (Hirschi et al., 2018). Continuously learning new skills/knowledge and updating existing competencies is key to personal development at work. It can also help expand one's career horizon and engage in new job roles or career paths (Hall, 1996). As such, we expect that people with stronger PG career strivings should be particularly motivated to engage in this type of career behavior.

> **H4.** PG career strivings are positively related to continuous learning behaviors beyond SE and ST career strivings and controlling for general career self-management behaviors.

METHOD

Sample and procedure

We recruited participants in Germany via an online access panel (Bilendi & respondi), inviting 2900 panelists, and 743 clicked the survey link (response rate 25.6%). We removed 205 participants because they (1) did not pass the three attention checks ($n = 25$) or (2) did not fulfill one of the inclusion criteria ($n = 180$): (a) age between 18 and 65, (b) living in Germany, (c) full-time employees, and (d) quotas regarding age (three intervals: 18–35, 36–50, and 51–65) and gender (50/50). In addition, five participants were removed due to careless answering patterns such as straight-lining ($n = 4$) and speeding (i.e., less than 2 s/item, $n = 5$). The final sample for Time 1 (T1) was 533 participants. At T1, we collected data on career strivings and socio-demographic variables, dispositional personal initiative, and proactive motivational states (i.e., career self-efficacy, career outcome expectations, and emotions towards career).

Three weeks later, participants were invited for another survey (T2), and 362 clicked the survey link (response rate 68%). In line with other studies (Liu et al., 2021; Steed et al., 2023), this time lag was chosen to reduce common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), while maintaining practical feasibility and maximizing response rates. We removed 25 participants because they either did not pass the three attention checks ($n = 3$) or had more than 80% missing values ($n = 22$). We removed an additional 14 participants based on data quality checks due to speeding or straight-lining (same criteria as in T1). The final sample for T2 was 323 participants. At T2, we collected data on career self-management behaviors (i.e., general career engagement, self-promotion, helping at work, and continuous learning).

We retained 312 participants for the subsequent analyses who completed both waves (57.7%, males, age from 18 to 65 years, $M = 45.8$, $SD = 10.9$). The organizational tenure of the participants ranged from 0 to 44 years ($M = 13.3$, $SD = 10.8$). The range of highest completed educational levels included mandatory schooling (27.2%), vocational training (20.8%), high school (15.1%), BSc or MSc university degree (34.3%), and PhD (2.6%). Their average working time for the past few weeks was 38.9 h per week.

Measurement

The means, standard deviations, bivariate correlations, and Cronbach's alpha of all measures are reported in Table S1. Unless otherwise indicated, two research assistants and one co-author translated items from English into German using Brislin's (1970) back-translation model.

Career strivings

We used the 14-item career strivings scales developed by Hirschi and Pang (2023) with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The measure consists of six items measuring SE career strivings (e.g., "In my career, I strive to have a high total compensation"), four items to assess ST career strivings (e.g., "In my career, I strive to do good for others through my work."), and four items to assess PG career strivings (e.g., "In my career, I strive to continue to learn and grow over the course of my career."). For all items, please see Appendix S1.

Dispositional personal initiative

We used the German version of the seven-item scale (e.g., "I actively attack problems") developed by Frese et al. (1997) using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not true at all*) to 5 (*very true*).

Career self-efficacy

We used the four-item career confidence scale (e.g., "I can develop my career successfully") from the German version of the Career Resources Questionnaire (CRQ; Hirschi et al., 2019; Hirschi et al., 2018) with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Career outcome expectations

We generated three items to assess expected positive outcomes that may result from engaging in career self-management, in accordance with similar items measuring outcome expectations for career exploration (Lent et al., 2017). The participants answered the following three statements: "If I take an active interest in shaping my professional future, I can better achieve my professional goals"; "If I take responsibility for developing my career, I am more likely to have a successful career"; and "If I pursue my career on my own instead of relying on my employer,

I am more likely to achieve greater satisfaction in my career." Responses ranged from 1 (*not true at all*) to 5 (*very true*). The newly developed measure demonstrated adequate internal reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .87 (see Table S1). Furthermore, because this construct and career self-efficacy both assessed proactive motivational states, their correlation of .52 ($p < .001$) suggested convergent validity. In assessing the discriminant validity, we examined its correlations with various theoretically unrelated measures. The construct demonstrated low to moderate correlations with all demographic variables, career engagement, self-promotion, and helping at work, thus evidencing its discriminant validity (see Table S1).

Positive and negative emotions towards one's career

Positive (e.g., "active") and negative emotions (e.g., "nervous") towards one's career were assessed with three items each from Lent et al. (2017) and the question "When you think about your career, how often did you feel like this in the last two weeks?" on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*).

Engagement in career self-management behaviors

We used the German nine-item career engagement scale by Hirschi et al. (2014) to assess the degree to which a person had proactively developed their career through different career behaviors during the last 6 months (e.g., "Cared for the development of your career") on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *almost never* to 5 = *very often*).

Self-promotion

We used five items from the impression management measure by Bolino and Turnley (1999) with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never behave this way*) to 5 (*often behave this way*). Respondents answered the question, "How often did you use the following strategies at work in the last 6 months?" A sample behavior was "Make people aware of your talents or qualifications."

Helping at work (OCB-helping)

We used the 14-item scale from Settoon and Mossholder (2002) with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Eight items of them tapped into person-focused (e.g., "I listen to coworkers when they have to get something off their chest.") and the remaining six into task-focused helping (e.g., "I help coworkers with difficult assignments, even when assistance is not directly requested.").

Continuous learning

We used the three-item learning scale (e.g., "I use every opportunity to expand my professional knowledge") from the German version of the CRQ (Hirschi et al., 2018, 2019).

