

# The Italian version of the Rotterdam Emotional Intelligence Scale: implications for career transitions, employability and work engagement among young professionals

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – In the face of fast-paced changes and career uncertainty, emotional intelligence (EI) is a critical resource enabling young professionals to adapt to stressful working environments and to sustainably navigate career transitions. The present study aimed to (1) validate the Italian version of the Rotterdam Emotional Intelligence Scale (REIS-IT) and (2) assess its association with perceived employability (PE) and work engagement (WE) among young professionals.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Following a back-translation process, Study 1 evaluated the REIS's factorial structure and reliability in a sample of 385 newly graduated individuals. In Study 2, the factorial structure was further validated through Confirmatory Factor Analysis, using a sample of 523 participants. Invariance tests assessed the robustness of the REIS across different groups (i.e. employees vs. students, males vs. females). Finally, in Study 3, the REIS's factorial structure and criterion validity were tested in another sample of 385 participants.

**Findings** – The findings confirm that the REIS-IT adheres to a four-factor structure and that EI can be reliably measured using 26 items instead of the 28 items in the original Dutch version. The invariance tests demonstrated that factor loadings were consistent across different groups, and the REIS-IT was associated with both PE and WE, establishing its criterion validity.

**Originality/value** – The findings highlight that the REIS-IT is a robust and reliable tool for measuring EI in the Italian context across diverse samples. Additionally, the study confirmed the positive relationship between EI, PE and WE, reinforcing the role of EI as a key resource for young professionals navigating career transitions.

**Keywords** Emotional intelligence, Employability, Work engagement, Career transition

**Paper type** Research article

## 1. Introduction

In today's fast-changing and interconnected job markets, accelerated by disruptive global events (Blokker *et al.*, 2023), managing career uncertainty and ongoing changes require continuous emotional and cognitive adaptation (Margheritti *et al.*, 2023). This challenge is particularly pronounced for young professionals entering the workforce, who must face a steep learning curve, meet high performance standards and quickly establish their professional identity (Lynn *et al.*, 2023). Against this backdrop, the "Great Resignation" phenomenon has surged in the post-pandemic era, with many young professionals leaving their jobs in search of



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better working conditions (Formica and Sfodera, 2022), while others have engaged in “quiet quitting,” limiting their effort to contractual obligations as a way to protect their well-being and work-life balance (Bernuzzi *et al.*, 2025).

These trends present a significant challenge for organizations striving to retain young talent. At the same time, in this context of increasing uncertainty, career sustainability has emerged as a key individual outcome, emphasizing the capacity of young professionals to build flexible and healthy long-term career trajectories. Sustainable careers require both resilient systems that address individuals’ present and future needs and proactive career competencies that support effective navigation of career transitions (Donald *et al.*, 2024). However, achieving career sustainability can be particularly challenging in a labor market increasingly characterized by precarious employment conditions.

Across the world, many young professionals experience precarious transitions from education to work, characterized by temporary, part-time, or low-paid jobs offering little career development (Burgess and Connell, 2015; Standing, 2011; Sutcliffe and Dhakal, 2018). Such conditions have given rise to what has been termed the “precariat,” a group exposed to chronic job insecurity, limited training and fragmented employment trajectories (Standing, 2011). These difficulties are not only economic but also psychological: long-term youth unemployment and job insecurity can have lasting negative effects on well-being, job satisfaction and future career prospects (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011).

From this perspective, career sustainability can be viewed as an ongoing and evolving individual journey, shaped by both personal and environmental factors that change over time (Russo *et al.*, 2025; De Vos *et al.*, 2020). Given the psychological strain associated with job insecurity, personal resources that help individuals manage emotions and uncertainty become critical. Emotions play a central role in career development, shaping aspirations, motivation and behavior and contributing to the maintenance and renewal of career systems. Moreover, social interactions and career-related practices elicit emotions that influence professionals’ career trajectories, fostering emotional investment and engagement in their careers (Gustafsson and Kärreman, 2024).

Among personal resources, emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a crucial personal resource for young professionals. EI is defined as the ability to perceive, evaluate and express emotions; access or generate feelings to facilitate thought; understand emotions and emotional knowledge; and regulate emotions to promote both emotional and intellectual growth (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Building on this conceptualization, Pekaar *et al.* (2018) proposed a refined model that distinguishes between self-focused and other-focused emotional competencies. This distinction is particularly relevant for understanding how EI operates in social and professional contexts, highlighting the dual role of emotional regulation in managing one’s own emotions and responding effectively to others. Within the framework of sustainable career development, this perspective allows a more nuanced examination of how EI supports adaptability, employability and engagement. By fostering these emotional abilities, individuals are better equipped to cope with structural and psychological challenges, thereby supporting employability, career sustainability and long-term development.

Existing literature suggests that specific personal resources, such as EI, can play a key role in career transitions (Parmentier *et al.*, 2019; Pirsoul *et al.*, 2023), as they can help individuals deal with workplace challenges, manage stress and build resilience in the face of uncertainty. Overall, these studies highlight EI as a key personal resource that supports adaptive and sustainable career development.

Despite the growing body of research, studies examining the interplay of EI with perceived employability (PE) and work engagement (WE) among young professionals remain scarce, particularly in the Italian context. Italy is characterized not only by persistently high youth unemployment rates but also by a highly segmented labor market, marked by widespread temporary contracts, delayed transitions from education to stable employment and pronounced regional disparities (Pavlovaite, 2024). The transition from higher education to the labor market occurs within a context characterized by relatively high youth unemployment rates and a career guidance system that is largely fragmented and delegated to the initiative of

individual universities. These structural and institutional characteristics contribute to a fragile early-career phase, in which young professionals are frequently exposed to uncertainty, career discontinuity and limited opportunities for skill development and advancement.

This issue is particularly relevant since prior research has highlighted cultural influences on the recognition, perception and management of emotions (Ekermans, 2009; Matsumoto *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, examining these relationships in the Italian context is important to assess whether cultural factors shape the functioning of EI measures developed in other countries and to provide insights into their applicability.

Building on these premises, the present research builds on the EI model proposed by Pekaar *et al.* (2018), a valuable framework for understanding EI within sustainable career systems. The model's distinction between self-focused and other-focused emotional competencies makes it particularly suitable for exploring how EI contributes to individual adaptability, employability and engagement in dynamic work environments.

