

# Do tensions lead to positive career satisfaction results?



## As tensões levam a resultados positivos na carreira?

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This research aims to analyze the effect of the paradox mindset as a mediator of the relationship between stress experimentation with career satisfaction and life satisfaction.

**Originality/value:** The present study allowed for making three major advances for the literature of paradox and career satisfaction. First, it contributed by analyzing the paradox at the individual level. Second, the study cooperates with the career satisfaction literature, raising the possibility of perceiving tensions as a positive factor. Third, the present research has advanced in the career satisfaction literature by bringing the individual as a protagonist in their career.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Based on the sample of 245 valid respondents (with more than ten years in a career), it was used for data analysis and hypothesis testing, a multivariate analysis of structural equations modeling (SEM). Furthermore, the variance accounted for (VAF) test or variance explained was performed in order to present the mediating effect proposed in the study.

**Findings:** The results showed a direct negative significant relationship between tensions and satisfaction with career and life. This indicates that career tensions can also lead to positive effects since they tend to promote a greater ability of the individual (paradox mindset) to deal with conflicting situations. Such ability enables the achievement of positive results. In practice, the results of this study suggest that changing scenarios previously seen as negative and problematic to a more paradoxical mindset can help individuals deal with uncontrollable tensions and therefore improve the ability to feel more satisfied with one's career.

**Keywords:** career tensions, paradox, resource scarcity, paradox mindset, structural equation modeling



## Resumo

**Objetivo:** Esta pesquisa procurou analisar o efeito da mentalidade paradoxal como mediador da relação entre experimentação do estresse com satisfação na carreira e satisfação com a vida.

**Originalidade/valor:** O presente estudo permitiu realizar três avanços principais na literatura de paradoxo e satisfação com a carreira. Primeiro, contribuiu analisando o paradoxo no nível individual. Segundo, o estudo colabora com a literatura de satisfação com a carreira, aumentando a possibilidade de perceber as tensões como um fator positivo. Terceiro e, finalmente, o presente estudo avançou na literatura de satisfação com a carreira, trazendo o indivíduo como protagonista em sua carreira.

**Design/metodologia/abordagem:** Com base na amostra de 245 respondentes válidos (mais de 10 anos de carreira), foi utilizado para a análise de dados e teste de hipóteses, uma análise multivariada da modelagem por equações estruturais (MEE). Além disso, realizamos o teste *variance accounted for* (VAF) ou *variance explained*, a fim de apresentar o efeito mediador proposto no estudo.

**Resultados:** Os resultados mostraram uma relação significativa negativa direta entre tensões e satisfação com a carreira e a vida. Isso indica que as tensões na carreira também podem levar a efeitos positivos, pois tendem a promover uma maior capacidade do indivíduo (mentalidade paradoxal) de lidar com tensões conflitantes, e essa capacidade permite a obtenção de resultados positivos. Na prática, os resultados deste estudo podem inspirar profissionais. Eles podem usar os resultados, mudar os cenários anteriormente vistos como negativos e pessimistas e vê-los como uma oportunidade para desenvolver uma mentalidade paradoxal e, portanto, a capacidade de lidar de maneira equilibrada e satisfatória com as tensões.

**Palavras-chave:** tensões na carreira, paradoxo, escassez de recursos, mentalidade do paradoxo, modelagem por equações estruturais



## INTRODUCTION

Over time, tensions in the workplace have been intensifying as a result of global acceleration, with increasingly dynamic demands and fewer resources available (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Some authors have addressed the drastic reduction of jobs, in addition to the constant changes in the labor market, as being the consequence of the extinction of some previously stable careers and the opening of new jobs (Gibbons et al., 2019). According to the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2016), the world unemployment rate is expected to rise from 5.7% in 2016 to 5.8% in 2017. In Brazil, according to data from the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística ([Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics] IBGE, 2016), unemployment stands at 11.9%, with 12.1 million people unemployed. This scenario may have negative impacts on the individual due to the lack of opportunities and increased competition for job vacancies, generating psychological tensions.

During the professional career, several problems and tensions arise, such as the need to choose a profession while still being young and not having assurances of success, difficulties of insertion in the labor market, the paradox between personal and professional life, etc. (Burnette et al., 2020; Ruder et al., 2020). This difficulty in decision-making is often due to the scarcity of resources such as lack of money and time or due to scenarios of competition, unemployment, and inflation, among others (Miron-Spektor et al., 2017; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

One approach that has been used to understand how individuals seek to cope with and manage these tensions is that of the paradox, more precisely, the micro-fundamentals of the organizational paradox, which analyze the contradiction in the context of the individual, for example, the division between work and family. The theory of paradox helps to understand the dynamics of the choices and results of organizational tensions by proposing that conflicting and simultaneous decisions can have a balanced response, for example, in the paradox between creative company *versus* results or family business and professional management. However, tensions denote competing elements, such as conflicting demands, objectives, interests, and perspectives, but the micro-fundamentals are evident in the actors and their behavior in the face of tensions (Miron-Spektor et al., 2017).

