SUMMARY

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EDITORIAL

Proactive strategies in work environments - precursors or outcomes of well-being and performance?

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Introduction

Balancing employee productivity and well-being has become increasingly difficult due to automation, digitalization, globalization, and the flattening of organizational hierarchies (Di Fabio, 2017). Over the past years resource productivity across the EU has increased (Eurostat, 2018), but so has the exposure of employees to risk factors for mental and physical health (Eurostat, 2017). This trend may negatively impact the performance of organizations and, in turn, the economy and society. Two decades ago, the *happy worker-productive worker* thesis emerged, which states that employees scoring high in well-being also perform well in the office, and vice-versa (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). Empirical evidence supports this claim (Zelenski et al., 2008), leading organizations to invest in generating resources that drive both employee well-being and performance upwards (Nielsen et al., 2017). *Job resources* (like social support from colleagues and supervisors) and *personal resources* (like self-efficacy, resilience, optimism) are critical elements in stimulating well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Furthermore, many companies supply interventions that aim to develop personal resources and encourage proactive behaviors (like job crafting) in order to enable employees to better utilize the resources at their disposal. *Individual strategies, or proactive behaviors,* represent improvable skills that employees rely upon to accomplish tasks, including planning and managing resources to a great effect (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018).

In two meta-analyses, the authors found that the interventions for enhancing psychological capital (i.e., PsyCap), as a personal resource, have an impact on the well-being of individuals and their performance outcomes (Lupșa et al., 2019), while interventions for job crafting, as an individual strategy, are linked to higher performance (Oprea et al., 2019). Furthermore, a meta-analysis conducted by Nielsen et al. (2017) indicates that job resources are related to employee well-being and performance. However, the data provided by Eurostat show that some of these mechanisms are still unclear, while present challenges (e.g., new technologies) are disrupting the happy worker-productive worker framework. Parker and Grote (2020) provide a possible explanation for why this may be the case. The authors indicate that job demands seem to increase with the introduction of technology, whereas job resources seem insufficient and can not keep up with them (Parker & Grote, 2020).

Now, more than ever, companies need to make the steps necessary to not only pursue

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productivity, but also to provide a healthy environment for the workers. In this vein, building upon the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), Self-Determination (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2017), Broaden-and-Build (B&B; Fredrickson, 2004), and Conservation of Resources (COR; Hobfoll, 2011) theories, it is necessary to investigate a novel configuration of job resources, personal resources, and individual strategies, that would enable employees to become more productive and fulfilled in their work.

Recently, two relatively new strategies have been proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2017) to be included in the JD-R theory: *strengths use*, as proactive behaviors which act on personal resources, and *proactive vitality management* (PVM), which focuses on managing one's own physical and mental energies. *Strengths use* (i.e., capitalizing on one's strong points, such as humor or zest) allows individuals to thrive and flourish in their work environment (Bakker & van Woerkom, 2018), which is linked to an increase in various performance types (Kong & Ho, 2016). *PVM* entails individual, goal-oriented behavior aimed at improving one's physical and psychological state (Bakker et al., 2020). Research indicates that behaviors such as trying to self-motivate or being energetic at work enable employees to be more productive, creative and to exhibit higher levels of personal well-being (Op den Kamp et al., 2018).

Considering the fact that the scarce research that has already been done regarding strengths uses and PVM in a work environment links these strategies to various health and performance outcomes, these strategies may represent the missing puzzle pieces in the thesis of the happy worker-productive worker.

Current challenges

The main challenge in establishing a clear framework that derives from the uncertain role played by proactive behaviors in the relation between job and personal characteristics, on the one hand, and well-being and performance on the other hand. First, most studies investigating individual strategies are correlational, and, as such, it is still unclear whether these strategies represent antecedents or outcomes of the studied variables. Second, the effectiveness of such strategies has been shown to be context-dependent. For instance, based on meta-analysis results, in the case of job crafting - the most studied individual strategy to date, results indicate that it is only effective in positions that allow employees high levels of autonomy (Oprea et al., 2019). Third, Kerksieck et al. (2019) found that the over-employment of individual capabilities (i.e., job crafting) tends to deplete rather than replenish personal resources, which contradicts the JD-R theory.

Consequently, a series of questions arise about less studied individual strategies, such as strengths use and PVM. Do individual strategies (i.e., strengths use and PVM) act as precursors or as outcomes of personal well-being and performance at work? Is it possible that the interplay between these variables is rather cyclical, with the employment of individual strategies promoting an increase in personal well-being and work performance, thus refueling the initial resource investment? Searching for an answer to these questions can be challenging, but it is required in order to map out the theoretical and empirical foundation regarding the role that strengths use and PVM play in personal well-being and job performance.

Strengths use and PVM

The first steps to study the relationship between these individual strategies and their well-being and performance have been made. Recent research has found that proactive vitality management and work engagement fully mediate the relationship between autonomy and performance, yet the study design was cross-sectional design (Tisu et al., 2021a). This model validates the theoretical assumption of the JD-R theory that employees who engage in individual strategies (i.e., proactive vitality management) can capitalize on existing job resources (i.e., autonomy) to increase their work engagement and performance. An important finding is that proactive vitality management, as an individual strategy, acts as a mediator between job resources, work engagement, and performance. For employees to experience a state of dedication, vigor, and absorption, they must also proactively engage in behaviors to capitalize on their autonomy. These associations between proactive vitality management, work engagement, and performance are similar to the ones found in recent studies (Bălăceanu et al., 2021; Bakker et al., 2020; Op den Kamp et al., 2020). These relations can be explained by the fact that employees who engage in proactive behaviors to sustain their energy levels boost their cognitive-motivational capabilities, which is also reflected in their performance (Tisu et al., 2021a).

Employing the COR perspective and building upon the JD-R theory, other cross-sectional research investigated the moderator role of strengths use, as individual strategy, in the relationship between job resources and individual performance (Tisu et al., 2021b). The data revealed that this proactive strategy is essential for different types of work performance. When employees actively look for tasks where they can employ their strengths and focus on the things they do well, they tend to be proficient, adaptable, and proactive in their work.

In daily research, proactive vitality management positively predicts work engagement (Pap, Vîrgă, & Lupșa, under review). Thus, employees actively manage their emotional, cognitive, and energetic resources throughout the workday and report experiencing more dedication, vigor, and absorption when at work. This finding indicates that PVM is a type of proactive behavior that can become an essential part of the motivational process in the JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). But, the most important finding of this research is the significant cross-level effect that strengths use has on work engagement and on the relationship between daily proactive vitality management and work engagement (Pap et al., under review). Thus, as a stable self-crafting strategy, strength use has an essential role in the motivational gain cycle described in the JD-R theory (Miglianico et al., 2019). Based on these results, strengths use and proactive vitality management could be part of the JD-R theory as self-crafting behaviors that facilitate engagement by having a positive effect on personal, energetic, and emotional resources. Thus, employees who proactively manage their energy and use their key strengths to complete work projects have the highest engagement over the work week.

Future research directions

Future studies should use randomized controlled trials to assess changes in autonomy, proactive vitality management, and work engagement leading to increased performance levels. Also, researchers could use randomized controlled trials to test whether manipulating specific job resources will determine changes in particular types of performance, and whether the strategies employed by the individual could positively influence these relations. Future studies should test the effectiveness of interventions that combine one proactive strategy (i.e., strengths use) with personal resources (i.e., psychological capital) to improve employees' well-being.

Similar to the daily cyclical ways work engagement feeds back into job crafting behaviors, it is also possible for work engagement to further predict proactive vitality management (Bakker, 2015). Future longitudinal research investigating gains cycles is necessary to deepen our current understanding of the dynamics existing between proactivity and individual well-being in organizations (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018).

In conclusion, both strengths use, and PVM may serve as essential elements in generating and maintaining resources that allow employees to adapt to new job demands and thus prevent occupational stress. Considering that, nowadays, the happy worker-productive worker thesis requires retouching; including the proactive behaviors that allow employees to thrive at work might prove the necessary ingredient for the said outcome. Thus, organizations could create a supportive climate for strengths use at the individual and team level in order to achieve enhanced task proficiency.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The role of psychological needs satisfaction in the relationship between stressors and ill-being

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Abstract

Drawing on Job Demands-Resources and Self-Determination theories, this study investigates the relationship between two categories of environmental stressors (operational and organizational) and two indicators of ill-being (burnout and mental health complaints). It also studies the moderating role of psychological needs satisfaction in this relationship. The results showed that environmental stressors are positively related to burnout and mental health complaints in a sample of 345 Romanian correctional officers. Also, high needs for autonomy and relatedness moderated the relationship between stressors and ill-being. Satisfaction of the need for competence, in turn, did not moderate this relationship. This research demonstrates the essential role that satisfying psychological needs plays for the correctional officers' ill-being. The buffering roles of satisfaction of the needs for autonomy and relatedness in the stressor-strain relationship elicits a better understanding of the psychological resources that help maintain low levels of burnout and mental health complaints.

Keywords

environmental stressors; psychological needs at work; ill-being

Introduction

In their job position, correctional officers protect and maintain security in the penitentiary environment, which involves many challenges, such as threats or aggression aimed at their person. Officers must possess various mental and physical resources to deal with such stressors effectively. Therefore, given the complexity level of this environment, the ill-being of correctional officers has long been a concern of researchers, with most of the research related to this occupational segment being conducted in the U.S. (e.g., Paoline & Lambert, 2012). In the literature, several organizational or occupational stressors experienced by correctional officers have been identified as resulting from their adverse work environment (Finney et al., 2013). In the case of Romania, unfortunately, we do not have studies that analyze the relationship between the characteristics of the correctional officers' jobs and their effects for ill-being. From the point of view of stressors, correctional officers in Romania face mainly the same problems that we find in other states, such as working in shifts, over-time demands, a disproportionate inmate-officer ratio, fatigue, bureaucratic red tape, or lack of resources.

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McCreary and Thompson (2006) conceptualize stressors experienced by police officers as belonging both to the category of operational factors (i.e., stressors associated with doing the job, such as paperwork or traumatic events) and to the type of organizational factors (i.e., stressors related to the administrative aspects in which police officers work, such as lack of resources or inadequate equipment), these two categories being part of the environmental stressors that safety public personnel face (Angehrn et al., 2022). Even though the two professions seem to be different in terms of tasks, police officers and correctional officers have a lot in common (e.g., dealing with co-workers, working shifts, pressure to give up free time, dealing with internal investigations, or traumatic events). Therefore, it is not surprising that this distinction of environmental stressors has been studied in a wide range of public safety professions, such as firefighters, paramedics, and dispatchers (Carleton et al., 2020; Summerlin et al., 2010). Thus, in this study we also include these environmental factors when evaluating the relationship between stressors and ill-being. Additionally, we analyze the moderating role of the satisfaction of psychological needs, as personal resources, in the relation between stressors and ill-being.

To better understand the relationship between the characteristics of the correctional workplace and ill-being, in this study we employ the Job Demands-Resources theoretical framework (JD-R; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), widely used for explaining occupational stress. JD-R theory argues that job demands initiate a health impairment or stress process. Personal resources may play a buffering role in the relation between job demands and ill-being, as they protect employees against stress from work-related demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Personal resources belong to the employee. They are related to resilience and reflect the individuals' belief in their capacity to control their environment (Hobfoll et al., 2003). Based on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000), in this research, personal resources are operationalized as the satisfaction of psychological needs at work, because the satisfaction of the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness contributes to the optimal functioning of employees. As personal resources, psychological needs are "nutrients that a living entity must procure to maintain its growth, integrity, and health" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 326). Previous research studied the mediating role of psychological needs intensively but neglected their moderating potential, which was investigated only in a few previous studies (Boudrias et al., 2020; Breaugh, 2020). This study covers this gap by exploring the buffering effect of the satisfaction of psychological needs in the relationship between stressors and ill-being.

This study contributes to the scientific literature in several ways. First, it furthers research by exploring the moderating role that the satisfaction of psychological needs plays in the stressor-strain relationship, thus bringing additional evidence regarding the role of these needs as personal resources, in line with the SDT theory. Personal resources are malleable and one could propose specific interventions directed at improving the level of need satisfaction among correctional officers. Second, in our study, we analyze the contribution of each need separately, which was suggested by Van den Broeck and her colleagues (2016) in their review, noting that many studies use psychological needs as a single latent factor in the analysis. Third, we integrate new job demands (i.e., operational and organizational stressors) specific to the correctional environment and as experienced by correctional officers into JD-R theory. Based on our results, managers could initiate a program to develop personal resources and implement organizational interventions to diminish environmental stressors.

Environmental stressors

This study will analyze the stressors that lead to a high level of ill-being. Job demands are defined as "aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort and are, therefore, associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017, p. 274). Numerous studies indicate that correctional officers' stressors (either organizational or operational) are related to increased burnout, higher staff turnover, poor job performance, and negative consequences on psychological health (e.g., Finney et al., 2013; Trounson et al., 2018). For example, among the most significant factors related to operational stressors are the risk of violence through interactions with offenders, the suicide of detainees (Lewis et al., 2013), or other aspects related to exposure to potentially psychologically traumatic events, such as reading details about crimes (Norman & Ricciardelli, 2021), all of which are associated with high levels of ill-being. This study operationalized ill-being in the form of burnout and mental health complaints (MHC). Burnout is a work-related phenomenon characterized by exhaustion or low energy and cynicism or low identification (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). Exhaustion and cynicism usually constitute the core dimensions of burnout. We also chose mental health complaints (i.e., anxiety, depression, behavioral/emotional control, and general positive affect), often used in various studies to operationalize ill-being (e.g., Secoșan et al., 2021; Vîrgă et al., 2017).

Inadequate training or inadequate equipment, paperwork, caseloads (Norman & Ricciardelli, 2021), poor communication, limited autonomy (Finney et al., 2013), and lack of resources are some of the factors related to organizational stressors which affect the ill-being as well as the health of correctional officers. Therefore, from a JD-R theory perspective, we argue that environmental stressors as a new type of job demands will lead to an increase in ill-being. Hence, we propose the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Environmental stressors will be positively related to a) burnout and b) mental health complaints.

The moderating role of psychological needs satisfaction

In SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), psychological needs are presented as universal needs that motivate behavior. According to this theory, there are three basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, relatedness, and competence) that, if satisfied, lead to optimal functioning and low levels of ill-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The need for autonomy represents the desire to decide regarding one's behavior and act according to one's own will. The need for competence indicates the desire to feel that one is in control of the situation and feels efficient. The need for relatedness refers to the wish to feel part of a group, to feel closeness with others. Many studies have shown that these needs can serve as predictors for organizational outcomes and can also play a mediating role (e.g., De Gieter et al., 2018; Stan & Vîrgă, 2021). Still, their moderating role is rarely studied despite Van den Broeck et al.'s (2016) recommendations. Recently, Boudrias et al. (2020) analyzed the buffering effect of psychological needs' satisfaction in the relationship between job demands and turnover intention. Their findings show that the satisfaction of needs for competence and autonomy leads to a decline in nurses' turnover intention even under role conflict conditions. Also, Breaugh (2020) demonstrated that the negative relationship between stressors and work engagement is attenuated in the case of employees who have satisfied the needs for relatedness at work. Thus, based on JD-R theory, psychological needs, as personal resources, could buffer the impact of job demands on the ill-being of correctional officers.

Research has shown that a sense of autonomy helps employees cope with stressful situations and leads to higher performance and increased well-being at work (Bakker et al., 2005). The need for autonomy is a task-related personal resource, and its satisfaction offers a sense of action out of one's own volition (Breaugh, 2020). Therefore, employees who feel they can decide and act independently (satisfying their need for autonomy) will cope better with job demands than those who do not have this feeling of autonomy (Boudrias et al., 2019). Therefore, correctional officers who experience choice and control over their actions will cope better with environmental stressors. Such a response would result in lower levels of burnout and fewer mental health complaints (i.e., MHC). As such, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The satisfaction of the need for autonomy buffers the negative relationship *between environmental stressors and a) burnout and b) mental health complaints.*

Given the scope of activities of a correctional officer, these could not be carried out optimally without the support of both colleagues and superiors. Research has shown that support from one's supervisor and colleagues leads to lower stress levels (Finney et al., 2013), while low-quality working relationships lead to reduced well-being. Satisfaction with the need for relatedness is a psychological resource related to social relations, offering a sense of association with others (Breaugh, 2020). Therefore, the occupational and organizational stressors, fulfilling the need for relatedness generates feelings of belonging to a group and trust in colleagues, leading to fewer mental health complaints and a lower level of burnout. The need for relatedness could buffer the aversive effect of job demands on ill-being. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: The satisfaction of the need for relatedness buffers the negative relationship between environmental stressors and a) burnout and b) mental health complaints.

The work of a correctional officer is full of unforeseen events that have varying degrees of danger. In their meta-analysis, Evers et al. (2020) identified several job demands specific to correctional officers, including role ambiguity (i.e., they are exposed to various tasks whose objectives are unclear), role overload (i.e., they have to perform several functions with few resources), and also role conflict or the risk of violence. Satisfaction of the need for competence is a task-related personal resource, offering a sense of confidence in one's own capabilities (Breaugh, 2020). Given the demanding work environment, we assume that if correctional officers feel confident about their ability to perform their tasks, they will reevaluate the job demands as challenging, which would lead to a decrease in the effects of the demands and, ultimately, to a lower level of burnout and fewer mental health complaints. In a sample of nurses, Trépanier et al. (2015) demonstrated extended exposure to an environment where employees are subjected to harmful behaviors that cause humiliation (workplace bullying), frustrate psychological needs, and foster burnout one year later. Therefore, correctional officers who need competence as a personal resource will react differently to new job demands, decreasing well-being. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: The satisfaction of the need for competence buffers the negative relationship between environmental stressors and a) burnout and b) mental health complaints.

Methods

Participants and procedure

Participants in this study are correctional officers who work in penitentiary units subordinated to the National Administration of Penitentiaries from Romania (NAP) recruited by non-probabilistic sampling. All participants worked in the operational sector, meaning that they were in contact with inmates most of the time. Given the nature of the organization, it was necessary to obtain various agreements before data collection. These were obtained from the NAP (no. 12927/DMRU/15.01.2020) and the Ethics Committee of our University (no. 22848/0-1/26.05.2020). A common calendar was established with each penitentiary unit, and then the data collection was carried out in group sessions by our team. Participation in this study was voluntary while respecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, who were asked to complete self-report questionnaires in paper and pencil form. All aspects of the research, such as objectives, purposes, informed consent, and other information, were presented and clarified on the questionnaire's first page, subsequently signed by them. The questionnaire was distributed to 400 correctional officers, but only 345 responded to all items (86.3% response rate). The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 55 years ($M = 35.43$, $SD = 8.83$), and the majority were men (96.5%). The average tenure of the participants in this study was 12.63 years. One hundred and seventy-four (50.5%) completed higher education (i.e., beyond the high school level). Half of the sample was married (55.9%), had at least one child (48.5%), and 91.3% worked in shifts.

Measures

For a part of our instruments, we relied upon tried-and-tested Romanian versions of existing instruments (i.e., need satisfaction, burnout, and mental health complaints). Other scales (i.e., environmental stressors) were adapted using the standard back-translation procedure (Breslin, 1970).

