

# Radboud University



Master thesis Strategic Human Resources Leadership

## The impact of COVID-19 on the perceived sustainability of one's career: a qualitative study

Name: Mathijs Beuting  
Student number: 4429974  
Email: [mathijsbeuting@student.ru.nl](mailto:mathijsbeuting@student.ru.nl)  
Supervisor: K. Pak  
Second reader: L. Dorenbosch  
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Mathijs Beuting, Masterstudent Strategic Human Resources Leadership  
Radboud University, Nijmegen

### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – COVID-19 has big implications on the lives and careers of people. It targets the health, happiness, and productivity that people perceive inside their careers. These indicators characterize a sustainable career, which might result in individuals taken career actions taken to safeguard these characteristics. This study contributes to the relatively new research field by examining the impact of COVID-19 on the characteristics of a sustainable careers and specific the taken career decisions regarding these changes.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Twelve semi-structured interviews were held with employees in heavily impacted industries by COVID-19 and analyzed using a template analysis.

**Findings** – The results showed that COVID-19 is primarily regarded as a temporary and uncontrollable career shock, with mainly an uncertain character. All characteristics of a sustainable career were negatively targeted when respondents were confronted with COVID-19. Some respondents took career-altering decisions, by changing careers, but most respondents adhered to their current career by adapting to their new working situation or by seeking temporary employment. The financial situation of respondents also played an important role in this decision-making.

**Research limitations/implications** – A limitation of this research is that COVID-19 was an ongoing crisis when the interviews were conducted, which means that not the entire crisis and its long-term career decisions could be taken into consideration. Also, because of the small research sample, the results cannot be generalized.

**Practical implications** - This study provides HR professionals with enablers to counteract the consequences of confrontation with a career shock, such as social support and transparent communication.

**Key words** COVID-19, Career Shocks, Sustainable careers & Career decision making

**Paper Type** Master Thesis

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***Eve (31): Flight Attendant***

*Eve has been working as a flight attendant at an airline working since the start of her career. She always dreamt of travelling, experiencing new cultures, and meeting new people. This job was made for her, she felt really happy and was highly productive. But then COVID-19 hit and the airline she had worked for her whole life could not fly anymore. The board decided that they had to restructure their organisation to survive due to revenue losses. Almost all flight attendants were fired and Eve was unemployed for the first time in her life. What was she going to do, how could she earn a living? These questions kept her up at night and gave her a lot of stress. She decided that something had to change. She started thinking about her job as a flight attendant and if she even wanted to continue working in this career. Her engagement towards her job was already starting to decrease, due to the fact that she was away a lot and had to leave her husband and two kids almost every week for several days. With her productivity also now at an all-time low because of her unemployment, she began thinking of exploring new career opportunities. She began searching for a new start and discovered a vacancy at a nearby hospital asking for caterers. She liked serving people and helping them, just as she did in her previous job. She applied and got invited to a job interview. The interview went perfectly and the hospital assured her that she could work for them. When leaving the job interview she felt relieved. A new door had opened, a new time has come!*

***Tim (43): Restaurant owner***

*Tim, a restaurant owner, has been self-employed for over ten years now. He first worked at an office, but really missed the interaction with people and the freedom of being self-employed. He started a restaurant in the city centre of his city and it took off. He could hire some young employees to help him out and the revenue was rising every year. He was very busy, but happy at the same time and felt that he had made it. But then COVID hit and the government prohibited him from opening his restaurant. At first, Tim thought this was over soon, but it turned out differently. When days became weeks and weeks became months other bar and restaurant owners in his neighbourhood began to evaluate if they could survive, but Tim didn't. To stay mentally sane and productive he started to redecorate the interior of his restaurant and paint the outside. He did not make any money, but he saved money for urgencies like this and with the help of government funding he easily got by. He made the best of the situation and knew that he was still very committed to staying self-employed and didn't want to go back to working in the office. He loved his job and COVID-19 just reassured that for him!*

## Introduction

COVID-19 has a big impact on the lives and careers of many people as illustrated by the cases of Eve and Tim above. People are experiencing a loss of income, job security, productivity, and increased emotional impact and general anxiety (Akkermans, Richardson, & Kraimer, 2020). These huge, unplanned events, like COVID-19, that have a big impact on the lives and careers of people are called career shocks (Akkermans, Seibert, & Mol, 2018). A career shock is a disruptive and extraordinary event caused by external factors outside someone's locus of control. When confronted with these shocks a thought process concerning one's career can be triggered (de Vos, van der Heijden, & Akkermans, 2020). Another representation of a big universal career shock has been seen in the economic crisis of 2012, which also was a career shock that significantly impacted many people's lives and eventually led to some people actively changing their career (Akkermans, Seibert, & Mol, 2018). These changes in the careers of employees do not necessarily lead to negative outcomes (e.g. becoming unemployed) but can also, over a longer period of time, result in positively perceived career experiences, outcomes, and opportunities (Seibert, Kraimer, Holtom & Pierotti, 2013). All in all, this suggests that the career shock COVID-19 can force people to evaluate the sustainability of their career and which could possibly lead to the experience of negative and/or positive consequences.

The sustainability of a career is characterized by health, happiness, and productivity at work (de Vos, van der Heijden, & Akkermans, 2020). COVID-19 targets these three indicators directly or by its implications on society. The *health* of employees is physically targeted by the virus (Guan et al., 2020) even after recovery (Carfi, Bernabei & Landi, 2020), but it is also targeted mentally because social life is restricted and uncertainty prevails (Banerjee, 2020; Brooks et al., 2020). Next to this, people also experience a loss of purpose, a distorted work-life balance, and greater loneliness which negatively affect the *happiness* of employees (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Lastly, reports show that some employees also experience lowered *productivity* (Bouwens, Zoomer, Hooftman, & Hengel, 2020). With COVID-19 targeting all or some indicators of someone's sustainable career a thought process regarding the sustainability of one's career during these times might be initiated (de Vos, van der Heijden & Akkermans, 2020). To get a better grip on how this works in practice we can look at the cases of Eve and Tim, who are both experiencing COVID-19 first hand. We see that Eve is confronted with lowered happiness and productivity inside her job and therefore starts looking for a new career that is more sustainable. On the other hand, Tim does not

perceive any loss of productivity or happiness, which did not lead to him taking any career decisions. It even reassured him that this is what he loves to do. These examples show that the same career shock can lead to different perceptions of changes in the characteristics of a sustainable career. In this thought process regarding their career, people might be reassured that their career fits them, but others might start to reassess their career if it still fits them as a person. Having such a strong person-career fit is an important precedent of perceiving their career as a sustainable one (de Vos, van der Heijden, & Akkermans, 2020).

COVID-19 is a new career shock that influenced a lot of careers simultaneously and is still impacting careers to date. Hite and McDonald (2020) therefore state that a lot is unsure about how careers and industries will be affected after COVID-19. To date, the concept of career shocks is relatively new and therefore knowledge on this topic is limited (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017). Akkermans, Richardson, and Kraimer (2020) state that the career shock experienced by COVID-19 can for some lead to new opportunities for changing work arrangements, career development, and skill upgrades, but that this differentiates from person to person. We know that career shocks have a significant impact on the careers of people, but do not know whether or not COVID-19 is experienced as a career shock in regard to the sustainability of their career (de Vos et al., 2020). Just as the concept of career shock, the newness also applies to the concept of sustainable careers. We do know that a thought process could be initiated by career shocks (de Vos et al., 2020), such as COVID-19, but little is known about what specific decisions people take regarding their careers when confronted with this kind of shock. This thesis tries to generate more knowledge on these concepts and career decisions and therefore fill the gap that exists around sustainable careers and career shocks. COVID-19 brings the ideal situation in which participants can be interviewed close after the occurrence which reduces the recollection bias (Pak, Kooij, De Lange, Meyers, & van Veldhoven, 2020). In summary, the knowledge about the concept of career shocks and its impact on the sustainability of one's career is still limited. Therefore, interviews need to be conducted with people experiencing the career shock COVID-19 in their work environment due to the impact it has on their industry. The industries that are heavily impacted by COVID-19 are restaurants, hotels, retail stores, airlines, and amusement/recreation industries (Berube & Bateman, 2020). To fill the gap and examine the perceptions and actions taken regarding the sustainability of their careers when confronted with a career shock interviews with these employees are conducted.

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to examine the possible change in the perception of the characteristics of having a (sustainable) career and it being subject to the career shock

COVID-19. This will be done by answering the following research question: *What career decisions do (heavily) impacted employees take to safeguard the health, happiness, and productivity of their career during the COVID-19 crisis?*

Qualitative research will be conducted to answer the research question. By answering this question this thesis tries to contribute to science by examining the effects of a specific career shock on the perception of a sustainable career characterized by health, happiness, and productivity. This research area is relatively new and therefore knowledge around this topic is limited (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017). This thesis tries to fill this gap within the existing literature by examining the impact of a specific career shock on the sustainability of one's career and what decisions people make regarding their career. To achieve this interviews will be held with people that work in heavily impacted industries by the COVID-19 crisis such as restaurants, hotels, airlines and, amusement/entertainment industries (Berube & Bateman, 2020). COVID-19 can be perceived as unexpected and uncontrollable by many employees from different industries, but especially for these groups of workers it possibly was a more disruptive and extraordinary event inside their work environment. This specifically characterises COVID-19 as a career shock for this group of workers more so than other groups (Akkermans, Seibert, & Mol, 2018).

This research contributes to practice in several ways. At first, it gives HR professionals insight into the decision-making processes of employees regarding their careers when their being confronted with a career shock. It shows how different employees deal with a career shock and what actions they take regarding the sustainability of their careers. HR professionals inside organisations can then develop practices that can help employees manage the shock and set guidelines to build more sustainable career cultures (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017; Hite & McDonald, 2020). Secondly, it shows how people deal with the confrontation of a career shock and whether or not this leads to them taking career decisions, which can help other people being confronted with career shocks to take certain actions or not.