Considered controls

Age in years was considered as a control variable because research showed that prosocial motivation and generativity generally increase with age (Kooij & Van De Voorde, 2011; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992), while extrinsic motivations such as salary, promotions, or recognition usually decline with age (Kooij et al., 2011). For the same reasons, we considered *organizational tenure* in years as another age-related variable in the work context. *Gender* was controlled because women generally report more altruistic values and community orientation (Le et al., 2018; Wegemer & Eccles, 2019), while men typically show more endorsement of extrinsic values such as power or achievement (Konrad et al., 2000). We also controlled for *educational level* because this represents an essential form of human capital relevant to career self-management and career success (Hirschi & Koen, 2021; Spurk et al., 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In dropout analyses, we compared complete and dropout participants using *t* tests for numerical variables and chi-square tests for categorical variables. The analyses revealed no significant differences in gender, career strivings (SE, ST, and PG), career self-efficacy, career outcome expectations, or positive emotions towards career. However, dropouts exhibited significantly higher negative emotions towards their career, $t(526) = -2.88$, $p < .001$. Bivariate correlations (Table S1) show all three career strivings—SE, ST, and PG—positively correlate with career engagement, self-promotion, helping at work, and continuous learning, with significant correlations ranging from $r = .16$ to $r = .52$ (all $p < .01$).

To test H1, we used hierarchical regression analysis to examine the incremental effects of career strivings (T1) on engagement in career self-management behaviors (T2) beyond social demographics, career self-efficacy, career outcome expectations, and emotions towards career (T1). As shown in Table 1, SE ($\beta = .26$; $p < .001$), ST ($\beta = .04$; $p > .05$), and PG ($\beta = .20$; $p < .05$) career strivings explained 5% additional variance in engagement in career self-management behaviors ($p < .001$) beyond social demographics, career self-efficacy, career outcome expectations, and emotions towards career, confirming H1.

To test H2–H4 (Table 2), we used hierarchical regression analyses to examine the incremental effects of specific career strivings (T1) on engagement in distinct career self-management behaviors (T2) beyond the other two career strivings as well as the controls of sociodemographics (T1) and general engagement in career self-management (T2). For *self-promotion*, ST and PG strivings explained an additional 2% of the total variance ($p < .01$) beyond the controls and general career engagement, and SE strivings explained an additional 3% of the total variance ($\beta = .25$; $p < .001$), confirming H2. For *helping behaviors at work*, SE and PG strivings explained an additional 9% of variance ($p < .001$) beyond controls and general career engagement; and ST strivings explained another 3% of variance ($\beta = .15$; $p < .01$), confirming H3. For *continuous learning behaviors*, SE and ST career explained 5% of variance ($p < .001$) beyond controls and general career engagement; and PG career strivings explained another 8% of variance ($\beta = .33$; $p < .001$), confirming H4.

Study 1 established that career strivings are key motivational forces driving increased engagement in career self-management, demonstrating their unique value beyond other

TABLE 1 Prediction of engagement in career self-management behaviors (Study 1).

Predictors	Engagement in career self-management behaviors		
Block 1			
Age	−.02**	−.02**	−.01*
Organizational tenure	−.01*	−.01	−.01
Gender	.03	.13	.10
Education	.11**	.06	.03
Block 2			
Dispositional personal initiative		.41***	.29**
Proactive motivational states			
Career self-efficacy		.02	−.07
Career outcome expectations		.15*	.06
Positive emotions towards career		.19**	.13*
Negative emotions towards career		.09	.05
Block 3			
Self-enhancement			.26***
Self-transcendent			.04
Personal growth			.20*
R^2	.12***	.29***	.34***
ΔR^2		.17***	.05***

Note: Gender: 1 = "male," 2 = "female."
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, and ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

proactive motivational variables. It also confirmed that specific career self-management behaviors are closely associated with particular career strivings, underscoring the targeted nature of career behaviors in achieving specific strivings.

STUDY 2: CAREER STRIVINGS AND THE ATTAINMENT OF CAREER SUCCESS

In this study, we aimed to build upon Study 1 and focus on the relation of career strivings to career outcomes by investigating the relations between various career strivings and objective career success and career satisfaction. Specifically, the study seeks to elucidate how distinct career strivings contribute to accumulating diverse resources, which, in turn, facilitate objective career success. Additionally, this study aims to explore the connection between different career strivings and aspects of subjective career success, examining their role in promoting career satisfaction. Through analysis of these relations, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between career strivings, resource building, and the attainment and perception of career success and career satisfaction.

TABLE 2 Prediction of engagement in different career behaviors (Study 1).

Predictors	Self-promotion				Helping behaviors at work				Continuous learning behaviors			
Block 1												
Age	−.01	.00	.00	.00	−.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.01	.01	.01
Organizational tenure	−.01	.00	.00	.00	−.00	−.00	.00	−.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Gender	.07	.05	.08	.07	−.23**	−.24**	−.20*	−.18*	−.11	−.12	−.10	−.07
Education	.06	.01	.00	−.01	.00	−.03	−.05*	−.05*	.09**	.04	.02	.00
Block 2												
Career engagement		.45***	.40***	.35***		.20***	.11*	.10*		.37***	.29***	.22***
Block 3												
Self-enhancement			–	–			−.02	−.01			.16**	.07
Self-transcendent			.16**	.16**			–	–			.17***	.07
Personal growth			.04	.02			.28***	.22***			–	–
Block 4												
Self-enhancement				.25***			–	–				–
Self-transcendent				–				.15**				–
Personal growth				–				-				.33***
R^2	.04**	.24***	.26***	.29***	.03	.10***	.19***	.22***	.03*	.22***	.27***	.35***
ΔR^2		.20***	.02**	.03***		.07***	.09***	.03**		.19***	.05***	.08***

Note: Gender: 1 = "male," 2 = "female."
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, and ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Career strivings and differences in objective career success and career satisfaction

As shown in Study 1, different career strivings can provide motivation to engage in various career self-management behaviors. These might contribute to both objective career success and career satisfaction, in line with the notion that career strivings are a general motivational force and positively related to different career attainments (Hirschi & Pang, 2023). Going beyond this more general observation, we presume strong SE strivings should be particularly beneficial for attaining higher objective career success, compared with ST or PG strivings. Per definition, SE strivings are directed towards status, prestige, and income goals. These goals reflect typical indicators of objective career success (Spurk et al., 2019) and should thus direct actions towards goal attainment related to these strivings (Lent & Brown, 2013; Lord et al., 2010). People with high SE strivings are thus more likely to pursue goals closely related to objective career success, resulting in increased objective career success on average. Conversely, ST and PG career strivings do not target goals indicative of objective career success. This divergence should lead them to invest less effort in pursuing such goals, thus yielding average comparatively lower levels of objective career success. Our study focuses on three typical indicators of objective career success (Ng et al., 2005; Spurk et al., 2019): salary, leadership position, and workplace status.

