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Disruption, emotion, and self-management: a temporal framework for sustainable career outcomes – a systematic review

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review synthesised 128 peer-reviewed studies (2017 – early 2025) to examine how unplanned, disruptive events may relate to emotions, psychological and behavioural self-management processes, and sustainable career outcomes over time. Existing research insufficiently addressed how disruptive events affect careers and only a few studies considered the role of emotions. While deliberate thinking plays a key role in career shocks, psychological aspects are often overlooked since self-management is typically viewed as an aggregation of behaviours, which hinders research. Our synthesis differentiates psychological self-management (e.g. self-reflection and resilience) from behavioural self-management, including mobilising social support and goal setting. The synthesis indicates that workers' appraisals of disruptive events may be associated with discrete emotional responses that appear to shape adaptation efforts and opportunity seeking. Initial disruption demands immediate attention, whereas subsequent stabilisation may create space to reflect on long-term career goals, pointing to career development as a gradual process. This review underscores the importance of supportive organisational resources in fostering resilience and adaptability. This study presents a framework detailing how emotions, self-management, and career outcomes reciprocally interact over time, providing insight into sustainable career development during periods of disruption. We related these findings to prior research and suggested directions for future research.

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1. Introduction

A worker's career is not just a linear sequence of uninterrupted career experiences and work positions, as major unplanned and disruptive events may impact and challenge their career sustainability (De Vos et al., 2020; Hirschi, 2010). Environmental disruptions, such as natural disasters and the rapidly changing and unpredictable economic environment, accelerated by technological advancements, can impact workers' situations by disrupting working conditions and the nature of work and creating a state of ambiguity and uncertainty (De Vos et al., 2020; Lawrence et al., 2015; Qin & Jiang, 2011). Ultimately, this will disturb individuals' professional lives and career trajectories (Akkermans et al., 2018).

There is accumulating research focusing on the impact of so-called career shocks, life events, or disruptive events on career behaviour (e.g. Akkermans et al., 2018, 2021; Pak et al., 2021; Seibert et al., 2013). While some research examines the role of disruptive events in how workers adjust their work and the consequences for their careers, there has been insufficient research on the mechanisms that explain *how* disruptive events impact both short- and long-term career outcomes (Akkermans et al., 2021). The limited understanding of the potential underlying mechanisms involved is a considerable concern, particularly since disruptive events are associated with stress and burnout, a significant issue in society (Bakker et al., 2019; Hakanen & Bakker, 2017; Leiter et al., 2014). In addition, psychological processes, such as critical reflection, can disrupt society, as is evident from the "Great Resignation" (Hill & Jones, 2021), which is also referred to as the "Great Rethink" (Gulati, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread resignations across various industries, driven by a universal "rethink" or deep critical reflection and reassessment of their workplace environments and organisational culture, leading to heightened dissatisfaction and concerns about a "great resignation," which will further worsen staff shortages (Hill & Jones, 2021; Krugman, 2021; Watermeyer et al., 2025).

This systematic review responds to the expressed need in the work of Akkermans et al. (2018, 2021) for more research on disruptive events and their impact on both short- and long-term career outcomes. Following Akkermans et al. (2018), the present review aimed to examine how diverse disruptive events may be associated with proximal work and life outcomes through workers' appraisals and emotions, and how workers adapt through psychological and behavioural responses and ultimately shape their long-term career path. As such, we intended to arrive at a better understanding of the "rich" and interconnected psychological and behavioural processes involved when coping with disruptive events.

In this study, we propose that the impact of disruptive events on career outcomes may be shaped through emotional responses, which may catalyse psychological and behavioural self-management processes, all potential mechanisms that merit further research (Akkermans et al., 2018, 2021). Only a limited number of studies have investigated the role of emotions as mechanisms linking disruptive events with affective states, such as feeling proud or guilty, which subsequently impact career outcomes through self-management processes (Ohly & Schmitt, 2015). Integrating emotions into career research may provide valuable insight into how emotional responses may affect short-term work and life outcomes, as well as explain why shocks have varied impacts on individuals (Akkermans et al., 2018).

Besides a focus on emotions, a second contribution of this study is that we deconstruct agentic self-management into distinct psychological and behavioural components. Effective self-management relies on a strong identity, clear values, and insights into career aspirations, requiring both psychological resources and reflective activity (De Vos & Soens, 2008). Nowadays, self-management is often positioned as a behavioural construct, defined by the aggregation of various behaviours focused on action (De Vos & Soens, 2008; Hirschi & Koen, 2021). Without considering psychological factors, research on self-management may be incomplete (De Vos & Soens, 2008).

A third contribution is the notion of the temporal dimension of disruptive events, particularly in relation to proximal and distal career outcomes (Akkermans et al., 2021). The important role of time (e.g. short-term versus long-term outcomes) is underdeveloped in the literature (Weisman et al., 2022). Sustainable careers constitute a dynamic process, with individual and contextual factors evolving over time and influencing career sustainability (De Vos et al., 2020). Disruptive events can have negative effects on career progress, psychological well-being, and attitudes in the short term, but can also contribute to the development of more fulfilling careers or job roles over time (Akkermans et al., 2020).

The study is also important for stress research, where stressful events are typically regarded as independent variables, known as stressors, that result in several mainly negative outcomes (Schwarzer & Luszczynska, 2013). This bivariate relationship is too simplistic, as stress is a process that takes place in context, whereby characteristics of the event, along with other determinants, such as personal attributes and resources, all influence how the event is appraised by the individual.

A theory-informed synthesis was employed to consolidate findings from selected studies, guided by a theoretical framework drawing on the models and theories presented by De Vos et al. (2020) and Weiss and Cropanzano (1996). Weiss and Cropanzano's Affective Events Theory (1996) addresses the impact of events on immediate cognitive appraisal processes, linking disruptions to proximal affective states and near-term behaviours. In contrast, De Vos et al. (2020) offer a longer-horizon, person-context perspective on sustainable careers, foregrounding the dynamic interplay of individual agency and contextual conditions in shaping career sustainability. Both frameworks serve as complementary lenses. By systematically identifying and mapping reported disruptive events, alongside the emotional responses and psychological and behavioural activities described in prior research, we sought to develop a more nuanced understanding of how career outcomes emerge from the complex interactions of personal and environmental factors over time (Akkermans et al., 2018; De Lange et al., 2021).

2. Theoretical background

To develop our contribution, we combined sustainable career theory and affective events theory to explore how disruptive events affected workers and how they coped and responded to these situations. According to Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015), sustainable careers encompass sequences of work experiences throughout an individual's life, crossing multiple life domains such as work, social, and family. The theory emphasises the importance of both personal and environmental influences on careers, with individuals taking primary responsibility for managing their meaningful careers through

personal agency (De Vos et al., 2020). Personal agency refers to an individual's career competencies and adaptability. Career competencies encompass the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities for career development, including self-reflection, communication, and action-oriented behaviours (Akkermans et al., 2013). Career adaptability is regarded as a psychosocial resource that enables individuals to effectively handle and respond to unforeseen or uncontrollable contextual factors (Savickas, 2005), such as disruptive events. According to De Vos et al. (2020), a sustainable career is characterised by three key indicators: happiness, health, and productivity. These factors are essential not only for individual prosperity but also for the well-being of other stakeholders within one's environment.

Disruptive events are an example of how a person's career sustainability is influenced by the interaction between the dimensions of person, context, and time. Throughout their working life, workers may encounter disruptive events beyond their control that can affect their jobs and careers (Hirschi, 2010). The heterogeneous nature of disruptive events, characterised by their different attributes, such as frequency, controllability, intensity, valence, and duration, accounts for the considerable variation in these events among workers and their respective effects on both proximal and distal career outcomes (Akkermans et al., 2018; Wordsworth & Nilakant, 2021). Certain events are manageable, allowing workers to continue working towards their career goals, while others are so disruptive that they disturb daily routines and negatively affect short-term career outcomes, including satisfaction and a sense of fit with one's environment (Akkermans et al., 2020).

Affective Events Theory (AET) may offer valuable insight into the mechanisms that drive the immediate and often emotional responses triggered by affective events (Korotov, 2021). Emotions are understood as both relatively immediate and short-term affective reactions to unforeseen disruptive events (Fugate et al., 2008), and as motivational drivers that shape psychological processes and adaptive behaviours (Vignoli et al., 2025). Affective events are "things [that] happen to people in work settings" to which "people react emotionally" (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996, p. 11). People compare aspects of their environment, such as job characteristics, pay, and chances for promotion, to their preferred states. Preferred states may reflect what individuals strive for, according to their values and needs, or what they wish to avoid. These preferences shape their perceptions and judgments, playing a key role in emotional appraisal (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Discrepancies between past experiences and expected future states can lead to negative emotions, such as anger and frustration (Konlechner et al., 2019). According to Ekman (1992), there are at least six basic emotions: anger (including irritation and frustration), fear (including anxiety), sadness, joy (including pride), disgust, and surprise.

Negative emotions serve both signalling and adaptive functions (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). They may serve as indicators that certain conditions may present challenges and are associated with experiences of instability, disconnection, perceptions of person–environment misfit, and discomfort (Akkermans et al., 2020; Caldwell et al., 1990; Tschaepe, 2024), which can affect one's health and psychological well-being (Veit & Ware, 1983). Initially, these experiences may be accompanied by psychological withdrawal, resistance, or intentions to leave; alternatively, a state of discomfort may operate as a catalyst for career adaptability processes, whereby workers may engage in reflective practices that can lead to adaptive behaviours and job crafting to address the perceived misfit

(Caldwell et al., 1990; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Tims & Bakker, 2010; Vignoli et al., 2025; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

It generally interrupts ongoing behaviour and triggers workers to reorganise and redirect their actions to cope with the emotional experiences and modify a harmful or threatening person-environment relationship, aiming to return to normalcy (Mansur & Felix, 2021). According to AET, the evaluation of affective events, the resulting emotions, and the subsequent psychological states are considered crucial mechanisms influencing work attitudes and determining workplace behaviour (Ohly & Schmitt, 2015; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Although initial sacrifices and setbacks in short-term outcomes may occur, over time disrupted circumstances can provide workers with opportunities to employ agentic self-management activities, such as developing and using professional networks and acquiring valuable skills, to position themselves for future opportunities while actively (re)shaping their career paths (Akkermans et al., 2020).

While a concept like career self-management is frequently positioned as a behavioural construct emphasising action, numerous studies have investigated and acknowledged the role of psychological factors, such as self-reflection, self-efficacy, and resilience as key predictors of behavioural activities (De Lange, 2020; De Vos & Soens, 2008; Hirschi & Koen, 2021; King, 2004). For example, according to action-regulation theory, self-knowledge serves as a fundamental psychological variable in guiding and enhancing self-management behaviours (Raabe et al., 2007).

