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## **Managing a sustainable career in the contemporary world of work: personal choices and contextual challenges**

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The main aim of my dissertation has been to provide an understanding of how individuals together with their surrounding stakeholders can build and manage sustainable careers. From an individual perspective, I have studied how the person influences career sustainability through contemporary career choices, moving from the decision to be self-employed in Chapter 2, to the choice to work from home in chapters 3 and 4. In addition, I have investigated how personal factors, such as demographics and career resources can impact the sustainability of careers. In chapters 4 and 5, for instance, I shed light on the influence of parental status and gender on sustainable careers. In addition, the last empirical chapter (5) has examined how career self-efficacy, as a personal career resource, can help individuals in crafting a sustainable career.

At the contextual level, my dissertation has examined how work and society can influence employees' career sustainability. For example, in Chapter 4, I shed light on supervisors' perceptions of those who work from home, and the consequences of those perceptions for employees' performance evaluations. In the final chapter on the glass cliff phenomenon, attention was paid to women's tendency to make a risky career move because of the societal barriers to career progression they still face. These chapters have demonstrated the necessity to study the interplay between the person and the context when investigating sustainable careers. Before I begin the in-depth discussion of the integration of the findings, I will first summarize the main results of each empirical study to address the research questions that were formulated in the introductory chapter of the dissertation. Hereafter, I will provide methodological reflections followed by practical implications for organizations, employees, and policy makers. I conclude with avenues for future research on sustainable careers.

## 6.1 ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In what comes next, I will briefly summarize the main findings of the empirical chapters to answer the research questions.

*Research Question 1: To what extent does the career sustainability of individuals who decide to be self-employed differ from those who decide to be organization-based employed?*

The first empirical study took a *person* approach and examined differences in the career sustainability between those who choose to be self-employed and those who choose organization-based employment, in order to understand how the path towards career sustainability varies among *employment relations*. Following previous research, we used health as a key indicator of career sustainability (De Vos et al., 2018). We proposed that the resource environment of the self-employed is richer because they have greater flexibility in choosing their work schedule, compared to employees, contributing to a better health status. In particular, using multi-wave data (2001-2015) from the Household, Income and Labor Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, we compared the self-employed with employees in terms of (a) differences in their health levels, (b) the disparity in their health status over time and (c) differences in the stability of their health over time.

In line with our hypotheses, we found that because of their richer work environment, the self-employed had better health and showed more stability in their health than employees. Specifically, we found that the work environment of the self-employed was richer in the flextime resource (i.e., schedule flexibility), which increased experiences of work-family enrichment and alleviated experiences of work-family conflict, positively affecting their health. Remarkably, we did not find evidence for the growing disparity in health over time between the two groups. A possible explanation for this finding may be found in adaptation theory (Ritter et al., 2016), which posits that individuals adapt to stressors over time such that they eventually return to their baseline well-being levels. Jointly, the findings of Chapter 2 provided us with a better understanding of how the contemporary career decision to be independently employed influences career sustainability. In particular, the findings suggest that individuals who choose to be self-employed may be better equipped to craft a sustainable career because of the greater autonomy and schedule control they have.

*Research Question 2: How does the decision to work from home influence individuals' daily path towards sustainable careers?*

In Chapter 2, we examined how the contemporary career-related decision to belong to a certain occupational group has implications for the health indicator of career sustainability, on the long-term. Yet, contemporary career decisions can also be studied at a more micro level, such as choosing alternative work arrangements (i.e., *personalization*) within the (same) occupation. Furthermore, individuals' health experiences are likely to show fluctuations on the short-term (i.e., on a day-to-day basis).

In Chapter 3, we took a *person* perspective and proposed an intraindividual model that examined the day-to-day effects (i.e., 10 workdays) of working from home on the health indicator of career sustainability (De Vos et al., 2018). This chapter builds on recent research that recommends scholars to move away from a cross-sectional approach towards a more episodic approach for a better understanding of the implications of working

from home (Allen et al., 2015; Anderson et al., 2015; Kelliher & De Menezes, 2019; Maertz & Boyar, 2011; Vega et al., 2015).

