

Proactive career support and employee thriving: The mediating role of job content plateau and the moderating role of political skill

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Abstract

Despite the growing empirical research on how work contexts enable employees to thrive, the majority focuses on employee's proximal, local work units. This study explores how and when contextual factors beyond local work environments affect employee thriving. Based on the socially embedded model of thriving, we posit that proactive career support implemented by the organization, as a factor featured in larger organizational contexts, fosters thriving via reducing job content plateau. We further contend that employees' political skill strengthens this role of proactive career support. As expected, our three-wave data demonstrates a positive indirect effect of the organization's proactive career

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support on thriving as mediated by job content plateau. For employees with stronger political skill, proactive career support is more likely to reduce job content plateau and, consequently, promotes employee thriving. From a practitioner perspective, these findings shed light on the importance of organizations' proactive career support in contributing to a thriving workforce, as well as when the benefits of this support can be enlarged.

KEYWORDS

job content plateau, political skill, proactive career support, thriving, human resource management

INTRODUCTION

The increasing emphasis on employee growth has prompted organizations to enhance human capital and develop a sustainable workforce (Xu et al., 2019). This trend has stimulated a surging research interest in employee thriving (Kleine et al., 2019), a positive psychological state in which workers experience learning (i.e., acquisition and utilization of new knowledge) and vitality (i.e., feelings of aliveness and energy) simultaneously (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Thriving is a “generic-level, broad umbrella that mirrors potential positive performance/behaviors, progress, and well-being” (Jiang et al., 2019, p. 801). Research suggests that thriving enables employees to monitor their progress of growth and well-being and thus make adaptive choices in work and career environments to benefit both themselves and the organization (Jiang et al., 2020). Some identified benefits include better health and performance, higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment, more organizational citizenship behaviors, and less burnout (Kleine et al., 2019; Porath et al., 2012).

Given these benefits, researchers have devoted growing attention to factors that may enable employee thriving. The socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005) emphasizes local work contexts as the primary source of enablers of thriving. By local work context, we refer to the immediate, proximal settings in which employees operate, such as their team dynamics, supervisory relationships, and day-to-day job features. These contexts include social structural features and resources that are directly experienced by employees in their work team, unit, or department. Research has reported enablers of thriving within these local settings, such as favorable workplace climates, job characteristics, leader–member exchange, supportive leadership, mentoring, co-worker social support, knowledge, and positive meaning (Jiang et al., 2020; Kleine et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2019). In contrast, larger work environments refer to broader, more distal organization-level factors, such as organizational policies, formal structure, organizational culture, and institutional systems. While scattered research has explored the impacts of larger work environments—for example, showing that perceived organizational support fuels thriving (Kleine et al., 2019), or that challenging larger contexts constrain the positive effect of local contexts on employee thriving (Xu et al., 2019)—this body of work remains limited and ambiguous. Specifically, it is yet to clarify what specific types of larger supportive

context can enable thriving, let alone how and when such support can exert influence on thriving. These areas are important omissions, considering that not all types of support in larger organizational contexts may drive employees' cognitive and affective states (Howland & Simpson, 2014) and that organizational support may not benefit employees universally (Thompson et al., 2020). Unless these gaps are resolved, we are unable to generate finer grained insights into how organizations can craft a broader context beyond employees' proximal work environments to boost their thriving.

To advance these areas, we examine a model (Figure 1), which highlights proactive career support from human resource management (HRM) as an antecedent of thriving, focusing on job content plateau as a mediator and political skill as a moderator. Informed by prior researchers (e.g., Kraimer et al., 2009; Savickas, 1997; Vakola, 2016), we define proactive career support as active assistance initiated by HRM to facilitate positive changes, movements, and prospects in employees' professional growth. Extending Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) thriving model, we focus on proactive career support as a contextual enabler, which is outside of employees' local work context, because thriving communicates growth and self-development in a professional setting larger than local work units (Porath et al., 2012). Distinct from perceived organizational support, which was previously examined as a generic factor featured in larger organizational contexts (Kleine et al., 2019), proactive career support is a more specific HRM practice capturing the active, dedicated nature of career assistance initiated and activated by the organization. As researchers explained, organizational support and/or general HRM practices (e.g., Taneva & Arnold, 2017) are more of a passive nature, as they mainly indicate the availability of support and involve carrying out required actions (Vakola, 2016).

We contend that job content plateau, a specific type of career plateau indicating a lateral stagnation wherein employees perceive job tasks to lack challenge or responsibility (Milliman, 1992; Yang et al., 2019), will serve as a mediator between proactive career support and employee thriving. The choice of job content plateau as a mediator is rooted in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005), which is the core foundation of the socially embedded model of thriving and its derivations (Spreitzer & Porath, 2014). Job content plateau reflects a status where employees' basic needs (e.g., needs for competence and autonomy) are unmet, as it is inherently tied to a blockage of career growth by learning and by freedom of choice at work (Feldman & Weitz, 1988). The associated lack of challenges and learning opportunities (Milliman, 1992; Yang et al., 2019) incurs negative affective experiences (McCleese et al., 2007), indicating a threat to employee thriving. Thus, considering that such a plateau can be alleviated by organizations' supportive practices (Yang et al., 2019), we may expect that reduced job content plateau accounts for the effect of proactive career support on employee thriving.

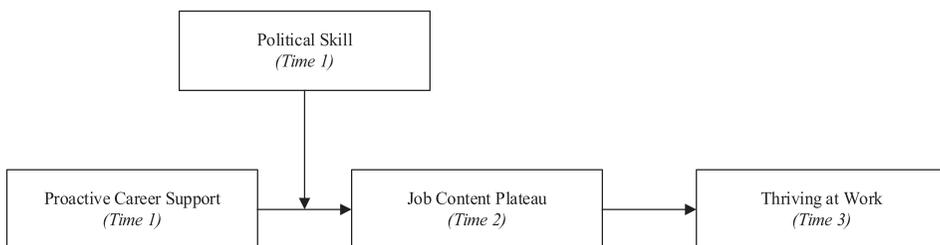


FIGURE 1 Conceptual model.

