



Decent Work for a Better Life: Unpacking the Role of Career Adaptability and Sustainability

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Abstract

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has integrated the International Labor Organization's Decent Work Agenda into its broader vision to promote a more sustainable future for all. As one of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development, the concept of decent work has been widely promoted in theory, practice and research to improve people's ability to experience freedom, fairness, security and dignity at work. However, the evidence on the impact of decent work on individuals' quality of life and long-term career prospects is still inconclusive. In this study, the relationship between decent work and quality of life was examined, with career adaptability and career sustainability playing an indirect role. The study involved 218 people between the ages of 19 and 71 who worked in various roles in the tourism industry. The results show a significant positive relationship between decent work and quality of life. Decent work improves both career adaptability and career sustainability, which in turn has a positive impact on quality of life. Serial mediation analysis confirms that career adaptability and career sustainability mediate the relationship between decent work and quality of life ($B = 0.493, p < 0.001$). These results are clear evidence that the development of career adaptability and the promotion of sustainable career practices are crucial when it comes to translating decent working conditions into a higher quality of life for workers.

Keywords: Decent Work; Career Adaptability; Career Sustainability; Quality Of Life; Sustainable Development Goals; Process Macro

Abbreviations

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals; OSD8: One of these goals; ILO: International Labor Organization; PWT: Psychology of Working Theory.

Introduction

The world of work continues to change, with the impact of technology, the intensification of activities and increasing

inequality in the workplace bringing potentially negative predictions for the future. These factors have a negative impact on careers and underline the need for effective strategies to ensure their sustainability. More and more jobs are becoming unsustainable due to high employer demands, stress, burnout and a lack of work-life balance. This affects the well-being of individuals, organizations and society. In response to these challenges, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at



alleviating the lack of sustainability in current development models, particularly in the environmental, economic and social sectors.

One of these goals (OSD8) relates to decent work. The eighth SDG, entitled Decent Work and Economic Growth, emphasizes the need to strive for decent work and growth to promote sustainable, inclusive – and lasting - economic growth, full employment and decent work for all.

Decent Work

The concept of “decent work” was introduced by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1999 and is defined as opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, justice, security and human dignity (ILO, 1999). This concept encompasses four main dimensions:

- Job creation,
- Rights at work,
- Social protection and
- Social dialog.

Decent work is seen as crucial not only for the development of individual careers, but also for the long-term competitive advantage of organizations and the general well-being of society [1-3].

The literature suggests that decent work is associated with a healthy work environment, social inclusion and the promotion of a sense of purpose and personal fulfillment [2]. As work is closely linked to self-concept, its conditions affect both the physical and psychological well-being of workers [4-5].

The Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) assumes that decent work results from the interplay of psychological, contextual and economic factors that either facilitate or hinder its realization. According to this theory, decent work has a direct impact on the well-being of individuals by satisfying their needs for survival, self-determination and social contribution [6,7].

Empirical studies confirm that decent work has a positive impact on job satisfaction and employees’ lives [8] and improves the perception of meaningfulness of work [9,10]. In addition, a work environment that is aligned with workers’ interests, values and talents increases job satisfaction and promotes indicators of well-being [11]. Conversely, the lack of appropriate working conditions has a negative impact on employees’ psychological and physiological well-being [12]. Research on Chinese Generation Y suggests that decent work can contribute significantly to their happiness and overall satisfaction [13,14]. Overall, people in decent working conditions are happier in both their professional

and personal lives.

Quality of life and well-being at Work

Quality of life is traditionally viewed from different perspectives, including physical, psychological, social and environmental dimensions. In the work context, quality of life is often associated with the concept of well-being at work, which includes factors such as job satisfaction, mental health, work-life balance and financial security [15].

Workers who feel secure, valued and integrated into a healthy work environment tend to report higher levels of quality of life. Studies by Kaan NM, et al. [16] suggest that the perception of a decent job increases job satisfaction and well-being, which in turn contributes positively to overall quality of life.