### 1.1 Research aims and structure

This study aims to: (1) evaluate Pekaar and colleagues' model's usability and applicability in the Italian context by assessing the validity of the Italian version of the Rotterdam Emotional Intelligence Scale (REIS-IT) that directly builds on the model (study 1 and 3); and (2) assess the REIS-IT association with PE and WE among young professionals (study 2). Validating the REIS-IT and exploring its associations with PE and WE can make a relevant contribution to understanding how emotional resources support PE and engagement among young professionals facing an increasingly uncertain future.

The paper is structured to guide the reader through the three different studies. First, the theoretical background and research hypotheses are presented, providing a framework for the overall investigation. This is followed by the three studies, each reported separately with its own methods, participants and results (Table 1). Finally, a general discussion integrates the findings across all studies, offering theoretical reflections, practical implications, limitations and directions for future research.

## 2. Theoretical background and studies' hypotheses

### 2.1 The emotional intelligence and its measurement

Over the past decades, EI has gained increasing recognition, attracting the attention of experts who have proposed various definitions and theoretical models to explain it (Fernández-Berrocal and Extremera, 2006; Gayathri *et al.*, 2013; Zeidner *et al.*, 2004), sometimes in conjunction with the evaluation of EI intervention effectiveness (Hodzic *et al.*, 2018;

**Table 1.** Structure of the paper

Data collection	Study	Aims	Constructs measured	Analysis
1 <sup>^</sup> (N = 770)	1 (N = 385)	To test the factor structure of REIS-IT	REIS-IT	EFA, reliability and descriptive analyses
	3 (N = 385)	To test the association between REIS-IT, perceived employability and work engagement	REIS-IT	Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Criterion Validity
2 <sup>^</sup> (N = 523)	2 (N = 523)	To test the measurement invariance of the REIS-ITs scale across men and women and between students and employees	REIS-IT, Perceived Employability and Work Engagement	CFA and Invariance Test

Mattingly and Kraiger, 2019). Following Salovey and Mayer's "Four-Branch" model (Salovey *et al.*, 2009; Salovey and Mayer, 1990), the four basic emotion-related abilities are: (1) recognizing emotions, (2) facilitating thought using emotion, (3) comprehending emotions and (4) controlling emotions. Conversely, Goleman (1996) described EI as any core personality trait not encompassed by cognitive intelligence. Similarly, Bar-On (2000) defined EI as a set of non-cognitive skills, competencies and abilities that influence an individual's ability to effectively cope with environmental demands and pressures. EI was instead identified as a trait by Petrides and Furnham (2001), who considered it a collection of emotional self-perceptions that form the basis of personality structures. According to the majority of theories, EI primarily involves recognizing, managing and regulating emotions to facilitate effective social and emotional functioning (Petrides, 2011; Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Zeidner *et al.*, 2008).

Along with the theoretical developments of the concept, various methods for measuring EI have emerged, sparking substantial debate regarding their format (i.e. ability tests vs. self-reported questionnaires (Roberts *et al.*, 2010). However, Pekaar *et al.* (2018) highlighted that relatively little attention has been given to whether EI should encompass both self- and other-focused dimensions. As a result, most EI models and instruments do not explicitly differentiate between these aspects, failing to account for the fact that individuals often exhibit varying competencies in regulating their own emotions (i.e. self-focused dimensions) versus managing the emotions of others (i.e. other-focused dimensions) (Niven *et al.*, 2011). For instance, the positive relationship between EI and health outcomes may primarily reflect self-focused EI, which pertains to managing one's own emotional state (Martins *et al.*, 2010). Conversely, associations between EI and social outcomes may be more closely linked to other-focused EI, which involves addressing the emotional states of others (Joseph and Newman, 2010; Lopes *et al.*, 2004).

To address this gap, Pekaar *et al.* (2018) developed a new EI model along with a self-reported instrument—the Rotterdam Emotional Intelligence Scale (REIS). This tool captures both emotion appraisal and emotion regulation, integrating these dimensions with a focus on either the self-focused emotions and other-focused emotions. The REIS identifies four distinct yet interconnected aspects of EI: self-focused emotion appraisal, other-focused emotion appraisal, self-focused emotion regulation and other-focused emotion regulation, offering a comprehensive perspective on emotional processes.

It is important to assess whether this model and the REIS instrument are valid and applicable in different contexts, such as the Italian context, or whether their use is limited to the setting in which they were originally developed. Given that no validation of the scale and its related model has been conducted in other contexts than the Netherlands, the present study seeks to address this gap.

In line with the adopted theoretical background and the REIS original validation, we hypothesized that:

- H1. Italian version of the Rotterdam EI Scale (REIS-IT) follows a four-factor structure, where each factor captures one of the interconnected aspects of EI (i.e. self-focused emotion appraisal, other-focused emotion appraisal, self-focused emotion regulation and other-focused emotion regulation).
- H2. The four-factor model of REIS-IT, including 28 items and a higher-order EI factor, fits the data best, compared with alternative models.
- H3. The REIS-IT factorial structure is invariant across employees, students and genders.

## 2.2 EI as key resource to promote sustainable career transitions

Career transitions, such as the transition from education to professional life, often involve a mix of positive and negative emotions, with professionals experiencing interpersonal

difficulties sometimes leading to profound feelings of unhappiness and worthlessness (Urquijo *et al.*, 2019). This change can cause “practice shock”, which leads to uncertainty for young professionals and it is therefore crucial to have the skills and resources to manage it (Urquijo *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, career transitions often involve significant emotional challenges as young professionals navigate workplace identity struggles, with emotions serving as key discursive resources for identity work (Ahuja *et al.*, 2019). In this context, the ability to understand, express and regulate emotions is essential for young professionals as they adapt to the demands of the job market.

