

APPLIED COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY DOCTORAL SCHOOL

SUMMARY OF THE Ph.D. THESIS

**MANAGERIAL DYSFUNCTIONAL COGNITION AND ITS IMPACT
ON STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING AND TEAM DYNAMICS**

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I. CHAPTER I. THEORETHICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Introduction to the Research Subject

The present PhD thesis focuses on the topic of dysfunctional cognition (DC) in organizations, operationalized as dysfunctional cognitive schemas (Young et al., 2006), as well as irrational beliefs involving absolutistic demands (Lindner et al., 1999), its impact in work settings, and its interplay with rational cognition (RC).

The main operationalization of DC is provided in this thesis by the concept of Early Maladaptive Schema (EMS), also known as Dysfunctional Cognitive Schema (Young et al., 2006, p. 7). The EMS are inflexible, generalized, and persistent cognitive structures (Curşeu et al., 2000), containing essential, absolute, and sufficient truths that self-perpetuate through selective information processing and overcompensating behaviors, are hard to change, and whose potential change is perceived as a threat by the individual (Young, 1990). In addition to the EMS framework, DC will also be explored in this thesis via the lens provided by Lindner et al. (1999), respectively as irrational beliefs involving absolutist demands, such as the need to be successful or to be liked at all costs, or the need for absolute comfort or for absolute fairness.

The thesis comprises four papers – a systematic literature review and three empirical studies. The systematic literature review provides a first integrative synthesis of empirical evidence on the role of DC at work. We present a contingency model of DC at work, which describes the cognitive-affective mechanisms through which DC influences work strain, which integrates the role of job demands and resources as activating and buffering factors of DC, and which distinguishes the dual impact of DC on task-related and interpersonal functioning at work.

In the first empirical study, by using the conceptual lens provided by the Upper Echelon Theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), we explore the interplay between managerial DC,

operationalized through EMS, and managerial rationality for decision comprehensiveness in organizational strategic decisions. The results support the detrimental impact of DC in strategic decision-making – the association between managerial rationality and comprehensiveness was positive only when managers reported low DC, while, when managers reported high levels of DC, the association between rationality and comprehensiveness was negative.

In the second empirical study, working within the framework of the Attraction-Selection-Attrition Model (Schneider, 1987), we tested (1) the prevalence of DC, operationalized through EMS, in a managerial and non-managerial population, (2) the mediation provided by DC between managerial role occupancy and disruption experienced during COVID-19, and (3) the moderating role of risk propensity on the explanatory role of DC in the relationship between role occupancy and COVID-19 disruption. The results showed that managerial role occupancy predicted negatively the overall DC score, that lower DC levels explain part of the relationship between managerial role occupancy and lower COVID-19 disruption, and that average and high levels of risk appetite accentuate the relationship between DC and COVID-19 disruption.

In the third and last empirical study, we are exploring the interplay between DC, operationalized as irrational beliefs involving absolutistic demands (Lindner et al., 1999), RC, and negative relations, and, respectively, knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding in work groups. The study was built on the theoretical foundations provided by the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), and the Resource-Rational Analysis (Lieder & Griffiths, 2020). Our findings support a positive impact of RC (increased knowledge sharing, decreased knowledge hiding, attenuated association between DC and knowledge hiding), and a detrimental impact of DC (increased knowledge hiding and increased probability of negative relations, the latter leading in turn to more knowledge hiding and less knowledge sharing).

1.2. The Importance of the Research

This PhD thesis aims to ‘elicit’ and explore the presence and impact of DC in organizations, to explore its outcomes as well as its interplay with other variables (such as RC, risk appetite, and group relations), to open avenues for further studies exploring the ‘dark’, irrational, dysfunctional side of cognition, and to provide useful input for practitioners.

Given that the literature to date lacks a systematic understanding of how DC is activated and regulated in work contexts, of how it operates as a cognitive vulnerability, and of how it impacts task and interpersonal engagement, and work-related outcomes, we will put forward an integrative model in which we show that contextual factors at work activate DC, and in which DC, once activated, triggers downstream influences through cognitive and emotional appraisals, impacting both task related and interpersonal behaviors in work settings. We also show that DC is shaped by job demands and stressors that activate and amplify maladaptive appraisals, by individual psychological resources that support adaptive coping, and by job-related social resources that buffer distress pathways and protect interpersonal functioning. We will also contribute to the field of managerial strategic decision-making, answer the call for exploring the role of DC as interpretative patterns that impact information elaboration in decision-making (Luoma & Martela, 2021), and show that RC fosters comprehensive strategic decision-making only when DC is low.

Relatively little is also known about the role of DC in managerial role occupancy, as research to date has typically explored only functional cognition as a prerequisite of managerial effectiveness (Chan et al., 2024; Hodgkinson & Healey, 2008). As such, our thesis provides empirical evidence on the prevalence of DC in managers vs non-managers, on the explanatory role of DC for the disruption experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and also on the role of general risk propensity in intensifying the adverse effects of DC in times of crisis.

Individual cognition has also been rather overlooked in the antecedents of knowledge sharing (KS) and knowledge hiding (KH) behaviors. We answer the call to explore the personal characteristics of the individuals engaged in knowledge-related behaviors (Connelly et al., 2019) by providing one of the first empirical, multi-source data attempts to test the interaction between DC, RC, and negative relations in a work setting, with respect to KS and KH behaviors. Our results show that both the SET (Blau, 1964) and the COR (Hobfoll, 1989) can be considered valid conceptual frameworks for predicting knowledge-related behaviors, however for different circumstances – individuals with high levels of RC will tend to engage in the mutually benefitting social exchanges of KS, while individuals with high levels of DC will tend to protect their own informational resources and will therefore rather engage in KH. We also reinforce the perspective that KS and KH are different constructs, as individuals with high DC can still engage in KS on their accord, while, when directly being asked for knowledge, they will rather go for KH, presumably as a coping mechanism.

II. CHAPTER II. RESEARCH GOALS AND GENERAL METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research goals

In the systematic literature review, we set two main research directions – to explore how DC impacts organizational behavior and work-related outcomes, and to identify contingencies that shape the impact of DC on organizational behavior and work-related outcomes, through accentuation or attenuation. Our main contribution is to establish the first conceptual framework of DC at work, and through it, to determine the cognitive-affective mechanisms through which DC affects work strain, to integrate the role of job demands and resources (personal and social) in activating and buffering DC, and to distinguish the impact of DC on task-related and interpersonal behavior at work.

A further goal of our research is evaluating the impact and interplay of DC and of rationality on strategic decision-making comprehensiveness. We test the association between rationality and comprehensiveness, between DC and comprehensiveness, and the extent to which DC (operationalized through dysfunctional cognitive schemas) reduces the positive association between rationality and comprehensiveness.

Given the role played by managers as disturbance handlers (Mintzberg, 2013), and hence the need for them to maintain a rational, balanced approach in times of crisis, we aim to explore whether managerial role occupancy is also associated with a lower level of the cognitive vulnerability represented by DC (Bamber & McMahon, 2008), as compared to the general workforce, and whether DC mediates the association between managerial role occupancy and the disruption experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, given the shared etiology of risk appetite and of DC, respectively, poor developmental environments and inept parenting (Harris et al., 2001; Mishra & Lalumiere, 2008; Simpson et al., 2019), we are looking to explore the degree to which general risk appetite accentuates the positive association between DC and the disruption experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, we consider the field of research associated with knowledge-related behaviors to be of particular interest with respect to DC in the work context. Given that both KS and KH are influenced by the subjective nature of the beliefs and interpretations regarding self, others, and the wider system, we aim to better understand the impact of DC and of RC of team members and of team leaders on both KS and KH. In addition, our goal is to also explore whether RC can act as a buffer between DC and the two knowledge-related behaviors.

2.2. General methodology

The systematic literature review follows the PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021), with the manuscript databases provided by Web of Science, ProQuest, and Scopus, reaching a final sample of 41 manuscripts to be the subject of the literature review. In the first two studies, data were collected via the convenience sampling method, based on volunteering of respondents working in different organizations, which were reached through our social network. In the first study, related to DC, RC, and strategic decision-making comprehensiveness, we explored data collected via self-reporting from a managerial population. In the second study, related to managerial role occupancy and COVID-19 disruption, the data was collected via self-reporting from both managerial and non-managerial populations. In the third study, covering the impact and interplay of DC, rational cognition and negative relations on knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding, the data was collected from a single organization, through a multi-sourced approach, with the team members providing data on DC and RC, as well as on negative relations, and KS and KH, while from the team leaders we only collected data on DC and RC.

III. CHAPTER III. ORIGINAL RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

3.1. Study 1. Dysfunctional cognition and work-related outcomes: A systematic literature review¹

3.1.1. Introduction

While functional cognition, including bounded-rationality (Lieder & Griffiths, 2020), has been the object of interest in numerous organizational studies, dysfunctional cognition (DC) has been much less often researched in work settings. By DC, we understand irrational beliefs involving absolutistic demands (Lindner et al., 1999), respectively early maladaptive schema (EMS), defined as inflexible, generalized, and persistent cognitive structures (Young et al., 2006). Another perspective is represented by essential, absolute, and sufficient truths, which self-perpetuate by influencing the selection of the information to be processed and by the manifestation of overcompensating behaviors (Young, 1999). EMSs have a self-defeating impact on the individual, yet are difficult to change, as their potential change is perceived as a threat (Young, 1999). They result from unmet needs and dysfunctional interpersonal relations during early childhood (Curşeu et al., 2000; Dickie et al., 2025; Simpson et al., 2012; Young et al., 2006).

Meta-analytic evidence documented DC as a psychological vulnerability leading to psychological maladjustment (Bishop et al., 2022; Janovsky et al., 2020), yet existing integrative approaches to cognition in organizations (Hodgkinson & Healey, 2008) have largely neglected the role of DC in shaping work-related outcomes. In particular, the literature lacks a systematic understanding of: (1) how DC is activated and regulated in work contexts; (2) how it operates as a cognitive vulnerability that shapes the appraisal process of task and

¹ This chapter is based on a manuscript submitted for publication in *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*.

interpersonal cues, and (3) how it impacts task and interpersonal engagement and ultimately work-related outcomes (such as well-being and performance). To address this gap, we set out to review the literature on DC at work and provide a first integrative synthesis of empirical evidence on the role of DC at work, consolidating findings across clinical, organizational, and cognitive-behavioral research traditions.

Building on general model of DC as behavioral antecedents (Janovsky et al., 2020; Young et al., 2006) and the insights of the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R, Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) we put forward a contingency model of DC at work that makes three important contributions to the literature: (1) it describes the cognitive – affective mechanisms through which DC influences work strain, (2) it integrates the role of job demands and resources as activating and buffering factors of DC and (3) it distinguishes the dual impact of DC on task-related and interpersonal functioning at work. The dysfunctional schemas are latent cognitive structures that remain latent until triggered by specific life events, circumstances, or stressors (Dozois & Beck, 2008; Scher et al., 2005).

In order to provide a clearer conceptual organization of DC, we distinguish between self-focused and relational schema (Baldwin, 1992; Cross et al., 2002). Table 1 presents an overview of self-focused and relational dysfunctional cognitive schema with illustrative examples from the reviewed organizational literature. We set out to answer two key research questions: (1) how does DC impact organizational behavior and work-related outcomes? and (2) which are the contingencies that shape the impact of DC on organizational behavior and work-related outcomes, through accentuation or attenuation?

3.1.2. Method

The present review focused on the impact of DC in organizations, alongside contingency factors that shape its impact. We closely followed the PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021). For the first search, we used the following search query: (“dysfunctional

cognition” OR “early maladaptive schem*” OR “dysfunctional cognitive schem*”) AND (organization* OR work OR employee* OR team* OR leader* OR manager*) NOT disorder*.

The initial sample consisted of 20 manuscripts. Upon feedback received from the reviewers, a second supplementary search was initiated in the same databases (i.e., Web of Science, ProQuest, Scopus) using an expanded search query: (“dysfunctional cognition” OR “early maladaptive schem*” OR “dysfunctional cognitive schem*” OR “cognitive distortion*” OR “maladaptive belief*” OR “irrational belief*” OR “dysfunctional attitude*” OR “maladaptive coping” OR “maladaptive schema*”) AND (organization* OR work OR employee* OR team* OR leader* OR manager*) NOT disorder*). Based on the full-text review, 21 papers were selected to be further included in the review. In total, 41 cumulative, non-redundant manuscripts were included in the review.

