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CAREERS IN THE GREEK PUBLIC SECTOR: CALIBRATING THE KALEIDOSCOPE

Journal:	<i>Career Development International</i>
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Keywords:	Career development, Kaleidoscope Career Model, Human resource management

~~LOOKING INTO THE KALEIDOSCOPE: CAREERS IN THE GREEK PUBLIC SECTOR:~~
CALIBRATING THE KALEIDOSCOPE

ABSTRACT

Purpose: We draw upon the Kaleidoscope Career Model to explore the career perceptions of public service employees in Greece.

Design/methodology/approach: Qualitative semi-structured interviews with 33 civil servants.

Findings: We demonstrate how context frames career perceptions and propose an additional KCM parameter (safetysecurity).

Research limitations/implications: Our context-based study proposes an extension of the KCM theory beyond the original three parameters that were dominant at its inception.

Practical implications: We provide recommendations for human resource practices, such as empowerment through training, fair promotions and providing meaning. Despite the common perception, the need for challenge exists even within the public sector, such that satisfying it can help organizations to gain strategic advantage.

Originality/value: This study expands a prominent career theory by exploring it in a unique context. By doing that, we are able to better understand how the parameters of the model are readjusted in different settings, and to uncover a previously unidentified theme.

Article Type: Research paper

Keywords: Career development, kaleidoscope career model, human resource management

INTRODUCTION

The Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) was developed based on the phenomenon of people opting out of organizations (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006) suggesting that career behaviors are being driven by three needs - authenticity, balance, and challenge. At different time points, different needs become dominant, reflecting the individual's situation at that time. While the model had demonstrated relevance to the changing world of work (Elley-Brown *et al.*, 2018; Mainiero and Gibson, 2018), its generalizability may be limited across contexts. As posited by Arnold and Cohen (2008), multiple contextual factors, including economy, politics, culture and society shape and structure available employment opportunities, which then serve as

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3 boundaries for career development. Forrier et al. (2009) point out differences between the
4 American and European traditions regarding career theory, when the European tradition
5 emphasizes institutional rules and structure, whereas the American view often assumes free
6 choice, thus underestimating boundaries. Our study aims to explore the KCM within a different
7 national, cultural and occupational context which is different from the context that the KCM
8 originated from.
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11 We chose Greece as the setting of the study because it is considered to be culturally different
12 from the US: while the US is highly individualistic, Greece tends to be a more collectivist
13 society (Hofstede et al., 2010). Prior studies demonstrated how national values might affect
14 career perceptions (Afiouni, 2014; Woodhams *et al.*, 2015), and due to the influence and
15 importance of context and culture within management research (Baruch and Vardi, 2016;
16 Khapova and Korotov, 2007), we argue that researching in Greece, with its unique history and
17 culture, may shed additional light on the conceptualization of KCM. In the current study, we
18 focus on the Greek public sector, which represents well the national culture as the most
19 desirable workplace and the largest employer, and adds value as a unique occupational setting.
20 Our research question is “*How and in what ways do Greek public sector employees perceive*
21 *authenticity, balance and challenge in their careers*”.
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43 **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONTEXT**

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45 The Kaleidoscope Career Model (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005, 2006) was introduced
46 following the changes in the concept of work: in a boundaryless world, with psychological
47 contracts breaking apart, people become the drivers of their careers, which may include opting
48 out of work within organizations. The model consists of three central needs that affect career
49 decision-making, namely authenticity, balance, and challenge.
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3 First, the need for authenticity means being genuine to one's values, a need to align work and
4 personal values (Cabrera, 2007; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). Authenticity is often displayed
5 through behaviors that resonate with personal strengths or involvement in activities that bring
6 pleasure or reflect the individual's inner nature. Next, the need for balance refers to
7 individuals' wish to have quality experiences in both work and family domains, combining
8 personal life with work (Litzky et al., 2013; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). Balance represents
9 work-family management and integration efforts to adjust attention to both work and nonwork
10 domains. Thus, to meet an increasing need for balance, individuals may choose career paths
11 that allow them to restrict work hours or slow down their career progression. Finally, the need
12 for challenge refers to the individuals' wish to participate in motivating work (Godshalk and
13 Litzky, 2018; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). Consistent with the idea of intrinsic motivation,
14 challenge is about stimulation, learning, and skill growth. It may be represented in an
15 individual's desire to make progress in their career - whether vertical, lateral or taking a whole
16 different direction. While in the KCM challenge is described as a desire to be stimulated, this
17 stimulation can come from an external source, for example work responsibilities and problems
18 (Sullivan et al, 2009).

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21 While all three needs may remain active throughout one's career, the model suggests an
22 interactive approach, such that one need may ascend at a given point, affecting the career
23 decisions accordingly. Hence, this approach views careers as dynamic and a part of a larger
24 context: for example, research found that the sequence of needs creates different patterns: the
25 alpha pattern, which is more typical to men, is sequenced as challenge-authenticity-balance,
26 while women often follow the beta patten – challenge-balance-authenticity (Sullivan and
27 Mainiero, 2007a). Together, these three needs form a set of career parameters that allow
28 understanding of individual career decisions (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006).

