

PATHFINDER



The Pathways to Adulthood Newsletter



In Brief

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Welcome

Capacity building and advancing the understanding of productive youth development in an international context are the objectives of the PATHWAYS Post-Doctoral Fellowship Programme which is funded by the Jacobs Foundation since 2008. In our biannual issue of the PATHWAYS newsletter, the PATHFINDER, we report on research conducted by the PATHWAYS fellows and the PATHWAYS team. Issue number 7 focuses on studies examining the association between motivation, academic attainment, and student's wellbeing.

What role do values and goal engagement play regarding career related outcomes in times of growing economic and occupational uncertainty? The two papers represented in this issue of the PATHFINDER focus on the values and behavioural responses of young adults facing an uncertain and unstable future and changing employment opportunities.

Clemens Lechner, one of the contributors, is a PATHWAYS Fellow based at the University of Jena at the Center for Applied Developmental Science. Here he reports on findings generated by the research team in Jena examining how contextual change, such as an economic downturn, affects individual development. In his own work he focuses on the interactions between social-contextual factors and personal attributes, in particular personal values and religiosity. His latest research on how young people respond to social change and increasing occupational uncertainty uses data from the Jena longitudinal study that includes information on the experiences of young people and adults in different regions of Germany. The findings suggest that goal engagement, such as active job search or education can improve career related outcomes even when regional employment opportunities are challenging.

Moreover, adaptive coping with occupational uncertainty depends on the capability to strike a balance between engagement and disengagement from active efforts in dealing with occupational uncertainty that matches variations in regional labour market conditions.

Florencia Sortheix, the other PATHWAYS Fellow featured in this newsletter, is based at the Faculty of Social Research at the University of Helsinki. Her work is focused on the role of work values in shaping career choices and work engagement among young adults. She uses data from the longitudinal FinEdu study to examine whether the type of work values held by young adults can help them to weather the current economic crisis and support them in establishing themselves in the labour market. In particular she focuses on the role of intrinsic (interest driven), reward- and security related work values as predictors of employment status and person-job fit, i.e. whether one's job matches one's own characteristics such as education and job preferences. She finds that intrinsic work values predicted a better person-job fit, reward values were associated with a lower risk of being unemployed, while security work values were associated with a higher risk of being unemployed two years later on.

Together these studies suggest that values and goal engagement do indeed play a significant role regarding career related outcomes in times of growing economic and occupational uncertainty. However their effect varies for different outcomes, such as objective and subjective indicators of career success, and their effect depends on contextual opportunities and institutional structures.

Goal Engagement Predicts Favourable Career-Related Outcomes in Coping with Occupational Uncertainty

Clemens Lechner
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In most societies worldwide, employment conditions and career paths have become more uncertain and unstable since the 1970s.¹ Globalization, the deregulation of labour markets, and not least the recent recession, have given rise to a number of new challenges for workers: Difficulties in finding adequate employment, growing risks of job loss, a higher prevalence of atypical and insecure forms of employment, and a lack of security in career planning. Young labour market entrants are often most adversely affected by the challenges that today's increasingly tense and flexible labour markets entail.²

How People Deal With Occupational Uncertainty...

A key question that we have been investigating in our lab in past years is what role people's behavioural responses to growing occupational uncertainty play in shaping important life outcomes. Broadly speaking, people can react in two ways: They can either invest active efforts in an attempt to overcome (or even prevent) occupational uncertainty and its potentially detrimental consequences for their careers, such as by looking for a job that is more secure or participating in continued education in order to improve their job position. This is what we denote as *goal engagement*. Alternatively, people can disregard the importance of occupational goals, downplay their own ability to change their job situation, or distance themselves from occupational challenges altogether. This is what we call *goal disengagement*.

