

Resilience: “The road towards accountants’ career sustainability”

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Abstract

It is widely recognized that the accounting profession is subject to different challenges and demands due to the complex and ever-evolving work environment that is dominant nowadays. Correspondingly, the need for resilience, adaptability, and the strategies to build a long-lasting career are considered as vital. This qualitative research study delved into this issue and examined the two concepts of resilience and career sustainability in the accounting profession in Cyprus, specifically in the private sector in an attempt to gain a broader understanding of the social reality of employees, and the factors that may have an impact on their potential career sustainability. Ten semi-structured individual online interviews of experienced accountants from different private audit firms were conducted and through the thematic analysis of the data, 3 main themes emerged which are: (1) the complexities of the accounting profession, (2) the resilience as a dynamic process, (3) the integrative nature of career sustainability. The research findings highlighted the way in which resilience is understood as a dynamic process, the complexities inherently linked to the accounting profession and the organizational, contextual, and personal factors that affect the career sustainability of accountants. Finally, the findings of the present study contribute to both theory and practice informing organizations on how they can promote resilience and foster career sustainability that can better assist accountants in dealing with the demands and challenges of their job role.

Keywords: accountants, resilience, career sustainability, qualitative research

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Ioanna Aristou

Introduction

As the British founder of “The School of Life” Alain de Botton once stated “A goof half of the art of living is resilience” (Webster & Neal, 2021). It is only when people are confronted with adversity and failure in both life and work that they learn how to become resilient, “how to embrace the beautifully broad spectrum of the human experience” (DeWalt, 2012). The goal of resilience is not just to survive the life’s ever-increasing waves of change but instead to thrive through the unexpected with ease and grace.

In recent times, people are experiencing more uncertainty than they have ever encountered before, both individually and collectively. The covid-19, the climate change and the pervasive social and political unrest that are dominant, each and all of these contribute to a sense of uncertainty and turmoil (Hartmann, et al., 2020). Particularly, in the corporate world fast-paced changes, high time-sensitivity, an ever-increasing workload, and additionally dwindling resources for accomplishing objectives are prevalent (Fergusson, et al., 2020). These trends have repercussions for the continuity and sustainability of careers, and may lead to insecurity, economic concerns, and critically high rates of burnout and anxiety among the working population (Barthauer, et al., 2020).

For this reason, there is a growing interest and focus on resilience and career sustainability, as leaders have sought to enhance their organization’s competitive edge in immensely complex markets especially in the accounting profession (Fergusson, et al., 2020). Undoubtedly, leaders in accounting firms, are moving into 2023 with cautious and guarded optimism, well aware of the challenges that lie ahead as well as the possibilities that unfold when investing in workforce’s Resilience and Career sustainability (Fergusson, et al., 2020). As the American author and motivational speaker Zig Ziglar in his book “See You at The Top” (1974) stated, “the real opportunity for success and progression lies within the person, and not in the job”.

Psychological Resilience

Defining the Undefinable

Without a doubt, the construct of resilience has been defined in multiple ways through the years resulting in conceptual discrepancies regarding the nature, direction and veracity of research

inquire. Furthermore, there is no consensus and unification on the operationalization of the concept, the standards for its application or its role in the explanation of models, and theories. Indeed, Davydov, et al., (2010) observed that resilience is often influenced by the historical and sociocultural context within which the research is conducted, the researchers' conceptual proclivities, and the population sampled. It should be noted that many specialists and practitioners portray the fact that "resilience is one of the great puzzles of human nature, like creativity or psychological instinct" (Coutu, 2002). That is the reason why, there has been an explosion of empirical research which played a pivotal role on investigating the factors which lead to its development, and how and why resilience influences outcomes of interest to individuals and organizations in general (Hartmann, et al., 2020).

Noting the compelling nature of resilience, proponents have postulated that it encompasses two defining elements: the experience of adversity and the occurrence of positive adaptation (Luthar, et al., 2000). Regarding the first component Fisher et al., (2018) highlighted that adversity may come in the form of isolated and high-intensity external or internal stressors or circumstances. This is especially applicable to the occupational setting where adversity may be defined and viewed as any unfavorable, stressful, traumatic, or difficult situation that is encountered by the employee. A substantial body of literature has been developed on the industrial and organizational adversities that the workforce is currently experiencing, and those include the intense and heavy workload, pressure of deadlines, no peer or supervisory support, and long working hours that result in work-life imbalance. Evidently, prolonged exposure to those adversity causes may result in exhibiting signs of burnout, emotional exhaustion, and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment. Consequently, adversity, in any form, is unquestionably a challenge as well as a potential threat to an individual's performance and well-being (Fisher, et al., 2018).

The second distinguishing feature of resilience is positive adaptation also known as reintegration, which refers to effective coping when confronted with hardship (Masten, 2001). According to Tugade and Fredricson (2004), the individual returns to a consistent level of well-being or performance or even bounces beyond it (Luthar, et al., 2000). As a consequence, resilience is often compared to the elastic band, which can stretch and snap back to its original state (Riopel,

2020). As discussed in the previous paragraph, the literature on resilience has revealed through the years the diverse forms of its existence and suggests that it can occur at multiple levels and manifest differently (Guo & Anderson, 2018). It is crucial to emphasize the fact that resilience builds on the ideas of positive psychology however, it has been studied and examined across a range of other disciplines, including psychiatry, sociology, business, management and more recently, biological disciplines, including genetics, epigenetics, and neuroscience (Hartmann, et al., 2020).

Given, the current high-profile debate, it is not quite surprising to say that trying to describe resilience is like attempting to define an undefinable, controversial term. Nonetheless, three primary conceptualizations have emerged during the last few years. Earlier practitioners viewed resilience as a steady personality quality, an extraordinary capacity held by few (Masten, 2001). This implies that individuals are generally better equipped to withstand adversity and setbacks than non-resilient people. For this reason, researchers utilized the words ego-resiliency and psychological resilience for this trait attribute (King, et al., 2015). Others have defined resilience as a dynamic process of disruption and reintegration in which an individual demonstrates stress resistance, reflectiveness and positive responses when confronted with new and stressful situations. Evidence for in support of this position can be found in Luthar et al.'s (2000) research study where they stated that resilience is "a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity" (p. 543). This perspective treats resilience as a malleable phenomenon that can be cultivated, through the use of cognitive transformation and personal growth training. Adding to the above, a considerable number of studies on psychological capital demonstrated a state-like nature of resilience. To illustrate, this perspective refers to resilience as an unfolding progression that emerges in response to a number of contingencies and results in a positive outlook, adaptation, and an ordinary magic. Resilience does not require extraordinary resources instead it arises naturally from the interaction of basic adaptive systems that foster and protect human development (Hartmann, et al., 2020).

Taking everything into account, each of these theoretical positions make an important contribution to our understanding of resilience, however for the purposes of this research study,

resilience would be conceptualized as a process since this viewpoint allows us to consider temporal and developmental aspects that are important in the study of resilience especially, in the corporate world (Fisher, et al., 2018).

Resilience in the Corporate World

Undoubtedly, resilience is a key factor in constructively responding and fostering an ability to cope with changing work environments (Britt, et al., 2016). Even in the face of repeated exposure to harsh working conditions or environments, employee resilience can be developed, to support rebounds from challenges, conflict, and failure. In general, this term has been examined in a variety of industries and professions, including corporate environment, the healthcare sector, the social work profession, educational setting, the police and the military (Hartmann, et al., 2020; Collins, 2007; Guo & Anderson, 2018).

Research on the outcomes of resilience has been found that it is positively associated with organizational performance outcomes, work engagement, organizational commitment, and negatively associated with emotional exhaustion and burnout (Collins, 2007). Furthermore, proponents suggested the fact that, resilient individuals were more likely to engage in organizational citizenship behavior, and that resilience enabled them to maintain high levels of motivation and exert more effort at work (Rees, et al., 2015). In addition, there is growing evidence that resilience is positively related to employees' work satisfaction and sense of career fulfillment in general. A strong correlation has also been found between employees' social competencies, such as emotional intelligence or empathy (Collins, 2007). Consistent with self-determination theory, (Ryan & Deci, 2000) researchers have also documented that when employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are satisfied, they tend to display higher levels of resilience (Verleysen, et al., 2015). Those three needs are considered as the fundamental determinants of human behavior thus experiencing a sense of volition and freedom, feeling effective, loved, and cared for are vital for the individual to demonstrate resilience.

An equally significant finding from prior studies, regarding resilience is the fact that it can be cultivated by setting limits and maintaining an optimal work-life balance, as rest and social contact during leisure time offer the opportunity to refill depleted resources (Marques & Berry,

2021; Hartmann, et al., 2020). At the same time, academics have begun to investigate how the work context in which employees are situated is connected to their resilience in addition to the psychological and interpersonal aspects (Britt, et al., 2016). In this regard, scholars have focused on the work resources, and found that social support and feedback from others in the workplace is positively related to resilience. To illustrate, social support gives the opportunity to individuals to talk about and work through stressful experiences and to debrief after encountering challenges at work. Referring to the theory of high-quality connections, Stephens, et al., (2013) found that an individual's emotional carrying capacity, defined as "the capacity to constructively express positive and negative emotions within a relationship", was positively linked to the employees' resilience and mediated the effects of relationship closeness.

It can be seen from the above analysis that, nowadays all people have battles to fight and challenges to overcome and according to Eric Greitens (2015) "it's often in those battles and challenges that we are most alive: it's on the frontlines of our lives that we earn wisdom, create joy, forge friendships, discover happiness, progress, and do purposeful work and this is what Resilience is all about".

Career Sustainability

Without a doubt, careers unfold in a dynamic and an unpredictable economic environment, and consequently, "sustainability of careers has become an increasingly salient concern for individuals, organizations, and societies" (Chin, et al., 2021, p. 1). Indeed, career sustainability is an emerging concept that has a major theoretical significance as well as practical value (De Vos, et al., 2018). Having considered this, it is reasonable to look at Arthur et al., (1989) conceptualization of career. In essence, the authors stated that career is "the evolving sequence of a person's working experience over time." Drawing on this conceptualization, De Vos, and Van der Heijden (2015) defined career sustainability as the "sequences of career experiences reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, thereby crossing several social spaces, characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual" (p. 7).

It could be also said that, for individuals, sustainable careers can result in a consistent source of income and satisfaction of needs, and disruptions such as career breaks or switching

career path could be prohibitive in terms of loss of livelihood and stress. The meaning of these terms, sustainability, and career, is not static, as they have a dynamic and ever-evolving nature that appears to be a process, not necessarily a destination (Lawrence, et al., 2015).

Career Sustainability Literature

The literature on career sustainability is in its infancy. Even the commonly adopted definition of career sustainability, by many scholars, is deemed as lacking conceptual clarity with no accepted indicators for accurately defining this phenomenon (Barthauer, et al., 2020). Notwithstanding such criticism and after introducing the developmental history of the philosophy of sustainable careers, Lawrence et al. (2015) claimed that until now this concept “has been largely implicit” (p. 432) consequently the authors suggested that sustainable careers have three key dimensions, namely: person, time, and context.

