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**Career counseling in the transition from university
to the world of work**

Tesi di dottorato

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INTRODUCTION

The world of work is complex and unstable, characterised by constant political, economic and social changes and people preparing to enter this world face numerous challenges. Therefore, recent theoretical models in the field of career counselling have required career practitioners to help their clients develop resources enabling them to manage the frequent transitions they will face throughout their careers.

In addition to personal resources, career counsellor must promote constructive ideas of the concept of work because the ways people think of work can influence their educational and career choices. Beyond the concept of work, interest has recently grown in the concept of decent work, which embodies principles such as security, freedom and fairness. Thus, future workers must learn to value decent work, so they can seek such work and so that future entrepreneurs can create decent work.

The goal of this thesis is to examine how personal resources can impact life satisfaction and perceptions of future work and the ideas that university students' have of work and decent work. Furthermore, this thesis presents the effectiveness of a training for enhancing students' resources and promoting broad concepts of work and decent work.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is theoretical and collects the main theories that have developed over time, from the beginning of the 20th century to today. Throughout this period, career counselling has changed and no longer represents an activity in which the subject only passively participates in career decisions. Instead, the consultant and the subject build the subject's personal and professional future together. Additionally, the consultant enhances the subject's resources and enriches his/her knowledge of self and the world of work. Lastly, the final part of the chapter examines personal resources that can contribute to career management.

Next, the second chapter presents quantitative study considering resources included in career management skills: risk intelligence, career adaptability and courage. This study investigates whether these three skills

could significantly enhance life satisfaction and university students' perceptions of their future work.

The third chapter presents a second quantitative study analysing optimism and self-efficacy, two more resources influencing life satisfaction and perceptions of future work. This study, which compares Italian and Swiss students, demonstrates that these resources can mediate between the perception of job insecurity and certain positive outcomes.

Subsequently, the fourth chapter presents qualitative study exploring numerous students' ideas of work and decent work. The qualitative analyses demonstrate that both concepts are most strongly anchored to the economic aspect.

The fifth study involved action research in which an experimental group of university students were involved in a training to strengthen personal resources and expand their concepts of work and decent work. Compared with the control group, this group displayed higher levels of personal resources and broader ideas of work and decent work at the end of the training session.

Lastly, the conclusion emphasises that career counsellors must acknowledge the importance of strengthening students' personal resources and their ideas of work and decent work. The Life Design approach can significantly contribute to achieving this goal. Therefore, this activity should both be conducted in transitional times and involve individuals of different ages experiencing various transitions.

PART 1

Career counseling from the 20th to the 21st century

TRADITIONAL AND NEW THEORIES OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

1. Introduction

1.1 The origins of career counselling in the early 20th century

The origin of career counselling is generally traced back to the early 20th century, a period in which the psychology of work was developing in a context characterised by prosperity and socio-economic progress, especially in the United States and especially in the automotive field. This was precisely the period of the great migrations to the United States, of the search for jobs where a lot of manual labour without specific professional qualifications was in demand.

In this context, occupational psychology immediately began to show its applicative vocation: within the selection processes of the army, in the creation and dissemination of intelligence tests and in counselling (Sarchielli & Fraccaroli, 2010). However, the credit for inaugurating the first 'job centre' goes not to a psychologist but to an American engineer named Frank Parsons, who opened the Vocational Bureau, an orientation service that aimed to match people with jobs.

The Vocation Bureau was opened on 13 January 1908, and Frank Parsons was the director. The main mission of this bureau was to support people in making vocational choices that would enable them to improve their lives by avoiding poverty and seeking to improve their own and others' lives (Parsons, 1909; Brewer, 1942; Baker, 2009; Savickas, 2009). «Light, Information, Inspiration, Cooperation» was the motto of the Vocation Bureau (Parsons, 1909, p. 92), and those who worked within it were called 'associate counsellors' (Parsons, 1909; Sensory-Briddick, 2009; Brewer 1942).

Within the Vocational Bureau, practitioners followed a set of rules, procedures and principles that Parsons had collected in his volume *Choosing a Vocation* (Parsons, 1909). Here he emphasised the importance of vocational choices:

‘No step in life, unless it be the choice of a husband or wife, is more important than the choice of a vocation. The wise selection of the business, profession, trade, or occupation to which one's life is to be devoted and the development of full efficiency in the chosen field are matters of the deepest moment to young men and to the public. These vital problems should be solved in a careful, scientific way, with due regard to each person's aptitudes, abilities, ambitions, resources, limitations and the relations of these elements to the conditions of success in different industries. If a boy takes up a line of work to which he is adapted, he will achieve far greater success than if he drifts into an industry for which he is not fitted. An occupation out of harmony with the worker's aptitudes and capacities means inefficiency, unenthusiastic and perhaps distasteful labor, and low pay; while an occupation in harmony with the nature of the man means enthusiasm, love of work, and high economic values, superior product, efficient service, and good pay’ (Parsons, 1909, p. 3).

Parsons realised that many young people between the ages of 14 and 16 were dropping out of school to enter the working world. His aim was to support them in making career choices in order to achieve success. The perspective that characterised orientation in this period is called 'psychotechnics'. Parsons (1909) was convinced that a career choice passed through three stages: an analysis of oneself (in terms of personal characteristics), an analysis of jobs (entry requirements to a given job, advantages and disadvantages, salary) and an analysis of the relationship between the first and second factor. Consequently, Parsons suggested proceeding by initially interviewing the candidate, stimulating a self-description and then going deeper by using standardised tests that would assess certain dimensions considered important for the performance of job tasks (e.g. reaction time, memory, attention or speed). All this would have made it possible to put 'the right man in the right place' with a sufficient degree of accuracy.

This phase of career counselling is termed aptitude diagnostics (Viglietti, 1988) and does not take into account individual differences in approaching work. At the same time, psychometrics was a rapidly expanding discipline, not least due to the introduction of the factor analysis method as a useful tool for constructing tests; when the United States needed to quickly choose people to use during the First World War, the task was entrusted to the American Psychological Association (APA). The APA set up a committee that developed two tests for selecting military personnel: Army Alpha (for those who could read and write) and Army Beta (for those who were illiterate) (Yoakum & Yerkes, 1920).

After the First World War, the subject of assessing those characteristics useful for the performance of an occupation aroused more and more interest; along with this subject, the assessment of intelligence began to be discussed in order to create typical 'intellectual profiles' for different occupations. Moreover, some studies (Baumgarten, 1949) challenged the psycho-aptitude approach, showing how two people with the same aptitudes can perform differently according to their interests.

1.2 The characterological-affective phase (1930–1950)

From the 1930s onwards, a new phase of career counselling began, defined as characterological-affective, during which the focus shifted to the link between personality and vocational interests.

The vocational interest is defined as a work activity that is suitable for satisfying one's needs and values (Di Nuovo et al., 2009). It is precisely at this stage that one realises that it is not enough to take aptitudes into account in the choice process, but that interests also play an important role. Career counselling is enriched but still materialises as a match between certain characteristics of the subject and the characteristics required by the jobs (Amenta, 2009).

This phase of career counselling continues to be referred to as purely psychometric, and we arrive at the beginning of the Second World War with even more advanced assessment instruments (Thurstone, 1938).

The first two phases of orientation show some aspects in common (Pombeni, 1996): the belief that the subject possesses certain aptitudes, interests or personality traits that are stable and measurable and which allow the individual's choices to be defined following the logic of the 'right man in the right place'; that the subject, in the orientation process, has a passive role, and he/she merely fills in tests, while the career counsellor is an expert in psychometrics who merely reads the test results and draws conclusions from them; and that career interventions are only carried out at the time of school or professional choice.

1.3 The clinical-dynamic phase (1945–1960)

The transition to the next phase is characterised by an increased focus on professional fulfilment. It is in this period, between 1945 and 1960, that the career concept becomes central to all reflections having to do with occupational choices. Probably contributing to this change was the rise in the population's education levels and the advancement of studies in the fields of psychology, pedagogy and sociology.

This phase is known as 'clinical-dynamic' or 'clinical-diagnostic'; it is precisely in this phase that the role of the career counsellor becomes more important and the role of initial school and training choices becomes significant (Grimaldi, 2001).

An important characteristic of this phase is the fact that attention is given to the individual's inclinations; they represent deep needs of the individual, and there can be no professional fulfilment if there is no correspondence between inclinations and the job being performed (Pombeni, 1996). Consequently, the subject's past and his/her experiences and motivations become important; orientation is transformed into a practice that sheds light on the person's needs (Mura, 2005). The conviction underlying this approach lies in the fact that the subject should know his or her own motivations and deep needs and subsequently make professional choices suited to them (Biagioli, 2005). Work is conceived as a way to realise one's needs, and the career counsellor is required to have specific competences.

Up to this point in the history of career counselling, psychology constitutes a crucial point of reference, as a science and instrument of investigation. However, sociology reproached this 'clinical' approach for not taking into account the role of the environment, both economic and social factors, on the individuals' formation of interests and choice possibilities. For example, Naville (1945), a sociologist, stated that it is mainly the social environment and economic factors that influence an individual's career. Similarly, his colleague Leon (1957) emphasised that school-professional choices are not only linked to subjective variables but also to environmental, social and family factors; they orient the individual towards a school or profession, amplifying or limiting the importance of interests. Consequently, according to the sociologist, orientation needed to be transformed into an educational action aimed at involving the individual in the creation of his or her own professional project.

In any case, the contributions coming from different disciplines underlie the development of future theoretical models and lines of orientation intervention (Pombeni, 1996). Up to this point, approaches adopted a partial view of the study of career development and privileged models in which the individual played a passive role, while the most important role in the orientation processes was played by the career guidance practitioner (Castelli & Venini, 1996).

1.4 The 1960s, 1970s and 1980s: the golden years of career counselling

The years between 1960 and 1980 can be considered the 'golden age of career counselling' (Soresi & Nota, 2020). In fact, it was in this period that the contributions of three great scholars became widespread: Frank Parsons, already mentioned as the one recognised as the founder of guidance; John Holland, who elaborated a theoretical model that related the individual and his or her living and working environment; and Donald Super, who elaborated a theory of career development throughout life.

In this phase, which can be defined as existential-vocational (Viglietti, 1988), the basic ideas are represented by the centrality of the individual in the

orientation process; the vision of orientation as a lifelong process; the possibility that interests change throughout life; and the desire for a collaboration between education, training, university and work systems from a lifelong perspective (Grimaldi, 2001).

1.4.1 Career typology theory

One of the most successful models in the field of orientation, derived from Parsons' studies, was developed by Holland (Holland, 1973).

In 1959, Holland had already completed his PhD at the University of Minnesota and was trained in a psychometric approach to constructing specific inventories to measure people's characteristics. Underlying Holland's theory (1959) is the close relationship between the individual and his or her living environment. According to the author, the person who has to make a career choice will do so by seeking out those occupations that are best suited to the interests and abilities possessed. Therefore, Holland (1992) suggests proceeding by taking the following into account: (a) each individual falls into one occupational typology comprising realist, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional; (b) by referring to these typologies, it is possible to differentiate occupational environments; (c) individuals tend to seek out those occupational environments that allow them to express their aptitudes, values and interests; and (d) the interaction between the individual and the environment determines people's behaviour.

Thus, in Holland's model, the interests that differentiate the characteristics of the six types are the following:

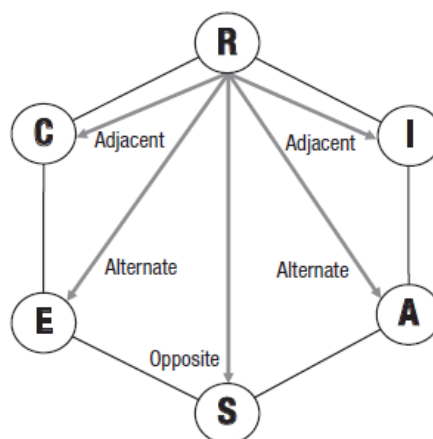
- The realist prefers activities that involve the use of objects, machinery or equipment. He possesses mechanical and agricultural skills and considers himself a spontaneous person who is practical and adventurous.
- The investigative person prefers a more analytical approach. He is interested in observing the reality around him to reflect on problems and to investigate natural phenomena. He considers himself an analytical person and argues rationally.

- The artistic person prefers innovative activities that allow him to produce something new. He perceives himself as an original and expressive, creative person.
- The social person prefers activities that allow him/her to help or assist others. He/she shows a preference for cooperative and empathetic work environments and perceives him/herself as a generous, kind and sociable person.
- The enterprising person prefers ambitious activities that allow him/her to exert influence on others in order to gain benefits. He/she considers himself/herself a self-confident and exhibitionist person.
- The conventional person prefers systematic and methodical activities and considers himself/herself orderly and methodical.

According to this model, the characteristics of each personality type are derived from interests.

Holland's model can be represented as a hexagon in which the six dimensions can be placed at the vertices; the distances between the vertices reflect the distance between the areas of professional interest, as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1. Holland hexagonal structure



Note. R = realistic interests; I = investigative interests; A = artistic interests; S = social interests; E = enterprising interests; C = conventional interests.
Figure from Nye et al. (2012)

On a practical level, this model gave a strong impetus to the development of interest analysis tools. However, it has presented some limitations, for example, over-simplification, over-emphasis on the individual without considering the social context, dominance of the diagnostic aspect and overestimation of the guidance professional (Guglielmi & Chiesa, 2021). Much of this criticism can be extended to all approaches centred on person-environment matching, whereby their usefulness is questioned (Savickas et al., 2009).

1.4.2 Career construction theory

Donald Super (1980) adopted a developmental psychology perspective to the study of careers. His efforts focused on analysing the role that work plays in the course of people's lives.

According to Super (1953), people differ from one another on the basis of personality, abilities, values, needs, interests and self-concept. On the basis of these characteristics, people feel more or less suitable for a profession. However, people's characteristics change through five stages over time: growth, exploration, stabilisation, maintenance and withdrawal. During each of these stages, the individual must perform specific developmental tasks. In this view, growth is a stage of developing curiosity towards professions. During this phase the individual should begin to worry about his or her future and acquire favourable attitudes towards work. Exploration is a phase during which the individual is led to reflect on himself and his place in the world of professions. In this phase the individual should identify what his or her goals are and strive to achieve the result of completing training and a first job placement. Stabilisation represents a phase of defining one's position in the professional sphere. It is during this phase that the individual stabilises within an organisation and seeks to take on increasingly broader responsibilities. Retention is a confirmatory phase during which the individual is asked to withstand difficulties and evaluate the possibility of changes in the path

undertaken. Finally, decline is the final phase that represents the gradual exit from the world of work with the planning of new forms of work-life balance. This phase corresponds to retirement.

The Super model has also been the subject of much criticism over the years. For example, it has been criticised for seeing the various stages in a rigid way, not necessarily applicable to all people. Other criticisms relate to linking the stages to the chronological age of the person and to the fact that the order of the stages does not currently correspond to the reality of modern work.

In spite of its limitations, this theory remains important today because it is a model that emphasises how career development concerns a person's life span.

1.5 Career counselling at the end of the 20th century

Until the end of the 20th century, it was assumed that there was a linear relationship between personal and contextual characteristics. Since the 21st century, this relationship has been called into question. It has been realised that there are much more complex relationships than previously assumed. In particular, thanks to the Society for Vocational Psychology, new methods and theories are spreading in the field of career counselling.

1.5.1 Social cognitive career theory (SCCT)

Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2002) propose the social cognitive career theory (SCCT). This theory is based on three variables: self-efficacy, outcome expectations and personal goals. Self-efficacy relates to beliefs about one's ability to perform activities and influences the initiation of behaviour. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as belief in one's capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. Self-efficacy derives from four sources: past experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and positive emotional and physiological states. Outcome expectations concern the rewards associated with a certain behaviour.

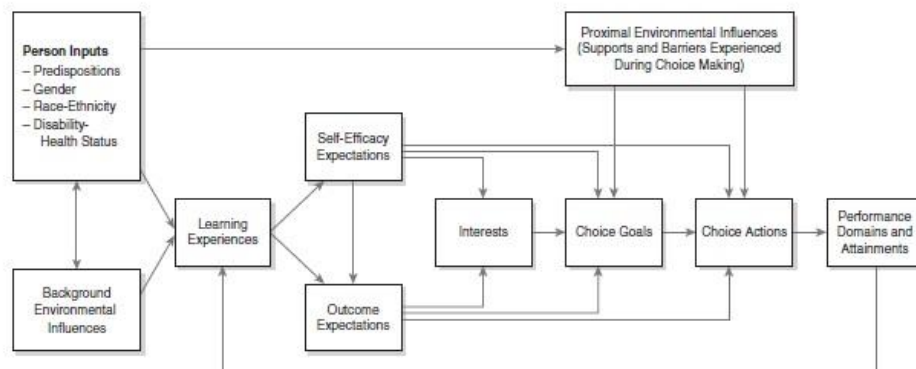
According to this model, behaviour results from interactions between the individual and the environment: people influence the context in which they

live and vice versa. Career choices, therefore, can be interpreted as a development process in which person and environment mutually influence each other.

According to the SCCT, the choice process is divided into a first phase that expresses the choice of a particular field, followed by a phase in which the individual implements a series of actions to achieve certain goals. Finally, there is a phase characterised by experience, which feeds a feedback process that will influence future choice alternatives.

Self-efficacy and outcome expectations influence career interests, thus defining goals; these goals define the actions the individual takes. As a result of his or her actions, the individual receives feedback of success or failure (Lent, 2005). This feedback in turn will influence self-efficacy and outcome expectations, as shown in figure 2.

Figure 2. The model of choice according to the SCCT



Note. Adapted from Lent et al. (1994).

From a practical point of view, SCCT can facilitate career choices by widening the alternatives available, helping clients to develop coping strategies with respect to obstacles in planning and achieving their career goals, promoting job satisfaction and improving job performance (Di Fabio, 2009).

2. Career counselling in the 21st century: between new challenges and new models

2.1 Career development in today's society

Today's society is characterised by profound changes that have taken place since the 1980s. Numerous sociologists have devoted themselves to the description of today's society, coining different terms depending on the central aspect of their theory. Thus, Giddens (2001) spoke of the 'Third Way', Lyotard (1982) of Postmodernity, Drucker (1993) of the information society and knowledge economy, while other authors have focused on concepts of globalisation and glocalisation (Robertson, 1999; Featherstone, 1995).

The society we live in was also described by the German sociologist Beck (2014); in his theorisation, the author has coined key concepts such as 'reflexive modernisation' and 'risk society'.

