Journal of Development and Social Sciences
www.jdss.org.pk

RESEARCH PAPER

Antecedents and Consequences of Sustainable Career: A Conceptual Model

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ABSTRACT

In this era of fast-changing workplace, sustainable career has emerged as a contested domain both for employees and the organizations. Currently, there is scant scholarship on the parsimonious model of sustainable career development, addressing antecedents and consequences of the issue. To fill this research gap, the study proposes a model of sustainable career by utilizing the theoretical discourse of conservation of resources theory and life-span theory. The conceptual exposition emphasizes on investigating sustainable HRM (S-HRM) practices as an antecedent of sustainable career and the impact of (S-HRM) on employee well-being through mediating mechanism of sustainable career. Further, the study highlights the considerable significance of career stage as a moderator between (S-HRM) practices and sustainable career as individuals on different career stages have multiple perceptions regarding sustainability of their careers. The study offers new insights into the scholarship of sustainable career and proffered to empirically test the model in future.

Introduction

The global changes, at accelerated pace, fueled with exogenous shocks such as Covid-19 pandemic are witnessing career development paths unfolding into Sustainable career (Hall, Yip, & Doiron, 2018; Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015).Working individuals are experiencing increasing stress, burnout, and less engagement due to job loss resulting in low productivity and loss to global economy annually (Gallup, 2021). This implies that mechanism of career planning considers individual characteristics, contextual conditions, and developmental potential. Thus, sustaining individual's career across the entire career path has become a significant concern for individuals as well as for organizations (Talluri, Schreurs, & Uppal, 2022).

Sustainable career is defined as such a career in which an employee stays happy, healthy, and productive, is influenced by various social factors like work and family, characterized by individual agency and provides meaningfulness in one's life (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015). Despite the increasing importance of sustainable careers, there has been little available scholarship on the individual as well as organizational antecedents and outcomes of sustainable career (Tordera, Peiró, Ayala, Villajos, & Truxillo, 2020). In recent past, few studies have attempted to investigate precursory effects of sustainable career, for example, impact of personality traits i.e proactive personality on sustainability of career (Talluri et al., 2022), impact of inclusive leadership on sustainable career (Fang et al., 2021), impact of career competencies on sustainable career (Tu, Zhang, & Chiu, 2020) and impact of HRM practices on sustainable career (Tordera et al., 2020). These studies have provided valuable insights in the domain of sustainable career, but it is largely unknown that how and up to what extent sustainable human resource management (S-HRM)

practices play their role in shaping sustainable career and what are the outcomes of sustainable career.

HRM literature commonly suggests that human capital is the source of competitive advantage for any organization (Barney & Wright, 1998; Boxall & Steeneveld, 1999; Luthans & Youssef, 2004) providing support for the rationale of putting employee well-being as a central agenda of S-HRM strategy (Ehnert, Parsa, Roper, Wagner, & Muller-Camen, 2016). Previously, HRM practices i.e. high performance work practices (HPWP), high-involvement work practices (HIWP) and high commitment work practices (HCWP) were all meant to achieve high performance from employees resulting in increased stress and job burn out among employees (Guest, 2017).The central idea of (S-HRM) strategies is to create long term benefits for the organization by controlling any negative effect of these strategies on employees, other stakeholders and society at large (Ehnert et al., 2016).Thus S-HRM policies will reduce negative work harm and improve employee well-being by minimizing any psychological and emotional work risks by implementing such practices that will provide work-life balance for employees (Mariappanadar, 2016).

This study proposes that one mechanism for improving employee well-being by S-HRM could be through mediating mechanism of sustainable career as employee's perception of career growth within their organization, acquiring new skills, and getting promotions and compensation have serious implications on employees' attitudes and behaviors (Chen et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2016). These arguments are based on theoretical underpinning of conservation of resources theory (COR theory) as this theory suggests that workplace environment presents various resources to employees who want to obtain, retain, and protect the resources they value more (Hobfoll, 1989). Thus, organizational practices i.e S-HRM practices will play a vital role in developing as well as maintaining sustainable career by offering various career resources to individuals and will result in improving happiness and wellbeing of employees (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017a; Tordera et al., 2020).