A disruptive event may prompt workers to thoughtfully examine their experiences, reflect on their motivations, and re-evaluate their priorities and goals, enabling them to modify strategies, and engage in a new course of action (Akkermans et al., 2021; Helyer, 2015; King, 2004; Rummel et al., 2021; Tol & Van Seggelen-Damen, 2025). Resilience, another psychological variable, refers to the psychological capacity to handle adversity arising from negative events and the emotions they provoke (Bimrose & Hearne, 2012; Luthans, 2002). Developing resilience is an essential psychological strategy for managing unexpected challenges in one's career (Seibert et al., 2016). Furthermore, building self-efficacy, the confidence in one's ability to perform work-related tasks effectively, enhances workers' capacity to cope with and adapt to change, thereby improving person-environment fit through active engagement in self-management behaviours (Bandura, 1986; De Lange, 2020; King, 2004). These self-management behaviours include activities such as mobilising social support, collaboration, human capital development, and setting goals. Nevertheless, workers do not always respond in a conscious and deliberate manner, and may exhibit more reactive behaviours when confronted with such disruptions (Schläpfer et al., 2025).

In sum, consistent with the sustainable career theory, this study suggests that agentic workers employ psychological processes to guide their goal-directed self-management behaviours, underscoring their role as active agents whose actions shape and are shaped by contextual factors and evolving conditions over time (Frese & Zapf, 1994; Zacher & Frese, 2018). Consequently, an initial adverse disruptive event may lead to positive long-term outcomes.

We will address the following questions in reviewing the existing literature:

- What are the characteristics of the included studies in terms of examined regions, sectors, and designs used (i.e. qualitative versus quantitative)?
- What types of unplanned, disruptive events, including their characteristics, are reported in the literature and how can these characteristics impact workers?

- How may disruptive events elicit affective reactions that impact short-term outcomes, triggering or hindering (immediate) action?
- What factors may influence psychological and behavioural self-management activities affecting long-term career outcomes?

3. Method

To answer the research questions, we conducted a systematic review that allowed us to identify, select, and critically evaluate earlier peer-reviewed empirical research, and to collect and analyse data from the studies that are included in the review. This study followed the principles and approach described by Petticrew and Roberts (2008).

3.1. Identifying the research question

This systematic review offers an extensive synthesis of the current literature regarding unplanned, disruptive events, associated affective responses, psychological and behavioural activities, and the resulting short- and long-term career outcomes emerging from these mechanisms. It aimed to uncover the connections among these concepts based on findings from prior research and develop an integrative overview of their interrelations. Additionally, we outlined the features of the reviewed studies, including the covered regions and sectors, and applied designs.

3.2. Search strategy and selection procedures

Akkermans and Kubasch (2017) reviewed four primary career-focused journals from 2012 to 2016 and found a lack of research on unplanned and disruptive events, indicating the need for an updated review. Our study included relevant articles from peer-reviewed journals published between 2017 and early 2025, using three electronic databases: Business Source Direct, PsychInfo, and Web of Science. The key variables were disruptive events, emotions, self-management at work, and career outcomes. The keywords representing the construct *self-management at work* included: "self-management", " emotion regulation", "goal orientation", "self-efficacy", "critical reflection", "reflective practice", "self-regulation", "proactivity", "resilience", "adaptability", "proactive", and "self-leadership". In our study, *career outcomes* was represented by the keywords: "person environment fit", "person job fit", "person organization fit", "demand abilities fit", "needs supplies fit", "job resources", "job demands", and "employability". Boolean operators were applied in formulating search combinations, and the truncation method was used by placing the truncation symbol at the end of the word. For example, the following search string was used to conduct title, abstract, and keyword searches relating to disruptive events: "event*" or "shock*" or "happenstance" or "serendipit*" or "disrupt*" or "synchronicit*". To narrow the focus to work-related disruptions, the prior search string for events was combined with a work-related search string: "career", "job", "work", or "occupation". An expanded thesaurus-based vocabulary was incorporated. To identify relevant dimensions and synonyms, three specialists in the field were consulted; however, only one provided a response. A total of 8079 references met the search criteria and were imported into Endnote. Figure 1 shows the identification and selection approach.

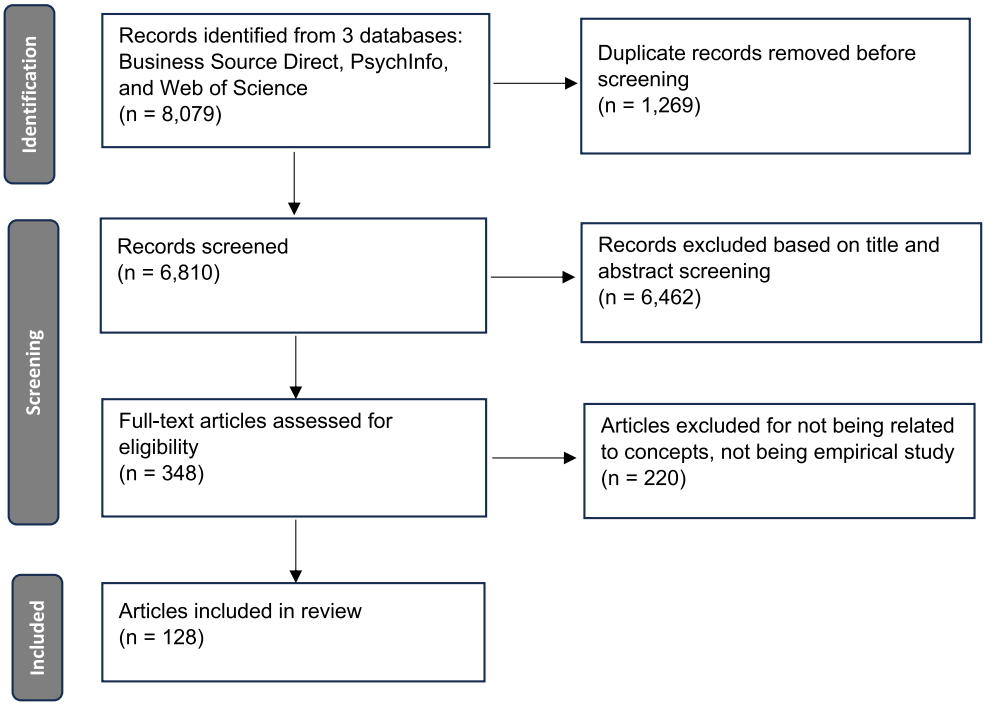

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of systematic review.

References from the journals were uploaded to online systematic review programs, specifically Covidence (Covidence, 2023) and Rayyan (Ouzzani et al., 2016). After removing duplicates, 6,810 references remained for title and abstract screening.

At the beginning of the review, key constructs were defined and clarified using illustrative examples in a coding map. For example, *psychological self-management* was broken down into reflection, resilience, and self-efficacy as its main components. For instance, *self-efficacy* was described as the perceived ability to perform career-related tasks (Lent & Brown, 2013), with examples like "evaluating one's competence to accomplish work tasks" (Rigotti et al., 2008). In the coding map, *resilience* was defined as the ability to persist in achieving career goals with the resources and strategies one has developed already, even when confronted with challenges and adversity (Seibert et al., 2016). To differentiate it more clearly from the related concept of career adaptability, which is about being more proactive by nature, our focus on *resilience* pertained specifically to addressing and overcoming setbacks when they occur (Bimrose & Hearne, 2012).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. Only peer-reviewed articles published in English were considered. Furthermore, the study focused exclusively on adult workers within organisational settings; articles involving workers outside this context, such as clients, patients, students, or entrepreneurs, were excluded. Additionally, we excluded articles that were unrelated to unplanned, disruptive events. Furthermore, studies not addressing disruptive events in conjunction with self-management and career outcomes were also excluded.

The initial review was conducted by the first author. To evaluate inter-rater reliability, two additional authors independently assessed a randomly selected sample of 20–25 studies each. First, the second author reviewed 25 studies independently, resulting in

six discrepancies and a calculated Cohen's Kappa of 0.444. After discussion and refinement of the in- and exclusion criteria, this second author conducted another independent review of 30 studies, yielding two discrepancies. However, as Covidence aggregated deviations from both samples, the resulting Kappa statistic was considered unreliable. Nevertheless, a consensus was reached that the 93% agreement rate was satisfactory. The third author's independent assessment of 20 studies produced two deviations; it was agreed that a 90% agreement rate represents an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability.

Once consensus was reached on satisfactory inter-rater reliability, the first author completed the title and abstract screening. A total of 348 studies were selected for full-text review. The first and second authors independently evaluated a collection of 30 studies. The outcomes were discussed in detail. Concepts were refined or, in some cases, broadened as needed (e.g. self-awareness was included as a reflective process) and the inclusion and exclusion criteria were further refined to ensure greater consistency. For instance, "workers in an organisation" became "adult workers in an organisation" to exclude child labour and interns. Five reviews were challenged and subsequently shared and deliberated upon by all contributing authors. After reaching a consensus on the revised concepts, criteria and approach, the first author completed the full-text review.

During the full-text review, 220 studies were excluded on the grounds that they did not address relevant constructs or were not related to our research questions. Finally, 128 studies were selected for further analysis. The studies were conducted in the following regions: Europe (24%), United Kingdom (12%), Middle East (8%), Africa (3%), Asia (15%), Australia and New Zealand (14%), North America (18%), South America (4%), mixed regions (2%). Respondents were recruited from the following sectors: education (12%), finance (3%), healthcare (19%), industry (7%), journalism (4%), public and social services (9%), leisure, such as sport, music, and tourism (9%), and mixed (37%). These studies were published in journals from various disciplinary domains, such as career development, education, healthcare, medical, psychology, HRM, and various others.

3.3. Charting the data

Guided by the research questions, relevant data from the final 128 studies was charted in extraction tables in Microsoft Excel. Per included study, relevant results were organised into columns based on specific concepts and components, including disruptive events, emotions, psychological self-management (with components such as critical reflection, self-efficacy, and resilience), various behavioural self-management components, such as impression management, building social contacts and human capital development, and career outcomes. Initially, the first author prepared extracts of three studies whereby the other authors reviewed this process and output to reach a consensus on the method for the rest of the studies to be completed by the first author.

3.4. Summarising and reporting the results

To address the research questions, this study applied a temporal lens to organise the data from the extraction tables into two separate tables: Table 2 focused on emotions and short-term career outcomes, while Table 3 centred on developments over time and long-term sustainable outcomes.