Career Adaptability

Career adaptability is defined as a person’s ability to adapt to career challenges and transitions while maintaining employability in a constantly changing labor market [17]. It is considered an important psychological resource that helps individuals develop the necessary skills to cope with the uncertainties of working life, thus promoting a more sustainable and fulfilling career.

Studies show that employees with high levels of career adaptability are better able to respond positively to changes and challenges in the work environment, such as organizational restructuring or economic crises, which increases their resilience and long-term well-being [18].

Career Sustainability

Career sustainability is the ability of a person to maintain a continuous and satisfying career over an extended period without compromising their health or well-being [19,20]. It is influenced by various factors, including support from the company, the flexibility of the work environment and the adaptability of the employee themselves.

Research by Van der Heijden, et al. [21] suggests that career sustainability is strongly associated with job satisfaction and job longevity, especially in sectors characterized by high volatility and innovation. Therefore, career sustainability is an important mediating factor in the relationship between working conditions and quality of life.

Aim and Hypotheses

This study aims to analyze the impact of decent work on quality of life, with indirect mediation through job

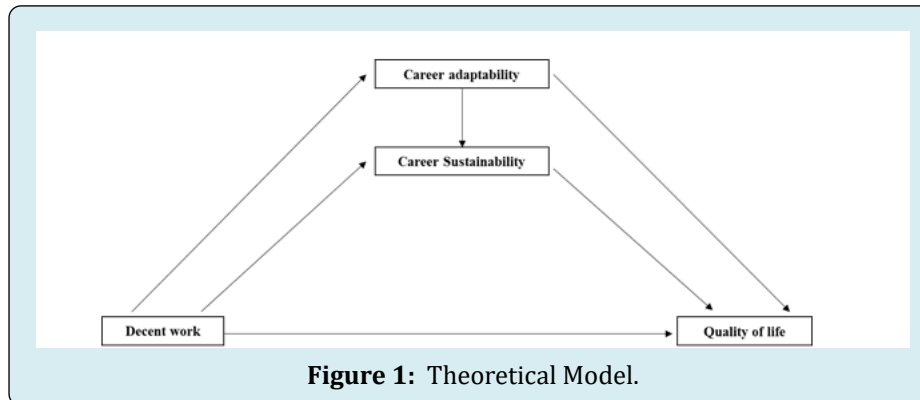
adaptability and career sustainability. The model (Figure 1) assumes that decent work increases career adaptability, which in turn leads to greater career sustainability, ultimately resulting in an improvement in quality of life. Our research hypotheses were formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Decent work has a direct positive impact on an individual's quality of life.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Career adaptability mediates the relationship between decent work and quality of life, such that decent work promotes greater adaptability, leading to better quality of life.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Career sustainability mediates the relationship between decent work and quality of life such that decent work contributes to greater career sustainability, thereby promoting a better quality of life.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Career adaptability and career sustainability act as serial mediators and jointly influence the relationship between decent work and quality of life. Specifically, decent work improves career adaptability, which in turn improves career sustainability and leads to a higher quality of life.



Materials and Methods

Participants

The study included 218 participants aged between 19 and 71 years ($M = 44.47$, $SD = 11.27$). The participants held various positions in the tourism industry, including sales manager, hotel manager, receptionist, reservation manager and travel agency employee. All participants were employed in Portugal's tourism industry in 2023.

Measures

Four measures were used to assess the constructs studied: Decent work: the Decent Work Scale [22] was used, which was adapted for Portugal by Ferreira, et al. [23]. This scale assesses five dimensions of decent work: workplace safety, healthcare, adequate compensation, free time and rest, and organizational values that correspond to family and social values.

Career adaptability: we adopted the Portuguese version of the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale by Savickas and Porfeli [24], which was adapted by Duarte, et al. [25]. This scale assesses four dimensions: concern, curiosity, control, and confidence.

Career sustainability: the Career Sustainability Scale [26] was used. This scale assesses four dimensions: flexible, renewable, integrative, and resourceful.

Quality of life: The WHOQOL-BREF instrument [27] was used, which consists of four domains: physical health, mental health, social relationships and environmental health.