In this context, emotional aspects play a particularly relevant role. Positive affectivity—the ability to maintain a positive emotional state—has been linked to sustainable career outcomes, including salary levels and WE (Mazzetti *et al.*, 2016; Miao *et al.*, 2023; Walsh *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, it contributes to career sustainability through cognitive reappraisal (i.e. reframing the significance of an experience to minimize its emotional impact) and organizational commitment (i.e. a person’s alignment with and trust in an organization’s objectives and core values) (Miao *et al.*, 2023). Similarly, emotion regulation abilities have been associated with career outcomes such as employment status, salary and job security. These abilities significantly impact career success, largely through their influence on job search self-efficacy (Urquijo *et al.*, 2019). As a psychosocial meta-capacity, EI enables individuals to navigate stressful social environments and successfully adapt to career transitions (Yitshaki, 2012). It is widely acknowledged as a crucial skill for adaptation across various life domains (Jain, 2012), including career development (Puffer, 2011, 2015). Researchers have also extensively examined the role of various competencies, closely linked to EI, in ensuring individual employability. These include strong communication skills, teamwork abilities, leadership and motivation (Dacre Pool *et al.*, 2014; Margheritti *et al.*, 2023), as well as adaptability (Fugate *et al.*, 2004), effectiveness and reflective thinking (Bridgstock, 2009; Pool and Sewell, 2007; Yorke, 2004). Furthermore, attributes such as empathy and curiosity are increasingly valued by hiring managers in shaping the future workforce. EI entails the ability to manage workplace behaviors, navigate social complexities and make sound, mutually beneficial decisions. Employees with high EI should be capable of assessing the emotions of those around them and adjusting their language, tone and gestures accordingly (Sapovadia, 2020).

Following these premises, we can focus on the final goal of this study: examining the relationship between the REIS dimensions and some positive organizational outcomes linked to career development and employability. We initially investigate the relationship between EI and PE, focusing on the idea that competencies related to identifying, understanding, using and managing emotions have a positive influence on how capable individuals perceive themselves to be in getting a job in the future. Research has indeed demonstrated that EI plays a crucial role in workplace success, and it is a key factor in effective job performance and career growth (Côté and Miners, 2006). High levels of EI have been shown to significantly enhance employees’ self-confidence and belief in their abilities, positively impacting their social skills and overall achievements (Ahmad Marzuki *et al.*, 2015). Emotional competencies empower individuals to navigate their social environment effectively, contributing positively to their employability. The connection between EI and PE has also been examined through an intervention study (Hodzic *et al.*, 2015). Careers are no longer confined to a single employer or organization, but instead involve flexible pathways that cross organizational and sectoral boundaries, as described by Arthur and Rousseau (1996, 2001) in the context of boundaryless careers. In this framework, EI could facilitate the management of complex relationships and social networks, which are crucial in boundaryless careers, helping individuals to negotiate opportunities and maintain good levels of PE in uncertain and dynamic work environments.

Following these premises, we hypothesized that:

- H4. Emotional Intelligence has a positive relationship with perceived employability among young professionals.

In addition, we investigated the relationship between EI and WE based on the key findings that highlight how the individuals' ability to interpret and manage their emotions and those of others is a critical skill that enhances WE experiences (George *et al.*, 2022). Building on this idea, the better individuals can respond to their emotions, the higher their level of WE will be. The connection between EI and WE lies in the emotional aspect of engagement, where work activities are fueled by the ability to manage emotions, providing the necessary energy to accomplish work tasks (Green *et al.*, 2017). Bakker and colleagues (Bakker *et al.*, 2008) highlighted that employees who are highly engaged tend to perform better than those who are not, largely because they frequently experience positive emotions such as happiness, joy and enthusiasm. These emotions not only enhance their well-being but also contribute to greater energy, persistence and motivation in their work, ultimately leading to improved job performance. WE proves to be a key issue in the context of sustainable career development as it is strongly linked to employees' career success. Moreover, from the perspective of Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005), the ability to manage emotions may also support young professionals in actively shaping and adapting their career paths, suggesting that EI not only promotes engagement in current tasks but also contributes to long-term career adaptability.

A substantial body of evidence, such as the meta-analysis by Ng *Et Al.* (2005), has demonstrated that EI has a positive impact on career outcomes, such as objective and subjective career success. Thus, we finally hypothesized that:

- H5. Emotional Intelligence has a positive relationship with work engagement among young professionals.

### 3. Study 1: Analyzing the factorial structure of REIS-IT

#### 3.1 Methods: procedure and participants

Data were collected using a sampling strategy involving young Italian professionals who voluntarily participated in the study. This population was selected because it is particularly exposed to critical career transitions, such as entry into the labor market and early career changes. Emails were sent between July 2023 and September 2024 through the collaboration with the job placement service of University of Milano-Bicocca, which used the contacts of students and alumni enrolled in the service to disseminate the survey. This method allowed for rapid data collection from readily accessible young professionals through professional networks. The emails included a link to the online questionnaire. No compensation was provided for participation in the study. Half of the total data collection sample ( $N = 385$ ), composed of 770 participants, was randomly drawn from the overall data collection and used for this study. This approach allowed us to use the same number of participants in Study 3, ensuring the sample maintained the same sociodemographic characteristics and descriptive features. In total, 385 employees compose the study sample, including 276 women (71.9%). The mean age was 28.23 ( $SD = 4.78$ ) years, and the majority had a master's degree (54%) or bachelor's degree (27.5%). Participants came from all faculties, both in the science and humanities fields. Most participants graduated in Economy (16.9%), Psychology (9.6%), Educational Sciences (9.6%) and Law (6.5%). All participants were employed at the time of the survey, working on average 37.07 ( $SD = 9.07$ ) hours per week. All the studies included in this research were approved by the Research Evaluation Committee, University of Milano-Bicocca (RM-2022-509).

#### 3.2 Back translation process

Before testing the factorial structure of the REIS-IT, the items were translated from English to Italian and then subjected to a back translation process (Brislin, 1970). Back translation involved translating a questionnaire into English and comparing the two language versions. The goal was to detect discrepancies between these two versions that might be due to errors in the Italian translation. No major discrepancies were found in the translation, so its accuracy was validated.

### 3.3 Results

The factorial structure of the REIS was explored using exploratory factor analysis (EFA; maximum likelihood) with oblique rotation (Oblimin) in SPSS v.29. As a criterion, factors with eigenvalues  $>1$  were retained. The extracted factors retained items that loaded at least 0.40 on the factor (Pett *et al.*, 2003). We thus excluded items that had cross-loadings  $>0.40$  or that did not load at least 0.40 on a factor. In addition, we removed items where the discrepancy between the primary and secondary factor loadings is not sufficiently large (at least 0.3) (Matsunaga, 2010). Following these criteria, we deleted two items until all criteria were met (Table 2).

