

# **GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION**



# Issue 12/2020

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InPractice is an applied journal of Work and Organizational Psychology (WOP) and is unique in this purpose (see <http://www.eawop.org/ejour-editor-s-statement>). The journal is recognised with a 1-star rating in the current ABS journal ranking document.

I am delighted to present Issue 12 of InPractice and our first edition this year. We present five original empirical papers; along with two reports; one from Albania, EAWOP's newly elected constituent association, and the other being a report from the 2019 EAWOP Congress in Turin. These papers are available in two formats: as a single edition download, or, a separate download for each paper.

We open with a fascinating paper by Gintaras Chomentauskas and Kristina Paulauskaitė from the Human Study Center, Vilnius, Lithuania looking at the relationship between subjective well-being and income. The paper explores the oversimplified understanding of these relationships expanding our knowledge of the complex economic and social factors at play in different national cultures.

Next, we have an exciting opportunity offered by Mare Teichmann of PE Konsult, Estonia to examine a new mapping tool exploring psychosocial risk factors at work. This tool enables different occupational stress interventions to be developed at both individual and organizational levels of interaction.

We follow with an absorbing study of non-binary people's experience in the workplace with a special focus on the experience of leadership. Mila Donders, studying at the Management School, the University of Sheffield, UK and living in the Netherlands

examines how gender identity complicates not only work life, but most of a person's daily life.

We continue with Emma Parry from the Institute of Work Psychology, the University of Sheffield, UK taking us on a captivating journey with young people making the transition from education to employment for the first time. Emma uses drawings and talk to examine young people's transitions and applies these findings to a range of practical applications for WOP practitioners and those working with young people in different capacities.

Continuing with the theme of transitioning into employment Esra Atilla Bal from Development Dimensions International, Turkey identifies the 'success profile' multinational and local organizations based in Istanbul are looking for from new graduates. The implications of these findings are discussed in relation to how these criteria can be fostered during educational years and beyond.

These empirical papers are followed by a report from The Order of Psychologists in Albania (OPA); EAWOP's newly elected constituent association. Valbona Treska, President of OPA, describes the origin, struggles and establishment of OPA and the range of its activities.

Finally, Colin Roth from BlackBox/Open describes a highly successful session from Co-op Friday (my explanation of this event is below) at the Turin congress in May 2019; you may have been there? Here a highly active debate was achieved between panellists, scientists and practitioners using a "Bar Camp" approach to encourage presentation and review.

Excitingly, InPractice is growing and changing. We continue with open access of our contemporary and eye catching presentation of material and availability in multiple formats. Next, we are going to be presenting more editions of InPractice each year along with different content formats. As one of the only applied journals of WOP that is regularly read by both practitioners and scientists we want to bring you new features such as interviews with thought leaders, topical discussions and debates and narrative explorations of work, that in reality, often does not always go to plan.

InPractice is closely integrated with several other EAWOP activities. Currently these include the annual WorkLab (see <http://www.eawop.org/worklab-2019a>) and the

increasingly popular stream at the bi-annual congress concerned with the co-creation of work and organizational psychology knowledge and practice (known as Co-op Friday in Turin). Through these developments EAWOP is facilitating InPractice to bring unique material to our readers and enabling developmental activities to support and encourage new authors to write about their work.

We are interested in a wide range of material from practitioners and scientists focusing on the application of WOP in Europe (and further afield). This may be empirical work, theoretical contributions, case study descriptions, evaluations of interventions or commentary on current “hot topics”. We are also interested to know what it is like to practice (or teach) WOP in your country and how psychologists maintain their continuous professional development. We welcome reports (with pictures) about activities and qualifications from psychological associations that will inform other applied psychologists.

We are happy to receive material in the form of a paper, or a plan of an intended paper. The plan will allow the editorial team to interact with the authors at an early stage and encourage a focus on the application of material. We hope by reading this edition you will want to write for InPractice, or try out an idea with us. We can never have enough material about the applied work people are doing; and its evaluation. Please contact us through [InPractice@eawop.org](mailto:InPractice@eawop.org) or via one of the editors. We look forward to working with you soon.

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# Relationship between income, happiness, and life satisfaction: Evidence from Lithuania

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## Abstract

For decades subjective well-being (SWB) has been receiving increasing attention from many perspectives, including health, personality traits, ageing, availability of social and medical services, and education. The research on the relation between happiness, life satisfaction, and income being the most popular. Many studies (e.g., Howell & Howell, 2008) support a wide spread opinion that income determines life satisfaction and happiness. However, there are many contradictions to this face value conclusion with rankings in the life satisfaction from high income countries (e.g., Denmark, Sweden) standing side by side with countries of much lower income (e.g., Mexico, Costa Rica) (Veenhoven, 2018). These data suggest an oversimplified understanding of the relationship between income and SWB that is misleading.

In order to understand these differences three important questions, need to be answered. Does SWB depend on absolute income allowing for basic needs to be met, or does it depend more on relative income (on how a person sees economic wellness in their particular social context)? Next, does an increase in income impact SWB all the way along its rising path or is there a satisfactory level of income (a satiation point) beyond which happiness stops to follow increasing income? Finally, is SWB determined more by general economic factors, such as income, or peculiarities of social relationships within a given society? Answers to these questions are of great

social importance, especially for countries dealing with low happiness, high suicide rates, and excessive emigration related to SWB; and are struggling to determine their priorities of social development. In this paper we study these factors in Lithuania, concluding that relative income is an important factor influencing SWB, but that other factors come into play once a satiation level of income is reached.

**Keywords:** Subjective well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, relative income, income satiation point

## Introduction

The studies of SWB have long attracted the interest of psychologists, economists, and sociologists. It's no wonder: knowing the right answer could potentially lead to the Holy Grail revealing the right direction to national social policy. However, research has not yet provided a detailed understanding of the phenomenon of happiness, nor a clear understanding of the factors influencing it.

As yet, there is no clearly established definition of the subject of research of life satisfaction. The number of concepts such as well-being, life satisfaction, happiness, and subjective well-being are widely used in articles as synonyms. Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith (1999), and Diener and Oishi (2000) defined well-being as a multidimensional construct of a person's reaction to one's life either in terms of cognitive evaluations (satisfaction), or in emotional reactions (affect). Life satisfaction is described as the subjective global evaluation of whether one is content, satisfied, and/or happy about one's life (Cheung & Lucas, 2015). Life satisfaction is viewed as an integral part of subjective well-being (Cheung, 2018). In research we distinguish two aspects of SWB, though consider them to be highly interrelated. Emotional well-being is considered to represent emotional quality of everyday experience, while life evaluation refers to cognitive evaluation of life quality. There is some evidence that these two aspects correlate differently to increase of income (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). To make things even more complicated, different research uses different methods to assess emotional and cognitive aspects of SWB, and this might lead to contradictory conclusions when interpreting results.

In our study we operationalise life satisfaction as more cognitive evaluation of one's own life, while happiness addresses less consciously represented realm of emotional attitude towards the way one experiences life at a current moment. Both aspects were measured in our study by single question scales (see the Method section). The common concept underlying these two aspects, emotional and cognitive evaluations, we consider to be SWB.

## Satisfaction, income, and social relations

Many researchers believe that people's life satisfaction should increase as their household income grows, because income predicts many additional factors that are expected to be associated with life satisfaction (such as better health care, a higher standard of living, and better housing). In addition, income allows more ways to become satisfied by providing opportunities for individuals to fulfill their desires (Cheung & Lucas, 2015).

Diener and Biswas-Diener (2002) suggest several major assumptions to explain the relationship between income and life satisfaction: a) income improves life satisfaction only insofar as it helps people to meet their basic needs; b) the interface of income and life satisfaction depends on the amount of material desires that people are allowed to fulfill; and c) societal norms for consumption are essential to understanding the relation between life satisfaction and income.

There is an obvious contradiction to the declared straightforward relationship between high income and SWB. High income countries such as Denmark (scoring 8.4 of 10), Sweden (7.8), or USA (7.3) stand side-by-side with countries of much lower income such as Mexico (8.3), Costa Rica (8.5) or Guatemala (7.2) in life satisfaction rankings (Veenhoven, 2018). Moreover, studies show that even the reverse relation between average national income and SWB is possible. The China Paradox could serve as an example, when SWB declined considerably in contrast to China's objective economic growth in 1990–2000. Life satisfaction fell in both urban and rural China in every income group (Brockmann, Delhey, Welzel & Yuan, 2009). These findings question the universality of the link between income and happiness and suggest the importance of other factors such as national peculiarities of wealth distribution or psychological factors such as social support, inclusion, or anomie (a condition of instability resulting

from a breakdown of standards and values or from a lack of purpose or ideals) that might even be stronger factors influencing SWB in a particular nation. The answers might lead to a completely different realm from personal income, such as the quality of personal social relations. Vaillant's (2002) main conclusion of a 75-year longitudinal study of adult development is that "warmth of relationships throughout life has the greatest positive impact on life satisfaction." If so, SWB research in nations should seriously shift from researching economic factors to peculiarities of social psychology in different countries.

### **Income satiation point**

What happens to the relationship between income and SWB when the level of income needed to meet all basic needs is reached? Is there a satiation point at which increased income does not increase SWB? Kahneman and Daeton (2010) found that life evaluation did not satiate, whereas affective well-being satiated at \$75,000. A study by Jebb, Tay, Diener and Oishi (2018) using data from a Gallup World Poll, a representative sample of over 1.7 million individuals from 164 countries worldwide, supports the finding that income is related to happiness. However, it also states that there is a certain income satiation point beyond which happiness stops following the increasing income. Globally they found that satiation point for life evaluation occurred at approximately \$95,000 of yearly household equalised income. For positive emotions, satiation occurred at a lower level of income, \$60,000, and for negative emotions at \$75,000. Measurement of yearly income was done for comparison reasons in International Dollars using the World Bank's private purchasing power parity ratios. The study also found significant differences across different countries and world regions. What accounts for these differences? What factors influence SWB after the satiation point is reached? The authors do not provide answers, but rather imply the necessity for further in-depth studies.

### **Absolute income versus relative income**

In order to further explore the association between life satisfaction and income, we have to consider two different concepts: absolute income and relative income. According to Cheung and Lucas (2016), absolute income refers to the idea that money can buy things that lead to life satisfaction. Past research showed that household income is positively associated with life satisfaction (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004;

Clark, Frijters & Shields, 2008; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Diener, Ng, Harter & Arora, 2010; Kahneman & Deaton, 2010; Luhmann, Schimmack & Eid, 2011).

But is your ability to buy and consume goods that satisfy your essential needs sufficient to feel satisfied? The link between plentiful resources and satisfaction may be true for most animal species. However, widespread assumption that absolute income level is the primary determinant of individual life satisfaction of humans does not appear to be well-supported. Recent empirical findings confirm that a person's life satisfaction not only depends on absolute income but also on a large degree of how it appears in context of the incomes of others in society. According to Dumludag (2013), relative income refers to the idea that comparisons with others play an important role in evaluating and constructing social reality. People compare their income with a reference group, and therefore an increase in the income of that reference group but to a lesser extent of their own is likely to have a negative effect on an individual's life satisfaction. According to Schneider (2016), relative income provides one of the standards by which people evaluating their own income position place themselves in a social hierarchy. Researchers find relative income to influence life satisfaction even more strongly than absolute levels of income (Cheung & Lucas, 2016; Dumludag, 2013; Easterlin, 1995; 2001; Knight, Song & Gunatilaka, 2007; Mayraz, Wagner & Schupp, 2009; Solnick & Hemenway, 1998). In other words, if person A lives in a poor country and earns more than average it will make them happier than person B who lives in a developed country and earns double but is poor in comparison to the people around them. It brings us back to the Easterlin paradox. According to Easterlin (1974), a society's average happiness is a constant even if per capita incomes increase. This is because one's income compared to fellow citizens does not improve. To put simply, if I buy a used Fiat and my neighbour buys used Cadillac, it makes me just as unhappy as when a few years later I buy a new Ford and my neighbour buys a new Bentley.

### **Income change and effect**

Income may play a different role for people at different stages in their lives. The recent longitudinal studies showed that the income change can lead to changes in life satisfaction. For example, Schyns (2001) examined the relationship between income change and life satisfaction in Russia and found that positive change in income caused an increase in life satisfaction for a period greater than one year. But, as soon

as people adjust to their higher income, the effect vanished. Similarly, Luhmann et al. (2011) tested the within-person effect using two large samples from Britain and Germany. They found that, controlling for the between-person effect of income, within-person income change was positively associated with SWB. Additionally, Gardner & Oswald (2001) found an increase in SWB among British respondents whose financial resources had changed due to winning a lottery or inheritance. However, some studies suggest that the effect of income change might be stronger in poorer nations. Diener and Oishi (2000) reported that for poorer nations with high economic growth there is a clear increase in SWB following the increase of income.

To summarise, research on the within-person association between income and life satisfaction has revealed mixed findings: positive change in income can cause an increase in life satisfaction, but the effect is more evident in poorer nations. In addition, according to adaptation theory, life satisfaction increases temporarily with an increase in income, but over time people adjust to their higher income such that their life satisfaction reverts back towards its original level.

## Research from Lithuania

Recently, more and more attention is being paid to life quality issues in Lithuania. The relevance of these issues is related to high suicide rates, record emigration, and low SWB. Although Lithuania's economy is one of the fastest growing in EU, it is still among the countries with lowest scores on happiness and life satisfaction. A pilot study by Chomentauskas and others (2008, 2009) found a relationship between SWB and anomie, hopelessness, and other factors, but they did not research the relationship between SWB and income. In recent studies, Rakauskienė and Servetkiene (2017), relying on their research data, have claimed that the feeling of happiness in Lithuania diminished from 2004 to 2016 despite the average income having increased. The authors see the explanation in the increasing inequality of income in the country. The decile dispersion ratio of income differentiation, which presents the ratio of the average income of the richest 10 percent of the population to the average income of the poorest 10 percent, increased from 10.3 in 2007 to 10.7 in 2014 (the EU average is 8.5). Diržytė (2017) investigated the relationship between household income and life satisfaction in Lithuania. In their study, groups belonging to different quintiles of income were compared for differences in their life satisfaction. People belonging to the

lower quintile according to their household income reported statistically significant less positive emotions and less positive cognition. Moreover, analyses demonstrated that people with higher household income report higher happiness and higher overall life satisfaction. These results are in line with the findings about the relationship between income and life satisfaction. However, the method of analysis that compares differences between low and high income groups does not support the hypothesis that within them satisfaction is determined by the same factors such as differences in income. In other words, it is not clear whether increase in income impacts satisfaction the same way in small and big income groups. In the latter study no satiation point was revealed.

Summarising, despite Lithuania's record high suicide rate and rates of emigration and low life satisfaction, it appears to be an attractive object for researchers looking deeper into the essence of a little-studied psychological and social phenomenon. In this work, we, the research team at Human Study Center in Vilnius, continue to look deeper into causes of happiness and SWB. In this research we aim to understand the relationship of income and SWB in Lithuania.

Our research goals are: a) whether there is a correlation between household disposable monthly income per capita (monthly household equalised income) and SWB; b) Is there a correlation between SWB and household disposable monthly income per capita in different income groups; and c) Does the possible income satiation point beyond which the correlation between income and SWB exist?

## Method

This research was done using data from our long-term study in the timeframe of 2008 – 2017; aiming to monitor social and emotional status of Lithuania. In this paper we describe part of the data related to SWB and income.

## Sample

The present study was conducted on a sample of 3,199 Lithuanian people (42.70% male, 57.30% female) between 2015 to 2017. Participant ages ranged from 15 to 92 years ( $M = 44.95$ ,  $SD = 18.343$ ). Research participants were interviewed individually, face-to-face and were asked structured questions as a part of national survey

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conducted by a survey company (Baltijos Tyrimai). The sample is representative of the Lithuanian population and details are provided in Table 1.

Table 1  
Demographic characteristics of the Lithuanian sample (N = 3,199)

<b>Variables</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>
Year of study					
2015 (0)		32.40			
2016 (1)		33.00			
2017 (2)		34.60			
Happiness		2.69	0.65	1.00	4.00
Life satisfaction		2.63	0.70	1.00	4.00
Individual income (Household disposable monthly income per capita in euros after all taxes)		330.56	162.647	38.00	1500.00
< = €250 (0)		35.60			
€251 – 450 (1)		45.90			
€451 – 500 (2)		7.80			
€501 – 650 (3)		6.40			
> €650 (4)		4.30			
Gender					
Female (0)		57.30			
Male (1)		42.70			
Age		44.95	18.34	15.00	92.00
15 – 19 (0)		12.30			
20 – 29 (1)		12.80			
30 – 39 (2)		14.60			
40 – 49 (3)		16.60			
50 – 59 (4)		17.70			
60 – 92 (5)		25.90			

## Measures

The following measures were used in our study.

### Happiness

In this study, we used a single question scale O-HL-u-sq-v-4-a from the World Database of Happiness (WDH) to measure self-reported happiness. In this study, respondents are asked, “*Taking all things together, would you say you are ...?*” They are asked to make a choice out of four possible answers: a) ‘Not at all happy’, b) ‘Not very happy’, c) ‘Quite happy’, or d) ‘Very happy’. Happiness is rated by respondents on a 4-step rating scale. In the WDH a set of one question and all admissible responses to that question are referred to as a “*measure of happiness*” (Veenhoven, 2005; 2009; 2010).

### Life satisfaction

We used a single question scale (O-SLL-u-sq-v-4-b) from the WDH to measure individual evaluation of life satisfaction. The main life evaluation question asked in this study is “*On the whole, how satisfied are you with the life you lead?*” (Veenhoven, 2005; 2009; 2010). Respondents are requested to make a choice out of four possible answers on a 4-step rating scale: a) ‘Not at all satisfied’; b) ‘Not very satisfied’; c) ‘Fairly satisfied’; or d) ‘Very satisfied’.

### Individual income

We define the term Individual Income as household disposable monthly income per capita. In the study, respondents were asked to specify the total household income and the number of family members. To get Individual Income, total household income was divided by household size (adult = 1 unit, and child = 1 unit).

## Results

The aim of this study is to find out how income is related to happiness and life satisfaction. After excluding all missing answers to questions, we analysed the results in two steps. First, we tested a relation between individual income and happiness, as well as a relation between individual absolute income and life satisfaction in the whole sample. Secondly, we tested whether there is a satiation point in individual absolute

income after which the correlation between income and happiness, either income and life satisfaction does no longer exist. For this reason, we split the sample into five groups (for grouping details see Table 3) according to their income and performed a correlation analysis between SWB and income in each of them separately. The Pearson Correlation Analysis was used in the first two steps and the results are given in Table 2.

Table 2  
Pearson correlations between happiness, life satisfaction, and income (N = 3,199)

Individual's income per month (€ net)	Year of study		
	2015	2016	2017
Happiness	0.191***	0.253***	0.157***
Life satisfaction	0.223***	0.230***	0.172***

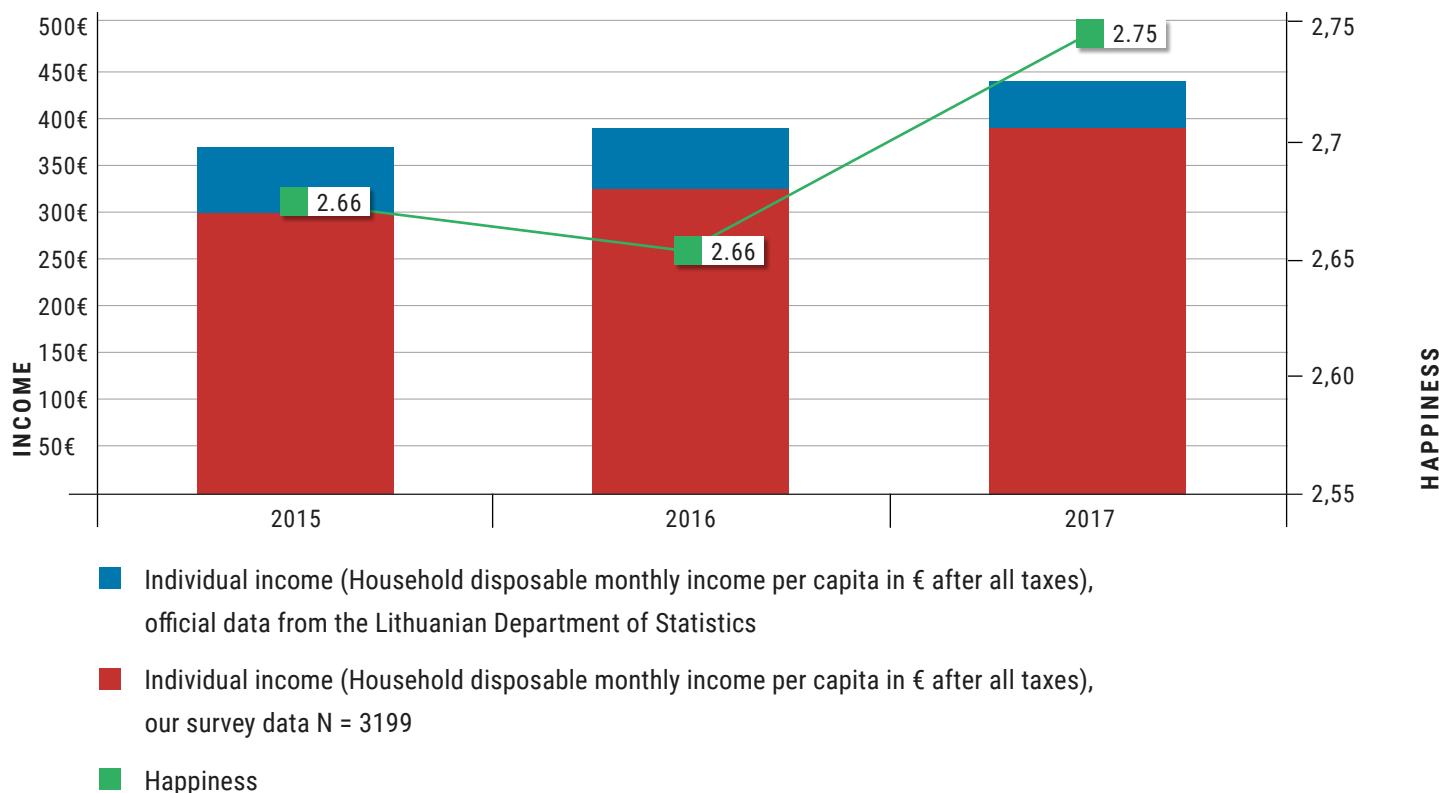
Note: Significance level: \*\*\* < 0.001

Analyses showed a significant positive relationship between happiness and individual income during the period from 2015 to 2017 (the correlation coefficient is between 0.157 and 0.253, p < 0.001). Likewise, we find a significant positive relationship between life satisfaction and individual income (the correlation coefficient is between 0.172 and 0.230). Therefore, we generally support the wide spread assumption that an income increase is associated with an increase in happiness and life satisfaction (see Table 2).

