Rewriting Success: How Generative AI Is Shaping New Definitions of Career Achievement

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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) integration into work life is transforming how early-career professionals define and pursue success. This qualitative, phenomenological study investigates how individuals in the early stages of their careers, immersed in AI-enabled environments, construct evolving notions of career success. Using purposive sampling, the study engaged ten participants – five females and five males – who graduated from Academic Year 2022 onwards, represent diverse career fields, and are currently employed or actively seeking work (Patton, 2015). Semi-structured interviews explored their lived experiences, with thematic analysis guided by Career Construction Theory, which views careers as self-constructed realities through which individuals make sense of their experiences. It emphasizes how people build their careers by using their personal stories, themes, and life experiences to adapt to vocational challenges. This focuses on adaptability, storytelling, and how individuals' personal narratives shape their professional paths, and the Protean Career Model which states that a career path is driven by the individual, not the organization, and that it is guided by a person's intrinsic values and a desire for psychological success, such as personal fulfillment and well-being. Findings reveal that GenAI workplace adoption contributes to a shift from traditional extrinsically oriented markers such as job stability, salary, and title, towards more intrinsic adaptive, and self-directed indicators, like autonomy, continuous learning and ethical AI use, while still preserving creativity and empathy in AI-mediated work. These results affirm protean and boundaryless orientations shaped by technological disruption, indicating the importance of responsive, future-ready career development programs that integrate human-centric values with AI-era competencies.

Keywords: career success, generative artificial intelligence, AI-driven workplace, protean career, career construction theory

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Introduction

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has profoundly transformed education and the workforce, redefining how tasks are performed and how success is conceptualized. Tools such as ChatGPT and DALL·E are reshaping learning, work, and communication, prompting a shift from traditional success markers—job stability, income, and hierarchical advancement—toward values such as adaptability, digital fluency, and purpose-driven work (McAfee & Brynjolfsson, 2014) or students preparing to enter AI-integrated industries, these changes raise critical questions about evolving perceptions of career success.

Historically, career success has been measured through objective indicators like salary and promotions, alongside subjective dimensions such as fulfillment and growth (Ng et al., 2005). However, as AI influences skill demands and professional expectations, students increasingly prioritize creativity, adaptability, and technological competence (Succi & Canovi, 2020). Despite this shift, limited research examines how students reconcile traditional ideals with emerging realities shaped by GenAI.

This study explores the changing definitions of career success among students by comparing pre-GenAI and post-GenAI perceptions. Specifically, it seeks to identify dominant themes before AI adoption, emerging criteria after integration, and professional perspectives on GenAI's impact on skills and values. Insights from these patterns will inform responsive academic and career support programs, guiding career development centers in designing interventions aligned with the demands of an AI-driven labor market. In doing so, the research contributes to preparing students for success in a rapidly evolving world of work.

Literature Review

Career Construction Theory

Career Construction Theory (CCT) conceptualizes careers as subjective, dynamic processes through which individuals actively construct meaning from their vocational experiences (Savickas, 2005). Grounded in social constructionism, the theory posits that careers are not merely objective sequences of rankings, but evolving life narratives shaped by personal identity, values, and contextual demands. Work serves as a central arena for self-authorship, allowing individuals to express and continually renegotiate their sense of self in response to changing life roles and work environments.

A core construct of CCT is career adaptability, defined as a set of psychosocial resources that enable individuals to cope with vocational tasks, transitions, and uncertainties (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Career adaptability comprises four dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. These dimensions reflect individuals' future orientation, sense of agency, exploratory behaviors, and self-efficacy in managing career challenges. In contemporary work contexts characterized by volatility and disruption, career adaptability is increasingly recognized as a critical mechanism for sustaining career development.

Protean Boundaryless Career Model

The Protean Career Model (PCM) further advances person-centered approaches to career development by emphasizing self-direction and values-driven career management (Hall, 2004) like traditional organizational career models, PCM positions the individual—rather than the

organization—as the primary agent responsible for career planning, development, and evaluation. Career decisions are guided by internal values and personal definitions of success rather than by externally imposed standards.

Central to PCM is the concept of psychological success, which refers to individuals' subjective evaluations of their career progress based on personal growth, authenticity, and alignment with core values (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Empirical studies have demonstrated that a protean career orientation is associated with continuous learning, adaptability, career satisfaction, and perceived employability (Briscoe et al., 2006) these findings underscore the relevance of PCM in explaining how individuals navigate increasingly uncertain and flexible career landscapes.

Evolving Definitions of Career Success

Career success is a central construct influencing career decisions and long-term goals. Perceptions of success are shaped by individual and contextual factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic background, and cultural context (Benson et al., 2020; Dries et al., 2008; Dyke & Murphy, 2006). These perceptions evolve over time in response to changing career contexts. Recent technological advancements, including generative AI, have further reshaped skill demands and career structures, prompting a redefinition of success (Duan & Wu, 2024).