This field is rapidly expanding because it enables problem-solving in a balanced way, i.e., a new way of perceiving and responding to simultaneous and competitive pressures. In addition, studies indicate that the result of stresses may be beneficial, given that there is evidence that some people energize themselves when faced with such adversity. Therefore, these pres-





tures can be treated as a positive or negative factor, depending on the approach that individuals adopt in relation to them (Miron-Spektor et al., 2017; Schad et al., 2016).

This perspective directly relates to how people see tensions. Some see them as a conflict, as something negative, which requires a lot of effort to be solved. Others see it as an opportunity, as a challenge that stimulates learning and agility. These individuals can create a mindset capable of dealing with paradoxes and, thus, turn an uncomfortable situation into a comfortable one (Burnette et al., 2020; Ruder et al., 2020; Bartunek, 1988; Schneider, 1999; Smith & Berg, 1987).

Even by stating that corporate tensions can affect individual-level decisions, the literature on tensions and paradox has focused mainly on the organizational level, i.e., addressing the impact of these tensions on how corporations react to simultaneous and competitive pressures. Previous studies, such as Lomranz and Benyamini (2016), Mehta and Zhu (2015), Miron-Spektor et al. (2017), and Miron-Spektor et al. (2011), have already advanced in the literature when they observe that the scarcity of resources, incongruities and conflicts can generate desirable consequences, such as increasing creativity, perceiving positivity in adverse situations and managing problems. However, it is not clear how this effect is related in the context of the professional career. In addition, the career literature addresses the difficulties of choice and satisfaction, but it is necessary to better understand how individuals can experience the tensions of this context. Thus, the present study aims to analyze the effect of the paradox mindset as the mediator of the relationship between stress experimentation, career satisfaction, and life satisfaction (Miron-Spektor et al., 2017).

The research was conducted with workers in the middle and final stages of their careers, more specifically professionals with more than ten years in their career. The sample group was comprised of 245 valid respondents. The data analysis shows that the proposed model has convergent validity, discriminant, and composite reliability, in addition to all the hypotheses proposed that were supported. The results presented demonstrate that for this sample, the direct effects of stress throughout the career have had negative impacts on individuals' professional and personal lives. On the other hand, the inclusion of the paradox mindset as the mediator of this relation makes the results of the tensions be perceived as positive, resulting in greater satisfaction with career and life.

When analyzing studies on career satisfaction and paradox, this study contributes theoretically to both areas. For the career satisfaction literature,





the study presents an alternative that had not been addressed until then, to confront the constant barriers and difficulties that are the main focus of studies so far, for example, in the studies by Murtagh et al. (2007) and Duff and Chan (2014). In addition, it advances by addressing a construct that can help empower the individual to their own career and life by directing a new mechanism of stress management, the paradox mindset. On the literature of paradox, we expand on the general approach in literature henceforth, focusing on the individual, i.e., in people's capacity to deal with paradoxical tensions. As addressed by Miron-Spektor et al. (2017), there is a need for studies on the micro-foundations of the paradox, relating it to other areas and contexts. In this study, we were able to move in this direction when verifying the positive relation of the field in question with the career literature.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Resource scarcity and the experiencing of tensions

Resource scarcity has been present in human life for ages. At different times it became relevant, turning into a constant, and always a great challenge in need of management (Roux et al., 2015). Similar to resource scarcity, tensions have permeated human life for a long time. The world is full of pressures at all times, and individuals are embedded in a large network of conflicting demands, interests, contradictions, and perspectives (Miron-Spektor et al., 2017). Conflict is present in every situation that demands decision-making, from the casual debate on the temperature of the air conditioning to more pertinent decisions regarding professional success and personal life, involving, for example, the tension between work life and family life (Savary et al., 2015). In this example, the difficulty in managing time can often generate such a strain that it forces the individual to decide to which side of life (professional or personal) one will devote their time and effort to.

Examples such as this show that scarce resources can generate or amplify the pressures experienced by individuals in personal and professional life. By observing the organizational context, these issues also apply, and individuals experience stressors (Smith & Lewis, 2011). To exemplify this relationship, Miron-Spektor et al. (2017) conducted a study adopting time and money as scarce resources and verified the relationship of these elements with the experiences of tensions encountered by employees. As a result, it was possible to understand that in a company environment, it is common to





demand high employee performance, with a low cost, placing the individual close to their limit. This evidence suggests that in situations of resource scarcity, experiences of tension increase.

In this study, we applied this concept to the association between scarcity of resources and tensions in the context of careers. Throughout their entire professional life, individuals face important decisions, which may result in significant financial and psychological consequences (Campbell & Cellini, 1981; Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009). For example, a mistake when making a career choice, more specifically of a college, can generate complications since the investment of time and money is relevant and, in many cases, difficult to reverse (Willner et al., 2015). By thinking about it this way, besides being a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, decisions during the career can have devastating consequences (Barron & Ali-Knight, 2017).

