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## Achieving Successful Outcomes

By: Fahmeena Odetta Moore

Ph.D. Student, Northcentral University

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## **Achieving Successful Outcomes**

### **Introduction**

Everyone - individuals, businesses, and governments - is interested in successful outcomes. Individuals want to be successful in their lives, which depends on success at work, school, and so on. Businesses want to be successful at their projects, operations, and mission. Government agencies want to be successful at their projects, provision of services to public, and operations. However, success is not guaranteed. People understand, and even the Holy Bible states, “The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all” (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Projects with very capable people fail, many promising small businesses and startups fail, companies go bankrupt, and so on. Success is important; the alternative - failure - leads to wasted time and resources, frustration, loss of confidence, and so on.

There is much research on the success of projects, the success of initiatives such as privatization of enterprises, the success of leaders, the success of political candidates, and the success of students. Researchers have looked at traits that contribute to leadership success, factors that determine the success of a project, how grit contributes to academic success, and so on. The contribution of this research is to review established literature (proverbs, stories of success, beliefs, songs etc.) to identify the factors that lead to achievement and success in life and then test the factors using the lives of successful individuals.

### **Data Collection and Method to Collect Factors**

The data for analysis came from a variety of websites. There were thousands of quotes on traits and qualities that are needed to lead a life of notable achievements, success in career, and

respect of peers. There were hundreds of stories to advise college graduates of what works in the world. There were stories from the Holy Bible. There were stories of celebrities. The data was all qualitative data.

I grouped all data collected into categories or general strengths/areas that are important for success. I noted the linkages between the areas or, in other words, which areas were related and how they were related. For example, the area perseverance is related to discipline and mental strength. The more mentally strong and disciplined we are, the more we can persevere through life's difficulties and struggles. I also noted which areas had a higher count or more examples of their contribution to successful outcomes.

This research had goals similar to those in the research by Arias et al. (2012). Arias et al. extended the work of the Standish Group on factors that lead to project failure or are important for project success. Arias et al. noted that available reasons for project failure from the Standish Group included reasons/factors that are symptoms of others (in other words, they were interrelated), and sought to develop a list of key, independent factors. I discovered the work by Arias et al. after I had completed the bulk of my research.

### The Resulting Factors

I selected those areas that had the highest count considering the relationships among them. The resulting factors are seven: preparation/planning, patience, perseverance, problem-solving, perception, persuasion, and panache. **Perseverance** is important. In life, people have setbacks, they struggle, they fail. They need to persevere to break free from struggles and recover from setbacks and failures. **Patience** is usually required.

**Persuasion** is needed to sell ideas, to convince others of something, for making others see things as you do, or for garnering support. Persuasion is known as a great superpower.

**Perception** deals with seeing things clearly, and also viewpoints, ideas, thinking, and vision.

**Preparation/Planning** is needed to formulate a strategy, to think through issues.

**Problem-solving** is needed to deal with all the problems that may crop up. Creative solutions to problems is a plus.

**Panache** has to do with confidence, style, charisma, and character.

### **Application of the Factors**

To test the seven factors, I selected seven successful people. I selected unique individuals who have achieved success despite formidable challenges. These individuals stood out because they were not born in the area/country, because they dressed differently, or did things in a different way. They are: Usain Bolt, Richie Etwaru, Rupert Clarke, Mindy Kaling, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Ravi Venkatesan, and Mark Zuckerberg.

A look at the life of each individual selected showed that the seven factors contributed to their success. I found that the contribution of the factors were not the same across individuals. Some factors played a larger role in the success of some individuals. For example, the story of Arnold Schwarzenegger is a story of perseverance and problem solving. Preparation and perception were more important in Mindy Kaling's life.

There was much perseverance in the stories of the selected participants. Usain Bolt, for example, trained tirelessly as all top athletes do. He diligently and consistently trained or prepared for events. When he had a hamstring injury in 2004, he was unable to perform at his best and was away from track for about two years. He persevered and came back with a

vengeance in 2007. He won medals at several championships. Ravi Venkatesan has suffered devastating setbacks that he thought he could not recover from. Recovering from setbacks requires patience and perseverance.