Environmental stressors were measured with the 40-item Police Stress Questionnaire (PSQ; McCreary & Thompson, 2006). This questionnaire was designed to measure environmental stressors specific to public safety employees. The PSQ consists of two subscales that assess both operational and organizational stressors. Participants were asked to rate how stressful a series of situations are for them, using a 7-point scale ranging from 0 (*not at all stressful*) to 7 (*very stressful*). An example item for operational stressors is: "Lack of understanding from family and friends about your work". In the case of organizational stressors, an example item is: "Inadequate equipment". Cronbach's alpha value of the PSQ scale was .97.

Need satisfaction was assessed with the Work-Related Basic Need Satisfaction Scale (Van den Broeck et al., 2010), adapted to the Romanian context by Tânculescu and Iliescu (2014). The scale consists of 18 items divided into three subscales with six items: the need for autonomy ("I feel like I can be myself at my job"), competence ("I feel competent at my job"), and relatedness ("At work, I feel part of a group."). The items were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 5 = *completely agree*). Cronbach's alpha value was .75 for the need for autonomy, .85 for the need for competence, and .75 for relatedness.

Burnout was measured with the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey (Schaufeli et al., 1996). Two scales were used to evaluate core burnout: emotional exhaustion (5 items; "I feel emotionally drained from my work.") and cynicism (4 items; "I have become more cynical about whether my work contributes towards anything."), adapted to the Romanian context by Vîrgă et al. (2019). All items were evaluated on a 7-point scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). Cronbach's alpha was .91 for the emotional exhaustion subscale and .88 for the cynicism subscale.

Mental health complaints were evaluated with a 5-item scale developed by Berwick et al. (1991), previously adapted in Romanian (Vîrgă et al., 2017). A sample item is "During the last month, have you been a very nervous person?". Response categories varied from 1 (never) to 6 (always) on a Likert-type scale. Cronbach's alpha value of the mental health complaints scale was .82.

Data analysis

Before testing the hypotheses, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) because our data were collected using self-reported questionnaires. Thus, there is a risk of common method bias. Also, Harman's single factor analysis was used to test whether the variance in the data could be attributed to a single factor (Chang et al., 2010). We assessed two measurement models: the M1-with six superordinate factors (environmental stressor, core burnout, need for relationships, competence and autonomy, and mental health complaints) and the M2-single factor models. We calculated three absolute fit indices (the chi-square statistic; RMSEA - the root mean square error of approximation, and SRMR - the standardized root mean square residual) and two relative fit indices (CFI - Comparative fit and TLI - Tucker-Lewis index). The cut-off values for the index indicating good fits are CFI and TLI > 0.90; RMSEA and SRMR < 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). We used the *lavaan* package (Rosseel, 2012) in R software (Team, 2013) for the analyses focusing on construct validity.

Second, we tested the moderating role of the psychological needs satisfaction (i.e., autonomy, relatedness, and competence) on the relationship between environmental stressors and ill-being (burnout and MHC) of correctional officers via hierarchical multiple regressions (Cohen et al., 2003). For the regression analysis, we used SPSS software (v.23). We transformed the predictor (environmental stressors) and potential moderators (need for autonomy, relatedness, and competence) into Z scores. Then, we calculated the interaction between the predictor and each moderator. In Step 1, we included age and gender as control variables. In Step 2, we entered both types of variables (predictor and potential moderators), and in Step 3, in addition to the variables from Step 2, we also included the interaction term. These moderator analyses can be found in Tables II, III, and IV.

Results

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and correlations for the study variables. The correlations between all variables were statistically significant, and the reliability values were at least acceptable. Participants' gender and age did not correlate with either of the two outcomes. We found only a positive correlation between participants' age and the need for autonomy (r = .14, p < .05), and a negative correlation between gender and need for relatedness (r = -.11, p < .05). The results also indicate that environmental stressors correlated positively with burnout (r = .67, p < .01) and MHC (r = .56, p < .01). Hence, hypotheses H1a and H1b were supported by our results.

Table 1. *Means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients between variables*

Variable	*M*	*SD*	*1.*	*2.*	*3.*	*4.*	*5.*	*6.*	*7.*	*8.*
1. Need for autonomy	21.26	4.16	(.75)							
2. Need for competence	26.58	3.32	.31**	(.85)						
3. Need for relatedness	23.65	3.65	.46**	.53**	(.75)					
4. Environmental stressors	94.31	41.84	-.51**	-.29**	-.42**	(.97)				
5. Burnout	8.62	9.34	-.56**	-.37**	-.46**	.67**	(.94)			
6. Mental health complaints	8.68	3.65	-.39**	-.32**	-.37**	.56**	.63**	(.82)		
7. Gender	-	-	-.05	-.02	-.11*	-.01	-.03	-.03	(--)	
8. Age	35.41	8.82	.14*	-.01	.02	-.02	-.09	-.04	.03	(--)

Notes: *N = 345, * p* < .05; ** *p* < .01. Internal consistency alphas are displayed in the diagonal.

The CFA demonstrated a better fit for the six-factor model (M1) than the single-factor model (M2; Podsakoff et al., 2012), which had a poor fit. The results show that the six-factor model (M1: χ^2 (213) = 597.61, p < .001, TLI = .90; CFI = .90; RMSEA = .07, 95% CI [.07, .08], SRMR = .07) was superior to the single-factor model (M2: χ^2 (230) = 1990.47, p < .001, TLI = .49; CFI = .54; RMSEA = .14, 95% CI [.14, .16], SRMR = .12; $\Delta\chi^2$ (17) = 1392.9, p < .001). Harman's single-factor analysis showed that a single factor could account for 37.7% of the variance, less than 50.0%. Therefore, common method bias does not seem sufficient to describe the associations among the variables in this study. Regarding the loading of the items on their factor, the results show that for the environmental stressors factor, the two categories load .88 for operational stressors and .94 for organizational stressors. In the case of the core burnout factor, the two dimensions load .91 for emotional exhaustion and .86 for cynicism. For the need for autonomy factor, the loading of the items ranges between .40 and .66, whereas for the factor need for relatedness between .49 and .67, and for the factor need for competence between .49 and .90.

Table 2 shows a significant interaction between the need for autonomy and environmental stressors in predicting burnout (β = -.18, p < .01; F(1, 339) = 23.58, p < .001; ΔR^2 = .03, p < .001) and MHC (β = -.10, p < .05; F(1, 339) = 4.58, p < .05; ΔR^2 = .01, p < .05). For each significant relation, we plotted the interaction at ±1 SD from the mean of the predictor (Aiken, 1991) and made simple slope analyses to determine the nature of these interactions. The slope analysis (Figure 1) shows that correctional officers with high satisfaction of the need for autonomy tended to report lower levels of burnout (b = 3.23, t =

2.99, $p < .01$) when they were confronted with high environmental stressors. Conversely, correctional officers with low satisfaction of the need for autonomy tend to report higher levels of burnout when environmental stressors were high ($b = 4.71$, $t = 11.78$, $p < .001$). Thus, hypothesis H2a was supported by the data.

Table 2. *Hierarchical multiple regression: The moderating effect of the satisfaction of the need for autonomy in the relationship between environmental stressors and ill-being (burnout and mental health complaints)*

Steps	Predictors	Burnout			Mental health complaints		
		β	β	β	β	β	β
1	Gender	-.02	-.04	-.02	.03	.03	.04
	Age	-.09	-.04	-.03	-.04	-.01	-.01
2	Environmental stressors		.55***	.50***		.50***	.48***
	Need for autonomy		-.27***	-.26***		-.13*	-.13*
3	Environmental stressors × Need for autonomy			-.18**			-.10*
	Total R^2	.008	.53	.56	.003	.34	.35
	Δ R^2			.03			.01
	F Change	1.43	191.64***	23.58***	.46	85.91***	4.58*

Note. $N = 345$, * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. The coefficients beta is standardized in this table

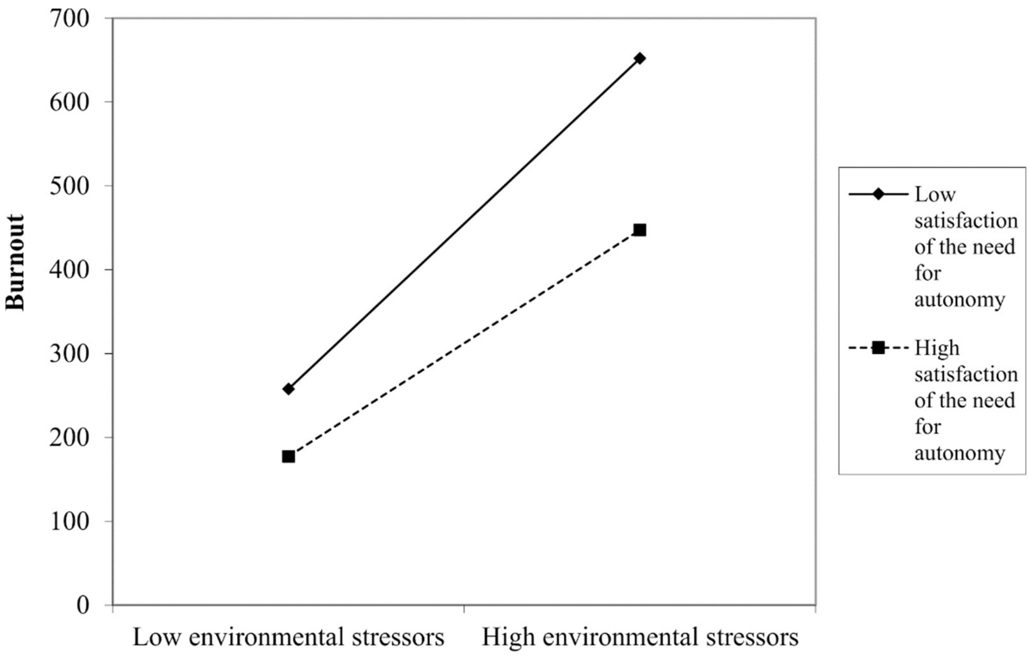

Figure 1. Interaction effect of environmental stressors and satisfaction of the need for autonomy in predicting burnout

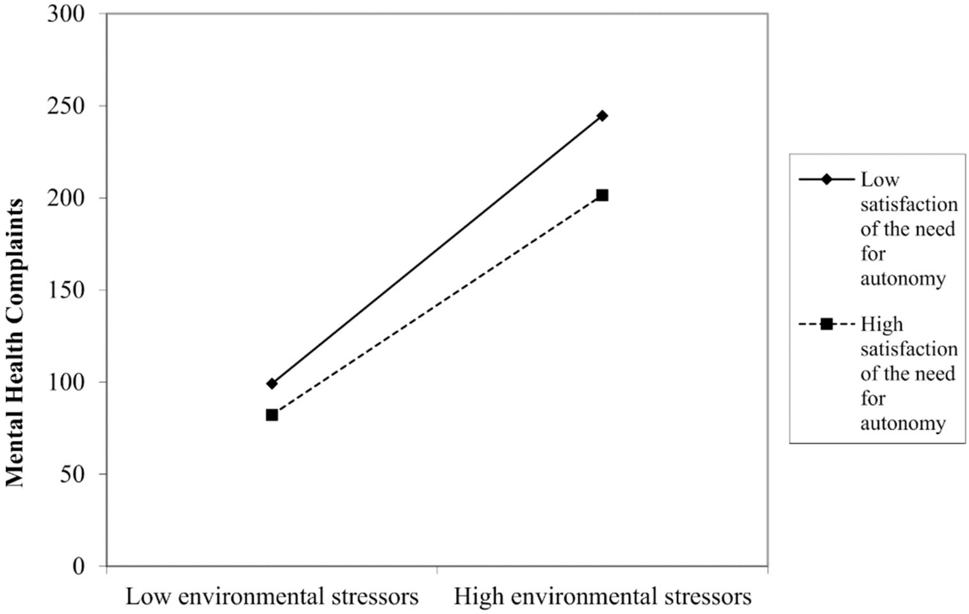

Figure 2. Interaction effect of environmental stressors and satisfaction of the need for autonomy in predicting mental health complaints

Figure 2 graphically represents the interaction between the satisfaction of the need for autonomy and environmental stressors in predicting MHC. The simple slope analysis indicated that environmental stressors significantly predicted MHC for officers with lower satisfaction of the need for autonomy (b = 1.74, t = 8.69, p < .001). Correctional officers with high satisfaction of the need for autonomy tend to report fewer MHC when environmental stressors are high (b = 1.42, t = 2.73, p < .01). Thus, hypothesis H2b was supported by the data.

Table 3. *Hierarchical multiple regression: The moderating effect of the satisfaction of the need for relatedness in the relationship between environmental stressors and ill-being (burnout and mental health complaints)*

Steps	Predictors	Burnout			Mental health complaints		
		β	β	β	β	β	β
1	Gender	-.02	-.04	-.04	.03	.02.	.03
	Age	-.09	-.07	-.07	-.04	-.02	-.02
2	Environmental stressors		.60***	.58***		.50***	.47***
	Need for relatedness		-.21***	-.19***		-.16**	-.13**
3	Environmental stressors × Need for relatedness			-.12**			-.19***
	Total R^2	.008	.52	.53	.003	.35	.38
	Δ R^2			.01			.03
	F Change	1.44	180.56***	9.73**	.46	88.99***	17.87***

Note. N = 345, * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. The beta coefficients are standardized in this table.

The results reported in Table 3 show that the need for relatedness also moderated the relation between environmental stressors, burnout ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .01$; $F(1, 339) = 9.72$, $p < .01$; $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p < .01$), and MHC ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .001$; $F(1, 339) = 17.87$, $p < .001$; $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $p < .001$). As shown in Figure 3, findings suggested that high environmental stressors predicted higher burnout when the satisfaction of the need for relatedness was low ($b = 5.41$, $t = 13.93$, $p < .001$). Correspondingly, correctional officers experienced lower levels of burnout in response to high environmental stressors when their need for relatedness was satisfied at work ($b = 4.36$, $t = 10.40$, $p < .001$).

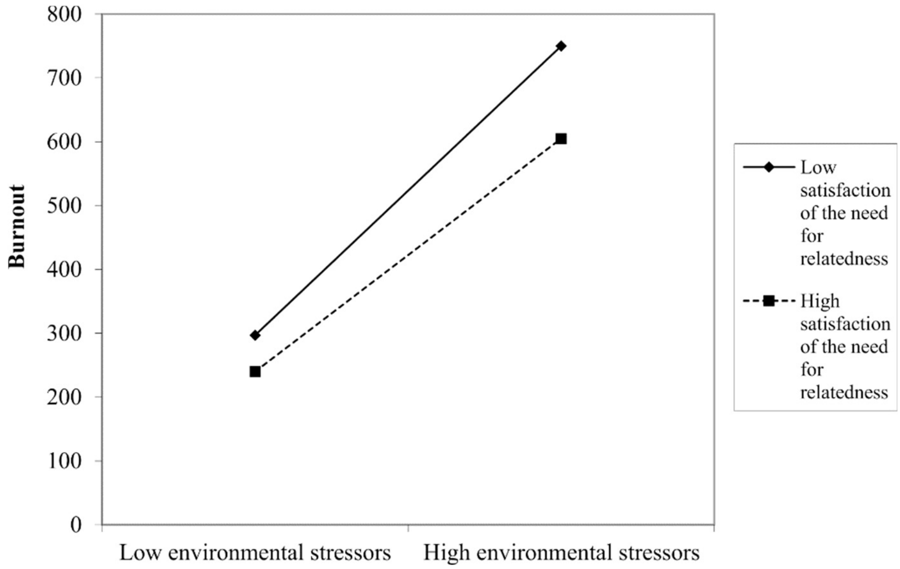

Figure 3. Interaction effect of environmental stressors and satisfaction of the need for relatedness in predicting burnout

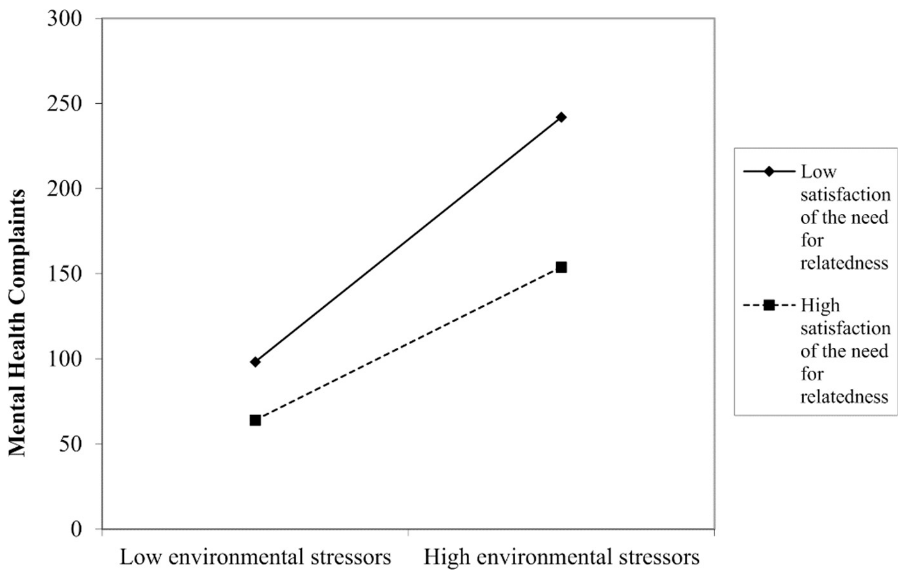

Figure 4. Interaction effect of environmental stressors and satisfaction of the need for relatedness in predicting mental health complaints

Figure 4 indicates that environmental stressors significantly predicted MHC when the satisfaction of the need for relatedness was low ($b = 1.71$, $t = 9.75$, $p < .001$). Conversely, when correctional officers with high satisfaction of the need for relatedness were confronted with high environmental stressors, they reported lower levels of MHC ($b = 1.07$, $t = 4.31$, $p < .001$). Thus, hypotheses H3a and H3b were supported by the data.

The results also showed that the interaction between the satisfaction of the need for competence and environmental stressors was not significant in predicting burnout (β = -.03, $p > .05$) or MHC (β = -.08, $p > .05$). Therefore, hypotheses H4a and H4b were not supported by the data (Table 4).

Table 4. *Hierarchical multiple regression: The moderating effect of the need for competence in the relationship between environmental stressors and ill-being (burnout and mental health complaints)*

Steps	Predictors	Burnout			Mental health complaints		
		β	β	β	β	β	β
1	Gender	-.02	-.02	-.02	.03	.03	.04
	Age	-.09	-.07	-.07	-.04	-.03	-.02
2	Environmental stressors		.64***	.63***		.52***	.52***
	Need for competence		-.18***	-.18***		-.17***	-.16**
3	Environmental stressors × Need for competence			-.03			-.08
	Total R^2	.008	.51	.51	.003	.35	.35
	Δ R^2			.001			.006
	F Change	1.43	176.87***	.46	.46	91.25***	3.18

Note. $N = 345$, * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. The beta coefficients are standardized in this table

Discussion

This study investigated the potential predictive role of environmental stressors (organizational and occupational) for two forms of ill-being (burnout and MHC). Moreover, embracing the SDT perspective and building upon the JD-R theory, our study examined the moderating role of psychological needs' satisfaction in the relationships mentioned above, arguing that these personal resources play a relevant role in these relations.