Since employees' job and career experiences also depend on their mobilization and/or utilization of relevant resources in professional contexts (Jiang et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2012; Xu et al., 2019), we further propose that political skill will moderate the influence of HRM's proactive career support. Political skill refers to "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ahearn et al., 2004, p. 311). Political skill, accumulating through work experience across the professional spectrum, is a personal resource that can be shaped and applied in local work contexts (Blickle et al., 2010). Politically skilled individuals would suffer less in undesirable situations and benefit more in desirable situations due to their ability to navigate social and structural resources (Cullen et al., 2018; Kumar & Mishra, 2017). Therefore, we propose that the role of proactive career support in reducing job content plateaus and consequently maintaining employee thriving will be enlarged by political skill.

This study has important contributions. First, although employees' sense of thriving can originate from the organizational context beyond local work units (Spreitzer et al., 2005), very limited empirical attention is paid to how thriving is affected by this wider context (Kleine et al., 2019). We advance this area by identifying HRM's proactive career support as a new antecedent that represents a specific supportive context beyond local environments, broadening the current focus of the thriving literature on generic organizational support (e.g., Kleine et al., 2019). Through this way, we also shift the focus of HRM and careers literature from the *availability* or *accessibility* of career resources (e.g., training programs and ability-enhancement activities), which is of a passive nature (Taneva & Arnold, 2017), to the *proactivity* of HRM practices. Second, by examining job content plateau as a mediator, we provide the earliest explanation about the process through which HRM's proactive support practices influence thriving. We reveal that the proactive provision of career support can remove lateral blockage of professional growth to maintain employees' sense of thriving. Third, verifying an important boundary condition, we highlight that political skill is a critical personal resource which employees can leverage to maximize the benefits of the organization's proactive career support. Most studies on political skill concentrate on its moderating role in the effects of other individual variables on work outcomes (e.g., Kranefeld et al., 2020). Thus, our study also contributes to the political skill literature by providing additional evidence that confirms its function as a moderator in mobilizing contextual resources for positive career and work outcomes. Altogether, answering the long-lasting call for investigating contextual factors beyond proximal work units (Spreitzer et al., 2005), we extend and enrich Spreitzer et al.'s thriving model by recognizing the effect of proactive career support on thriving and by clarifying the mechanism and boundary condition underlying this effect.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Thriving at work

Characterized by both learning and vitality, thriving captures cognitive and affective states of psychological experience. Learning reflects the sense that individuals are gaining and applying knowledge and skills, while vitality indicates the sense that individuals are feeling energy and aliveness. These two components together improve individual functioning and adaptability at work (Spreitzer et al., 2005). According to the socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer

et al., 2005), learning and vitality are not derived solely from employees' own minds or independent of work contexts where they are situated. Instead, certain resources (e.g., knowledge, positive meaning, and relational and affective resources) and social structural characteristics (e.g., decision-making discretion, information sharing, and atmosphere of trust/respect) embedded in local work contexts play important roles in shaping employee thriving. These factors become nutriments of thriving as they trigger personal agency, such as actively engaging in exploratory behaviors, focusing on job tasks, and heedfully connecting to others (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

In theorizing the socially embedded model of thriving, Spreitzer et al. (2005) primarily focused on immediate work contexts (i.e., local work units and the resources gained/applicable in the doing of work) while largely neglecting the broader organizational contexts with which employees are affiliated. However, Spreitzer et al. acknowledged that larger work contexts could exert influence on employees and highlighted the importance of considering contextual characteristics beyond proximal work environments. As stated earlier, scattered attempts have begun to attend to wider organizational contexts. Spreitzer and Porath's (2014) conceptualization of contextual features is extended to environmental volatility (e.g., organizational upheaval creating uncertainties), which would inhibit thriving. Empirically, Xu et al. (2019) found that spatial crowding across the organizational environment constrains the functions of local contexts (e.g., leader-member exchange) in fostering thriving. To advance this area, we consider the organization's proactive career support, which is an active HRM practice implemented at a wider organization level, as the focal contextual variable.

Proactive career support, job content plateau, and thriving

We argue that HRM's proactive career support, due to its potential to satisfy basic psychological needs, will alleviate perceived job content plateau and, in turn, promote employees to thrive (i.e., sensing learning and vitality). Based on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), when employees are in a self-determined status where they are offered choices, have volition, and are intrinsically motivated, they are likely to be vitalizing and growing (Spreitzer & Porath, 2014). This self-determination is blocked when basic psychological needs (i.e., needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness; Gagné & Deci, 2005) are not fulfilled. As mentioned earlier, job content plateau reflects at least a partial failure of need satisfaction; for it indicates a situation where employees perceive limited opportunities and freedom to obtain tasks or responsibilities that help them grow (Feldman & Weitz, 1988; Kaur & Kaur, 2021; Milliman, 1992). However, we expect that HRM's proactive career support can alleviate perceived job content plateau by fulfilling employees' basic psychological needs.

HRM's proactive career support involves initiatives intentionally designed to promote employees' ongoing career development and adaptability (Kraimer et al., 2009; Savickas, 1997). This type of support is characterized by HRM's active role in initiating career support practices, which are implemented to facilitate positive changes, movements, and prospects that enable employees' adaptable career growth. This HRM-initiated support guides employees to focus on at least three aspects: looking into the future and surroundings (e.g., social/network resources), developing new skills and knowledge, and seizing opportunities fitting their interests or identities (Savickas, 1997). These aspects can both independently and jointly promote employees' career progress (e.g., positive changes, movements, and prospects). For instance, positive changes may be observed through improvements in employees' skills, knowledge, and

professional capabilities, which enable them to become more effective and satisfied in their career roles. Positive movements are reflected through employees exploring and taking advantage of new opportunities, such as lateral moves, promotions, or cross-functional projects, which help them achieve career goals and prevent job stagnation. Prospects in growth encompass a forward-looking perspective wherein employees are encouraged to envision and plan for their future career development, supported by opportunities for advancement and long-term career planning actively driven by HRM. While these attributes generally reflect the scope of typical career support, the level of proactivity in delivering such support may be more critical. Proactive efforts by HRM or HR professionals in implementing these initiatives can significantly influence their overall effectiveness.

With these attributes, HRM's proactive career support shares a few commonalities with other constructs in the literature, such as HRM career intervention (Raabe et al., 2007) and organizational career support (Kraimer et al., 2011). However, it differs in multiple ways. For example, while Raabe et al.'s (2007) HRM career intervention is narrowly focused on the process of setting and working towards specific career goals (i.e., goal development, information collection, plan generation, and plan execution/monitoring), our conceptualization of proactive career support is broader, capturing a wider, more overarching spectrum of potential support. Similarly, Kraimer et al.'s (2011) construct of perceived organizational career support is broadly focused on the support more generally available across the organization rather than specifically on the proactive engagement from HRM. Their construct may cover career support from senior management, supervisors, or other non-HR parties and does not necessarily indicate a proactive nature.