We introduce career stage as a moderator between S-HRM practices and sustainable career. Lifespan development theories e.g., SOC theory (Selection, Optimization and Compensation theory) (Nr, Baltes, Baltes, & Freund, 1999) significantly contributes to our knowledge about impact of age relevant changes (e.g., career and life stage changes) on an individual's motives, his needs, and objectives throughout his career span (Tordera et al., 2020). Therefore, sustaining employees' career at different career stages may require considering individuals' career-related goals and objectives and how S-HRM practices can help achieving these goals (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017; Kooij & Boon, 2018; Tordera et al., 2020).

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, the research will contribute towards conceptual clarity of sustainable career by delineating the antecedental role of S-HRM practices as an organizational factor. Second, based on COR theory, the study argues to investigate the impact of sustainable career as a mediator between S-HRM practices and employee well-being. Third, the study introduced career stage as a moderator between S-HRM practices and sustainable career based on the underpinnings of Life-span theory because career stage is an evolving path subject to individual preparedness and environmental changes. Thus, the study responds to contextualize sustainable career research reflecting both individual and organizational perspective.

Literature Review

Sustainable HRM

The concept of sustainability and sustainable development first appeared in Brundtland Report by United Nations (Brundtland, 1987). In this report sustainable

development is defined as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987). Recently the concept of sustainability is linked with HRM and S-HRM is introduced as an effective tool for formulating a productive and vigorous workforce not only for present but for future times as well (i.e for entire career of an employee) (Ehnert et al., 2016; Pfeffer, 2007).The studies on S-HRM do not represent an integrated body of literature, but these studies strongly agree that this approach is substantially different from previous HRM practices specifically from Strategic Human Resources Management (SHRM) (De Souza Freitas, Jabbour, & Santos, 2011; Kramar, 2014). The main difference is the emphasis of S-HRM practices to benefit all stakeholders including the employees of the organization, abandoning the central theme of Strategic-HRM of benefiting only the owners of the organization (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017; Kramar, 2014). Ehnert, (2009, 2013) defined S-HRM as the "pattern of planned or emerging human resource strategies and practices intended to enable organizational goal achievement while simultaneously reproducing the HR base".Ehernet (2009, 2013) argues that sustainability goes beyond environment and economic sustainability and should incorporate the elements of human sustainability including employee training and development, well-being, employability, and justice. Kramar (2014) defined S-HRM as the "pattern of planned or emerging HR strategies and practices intended to enable the achievement of financial, social and ecological goals while simultaneously reproducing the HR base over a long term." S-HRM ensures to create such a system that prepares happy and productive employees and ensures employee engagement not only for the present but for the future as well. Hobelsberger (2014) provided his view that S-HRM practices are adaptable and flexible considering the changing needs of the workforce and the business environment as well.

This study embraces the idea that (S-HRM) practices are developed to effectively manage people, facilitating them in learning and developing, improving their well-being, and contributing to organization's effectiveness as well (Wikhamn, 2019).

Sustainable Career

The term sustainable career is recently coined to tackle the current issues emerging in the external environment i.e, globalization, technological innovations and increased work pressures causing stress and burn out among employees (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). Sustainable careers are such careers that ensures sufficient economic security for an individual, aligns one's career with his values, incorporates the elements of adaptability and offer renewal opportunities as well (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). Newman (2011) explained that career sustainability has three features: (1) renewal opportunities to improve health and well-being of employees (2)flexibility to encourage continuous learning and development of employees and (3) integration that leads to the sense of wholeness, completeness, and sense of meaningfulness in one's career span.(Van der Heijden & De Vos, (2015) conceptualized and defined sustainable career as "a sequence of career experiences reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, thereby crossing several social spaces, characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual." This definition includes four dimensions of sustainable career: time element reflects that career span includes present as well as future career demands; social space states that careers are influenced by various contextual elements like family, organization and society at large for making various career choices, agency factor signifies the role of an individual while selecting his career choices and meaning dimension means that individuals self-craft their career objectives such as achieving career success, satisfaction and well-being. Though the conceptualization of sustainable career is based on different viewpoints, the recent literature converges on three dimensions of sustainable career namely, individual's health, happiness, and productivity over his entire career span (Van der Heijden et al., 2020).

