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### The pursuit of an employment relationship

*Managing people in a flexible labor market*

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# **Chapter 6**

## **Discussion**

## **6.1 Theoretical Implications**

The research in this dissertation set out to investigate the consequences of today's flexible labor market for workers, in terms of how they manage their jobs, careers, and employment relationships. On the one hand, the increasing mobility and changing nature of the world of work demands employees to be self-regulatory, proactive, and able to adapt to dynamic environmental circumstances. On the other hand, the growing use and variety of non-traditional employment arrangements imply a number of changes for the traditional conceptualization and management of the employment relationship that have consequences for the individuals themselves. Here, by building on work from the jobs, careers, and HRM literatures, we addressed the need of more research focusing on (1) how workers self-regulate at different moments of their careers, and (2) the role of HRM in non-traditional employment arrangements. The aim was therefore to answer research questions related to the consequences of today's flexible labor market for workers, such as: What are the self-regulatory behaviors that workers implement to face the demands of their jobs and careers? What can be done from an HRM point of view in such non-traditional challenging contexts? Below we combine the insights of the empirical chapters and highlight their theoretical contributions.

### ***6.1.1 Implementing Self-Regulatory Behaviors in Jobs and Careers***

While there is consensus in the career and job literatures on the conceptualizations of individuals as strategic governors of their own pathways (Guichard, 2015), less is known about the ramifications of this in terms of the demands or challenges that workers currently face in managing their own jobs and careers. In the first two empirical chapters of this dissertation, we focused on the self-regulatory strategies that workers can use in different moments of their careers, and pointed at their beneficial effects for the workers themselves. Consistent with the self-

regulatory conceptualization of the job search process (Kanfer et al., 2001), in Chapter 2 we showed that a positive development of self-efficacy beliefs is related not only to increased chances of finding a job, but also to the quality of the employment the job seekers find. Consistent with the career construction model of adaptation (Savickas, 2002), in Chapter 3 we showed that workers with higher self-regulatory abilities such as career adapt-abilities are more likely to proactively shape different aspects of their jobs and, in turn, be more engaged with their work. Together these results highlight the transversal relevance of self-regulatory, proactive, and adaptive strategies in handling both career transitions and one's everyday job.

Overall, from a theoretical point of view, we attempted to respond to the call for more research aimed at bridging the fields of jobs and careers (Akkermans & Tims, 2017; Hall & Las Heras, 2010). For far too long these two fields have been proceeding in a parallel and somewhat independent manner; given that careers are aggregations of job experiences and that individuals are likely to implement similar behavioral mechanisms to self-regulate in their jobs and careers, we second the call for more contamination between these two literatures, which we started doing by providing empirical support for how career-related self-regulatory strengths can impact individuals' job quality and job design.

Furthermore, there are a number of theoretical implications deriving from the first two empirical chapters of this dissertation that we would like to address here. First, our results point at the importance and effectiveness of the behavioral self-regulatory strategies that individuals use to manage their jobs and careers. In Chapter 3, we proposed job crafting (defined as the bottom-up job redesign process of applying changes to different aspects of one's job) as an adapting response in the career construction model of adaptation. In doing so, we addressed the interplay between individuals' (career) adaptability and proactivity at work. These two concepts have

traditionally been treated as independent processes, where the first one refers to reactions to contextual changes and the second one refers to self-initiated actions aimed at promoting change (Griffin et al., 2007). While they originated in different research domains, we point at their interrelatedness and show that job crafting is (one of the) mechanism(s) through which career adaptability relates to work engagement. That is, our results suggest that individuals with higher levels of psychosocial strengths captured by career adapt-abilities (i.e., concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) are more prone and able to apply proactive changes to different aspects of their job and thus reach a higher level of engagement with their own work. Similarly, recent research showed a positive relation between individuals' wider career competencies (i.e., reflection on motivation and qualities, networking, self-profiling, work exploration, career control) and employability through an increased level of job crafting behaviors and career success (Akkermans & Tims, 2017; Blokker, Akkermans, Tims, Jansen, & Khapova, 2019). Hence, it would be interesting to further investigate how self-regulatory adaptable and proactive behaviors influence each other in different moments of workers' careers, and their effects on workers' attitudes and well-being.