Historically, career success reflected prevailing economic structures. In agricultural societies, success meant survival and stability; in industrial economies, it was linked to hierarchical advancement and external indicators such as income and job title (Dries, 2011), globalization and knowledge-based industries later broadened definitions to include subjective measures like job satisfaction and work-life balance (Mirvis & Hall, 1994). Judge et al. (1995) defined career success as positive material and psychological outcomes of work experiences, emphasizing accumulated achievements. While traditional benchmarks remain influential, they are increasingly re-evaluated amid social and technological change (Judge et al., 1995).

Contemporary frameworks such as the protean career model emphasize self-direction, adaptability, and lifelong learning. Success is now defined by authenticity, purpose, and holistic well-being rather than material rewards or organizational rank (Hall, 2004). These models highlight proactive career orientations, where individual agency and identity alignment play a central role in achieving subjective success.

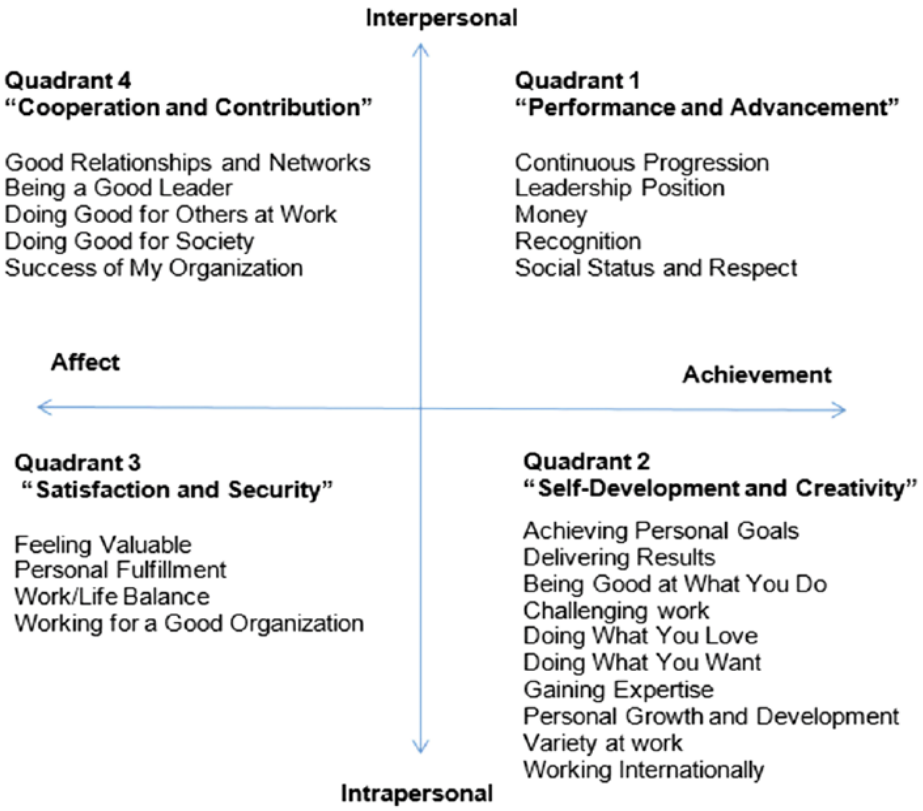
Multidimensional Framework and Technological Influences

Beyond the objective-subjective dichotomy, Dries et al. (2008) proposed four quadrants of success: intrapersonal (personal growth, value alignment), interpersonal (recognition, relationships), affect (emotional well-being), and achievement (performance, financial outcomes) (Dries et al., 2008). This framework captures the complexity of modern careers and remains relevant across generations (Benson et al., 2020). In the context of technological disruption, such as generative AI, these quadrants provide a lens for understanding shifting priorities among students entering a dynamic labor market.

Technology amplifies this personalization by transforming career guidance and development. AI-powered platforms and digital tools enable tailored career planning, interactive self-assessment, and customized learning pathways (Duan & Wu, 2024). Beyond initial job placement, technology supports continuous growth through online courses, virtual internships, and certifications, reinforcing the importance of lifelong learning and adaptability in dynamic

labor markets. This evolution marks a shift from standardized career trajectories to flexible, individualized journeys, where success is viewed as an ongoing process shaped by intentional choices, resilience, and technological empowerment.

Figure 1
Career Success Quadrants



Source: Dries et al., 2008

The Quick Evolution of Technology, Students' Preferences, and Institutional Support

Generative AI (GenAI) is reshaping career development and the broader world of work by transforming decision-making processes, job structures, and success criteria. At the macro level, GenAI automates routine tasks, augments decision-making, and creates new roles requiring hybrid human-AI skills, emphasizing adaptability, digital literacy, and lifelong learning (OECD, 2023; World Economic Forum, 2020). At the individual level, AI-powered platforms offer personalized career planning through resume feedback, interview simulations, and labor market insights, enabling more informed and reflective choices (Meng et al., 2025). Rather than replacing human guidance, GenAI complements it by allowing counselors to focus on meaning-making, values clarification, and emotional resilience (Bimrose et al., 2008). However, its adoption raises concerns about equity, ethics, and student agency, including issues of data privacy and algorithmic bias (Hooley, 2024).