Figure 1 illustrates trends in happiness, life satisfaction, and income visually. Trends illustrate a positive relation between income level and happiness. The graph shows a slight difference between official individual income per month in Lithuania according to official statistics and individual income reported by the respondents during the period from 2015 to 2017. The average individual income per month in Lithuania has been increasing both in official data and according to our survey: officially in 2015 it was €375.90 per month (€291.68 reported in this study), in 2016 – €408.40 per month (€317.00 reported in this study), and in 2017 – €441.10 per month (€389.15 reported in this study).

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Figure 1  
Trends in individual income per month and happiness in Lithuania, 2015-2017



However, stating that there is a significant positive relationship between happiness and individual income does not exclude the possibility that after reaching some point in income, the level of happiness and life satisfaction no longer relates to an income level. In other words, it reaches a certain satiation level. To test this supposition, it was necessary to evaluate how income affects happiness and life satisfaction of people belonging to different income groups. For this purpose, we split the sample into five different groups depending on their income (for grouping details see Table 3 below). Group analyses showed a significant positive weak relationship between happiness and income (the correlation coefficient is between 0.120 and 0.126,  $p < 0.01$ ), but only for the two lowest income groups: when the individual absolute income was up to €450. When the individual income increases to more than €450, the relationship between happiness and income is no longer statistically significant (see Table 3).

Table 3  
Pearson correlations between happiness and income ranges (N = 3,199)

	Individual income per month (€ net)				
	< = €250	€251 – 450	€451 – 500	€501 – 650	> €650
Happiness	0.120**	0.126**	-0.02	-0.08	0.07

Note: Significance level: \*\* p < 0.01

Likewise, we find a significant positive weak relationship between life satisfaction and income (the correlation coefficient is between 0.100 and 0.105), but only when the individual absolute income is up to €450. When the individual income increases to more than €450, the relationship between life satisfaction and income is no longer significant (see Table 4). Therefore, an increase of income up to a certain factor is no longer associated with a significant increase in life satisfaction and happiness.

Table 4  
Pearson correlations between life satisfaction and income ranges (N = 3,199)

	Individual income per month (€ net)				
	< = €250	€251 – 450	€451 – 500	€501 – 650	> €650
Life satisfaction	0.100**	0.105**	-0.05	-0.04	0.16

Note: Significance level: \*\* p < 0.01

In short, our findings show a significant positive relationship between happiness and individual income. Higher SWB is related to income appears to be true as a general statement. However, this relationship is different in different income groups. We found, that income is significant factor impacting SWB in lower (<€250) and up to average income (€251 – 450) groups. When income gets above hypothetical satiation point, that is in our case close to national average income (>€451), it stops to be a significant factor of happiness and life satisfaction.

## Discussion

There are three domineering thought paradigms in SWB income relationship research. Many studies on happiness and life satisfaction believe that life satisfaction should

increase as income grows, because income predicts many additional factors, such as better health or a higher standard of living (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004; Diener, Biswas-Clark, Frijters & Shields, 2008; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Diener et al., 2010; Luhmann et al., 2011). The second paradigm claims that income influences SWB as long as a certain satiation point is reached beyond which increasing income does not add to SWB (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010; Jebb et al., 2018). And the third paradigm, placing roots in the Easterling Paradox (1974), which stresses importance of relative income and refers to the idea that comparisons with others, plays an important role in evaluating and constructing social reality and thus determines SWB. People compare their income with a reference group and therefore an increase in the income of the reference group but to a lesser extent of their own is likely to have a negative effect on individual life satisfaction and vice versa (Dumludag, 2013; Schneider, 2016).

The results of our study show that all three might be true. Our study of the representative sample of the Lithuanian population shows a statistically significant relationship between happiness, life satisfaction, and individual income (household disposable monthly income per capita) when the whole sample is considered to be homogeneous and is analysed as such. However, when the sample is split into five groups according to household income per capita, it appears that a positive relationship between happiness and income exists only in individual income up to a certain point: in the case of Lithuania it was €450 of monthly household disposable income per capita. When the income increases to more than €450, the relationship between happiness and income is no longer statistically significant. Likewise, we found a positive relationship between life satisfaction and income, but only when income is up to €450, but when the income increases to more than €450, the relationship between life satisfaction and income no longer exists. These results are in line with the concept of satiation, beyond which the relationship between income and SWB is broken.

However, the results are also in accordance with the idea that happiness depends not only on the absolute value of income, but to a larger extent it depends on how income relates to the income of other people in a given social context, is higher or lower than the average of social context. Our study allows us to assume that happiness is related to income when it is below average, but once it gets above the average point the

relationship is lost. The results and design of the study do not allow us to specifically discriminate which of the factors, income satiation point or the relationship between individual income and average income of social context, are the determining factors, as average income and income satiation point fall into the same income value; that is around €450.

It is worth mentioning that the determined satiation point is very low, just €5,400 household disposable yearly income per capita, or converted to international dollar using parity purchasing power index that in 2017 according to OECD (2018) was 0.461, equal to 11,714 International Dollar household disposable yearly income per capita. This is several times lower than results obtained by the research of Jebb et al., (2018), where the life satisfaction satiation point was found at 45,000 International Dollar, and positive affect satiation point was at 35,000 International Dollar for Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Though differences may partially arise as a result of different methods used for household disposable yearly income per capita estimation and methods for statistical analysis, they cannot explain the significant differences between the results obtained.

Putting this incongruence aside, the fundamental questions concerning income and the SWB relationship still remain. What determines satiation point and why is it so different in different countries? Is it determined by average income in a given social context or factual purchasing power that allow individual to gratify his most important needs? Does the SWB and income relationship dependence on dominant societal values show its highest power in materialistic cultures and subdues in other cultures? Or is the SWB income relationship determined by a unique set of social and cultural circumstances and values in each country? Answers to these questions are complicated and are still to be clarified as they require appropriate multifactor and multinational research designs. From the results of our study we can raise this hypothesis: the satiation point is likely to be linked to average income in a social context, and the factors beyond the satiation point might refer to other than economic factors. A research group from Human Study Center intends to analyse these factors further.

## Conclusions and practical applications

These findings suggest applications for both policy makers and employers. By following the currently domineering concept “higher income = higher SWB” in social politics and organization management, decision-makers may be statistically right. However, such overly simplified view is missing the point. Income relates to SWB only to a certain level until it reaches two goals: a) secures satisfaction of main individual needs and; b) is around the average income of other people in that social context thus allowing a person to feel equal and belonging to that social group. We think, that achievement of these goals creates the necessary base for SWB by allowing people feel comfortable enough both physically and socially. Once income gets above this point it stops to be a SWB related factor and the domain of SWB becomes related to other more complicated social and psychological factors.

What is said, makes the income satiation point quite an important concept from the perspective of applied psychology. Can we determine this income satiation level in numbers? If we can do research in every country, or every social group of interest, the answer is yes. By simplifying we can even approximate that the numbers might be around average income at a time in a given social context. But, once we start looking for a universal “magical number”, that fits every country or social group within it, the answer is no. Numbers might substantially vary in different countries and with social and/or professional groups, depending on many factors (such as average income, parity of purchasing power with different currencies, wealth distribution, dominant social values).

Translating scientific research results to actions is always complicated and ambiguous as real life presents a vast number of factors not considered in any individual study. Nevertheless, we see three main practical implications from our research to be considered by both policy makers and employers:

- We can expect that income increase in lower income up to average income groups will increase their SWB;
- Factors other than financial factors impact individual SWB once income reaches the satiation point;

- It is worth considering increasing minimum wages and seeking more even income distribution among people by salary policies, tax and compensatory mechanisms. This would help to avoid a negative impact of obvious financial inequality on SWB in a social context and/or society.

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# Mapping and assessing psychosocial risk factors for individual- and organizational-level occupational stress intervention

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Mare Teichmann holds PhD in Psychology from the Behterev Psychoneurological Institute Leningrad, now Saint Petersburg. She is founder and Chair of Psychology at Institute of Industrial Psychology at Tallinn University of Technology where she is now Professor Emeritus. She is a member of several professional boards and councils, including Chair of the WHO Estonian Quality of Life Centre, the EAWOP and Estonian Work and Organizational Psychology Association and the Estonian representative of European Network of Work and Organizational Psychology (ENOP). She is a pioneer in e-learning solutions in Estonia. Parallel to academic work she has been applying science-based knowledge and psychological methods to practice; as CEO of PE Konsult Ltd.

## Abstract

Various international organizations have raised awareness regarding psychosocial risks and work-related stress. From January 1, 2019, an amendment to the Estonian Occupational Health and Safety Act came into force, obliging the employer to take measures to improve the psychosocial environment of the company in order to prevent health damage caused by psychosocial hazards. In current paper the focus is on: a) developing a mapping tool for psychosocial risk factors at work (Organizational Psychosocial Factors Indicator, OPSTI); b) delivering automatic feedback for the OPSTI test taker; c) evaluating workplace psychosocial risks at work by developing an organizational level psychosocial risk assessment system compliant with the requirements of European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA); and d) developing different occupational stress interventions.

**Keywords:** work-related stress, psychosocial risk factors, OPSTI test

## Introduction

Occupational stress is a growing problem that results in substantial cost to individual employees and work organizations in Estonia. The 6th European Working Conditions Survey (Eurofound, 2016) shows that in 2015, 27% of workers in Europe said they experience work-related stress for all or most of their working time. In Estonia, there

was an increase the general levels of work-related stress; for example, from 26% in 2001 to 32% in 2005. In recent years, the work-related stress level has decreased slightly; but remains fairly stable (around 15–18% between 2010 and 2015). Such levels of strain are likely to impact the economy. Surveys conducted in the UK show the economic impact of work-related stress, in particular due to illness, absenteeism, loss of profit, and errors in work performance, makes an estimated 2.5 – 10% of GDP (Dollard, Winefield, A. & Winefield, H., 2003).

From January 1, 2019, an amendment to the Estonian Occupational Health and Safety Act (hereafter the Act) came into force, obliging the employer to take measures to improve the psychosocial environment of the company in order to prevent health damage caused by psychosocial hazards. This requires mapping and evaluating the psychosocial risk factors present in the company that may affect the individual employee's mental or physical health, including work-related stress.

The Act defines psychosocial hazards as follows:

- a) *"Psychosocial hazards are work involving a risk of an accident or violence, unequal treatment, bullying and harassment at work, work not corresponding to the abilities of an employee, working alone for an extended period of time and monotonous work and other factors related to management, organisation of work and working environment that may affect the mental or physical health of an employee, including causing work stress."*

Moreover, the Act imposes several obligations on the employer:

- b) *"In order to prevent damage to health arising from a psychosocial hazard, the employer shall take measures, including to adapt the organization of work and workplace to suit the employee, optimise the employee's workload, enable breaks to be included in the working time for the employee during the working day or shift and improve the enterprise's psychosocial working environment".*

These developments highlight that one of the major contributions of the change in the law could be better management of psychosocial risks, as well as clearly focused occupational stress interventions in work organizations.

Broadly, occupational stress interventions could be divided into two groups, namely, individual-level and organizational-level interventions. However, both

forms of intervention require the process to begin with mapping and assessment of psychosocial risk factors at employee level and organizational level, respectively.

## Developing a mapping process

The commitment to start mapping and assessing psychosocial risk factors for individual- and organizational-level stress intervention was new for Estonian organizations. Therefore, we designed a measurement tool called the Organization Psychosocial Factors Indicator (the OPSTI test). This test follows two classical occupational stress approaches. Firstly, the stressor-strain approach to occupational stress (Cooper & Williams, 1996; Cox, 1978; Hurrell, Nelson & Simmons, 1998; Spector et al., 2002; Teichmann & Ilvest, 2007), and secondly, the Job Demand Control Model (Karasek et al., 1998; Karasek & Theorell, 1990). On the other hand, the OPSTI test is directly following changes made in the Occupational Health and Safety Act (2019).

The OPSTI test is evidence-based and both the validity and reliability have been verified. In studies investigating the OPSTI (Nunnally, 1978; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Steiner, 2003) found both indices and factors maintained adequate internal consistency (at the 0.70 alpha coefficient).

An OPSTI test is specifically tailored to map and assess the psychosocial hazards listed in the Act at the level of the individual employee. Mapping and evaluating psychosocial factors at the organizational level is carried out by statistical data processing and by analysing the results of the survey conducted in the company.

The test consists of 60 items with six responses ranging from: 'Never / Very infrequently' to 'Always / Very frequently'. The test can be used electronically and is available in seven languages (including Estonian, Russian and English). Figure 1 gives an example of part of the test.

The procedure to use the OPSTI test involves: a) each employee completes a survey measuring psychosocial hazards at work and the level of their own work stress; b) each employee automatically receives electronic feedback on the psychosocial hazards of their own working environment; c) employees can compare their survey results with the average results in Estonia; and d) the factors can be aggregated to map the psychosocial risk factors of the company assessing the level of work stress of the

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workforce, and, to find ways to prevent the effects of psychosocial risk factors and to cope better with work stress.

Figure 1  
A screenshot of the online OPSTI test

The screenshot shows the OPSTI test interface. At the top left is the logo 'ASPE KONSULT' with a stylized Greek letter ψ. To its right is the text 'OPSTI TEST'. Below these are icons for various countries: Norway, United Kingdom, Russia, Germany, Poland, Sweden, and France. A text input field for 'Your E-mail address' is followed by a text input field for 'Age'. Under 'Gender', there are two radio buttons: 'Male' and 'Female'. The section 'WORK-RELATED DEMANDS' is titled 'Quantitative demands' and contains two questions: '1. In ordinary working day, do you have enough time to finish your tasks?' and '2. Can you mostly work without feeling rushed?'. To the right is an 'Assessment scale' from 1 to 6. The section 'Qualitative demands' contains two questions: '3. Does your work demand high degree of accuracy?' and '4. Do you have serious consequences of the mistakes you made?'. The 'Psychological demands' section is partially visible at the bottom. The background features a light blue gradient.

**Assessment scale:**  
1 = Never / Very infrequently  
2 = Very rarely / Infrequently  
3 = Rarely / Sometimes  
4 = Quite often / Occasionally  
5 = Very often / Frequently  
6 = Always / Very frequently

**WORK-RELATED DEMANDS**

Please use the scale to answer each question. Please select the answer that comes closest to your own opinion.

**Quantitative demands**

1. In ordinary working day, do you have enough time to finish your tasks?  
2. Can you mostly work without feeling rushed?

**Qualitative demands**

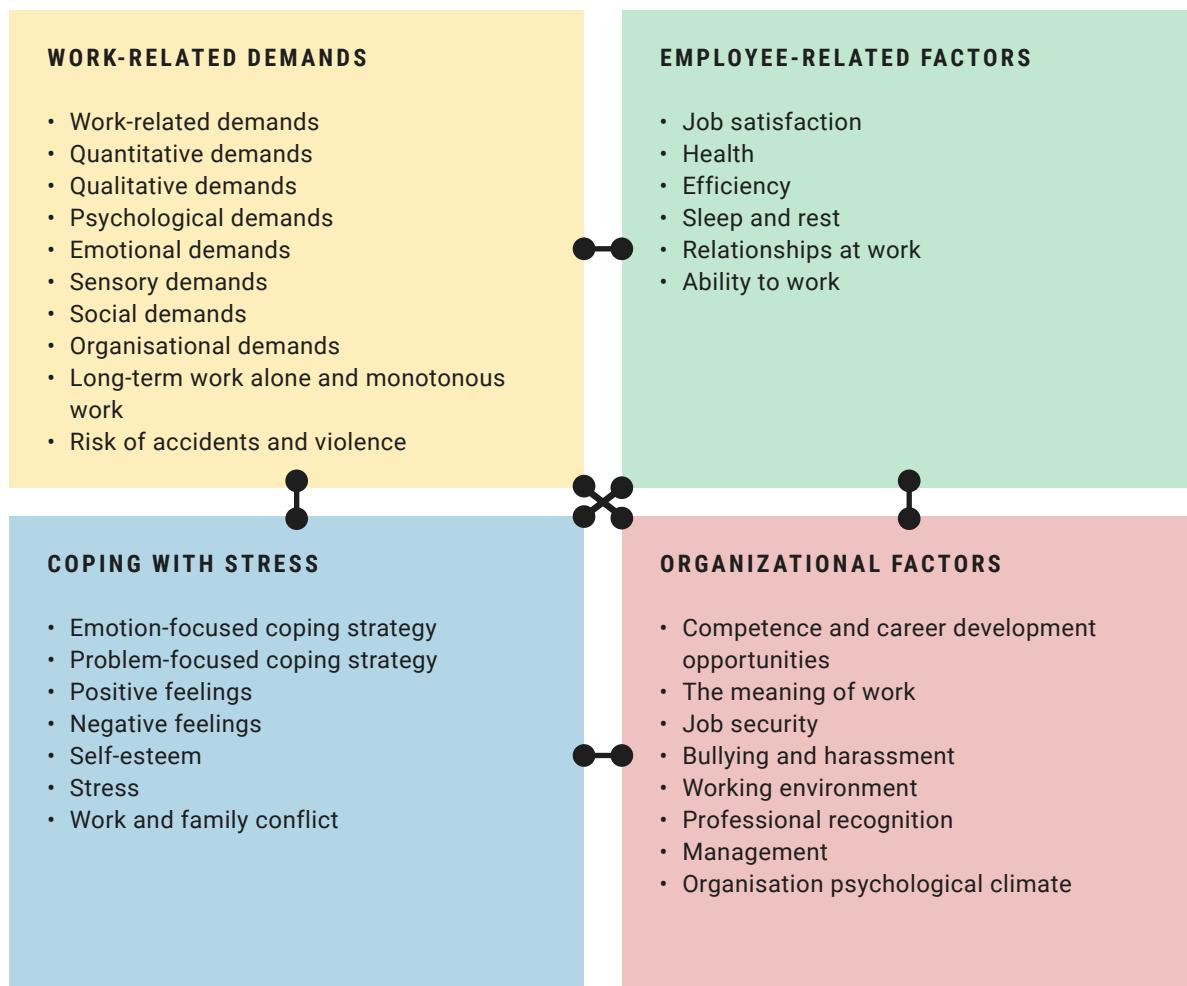
3. Does your work demand high degree of accuracy?  
4. Do you have serious consequences of the mistakes you made?

**Psychological demands**

The OPSTI test also contains four lay-scales that evaluate the trustworthiness of the test results. For example, including paired items like: “Are you an optimist?” and “Are you a pessimist?”. If the test taker answers both questions “Yes” or “No”, then the reliability of the test performance decreases by 25%.

The 60 test items incorporate four indexes and 30 factors (see Figure 2).

Figure 2  
Four indexes and 30 factors were incorporated into OPSTI test



## Testing the mapping process

The four Indexes are related moderately to well between each other showing internal consistency (see Table 1). Overall, OPSTI test scales maintained adequate internal consistency with reliabilities assessed with the widely accepted 0.70 coefficient alpha standard suggested by Nunnally (1979) was 0.86 in average of OPSTI test and alpha coefficients ranged from 0.79 to 0.84 by indexes. Our pilot study was obtained from a sample of 665 employees from different public and private sector organizations (45% males, average age was 42.4 years).

**Table 1**  
Internal consistency of OPSTI test

	N	INDEX	FACTORS	ITEMS	COEFFICIENT ALPHA
1.	665	Work-related demands	9	18	0.79
2.	663	Employee-related demands	6	12	0.83
3.	665	Coping with stress	7	14	0.80
4.	661	Organizational demands	8	16	0.84

An OPSTI test inter-correlation within indexes ranged from 0.29 to 0.53 and were significantly different at  $p < 0.05$ ; indicating the tests ability to differentiate between indexes (see Table 2). For, example, the lowest, but still significant correlation, was between Work-related demands and Coping with stress.

**Table 2**  
Inter-correlations within OPSTI test Indexes

	WORK-RELATED DEMANDS	EMPLOYEE-RELATED DEMANDS	COPING WITH STRESS	ORGANIZATIONAL DEMANDS
Work-related demands	1.00			
Employee-related demands	0.40	1.00		
Coping with stress	0.29	0.53	1.00	
Organizational demands	0.39	0.52	0.44	1.00

## Test feedback

Individual OPSTI test feedback is sent automatically to each employee's e-mail address after a few minutes of completing the test. The individual psychosocial factors of an employee can be compared with the average results in Estonia (see Table 3).

