

Analysis of Methods for Studying the 'Success Factors in the Bulgarian Socio-Cultural Environment'¹

Mayiana Mitevska, Prof. D.Sc.

Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski", Faculty of Pedagogy, Department of Psychology, Bulgaria, Plovdiv

Denis Nikiforov

Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski", Faculty of Pedagogy, Department of Psychology, Bulgaria, Plovdiv

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Abstract: This scientific article presents an in-depth analysis of the methods used to study the factors of success within the Bulgarian socio-cultural context. The emphasis is placed on the Big Five personality model. The study focuses on the interaction between individual, social, and cultural factors that determine success in the Bulgarian socio-cultural environment. An analysis of a pilot study conducted through an online survey with psychology students from Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" is integrated in order to evaluate its methodological effectiveness. The results highlight the necessity of employing combined methods to achieve comprehensive conclusions.

Keywords: success factors, Big Five, Bulgarian socio-cultural environment, positive psychology

Introduction

The topic "*Success Factors in the Bulgarian Socio-Cultural Environment*" represents a current field of research within positive psychology, focusing on the interaction between individual characteristics, social norms, and cultural contexts that define success. In the Bulgarian context, success is often perceived through the lens of post-socialist transformation, where factors such as economic instability, social networks, and personal resilience play a crucial role. For instance, in rural areas of Bulgaria, development depends on supportive measures that act as agents of transition toward sustainability, including ecological and social factors. Cultural specificities also influence motivation, goals, and life satisfaction. This article provides an in-depth analysis of various research methods for studying success factors, with a particular focus on the Big Five personality model as a key instrument. The paper also integrates an analysis of a pilot study presented through the provided Google Form survey.

Different Methods for Studying Success Factors

The study of success factors in a socio-cultural context requires a multidisciplinary approach combining psychology, sociology, and cultural studies. The methods can be classified into three main categories: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed. Each method offers unique advantages for understanding the complex interactions between individual, social, and cultural factors.

Quantitative Methods

Quantitative approaches focus on measurement and statistical analysis to identify correlations and predictions. They are particularly useful for large samples and generalizable results.

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Surveys and standardized scales: Commonly used to collect self-assessment data. For example, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) by Diener et al. (1985) measures subjective well-being, which is associated with success. In the Bulgarian context, studies such as Petrova (2020) on academic success among students employed correlation analysis to link factors such as education and social ties with achievements. Advantages: objectivity and potential for regression analysis. Disadvantages: lack of depth in capturing cultural nuances.

Statistical models: The use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test hypotheses. For instance, in a study on socio-cultural factors influencing innovation (Angelova, 2022), SEM revealed how cultural values moderate the relationship between personality traits and success. This method is effective in the Bulgarian socio-cultural environment, where economic instability can be modeled as a moderator.

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods emphasize subjective experiences and cultural interpretations, which are critical in socio-cultural research.

Interviews and focus groups: In-depth interviews help uncover culturally specific definitions of success. In the Bulgarian context, focus groups with participants from different regions (e.g., Sofia vs. rural areas) can highlight the influence of urbanization. A study by Krasteva (2019) used thematic analysis to identify themes such as family support as a key factor for success among young entrepreneurs. In social entrepreneurship, qualitative methods uncover successful models in Bulgaria. Advantages: richness of data. Disadvantages: subjectivity and difficulty in generalization.

Ethnographic approaches: Observation in natural settings to understand how socio-cultural norms influence behavior. In Bulgaria, this may include analyzing corporate cultures in the post-pandemic period, where hybrid work reshapes success factors.

Mixed Methods

Mixed approaches combine quantitative and qualitative data for a comprehensive analysis. For example, the Delphi method (used in socio-cultural studies such as Linstone & Turoff, 1975, adapted to the Bulgarian context) involves iterative expert opinions followed by statistical validation.

Alternative Methods

In addition to traditional categories, other alternative methods can be applied, particularly suitable for studying success in the Bulgarian socio-cultural environment.

Cross-cultural comparative methods: Techniques such as cross-national convenience sampling are used to collect data (e.g., via universities or networks), research companies providing online survey services, or existing international databases (such as the World Values Survey).

The Big Five Model as a Key Method for Studying Success

The Big Five personality model (OCEAN: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism) is one of the most widely used tools in psychology for predicting success. Developed by Costa and McCrae (1992), it measures five fundamental personality dimensions that are universal yet culturally modulated.

Theoretical Overview

Openness to Experience: High levels are associated with creativity and adaptability, which are crucial for success in dynamic environments. In Bulgaria, where economic transformation requires innovation, openness predicts entrepreneurial success (Merit Research Journals, 2023).

