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Invest in Your Mental Health, Support Your Career. Exploring the Impact of Mental Health Activities on Movement Capital and the Mediating Role of Flourishing and Career Engagement during the Transition to Work

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Abstract: The current theorising of career self-management advocates that personal resources that support an adaptive transition to work are bound to individual agency. Yet, research still needs to enrich the empirical exploration of how behaviours in personal life affect careers. For this reason, we explored the impact of mental-health activities—a group of self-help activities that people can perform to increase their mental health—on movement capital among Italian new entrants in the labour market. We also explored a mechanism underlying this relationship by testing the mediating role of flourishing and career engagement. We collected data from 229 Italian university students and recent graduates through an online questionnaire. Contrary to our expectations, we found no significant direct relationship between mental-health activities and movement capital, yet the results supported an indirect relationship. The findings contribute to existing evidence about how personal life behaviours affect career self-management and advance the understanding of the role of mental health activities. This work suggests ways to encourage engagement in self-help behaviours and implement public and higher education interventions to foster these behaviours’ benefits for an adaptive transition to work.

Keywords: mental-health activities; career self-management; school-to-work transition; flourishing; career engagement; movement capital; transition to work



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1. Introduction

The transition to work for young people raises severe concerns among scholars and practitioners in early career studies. Labour market entrants face tough challenges worldwide. Normative tasks of entering a new life stage, such as negotiating professional identity and fulfilling societal expectations as adults in the labour market [1,2], are combined with the constant evolution of work and technologies and subsequent discontinuity to entrants’ future career prospects [3–6]. In addition, the peculiar career ecosystem exerts its demanding effect through local economic and political forces [3]. A stagnant economy like the Italian one falls short of assuring significant occupational opportunities for youth [7,8] or stimulating recovery from unprecedented and disruptive events for youth employment outlooks (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic and War in Ukraine [7]). These challenges hinder a positive adaptation to a new life stage at the expense of career sustainability—namely, well-being, happiness, and productivity [4,6]—a crucial achievement of contemporary careers at all stages. Indeed, these conditions may constrain new entrants’ capacity to gain meaning and continuity in their career endeavours over time and across spaces, which are needed to achieve sustainability.

The resource-based view of career self-management [9] asserts that people's career self-management relies on building and fostering career resources—through proactive career behaviours—to face career demands proficiently. In line with this, new entrants must accumulate career resources to increase their employability, enhance coping responses against threats of life/career events, and gain valued transition-to-work outcomes even against the complexity of their career landscape [10,11]. Recently, the need to explore whether behaviours outside the realm of careers cultivate career resources has been advocated [12,13]. This is based on the assumption that a career occurs in a multidimensional life context, where personal-life aspects can intersect with the career and everyday behaviours influence its management [14]. In particular, mental-health activities (henceforth, MHAs)—the engagement in purposeful achievement, exercise, and emotional-regulation behaviours [15]—are connected with psychological well-being and motivate better functioning and behaviours in life domains, leading to personal resources [16]. Although promising research has already been conducted—considering, for instance, the role of leisure activities [17]—the analysis of non-work/non-career behaviours and their relationship with career self-management factors is still to be discussed.

Therefore, we draw on the resource-based model of career self-management [9,12,18] and the overarching Conservation of Resources (henceforth, COR) theory [19]—upon which the career self-management model is rooted—to answer the research question of whether and how MHAs play a role in the accumulation of relevant career resources. COR theory understands human behaviour as motivated towards achieving key psychosocial resources to reach one's goals and life functioning, and the career self-management model has incorporated this basic tenet. Within this framework, our study chases two specific goals via a study conducted with a sample of Italian entrants in the labour market (i.e., university students and recent graduates). First, we draw upon the basic tenet of the resource-based framework adopted and test the relationship between MHAs and movement capital, an aggregate of career resources [20]). Indeed, we advance that devoting efforts to self-care and self-help is functional to building or reinforcing one's connections, understanding aspects of the professional self, and increasing self-confidence. This is expected to enhance new entrants' social capital, career identity, and self-efficacy, the core dimensions of movement capital. Second, we lean on the COR theory's gain-spirals principle [19] to depict one mechanism through which MHAs lead to movement capital. We indeed hypothesise that the initial investment in MHAs elicits a gain spiral towards career resources through the subsequent mediation of flourishing and career engagement.

On the theoretical side, our work responds to the call to further delve into the career-/non-career-domains connection and its effect on career self-management [12], proposing MHAs as career-resource-generating factors. Moreover, the serial mediating hypothesis may shed light on how individuals can capitalise on their involvement in daily self-help activities to trigger a positive spiral of resource acquisition, which can also benefit their entry-to-work stage. Our results may inform new entrants, higher-education institutions, and guidance professionals regarding implementing health-oriented behaviours to increase new entrants' chances of having an adaptive transition to work.

