

The relationship between so-called boundaryless careers and occupational well-being is a fascinating issue. The themes of boundaryless and protean careers are noteworthy if we consider the challenges posed by a transition to more temporary employment arrangements from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy that we are facing today.

The book is enriched by empirical data analysis and case studies, which on one hand allow an in-depth view of the relation between new careers and well-being for specialists and, on the other, become a fertile benchmark for professionals to study. The uniqueness of this volume is in its interdisciplinary approach including law, organizational psychology, economics and occupational health.

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ISBN 978-0-230-23660-8



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14

Work Identity, Well-being and Time Perspective of Typical and Atypical Young Workers

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Introduction

During recent decades, important changes have occurred in the labor market and the spread of fixed-term employment contracts (i.e. atypical jobs) has increased job insecurity (Chirumbolo & Hellgren, 2003). Understanding the psychosocial consequences of this phenomenon is not an easy task because it is complex and multifaceted. For instance, in a qualitative study conducted with Italian young adults with atypical jobs, Sarchielli, Mandrioli, Palmomari and Vecchiato (2006) found evidence for both positive and negative outcomes of atypical employment contracts. Specifically, atypical workers evaluated their work conditions positively, although they complained about their contracts; they received strong support from their close social network (i.e. partner, peers and family), whereas they complained about the lack of adequate support from the trade unions and work services; they emphasized how job insecurity may lead to relational insecurity, by being an obstacle to the formation of a new family and to the possibility of having children; they underlined that atypical contracts may facilitate entrance into the labor market, but they might become a serious threat when the condition of atypical workers becomes chronic.

Until now, studies on the effects of job insecurity have yielded contrasting findings (Sarchielli, 2008). This might be due to the fact that several variables can moderate the impact of job insecurity on individual and organizational outcomes. One potential moderating variable is the age of the workers (Novara, 2005). Therefore, in this contribution we will examine the effects of job insecurity during a specific developmental period: emerging adulthood. Arnett (2000) proposed *emerging adulthood* as a new conception of development for the period from the late teens through the twenties, with a focus on ages 18-28. He argued that if the end of adolescence is measured in terms of taking on adult roles such as marriage, parenthood and

stable full-time work, adolescence currently ends much later than in the past because many people are postponing these transitions until the mid- or late twenties. Therefore, it is important to study emerging adulthood as a life span period distinct from both adolescence and adulthood.

In our study, we investigate the effects of job insecurity on three aspects relevant to emerging adults' experiences (work identity, well-being and time perspective) and we will compare atypical workers with a "control group" composed of typical workers of the same age.

Identity. Identity formation is a key task for an individual's entire life span that becomes particularly urgent in adolescence and young adulthood (Erikson, 1950). The most important development of Erikson's views on identity formation is Marcia's (1966) identity status paradigm. Marcia describes four clearly differentiated identity statuses, based on the amount of exploration and commitment that adolescents experience or have experienced. *Exploration* refers to the active questioning and weighing of various identity alternatives before making decisions about the values, beliefs, and goals to pursue. *Commitment* involves making a relatively firm choice about an identity domain and engaging in significant activities geared toward the implementation of that choice.

Specifically, in the *diffusion* status adolescents have not engaged in a proactive process of exploration of different alternatives, nor have they made a commitment in to a specific identity domain. In the *foreclosure* status, adolescents have made a commitment without exploration. In the *moratorium* status, adolescents are actively exploring various alternatives and have not yet made a commitment. In the *achievement* status, adolescents have made a commitment in a specific identity domain, following a period of active exploration.

Recently, Crocetti, Rubini, and Meeus (2008) expanded Marcia's paradigm by proposing an identity model in which commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment are taken into account as pivotal identity processes. Specifically, *commitment* is conceptualized as a choice made in identity relevant areas as well as the extent to which one identifies with that choice. *In-depth exploration* represents the extent to which adolescents deal with current commitments actively, reflecting on their choices, looking for information, and talking with others about them. *Reconsideration of commitment* refers to the comparison between current commitments and possible alternatives, as well as to efforts to change present commitments. It represents the crisis-like aspect of identity formation. This model can be used to study identity formation in adolescents (Crocetti et al., 2008) as well as in emerging adults (Crocetti, Palmionari & Pojaghi, 2007).

Well-being. Well-being is a multifaceted construct. In this contribution we will focus on the cognitive component of subjective well-being that is referred to as *life satisfaction* (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). People who report high satisfaction with life are those who find a positive

match between their standards and their current situation. Among the various factors that can affect satisfaction with life, work conditions have a strong impact, in fact satisfaction with life is strongly related to work satisfaction (Tait, Padgett & Baldwin, 1989). This association is particularly pronounced in people with autonomous jobs, high income, high educational level and high job involvement (Warr, 1999).