Conscientiousness: The strongest predictor of academic and professional success. It includes persistence and discipline, helping to overcome socio-cultural barriers such as bureaucracy. A meta-analysis by Poropat (2009) reported a correlation of $r = 0.23$ with academic achievement.

- Extraversion: Facilitates social connections, critical in collectivist cultures such as the Bulgarian one.
- Agreeableness: Supports teamwork but may limit ambition in competitive environments.
- Neuroticism: Low levels are associated with emotional stability and better coping with failures.
- Application in the Bulgarian Socio-Cultural Environment

In Bulgaria, the Big Five has been adapted in studies on career choice and self-efficacy (The Choice of Career and Bulgarian Students, 2022). For example, high conscientiousness correlates with educational success, while neuroticism may be exacerbated by socio-cultural stressors such as migration or economic insecurity. A study published in SGEM Social (2023) showed that the Big Five influences team success in Bulgarian companies, with an emphasis on autonomy.

Methodologically, the Big Five is measured using questionnaires such as the NEO-PI-R, which can be integrated into dissertation research for predictive purposes. Analytically, the model allows for cultural comparisons: in Western cultures, extraversion is a stronger predictor, whereas in Bulgaria conscientiousness dominates due to the historical emphasis on hard work.

Enriching the Study with Karabelova's Work

The investigation of success factors in the Bulgarian socio-cultural environment can be enriched through the integration of the works of Sonya Karabelova, whose book *Career Choice* (Karabelova, 2021) offers an integrative approach to diagnosing the career preferences of young people in the Bulgarian socio-cultural context. Karabelova emphasizes that career structures everyday reality and serves as a primary source of personal identity and self-esteem. Her approach highlights the psychological significance of career choice, particularly during adolescence, when life trajectories are being formed. In the Bulgarian context, where social ties and cultural norms play a substantial role, her research underscores the importance of personality traits and social support as success factors.

Analysis of the Pilot Study

The pilot study, presented via Google Form (link: Survey Link), consists of more than 40 questions focused on demographic data, life satisfaction, definitions of success, motivation, factors, and future plans. It serves as a preliminary tool for a dissertation on the topic "Success Factors in the Bulgarian Socio-Cultural Environment" and aims to gather insights into success factors within the Bulgarian context.

Research Design and Structure

The survey begins with demographic questions (gender, age, marital status, work experience, professional hierarchy, education, place of residence), allowing for data segmentation. It then includes satisfaction scales (inspired by the SWLS and the Subjective Happiness Scale by Lyubomirsky), open-ended questions on definitions of success (to capture subjective interpretations), and Likert-scale assessments of factors such as hard work, luck, education, social ties, personality traits, and support.

Benefits of the Study

Complexity: Covers multiple dimensions, including motivation (goal-setting frequency, aspirations) and obstacles, enabling correlation analysis.

Connection with the Big Five: Questions on "personality traits (such as persistence, determination)" directly relate to Conscientiousness. This could be expanded by including a Big Five questionnaire for a more precise link.

Cultural Relevance: The focus on social ties and family support reflects Bulgarian collectivist values, as also seen in models of success shared on social media.

Positive psychology, as a scientific field, focuses on studying strengths and positive aspects of human functioning such as happiness, well-being, and flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In the present pilot study, 77 individuals participated, all of them psychology students from Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski.” Of the participants, 84.4% were women (see Fig. 1).

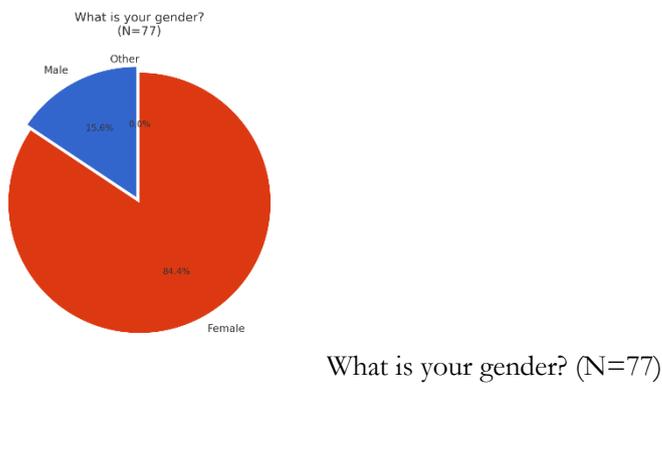


Fig. 1. Distribution by Gender

80.5% of the respondents are between the ages of 18 and 30 (see Fig. 2). Another significant demographic aspect is the marital status of participants, with 63.6% being married (see Fig. 3).