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3 The model has been used in various studies, exploring career perceptions within different
4 sectors, however, the majority of studies have been conducted mainly within Anglo-Saxon
5 contexts such as USA, Australia and Ireland. For instance, the model was used to interpret the
6 findings of the careers of CEO's within the sports industry in New Zealand (Shaw and
7 Leberman, 2015), and health care workers in Australia (O'Neill and Jepsen, 2019). In the US
8 the model was used to examine the career needs of male and female head coaches (Dabbs and
9 Pastore, 2017) and entrepreneurs (Sullivan et al., 2007), as well as midcareer professionals
10 from various occupations (Mainiero and Gibson, 2018). In Australia, a few studies
11 examined career intentions and choices of women (Elley-Brown et al., 2018; O'Neill and
12 Jepsen, 2018) and young professional couples (Clarke, 2015). These studies mainly have
13 tested the model (Cabrera, 2007; Sullivan et al., 2009) or used it to interpret their findings,
14 rather than develop the theory. Some exceptions are O'Connor and Crowley Henry (2019)
15 that claimed to extend the theory beyond gendered patterns, applying it to skilled migrants,
16 and Elley-Brown et al. (2018) who suggested a potential new pattern in which authenticity
17 was dominant over time and overlapped with the other needs. In general, while research into
18 the KCM is increasing, the model has not been substantially extended beyond its original
19 formulation.

