



STUDENT RESOURCES

Understanding factors in career success

Career success can be defined in different ways by different people; we don't all have to be Olympic gold medal winners, or world-renowned scientists to be considered a success in our careers or work!

However, many different factors can influence a person's success (positively or negatively). Understanding what these factors are can help you identify what you can achieve, and help you to work effectively towards your personal goals.

In this activity, you will consider:

- What career success can mean for different people;
- Factors that influence on your career success; and
- How to apply your understanding of these factors as you plan and manage your career

Think about these two prominent Australians – Cathy Freeman and Professor Elizabeth Blackburn. Both women have faced many challenges in their journeys to achieve great things!

Click on each picture to go to a Wikipedia biography for Cathy and Elizabeth. Alternatively, select a different 'successful' person who works in a job or industry you are interested in, and add this person below. Look at a minimum of two biographies before starting the activity.



Cathy Freeman (200 and 400m sprint Olympic gold medals, 2000 Olympics. Aboriginal Australian leader.



Professor Elizabeth Blackburn (Nobel prize winning scientist – in stem-cell research. Leader and educator).



A different 'successful' person who works in a job or industry you are interested in:

Activity instructions

In this activity, you will divide the factors relating to career success into two categories: 'inside' and 'outside'. The categories can be interpreted in two different ways:

- Inside the person | outside the person
- Inside the person's control | outside the person's control

Your interpretation can make a big difference to your career strategy, so complete the activity from both perspectives. The factors below will help you to get started.

Challenge question

Which of the following factors can be both "challenges to success" and "factors which can be helpful", depending on which interpretation you use? See if you can identify them!

Factors to get you started

willpower	intelligence	genetics	practice
work ethic	family	culture	coach/teacher

Using the table below, identify factors which may have helped these people to be successful.

Factors which may helped them to be successful	
Inside	Outside

Next, identify some of the challenges to success that they may have overcome.

Challenges to success /specific challenges they faced	
Inside	Outside

Make it count!

Apply your understanding

When you are developing a career plan or strategies, or assessing your strengths and learning gaps or areas for improvement, focus on the factors you can control. For example, applying strategies to improve the way you study is more effective than worrying about whether or not you have enough 'natural talent' or 'intelligence' to be successful. Understanding the factors that influence career success may also help you to understand factors which contribute to, or limit, career resilience.

Questions for further reflection or discussion

When you are asked in a job or placement interview to talk about your strengths and weaknesses, you will demonstrate greater self-awareness if you have reflected deeply on these ideas. The following questions will help you to reflect, but add your own questions as well.

- Which factor is the most important one for career success, in your view? Does it depend on the field of study, profession or industry?
- What is the most important factor in the profession or industry you are interested in?
- Did any of the factors move from inside to outside when you changed the definition from 'internal to the person' to 'inside the person's control'?

- To what extent do you think 'luck' or 'chance' plays a part in career success?
- What should a person focus on to achieve success in their field?
- Think about your own career goal setting: how does this analysis of factors contributing to success inform your realistic career goals?

References and further reading

The theoretical foundations of this activity include Social Cognitive Career theory - self-efficacy (Lent Brown and Hackett) and Chaos theory of Careers (Bright and Pryor, 2011)].

Bright, J., & Pryor, R. (2011). The chaos theory of careers: A new perspective on working in the twenty-first century. New York: Routledge.

Duffy, .Ryan and Dik, Bryan J. (2009) Beyond the Self: External Influences in the Career Development Process The Career Development Quarterly September 2009 • Volume 58

Freakonomics (2017) How to Get More Grit in Your Life (Ep. 246) online: <http://freakonomics.com/podcast/get-grit-life-rebroadcast/> (interview with Angela Duckworth, author of Grit).

Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 45, 79-122.

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