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To employability and beyond

Sustainable careers within contextual boundaries

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Chapter 5

General Discussion

Sustainable careers refer to career paths that are driven by individual agency and that are characterized by mobility, notably in a manner that is continuous (sustainable employability), and that preserves individual productivity, health, and happiness across varying circumstances and over prolonged periods of time (De Hauw & Greenhaus, 2015; De Vos et al., 2018; Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015). The overarching research question of this dissertation pertained to unraveling how individual career resources (person), and institutional resources and barriers (environment), interact in shaping sustainable careers, indicated by employability, productivity, happiness, and health.

First, we asked what individuals can do to sustain their careers against the backdrop of constantly changing demands in their jobs, occupations, and broader labor markets? In answering these questions, across three empirical studies we provided greater insight in different resources that individual can use to sustain their careers and process through which they do so.

Second, we asked when are personal resources associated with career sustainability, and when are they not? In answering this question, we strove to explore the extent to which factors related to the broader institutional environment; that is economic and cultural opportunities and barriers, affect the investment of personal resources in sustaining careers.

Below we first outline the theoretical implications of the three empirical studies in this dissertation. Subsequently, we address the methodological and practical implications. Finally, we hint at topics that we feel represent viable and important channels for future research.

Theoretical implications

The resource caravan as a driver of career sustainability

Motivated by the unabated need to assist individuals to create sustainable careers in the uncertain world of work, the first aim of this dissertation is to contribute to a deeper understanding of those resources that individuals can rely on to sustain their careers and the process through which they use these resources. Building on the dominantly agentic focus of careers literature over the past twenty years (Guichard, 2015), we strove to comprehensively systematize and quantitatively integrate the existing research base on the link between individual resources and sustainable

careers. Because the current literature is disjointed, creating an integrated overview was a necessary step in enabling conclusions about precisely which resources relate to different sustainable career outcomes and in generating insights for further theory building. To this end, in Chapter 2, we proposed a general framework for organizing our thinking about the role of individual resources in realizing sustainable careers combining insights from conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989) and the most recent framework on sustainable careers (De Vos et al., 2018). Then, we applied this framework in performing a comprehensive quantitative review of the antecedents of career sustainability. We positioned the perceived chance of obtaining, maintaining, and changing employment (i.e., perceived employability; Berntson & Marklund, 2007; Vanhercke et al., 2015) as a central construct in the nomological network because we posit that it reflects a subjectively aggregated reference point used by individuals to navigate the increasingly volatile labor market. Perceived employability indicates a caravan, or a pack, of salient resources within both the personal and environmental resource pool and is therefore likely to be more proximally associated to sustainable career outcomes than more distal individual resources (such as dispositional characteristics) and external conditions (such as the state of the labor market) on their own (De Cuyper et al., 2012).

Contributing to the literature on sustainable careers, the results of Chapter 2 provide evidence of significant meta-analytic relationships of perceived employability with a caravan of individual and organizational career- related resources as antecedents, as well as with indicators of sustainable careers as outcome correlates (i.e., productivity and health). Indeed, individual resources that reflect being self-directed, adaptable, proactively oriented towards the future and change, competent, well connected, and having generally positive feelings about managing one's career related positively to employability perceptions, and employability perceptions were positively related to indicators of health and productivity. However, the sheer number of different resources included in the meta-analysis also suggests the need for construct condensation and refinement in the antecedent domain, as well as the investigation of relationships, relative contributions, and interactions among the indispensable resources.

Also, the output of meta- analytic path analysis provides an initial, more comprehensive test of the overall conceptual model of sustainable careers, suggesting the indirect relationship between resources and sustainable career outcome correlates through employability perceptions. Namely, individuals might

rely on the resources available in their pool of resources to estimate their chance of employment (perceived employability), and this subjective estimate might further relate to experiencing productivity and health. Future research might attempt to provide a more complete test of this overall conceptual model, and take into account several personal and organizational resources simultaneously.