4. Results

This section details the results from our synthesis of the reviewed studies regarding the impact of disruptive events on career outcomes. The results were structured using the framework shown in Figure 2 and divided into two sections, based on the temporal lens through which workers interpret and deal with person-environment (mis)fit: proximal or short-term outcomes, such as misalignment and instability in the short run, and distal or long-term outcomes, which were categorised according to the indicators of sustainable career theory (Talluri et al., 2025). Section 4.1 focused on multiple categories of disruptive events and analysed how appraisal processes and resulting emotions appear to influence immediate outcomes, such as the experienced discomfort and disconnection (Tschaepe, 2024). We also examined how workers managed disrupted and changing work demands and coped with personal and environmental challenges through psychological and behavioural strategies. In Section 4.2, we examined how the opportunities and constraints that emerged following the shock seemed to affect agentic self-management activities and their impact on long-term sustainable career outcomes. Tables 2 and 3 provide descriptive summaries of the results from each section.

4.1. Short-term perspective

The impact of disruptive events on career-related outcomes depends on the workers' appraisal of the event, which influences emotions, cognitions, and behaviour (Fris et al., 2024). The outcomes may evolve over time as both immediate and long-term responses to the event emerge (Chen, 2005).

4.1.1. Disruptive events

Table 1 provides an overview of the disruptive event types, the corresponding study designs, examples of underlying events, and the reported characteristics in the original articles. We classified the events as labelled by the original authors.

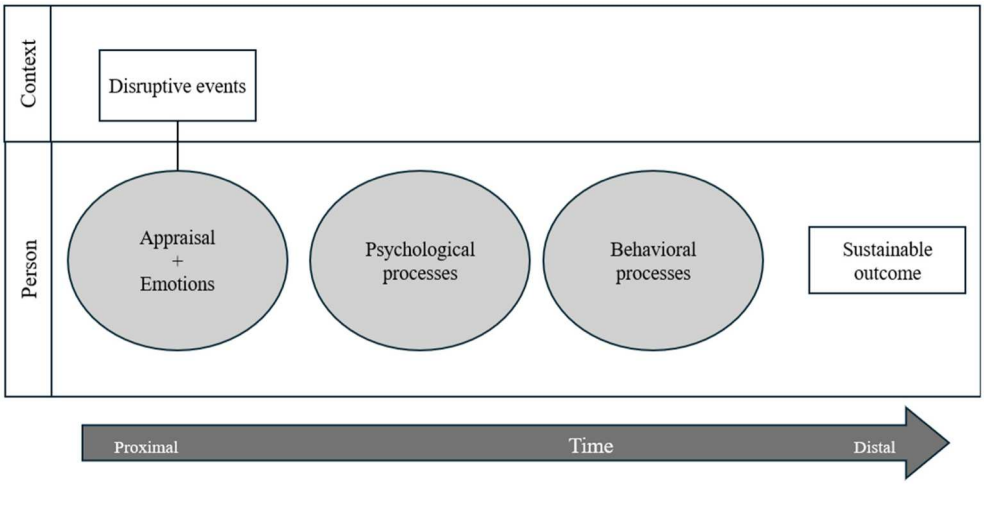

Figure 2. Conceptual framework adapted from De Vos et al. (2020), Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), and Tol and Van Seggelen-Damen (2025).

Table 1. Overview of disruptive event types and study designs.

Event type	Total studies	Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed	Examples of underlying events	Reported Characteristics
Career shock	17	9	6	2	Mentor departure, organizational change, quick promotion (Seibert et al., 2013), health issues, personal events (pregnancy)	Mostly negative valence, except for some shocks in private life (new relationship) or at work (new job)
Chance event	4	2	2	0	Up-or out promotions, unplanned career- and life events, proximate work-related incidents	Incidental, unplanned events, mostly negative valence
Change event	4	0	4	0	Shifts in organisational environments, e.g., reorganisation, workplace relocation	Varied valence: fortunate coincident versus negative experience
Major life event	7	2	5	0	Stressful experiences like losing loved one, major health changes (stroke), promotion	Mostly negative valence, duration varied sometimes lasting for years
Natural disaster	2	0	2	0	Earthquake and extreme weather	Unexpected, catastrophic, traumatic
Pandemic	76	29	39	8	COVID-19, as a macro-level disruption, instigated a series of cascading micro-disruptions, e.g. financial challenges, workplace concerns, space-related issues during lockdown	Unexpected, chaotic and disruptive, creating uncertainty. While duration was generally unknown, expectation was it would persist for some time
Technological	16	3	12	1	Digital manufacturing, robotisation, social media	Expected, though creating uncertainty and ambiguity, valence varied
Various	2	0	2	0	Variety of shocks (conflicts, political, economic)	Unexpected and destabilising, negative valence
	128	45*	72**	11***		
		35%	56%	9%		

Note: There are 15 multi-wave studies: *six for quantitative, **seven for quantitative, and ***two for mixed studies.

Table 2. Relationships between contextual factors, emotions, and state of (dis)comfort and subsequent self-management processes.

(Example) Author(s), year	Type of event	Contextual factors	Emotions	State of (dis)comfort	Psychological self-management processes	Behavioural self-management processes
Nair and Chatterjee (2021)	CS	Argument with boss	Fear	Stress, feeling unsafe unsecure, uncertain about career path	Reflection on situation	Negotiate agreement, taking a break
Nair and Chatterjee (2021) and Visentini et al. (2023)		Work-home interferences	Guilt fear	Unhappy about decreased care children	Reflection on work–life balance	Mobilising domestic and social support
Simosi and Conway (2025)		Changed working conditions and increased workload	Frustration, fear	Stress, reduced job satisfaction, poor job-environment fit	Reflection on demands–abilities fit and upskilling	Working in other roles, learning new tasks
Barbulescu et al. (2022)	CcE	Unpredictable project allocation in up-or-out system	Fear	Emotional resignation, diminished sense of accomplishment	Reflection on recent experiences and coming to terms with negative chance events	Proactive behaviour (influencing allocation projects) vs passive avoidant responses
Kim et al. (2019)		Harmonious relationship focus	Fear	Self-confidence and optimism vs lack of self-confidence and self-effacement	Negative vs positive appraisal due confident internal attributes, awareness, and seeing chances	Conforming, harmonious and conflict-avoidant behaviour, mobilising social support
Clarke et al. (2024) and Samuel et al. (2020a)	CgE	Changed working conditions, lack of resources, and increased workload	Positive emotions, frustration, anxiety	Positive appraisal and physical fitness vs negative appraisal, stress and ill-being	Continuous appraisal and evaluation of situation and, available resources, awareness of attitudinal change	Adapting working habits, problem-focused coping by goalsetting vs avoidant behaviour
Schmitt et al. (2024)		Changed working conditions and increased workload due to merger	Negative emotions, anxiety	Uncertainty and pressure causing stress	Reflection, emotion regulation, building self-efficacy, and resilience	Adaptation for acceptance, new working environment, mobilising social support, new working habits, learning
Hopkins et al. (2024) and Trusson et al. (2021)	MLE	Reintegration struggles after cancer (e.g. lack of energy)	Frustration, emotional tensions	Stress, exhaustion, and fatigue, dissatisfaction	Reflection on impaired physical capabilities, self-regulation of post-cancer experiences and emotions	Proactively changing work roles and routines
Bakker et al. (2019) and Walder and Molineux (2017)		Occupational identity disruption	Frustration, disappointment	Stress and exhaustion, psychological detachment	Rumination and postponing cognitive closure, building self-efficacy through psychological detachment	
Al Maamari (2024) and Wordsworth and Nilakant (2021)	ND	Loss of resources	Negative emotions	Stress and exhaustion	Reflection on career and non-work goals, emotional awareness, building resilience	Active job search vs impulsive job transition, mobilising social support, seeking work–life balance

(*Continued*)

Table 2. Continued.

(Example) Author(s), year	Type of event	Contextual factors	Emotions	State of (dis)comfort	Psychological self-management processes	Behavioural self-management processes
Aughterson et al. (2021), Blustein et al. (2022) and Dima and Simon (2025)	PA	Virus transmission concerns	Fear, frustration, threat	Stress, exhaustion, fatigue, sadness, decreased job satisfaction and wellbeing, decreased effectiveness	Reflection on situation, self, identity, work priorities and routines, building resilience, building confidence through upskilling	Adapting work habits by taking extra measures, upskilling for protection
Flaherty and Schroeder (2022), Rochette et al. (2025) and Shahlaei and Snis (2022)		Changed working conditions and workload	Fear, frustration	Stress, exhaustion, fatigue, depression, decreased satisfaction and wellbeing, reduction in productivity	Reflection on routines and work changes, building resilience through coping and adaptation, increased self-confidence through upskilling	Job crafting and innovative adaptation, upskilling, interprofessional collaboration
Bratun et al. (2023), Chully et al. (2022) and Zaza and Erskine (2024)	PA	Loss of resources (health risk)	Fear, frustration, anger, guilt	Stress, exhaustion, feeling uncertain and sad, decreased satisfaction and productivity	Psychological withdrawal, reflection on priorities, reappraisal of traumatic events	Mobilising social support, adapting work habits, upskilling, proactive behaviour
Calleja and Camilleri (2021) and Khatib et al. (2024)		Remote, online working	Fear, guilt	Stress, less engagement, diminished sense of gratitude, satisfaction and performance	Reflection on nature of work, lateral thinking, acceptance change, building confidence	Adapting work habits, co-creating knowledge and practice
Nessel (2022) and Turner et al. (2022)		Financial challenges (loss of income)	Negative emotions, anxiety, fear, anger	(Financial) stress, feeling overwhelmed and sad, loss of perspective	Focusing on work, building resilience	Pausing professional life, adapting work habits, remaining in underpaid jobs, practicing frugality
Arnold-Reed et al. (2023) and Billing et al. (2023)		Work–home interferences (conflicting responsibilities)	Emotional hardship, fear	Stress, burnout, trauma, diminished wellbeing, decreased effectiveness and productivity	Reappraisal of status quo, reflection on work,	Fast digital adoption, establishing new balancing routines, mobilising support
Butler et al. (2021) and McMillan et al. (2021)	PA	Inconsistent policies (e.g. infection control and visitor restrictions)	Frustration, negative emotions	Stress, fatigue, feeling cynical, sense of alienation, emotional (moral) dissonance	Awareness of policy impact, building resistance through exercising power	Taking ethical action, resisting or breaking rules, mobilising social support
Davey et al. (2022) and Hanna et al. (2022)		Providing extra service (walking the extra mile)	Pride	Increased satisfaction, sense of accomplishment	Reflection on unexpected changes in caring jobs, learning to trust oneself, building self-efficacy	Persist working in challenging circumstances
Shahlaei and Snis (2022) and Sengupta et al. (2022)	TE	Changed working conditions	Frustration	Demand-abilities misfit, feeling irrelevant, job insecurity, interpersonal conflicts, career volatility	Reflection on changes, perceiving misfit as a growth opportunity vs perceiving misfit as a psychological strain	Skill development, seeking support, changing workplace practices, collaboration with experts vs not investing in skill development

Note. For type of event. CS, Career shock; CcE, Chance event; CgE, Change event; MLE, Major Life Event; ND, Natural disaster; PA, Pandemic; TE, Technological.

