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Psychological sustainability in the translation professions

Findings from two intervention studies

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Abstract

Psychological sustainability is increasingly recognised as an important component of professional development, and it is known to influence worker well-being and career success. Nevertheless, there is little information available on professional translators' psychological sustainability. The aim of this study was to explore whether a two-hour focused intervention could make a difference in this respect. Drawing on established psychological frameworks, two intervention studies with CIoL linguists and UN translation staff were delivered targeting emotional skills and making use of a workshop design and a coaching approach. Findings from the post-intervention questionnaire data (n=94) revealed that language professionals perceive this type of intervention to be relevant and useful for their job, and that emotional skills learned can influence future work behaviours. Findings from open comments suggested specific ways in which interventions can develop psychological and career sustainability. The study concludes with a discussion of its limitations and practical implications for future intervention studies with translators.

Keywords: Intervention, psychological sustainability, emotional skills, career success, professional development

1 Introduction

When the United Nations (UN) identified 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that required urgent attention and action in 2016, this marked a move towards creating a more people-centred global development agenda. Two goals in particular can be considered relevant for language professionals: the third SDG which emphasizes well-being and healthy living, and the eighth SDG which promotes decent work and inclusiveness. While research has convincingly demonstrated that well-being is an essential part of professional life and, in turn, that work satisfies psychological needs (Di Fabio 2017a), the significance of psychological sustainability

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and well-being in the language professions¹ remains underexplored. In addition, there is a paucity of training opportunities that might support professional translators in cultivating relevant psychological skills for working in a diverse, multifaceted, and often unpredictable environment. These gaps in research and practice present challenges for language professionals, such as difficulties in managing work-related emotions, identifying suitable coping strategies, or maintaining job satisfaction (e.g., Penet & Fernandez Parra 2023; Perdikaki & Georgiou 2023; Hubscher-Davidson 2018).

The present study seeks to address these gaps by reporting on the outcomes of a two-hour focused training intervention aiming to enhance psychological sustainability among two cohorts of language professionals: professional linguists who are members of the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIoL) in the UK, and translators and revisers from the United Nations Documentation Division of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) based in New York. While research on freelance translators' professional and personal experiences is increasingly prevalent in the translation process literature, in-house translators have received less attention. This study attempts to rectify this by illuminating the specific ways in which a brief intervention employing a coaching approach can positively impact both freelance and in-house language professionals.

The theoretical foundations for the study are presented in the next sections, followed by a detailed description of the interventions. Finally, drawing on 94 post-intervention questionnaires, evidence is provided of the perceived relevance and usefulness of the intervention and its impact on translators' psychological and career sustainability. To enable replication in a wide range of contexts, implications and limitations from the study's findings are subsequently discussed.

2 The psychology of sustainability in professional environments

Sustainability can be defined as “avoiding the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain ecological balance” (WDO 2023), and the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report described the concept of sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations 1987). The natural resources and development referred to in these definitions, however, can be viewed not only in terms of the ecological and socioeconomic environment, but also from the perspective of psychology which is concerned with enhancing the sustainability of interpersonal and intrapersonal talent, as well as of groups and communities (Giorgi *et al.* 2020). This perspective, referred to as the psychology of sustainability, entails viewing a positive work/life environment which promotes personal health, well-being, and performance as essential for the quality of life of human beings.

Rather than focusing on preventing damage, removing risks, and exhausting resources, this new perspective is built on enhancing, developing, and transforming, in the sense that the focus has shifted to promoting growth, enrichment, creating positive experiences and narratives, building relationships, and developing a healthy work environment (Chen *et al.* 2021; Di Fabio & Rosen 2020; Di Fabio & Tsuda 2018). The message that many scientist-practitioners are now promoting is thus one of helping to improve people's lives, rather than simply avoiding risks (Jones 2020: 242). In the context of organisations, Sergio Pérez *et al.* (2018) explain that this is a

¹ Language professions/professionals and translation professions/professionals are umbrella terms used interchangeably in this study to cover the varied work undertaken by linguists in the translation industry (translators, revisers, editors, localisers...).

move from solely focusing on economic profits to emphasising aspects such as corporate social responsibility.

This new perspective places emphasis on finding innovative and positive solutions, such as regenerating resources. Emanuele Leporelli and Giovanni Santi (2019) highlight that this focus on optimal functioning is the basis for positive healthy societies. In this framework, challenges are viewed as opportunities, and the psychology of sustainability can be seen as an adaptive response to the need to develop well-being in 21st century organizations (Di Fabio 2017a: 4).