Consistent with our hypotheses, we observed that on days when employees work from home they experience their work as less demanding (i.e., less time pressure), so that employees are left with more resources to actively participate in the family role (i.e., less work-family conflict). Moreover, we found that on days when employees experience heightened levels of work-family conflict, they become vulnerable to further resource loss such that individuals feel more emotionally exhausted and less engaged in their work the next morning. Finally, the results indicated that individuals wake up with negative emotions about the organization they work for when work has interfered with their family life the previous workday. In the least, these findings suggest that the contemporary career-related decision to work from home has beneficial consequences for employees' work-home interface and well-being on a daily level.

Moreover, these results suggest that individuals' experiences of career sustainability fluctuate on a day-to-day basis because of their work-home interface. Apparently, individuals' career sustainability benefits more from working from home days than office days, because they experience less conflict between the work and home domain. Thus, we could argue that individuals' daily decision to either work from home or at the office has crucial implications for the sustainability of their careers.

*Research Question 3a: What are the implications of working from home for supervisory performance ratings?*

Taking a person-centred approach, Chapter 3 extensively discussed the relationship between the choice to work from home, and the health indicator of career sustainability. In Chapter 4, we put forward a model that examined the implications of the choice to work from home for employees' perceived performance to understand how *work* (i.e., supervisors) as a contextual factor influences the productivity proxy of sustainable careers. Building on the growing stream of research on the negative effects of flexible working practices (Leslie et al., 2012; Yam et al., 2014; Kelliher & Anderson, 2008), we argued that working from home can stand in the way of objective performance ratings. In concordance with signalling theory (Spence, 1973), we observed that working from home sends a signal of low work centrality and organizational commitment. Supervisors may then "penalize" employees who choose to work from home by giving them lower performance ratings.

*Research Question 3b: To what extent does parenthood influence the relationship between working from home and supervisory performance ratings?*

In addition to examining the process by which working from home results in low supervisory performance ratings, we identified employees' parental status as an important boundary condition for the negative effects. Building

on previous research that shows that parents are viewed more unfavourably when it comes to work attitudes because of care responsibility (Leslie et al., 2013; Fuegen et al., 2004), we expected parents who choose to work from home to receive lower performance ratings than employees without children who work from home. Contrary to our expectations, the results indicated that the negative effects of working from home particularly prevail for employees without children. This finding might be explained by the fact that childless employees are perceived as not having legitimate reasons (e.g., related to care) to work outside of the office (Wilkinson et al., 2017). Moreover, we demonstrated that the tendency to penalize employees who work flexibly was most pronounced among male supervisors who never work from home themselves.

Overall, the findings of this chapter illustrate that the decision to work from home may have detrimental consequences for employees' performance ratings and therefore career sustainability, but that these effects are complex and contingent on characteristics of both the supervisor and the employee. Finally, it is important to note that the obtained results were not entirely consistent across the two samples (i.e., students and professional workers), and thus caution is warranted when drawing conclusions.

*Research Question 4a: To what extent do external barriers (i.e., lack of promotional opportunities) explain women's willingness to make a risky career move, in terms of accepting a risky leadership position?*

*Research Question 4b: How do personal resources, such as career self-efficacy, influence women's career decision to accept a risky leadership position?*

Chapter 4 supplemented the person-centred perspective of chapters 2 and 3, by showing that the context (i.e., supervisor) plays an important role in fostering career sustainability, such that employees' career decisions need to be supported by supervisors. That is, there needs to be a clear alignment between the employee and the organization (Van der Heijden et al., 2020). Yet, contextual factors can also affect sustainable careers by creating boundaries to individuals' decision making (De Hauw & Greenhaus, 2015). To this end, in Chapter 5, we discussed the role of contextual factors deriving from *society* on women's career decision-making and eventually their career sustainability. We explored how societal norms influence career decisions, in particular the decision to accept a leadership position in an organization that is in crisis (i.e., a glass cliff position). Research on the glass cliff has focused almost exclusively on decision makers who need to fill a glass cliff position. We therefore incorporated the perspective of job seekers to elucidate the processes underlying individuals' career decisions and their motives for making a risky career move.