3.1.3. Results

Taken together, the results of our SLR show that DC is a cognitive vulnerability whose impact on organizational behavior and work-related outcomes is shaped by: (1) job demands and stressors that activate and amplify maladaptive appraisals, (2) individual psychological resources that support adaptive appraisal and coping strategies, and (3) job-related social resources that buffer distress pathways and protect interpersonal functioning. The observed mediators, such as rumination, catastrophizing, negative affectivity, self- and other blame indicate that DC influences work outcomes primarily by shaping cognitive-affective processing and interpersonal behavior under stress. Given their deeply ingrained natures, DC can be considered a stable antecedent of primary appraisal processes (Goh & Oei, 1999; Guppy & Weatherstone, 1997). We thus build on previous models of dysfunctional attitudes at work (Judge & Locke, 1993) to put forward an integrative model in which contextual factors at work activate DC that function as cognitive vulnerabilities and trigger downstream influences through cognitive and emotional appraisals.

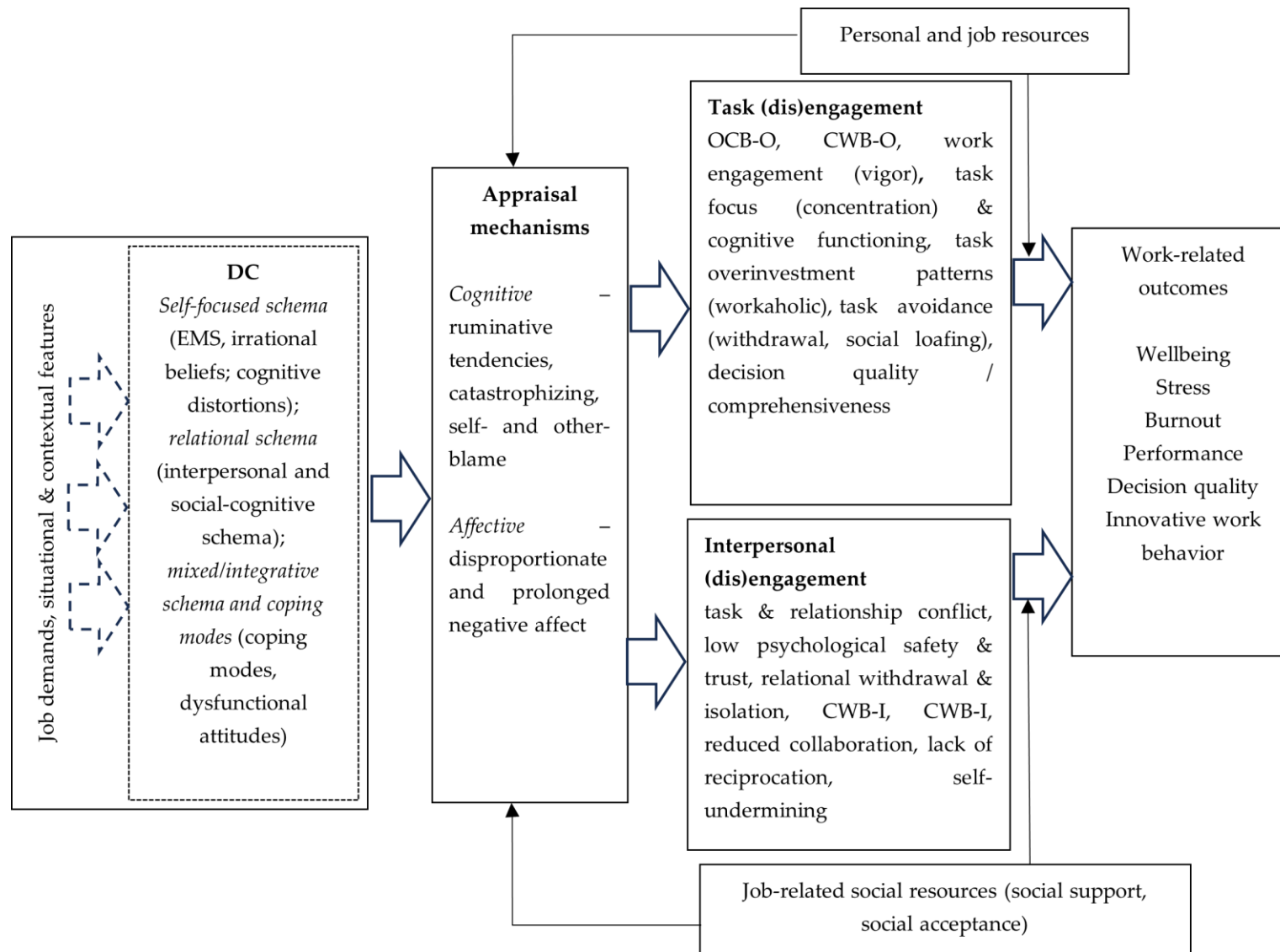
Table 1*Types of self-focused and relational dysfunctional schema*

Category	Type of cognition	Definition	Example in reviewed studies
Self-focused schemas	Early maladaptive schemas (self-related)	Stable negative beliefs about the self, including inadequacy, failure, or vulnerability	Defectiveness, failure, dependence, unrelenting standards
	Irrational beliefs (self-evaluative)	Rigid, absolutist beliefs about personal performance or worth	“I must always succeed”, low frustration tolerance
	Cognitive distortions (self-related)	Biased interpretations of personal experiences	Catastrophizing, overgeneralization
Relational schemas	Interpersonal / relational schemas	Cognitive representations of others and social interactions, including expectations about treatment by others	Mistrust, rejection, abandonment, demand for fairness
	Social-cognitive schemas (contextual)	Broader expectations about the social world shaped by experiences such as discrimination or stress associated with perceptions of disconnection from others and/or the self	Social vigilance, invalidation concerns, abandonment, social alienation, social inadequacy
Mixed/integrative schema and coping modes	Schema modes / cognitive-affective patterns	Dynamic thinking patterns combining self and relational schemas with emotional appraisal and behavioral tendencies	Detached protector, demanding parent, dysfunctional attitudes

3.1.4. Discussion and conclusions**3.1.4.1. Theoretical implications**

Given the distinction between different types of DC identified in this review and presented in Table 1, we argue that self-focused dysfunctional schema tend to activate appraisal modes with a dominant impact on task engagement and ultimately impact wellbeing at work and individual performance (individual work-related outcomes).

Figure 2. An integrative model of dysfunctional cognition at work.



Relational dysfunctional schemas are expected to impact more broadly on interpersonal engagement at work and trigger a negative relational climate that ultimately reduces team and organizational performance (collective work-related outcomes). Finally, the mixed/integrative schema and coping modes, due to their global nature and their affective evaluative dimension, are expected to have a more pervasive and global impact on task-related as well as relational dimensions of work, having the most detrimental influence on both individual as well as collective work-related outcomes. Although we do not hypothesize exclusive influences on task-related and interpersonal interactions at work, we do expect a certain domain-specific influence of different types of DC identified in this review that call for multilevel explorations of the impact DC has on individual and collective work-related outcomes. The overall integrative model of how DC impacts work -related outcomes is presented in Figure 2.

3.1.4.2. Future research directions

A first direction for further exploration is how do job demands function as activating contingencies for DC at work. In our integrative model of DC we include elevated job demands as activating conditions for DC, and we call for future research to investigate the triggering role of job demands for DC in work settings. Job-related social resources can serve a protective role and social support, for example, is expected to induce a more functional appraisal of the work conditions under high distrust schema (Muntean et al., 2025). Moreover, personal resources such as resilience and optimism can impact the appraisal tendencies and reduce the deleterious effects of DC. Future research could therefore investigate the role of personal, social and job resources in shaping the appraisal tendencies triggered by DC.

Little emphasis was put on the relation between DC and the coping styles at work – future research could explore the dynamics between DC and different coping styles (functional vs dysfunctional) in work contexts. Future research could also explore the role of dysfunctional work environments as potential triggers of DC. A particular line of research concerns the

leader-follower interactions, especially in the context of toxic leadership practices, as such leadership can spur negative and persistent relational spirals that can foster the emergence of DC.

A relevant research direction could therefore be the exploration of the role of the interplay of DC in leader-follower dyads. Future research could therefore conceptualize leader-member dyads as relational units that regulate the activation of DC and shape individual appraisal tendencies. We call for studies that focus on the relational dynamics in teams and leader-member dyads as regulatory system shaping the translation of DC into work-related outcomes by impacting cognitive-affective appraisal tendencies as well as interpersonal regulatory processes and the interpersonal resource exchange.

Building on the differentiation-integration framework advanced in recent research on hybrid work (Manole et al., 2025), future studies could examine how evolving work arrangements and broader societal and technological transitions reconfigure the activation and regulation of DCs across interrelated work domains. Future research could explore communication behavior in teams in face to face and virtual settings as it is driven by activated DCs.

3.1.4.3. Practical implications

We recommend to organizational practitioners to make space also for the topic of dysfunctional cognition when designing developmental programs, by addressing it as a latent cognitive vulnerability, and by making explicit that it can affect employees both personally (leading potentially to burnout and emotional exhaustion) and interpersonally (leading to conflictual, harmed relationships) and that, mirroring its negative outcomes, it can be mitigated by building personal (resilience and hardiness) and interpersonal (social support and psychological safety) resources. In addition, we would recommend embedding individual coaching conversations in higher-stakes development programs, as it provides, akin to the

schema therapy (Young et al., 2006), a structured reflection environment where dysfunctional scripts and beliefs can be brought to awareness, can be explored, and can potentially undergo a restructuring process.

3.1.4.4. Limitations

Our systematic literature review has several limitations. First, the empirical evidence reviewed stems predominantly from cross-sectional research designs, limiting the causal inferences possible and also raising concerns related to the common method bias. Second, the studies included in this review reflect significant heterogeneity concerning the operationalization of DC, including EMS, maladaptive coping styles and irrational beliefs. Third, the empirical evidence includes various occupational groups, yet the focus on healthcare professionals, teachers, and psychologists limits the generalizability of our inferences. Moreover, the sample is geographically skewed towards European and Middle East samples with a clear focus on individual outcomes, with relatively little attention to team or organizational level outcomes. Fourth, relatively few studies explicitly tested moderation and mediation models, limiting the grounding of the contingencies presented in our theoretical model. Additionally, despite following the PRISMA guidelines and using different search strategies, the results reported in this paper may be subject to publication and language bias as non-English papers and practitioner-oriented reports have been omitted. Finally, the present review has not been pre-registered on any platform. Yet, the review authors prepared a review protocol from the beginning, including the search string, the databases for the search, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the analysis strategy.

3.2. Study 2. Managerial rationality, dysfunctional cognition and organizational decision comprehensiveness²

3.2.1. Introduction

Modern organizations face extraordinary levels of turbulence and uncertainty. It thus becomes paramount to make comprehensive strategic decisions that enable adaptation to such conditions. While the technical capabilities needed to adapt to changing market conditions may be available, many organizations fall prey in their strategic processes to their own, internal inertial forces, such as managerial cognition (Gamble, 2020; Montreuil, 2024; Sandra et al., 2023; Tripsas & Gavetti, 2017). Although early research on strategic decisions theorized the essential role of cognitive competencies (Das & Misra, 1995) or strategic intelligence (Levine et al., 2017) as antecedents of the strategic decision-making processes, and ample research explored rationality in decision-making (Shafir & LeBoeuf, 2002), few studies evaluated directly managerial rationality and its impact on strategic decision comprehensiveness (Jia et al., 2021). We believe that rationality, defined as the individual competence of making choices aligned with a normative ideal (Baron, 2012) is a key antecedent of strategic decision comprehensiveness, therefore the first aim of our paper is to test the association between managerial rationality (as an individual cognitive competence) and the comprehensiveness of their strategic choices.

