

Article

Positive Affectivity as a Motivator: How Does It Influence Employees' Sustainable Careers

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Abstract: Given the critical role of the sustainable careers of employees in their survival and development, interest in how to improve employees' sustainable careers is growing rapidly. Previous studies primarily focused on the role of contextual factors, and neglected the role of agentic factors such as positive affectivity. Based on the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, the aim of this study is to investigate whether, how and when positive affectivity affects sustainable careers. A time-lagged study with two waves of data collected 8 months apart was conducted. With a sample of 580 employees in China, regression analyses showed that positive affectivity influenced employees' sustainable careers indicated by vigor and level of pay; cognitive reappraisal mediated the positive relationships between positive affectivity and sustainable careers; and organizational commitment moderated the indirect effects of positive affectivity on sustainable careers via cognitive reappraisal. Our findings illustrate the important role of positive affectivity in building employees' sustainable careers in the workplace.

Keywords: sustainable careers; positive affectivity; emotion regulation; broaden-and-build theory of positive emotion



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1. Introduction

Stressful work environments due to complex economic and societal developments threaten the sustainable careers of employees [1,2]. According to a report from Gallup, more and more employees have begun to experience the loss of sustainable careers, which leads to low productivity and costs the global economy USD 7.8 trillion [3]. Therefore, how to maintain and foster employees' career sustainability has become a key issue that urgently needs to be solved.

In recent years, the topic of how to help employees obtain career sustainability has been attracting increased attention from scholars [4–10]. However, these studies mainly examined the predicting role of contextual factors, such as supervisor support [6,7] and human resources practices [8–10], ignoring agency factors. Although agentic factors play a leading role in the model of sustainable careers [11], a notably limited body of research explores agentic predictors. Thus, in a recent literature review, De Vos et al. suggested that future investigation into the predicting role of agentic factors such as individual characteristics is warranted [5]. Another literature gap is that only limited research focuses on job performance or happiness as the indicators of sustainable careers from a single perspective [12]. In fact, individual sustainable careers include three elements: happiness, health and productivity [5]. It is essential to explore other indicators of sustainable well-being and a recent review stated that future research should pay more attention to happiness (e.g., vigor) and productivity (e.g., level of pay) [13]. Meanwhile, to date, a significant portion of research on sustainable careers has followed an inductive approach [8,9]. The lack of a theoretical framework makes it impossible to recognize the predictors linked to

sustainable careers [6]. To achieve this goal, De Vos et al. [5] suggested that theoretical models are needed to explain how sustainable careers foster and develop.

To address these issues, the current study attempts to extend prior research in several ways. First, we aim to examine the predicting role of positive affectivity on employees' sustainable careers. As a trait reflecting stable individual differences in positive emotional experience [14,15], positive affectivity refers to a “moderately stable trait over time and individuals demonstrate consistent mood levels across different situations” (p. 207) [16]. Recent empirical evidence suggested that positive affectivity enables individuals to achieve positive career development when facing a challenging environment [17–21]. However, whether positive affectivity has a positive effect on sustainable careers is still unknown. Thus, we seek to explore this unanswered question. Second, some scholars [13] have suggested happiness and productivity are two critical indicators of sustainable careers. Thus, we substantiate this by considering vigor and level of pay as two indicators of sustainable careers. Third, to deeply explain how and when positive affectivity affects employees' sustainable careers, we introduce the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (B & B theory) as the theoretical framework. The B & B theory points out that positive affectivity is conducive to the acquisition of resources by expanding cognitive scope and action scope [22]. Cognitive reappraisal refers to a cognitive-focused strategy, which means that an individual reinterprets the importance of an experience in a way that reduces the emotional impact of the event [23]. Expression suppression refers to an action-focused strategy, which means inhibiting or suppressing the outward expression of one's emotions, especially negative emotions [23]. Therefore, based on the B & B theory, we assume that (a) positive affectivity is positively related to sustainable careers, as indicated by vigor and level of pay; (b) cognitive reappraisal and expression suppression mediate the positive relationships between positive affectivity and sustainable careers; and (c) organizational commitment moderates the indirect effects of positive affectivity on sustainable careers via cognitive reappraisal and expression suppression. By engaging in this investigation, we contribute to the literature in the following meaningful ways. First, we provide new insight into the antecedents of sustainable careers from an agentic perspective. Second, we deepen understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying the relationship between positive affectivity and work-related outcomes. Third, we provide new support for the B & B theory. In addition, our results also provide new insight into how to foster employees' sustainable careers in the workplace. In sum, based on the B & B theory, our conceptual model is illustrated by Figure 1.