Persuasion was significant. Several individuals had major persuasive wins that changed their lives. For example, Arnold Schwarzenegger persuaded citizens of California to select him as governor. Rupert Clarke persuaded music executives to enter into a contract to allow him to sing professionally.

Each individual had panache that contributed to his or her success. Richie Etwaru was a shy teenager who transformed into a confident, self-assured adult. In his article “Networking Like A Ninja: Seven Skills,” he wrote that his nickname in high school was “cry baby.” Now, he is usually at events holding people by the hands walking them over to meet others, high fiving CEOs he just met, and daring people to tweet selfies with him included. Mark Zuckerberg had a different style from most CEOs. He was known as the “hoodie-wearing” CEO.

Here is information on how the factors contributed to success for one of the selected individuals selected at random - Ravi Venkatesan:

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Ravi Venkatesan was born in India. He is incredibly successful. He was Chairman of Microsoft India between 2004 and 2011 which, under his leadership, became Microsoft's second largest and one of its fastest growing geographies. In 2011, Ravi received the Distinguished Engineering Alumnus award from Purdue University. Ravi was also voted the most influential MNC CEO for 2011 by the Economic Times Daily. He received the Distinguished Alumnus

award from the Indian Institute of Technology. Ravi possesses all seven key traits and talents in varying degrees.

Ravi has a combination of panache and persuasiveness that led people to believe in him and give him more job responsibilities during his career. He started as a manufacturing engineer at Cummins Engine and rose rapidly through the ranks to become one of the youngest officers of the company.

Ravi prepared for his career by completing a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay; a master's in engineering from Purdue University; and a Master of Business Administration from Harvard Business School. He left his country in 1985 at age 22 to pursue the master's degree in engineering at Purdue University. He later decided on a master's degree in Business Administration, which provided a rounded education.

At 32, Ravi was doing really well in America but decided to return to India to do a job that no one else wanted. He had the vision that he could be successful at the job and took a risk. As Chairman of Cummins India Limited, he oversaw the company's transformation into a leading provider of power solutions and automotive engines in India. At 40, he left a wonderful career at Cummins for the challenges of Microsoft and an industry he knew nothing about, against the advice of friends and family. He again had the vision that he could be successful by believing in himself.

As a corporate executive, Ravi had to solve many problems. In his article "When Tenacity Is More Important Than Brilliance," Ravi wrote that he got better at hiring people who were outstanding at what he was not. Hiring and managing people was a challenge. He said stars

are often hard to manage and often resist collaboration while “B players” are easier to hire but simply do what they are told.

Ravi has suffered setbacks. He wrote that he has never encountered a devastating setback that he couldn’t recover from. Recovering from setbacks requires patience and perseverance.

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## **Discussion**

Research has shown that perseverance, also known as grit, is important for academic and professional success. Grit is a non-cognitive trait “associated with motivation, attitude and temperament rather than intellect” (Bliss and Jacobson, 2020). Bliss and Jacobson (2020) determined that grit should be considered when deciding which students to admit to the Doctor of Physical Therapy program in addition to cognitive traits such as performance on admissions tests. Students strong in non-cognitive traits have strengths that will allow them to be successful in the complex healthcare industry. Seguin (2019) showed that grit contributes to the success of nurse leaders.

From Usain Bolt and Arnold Schwarzenegger, it was clear that grit is necessary for athletes. Sigmundsson, Haga, and Hermundsdottir (2020) showed that along with passion (having a strong enthusiasm or desire for something), grit is needed to become an expert achiever. And, growth mindset is an underlying cognitive factor of both passion and grit. Growth mindset is believing you can achieve much if you dedicate your energies to growing your abilities. Sigmundsson et al. (2022) used this model to explore the performance of athletes. There was a difference in passion between the two football teams studied and no difference in grit and



growth mindset. Sigmundsson, Guðnason, and Johannsdottir (2021) found that there is no significant difference between growth mindset and grit of males and females. There was a difference in passion, in favor of males.

