Fostering Career Sustainability: The Combined Effects of HR Practices and Perceived

Organizational Support in Working Professionals

Master's Thesis

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Summary

Career Sustainability is a new and upcoming construct that paves the way for researchers to understand the effects of contextual and personal traits on an employee's long term career happiness and productivity. This study aims to understand the interplay of two sets of contextual factors, HR practices and perceived organizational support, on the career sustainability of working professionals. With a sample of 160 working professionals collected from various geographical locations, the research investigates the effect of availability and use of HR practices and perceived organizational support on career sustainability. Furthermore, the mediating effect of perceived organizational support between HR practices and career sustainability was also tested. Results of the statistical analyses indicated that availability of HR practices and perceived organizational support showed a positive association with career sustainability. The mediation effect of Perceived organizational support was also found to be significant, implying that the employees' positive perceptions of their organization's supportive practices can partially explain the positive relationship between the availability of HR practices on career sustainability. However, the use of HR practices didn't produce similar results. These study findings thus highlight the significance of supportive HR practices in developing sustainable careers, displaying important avenues for future research, and practical applications for HR professionals and organizational leaders.

Introduction

The concept of career sustainability has gained increased academic attention as an evolving construct in organizational psychology. This has been observed by its emergence in academic journals, conferences, and special issues (Chin et al., 2021). De Vos and Van Der Heijden (2015) can be deemed the pioneers of this research area. They define "careers" as a dynamic cycle of events and decisions shaping individuals' work trajectories, including transitions between various work roles, organizations, and other statuses such as unemployment and retirement. This dynamic concept of careers has contributed towards the newfound domain of sustainability, which could help understand how various stakeholders in an individual's career interact with each other, throughout the different career phases and contexts over time to help build a long and satisfying career (De Vos and Van Der Heijden, 2015).

Career sustainability, as conceptualized by De Vos et al. (2018), includes various indicators such as health, happiness, and productivity, with three underlying determinants that influence it - "person", "time", and "context". In the present study, we aim to build upon the "context" dimension of career sustainability, which comprises situational aspects that employees interact with, such as the business sector, employer market, organizational policies and practices etc. Existing research in similar areas suggests that organizational factors like HR practices, when available and implemented well, can increase the employees' tendencies to stay on for longer, i.e., display increased sustainable employability (Ybema et al., 2017), thereby drawing a possible relation with employees' sustainable careers too. Furthermore, the organizational context can also comprise the efforts or support shown by employers towards their employees in terms of practices that make employees feel valued. This type of support can be described as

perceived organizational support, and it has been suggested by empirical evidence to be a mediator between HR practices and positive job outcomes such as organizational trust and job satisfaction (Mayes et al., 2016; Narang & Singh, 2012). Such positive outcomes have also been potentially linked with employees' tendencies to have sustainable careers (De Vos, 2018).

There is currently limited research on the direct relationship between perceived organizational support and Career Sustainability, but there's evidence for an indirect association through variables like job satisfaction, which is both an outcome of perceived organizational support and a precursor of career sustainability (De Vos et al., 2020; Mayes et al., 2016). The study therefore aims to examine potential relations between perceived organizational support, HR practices, and career sustainability from the perspective of the employee. The specific hypotheses and the proposed theoretical model to be investigated are highlighted in the following sections, along with a brief review of existing research on the three major variables of our study.

Career Sustainability

Career Sustainability was introduced as a new career concept by De Vos and Van Der Heijden (2015), and was defined by them as "the sequence of an individual's different career experiences, reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, crossing several social spaces, and characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual." This explanation highlights the "dynamic" nature of a career, reflecting the combination of events in an individual's career and also the subjective and objective outcomes of these events (p. 2). The definition also reflects the broader life and organizational context of a career, which includes components such as work, home, friends, and leisure (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). The value an employee assigns to the career sequences and outcomes refers to the "meaning" aspect of the definition. This dimension is relevant as people may have different

perceptions about the longevity of their careers and have different development capacities required to achieve desired professional expertise in their careers (De Vos & Van Der Heijden, 2015). This conceptualization of Career Sustainability represents the initial set of knowledge about this construct, and over the years, it was further worked upon. De Vos et al. (2020) developed a new conceptual model of career sustainability and introduced three distinct indicators of a sustainable career - health, happiness and productivity. "Health" refers to an employee's capacity to cope with the physical and mental demands of their job. "Happiness" reflects an individual's subjective career satisfaction from a broader perspective of life. Finally, "productivity" refers to the employability and the potential of an individual to perform in their current and future jobs. De Vos et al (2018) also included three influencing factors of career sustainability. First, the "person" dimension, which refers to the influence of an individual's actions and perceptions of career experiences on their career. Second, the "context" dimension, referring to the acts of navigating various stakeholders and contexts in one's career; these can be the organizational or work context, social or private life, the work sector and even the larger job market. The "time" dimension describes the evolution or stability of work-related experiences over time. These dimensions interact dynamically to influence the career sustainability of an employee (De Vos et al., 2018).