Time perspective. Lewin conceptualized time perspective as "the totality of the individual's view of his psychological future and psychological past existing at a given time" (1942, 75). Therefore, psychological past and future have a strong impact on current behavior. The Lewinian conceptualization of time perspective has been developed by Zimbardo and Boyd (1999), who stressed that time perspective is a crucial process in individual and societal functioning. They proposed to consider five dimensions of time perspective: the *past-negative* reflects a generally negative, aversive view of the past; the *past-positive* reveals a warm, sentimental attitude toward the past; the *present-hedonistic* reflects a hedonistic, risk-taking attitude toward time and life; the *present-fatalistic* expresses a fatalistic, helpless and hopeless attitude toward life; the *future* dimension suggests that behavior is dominated by a striving for future goals and rewards.

In order to gain a better understanding of the effects of job insecurity on emerging adults' lives we will integrate a variable-centered and a person-centered approach. Using a variable-centered approach we will investigate differences in mean scores and associations among relevant variables included in this study, while, through a person-centered approach, we will identify groups of individuals who have reached different work identity statuses.

Method

Participants

The participants were 227 workers (47% men), aged between 18 and 28 years ($M = 25$ years, $DS = 2.7$ years). Two groups of participants were identified in the total sample by level of employment contract. The first group was comprised of 108 (48% of the sample) typical workers (55% men); the second group included 119 atypical workers (40% men). The mean age of the two groups was the same ($M = 25$ years), whereas the gender composition was statistically different ($\chi^2(1, 227) = 5.21, p < .05$), with more men in the typical worker group and more women in the atypical group. Additionally, the educational level was higher among individuals with an atypical job ($\chi^2(1, 227) = 12.47, p < .001$): 17.7% of typical workers held a university degree whereas 40.2% of the atypical group had that level of education.

Measures

Work identity. This was measured using the Italian version (Crocetti et al., 2007; Crocetti, Schwartz, Fermiani & Meeus, 2010) of the Utrecht-Management of

Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS; Crocetti et al., 2008). It consists of 13 items with a response scale ranging from 1 (*completely untrue*) to 5 (*completely true*). Sample items include: "My work gives me certainty in life" (commitment; 5 items; $\alpha = .84$); "I think a lot about my work" (in-depth exploration; five items; $\alpha = .68$); and "I often think it would be better to try to find different work" (reconsideration of commitment; five items; $\alpha = .88$).

Well-being. This was assessed using the *Satisfaction With Life Scale* (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985). The SWLS consists of five items (e.g. "I am satisfied with my life") with a response scale ranging from 1 = completely untrue to 5 = completely true ($\alpha = .81$).

Time perspective. This was measured using the *Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory* (ZTPI; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). This instrument consists of 60 items with a response scale ranging from 1 (*completely untrue*) to 5 (*completely true*). Sample items are: "I think about the bad things that have happened to me in the past" (past-negative; 12 items; $\alpha = .82$); "I get nostalgic about my childhood" (past-positive; 7 items; $\alpha = .71$); "Taking risks keeps my life from becoming boring" (present-hedonistic; 19 items; $\alpha = .74$); "My life path is controlled by forces that I cannot influence" (present-fatalistic; 9 items; $\alpha = .70$); "When I want to achieve something, I set goals and consider specific means for reaching those goals" (future; 13 items; $\alpha = .68$).

Results

A variable-centered approach

Results of the descriptive statistics for the overall sample are reported in Table 14.1.

Table 14.1 Descriptive statistics for the variables included in the study

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Work identity	3.39	0.91
Commitment	3.81	0.70
In-depth exploration	2.63	1.20
Reconsideration of commitment	3.33	0.75
Satisfaction with life		
Time perspective		
Past-negative	2.84	0.60
Past-positive	3.45	0.59
Present-hedonistic	3.33	0.43
Present-fatalistic	2.68	0.56
Future	3.48	0.43

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on work identity, satisfaction with life, and time perspective as dependent variables, and with gender (men vs. women), educational level (low vs. high), and employment contract (typical vs. atypical) as independent variables revealed that, based on the Wilks' Lambda criterion, the combined dependent variables were significantly affected by educational level ($F(9, 192) = 2.00, p < .05, \eta^2 = .09$) and employment contract ($F(9, 192) = 2.45, p < .05, \eta^2 = .10$). Gender differences, two-way interactions, and the three-way interaction were found to be not significant.