Table 3. Relationships between situational opportunities and constraints and subsequent self-management processes and long-term sustainable outcomes.

(Example) Author(s), year	Type of event	Situational opportunities and constraints	Psychological self-management processes	Behavioural self-management processes	Long-term (non-)sustainable outcomes
Ali and Mehreen (2021) and Peeters et al. (2022)	CS	Professional challenges	Openness to change was positively related to resilience, self-efficacy and resilience	Proactive self-management activities (e.g. drawing attention, networking positively related to behaviour	Increased salary and career satisfaction, job security, improved well-being, and upskilling
Nair and Chatterjee (2021), Pak et al. (2021) and Simosi and Conway (2025)		Post-shock person-environment misfit (changes in demands and resources)	Negative impact on self-efficacy and engagement, critical reflection on career path	Staying in poorly fitting situations vs agentic behaviour, such as mobilising social support, developing professional networks	Decreased internal employability, productivity and job satisfaction, critical reflection on career path often triggered job transition
Blokker et al. (2019), Korotov (2021) and Leong et al. (2024)		Adversity provides opportunities for development	Critical reflection on the situation and reconsidering long-term career (opportunities and strategies) and life directions	Engaging in career crafting, upskilling, and mobilising social support	Career progress, improved commitment and work satisfaction, and perceived employability
Nair and Chatterjee (2021) and Visentini et al. (2023)		Non-work-related shocks (e.g., long-term illness, and death)	Critical reflection on life resulting in personal transformation	Making career decisions, e.g., leaving a job, relocating, letting go better career opportunities	Career sacrifices, shifting focus from productivity, work–life balance
Barbulescu et al. (2022), Kim et al. (2019) and Schlosser et al. (2017)	CcE	Unplanned and uncontrollable organisational factors	Critical reflection on life motives and values, self-concept and career-image (re)construction	Expectation management, mobilising social support, actively shaping one's future versus passive behaviour	Career advancement and enhanced employability vs low internal employability and planning to leave the job
Samuel et al. (2020a) and Samuel et al. (2020b)	CgE	Changing working conditions and methods (a. relocation; b. new technology)	Experiencing multi-layer identity changes (e.g. work, gender, and ethnic identity), critical reflection on role, variation in willingness to change	Mobilising social contacts, decision-making, problem-focused coping strategies	Professional progress, improved performance vs resistance to change and experiencing (transition) barriers (e.g. lack of professional progress)
Clarke et al. (2024) and Schmitt et al. (2024)		Accepting a merger or relocation and actively engaging	Critical reflection to reframe experiences and develop a post-merger identity, building self-efficacy through a positive focus and sense of control	Establishing new patterns of behaviour, mobilising support, managing tasks, and gaining control	Greater self-compassion and improved well-being, improved health due to reduced stress
Bakker et al. (2019), Brose et al. (2023) and Hopkins et al. (2024)	MLE	Continue participating in valued activities (work role centrality)	Psychological detachment and focus on work tasks, renewing sense of self vs rumination, causing reduced self-efficacy and engagement	Selective participation in purposeful activities, adjusting goals to feasibility	Increased meaning, self-worth and purpose, improved engagement and performance vs lack of purpose and dissatisfaction

(*Continued*)

Table 3. Continued.

(Example) Author(s), year	Type of event	Situational opportunities and constraints	Psychological self-management processes	Behavioural self-management processes	Long-term (non-)sustainable outcomes
Comolli et al. (2024)		Concentration of life events	Greater resilience was observed in women than in men, lower socio-economic status (SES) men showed less resilience	Long-term low SES reduced coping abilities	Decreased life satisfaction and wellbeing later in life, (wellbeing varied across gender and low SES family background)
Wordsworth and Nilakant (2021)	ND	Higher social capital and support during earthquake	Re-prioritisation of career or non-work goals, critical reflection on life and career priorities, and building resilience (facilitated by mobilising social support)	Mobilising social support, job search behaviour (in some cases), removing barriers for leaving	Career transition to resolve latent disquiet or search for a more meaningful role or unanswered calling
Al Maamari (2024)	ND	Essential caregiving	Inner strength and spirituality facilitate resilience	Helping others sets work-life boundaries, mobilising social support for coping	Increased sense of satisfaction and happiness, work-life balance
Bratun et al. (2023), Bui et al. (2023) and Castelleijn et al. (2024)	PA	New way of working, requiring a new identity	Changing perception of virtual work and establishing a virtual identity, self-awareness vs detachment		Stability and sense of belonging, increased vs decreased wellbeing
Aughterson et al. (2021) and Nessel (2022)		Slowing down and focus on non-work relationships and leisure	Critical reflection on life, positive self-evaluation vs negative self-evaluation	Strengthening relationships and leisure activities	Increased optimism, personal growth, satisfaction, and health vs motivation loss and struggle
Khurshid et al. (2021), Rowen (2024) and Zaza and Erskine (2024)		Need for changed practices and workplace innovation	Developing new perspectives and ideas, reassessment of underlying assumptions regarding effective operations	Mobilising social support, adaptation through discovering new work methods	Stabilising productivity, increased ownership, satisfaction, and health
Nguyen et al. (2023), Kuenzi et al. (2024), and Spennemann and Whitsed (2023)	PA	Person-job and person-organisation misfit	Critical reflection on career and reconsidering career	Proactively creating alternative opportunities, upskilling for a new career path, leaving the organisation or industry	Unstable and unsafe jobs with low job security, reduced job satisfaction, and productivity
Berry et al. (2022), Kiekel et al. (2022) and Chully et al. (2022)		Major disruption to professional identity	Redefinition of roles and challenging assumptions, reshaping identity vs feeling alienated to work	Teamwork and collaboration toward shared goals	Finding new meaning, sense of accomplishment, and satisfaction vs alienation, conflict, and mistrust
Brougham et al. (2019), Fréour et al. (2021) and Rahman et al. (2024)	TE	New technology perceptions	New perception of advantages of new technology and opportunities	Upskilling, developing new knowledge through collaboration	Increased efficiency and performance, professional advancement, and growth
Aurrekoetxea-Casaus and Diez (2020) and Sengupta et al. (2022)		Transformation of work	Redefining roles and work, identity work vs. resistance due to lack of technological self-efficacy	Active adaptation, upskilling, and adoption of new technologies vs. resistance, passive responses, and exit	Diversification of business and new professional roles, enhanced productivity vs job insecurity and career volatility

Note. For type of event. CS, Career shock; CcE, Chance event; CgE, Change event; MLE, Major Life Event; ND, Natural disaster; PA, Pandemic; TE, Technological.

It is important to note that comparable events, such as a cancer diagnosis, have been classified inconsistently across studies; authors have labelled them as chance events, major life events, or career shocks. Furthermore, this systematic review examined articles published from 2017 to early 2025. With the first infection cases reported in December 2019, followed by a global outbreak in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in extensive worldwide research in this period and later (Weiner et al., 2020). Consequently, a large proportion of the included studies focused on pandemic disruptive events (COVID-19 and, in some cases, Ebola) across diverse occupational domains, including teaching, nursing, public services, manufacturing, etc. While COVID-19 has been characterised as a career shock (Akkermans et al., 2020), this synthesis adhered to the categorisation applied by the original authors, treating it as a distinct disruptive event. Notwithstanding this categorisation, the pandemic had many facets and, in some cases, could just as easily be classified as a major life event due to personal bereavement (e.g. Lafferty et al., 2022; Raven et al., 2018), or as a technology event, marked by the accelerated implementation of virtual teaching solutions (e.g. Calleja & Camilleri, 2021). In addition, as a macro-level disruption, the pandemic instigated a series of cascading micro-disruptions, such as financial challenges (e.g. lost income), workplace concerns (e.g. health safety risks), and space-related issues due to working at home during lockdown (Turner et al., 2022).

4.1.2. Personal attributes

Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) propose that personal attributes moderate the relationship between disruptive events and emotional responses. Similarly, Hirschi and Koen (2021) suggest that attributes such as optimism and internal attribution tendencies influence career-related behaviour. Our synthesis indicated that personal attributes such as openness to change, optimism, and a high uncertainty tolerance, were consistently associated with greater resilience and self-confidence, which were described as supporting successful adaptation to change (e.g. Lee et al., 2022; Schmitt et al., 2024). Using a longitudinal design, the study of Peeters et al. (2022) reported a positive relationship between openness to change and subsequent career resilience, as well as a reversed pathway. According to the authors, these findings indicate that both openness to change and career resilience are integral components in shaping one's career trajectory.

4.1.3. Cognitive appraisal and emotions

Appraisal theory differentiates between primary appraisal, in which individuals evaluate whether an event threatens their well-being and thereby influence the intensity and valence of their emotions, and secondary appraisal, in which they assess their capacity to manage or cope with the demands posed by the event (Lazarus, 1991; Schmidt et al., 2010). Because disruptive events often involve change and perceived loss, they are often appraised as threatening, which may elicit negative emotional reactions (Fugate et al., 2008). In empirical work, Barclay et al. (2022) observed that workers' appraisal of disruption in relation to their own work, including its meaningfulness and effectiveness, prompted distinct emotional responses. Their observations underscore the heterogeneity in appraisal outcomes: different workers interpreted the same environmental disruption differently, and not all considered the resulting changes to be negative.

Table 2 provides an overview of the relationships between contextual factors associated with disruptive events, as reported in the included studies, and the corresponding emotions reported. Fear emerged as the most frequently described response, with frustration also frequently noted. Other reported negative emotions encompassed guilt, anger, feelings of threat, and irritation, or were occasionally described in broader terms as emotional hardship or unspecified adverse affective states. Pride was identified as one of the positive emotions reported. Below, we briefly outline the main emotions identified.

Fear. Various studies have identified fright, anxiety, and fear as basic responses to a range of disruptive situations. For coding consistency, these distinct emotions were grouped together under the broader category of *fear*, in accordance with Ekman's (1992) classification of basic emotions. Fright denotes an immediate, concrete, and overwhelming physical danger, typically elicited by direct exposure to a significant threat (Lazarus, 1999), such as the immediate risk of infection during COVID-19 (e.g. Blustein et al., 2022). Anxiety more often reflected uncertain or existential threats, including challenges to ego identity and future direction; in several disruptive contexts, workers reported profound identity-related concerns (e.g. Walder & Molineux, 2017). Reports of fear frequently co-occurred with elevated stress, fatigue, and burnout, alongside lower levels of job satisfaction and well-being. Some studies also linked fear with perceived reductions in productivity or effectiveness. These patterns suggest that fear-oriented appraisals during disruption may be associated with decreased health, dysregulated affect, and less favourable work-related experiences.