Second, the affective connotation of self-regulatory strategies implemented by workers seem to be relevant too. The rather prominent role of job search self-efficacy (JSSE) as opposed to actual job search behaviors (as shown in Chapter 2) for example, highlights the buffering role that individuals' beliefs in their own capability of reaching a certain goal have in managing a crucial moment such as entry in the labor market. Indeed, individuals with higher levels of JSSE might be more successful in their job search because of their higher capability of reacting to setbacks or difficulties, and to manage the overall process of setting a goal and striving for its accomplishment. Undoubtedly, searching for a job is a process that does not only boil down to a

series of actions that should be undertaken, but it also is an emotional process which carries a number of affective and health related consequences (Wanberg, 2012) that need to be addressed. If we extend this line of thinking to the context of boundaryless careers (Arthur, M.B., 1994), the attention that needs to be paid to the affective burden implied in constantly regulating one's actions and initiatives, exponentially escalates. That is, if we recognize that nowadays employees engage in regular or even constant career transitions, are in charge of their own career development and are, to some extent, virtually always searching for a job, then the affective connotations of such self-regulatory strategies become increasingly relevant and deserve more attention of scholars and practitioners alike. More research is needed on the effects of JSSE and/or broader self-regulatory behaviors in the context of boundaryless careers, for example focusing on the long-term affective benefits of possessing such capabilities, and on whether possessing them increases the likelihood of engaging in more frequent job transitions.

Third, if the unpredictability of today's labor market represents demands for workers that need to be addressed with appropriate behavioral and affective strategies, it also encourages us to have a closer look at the importance of the match between people and jobs, and at how this match could (and should) be maximized. In the last couple of decades, scholars pointed at the relevance of fit between the person and the job, and thus tackled the perceptions of congruence between workers' values, needs, and skills with the organizations' culture, rewards, and the jobs' demands (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Van Vianen, 2018). Similarly, matching processes of supply and demand of labor are being investigated at aggregated and disaggregated levels by several other disciplinary fields, such as labor economics, sociology of occupations, and lifelong learning (e.g., Fernández-Macías & Hurley, 2008; Fischer & Konomi, 2007; Tjeldens, De Ruijter, & De Ruijter, 2012).

Here, we approached this theme of (mis)matches between individuals and jobs by highlighting (1) the relevance of including employment quality as an indicator of job search success, and (2) the perpetual bottom-up actions initiated by employees aimed at crafting their jobs in an individualized manner. On the one hand, in Chapter 2 we expanded the criterion space of what constitutes job search success to encompass indicators of how well the obtained job fits the job seeker, in order to enhance our understanding of the job search process and its long-term consequences on the job seekers (Kinicki et al., 2000; Leana & Feldman, 1995). On the other hand, in Chapter 3 we focused on employees' proactive actions aimed at maximizing person-environment fit by means of changing the task, relational, cognitive and skill boundaries of their jobs, and at seeking resources and challenges (Bindl et al., 2014; Tims et al., 2012). Overall, we believe that investigating these specific aspects points at the relevance of looking not only at how employees manage their careers and jobs, but at how they (could) do so in a *sustainable* way. That is, the fit between people and their jobs could hardly be considered a given, but it is a rather dynamic process that is susceptible to the individuals' initiative (e.g., job crafting) and in conjunction with the organization (e.g., idiosyncratic deals). In this regard, future research could investigate how individual self-regulatory behaviors affect the fit between people and jobs over time, in traditional and less traditional employment contexts alike.