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22 We argue that at this stage, theory development for the KCM is vital. In a cross-cultural
23 project, Mayrhofer et al. (2016) identified seven globally recognized dimensions of career
24 success: financial security, financial achievement, learning and development, work-life
25 balance, impact, positive relationships and entrepreneurship. While some of these dimensions
26 correspond with the KCM parameters, the dimensions related to financial wellness are not
27 reflected in the KCM, which warrants further investigation. We propose that because the
28 KCM was developed in North America during relatively prosperous times, it represents
29 specific values and views of career success that are typical to the American culture, while
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3 capturing a mindset of relative financial security. Baruch and Vardi (2016) point out a
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5 limitation of the model, proposing that the order of needs in the KCM pattern might not be
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7 voluntary but imposed by unpredictable events and that the need for authenticity is often a
8
9 “luxury” that is suppressed in order to survive financially. For example, we can see how
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11 following the economic crisis of 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic, financial survival
12
13 became a major concern, thus suggesting re-evaluation of the KCM.
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17 In addition, there is growing evidence for the importance of context in organizational research,
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19 as contexts can shape meanings and help explain variation in research findings (Johns, 2006;
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21 Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Woodhams *et al.*, 2015). Because the KCM has
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23 been primarily used in the Anglican context, there is scarce evidence of its applicability to other
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25 cultures. Studying the KCM in other cultures may provide additional insights into potential
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27 needs and patterns that have not been included in the original theory (Arnold and Cohen, 2008;
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29 Forrier *et al.*, 2009).
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34 Finally, while the model has been used to explore careers within various occupations such as
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36 CEOs, health workers, sports coaches and entrepreneurs, it has not been used within the public
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38 sector administration. This is a unique context because of its closed organizational structure
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40 which affects career opportunities and therefore frames career paths (Forrier *et al.*, 2009).
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42 Hence, we are extending the application of KCM to an organizational context that is
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44 characterized by boundaries. Given the existing research on KCM and the limited context in
45
46 which it has been studied, the model deserves not only to be used for explaining findings, but
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48 to be expanded and enriched. In the present study, we aim to examine the KCM in the public
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50 sector in Greece. As such, our study attempts to explore, indigenize and add value to the KCM
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52 to enhance its applicability to different contexts (Berkema *et al.*, 2015; Counsell, 1999).
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3 **Context:**
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6 Greece is a Southern European country with a rich history and cultural heritage. In the seminal
7 cultural dimensions classification study (Hofstede et al., 2010), the Greek culture is considered
8 to be average collectivist, where people are born into extended families and expect their in-
9 group or extended family, such as grandparents, uncles, etc., to look after them, in exchange
10 for loyalty. With that, the Globe study (House and Javidan, 2004) differentiates between
11 institutional collectivism, where collective action and group loyalty are encouraged even at the
12 expense of the pursuit of individual goals; and in-group collectivism, where loyalty is limited
13 to close social circles such as family, and the in-group interests are above the wider collective
14 goals. In this framework, the Greek culture can be classified as low on institutional collectivism
15 and high on in-group collectivism, such that within the 'in-group' people's behaviour is
16 cooperative, whereas behaviour toward out-group people is suspicious and competitive
17 (Papalexandris, 2008). Hence it is common to take employees' in-groups (such as family,
18 friends or people with similar political views) into account when making hiring and promotion
19 decisions (Bozionelos, 2014). In terms of the KCM, it is possible that authenticity, which is
20 more typical to highly individualist countries, might not be perceived in the same way in
21 countries that are more collectivist. This dimension may also have an impact on the need for
22 balance, since relationships – both with the in-group and the larger society – have increased
23 importance in collectivist cultures.
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48 Historically, employment in the Greek public sector was highly desirable, as it offered high
49 levels of job security and status. Greece scores highest on the uncertainty avoidance cultural
50 dimension, which considers how a society copes with an unknown and unforeseen future
51 (Hofstede et al., 2010) and working in the public sector is labelled the "Greek dream" since it
52 embodies this cultural preference for security (Saiti and Papadopoulos, 2015). In cultures that
53 are high in uncertainty avoidance people appreciate clarity and structure; and prefer to remain
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3 in jobs even if they are not fulfilling, to avoid ambiguity and change (Hofstede, 2011). As a
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5 consequence, the Greek public sector is the largest employer in the country, with about 567,000
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7 employees (Georgiadou, 2016). We argue therefore that uncertainty avoidance may be
8
9 reflected in the need for challenge, when people high on uncertainty avoidance prefer to
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11 maintain status quo rather than experience changes.
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15 The Greek public sector is highly bureaucratic at three main levels: the
16
17 organizational/structural, the personnel, and the operational (Michalopoulos and Psychogios,
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19 2003). The structural level is characterized by high centralization and formalization: the laws
20
21 and regulations that govern the sector are complex and high levels of red tape constrain and
22
23 standardize employee activities. The personnel level is associated with questionable hiring
24
25 practices. Many civil servants have been appointed through the system of clientelism
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27 (Michalopoulos and Psychogios, 2003). In order to deal with this issue, in 1994 the process of
28
29 personnel recruitment in the public sector became mandated by ASEP, the Supreme Council
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31 for Civil Personnel Selection, an independent authority responsible for transparency, publicity,
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33 objectivity and meritocracy in the civil personnel selection. However, governmental changes
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35 over the years limited the power of ASEP, allowing loopholes that lead to misallocation of
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37 human resources (Spanou and Sotiropoulos, 2011).–_ThusHence, employee selection is
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39 formally based on meritocracy, but in reality, politicians are inclined to offer jobs in exchange
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41 for support (Bozionelos, 2014). Thus, some employees have neither the appropriate skills nor
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43 educational background to accomplish their work, and promotions are based on clientelism or
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45 political connections. The operational level refers to the limited use of fundamental
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47 management functions like planning, evaluation, and leadership. Culturally, Greece scores low
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49 on the performance orientation dimension in the Globe study (House and Javidan, 2004), and
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51 many organizations in the public sector are not investing in effectiveness and efficiency
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53 (Michalopoulos and Psychogios, 2003; Moschuris and Kondylis, 2006). As a result, people
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3 who look for challenge, achievement and advancement might not be satisfied in this line of
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5 work.
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8 With the economic crisis of 2007–2008, employment and working conditions in the public
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10 sector became a prime target of government responses. A series of austerity measures were
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12 implemented, including the reduction of the number of civil servants by 18% (Georgiadou,
13
14 2016) and extensive pay cuts (Mylona and Mihail, 2019). As a result, the sector was slimmed
15
16 down, thus making career progression harder (Kornelakis and Voskeritsian, 2014). This
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18 situation created conditions that may have affected career options on a national level,
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20 potentially limiting ambitions for career development.
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25 In this study, we employ a qualitative methodology that can help reach a deeper
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27 understanding of career perceptions, which are socially constructed and context-dependent
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29 (Arnold and Cohen, 2008; Forrier et al., 2009; Thomas and Inkson, 2007). We examine
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31 careers in a different cultural context, as “careers do not occur in a vacuum” (Sullivan and
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33 Baruch, 2009, p.1549), but rather evolve within a country’s unique historical and socio-
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35 political factors. Exploring career theories in contexts different than where they originated
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37 from allows to extend and enrich these theories beyond the original propositions.
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42 The current research makes the following contributions to the understanding of careers. First,
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44 we demonstrate that our participants do not follow the previously identified alpha or beta
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46 patterns (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007a), as their need for balance is the most dominant and is
47
48 relatively stable. This might suggest an existence of another pattern, which can be further
49
50 explored in a future study. Second, while the KCM uses three “mirrors” that create patterns,
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52 different or additional “mirrors” may exist, that were not identified at the time and place
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54 when the KCM was conceptualized. Our investigation proposes an additional “mirror”, that
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56 we recognize as a need for safetysecurity. Finally, we focus on civil servants, whose careers
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3 take place in a closed hierarchical system, which is often overlooked in the search for
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5 boundaryless careers (Clarke, 2013). We argue that giving voice to public sector employees
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7 can substantially advance career theory.
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10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 **METHODOLOGY** 18