Drawing on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), research suggests that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs motivates employees to engage in their careers, and thus, it is essential to pull employees out of undesirable career experiences that prevent need satisfaction, such as career plateaus (McCleese et al., 2007). Active HRM efforts in supporting employee careers are helpful in satisfying individuals' psychological needs, leading them to volitionally navigate career planning and development. For instance, HR professionals' proactive implementation of career-oriented initiatives, which enable positive development outcomes (e.g., skill enhancement), may help fulfill the need for competence as they trigger feelings of being capable and skillful (Kost et al., 2020). HRM's active enactment of practices that facilitate in exploring surrounding professional contexts (e.g., relational/network resources) is likely to nurture a sense of belonging (Marescaux et al., 2013), which helps satisfy the need for relatedness. When HRM actively guides employees to identify and choose interested development opportunities, employees may develop feelings of autonomy, for example, in career planning and decision-making (Van den Broeck et al., 2014). Compared with passive support (e.g., the availability/accessibility of support), HRM's proactive career support can be more powerful in promoting feelings of involvement, relatedness, and volition.

As employees become more empowered because of HRM's proactive engagement in supporting their career development, they should be less likely to feel plateaued in their jobs. Consistent with this argument, research indicates that HRM's proactive career intervention assists with early identification of, and prompt solutions for, employees' career-related challenges and stress (van der Horst & Klehe, 2019). Indirect support can be found in research showing that professional development well implemented by the organization leads employees to develop positive career prospects (Barnett & Bradley, 2007) rather than feel bored and plateaued (Smith-Ruig, 2009). In brief, we propose that when working in organizations that offer proactive career support, employees tend to perceive more skill enhancement opportunities,

take on more challenges, and hold more promising views about their careers, all of which decrease the chances to experience job content plateau.

Furthermore, as job content plateau is alleviated by HRM's proactive career support, employees tend to maintain a thriving state at work. Job content plateau is a combined reflection of a situation where employees are demotivated due to lack of need fulfilment. This demotivated status hinders them from experiencing work as self-determined and inhibits the development of thriving experiences (Spreitzer & Porath, 2014). The detrimental effect of job content plateau on employee thriving can occur at both sides of thriving (i.e., learning and vitality). First, when plateaued laterally in job content, employees no longer receive challenging responsibilities that enable them to grow further via gaining new knowledge and skills. This lack of opportunities to learn and apply new things decreases the chance of sensing learning. Second, job content plateaued employees feel that the job is boring and routine and perceive overall staleness at work. Thus, they may lack motivation to be focused on and engaged in their work (Purcell, 2014), and, accordingly, feel less enthusiastic and energetic (Spreitzer et al., 2005). The restricted learning opportunities also place an additional hurdle for plateaued employees to actively and purposefully explore new ways of working, leading them to miss out on occasions for energy restoration (Stirpe et al., 2018). Therefore, reducing job content plateaus is likely to increase employees' sense of thriving. Despite the lack of direct evidence, empirical results support that vitality is primarily derived from competence and autonomy (Sheldon et al., 1996), which unfortunately is luxury for job content plateaued employees. Echoing these results, research also found that engaging job experiences (e.g., task identity and autonomy) allowing for autonomous development of interests can promote employee thriving (Jiang et al., 2020).

Altogether, these arguments highlight a mediation pathway, in which HRM's proactive career support potentially decreases perceived job content plateau, and the mitigated plateau is less likely to threaten employee thriving. This represents an indirect effect of proactive career support on thriving via job content plateaus. Accordingly, we propose:

Hypothesis 1. Employees perceiving greater proactive career support are less likely to perceive a job content plateau and, in turn, are more likely to be thriving at work.

The moderating effect of political skill

We thus far have explained that HRM's proactive career support inhibits job content plateau, which prevents thriving. However, this inhibiting effect might be more prominent among some employees, as they may better leverage organizational support to improve career experiences. As stated earlier, we expect that political skill, as a personal resource differing across individuals, explains the variation in the effect of proactive career support. Careers can be viewed as "political campaigns" (Inkson, 2004), where politically skilled employees are more successful in utilizing resources to achieve career objectives (Blickle et al., 2010). From a multidimensional perspective, the literature suggests four aspects of political skill, including social astuteness (i.e., the ability to understand other parties), interpersonal influence (i.e., the ability to use this understanding to exert influence), networking ability (i.e., the ability to develop social or interpersonal networks), and apparent sincerity (the ability to make oneself look sincere to others) (Ferris et al., 2005). However, apart from this multidimensional lens, political skill has also been commonly viewed from a unidimensional angle, which emphasizes the combination of

the former two aspects (e.g., Ahearn et al., 2004). As indicated by Ahearn et al. (2004), the typical nature of political skill sufficiently and representatively manifests through the integration of social astuteness and interpersonal influence. This is consistent with their definition that political skill describes one's effectiveness in understanding others and in utilizing this knowledge to influence others in a way that benefits his/her or organizational goals (Ahearn et al., 2004). While networking ability and apparent sincerity emerged from the multidimensional view, they to some extent overlap with or are reflected in, the two typical elements of political skill at the unidimensional level. For example, interpersonal influence may involve or indicate one's networking ability, while social astuteness is somewhat indicative of one being sincere when showing understanding to others. In this case, it appears that the nature of networking ability and apparent sincerity in the construct of political skill still warrants ongoing debates.

As such, following predecessors (Ahearn et al., 2004; Shi et al., 2012), our study draws upon the unidimensional lens, which primarily captures the two key attributes, social astuteness and interpersonal influence, to guide our theorization and empirical investigation. With such attributes, politically skilled employees can leverage resources available to them or generate new resources to gain benefits (Wei et al., 2012). Aligning with this notion, we propose that employees who are more politically skilled are more adept at taking advantage of HRM's proactive support to prevent job content plateaus. Specifically, as discussed previously, the job content plateau is a combinative indication of ill-fulfilled basic needs at work which inhibit one from moving forward laterally in professional contexts (Kanfer et al., 2017). We argue that the two attributes of political skill allow employees to mobilize contextual resources in wider organizational environments to fulfill fundamental psychological needs, thereby stepping away from negative career experiences (e.g., job content plateau).