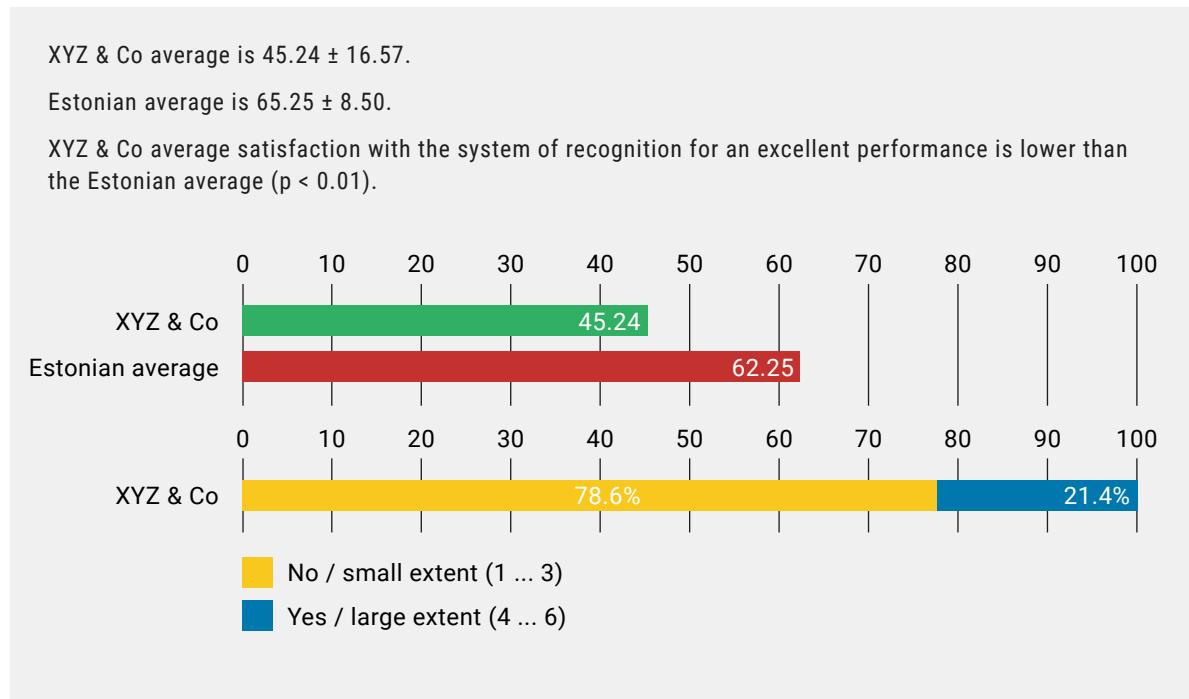
**Table 3**  
Example OPSTI test results for Work Related Demands

	YOUR SCORE	AVERAGE SCORE IN ESTONIA	±
Quantitative demands	80	62.58	7,00
Qualitative demands	90	33.03	7.00
Psychological demands	80	35.69	6.60
Emotional demands	70	58.10	8.10
Sensory demands	80	45.65	7.90
Social demands	70	33.53	6.60
Organizational demands	70	46.97	8.00
Long-term work alone or monotonous work	70	81.83	7.50
Risk of accidents and violence	70	73.53	9.10

Note: Higher scores indicate higher Work Related Demands. ± indicates range of error, plus or minus.

The work organization is provided with a comprehensive report of psychosocial risk factors within the organization at an aggregate level. The report presents the results of the study and statistical analyses including comparison with the average test indices and factors in Estonia. Figure 4 shows an example of organizational level feedback. For an example, company XYZ and Co (company name has been changed) significant ( $p<0.05$ ) correlations were found between Satisfaction with the system of recognition of excellent performance and with some OPSTI test items like: Enough time for finishing the tasks ( $r = 0.55$ ); Satisfaction with content of work ( $r = 0.56$ ); Positive emotions ( $r = 0.70$ ); Meaning of work ( $r = 0.62$ ); Leadership ( $r = 0.65$ ); and Coping with stress ( $r = 0.69$ ).

Figure 3  
An example of organizational level feedback



And finally, having a sufficiently large database, we detect how many of the 30 OPSTI test factors have statistically significant correlative links with each other. Of these, for example, Relationships at work were correlated with 25 factors, the Meaning of work correlated with 24 factors (see Figure 3). Such analysis draws attention to the most influential psychosocial risk factors, and it provides an opportunity for the better management of psychosocial risks within work organizations.

**Figure 4 - Part 1**  
Statistically significant links with between OPSTI factors

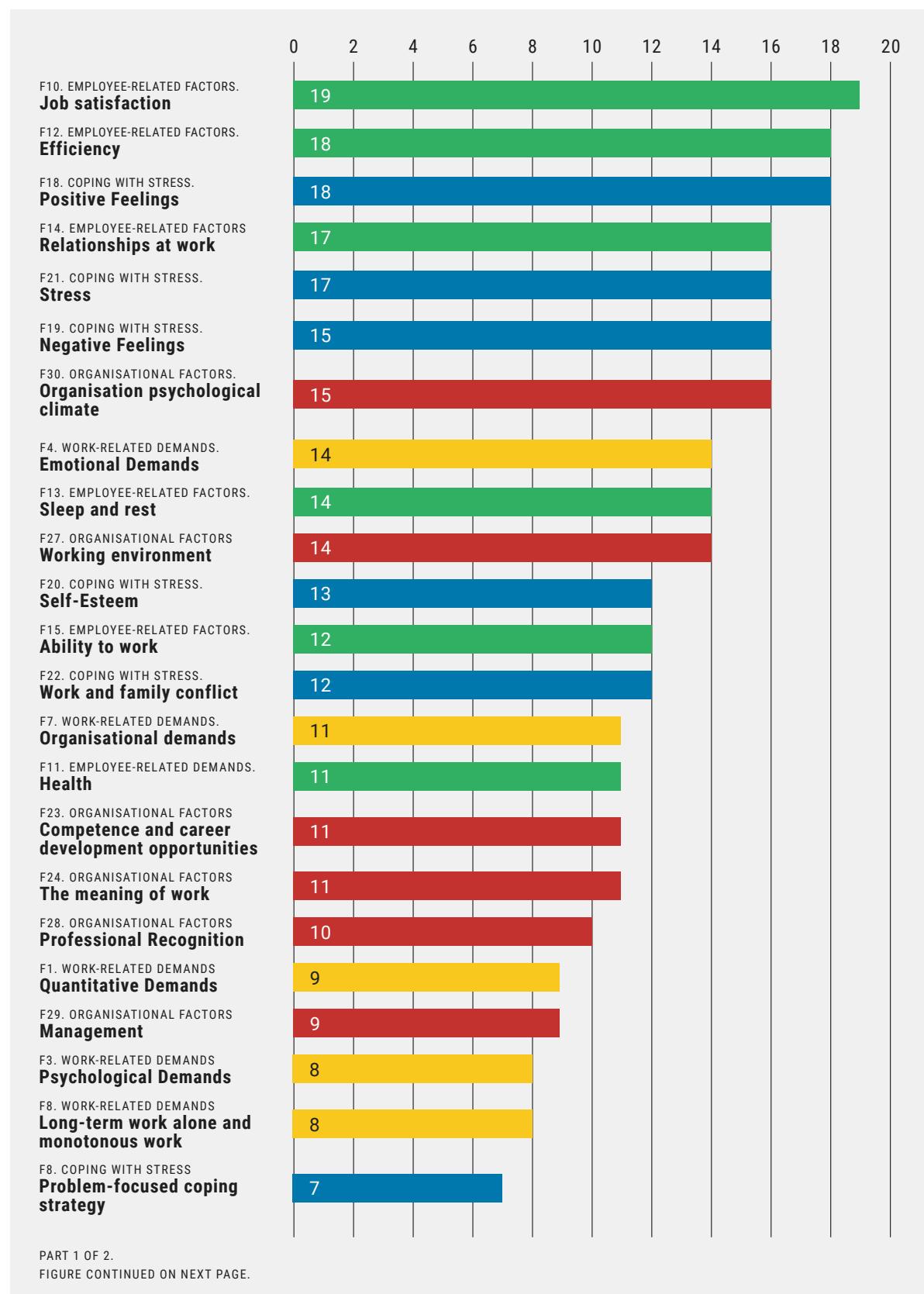
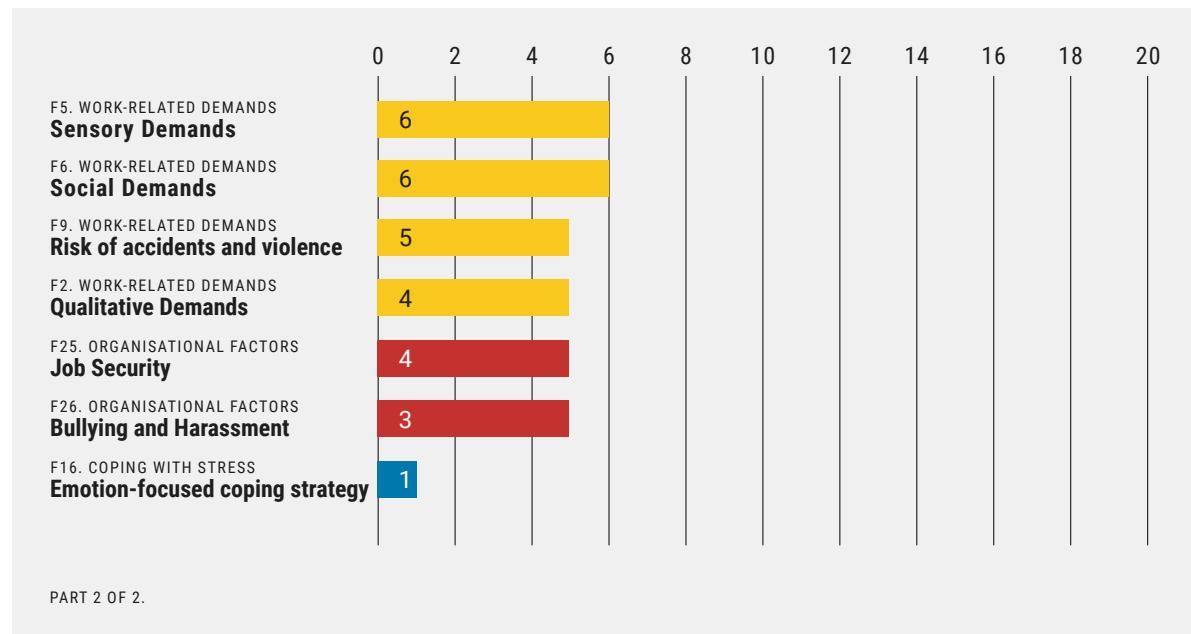


Figure 4 - Part 2  
Statistically significant links with between OPSTI factors



## Concluding remarks

Firstly, as individual studies give somewhat different results on how many employees actually experience occupational stress, we decided to control the facts, and ask employees directly how often they have tension and stress at work. In Estonia, a massive survey ( $n=8,794$ , 36,2% males, 523 organizations) was conducted about the wage fairness (Seeder, 2019). We were able to incorporate two additional questions into that survey about occupational stress and stress at home applying exactly the same questions and answer scales used in the OPSTI test. Findings show that 14% employees answered that they experienced occupational stress ‘Very often / Frequently’ and ‘Always / Very frequently’ and 32% answered, ‘Quite often / Occasionally’.

Our studies of psychosocial risk factors conducted in 2019 using the OPSTI test ( $n=1,203$ , 51% males, 13 organizations, among them five organizations from the public sector) our findings were less optimistic. Namely, 19.4% answered that they have occupational stress ‘Very often / Frequently’ and ‘Always / Very frequently’ and 30.8% answered, ‘Quite often / Occasionally’. This difference may be due to the fact that the whole OPSTI test was focused on occupational stress, whereas the payroll study

focused on additional things. However, we can conclude that occupational stress level in Estonia is not extremely high (between 14% and 19%).

In conclusion, some facts emerging from this recent study are:

- One third employees manifest sleep problems (31.7%), the relationship between sleep disorders and occupational stress is clear ( $r=0.34$ ;  $p<0.05$ );
- Almost half of the employees (57%) complain about poor working relationships, and half of employees are unable to balance their work and family life (47.2%), Over one third of employees (38%) have worries about losing their job. One third of employees does not know how to use different ways of dealing with work-related stress (33%);
- Occupational stress is associated with various stress symptoms: problems with health ( $r=-0.36$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), decreased efficiency and fatigue ( $r=-0.42$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), problems with sleep and rest ( $r=-0.34$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), experience tendency to eat, drink, or smoke more than usual ( $r=0.40$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), periods of feeling fatigued or exhausted at work ( $r=0.40$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), periods of feeling that you don't want to or don't have enough energy to get up in the morning ( $r=0.35$ ;  $p<0.05$ );
- Occupational stress is associated with different work-related demands: quantitative demands ( $r=0.45$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), psychological demands ( $r=0.42$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), emotional demands ( $r=0.35$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), social demands ( $r=0.24$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), organizational demands ( $r=0.31$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), risk of accidents and violence ( $r=0.2$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), and concerns about their work ability ( $r=0.40$ ;  $p<0.05$ );
- Occupational stress has negative correlation with employee-related factors: job satisfaction ( $r=-0.21$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), relationships at work ( $r=-0.24$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), workplace bullying ( $r=-0.28$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), satisfaction with workplace psychological micro-climate ( $r=-0.24$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), and satisfaction with leadership ( $r=-0.23$ ;  $p<0.05$ );
- Work-related stress is significantly related with both positive and negative emotions (respectively,  $r=0.27$  and  $r=-0.23$ ;  $p<0.05$ );
- Multitasking is related with occupational stress ( $0.42$ ;  $p<0.05$ ); with 58% of employees agreeing that their job requires multitasking 'Frequently' or 'Very frequently'.

Summarising, the findings listed above, I suggest that it is not enough to map psychosocial risk factors at an organizational level. For interventions to reduce occupational stress individual level actions (e.g., stress management training, coping strategies) need to be initiated to guarantee employee's competence and readiness to cope with stress. This includes raising an employee's awareness about psychosocial risk factors in their own workplace. At an organizational level I recommend strategic policies for stress reduction, including dealing one by one with the most significant psychosocial risk factors within the organization. This is significant work and occupational stress interventions are a special challenge for psychologists, HR specialists and safety and health professionals.

**Note:** more detailed information about the Organization Psychosocial Factors Indicator can be downloaded from <https://www.pekonsult.ee/testid/OPSTIen.pdf>).

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# He, She or They – Does it matter in the workplace?

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## Abstract

This study examines non-binary people's experience in the workplace with a special focus on the way they experience leadership. Five participants were interviewed and confronted with a hypothetical scenario in which they had to decide whether or not they would take a leadership position. The findings suggest that the non-binary gender identity and colleagues' attitude towards it affected their decision and in some cases would cause the participants to decline the leadership position. Difficulties navigating the workplace as a non-binary person are also discussed. It is concluded that having a non-binary gender identity complicates not only work life, but most of a person's daily life. However, more research is needed in order to clearly distinguish what the most pressing issues are.

*Keywords:* gender identity, gender roles, authenticity, leadership.

## Introduction

For many people, non-binary genders may be a new phenomenon. The term “non-binary gender” points to any gender that is neither male nor female. It can be a combination of both or something completely outside those categories. While non-binary (NB) people may experience the world very differently than binary (cisgendered) people do, there has been virtually no research into that unique experience. Non-binary gender identities tend not to be taken very seriously as it is a foreign concept to many, and they are often not legally recognised (Tritt, 2018). It is for this reason that many NB people are still not out, meaning that they are not open about their gender identity towards other people. The society we live in is by definition very much gendered; we base many of our social constructs on being either male or female. Fiske, Haslam and Fiske (1991) found that the most prevalent factors leading

to a person confusing two other people were gender and personal relationship. This means that gender is a primary factor we use when categorising people, underlining how very important gender is to us. Seeing as we only truly recognise two genders, it is perhaps not surprising that NB genders are far from being seen as a legitimate construct.

However, to make progress regarding this issue, research into NB is essential (Vargo, 2011). The lack of research into NB people is a cause for concern when taking into consideration the findings from Baum and colleagues (Baum et al., 2012) showing the difficulties they face. In their survey, they found that 27% of straight, cisgendered male youth reporting being “very happy”, while only 4% of gender-expansive (NB and transgender) youth gave the same response. Additionally, it was found that only 5% of gender-expansive youth reported “definitely fitting in” in their community while 30% reported “definitely not fitting in”. In contrast, roughly a third of straight, cisgendered youth (both male and female) responded that they were “definitely fitting in”. Harrison, Grant and Herman (2011) showed that transgender and NB people are twice as likely to be unemployed than the general population. Vargo (2011) also reports that gender-expansive people often experience more psychiatric disorder, substance abuse, and alcoholism.

Considering the fact that these were the results of the few pieces of research that have looked further into the lives of NB people, it seems to be important to learn more about the causes and effects of these findings. Therefore, this paper seeks to find out more about the consequences of having a NB gender identity and focuses on the workplace as this is a large part of one’s daily life. There is also a special focus on leadership as this can shed light on NB people’s sense of confidence and comfort within the workplace.

For clarity’s sake, when terms relating to binary genders (man, woman, men, women) are mentioned in this paper, unless otherwise specified, this refers to cisgendered men and women, or in other words, people whose gender identity is the same as their biological sex. The following section will define and explore some of the terms associated with these concepts.

## Gender and sex

In the context of this paper gender is considered a spectrum ranging from masculinity to femininity on which everyone has a place that can change over time; thus, it is not a binary concept (Baum et al., 2012). This place on the spectrum often, but not always, correlates with a person's biological sex. A person's (biological) sex is binary; it is either male or female, determined by the sex organs they have. The only exception to this rule are hermaphrodites, who are born with both sex organs. A person's sex can be different from a person's gender.

## Gender roles

The roles we have in our lives are heavily related to gender and the way in which it is expressed. When examining Eagly and Karau's (2002) theoretical article on role congruity theory, one could say that gender is something we do, not something we are. This view is further backed up by West and Zimmerman (1987) as well as by Richards and colleagues (Richards et al., 2016), who see gender as something that is embedded in interaction. A gender role can then be defined as the way in which we express the gender we identify with through (social) behaviour, appearance, and thinking style, for example; and is culturally dependant and can change over time.

Gender roles are related to authenticity, which by Hallam, Olsson, Bowes and Toumbourou (2006) is defined as being able to consistently express oneself congruently with one's own ethical values and innate talents and desires.

Gender roles are also different from gender stereotypes or norms, which include descriptive and prescriptive aspects of one's being. Heilman (2001) makes the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive processes but refers to both concepts as stereotypes. The current paper considers gender stereotypes a description of what a certain person should look and act based on certain characteristics, in this case gender (e.g., "women have long hair" or "men like sports"). Norms, then, are a set of prescriptions that different groups of people must adhere to based on certain characteristics (e.g., "men must be strong" or "women must not be sexually promiscuous"). Thus, gender stereotypes and norms refer to the way we traditionally view the two binary genders; they have to do with views from the extrinsic world. Gender roles are more intrinsic and personal; they refer to the way we choose to

express our gender and are influenced by the aforementioned extrinsic processes. In this research, gender and gender roles are presented as a unified theme as they are so heavily related to one another that making them into separate themes would negatively impact the cohesiveness of the paper.

## Leadership

In the context of this paper leadership refers to organizational leadership, which refers to the ability to influence individuals within an organization toward the achievement of a vision or set of goals. This definition was adapted from Robbins and Judge (2001).

Naturally, gender affects work life and leadership. This interaction is complex and multifaceted, but luckily it has been researched extensively.

To clarify what aspects of gender relevant for leadership, Goktepe and Schneider (1989) found that sex is not a predictor for leader emergence, but gender roles (“gender role orientation” in their words) are; in that the masculine gender role was strongly associated with leader emergence. The findings of Fiske and colleagues (Fiske et al., 1991) show that because gender is so important to us, it is a primary influence on leadership and can help determine not only who emerges as a leader, but it can also influence how a leader’s competence and performance is perceived by followers.

More depth into this notion can be found through role congruity theory, which is a leading theory created by Eagly and Karau (2002). The theory proposes that people have different “roles” that they play in their life, and others have assumptions about these roles as a result of societal influence. When the assumptions about one role (e.g., gender norms/stereotypes) are incongruent with the assumptions about another role (e.g., being a leader), the person is less likely to be seen as a successful occupant of one of these roles. This view was also asserted by Schein (1973) and Appelbaum, Audet and Miller (2003). The male gender role fits the socially constructed idea of a leader, which makes men appear to be more successful occupants of a leadership role, and the reverse effect can be seen in women.

Social identity theory (SIT) cannot be overlooked when considering these issues. Originally created by Tajfel and Turner (1979), SIT states that parts of our identity are determined by the social groups we belong to. In the group context, we see our own

group as the in-group and other groups and the people belonging to them out-groups. Intergroup communication can be challenging as out-groups are frequently placed in a negative light by the in-group. Within an organization, social identities may help newcomers feel comfortable, but can also be a source of conflict (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

It has been found that women encounter sexual discrimination in several forms in the workplace, making it especially difficult for them to obtain a leadership position (e.g., Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001). This problem is also referred to as the glass ceiling-effect, which continues to be a relevant issue in the workplace (Vial, Napier & Brescoll, 2016). Moreover, Ridgeway (2001) confirms that women are indeed at a disadvantage when trying to get into leadership positions, but ascribes this phenomenon to the theory that men are seen as having greater status. Being a man is more “desirable” and this works to the disadvantage of women.