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20 This qualitative study considers the career perceptions of civil servants in Greece regarding
21
22 their understanding of the Kaleidoscope needs. Between November 2014 and July 2015, the
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24 first author conducted 33 in-person interviews with employees ~~in~~ from the two largest
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26 social insurance organizations in Greece at the time of data collection (one that is responsible
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28 for salaried employees in the general sector, covering dependent employment in Greece
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30 except for a few specific industries such as agriculture, and one that is responsible for
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32 professionals and business owners), thus being typical examples of the Greek public sector.
33
34 We took a purposive and a subsequent snowballing sampling approach. The interviews
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36 were conducted in Greek and then transcribed and translated by the first author in order to
37
38 allow analysis the second author to be an equal partner in the analysis and discussion process
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40 (Mouratidou et al., 2020); the average interview length was around 46 minutes. The risk of
41
42 intragroup contamination was minimized by asking each interviewee not to discuss the
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44 interview with their co-workers. The interviews continued until no new unique insights have
45
46 emerged, and suggestions for new informants became repetitive, thus reaching saturation
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48 (Morse, 2000). The sample consisted of 23 women and 10 men, average age 44, average
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50 work experience 17 years. Table 1 provides demographic details about the participants
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52 (names have been replaced with pseudonyms).
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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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3 The protocol of the interviews was semi-structured to facilitate the understanding of unique
4 perspectives on the research phenomenon. First, the career history of participants was
5 explored to understand their career decisions. The study was specifically focused on the
6 KCM needs, such that the research questions aimed at capturing the perceptions of the
7 interviewees regarding authenticity, balance and challenge. Participants were asked to reflect
8 how they understand work-life balance, the meaning of work for them and what does
9 challenge at work- means for them.

10
11 Both researchers analyzed the data set separately and systematically. Individual extracts of
12 data were coded in as many different themes as they fit and as many times as deemed
13 relevant. Our analytical process combined deductive and inductive approaches; ~~the first step~~
14 ~~was deductive, using with~~ a template analysis procedure ~~following~~ (King, 's (2012)
15 ~~suggestions, thereby allowing for the inclusion of a priori themes to be applied to the full~~
16 ~~data set.~~ A coding template was developed based on the three KCM dimensions, ~~thereby~~
17 ~~allowing for the inclusion of a priori themes to be applied to the full data set.~~ ~~Next, Then a~~
18 ~~all~~ of the text was coded for first-level themes using Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines to
19 thematic analysis: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes,
20 reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

21
22 ~~Thus, While~~ the major themes – authenticity, balance, and challenge – were pre-defined
23 ~~(deductive approach), but in the second step,~~ subthemes were formed inductively without
24 trying to fit them into a pre-existing coding framework. Examples of first-level codes:
25 *helping; compromise; meaning in relationships, separation of work and private life, routine*
26 *work.* The first level-codes were classified and arranged using the previously developed
27 template (authenticity, balance and challenge), then aggregated within them into second-level
28 codes or subthemes inductively. Examples of second-level codes: *values, free time, disdain.*
29 Codes that did not fit with the pre-existing categories as defined by the KCM, for example

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3 *holding on to a job* were kept separately in an “other” category which was later analysed
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5 inductively, forming second-level themes (*stability, survival, money*) and a third-level theme
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7 (*safetysecurity*) in an iterative process via discussion. This process allowed us to examine
8
9 how ideas were evolving, and frequent online meetings were held to discuss themes until
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11 consensus was reached (Saldaña, 2015). Our findings are outlined below, together with
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13 illustrative quotes from participants. Figure 1 presents the data structure.
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30 FINDINGS

