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# Self-Perceived Employability and Meaningful Work: The Mediating Role of Courage on Quality of Life

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**Abstract:** The concept of sustainability, from a psychological point of view, can be related to the promotion of personal resources that help people to find decent and meaningful work and live quality lives. In the psychological concept of sustainability and sustainable development, the sustainability of careers is related not only to individual career management, but also to the possibility for individuals to obtain a good quality of life despite the frequent changes and the unpredictability of the work context. The present study focuses on the constructs of self-perceived employability and meaningful work, analyzing their relationships with workers' quality of life. An empirical study was conducted on 660 Italian workers using the following measures: Self-perceived employability scale, work and meaning inventory, courage measure, satisfaction with life scale, and the flourishing scale. The results showed direct effects of employability and meaningful work on the indicators of quality of life (life satisfaction and flourishing); moreover, indirect effects of employability and meaningful work on the quality of life were found to be caused by the mediation of courage.

**Keywords:** employability; meaningful work; courage; life satisfaction; flourishing

## 1. Introduction

The concept of sustainability has become relevant in the most recent policies of Western governments, and the recent Asvis Report [1] confirms the need for a country to structure its sustainability policies in a systemic way and not exclusively by sectors. It should do so by activating virtuous processes around seven circuits: Climate change and energy; poverty and inequality; circular economy, innovation, and work; human capital, health, and education; natural capital and quality of the environment; city, infrastructure and social capital; and international cooperation. Therefore, sustainability issues beyond the ecological and socioeconomic aspects also need approaches that include a psychological perspective [2], focusing attention on the sustainable development of well-being in individuals and organizations. The psychology of sustainability and sustainable development [2] is focused on the attempt to understand how it is possible to live meaningful lives and get meaningful work despite the uncertainty, challenges, and transitions that characterize today's career paths [3]. In fact, the workers of the 21st century have to deal with frequent uncertainty and insecure working conditions that require the development of psychosocial resources. Survival in this turbulent career environment continually requires workers to manage change in themselves and their contexts; effectively facing instability requires that workers actively construct their professional projects rather than passively adapt to the circumstances [4,5]. Finally, sustainability is broadened from a psychological point of view by encompassing not only economic, ecological, and social factors, but also well-being and quality of life from a preventive approach [6].

In the psychological concept of sustainability and sustainable development, we can position the concept of sustainable careers, which refers to the “sequences of career experiences reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, thereby crossing several social spaces, characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual” [7].

The theoretical framework of career sustainability [8] focuses on the individual’s point of view in understanding the multiple factors affecting career sustainability, through a systemic approach, and in realizing how changes affect career sustainability, through a dynamic approach. The authors design sustainable careers as a cyclical, self-regulatory process [9] which includes both positive and negative experiences and events, and the way these are perceived and interpreted by the individual and the different parties involved, offering opportunities for ‘dynamic learning’. As stated by De Vos and colleagues [8], the challenge of sustainability includes more than individual career management and requires the consideration of all the other parties involved, as the individual’s family and peers, supervisor(s), employer, educational system, and society [7,10]. The indicators of a sustainable career [8] are grouped into three categories: (1) Health, encompassing both physical and mental health; (2) happiness, considered as the feeling of success or satisfaction with one’s career, yet seen from a broader life perspective; and (3) productivity, which means strong performance in one’s current job as well as high employability or career potential [11] in the future or in other jobs.

In addition, the construct of employability assumes a new significance, encompassing meaningfulness and affecting workers’ quality of life. Van der Klink et al. [12], introducing the concept of sustainable employability, included in it the importance of personal values, work meaning, and the well-being of individuals. “The evolution of the definition of employability has thus moved from maintenance of work through personal resources, attitudes, and meta-competences to external factors and the focus on personal values, work meaning, and the well-being of individuals” [13] (p. 110). The study presented relates to this widening perspective of sustainability, analyzing the effects of self-perceived employability and meaningful work on quality of life.

