
Human capital sustainability leadership e benessere edonico oltre i tratti di personalità nei lavoratori

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Sommario

Il presente studio ha analizzato le relazioni tra *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership* e benessere edonico (*Positive Affect at work*, *Negative Affect at work* e Soddisfazione Lavorativa), controllando l'effetto dei tratti di personalità. A 206 lavoratori italiani sono stati somministrati il *Big Five Questionnaire* (BFQ), il *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule at Work* (PANASW), la *Job Satisfaction Scale* (JSS) e la *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale* (HCSLS). I risultati hanno mostrato che la *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership* ha spiegato un'ulteriore percentuale di varianza nel benessere edonico (*Positive Affect*, *Negative Affect* e Soddisfazione Lavorativa) oltre ai tratti di personalità. Questi risultati evidenziano il valore della *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership* nel promuovere il benessere dei lavoratori, suggerendo prospettive future per la ricerca e l'intervento.

Parole chiave

Human Capital Sustainability Leadership, Benessere edonico, *Positive Affect at work*, *Negative Affect at work*, Soddisfazione Lavorativa, Tratti di Personalità.

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Human Capital Sustainability Leadership and Hedonic Well-Being Beyond Personality Traits in Workers

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Abstract

The present study analyzed the relationships between human capital sustainability leadership and hedonic well-being (positive affect at work, negative affect at work, and job satisfaction), controlling for the effect of personality traits. Two hundred and six Italian workers were administered the *Big Five Questionnaire* (BFQ), the *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule at Work* (PANASW), the *Job Satisfaction Scale* (JSS), and the *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale* (HCSLS). The results showed that human capital sustainability leadership explained additional variance in hedonic well-being (positive affect at work, negative affect at work, and job satisfaction) beyond personality traits. These findings highlight the value of human capital sustainability leadership in promoting well-being of workers, suggesting future perspectives for research and intervention.

Keywords

Human capital sustainability leadership, Hedonic well-being, Positive affect at work, Negative affect at work, Job satisfaction, Personality traits.

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Introduction

Workers' well-being emerged as a central aspect in organization research because well-being favors engagement, motivation, and productivity (Peiró et al., 2019, 2021; Robertson & Cooper, 2010; Johnson et al., 2018). On the other hand, the mental health of workers represents a serious concern in the workplace: when workers experience mental health difficulties, organizations can incur significant costs. In contrast, investing in preventive mental health support for workers constitutes a source of competitive advantage for organizations, reducing costs connected with mental health problems of workers and enhancing productivity (Kelloway et al., 2023). Promoting healthy organizations (Di Fabio et al., 2020; Peiró et al., 2019, 2021) is thus fundamental to enhancing the virtuous circle between healthy workers and successful performance (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) for healthy business (Di Fabio, 2017a).

In the literature, leadership emerged with implications for workers' well-being (AzilaGbetor et al., 2024; Lundqvist & Wallo, 2023; Specchia et al., 2021). Human capital sustainability leadership (HCSL; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018, 2023) is an advanced leadership construct focusing on sustainable development of human capital in organizations as well as flourishing of workers. The *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale* (HCSLS; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) was developed within the current framework of the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development (PSSD) (Di Fabio, 2017b, 2021; Di Fabio & Cooper, 2023; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018, 2023; Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018, 2020; Rosen & Di Fabio, 2023). The PSSD research and intervention area is included in the transdisciplinary perspective of sustainability science (Komiyama & Takeuchi, 2006; Sahle et al., 2025; Takeuchi et al., 2017), using psychological lenses to offer contributions to sustainability research and practices. Paying specific attention to psychological aspects could help to better understand how sustainable development can be reached and kept over time (Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018).