...and why it Matters

Is one of the two ways of dealing with occupational uncertainty – engagement or disengagement – preferable over the other? In his work, PATHWAYS fellow alumnus Martin Tomasik had shown that goal disengagement can, under certain circumstances, be beneficial for subjective well-being. Such was the case among German adults who experienced a high amount of occupational uncertainty and who lived in regions in which objectively unfavourable labour market conditions limited the return on investment of engagement.^{3,4} This work pointed to an important adaptive function of goal disengagement in protecting well-being against futile struggles with occupational goals.

Yet these "benefits of disengagement" are only half of the story. People may sometimes

be able to bolster subjective well-being by disengaging from occupational uncertainty instead of engaging with it – but how might this affect their objective job and career situation? After all, coping strategies that optimize subjective well-being may not necessarily improve one's objective situation. In a recent study that I conducted together with current PATHWAYS fellow Maria K. Pavlova, Principal Investigator Rainer K. Silbereisen, and another colleague of ours from Jena, we set out to investigate this question.⁵ Specifically, we were interested in whether goal engagement and disengagement in coping with occupational uncertainty predict three objective career-related outcomes: Job loss, job finding, and income change.

Our Expectation: Goal Engagement Predicts Positive Career-related Outcomes

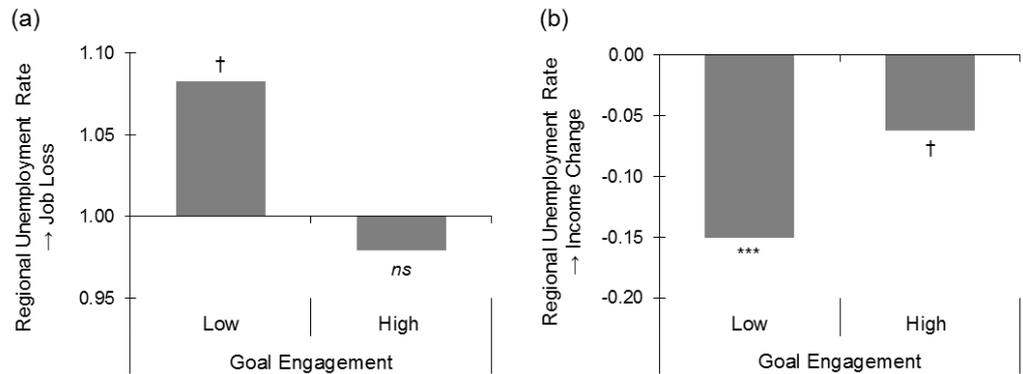
Our expectation was twofold. First, we hypothesised that higher goal engagement predicts favourable career-related outcomes: a lower odds of job loss, a higher odds of finding a job, and positive income change over a one-year period. Second, we hypothesized that goal engagement can countervail the risks that objectively unfavourable labour market conditions in respondents' home regions (i.e., German *Landkreise*) pose for these outcomes; we used regional unemployment rates as an indicator of the labour market situation. In addition, we explored possible effects of goal disengagement in order to juxtapose its effects on the three objective career-related outcomes with those on subjective well-being from Martin Tomasik's studies.

Our Sample: German Youth and Adults

Our analyses focused on a longitudinal sample from the Jena Study on Social Change and Human Development, comprised of 620 German youth and adults aged 16 to 43 years who were first interviewed in 2005/06 and then reinterviewed up to three more times in consecutive yearly assessments (2007, 2008, 2009). Most interviews hence fell into a period in which labour market conditions in Germany were relatively tense. Importantly, however, there was considerable regional variation in labour market conditions among the 81 regions from which our respondents came, with unemployment rates ranging between 3.4 and 27.8 per cent.

Figure 1:

Associations between regional unemployment rate and career-related outcomes at high and low ($M \pm 1$ SD) levels of goal engagement in coping with occupational uncertainty at T1. Outcomes are (a) the likelihood of job loss between T1 and T2 (simple slopes expressed in odds ratios), and (b) income change (i.e., income at T2 controlled for income T1; simple slopes expressed in unstandardized regression weights). † $p < .10$. *** $p < .001$.