### *1.1. Relationships between Employability and Quality of Life*

Rothwell and Arnold [14], considering the psychosocial nature of the employability construct [15], defined employability as “the ability to keep the job one has or to get the job one desires” (p. 25), including not only individual characteristics but also factors related to the labor market. In the modern labor market, having high levels of employability could give the chance to benefit from the advantages that a job can offer. For example, those who have high perceived employability could easily evaluate job circumstances in a positive way, extend more positive interpretations of job transitions as opportunities for self-realization than just stressful events related to job loss, and consequently experience better health and well-being [16].

Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden [11] proposed a competence-based conceptualization of employability, constituting five competences: (1) Occupational expertise; (2) anticipation and optimization, which require preparing for future work changes in a personal and creative manner in order to endeavor for the best possible career outcomes [17,18]; (3) personal flexibility, which regards the capacity in adapting easily to all kinds of changes in the internal and external labor market; (4) corporate sense, which broadens the concept of organizational citizenship behavior [19], including the participation to different workgroups, working teams, to the occupational community, and other networks; and (5) balance, which is defined as compromising between employers’ and employees’ interests.

More recently, Vanhercke et al. [20] defined “perceived employability as the individual’s perception of his or her possibilities of obtaining and maintaining employment” (p. 594), highlighting the perceived possibility to maintain current employment next to obtaining new employment. It is a subjective evaluation regarding the “possibilities” of employment through the integration of personal factors, structural factors, and their interactions.

We agree with De Vos and De Hauw [21] when they affirm that, in addition to the differences between the definitions of employability, they are all referred to the employee's ability to manage positively the transitions in the labor market [22]; this ability comprises an employee's know-how, skills and adaptability [15,22–24].

Numerous studies offer a valid theoretical and empirical contribution to understanding how employability may have a positive effect on subjective well-being [25]. For example, previous research investigated the relationship between perceived employability and health [16], having a positive relationship to both work-related (engagement) and general life satisfaction [22], predicting job satisfaction [26], and moderating the relationship between job insecurity and life satisfaction [27]. Moreover, when faced with threatening situations, individuals who show higher levels of self-perceived employability are better suited to cope with such events [28]. Some authors [22] underlined that employability may be a way to secure one's labor market position, rather than a way to cope with job insecurity; however, it determines more flexibility and a better approach to change, and it enhances alternatives [15] and facilitates the pursuit of alternatives consistent with a worker's salient career identity [29]. Furthermore, employability can have a significant impact on one's psychological well-being during unemployment, as the self-esteem of individuals who are highly employable is less likely to suffer during unemployment than that of those who have low employability [30].

### 1.2. Relationships between Meaningful Work and Quality of Life

Following Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski [31], Steger et al. [32] defined meaningful work both as whatever work means to people (meaning) and how much work is significant and positive in valence (meaningfulness), specifying that the positive valence of meaningful work has a eudemonic (growth- and purpose-oriented) rather than hedonic (pleasure-oriented) focus. As Scroggins [33] underlined, individuals experience meaningfulness in work when it confirms their perceptions of what they aspire to become and when the performance of job tasks increases the individual's self-esteem. Consistency between work experiences and an individual's self-perception may increase self-esteem and, in turn, will make the work seem more meaningful. In very early studies [34], it was already highlighted that meaningfulness is a determinant of psychological well-being, and therefore, it is important for individuals to find meaning in life. Following Fairlie [35], *meaning* involves the concepts of "life meaning, purpose, and coherence" [36] (p. 132); the dimensions commonly included in the concept of meaning are having a purpose, living according to one's values, autonomy, control, commitment, engagement, self-realization, growth, and fulfilment [37,38]; according to the author, meaning has been linked to well-being [39–42].

Arneson [43] defined meaningful work as a perfectionist ideal which "assumes objective knowledge of the good life for human beings, the activities that constitute human flourishing" (p. 520). However, Rawls [44] recognized the value of meaningful work in the broader point of view of human flourishing and autonomy. As underlined by Yeoman [45], the experience of meaningful work is linked to greater reported levels of well-being [46], because the workers who perceive their work as meaningful attribute importance and centrality to it [47] and to higher levels of job satisfaction [48,49]. Employees who experience meaningful work and who serve some greater good experience better psychological adjustment and possess desirable qualities for the organizations in which they work [32], such as commitment at work [50] and engagement [35].