### ***6.1.2 Managing Workers in Non-Traditional Employment Contexts***

In Chapter 3, we started contextualizing the career- and job- self-regulatory behaviors of employees, by examining how they interacted with the HPWPs implemented by their employers. By complementing theoretical insights stemming from the Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2002) and the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we proposed an interaction model between workers' adaptation and the HPWPs implemented by their managers in influencing

the workers' proactive redefinition of their jobs. We did so in order to highlight that individuals' self-regulatory strengths are capacities that reside at the intersection of person-in-environment, and that the environment can set favorable conditions for individuals to express such adaptability (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Our results indicated that the relationship between career adaptability and job crafting was moderated by opportunity-enhancing HPWPs, which are practices aimed at increasing employees' opportunities to perform (e.g., job design and participation) (Jiang et al., 2012; Lepak, Liao, Chung, & Harden, 2006). This points at the need to look at the contextual contingencies that can help individuals capitalizing on their personal self-regulatory resources, by creating a resource pool they can benefit from, and triggering a gain spiral where internal and external resources interact in affecting employees' adaptive responses.

Extending this line of thinking, in the last two empirical chapters of this dissertation we turned the attention to explicitly investigating how individuals and contexts interact in the new world of work. That is, in a flexible labor market characterized by a growing number of individuals who work in non-traditional employment contexts, there is the need to understand the repercussions of this, both for the employment relationship(s) they hold and for the individuals themselves (in terms of their well-being, attitudes, and beliefs). We therefore aimed to contribute to research in the context of atypical employment arrangements by focusing on what individuals need in such settings. Hence, we explored the characteristics of the employment relationships of temporary and platform workers, and highlighted the contextual conditions under which such relationships could be sustainable for the individuals themselves. Here, we discuss the combined and specific theoretical insights derived from the empirical results of Chapter 4 and 5.

The theoretical lens of Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) can help us in interpreting part of the results of both Chapters 4 and 5, in that it can explain why the perceived HRM practices

are associated with different attitudes and wellbeing of the workers. That is, temporary and platform workers alike may be able to engage in a social exchange with their organization(s) despite the contingent nature of their employment relationship(s). In Chapter 4, we found that the profiles of temporary agency workers (TAWs) with a higher configuration of perceived HRM practices, had higher levels of (1) job satisfaction, (2) commitment, and (3) intentions to stay within the organization. Thus, even though previous literature highlighted that temporary workers had a lower level of job satisfaction compared to permanent workers (Guest, 2004), our results extend the line of research that has started to point at similarities in how permanent and contingent workers react to the (quality of the) social exchange implied in their employment relationship (Montes & Irving, 2008; Morf et al., 2014).

In Chapter 5, while we found an interaction between HPWPs and hours spent gig working in affecting the levels of work-life balance and job satisfaction, we did not find this effect for the commitment of platform workers. In interpreting these results, we pointed at the rather high association between perceived HPWPs and commitment, which was thus unlikely conditioned upon the number of work hours or other contextual factors. Hence, the mechanisms of mutual reciprocation described by Social Exchange Theory could be a main driver of these workers' commitment, where platform workers perceiving a fair, even though temporary, exchange with the platform, might be more committed to the platform, regardless of the number of hours they actually spend working through it. We believe that these results point at the need for more research investigating specifically the impact different HRM practices might have depending on the workers' employment arrangement. That is, in different employment arrangements there might be specific HRM practices that drive the association between perceptions of HRM practices and workers' commitment. In Chapter 5 we focused on on-location platform-determined routine

workers; the question whether different HRM practices might be differently relevant among other types of platform workers naturally follows.

A related aspect of our findings is the (perhaps neglected) relevance of the social aspect of the work of temporary and platform workers. On the one hand, TAWs' overall satisfaction with their own jobs was found to be related to the profiles of both agency and company HRM (Chapter 4), thus supporting previous research on the association between psychological contract fulfillment and workers' positive attitudes. However, we found a stronger effect size for company HRM. We interpreted these results in light of the closer proximity of the company to workers' daily jobs compared to the more distal role of the agency. On the other hand, the results of the qualitative interviews we conducted among platform workers (Chapter 5), pointed at the negative effects of the closure of the main headquarters of two platforms located in the city on the workers. That is, the social support they derived from sporadic interactions with colleagues, was much welcomed by the workers, in that it was alleviating the degree of loneliness of platform work, which is by definition somewhat isolated. Building on these findings, and on theoretical mechanisms described in terms of mutual exchange (Social Exchange Theory) and additional resources to rely on (Conservation of Resources Theory), we regard the lack of social support that might be automatically associated to forms of employment that are contingent and transactional in nature, as a relevant aspect and a potential stressor for workers, which should not be overlooked. The fact that temporary and/or platform workers might have a less relational exchange with the organization(s) and other organizational members compared to permanent workers (cf., Rousseau, 1995), does not mean that such exchange and the social support it implies are unimportant in managing their employment relationships, as well as in affecting their attitudes, beliefs, and well-being.