2. Hypothesis Development

2.1. *The Relationship between Mental-Health Activities and Movement Capital from a Resource-Based View of Career Self-Management*

COR theory [19,21,22] asserts that people must invest in purposeful and intentional behaviours to protect, recover, and accumulate aggregates (or caravans) of psychosocial resources valued on their own or useful for reaching meaningful goals. Hirschi et al. adopted this approach in explaining career self-management [9,18] to assert that caravans of career resources for proficient and rewarding career management at all stages of one's development are conditional upon people's agency. The psychological literature on careers acknowledges that a career happens in a multidimensional context and results from the intersection of career and non-career domains [10,12] and that aspects of private life can

empower career resources [23]. This leads to the assumption that the personal life sphere represents a resource-generating factor and that purposeful involvement in self-directed activities in private life, here represented by MHAs, can build career resources, that is, in our study, movement capital.

The scholarly work from Morgan et al. [15,24] identified a group of self-help activities people could perform to increase their mental health (i.e., MHAs). These activities encompass three discrete groups of behaviours [25]: (1) positive-orientation activities, which refer to the performance of purposeful activities to enhance positive emotions, achievement, and social connectivity; (2) emotion regulation, encapsulating activities carried out to alleviate tension and emotional arousal; and (3) physical engagement, addressing exercise and physical activity. Morgan et al. [15] underlined that these activities are meant to be practical actions that people without mental health issues can perform without professional guidance to promote personal resources for improving the quality of their lives.

Movement capital represents a building block for a proficient transition to work [26]. Indeed, it is an aggregate of psychosocial resources facilitating people's employability, triggering motivation and agency in career transitions [20]. We understand movement capital as composed of social capital, career identity, and self-efficacy. Social capital embodies the network of one's relationships, which helps increase skills, knowledge, access to opportunities, and social support. Career identity encompasses how people see themselves in their occupational future [27], which enables them to set meaningful career goals and choices [26]. Self-efficacy reflects the adaptability feature of movement capital [28], as it represents the self-judgement about the capability to perform tasks across situations and overcome obstacles and changes [29], produced by direct and indirect life experiences [30]. Herein, we posit that MHAs influence the three resources of movement capital based on the COR theory's assumption that resources do not nurture singly but flourish together in fertile conditions [22].

Previous studies about leisure-time activities—conceptually close to MHAs [25]—help support the relationship between MHAs and movement capital. Concerning social capital, research has shown that engaging in various forms of purposeful and playful activities reflecting positive orientation (e.g., doing something pleasant and meaningful) constitutes a setting for building social interactions that can be exploited to receive information and support [31,32]. Analogously, engaging in physical activity (e.g., playing sports, exercising) is a driver to building connections with others, which can be prosperous and resourceful in terms of support and opportunities [33,34]. Moreover, research has shown that emotion-regulation-related behaviours like self-disclosure or connecting with trusted ones can strengthen interpersonal relationships through enhanced reciprocity and trust [35,36].

Scholars have also advocated that engagement in activities for personal enjoyment and health informs career identity development. These actions represent a space where one can explore various spheres of activity, discover and test their talents and values, and understand the desired future career self to commit to [37–39]. For instance, previous studies have demonstrated that positive orientation and physical-engagement behaviours are associated with developing occupational interests, preferences, and aspirations about future professional life [40–42]. Tension-alleviating techniques (i.e., emotion regulation) downplay the impact of intrusive and negative career thoughts [43]. As such, they enhance career decision-making processes [44], producing more precise career goals and stronger commitment [45], ultimately strengthening career identity [43].

Coherently, past research has shown that engaging and mastering positive orientation or physical engagement generates more positive beliefs in one's capabilities and problem-solving capacity [46], inducing a heightened sense of efficacy [13,47,48]. In addition, the literature reports that relaxation and self-rewarding behaviours (i.e., emotion-regulation activities) are functional in replenishing psychological energies that could be mobilised adequately, eliciting confidence in handling tasks (that is, self-efficacy [47]).