Fletcher (2004) asserts that women might in fact be better fit to be leaders in today's culture. For instance, they tend to put more focus on mutual co-operation rather than strictly hierarchical leadership. However, she also theorises that when men engage in more “feminine” leadership behaviours, they are perceived as being innovative leaders, whereas the same behaviour in women is unconsciously associated with motherly behaviour. Interestingly enough, Daher and Guillaume (2016) found that leader effectiveness tends to be rated higher when the leader is more prototypical. For example, women with directive leadership styles are considered more effective because their demeanour is perceived as being prototypical for a leader. But, it is unclear how NB people are viewed in terms of leadership.

In summary, previous research makes clear that NB people seem more likely to have problems finding their way in life. There is no research on NB people in the workplace, but the vast amount of literature on gender and work life shows that women tend to encounter more difficulties than men do, and that men are by default seen as better leaders than women. For NB people, this poses an extra challenge; not only do they face difficulties because of their gender identity, but also have to face the same gender-related issues we all do.

## Method

To address the research question of how a NB gender identity shapes an individual's leadership experiences, this research employed an inductive qualitative approach, which is appropriate for new and under-developed research topics (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). The research aims to find out how having a NB gender identity affects one's experience of work life. It also intends to clarify what effect a NB gender identity has on one's desire to lead.

### Study participants and the interview process

Five people (P1 to P5) took part in the study contacted through a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. All participants except for P5 were people the author was at least vaguely acquainted with through their studies. P5 was found through another person acquainted with the author. The participants were all contacted through Facebook. As it is extremely challenging to find NB participants, these sampling methods were considered adequate. Participants were aged 20–23 years and their gender identity and nationality are described in Table 1.

Table 1  
Participant age (at time of interview), gender identity, preferred and nationality

PARTICIPANT ID	AGE	GENDER IDENTITY	PREFERRED PRONOUNS	NATIONALITY
p1	22	Genderqueer	They/them	Dutch
p2	21	Genderfluid/gender non-conforming	She/her	Dutch
p3	20	Non-binary	They/them	Dutch
p4	20	Genderqueer/non-binary	They/them or she/her	Dutch
p5	23	Bigender: female and genderqueer/maverique	They/them	British

All participants have completed or are currently in the process of completing a university education. Four participants are still students, not yet having had full-time work; but they have part-time jobs in restaurants, warehouses, and stores.

One participant (P5) does have a full-time job in the medical sector. All are biologically female.

The research was carried out through one-on-one interviews via Skype or Google Hangouts, according to each participant's preference. Prior to the interviews, participants were asked to read through an information sheet, after which they signed a consent form. An interview consisting of 19 questions and a hypothetical scenario (see below) were created beforehand. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were digitally recorded and transcribed professionally. One interview recording included poor audio quality, thus the transcript includes some gaps. However, notes were taken during all interviews and in this case, the researcher's notes complemented the transcript. Notes were taken throughout all interviews in order to have a record of the participants' demeanour and body language in case anything stood out, and to have an alternative source of information in case the audio recordings were insufficient. The participants were aware of the notetaking and consented to it taking place.

The original scenario proposes that the participant has been working for the same company for a number of years and is offered a promotion to a more managerial position. The participant will receive a raise but also have more responsibilities and administrative tasks. Their colleagues know about their gender identity and most show an accepting attitude, but some do not.

First, the participants were asked about their age, education and work experience. They were then asked about the nature, origin and effect of their gender identity before going into the scenario and the questions about how they would respond to the hypothetical job offer and why they would respond in this manner. In each interview, the scenario was adapted in order to gain more detailed responses. This meant that the attitudes and opinions of various groups within the organization, namely upper management, Human Resources (HR), or future followers, would change to be more hostile or accommodating. The participants were also asked what they would do if they were not open about their gender identity at work.

## Data analysis

Data were analysed in NVivo using the template analysis method (King, 1998). Three themes (see below) were identified before starting the analysis based on the central constructs within the research. Throughout the analysis, additional themes were added and the hierarchy and structure of themes and their sub-themes was changed according to the narrative told by the data.

## Findings

The three themes identified in the analysis were leadership, gender, and gender roles (a sub-theme to gender identity).

### Leadership

After reading the original scenario, all participants except for P1 said that they would probably accept the job offer. The major factors in making this decision were generally the increasing salary, career progression, the fact that they already have experience working for the company, and confidence in taking on a leadership role.

P1 immediately brought up the influence of the opinions of their future followers and upper management:

*"Of course if the people that work under you don't like you then they start to raise complaints about you [...] and that puts your position in jeopardy".*

The participant would therefore consider it important to be supported by upper management and would prefer to speak to them as well as to their potential followers before deciding whether or not to take the position.

Changing aspects of the scenario such as the opinions of certain groups of people within the organization, or the amount of openness the participants handled around their gender identity also changed the responses. Generally speaking, participants felt comfortable taking the leadership position only when there was what they considered an adequate level of acceptance towards their gender identity.

P4 was the only participant that would take the position in any case. A hostile upper management would make them feel uncomfortable but they feel that their gender

identity is irrelevant to the work they do. In the case of a more hostile team, they would be uncomfortable but this would not necessarily stop them as they would be hierarchically a level above the team.

These findings show that participants mostly expected people in the workplace to be professional; that their performance should come before their gender identity, not the other way around. P2 felt that if her team were unaccepting towards her gender identity, it should be possible for her and her team to remain professional and leave personal issues out of the work dynamic. However, if the team were more openly hostile and HR were unwilling to support her as well, she would lean towards leaving the company all-together.

Speaking about leadership style and experience, most participants reported not having much experience but did generally feel comfortable taking on a leadership position, provided that they have enough knowledge and experience for the position in question. The participants had a rather people-focused leadership style, putting the emphasis on communication and mutual cooperation. Participants P2 and P3 both reported lacking assertiveness while P4 and P1 described themselves as being fairly assertive leaders.

In terms of the influence their gender identity had on the way the participants' experience leadership, P1, P2, and P5 noted that they were more aware of the mental health and personal experience of the people around them, including possible followers. Another participant, P5 mentions that as a leader, they specifically focus on providing a good role model for their followers; if they have a positive experience with a NB leader, this might change the way they look at NB people in general.

Further, P3 reported having difficulty identifying the influence of their gender identity on their leadership skills and experience:

*"I always think (...) where do I separate (...) gender and personality and how do they influence each other, so I'm never sure if I'm just a shy or a careful person or if because I always feel like I was hiding something that I've become like a more shy and careful person".*

## Gender and gender roles

The importance of gender roles is mentioned by P2:

*"...people do see me that way, as being gender fluid, and (...) with some people that comes first, (...) mostly with people who don't have any experience of that yet".*

Thus, according to her, gender comes first and she comes second. Related to this statement was another observation; she mentions that she would probably hesitate to take the position more if her team were mostly older men, because in her experience they are more difficult to work with, especially if you are a non-stereotypically feminine woman. Additionally, in terms of upper management, P2 says this could present the biggest problem. Her gender identity has influenced the way she interacts with authority figures, so if she were to be unsure of the opinions of the people higher up, she would sooner quit than talk to them because she would not expect them to understand or support her.

P5 discusses the influence a hostile attitude towards their gender identity on their choice to take or turn down the job offer:

*"I would have to think about would changing my position mean that I have to feel less confident in my gender identity, and probably take up a position I'm comfortable with anyway, like I'm not struggling salary wise... I'd probably prefer to stay in a less senior position if that means that I'm having less issues".*

However, they also said it might be a motivating factor that would drive them to try and prove themselves. Either way, a hostile attitude from any direction would affect their decision.

The scenario asked about what the participants would do if they were out at work, which they would generally not be in the current situation. P1 reports that if they were not out in the interview scenario, they would not have any doubts about taking the position.

Reasons for not taking the position that were not related to gender identity were not feeling comfortable with the job itself, not liking the people in the team, and a sexist work environment. The sexist work environment was related to the fact that the participants are biologically female.

For P3, the fact that they were out as NB in the scenario as well as the fact that this was supported by at least a part of the people at work is important. This would make them feel more comfortable because their primary concern would be whether or not to come out at work. If upper management were accepting of their gender identity but the team's attitude was leaning towards negative, however, they would not take the position because it would make it unpleasant to do the work itself. They do emphasise that this would only be the case if the team's attitude were clearly negative and P3 would see no possibility to change their opinions.

## Fitting into the workplace

A dominant theme throughout the interviews was the difficulties the participants experienced fitting into a society that puts a strong emphasis on gender. This leads them to often feel misunderstood. As told by P4:

*"If you're non-binary or gender queer or whatever people won't be able to understand because what you're going through is such [...] a unique experience you won't understand, and of course they can try to understand but they will never get to the 100 percent. Some people are supportive and some people are not, which makes it more painful..."*

Because of these feelings of being misunderstood and unsupported, the participants expressed difficulties disclosing their gender identities to others. As a result, none of the participants were out at work. The reasoning they gave for this was similar: their gender identity could be a point of friction and it was better not to risk creating tension. One participant (P3) expresses that at work, it is not necessary to be out, even though they consider their gender identity as a very important part of their being. This view was shared by the other participants. While they ideally would want to work in an environment where they can be out and supported, they are aware that this might not be possible. Further, P1, P3 and P4 saw it in their future to work in academic environments related to topics such as anthropology and gender studies, which they felt would be more accepting environments, but of course it is not certain that they will actually find work in those industries.

In more general terms, P1 says that their gender identity

*"does affect work because of course a lot of people just don't agree with it, [...] I might want a job in education so people don't necessarily want you around their kids".*

But, P5 notes that their gender identity influences their work life in another way:

*"I would (...) want to make our workplace very welcoming in that way [towards NB people] because maybe it's on my mind a little bit more (...) because it applies to me specifically".*

In general, the participants agree that a NB gender identity complicates daily life, and with that work life. While they might feel relatively confident in their leadership skills, the views others have on their gender identities might discourage them from taking on a leadership position, or make this decision rather complicated. Additionally, their biological sex and gender roles also influence this already complex decision.

## Discussion and implications for the workplace

The result of society's views that NB genders are illegitimate (Tritt, 2018) is that the participants are hesitant to be open about their gender identity, which leads them to often not be fully authentic. This lack of authenticity can then lead to decreased well-being (Hallam et al., 2006). Tying these findings back to those of Baum et al. (2012) and Harrison et al. (2011), it becomes clear that the lack of authenticity as a result of society's inability to accept NB genders as a concept could be a major factor in NB people's feelings of depression and not fitting in. This inevitably affects not only their personal lives, but also the work lives of NB people.

It is then not surprising that none of the participants were out at work, with P2 directly mentioning that they are afraid to be judged if they did come out at work. In the scenario, the participants were hypothetically out at work. Participants made it clear that they expect a certain degree of professionalism in the workplace, but this does not mean that there will not be any judgment. The research on gender norms and stereotypes shows how easy it is for people to have expectations of others without being conscious of it (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Heilman, 2001). According to Fiske and colleagues (Fiske et al., 1991), people primarily use gender as a way to categorise others. This is interesting when thinking about something P2 said.

They mentioned that with some people “the gender comes first and I come second”. If gender comes first, and NB genders are generally received with scepticism, this would naturally reflect negatively on NB people.

Eagly and Karau (2002) found that when there is role incongruity, the person in question is more likely to be seen as a competent occupant of one of the roles that are incongruent with each other. This seems to reflect what P2 said: it is difficult to be taken seriously as a leader if you are a non-stereotypical biological woman in a leadership position. P2’s gender role is already different from the norms and stereotypes attached to her biological sex, so there is incongruity between the way she is expected to look and behave (her role as a biological woman) and the way she actually looks and behaves (her gender role). However, Daher and Guillaume (2016) report that leaders are seen as more effective when they show a more prototypical (i.e., directive) leadership style. This leadership style shows classically male characteristics, and while P2 is not a prototypically feminine biological woman, she does report having a team-oriented and people-focused leadership style. She does not see herself as a natural leader but does consider herself a good leader. In contrast, P4 reports having a more directive leadership style, and they do consider themselves a natural leader. Additionally, P4 will sometimes be mistaken for a man, which shows that perhaps it is their gender role in combination with their leadership style that makes them a natural leader.

According to Fiske et al. (1991), we use gender as a primary means of categorising other people. It can thus be said that because society only recognises the two binary genders, those are the two main categories we use when mentally organising the people we know. This might mean that when people do not necessarily belong in either of those two categories, this is upsetting because it is dissonant with the methods we all use to make sense of the world. We could still use a person’s biological sex as a way to categorise people and we probably do, but the concept of NB people could be particularly difficult to get used to because it is incongruent with the way we feel things ought to be.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) note that finding a social identity through belonging to an in-group within the workplace helps socialisation. Non-binary people

might have difficulties doing this as their general social group based on gender is hugely unconventional and thus only fits within a very specific group. Thus, the nonconforming nature of a significant part of their social identity could cause mental distress. Moreover, because NB people express their gender differently than conventionally accepted, they might automatically be placed in the out-group by colleagues, leaving more space for conflict. Humans are predisposed to forming different groups; this is certainly not solvable, but conflict could be avoided by focusing on similarities rather than differences. This could be especially true for NB people as they generally tend to feel as though they are outcasts. Therefore, teambuilding exercises aimed to find similar aspects of individuals' identities and work with those instead of their differences might be of enormous value, not only for NB people, but for their colleagues as well.

The difficulties NB people experience seem to be deeply rooted in our society and the way we make sense of the world and of other people. While the increasing exposure of NB gender identities might signal the start of a movement towards a more gender neutral society, the experiences of the participants in this study signify that this shift, if indeed happening, is only just commencing. In the workplace, it is important for NB people to feel as though they are accepted for who they are. Awareness and tolerance building would contribute to this, but practical changes such as adding a NB option on application forms or adding gender neutral bathrooms might also have a positive impact.

### **Limitations and implications for future research**

The relatively low number of participants might have affected the reliability of the study. If more research about NB people were to be done, it would be desirable to find a larger sample of participants. The participants for this study were rather similar: all were biological women between the ages of 20 and 23 that were either still at university or had just finished university. This could have decreased the validity of this study as the sample is not very generalisable. In future studies, it might be interesting to look at older NB people and NB people that are biologically male. Another limitation of this study was that most participants did not have much leadership experience. This might make it difficult for them to envision themselves as a leader and to understand leadership in general. Again, this should be taken into account in future research.

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# Going straight into work from school: Young people's hoped-for occupational possible selves

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## Author biography

Emma is an Occupational Psychologist who has worked on a range of national and European projects over the past 20 years in the field of diversity and employment. She has supported hundreds of women and young people to build soft skills in order to enter/re-enter the labour market or start their own business, through coaching, training and mentoring projects. Emma is in the final stages of her PhD focusing on the topic of young people's transitions from education to employment. Emma's research has explored the experiences of young people who are choosing to go directly to work from school or further education college to work, rather than going to university. In addition, her research has explored managers' perceptions of young people entering the workplace directly from school. Emma is interested in the way we talk about young people in our society and how this may impact on young people's subsequent experiences in the workplace. She is also exploring how to encourage employers to take a more youth-friendly approach in their recruitment and development practices as well as showcasing the positives associated with employing young people. Emma is currently the Convenor of the British Psychological Society's Division of Occupational Psychology's working group on youth employment.

## Abstract

The latest (2016/17) destination figures for 18 year olds in England from the Department for Education (2018) showed that 22% of young people entered work directly following compulsory schooling; 6% started an apprenticeship; and the largest proportion (50%) continued on to university studies. The diversity of pathways that young people follow as part of their school to work transitions (STWT) is increasingly recognised as the reality for many young people operating within precarious labour markets across Europe. This paper presents a qualitative exploration of young people's accounts of their future hoped-for occupational possible selves (HOPS) in the period just prior to making the transition from education to employment for the first time. Findings are presented from a group of young people in the UK who made the decision to enter employment directly following completion of compulsory schooling at age 18 years, rather than following the more dominant route of university to employment. The paper outlines the diversity of HOPS expressed by the young people in the study

(in the form of drawings and talk) as well as how young people perceived the reactions of others' to these drawings. The paper applies the research findings to a range of practical applications for Work and Organizational Psychology practitioners and those working with young people in different capacities.

*Keywords:* possible selves, school to work transitions, youth, careers counselling

## Introduction

The question 'what do you want to be when you...' (grow up/are older/finish school/finish university?), is one that most of us have either asked, or been asked, at some point in our life. Whilst the question may be worded differently depending on the respondent's age, the premise of the question appears clear. At all ages and stages in life, you need to have a clear idea of the future career or job that you are working towards. A rich 'picture' in mind that you can somehow tap into and describe eloquently to your questioner. As a Doctoral Researcher I am interested in unpicking the notions tied up within this seemingly straightforward question we ask of young people as they come to the end of compulsory schooling (aged 18 years in the UK), especially for those young people who have not decided to take the dominant path of going to university.

Do young people, in particular (with limited or no exposure to work as yet), have these pictures in mind of what they hope for in their future careers? If they do, how do they build up these ideas of future jobs or careers? How do they describe them to others and what do they imagine others' reactions would be if they talked about their future hoped-for career? These questions and many others, brought me to doctoral research to explore young people's experiences of making the transition from education to employment for the first time. As a reader of EAWOP's InPractice, perhaps you yourself have a more fundamental question regarding youth transitions. Namely, why should Work and Organizational Psychologists (WOP) take an interest in such things?

Work and Organizational Psychologists often have a central role in the recruitment and development of people (including young people therefore) as well as sometimes working specifically in career counselling contexts with young people. If we are to better support young people when they start work or are looking to make choices

about and develop their future careers, we need to have a better understanding of how young people construct their HOPS, so that we can better understand motivations and goals within them and support young people accordingly. As WOP or other related professionals who work with organizations recruiting young people, we need to work alongside managers to break down unhelpful intergenerational stereotypes and at the same time equip organizations with the skills to support young people in the development of their best selves in work.

It is easy to feel a sense of despair about the state of the labour market in the UK for young people today. Young people continue to be the group most likely to be unemployed or in low-paid and precarious jobs. Combine this with high rents and a housing market with little opportunities for young people to get onto the first rung on the housing ladder, and it becomes difficult to feel hopeful about young people's future economic opportunities (Yates, 2019). Unhelpfully for young people in the UK, a difficult and complex economic climate is underpinned by an undercurrent of hostility at worst, and ridicule at best, from media and society at large intent on perpetuating myths around so-called 'millennials' being lazy, entitled and 'snowflakes', unable to cope with adversity (Mohdin, 2019).

Perhaps as a result of these economic and social changes and operating contexts for young people, transitions to adulthood are no longer standardised – there is no one 'right way' for young people to move from youth into adulthood (Schulenberg & Schoon, 2012). The field of academic youth transition research has however been slower to acknowledge this reality for young people. As a reaction, researchers in the last few years have begun calling for academics to recognise and explore more of the 'diverse pathways' young people take, as they navigate the education to employment journey (Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2017).

There is much talk about young people staying longer in education as a way of avoiding entering the labour market (e.g., Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2016). Young people who are able to delay transitions to adulthood, by remaining longer in education, for example, are however, more likely to be from families who can support young people financially in making this choice. Those who experience relatively fast transitions, moving quickly from education to some form of employment, tend to be from a less

privileged background (Schoon, Chen, Kneale & Jager, 2013). Inequality and education to employment transitions are therefore interlinked. Research focused on young people who leave education relatively early these days (before 21 years), and attempt to enter the labour market is scarce. These young people are the 'missing middle' (Roberts, 2004) or the 'forgotten half' (Birdwell, Grist & Margo, 2011).

Young people moving straight from school or a further education college directly into work (including Apprenticeships) were the focus of my research in an attempt to bring some attention to those perspectives missing from research currently. My aim was to broaden understanding of education to employment transitions away from extreme narratives often featured in transitions research (higher education graduates versus young people outside of the labour market), and explore the pre-transitional experiences of young people from this 'missing middle'.

This paper presents the findings from a section of my PhD research. I begin with an introduction to the theoretical lens I employed for this part of my study: the Theory of Possible Selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). I will then move to briefly describe the methods used (visual methods and interviews) and my approach to analysis (thematic and discursive). I will then move on to present an overview of the findings, focusing on the ways in which young people talk about their HOPS. I will end this paper with some thoughts on potential application of my findings to three relevant groups: WOPs; employers; and Career Counsellors.

### **Theoretical lens utilised within my research: Theory of Possible Selves**

Markus & Nurius (1986) provide a framework to better understand how young people develop internalised future possibilities during the education to employment transition. Possible selves are "future-projected" aspects of self-knowledge – an individual's perception of what is potentially possible for themselves. They are cognitive images of an individual's hopes, fears, and fantasies for the future. Possible selves importantly include both positive and negative possibilities for the future – selves which we hope we are moving towards but also those which we are fearful of ('hoped-for selves' and 'feared selves') (Markus & Nurius, 1986). This theory was built upon within a Work and Organizational context by Strauss (2009) who focused on an individual's hoped-for future possible selves in relation to work and termed these

our Future Work Selves (FWS). Research in this area has explored links between FWS, motivation and proactivity at work (Strauss, Griffin, & Parker, 2012; Strauss & Parker, 2018). My PhD research looked at both types of possible selves in young people prior to the STWT. This paper however presents only the hoped-for occupational possible selves, due to space constraints.