The study also includes schematic responses based on levels of agreement, as well as open-ended responses concerning the topic of success. Participants expressed a high level of agreement regarding the importance of achieving success in life, which, in turn, is strongly associated with goal-setting (see Fig. 4).

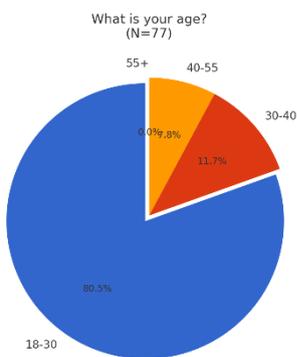


Fig. 2. Age Distribution

What is your age? (N=77)

18-30	80.5%
30-40	11.7%
40-55	7.8%
55+	0%

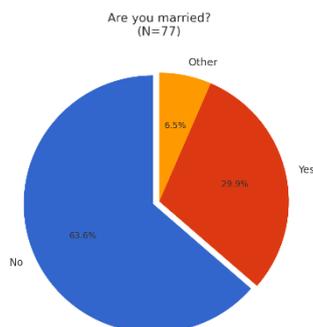


Fig. 3. Distribution by Marital Status

Are you married? (N=77)

No: **63.6%**

Yes: **29.9%**

Other: **6.5%**

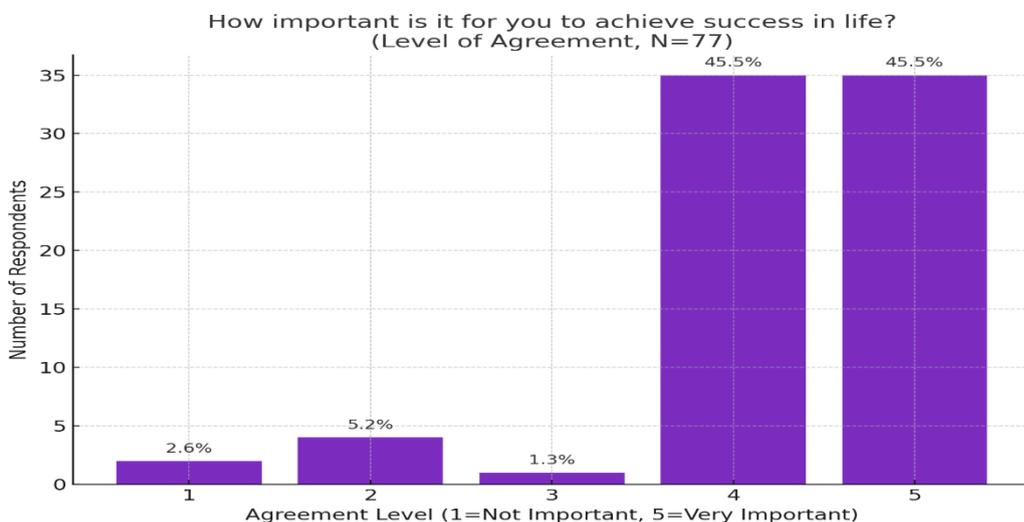


Fig. 4. Importance of Achieving Success in Life (Level of Agreement)

The distribution of responses shows a clear consensus regarding the importance of success in life. Out of 77 participants:

45.5% selected level 4 (high importance),

45.5% selected level 5 (very high importance).

Together, these two categories account for 91% of the sample, which demonstrates that the majority of respondents strongly associate life success with personal goals and achievements.

Only a small minority of participants rated success as less important:

5.2% chose level 2,

2.6% chose level 1,

1.3% chose level 3.

This indicates that low levels of agreement are marginal and represent outliers rather than a general tendency.

Interpretation in Context

The strong clustering at levels 4 and 5 reflects a cultural emphasis on striving and goal orientation in the Bulgarian socio-cultural environment.

It aligns with findings in positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), where goal-setting and

achievement orientation are strongly linked to subjective well-being.

Within the pilot study, this result supports the assumption that success is not perceived as optional or secondary, but as a central life priority.

Given the high proportion of young respondents (80.5% aged 18–30), these results may also reflect developmental priorities of emerging adulthood, where career establishment and goal achievement are especially salient.

Analysis of the Question: “What Are Your Main Goals at the Moment?”

Number of participants: 77

Based on the responses to the open-ended question “What are your main goals at the moment?”, a thematic analysis was conducted. The answers were categorized by semantic similarity, with some participants mentioning more than one goal.