The conceptual model by De Vos et al (2018) included comprehensive perceptions of the underlying facets of career sustainability and its several influencing factors. However, other research work also touches upon the concept and has several relevant findings that enhance the knowledge of the concept. Chudzikowski, Gustafsson, and Tams (2020) explained career sustainability through the lens of person-organization fit, suggesting that aligning one's career interests with organizational goals can enhance their career sustainability, however, this means

that organizations must also take up a customized approach to ensure good alignment between themselves and their employees. Using the Job-demands-Resources framework (JD-R) to explain career sustainability, Richardson and McKenna (2020) suggested that psychological job demands such as highly stressful job environments and demands for discipline and resilience at work could reduce the career sustainability of employees in the short term. Hirschi et al. (2020) also add to the research by suggesting that a higher alignment of work and non-work domains of life is essential for increase in career sustainability. The importance of personal values, skills and traits in influencing career sustainability was already discussed by De Vos et al. (2018) in their conceptual model, and research by Heslin et al. (2020) added to this claim by highlighting the importance of a "growth mindset" in an employee's career development and in turn, their career sustainability.

Career Sustainability and HR Practices

There is a significant body of HRM research that suggests the presence of numerous positive effects of HR practices on organizational outcomes and personal work-related outcomes of employees. Specifically, HR practices that aid in improving employees' motivation, knowledge, skills, and opportunities yield positive results including greater dedication, lower attrition, increased output and quality, and better financial performance (Jiang et al., 2012). When employees are exposed to key HR practices such as proper selection, pay for performance, and training and development, they might feel more committed to their organizations, exhibit proper role behaviour, higher quality and higher productivity, and show less dysfunctional behaviour that could result in workforce reduction (Wright et al., 2003). These outcomes could result in lower overall operating expenses and higher profitability, which further highlights how HR practices can positively impact organizational outcomes. The effectiveness of HR practices

can be determined by the accomplishment of organizational goals, but also of employee development goals (Guest & Peccei, 1994). According to Guest and Conway (2011), there needs to be HR procedures in place, and they need to be applied successfully for them to be considered effective. Hence, it is not just the access or implementation of HR practices but the actual use of these HR practices by employees which can deem their effect meaningful with regards to career sustainability. Which is why in the present study, both availability and use of HR practices has been considered as two components of the "HR practices" variable. It can be suggested that active use of HR practices can provide employees with the appropriate and necessary resources to deal with career challenges and strive for career success, thereby theoretically leading to higher career sustainability.

In the context of sustainable careers, existing research has shown evidence of a positive association between specific HR practices and both sustainability of employees' careers, as well as their sustained employability within their current organizations. Organizations may create a workforce that is sustainable by offering HR practices targeted towards developing employees' skills, health and motivation (Ybema et al., 2017). Organizations can also assist their employees by promoting means to have sustainable careers even beyond their current employers. Practices aimed towards training, career counselling, and performance management are positively associated with higher career sustainability of employees as these practices can enable them to adapt and learn continuously (De Vos et al., 2020; De Vos & Van Der Heijden, 2015; Forrier & Sels, 2003).

While prior research illustrates the fact that HR practices can contribute to career sustainability, it has primarily observed the organization's perspective in measuring the availability, use and implementation of HR practices. For the purpose of this study, we decided

to understand the employee's perspective as employees might perceive these practices and its benefits differently than organizational leaders. Through the study, I would be measuring what the employees feel about the access to and availability of HR practices in their organizations, along with the extent to which they themselves use these practices, thereby aiming to fill the presented research gaps. We thus expect that higher availability and use of HR practices as perceived by employees may lead them to perceive their careers to be more sustainable.

Hypothesis 1 - The more HR practices available for employees and the higher their use, the higher will be the levels of career sustainability.

Career Sustainability and Perceived Organizational Support

In the previous section, it was highlighted that career sustainability is often seen in the broader contexts of an employee - which can be their personal lives, the employee market, their business sector and their organization. These contexts, including organizational practices, can influence the degree of an employee's career sustainability (De Vos et al., 2018). Organizational practices can also be perceived by employees as the organization's way of showing the employees that they are valued. This type of support by the organization, which is also known as perceived organizational support, has been the determinant for various work-level outcomes for employees (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Perceived organizational support is part of a broader theoretical concept of Organizational Support Theory (OST), which essentially states that workers form "global ideas" about the above-mentioned support in order to gauge the organization's willingness to reward greater job effort and meet the socioemotional demands of workers (Eisenberger et al., 1986). George et al. (1993) also argued that perceived organizational support can be viewed as a guarantee that assistance from the company will be provided when required by employees. Perceived organizational support has been linked with

several etiological factors that influence the degree to which it is experienced by employees. Organizational factors provided by the organizations, such as organizational justice, trust, fairness, supervisory support and peer support can contribute to an increase in perceived organizational support when provided sufficiently (Ling et al., 2006; Dawley et al., 2010; Rhoades et al., 2002; Sun, 2019; Wayne et al., 2002). However, high workload and role pressures, and high organizational politics can also have the opposite effect (Hochwarter et al., 2003; Rhoades et al., 2002; Sun, 2019). Employees' past job experiences, job status, traditional beliefs or values, and tendencies to feel fatigued or feel positive emotions can also influence these levels of perceived support (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Hui et al., 2007; Watt & Hargis, 2009). In addition, factors centered around the employee-organization relationship such as higher leader-member exchange, better management communication, and enhanced value-match between employee and organization have been associated with higher perceived organizational support, whereas contract violations and abusive management can have the opposite effect (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, Mallette, 2011; 2011; Shoss et al., 2013; Sluss et al., 2008; Tan, 2012).