Based on the same logic, we propose that ST or PG career strivings should be particularly beneficial for achieving higher career satisfaction, compared with SE career strivings. People with ST or PG career strivings pursue goals closely related to career satisfaction, such as deriving meaning from work, experiencing personal fulfillment, and engaging in growth and learning opportunities (Shockley et al., 2016; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). As a result, they should be more likely to attain these goals on average, culminating in stronger career satisfaction. Additionally, research demonstrates that ST or growth strivings generally correlate with increased well-being and satisfaction because they fulfill basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Conversely, SE strivings prioritize extrinsic goals that do not satisfy basic needs, ultimately leading to less satisfaction (Kasser & Ryan, 1993).

H5. SE strivings are related to higher objective career success in terms of (a) salary, (b) leadership position, and (c) workplace status beyond ST and PG career strivings.

H6. (a) ST and (b) PG career strivings are related to higher career satisfaction beyond SE career strivings.

Career strivings and different ways of attaining objective career success

Although we anticipate that people with different career strivings demonstrate variations in their attained levels of objective career success, we also posit that different strivings can be beneficial in achieving objective career success through building and utilizing different resources (Spurk et al., 2019). Given that different strivings direct various actions towards goal attainment, we specifically hypothesize that career strivings are linked with distinct pathways to attain objective career success by building and leveraging different resources. Illustrating this point, Porter et al. (2023) found that not only did different professional networking motives relate to different types of networking behaviors, but different networking motives positively

related to objective career success. This supports the notion that objective career success is a goal that can be attained through different means, which in turn relate to different motives.

On the one hand, people with SE strivings, who aim to achieve extrinsic goals that heavily rely on the evaluation of others (Kasser & Ryan, 1993), could achieve success by building resources that emphasize extrinsic factors, such as image and reputation. On the other hand, people with ST strivings, who aim to achieve (pro-)social goals, could achieve success by developing social resources (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These resources may include social capital and strong professional networks, which can facilitate obtaining objective career success. Lastly, people with growth strivings, who seek to attain knowledge and skills and foster personal development (Dweck, 2006), could achieve success by acquiring knowledge and skill resources. Developing this human capital can enhance their employability and adaptability, thereby promoting their objective career success.

H7. SE career strivings are indirectly positively related to objective career success through increased reputational resources beyond (a) ST and (b) PG career strivings.

H8. ST career strivings are indirectly positively related to objective career success through increased social capital resources beyond (a) SE and (b) PG career strivings.

H9. PG career strivings are indirectly positively related to objective career success through increased human capital resources beyond (a) SE and (b) ST career strivings.

Career strivings lead to career satisfaction via different pathways

Beyond objective career success, different career strivings can be beneficial for attaining career satisfaction. As career strivings provide meaning and direction for a career, pursuing such strivings should be accompanied by a sense of meaning and purpose (Barrick et al., 2013). Furthermore, because strivings motivate goal-directed actions, which should increase the likelihood of attaining these goals, this should be accompanied by increased satisfaction due to goal progress and attainment (Barrick et al., 2013; Lent et al., 2005).

However, based on the reasoning above, we assume that people with different career strivings utilize different pathways to attain career satisfaction. Research showed that subjective career success has several facets that can contribute to satisfaction with one's career (Shockley et al., 2016). This study presumes that people with different strivings attain career satisfaction through satisfaction with different, more specific, facets of subjective career success that correspond to their respective career strivings. Supporting this assumption, Porter et al. (2023) found that different professional networking motives related to different forms of subjective career success: Prosocial networking motives related to an increased sense of quality of work and meaningful work, networking motives to gain status related to more received recognition and influence, and learning and performance networking motives related to an increased sense of growth and development.

We expand these findings and examine the relation of career strivings with different forms of subjective career success and career satisfaction. We presume that people with SE career strivings aim to attain goals that are dependent on the evaluation of others (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). As a result, they should attain career satisfaction primarily through increased

recognition for their work. Conversely, people with ST career strivings aim to achieve (pro-) social goals. Research showed that engaging in prosocial actions and contributing to the greater good is essential to experiencing meaning (Grant, 2008). Thus, people with ST strivings should attain career satisfaction primarily through increased meaning at work. Finally, people with growth strivings aim to attain goals focused on personal learning and development. Consequently, they should attain career satisfaction primarily through increased PG.

H10. SE career strivings are indirectly positively related to career satisfaction through increased experienced recognition beyond (a) ST and (b) PG career strivings.

H11. ST career strivings are indirectly positively related to career satisfaction through increased experienced meaningful work beyond (a) SE and (b) PG career strivings.

H12. PG career strivings are indirectly positively related to career satisfaction through increased experienced PG and development beyond (a) SE and (b) ST career strivings.

METHOD

Sample and procedure

The same panel provider as in Study 1 invited 2100 participants to participate in the T1 survey, none of whom participated in Study 1, and 651 clicked the T1 survey link (response rate 31%). We removed 201 participants because they (1) did not pass the three attention checks ($n = 30$); or (2) did not fulfill one of the inclusion criteria ($n = 171$; same criteria as in Study 1). In addition, 26 participants were removed due to careless answering patterns such as speeding (i.e., less than 2 s/item, $n = 14$), straight-lining ($n = 9$), or reporting obviously wrong data (i.e., working more than 65 h a week, $n = 3$). The final sample for T1 was 421 participants. At T1, we collected socio-demographic variables and career strivings.