Employee-wellbeing

Research on well-being has basically been organized in two domains i.e., hedonic well-being and eudemonic well-being (Ryan, & Deci, 2001). Hedonic well-being is defined as the perception of people about experiencing pleasure and positive affect (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2000). This hedonic view has introduced the concepts of positive and negative affect, job satisfaction, and other happiness indicators in the discussion of employee well-being. Eudemonic wellbeing focuses on meaning and self-realization rather than affect and emotions (Warr & Nielsen, 2018). Eudaimonism includes individuals' self-engagement in attaining their personal goals that brings purpose and meaning in their life (Warr & Nielsen, 2018). The above-mentioned philosophical perspectives i.e hedonism and eudaimonism have given rise to various models, paradigms, and operationalizations to study the concept of employee-wellbeing (Zheng, Zhu, Zhao, & Zhang , 2015).

Following hedonic approach, Diener and Chan, (2011) defined employee well-being as subjective well-being. Subjective well-being (SWB) is defined as an individuals' general assessment of his quality of life based on his personal evaluations (Diener et al., 2000). It comprises of two elements i.e life satisfaction that is perception about one's quality of life and emotional experience which includes both positive and negative emotions (Diener, 1984 ,Diener, et al., 2000).The perspective of eudemonic well-being has given rise to the concept of psychological well-being defined as good state of psychological functioning and the fulfillment of an individual's personal potential (Ryff & Singer, 2008). According to Ryff and his colleagues (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008) PWB comprises of six dimensions including, self-acceptance, purpose in life, personal growth, environment mastery, autonomy, positive relations with others. (Cotton & Hart, 2003) operationalized EWB as comprising of positive affect (PA), negative affect (NA) and job satisfaction. Peng and Chen (2010) applied an integrated approach and combined the elements of SWB and PWB to investigate employee well-being. In recent years, multiple-measure approach has been employed by researchers to investigate the concept of employee well-being. In this regard, Page and Vella-Brodrick, (2009) examined employee well-being as comprising of both work and non-work-related psychological issues and health status of employees.

Zheng et al., (2015) have developed multidimensional measure of EWB in the context of Chinese culture and explained that EWB comprises of Life well-being (LWB), Job well-being (JWB) and psychological well-being (PWB). LWB is defined as overall satisfaction with one's life, WWB is defined as comprising of work satisfaction and work-related affect while PWB encompasses psychological elements including learning, growth, self-actualization, and work-achievement (Zheng et al., 2015).

Career Stage

Career Development Model by Super (1957) suggests that employees navigate through three career stages in their entire career span i.e., establishment or exploration stage, advancement stage and maintenance stage. During establishment or exploration stage, the primary concern of an employee is to identify his/her interests and competencies and to develop himself in his job (Ornstein, Cron, & Slocum, 1989). In the first stage, the employee is basically interested in building relationships at work, getting familiar with his new job, developing competencies, and gaining acceptance from their peers (Lynn, Cao, & Horn, 1996). Therefore, during the first stage, employees' basic needs are associated with their work and about building good relationships with their colleagues (Gould & Hawkins, 1978). During advancement stage, an employee want to become an expert in his/ her identified area of interest, want to excel in his career and want to achieve stability in his working life (Ornstein et al., 1989). During the final career stage, employees aim to maintain their self-concept, become more interested in managing peer and professional relationships by helping and coaching their peers and improving the image of their organization (Gould & Hawkins, 1978; Kooij & Boon, 2018; Lynn et al., 1996).

Sustainable HRM and Employee-well-being

Traditionally, HRM research (e.g. (Huselid, 1995) has focused on the implementation of various bundles of HR practices on improving employee performance at workplace (e.g, High Performance Work Practices (HPWP), High commitment work practices and High involvement work practices) at the expense of employee burnout and well-being. Within the workplace, wellbeing is of paramount importance not only for individual employees for maintaining their physical and mental health but also for the organizations as poor well-being at work may have adversative effect on employee performance and his productivity (Guest, 2017; Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019). Recently, scholars have called for applying such HRM practices that can result in mutual gain for both the employees as well as for organizations (Guest, 2017). Such HRM approach is called optimistic approach which proposes that HR practices aimed at improving well-being of employees will ultimately improve performance of employees and will result in mutual gain by benefiting both the employees and the organization (Tordera, Peiró, Ayala, Villajos, & Truxillo, 2020). One such practices can be S-HRM practices, seeking to attract and retain motivated and capable employees by providing them a healthy and conducive working environment along with opportunities for training and development (Ehernet, 2014). S-HRM practices focus on financial, ecological as well as social goals of the organization along with controlling for unintended side effects of these practices. In this way, these practices aiming for benefiting multiple stake holders including employees of the organization (Manzoor, Wei, Bányai, Nurunnabi, & Subhan, 2019). Based on above-mentioned arguments, we propose that.