After removing item 7 and item 15, the iterative process resulted in 26 items loading on four factors (Table 2). The four factors explained a cumulative 50.77% of the variance in the data. Specifically, the first factor consisted of other-focused emotion appraisal (Eigenvalue = 6.42) and explained 24.70% of the variance. The second factor, self-focused emotion appraisal (Eigenvalue = 2.91), explained 11.18%. The third factor, self-focused emotion regulation (Eigenvalue = 2.28), explained 8.78%. The fourth and final factor, other-focused emotion regulation (Eigenvalue = 1.59), explained an additional 6.12% of the variance. The internal consistencies (alphas) of all dimensions were satisfactory (Table 2), and the intercorrelations ranged between  $r = 0.11$  and  $r = 0.50$ .

This first study partially supported the four proposed dimensions of the REIS. Good reliability and weak to moderate intercorrelations between the subscales were identified, which suggests that the subscales appear to capture different EI dimensions reliably. Despite this result, two items were removed from the original factorial solution, indicating that in the factorial solution of the REIS-IT, these two items are not fully reliable. To examine whether the proposed structure of the REIS-IT is independent of the sample used, the next step was to compare the two factorial solutions, namely the original one (Pekaar *et al.*, 2018) and the one obtained from Study 1, in a new sample.

## 4. Study 2: confirmatory factor analysis and cross-validation of REIS-IT

### 4.1 Methods: procedure and participants

In parallel with the data collection of Study 1 (between July 2023 and September 2024), a second data collection was carried out and the research was: (1) promoted through social media and the authors' personal networks to reach and recruit young workers and (2) disseminated to students and alumni attending classes during that period by presenting it in the classroom and inviting them to participate. This approach allowed for rapid access to a large and relevant sample of young workers, facilitating timely data collection within the available resources and ensuring sufficient participation for preliminary analyses.

Thus, the samples of Study 2 were two convenience samples that consisted of Italian employees (subsample 1) and students (subsample 2). Participation was voluntary, and no compensation was provided for it. Subsample 1 included 270 employees, including 180 females (66.7%). The mean age was 40.63 (SD = 11.24) years. Most participants had bachelor's or master's degree (56.7%), or post-laureate degree (23%). Few participants had a high school diploma (17.8%) or eighth-grade graduation (2.6%). Subsample 2 consisted of 253 students, including 182 females (72.2%). The mean age was 22.71 (SD = 3.74) years. Most participants attended a bachelor's degree (56.5%) or a master's (40.7%). Only a few were involved in post-laureate programs (2.8%). All the studies of the present research were approved by the Research Evaluation Committee, Univerity of Milano-Bicocca (RM-2022–509).

### 4.2 Results

**4.2.1 Confirmatory factor analysis.** Confirmatory factor analysis was used to determine whether a hierarchical 28-item four-factor solution fitted the total data set best compared with alternative models in the Italian sample (one factor, two factors and the model obtained in our

**Table 2.** Exploratory factor analysis

Item wording	M	SD	$\alpha$	Factor			
				1	2	3	4
<i>Self-appraisal</i>							
2 Riesco a distinguere bene le mie emozioni <i>I can distinguish well my emotions</i>	3.61	0.96	0.85	0.83			
3 Sono consapevole delle mie stesse emozioni <i>I am aware of my own emotions</i>	3.75	0.87		0.82			
5 Riconosco le emozioni che Provo <i>I recognize the emotions I feel</i>	3.82	0.78		0.81			
1 So sempre come mi sento <i>I always know what I feel</i>	3.48	1.02		0.71			
6 In generale, sono in grado di spiegare esattamente come mi sento <i>In general, I am able to explain in detail how I feel</i>	3.28	1.02		0.60			
4 Capisco perché Provo quello che Provo <i>I understand why I feel what I feel</i>	3.55	0.96		0.56			
7 Posso giudicare bene se gli eventi mi toccano emotivamente <i>I am good at judging whether events touch me emotionally</i>	3.69	0.97		0.35			
<i>Other appraisal</i>							
8 Sono consapevole delle emozioni delle persone che mi circondano. <i>I am aware of the emotions of those around me</i>	3.71	0.87	0.88		0.85		
9 So quali sentimenti provano gli altri <i>I understand the feelings of others</i>	3.51	0.90			0.80		
13 Riesco a distinguere bene tra le diverse emozioni degli altri <i>I can distinguish well between other people's emotions</i>	3.51	0.85			0.75		
10 Quando guardo le altre persone, posso vedere come si sentono. <i>When I see other people, I can recognize how they feel</i>	3.56	0.92			0.73		
12 Capisco perché le altre persone sentono come si sentono. <i>I understand why other people feel in a certain way</i>	3.66	0.88			0.64		
11 Posso entrare in empatia con le persone intorno a me <i>I can feel empathy with the people around me</i>	4.01	0.81			0.51		
14 Posso giudicare bene se gli eventi toccano gli altri emotivamente <i>I can judge well if events touch others emotionally</i>	3.67	0.85			0.47		
<i>Self-regulation</i>							
16 Posso sopprimere facilmente le mie emozioni <i>I can suppress my emotions easily</i>	2.76	1.11	0.84			0.77	
17 Non lascio che le mie emozioni prendano il sopravvento <i>I do not let my emotions take over</i>	3.07	1.08				0.78	
19 Anche quando sono arrabbiato, riesco a stare calmo <i>Even when I am angry, I can stay calm</i>	3.16	1.13				0.68	
18 Mostro le mie emozioni solo quando è appropriato <i>I only show my emotions when it is appropriate</i>	3.37	1.08				0.64	
20 Se voglio, riesco ad avere una faccia inespressiva (come un giocatore di poker) <i>If I want to, I put on my poker face</i>	2.63	1.22				0.59	
21 Adeguo le mie emozioni quando necessario <i>I adjust my emotions when necessary</i>	3.75	0.94				0.59	
15 Ho il controllo delle mie emozioni <i>I am in control of my own emotions</i>	3.14	1.04		0.30		0.48	

(continued)

Table 2. Continued

Item wording	M	SD	$\alpha$	Factor			
				1	2	3	4
<i>Other regulation</i>							
24 Riesco a stimolare o mitigare le emozioni degli altri <i>I can boost or temper the emotions of others</i>	3.65	0.75	0.86				0.76
23 Posso alterare lo stato emotivo di un'altra persona <i>I can alter another person's emotional state</i>	3.46	0.90					0.75
22 Sono in grado di far sentire qualcun altro in modo diverso <i>I can make someone else feel differently</i>	3.58	0.82					0.71
27 So influenzare le persone <i>I know how to influence people</i>	3.17	0.94					0.69
25 Ho una grande influenza su come si sentono gli altri. <i>I have great influence on how others feel</i>	3.01	0.89					0.68
28 Sono in grado di calmare gli altri <i>I am able to calm others down</i>	3.72	0.79					0.61
26 So cosa fare per migliorare l'umore delle persone. <i>I know what to do to improve people's mood</i>	3.54	0.81					0.54

study 1 with 26 items) using Lavaan on RStudio with maximum likelihood estimation. The fit of the proposed models was assessed with four indices: the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) and the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR). The fit indices were interpreted using [Hu and Bentler's \(1999\)](#) suggested values, which should be close to 0.95 for CFI and TLI, close to 0.06 for RMSEA, or close to 0.08 for SRMR.

