

THE CONTEMPORARY CAREER: A SUSTAINABILITY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Recently a sustainability perspective on careers has gained momentum within scientific career literature in response to shifts in a socioeconomic context. The paper focuses on the concept of sustainable careers: what they are and why they matter today.

Purpose – the aim of this research is to illustrate the relevance of the sustainability perspective to the examination of contemporary careers.

Design/methodology/approach – theoretical methods were used in this paper (logical-analytical, comparative, systematic). Firstly, changes in the global economic market which have affected career environment are analyzed. Further, the examination of conceptualizations and key dimensions of sustainable careers is presented.

Finding – sustainable careers is a fresh trend in the scientific research on careers bringing research efforts to a more comprehensive and complementary level. The systemic approach distinguishes the theory of sustainable careers from other contemporary career theories. The sustainability perspective reveals a multidimensional nature of careers and highlights the role of interconnectedness of different contexts (private life, organizational environment, broader labor market, governments, educational institutions) wherein career unfolds. The theory brings back the importance of organizational role in individual career management. The alignment between both the parties, i.e. an organization and an individual in terms of mutual benefits is needed in order to create a more resilient career system. Furthermore, the sustainability perspective provides an important insight into the time dimension in career management. The linear and age-based career has become more dynamic and fragmented. This means that an individual's career continuity can be safeguarded through life-long learning and proactive career self-management rather than counting on loyalty to the same employer.

Research limitations/implications – the principal limitation of this study is that the research is based on a theoretical conceptual analysis without presenting any empirical data.

Practical implications – this paper may be useful in fostering an interest in applying sustainability perspective on careers among scholars, as well as individuals, managers of organizations and human resource professionals. A sustainable career continuity over time can be fostered through combined efforts of individuals themselves and all stakeholders acting in career environment. Firstly, an individual, a central career actor, has to take responsibility for his or her career and proactively engage in career self-management in order to sustain employability. Through the focus on life-long learning and development of new competencies, an individual will appear more attractive, valuable and marketable to employers and consequently, will be able to build a satisfying career. Next, policy makers can influence individuals' careers sustainability through implementation of various programs and projects, e.g., helping to bridge the gap between education and labour market, to promote entrepreneurship, to stimulate employees to work longer, to facilitate the entrance to labour market of young individuals, etc. (De Vos, Dujardin, Gielens, Meyers, 2016). From the organizational perspective, sustainable careers may be fostered by implementing practices which address employees' work-home conflicts (Greenhaus, Kossek, 2014), engage employees appropriately over the life-span (Newman, 2011) and promote the physical as well as psychological health and well-being of employees creating organizational climates that increase workplace safety and reduce stress (Ehnert, 2014).

Originality/Value – sustainability is a fresh perspective on contemporary career theories. What is distinctive about the sustainable career concept is that it encompasses much more than individual career management and requires to take a more comprehensive approach on careers. It essentially seeks to find answers to such issues as how a resilient career system may be built which would not only respond to the individual's needs but would also allow the organization to flexibly respond to changing market requirements by having an engaged and adaptable workforce.

Keywords: contemporary careers, sustainability perspective on careers

Research type: conceptual paper

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