Beck's starting point is the change that led society to move from modernity to a 'second modernity'. Reflexive modernisation refers to a distinct second phase: the modernisation of modern society (Beck et al., 2003). When this happens, not only institutions are transformed but also the very principles of modern society. The side effects of modernity that have been created by humans produce social uncertainty, leading to a new era in which people are forced to deal with the consequences of their actions. Consequently, society in second modernity is interested in how it manages risks, and one of the questions that arises is 'How can one make reasonable decisions about the future under conditions of such uncertainty?' (Beck et al., 2003). While primary modernity was characterised by safety, lifelong work and secure retirement, the 'risk society' is characterised by disorientation (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1994), in the face of which people are forced to make choices about how plan and live their life.

From this perspective, risk, uncertainty and change are prominent characteristics of today's society, and there are some aspects of this new context that are particularly important for understanding the work of career counsellors.

An aspect that characterises the current socio-economic context is globalisation at a technological, political and economic level (Negura, 2006).

On an economic level, the functioning of organisations, the world of work and the way in which workers relate to it changes. Indeed, a word closely linked to economic globalisation dominates, which is flexibility (Mercure, 2001). Regarding flexibility, it can take two forms (Gallino, 2001): qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative flexibility refers to changes in wages or working hours or to the possibility of companies to license or hire on the basis of organisational needs and production flexibility; quantitative flexibility refers more directly to workers, to their need to remain employable in the labour market through continuous training and professional development in order to better respond to organisations' expectations (Mercure, 2001).

A consequence of the different forms of flexibility is the development of a segmented labour market (Guichard & Huteau, 2006), within which we can distinguish knowledge workers and peripheral workers. The former adapt to flexibility, represent highly requested profiles in the labour market and respond well to the needs of today's organisations. Peripheral workers, less able to adapt to flexibility, alternate periods of employment with periods of under-employment or unemployment.

This has important consequences for the work of career counsellors (Masdonati & Dauwalder, 2010). A career counselling activity with a knowledge worker consists in promoting the development of skills that can favour his or her stay in the labour market; with a peripheral worker, however, it is necessary to develop survival strategies in an uncertain and unpredictable world (Pellettier & Dumora, 1984).

All this allows us to understand why the effects of globalisation, in particular flexibility, have begun to attract the attention of many career scholars, who have increasingly shown dissatisfaction with linear career concepts in favour of non-linear models of professional development (Baruch, 2003).

2.2 Careers in the 21st century

In contemporary society, career development must be thought of beyond the linear characteristics of the past: it is unstable and cyclical, and it requires numerous transitions throughout the life span (Bimrose et al., 2008; Hearne, 2010; Bimrose & Hearne, 2012).

While the watchword of the 20th century was stability, which provided a solid basis for planning one's future, today, as we have seen, the new social organization of work, made up of short-term assignments and limited-time projects, has replaced the workplace for life (Kalleberg et al., 2000). Thus, an individual can find himself holding, in his life, even more than 10 job positions at the same time (Saratoga Institute, 2000). This means that individuals find themselves building their careers by coping with feelings of anxiety and uncertainty and that a career is no longer a lifelong commitment to a single employer (Savickas, 2012). Employment prospects are unpredictable and job transitions increasingly frequent and difficult.

Super (1980) has described labour transitions as expected events inserted within a stadial model, while other authors (Schlossberg et al., 1995) have highlighted the unpredictability of labour transitions.

This contextual analysis has prompted researchers to reconceptualise careers in different ways.

In 1976, Hall, in his book *Careers in Organizations* (Hall, 1976), spoke for the first time about a protean career, which he describes as a career for which the individual, and not the organization, is responsible. These are careers that develop by moving between multiple organizations, are not predetermined and, consequently, are difficult to control. This theorisation is still relevant (Hall, 2004) and has given rise to a line of research on careers known in the literature as *boundaryless careers*.

The concept of boundaryless careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 2001) is the definition that is most suited to describing the forms that careers can take today (Magnano et al., 2021). The term 'boundary' indicates the presence of an area,

a territory; the suffix ‘-less’ indicates ‘not to have’ (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1990). Thus, the term refers to a career that has no clear territorial limits.

The boundaryless career Arthur (1994) speaks of is similar to the protean career but places a greater emphasis on the fact that ‘boundaryless’ individuals do not necessarily rely on a single organization to develop their careers. In fact, when Arthur and Rousseau (1996) describe the characteristics of boundaryless careers, they refer to the unfolding of a career beyond a single work environment; therefore, this type of career often involves physical mobility (McCabe & Savery, 2007).

Sullivan (1999) lists the main differences between traditional carriers and boundaryless careers: while traditional careers provide workers job security in exchange for loyalty to one's organization, in boundaryless careers the worker provides his or her own performance and flexibility in exchange for employability. The boundaries of traditional careers are more defined, and the career takes place within one or at most two organizations. This does not happen in boundaryless careers, where borders are permeable and the career develops in multiple organizations. In the context of traditional careers, skills are specific to an organization, while in the second type of career, they are transferable from one organization to another. In the first case, success is measured on the basis of status, money or promotions, while in the second case, it refers to job satisfaction; consequently, the responsibility for the career falls to the organization in the case of traditional careers but to the individual in boundaryless careers. In the latter type of career, training is of the ‘on-the-job’ type, while in traditional careers, it is formal. Finally, in traditional careers the steps are linked to age, while in boundaryless careers, they are linked to learning.

Mobility is a key element in a boundaryless careers. Sullivan and Arthur (2006) suggest that mobility between work and organization can be of a physical or a psychological type. Physical mobility refers to the will to physically go outside the boundaries of the organization (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009, Okurame & Fabunmi, 2014); psychological mobility refers to the willingness

to establish relationships outside the organization without physically leaving it (Briscoe et al., 2006).

Defilippi and Arthur (1996) believe that in the construction of a boundaryless career path, the skills of the individual are of fundamental importance. The authors identify three types of skills: knowing-why (concerning motivations, personal meaning and identification); knowing-how (i.e. relational, transversal) and knowing-whom (referring to career-relevant networks).

The boundaryless career model seems today to be more adequate than the traditional career model in capturing the characteristics of changes in individuals' career paths (Murgia, 2006). Protean and boundaryless career models require career counsellors to provide new ways to counsel their clients. It is necessary to facilitate career transitions through methods that allow the promotion of client autonomy (Stoltz & Young, 2013).

2.3 Life design approach

Due not only to the instability of the surrounding environment but also to careers that present unpredictable trajectories and to professional choices that do not end at a specific moment of life but persist throughout life (Parola & Marcionetti, 2022), the relationship between individual and career must be rethought (Savickas et al., 2009; Masdonati & Dauwalder, 2010). In the same way, the way in which orientation is done must be rethought.

One of the main paradigms in the field of guidance since the 21st century has been that of Life Design (Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas, 2012). The aim of the Life Design paradigm is not to deny everything that until the 21st century was done in the field of orientation; rather, it has originated due to the need to adapt orientation practices to a context that has changed compared to the past, where careers are no longer the same. In this light, Life Design allows reflections on three elements. One of these elements is about the context, and the other two have to do with the people directly involved in the orientation

process, namely the individual being orientated and the counsellor (Masdonati & Dauwalder, 2010).

As regards the context, Life Design starts from the assumption that changes in today's society are increasingly frequent and transitions more complex, so it would be more appropriate to speak of 'life trajectories' (Savickas et al., 2009). The watchword of the current context is 'flexibility' (Mercure, 2001). The flexibility of the new context can refer to production or wages. In the first case, flexibility refers to adapting company production to the demands of the labour market in order to cope with competition; in the second case, we refer to the change in wages. There are also two other types of flexibility: qualitative, according to which workers adapt to the demands of the organization, and quantitative, according to which organizations increase or decrease staff according to the demands of the labour market (Mercure, 2001).

Faced with a rapidly evolving context, the individual does not passively undergo change but actively reacts to it (Almudever et al., 1999). According to the Life Design paradigm, individuals should be helped to build satisfying lives (Campbell & Ungar, 2004; Savickas, 1989; Savickas, 1993). For this reason, career professionals and researchers have begun to work and investigate new constructs to help their clients build a life of change (Guichard, 2005). Identity, adaptability, intentionality and narration are key concepts of the Life Design paradigm (Savickas, 2012).

The counsellor, on the other hand, has the obligation to take into account contextual and individual changes. He or she can no longer rely on the past idea of the stability and must pay particular attention to the choice of intervention methods (Masdonati & Dauwalder, 2010), to the relationship with the customer (Mallet, 2002) and to a temporal dimension that is not exhausted in the here and now but which foresees long-term planning (Masdonati, 2007).

In career counselling designed according to the Life Design approach, individuals have the opportunity to construct themselves through storytelling (Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas, 2012) and are directly responsible for their professional and personal future (Guichard, 2013). The importance of the

qualitative and narrative perspective has been underlined by several authors (Hartung, 2010, 2012, 2013; Maree, 2007; McMahon & Patton, 2002; Rehfuss, 2009; Savickas, 1995, 1997; Soresi & Nota, 2010; Di Fabio & Maree, 2012; Di Fabio, 2016). In fact, quantitative procedures show limitations in the process of working on the career with the client: they do not sensitively grasp the specificity of each individual and may be unsuitable for some types of users who have linguistic difficulties or disadvantages or who do not consider the orientation process as important (Savickas et al., 2009; Soresi & Nota, 2010). The qualitative procedures, on the other hand, allow a wider range of possibilities to personalise the interaction process with the customer; they assign the subject an active role and are not based exclusively on the diagnosis of some personal characteristics. They allow a global study of the individual, and they work in contexts characterised by small groups. Further, they are particularly useful when the orientation process is aimed at people who, for some reason, have disadvantages (Goldman, 1990).

3. New resources to meet the challenges of the 21st century

In a recent paper, Magnano et al. (2021) state that career transitions are critical steps that can create negative feelings in people. Savickas (2011) proposed that people should be able to respond to change. As individuals put their career management resources into practice and respond appropriately to changes (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), they are promoting active career building.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in the report *Career Guidance and Public Policy: bridging the gap* (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2004) asserts: «A key challenge for policy-makers is to shift their career guidance systems to adopt a broader perspective, emphasising the promotion of people's capacity to manage their own careers. This is consistent with the view that the role of governments in democratic societies is to help citizens to manage their own lives, not to manage their lives for them». (OECD, 2004, p. 139). The Council of the European Union (2008) added that: «Career management skills play a decisive role in empowering people to become involved in shaping their learning,

training and integration pathways and their careers. Such skills, which should be maintained throughout life, are based on key competences, in particular ‘learning to learn’, social and civic competences – including intercultural competences – and a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship» (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 8).

The concept of “career management skills” has therefore become central. Ronald Sultana (2012) pointed out that the term career management skills is a term of Anglo-Saxon origins whose definition could vary from country to country. A common definition, however, was provided by the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, which defined career management skills as a «[...] set of competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes) that enable citizens at any age or stage of development to manage their learning and work life paths. The knowledge, skills and attitudes concern personal management, learning management, and career management» (ELGPN, 2015, p. 13). This definition makes it clear that these are competences that are part of the social sphere, planning, self, learning and work. Furthermore, it clarifies that these are skills that develop throughout life (ELGPN, 2015).

The development of career management skills helps university students achieve their educational and work goals (Sung et al., 2013), increase their employability (Mason et al., 2009) and also promotes success in life (Tran, 2013). Some resources are traditionally found among those skills: Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou et al. (2016) identify career adaptability, career self efficacy, and career resilience. Bridgstock (2009) has identified a model that describes the Self-management skills and Career building skills among the career management skills. Self-management skills are skills related to the perception and evaluation of oneself in terms of values, skills, interests and goals. Career building skills refer to the ability to research and use career and job market information and the ability to take advantage of career opportunities. Recently, Zammitti et al. (under review) have described, among career management skills, also risk intelligence and courage.

3.1 Psychological resources

3.1.1 Subjective risk intelligence

Craparo et al. (2018) defined subjective risk intelligence as «the capacity of a person to effectively assess the pros and cons of a decision in situations in which not all outcomes are totally expected» (p. 968). People who have a high level of risk intelligence know how to effectively evaluate risks, consider their advantages and disadvantages and face them as if it were an opportunity and not a threat. These people generally see themselves as capable of handling lack of information and uncertainties.

As pointed out by Craparo et al (2018), risk intelligence can be considered a resource that can help people manage the unpredictability of the world. For this reason, this resource can be involved in professional transition processes. Risk intelligence plays an important role in fostering entrepreneurship and influences career adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). In fact, risk intelligence correlates with openness to innovation (Zammiti et al., 2021), a relevant aspect of corporate culture (Engle & Nehrt, 2012). Furthermore, it affects job satisfaction and career success (Craparo et al., 2018).

3.1.2 Career adaptability

Savickas defined career adaptability as «readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by the changes in work and work conditions» (Savickas, 1997, p. 254).

Savickas (1997) described the four dimensions of career adaptability, which are: (a) concern for one's future; (b) confidence in the ability to anticipate successes and overcome obstacles to pursue career-related goals; (c) curiosity about job opportunities and opportunities; and (d) control, or the individual's perception of being able to make decisions. It is a very important resource, capable of helping people to face an uncertain professional future and cope with career fears (Rossier, 2015). Career adaptability increases well-being (Savickas

et al., 2009; Maggiori et al., 2013), life satisfaction (Santilli et al., 2014), and quality of life (Soresi et al., 2012).

University students who have higher levels of career adaptability are more confident in their professional adaptability and this allows them to experience higher levels of general life satisfaction (Cabras & Mondo, 2018). Furthermore, they feel more capable of managing career transitions (Neuenschwander & Garrett, 2008; Patton, Creed & Muller, 2002) and of taking courageous action, increasing their level of satisfaction with life (Magnano et al., 2019). High levels of career adaptability are linked to less fear of failure (Ginevra et al., 2018).

3.1.3 Courage

Courage has recently become an object of study in the field of psychology. Norton and Weiss (2009) define courage as «persistence or perseverance despite having fear» (p. 213). Similarly, Woodard (2004) defined courage as «the ability to act for a meaningful (noble, good, or practical) cause, despite experiencing the fear associated with perceived threat exceeding the available resources» (p. 174). Seligman (2013) considers courage one of the 24 variables that can improve people's well-being. Ginevra et al. (2018) defined courage as «an adaptive behavior to cope with career development tasks and changing work and career conditions and for promoting life satisfaction» (p. 459).

Courage plays a very important role in a social context characterized by different challenges like today's society (Beck, 2015); for example, courage can make people able to resist external problems and keep the desire to do things high (Magnano et al., 2019). Courage helps people protect what they consider important (Fowers et al., 2017), such as their future. A study by Magnano et al. (2019) showed that college students who possess career development skills by combining these skills with courage are happier with their lives. Courage influences coping strategies (Magnano et al., 2017) and career planning (Watson, 2003).

3.1.4 Optimism

Some psychological resources such as optimism are important capacities for work and life (Luthans et al., 2007). Scheier and Carver (1985) defines optimism as a personality trait that «reflects the extent to which people hold generalized favorable expectancies for their future» (p. 879). Thus, optimism refers to the possibility of imagining positive rather than negative future scenarios (Santisi et al., 2020). Carver et al. (2010) pointed out that optimism includes a goal-directed behavior to achieve a goal. Luthans, Youssef and Avolio (2015) placed optimism among the dimensions of psychological capital (PsyCap), along with hope, self-efficacy and resilience. The PsyCap is defined as «an individual's positive psychological state of development, and is characterized by: (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put the necessary effort into succeeding on challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success» (Luthans et al. 2007, p.3).

Optimistic people think that their goals will be achieved. Optimism is linked to a range of psychological qualities that favor the adaptation of individuals (Segerstrom, 2010) and professional success (Segerstrom, 2007; Solberg et al., 2009).

In fact, from a general point of view, optimism influences life satisfaction and well-being (Yalçın et al., 2011; Bailey et al., 2007; Kardas et al., 2019; Scheier et al., 2001), reduces the psychological distress (Carver et al., 2010) and improves self-esteem (Chang, 2001; Chang et al., 1997; Extremera et al., 2007).

From a career outcome perspective, optimism predicts career goals, planning, exploration (Patton et al., 2004), academic and professional success

(Segerstrom, 2007; Solberg Nes et al., 2009) and is positively correlated with adaptive decision-making styles (Magnano et al., 2015).

3.1.5 Self-efficacy

The author who first addressed the topic of self-efficacy was Bandura (1997) who defined it as the ability that an individual possesses to put into practice the actions necessary to achieve their goals.

Self-efficacy is part of the social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1997) and develops through four sources: past experience, which refers to past successful situations. In this case, the perception of having performed similar tasks can predict good self-efficacy (Joet et al., 2011); the vicarious experience, or the observation of models that have performed similar tasks and achieved success (van Dinther et al., 2011); verbal persuasion, which refers to feedback from other people (Zeldin & Pajares, 2000); the emotional and bodily experience linked to the activities that take place and that allow people to feel capable or not of dominating a situation (Usher & Pajares, 2008).

In recent years, scientific research has shown that self-efficacy is linked to important indices of well-being and a profitable career development. Self-efficacy, in fact, represents a protective factor of the mental health of university students (Capone et al., 2020), is linked to academic success and motivation (Richardson et al. 2012; Robbins et al. 2004; Pajares, 2008), career development (Lent et al., 1994, 2002) and job satisfaction (Pinquart et al., 2003).

Since career transitions are experiences related to feelings of insecurity (Caspi & Moffitt, 1993; Perrig-Chiello & Perren, 2005) good beliefs of self-efficacy can lead to success in facing challenges (Chemers et al., 2001; Pinquart et al., 2003; Rigotti et al., 2008).

3.2 Work and Decent work

In a theory review proposed by Rosso et al. (2010), the authors pointed out that the meaning of the work is developed through four sources. The first

source is the self, from the point of view of values, motivations, and beliefs. The working values are «the end states people desire and feel they ought to be able to realize through working» (Nord et al., 1990, p. 21); for this there is a relationship between values and the meaning that individuals attribute to work (Nord et al., 1990; Brief & Nord, 1990).

The concept of work can refer to different aspects: the possibility of expressing one's identity, having social status, and feeling part of the society in which one lives. In fact, according to the psychology-of-working theory (PWT; Blustein, 2001, 2008), work makes it possible to satisfy people's needs for survival, relationships, and self-determination. Thus, work can help people meet survival (Blustein, 2006) or higher order needs (Blustein et al., 2008; Grant, 2007). When a job is perceived as significant, it predicts life satisfaction (Magnano et al., 2019) and personal fulfillment (Kahn, 2007).

Recently, the concept of decent work has been introduced (Anker et al., 2003). This concept refers to the possibility for men and women to obtain productive and satisfying work in conditions of freedom, equity, safety and respect for human rights, prospects for individual development and social integration (ILO, 2003). Duffy et al. (2016), consistent with the psychology-of-working theory, affirm that decent work is made up of five components: safe working conditions on an interpersonal and physical level, access to health care, adequate compensation, free time for rest and values that correspond to family and cultural values. According to a philosophical perspective (Peruzzi, 2015), decent work is linked to the importance of dignity, which constitutes a fundamental aspect together with equity, freedom and security, constituting its central aspects. According to a legal approach, the analysis of decent work becomes fundamental to protect respect for people's fundamental rights, such as fair working conditions (Faioli, 2009). From an economic point of view, the focus is on the fairness of pay, which should not be based on gender, race or other individual differences. In addition, the aspect of safety in the workplace and the balance between work and private life is emphasized.