Results: Goal Engagement is Beneficial, but its Benefits Depend on the Specific Outcome

We separately assessed the effects of goal engagement and goal disengagement in each preceding year (T_1) on the risk of job loss, odds of job finding, and residual changes in income between this year and the next (T_2). Results partly confirmed our expectations: Goal engagement had a positive main effect on job finding; people who reported more active efforts in dealing with occupational uncertainty were more likely to find a job over a one-year period. In addition, goal engagement buffered the association between higher regional unemployment and higher odds of job loss, as well as negative income change. That is, people who reported more engagement in dealing with occupational uncertainty were less likely to be affected by adverse regional labour market conditions than those who were less engaged. In fact, high engagement appeared to largely offset this relationship. As Figure 1 shows, higher regional unemployment was associated with increased odds of job loss and negative income change for people who showed relatively low (-1 SD) goal engagement but much less so for those reporting high ($+1$ SD) engagement. Finally, goal disengagement predicted a lower income over one year but had no other statistically significant effects.

Goal Engagement and Disengagement in the Context of a Highly Regulated Labour Market

Thus, goal engagement and disengagement matter not only for how people *feel* – but also for how they *fare*. Even though effect sizes were small in conventional terms, we found it remarkable that people's ways of dealing with occupational uncertainty mattered for all three objective career-related outcomes – especially when considering some particularities of the German employment relations system. In a comparative perspective, the German labour market is a “closed” system with a strong differentiation between insiders and outsiders.

Institutional and legal protection for those with job tenure is high and increases over time as seniority privileges arise. The highly regulated nature of the German labour market may both curb the need for, and limit the leeway of, individual agency. This may explain both why the effects of goal engagement were generally limited in scope – and why goal disengagement did not do more harm. It will be worthwhile to extend this research to other countries with more flexible (e.g., Great Britain) and less flexible (e.g., France) labour market regimes.

Striking a Balance Between Goal Engagement and Disengagement

Together with Martin Tomasik's earlier work, these results suggest that both goal engagement and goal disengagement can be adaptive – but their role is contingent on the context and the specific outcome: Whereas goal engagement can promote objective career-related outcomes and shield them against unfavourable labour market conditions, goal disengagement can be useful for protecting subjective well-being under very unfavourable circumstances. In contrast to the popular stereotype that, “Winners never quit, and quitters never win”, adaptive coping with occupational uncertainty thus depends on people's ability to strike a balance between engagement and disengagement in a way that matches the contextual opportunity structure.

What personal attributes and social-contextual factors might promote such opportunity-congruent engagement and disengagement? Our recent work has begun to shed some light on this issue, pointing to religiosity⁶ and dispositional optimism⁷ as psychological factors that can promote opportunity-congruent coping with occupational uncertainty. Certainly, however, more can be learned about this question in future work, including whether opportunity-congruent engagement is a capability that can be promoted through interventions.

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Author profile:

Clemens M. Lechner

Dr. Clemens M. Lechner is a post-doctoral researcher based at the Center for Applied Developmental Science (CADS), Friedrich-Schiller University of Jena in Germany working with Professor Rainer Silbereisen

Clemens studied psychology with sociology as a minor at the University of Jena where he received the award for the best degree of the year 2011. He then completed his PhD *summa cum laude* at the Collaborative Research Center 580 (“Psychosocial resources and coping with social change”). In his doctoral dissertation, he investigated the role of religiosity as a resource and risk factor in coping with social and economic change.