The "person" dimension refers to the authors' investigation of how people might be active agents in the construction of their own sustainable career plans. By time, they refer to the fundamentally dynamic nature of the sustainability of the career and to how it may be developed through time. Finally, by emphasizing the context, the researchers acknowledge that careers do not occur in a vacuum and that, as such, the environment in which they are enacted may play a significant role in the creation of an individual's professional path (Lawrence, et al., 2015). Based on these core elements of the existing theory on sustainable careers and according to Savicka's (2005) prior study, even though individuals are the central actors in their career construction, the degree of their activeness and agency is likely to depend on and interact with several dimensions of their social environment. Family norms, organizational policies, occupational sector, country, and cultural factors can all be contextual influences that extend over time and throughout individuals' professional lives (Savickas, 2005).

Moreover, proponents have suggested that the topic of career sustainability can be approached and discussed from slightly different perspectives and angles. Herman and Lewis (2012) investigated how mothers may attain the sustainability of their careers, Baldrige and Kulkarni (2017) examined how individuals with a disability, for instance hearing loss, can build a sustainable career, and Kossek, et. al., (2014) explored long-term career growth in relation to

work-life balance. Furthermore, the literature on career sustainability postulated the fact that leadership, which is an organizational factor, has a considerable impact on career longevity and has been widely addressed in the context of stimulating work passion, reducing burnout, clarifying identity orientation, and boosting career satisfaction (Bozionelos & Cai-Hui, 2020). All such factors are closely related and relevant to career sustainability, although few studies have identified a direct link between leadership and career sustainability (Fang, et al., 2021).

In addition, sustainability of careers benefits multiple stakeholders where apart from individual career actors, employers benefit from their employees' knowledge, skills, energy, and other capacities which ensure sustainable performance and, hence, survival and prosperity of the business in the longer term (Baruch, 2015; De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2017). Consequently, the responsibility is held not only by the individual but also by organizations to develop sustainable careers that meet the needs of the present without compromising or jeopardizing future generation's capacity to do the same (Bozionelos & Cai-Hui, 2020).

Career Sustainability and HRM

For several years, the underlying belief of career studies has been that careers reflect individuals' continuing employment in professions that allow them to evolve personally through time (Richardson, et al., 2017). However, individuals widely differ on their views on how personal growth should occur in order to be regarded as effective and enduring. Recently, the sustainable career paradigm has started to gain momentum, and is being studied in connection with HRM policies and practices, aging, and motivation, learning agility, and employability (De Vos, et al., 2018; Kossek, et al., 2014; Richardson, et al., 2017). Undoubtedly, organizations play a critical role in promoting sustainable careers through their human resource (HR) management by providing individuals different resources and supporting them on how to manage the excessive demands that may alter the balance between work performance and wellbeing.

Adding to this, De Vos and Van der Heijden (2017) used the term sustainable human resource management (HRM) as a starting point. They highlighted four fundamental criteria of a sustainable career as follows: one that fits well with one's professional and life values, provides sufficient and adequate job security and a sense of well-being, and ensures a certain level of

flexibility to meet one's changing career choices. In 2018 they extended their seminal work by proposing three core indicators that through the involvement of the HRM can make careers sustainable, which are health, happiness, and productivity (De Vos, et al., 2018).

Specifically, health encompasses both physical and mental health, and refers to the dynamic fit of the career with one's mental and physical capacities. Physical demands might not be impactful in the early stages of a profession, but their influence on an individual's physical condition such as the ability to sleep well, might become apparent as one grows older. It is vital to emphasize the fact that, if not initiatives are taken to preventively deal with these strains, they may become even more impactful. The same holds for the effects of mental demands, which might only become noticeable at a certain point in one's career when, for instance due to increase in demands, and life roles an individual is no longer capable of dealing with a stressful job and drops out due to burnout (De Vos, et al., 2018). According to De Vos, et al., (2018) happiness refers to the subjective elements of feeling successful or satisfied with one's career when seen from a broader life perspective. For many people, happiness is the primary life goal, and it concerns the dynamic fit of the career with one's beliefs, career objectives, or needs regarding work-life balance or personal growth, which can be captured through measurements of subjective career success or career satisfaction. As these needs, and what contributes to feelings of career success or satisfaction, are likely to change over the course of one's career, this aspect of sustainable careers cannot be fully grasped or understood when looking at a single snapshot in time (De Vos, et al., 2018). Productivity refers to good performance in one's current job as well as great employability prospects or career potential in the future. Thus, productivity includes both work and career performance.

Recent research based on this framework has mainly focused on the importance of individual or contextual factors related to career management in promoting career sustainability. Most studies have focused on competencies, and psychological resources, organizational factors, employer-related contextual aspects, or working conditions. As illustrated by the notion of the dynamic person-career fit, health, happiness, and productivity are three aspects that interact

dynamically are considered as the core of sustainable careers. Also, they are essential not only for the individuals but also for the organization and the broader context (Fang, et al., 2021).

To summarize, according to De Vos et al., (2018) a sustainable career incorporates continuous learning, periodic renewal, the security that comes with employability, and a harmonious fit with broader life roles. The keys to crafting a sustainable career are knowing yourself, what fascinates you, what you do best and not so well, what energizes you, and being acutely attuned to the fields and companies you're interested in, so that you can discover places where you can add value (Verleysen, et al., 2015). A sustainable career is built upon the capacity of the individual to demonstrate that he/she can fill a need for which someone is willing to pay for. This is accurate not just when establishing a business or looking for a new job, it's also an important springboard, starting point, for refining your current job and your career trajectory to make it more ideal (Chin, et al., 2021).

The Accounting profession

It is well accepted that, changes in professional careers have increased in number and magnitude in recent years, as the world of work is undergoing a major transformation driven by various "megafactors" (Barthauer, et al., 2020). Technological advances, self-directed careers, the gig economy, a greater degree of business volatility are redefining the workplace and reshaping the future of the accounting profession. Nevertheless, there is a certain level of consensus in considering that the accounting profession is critical for building and creating sustainable organizations, with accountants even presented as possible "saviors" of the business world since they hold the key to changing our flawed economy (Olivier, 2010).

Bearing this in mind, it is important to note that accountants undertake important responsibilities and roles, such as providing assistance in order to effectively manage organizational risk, evaluating, and analyzing information to help improve internal decision making, and generating detailed reports that provide a more complete picture of corporate performance (Wanderley, 2022). Moving on, of central concern is the fact that, numerous studies have demonstrated that technology will have the greatest influence on the future of accounting profession, which is why their function will become even more important in the next years to come

(Moll & Yigitbasioglu, 2019). Correspondingly, digital advances may present an opportunity for accountants to increase new possibilities and add value to companies through their practice. Noting the compelling and demanding nature of accounting profession employees should constantly expand their knowledge on legislation and international auditing standards, new emerging technologies, as well as attend to seminars and trainings to upscale their skills and abilities (Moll & Yigitbasioglu, 2019).

However, it is crucial to recognize that the accounting profession is subject to different challenges and stressors which can be classified into three types: role conflict, role ambiguity, and work overload. In essence, role conflict refers to having to respond to different types of stressors that cannot be satisfied at the same time, role ambiguity consists of a lack of information necessary to complete a task, and work overload is having too much work to perform on a tight deadline (Guo & Anderson, 2018). Empirical evidence shows that the above-mentioned strains are interconnected and may be catastrophic for the well-being and performance of the employee. Role conflict may be prevalent when there is lack of information and control, and the individual should put excessive effort in order to manage to reach an adequate level of performance. This, in turn, has an impact on personal exhaustion, which is one of the dimensions of burnout (Barthauer, et al., 2020). Furthermore, auditors experience pressure since they must be independent yet simultaneously maintain a positive business relationship with the customer. At the personal level, accountants have an incentive to maintain a healthy client relationship since the financial departments of customers may be their next professional destination (Olivier, 2010).

Without a doubt, the demand for accounting services is constantly growing, the volume of work remains overwhelming for most accounting professionals, and companies are finding it increasingly difficult to retain people to handle it all. By the same token, employee turnover in public accounting companies is considered to be an issue (Chi, et al., 2013). To illustrate, annual turnover rates at accounting companies, have risen to more than 25% from roughly 17% a few years ago. Furthermore, practitioners relatively recent found that turnover is linked to audit quality. Evidence for in support of this position can be found, in the Persellin et al'. , (2015) research study which examined the extent to which workload and correspondingly turnover affected audit quality.

In essence, the authors conducted a survey of 776 current and former auditors of various ranks from small, medium, and large firms and discovered that “auditors were working, on average, five hours per week above the threshold at which they believe audit quality began to deteriorate and often twenty hours above this threshold at the peak of busy season” (Smith & Emerson, 2017). Adding to this the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB, 2015) argued that “a comparatively high rate of turnover, auditor transfer and workload within a firm may adversely affect audit quality and services”.

However, it is worth noting that the turnover problem in public accounting appears to be a global and intergenerational phenomenon. For example, Gertsson, et al., (2017) investigated the factors that impact public accounting turnover in Sweden and found that younger workers were more driven by status and material motivations than their older counterparts. Moreover, Chi, et al., (2013) observed that over 77% of staff auditors in a Taiwanese public accounting company left the firm during a ten-year span and found that gender, performance ratings, and salary to be significant predictors of departure. Indeed, according to Nouri & Parker, (2013), public accounting turnover research has identified turnover problems in several other countries including Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Ireland, and Singapore.

Furthermore, there is evidence that the negative ramifications of audit turnover have filtered down to the classroom as a study of accounting students in China found that student views of excessive turnover in public accounting deterred them from pursuing the public sector in favor of private employment (Nouri & Parker, 2013). For this reason, there has been stimulated considerable research on the antecedents to turnover intentions which suggested that factors such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction can act as inhibitors to turnover intentions (Nouri & Parker, 2013). Nevertheless, further research in this particular sector is needed for theory and practice in order to provide recommendations for accountant's career retention, progression, and psychological well-being.

Accounting profession in Cyprus

Currently, as Cyprus experiences a relatively stable growth in tourism, provision of professional financial and fiduciary services, emergence of the Fintech industry and start-ups,

accounting and bookkeeping will be in high demand as these sectors expand their operations alongside a rapidly recovering economy (European Institute of Management & Finance, 2022). As a result, the accounting industry in Cyprus has plenty of potential for growth and stability. According to leading statistics portal Statista, the income of accounting activities in Cyprus has consistently increased over the last decade, rising from around 340 million Euros in 2010 to an estimated 520 million Euros in 2020. Additionally, given its privileged geographic location, steady political environment, low tax rate and educated workforce, Cyprus will remain as a gateway to Europe for the Middle East, Northern Africa, Russia and beyond, attracting new businesses that will undoubtedly require accounting and bookkeeping services (European Institute of Management & Finance, 2022; Statista, 2019).