## Theoretical Framework

### Sustainable careers

In this study, the central concept is the sustainability of one's career. Van der Heijden and de Vos (2015) first conceptualized the concept of sustainable careers as: "*sequences of career experiences reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, thereby crossing several social spaces, characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual*" (p.7). Later, de Vos, van der Heijden, and Akkermans (2020) further characterized the sustainability of an individual's career by three indicators: health, happiness, and productivity. The *health* characteristic, entailing both the physical- and mental health of an individual, directly refers to a dynamic fit between the mental- and physical capabilities of an individual and the career. In this research, *health* is conceptualized as well-being, which represents someone's general health but also their mental, psychological and emotional aspects. People's well-being is affected by their work setting, but also by their personality traits (De Simone, 2014). The second characteristic, *happiness*, refers to the subjective elements of feeling successful or satisfied with your career (de Vos et al., 2020). According to Fisher (2010), *happiness* at work can be defined as work engagement. Engaged employees experience high energy levels and are enthusiastic about their job (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). The last characteristic, *productivity*, is described as the strong performance in someone's current profession as well as high employability or career potential. In this study, productivity is therefore expressed by the performance of an individual. Job performance is the expected value to an organization of what someone does for and can bring to an organization over time (Motowidlo & Kell, 2012). When the performance of someone is not at the level that they or the organization expects from them, both could perceive this as not being productive. The three characteristics are equally important and when violated interfere with the sustainability of one's career (de Vos et al., 2020).

If we relate the above to Eve and Tim we can see that in the case of Eve it is clear she experienced a loss of productivity and possibly also happiness due to the fact she could not work anymore. These changes in her career could possibly lead to her perceiving her career as unsustainable (de Vos et al., 2020). She wants to perceive her career as sustainable, but this is not the case because of a lack of productivity and happiness. She tries to achieve this by searching for a new job.

An important theory that needs to be taken into consideration when assessing the three characteristics of sustainable careers is the person-career fit theory. The person-career fit theory is the origin and cornerstone of many career-decision theories (Parasuraman, Greenhaus, & Linnehan, 2000). The person-career fit is defined as the extent to which an individual's career experiences are compatible with his or her needs, values, interests, and talents (Parasuraman, Greenhaus, & Linnehan, 2000, p.11). A stronger perception of a person-career fit leads to an individual assessing their career as more sustainable (Cha, Kim, & Kim, 2009). This is because they experience higher satisfaction towards their job and higher commitment to their organisations (Cha, Kim, & Kim, 2009). Thus, the person-career fit is an important indicator for whether or not someone perceives their career as sustainable. When the person-career fit is strong the health, happiness, and productivity inside a career might be perceived as indicating a sustainable career. On the contrary, when you do not feel your career fitting this might negatively impact the health, happiness, and productivity of someone leading to career decisions being made.

Relating this, for example, to the case of Tim we can see that he experiences a high level of fit towards his career explained by his dedication to his restaurant. He still feels that this is what he wants to do and that he does not want to go back to work inside an office. The commitment to make his restaurant a success and the satisfaction he gets from doing what he loves to do might be explained by the person-career fit he still perceives.

### **Career shocks**

The sustainability of one's career can be impacted by a career shock. A career shock was first mentioned by Seibert, Kraimer, Holtom, and Pierotti (2013). In their study, they defined a career shock as 'any event triggering deliberation involving the prospect of a change' (p. 172). A few years later Akkermans, Seibert and, Mol (2018) further defined a career shock as follow:

*... a disruptive and extraordinary event that is, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside the focal individual's control and that triggers a deliberate thought process concerning one's career. The occurrence of a career shock can vary in terms of predictability and can be either positively or negatively valenced. (p.4)*

This definition elaborates further on the definition by Seibert et al. (2013), but includes some crucial elements. The key elements of what defines a career shock are further clarified by linking it to COVID-19. The first characteristic is that a career shock is a disruptive and

extraordinary event. COVID-19 at the beginning of 2020 changed a lot of lives and had disruptive and extraordinary implications on our lives that no one ever experienced before, such as lockdowns and social distancing (Zhang, Jiang, Yuan & Tao, 2020). Secondly, the implications that COVID-19 brings originate outside of everyone's control. The consequences of the spread of the virus were unpredicted and led to people and organisations taking decisions they normally would not need to take. For example, restructuring and firing employees, like Eve, can be experienced as a career shock by the employee because it is out of their locus of control. On the other hand, willingly resigning from a job would not be perceived as a shock due to the predictability unless it has unexpected consequences, such as not being able to find a new job as fast as expected. Career shocks can, based on their valence, be divided into a group of positive- and negative shocks. A positive shock is for example a promotion or receiving an award and an example of a negative shock is a sudden injury or layoff (Akkermans, Seibert, & Mol, 2018). COVID-19 could for one be perceived as a negative career shock, but for others as a positive one. For some, it might lead to them being forced out of their job because of financial setbacks resulting in negative consequences for their personal- and working lives, whereas for others it might lead to discovering new career opportunities, like becoming self-employed, now they are forced to be at home longer and sometimes have more free time on their hands.

Career shocks play a big role in the career decision-making of people. They can trigger a deliberate thought process concerning one's career (Akkermans, Seibert, & Mol, 2018) and also can lead to epiphanies causing people to re-evaluate their career trajectories or broader life aspirations (Akkermans, Richardson, & Kramer, 2020). Studies by Vough, Bataille, Noh, and Lee (2015) and Richardson and McKenna (2020) support this standpoint. They both showed that negative life events (e.g. family loss, unemployment) can stimulate a re-evaluation of career aspirations. Research looking at positive career shocks, such as an unexpected raise or promotion, found that these events strengthen employability (Blokker, Akkermans, Tims, Jansen, & Khapova, 2019) build employee's confidence, and makes them pursue challenging career opportunities (Seibert, Kraimer, Holtom, and Pierotti, 2013). Thus, the experience of a career shock, both negative or positive, could possibly lead to new insights or opportunities regarding the sustainability of one's career.

It is possible that this thought process considering the sustainability or unsustainability of their careers can lead to them taking career decisions. This can be due to the fact that they perceive, changes in their indicators of a sustainable career, a loss of resources in their current profession, or a weakened person-career fit. It is discovered that

changes in the employee's work environment and/or personal lives, possibly related to their health, happiness or productivity, leads to them making career decisions (Bright, Pryor & Harpham, 2005; Amundson, Borgen, Iaquinta, Butterfield & Koert, 2010). They found that examples of the career decisions are relocating to seek employment, leaving employment after a demotion or job dissatisfaction, pursuing post-secondary studies to retrain for new employment, working day jobs to support their life, and continuing to work as a temporary employee when full-time positions are eliminated (Amundson, Borgen, Iaquinta, Butterfield & Koert, 2010).

These career decisions can be an outcome of the thought process triggered by a career shock. How this decision-making is triggered can be explained by the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobföll, 1989). In his theory he states that people are motivated to protect their current resources and want to acquire new resources (Hobföll, 1989; Hobföll, 2001). A career shock, like COVID-19, could target these resources and motivate people to protect their current or acquire new resources. This could not only lead to a resource loss, but also result in resource gain (Akkermans et al., 2018). These resources play an important role when it comes to defining the sustainability of one's career (De Lange, Kooij, and Van der Heijden, 2015). De Vos et al. (2020) argue that careers wherein individuals perceive higher levels of resources are regarded as more sustainable, because the health, happiness, and productivity is then safeguarded. When internal- and external forces target these resources individuals proactively react to prevent resource loss or start to acquire new resources, due to the fact that they want to pursue careers that entail higher levels of health, happiness, and productivity resources. A profession wherein they cannot safeguard this and wherein they only perceive resource losses is likely to be perceived as unsustainable and vice versa (De Vos et al., 2020). The cases of Eve and Tim also explain this further. Eve perceives a loss of the resource job security, because she is fired, and she is motivated to protect these resources by searching for a new employment as a caterer inside a hospital. The loss of resources has led to her taking career decisions to protect these resources.

These decisions that people like Eve and Tim do or do not make could be related to either the COR-theory (Hobföll, 1989; Hobföll, 2001) and/or the person-career fit theory (Parasuraman, Greenhaus & Linnehan, 2000). First, people could be motivated to protect the resources that they possibly lost, which could lead to them making career decisions. Examples of career decisions are retraining for new employment, going from full-time to part-time employment, or even completely changing their profession (Amundson, Borgen, Iaquinta, Butterfield & Koert, 2010). These decisions are all based on the motivation to

protect their current resources or to acquire new resources. On the other hand, they could also perceive a career as not fitting them as a person anymore and they can participate in a postsecondary study to retrain for a profession and career that they feel a strong fit towards. All in all, it is possible that the career shock COVID-19 can impact the characteristics of a sustainable career which leads to people evaluating their career resources and career fit and thus making career decisions such as the examples set above.

## **Conclusion**

Concluding the theoretical framework, three indicators that characterize a sustainable career were discovered and characteristics of COVID-19 as a career shock were defined. Assumed is that the gain or loss of resources due to the COVID-19 crisis initiates a thought process inside employees affected by it, which leads to them taking decisions regarding their career. The change in the indicators that characterize the perception of a sustainability of one's career might also lead to career decisions that safeguard these indicators. However, the studies described above are almost all theoretical based and do not elaborate on the specific process people go through and how this leads to particular career decisions. This study tries to dive deeper into this process and examine the perception of the sustainability of one's career when confronted with a career shock. Leading from this, this qualitative thesis aims to answer the following sub-questions:

How is COVID-19 experienced as a career shock?

How do people perceive their health, happiness, and productivity at work when confronted with COVID-19?

What decisions did they make to safeguard the sustainability of their careers?