The Upper Echelon Theory (UET; Hambrick & Mason, 1984) is considered as one of the most influential perspectives in strategic management literature (Neely et al., 2020). The UET (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) postulates that top managers interpret various strategic contexts through their own lenses (i.e., personalities, skills, values, cognition, competencies),

² This chapter is based on an article published as Scholtes, C., Trif, S., & Curseu, P. L. (2024). Managerial rationality, dysfunctional cognition and organizational decision comprehensiveness. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 37(3), 490-503.

leading to strategic decisions influenced by these subjective factors. According to Stubbart (1989) managerial interpretation is implicit in any strategic management theory that is based on the analysis of internal or external factors. In line with these claims, executives act upon their personalized interpretations of the strategic situations they face (Finkelstein et al., 2009; Hambrick, 2007) and when such interpretations are based on dysfunctional cognitive structures, they trump the strategy process. As such managerial strategic choices are a dynamic, purposive, and politically charged process of meaning construction that is guided by the cognitive schemas of managers (Kaplan, 2011) yet we know very little about how dysfunctional cognitions impact strategy. The second aim of our paper is to test the role of dysfunctional cognitive structures in the comprehensiveness of strategic decisions and we explore the extent to which such dysfunctional schemas reduce the positive association between individual rationality and strategic decision comprehensiveness.

3.2.1.1. Rationality and decision comprehensiveness

Within the larger UET area, extensive research has focused on the comprehensiveness of the strategic decision-making process (Fredrickson & Mitchell, 1984; Ireland & Miller, 2004; Meissner & Wulf, 2014). Comprehensiveness has been defined as “the extensiveness with which an organization’s top executives systematically gather and process information from the external environment in making strategic decisions” (Forbes, 2007, p. 362), respectively as the extent to which decision-makers are exhaustive and inclusive when making strategic decisions (Meissner & Wulf, 2014). In line with this definition, comprehensiveness has also been seen as the rationality of the strategic decision-making process (Papadakis et al., 1998) and showed to impact positively firm performance assessed using subjective outcomes (Samba et al., 2021).

In terms of individual differences most likely to impact on information search and information elaboration during strategic decision-making processes, we expect that the

rationality of the managers is a conducive factor. Hough and White (2003) state that rational decision-making research stresses analytic and integrative comprehensiveness, therefore we expect rational decision-makers to extensively explore the information available, use logic to combine premises, and that their choices are aligned with the normative ideal as argued by Baron (2012).

We expect that managers scoring high on rationality are better able to cope with the information overload that is often encountered in complex strategy processes. Information overload describes decision situations in which there is too much information to be processed. According to Buchanan and Kock (2001), under conditions of time pressure, decision quality first increases with information load and then decreases, a trend that affects especially managers who operate with a long-term strategic focus. Bawden and Robinson (2009) argue that cognitive overload emerges due to an ever-expanding quantity of information managers have to process in a context in which they are subjected to multiple distractions and interruptions. Under such circumstance, we believe that their cognitive competence of analyzing information extensively is crucial for decision effectiveness. Another more recent intrusive reason for overload is due to information overload available on various public and corporate social media platforms (Bolisani et al., 2018).

In the same line of reasoning, in a recent meta-analysis study, Samba and collaborators (2018) propose the concept of ‘information elaboration’, as an underlying construct of decision comprehensiveness (i.e., an extensive exploration and analysis of the available information in the decision situation). Starting from the argument that information elaboration is key for decision comprehensiveness, we argue that managerial rationality fosters an analytical approach to decision-making and increases decision comprehensiveness.

Hypothesis 1: Managerial rationality has a positive association with decision comprehensiveness in organizations.

3.2.1.2. Dysfunctional cognitive schemas and decision comprehensiveness.

Cognitive schemas qualify as personalized constructs that, in line with the UET, are filters that managers use to organize incoming strategic input (Hambrick, 2007). Schemas are defined as preexisting assumptions about the way the world is organized (Axelrod, 1973), basic cognitive representations that organize human experiences, and help us make sense of events and incoming information (Gilboa & Marlatte, 2017).

According to Hiller and Hambrick (2005), given the informational overload of executives and the level of ambiguity executives are dealing with, their personal schemas (i.e., values, experiences, personalities, and various other human factors) will affect both their interpretations of the situations at hand and their strategic choices. Especially when dealing with high job demands, executives will take mental shortcuts and will rely on what they have seen work in the past, and as such their choices will rather reflect their personal schemas (Hambrick, 2007).

This dynamic will presumably be even more dysfunctional when the involved executives are affected by a high level of personal ‘hubris’. Hayward and Hambrick (1997) define it as exaggerated self-confidence or pride. Hubris stimulates risk-taking especially when the level of managerial discretion was high rather than low (Li & Tang, 2010). Thus, when managerial discretion is high and procedural pressures are low, managerial decisions are likely to be driven by cognitive schema that ultimately shape the decision context (Kaplan, 2011).

Hypothesis 2: Dysfunctional cognitive schemas have a negative association with decision comprehensiveness in organizations.

3.2.1.3. The interaction between rationality and dysfunctional cognitive schemas

According to Hodgkinson and Healey (2008), managerial (dysfunctional) cognitive schemas have a significant impact on all phases of strategic decision-making, as they may constitute barriers to change, and may lead to inertia, inflexibility, and lack of empowerment

of others. For example, narcissistic CEOs (Zhu & Chen, 2015), in order to assert their presence, will go to the extreme of guiding their corporation through strategic choices that are opposite to the previous experience of their directors. We therefore expect that dysfunctional cognition limits the benefits of rational thinking in strategic choices.

From a different line of research, that of clinical psychology, a particularly interesting proposition is being made – that the maladaptive schemas lay dormant, until they get activated by contexts of particular life stress (Dozois & Beck, 2008; Scher et al., 2005). In line with the arguments presented in the integrative model of behavioral strategy (Powell et al., 2011) cognitive schema are contextual elements that interact with individual competencies to impact strategic decision processes. Moreover, using a dual information processing view on strategic cognition, Luoma and Martela (2021) argue that analytic information processing should be explored under the contextual influences of implicit biases tied to cognitive schema.

With some exceptions (Hodgkinson & Healey, 2011), literature on the impact of unconscious processing of information, distorted by the activation of one's own dysfunctional cognitive schemas, on strategic decision-making seem to be by far and large missing. Traditional research on rationality as cognitive competence explored its effects in a rather de-contextualized manner (Powell et al., 2011), yet contextual factors may impact the extent to which a competence is truly manifested in cognitive performance, including decision comprehensiveness. Recent neuropsychological research has documented the interaction between stable individual attributes and contextual factors in strategic decision processes (Richner et al., 2023) and we answer the call for exploring the role of dysfunctional cognition as interpretative patterns that impact information elaboration in decision making (Luoma & Martela, 2021) by hypothesizing the following:

Hypothesis 3: Dysfunctional cognitive schemas moderate the positive association between managerial rationality and decision comprehensiveness in organizations.

3.2.2. Method

3.2.2.1. Sample and procedure

Our final sample included 270 managers, comprised of 145 women and 125 males. The average age is 40.72 years old ($SD = 7.82$) and the average work tenure is 17.68 years ($SD = 7.62$, ranging from 2.5 to 37 years of work experience).

3.2.2.2. Instruments

Dysfunctional cognitive schemas were evaluated with short 90 item version of the YSQ (Young & Brown, 2005). **Managerial rationality** was evaluated using the revised seven-item version of the CRT test (Frederick, 2005). **Organizational decision comprehensiveness** was evaluated with a five item scale developed by Ogilvie and Glick (1990) and further refined by Miller and collaborators (1998). We have used gender, age, work tenure, and hierarchical position as control variables in our analyses.

3.2.3. Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Means, standard deviations and correlations

Variable	Mean	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	.54	.50	1					
2. Age	40.72	7.82	-.06	1				
3. Tenure	17.68	7.62	-.05	.93**	1			
4. Managerial position	1.24	.69	-.12*	-.14*	-.19**	1		
5. Managerial rationality	4.22	2.01	-.17**	-.06	-.04	-.19**	1	
6. Dysfunctional cognition	2.12	.61	.05	-.23**	-.21**	.08	.07	1
7. Strategic decision comprehensiveness	4.88	1.29	-.07	.08	.03	-.08	.01	-.10

Note. gender was coded as a dummy variable with 0 = men and 1= women.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, and * $p < .05$.

We have tested our hypotheses using OLS regression analyses, in which we added the control variables (i.e., gender, age, tenure, managerial position), the two predictors (dysfunctional cognition and rationality) and the cross-product term between the two predictors. The results of the regression analyses are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

OLS regression results for managerial rationality and dysfunctional cognitive schemas on decision comprehensiveness

Variable	Strategic decision comprehensiveness		Strategic decision comprehensiveness DFS	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	4.84* (.14)	4.84** (.14)	4.84* (.14)	4.84** (.14)
Gender	-.19 (.16)	-.14 (.16)	-.18 (.16)	-.13 (.16)
Age	.05 [†] (.03)	.06* (.03)	.05 [†] (.03)	.06* (.03)
Work tenure	-.05 [†] (.03)	-.05* (.03)	-.05 [†] (.03)	-.05 [†] (.03)
Managerial position	.18 (.12)	.17 (.12)	.18 (.12)	.17 (.12)
Dysfunctional cognition (DC)	-.17 (.13)	-.20 (.13)	-.12 (.08)	-.13 (.08)
CRT	-.002 (.04)	-.001 (.04)	-.01 (.08)	-.01 (.08)
CRT x DC		-.17** (.06)		-.18* (.07)
N	270	270	270	270
R ²	.04	.06	.04	.06
F change	1.61	7.96**	1.74	6.27*
F statistic	1.61	2.56*	1.74	2.41*

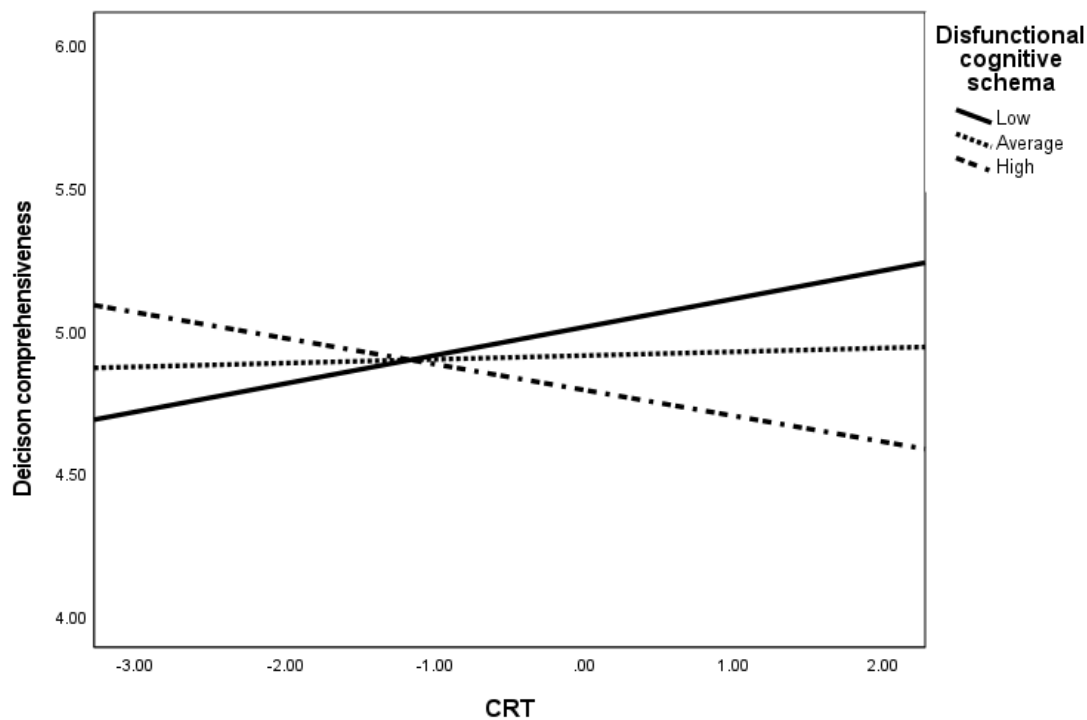
Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients are shown with standard errors between parentheses; CRT – Cognitive Reflection Test, a measure of managerial rationality, DC – dysfunctional cognition; DFS – Bartlett dominant factor score; gender was coded as a dummy variable with 0 = men and 1 = women.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, [†] $p < .10$.