Meaningless work is often associated with negative outcomes, such as burnout, apathy, and detachment from one's work [51], while intrinsic reasons for working (i.e., finding the work more meaningful) have been demonstrated to be predictors of intentions to work, in a sample of terminal ill patients [52].

### 1.3. The Quality of Life

The three major philosophical approaches [53] described the *good life* as (1) the alignment between individuals' life characteristics and normative ideals based on a religious, philosophical, or other

systems; (2) the satisfaction of preferences, so that the quality of life is proportionate to individuals' resources and desires; (3) the experience of individuals, so that if a person experiences his/her life as good and desirable, it is assumed to be so. The third approach considers *life satisfaction* as a primary constituent factor of the quality of life [54]. Scientific approaches to measuring quality of life distinguish between "objective" or social indicators and the measurement of subjective well-being. Subjective well-being research regards individuals' subjective experience of their lives and consists of three interrelated components: Life satisfaction, pleasant affect, and unpleasant affect. Life satisfaction refers to a cognitive sense of satisfaction with life; both effect and reported satisfaction judgments represent people's evaluations of their lives and circumstances [54]. Furthermore, as stated by Sumi [55], in both theoretical and empirical studies, we can find support to the importance of meaning and purpose in life in the pursuit of well-being [56–59]. In recent studies, Diener has enhanced his concept of well-being by including the construct of 'flourishing', whose components are: Purpose in life, positive relationships, engagement, competence, self-esteem, optimism, and contribution towards the well-being of others [60].

Other studies [61] distinguish two main theoretical frameworks in the analysis of well-being: The hedonic approach and the eudemonic approach [38]. Hedonic well-being coincides with the subjective well-being construct; eudemonic well-being is related to the optimal psychological functioning of the individuals (e.g., meaning in life, positive relationships, and self-acceptance). Although these two perspectives have been grown as separate frameworks, recently some authors have integrated them [62] because of the substantial overlap between the two constructs [63–65]. Thus, starting from these considerations, we have considered *life satisfaction* and *flourishing* as indicators of the quality of life.

#### 1.4. The Role of Courage

In the context of psychological literature, the role of courage has only recently been considered; in fact, the definition of courage is still the subject of investigation. Rate, Clarke, Lindsay, and Sternberg [66] conducted qualitative research on the construct of courage and identified four dimensions of it: (a) The intentionality of the action, (b) the presence of personal fear, (c) nobility of purpose, and (d) personal risk.

The presence of fear within the definition of courage is also underlined in other studies: Woodard [67], for example, defined courage as "the ability to act for a meaningful (noble, good, or practical) cause, despite experiencing the fear associated with perceived threat exceeding the available resources" (p. 174). Woodard and Pury [68] defined courage as the will to act to achieve a goal, with or without fear. Finally, Norton and Weiss [69] defined courage as persistence despite fear. Each of these definitions of courage shares three aspects: The presence of fear, the intentionality of the action, and a significant goal.

Not many studies are available on courage from a psychological point of view; it was noted that courage predicts good academic performance [70], promotes change and innovation [71], and correlates positively with self-efficacy, persistence, and resilience [72,73]. Courage helps people to resist external problems and sustain the desire to do things [74–76].

Some authors have studied courage in organizations or in relation to leadership. Sarros and Cooper [77] affirmed the importance of courage within organizations; in fact, courage allows us to establish long-term goals without being paralyzed by fear. Leaders who show courage are able to achieve benefits for themselves, as well as their followers and the entire organization [78]. Moreover, Sosik and colleagues [75] have shown that top-level executives who act bravely are more likely to be considered effective performers who produce successes for the whole organization.

Recent studies have shown that courage correlates positively with life satisfaction [79], psychological well-being [80,81], and subjective well-being [82]. In the same way, in very recent studies, Ginevra et al. [83] have shown that courage mediates the relationship between career adaptability and life satisfaction in adolescents. Sovet et al. [84] have also shown that this important psychological

resource is positively associated with career adaptability. Finally, courage is a mediator between personality and coping [85].

Except for the corpus of recent research around the construct of workplace courage, which is not the focus of the present study, only a few studies put courage together with other working and organizational variables (employability, engagement, or meaningful work), and none of them have explored the way courage affects the relationship employability and meaningful work have with quality of life. The present study aims to fill this gap.