As career success becomes more personalized and adaptive, higher education institutions must shift from static job-placement models to dynamic, developmental approaches (Kozhuk, 2023). Career services should integrate tools that foster reflection, identity development, and adaptability while leveraging AI for scalable, personalized guidance. Human advisors remain essential as interpreters and ethical anchors, ensuring students critically engage with

technology (Hooley, 2024). Institutions should embed career adaptability and psychological capital (Luthans et al., 2007) into curricula and co-curricular programs, promoting resilience and lifelong learning. Equity considerations are critical to prevent digital divides and ensure culturally responsive career technologies (OECD, 2023). Ultimately, universities must combine high-tech tools with high-touch engagement to prepare students for success in an AI-driven labor market.

Beyond career development, GenAI acts as a workplace disruptor, which fundamentally alters norms and practices. A disruptor is any force that drives rapid changes in work organization, job tasks, skill priorities, and career pathways (Inie et al., 2023). GenAI tools, including large language models and creative content generators, are significantly impacting routine tasks, job roles, and economic structures (Sarioguz & Miser, 2024). This disruption compels organizations and individuals to adapt to new approaches to work (Epstein et al., 2023), as GenAI accelerates job automation, hybrid work models, and the rise of gig and portfolio careers (Al-kfairy et al., 2024). These changes occur within compressed timeframes, from months to a few years, signaling an unprecedented pace of transformation (Feuerriegel et al., 2023).

Integrating Career Construction Theory, the Protean Career Model, and Career Success in the Age of Generative AI

The rapid advancement of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has reshaped how work is organized, how skills are valued, and how careers develop. By automating routine cognitive tasks and augmenting decision-making, GenAI has increased labor market uncertainty and accelerated skill obsolescence (McAfee & Brynjolfsson, 2014; World Economic Forum, 2020). As a result, traditional definitions of career success based on stability, expertise, and hierarchical advancement are increasingly inadequate. Career Construction Theory (CCT) and the Protean Career Model (PCM) offer complementary frameworks for understanding how individuals define and experience career success under these conditions.

From a career construction perspective, GenAI heightens the need for meaning making as individuals adapt to changing occupational roles. Career success is understood as the ability to maintain coherence between self-concept and work despite disruption, requiring individuals to continually reconstruct their career narratives (Savickas, 2005). Central to this process is career adaptability, which enables individuals to anticipate change, exercise agency, explore new opportunities, and sustain confidence amid technological transformation (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Within this framework, success is defined not by resistance to technology but by meaningful adaptation alongside it.

The Protean Career Model complements this view by emphasizing self-directed and values-driven career management. As GenAI accelerates skill commodification, individuals increasingly rely on internal criteria, such as personal growth and values alignment, to evaluate success rather than external indicators like status or tenure (Hall, 2004). This focus on psychological success becomes more pronounced in AI-mediated environments where traditional markers of professional value are destabilized (Hall & Chandler, 2005).

Empirical research supports this shift, highlighting subjective outcomes such as meaningful work, employability confidence, and learning orientation as key indicators of contemporary career success (Shockley et al., 2016). GenAI reinforces this trend by elevating uniquely human competencies, including creativity, ethical judgment, relational intelligence, and sensemaking,

which are less susceptible to automation. PCM provides a framework for understanding how individuals intentionally prioritize these attributes when navigating AI-augmented careers.

Together, CCT and PCM conceptualize career success in the GenAI era as adaptive, subjective, and agentic. CCT explains how individuals reconstruct vocational identity and meaning in response to disruption, while PCM explains how individuals actively align their careers with evolving values and personal definitions of success. In this integrated framework, career success is viewed as a dynamic process of ongoing adaptation, psychological fulfillment, and self-authorship, rather than a fixed outcome defined by occupational stability or technical superiority.

Conceptual Framework

The rise of generative AI (GenAI) represents a turning point in the world of work, introducing disruptions that extend beyond routine automation to areas traditionally considered uniquely human—creativity, knowledge work, and complex decision-making (West, 2018). This transformation underpins the framework's core pillars: job transformation, automation, and career adaptability. GenAI's ability to produce high-quality outputs rapidly not only enhances efficiency but also redefines professional value, signaling a shift from rigid, hierarchical career progression toward fluid, flexible pathways (Inie et al., 2023).

In this context, AI fluency emerges as a new professional currency, comparable to literacy or digital skills in earlier eras (Digital Education Council, 2025). However, technical proficiency alone is insufficient; enduring relevance depends on distinctly human capabilities such as creativity, empathy, critical thinking, resilience, and adaptability (Mukherjee et al., 2025). These competencies enable individuals, particularly students navigating the GenAI era, to thrive amid continuous disruption (Succi & Canovi, 2020).