Following completion of this PhD, Clemens joined the PATHWAYS programme as a postdoctoral fellow in January 2014. He is currently working with Rainer K. Silbereisen at the Center for Applied Developmental Science (CADS). Clemens’ research is broadly concerned with how social and

economic change impact on human development across the life span. It is comprised of three interconnected strands. First, he investigates how uncertainties (e.g., occupational uncertainty), opportunities (e.g., broadening lifestyle choice), as well as life events (e.g., unemployment) that arise from macro-level societal change influence individual development. Second, he explores what role psychosocial resources (e.g., religiosity) and individual agency (e.g., coping strategies) play in dealing with such challenges and opportunities. Third, he is interested in how social ecologies (e.g., labor market conditions) shape people’s exposure to social and economic change.

In addition to his work in academia, Clemens has been active in the



German Speaking University Debating movement for a decade now. As a trainer, coach, and organizer in various roles, he is working to promote political debating and critical thinking skills among youth and young adults in order to empower them to be drivers of social change.

Work Values and Engagement among Youth in the 21st Century: Perspectives from Finland in a European Context

Florencia M. Sortheix

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The current economic crisis poses great challenges to emerging young adults striving to gain financial independence. The difficulties in the transition from education to work and structural factors have created a generation of young people named in the media as “the Génération précaire” (France), “the Mileuristas” (Spain) or “lost generation”. In my post-doctoral research I focus on the motivational factors associated with a successful transition from study to work life in a changing social context. I am originally from Argentina and having lived in Spain and Finland gave me the possibility to experience myself how different contexts shape the possibilities we can dream for ourselves and our future.

Work values and the transition to working life

This report is about two studies that are part of my post-doctoral research within the PATHWAYS program. In particular I focus on the question: what type of motivation in terms of work values could help young adults to weather the current economic crisis and support them in the transition to work life? Work values are the things people consider important in their future jobs (Johnson & Monserud, 2010; Johnson, Sage, & Mortimer, 2012) and constitute one of the most important motivational concepts in vocational and organizational psychology (Johnson & Monserud, 2010; Judge & Bretz, 1992). Intrinsic work values are defined as the importance placed on rewards derived from participating in the work tasks themselves, such as interest, possibilities of learning and a good match between job characteristics and personal skills and values. On the other side, extrinsic work values refer to the importance placed on rewards that are external to the work experience, such as having a high salary, chances of promotion and security in the work place. Young people have to decide what to do when they graduate - and their work values are important antecedents of the career choices and occupational outcomes. However, the role of work values in shaping other important work outcomes, such as work engagement has not been explored.

Work engagement is a key research topic for career development, performance and well-being. Work engagement refers to a positive and psychologically fulfilling state of mind characterized by high levels of energy, involvement, and concentration in work situations (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008; Salmela-Aro, Tolvanen, & Nurmi, 2011).

In collaboration with PATHWAYS fellows Julia Dietrich, Angela Chow and Prof. Katariina Salmela-Aro we analyzed whether work values were related to work engagement using the FinEdu longitudinal sample of Finnish young adults ($N = 571$).

Based on self-determination theory ideas (SDT, Ryan, & Deci, 2000) and the job-demand resource model (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007) we proposed that intrinsic and extrinsic career values would serve as a *personal resource* providing different motivations for subsequent engagement at work. We proposed that intrinsic career values would be positive antecedents of work engagement as these values are based on autonomous forms of motivations and foster the satisfaction of autonomy and competence needs (Gagné & Deci, 2005). In turn, extrinsic work values motivate behavior for instrumental reasons. The motivation to work comes from the rewards or other consequences separable from the work activities per se (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT characterizes this later form of motivation as controlled motivation, which is related to higher anxiety, lower well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Sheldon, & Elliot, 1999), and higher burnout in the long term (van Beek, Taris, & Schaufeli, 2011). We proposed that extrinsic work values (focused on high salary or security) would undermine feelings of autonomy and well-being at work, and thus were expected to relate to lower levels of work engagement.