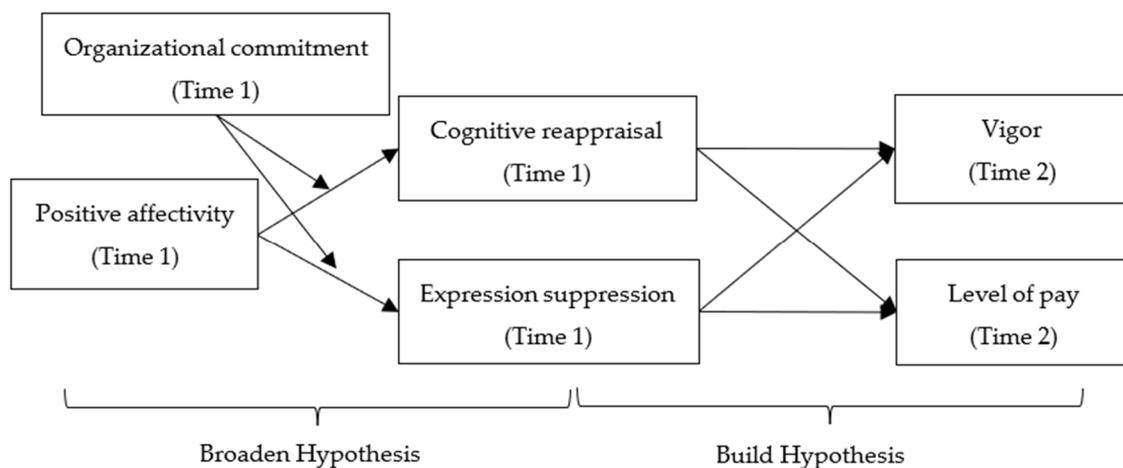


Figure 1. Hypothesis model.

2. Theory Background and Hypothesis Development

2.1. The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions

The B & B theory provides a strong theoretical basis to explicate our hypothetical model. The B & B theory points out that positive affectivity is of great significance in building personal resources including psychological resources and material resources due to the function of positive emotions in broadening the individual's cognitive and action scope [23,24]. It is noted that the model includes the two hypotheses: the build hypothesis and the broaden hypothesis. First, the build hypothesis posits that positive emotions have the function of spurring the development of personal resources such as psychological resources (e.g., resilience) and material resources (e.g., salary) [21]. Stanley et al. [25] further called for future research to explore how the theory may explain and help facilitate the development of more positive individual characteristics. According to the B & B theory, positive affectivity is conducive to the acquisition of resources and the development of careers [21]. Second, the broaden hypothesis states that "positive emotions widen the array of thoughts, action urges, and percepts that spontaneously come to mind" [21] (p. 17). The broaden hypothesis highlights that positive emotion is conducive to regulating personal emotions by expanding cognitive scope and action scope [21]. Applying this theorizing, we posit that positive affectivity may be conducive to building enduring personal resources such as psychological resources (e.g., vigor) and material resources (e.g., level of pay) through self-regulation activities (e.g., cognitive reappraisal and expression suppression) [26]. Thus, B & B theory provides a comprehensive theoretical framework to explain the impact of positive affectivity on sustainable careers.

2.2. Hypothesis Development

2.2.1. Positive Affectivity and Sustainable Careers

As an important personal resource across one's career span [5], a sustainable career is broadly defined 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" [27] (p. 7). Based on this conceptualization, there is a convergence of opinion that variables reflecting well-being and productivity are key indicators of sustainable careers [5,28]. To date, scholars have explored the antecedents of various indicators of sustainable careers, including job satisfaction [29,30], career satisfaction [9,31] and job performance [6]. In fact, individual sustainable careers include three elements: happiness, health and productivity [5] and a recent review stated that future research should pay more attention to happiness (e.g., vigor) and productivity (e.g., level of pay) [13]. Vigor is typically conceptualized as being full of energy and having the willingness to make efforts in work, and is an important subjective career experience indicating employees' sustainable careers [32,33]. Meanwhile, sustainable careers are embodied by objective career experiences such as level of pay [10,34], which refers to various forms of remuneration obtained by employees for providing services to their organizations [35]. Although vigor and level of pay are widely recognized as important indicators of sustainable careers, there is no study investigating how to improve employees' sustainable careers indicated by vigor and level of pay. To fill this important theoretical gap, the aim of this study is to explore the effects of positive affectivity on vigor and level of pay based on the B & B theory [23].

The B & B theory points out that positive affectivity helps to accumulate personal resources and build individual psychological resources [36]. Within the B & B theory, vigor is a psychological resource [23]. Therefore, according to the B & B theory, we expect that positive affectivity is positively related to vigor. Specifically, individuals characterized by positive affectivity are dispositionally more prone to show enthusiasm, satisfaction and comfort in their work [37]. Thus, they have the ability to attain more physical strength and emotional energy at work. In addition, people with positive affectivity are always full of hope for the future [38]. Generally speaking, employees full of hope tend to believe that they have abilities to achieve work-related goals [39]. Hence, people with positive

affectivity are likely to actively strive for goals and have willingness to make efforts in their careers.