The framework also acknowledges the psychological dimension of technological change. Accelerated automation fosters "AI anxiety," manifesting as fears of job loss and skill obsolescence (Epstein et al., 2023). Consequently, continuous learning becomes a professional imperative, transforming from an optional pursuit into a necessity (OECD, 2023). Simultaneously, values surrounding work and success are shifting toward fulfillment, balance, and social impact rather than salary or status alone (Benson et al., 2020; Ng et al., 2005).

Ultimately, the framework conceptualizes career success as a cyclical process of adaptation and value alignment. Each wave of disruption prompts individuals to refine their understanding of success through skill mastery, resilience, and intentional career choices (Luthans et al., 2007). Success is no longer a fixed destination, but an evolving construct shaped by the dynamic interplay between external technological forces and internal reassessment of purpose and meaning (Hall & Chandler, 2005).

Figure 2
Conceptual Framework: Rewriting Success: How Generative AI is Shaping New Definitions of Career Achievement

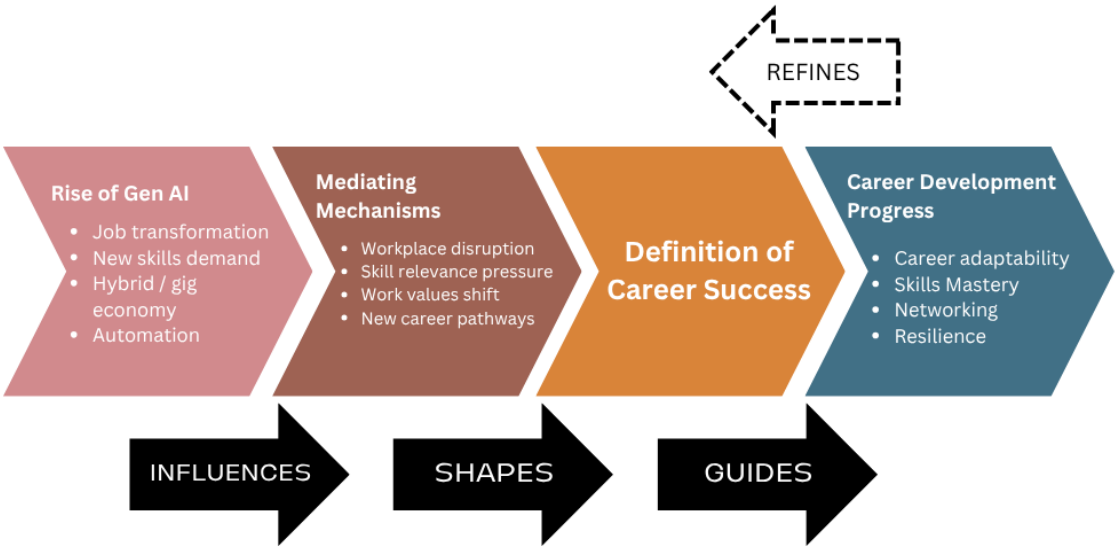


Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study, which begins with the *Rise of GenAI*, representing technological disruptions such as job transformation, automation, and the emergence of hybrid and gig economies. These changes introduce Mediating Mechanisms, including workplace disruption, skill relevance pressures, shifting work values, and new career pathways. Together, these mechanisms shape the Definition of Career Success, moving it beyond traditional markers like salary and status toward more dynamic, personalized criteria such as adaptability, purpose, and lifelong learning.

The final component, Career Development Progress, highlights adaptive strategies—career adaptability, skills mastery, networking, and resilience—that guide individuals in navigating this evolving landscape. The dashed arrow labeled "Refines" signifies the cyclical nature of this process, where each stage of career development continuously redefines success in response to technological change and personal value alignment. This framework reflects the study's core argument: success in the GenAI era is not a fixed destination but an ongoing journey shaped by external disruptions and internal adaptation.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design utilizing semi-structured interviews to examine how individuals conceptualize and define career success in the post-2019 era, with particular emphasis on the influence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) as a potential disruptor (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are well-suited for investigating abstract or subjective constructs, as they enable participants to articulate their lived experiences while maintaining a consistent framework for comparative analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis approach, which facilitates systematic coding and identification of recurring patterns, contextual factors, and emerging redefinitions of career success (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