In addition to the causes of perceived organizational support, its effects can be seen in employees showing more trust in the organization, less fear of exploitation, better job satisfaction, higher identification with the organization and lesser job stress (Kurtessis et al., 2015; Rousseau et al., 1998). An employee can also feel the enhancement of their job resources when they have higher perceived organizational support. For instance, such employees may feel more emotionally attached to their workplace, experience increased job-related self-efficacy and have a healthier balance between work and family lives (Kurtessis et al., 2015; Ng & Sorensen,

2008). Higher perceived organizational support has also been associated with reduced job demands such as lower job stress and lower risk of burnout at work (Kurtessis et al., 2015).

A large portion of the aforementioned positive outcomes of increased perceived organizational support have also been associated with more sustainable careers of working professionals, thereby suggesting a potential relation between the two constructs. For starters, management of job demands such as job stress and burnout and provision of resources such as better work-life balance has a direct association with more support from organizations, which can also be further linked with higher career sustainability. Particularly, better work-life balance has shown evidence of predicting more sustainable careers (Hirschi et al., 2020; Kurtessis et al., 2015; Richardson & McKenna, 2020). Further associations can also be drawn between perceived organizational support and sustainable careers, by looking at the former as an antecedent of employees' overall health and well-being, which further enables them to sustain their careers (Stamper, 2003). Employees feeling more valued by their organizations can also be related to them being more satisfied at work and committed towards it (Allen et al., 2003; Rhoades et al., 2002). This demonstrates another potential association between the two constructs as career sustainability and long term career development are more likely to occur in employees who are satisfied with their jobs and depict greater organizational commitment (Judge et al., 2001; Meyer et al., 2002).

Considering the aforementioned indirect effects of perceived organizational support on career sustainability, we seek to examine any potential associations that may exist between perceived organizational support and career sustainability. Based on the reviewed literature, we expect that employees who perceive higher support from their organizations may have also have more sustainable careers.

Hypothesis 2 - The higher the perceived organizational support, the higher the career sustainability

Career Sustainabilty, Perceived Organizational Support, and HR Practices

We have already covered sufficient insights and evidence from previous research that speaks multitudes about how career sustainability is associated with HR practices and perceived organizational support. In addition to these insights, existing research has demonstrated how HR practices also aid in the increase of perceived organizational support among employees, which further leads to more positive organizational and employee-related outcomes. Work done by Allen et al. (2003) on perceived organizational support and HR practices produced findings that reinforce the argument that supportive HR practices (such as growth opportunities and fairness of rewards) boost perceived organizational support and foster an affective relationship with the company, as staff members believe they are supported and cared for by the organization. HR practices can thus have an indirect effect on job-related outcomes for employees such as reduced turnover intention, increased organizational commitment, and even enhanced job satisfaction through the mediation of perceived organizational support (Allen et al., 2003; Mayes et al., 2016). All of these positive outcomes could be related to employees' high career sustainability, or their sustained employability in an organization, as discussed in previous sections. Hence, it can be suggested that HR practices that focus on the development of employees can also contribute towards their sustainable careers. Not just the access to such practices, but also its use by employees can lead to positive job-related outcomes, and thereby increased career sustainability. However, the use of HR practices will tend to have a higher positive impact on career sustainability if employees perceive them to be relevant and more meaningful for their own needs. Therefore, perceiving the offered practices as relevant can also give the employees

an indication of higher perceived organizational support, thereby allowing the higher use of HR practices to also have a higher impact on career sustainability (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). From this, we can further suggest the mediating effect of perceived organizational support in the relationship between availability and use of HR practices and career sustainability.

Looking at the aforementioned insights from previous research, it is discernible how perceived organizational support mediates the relationship between HR practices and turnover intentions, commitment and job satisfaction, all of which are potentially associated with career sustainability. Considering these observations, we expect that the availability and use of HR practices would make employees feel valued and supported by their organization. Further, this sense of support would increase employees' career sustainability by serving as a bridge for HR practices. Therefore, the final study hypothesis is proposed to test and understand the mediation effect of perceived organizational support on the relationship between HR practices and Career sustainability.