In organisational contexts more specifically, it has become increasingly accepted in recent years that the social, mental, and physical well-being of employees needs to be supported as it enriches the working environment (Gaur 2020). Annamaria Di Fabio (2017b) argues that promoting healthy organisations where culture, climate, and good practices create an environment that supports employee health and safety will lead to increased effectiveness, successful business, and the creation of healthier societies. Indeed, a positive psychological climate at work can lead to a more positive perception of the organization and the support it provides, which also enhances mutual trust between workers and employers (Giorgi *et al.* 2020). Perhaps unsurprisingly, when a company provides social and emotional support to its employees alongside economic support, especially in uncertain times, this tends to decrease both work-related stress and workplace bullying (Giorgi *et al.* 2020: 9–10). This indicates a strong link between organisational profitability and the well-being of employees. Nevertheless, individuals need to perceive themselves to be efficacious and to have the potential to succeed in order for them to develop interest and engagement, and for sustainability to be fostered (Di Fabio & Rosen 2020).

Interestingly (and noteworthy for the translation professions), the importance of sustainable work is not limited to traditional organisational contexts. The enhancement of individuals' knowledge, skills, and personal qualities has also been found to be key for nonlinear, insecure, and dynamic forms of employment which are subject to repeated changes and uncertainty. For instance, much like translating, career counselling can be considered a changing profession where individuals with diverse backgrounds might have multiple meaningful career experiences over time and work flexibly, often as freelancers. In their study involving career counsellors, Katerina Argyropoulou *et al.* (2020) found that, in this so-called liquid labour market, it is vital to improve individuals' adaptability and that the sustainability of careers depends on being able to manage life-career transitions, understanding occupational and personal goals, and choosing meaningful and authentic projects. For freelance workers in particular, a higher level of career adaptability is likely to lead to better performance, better service, and less stress.

As Paola Magnano *et al.* (2019: 1) argue, “survival in this turbulent career environment continually requires workers to manage change in themselves and their contexts.” For instance, viewing job transitions as opportunities for self-realization is more adaptive than seeing these as stress-inducing events. In their study involving 660 Italian workers, Magnano *et al.* (2019) discovered that self-perceptions of employability, i.e., seeing oneself as able to keep or obtain the job one desires, reduces worry and fear of change. In addition, they found that self-perceived courage is an extremely useful psychological resource and an adaptive behaviour that helps individuals deal with issues related to their changing jobs, and to cope with risks rather than being blocked by obstacles. Having an ability to reframe challenges as opportunities, and to adapt to circumstances, could thus be the difference between a satisfying/sustainable or unfulfilling/unsustainable working life.

3 Adopting a primary preventive approach

Within the psychology of sustainability framework, sustainability consists mainly of actions aiming to actively improve people’s health and well-being and increase their resources. Annamaria Di Fabio and Akira Tsuda (2018) outline three levels where actions can take place: primary prevention, secondary prevention, and tertiary prevention. According to the authors, primary prevention focuses on avoiding the emergence of a problem before it begins, and on promoting psychological wellbeing; secondary prevention involves early interventions when first symptoms emerge; and tertiary prevention entails the decreasing of symptoms and enabling the functional recovery of the individual.

In the present study, a primary prevention perspective is adopted, whereby preventive actions are considered most effective for well-being. For Argyropoulou *et al.* (2020), one way to actively implement a primary preventive perspective in order to promote the well-being and quality of life of human beings in a sustainable environment is to implement advanced counselling interventions to encourage reflection, self-awareness, and reflexivity. In their study, 33 career counsellors were provided with a methodology to plan their future and enhance harmonization and sustainable career development. The four-day intervention contained three modules aiming to achieve specific reflexive levels and meta-competences and also entailed the taking of specific psychometric measures. Findings revealed an increase in both reflexivity and self-awareness as a result of the intervention, and the authors concluded that counsellors require this type of experiential training in order to promote their own sustainable development and positively impact their clients. The authors also suggested that effective interventions could include written exercises involving opportunities for future planning and goal-setting.