Recent studies have begun to examine the role of behavioral courage on career related outcomes, suggesting that courageous behaviors influence positive work behavioral outcomes, personal identity, and prosocial behaviors [71,86]. Hannah and colleagues' [87] model conceptualizes courageous behavior as malleable and influenced by a series of personal strengths and resources. Thus, considering the employability as a psychosocial construct, derived from the individual's perception of his/her own resources in managing uncertainty and transitions in work, it could be modified by the effect of courage, which is a behavioral dimension required in situations perceived as threatening; the capacity to react to the situations characterized by fear can strengthen the psychosocial resources and improve quality of life.

Given that employability and meaningful work are positive predictors of individual well-being and that courage has played the role of mediator in previous research, we hypothesize that the effects of employability and meaningful work on quality of life could be mediated by courage. More specifically, we hypothesize the following:

- Hypothesis 1: Employability positively predicts life satisfaction and flourishing.
- Hypothesis 2: Meaningful work positively predicts life satisfaction and flourishing.
- Hypothesis 3: The effect of employability on life satisfaction and flourishing is mediated by courage.
- Hypothesis 4: The effect of meaningful work on life satisfaction and flourishing is mediated by courage.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Measures

For each scale, we reported Cronbach's alphas as indicators of internal consistency; we consider alpha's values <0.60 not acceptable; between 0.60 and 0.70 acceptable; >0.70 good; >0.80 very good (for acceptability of alpha coefficients for personality tests see [88–90]).

- Self-perceived employability scale

The self-perceived employability scale (SPES) [14] is composed of 11 items, with a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*). It measures two dimensions of employability: Internal (sample item: "My personal networks in this organization help me in my career"; Cronbach's alpha = 0.72) and external (sample item: "I have good knowledge of opportunities for me outside of this organization even if they are quite different to what I do now"; Cronbach's alpha = 0.85). Cronbach's alpha of the entire scale for the study sample was 0.86.

- Work and meaning inventory

The work and meaning inventory (WAMI) [32] has 10 items measured using a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*). It measures three dimensions of the meaning in work: Positive meaning (sample item: "I have found a significant career"; Cronbach's alpha = 0.86), meaning making through work (sample item: "I believe my job contributes to my personal growth"; Cronbach's alpha = 0.81), and greater good motivations (sample item: "My job contributes positively to the world"; Cronbach's alpha = 0.64). Cronbach's alpha of the entire scale for the study sample was 0.91.

- Courage measure



The courage measure (CM) [69] in the reduced version of Howard and Alipour [91] is a one-dimensional, six-item scale, with a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*; sample item: “I tend to face my fears”). Cronbach’s alpha of the study sample was 0.86.

- Satisfaction with life scale

The satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) [92] is a one-dimensional, five-item scale with a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) that evaluates general life satisfaction. The Cronbach’s alpha for the study sample was 0.90.

- Flourishing scale

The flourishing scale [60] is a one-dimensional, five-item scale with a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) that measures meaning and purpose in life (sample item: “I am engaged and interested in my daily activities”). The Cronbach’s alpha for the study sample was 0.91.

## 2.2. Participants

The participants were 660 Italian workers (male = 294, 44.5 %; female = 336, 55.5%) aged between 18 and 65 years ( $M = 40.77$ ;  $SD = 11.19$ ). The respondents came from various Italian regions. Almost half of them had university degrees (344, 52.1%); the remaining part had high school degrees (273 41.4%) and junior high school degrees (43, 6.5%). They were recruited from public (284, 43%), private (347, 52.6%), and nonprofit (29, 4.4%) organizations. The majority of them have permanent contracts (391, 59.2%); the remaining part have fixed-term contracts (115, 17.4%) and other types of contracts (154, 23.4%).

The participants were recruited on a voluntary basis using convenience sampling. Data were collected anonymously by an online survey, and the participants could interrupt their participation at any moment. The survey was approved by the ethical commission of the university, and the research followed the ethical rules of the Italian Psychological Association.