All these characteristics are accepted from a social, economic, and political point of view, but are not always put into practice in the current labor market (Magnano et al., 2021; Magnano & Zammitti, 2020). However, from the point of view of career counseling, it is imperative to promote broad ideas about work and decent work as these concepts can promote the fight against poverty (Sengenberger, 2001) and be an important basis for the psychological health of individuals and groups (Blustein, 2008; Paul & Moser, 2009).

PART 2

Research and training for effective career counseling

INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in the field of career counseling have made counselors think about examining various resources and tools to meet clients' needs. Those entering the workforce may struggle to imagine the future positively; on the other hand, the well-being of people can be influenced negatively. The following studies present research based on the theoretical premises that emphasise the importance of studying the relationship between personal resources, well-being, and perceptions of the future. Similarly, studying what people think about the concept of work is important because such information can influence the construction of an individual's career and life. Therefore, the first three studies is both quantitative and qualitative. The fourth study describing action research to enhance the personal resources of students who participated in a training session.

Study 1 was conducted with a group of Italian university students to investigate the relationships between certain personal resources and the students' well-being and visions of future work. In this case, the study used longitudinal research and a mediation model to verify whether courage could mediate between risk intelligence, career adaptability and satisfaction and future work positive perception indicators.

In Study 2, the resources considered came from the field of positive psychology. The research question was as follows: Can optimism and self-efficacy mediate between job instability and life satisfaction and the perception of a decent future work? In this case, all data were collected simultaneously and involved Italian and Swiss students. Thus, a model of structural equations was applied to answer the research question.

Next, Study 3 was qualitative, designed to investigate university students' concepts of work and decent work. Studying such ideas is important for those involved in career counseling because these concepts influence career construction.

The studies mentioned so far have demonstrated the importance of personal resources in the well-being of university students and the possibility of imagining a positive future work. The ideas of work and decent work emerged as anchored above all to the economic aspect. In light of these results, it is important to implement career counseling practices to strengthen personal resources and broaden the ideas of work and decent work. This was the goal of the last study (Study 4), which described the effectiveness of a training called ‘Jump in Your Future’.

All studies described broaden the knowledge in the field of career counseling and provide useful tools to support clients facing the challenges of the 21st century.

STUDY 1. THE IMPACT OF CAREER MANAGEMENT SKILLS ON LIFE SATISFACTION AND FUTURE PERCEPTION OF WORK

1. Introduction

Career construction is a demanding activity influenced by various factors, including culture, national economy, personal variables, and relationships (Greenhaus et al., 2008). The changes that characterize the world of work force people to experience different career transitions throughout their lives, so individuals must strengthen their abilities that will help them face the new challenges of the professional market (Savickas, 2013). Many studies have highlighted the importance of career resources in professional development (Hirschi, 2012; Hobfoll, 2002; Hobfoll et al., 2018). For instance, the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (2012) stressed the importance of career management skills (CMS). These abilities allow people to collect information and analyze their education and professional preference, to manage transitions and regulate the relationship between their private and professional lives (ELGPN, 2012).

Numerous studies have focused on career adaptability as a professional resource (Johnston, 2018; Maggiori et al., 2013; Zacher, 2014). Indeed in the meta-analysis proposed by Rudolph et al. (2017), career adaptability was associated with self-esteem, optimism, career exploration and planning, professional identity, and job satisfaction. Additionally, career adaptability was linked to important career outcomes, such as career satisfaction (Chan & Mai, 2015; Zacher, 2014; Zacher & Griffin, 2015), job search success (Guan et al., 2013; Koen et al., 2010), better response to adversity (Tian & Fan, 2014); employability (De Guzman & Choi, 2013), and career decidedness (Urbanaviciute et al., 2014). In developing the concept of career adaptability, Savickas referred to Super's theory illustrated in the first part of this work. Savickas defined career adaptability as the «readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by the changes in work and work

conditions» (Savickas, 1997, p. 254). Beyond this, career adaptability is crucial in preparing for the future (Skorikov, 2007). As stated by Savickas and Porfeli (2012), this aptitude comprises four competencies. First, *concern* refers to one's commitment to undertake activities to further their professional future. This type of career concern prompts individuals to identify career-relevant activities in the present and connect those activities with their desired future. Second, *control* is one's ability to take responsibility for career choices. According to Savickas (2005), individuals are autonomous when making these choices. Third, *curiosity* is openness to all information that could increase one's knowledge about the professional world, which helps people expand their personal and professional networks, increasing their career possibilities (Toncar & Cudmore, 2000). Finally, *confidence* is the ability to aspire to success despite risks and challenges.

Although career adaptability is a necessary resource for professional development, other resources are also essential (Hirschi, 2012). Life changes and professional trajectories can be classified as risk situations (Nicholson & West, 1988), so risk intelligence is a useful psychological resource in professional transitions. For instance, risk intelligence affects people's expectations of their future employment (Lodi et al., 2021), influences professional success (Craparo et al., 2018), and correlates with openness to innovation (Zammitti et al., 2021), a relevant aspect of corporate culture (Engle & Nehrt, 2012). Craparo et al. (2018) defined risk intelligence as «the capacity of a person to effectively assess the pros and cons of a decision in situations in which not all outcomes are totally expected» (p. 968). This trait has four dimensions: a positive attitude toward uncertainty, meaning the ability to see uncertainty as a positive opportunity; self-efficacy in problem-solving, the ability to master uncertain situations; imaginative capability, which means exploring the unknown to produce new ideas; and stress management, one's capacity to self-regulate one's behavior and emotions (Magnano et al., 2016).

Courage is a resource that mediates the relationship between career adaptability or risk intelligence and life satisfaction and other positive career outcomes (Magnano et al., 2021). Norton and Weiss (2009) described courage

as a dimension allowing individuals to act despite the presence of fear (Norton & Weiss, 2009). Rate et al. (2007) highlighted four main characteristics of courage: intentionality, resolution, the ability to cope with risks, and a noble or useful purpose. Hence, courage has a behavioral component (Woodward & Pury, 2007; Norton & Weiss, 2009). Recently, studies have investigated the effects of courage on career choices. For instance, one study revealed that high levels of courage increase motivation and the development of career strategies (Ginevra & Capozza, 2015). Additionally, courage contributes to life satisfaction (Bockorny, 2015) and positively correlates with career adaptability (Magnano et al., 2021) and risk intelligence (Magnano et al., 2022). Magnano et al. (2021) demonstrated that courage plays a mediating role between career adaptability and well-being indicators (including life satisfaction). Furthermore, courage helps people cope with risks and stress (Magnano et al., 2017), strengthening optimism about professional fulfillment (Zammitti et al., 2021).

Adaptation skills are crucial for career development (Biemann et al., 2012, Hirschi et al., 2015, Raabe et al., 2007), so career adaptability, risk intelligence and courage have been introduced in the field of career psychology to help people manage changes in the labor market (Super & Knasel, 1981; Lodi et al., 2021; Magnano et al., 2021). As college students get closer to experiencing the transition from university to professional world, they can experience positive or negative expectations by imagining their future career. The well-being experienced at the university level and the support that personal resources can give to career development can stimulate positive visions of the future job. In fact, the way in which people manage risks, adapt to changes in the world of work or act despite fears, could lead students to imagine a positive future, characterized by satisfying work, consistent with their interests and not in too long times (Lodi et al., 2021).

1.1 Study aims

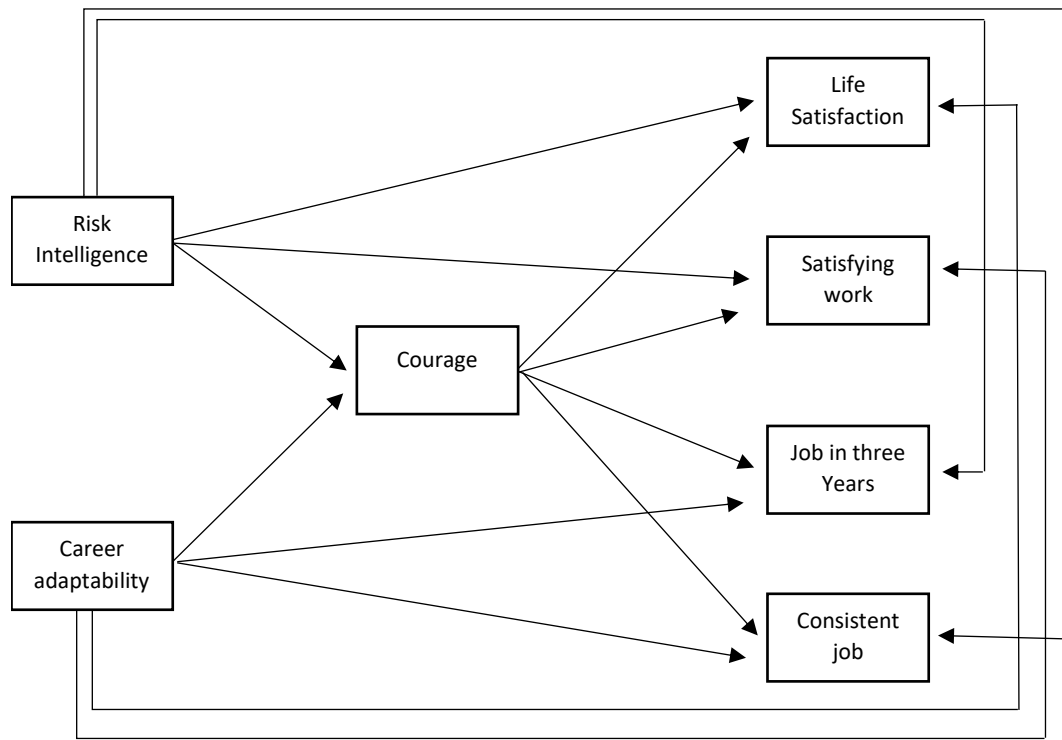
Based on the literature review, career adaptability and risk intelligence are career management skills related to life satisfaction and perceptions of

future employment. Additionally, courage seems to enhance career development and promote life satisfaction.

Career adaptability, understood as the ability to adapt to changes in the world of work (Savickas, 1997), could directly affect life satisfaction and the perception of a positive working future (consistent with one's studies, satisfactory and quickly); moreover, career adaptability could stimulate positive action despite worries related to the world of work. These actions could also promote life satisfaction and improve the perception of a positive working future. So the hypotheses, in this case, are that career adaptability can have a direct and indirect effect, mediated by courage, on life satisfaction, on the perception of obtaining a future job consistent with one's studies, satisfactory and quickly. Similarly, risk intelligence (Craparo et al., 2018) could have a positive effect on life satisfaction and indicators of a positive working future. Furthermore, risk intelligence could foster courageous actions, and these improve life satisfaction and the perception of a positive working future. Therefore, it is hypothesized that risk intelligence can have a direct and indirect effect, mediated by courage, on life satisfaction, on the perception of obtaining a future job consistent with one's studies, satisfactory and quickly.

Thus, the aim of this study was to test the mediating role of courage between two independent variables (career adaptability and risk intelligence) and four dependent variables (life satisfaction and three indicators of future employment) as illustrated in Figure 1. All relationships were hypothesized as positive.

Figure 1. Hypothesized model



2. Method

2.1 Design, participants, and procedure

This study implemented a longitudinal data collection, as there were mediation hypotheses. Mediation are hypotheses about causal processes (MacKinnon et al., 2007; Shrout & Bolger, 2002), which require time to unfold (Cole & Maxwell, 2003; Gollob & Reichardt, 1987, 1991). On the other hand, if cross-sectional data had been used, there would have been a risk of hypothesizing instantaneous causal relationships (Selig & Preacher, 2009). Maxwell and Cole (2007) explained that cross mediation tests can yield biased results even when mediation is zero. To conduct mediation analyzes it would be necessary to collect data in 3 stages. However, when this is not possible, mediation analysis using two-stage data collection is still better than cross-sectional data collection (Littel, 2013). However, researchers in this field have debated over the best time interval to use in data collection in this type of study (Collins, 2006; Selig & Preacher, 2009). For instance, Selig and Preacher (2009)

suggested that time intervals must be long enough for effects to occur but not so long that these effects can disappear. In the present study, two administrations were performed two months apart. At Time 1 the dependent variables were evaluated; at Time 2 the mediator and independent variables were evaluated. This made it possible to conduct mediation analyzes rather than opting for a structural equation model, in which data is generally collected across the board.

University education is a particularly important moment in one's career path, a time when students begin working toward their professional goals. This is a time when undergraduates should apply their personal resources (including risk intelligence, career adaptability and courage) to feel satisfied with their life and envision a positive professional future. For this reason, the study was aimed at university students.

Before proceeding with the data collection, the minimum sample size was verified to test the hypotheses. To do this, GPower software (Faul et al., 2007; Faul et al., 2009), version 3.1 was used. The parameters indicated were a medium effect size of .15 (Effect size $f^2 = .15$) with $\alpha = .05$, minimum Power $(1 - \beta) = .95$ and Number of predictors = 3 (risk intelligence, career adaptability and courage). The analysis showed that a minimum of 119 participants was needed.

Given this premise, participants were 316 (M = 92; F = 224), aged 19 to 27 years (M = 22.92; SD = 1.78). Convenience sampling was used as the sampling method. At the time of completing the protocol, all the participants were attending a degree course. With their professors' permission, the students participated in this study during class hours. At the first data collection, participants were given the online protocol and asked to enter a code consisting of the first letter of their surname, the first letter of their first name, and their day of birth. In this way, anonymity was guaranteed, and protocols filled at the first and at the second data collection (after two months) could be paired. At the time of the creation of the protocol and its administration, the Italian Association of Psychology's (AIP, 2015) code of ethics was implemented.

2.2 Measures

The research protocol consisted of the measures listed below. In the first step (Time 1), the subjective risk intelligence and career adaptability were detected; after two months (Time 2), courage scale and three questions exploring expectations about future work were administered to the same participants.

Biographical Data. The participants were asked to indicate their age and gender.

Risk Intelligence Scale (SRIS; Craparo et al., 2018). Risk Intelligence Scale is composed of 21 items that describe behaviors or moods. In this study, the participants indicated their degrees of agreement or disagreement with various statements based on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (“totally disagree”) to 5 (“totally agree”). These items included statements such as the following: “When I feel fearful about something, I have difficulty concentrating on anything” and “To be able to create new procedures, I think for myself instead of following procedures established by others.” Subsequently, a total Risk Intelligence score was used. In this study Cronbach’s alpha was .84.

Career Adaptability Inventory (CAAI; Soresi et al., 2012). The Career Adaptability Inventory is composed of 24 items and was used in this study to evaluate a total point of Career Adaptability. Again, the participants had to respond to statements by indicating their degrees of agreement or disagreement with those statements (e.g., “how much do you feel capable of ... preparing for the future”), using a 5-point response scale, from 1 (“not strong”) to 5 (“strongest”). In this study Cronbach’s alpha was .95.

Courage Measure (CM; Norton & Weiss, 2009; Ginevra et al., 2020). The Italian version of the Measure of Courage consists of six items. Sample items included items such as the following: “If I am worried or anxious about something, I will do or face it anyway.” The answers were given on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (“never”) to 7 (“always”). In this study Cronbach’s alpha was .82.

Satisfaction with life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985). The SWLS consists of five items requiring individuals to indicate their agreement with proposed statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly agree”; 7 = “strongly disagree”). Sample items included statements such as “In most ways, my life is close to my ideal”. In this study Cronbach’s alpha was .88.

Satisfying work. To evaluate the belief that one will find a satisfying job after graduation, the researchers created a new item for this study: “After graduation, how likely do you think you are to find a job that satisfies you in at least one aspect you consider important (e.g., economic aspects or the type of activities carried out)?” The responses to these items were given on a 10-point Likert scale, from 1 (“not at all probable”) to 10 (“extremely probable”).

Job in Three Years. To evaluate the belief that one would find a job within three years of graduation, the following item was created specifically for this study: “How likely is it that you will find a job within three years of completing your studies?” In this case, the answers were also given on a 10-point Likert scale, from 1 (“not at all probable”) to 10 (“extremely probable”).

Consistent work. To evaluate the belief that one would find consistent work in their own fields after graduation, this item was specifically created for this study: “After graduation, how likely is it that you will find a job consistent with your studies?” Again, these answers were given on a 10-point Likert scale, from 1 (“not at all probable”) to 10 (“extremely probable”).

2.3 Data Analysis

Before testing this model, the properties of the measurement model was assessed. To do this, a CFA according to Harman's single factor test was performed to determine to what extent the variance of the common method was an issue.

For data analysis the JASP 0.14.1.0 software (JASP Team, 2022) was used. Initially, the software made it possible to perform data normality analysis and calculate descriptive statistics and correlations. Next, a mediation analysis was conducted using the bootstrapping method with 5000 repetitions, with a confidence interval (CI) of 95%. In all cases, to facilitate interpretation of the

result, the standardized β and the confidence intervals (CI) 95% were reported. The latter, when it does not include 0, indicates the significance of the effect with a 5% probability of error. Each of the hypotheses expressed above was tested individually.

3 Results

3.1 Descriptive statistics

The Shapiro–Wilk test was used to evaluate the distribution of the variables; being significant ($p < 0.05$), this test indicated deviations from the normality. Descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 1. Regarding the three independent variables, it is possible to observe that the students show a medium-high score on all three constructs: satisfying work, job in three years and consistent work.

The Shapiro-Wilk tests indicate that all dimensions did not have a normal distribution. No changes have been made to the data for analyses to follow.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Construct	M (DS), Shapiro–Wilk (p value)
Risk intelligence	3.19 (0.47), 0.96 (<.001)
Career adaptability	4.23 (0.55), 0.96 (<.001)
Courage	5.16 (1.09), 0.97 (<.001)
Life Satisfaction	4.89 (1.23), 0.98 (<.001)
Satisfying work	7.27 (2.00), 0.93 (<.001)
Job in three Years	7.39 (2.29), 0.90 (<.001)
Consistent work	7.21 (2.20), 0.93 (<.001)

Note: M = mean; DS = standard deviation.