First, to benefit from contextual resources such as organizations' career support, employees should not only stay attuned to the organization's initiatives but also ingeniously pick priority areas to fulfill their needs (Kimura, 2015). Politically skilled employees can use social astuteness to detect resources in surrounding contexts and to select resources fitting their needs. When career support initiatives are set up by the organization, individuals high in political skill are likely to heedfully attend to these resources (Ferris et al., 2005). They also tend to actively comprehend the context and the self to determine which specific resource (e.g., types of career support initiatives) would fit their psychological needs and whether these resources are worth pursuing (Ahearn et al., 2004; Ferris et al., 2005) to avoid becoming job content plateaued. Proactive career support goes beyond routine HRM practices and represents organizations' 'extra support'. Since politically skilled employees are often socially astute individuals with better judgment of organizational contexts, they are more attentive to the proactive nature of this support, which signals not only the opportunity for enhancing career skills (e.g., meeting need for competence) but also the room for negotiating preferred ways of doing so (e.g., meeting need for autonomy). On these bases, the social astuteness could make politically skilled employees more likely to identify organizations' proactive career support as a valuable channel to deal with plateauing issues.

Second, mobilizing career resources in organizations requires individuals to exert influence and control over other parties (Ferris et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2012). While social astuteness assists politically skilled employees in identifying focal situational resources that meet their psychological needs, interpersonal influence and control may smooth their acquisition and coordination of needful resources. Being socially influential, individuals high in political skill possess strong behavioral flexibility, which allows them to adapt and calibrate their behaviors to each contextual condition so as to elicit specific responses from other parties (Ferris et al., 2005;

Kimura, 2015). This ability to influence and control social contexts can facilitate them in accessing and mobilizing diverse career resources and support (e.g., initiatives proactively implemented by HRM) through network connections across different parts of the organization. Additionally, the politically skilled usually have a strong goal focus (Ferris et al., 2005; Wei et al., 2012). With a goal orientation, they can be motivated to direct efforts to achieving career objectives, which needs them to control, shape, and sustain workplace career resources to cope with undesirable job experiences (e.g., job content plateaus) that obstruct their growth and development.

In brief, compared with those low in political skill, employees with stronger political skills are more cognitively capable (socially astute) to sense and comprehend contextual career resources and match resources to their interests or needs. They are also more behaviorally flexible (interpersonally influential) to control and utilize these resources to fulfill these needs to avoid feeling job content plateaued. Thus, we expect that employees with stronger political skills will benefit more from HRM's proactive career support in alleviating perceived job content plateau.

Hypothesis 2. The negative relationship between proactive career support and job content plateau is stronger for employees with a higher level of political skill.

We have proposed that organizations' proactive career support may prevent employees from being job content plateaued and, therefore, helps maintain employee thriving. As discussed earlier, employees with stronger political skill are more cognitively and behaviorally effective in mobilizing and utilizing career resources to satisfy psychological needs. Thus, when perceiving proactive career support, they may experience fewer barriers (e.g., job content plateaus) to thriving. These predictions indicate a mediation process conditional on political skill (Hayes, 2013). Integrating our rationale for Hypotheses 1 and 2, we further propose that employees with stronger political skills will benefit more from proactive career support to conquer job content plateau and consequently will thrive at work. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3. The indirect positive effect of proactive career support on thriving through job content plateau is stronger for employees with a higher level of political skill.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

Participants were recruited via Prolific (<http://prolific.ac>), a UK-based research crowdsourcing platform with participants across Europe and North America. This well-established online panel has been reported in many studies, which demonstrated its feasibility and reliability (e.g., Morandin et al., 2021). To ensure the sample was appropriate for this research, participants were required to be working at a nonself-employed job. We administered a three-wave survey to collect data. At Time 1, participants reported HRM's proactive career support, political skill, and basic demographic information. Two weeks later (Time 2), participants rated job content plateau. Another 2 weeks later (Time 3), they answered items for thriving. This method of data collection with multiple measurement points helps mitigate common method variance

concerns across the key study variables (Ostroff et al., 2002; Podsakoff et al., 2012). The 2-week interval was chosen because previous research suggests that this time lag is sufficient to capture individuals' psychological reactions, which often occur relatively quickly (Jiang et al., 2019), while avoiding potential erosion effects over longer periods (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). This time interval is also consistent with prior studies examining the influence of work contexts on employees' psychological experiences and behaviors (e.g., De Clercq et al., 2021; Rasheed et al., 2024; Ren et al., 2021; Spoelma, 2022).

Time 1 survey generated 584 complete responses. Among them, 503 were valid after removing 81 careless respondents who failed to pass any attention checker (e.g., "This is an attention checker. Please select strongly disagree."). At Time 2, 439 submitted complete surveys. We removed 35 careless cases, three cases wherein employment had changed, and nine cases with confusing data entry, resulting in 392 valid participants. They were invited to finish the Time 3 survey, and 338 returned. This sample was reduced to 301 after excluding 35 careless responses and two cases with changes in employment.

The final sample ($N = 301$) had 161 males (53%). The average age was 35.66 years ($SD = 10.45$), and the average organizational tenure was 6.84 years ($SD = 6.04$). The participants worked in different industries, with the most common being computer and data services (14%), engineering and technical services (7%), and accountancy (5%). We divided Time 1 valid respondents into two subgroups. One subgroup included participants who returned valid responses at Time 3 ($N = 301$), and the other subgroup included those who dropped after Time 1 and those whose Time 3 responses were not valid ($N = 202$). Independent sample tests showed that there were no differences between these two groups in our key variables, proactive career support ($t = -1.89, n.s.$) and political skill ($t = -0.38, n.s.$).

Measures

Unless otherwise stated, respondents rated the measures on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1, *Strongly disagree*; 5, *Strongly agree*).

Proactive career support (Time 1)

Given the lack of a readily available scale that could measure HRM's proactive career support specifically, we created three items based on the three essential components suggested by Savickas (1997) to support the development of individuals' adaptable careers. Applying these components to the HRM context, we framed the items to capture HRM's proactive career assistance that drives employees to explore surrounding resources, develop the self, and seize opportunities for career futures. When creating these items, we consulted three seasoned and well-published researchers in careers, HRM, and organizational studies. They pointed out that our items largely encapsulated the proactive career support by HRM as defined in our paper. Additionally, they noted that these items capture more precise nuances from the HRM perspective by specifically including the term "human resource management," distinguishing them from more general or career-relevant organizational support. Beginning with the wording "My organization proactively implements human resource management practices to," our items were "... guide me to look ahead and look around in my career," "... help me develop myself," and "... help me choose career opportunities to become the person I want to be."