P1: Sustainable HRM (S-HRM) will have a positive relationship with employee well-being.

Sustainable HRM and Sustainable Career:

The concept of S-HRM for developing sustainable career (Manzoor , Bányai, Nurunnabi, & Subhan, 2019) is recently suggested by career scholars (De Prins, Van Beirendonck, De Vos, & Segers, 2014; De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017). S-HRM is a new and a better approach for managing the employees of the organization which can help in establishing sustainable career (Singh & Vanka, 2020). As organizations are source for providing career opportunities to their employees, (S-HRM) practices can serve as privileged levers for organizations that can help promote career sustainability of their employees (Tordera et al., 2020). Unsustainable careers resulting out due to career breaks, voluntary turnover, inadequate career advancement opportunities, discrimination and biasness can be effectively managed by S-HRM practices (Singh & Vanka, 2020). Based on above-mentioned arguments, we propose that,

P2: Sustainable HRM (S-HRM) will have a positive relationship with sustainable career.

Sustainable Career and Employee well-being

In recent years, scholars have proposed to investigate the intricate connections between contemporary career concepts i.e sustainable career and employee well-being (Don Gottfredson & Duffy, 2008; Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014; Li, 2018).Scholars have suggested that organizational practices that are related with employee's career sustainability can help improve employee's positive career experiences (Torrey & Duffy, 2012). These positive career experiences will result in employee well-being as their career unfold over time (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). Moreover, some career factors such as perceived organizational justice, perceived organizational support and protean career orientation (Babic, Stinglhamber, & Hansez 2015, Rahim and Zainal, 2015) have been investigated to predict employee well-being. Recently, Chin, Jawahar, & Li, (2021) have investigated the relationship of career sustainability and psychological well-being and found that career sustainability has positive relationship with autonomy, environmental

mastery and personal growth that are the indicators of psychological well-being. In the light of above-mentioned arguments, we propose that Sustainable Career will have a positive relationship with employee-well-being.

P3: Sustainable career will have a positive relationship with employee well-being.

Sustainable Career as a Mediator between Sustainable HRM and Employee well-being:

Employee well-being is an important consequence of S-HRM practices as it offers answer to the question about how organizations can recruit, train, develop and retain highly qualified employees over time (Ehnert et al., 2014). It is pertinent to investigate the mediating mechanisms through which S-HRM enhances employee well-being as it is still unknown that how S-HRM translates into employee-wellbeing (Ehnert et al., 2014). One such mediating mechanism can be perceptions of sustainable career between S-HRM and employee well-being as Kim et al. (2016) and Chen et al. (2016) found that employees' perception of career growth within their organization through achieving career goals, acquiring new skills, and getting promotions and compensation have serious implications on employees' attitudes and behaviors.

According to Valcour, (2015) HR practices needs customization and practitioners must understand individual employee strengths, interests and motives and help them achieve their career goals and improve their well-being by making them happy, healthy, and more productive at the workplace . In absence of career related support by the organization individual employees have a feeling that their career deal has not been met and they should look somewhere else for their career (Sturges, Conway, Guest, & Liefooghe, 2005). Therefore, it becomes important for the organizations to make career sustainable for their employees that will result in stronger employment relation, retention of employees as well as improving their health and well-being (Valcour, 2015). Based on above-mentioned arguments, we propose that.

P4: Sustainable career will act as a mediator between S-HRM practices and employee well-being.

Career stage as a moderator between sustainable HRM and sustainable career.

From the perspective of life span theory, there are some challenges regarding sustainable career of employees in all major stages of their career life cycle: i.e., for beginners, in mid careers and during advance stage (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017). Therefore, it is paramount to understand changes in perception regarding sustainable career and sustainable employability at different career stages. As, employees at different career stage respond in a different way to various HR practices and perceive career sustainability in a different way(E. Conway, 2004; N. Conway, Guest, & Trenberth, 2011; De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017), it is argued that career stage will act as a moderator S-HRM and sustainable career practices.

P5: Career stage will act as a moderator between S- HRM practices and sustainable career.