Due to the non-normality of the data, the correlations were calculated using a non-parametric method, the Spearman correlation coefficient. Aside a negative correlation with consistent work, age did not correlate significantly with any other variable. Instead, all other variables correlated significantly and positively. These results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Bivariate correlations between model variables (Spearman's rho)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Age	1							
2 Risk Intelligence	.09	1						
3 Career adaptability	.06	.38**	1					
4 Courage	.05	.39**	.63**	1				
5 Life Satisfaction	-.10	.19**	.49**	.49**	1			
6 Satisfying work	-.06	.25**	.41**	.42**	.47**	1		
7 Job in three years	-.01	.19**	.28**	.30**	.32**	.35**	1	
8 Consistent work	-.13*	.15*	.28**	.27**	.43**	.62**	.34**	1

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

3.2 CFA of the Measures

A CFA was performed according to the Harman single factor test to determine to what extent the variance of the common method was a problem. The model in which the items were loaded on a single factor provided the following fit indices: χ^2 / df of 4.40, an IFI of .49, a CFI of .49, RMSEA of .10. This indicates that there was not a good fit of the model when all items were loaded on a single factor.

3.3 Mediation Analysis

The bootstrapping method was used to test all mediation hypothesis, allowing to verify the significance of indirect effects. The mediation results are presented in Table 3, which contains the standardized C.I., indicating the intensity of the effect, and the 95% C.I., indicating the significance of the effect with a 5% probability of error (the C.I. that do not contain 0 are significant).

Table 3. Direct, indirect, and total effects (standardized β)

Paths	Direct effect		Indirect effect		Total effect	
	β	C.I. 95%	β	C.I. 95%	β	C.I. 95%
RI-CO-LS	-0.18	-0.44–0.09	0.43	0.18–0.67	-0.02	-0.30–0.25
RI-CO-SW	0.16	-0.31–0.63	0.43	0.15–0.71	0.32	-0.15–0.80

RI-CO-CW	-0.17	-0.71–0.38	0.17	0.03–0.30	-0.00	-0.55–0.54
RI-CO-JR	0.20	-0.59–0.99	0.16	0.03–0.29	0.29	-0.49–1.06
CA-CO-LS	0.66	0.40–0.92	0.41	0.26–0.56	1.07	0.83–1.30
CA-CO-SW	0.80	0.34–1.26	0.22	-0.16–0.62	1.22	0.82–1.63
CA-CO-CW	0.54	0.01–1.08	0.09	-0.07–0.24	0.98	0.51–0.54
CA-CO-JY	0.29	-0.48–1.05	0.16	0.05–0.26	0.51	-0.14–1.17

Note. RI = risk intelligence; CO = courage; CA = career adaptability; LS = life satisfaction; SW = satisfying work; CW = consistent work; JR = job in three years

In this study, career adaptability had a direct relationship with life satisfaction, satisfying work and consistent work. Courage mediated the relationship between career adaptability and life satisfaction and career adaptability and belief one would find a job within three years after graduation. Moreover, the relationship between risk intelligence and all other variables was fully mediated by courage.

4. Discussion

This study's aim was to demonstrate the mediating role of courage between career adaptability and risk intelligence as input variables and life satisfaction, the perception of finding a satisfactory job, within three years, and consistent with one's studies as output variables. The results highlighted the existence of indirect effects among our variables. According to Hayes (2018), «It is the test of the indirect effect that matters, not the test on the individual paths in the model» (p. 119).

Regarding risk intelligence, contrary to the initial hypotheses, no direct effects on the independent variables emerged, but all the effects are indirect, mediated by courage. The role of courage as a mediator between individual resources and general satisfaction is already known in the literature. For instance, Magnano et al. (2021) investigated the role of courage as a mediator between personal resources and individual well-being outcomes. These authors showed that courage mediates between professional readiness and life satisfaction. Similarly, Lodi et al. (2022) showed that courage mediates between

positive personal resources (optimism and hope) and life satisfaction. Probably the evaluation of something as risky could arouse emotions of fear; courage, being the tendency to act despite fear, could trigger actions that would enable the individual to achieve the goals of well-being and imagine a more positive working future.

Furthermore, courage mediated the relationship between risk intelligence and the expectations students had about their future employment. In fact, the role of risk intelligence in predicting future job expectations had already been confirmed in the literature. For example, Magnano et al. (2021) linked risk intelligence to expectations of future work through the mediation of satisfaction with one's degree course and its perceived usefulness for one's future career. The results of this study allow to broaden the knowledge of the relationship between risk intelligence and expectations on future work. These results, in fact, could suggest that risk intelligence contributes to activating individual actions capable of improving life satisfaction and perception of a positive working future in terms of satisfaction, consistency and waiting times.

Regarding career adaptability, a direct effect was found on life satisfaction as already found in other studies (Hirschi, 2009; Ginevra et al., 2018; Cabras & Mondo, 2018). Moreover, courage mediated its relationship with life satisfaction, confirming the results of Magnano et al. (2021).

Finally, there was a direct effect of career adaptability on the perception of achieving satisfying and consistent work, but there was no indirect effect through the mediation of courage, although a total effect was present. Furthermore, contrary to our hypotheses, there was no direct effect of career adaptability on the perception of getting a job within three years and in this case there was only an indirect effect, mediated by courage. These results may suggest that, in general, those with high career adaptability have more optimistic visions of their future than those with less career adaptability. Courage increases the perception of being able to get a job within three years, but it has no impact on the quality of this job (i.e., whether it is satisfactory and consistent with one's studies). These results confirm the literature's results on the relationship of

career adaptability and courage with creating positive expectations about the future (Creed et al., 2003; Germeijs & Verschueren, 2007; Neuenschwander & Garrett, 2008; Patton et al., 2002).

5. Limitations and conclusions

The world is a socioeconomic context characterized by profound changes, and those who enter the world of work often find it difficult to imagine themselves in their future professional activity. Frequently, these changes can negatively affect perceived well-being. This study revealed that risk intelligence and career adaptability, with the mediation of courage, can increase life satisfaction and positive thinking about the future. Therefore, courage helps people implement behaviors to manage risks and adapt to changes in the work world. These resources are fundamental aspects for the well-being of professionals as they build their careers.

However, this study's results must be read while considering certain limitations. First, a convenience sample was used, mostly from southern Italy. This origin could influence the generalizability of the results because southern Italy has different characteristics than northern Italy. In fact, the employment rate is increasing in northern Italy, while in southern Italy it is decreasing. Most of the sample population was female; the prevalence of one gender over the other may have produced further distortions. This study used self-reporting measures, which could have affected the reliability of the data. The protocol administered at two different times was used to test the mediation, while the ideal would be to have three measurement times. Finally, some variables (the socio-demographics, for example gender and age) could have been added as control variables, to check whether they intervene or not in the mediations.

Thus, future research could further explore the role of courage as a mediator between positive resources and well-being or career-building indices. Additionally, further research could focus on training schedules to develop personal resources. Indeed, career professionals have an increasing need for

tools to help their clients build their careers through the enhancement of resources.

STUDY 2. SELF-EFFICACY AND OPTIMISM AS RESOURCES TO MANAGE JOB INSTABILITY AND PROMOTE LIFE SATISFACTION AND FUTURE DECENT WORK PERCEPTIONS: RESEARCH WITH ITALIAN AND SWISS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

1. Introduction

The concept of decent work was introduced in 1999 by the Director General of the International Labor Organization (ILO). During the conference, the Director General emphasized that work is essential for the well-being of individuals and communities; a necessary condition of employment that promotes well-being, however, is that one's job is decent (ILO, 2003). Decent work involves obtaining productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and respect for human rights (Anker et al., 2003). This concept includes six dimensions:

- *Opportunity*, which refers to the need to have work to be able to speak of decent work.
- *Freedom*, which refers to the possibility of freely choosing one's occupation without being forced to accept working conditions characterized by discrimination.
- *Productivity*, which refers to being guaranteed adequate tools necessary for one's livelihood.
- *Fairness*, which concerns the absence of discrimination.
- *Safety*, which relates to the health of workers.
- *Dignity*, which, for example, involves respect for workers, who should actively contribute to decisions affecting their work.

Respect for these principles is shared on several levels: political, economic, social, and scientific; however, this respect is not always put into practice (Magnano & Zammitti, 2021). Society is full of risk (Beck, 2014). Instability in respect of one's professional future can cause feelings of discomfort and despair (Nota & Rossier, 2015). Emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2011) was defined as the age of instability. During adulthood, a person is subject

to frequent changes in his/her work, training, and other important dimensions of life. In light of this, job instability takes on particular significance. Such instability is common among young people who are about to begin their careers (Salas-Nicás et al., 2020). Individuals experience job instability differently based on their personal characteristics, such as age, sex, education, and career status (Metin Camgoz et al., 2016; Erdogan et al., 2020; Salas-Nicás et al., 2020).

The perception of having the opportunity to find a decent job negatively correlates with job insecurity (Marcionetti & Zammiti, under review; Zammiti et al., 2022). Job instability causes stress and anxiety (Debus et al., 2019; Yeves et al., 2019) and makes it difficult for a person to imagine the prospect of a decent job (Magnano et al., 2021). Job insecurity can have the same negative outcomes as job loss because it causes uncontrollability and unpredictability (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995; Sverke et al., 2002). Furthermore, this can have a negative effect on one's overall life satisfaction. Indeed, researchers have highlighted correlations between job insecurity and negative outcomes for individuals' health, well-being, and satisfaction (Silla et al., 2005). Based on this research, this paper offers the following two hypotheses:

H1: Job instability could have a negative effect on a person's perception of finding decent work in their own region

H2: Job instability could have a negative effect on life satisfaction

The way people deal with job insecurity and its possible effects on their perception of obtaining decent work in the future can be influenced by the personal resources they possess. In fact, as Magnano et al. (2021) note, career transitions are a critical period that can increase the uncertainty and worries a person experiences; faced with worry and discomfort, individuals should be able, with their own resources, to respond and adapt to job instability (Savickas, 2011).

One such resource is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a key concept that is derived from Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986). The elements of this theory are reciprocal determinism, human agency, and self-efficacy. Reciprocal determinism refers to the fact that people, their behaviors, and the environment influence each other. Human agency refers to the ability people have to make events happen. Self-efficacy corresponds to beliefs about the possibility of achieving one's goals (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1996).

Self-efficacy affects one's motivation, persistence, and interest in a task (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Schunk, 2003); it is negatively correlated with depression and anxiety (Ehrenberg, Cox & Koopman, 1991; Muris, 2002) and positively correlated with academic satisfaction (Huebner & McCullough, 2000) and scholastic success (Pajares & Miller, 1994; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994; Mone et al., 1995; Magnano et al., 2020). Hence, self-efficacy plays an important role in career development (Bandura, 1982). Self-efficacy is a resource contextualized to a specific area and many studies have focused on self-efficacy as a source of student influence on motivation and learning (Bouffard-Bouchard, 1990; Bouffard-Bouchard et al., 1991; Lent et al., 2002; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Schunk, 2003; Zimmerman et al., 1992). Indeed, self-efficacy could influence students' motivation through task interest, persistence, goals, use of cognitive and self-regulatory strategies. The studies show that self-efficacy plays a predictive role in achievement.

Regarding the relationship between self-efficacy and decent work, researchers in one study found that adolescents who had higher levels of self-efficacy possessed a more complex view of the concept of decent work (Zammitti et al., 2021). However, in their study, Zammitti et al. (2021) did not verify whether there were any prediction relationships. This leads one to speculate that self-efficacy could be a valuable resource for managing job insecurity and encouraging people to believe they will have opportunities to obtain a decent job in the future.

There are few studies on the relationship between self-efficacy and job insecurity (Etehad & Karatepe, 2019). However, research has shown that job insecurity has a negative effect on people's self-esteem (Kinnunen et al., 2003), sense of personal control (Glavin, 2013), and professional self-efficacy (Guarnaccia et al., 2018). Moreover, job insecurity has been linked to a number of personal characteristics such as neuroticism (Tivendell & Bourbonnais, 2000) and negative affectivity (Mak & Mueller, 2000). Therefore, one could hypothesize that:

H3: Job instability can have a negative effect on student self-efficacy.

H4: Student self-efficacy can have a positive effect on the perception of having a decent job

H5: Student self-efficacy can have a positive effect on life satisfaction

Another important resource that could help college students cope with job instability is optimism. Scheier and Carver (1985) argue that optimistic people tend to expect positive results even in the face of obstacles. Shifren and Hooker (1995) define optimism as «the current expectancy that positive outcomes will occur in the future» (p. 61). Youssef and Luthans (2007) characterize optimism as an «attributional style that explains positive events in terms of personal, permanent, and pervasive causes and negative events in terms of external, temporary, and situation-specific ones» (p. 778). As with self-efficacy, optimism is also linked to the health and well-being of individuals. Indeed, optimism is a predictor of subjective well-being (Chang & Sanna, 2001, Diener et al., 2003, Eid & Diener, 2004, Makikangas & Kinnunen, 2003).

Furthermore, scholars have suggested that optimism could be a predictor of positive career outcomes (Kluemper et al., 2009). Being a positive psychological resource, optimism can promote positive career-enhancing attitudes (Cameron et al., 2003; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Spreitzer et al., 2005). In planning one's future, having high expectations pushes one to commit more

deeply to one’s goals and persist to achieve the desired results and meet the challenges one faces (Ginevra et al., 2017). Obtaining a decent job is a challenge in the current labor market, such that the 2030 Agenda includes the following among its objectives: Encouraging economic, lasting, inclusive and sustainable growth, full and productive and decent work for all (United Nations, 2015). Consequently, in imagining that one can obtain a decent job in their own context, optimism could help one avoid becoming stuck due to job instability, promote one’s well-being, and take steps toward a more positive future. Given these premises, we assume that:

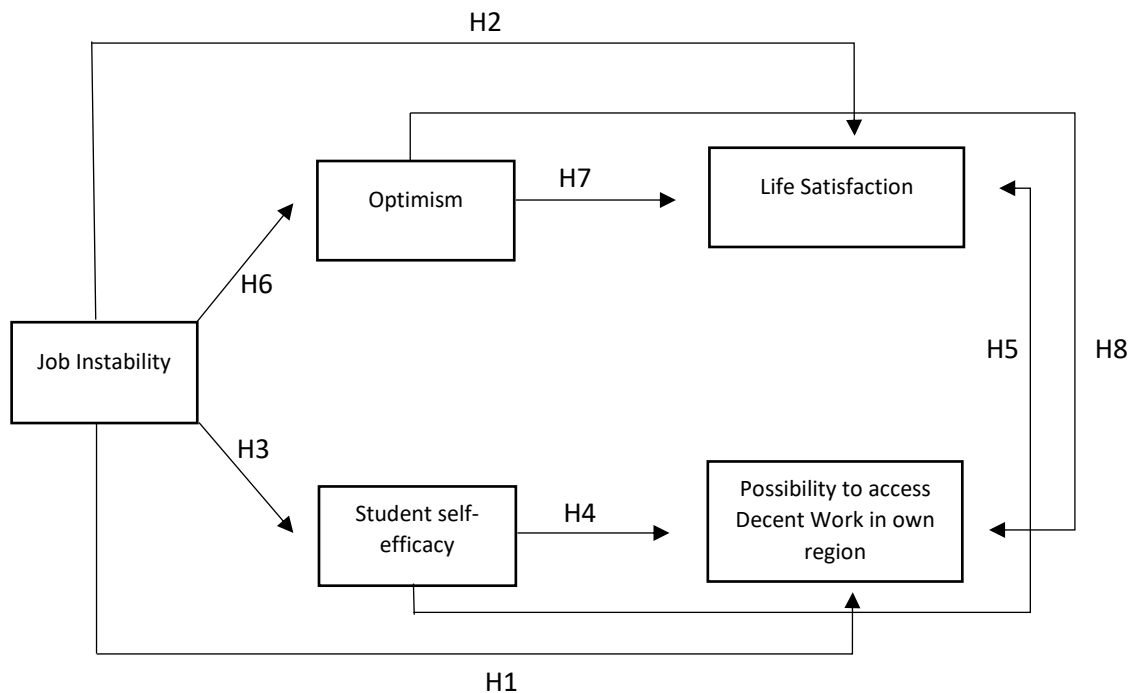
H6: Job instability can have a negative effect on optimism

H7: Optimism can have a positive effect on life satisfaction

H8: Optimism can have a positive effect on the perception of obtaining local decent work

Figure 1 summarises all the assumptions made previously.

Figure 1. The hypothesized model.



1.1 The context

The research was conducted in the south of Switzerland (Canton Ticino) and in the south of Italy (Sicily). Switzerland has 8.5 million inhabitants and is divided into three main linguistic and cultural regions: a German-speaking region, a French-speaking region, and an Italian-speaking region. The Italian-speaking region is in Southern Switzerland, which represents 8% of the population of Switzerland (SWI; www.swissinfo.ch). The official language in this area is Italian. Geographically, Switzerland is located in the center of Europe, but it is not part of the European Union. The other location for this research, Italy, has almost 59 million inhabitants (ISTAT; www.istat.it). Italy is part of the European Union. In the south of Italy lies Sicily, which has nearly 5 million inhabitants. Geographically, Italy is located south of Switzerland, which it partially borders.

Masdonati et al. (2019) found that decent work is correlated positively with job and life satisfaction. Di Fabio and Kenny (2019) obtained similar results, finding that the dimensions of the decent work, which can be measured using the Decent Work Scale (DWS; Duffy et al., 2016), are positively correlated with job satisfaction. Both these two studies included qualitative components that took the participants' views on decent work into account. In the first study, conducted in Switzerland, the authors found that the definition of decent work includes four categories, each of which can be divided into two sub-categories: (1) positive employment conditions (sub-categories: compensation and workload and hours); (2) attractive work context (sub-categories: relationships at work and contents of work); (3) work security (sub-categories: physical security and employment security); and (4) valued personal outcomes of work (sub-categories: meaning at work and growth at and through work). In the second study, which was conducted in Italy, the authors identified 12 categories: remuneration, relationships, safety, work organization, meaning, work/family balance, free time, rest, recognition, respect, growth, protection, and equality.

Few studies have compared the Swiss and Italian contexts with respect to the dimensions. In Santilli et al. (2017) research, the goal was to verify the relationship between professional adaptability, hope, and optimism in terms of life satisfaction. In their study, the sample consisted of young Swiss and Italian adolescents. Although there was a difference between the two groups with respect to career adaptability and orientation toward the future, the authors did not find a difference in life satisfaction. Moreover, in both samples, the participants' orientation towards the future (evaluated by measuring their hope and optimism) had a positive effect on life satisfaction.

In Marcionetti and Zammitti's (under review) study, they compare a sample of university students from southern Switzerland with a sample of university students from southern Italy. In studying both samples, they tested a model in which job instability negatively influenced the participants' perceptions of access to decent work. Given these premises, it is hypothesized that:

H9: The model hypothesized and described in Figure 1 will function in the same manner in the sample of Swiss students and the sample of Italian students.