The literature does not document the impact of MHAs on career resources. On the other hand, the closely related concept of leisure has been shown to be influential, affecting

career resources like adaptability, resilience, and perceived employability [13,17,49]. In this vein, Kelly et al. [13] suggested enriching empirical exploration of the role of extra-career behaviours by analysing their impact on other resources useful for career achievements. Building on this, we want to extend the understanding of how the personal sphere affects career self-management, particularly the development of movement capital. Hence, we expect that:

Hypothesis 1. *MHAs are positively related to movement capital.*

2.2. The Mediating Role of Flourishing and Career Engagement

We posit the serial mediation of flourishing and career engagement to explore a mechanism underlying the MHAs–movement-capital relationship. The theoretical support for this assumption comes from the COR theory, stating that people wealthier in resources are better positioned to invest in resources, maximise existing resources, and build new ones in an upward gain spiral [19,21]. Investing in mental-health behaviours should result in acquiring a resource like flourishing, which motivates career-engagement behaviours and, in turn, enhances movement capital.

The first step of the serial path is the MHAs–flourishing relationship. Flourishing represents psychological well-being as a form of psychosocial prosperity in a unique general variable combining hedonic well-being (i.e., positive emotions) and eudaimonic well-being (i.e., optimal functioning in terms of purpose in life, positive relationships, sense of mastery, and meaning in life) [50]. MHAs have been shown to promote positive psychological well-being and human functioning [16,24] in non-clinical populations. Adopting Frederickson's [51] broaden-and-build perspective, scholars have assumed that positive emotions and moods triggered by practising MHAs might broaden thinking and coping repertoires, ultimately leading to well-being through a resource-gain spiral. Along the same lines, flourishing is amenable to change thanks to MHAs. Catalino et al. [52] showed that engaging in recreational and social behaviours (i.e., positive orientation) elicits a positive spiral of positive emotions and regulatory functions, sustaining higher purposefulness and environmental mastery, ultimately enhancing flourishing. Bélanger et al. [53] and Oswald et al. [54] demonstrated that purposefully walking in nature or spending time outside (i.e., emotion regulation) is associated with higher levels of flourishing. Lastly, behaviours related to physical health and achievement are also beneficial to making people flourish [55–57].

The second step of the serial path includes a flourishing–career engagement relationship. Career engagement pertains to the proactive behaviours necessary to direct one's career development and optimise the transition to work. It represents the extent to which someone develops their career through a host of behaviours like (a) career planning, (b) self-and environment exploration, (c) networking, (d) human-capital development, and (e) positioning behaviours [58]. Along the lines of the COR theory, flourishing people may have in their well-being a resource to invest [59,60] and take the initiative towards reaching the goal of effective career development [61]. Specifically, flourishing people are expected to experience positive emotions and psychological functioning, which may broaden their repertoires of action and thought, enhancing cognitive and behavioural flexibility [51,59]. This means they could be more willing and capable of taking the initiative in proactive behaviours [62,63], including those relevant to career development (i.e., career engagement [64]). Research has testified that flourishing facilitates human-capital development and positioning (e.g., academic engagement and achievement [65–67]). Flourishing enacts more lateral and generative thinking [68], helping new entrants to develop and regulate their career goals and plans to commit to them [69]. Moreover, flourishing promotes people's curiosity, interest, and openness [68], suggesting that it elicits career-exploration behaviours [70,71]. Lastly, flourishing people are expected to be more other-oriented and willing to engage in interpersonal relationships [59], thus hinting at a positive relationship with networking behaviours [72].

Having well-being resources to invest in career engagement and further build new resources leads to serial mediation's third and final step, which includes the relationship between career engagement and movement capital. Vocational and career self-management literature usually regards career resources as motivational levers of career behaviours [73]. On the contrary, based on the COR theory of career self-management [9], we incorporate career engagement as a resource-caravan (i.e., movement capital)-generating factor. Career engagement contributes to resource enhancement, such as perceived employability and career identity [58,74]. Recently, Petruzzello et al. [75] argued that the transition to work calls upon multiple career behaviours to produce a compound of resources on which to capitalise. They posited that career-engagement behaviours foster career identity not only through self- and environmental exploration—which is widely known to result in career identity—but also by integrating information derived from networking and self-enhancement actions. Moreover, social capital is developed not only through networking but also by creating serendipitous connections during exploration and development activities. Self-efficacy also rises through career engagement (i.e., learning experiences derived from career behaviours that can nurture self-confidence). They found a significant positive relationship between career engagement and movement capital.

Building on the above, we argue that flourishing and career engagement bridge MHAs and movement capital, explaining this relationship. Hence, we posit that:

Hypothesis 2. *Flourishing and career engagement serially mediate the relationship between MHAs and movement capital.*

Figure 1 shows the hypothesised model.