As Helen Brand, CEO of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, said during a visit to Cyprus back in 2015, the accounting profession, in general, “can play an important role, particularly either in business or as advisors to small businesses, who will always be the backbone of generating jobs and economic growth for countries like Cyprus.”

Resilience and career sustainability in the accounting profession

Resilience and career sustainability, together, embody today's key social, economic, and environmental goals, to build systems that enhance, rather than degrade the world around them, and in turn that can withstand inevitable shocks of environmental and technological changes. By the same token, career sustainability and Resilience may be seen of as the “two sides of the same coin” and maintaining and increasing resilience can be an indicator of career sustainability (Fergusson, et al., 2020). Moreover, researchers propose that individuals with sustainable careers are capable of gaining knowledge and learn from key experiences either positive or negative, that they acquired through their careers. Correspondingly, they can take advantage of that personal and contextual knowledge to achieve productive, healthy, and successful careers over time (De Vos, et al., 2018).

At this point it is crucial to mention the fact that, these two notions, resilience and career sustainability, have recently come into use in the literature of accounting profession and they revolve around diverse lines of enquiry such as sustainable organizations, how HR practices impact on the development of social capital, the role of the workforce as an organizational and

professional resource and finally well-being and performance (Kossek et al., 2014; Richardson, et al., 2017). For this reason, it can be considered as critical to explore them in relation to the Audit sector especially in this constantly changing and volatile times that Cyprus is experiencing.

Chaytor, in particular, the ACCA and the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) (2021) published a report, which revealed that generation Z is concerned about the future of accounting profession. To illustrate, this report mentions well-being as a key issue and that in their attempt to build a Sustainable career, individuals are searching for organizations or employers which support their mental health and provide a good work-personal life balance which according to the literature are all related to Resilience (Britt, et al., 2016). Another important aspect revealed by this research was the fact that, for 58% of the respondents, the “lack of job opportunities/job security” was the main concern about the future. Correspondingly, this concern of generation Z is explained by the fact that people during a very formative stage of their careers experience a kind of crisis that none of the previous generations that are actively working today have faced, they come to realize that the work environment is unstable, ever-changing, overwhelming, and demanding (Olivier, 2010).

However, there is growing empirical and practical support for the efficacy of resilience as a counteracting influence on the adverse effects of the current corporate world. To illustrate, the research study of Smith, et al., (2020) suggested that resilience training can enhance the capacity of the individuals employed in the audit sector, to cope with the challenges and risks that unfold during their professional practice. It represents a potentially cost-beneficial intervention for firms to address the high cost of staff turnover and increase the individual's potential career sustainability.

Moving on, of central concern is the fact that, according to the ACCA and PwC (2019) report, career routes will continue to evolve in accordance with the “macro” trends that are occurring globally, for instance, flexible work, hybrid way of working, greater life expectancy, and lifelong learning. Consequently, career paths will be difficult to foresee more than two to three years in advance as they are increasingly likely to deviate from the formal path and will contain mechanisms that allow people to “enter” and “exit” their professional trajectories (ACCA & PwC, 2019).

Therefore, a focus on fostering resilience and sustainable careers in the accounting profession as well as understanding how individuals and organizations can promote flexible and sustainable career paths in light of the increasing turbulence and uncertainty is of paramount importance (Tomlinson et al., 2018; Van der Heijden et al., 2020). Taking everything into account, sustainable career endures over time, and is defined by development, conservation, and renewal of the working individual's career-related resources, as well as personal attributes such as proactivity and resilience that aid in career self-management (Valcour, 2015, p. 22) The key question is how professional accounting careers will adapt, how the skills will transform, and how learning in the profession will evolve as it takes on a central role in establishing and protecting individuals and organizations in a sustainable future (De Vos, et al., 2018).

Present research study

It can be seen from the above analysis that is imperative to fill the gap that exists in the literature and support new studies on how accountants may overcome multiple work role transitions as well as how they can pursue professional career paths that are multidimensional, and sustainable by nature (Fergusson, et al., 2020). This in turn will allow them to proactively prepare for desirable role transitions, adapt more effectively and positively to imposed work changes throughout their careers and be resilient.

Recognizing the interconnection of environment and societal contexts and steering these linkages down to more sustainable routes are critical to people's future well-being. As a result, inter- and transdisciplinary methods to problem-driven and solution-oriented research have acquired significant popularity in recent decades, as seen by the growth of the area of sustainability science and resilience (Nouri & Parker, 2013).

For this reason, this qualitative research study will delve into this issue and examine the two concepts of resilience and career sustainability in the accounting profession in Cyprus, specifically in the private sector. Having reviewed those two key themes in the relevant literatures three research questions will be addressed through the study. The first research question concerns "How do accountants perceive resilience". The main purpose is to broaden our understanding on the concept of resilience and gain a holistic view of the psychological insights of individuals in this

profession. The second question is related to "Which are the factors that influence resilience", so as to reveal the personal, professional, environmental, and contextual elements of resilience and obtain detailed descriptions of people's experiences in their daily professional lives. Finally, the last research question is: "How do those factors affect their potential career sustainability". By examining the factors which affect career sustainability, will contribute to identifying the intersection of resilience and career sustainability.

Through the comprehensive exploration of this qualitative research study on the accounting profession in Cyprus, this study aims to deepen our understanding of the challenges regarding career sustainability and resilience. Furthermore, this research will contribute to both theory and practice informing organizations on how they can promote resilience and foster career sustainability that can better assist accountants in dealing with the demands of their profession. It is important to note that, this is the first study conducted in Cyprus which is exploring the two concepts of resilience and career sustainability in relation to the audit sector and thus encouraging and allowing employee to be heard regarding their professional experiences.

In conclusion, it is well-argued that resilience and career sustainability are changing and dynamic concepts (Breda, 2018), which clearly cannot provide "all the answers" but the exploration of them will inform action, give voice, and contribute to the existing literature where individuals and organizations can evolve as they adapt to this new world of work.

Methodology

Introduction

This research study endeavor to discover the social concepts and phenomena of resilience and career sustainability. It stresses on how people and specifically accountants make sense of their experiences in the working environment in an attempt to gain a broader understanding of the social reality of employees, the complexity that governs human behavior and to bring out the "voice" and discourse of the individuals themselves in the research (Issari & Pourkos, 2015)

Methodological design and approach

In order to satisfy the objectives of the research study, a qualitative methodology design was utilized (Mohajan, 2018). This method was chosen on the basis that it is exploratory and offers

a complete description and analysis of a research subject, without limiting the scope of the research and the nature of the participant's responses (Collis & Hussey, 2013). At this point, it is important to mention the fact that, the theoretical perspective utilized was "Phenomenology". This type of research was selected due to the fact that, resilience, and career sustainability, are concepts which there is lack of knowledge and a common framework in the existing literature. Furthermore, phenomenological approach was portrayed as the ideal type since it gives the opportunity to engage with another individual's "lifeworld" and investigate the subjective states and insider perspectives of how accountants perceive resilience, the factors that influence resilience and potential career sustainability (Lawthom & Tindall, 2011).

Data collection method and tools

As far as data collection method is concerned, the research study involved in depth interviews (Rabionet, 2011). The main advantage of interviews is that they involve personal and direct contact between interviewers and interviewees giving the opportunity to identify participant's emotions, feelings and opinions as well as eliminate non-response rates. Specifically, for the purposes of this research, semi-structured interviews were used, since they offer flexibility in terms of the flow of the interview, thereby leaving room for the generation of conclusions that were not initially meant to be derived (Alsaawi, 2014). It is vital to note the fact that, some certain questions were prepared, so as for the researcher to guide the interview towards the satisfaction of research objectives, but additional questions were made encountered during the interviews (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Overall, the participants were asked to answer seven-open ended questions which concerned the way in which the concept of resilience is understood and sustainable within the audit profession but also the potential impact of various environmental or contextual factors on both resilience and career sustainability.

It is worth noting the fact that a pilot interview, which was included in the data analysis, was conducted with a person who met the selection criteria of the sample, using the interview protocol. The ultimate goal was to determine the "effectiveness" of the tool, and whether it met the specifications of clarity, coherence, completeness, appropriate structure, and extent (Issari & Pourkos, 2015).

Sample selection/participants

The method of purposive sampling was adopted to develop the sample of the research under discussion (Mohajan, 2018). According to this method, which belongs to the category of non-probability sampling techniques, participants were selected on the basis of their professional experience. Therefore, an active and deliberate selection of the sample was carried out based on the years of professional experience of the accountants, which should have been at least 5, and to work on private sector, so that the members respond in the best way to the purposes and questions of the research. In the current study, the sample included 10 experienced accountants from different private audit organizations in Cyprus, in which 5 were women and 5 men. Their years of professional experience ranged from 5 to 29. Also, the age range of the sample is 27 – 52 years. The goal of this specific sample selection method was not the generalization and representativeness of the sample in the general population but the identification of information-rich cases (Mohajan, 2018).

Research process

The researcher reached out to audit practitioners via phone and the consent and information forms were initially sent out to them explaining the purpose of the research study and the procedure which would be followed. Moving on, individual interviews were conducted via an online meeting which lasted approximately 20 – 30 minutes and were completed over a period of one month, from early October to the end of November 2022. Online meetings were conducted via Skype rather than face-to-face due to the fact that, it was more convenient for the participants.

Participants were initially asked about their years of professional experience and the position in the private organization where they were assigned to. Next, they were asked about their general understanding of the concept of resilience in relation to their role as an accountant, whether they believe accountants should be resilient and the factors that may have an impact on both resilience and career sustainability. Specifically, they were asked about their career trajectory in the audit function (See the detailed interview protocol in Appendix A). It is important to mention the fact that, participants did not receive a definition of resilience or career sustainability. Furthermore, the 10 semi-structured interviews of the accountants were conducted using a tape recorder and then

transcribed and written down after they had been heard several times. Finally, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis

The method of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was utilized to identify, describe, report and thematize recurring semantic patterns of meaning within and across the qualitative data. Thematic analysis was used in order to carry out an analytical recording of the codes which are the building blocks for themes, that emerged from interviews (Issari & Pourkos, 2015). This type of data analysis provides the opportunity for experiential research, which not simply summarize the data content, but identifies and interpret key features of the data, guided by the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Also, parts of Gioia Methodology was used in order to interpret the results of career sustainability (Gioia, et al., 2012). This combination of data analysis approach was more suitable for this specific research study since it examines two concepts, resilience, and career sustainability.

Moving on, in terms of epistemology, the essentialist approach was utilized as it can provide cognitive access to the pre-existing experiences and actions of the participants in the context of accounting. In addition, the type of data analysis followed was the rich thematic description of the entire set of data, so as to give a more general sense of the dominant and important themes identified (Tsiolis, 2015). This type of analysis was considered particularly useful as the concepts of resilience and career sustainability still present several research gaps. Furthermore, it is important to note that, the themes presented in the data emerged through the inductive approach, as both themes and data were closely related to each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through the use of inductive analysis, the process of coding the data was carried out without attempting to integrate the research elements into a pre-existing coding framework. In addition, the topics were identified at a semantic level, as the superficial and explicit concepts related to the perception of resilience and career sustainability as well as the individual aspects that contribute to those phenomena in the context of Audit sector were identified.