Moving on to the specifics of these two types of non-traditional employment arrangements, by applying principles stemming from the psychological contract literature to the HRM field, in Chapter 4 we stressed the importance of looking at both employment relationships with the company and the agency when doing research on TAWs. This explicit focus of our investigation allowed us to deepen our understanding of the complex spillover mechanisms involved in the dual employment relationship of TAWs. Our results, after controlling for the workers' tenure, show a weak spillover effect across the two employment relationships for the intentions to leave the agency and the company, and no such spillover effect for the workers' commitment to both organizations. These findings highlight the relevance (and need) to look at both employment relationships together, in that the evaluation of one of the two organizations affects some of the workers' considerations to stay within the other one. Hence, the perceptions around one of the two employment relationships seem to be not completely independent from the evaluations of the other employment relationship, which might be due to the fact that the agency and the company are themselves engaged in a business relationship with one another (Moorman & Harland, 2002). Building on these results, future research in the HRM literature could pursue this more fine-grained approach, and investigate specifically the implementation of which specific HRM practices could be more relevant for the agency and which for the company in managing TAWs. Such line of investigation could be useful also from a practical point of view, by pinpointing the core responsibilities of both organizations towards the workers, and hence facilitating the reciprocal coordination in this triangular relationship.

Finally, the results of Chapter 5 point at the need to look at the demands and resources that platform workers have, especially in the current highly deregulated conditions. Consistent with principles stemming from the Conservation of Resources and from the Job Demands-Resources

Model (Bakker et al., 2003), the interaction between hours of work and HPWPs in affecting work-life balance and job satisfaction highlights how the simultaneous presence of demands and lack of resources might trigger a loss spiral associated with lower levels of workers' health and well-being. Thus, working an increased number of hours might imply a resource loss or demand which needs to be backed up by the presence of other resources to rely on. Such resources could be of a diverse nature, and here (like in Chapter 3) we analyzed whether HPWPs could constitute one example of contextual resources the workers could benefit from, which the results support. The results of our qualitative interviews expanded on this, by highlighting the buffering role of certain job resources (such as autonomy and feedback) for workers' well-being. Moreover, the low perceived autonomy, support, communication and rewards could seriously impact the workers' schedule and rhythm, hence constituting not only a missed resource, but even constituting an additional demand for the workers. In this regard, it would be interesting to adopt a person-centered approach here as well, by investigating simultaneously the multiple employment relationships platform workers have with the different platforms they might be working for at the same time. Whether we could expect spillover effects (such as the ones between agency and company among TAWs) between different platforms and for whom, are only some of the future research avenues in this context.

Overall, the findings presented in the empirical chapters of this dissertation enhance the relevance of self-regulatory behaviors of workers in the current labor market and their employment relationships in less traditional context. Future research could build on this, and further contribute to the contamination of different literatures. For example, more research is needed focusing on dispositional characteristics which could give account for individual variability not only in self-regulating, but also in the choice and pursue of an alternative work arrangement. Individual differences in agency (such as personality or dispositional employability) could in part explain the

existence of different career paths. For example, such individual differences could be related to increased or decreased use of alternative work arrangements, perhaps depending on the specific moment in their career in which they make this choice. Furthermore, more research is needed on individual characteristics that could help people in working in a sustainable way in the new world of work. Ashford and colleagues for example (Ashford, Caza, & Reid, 2018), pointed at a set of necessary behaviors (e.g., resilience, proactivity, and relational agility) and capabilities (e.g., cognitive flexibility, learning agility, and emotion regulation) as key factors to survive and thrive in the gig economy. As these authors note, whether such behaviors and competencies are differently relevant in the gig economy compared to the traditional economy still needs to be empirically ascertained.