Frustration. A notable proportion of participants reported frustration in various disruptive contexts. Frustration was often reported alongside stress, fatigue, and burnout, and aligned with less positive career-related experiences, including job dissatisfaction and perceived decreases in productivity.

Pride. Pride was also salient in several accounts. For example, disruptions to teaching practices during lockdown initially elicited discomfort among teachers (e.g. Calleja & Camilleri, 2021). As teachers became aware of the need to adapt and developed competencies with digital technologies, they described growing ownership and pride, alongside enthusiasm and motivation to direct their professional development and engagement. Similar experiences were observed in nursing (e.g. Davey et al., 2022), physiotherapy (Campo et al., 2023), and other sectors (e.g. Barclay et al., 2022). Experiencing pride and achievement contributed to an enhanced sense of happiness.

4.1.4. Short-term outcomes

Consistent with Affective Events Theory, disruptive events seemed to function as proximal causes of affective reactions that, in turn, appeared to shape short-term health, satisfaction, and productivity-related outcomes (Ohly & Schmitt, 2015; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

Table 2 provides an overview of the ways in which various disrupted circumstances, categorised as *contextual factors*, elicited emotional responses, and the manner in which these responses were linked to various short-term outcomes, collectively referred to as *states of (dis)comfort*. Various situations experienced at work, home, and in social contexts were related to various health risks, including stress, exhaustion, and ill-being. The changes in working conditions, resource loss, workload, and home-related issues,

including balancing work demands with domestic duties, all resulted in heightened stress, exhaustion, fatigue, and burnout. In the social context, a career shock like a conflict with a supervisor, caused stress and feelings of unsafety and uncertainty (Nair & Chatterjee, 2021). In addition to elevated health risks, reduced job satisfaction and well-being have been increasingly reported as a result of changed working conditions, heightened demands, and resource depletion. In contrast, experiencing positive feelings from providing services was associated with increased satisfaction. Additionally, factors such as resource constraints, altered working conditions, and work-home conflicts seemed to result in reduced productivity.

In summary, workers' appraisals of disruptive events were associated with short-term states of (dis)comfort, which manifested as changes in mental health, job satisfaction, engagement, and performance.

4.1.5. Psychological processes

After the initial shock and the experienced discomfort, most workers made efforts to resume their roles so they could keep serving patients, clients, and students. This was because work was central to their lives and professional identity (Bakker et al., 2019; Walder & Molineux, 2017), often viewed as *a sense of duty* (Berry et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022) or a *calling* (Kuenzi et al., 2024). Psychological processes and resources acted as catalysts for these efforts.

Reflective processes. Across heterogeneous events, psychological processes consistently demonstrated an evaluative and/or reflective character. The nature of the disruptive event and its specific triggering situations (see *contextual factors* in Table 2) shaped the initial focus of the reflective process, which usually centred on the immediate situation. For example, changing working conditions prompted reflection-in-action on potential person-demands mismatches (e.g. Berry et al., 2022) and lateral thinking (e.g. Calleja & Camilleri, 2021), whereas workplace relocation triggered an ongoing assessment and evaluation of the developing circumstances and available resources (e.g. Nair & Chatterjee, 2021). A serious illness, such as cancer, often led individuals to regularly assess the effects on their physical capabilities (Trusson et al., 2021). Notably, frustrations associated with major life events, such as low energy following treatment, initiated reflective processes that diverged from those triggered by frustrations caused by organisational inconsistencies, such as inconsistent workplace policies during the pandemic, underscoring the context-dependent nature of cognitive appraisal and reflective practices.

Resilience and self-efficacy. Across the majority of studies, participants often demonstrated psychological resilience and self-efficacy. Especially during the pandemic, following an initial phase marked by disruption, heightened emotions, uncertainty, and concerns, workers seemed to adapt, gained confidence, and initiated change that strengthened their resilience and self-efficacy (e.g. Campo et al., 2023; De Clercq & Pereira, 2021). Resilience and self-efficacy interacted, often reciprocally, with the evaluative and reflective processes and the subsequent actions and behaviours. For instance, rumination undermined the effectiveness of personal resources, such as self-efficacy, in facilitating work engagement and adaptation (Bakker et al., 2019). This suggests that disruptive events absorb energetic and cognitive resources, causing emotional fatigue and psychological trauma, which in turn prevents the full use of psychological resources at

work (Bakker et al., 2019; Butler et al., 2021). In addition, personal factors, such as prior experiences, also influenced psychological resources; Borg et al. (2023) found that senior employees with substantial experience, relevant knowledge, skills, and confidence in their ability to grow from overcoming crises demonstrated greater resilience and adaptability during the pandemic compared to more junior workers. They also reported greater growth in their career resilience and adaptive capabilities during the pandemic.

The changed situation often provided opportunities to act, evaluate the outcomes, and gain insights into themselves and their abilities, ultimately leading to greater resilience, self-efficacy, and an improved self-concept (e.g. De Clercq & Pereira, 2021; Hanna et al., 2022; Kiekel et al., 2022).

4.1.6. Adaptive behavioural processes

Across the included studies, workers tended to engage in adaptive strategies to resume their responsibilities. The most commonly reported behaviours were mobilising support, developing human capital by adapting tasks and roles, collaborating, and managing home–work balance. These actions, including situation-specific behaviours like negotiation in case of a conflict, are summarised as *behavioural self-management processes* in Table 2.

Mobilising social support. Seeking and receiving support from colleagues, family, and friends was a key adaptive strategy across all events. For example, due to the change of working conditions and the loss of resources, mobilising support from colleagues, family, and employers functioned as sources of sympathy, trust, and encouragement. Their help and support fostered a sense of belonging and aided workers in coping with and adapting to challenging circumstances (e.g. Al Maamari, 2024; Bratun et al., 2023).

Collaboration and teamwork. Collaborating with others and a sense of collegiality encouraged workers not to give up but to move forward (e.g. Calleja & Camilleri, 2021). Engagement with professionals from various disciplines, contributed to new knowledge, insights, and skills (Shahlaei & Snis, 2022).

Human Capital development. Workers commonly modified practices, tasks, and role boundaries to meet altered demands and resource constraints, particularly during the pandemic. Emotional experiences (e.g. frustration) and psychological drivers functioned as antecedents of self-initiated adaptation, including job crafting and adoption of new methods to maintain service delivery (e.g. Barclay et al., 2022; De Clercq & Pereira, 2021; Shahlaei & Snis, 2022). For example, a major life event, such as cancer treatment, required adjusting work roles and routines to manage job demands while coping with reduced energy and physical limitations. Often, the motivation underlying this behaviour stemmed from workers' frustration caused by a lack of engagement in occupational roles (e.g. Hopkins et al., 2024; Trusson et al., 2021).

Balancing home-work demands. We found that disruptive events led to a shift in work–life balance, either positive or negative. Several career shocks in private life, such as the birth of a child, the illness of a spouse or loved one, a divorce, having problems with children, were associated with perceived increases in domestic demands, which urged workers to find a new balance between work and home responsibilities (Pak et al., 2021). This was manageable when adequate resources were available. The pandemic introduced its challenges with the risk of family members contracting the virus

or the shift to working from home, which required restructuring living arrangements, and, at times, limiting contact with loved ones to mitigate health risks (Davey et al., 2022; Variyan & Reimer, 2022).

Reactive behaviour. Besides demonstrating adaptive behaviours, a subset of workers remained inactive, showed avoidant behaviour, and did not adapt. For example, in some cases, workers experiencing misfit following a career shock refrained from changing course, treated the misfit as temporary, and remained in unsuitable roles in the expectation of improvement (Simosi & Conway, 2025). This pattern was frequently linked to a low perceived sense of employability.

4.2. Long-term perspective

Experiences, whether positive or negative, encountered by workers during their lives can provide opportunities for "dynamic learning", contributing to long-term sustainable career and life outcomes (De Vos et al., 2020). Table 3 presents an overview of how *situational opportunities and constraints* identified in our review arising from disruptive events are related to psychological processes and behaviours (Johns, 2006). These processes may, in turn, be associated with beneficial consequences for both individuals and their broader environments, particularly when considered from a long-term perspective (De Vos et al., 2020). Accordingly, the career and life outcomes reported in our reviewed studies that contribute to such enduring consequences are categorised here as *long-term sustainable outcomes*. These outcomes are organised according to the key indicators of a sustainable career: health, happiness, and productivity. In addition to these indicators, to have a sustainable career, it is essential for the person to be mindful about who and what matters to them in their career (De Vos et al., 2020). In this respect, a sense of meaning constitutes a fundamental component of career sustainability. Moreover, resources such as income, social networks, workplace stakeholder support, and stable, satisfying personal relationships further strengthen career sustainability. By contrast, passive or ineffective self-management processes may result in non-sustainable outcomes. The subsequent sections will analyse the psychological and behavioural self-management mechanisms activated by situational factors, as well as consider their potential impact on enduring sustainable outcomes.

4.2.1. Psychological self-management processes

Whereas short-term psychological processes tended to be oriented toward the management of immediate situational demands, post-shock psychological processes appeared to focus on sustainable factors such as career trajectory, personal identity, sense of purpose and meaning, as well as professional growth and workplace innovation.

Reflective processes. Across the included studies, disruptive events commonly appeared to precipitate critical reflection regarding career direction, meaning in work and life, self-concept and identity, and future work practices. Various work-related constraints and opportunities across diverse events (see Table 3), like person–environment misalignment, organisational restructuring and workplace innovation, were frequently described as prompting reassessment of career trajectories and strategies, including whether to remain with an employer (Nair & Chatterjee, 2021), or to reconsider industry standards and unwritten rules to modify existing practices (e.g. Flaherty & Schroeder, 2022).

Change events, such as a merger, were also linked to identity work, with workers reflecting on and reframing experiences to accommodate new identities, such as post-merger identities (Schmitt et al., 2024). In addition, career shocks, chance events, and major life events were reported to lead workers to revisit motives and values and revise their self-concepts (Brose et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2019). For example, the loss of wholeness and the devastating effect of their deteriorating body had an impact on their sense of self and meaning (Brose et al., 2023).

Resilience and self-efficacy. Reflective processes contributed to building resilience by providing therapeutic benefits or by re-establishing order during disruptive situations. Reflection on identity threats and the reframing of adverse experiences were described as mechanisms through which workers developed greater resilience and adaptability (Schmitt et al., 2024; Turner et al., 2022). In turn, higher resilience and self-efficacy were associated with proactive self-management behaviour directed toward sustainable outcomes, including efforts to safeguard employability and enhance well-being (Ali & Mehreen, 2021; Peeters et al., 2022). While certain resilient workers were able to find new meaning in their work and were able to redefine their identity, other workers felt alienated from their new roles, reporting workplace divisions, value conflicts, and rising mistrust (Butler et al., 2021).