Important to mention is the fact that, the six steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed for conducting the thematic analysis. Initially, a familiarization with the data was

carried out and the initial ideas related to the examined phenomenon of resilience were recorded. Following, coding was used in order to produce initial codes which were then combined to reveal possible themes or patterns that emerged from the data. The items were then reviewed to achieve internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, the essence of each topic was determined, its detailed analysis and the way in which it fits into the wider context.

Ethical considerations

The protection of human subjects through the application of appropriate ethical principles is important in any research study as it was for the existing. In a qualitative study, ethical considerations have a particular resonance due to the in-depth nature of the study process. For this reason, four important ethical issues were taken into account in this study, and these are discussed below (Shaw, 2003).

To begin with, the ethical principle of informed consent was ensured according to which all information related to the research project was available to the participants and transparency was achieved (Isari & Pourkos, 2015). The participants were informed both orally and in writing, with a consent and information form, about the reason and purpose of the research, the procedures that were to be followed, and finally the possible benefits and risks of their participation (See the Consent Form & Information Form in Appendix B). Also, it was made clear to the participants that their participation in the research was free and voluntary and if they initially agreed to be involved, they had the right at any time to withdraw from the entire research process, as well as to request the deletion of the data produced from their interviews, without any cost (Shaw, 2003).

Regarding the personal data of the participants, absolute confidentiality was maintained. For this reason, the information collected was anonymized and pseudonyms were used in order to protect the individuals and not reveal their identity to third parties (Shaw, 2003). Moreover, their personal information remained confidential not only during the research, but also after the analysis of the findings and their utilization in general. In addition, written consent was obtained from the participants to record the interview in audio files for their further study (Shaw, 2003). It is worth noting that signed consent forms and original recordings were kept on the researcher's computer on

an encrypted drive, to which only the researcher had access, until the examination committee confirmed and reviewed the thesis results.

Findings

The purpose of this research study is to explore the “how” and “why” the concepts of resilience and career sustainability operate as they do in the audit profession, delving into each accountant’s experiences, emotions, and perceptions. The thematic analysis of the data revealed the following 2 major themes and 1 aggregate dimension: (1) The complexities of accounting profession, (2) Resilience as a dynamic process, (3) The integrative nature of career sustainability (See the thematic map in Appendix C). It is important to note the fact that the afore-mentioned themes are accompanied by sub-themes, codes, or data sets, as well as corresponding interview excerpts and the aggregate dimensions are accompanied by 2nd order themes and 1st order concepts. The above-mentioned are summarized in the table below.

Table A

Themes	Sub-themes	
<i>The Complexities of the accounting profession</i>	Workload, Long working hours, Increased demands, Challenges, Competitive environment	
<i>Resilience as a dynamic process</i>	Positive adaptation, psychological stability, Coping strategies, Progression	
Aggregate dimensions	2 nd order Themes	1 st order Concepts
<i>The integrative nature of career sustainability</i>	Organizational dimension	Rewards, Flexibility, Career opportunities, Support from superiors/colleagues
	Contextual/Environmental dimension
	Personal Aspect of Life	Resilience, Love for the profession, Personal effort, After work activities

The complexities of the accounting profession

The accounting profession is under constant pressure to evolve and meet the needs of the rapidly changing business world. Correspondingly, the complexities of the accounting profession

were particularly highlighted in all of the participants' narratives (See codes and relevant excerpts in Appendix D). PA very persuasively stated:

“Audit is one of the most important professions in the world. Without accurate and reliable financial information businesses and economies would crumble, that is the reason why it has so many complexities” [PA].

Workload

Undoubtedly, corporate accountants during the last few years are facing an increasing workload due to:

“The new regulations and standards which are set by the authorities...employers tend to increase the workload of their employees” [AK].

Elaborating on the heavy workload that exists and the inadequately staffed organizations MT said:

“There are strict deadlines and pressure that comes from the fact that you have to handle the financial statements of too many companies and clients...so there is too much workload and few employees to deal with it” [MT].

Moving on, MP remarked that:

“The heavy workload makes the profession difficult...and sometimes you cannot manage it. But it is important to note that it is not the actual complexity of the work itself but the complexity of the environment that adds this pressure to us as auditors” [MP].

Long working hours

The finance industry is known for its “unspoken rule” and behavioral expectation of long working hours. This was portrayed by most of the participants and particularly by GP:

“There are periods during the year where auditors and accountants in general, need to work long working hours. There were times where we used to work 24/7 for 2 or 3 months, bearing in mind that we had deadlines from a list of companies” [GP].

MP goes on to clarify:

“But I have to say that this is not the case for the whole year, but only between January and April, which is considered as a busy period. Then you have more let's say steady

working hours. So, that is perceived usually as acceptable. But, if you work 12 months for 15 to 16 hours per day including weekends, then of course this is detrimental for you and is not tolerable”[MP].

Finally, AM confessed with frustration that working hours tumble on personal time:

“I work so many hours and when I return back home, I don't have the time or energy to do something else, to meet with friends and devote enough time to my family. But it is how it is”[AM]

Increased Demands

According to the narratives of the participants, psychological, social, and organizational demands are present for any job as it is for the accounting profession. As AK highlighted:

“Accounting as a profession is very demanding and has a changing environment...for instance one day you may have some financial reporting standards and the next day new regulations will arise...so employers and clients tend to increase also their expectations from you”[AK].

Adding to the above, MG portrayed the fact that the demanding nature of the profession lies within the fact that:

“Its scope is so wide and the obligations due to the authorities are so many....ranging from banking to the government” [MG].

Lastly, as PA stated accountants carry a heavy responsibility and should be accountable for their job:

“Since there are many deadlines imposed by clients, banks, shareholders...and must be meet no matter what. This is particularly demanding...because if the company does not submit the audited accountants in a timely manner, it will face penalties”[PA].

Challenges

There is also, a further point to be considered according to more than half of the participants who emphasized the fact that due to the “changing landscape” accountants encounter various new challenges during their daily professional practice. For instance, as EL stated:

“Every day is challenging and probably something will arise which would be out of your agenda, and you will have a deadline for the day. If I could say a percentage in order to illustrate my professional year, then 75% of our time as accountants is stressful and challenging and 25% is more relaxed” [EL].

Adding to this MP referred to the nature of the challenges saying:

“In our profession you face a lot of adversities and challenges whether those are professional, psychological, or personal like relationships and interactions with your colleagues and superiors” [MP].

Moreover, PA mentioned another challenge which is all about accomplishing the budget set by the employer. Particularly she explained:

“In our company and in general in Audit firms, each employee has a specific budget that must be met during the year...which is a key performance assessment criterion. The challenging part is the fact that we need to meet this budget in order to be accordingly rewarded, by promotions, bonuses and so this aspect creates an additional pressure to us as employees” [PA].

Competitive Environment

The accounting profession comprises of numerous large organizations, and as an industry, today, faces intense competition, especially in Cyprus. As MT illustrated:

“...In Cyprus we are so many accountants...and even more qualified ones. This industry has too many of us, so you have to do something else in order to differentiate yourself...and have a competitive advantage in the market” [MT].

Elaborating on this, EL referred to the fact that nowadays there is a need for all accountants to develop specialized roles and gain expertise:

“Well, once I finished the ACA qualification, I thought that there isn't more to learn in our profession but due to the fact that the market is so broad and competitive you have to do something additional in order to have a more specialized role in a company like for instance, AML”. The best ones, she said, “will specialize and find a niche in their practices...they will not be all things to all people” [EL].

Resilience as a dynamic process

From all the interviews it emerged that resilience it is not a personal characteristic rather than it is a process through years of continuous adaptation and effort to maintain your psychological stability, cope with adversities and manage to progress (See codes and relevant quotes in Appendix E). Particularly, PA mentioned:

“It is a process that you go through the years, improving yourself as a professional and as a person in general”[PA].

Elaborating on the importance of resilience and its developmental nature MP said:

“Resilience would be something that we will all need to have...so it would be kind of a skill or a quality which should be developed to individuals before even entering their professional lives” [MP].

Positive Adaptation

Initially, the participants stated that resilience is the ability of an accountant to adapt and approach situations that may arise in their daily practice in a positive manner. AM specifically stated:

“Well, resilience is all about positive adaptation. As a person I feel that I have this quality because I adapt very easily...I moved from accounting, to corporate and then ended up in audit. I adapt very easily to the changes in environment, depending on the situations and circumstances”[AM].

Furthermore, MP stated the fact that resilience as an adaptive mechanism will be dominant in the future:

“I believe that professionals in the future will have this quality and will adapt more easily because they will see more changes in their life”[MP].

Psychological Stability

Moving on, three participants noted that resilience is all about psychological stability, specifically GM explained:

"I suppose resilience has to do with the fact that you feel proud of what you are doing, you feel stable on your everyday life, that you are doing something that makes you happy. It provides you with psychological stability" [GM].

Elaborating on this, MG persuasively stated:

"It is important to be resilient, sometimes it is not possible because we are human beings after all...but you need to be resilient...to find ways to be psychologically okay...and keep a balance. It is difficult because you go through faces in life. But you try to think the bigger picture" [MG].

Coping Strategies

All of the participants highlighted that resilience has to do with coping and handling the challenges that may arise. Specifically, PA mentioned:

"I believe the main part of resilience is about handling your stress and pressure ...[laugh] cope with the difficulties. Which it was and continues to be quite difficult for me because generally I am a perfectionist and I am accountable for my work, I want to have the best possible audit quality" [PA].

As MT well-stated:

"Being resilient for me is finding ways to manage the pressure and have the coping strategies that allow you to "survive" [MT].

Adding to this AK shared his Big4 experience in order to portray the importance of coping strategies:

"I managed to obtain the ACA title and work for one of the big four firms for 4 years, which was major achievement for me since I encountered many challenges during that period of time....If I have managed to cope with that, I can be considered as resilient" [AK].

Progression

Resilience for several of the participants was considered as a sign of progression.

Specifically, MT mentioned:

“For me being resilient is really important...and I believe I am resilient because I progress in life and in my profession. I started as an associate at the Audit department and throughout the years, I became supervisor of several departments. According to the feedback I gained from my superiors I am a successful employee, and I was titled as the star of the year” [MT].

Furthermore, GM highlighted:

“I believe it is important for every employee, human being to be resilient it does not have to do with being an accountant, it is a quality that of course helps you to progress ...” [GM].

Finally, PA stated:

“Having resilience, it means that you will manage to have career progress, to be capable to overcome the challenges and accelerate your career” [PA].

The integrative nature of career sustainability

Career sustainability through the interviews was considered as a complex concept and as a long, adventurous journey which is affected by many areas of life.