Unlike vigor, level of pay is a material resource within the B & B theory [21]. Therefore, according to the B & B theory, positive affectivity is expected to be positively related to level of pay. First, people with positive affectivity show better job performance than others in the face of a changing work environment [40]. Generally speaking, employees with high-quality job performance achieve a higher level of pay [41]. Thus, the experience of positive affectivity is likely to influence the level of pay in a positive way. Second, people with positive affectivity have a tendency to maintain good interpersonal relationships with supervisors [42]. Indeed, employees having good relationships with supervisors are likely to receive more rewards, such as level of pay [43]. Based on the above discussion, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. *Positive affectivity is positively related to sustainable careers indicated by vigor (1a) and level of pay (1b).*

2.2.2. The Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation

Why does positive affectivity, indicated by vigor and level of pay, link sustainable careers? The broaden hypothesis of the B & B theory points out that positive affectivity helps individuals build personal resources due to the function of positive affectivity in broadening the individual's cognitive and action scope [21]. Drawing on the B & B theory, Mielniczuk and Laguna (2020) suggested that positive affectivity is linked to the cognitive system and novel thinking, which in turn enhances personal growth [26]. Emotion regulation is defined as "a process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, and how they experience and express these emotions" [44] (p. 275). According to the B & B theory, we assume that positive relations between positive affectivity and sustainable careers, indicated by vigor and level of pay, are mediated by emotion regulation, which includes cognitive reappraisal and expression suppression.

Cognitive reappraisal is a cognitive regulation process [45] and involves explaining or re-evaluating the situation in which emotions are generated with a positive appraisal style [46]. Studies in psychology and neuroscience have shown that individuals who frequently use cognitive reappraisal tend to have better emotional outcomes and cope more effectively with stressful or challenging situations [22]. Based on the B & B theory, cognitive reappraisal is consistent with the cognitive broadening process and we anticipate that cognitive reappraisal mediates the relationship between positive affectivity and sustainable careers. Positive affectivity plays an important role in triggering cognitive reappraisal because employees with positive affectivity tend to show greater cognitive flexibility, which is conducive to taking a positive view to dealing with a challenging or stressful environment [23]. When employees broaden their cognitive scope through a positive perspective, they are likely to "build" vigor and level of pay in the workplace. In addition, positive affectivity is a signal that life is good and there are no threats readily apparent [47]. In such a safe and comfortable environment, employees tend to evoke the memory of positive events to adopt cognitive reappraisal strategy, which in turn has the ability to "build" new personal psychological resources and material resources such as vigor and level of pay [21]. Especially when faced with setbacks, those who engage in cognitive reappraisal tend to maintain a positive perspective more easily. This resilience can help maintain vigor. On the other hand, employees who can maintain clarity of thought and rational decision-making may be seen as valuable assets to the organization [22]. Their ability to effectively address complex challenges might lead to a high level of pay [22]. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. *Cognitive reappraisal plays a mediating role in the relationships between positive affectivity and sustainable careers indicated by vigor (2a) and level of pay (2b).*

Expression suppression represents a behavioral regulation process [44,45] and refers to the suppression of persistent undesirable emotional expression behavior when negative emotions are awakened [48]. People use this strategy to conform to social norms and maintain a positive impression [22]. According to the B & B theory, expression suppression is consistent with the action broadening process and we propose that expression suppression plays a mediating role in the relationship between positive affectivity and sustainable careers. Individuals with positive affectivity tend to have strong abilities to control themselves to avoid evoking unpleasant memories in a vicious environment, which is conducive to reducing undesirable emotional expression behavior [49]. The B & B theory states that when individuals broaden their action scope to avoid negative superficial behavior caused by negative emotion, they are likely to further “build” personal resources such as vigor and level of pay. Additionally, employees with positive affectivity have a clear psychological representation to identify the connection between their efforts and achieving valuable results [39]. These employees may realize that, by trying harder to engage in suppression behavior, they are actually trying to reduce emotional disorder. Considering that expression suppression is an effective strategy, employees with positive affectivity tend to adopt expression suppression, which in turn helps them “build” enduring personal psychological resources and material resources such as vigor and level of pay [21]. Especially, by suppressing outward emotional displays, employees may conserve their emotional energy [22] and this preservation of emotional resources can result in a higher overall level of vitality. On the other hand, employees who effectively suppress their emotions may be perceived by their superiors as more professional and emotionally composed. This perceived competence could contribute to favorable performance evaluations, which might lead to a high level of pay [22]. Therefore, we propose that:

Hypothesis 3. *Expression suppression plays a mediating role in the relationships between positive affectivity and sustainable careers indicated by vigor (3a) and level of pay (3b).*