First, aligned with JD-R theory, the results showed that environmental stressors, such as new job demands, led to an increase in burnout rates and MHC. Previous research supports these results (Finney et al., 2013; Norman & Ricciardelli, 2021; Trounson et al., 2018). Thus, these demands play a role as predictors of ill-being.

Second, in line with SDT and JD-R theories, the results demonstrated that satisfying the needs for autonomy and relatedness as personal resources moderated the relationship between stressors and ill-being. Specifically, satisfying the need for autonomy buffered the impact of environmental stressors on burnout and MHC. Similarly, satisfying the need for relatedness moderated the impact of environmental stressors on burnout and MHC. These findings align with previous research showing that personal resources mitigate the adverse effects of job demands on ill-being. For example, Secoșan et al. (2021) showed that frontline healthcare workers who have high PsyCap coped better with the increased demands from the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic, reporting a lower level of burnout and fewer mental health complaints. Also, another study showed that the positive relationship between job demands and ill-being could be buffered by personal resources, such as PsyCap (Okros et al*.*, 2022).

In contrast, the results did not demonstrate a significant moderating role in the case of satisfying the need for competence. This implies that the environmental stressors correctional officers are facing can lead to increased burnout and increased mental health complaints, regardless of their perception of competence. In this vein, a review by Van den Broeck et al. (2016) showed that the need for competence was not significantly related to life satisfaction as a form of well-being. Based on SDT, these results show that correctional officers who experience autonomy at the workplace and feel part of a group (the need for relatedness) are less affected by environmental stressors because they are better "equipped" with personal resources to face them.

Theoretical and practical implications

From a theoretical perspective, our study contributes to the existing literature by identifying the moderating role that satisfying two basic psychological needs (autonomy and relatedness) has in the relationship between new job demands, on the one hand, and burnout and MHC, on the other hand. Specifically, correctional officers who experienced various environmental stressors, but perceived that their work satisfied their needs for autonomy and relatedness, had lower levels of burnout and fewer MHC. These new job demands align with the role of job demands in JD-R theory and also expand the number of categories of job demands.

Employing the SDT perspective, this study is one of the few that demonstrate the moderating role of psychological needs satisfaction, with most studies analyzing the mediating role of needs (e.g., De Gieter et al., 2018). Thus, another contribution is related to understanding the role of personal resources within the JD-R theory. Namely, it is essential to demonstrate how fulfilling each need contributes to the healthy functioning of employees. Our study showed that only the satisfaction of the need for autonomy and relatedness buffered the relationship between these specific stressors and correctional officers' ill-being.

These results also have a number of practical implications. Our results indicate that stressors are positively related to burnout and MHC. Therefore, the NAP should review organizational issues (e.g., excessive administrative duties) and improve the officers' quality of life by reducing operational stressors (e.g., occupation-related health issues, over-time demands). Given the beneficial effects of satisfying the two needs (autonomy and relatedness), NAP's human resources specialists could design various training programs to increase the feeling of autonomy and of relatedness in the workplace because these can serve as personal resources, which can be built upon and improved through specific interventions. One possibility would be for managers to be instructed via training sessions on how to promote autonomy in the workplace and to take into account the ideas of others (see Su & Reeve, 2011). Also, other programs could be created to improve the cohesion between employees so that they feel part of a group (Slemp et al., 2021).

Limitations and directions for future research

In interpreting the results, we must consider some limitations of this study. First, we used a cross-sectional design. Therefore, we cannot conclude causality. Future studies should use longitudinal designs to analyze the moderating role of psychological needs in the relationship between stressors and ill-being. Second, we used self-reported questionnaires to collect data for the study, which raises the risk of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

However, the CFA and Harman's single factor analysis showed that the single factor model did not fit the data well. A single factor could not explain that variance, suggesting a low probability of common method variance. Also, future research could assess other aspects of work as potential job demands, such as work-family conflict or pay and living situation.

Conclusions

Our study provides a better understanding of the role that psychological resources (i.e., the satisfaction of the needs for autonomy and relatedness) plays in helping correctional officers cope with domain-specific job demands and protecting them from burnout and mental health struggles. The buffering role that psychological needs satisfaction plays in the relationship between stressors and ill-being is essential to advancing our understanding and has practical implications. Thus, creating work environments where employees have the freedom to act independently and where building relationships with colleagues is encouraged represents a scientifically supported way to better manage stressors at the workplace.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Interventions for the prevention of perceived unfairness in assessment contexts

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Abstract

Based on a posttest-only control group design, we analyzed the efficiency of three group-level interventions (i.e., cognitive reframing, mood induction, and instrumental interventions) on the fairness perceptions of 198 participants in an assessment context. Each intervention was derived from a conceptual framework (Gilliland's theory, Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy, Affect-as-Information Perspective), which was empirically validated. Although the results are not extremely encouraging, as between the three experimental groups and the control one (no intervention) there were not large statistical differences, our study still highlights that the assessors need to focus on the participants if they wish to increase their perceptions of fairness, not only over its formal elements. A series of limitations and future research directions are presented.

Keywords

candidate reactions, perceived fairness, assessment, cognitive reframing, mood induction, and instrumental interventions.

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Introduction

This study examines the effect of three experimental interventions to reduce unfairness perceptions in assessment situations. The perception of unfairness is a phenomenon that frequently occurs in the context of assessments, whether we are talking about evaluation in an educational setting (D'Arcy, Geoghegan, Gibson, Hines, & MacAnaney, 2016), in the context of organizational selection and development, or employee performance evaluations (Nikolau, Bauer & Truxillo, 2015), as all those who take part in an assessment process inadvertently and inevitably form certain perceptions about how they were treated (i.e., interpersonal justice), the way they were evaluated (i.e., distributive justice) and the way the process went, judging by the stages of the evaluation (i.e., procedural justice) (Colquitt & Rodell, 2015). As it is an immediate, subjective evaluation, one's perception of fairness vs. unfairness appears in all the contexts in which a person is exposed to a process in which one has to perform. And there is no more of an immutable context that a person is required to complete than the educational and professional environment, where assessment is the critical, legally regulated tool for documenting one's acquired knowledge or consolidated skills (Birenbaum, DeLuca, Earl, Heritage, Klenowski, Looney, et al., 2015).

As such, one's fairness or unfairness perception is a central construct in both the educational and organizational fields. It concerns or should concern all stakeholders. However, stakeholders' interests must not only arise from the scale of the phenomenon but especially from rational arguments about its consequences. From this perspective, the scientific literature on assessment (e.g., Gilliland, 1993; Bell, Ryan, & Wiechmann, 2004; Hausknecht, Day, & Thomas, 2004), especially the one dedicated to the candidates' reactions, abounds with examples of negative consequences associated with the participants' perception of unfairness. These consequences of one's unfair perceptions are pointed in two directions, one toward the participant, whether we are talking about the employee or the student (e.g., negative affect; Butucescu & Iliescu, 2020; low levels of motivation and affective learning, deception; Chory-Assad, 2002; self-esteem and self-efficacy; Goodrum, Hackling, & Rennie 2001) and towards the organization (e.g., teacher-owned resistance; Paulsel, Chory-Assad, & Dunleavy, 2005; engaging in aggression, revenge, and hostility; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004; taking action, expressing verbal aggression, and dissenting to authority, Chory, Horan, & Houser, 2017; lower trust and adherence to internal protocols, Tyler, Goff, & MacCoun, 2015; Yeager et al., 2017). Although split into distinct categories, these consequences are intertwined: participants with negative perceptions of fairness will ultimately impact the organization (Byrne, 2005). This aspect is even more relevant and of great importance nowadays, as it is increasingly hard to find qualified employees (Rumschlag, 2017); also, if considering the educational environment where higher-education institutions have increasingly started to treat students as consumers, who must be satisfied, as they are increasingly confronted with financial constraints, on top of an unprecedented competitive market (Guilbault, 2016; Chory, Horan, & Houser, 2017).

Given this new educational paradigm that heavily draws from the "student as a customer" business model (Guilbault, 2016) and in the context of an abundance of evidence on the consequences of perceived unfairness, what can be done to increase fairness perceptions arises naturally. It should be addressed by both researchers and practitioners in the field. The answer lies in pinpointing the antecedents of candidates' unfairness perception throughout the assessment processes.

In this manner, a comprehensive systematic review (McCarthy et al., 2017) suggests that the most helpful taxonomy is to conceptualize the determinants of applicant attributions, which then lead directly to participants' reactions, as either dispositional (e.g., personality; Truxillo, Bauer, Campion, & Paronto, 2006; participants self-efficacy in assessment situations, general belief about tests, Panadero, Jonsson, & Botella, 2017) or situational (e.g., content-relatedness, consistency of administration, treatment at the test site, Gilliland, 1993). Although both streams of literature (i.e., the dispositional and situational determinants) bring essential contributions to a better understanding of perceived fairness in assessment contexts, there is a lack of knowledge on how to enhance perceived fairness, as this has not been studied in an intervention setting to date, as far as we are aware. Starting with the main determinants (i.e., dispositional and contextual), we identified three possible relevant interventions: an instrumental intervention, based on Gilliland's theory (1993), a mood induction intervention (based on The Affect-as- Information Perspective (Schwarz & Clore 2007), and a cognitive reframing intervention, based on the Cognitive Restructuring theory (Ellis, 1950). These interventions were selected for three distinct reasons. The instrumental intervention was tested to experimentally examine whether Gilliland's criteria are equally relevant. The literature and assessment guidelines calling for adherence to Gilliland's model are numerous, and there are positive associations between these criteria and participant's perceptions of fairness. This correlation was highlighted by a number of cross-sectional, correlational and longitudinal studies; however, it has not been experimentally tested previously. To our knowledge, there is no experimental design which includes comparing the efficiency of Gilliland's criteria against a control group, as we set out to do. The other two proposed interventions stem from our observations during practice, as well as from the broader scientific literature which shows that sometimes, fairness perception can be influenced by various reasons beyond the evaluation process in and of itself, and the circumstances in which it takes place. For instance, the candidate's nerves before the examination, or their cognitions and beliefs about exams in general, or how efficient they perceive themselves to be in these scenarios.

The central question addressed in this study is: What are the effects of three different group-level interventions (i.e., cognitive reframing, mood induction, and instrumental interventions) on participants' perceived fairness? This study meaningfully contributes to the literature on participant reactions, as this is one of the first studies examining how perceived fairness may be enhanced via preventive interventions.

Preventive Interventions in Perceived Fairness

The scientific literature dedicated to interventions in organizational contexts characteristically classifies interventions based on the time it takes place, as follows: primary, secondary, or tertiary (Tetrick & Winslow, 2015). The purpose of primary interventions is to prevent the occurrence of a negative effect, either by removing its causes or by enhancing the external conditions (i.e., resources). The purpose of secondary interventions is to alleviate already existing negative effects to prevent aggravation, while tertiary interventions aim to rehabilitate and bring those who are already experiencing the adverse effects back into an optimal state of functioning. Our study draws from the scientific literature focused on the determinants of unfairness perceptions (as cited above). It pinpoints those primary interventions that organizational institutions could implement before unfairness perceptions occur. Once in place, a negative phenomenon (i.e., perceived unfairness) can hardly be replaced, especially if its affective fairness and restoring trust in the institution's stakeholders. Moreover, the interventions we propose in our study focus on the group level, not on the intraindividual level, to foster a more efficient scaling-up process.

Instrumental Intervention Based on Gilliland's Theory

Gilliand's (1993) theory is probably the most widely known conceptual framework in the scientific literature about participants' reactions to assessment and was successfully applied both in an organizational environment (e.g., selection) as well as in an academic setting (e.g., educational testing), spearheading several scientific papers, in addition to international practice guides (e.g., SIOP). In short, Gilliland's theory states that in an assessment context, if participants are not treated properly, they will suffer several adverse effects (e.g., negative effects on the candidate's well-being (Truxillo & Fraccaroli, 2011), low self-efficacy (Panadero, Jonsson, & Botella, 2017), negative emotions (Butucesc& Iliescu, 2020). Candidates who view the selection process as unfair may withdraw from the shortlisted group of candidates (Macan, Avedon, Paese, & Smith, 1994). Moreover, inadequate selection procedures can lead to candidates filing complaints or taking legal action (Anderson, 2011). Gilliland (1993) further proposed a number of ten postulates that positively influence the candidate's experience of fairness. These rules provide a framework that the evaluator can use to think about the selection process from the candidate's perspective and, at least theoretically, once secured, prevent the occurrence of unfairness perceptions. The ten rules of unfairness prevention are as follows: ensuring that the assessment is relevant to the job or the topic under scrutiny in the educational context; providing participants with an opportunity to perform and exhibit their knowledge; allowing participants to challenge their results; ensuring that procedures are consistent for all participants; providing participants with informative and timely feedback; providing explanations and justifications for the use of a particular design or decision; ensuring that decision-makers are honest when communicating with participants; ensuring that decision-makers treat participants with respect and warmth; supporting a two-way communication process; ensuring that questions are legally justified and non-discriminatory. The 10 rules proposed by Gilliland were extensively tested within the scientific literature, and were associated with the above-mentioned criteria, particularly with the author of an assessment scale Selection and Procedural Scale (Bauer et al., 2011). Fundamentally, this scale is a comprehensive measure of Gilliland's model (1993), while the scale validation study associates rule abiding with criteria such as organizational attractiveness, organizational commitment , recommendation intentions and self-esteem. Therefore, based on this theory, those participants who are provided with an evaluation context in which all these rules are applied should perceive the process as fairer than those who did not benefit from such a context.

Given the above considerations, our first hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Participants in the instrumental intervention group will report higher perceived fairness (i.e., about the characteristics of the evaluation, explanations and interpersonal treatment) related to the assessment than the control group.

Cognitive Reframing Intervention based on Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive restructuring was coined by psychologist Albert Ellis in the mid-1950s and is a critical component of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT). CBT can control and change negative thoughts, which are sometimes linked to detrimental behaviors. Research suggests that CBT leads to a significant improvement in one's functioning and quality of life. In many studies, CBT is more effective than other psychological therapy or some psychiatric medication, especially in treating anxiety or depressive disorders (Tolin, 2010). It is important to note that progress in CBT was made on the basis of both research and clinical practice and is an approach for which ample scientific evidence shows that its methods actually generate changes. It is based on several fundamental principles, including the idea that psychological problems are based, in part, on wrong or reactive ways of thinking. CBT treatment usually involves efforts to change one's thinking patterns. Cognitive restructuring is the most common technique in CBT, helpful in understanding negative feelings and moods and counteracting the sometimes wrong "automatic beliefs" that may be behind them (Ellis, 2003). It can be used to reframe the unnecessary negative thinking we all experience from time to time. Applying the cognitive restructuring technique in educational settings helps students identify the irrational beliefs guiding their approach and perspectives on the subject. During assessment situations, it is common for participants to have automatic, negative thoughts in anticipation of failing in the assessment they are about to engage in. Implementing cognitive restructuring techniques in this study was to build an adaptive mindset related to the assessment worries.

Hypothesis 2: Participants in the cognitive restructuring intervention group will report a higher level of fairness (i.e., about the characteristics of the evaluation, explanations, and interpersonal treatment) in their perception of the exam than the control group.

Mood Induction Intervention, based on The Affect-as-Information Perspective

Generally speaking, interventions for individuals are aimed toward either emotional change, cognitive change, behavioral change, or all of the above. Unfairness was traditionally studied as a mental or perceptual state (e.g., Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001), which means that interventions should target individual beliefs. However, more recent literature has shown that perceived unfairness is more closely associated with emotions. Some authors even claim that perceived unfairness should be defined as a purely emotional state (for a detailed review, see Barclay & Kiefer, 2014). In this context, the third intervention addresses emotional changes in the participants. Numerous theories state the importance of emotional states in fairness perception, and we used them as theoretical fundaments. One of the most prominent theories is The Affect-as-Information Perspective (Schwarz & Clore, 2007), who suggests that individuals rely on their affective state to form impressions; therefore, fairness perceptions depend on the general mood of the participant before the assessment. Studies that also take this view (e.g., Barsky, Kaplan, & Beal, 2011, Butucescu & Iliescu, 2020) have shown that prior mood, also called incidental affect, significantly influences candidates' perceptions of fairness. This means that participants who have a positive state of mind are more likely to evaluate information from the environment positively (e.g., assessor attitude, assessment conditions, etc.), tend to perceive assessments as opportunities rather than threats, tend to regard others (e.g., assessors) more positively, to have more optimistic behaviors and to make more positive decisions (Ashton, James, & Ashkanasy, 2005). Similarly, participants with a negative mood will tend to approach situations more pessimistic, regard events as threats or disadvantages, have more negative views of people, and have a higher likelihood of adopting a negative stance when making decisions. These theoretical arguments have also been empirically supported in one study (Butucescu & Iliescu, 2020), with results highlighting that only negative emotions impact a person's perception of fairness during assessment contexts. Therefore, based on the arguments mentioned above, the proposed experimental intervention for assessment participants will pursue changes in their emotionality/mood induction, mainly focusing on reducing negative emotions.

Hypothesis 3: Participants in the mood induction intervention group will report a higher level of fairness (i.e., about the characteristics of the evaluation, explanations, and interpersonal treatment) in their perception of the exam than the control group.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 198 de participants, out of which 174 were females (87.87%) and 24 males (12.03%), aged between 20 and 41 years (M = 21.00, SD = 1.82). Initially, 235 students agreed to participate in the study, but 37 dropped out. Those who completed the study received a bonus point in one of their semester classes. Students were then split between 4 groups, three experimental and one control group, using the online website www.random.org (Haahr, 2021).

Procedure

Students allocated to the experimental groups were contacted ahead of the assessment and told that, before one of their exams, they would have to take part in an online group discussion with one of the experimenters. This was to take place precisely one hour before the actual exam. We chose this specific timeframe, of an hour ahead of the exam, to avoid any inter-participant exchanges of thoughts about the intervention before the end of the study to prevent cross-contamination from one group to another. After the interventions, students sat for their exams online. Immediately after the examination, they were asked to fill in a questionnaire about the fairness of the assessment process they had just gone through. Because the fairness perceptions of the exam could not have been collected before the intervention (seeing as how one's perception of fairness is formed during and after the process), we could not use a pre-test- post-test experimental design. Therefore, we used a post-test design. The post-test-only control group design is a research design with at least two groups, one of which does not receive any treatment or intervention, and data are collected on the outcome measure after the treatment or intervention (Allen, 2017). The intervention meetings that took place lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

The brief CBT intervention was administered by a specialized therapist in CBT one hour and involved five steps. In the first step, the therapist briefly explained to the participants the ABC model while offering an example of antecedents (A), irrational thoughts (B), and positive or negative consequences (C). The first step lasted five minutes. The second step involved a 15-minute activity in which students were invited to think about their thoughts and feelings regarding the upcoming exam. In the third step (about 10 minutes), the therapist, together with the participants, debated irrational thoughts and helped participants distinguish rational from irrational thinking (e.g., "I will surely fail the exam" – irrational thought versus "I will take the exam and do my best." – rational thought). The fourth step involved a series of questions aimed at helping participants to investigate evidence of irrational thinking. Thus, the therapist helped participants ask and analyze in a rational matter whether the fear of failure will actually lead to failing the exam or the disadvantages of thinking about failing. The last step involved an exercise on building alternative thoughts (e.g., "There is a possibility that I might fail the exam, but that does not exclude trying to pass the exam in the next session").