Notably, research on alternative work arrangements such as idiosyncratic deals (Rousseau, Ho, & Greenberg, 2006) emerged in parallel with a heightened interest in individualized perspectives on jobs and careers, such as proactivity at work, protean careers, and job crafting (Bal & Rousseau, 2015). The simultaneous shift of attention in multiple literatures perhaps is due to the shared recognition that jobs- and careers- adaptations currently follow an individualized approach. In this dissertation, we attempted to enhance our understanding of different self-regulatory strategies and behaviors of employees in different moments of their careers, as well as the consequences of non-traditional employment arrangements for employees. We recommend future research to pursue such theoretical contamination, and keep investigating how individual agency and non-traditional employment conditions can interact in affecting the individuals, and what could be done from an HRM point of view to make sure that the new world of work (and its derivations) is sustainable for the workers.

## 6.2 Practical Implications

The results of the empirical chapters presented in this dissertation provide practitioners and individual workers themselves with some guidelines on how to manage workers' self-regulatory strategies and employment relationships in less traditional contexts. In Chapter 2, the prominent role of self-efficacy beliefs over job search behaviors indicates that it is not only important what job seekers do, but also how confident they feel about it. This study therefore reiterates the need to promote efficacy-enhancing interventions among job seekers, possibly at an early stage of their job search process (e.g., during educational programs). Such interventions could be aimed at providing instructions on self-regulation and management of employment goals at the beginning and throughout the all process. Similarly, following the results of Chapter 3, organizations could stimulate workers' proactive behaviors and work engagement through integrating career adaptability interventions in structured vocational training, coaching, and counselling. Furthermore, providing employees with more opportunity-enhancing HPWPs (e.g., work-life balance, participation and information sharing practices) could give them room to express and apply adaptive and proactive behaviors that could help them in managing both their careers and jobs.

When it comes to managing employees in less traditional employment contexts, our results point at some practical recommendations that are specific to the different contexts, but also at some general issues that are somewhat transversal across non-traditional employment arrangements. The arguably most relevant issue that emerged from our study on temporary agency workers (Chapter 4) is the need to recognize the simultaneous relevance of both the agency and the company in shaping the employment relationship and affecting the attitudes and believes of TAWs. From an HRM point of view, it is more efficient and appropriate to focus on both, in that workers have

expectations and engage in a mutual exchange with both organizations. Following this line, the spillover effects reported in our study point at the necessity of coordination and communication between the agency and the company when it comes to what is expected and what is eventually delivered to the workers, in order to avoid a paradoxical scenario where TAWs are in charge of their own management, thus turning into workers with two employers and no proper employment relationship.

The results of Chapter 5 point at the need to recognize the importance and effects of employers-like actions currently implemented by the platforms in the gig economy. The HPWPs measured in this study (i.e., selection, training, participation, autonomy, and competitive compensation) are related to higher levels of employee attitudes and well-being. The different mechanisms implemented by the platforms to manage compensation and rewards did have a differential impact on workers' work-life balance, and hence this needs to be carefully considered and implemented. For example, workers expressed concerns about being able to rely on a secure income due to the uncertainty around the availability of rides, more so if platform work is one's main source of income. Also, the communication with the platform was generally found to be effective in handling practical and urgent matters, but less effective in dealing with less urgent ones such as processing riders' suggestions, or handling problems with their payments. Furthermore, if we take into account the considerable freedom workers currently have in establishing how many hours to work through platforms, whether compensation is determined on gigs, on hours, or on the basis of bonuses in certain time slots of the day, does make a difference for workers. In this regard, data for this study was collected in a turbulent time where most of these matters were (and are) not (yet) regulated. Hence, we encourage policy-makers to take into account the consequences of working for different numbers of hours. Even though the gig economy by

definition created the impression of being a digital environment that facilitates the access to “gigs”, in practice (and as our results stress) especially on-location platform-determined routine workers might use it in a manner that resembles a full appointment and platforms do engage in employer-like actions.

