



6th World conference on Psychology Counseling and Guidance, 14 - 16 May 2015

Intrapersonal Factors Effects on Professional Orientation and Environmental Representations.

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Abstract

Intrapersonal factor significantly affected the representation of own environment, in line with literature findings. Relational fluidity showed a positive impact on the representation of the Territory of belonging. With regard to the relationship between actual project and territory support we found that if context analysis had a negative effect on perception of territory as supportive, project involvement showed instead a positive effect. Intrapersonal factor significantly predicted personal goals too. Project involvement showed a significant positive effect on preference for a permanent employment and on intention to contribute to territory development whereas negatively predict entrepreneur intentions. Coping efficacy instead significantly predicted a self-employment orientation. If commitment to a specific project showed to perform its motivational function with regard to territory development on the other end coping efficacy predicted a self-employment orientation.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Research and Education Center.

Keywords: self efficacy, environment, personal goals, support, barrier

1. Theoretical background

Within a framework characterized by uncertainty, life and career projectuality play an even more fundamental, complex and sensitive role. Life and career projectuality cannot be thought outside the psychological and social environment within which are generated and acted (Castiglione, Licciardello, Sanchez, Rampullo, & Campione, 2013; Franchi, 2005).

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Consistent with this perspective is the Social Cognitive Career Theory. According to this theory, professional orientation is the result of the dynamic and mutual relationship between intrapersonal and contextual factors. Intrapersonal factors, like Self-efficacy, have an impact on personal goals. These relationships affect and are affected by contextual factors (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

If generally self-efficacy refers to a specific set of actions, Bandura (1997) described a more general type of self-efficacy too, that is coping-efficacy, as global beliefs that one can effectively deal with and manage complex situations bringing down the odds of negative results. Coping efficacy incorporates beliefs about the past and the future ability to cope with stressful events and the related emotions (Sandler, Tein, Mehta, Wolchik, & Ayers, 2000). Furthermore coping efficacy affects in a positive way performance, representation of own environment, perceived as less dangerous, and emotional responses (Bandura, 1997; Judge & Bono, 2001; Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001).

Another important aspect of Social Cognitive Career Theory is personal goals, conceptualized as the intent to undertake a specific course of action and/or to achieve a given result. Personal and contextual factor influenced personal goal, which have motivational functions (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 2003). Commitment to a particular goal is a fundamental aspect of the motivation function of goals. Without commitment, as determination to achieve a specific goal, goals lose their motivational feature (Fishbach & Dhar, 2005; Jostmann & Koole, 2009; Locke & Latham, 1990; Oettingen et al., 2009).

Intrapersonal factors, outcome expectations and personal goal are all thought within a mutual and complex relationship with the environment. Environment can act, objectively and subjectively, as a source of support or as a barrier (Lent et al., 2003; Lent, 2005; Lewin, 1951). The perception of the environment is a function of the mutual relation between the person and his environment, within a framework that conceptualizes the environment as a psychosocial construct rather an objective fact (Lent et al., 1994; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986). Furthermore, barriers and source of supports can be both intrapersonal (e.g. Self-concept) and/or environmental (work discriminations) elements which can hinder or hold up one's career and life development (Lent et al., 1994; Swanson & Woitke, 1997). In line with this concept, the new complex and changing reality (Bauman, 2000) requires to individuals to be flexible, creative and capable to manage new challenges. It requires a flexible identity, constantly evolving, within a dynamic relationship with its environment. (Arnett, 2002; Henderson & Robertson, 2000; Leccardi, 2005). The relation between an individual and his environment, as the territory of belonging, should be founded on openness and flexibility so that the territory is being perceived as chance rather than a limit (Licciardello & Castiglione, 2008). A territory conceived as a psychosocial place where social representations, norms and values are co-constructed (Castiglione, Rampullo, & Licciardello, 2014; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; 2004; Licciardello & Damigella, 2014; Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996).

2. The present study

Different levels of specificity, from a general to a specific one, can be used to measure factors underlying Social Cognitive Career Theory. Lent and Brown proposed an example: Self efficacy can be measured from a general level, as global occupational functioning, through a more specific domain like a given occupational field, to a specific skill within a determinate field (Lent & Brown, 2006).