Procedures

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of Universidade Europeia. Participants were asked to give their consent to participate in the online survey, which included an electronic consent form outlining the aims of the study. The form emphasized the importance of their participation, assured confidentiality, and informed them of their right to voluntarily participate in or withdraw from the study at any time.

PROCESS model 6, a macro developed by Andrew F. Hayes [28], was used for data analysis. Model 6 of PROCESS is a serial mediation model that can be used to examine how an independent variable influences a dependent variable through two sequential mediators.

Results

The results indicate a positive and statistically significant relationship between decent work and quality of life, which supports hypothesis H1 (see Table 1 – Model 1). Approximately 26.5% of the variability in quality of life can be explained by decent work ($R^2 = 0.265$). In addition, the analysis revealed a moderately strong relationship between

the two variables ($\beta = 0.515$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the observed relationship is highly significant.

In relation to hypothesis H2, the analysis (see Table 1 – Model 2) shows that decent work significantly affects career adaptability ($B = 0.406$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that better working conditions improve career adaptability. This adaptability in turn has a positive effect on quality of life ($B = 0.482$, $p < 0.001$), which indicates that greater career

adaptability contributes to a better quality of life.

Similarly, for hypothesis H3, decent work was found to have a significant effect on career sustainability ($B = 0.588$, $p < 0.001$) and career sustainability was found to have a positive effect on quality of life ($B = 0.515$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that higher career sustainability is associated with better quality of life (see Table 1 – Model 3).

Hypothesis	Model	Variable	R	R-square	Adjusted R-square	B	Beta	t	Sig.
H1	Model 1: Direct Effect								
	Decent Work → Quality of Life	Decent Work	0.515	0.265	0.262	0.492	0.515	9.028	<0.001
	Model 2: Mediation Effect								
H2	Decent Work → Career Adaptability	Decent Work	0.406	0.163	0.161	0.406	0.406	6.67	<0.001
	Career Adaptability → Quality of Life	Career Adaptability	0.482	0.233	0.229	0.482	0.482	8.22	<0.001
H3	Decent Work → Career Sustainability	Decent Work	0.588	0.346	0.343	0.588	0.054	10.931	<0.001
	Career Sustainability → Quality of Life	Career Sustainability	0.515	0.266	0.263	0.515	0.515	9.124	<0.001
	Serial Mediation								
H4	Decent Work → Career Adaptability → Career Sustainability → Quality of Life	Decent Work (with mediation)	0.528	0.279	0.275	0.493	0.495	8.743	<0.001
	Career Adaptability → Career Sustainability	Career Adaptability	0.471	0.222	0.219	0.471	0.471	7.855	<0.001
	Career Sustainability → Quality of Life	Career Sustainability	0.523	0.274	0.27	0.523	0.523	9.312	<0.001

Table 1: Regression Analysis.

For hypothesis H4, the serial mediation analysis (see Table 1 – Serial mediation) shows that decent work significantly influences career adaptability ($B = 0.406$, $p < 0.001$), which in turn promotes career sustainability ($B = 0.471$, $p < 0.001$). Career sustainability, in turn, has a significantly positive effect on quality of life ($B = 0.523$, $p < 0.001$). When career adaptability and career sustainability are included as serial mediators, the direct effect of decent work on quality of life is reduced ($B = 0.493$, $p < 0.001$), which underlines the crucial role of these serial mediators. The overall effect of decent work on quality of life is thus mediated by the sequence: decent work → career adaptability → career sustainability → quality of life. These results confirm that career adaptability and career sustainability act as serial mediators and influence the relationship between decent work and quality of life.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that decent work has a significant positive impact on quality of life (H1), which is consistent with recent findings in the literature. Studies show that better working conditions, including job security and fair treatment, are strongly associated with individual well-being, suggesting that a healthy work environment is crucial for job satisfaction and quality of life (e.g., [8,15,29,30]). For example, recent research by Junker, et al. [29] emphasizes the importance of job resources and a supportive work climate in enhancing employee well-being and life satisfaction. Similarly, studies (e.g., [8, 15,30]) have shown that a positive work environment contributes significantly to employees' overall quality of life and mental health, supporting the idea

that decent work is an essential component of well-being.