As indicated in Table 5, managerial rationality does not have a significant association with decision comprehensiveness ($\beta = -.001$, $p = .99$), therefore Hypothesis 1 was not supported by the data. Moreover, although the dysfunctional cognitions had a negative association (as hypothesized) with decision comprehensiveness, this negative effect was not significant ($\beta =$

.09, $p=.14$), therefore Hypothesis 2 was not supported. The interaction effect between managerial cognition and dysfunctional cognition was significant ($\beta=-.17$, $p=.005$), therefore the third hypothesis was fully supported by the data.

Figure 3. The interaction effect between managerial rationality and dysfunctional cognitive schema on decision comprehensiveness



Note. CRT – Cognitive Reflection Test a measure of managerial rationality

To further check the robustness of our results we have used the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2012) to test the interaction effect between managerial rationality and dysfunctional cognition on decision comprehensiveness and we have used the PROCESS output to also generate the interaction plot. The interaction pattern depicted in Figure 3 supports our third hypothesis showing that for low YSQ scores the association between managerial rationality and decision comprehensiveness is positive, and it is reversed in the case of high levels of YSQ scores.

3.2.4. Discussion and conclusions

3.2.4.1. Theoretical implications

We have used an objective test to assess managerial rationality, yet the main effect specified in the first hypothesis was not supported by the data. A plausible explanation for this lack of significant association between managerial rationality and decision comprehensiveness stems from Hodgkinson and Sadler-Smith's (2018) seminal work on managerial cognition that supports a more blended view on how effective decisions are made, such that effortful forms of information analysis are mixed with the skilled utilization of less deliberative, intuitive processes. In the same vein, an interesting perspective has emerged recently, which is integrating rationality with intuition, as opposed to considering them mutually exclusive manifestations. Moreover, Hambrick (2007) suggests that executives' actions are due more to their pre-determined mandate than to any unconscious biased information processing on their part, therefore the lack of support for the main effect of individual rationality on the comprehensiveness of strategic choice can also be explained by relational aspects that were not explicitly considered in our study.

The second hypothesis concerning the detrimental role of dysfunctional cognition on strategic decision comprehensiveness was also not supported by the data. An alternative explanation lies in external organizational dependencies. Horodecka and Vozna (2020) present an interesting perspective, according to which collective, organizational rationality (in the terms of our study, strategic comprehensiveness) emerges not quite from the sum of individual rational reasoning processes, but rather the institutions, with their feedback loops, norms and procedures. The third hypothesis was supported by the data and as the results show dysfunctional cognition qualifies the association between managerial rationality and the comprehensiveness of strategic decision-making, such that rationality fosters comprehensiveness only when dysfunctional cognition is low. Such results point to the essential role of the interplay between cognitive competencies and dysfunctional cognition in

strategic decision processes, providing support for cognitive entrainment (Sandra et al., 2023) in strategic decision processes. Our results are aligned with an interactionist and contextual model (Powell et al., 2011) of cognitive competencies in strategic management showing that the positive association between rationality (as an individual cognitive competence) and decision comprehensiveness is qualified by cognitive vulnerability as illustrated by dysfunctional cognition.

3.2.4.2. Limitations

The most important limitation is that our design was cross-sectional and relied on self-reporting. As reported in a recent meta-analysis decision comprehensiveness is positively associated with firm outcomes when self-reports are used (Samba et al., 2021), therefore common method bias can impact the magnitude of the observed effects. In line with Siemsen and collaborators (2010), it is unlikely that our interaction effect was overestimated. We believe that using self-reports was the most appropriate approach in collecting data, as we have evaluated rationality as a cognitive competence of making rational choices and we have evaluated personal cognitive schemata.

3.2.4.3. Practical implications

Our study has some relevant implications for managerial decision-making. Based on our empirical knowledge, by far and large, management development programs utterly ignore the presence and the impact of personal dysfunctional cognitive schemas. If managers attending these programs happen to be significantly affected by some such schemas, chances are that the prescriptive, ‘as it should be’ kind of rational decision-making approaches promoted by such programs will mean that they have rather superficial and short-lasting effects, given that the rigid and generalized character of the cognitive schemas will interfere with the newly acquired theoretical knowledge. It may therefore be an inspired approach to adapt and transfer in an organizational context the 8-steps process created by Young (1990), for restructuring cognitive schemas.

3.3. Study 3. Managerial role occupancy, dysfunctional cognition, and risk propensity as predictors of COVID-19 disruption in organizations³

3.3.1. Introduction

In an increasingly complex and turbulent business environment managers need to be able to anticipate changes and ensure resilience (Vakilzadeh & Haase, 2021), while exercising with responsible agency their high influence on the culture and productivity of the organization (Young et al., 2000). Our study sets out to investigate the extent to which dysfunctional cognition explains the disruption experienced at work during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the attraction-selection-attrition model (Schneider, 1987), managers are selected based on personality traits and capability profiles that fit the task requirements, emphasizing the planning, coordination, and control of work activities required for performance. Given the fact that managers have to address task-related as well as relational issues, a broad and rich cognitive repertoire is required to ensure they are effective in dealing with task-related as well as social issues at work (Yamazaki et al., 2018). Moreover, managers present higher levels of general mental ability (Ones & Dilchert, 2009), emotional stability, extraversion, and agreeableness (Furnham & Crump, 2015; Lounsbury et al., 2016; Ones & Dilchert, 2009), ethics (Huhtala et al., 2011; Siu & Lam, 2009), critical thinking (Zuriguél-Pérez et al., 2018), happiness (Jaworek et al., 2021), and, from a constructive developmental perspective, meaning-making complexity (Floris & Cuganesan, 2019). Executives appear to both outscore the general population (and other managerial levels included) and be remarkably homogenous in their personality profile (Ones & Dilchert, 2009; Winsborough & Sambath, 2013). Despite these cognitive and emotional characteristics, we know relatively little about

³ This chapter is based on a manuscript submitted for publication in *Journal of Workplace Health Management*.

the role of dysfunctional cognition differences in being selected for, and further occupying, a managerial role.

Especially in turbulent times bringing disruption to work processes, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, managers are required to provide direction and act swiftly to help organizations adapt to the new contextual constraints. Researchers to date have explored functional cognition and proactive personality as key requisites for managerial effectiveness under such disruptive environmental conditions (Chan et al., 2024; Hodgkinson & Healey, 2008). In the current study, we will explore differences in DC between managers and non-managers building on the Early Maladaptive Schemas framework (EMSs; Young et al., 2006). An EMS is defined as a “broad, pervasive theme or pattern, comprised of memories, emotions, cognitions, and bodily sensations, regarding oneself and one’s relationships with others, developed during childhood or adolescence, elaborated throughout one’s lifetime and dysfunctional to a significant degree” (Young et al., 2006, p. 7).

EMS are dysfunctional cognitive patterns that bias the processing of incoming information, diminishing decision comprehensiveness (Scholtes et al., 2024), potentially undermining work performance and adaptation. We build on the attraction-selection-attrition model (Schneider, 1987) to argue that managerial roles favor traits associated with high-functioning cognition (cognitive complexity, effective self-regulation) and DC is at odds with such managerial roles. Moreover, as managerial roles require rapid adaptation and resilience, we argue that employees scoring high on DC are “naturally” deselected from such roles in their career trajectories. Most of the previous research on managerial resilience during COVID-19 focused on positive personality and cognitive attributes (Hadjielias et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2024; Lombardi et al., 2021), leaving unaddressed the role of DC in shaping the responses to such disruption. In terms of adaptation, DC reduces the resilience in times of crises. Therefore,

we set out to investigate the extent to which DC explains the disruptions experienced by managers and non-managers during the COVID-19 crisis.

The concept of cognitive schema is understood as a set of cognitive representations, sometimes organized as lay theories about the surrounding reality that enable the identification, organization, interpretation, and evaluation of experiences, as well as the anticipation of events (Epstein, 1973; Schmidt et al., 1999). Cognitive schemas do not inherently possess a dysfunctional attribute, as the creation of flexible cognitive schemas is a healthy and necessary part of our interaction with and understanding of the wider world. However, the EMSs do not meet adaptive functions, nor are they representative of the overall population, as they are developed based on maladaptive conditions in early childhood (Dickie et al., 2024; Simpson et al., 2019; Young, 1999). Cognitive schemas are therefore the lenses through which individuals make sense of the surrounding environment, including the workplace.

One significant difference between adaptive cognitive schemas and the EMS lies in the degree of restructuring when exposed to a critical mass of information that differs significantly from the one held by the respective schema. In the case of adaptive schemas, there's an iterative process of activation, deactivation, and restructuration in response to what is considered useful and functional (Thornton, 2018). Schemas become maladaptive when they are rooted in dysfunctional relations with relevant others during early development, being inflexible, generalized, and persistent cognitive structures that distort information processing in adult life (Curşeu et al., 2000; Scholtes et al., 2024). When flexible regulation is missing and the context is misrepresented, EMSs lead to behaviors and decisions that are risky or even harmful for the self and others (Thornton, 2018).

EMSs are defined as self-defeating core beliefs, themes, or patterns that we repeat throughout our lives, which result from unmet needs during childhood (Young et al., 2006). They shape how individuals perceive themselves and the world around them and might

profoundly affect feelings and behaviors, significantly impacting mental health and psychological well-being (Young et al., 2006). When activated, they influence how an individual receives, codes, stores, and retrieves information (Bishop et al., 2022). Research indicates a link between EMSs and conditions such as depression and anxiety (Bishop et al., 2022; Cámara & Calvete, 2012). Specifically, the EMSs related to feeling flawed, unlovable, and socially excluded have been identified as especially impactful (Bishop et al., 2022). EMSs are also correlated with emotion recognition impairment, especially in the case of happiness (Csukly et al., 2011). Research also shows that negative self-schemata negatively influence self-evaluations and self-efficacy, as they activate a self-depreciative confirmatory bias, as well as pessimistic expectations about future events (Bruch et al., 1989).

While not many scholars took an interest in EMS in an organizational context, those who did reached a similar view as presented above. More specifically, the distrust schema reduces feelings of leadership empowerment as well as the identification with the organization (Tucaliuc et al., 2023, 2025), while generic DC fosters counterproductive work behaviors in teachers (Muntean et al., 2025). In a similar study, the unrelenting standards schema predicted high burnout among clinical and counselling psychology trainees (Kaeding et al., 2017).

The attraction-selection-attrition model (Schneider, 1987) describes three theoretical mechanisms for understanding the congruence between employee cognition and organizational roles. In line with this theoretical model, we posit that managerial roles are inherently complex, dynamic, and cognitively demanding. Therefore, managerial roles could act as a challenging cognitive development context (Bamber & McMahon, 2008) and thus, next to selection effects, we expect that managerial role occupancy is associated with a lower incidence of DC. In addition, employees in non-managerial roles tend to have less control over their work environment, and such a context could activate (or enhance) their cognitive vulnerabilities. Finally, if individuals scoring high on DC do end up in managerial roles, they are at heightened

risk of derailment, defined as the failure to sustain performance at high levels of responsibility (Carson et al., 2012). In line with these arguments, we hypothesized that differences in organizational role occupancy between managers and non-managers are reflected in different levels of DC.

Hypothesis 1: Managers report lower overall levels of dysfunctional cognition than non-managers.

In Mintzberg's words (1973, p. 31), in a managerial role, "the significant activity is interspersed with the trivial one in no particular pattern. Hence the manager must be prepared to shift moods quickly and frequently". As such, the managers are supposed to act as disturbance handlers (Mintzberg, 2013) and such work contexts could serve as cognitive development contexts that ameliorate their vulnerabilities, leading to higher resilience and adaptation. We therefore posit that organizational role occupancy creates differences in the cognitive development opportunities (Bamber & McMahon, 2008) and managerial roles are inherently developmental, helping managers to absorb better external disturbances.