Overall, the results of the last two empirical chapters of this dissertation suggest a consideration around managing workers in a non-traditional context which in our opinion is of both theoretical and practical relevance. That is, taking into account the specificities of the different forms of non-traditional employment arrangements, it seems evident that in terms of workers’ attitudes and well-being, the instrumental and temporary nature of such agreements does not compromise the legitimacy and the expectations around their employment relationships.

### **6.3 Methodological Implications**

In this dissertation we made use of different types of research designs to examine the different research questions. In doing so, we examined the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of the variety of methodological options we had, and made an informed choice concerning what would be the most fitting methodological derivation of our substantive theoretical interest. Here, we briefly discuss them, by highlighting the implications that such methodological choices had on our research questions from a theoretical and practical point of view.

Firstly, in Chapter 2 we were interested in tackling how job seekers regulate themselves throughout the job search process and how this development was related to the employment quality measured at a later point in time. Indeed, in the job search literature an increasing number of studies can be found on the between- and within- components of job search intensity and on its relationships with chances of finding employment (e.g., Da Motta Veiga & Turban, 2018; Sun, Song, & Lim, 2013), while there is a paucity of research adopting such designs (and related

statistical modelling) investigating the chances of getting a high quality employment (e.g., Saks & Ashforth, 2002). Furthermore, the relevance of time is also embedded within the conceptualization itself of the job search process as a self-regulatory one. That is, searching for a job entails a dynamic pattern of volitional actions aimed at reaching a specific goal, during which the individuals invest personal resources, assess their progress, use feedback from the environment, and adjust accordingly their investment of resources. Hence, in this theoretical conceptualization, how the individuals manage their behaviors and emotions over time, and organize and evaluate themselves is of high relevance, and should be addressed accordingly from a methodological point of view. Therefore, one of the contributions of this study lies in the adoption of a longitudinal design which allowed us to capture the development of self-regulation during the job search process, and relate such development (rather than one measurement taken in a relatively arbitrary point in time) to the outcome(s) of interest.

Secondly, as mentioned above, one of the general conclusions we recognize as stemming from the overall dissertation, is the importance of perceptions around the employment relationship(s) of all parties involved, in traditional and less traditional contexts. This relevance is due to the reciprocal obligations, attributions, and fulfilment that different actors involved in an employment relationship have with each other (e.g., Rousseau, 1995). It follows that being able to capture ratings of HRM practices by different sources might yield interesting insights concerning the dynamics of the employment relationship itself. In Chapter 3, we adopted a multi-source study design and collected data among employee-manager dyads, where the HRM practices were rated by the managers, whereas the other variables of interest were rated by the employees. Furthermore, this choice allowed us to reduce common method bias (CMB) concerns around some relationships of the hypothesized model (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Hence, compatibly with feasibility concerns,

we foster the use of multiple sources of ratings not only as a mean to deal with the transversal issue of CMB, but also as an additional tool to explore dynamics of reciprocal obligation and fulfilment around the HRM perceived/implemented in the employment relationship of workers.

Thirdly, in Chapter 4 we adopted an alternative methodology to model the workers' perceptions of HRM practices. Building on the synergistic conceptualization of HRM systems (Lepak et al., 2006), we focused on examining configurations or bundles of interdependent practices rather than on single practices or aggregated systems, under the assumption that the effect of their simultaneous implementation differs from the sum of their separate effects. We regarded this conceptualization as the most appropriate one, given the focus on TAWs who simultaneously held employment relationships with the agency and the company. Previous research on the synergistic conceptualization of HRM systems however, generally corresponded to the adoption of an interactive analytical approach, which, besides being problematic in terms of model parsimony, would bring about complex interpretation issues (Dahling et al., 2017). We therefore pursued a person-centered approach to be able to give account of workers' simultaneous perceptions of such configurations. Mixture models allow to identify subgroups of individuals who differ one from the other in their configuration on a set of indicators, hence taking into account the co-existence of multiple HRM practices as a holistic configuration. With some notable exceptions (Chambel et al., 2016; De Cuyper et al., 2008), their use in organizational research is rather scarce. Hence, this methodological choice allowed us to identify subgroups of workers across a set of examined HRM practices, perceived as being implemented by the agency and the company. Doing so, provided us with insights on the nature and characterization of such profiles (in terms of shape rather than level), as well as their association with a number of outcomes of interest. Thus, this specific methodological choice allowed us to disentangle the peculiarities of different subgroups