The intervention by positive mood induction was realized in three parts, for 45 minutes (just before the exam). In the first part of the procedure (about 10 min), after a short introduction, participants were invited to find a comfortable sitting position and to follow some breathing techniques (e.g.," we are aware of the physical sensations determined by each inspiration and expiration") and awareness exercises (e.g.," with your eyes closed, alert, be aware of inner calm, be aware of inner peace") to reduce the intensity of physiological reactions generated by the anxiety of assessment. The second part, increasing the awareness state and preparing the transition to a positive mood (about 15 min), involved a guided mindfulness meditation for, in order, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic sensory modalities. For example, for kinesthetic sensory, we showed the participants to be more aware of their bodies (e.g.," with your eyes closed, notice the position you are in, the part of the other body segments, the state of relaxation or tension of the back, shoulders, hands, possible muscle tension or discomfort, we don't evaluate these signals, we just observe them"). In part three, participants watched three funny short clips: a work meeting (about 10 min), a show video (5 min), and a video fragment of a comedy (5 min) with a few seconds of pause between these.

The instrumental intervention, which focused on offering extensive procedural information, was led by the assistant professor of that specific class and supervised by an external mediator. The mediator asked participants whether they had detailed information about the type of exam they were taking if they were familiar with such examinations, if they knew when exactly they would receive their results and whether they knew their rights (i.e., to challenge the assessment process, to be treated respectfully, to receive an examination topic that does not contain any discriminatory items, to have an open rapport and communication with their evaluators, to be able to ask questions and voice their concerns, as well as the opportunity to report anything that they do not find by the exam stipulations – e.g., exam items about topics which were not included in the curricula). When they were unsure, the teaching assistant offered simple answers. We ensured the assessment process was as sound as possible, starting with Gilliland's (1993) rules on the instrumental intervention.

Instruments

A version of the Selection Procedural Justice Scale (SPJS) of Bauer et al. (2001), adapted to an educational context (Butucescu, Iliescu & Opariuc, 2019), was used to measure fairness perceptions for the evaluation process. Because participants completed the questionnaire after the exam but before receiving the results, the items about reconsideration opportunity (opportunity to have my test results rechecked) were left out. The remaining items were considered either formal characteristics of the evaluation (e.g., *I could really show my skills and abilities through this test, I knew what to expect on the tests*) with an Alpha Cronbach of 0.74, or explanations (e.g., *I had a clear understanding of when I would get my results, I knew when I would receive feedback about my test results*) with an Alpha Cronbach of 0.78 and interpersonal treatment (*Test administrators made no distinction in how they treated applicants, I was treated honestly and openly during the testing process*) with an Alpha Cronbach of 0.82. The global perceived fairness consists of an overall score (Alpha Cronbach of 0.85).

Results

The CBT experimental group was associated with higher global perceived fairness (*M*= 204.25; *SD*= 23.86) than the CBT control group (*M*= 201.70, *SD*= 22.78). To test the hypothesis that the CBT control and CBT experimental group were associated with the statistically significant different mean of the global perceived fairness, an independent sample *t*-test was performed in Jamovi, Version 2.3. (2022). The independent *t*-test was associated with an statistically insignificant effect (*t*(98)= -0.54, *p*= 0.58). A graphical representation of the means and the 95% confidence intervals are displayed in Figure 1. The same results can also be reported for the fairness perception components, namely formal characteristics and interpersonal treatment variables. As such, those in the CBT experimental group (cognitive reframing) reported a higher perception of the information they received about the assessment (i.e., information about the structure of the exam, the relevance of its contents; *M*= 39.91, *SD*= 8.13), compared to those in the CBT control group (*M*= 39.47, *SD*= 7.42), although the difference was not significant (*t*(98)= -0.28, *p*= 0.78). The CBT experimental group reported an even lower perception of the interpersonal treatment (i.e., whether they were treated respectfully and were given proper consideration; *M*= 94.43, *SD*= 10.94) compared to those in the CBT control group (*M*= 95.13, *SD*= 7.69), although the difference was not statistically significant (*t*(98)= 0.36, *p*= 0.70). The only significant difference was related to the explanatory variable, where those in the CBT experimental group (*M*= 6.19, *SD*= 1.96) perceived that they were better informed about the timeline in which they would get their evaluation results compared to those in the control group (*M*= 5.21, SD= 1.65; *t*(98)= 2.67, *p*= 0. 009). Cohen's *d* was estimated at 0.53, 95% CI [-0.94, -0.12], a medium effect based on Cohen's (1992) guideline.

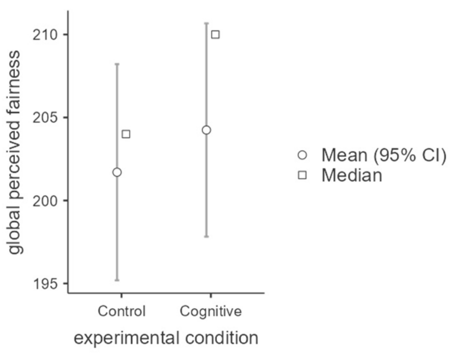

Figure 1. Graphical representation of the means and the 95% confidence intervals for global perceived fairness (experimental-cognitive reframing group versus control group).

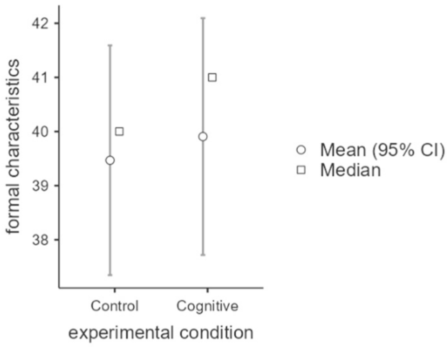

Figure 2. Graphical representation of the means and the 95% confidence intervals for perceived fairness of formal characteristic (experimental- cognitive reframing group versus control group).

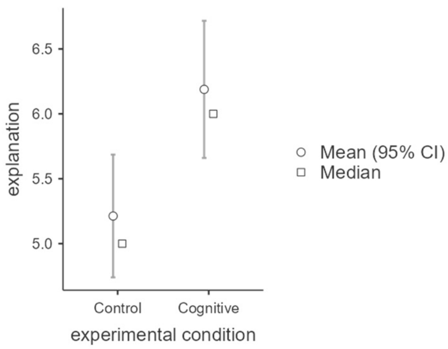

Figure 3. Graphical representation of the means and the 95% confidence intervals for perceived fairness of the explanation (experimental- cognitive reframing group versus control group).

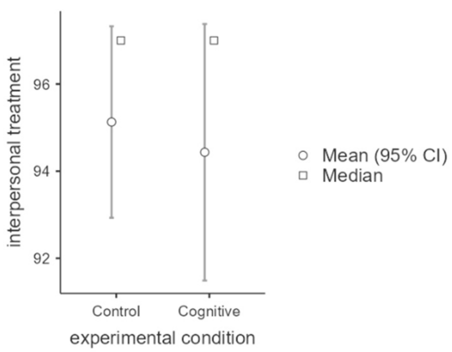

Figure 4. Graphical representation of the means and the 95% confidence intervals for perceived fairness of the interpersonal treatment (experimental- cognitive reframing group versus control group).

The second hypothesis was about identifying differences between the experimental and instrumental groups, where participants received extensive information about the procedural aspects of the evaluation process beforehand, as opposed to the control group. Results show that the global perception of the fairness of the process was higher in the experimental instrumental intervention group (*M*= 210.02, *SD*= 22.78) versus the instrumental intervention control group (*M*= 201.70, *SD*= 20.78). However, this difference is limited in its statistical significance *(t*(90)= 1.85, *p*= 0.06). The biggest, statistically significant difference, was registered for the explanation variable (*t*(90)= -2.36, *p*= 0.020, *d*= 0.49, 95% CI [-0.91, -0.07]), where the experimental instrumental intervention group (*M*= 6.11, *SD*= 1.65) perceived a higher fairness of the information received about the timeline in which they will get feedback on the results, as opposed to the instrumental intervention control group (*M*= 5.21, *SD*= 1.65). The other two components of the fairness perceptions are not significant. In other words, there are no major differences between the experimental instrumental intervention group (*M*= 41.60, *SD*= 8.02) and the instrumental intervention control group (*M*= 39.47, *SD*= 7.42, *t*(90)= -1.32, *p*= 0.18) when it comes to the formal characteristics. Similarly, there were no differences related to the interpersonal treatment, in the experimental instrumental intervention group (*M*= 97.82, *SD*= 8.36), or the control group (*M*= 95.13, *SD*=7.69, *t*(90)= -1.61, *p*= 0.11).

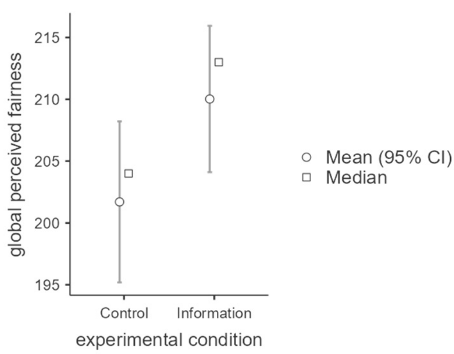

Figure 5. Graphical representation of the means and the 95% confidence intervals for

the global perceived fairness (experimental-instrumental group versus control group).

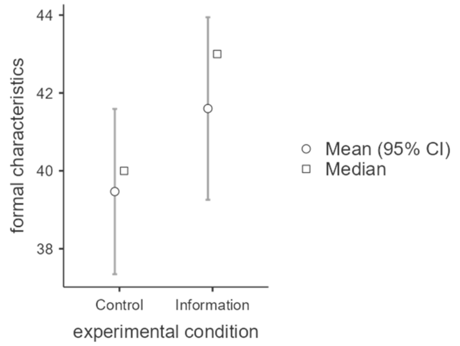

Figure 6. Graphical representation of the means and the 95% confidence intervals for perceived fairness of formal characteristic (experimental- instrumental group versus control group).

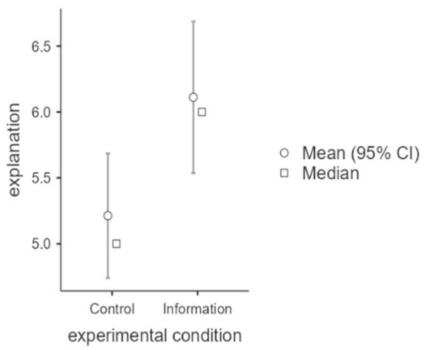

Figure 7. Graphical representation of the means and the 95% confidence intervals for perceived fairness of the explanation (experimental- instrumental group versus control group).

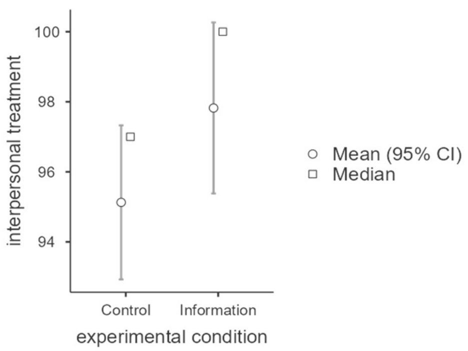

Figure 8. Graphical representation of the means and the 95% confidence intervals for perceived fairness of the interpersonal treatment (experimental- instrumental group versus control group).

The smallest recorded differences were between the experimental mood induction intervention groupversus the control group. As such, in terms of the overall fairness perceptions, the experimental mood induction group has a higher perception (*M*= 206.19, *SD*= 19.77) compared to the control group (*M*=201.70, *SD*= 22.78), although it is not statistically significant (*t*(98)= 1.07, *p*= 0.28). Similar results were obtained for the other assessment components, so there are no significant differences between the fairness perception in formal characteristics (*t*(98)= -1.00, *p*= 0.32), experimental mood induction group (*M*= 40.87, *SD*= 6.57), control group

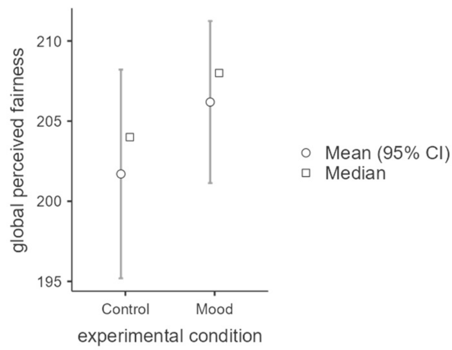

Figure 9. Graphical representation of the means and the 95% confidence intervals for global perceived fairness (experimental- mood induction group versus control group).

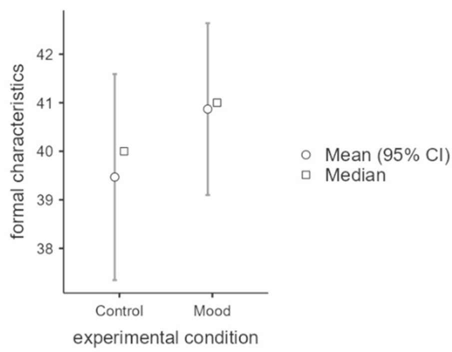

Figure 10. Graphical representation of the means and the 95% confidence intervals for perceived fairness of formal characteristic (experimental- mood induction group versus control group).

(M= 39.47, SD= 7.42); explanation (t(98)= 0.46, p= 0.64), experimental mood induction group (M= 5.04, SD= 2.07), control group (M= 5.21, SD=1.65); interpersonal treatment (t(98)= -0.63, p= 0.53), experimental mood induction group (M= 96.15, SD= 8.44), control group (M= 95.13, SD= 7.69).

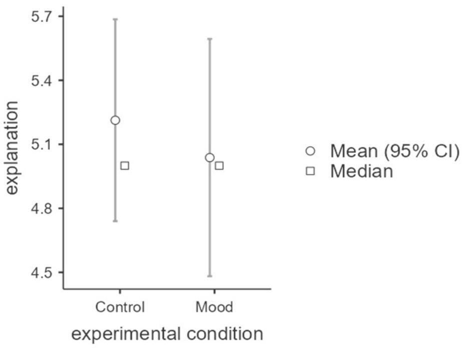

Figure 11. Graphical representation of the means and the 95% confidence intervals for perceived fairness of the explanation (experimental- mood induction group versus control group).

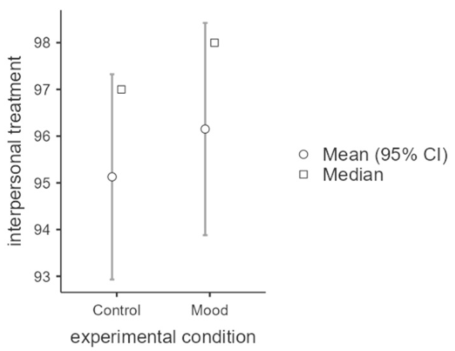

Figure 12. Graphical representation of the means and the 95% confidence intervals for perceived fairness of the interpersonal treatment (experimental- mood induction group versus control group).

Discussion

Stemming from three theories, namely Gilliland's theory, the Affect-as-Information Perspective, and the Cognitive Restructuring theory, this study experimentally tested whether participants' perceptions of fairness during assessments were higher compared to a control group, where there was no intervention. Thus, starting from Gilliland's theory, we set out to investigate whether the perception of fairness, as measured after an assessment, will be higher in the experimental group, which, before the assessment, had to go through an informative session, where participants were offered extensive information about all the procedural and details of the process. On the other hand, the control group does not have the benefit of a particular session in which to address their questions or concerns related to the content of the assessment, the possibility of contesting, etc. Results show that, although the difference is at the border of statistical significance (p = 0.06), the experimental group had an overall higher perception of the assessment process's fairness than the control group. The differences are in the same direction when we talk about various procedural aspects (e.g., formal characteristics, explanation, interpersonal treatment). Out of all the procedural elements, the “explanation” variable displays the most significant statistical difference, the only one that was statistically significant; those who received additional explanations about the timeline in which they will have their assessment results released viewed the entire process as fairer than those who did not receive such accurate information.

The second objective of this paper, based on the Cognitive Restructuring theory, was to see if participants’ perception of fairness, as measured after the assessment, will be higher in the experimental group which, before the exam, went through a session of cognitive restructuring of participants' negative cognitions associated with the assessment situation. The control group did not receive any treatment. Results show that, although there is a difference between all the study variables, the explanation variable seems to be the only one that differentiates the control group from the experimental group in the cognitive restructuring scenario, in the sense that the latter perceived the assessment component related to the sharing of information as more accurate. However, the two groups did not actually receive different information about the date they were due to receive the results after the evaluation. One possible explanation for this difference could be that those undergoing cognitive restructuring became more resilient. They stopped being under so much pressure to find out the results.

Interestingly, there is no effect of cognitive restructuring on the other procedural components of the assessment process (e.g., formal characteristics, interpersonal treatment) compared to the control group, which essentially means that there are no differences in the overall perception of the fairness of the process. The most plausible explanation, which essentially affected the results, refers to the very low variability of the control group's responses. Most participants perceived the process as fair, thus failing to differentiate between the control and the experimental groups.

The third proposed objective was related to the Affect-as-Information Perspective. It was to see if participants' perception of fairness assessed after the exam would be higher in the experimental group, which went through a positive mood induction session before the exam. The control group did not receive any treatment in this regard. Results show that, although the differences between the two groups are in the expected direction, i.e., those in the experimental group have higher scores on the perception of global and component correctness, the difference is not actually significant.

Although the results are not highly encouraging, in the sense that there are no significant differences between the control group and the experimental groups on many of the variables, we consider that this article brings several contributions that are worth exploring in future studies with a more robust experimental design.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

From a theoretical standpoint, this is the first study we are aware of that experimentally investigates the effects of three different types of interventions on participants' perceptions of fairness. Although modest, the results are mainly in line with the scientific literature on candidate reactions (e.g., Gilliland, 1993; Nikolau, Bauer & Truxillo, 2015), which emphasizes the importance of correctly, completely and transparently briefing candidates before going through the assessment process to increase participants' perception of fairness. Gilliland's theory contains some rules that evaluators should follow, rules that can be condensed into various components of the assessment process (e.g., rules on content relatedness, rules on interpersonal relations with participants, etc.), and there is an assumption that evaluators should place equal importance to all aspects of the process. Our study highlights that not all rules (or procedures) are likely to weigh the same. In our study, participants who received an instrumental intervention (i.e., received extensive information on all procedural aspects) viewed the process as fairer than the participants in the control group, especially regarding finding out the results. There may be several explanations, the most plausible being the sample's composition in the control group. However, from a theoretical point of view, at least one hypothesis can be advanced. The importance of the information that candidates receive about the end of the process evaluation (i.e., when they get their results) weighs more than other information about the process itself. If this hypothesis is validated in another study with a more robust design, this brings a significant theoretical increment to Gilliland's theory and the broad scientific literature.