Growth mindset is really believing in yourself and not limiting your abilities. These qualities are found in perception and panache. Panache also covers the drive to succeed, which is really passion. From my research, I saw that passion is dangerous in that it could lead the individual to engage in unethical practices. Passion must be balanced with the view that enough is enough and to get/do more is to go overboard. This is contentment.

Planning is important for the individual. Just as the old saying goes, “Fail to prepare, prepare to fail.” As far as I know, there is not much research in this area. There is some research on the importance of planning in career success. Livingston (2003) investigated whether a career plan was important and its impact on the career success of the Black female. She found that three elements of a career plan - hire status, organization type, and career enhancement strategies - are important for upward mobility.

In academia, there has been a lot of research in the area of project success. Researchers looked at factors that determine the success of a project (i.e., factors that lead to success or cause a project to be successful) or sometimes factors that lead to project failure. Some researchers focused on specific sub-areas, such as: (1) the process/life cycle stages used or followed on the project, and (2) projects of a specific type or complexity, such as ERP projects. For example, research by \_\_\_\_\_

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Some researchers focused on a specific project to understand and learn from the drivers of success as well as issues on the project. There is **no comparison** of factors that determine the success of a project and factors that determine the success of individuals or other types of success.

In my PhD-level IT Management course at Northcentral University, I stumbled upon an article that was so similar to my work on factors that lead to the success of individuals that I believed a comparison of results would be worthwhile. The article \_\_\_\_\_

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The researchers came up with 7 key factors: senior management support, qualified project managers, adequate planning, key users involvement, requirements management, monitor and control the project execution, and development team management.

My work on individuals success also developed 7 factors that determine success: preparation/planning, patience, perseverance, problem-solving, perception, persuasion, and panache. I followed a similar methodology/process to come up with the 7 factors. I started with the thousands of quotes, speeches (such as graduation speeches), success stories, proverbs, and so on, then organized them and placed them into categories. I noted the connections and interrelationships between the categories. For example, perseverance is related to discipline and mental strength. The more mentally strong and disciplined we are, the more we can persevere through life's difficulties and struggles. The process to reduce the large number of categories was a long one. At first, I developed several song lists with matching/related quotes. The topic could be identified from the song and quotes. I also

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### **Research Problem**

We all want successful outcomes. Managers want their projects to be successful, business owners want their ventures to be successful, investors want companies they invest in to grow and thrive, and so on. However, success is not guaranteed. People understand, and even the Holy Bible states, "The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all" (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Projects with very capable people fail, many promising small businesses and

startups fail, companies go bankrupt, and so on. The success of projects and companies is an area that has been widely researched in academia. There is also a lot of research and analysis on the success of individuals (private lives) outside of academia. There is not much research on similarities or relationships between the success of individuals and the success of projects. This gap is the problem to be addressed.

Some individuals have managed to achieve great success on their own. In the United States, for example, 62 % or 363 of the 585 billionaires as of January 2016 were self-made – individuals who did not have riches handed to them, but who accumulated a lot of wealth from a new idea, a new company, or some other means they developed (Clifford, 2016). Some are famous (for a particular thing) or respected as someone who achieved a lot despite great obstacles or adversity. These individuals have had to manage their lives, especially in times of difficulty and struggle. Their private lives could be looked at as projects. A lot could be learned from such individuals, especially the “different” individuals - individuals who stood out in their class or group because they were not born in the area/country, because they dressed differently, or did things in a different way.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions:

RQ1: How did “different” successful individuals achieve their success?

RQ2: Did the “different” individuals have unusual struggles or issues because they are different?

RQ3: Are there similarities between the management of private lives for success and the management of projects for success?