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis are reported in [Table 3](#). Our results indicate that the four-factor model with 26 items ([Figure 1](#)) fits the data better than the 28-item model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 178.135, p < 0.001$ ), the one-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 1,664.92, p < 0.001$ ) as well as two factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 2033.578, p < 0.001$ ). Consistent with the EFA from study 1, the CFA also indicated that two items (item 7 and item 15, [Table 2](#)) showed weak performance, as their inclusion significantly worsened the model fit in the Italian sample. As a result, the best factorial solution in the sample of Italian workers and students is the 26-item solution, only partially confirming [Hypothesis 2](#).

**4.2.2 Invariance tests.** The invariance of the REIS-IT (26 items) across men and women was tested using a multi-group analysis in RStudio (Lavaan). Specifically, we first ran the model separately in men and women ([Table 4](#)), after we tested a model (model 1 in [Table 4](#)) that did not include cross-group constraints and simultaneously estimated all parameters. Finally, we compared the fit of the unconstrained model with that of model 2, where the factor loadings were constrained. The chi-square difference test resulted in a non-significant value ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 33.73, \Delta df = 25, p = 0.11$ ) for this comparison, suggesting that the factor loadings were constant between the samples. However, a difference was found in the relationship between the four dimensions (i.e. self-focused emotion appraisal, other-focused emotion appraisal, self-focused emotion regulation and other-focused emotion regulation) and the second-order factor of EI. Indeed, while all four dimensions saturated the second-order factor in the female sample, this was not the case for men. In the male sample, the dimension related to self-regulation did not appear to be associated with the second-order EI construct ([Table 4](#)).

A similar procedure was performed to test for invariance across students and employees. We then compared the fit of a model without equality constraints (model 3) with the fit of a model in which we constrained the factor loadings (model 4). This comparison produced a significant chi-square difference test value ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 42.01, \Delta df = 25, p = 0.02$ ). However, since the  $\chi^2$  difference test is dependent on sample size ([Bentler and Bonett, 1980](#); [Hooper](#)

**Table 3.** Confirmatory factor analysis and invariance tests of the REIS in study 2 ( $N = 523$ )

Model	$\chi^2$	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
One-factor model	2722.612	347	0.497	0.452	0.134	0.140
Two-factor model (Appraisal and Recognition*)	2353.954	346	0.575	0.536	0.123	0.160
Four-factor model (original; 28 items)	867.169	342	0.904	0.894	0.054	0.070
Four-factor model (study 1; 26 items)	689.034	291	0.922	0.913	0.051	0.059
<i>Invariance test among men (<math>N = 161</math>) and women (<math>N = 362</math>)</i>						
Model 1 (four-factor model–unconstrained)	1042.151	582	0.911	0.900	0.055	0.065
Model 2 (four-factor model–factor loadings constrained)	1075.878	607	0.909	0.903	0.054	0.071
<i>Invariance test among students (<math>N = 253</math>) and employees (<math>N = 270</math>)</i>						
Model 3 (four-factor model–unconstrained)	1046.321	582	0.910	0.899	0.055	0.064
Model 4 (four-factor model–factor loadings constrained)	1088.322	607	0.906	0.900	0.055	0.069

**Note(s):** The two-factor model includes a second-order structure, with the two factors representing the higher-order dimensions of appraisal (self and other) and recognition (self and other)

*et al.*, 2008), the models were also examined by the change in CFI, SRMR and RMSEA between the less and more constrained models. Since values of  $\Delta$ CFI up to 0.010,  $\Delta$ RMSEA up to 0.015 and  $\Delta$ SRMR up to 0.030 indicate that the fit of the nested models did not significantly deteriorate (Meade *et al.*, 2008), the model fit values of this constrained model were acceptable ( $\Delta$ CFI = 0.005,  $\Delta$ RMSEA = 0.000 and  $\Delta$ SRMR = 0.005).

The results of Study 2 indicated that the proposed hierarchical four-factorial structure with 26 items showed a substantially better fit to the data than alternative structures. Furthermore, the invariance tests indicated that the factor loadings of the REIS-IT were invariant across employees, students and gender groups, implying that these different groups respond to the items similarly, confirming Hypothesis 3.

## 5. Study 3: reis-it relationship with positive career outcomes

### 5.1 Methods: procedure and participants

To investigate the associations between the REIS-IT, PE and WE, the second half of the data collection described in Study 1 ( $N = 385$ ; see Section 3.1) was utilized. This approach ensured that the factorial structure of the REIS-IT was validated in an independent sample prior to examining its relationships with the outcome variables. The sample included 385 employees (70.5% women), with a mean age of 28.73 years ( $SD = 4.34$ ). Most held a master's (57%) or bachelor's degree (23.5%) across various fields, mainly economy (18%), psychology (9.8%), educational sciences (7.6%) and law (6.7%). All were employed, working on average 35.07 h per week ( $SD = 8.97$ ). All the studies of the present research were approved by the Research Evaluation Committee, University of Milano-Bicocca (RM-2022–509).

Confirmatory factor analysis was done using Lavaan on RStudio with maximum likelihood estimation. The fit of the proposed models was assessed with four indices: the CFI, the TLI, the RMSEA and the SRMR. The fit indices were interpreted using Hu and Bentler's (1999) suggested values, which should be close to 0.95 for CFI, and TLI, close to 0.06 for RMSEA, or close to 0.08 for SRMR.