A purposive, criterion-based sampling strategy was adopted (Patton, 2015), targeting individuals who graduated in 2019 or later and are currently employed. Participants were

recruited primarily from the researcher's professional and social networks, provided they met the inclusion criteria (He et al., 2025). Snowball sampling complemented this process, allowing participants to refer peers who satisfied the eligibility requirements. To capture a broad range of perspectives on career success, the sampling strategy incorporated elements of maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2015) ensuring representation across gender and professional domains. A total of 10 participants were recruited: five male and five female individuals who graduated on or after 2019 and are currently employed in various fields. Wutich et al. (2024), in their study in 2024 reported that theme saturation in qualitative interviews can be achieved with nine interviews. The year 2019 serves as a critical cutoff point, coinciding with the initial integration of GenAI into educational and professional contexts (He et al., 2025). Diversity in gender, occupation, and socioeconomic background was intentional, as prior research indicates that factors such as gender (Dyke & Murphy, 2006) socioeconomic status (Andresen & Stapf, 2023) and cultural background (Benson et al., 2020) significantly influence perceptions of career success. Given that GenAI adoption varies across industries, participants were drawn from multiple sectors to capture both shared and sector-specific nuances.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via secure online platforms (e.g., Zoom or Microsoft Teams), depending on participant availability and preference. Prior to participation, individuals received an information sheet outlining the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and participant rights. Written informed consent was obtained before the commencement of any interview or recording.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent to guarantee the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their responses. The researcher also maintained reflective field notes to capture contextual information, non-verbal cues, and emergent insights during and immediately following each interview. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and all personally identifiable information was removed in accordance with the study's Data Management Plan. Anonymized transcripts constituted the primary dataset for analysis.

The interview guide was informed by established literature on career success and career development, ensuring conceptual coherence and theoretical grounding. Interview questions were organized around the following thematic areas:

1. **Definitions of Career Success.** Initial questions invited participants to articulate their personal definitions of career success, consistent with a study from 2005 on subjective interpretations (Heslin, 2005) and Pico-Saltos et al.'s (2021) conceptualization of success as a cumulative sense of achievement over time. (Pico-Saltos et al., 2021)
2. **Objective and Subjective Markers of Success.** Participants were asked to reflect on both tangible indicators (e.g., salary, promotions) and intangible criteria (e.g., satisfaction, purpose, well-being), drawing on the classic objective–subjective distinction articulated by Judge et al. (1995) and the four-quadrant model proposed by Dries. (Dries et al., 2008; Judge et al., 1995)
3. **Traditional Versus Evolving Conceptions of Success.** Questions explored perceptions of traditional career trajectories and upward mobility, informed by Dries' (2011) work on the shift from hierarchical to more fluid, boundaryless career models. (Arthur et al., 2005)
4. **Perceived Impact of Technology and Generative AI.** Participants reflected on whether and how generative AI influences their understanding of career success, building on Duan and Wu's (2024) argument that technological disruption is redefining work roles, skill requirements, and indicators of achievement. (Duan & Wu, 2024)

5. **Contextual and Social Influences.** Follow-up prompts examined how demographic and structural factors—including gender (Dyke & Murphy, 2006) socioeconomic background (Hennequin, 2007) and cultural context (Benson et al., 2020)—shape individual definitions of success.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis combined inductive coding, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data, with deductive coding informed by existing theoretical frameworks, including the objective–subjective distinction in career success and Dries et al.'s (2008) quadrants (Dries et al., 2008).

Initial codes were iteratively reviewed and refined, leading to the identification of higher-order themes that captured shared patterns in participants' definitions of career success. This analytic approach supported a systematic, transparent, and theoretically informed interpretation of how success is being redefined in the context of generative AI and broader labor market transformations.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers complied with established ethical guidelines to ensure the protection, confidentiality, and well-being of participants. The participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty, and assurances of anonymity and data confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained prior to all interviews. To safeguard identities, pseudonyms (e.g., P1–P12) were used in transcripts and reports, and all personally identifying details were removed or generalized. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored in password-protected digital files accessible only to the researcher and were permanently deleted following data analysis and dissemination. As the primary researcher is a registered guidance counselor (RGC), participants were briefed before and debriefed after each interview, with opportunities provided to express any discomfort; interviews were paused or discontinued if distress was observed. While the topic posed minimal risk, participants were reminded they could skip questions or withdraw at any time, and referrals to support services were made available if needed. As a gesture of appreciation, participants received a modest honorarium transferred via digital wallet upon completion of the interview.

Results

The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews of ten Gen Zs (5 males and 5 females) revealed four major themes describing how early-career professionals define and experience career success in the context of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI): (1) persistence of traditional success markers, (2) emergence of adaptability and continuous learning as indicators of success, (3) human-centric values in AI-mediated work, and (4) coexistence of stability and self-directed career orientations.

Theme 1: Persistence of Traditional Success Markers

Across participants, traditional indicators of career success, such as stable employment, financial security, and professional legitimacy, remained salient. These were very apparent with prominent statements that related to status and financial capacity. Many participants described success as having a "stable job," "reliable income," or "position that proves

competence," particularly during the early stages of their careers. These markers were often linked to family expectations and cultural norms, with participants noting that financial stability was a prerequisite for independence and personal fulfillment. While participants acknowledged changes in the nature of work, traditional success markers were consistently framed as foundational rather than outdated. Answers from the participants included achieving a certain level in their careers, specific asset acquisitions and the likes. It cannot be denied however, that some were noted to veer away from these traditional markers. It can be noted from their answers that they also value "purpose" "passion" and "peace of mind," which are more personal rather than traditional.