## Methodology

### Research design

This research has a qualitative design to provide an in-depth understanding of the impact of COVID-19 as a career shock on the perception of sustainability of one's career based on the characteristics of health, happiness and, productivity and the decisions people take regarding their (sustainable) careers. The choice for a qualitative approach in the form of interviews over a quantitative approach was based upon the reason that these are more suitable to unravel people's underlying experiences, emotions, and beliefs (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013). Furthermore, a more in-depth understanding can help HR professionals inside organisations to gain insights into how people cope with career shocks. Because of the relatively new concept and therefore limited knowledge surrounding the topic of career shocks and the recent theory about sustainable careers, this study has an exploratory nature (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013). An exploratory nature better helps fill the existing knowledge gap surrounding the relatively new concepts of sustainable careers and career shocks. Data collection has been done by conducting 12 interviews with people that work in industries (heavily) impacted by the crisis (e.g. entertainment or airline industry). This, in combination with a thick description of the interviewees, will increase the transferability (Symon & Cassell, 2012). These interviews were held from the start of March 2020 till March 2021.

### Sample

For this research twelve participants were interviewed. Participants were selected based on the impact that the COVID-19 crisis had on their industry to increase the odds that a thought process was initiated that could be examined. The used industries are the hotel, restaurant, entertainment, airline, and travel industry. The interview questions were specifically focused on the COVID-19 crisis and how it changed the health, happiness and, productivity at work of people. The sampling technique that was used to collect the participants in this study is purposive sampling, because the representativeness of the respondents was defined before interviewing (Symon & Cassel, 2012). By using purposive sampling a sub-group could be created from which suitable participants from the researcher's network were asked if they would like to participate. Next to this, respondents were found online by making use of LinkedIn. Purposive sampling was chosen, because this allows the researcher to judge upon the usefulness of the participant, and therefore the participant that adds the most value can be

chosen. Table 1 will give a brief description per participant, which also increases confirmability (Symon & Cassel, 2012). In total 6 males and 6 females were interviewed, ranging from an age of 22 to 55 and a tenure from 1 to 30 years. The level of education varied between vocational and higher education, with more respondents having a higher education.

<b>Participant number</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Function title</b>	<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Education level</b>
1	Male	46	Leisure	Hotel manager	28	WO
2	Male	41	Entertainment	DJ/Event organiser	20	HBO
3	Female	43	Leisure	Hotel manager	21	HBO
4	Female	25	Food & Drinks	Waitress	10	HBO
5	Male	40	Airline	Pilot	9	HBO
6	Female	55	Travel	Travel organiser	30	MBO
7	Male	29	Airline	Steward	8	HBO
8	Female	24	Entertainment	Dancer/Actress	4	MBO
9	Male	26	Food & Drinks	Account manager Brewery	2	WO
10	Female	22	Former Food & Drinks	Legal worker	1	WO
11	Female	51	Food & Drinks	Restaurant owner	20	MBO
12	Male	32	Entertainment	Event organiser	8	WO

*Table 1.* Overview of participants

In the end it was tried to equally divide the interviewees based on gender, age, industry or job to achieve a representative sample.

### **Instruments**

The instruments used in this research are drawings supported by semi-structured interviews. First, participants were asked some general questions about their selves and their careers. Secondly, retrospective drawings were used to derive the impact of the shock on people's lives and characteristics (Adriansen, 2012). These drawings show how the characteristics have changed throughout COVID-19. The participants were asked to draw a line from the beginning of 2020 until the date of the interview, because this takes them through the period

before COVID-19 and with COVID-19 in which they can express the most impactful situations. The lines were drawn based upon health, conceptualized by well-being, happiness, conceptualized by work engagement, and lastly productivity which was conceptualized by performance. The participants were given some time to draw the line. Next, semi-structured interviews were used to dive deeper into the specific lines that were drawn. Semi-structured interviews are interviews that are to some extent free to vary and are likely to change substantially between participants, because it is based upon a topic list (Fylan, 2005). A topic list gives the researcher and interviewee a general idea of what topics need to be covered, but also gives them freedom to stray away (Fylan, 2005). The topic list is built upon what has been found in the literature review, which is the theory of sustainable careers and career shocks. In this research semi-structured interviews work best, because the line that is drawn differs per participant, because everyone experiences COVID-19 differently, and questions need to be adjusted according to this. Therefore, participants were all asked to define changes in their characteristics and whether or not they took (career) decisions regarding these changes. They were asked how they kept their careers sustainable and what career-altering or adhering decisions they might have made. The overall interview guide is added in Appendix 1.

After the interview, the respondents were asked if they would want a summary of the most important findings to be sent to them for approval to increase credibility (Symon & Cassel, 2012). No significant changes were made upon these checks.

### **Procedure of data collection**

The procedure of data collection consisted of several steps. At first, a topic guide was built based upon the theoretical framework. Secondly, the participants were searched for online (via LinkedIn or Facebook) or taken from my own network. When someone was willing to participate they were invited to an interview by email. This interview was preferably physical, but sometimes also digital due to the COVID-19 regulations. Next, semi-structured interviews with the participants were conducted. The duration of the interviews differed between 41 and 66 minutes. At the start of the interview, the researcher introduced the concepts of the research, assured anonymity to increase credibility, and decrease socially desired answers from the participants (Symon & Cassel, 2012). Next, each participant was asked if the interview could be recorded. At the end of the interview, the participant was asked if he or she would want to receive the final master thesis and were thanked for their

participation. The interviews were then transcribed and analysed using the ATLAS.Ti program.

### **Data analysis**

All conducted interviews were verbatim transcribed and analysed according to a template analysis. The template analysis starts with an initial coding scheme based on the theoretical framework in which new codes are added based on the findings (King, 2012). An advantage of using a template is that codes do not have a strict hierarchy and the researcher can add codes during the analysis and create more extensive themes (King, 2012). First, an initial coding scheme is built upon the literature review. If during the coding of the transcripts some important quotes could not be linked to the initial coding, the new codes are added in the process.

The analysis of the data consisted of several steps. First, the interviews were coded based on the initial coding scheme. This scheme is added in Appendix 2. Next, possible additional codes were added when quotes did not apply to the initial coding. These were combined within the initial coding scheme, resulting in the final coding scheme, added in Appendix 3. The initial coding scheme consisted of codes for the different characteristics of sustainable careers health (work-ability), happiness (work-engagement) and productivity (performance), the person-career fit, the experienced impact of COVID-19 as a career shock, and the career decisions people made. The newly added codes were related to the financial situation of people, the adaptability to the new and uncertain situation, and the intertwining of characteristics. The quotes from the interviews were linked to a certain code group. These quotes come from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted as a response to the drawings. Lastly, the differences and similarities in the characteristics and the career decisions people made were compared and summarized. These will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

## Results

### COVID-19 as a career shock

First, the characteristics of the career shock COVID-19 were examined. The characteristics of a career shock are that it is (1) a disruptive and extraordinary event, (2) which originates outside someone's locus of control, and (3) initiates a deliberate thought process (Akkermans et al., 2018). When the stories of the respondents entailed all three of these characteristics, COVID-19 was regarded as a career shock.

In the interviews, almost all participants perceived COVID-19 as a disruptive and extraordinary shock to their career and their industry. When asked to rate the impact of COVID-19 on their working(lives) participants rated it from a 6 to 10, with 10 participants giving it a 9 or 10. This shows that they experienced COVID-19 as a big shock. When asked to rate the impact a respondent mentioned: *'A 10! It turned it completely upside down. The route I took last year would have been completely different if COVID-19 was not there'* (Event organiser, male, 32 years). The COVID-19 crisis was moreover mentioned as a negative shock than as a positive shock, because it had multiple negative consequences to the respondent's lives and careers. The negative consequences that were primarily mentioned were the inability to do their normal job and the increased feeling of uncertainty, also because of the lack of perspective given by the government.

Following this, most respondents also described it as a situation that was totally out of their control. This was because they were dependent on the restrictions and actions that were taken by the government. A hotel manager experienced this as follows: *'In the beginning it was really unreal. The city centre of Amsterdam was just dead and dead silent. One week after the first press conference we had to close down 3 or 4 floors. Then you are just walking through an empty and quiet hotel, where normally you have an occupancy of 98%. [...] Then it just stops, [silence], that does something with you emotionally'* (Hotel manager, male, 46 years).

Adding to this, it was remarkable that almost all interviewees multiple times mentioned that they perceived COVID-19 as a shock that had a temporary character. In comparison to being fired, which is a quick but sudden shock, the COVID-19 crisis is by almost everyone seen as a shock that is long but temporary. This is also supported by one respondent when asked about how he experienced COVID-19: *We [as an industry] constantly have that dot on the horizon that it is going to be over soon. We know that when this is over it could, and possibly will, get rapidly all be back to normal* (Pilot, male, 40

years). This respondent also made the comparison of the COVID-19 crisis with the financial crisis of 2008 and concluded that in that crisis he saw industries completely changing their way of working and that this was not happening in this crisis, because of its temporary character.

Next to COVID-19 being seen as a temporary crisis, respondents also moreover mentioned the lack of perspective as an important characteristic of the COVID-19 crisis. The uncertainty of this crisis, which they never experienced before, was something that struck them. A respondent stated: *‘That uncertainty, that was what really struck me and got me frustrated. That we really did not know how long this was going to take, what the impact will be, if there would come subsidies and what we would have to do with the personnel’* (Restaurant owner, female, 51 years). All in all, uncontrollability, temporariness, and uncertainty are the most important characteristics of COVID-19 being perceived as a career shock.

### ***Initiated thought process***

From the theoretical framework it became clear that a career shock can initiate a thought process regarding one’s career (de Vos et al., 2020). This was also the case for every respondent in this research. All respondents mentioned in some form that COVID-19 initiated such a process inside them. However, the thought process changed during the first lockdown, the summer period, and the second lockdown.