We proposed that societal norms that elevate men as natural managers and leaders (think manager, think male) explain why and how women are more likely than men to accept risky leadership positions. First, building

on previous research that has shown a link between career barriers and accepting precarious job positions (Mulcahy & Linehan, 2014) we argued that women's lack of career advancement opportunities may lead them to perceive any leadership position as a promotional opportunity (even risky ones), which increases their tendency to accept a risky leadership position. Second, we posited that it is particularly women with low self-efficacy who accept risky leadership positions because they are confronted with both high internal barriers (i.e., low self-efficacy) and high external barriers.

The findings were largely in line with our hypotheses. We found that the decision to accept a risky leadership position was most pronounced among women with low career self-efficacy, because they perceive any leadership position as a promotional opportunity, even if it comes with great risks. In fact, we found that women with high levels of self-efficacy step away from precarious leadership positions, because they believe such positions offer fewer promotional opportunities than leadership positions in successful organizations. These findings clearly illustrate the impact of both the context and person dimension as proposed by De Vos and colleagues (2018) on the career sustainability of women. That is, while external barriers (i.e., context) push women to make compromises and accept a risky leadership positions, self-efficacy (i.e., a personal resource) helps women to persist and step away from such risky positions.

## 6.2 INTEGRATION OF FINDINGS AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

In the preceding sections, I provided a brief summary of the main findings of each empirical chapter. In what comes next, I will reflect on how these chapters build on each other and contribute to the development of the theoretical framework of sustainable careers (De Vos et al., 2018).

### 6.2.1 Flexible Working Practices and Sustainable Careers

Jointly, the findings of chapters 2, 3 and 4 suggest that flexible working, referring to both schedule and workplace flexibility can simultaneously promote sustainable careers because of greater well-being and create challenges for sustainability because of detrimental performance ratings. Specifically, chapters 2 and 3 illustrate a dual or perhaps paradoxical process of working from home: although working from home benefits individuals' well-being and thus assists individuals in achieving sustainability in terms of remaining healthy, telework may hinder the path towards a sustainable career when it comes to productivity. Put differently, there appears to be a trade-off between the career sustainability indicators (this is a point that will receive more attention in the future research section of my dissertation, i.e., in 6.3.1).

The differing results across the two chapters of my dissertation are very much dependent on the alternative theoretical perspectives that were



taken across the chapters. In Chapter 3, we drew on the resource (drain) perspective in work-family spillover theory (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000) to build an argument as to why working from home days benefit individuals' work-home interface and consequently work-related well-being. In the subsequent chapter on the consequences of working from home, however, we built on signalling theory (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973) to hypothesize that working from home might send a signal of low commitment to the supervisor. Thus, while from a resource perspective working from home holds the potential to assist individuals in building a sustainable career, from a signalling perspective it can harm individuals because the supervisor might interpret working from home as a signal of low work centrality. These findings are in line with the conflicting opinions in the literature regarding the consequences of flexible working practices for sustainable careers.

Similar to the findings in this dissertation, the benefits of teleworking seem to be mostly related to well-being, while the negative consequences are often associated with career-related outcomes, such as career potential (Allen et al., 2015). In terms of the consequences of flexible working for employee well-being, meta-analytical studies have shown that working from home has a work stress and exhaustion reducing potential (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Sardeshmukh, Sharma, & Golden, 2012). When it comes to career-related outcomes, however, studies show that flexible working practices relate to fewer opportunities for promotion (Kelliher & Anderson, 2008) and lower performance ratings (Yam et al., 2014). For instance, Yam and colleagues (2014) showed that employees who choose a flexible work schedule and arrive at the office late in the morning (10am) receive lower supervisory performance ratings than those who arrive early (7am).