From a practical standpoint, the study brings a small contribution, which emphasizes the importance of the care that evaluators should give to participants before the assessment process so that, in the end, they perceive the process as fair. Although in most cases, the proposed interventions did not have as significant an impact as we expected compared to the control group, the slight differences noted are still in the predicted direction (i.e., those who received more information about the process, those who went through debriefing session about their beliefs on the evaluation process and those who went through a mood induction session have a slight tendency to perceive the process more favorably than those who did not receive any special attention before the evaluation). However, most of the differences are not so significant and therefore it is difficult, from a utility standpoint, to make practical suggestions on the critical need to introduce kick-off sessions before evaluation because, although such a suggestion is common sense, the present study does not confirm that there is a guarantee that there will be significant positive improvements on how candidates perceive the process, at least in our study protocol. However, there is a high probability that in future studies, the slight differences reported in this study will be more comprehensive if the research design is improved. Thus, it is critical to emphasize the issue of the study's limits.

Limits

The main limitation is that the assessment situation itself was perceived by all participants as fair, as there was no different experimental treatment from this point of view. It is challenging, if not impossible, in an actual examination situation, such as this one, to design a context in which to intervene experimentally (e.g., to discriminate between participants, to withhold basic information on the content of the evaluation, conditions, etc.), to create the intense context of unfairness. Such designs can be researched only in a simulated context or in a context without any stakes for the participant, yet, at the same time, such contexts are constraining in nature. Another limitation is that the control group participants, like all the participants, agreed to take part in the study, knowing that it was an experimental study, but not knowing which group they would belong to. It was probably easy to guess that they were part of the control group, as long as they had not been contacted for any intervention before the assessment process. Subsequent studies should simulate an intervention with the control group as well so that it is not intuitive for participants to guess their role in the study, which may affect their direct involvement. Another limitation is to receive a bonus for those enrolled in the study. We could not ensure the anonymity of the answers to be more confident that participants could give honest feedback on how they perceived the evaluation process. A suggestion would be to investigate participants' perception of the fairness of the evaluation process after the evaluation, as in the present study, and after receiving the results, to not give them the feeling that the negative feedback they may have about the process could influence their evaluation result. All we could do in the present study was to assure them that their feedback does not reach the course holder so that they can report on the process honestly. Another limitation may be the actual intervention protocol, particularly the one related to cognitive restructuring, in the sense that the protocol generally requires more than one intervention. Moreover, the participants likely had different levels of anxiety or dysfunctional thoughts related to the test situations.

Conclusions

Although, as shown above, the present study has several limitations, this article is the first step in interventions related to candidate reactions. It brings forth the option to consider the possibility of assessors intervening to increase participants' perceptions of fairness, not only in the evaluation process but also in the candidates. This could be done through taking measures of inducing a positive emotionality or by managing to diminish their negative beliefs about evaluations which, in fact, as we know from the broader literature, have effects on their evaluation performance as well.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Multiple team membership and individual learning: The moderating role of socially prescribed perfectionism

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Abstract

Multiple team membership (MTM) is a widespread work arrangement, with claimed beneficial effects for employee knowledge and skills acquisition. By building on the Work Design Growth Model, this study sets out to explore the relationship between MTM and individual learning in the workplace, as well as the role of individual factors, namely socially prescribed perfectionism, as potential boundary conditions. By testing a hierarchical regression analysis model on a sample of 80 employees working in multiple teams, our findings indicate a moderating effect of socially prescribed perfectionism on the relationship between MTM and learning. The relationship between MTM and learning is positive for employees with high socially prescribed perfectionism, and curvilinear for employees with low socially prescribed perfectionism, showing a decreasingly positive association.

Keywords

multiple team membership, multi-teaming, individual learning, perfectionism

Introduction

Organizations increasingly rely on more fluid team structures such as simultaneously allocating employees to multiple work teams (i.e., multiple team membership, MTM) (Parker, Morgeson, & Johns, 2017; Salas, Kozlowski, & Chen, 2017; Tannenbaum et al., 2012) in order to better respond to the growing need for dynamism, flexibility, and adaptation to technological changes. Up to 95% of employees work in more than one team at a time (Mortensen, Woolley, & O'Leary, 2007; O'Leary et al., 2011), with increased popularity of MTM in knowledge intensive industries such as IT, consulting, and R&D.

Such work arrangements bring about promising advantages such as increased flexibility and efficiency for the organizations, and enhanced developmental and networking opportunities for the employees. However, MTM can also be costly due to the pressures on team coordination, but also the cognitive load stemming from repeated transitions from

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one team and task environment to another (O'Leary et al., 2011).

Working in multiple teams can thus have both an enhancing as well as a hindering effect on outcomes such as individual learning (i.e., acquisition of knowledge and skills) (O'Leary et al., 2011), and the literature is yet to determine the nature of the effects of MTM on learning as well as its boundary conditions. Moreover, empirical studies have so far favored exploring the implications of multi-teaming for employee performance (Bertolotti, Mattarelli, Vignoli, & Macrì, 2015; Chan, 2014; Cummings & Haas, 2012; Gupta & Woolley, 2018; van de Brake et al., 2018) and, with few exceptions (Chan, Oerlemans, & Meslec, 2021) have not shed light on how such a work arrangement might alter the individual learning outcomes.

This study aims to address that very gap and thus it makes several important contributions to the literature. First, by drawing on the Work Design Growth Model (Parker, 2017), which argues that work characteristics can enhance short- and long-term development through cognitive, motivational, and behavioral processes, our study theorizes MTM as a work design feature and empirically explores how a work arrangement involving the simultaneous assignment to a variety of work teams is associated with employee learning outcomes. Second, our study adds to the literature on both work design and MTM by testing whether employee socially prescribed perfectionism can act as a boundary condition and alter whether MTM brings beneficial or detrimental effects for individual learning.

Pursuing these research questions is important, as organizations could better design work arrangements and assign employees more efficiently to multiple teams such that the potential beneficial effects of MTM are preserved. In the same vein, investigating the effect of socially prescribed perfectionism on the relationship between MTM and learning could help organizations tailor more efficient personnel/team recruitment and intervention policies so as to achieve better employee – work arrangement fit.

Multiple team membership and individual learning: A work design perspective

One of the core theoretical models on the impact of work design features on outcomes pertaining to the employees is the Job Characteristics Model (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). In short, the model argues that five core job characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback from the job) have motivational value and drive employee performance and satisfaction through several mechanisms such as experiencing meaningfulness, responsibility, and knowledge of results. Drawing on these postulates and extending them further, Parker (2017) formulated the Work Design Growth Model which argues the differential effect that work characteristics have on outcomes that are different from performance and job satisfaction, namely on the short-term learning and the long-term cognitive, personal, and moral development of the employees. The underlying mechanisms explaining the effect of work design features on employee learning and cognitive, personal and moral development refer to cognitive processes, such as information processing, exposure to different perspectives and roles, motivational processes, such as need fulfillment and learning motivation, but also behavioral processes, such as experimentation, and reflection.

Individual learning is especially important in the context of MTM and one of its claimed benefits. In line with the Work Design Growth Model (Parker, 2017), we argue that learning conceptualized as an outcome is defined as relatively permanent changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors occurring as a result of the employees' experiences (Ellis et al., 2003).

Moreover, the experience of working in multiple teams is defined in connection to context switching, temporal misalignment, and team-member dependencies (O'Leary et al., 2011; Margolis, 2020). When working in MTM, employees may switch between multiple team contexts in a given workday, changing the tools and technologies they have to use, solving different type of tasks, but also changing team climate, culture, norms, and role expectations. As such, in line with the Work Design Growth Model applied to the context of MTM, we argue that as the number of teams one is simultaneously part of varies, so will some of the core features of work design that can be influential for individual learning and development such as: complexity, social support, exposure to multiple responsibilities and roles (Parker, 2017).

In line with O'Leary et al. (2011) we argue that the number of teams an employee is simultaneously part of has an inverted U-shape with individual learning such that when the number of teams increase from low to average, learning also increases, whereby as more teams add up, individual learning decreases. This claim is based on several arguments related to the changing nature of one's work design. For instance, a possible underlying mechanism explaining the impact of MTM on learning is the context switching pertaining to working in multiple teams. At a low to moderate number of teams one is simultaneously part of, context switching has a stimulating effect on learning by facilitating exploration behaviors and access to a larger pool of knowledge (Chan, Oerlemans, & Meslec, 2020; Margolis, 2020). Similarly, context switching is analogous to job rotation, which is positively related to learning, by enhancing knowledge and skill acquisition (Campion et al., 1994).

On the other hand, when the number of teams increases from moderate to high, context switching also increases, making it harder to integrate new information (even if the pool of available information is richer), as employees will have less time to encode, integrate, and reflect on new information or skill development. As the number of teams increases, employees may need to refocus their attention on new team contexts more often, which further decreases their cognitive resources that could otherwise be used for learning purposes (Leroy, 2009; O'Leary et al., 2011).

As the number of teams increases from low to moderate, so does job complexity, which is defined as the extent to which a job is multifaceted and difficult to perform (Humphrey et al., 2007). At first, a higher level of job complexity increases the associated demands, but these demands decrease with time through adaptation as employees develop skills and accumulate knowledge. This creates a dynamic, iterative process: adaptation to the workload frees up cognitive resources that can be used for learning, and learning further facilitates future adaptation (Parker, 2017).

In contrast, when the number of teams becomes too high for an employee, job complexity is likely to become too high as well, posing constraints on employee time and resources, such as time management, task prioritization, and informational transfer from one team to another (O'Leary et al., 2011). Holding other work design features constant (i.e., no increase in job resources), an increased job complexity is likely to lead to role overload (Humphrey et al., 2007).

Social support, defined as the extent to which a job offers help and advice-seeking opportunities from coworkers or supervisors (Humphrey et al., 2007) is another work design feature, likely to vary with the number of teams one is part of and which can facilitate or hinder learning. When belonging to a small number of teams, forming social networks becomes easier and this leads to a more facile access to social and instrumental support, as well as to more learning opportunities, drawing on the diverse knowledge of their teammates (O'Leary et al., 2011). In contrast, when belonging to a large number of teams, social support decreases as employees become overloaded with conflicting tasks, roles, and demands that can negatively affect the time available to be invested in interacting with one's peers and accessing the network of support (Pluut, Fleștea, & Curşeu, 2014).

Based on the arguments above, the first hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1. Multiple team membership (MTM) has a curvilinear (inverted U-shaped) relationship with learning, with learning increasing from a low to moderate number of teams, after which it reaches an inflection point and learning decreases from a moderate to a high number of overlapping teams.

The moderating role of socially prescribed perfectionism

Perfectionism is a multi-dimensional personality trait, characterized by low tolerance to mistakes, high and unrealistic standards, and critical evaluations, which can be self or other-directed (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). The model developed by Hewitt and Flett (1991) defines three types of perfectionism: self-oriented perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism, and other-oriented perfectionism. Individuals with self-oriented perfectionism tend to hold the belief that reaching perfection is highly important, set high personal standards, and are highly critical of themselves when making mistakes. In the case of other-oriented perfectionism, individuals tend to have high expectations for the significant others and believe that it is highly important for others to reach those standards and aspire to perfection. Lastly, individuals with socially prescribed perfectionism tend to perceive high external pressures for perfection and believe that others have high expectations of them, and their social acceptance is conditioned by their ability to reach these expectations (Enns & Cox, 2002; Hewitt & Flett, 1991).

Among these three factors, socially prescribed perfectionism is especially relevant in the context of individual experience in organizational teams due to its focus on the interpersonal and social aspects of perfectionistic beliefs. Because working in teams in general creates a salient context for social comparison and management of social expectations, being an employee with socially prescribed perfectionism can alter the experience of MTM by hindering social interactions that could enhance learning or redirecting personal resources away from learning goals.

Socially prescribed perfectionism has been identified as a maladaptive trait, with negative effects on outcomes such as well-being in the workplace (Birch, Riby, & McGann, 2019), leading to higher burnout and stress, to reduced commitment (Childs & Stoeber, 2010; Childs & Stoeber, 2012; Rice & Liu, 2020) and increased workaholism (Taris, van Beek, & Schaufeli, 2010). At the interpersonal level, it has been linked to alienation from peers, low social support, avoidance of social interactions, interpersonal conflicts, and hostility (Kleszewski & Otto, 2020).

Socially prescribed perfectionism can negatively impact learning through negative biases and hindered motivational processes. In a study by Rudolph, Flett, and Hewitt (2007), socially prescribed perfectionism was positively related to maladaptive cognitive strategies, such as self-blaming, catastrophic thinking, and rumination, and negatively related to adaptive cognitive strategies such as changing perspectives or positive reappraisal. In a study by O'Connor, O'Connor, and Marshall (2007), socially prescribed perfectionism had the strongest relationship with rumination and psychological distress compared to self-oriented perfectionism and other-oriented perfectionism.

Socially prescribed perfectionism can negatively impact the motivational processes required for learning. In a study using a sample of students, socially prescribed perfectionism was negatively related to self-efficacy for learning, intrinsic motivation, and learning strategies, and individuals with higher socially prescribed perfectionism were motivated to learn by recognition from external sources (Mills & Blankstein, 2000).

Socially prescribed perfectionism negatively affects the social processes that enhance access to resources and facilitate learning. In a study conducted by Bartsch, Ebers, and Maurer (2013), organizational learning was facilitated by team members' social capital; the social connections between project team members and employees in the rest of the organization facilitated organizational learning despite existing barriers, such as low motivation, lack of opportunities, or the ability to disseminate project-based learning. Drawing on these findings, socially prescribed perfectionism may hinder learning opportunities from multiple sources in the context of MTM through impairing social interactions.

Another argument relates to the tendency of individuals with socially prescribed perfectionism to avoid evaluation contexts (Casale, Fioravanti, Flett, & Hewitt, 2014; Ocampo et al., 2020) due to a need to avoid possible criticism which increases their distress (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). This response is maintained by cognitive and affective mechanisms – in a study by Stoeber and Yang (2010), students with high socially prescribed perfectionism experienced negative emotions and low satisfaction regardless of their task performance. Avoiding evaluation and criticism can negatively influence employees' motivation to learn, directing their cognitive resources towards self-monitoring behaviors and avoidance of unpleasant interpersonal situations to the detriment of learning.

Socially prescribed perfectionism is expected to have negative effects on individual learning in the context of MTM, by hindering interpersonal work relationships, and decreasing the cognitive resources and motivational processes essential to learning in such complex environments. It can lead to high psychological distress, burnout, and perceived strain, but also to avoidance of evaluations and feedback situations that would otherwise facilitate learning through adaptation. As such, we hypothesize.

Hypothesis 2. Socially prescribed perfectionism moderates the curvilinear relationship between multiple team membership and learning, such that employees with higher socially prescribed perfectionism have a lower inflection point (the negative effects of MTM on learning occur for a lower number of teams) compared to employees with lower socially prescribed perfectionism.

Method

Participants and procedure

The hypotheses were tested in a cross-sectional design, using survey data from employees working in multiple simultaneous teams. The sample consisted of 80 participants (54% women), aged between 18 and 41 years (M = 26 years, SD = 4.37). They were assigned to an average of 2.43 teams (SD = .71). The participants were recruited from multiple organizations in Romania, operating in different industries, such as IT (45%), consulting (25%), administrative (12.5), logistics (10%), manufacturing (3.8%) higher education (2.5%), and healthcare (1.2%). The participants completed an online self-report anonymous questionnaire, and their participation was voluntary.

Measures

Following previous research (Chan, 2014; Pluut et al., 2014; van de Brake et al., 2018), multiple team membership was measured by asking employees to report the number of teams they were working in at the time of the questionnaire.

Learning was measured using a scale developed for the purpose of this study, referring to the extent to which employees have acquired knowledge, skills, or attitudes as a result of their work environment (belonging to multiple teams). The scale consists of 4 items, measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "very little", 5 = "very much"). Participants were instructed to respond to the scale by thinking about the last weeks of work. A sample item is "After working in multiple teams during this period, I acquired new knowledge (I know new things) or developed the knowledge I already had." The CFA results conducted using AMOS 20 showed a good fit for the one-factor scale structure ($\chi^2(2) = 1.75$, $p = .42$, RMSEA = 0.000, GFI = 0.989, TLI = 1, CFI = 1).

Socially prescribed perfectionism was measured using the corresponding subscale of the short version of the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Cox, Enns, & Clara, 2002; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). The scale consists of 5 items, measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree"). A sample item is "Although they may not say it, others (colleagues, etc.) get very angry with me when I'm wrong". Because this construct reflects personality traits, participants were instructed to indicate the extent to which they agree with these statements in general.

The control variables included were age, gender, and education level (De Lange et al., 2010; Stoeber & Stoeber, 2009).

Results

The data were analyzed using hierarchical multiple regression in IBM SPSS 20. Descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and bivariate correlations are reported in

Table 1. The values of Cronbach's alpha fidelity coefficients exceed the .70 threshold for internal consistency. To avoid multicollinearity, which leads to increased errors associated with regression coefficients and difficulties in determining the importance of adding each predictor to the multiple regression model, the predictor variables were mean-centered prior to the calculation of the quadratic and interaction terms (Dawson, 2014).

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Internal Reliability Coefficients for Study Variables*

	M	SD	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. MTM	2.43	.71	[1-5]	–					
2. SPP	3.48	1.19	[1.2-5.8]	.22	.74				
3. Learning	3.69	.83	[1-5]	.37*	.04	.85			
4. Age	26.06	4.37	[18-41]	.04	.08	.01	-		
5. Gender	-	-	[1-3]	-.04	-.04	-.01	.08	-	
6. Education	-	-	[1-4]	-.08	.11	.07	.51*	.33*	-

Note. Cronbach's alpha coefficients are presented on the diagonal. MTM = multiple team membership (only 1 survey item); MTM = Multiple Team Membership; SPP = Socially Prescribed Perfectionism.
*$p < .01$.

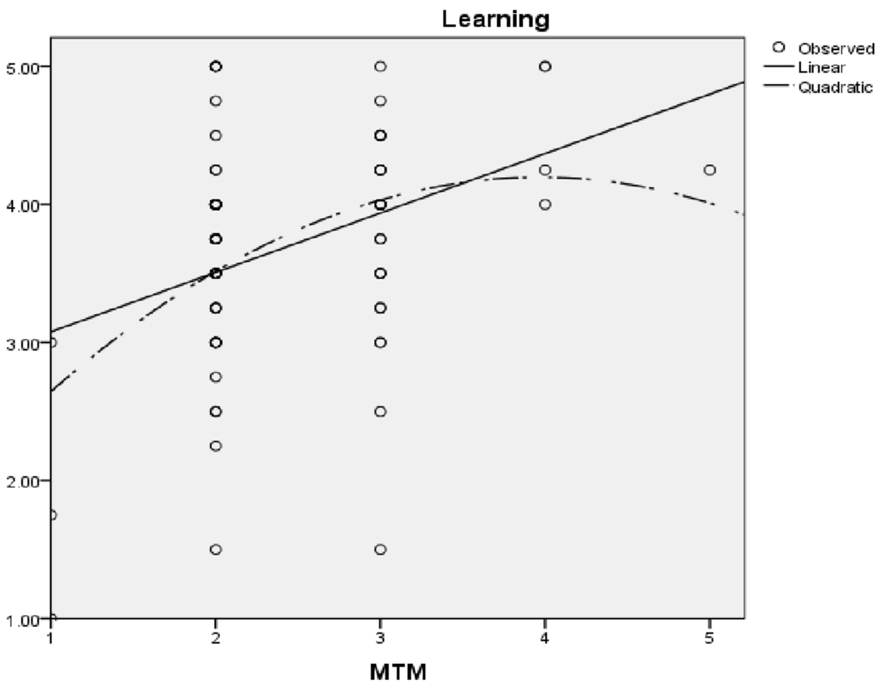

Figure 1. *Comparison between the linear and quadratic model for the relationship between MTM and learning*

Note. MTM = multiple team membership

Curve Estimations was used to compare the linear and curvilinear relationship. The linear model was significant ($F(1, 78) = 12.13$, $p = .001$, $R^2 = .14$), as well as the quadratic model ($F(1, 77) = 7.49$, $p = .001$, $R2 = .16$). The graphical comparison between the two models is reported in Figure 1.