Human capital sustainability leadership (HCSL; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) is an advanced approach of leadership that places workers' flourishing and sustainable development at the core of organizational success. HCSL is conceptualized as a higher order construct, incorporating four leadership facets: ethical, sustainable, mindful, and servant leadership. Leaders who embody HCSL act ethically, making fair and transparent decisions while maintaining integrity and respect in all interactions (ethical leadership). They adopt a sustainable perspective, thinking long-term and fostering continuous learning, talent development, and the appreciation of diversity (sustainable leadership). HCSL leaders remain aware of their own emotions and actions, staying present and responsive even under high-pressure situations (mindful leadership). Finally, these leaders prioritize the development and well-being of their team members, on the basis of a

moral responsibility towards them, placing personal needs of workers alongside organizational objectives (servant leadership). HCSL is primarily an advanced leadership style for managerial roles aligned with the challenges of the current liquid and continuously changing world of work. A valuable specificity is that it can also be considered in terms of informal leadership in relation to other roles of workers in the organizations, useful also for collaboration among peers (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018; Peiró et al., 2023). HCSL fosters a culture where both workers and organizations flourish together, creating an environment conducive to a virtuous circle between well-being and performance (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018).

In the literature, well-being is commonly divided into two broad approaches: hedonic well-being (Diener, 1984) and eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Hedonic well-being (Diener, 1984) encompasses both emotional affective components (positive and negative affects) and cognitive evaluation in terms of life satisfaction. Essentially, it reflects how good people feel and how satisfied they are globally with their life (Diener, 1984). On the other hand, eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 2008) emphasizes personal growth, self-realization, and living in accordance with one's true values and potential. It is less about momentary happiness and more about meaningfulness and purpose (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

In the literature, human capital sustainability leadership (HCSL, Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) showed positive associations with eudaimonic well-being in terms of meaning and flourishing both in life and at work (Peiró et al., 2023). Until now the associations of human capital sustainability leadership with hedonic well-being have not been studied. Furthermore, because personality traits contribute to well-being (Anglim et al., 2025; Joshanloo, 2023), it is important to control the effects of personality traits in the associations between HCSL and well-being.

With the relationship between HCSL and hedonic well-being not yet having been examined in the literature to the best of our knowledge, the present study aims to analyze the relationships between human capital sustainability leadership and hedonic well-being (positive affect at work, negative affect at work, and job satisfaction), controlling for the effects of personality traits.

The following hypotheses were formulated:

- *H1*. A positive relationship will emerge between HCSL and positive affect at work.
- *H2*. HCSL will account for an additional percentage of variance in positive affect at work beyond that accounted for by personality traits.
- *H3*. An inverse relationship will emerge between HCSL and negative affect at work.
- *H4*. HCSL will account for an additional percentage of variance in negative affect at work beyond that accounted for by personality traits.
- *H5*. A positive relationship will emerge between HCSL and job satisfaction.

- H6. HCSL will account for an additional percentage of variance in job satisfaction beyond that accounted for by personality traits.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and six Italian workers with a mean age of 45.74 years ($SD = 11.70$). Among them, 41.75% males; 58.25% female.

Measures

Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ; Caprara et al., 1993). It consists of 132 items on a Likert scale (from 1 = *Absolutely false* to 5 = *Absolutely true*). It detected five dimensions: Extraversion («I find it easy to talk to people I don't know»), Cronbach's alpha .81; Agreeableness («If necessary, I don't shy away from helping strangers»), Cronbach's alpha .71; Conscientiousness («I follow through with the decisions I've made») Cronbach's alpha .81; Emotional Stability («I don't usually overreact even to strong emotions»), Cronbach's alpha .90; and Openness («I am a person who is always looking for new experiences»), Cronbach's alpha .75.

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule at Work (PANASW; Di Fabio & Gori, 2021). It includes 20 adjectives: 10 for positive affect (PA) (examples: «interested», «determined», «enthusiastic»; 10 for negative affect (NA) (examples: «afraid», «irritable», «distressed»). In the PANASW, participants are asked to rate the intensity of the feelings they generally experience at work, using a scale from 1 = *Very slightly or not at all* to 5 = *Extremely*. Regarding reliability, Cronbach's alphas are .86 for positive affect at work and .89 for negative affect at work.

Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS; Judge et al., 1998; Italian version Di Fabio, 2018). The scale includes five items with a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*). Examples of items are: «I find genuine pleasure in my work»; «Most days I am enthusiastic about my work». Cronbach's alpha is .89.

Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale (HCSLS; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018). It is composed of 16 items on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = *Not at all* to 5 = *Very much*). Higher-order construct including four specific leadership styles: ethical («I act by giving an example of doing tasks in an ethically correct manner»), sustainable («I leave out the superfluous by focusing the resources on the crucial aspects of work»), mindful («I put myself in the shoes of my collaborators when they are doing tasks»), and servant leadership («In general, I show interest in the professional and personal lives of my collaborators»). Cronbach's alpha is .94.

Procedure

Participants completed the questionnaires during group sessions and provided informed consent beforehand. All procedures complied with current Italian data protection and privacy laws. To reduce potential order effects, the sequence in which the questionnaires were administered was counterbalanced across participants.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analyses, and hierarchical regression methods, all executed in IBM SPSS Statistics.

Results

In Table 1, the correlations among BFQ, PA at work, NA at work, JS and HCSL are reported.

Table 1

Correlations Among BFQ, PA at Work, NA at Work, JS and HCSL

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. BFQ Extraversion	–								
2. BFQ Agreeableness	.15*	–							
3. BFQ Conscientiousness	.13	.04	–						
4. BFQ Emotional stability	.35**	.24**	.02	–					
5. BFQ Openness	.39**	.20**	.18**	.24**	–				
6. PA at work	.48**	.21**	.31**	.31**	.25**	–			
7. NA at work	-.32**	-.25**	-.12	-.38**	-.11	-.48**	–		
8. JS	.21**	.21**	.27**	.34**	-.04	.62**	-.47**	–	
9. HCSL	.38**	.34**	.29**	.25**	.31**	.52**	-.46**	.51**	–

Note. N = 206. * < .05, ** < .01.

BFQ = Big Five Questionnaire

PA = Positive Affect at Work

NA = Negative Affect at Work

JS = Job Satisfaction

HCSL = Human Capital Sustainability Leadership

Three hierarchical regression analyses were carried out with HCSL as the independent variable, and PA at work, NA at work, and JS separately as dependent variables.

For the first hierarchical regression (Table 2), personality traits (BFQ) entered at step 1 explained 33% of the variance in positive affect at work. When human capital sustainability leadership was added at step 2, the model remained significant and accounted for an additional 8% of the variance (total $R^2 = .41$). For the second hierarchical regression (Table 3), personality traits (BFQ) entered at step 1 explained 22% of the variance in negative affect at work. When human capital sustainability leadership was added at step 2, the model remained significant and accounted for an additional 9% of the variance (total $R^2 = .31$). For the third hierarchical regression (Table 4), personality traits (BFQ) entered at step 1 explained 25% of the variance in job satisfaction. When human capital sustainability leadership was added at step 2, the model remained significant and accounted for an additional 15% of the variance (total $R^2 = .40$).

Table 2

Hierarchical Regression. The Contribution of Personality Traits (BFQ) and Human Capital Sustainability Leadership (HCSL) to Positive Affect (PA) at Work

	PA at work
	β
<i>Step 1</i>	
BFQ Extraversion	.37**
BFQ Agreeableness	.12
BFQ Conscientiousness	.26**
BFQ Emotional Stability	.14
BFQ Openness	.10
<i>Step 2</i>	
HCSL	.33**
R^2 step 1	.33***
ΔR^2 step 2	.08***
R^2 total	.41***

Note. $N = 206$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

BFQ = Big Five Questionnaire

HCSL = Human Capital Sustainability Leadership

PA = Positive Affect at Work

Table 3

Hierarchical Regression. The Contribution of Personality Traits (BFQ) and Human Capital Sustainability Leadership (HCSL) to Negative Affect (NA) at Work