Hypothesis 3 - HR practices will have a positive, indirect relationship with career sustainability through perceived organisational support (mediator)

The three aforementioned hypothesis can be further illustrated using the process model shown in figure 1, which also represents the proposed associations that will be tested in the present study.
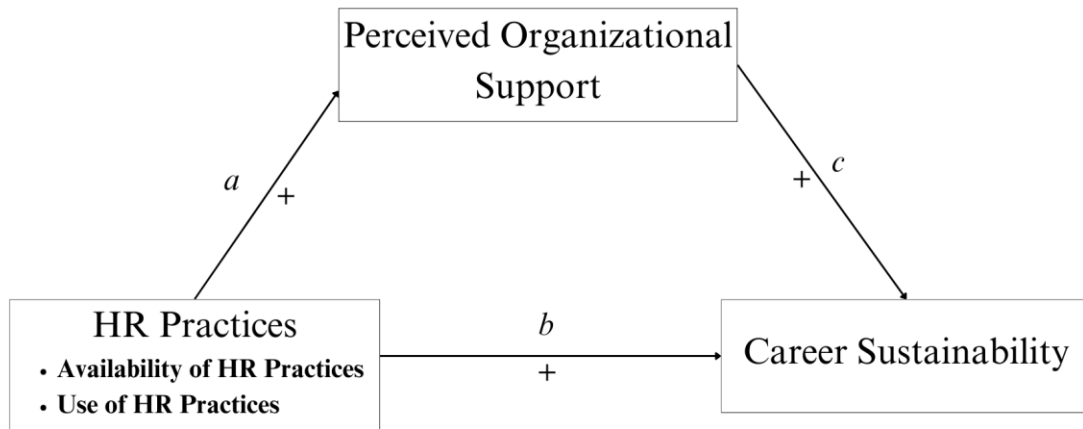
Figure 1 The proposed model between HR Practices, perceived organizational support and

Career Sustainability

Methods

Participants

Participants of this study were survey respondents, collected through convenience sampling. The sample included working professionals (full time employees, part time employees, self-employed people, and interns) from various geographical locations, including countries in Europe, Asia, and United States. There were 168 participants in total who initiated filling out the survey, out of which 8 were excluded as their recorded responses were either incomplete or in progress for more than 5 days. Majority of the participants were Male (56%), while 44% were belonging from India and 35% fell in the 18-24 age group. With regard to the employment status, 69% of the participants were full time employees. Table 1 includes a summary of demographic details of all participants.

Procedure

The present cross-sectional cross sectional study was initiated by first collecting survey responses from various networks of working professionals. Data was collected through an online questionnaire designed and hosted using Qualtrics Surveys (www.qualtrics.com), and lasted from 1st April 2024 to 15th May 2024. The questionnaire was sent out within several networks of working professionals. The participants were gathered via digital messaging and outreach platforms like LinkedIn, Telegram, WhatsApp, Instagram and email. To acquire the respondent's informed permission, the inclusion criteria, research purpose, and information about confidentiality were explained at the beginning of the survey, after which informed consent was taken in the form of a "check-box". All contents of the survey were written in English. The survey required approximately 8 minutes to complete, and the interquartile range of the duration

came out to be 4 minutes. The website automatically skipped to a thank-you message when the

survey was completed and submitted.

Table 1

Regular Demographic/Informational Table

Variable	Count (N=160)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	90	56.3
Female	69	43.1
Preferred not to say	1	.6
Age		
18-24 years old	56	35%
25-34 years old	40	25%
35-44 years old	31	19.4%
45-54 years old	25	15.6%
55-64 years old	8	5%
Nationality		
India	70	44%
Netherlands	45	28%
Others	45	28%
Employment Status		
Employed full time	110	68.8%
Intern	20	12.5%
Employed part time	19	11.9%
Others	11	6.8%

Measures

Career Sustainability (CS)

This construct was measured using the "Career Sustainability Scale" developed by Chin et al. (2021). This is a self-report questionnaire containing 12 items that are scored on a 6-point Likert scale from 1(Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). Sample items include "My career allows me to continuously learn new things" and "My career makes me feel like I have a bright future". This scale indicates the respondent's perceptions about their career's sustainability, especially by assessing their flexibility, renewability, integrativeness, and resourcefulness. The Cronbach's alpha value was also calculated in SPSS, which came out to .91, indicating a good internal consistency (Janssens, 2008).

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support was measured using a shorter, 16-item version of the "Perceived Organizational Support Scale" (Mayes et al., 2016), originally developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986). This scale was also a self-report questionnaire scored on a 7-point Likert type scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). A few sample items from this scale are "The organization values my contribution to its well-being." and "The organization strongly considers my goals and values". Same as the previous scale, the Cronbach's alpha was also calculated for this scale, and it indicated a good internal consistency with an alpha value of .92 (Janssens, 2008).

HR Practices

This construct was measured using a self-report questionnaire developed by Mayers (2021). The questionnaire is divided into two parts, one includes "yes or no" items that inquire about the availability of HR Practices in the respondents' organization; the second part comprises follow up questions to each item in the previous section, that was answered with a "yes", which inquire about the frequency of the use of these practices. The items in the second section are measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Sample items from the "availability" scale were "In the past 3 months my organization has provided me with coaching that supports my development" and "In the past 3 months my organization has provided me with coaching that supports my development"; the "use" items were consistently asking about the frequency with which the available HR practices are used, for instance, "In the past 3 months, I took advantage of this opportunity".