Whilst possible selves are framed as cognitive images, my focus was on how young people construct and re-construct these future identities through their talk, as part of their 'Identity Work' (Watson, 2008) during transitional times. Understanding the projected futures young people see for themselves could lead to better support (from educational institutions, parents and other supporters) for young people to work through these potential selves, to achieve their best possible self, tapping into useful motivational aspects of possible selves. If young people are self-limiting, or anxious about their future potential, for example, those supporting young people's transitions need this knowledge, in order to be able to provide better quality guidance. The psychological concepts surrounding possible selves link with transitions as these are acknowledged as times when individuals are 're-negotiating a sense of self' (Bowen, 2016; Mercer, 2007) or re-constructing identities (Ng & Feldman, 2007). The Theory of Possible Selves also relates to the aforementioned notions of acknowledging 'diverse pathways' within education to employment transitions (Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2017) as a psychological device through which young people imagine a range of potential future career paths.

## Method

To explore young people's possible occupational selves, I used a qualitative approach – not claiming to be revealing one 'truth' in my research, and acknowledging my active role as a researcher in shaping the process and findings as a result of my own positionality. I used an interpretative and reflexive approach to data analysis which enabled me to explore both overall themes within young people's possible selves. Within the data I looked at both a micro level of discourse (discursive devices such as metaphors used, for example) and macro level (educational or societal discourses referred to or implied) in the way young people talked about and drew pictures of

their HOPS. This approach is a branch of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), identified as thematic discourse analysis (Clarke, 2005).

As with any research project, gaining access to participants was a lengthy process of negotiation between myself and 'gatekeepers' from various further education colleges and schools, over a number of months. The recruitment process was challenging predominantly due to the project's focus on young people and colleges and schools rightly being concerned about associated safeguarding (measures to protect children and young people's health and well-being) and confidentiality issues. I was able to put gatekeepers' minds at rest regarding these via discussion of my ethics application that was university-approved and covered their areas of concern. Thirteen young people (aged 16–19 years) were recruited (seven from a sixth form in a high school; six from a further education college). Participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews (approximately one hour in length) and asked to produce drawings of their hoped-for and feared-for future occupational possible selves during the interview. I introduced the notion that we all have hopes for our future in terms of work once we finish school or college, and that I was interested in seeing what kind of job or career they would really like to be in once they finished their education. I reminded participants that there was no judgement regarding the quality of their drawings, but that it was merely a different way for us to talk about their work hopes for the future. These drawings then formed the basis of the conversation between participants and myself. Participants were from a range of subject areas, studying A levels (Advanced Level qualifications taken usually at 18 years old prior to university education) or further education vocational qualifications such as Diplomas. Participants were recruited from a secondary school (from the final two years of compulsory education known in England as 'sixth form') and a vocational education college in the North of England.

Asking young people to draw pictures to represent their future possible selves (feared for and hoped for) provided greater scope for exploring the 'malleability' of possible selves and how young people go about constructing future identities and carrying out Identity Work (Watson, 2008). On a practical level, the drawings provided a useful sense of structure for our conversations and were a valuable device to engage with young people on topics that could potentially evoke strong and complex reactions.

All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim by the author and were analysed alongside participants' drawings, to develop a series of themes across the data, some of which will be presented in the next section. All names featured in this paper are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and protect participants' identities.

## Findings

This section will begin by presenting an overview of the findings from my study regarding young people's HOPS. Firstly, I present a visual collage, developed from elements of a number of participants' drawings of their HOPS. I will then proceed to present a number of themes identified and developed during my analysis relating to young people's HOPS (grouped according to whether they were perceptions from the self; family; or teachers): a) Self-perceptions ('Picturing the Future as a Dream Come True'; 'Confusion and Uncertainty about the Future'); b) Anticipated reactions from family members ('Family Notions of Success'; 'Perceived Lack of Support from Family for the Future'); and c) Anticipated reactions of teachers ('Making Teachers Proud'; and 'Disappointing Your Teachers').

### An overview of participants' key visually expressed themes

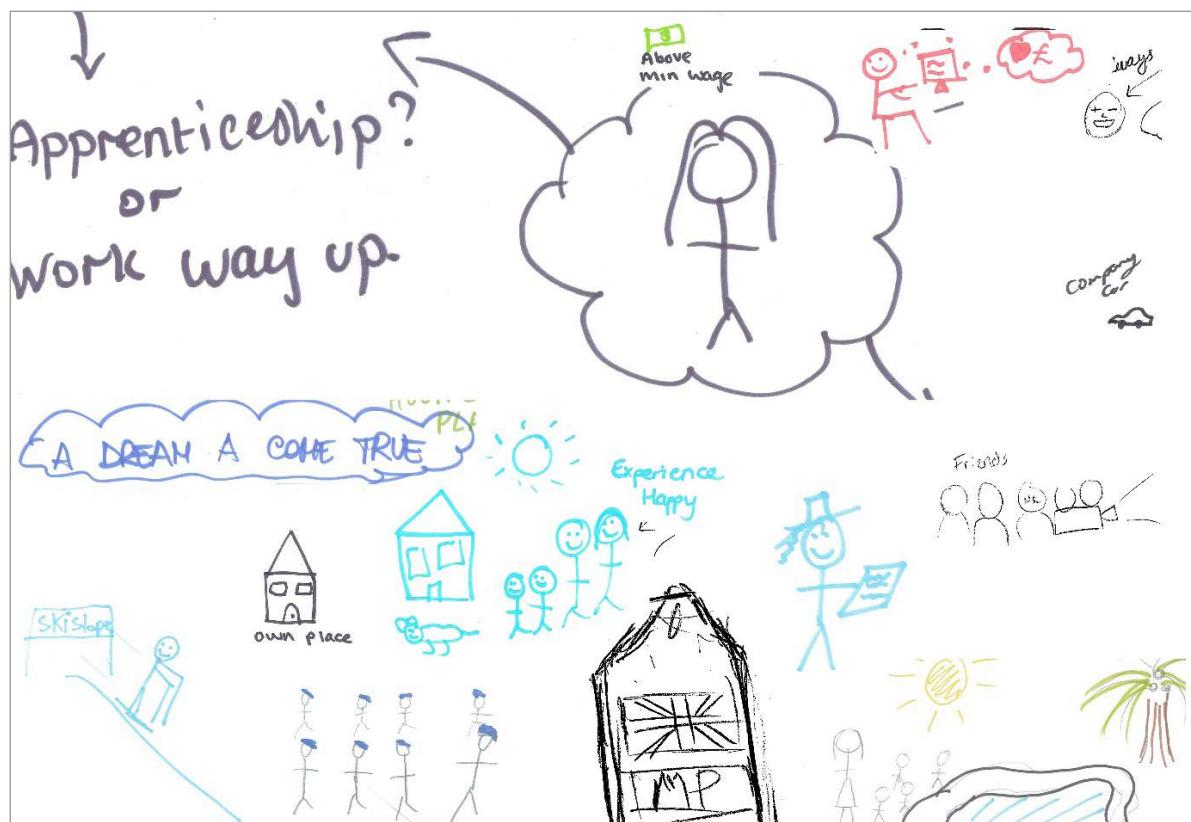
Figure 1 shows a collage of key elements from participants' drawings produced when asked to draw a picture of what they hoped to be doing for work once they had finished sixth form or college. There were a combination of hopes in relation to tasks in future jobs and careers, in addition to additional benefits to be gained from work. For example, participants drew pictures of performing tasks such as leading a group of people in the Army (the stick figures with blue berets), doing accounts on the computer (stick figure in red) or directing a film with friends (old fashioned video camera). Whilst some job-situated tasks were drawn, the majority of elements featured in participants' drawings related more to additional benefits that young people imagined would be associated with achieving their HOPS. For example, participants drew images of financial benefits they saw as being part of their hoped-for future selves, such as having a company car; renting or owning their own home or 'own place'; and earning money (in varying desired amounts).

Participants also drew images related to the perceived social benefits they hoped for in their future career, such as:

- having a happy family in addition to renting or owning their own home (blue stick figures);
- being happy at work (happy working at the computer);
- having friends at work (with the film camera);
- working abroad in a sunny climate (palm trees and pool);
- being proud of where they worked (British flag on building);
- having fun and adventure at work (skiing).

Some uncertainties about the future from participants also appeared on their hoped-for future selves' drawings, despite a positive focus overall. For example, Helen, who was uncertain about the route to her future hoped-for work self, added 'apprenticeship?' or 'work way up' to her drawing, to show confusion, not with the end of the journey (a career in design) but with the path to take to best achieve it.

Figure 1  
Collage of Elements from Participants' HOPS



I now move onto presenting a selection of themes developed to illustrate how the young people talked about their own interpretations and reactions to their drawings, as well as the anticipated reactions of others, towards their HOPs.

## Participants' reactions to their HOPs drawings

### Picturing the Future as a Dream Come True

When asked how they felt looking at the picture they had drawn of their hoped-for future self at work, some participants talked of this evoking a positive and dream-like feeling. Looking at the picture helped them to tap into the positive emotions associated with achieving this goal in the future. Olive summarised her future hope of joining the military as a long-term goal achieved, stating that her drawing encapsulated her long-held future career hopes:

*Olive: "Well, the picture...basically it's what I've wanted to do for a long time..."*

Similarly, Helen emphasised that seeing her completed drawing immediately motivated her, bringing the positive thoughts of the future to expected reality and again focussing in on goal achievement. Her use of the words 'I want to get to' shows her awareness that this was a journey for her, one which she had the end goal clearly mapped out in her mind:

*Helen: "Cos like...that's my goal...that's what I want to get to..."*

*Helen: "It is my dream job...I can just imagine like...I'm looking forward to it because it is my dream job so it's the sort of thing I want to do."*

### Confusion and Uncertainty about the Future

Contrasting with some participants using the dream-like narrative when describing and drawing what their hoped-for future work self would be, Amanda used the word 'dream' derogatively to illustrate that working out what you want to do in your future was not something without effort, as is implied by the dream analogy; you have to work at it. Amanda felt completely 'lost' about what she wanted to do next and felt that it was hard work deciding what you wanted to do. She had a realist view and felt strongly that working out your future career hopes was not some kind of 'magic', where you would be visited by a dream guiding you to your future career. This realist perspective contrasts starkly with the general careers discourse young

people are exposed to on the internet and social media. For example, Google returned 763,000,000 results to the search term 'dream jobs'.

*Amanda: "I think...obviously I have to put some work into it (laughs)...it's not gonna like magically like show up to me...like a dream or something (laughs) that I really want to do this..."*

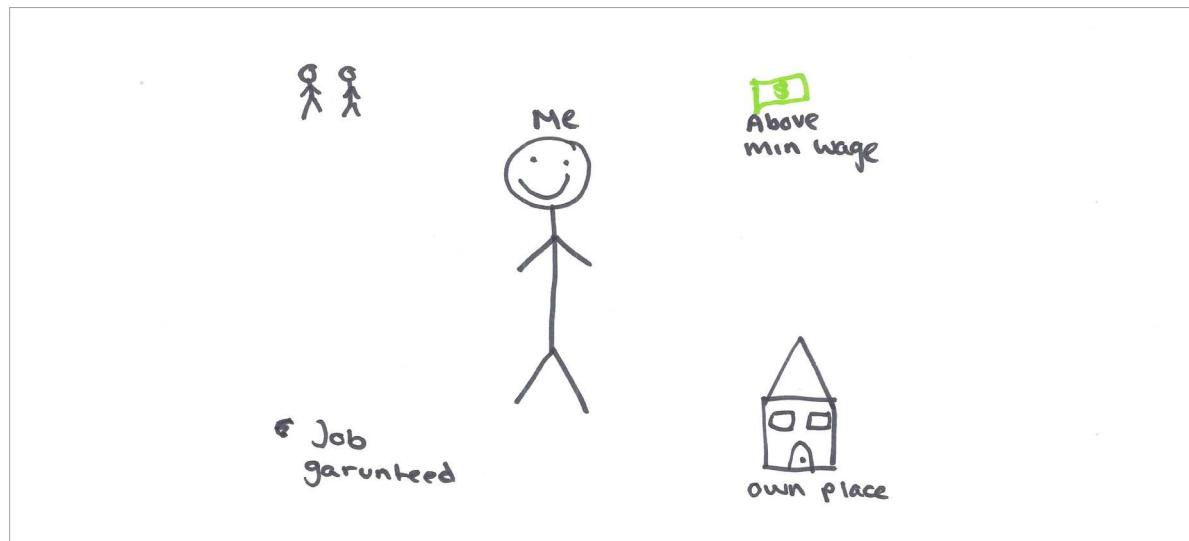
Contrasting with participants who had detailed ideas on their future 'dream jobs' and hoped-for future work selves, participants who felt more confused and uncertain about their futures in work expressed their futures in more cautious terms. Melissa's drawing of her hoped-for future work self (see Figure 2) focused on her wishes to have a job that was 'above the minimum wage'. Her expectations could be seen either as realistic or self-limiting, depending on which discourse you draw upon linked to young people's aspirations.

Salary expectations of young people are routinely mocked in the British media, as yet another example of young people's unrealistic expectations of work, packaged up within stereotyped references to 'millennials' (Jacobs, 2013). Unpacking this further necessitates reflection on young people's levels of exposure to 'real' salaries by careers guidance professionals, teachers and others in their networks. If young people are not provided with this guidance and their social networks contain young people working in minimum wage jobs, such as Melissa's, for example, then this is the data that young people will use as a reference point.

For Melissa, the hopes for her future career centred on what the future job could provide for her, in terms of personal, social and economic resources, as opposed to the tasks or activities she would be undertaking. Providing her with her 'own place', security and stability in the form of a 'job garunteed [guaranteed]' and working somewhere where people were 'friendly' (shown by the two stick figures in the top left of her drawing) were essential elements for her. The matter of what job or career was going to provide these, was less important to her.

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Figure 2  
Melissa's HOPS



## Participants' anticipated reactions of family members

### Family Notions of Success

Sarah's first reaction of her family's judgement regarding her drawing of herself as a design professional was that her parents would be 'satisfied', because of their desire for her to be successful at work. The implication here being that in order for them to be satisfied with her future career choices, she would need to be in a 'professional' career such as a Doctor, Lawyer or Architect, which their careers narrative associated with greater success. Her choice of the word 'satisfied', compared to a word such as 'pleased' or 'proud' implied her parents had high demands for her future, and dampened Sarah's mood slightly in respect to her future hoped-for career. To have a professional career was merely an expectation for her parents, not an achievement owned by Sarah.

*Sarah: "Well I think my parents are satisfied...because they just want to see me successful..."*

The idea of success featured in several participants' discourses around their HOPS, varying in its meaning to the individual, due to this notion being such an individualised concept influenced by discourses from a range of sources such as family, educational and the media.

### **Perceived Lack of Support from Family for the Future**

The perception that parents would not always be supportive of a participant's HOPS was apparent in Greg's description of his anticipated negative attitude of his mother (mum) towards his hoped-for future career:

*Greg: "well mum would say...something along the lines of...there's no chance of being another Ed Sheeran sort of thing (laughs)... <Emma (Researcher): <right> and I'm like...no...I don't want to be another Ed Sheeran, I want to be my...the first kind of person sort of thing...um..."*

Greg felt that his family and his mum would belittle his hoped-for future career (full-time musician), bringing him back to 'reality', by stating that there was 'no chance' of him becoming a great success as a musician. Using the example of Ed Sheeran (male singer/songwriter who gained worldwide success making music from his bedroom); Greg showed his awareness that there would be a low chance of this scale of success for himself (as for many musicians); but that he still wanted to pursue his own individualised dreams of success and define career success on his own terms.

The harsh realities for young people's career aspirations versus the reality of jobs young people are most likely to work in, is illustrated by the Office for National Statistics (2018) report on the 'Top Five Dream Jobs' of young people in the UK (based on a survey of 1,407 16–21 year olds). For example, just over 11% of young people had aspirations for an artistic, literary or media career, whereas only 1% of 22–29 year olds worked in these types of jobs.

### **Participants' anticipated reactions of teachers**

#### **Making Teachers Proud**

Participants spoke of an expectation of positive judgement from teachers and other professionals within the school or college environment upon viewing their drawing of their hoped-for future work self. Helen spoke of the happiness she believed that her college teachers would feel if they saw her drawing which featured a clearly defined hoped-for future career, due to the clarity she had for her future career path in design:

*Helen: "um...I think they'd be happy...(laughing) cos a lot of people in my class don't tend...like a lot of them don't really have aspirations or don't really know what they're doing...but I think I'm one of the people in the class who do know what they're doing so I think they'd be quite pleased that I've got my head straight (laughs) and I've got an idea of where I want to go."*

Helen compared herself favourably with other students in her class who she judged to lack 'aspirations' or 'don't really know what they're doing'. Helen appeared to be drawing from a discourse of individualisation, which focuses on the need to 'know what you are doing' at all times and have a clear sense of 'project you' (Giddens, 2016). Fear of a negative judgement towards young people who are unsure of their future career trajectory, is implied here.

### **Disappointing Your Teachers**

In contrast, Greg stated that he would imagine a sense of negative judgements and disappointment from his teachers about his drawing of his hoped-for future work self (musician).

*Greg: "um...I know my Maths teacher would be disappointed (laughs)."*

Greg spoke of having originally wanting to enter a career in Accountancy but had then changed his mind to see if he could focus on a career in music. He spoke about how teachers felt it was a disappointment if you did not 'choose' their topic as your future career. Some participants perceived that a teacher's primary goal was to persuade young people to follow the same topic or career they had.

Amanda also spoke of a judgemental attitude expected from teachers at college about her future plans (which she herself acknowledged as being very unclear). She reflected on the nature of success and the definition of career success in particular being dependent upon individual teachers' views, as to whether it was about being happy in your work or well-paid, for example. Amanda described two educational discourses ('go to university' versus 'do what makes you happy'), as representing teachers' views on the 'best' route to future career success. These mirrored the way she talked about her own struggle to decide what she wanted to do in the future. Amanda appeared to feel surrounded by teachers, family and friends re-producing the dominant discourse of 'if you are bright, you go to university', but had temporarily pushed back against this position by deciding to go and work abroad for a year to have time out to consider and reflect on her future options.

To summarise, the young people who participated in my study expressed (talked about and drew pictures illustrating):

- a variety of future hoped-for occupational possible selves (HOPS);
- a range of financial and social benefits they expected to gain from work;
- fulfilling their HOPS would be a 'dream' come true;
- fear of disappointing teachers by not choosing the subjects that teachers taught them;
- an expectation that teachers would be proud if they had a clear future HOPS;
- a sense of uncertainty and confusion regarding HOPS;
- a perceived lack of support from family about their HOPS;
- differences in family notions of what it means to be successful at work in the future.

## Discussion

The findings presented in this paper regarding the ways in which young people drew pictures of and talked about their future HOPS illustrates the tensions and contradictions present as individuals go about their 'Identity Work' in the early stages of shaping future career identities as they embark on the STWT. For example, some young people spoke of wanting to make teachers proud of them in the future career path they took, whilst others felt anxious that they were somehow letting teachers down. Some participants talked about a strong sense of family support for their future 'dream' job whilst others perceived a lack of familial support for their future choices and hopes. Utilising the theoretical framework of Possible Selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) combined with the visual method of participant-produced drawings, facilitated young people's expressions of what they were hoping for in future careers or jobs and shaped our conversations almost as career counselling sessions.

Participants expressed a diverse range of HOPS, with varying degrees of clarity and certainty. Young people's HOPS are clearly not homogeneous, just in the same way that young people themselves are not. There is no one HOPS that represents all young people from the 'missing middle', and neither should we wish for this to be the case. This diversity of future work identities and the ways young people go about shaping and talking about these, represents both a challenge and an opportunity for those

practitioners and professionals working with young people as they locate their way through education to employment transitions and embark on career decisions.

## Potential Applications

As Work and Organizational Psychologists, we are Applied Psychologists, and are therefore rightly concerned with the practical application of research to the individuals and organizations we work with. Based on my research findings, I offer a number of potential applications:

- Potential employers need to be aware of the re-construction of identity which is a common feature of young people embarking on the early stages of making the transition from education to employment. Their future hoped-for careers or jobs are malleable and not yet fixed for many young people. As this appears to be an active and co-constructive exercise, employers could therefore work alongside young people to recognise this active shaping process that naturally occurs during the transition to employment and support young people better through this. For example, employers could acknowledge and recognise that young people may be 'trying out' hoped-for careers or aspects of hoped-for careers in their first jobs and may need support in job crafting activities or career development support to realise their hoped-for selves in work.
- These findings show the importance of the anticipated or expected reactions of 'others' (family and teachers, for example) towards young people's HOPS. All the agents involved in the STWT therefore need to work more collaboratively as an active support network for young people as they move from education to employment. Employers need to work earlier on with young people prior to them making decisions which will affect how they shape their HOPS, in conjunction with families, teachers and careers professionals, if they are interested in better supporting young people through the transition to work process.
- The value of using the theory of Possible Selves as a framework to help young people explore future possible occupational selves (both hoped and feared-for) and to start dialogue in career counselling conversations regarding hoped-for and feared-for future occupational selves is clear. In practical application of this theory, I see a strong case for the benefits gained from working with visual methods with clients

within career counselling or career guidance sessions. For example, asking young people to draw future general possible selves, or to produce other images to visually represent future identities which can be difficult to verbalise, such as collages (cutting out pictures from magazines that culminate to represent a future self, for example). These could enable deeper discussions and reflections to take place between careers professionals and young people as they embark on crucial decision-making about their futures, as well as enabling clients to tap into important motivational components of possible selves by linking future hopes to current goals and tasks.