2.2.3. The Moderating Role of Organizational Commitment

In the above process, it is worth noting that the initiative of choosing emotion regulation strategies will be influenced by personal attitudes [50]. Organizational commitment represents an individual’s recognition and trust in the goals and values of the organization, and it is an important employee attitude, consisting of value commitment, effort commitment and retention commitment [51,52]. In the case of high organizational commitment, employers may possess a greater motivation to proactively manage their emotions [53]. They are likely to channel their positive affectivity towards constructive cognitive reappraisal, which involves the reframing and reinterpretation of situations to mitigate potential challenges. This adaptive emotion regulation strategy, when coupled with high organizational commitment, is expected to amplify the positive effects of positive affectivity on sustainable careers. On the other hand, employees with stronger organizational commitment are more likely to exhibit emotional self-control and conformity to organizational norms [45]. This heightened commitment may lead them to carefully regulate their outward emotional expressions to align with workplace expectations, thereby potentially translating positive affectivity into vigor and a high level of pay. In contrast, employees with low organizational commitment do not attach importance to adopting emotion regulation strategies to meet the needs of challenging environments. Consequently, it is difficult to obtain the development of psychological resources and material resources. Taking these aspects together, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 4. *Organizational commitment moderates the indirect effect of positive affectivity on sustainable careers via cognitive reappraisal (4a) and expression suppression (4b).*

3. Method

3.1. Participants

According to the tent of the B & B theory [20] and to reduce the concern of common method bias [54], we conducted a time-lagged study with two waves of data collected 8 months apart. Specifically, participants were asked to provide information about demographic variables, positive affectivity, cognitive reappraisal, expression suppression and organizational commitment at Time 1. Eight months later (Time 2), participants were asked to provide information about vigor and level of pay. To seek out potential participants, we collaborated with a large state-owned communication company located in southern China. The enterprise has a huge employee system, including more than 2000 employees. Although data were gathered from a single organization, by implementing this practice, the potential effects of external variables, including organization characteristics, can be minimized [55]. It is worth noting that our sample from this organization included employees from diverse departments, such as the customer department (35.50%), network department (25.10%), marketing department (23.50%) and customer service center (15.90%).

With the director of human resources' support, we invited 1115 employees to engage in the survey via e-mail. The e-mail clarified the study's objective and guaranteed the confidentiality of participants' responses. Employees who were interested in participating could reply by e-mail. A total of 1115 questionnaires were distributed and 893 responses were received. Before formal analysis, we deleted some invalid responses according to the following criteria: (a) the participants chose the same option for most of the items; and (b) the participants did not complete the questionnaire. Finally, we obtained 580 valid responses. The average age of the sample was 29.49 years old ($SD = 4.31$) and the average organizational term was 6.11 years ($SD = 3.86$). In terms of gender, 28.44% were male and 71.56% were female. In terms of educational level, 28.56% had a master's degree or above and 51.18% had a bachelor's degree.

3.2. Instruments

Positive affectivity. Positive affectivity was measured with the 10 items of the PANAS Scale from Watson et al. [14] at Time 1. Each affective dimension is evaluated using 10 words associated with positive emotions (e.g., "excited", "interested", "active", "inspired", "proud", "determined", "strong", "enthusiastic", "attentive", "alert"). As positive affectivity is a stable individual difference, we used "general" as an instruction and sample items included "I generally feel excited." Respondents indicated their general feelings on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.92.

Cognitive reappraisal. Cognitive reappraisal was measured with the seven-item Cognitive Reappraisal Subscale from the Emotion Regulation Scale [56] at Time 1. The responses were based on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items included "I will try to change my view of the surrounding environment to make myself happier." The internal consistency of the scale was $\alpha = 0.90$.

Expression suppression. Expression suppression was measured with the seven-item Expression Suppression Subscale from the Emotion Regulation Scale [56] at Time 1. The responses were based on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items included "When I feel happy, I try not to show it." The internal consistency of the scale was $\alpha = 0.82$.

Organizational commitment. Organizational commitment was measured with the 15-item Organization Commitment Questionnaire [57] at Time 1. The responses were based on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Sample items included "I really care about the fate of this organization." The internal consistency of the scale was $\alpha = 0.92$.

Vigor. Vigor was measured with the three-item Vigor Subscale from the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9 Scale) [58] at Time 2. The responses were based

on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). Sample items included “I’m very vigorous at work.” The internal consistency of the scale was $\alpha = 0.80$.

Level of pay. Level of pay was measured with the five-item Level of Pay Scale developed by Blau et al. [59] at Time 2. The responses were based on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*a lot less*) to 4 (*a lot more*). Sample items included “Compared to relevant employees in similar organizations, my pay level is . . .” The internal consistency of the scale was $\alpha = 0.72$.

Control variables. Previous studies have shown that vigor and level of pay are affected by sociodemographic variables [60–62]. Thus, the participants’ age, organizational tenure, gender (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*) and education (1 = *associate and below*, 2 = *bachelor*, 3 = *master and above*) were controlled for in the current study.

