

Research project: **Psychological resources for dealing with career insecurity**

## **Theoretical background**

Nowadays, the world of work is more and more characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA environment). In this scenario, careers are changing rapidly, and ask people for managing unpredictable career trajectories. Early career stage seems to be mostly affected by these changes and the consequent uncertainty of career development (i.e. Rydzik & Bal, 2023, Symeonaki et al., 2019). For instance, young adults are overrepresented among those in precarious jobs based on flexible employment contracts. This state may lead to career insecurity, that means “an individual’s thoughts and worries that central content aspects of one’s future career might possibly develop in an undesired manner” (Spurk, et al., 2022, p.257), with detrimental effects on life satisfaction and wellbeing.

According to Career Resources model (Hirschi, 2012), the individual capability to manage current career challenges is based on four categories of critical resources: *human capital resources* include work-relevant knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics acquired through education and work expertise. *Social resources* are related to the structure and content of an individual’s social relations, and its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity they make available to the person. *Psychological resources* refer to the positive psychological traits and states, like the cognitions, motivations, and affect of the person, which are generalized and expressed in different contexts and more specifically in relation to the work role. Finally, *career identity resources* mean resources related to one’s conscious awareness of oneself as a worker, of one’s occupational interests, abilities, goals and values, of the importance of one’s work, and of the structure of meanings in which such self-perceptions are linked with career roles.

Among psychological resources, ambiguity tolerance has been defined as the way individuals evaluate and respond to ambiguous situations or information characterized by an array of unfamiliar, complex, or inconsistent clues (Furnham & Marks, 2013). It includes a set of negative and positive psychological responses cognitive, emotional, and behavioral provoked by the conscious awareness of ignorance about particular aspects of the world (Hillen et al., 2017). According to Xu & Tracey (2015), it has demonstrated to be associated to career-related issues as career indecision and career adaptability.

## **Aims and Hypotheses**

The study intends to explore the relationship between a career psychological resource as ambiguity tolerance and career insecurity.

We hypothesize that people more tolerant to ambiguity will perceive less career insecurity during the early career stage.

We also expect that this relationship will be mediated by employability orientation, as openness to develop themselves and to adapt to changing work requirements (Van Dam, 2004).

It means that, we expect that people able to evaluate and respond to ambiguous situations or information, maintain a positive attitude toward personal and professional development, and, consequently, reduce the career insecurity.

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

The participants will be individuals in the early career stage, as denoted by their age, i.e.,  $\leq 30$  years old. According to EUROSTAT's definition, a young individual is considered a person aged 15 to 24, for this study the upper limit will be prolonged to 30 years. In line with some previous studies on uncertainty in the early career stage, the reason of this choice is to capture more information on the postgraduation employment experience of young people who have completed tertiary education. An a priori sample size has been calculated by G\*Power, Version 3.1 (Faul, Erdefelder, Buchner, and Lang, 2009) using the following parameters for running multiple regression analysis: alpha at 0.05, power at 0.80, an estimated medium effect size of 0.80 and six predictors (two main variables-ambiguity tolerance and employability orientation- and four control variables-age, gender, educational level, and employment status), which yielded a sample size of 98. Given the risk of dropout between the two waves we decide to increase the sample size of 60% for a total of 157 participants. To check for selective non-response, we will compare respondents and non-respondents in the T2 sample, using a logistic regression with control variables, and psychological variables.

### *Procedure*

The research design is a two-wave study. Quantitative survey data will be collected using the Qualtrics platform at two timepoints with a three-months timespan. In the first timepoint (T1), the survey will be promoted in the researchers' networks and on professional networks as LinkedIn. Only participants who will provide their informed consent will be included in the study. Three months later, participants will be contacted to answer the T2 survey using the e-mail addresses they provided at the T1. The data will be anonymized, separating the participants' email address from the rest of the dataset.

### *Statistical analyses*

The factor structure and dimensionality of the measures will be tested by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in Mplus 8.9 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). To test our hypotheses, we will perform observed variable path analysis.

### **Declaration of commitment to request ethical approval**

The study will be submitted to the ethical committee of university for approval.

### **Expected results and Implications**

The study is expected to clarify if ambiguity tolerance can be considered a career psychological resource for promoting a proactive attitude toward volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous workplace scenarios, thanks to the employability orientation improvement and career insecurity decrease.

The theoretical implications are potentially relevant. The construct of career insecurity has been quite recently introduced and there is a lack of knowledge about its antecedents. Moreover, introducing the psychological resource of ambiguity tolerance, we intend to explore the possibility that people, if "well-equipped", may face positively uncertain labour market scenarios, increasing their employability orientation, that means their willingness to keep their skills up to date and open to changes in career path.

This study may have potential significant implications for practice, too, especially for career intervention dedicated to young people in early career stage. It may suggest how to prepare young people to manage their careers.