The Cronbach's alpha for availability of HR practices was .71, which is an acceptable metric for the scale's reliability (Janssens, 2008). The internal-correlations for the "Use" items came out to be r=.28, which implies a 'weak-to-moderate' correlation (Cohen, 1988).

Statistical Analyses

The collected data was imported from Qualtrics into Microsoft excel, where the responses were coded into numerical values and scored before conducting the analyses. The final data was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29. At the preliminary stages, a power analysis was conducted using Monte Carlo Power Analysis for Indirect effect (Schoemann et al., 2017) to determine the minimum sample size required to test the study hypotheses, based on data from previous studies by Mayers (2021), and Lamm et al. (2014). With target power = 0.80,

significance criterion of α=.05, and confidence interval=95%, the minimum sample size indicated was N = 160 for multiple linear regression.

The demographic data of participants, including age, gender, nationality and employment status were summarized using descriptive statistics. To test the hypothesized theoretical model, two types of analyses were used. For the direct paths presented in Figure 1, i.e., the association between the availability and use of HR practices and perceived organizational support, the association between perceived organizational support and career sustainability, and the association between availability and use of HR Practices and career sustainability, multiple linear regression was used. To test for the mediation of perceived organizational support in the relationship between HR Practice and career sustainability, the PROCESS-Macro method by Hayes (2017) was used.

Results

For every study variable in this paper, Table 2 displays their means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients. We can see from the mean scores that the career sustainability of the sample was moderate. On an average, the participants collectively had 7 out of 12 HR practices available in their organizations, however, their overall use of these practices was reported to be moderate. The mean score of Perceived organizational support also suggest that this construct was also observed at a moderate level. The percentage and count of availability and use of all 12 HR Practices is given in Appendix 1a and 1b. The Pearson's correlation analysis found significant and positive correlations between career sustainability and perceived organizational support ($r = .593$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, a positive correlation was also found between the availability of HR practices and both perceived organizational support ($r = .442$, $p < .01$) and career sustainability ($r = .548$, $p < .01$). However, the other component of the HR practices variable, i.e., "Use of HR practices", did not have any significant correlations with any of the remaining study variables.

Table 2

Means. SDs and Correlations

Variable	Range	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. HR Practices (USE)	1 - 5	3.44	.79	1.00			
2. HR Practices (Availability)	0 – 12	7.70	2.66	-.022	1.00		
3. Perceived Organizational Support	1 – 6	4.92	1.03	.013	.442**	1.00	
4. Career Sustainability	1 - 7	4.50	.76	-.007	.548**	.593**	1.00

*Note. **correlations are significant at the .01 level*

HR Practices and Career Sustainability

The regression analysis carried out to test hypothesis 1 yielded a partially favorable result. The regression model for H1 included the use and availability of HR practices as predictors for career sustainability. As illustrated in Table 3, this model was statistically significant (F $(2, 156)$ = 19.03, p <.001). Results for this regression analyses also demonstrated that the current model explains 18.6% of the variance in career sustainability. However, observing the regression coefficients, it was apparent that only availability of HR practices was positively associated with career sustainability (b = 0.127, p < .001). On the other hand, use of HR practices was not a significant contributor to career sustainability in this model. The availability of HR practices is thus positively associated with Career sustainability, however their use may not yield the same result. Hence, H1 was partially accepted, with only one component of HR practices, i.e., the availability of HR practices, being positively associated with career sustainability.

Table 3

Regression of Career Sustainability on the Use and Availability of HR Practices

Variable	B	SE	t	p	%CI
(Constant)	3.453	0.294	11.755	<0.001	[2.811, 4.014]
HR Practices Availability	0.128	0.021	6.167	<0.001	[0.090, 0.167]
HR Practices Use	0.022	0.069	0.317	0.764	[-0.141,0.195]

Note. For the above model, R^2= 0.186

HR Practices and Perceived Organizational Support

The use and availability of HR practices was also expected to associate positively with perceived organizational support in our theoretical model, as shown in figure 1. The regression analyses carried out to test this association produced favorable results. As can be observed in Table 4, the model including the use and availability of HR practices as predictors is significant $(F (2, 156) = 33.49, p <.001)$ and explains 29.1% of variance in perceived organizational support. The regression weights can determine that only the availability of HR practices was positively associated with perceived organizational support (b=0.212, p<.001), whereas the use of HR practices was not.