Organizational dimension

The majority of the participants mentioned the fact that rewards either monetary or non-monetary were an important motive for them in order to remain in the profession(See codes and relevant quotes in Appendix F). MP stated:

“Getting rewarded for your job helps a lot...rewards for performance secure the employee in the profession. So, when you see yourself moving up the ladder and progress then most probably you will remain in the profession. Not only monetary rewards also appreciation is important. I believe that the main reason why there is a high employee turnover in this profession is the fact that most of the employees are not appreciated for their job” [MP].

Moving on, MT added:

“Once you remain in the position you will get the benefits and even if you don't like the job 100% the benefits will maintain you in the profession. No one works only for happiness. You work to live” [MT].

Also, flexibility which was introduced in the professional lives of many people during the last few years is considered as one of the most important factors to remain in the profession by the participants. MP explained:

“Flexibility has changed the way in which I was perceiving my job because it allows me to manage my schedule how I want it. Due to the introduction of the hybrid working, things have improved especially because I am out of town, and my job is in Nicosia. It saves me a lot of time. This is the most important reason after the rewards for me to remain in the profession” [MP].

Moreover, GP mentions:

“At some point in time, you have to find your work life-balance and as the years passed, we have progressed in this area, through flexible working arrangements in order to help us and our colleagues to manage our time. These new management styles and decisions are well received by the people” [GP].

Moreover, the narratives of six participants revealed the importance of the support from superiors and colleagues to career sustainability. As AM explained:

“You need to feel that your team is with you, and it will support you in order to get where you need to get. In the company I am currently both my supervisors/partners, and my team are very supportive. We try to help each other with any way we can. This is very important for someone to remain in the profession” [AM].

GP in order to illustrate the importance of the support of superiors shared his personal experience saying:

“To be honest, there were periods where the stress the long working hours, the pressure could lead you to give up. However, I came very close once in my career and that was about 15 years ago because I was working 24/7 for 3 months. At that time when I went to my boss to discuss my intention to leave, she said “ I will not accept your resignation now, take a week off, go rest, think what we could do in order to relieve your stress and come back to discuss again”. That worked in both ways, for me to take some actions to reduce

the hours I was working and also for my employers to stop giving me work which exceeded the capacity of what I could handle” [GP].

Finally, the accounting profession is well-known for its career opportunities as GP mentioned: *“The profession can open doors” [GP].*

Elaborating on this MG, stated:

“What keeps me in the profession is that it is interesting and has so many job opportunities. You can always change departments or positions. As you progress...there are always things to learn...this is one of the professions that will never stop evolving” [MG].

Contextual/Environmental dimension

Nowadays, there is a rapidly changing business and contextual environment that plays a critical role and affects the career of the accountants(See codes and relevant quotes in Appendix G). As MG persuasively stated:

“The times we are living in are very difficult and everything is changing.... Times have changed...being 24 years in the profession the things are not like they used to be...even though we progress with the systems, technology, and programs, that you expected that would be helpful, those factors made our profession even more demanding, more things are expected from us. Those factors influence our career, whether we will progress or maybe pursue something different. This is the new reality” [MG].

Also, GP mentioned:

“Undoubtably, there were some unexpected events in the world that have impacted the career of everyone and led to either fast progression or slow. For instance, the financial crisis of the 2013, this circumstance slowed down the growth of the firm and eventually that led to slow down the career progression of many people. Another example is the covid-19 or now with the war in Ukraine where we lost so much. All these events in the economy can lead to slow down someone’s career even if he/she may have the qualities and skills to advance and excel in the profession” [GP].

Moreover, EL emphasized the fact that the contextual situation influences the choice of career:

“Cyprus is a country that mainly provides services, so accounting/audit profession is widespread within the working population. However, nowadays it seems that many individuals don't pursue a career in accounting because in the post covid-19 era they tend to avoid stressful professions” [EL].

Personal dimension

The majority of the participants brought to light that due to the fact that career in accounting profession is like a “roller coaster” very few remain in this profession until the retirement (See codes and relevant quotes in Appendix H). For this reason, personal commitment, and effort to sustain your career is required. As AM explained:

“I believe that resigning or giving up is a sign of failure, so I never thought about it. It was not an option for me. I try every time to give a 100% of myself. I try with all means to deliver the best results. It needs dedication and effort to sustain your career” [AM].

Rationalization is also important as MG stated:

“We are humans not superhumans we cannot handle everything. But you keep going...you need to put a lot of personal effort” [MG].

GP shared his personal experience and stated that sometimes you need to take actions in order to improve yourself since:

“It is never an easy path you have to work hard. I took the opportunity to attend training programs where you can learn how to manage your stress, yourself, and your colleaguesand during my discussion with my instructor, I realized that I cannot say no to anybody that asks me to do something! At the end, I got a lot of unnecessary work that should not be assigned to me because I used to never say no. So, he asked me: What is the worst thing that can happen if you say no? They will fire you? Because you cannot bear an additional task? Because you are working 12 hours per day and gave you work for 15 hours? Then thinking about it I realized that he was right...For me still sometimes it is

difficult to say no, but I am working on it. Now that I am in a managerial position, I try not to push my colleagues to an extent that will bring them in the situation of burnout” [GP].

Another important factor which helps accountants remain, is the love for the profession as PA explained:

“I learnt through my career that you need to want it so much and love your job, in order to remain in this profession, and have career advancement. You cannot be in the profession without being passionate about it. Otherwise in my opinion you will not last long” [PA].

Also, MP declared:

Definitely, it is a great profession to be in and if I had the choice 9 years ago, I would choose the same profession again...but you need to be ready and be sure that this is the profession you want and not what others have told you to do, or reasons have brought you to this decision” [MP].

Furthermore, as illustrated by most of the participants after work activities are important, as MG mentioned:

“You try to balance things, because you know the hours are very long especially when we have projects and deadlines...during the year end. After work it is really important to do something to relieve your stress, whether it is a hobby or whatever” [MG].

Adding to this PA emphasized:

“Doing activities like gym and pilates helped me relieve my stress and tiredness ...after work” [PA].

AK added:

“Doing excursions to the nature...the nature is a good way to relief your stress either walks or whatever” [AK].

Through the narratives of the participants, it emerged that professional life does not get any easier or more relaxed, however employees need to get stronger and more resilient. Resilience as PA mentioned: *“ensures career sustainability in accounting profession” [PA].*

Moreover, as GM rhetorically questioned:

“If you don't feel stability in the profession or resilient with yourself, how would you remain or continue building your career?” [GM].

Discussion

The findings of the present study provide an understanding of how professionals in the accounting industry of Cyprus experience and perceive the concepts of resilience, and career sustainability, as well as the factors which contribute and affect the individual's capacity to build a long-lasting career. Through the interviews, the complexities inherently linked to the accounting profession were revealed, such as the constantly growing demands of the clients and employers due to new regulations and associated disclosure rules, the competitive environment that exists, and the multifaceted challenges that professionals must overcome in order to be able to cope with their job role (Barthauer, et al., 2020). This pattern of results is consistent with the editorial conducted by Cláudio de Araújo Wanderley (2022) who claimed that the psychological, and emotional demands and challenges are dominant in the accounting profession, and they often incur burnout and chronic levels of stress leading to the end of an accountant's career.

At the same time, particular emphasis was placed on the fact that, the audit industry has been growing gradually in recent years, and auditor workload stress has been intensified (Wanderley, 2022). According to prior statistics, audit industry grows 4.5% per year and as Rose & Palattiyil (2020), characteristically mentioned in their prior research study the heavy workload leaves little time for emotional support, quality of work and professional development, so the efforts of employees to thrive in this environment become quite difficult.

Moreover, the results of this research provide supporting evidence that long working hours are the norm in the accounting profession and has become one of the most important factors affecting the personal life of individuals. According to the narratives, people once they become parents or married, they have to make a significant choice of Family vs Career and usually the choice is family. Consequently, people are leaving the profession at this stage of their life because they cannot manage this timetable anymore. These results are consistent with past research studies which indicated that long working hours have a negative impact on work-life balance and may lead to hypertension, and occupational stress (Hong, et al., 2022).

Adding to the above, the literature on resilience tends to move away from notions of inherently resilient individuals towards a dynamic developmental process that can potentially be influenced by a mix of factors, which this is consistent with the findings of the present study (Rees, et al., 2015). Specifically, positive adaptation, progression in both life and work and coping strategies were understood by most of the participants as some of the major qualities of resilience. These findings are consistent with Fisher et al.'s (2018) work which demonstrated that following the experience of challenges, individuals who exhibit resilience are able to recuperate, maintain, or otherwise optimize their functioning. This in turn suggests that resilience is associated with desirable outcomes related to effective functioning and performance in the workplace (Fisher, et al., 2018). Regarding the finding of emotional stability, Flynn, et al., (2021) found that it is indeed positively related to employee resilience and highlighted the importance of applying emotion regulation strategies in order to ensure that a negative emotional reaction does not overwhelm one's capacity to cope with the demands and challenges of their job role.

It is widely accepted that there is a growing body of research examining the factors that may have an impact on career sustainability (Bozionelos & Cai-Hui, 2020). One of these dimensions according to the narratives of the participants is the organizational and there are four key findings related to this aspect. Specifically, according to the participants, rewards for performance and flexibility are considered as two of the most critical motivators for employees in order to remain in the profession. In the light of the findings of the present study, prior research conducted by Ayman Alhmoud and Husam Rjoub (2019) found that when employees are satisfied with the total rewards offered by their organization, this leads to employee retention. Also, it is considered as greatly beneficial for individuals when organizations are adopting flexible working arrangements in order to better accommodate their employees during busy and stressful times and give them the option to work in a way that better fits their lifestyles, which this finding was consistent with the participant's narratives (Ray & Pana-Cryan, 2021). However, it is worth mentioning the fact that, participants argued that monetary compensation alone is not enough for employees to remain in the profession, intrinsic factors such as career opportunities are vital. This

is also supported by the work of Manzoor, et al., (2021) which portrayed that once the pay exceeds the subsistence level, intrinsic factors neutralize the employee's potential turnover intentions.

Moreover, Hartmann, et al., (2020) found that, social and psychological support provided by colleagues and supervisors was strongly related to employees' resilience and career sustainability which this is consistent with the findings of the existing research study. Social support provides to the individuals the opportunity to actualize their capabilities in a proactive way, talk about and work through stressful experiences and debrief after encountering challenges at work (Hartmann, et al., 2020).

Another factor which contributes to career sustainability is the personal dimension. The burden of responsibility to sustain a career in accounting profession, according to the participants, is not only routed towards the organization but also it is tailored to the personal efforts. This is mainly achieved through persistence, focus, hard-work, and participation in activities of interest outside of work. As Alexander Pope mentioned "the strength of mind is exercise, not only rest" and this was also confirmed by the work of Kapoulitsas & Corcoran (2015) who identified that exercise and other activities of interest are key elements in the promotion of well-being and consequently the sustainability of a career. Furthermore, participants argued that resilience is another important element of the multidimensional concept of career sustainability. Particularly, they illustrated that it is very important for an accountant to be resilient and love the profession, and sometimes it can be considered as a requirement since individuals who exhibit high levels of resilience remain in the accounting profession and those who do not have this quality tend to search for different career paths.