31 *Authenticity:*

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35 Authenticity means being true to one’s values and it is expressed as the focal point in decision-
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37 making being the self rather than the surrounding context (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006).
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39 Interestingly, when our participants described their authenticity concerns, the discourse
40
41 included other people, such that the self was not separate, but rather was part of the context. A
42
43 major theme regarding authenticity was *finding meaning outside of work*: while our participants
44
45 indicated having dreams in the past and wishing for having fulfilling and meaningful work,
46
47 they shifted the focus to finding meaning in other aspects of their life, such as family and
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49 relations.
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54 “... *It gives me a place to go to and a salary. Meaning, I don’t think so. [This job] does not*
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56 *define me or give me meaning...Meaning for me is deeper than my job... Meaning, I think*
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3 *comes from the relationships that I have built. My husband, kids, dear friends. That is*
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5 *meaning to me” (Konstantina).*
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8 Apostolos provides similar insights:
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11 *“...Meaning in life is related to love and happiness of your family and friends... I don’t think*
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13 *that meaning in life lead me to this job but via this job I made friendships that are strong. The*
14
15 *work itself does not lead to meaning in life but it helped me connect with people that I care*
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17 *about and have created bonds with. I think that the most important thing in life is to have*
18
19 *lifetime relationships. That is meaning in life”.*
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23 Apostolos gave up on his original dream of becoming a lawyer and entered the public sector to
24
25 “adapt to reality”. In general, for most participants, the job in the public sector appears to be a
26
27 compromise rather than a choice that reflects their authentic selves. Yet, some of them found
28
29 ways to explain how these jobs still connect to their personal *values*. The main value was the
30
31 importance of helping others or serving society.
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36 *“I am here to provide my services the best way I can... I also feel that as a human being offering*
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38 *help is important, it is part of our nature, I believe that offering your services is a way of*
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40 *providing meaning, not in life but in one’s career.” (Stella)*
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43 For Stella, giving back to society is a way of finding meaning in one’s career, and this value
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45 was echoed by many other interviewees. Another salient value was ethics, or the need to
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47 work well:
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51 *“I am motivated to do my job correctly, I was brought up to work hard, this was the motto of*
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53 *my father and still is. He is 73 years old and still works at the farm...when we were young,*
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55 *we were taught to work hard, and never complain, so yes my values are working hard and*
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57 *doing it well.” (Urania)*
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3 Finally, a few interviewees referred to a *sense of joy and personal satisfaction*, when their
4 task was connected to their identity:

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8 “... *I love my working task. I was offered 2-3 times the opportunity to change department and*
9
10 *task... The position would be more prestigious, with more money...Despite that, I refused... I*
11 *did not want to go out and conduct controls. It is not who I am. I get attached to people and*
12 *situations and things. So I would not be able to take this post” (Nikos).*
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17 All in all, most participants reported that their careers do not provide them with meaningful
18 work. With that, they found creative ways to reconcile their work with their identity, by
19 finding values that the job can satisfy, or shifting focus to find meaning elsewhere, mainly
20 relationships.
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27 28 29 30 31 *Balance*

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33 The second KCM need is balance - people choose careers and/or find strategies to balance their
34 work lives with their personal lives (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). Our study focused on the
35 public sector, where working hours are relatively stable, and overtime work is rare, thus making
36 it an ideal working place for people with a strong need for balance. This was reflected in the
37 interviews, although in an interesting way: because balance was present, the majority of
38 participants did not mention any work-life conflict, balance was taken for granted. The need to
39 balance their lives was one of the most important considerations to enter the public sector,
40 especially for participants who had previously worked in the private sector. Our participants
41 reported low tension between work and non-work because of the stable working hours, and
42 less stress in general, demonstrating *serenity*:
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57 “Yes, *quality of life, more free time, and that was a decisive part as well when choosing the*
58 *public sector. I may earn less now, but I have more time to do what I like. In the bank, where*
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3 *I was working previously, I worked over 10 hours a day, I had no spare time, my children*
4 *were little, my wife was nagging and I wanted to find a job where I could have more free*
5 *time.” (Zaharias).*
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11 An interesting notion of balance is the *separation between work and home*. As described by
12
13 Konstantina:
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16 *“Not focusing only on work all the time, but having other things in your life and spending an*
17 *equal amount of time on all of these things, like family, work, friends... I have work to go to,*
18 *but when I leave the office, I have forgotten everything about it. I am doing my things. I don’t*
19 *allow work to take over. I know the boundaries... I work and as I said I leave and I am fine, I*
20 *don’t carry the work with me”.*
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29 In general, lack of balance was rarely a concern, since this factor motivated the career choice,
30 and that is why this theme was relatively small in the interviews, taken as a basic component.
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32 Its relative absence from the narrative does not mean it is not important, but rather the
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34 opposite: the need for balance was stable and dominant among all participants while they
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36 expressed concerns regarding satisfaction of other needs. Balance is a major factor that
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38 reflects the national culture, and as it is satisfied, it leaves space for other issues to appear.
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42 *Challenge*

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45 The third career need in the KCM is challenge – the desire to grow and find stimulating,
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47 interesting work (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). Our findings show that the interviewees’
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49 view of challenge is complex. Given the routine work, most tasks are boring, repetitive, not
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51 providing any challenge or stimulation.
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56 *“Day in and out we do exactly the same thing, we complete the same reports, we use the same*
57 *manuals and screens, and we listen to the same stories of people” (Gianna).*
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3 This feeling was voiced by the majority of participants, which is not surprising given the nature
4 of the work they chose. However, many participants also reported that they initially were
5 interested in challenge in terms of progress, but came to the understanding that their work was
6 monotonous with little opportunities for development, and learned to accept it, demonstrating
7 *withdrawal*:

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15 *“I think that we all like to be challenged so that we don’t rest on our laurels with what we*
16 *have already. Here you are appointed, and you stop searching for anything else... So, I don’t*
17 *think that I am looking for challenge”*. (Sofia).