One such meta-disturbance was the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed significant constraints, exposed individuals to painful and traumatic circumstances, and required frequent and immediate transformations in how work was organized and delivered (Glette et al., 2024; Ozmen & Arslan Yurumezoglu, 2022; Vázquez-Calatayud et al., 2022; Udod et al., 2024). As such, the pandemic imposed severe challenges and a need for adjustment (Haider et al., 2023), creating the necessity to act effectively as a leader while navigating high levels of uncertainty (Jain & Kondayya, 2023).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, managers had to reorganize work routines and combine the higher work-related pressures with working from home. Under these adverse conditions, the managers' resilience was paramount for organizational adaptation. Empirical evidence shows that EMS increased rumination tendencies during the COVID-19 pandemic

with deleterious consequences on anxiety and depression (Curşeu et al., 2025). Moreover, comparative studies on COVID-19 adaptation report that managers, although exposed to higher levels of job demands, report higher levels of adaptation as compared to other employees (Pfeifer, 2021). Conversely, for employees, the drastic changes generated by COVID-19 led to heightened perceptions of occupational health risks and associated emotional responses, such as irritability (Hamza, 2024). We build on the premise that DC is not a static attribute, but it reflects a latent psychological vulnerability (Bamber & McMahon, 2008) that can be triggered and exacerbated in low agency work environments (Dozois & Beck, 2008). Managerial role occupancy predicts negatively DC, which in turn shapes the adaptation process to work disturbances as those created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the view that managers are resilient disturbance handlers, who are typically more cognitively complex, ambivalent, and versatile than the general population, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Dysfunctional cognition mediates the association between managerial position and the disruption experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the context of the disruption experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we also considered the impact of risk propensity, defined as an individual's current tendency to take or avoid risk (Sitkin & Weingart, 1995). It appears to share to a significant degree the etiology of EMS, being associated with poor developmental environments and inept parenting (Harris et al., 2001; Mishra & Lalumiere, 2008; Simpson et al., 2019). Moreover, the existence of various EMSs, such as unpredictability, disconnection, or rejection schemas, increases risk appetite and the probability of risk-taking behaviors (Dickie et al., 2024; Marengo et al., 2019; Ross & Hill, 2002).

Risk propensity can be particularly detrimental in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, given the high number of severe risks across various life domains (health, financial, social, ethical) it generated (Clemente-Suárez et al., 2021). Given the negative impact

of EMSs (Bishop et al., 2022; Cámara & Calvete, 2012; Kaeding et al., 2017; Muntean et al., 2025), we expect that the emergence of both EMSs and risk propensity may represent a detrimental combination regarding the adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thus, we argue that:

Hypothesis 3: General risk appetite accentuates the positive association between dysfunctional cognition and disruption experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.3.2. Method

3.3.2.1. Participants and procedure

The present study included 434 participants, comprising 293 females (67.5%) and 141 males (32.3%). The average age is 37.31 ($SD = 9.31$), and the average job tenure is 14.54 years ($SD = 8.85$).

3.3.2.2. Instruments

COVID-19 disruption was measured with a 4-item scale developed by Lin et al. (2021). DC was evaluated with the 90-item version of the YSQ (Young & Brown, 2005). For risk propensity, we used the revised version of the DOSPERT Scale (Blais & Weber, 2006). The managerial position was evaluated by asking participants to check the option that best described their employment situation. They were able to choose from the following options: top management, middle management, team leader, a non-managerial, unemployed. Moreover, we have used gender, age, and job tenure as control variables in our subsequent analyses.

3.3.3. Results

We present the means, standard deviations, and correlations in Table 6. As our general model focuses on a moderated mediation, we have used the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2012) to test our hypotheses. We have used gender, age, and job tenure as control variables. In the first step of the analysis, we used managerial position to predict dysfunctional cognition. We have used the heteroscedasticity-consistent estimates (Hayes & Cai, 2007) and the results of the analysis are presented in Table 7.

Table 6*Means, standard deviations and correlations*

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	.68	.47	1					
2. Age	37.31	9.31	-.24**	1				
3. Tenure	14.54	8.85	-.23**	.95**	1			
4. Managerial position	.62	.49	-.38**	.47**	.46**	1		
5. Risk propensity	3.11	.67	-.17**	-.07	-.06	.10*	1	
6. Dysfunctional cognition	2.23	.67	.10*	-.27**	-.26**	-.23**	.07	1
7. COVID-19 disruption	2.98	1.44	.04	-.02	-.03	-.13**	.01	.20**

Notes. gender is coded as a dummy variable 1=women, 0=men; managerial position was coded as a dummy variable with 0=non-manager, 1=manager.

[†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

As indicated in Table 7, managerial position predicted negatively the overall dysfunctional cognition score ($B = -.18$, $SE = .08$, $p = .02$) supporting the first hypothesis. In order to test the second hypothesis, we estimated the indirect association between managerial position and COVID-19 disruption as mediated by dysfunctional cognition by using Model 4 in PROCESS. This effect was significant as the 95% confidence interval did not include zero ($B = -.08$, $SE = .04$, 95%CI [-.16; -.02]). The remaining association between managerial position and COVID-19 disruption was significant ($B = -.38$, $SE = .18$, $p = .04$) showing that the mediation is partial and managers tend to report lower levels of COVID-19 disruption than non-managers, difference that was not explained by the difference in dysfunctional cognition.

In order to test the moderating role of risk appetite in the relation between dysfunctional cognition and the COVID-19 disruption we have used Model 14 from PROCESS. The interaction effect of dysfunctional cognition and general risk appetite on the perceived COVID-

19 disruption was significant ($B = .34$, $SE = .16$, $p = .03$). The interaction effect is depicted in Figure 4 and it is fully aligned with Hypothesis 3 that postulated an accentuating role of risk appetite in the relation between dysfunctional cognition and COVID-19 disruption.

Table 7

Results of the regression analyses for dysfunctional cognition and COVID-19 disruption

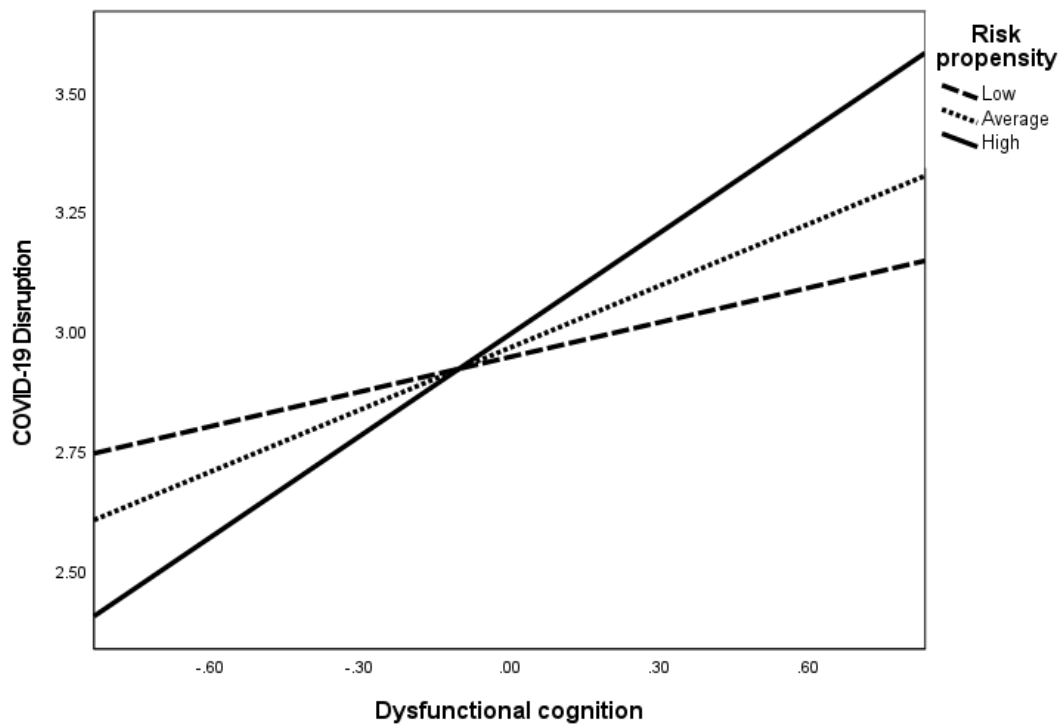
Variables	Dysfunctional cognition	COVID-19 disruption
Constant	.67**(.23)	2.25*** (.52)
Gender	-.003 (.07)	-.02 (.15)
Age	-.01(.008)	.03 [†] (.02)
Tenure	-.0007 (.009)	-.02 (.02)
Managerial position	-.18 * (.08)	-.38* (.18)
Dysfunctional cognition (DC)		.46*** (.11)
Risk propensity (RP)		.03 (.10)
DC x RP		.34* (.16)
N	433	433
R ²	0.09	0.07
F	9.04***	4.34***

Note: gender is coded as a dummy variable with 0 = male and 1 = female; managerial position was coded as a dummy variable with 0=non-manager, 1=manager; unstandardized regression coefficients are shown with robust standard errors between parentheses (the H3 estimator was used); *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; [†] $p < .10$.

The conditional association between dysfunctional cognition and the perceived COVID-19 disruption was not significant when risk propensity was low ($B = .24$, $SE = .15$, $p = .12$), yet it became significant when the risk propensity was average ($B = .43$, $SE = .11$, $p < .001$) and high ($B = .71$, $SE = .16$, $p < .001$). The conditional indirect association through dysfunctional cognition between managerial position and COVID-19 disruption was not significant when the risk propensity was low ($B = -.04$, $SE = .03$, 95%CI [-.12; .01]), yet it was significant at average levels of risk propensity ($B = -.08$, $SE = .04$, 95%CI [-.16;-.01]) as well as high levels of risk propensity ($B = -.13$, $SE = .06$, 95%CI [-.26;-.02]). Finally, the index of

moderated mediation was significant ($B = -.06$, $SE = .04$, 95%CI $[-.15;-.006]$) as the 95% confidence interval did not include zero.

Figure 4. The interaction effect between dysfunctional cognition and risk propensity on COVID-19 disruption



3.3.4. Discussion and conclusions

3.3.4.1. Theoretical implications

Our first hypothesis received empirical support, suggesting that managers report lower levels of DC compared to the non-managerial population. We can further infer that individuals with higher DC are potentially either not attracted to managerial roles, as these roles are perceived to generate negative emotions by activating the dysfunctional schemas in high-stakes contexts, or they do not get to be selected for such roles, as the DC will manifest in previous tense job circumstances or in the high-stakes moments of the selection process (e.g., partaking in assessment centers), or, if they will have been selected for a managerial role, they will experience managerial derailment sooner rather than later due to their DC.

In addition, the second hypothesis, stating that DC mediates the association between managerial position and the disruption experienced during COVID-19, received empirical support. While COVID-19 was a global, severe crisis, at some level, for the managerial population, it represented yet another crisis to be dealt with in their role of disturbance handlers (Mintzberg, 2013). According to our results, one element that explains managers' lower levels of disruption during COVID-19 is the lower levels of DC, implying higher levels of cognitive complexity and flexibility. First, these results underline factors that facilitated managers to act swiftly when facing the COVID-19 crisis, without getting caught in inflexible and limiting patterns characteristic of DC.

Lastly, the third hypothesis, stating that the general risk appetite accentuates the positive association between dysfunctional cognition and the disruption experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, was also supported. More specifically, in the case of individuals with a high level of risk propensity, the adverse impact of DC on COVID-19 disruption was the highest. Conversely, low levels of risk propensity led to an insignificant effect of DC on COVID-19 disruption. As both risk propensity and DCs are related to suboptimal developmental conditions (Harris et al., 2001; Mishra & Lalumiere, 2008; Simpson et al., 2019), our results point towards a mix of cognitive and behavioral vulnerabilities leading to disruption.

3.3.4.2. Limitations and future research directions

First, the cross-sectional design does not allow causal inferences. At such, a potential topic for exploration could be the degree to which individuals who have significant levels of EMS are excluded from managerial selection process, or if the experience of becoming a manager (and the associated developmental measures, such as individual coaching; Miško et al., 2022) has a significant impact on the individual's increased awareness of their DC and

provides them the chance to limit their presence and effectiveness in their professional lives. Last, the self-report measures may be a source of bias.