2. Method

2.1 Design, participants, and procedure

As the study 1, before proceeding with the data collection, the minimum sample size was verified to test the hypotheses, using GPower software version 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007; Faul et al., 2009). The parameters indicated were a medium effect size of .15 (Effect size $f^2 = .15$) with $\alpha = .05$, minimum Power ($1 - \beta$) = .95 and Number of predictors = 3 (job instability, optimism, and self-efficacy). The analysis showed that a minimum of 119 participants was needed.

Convenience sampling was used as the sampling method. In this study, participants were 430 university students ($M = 134$; $F = 296$), aged from 18 to

30 years ($M = 22.23$; $SD = 2.49$). The participants were divided into two nationalities: 227 of them came from southern Switzerland, the other 203 from southern Italy. All the participants, at the time of completing the protocol, were attending a degree course.

Participants were invited to take part in a research on personal resources. The objectives of the research were explained in the introduction to the protocol. After giving their informed consent to the use of the data, the participants completed the research protocol; they were free to abandon the compilation at any time. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and were asked to indicate certain demographic information (age, sex, country of residence). All the administrations took place during a time when the students were engaged in university lessons. This ensured that all participants were indeed students. During the administration of the protocol, all the indications provided by the code of ethics of the Italian Association of Psychology (AIP, 2015) were taken into consideration.

2.2 Measures

The following measures were used:

Biographical Data. Participants were asked to indicate their gender, age, and country of residence.

Job instability. We used four items adapted from De Witte et al. (2010). Participants were presented with statements, and they had to indicate how much they agreed. Answers were given on a five-point Likert scale from 1 “I totally disagree” to 4 “I totally agree”. An item example was “I think the profession in which I am training will soon change for the worse”. Items were translated in Italian and adapted for this study. Cronbach's alpha was .83.

Life Orientation Test (LOT-R; Scheier et al., 1994). This instrument assesses optimism and consist in 6 items (sample item is: In uncertain times, I usually expect the best). The participant must read the statements and indicate how much they describe themselves, using a scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to

5 (strongly agree). For this sample, Cronbach's alpha for the two dimensions was .79.

Student self-efficacy. To evaluate Student self-efficacy, we used 5 items from the The Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS) by Midgley et al. (2000). Also in this case, items were translated in Italian and adapted for this study. An item example is “I’m certain I can master the skills taught in this training”. The participants read the items and gave an answer on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (not true at all) to 6 (completely true). In this study, Cronbach’s alpha was .91.

Satisfaction With life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985). The SWLS consist in 5-items that require an answer on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly disagree). Sample item is “In most ways my life is close to my ideal”. The participant had to indicate his degree of agreement with the statements. Cronbach’s alpha was .88.

Possibility to access Decent Work in own region. The perception of the easiness of access to decent work in own region was evaluated with one item: “Decent work is an employment that meets the minimum acceptable standards for a good life. Do you think it is easy for you, in your region, to find decent work today?”. The answer was given on a six-point Likert scale from 1 “not at all easy” to 6 “very easy”.

2.3 Data Analysis

The SPSS software was used to carry out the preliminary analyzes; in this way we calculated the descriptive statistics, the Cronbach alpha coefficients and the correlations between the variables of the study.

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed with the aim of testing the properties of the measurement model. Subsequently, a structural equation model (SEM) was tested. In this phase the AMOS software was used (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999). A structural equation model (SEM) was initially tested for the total sample. To assess whether the model was good, we referred to some indices indicated in the literature: the ratio between χ^2 per degrees of

freedom (χ^2 / df), which must be less than 3, the Incremental Fit Index (IFI) and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), whose values must be greater than 0.90 (Medsker et al., 1994), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), which must be less than 0.08 (Byrne, 2010). Then, to investigate whether the estimated effects were similar within the Italian and Swiss sample, we performed a multiple-group SEM permitting to test for invariance across the two groups. As recommended by Chen (2007), the assumption of invariance between models is considered acceptable if $\Delta CFI < 0.01$ and $\Delta RMSEA < 0.015$.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 1. The Shapiro – Wilk test was used to calculate the distribution of the variables; being significant ($p < 0.05$) this test indicated deviations from normal. This means that all dimensions did not have a normal distribution. No changes have been made to the data.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Construct	M (DS), Shapiro–Wilk (p value)
Job instability	2.46 (0.96), 0.92 (0.000)
Optimism	3.11 (0.72), 0.99 (0.001)
Student self-efficacy	4.71 (0.85), 0.96 (0.000)
Life satisfaction	4.56 (1.28), 0.98 (0.000)
Possibility to access decent work in own region	2.82 (1.16), 0.92 (0.000)

Note. M = mean; DS = standard deviation.

Due to the non-normality of the data, the correlations were calculated using a non-parametric method, the Spearman correlation coefficient. Significant positive correlations were found between optimism, student self-efficacy, and life satisfaction. Job instability negatively correlates with all dimensions. Optimism and life satisfaction correlate positively with possibility

to access decent work in own region. Age correlates only with satisfaction, in a negative way. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Bivariate correlations between model variables (Spearman's rho).

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Age	1					
2 Job instability	-,06	1				
3 Optimism	,05	-,22**	1			
4 Student self-efficacy	,04	-,30**	,26**	1		
5 Life satisfaction	-,11*	-,21**	,41**	,29**	1	
6 Decent work perception	-,03	-,13**	,19**	,06	,23**	1

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

3.2 CFA of the Measures

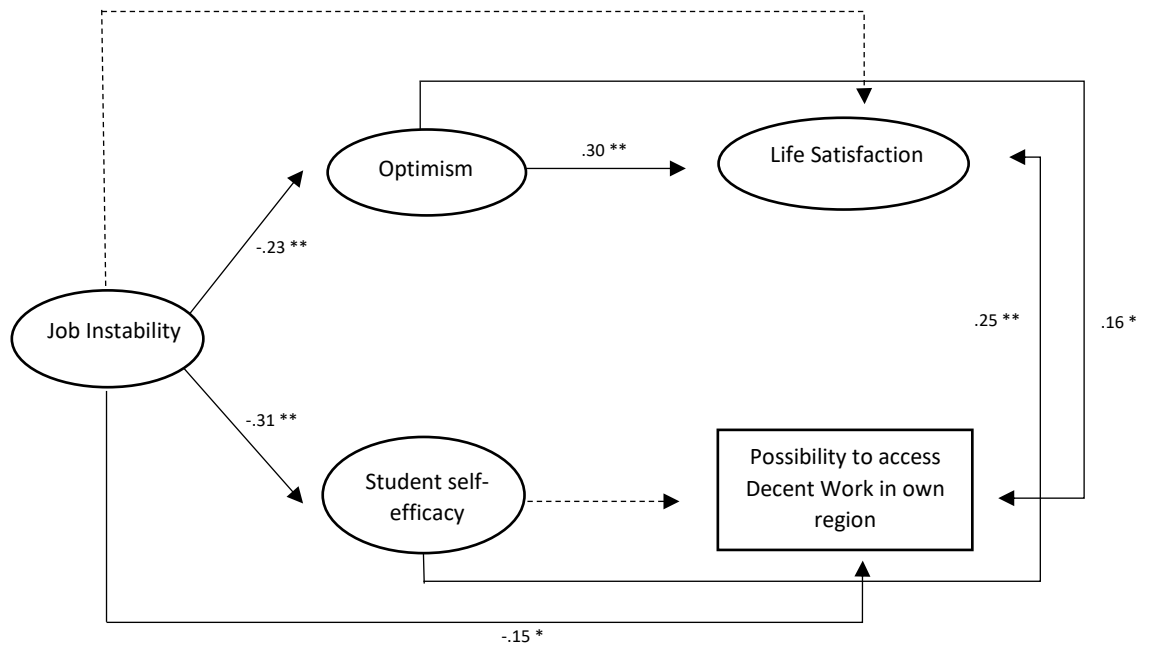
A CFA was performed according to the Harman single factor test to determine to what extent the variance of the common method was a problem. This allowed us to compare the hypothesized measurement model with a single factor model, in which all items of the different scales were loaded on a single factor.

The model in which the items were loaded on a single factor provided the following fit indices: χ^2 / df of 16.12, an IFI of .394, a CFI of .392, RMSEA of .188 and AIC of 3130.955. The second model, the hypothesized one, provided better indices with a χ^2 for degrees of freedom of 3.38, a IFI of .91, a CFI of .91, RMSEA of .075, and AIC of 713.922. However, with the aim of achieving even better indices, we correlated the errors of item 1 and 3 of Optimism. This led us to have the following fit indices: χ^2 per degrees of freedom of 2.86, a IFI of .93, a CFI of .93, RMSEA of .066, and AIC of 618.656. The hypothesized model therefore provided a better result than the single factor model. The differences were significant according to a comparison of the models' χ^2 values and degrees of freedom: $\Delta\chi^2 (8) = 3044.095$ ($p < 0.000$). According to these results, we found no evidence of common method bias in the data.

3.3 Structural Model

Finally, a SEM model was tested in which Job instability had an effect on Optimism and Self-efficacy, and in which all these dimensions affect Life Satisfaction and Possibility to access Decent work in own region perception. In the first step, the specified model provided a good fit for the data, with a χ^2 per degrees of freedom of 3.38, a IFI of .91, a CFI of .91, and RMSEA of .075. To further improve the model, the errors of Optimism items 1 and 3 were correlated. The model reached a better fit, with a χ^2 per degrees of freedom of 2.86, a IFI of .93, a CFI of .93, and RMSEA of .066. Significant relations are reported in Figure 2. All the relationships between the variables are indicated by standardized beta.

Figure 2. SEM Model



Note. Only significant relationships are reported. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$

Job instability had a significant and negative direct effect on optimism, student self-efficacy and possibility to access decent work in own region

perception, confirming H1, H3 and H6. There wasn't effect of job instability on life satisfaction, disconfirming H2. Optimism had a significant and positive direct effect on life satisfaction and possibility to access decent work in own region perception, confirming H7 and H8. Student self-efficacy had a significant and positive direct effect on life satisfaction, confirming H5, but had no effect on possibility to access decent work in own region perception, disconfirming H4.

For this model, using a multiple-group SEM, national invariance was tested to confirm that the model was adequate for Italian and Swiss students. The analysis confirmed weak factors invariance ($\Delta\text{CFI} = 0.001$ and $\Delta\text{RMSEA} = 0.000$) and structural invariance ($\Delta\text{CFI} = 0.000$ and $\Delta\text{RMSEA} = 0.000$). H9 was confirmed.

4. Discussion

One of this study's hypotheses was that personal resources (such as self-efficacy and optimism) could have a mediating effect between job instability on the one hand and life satisfaction and one's perception of the possibility they could obtain decent work locally on the other. Furthermore, we hypothesized that the model could work in both the Italian and the Swiss samples.

The assumptions have been partially confirmed. In Marcionetti and Zammiti's (under review) study, they found that job instability had a negative effect on participants' perceptions of obtaining a decent job in the future. This result is also confirmed in this study. Thus, perceiving high levels of professional instability leads students to imagine a less dignified working future in their own context.

According to the results of the present study, job instability has a negative effect on student self-efficacy and optimism. In fact, these results are consistent with what has been reported in the literature on the subject, as job instability has a negative effect on different personal resources. Job instability is part of contemporary working life due to currently uncertain economic conditions, the many organizational changes that characterize the modern world, technological progress, and other factors. Regarding self-efficacy,

research on the influence of job instability on self-efficacy is scarce. Rather, some authors have attempted to study the relationship between self-efficacy and job insecurity, which reflects a perceptions of job instability (Landsbergis et al., 2012). Thus, job instability and job insecurity are interrelated. Job instability represents the set of objective conditions that can lead to job insecurity (e.g., the closure of organizations), and job insecurity represents the individual's perceptions of job instability (Probst, 2005). In a study conducted on a sample of Chinese workers, Feng, Lu, and Siu (2008) found that self-efficacy moderated the relationships that link job insecurity to physical and psychological well-being. In another study with Italian workers, Guarnaccia et al. (2018) found that job insecurity had a negative effect on occupational self-efficacy and general health. In Finland, Kinnunen et al. (2003) found that job insecurity has a negative effect on self-esteem. In Zheng et al.'s (2014) research, they found that job insecurity was negatively correlated with optimism. Furthermore, Bosman and Buitendach (2005) demonstrated that high levels of optimism are associated with low levels of job insecurity.

Generally, the studies presented above focused on adults. Given the sample in the present study, it seems possible to extend the same conclusions to samples of younger populations. Perceptions of professional instability can therefore have a negative effect on students' personal resources. However, researchers have not yet investigated what factors can cause students to perceive the professions that they are training for as being unstable.

This study also hypothesized that job instability would have a negative effect on life satisfaction. This hypothesis has not been confirmed. Studies in this field have mainly been conducted on samples that consist of adults who possess work experience. In this case, the sample was made up of university students. Notably, job instability varies based on where a person is in their career (Metin Camgoz et al., 2016; Erdogan et al., 2020; Salas-Nicás et al., 2020). Therefore, college students who have not yet gained work experience might find job instability threatening, but not to the point of having an effect on their life satisfaction.

As hypothesized, optimism and student self-efficacy could influence life satisfaction. This is consistent with what has been found in the literature. Studies show that optimism is correlated with life satisfaction in children (Veronese et al., 2012), adolescents (Santilli et al., 2017), university students (Bailey et al., 2007; Kardas et al., 2019), adults (Hayes & Weathington, 2007), and even the elderly (Leung et al., 2005). Moreover, self-efficacy influences life satisfaction. Studies have shown that self-efficacy is correlated with life satisfaction in young adults (Çakar, 2012), university students (Capri et al., 2012; O'Sullivan, 2011; Azizli, 2015), adults (Chang et al., 2013), and older adults (Stephan et al., 2011).

Although some studies have indicated that there is a relationship between self-efficacy and decent work (Zammitti et al., 2021), this study has not confirmed this relationship. Self-efficacy is a contextualized dimension. The present study has evaluated self-efficacy in one's training. It is most likely that self-efficacy, in this specific context, has no direct effect on one's perception of whether they will obtain a local decent job in the future. Indeed, in Marcionetti & Zammitti's study (under review) there would appear to be a possible indirect effect of self-efficacy on decent work access perception, through the mediation of the value accorded to education and student social engagement.

Finally, it was assumed that the model would be suitable for both Swiss and Italian students. This hypothesis has been confirmed and is consistent with other studies in the field (Zammitti et al., 2022).

5. Limitations and conclusions

The present study is not without some limitations. For example, the use of self-assessment tools could lead to errors. The study showed that the hypothesized model fit the data. However, it is a cross-sectional study. This implies that it would be appropriate for future research to retest the model through a longitudinal design. This would allow for robust testing of mediation effects and assessment of cause-effect relationships.

The results might suggest that for university students, their perception of insecurity in the job market of the profession for which they are training

negatively affects them. However, just before undertaking the transition from college to work, optimism can be a valuable resource for individuals in building positive expectations about their future jobs. Along with self-efficacy, optimism can also boost life satisfaction. These effects have been analyzed and extensively discussed within the life design approach (Savickas et al., 2009), which underlines the importance of individuals' positive resources. Universities could focus more on strengthening career counseling services; these services can offer students courses to improve their personal resources (Lodi et al., 2021). In this regard, the life design approach could be a valid ally.

However, career counselors who work as freelancers may also be interested in the results of this research. Even individually, counselors can use reflection activities to help students overcome the job uncertainty that is commonplace in the contemporary world and project themselves positively into the future. Along with an optimistic outlook on future work, decreasing uncertainty, increasing personal resources, and promoting life satisfaction can undoubtedly help students avoid the negative effects of the discomfort they may experience during the transition from academic to professional life.

Future research could aim to clarify what aspects lead university students to develop insecure perceptions of the professions they are training for. Furthermore, future studies could use additional variables that are also related to personality traits or professional values. Lastly, future research may focus on experimenting with pathways that achieve all these goals.

STUDY 3. UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' REPRESENTATIONS OF WORK AND DECENT WORK

1. Introduction

Around the world, workplaces have been characterized by a reduction in the number and quality of jobs (Blustein et al., 2018). In addition to this aspect, there are also the concerns related to the promotion of decent work (Di Fabio et al., 2016; Di Fabio & Blustein, 2016). How people respond to the unpredictability of employment can be influenced by their idea of work and decent work (Di Fabio & Blustein, 2016). The ideas that people have about the concept of work influence the choices they make about their careers (Ferrari et al., 2008). For example, if a person thinks that the job is only for earning money, they probably won't bother looking for a job that is satisfactory in other respects as well. For this reason, it is useful to study what individuals think about work and decent work.

Interest in the study of the concept of work has become increasingly widespread in the field of psychology (Rapaport & Bailyn, 1998). There are several definitions of the concept of work and many of them focus on the consequences of work. Drenth (1991) defines it as an activity that allows individuals to meet their needs and achieve personal fulfillment. Richardson (1993) underlines how work affects personal satisfaction, self-affirmation, and the possibility of connecting individuals with society. According to Warr (1984), work involves both positive and negative aspects (for example, the stress or physical and psychological strain resulting from performing a job). The Psychology-of-Working Framework (PWF; Blustein, 2001, 2008) suggests that people can meet three categories of basic needs with work: survival and power, relationship, and self-determination needs. However, each person views work in different ways. For one individual, work might be a source of professional fulfillment, while for another it could be a source of stress (Blustein, 2006).

Qualitative research in this field is limited. However, some authors have pointed out that people attribute different meanings to work based on their social, economic, and cultural characteristics (Blustein et al., 2002; Chaves et

al., 2004; Phillips et al., 2002). For example, Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) conducted a study in 33 schools. In that study, participants defined work in strictly negative terms. While acknowledging its importance for their future, the young people who participated in the study described work as depressing and boring. Again, relying on a sample of Italian adolescents, Zammitti et al. (2020) found that young people between the ages of 11 and 14 describe work in terms of its economic benefits and how effectively it satisfies their values. In addition, most of the participants described work in positive terms, but some emphasized the commitment work requires in terms of sacrifice and effort. These results are consistent with those from other research (Chaves et al., 2004; Blustein, 2006; Ferrari et al., 2009). Wilson (1996), in a study with adults, stresses the role of work in ensuring a link with the economic and social activities of the society in which one lives.

In a study on socially vulnerable adults, Magnano et al. (2020) found that «work includes intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the person: in fact, it is an activity that helps with maintaining survival and that allows for the realization of one's success and the feeling of worth. The surrounding context (with a particular reference to the political management of the country) should be the first to put people in a position to find work» (Magnano et al., 2020, p. 108).

People belonging to higher socio-economic classes define work as a means for people to express themselves, while people belonging to lower socio-economic levels see it as a means to survive (Blustein et al., 2002).

Alongside the concept of work, the concept of decent work has been proposed. This concept was first introduced at the International Labor Conference, where it was defined as to the opportunity for women and men to obtain productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and respect for human rights (Anker et al., 2002, 2003).