### 5.2 Outcome measures

- (1) Self-Perceived Employability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.87$ ) was measured through Lodi *et al.*'s (2020) Italian version of the "Self-Perceived Employability Scale," SPES (Rothwell *et al.*, 2008). The Italian version consists of 13 items on a 5-point Likert-

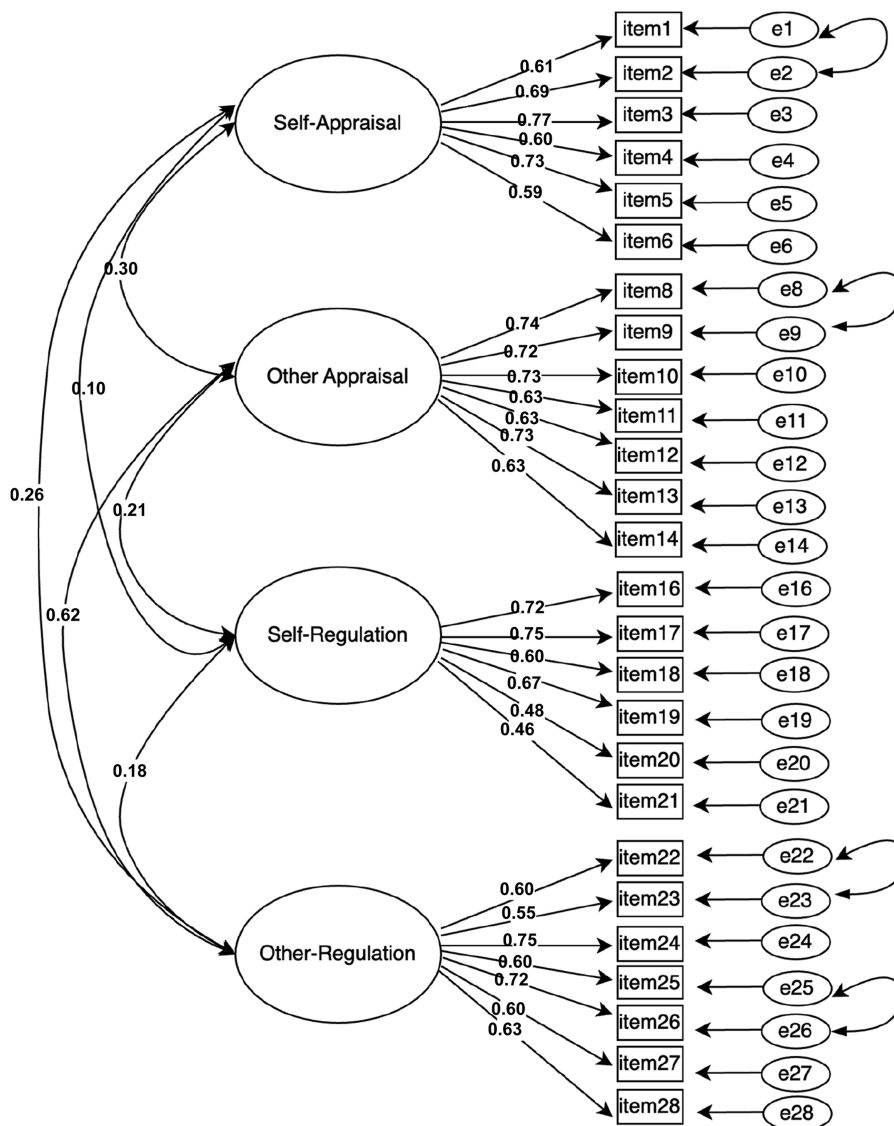


Figure 1. REIS-IT factorial model (CFA)

type scale (from 1 “totally disagree”, to 5 “totally agree”). Examples of items are “if there were layoffs in this organization, I have confidence in staying” and “the skills I have acquired with my current job are transferable to other occupations outside this organization”.

- (2) WE (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.93$ ) was measured using the Italian version (Simbula *et al.*, 2013) of the “Utrecht Work Engagement Scale” (UWES), consisting of 9 items and developed by Schaufeli *et al.* (2006). This scale includes three items that measure vigor (e.g. “In my work I feel energetic”), three for absorption (e.g. “I am immersed in

**Table 4.** Standardized factorial saturations on the second-order construct (REIS)

	Women ( <i>N</i> = 362)		Men ( <i>N</i> = 161)	
	Std. all coefficient	<i>p</i>	Std. all coefficient	<i>p</i>
Self-focused emotion appraisal	0.276		0.496	
Other-focused emotion appraisal	0.858	0.000	1.004	0.002
Self-focused emotion regulation	0.316	0.002	0.115	0.246
Other-focused emotion regulation	0.747	0.000	0.625	0.000

my work”) and three for dedication (e.g. “I am enthusiastic about my work”). The Italian version asks participants to consider each item on a Likert scale from 0 (never) to 6 (every day). A unique score was then calculated to reflect the WE construct (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006).

### 5.3 Results

The hypothesized REIS measurement model adequately fitted the data in this sample ( $\chi^2(342) = 760.815$ , CFI = 0.912, RMSEA [90% Confidence Interval (CI)] = 0.056 [0.051, 0.062], SRMR = 0.060). Thus, after verifying the stability of the factor solution, the criterion validity of the REIS was tested by examining its linear correlations (Pearson) with the outcomes of interest.

Table 5 presents the study variables’ means, standard deviations and correlations. Confirming our expectations, the REIS-IT (26 Items) and all its sub-dimensions showed a significant and positive correlation with PE ( $r = 0.309$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and WE ( $r = 0.319$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, proving its criterion validity and confirming our hypotheses 4 and 5.

## 6. General discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the factorial structure of the REIS-IT (Study 1 and 2) and assess its association with PE and WE among young Italian professionals (Study 3). Following the distinction between micro, meso and macro levels of theorizing proposed by Homer and Lim (2024), the contribution offered by the present study is positioned primarily at the micro level. The adaptation of the REIS to the Italian context and the refinement of its factorial structure reflect an emic, context-sensitive contribution, showing how EI is expressed, interpreted and measured within a specific cultural and generational group. In this sense, the

**Table 5.** Means, standard deviations and correlations of the REIS-IT dimensions and indicators of criterion validity

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Self-appraisal			1						
2. Other appraisal			0.324***	1					
3. Self-regulation			0.269***	0.118*	1				
4. Other-regulation			0.259***	0.558***	0.182***	1			
5. Emotional intelligence	3.45	0.47	0.676***	0.714***	0.597***	0.735***	1		
6. Perceived employability	3.63	0.63	0.175***	0.214***	0.156**	0.297***	0.309***	1	
7. Work engagement	5.58	1.21	0.292***	0.174**	0.202***	0.223***	0.319***	0.436***	1

**Note(s):** \* $<0.05$ , \*\* $<0.01$  and \*\*\* $<0.001$ . “Emotional intelligence” stands for the 26-item REIS-IT scale

present validation does not simply test a measurement model but provides theoretically meaningful insights into how established EI frameworks require cultural re-specification to operate across different contexts. At the same time, the associations identified in Study 3 between EI, PE and WE also represent a meso-level refinement, illustrating how these constructs function within a particular segment of the Italian labor market. This layered perspective aligns our work with [Homer and Lim's \(2024\)](#) call to integrate micro-level contextualization with meso-level theoretical elaboration in globalized research environments.