Theme 2: Adaptability and Continuous Learning as Emerging Indicators of Success

Participants frequently identified adaptability and the capacity for continuous learning as central indicators of career success in AI-influenced environments. Success was described less in terms of long-term permanence and more in terms of the ability to respond to rapid technological change. Many participants emphasized the importance of "keeping skills updated," "learning how to use AI tools," and "staying relevant" in their fields. Rather than viewing success as a fixed endpoint, participants described it as an ongoing process of adjustment and skill acquisition shaped by evolving workplace demands. In essence, these participants valued continuous learning evolution, even after attaining a certain degree of stability.

Theme 3: Valuing Human-Centric Skills in AI-Mediated Work

Despite recognizing the efficiency and utility of GenAI tools, participants consistently highlighted the importance of preserving human-centric skills. Creativity, critical thinking, ethical judgment, and empathy were described as qualities that distinguish meaningful work from automated tasks. Several participants expressed that success involved knowing "when to rely on AI and when not to," emphasizing responsible and ethical use. These narratives suggest that participants perceive success not as technological mastery alone, but as the balanced integration of AI capabilities with human values and judgment. Additionally, the participants emphasized that AI is not the end all be all, and that it cannot do what the humans do because to quote one participant, AI doesn't have a *"soul,"* which is the edge of what human work can deliver. In fields that value human relationships such as healthcare, you still cannot replace the human touch with an AI mind. Participants reiterate that AI still could not perform surgeries, therapy and the likes. There is still very much a need for social interaction which AI cannot provide.

Theme 4: Coexistence of Stability and Self-Directed Career Orientations

Participants articulated a dual orientation toward career success that combined traditional stability with increased self-direction. While organizational roles and income remained important, participants also emphasized autonomy, flexibility, and alignment with personal values. Some participants described success as having the freedom to explore multiple career paths, pursue side projects, being more in touch with self, having peace of mind, or the ability to redefine goals over time. This coexistence reflects a shift toward more individualized and self-managed career trajectories, while still maintaining concern for economic security.

Discussions

This study examined how early-career professionals define career success in the context of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), focusing on (1) dominant definitions of success prior to GenAI integration, (2) emerging criteria of success in AI-enabled environments, and (3) how individuals reconcile traditional success markers with evolving work realities. The findings suggest that GenAI does not bring about a radical shift in how success is understood; rather, it accelerates and reframes existing values, reinforcing multidimensional, adaptive, and self-directed conceptions of career achievement.

Traditional Definitions of Career Success Before GenAI

Prior to explicit GenAI integration, participants largely defined career success using traditional, extrinsic indicators such as job and financial stability, adequate income, professional recognition, and upward mobility. These definitions were shaped by family expectations, educational norms, and early workplace socialization, reflecting historically entrenched success schemas. Particularly within the Philippine and broader Asian context, financial security was described as a prerequisite for feeling successful, underscoring the continued importance of pragmatic concerns tied to socioeconomic realities.

However, even before GenAI's rise, participants' narratives already included subjective elements such as personal growth, fulfillment, and work-life balance. It is also worth it to note that these participants also gave a premium to the value they add and the purpose they are fulfilling. This suggests that the shift toward multidimensional career success predates GenAI, aligning with prior literature that frames contemporary success as a combination of objective and subjective dimensions. Rather than viewing traditional markers as obsolete, participants positioned them as foundational—necessary but insufficient on their own.

Emerging Definitions of Career Success in the GenAI Era

With the integration of GenAI into work and learning environments, participants articulated new criteria for evaluating career success, particularly adaptability, continuous learning, autonomy, and relevance. Success was increasingly defined as the ability to "keep up," "learn quickly," and "remain employable" amid rapid technological change. These narratives reflect a movement away from static milestones toward dynamic capabilities, where success is measured by responsiveness to disruption rather than fixed achievements.

This shift is consistent with Career Construction Theory, which emphasizes adaptability and meaning-making in response to vocational challenges. GenAI functioned as a salient career disruptor that prompted participants to reassess their skills, identities, and future trajectories. Success, in this context, was described as an ongoing process of adjustment and recalibration rather than a final destination.

Participants also emphasized increased autonomy and self-direction, key features of the Protean Career Model. GenAI tools were seen as enabling greater independence, efficiency, and flexibility, allowing individuals to shape their careers beyond traditional organizational boundaries. Success was thus reframed as being personally driven and values-based, emphasizing psychological fulfillment alongside professional competence.

Importantly, participants did not equate success with full reliance on AI. Instead, they highlighted the importance of preserving human qualities such as creativity, critical thinking, empathy, and ethical judgment. These attributes were perceived as increasingly valuable precisely because GenAI can replicate or automate technical tasks. As such, success in the GenAI era was framed as effective human–AI integration rather than technological dominance.

Reconciling Traditional and Evolving Success Criteria

A key finding of this study is that participants did not abandon traditional success markers in favor of new, AI-driven ideals. Instead, they articulated a dual orientation in which extrinsic indicators such as salary and stability coexist with intrinsic markers such as purpose, autonomy, and well-being. Traditional markers continued to provide security and legitimacy, while newer criteria offered meaning and sustainability.