Thus, in considering the evidence that resource scarcity (money and time) can positively influence the experiencing of tension, including in the context of a professional career, we can assume the following hypothesis:

- H1: Resource scarcity (limited time and money) is positively associated with the experiencing of stressors in an individual's professional career.

## **Experiencing tensions and satisfaction in the professional career**

In most careers, individuals face various pressures, which become barriers they need to overcome to reach a satisfactory career level (Santos, 2016). As an example, it is common in the labor market for employers to look for a particular “type” of a candidate, as in a luxury car dealership, by requiring women who are perceived as being beautiful to work at the front desk. All of this can make a difference for an individual by imposing barriers that determine the course of careers (Murtagh et al., 2007).

However, in addition to these external factors, internal factors, i.e., that depart from individuals themselves, both psychologically and emotionally, can also cause such tensions (Vignoli, 2015; Berlato & Correa, 2017). A common example can be found in people with low self-esteem, who face difficulties at various points in their career because they often doubt and question their own abilities (Cai et al., 2015). Murtagh et al. (2007) define, by means of a qualitative study, three groups of career barriers: 1. structural barriers, including lack of money and lack of access to higher education; 2. psychological obstacles, including low self-expectations, and 3. social norms, i.e., imposed by society.





A study that addresses the flaws and threats suffered by an individual during their career divides it into three phases: beginning, middle, and end. The study shows that mid-career, i.e., between the ages of 40 and 50, tensions can generate the feeling of being “stuck” in unwanted jobs, in other words, dissatisfied with their career. We can observe an example of an undesirable situation when an individual is facing low pay (associated with financial challenges) or the gradual loss of status (associated with career failure), which can be perceived by the individual as shame and humiliation (Duff & Chan, 2014).

The study by Moore et al. (2007) addresses the theory of ERG (existence, relatedness, and growth) in the sense of the need for balance in meeting human needs. His study showed that the most successful individuals can change their needs and priorities while navigating life and demonstrate growth over time. Thus, the present study interprets that the best management of difficulties faced during one’s career can bring a better result when it comes to career satisfaction, and if it is poorly managed, it negatively affects satisfaction.

Thus, in considering the tensions of the career and evidence from the study by Miron-Spektor et al. (2017), which analyzed the influence of stressors on performance and innovation at work, it is suggested that the same negative impact is identified when analyzing the effect of experiencing pressures on career satisfaction. Therefore, we constructed the second hypothesis of this study:

- H2: The experiencing of tensions is negatively associated with the satisfaction in the professional career of individuals.

## Experiencing tensions and satisfaction with life

In recent years tensions in the workplace have blended with family experiences. That is, day-to-day demands, goals, and conflicts intertwine, hindering both the professional career and the satisfaction with personal life (Woolnough & Redshaw, 2016). Except for the time spent sleeping, work takes up more time than any other individual activity. This factor leads some people to feel more comfortable with day-to-day work activities than with leisure activities or their personal lives (Loewe et al., 2015; Ribeiro et al., 2019).

This relationship can lead to negative outcomes, such as depression and even suicide. The authors Duff and Chan (2014) addressed the relationship between experiences throughout one’s career and the major causes of





suicides. They identified that for each stage during the career (beginning, middle, and end), people are faced with negative and frustrating situations, and some cannot overcome them and reach the point of taking their own lives. Thus, we perceive that work, and consequently the professional career, has a direct influence on life satisfaction (Loewe et al., 2015). Therefore, in considering the studies by Loewe et al. (2015) and Miron-Spektor et al. (2017), we suggest that just as in career satisfaction, experiencing tensions, consequently individuals will have a negative effect on life satisfaction. We propose the following hypothesis:

- H3: The experiencing of tensions is negatively associated with satisfaction with individual's lives.

## **Paradox mindset as a mediator**

In dealing with the subject of pressures in the workplace and in careers, it is important to understand that people have the ability to deal with them differently. That is to say, one person can see a tension or conflict as something positive, and another may see it as something negative. For example, having little financial resources and having to deliver results can be an extremely negative tension for some, while for others, this scenario can be seen as an opportunity, where doing more with less would become rewarding (Miron-Spektor et al., 2017; Bartunek, 1988; Schneider, 1999).

Studies such as Savary et al. (2015) proposed a positive perspective on conflicts. They note that in the face of conflicting objectives, individuals were able to activate cognitive processes that increased the possibility of resolution, which, in turn, solved the problems in a simplified and facilitated way.

Miron-Spektor et al. (2017) utilize the paradox mindset concept to explain this thinking capacity that some people take advantage of, in order to look at scenarios involving conflict with a positive outlook. In this case, the authors state that the paradox mindset is based on how the problems are approached and under which perspective we see tensions and that this concept was based on the paradox literature, with it being positioned as a way to change the way the problems are addressed. Thus, the authors argue that the paradox mindset is the ability of an individual to think paradoxically, that is, the ability to manage simultaneous and contradictory demands and to achieve positive results in both.