Two weeks later, all completers of T1 were re-invited to participate in the T2 survey, of which 359 clicked the T2 survey link (response rate 85%). We removed 37 participants because they (1) did not pass the three attention checks or (2) did not fulfill one of our inclusion criteria (same criteria as in Study 1). In addition, 12 participants were removed due to speeding or straight-lining. The final sample for T2 was 310 participants. At T2, we collected data on reputational, social capital, and human capital resources, recognition, meaningful work, and experienced PG and development.

Another 2 weeks later, all completers of T1 were re-invited to participate in the Time 3 (T3) survey, of which 357 clicked the T3 survey link (response rate 85%). Among them, 20 were removed because they (1) did not pass the three attention checks or (2) did not fulfill one of our inclusion criteria (same criteria as in Study 1). In addition, 11 participants were removed due to speeding or straight-lining. The final sample for T3 was 326 participants. At T3, we collected data on objective (i.e., salary, leadership position, and workplace status) and career satisfaction.

The matched sample comprised 299 participants who completed all three waves (51.5%, males, ages from 20 to 65 years, $M = 44.6$, $SD = 11.3$) and was used for the subsequent

analyses. The organizational tenure of the participants ranged from 0 to 45 years ($M = 11.5$, $SD = 10.4$). The reported range of highest completed educational level included mandatory schooling (23.4%), vocational training (20.7%), high school (16.7%), BSc or MSc university degree (37.1%), and PhD (2.0%). Their average working time for the past few weeks was 39.7 h per week.

Measurement

The means, standard deviations, bivariate correlations, and Chronbach's alpha of all measures can be found in Table S2. Results of CFA to support the empirical distinction of the assessed variables are reported in Table S3. Same as in Study 1, unless otherwise indicated, items were translated from English into German using Brislin's (1970) back-translation model.

Career strivings

We used the same 14-item career strivings measure as in Study 1.

Reputational resources

Reputational resources were assessed by measuring personal brand equity (PBE). The 12-item scale by Gorbatov et al. (2021) uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), tapping into brand appeal (e.g., "I have a professional positive image among others"), brand differentiation (e.g., "I am regarded as a better professional than others"), and brand recognition (e.g., "I am known outside of my immediate network").

Social capital resources

We used the four-item social support scale (e.g., "I receive a high level of career support from my social environment") from the German version of the CRQ (Hirschi et al., 2018, 2019).

Human capital resources

We assessed human capital resources in terms of self-assessed occupational expertise (e.g., "I have a very high level of expertise and skill in my occupation") and soft skills (e.g., "I have many skills that I could use in a range of different occupations") from the German version of the CRQ (Hirschi et al., 2018, 2019) with six items.

Recognition

We used the German translation (Haenggli & Hirschi, 2020) of the three-item recognition scale of the Subjective Career Success Inventory (SCSI) by Shockley et al. (2016) with a 5-point Likert

scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The SCSI consists of 24 items divided equally into eight subscales, with three items each. Each subscale demonstrated adequate reliability (α = .78–.92) in the original study. Regarding construct validity, Shockley et al. (2016) report evidence for criterion-related, convergent, and discriminant validity for each of the eight dimensions.

Meaningful work

We used the German translation (Haenggli & Hirschi, 2020) of the three-item meaningful work scale (e.g., "I believe my work has made a difference") from the SCSI (Shockley et al., 2016).

PG and development

We used the German translation (Haenggli & Hirschi, 2020) of the three-item growth and development scale (e.g., "I have stayed current with changes in my field") from the SCSI (Shockley et al., 2016).

Objective career success

We assessed (a) salary, (b) leadership position, and (c) workplace status as indicators of objective career success. *Salary* was assessed as annual salary before tax and indicated in steps of 6000 Euro from 1 (<6000 Euro) to 20 (≥114,000 Euro). Because of a non-normal distribution, the salary score was log-transformed for all analyses, which is commonly done in other studies (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Haenggli & Hirschi, 2020). *Leadership position* was measured by asking participant to indicate their current position in term of 1 = no leadership position, 2 = in a highly skilled specialist position (e.g., project manager), 3 = in lower management (e.g., team leader, section head, head of a smaller branch/operation), 4 = in middle management (e.g., department head, regional manager), 5 = in top management (e.g., executive board, management, department head). *Workplace status* was assessed using the five-item (e.g., "I occupy a respected position in my organization.") Workplace Status Scale (Djurdjevic et al., 2017) in the German version (Spurk et al., 2022) and a response scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Career satisfaction

We assessed career satisfaction using the three-item satisfaction scale (e.g., "My career is personally satisfying") of the SCSI (Shockley et al., 2016) in its German translation (Haenggli & Hirschi, 2020).

Considered controls

For the reasons outlined in Study 1, we considered the controls age, organizational tenure, gender, and educational level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dropout analyses revealed no significant differences in gender or career strivings (SE, ST, PG) between completers and dropouts at T2 or T3. Bivariate correlations in Table S2 show that all career strivings positively correlate with several career success indicators like PBE, social capital resources, leadership position, workplace status, and career satisfaction.

To test H5 and H6, we used hierarchical regression analysis. As shown in Table 3, SE career strivings explained 4% additional variance in leadership position (confirming H5b), and 17% additional variance in workplace status (confirming H5c; both $p < .001$) beyond ST and PG career strivings. Unexpectedly, SE career strivings did not explain more variance in salary beyond the other two career strivings (refuting H5a). As shown in Table 4, ST career strivings explained 8% additional variance in career satisfaction ($p < .001$) beyond SE career strivings, while PG career strivings explained 4% additional variance in career satisfaction ($p < .001$) beyond SE career strivings, confirming H6.