### 6.1 Validation of the REIS-IT scale

Study 1 provided partial support for the four proposed dimensions of the REIS-IT ([Hypothesis 1](#)). Two items were removed from the original factorial solution, since they did not demonstrate completely satisfactory reliability within the Italian version of the scale. However, they might still be considered for research purposes with the aim of comparing cross-cultural data.

Importantly, the removal of these two items is not merely a psychometric adjustment but it reveals meaningful cultural nuances in the way EI is expressed and understood. Specifically, the item referring to judging whether events affect one's emotions (i.e. "I am good at judging whether events touch me emotionally") appears to frame emotional awareness in cognitive rather than experiential terms, while the item concerning control of one's emotions (i.e. "I am in control of my own emotions") may evoke notions of suppression rather than adaptive regulation.

These findings suggest that while the overarching structure of EI is preserved, its manifestations are filtered through culture-specific meanings. Thus, the present study supports existing knowledge by highlighting how emotional awareness and regulation are culturally embedded constructs ([Matsumoto et al., 2008](#)), refining cross-cultural theory on EI beyond the level of structural equivalence.

The results of Study 2 indicated that the proposed hierarchical four-factor structure, comprising 26 items, exhibited a substantially better fit to the data compared to alternative models. Moreover, invariance testing demonstrated that the factor loadings of the REIS-IT were invariant across employees, students and gender groups. However, the self-focused emotion regulation factor does not load onto the male group's second-order dimension (viz. EI) when examining the factorial structure across men and women. This finding suggests that, while the factorial structure of the REIS-IT scale is invariant between men and women, there are differences in how self-regulation is perceived as a component of EI. From a cultural and social norms perspective, men may not view the ability to self-regulate their emotions as closely linked to EI because they are taught to exercise greater emotional control than women and are expected to inhibit their emotional expressions more frequently ([Śmieja et al., 2011](#); [Underwood et al., 1992](#)). Given that the expression of emotions is often considered "unmanly" ([Brody, 2000](#)), it could be that men regard regulating and suppressing their emotions as a social norm that does not concern aspects of personal emotional competence. This finding aligns partially with studies suggesting that men are more likely to use suppression strategies than women ([Flynn et al., 2010](#); [Gross and John, 1995](#)). However, since our sample is gender-imbalanced and the sample of men is not so large, future research should more thoroughly explore this topic from a gender differences perspective. In conclusion, the REIS-IT proved to be a useful and reliable instrument for assessing EI across samples differing in gender and professional background, thereby supporting [Hypothesis 3](#).

### 6.2 Emotional intelligence and career sustainability

The findings of Study 3 confirm that EI significantly enhances both PE and WE among Italian young professionals ([Hypotheses 4 and 5](#)). These results support the role of EI as a key resource for navigating social and professional contexts, particularly during periods of uncertainty. By fostering the ability to identify, understand and manage emotions—both one's own and those of others—EI empowers individuals to build self-confidence, strengthen social

skills and adapt effectively to changing environments. This adaptability not only supports greater engagement in work activities by providing the emotional energy necessary for task completion but also bolsters individuals' perceptions of their ability to secure employment in the future. EI emerges as a critical factor in promoting resilience and success in dynamic work environments. Since the dynamic transition from education to professional life is crucial for young professionals' career sustainability (Urquijo *et al.*, 2019), EI is confirmed to be essential for young people entering the labor market as a key resource in supporting a sustainable transition.

Moreover, the pattern of results offers empirical support for contemporary career theories that conceptualize modern career paths as fluid, dynamic and self-directed. In particular, our findings resonate with the Boundaryless Career perspective (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996, 2001), suggesting that emotionally intelligent individuals may be better equipped to manage the interpersonal complexity and social negotiation required in boundaryless careers. Through emotional awareness and regulation, they can build and sustain professional relationships across organizational boundaries, thereby maintaining employability in uncertain and shifting work environments.

Similarly, from the standpoint of Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005), the capacity to understand and manage emotions appears to support individuals in actively shaping and adapting their career trajectories. EI may therefore facilitate career adaptability—the readiness to cope with predictable and unpredictable career changes (Savickas, 2005) by strengthening self-reflection, optimism and persistence. In this sense, the present findings extend previous theoretical claims by demonstrating that EI not only fosters momentary engagement but also underpins the long-term construction of sustainable and meaningful careers.

Our findings are particularly applicable to the Italian context. Italy's labor market is indeed characterized by notable regional diversity and by ongoing transformations driven by globalization, digitalization and changing work values (Dusi, 2017). In this area, perceptions of employability and career prospects are particularly salient for young professionals, as they navigate both opportunities and uncertainties in a rapidly evolving work environment. At the same time, recent labor market trends, including phenomena such as the Great Resignation and increased attention to work-life balance, highlight the growing importance of personal resources, such as EI, in supporting career adaptability, engagement and the ability to proactively manage one's employability. Thus, our findings offer particularly meaningful insights into how EI functions as a key resource for young professionals operating within such a challenging economic and social environment.

## 7. Research and practical implications

Our results provide both research and practical implications. From a research perspective, this study provides initial evidence that the REIS is valid for assessing EI in Italy, demonstrating that it can be reliably used within this specific cultural context. By testing invariance across gender, students and employees, we found that the tool appears robust and adaptable for different groups, which is encouraging for future studies. While these findings suggest potential applications of the REIS in cross-cultural research, such as comparing EI between countries or regions, or across different population groups, further validation in other cultural contexts would be needed before drawing firm conclusions about its broader applicability. The tool could also support longitudinal research to explore how EI develops over time and how it relates to career outcomes, WE and well-being. Overall, these findings indicate that the REIS-IT is a reliable tool for studying emotional competencies and their role in shaping professional paths within the Italian context, and they provide a foundation for future studies in other settings.