Table 4

Regression of Perceived Organizational Support on the Use and Availability of HR Practices

Variable	B	SE	t	p	%CI
(Constant)	3.249	0.368	8.819	<0.001	[2.616, 3.983]
HR Practices Availability	0.212	0.026	8.185	<0.001	[0.156, 0.263]
HR Practices Use	0.016	0.087	0.180	0.858	[-0.150,0.193]

Note. For the above model, R^2= 0.291

Perceived Organizational Support and Career Sustainability

The regression analyses carried out to test the direct effects of Perceived organizational support on Career sustainability yielded favorable results for the second hypothesis. Table 5 illustrates the results of the regression analyses conducted for H2. As demonstrated by the results, the model containing perceived organizational support as a predictor was statistically significant ($F_{(1, 158)} = 85.51$, $p < .001$) and it explains 34.7% variance in career sustainability. The regression coefficients exhibited that perceived organizational support was positively associated with career sustainability ($b = 0.437$, $p < .001$). A higher sense of perceived support from organizations was associated with employee's career sustainability, which means we can accept H2.

Table 5

Regression of Career Sustainability on Perceived Organizational Support

Variable	B	SE	t	p	%CI
(Constant)	2.357	0.238	9.923	<0.001	[1.888, 2.826]
Perceived Organizational Support	0.437	0.047	9.248	<0.001	[0.343, 0.530]

Note. For the above model, $R^2 = 0.347$

HR Practices, Perceived Organizational Support, and Career Sustainability

For the mediation hypothesis of the study, it was expected that HR practices would be positively associated with career sustainability through the mediation of perceived organizational support. The PROCESS Macro (Model 4) analysis by Hayes (2017) was used to test this hypothesis. As shown by the results presented in Table 6, the indirect effect of the availability of HR practices on career sustainability was found to be statistically significant. The bootstrapped indirect effect was .076, and the 95% confidence interval ranged from .047 to .109. This shows that this indirect effect of the availability of HR practices through perceived organizational support explains 60% of the total effect on career sustainability. In addition, the direct effect of the availability of HR practices on career sustainability in the presence of the mediator was also significant (B=.051, *p*=.019), thereby indicating that perceived organizational support partially mediated this relationship. This direct effect explains 40% of the total effect. However, the indirect effect of the use of HR practices on career sustainability was not statistically significant. From the results, it was apparent that the higher availability of HR practices has a positive association with employees' career sustainability through the mediation of higher perceived organizational support, however, the same results for the use of HR practices cannot be affirmed (as observed in figure 2). Hence, it can be concluded that hypothesis 3 was partially accepted.

Table 6

Mediation Analysis for the Relation Between Availability and Use of HR Practices, Perceived

Organizational Support, and Career Sustainability

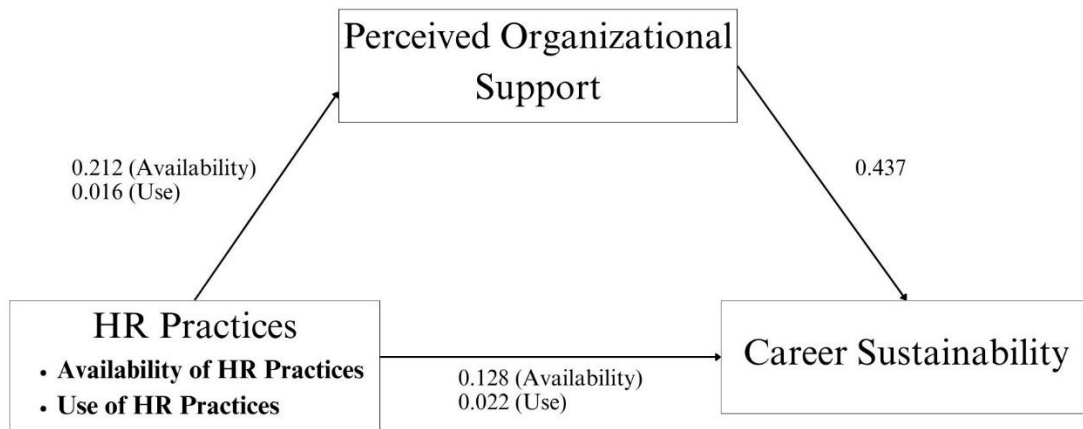| Path	B	SE	t	p	CI
Indirect Effect of Availability of HRP on CS	.076	.015	-	-	[.047,.109]
Direct Effect of Availability of HRP on CS	.051	.021	2.37	.019	[.008,.093]
Total Effect of Availability of HRP on CS	.127	.020	6.214	.000	[.087,.168]
Indirect Effect of Use of HRP on CS	-.004	.052	-	-	[-.100,.102]
Direct Effect of Use of HRP on CS	.017	.062	.270	. 787	[-.105,.139]
Total Effect of Use of HRP on CS	.013	.076	.164	.870	[-.138,.163]

Figure 2 The unstandardized coefficients for the different pathways in the relationship between the use and availability HR practices and Career sustainability, with perceived organizational support as the mediator.