To test H7–H9, we used path analysis with 1000 bootstrapping samples within the linear structural equation modeling (SEM) framework (Gunzler et al., 2013; Loh et al., 2022). Figure 1 illustrates the path analyses, and Table 5 and Figures S1–S4 summarize the most relevant results. For *salary*, no total effects were significant. There were two indirect effects but no direct effects, indicating that SE and ST strivings were indirectly positively related to salary through increased reputational resources (PBE) beyond PG career strivings. However, no indirect effects were observed on the outcome salary for the other two mediators. These results confirmed H7b but not H7a, H8, and H9. For *leadership position*, we found total effects for SE and PG strivings and a direct effect for SE strivings. No indirect effects were observed for any of the three mediators. Thus, the positive relation between SE strivings and leadership position was not mediated by reputational resources (PBE), refuting H7–H9 for the outcome leadership position. Finally, for *workplace status*, we found total effects for SE and ST strivings and a direct effect for SE strivings. In addition, three indirect effects were observed in that SE strivings indirectly positively related to workplace status through increased reputational resources (PBE) beyond ST and PG career strivings, confirming H7b; ST career strivings indirectly positively related to workplace status through increased social capital resources beyond SE and PG career strivings, confirming H8 but not H9.

To assess the pathways to career satisfaction and test H10–H12, we used the same path analysis with 1000 bootstrapping samples with the dependent variable career satisfaction; the mediators were recognition, experienced meaningful work, and experienced growth and development. Figure 2 illustrates the path analyses, and Table 5 summarizes the most relevant results. We found only one total effect of ST strivings on career satisfaction and no direct effects. Five indirect effects were observed: The positive relation between SE strivings and career satisfaction was fully mediated by experienced PG and development; the positive relation between ST strivings and career satisfaction was fully mediated by experienced meaningful work and experienced PG and development; and the positive relation between PG strivings and career satisfaction was fully mediated by recognition and experienced PG and development. The results confirmed H11 and H12b, but not H10 and H12a.

Overall, Study 2 demonstrates that SE strivings are primarily linked to higher objective career success (leadership position and workplace status), whereas ST and PG strivings more strongly relate to career satisfaction. Moreover, career strivings differentially related to objective career success and career satisfaction, mediated through specific resources. SE career strivings were indirectly positively related to salary and workplace status through increased reputational

TABLE 3 Prediction of objective career success indicators (Study 2).

	Objective career success indicators								
Predictors	**Salary (log-transformed)**			**Leadership position**			**Workplace status**		
Block 1									
Age	.00	.00	.00	.01	.01	.01*	.01	.01	.02*
Organizational tenure	.01***	.01***	.01***	.02**	.03***	.03***	.02	.02**	.02*
Gender	−.12*	−.13*	−.12*	.01	−.11	−.05	.01	−.12	−.06
Education	.11***	.11***	.10***	.18***	.14**	.13**	.21***	.17***	.16**
Block 2									
Self-transcendent		−.02	−.02		.06	.06		.31**	.31**
Personal growth		.03	.01		.39***	.23*		.33**	.15
Block 3									
Self-enhancement			.05			.35***			.40***
R^2	.19***	.19***	.19***	.09***	.16***	.20***	.08***	.18***	.35***
ΔR^2		.00	.00		.07***	.04***		.10***	.17***

Note: Gender: 1 = "male," 2 = "female."
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, and ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

TABLE 4 Prediction of career satisfaction (Study 2).

Predictors	Career satisfaction			
Block 1				
Age	.01	.01	.01	.01
Organizational tenure	.01	.01	.01	.01*
Gender	.17	.18	.14	.10
Education	.09**	.08*	.08*	.06
Block 2				
Self-enhancement		.15*	.08	.05
Block 3a				
Self-transcendent			.29***	–
Block 3b				
Personal growth			–	.26***
R^2	.04*	.06**	.14***	.10***
ΔR^2		.02**	.08***	.04***

Note: Gender: 1 = "male," 2 = "female."
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, and ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed).

resources (PBE), while ST career strivings were indirectly positively related to workplace status through increased social capital resources. SE career strivings were indirectly positively related to career satisfaction through increased experienced recognition, while PG career strivings were indirectly positively related to career satisfaction through increased experienced PG and development.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The general aim of the current paper was to examine the role of different career strivings in career self-management. We thereby contribute to a better understanding of why and for which purposes people self-manage their careers, specifically, the implications of such career strivings for career self-management behaviors and attaining objective career success and career satisfaction.

Career strivings as motivational forces for career self-management

Study 1 found that career strivings relate to more engagement in career self-management behaviors beyond established proactive personality and motivational states. This contributes to the literature by suggesting that strivings are a critical motivational force for career self-management. This supports the notion that career self-management is a goal-directed process and that people engage in career self-management behaviors to attain their longer term career goals (Hall et al., 2018; Lent & Brown, 2013). All three career strivings positively correlated with more general engagement in career self-management behaviors. This supports theoretical assumptions from social cognitive career theory of career self-management (Lent &