The aim of this study is to explore on a general level of specificity the relationship between: *personal factors*, in terms of coping self-efficacy and commitment to a specific project; *representation of environment* in terms of perception of territory of belonging; *personal goals* as general professional orientation.

We hypothesized that Personal factor has positive effects on environmental representation and personal goals.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The sample consisted of University of Catania students with a mean age of 23.5 ($SD=2.74$, range 19-36).

3.2. Measures

Semi-structured questions about age, gender and major area.

Personal factors. Personal factors were measured by two scales. We used the *Self-efficacy in Management of complex problems scale* (Farnese, Avallone, Pepe, & Pocelli, 2007) to measure coping efficacy. The measure is composed of 24 items, rated on a 7-point Likert scale, about beliefs to manage complex problems. It's divided into 4 factors, which are used to measure efficacy beliefs about the ability: to cope with stressful events (*Emotional Maturity*; $\alpha=.79$); to pursue concrete goals (*Finalization of Action*; $\alpha=.82$); to manage relationships and interpersonal conflicts (*Relational Fluidity*; $\alpha=.81$); to analyze, to act and to adapt in relation to environmental elements (*Context analysis*; $\alpha=.84$). Furthermore, we used the *Project involvement scale* ($\alpha=.77$) to measure actual commitment levels to a specific project. It was composed of 21 statements rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

Environmental representation. A *Semantic Differential* (Di Nuovo & Licciardello, 1997), was used to measure representation of the *Territory* of belonging ($\alpha=.89$). Furthermore, we used one item to measure perception of *Territory support* of actual projects. We asked "To what extent the territory, in which you live, supports or hinders the achievement of your project?". Students had to answer on a 10-point Likert scale from it's really hindering (1) to it's really supportive (10).

Personal goals. We used 5 items (Castiglione et al., 2013), rated on a 7-point Likert scale, to measure general professional orientations. We asked "Thinking about your professional future, you imagine you will": be a *Permanent employee*; be *Self-employed*; be *Entrepreneur*; be content with what life offers you (*What Life Gives*); contribute actively to the development of your territory (*Territory Development*).

3.3. Data analyses

The checking for statistically significant differences was carried out using the following tests: Analysis of Variance, within N factors, concerning the comparison of subscale scores; One-sample t-test in order to compare sample means with mid-point value; Correlation matrix among variables; Multiple-regression analyses, method enter; Cronbach's alpha to check the reliability of the assessment inventory scales, we analyzed only subscales value with a Cronbach's alpha value above .60, which is considered an acceptable value. The data analysis was performed using SPSS v.20 for Windows.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

Personal factors are characterized by a positive sign (See table 1). The sample generally has displayed positive $F(1473,3)=149,65$, $p<.001$, beliefs about the ability: to analyze, to act and to adapt in relation to environmental elements (*Context analysis*; $M=5.79$ $SD=.76$); to pursue concrete goals (*Finalization of Action*, $M=5.84$ $SD=.81$); and to manage relationships and interpersonal conflicts (*Relational Fluidity*, $M=5.52$ $SD=.96$). Students displayed slightly low positive beliefs about the ability to cope with stressful events (*Emotional Maturity*, $M=5.03$ $SD=.94$). Furthermore, they showed positive a level of commitment to actual project (*Project involvement scale*; $M=5.42$, $SD=.60$).

Environmental representation is characterized by a negative sign. Students showed negative attitude toward *Territory* of belonging ($M=3.66$ $SD=.87$), *one test* to midpoint=4, $t=-8.809$, $p<.001$. Furthermore, they perceived territory as really hindering their actual project ($M=3.53$; $SD=1.6$), *one test* to midpoint=5.5, $t=-6.411$, $p<.001$.