To further ensure the content validity of these items, we followed prior researchers (Jiang, 2017; MacKenzie et al., 1991) in employing an expert panel consisting of eight experienced researchers in the same field to evaluate how well each item reflected our definition of HRM's proactive career support. We presented this definition to the judges and asked them to evaluate whether they considered each item to be conceptually consistent with it on a scale of *inconsistent*, *unsure*, or *consistent*. According to Lawshe (1975), content validity is deemed to be adequate if the content validity ratio¹ (CVR) is equal to or greater than 50%. For the three items, all judges ($n = 8$) considered them to be consistent with our construct, resulting in a CVR of 100%. This suggested that the three-item measure is well aligned with the construct of HRM's proactive career support defined in our research. This scale of proactive career support also demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = .96$).

We also employed a similar qualitative approach based on Lawshe's (1975) method to assess the distinctiveness of our construct compared to five related constructs: perceived organizational support, organizational career support, supervisor career support, co-worker career support, and HRM career intervention. Seven researchers with expertise in relevant fields were provided with the definition of HRM's proactive career support and its three-item measure. They were requested to evaluate the conceptual distinctiveness of our construct relative to the others using a 3-point scale (1, *Not different*; 2, *Somewhat different*; 3, *Completely different*). Responses categorized as "2" and "3" indicated that HRM's proactive career support was conceptually distinct from perceived organizational support (100%; $n = 7$), organizational career support (86%; $n = 6$), supervisor career support (86%; $n = 6$), co-worker career support (100%; $n = 7$), and HRM career intervention (86%; $n = 6$). The minimum CVR was 71.4%, exceeding the threshold of 50%. Although correlational data from large samples were unavailable, these results provided preliminary evidence supporting the uniqueness of HRM's proactive career support.

To further establish the distinctiveness of HRM's proactive career support, we collected additional data from a small sample ($n = 48$) of full-time workers in China to examine its correlations with related constructs. The results showed that HRM's proactive career support exhibited moderate correlations (a range of .3–.7; Ratner, 2009) with perceived organizational support ($r = .51$, $p < .05$; eight items; Settoon et al., 1996), organizational career support ($r = .60$, $p < .05$; six items; Kraimer et al., 2011), supervisor career support ($r = .68$, $p < .05$; five items; London, 1993), co-worker career support ($r = .66$, $p < .05$; three items; Andersén, 2017), and HR career intervention ($r = .68$, $p < .05$; four items; Raabe et al., 2007). These findings indicate that while HRM's proactive career support shares some similarities with these constructs, it remains empirically distinct. Taken together, the results from expert panel evaluations and correlational analyses provide some empirical support for HRM's proactive career support as a unique construct.

Political skill (Time 1)

Two measures of political skill have been dominantly used in the literature, those being a short, six-item scale (Ferris et al., 1999) and an 18-item scale (Ferris et al., 2005). Researchers (e.g., Ahearn et al., 2004; Shi et al., 2013) have clarified that the former mainly captures the overall-level political skill as a unidimensional score, while the latter emphasizes specific components of political skill using dimensional scores. In this study, we followed Ahearn et al. (2004) in evaluating participants' overall level of political skill with the six-item scale ($\alpha = .85$).

This short measure has been used in prior studies conducted in different contexts (Ahearn et al., 2004; Shi et al., 2013). Albeit unidimensional, it primarily highlights social astuteness and interpersonal influence with an indicative reflection of networking ability and apparent sincerity. Indeed, it has been found to highly correlate with the 18-item scale ($r = .78$, Ferris et al., 2005). A sample item of this short scale is “It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people.”

Job content plateau (Time 2)

We measured perceived job content plateau ($\alpha = .83$) using three items developed by Milliman (1992). This three-item scale proved its reliability and validity in prior research (Jiang et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2014). One sample item was “I have an opportunity to learn and grow a lot in my current job” (reverse-coded).

Thriving (Time 3)

We assessed thriving ($\alpha = .95$) using 10 items developed by Porath et al. (2012) to capture both a sense of learning and a sense of vitality. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences at work and, on a 7-point Likert scale (1, *Strongly disagree* and 7, *Strongly agree*) answer items such as “I find myself learning often” (learning) and “I have energy and spirit” (vitality).

Control variables

Based on previous findings (e.g., Jiang et al., 2019), we controlled demographic variables (gender, age, education, and organizational tenure). We repeated analyses without these control variables, and the pattern of the results remained the same. Thus, for clarity and parsimony (Carlson & Wu, 2012), we reported hypothesis testing results without the control variables. The results, including the control variables, are available upon request.

RESULTS

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

Prior to testing our hypothesis, we conducted a series of CFA using to evaluate the construct validity of the key study variables. Like numerous other studies (Schabram & Heng, 2022; Schuh et al., 2021), we created item parcels for variables (i.e., thriving) with more than six items. The use of parcels for variables with too many items (e.g., 10 items for thriving) could make a model more parsimonious, decrease the chances of correlating residuals or incurring dual loadings, and reduce sources of sampling errors (Little et al., 2002). We first tested the factorial structure of thriving. In line with Porath et al. (2012), we conducted a second-order CFA for thriving, where the latent vitality and learning factors loaded onto a second-order latent factor of thriving. This model ($\chi^2_{[33]} = 93.33$, $p < .001$, SRMR = .025, RMSEA = .078, CFI = .983)ⁱⁱ provided a better fit than a single-factor model ($\chi^2_{[35]} = 886.729$, $p < .001$,

SRMR = .293, RMSEA = .284, CFI = .764), supporting the approach of treating thriving as a higher order construct. Following recommendations for reducing complexity (Little et al., 2002), we adopted an internal-consistency approach (Kishton & Widaman, 1994) to create item parcels for thriving. Specifically, we computed two parcels by averaging the items corresponding to the vitality and learning subscales, respectively. This approach is recommended to mitigate distortions in CFA results due to the shared secondary covariance among item sets within a subscale (Hall et al., 1999).