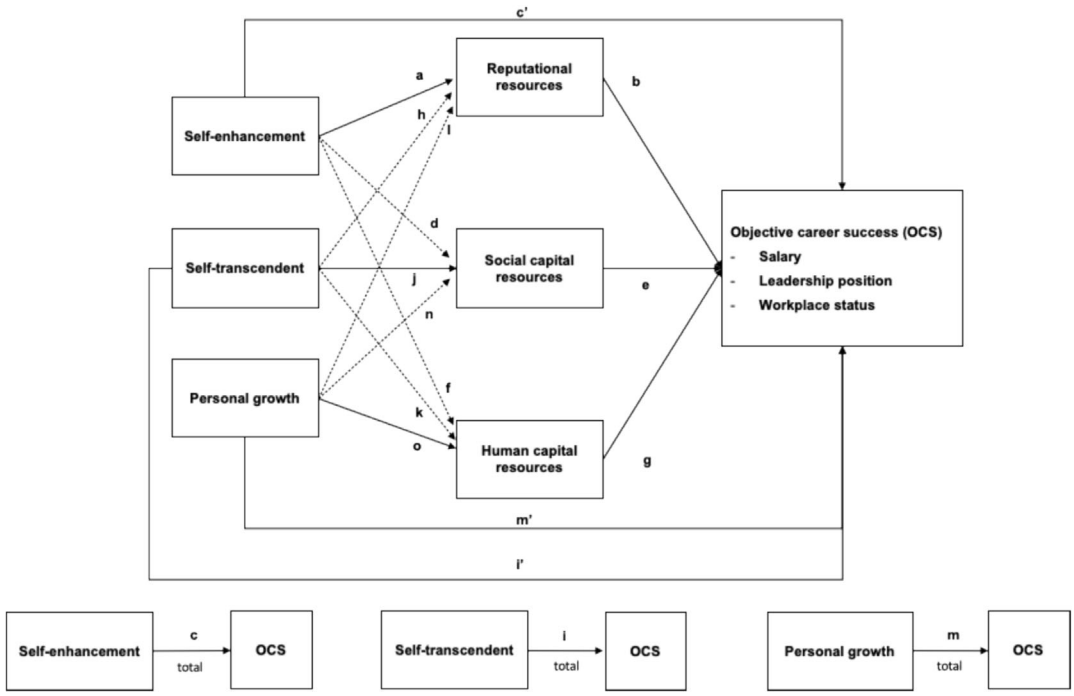

FIGURE 1 Graphical representation of path analyses on objective career success indicators (Study 2). *Note*: IV = self-enhancement career strivings, ST career strivings, and personal growth career strivings. DV = three objective career success indicators: salary, leadership position, and workplace status. Mediators = reputational recourses (PBE), social capital resources, and human capital resources. a = direct effect of IV (self-enhancement) on the mediator (reputational resources). b = direct effect of the mediator (reputational recourses) on DV (objective career success indicators). a * b = indirect effect of IV (self-enhancement) on DV (objective career success indicators). c = total effect of IV (self-enhancement) on DV (objective career success indicators). c′ = direct effect of IV (self-enhancement) on DV (objective career success indicators). j = direct effect of IV (ST) on the mediator (social capital resources). e = direct effect of the mediator (social capital resources) on DV (objective career success indicators). j * e = indirect effect of IV (ST) on DV (objective career success indicators). i = total effect of IV (ST) on DV (objective career success indicators). i′ = direct effect of IV (ST) on DV (objective career success indicators). o = direct effect of IV (personal growth) on the mediator (human capital resources). g = direct effect of the mediator (human capital resources) on DV (objective career success indicators). o * g = indirect effect of IV (personal growth) on DV (objective career success indicators). m = total effect of IV (personal growth) on DV (objective career success indicators). m′ = direct effect of IV (personal growth) on DV (objective career success indicators).

Brown, 2013) and models of self-regulation in the work context (Lord et al., 2010), that goals give motivation to engage in career behaviors to attain these goals.

SE and PG career strivings showed positive relations to engagement in career self-management. This suggests that extrinsic and intrinsic reasons can lead people to engage in career management actively. However, ST career strivings did not uniquely affect general engagement in career self-management beyond the other two strivings. The findings thus contribute to the literature by suggesting that people actively manage their careers mainly motivated by self-focused goals and personal benefits—either extrinsic (power and money) or intrinsic (PG). However, other-focused goals, such as promoting the greater good or prosocial aims, seem to be a less critical motivating factor for proactive career management.

TABLE 5 Results of SEM mediation path analyses on objective career success indicators and career satisfaction (Study 2).

Objective career success indicators	SE–PBE					ST–SCR					PG–HCR				
	a	**b**	**a * b**	**c**	**c′**	**j**	**e**	**j * e**	**i**	**i′**	**o**	**g**	**o * g**	**m**	**m′**
Salary	.14**	.14**	.02[a]	.05	.03	.29***	.02	.01	−.02	−.05	.23**	.01	.00	−.02	−.04
Leadership	.14**	.28*	.04	.35***	.29***	.29***	.17*	.05	.11	.01	.23**	.02	.00	.18*	.14
Status	.14**	.88***	.12[a]	.36***	.22*	.29***	.24**	.07[a]	.35**	.09	.23**	.02	.05	.12	−.03
Career satisfaction	**SE–recognition**					**ST–meaningful work**					**PG–growth and development**				
	p	**q**	**p * q**	**r**	**r′**	**y**	**t**	**y * t**	**x**	**x′**	**ü**	**v**	**ü * v**	**ö**	**ö′**
	−.08	.20***	−.02	.02	.07	.39***	.32***	.12[a]	.22**	.02	.36***	.31***	.11[a]	.10	−.09

Note: a = direct effect of IV (SE) on the mediator (PBE). b = direct effect of the mediator (PBE) on DV (objective career success indicators). a * b = indirect effect of IV (SE) on DV (objective career success indicators). c = total effect of IV (SE) on DV (objective career success indicators). c′ = direct effect of IV (SE) on DV (objective career success indicators). j = direct effect of IV (ST) on the mediator (SCR). e = direct effect of the mediator (SCR) on DV (objective career success indicators). j * e = indirect effect of IV (ST) on DV (objective career success indicators). i = total effect of IV (ST) on DV (objective career success indicators). i′ = direct effect of IV (ST) on DV (objective career success indicators). o = direct effect of IV (PG) on the mediator (HCR). g = direct effect of the mediator (HCR) on DV (objective career success indicators). o * g = indirect effect of IV (PG) on DV (objective career success indicators). m = total effect of IV (PG) on DV (career satisfaction). m′ = direct effect of IV (PG) on DV (objective career success indicators). p = direct effect of IV (SE) on the mediator (recognition). q = direct effect of the mediator (recognition) on DV (career satisfaction). p * q = indirect effect of IV (SE) on DV (career satisfaction). r = total effect of IV (SE) on DV (career satisfaction). r′ = direct effect of IV (SE) on DV (career satisfaction). y = direct effect of IV (ST) on the mediator (meaningful work). t = direct effect of the mediator (meaningful work) on DV (career satisfaction). y * t = indirect effect of IV (ST) on DV (career satisfaction). x = total effect of IV (ST) on DV (career satisfaction). x′ = direct effect of IV (ST) on DV (career satisfaction). ü = direct effect of IV (PG) on the mediator (growth and development). v = direct effect of the mediator (growth and development) on DV (career satisfaction). ü * v = indirect effect of IV (PG) on DV (career satisfaction). ö = total effect of IV (PG) on DV (career satisfaction). ö′ = direct effect of IV (PG) on DV (career satisfaction).