## Conclusions

I talked about the bleak state of the UK labour market in the introduction to this paper. It seems apt therefore to attempt to finish the paper on a more optimistic tone. The strengths, along with hope and optimism for their futures in work shown by young people in my study were many and varied. These strengths included the ability to be open and honest about their future occupational hopes and worries as well as reflecting on their own perspectives and those of others as they navigate their way through uncertain futures. The young people I spoke with demonstrated that they had the ability (and agency) to recognise, access, and utilise a wide range of individuals and sources of support to help them through a complex transitional time, such as the school to work transition. Skills such as these are all highly sought-after by employers and organizations and highlight the emerging self-reflection and self-awareness skills many young people have that could be developed in careers interventions and be useful to any potential future employer.

The young people in my study demonstrated the essential role of others during the STWT. However, the majority of young people seemed unclear as to the purpose of careers professionals within their support network. Clearly there is more to do to support young people to recognise and perhaps more importantly, believe, that career professionals are there (or should be, in my view) for everyone (whether you are clear what you want to do for your future in work or not). We all need to recognise our individual responsibility in our multiple roles and interactions with young people (as parents, mentors, coaches, teachers, career advisors, managers, and many more)

and take our role seriously in the support of young people to enable them to have the best possible experiences as they make this important first move from school to work. Young people are not a homogeneous group and neither therefore are their paths from education to employment. As practitioners and professionals working alongside young people and/or employers, we need to acknowledge this and appreciate diverse transitional pathways as a business strength bringing with them as they do, diverse experiences, ways of thinking and creative approaches as just some of the tangible business benefits of welcoming young people into our organizations.

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# Recruiting new graduates: What success profile are organizations looking for?

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## Author biography

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## Abstract

In today's competitive business world, even though young adults strive to be employed by well-known corporations, having a degree does not guarantee an employment opportunity. Employers prefer candidates not only with qualifications, but also with a 'success profile' comprised of competencies, personal attributes, experience and knowledge that portray a holistic view of success (DDI, 2009). This study aims to shed light on the 'success profile' organizations are looking for from new graduates regardless of the positions they are being recruited for. As part of the study, 205 participants (predominantly recruitment professionals) from both multinational and local companies based in Istanbul, took part in an on-line survey. According to the results, the criteria identified in order of importance were; working as part of a team, written communication skills, analysing and gathering information (competencies); knowledge of advanced English, degree course and prestige of university (knowledge); internship experience, taking part in extracurricular activities, volunteer work (experience) and; highly responsible, continuous learner and good communicator (personal attributes). Personal attributes were followed by competencies, knowledge and experience in terms of priority rankings. The findings and their implications will be discussed as to how these criteria can be fostered during educational years and beyond.

*Keywords:* new graduate recruitment, success profile, personal attributes, competencies

## Introduction

According to the OECD's Future of Work and Skills Report (2017), the three on-going trends of globalisation, technological progress and demographic change have the potential of significantly altering the nature of work. As stated by the report, these trends are likely to affect the quantity and quality of jobs available, as well as how and by whom they will be carried out. Against this ever changing background, a major challenge seems to be the implementation of policies which will prepare young people for the jobs of the future by equipping them with the right type of skill sets (OECD, 2017).

On a global scale, youth are three times as likely as adults to be unemployed (ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth, 2017) and over the last twenty years, the proportion of youth actively engaged in the labour market, either by working or looking for work declined from 55% to 45%. This trend seems to be driven by various factors such as young people remaining longer in education, lack of sufficient labour market opportunities and young people lacking the skills and competencies demanded by potential employers.

Transitions can entail tough times and moving into professional life is an especially complex and vulnerable period for young adults. Graduating from college involves leaving the educational comfort zone where there are clear rules and set expectations. Work life, on the other hand, involves various uncertainties, and challenges for new graduates (Ryan, 2001). In order to respond to these changing and complex needs of the contemporary workplace, universities are increasingly required to produce highly skilled graduates (Possa, 2006). This study is conducted in Turkey, where the main teaching method in universities is didactic lecturing (European University Association Report, 2008) accompanied by a teacher-centred directive approach and similar passive learning methods utilised during secondary education years. This leads to the common belief that in many Turkish universities, students are not adequately equipped with the competencies needed to enter the job market. Thus, in Turkey transitions from school to work are especially challenging for students and discrepancies exist between expectations of the job market and the capabilities of graduates (Kılıç, Işık, Tuncer, Özbek & Özgen, 2015).

In a workplace context, a competency can be defined as a combination of cognitive skills (knowledge and abilities) and personal or behavioural characteristics (attitudes, values & motives), which are a function of an individual's personal attributes (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Recent literature examining generic competencies required of graduates points to increasing emphasis on personal attributes, rather than technical or 'hard' skills (Liston, 1998). Research findings point to a number of competencies expected of graduates such as oral communication, problem-solving skills and self-motivation (Maes, Weldy & Icenogle, 1997), as well as teamwork, communication skills and personal qualities (Stasz, 1997). Similarly, in a recent survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2016), the top five soft skills employers look for on a candidate's resume were described as; leadership, teamwork, written communication, problem-solving and verbal communication. In a similar vein, Hart Research Associates (2015) found that employers believe verbal communication, teamwork, written communication, ethical judgment, decision-making and critical/analytical thinking/reasoning to be the top five crucial skills when hiring college graduates. Even though these two studies share many commonalities, the NACE (2016) study adds a general leadership competency which encompasses people management skills, whereas the Hart Research Associates survey findings (2015) emphasise the ethical aspect of decision-making by drawing attention to a crucial personal attribute; honesty. In the literature, the Five-Factor Model (FFM) provides a comprehensive structure for the study of personality (Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997), namely; Openness to experience (imaginative, curious, broad-minded), Conscientiousness (dependable, responsible, organised, planful), Extraversion (sociable, assertive, active), Agreeableness (trusting, good-natured, cooperative) and Neuroticism (anxious, depressed, emotional). In their meta-analytic study, Barrick and Mount (1991) found Conscientiousness and Extraversion to be valid predictors of job performance.

In a study conducted by the global human resources consultancy firm DDI (Development Dimensions International) and the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2008, 36% of respondents said the greatest barrier to effective strategy execution was placing the wrong person in a key role (Cosentino, Erker & Tefft, 2009). In line with this view, DDI has coined the term 'success profile' and has created a holistic view of success. Success profiles fully capture the requirements of job success – what

knowledge, experience, competencies, and personal attributes are critical to perform any job. More specifically, the success profile encompasses what employees need to ‘know’ (technical and/or professional information needed to perform job activities successfully such as a specific programming technique), ‘what they have done’ (educational and work achievements needed to perform job activities successfully such as leading a team), ‘what they can do’ (competencies performed while carrying out a job such as decision-making) and ‘who they are’ (personal dispositions and motivations that relate to job satisfaction, success or failure such as arrogant) (Cosentino, Erker & Thefft, 2009). Figure 1 presents the four components of the success profile.

Figure 1  
The Success Profile (DDI, 2009)



Research results reveal that, accuracy in defining success regarding the four components of the model are the cornerstone of an effective talent management system (Byham, Smith & Paese, 2002). Therefore, it is crucial that organizations have a designated success profile in mind when recruiting new staff who will form the driving force towards their company's vision.

Previous literature findings point out the importance of both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ skills and concentrate mostly on the lists of skill sets and competencies deemed important for professional life. This study aims to advance the current literature by holistically defining what ‘success’ means for employers not only in terms of the desired competencies/skills, but also in terms of the experience, knowledge and personal disposition factors that are crucial to make success possible in a position. The study also aims to add value to the current literature by showing how these four factors compare to each other in terms of perceived importance as depicted by employers.

## Method

### Procedure

The study was conducted on-line with 205 Turkish professionals. Convenience sampling was employed and an on-line questionnaire was sent to the e-mails and LinkedIn accounts of the researcher’s network of both human resources and other professionals who had active recruitment roles. Participants were asked to think about and define what specifically constitutes success for a new graduate they would like to recruit for their organization.

### Measures

A 14-item online questionnaire was created by the researcher including demographic, Likert-type scale and open-ended questions. The competency, experience and knowledge quadrants of the success profile were measured by questions developed by the researcher using the Hart Research Associates’ Survey (2015) and NACE Survey (2016) as a guide. Response choices were arranged on a five point Likert-type scale ranging from ‘Not Important At All’ (1) to ‘Very Important’ (5).

To assess the four components of the success profile, the participants were first asked to rate the importance of new graduates being equipped with the following list of competencies at the time of recruitment; written communication skills, verbal communication skills, working as part of a team, analysing information, decision-making, planning and organising, influencing others and technical knowledge. Next, the participants were provided with list of six items pertaining to knowledge (having an advanced level of English, degree course, prestige of university, having an

advanced degree, prestige of high school and having a high Grade Point Average (GPA, in the Turkish university context a ‘high’ GPA that is a 3 or more out of a possible of 4 points is equal to 80% or higher out of 100) and asked to rate each in terms of its importance for recruitment to their company. A third question introduced five items pertaining to experience (volunteer work, exchange, leadership, and internship experience and taking part in extracurricular activities) and similarly asked the respondents to rate each in terms of its importance for recruitment. The personal attributes component of the success profile was assessed by the open-ended question: “*The new graduate I would like to recruit for my company is someone who is.....*” and the participants were asked to fill in this blank by sharing the personal attributes they believed to be crucial for new graduate success. Finally, the last question asked the participants to rank the four quadrants of the success profile in terms of their priority of importance. To do this, the participants were instructed to rank each component by attributing a numerical rank to it from 1 to 4, with the highest prioritised component receiving rank 1, followed by the rest on priority. The participants were also instructed not to provide the same rank to any two or more components.

## **Analyses**

The results of the questions measured by the five point Lickert type scale were depicted in terms of estimated means. For all of these items, the respondents’ ratings were first summed and then divided by the total number of respondents thus yielding their mean values. The responses to the open-ended question were analysed via thematic analysis to identify patterns or themes within the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each participant provided more than one characteristic to describe their ideal graduate and responses were coded according to their content to arrive at the main personal attribute themes. The emerging themes were then depicted as frequencies reflecting the numbers of participants who endorsed each theme. Priority rankings of the four components of the success profile were also reported in mean values, whereby the lowest value represents the highest priority ranking.

## **Results**

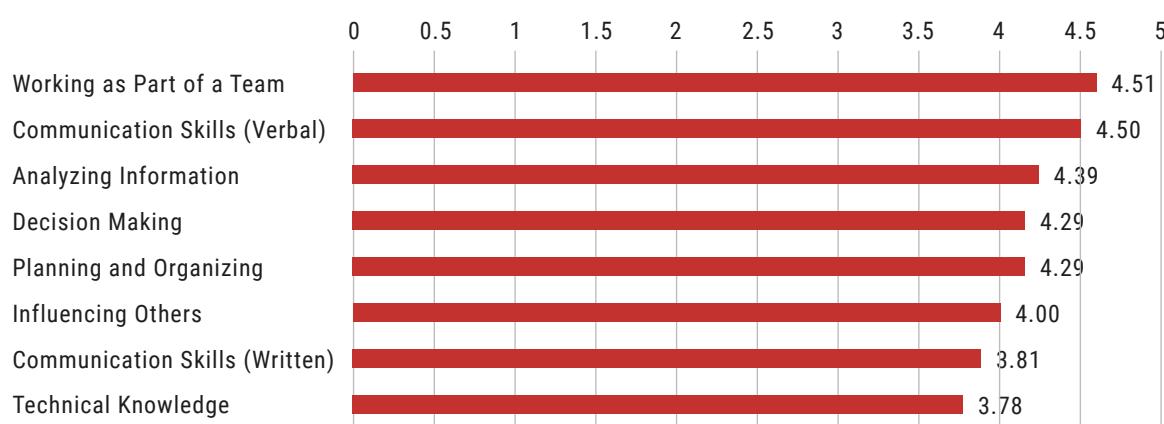
Study participants were mostly female (71%) and 94% were aged between 20 to 50 years. Respondents with a bachelor degree or higher made up 96% of the sample.

53% of the participants worked in locally owned companies, 44% in multinational corporations and 3% worked in public institutions. The participants represented a heterogeneous sample in terms of sector of work; ranging from health services (22%), manufacturing (21%), professional services (20%), consumer goods (15%) and various others including transportation, energy, education and technology (22%).

## Competencies quadrant of the success profile

As can be seen on Table 1, the means of competencies were rated quite highly; ranging between 3.71 and 4.51 out of a possible of 5 points. Working as Part of a Team, Verbal Communication Skills and Analyzing Information were the top three competencies identified as crucial for new graduate success. These competencies were followed by Decision Making and Planning and Organizing at a tie in terms of mean ratings and the last three competencies were identified as Influencing Others, Written Communication and Technical Knowledge respectively. The competency of Influencing Others comes reflects biggest drop in mean values which is understandable since influencing others is a leadership competency not to be expected of new graduates early in their careers. Written Communication follows Influencing Others, which is also a competency endorsed as crucial for new graduate success mostly following verbal communication skills (e.g., Hart Research Associates, 2013) as is the case in this study. The competency that has received the lowest rating among the eight factors is Technical Skills, yet it is still evaluated as close to the ‘important’ level by employers.

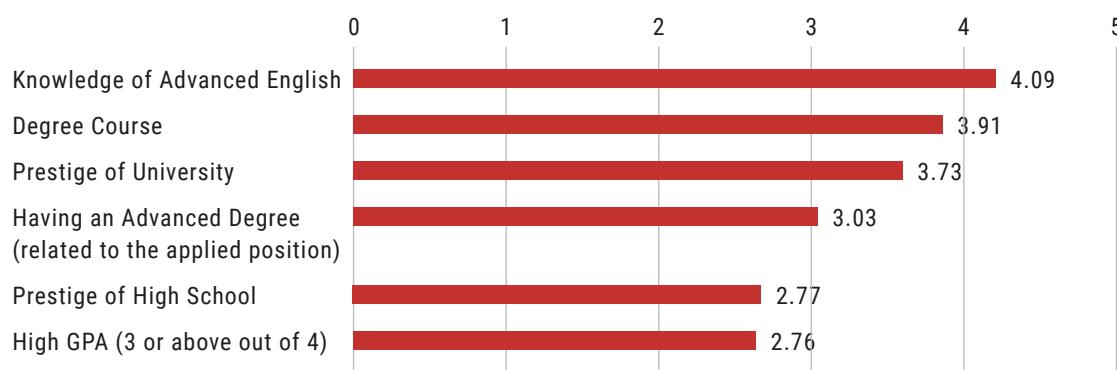
Table 1  
Ratings of the Importance of Graduate Competencies



## Knowledge quadrant of the success profile

The top three factors in terms importance regarding the knowledge quadrant were: knowledge of advanced English, the degree course completed and the prestige of university (see Table 2). These criteria were followed by having an advanced degree related to the applied position, the prestige of high school and having a high GPA. Having an advanced degree follows the ranking of a prestige of university with a sharp decline in mean value which could reflect the view that, for new graduates, having an advanced degree is a '*Nice to have*' instead of a '*Must have*'. Finally, for this quadrant of the success profile, having a high GPA takes the lowest ranking with an evaluation between '*Not really important*' and '*Somewhat important*'. As can be seen from these results, the mean values of the six knowledge factors reflect a lower range of ratings compared to the competency factors (between the range of 4.09 and 2.67).

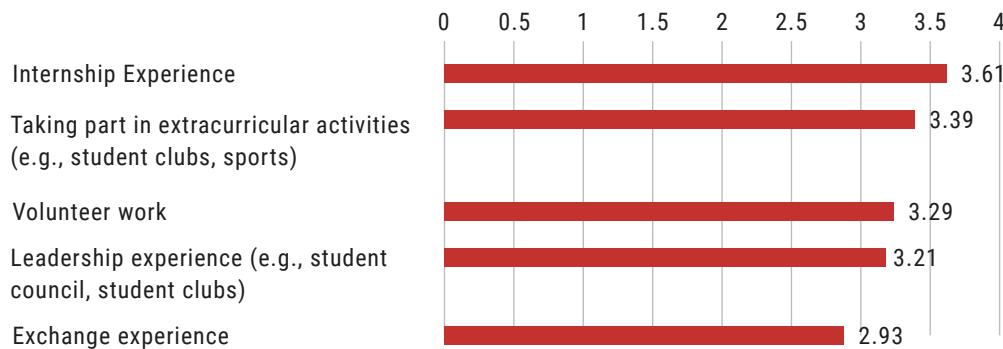
Table 2  
Ratings of the Importance of Graduate Knowledge Factors



## Experience quadrant of the success profile

The top three criteria identified for the experience quadrant were: internship experience, taking part in extracurricular activities and volunteer work (see Table 3). These were followed closely by leadership experience and rather less closely by exchange experience. For this quadrant of the success profile, the data is distributed more evenly compared to the knowledge quadrant, especially among the first four criteria. While exchange experience was rated as the lowest factor, it was still close to the '*Somewhat important rating*'.

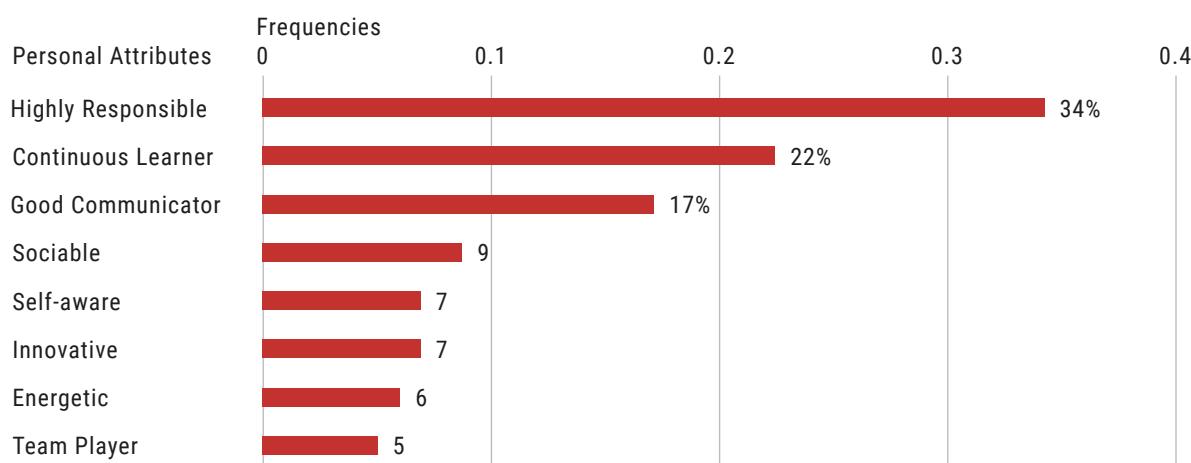
**Table 3**  
Ratings of the Importance of Graduate Experience Factors



### Ideal graduate

As can be seen in Table 4 (below) the top three ideal graduate personality attributes identified by the respondents were: '*highly responsible*', '*continuous learner*' and '*good communicator*'. The remaining five characteristics, which were '*sociable*', '*self-aware*', '*innovative*', '*energetic*' and '*team player*' received less than 10% of the respondent ratings.

**Table 4**  
Perceptions of the Ideal Graduate in terms of Personal Dispositions

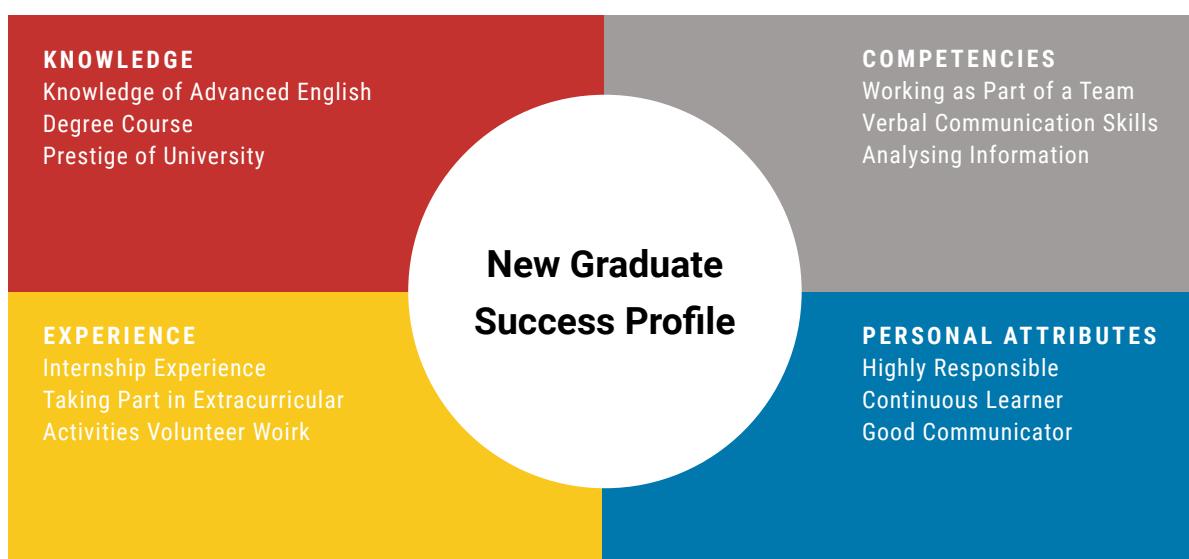


After the success profile data were identified, respondents were asked to rank these four quadrants in terms of their priority of importance. Among the four criteria; personal attributes received the highest average ranking (mean=1.89), since the highest prioritised component received rank 1, followed by competencies (mean=2.11), knowledge (mean=2.61) and experience (mean=3.37). These rankings are in line

with the trends regarding the mean values assigned to the competency, knowledge and experience quadrants as previously mentioned. According to these results, the personal attributes quadrant of the success profile emerges as the most crucial criteria pertaining to the perception of new graduate success followed by competencies.