Undoubtedly, both organizations and individuals are affected by the occupational and institutional context in which they operate, and this is considered as the last dimension of career sustainability according to the narratives of the participants. Huge, unplanned events, such as COVID-19, have a significant impact on people's lives and careers, and according to previous research, these are referred to as career shocks (Akkermans, et al., 2018). Another example of a large universal career shock was the 2012 economic crisis, which had a significant impact on many people's lives and eventually led to some people actively changing their career. Employee career

changes do not always result in negative outcomes, but they can also result in positively perceived career experiences, outcomes, and opportunities over time which this is consistent with the results of the present study. Also, according to prior studies technological changes and advancements such as digital transformation have a more substantial impact on the long-term viability of one's career. These disruptive changes have consequences for the individuals who work within them, as their jobs are likely to change or even disappear, making some competencies obsolete while increasing the need for new competencies (Akkermans, et al., 2018).

Taken together, the findings of the present study indicate that careers do not unfold in a vacuum. They are heavily influenced by economic and societal forces and by the multiple contexts in which people engage in as they craft their lives. A sustainable career is one that recognizes not only the influence of certain environmental factors, but also the interconnectedness of work life, family life, and community life (Van der Heijden & DeVos, 2017). The story which emerged through this research study is that career sustainability and resilience are concepts interconnected and resilience is lighting the path towards career sustainability. The complexities of the accounting profession make necessary the ability of the individual to positively adapt to the competitive environment, cope with the ongoing challenges and the massive workload, remain stable in a psychological manner and manage to progress. The weapons on the quiver of the accountant are the rewards that the individual gains through this process, the career opportunities that unfold when someone loves the profession and dedicates his energy and time. Also, during this long journey of career sustainability and resilience the individual has allies his/her colleagues and superiors who through understanding and support they help the person to progress. But also, the most important part of this journey is the person itself who has to put some personal effort and strive for acceleration and achievement. However, sometimes things in life are not under the control of the individual, such as unexpected events that may arise during the lifespan and affect the status quo of the person and the world. It is worth mentioning the fact that, it is not the emergence of the events that matter most but how we respond and react to them. This is what career sustainability and resilience is all about.

Limitations of the Research

Even though the present research study has provided important information about the experience of accountants it is necessary to acknowledge and consider its limitations. Notably, the study consisted of a small sample size of participants, so the findings cannot be generalized to the whole population (Alsaawi, 2014). However, they can be applicable in similar cases by raising relevant topics for discussion between accountants. Also, it is important to mention the fact that there was lack of prior research studies on the topic which could lay a foundation for understanding the concepts of resilience and career sustainability. Another, limitation of this study was the fluency in a language, since the native language of the participants is Greek and some of the participants found it quite difficult to express themselves and elaborate more on their experiences. For this reason, this deficiency should be acknowledged.

Furthermore, the fact that the participants were selected based on years of professional experience may involve some elements of bias as well as the fact that only those who were interested in the topic took part. However, this particular way of selecting participants does not compromise the scope of the data they have collected, nor does it lead to any specific interpretation or experience of resilience or career sustainability. Although the qualitative nature of this study was highly beneficial in increasing understanding of the constructs of resilience and career sustainability it is important to mention the fact that the researcher's interpretations are limited and positioned subjects and may lead to influence the conclusions of the research study (Alsaawi, 2014).

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

The information gathered from this research confirms and reinforces what is reported in the literature on resilience and career sustainability in accounting profession, offering valuable insights into the ways in which experienced accountants in Cyprus perceive the concept of resilience and how the contextual/environmental, organizational, and personal dimension affects their potential career sustainability.

Therefore, through the personal narratives of the accountants, the way in which the accountants manage the complexity of their professional role was achieved. Thus, the findings

provide the possibility of taking support measures as well as developing any interventions to promote resilience and career sustainability that will not be based on academic theories but will consider their personal perceptions, as the need to be "resilient" was duly recognized by the participants. It is therefore obvious that it is necessary to strengthen the organizational support either through the reduction of the workload that is assigned to each employee, but at the same time, on the part of the superiors, to maintain an attitude of support and encouragement of the employees. All these in relation to the individual's personal life must act protectively in order to support this important quality and ensure the well-being of the workforce.

The findings mainly highlighted that resilience and career sustainability are an ongoing business journey. Therefore, throughout the training process, a clearer focus is needed on developing a toolbox of strategies/skills to strengthen resilience of individuals and their capacity to sustain their career. As noted by Kinman and Grant (2011) interventions need to be developed early in an individual's career in order to enhance qualities that may support resilience and career sustainability. Finally, contemporary career theory suffers from a lack of systematic attention to context – that is, the situational constraints and opportunities that affect attitudes and behaviors and the stakeholders operating within this context, as it tends to put a strong emphasis on the individual as the central career actor which this was investigated through this research study (Bozionelos & Cai-Hui, 2020).

Clearly, these strategies are within the sphere of influence of HR professionals, indicating that HRD can play an important role in assisting individuals in recovering and sustaining their careers (De Vos, et al., 2018). Human resources management can also have an impact on the development of more humane organizational cultures that foster a greater sense of altruism, empathy, and prosocial values, thereby enhancing societal well-being through one's work experiences. The timing is good to reinforce that approach in systems, as companies consider how to keep those working from home engaged, how to handle the stressful and long work schedules, or possibly how to implement a generalist approach to their workplaces. HRD has an opportunity in this moment to play a significant role in helping individuals and organizations find and support

resilience, manage the shocks, replenish reduced resources, and build more sustainable careers (De Vos & Van der Heijden, 2015).

It is important to mention that the specific findings for resilience and career sustainability would be reasonable to be further examined with a quantitative study in order to be confirmed. In addition, there is a need to investigate more extensively the factors that may have an impact on career sustainability as well as to make a comparison between experienced and non-experienced accountants in order to establish the contribution of professional experience in dealing with the adversities of everyday life. It would be particularly interesting in future studies to examine career sustainability in different professions in order to have a holistic view of this concept.

Taking everything into account, a sustainable career evokes the notion of a journey where periods of rejuvenation and renewal will be required to ensure its longevity. A variety of challenges will test its ability to survive, suggesting the need for resilience. Like any open system, it will thrive when the interdependence of subsystems, such as work, home, and community, are recognized and supported, rather than considered as separate entities that do not interact and inform the others.

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Appendix A

Interview protocol

Demographics

- Gender :
- Age:
- Years of Professional Experience:
- Department /Service in which you are appointed:
- Position held:

Body

Introductory Questions

1. A. In your opinion, what makes accounting demanding and particularly challenging as a profession?

The nature of the job itself makes the job demanding. Different issues, jurisdictions.

- B. How would you describe your daily professional life?
2. What are your career plans in the accounting profession?

Main questions

1. A. How did you managed through these years to sustain a career in accounting profession?

Actually, it is a path that I have chosen.

- B. How would you describe the trajectory of your career?
2. What does it mean for you to be resilience in relation to your job role as an accountant?
(Probe: Do you feel resilient?)

Resilience is all about being proud of what you are doing. I am doing something stability.

3. If yes, looking back over your years of professional experience what do you think has helped you maintain your personal resilience?

4. Have you ever been in a situation where you were close to giving up? How did you overcome this? What were some of the obstacles towards that end and what about any supports you drew on?

Goals, many times.

5. In your opinion, is it important for an accountant to be resilient? If so, for what reasons?
6. How do you think resilience influences career sustainability? (Probe: Why)

It is a requirement.

7. If a student came to you and told you that she/he would be interested in pursuing a career in accounting what would be your advice?

Really think about it.

8. Is there something else that you would like to mention about your career experiences?

Appendix B

Participant Information Form

The present form intends to provide information regarding the research study of Resilience and Career sustainability in the accounting profession.

For this reason, you are kindly requested to carefully read the following information.

If you have any questions, or if you'd need additional information or clarifications regarding this informative text or the consent form, please do not hesitate to contact me.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the two concepts of resilience and career sustainability in the accounting profession in Cyprus, particularly in the private sector. Adding to this, this research intends to gain a better understanding of what helps accountants maintain their career in the profession as well as their overall individual resilience.

What will the study involve?

The study involves semi-structured individual interviews which will be conducted via an online meeting in Skype. Each will last approximately 30 – 40 minutes and you will be asked to answer open-ended questions regarding your broader understanding of how you managed to sustain your career in the profession, the supports you drew on and the obstacles (what helped your resilience and what made it difficult). Also, you will be requested to answer questions regarding any factors that may have an impact on both your individual resilience and career trajectory. You can of course skip any question that you may not feel comfortable answering. It is important to mention the fact that with your consent the interview will be recorded so that the information you will provide can be further examined by the researcher.

How will your privacy be protected?

I would like to inform and assure you that absolute anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. With your consent, the data gathered during the interview will be recorded in audio files for further examination. Furthermore, the information you will provide will be anonymized, using pseudonyms so that your identity cannot be revealed to third parties. Signed consent forms

and original recordings will be kept on my secure, password-protected computer, to which only I will have access until the examination committee has confirmed and reviewed the thesis results. Furthermore, your information will be destroyed after the completion of my master's degree as it will no longer serve the purpose of the thesis.

What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part?

Your participation in the research does not involve any risk to you, however, a possible inconvenience may be the time you will allocate for your participation. Also, there are no direct benefits for you from participating in this research. However, your contribution to the study is important as it is likely to contribute to both theory and practice informing organizations on how they can promote resilience, foster career sustainability, and better assist accountants in dealing with the demands of their profession.

Why you have been asked to take part?

You have been asked to participate in the existing research study because of your years of professional experience in the accounting profession and the fact that you are employed to an organization in the private sector.

Is your participation mandatory?

Your participation in the research study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to participate without any reason or excuse. However, if you agree to participate, please carefully read the form in your hands, keep it and sign the consent form. Even after you agree to participate, respecting the rules of ethics, you have the right to withdraw from the research if you wish, at any time, and for any reason, without any consequences for you. In this case, you can request the data and information collected from you to be deleted within two weeks after the interview.

What will become of the research results?

The results of the research will serve the requirements of my thesis.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information or clarification, do not hesitate to contact:

Researcher's contact information:

Name: Ioanna Aristou

Email Address: iarist02@ucy.ac.cy

Contact phone: 99185287

Supervisor's contact details:

Name: Andrie Michaelidou, PhD

Visiting Lecturer at the Department of Business & Public Administration

University of Cyprus

<https://ucyweb.ucy.ac.cy/dir/en/component/comprofiler/userprofile/amichael%20>

Email Address: michaelidou.andrie@ucy.ac.cy

Thank you very much.