## 2.3. Data Analyses

Linear structural equation models were calibrated to test the hypothesized model using Lisrel 8.80 [93]. First, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test the model fit of the measurement model [94] to produce a measurement model for the latent factors of the analyzed dimensions. Lisrel provides several goodness-of-fit indices, including chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), comparative fit index (CFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA).  $\chi^2$  tests the null hypothesis that the covariance matrix and mean vector in the population are equal to the model-implied covariance matrix and mean vector [95]. A significant  $\chi^2$  value leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis that the model fits in the population. The CFI provides an evaluation of the difference between an independent model and the specified model. For the CFI, values over 0.90 suggest acceptable fit, while values over 0.95 suggest a good fit [96]. According to Browne and Cudeck [97], an RMSEA <0.09 is still an indicator of a reasonable error of approximation in smaller samples.

The significance of the indirect effects has been calculated using Process v.3.1 [98], through the bootstrapping method with 5000 repetitions and establishing a confidence interval (CI) of 95%.

Other well-known analytical tools, such as correlations, were also used, implemented using SPSS 20.0. (IBM, New York, NY, USA) To optimize the sample size, missing values for the relevant items were estimated using the expectation maximization method. None of the items had more than 5% missing values, indicating that this option was appropriate for use [99].

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

To examine the measurements (SPE, WAMI, SWL, Flourishing, and Courage), mean and standard deviation were computed. Furthermore, Pearson correlations between the study variables were

conducted to analyze the relationships between employability, meaningful work, courage, life satisfaction, and flourishing. Mean, standard deviation and correlations are presented in Table 1. All the correlations between the main variables are significant at  $p < 0.001$ .

**Table 1.** Descriptive and correlations between the variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. SPE internal	3.54	0.78	1									
2. SPE external	3.40	0.81	0.45	1								
3. SPE total	3.45	0.69	0.77	0.91	1							
4. GG	3.80	0.89	0.40	0.18	0.32	1						
5. PM	3.76	0.87	0.52	0.28	0.45	0.67	1					
6. MM	3.76	0.92	0.49	0.22	0.40	0.64	0.81	1				
7. WAMI total	3.77	0.80	0.53	0.26	0.44	0.85	0.93	0.91	1			
8. SWL	4.47	1.20	0.40	0.27	0.36	0.37	0.49	0.39	0.47	1		
9. Flourishing	5.33	0.90	0.42	0.33	0.43	0.40	0.43	0.39	0.45	0.61	1	
10. Courage	4.93	1.14	0.21	0.20	0.25	0.22	0.19	0.16	0.21	0.19	0.41	1

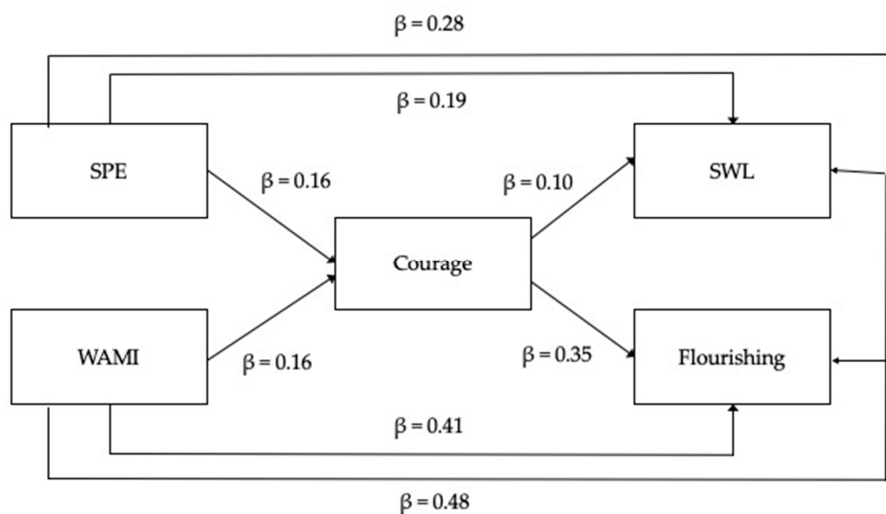
Note. SPE = self-perceived employability; GG = greater good motivation; PM = positive meaning; MM = meaning making through work; WAMI = Work and Meaning Inventory; SWL = satisfaction with life.