Figure 2 summarises the final profile for success identified by the participants in terms of the top three criteria defined for each quadrant of the success profile. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next section.

Figure 2  
The Success Profile Identified by Study Participants (adapted from DDI, 2009)



## Discussion

This paper aimed to shed light on the factors that constitute new graduate success from the point of view of recruitment professionals. To achieve this aim, a ‘success profile’ that captures the requirements of job success – what knowledge, experience, competencies, and personal attributes are critical to perform any job (DDI, 2009) was used as a guide.

As can be seen from Figure 2, employers seem to have quite high expectations from new graduates; especially in terms of competencies since most of the competencies are rated as between the ‘Important’ and ‘Very important’ range. These high expectations are also shared by other studies conducted in western nations mentioned previously

(e.g.; NACE, 2016; Hart Research Associates, 2015, Hodges & Burchell, 2003). However, as previously mentioned, this study has been conducted in a developing country with a didactic and teacher-centered educational context – making it even harder to foster the various components of the success profile. Thus, it seems feasible to think that other partners including organizations, professionals and labour policies are needed to join forces to make this success profile possible.

The results showed that, Working as Part of a Team, Verbal Communication Skills and Analyzing Information were the top three competencies identified as crucial for new graduate success. These findings are in line with the NACE (2016) survey, whereby out of the 38 attributes employers' seek on a candidate's resume, Ability to Work in Teams was ranked number one, Communication Skills (verbal) was ranked number five and Analytical Skills was ranked number eight. Similarly, research results of an on-line survey carried out by Hart Research Associates (2015) revealed that, employers think most emphasis should be placed on: Analytical Thinking and Communication. The lower rating assigned to Influencing Others is understandable since this is not an '*Urgent*' competency to be expected of new hires, yet will gain in importance as the new graduate starts to assume leadership roles. Written Communication is a competency endorsed as crucial for new graduate success mostly following verbal communication skills in previous studies, (e.g., Hart Research Associates, 2013) as is the case in this study. The competency that has received the lowest rating among the eight factors is Technical Skills. This finding is in line with previous studies of employer views on graduate competencies (Hodges & Burchell, 2003; Burchell, Hodges & Rainsbury, 2001) and can result from the preference of employees who expect new graduates to acquire these technical „Knowledge“ skills once recruited in their firms and not necessarily possess these as a given at the time of recruitment.

Out of the six factors related to the knowledge quadrant of the success profile, knowledge of advanced English is depicted as the number one to secure a decent position in the job market. Hence, in Turkey, getting into multinational corporations which have attractive career prospects and compensation benefits is extremely competitive and knowledge of advanced English is a must to achieve this. This criteria is closely followed by degree course and the prestige of university. The degree course denotes the foundation of knowledge a new graduate has regarding the position

applied for and this criteria is closely tied to where this degree has been gained. Hence, in Turkey, each year, there is a nationwide central placement examination administered by the National Measurement, Selection and Placement Center and gaining entry into the few „Best“ selective universities is very competitive (Kılıç et al., 2015). Moreover, having an advanced degree and a high GPA seem to be ‘nice to have’ not ‘must have’ factors for recruitment professionals. In line with this finding, having an advanced degree is not considered among the criteria of decision attributes during the recruitment of graduates in similar studies (e.g., NACE, 2016). The GPA criteria has received the lowest rating which could reflect the doubts of potential employers’ regarding the uneven selectivity levels of certain degree programmes as well as students’ abilities to transfer their know how into practice, since having a high GPA doesn’t necessarily translate to workplace success.

Regarding the experience quadrant of the success profile, the top three criteria for success identified by the respondents were; having an internship experience, taking part in extracurricular activities and having carried out volunteer work. Previous studies also point out that it is important for graduates to have some kind of work experience prior to completing their studies (Hodges & Burchell, 2003). Except for the criteria of having an exchange experience, the participants’ ratings for the remaining four criteria were between the ‘Somewhat important’ and ‘Important’ evaluation range, demonstrating that employees prefer graduates who have spent time applying their skills in various contexts. In a study carried out by Andrews and Higson (2008), work-based learning in a business type environment was identified as particularly valuable since it enhanced students’ learning experiences meanwhile providing them with the opportunity to acquire and polish various work-related skills. Similarly, having a leadership role in a student club, sports team or at a student council provide students a well-suited opportunity to strengthen the experience quadrant of their success profile. Previous research results also convey that when deciding among several candidates, recruiters considered ‘Having held a leadership position’, ‘Being involved in extracurricular activities’ and ‘Having carried out volunteer work’ to be among the top six attributes influencing their decision-making (NACE, 2016). However, in the same study, ‘Having studied abroad’ had the eighth ranking with an evaluation of ‘Not much influence’ on recruiter decisions, similar to the low rated significance of this criteria found in this study.

According to the findings, the top three personal attributes professionals expect from new graduates emerged as; being ‘Highly responsible’, ‘A continuous learner’ and ‘A good communicator’. In their meta-analytic study, Barrick and Mount (1991) found a positive relationship between the personality dimension of Conscientiousness and job performance. The finding that ‘Highly responsible’ is the number one personal attribute desired in new graduates is in line with this result. The three factors of ‘Self-aware’, ‘Continuous learner’ and ‘Innovative’ identified in this study could be part of the *Openness to experience* personality dimension since individuals high on this trait are described as creative, inquisitive, introspective, and attentive to inner feelings (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Previous research results regarding employees’ perceptions point out that, staying capable in a world of continuous change requires the ability to effectively manage one’s own learning (Stephenson, 1997). The importance of this attribute is reflected in the findings since it has gained the second priority in terms of importance. Extraverts are generally positive, social, energetic, and interested in other people (Watson & Clark, 1997); thus, the attributes of good communicator, sociable and energetic could be a part of the personality factor of *Extraversion*. In Barrick and Mount’s (1991) meta analytic study, extraversion was found to be a valid predictor of job performance for occupations such as, managers and sales where interaction with others is a significant portion of the job. Overall, these findings suggest that the new graduates who exhibit higher levels of conscientiousness, extraversion and openness to experience could be at an advantage in terms of demonstrating the personal attributes sought after by recruitment professionals.

It is interesting to note the overlaps of these personal attributes with the competencies identified as crucial such as the attribute of ‘Good communicator’ with the Communication Skills competency and the attribute of ‘Team player’ with the Working as Part of a Team competency. These overlaps highlight the importance given to these two criteria since they are identified to be crucial for new graduate success in more than one quadrant of the success profile. Moreover, these two attributes are ‘More able to be developed’ since they are more behavioural in nature as opposed to the personal dispositions of ‘Highly responsible’, ‘Continuous learner’ and ‘Self-aware’ which are less able to be developed since they represent dispositional tendencies. Thus, it is crucial to address the presence of these attributes that are ‘Less able to be developed’

in a potential employee during the selection and recruitment process especially if they are a ‘Must for success’ at the required position. However, even though a candidate may not efficiently demonstrate a competency at the time of recruitment, if this competency is on the ‘More able to be developed’ side, the hiring managers can recruit this person and then make a developmental plan to improve that competency once the new graduate is on board. Hence, it is crucial that hiring professionals have a clear understanding of these nuances regarding the different components of the success profile.

Moving on to recruiters’ rankings of the success factors in terms of priority of importance, it can be seen that the highest ranking is given to the personal attributes followed by competencies. This crucial finding points out that, employers focus predominantly on personal attributes and skills compared to knowledge and experience. Indeed, out of the four quadrants of the success profile, ‘Who people are’ emerges as the most important component taking precedence over ‘What people know’, ‘What people have done’ and ‘What people can do’. This priority ranking is in fact understandable, since this quadrant entails many personal dispositions that are ‘Not able to be developed’ unlike various competencies which are ‘More able to be developed’. Similar findings can be found in previous studies (Strebler, 1997; Sweeney & Twomey, 1997) where results convey that ‘Soft skills’ (personal attributes and competencies) are gaining more importance compared to ‘Hard skills’ (e.g., technical knowledge). The rankings could also signal the possibility that employers increasingly prefer to employ people with the ‘Right attitude and potential’ and then help them fully develop their knowledge and provide them with experiential opportunities to put their skills into practice. Thus, it can be inferred from these results that, if new graduates are equipped with attributes such as conscientiousness, high learning orientation and interpersonal skills (i.e., good communication and ability to work in teams), they have a solid foundation for success on a job.

In comparison to the lists of most skill sets and competencies identified in previous studies, this study provides a holistic picture of success by summarising the main components of a new graduate success profile, and focuses the attention of both recruiters and potential employees on a specific set of criteria that can be prioritised in terms of importance. The findings also make it possible to compare these four

quadrants in terms of importance and provide valuable insight for potential employees regarding where to concentrate their developmental efforts.

## Practical Implications

This research offers practical value by shedding light on a holistic view of success as captured by the success profile. The results previously discussed convey that, regarding the four quadrants of the success profile, employers have high expectations from graduates. However, such high expectations presents a big challenge to educational institutions and it seems necessary that joint effort on the part of educational institutions, organizations and governmental policies is needed to achieve such a challenging goal.

In order to address the gap between the demands of the job market and students' level of preparedness for work life, it seems crucial to establish certain strategies to strengthen these success profile components during the higher education years. Since skill acquisition is solidified by experience, the tools of experiential learning can be extensively utilised throughout the courses (Kolb, 1984) in higher education to develop various competencies. The experiential learning model entails a holistic learning process that encompasses four components; namely concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation (Smith, 2001). These experiential learning activities also include useful feedback on student performance which is a valuable method to enhance student awareness regarding strengths and developmental areas and get a chance to work on them. To illustrate, in Turkey, such a course entitled 'Academic and Life Skills: Transition to Professional Life' is conducted at Koç University aims to assist students in discovering their potential before they graduate and provide them with the skills that are needed in academic and professional life such as; relationship management, teamwork, conflict resolution, creative thinking and problem solving (Kılıç et al., 2015). Moreover, educational institutions can also foster the development of competencies through maintaining physical environments such as interior designs for group, team and individual learning that will support the teaching and learning of skill outcomes in demand by organizations. These could entail conducting courses in classrooms that have U-shaped seating arrangements encouraging interaction among participants or flexible seating layouts where conducting groupwork is possible.

Another strategy could be encouraging activities such as volunteer internships, exchange experiences and community involvement projects during the college years to strengthen the experience component of the ‘success profile’. To enable this, the higher education institutions can plan the work week of the students by leaving adequate time for internship and apprenticeship experiences. Professionals could also assist this process by creating flexible long and short-term internship opportunities at their companies. Since it’s very tough for most students to work three days a week at an internship during the school term, there needs to be more feasible options to acquire work experience during the higher education years with the joint support of educational institutions and hiring organizations.

The responsibility to nurture and develop the four quadrants of the success profile does not remain solely with higher education institutions. It is also essential for employers to form a joint alliance with these institutions during the process and create a supportive culture and environment which fosters the emergence and continued development of these aspects of employability after recruitment takes place. Thus, employers can help themselves achieve this aim by getting actively involved in the higher education years of their potential hires. To achieve this aim, higher education institutions and industry professionals can collaborate on curricula development and include courses that foster skills and competencies crucial for working life. Professionals could also play an active part in teaching by acting as guest lecturers and using experiential methods (such as role plays, cases and simulations) to help students develop the crucial competencies required at work. During class visits, professionals could provide realistic job previews of the positions offered at their workplace and share information regarding the success profile they’re looking for. Information about the organization’s culture also needs to be shared with the students during these visits. Another valuable contribution professionals could make for student development would be mentoring and coaching; on a regular and long-term basis, about worklife and how they can best students can prepare themselves as potential hires.

Finally, recruiters also need to be realistic in terms of the success profile components they expect from new graduates. It is important to keep in mind that, competencies under the domains of ‘Managing Work’ (such as Analyzing Information) and

'Managing Relationships' (such as Teamwork) have more opportunity to be developed during the higher educational years. However, those competencies related to 'Managing People' (such as Delegation), need experience and a suitable context to develop. Thus, recruiters can aim to assess the potential of these type of competencies in new hires, yet not be discouraged if they are lacking and aim to foster them once the new graduate is on board.

Throughout the world, youth unemployment is increasing alongside education levels (ILO, 2017) and the failure to tap into this enormous potential will create long-term developmental and societal consequences. Young people need strong support through the transition from education to employment so that they are integrated into labour markets and become active members of their societies. Thus, governments also need to team up with higher education institutions and organizations to support young people's transitions to the world of work. To achieve this, governments could promote access and participation in lifelong learning for young people as well as those not in employment, education or training to ensure their social inclusion (ILO, 2017).

Governments could also increase their investment in public employment services whereby offering personal counselling and placement services and improving labour market information to support young people's decision-making during their transition into employment. During this process, governments could collaborate with partner organizations in the private sector. Hence, in some countries, public employment services reach out to young people through the apps they develop and maintain. Belgium, for example, offers the Mycoach app which provides users on-line coaching on job applications whereas the Mentor app matches school-leavers with professional mentors (ILO, 2017). Thus, if well managed, new technology can aid young peoples' actions to make smoother transitions from school to work. These applications will be especially important in the eastern and southeastern rural regions of Turkey. Here it is much harder to find decent work opportunities; and the presence of private sector employment support services are rare compared to the bigger cities in other regions. Thus, the relatively low cost of such digital services could also assist the school to work transition for young people in the more disadvantaged rural regions in Turkey.

## Limitations

In this study, the respondents were provided with competency names and asked to rate their importance for graduate recruitment when assessing the competency quadrant of the success profile. Thus, the respondents compared and rated these skills based on their own interpretation of the assigned skill term. Future studies can overcome this limitation by providing competency definitions in the survey instrument so that all participants are at the same page regarding competency meanings. Moreover, in addition to providing competency definitions, the key actions that define the competencies could also be provided to participants so that they can prioritise them by being better aware of the crucial nuances they entail. This in turn could facilitate more valid and reliable conclusions regarding the ratings. In addition to this, the present findings reflect the characteristics of Turkish employers which might present a generalisability issue. Even though results from other studies representing western nations (United States, New Zealand, Slovenia, Romania, Austria and United Kingdom) show similar trends in employer preferences (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Hodges & Burchell, 2003; Stewart, Wall & Marciniec, 2016) it would be interesting to look at other similar cultures and see to what extent these findings regarding the components of the success profile are generalisable.

## Conclusions

Whereas the possession of detailed facts and figures was once a passport to a professional job, there is now much more emphasis on what people can do with the knowledge they can access (Silva, 2009) as well as their interpersonal skills. Thus, to cope with the demands of the changing workplace, organizations need and aim to recruit the most qualified new graduates they can reach. This study's value lies in its attempt to shed light on what those factors are that render new graduates 'most qualified' for the recruitment process (Figure 2).

The transition from school to work is a challenging time for young people, and thus demands a collective response on the part of higher education institutions, organizations and governments to develop curricula, classroom and workplace training and development methods as well as various other mutual strategies that ensure long-term employment gains for young people. This is a crucial collaboration

since enhanced graduate employability benefits all stakeholders: graduates through a smoother transition to workplace and further career advancement opportunities, industry through added value and enhanced competitiveness and governments through a greater economic return on public investment (ILO, 2017).

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# Work and Organizational Psychology in Albania

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## Author biography

Valbona Treska completed her studies in clinical psychology in 2004 at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana, Albania's capital city. Having gathered much experience counselling hundreds of couples in divorce, her PhD focused on the effects of divorce on children. She started her career as a psychologist working at one of the largest high schools in Albania; while at the same time acting as an expert psychologist in courts of all levels in the country. From 2011 she has been engaged as a lecturer in one of the non-public universities in Albania, both at bachelor and master's degree level. Since 2005, Mrs. Treska runs her own practice, and last year established Family; a center of psychological and legal services in Tirana. This is the first centre offering an interplay of psycho-legal services. In January, 2017 Mrs. Treska was elected as the first President of the Order of Psychologist in Albania for a four-year term.

## Introduction

The Order of Psychologists in Albania (OPA) has applied to become a Constituent member of EAWOP at the next congress to be held in Torino, Italy, in May 2019 (see Figures 1 showing OPA's request for membership of EAWOP in 2018). OPA is one of the newest institutions established by law in Albania. There are about 800 members around the country. In order to be a member of the OPA, psychologists must have obtained the Bachelor's Degree, Master of Science's Degree or Professional Master's Degree (i.e., two study cycles in psychology or other equivalent studies in both scientific and professional disciplines). Further, individuals are required to have practiced the profession for one year under supervision, and to have successfully passed the state examination.

OPA's mission is to promote and to maintain high standards in the training and practice of the profession of psychology, as well as the protection of service users from the wrongful practice of psychology. In Albania since the profession of psychologist is regulated by law, no individual can practice psychology (in public or private organizations) without being a member of the OPA and having received the license for the individual practice of the profession issued by OPA.

Over the next pages I will introduce the practice of WOP in Albania, describing some of the issues the OPA is addressing.

Figure 1

OPA's presentation requesting membership to the Constituent Council of EAWOP, Turin 2018



## Psychology in Albania before the establishment of OPA

Psychology in Albania started to take its first steps in the 1980s, but since the country was under the communist regime during those years, studies in this field were rather vague and characterised by the communist spirit; and were not contemporary. In 1996, a few years after the collapse of the communist regime, the Department of Psychology was established at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Tirana. After that, several other psychology departments opened in public and private universities. Since 1996, hundreds of students have completed their studies in psychology, but we do not know how many as the state authorities has never kept a nominal list (or database)

of psychology graduates over these years. This lack of information about the number of psychological undergraduates, along with their specialisation profile in the various areas of psychology, has led to the lack of clear policies on university curricula, particularly relating to masters and employment programmes, and the lack of impact on legal amendments for the implementation of the psychologist's role.

During these years there has been a lack of standardised assessment tools for psychologists, and for working protocols, as no clear definition of competence in certain disciplines of psychology. There have been sporadic trainings, and there has never been a Code of Ethics that sets standards of professional conduct. Everyone has made all possible efforts in the framework of the profession to generate financial income, without having a legal basis and a professional regulator. The rapid increase of the number of psychologists in the market and the need to regulate the profession led to the imperative of drafting special legislation and the establishment of the Order of Psychologists. The OPA was established by the Founding Assembly on 28 January 2017, based on a specific law (Law 40/2016 "On the Order of the Psychologist in the Republic of Albania", see Figures 2 and 3).

This law stipulates that in order to practice as a psychologist in the Republic of Albania, it is imperative to be a member of the OPA (i.e., to have completed Bachelor and Master's studies in psychology (both scientific and professional) and to have practiced the profession for one year under supervision, successfully passing the state examination).

Figure 2  
The founding of the OPA at its assembly in 28 January 2017



Figure 3  
The President at the founding of the OPA, 2017



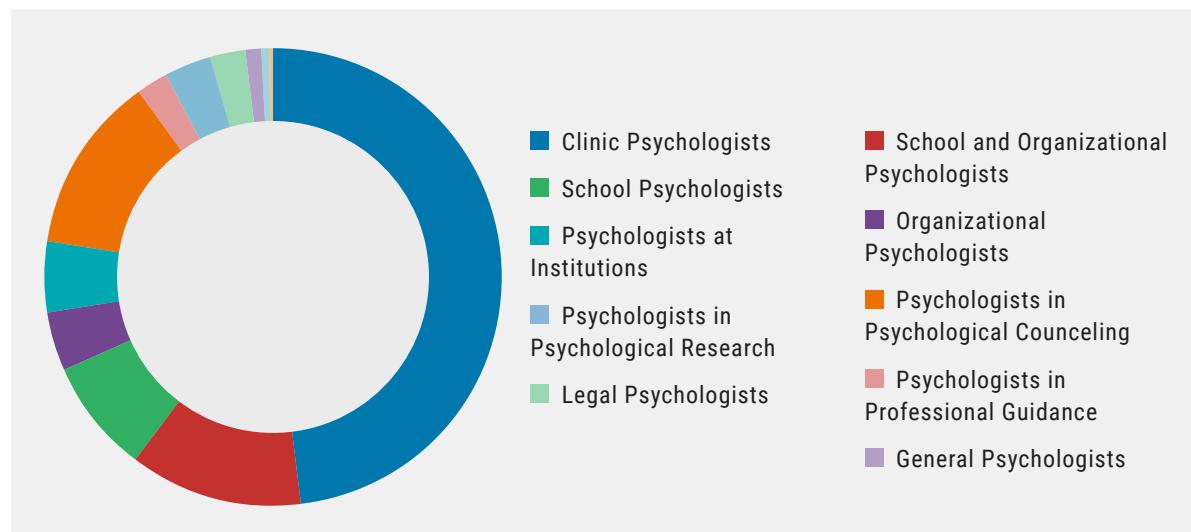
After the establishment of OPA we immediately started to focus on strengthening the role of psychologists in the country, building records with accurate data of psychologists who operate in the market, identifying problems, drafting policies and strategies for providing job opportunities for all profiles of psychology, including Work and Organizational Psychologists.

## Work and Organizational Psychology in Albania today

Primarily, Work and Organizational Psychology (WOP) are among the branches that have educated the highest number of psychologists in Albania. Current data tells us that of the 2000 psychology graduates, there are 1200 WOPs, mainly from the public

universities in Albania. Based on the OPA membership register, this category is second to clinical psychologists with currently 120 licensed WOP practitioners, out of a total of 500 licensed psychologists in Albania (see Figure 4 for a breakdown of all the psychological profiles in Albania).