The results of the regression analysis are reported in Table 2. The control variables introduced in the first model (age, gender, and level of education) did not significantly predict the dependent variable. Hypothesis 1 predicted a curvilinear relationship between MTM and learning. In model 2, the term for the linear relationship is positive and significant (β= .38, $t(75)$= 3.54, p = .001), indicating a positive direct relationship. In model 3, the squared term for MTM was introduced and the results (β = -22, $t(74)$ = -1.80, p = .08) do not provide support for Hypothesis 1. The linear term remains significant and positive in model 3 (β= .49, $t(74)$= 4, $p < .001$).

Table 2. *Results of the hierarchical regression analysis: Direct and quadratic effects on learning, interaction effects on the relationship between MTM and learning*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Main effects						
Age	-.03	-.07	-.11	-.11	-.10	-.08
Gender	-.03	-.03	-.03	-.03	-.02	-.01
Education level	.09	.14	.18	.18	.18	.14
MTM	–	.38*	.49**	.51**	.50**	.43*
SPP	–	–	–	-.06	-.04	-.22
Quadratic effects						
MTM squared	–	–	-.22	-.22	-.25	-.43*
Linear interaction						
MTM × SPP	–	–	–	–	.07	.03
Quadratic interaction						
MTM squared × SPP	–	–	–	–	–	.43*
R^2	.01	.15	.18	.19	.19	.27
F change	.14	12.51*	3.22	.26	.36	7.27*

Note. Standardized regression coefficients are reported. MTM = multiple team membership; SPP = Socially Prescribed Perfectionism.
*$p < .01$. **$p < .001$.

Hypothesis 2 predicted a moderation effect of socially prescribed perfectionism on the curvilinear relationship between MTM and learning. In model 5, the interaction between MTM and socially prescribed perfectionism is positive and insignificant ($\beta = .07$, $t(72) = .60$, $p = .55$). However, in model 6, when the interaction between squared MTM and socially prescribed perfectionism is introduced, the quadratic term becomes significant ($\beta = -.43$, $t(71) = -2.98$, $p <.01$), and the interaction term is positive and significant (β= .43, $t(71)$= 2.7, $p <.01$). According to the results reported in Model 4 (Table 2), socially prescribed perfectionism is not a significant predictor of learning (β= .06, $t(73)$ = - 51, p= .61). This model explains the largest amount of variance (R^2= .27). The inflection point calculated using the regression equation was 1.43 for centered data, and 3.86 for raw data. According to this result, the optimal number of teams for learning is between 3 and 4.

Drawing on the results of the regression analysis, multiple factors suggest a suppressor effect. Firstly, the quadratic term becomes significant and the predictive power of the variables increases significantly when the interaction term is introduced in the model. Secondly, this interaction term was not significant in previous models. Moreover, socially prescribed perfectionism does not correlate significantly with the dependent variable. Because both the quadratic effect and the interaction effect become significant when introduced together in the latest model, this suggests a mutual suppressive effect (Ganzach, 1997; Pandey & Elliott, 2010; Tzelgov & Henik, 1991). In the presence of suppressor effects, it is recommended that the analysis and discussion are limited to the last model introduced in the analysis, in which the suppressive effect appears.

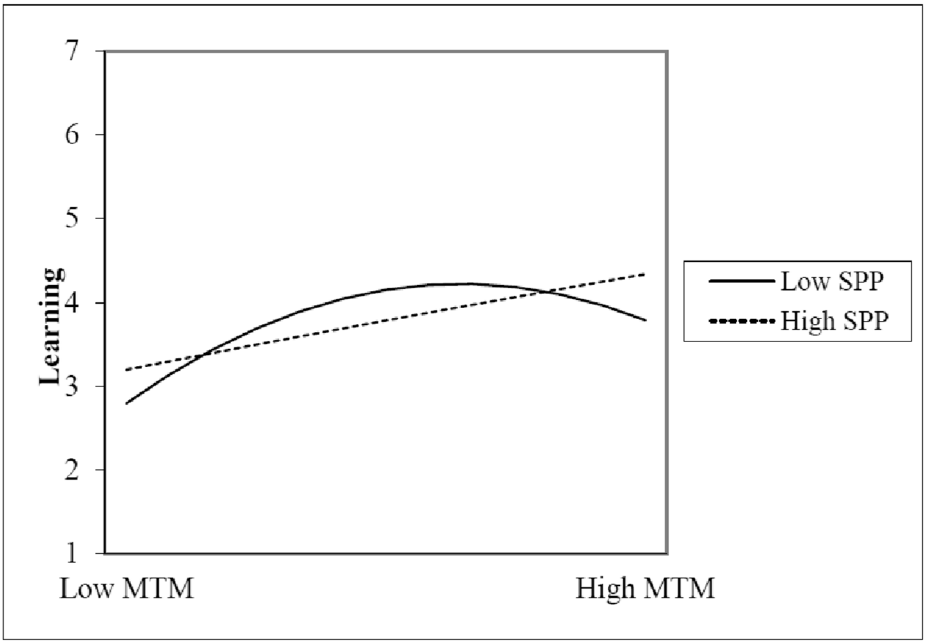

Figure 2. Graphed interaction between MTM and socially prescribed perfectionism on learning

Note. MTM = multiple team membership; SPP = Socially Prescribed Perfectionism.

The graphical representation of the quadratic interaction between MTM and socially prescribed perfectionism is reported in Figure 2. Based on the results of the Simple Slopes analysis, for employees with high levels of socially prescribed perfectionism, the relationship between MTM and learning is direct and positive. Thus, employees with a high level of socially prescribed perfectionism have a higher level of learning when they are part of multiple teams. In contrast, for employees with low socially prescribed perfectionism, the relationship between MTM and learning is nonlinear, such that the relationship is positive from a low to moderate number of teams, after which the two variables have a decreasing positive association and not a U-shaped relationship, contrary to our predictions. Based on these results, Hypothesis 2 was only partially supported.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

Based on a Simple Slopes analysis, for employees with low socially prescribed perfectionism, the relationship between MTM and learning is nonlinear. The relationship is positive until it reaches a turning point, after which the slope becomes decreasingly positive. In contrast, for employees with high socially prescribed perfectionism, the relationship is positive and linear. Based on this finding, employees with high socially prescribed perfectionism learn more when they are members of more teams. This result contradicts the previous literature which highlights the negative effects of high perfectionism, but there may be additional explanations related to the specific context of MTM.

It is also possible that the high fragmentation associated with a higher number of teams reduces the time spent in each individual team, thus decreasing both the chances of receiving social support and the occurrence of interpersonal conflicts (O'Leary et al., 2011). In this situation, employees may use their motivation to meet external standards in an adaptive way that facilitates learning. Alternatively, we cannot infirm the existence of an inflection point even for the case of low socially prescribed perfectionism, if this inflection point appears after the number of teams observed in the sample. This possibility is supported by previous studies observing inflection points that lie outside the distribution range reported in this study (e.g., for more than 5 teams, Bertolotti, Mattarelli, Vignoli, & Macrì, 2015).

Limitations and Future Directions

This research has several limitations that should be addressed in future research. Firstly, the sample size was rather low and the cross-sectional nature of the data does not permit causal inferences, which could be achieved through experimental studies. Moreover, longitudinal research could shed light on the underlying mechanisms linking MTM and learning.

The self-report nature of the measures used in the study could increase common method bias (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), but previous research highlighted that common method variance deflates quadratic effects and common method bias is less likely in the case of nonlinear effects (Siemsen, Roth, & Oliveira, 2010).

Suppressive effects are still under-reported in empirical studies and difficult to interpret (Martinez Gutierrez & Cribbie, 2021). The restricted range of values for socially prescribed perfectionism (the maximum observed value is 5.8 out of 7) and the low number of participants who reported a high number of teams (4 or 5) bring difficulties in interpreting the results of regression (Cohen et al., 2014). Moreover, the lack of studies investigating the effects of low values of socially prescribed perfectionism; thus, the interpretation and conclusions regarding lower levels of the variable rely on limited empirical evidence (Harari et al., 2018). Due to these limitations, it is recommended that the results of this study should be interpreted with caution.

Future studies may directly analyze the relationship between the prevalence of colleagues or supervisors with other-oriented perfectionism and the activation of socially prescribed perfectionism traits or differentiate between the sources of perceived standards, such as colleagues, supervisors, or clients (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008).

Practical Implications

The results reported in this study suggest that socially prescribed perfectionism interacts with the work context (i.e., the number of teams one is simultaneously part of) in predicting employee learning. Managers may consider the extent to which employees are attentive to the standards of their colleagues or supervisors when they are assigned to multiple simultaneous teams. However, due to the general negative effects of perfectionism, it is recommended that social and organizational support is available to employees with high levels of perfectionism, such that this trait does not harm their well-being and performance. Taking into account the influences of the social environment and team contexts, managers can also consider the extent to which teammates and supervisors of employees with socially prescribed perfectionism have realistic standards for employees working in multiple teams.

Conclusions

This study has several implications for understanding the role of socially prescribed perfectionism for individuals working in a complex setting, such as working in multiple teams. Socially prescribed perfectionism may not have negative effects in every work setting, and the effect of this personality trait appears to interact with the work environment. This study suggests that work-based learning is impacted by the interaction between MTM and individual traits that have social consequences, but future studies are still needed in order to replicate these results and shed light on this relationship.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Identity-Based Workplace Discrimination in Romania: Experiences of LGBTQ Community Members

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Abstract

Among challenges faced by LGBTQ community members throughout the world, workplace discrimination is one that can heavily influence how these individuals adjust their behavior in organizational settings. This study investigates perceptions of workplace discrimination experienced by members of the LGBTQ community in Romania in order to map discrimination patterns and the effects felt by the participants. Through the ten interviews conducted with employees of various organizations from various Romanian cities, this research shows that discrimination is perceived to engender both positive and negative effects, and the timing of coming out is found to be an important factor. Whereas the participants' relationship to their supervisors might not suffer dramatic changes, coworkers seem to engage in various forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, such as microaggressions.

Keywords

workplace discrimination, LGBTQ, Romania, gender identity, sexual orientation.

Introduction

Globalization and the emergence of spaces marked by multiculturalism and diversity have made the studying of discrimination phenomena a pressing matter, necessary for the identification of the causes of, manifestations of, effects of, and solutions to this form of social inequality. Whereas workplace discrimination has been researched across the globe, tackling issues such as discrimination based on race, gender, age, or religion criteria, the investigation of workplace discrimination that is based on sexual orientation and identity is quite a recent endeavor, and few Romanian scholars have looked into this phenomenon. Sexual orientation and identity are still considered

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taboo, and LGBTQ community members continue to be heavily discriminated against as a result. In a survey study of nearly 1000 LGBT adults in the United States, Sears et al. (2021) found that over half of employees are not "out" to their supervisors, and nearly 70% are not out to all of their colleagues. Many LGBT employees reported having changed how they present themselves at work or how they are reluctant to talk about their lives to avoid discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity, while several respondents reported having done so because of having been told to do so (Sears et al., 2021).

Society overall constitutes a barometer for attitudes regarding individuals who hold and display counter-normative identities. Public attitude about LGBT people can influence how they are perceived in school or at work, and confronting stigma and prejudice based on identity might help LGBT community members navigate these challenges (Herek, 2007). Using longitudinal data on attitudes toward LGBT people across nearly all countries, the Global LGBT Acceptance Index (Flores, 2019) ranks Romania 95th with a score of 4.1 out of 10 for 2014-2017 – recording a decline from the 4.4 score in 2000-2003. No country has yet to record full acceptance. After drug addicts and alcoholics, people identifying as gay face the highest level of intolerance; in 2014, 62% of Romanians would not want a gay person as a neighbor, compared to 75% in 1990 (Chilin & Lup, 2017). School is not a safe environment for LGBT people either, especially from an emotional standpoint, as 71% of LGBT students in Romania confessed (Costache, 2016). Romanian education professionals suggest that LGBT issues are tackled through homophobic remarks and religious precepts (Monro et al., 2016). In terms of work, one in four LGBT people in Romania experience discrimination during the process of searching for a job or as employees; however, this comes with costs to the economy, as it was found that LGBT inclusion and economic development are mutually reinforcing (Badgett, Waaldijk, & Rodgers, 2019).

Discrimination entails a different behavior or treatment directed towards an individual or a group of individuals belonging to a certain community, minority, or social group, as compared with other members of said group in similar situations and contexts (Dovidio et al., 2010). Even though Chapter 8 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals aims to protect labor rights and promote safe workplace environments for all workers, in 2019, only 38% of all UN members forbid employment discrimination based on sexual orientation by law (Mendos, 2019). Discrimination is defined by The Romanian National Council for Combating Discrimination as "any difference, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, social status, beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, chronic non-communicable disease, HIV infection, membership in a disadvantaged group, and any other criterion having its object or effect the restriction, removal of the recognition, use of exercise, on equal terms, of human rights and fundamental freedoms or rights recognized by law, in the field of political, economic, social and cultural or in any other field of public life" (n.d.).

Legislative provisions are not enough for workplaces to ensure protection of sexual minorities' rights; managers should act proactively and adjust policies in a way that creates a culture where differences are respected (Zugelder & Champagne, 2018). Moreover, workplace networks seem to moderate loneliness and stigma associated with consequences of one's disclosure of their sexual orientation at work (McFadden & Crowley-Henry, 2017). Unique perspectives brought into the workplace based on LGBT identity are found to increase perceived advantages to one's career, when the employer/ manager appreciates this unique perspective; conversely, when not appreciated, these unique perspectives are associated with more perceived discrimination (Gacilo et al., 2017). Workplace diversity policies weigh positively and significantly on firm innovation, as do individual policies employed by colleagues (Hossain et al., 2019). To be able to attract and retain such diverse employees, however, Resnick and Galupo (2018) stress that employers first need to understand the different experiences of these minority group members within the organization; microaggressions-based experiences need to be unpacked and approached with care. Mental health professionals, when trained on LGBT-relevant experiences, seem to increase competence in dealing with the subject, even in a stigmatizing cultural setting as is the case in Romania (Lelutiu-Weinberger & Pachankis, 2018).

The LGBTQ community can be considered a significant minority contributing to the labor and consumer market (Day & Greene, 2008). The ratio between LGBTQ employees and the whole workforce ranges between 3% and 12% in the USA, and between 5-7% in the UK (Colgan et al., 2007). In other countries though, the vast majority of LGBTQ individuals decide to stay *in the closet*, term used as "a metaphorical cultural construction where people are encouraged to hide aspects of their identities that others do not want to see," according to Manning (2016). In terms of workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation, Romania ranks among EU countries most unaware of such issues: 20% of respondents did not know what to think of the subject (European Commission, 2012). In post-socialist countries, LGBT employees seem to be invisible; in Hungary, a safe way to avoid discrimination is by not disclosing one's gender identity, yet trans people not being able to do so is likely to keep them unemployed (Takács, 2016). Experienced discrimination by and empathy for LGBT people might be a research avenue worth exploring further, as a Romanian-based study shows some connection between the two variables (Dragomir, 2020). In Canada, gender-diverse employees are 2.2 to 2.5 times more likely than their cisgender colleagues to experience workplace discrimination and harassment (Waite, 2020).

Discrimination, as shown by myriad studies, is widespread. Yet, workplace discrimination is an under-investigated phenomenon, with strong implications for the economic and social climate in Romania, as well as for individuals of various identities active within the work force (as shown by Badgett, Waaldijk, & Rodgers, 2019). This study aims to map workplace discrimination experiences of LGBT community members in Romania, through in-depth interviews carried out with self-selected participants currently employed in various organizations across the country.

Workplace discrimination

The actions of the organizations, companies, employers, and their members, actions meant to create a disloyal climate and conditions that systematically and negatively impact the capacity of their members to conduct activities in the workplace, are known as workplace discrimination (Rospenda et al., 2009). Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper (2003) see discrimination as "harassing, offending, or socially excluding someone and negatively affecting [their work performance], […] repeatedly and persistently directed towards one or more employees for a certain period of time" (p. 15).

In Romania, high rates of intolerance towards the LGBTQ community have been documented throughout our years of democraticy. A study conducted by the Open Society Institute (Swiebel, 2002) showed that 59% of Romanians consider homosexuality to be "a disease," "a sin against nature," "an emotional problem," "a vice," or "an Occidental way of living." Therefore, members of sexual minorities must often hide their identity for fear of losing their job. In a later study on student attitudes toward homosexuality, Moraru (2010) found younger people (under 20) and older study participants (over 31 years old) to be more intolerant as compared to students aged between 20 and 30. Studies discussed above show little improvement over time in terms of general attitudes towards LGBTQ community members.

Oftentimes, this sort of negative attitudes towards sexual minorities takes the shape of workplace discrimination, impacting workers' both physical and mental health (Bialer & McIntosh, 2016; Carlson, Gammage, & Barrientos, 2015; Delgado, Gordon, & Schnarrs, 2016; Marciano & Antebi-Gruszka, 2020; Sutter & Perrin, 2016). During the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, the LGBTQ community faced high levels of depression and stress, and experienced discrimination, which had a large and significant impact on mental health (Kneale &

Becares, 2021). Discrimination takes place at any stage of the professional life when LGBTQ individuals face obstacles when trying to access certain job openings (Ahmed, Andersson, & Hammarstedt, 2013; Drydakis, 2021; Laurent & Mihoubi, 2017), are promoted or fired (Aksoy et al., 2019; Burdge, 2008; Drydakis, 2015), receive less pay benefits (Bryson, 2017; Chuang, Church, & Ophir, 2011), are denied equal employment opportunities (Colvin, 2009) or are not provided with a safe work environment (Mennicke et al., 2018) because of their sexual orientation or gender identity or presentation (Mara, Ginieis, & Brunet-Icart, 2021). For LGBTQ individuals who have come out, finding a place to rent, negotiating rental prices or frequently changing housing can be particularly challenging (Yılmaz & Göçmen, 2016). Oftentimes, they are refused access to medical treatment because of the associated social stigma (Chance, 2013; Whaibeh et al., 2020). Transgender individuals seem to be the most affected by these disparities, as Badgett et al. (2009) show in a study conducted over a ten-year span (1998-2008) in the USA: 15 up to 57% of transgender people have been fired, 13% to 47% have been refused job openings and 22% to 31% have faced workplace aggression or harassment.