Discussion

The results of this study produced some interesting findings that mostly aligned with the anticipated outcomes based on the proposed theoretical framework. The first major finding was the availability of HR practices associating positively with career sustainability. The "availability" component here can refer to the extent to which human resource practices such as training and development opportunities, job resources such as autonomous and collaborative work environment and supportive work policies such as flexible hours are implemented and clearly communicated to employees. It can thus be implied that employees, when perceiving the availability of such practices and policies within their organizations to be sufficient, can feel supported by the organization, which contributes to their career sustainability. Similar findings have also been observed in previous work, where HR practices aimed towards enhancing employees' career development have had a positive impact on their career success, which can also be interpreted as an important aspect of career sustainability, referring to the subjective positive interpretations of success that employees attach to their careers (De Vos et al., 2018; Giancaspro et al., 2021).

While one component of our first hypothesis was observed to be valid in our results, the second component, which anticipated that the higher use of HR practices would also have a positive impact on career sustainability, was not accepted in our results. A reason for this could be a difference in perception of the availability and use of HR practices by employees. The availability and knowledge that there are HR practices in place for employees might enhance their positive impressions about their organization's support for their efforts and wellbeing. However, engaging with these HR practices can depend a lot on employees' personal needs and choices. For instance, not all employees may feel the need to benefit from specific policies for

working parents, or flexible work shifts or even mental and physical health improvement

resources. It's possible that when employees feel that certain HR practices could be more

beneficial for their best interest, it might just increase their use of these HR practices, thereby

enhancing their job satisfaction, motivation at work and reducing their experience of work

related pressure, all of which can potentially contribute to sustainable careers (D. E. Guest,

1999).

Another critical finding of the present study highlighted that increased perceptions of

support from the organization by employees is associated with increased career sustainability. In

this study, we also considered the conceptualization of these perceptions of support as the

organization's way of exhibiting care for their employees' wellbeing and recognizing the value

they add to the company. This finding aligns with existing research, especially with the

previously discussed Organizational Support Theory (OST), which states that employees respond

to an organization's display of support and care by exhibiting greater effort and commitment

towards their work. This could further increase their tendencies to improve their work

performance, which is also considered an integral indicator of career sustainability (De Vos et

al., 2018; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger., 2002).

It was also expected that the use and availability of HR practices would have an indirect

effect on career sustainability when perceived organizational support is also high among

employees. This proposition was also partially supported by the study results. It was found that

the mediation of perceived organizational support in this relationship was significant, although

only for the availability of HR practices. An understanding behind this finding could be that

employees, when experiencing recognition for their efforts through the access of supportive

practices from the organization, can lead to increased perceptions of support from the

organization, and a higher motivation to perform in their roles. This could contribute to the employees' higher career sustainability. Similar findings have been produced by previous researchers who observed that better support and access to HR practices such as growth opportunities and fairness of rewards has often led to positive job outcomes like commitment that could be linked to career sustainability (Allen et al., 2003; Mayes et al., 2016). Thus, employees' perceived organizational support can partly explain the effectiveness of HR practices by fostering positive job outcomes, which can also be associated with their enhanced career sustainability (Van der Heijden et al., 2020). However, a similar positive indirect effect of the use of HR practices on career sustainability was not found. This result can highlight how the "use" and "availability" of HR practices are two distinct entities which can be perceived differently by employees. The availability of HR practices can give an indication to the employees that the organization, as a whole, has a supportive work culture where employees can expect positive career outcomes in their jobs, which has a positive impact on their career sustainability (Liou et al., 2012). However, besides mere visibility, if employees don't find the practices relevant for their own goals, they might not be useful to them and hence may hamper the effect of HR practices on positive job outcomes and career sustainability (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). We can also say that employees' perception of organizational practices plays a critical role in understanding their effectiveness for job-related outcomes and career sustainability.

Limitations

The present study also comprises certain limitations that need to be considered. First, respondents who answered "no" to the availability of certain HR practices could not respond to the "use" questions for those practices. This could have led to a non-response bias, by excluding the perspectives of some respondents on the "use" of HR practices. In addition, the use of self-

report measures depends a lot on a person's memory, thereby having a risk of recall bias and compromised validity. The cross-sectional design of the study also has the potential to limit the causal inferences drawn from the results. Finally, majority of the participants were from India and Netherlands, hampering the overall representation of working professionals and thus potentially impacting the generalizability of findings.

Future Research

In addition to addressing the above limitations, there are several avenues that future research can take up. The impact of age on career sustainability can be assessed in future, especially to understand the various age-specific HR practices carried out by organizations which can impact the career sustainability of different age groups (Neupane et al., 2022). Going beyond the cross-sectional design, a longitudinal study approach can also be helpful to examine a stronger causal relationship between HR practices and career sustainability, assessing how the former impacts the latter in different points of an individual's career (Van Der Heijden et al., 2020). Future research can also contribute in knowing the effects of various employment types such as full time, part time, freelance, or business sectors such as healthcare, manufacturing, retail etc. on Career sustainability. Further work can also be done to improve upon the existing structure of the use and availability of HR Practices questionnaire, possibly by splitting up the two components into distinct measures and integrating aspects of meaningfulness or relevance of HR practices for the employees. Country-specific studies could also be conducted to understand the cultural contexts of career sustainability. On the other hand, a larger study with proportional stratified sampling of a mix of cultures (eg. European, South Asian, American, South American etc.) can also be done to aim for a fairer representation of the global workforce. In addition, perceived organizational support is still a rather ambiguous concept and some specific research

can be done to also understand what all practices undertaken by an organization classifies them as "supportive" for employees.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