With regard to their personal future goals, students seemed to slightly prefer to be a permanent employee ($M=5.12$ $SD=1.69$) and to contribute actively to the development of their territory ($M=4.91$ $SD= 1.63$), $F(4, 1968)=111,60$, $p<.001$. They displayed a slightly lower positive preference toward self-employment ($M=4.51$ $SD= 1.91$). The idea to be an entrepreneur overlap mid-point ($M=3.92$ $SD=2.03$). Instead, they rejected the idea to be content with what life offers them ($M=3.15$ $SD=1.80$), *one test* to midpoint=4, $t=-10.55$, $p<.001$.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations of all variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Personal factors												
Context analysis	1											
Emotional Maturity	.37**	1										
Finalization of Action	.52**	.29**	1									
Relational Fluidity	.57**	.37**	.39**	1								
Project Involvement	.37**	.29**	.50**	.37**	1							
Environmental representation												
Territory	.00	-.03	.02	.08	.08	1						
Territory support	-.02	.00	.05	.03	.15**	.22**	1					
Personal goals												
Permanent employee	.12**	.04	.13**	.07	.15**	.06	.02	1				
Self-employed	.12**	.18**	.12**	.17**	.06	.11*	.06	.16**	1			
Entrepreneur	.07	.10*	.10*	.14**	-.02	.07	.02	.14**	.57**	1		
What Life Gives	-.11*	-.06	-.14**	-.04	-.12**	.03	.02	.00	-.01	.03	1	
Territory Development	.18**	.15**	.10*	.19**	.25**	.09*	.00	.04	.15**	.16**	.16**	1
<i>M</i>	5.79	5.03	5.84	5.52	5.42	3.65	5.04	5.12	4.51	3.92	3.15	4.91
<i>SD</i>	.76	.94	.81	.96	.60	.87	2.29	1.70	1.91	2.04	1.80	1.63

Note. *p< .05. **p< .01. Territory support range from 1 to 10. All other variables range from 1 to 7.

4.2. Personal factors effects on environmental representation

A series of enter multiple-regression analyses were conducted to evaluate the effects of personal factor variables (coping efficacy and project involvement) on: environmental representation. Personal factors significantly predict Territory ($R^2=.013$, $F(5,487)=2.251$, $p=.05$) and Territory support ($R^2=.032$, $F(5,487)= 3.265$, $p=.001$).

Table 2. Summary of Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting environmental representation.

Variables	Territory			Territory support		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
(Constant)	3.204	.404		2.825	1.076	
Context analysis	-.088	.069	-.077	-.359	.183	-.120*
Emotional Maturity	-.075	.046	-.082	-.067	.123	-.028
Finalization of Action	-.009	.061	-.008	.070	.162	.025
Relational Fluidity	.117	.051	.131*	.088	.137	.037
Project Involvement	.137	.077	.095	.688	.207	.181***
R^2		.023			.034	
ΔR^2		.013			.032	
<i>F</i>		2.251*			3.265**	

Note. *p < .05. **p< .01, ***p< .001.

Relational fluidity showed a positive impact on representation of Territory ($\beta=.131$, $t=2.302$, $p=.02$). Context analysis had a negative effect on perception of territory as supportive ($\beta=-.120$, $t=-1.963$, $p=.05$) whereas project

involvement showed instead a positive effect ($\beta=.181$, $t=3.317$, $p=.001$). Other coping efficacy factors did not show significant effects (See table 2).

4.3. Personal factors effects on personal goals

Table 3. Summary of Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Personal Goals.

Variables	Permanent employee			Self-employment			Entrepreneur			Territory Development		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
(Constant)	2.281	.788		1.894	.883		3.071	.941		.469	.737	
Context analysis	.165	.134	.074	-.028	.150	-.011	-.146	.160	-.054	.190	.125	.088
Emotional Maturity	-.045	.090	-.025	.262	.100	.129**	.159	.107	.073	.080	.084	.046
Finalization of Action	.099	.118	.047	.145	.133	.062	.307	.141	.123*	-.205	.111	-.102
Relational Fluidity	-.025	.100	-.014	.232	.112	.117*	.323	.119	.153**	.130	.093	.077
Project Involvement	.309	.151	.109*	-.124	.169	-.039	-.495	.180	-.145**	.629	.141	.230***
R ²		.029			.046			.042			.085	
ΔR^2		.019			.036			.032			.076	
F		2.887**			4.651***			4.277***			9.060***	