The conflicting findings in the literature combined with the findings in my dissertation challenge the boundaryless and protean career perspectives, and specifically, the associated belief that careers are makeable regardless of employers' values, expectations and preferences (e.g., Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Briscoe, Henagan, Burton, & Murphy, 2012). In fact, an integration of the findings of chapters 3 and 4 underscores the importance of an alignment between individual preferences and organizational support for sustainable careers. This is consistent with the traditional model of Person-Organization (P-O) fit (Kristof, 1996), which refers to the compatibility between the employee and organization by identifying on the one hand the characteristics of the organization (e.g., norms) and on the other hand the characteristics of the employee (e.g., attitudes). In essence, the model suggests that the extent of fit between the organization and the person depends on the degree of value congruence between the two parties (Kristof, 1996).

Researchers have used the P-O fit model to predict numerous employee and organizational outcomes (Kim, Aryee, Loi, & Kim, 2013; Resick, Baltes, & Shantz, 2007). Kim and colleagues (2014), for instance, found that individuals who experience high levels of P-O fit are more satisfied with their job, show more commitment to the organization, perform better in their



job and demonstrate more organizational citizenship behaviours towards the organization they work for. Considering the impact that P-O fit has on employees' well-being and work behaviour, I believe that the P-O fit model can inform sustainable careers and has the potential to further advance the sustainable careers framework. For example, researchers can study how employees' perception of their fit with the organization they work for relates to the key indicators of career sustainability; that is, health, productivity and happiness (De Vos et al., 2018). Moreover, considering that work environments and organizations transform continuously (e.g., new ways of working), it would be interesting to examine the process by which P-O fit changes over time and influences sustainable careers in the long run.

### 6.2.2 The Career Sustainability of Minority Groups

Little is known about the career sustainability of individuals from disadvantaged groups (De Vos et al., 2018; Van der Heijden et al., 2020). Together, the findings of chapters 4 and 5 suggest that employees without children compared to parents and women, more so than men, may have a harder time in crafting sustainable careers, in terms of employability (i.e., the productivity indicator of sustainable careers; De Vos et al., 2018). These results challenge existing work that shows that non-parents have better chances for career progression than parents (Heilman & Okimoto, 2008; Straub, Vinkenburg, & van Kleef, 2019) and build on previous research that suggests that women face more career obstacles on their pathway towards career advancement than men (Ryan et al., 2007; Doldor & Vinnicombe, 2015). In the following section, I will review these papers and outline how my findings relate to those in previous work.

In terms of differences in the career progress (i.e., productivity indicator of career sustainability) of parents and employees without children, previous research suggests that parents' career sustainability may suffer because they do not match the image of the ideal worker, who should lend work their full dedication while someone else bears their caring responsibilities (Blair-Loy, 2003; Reid, 2015; Williams, Blair-Loy, & Berdahl, 2013). Heilman and Okimoto (2008), for example, demonstrated that parenthood (in particular for women) can impede career progress because parents are perceived as being less committed to their job than childless workers. Moreover, Straub and colleagues (2019) showed that parents who choose to customize their careers in a flexible way (i.e., decelerated pace, less workload, work anytime/anywhere and choose a role with less responsibility), receive lower performance evaluations than non-parents. The findings of my dissertation, however, suggest that it is the non-parents who are more critically evaluated, when it comes to career progress.

Specifically, the results of Chapter 4 suggest that childless employees more than parents are confronted with contextual challenges; such that childless employees receive less supervisory support (in terms of lower supervisory performance ratings) when they decide to work from home.

An explanation for these findings might be found in the historical design of flexible working practices. Flexible working practices were primarily designed to enable the careers of employees with family responsibilities. Considering that employees without children have few care responsibilities, supervisors may assume that these individuals do not require job flexibility. Thus, I would argue that perceptions about the legitimacy of individuals' private life plays a crucial role and can help explain why, when it comes to the uptake of flexible working practices, non-parents are more disadvantaged in terms of career sustainability than parents. Indeed, as alluded to in Chapter 4, this point has recently been picked up in a qualitative study by Wilkinson and colleagues (2017). Childless employees in that study indicated that they felt unable to request flexible working because their private life activities (e.g., sports) were not considered to be legitimate reasons to leave work. Specifically, participants reported that legitimate reasons to pull time away from the workplace were mainly related to family and care responsibilities.