The great shift in the mindset from ordinary individuals to individuals with a high paradox mindset is that at the moment when the latter is faced with a conflict or tension, they have the ability to exploit both polarities





involved in this tension, without deciding between one alternative or the other, but seeking to reconcile them simultaneously. In order to facilitate the understanding, for example, a common situation where professionals face in the career is having to choose between financial return and pleasure. An individual with a non-paradoxical mindset would choose between one sphere or another, i.e., would set a priority between the two as a criterion for career choices, and this would possibly have negative consequences arising from not choosing one of the possibilities. Should they choose financial return, the individual would have to deal with the frustration of lack of pleasure in the workplace. On the other hand, if they were to choose a more pleasurable career, they would probably need to be prepared to deal with financial returns short of the desired. In this paradigm, the ability to accept frustration is seen as essential for the individual to reduce frustration and increase satisfaction with their choices. However, in the case of an individual with a high paradox mindset, the tendency is to be able to deal with tensions and define a career strategy in which the individual does not choose between one criterion or the other but to seek being benefited from the reach of the two spheres mutually, i.e., to arrive at the financial return through the pleasure, or the inverse. Thus, the individual recognizes the interdependence between both polarities and seeks to define a strategy for achieving financial returns, not despite but through pleasure in the workplace (Miron-Spektor et al., 2017; Bartunek, 1988; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008).

Based on the study by Miron-Spektor et al. (2017), which analyzed, among other hypotheses, the mediating effect of the paradox mindset in the relation between tensions, performance, and innovation in the workplace, we conclude that this mediator indirectly transforms the negative effect into positive, bringing benefits to individuals. The present study proposes that, for individuals with professional careers irrigated with tensions, the paradox mindset effect is similar. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H4: The experiencing of tensions will have an indirect positive effect, mediated by the paradox mindset, on the career satisfaction of individuals.

Professional and personal lives are related, as seen, for example, in the study by Blau et al. (2013), which correlated unemployment with life satisfaction, where they pointed that the financial tension had a negative impact on life satisfaction out as one of the results. However, the paradox mindset is expected to prepare individuals to deal with tensions to the point where they perceive them as positive, resulting in greater satisfaction. Thus, we propose the last hypothesis of this study:





- H5: Experiencing stressors will have an indirect positive effect, mediated by the paradox mindset, in the level of satisfaction of the life of an individual.

## METHODS

We chose to conduct a descriptive and quantitative cross-sectional investigation with primary data. Individuals with over ten years of experience in their careers formed the target population of this study. We chose this audience because individuals at the beginning of their careers could not consistently give their opinion on career satisfaction and personal life. In the sample composition, we used the non-probabilistic technique by accessibility.

We base the questionnaire on the constructs validated by the literature available and elaborated it with 38 questions organized as follows: the first question was used for control, as to whether the respondent has at least ten years of experience in their professional career. Questions 2 to 33 measured the resource scarcity constructs (Miron-Spektor et al., 2017), containing six statements; the experiencing of tensions (Miron-Spektor et al., 2017), with seven statements; career satisfaction (Greenhaus et al., 1990; Waismel-Manor et al., 2016), containing five statements; satisfaction with life (Diener et al., 1985), with five statements, and paradox mindset (Miron-Spektor et al., 2017), with nine statements.

To answer them, we used the response model based on the Likert scale where the respondent indicated their degree of agreement or disagreement with the statements presented in the questionnaire (with 1 being “Strongly disagree” and 7 “Totally agree”). Questions 34-38 referred to the demographic aspects of respondents (gender, age, marital status, schooling, and income). After translating the questionnaire’s statements, we adapted them to the career context. In sequence, we submitted a pre-test with 18 respondents to verify possible misunderstandings that could arise. After the corrections, we used a link on an online platform for delivery to the public, delivered to MBA and master’s students, and professionals from a list of business contacts, all of whom were Brazilians. We applied the electronic questionnaires in June and July of 2017.

In the data collection, we obtained 313 questionnaires answered, of which 245 were valid, since the others were not part of the focus group of the research, i.e., they were not in the middle and final stages of their careers.





From the demographic and socioeconomic data collected, we were able to identify that the audience of this research was largely composed of men (54.3%) with an average age of 41 years old, with purchasing power from medium to high (68.2% above five minimum wages). Another factor that characterizes the sample is the academic background, of which 91.4% have a university degree or higher, and 41.6% have an MBA or specialization. In addition, the majority of the sample were respondents who were married or in a stable union, which corresponded to 67.8% of the total.