In addition to contributing to the broader debate on sustainable careers, Chapter 2 offers more specific contributions to the literature on employability. First of all, our meta-analysis positioned the overall employability perceptions as the focal variable, and we explored the distinction between perceptions of employment opportunities within the current organization (i.e., perceived internal employability), and outside of the current organization (i.e., perceived external employability) as a moderator. To do this, we first reviewed the content of employability measures which were used in the primary studies. The review of perceived employability measures shows that these measures vary in the extent in which they subsume both internal and external opportunities, and that it is often not at all clear whether they do or not include both dimensions. Moreover, studies that assessed perceived internal employability were a minority compared to studies that assessed perceived external employability. Furthermore, although the underrepresentation of studies that assessed perceived internal employability constrained the results of subsequent moderator analyses, the obtained results offer an indication that the two types of perceptions might differ in terms of their relationship to some antecedents and outcomes. To improve construct validity of employability perceptions and to facilitate further theoretical development in this realm, more studies that measure perceived internal employability need to be conducted, and the differential criterion-related validity of internal versus external employability perceptions with different outcomes assessed.

Second, numerous outcomes with a varying focus on career, job, and personal life have been related to perceived employability across studies, oftentimes, however, without a sound theoretical rationale. The output of the current dissertation contributes to theory development in that it points to two mechanisms that may explain why employability perceptions might be particularly related to productivity and health. On the one hand, high levels of perceived employability might serve an enabling role for individuals as they signal a more abundant career resource caravan that individuals can use in the realization of productive careers in terms of performance, success, and engagement. On the other hand, the resource caravan might also serve a protective role by offering a sense of control to individuals that protects individual health and

wellbeing. The lack of significant relationships between perceived employability and indicators of mobility and some indicators of happiness here too indicates the need for further theory refinement. For example, in hypothesis development greater attention should be given to construct correspondence (Harrison, Newman, & Roth, 2006) between perceived employability and the constructs in the criterion domain. It is possible that perceived employability has a stronger predictive value for explaining outcomes that have implications for the sustainability of the sequence of work experiences, rather than for the current work experience in isolation. However, most of the variables encompassed within the outcomes of mobility and happiness (i.e., turnover intentions, affective organizational commitment, or job satisfaction) referred to employees' evaluation of their current work experience.

In sum, the results of the Chapter 2 provide evidence in support of perceived employability as a valuable link between personal resources and different sustainable career outcomes, while at the same time pointing to the need for the field to come of age in terms of theorizing, research design, and transparency of reporting.

Next, to provide deeper understanding of how specific personal resources within the resource caravan contribute to sustainable careers in Chapter 3 and 4 we focused on those personal resources that assist individuals to align themselves to occupational demands, challenges and transitions, and to achieve specific sustainable career outcomes. Among employed individuals, we focused on the outcomes of employability and performance as rated by the supervisor, and among those in the moment of extreme career transition we looked at job search self-efficacy. In line with the career construction model of adaptation (Savickas, 2005, 2013), our results indicate that individuals sequentially use multiple personal resources to sustain their careers. Specifically, the more stable individual dispositions (i.e., proactive personality, conscientiousness, psychological capital) seem to activate individual self-regulatory resources within the career domain (i.e., career adapt-ability resources), and surface in specific behaviors used to address occupational demands and challenges (i.e., proactive skill development, career planning). Our results suggest that employees with higher levels of psychosocial strengths, as captured by the career adapt-ability construct (i.e., concern, control, curiosity, and confidence), are more likely to address demands and challenges in their work either by proactively developing skills or by creating future career plans. It is through these efforts that they reach a higher level of performance in their own work and a higher level of employability (as rated by their supervisor). Accordingly, through analogous career-adaptability

mechanism individuals who are undergoing a major threat to sustainability of their career (i.e., forced migration) develop more favorable beliefs about their efficacy in searching for work and re-establishing their careers. Our results are compatible with recent research that has shown a positive relation between individuals' career adapt-ability and work engagement through job crafting behaviors (Federici, Boon, Den Hartog, 2019), as well as between career adapt-ability and adapting to looming career transition (Van der Horst, Klehe, & Van der Heijden, 2017). Future research should investigate how career adapt-ability and adapting relate to other indicators of sustainable careers, such as employee health and wellbeing.