CFA results are shown in Table 1. The hypothesized, four-factor measurement model, in which all indicators loaded on their respective latent variables (proactive career support, political skill, job content plateau, and thriving), demonstrated an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2_{[71]} = 197.442, p < .001, SRMR = .056, RMSEA = .077, CFI = .949$). We compared this model with five alternative models with combinations of focal variables and found that the four-factor model fitted the data significantly better than others. These results showed that our four focal variables could be distinguished from one another. Table 2 presents means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients.

Hypothesis testing

We used the PROCESS for SPSS (Hayes, 2013) with 5000 bootstrap samples to test hypotheses. This program provides bootstrapped estimates and bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) to examine (conditional) indirect effects (Hayes, 2013).ⁱⁱⁱ

As shown in Table 3, proactive career support was negatively related to job content plateau ($B = -0.26, SE = 0.04, p < .001$), which, in turn, was negatively related to thriving ($B = -0.39, SE = 0.07, p < .001$). The indirect effect of proactive career support on thriving via job content plateau was significant ($B = 0.10, SE = 0.02, 95\% CI = [0.06, 0.15]$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

To test Hypotheses 2 and 3, we used PROCESS Model 7. Proactive career support and political skill were mean-centered for calculating the interaction term. Their interaction was significantly related to job content plateau ($B = -0.18, SE = 0.06, p < .01$). We plotted this

TABLE 1 Confirmatory factor analysis.

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	SRMR	RMSEA	CFI
1	1291.328***	77	1093.886***	6	.197	.229	.512
2	869.226***	74	671.784***	3	.174	.189	.680
3	584.734***	74	387.292***	3	.135	.151	.795
4	516.093***	74	318.651***	3	.107	.141	.822
5	332.069***	74	134.627***	3	.094	.108	.896
6	197.442***	71	–	–	.056	.077	.949

Note: $N = 301$. Model 1 (one factor): All four variables (PCS, PS, JCP, and thriving) loaded on one factor; Model 2 (three factor): Proactive career support and political skills loaded on one factor; Model 3 (three factor): Political skills and job content plateau loaded on one factor; Model 4 (three factors): Proactive career support and job content plateau loaded on one factor; Model 5 (three factors): Thriving and job content plateau loaded on one factor; Model 6 (four factors): Each of the four variables loaded on an independent factor.

Abbreviations: JCP, job content plateau; PCS, proactive career support; PS, political skills.

*** $p < .001$.

TABLE 2 Means, standard deviations, and correlations.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Age (year)	35.66	10.45							
2 Gender (female = 0, male = 1)	.53	.50	-.02						
3 Tenure (year)	6.84	6.04	.52**	.05					
4 Education	3.70	1.13	-.15*	.06	-.17**				
5 Proactive career support	2.79	1.16	-.05	.01	-.06	.12*			
6 Political skills	3.81	0.67	.04	-.20**	.01	.05	.27**		
7 Job content plateau	2.75	0.91	.10	.07	.06	-.18**	-.34**	-.16**	
8 Thriving	4.96	1.19	-.05	-.04	-.05	.17**	.45**	.40**	-.41**

Note: $N = 301$. Education: 1 = Year 10 or below, 2 = secondary school, 3 = postsecondary diploma/certificate, 4 = bachelor, 5 = masters, and 6 = doctoral qualifications.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

TABLE 3 Mediation analysis.

	Job content plateau		Thriving	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
(Constant)	3.49***	0.13	5.05***	0.28
Proactive career support	-0.26***	0.04	0.35	0.05
Job content plateau			-0.39***	0.07
<i>Indirect effect</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	
	0.10	0.03	[0.06, 0.16]	

Note: $N = 301$.

*** $p < .001$.

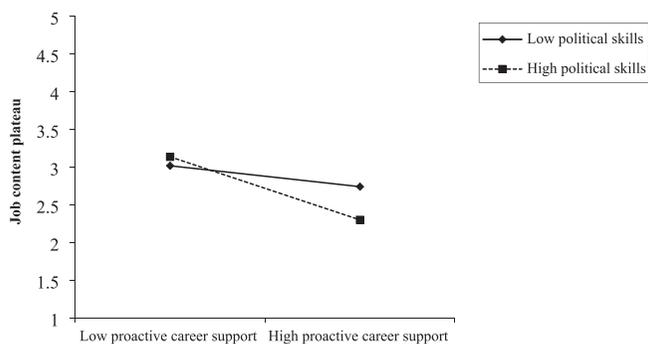


FIGURE 2 The moderating role of political skill.

interaction effect at one standard deviation above and below the mean of political skill (Figure 2). The results of simple slope analysis showed that the negative relationship between proactive career support and job content plateau was stronger when political skill was high (simple slope = -0.37 , $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$) than when it was low (simple slope = -0.12 , $SE = 0.06$, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Regarding Hypothesis 3, Table 4 shows the conditional indirect effect for both high and low levels of political skill. Bootstrap analysis revealed that the conditional indirect effect of proactive career support on thriving via job content plateau was significant at the high (95% $CI = [0.08, 0.21]$), but not at the low (95% $CI = [-0.01, 0.10]$), level of political skill; index of moderated mediation = 0.07 , $SE = 0.03$, 95% $CI = [0.02, 0.13]$. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

DISCUSSION

On the basis of the socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005) and its core theoretical foundation (i.e., self-determination theory; Deci & Ryan, 2000), we have built and tested a moderated mediation model to explain a mechanism and a boundary condition underlying the effect of HRM's proactive career support on employee thriving. Our results confirm that reduced job content plateaus account for the indirect effect of an organization's proactive career support on employee thriving. The role of proactive career support in alleviating a job content plateau becomes more prominent when employees are more politically skilled, as is its indirect

TABLE 4 Regression coefficients and conditional effects.

	Job content plateau		Thriving			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>		
(Constant)	2.80***	0.05	1.26***	0.32		
Proactive career support	-0.24***	0.04	0.10	0.10		
Political skill	-0.12	0.07				
Proactive career support × political skill	-0.18***	0.06				
Job content plateau			-0.38***	0.07		
R^2	.39***		.52***			
<i>Conditional effects</i>						
Moderator: Political skill	Conditional main effects (proactive career support → job content plateau)			Conditional indirect effects (proactive career support → job content plateau → thriving)		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% <i>CI</i>
Low	-0.12	0.06	[-0.24, 0.00]	0.05	0.03	[-0.01, 0.10]
High	-0.37	0.06	[-0.48, -0.26]	0.14	0.03	[0.08, 0.21]
<i>Index of moderated mediation</i>						
	Index	Boot <i>SE</i>	95% <i>CI</i>			
	0.07	0.03	[0.02, 0.13]			

Notes: $N = 301$.