## Literature Review

Some research has looked at how individuals manage personal projects and their personal lives. Jones, Bruce, Foxley, and Munat (n.d.) sought information on the types of projects people work on, the information needed for the projects, and how they organize and manage information on a project. Participants said they were working on an average of 5.27 projects (at that point in time) - projects such as planning an online course, planning a vacation, and taxes. Just under half of the projects were work-related and participants expected the projects to last from a few weeks to 1 year or longer, similar to the duration of projects in an organization as reported by Singh and Lano (2014). Sources of information for a project included: paper documents, e-documents, emails, and web pages. Information tended to be scattered across different types of documents, different devices, different tools etc. - termed information fragmentation. The research found that people used to-do lists, outlines, and other planning documents to manage tasks that are a part of their projects.

Rousmaniere (2015) provided an example of how an executive coach uses principles and tools of project management to improve his life. The coach designed a “strategy” using techniques project teams use at the office - he used a personal Kanban similar to Kanbans used on project teams, a retrospective approach to family meetings like Scrum project teams do, and so on. He used low-tech tools because he thought it was more important to learn good habits than to learn a tool. One key result: “[the realization and understanding of] why we feel overwhelmed....we saw exactly how much was on our plates, [and] it forced us to make decisions on what we value.” The coach was like a project manager who selected and

implemented tools to achieve a goal and was successful at it. The main driver of success in this personal project management was methodology or process.

Methodology or process is also a determinant of success for corporate projects. The coach above probably saw it firsthand. Newer methodologies such as agile and scrum improved upon many of the problems of traditional or earlier approaches such as the waterfall approach and, as a result, help to achieve project success (Serrador & Pinto, 2015). Research by Mir and Pennington (2014) found that methodologies, specifically Lifecycle Management Processes, enabled high project manager performance. In other words, the processes directly contributed to the performance of the project manager. Their model included other enablers.

Project management is considered to be the most important factor or driver for project success. Research indicates that project management contributes more to success than other factors (Mir and Pennington, 2014). Project managers are responsible for the overall success of the project - they allocate/reallocate project resources, manage the project team, and so on. Some other factors are: skill of the project team, process followed on the project, and whether there are established, tried-and-true ways and technology to accomplish the work (Moore, 2016).

Some research on the success of corporate projects looked at why projects fail or the factors that cause failure. Some researchers, such as Arias et al. (2012), extended the work of others on factors that lead to project failure. Arias et al. (2012) noted that available reasons for project failure from the Standish Group included reasons/factors that are symptoms of others, and sought to develop a list of key, independent factors. As shown in Table 1 below, Arias et al. came up with 7 key factors that determine the success of medium and large software projects. For each factor, Arias et al. provided best practices based on the PMI framework and Rational

Unified Process. For factor ‘qualified project managers,’ Arias et al. identified skills managers should possess such as: knowledge of project management tools (and be certified if possible), knowledge of quality software development models such as CMMI, knowledge of software development processes, and have strong communication skills, both oral and written, since 90% of his or her time will be spent communicating.

**Table 1**

**Results of Research by Arias et al. (2012) Compared With Factors They Started With**

<b>Reasons for failure (or factors for success) from the Standish Group</b>	<b>Key factors that determine the success of medium and large software projects (Research by Arias et al., 2012)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Incomplete Requirements -- 13.1% of projects</li> <li>● Lack of User Involvement -- 12.4%</li> <li>● Lack of Resources -- 10.6%</li> <li>● Unrealistic Expectations -- 9.9%</li> <li>● Lack of Executive Support -- 9.3%</li> <li>● Changing Requirements and Specifications -- 8.7%</li> <li>● Lack of Planning -- 8.1%</li> <li>● No longer required -- 7.5%</li> <li>● Lack of IT Management -- 6.2%</li> <li>● Technology Illiteracy -- 4.3%</li> <li>● Other -- 9.9%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Senior management support</li> <li>● Qualified project managers</li> <li>● Adequate planning</li> <li>● Key users involvement</li> <li>● Requirements management</li> <li>● Monitor and control the project execution</li> <li>● Development team management</li> </ul>
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Singh and Lano (2014) identified cultural factors as a cause of failure on international projects (multi-cultural teams). Cultural differences could affect relations between people, motivational orientation, and attitude towards time. Project team members may encounter significant barriers to communication .....





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