Participant Consent Form

- I consent to voluntarily participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I will be able to withdraw from the research if I wish at any time and for any reason without any consequences.
- I understand that I can skip any question that I may not feel comfortable answering.
- I understand that I can withdraw my data consent within two weeks after the completion of the interview and in this case, I can request the information collected to be deleted.
- I have understood the purpose and nature of the study as it has been explained to me in the Participant Information Form and I was given the opportunity to ask questions about the research.
- I understand that my participation is in the form of an interview, and I will be asked to answer open-ended questions that will concern my broader understanding of the concepts of resilience and career sustainability.
- I understand that I will not directly benefit from my participation in this research.
- I consent to the fact that my interview will be recorded.
- I understand that absolute anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained regarding my personal data so that my identity cannot be revealed to third parties.
- I understand that parts/quotes from my interview may be referred to in the thesis using a pseudonym.
- I understand that if I tell the researcher that I or anyone else may be at risk, she may be required to report it to the appropriate authorities, but she will discuss it with me first. However, at some cases she may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that the signed consent forms and the original recordings will be kept in the researcher's office and specifically on her computer with a security setting, password until the examination committee confirms and reviews the results of the thesis.
- I understand that a copy of my interview will be kept until the researcher graduates.

- I understand that I have the right to access the information I have provided at any time while it is stored as set out above.
- I understand that I may contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information or clarification, do not hesitate to contact:

Researcher's contact information:

Name: Ioanna Aristou

Email Address: iarist02@ucy.ac.cy

Contact phone: 99185287

Supervisor's contact details:

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Visiting Lecturer at the Department of Business & Public Administration

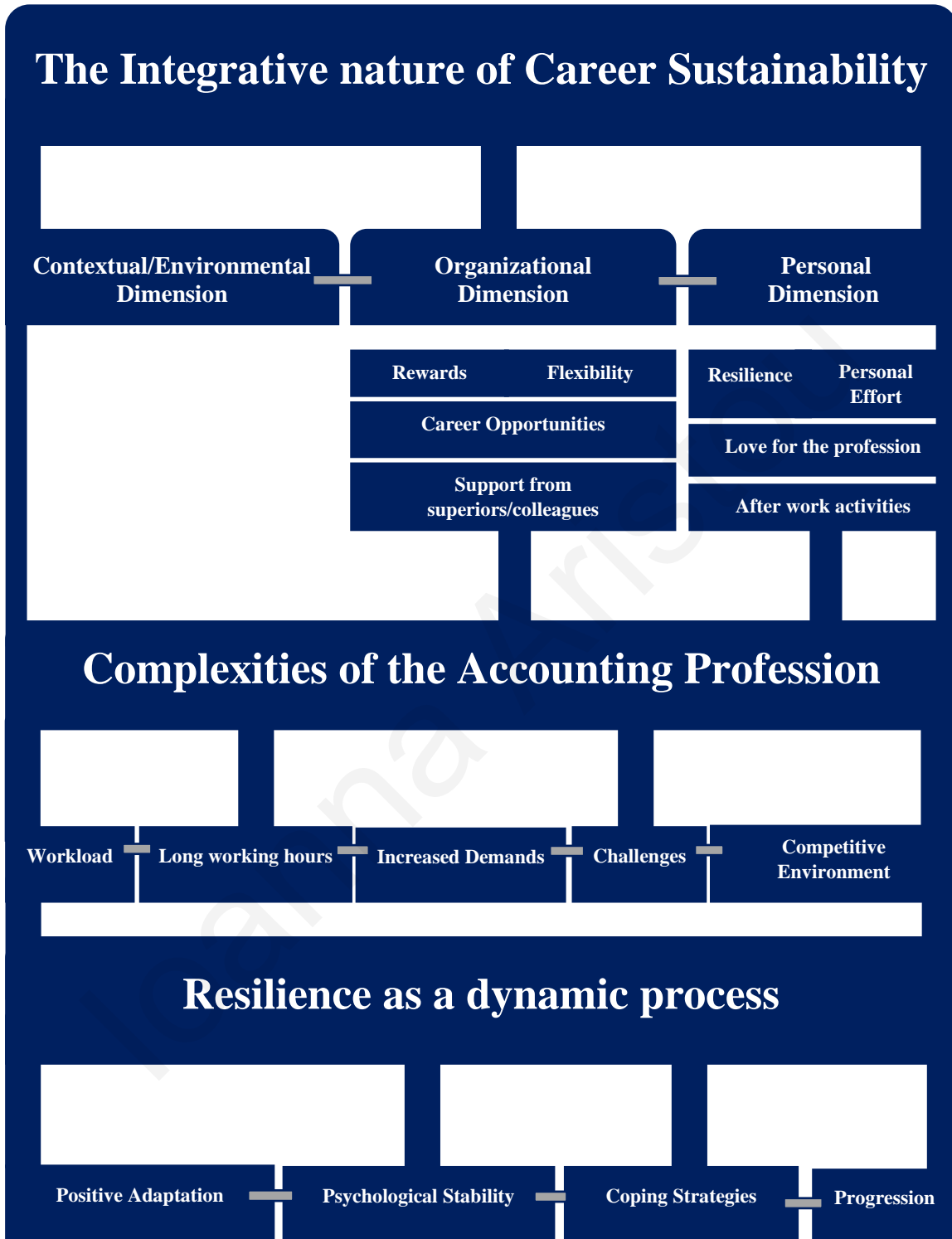
University of Cyprus

<https://ucyweb.ucy.ac.cy/dir/en/component/comprofiler/userprofile/amichael%20>

Email Address: michaelidou.andrie@ucy.ac.cy

Thank you very much.

Appendix C
Thematic Map



Appendix D

1st Theme: The complexities of the accounting profession

The complexities of the accounting profession			
Workload	Long working hours	Increased demands	Challenges
<p>“Due to the new regulations and standards...employers tend to increase the workload of their employees” (Interview AK)</p> <p>“The profession itself is not complicated but the deadlines that are set by the authorities and the demands of clients lead to heavy workload and it makes the profession difficult. It is not the actual complexity of the work but the complexity of the environment” (Interview MP)</p> <p>“The strict deadlines, the pressure that comes from the fact that you have to handle the financial</p>	<p>“The most difficult part of our profession I believe that mainly are the hours that we have to spend in order to meet the deadlines” (Interview AM)</p> <p>“I work so many hours and when I return back home, I don't have the time to do something else, to meet with friends” (Interview AM)</p> <p>“There are periods of time where auditors and accountants in general, need to work long working hours. There were times where we used to work 24/7 for 2 or 3 months, bearing in mind that we have a list of companies in</p>	<p>“[Accounting profession is demanding] due to the newest standards and regulations that exist, the increased demands from the employer....” (Interview AK)</p> <p>“Accounting as a profession is very demanding and has a changing environment...for instance one day you may have some standards and the next day new regulations will arose” (Interview AK)</p> <p>“The nature of the profession itself makes accounting demanding and challenging because you have to deal with</p>	<p>“If I could say a percentage in order to illustrate my professional year, then 75% of our time as accountants is stressful and challenging and 25% is more relaxed. (Interview EL)</p> <p>“If it is a busy period, you have a lot of stress...so some days are easier, and some others are more complicated and difficult. Overall, every day is challenging” (Interview MT)</p> <p>“Moreover, in our company and in general in Audit firms, each employee has specific budget that must be meet during the</p>

<p>statements of too many companies...so there is too much workload and few employees to deal with it" (Interview MT)</p> <p>"Sometimes...you have too much workload that you cannot handle it..." (Interview MT)</p>	<p>our portfolio" (Interview GP)</p> <p>"The hours are very long especially when we have projects and deadlines...during the year end" (Interview MG)</p> <p>"Definitely. Most of the time we have to work extra hours to meet the deadlines. But I have to say that this is not the case for the whole year, but only for few months, mainly between January and April" (Interview MP)</p> <p>"Most of the times we have to work extra hours in order to meet those deadlines and budgeted. The demands of this profession exceed the normal working hours" (Interview PA)</p> <p>"I believe that the worst thing about our profession is the</p>	<p>several types of clients, jurisdictions, and companies who have different issues to handle. It is challenging because you have to adapt and adjust to the needs of every client and the demands of each case and situation" (Interview GM)</p> <p>"It is really demanding because you have deadlines from our listed companies and our clients to deliver them their financial statements" (Interview GP)</p> <p>"The accounting profession is demanding because its scope is so wide and the obligations due to the authorities are so many...ranging from banking to government authorities" (Interview MG)</p>	<p>year...which is the main key in order our performance to be assessed. The challenging part is the fact that we need to meet this budget in order to be accordingly rewarded, by promotions, bonuses and so these two aspects create an additional burden to us as employees in the audit firms" (Interview PA)</p> <p>"My daily professional life is like a roller coaster...sometimes is quiet and sometimes is overwhelming" (Interview AK)</p> <p>"Every day is challenging and probably something will arise which would be out of your agenda, and you will have a deadline for the day" (Interview EL)</p>
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	<p>working hours. Because of the deadlines you always need to work overtime without any additional salary” (Interview PI)</p>	<p>“What makes accounting profession very demanding are the many deadlines which are imposed by clients, banks, shareholders...and must be meet no matter what...or else if the company did not submit the audited accountants will have penalties” (Interview PA)</p> <p>“What is demanding is that you have always to keep up with the current developments in the industry, standards, and taxation” (Interview AM)</p>	<p>“In our profession you face a lot of adversities and challenges whether those are professional, psychological, or personal like relationships and interactions with your colleagues and superiors” (Interview MP)</p>
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<p>The complexities of the accounting profession</p>
<p>Competitive environment</p>
<p>“There is high competition in the market” (Interview PI)</p> <p>“...In Cyprus we are so many accountants...and even more qualified ones. This industry has too many of us, so you have to do something else in order to differentiate yourself...” (Interview MT)</p>

“In order to be in this profession, you need to be fully dedicated to your goals and bear this pressure and competitive environment” (Interview PA)

“Well, once I finished the ACA qualification, I believed that there isn't more to learn in our profession but due to the fact that the market is so broad and competitive you have to do something additional in order to have a more specialized role in a company like for instance, AML” (Interview EL)

Ioanna Aristou

Appendix E

2nd Theme: Resilience as a dynamic process

Resilience as a dynamic process			
Positive adaptation	Resilience as a process	Psychological stability	Coping strategies
<p>“You need to be resilient, to adapt...” (Interview AK)</p> <p>“Well, I feel that I am resilient because I adapt very easily...I moved from accounting, to corporate and then ended up to the audit. I adapt very easily to the environment, depending on the situations” (Interview AM)</p> <p>“I believe that professionals in the future will have this quality and will adapt more easily because they will see more changes” (Interview MP)</p>	<p>“Being resilient for me is really important and I believe I have managed through the years to develop it” (Interview MP)</p> <p>“Resilience would be something that we will all need to have...so it would be kind of a skill or quality which will be developed to individuals before even entering their professional lives” (Interview MP)</p> <p>“It is a process that you go through the years, improving yourself as a professional and as a person in general” (Interview PA)</p> <p>“At the beginning of my career, I was not</p>	<p>“I believe resilience has to do with the fact that you feel proud of what you are doing, you feel stable on your everyday life, that you are doing something that makes you happy. It provides you psychological and economic stability” (Interview GM)</p> <p>“It is important to be resilient, sometimes it is not possible because we are human beings after all...but you need to be resilient...to find ways to be psychologically okay...and keep a balance. It is difficult. Because you go through faces in life. But you try to think the bigger picture” (Interview MG)</p>	<p>“Being resilient for me is finding ways to manage the pressure and have the coping strategies that allows you to “survive” (Interview MP)</p> <p>“I try every time to handle the stressful situations that exist in my daily life” (Interview AK)</p> <p>“I managed to obtain the ACA title and work for one of the big four firms for 4 years, which was major achievement for me since I encountered many adversities during that period of time...If I have managed to cope with that, I can do anything...and be</p>