This coexistence aligns with Dries et al.'s multidimensional framework of career success, particularly the intrapersonal and affective dimensions. Participants increasingly evaluated success through psychological well-being, value alignment, and resilience, especially in response to perceived uncertainty introduced by GenAI (Dries, 2011). The study's finding that there is no complete shift, but rather a perpetuation and refinement of values, challenges deterministic narratives that portray AI as fundamentally overturning career norms.

Instead, GenAI appears to accelerate an ongoing transition toward protean and boundaryless career orientations. Participants' definitions of success reflect continuity as much as change, suggesting that technological disruption intensifies reflection on existing values rather than replacing them outright.

GenAI, Anxiety, and Adaptive Reframing of Success

Participants also expressed varying degrees of anxiety related to GenAI, particularly concerning job displacement and skill obsolescence. However, this anxiety did not translate into resistance toward technology. Rather, participants reframed success as the ability to adapt, reskill, and collaborate with AI systems. Feeling successful was associated with remaining flexible, employable, and mentally prepared for ongoing change.

This reframing highlights the role of career adaptability and psychological capital in mediating the relationship between technological disruption and career success. GenAI-induced uncertainty prompted greater emphasis on resilience, continuous learning, and proactive career management. Success thus became closely tied to perceived preparedness for the future rather than certainty or permanence.

Cultural Context and Pragmatic Orientations

The findings also underscore the importance of cultural context in shaping definitions of career success. While participants expressed values aligned with protean careers—such as autonomy and self-fulfillment—these were often framed as goals that follow economic stability rather than replace it. This sequencing reflects an Asian pragmatic orientation in which financial security remains central, particularly in early career stages.

GenAI did not diminish these pragmatic concerns; instead, it heightened awareness of the need to balance security with adaptability. Participants' narratives therefore reflect both global

career trends and localized socioeconomic constraints, reinforcing the culturally embedded nature of career success.

Implications for Career Development and Education

The findings suggest that career development initiatives should move beyond narrow employability metrics and incorporate adaptability, ethical AI literacy, and reflective career planning. While GenAI tools can enhance efficiency and personalization, participants' experiences highlight the continued importance of human guidance in navigating uncertainty and meaning making. Career success in the GenAI era requires both technological competence and psychological support.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Overall, this study demonstrates that generative AI is reshaping but not replacing how early-career professionals define career success. Traditional markers such as stability and income remain central, particularly within the Asian cultural context of the study, where financial security continues to be prioritized before higher-order aspirations such as purpose or self-actualization. Rather than signaling a fundamental shift in values, the findings suggest an affirmation and perpetuation of established career success frameworks, now complemented by emerging dimensions such as adaptability, autonomy, and meaningful work. Career success thus emerges as a dynamic, yet continuous, self-constructed process shaped by technological change alongside enduring personal and cultural values.

Importantly, the absence of a clear redefinition of career success at this stage highlights the relative novelty of generative AI in professional life. While GenAI is influencing how work is performed and experienced, it has not yet disrupted the foundational criteria by which early-career professionals assess success. This reinforces the interpretation of generative AI as a reshaping force rather than a transformative replacement, with value systems remaining largely intact as individuals adapt to new technologies.

Given that this topic is emergent, the findings should be interpreted as a snapshot of an evolving phenomenon. Future research would benefit from longitudinal designs that revisit participants over time, particularly after five to ten years, to determine whether prolonged exposure to generative AI leads to substantive shifts in career success definitions. Expanding the number of participants and increasing diversity in terms of geography, industry, career stage, and socioeconomic background would further strengthen the generalizability of insights. Additionally, a systematic review of existing and forthcoming studies would help consolidate fragmented evidence and clarify emerging patterns across contexts.

By emphasizing career success as multidimensional, contextually anchored, and temporally evolving, this study provides a realistic framework for understanding how early-career professionals navigate the future of work in the GenAI era. As generative AI continues to mature and integrate more deeply into professional environments, continued empirical attention is essential to capture whether current patterns of value perpetuation give way to more transformative redefinitions of success.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate, refine, or correct the content in the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Interview Guide

Rewriting Success: How Generative AI Is Shaping New Definitions of Career Achievement
Proponents: Ma. Asuncion Clara Pantaleon and Arlyn Napenas (facilitators)

Contact details:

ma.asuncion.pantaleon@dlsu.edu.ph
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Section A. Warm-Up and Background

Can you tell me a little about your educational background and your current job or profession?
Purpose: Build rapport; situate participant's experience within career context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Section B. Definitions of Success

When you hear the word "career success," what comes to mind for you? How would you define it in your own terms?
Based on: Heslin (2005) – importance of subjective success interpretations.

Looking back, how did you first learn what "success" meant — from family, school, or early work experiences?
Based on: Nugin & Onken (2010) – career definitions evolve with lived experiences.