Future research could focus on the moderating role of the field of activity. Similarly to the approaches described in the ‘naturalistic decision-making studies’ (Klein, 2015; Nemeth & Klein, 2010), dysfunctional cognitive schemas may be activated by pattern recognition processes, representing ‘the dark side’ of pattern recognition.

Other variables that should be studied concerning DC include self-efficacy, focusing on how the presence of EMS affects the level of self-efficacy, and, vice versa, how a healthy level of self-efficacy accumulated through personal effort and the experience of success contributes to the suspension of personal EMS. An additional course of research can be provided by the interaction of the existing DC and the meaning-making system.

3.3.4.3. Practical implications

Our results underline the weight of inherent cognitive schemas regarding managerial resilience, moving beyond more surface-level biases and heuristics and suggesting a layered view on managerial cognition. These results offer a clear direction for managerial training designs focusing on the interplay of training and education on cognitive biases and heuristics, alongside a more therapeutic approach related to pinpointing and analyzing in-depth, personal EMSs. Moreover, given the mentioned root causes of both risk propensity and DC (Harris et al., 2001; Mishra & Lalumiere, 2008; Simpson et al., 2019), interventions designed towards the prevention of both would lie in the area of better skilled and love driven parental approaches – and the exploration of the possibility that the genitors themselves are victims of their own DC and risk propensity.

3.4. Study 4. To share or not to share: An exploration of irrational cognition and knowledge sharing in groups

3.4.1. Introduction

Knowledge, defined as ‘a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insights’ (Davenport & Prusak, 1998, p. 5), is an essential organizational resource (Bereznoy et al., 2021; Pan et al., 2018), critical for obtaining and maintaining a competitive advantage (Voelpel, 2005). While knowledge may be acquired individually, it needs to be shared to be useful for the internal community of practice (Bouthiller & Shearer, 2002), making knowledge sharing (KS) one of the most studied fields of research in knowledge management (Al Alawi et al., 2007; Bordia et al., 2006; Yang & Wu, 2008). KS is defined as the mutual sharing of organizationally relevant information, ideas, suggestions, and expertise (Bartol & Srivastava, 2002), serving the joint creation of new knowledge (Van den Hooff & de Leeuw van Weenen, 2004), providing a significant competitive advantage (Jackson et al., 2006; Matsuo & Easterby-Smith, 2008), improving the company’s innovation capability (Chen et al., 2010; Lin, 2007), and, generally, being a significant predictor of business performance (Farooq, 2017; Mesmer-Magnus & DeChurch, 2009).

KH is defined as ‘an intentional attempt by an individual to withhold or conceal task information, ideas, and know-how that another person has requested’ (Connelly et al., 2012, p. 65). KH has significant costs, as it affects organizational, team, and individual performance (Chatterjee et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022; Peng, 2013), while it also reduces creativity and innovation of both knowledge seeker and knowledge hider, via a reciprocal distrust loop (Černe et al., 2014; Guo et al., 2022). According to Connelly et al. (2012), KH is not merely the absence of KS, but an intentional behavior of withholding or concealing knowledge, when the respective knowledge has been explicitly asked for by another individual.

Despite research looking into individual and group antecedents of KS and KH (Nguyen et al., 2019; Shen et al., 2025), the critical role of rational (RC) and irrational cognition (IC) has been widely overlooked. We build upon the social exchange theory (SET; Blau, 1964), considering knowledge exchange processes similar to economic exchanges (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Weiss, 1999), alongside the conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989), stating that individuals perceive knowledge as a highly valuable and finite resource, which they will strive to preserve, to argue that both team and leadership level cognition impact the engagement in KS and KH.

Given the subjective nature of the beliefs and interpretations regarding self, others, and the wider system, influencing both KS and KH in work groups, RC and IC on both team members (TM) and team leaders (TL), are key antecedents of KS and KH. As both processes are relational in nature, we also set out to investigate the mediating effect of negative relations.

SET (Blau, 1964) posits that individuals engage in resource-exchange behaviors after estimating the potential gains and losses of various behavioral options and choosing the one they expect will yield the highest tangible or intangible returns and benefits (Garg et al., 2022). However, as opposed to economic exchanges, the obligations derived from social exchanges are not subject to specific clauses and are, therefore, subject to perceptions of uncertainty and risk (Kankanhalli et al., 2005; Molm, 2003). Given that uncertain and high-stakes circumstances are triggers of rational and irrational cognitive processing (Spiliopoulos & Hertwig, 2024; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), the subjective interpretation of these obligations, and, respectively, the choice to engage in KS or KH, is likely to be influenced by RC and IC.

Seen through the lens of COR (Hobfoll, 1989), knowledge represents a competitive advantage and a strategic resource for the individual (Guo et al., 2022; Yang & Wu, 2008), which turns the perspective of sharing one's knowledge into a cooperation dilemma (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002). Given that knowledge gaining and sharing require time and effort (Bartol &

Srivastava, 2002; Demsetz, 1988), and that KS involves potential risks, such as a negative evaluation of the information shared or of one's own competence, or losing the competitive advantage (Zhao et al, 2021), it is understandable why individuals may be reluctant to engage into KS.

COR provides another relevant conceptual framework for KH as well, as KH appears to be triggered especially in situations where the need to protect one's own resources increases, both due to real constraints and to personal, subjective, potentially dysfunctional interpretations. Some antecedents identified for KH are both real organizational crises, which decrease job security and make individuals act more protective towards their resources (Nguyen et al., 2022), but also appraising the knowledge request as being harmful or threatening (Rezwan & Takahashi, 2021; Wu, 2020), experiencing suspicion and distrust (Connelly et al., 2012; Černe et al., 2014), as well as having personal 'dark' traits such as cynicism, machiavellianism and neuroticism (Pan et al., 2018; Skerlavaj et al., 2023). The latter antecedents lead to negative interpretations of others' knowledge-seeking motives and/ or lack of consideration for others' knowledge-seeking needs. This subjective perspective also challenges the common view about KH as a negative, objective, reactive, and relational behavior (Tokyzhanova & Durst, 2024).

Given the role cognition (both rational and irrational) plays in interpreting the social exchanges and in protecting one's knowledge resources, we set out to investigate the extent to which RC and IR predict KS and KH behaviors.

3.4.1.1. Team members' rational and irrational cognition and knowledge behaviors

RC and IC are filters through which incoming information is selected and processed (Kunda, 1990), and they impact work-related behaviors (Muntean et al., 2025) as well as engagement in interpersonal relations at work. In the same vein, individual beliefs have been

shown to strongly influence knowledge-related attitudes and behaviors (Brock et al., 2005), even more than organizational culture (Fullwood & Rowley, 2017).

Given that IC can co-exist latently along with RC (Bamber & McMahon, 2008; Dozois & Beck, 2008), there is therefore an opportunity to study the impact of RC, the impact of IC, as well as the interplay of these two dimensions on KS and KH. Moreover, we include the role of leaders' RC and IC in shaping knowledge-related interactions in work groups, as, to our knowledge, no studies are looking into their effects.

A recent theoretical framework, the resource-rational analysis (Lieder & Griffiths, 2020), explores rationality from a more pragmatic and practical perspective – as ‘good enough, soon enough’ choices resulting from the intersection of functional constraints (such as existing goals, environmental requirements), and scarcity of resources (finite time and limited cognitive computational structures, such as attention and memory). As such, in a resource-constrained context, given the pooled benefits of KS, and the mutual costs associated with KH, we expect that a resource-rational choice will be to engage in the former and to refrain from the latter.

Hypothesis 1: The rational cognition of team members has (a) a positive association with knowledge sharing in groups and (b) a negative association with knowledge hiding in groups.

We define IC as irrational beliefs that involve absolutistic demands (Lindner et al., 1999), or, in the shape of dysfunctional cognitive schema, as essential, absolute, and sufficient truths that self-perpetuate by influencing the selection of the information to be processed and by the manifestation of overcompensating behaviors (Young, 1999). These beliefs influence the processing of incoming information, with negative effects, such as diminishing decision comprehensiveness (Scholtes et al., 2024). These dysfunctional beliefs create a latent vulnerability and may lay dormant until activated by a stressful situation (Bamber & McMahon, 2008; Dozois & Beck, 2008), when their activation generates a self-depreciative

confirmatory bias and pessimistic expectations about future events (Bruch et al., 1989), such as evaluation apprehension (Bordia et al., 2006), leading presumably to a reduced appetite for KS and an increased tendency to engage in KH.

While there are numerous studies about the impact of RC in work settings, it was noted that there are very few studies exploring the impact of IC in these contexts (Hodgkinson & Healey, 2011). While not directly about IC, it was shown that employees who are affected by personality disorders tend to engage in KH (except for the histrionic, turbulent, and compulsive personality disorders, which actually have the opposite effect; Serenko, 2022). Similarly, individuals who are severely affected by rumination tend to isolate themselves and to withdraw from helping behaviors such as KS, by pretending that they do not have the required knowledge (Wu et al., 2022).

Therefore, as opposed to the lens provided by the resource-rational analysis (Lieder & Griffiths, 2020), in which the scarcity of resources will lead, in the presence of RC, to increased KS and decreased KH, in the presence of IC, the scarcity of knowledge resources will lead to increased KH, and, due to perceived risks associated with sharing knowledge, to decreased KS.

Hypothesis 2: The irrational cognition of team members has (a) a positive association with knowledge hiding in groups and (b) a negative association with knowledge sharing in groups.

3.4.1.2. Team managers' rational and irrational cognition and knowledge behaviors

Managerial expressed and role-modelled support for KS has a positive impact on this knowledge behavior (Wang & Noe, 2010), via the establishment of a psychologically safe and an open and transparent communication environment (Skerlavaj et al., 2023; Yin et al., 2019). Ethical leadership reduces the employees KH behaviors (Abdullah et al., 2019; Agarwal et al., 2022; Men et al., 2020), while transformational leadership (Le & Lei, 2018) increases KS.

Vice versa, abusive leadership (Offergelt & Venz, 2023) and leadership marred by the presence of the dark triad (Soral et al., 2022) increases the probability of KH, to the degree to which the employees' KH has been considered as a coping, resource-protecting mechanism, in dealing with abusive leadership (Feng & Wang, 2019; Soral et al., 2022).

In the spirit of the previous two hypotheses regarding the impact of RC and IC on KS and KH, and given that, according to the social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977), individuals learn not only through direct experience, but also by watching others' behaviors, and given that the direct managers are the most visible representatives of the organizational culture and the strongest role models for the team members (Koch & Binnewies, 2015; Weaver et al., 2005), we expect that the RC and the IC of the team leader's will exercise a significant impact on the presence of KS and KH in the work groups.

Hypothesis 3: The rational cognition of team leaders has (a) a positive association with knowledge sharing and (b) a negative association with knowledge hiding in groups.

Hypothesis 4: The irrational cognition of team leaders has (a) a positive association with knowledge hiding and (b) a negative association with knowledge sharing in groups.

3.4.1.3. The interaction between RC and IC

As mentioned above, RC can co-exist with IC. While the former will, in the spirit of the resource-rational analysis (Lieder & Griffiths, 2020), manifest itself continuously in regular circumstances by finding good enough, quick enough solutions given the requests of the environment and the computational limits of the human cognitive systems, the latter will lay dormant, until getting activated by stressful life events (Bamber & McMahon, 2008; Dozois & Beck, 2008). The activation of IC, along with its fears and worries, and its absolute demands, expressed in a series of 'musts' (Lindner et al., 1999), does not imply that RC ceases its function, but that it adds another layer of constraints that the RC has to mitigate. This may explain why, in a complex situation, instead of considering all potential scenarios and

outcomes, individuals may only consider the most significant possibilities – the best-case scenario (where the IC predictions will not materialize) and the worst-case scenario (where the IC predictions will materialize; Lieder et al., 2018). As such, the work group members' RC, and, specifically, the work group leaders' RC, provide a buffer between the activation of IC and what would otherwise be the automatic increase of KH, respectively the automatic decrease of KS in the group.

Hypothesis 5: The rational cognition of (a) team members and (b) team leaders attenuates the positive association between the irrational cognition of team members and knowledge hiding in groups.