	<p>considered as resilient, but now I have developed coping strategies and my resilience” (Interview PI)</p>	<p>“It is all about finding the balance first within yourself and then you will find it in your life either professional or personal” (Interview GP)</p>	<p>considered as resilient” (Interview AK)</p> <p>“I believe the main part of resilience is about handling your stress and pressure ...[laugh] cope with the difficulties. Which it was and continues to be quite difficult for me because generally I am a perfectionist and I am accountable for my work, I want to have the best possible audit quality.</p>
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Appendix F

Aggregate dimension: The integrative nature of career sustainability

Organizational Dimension			
Rewards	Flexibility	Career Opportunities	Psychological Support from superiors and colleagues
<p>“There is a certain level of satisfaction of this profession...because you finish a project and get rewarded” (Interview MG)</p> <p>“Getting rewarded for your job helps a lot...rewards for performance secure the employee in the profession. So, when you see yourself moving up the latter and progress then most probably you will remain in the profession. Not only monetary rewards also appreciation is important. I believe that the main reason why there is a high turnover in this profession is the fact that most of the</p>	<p>“Flexible arrangements make professional life easier. I mean to wake up and make your program depending on your needs is really important” (Interview AM)</p> <p>“At some point in time, you have to find your work life-balance and as the years passed, we have progressed in this area, through flexible working arrangements in order to help us and our colleagues to manage our time. These new management styles and decisions are well received by the people” (Interview GP)</p>	<p>“I chose this profession because you have the opportunity to learn a lot of things and see different companies, gain experience and then it is easier to find something else in another industry. Accounting for me it was a starting point” (Interview AM)</p> <p>“But what keeps me in the profession is that it is interesting and has so many job opportunities. Accounting is very wide...and you can always change departments or positions etc. As you progress...there are always things to learn...this is one of the professions that</p>	<p>“You need to feel that your team is with you, and it will support you in order to get where you need to get. In the company I am currently both my supervisors/partners, and my team are very supportive. We try to help each other with any way we can. This is very important for someone to remain in the profession” (Interview AM)</p> <p>“I remained in the profession because in the company that I currently work for there is a great working environment, my colleagues are supportive. What helps you to remain is the working environment and your</p>

<p>employees are not appreciated for their job” (Interview MP)</p> <p>“Once you remain in the position you will get the benefits and even if you don’t like the job 100% the benefits will maintain you in the profession. No one works only for happiness. You work to live” (Interview MT)</p> <p>“The very important part, where I believe most employees consider...is the monetary value that this profession has” (Interview PA)</p> <p>“So, when I started, I wasn’t qualified and once I gained the qualification, I obtained a significant increase in my salary. This is considered as a motive for most of the people to be qualified and...continue to</p>	<p>“Nowadays there is the flexibility of working from home, so this allows me to wake up, get my coffee done and start work. Then take my lunch break and go to the gym and continue my work. Due to the introduction of the hybrid working, things have improved especially because I am from Larnaca, and my job is in Nicosia. It saves me a lot of time. Flexibility has changed the way in which I was perceiving my job because it allows me to manage my schedule how I want it. This is the most important reason after the rewards for me to remain in the profession” (Interview MP)</p>	<p>will never stop evolving” (Interview MG)</p> <p>“The profession can open doors” (Interview GP)</p> <p>“It is a safe career, and if you have the energy to invest there are career opportunities and you can progress” (Interview EL)</p>	<p>surroundings, if your superiors are good coaches and give you good guidelines and have an open communication then everything is all better. Through this support I managed to handle the strict deadlines and the pressure” (Interview EL)</p> <p>“To be honest, yes there were periods where the stress the long working hours, the pressure could lead you to give up. However, I came very close once in my career and that was about 15 years ago because I was working 24/7 for 3 months. At that time when I went to my boss to discuss about my intention to leave, what she did, was that she told me “ I will not accept your resignation now, take a week off now, go rest, think what we</p>
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<p>progress” (Interview PA)</p>			<p>could do in order to relief you from the stress and come back to discuss again”. That worked in both ways, for me to take some actions to reduce the hours I was working and also for my employers to stop giving me work that may excess my capacity and what I could handle” (Interview GP)</p> <p>“If for instance you are working for a company which has a really toxic environment, and you have not close relationship with your colleagues then most probable you will leave the sector...I can say that I have also the support of ...some...or most of my superiors...and usually in difficult situations or even when I make mistakes, they were there for me to help me and showed</p>
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		<p>understanding. This is really important and helpful because if you are having issues with your superiors and go every day at work and you say that you cannot sustain his/her...this is an issue, and you may probably leave the company or even the sector because you have formed bad experiences” (Interview MT)</p> <p>“What motivates me is that we are fighting for the team everyday...and every day we are working for us...for the team” (Interview MT)</p> <p>“At the beginning of my career, I was a bit scared...because I had to handle a lot of information...considering the profession and so on. Thank God I had enough guidance from my superiors so...it was step by step the</p>
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		<p>knowledge I gained and the tasks that have been assigned to me. I believe I managed it with the help of my supervisors...quite well in order to smooth the progress throughout the years in this profession” (Interview PA)</p> <p>“In general, my colleagues assisted me because there is a culture of helping each other, and not have this competitive environment which larger firms may have, because we are a family-based company of medium size. This helped me grow throughout the years...” (Interview PA)</p> <p>“I have support from my managers and colleagues, and this is really important in our profession. Support for not only professional but also</p>
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			for personal matters” (Interview PI)
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Contextual/Environmental dimension

“Cyprus is a country that mainly provides services, so accounting/audit profession is widespread within the working population. However, nowadays it seems that many individuals don't pursue a career in accounting because in the post covid era tend to avoid stressful professions”
(Interview EL)

“Undoubtedly, there were some unexpected events in the world that have impacted the career of everyone and led to either fast progression or slow. For instance, the financial crisis of the 2013, this circumstance slowed down the growth of the firm and eventually that led to slow down the career progression of many people, another example is the covid or now with the war in Ukraine where we lost so much. All these events in the economy can lead to slow down someone's career even if he/she may have the qualities and skills to advance and excel in the profession”
(Interview GP)

“It is becoming even more difficult due to the current situation that exist everywhere not only in Cyprus but across the world” (Interview MG)

“The times we are living in are very difficult and everything is changing...its not only in the accounting profession that we need to be resilient but in all professions because of the times we are living in. Times have changed...being 24 years in the profession the things are not like they were...even though we progress with the systems, technology, and programs, that you expected that would be helpful those factors made our profession even more demanding, more things are expected from us. You have to be resilient everywhere you go this is the new reality, it is how it is” (Interview MG)

“Managers tend to look only at budgets, they don't care whether an employee has job satisfaction or is psychologically well...they don't care. The financial constrain in 2013 and onwards has worsen this”(Interview MP)

Personal dimension			
Resilience	Love for the profession	Personal Effort	After work activities
<p>"I believe yes if you cannot have resilience you cannot remain in the profession" (Interview AM)</p> <p>"Resilience.....ensure s career sustainability in accounting profession" (Interview PA)</p> <p>"Yes certainly, because if you don't feel stability in the profession or resilient with yourself, how would you remain or continue building your career?" (Interview GM)</p>	<p>"I learnt through my career that you need to want it so much in order to remain in this profession and have career advancement" (Interview PA)</p> <p>"I like my job" (Interview MT)</p> <p>"First of all, I love my work. I love the environment in which I operate. Definitely, it is a great profession to be in and if I had the choice 9 years ago, I would choose the same profession again...but you need to be ready" (Interview MP)</p> <p>"For me basically resilience is all about having love for your profession, love what you do. You cannot be in the profession without being</p>	<p>"I believe that resigning or giving up is a sign of failure, so I never thought about it. It was not an option for me. I try every time to give a 100% of myself. I try with all means to deliver the best results. It needs dedication and effort to sustain your career" (Interview AM)</p> <p>"Another factor which played a significant role for me in order to remain in this profession was the precision and commitment that I had to my goals" (Interview PA)</p> <p>"I overcome this by trying to find my own solutions....In general am a very patient individual, and sometimes over</p>	<p>"Having excursions to the nature...the nature is a good way to relief your stress either walks or whatever" (Interview AK)</p> <p>"I made a lot of yoga and meditation in order to relief my stress" (Interview EL)</p> <p>"Having activities like gym and Pilates helped me relieve my stress and tiredness ...after work" (Interview PA)</p> <p>"Recently, I began to go to the gym, and that is the reason why I have managed to balance my life. You always have to find new ways to relax to do something different. Because if you just leave from your work and go back home and sleep</p>

	<p>passionate about it. Otherwise in my opinion you will not last long in the accounting” (Interview GP)</p> <p>“I would tell him/her to really think about it and go for it only if you are 100% sure that this is what you want and not what others have told you to do, or reasons have brought you to this decision” (Interview GM)</p> <p>“You need to want and love it really in order to succeed in this profession and have a long-lasting career” (Interview AM)</p>	<p>tolerant and focusing on my goals....this helped me...I wasn't feeling to give up and accept my failure. Always I try, even though sometimes this may have a personal cost...” (Interview PA)</p> <p>“We are humans not superhumans we cannot handle everything. But you keep going...you need to put a lot of personal effort” (Interview MG)</p> <p>“It is never an easy path; you have to work hard in order to progress” (Interview GP)</p> <p>“We had also the opportunity to attend training programs where you can learn how to manage your stress, yourself and your colleagues and etc. I once attended to a training program abroad and during my</p>	<p>and this happens on a daily basis, on repeat then you will not helpful.” (Interview MT)</p> <p>“You try to balance things, because you know the hours are very long especially when we have projects and deadlines...during the year end. After work it is really important to do something to relief your stress, whether it is a hobby or whatever” (Interview MG)</p>
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		<p>discussion with my instructor, I realized that I cannot say no to anybody that asks me to do something I don't say no. At the end I get a lot of unnecessary work that should not be assigned to me because I never say no. He asked me: what is the worst thing that can happen if you say no? They will fire you because you cannot bear an additional task? Thinking about it I realized that I was performing well, will someone tell you anything if you say no? because you are working 12 hours per day and gave you work for 15 hours? But you have to manage this, for me still sometimes it is difficult to say no, but I am working on it. Now that I am in a managerial position, I try not to push my colleagues to an</p>	
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		extent that will bring them in the situation of burnout and leave (Interview GP)	
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Ioanna Aristou