In a report on humanistic futures of learning commissioned by UNESCO, J  r  me Rossier *et al.* (2020: 190–191) stipulate that lifelong learning, counselling, and appropriately contextualised life designing interventions should become key practices supported by international organizations and implemented by national public policies. The authors claim that engaging in reflection on one’s experiences is crucial for facing major social changes occurring all over the world: “we must promote lifelong counseling policies [...] and life design interventions [...] to support people in their lifelong career and personal constructions, helping them to generate actions that promote the attainment of sustainable careers and decent working conditions” (ibid.). The authors add that such interventions can promote the conservation of resources, proactive growth and development, and self-awareness. It is interesting to note that a coaching approach is being promoted for work-related sustainability purposes. This could be due to the now acknowledged and widespread recognition that coaching is an effective way to accelerate learning and development and, as such, constitutes a viable solution to a wide range of development needs (e.g., Cox *et al.* 2018).

Primary prevention approaches aiming to build resources and strengths and to promote workers’ well-being can include stress management training to enable individuals to cope with high levels of uncertainty. As stress and uncertainty are key concerns for translators (e.g., Hubscher-Davidson & Lehr 2021), this is particularly relevant. According to Rita Chiesa *et al.* (2018: 7):

Nowadays, stress management is essential for workers who have to cope with high levels of uncertainty (i.e., temporary and self-employed workers) [...] Increasing personal resources may be essential to create a “gain-spiral” of resources aimed to enhance the perceived level of employability and decrease job insecurity.

In their study of employee stress and turnover, James B. Avey *et al.* (2009) define workplace stress as a key human resource management issue and an epidemic plaguing today's organisations. After surveying 416 working adults from a wide variety of jobs and industries, they found that employees need help to combat the dysfunctional effects of stress. The scholars propose that training and development efforts that recognize and enhance employees' positive psychological resources will help them to combat stress and, in turn, reduce voluntary turnover. Although completely eliminating workplace stress is not necessarily realistic (or maybe even desirable), helping employees and leaders to better manage stress is thought to be crucial for companies' sustainability (Katic *et al.* 2019).

Personal resources that have been shown to improve with specific training include resilience, empathy, emotional intelligence (EI), positive relational management, human capital sustainability leadership, acceptance of change, and intrapreneurial self-capital amongst others (Di Fabio & Rosen 2018). Bryton L. Moeller and Alexander G. Stahlmann (2019: 133) argue that character strengths like self-efficacy can also contribute to actions that enable communal thriving, and may be antecedent to pro-environmental behaviour and also to the well-being of others. A number of workplace interventions focusing on emotional skills have been reported in the psychological literature with significant results, such as enhancing self-awareness, evoking personal introspection, and consolidating a personal and professional consciousness (e.g., Kyriazopoulou & Pappa 2023). As highlighted in Séverine Hubscher-Davidson and Caroline Lehr (2021), short and well-designed emotion-based interventions are capable of improving individuals' affective competencies and psychological wellbeing, with changes usually staying effective for some time post-intervention.

4 Translators and the profession

Discussions around the sustainability of translators' work and their psychological health have multiplied in recent years. Emerging from Michael Cronin's (2017, 2019, 2021) research on translation and ecology which sheds light on the links between translation as a highly complex activity and the environmental emergency, research in Translation Studies has begun to focus more closely on issues of sustainability. Although the notion of eco-translation has been interpreted differently by various scholars, Cronin (2021: 47) highlights two areas of enquiry in particular that raise questions for both translation professionals and practitioners: the impact of technology and market growth.

The ecological consequences of these developments are addressed, for instance, in an article by Joss Moorkens (2020) detailing how current workflows in the translation industry are impacting long-term sustainability. Amongst other aspects, the scholar notes a shift to Digital Taylorism (DT) in the translation industry which entails a division of translation jobs into small tasks, depersonalized relationships, an increase in monitoring, and a continuous striving for speed and efficiency, all of which indicate a commodification of translation, a degradation of the working environment, and a lack of care about translators' motivation and job satisfaction. Moorkens concludes that there is little evidence of sustainability in the translation industry, and that DT removes translators' autonomy, thus potentially reducing the meaning and satisfaction that translators might derive from their work.