	NA
	β
<i>Step 1</i>	
BFQ Extraversion	-.22**
BFQ Agreeableness	-.17*
BFQ Conscientiousness	-.10
BFQ Emotional Stability	-.28**
BFQ Openness	-.09
<i>Step 2</i>	
HCSL	-.36**
R^2 step 1	.22***
ΔR^2 step 2	.09***
R^2 total	.31***

Note. $N = 206$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

BFQ = Big Five Questionnaire

HCSL = Human Capital Sustainability Leadership

NA = Negative Affect at Work

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression. The Contribution of Personality Traits (BFQ) and Human Capital Sustainability Leadership (HCSL) to Job Satisfaction (JS)

	JS
	β
<i>Step 1</i>	
BFQ Extraversion	.13
BFQ Agreeableness	.16*
BFQ Conscientiousness	.29**
BFQ Emotional Stability	.31**
BFQ Openness	.25**

<i>Step 2</i>	
Job Satisfaction	.46**
<i>R² step 1</i>	.25***
ΔR^2 step 2	.15***
<i>R² total</i>	.40***

Note. $N = 206$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

BFQ = Big Five Questionnaire

HCSL = Human Capital Sustainability Leadership

JS = Job Satisfaction

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the associations between HCSL and hedonic well-being at the workplace (positive affect at work, negative affect at work, and job satisfaction), controlling for the effect of personality traits. The results of the present study confirmed all the formulated hypotheses.

We expect that HCSL is positively related to positive affect at work (H1). In the present study, workers who care about ethics, mindfulness, sustainability, and employee growth (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) perceived more positive affect at work. This advanced leadership style (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) appears to make workers have more positive emotions at the workplace (Peiró et al., 2023). In this study, even after considering personality traits, HCSL maintains its role in positive affect at work (H2). In this study, HCSL seems able to increase positive emotions of workers at workplace over personality traits.

HCSL is expected to be negatively related to negative affect at work (H3). In the present study, workers who act mindfully, ethically, and with a sustainable and servant mindset (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) perceived fewer negative emotions at work. In the present study, HCSL also explained incremental variance in negative affect at work beyond personality traits (H4). The participants of the present study who use a supportive and sustainability-focused leadership style (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) perceived fewer negative emotions (Peiró et al., 2023).

We also expected that HCSL to be positively related to job satisfaction (H5). In this study, workers who focus on fairness, ethics, sustainability, and employee growth (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) perceived more satisfaction in their job. Finally, in the present study HCSL explained additional variance in job satisfaction, controlling for personality traits. The results seem to suggest that in this study HCSL gives an incremental contribution to job satisfaction beyond personality traits, underling the value of this advanced leadership style (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) to be satisfied with one's job.

Even if the results of this study are promising, some limitations need to be mentioned. The participants do not represent Italian workers of all Italian areas. For this reason, future studies should include workers from other regions of Italy. It would also be useful to carry out this research in other countries, in order to compare results across different cultural contexts. Furthermore, this is a cross-sectional study, limiting the possibility to infer causal relationships among the examined variables. Future studies adopting a longitudinal design should be conducted to better clarify the causal relationships among these variables.

If future studies confirm these results, they may suggest new directions for improving workers' well-being, especially from a prevention perspective. In particular, these findings could be useful in a primary prevention perspective (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016; Kenny & Hage, 2009; Hage et al., 2007) and in a strength-based prevention perspective (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021), underlining the promising value of human capital sustainability leadership as an increasable resource to be implemented for promoting workers' well-being. Personality traits are usually considered stable in the literature (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Instead, human capital sustainability leadership can be developed and strengthened through specific interventions. By supporting the development of HCSL (Di Fabio et al., 2023; Di Fabio & Gori, 2021; Palazzeschi & Di Fabio, 2025), organizations may increase workers' well-being, contributing to more sustainable and healthy workplaces (Di Fabio, 2017a, 2024; Di Fabio et al., 2020; Peiró et al., 2019, 2021; Di Fabio & Cooper, 2023).

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