During the first lockdown almost every respondent specifically mentioned a thought process being initiated concerning their career. A respondent described this process as: *‘You begin to think what if this does not go well for me and the organisation, what then? What am I going to do then? How do you feel then? Yes, that are difficult issues, so to speak.’* (Travel organiser, female, 55 years). Another respondent mentioned something similar: *‘Of course, it is not a hobby that we are doing. It’s just a business, so it has to make money. And then you start thinking, what if it does stop, what then? I don’t know what I would do next. But I did think about that during that period’* (Hotel manager, male, 46 years). This initiated thought process mainly came from an increased uncertainty of the consequences of the lockdown, therefore also leading to greater job insecurity for many respondents as shown in the quotes above.

During the summer period this thought process faded away, because respondents could return to their normal way of working. One participant explained it as: *‘Then in the*

*summer we opened again and I was actually very happy. I really liked it a lot. After a month, I even changed jobs within the restaurant and that was really fun to'* (Waitress, female, 25 years). More respondents mentioned that the lifting of the restrictions made them feel much better and also sometimes made them believe they had survived the crisis. This indicates that the thought process might be less necessary to be initiated.

This changed when the restrictions and measures taken by the government slowly started to return in the period after the summer. Some respondents again mentioned that the thought process returned. The same waitress that was happy to return to work during the summer period now mentioned: *At one point [during the second lockdown], I also thought of making a career switch. I started thinking about starting a new study in February, because it could take a few more years before we would really get rid of it* (Waitress, female, 25 years). This quote is in line with other respondents who mention that the reintroduced restrictions really made their work less fun to do or even impossible.

Respondents did not only mention that the thought process led to them evaluating their careers, but also that the perception of the vulnerability of their industry, and with that their own vulnerability, was taken into consideration in this process. A respondent described this as: *I think that the vulnerability of our industry now really comes to light during these times. It always has been vulnerable, but the only thing that changed is the pandemic. [..] And with the industries vulnerability also your personal vulnerability comes more to light* (Event organiser, male, 32 years). Participants mentioned that they regarded their industry as more vulnerable than they had ever experienced before. Another respondent mentioned: *'We always took for granted that people would come to dinner and that just changed suddenly. You just don't expect that. We always believed people would come and suddenly it is no longer allowed* (Waitress, female, 25 years). Whereas things were taken for granted before COVID-19, like guests being able to come to dinner or going to a festival or on vacation, this completely turned around after the first and second confrontation with the restrictions. Most respondents mentioned that they believe the restrictions will go away eventually, but the newly experienced vulnerability will stay for a while and possibly influencing their career decisions on a long-term basis.

All in all, the COVID-19 crisis can be seen as a career shock. It is experienced as an extraordinary and disruptive event, uncontrollable for the respondents, and also triggers a deliberate thought process regarding one's career. This thought process also led to some respondents taken career actions, because of a perceived vulnerability in their careers. The

specific career actions in regard to the perceived changes in their health, happiness, and productivity is further elaborated on in the next paragraph.

### **Characteristics of a sustainable career**

Next, the perceived changes in the characteristics of a sustainable career were examined. The perceived fluctuations in the health, happiness, and productivity of respondents are caused by enablers and constraints in their environment. Enablers are actions or situations wherein the characteristic is changing positively and constraints are actions or situations wherein the respondent experiences a negative change. The changes in the characteristics will be discussed by examining the most important periods such as the first lockdown, the summer, and the second lockdown until now. After examining the changes in their health, happiness and productivity the taken, or not taken, career actions during that period will be discussed.

Starting at the beginning of 2020, prior to any confrontation with COVID-19, almost every respondent perceived their careers as healthy, happy, and productive. This indicates that they all perceived their career then as sustainable and something they saw themselves working in for a long period. Only two respondents mentioned that they already felt a decrease in their happiness and motivation to work, which might indicate a perception of unsustainability beforehand.

### ***First confrontation and lockdown***

#### **Health during the first lockdown.**

When first being confronted with COVID-19 almost every respondent showed a decline in their health. When looking at these perceived changes in their health, it could be divided between their physical- and mental health. No respondent perceived a severe change in their physical health. A mentioned enabler that helped some respondents sustain their physical health was exercising more. One respondent also related this exercising to their mental health: *‘When the first lockdown started I tried to exercise more. This also helped to clear my head’ (Travel organiser, female, 55 years)*. Whereas the participants did not perceive many changes in their physical health, the mental health of respondents was severely targeted. This led to them showing a bigger drop in their health characteristic. All participants showed some form of a decline in mental health when first being confronted COVID-19 in the Netherlands. A respondent vividly explained her mental feelings when confronted with the first lockdown as following: *‘It turned me inside out. Really inside out. I felt like I was put in a washing machine, washed on 90 degrees and then put in the dryer. I have not been sick,*

*luckily, but mentally it turned me inside out* (Hotel manager, male, 46 years). What primarily caused the mental strain for this respondents was that she began doubting her initial career choice and an increased experience of uncertainty whether or not she could keep their job. These concerns are in line with the initiated thought process triggered by COVID-19 and show how uncertainty can have an impact on someone's mental health.

Next to the increased job insecurity also the increased financial concern was a constraint to their mental health. With COVID-19 taking a lot of their core business away, also their revenues and incomes started to drop. This turned somewhat around when the government started investing money in these heavily impacted industries. For most respondents this led to them getting paid during this crisis, which took some concern away. A participant mentioned: *'Every month I still get my salary. It is not that they say you didn't work so you won't get paid, luckily for me. This provided me with a stable situation* (Steward, male, 29 years). This governmental subsidy was sometimes not enough to fully cover the expenses of respondents and therefore also led to some respondents dipping into their savings. They mentioned that this was an easy decision, because they regarded the crisis as temporary and therefore their losses would be restricted. Whereas most respondents got paid during the first lockdown, one self-employed respondent did not. This led to an unsure situation and her eventually deciding to take a temporary job to secure her income. This shows that whenever someone is confronted with a more negative financial situation this might lead to more direct career actions being taken.

All in all, most respondents related their lowered mental health to two constraints, which were the uncertainty of the situation and the feeling of being restricted to execute their normal working activities. However, it was also remarkable that the respondents that had a management responsibility also mentioned that their mental health was targeted, because they worried about how they would retain every employee or even thought of firing employees. A hotel manager that was responsible for the personal management inside the hotel mentioned that this gave her a lot of stress, but a restaurant owner also mentioned that she worried about the uncertainty whether or not she could retain her staff. These specific mental health constraints were not mentioned by respondents being in paid employment. This might indicate that there is a difference between being an entrepreneur or manager in comparison with being in paid employment.

### **Happiness during the first lockdown.**

Just as mental health, almost all respondents showed a loss of happiness and motivation to work. This was again mostly related to the restrictions and measures they had to deal with regarding their job. A waitress explained it as following: *‘Yes, the restrictions made it really less fun to work, because you could just not do it how you would want to do it. [...] It is out of your control, that makes it even more difficult’* (Waitress, female, 25 years). Herein, it is also shown that the attribute of uncontrollability of the career shock directly influences the happiness to work. Another respondent mentioned when asked if her motivation to work completely was taken away with: *‘No, it doesn't. It doesn't disappear completely, but you get a bit discouraged or something. You have the idea that you can't do anything about it on your own, and of course that's it’* (Dancer, female, 24 years). A respondent also mentioned that his intrinsic motivation to work was just as high as before, but that the way he was limited in doing their job just made their job harder to execute and therefore stay motivated and happy to work. The restrictions to do their normal job and working activities were the most mentioned constraints in the first lockdown considering their happiness.

### **Productivity during the first lockdown.**

Lastly, almost all participants experienced a loss in productivity when confronted with COVID-19. They completely lost the ability to work or do their normal job (e.g. catering industry/entertainment industry) or were confronted with a lowered demand for their products (e.g. emptied hotels or minimal travel opportunities). A few respondents experienced no change in their productivity. When asked why a respondent explained this as follows: *‘Where I normally was busy with arranging trips and vacations, I am now busy with arranging the vouchers for customers. So in that case I am still productive, but in a different way’* (Travel organiser, female, 55 years). They were sometimes practically forced to start new activities to survive the crisis and safeguard their productivity, for example taking up new administrative tasks. Another respondent was busy with his internal training for a new position inside the organisation, which he perceived as a productive period.

The other participants confronted with a lowered productivity mentioned that they tried to quickly adapt to their new working situation to stay somewhat productive. They mentioned going into some form of ‘survivor mode’. They started looking for activities they could do instead of which they cannot. The COVID-19 crisis primarily targeted the core

business of the respondents' industries. Hotels were emptied due to travel restrictions and bars were closed in fear of contaminations. Whereas most respondents, therefore, experienced some form of unproductivity during the first lockdown, they mostly did invest time and effort in other ways to stay productive. By adapting to their new working situation they enabled themselves to keep working in their normal job. For example, a hotel invested in more local target groups, whereas they normally focussed on foreign groups, and restaurants started takeaways to keep in touch with their customers. However, whereas these actions eventually made them feel more satisfied and productive with what they had done over the day, it initially did not make them happier. This was mainly since it was not their normal day-to-day job. A restaurant owner, who started doing take-ways, explained this as follows: *'I found it mentally quite heave though [doing take away], because you are doing all sort of things that are not part of your normal routine. It may sound strange, but I'd rather have a group of 40 that I serve on the terrace, which is my daily thing, than to make take-aways for 10 people and have to remember all the things I do. Oh man, I had to think about everything. I was broken in the evening and I had only worked 2 hours'* (Restaurant owner, female, 51 years). Most respondents tried adapting to their new working situation to also adhere to their current job and survive the first lockdown, so that they could return to their normal work as soon as the restrictions were lifted. They mentioned that this was also because that they mostly perceived it as temporary and something they would, and could, survive.

