

FOSTERING RETENTION AMONG PROJECT MANAGERS THROUGH CAREER SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

In the face of rapid technological advancements and market changes, project management is crucial for driving innovation and organizational adaptability. This is essential for maintaining a competitive edge and meeting evolving customer needs. Project management significantly contributes to the economy by facilitating large-scale infrastructure projects, technological innovations, and business expansions. These projects create jobs, stimulate economic growth, and improve societal well-being.

Projects are no longer just temporary organizational endeavors; they represent a fundamental way of organizing human activities, a phenomenon often referred to as the "projectification" of society. This underscores the increasing prevalence and significance of projects in our daily lives, shaping our actions, conversations, and identities. The Project Management Institute predicts that by 2027, employers will need nearly 88 million individuals in project management-oriented roles, highlighting the substantial job creation potential.

Despite project managers critical role to organizational success, project management as a career path is still undervalued. A lack of opportunities for continuous development and career progression limits project managers career sustainability and leads to high turnover rates. A significant factor contributing to high turnover is that many project managers are often outsourced, limiting their opportunities for continuous development and career progression, which reduces career sustainability. Recently, it has been proposed that career sustainability theory may be an appropriate framework to study project managers' careers and address turnover in project management. Nonetheless, there is a significant lack of empirical research focused on project managers' career sustainability.

Previous research highlights that many organizations do not have dedicated career pathways or support structures for project managers, such as a supportive organizational culture, mentorship programs, training and development opportunities, and effective feedback and performance management systems. This lack can lead to career stagnation and dissatisfaction. Low career satisfaction not only hampers individual career growth but also increases the intention to leave the organization, negatively impacting organizational performance. Conversely, research indicates that employees who perceive their careers as sustainable report higher levels of career satisfaction.

Project managers face unique challenges, such as high job demands and stress, which significantly impact their overall well-being. The demanding nature of the job often leads to poor well-being, which in turn contributes to turnover. There is a pressing need for research that further explores these challenges to develop strategies that may enhance

project managers' well-being. Sustainable careers, characterized by continuous learning, adaptability, and work-life balance, contribute significantly to employees' overall well-being.

This paper explores how career sustainability affects career outcomes such as career satisfaction, well-being, and two types of turnover intention: from the organization and from the career of project management itself. By examining the combined effects of career sustainability on career satisfaction, well-being, and turnover intention among project managers, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on career development and sustainability within the field of project management, providing actionable insights for organizations, policymakers, and practitioners.

Using a convenience sample of 224 project managers, we test a conceptual model with partial least squares (PLS). Findings indicate that two dimensions of career sustainability - resourcefulness and renewability - positively impact project managers career satisfaction, while reducing turnover intention. Resourcefulness also has a positive impact in project managers well-being.

This study significantly advances career sustainability theory by introducing resourcefulness as a critical dimension, thus extending theoretical frameworks in several key ways. Resourcefulness, being the newest and least explored dimension, is pivotal for understanding crucial outcomes such as career satisfaction, well-being, and turnover intentions. By examining the interplay between the dimensions of career sustainability and various career outcomes within the context of project management, this research offers a nuanced understanding of how these dimensions impact organizational outcomes, thereby extending existing theories of career development.

The study demonstrates that when employees perceive their careers as resourceful and renewable, they experience higher levels of career satisfaction and psychological well-being. This reinforces previous findings linking career sustainability to enhanced job satisfaction and mental health. The positive relationship between resourcefulness and career satisfaction, well-being, and retention underscores the importance of effectively utilizing networks, time, and financial resources to navigate career challenges and opportunities successfully. Similarly, the relationship between renewability and career satisfaction highlights the role of adaptability and continuous learning in fostering long-term career fulfillment. Continuous professional development is thus identified as a key factor in career sustainability, contributing significantly to the framework.

Additionally, by uncovering the role of resourcefulness in project management—efficiently leveraging resources to address challenges in dynamic and temporary project environments—and the role of renewability in continuous skill enhancement to manage projects effectively, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how individuals navigate their careers within project-based settings. This highlights the career sustainability dimensions that enable project managers to handle project demands more effectively.

The study presents and validates a comprehensive model elucidating how career sustainability influences both career and organizational turnover. By identifying resourcefulness and renewability as crucial dimensions, it offers a nuanced understanding of how sustainable career practices can mitigate turnover rates. This model extends the theoretical framework by linking these dimensions to career outcomes such as satisfaction, well-being, and turnover intentions. Resourcefulness emerges as a critical competency, enabling effective utilization of career opportunities, while renewability emphasizes ongoing learning and adaptation, reflecting the dynamic nature of career sustainability.

The practical implications are manifold, offering actionable recommendations for organizations, policymakers, and practitioners in project management. Organizations can design more effective talent management strategies by prioritizing the cultivation of resourcefulness and renewability among project managers, creating supportive environments that foster career satisfaction, retention, and well-being. Practitioners can enhance their career prospects by developing resourcefulness skills and embracing continuous learning, ensuring they remain resilient and adaptable to evolving role demands. Integrating these insights can contribute to a more sustainable and resilient project management workforce.

Keywords

Project managers, career sustainability, well-being, turnover intentions, career satisfaction.