Abbreviations: HCR, human capital recourses; PBE, personal brand equity; PG, personal growth career strivings; SCR, social capital resources; SE, self-enhancement career strivings; ST, self-transcendent career strivings.

[a]The 95% CI obtained for the indirect effect by bootstrapping did not include 0.

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, and ***$p < .001$ (one-tailed).

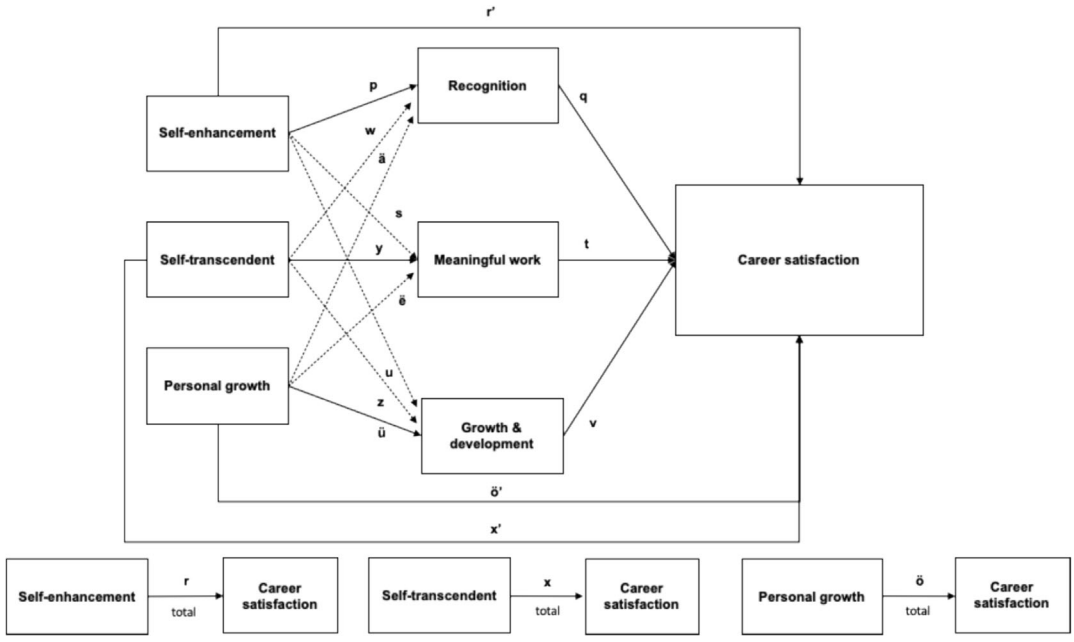

FIGURE 2 Graphical representation of path analyses on career satisfaction (Study 2). *Note*: IV = self-enhancement career strivings, ST career strivings, and personal growth career strivings. DV = career satisfaction. Mediators = recognition, experienced meaningful work, and experienced growth and development. p = direct effect of IV (self-enhancement) on the mediator (recognition). q = direct effect of the mediator (recognition) on DV (career satisfaction). p * q = indirect effect of IV (self-enhancement) on DV (career satisfaction). r = total effect of IV (self-enhancement) on DV (career satisfaction). r′ = direct effect of IV (self-enhancement) on DV (career satisfaction). y = direct effect of IV (ST) on the mediator (meaningful work). t = direct effect of the mediator (meaningful work) on DV (career satisfaction). y * t = indirect effect of IV (ST) on DV (career satisfaction). x = total effect of IV (ST) on DV (career satisfaction). x′ = direct effect of IV (ST) on DV (career satisfaction). ü = direct effect of IV (personal growth) on the mediator (growth and development). v = direct effect of the mediator (growth and development) on DV (career satisfaction). ü * v = indirect effect of IV (personal growth) on DV (career satisfaction). ö = total effect of IV (personal growth) on DV (career satisfaction). ö′ = direct effect of IV (personal growth) on DV (career satisfaction).

We also supported the assumption that career strivings relate to different types of career behaviors, contributing to established theories of career self-management (Lent & Brown, 2013), self-regulation in the work context (Lord et al., 2010), and intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Kasser & Ryan, 1993), by illustrating the pivotal role of career strivings as motivational forces that shape the engagement in different CSM behaviors. Specifically, Study 1 clarified how different types of career strivings—whether aimed at SE, ST, or PG—related to the selection of distinct CSM behaviors, a notion that complements existing theoretical perspectives by highlighting the strategic alignment of career behaviors with overarching career goals. This advances the conversation beyond the mechanisms of career management to the motivational roots that drive these behaviors. It expands the literature, which generally acknowledged that goals and strivings should predict career behaviors (Hall et al., 2018; King, 2004; Lent & Brown, 2013) but did not specify how different types of strivings might incline people to engage more in some rather than other behaviors.

Career strivings and the attainment of different forms of career success and career satisfaction

In Study 2, we investigated the implications of various career strivings for objective career success and career satisfaction. The study results can be interpreted in the context of the social cognitive career theory of career self-management (Lent & Brown, 2013) and models of self-regulation in the work context (Lord et al., 2010), further adding depth to our understanding of how career strivings shape career success. In line with these frameworks, we found that people with specific career strivings, whether SE, ST, or growth-oriented, are more likely to succeed in line with their respective strivings. This strengthens the argument from the social cognitive career theory of career self-management (Lent & Brown, 2013) and models of self-regulation in the work context (Lord et al., 2010), that goals guide actions and persistence towards attainment, adding empirical evidence to these theories in the career development domain.