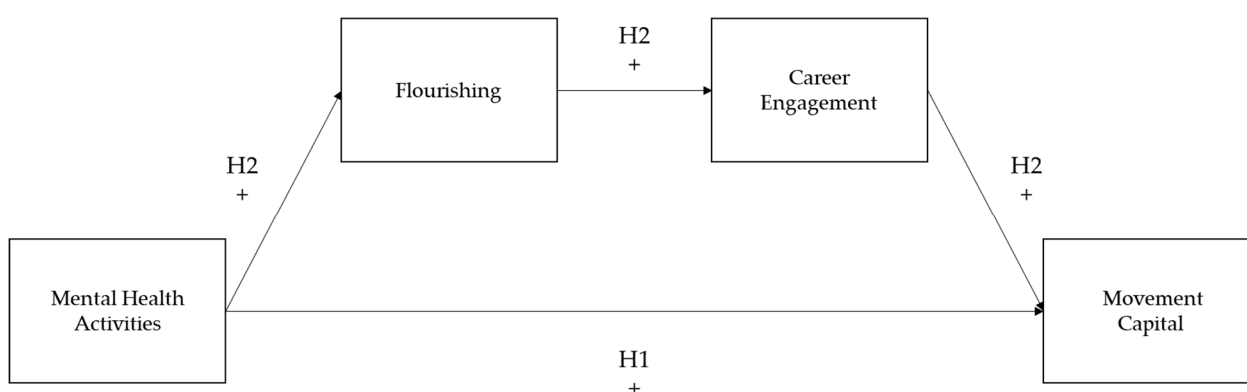


Figure 1. The hypothesised model.

3. Method

3.1. Procedure and Sample

Our study, which started in July 2022 and ended in January 2023, complied with the Guidelines of the Helsinki Declaration [76]. The ethical committee of the authors' institution authorised the data collection. The research adopted a cross-sectional design involving entrants in the Italian labour market who were asked to complete an online questionnaire. In line with the study's rationale, we recruited participants among (1) university students and (2) recent graduates who had received their degrees up to one year and a half before the data collection. The questionnaire was distributed for voluntary completion on the online platform Qualtrics. It contained an introduction that explained the research purpose and assured confidentiality. Participants could participate voluntarily and give their informed consent. In addition, they had the right to withdraw at any time, in compliance with EU Regulation no. 679/2016. We obtained a final sample of 229 participants, mostly women (89%). Age ranged from 22 to 35 years ($M = 27.44$; $SD = 2.63$). Concerning their educational and professional condition, most declared themselves as belonging to the category of recent graduates, as they had a bachelor's or master's degree (82.1%). The rest were students

in bachelor's- or master's-degree programs. Most participants claimed to be employed (66.4%). The majority (80.3%) also reported previous work experience.

3.2. Measurements

3.2.1. Mental-Health Activities

The questionnaire included the Mental Health Activity Scale, based on the work of Morgan and Jorm [15], developed by Hofmann and Kholman [25], and translated from English to Italian following a translation-back-translation procedure [77]. We used 11 items of this self-report scale to assess three facets of MHAs: positive orientation (four items, e.g., "I do something I enjoy"), physical engagement (three items, e.g., "I am physically active or engaged in exercise"), and emotional regulation (four items, e.g., "I talk over problems or feelings with someone who is supportive and caring"). The response format ranged from 1 = *not true* to 4 = *true*. The original scale obtained an acceptable reliability value in the global version, whereas the subscales presented insufficient internal consistency, as tested by Cronbach's alpha [25]. Moreover, the original study remarked on a three-factor structure of the scale. Following the indications provided by the translation procedure, we removed one item, as its formulation and meaning may not have been fully applicable to an Italian audience. Three factors emerged from an exploratory factor analysis (using principal-axis factoring with Promax rotation and the scree plot), accounting for 57.87% of the total variance and corresponding to positive orientation, physical engagement, and emotional regulation. We dropped one item because it did not load any of the factors that emerged. Following Hofmann and Kholman [25], we further tested the factorial structure via confirmatory factor analysis with the Amos software, testing a three-factor model with the nine resulting items. We evaluated the model's goodness of fit using the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR), the comparative fit index (CFI), the non-normed fit index (NNFI), and the ratio of the model's chi-square and the degrees of freedom (χ^2/df). Values for CFI and NNFI at least ≥ 0.90 , RMSEA and SRMR at least ≤ 0.08 , and $\chi^2/\text{df} < 3$ suggest an acceptable fit [78]. The results indicated a good fit (RMSEA = 0.07; SRMR = 0.05; CFI = 0.94; NNFI = 0.91; $\chi^2/\text{df} = 2.26$). We used the score computed from the nine items as a single indicator of MHAs with good internal reliability (Cronbach's-alpha value = 0.76).