The studies presented in Chapter 3 and 4 also yield additional implications for career construction theory (Savickas, 2013). First, by testing the links between career adapt-ability and two career management strategies (i.e., proactive skill development and career planning) we contribute to empirically elucidating the infrequently studied link between adaptivity and specific adapting behaviors (Rudolph et al., 2017). Moreover, by demonstrating the relationship of career adapt-ability with supervisor rated outcomes, in-role performance, and employability, we provide a more rigorous test of the internal validity of the career construction model of adaptation, and complement the evidence base on the value of career adapt-ability resources in not only the career domain but also the domain of the current job (Rudolph et al., 2017; Ohme & Zacher, 2015). Future research should investigate the conditions that might determine in which domain (job vs career) career adapt-ability resources are deployed, and try to identify profiles of behaviors that might be linked to specific job and career related outcomes. Finally, the study presented in Chapter 4 offers support for the value of career adapt-ability resources as critical self-regulatory strengths that aid refugees in reestablishing their careers within host country. As such, it offers a test of the career construction model of adaptation among an extremely vulnerable and understudied group, complementing previous tests on the groups of older (Zacher & Griffin, 2015), disabled (Santilli et al, 2014) and unemployed (Zikic & Klehe, 2006).

Contextual boundaries to sustainable careers

Motivated by the notion that human behavior is not only a function of the person but also of the (rapidly changing) environment, the second objective of this dissertation was to investigate to what extent the relationships between the

individual resource caravan and sustainable career outcomes is universal, or stronger or weaker for employees in particular contexts. In studying context, we focus on the often recognized but seldom investigated role of the broader institutional environment. Across the three empirical chapters we address individual resource caravan (Chapter 2) or specific resources within that caravan (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) and we approach the question of context in different ways.

In Chapter 2, we explore variability in the relationships of perceived employability with personal and organizational resources as antecedents, and indicators of sustainable careers as outcomes across moderators that capture broader institutional context of the countries in which the primary studies were conducted. Specifically, we investigate how individual vulnerability stemming from belonging to a less resource endowed group within a population, country level macroeconomic conditions, and a set of culturally embedded values, moderate the relationships between individual resources, perceived employability, and indicators of sustainable careers. Extending this line of thinking, in the next two empirical chapters of this dissertation we turned our attention to explicitly investigating how individuals secure sustainable careers in specific contextual circumstances. In Chapter 3, we zoomed into occupational and country context of both part-time and full-time nurses in Hungary, and we examined how career adapt-ability resources relate to productivity and employability. In Chapter 4, we investigated how administrative and social career barriers that accompany the experience of forced migration threaten the career sustainability of individuals resettled in new host countries (Greece and the Netherlands).

By and large, the three studies indicated that context influences the relationships between individual career resources and career sustainability in several ways. Here we integrate four main conclusions. First, the scarcity of particular environmental resources might stimulate individual efforts to sustain the career or overcome career related transitions and challenges through strengthening the relationships between specific motivational and self-regulatory personal resources and sustainable career outcomes. Specifically, in Chapter 2, we showed that psychological capital has a stronger positive relationship with employability perceptions in samples from countries with higher unemployment rates. Accordingly, in Chapter 3, we show that for refugees who have resettled in Greece and the Netherlands, high administrative barriers strengthened the positive relationship of adaptive readiness or career adapt-ability with job search self-efficacy. These findings imply that that even in more detrimental circumstances, the sense of control that might be derived from a generally

positive outlook on life of individuals who are more optimistic, hopeful, resilient, and confident in their capacity to cope can have a positive impact on evaluating: 1) individual employment chance, and 2) their own competence in searching for work. The question future studies should answer is whether the positive career outcomes of hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy are sustained in the long run if individuals keep experiencing contextual barriers (e.g., high unemployment rates, administrative barriers) over prolonged periods of time.