Figure 4  
The numbers of psychologists in each profile in Albania



However, regardless of the high number of graduating WOPs, regrettfully this profile is practiced by few psychologists in Albania; with only a few individuals being employed by major international companies operating in Albania. The number of such employees is no more than 10 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5  
The number of practicing WOPs in Albania



Under these conditions, and based on the information received from OPA, it is clear that WOP in Albania is currently a little known and rarely practiced field. There are many reasons for these issues. Among them is the historical background of our country. By the early 1990s, the entire country's economy was state-run and centralised, due to the dictatorial communist regime. During that period, psychology was considered to be a decadent, bourgeois science, unnecessary for the "new man" that the system had created. Furthermore, Organizational Psychology was considered an exploitation instrument of the capitalist class against the working class.

With the change of the system and the outset of the democratisation processes of the country, awareness about the role of the science of psychology in general grew. But, the large state-owned companies were dissolved and reduced to hundreds of small companies employing only a few workers and/or to family businesses. At the beginning of that period, small and medium-sized companies dominated the Albanian market, in which, not only the role of the WOP was quite unknown, but the concept of "human resources" was also vague. Only during the last ten years, large business companies are consolidating within the country's economy, and are becoming well-structured and employing a considerable number of workers.

On the other hand, the lack of job opportunities has constrained those psychologists completing their studies in WOP to practice other specialties or branches of psychology, since the profession of psychologists was unregulated by law. Therefore, these psychologists could not retain their academic background, nor practice WOP, thus being unable to adapt to the latest socio-economic developments in the country. It is important to highlight that training in the field of WOP was entirely absent during this period and totally lacked standardised instruments that would help WOPs in their practice.

## OPA Objectives in WOP

The fact that OPA has made an application to become a Constituent member of EAWOP has not been an incidental decision. One of OPA's key objectives is to strengthen the role of WOPs in Albania. For this purpose, OPA has built a multi-dimensional and ambitious strategy which extends in several directions, to develop awareness

of business and society in general about the role of the organizational and work psychologist (OPA Annual Report, 2017, p. 14).

Because there is a lack of common practice, it is important that companies in Albania become aware of the role and benefits of WOP. OPA are planning to organise a range of activities such as workshops, conferences, multi-lateral meetings with representatives of companies and business organizations, in order to raise the awareness of company representatives of the importance of WOP. Within this year, a meeting will be held in collaboration with the National Chamber of Commerce, in order to explain in detail, the assistance that the WOP can provide directly to the companies, aiming at promoting employment in this sector.

Further, another of OPA's major objectives is to lobby for the issue legal and sub legal acts stipulating the mandatory employment of psychologists in the structure of public administration, as well as in the structure of public or private companies who have over 50 employees. Assistance and expertise from EAWOP in this regard will be of particular importance. The publication of information and awareness brochures supporting these objectives will help us to achieve this goal.

### **Training and updating the knowledge of WOPs**

Increasing the professional capacities of WOPs will be an essential element of the success of this project. As the Albanian economy has a tendency to rapidly follow the globalisation pace, and within the framework of Albania's expected accession to the European Union, the preparation and development of WOPs needs to keep pace with business needs. It is imperative that the skills of WOPs are updated with contemporary professional knowledge through conducting intensive training and development.

This year, OPA developed for the first time an on-going education system. Thus programme is compulsory requiring all psychologists to attend compulsory on-going training and development complying with approved criteria, in order to preserve their right to practice their profession in a particular field. This system will provide WO psychologists with specific competency development.

### **Encouraging the use of standardised instruments in WOP**

One of OPA's short-term objectives is to encourage the use of standardised assessment

tools in psychology. Being aware of their complete lack so far, OPA has undertaken a series of initiatives promoting the standardisation of internationally recognised, valid and reliable instruments. In January, 2018 OPA organised an important activity with regard to WOPs. It was training from “Giuniti psychometrics”, an Italian company providing psychometric tests, on the topic of: “The role of the work psychologist, tools and areas of intervention”; where among other things, several standardised tests were presented in the Albanian language (see Figure 6). This was a popular event with over 130 psychologists attending.

Figure 6  
“Role of the work psychologist, tools and areas of intervention”, Tirana, January 2019



## Establishing the Division of Work and Organizational Psychologists

The OPA is a new institution, which in less than two years has achieved great success in regulating the psychology profession, despite its financial difficulties. Within this short time, most of the practicing psychologists have been licensed, and for the first time the ethics and deontological norms imposed for implementation have been set. In this context, it is necessary to set up protocols for each area of psychology, and set clear standards of practice that will benefit both the WOP and the profession. Thus it is of paramount importance that respective Divisions are set up according to their field of competence, which, besides the above, are thought to be a catalyst for the growth of the psychologist's role in society. Within this year, we aim to establish the Division of Work and Organizational Psychologists in order to lobby and protect the interests

of this category of psychologists, as well as to promote professional and professional development in this field.

## Conclusions

The OPA are aware of the great daily difficulties that start with overcoming social mentalities to encouraging the continued professional growth of its members.

However, since the application of psychology in Albania is still in its early stages, this profession is still young for the Albanian society, the OPA is aware that the margins of change that can and should be made are as great.

The greatest need for achieving these set objectives is to get the best international expertise and exchange experience with experts from the most developed countries in the field of psychology, in order to apply best international practices that will enable a fast and sustainable development of psychology in our country. The requirement to become a Constituent member of EAWOP is within the framework of this strategy, in the light of strengthening the role of the WOP in Albania and increasing professional practice.

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# The digital transformation of work is here – how scientists and practitioners can work together to manage needed workplace changes

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## Panelists

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## Abstract

Organizations across Europe are reinventing their structures and processes in the quest to become more “agile”. To facilitate these changes methods like “Design thinking”, “Bar Camps” or “Working out loud” are becoming mainstream, no longer only used in hip start-ups and communication agencies. Traditional working environments, typically associated with rules, routines, and regulations are now transformed into open (co-working) spaces. Something big is going on and we wanted to find out about it by holding an interactive discussion.

In this panel discussion we invited scientists and practitioners to engage in a conversation about future directions of Work and Organizational Psychology (WOP) with the aim of keeping education, research and practice relevant to contemporary working practices. We want to look into the current state of co-operation and co-creation within WOP and examine what needs to change and how this will be achieved. Together, we would like to figure out how research can support practitioners in their work with organizations and how to manage the digital transformation. As part of the scientist – practitioner collaborative stream (that has become known as Co-op Friday) this panel discussion complements the conference theme of Working for the Greater Good by looking into future directions of organizational development and how to use evidence-based practices to help individuals to adapt to change.

The aim of the session was to have an active debate between panelists and the audience generating ideas and activities to improve co-operation. We used an innovative process method called “Bar Camp” to encourage presentation and review. This resulted in interactive discussions with panel members and participants working

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in small groups (see Figure 1) discussing particular issues (see further detail in the following report). Each discussion session was followed by a brief summary that was shared across the groups.

Figure 1  
Small group discussion at the Bar Camp



## Session report

The session took place at EAWOP's 2019 Congress in Turin, in the Sala Roma on the upper level of the venue. Approximately 65 people attended the session. After a short introduction of the agenda (see Figure 2) three invited experts presented their topics for discussion in "Pecha Kucha" presentations. A Pecha Kucha is a slideshow presentation format with specific rules. The presenter uses 20 slides with a time limit of 20 seconds for each slide to give a short and precise overview of their topic.

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Short texts, illustrations and pictures are used instead of large text blocks. Thus, a Pecha Kucha is limited to six minutes and 40 seconds for each presentation. After each presentation a three minute and 20 seconds discussion was conducted, adding up to a 10-minute timeframe for each topic.

Figure 2  
The Bar Camp agenda

#	What?	Who?	When?
0	Welcome	Colin	10:45
1	Pecha Kucha #1	Katarzyna	10:50
2	Pecha Kucha #2	Hartwig	11:00
3	Pecha Kucha #3	Roman	11:10
4	Post it Session: Open Topics	All	11:20
5	Sessions 1-4	All	11:25
6	Wrap Up 1-4	All	11:50
7	Elevator Pitch	Diana & Oliver	12:00
8	Post it Session: Open Topics	All	12:05
9	Sessions 5-8	All	12:10
10	Wrap Up 5-8	All	12:35
11	Good Bye	All	12:45

Katarzyna Więcek-Jakubek from the University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland presented the opening Pecha Kucha. Her topic “Homo Digitalis: Context and challenges for Work and Organizational Psychology” showed that digital transformation in organizations should not only be viewed from a technology perspective, but also through the lens of WOP. Digital transformation calls for new ways of work design, new challenges for team co-operation and team work, alternative models of leadership, and new strategies of self-management (like job crafting). Further, these developments require organizations to develop a culture of innovation. Kasia emphasised that these will be important working areas for WOP practitioners in the future. Thus, she is encouraging the upcoming generation of WOPs to contribute to the transition of modern organizations with both theoretical knowledge and evidence based practices.

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In the second Pecha Kucha, Roman Soucek from the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany presented his work on resilience. In digitalised working environments, he argues, people will be confronted with new challenges that will require a broader set of individual competencies to be able to deal with these demands. On the other hand, digitalisation offers new chances and possibilities to develop training, education programmes, and innovative concepts for organizational development. In a government funded research project on resilience at work Roman and colleagues have developed an on-line assessment of individual, team, and organizational resilience. Following assessment on-line training can be designed that is tailored to individual / group learners' needs and resources. Roman Souceks work is another fine example of how cutting edge research in WOP can be directly used to improve work places and to foster skills and competencies of employees in the digital era.

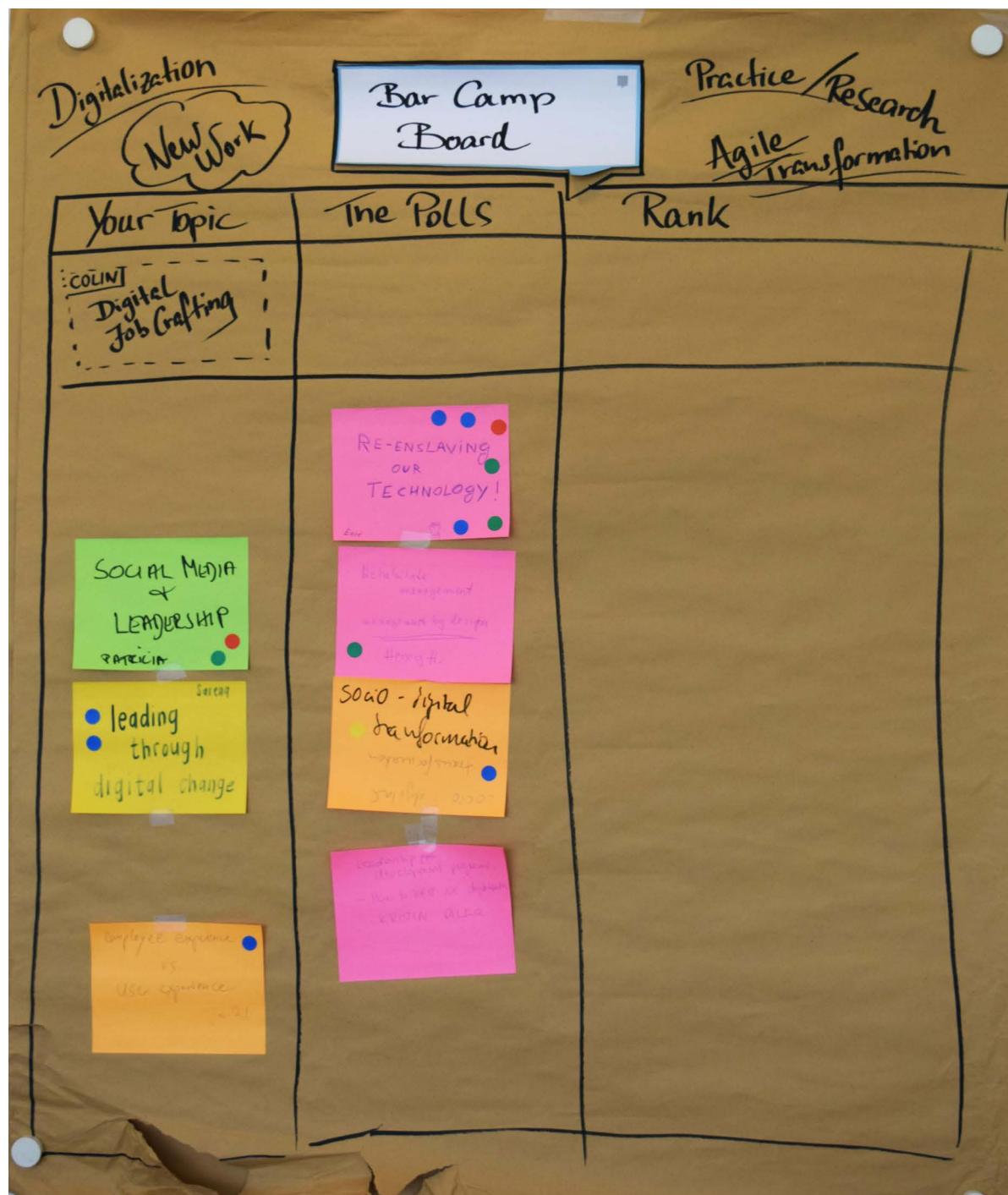
Hartwig Fuhrmann from t-velopment, a WOP consultancy based in Dortmund, Germany presented the third Pecha Kucha on a web-based software that can be used to integrate personnel selection and development. Today, he argues, selection and training are separated domains with specific methods and approaches to measure qualification, performance, or fit. In the selection process, participants typically experience measurement in the form of a set of tests (such as personality profiles). But, after successfully entering the organization new hires are typically confronted with alternative measurements of their performance, competencies or achievements. Hartwig presented a new way of combining personality profiling with competency-based and/or behavioural-based performance measures using a digital feedback tool. Hence, employees will experience a seamless way of being evaluated across their employee life cycle from personnel selection, to training and development, and even to outplacement. He is making a case, that digital innovations can not only improve the efficiency of the Human Resource processes but also improve the quality of decision-making by combining knowledge and evidence-based practices from different areas of WOP.

Before moving to the sessions based on the Pecha Kuchas participants had the opportunity to choose the topic (and the associated presenter) for the fourth session. Participants were invited to contribute by placing the names of their own topics (described in three words) on a “Bar Camp” Board (see Figure 3). After a short

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moment of hesitation, participants placed their bids on the board. Ten bids were presented and participants voted for their preference by putting a sticky dot on the presentation of their choice. The majority voted for a presentation on “Fostering a digital mindset” that was selected for the fourth presentation.

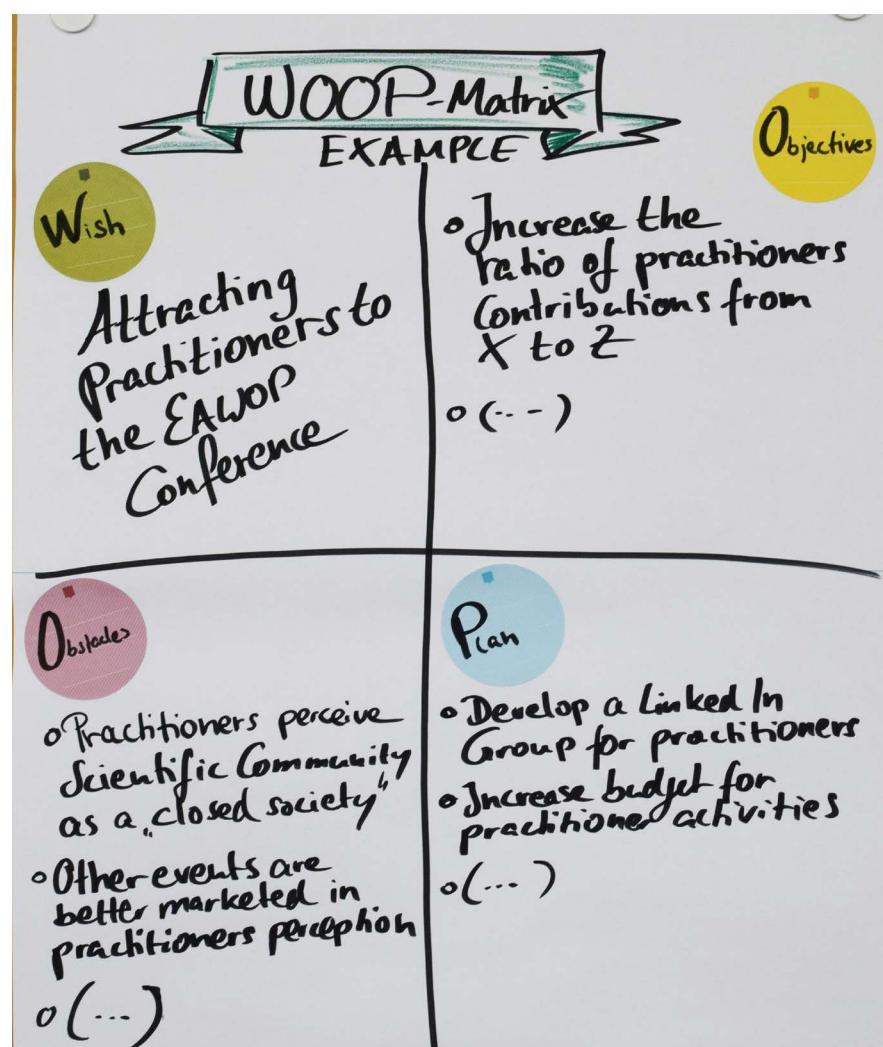
Figure 3  
The Bar Camp board



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Four workshops were then held, three facilitated by the invited panelists and the fourth by the person who contributed the new topic. Participants could then join the workshop featuring the topic that they were most interested in. Each workshop was held in separate parts of the Sala Roma lasting for 25 minutes. Each group presented their results on prepared posters using a four-field “WOOP” matrix; WOOP stands for “Wish”, “Objectives”, “Obstacles”, and “Plan” and is a helpful and structured tool to come up with first ideas, next steps, or even measures that can be implemented directly after the meeting (see Figure 4).

Figure 4  
Example of the WOOP matrix



Exploring the topic of “How to foster a digital mindset” discussion identified that in order to achieve a major ‘wish’ to take people along the way, a core ‘objective’ can be

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to provide training both on digital mindset as a competency and as an attitude. One major ‘obstacle’ might be that people fear to be left behind, and not join the training. The group came up with a specific ‘plan’ to overcome these potential obstacles, (e.g., by engaging leaders in the process, allowing participation, and transparent communication about the vision and objectives of the training programme).

## Round two

Following the workshops, a second presentation round was held. Two invited experts presented their topics using another presentation technique, the “elevator pitch”. For one minute only, the presenters had to give a clear picture of the topic and to attract people to their workshop.

The first topic was presented by Diana Rus from Creative Peas, a WOP consultant based in Amsterdam. She invited the participants to engage in a broader discussion about what researchers and practitioners in WOP can achieve together in the future. In her workshop, the participants worked on core objectives for future collaboration of WOP researchers and practitioners. During the workshop, participants argued that one objective could be, that researchers and practitioners work out a common identity and thus unite as “one body”. Some other ideas that emerged were that meetings (such as the EAWOP congress) could become a platform for strong debate and co-creation among researchers and practitioners. Moreover, research results should be translated into “stickable” products, and these products should be aligned with ethical guidelines and human principles. One other common theme that emerged was that “No one should be left behind”, meaning that WOP research and practice should be accessible to, not only, knowledge-intensive workers but also to blue-collar workers.

The second topic was presented by Oliver Kohnke, the Chief Business Consultant at Business Innovation and Transformation Services of SAP, Germany. His topic was “Digital culture” and the future role of WOPs as facilitators of such a culture. The participants worked out four objectives: First, they should follow a “balanced, human-centered approach”. Secondly, they should emphasise applied WOP. Thirdly, they should add competency in how to measure progress and success. The fourth objective was “theory development”. They also discovered potential obstacles such as a lack of

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business reputation and missing networks that might be detrimental to the potential impact of the practical application of WOP in the field.

As in the first round, the Bar Camp Board was also used to place and select additional topics by the participants. Two additional topics were selected: “Effective communication in times of digitalization” and “Digital competencies”. According to the participants in the first group, important challenges for effective communication in times of digitalisation are complexity, work-life balance, and variation in participation among co-workers. The group discussed how to implement digital communication platforms and how to foster a broader acceptance in the use of these platforms. According to the discussion, leaders will be key figures in the process, acting as role models, moderators/facilitators will be needed to foster engagement, and pilot testing in small groups will be helpful to develop tailor-made solutions that fit to the needs of the specific organizations. According to the second group, relevant digital competencies in the future will be communication skills, social media literacy (including the ability to cope with information overload). In order to foster digital competencies, the group stressed the importance of acknowledging work design in technology design, making another case that WOP practitioners are also needed in the Information Technology sector.

Both topics were discussed and facilitated by participants during a 25-minute workshop followed by a presentation of the outcomes using the “WOOP” matrix.

## Evaluation

Overall, the session was very well received by the participants and there was a noisy, lively atmosphere demonstrating active engagement with the tasks and discussion. Participants were happy to offer topics and facilitate workshops and there was a high level of co-operation with the session organisers.

Feedback and ideas were collected on a “Wall of take aways”. In summary, participants liked the active learning aspect of the session, wished that more congress sessions were organised like this one, and that digitalization and new work should have a broader platform at the up and coming EAWOP Congress to be held in Glasgow, in May 2021. These ideas will be taken forward to the Programme Committee by the session organisers.