3.2.2. Flourishing

We used the Italian version of the scale by Diener et al. [50], validated by Di Fabio [79]. This scale consists of 8 items, with which the participants must express their degree of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = *Completely disagree* to 5 = *Completely agree*). An example of an item is: "I lead a purposeful and meaningful life." The internal reliability was good (Cronbach's-alpha value = 0.82).

3.2.3. Career Engagement

We used the Italian version of the career engagement scale [58] by Petruzzello et al. [75]. The scale's nine items (e.g., "To what extent have you in the past two months ... " " ... actively sought to design your professional future?") were assessed with a Likert response scale ranging from 1 = *Almost never* to 5 = *Very often*. We obtained good internal reliability (Cronbach's-alpha value = 0.89).

3.2.4. Movement Capital

Following González-Romá et al. [28], we measured the participants' movement capital by assessing career identity (four items, e.g., "I have a clear idea about the place where I want to address my professional career"), social capital (two items, e.g., "I have an extensive network of friends and family members who would help me find job opportunities"), and self-efficacy (three items; e.g., "I am able to solve the problems that I deal with"). The response scale was Likert type, ranging from 1 = *Completely disagree* to 5 = *Completely agree*.

agree. We averaged these items to create an overall score with acceptable internal reliability (Cronbach's- α value = 0.75)

3.2.5. Control Variables

We included participants' age, gender, previous work experience, and employment status as control variables. These variables have been deemed to influence the career-self-management process of resource accumulation [12].

See the list of items for MHAs, flourishing, career engagement, and movement capital in Appendix A.

3.3. Analytical Strategy

We performed Harman's one-factor test to evaluate the severity of common-method bias, which would affect our results, given the nature of the data collection, with self-report measures and a cross-sectional design [80]. Moreover, we computed each study variable's means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations. For the hypotheses, we used IBM SPSS software, version 25. We employed the analytical approach and the macro PROCESS developed by Hayes [81] to test the direct (Hypothesis 1) and indirect (serial-mediation hypothesis; Hypothesis 2) relationships with Model 6 of the macro. We used 5000 bootstrapped samples with a 95% confidence interval for the model testing and effects estimation.

4. Results

Harman's single-factor test confirmed the low potential impact of common-method bias since the single factor explained only 23.03% of the variance. Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics of our data. Specifically, our study's core variables are all positively and significantly related.

Table 1. Correlations, means, and standard deviations.

| | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|-----------------------------------|-------|------|--------|----------|-------|-------|---------|---------|---------|---|
| 1. Gender ^a | 0.89 | 0.31 | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Age | 27.44 | 2.63 | −0.035 | | | | | | | |
| 3. Employment status ^b | 0.34 | 0.47 | 0.004 | −0.21 ** | | | | | | |
| 4. Work experience ^c | 0.19 | 0.39 | −0.08 | −0.22 ** | 0.10 | | | | | |
| 5. Mental-health activities | 2.83 | 0.53 | −0.03 | −0.05 | −0.03 | −0.02 | | | | |
| 6. Flourishing | 3.73 | 0.54 | −0.02 | −0.07 | −0.06 | −0.04 | 0.64 ** | | | |
| 7. Career Engagement | 3.47 | 0.76 | −0.02 | 0.06 | 0.03 | −0.05 | 0.26 ** | 0.34 ** | | |
| 8. Movement capital | 3.54 | 0.51 | −0.08 | −0.07 | −0.03 | −0.01 | 0.39 ** | 0.53 ** | 0.49 ** | |

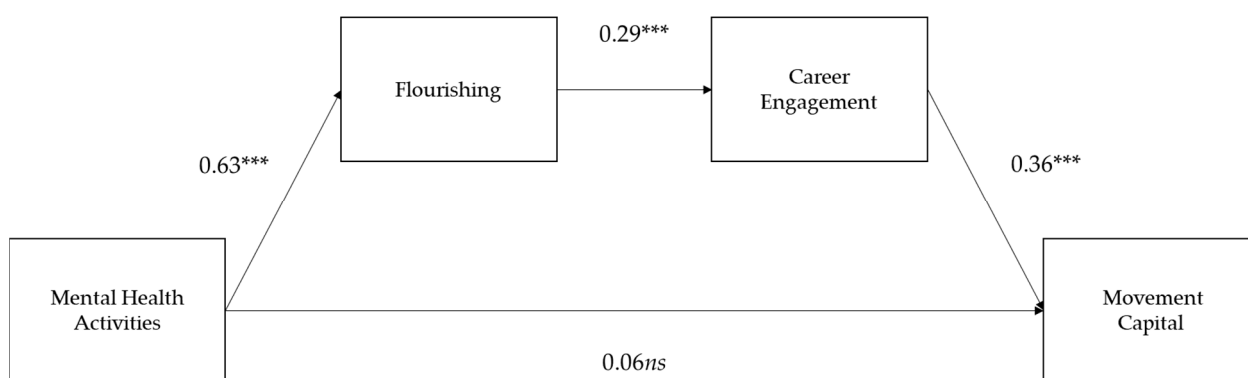
Note. $N = 229$. ** $p < 0.01$. ^a 0 = man; 1 = woman; ^b 0 = employed; 1 = unemployed; ^c 0 = with work experience; 1 = without work experience.