4.2.2. Behavioural self-management processes

Pak et al. (2021) reported that workers managed both positive and negative disruptions at work or in their personal lives through maintaining a functional balance between job demands and personal resources. The authors suggested that this balance was sustained not only through organisational development and utilisation support but also through workers' own self-regulatory contributions, including self-management and job crafting.

In general, the reviewed studies showed that reflective, resilient, and self-efficacious workers tended to engage proactively in self-management behaviour, such as drawing attention, building networks, mobilising contacts, updating skills, and collaborating with others to achieve sustainable career outcomes (e.g. Ali & Mehreen, 2021; Leong et al., 2024; Peeters et al., 2022). In addition to developmental activities aimed at enhancing personal resources, negative career shocks may also act as a catalyst that prompt workers to re-evaluate their fixed or outdated career pathways, identifying alternative career opportunities, and pursue job transitions (Leong et al., 2024). Various disruptive events, such as career shocks, change events, and the pandemic, have prompted workers to engage in proactive job search, sometimes resulting in leaving their organisation and, in some cases, the industry at large (e.g. Simosi & Conway, 2025). There were various reasons for this behaviour, such as becoming aware of a deteriorating health and seeking a healthier work–life balance (Visentini et al., 2023), seeking stable employment, and adequate pay (e.g. Puteková et al., 2023).

Certain behaviours were associated with particular events, such as workers relocating or passing up better opportunities if they prioritised caring for family over work (Nair & Chatterjee, 2021). Workers experiencing major life events, such as living with advanced cancer (Brose et al., 2023) employed ongoing adaptive strategies, such as focusing on daily goals and prioritising what's most valuable for them, to remain engaged in their everyday activities.

4.2.3. Long-term, (non-)sustainable career outcomes

The studies reviewed suggest that while disruptive events can negatively impact career outcomes in the short term, they may support career sustainability in the long run, provided workers have sufficient resources to meet altered demands (Pak et al., 2021). A sustainable career is associated with sustained health, happiness, and productivity (De Vos et al., 2020).

The evidence suggests that the interplay between personal attributes and psychological and behavioural self-management may influence indicators of career sustainability.

Health. Health is an essential outcome in the context of a sustainable career, encompassing both physical and emotional well-being (De Vos et al., 2020). Proactive strategies, such as reframing challenges, learning and adopting new technologies, encouraging innovation, and sharing solutions, were associated with reduced stress and a healthier work climate (e.g. Khurshid et al., 2021; Zaza & Erskine, 2024). Similarly, self-awareness and positive self-evaluation were linked to attention to health-promoting behaviours (Aughterson et al., 2021; Nessel, 2022). Longitudinal evidence indicated that the adverse health effects of negative work events may be short-lived, with a return to baseline levels within approximately one year, potentially reflecting the activation of compensatory resources (Udayar et al., 2021).

Happiness. Happiness refers to the subjective experience of success or satisfaction in both professional and personal domains and reflects the extent to which a career aligns dynamically with an individual's values, career goals, or needs related to work–life balance or personal growth (De Vos et al., 2020). The research conducted by Simosi and Conway (2025) indicated that career shocks initially led to adverse career and psychological outcomes, including reduced compensation, job satisfaction, and engagement. However, for some workers, these experiences ultimately facilitated reflection and enabled them to pursue more fulfilling career opportunities over time. Demonstrating strength and resilience following a disruptive event, such as a natural disaster, coupled with making a constructive contribution by helping others, was associated with increased levels of happiness and satisfaction (Al Maamari, 2024). Longitudinal survey data also suggest an indirect, time-lagged link between career resilience and career satisfaction via career self-management (Peeters et al., 2022), with the authors inferring that greater resilience may be related to higher earnings and satisfaction. Certain workers found it challenging to engage in efficient self-management or adapt successfully. Rather than reflecting constructively, some workers tended to ruminate, leading to feelings of aimlessness and dissatisfaction (Bakker et al., 2019). Others became alienated from work, which caused conflict and mistrust (Butler et al., 2021).

Productivity. Productivity includes strong performance in one's current job, career success, engagement, as well as high employability or career potential (De Vos et al., 2020). Productivity-related outcomes appeared to unfold through shifts in person–environment fit and agentic adaptation processes. Specifically, changes in demands–ability or needs–supplies fit were associated with altered ability, motivation and/or opportunity to continue working, with implications for satisfaction, performance, and external employability (Pak et al., 2021; Simosi & Conway, 2025). Negative career shocks tended to initially impede employability; however, workers who engaged in developing new skills and reframing challenges reported improved person–career fit, greater use of strengths, and enhanced perceived employability and career performance (Leong

et al., 2024). However, not all workers were able to resolve post-shock person–environment misfit, which led to decreased productivity and employability (e.g. Simosi & Conway, 2025). In a three-wave survey, workplace-related shocks indirectly contributed to perceived employability by motivating networking behaviours (Zhou et al., 2023). However, these relationships are not always straightforward and simple. The study of Blokker et al. (2019) showed that workers who had developed a high level of career competencies were more satisfied with their career and perceived themselves as more internally employable, yet less externally employable. The authors suggested that increased career satisfaction may foster a strong internal focus, such as organisational commitment and sense of job security, while also resulting in a weaker orientation towards the external labour market. Evidence also suggested a reciprocal relationship between productivity factors and psychological and behavioural processes, with perceived employability associated with agentic actions such as setting new career goals and job search (Simosi & Conway, 2025).

4.3. Integrative overview

Considering all the concepts, variables, and their interconnections outlined earlier, we were enabled to integrate them into an overall overview as illustrated in Figure 3. Many of the included findings stem from a systematic theory-informed synthesis and have not been consistently validated through longitudinal research designs. Accordingly, the overview should be seen as a synthesis of the current state of knowledge, rather than a definitive account of how these relationships unfold over time.

Drawing on the extant literature, sustainable career outcomes appear to emerge through a dynamic interplay between environmental conditions, personal attributes, and psychological and behavioural processes, all influencing each other over time

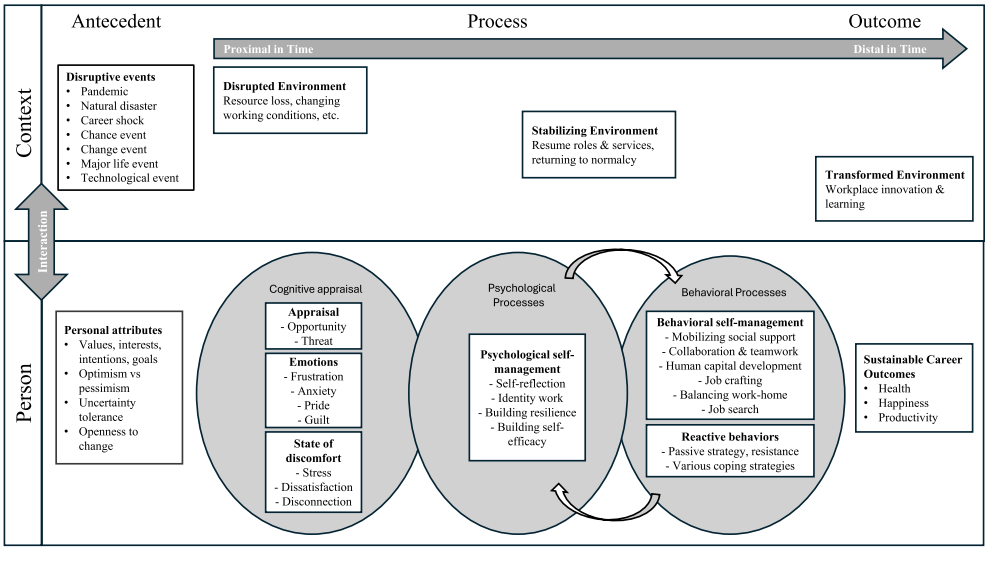

Figure 3. Integrative overview of contextual factors, person-related factors, such as cognitive appraisal, emotional states and psychological and behavioural processes, and career outcomes progressing over time.

(De Lange et al., 2021). In our synthesis, these outcomes were not merely endpoints but also functioned as inputs to ongoing self-management processes. For example, perceived employability, a productivity-related outcome, was associated with heightened self-efficacy and appeared to prompt agentic behaviours such as revising career goals and engaging in proactive job search activities. Psychological and behavioural processes demonstrated reciprocal influences, both internally and in relation to each other. Mobilising social support, for example, seemed to enhance the capacity and motivation to adjust work practices by facilitating collaboration and the exploration of innovative work approaches, while also fostering critical reflection and resilience.

There was notable variation in how workers appraised and managed disruptive events. Workers who held more positive self-views tended to report greater optimism and self-efficacy, whereas those with more negative self-perceptions focused on obstacles, which appeared to constrain development and the recognition of opportunities. Interpreting situational demands as enabling rather than obstructive was associated with resilience and more adaptive and proactive self-management.

Overall, the overview is broadly consistent with the process model of sustainable careers (De Vos et al., 2020), illustrating how the interaction among the person, the environment, and temporal dynamics may influence indicators of sustainability. In this framing, disruptive events and environmental conditions formed the context in which a worker's resources, including personal attributes and cognitive and behavioural competencies, seemed to play a crucial role in shaping their ability to manage the emotional and environmental challenges associated with disruption. Following the initial impact, self-management processes appeared to unfold via incremental, iterative steps, enabling workers to adjust to evolving contexts over time and, in doing so, build more distal, sustainable career trajectories.

5. Discussion

This systematic review of peer-reviewed journals from 2017 to early 2025 explored how the interplay between workers' emotional responses and psychological and behavioural self-management activities following a disruptive event seemed to relate to short-term and long-term career outcomes. The analysis revealed the strategies employed by workers to manage disruptive events through adaptive and dynamic processes. Drawing upon comprehensive and varied evidence, across different sectors, regions, and event types, this theory-informed synthesis offers process-oriented insights for research on sustainable careers, disruptive events, including career shocks, and work-related stress. Specifically, the synthesis examined the characteristics of disruptive events within their multifaceted contextual settings, foregrounded the often underemphasised role of emotions in vocational research, distinguished psychological from behavioural mechanisms, and employed a temporal lens to capture how responses to change and outcomes unfold. Building on these insights, we also provided suggestions for a future research agenda.