To conclude, I believe that our finding that employees without children are more negatively affected in terms of career progress, when they work flexibly, highlights that the ideal worker ideology may not always apply as an explanation. Thus, I believe that in order to better understand the inconsistent findings related to parenthood and career sustainability, it is imperative to look at the relationship from alternative theoretical angles and perspectives (e.g., private life legitimacy).

Chapter 5 builds on Chapter 4, by providing additional insights into the direction of the interplay between person and context. That is, while Chapter 4 shows how the context (i.e., supervisor) reacts to the choice (i.e., working from home) of individuals from minority groups, Chapter 5 illustrates how individuals from minority groups react (i.e., accepting a leadership position) to contextual factors (i.e., career barriers because of societal norms). In line with the theory of compromise and circumscription (Gottfredson, 1996) the results of Chapter 5 indicate that in response to a lack of promotional opportunities, women, more than men, make career compromises, in terms of accepting a glass cliff position (i.e., risky leadership position). This finding confirms previous research that suggests that glass cliff positions may be perceived as golden career opportunities for women because they believe such positions can help them attain executive positions that would normally be out of their reach (Ryan et al., 2007).

Yet, this is not to say that all women accept a glass cliff position. Consistent with social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent et al., 1994, 2000, 2002) that explains how self-efficacy determines whether individuals persist their career goals in response to barriers, the findings of Chapter 5 showed that women with high levels of career self-efficacy stepped away from risky leadership positions. Similar to the results of this dissertation, previous research has shown the importance of the self-efficacy resource in constructing a sustainable career (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Kelly, Strauss, Arnold, & Stride, 2019; Lent & Brown, 2013; Mishra & McDonald, 2017).

For instance, Abele and Spurk (2009) found that career self-efficacy predicts career satisfaction and a higher salary, which relate to the happiness and productivity indicators of sustainable careers, respectively (De Vos et al., 2018). In my dissertation, I show that career self-efficacy is related to remaining persistent in career goals. Put differently, self-efficacy helps women to avoid making a risky career move (i.e., accepting a risky leadership position). This is in line with the reasoning of De Vos and colleagues (2018) that high levels of career adaptability (e.g., confidence and self-esteem) can help people to successfully solve career-related problems; that is, step away from a risky leadership position even when faced with many career-related barriers.

In sum, these findings highlight the importance of incorporating a job seeker perspective when studying the glass cliff phenomenon. Previous glass cliff research has predominantly focused on decision-makers who want to fill a precarious leadership position (Ryan and Haslam, 2005a; Ryan et al., 2010). Such a perspective neglects the role of the job seeker in responding to contextual challenges and thus fails to provide us with an insight into the role of individuals in safeguarding their career. Thus, I would argue that if we want to gain a better understanding of how minority members are affected when it comes to the sustainability of their careers, it is imperative to study both external and internal factors; that is, career progress barriers and personality traits, respectively.

Moreover, integrating my findings with previous research that has examined what happens to women after they take the helm of a risky leadership position suggests that such positions can be expected to hinder rather than foster women's career sustainability. Previous research suggests that leaders of companies in organizational distress have a lower chance to be selected for leadership positions in the future (Ferris, Jagannathan, & Pritchard, 2003) and thus "the precariousness of glass cliffs manifests itself an increased incidence of career trauma" (Ryan et al., 2016, p. 453). If we speculate based on the glass cliff study, we could then argue that although taking the helm of a risky leadership position might seem like a sustainable decision in the short-term (an opportunity for a promotion), it might ultimately challenge women's career sustainability because it jeopardizes their employability in the future. Future research should examine this assumption and investigate how accepting a glass cliff position affects women's productivity, health and happiness on the long-term.