Second, it appears that there are also external factors which might impede career sustainability by weakening the relationship between personal resources and some sustainable career outcomes. Specifically, in Chapter 2 personal resources had a weaker relationship with employability perceptions among samples of older workers. Also, the results of Chapter 3 suggest that experiencing higher social (but not administrative) barriers reduces the strength of the relationship between psychological capital and job search self-efficacy through career adapt-abilities. This suggests that experiencing social barriers to labor market integration may form a particularly vexing impediment for refugees. The experiences of not speaking local language or not being familiar with the cultural norms in the destination country seems to diminish the positive career adap-ability mechanism. A potential explanation for why different contextual barriers have different effects on individuals' capacity to sustain their careers might be derived from attribution theory (Kelley, 1967). This theory distinguishes between dispositional and external attribution, with the former referring to ascribing the cause of behavior to some internal characteristic of the person, and the latter to ascribing the cause of that behavior to contextual forces outside a person's control. It might be that individuals are more prone to interpret barriers related to social and cultural differences, or discrimination, as indirectly deriving from their own characteristics, flaws or failures, while they more likely attribute the cause of barriers related to higher unemployment or bureaucratic difficulties to situational and economic conditions that are beyond the scope of individual influence.

Third, the broader institutional environment might be the source of resources that complement the pool of resources available to individuals, and therefore contribute to sustaining the career. In Chapter 2 we demonstrated that employability perceptions relate more positively to psychological wellbeing in countries with higher employment protection legislation indicating that stricter legislative measures pertaining to hiring and laying off employees via flexible employment

contracts might help individuals in efforts to sustain their wellbeing. Importantly, employment protection legislation seems to be a broader institutional resource that strengthens the contribution of organizational resources, and specifically job security, to perceived employability. In addition to employment protection legislation, the relationship between organizational resources and employability perceptions as well as perceived employability and employee health was stronger in certain cultural contexts compared to others. Specifically, it seems that societies that: (a) have an orientation towards future (long-term orientation), (b) value active efforts to affect and modify one's surrounding in order to achieve goals and progress (mastery), and (c) tend to rely on hierarchical systems when it comes to distribution of power (hierarchy), create either an obligation or norm for organizations to support individual employability and sustainable careers. In such societies the link between employability and positive indicators of individual wellbeing was also stronger indicating that cultural norms might provide interpretative frameworks that individuals use to appraise the value of personal resource pool in achieving sustainable career outcomes. Recognition that the characteristics of the broader institutional context and cultural norms might support individual careers indicates the importance of investigating alternative forms of support to career sustainability that may benefit individuals who work in less regulated sectors and environments (e.g., the platform economy), as they might be left without structural and organizational support, and be in a position where they have to rely entirely on their personal resources. Similarly, future research should also investigate the role of institutional support to sustainable careers of particularly vulnerable groups. Namely, understanding which forms of support (e.g., social support and career targeted support) can stimulate job search self-efficacy and subsequent employment outcomes of refugees would be recommended.

Finally, based on our studies it does not seem to be the case that resources within the broader institutional environment have a negative effect on career sustainability, in other words too much of a good thing will not make individuals more passive in managing their own careers and have negative repercussions on, for example, indicators of productivity. This is another topic that warrants future research.

Methodological recommendations

To answer research questions posed in the current dissertation we employed different research designs and analytical strategies across the empirical studies presented in each chapter. As we have discussed the reasons for specific design and analytical choices within each chapter, here we will reflect upon implications of different methodological choices, and offer several recommendations for career researchers.

The first research question of the current dissertation revolved around offering more comprehensive insight into which career resources individuals can utilize to secure employability, and subsequent sustainable career outcomes of mobility, productivity, happiness and health. In Chapter 2, we first created a nomological network of resources that might contribute to sustainable career outcomes and we positioned perceived employability as the focal construct that could serve as a link between a variety of resources and sustainable career outcomes. Next, we conducted a systematic quantitative review of the relationships between individual resources (as antecedents) and indicators of sustainable careers (as outcomes) of perceived employability.