### **Career actions during the first lockdown.**

With most respondents trying to adapt and survive the first lockdown other career actions during the first lockdown were limited. The perceived constraints played a big role in the initiation of the thought process, but this did for most respondents not lead to any career actions being taken. Due to the uncertainty of the severity and duration of the crisis respondents began asking themselves if they would still be able to keep their job if this crisis prolonged much longer, but during the first lockdown most respondents tried to adapt to their new working situation or dipped into their savings to get by financially.

The respondents that did take action either willingly resigned from a job or had sought a temporary job to stay productive. The first mentioned that he already felt a decreased motivation to work in his current job before COVID-19. The COVID-19 crisis sped up his decision-making to resign from his job. The other respondent started doing temporary work during the first lockdown primarily to get by financially. This was mostly because she was

self-employed and her assignments completely disappeared. When asked why she decided to start a temporary job she mentioned: *'Some days I was just staring at the wall, which is not good for your mental health and motivation. I just need to go out of the door and do something'* (Dancer, female, 24 years). This shows that the perceived change in her productivity and mental health led to her deciding to seek temporary work, but it also shows that the characteristics are intertwined.

This intertwining of the characteristics also was mentioned by other respondents. For example, they mentioned that when their productivity decreased, this also had consequences for their mental health which then also showed a drop or decrease. Also, the characteristics of productivity and happiness were found to be closely related, illustrated by this next quote: *I just could not perform. I really thought of doing something online, but that is just not the same. Then you don't get motivated, which also not helps your productivity. And then your productivity declines even more and you get in a downward spiral. That just does not help* (DJ, male, 41 years). With the characteristics intertwining with each other, this might lead to a different decision-making process.

### ***Summer period***

After the first lockdown, the summer period started. During this period most restrictions were lifted, which meant that most respondents could return to their normal jobs. In doing so, they also perceived changes in their health, happiness, and productivity.

#### **Health during the summer period.**

When the most impactful restrictions were lifted during the summer period most respondents perceived a direct increase in their mental health, also mentioned by the following interviewee: *Yes, towards the summer period we could fly again and then your health just really goes up. That you can go to work again and think like.. it's over. The whole summer we could work reasonably normal. That just really helps* (Pilot, male, 40 years). Other participants also thought, in line with this quote, that they had survived the crisis and everything was going back to normal as soon as possible. It showed respondents that this shock was something temporary and could be completely over very soon. Only two respondents did not perceive increased health. For one this was because he was in between jobs and this led to some stress concerning his new job decisions. The other respondent mentioned the following when asked why her health did not increase: *'Our target group changed at once, and that's why I knew it was temporary, because normally we are on the American and English market and now the Dutch, Germans and Belgians. So I knew that the*

*summer was short-lived. And of course it was very nice for a while, but I also knew that when the summer holidays were over, we would fall into a hole again. Yes, we did realise that'* (Hotel manager, female, 43 years). This standpoint is opposite from other respondents mentioning that they thought they had survived the crisis, because this respondent mentioned that she saw the second lockdown coming.

### **Happiness during the summer period.**

Next to health, the lifting of the restrictions also helped increase the respondent's happiness to work again. During this summer period, most respondents could get back to their normal work. Sometimes this was with a few adaptations, but most respondents mentioned that they were already happy that they could work. A respondent mentioned: *'Then in the summer period we reopened and then I was actually quite happy again. I really like it a lot. [...] It was back to full duty. It was back to normal, everyone on the terrace. Just super nice seeing my colleagues again as well. Just like it had always been and we hadn't closed down. Everybody thought: 'It's is over'* (Waitress, female, 25 years). This quote also shows the thought of survival of the crisis and the belief that everything was over. The lifting of the restrictions enabled them to mainly work as they were used to do and this led to an overall increase of happiness to work.

### **Productivity during the summer period.**

This increased happiness to work, as illustrated above, was closely related to increased productivity. People were enabled to do their normal work again, which also increased their perception of being productive. A respondent mentioned this as: *'And then in the summer, we caught up on some performances in the theatre. There were only 100 people allowed in the audience. [...] Whereas you normally had 500 people in the audience for one show, you now had 300 people maximum on one day. This did gave some weak applause, but it was something. So we did that for a couple of weekends'* (Dancer, female, 24 years). Other respondents also mentioned similar stories. They could do their job, sometimes with a few adaptations, but this enabled them to feel productive again.

### **Career actions during the summer period.**

With the increase in all of their sustainable career characteristics, indicating them perceiving their career as sustainable, fewer respondents mentioned a thought process being initiated during this period. Considering this, for most respondents this also meant that they

did not take any actions to safeguard their health, happiness, and productivity, but not for all.

One respondent mentioned that she had invested time and energy in investigating new and different career opportunities. She mentioned that these actions improved her current career moreover and to better handle the insecurities inside her job. A decision she made was that she made her own website to better market herself as a freelancer. These (career) decisions gained momentum during the time of COVID-19, according to the respondent. She mentioned it as follows: *‘I also started looking at new opportunities and it opened doors for me. I started looking more on the commercial side of my job, which I normally didn’t do when I was working. You start to look further, that’s something that really changed for me (Dancer, female, 24 years)*. She mentioned that the entertainment industry always has some form of insecurities inside them and that COVID-19 has brought this to light. To better handle these insecurities in the future and to safeguard her health, happiness, and productivity she took these decisions.

For most other respondents these perceived increases of vulnerabilities in their careers and industries faded away during the summer. There was no need to make decisions to safeguard their health, happiness, and productivity, because the lifting of the restrictions enabled them to work again. This might have pushed the career decision-making to the background. This led to them possibly regarding their careers as sustainable, future proof and resistant to perceived vulnerabilities. In summary, during the summer respondents either were trying to protect their current career path or invest in new opportunities within their current career. The lifting of the restrictions and the possibility to return to their normal jobs was the biggest enabler in all of this.

### ***Second lockdown***

Quickly after the summer the second lockdown slowly started. This had again a significant impact on the respondents characteristics of a sustainable career.

#### **Health during the second lockdown.**

This lockdown divided the respondents almost into two even groups when it came to their mental health. One group of participants perceived a decrease in their mental health, it sometimes even being a bigger one than the first lockdown. A participant mentioned: *‘Then the second lockdown started, I really didn’t see that one coming. I really thought that they’re not going to do that to us. That really came as a surprise. But I was like, you know, three*

*more months and then we'll be done with it (Restaurant owner, female, 51 years).* The reinstated uncertainty, the unexpectedness of the second lockdown, and even the weather were all mentioned as health constraints. This period was regarded as very difficult and tough by this group of respondents, because of the complete lack of perspective. The other group of respondents adapted to the new working situation again, as was also discussed in the first lockdown. The experiences from the first lockdown helped them to quickly adapt to the new situation and therefore also limited the perception of health losses. Another enabler that helped respondents to keep their mental health high was the acceptance of the whole situation. When asked why the second lockdown did not influence his mental health a respondent answered: *'I was just not constantly watching the news and press conference anymore. If something important was said I would hear it anyway. I still followed the rules of course, but I really made a choice in that for myself. Yes that second lockdown was completely shit, we can't perform we can't do nothing, but you just need to adapt to it (DJ, male, 41 years).* By not focusing on what he could not do but on what he could, he adapted to the new situation during the second lockdown. He, for example, invested more time in his new career path as a youth worker. In line with this respondent, another one also mentioned: *'Then there does come a bit of acceptance, that you do start to think that it's not personally. It's not only our hotel that has to deal with this, but the whole world. A lot of hotels also decided to close, but we stayed open and continued. And then, oddly enough, you start making the best of it. Strangely enough, you also become more and more creative how you can sell the rooms. So that also gives some kind of boost. [...] And because it took so long, at a certain point you realise this will still take a while. So you kind of make peace with it (Hotel manager, female, 43 years).* On the contrary, a younger respondent described this period as: *'Then second lockdown really started in October. Yeah, I just didn't expect that we'd have to stay inside again, and lose my job again. Then I had to find another [temporary] job. I still feel that there is no real future in it or anything' (Waitress, female, 25 years).* For her, the lockdown still very much impacted her view on the situation, for which she also sought mental aid to help her out. This might indicate that there is a difference in the acceptance when it comes to career shocks regarding someone's age. The enablers mentioned by respondents from this group were the acceptance of the severity of the situation, an already generated adaptability to cope with the situation, and the mental aid that was sought. Next to this, two respondents also changed professions, which helped them safeguard their mental health better. Their new working environment allowed them to fully focus on this and to not let COVID-19 influence them as much mentally.

### **Happiness during the second lockdown.**

During the second lockdown, the happiness to work declined again in most participants, mostly because of the restrictions. Just as with health, the respondents could be divided into two groups. A large group of eight respondents showed a loss in their motivation to work and another smaller group of four respondents showed no changes or even an increase.

The first group mentioned constraints such as the loss of contact with colleagues and the unexpected renewed confrontation with restrictions and measures. A respondent mentioned this as: *'In October I really thought, well, now they're not going to close everything again even the hotels. [...] They just didn't allow anything anymore. Yes, then my motivation was really down again. Especially at the restaurant, I thought, forget it'* (Restaurant owner, female, 51 years). The motivation to work really declined now that the restrictions again prohibited the respondents to do their normal job. This really targeted their happiness to work and sometimes led to them taking career decisions to safeguard their happiness.

The second group, which showed no change in their happiness or even an increase, related this to different things. Two respondents did change careers after the summer and experienced a lot of motivation and engagement to work. Another respondent had already adapted to the new working environment by searching for activities that motivated her. The last respondent had accepted his new working situation. He mentioned: *'Sometimes I had to wait 2 weeks before I could fly again, but I actually started looking forward to it so much. During these times I often called my parents and sister just to have a little chat, that just really got me through that period. The day before I would fly again I really had to be up to date considering COVID regulations and stuff. And once you arrive and you see the planes then you really feel like yes I can work again and look I'm looking forward to it. Sounds dull, but that's really my experience now'* (Steward, male, 29 years). This respondent was still happy to work even when his work was starting to decline. He looked forward to start working even when the intervals he could work were longer. This respondent also mentioned that his personal situation helped him through this period. He just got married and was happy to be at home and be able to talk to someone close about his experiences. He mentioned that this situation enabled him to stay motivated to work. In line with this, other respondents also mentioned similar experiences, for example, talking to family and friends and spending more time on hobbies. One respondent mentioned: *'I just pushed myself to for example exercise more and gain some more energy out of other things. Also more outside my normal job. I*

*moreover pursued my hobbies to just also feel like doing other things. That also gave me more energy and motivation to start working again. (Legal worker, female, 22 years).* These activities provided her with new energy to do his job during uncertain times.