While other studies have addressed aspects of translators' professional sustainability as it relates to disruptive technologies, platform capitalism, and the Uberisation of the profession (Do Carmo 2020; Şahin & Oral 2021; Lambert & Walker 2022), the psychological component of sustainability in the translation arena is a relatively new addition to the literature. Building on

Cronin's argument that digital translation practices have led to cyborg labour and an industry which can no longer provide sustainable and meaningful employment (2017: 105), Hubscher-Davidson (2020) employed the concept of psychological capital to describe translators' motivational propensities accrued through positive psychological constructs such as self-efficacy. Developing translators' psychological and emotional resources could be particularly beneficial for the sustainability of the profession. In a competitive context where translators often feel underpaid and undervalued (e.g., Lambert & Walker 2022), it can be tricky to leverage one's strengths in order to enjoy sustainable translation work experiences.

Recent studies of translators' job satisfaction have produced mixed results in this respect. For instance, Minna Ruokonen *et al.* (2020) re-examined three sets of data on Finnish translators from the perspective of job satisfaction and found that, while most translators were generally satisfied with their jobs, their experiences varied. Job satisfaction derived mainly from the translation work itself, or task-related resources, but disparities emerged in relation to work being valued by others, the experience of negative stress, and the opportunity to exercise agency. The authors highlight that having a fixed employment does not necessarily prevent stress, that personal characteristics such as self-esteem could impact both job satisfaction and performance, and that translators need "more information on how to foster resources contributing to job satisfaction, as these can offset the impact of stress and other job demands" (2020: 119). The growing interest in aspects of translators' job satisfaction and career sustainability highlights the relevance of a psychology of sustainability approach for translation professionals, as well as the need for effective interventions that would further strengthen translators' psychological capital.

In particular, it has been argued that optimizing emotional resources in translation professionals could enhance sustainable work behaviours, such as job adaptability, performance, engagement, and reduce burnout (Hubscher-Davidson 2018; Bednárová-Gibová & Majherová 2023; Perdikaki & Georgiou 2023). In a volume addressing how to improve the emotional intelligence of translators, Hubscher-Davidson and Lehr (2021) outline how an effective emotion-based intervention tailored to the needs of translators can be carried out. Their stated aim is, in part, "to enable translators to learn to draw on their emotional and interpersonal resources in order to contribute to a healthy workplace climate and improve their own wellbeing." (2021: 5)

In addition, in describing a method for designing psychology-based training that is grounded in scientific evidence and aligned with established conceptual frameworks, Hubscher-Davidson and Lehr (2021) also provide translator educators with a roadmap for carrying out interventions aiming to enhance psychological wellbeing. This seems timely, as there is a gap in the provision of evidence-based professional development in this area. While JC Penet and Maria Fernandez Parra (2023) have started to trial the implementation of EI-based interventions in the context of undergraduate translation teaching, professional organizations still do not provide sufficient opportunities for their members to develop their psychological sustainability. For instance, a search performed in August 2023 of the CioL's webinar library which contains over 175 training videos for members, returned only one webinar in the 'wellbeing' category. In contrast, there were 10 webinars in the 'marketing' category and 16 webinars in the 'business' category. This highlights that there remains an imbalance in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) provision, despite the fact that the CioL's Insights Report highlighted that many language professionals have personal, health, and well-being concerns, such as suffering from isolation, mental health issues, cognitive overload, and a lack of confidence in their own skills (CioL 2022: 15). It therefore seems timely to create more learning opportunities that might support professional translators with these emotion-eliciting aspects.

The aim of the present study is to report on the delivery of two evidence-based interventions explicitly focused on emotional competencies and psychological wellbeing. The interventions

explored whether professional translators' psychological resources could be improved with a primary prevention approach, and gauged perceptions of the usefulness of such an intervention for their work and careers. The content, implementation, and evaluation of the interventions were guided by the methodological design outlined in Hubscher-Davidson and Lehr (2021)². Using a workshop design and a coaching approach, the study examined whether two-hour interventions targeting emotional skills could increase translators' psychological sustainability.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. Do translation professionals perceive a 2-hour intervention targeting emotional skills to be relevant and useful for their work?
2. Can emotional skills learned during a 2-hour intervention influence future work behaviours and career sustainability?
3. What specific aspects of psychological sustainability can a 2-hour intervention impact?

5 Methodology

5.1 Participants

Cohort 1

In September 2020, a two-hour workshop was delivered to approximately 80 language professionals who are members of the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIoL). For the majority, participants were freelance translators who registered on a voluntary basis, and 36 completed a post-intervention questionnaire. Lehr and Hubscher-Davidson collaborated on the design and delivery of this workshop.