Hypothesis 6: The rational cognition of (a) team members and (b) team leaders attenuates the negative association between the irrational cognition of team members and knowledge sharing in groups.

3.4.1.4. The mediating role of negative relationships

Given the relational nature of KS and KH (Tokyzhanova & Durst, 2024), the quality of the relations in the work groups may influence both these work-related behaviors. Positive relationships, such as social cohesion and strong ties, are positively associated with KS (Reagans & McEvily, 2003), while relationship conflicts (Alam et al., 2021) and workplace incivility (Wu et al., 2022), or even just the suspicion regarding the lack of reciprocity in support behavior (Černe et al., 2014), increase the probability of KH.

The presence of IC is not conducive to positive, trust-based relationships. IC domains, such as the need to be successful or to be liked at all costs, the need for absolute comfort or for absolute fairness, respectively the perception of worthlessness of self or of others (Lindner et al., 1999), are creating absolutist requirements and/ or lack of confidence in self and others, which are putting a strain on collaborative, mutually supportive ways of working together

(Muntean et al., 2025). IC leads therefore to less trust, more suspicion, and, in the end, negative relationships, which in turn increase the probability of KH, and decrease the probability of KS.

Hypothesis 7: Negative relations mediate the association between the irrational cognition of team members on the one hand and knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding on the other hand.

3.4.2. Method

3.4.2.1. Sample and procedure

Our final sample included 42 team leaders (28 women with an average age of 30.86 years old), and 422 team members embedded in 42 teams.

3.4.2.2. Instruments

Rational and irrational cognition was evaluated with the short version of the General Attitude and Belief Scale (Lindner et al., 1990). **Negative relations** were evaluated by asking team members answer three items developed based on the suggestions to evaluate negative relations using self-reports, presented in De Jong et al. (2014). **Knowledge sharing and hiding in teams** was evaluated using the scales developed by Connely et al. (2012). We have used gender as a control variable in our analyses.

3.4.3. Results

The means, standard deviations and correlations are presented in Table 8. Because our data is nested in nature and we use multiple sources of data we have used multilevel analyses to test our hypotheses. As the last hypothesis concerns a mediation relation, we have used the MLMed procedure and the multilevel mediation macro (Beta 2 version) for SPSS developed by Rockwood (2017).

The overall results of the multilevel analyses are presented in Table 9. Gender has a negative and significant within groups effect on knowledge hiding ($B = -.22$, $SE = .10$, $p = .03$) such that women tend to report less knowledge hiding than men do. As predicted, the rational

cognition of team members has a positive and significant association with knowledge sharing within groups ($B = .20$, $SE = .08$, $p = .01$) as well as between groups ($B = .60$, $SE = .26$, $p = .02$), therefore Hypothesis 1a was fully supported by the data. Moreover, rational cognition has a negative and significant association with knowledge hiding both within ($B = -.16$, $SE = .06$, $p = .01$) as well as between groups ($B = -.50$, $SE = .25$, $p = .04$), therefore Hypothesis 1b was also supported. Irrational cognition has only a significant and positive association with knowledge hiding within groups ($B = .20$, $SE = .07$, $p = .006$), therefore only Hypothesis 2a was supported. The irrational cognition of the team members had no significant association with knowledge sharing, therefore Hypothesis 2b was not supported.

Table 8

Means, standard deviations and correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	.53	0.50	1						
2. TM RC	3.81	0.79	.11*	1					
3. TM IC	2.61	0.69	-.09	-.09	1				
4. LD RC	4.12	0.64	.17**	.01	.09	1			
5. LD IC	2.49	0.65	.04	.10*	.06	.13**	1		
6. Negative relations	2.32	0.95	.05	-.04	.20**	.02	.08	1	
7. Knowledge sharing	5.49	1.27	.04	.15**	-.05	.01	.10*	-.08	1
8. Knowledge hiding	1.82	1.03	-.13**	-.15**	.18**	-.03	-.06	.13**	-.41**

Note. gender is coded as a dummy variable 1=women, 0=men; TM RC – team members rational cognition; LD RC – leader rational cognition; TM IC – team member irrational cognition; LD IC – leader irrational cognition;

[†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The association between the rational cognition of the team leaders on the one hand and knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding on the other hand was not significant, therefore Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Further, the association between the irrational cognition of

the team leaders on the one hand and knowledge sharing and hiding on the other hand were not significant, therefore Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Table 9

Results of the within-between multilevel analysis

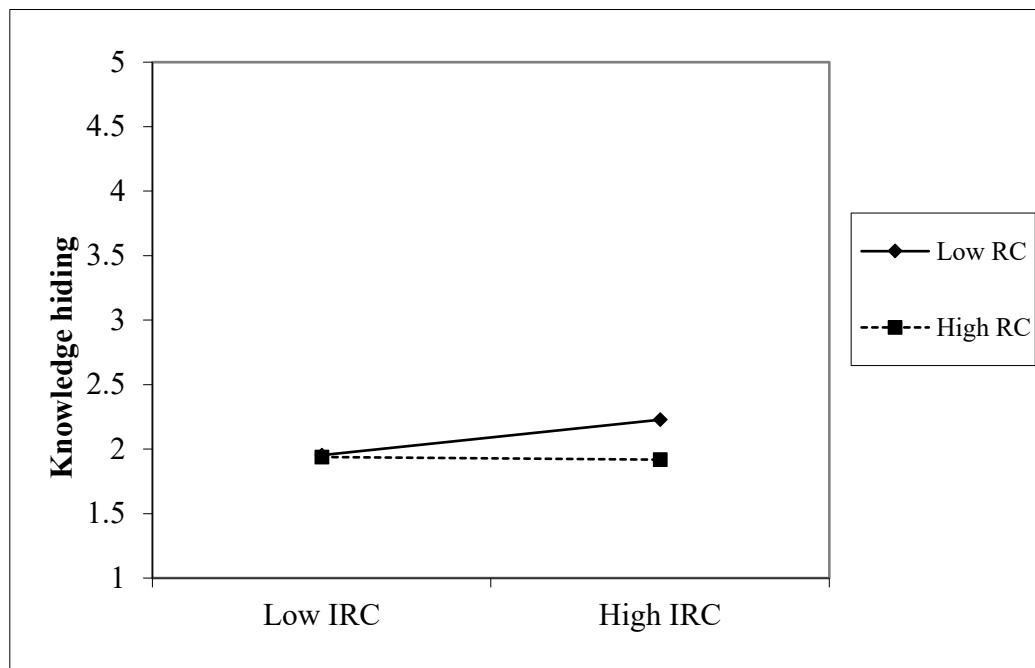
Variable	Negative relations		Knowledge sharing		Knowledge hiding	
	Within	Between	Within	Between	Within	Between
Constant	.04 (.20)		5.46*** (.22)		2.09*** (.21)	
Gender	.13 (.10)	.01 (.35)	.07 (.13)	.13 (.39)	-.22* (.10)	-.57 (.36)
TM RC	-.06 (.06)	-.007 (.24)	.20* (.08)	.60* (.26)	-.16* (.06)	-.50* (.25)
TM IRC	.29*** (.06)	-.33 (.34)	-.05 (.09)	.29 (.39)	.20** (.07)	.51 (.36)
LD RC		.11 (.13)		-.05 (.14)		-.01 (.14)
LD IRC		.09 (.10)		.07 (.11)		-.06 (.11)
TM RC X TM IRC	.12 [†] (.07)	.35 (.29)	.12 (.10)	.62 [†] (.35)	-.21** (.08)	-.40 (.31)
LD RC X TM IRC		-.17 [†] (.10)		.10 (.14)		.11 (.11)
Negative relations			-.14* (.07)	.12 (.19)	.15** (.06)	.04 (.18)

Notes. Unstandardized coefficients are presented in the table with SE in parentheses; gender is coded as a dummy variable 1=women, 0=men; TM RC – team members rational cognition; LD RC – leader rational cognition; TM IRC – team member irrational cognition; LD IRC – leader irrational cognition;

[†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The interaction effect of rational and irrational cognition on knowledge hiding was only significant for team members ($B = -.21$, $SE = .08$, $p = .004$). As illustrated by Figure 5, the association between team members' irrational cognition and knowledge hiding was only significant when rational cognition was low, therefore Hypothesis 5a was supported by the data. The interaction effect between team members rational cognition and their irrational cognition on knowledge sharing was only marginally significant as shown in Table 9, therefore Hypothesis 6a was not supported by the data. The interaction effect between leaders' rational cognition and team members irrational cognition was not significant, therefore Hypotheses 5b and 6b were not supported by the data.

Figure 5. The interaction effect between rational and irrational cognition on knowledge hiding in teams (within groups interaction effect)



Note. The graph represents a within groups interaction effect; RC – rational cognition, IRC – irrational cognition.

According to the last hypothesis, negative relations mediate the association between the irrational cognition of team members on the one hand and knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding on the other hand. This hypothesis received partial empirical support. Regarding knowledge sharing as an outcome, there was a significant within indirect effect ($effect = -.04$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI $[-.09; -.0003]$), but not a between indirect effect ($effect = -.04$, $SE = .10$, 95% CI $[-.28; .13]$). Regarding knowledge hiding as an outcome, there was a significant within indirect effect ($effect = .04$, $SE = 0.2$, 95% CI $[-.01; .09]$), but not a between indirect effect ($effect = -.01$, $SE = .09$, 95% CI $[-.21; .16]$).

3.4.4. Discussion and conclusions

3.4.4.1. Theoretical implications

Our paper shows that RC, understood through the lens of the resource-rational approach (Lieder & Griffiths, 2020) as a constraints- and resources- aware ‘bounded optimality’ in

dealing with organizational requests, does support KS, as it presumably supports a view of KS as a means to mitigate the limitations of individual knowledge availability and information processing, by increasing the wisdom of the group. RC also decreases the probability of KH when IC is activated, by acting as a buffer between the activation of IC when individuals are being asked for knowledge, and what otherwise potentially be an activation of the KH, understood as a coping mechanism. As such we contribute to the literature on organizational cognition by emphasizing the role of individual RC and IC as antecedent of negative relations and KS and KH in teams.

Furthermore, we have challenged the traditional view of KH as a wrongdoing behavior based on the conscious choice of pursuing own interests at the expense of the team results, a view which was challenged by other recent studies as well (Serenko, 2022). We have shown that the presence of dysfunctional cognition within the team members does indeed contribute to the presence of KH behaviors, but that it actually does not seem to affect the behavior of KS, which is done by own volition.

One further contribution of our study was to reinforce that the view KS and KH do not represent a poles of a single continuum, as they can co-exist, in a similar manner to the co-existence of RC and IC, presumably with RC serving us on a daily basis, in the ‘bounded optimality’ framework of good enough – soon enough approaches, and IC getting triggered by experiences that are considered as potentially harmful and risky – in which case RC will aim to buffer the additional strain brought by the dysfunctional views brought in by IC, which would otherwise lead to more KH behaviors.

3.4.4.2. Limitations and future research directions

First, the measurement of rational cognition presented Cronbach’s Alpha levels below the .70 threshold, both for managers and for group members, potentially weakening the observed relationships. Another limitation may be represented by the low number of teams,

leading to an underpowered multilevel approach. Yet, the number of teams size is aligned with the minimal requirements proposed by Maas and Hox (2005). Another limitation is based on the fact that our participants come from the same organization, limiting the potential generalizability of our results.

Our results also open avenues for future research. It would be probably relevant to explore the impact of RC and IC on the personal dimension of self-efficacy, and the interpersonal one of mutual trust. Another insufficiently explored avenue of research, is that of the impact of emotional states on KS and KH (Rezwan & Takahashi, 2021). In this regard, it would potentially be interesting to investigate how RC and IC generate different, potentially contradictory emotional states when facing the opportunity to share, or the request to provide hard won knowledge.

3.4.4.3. Practical implications

There are several practical implications of our study. First, managers can assist employees not to engage in KH by increasing their awareness that they have the choice to maintain the availability for knowledge exchange experiences also when being asked to share knowledge, not just when sharing knowledge on their own accord. While the request for knowledge may trigger IC scripts and concerns, employees still have the leverage provided by their RC – it may be that they will experience some discomfort when sharing knowledge upon request, but the rational, practical benefits of doing so exceed the temporary state of tension generated by the views of IC. A second implication is that it is not necessarily the IC itself that generates directly less KS and more KH, it is rather the negative effect IC has on the quality of the team relationships and climate, which in turn shapes KH and harmful for KS.