Confirmation of H2 suggests that career adaptability acts as a mediator in the relationship between decent work and quality of life. The data show that decent work promotes greater career adaptability, which in turn leads to higher quality of life.

These findings are consistent with career adaptability theory, which emphasizes the importance of the ability to adapt to changes in the work environment for individual success and well-being [31]. The literature supports this view and suggests that career adaptability is crucial for coping with challenges and changes in the labor market and thus contributes to overall well-being [32].

Confirmation of hypothesis 3 (H3) also shows that career sustainability mediates the relationship between decent work and quality of life. Decent work is associated with greater career sustainability, which in turn improves quality of life. This finding supports the notion that career sustainability, which encompasses the ability to maintain long-term employment and balance work and personal demands, is a critical determinant of well-being [33-34]. Previous studies have shown that career sustainability is closely related to work-life balance, which has a positive impact on quality of life [35].

Finally, the confirmation of hypothesis 4 (H4) shows that career adaptability and career sustainability act as serial mediators in the relationship between decent work and quality of life. The overall effect of decent work on quality of life is mediated by the sequence: decent work → career adaptability → career sustainability → quality of life. This result suggests that career adaptability and career sustainability are interlinked components of a complex mediation process. Decent work increases adaptability, which in turn improves career sustainability and leads to a better quality of life.

Implications

The results support the integration of theories of career adaptability and career sustainability when analyzing the impact of working conditions on quality of life. The serial mediation model presented offers a more comprehensive and dynamic understanding of the interactions between these variables and provides a detailed view of the mediation processes involved.

These results make an important contribution to the existing literature by demonstrating that serial mediation can provide a more comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms through which decent work affects quality

of life. The identification of career adaptability and career sustainability as serial mediators highlights the complexity and interconnectedness of these factors in the context of the relationship between working conditions and well-being.

Furthermore, the practical implications of these findings suggest that policies promoting fair and safe working conditions can have a significant impact not only on career adaptability and career sustainability, but also on workers' quality of life. Investing in programs that promote career adaptability and sustainability can therefore be an effective strategy to improve workers' quality of life and promote a work environment that supports both career development and personal well-being.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations must be acknowledged in this study, including the sample size and the specific context of the research, which focused exclusively on workers in the tourism sector in Portugal. This narrow scope limits the generalizability of the results to other sectors and cultures.

Future research should address these limitations by examining additional mediating variables, such as work engagement and job satisfaction. Research shows that employees who feel valued in a decent work environment tend to show higher levels of engagement, which can contribute to a higher quality of life [29-30]. Fair and safe working conditions have also been shown to increase job satisfaction and have a positive impact on overall wellbeing [16].

Furthermore, it is important to investigate these relationships in different cultural contexts and industries beyond tourism. Conducting longitudinal studies could further confirm the causal relationships identified in this study. Increasing the sample size and including more heterogeneous populations would improve the external validity of the results. A more comprehensive examination of mediators could provide a more holistic understanding of the mechanisms linking decent work to quality of life**. Longitudinal studies would also facilitate the demonstration of causal pathways and allow the observation of changes over time, providing deeper insights into the dynamic relationships between variables.

Conclusion

This study shows that decent work has a significant and positive impact on quality of life and is mediated by factors such as career adaptability and career sustainability, which play a crucial role in the relationship between working conditions and individual well-being. Serial mediation

analysis has led to a deeper understanding of these mechanisms and has shown that decent work can only lead to a substantial improvement in quality of life if individuals develop adaptive skills and promote a sustainable career. Therefore, the improvement of these skills should be promoted at both individual and organizational levels.

This understanding can serve as a basis for public policies-such as workforce development programs, decent work regulations and career guidance and support services-as well as corporate practices, including organizational training and development, promotion of sustainable careers and work-life balance initiatives, to improve quality of life by promoting decent working conditions. It also underlines the importance of flexible and sustainable career strategies in an ever-changing labor market.

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