3.3. Preliminary Analyses

First, we used Mplus 8.0 to perform confirmatory factor analysis to test the distinctiveness among the core constructs in this study. The results showed that the six-factor model distinguishing between positive affectivity, cognitive reappraisal, expression suppression, organizational commitment, vigor and level of pay was a better fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 1556.48$, $df = 545$, $\chi^2/df = 2.86$, $CFI = 0.91$, $TLI = 0.90$, $SRMR = 0.06$, $RMSEA = 0.06$) than the alternative models as follows: (a) the five-factor model in which vigor and level of pay were combined in one factor ($\chi^2 = 1949.46$, $df = 550$, $\chi^2/df = 3.54$, $CFI = 0.87$, $TLI = 0.86$, $SRMR = 0.07$, $RMSEA = 0.07$); (b) the four-factor model in which vigor, level of pay and organizational commitment were combined in one factor ($\chi^2 = 2699.98$, $df = 554$, $\chi^2/df = 4.87$, $CFI = 0.80$, $TLI = 0.79$, $SRMR = 0.08$, $RMSEA = 0.08$); (c) the three-factor model in which vigor, level of pay, organizational commitment and expression suppression were combined in one factor ($\chi^2 = 3893.77$, $df = 557$, $\chi^2/df = 6.99$, $CFI = 0.69$, $TLI = 0.67$, $SRMR = 0.11$, $RMSEA = 0.10$); (d) the two-factor model in which vigor, level of pay, organizational commitment, expression suppression and cognitive reappraisal were combined in one factor ($\chi^2 = 4395.38$, $df = 559$, $\chi^2/df = 7.86$, $CFI = 0.64$, $TLI = 0.62$, $SRMR = 0.11$, $RMSEA = 0.11$); and (e) the one-factor model in which all the latent variables were combined in one factor ($\chi^2 = 6166.75$, $df = 560$, $\chi^2/df = 11.01$, $CFI = 0.48$, $TLI = 0.45$, $SRMR = 0.13$, $RMSEA = 0.13$). Generally, the six-factor model was significantly better than the fitting index results of the other competitive models. Therefore, our measurement model had good discriminant validity.

Second, as the variables were collected from the same sources, potential common method bias remains a concern in this study [54]. Following the advice of Podsakoff and Organ [63], we adopted Harman’s single-factor test method to check the problem of common method bias. The results showed that 10 common factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted and the maximum variance interpretation rate of the first common factor was 27.57%, which was less than the critical standard [63]. Therefore, common method bias is minimized in the current study.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 reports the results of the descriptive statistical analysis and Pearson’s correlation analysis of all the variables.

As shown in Table 1, positive affectivity was positively correlated with vigor ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$) and level of pay ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, cognitive reappraisal was positively correlated with vigor ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$) and level of pay ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$). Expression suppression was positively correlated with vigor ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$) and level of pay ($r = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the results provided preliminary support for hypotheses 1 to 3.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	30.32	4.33									
2. Gender	0.52	0.50	0.06								
3. Education	2.13	0.68	0.10 *	−0.05							
4. Organizational tenure	7.13	3.73	0.80 ***	0.17 ***	0.13 *						
5. Positive affectivity	2.72	0.88	0.00	−0.12 **	0.00	−0.08					
6. Cognitive reappraisal	5.00	1.07	−0.01	−0.01	−0.01	−0.06	0.43 ***				
7. Expression suppression	3.85	1.03	−0.08	−0.07	−0.05	−0.12 **	0.19 ***	0.46 ***			
8. Organizational commitment	4.44	0.76	0.06	0.04	0.07	0.02	0.47 ***	0.50 ***	0.05		
9. Vigor	3.42	1.16	0.06	−0.06	0.00	0.01	0.39 ***	0.29 ***	0.16 ***	0.40 ***	
10. Level of pay	2.44	0.46	0.04	−0.01	−0.01	0.02	0.23 ***	0.18 ***	0.10 *	0.29 ***	0.43 ***

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

4.2. Hypothesis Testing

We used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test our conceptual model. The standardized regression coefficients of each path in the structural equation model are shown in Figure 2.