It should be noted that to avoid common method variance and bias, the following procedures were adopted, following the recommendations of Fuller et al. (2016) and Podsakoff et al. (2003): 1. constructs were chosen without questions that allowed socially desirable answers; 2. scales previously validated and tested in previous studies that presented adequate reliability were chosen; and 3. the confidentiality of individual responses was guaranteed. In addition, the application of Harman's single-factor test (discussed and tested in Fuller et al., 2016), a standard procedure for cross-sectional studies, single source and self-reported, did not suggest common method variance: 58% of the variance was explained by five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, and the first factor explained only 25.8% of the total variance, below the 50% recommended by the literature (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In addition to this test, confirmatory factor analysis was used to validate the measurement model.

For data analysis and hypothesis testing, we performed a multivariate analysis of structural equations modeling (SEM), with the PLS technique that allows identifying factors (linear combinations of the variables X) that best shape the dependent variables Y. We validated the structural model through the confirmatory factor analysis, verifying the matrix of factor loadings, the convergent validity, and the discriminant validity. Then we performed the hypothesis test. Furthermore, according to studies by Hair Jr. et al. (2014), Preacher and Hayes (2004), and Preacher and Kelley (2011), we performed the variance accounted for (VAF) test or variance explained, in order to present the mediating effect proposed in the study. For this validation, the following procedure is necessary: after testing the hypotheses, we needed to verify whether the direct effect between the constructs is significant; if yes, we included the mediator variable and evaluated the significance of the indirect effect. If the indirect effect was significant, we calculated the VAF to check whether there was mediation or not in this relation.



## ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

### Validation of the structural model

To verify the suitability of the collected data, we needed to analyze its psychometric properties. In order to do so, we analyzed the presence of discriminant validity, convergent validity, and composite reliability, properties that guarantee the predictive capabilities of the model and, consequently guarantee their quality (Hair Jr. et al., 2014).

Convergent validity indicates the extent to which a variable positively correlates with alternative variables of the same construct (Hair Jr. et al., 2014). The presence of this property is identified when the assertions related to a construct have a factor loading on this same latent variable, with a value equal to or greater than 0.50. Another criterion used is to obtain a value equal to or greater than 0.50 in the index of the average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair Jr. et al., 2014). For this analysis, we first verified the factor loadings referring to the assertions of the research and, for this study, according to Table 1, we verified through successive measurements that the variables RS1, RS3, ET1, ET3, PM1, PM2, PM3, and PM8 presented factor loadings below that proposed by Hair Jr. et al. (2014), and were, thus discarded. After discarding the variables, we observed that the loadings of the confirmatory factor matrix reached values above 0.50. In order to complement the verification of convergent validity in this study, we verified the index of the AVE, in which we observed that all latent variables reached the proposed criterion, greater than 0.5, such results can be observed in Table 2 (Chin, 2001).

**Table 1**  
*Matrix of cross-loadings*

Latent variables	Resource scarcity (RS)	Experiencing of tensions (ET)	Paradox mindset (MP)	Career satisfaction (CS)	Satisfaction with life (SL)
RS2	0.68	0.06	0.22	0.36	0.40
RS4	0.89	0.05	0.23	0.58	0.51
RS5	0.89	-0.05	0.11	0.59	0.56
RS6	0.86	0.06	0.28	0.53	0.49
ET2	0.01	0.61	0.33	0.01	-0.01

*(continue)*

**Table 1 (conclusion)***Matrix of cross-loadings*

Latent variables	Resource scarcity (RS)	Experiencing of tensions (ET)	Paradox mindset (MP)	Career satisfaction (CS)	Satisfaction with life (SL)
ET4	0.02	0.64	0.38	0.00	-0.03
ET5	0.06	0.75	0.38	0.01	-0.02
ET6	0.02	0.79	0.50	0.16	0.08
ET7	0.04	0.75	0.50	0.02	-0.05
PM4	0.29	0.35	0.68	0.19	0.19
PM5	0.20	0.44	0.79	0.25	0.19
PM6	0.07	0.61	0.73	0.13	0.06
PM7	0.24	0.37	0.72	0.28	0.23
PM9	0.13	0.38	0.72	0.24	0.16
CS1	0.49	0.06	0.16	0.87	0.77
CS2	0.53	0.02	0.24	0.87	0.78
CS3	0.54	0.10	0.29	0.83	0.75
CS4	0.37	0.05	0.25	0.63	0.38
CS5	0.40	0.01	0.25	0.61	0.35
SL1	0.46	0.02	0.18	0.63	0.80
SL2	0.53	0.03	0.20	0.71	0.84
SL3	0.43	0.00	0.15	0.61	0.82
SL4	0.50	-0.07	0.23	0.79	0.83
SL5	0.38	0.02	0.11	0.56	0.69

*Source:* Elaborated by the authors.

The composite reliability indicates the internal consistency of the constructs. That is, it determines if the items that measure a construct are similar in their scores (Hair Jr. et al., 2014). The presence of this property is identified when the composite reliability value is equal to or greater than 0.70 (Hair Jr. et al., 2014). In the correlation of latent variables presented in Table 2, it is possible to verify that the said index was satisfactory since the composite reliability was greater than 0.7, which reflects according to



the criteria explained by Chin (2001) and Hair Jr. et al. (2014), the presence of this psychometric property.