Opting for meta-analysis as a strategy of choice enabled us to generate a systematic overview and more precise and more statistically powerful estimates of the relationships between perceived employability, its antecedents, and its outcomes, and to offer more generalizable theoretical and practical implications than those that would emerge from a single primary study. Hence, Chapter 2 contributes to the cumulative knowledge base regarding the nomological network of perceived employability, which, in our opinion, the field profoundly needed. Although career researchers have a long tradition of using meta-analyses to answer research questions (see for example: Assouline & Meir, 1987), this is the first meta-analysis in the field of employability. Hence, we would like to stress several methodological recommendations for employability researchers that, we believe, will facilitate future quantitative integration of the produced evidence, and contribute to greater rigor in terms of research design, measurement, and transparency of reporting.

First, authors in employability research should provide ample information about the employability measures used in the studies, such as the reference to the original measure(s) used; the extent to which and the way in which the authors adapted the original measure; the employability dimensions that were encompassed within the

used measure; the reliability of each dimension and of the overall scale. Second, the characteristics of the samples used in the primary studies should be reported in detail to enable greater insight into boundary conditions for interpreting the results and drawing the conclusions. The reported information should at the very least include, but not necessarily be limited to, basic demographic characteristics of the sample, information about the country, industry and occupational context where the data was collected. Third, the authors should strive to provide a correlation matrix which exhaustively reports correlations among all measured variables and, in studies that include several independent samples, report correlations for each sample. We understand that authors sometimes omit this information to preserve journal space, and therefore suggest reporting of additional information in form of supplementary information and/or making greater use of open science platforms (e.g., OSF, 2020).

The second research question of the current dissertation focused on examining to what extent broader institutional and cultural context affect the investment of individual resources in sustaining careers. In addressing this question, using meta-analysis as our analytical strategy in Chapter 2 enabled us to empirically test the variability in the relationships between perceived employability, its antecedents, and its outcomes across a range of country-level moderators, such are unemployment rates (ILOSTAT, 2018), employment protection legislation (OECD, 2013), cultural values (Hofstede et al., 2010) and cultural value orientations (Schwartz et al., 2008). Thereupon, combining the information from the primary studies and information on country-level characteristics offered a unique opportunity to respond to calls for investigation of the role that contextual boundaries have in shaping individual careers (e.g. De Vos & Cambre, 2017; Garbe & Duberley, 2019; Arnold & Cohen, 2008; Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012). Exploring differences in relationships between perceived employability, antecedents, and outcomes across different country contexts would be an immensely demanding task for a primary study because it would require sampling participants from many countries that vary in terms of macroeconomic and cultural conditions. As such, our study offers theoretical and practical implications for future research that would less likely emerge from a single primary study. Nevertheless, although meta-analysis provides a valuable technique for assessing the moderating role of contextual variables, it is constrained to those contexts in which primary studies were conducted. When it comes to the topic of perceived employability, we could observe over-representation of studies conducted in Europe (66.2%), following studies from Asia (15.7%), North America (9.4%), Africa

(4.7%), Australia (2.4%) and South America (1.6%). Future research should investigate why we see less employability research in non-European contexts.

Finally, in the last two empirical chapters of the current dissertation we focused on the specific contexts of nursing professionals in Hungary and Syrian refugees in Greece and the Netherlands. As sustainable careers are bounded to the context in which they evolve, studies in such specific contexts and especially among more vulnerable groups within the general population are much needed. The last two studies complement the existing body of research on career sustainability within specific populations which has so far mostly been qualitative (e.g., Richardson, & McKenna, 2019), or published in fields other than careers and organizational behavior (e.g., occupational health, Janine & Juanita, 1999; criminology, Alós, Esteban, Jódar, & Miguélez, 2015). Here we will reflect upon several methodological complexities that we encountered while conducting our study with refugees, and suggest potential recommendations for career researchers who might be doing research on these or other groups of vulnerable workers.

First, guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity of the data provided by the participants is a key concern in conducting research with vulnerable groups. Although participation in the current study was voluntary, the surveys were anonymous, and no personal identifiers were obtained, participants often needed to be reassured that their responses would exclusively be used for research purposes and individual responses would not be made available to any third parties. In our study, this was especially the case when participants were approached through NGOs or governmental stakeholders. Investing time and effort in establishing trust and rapport with participants improves the willingness to participate in the study, and their diligence in responding.

Second, although logistically more challenging, collecting data from participants in their mother tongue or providing such possibility facilitates establishing contact and involvement of lower skilled members of the population, who might be less able to have their voices heard in a study conducted in English or other local languages. In our study, we provided participants the opportunity to choose whether to fill in the survey in Arabic, Greek, Dutch, or English, and although some of them were fluent in English and/or the local language they chose to fill in the survey in Arabic. Hence, we believe that this had positive impact on the response rates.

Third, different sampling and data collection strategies have their own strengths and challenges which need to be accounted for by the researchers who study vulnerable groups. Collecting data through governmental stakeholders and large NGOs might facilitate access to a larger and potentially more representative sample but might raise concerns about the purposes of the study and might require additional effort to ensure confidentiality. Comparably, there is a disagreement about doing research on refugees with refugees as data collection assistants. While some studies indicate that it could mitigate the potential risks of power imbalance between researchers and participants (Bloch, 2002; Temple & Moran, 2006), others underline that use of refugees as data collection assistants could sometimes intensify the power imbalance (Block, Warr, Gibbs, & Riggs, 2013). In the current study, we recruited participants through multiple care organizations, accommodation providers, and referrals among potential participants who shared study relevant characteristics. We collected the data collaboratively with a translator or the data collection assistants who were recruited through multiple channels. In our experience, some of the data collection assistants were instrumental in helping researchers establish contact with participants as they assisted in translation of additional comments that some participants had, helped in resolving challenges in data entry etc. Based on our experience, in order to account for differences in educational background and engagement in data collection across different data collection assistants, researchers should provide thorough training, a structured data collection protocol, transparent communication, and good rapport with data collection assistants, supervision, and quality control procedures.

Fourth, refugees are not a homogeneous group and should not be treated as an undifferentiated whole (Bloch, 2002; Temple & Moran, 2006), yet studies with refugee samples often include diverse groups in terms of countries of origin, time of arrival, and experiences of prior to forced migration. Although more inclusive samples are potentially more representative of the wider population of forced migrants in a specific country and at a specific time point, they run the risk of mixing very different subpopulations which can bias the findings, especially when small sample sizes do not enable systematic comparisons across groups. Somewhat contrary to these approaches, in the study presented in Chapter 3 we choose to focus only on post-2014 refugees from Syria as the largest group with approved asylum applicants in European Union (UNHCR, 2017a).

Last but not the least, when doing research on refugee careers and labor market integration researchers need to be extremely aware of and transparent in communicating the potential of their study (or the lack thereof) to bring transformative change to refugee lives. Although Jacobsen and Landau (2003) propose that refugee research should have a dual imperative of contributing to scholarship and advocacy, many studies remain at the level of providing broad policy implications (Temple & Moran, 2006). To generate insights of more immediate practical relevance for sustainable careers of refugees and other vulnerable groups, more intervention studies are needed.

Overall, the current dissertation underlines the necessity for every researcher to critically evaluate the appropriateness of a certain methodological strategy for answering their research questions and to understand the strengths and limitations that come with each choice.

Practical recommendations

The results of the empirical chapters presented in this dissertation provide policy makers, organizational stakeholders, and individual workers with a number of implications for managing employability, productivity, and health as indicators of sustainable careers.

How people feel about their career matters for its sustainability. We found that psychological capital (i.e., hope, optimism, resilience, self-efficacy) forms a valuable personal resource for individual employability and job search self-efficacy, even more so when individuals live in countries with higher unemployment rates, or when they are transitioning to a new country in an effort to escape violent conflict. Increasing individuals' emotional and motivational capacity, and inspiring them to be hopeful and optimistic, might help their employability and protect them from the psychological distress associated with unemployment. Individual level interventions targeted at activating and developing a more positive outlook on life are important for empowering people to bare the difficult times, and to cope with unpredictable circumstances and inevitable challenges along their career paths.