The idea of decent work includes six dimensions (Anker et al., 2003):

1. Decent work is not possible without the existence of some form of work (any economic activity, including self-employment, working at a family business, and any paid activity, either on a formal or informal basis).

2. Work that provides conditions of freedom (freedom of choice; the unacceptability of certain working conditions, such as forced labor, slave labor, and child labor; and freedom to belong to protection associations and be free from discrimination).

3. Work should be productive (quality of life that is acceptable to oneself and one's family, sustainable development, and the competitiveness of companies and countries).

4. Work should be fair (equal treatment and opportunities in work, the absence of discrimination both in access to work and in the performance of it, and balance between work and life).

5. Work should be safe (health protection, retirement, and other forms of protection in the event of illness; guarantees against insecurity resulting from the possible loss of work).

6. Work that provides dignity (respect in the workplace, active participation in decisions about one's working conditions, and the right to represent one's interests collectively).

According to the Psychology-of-Working Theory (PWT; Blustein, 2001, 2008), there are five characteristics of decent work: “physical and interpersonally safe working conditions (e.g., absence of physical, mental, or emotional abuse), hours that allow for free time and adequate rest, organizational values that complement family and social values, adequate compensation, and access to adequate health care” (Duffy et al. 2016). In the current labor market, although there is agreement on these principles – this respect is shared at all levels of society (political, economic, social, and scientific) – the principles do not seem to be applied consistently and in every case (Magnano & Zammitti, 2019). The promotion of decent work has aroused significant international interest. For example, Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda is to “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” (United Nations, 2015). Furthermore, two sub-articles of Agenda 2030 propose that countries pursue a number of objectives. Goal 8.3 provides that countries should promote

development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises, even through access to financial services (goal 8.3). Goal 8.5 recommends that countries achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value by 2030.

Every person who works or is looking for work, whatever their origin, occupation, or skill level, has an idea of what a decent job is (Anker et al., 2003). Promote broad and positive ideas of this concept should be a goal of career counselors. Some researchers (Masdonati et al., 2019; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2019) have studied the components of decent work qualitatively by examining the following question: “Decent work is employment that meets the minimum acceptable standards for a good life. Given this definition, what components do you feel a job needs to have to be considered 'decent' or 'acceptable'?”. In studying a sample of 104 Swiss adults who answered the above-noted question, Masdonati et al. (2019) identified four main categories associated with decent work, each of which is divided into two sub-categories: (1) positive employment conditions (subcategories: compensation and workload and hours), (2) attractive work context (subcategories: relationships at work and contents of work), (3) work security (subcategories: physical security and employment security) and (4) valued personal outcomes of work (subcategories: meaning at work and growth at and through work). Similarly, Di Fabio and Kenny (2019) based on findings derived from a sample of 246 Italian participants identified 12 categories: remuneration, relationships, safety, work organization, meaning, work/family balance, free time, rest, recognition, respect, growth, protection, and equality.

A study on Italian adolescents showed that the definition of decent work is based on the following nodes: respect for rights and duties, economic aspects, personal well-being, commitment, equity, security, and possibility of family maintenance (Zammitti et al., 2020). The authors also find that some adolescents had a negative view of decent work, and many could not answer the

question “What is decent work for you?”. In another Italian study, the same authors (Magnano et al., 2021) studied the idea of decent work in a sample comprised of socially vulnerable people. They find that for the participants, one factor, respect for rights and duties, prevailed in their descriptions of decent work.

The goal of this study is to understand what ideas university students have about work and decent work and investigate any gender differences for these concepts. Indeed, working women appear to be more satisfied at work than men (Dex, 1988; Bokemeier & Lacy, 1987; Hodson, 1989; Kifle & Desta, 2012), although they receive lower salaries and occupy less qualified positions in the workplace (Bender & Heywood, 2006; Bilimoria et al., 2006; Kaiser, 2007; Long, 2005). Other studies suggest that men and women report equal levels of job satisfaction (Sloane & Ward, 2001; Mora & Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2009; Zou, 2015). This is likely because women compare work to the alternative – housework – and therefore see professional activity as more satisfying (Clark, 1997). This could lead to differences in the definition of work between males and females.

This study could fill the gaps in the psychology literature due to the fact that qualitative research is less widespread than quantitative research. The research questions are as follows: (1) What ideas do university students have about work? (2) What is the idea that university students have about decent work?

2. Method

2.1 Design, Participants, and Procedure

This study used a qualitative and discovery-oriented methodology. Consistent with grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), a rigorous qualitative survey to answer the research questions was developed. The contents of the responses related to relevant categories and themes was analyzed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This type of analysis allows the use of an inductive approach that relies on the data and does not require the creation of hypotheses (Hsieh &

Shannon, 2005). For this reason, in the analysis of the data, we did not consider the definitions of work and decent work presented in the literature. We relied solely on the definitions that emerged from the data.

The initial sample consisted of 426 university students, 168 males and 188 females. After eliminating the incomplete protocols, 160 males and 171 females remained. To reach an equal number of males and females, an additional 11 complicated protocols from females were eliminated. Finally, the study involved 320 Italian university students – 160 males and 160 females – who were between 19 and 26 years of age ($M = 22.71$; $DS = 1.81$). Participants held either a secondary school diploma (262, 81.9%) or a bachelor's degree (58, 18.1%).

Participants were recruited through social networks (LinkedIn or Facebook) to complete an online survey or were asked to respond during university lessons. Completing the brief survey took approximately 10 minutes. Participation in the research was voluntary. Before participants filled out the survey, they first reviewed an introduction that explained that the survey was for a qualitative research study and eligibility to participate was based on certain demographic variables, such as age, gender, and student status (i.e., whether a prospective participant was a student or not). Participants were asked to indicate their student status to avoid replies from non-university students. The research manager's contact information was also indicated, and participants were guaranteed that the data collected through the survey would be treated in an anonymous and aggregate form. All the indications present in the code of ethics of the Italian Association of Psychology (AIP, 2015) have been respected.

2.2 Measures

The research protocol included the following sections:

Biographical Data. Participants were asked to indicate their gender, age, and student status (i.e., whether they were a university student or not).

The Idea of Work and Decent Work. To investigate the idea of work and decent work, we included two open questions; this is similar to the approach used in other studies (Ferrari et al., 2009; Zammitti et al., 2020; Magnano et al., 2021; Zammitti et al., 2021). The questions were as follows: What is your definition of work? What is your definition of decent work?

2.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using NVivo 12.0 software. Before performing the analysis, the data were checked to correct any grammatical errors and translate any words written in dialect. The analysis was conducted on texts written in Italian. In performing data analysis using NVivo software, we first identified the words participants used most frequently to describe the two concepts of work and decent work. Subsequently, the most-used nodes in the description of the concepts were identified. To do so, we used a query, word frequency, which is available in the NVivo 12 software (QSR International, 2014). This query allows one to identify themes, and it is particularly important in the early stages of the analysis. Knowing the most-used words allows a researcher to define the main themes (i.e., nodes). In this study, the most-used words of four or more letters that were repeated at least six times were calculated. All articles and adverbs were excluded and placed in the list of non-significant words. Before identifying the nodes, some words were merged as expressed in the masculine or feminine or plural and singular. After analyzing the most-used words using the word frequency function, the nodes that the university students used to describe what they thought the concepts of work and decent work mean was identified.

Finally, a correspondence analysis was performed using SPSS 25.0 software to verify how one's gender might affect how one conceptualizes work and decent work. In fact, in the cases of both gender and the ideas of work and decent work, the data are categorical. This means that traditional statistical methods (for example, the chi-squared test or linear regression) are not adequate for analyzing how they might relate to certain traits or factors. Using the

identified nodes, correspondence analysis was then used to verify how gender relates to the ideas of work and decent work.

3. Results

The results of the word frequency analysis for the concept of work showed that the word most used to describe work refers to the economic aspect (remuneration/money/salary). Other important words, which have surfaced more than twenty times, are activity, work, to allow, satisfaction/well-being, life, society, realization, independence, and to live. These results are reported in Table 1, where the words appearing at least 6 times are present.

Word	Count
Remuneration/money/salary	99
Activity	69
Work	44
To allow	42
Satisfaction/well-being	32
Life	29
Society	26
Realization	24
Independence	24
To live	22
Practice	18
Passion	17
Skills/knowledge	15
Like	11
Time	10
Source	9
Services	9
Family	7
Personal	7
To grow	6
Gratification	6
Commitment	6
Important	6
Obtain	6

After the analysis using the word frequency function, the following nodes and sub-nodes were codified. The first node, economic aspect, refers to the purely economic aspects of a job, as something a person must do to earn money. Examples of statements that fall into this node are “a means of economic support” and “a source of money”. The second node, well-being, refers to work as a source of well-being. It can be divided into two sub-nodes, the first of which is personal well-being. This sub-node refers to the fact that work is seen as a source of satisfaction, well-being, and personal fulfillment. With respect to the answers that pertain to this node, participants suggested that work allows one to live a good life and express oneself. For example, participants stated that “work allows personal fulfillment and constitutes a means of expression of one’s identity” and said work is “an activity that allows you to live a life worth living”. For the second sub-node, collective well-being, participants’ answers refer to the fact that work allows an individual to contribute to the society in which they live positively. Examples of answers that pertain to this node include “work is a way of actively contributing to society” and “work ... is a contribution that an individual makes to his society”. With respect to the second node, building the future, participants’ answers referred to how work offers an opportunity to build one's future, which includes the creation of a family and the improvement of one's skills. Examples of answers that fall into this node include “work is a fundamental part of adult life. It allows you to build solid foundations for your future and that of your family” and “work makes man grow both professionally and humanly”. The fourth node, practicing one’s skills and passions, refers to the perception that work can help people put into practice everything they have studied and learned during their formative years. With respect to this node, participants gave answers like “work is the possibility of putting into practice what has been learned in the past” and “work represents the professional environment in which to put into practice the knowledge and skills [one has] acquired”. The fifth node is right and duty. This node includes all the answers that described work as a person’s right or a duty. For example, answers falling under this node include “work is a right, but also a duty” and “work must be considered not only as a human right but also as a citizen's civic duty”. Some

answers were not classifiable under any of the previous nodes, so a separate node, “unclassifiable”, was created for these answers. For example, the answers “work is everything” and “work represents many things” did not fit into any other node. Finally, some of the participants did not answer the question they were asked. In those cases, the non-responses were included in a node called “no response”. Table 2 sets out the nodes and sub-nodes.

Table 2. Nodes, sub-nodes, and references for the concept of work.

Node	References		
	Male	Female	Total
Economic aspect	58	74	132
<i>Well-being</i>			
Personal well-being	50	75	125
Collective well-being	21	16	37
Building the future	10	14	24
Practice your skills and passions	17	21	38
Right and duty	6	2	8
Unclassifiable	12	5	18
No response	21	12	33

Correspondence analysis was used to test for gender differences. No difference was found for the following nodes: *economic aspect* (inertia = .01; chi-square = 3.31; df = 1, p = .07), *collective well-being* (inertia = .00; chi-square = .76 ; df = 1, p = .38), *building the future* (inertia = .00; chi-square = .72; df = 1, p = .39), *practice one’s skills and passions* (inertia = .01; chi-square = .48; df = 1, p = .49), *right and duty* (inertia = .01; chi-square = 2.05; df = 1, p = .15), *unclassifiable* (inertia = .01; chi-square = 3.76; df = 1, p = .05), and *no response* (inertia = .01; chi-square = 2.74; df = 1, p = .09). Significant differences emerged in relation to the *personal well-being* node. In this case, the model has an inertia of .03 and a chi-square = 8.21 (df = 1, p = .004). Female participants provided more job definitions that fall into this node (75) than male participants (50).

For the concept of decent work, the results of the word frequency showed also in this case that the word most used to describe this concept refers to the economic aspect (remuneration/money/salary). Other important words,

which have surfaced more than twenty times, are respect, decent, correct, life, worker, and to allow. All the results are reported in Table 3. Also, in this case the table shows the words that appear at least 6 times in the description of the concept of decent work.

Table 3 – Word frequency for the concept of decent work

Word	Count
Remuneration/money/salary	139
Work	131
Respect	62
Decent	45
Correct	43
Life	31
Worker	28
To allow	20
Rights	19
Time	18
Satisfaction	13
Well-being	10
Time	10
Environment	9
Security	9
Conditions	8
Guarantee	8
Exploitation	8
Social	8
Legal	7
Free	7
Honest	7
Contract	6
Family	6

After using the word frequency function, we codified the nodes and sub-nodes. The first node, respect for rights and duties, refers to the idea of decent work as work in which the rights of workers are respected and workers respect their duties. Example answers that fall into this node include “it is a job in which all the rights of workers are respected” and “decent work means that the worker respects his duties but also his rights”. The second node, good and fair economic

remuneration, refers to an economic aspect of work: its role as a source of money. However, most of the replies stressed that remuneration should be commensurate with the work one does and how well he/she does it. Answers that pertain to this node include “it must be a well-paid job based on the working hours and services offered” and “it is a job where there is good pay”. The third node, satisfaction, refers to decent work as a source of personal satisfaction. Some examples of answers that fall under this node are “it is a job that allows the person to feel satisfied” and “it is a satisfying job for the individual”. Node four, building one’s future, refers to the possibility of building one’s future through work. Example answers here include “it is a job that gives you the basis for creating a family in the future” and “it is a job that allows individuals to create a future”. The fifth node, healthy environment, refers to the type of work environment that characterizes decent work; for work to be decent, it must occur within a healthy environment that features positive relationships between colleagues and with one's superiors. Example answers that fall under this node are “it is a job in which there are good relationships between colleagues” and “it is a job in which workers have good relationships with their employers”. Node six, safety, includes the answers that explicitly refer to work safety, such as “it is a safe job” and “it is a job that gives security to the worker”. Equity, the seventh node, refers to the absence of discrimination within the workplace. Answers that fall into this node include “decent work is the key to promoting equality” and “it is work that respects workers, without discrimination or inequalities related to gender, race or sexual orientation”. Node eight, work-life balance, refers to the possibility that decent work allows one to balance one’s private and professional lives. Answers that pertain to this node include “decent work occurs when there is a balance between work and free time” and “it is a job that allows you to coincide life with work”. Furthermore, some answers were not classifiable under any node. For such answers, the “unclassifiable” node was created, which includes all of the answers that were similar to the following ones: “any job is decent” and “I don't think there is a [job that is a] more dignified job than [an]other”. Finally, all non-responsive answers were collected under the “no response” node. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Node and references for the concept of decent work

Node	References		
	Male	Female	Total
Respect for rights and duties	47	50	97
Good and fair economic remuneration	75	88	163
Satisfaction	35	26	61
Building one's future	7	4	11
Healthy environment	9	19	28
Safety	14	12	26
Equity	4	6	10
Work-life balance	10	26	36
Unclassifiable	17	10	27
No response	15	16	31

In this case as well, correspondence analysis was used to test for gender differences. No difference was found for the following nodes: *respect for rights and duties* (inertia = .00; chi-square = .13; df = 1, p = .72), *good and fair economic remuneration* (inertia = .01; chi-square = 2.11 ; df = 1, p = .15), *satisfaction* (inertia = .01; chi-square = 1.64; df = 1, p = .20), *practice one's skills and passions* (inertia = .01; chi-square = .478; df = 1, p = .49), *building one's future* (inertia = .00; chi-square = .85; df = 1, p = .36), *safety* (inertia = .00; chi-square = .17; df = 1, p = .68), *equity* (inertia = .00; chi-square = .41; df = 1, p = .52), *unclassifiable* (inertia = .01; chi-square = 1.51; df = 1, p = .22), and *no response* (inertia = .00; chi-square = .04; df = 1, p = .85). Significant differences emerged in relation to the *healthy environment* (inertia = .01; chi-square = 3.91; df = 1, p = .048) and *work-life balance* (inertia = .03; chi-square = 8.01; df = 1, p = .005) nodes. In the first case, with respect to the healthy environment node, female participants gave more definitions that pertain to this node (19) than male participants (9). Also with respect to the work-life balance node, female participants gave more definitions that pertain to this node (26) than male participants (10).

4. Discussion

The goal of this study was to explore how college students view decent work and work. According to the results, the university students mainly characterized work according to its economic aspects and its possibilities for improving personal well-being. Other important aspects of work, albeit less present ones, are well-being for the community, the possibility of building one's future through work, the possibility of putting into practice everything that one has studied, and respect for rights and duties. These results are consistent with those identified by other authors (Chaves et al., 2004; Blustein, 2006; Ferrari et al., 2009). In particular, using the same method of investigation, Zammitti et al. (2021) examined the idea of work among adolescents. The results were very similar except for the reference to skills; the adolescents referred to the possibility of expanding their skills through work, while the university students viewed work as the possibility of putting into practice the knowledge and skills one has acquired. This difference could be explained by referring to the age difference between the participants in the two studies. The university students may be closer to entering the workforce, and they may have knowledge and skills that they would like to put into practical use at work.

Especially for female participants, work was seen as a source of well-being. Indeed, some studies in the literature have shown that women are more satisfied at work than men (Dex, 1988; Bokemeier & Lacy, 1987; Hodson, 1989; Kifle & Desta, 2012). According to Clark, (1997) this is due to the fact that women compare the job position with the probably less satisfying alternative of housework. Women may feel less pressured to be successful at work than men, as men are normally considered to be responsible for the financial support of the family (Carvajal & Popovici, 2018). Another explanation for this phenomenon could be that women have lower expectations than men and therefore it is easier for them to achieve their goals (Clark, 1997). This could lead female students to see work as a source of greater satisfaction than male students. Men are more competitive than women in the workplace (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007) and may believe they have a greater responsibility to aspire to important job positions.

Regarding decent work, the main aspect emerged for this concept is remuneration. However, in this case, the participants specified that it is not a job that serves only to have money but a job that provides one with adequate remuneration for the hours they work and the activity they perform. This also highlights further aspects of decent work: respect for rights and duties, the possibility of feeling satisfied with one's work, the possibility of building a future, the need to work in a safe and fair environment characterized by positive interpersonal relationships, and balance between one's private and work lives. Many of these aspects are consistent with Anker et al.'s (2013) definition of decent work and with the decent work characteristics that the Psychology-of-Working Theory (Duffy et al. 2016) emphasizes.

These results are comparable to those of Di Fabio and Kenny (2019), who studied the definition of decent work in a sample of adults. The authors identified the following characteristics: remuneration, positive relationships, safety, work and family balance, free time, respect, growth, and equality. Masdonati et al. (2019) identified several characteristics of decent work that emerged also in the present study: (1) positive working conditions, such as good pay and management workloads and hours; (2) an attractive working environment, including in terms of employment relationships; (3) job security, including physical security; and (4) estimated personal job outcomes, including the ability to advance at one's job and grow through work. Finally, conducted with the same methodology, Zammitti et al.'s (2021) study highlights how Italian adolescents, in describing decent work, refer to respect for rights and duties as being of the most importance. However, results also suggested that adolescents have an unclear understanding of this construct.