**Table 2**  
*Correlations of latent variables*

Constructs	Resource scarcity (RS)	Experiencing of tensions (ET)	Paradox mindset (PM)	Career satisfaction (CS)	Satisfaction with life (SL)
RS	<b>0.78</b>				
ET	0.04	<b>0.71</b>			
PM	0.25	0.60	<b>0.73</b>		
CS	0.61	0.06	0.30	<b>0.77</b>	
SL	0.58	0.00	0.23	0.83	<b>0.80</b>
AVE	0.61	0.51	0.53	0.59	0.64
CR	0.88	0.84	0.85	0.88	0.90

*Source:* Elaborated by the authors.

The values shown in bold on the diagonal correspond to the AVE square root.

CR: composite reliability.

Discriminant validity indicates the extent to which a variable has a distinction in relation to the others (Hair Jr. et al., 2014). To establish this validity, we needed to compare the square roots of the index of the AVE of each construct with the values of the correlations between the other constructs, and we expect the square root indices of the AVE to be greater in their respective constructs (Hair Jr. et al., 2014). In Table 2, we noticed that almost all constructs presented discriminant validity since the square root indices of the AVE were higher values in their own constructs. The only construct that did not present discriminant validity was career satisfaction, with the square root index of the AVE inferior to the coefficient of the construct satisfaction with life. However, since the variables that did not present themselves as discriminants are two independent variables in the model, it is understandable that they have some degree of overlap.

Career satisfaction can be understood as being enclosed in the broader concept of life satisfaction. Although they cannot be considered as discriminating, we chose to keep them in the model since it is relevant in theoretical terms to assess whether the mediating effect of the paradox mindset in the

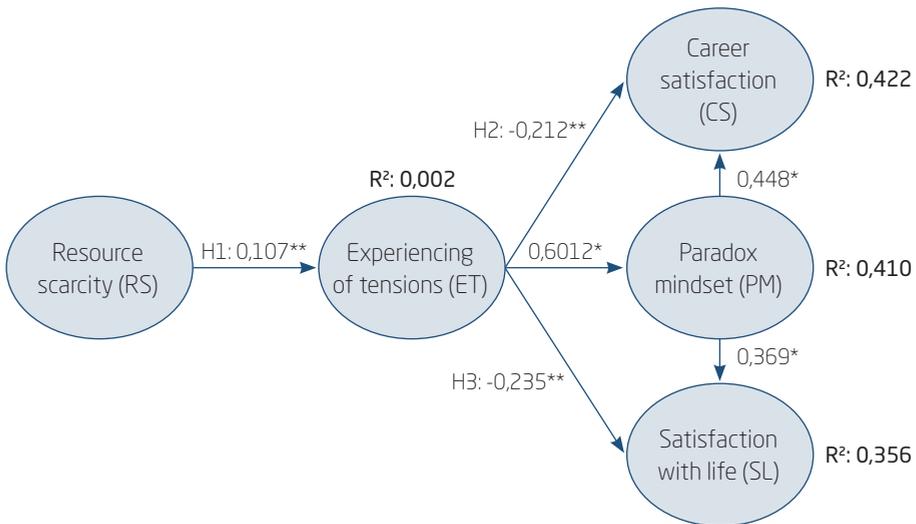
relationship between the experiencing of career tensions and both spheres of satisfaction is present. If the model only assessed the impacts on career satisfaction, it would be possible to verify if there were side effects in satisfaction with life as a whole. On the other hand, if the model included only satisfaction with life, it would be inaccurate in not providing specific data on the sphere of the workplace.

## Analysis of bivariated relationships of the structural model

After validating the structural model, we performed the hypothesis test based on the magnitude and significance of the estimated path coefficients. Thus, we tested the relationships proposed in the study (Figure 1), and we were able to verify if the suggested hypotheses were supported or whether we did not reject the alternative hypothesis.

**Figure 1**

### Estimated structural equation modeling



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ .

By initiating the analysis of the data, we verified through our first hypothesis (H1) that the resource scarcity (limited time and money) is positively associated with the experiencing of tensions by individuals ( $\beta$ : 0.107,  $p = < 0.005$ ).



The hypothesis H2 that analyzed the negative association of experimentation with career satisfaction was also supported ( $\beta$ : -0.2121,  $p = < 0.005$ ), that is, for this sample, the greater the experiencing of tensions, the lower the satisfaction with the career.

Hypothesis H3 analyzed the negative association of the experiencing of tension with satisfaction with life, and it was also supported ( $\beta$ : -0.2352,  $p = < 0.005$ ). Thus, we can say that, for this sample, the greater the experience of tensions, the greater the satisfaction with life.