### **Productivity during the second lockdown.**

When the second lockdown started, also the productivity of participants was again targeted. Again they were confronted with restrictions being slowly introduced, which prohibited or partly restricted them in their working activities. Bars closed down, flights were cancelled and hotels were emptied. A respondent mentioned this as: *'Generally speaking [outside COVID-19], we'd also get an email saying that the last room has been sold. And that feeling was just not there anymore and I find it really difficult to therefore say that I am productive enough. It's a bit of a mental thing. Of course, it's all connected. You can't see it completely separately'* (Hotel manager, male, 46 years). Other respondents also mentioned that the decrease in their health and happiness to work also was connected with the feeling of unproductivity. For most respondents, the reintroduction of the restriction was mentioned as a constraint to their productivity.

Some respondents mentioned that their productivity did not change during the second lockdown. Reasons for this was that she already changed their working activities during the first lockdown and continued working so or again adapted to their new working situation guaranteeing some form of productivity. They mentioned that employers tried to enable them to stay productive and helped them find activities which they could do. In summary, respondents again perceived the second lockdown as constraining them from their normal working activities and leading to an increased feeling of unproductivity.

### **Career actions during the second lockdown.**

All in all, the second lockdown led to multiple respondents taking (career) actions to safeguard their health, happiness, and productivity during this period. Two respondents started new career opportunities, whereas one of these respondents began as a youth worker and the other started working in a new start-up business. Two other respondents started working in temporary jobs, like working in catering when this was still possible or working for the Area Health Authority. Lastly, one respondent started a secondary business with a friend alongside his normal work. He mentioned this decision as: *'I always had that [idea of starting a business]. We both had the idea that we would never want to do that as a full-time job, but just alongside our current work, but COVID really accelerated that. At some point*

*you just have your hands free. So we thought this was a good time to set it up and to start some acquisition (Pilot, male, 40 years).* The decision to start this business alongside his normal job was mainly because he perceived vulnerabilities in his current industry and career. COVID-19 has again shown, these vulnerabilities and has sped up his decision to start a secondary business.

Next to these respondents, other respondents again started to adapt to their new working situation and started investing time and money in activities that they still could do. This adaptability helped them to safeguard their health, happiness, and productivity, but also made it possible for them to adhere to their current jobs and careers. This could go from renovating the restaurant they worked in, starting takeaways, or selling hotel rooms to local customers. The last adaptation is clearly illustrated by the next quote. When the owner of the hotel wanted to close their doors temporarily during the second lockdown a hotel manager responded with the following: *'I said: 'No we are not closing, I need this mentally and the other employees do as well'. She agreed and we stayed open and I looked at different opportunities to fill our rooms. And Valentine's day we were full again, just because we stayed open and adapted to our new situation. That is something important to see, that we could even sell rooms in a lockdown (Hotel manager, participant 1).* This quote also shows that the intertwining of the characteristics of health and productivity plays an important role in decision-making.

When adapting to the new situation most participants again assumed that this second lockdown was temporary as well and that they just need to safeguard their health, happiness, and productivity for now and that their normal activities would return as soon as possible. A steward mentioned: *'For my feeling this is just temporary. I have a strong feeling that we will survive this and that we are going back to airplanes with 400 people in it. Then it's back to hard work and sweat and all. And we will think and laugh of this period where we only had 5 passengers' (Steward, participant 7).* In some cases also accepting the new uncertain situation just as it is helped them to safeguard their health, happiness, and productivity. It can be concluded that, contrary to the first lockdown, the second lockdown led to more participants taking (career) decisions. The experience with what a lockdown entails might have changed their perception of this.

In summary, the results show that the career shock COVID-19 is perceived as a shock with a big impact, but also a temporary one. In almost all respondents the COVID-19 crisis initiated a thought process regarding their career. This thought process was based upon the

perception of insecurity, vulnerability, and uncertainty inside their current career. Next to this, respondents also mentioned that lockdowns changed their perception of their sustainable career characteristics health, happiness, and productivity. During the summer period, this led to an increase of the characteristics, because the restrictions prohibiting them to do their normal job were lifted. Eventually, almost all respondents took action to safeguard their health, happiness, and productivity, which went from temporarily taking another job to adapting their working activities to the new situation. All in all, most respondents still believed that they could return to their normal careers as soon as possible. The career decision-making of respondents was also impacted by the financial situation and the adaptive skills of people to cope with the new situation.

## **Discussion**

The findings show that COVID-19 can be classified as a career shock. Furthermore, it shows the career decisions people take to safeguard the sustainability of their careers when confronted with COVID-19. To safeguard their careers, some respondents immediately took career-altering decisions to safeguard the sustainability of their careers. For others, it led to them adhering to their careers and seeking actions and activities to survive and overcome this crisis situation. For many though, different factors played an important role in their career decision-making. In the following paragraphs, these factors, (1) the attributes of COVID-19 as a career shock, (2) the changing characteristics of a sustainable career, and (3) the job crafting abilities of respondents will be discussed in terms of their contribution to the existing theory or their relations with previous research.

### **Implications of the career shock COVID-19**

A career shock is defined by its extraordinary character, outside someone's locus of control and initiating a thought process. However, Akkermans et al. (2017) also stated that career shocks differentiate based upon attributes such as their duration and controllability. The following paragraph discusses these attributes further, by also discussing how these attributes impacted the career decision-making of respondents.

First, the attribute duration impacted the way respondents made decisions regarding their careers. COVID-19 is a career shock with an initial starting point, but with several little shocks (e.g. lifting of measurements) inside it. These findings are in line with research by Wordsworth and Nilakant (2021) who researched the career decision-making of people confronted with an earthquake. The temporary character of an earthquake, combined with

several aftershocks later in time, is similar to the situation of COVID-19. The findings by Wordsworth and Nilakant (2021) and this research both show that the duration of the career shock, with several 'aftershocks', might not lead to career decisions being made at the initial starting point of the shock, but that a tipping point being reached after some time. Career shocks like COVID-19 and earthquakes, which their specific duration attributes, can lead to different career actions being taken at different points in time after initially being confronted with the career shock.

Second, the findings of this research show that the attribute of controllability also plays a role in the decisions making of respondents. Individuals want to exert control over their careers by making use of their career competencies and therefore enhancing their employability (Forrier, Verbruggen & De Cuyper, 2015). Employability is the skill to get, keep and do well on a job (Robinson, 2000). This relationship between career competencies and employability can be negatively impacted by negative career shocks (Blokker, Akkermans, Tims, Jansen, & Khapova, 2019). Because COVID-19 in this research by most respondents is regarded as a negative and uncontrollable career shock this might indicate that their employability is impacted as well. The findings of this research add upon the theories above by also showing that this lowered employability might also lead to fewer career actions being taken, because respondents did not feel like they had the skills to get, keep or do well on a job. Therefore, different or even no career decisions might be taken by people confronted with negative career shocks.

Third, considering the initiated thought process triggered by COVID-19 it was discovered that not only the career was taken into consideration, but also the vulnerabilities of the industry wherein the career lies were assessed. Urbanaviciute, Bühlmann, and Rossier (2019) already discovered that building sustainable careers in industries formed by uncertainty, inequity and constant pressure is difficult. The findings in this research contribute to this research by also showing that in industries, where these vulnerabilities normally do not come to the surface, this is now taken into consideration when assessing the sustainability of one's career. Career shocks targeting whole industries at the same time, like COVID-19, can lead to vulnerabilities coming to the surface, which would not have happened when one individual is targeted by a shock (e.g. being fired). Thus, the findings showed that these vulnerabilities inside an industry are taken into consideration as well when assessing one's career, therefore indicating that this plays a role in the decisions making of individuals.

**Implications of the characteristics of a sustainable career**

Next, the specific actions taken to safeguard the sustainability of their career regarding the changes in the characteristics of a sustainable career by COVID-19 are discussed. Important topics in this are the negatively affected financial situation, the perceived person-career fit, and the intertwining of the characteristics of a sustainable career.

In this research, it was moreover mentioned that the financial situation of respondents played a role in the mental health, and therefore the decision-making, of respondents. The relationship between mental health issues concerning the financial situation in times of COVID-19 has been found before (Wilson, Lee, Fitzgerald, Oosterhoff, Sevi & Shook, 2020). In this research by Wilson et al. (2020) the increased job insecurity of people was also taken into consideration, with financial concern mediating the relationship between mental health consequences. This study elaborates further upon these relationships in a qualitative manner, by showing that this relationship is not only found by quantitative research but also by qualitative. Thus, showing that the financial situation impacts the decision-making of people when confronted with COVID-19. In this research, the financial concern of respondents was limited, mainly because the Dutch government introduced the Temporary Emergency Bridging Measure for Sustained Employment (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020). This governmental help might have taken some financial concern away and therefore some mental health issues considering increased job insecurity.