Section C. Objective vs. Subjective Markers

What would you consider as signs of success that can be measured or seen by others (e.g., salary, promotions, recognition)?
Based on: Judge et al. (1995) – objective success markers.

What about more personal or internal signs of success, such as fulfillment, growth, or purpose?
Based on: Dries, Pepermans, & Carlier (2008) – subjective success quadrants.

Section D. Traditional vs. Evolving Success

Traditionally, career success was often described as "climbing the ladder" or moving up in an organization. Does this idea still apply to you? Why or why not?
Based on: Dries (2011); Wilensky (1961); Heslin (2005) – hierarchical career models.

Do you think success today involves broader or more personal goals compared to the past? Can you share examples?
Based on: Arthur et al. (2005); Mirvis & Hall (1994) – boundaryless and protean career perspectives.

Section E. Technology and GenAI

In your opinion, how has technology, particularly generative AI, influenced how people define or pursue career success?
Based on: Duan & Wu (2024) – technology as a driver of redefining success.

Have AI tools changed the kinds of skills or values that you believe are important for success in your field?
Based on: Benson et al. (2020); Kaše et al. (2018) – contextual influences on success.

Section F. Personal Influences

How do factors such as your gender, socioeconomic background, or culture shape your idea of career success?
Based on: Dyke & Murphy (2006); Hennequin (2007); Benson et al. (2020).

Section G. Reflection and Closing

If you could give advice to students or graduates just entering the workforce about "how to define success," what would you tell them?
Purpose: Summative reflection; aligns with practical implications for career support programs.

Once the interview is done, the interview facilitator will wrap up the session and will conduct a debriefing session for the participants (not recorded) should they need to express feelings of discomfort or any untowardness in the duration of the interview.

Upon completion of the interview, an amount will be sent via cash transfer to the participants' digital wallet.

Appendix B
Informed Consent Form

Rewriting Success: How Generative AI Is Shaping New Definitions of Career Achievement

Ma. Asuncion Clara Pantaleon (ma.asuncion.pantaleon@dlsu.edu.ph)
Arlyn Napenas (arlyn.napenas@dlsu.edu.ph)

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please read the following information carefully and feel free to ask any of the researchers if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is ***to explore how individuals who graduated or entered the workforce on or after 2019 define "career success" in light of the rise of Generative AI (GenAI). By gathering perspectives across different professions, this study seeks to understand how success is being redefined in today's technology-driven world.***

STUDY PROCEDURES

The participants of this study will undergo a one-on-one interview with the authors of this research. The interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes and will be conducted either face-to-face or online modality, whichever the participant prefers. With your consent, the session will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in data collection. You may freely decline to answer any question or withdraw at any point without any consequence.

The data collected is intended for research presentation and publication. This being said, the authors of this research would assure you that your name and any identifying information will not appear in any report or publication. Data will be anonymized, securely stored, and deleted after completion of the study and dissemination of findings.

The questions will revolve around your personal definition of career success, and the factors that influenced this definition. There are 9 questions in the interview, with two being check-in questions and a reflection/closing question to end the session.

DURATION

The interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes and will be conducted either face-to-face or online modality, whichever the participant prefers.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. It is up to you whether or not you decide to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this consent form. After you sign this consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be destroyed.

RISKS

While the topic is not inherently sensitive, discussing career success in the context of AI may raise concerns related to job security, personal achievement, or uncertainty about the future. You can opt out of this study at any time, and you can skip any question. If signs of discomfort arise or if you express verbally your intent not to proceed during the interview, the session will be paused, and you will be asked whether you would like to continue. If you experience heightened distress, the session will cease, and an appropriate debriefing session will be provided with information about counseling or support services.

BENEFITS

Data gathered in this study will be very helpful to the improvement and creation of appropriate progams and activities for career development of university students.

In addition, upon completion of the interview, your GCash account number will be collected for purposes of the monetary benefits (Php 300.00). Your account number will then be deleted as soon as this has been completed.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your responses in this research will be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality, including the following:

1. Assigning codes for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents;

2. Keeping of notes, interview transcriptions, and any other personal identifiers in the researcher's gadget that will be secured with a password that only the researchers will have access to;

3. Soft copies of notes and research data with personal identifiers are password-protected and has multi-factor authentication enabled for security;

4. Data with identifiers are kept only until the research has been presented and published. After which, all soft copies will be securely deleted;

5. Research results for publication will not include any personal identifiers of the research participant, unless explicit consent was given by the participants;

6. Research participants will be notified, and a separate consent will be asked should any collected data be used beyond the scope of this consent.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions at any time about this study, or if you experience any non-normative sensations because of participation, or to exercise your data privacy rights, you may contact any of the researchers whose contact information is on the first page.

CONSENT
This section is mandatory

I have read the provided information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I will be given a copy of this form, and the researcher will keep another copy on file. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT	**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**

DATE (dd/mm/yyyy)