### **Validation of mediation: variance accounted for (VAF) or variation explained**

To test hypotheses 4 and 5 of this study, we needed to analyze the effect of mediation on previously supported relationships. A mediating effect is characterized by the inclusion of a third variable; more precisely, it mediates the relation, creating an indirect effect. To exemplify this effect, we can say that A affects B by means of C. In the case of this study, the paradox mindset assumes the position of mediator and intervenes in the relationship between the experiencing of tensions with career satisfaction and satisfaction in life.

As indicated by Hair Jr. et al. (2014), to verify if there is mediation, we needed to apply the formula of VAF, a tool to confirm the mediating effect. A VAF lower than 20% indicates that there is no mediation; between 20% and 80%, a partial mediation; above 80% full mediation. Given these criteria, the following are the calculations for the analysis of mediations.

$$VAF = \frac{\beta_{12} \cdot \beta_{13}}{(\beta_{12} \cdot \beta_{23}) + \beta_{13}}$$

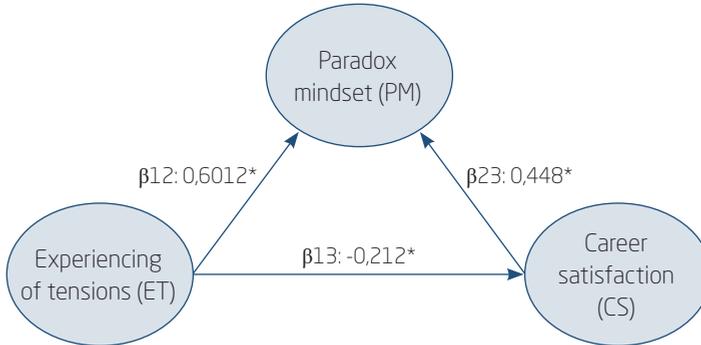
therefore:

- $\beta_{12}$ : The effect between the predecessor variable and the mediator variable;
- $\beta_{13}$ : The effect between the predecessor variable and the final variable;
- $\beta_{23}$ : The effect between the mediator variable and the final variable.

For H4, which analyzed if the experiencing of tensions would have an indirect positive effect, mediated by the paradox mindset, in the career satisfaction of the individuals, we used the VAF calculation based on the following composition:



**Figure 2**  
*Mediator role in career satisfaction*

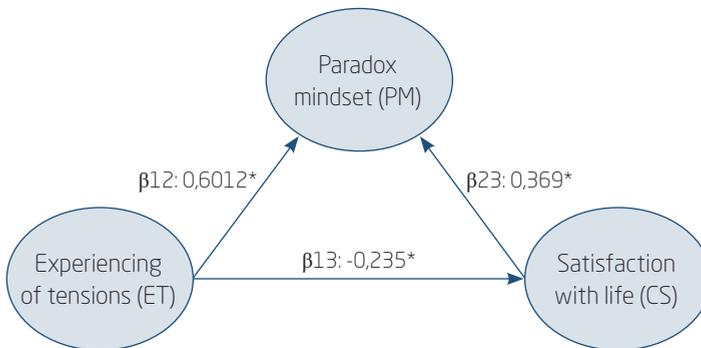


Source: Elaborated by the authors.

\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ .

The result found for the H4 was 56%, which, according to Hair Jr. et al. (2014), indicates the occurrence of partial mediation. Thus, we can say that hypothesis 4 was supported. Just as in the previous hypothesis, for the H5, which analyzed whether the experiencing of tensions would have an indirect positive effect, mediated by the paradox mindset, in the satisfaction with the life of the individuals, we used the VAF calculation, but with the following composition:

**Figure 3**  
*Mediator role in satisfaction with life*



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ .

The result of mediation for H5 was 49%, which indicates the occurrence of a partial and support mediation for it.



## DISCUSSION

To fulfill the purpose of this study, we developed two groups of hypotheses that sought to find evidence that explains how individuals see and deal differently with tensions throughout their career satisfaction. The first three hypotheses of this study were significant and analyzed how experiencing stressors during the career were associated with a negative effect on the professional career satisfaction and the personal life of workers, especially in a scenario where they were said to face scarce resources, in this case, time and money. The literature had already explored the impacts of adverse career situations, in studies by Di Fabio and Palazzeschi (2009), Duff and Chan (2014), Murtagh et al. (2007), and Vignoli (2015) that had already corroborated the negative view of tensions and how they can undermine an individual's career satisfaction and personal life. The present study contributes to this perception and highlights evidence that problems and difficulties throughout the career tend to harm the end of a professional trajectory and the satisfaction of life as a whole.