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Personal factors significantly predict preferences for permanent employment ($R^2=.019$, $F(5,487)=2.887$, $p=.01$). Only project involvement showed a significant positive effect on preference for a permanent employment ($\beta=.109$, $t=2.045$, $p=.04$). Personal factors displayed a significant impact on self-employment ($R^2=.036$, $F(5,487)=4.651$, $p<.001$). Emotional Maturity ($\beta=.129$, $t=2.613$, $p=.009$) and Relational Fluidity ($\beta=.117$, $t=2.076$, $p=.04$) showed a significant positive effect on preference for self-employment. Personal factors significantly affected preferences for entrepreneurship ($R^2=.032$, $F(5,487)=4.277$, $p=.001$). Relational Fluidity ($\beta=.153$, $t=2.715$, $p=.007$) and Finalization of Action ($\beta=.123$, $t=2.715$, $p=.03$) showed a positive effect on intention to become an entrepreneur whereas instead project involvement showed a significant negative effect ($\beta=-.145$, $t=-2.743$, $p=.006$). Personal factors significantly predict to actively contribute to the development of own territory ($R^2=.076$, $F(5,487)=9.060$, $p<.001$). Only project involvement ($\beta=.230$, $t=4.455$, $p<.001$) showed a positive effect on intention to actively contribute to the development of territory of belonging (See table 3). Personal factors variables did not significantly predict to be content with what life gives.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore on a general level of specificity the relationship between core elements of Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994).

Accordingly to Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994), our hypothesis was confirmed. Intrapersonal factor significantly affected the representation of own environment, in line with literature findings (Judge & Bono, 2001; Luzzo & McWhirter, 2001). Relational fluidity showed a positive impact on the representation of the Territory of belonging. With regard to the relationship between actual project and territory support we found that if context analysis had a negative effect on perception of territory as supportive, project involvement showed instead a positive effect. The relationships between intrapersonal factors and environmental elements is fundamental because both play an important role on career and life development (Lent et al., 1994; Swanson, & Woitke, 1997) and it is mutual rather than linear (Lent, 2005; Lewin, 1951).

Lastly, intrapersonal factor significantly predicted personal goals too. Project involvement showed a significant positive effect on preference for a permanent employment and on intention to contribute to territory development whereas negatively predict entrepreneur intentions. Coping efficacy instead significantly predicted a self-employment orientation. If commitment to a specific project showed to perform its motivational function (Fishbach & Dhar, 2005; Jostmann & Koole, 2009; Oettingen et al., 2009) with regard to territory development on the other

end coping efficacy predicted a self-employment orientation. In this sense, both represent important aspects in a liquid society (Bauman, 2000) which it requires to individuals to manage new challenges within a territory that should be perceived as a chance rather than a limit (Licciardello & Castiglione, 2008).

The results of the present study have implications for the planning of interventions aimed to support and to direct career path development (Betz, 1992). Students should be supported in developing their career in the management of stressful and unexpected events. (Marshall et al., 2011). Supporting coping efficacy (Ali, McWhirter, & Chronister, 2005; Sullivan & Mahalik, 2000) beliefs and commitment to actual project is likely to have positive effects on: environmental representations, in terms of improved mutual and supportive relationship (Lent, 2005); and personal goals, in terms of higher self-employment orientation, fundamental within actual context (Wilpert, 2009).

Research results should be taken into account having clear some limits. We used single-item to measure personal goals. The latter could enhance measurement biases. Furthermore, we built specific measures (e.g. Project involvement scale) for the purposes of the present study. Another limit is intrinsic to the cross-sectional design used. Indeed, we are not allowed to suggest a causal conclusion with regard the relationship between personal factors, outcome expectations, environmental representation, and personal goals. However, these variables were thought in a mutual relationship (Lent et al., 1994) within the theoretical framework used in this research. Lastly, some variables explained in some cases a relatively small amount of variance.

Given these limitations, our research should be replicated using other measures (e.g. Multiple-item scale for personal goals). Future research should explore other person and contextual inputs variables (e.g. College years). Furthermore, it should take into account Social Cognitive Career Theory elements with a different level of specificity (Lent & Brown, 2006) with regard to coping efficacy and commitment to a project. To deepen causal relationship, future studies should use other designs (e.g. Longitudinal).

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