

# Career aspirations and work values in transition: Macro-economic, socialization and life course effects



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- Organizational attractiveness, employer branding: Attention to employees' work values and career aspirations
- Career aspirations: Many concepts with different emphases
  - General dimensions of career orientations:
    - Career anchors (Schein, 1975, 1990),
    - Career orientations (Derr, 1986),
    - Subjective career success scale (5C research network; Mayrhofer et al., 2016)
  - Building on concepts of „new careers“:
    - Protean career (Hall, 1976, 2004),
    - Boundaryless career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996),
    - Career fields (Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Mayrhofer et al., 2004)
- Reasons for changes or individual differences in career aspirations rarely explored, mostly in studies on „generational differences“

# Why may career aspirations change?

- Literature on aging  
based on (developmental) psychological theories: Selection, Optimization, Compensation (SOC) model (e.g., Baltes & Baltes, 1990), Socio-emotional Selectivity Theory (SST; Carstensen et al., 1999); Future Time Perspective (FTP; Carstensen, 2006); Occupational Future Time Perspective (OFTP; Zacher & Frese, 2009, 2011) → **Age effect**
- Literature on changes in contemporary careers  
(e.g., Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Ashford, George & Blatt, 2007; Biemann et al., 2012; Cappelli & Keller, 2013) and empirical evidence regarding business cycle effects on career-related attitudes and behaviour (e.g., Berntson et al., 2006; Biemann et al., 2012; Cornelißen et al., 2007; Green et al., 2000; Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2016; Kattenbach et al., 2014) → **Period effect**
- Literature on „generational differences“  
based on sociologist Karl Mannheim's (1928, 1952) work („The problem of generations“): Imprinting (long-lasting) effects of context on adolescents' and young adults' beliefs and values; change of context produces differences between generations → **Cohort effect**

# Hypotheses (1)

- Theories related to aging (Carstensen, 1999; Freund & Baltes, 1998; Zacher & Frese, 2011) indicate changes of goals and priorities over an individual's lifecourse
- Career stage models describe how goals change over the career (Levinson et al., 1978; Super, 1984):
  - Early adulthood: Experimenting and turbulence, developing a self-concept;
  - Mid-adulthood: making family commitments, accepting responsibilities, developing a stable work and personal life

***H1a: Age is positively related to the desire for security and stability.***

***H1b: Age is negatively related to the desire for personal development.***

# Hypotheses (2)

- Empirical evidence for influences of the business cycle on career-related attitudes and behaviour:
  - Perceived re-employment chances (UK, 1986 vs. 1997: Green et al., 2000; Sweden, 1993 vs. 1999: Berntson et al., 2006)
  - Association of annual GDP and job transitions (Germany, 1984-2010: Kattenbach et al., 2014)

***H2: The desire for security and stability is positively related to the national unemployment rate.***

- „Generational differences“ studies on work values of Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y (e.g., Joshi et al, 2011; Krahn & Galambos, 2014; Lyons & Schweitzer, 2017; Twenge & Campbell, 2012)
- Criticism for use of cross-sectional designs and lack of reasoning for particular differences
- Desire for security and stability may depend on socialization experiences. WU graduation cohort 2000 (1990s: political and economic optimism); cohort 2010 (2000s: burst of dotcom bubble, Great Recession)

***H3: The 2010 cohort has a higher desire for security and stability than the 2000 cohort.***

# Method and Results



## Sample

Two cohorts of WU graduates

- Graduation 2000-2002: 4,577 observed years (2001-2017), N=547; age: M=27.9 years (SD=3.3); 45% female
- Graduation 2010-2011: 1,986 observed years (2010-2017), N=540; age: M=26.7 years (SD=3.1); 57% female

## Measures

- Independent variables: „Desire for security and stability“ (DSS), „Desire for personal development“ (DPD)  
Single-item measures, 5-point Likert scale
- Control variable: Neuroticism  
(German NEO-FFI scale, 12 items, 5-point Likert scale)

## Analysis

- Mixed linear model for longitudinal data
- cross-checked with multilevel ordinal regression