The present study found that females referred to two nodes more than males did: healthy environment and work-life balance. This difference can probably be explained by referring to the differences in personality traits, particularly women's more outgoing and open nature (Schmitt et al., 2009; Yanna et al., 2011; Soudeh & Masound, 2012). These personality differences might cause women to emphasize the importance of a healthy environment more frequently than men from the point of view of relationships to talk about

decent work. Another possible explanation could be related to the fact that in the literature women emerge more anxious than men (Peterson et al., 2007; Caballo et al., 2014). This could lead to a need for psychological peace of mind even in the workplace. For this reason, in order for there to be decent work, women could emphasize the aspects of healthy environment and work-life balance more. Finally, compared to men, women experience greater conflict between their work and family roles (Noor 2004; Welter, 2004; Frone et al., 1992). This could lead female students to conceptualize decent work as work that allows them to balance their private lives and work.

5. Limitations and conclusions

This study's results contribute to this area of study by deepening knowledge about the ideas that university students have about the concepts of work and decent work. Knowing these ideas is useful because it can influence the career choices of people (Ferrari et al., 2008). However, it is necessary to underline some limitations of this study. The study involved students from Southern Italy. In this part of the country, unemployment is higher than in the north and this could influence how people from this region define the concepts. This limit could concern the generalizability of the results; however it does not exclude their reliability. Another limitation is the study's methodology. Despite having a large and gender-balanced sample, the study examined complex concepts. As a result, it could have been reductive to use only one question to collect the data from the participants. Finally, in addition to gender, other variables should be considered, such as socio-economic background.

However, these findings add further knowledge to the field of career counseling. Researchers and career practitioners could be encouraged to reflect on work and decent work. Beginning in adolescence, it is necessary to help young people to reflect on these concepts (Zammiti et al., 2020). Knowing what their clients think about work and decent work can help consultants support their clients during periods of transition and in promoting healthy ideas of these concepts. One should recall that the 2030 Agenda also includes the objective of

“Promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” (Objective 8, United Nations, 2015). Career counselors can accept this by promoting broad and correct ideas of the concepts of work and decent work in their activities. One day in the future, the young people in the country will be the ruling class. They will have to confront the challenge of looking for decent jobs or, for those who pursue entrepreneurship, creating them.

STUDY 4. ‘JUMP IN YOUR FUTURE’: A PROGRAMME TO STRENGTHEN PERSONAL RESOURCES TO FACILITATE THE WORK PLACEMENT OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

1. Introduction

Thus far, due to globalization, pandemic, wars, the 21st century has involved an increase in risky situations, unemployment, worry, danger and social insecurity, all due to rapid social changes. Consequently, people must find new ways to interpret the environment and to acquire new resources to read, addressing social and working contexts (Nota & Rossier, 2015). Additionally, careers have lost their past linearity (Bimrose et al., 2008; Hearne, 2010; Bimrose & Hearne, 2012), and individual career decisions are now influenced by both the past and people’s perceptions of the future (Gabrielli & Profili, 2016). Overall, work has increasingly become an opportunity people must seize themselves (Hall, 1996).

For these reasons, the transition from university to work has become a particularly important, because it signifies the end of a phase of life characterised by student rules and the begin of a a new phase defined by work. Decisions made at this stage can determine university graduates’ future career success (Saks, 2018). However, job placement is difficult for new graduates because of their limited professional experience, lack of professional networks and harsh economic times. Therefore, graduates entering the workforce may experience underemployment, which, like unemployment, often decreases one’s well-being and general life satisfaction (Kinicki et al., 2000; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). Some studies have demonstrated that one’s first job can have a significant effect on one’s future career (Ng & Feldman, 2007), so it is important to support young graduates pursuing job placement. To do this, educators can provide students with personal resources useful for the university–work transition to prevent unemployment and other negative issues in their careers. These resources are reflected in some personal skills.

In this vein, research in positive psychology and career counseling (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000; Savickas et al., 2009) has identified

multiple psychological resources to increase students' life satisfaction and support their professional planning. The first three studies of this thesis demonstrate the following:

1. Risk intelligence, career adaptability and courage can improve life satisfaction and one's hopes of finding a fulfilling, consistent job.
2. Self-efficacy and optimism can help increase life satisfaction and make one more optimistic about securing decent work in future.
3. University students' concepts of work and decent work are anchored to economic aspects.

In light of these findings, the Life Design approach invites career counselors to develop pathways to help their clients enhance their resources (Savickas et al., 2009). For instance, Zainudin et al. (2020) stated that mixed counseling (individual online and group presence) can increase an intervention's effectiveness.

1.1 Online career counseling

The internet is not only a technological phenomenon but also a complex social phenomenon, increasingly intertwined with every aspect of people's lives, including education and work (Hooley, 2012). The internet can be used for guidance practices. In this vein, career counseling has already been conducted online for several years (Walsh, 2010), and its evaluations have generally been equivalent to paper-and-pencil ones (Barak & Cohen, 2002; Gati & Saka, 2001; Kleiman & Gati, 2004; Salgado & Moscoso, 2003). Frequently, online activities may initially be regarded with mistrust, but this scepticism often disappears as these activities continue (Bjornsen et al., 2018).

In recent years, the use of technology has increased to the extent that even the American Counseling Association (2020) has examined the ethical issues involved with this type of counseling, highlighting its advantages and disadvantages. As early as 2004, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2004) strongly supported exploiting information and communication technologies (ICT) to internationally increase access to and

improve the efficiency of career guidance services. In this vein, a study involving 52 career counselors from 16 countries (Kettunen & Sampson, 2018) identified four challenges in promoting technology in career support services. These challenges included the following: (1) inadequate access to ICT, meaning inadequate infrastructure in certain areas and organisations (e.g. available equipment at schools); (2) inadequate access to information, including content-based interventions and the availability of updated and reliable content; (3) inadequate skills and competences (highlighting the need to educate people in the use of technologies, such as improving digital skills, especially for professional operators); (4) inadequate integration, which could be overcome by creating a conceptual framework representing a common working model for career guidance services to increase their quality and efficiency.

Situmorang (2020) mentioned certain benefits of using technology, namely privacy, the ability to conduct interviews in a known environment, and not needing a physical space, which would reduce overhead and the need for travel. Additionally, using technology to provide career guidance includes the following advantages: (1) interventions can be conducted at convenient times and locations; (2) online interventions significantly reduce barriers to career counseling services, such as stigma and a lack of anonymity; (3) the most sophisticated systems document consultant–client exchanges for both parties; (4) interventions can be recorded; (5) interventions are structured, improving standardised evaluations (Gati et al., 2003); and (6) interventions' prices can be lowered (Herman, 2010). However, despite these advantages, Situmorang (2020) identified several problems with using technology in career counseling, including the difficulty of collecting nonverbal data and the need for good technical preparation. Furthermore, career counseling training conducted solely through technology is based on algorithms, presenting the same activities to all users. That is, these activities adapt to low-complexity problems, and it can be intended for users with specific characteristics, therefore not built to meet individual with special needs.

Several online career counseling interventions have been published and validated. For example, Pordelan et al. (2018) conducted a study among three

groups of university students. One group participated in an online career counseling intervention, one group participated in a face-to-face career counseling intervention and the last group was the control group. The results showed that both the first two groups experienced career development improvement. Similarly, Santilli et al. (2021) developed online training for a group of young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic, which promoted important dimensions of career planning.

Referring to what is expressed in the literature, a professional consultancy intervention was developed mainly online. This intervention, named Jump in Your Future, is an online programme that was created from the Life Design perspective (Savickas et al., 2009) to readjust to fit the psychology of career counseling of the 21st century. According to this approach, individuals are not passive spectators of their lives but actively react to the changes around them (Almudever et al., 1999). Consequently, career practitioners should consider these changes when deciding how to operate, accompanying clients in the co-construction of their life projects (Masdonati & Dauwalder, 2010), helping customers develop their personal resources.

1.2 Study aims

This study evaluated an online group career counseling intervention aimed at university students. With the present study, given the initial assumptions, it is expected that an orientation course constructed using the advantages of technology can also have a positive effect on students' personal resources. The hypotheses developed were that (1) the students involved in the online group counseling intervention would show higher post-test than pre-test levels of risk intelligence, career adaptability, optimism, courage, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy; (2) these students would use more words after the test than before it to describe work and decent work; (3) the control group's risk intelligence, career adaptability, optimism, courage, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy would not change throughout the intervention; (4) the control

group would describe work and decent work the same before and after the test, using similar numbers of words used to describe these concepts both times.

2. Method

2.1 Design, Participants and Procedure

The study involved 76 university students (17 male and 59 female) with an average age of 23.25 (SD = 3.08). The participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group, which consisted of 38 participants (7 males and 31 females) with an average age of 22.87 years (SD = 2.28) and a control group, which also contained 38 students (10 male and 28 female) with an average age of 23.63 years (SD = 3.70).

Participants of the experimental group were recruited from a psychology university and obtained college credit in exchange for their participation. Initially, the study involved a version of the programme with two small groups of students (3 and 4 participants per group). This version was used only to receive feedback on the pleasantness of the training. The results of this version were not considered in the present study. Subsequently, the training was proposed to small groups of 15 or 16 participants. A virtual class was created, and the students were invited to participate in an initial meeting with the career counsellor. Subsequently, each student was assigned an activity every three days. These activities are detailed below. Within the course, two other face-to-face meetings with the career counselor were planned, one in the middle of the course and one at the end. Table 1 summarises the structure of this programme.

The participants in the control group were student volunteers who took part in longitudinal research. These students had similar characteristics to those who participated in the pathway: they came from the same university and the same course of study. They were recruited with an invitation to participate in longitudinal research, on a voluntary basis. They completed the research protocol at Time 1 and Time 2 and received no guidance counseling in return.

2.2 Programme sections

The training was divided into three sections, and the activities conducted by the participants in each section are described in Table 1. The duration of the program was approximately 2 months. The materials used included fact sheets, short readings, videos, films and stimulus stories, and the participants wrote down their reflections.

Before beginning the online activities, the participants attended a face-to-face group meeting. During this meeting, the career counselor fostered knowledge among group members, explained the objectives of the project and provided information on using the virtual classroom. Next, the participants were told that they would be receive an activity every three days and that only the counselor could read their personal reflections on these activities. Subsequently, the participants completed the initial assessment protocol.

The first section of the intervention examined the participants' pasts' and involved four online exercises. In Exercise 1, 'Passages', the participants were sent a video about change and asked to answer questions about the most significant changes in their lives. In this exercise, a positive vision of change was proposed. Exercise 2 was called 'Fears' and examined the topic of fear. The participants were invited to reflect on their fears and on past situations in which they had felt afraid but had been able to overcome this fear. Exercise 3 followed the same procedure as Exercise 2 and was called 'Risk', and the participants were asked to describe past situations involving risk which had positive outcomes. The last exercise in this section, 'Courage', required participants to watch videos and write reflections on courage and on moments in which they had been courageous.

The second section focused on the present and included four online exercises and a face-to-face meeting after the second exercise. In this section, the main themes were personal resources and self-knowledge. In the first exercise, 'Optimism videos', the participants watched two videos and wrote reflections on these videos. Exercise 2, 'The meaning of life', invited participants to read a short book on the meaning of life and write down their reflections. During the group meeting, the participants conducted several self-

knowledge activities, such as analysing their personal resources and writing their own professional projects. Additionally, the career counselor discussed the activity's important points to that point and suggested that the participants reflect on themselves and on other elements of the programme. In the next two online exercises, the participants watched videos (Exercise 3, 'Risk') and read a stimulus story (Exercise 4, 'Courage') and wrote reflections on these exercises.

Finally, the third section examined the future. This section involved four online exercises and a final face-to-face meeting. The first exercise in this section was called 'Kindness', in which participants were asked to perform acts of kindness towards someone. Specifically, each participant had to perform one act of kindness per day for five days. The second exercise was called 'My self-efficacy model' and asked the participants to identify their self-efficacy models by reflecting on people with high self-efficacy and answering stimulus-questions. Exercise 3 was called 'Film', and the participants watched a film and wrote comments on it. The final exercise was called 'Decent work' and invited the participants to reflect on the concept of decent work and to give their thoughts about their future work. During this exercise, the participants completed their professional project.

During the final meeting, the participants, with the help of the counselor, wrote a summary of all the activities and wrote their final professional project.

Table 1. Training contents

Section	Exercise	Dimensions	Activity
Introduction	Welcome		
Section 1	1. Passages	Past and change	Analysis of change and exploration of the past
	2. Fears	Change and fears	Recognition of fears and how they were overcome
	3. Risk	Risk intelligence	Identification of moments in the past in which one took a risk
	4. Courage	Courage	Reflections on past situations

Section 2	5. Optimism videos	Optimism	Watching motivation videos and reflections
	6. Meaning of life	Optimism	Reading a book and reflections
	My resources	Self-knowledge	Analysis of personal resources
	7. Risk	Risk intelligence	Watching risk videos
	8. Courage	Courage	Reading a stimulus story and reflections
Section 3	9. Kindness	Life satisfaction	Being kind to others
	10. My self-efficacy model	Self-efficacy	Identification of a self-efficacy model for the future
	11. Film	Courage and decent work	Watching and commenting on a film
	12. Decent work	Decent work	Reflections on future work
Closing	Personal reflections and professional project		

2.3 Measures

At the beginning and at the end of the course, all participants were asked to fill in a protocol consisting of the following sections and tools:

Biographical Data. The participant was asked to indicate age and gender. Furthermore, in this section we have asked to indicate a code so that the data collected from the first and second questionnaire could be matched.

Risk Intelligence Scale (SRIS; Craparo et al., 2018). Twentyone items form the risk intelligence Scale; they describe behaviours or moods and participants must indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement based on their experience. The response scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Sample items are: “when I feel fearful about something, I have difficulty concentrating on everything” or “to be able to create new procedures, I think for myself instead of following procedures established by others”. A total risk intelligence score was used. In this study Cronbach’s alpha was .85 at pre-training and .91 at post-training.

Career Adaptability Inventory (CAAI; Soresi et al., 2012). The 24 items of the career adaptability inventory were used to evaluate a total point of career adaptability. The items present statements with which participants must indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement (e.g. “how much do you feel capable of ... preparing for the future”), using a 5-point response scale, from 1 (not strong) to 5 (strongest). In this study Cronbach’s alpha was .93 at the pre-training and .96 in the post-training.

Courage Measure (CM; Norton & Weiss, 2009; Ginevra et al., 2020) The Italian version of the measure of courage consists of 6 items whose answers must be given on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 7 (always). The students are asked to show how the statement fits themselves (sample item is: If I am worried or anxious about something, I will do or face it anyway). In this study Cronbach’s alpha was .76 at pre-training and .88 at after-training.

General Self-efficacy Scale (Schwarzer, 1993; Di Nuovo & Magnano, 2013). This scale counts 10 items and answers are given on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). The participants must indicate how well each statement fits themselves. A sample item is: “Thanks to my cleverness, I can handle unforeseen situations”. In this study Cronbach’s alpha values were .89 at pre-training and .90 at after-training.

Visions about future (VAF; Ginevra et al., 2017). This scale consists of 19 items and assesses hope, optimism, and pessimism. In this study 6 items that evaluate optimism were used (sample item is: “Usually, I am full of enthusiasm and optimism about my future”). The participants must read the statements and indicate how much they describe themselves, using a scale from 1 (it does not describe me at all) to 5 (it describes me very well). For this sample, Cronbach’s alpha for the two dimensions was .92 at pre-training and .93 in post-training.

Satisfaction With life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985). The SWLS consist in 5 items that require individuals to indicate their agree with statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly disagree). Sample item is “In most ways my life is close to my ideal”. In this study Cronbach’s alpha was .91 and .92, respectively in the pre-training and post-training.

Concept of work. To investigate the concept of work, the following question was used: what is work for you?

Concept of decent work. To investigate the concept of work, the following question was used: what is decent work for you?

2.4 Data Analysis

Statistical analysis were conducted using two software packages: SPSS 25.0 and Nvivo12, respectively for quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Before proceeding with the evaluation of the efficacy of the “Jump in your future” training, analyses were conducted to verify any differences between the control group and the experimental group at the time of the first administration (Time 1). It was verified whether there were any differences related to gender, age or the variables evaluated. This verification made it possible to highlight that the two groups did not show differences in gender ($\chi^2_1 = .682, p = .409$), age ($t_{74} = -1.082, p = .283$), risk intelligence ($t_{74} = 1.904, p = .061$), optimism ($t_{74} = 1.588, p = .117$), courage ($t_{74} = .043, p = .966$), satisfaction ($t_{74} = 1.968, p = .053$), career adaptability ($t_{74} = .571, p = .569$) and self-efficacy ($t_{74} = .770, p = .777$).

Subsequently, to verify the hypotheses of the research, a paired sample t-test between the pre-test phase (Time 1) and the post-test phase (Time 2) was used; this analysis was carried out, separately, for both the experimental group and the control group; furthermore, we verified at post-test (Time 2) if there were any differences between the experimental and the control sample, using the independent sample t-test (Peck et al., 2015; Kirkwood & Sterne, 2010).

Cohen’s d and statistical power were used as additional metric of effect-size. Cohen’s d is one of the most common ways to measure effect size. It was interpreted as follows: small if > 0.2 , medium if > 0.5 , and large if > 0.8 (Cohen, 2013). Cohen’s d was calculated using an Effect size calculator (Becker, 1998), using means and standard deviations.

The qualitative data analyses were conducted using the NVivo 12.0 software; as in study 3, also in this case the data were checked before starting the analyses. Grammatical errors were corrected and some words that were

written in dialect were translated. This made it possible to conduct all the analyses in Italian.

The words most used to describe the two concepts of work and decent work were initially identified. Subsequently, the most used nodes in the description of the concepts were identified. In particular, a query available in the NVivo 12 software was used, the word frequency (QSR International, 2014). Knowing the most used words allows the researcher to define the main themes, called nodes. To proceed with this analysis, we checked which were the most used words made up of at least 4 letters, and which were repeated at least 3 times. All articles and adverbs were excluded, putting them in the list of non-significant words. Before identifying the nodes, some words were merged as expressed in the masculine or feminine or in the plural and singular form. After analysing the word frequency, the nodes that college students use to describe the concepts of work and decent work were identified.