Taken together, the findings from chapters 4 and 5 jointly contribute to the career sustainability literature by showing that the career paths of minority groups members are not similar to those of majority groups, because of external (chapters 4 & 5) and internal barriers (Chapter 5). Thus, I would argue that if we are to better understand how the career sustainability of minority members is affected, we should unravel their decision-making processes and investigate how other stakeholders react to their decisions.

### 6.3 SUSTAINABLE CAREERS: FUTURE RESEARCH AVENUES

The topic of career sustainability has been “the underlying ideology of careers research for many years” (Lawrence, Hall & Arthur, 2015, p. 432). Yet, scholars have only begun to examine what makes careers (non)sustainable, by putting forward specific indicators, such as, health, happiness and productivity (De Vos et al., 2018). My aim has been to contribute to this stream of research by investigating the influence of personal choices and contextual challenges on health and productivity. However, much remains to be explored. Based on the findings of my dissertation, I present two main future research avenues that are intended to inspire scholars who wish to advance research on sustainable careers.

#### 6.3.1 Trade-off between Career Sustainability Indicators

The findings in my dissertation suggest that there might be a trade-off between the indicators; working from home is good for health but detrimental for performance ratings. However, if we are to examine the overall sustainability of individuals’ careers, we should perhaps not consider these indicators in isolation. I agree with De Vos and colleagues (2018) that for a better conceptualization of sustainable careers we need to study the different indicators in tandem and investigate any potential interplay and trade-off between the indicators.

The results of my dissertation remind us of how many questions are yet to be explored. For instance, which proxy (i.e., health, productivity) plays the biggest role in experiencing career sustainability? Should all the indicators be optimal at the same time for sustainable careers to be crafted? I believe these questions can be best answered by employing qualitative research methodologies. For instance, interviews with employees could help unravel which indicator has the greatest influence on individuals’ experiences of career sustainability. Existing career sustainability research provides some guidance. Drawing on interviews with management consultants, Chudzikowski and colleagues (2019) show that for sustainable careers to be built all indicators are not required to be high at all times. For instance, although job turnover because of a toxic workplace might lead to temporary unsustainability (i.e., reduced productivity), it could eventually lead to greater sustainability when the person leaves an unhealthy work environment and is happier and more productive in a new job. I recommend future research on career sustainability to follow the lead of Chudzikowski et al. and design qualitative studies aimed at enhancing our understanding of any tensions and possible interplays between the career sustainability indicators.

#### 6.3.2 A Diversity Perspective to Sustainable Careers

The findings of my dissertation suggest that the career paths of minority group members are not similar to those of majority groups. Specifically, in

the current dissertation, I shed light on the career sustainability of parents and women. However, there are several other minority members that deserve attention when it comes to analysing the sustainability of their careers. For instance, although we know that black employees and older employees have fewer chances for career progress (EEOC, 2015; UNECE, 2018) it is unclear how the sustainability of their career is affected. It would be a fruitful avenue for future research to investigate how these groups are affected in relation to the research questions of my dissertation. For example, it would be interesting to examine whether the glass cliff phenomenon can be extended from gender to ethnic minorities. Building on glass cliff theory, scholars could investigate whether black employees are more likely than white employees to accept the helm of a risky leadership position, because they are offered less career advancement opportunities. Furthermore, signalling theory and the ideal worker concept could be used to examine psychological mechanisms that help elucidate why older workers receive less opportunities for career progress. For example, age might send a signal of psychological and physical fitness that may not entirely match the image of the ideal worker who can be fully dedicated to the job.

Overall, I believe that a diversity perspective to career sustainability is imperative to further address how employees from minority groups are affected by different contextual elements outside of their control.

#### 6.4 METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

As with every thesis, this dissertation has a number of methodological limitations that should be addressed. Since the limitations of each study were discussed elaborately in each empirical chapter, the following section will focus on the overarching issues.