Results showed that higher intrinsic career values at age 20 were positively related to subsequent work engagement by age 22, controlling for other relevant variables, such as work situation (Sortheix, Dietrich, Chow, & Salmela-Aro, 2013). However, the results showed no significant associations between rewards and security work values and engagement. Finally, perceived person-organization (P-O) value congruence (i.e. a good match between the individuals' values and goals and those of the organization) was the strongest predictor of work engagement.

Our findings agree with the idea that the experience of work engagement indicates the adaptation to the new life situation and reflects the interplay between personal characteristics and the available resources in the environment (Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2003).

In our study personal resources, such as intrinsic work values, and organizational factors, such as the P-O value congruence were significant factors in shaping and facilitating the transition from study to work life in terms of engagement. Organizations aiming at increasing well-being of their employees could profit from these results by restraining from using only extrinsic job rewards to motivate young workers.

Work values and success in employment

To further explore the role of career or work values in the transition to employment, we examined whether work values at age 20 predicted success in employment at age 23 as defined by having a job (versus being unemployed) and person-job fit (Sortheix, Chow, & Salmela-Aro, submitted). Person-job fit refers to the level of match between the job characteristics and the person's competences, interests, values and abilities. We examined the role of three work values: 1) intrinsic (perceived importance of having a job that is interesting and matches one's own competences), 2) rewards (having a good salary and high chance for promotion), and 3) security (having a stable job) on subsequent employment status and person-job fit.

Results showed that intrinsic work values predicted a higher degree of person-job fit two years later. This finding suggests that even under the current economic crisis and greater challenges for youth in finding a job, holding an intrinsic work motivation seems to direct individuals towards a job that suits their competences and abilities (i.e. higher person-job fit).

Rewards oriented work values predicted lower chances of being unemployed, whereas security work values predicted higher chances of being unemployed later on. Based on our results from this Finnish sample, focusing on finding a stable job with good working conditions (security work values) does not seem to be a good strategy in terms of finding employment. A focus on security in the context of an uncertain labour market points towards a mismatch between expectations (i.e. having stability) and the opportunities that are likely available (e.g. flexible and changing jobs). On the contrary, rewards work values decreased the chances of being unemployed.

Research has shown, however, that such extrinsic work orientation was related to higher burnout in adulthood because it does not contribute to the satisfaction of human needs for autonomy and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; van Beek, Taris, & Schaufeli, 2011).

Thus, caution should be taken before promoting rewards work values as the drive for work as this might have negative consequences in the long run.

Unexpectedly, results also showed that those participants who had followed an academic track reported lower person-job fit than those in vocational track. This could be signaling the difficulties higher educated people experience in finding suitable jobs during times of economic crisis. Contrary to previous findings in the US, family socio-economic status (SES) was not related to unemployment status. Lower SES was associated to higher security work values, but was not related with intrinsic and rewards work values. Differences in our findings from research done in the US could be explained by the strong welfare system in Finland which guarantees free education for everyone regardless of their family background.

The interplay of motivations and opportunities

In sum, these studies suggest that the interplay between personal motivations and the opportunities available in the context influences the associations between work values and work outcomes. It is however, interesting to see that even in the context of the current economic crisis which poses limits to personal choice, developing intrinsic work values during college years seems a helpful strategy to foster work engagement and a higher level of person-job fit later on. However, not all jobs allow for self-expression and further research is needed to analyze whether having high intrinsic work values may lead some young adults to reject some types of jobs that do not match their interests and skills and could be detrimental for finding employment in times of economic hardship. In fact, intrinsic work values were not related to having a job (versus being unemployed) in our sample. The challenge of finding *any* job under the current economic reality could explain why rewards work values were positively and security work values negatively related to having a job later on. Rewards work values direct people to look for a job as a means of survival as they need to work to provide for independent living and get ahead in life. On the contrary, when insecurity reigns, attributing importance to a job that offers predictability and security may drive people away for the job possibilities that would be available (i.e. more flexible or instable jobs). Finally, these conclusion warrant caution as the results come from a strong Scandinavian welfare country, and results could be different in other countries with a flexible labour market, such as the US or the UK.