*** $p < .001$.

role in fostering a sense of thriving via decreasing this plateau. As discussed below, these findings have important theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical implications

This study has theoretically advanced the literature in several important ways. First, it is among the few, and earliest, attempts to empirically examine the impact of contextual factors beyond employees' proximal, local work environment on employee thriving. As emphasized previously, prior studies have focused mainly on physical work conditions (e.g., as a moderator of local social contexts; Xu et al., 2019) or 'passive' general organizational support (Kleine et al., 2019). Our focus on proactive career support has extended these studies, which did not directly capture the wider contexts tailored for employee growth and development, which is a core tenet of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Furthermore, by specifically referring to career support initiated by HRM at the organization level, our research has addressed the ambiguity arising from the vague boundary between the local and larger/wider contexts. As noted in previous research (Guan & Frenkel, 2020), employees do not always clearly distinguish a local context (e.g., the supervisor) from a larger context (e.g., the organization as a whole). They sometimes see an immediate supervisor as the organization's representative (Flickinger et al., 2016). Thus, it might be difficult to conclude if, or how much, the wider context accounts for the effect of general organizational support on employee thriving. Through setting up a more definite boundary of the local work context, our study provides a clearer understanding of the roles of wider organizational contexts (i.e., HRM's proactive career support) in influencing employee thriving. Moreover, the emphasis on the proactivity of HRM's career support differentiates our study from, and supplements, other thriving-related research, which concentrates on passive support such as availability or accessibility of supporting resources (e.g., policies) when requested or sought by employees (Taneva & Arnold, 2017). Integrating all these aspects, our research has enriched and expanded the socially embedded model of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005) by identifying HRM's proactive career support as a new antecedent featured in a larger context, which is clearly beyond one's proximal work context.

Second, our finding that the job content plateau mediates the role of HRM's proactive career support in eliciting employee thriving has extended the thriving models developed by Spreitzer and colleagues (Spreitzer et al., 2005; Spreitzer & Porath, 2014). Rooted in the same core theory (i.e., self-determination theory; Deci & Ryan, 2000), prior thriving literature has mainly examined the pathways characterized by individual agentic behaviors (Kleine et al., 2019; Spreitzer et al., 2005). Complementing these agentic behavior-based pathways, our research reveals a career status-related pathway and suggests that proactive career support helps individuals cope with job content plateau and in turn keeps them thriving at work. This might be due to that job content plateau reflects unmet psychological needs (e.g., competence and autonomy) (Feldman & Weitz, 1988; Milliman, 1992), while proactive career support enables these needs to be satisfied. Manifesting issues related to need satisfaction, this function of job content plateaus also supports the thriving model of human growth at work (Spreitzer & Porath, 2014), which suggests that a key way for contextual antecedents to enable thriving is to promote a sense of autonomy, competence, and/or relatedness that makes individuals self-determined. Although, as mentioned above, emerging attempts have begun to explore larger or distal organizational contexts beyond local work units (e.g., Taneva & Arnold, 2017; Xu et al., 2019), empirical literature does not offer a ready answer to how these contexts function to foster thriving.

Our study moves this field forward by initiating a dialogue on the mechanism explaining the effects of larger contexts on thriving.

Third, our focus on political skill sheds light on the importance of considering the intervention of personal resources in explaining the contextual influence on thriving. Spreitzer et al. (2005) propose that contexts and personal resources, which can be developed at work, are sources of thriving. While their original model does not explicitly highlight the interactions between context and personal resources, they argue that it is important that employees, despite most being unable to alter contexts, can use their resources to maximize the benefits they can gain from the context and ultimately achieve thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Our findings suggest that political skill is such a personal resource. It allows employees to navigate through wider organizational contexts to meet basic psychological needs in work and careers (e.g., to avoid job content plateaus), and, as a result, to thrive. Extending the focus of extant thriving-related studies (e.g., Rego et al., 2021) on the interaction between personal attributes and local work contexts, our findings generate the earliest empirical insight on how personal resources interplay with distal contextual factors to conquer barriers to thriving. Also, although several aspects of political skill might be dispositional, as researchers have explained (Wei et al., 2012), more of its elements are developed through accumulated work experiences over a relatively long period. As such, focusing on political skill, our study effectively broadens the set of personal resources Spreitzer et al. (2005) nominate to enable thriving and extends their thriving model by clarifying an example boundary condition, which accelerates the facilitation role of favorable larger organizational contexts. Furthermore, the verified moderation of this study potentially contributes to the political skill literature through broadening its utility in resource mobilization for positive outcomes at work. As noted earlier, political skill has mainly been treated as a moderator that facilitates one in driving individual factors (see Kranefeld et al., 2020) or overcoming contextual hindrances (e.g., Chang et al., 2023; Offergelt & Venz, 2023) for favorable outcomes, with only scattered studies emerging to explore its moderating role in mobilizing contextual resources (e.g., Buch et al., 2016; Joo & Cruz, 2024). Our findings have generated new evidence that confirms and consolidates the view that political skill not only helps people navigate their own individual attributes or challenging contexts but also maximizes the benefits of contextual resources.

Limitations and future research directions

This study has several limitations requiring attention. First, although common method bias is alleviated, given that we collected data at three time points (Podsakoff et al., 2012), this bias cannot be ruled as all data were self-reported. Future research may consider additional strategies to minimize the risk of common method bias. For example, it would be useful to incorporate an a priori marker variable and analyze the extent to which the results are affected by common method bias.

Second, causal effects could not be inferred from this study. While proactive career support, job content plateau, and thriving were measured sequentially in time, we could not conclude empirically if variation of one variable caused change in another over time. Also, we cannot rule out the possibility of an alternative mediational model in which thriving mediates between proactive career support and job content plateau. As thriving is conceptualized as a combination of learning and vitality (Spreitzer et al., 2005), it is plausible that proactive career support, which is focused on employees' growth and development, can promote thriving, which in turn

may reduce their perceived job content plateau, an indicator of inadequate learning at work. Unfortunately, given the approach we used, we were unable to conclude if job content plateau would still mediate between proactive career support and thriving had this alternative model been controlled for. Thus, although our proposed model is deeply grounded in theory and guided by identified research gaps, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as the empirical design does not enable a rigorous test of competing causal mechanisms. Future research using repeated-measures longitudinal or experimental designs, or incorporating relevant control mechanisms, would provide stronger causal evidence and allow for more nuanced tests of mediation. We encourage such work to further validate and extend the model proposed in this study.