### 3.2. CFA of the Measures

We assessed the properties of the measurement model with a CFA using Lisrel 8.80 (Scientific Software International, Skokie, IL, USA). We ran a single CFA that grouped all the multi-item measures, constraining all error covariance to zero. The model thus specified showed a reasonably good fit with the data:  $\chi^2(730) = 2895.279$ ; CFI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.07; and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.07. All the items loaded significantly on the hypothesized latent variables (factor loadings range 0.31–0.87;  $t > 2.58$ ), indicating convergent validity. All constructs showed excellent values of composite reliability (CR > 0.80) and good values of average variance extracted (AVE > 0.30).

### 3.3. Structural Model and Mediation Analysis

We tested our hypotheses using structural equation modeling analysis. The main fit indices suggest that the model fits the data acceptably well ( $\chi^2(731) = 3064.67$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 4.19$ ; CFI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.07; SRMR = 0.08). The final model is presented in Figure 1. All the relationships between the variables, indicated by standardized  $\beta$ , are significant. Thus, as represented in the figure, employability and meaningful work have both a direct effect and indirect effect on life satisfaction and flourishing; the indirect effects are mediated by courage. The standardized  $\beta$  indicates the intensity of the affection of the predictor on the outcome.



**Figure 1.** The final model.

We tested the mediational hypothesis verifying the significance of the indirect effects through the bootstrapping method. Table 2 reports the results of the mediations, presenting the standardized  $\beta$ , which indicates the intensity of the effect, and the confidence intervals (CI) 95%, which indicate the significance of the effect with a 5% of probability of error (CI >0 are significant). The results, presented in Table 2, show that employability has a direct effect on life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.30$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and flourishing ( $\beta = 0.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming Hypothesis 1; moreover, the path from employability to courage was significant ( $\beta = 0.23$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), as well as the path from courage to life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.09$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and flourishing ( $\beta = 0.34$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), showing a direct and indirect effect of employability on life satisfaction (IE = 0.02; CI 0.006–0.040) and flourishing (IE = 0.08; CI 0.049–0.114), mediated by courage (these results confirm Hypothesis 3).

**Table 2.** Effects of employability and meaningful work on life satisfaction and flourishing through courage (standardized  $\beta$ ).

Paths	Indirect Effect		Direct Effect		Total Effect	
	$\beta$	C.I. 95%	$\beta$	C.I. 95%	$\beta$	C.I. 95%
Employability–Courage–Life satisfaction	0.02	0.006–0.04	0.27	0.21–0.33	0.30	0.24–0.35
Employability–Courage–Flourishing	0.08	0.05–0.11	0.34	0.28–0.41	0.42	0.36–0.49
Meaningful work–Courage–Life satisfaction	0.02	0.003–0.03	0.34	0.29–0.39	0.35	0.30–0.40
Meaningful work–Courage–Flourishing	0.06	0.04–0.09	0.35	0.29–0.41	0.41	0.35–0.47

Then, meaningful work has a direct effect on life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and flourishing ( $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming Hypothesis 2; moreover, the path from meaningful work to courage was significant ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), as well as the path from courage to life satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.08$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and flourishing ( $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), showing a direct and indirect effect of meaningful work on life satisfaction (IE = 0.02; CI 0.003–0.030) and flourishing (IE = 0.06; CI 0.037–0.092), mediated by courage (these results confirm Hypothesis 4). Therefore, all the hypotheses of the study were confirmed.

#### 4. Discussion

The present study aimed to verify whether life satisfaction and flourishing could be predicted by employability and meaningful work, and the results showed the effects of employability and meaningful work on one's quality of life could be mediated by courage. Data analysis confirmed all the research hypotheses, showing a direct effect of employability and meaningful work on the indicators of quality of life (life satisfaction and flourishing); moreover, the results showed indirect effects of employability and meaningful work on the quality of life, by the mediation of courage. More specifically, we can first observe that self-perceived employability directly affects life satisfaction and flourishing.

To date, little analysis of the relationship between employability and well-being has been done: Berntson and Marklund [16] conducted a longitudinal study on a representative sample of Swedish employees, and in a series of studies, De Cuyper and colleagues [22,27,100] demonstrated that employability was positively related to life satisfaction because it prevents the development of negative experiences related to work. Moreover, following the results of these authors, employability moderates the effects of job insecurity on well-being.