of TAWs, which would have been otherwise ignored in a variable-centered approach, where variables' averages would have been forced among workers who might have held distinct typologies of employment relationship.

Lastly, in Chapter 5 we collected data in two different phases: first we analyzed quantitative data collected by means of surveys, and then we analyzed qualitative data collected by means of semi-structured interviews, hence making use of a mixed-method sequential explanatory design (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006). That is, we firstly gained a general understanding of the interaction between the number of hours worked and the perceptions of HPWPs implemented by the platform in affecting a variety of outcome variables related to the workers' health and attitudes. We then used in-depth interviews to refine and explain the statistical results we obtained by getting insight in real life and context driven experiences and examples of a number of individuals working through different platforms. This methodological choice was due to the novelty and peculiarities of the topic under investigation: the employment relationship in the new platform economy. In such new context, where the available information is rather scarce and existing paradigms and approaches are questioned in their applicability, we deemed it necessary not only rely on quantitative data, but also gaining concrete examples of how the (so far denied) perceived employment relationship between the workers and the platforms could still find its legitimacy and relevance. By doing so, we were able to understand how "small" employer-like actions implemented by the platforms have a serious impact on workers' life, in terms of how they concretely manage their work, how they build their own schedules, how they tailor their expectations around the remuneration they gain, how they relate to the platform, and how all these factors influence their evaluations on the long-term feasibility and convenience to keep working through such platforms. Taking into account considerations around the feasibility of resources to

collect and analyze different kinds of data, we strongly recommend using such a mixed method approach, especially when the researcher is approaching a new emerging topic or field of investigation, where existing knowledge is limited and/or being questioned in its applicability.

Overall, the empirical chapters of this dissertation bring about a transversal consideration: the adoption of increasingly complex research designs which rely on multiple measurement occasions, data sources, statistical modelling techniques, and/or data types seems an inevitable feature of future research in this field. The reason behind this is not only the progressively higher level of what constitutes a research contribution in general, but lies at the intersection of theory and methods. That is, in striving to answer any given theoretical research question, the researcher should carefully evaluate different methodological options and related theoretical implications. Building on the studies presented here, we highlight the importance of capitalizing on the additional insights that could emerge from specific combinations of theory and methods.

#### **6.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

The studies in this dissertation of course also have several limitations which should be taken into account in order to provide boundaries within which their results should be interpreted. First, we used a longitudinal design only in Chapter 2, thus the implied causal inferences about the relationships under investigation are based on theory or previous work, and not actually tested in the other chapters.

Even though the direction of causality was argued on the basis of the definition of the variables we were studying, a longitudinal design could be particularly useful in investigating the long-term consequences of the two main themes discussed here: (1) the self-regulatory strategies implemented by the workers in dealing with their careers and jobs in a flexible labor market, and (2) the effects on workers' health, attitudes and behaviors of the changing nature of the

employment relationships in non-traditional contexts like temporary or platform work. That is, the demands that are placed on workers in terms of the resilience, adaptability, and self-regulation required to face the constantly changing circumstances might be especially detrimental in the long run, where a cumulative dynamic could take place. Related to this, future research could expand on the results of Chapter 3, by investigating when workers are more likely to engage in limiting job crafting (i.e., decreasing stimulation or reducing the complexity of one's job) with the purpose of reducing stress, preventing strain, and reaching adaptive results. Likewise, working for an extended period of time in a non-traditional context, for example platform work (Chapter 5), could have effects on workers, especially on those who use it as a primary source of income (like suggested by our interviews). Related to this, exploring the long-term consequences on the well-being of temporary workers, on their work-life balance, and perceived flexibility, might provide both the companies and agencies who manage them valuable insights on how to reciprocate the dual employment relationship. More longitudinal studies are needed to answer these questions.