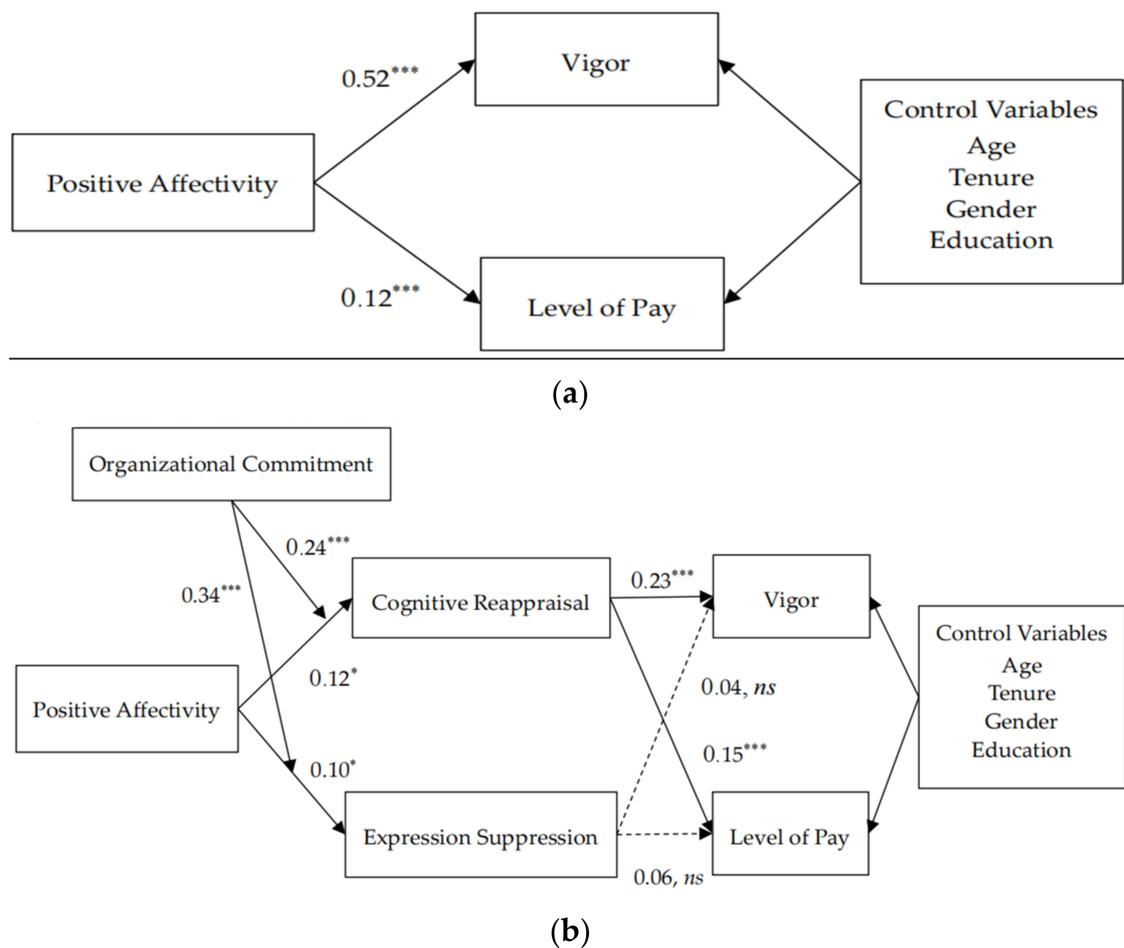


Figure 2. Results of structural model assessment. (a) Direct pathway and (b) indirect pathway. Notes: Standardized path coefficients are reported; for brevity, path coefficients for control variables are not reported but are available from the first author; * $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$, *ns* = not significant.

Hypothesis 1 stated that positive affectivity is positively related to sustainable careers indicated by vigor and level of pay. Figure 2 showed that, after controlling the four

demographic variables (age, organizational tenure, gender, education), positive affectivity was still positively related to vigor ($B = 0.52$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$) and level of pay ($B = 0.12$, $SE = 0.02$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, hypothesis 1a and hypothesis 1b were supported.

Hypothesis 2 stated that cognitive reappraisal plays a mediating role in the relationships between positive affectivity and sustainable careers indicated by vigor and level of pay. Figure 2 shows that positive affectivity had a positive impact on cognitive reappraisal ($B = 0.12$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.05$), which in turn was positively related to vigor ($B = 0.23$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$) and level of pay ($B = 0.15$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < 0.001$). The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect showed that positive affectivity was indirectly and positively related to both vigor (estimate: 0.10, 95% CI = 0.07, 0.14) and level of pay (estimate: 0.06, 95% CI = 0.04, 0.10). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported. Of note, expression suppression did not directly relate to vigor ($B = 0.04$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = 0.35$) or level of pay ($B = 0.06$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = 0.30$). The indirect effect was also not significant (indirect effect for vigor: 0.03, 95% CI = [-0.01, 0.06]; indirect effect for level of pay: ($B = 0.01$, 95% CI = [-0.02, 0.04]). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 stated that organizational commitment moderates the indirect effect of positive affectivity on sustainable careers via cognitive reappraisal and expression suppression. This was tested in Mplus 8.0 via moderated mediation analyses [64]. Table 2 shows that beginning with vigor, for organizational commitment, the positive indirect effect of positive affectivity on vigor via cognitive reappraisal was significant at lower (-SD, estimate: 0.05, 95% CI = 0.04, 0.06) versus higher organizational commitment (+SD, estimate: 0.10, 95% CI = 0.06, 0.16; difference = 0.05, 95% CI = 0.02, 0.08). A similar pattern emerged for level of pay, with the positive indirect effect stronger at high organizational commitment (+SD, estimate: 0.07, 95% CI = 0.04, 0.11) than low organizational commitment (-SD, estimate: 0.03, 95% CI = 0.01, 0.05; difference = 0.04, 95% CI = 0.02, 0.06). Thus, Hypothesis 4 (a) was supported. To clearly illustrate the moderating role of organizational commitment, Figures 3 and 4 were plotted. Figures 3 and 4 show that the effect of positive affectivity on sustainable careers indicated by vigor and level of pay was more pronounced when organizational commitment is high.

Table 2. The result of moderated mediation analyses.