Discrimination can often take the shape of subtle microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007), occurring verbally, behaviorally, or environmentally, and conveying hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward members of oppressed groups (Sue et al., 2008). Emphasizing the exoticism of LGBTQ individuals can be seen as a form of microaggression, along with insults and workplace social exclusion, to name just a few (Galupo & Resnick, 2016). Discrimination at work based on sexual orientation can be either formal (dealing with job application rejection or getting fired, facing career difficulties or obstacles, refusal to promote or offer equal benefits to LGBTQ individuals), or informal (disguised as verbal harassment, homophobic jokes, losing credibility, lack of acceptance and respect from managers and colleagues etc.) (Croteau, 1996). Both types of workplace discrimination can have a significant impact on both the employee, and the organization he/she works for. As Rostovsky and Riggle (2002) argue, job discrimination can be a serious threat to the wellbeing of sexual minority individuals. The statistics are staggering. In 2014 only, the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2015) reported over 88,778 complaints for workplace discrimination against people with different sexual orientation, compared to an annual mean of 90,445 total complaints during the last decade.

Coming Out **and discrimination**

Previous studies on LGBTQ workplace discrimination have focused on the levels of concealment or openness (Croteau, 1996), or the "disclosure dilemma" (Rengers et al., 2019) as a determinant of LGBT members' inclusion in the workplace (Mara, Ginieis, & Brunet-Icart, 2021). Most studies look at individuals' appearance for clues that might betray their sexual orientation or at the voluntary process of coming out as a personal decision. Defined by Rust (2003, p. 227) as "the process by which individuals come to recognize that they have romantic or sexual feelings toward members of their own gender, adopt lesbian or gay (or bisexual) identities, and then share these identities with others," *coming out* is often described as one of the most stressful experiences in life, fearing physical threats, rejection from colleagues at work and getting fired, rejection from houses of worship, or fearing they would hurt close relatives and thus be banished by family (Baker & Lucas, 2017; Charbonnier & Graziani, 2016; Manning, 2016). Two types of coming out can be identified: to the self, acknowledging and accepting one's own sexual orientation and gender identity, and to others (friends, family, colleagues etc.). Coming out does not happen instantly, as one has to go through this process every time he/she changes the workplace, home, or activity (Guittar & Rayburn, 2016). Also, the difficulty of coming out differs depending on the organization, industry, and location (Stocum, 2006). Still, oftentimes the outing phenomenon is not a personal decision, for others could reveal the sexual orientation of an individual, either intentionally or unintentionally (Gusmano, 2008).

Coming out at work is more beneficial to both the LGBTQ employee and the organization. They have better work performance (Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Griffith & Hebl, 2002), display higher job engagement, perceive better management support, lower job ambiguity and less home-work conflicts (Pezzella, 2018).

The impact of workplace discrimination on employees

Discrimination has numerous negative effects, such as: job market uncertainty, longer time span and higher costs for finding a stable job, higher unemployment rates, increased levels of pessimism, anxiety, and depression (Dobre, 2011), lower job satisfaction, or longer job absence due to illness (Rhead et al., 2021).

For certain minorities, such as Latin-Americans, workplace discrimination poses risks like limited financial opportunities, emotional stress, and social isolation not only for them as workers, but also for their family, living in ethnic enclaves, on the edge of poverty, and with children attending low quality schools (Ayón, 2015), a situation which is similar to the Romanian Roma community (Patache & Neguriță, 2020). Also, workplace discrimination has long-term effects on employees' self-esteem, confidence, dropout rates, unemployment, and stereotype perpetuation. On the other hand, companies adopting practices of non-discrimination show various benefits: environments enforcing non-discrimination policies promise career progression, team cohesion, creativity, morale, and worker retention (Henneman, 2004; Stocum, 2006; Tejeda, 2006; Turner, 2004), and perhaps improved attitudes and productivity (Correia & Kleiner, 2001).

How do LGBTQ individuals cope with discrimination at work?

A systematic review conducted by Mara, Ginieis, and Brunet-Icart (2021) indicates four strategies for coping with LGBTQ discrimination at work, based on two dimensions: empowerment, or the capacity to cope with workplace discrimination, and the option to conceal or fully disclose their identity or sexual orientation.

According to Mara, Ginieis, and Brunet-Icart (2021), individuals who internalize decide on their own when, how and to whom to disclose their identity in the workplace. They decide how to deal with the discrimination on their own, by either using gender normative strategies or using preventative-preparative actions like avoiding actions that could lead to discrimination, disclosing half-truths or mixing heterosexual cues with homosexual ones, outperforming at the job, disengagement strategies and emotion-regulation strategies. On rare occasions, they tend to use other strategies like self-affirmation, burying the past, substance consumption or cognitive reframing. External strategies consist of using relational support from people outside of work to cope with discrimination, using health or legal services, and last, but not least, using religious and spiritual support. Reactive strategies are rather defensive and are used when the employee has confidence in his/her position at work. They can take the shape of defensive actions, discussions with the HR, confrontation with the harasser or defying the discriminatory policy. Proactive strategies can be employed when LGBTQ workers establish a culture of trust and feel that they can fight against discrimination at work by participating in LGBTQ organizations, attending events, protecting LGBTQ rights, and educating others online and offline.

Workplace discrimination prevention

Workplace inclusion related to either gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or age, is the new trend in organizational practices, especially in countries with great social diversity, such as UK or USA. Still, in many countries, few policies and practices have been developed, and the topic has been highly debated during recent years. Laws against workplace discrimination are often flawed. As we have seen, only 74 UN member states (38%) forbid employment discrimination based on sexual orientation by law. On a global level, only 10% of the countries ensure gender identity protection; and 23% have developed laws protecting individuals from harassment based on sexual orientation (Heymann et al., 2020). Sexual orientation and gender identity laws are placed at the bottom of the ranking concerning countries with explicit protection from discrimination at work.

Still, we can prevent discrimination at work by ensuring an inclusive workplace environment. Day and Greene (2008) listed some of the best practices and recommendations for establishing inclusiveness at work: ensuring top management support, defining antidiscrimination policies and including sexual orientation, using recruitment practices that are free of biases, making the firm's culture affirming for all employees, implementing benefit parity, communicating frequently about the diversity program, encouraging affinity groups, tracking legislative changes, and last, but not least, making sure not to encourage backlash.

This study aims to map workplace discrimination experiences of LGBTQ individuals, based on gender identity, across Romania. Building on international literature on discrimination experiences among LGBTQ community members, the following research questions are addressed:

RQ1: How is workplace discrimination perceived in Romania, based on sexual orientation and gender identity criteria?

RQ2: What are the forms of workplace discrimination of LGBTQ individuals in Romania?

RQ3: What are the experienced effects of this type of discrimination upon LGBTQ individuals?

Methodology

Through qualitative interview-based research, our study includes variables selected based on studies presented above, about *coming out*, microaggressions, workplace climate, self-image, and self-confidence.

Sample and procedure

Using the snowball technique, 10 LGBTQ community members in Romania already active in the workforce, and who have disclosed their sexual orientation and gender identity at work, were interviewed in the spring of 2021. The participants were self-selected following research calls posted on Romanian Facebook groups of the LGBTQ community. The focus of the study was on identifying and illustrating categories of meaning from the ten individuals, being therefore rather idiographic and emic (Morrow, 2005), and data were gathered with great care, to the point of redundancy.

The interview strategy followed the "conversation with a purpose" model (Dexter, 1970), and was carefully designed to identify rich, on the spot answers, while presenting the opportunity to verify and clarify answers during the interview itself. Open-ended questions were used to elicit richness of examples and sheaving meaningful impromptu personal experiences of workplace discrimination. The interviews lasted on average around 35 minutes, were recorded and then transcribed verbatim, to allow the research team to extract relevant data. The interview guide consisted of 15 open-ended questions, and socio-demographic data were also collected, related to age, location, gender identity, sexual orientation, work experience, and current occupation. The grid covered aspects of workplace climate and relationships, the coming out process, forms of workplace discrimination and experienced effects, related to self-image, self-confidence, and self-esteem.

Among the participants, five individuals identify as gay men, two individuals identify as lesbian women, one participant identifies as a transgender man, and two others identify as bisexual, although noting that a more suitable defining term would be *pansexual.* Moreover, the transgender man is also bisexual, and two participants identify as non-binary. From an age perspective, the participants range between 19 and 40 years old, and have had various jobs throughout their work lives, but the interview focused on the most recent experiences. Variety of experience of the interviewees was central to our endeavor as we intended to cover the different perspectives of individuals subjected to workplace discrimination. In analyzing the data, reflexive thematic analysis was employed, an upgraded version of their thematic analysis focusing on "researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process" (Braun & Clarke, 2019). We have also used the reflexive strategy (Morrow and Smith, 2000) by consulting within our team, using peer debriefing after the interviews have been conducted and throughout the entire analysis of data, trying to apply the devil's advocate technique and to challenge the team in developing "a critical and sustained discussion" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, in Morrow, 2005).

In developing the reflexive thematic analysis, we have employed an inductive schema of analysis, where coding and theme development are directed by the content of the data, based on the responses correlated with topics in the literature (ex. Coming out and micro-aggressions). We have constructed patterns of meaning as an "output" from the data, using researcher subjectivity as a valuable resource (Braun et al., 2019). Six steps were followed: familiarization with the data, generating codes, constructing themes, revising, and defining themes, and producing the report of the analysis. We started by familiarizing ourselves with the transcribed interviews, actively reading them several times and making comments on the potential points of interests for each member of the research team. Engaging with the data, two of the researchers generated themes and they were asked to check the levels of understanding and congruency. Then we highlighted several relevant text excerpts. Coding was predominantly inductive and semantic. A final list of 34 explorative and inductive codes was developed. A brief engagement with potentially relevant theoretical literature followed and three major themes were encompassed: work climate and work relationships, coming out, and micro-aggressions. We have repeatedly returned to the raw data during this process, to see whether the categories were broad enough and to discuss our understanding of the overarching themes. The fourth theme emerged from the previous published articles: experienced effects of workplace discrimination. Themes were discussed within the team to check the criteria of internal coherence, consistency, and distinctiveness. Step 4 and 5 included a revision and definition of themes, quotes have been translated, discussed, and collated to illustrate ideas adequately. The final phase was the writing of the report. The perspectives of multiple participants were taken into consideration, and links to the existing literature were also revealed, allowing us to better understand the experiences of the participants and to expand the interpretation of the data.

Results

Workplace discrimination experiences of LGBTQ individuals in Romania

Work climate and work relationships. The first set of questions focused on the workplace climate and the relationship with the coworkers and the superior. Half of the participants affirmed that, although feeling comfortable at work and having a good relationship with their superior and colleagues at that moment, there had been moments when they did not feel well and even felt discriminated against.

More specifically, R1 (*gay man, chef, Cluj-Napoca*) said that, although the atmosphere at work was a good one, there had been events and situations when he felt discriminated against:

> "At this job and at a previous one, where my colleagues knew I was gay, it was and is okay, a nice atmosphere. […] I have a good relationship with my kitchen colleagues, we make jokes, we are having a good time, and the only issues that emerge are with delivery drivers. Not all of them are trained to be open towards people with a different sexual orientation and sometimes what happened was when a new driver came, older drivers flagged me, like 'Look, that guy is gay!,' as if it was the foremost fantastic, sensational information to know about me. […] With my superiors I have a rather formal relationship, we meet on pay day, I get my paycheck and that's all, it is not a relationship in which we communicate, we get to know each other. I suppose, that they know about me

> [about his sexual orientation], but we have not discussed it straightforward" (*R1, gay man, chef, Cluj-Napoca*).

Moreover, R2 (*bisexual man, deputy accountant, Bistrița*) recalled an isolated event he perceived as tense regarding the receptiveness of his sexual orientation at his workplace, based on religious grounds: "I feel very comfortable, despite having had a heated argument with a rather Christian female colleague… but yes, I feel okay." Besides, R3 (*lesbian woman, call center operator, Cluj-Napoca*) disclosed jokes based on sexual orientation, but the workplace climate is a rather positive one: "I felt okay, I had a diverse work group, younger and less young… I did not hide, things evolved on their own. […] I got along well with them, it was an open crowd, but there have been some rather troubling minor jokes." Support from the manager may be helpful in many situations, as the participant emphasizes:

> "I got along really well with my superiors, in fact one of the people who were higher in rank – she was one of the people who supported me and told me that many of her friends were part of the LGBTQ community, and we had a super cool and open relationship from this perspective, it was awesome" (*R3, lesbian woman, call center operator, Cluj-Napoca*).

R7 (*gay man, therapist for children with autism, Bucharest*) stated that everything went well at his workplace, with his colleagues and superiors: "Well… very well. I have colleagues with whom I get along really well, we speak on a first name basis, [there is] an informal climate between us, me and my superior. All the staff is very open-minded, all coming from a therapy, psychology background, we get along really well." The only problem mentioned regarding his sexual orientation was a discriminatory event between him and children's parents, when a mother demanded him not to be present at and associated with that workplace, so that her child would not be around a visibly gay man: "Her son should not be around me, as he would allegedly become gay as well." R9 (*gay man, security guard, Cluj-Napoca*) confessed to not feeling very comfortable at his workplace and that the relationship with his superiors is more damaged than with his colleagues.

'Coming out'-related changes. To questions about changes emerging from the participants' disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity towards their colleagues, after coming out, answers were rather diverse. For instance, three out of ten subjects said that coming out to their colleagues and superiors about their sexual orientation or gender identity did not affect them at all, it had no impact: "It did not affect [the relationship] absolutely at all, I really am happy about it, for some colleagues it was the very first time dealing with a gay person" (*R4, gay man, delivery person, Bucharest*); "It had no effect that I came out towards them, we do not share much on a friendship level to fuel reactions my coming out would have generated. This thing did not affect me professionally" (*R5, gay man, service analyst, Cluj-Napoca*).

Three participants confessed to have generated a positive impact through their coming out, both with superiors and colleagues – these individuals pointed out that they work in corporate organizations, where there are relevant internal regulations and antidiscrimination policies, yet this may not be the cause of the positive impact, but rather the fact that people working in these types of organizations are usually higher education graduates and have experience with LGBTQ people. For instance, one of the participants confessed to an improvement in the relationship with his colleagues following his coming out, as it created a layer of vulnerability and openness among them:

> "It had a positive impact, this thing [coming out] – for instance – helped me a lot, especially with my subordinates, it helped us get closer from an interpersonal standing, because it is a relatively vulnerable subject and it helps us get along better as people, and it also helped them open up towards me, it helped me very much from a management perspective, really. It was very easy to lead a team that was open towards me, and with my equals the relationship remained unchanged. I do not have enough time to discuss these

issues with my superiors" (*R6, gay man, IT project manager, Cluj-Napoca*).

R8 (*transgender man, bisexual, NGO intern and researcher, Bucharest*) also declared that disclosing his sexual identity had a positive impact: "[…] in a very positive way. I chose the workplace because I knew it was LGBTQ-friendly, I had already mentioned in my resume that I was trans and I did not need to engage in a straightforward coming out towards my colleagues," and superiors had no reaction. And for R10 (*lesbian woman, IT project manager, Cluj-Napoca*), the relationship with her colleagues changed for the better, she created new connections:

> "In a positive way, honestly… and I did have, in this respect, a moment that I have discussed, not directly with my superiors, but with a team leader from an alternate team, who told me that up to that time he had never in his life met a lesbian and that from that time on, he felt like a better manager having had this experience" (*R10, lesbian woman, IT project manager, Cluj-Napoca*).

The other four participants disclosed various negative impacts from their coming out. For instance, R1 (*gay man, chef, Cluj-Napoca*) said that things went sideways in the relationship with his colleagues, being treated differently: "Things sort of changed, for instance, delivery drivers usually give employees rides home after work, but nobody ever gives me a ride, because I am gay, and I would rather them not have known that about me, because it is not something they should know… There were rumors, jokes, and had they not known, I could have avoided them," but while him and his colleagues drifted apart, in relation to his superiors nothing changed.

R2 (*bisexual man, deputy accountant, Bistrița*) stated that his coming out did not have an impact on his coworkers, but there is one female colleague who changed her attitude towards him in a negative way: "and with that utterly Christian female colleague… I don't know for sure that she knows, but the change in attitude is obvious, she is colder," while he noticed a bit of a bonding towards his superiors. R3 (*lesbian woman, call center operator, Cluj-Napoca*) confessed that many of her colleagues started avoiding her, avoiding socializing around her on certain topics, such as their love lives etc., while superiors showed no problems with that aspect:

> "There were colleagues who were a little more reluctant in touching upon certain topics with me and there were colleagues who were super okay, with whom I did not have any issues, but I told you… There were people who were choosing not to touch upon certain topics with me around… No sorts of jokes were made when I was around, related to LGBTQ, no talks about future plans regarding love life…" (*R3, lesbian woman, call center operator, Cluj-Napoca*).

R9 (*gay man, security guard, Cluj-Napoca*) stated that the current situation, with superiors and colleagues knowing about his sexual orientation, animosities and cold behaviors emerged: "it created some animosity in relation to my colleagues, not up front, but overall, it was okay, the relationship took a bad turn, but not a really bad one," and the relationship to his superiors became more distant.

Forms of workplace discrimination of LGBTQ individuals. All participants gave answers that confirm and coincide with previous studies. There were explanations such as: "Those with whom you interact start behaving in a different way… They would not do that had they not known certain information about you regarding your race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation etc." (*R1, gay man, chef, Cluj-Napoca*) or

> "I see discrimination as essentially any form of behavior that becomes different only because of certain patterns and conceptions people have about you. So I refer to positive discrimination as well, the type of discrimination that I have felt tremendously in relation to my colleagues, because they were behaving towards me much more carefully than they would behave with anyone else" (*R3, lesbian woman, call center operator, Cluj-Napoca*), or

> "It means any restriction upon my rights, it means any different approach from what I had experienced before coming out… any

different approach between me and a straight person, all the more a straight married person (because I also have a life partner), it means oppression, isolation… and that's all. I find discrimination in a formal environment very severe, because it prevents me from lifting an instant protective bubble around me and leaving, because there are lengthy procedures that need to be followed" (*R3, lesbian woman, call center operator, Cluj-Napoca*).

Asked about forms in which workplace discrimination emerged, four out of ten respondents reported negative changes following their coming out: "There were all sorts of jokes, they avoided giving me a ride home" (*R1, gay man, chef, Cluj-Napoca*), "I had a supervisor who was a misogynist, racist, homophobe and all that… he was pretty jumpy around me, I had to behave as straight as possible around him… with my colleagues I got along super okay" (*gay man, security guard, Cluj-Napoca*). R3 (*R3, lesbian woman, call center operator, Cluj-Napoca*) confessed to being treated differently, subject to irony, a target for jokes and insensitive curiosities:

> "Yes, I felt discriminated against by some colleagues, taunted, partly because I hung out with girls more and because I was in relationships with girls they labeled me as a man, even though I am rather feminine. They would speak in a low voice and impose themselves and make some really juvenile jokes, some of them. Most were men, those making these sorts of jokes, girls did not say anything… I was asked disturbing questions, such as how intercourse happened between two women, but in a very offensive way" (*R3, lesbian woman, call center operator, Cluj-Napoca*).

And R9 recalled an event when someone in a position of power intervened against his participation to an election-related event because of his sexual orientation. R8 (*transgender man, bisexual, NGO intern and researcher, Bucharest*) mentioned a previous bartending job where he was offended by customers because of his appearance that violated gender norms, and even felt harassed. The rest of the interviewees reported having observed discriminatory events in their workplaces, stating that they work in corporate organizations that have antidiscrimination policies and inclusion policies, or they simply have not felt any discrimination:

> "We have a very inclusive environment, we have a support group for the LGBTQ community, we organize events for the whole company related to LGBTQ visibility. We held a workshop about LGBTQ history in Romania during the LGBTQ history month… we invited a transgender person from Cluj who talked about their personal experience as a transgender person in Romania. We have signatures with the preferred pronoun for everyone in the company. The idea of 'bringing your whole self to work' in encouraged" (*R10, lesbian woman, IT project manager, Cluj-Napoca*).