In addition, career adapt-ability as a career specific set of self-regulatory resources can be a valuable strength for people in managing their professional paths. People with greater career adapt-ability resources are more empowered to actively engage in proactively developing their skills and planning their careers. As a consequence,

these individuals have better performance in their current jobs, and more ample employment alternatives (as perceived by both the individuals themselves and as rated by their supervisors). Although career adapt-ability is partially determined by stable individual characteristics (i.e., proactive personality, conscientiousness, and psychological capital) research has shown that at least to some extent these self-regulatory competences can be trained (Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen, 2012).

The current dissertation implies that training individuals' career- concern, control, curiosity, and confidence could be beneficial at the beginning of their careers, within specific jobs, and during times of career transitions. For individuals at the beginning of their careers, developing career adapt-ability through structured vocational training, career coaching, and counseling, can help in developing young professionals who are future oriented, who take responsibility for the development of their own careers, who explore multiple opportunities, and who believe that they can solve the challenges that come their way. These employees will therefore be able and willing to set career goals and to proactively acquire the knowledge that they might have not acquired during their formal education in order to match the demands of the labor market. At later career stages, through coaching, training, and development, organizations may foster personal career adapt-ability resources and contribute to develop employees that are more able to anticipate and respond to changes within their job, their organizations, and their careers in general.

However, because consequences of labor market trends for employees' sustainable careers are not only an individual issue but also reflect a broader societal problem, meso (i.e., organizational) and macro (i.e., country) level interventions are also suggested by the reported findings. The current dissertation demonstrates that the broader institutional context does relate to sustainable careers of individuals, indicating that policymakers should work on creating an infrastructure that supports sustainable careers, and on incentivizing and supporting organizations to invest in the sustainable careers of their employees. As shown here, these interventions might take the form of employment protection legislation (e.g., procedures and costs involved in dismissing individuals or groups of workers, and the procedures involved in hiring workers on fixed-term or temporary work contracts), but also in the form of organizational support practices aligned with cultural values of the country where the organization operates. Alternative forms of institutional support, that go beyond employment protection legislation (e.g., unionization) could be further explored.

When it comes to implications for organizational stakeholders, an important implication that emerged from the current dissertation was that both employability perceptions and career adapt-ability were positively related to job performance, while perceived employability also had a positive relationship with work engagement and wellbeing, and a negative relationship with employee burnout. It seems from our studies that organizations have lot to gain from investing in the employee career resource caravan, especially in terms of higher productivity, higher engagement, and better employee health. Stimulating the sustainable careers of their employees through the provision of job security, supervisory support, job autonomy, and HR practices oriented towards development, and flexibility is crucial for the long-term success and agility of organizations.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

In discussing the findings and implications of the current dissertation, we also need to account for a number of limitations.

First, the cross-sectional nature of the data collection in the empirical studies that we conducted and in the majority of primary studies included in the meta-analysis limits the ability to support causal inferences. Careers are dynamic and fluctuating phenomena that by definition evolve over time (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989), and it is thus necessary to test the directionality and potential reciprocal nature of the investigated relationships over time. Importantly, longitudinal designs are necessary to judge the long term-implications of the use of personal resources in sustaining careers across prolonged periods of time and in different phases of life. Even though we showed that some contextual barriers might force individuals to rely on their emotional, motivational, and self-regulatory resources in sustaining their careers, long term exposure to scarce external resources could deplete the pool of individual resources, and endanger career sustainability. Moreover, it is also possible that certain changes and career transitions temporarily endanger career sustainability but end up contributing to it in a long run. For all these reasons, future research that empirically investigates how individual careers evolve over longer time windows are necessary.