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23 *“I don’t want to reach anywhere. Mainly because I don’t have any prospects. One must have*
24 *a university degree to become a senior manager and this means that I never will.”* (Theodor).

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28 Another reason to see challenge as progress, that is desirable but unattainable, was the
29 bureaucratic structure of the public sector, and specifically, the inherent *inequity* or *lack of*
30 *fairness*. First, the advancement is based not on performance but on tenure and/or personal
31 connections, while permanency does not encourage personal initiative either:

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38 *“In the public sector, the years of service determine the development or promotion, not your*
39 *personal effort”*. (Petros)

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43 *“[knowing people], in Greece it is everything. That is the fuel. If you don’t have people that*
44 *will help you, you will just be a simple employee. You will not do anything, I mean reach a*
45 *higher level or whatever”* (Koula).

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51 As a result, the more tenured employees are likely to become complacent, and the newer
52 employees receive demotivating signals. Lack of fairness leads to frustration: performance
53 doesn’t lead to recognition, and progress seems impossible. As a result, taking on challenges
54 (i.e. more responsibilities and investing in professional growth) means doing extra work
55 without incentives, thus becoming a source of stress and not a motivator.
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3 An interesting finding was that unlike in North America, challenge can be seen as a negative,
4 undesirable thing. When asked about challenge, some interviewees showed *disdain*: rather
5 than a way to improve oneself, a challenge was perceived as a burden that is laden with
6 negative emotions.
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13 *“[challenge is] when meeting difficult people and serving them...people that are rude,*
14 *demanding, coming here and demand their issues to be solved at once...some of them are*
15 *shouting, not all but some and that is really annoying and challenging, to keep calm.”*
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20 (Mihalis).
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23 *“I have never been to a seminar regarding my department... I learned about the tasks by*
24 *reading previous policies and by asking colleagues who showed me things. But the multitude*
25 *of laws and their complexity which is bombarding us, is only confusing staff and makes work*
26 *harder... It is a nightmare”.* (Zaharias)
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32 SafetySecurity

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36 In addition to the topics of authenticity, balance and challenge, the participants described in
37 their stories additional factors that were important to them: *stability, money, and survival*
38 through uncertainty. These sub-themes could not be classified into any of the pre-defined
39 categories, which suggests that they belong to a separate, previously unidentified theme, that
40 can be defined as the need for safetysecurity.
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48 The choice to work in the public sector was explained by most participants as a desire for
49 stability, which is a national value:
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53 *“I always wanted to join the public sector. When I passed the exams in order to join the*
54 *public sector, I was joyful because there is the Greek mentality of the public sector being the*
55 *Greek dream...I like the security and stability at work”* (Maria).
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3 Liza explained how she was socialized to that value, although it took time:
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6 *“...it wasn't my dream, it became my dream over the years. Yes, I like what I do. In the*
7 *beginning, when I was appointed... this was not the dream [job], I was 22 years old and*
8 *maybe I chose it because of the way we were brought up. I mean it was safetysecurity, it gave*
9 *a wage, it was different back then... We were different, back then it was The Job”.*

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16 *“I chose the public sector for survival and permanency purely...it is purely an issue of*
17 *survival”.* (Athanasia)

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21 *“I think that the main reason was because of the security it provides...Certainly the money*
22 *was also a reason... For me money is important, and I think for everyone who is working,*
23 *money is important. Why would we work, if it wasn't to make a living?... I think that in order*
24 *to work, you need to be motivated and this means to have a good salary. I think that, this is a*
25 *precondition, you need to have the money”.* (Stefania)

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33 The need for security was part of every narrative. Sometimes the crisis was mentioned as
34 triggering feeling of insecurity, but in general, stability emerged as a permanent part of the
35 Greek work culture, which became even more dominant in the light of recession.

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41 *“The way things are going [in Greece] I see no improvement. Unemployment everywhere,*
42 *debts, and fear. If you have a job, you are lucky...if you lose it, it's probably impossible to find*
43 *another one”* (Antonis).

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49 *“Everything changes constantly. The government changes laws, and no one knows what is*
50 *going on. You wonder constantly, will I be fired? What is going to happen next? There is*
51 *continuous general insecurity and fear in our society”* (Irimi).