A first issue relates to the selected samples in this dissertation and their implications regarding the generalizability of findings. Similar to most psychological research, the samples in this dissertation consist of people from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) societies (Arnett, 2008; Rad, Martingano, Ginges, 2018). For instance, the findings of the working-from-home study in Chapter 3 might not completely extrapolate to other than WEIRD individuals as research suggests that the ability to work from home is tied to education, race and class, in that people of colour and those with a high school diploma are more restricted than white people and workers with advanced education to work from home (BLS, 2019). Such differences highlight the importance of conducting research among diverse populations to see whether our results hold beyond WEIRD samples. Another sampling aspect that might affect the generalizability of findings is the national context. Particularly, the Australian-based sample used in Chapter 2 raises the question whether and how culture may have affected the proposed relationships in our model.

For instance, it could be that Australians' relatively short-term orientation (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010), makes self-employment a less stressful occupational choice, which might overestimate the positive effect of self-employment on health. A cross-cultural approach to sustainable careers is therefore recommended to study the extent to which the national context influences careers, and the sustainability thereof, in more detail.

Another limitation concerns the way in which we measured the study variables in this dissertation. The used data across the studies are almost exclusively based on self-report measures, potentially increasing the chance of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012). However, following the advice of Podsakoff and colleagues (2012), the study participants in this dissertation were guaranteed anonymity and were assured that there are no correct or wrong answers to minimize the risk that individuals provide socially acceptable responses. Another way in which we tried to reduce common method bias, is by employing a longitudinal design (i.e., Chapter 3), where the independent variable and dependent variables were measured across different questionnaires at different moments in time. Future research is advised to design such studies and to collect data from different sources such as colleagues, supervisors and household members.

Finally, the results of this dissertation might have been affected by self-selection bias and non-response bias. For instance, (with an exception of the first study of Chapter 4), the data for chapters 2 and 4 were collected from individuals who have selected themselves to participate in a panel. However, even though the panel sample might suffer from self-selection bias, the final study samples used in chapters 2 and 4 were composed using equal distributions among demographics, such as age, gender and nationality, in order to construct samples which are representative of the study population. Moreover, the findings of chapters 3 and 5 might have been affected by non-response bias because of the convenience sampling methods that were employed. This might have been especially the case for Chapter 3, as dropouts over time are relatively common in longitudinal studies (De Leuw & Lugtig, 2015). Yet, by designing our experience sampling study in a way that promotes participants' commitment and maintains their motivation, we attempted to maximize the response rate and therefore minimize the non-response bias. In particular, we developed a relationship with the participants by sending out multiple reminders on a daily basis and by distributing raffle prizes (e.g., book and cinema vouchers). Moreover, considering that experience sampling is time and resource intensive, we kept the surveys relatively short (i.e., 5 minutes per survey). These strategies turned out to be successful as no participant dropped out and we obtained responses with an average of 9.4 days per individual out of 10 working days.



## 6.5 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

In what comes next, I will describe how the findings of my dissertation can be translated into practical implications for employees, organizations and policy-makers. First, my dissertation has provided insights that help employees understand the two-sided implications of flexible working practices for sustainable careers. That is, employees should become aware that working from home could help them in building a sustainable career when it comes to health because it reduces experiences of time pressure and at the same time hinder their career sustainability path because it may send a signal of low commitment. Thus, while employees are recommended to schedule working from home days in their weekly calendar to safeguard their health, they are advised to employ strategies focused on mitigating the negative perceptions associated with working from home.

One strategy that may help overcome the perception of low organizational commitment is for employees to schedule their working from home days around the needs of other organizational stakeholders. In fact, previous research has shown that successful teleworkers (e.g., high performers) plan their working from home days when it is most convenient for supervisors, colleagues and external stakeholders, such as clients (Greer & Payne, 2014). Another strategy that can be used to overcome the negative perceptions associated with teleworking, and especially that of work centrality, is for employees to demonstrate their output. For example, on days when employees work from home, they could send what has been achieved during that day to their supervisor. Employees are advised to make an extended effort to be extra productive on working from home days, as research has shown that flexible working practices result in career premiums, when supervisors believe an employee makes use of such practices for productivity reasons (Leslie et al., 2012).