The findings that SE strivings are linked to objective career success while ST and PG strivings correlate with career satisfaction offer a nuanced extension to research on career success (Shockley et al., 2016). Our research not only corroborates the differential pathways through which career strivings relate to career outcomes but also enriches theoretical discussions on career success by delineating how specific resources—reputational for SE and social capital for ST—serve as mediators in this process. This distinction between the pathways to objective career success and career satisfaction deepens our theoretical understanding of how individuals' intrinsic motivations and external recognitions interact to shape career trajectories.

Our results also support the idea that different strivings relate to career success and career satisfaction via building and utilizing different resources (Porter et al., 2023; Spurk et al., 2019). The differentiated relations we found between different career strivings and objective career success and career satisfaction align with the theoretical proposition of modern careers as multifaceted, heterogeneous, and driven by individual values and goals (Hall, 2004; Hall et al., 2018; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Moreover, our results contribute to the ongoing debate about the role of extrinsic versus intrinsic career success (Spurk et al., 2019). We provide empirical evidence suggesting that while both objective career success and career satisfaction are important, their relevance varies depending on people's career strivings. This nuanced understanding supports a more protean, values-driven view on career success and career satisfaction (Hall, 2004; Hall et al., 2018). In the context of social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994; Lent & Brown, 2013), our findings underline the importance of personal factors (career strivings) in shaping career outcomes and satisfaction.

Our study presents several unexpected findings, offering new directions for theoretical exploration and future research. Notably, we found no indirect relationship between SE career strivings and objective career success through reputational resources, challenging the assumptions of social capital theory (Adler & Kwon, 2002), which would imply an instrumental role of reputation for career advancement. This suggests that SE may lead to leadership positions via alternative routes, for example, through political savvy (Ferris et al., 2005) or tacit knowledge (Wagner & Sternberg, 1985), warranting further investigation.

Contrary to expectations, ST career strivings did not relate to salary via social capital resources, implying that objective career success might rely more on other forms of capital, such as human capital and job resources (Ng & Feldman, 2014). However, reputational resources unexpectedly mediated the relation between ST strivings and workplace status, highlighting the potential recognition gained from prosocial values (Grant, 2007).

Additionally, our findings did not support the predicted link between PG career strivings, human capital, and career success, contrasting with what would be assumed based on a human capital theory of career success (Ng et al., 2005; Ng & Feldman, 2014). Possibly, the role of human capital for career success may be more context-dependent, varying across industries, professions, or organizational cultures. Finally, the indirect effects of SE strivings on career satisfaction through PG and those of PG strivings through recognition provide insights counter to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This suggests that people might find satisfaction through multiple pathways, not just those most closely aligned with their primary striving. Overall, these findings collectively highlight the nuanced complexity of career dynamics and challenge existing theoretical frameworks on career strivings and success.

Limitations and future research

Several limitations should be noted when discussing the study findings' implications. The study's reliance on self-reported data points to a potential limitation. Although we assessed data at different measurement points to reduce common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), it could be insightful to examine career strivings in relation to more observable outcomes, such as job performance and prosocial work behaviors, as evaluated by third parties like supervisors or peers. Moreover, this study did not focus on the emergence and change in career strivings over time but explored the impact of career strivings on theoretical outcomes. However, career strivings may be dynamic, potentially changing with evolving career stages, personal experiences, or contextual shifts (Hall et al., 2018; Wrzus & Roberts, 2017). Our studies can also not rule out inversed causal mechanisms whereby career behaviors and experienced success might shape career strivings. There are rich opportunities for future research to delve deeper into the factors shaping career strivings, their connections to fundamental personality traits, and their evolution over time.

Moreover, the unique contribution of career strivings within the career development literature lies in their role as fundamental drivers of professional ambitions and motivational orientations, distinct from prominent constructs such as career self-efficacy or adaptability. Future inquiries into the dynamic interplay between career strivings and such constructs would offer deeper insights into the mechanisms through which career strivings influence and are influenced by constructs such as career self-efficacy and adaptability. Finally, in both studies, the cultural context of the study may have contributed to the prominence of PG career strivings and self-focused career strivings for career self-management behaviors. The study was conducted in a Germanic culture, typically characterized by high levels of individualism (Hofstede, 2001). This could have amplified the value of personal advancement, growth, and development in career and work contexts. Future research might aim to corroborate and extend these findings in other cultural environments to understand the potential variability of career strivings across different cultures.

Practice implications and conclusion

Our studies' findings offer significant insights for individuals striving to navigate their career paths more effectively. By understanding the impact of different career strivings—such as SE, ST, and PG—on career behaviors and outcomes, individuals can more strategically align their career actions with their core values and goals. For organizations, this research underscores the

importance of recognizing and supporting diverse career aspirations among employees. By doing so, organizations can foster a more engaged and motivated workforce and implement tailored career development programs that resonate with the unique aspirations of their employees.

In conclusion, the current studies contribute to the career literature by elucidating the intricate connections between career strivings, self-management behaviors, and outcomes. Importantly, our findings underscore the differential effects of distinct career strivings on various career behaviors and outcomes, shedding light on the complex motivational dynamics of career self-management. Moreover, our results have extended our knowledge about the diverse indirect paths by which career strivings relate to objective career success and career satisfaction, emphasizing the value of a comprehensive, multivariate approach to understanding career success. We hope that this research paves the way for future investigations into career strivings, inspiring questions on their origins, development, interrelationships, and career consequences.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data are made available upon reasonable request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The reported studies were approved by the University of Bern, Institute of Psychology Ethics Committee, No. 2014-10-1051882. No material was reproduced from other sources.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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