> "I don't think my sexual orientation has been seriously discussed at work, and regarding my performance, sexual orientation did not have a negative, nor a positive impact" (*R4, gay man, delivery person, Bucharest*), or "I don't think I have noticed or that this phenomenon is happening in my workplace, I have never felt discriminated against in over nine years, and some colleagues and superiors know that I am HIV-positive and this has not affected our relationship" (*R5, gay man, service analyst, Cluj-Napoca*).

Microaggressions. In terms of workplace microaggressions, seven out of ten people declared that there have been jokes, ironic compliments, teasing, weird looks, insensitive remarks, masked insults, shallow requests from their superiors etc. "I think I may have once heard some name-calling among colleagues, they were calling me a wuss, but I did not take it as something that would affect me and I think I have also had subtle, yet uncomfortable looks thrown my way" (*R5*). R8 experienced requests from his superior that conflicted with his gender expression: "to be more feminine, to grow my hair, to look more like a lady." And R10 mentioned an event when a coworker refused to sit next to her at lunch because she is a lesbian.

Asked about inappropriate communication at work, the majority answered in the negative, although one participant said that "discrimination, discriminatory behavior or inappropriate communication at work based on sexual orientation not, but gender-based discrimination, very often" (*R6, gay man, IT project manager, Cluj-Napoca*).

Experienced effects. Reported effects discrimination has upon the mental state of LGBTQ individuals and their actions include anxiety, feeling attacked, vulnerability, anger, shame, or freeze responses, based on accounts from six out of ten interviewees. Oftentimes avoidance emerges as a coping mechanism, or rumination and overthinking (*R2*). "I felt weird, besides the fact that I was ashamed, I did not know what to do, I didn't know if I should ignore it, go on with it, I didn't know how to react, I was a bit paralyzed for a few moments when these things happened, I didn't want to reciprocate" (*R3*). Microaggressions can also lead to enhanced resilience: "very confident with who I am, I think that after a certain age we are not so bothered by these aspects; I refused to listen to everything I was being told" (*R3*).

R9 sustained that discrimination or feeling discriminated against felt like it exacerbated during the Referendum for redefining the family in October 2018, and that he felt attacked, discouraged, afraid, and his experience with discrimination made him choose carefully the people with whom he surrounds himself, made him not feel so affected: "when I see extremist movements of any kind… I get uneasy." Social support is valuable:

> "I feel okay, I have reached a sufficiently stable level of maturity not to let myself be affected [by these things] anymore, not to get my hopes too high, not to have them be too unrealistic; the truth is that I've managed to get a circle of people around me to count on and who are the confirmation that there is still hope, and about discrimination… it is a wake-up call that not everything in life is great and pink and that we still have work to do" (*R9, gay man, security guard, Cluj-Napoca*).

There is, however, also a negative effect on self-esteem and self-confidence. R10 felt excluded in the past, that she did not belong within society, and these repeated events made it so that she currently ignores or takes a stand when it comes to discrimination. R8 stated that everything came down to searching for jobs where no one made her feel like less of a person: "[it took her] long enough because it is not normal to think of a job in terms of it being okay only because it doesn't treat me like trash." And R3 said that discrimination affected her to such an extent that she could no longer talk to anyone, and her self-esteem and confidence were so affected that pain lasted for a few days: "I would always stick to my spot and would not feel like talking to anyone, I felt weird, like I wasn't good enough, and then I got over it. Is it worth it? I realized it is not worth to take into consideration what others think about me." For the more resilient individuals, the effect of discrimination can be a motivational boost: "Most of the times, I flipped it on its head, it helped me build trust in myself…"

The effects described above are closely tied to the desire to act against discrimination, thus four in ten participants feel so affected that they completely ignore discrimination and do not fight against it, do not take personal or formal measures: "It depends, sometimes I talk back, others I sit and put up with it in silence" (*R8*), "I don't respond in any way, I don't face the situation, I avoid reacting in one way or another… I don't know if it's a fear or not, but ever since I've been a child I have been used to not reacting, not expressing anger, these [negative] emotions" (*R1*).

The other participants reacted according to the severity of the situation: in case it was a light one, they did not react or tried to explain why it is not right to behave that way, and in case it was more severe, repeated discrimination or microaggressions, they resorted to in-house formalities, like R10, for instance, would do:

> "I refute it through logical arguments, depending on the severity and the other's reactions. I have realized that some microaggressions were not intended and were rather done due to lack of information on the topic, this is where stereotypes play in. Many people think that a lesbian couple exists only if one is masculine and the

other one feminine and when people make jokes about it, they do it just because they know this to be the only possible combination… And when you explain how things are, people change their minds. This is why I think that we first need to talk, to explain it to people before we complain to HR."

When asked about what changes they would bring to their communication with colleagues and superiors, interviewees mentioned various changes to the organizational climate and on a personal level, to stop experiencing workplace discrimination. From disclosing their sexual orientation early on, to avoid mental constraints to generating discussions about LGBTQ issues to educate colleagues, preparing their coming out in a timely manner, self-acceptance, and enhancing self-esteem.

Discussion and conclusions

RQ1: How is workplace discrimination perceived in Romania, based on sexual orientation and gender identity criteria? The findings from the interviews showed LGBTQ community members' perceptions of discrimination experiences in Romanian workplaces. Most participants declared a relative comfort at work, in relation to their superiors and coworkers, but after coming out, after disclosing their sexual orientation, changes in coworkers and/ or superiors' attitudes and behaviors have emerged. The interview results pointed to a difference between coming out before being employed, during onboarding, or coming out after being employed, just like Pezzella (2018) argued; coming out early in the stages of the collaboration facilitated the relationship and did not make them feel as discriminated against as when the information was disclosed later.

Some research limitations need to be further addressed. The study was based on in-depth interviews with members of the Romanian LGBTQ community; the findings cannot and should not be generalized, but they are fully transferable, according to qualitative research guidelines (Morrow, 2005). The interviewees work in large cities such as Bucharest or Cluj-Napoca, and over half are corporate employees where, as Prayson and Rowe (2019) assert, there are regulations, codes of deontology, even workshops or sessions of awareness and education on the LGBTQ community within companies. The results show that discrimination of LGBTQ individuals in the workplace occurs both horizontally and vertically, more frequently the former, among coworkers. As Zugelder and Champagne (2018) stressed, managers' policies for LGBTQ protection should go beyond respecting legislative provisions and should aim to create a culture of diversity. Managers' understanding of minority employees' unique perspectives becomes a contributing factor to nurturing a culture of diversity in the workplace (Resnick & Galupo, 2018). Based on Lelutiu-Weinberger and Pachankis' (2018) work, attracting HR professionals trained on LGBTQ experiences may be beneficial to both employers and employees.

RQ2: What are the forms of workplace discrimination of LGBTQ individuals in Romania? The interview analysis shows that discrimination, thoroughly understood by the interviewees, according to textbook definitions (Dovidio et al., 2010), manifests as marginalizing the individual with a different sexual orientation, through applying different treatments such as refusing to sit at the table with that person or denying a ride home, or even posing obstacles in carrying out a task or outright harassment, as was the case of the transgender participant. Moreover, discrimination occurs through microaggressions such as jokes, ironic comments, lack of communication, uncomfortable looks and gestures of coworkers, all based on sexual orientation and gender identity criteria; as Galupo and Resnick (2016) found, microaggressions are not perceived or realized by those who do them, but are heavily felt by the targets of these behaviors, in this case, seven out of ten interviewees who declared having been subjected to such discriminatory practices at work. More awareness on the topic could reduce the stigmatizing cultural setting in the Romanian workplace.

RQ3: What are the experienced effects of this type of discrimination upon LGBTQ individuals? The effects of discrimination on LGBTQ individuals in the workplace are very visible and deeply felt, as found in this research. Effects consist of anxiety, lowering of self-confidence and self-esteem, the emergence of fear, panic episodes, feeling helpless and inferior, depression, not reacting when faced with the phenomenon because of social pressure, negative effects on task performance, and emphasizing of stereotypes and discrimination. Thus, discrimination experienced by LGBTQ individuals in the Romanian workplace is a reality, and its manifestations are quite varied; it is often masked as microaggressions, and its effects are visible and heavily felt by the targets. In line with previous studies, effects of negative attitudes towards sexual minorities can have a significant impact on both physical and mental aspects of well-being. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when this research was being done, the interaction between stress, depression, and discrimination in the workplace was even stronger for LGBT individuals than before (Kneale & Becares, 2021).

Theoretical and practical implications

The present research brings new information about LGBTQ experience within Romanian workplaces and could engender a larger discussion on workplace discrimination in general, and on LGBTQ individuals in particular. The findings bear implications for HR representatives, leaders, and organizations, and more work needs to be done to understand diverse workplaces and accommodate the identities and needs of individuals. In terms of workplace inclusion practices, Prayson and Rowe (2019) discussed training and workshops for inclusive communication, especially in corporate settings. They propose a series of guidelines for LGBTQ workplace inclusion, such as: acquiring language or terminology related to the LGBTQ acronym that comprises a wide spectrum of diverse sexualities and genders, learning the differences between sex and gender, learning how to address LGBTQ individuals and preferred pronouns, pointing out and sanctioning bullying, counseling regarding this phenomenon, creating a climate in which apologies – where due – are normalized and meant to prevent further offenses. They also argue that open organizational cultures influence members' performance, as diversity and inclusion facilitate idea exchanges and diverse perspectives.

LGBT rights protection has been politicized in recent years, as the Referendum for the Traditional Family organized in 2018 was framed as an attempt to fight "LGBT ideology", deemed incompatible with the religion-based values in Romania (Norocel & Băluță, 2021). However, what this conservative movement achieved was to help the LGBT movement in Romania evolve, "by forcing the supportive groups to coagulate their energy, formulate pertinent and efficient strategies, and persuade other groups of the civil society" (Margarit, 2019, p. 10). This makes the current research even more topical.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Fully aware of the insider perspective of the interviewer, focusing on fairness and using the naïve inquirer perspective, suggested by Morrow (2005), we have presented the results to our interviewees. Still, in future research endeavors, participant checks could be taken into consideration through focus groups employed as a forum for the researcher to verify understanding, to reflect interviewees meanings, and to obtain feedback from the participants on the accuracy of the data presented. Moreover, employers' perspectives would enrich knowledge of workplace diversity policies, and interviews or focus groups with HR representatives would facilitate an in-depth understanding of the process of navigating challenges with multiple identities among staff and would offer future courses of action for improving diversity strategies in companies.

As trans individuals' experiences within the work force are even more challenging (Takács, 2016), special attention should be cast upon their perceived discrimination in seeking or holding a job. Barometers on discrimination in Romanian workplaces show low awareness of LGBT colleagues among respondents (European Commission, 2012), but invisibility is even more of an issue for trans individuals, who can experience several layers of discrimination based on their juxtaposed vulnerabilities. Future studies could explore intersectionality and the distinction between diversity and inclusion of LGBTQ community members in their workplaces. Intersectional identities pose additional challenges, and the various layers of identities that make individuals vulnerable to discrimination need to be addressed to obtain more data and generate better practices. Cultural differences should also be factored in, as socio-political realities, the rural-urban divide, with religious and heavily conservative citizens, on the one hand, and the diverse, secular, progressive public on the other hand, might increase polarization within Romanian society. An overlooked subject of research consists of the intersection of religiosity and coming out, and studies exploring identity emergence and the role of social support in selecting the right moment to come out might bring valuable practical information and theoretical frameworks in examining the LGBTQ community.

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PUBLISHING STANDARDS

Psychology of Human Resources – guide for authors

THE EDITORS

This document represents the "Guide for Authors". It covers the format and language to be used for manuscripts submitted to Human Resources Psychology. Also, this document can be found on the webpage of the Romanian Association of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (www.apio.ro).

This "Guide for Authors" follows the 6th APA Publication Manual.

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All manuscripts for the journal Human Resources Psychology should be submitted to the following e-mail address: revista@apio.ro.

To edit the manuscript please use Times New Roman 12-point type, 1.5 line spacing and the A4 page setting. Each page will be numbered in the upper right corner. The top and side margins should be left of at least one inch or 2.54 cm. A full example of a manuscript can be found in the 6th APA Publication Manual.

Publications

Accepted papers are copy-edited and retyped. Authors have to review edits and proofread their work. The editor of Human Resources Psychology will contact the corresponding author after the editor assigns your work to an issue.

If your work is accepted, please keep the editor informed of changes in your contact information and of long absences.

Front Page

The first page of the manuscript should include the following information:

1. Title

The title should be a concise statement of the main topic and should identify the variables or theoretical issues under investigation and the relationship between them. It should be typed in sentence case, centered between left and right margins, and positioned in the upper half of the page.

2. Author name(s) and institutional affiliation(s)

Author name(s) will be presented in the following form: first name, middle initial(s), and last name.

Institutional affiliation should reflect the institution/location where the author(s) were when the research was conducted. When an author has no institutional affiliation, the city and state of residence below the author´s name should be specified. The institutional affiliation should be centered under the author's name, on the next line.

3. Author´s note

This section should include the following:

- First paragraph should include the departmental affiliations at the time of the study for all authors as follows: name of the author as it appears in the byline, comma, department name, comma, university name, semicolon, next

author name, and so on, and end with a period.
- Second paragraph should include any changes in author affiliation subsequent to the time of the study as follows: [author´s name] is now at [affiliation].
- Third paragraph should include acknowledgments (only for grants or other financial support, any special agreements concerning authorship, thanks for personal assistance) and special circumstances (disclose them before the acknowledgements in this paragraph).
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Place the author note on the title page, below the title, byline, and affiliation. Center the label *Author Note.* Start each paragraph of the note with an indent, and type separate paragraphs for the authors' names and current affiliations, changes in affiliations, acknowledgments, and special circumstances, if any, along with the person to contact. The author note is not numbered or cited in the text.

Abstract Page

The abstract as well as the title of the work go on page 2. The abstract should be no longer than 150 words. The label *Abstract* should appear in sentence case, centered, at the top of the page. Type the abstract itself as a single paragraph without paragraph indentation. Place a running head (short title).

The abstract will be written in English. It is necessary to include 3-5 key words after each abstract, in all these three languages.

Main body text pages

In preparing your manuscript, begin the introduction on page 3. Type the title of the manuscript in sentence case centered at the top of the page, and then type the text. The remaining sections of the article follow each other without a break; do not start a new page when a new heading occurs.

This section should include the following:

- Introduction of the problem. This section will present the specific problem under the study and describe the research strategy. There is no need to label this section as Introduction.
- Explore importance of the problem. This section states why the problem deserves new research. State explicitly this problem according to the type of the study (empirical study, literature review and meta-analysis, methodological paper and case study).
- Describe relevant scholarship by discussing the relevant related literature and demonstrating the logical continuity between previous and present work.
- State each tested hypothesis clearly and provide a theoretical argument for how it was derived from theory or is logically connected to previous data and argumentation.

Method

This section describes in detail how the study was conducted, including conceptual and operational definitions of the variables used in the study. Authors should include the following:

- Sample description, by describing the main characteristics with particular emphasis on characteristics that may have bearing on the interpretation of results.
- Sampling procedure by describing the procedures for selecting participants in terms of sampling method, the percentage of the sample approached that participated, the number of participants who selected themselves into the sample.
- Sample size, power and precision.
- Measures and covariates by describing the methods used to collect data and to enhance the quality of the measurements.
- Research design.
- Experimental manipulations or procedures.
- Task description.

Results

This section summarizes the collected data and the analysis performed on the data to test the proposed hypotheses. Report the data analysis in sufficient detail to justify your conclusions. For more information please consult the 6th APA Publication Manual.

Discussion

This section evaluates and interprets the implications of the results, especially with respect to original hypotheses. Examine, interpret, and qualify the results and draw inferences and conclusions from them. Emphasize any theoretical or practical consequences of the results.

Also, the limits of the study and possible future studies can be considered in this section.

References

References are your entries in the *alphabetical list at the end* of your article or research note. This list should include all the works you have cited throughout the manuscript. The references should be formatted as follows:

1. Periodicals (selective examples)

Author, A.A, Author, B. B., & Author, C. C. (year). Title of article. *Title* of *Periodical, xx,* pp-pp. doi: xx.xxxxxxxxxxx

Author, A. A., Author, B. B., Author, C. C., Author, D. D., Author, E. E., Author, F.F., … Author, Y.Y. (year). Title of article. *Title* of *Periodical, xx,* pp-pp. doi: xx.xxxxxxxxxx

Author, A.A, Author, B. B., & Author, C. C. (year). Title of article. *Title* of *Periodical, xx,* pp-pp.

Author, A.A., & Author, B.B. (in press). Title of article. *Title of Periodical.* Retrieved from http://cogprints.org/5780/1/ECSRAP.F07.pdf

2. Books

Author, A. A. (year). *Title of work.* Location: Publisher.

Author, A. A. (year). *Title of work.* Retrieved from http://www.xxxxxxx

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3. For chapters in a book or entry in a reference book (selective example)

Author, A.A., & Author, B.B. (year). Title of chapter or entry. In A. Editor, B. Editor, & C. Editor (Eds.), *Title of book* (pp. xxx-xxx). Location: Publisher.

Author, A.A, &Author, B.B. (year). Title of chapter or entry. In A. Editor & B. Editor (Eds.), *Title of book* (pp. xxx-xxx). Retrieved from http://www.xxxxxxx

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4. Meeting and symposia (selective examples)

Contributor, A.A., Contributor, B.B., Contributor, C.C., & Contributor, D.D. (Year, Month). Title of contribution. In E.E. Chairperson (Chair), *Title of symposium.* Symposium conducted at the meeting of Organization Name, Location.

Presenter, A.A. (Year, Month). *Title of paper or poster.* Paper or poster session presented at the meeting of Organization Name, Location.

5. Unpublished works (selective examples)

Author, A.A. (Year). Title of manuscript. Unpublished manuscript [or "Manuscript submitted for publication," or "Manuscript in preparation"].

For a detailed description of the procedure related to the citation of other types of work than those listed above, consult the 6th APA Publication Manual.

Footnotes

Footnotes are used to provide additional content or to acknowledge copyright permission status.

Appendices

The appendices of the manuscript (labeled APPENDIX A, APPENDIX B etc.) contain materials that supplements article content such as lengthy methodological procedures, calculations of measures, scales etc.

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The author should number all tables and figures with Arabic numerals in the order in which they are first mentioned in the text, regardless of whether a more detailed discussion of the table or figure occurs later in the paper. The author should label them as Table 1, Table 2, and so on or Figure 1, Figure 2, and so on. List all tables first followed by figures. Place tables and figures after appendices at the end of the manuscript, and indicate the position of each in the text as follows:

Insert Table 1 about here

Each table or figure needs an introductory sentence in your text. The format agreed is the standard (canonical) one. Each table should report one type of analysis (which is identified in the title), and each vertical column and horizontal row should contain only one type of data.

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(Johnny, 2011, p. 13)

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