We tested the direct and indirect effects through PROCESS macro estimation of the model (Table 2 and Figure 2). Our data did not support Hypothesis 1, as the presumed positive relationship between MHAs and movement capital was not significant. On the other hand, the results corroborated Hypothesis 2. Indeed, all the presumed direct relationships marking the steps of the mediating process were significant, and the indirect relationship between MHAs and movement capital through the serial mediation of flourishing and career engagement was significant (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of the mediation analysis for Hypotheses 1 and 2.

| Variable | Mediator 1 (Flourishing) | | | | Mediator 2 (Career Engagement) | | | | Dependent Variable (Movement Capital) | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|------|---------|---------|-----------------------------------|------|---------|---------|--|------|---------|---------|
| | β | SE | t-Value | p-Value | β | SE | t-Value | p-Value | β | SE | t-Value | p-Value |
| Control Variable | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gender | −0.01 | 0.08 | −0.15 | 0.88 | −0.01 | 0.12 | −0.18 | 0.86 | −0.06 | 0.06 | −1.21 | 0.23 |
| Age | −0.06 | 0.01 | −1.09 | 0.28 | 0.09 | 0.02 | 1.41 | 0.16 | −0.07 | 0.01 | −1.31 | 0.19 |
| Employment status | −0.05 | 0.04 | −0.91 | 0.36 | 0.07 | 0.07 | 1.11 | 0.27 | −0.03 | 0.04 | −0.51 | 0.61 |
| Work experience | −0.04 | 0.07 | −0.69 | 0.49 | −0.03 | 0.12 | −0.45 | 0.65 | 0.01 | 0.07 | 0.19 | 0.84 |
| Independent Variable | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Mental health activities | 0.63 | 0.05 | 12.25 | 0.00 | 0.08 | 0.12 | 0.97 | 0.33 | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.96 | 0.34 |
| Flourishing | | | | | 0.29 | 0.12 | 3.64 | 0.00 | 0.36 | 0.07 | 5.24 | 0.00 |
| Career engagement | | | | | | | | | 0.36 | 0.04 | 6.41 | 0.00 |
| R^2 | | | 0.41 | | | | 0.13 | | | | 0.41 | |
| F | | | 31.11 | | | | 5.53 | | | | 21.58 | |
| Indirect Effect | | | | | | | | | β | SE | LL | UL |
| Mental health activities → flourishing → career engagement → movement capital | | | | | | | | | 0.07 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.11 |

Note. $N = 229$. SE = standard error. LL = lower limit of the 95% confidence interval (1000 samples); UL = upper limit of the 95% confidence interval (1000 samples).

**Figure 2.** Path coefficients of the tested model (Hypotheses 1 & 2). Note. *** $p < 0.001$; ns = not significant.

5. Discussion

The COR-theory-based career-self-management perspective [9,18] assumes that career self-management pertains to acquiring resources for an adaptive transition to work in complex scenarios, conditional upon people's investment in career behaviours. Scholarly work has suggested that investment in activities outside the career domain also generates resources for an adaptive career endeavour and has encouraged more empirical inquiry into the role of these activities [12,13]. Consistently, referring to the principles of COR theory [21], we studied the role of certain non-career behaviours in generating career resources, involving a sample of Italian new entrants in the labour market—namely, university students and recent graduates.

First, we tested the positive relationship between MHAs (i.e., everyday self-help behaviours functional to enhancing mental health and human functioning, combining purposeful achievement and physical- and emotion-regulation behaviours [15]) and movement capital (Hypothesis 1). Contrary to our expectations, the relationship between MHAs and movement capital was not significant, thus not supporting our hypothesis. This finding does not align with the existing literature, which has shown that investment in leisure behaviours (conceptually close to MHAs [16]) is associated with an increase in personal career resources in early career stages [13,17,49]. A possible explanation of this result is that MHAs encompass the performance of self-help activities on a general level, whereas previous studies found that extra-career influence occurs only under certain conditions. For instance, Demirtas et al. [49], Kelly et al. [13], and Nimmi and Donald [17] showed that the seriousness (e.g., frequency), quality, and content (e.g., similarity with work-/career-related tasks) with which people engage in recreational and self-care behaviours affect