Second, although we approach context in several different ways across the different empirical chapters, which we believe advances our understanding on the role of contextual boundaries to career sustainability, we were not able to test trickle-down effects from the macro (country), and meso (organizational) level to the

micro (individual) level. To achieve this goal large scale, multilevel, cross-cultural, collaborative and cross-organizational data collection efforts are sorely needed. Moreover, in the current dissertation we either focused on a specific occupational context (nurses) or included individuals with diverse occupational backgrounds, but we did not assess the influence of specific dimensions of context that vary across occupations and/or industries. Career researchers could make greater use of large-scale panel data available in some countries, for example the Dutch working conditions survey (Monitor Arbeid, 2020), the Swedish longitudinal occupational survey of health (SLOSH, 2020) and the German socio-economic panel (German Institute for Economic Research, 2020) which all capture information about working conditions, and indicators of employability, mobility, health, productivity, and happiness for representative samples of working adults and employees with specific occupations within these countries.

Third, although the meta-analysis reported in Chapter 2 of this dissertation encompassed 127 independent samples and a total of 69.301 individuals that originate from different industries and cultural contexts, in the remaining two chapter we focused on specific samples of nurses in Hungary and post-2014 Syrian refugees in Greece and the Netherlands. Although this contextualized approach has the advantage of offering more targeted implications for these specific groups, the generalizability of our findings to other professions and countries, and indeed to groups that are facing other particularly challenging times in their lives apart from forced migration is uncertain and needs to be established. Future research could use probability sampling to test the replicability of these results in samples that are more representative of the overall working population. In addition, conceptual replication of the findings and empirical tests of the role of career barriers among groups that are undergoing other forms of career transitions and traumas, or that are facing other forms of precarious and challenging external circumstances, would be highly valuable in advancing the conversation on when and why certain barriers might challenge or hinder individual career sustainability. For example, studies among occupations in which employees are exposed to high health risks (e.g., mining) would be interesting.

Fourth, with the exception of Chapter 3, where we obtained supervisory performance and employability ratings for the sample of full-time nurses, and in Chapter 2 where we obtained data on country-level context from sources different than primary studies, the majority of the constructs in the current dissertation were

measured through individual self-ratings. Although relying on individual perceptions was to some extent inevitable considering that the aim of the dissertation was to study subjective evaluations of career sustainability, the practice of relying on self-ratings increases the risk of common source and common method bias. While individual evaluations of career related experiences will always be a valuable source of insight in studying sustainable careers, it would be valuable to incorporate more objective outcomes in future research, such as data about actual transitions and job changes as indicators of mobility, and medical data as indicators of health.

Conclusion

The current dissertation examined how individuals sustain the continuity of their careers, working productively now, and in the future, while simultaneously creating a healthy and happy life within and outside of work. More specifically, across the three studies we investigated to what extent individual career resources interact with the characteristics of the broader institutional and cultural context in shaping career sustainability.

Taken together, the results demonstrate that a broad range of career resources which reflect personal agency and meaning making contribute to the continuity of individual careers that is across different studies reflected in: 1) the individual appraisal of their chance of finding (alternative) employment; 2) the individual career potential as rated by their supervisors; and 3) an individual sense of competence in searching for employment after major transition. Moreover, employability perceptions, and specific self-regulatory resources in the form of career adapt-ability were shown to further positively contribute to productivity and health, two indicators of career sustainability.

Although individuals rely on their personal resource pool in managing sustainable careers, across studies we also show that these careers do not evolve in a vacuum, but that the broader institutional and cultural context affects the strength of the link between individual resources and sustainable career outcomes. On the one hand, specific career barriers, such as unemployment and administrative challenges, strengthen the positive relationships between personal resources (i.e., hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy) and sustainable career outcomes (i.e., individual appraisal of their chance of finding employment and sense of competence in searching for employment after a major transition). On the other hand, social barriers, such as, for example, differences between cultures in country

of origin and the host country experienced by refugees, weaken the positive relationship between psychological capital and a sense of competence in searching for employment. Finally, while some institutional conditions might represent a barrier to the sustainable career, others, such as employment protection legislation, might represent an additional resource that individuals rely on in sustaining their employability perceptions, and more distal career outcomes.

In light of the general findings, it is our hope that this dissertation might encourage new and inspiring avenues for research that could help to better understand how individuals can develop sustainable careers against the backdrop of constantly changing labor markets.