Follow-up univariate analyses of variance revealed significant differences by educational level on work in-depth exploration ($F(1, 207) = 4.72, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$); satisfaction with life ($F(1, 207) = 6.34, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$); past-negative ($F(1, 207) = 6.86, p < .01, \eta^2 = .03$), and future orientation ($F(1, 207) = 9.43, p < .01, \eta^2 = .04$). Specifically, emerging adults with a high educational level (i.e. university degree) scored higher on work in-depth exploration, satisfaction with life and future orientation than their peers with a lower educational level. On the other hand, individuals with a low educational level (i.e. high school degree or lower) scored higher on past negative than those with a high educational level.

Significant differences by employment contract were found on work commitment ($F(1, 227) = 12.81, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$) and in-depth exploration ($F(1, 227) = 4.57, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$). Findings revealed that emerging adults with atypical jobs reported lower commitment and higher in-depth exploration than their peers with typical jobs.

A further aim of this study was to test whether work identity processes were related to well-being. To reach this goal we performed regression analyses, in the total sample, as well as in the typical and atypical worker subgroups, in which the identity processes were entered as predictors and satisfaction with life was the dependent variable. Findings consistently indicated that work commitment was significantly associated with satisfaction with life (see Table 14.2), especially within the typical worker group.

Table 14.2 Associations between work identity processes and satisfaction with life (standardized betas and proportions of explained variance)

	Satisfaction with life		
	Total sample N = 227	Typical workers n = 108	Atypical workers n = 119
Work identity			
Commitment	.30***	.38***	.23*
In-depth exploration	.11	.11	.11
Reconsideration of commitment	-.14	-.10	-.14
R ²	.19***	.25***	.14***

A person-centered approach

In order to investigate work identity using a person-centered approach, we examined which identity statuses could be derived from the combination of work commitment, in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitment. We employed cluster analysis, a method of data-driven classification, following the two-step clustering procedure suggested by Gore (2000). On the basis of various criteria (i.e. theoretical meaningfulness of each cluster, parsimony and explanatory power) we retained a three-cluster solution, shown in Figure 14.1. The first cluster was comprised of individuals (33% of the sample) with low scores on commitment and in-depth exploration, associated with high scores on reconsideration of commitment. The second cluster included emerging adults (28.2%) with high scores on commitment, combined with low scores on in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitment. The third cluster consisted of individuals (38.8%) with high scores on commitment and in-depth exploration, associated with low scores on reconsideration of commitment. Based on Marcia's (1966) identity status paradigm, the three clusters could be labeled work moratorium, foreclosure and achievement, respectively. This three-cluster solution explained 48% of the variance in commitment, 43% of the variance in in-depth exploration, and 68% of the variance in reconsideration of commitment.

We examined whether the distribution of participants across the three work identity statuses varied as a function of employment contract, educational level, and gender. Findings indicated that only differences by employment contract were statistically significant ($\chi^2(2, 227) = 12.02, p < .01$): emerging adults with an atypical job were more likely to be in the status of

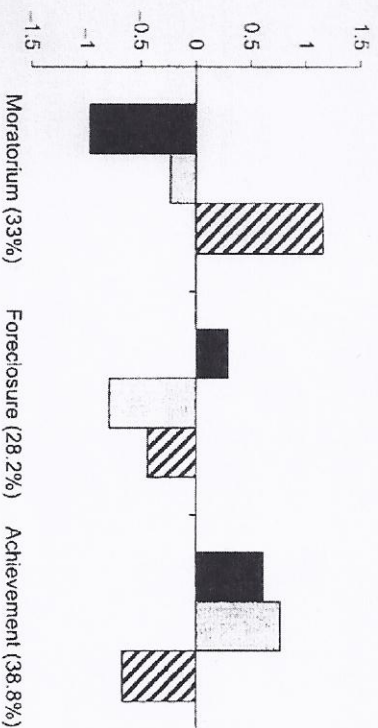


Figure 14.1 Z-scores for commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment for the work identity clusters.

Table 14.3 Distribution of typical and atypical workers across work identity statuses

	Moratorium	Foreclosure	Achievement	Total
Typical workers	24%	38%	38%	100%
Atypical workers	41.2%	19.3%	39.5%	100%

moratorium, whereas individuals with a typical job were more likely to be in the status of foreclosure (see Table 14.3).

Thus, we examined whether participants in the various work identity statuses reported significant differences on well-being and time perspective. Findings of the MANOVA and Tukey post hoc tests revealed that individuals in the moratorium statuses exhibited significant lower satisfaction with life ($F(2, 227) = 17.93, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$) and higher negative view of their past ($F(2, 227) = 6.42, p < .01, \eta^2 = .05$) than their peers in the foreclosure and achievement statuses. These results were not moderated by participants' employment contract.

Discussion

In this study, we integrated variable-centered and person-centered approaches to expand our understanding of the effects of employment contract (atypical vs. typical) on emerging adults' lives.