5.1. Impact of attributes of disruptive events in a complex environment

Akkermans et al. (2021) call for clearer insight into whether event attributes, such as valence and controllability, shape how individuals respond to disruptive events. Evidence

from this review indicates that, in addition to personal attributes, event characteristics or attributes like unpredictability, uncertainty, valence, and intensity, appeared to shape workers' perceptions as well as their emotional and coping responses. For example, when workers encountered intensive and relatively uncontrollable life events, such as chronic illness, marked by ongoing losses and fluctuating functional capacity, studies reported withdrawal from goals that were rendered unattainable by their condition (e.g. Brose et al., 2023). This withdrawal may serve to protect mental health. Conversely, care workers faced with constantly changing and conflicting policies during the pandemic, such as enforcing strict visitor restrictions, reported frustration and efforts to reassert control by breaking rules or requesting exemptions (McMillan et al., 2021). In these two situations, the degree of controllability led to distinct response strategies. These observations align with research on stress, indicating that factors such as the level of intensity, unpredictability, and controllability of events can impact appraisal and coping strategies (Lucas et al., 2014). An active coping style is likely most effective in situations that are relatively controllable and modifiable, whereas a passive approach tends to be more beneficial when control is limited. Prior research suggests that intensive disruptive events resulting in major losses, like death or loss of employment, often evoke coping strategies like reappraisal and acceptance, whereas events involving threat (e.g. health threat like COVID-19) may trigger a "fight or flight" response, leading to direct action or avoidant coping strategies (Updegraff & Taylor, 2000). Relatively few studies examined the characteristics and resulting appraisal and management of stressful events in depth, highlighting a need for further research (Schwarzer & Luszczynska, 2013; Updegraff & Taylor, 2000).

In addition to the variability in attributes within specific events, our synthesis suggests that different event types with directionally consistent attributes could have differential effects due to contextual complexity. The unfolding underlying situations were associated with variation in appraisals and emotional reactions, and distinct self-management strategies. For instance, studies focusing on both technology-related and pandemic-related events frequently emphasised attributes such as controllability and unpredictability. Within technology-intensive environments, rapidly shifting, unpredictable, and uncontrollable job and client demands caused uncertainty, created knowledge gaps, disrupted established routines, and contributed to worker frustration (Sengupta et al., 2022; Shahlaei & Snis, 2022). These challenges were commonly addressed through self-management strategies focused on workplace learning and seeking instrumental support, including targeted training, coaching, and cross-disciplinary collaboration (Aurrekoetxea-Casaus & Diez, 2020; Brougham et al., 2019). In contrast, the unpredictability and lack of control experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic were identified as factors contributing to a cascade of micro-disruptions, such as safety and protection concerns, financial challenges, and loss of resources. These disruptions were often linked to negative emotional states and adverse health outcomes, including stress, exhaustion, and burnout (Berry et al., 2022; Blustein et al., 2022; Kiekel et al., 2022). Addressing these problems required distinct self-management strategies, including psychological and physical withdrawal, seeking social and emotional support, and adapting personal protective measures. Compared to technological events, pandemic-related events appeared to be more difficult to predict and control. This difficulty may be attributed to the concurrent disruptions occurring within various domains, such as society, the workplace, and

domestic settings (Ibert et al., 2022). The interplay between individuals and their multifaceted contexts, shaped by numerous exogenous and endogenous factors, makes the event more complex and challenging (Pryor & Bright, 2014).

This review advances sustainable career theory and career shocks research by providing a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between diverse contextual factors and workers' cognitive appraisal of these factors, as well as their potential impact on the selection and scope of adaptive self-management activities. Across studies, patterns tentatively suggest that proximal responses were more consistently aligned with the unfolding cascade of underlying situations and the nature and level of attributes embedded within them (e.g. perceived intensity, controllability, and predictability), than with the categorical nature of the macro-level disruptive event itself. As individuals both shape and are shaped by their environment, following Chen et al. (2021), we suggest that future research adopt an interactionist approach that examines workers in dynamic interaction with their complex environment. Such research could take a holistic approach that considers workers in their entirety, including their personal attributes and resources, alongside contextual limitations and opportunities (Akkermans et al., 2021, 2024; Pryor & Bright, 2014). Such an approach could provide deeper insight into the patterns and processes that shape careers over time.

5.2. Emotions

This review considered emotions as a potential explanatory mechanism underlying the heterogeneous effects that disruptive events may have on workers (Akkermans et al., 2020). Across the included studies, disruptive events appeared to be experienced in diverse ways, as reflected by the varied affective responses reported by workers. Drawing on appraisal theories, these differences can be explained by the idea that workers first evaluate how events relate to personal goals and values (Frijda, 1993), implying that individual responses can vary based on person-related factors, including values, goals, commitments, intentions, and plans (Lazarus, 1999). For example, Israeli handball players relocating to Germany reported varied emotional experiences that seemed contingent on their psychological needs and goals (Samuel et al., 2020a). Changes to training conditions and standards were appraised by some players as undermining anticipated professional progress, which they described as frustrating and demotivating. In line with their appraisals of transition demands, barriers, expectations, and resources, players reported multiple transition pathways (e.g. opting for change versus resisting change), which were associated with varying career trajectories.

In the first instance, negative emotions may have adverse implications for both workers and organisations, as they are linked to undesirable outcomes, such as negative impact on mental health, energy depletion, decreased engagement, and diminished performance (Ali et al., 2020; Fugate et al., 2008; Hamouche et al., 2023). The reviewed studies identified a range of negative emotions, including fear, frustration, guilt, anger, threat, and irritation, which, from an appraisal perspective, provide distinct insights into how individuals evaluate events and are linked to particular action tendencies (Frijda et al., 1989). Guilt, for example, has been described as closely tied to moral values (Lazarus, 1999) and may function to promote prosocial behaviour while constraining antisocial behaviour (Özden & Walle, 2025). In several reviewed studies,

guilt was reported when individuals felt unable to help others (i.e. an affect-eliciting event) in ways that conflicted with their values and professional identity as helpers (e.g. Rochette et al., 2025; Van Biljon & Van Niekerk, 2022). These conflicts may be experienced as psychological discomfort and have been linked to adverse health outcomes, including heightened stress.

At the same time, emotions also appeared to influence action readiness that can support adaptive responding to environmental demands, enabling individuals to mobilise physiological activity to address potentially harmful or threatening situations (Lazarus, 1999; Ridderinkhof, 2017). For example, longitudinal evidence suggests that when workers perceived improvements in the meaningfulness and effectiveness of their work, they experienced discrete positive emotions, such as pride, which in turn prompted promotion-focused job crafting, for example, broadening one's task repertoire (Barclay et al., 2022). Conversely, perceived deteriorations in the meaningfulness and effectiveness of work were associated with frustration, which triggered prevention-focused job crafting, such as narrowing task scope and concentrating on the most critical job aspects to manage demands and challenges. In Rochette et al. (2025), COVID-19-related disruptions and limited resources elicited a wide array of emotions; but resilient and self-confident clinicians adapted creatively and took on new roles. Emotions evolved over time, shifting from more acute distress and negativity toward more positive emotions, such as gratitude for organisational support and pride in professional accomplishment.

These insights contribute to sustainable career and stress research by underscoring the significance of personal attributes and psychological factors, such as values, needs, and identity, serving as key anchor points that inform appraisals and subsequent emotions (De Vos et al., 2020; Hobfoll, 1989). These appraisals may have implications for workers' motivation, commitment, engagement, and adaptive behaviour. Positioning emotions within the *person* dimension may thus facilitate analysis of their interaction with other person-related aspects, including resilience and coping skills. Such an approach may enable a richer understanding of the mechanisms through which some individuals adapt effectively to dynamic environments while others face challenges and sustained discomfort. Moreover, the reviewed literature suggests that emotions evolve over time, pointing to their potential role as temporal regulators of psychological and behavioural processes. From this perspective, non-sustainability may not constitute a permanent state, but rather a condition that may improve over time, particularly when supported by appropriate learning opportunities and receiving organisational and social support.

Despite the importance of emotions, empirical research examining emotions as a central mechanism, linking work contexts (e.g. environmental changes) to job attitudes and work outcomes, remains limited (Beare et al., 2020; Weiss & Beal, 2005). To clarify how disruptive events may shape emotional states and work outcomes, including job attitudes, motivation, engagement, performance, and well-being, future research would benefit from studies that examine dynamic interactions between contextual factors and key anchors, personal and organisational resources, and the psychological and behavioural mechanisms that drive these attitudes and work outcomes (Fugate et al., 2008; Ohly & Schmitt, 2015; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Such research should focus on designing studies that systematically identify the relevant variables influencing

workers' appraisals and emotional reactions, with careful evaluation of how these factors affect the management of workplace challenges (Fugate et al., 2008). For example, the Conservation of Resources model offers a useful lens for understanding how individuals appraise, protect, and build resources to meet needs and pursue career goals, supporting sustainable careers (De Vos et al., 2020). This will require careful specification of which resources are perceived as helpful in the context of different resource losses, the extent to which these resources can be enhanced through intervention, and the specificity, potency, time course, and robustness of resources in offsetting losses (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002). For instance, social support may exert time-limited effects, whereas self-esteem may represent a more enduring resource (Hobfoll, 1989).

5.3. Temporal effects – timing is key; there is a right moment for everything

This study points to the dynamic and evolving nature of careers and suggests that time may play an important role in how contextual changes unfold as individuals interact with their environment. As reflected in the integrative overview (see Figure 3), disrupted environments as well as workers often progress toward stability and, over time, undergo transformation. In a similar vein, periods of unsustainability may be addressed and, under certain conditions, may be followed by more sustainable career outcomes. Psychological processes, such as reflection, appear to be vital in these developments. In this respect, the present synthesis offers additional insights into research on career shocks.

Existing research on career shocks recognises that such an event represents a combination of an external event and an internal process of initial sensemaking and internal deliberate thought process concerning one's career, such as the need for acquiring new skills, changing occupations, or retiring (Akkermans et al., 2018; Seibert et al., 2016). Akkermans et al. (2018) suggest that a major external event that does not trigger reflection on one's career path or options would not constitute a career shock.

Building on the reviewed literature, the present synthesis suggests that the reflection process progresses through distinct phases, from appraisal, situational assessment to critical reflection. While a deliberate thinking process about the career is inherent to a career shock, our findings indicate that reflection does not always appear to concern explicit decisions about career direction from the outset. In the first instance, after a period characterised by disruption and chaos, individuals might be too shocked, upset, and confused to reaffirm important identities or to reflect directly on their career trajectory (Campo et al., 2023; Turner et al., 2022). Instead, the reviewed studies suggest that the thinking process following an initial shock may resemble a more iterative or "zigzag" process (Jeong & Brower, 2008, p. 22), in which workers scanned, noticed, evaluated, and made sense of their immediate situation, while also considering longer-term constraints and opportunities (e.g. Barbulescu et al., 2022; Nair & Chatterjee, 2021). Within this process, emotions may function as signals that draw attention to matters requiring immediate response (Lengelle et al., 2016). Workers may then take action to address pressing concerns, after which they re-evaluate and interpret the outcomes of those actions. Reflective practices appear to support the evaluation of coping and problem-solving strategies (Crane et al., 2019), thereby becoming an integral element of thoughtful action (Mezirow, 1990). The disturbed day-to-day demands required workers' attention,

leaving limited opportunity to prioritise critical reflection on long-term career goals during the chaotic phase of the event.