3. Results

3.1 Quantitative results

The paired sample t-test showed significant differences between the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group. Higher levels of the following dimensions emerged in the post-test: risk intelligence, optimism, courage, life satisfaction, career adaptability, and self-efficacy. The effect was small for life satisfaction and optimism, medium for courage and self-efficacy, and large for risk intelligence and career adaptability. Overall, no differences were detected in the control group. The following significant differences were found between the control group and the experimental group at Time 2: *risk intelligence*, *optimism*, *life satisfaction*, *career adaptability* and *self-efficacy*. No difference was noted in the *courage* dimension. The results are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of experimental and control groups during pre-test and post-test

Experimental group				Control group			
Time 1	Time 2	p	d	Time 1	Time 2	p	d

	M (ds)	M (ds)			M (ds)	M (ds)		
Risk intelligence	3.48 (.44)	3.87 (.47)	.000	.86	3.28 (.51)	3.29 (.61)	.743	.02
Optimism	3.69 (.79)	3.93 (.74)	.000	.31	3.28 (.97)	3.30 (1.09)	.861	.02
Courage	5.13 (.74)	5.50 (.89)	.003	.45	5.13 (1.01)	5.14 (1.16)	.970	.01
Life satisfaction	4.79 (1.17)	5.13 (1.20)	.043	.29	4.15 (1.62)	4.25 (1.57)	.570	.06
Career adaptability	4.32 (.44)	4.57 (.38)	.000	.61	4.26 (.51)	4.24 (.58)	.761	.04
Self-efficacy	3.96 (.51)	4.21 (.51)	.000	.49	3.92 (.61)	3.86 (.65)	.491	.10

3.2 Qualitative results: Concept of work

The definition of work was analysed and compared before (at Time 1) and after the training (at Time 2) by using word frequency and highlighting the emerging nodes in the control and experimental groups. Thus, Table 3 summarises the words most used to describe the concept of work by the control and experimental groups during the first and second administrations.

In the first administration, 11 words were most used by the experimental group to describe the concept of work. Based on this analysis, it was possible to identify in the first administration two different nodes describing the concept of work. The first node was ‘economic utility’, which referred to work as something needed for economic gain and thus independence. Words specific to this node included ‘money’ and ‘independence’. One answer attributed to this node was that of Participant 36: ‘I consider work as a source of income’. The second node that can be identified in descriptions of work was ‘personal realisation and growth’. Words such as ‘achievement’, ‘growth’ and ‘goals’ were part of this node. For example, Participant 19 defined work as ‘personal fulfilment and satisfaction’. Ultimately, the concept of work was defined by the experimental group as ‘an activity allowing people to have money and thus achieve independence in life. Beyond this, work is a source of personal realisation and growth and a way to achieve one’s goals’.

In the first administration of the control group, nine words were identified among those most used. These words could be traced back to the same

nodes identified in the pre-training phase of the experimental group: (1) 'economic utility' (for example, Participant 17 wrote that work 'is a way to finally be able to sustain oneself economically'); (2) 'personal realisation and growth' (for example, Participant 20 wrote that work 'is one of the main tools that allows a person to experience satisfaction'). In this sense, the definition of work in the initial phase of the path (Time 1) was the same for the control group and the experimental group.

In the administration at Time 2, 23 words were identified that best described the concept of work for the experimental group. These words allowed to identify four nodes. The first node, as in the first phase, was 'economic utility' and referred to the purely economic aspect of work. For example, Participant 2 wrote that work is 'an important source of income but also of personal realisation'. The second node was named 'personal realisation and satisfaction', which describes work as a source of well-being. Words such as 'realisation', 'satisfaction', 'personal' and 'life' were part of this node. For example, Participant 6 wrote that work is 'the realisation of an individual, which helps to improve our life, [...] fills one's life with meaning and allows the person to have self-esteem'. The third node identified in the second administration was the 'social aspect of work'. Words involved in this node were 'society', 'others', 'help' and 'services', which all describe the social intention of work, which is to produce goods and services for others and to help other people. For example, Participant 22 wrote that work is 'an activity that is done to produce goods and services, able to satisfy the need of survival and the need to establish social relationships'. The fourth node was the 'spiritual aspect of work' and included words such as 'ennoble' and 'self-determination'. These words describe aspects of work associated with spirituality, such as ennobling people or giving them feelings of freedom. For example, Participant 20 described work as 'what makes a human noble'. Ultimately, in the second administration, the concept of work was described by the experimental group as follows: 'work is everyone's right, which requires an investment of time from people. This activity of producing goods and services allows people (1) to have an income to survive; (2) to feel satisfied and fulfilled from a personal viewpoint through both the realisation of

one's own needs, goals and dreams and the expansion of one's knowledge; (3) to help maintain society; (4) to ennoble individuals and help people acquire a feeling of self-determination'.

Next, the analyses conducted on the data collected at Time 2 for the control group showed 12 most frequently used words, which can be traced back to the two nodes identified in the first administration. These nodes were as follows: *economic utility* (for example, Participant 3 wrote that 'work is a source of money') and (2) *personal realisation and growth* (for example, Participant 33 wrote that 'work is something that allows you to realise yourself better').

**Table 3. Word frequency for concept of work
(Time 1 and Time 2 in experimental and control groups)**

Experimental group				Control group			
Pre (Time 1)		Post (Time 2)		Pre (Time 1)		Post (Time 2)	
Word	Count	Word	Count	Word	Count	Word	Count
Work	19	Work	25	Activity	14	Money	14
Activity	13	Activity	15	Work	12	To allow	9
Money	9	Production	10	Money	10	Work	9
Personal	6	Satisfaction	9	Life	7	Life	6
Life	6	Life	9	To allow	10	Activity	6
Independence	5	Needs	8	Satisfaction	3	Satisfaction	5
Goals	5	Money	7	Service	3	Realisation	4
To allow	5	Goals	7	Instrument	3	Obtain	4
Realisation	5	To allow	7	Goals	3	Instrument	4
Growth	3	Services	6			Independence	4
Source	3	Others	5			Personal	3
		Knowledge	5			Knowledge	3
		Personal	5				
		Self-determination	4				
		Source	4				
		Survive	4				
		Time	4				
		Help	3				
		Right	3				
		Ennoble	3				
		Realisation	3				
		Society	3				
		Dreams	3				

3.3 Qualitative results: Concept of decent work

The definition of decent work was analysed and compared pre-training (Time 1) and post-training (Time 2) by using word frequency and emphasising the emerging nodes in the control and experimental groups. All results are summarised in Table 4.

In the experimental group, 16 words most used to describe work were found, which allowed to identify three nodes. The first node was ‘economic utility’, referring to the economic aspect of decent work. For example, Participant 22 wrote that ‘decent work means receiving adequate remuneration for working hours’. Words such as ‘money’ or ‘to live’ are part of this node. The second node was ‘decent work as well-being’ and included words such as ‘well-being’, ‘good’ and ‘life’. This node demonstrates that decent work can bring well-being to people’s lives. For example, Participant 4 described decent work as ‘a job that promotes personal well-being’. The third node involved ‘respect for rights’ and included responses emphasising that decent work guarantees respect for workers’ rights. This node comprised words such as ‘worker’, ‘respect’, ‘rights’ and ‘guarantee’. In this vein, Participant 38 wrote that ‘decent work exists when there is full respect for the rights of the person’. Ultimately, decent work was described by the experimental group in the first administration as ‘any activity that allows a person to lead a good life, guarantees good remuneration and respects the rights of all workers’.

In the control group, 12 of the most frequently used words were identified to describe the concept of decent work at Time 1. The nodes that facilitated this identification were the same as those in the first administration for the experimental group. Thus, the first node associated with the economic aspect of decent work was called ‘economic utility’. For instance, Participant 13 stated that ‘decent work allows you to live your life and gives at least a decent salary’. Words such as ‘remuneration’ and ‘living’ were part of this node. The second node was *decent work as well-being* and included words such as ‘well-being’ and ‘good’. Again, this node referenced how decent work can bring well-being into people’s lives. In this vein, Participant 36 stated that ‘decent work

enables a person's well-being'. The third node emphasised typical aspects of decent work, including words such as 'worker', 'respect', and 'rights'. As before, this node was called 'respect for rights'. For example, Participant 9 described decent work as 'respecting the rights of the worker, where one is free to express oneself and put one's skills into practice'.

Analyses of the data collected at Time 2 for the experimental group revealed 19 words that were most descriptive of the concept of decent work for the experimental group. These words allowed to identify the following three nodes. The first node confirmed the previously defined economic aspect of decent work. As before, this node was called 'economic utility' and included words such as 'remuneration' and 'to live'. For example, Participant 3 described decent work as 'a source of money'. The second node involved words such as 'rights', 'equity', 'gender', 'security', 'freedom', 'productivity', 'conditions' and 'race'. These items are all typical elements of decent work, so this node was named 'typical characteristics of decent work'. On this subject, Participant 12 wrote that 'decent work is productive work, which guarantees results to the worker and safety in the work context'. The third node was 'personal and social well-being' and included words such as 'well-being' and 'society'. This node covers decent work described as an activity that facilitates both personal and social well-being. For example, Participant 36 wrote that decent work 'makes it possible to achieve one's own well-being and that of the whole society'. Ultimately, decent work in the second administration of the experimental group was described as 'a productive activity guaranteeing workers' rights which can be conducted in conditions of safety, freedom, respect and gender equity, without differences based on gender or race and which allows people to achieve personal and social well-being'.

In the administration at Time 2, 10 words were identified for the control group as those used most frequently to describe decent work. As in previous parts of the study, these words could be traced back to the three nodes identified in the first administration: (1) *economic utility* (e.g. Participant 2 wrote that 'for decent work, people are paid what they deserve'); (2) *decent work as well-being* (e.g. Participant 12 wrote that 'decent work guarantees well-being'); (3) *respect*

for rights (e.g. Participant 7 described decent work as ‘guaranteeing our rights’). Thus, the definitions of decent work in both the first and second administrations for the control group were the same as the explanation in the first administration of the experimental group. That is, work was defined as ‘any activity that allows a person to lead a good life, guarantees good remuneration and respects the rights of all workers’.

**Table 4. Word frequency for concept of decent work
(Time 1 and Time 2 in experimental and control groups)**

Experimental group				Control group			
Pre (Time 1)		Post (Time 2)		Pre (Time 1)		Post (Time 2)	
Word	Count	Word	Count	Word	Count	Word	Count
Work	38	Work	53	Work	39	Work	35
Decent	18	Decent	25	Decent	15	Decent	13
To allow	9	To allow	16	Remuneration	14	Remuneration	10
Remuneration	8	Rights	11	To live	7	Worker	7
Worker	6	Equity	10	Worker	6	To allow	6
Activity	5	Security	10	Rights	5	Respect	6
Others	4	Freedom	9	Security	5	Rights	4
Well-being	4	People	9	Others	5	Good	4
Good	4	Worker	8	Good	4	Conditions	4
Rights	4	Remuneration	8	Respect	4	Well-being	4
Guarantee	4	Productive	5	Conditions	4		
Life	4	Well-being	5	Well-being	4		
Respect	3	Conditions	4				
To live	3	Opportunity	4				
		To allow	4				
		To live	4				
		Race	3				
		Gender	3				
		Social	3				

4. Discussion

The Italian work context is currently characterised by an increase in unemployment (ISTAT, 2021), probably due to the COVID-19 pandemic (ILO, 2020). Thus, the objective of this study was to verify the effectiveness of an

online training to enhance personal resources to help people face an uncertain future.

All the hypotheses of this study were confirmed. That is, after the training, the experimental group showed higher levels of risk intelligence, career adaptability, optimism, courage, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy. Additionally, the experimental group gave more complex descriptions of work and decent work after the training. In the first administration, the experimental group described work ‘as an activity that allows people to have money and thus achieve independence in life. Additionally, work was called a source of personal realisation and growth and a way to achieve one’s goals’. In the second administration, work was described as ‘everyone’s right, which requires an investment of time from people. This producing goods and services allows people (1) to have an income and thus to survive; (2) to feel satisfied and fulfilled from a personal point of view through the realisation of their own needs, goals, and dreams and through the expansion of their knowledge; (3) to help maintain society; (4) to ennoble individuals and help people acquire self-determination’. At Time 1, the concept of decent work was defined as ‘any activity allowing a person to lead a good life, guaranteeing good remuneration and respecting the rights of all workers’. At Time 2, participants defined work as ‘a productive activity that guarantees workers’ rights which can be conducted under conditions of safety, freedom, respect and gender equity. This activity does not involve differences based on gender or race and allows people to achieve personal and social well-being’.

On the other hand, the control group demonstrated no significant differences in the dimensions assessed at Times 1 and 2. Moreover, in the control group, more complex definitions of work and decent work were not given at Time 2. In this vein, the definitions of work and decent work at Times 1 and 2 were similar to those of the experimental group at Time 1.

Other studies have produced similar results, showing that online training protect students’ mental health (Zhu et al., 2021; Arenas et al., 2021). These outcomes confirmed the findings of Santilli et al. (2021), who proposed an intervention that strengthened the personal resources of the participants during

the first COVID-19 lockdown in Italy. Additional studies with adolescents (Zammiti et al., 2021; Zammiti, 2022) have also revealed that career counseling paths based on the life design approach can enhance participants' personal resources, making people more able to face an uncertain future. Furthermore, this study provides further evidence that professional consulting models based on the Life Design approach (Savickas, 2009) can be designed by exploiting the internet (Bimrose et al., 2011). This information can be used to enhance the personal resources of students about to enter the workforce and encourage reflections on both work and decent work.

5. Limitations and conclusions

In commenting on this training, some limitations must be considered. First, this training was developed for university students without considering the specificity of the participating subjects, which may have limited the study. This may have affected the effectiveness of the proposed program; consultants must consider that interventions must be personalised. Next, because of the small sample size, the training should be performed on other students to permit to further assess its efficacy. Most of the students who participated in the training were female; thus, subsequent studies should examine mixed samples. Additionally, in this study, all the students were undergraduates studying psychology, which may have been a motivating factor because students in this field may generally be more aware of the importance of these activities and thus more willing to participate in them. Another limitation of this study was that it was not possible to perform a follow-up evaluation after 6 or 12 months, so future studies should conduct this evaluation. Finally, self-assessment tools were used, which may have led to bias.

Nevertheless, one could add this study's training method to the online career counseling experiences which have enhanced university students' personal resources. The results demonstrated that the online training improved positive psychological resources related to career management, increasing life satisfaction and expanding the participants' ideas of work and decent work. Furthermore, numerous authors have demonstrated that improving personal

resources from adolescence can prevent psychological distress and increase life satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS

Beck (2014) said the current society is one of risk, characterised by constant change, such as globalisation, rising unemployment, the pandemic or the war in Europe. Such events have increased uncertainty and affected how people perceive the world, including the world of work. The latter presents many challenges, especially to new university graduates seeking employment for the first time. Frequently, those about to enter the world of work lack adequate resources to cope with the challenges they will encounter in their careers, complicating the transition between university and employment. Therefore, students require certain resources to read the social and work context and avoid visions of the future characterised by despair and unease (Nota & Rossier, 2015). Thus, a successful transition from university to the world of work could depend on how well students employ these resources (Santisi et al., 2018). In this vein, career counseling must not be implemented only during transitions, even if this thesis focused on the change between university and the world of work. The aim was to increase knowledge in this field by providing research and tools to support university students in their job placement. However, career planning should begin long before graduation.

This thesis work follows the most recent theories that have developed over more than a century of career guidance activities. At the beginning of the 20th century, career counseling was characterised by ways that could not be effective in a career counseling activity today. For instance, the first stages of career counseling were the diagnostic-attitudinal, characterological-affective and clinical-dynamic phases (Viglietti, 1988; Pombeni, 1996; Grimaldi, 2001). Although in different ways, these were phases in which the important thing in an orientation activity was to assess the individual and associate him/her with the most suitable profession. This is a fundamental part of the history of career counseling but quite different than current models.

After the 1960s, the counseling field entered a golden phase (Soresi & Nota, 2020), defined as the existential-vocational phase (Viglietti, 1988). During this time, the idea of the individual as the centre of the guidance process

was affirmed (Grimaldi, 2001), work that involved the contributions of Holland (1973) and Super (1980). Such work helped shape future theories which are better suited to the current world of work. For example, life design (Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas, 2012) developed from a desire to adapt orientation practices to a changed context from the past, where careers are no longer the same. This approach assigns the individual an active role in the process of constructing their future life (Almudever et al., 1999), helping them construct a satisfying life project (Campbell & Ungar, 2004; Savickas, 1989; Savickas, 1993).

The studies conducted in this thesis focused on resources that have been framed within life design, emphasising their importance in individual well-being and for imagining a better future: risk intelligence, described as «the capacity of a person to effectively assess the pros and cons of a decision in situations in which not all outcomes are totally expected» (Craparo et al, 2018, p. 968); career adaptability, defined as «readiness to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by the changes in work and work conditions» (Savickas, 1997, p. 254); courage, meaning the «persistence or perseverance despite having fear» (Norton and Weiss, 2009, p. 213); optimism, which «reflects the extent to which people hold generalised favourable expectations for their future» (Scheier & Carver, 1985, p. 879); and self-efficacy, which Bandura (1997) described as the ability that an individual possesses to put into practice the actions necessary to achieve their goals.

When organising their guidance activities, career counselors may consider improving these resources because they can impact student satisfaction and their perceptions of a better future. These were the results of the first two studies conducted in this doctoral thesis. Thus, Study 1 demonstrated that courage can mediate between risk intelligence and career adaptability with positive outcomes related to life satisfaction and perceptions of positive professional futures. Similarly, Study 2 revealed that optimism and self-efficacy can mediate between the perception of job instability and life satisfaction and the perception of finding a decent job in the future.

Another aspect to be considered in career counseling activities could be the concept of work and decent work. From the point of view of career counseling activities, these concepts are important because what people think about work could influence the choices they make regarding their personal and professional plans (Ferrari et al., 2008). The third study showed that university students' ideas of work and decent work are mainly anchored in an economic aspect. Although there is no shortage of references to more complex aspects of work and decent work, it is advisable that employment counselors do not neglect these ideas in their career activities.

To answer the question 'How is it possible to combine these dimensions and concepts in an orientation pathway and help students design their future?' the fourth study developed a training entitled 'Jump into Your Future'. This online training, with its specially created activities, can help students improve the personal resources discussed, better illustrating the concepts of work and decent work. Thus, this study showed that vocational counseling models based on the life design approach can help university students navigate the professional world, using the advantages of technology. Career counselors can use this type of intervention to achieve the goals proposed by the life design paradigm.

The study's results confirmed the literature's previous conclusions regarding the relationship between personal resources and life satisfaction. Additionally, these studies added that the resources considered may have impacted a better, more dignified professional future. This idea could stimulate the motivation of university students. That is, people who imagine their future positively will try to strive for this goal (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986). The significance for students of work and decent work was emphasised by studying these concepts qualitatively and not quantitatively, as is often the case in psychological research. Furthermore, this thesis provided concrete evidence that career counseling models based on the Life Design approach can be beneficial by exploiting technology (Bimrose et al., 2011). Therefore, this study's results could improve the personal resources of students entering the world of work and encourage reflection on both work and decent work.

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