From a practical point of view, our results highlight the importance of implementing concrete, practical strategies focused on strengthening and developing EI as a key resource for professional success. In the context of the profound transformations currently characterizing the Italian labor market (Tanzi, 2023), such strategies are particularly relevant for supporting

entry into the workforce, managing early career transitions and fostering sustainable employment trajectories.

Under the lens of sustainable career systems, EI development among young professionals requires a multifaceted approach, which includes both training and contextual interventions to ultimately boost professional success (Donald *et al.*, 2024). Thus, universities should collaborate with internal (e.g. career services) and external (e.g. employers) partners to offer students and graduates experiences that enhance their human, social and emotional capital (Donald *et al.*, 2024; Tomlinson, 2017).

From an applied standpoint, the REIS-IT may be used as an assessment tool to support the design, implementation and evaluation of EI development initiatives. Specifically, universities, career services and organizations may employ the REIS-IT to identify emotional competencies that require further development during early career phases, such as emotion regulation, empathy and relational skills and to tailor training, career counseling and professional development programs accordingly. As demonstrated by our findings, developing these competencies can directly enhance employability by improving young professionals' ability to navigate career transitions and leverage their skills effectively, and WE, by fostering motivation, involvement and satisfaction in professional settings.

In line with our results, practical interventions should prioritize the development of cross-functional emotional competencies that support self-efficacy, stress management and the ability to build effective professional relationships (Petruzzello *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, strengthening EI may contribute not only to interpersonal effectiveness and adaptability but also to ethical judgment and decision-making in complex work environments (Angelidis and Ibrahim, 2011). Integrating EI training into professional development pathways may therefore enhance both personal effectiveness and responsible professional behavior.

Finally, public institutions should promote policies that encourage the integration of EI into orientation, selection and professional development pathways, supporting the dissemination of targeted tools and training programs. Investing in EI development not only facilitates the transition of young professionals into the workforce but also contributes to the greater sustainability of their careers in an increasingly complex and dynamic labor market.

### 7.1 Policy recommendations

Policy scholars have long acknowledged the relevance of emotional for academic, professional and personal outcomes (Mayer and Cobb, 2000). Early work also suggested that emotional competencies may play a substantial role in school and workplace success (Pool, 1997), positioning EI as a core component of character development and as a domain with potential for structured educational interventions. Building on these insights, future policy initiatives in Italy could integrate EI within educational and professional development frameworks. EI training could be embedded in higher education and early-career programmes, as well as in public-sector leadership and employability initiatives.

Importantly, emerging evidence indicates that EI can, to some extent, be developed (Hodzic *et al.*, 2018). A recent multilevel meta-analysis of 24 studies (28 samples) reported a moderate, significant pre-to post-training improvement in EI, with effects that persisted at follow-up (Hodzic *et al.*, 2018). At the same time, this does not imply that all aspects of EI are equally trainable or that any programme is effective. As Clarke (2006) cautions, many EI training initiatives make strong claims, whereas the development of specific emotional abilities—particularly those grounded in ability-based models—likely depends on contextualized, workplace-embedded learning processes.

Furthermore, as Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) suggest, liberal-arts and creative disciplines naturally cultivate emotional reasoning through engagement with narrative, music and art—domains that merit protection and support as vehicles for emotional learning. Embedding evidence-informed EI principles into national education and workforce policies could help foster a more emotionally literate, adaptive and resilient professional culture.

## 8. Limitations and future research agenda

In interpreting these results, some limitations need to be considered. Firstly, we removed two items from the original factorial solution of the scale, which introduces the need for further analysis of content validity (Roebianto *et al.*, 2023). A content validity analysis would be essential to assess the appropriateness of the item formulations in the Italian context.

A further limitation is the use of a convenience sample, which may have introduced selection bias and limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the young Italian professionals included in the study. Moreover, although participants obtained their degrees from universities located in Northern Italy, it is not possible to determine whether they currently live or work in this area. As a result, the sample might include a higher proportion of individuals with connections to Northern Italy, which could introduce a contextual bias related to regional economic and labor market characteristics. Such contextual factors might have influenced participants' experiences and responses, thereby limiting the extent to which the findings can be generalized to Italy. Future studies should replicate this validation across different regions of Italy and in other cultural contexts to confirm the scale's broader applicability.

In addition, our sample was composed primarily of recent graduates (except for study 2). This population was intentionally chosen as the primary target of the study, given that career behaviors are particularly relevant during transitional phases (Hirschi *et al.*, 2014). However, the homogeneity of this sample limits the ability to assess the applicability of the scale to older age groups, who also engage in other career transitions (Lent and Brown, 2013). A more heterogeneous sample would enhance the robustness of future findings. Additionally, our sample consisted predominantly of women, which limited the possibility of further exploring gender differences observed during the validation study, particularly with respect to the emotion regulation factor. This imbalance likely reflects the recruitment strategy, as participants were reached through alumni and job placement networks of our university, which predominantly serve graduates from humanities and social science programs, fields typically characterized by a higher proportion of female students. Future studies should aim to recruit more gender-balanced and sectorially diverse samples to further examine potential gender differences and strengthen the generalizability of the findings.

Lastly, we did not collect variables that could explain intraindividual processes, such as those related to individuals' environments (situational variables), which are crucial to the transition to work (Clarke, 2018). Environmental and cultural factors, such as family support, social pressure and the design of higher education curricula (Blokker *et al.*, 2023; Petruzzello *et al.*, 2024), as well as labor market conditions in the post-pandemic era, may offer valuable insights for future research especially in the context of sustainable career systems, where these factors can significantly influence individuals' career development and their ability to navigate transitions in a changing labor market. Understanding how these environmental and cultural factors interact with EI can help shape interventions that foster long-term career sustainability.

## 9. Conclusion

The aims of this study were to: (1) evaluate the usability and applicability of Pekaar *et al.*'s (2018) model in the Italian context by assessing the validity of the REIS-IT, which directly builds on the model and (2) examine the associations of the REIS-IT with PE and WE among young professionals. The validation of the Italian version of the REIS-IT provides a reliable tool for measuring both self-focused and other-focused EI dimensions. In addition, our findings show that EI significantly contributes to enhancing PE and WE, highlighting its importance as a personal resource for navigating workplace challenges. By emphasizing the relevance of EI for sustainable career development, this research provides insights for future interventions aimed at fostering EI in young professionals, finally supporting their long-term success in a changing labor market.

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