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Florencia is a post-doctoral researcher at the Faculty of Social Research (Social Psychology), University of Helsinki and at the Department of Psychology, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. In her doctoral dissertation, which was completed at the University of Helsinki in April 2014, she analyzed the role of context on the relationships between personal values and well-being. Results showed that these associations are influenced by country-level characteristics, by the social groups to which individuals belong, as well as by organizational and developmental situations.

Florencia has been involved in the Finnish Educational Transitions (FinEdu) Study lead by Prof. Katariina Salmela-Aro since 2010. Her current

research focuses on the relationships between work values, career choices and work engagement among young adults. Of particular interest is the development of motivation during early work experiences. She is also interested in cross-national comparisons examining the role of context on individual-level variables.

As a psychotherapist by training Florencia is interested in how academic knowledge can be transmitted into practices that influence the lives of young people. Towards this aim, she has started collaborating with Nyyti, a Finnish association that works to promote the mental health of youth.



Florencia is collaborating with a proposal for Horizon 2020 call “youth as drivers of social change” together with Prof. Salmela-Aro, and partners from UK, Italy, Poland, Germany and Turkey. She has also been awarded the Ella and Georg Ehrnrooth foundation’s grant and The Finnish Work Environment Fund postdoctoral grant to continue with her research.

Recent author publications

- **Lechner, C. M.,** & Silbereisen, R. K. (2015). Neue Impulse für die Sozialisationsforschung aus der Entwicklungspsychologie [New Directions for Socialization Research: Insights From Developmental Psychology]. *Zeitschrift für Soziologie der Erziehung und Sozialisation*, 35(2), 141–156.
- Körner, A., **Lechner, C. M.,** Pavlova, M. K., & Silbereisen, R. K. (2015). Goal Engagement in Coping With Occupational Uncertainty Predicts Favorable Career-Related Outcomes. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 88, 174–184.
- **Lechner, C. M.,** & Leopold, T. (2015). Religious attendance buffers the impact of unemployment on life satisfaction: Longitudinal evidence from Germany. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 54(1), 166–174.
- **Sortheix, F. M.** & Lönnqvist, J.-E. (2015). Person-group value congruence and subjective well-being in students from Argentina, Bulgaria and Finland. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 25, 34-48.
- **Sortheix, F. M.** & Lönnqvist, J.-E. (2014). Personal value priorities and life satisfaction: The role of socio-economic development across Europe. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 45 (2), 282–299.

News

Pathways Fellows, Florencia Sortheix and Heta Tuominen-Soini, from the University of Helsinki organised a collaborative meeting with Fellows, Maria Pavlova and Clemens Lechner, from the University of Jena in April this year. A Pathways seminar on “Transitions to work life” was held at the University of Helsinki, Finland on April 10th, 2015. The visiting Fellows stayed for a week to work on joint research interests using the FinEdu data.

Florencia Sortheix also hosted Pathways alumnus Julia Dietrich’s Erasmus teacher exchange program including a course on longitudinal analyses using Mplus at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki.



- The major objective of the programme is to promote the next generation of researchers through funding, mentoring and collaboration
- The mission of this Collaborative Post-Doctoral Fellowship Programme is to stimulate innovative, interdisciplinary, and comparative research of productive youth development.
- Our programme brings together experts from the UK, Germany, Finland, Sweden and the US
- We engage with different stakeholders in how best to equip young people or mastering the challenges of growing up in a changing social context.

Principal Investigators and participating institutions

- Lars Bergman – Stockholm University
- Jacquelynne S. Eccles – University of Michigan
- Katariina Salmela-Aro – University of Helsinki
- Barbara Schneider – Michigan State University
- Ingrid Schoon – Institute of Education, University of London
- Rainer K. Silbereisen – University of Jena
- Ulrich Trautwein -University of Tübingen

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