The next topic, that might have played an important role in the career decision-making of people, is the perceived person-career fit. Parasuraman, Greenhaus, and Linnehan (2000) stated that the person-career fit is strong when someone experiences their career compatible with their needs, values, interests, and talents. A career wherein someone experiences this might be perceived as more sustainable (Cha, Kim, & Kim, 2009). This research expands the current knowledge surrounding this topic. In this research, respondents mentioning a decrease in the motivation or happiness to work in their current career also made career-altering decisions during COVID-19. Other respondents not mentioning such a decrease might not regard their career as unsustainable as these respondents. Their health, happiness, and productivity might be temporarily decreased by the confrontation with COVID-19, but this did not change their overall view upon the sustainability of their career. Without the restrictions of COVID-19 they still perceive values, needs, and interests inside their career in their career, which defines a strong person-career fit. This might have led to them moreover choosing for career adhering decisions and trying to survive the crisis, then deciding to take more career-altering decisions. All in all, these findings may indicate that the

person-career fit is more important than health, happiness, and productivity when it comes to making career decisions during a career shock.

Lastly, this study showed that health, happiness, and productivity are intertwining with each other. This aligns with the research of de Vos et al. (2020), in which they state that the characteristics are interrelated with each other and cannot be examined solo when regarding the sustainability of one's career. The findings of this research support these claims by multiple respondents mentioning that their health, happiness, and productivity at work are intertwining with each other. Whereas productivity decreased, happiness and mental health also showed a drop or decrease. This interrelation and interference found in this research confirm the assumptions made by de Vos et al. (2020) regarding this interrelationship of the characteristics. This might indicate that when one characteristic is targeted by a career shock the other also might change and therefore leading to someone regarding their career as unstable.

### **Adaptability & Job Crafting**

The last factor that impacted the career decision-making of people was the adaptive skills. These skills determine how respondents react and cope with the new uncertain situation. People even mentioned going into some form of 'survivor mode' or starting in developing entrepreneurial skills (e.g. starting takeaways/selling rooms to locals). Aligning with the above, the 'survivor mode' could be seen as an adaptive approach for some to cope with the new and uncertain situation. This adaptability to this new situation can be seen as a form of job crafting. Job crafting is defined as someone changing how their work is carried out, with whom it interacts, and how they gave meaning to it (Tims & Bakker, 2010). The findings of this research show that individuals are enabled to adapt and change their working environment themselves when being confronted with a career shock. This might suggest that job crafting is an action that can be used during career shocks to mitigate the negative consequences.

The findings of this research also confirm earlier made arguments by de Vos et al. (2020) arguing the relationship between Hobföll's COR theory (2001) and their characteristics of a sustainable career. They argued that people that proactively react to external forces by investing in conserving and acquiring new beneficial resources are better able to protect the sustainability of their careers (de Vos et al., 2020). The findings of this research support this argument by showing that respondents in this research were motivated to protect or acquire new resources, because their current resources (e.g. job security) were

targeted by COVID-19. By adapting to their new situation they were able to craft their job to make it a more sustainable job during this uncertain situation. Thus, developing entrepreneurial skills during confrontation with a career shock and looking at what you can do instead of what you cannot, might help people to overcome and ‘survive’ the shock easier.

Next to this, some respondents also adapted to the new uncertain situation by choosing to start taking temporary jobs. These career decisions could also be linked to the COR theory (Höbfol, 2001). These respondents might have perceived loss of resources (e.g. job security) in their current career, which might have led to them being motivated to acquire these resources in a (temporary) job. This way they could survive this current situation and return to their normal careers as soon as this was all over.

All in all, the adaptive skills of people experiencing a career shock first hand gives some new insights in how people craft their job and career. It also shows the effort people take to sustain the sustainability of their careers when confronted with a career shock. However, it was multiple times mentioned by respondents that this ‘survivor mode’ was only possible because they perceived the adaptations to their work as temporary. This ‘survivor mode’ might not be a sustainable state to be in for over a longer period of time.

### **Limitations and future research**

This study has four main limitations. The first limitation is that the COVID-19 crisis is still ongoing during the time this research was conducted. This means that not the entire crisis, and therefore all the career decisions that go with it, could be included in this study. Similar research by Worsdworth and Nilakant (2021), who also examined an extra-organizational event (earthquake), found that the event duration played a big role in the career decision-making of people affected by this earthquake. This shows that the ongoing career shock COVID-19 still can initiate career decisions in the future that could not be taken into consideration in this research. During this research, it was not sure how long and how intense this crisis was going to be. Career shocks like earthquakes (aftershocks) and COVID-19 are shocks with a longer duration and multiple smaller shocks inside them. Therefore, the initial shock might not directly lead to any consequences, but the smaller shocks eventually might lead to a threshold being reached (Andrus, Withers, Courtright, & Boivie, 2019). With COVID-19 being an ongoing shock with restrictions still being tightened and lifted to this date this threshold might not be reached yet in respondents in this research and therefore not leading to any (big) career decisions. In line with this, a similar limitation can be seen in the

difference in the short and long-term consequences of COVID-19 (Akkermans, Richardson & Kraimer, 2020). In this study, only the short-term consequences could be taken into consideration, because examining the long-term consequences was not feasible within the short period of this research. Future research can take a better look at the situation after COVID-19 and examine if more career decisions are taken in the long term.

Secondly, this research only consisted of twelve interviews with people confronted with COVID-19 as a career shock. This is a limited sample of people that are directly targeted by this crisis. In crises like this, it is very important to consider the contextual impact, because it also explains the human behaviour of the person (Johns, 2006). Therefore, this research provides a new perspective on how some people deal with the career shock, but is not generalizable to the whole population as every individual and context is different. More qualitative and quantitative research needs to be conducted to examine the overall effects of COVID-19 on the whole affected population.

Thirdly, a limitation is that this research has a qualitative design, from which no statistical conclusions can be drawn. During this research, it is found that the characteristics of a sustainable career are intertwined. In this research, it cannot be proved how these are related to each other and how the relation precisely works. Future research can focus on a more quantitative approach examining this intertwining more and create an in-depth understanding of the correlation and relationship between these characteristics.

The fourth and last limitation is that only the characteristics of a sustainable career and not the dimensions of a sustainable career are taken into consideration. In addition to the indicators of a sustainable career (health, happiness & productivity), personal, time, and contextual factors also play important role in regarding a career as sustainable (De Vos et al., 2020). In this research, it was found that the financial situation played an important role in the eventual career decision-making of people. Future research can focus more on how these contextual and personal factors played a role in the perception of a sustainable career during COVID-19 next to the characteristics.

Another suggestion for future research is further investigating the role of age in the way people are impacted by a career shock. Kraimer, Greco, Seibert, and Sargent (2019) already stated that different younger employees perceive different outcomes of a career shock than people who are in their late careers. Future research could further investigate whether or not age plays a significant role in the way COVID-19 impacts an individual.

The last suggestion for future research is the impact of having managing and HR responsibilities and the perceived impact of COVID-19. During this research, it was found

that respondents with management responsibilities, such as being responsible for the hiring and firing of employees, and entrepreneurs experienced a high level of mental stress because of this. Future research can further investigate this by examining if the scope of control plays a part in the perception of a sustainable career.

### **Practical implications**

This study adds to practice with several implications. First, this study shows that when people are confronted with a career shock they are capable of quickly adapting themselves and their working activities to the new situation when they perceive the crisis as temporary. Managers can learn from this, because it shows them how to deal with employees confronted with a career shock and that they can support them in adapting to their new situation. Furthermore, it shows that the uncontrollability and uncertainty of a career shock have big implications on the perception of a sustainable career. By helping employees to cope with this uncontrollability and to create some perspective in the uncertainty they can help employees to perceive their career as sustainable when confronted with a career shock. An enabler that helped to counteract the effects of uncertainty and uncontrollability was social support. Walen and Lachman (2000) also found that partner and family support predicted well-being. Managers can therefore focus on integrating the family and friends of someone when being confronted with a career shock, because this mitigates the negative effects. Also, transparent and active communication is often mentioned as good a way to manage uncertainty (Brashers, 2000). Lastly, it shows that the financial situation of employees plays a role in them assessing their career as sustainable or not. Managers and governments can help create a stable financial situation to keep people inside sustainable careers or to move away from an unstable career when necessary. Amundson et al. (2010) found that career decisions were prioritized upon financial needs over connectedness and meaningful engagement, which shows the importance of a positive financial situation when taking career decisions. All in all, these practical implications help to sustain health, happiness, and productivity inside an individual's career.

## Conclusion

This study investigated the following research question: *What career decisions do (heavily) impacted employees take to safeguard the health, happiness, and productivity of their career during the COVID-19 crisis?* This study showed that COVID-19 can be regarded as a career shock directly targeting the characteristics of a sustainable career. In some cases, this led to people taking action to safeguard their health, happiness, and productivity. They either adapted to the new working situation, searched for temporary jobs, or investigated new career opportunities. With most respondents perceiving a strong person-career fit and positive financial situation due to government subsidies (big) career actions were relatively limited. Herein, the perceived temporariness of the COVID-19 crisis also played a big part. In sum, this research contributes to the relatively new concepts of career shocks and sustainable careers, but more research is needed to fully grasp the concept of sustainable careers and career shocks.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Interview guide

#### Introductie

Goedemiddag, ik heb u hier vandaag uitgenodigd voor een interview over de impact die corona heeft gehad op uw carrière en de keuzes die u heeft gemaakt aan de hand daarvan. Ik verwacht dat dit interview ongeveer 60 tot 75 minuten zal duren. Ik zal u eerst wat over mezelf vertellen en mijn achtergrond. [INTRODUCTIE MATHIJS] Om dit interview goed te kunnen verwerken zou ik het graag op willen nemen, heeft u daar bezwaar tegen? Daarnaast zal dit interview anoniem zijn en zal er niks rechtstreeks naar u herleidbaar zijn. Wanneer het interview voor u ongemakkelijk aanvoelt, kun u vanzelf sprekend aangeven te willen stoppen. Als laatste zou ik u willen vragen een consent formulier te tekenen ter bevestiging.