Indirect Effect	Organizational Commitment	Estimate	95% CI
Positive affectivity → Cognitive reappraisal → Vigor	High	0.10	[0.06, 0.16]
	Low	0.05	[0.04, 0.06]
	Difference	0.05	[0.02, 0.08]
Positive affectivity → Cognitive reappraisal → Level of pay	High	0.07	[0.04, 0.11]
	Low	0.03	[0.01, 0.05]
	Difference	0.04	[0.02, 0.06]

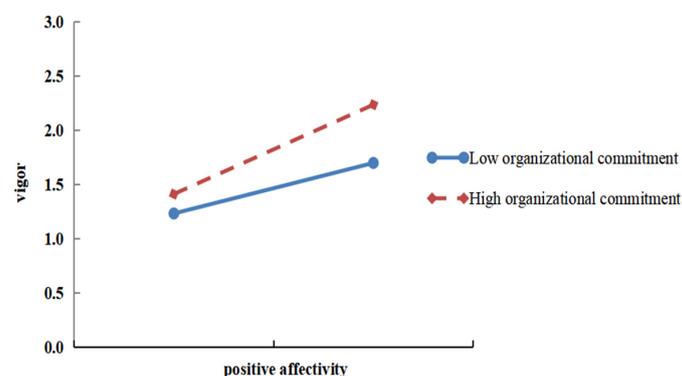


Figure 3. Organizational commitment as a moderator in the relationship between positive affectivity and vigor.

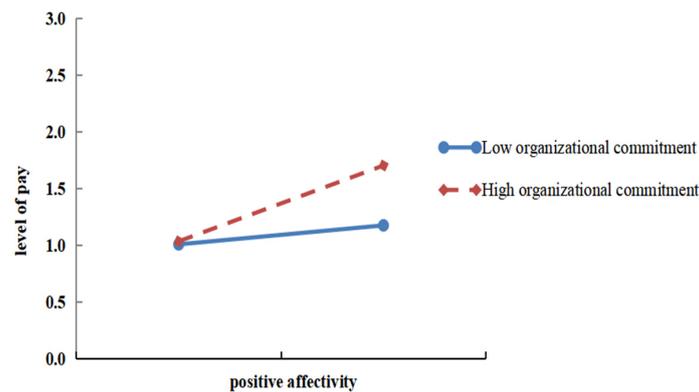


Figure 4. Organizational commitment as a moderator in the relationship between positive affectivity and level of pay.

5. Discussion

5.1. Discussion of Empirical Results

Recently, interest in how to improve employees' sustainable careers has been growing rapidly. Prior studies mostly focused on the role of contextual factors [6–10] and neglected the role of agentic factors. In a recent review, Vos et al. called for more research to identify the predicting role of agentic factors [5]. The B & B theory suggests that positive individual characteristics, such as positive affectivity, are conducive to the acquisition of resources and the development of careers [21]. Positive affectivity may be a neglected key predictor and it is vital to explore its mechanism and boundaries. The main purpose of this study was to examine *whether* positive affectivity has an effect on sustainable careers and *how* and *when* positive affectivity affects employees' sustainable careers. First, the results showed that positive affectivity positively predicted employees' sustainable careers indicated by vigor ($B = 0.52, p < 0.001$) and level of pay ($B = 0.12, p < 0.001$), which means that Hypothesis 1 was supported and positive individual characteristic such as positive affectivity can enhance the sustainable career. Second, based on the B & B theory, we introduced the strategies of emotion regulation as the mediators. The results showed that cognitive reappraisal mediated the positive relationships between positive affectivity and sustainable careers indicated by vigor (estimate: 0.10, 95% CI = 0.07, 0.14) and level of pay (estimate: 0.06, 95% CI = 0.04, 0.10). However, expression suppression did not play the same mediating role ($B = 0.01, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-0.02, 0.04]$), which means that considering the mediating role, only Hypothesis 2 was supported. In fact, while expression suppression can be effective in certain situations, it is also associated with potential negative consequences. Research has shown that suppressing emotions can lead to increased reduced emotional well-being [65]. Certain emotion theorists posit that the ability to flexibly regulate emotions is more crucial for adjustment than the mere act of suppressing emotional expression [66]. These may be the explanations for the invalidation of express suppression. Finally, as we expected, organizational commitment moderated the indirect effects of positive affectivity on sustainable careers via cognitive reappraisal. Specifically, the indirect effect is more pronounced among employees who exhibit a higher level of organizational commitment than for those with a lower level of organizational commitment, which means that Hypothesis 4 was supported.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

First, this study provides new insight into the antecedents of sustainable careers from an agentic perspective. A sustainable career is the key to employees' personal growth and the high performance of organizations [67]. In recent years, sustainable careers have become a hot topic in the field of vocational psychology and organizational behavior. However, these studies mainly focus on measurement indicators and outcome variables [67,68]. Little research explores the antecedents of positive affectivity [69] and these limited studies

mainly focus on contextual factors, such as supervisor support [6] and human resources practices [8,9], ignoring agentic factors. In fact, agentic factors play a leading role in the model of sustainable careers [11]. In a recent literature review, Vos et al. [5] called for research to identify the predicting role of agency factors such as individual characteristics. Based on the B & B theory, this study found the key predicting role of positive affectivity on sustainable careers, as indicated by vigor and level of pay.