Moreover, we believe that perceptions of S-HRM will have a stronger relationship with perceptions of sustainable career in advancement stage in comparison to establishment and maintenance stage. The usefulness of a particular HR practice may perceived differently as employees' motives and abilities change with time as they advance in their career stage (Kooij & Van de Voorde, 2015, Tordera, 2020).Consistent with life span theory and conservation of resources theory, career security and supportive career management practices could be a source of enhancing advance stage workers' resources

and compensating for their losses more than employees at beginning or maintenance stage (Tordera et al , 2020). Advanced stage employees also require more support regarding career management as they will have less job opportunities if they get out of a job (Wanberg, Kanfer, Hamann, & Zhang, 2016).

P6: Career stage will act as a moderator between S-HRM practices and sustainable career such that people at advanced stage of their careers perceive their careers as more sustainable as compared to people at maintenance and advanced stages of their career.

Conceptual Model
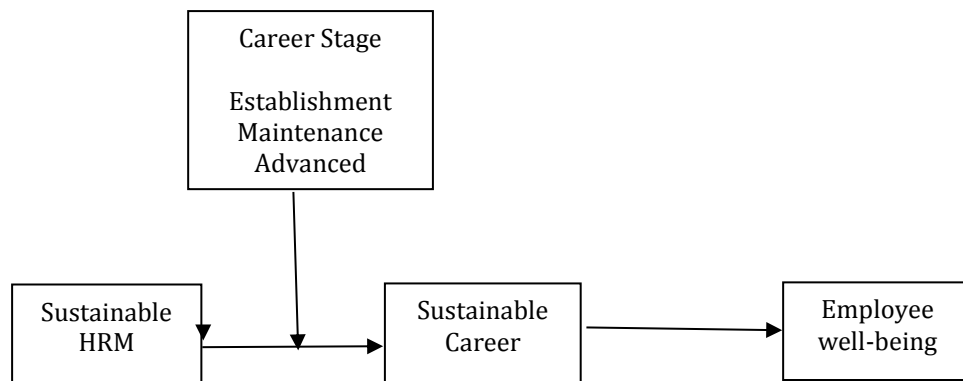
Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature of sustainable career by showcasing how S-HRM practices enhances career sustainability and employee well-being over entire career span of an employee. Complementary to some recent studies, exploring the role of a single HRM practice or some generic HRM practices on sustainable career (Bozionelos, Lin, & Lee, 2020; Pak, Kooij, De Lange, Meyers, & van Veldhoven , 2020; Tordera et al., 2020), this study contributes to build our understanding on the impact of S-HRM practices on sustainability of an individual's career. Secondly this study, explains the interrelationships between S-HRM, career sustainability and employee well-being by using the theoretical underpinning of COR theory and introduces sustainable career as a mediator between S-HRM and employee well-being. Thirdly, this study also enhances our understanding about the effect of S-HRM practices on the perceptions of career sustainability of employees who are at different career stages.

Practically, this study has implications for both working professionals as well as business organizations. Business organizations can focus on S-HRM practices for developing sustainable careers of employees' and enhancing their well-being. As contemporary careers are becoming more and more boundaryless, employees continuously look for alternate employment options if they perceive that their current organization is less supportive. Therefore, organizations should be supportive towards their employee's career management by implementation of S-HRM practices. Sustainability is a such a concept that have long-term benefits and that will pay off through employee well-being. This employee well-being will result in increasing employee performance in the long run as happy and satisfied employees are more productive. Moreover, this study guides HR managers in improving their understanding about perceptions of employees working at different career stages i.e., beginners, at maintenance stage and advance stage.

Conclusion

The study presented a dynamic conceptual model arguing antecedental effects of S-HRM practices on developing sustainable career resulting into employee well-being. The research further contended the moderating effect of career stage given the evolving nature of career stage resulting from personal characteristics, and contextual effects over time to understand the nuances of sustainable career. As such, we postulated that it is the dynamic interaction between the personal characteristics and the situational variables that changes over time, and together determine the career stage thereby framing sustainable career.

Following this conceptual model, we will suggest future researchers to empirically test the interconnections between the key variables to advance the field of S-HRM and sustainable career. Moreover, qualitative studies will be useful to uncover the dynamic and evolving nature of constructs of S-HRM and sustainable career. The themes emerging through the qualitative studies could be further validated through quantitative study. Moreover, opportunity also exists to explore and test the association of the key variables of this study in different contextual settings to gain nuanced understanding of the impact of S-HRM practices in enhancing employee well-being through the mediating mechanism of sustainable career. Longitudinal and time lag designs could also be applied to understand the impact of temporal factors on establishing career sustainability of employees.

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