Similarly, the direct relationship between self-perceived employability and flourishing has not been explored yet [13]. Only a few studies have reported similar results [101], but, in a broader sense, the perception of being employable may have positive effects on the well-being of an individual for several reasons [25]. First, it reduces the risk of being unemployed and the risk of worrying about the loss of a job. Second, self-perceived employability influences the way individuals face events that occur in an organization, interpreting change as less threatening even when a change of employment is requested. Hence, this attitude could prevent future negative outcomes linked to stress and strain, being associated to higher levels of perceived well-being. As stated by Di Fabio [13] (p. 110), "the evolution of the definition of employability has thus moved from maintenance of work through



personal resources, attitudes, and meta-competences to external factors and the focus on personal values, work meaning, and the well-being of individuals”.

The second result discussed regards the relationship between meaningful work and the indicators of quality of life, life satisfaction, and flourishing. Some authors [45] have underlined how the concept of well-being and flourishing is intrinsically included in the concept of meaningful work [31], which comprises following one’s value system [102], being internally motivated [103], and developing high levels of job involvement (i.e., the extent to which employees believe their jobs are central to their lives) and reflects the congruence between one’s needs and perception that the job can meet those needs [104]. Moreover, in their review on meaningful work, Rosso and colleagues [31] highlighted that the meaningfulness of work has been shown to influence personal fulfilment [105]. These authors also underlined that (p. 93) “the topic of the meaning of work [ . . . ] moves beyond hedonic perspectives of work behaviour to deeper considerations of purpose and significance [106,107] and eudaimonic aspects of well-being” [57,108].

Third, the results of our study showed the mediational role of courage in the relationships previously discussed; in fact, we can observe the mediating effect of courage in influencing the relationship between employability and meaningfulness using the indicators of quality of life. In the emerging interest in the construct of courage, from a psychological point of view, recent studies have shown the effect of courage on life satisfaction, finding that courage positively contributed to life satisfaction as a dimension of entrepreneurial success [79]. Analogous results have been found in organizational contexts by Kilman et al. [109], and they concluded that courage activated feelings of moral elevation and fulfilment. Similar to Ginevra and colleagues’ [83] study, our findings suggest that employability and meaningful work are positively linked to self-perceived courageousness, which in turn is positively linked to life satisfaction and flourishing. Therefore, courage could be considered an adaptive behavior that helps individuals to deal with the requests coming from their work in an age of change and uncertainty. Workers with higher levels of self-perceived employability and meaningfulness may perceive themselves as more able to act courageously in handling the issues related to their jobs, coping with risks rather than becoming stymied by obstacles, and developing a positive judgement of their quality of life.

## 5. Conclusions and Limitations

The findings of the present study can be read using the sustainable career as a framework. In fact, employability and meaningful work can be considered necessary resources in managing the changing and unpredictable global economic environment in which careers unfold, with the aim to improve the three dimensions for a sustainable career: Health, happiness, and productivity [8], which also represent indicators of quality of life. The new conceptualization of sustainable employability [13] merges in it the meanings of both the constructs, putting in light also the importance of personal values, work meaning, and the well-being of individuals.

In addition, the contribution of our study is the revelation of the mediating role of courage in these relationships: Courage is a behavioral construct characterized by the presence of fear, the intentionality of the action, and the significant goal; as underlined before, courage helps people to resist external problems and keep the desire to do the things, when these are considered to be significant for the individual [74–76]. In times of transitions and insecurity, and in the risk society, risk, uncertainty, and frequent changes are notable characteristics [110]; changes in the job, frequent transitions, and the instability of future perspectives can be the cause of feelings of fear: Courage as a psychological resource can be an adaptive behavior that supports individuals in facing the demands coming from their work contexts and the difficulties related to work transitions.

However, the results of the study should be read in light of several limitations: First of all, the cross-sectional nature of the study does not permit to establish causal relationships; second, we cannot consider the study’s sample to be representative, as we used a convenience sample; third, the sample was not paired by age groups, educational level, type of organization, and employment status.

Future research could be focused on the comparison between different groups, highlighting possible differences in the relationship between employability and meaningful work, on one side, and courage and quality of life, on the other.

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