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56 To sum up, participants provided a shared understanding of authenticity that is found in
57 moral/relational aspects of the work or outside it; balance as a need that is stable and that is
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3 satisfied to a large extent; and challenge as something desirable yet often unattainable, although
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5 sometimes described with a negative connotation. In addition, the need for security and
6
7 financial stability emerged either tangled with the other themes or separately, creating a new
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9 theme.
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11 12 13 **DISCUSSION** 14 15

16 Our findings support the idea that career perceptions are socially constructed and context-
17
18 dependent (Arnold and Cohen, 2008; Forrier et al., 2009). In our case, the Greek culture and
19
20 context create conditions that influence people's understanding of their career needs. For
21
22 some of participants, work in the public sector was really "the Greek dream" from the
23
24 beginning, others grew to accept it and let go of their early dreams. Although the need for
25
26 authenticity means being true to oneself, the in-group collectivist nature of the country
27
28 (Papalexandris, 2008) is reflected in the fact that people seem themselves as socially
29
30 embedded, and their self-concept is relationship-based. When no meaning was found in the
31
32 work itself, people found ways to reconcile their identity with their line of work, looking for
33
34 meaning elsewhere, often in relationships - a dominant part of the national culture. Other
35
36 values that are fulfilled even if the job is not a "dream job", are social-ethical - helping
37
38 people, working well, and being a productive member of society. This finding is consistent
39
40 with previous knowledge of intrinsic motivational factors in the public sector (Perry and
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42 Wise, 1990).
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49 The need for balance between personal lives with work was shared by all the participants, and
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51 for most of them, it was satisfied. This also may be interpreted as a cultural factor, since the
52
53 interest in a stable career that allows to separate work from life and spend time with loved
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55 ones exists on a national level. This wish was the major factor that guided the career choice,
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57 for people who have always worked in the public sector (often following their parents'
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3 advice) and even more so for those who worked previously in the private sector. Balance
4
5 seems to be a crucial need that is largely satisfied, such that not much time and effort is spent
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7 on thinking about it, and other issues become salient. The importance of balance throughout
8
9 the narratives suggests that neither alpha or beta patterns (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007a)
10
11 apply to the career trajectory of the participants. The unique dynamic with a relatively stable
12
13 need for balance is consistent with Elley-Brown's et al. (2018) findings regarding the stable
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15 dominance of authenticity, which can potentially lead to the identification of new career
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17 patterns.
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22 Challenge was often described as something that was initially desired, but not anymore. The
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24 participants became disillusioned, as they learned that the system is constructed in a way that
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26 will not provide them with growth opportunities or interesting tasks. While for most of the
27
28 participants, challenging work meant targets, promotions, and incentives, they found their
29
30 work to be as repetitive and bureaucratic, where rules and procedures had to be strictly
31
32 followed, not providing them with opportunities for development. On one hand, public
33
34 service work is not known to be intellectually stimulating, yet we see that many interviewees
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36 expected challenge upon entering this line of work, and only later realized that it is
37
38 unattainable, the work will not become more interesting and that they will not be promoted.
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43 Another obstacle to fulfilling the need for challenge is a systemic lack of fairness,
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45 demonstrated in the way appointments and promotions are made, and in performance
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47 evaluations. Distributive injustice, where instead of meritocracy-based promotions,
48
49 favouritism and political connections play a major role, is an idiosyncratic feature of the
50
51 Greek public sector (Bozionelos, 2014) and is therefore important in shaping careers (Arnold
52
53 and Cohen, 2008). As a result, people are not motivated to take on challenging work or even
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55 exert much effort in the current role, as they don't believe they have good chances to be
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57 promoted or even maintain their job in case of layoffs, compared to more connected peers.
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3 In this reality, challenge becomes associated with negative factors, stressful work that will
4 not be recognized, and therefore is undesirable: if everyone will eventually be paid the same,
5 nobody wants to work harder. In this sense, challenge is seen as a potential stressor, which is
6 consistent with Godshalk and Litzky's (2018) argument, stating that when career aspirations
7 are limited, challenge is not always perceived as desirable. Also, as pointed out by Mylona
8 and Mihail (2019b), challenge through training and development in the public sector in
9 Greece is specifically associated with the need to improve performance under budget cuts,
10 which gives it a negative connotation.
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22 Finally, an important theme that was expressed by all the study participants is a desire for
23 safety-security and stability, which is also reflected in the aspiration to work in the public
24 sector (Lewis and Frank, 2002). Some of the participants referred to it in regard to
25 authenticity, balance, or challenge. Yet, it was hard to classify this theme under one of these
26 needs, as it seemed to be distinct, suggesting a category of its own. This finding requires further
27 investigation, as it was salient in the interviews. Perhaps we can attribute it to the cultural
28 idea of safety-security being passed on through generations as a way to avoid uncertainty
29 (Hofstede et al., 2010; Papalexandris, 2008), and the current financial context in which
30 people hold on to the jobs that they have. Before looking for challenges and fulfilment,
31 people first need to make a living (Baruch and Vardi, 2016). However, it is important to point
32 out that this need was not necessarily linked to the financial crisis. Rather, it was present
33 before the crisis, in the initial career choice in the public sector. The crisis confirmed this
34 choice, when despite the negative changes, public sector workers still had more safety
35 security compared to private sector, considering themselves as lucky to have a job. This
36 strengthens our findings, which suggest an expansion of the KCM framework by adding a
37 fourth "mirror" of safetySecurity, or "Defence".
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3 In terms of theoretical contributions, this research advances the understanding and relevance
4 of the KCM (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006) in exploring career perceptions and needs in a
5 different context than the one the model originated from. While contemporary careers are
6 characterized by the individual's ability to cross boundaries, our research supports the notion
7 that boundaries are not necessarily crossed (Inkson et al., 2012), by showing how people
8 make sense, find meaning and adapt their career perceptions within the boundaries that are
9 created by their context. Our participants reframe their career narrative upon realizing that
10 their work will not become more meaningful and that they will not be challenged, they find
11 consolation in work-life balance and relationships. This reconstruction of career narratives is
12 interesting and warrants further attention. Moreover, we identify a new "mirror" which
13 corresponds with the financial security dimension of career success (Mayrhofer et al., 2016).