Secondly, this study deepens the understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying the relationship between positive affectivity and work-related outcomes. Since positive affectivity was introduced into the fields of vocational psychology and organizational behavior, scholars have begun to pay attention to the relationship between positive affectivity and work-related outcomes [70,71]. However, to date, extant studies have frequently been absent of theory, with scholars explaining relational patterns without a comprehensive conceptual framework [70]. Based on the broaden hypothesis and the build hypothesis of the B & B theory, we constructed a dual-process model of positive affectivity affecting sustainable careers to explain how positive affectivity affects work-related outcomes.

Thirdly, this study provides new support for the B & B theory. The B & B theory argues that positive affectivity can help broaden an individual's cognitive and action scope, which in turn builds additional personal resources [72]. Although extant research introduced the B & B theory as a conceptual framework, it did not take both the build hypothesis and the broaden hypothesis into consideration. We used a time-lagged design to examine how positive affectivity affects sustainable careers via dual processes, which is conducive to providing empirical evidence for both the build hypothesis and the broaden hypothesis of the B & B theory. Of note, every theory has its boundaries, and the B & B theory also needs to find its theoretical boundary [73]. As another "motivating force", organizational commitment, representing the degree of organizational belonging and recognition, is conducive to strengthening the occurrence of employees' positive behavior [52]. By introducing organizational commitment as a boundary condition, we further offer new empirical evidence of when positive affectivity promotes positive outcomes such as sustainable careers.

5.3. Practical Implications

Furthermore, this study also offers practical implications for how to improve an individual's sustainable career in the context of a challenging work environment. Based on the result that positive affectivity has a positive impact on employees' sustainable careers, managers of companies can implement the following strategies to support employees' career sustainability through selection and socialization practices. On one hand, from the standpoint of selection, managers may measure employees' positive affectivity when hiring employees. Specifically, employers should clearly identify the specific positive emotional traits they are looking for in employees. This could include activeness, interest, enthusiasm and pride. On the other hand, from a socialization standpoint, based on the result that cognitive reappraisal mediates the positive relationships between positive affectivity and sustainable careers, managers may guide employees in developing positive emotion regulation strategies such as cognitive reappraisal. For instance, managers can guide employees in such a way that, instead of viewing a difficult project as a burden, they can see it as an opportunity for growth and development. Meanwhile, based on the result that organizational commitment moderates the indirect effect of positive affectivity on sustainable careers, managers may foster the organizational commitment. Acknowledging and valuing diversity, offering growth opportunities and recognizing individual contributions all contribute to employees' sense of belonging and commitment.

In addition, our research offers implications for employees. First, our research demonstrated that positive affectivity is conducive to the acquisition of resources such as vigor and level of pay. This suggests that to obtain sustainable careers, employees should appreciate and savor positive affectivity by measures such as recognizing positive emotions as an integral aspect of stable personality. Second, in view of the mediating role of cognitive

reappraisal, employees should practice cognitive reappraisal. For example, employees may work on developing this skill by challenging negative thoughts and focusing on the positive aspects of challenging situations.

5.4. Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study obtained some valuable research findings, it still has the following limitations. First, in order to minimize the impact of external factors, including organization characteristics, we selected participants exclusively from one organization [55]. While this decision enhances the internal validity of our study, it limits the applicability of our findings to a broader context. Therefore, future research should further explore whether the results could be extended to more other organizational contexts. Second, although the data were collected at two time points, our study is cross-sectional in nature [74], which means that we cannot rigorously establish a causal relationship between positive affectivity, cognitive reappraisal, expression suppression, vigor and level of pay. In the future, rigorous longitudinal design is needed to replicate the findings.

Third, although we found the boundary role of organizational commitment in the relationship between positive affectivity and emotion regulation, there may still be other reasons to explain the individual differences in the effectiveness of positive affectivity besides organizational commitment in the context of a challenging work environment. Positive affectivity is always required in the workplace. Therefore, future research should further explore which organizational variables are related to the effectiveness of positive affectivity. Finally, this study selected only vigor and level of pay as the measurement indicators of sustainable careers. In fact, a sustainable career is a multi-dimensional concept [5]. In the future, more indicators of sustainable careers could be selected to investigate the influence of positive affectivity on employees' sustainable careers, in order to verify the findings of this study and expand the generalization of the research conclusions.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, based on the B & B theory, this study finds that positive affectivity positively influences employees' sustainable careers indicated by vigor and level of pay through cognitive reappraisal, and organizational commitment strengthens the indirect effects of positive affectivity on sustainable careers via cognitive reappraisal. However, expression suppression did not play a mediating role. We provide new insight into the antecedents of sustainable careers from an agentic perspective and find the psychological mechanism and boundary condition of the positive affectivity-sustainable careers link. These findings examine and provide new support for the B & B theory and have important practical implications for how to foster employees' sustainable careers in the workplace.

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