Results

Main categories and frequency of mention:

- Completing education – 34 participants
Examples:
 - “To graduate from university.”
 - “To pass my exams.”
 - “To complete both of my bachelor’s degrees.”
- Professional development and career – 27 participants
Examples:
 - “To develop professionally.”
 - “To find a job.”
 - “To get a promotion at work.”
- Personal development – 24 participants
Examples:
 - “To be a better version of myself.”
 - “Personal growth.”
 - “Spiritual elevation.”
- Financial stability and independence – 16 participants
Examples:
 - “To earn enough money so I don’t have to worry.”
 - “Financial security.”
 - “To be financially independent.”
- Family and personal relationships – 10 participants
Examples:
 - “To start a family.”
 - “Harmony in the family.”
 - “Family, career, and personal development.”
- Travel and new experiences – 6 participants
Examples:
 - “To travel.”
 - “New experiences.”
 - “To save money to travel.”
- Spiritual and emotional well-being – 6 participants
Examples:

- “Happiness.”
- “Inner peace.”
- “Spiritual development.”
- Searching for life direction / self-determination – 4 participants
Examples:
 - “To find my path.”
 - “To orient myself in the field.”
 - “To figure out what I want to do.”
- Housing independence – 3 participants
Examples:
 - “To move out of my parents’ home.”
 - “To have my own home.”
- Prefer not to share – 1 participant
Example:
 - “I would prefer not to share.”
- Conclusions
- The most frequently mentioned goal was completing education, identified by nearly half of the participants.
- Professional development and personal growth are regarded as interconnected priorities.
- Financial independence is strongly emphasized and often combined with other goals such as education and family.
- There is also a noticeable aspiration toward emotional well-being, spirituality, and achieving inner balance.
- Although less common, some responses reveal personal or existential searches, such as self-determination and leaving a toxic environment.

The results highlight the importance of setting and achieving specific goals among the participants. (See Fig. 5 and Fig. 6.)

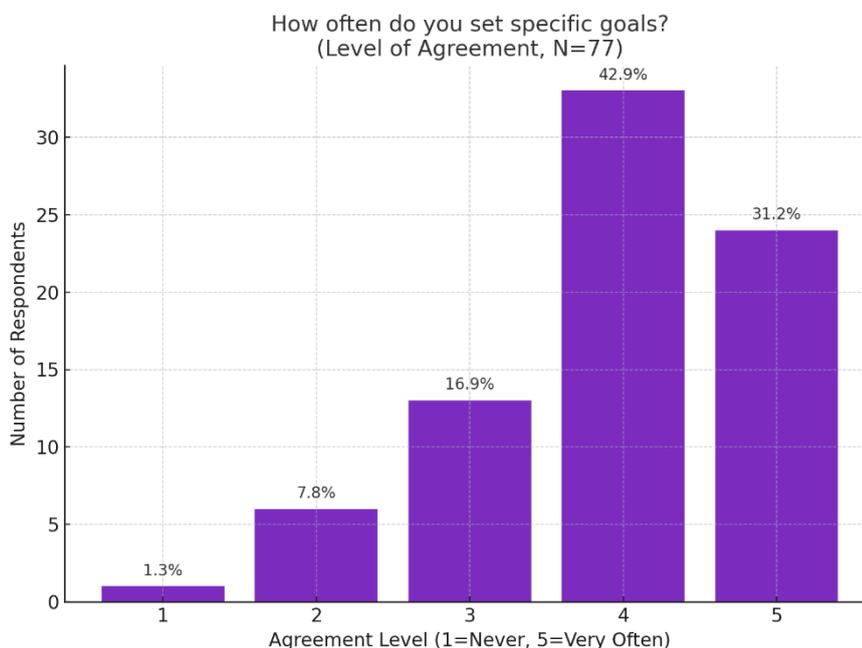


Fig. 5. Frequency of Setting Specific Goals

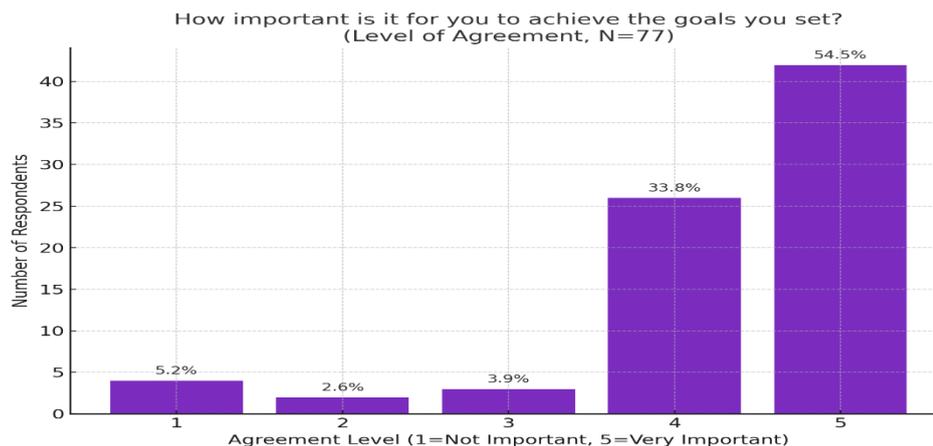


Fig. 6. Importance of Achieving the Goals You Set (Level of Agreement, N=77)