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28 As this need for security was uncovered in a specific cultural and industrial setting, it is
29 possible that more "mirrors" or needs exist, or nuances of these "mirrors", that can be
30 identified in future studies that will be conducted in other contexts in terms of national
31 culture and/or industry. Finally, ~~We~~we also see that alpha or beta career patterns were not
32 applicable in this context, such that there are few-multiple potential ways to extend the KCM
33 framework.

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43 In terms of practical contributions, while acknowledging the inherent structural barriers, we
44 recommend investing in Human Resource Management practices, that could be useful in the
45 public sector. While the New Public Management approach was expected to improve the
46 effectiveness of the public sector through structural changes and performance management
47 (Diefenbach, 2009), in reality, the Greek public sector is lagging behind in its
48 implementation, which also can be attributed to the socio-political environment
49 (Lampropoulou and Oikonomou, 2016). Hence, it might be more practical to invest in small-
50 level changes, such as increasing psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995). Providing
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3 employees with meaning (strengthening the link between work and values), and self-
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5 determination (making work less rigid) to increase authenticity; and improving their
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7 competence (through training), as well demonstrating their impact (promotions based on
8
9 merit) for a positive challenge, is likely to have a positive impact on employee attitudes and
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11 behaviors. Psychological empowerment has been previously linked to job satisfaction,
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13 organizational commitment, innovation, organizational citizenship behavior and performance
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15 (D’Innosenzo et al., 2016; Liden et al., 2000) as well as to reduced strain and turnover
16
17 (Seibert et al., 2011; Spreitzer et al., 1997). Satisfying the suppressed KCM needs such as the
18
19 need for authenticity and challenge while providing safety-security will have a high practical
20
21 value both in times of stability and crisis, signalling support and care for the employees.
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27 **LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

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29 As our study was conducted in a narrow context of public sector employees in Greece, its
30
31 findings cannot be generalized. We recommend expanding the study to see how the KCM
32
33 applies to the public and private sectors in other countries that differ in their economic
34
35 conditions. In addition, it would be interesting to explore the existence of our identified need
36
37 for safetysecurity, and other patterns beyond the currently recognized alpha and beta. Further
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39 investigation of the model in different cultures and industries can provide ~~By further~~
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41 ~~researching the model,~~ new insights, including additional “mirrors”, ~~will emerge that will~~
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43 advance theory and practice.
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Development International

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the study participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Highest qualification	Years of service	Job title
Alexis	Male	51	High school	24	Front line
Antonis	Male	35	High school	8	Front line
Apostolos	Male	39	High school	18	Front line
Athanasia	Female	46	High school	23	Front line
Christina	Female	39	MA	11	Front line
Chrysa	Female	45	Technological	14	Front line
Eleftheria	Female	42	MBA	13	Front line
Eleni	Female	48	Technological	23	Middle manager
Eva	Female	43	High school	9	Front line
Gianna	Female	48	High school	26	Front line
Giannis	Male	38	Technological	10	Front line
Hermione	Female	50	Bachelor	28	Senior manager
Iliana	Female	33	Bachelor	8	Front line
Irini	Female	42	MA	13	Front line
Konstantina	Female	36	BA	7	Front line
Koula	Female	63	BA	31	Senior manager
Litsa	Female	49	BA	22	Middle manager
Liza	Female	55	BA	26	Middle manager
Magda	Female	38	BA	10	Front line
Makis	Male	41	High school	18	Front line
Maria	Female	37	Technological	15	Front line
Mihalis	Male	57	Compulsory	33	Front line
Nikos	Male	40	Technological	17	Front line
Parthena	Female	51	Technological	29	Middle manager
Petros	Male	41	BA	8	Front line
Sofia	Female	38	MA	10	Front line
Stefania	Female	32	Technological	8	Front line
Stella	Female	37	MA	10	Front line
Theodor	Male	45	High school	15	Front line
Toula	Female	48	Technological	9	Front line
Urania	Female	49	Technological	26	Middle manager
Vaso	Female	41	MA	15	Middle manager
Zaharias	Male	41	MA	12	Front line

Figure 1: Data structure

Career Development International

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