The present study paves the way for several practical implications for organizations, working professionals, HR professionals, and other relevant stakeholders. Organizations can offer HR practices that cater to their employees' career development such as timely growth opportunities, training and development opportunities, leadership paths, fairness of rewards and appraisal (De Vos et al., 2018; Giancaspro et al., 2021). These types of practices can help organizations be supportive towards employees and also enhance their career sustainability. Fostering a supportive work environment or work culture, where employees feel that their career trajectory is secure and not threatened, can also be considered by organizations to ensure career sustainability. As highlighted earlier, it is not only the access to HR practices that could benefit employees' career sustainability but also the degree to which they find it relevant for their own use. Hence, companies can take up an empathetic approach and engage in practices like seeking regular feedback or "employee listening" to create more tailor-made HR practices that align with employees personal goals, in addition to the organizational goals (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Moreover, a targeted approach focusing on specific practices has also been considered more effective and cost-efficient, especially in larger organizations, to address the diverse needs of employees. Organizations can also take steps to increase employee participation in design and implementation of HR practices, as it can have a positive impact on alignment with employee needs, and enhance utilization of these practices (Ybema et al., 2017).

The study also contributes theoretically by further validating and adding some additional conceptual elements to the Organizational Support Theory (OST) by Eisenberger et al., 1986. It

was demonstrated that an organization can display support through implementation of HR practices, which could in turn be perceived as supportive by employees and result in positive individual job outcomes, i.e., a higher career sustainability. Career sustainability, still being a new and developing construct, was further understood in this study, adding to its conceptual knowledge. Understanding this concept from an employee's perspective, and how they perceive their own career sustainability being impacted by organizational factors, can also enrich existing knowledge related to organizational behavior by presenting new possible determinants of successful career trajectories.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study produced some comprehensive results that contributed to present knowledge and understanding of the novel career sustainability concept. Based on existing theoretical underpinnings, the hypothesized theoretical model in this study was considered valid, albeit partially. The findings indicated that high availability of HR practices and more positive perceptions about their organization's supportive nature could lead to employees having healthier, happier and more productive careers in the long run. While there were some limitations to the study, overall, the results can be justified by affirming that employees in general perceive the access to HR practices as a means of support from their organizations, provided to the employees as a recognition of their efforts. This perception can thus have a possible impact on the career sustainability of employees, even if the employees may not deem the HR practices useful or meaningful for themselves.

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Appendices

Appendix 1a

Description and Summary of HR Practices (Availability) Items

Available HR Practices	Number of Respondents with the Available Practices	Percentage of Respondents with the Available Practices
Follow courses, trainings, and workshops	116	72.5
Coaching that supports development	85	53.1
Flexible working hours	137	85.6
Opportunity to work part time	81	50.6%
Policies that support working parents	74	46.3%
Possibility to work closely with colleagues	134	83.8%
Freedom to carry out work in their own way	131	81.9%
Certainty of job security	108	67.5%
Social and/or team building activities	123	76.9%
Resources to improve mental health	69	43.1%
Resources to improve physical health	61	38.1%
Access to working supplies	112	70%

Appendix 1b

Description and Summary of HR Practices (Use) Items

HR Practices	Never %(N)	Seldom %(N)	Sometimes %(N)	Often %(N)	Always %(N)
Follow courses, trainings, and workshops	6% (7)	6.9% (8)	32.8% (38)	28.4% (33)	25.9% (30)
Coaching that supports development	2.4% (2)	5.9% (5)	27.1% (23)	32.9% (28)	31.8% (27)
Flexible working hours	9.5% (13)	10.2% (14)	32.1% (44)	26.3% (36)	21.9% (30)
Opportunity to work part time	23.5% (19)	7.4% (6)	25.9% (21)	22.2% (18)	21% (17)
Policies that support working parents	47.3% (35)	8.1% (6)	23% (17)	13.5% (10)	8.1% (6)
Possibility to work closely with colleagues	7.5% (10)	6.7% (9)	20.1% (27)	41.0% (55)	24.6% (33)
Freedom to carry out work in their own way	6.9% (9)	1.5% (2)	19.8% (26)	42.7% (56)	29% (38)
Certainty of job security	6.5%(7)	4.6% (5)	23.1% (25)	25.9% (28)	39.8% (43)
Social and/or team building activities	6.7% (8)	9.2% (11)	30% (36)	31.7% (38)	22.5% (30)
Resources to improve mental health	31.9% (22)	23.2% (16)	24.6% (17)	13.0% (9)	7.2% (5)
Resources to improve physical health	34.4% (21)	19.7% (12)	26.2% (16)	11.5% (7)	8.2% (5)
Access to working supplies	9.8% (11)	4.1% (5)	16.1% (18)	28.6 (32)	41.1% (46)