Second, the data used in the empirical studies was collected by means of non-probabilistic sampling techniques. Besides limiting the generalizability of the results, this also implies that future research could replicate our results in slightly different settings, or by focusing on specific subpopulations which could present peculiar characteristics compared to the members of our samples. For example, it would be interesting to replicate the results of Chapter 2 (which were based on a sample of new entrants) on laid-off and employed job-to-job seekers, or among a sample which could be more diversified in terms of length of unemployment. The results of Chapter 3 as well could be replicated by focusing on employees who belong to different age cohorts (e.g., newcomers, aging workers) in order to investigate their specific job- and career-related struggles, and how self-regulatory, adaptive, and proactive behaviors might be differently relevant or useful

in different moments of one's professional life. The same reasoning applies to the results of Chapter 5, where the samples could be stratified on a number of criteria, namely: characteristics of the context (e.g., different platforms, types of jobs, regulations), of the job (e.g., the number of hours worked, and the employment arrangements they have with the platform), and compensation systems (i.e., whether they are paid on the basis of number of gigs or number of hours worked). In all the above, secondary data provided by national or international surveys could be extremely insightful, when available.

Third, three out of four chapters used data collected from only one source. This means that their results might be subject to common method bias (CMB). Even though we often dealt with constructs that by definition were difficult to measure other than through self-reports (e.g., career adaptability, work engagement, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, commitment, and work-life balance) because they referred to subjective beliefs and attitudes, their relationships might have been subject to CMB and must therefore be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, as mentioned above, when it comes to exploring mutual perceptions of what an employment relationship entails for different parties, it might be particularly relevant to involve them all in the data collection stage, in order to ascertain the degree of congruence between their perceptions. That is, capturing the (potential differences in) perceptions of both sides of any given employment relationship might constitute valuable information when it comes to analyzing the dynamics involved in the relationship itself, in terms of the extent to which the parties involved agree in assessing it. We therefore encourage future research to explore issues surrounding the employment relationship by using multi-source data, for example by relying also on the platform's ratings of the extent to which they implement such employer-like actions that were highlighted in Chapter 5.

## 6.5 Conclusions

This dissertation aimed at enhancing our understanding of the consequences of today's flexible labor market on individuals, in terms of how they manage their careers, their jobs, and the employment relationship they have with their employers. On the one hand, we set out to investigate if and how self-regulatory behaviors and competences can be valuable to the individuals at different moments of their careers. We found that a self-regulatory job search process characterized by a growing level of self-efficacy can increase the chances of finding a job that fits the individual. We also found that, once the person has a job, self-regulatory competencies in the form of career adaptability can trigger self-initiated behaviors aimed at changing some parts of one's job, in order to constantly pursue a good fit between the person and the job, and thus a good engagement in one's work.

On the other hand, we investigated the challenges associated with the rise and spread of non-traditional work arrangements in the current labor market, in terms of the nature of their employment relationships and its effects on the workers. We found that temporary agency workers characterized by higher perceived configurations of HRM practices also hold more positive attitudes towards the organization and the job, and that the HRM practices implemented by the agency and the company are not completely independent from each other, thus pointing at the interrelatedness of their two employment relationships and spill-overs between the two. We also found that platform workers instead seem to face a somewhat opposite challenge, having to deal with platforms which (might) implement employers-like actions while not being officially recognized as employers, yet where such actions (in conjunction with the amount of work carried out) does still affect their health and attitudes. The management of these types of workers thus triggers questions around how their work could be kept sustainable from an HRM point of view.

Together, these studies point at the importance to focus on individuals in the new world of work, in terms of strategic behaviors they (and their employers) could implement in order for them to keep working in a sustainable manner.