The effects of educational level

Using a variable-centered approach, we found that differences on well-being and time perspective are explained more by participants' educational background than by their employment contract. In fact, emerging adults with a university degree report higher satisfaction with life and higher future orientation compared to their peers with a lower educational level. On the other hand, individuals with a low educational level report a more negative view of their past than their peers with a higher level of education. These findings shed light on differences between emerging adults who have access to higher education and their peers who enter directly into the labor market after completing high school, providing elements useful in understanding the "forgotten half" (Arnett, 2000, 476). In fact, studies of young people who do not attend college in the years following high school remain rare, thus little is known about the experience of emerging adults who face the challenge of finding their own occupation earlier or with a lower level of education (Arnett, 2000). Our results suggest that these emerging adults face difficulties that may lead to a decrease in satisfaction with life and may influence their time perspective. In particular, these emerging adults are less future oriented,

perhaps because they feel less equipped to deal with continuous changes in the labor market that increasingly require highly specialized workers.

The effects of employment contract

Furthermore, we found that the employment contract of the participants influences their work identity, but not their satisfaction with life and time perspective. These findings differ from those presented by Crocetti, Graziani and Moscatelli (2006), who showed that atypical workers have difficulty planning their future and looking at it with optimism. These differences might be due to the diverse age of the participants. In the present study workers ranged in age between 18 and 28 years, whereas Crocetti et al. (2006) presented data collected on participants whose age ranged between 26 and 36 years. Perhaps atypical jobs are more acceptable for emerging adults who are entering the labor market, while they become a serious threat for young adults who, because of the precariousness of their work condition, may not plan other personal goals, such as getting married and having children (Novara, 2005).

Integrating a variable-centered and a person-centered approach

Findings from a variable-centered and a person-centered approach both confirmed that atypical workers exhibit a less stable work identity than typical workers. In fact, atypical workers report lower work commitment and higher in-depth exploration than typical workers. Moreover, individuals with an atypical contract are much more represented in the status of identity moratorium, which indicates that they have not yet found what work fits their standards and aspirations, so they are still struggling to find the occupation that is right for them. This condition, more than the atypical employment contract itself, is responsible for low levels of satisfaction with life and a negative view of past experiences. These results are in line with an extensive literature that shows that the moratorium status is characterized by maladjustment (for a review see Meeus, Iedema, Helsen & Vollebergh, 1999). Interestingly, in this study, the cluster analysis pointed out the presence of three distinct groups (i.e. moratorium, foreclosure and achievement) but did not detect the fourth status included in Marcia's (1966) model: identity diffusion. This means that in our sample there was not a group of individuals characterized by low work commitment, in-depth exploration and also low reconsideration. Thus, emerging adults who have participated in this study have found a work commitment they consider right for them (thus they are in a status of identity achievement or foreclosure) or they are striving to find it (i.e. they are in a status of moratorium). Overall, these findings highlight that the formation of a stable work identity is a very important goal for young people.

Our findings also indicated that work commitment is strongly intertwined with life satisfaction, especially in people with typical jobs. These

results are consistent with those documented by Meeus, Deković and Iedema (1997) who found that employed youth tied well-being to their work identity, whereas unemployed individuals tied well-being to relational identity. The authors stated that the favorability hypothesis of social comparison could provide the theoretical mechanism for understanding these results (Hestinger, 1954). According to this hypothesis, individuals select comparison dimensions on which they perform well as the most important for self-definition. Therefore, typical workers can link their well-being to their work identity, whereas atypical workers, who do not have a steady work condition, can tie their well-being to other aspects of their experience that they perceive to be more stable.

Limitations

Findings of this study should be considered in light of some limitations. The first is that we employed a cross-sectional design. Thus, we cannot ascertain causal links between work identity, well-being and time perspective. Future studies should improve our understanding of the effects of job insecurity by investigating this topic longitudinally in order to detect short and long-term consequences of work identity transitions on adjustment and time perspective. The second limitation concerns the fact that we did not control some variables that may moderate the effects of the employment contract (De Cuyper, de Jong, De Witte, Isaksson, Rigotti & Schalk, 2008), such as: the content of jobs (our sample was heterogeneous, with emerging adults employed in different types of work; given the small sample size it was not possible to examine specific situations), volition (i.e. whether workers voluntarily choose an atypical job or if the atypical job was the only possibility) and balance between personal and work life. Therefore, future investigations should consider these variables, which could account for differences in the outcomes of job insecurity.

Conclusion

The present contribution highlights the fact that emerging adults with atypical jobs face more difficulties in defining a firm work identity and they struggle to find an occupation that corresponds to their interests and goals.

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