Positive Psychology and Success

Positive psychology provides a framework for understanding success not only as an external achievement but also as an internal state of satisfaction and meaning (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Key constructs such as optimism, resilience, self-efficacy, and social support are considered important predictors of achieving goals and experiencing success (Bandura, 1997; Carver & Scheier, 1998). In the Bulgarian context, it is important to explore how these universal principles are filtered through the lens of national values and social norms.

Happiness and Subjective Well-Being in Bulgarian Culture

Research shows that the understanding and experience of happiness can vary significantly across cultures (Diener et al., 2003). In the Bulgarian socio-cultural environment, factors such as family ties, social connections, and the sense of belonging may play a substantial role in subjective well-being and the perception of a successful life (Gancheva & Ivanova, 2018).

The Role of Motivation and Personal Development

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are key drivers for achieving success. Personal development, including learning, acquiring new skills, and working on oneself, is an important aspect of the path toward success (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In the Bulgarian context, it is particularly interesting to investigate how cultural values and the educational system influence motivation and the pursuit of personal development. (See Fig. 7.)

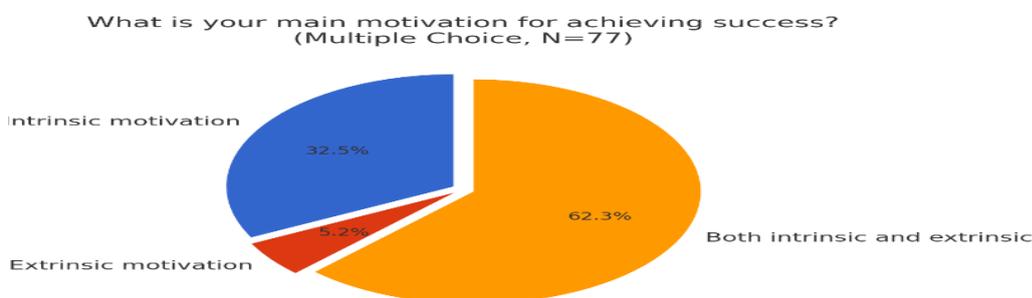


Fig. 7. What Is Your Main Motivation for Achieving Success? (Multiple Choice, N=77)

Intrinsic motivation (personal satisfaction, skill development): **32.5%**

Extrinsic motivation (financial rewards, social recognition): **5.2%**

Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation: 62.3%

The majority of respondents (62.3%) reported being driven by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, while 32.5% emphasized intrinsic factors alone, and only 5.2% relied primarily on extrinsic drivers.

The results indicate that the majority of respondents (62.3%) reported being motivated by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. This suggests that for most participants, success is associated not only with personal growth and internal satisfaction but also with external validation and tangible rewards such as financial stability or social recognition.

A significant portion (32.5%) emphasized intrinsic motivation alone, highlighting the importance of self-improvement, personal fulfillment, and skill development. This finding aligns with principles of positive psychology (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasize that intrinsic motivation is closely linked to long-term well-being and sustainable goal achievement.

Only a small minority (5.2%) identified extrinsic motivation as their primary driver, indicating that external rewards such as money or recognition are not sufficient as stand-alone motivators for most participants in the Bulgarian socio-cultural context.

Interpretation in Context

The predominance of combined motivation reflects the socio-cultural reality in Bulgaria, where young adults often balance personal aspirations with economic pressures and the need for social approval. The strong presence of intrinsic factors suggests that self-actualization and inner satisfaction remain central to how success is perceived. The minimal reliance on purely extrinsic motivation may indicate a cultural preference for internal values over materialistic measures of success, while still recognizing the importance of external support.

Conclusion

The analysis of methods for studying success factors highlights the need for a balanced approach, where the Big Five provides a structured model for understanding the personality determinants of success. In the Bulgarian socio-cultural environment, the model can reveal how cultural values shape success, with conscientiousness emerging as a key factor. The pilot study offers valuable insights but requires refinement to ensure greater methodological rigor. This will enrich the forthcoming dissertation on “*Success Factors in the Bulgarian Socio-Cultural Environment*” and contribute to the development of Positive Psychology in Bulgaria.

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