# Results (1)

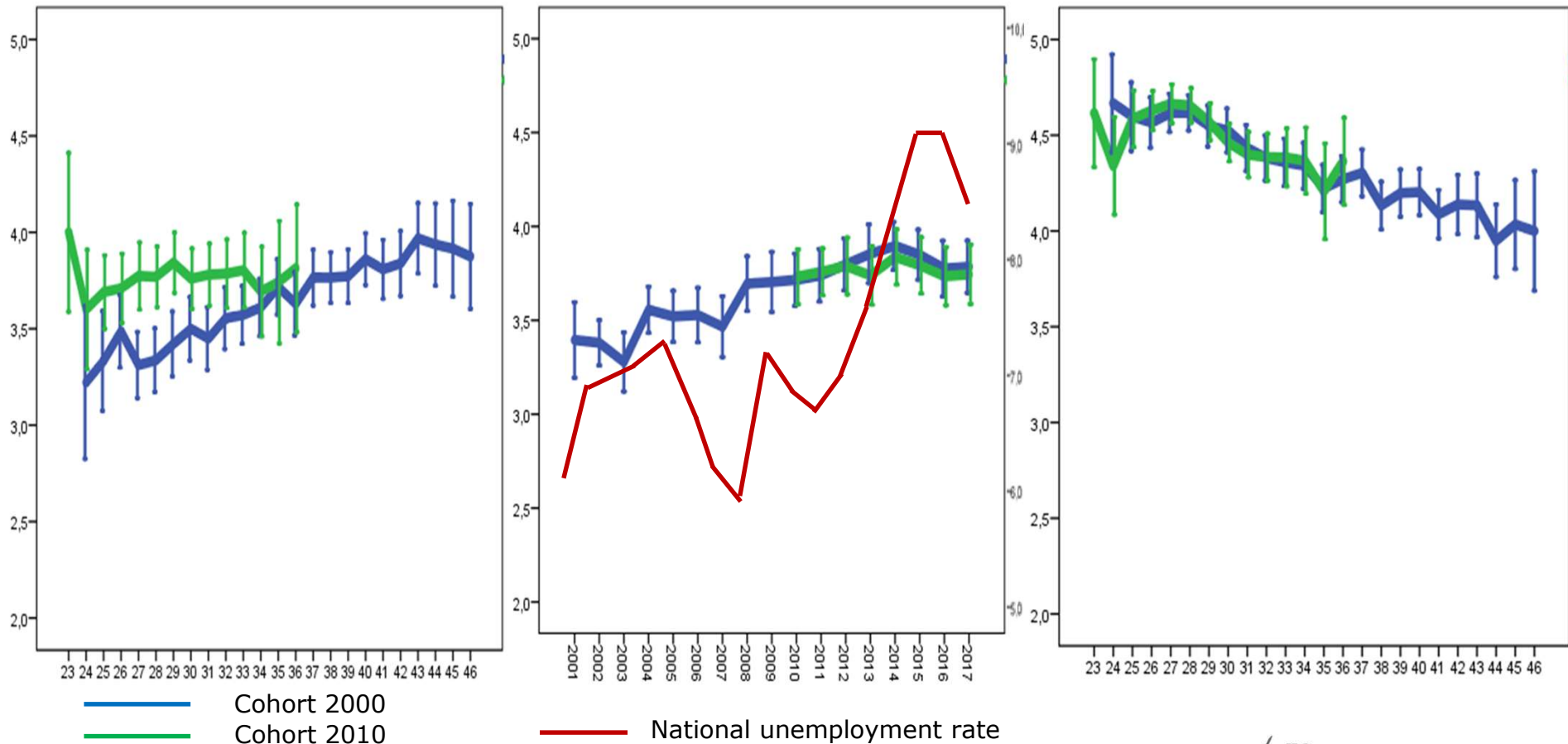
## Desire for security and stability

## Desire for personal development

Age

Year, unemployment rate

Age





# Results (2)

n = 762	Desire for security and stability			Desire for personal development		
	par. est.	s.e.	t value	par. est.	s.e.	t value
Constant	-.06	.04	1.63	-.10	.03	2.86**
Age (H1ab)	.16	.04	<b>3.60**</b>	-.09	.04	<b>2.14 *</b>
Year	-.01	.04	.07	-.17	.04	3.88**
Unemployment rate (H2)	-.00	.02	.14	.03	.02	1.23
Cohort (2010) (H3)	.23	.10	<b>2.36*</b>	.35	.09	3.92**
Neuroticism	.17	.02	7.32**	-.08	.02	3.62 **

# Discussion

- Hypotheses 1a and 1b supported: **Age** is
  - positively related to desire for security and stability (DSS),
  - negatively related to desire for personal development (DPD)
- Issues of turbulence vs. stability inherent in lifecourse and career stage theories
- DSS might also be associated with family responsibilities in mid-life (e.g., Bennett et al. 2017; Hill et al., 2014; Huffman et al., 2013)
- Hypothesis 2 (**period** effect) not supported for employment rate as economic context variable
- Privileged sample (highly educated, management/business law)
- Analysis on annual basis rather than distant points in time or time periods with pronounced macro-economic differences
- Additional analysis, comparing time periods 2000-2008 and 2009-2017, supports idea of macro-economic effects on DSS
- Hypothesis 3 supported: **Cohort** 2010 has a higher DSS than cohort 2000
- Strong and sustainable imprinting effect of context during adolescence and early adulthood, in line with Mannheim (1928) and findings on change in (post-)materialist values (Inglehart, 1977, 2018)

# Implications

- Evidence for differences regarding a core career-related aspiration due to socialization and aging
- Methodological perspective: Study shows necessity for efforts to disentangle APC effects
- Study contributes to connecting disciplines interested in labour issues (sociology, psychology, economics) and levels of analysis (micro, macro)
- **Practical implications** for employee attraction and retention via organizational career management systems, in particular in times of decreasing commitment of organizations and increasing career uncertainty and complexity under neoliberal dominance in the global economic system

## Limitations

- Single-item measurement of dependent variables
- Proportion of panel members with one or more missing data collection points
- Assessing APC effects simultaneously is generally challenging

# THANK YOU

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