the development of career resources. Translated herein, we argue that MHAs should be characterised by continuous and structured (rather than casual or short-term) involvement and effort in learning and mastering new things to generate movement capital effectively. In addition, they should be meaningful so that the resource acquired in the private domain can be transferred to the career-management domain [82]. Related to this, it is also arguable that our inconsistent result is because movement-capital development needs meaningful activities in which challenges are mastered, there is opportunity to socialise with others, and experimenting with possible future selves can take place, which may not be the case for everyone. However, the MHA scale used here does not tap into the multifaced nature and content of self-help activities. That said, we endorse existing literature that suggests integrating the MHA type and content into theorising about the functioning and effects. Moreover, we encourage future research on the career-/non-career-domain connection to consider the complexity of self-help activities and the conditions under which they affect career self-management.

Even though we did not find that MHAs impact movement capital on their own, our results indicate an indirect mechanism through which this relationship occurs. Hypothesis 2 posited a serial mediation of flourishing and career engagement. The results supported the hypothesis, identifying that the higher the engagement in self-help activities, the higher their levels of well-being as expressed by flourishing. This evidence aligns with previous studies showing that people may better cope through MHAs, enhancing their environmental mastery and self-regulation and ultimately leading to heightened positive moods and functioning (i.e., flourishing; [16,52]). Flourishing people, in turn, rely on finer cognitive and behavioural schemas to devote efforts to their career development (that is, career engagement) and, ultimately, further increase the caravan of resources to benefit their career endeavours. These results provide further empirical evidence for the gain-spiral tenet of COR theory, corroborating that investing in a more ample resource set bodes well for further resource acquisition [19]. Moreover, we extend career-self-management theorising. We showed that psychological well-being is a resource that can be used to accumulate resources and foster individuals' chances to fulfil their responsibilities of the transition to work proficiently [60]. In this sense, although the current theorising on career self-management assumes that it represents a process leading to career sustainability (which regards psychological well-being as a major indicator [10]), we demonstrated that the relationship works the other way around. Said differently, psychological well-being and the actions to foster it can be the starting point of the career-self-management process.

All in all, our findings represent a step to revise further career-self-management theorising. Responding to the call for more empirical inquiry into the predicting role of extra-career behaviours [12,13], we suggest incorporating self-help behaviours to increase mental health as an influential factor. In addition, we suggest that future research delve further into the cognitive and behavioural mechanism sustaining career self-management, accounting for the explanatory role of psychological well-being.

5.1. Implications for Practice

Our results outline that engaging in MHAs results in benefits (i.e., resource accumulation) for those entering the labour market. In line with these findings, supporting a proficient transition to work also means designing and implementing public interventions to raise mental-health literacy and stimulate MHAs, as the literature suggests [83,84]. This is also recommended because MHAs are simple actions people can perform independently without costly professional guidance [15]. Educational settings such as universities can encourage such activities through their guidance and counselling services [85], thus broadening their major role in facilitating a proficient transition to work [86,87]. Recent studies within Italian universities have described interventions integrating actions to raise awareness towards mental health and exercises to increase emotional-regulation strategies, socialising skills, and motivation to engage in self-help [88,89]. Moreover, digital

aids (e.g., apps) to conduct these interventions help reach participants and increase their involvement [89].

5.2. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Some limitations are worth indicating in interpreting our results. First, our data were collected with a cross-sectional design adopting self-report measurements. Even though we performed Harman's test and used different response formats for the potential impact of the common-method bias [80], we encourage future research to adopt a multi-wave longitudinal approach. This could also be functional for affirming the causal relationships between our study's variables, which cannot be inferred with a cross-sectional study.

Second, we mentioned in the previous section that we did not consider the conditions upon which MHAs may exert their effect on career resources. The scale we adopted prevented us from evaluating the seriousness and the content of the activities oriented toward mental health, which previous studies have pointed out for facilitating career-resource generation [13,17]. Accounting for such aspects may provide additional nuances of MHAs and more robust results about their effect on career resources.

Third, the sample composition prevents us from drawing general conclusions about the relationships under scrutiny. Indeed, although new entrants in the labour market may have more time to devote to MHAs, testing our model with workers with a longer tenure in a job (e.g., adults with family-care responsibilities) is required to establish the model's robustness. Moreover, doing so may add nuances to understanding the private domain's contribution to the career one, which has been covered chiefly by work-home/work-family interaction [82]. By integrating existing research with older workers and following the lines of the COR theory, future research may examine whether support from family members represents social resources that could be optimised for the further accumulation of resources [90]. It may establish whether the family is either an ally of MHAs, encouraging them [23], or an obstacle due to interference [91].