The two subsequent hypotheses that evaluated the mediating effect of the paradox mindset on the relation of tensions to career satisfaction and life were significant and brought the concept of paradox mindset as the mediating factor that transformed the effect of stressors, from negative to positive, both in career satisfaction and personal life. In other words, the indirect effect of tensions mediated by the paradox mindset provided a positive effect on employee satisfaction with their careers and personal lives. Other studies have proposed discussions on different ways of looking at problems, studies such as those by Miron-Spektor et al. (2017), Lüscher and Lewis (2008), Mehta and Zhu (2015), and Lomranz and Benyamini (2016) have already found evidence that adverse situations can bring positive results. This study collaborates with this strand by directing the discussion to how we view problems and not only how to avoid them. In addition, it demonstrates and agrees with literature that is not often discussed, that of the paradox at the level of the individual and not being limited to the individual inserted in contexts of macro paradoxes.

Based on these results, the present study allowed for making three main advances in the literature of paradox and career satisfaction. First, it contributed by analyzing the paradox at the individual level, that is, the micro-fundamentals of the paradox. The authors Keller et al. (2017), Miron-Spektor et al. (2017), and Schad et al. (2016) discuss this field of study, and they advocate the importance of new studies relating the theme to the real





demands of workers and organizations. The present study corroborates this discussion and adds to the literature of paradox in analyzing the experiencing of tensions throughout the career through a paradoxical lens. This analysis allows us to verify how the paradox mindset acts by transforming individuals' perceptions and bringing satisfaction benefits in both career satisfaction and personal life.

Second, the study cooperates with the career satisfaction literature, raising the possibility of perceiving tensions as a positive factor, or rather, as a potentiator of satisfactory career outcomes. This result presents a discussion by proposing a new way of looking at tensions, for, until then, much of the work on career study has been limited to seeing tensions as predominantly negative (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2009; Duff & Chan, 2014; Murtagh et al., 2007). In this study, the adoption of the micro-fundamentals of the paradox, more specifically the paradox mindset, provides another perspective on the difficulties that many people need to deal with throughout their careers.

Third, and finally, the present study has built upon career satisfaction literature by bringing the individual as a protagonist in their career, i.e., through the paradox mindset, they take an active stance in dealing with stressors (Lyons et al., 2015; Vignoli, 2015). This new approach generates an amplification of the literature since, until then, individuals were treated, in the majority of cases, as mere assistants or spectators of their own careers. Thus, this different perspective allows us to better understand how individuals with such an attribute are able to take advantage of the circumstances of negative scenarios.

## CONCLUSION

The results indicated that, indirectly, in the satisfaction of one's career and their life, the more tensions an individual experiences, the greater the satisfaction with their career and life, when mediated by the paradox mindset. This result can be considered counterintuitive since much of the career satisfaction literature, such as the study by Murtagh et al. (2007), argues that barriers and tensions lead to career losses. However, through the insertion of the paradox mindset in this relation in the form of a mediator, we verified that the stressors had a positive effect, bringing benefits to the career satisfaction of the respondents of this study. This effect can be explained by relating how each individual views the tensions, whether posi-





tively or negatively. Professionals who see tensions as an opportunity and who can learn from them can develop a mindset that makes them more apt to deal with and manage these problems throughout their careers (Miron-Spektor et al., 2017; Bartunek, 1988; Schneider, 1999).

Such results contribute to the career satisfaction literature. First, it shows that tensions can lead indirectly to higher levels of career satisfaction. This result is innovative, as previous studies have suggested the opposite. Second, it explains the mechanism through which tensions and career satisfaction can interrelate (through mindset paradox). It connects to one traditional literature from the organizational behavior field (career satisfaction) with a recent and prominent literature from the organizational studies (paradox mindset). This innovation helped explain why people feel energized and satisfied with their careers, not despite tensions, but as a result of experiencing them.

In practice, the results of this study can inspire professionals throughout their professional life in order to enhance their satisfaction with their career and personal life. They can use the situations to change scenarios previously seen as negative and problematic and to see them as an opportunity to develop a paradox mindset and, therefore, the ability to deal with the tensions in a balanced and satisfactory manner. These results serve as an alternative for individuals in dealing with the stressors inherent in the business world, allowing them to learn to deal with such challenges and turn them into something beneficial. In addition, companies can adopt practices to identify the profile of a professional that is capable of dealing with tensions, especially for positions that experience deeply rooted challenges.

The present study has limitations and proposes discussions that can be explored in future studies. First, a gap not addressed in the study is the ability of individuals to develop the paradox mindset, that is, to verify whether it is a natural skill or one that can be learned. In this way, we suggest that future research explores whether and how individuals can develop the paradox mindset. Second, we used a cross-section, and it would be compelling to evaluate how this mediating effect of the paradox mindset would take place over a longer period, that is, through a longitudinal cross-sectional survey. Third, the research has a non-probabilistic character, which makes it impossible to generalize the study results. Still, it should be emphasized that it provides evidence of individuals' behavior. Finally, the study analyzed the paradox mindset of the individual without considering the interactions with the group and organizational levels of analysis. We suggest that future research takes a multilevel analytical perspective to identify whether there is





a higher incidence of professionals with a paradox mindset in organizations and groups with greater ambition.

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