Third, like many recent HRM and career scholars (e.g., Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2018), we used data purely from an online panel. While it has been widely adopted and has proven highly reliable when appropriately implemented (Walter et al., 2019), it does not contextualize a sample to a specific organization where HRM practice is actually implemented. However, because results based on well-established online panels are usually highly generalizable (Jiang et al., 2018), the phenomena found in our study would be likely to be observed in diverse organizational settings. Nonetheless, we recommend that future studies consolidate our findings by considering a more contextualized design, either for online panel study or for field investigation within the organization.

Fourth, we exclusively focused on the influence of larger organizational contexts (i.e., HRM's proactive career support). Whereas this focus has escalated a conversation regarding the expansion of contextual enablers of thriving (Xu et al., 2019), our study did not explicitly attend to local work contexts, which are deemed to be proximal drivers of thriving (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Thus, it is unknown whether the positive effect of proactive career support would still exist had relevant features of employees' local contexts been controlled for. The neglect of local contexts may also have raised the question of whether the influence of larger contexts (e.g., HRM career support initiatives) on thriving also takes place through triggering the influence of local contexts (e.g., team/unit leaders' support of HRM initiatives). Relatedly, we also did not control for other forms of organizational support that might be perceived as similar to HRM's proactive career support, such as perceived organizational support, organizational career support, supervisor career support, co-worker career support, and HRM career intervention. Consequently, it remains unclear whether the relationships identified in our study would persist when these related constructs are accounted for. Furthermore, we did not control for passive organizational career support, which may impact employees' career- and job-related experiences. Thus, it might be premature to conclude to what extent proactive career support could go beyond support of a passive nature to explain additional variance in job content plateau and thriving. Since research suggests that employees in organizations that more proactively implement supportive policy and practice tend to be more aware of the resources and support available to them (Ramus, 2001), it is possible that proactive organizational career support triggers employees' perception of passive support and thereby influences employee reactions. Future research should address these limitations by examining the interplay between larger organizational contexts and local work contexts, investigating whether proactive career support influences thriving directly or through local-level mechanisms. Additionally, future studies should control for related constructs and passive career support to identify the unique variance that HRM's proactive career support explains in employees' experiences. The integration of these perspectives may provide a clearer understanding of how organizational/HRM proactivity shapes employee thriving and career development.

Lastly, while we highlighted HRM's proactive career support by emphasizing both its proactive stance and its role in fostering employees' career proactivity and adaptability, we acknowledge that capturing the "proactivity" aspect solely through survey wording may have limitations. Specifically, although we used the term "proactively" in the lead-in of our measurement items, it is possible that some participants were more attuned to the career support content itself rather than the proactive nature of its implementation. Despite similar methodological approaches used in prior studies (e.g., Lin & Johnson, 2015; Presbitero, 2015; Zhang et al., 2020), we recognize that this approach may not fully account for variations in respondents' interpretations. Future research could refine our conceptualization and/or measurement to provide a more robust evaluation of the proactive nature of HRM's career support.

Practical implications

As our findings reveal a positive effect of HRM's proactive career support on thriving via alleviated job content plateaus, we recommend that organizations place importance on *proactive* offerings of career support and closely monitor plateauing issues threatening employee thriving. Though organizations may have career/professional development programs available, employees may not have paid much attention to these forms of career support (Taneva & Arnold, 2017) due to, for example, HRM's lack of proactivity in implementing or communicating them and such support being general (e.g., not tailored to fit individual career needs). In this case, employees may feel that the organization does not seriously care about their career development and professional growth, and thus, they may not be excited about these resources, which represent passive support (Vakola, 2016). Based on our findings, we suggest that HRM managers proactively approach individual employees to guide them to look ahead and around, to develop/improve themselves, and to choose feasible opportunities within the organization to fit their career interests and needs. This active practice should go beyond the general, one-size-fits-all supporting career resources and be customized for individuals. Considering our results on the mediating role of the job content plateau, we further suggest that organizations can monitor employees to determine whether they are experiencing this plateau (e.g., via internal surveys or/and performance management conversations) and use the results as an alert for the need of HRM's proactive career intervention to minimize barriers to thriving.

Furthermore, our results highlight that employees' political skill drives how effectively they leverage HRM's proactive career support to reduce threats to employee thriving. Employees high in political skill benefit more from this organizational support. Therefore, in addition to proactively implementing career supportive practice, HRM should assist employees in enhancing political skill so that they can be more socially astute, interpersonally influential, and goal-oriented to enlarge the benefits that can be gained through career support. For example, to develop and strengthen political skill, HRM may deliver briefing sessions that help employees understand the organization's political dynamics and purposely identify mentors for less experienced staff (Kimura, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Employee thriving is important for an organization's sustainable development. Building and maintaining thriving human capital in the workplace require dedicated support from the

organization. Drawing upon and extending the socially embedded model of thriving, which is grounded in self-determination theory, our research suggests that HRM's proactive career support, as a contextual variable that goes beyond one's local work unit, enables employees to thrive at work. As shown by our mediation mechanism, an important reason is that such career support reduces their job content plateaus so as to remove barriers to individual thriving. This study further reveals that these benefits of HRM's proactive career support to employee thriving via reduced plateauing are more salient for people with higher levels of political skill. To maximize these benefits, we encourage organizations to tailor, and be proactive in offering, support to fit employees' career needs, while endeavoring to enhance their political skill. To extend our research, we recommend that future studies continue to explore contextual antecedents of thriving that are embedded in distal work environments and examine associated new processes and boundary conditions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not available due to ethics restrictions.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This research was conducted in accordance with local and international ethics standards. It followed the APA requirements regarding the treatment and protection of human participants.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ Content validity ratio (CVR) = $(N_c - N/2)/(N/2)$, where N_c represents the number of judges indicating "consistent" and N is the total number of judges (Lawshe, 1975).

ⁱⁱ To address under-identification due to having only two first-order factors, the coefficients of the first-order loadings were set to be equal, following Porath et al. (2012). Additionally, the error terms of two thriving items were correlated based on modification indices.

ⁱⁱⁱ Missing data were removed using listwise deletion; however, the results remained consistent when using full information maximum likelihood (FIML) to handle missing data.

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