Second, the findings of my dissertation indicate that organizations and especially supervisors play a critical role in supporting individuals' career sustainability. As suggested in this dissertation, supervisors can hinder the career sustainability of employees who work from home because of potential ideal worker biases. Organizations are recommended to take proactive measures to reduce biases and the negative perceptions that are associated with flexible working practices. Specifically, Personnel or Human Resources staff should offer compulsory trainings to supervisors who manage teleworking employees. While these sessions should be predominantly focused on raising awareness about the stigmas associated with working from home, it is equally important to promote the benefits of the practice.

One way to demonstrate the benefits is to share flexible working success stories, and present examples of high performing and engaged teleworkers. However, organizations should bear in mind that successful teleworking requires a shift in organizational culture (Putnam, Meyers, & Gailliard, 2014) and that changing perceptions may not be realized through trainings alone but requires the involvement of key organizational players. A recent study



based on ten cross-sector flexible working case studies identified sponsorship from senior leaders and executives as vital for creating a supportive telework culture (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2019). With this argument in mind, leaders could act as role-models of flexible working themselves to show supervisors that work dedication and organizational commitment while working flexibly is possible.

Another practical solution would be for supervisors and their employees to design a Flexplan, with the aim to increase transparency about the consequences of working from home. In the Flexplan, both the supervisor and the employee can make clear agreements about the employee's working from home behaviours. One of the concerns that is often raised by supervisors who manage teleworkers is that employees are less reachable (Greer & Payne, 2014). This concern can be overcome by establishing clear rules in the Flexplan regarding the hours during which the employee is expected to be accessible on working from home days. However, both parties need to remain mindful that the Flexplan is merely a tool to create greater transparency and help minimize the negative assumptions associated with working from home, but that for flexible working to really succeed there needs to be a strong element of trust between the employer and employee (Roach, 2016).

Finally, the findings of my dissertation have implications for policy-makers. Flexible working policies, such as working from home, were primarily introduced to enable the careers of working mothers. While certainly important for parents, a pitfall of such a label is that it solely emphasizes the benefit of enabling employees to manage care responsibilities and thereby neglects its benefits for the career sustainability of all individuals. Indeed, the findings of my dissertation suggest that working from home jeopardizes the career sustainability of individuals without children. Thus, policy-makers are strongly recommended to re-evaluate and review the purpose and definition of flexible working policies by promoting a wider understanding of the benefits of flexible working practices.

Similar to the findings in this dissertation, research has shown that working from home is positively associated with work-related well-being, such as flow and positive affect (Anderson et al., 2015, Peters & Wildenbeest, 2010). Governmental actors are recommended to promote these overall benefits of flexible working for sustainable careers. The UK, for example, recently launched a Flexible Working Task Force across governmental departments, employer groups and employee representative groups to highlight the benefits of flexible working practices for sustainable careers, in terms of productivity, satisfaction and engagement. I believe that such campaigns can help raise awareness about the stigma around flexible working practices and normalize the uptake of such practices for all employees.

## 6.6 CONCLUDING NOTE

My goal has been to provide an understanding of how individuals together with their surrounding stakeholders can craft sustainable careers. At the individual-level, I have shown that contemporary career decisions have the potential to promote sustainable careers. However, crafting a sustainable career requires more than agentic behaviours, such as career decision-making. For instance, we have learned that contemporary career decisions (e.g., working from home) can only foster sustainability if supervisors support individuals' decisions. Moreover, my dissertation has shown that challenges to building a sustainable career are not equal for all and that building a sustainable career requires individuals to be self-efficacious and respond smartly to external challenges (e.g., declining a risky leadership position even if confronted with career progression barriers). All in all, my dissertation stresses the necessity of researching the interplay between the person and the context when analysing sustainable careers. I hope my work inspires scholars to examine the topic of career sustainability in more detail.