Fourth, we encourage more research to investigate other intervening variables' effects. As a way of example, the impact of potential moderators on the relationships tested here can be analysed. For instance, career engagement of new entrants could also be motivated by contextual facilitators (e.g., family, friends, and university staff [64,87]). Future research is required to examine whether the interaction between personal and contextual resources affects the resource-generation mechanism explained here. Moreover, we involved students and recent graduates, and part of them comprised employed people. This could be influential, for instance, in terms of resources available to invest efforts in MHAs or career engagement (e.g., time, quantity, and type of social connections). Future research could account for the sub-samples composing the population of new entrants in the labour market and investigate a moderation effect or test the hypotheses through a multi-group comparison.

Moreover, a stronger focus should be considered on the pandemic's long-term psychological impact. Indeed, research has shown that concerns related to the pandemic might affect engagement in MHAs [92], and labour-market constraints might influence career engagement in the post-pandemic world [93,94]. Future research should replicate our analyses by accounting for these factors.

6. Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the impact of MHAs on career self-management, testing its direct and indirect relationship with movement capital among Italian new entrants in the labour market. Although the direct relationship was not significant, our data supported the existence of an underlying mechanism (consisting of the serial mediation of flourishing and career engagement) linking MHAs and movement capital. Our study enriches the promising literature about how daily life behaviours spill their effects over into the career domain by generating career resources and advances the understanding of the multifaceted host of factors involved in career self-management. The results of this study

can provide useful insights for entrants in the labour market, higher-education institutions, and policy-makers to support an adaptive transition to work.

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Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. List of items used to measure the study's variables.

| Variable | Item | Response Scale |
|--|--|---|
| Mental-health activities (Hofman and Leihmann, 2018 [25]) | • I do something I enjoy. | 1 = <i>Not true</i> ; 2 = <i>Barely true</i> ; 3 = <i>Somewhat true</i> ; 4 = <i>True</i> |
| | • I remain involved in purposeful activities for at least a small part of the day. | |
| | • I am engaged in activities that give me a feeling of achievement. | |
| | • I am physically active or engaged in exercise. | |
| | • I practice good sleep hygiene. | |
| | • I eat a healthy and balanced diet. | |
| | • I have a trusted friend or relative with whom I get out and do some activities. | |
| | • I reward myself for reaching a small goal. | |
| Flourishing (Diener, 2010 [50]) | • I talk over problems or feelings with someone who is supportive and caring. | 1 = <i>Strongly disagree</i> ; 2 = <i>Disagree</i> ; 3 = <i>Neither agree nor disagree</i> ; 4 = <i>Agree</i> ; 5 = <i>Strongly agree</i> |
| | • I lead a purposeful and meaningful life. | |
| | • My social relationships are supportive and rewarding. | |
| | • I am engaged and interested in my daily activities. | |
| | • I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others. | |
| | • I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me. | |
| | • I am a good person and live a good life. | |
| | • I am optimistic about my future. | |
| | • People respect me. | |

Table A1. Cont.

| Variable | Item | Response Scale |
|---|--|--|
| Career engagement (Hirschi et al., 2014 [58]) To what extent have you in the past two months ... | • ... actively sought to design your professional future? | 1 = Almost never; 2 = Occasionally; 3 = A moderate amount; 4 = Quite often; 5 = Very often |
| | • ... actively sought to design your professional future? | |
| | • ... undertook things to achieve your career goals? | |
| | • ... cared for the development of your career? | |
| | • ... developed plans and goals for your future career? | |
| | • ... sincerely thought about personal values, interests, abilities, and weaknesses? | |
| | • ... collected information about employers, professional development opportunities, or the job market in your desired area? | |
| | • ... established or maintained contacts with people who can help you professionally? | |
| | • ... voluntarily participated in further education, training, or other events to support your career? | |
| Movement Capital (Gonzalez-Romà et al., 2018 [28]) | • ... assumed duties or positions that will help you progress professionally? | 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree |
| | • I strongly identify with my chosen line of work/career field. | |
| | • I have a clear idea about the place where I want to address my professional career. | |
| | • I do whatever I can in order to develop the professional career that I want to achieve. | |
| | • I'm highly motivated to develop my desired professional career. | |
| | • I am able to solve the problems that I deal with. | |
| | • I am able to perform complex tasks properly. | |
| | • I am able to deal with the setbacks that I face. | |
| | • I have an extensive network of friends and family members who would help me to find job opportunities. | |
| | • I have an extensive network of professional contacts that would help me to identify job opportunities. | |

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