Allemaal akkoord, dan gaan ik beginnen! [Start opname]

Het onderzoek gaat hoe over iemand zijn carrière inricht en hoe diegene ervoor zorgt dat hij/zij het werk lang kan blijven doen. Een mogelijkheid is dat de carrière onder druk komt te staan van een schok, zoals bijvoorbeeld een ontslag, promotie of het krijgen van een kind. Dit kan ervoor zorgen dat iemand anders gaat kijken naar zijn/haar carrière en ook andere keuzes gaat maken. Ik doe een onderzoek naar hoe corona invloed heeft op iemand carrière. Dit doe ik aan de hand van drie kenmerken van een goede carrière: dat zijn gezondheid, bevlogenheid en productiviteit. Per kenmerk krijgt u een blaadje met daarop een tijdlijn en ik zou u willen vragen de ontwikkeling van de karakteristiek over vorig jaar en dit jaar in te vullen, maar daarover straks meer.

Voordat we daarmee beginnen zou ik u eerst wat algemene vragen willen stellen als dat mag.

1. Wat is uw leeftijd?
2. Heeft u op dit moment een baan? Zo ja, wat is uw functie?
3. Is dit veranderd het afgelopen jaar? Zo ja, wat deed u daarvoor?
4. Wat zijn uw werkzaamheden nu?

#### COVID-19

Ik zou u allereerst wat vragen willen stellen omtrent corona.

1. Op een schaal van 1 tot 10, hoe groot was de impact van corona op uw (werk)leven?
2. Zou u mij wat kunnen vertellen over hoe corona uw leven precies heeft veranderd? Of is er niks veranderd?

Dan gaan we nu over naar het eerste kenmerk en het daarbij behorende vel.

#### Sustainable Careers

Het eerste onderdeel is de karakteristiek gezondheid, oftewel: *welzijn*. Dit gaat over hoe u, u lichamelijk en geestelijk voelt. Ik zou u willen vragen om vanaf begin 2020 tot eind 2021 een lijn te tekenen met hoe uw mentale- en fysieke gezondheid mogelijk is veranderd. Neem hierbij rustig de tijd om na te denken hoe dit is veranderd over afgelopen jaren.

*\*Vraag naar verdere toelichting op de getekende lijn en opvallendheden\**

*!Follow-up questions!*

- Welke veranderingen heeft u gemerkt tijdens corona in uw mentale- en fysieke gezondheid? En waarom?
- Heeft uw (veranderde) gezondheid uw perceptie ten opzichte van uw carrière veranderd?
  - o Zo ja, zou u dit verder uit kunnen leggen?
  - o Zo nee, waarom niet?
- Zou u als u terugkijkt andere keuzes hebben gemaakt ten opzichte van uw carrière op basis van uw gezondheid?

Het tweede onderdeel is de karakteristiek geluk, oftewel: *bevlogenheid*, dit gaat over de hoeveelheid energie u krijgt van uw werk en of u voldoening eruit haalt. Ik zou u willen vragen om vanaf begin 2020 tot eind 2021 een lijn te tekenen met hoe uw bevlogenheid richting uw werk mogelijk is veranderd. Neem hierbij rustig de tijd om na te denken hoe dit is veranderd over afgelopen jaren.

*\*Vraag naar verdere toelichting op de getekende lijn en opvallendheden\**

*!Follow-up questions!*

- Krijgt u energie van uw werk? En waaruit haalt u dan die energie?
- Is dit veranderd sinds de afgelopen tijd?
  - o Zo ja, waaraan merkt u dat dan?
  - o Zo nee, waarom niet?
- Heeft u beslissingen genomen om energie uit uw werk te halen?
- Bent u enthousiast over uw werk? Waaraan merkt u dat?
- Is dit veranderd over de tijd?
  - o Zo ja, waaraan merkt u dat dan?
  - o Zo nee, waarom niet?
- Zou u uzelf omschrijven als bevlogen richting uw werk?
- Welke acties hebt u ondernomen om dat ook te zijn en te blijven tijdens corona?

Het derde en tevens laatste onderdeel is de karakteristiek productiviteit, oftewel: *prestatie*, wat doet u op een dag en voldoet dit aan uw verwachtingen van uzelf of de organisatie. Ik zou u willen vragen om vanaf begin 2020 tot eind 2021 een lijn te tekenen met hoe uw performance op uw werk mogelijk is veranderd. Voor de maanden die nog komen wil ik u vragen een reële inschatting te maken van hoe u naar de toekomst kijkt. Neem hierbij rustig de tijd om na te denken hoe dit is veranderd over afgelopen jaren.

*\*Vraag naar verdere toelichting op de getekende lijn en opvallendheden\**

*!Follow-up questions!*

- In hoeverre heeft u het gevoel dat corona uw prestatie op uw werk beïnvloedde ?
  - o Zo ja, op welke manier?
  - o Zo nee, waarom niet?
- Welke acties hebt u ondernomen om toch te presteren tijdens de pandemie?
- Had u het gevoel dat u aan de verwachtingen van uzelf/uw werkgever voldeed tijdens de pandemie qua prestatie?

Dan zijn we aan het einde gekomen van het interview. Ik wil u hartelijk bedanken voor uw tijd en energie. Heeft u verder nog wat aan te vullen of wilt u nog iets kwijt over het onderwerp? Mocht u interesse hebben in de resultaten dan hoor ik dat graag. Dankuwel!

Mailadres: .....

## Appendix 2 – Initial coding scheme

### Coding scheme

Code	Categories	Sub-categories	Definition
Characteristics of a sustainable career			<i>Sequences of career experiences reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, thereby crossing several social spaces, characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual (De Vos and van der Heijden, 2015)</i>
	Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical wellbeing (decline, growth, no change)</li> <li>• Mentally wellbeing (decline, growth, no change)</li> </ul>	<i>Someone's general health, but also their mental, psychological, and emotional aspects (De Simone, 2014)</i>
	Work-engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decline</li> <li>• Growth</li> <li>• No change</li> </ul>	<i>The experience of high levels of energy and being enthusiastic at their job (Bakker &amp; Demerouti, 2008)</i>
	Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decline</li> <li>• Growth</li> <li>• No change</li> </ul>	<i>The expected value to an organization of what someone does for and can bring to an organization over time (Motowidlo &amp; Kell, 2012)</i>
Career shock			<i>A disruptive and extraordinary event that is, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside the focal individual's control and that triggers a deliberate thought process concerning one's career. The occurrence of a career shock can vary in terms of predictability and can be either positively or negatively valenced. (Akkermans, Seibert and, Mol, 2018)</i>
	Negative shock	Becoming unemployed	
	Positive shock		

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Career development decisions			<i>Career altering or adhering decisions that are impactful to the development of the career.</i>
	Negative decisions		
	Positive decisions		
	No decisions		
Person-career fit		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decline</li> <li>• Growth</li> <li>• No change</li> </ul>	<i>The person-career fit is defined as the extent to which an individual's career experiences are compatible with his or her needs, values interests, and talents (Parasuraman, Greenhaus &amp; Linnehan, 2000)</i>
Resources	Protecting current resources		
	Acquiring new resources		

## Appendix 3 – Final coding scheme

Code	Categories	Sub-categories	Definition
Characteristics of a sustainable career			<i>Sequences of career experiences reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, thereby crossing several social spaces, characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual (De Vos and van der Heijden, 2015)</i>
	Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical wellbeing (decline, growth, no change)</li> <li>• Mentally wellbeing (decline, growth, no change)</li> </ul>	<i>Someone's general health, but also their mental, psychological, and emotional aspects</i>
	Work engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decline</li> <li>• Growth</li> <li>• No change</li> </ul>	<i>The experience of high levels of energy and being enthusiastic at their job</i>
	Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decline</li> <li>• Growth</li> <li>• No change</li> </ul>	<i>The expected value to an organization of what someone does for and can bring to an organization over time</i>
	Intertwining characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health intertwining with happiness</li> <li>• Happiness intertwining with productivity</li> <li>• Productivity intertwining with health</li> </ul>	
Changes in characteristics of a sustainable career			
	Enablers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from colleagues/friends</li> <li>• Perspective after COVID-19</li> <li>• More time on hobbies</li> </ul>	
	Constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction restrictions</li> <li>• Colleagues being fired</li> </ul>	

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Career shock			<i>A disruptive and extraordinary event that is, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside the focal individual's control and that triggers a deliberate thought process concerning one's career. The occurrence of a career shock can vary in terms of predictability and can be either positively or negatively valenced. (Akkermans, Seibert and, Mol, 2018)</i>
	Negative shock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becoming unemployed</li> <li>• Firing employees</li> </ul>	
	Positive shock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career switch</li> </ul>	
	Attributes of COVID-19 as a career shock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temporary</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncertainty</li> <li>• Lack of perspective</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncontrollability</li> <li>• Lack of influence</li> </ul>	
Career development decisions			<i>Career altering or adhering decisions that are impactful to the development of the career.</i>
	Career altering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starting a new job</li> <li>• Starting a new business</li> </ul>	
	Career adhering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starting temporary jobs</li> </ul>	
	No decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doing nothing/waiting</li> </ul>	
Person-career fit		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decline</li> <li>• Growth</li> <li>• No change</li> <li>• Reinforced</li> <li>• Weakened</li> </ul>	<i>The person-career fit is defined as the extent to which an individual's career experiences are compatible with his or her needs, values interests, and talents (Parasuraman, Greenhaus &amp; Linnehan, 2000)</i>

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Experiences regarding career resources			
	Protecting current resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job security</li> <li>• Collegial support</li> <li>• Financial stability</li> </ul>	
	Acquiring new resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurial skills</li> <li>• Task variety</li> </ul>	
Financial situation			
	Positive financial situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subsidy from government (NOW)</li> <li>• Savings</li> </ul>	
	Negative financial situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No income from primary job</li> <li>• No sufficient subsidy</li> <li>• No savings</li> </ul>	
Adaptability		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapting to new working situation (job crafting)</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing mindset</li> </ul>	