This interpretation is consistent with prior theorising that suggests critical reflection may not be fully embedded in immediate action but instead may require deliberate hiatus from activity (Mezirow, 1990) or a reflective pause (Seibert et al., 2016). For example, the pandemic-related "slow down" afforded extended periods for contemplation on what matters most (Aughterson et al., 2021; Nessel, 2022), and there is evidence that self-imposed breaks created space for critical reflection, frequently supported by significant others, which prompted reconsideration of career plans (Wordsworth & Nilakant, 2021). Research indicated that the process of delayed critical reflection and career image (re)construction appeared to unfold gradually and iteratively, with multiple alternatives considered in parallel rather than sequentially (Barbulescu et al., 2022; Blustein et al., 2022; Zamora-Sole et al., 2022). As shown in Table 3, the psychological self-management process often involved revisiting and sometimes transforming deeply held beliefs, values, and meaning schemes regarding oneself, others, and the surrounding context (Leung & Kember, 2003; Mezirow, 1981; Taylor, 2000). Given that such perspectives are formed over prolonged periods and often anchor core interests and activities, they seem resistant to change and may require both time and conducive circumstances to shift (Henderson, 2002; Leung & Kember, 2003).

Once individuals carefully have evaluated their beliefs, assumptions, and values, they should integrate the newly developed perspectives into their lives (Henderson, 2002; Mezirow, 1981). Such shifts in perspective may, in turn, prompt reconsideration of strategies, adjustments in career-related behaviours, and engagement with new courses of action (Seibert et al., 2013). Across reviewed studies, workers seemed to undergo gradual changes, including the development of new attitudes and adaptations to altered contexts (e.g. Campo et al., 2023; Sengupta et al., 2022). This appeared to be a dynamic process that seemed to require continuous nurturing and commitment, help-seeking, reflection, and self-care (Davey et al., 2022). Therefore, research on disruptive events may benefit from considering both the immediate challenges that require attention and intervention as well as the long-term effects and implications of disruptive events for both employees and employers. The "rethink" development introduced earlier may be interpreted as an indication of this broader and ongoing process.

Overall, these findings provide a more nuanced perspective on the temporal development of coping with disruptive events, suggesting that reflection is valuable not only for long-term meaning-making but also for informing short-term response strategies.

5.4. Differentiating between psychological and behavioural self-management processes

This systematic review examined how workers appeared to manage the misfit in their work and home environment caused by disruptive events through psychological and behavioural self-management activities. When workers experience a mismatch between themselves and their jobs, prior research suggests that they may seek to regain control and re-establish balance in relation to workplace conditions and emerging job demands (Caldwell, 2011; Tol & Van Seggelen-Damen, 2025). This study differentiated between psychological- and behavioural self-management factors. The reviewed studies indicated that psychological

processes and resources, such as self-reflection, resilience, and self-efficacy, could play a vital role in enabling worker's self-initiated adaptive behaviour, including building and mobilising social support, and human capital development. The synthesis further suggested that distinct self-management factors may interact with one another; for example, human capital development may be facilitated by goal setting, while resilience may be strengthened through self-reflection. In addition, several studies pointed to reciprocal dynamics whereby behaviours such as job crafting and collaboration appeared to feed back into psychological processes, for instance by prompting reflection and enhancing confidence (e.g. Calleja & Camilleri, 2021; Kiekel et al., 2022; Variyan & Reimer, 2022). Taken together, these findings tentatively indicate that psychological and behavioural self-management may co-evolve as workers navigate misfit following disruptive events.

The differentiation between psychological and behavioural self-management may offer a useful contribution to career research. More specifically, this differentiation may help to facilitate the research on *how* workers appraise and regulate and *what* workers do when encountering disruptions in their work environment. Across the synthesised literature, psychological self-management, such as evaluating changing conditions and cultivating resilience, emerges as a potential enabling or constraining condition for behavioural change, suggesting that these psychological processes may function as antecedents to subsequent action. Modelling psychological processes as antecedent mechanisms may also clarify how actions (e.g. effective job crafting, collaborative problem-solving) could reciprocally contribute to the development of self-efficacy, resilience, pride, and meaning; capacities that are frequently associated with stress recovery and sustained functioning (e.g. Ali & Mehreen, 2021; Peeters et al., 2022). Moreover, differentiating between psychological processes and behavioural actions may allow for a more precise analysis of how the different elements of these processes interact with contextual factors. As discussed in Section 5.1, different situations appeared to be associated with different psychological and behavioural responses.

In current research, cognitive and behavioural aspects tend to be grouped together under a broad career self-management concept, potentially obscuring their individual contributions (Jiang et al., 2022). We suggest deconstructing the concept of career self-management into distinct psychological and behavioural sub-components. We also recommend that future research should adopt an integrative design that examines these components together, including how they relate to each other, while considering contextual influences that affect work and home domains and their interplay. In addition, conducting longitudinal studies could help to clarify the temporal dynamics of these factors and provide valuable insights into their causal relationships and proximal and distal outcomes.

In the present review, particular attention was placed on critical reflection, resilience, and self-efficacy as key variables of psychological self-management. However, future work might extend this focus to include hope (Variyan & Reimer, 2022; Walder & Molineux, 2017), decisiveness (Trusson et al., 2021), and commitment (Berry et al., 2022; Blokker et al., 2019) as well.

5.5. Practical implications

Our review offers several practical implications for both workers and employers in relation to disruptive events occurring in work and home domains. First, the synthesised

findings suggest that reflective, resilient, and self-efficacious workers were able to adapt by seeking and receiving social and emotional support and participating in learning opportunities. From this perspective, employers may play a vital role by providing meaningful work experiences, fostering social support, and facilitating opportunities for professional development and work–life balance (Van der Heijden et al., 2020). More specifically, organisations may benefit from developing greater awareness of the emotional dynamics associated with careers and from supporting employees in building effective coping strategies. They may also be able to mitigate some of the negative implications, or reinforce possible positive consequences, of disruptive events in both private and work life by offering tailored support, appropriate facilities, and accommodative HR practices (Pak et al., 2021), such as mentoring programs, talent management or idiosyncratic (career-focused) arrangements (Hofer et al., 2021). For example, annual assessments or performance reviews may provide an opportunity to discuss workers' career resilience and to offer support for career self-management and skill development, including through supervisor mentoring (Peeters et al., 2022).

Second, as the research of Beare et al. (2020) demonstrated, various personal and contextual factors influence and interact with each other, which can result in a wide range of often conflicting emotional responses of workers to changes in work environments. This insight may be particularly relevant for organisations implementing workplace change and seeking to identify opportunities for effective intervention (Barclay et al., 2022). In this regard, factors such as peer support, leadership styles, and clear communication appear to be key factors. The reviewed studies further suggest that work settings may benefit from implementing practices that allow workers flexibility and a degree of agency, as these conditions may support adaptive expertise (Rochette et al., 2025; Van Biljon & Van Niekerk, 2022). In addition, as organisations increasingly structure work around teams, positive team behaviour such as collaboration, may become important in team-based contexts (DeRue & Morgeson, 2007). For example, in healthcare settings, the complexity and emergent nature of health issues appeared to increase the importance of interprofessional collaboration among practitioners (Dyess et al., 2019).

Third, given the normalisation of hybrid and remote working following the pandemic, both workers and organisations may be able to draw on these insights when considering how to transform work conditions and cultures and self-management behaviours in ways that support workers' work and non-work lives (Kossek et al., 2021).

6. Limitations

This systematic review followed a systematic approach and aimed to be as comprehensive as possible. Nevertheless, the findings may be influenced by the inevitably interpretive application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Although some degree of selection bias cannot be ruled out, efforts were made to conduct the review in an ethical, systematic, and consistent manner, including attention to inter-coder reliability in the study selection process and the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria in the screening process.

Our review focused exclusively on workers in organisational settings and therefore excluded students, gig workers, and entrepreneurs. As noted by Rummel et al. (2021), entrepreneurs, as well as students and gig workers, differ from regular workers and

should be studied as a separate group. While some disruptive events may be relatively universal, others are likely to be more specific to particular populations. Future research may therefore benefit from examining both common and unique events across different target populations (Akkermans et al., 2021).

Pandemic events represented 60% of the disruptive events included in this review, which may have resulted in a relative overrepresentation of the pandemic in the findings. At the same time, by viewing these events as a series of cascading micro-disruptions, such as financial challenges (e.g. loss of income), changed working conditions and increased workload, and work-home interferences, the insights derived become relevant to a wider range of events.

Although this was not an intentional focus, most of the events represented in the included studies were characterised by negative adversity. However, individuals may also encounter positive perceived disruptive events, such as receiving an award or an unexpected promotion (Akkermans et al., 2018). In this regard, it is important to remember that it is the individual who perceives and categorises an experienced event (Akkermans et al., 2018).

Given the international scope of the reviewed studies, cultural variations may influence how situations trigger and shape emotions and self-management processes. The predominance of studies conducted in Western regions and contexts may therefore have introduced a degree of Western-centric bias.

Finally, although the integrative overview presented in Figure 3 aims to capture the complexity of the literature in a comprehensive way, it may also risk being perceived as overly inclusive. Accordingly, it should be regarded as a theory-informed synthesis that systematically organises recurring empirical patterns observed across diverse studies, rather than presenting a causal model.

7. Conclusion

In this systematic review, we synthesised evidence on the consequences of disruptive events for short- and long-term career outcomes, with particular attention to the potential role of emotions and psychological and behavioural self-management processes. The reviewed literature suggests that disruptive events may be associated with sustainable career outcomes through the dynamic, reciprocal interplay among affective, psychological, and behavioural processes. These events appear to extend across multiple domains, including the workplace, home, and the wider societal context, giving rise to situations that may be perceived as either constraining or enabling. The appraisal of these situations may elicit emotional responses that shape short-term adaptive efforts, often oriented toward restoring control, resuming role responsibilities, and maintaining service delivery. The synthesis also suggests that psychological self-management factors, particularly self-reflection, resilience, and self-efficacy, likely facilitated the adoption of adaptive behaviours, including building and using social networks, collaboration, and investing in human capital. At the same time, behavioural self-management processes may also feed back into psychological processes, suggesting a potentially reciprocal relationship between the two processes. In the initial phases of disruption, employees appear to focus primarily on adapting to altered daily routines and immediate demands, which may shift long-term career planning to a lower priority. When stability was re-established,

opportunities for reflective processing increased, allowing individuals to realign goals and plan for the future. Taken together, these insights point to the potential importance of emotional appraisal and of psychological and behavioural self-management capacities in understanding both immediate adjustment and subsequent career-related development following disruptive events. At the same time, given the synthesised nature of the evidence and the limited availability of longitudinal validation, these patterns should be interpreted as indicative rather than as definitively established over time.

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