IV. CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSIONS AND GENERAL DISCUSSION

4.1. Theoretical Contributions

The first goal of our study was to explore via a systematic literature review the manner in which DC impacts organizational behavior and work-related outcomes, and identify contingencies that shape the impact, through accentuation or attenuation. We have gone to show that DC is indeed a specific cognitive vulnerability, which manifests itself under stressful circumstances, and which affects both mood as well as information selection and processing. We have put forward an integrative model that shows how DC is triggered by work-specific factors (such as job demands and stressors), leading to maladaptive cognitive and emotional responses (such as rumination and negative affectivity), and that the pathway is buffered by individual psychological resources that support adaptive coping (such as hardiness and resilience) and by job-related social resources (such as supportive peer interactions, social acceptance, and psychologically safe climates) so that personal wellbeing and interpersonal functioning are protected. These outcomes are consistent with stress and coping research showing that strain can be reduced not only by lowering demands, but also via optimized appraisal processes, which promote more adaptive coping strategies (Goh & Oei, 1999). To summarize, we have shown that DC is indeed a dormant cognitive vulnerability, which can get activated by stressful job demands and then have a harmful impact on the individual's wellbeing and work-related behaviors, and that there are personal and interpersonal resources that can be built and deployed to mitigate these risks. As such, at a broader level, our outcomes feed into the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) – seen through this lens, it can be said that DC affects the primary appraisal, by interpreting stressors in absolutist or catastrophic terms, and that the secondary appraisal depends on the existence of personal and interpersonal resources; in one of the empirical studies presented in this thesis, we have completed this picture by showing that also RC is one of the personal resource

buffering the impact of DC-driven maladaptive interpretations (such as appraising the request to share knowledge as potentially harmful). As a practical implication, acknowledging DC as a latent cognitive vulnerability, triggered by stressful situations, and embedding structured reflections around potential sources and manifestations of individual DC (such as via coaching) in organizational developmental interventions would have a beneficial effect on the impact of such interventions.

A further goal of our research was to evaluate, in the framework provided by the Upper Echelon Theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), the impact and interplay of both DC and RC on strategic decision-making comprehensiveness. According to our results, RC by itself does not appear to increase comprehensiveness, neither does DC by itself diminish it. However, as an additional result generated by our empirical study, we have shown that the interplay of RC and DC is indeed significant – that is, that RC fosters strategic comprehensiveness only when DC is low. This result is aligned with the interactionist and contextual model of cognitive competencies in strategic management (Powell et al., 2011) and it is significant because it provides empirical evidence for the interplay between RC and DC in the high-stakes managerial process of strategic decision-making, and because this interplay may manifest itself in other critical managerial processes as well.

An additional research goal was to explore the degree to which managerial role occupancy is associated with lower DC levels as compared to the general workforce, whether DC mediates the association between managerial role occupancy and the disruption experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and, given the shared etiology of risk appetite and of DC, whether the general risk appetite accentuates the association between DC and COVID-19 disruption. Our results have shown that the managerial position negatively predicts the level of DC, that the lower DC explains partly the relationship between managerial role occupancy and experiencing a lower COVID-19 disruption, and that average and high levels

of general risk appetite accentuate the positive association between DC and disruption experienced. The results fit with the definition of the managerial role as disturbance handler (Mintzberg, 2013), and present additional empirical data into the Attraction-Selection-Attrition Model (Schneider, 1987), on the importance of (lack of) DC in managerial role occupancy. According to our knowledge, this is one of the very first studies to assess the prevalence of DC in an organizational context in a managerial respectively a non-managerial population. A further outcome of our study, that average and high levels of risk appetite accentuate the relationship between DC and disruption, has relevant wider implications as well. Risk appetite, which appears to have a similar etiology with DC, i.e., poor developmental environments and inept parenting (Harris et al., 2001; Mishra & Lalumiere, 2008; Simpson et al., 2019), seems to be one of the factors that have the potential to transform DC from a vulnerability in a liability. This outcome therefore opens yet another line of potential research, aimed at identifying the individual factors that increase the severity of the impact of DC.

Our results have shown the following – team members' DC increases KH, does not affect KS, and leads to more negative relations within the team, which in turn leads to more KH and less KS; team members' RC increases KS, decreases KH, and attenuates the positive association between their DC and KH; team leaders' RC and DC appears to have no effect on the work group's KS and KH behaviors. Our study has several significant theoretical contributions. It supports the view that KS and KH are conceptually different, not merely the opposite ends of a continuum (Connelly et al., 2012), as DC does not decrease KS (which is a behavior done by own volition), but it increases KH (which is a reaction to information being requested by others). It also provides empirical evidence for both the social exchange theory (SET; Blau, 1964), and the conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989), however, for two different scenarios – in the presence of heightened DC, the COR model predicts better the cautious KH behavior, while in the presence of heightened RC, the SET model predicts

better the resource-rational choice of mutually beneficial KS behavior. With our study, we have also contributed to the research of team dynamics, as we have shown that DC has a negative impact on the quality of the team relations, which then in turn affects knowledge behaviors. Potentially the most important outcome is that, completing the results of our strategic comprehensiveness study, where DC affects the positive impact of RC on managerial comprehensiveness, with this study we have shown support for the opposite effect as well – RC will buffer the effect of DC on KH, which can be interpreted as the individual still having a choice to not engage in counterproductive work behaviors (such as KH), despite what their DC might lead them to do. DC and RC are therefore co-existing and are potentially engaged in a constant interplay, with rational choices and dysfunctional scripts influencing each other, depending on contextual factors and personal dispositions, subject to further research. Last but not least, we have challenged the traditional view of KH as an intentional wrongdoing behavior, by integrating the dimension of DC, which is also associated with unconscious, automatic processing of incoming information in a dysfunctional manner.

4.2. Practical Contributions

We believe that the studies included in this PhD manuscript have several practical contributions as well. The reflections that follow combine insights derived from consultancy practice of the author with theoretical insights gathered and generated while conducting the PhD research. A first reflection is that while covering a considerable amount of professional training and coaching services, most management development programs do not embed the dimension of dysfunctional cognition/ irrational beliefs whatsoever. Their learning architecture is built quasi exclusively on rational, collaborative, and prescriptive models and choices, with no time or attention spent on providing participants with the opportunity to reflect on their potential sources of dysfunctional interpretations of own role and priorities, of the nature of relationships with peers, direct reports and higher management, or of the wider systems rules

and regulations. This omission is presumably accountable to some degree for the limited, time-bound effect of various development programs, as they depict managerial choices and behaviors based solely on RC, while in reality, at least according to our practical knowledge and to our empirical research, managers are subject to the rigid and generalized traits of DC, even if, as mentioned, in smaller amounts than the general population. Given the deleterious effects of DC on strategic decision-making, disruption experienced in times of crisis, knowledge hiding and team dynamics, we find it relevant to acknowledge, make explicit and work with DC in management development programs, as a dormant cognitive vulnerability that may get activated in times of stressful circumstances and, when triggered, will require additional regulation via RC.

Another practical application connected to developmental programs is associated with the need to work on the psychological safety and collaboration climate in teams, before asking them to participate in yet another prescriptive communication program. According to our results, if psychological safety and good collaboration are rather missing, chances are that the team members' DC will get activated when facing high workload/ stress, which in turn will then affect even further the quality of relations in the team, leaving traditional training on how to communicate better quite ineffective.

A further practical aspect is connected to the personal and social aspects impacted by and impacting DC. On the one hand, DC increases the chances of personal burnout/ emotional exhaustion, respectively of negative team relations. On the other hand, DC harmful outcomes are buffered by personal resilience/ hardiness, respectively by job-related social support. A healthy developmental approach in organizations may therefore be to acknowledge the existence of DC, and to make explicit that it can affect employees personally and interpersonally, and that its effects can be mitigated by building personal and interpersonal resources.

An additional practical aspect is related to the selection and promotion of managers in organizations. Given the mentioned multiple harmful effects of DC on self and team, it is critical to address the risk of DC lying dormant in candidates to managerial positions, in order to limit the risk of their later managerial derailment. We see therefore an opportunity to assist managerial candidates/ newly appointed managers to become aware of their potential DC rather soon, and to provide them with the tools needed to keep it in check and limit its harmful impact.

Connected with the point above, we see a practical opportunity specifically for managerial coaching interventions. As such, given that, as we have shown, DC are present also in nonclinical population, we consider that, within the limits of a non-therapeutical approach, coaching can provide an effective path to examine one's own DC, its foundations, and its impact in daily organizational life, especially in stressful situations. In this regard, the similarities between the coaching practice and the key principles of schema therapy (Young et al., 2006) are remarkable, such as the collaborative alliance, with the therapist/ coach and the client acting together as equal participants in dealing with the dysfunctional scripts, the empathic confrontation approach that invites both challenge and compassion in the conversation, the aim to replace maladaptive coping styles with better adjusted, emotionally and rationally regulated responses, and overall inviting the client to act from an 'healthy adult' stance. There may be therefore an opportunity to consider adapting Young's schema therapy for a coaching setting, within the boundaries of non-therapeutical interventions.

As a last practical consideration, given the turbulent and unpredictable circumstances of today's world, there's a need for agile, flexible, and adaptable organizational leadership, willing to work with hypotheses and with open-ended experiments. These approaches are, however, at odds with the rigid, inflexible, oversimplifying nature of DC. As such, preparing managers to be able to effectively manifest their role of disturbance handlers (Mintzberg, 2013), may require the examination of their cognitive scripts when dealing with crisis, and

benefitting from coaching interventions such as presented above, aimed at replacing maladaptive interpretations and actions with more adaptive choices.

4.3. Further DC Research

To our knowledge, there are no studies that have explored within a longitudinal design the impact of developmental approaches addressing DC within work settings. We consider this to be a relevant field of research, as it will provide an insight into the degree to which the presence and effects of DC can be moderated by developmental interventions such as coaching, which was shown to be effective in dealing with related cognitive vulnerabilities, such as cognitive distortions (Miško et al., 2022).

It is also of interest to investigate whether the difference in DC between managers and operational employees is due to the attraction and selection processes, where either individuals with high levels of DC don't apply or are not selected for managerial roles, or whether, in the attrition process, the individuals with higher levels of DC are either experiencing managerial derailment and leave the managerial role, or undergo developmental processes that allow them to buffer the presence and impact of their DC.

Further research could also explore the triggering role for DC of global contexts such as geopolitical instability, economic downturns, generalized job uncertainty, and the way in which such events potentially accentuate the negative impact of DC on the organizational engagement and productivity of the workforce.

A further line of research may be provided by the interplay between individual DC and organizational rationality (Horodecka & Vozna, 2020), exploring the possibility that institutional logics (manifested through operational procedures, feedback loops, behavioral norms, etc.) can provide a systemic regulation to individual dysfunction

From a constructive developmental perspective (Floris & Cuganesan, 2019), an additional area of research can be provided by the interplay between DC and the meaning-

making system. According to the constructive developmental approach individual, adult development is associated with a complexification of the meaning-making systems, that is, with more complex and conditional interpretations of organizational contexts and priorities. Considering that DC represents rather the opposite state, respectively an oversimplification of complex truths and multilayered organizational realities, it may be worthy to explore the interplay between meaning-making capacity and DC, and to identify effective developmental pathways that enable the mitigation of the presence and impact of DC, in order for complex meaning-making capacity to emerge.

Finally, as we have shown that a dysfunctional work behavior (knowledge hiding) is not necessarily intentional, as was the traditional theoretical view regarding this behavior, but can be rather the outcome of unconscious and maladaptive appraisals, as generated by DC, a further line of research could explore other harmful work behaviors (such as disengagement, excessive criticism, etc.) through the lens provided by DC. The stake of such a line of research is associated with the possibility of understanding and addressing maladjusted behavior at work as an outcome of personal dysfunctional scripts, rather than intentional acts of harming self, others, or the wider system.

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