Cohort 2

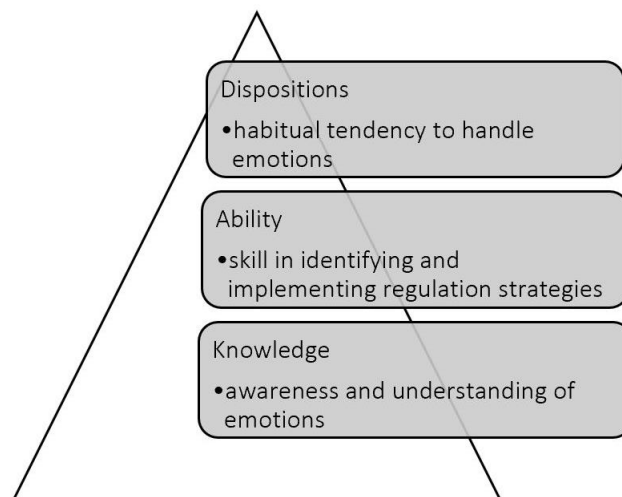
In December 2022 and January 2023, four identical two-hour workshops were delivered to approximately 100 in-house translation staff from the United Nations Documentation Division of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) based in New York. Participants registered on a voluntary basis, and 58 completed a post-intervention questionnaire. Hubscher-Davidson designed and delivered these workshops.

5.2 Intervention content

Each intervention consisted of a two-hour workshop aiming to raise awareness of the importance of emotional competencies and psychological wellbeing for translation work, and to provide some theoretical guidance and practical advice for managing emotions and leveraging one's psychological resources. The structure of the workshops was based on previous emotion-focused interventions that used psychological approaches with solid theoretical underpinnings (e.g., Nelis *et al.* 2011). As such, the interventions were designed around the tripartite model (Figure 1) which integrates individual differences in emotion-related knowledge, abilities, and dispositions (e.g., Mikolajczak & Peña-Sarrionandia 2015).

² While others have published activities aiming to foster emotional competence in the translation classroom (e.g., Stachl-Peier and Pagano 2020), comparatively little space is dedicated to discussing how specific activities draw on integrated models rooted in well-established schools of psychological thought.

Figure 1. The three levels of the tripartite model of emotional competence



In particular, the interventions in the present study targeted the knowledge and ability levels of the model by raising participants' awareness of what may be emotion-eliciting for them and enabling them to integrate specific reappraisal and coping techniques (Hubscher-Davidson and Lehr 2021). In this sense, the approach is called *cascading*, as the theory suggests that training at the knowledge and ability levels should, in turn, lead to improvements at the disposition³ level (Ge  bler *et al.* 2021: 456). The workshops thus combined training on the competencies of emotion understanding and identification, so-called fundamental abilities, as well as emotion use and regulation, so-called higher order abilities (*ibid.*).

All workshops followed a similar format and included a combination of coaching exercises, structured input, and theoretical instruction⁴. Although delivered online, some dedicated time for interaction was also included due to its potential influence on the effectiveness of interventions (Mattingly & Kraiger 2019). The appendix contains a sample workshop outline.

5.3 Post-intervention questionnaire

A questionnaire was made available for a week post-intervention, and completed by 94 participants across all workshops. While some questions (e.g., relating to the perceived relevance and usefulness of the workshops) were the same for all interventions, others differed depending on the sponsoring organisation's requirements. For instance, the CIoL questionnaire included a question asking participants for suggestions for future events. For the purposes of the present

³ Although personality traits and dispositions are said to be relatively stable over one's life span, repeated practice can alter emotional skills, competencies, and behaviours (e.g., Allemann & Fl  ckiger 2022).

⁴ It seems useful to clarify that, in adopting a coaching approach to delivering the workshops, the author employed a broad range of participant-focused, non-directive techniques to guide translators towards their own understanding and solutions. Rather than focusing on a specific technique or tool, a coaching approach refers to a general philosophy guiding the overall style or method of coaching so as to create a supportive environment facilitating development and learning.

study, answers to the following two closed questions included in all questionnaires will be analysed:

1. Did you find the workshop to be useful and relevant to your work?
2. Do you think you will apply some of the discussed emotion management strategies in the future?

Answers to these questions will provide useful data in relation to the study's first two research questions. The open comments provided by participants will provide useful data in answer to the study's third research question. In order to identify which specific aspects of psychological sustainability the interventions might have influenced, the open comments were organised thematically according to the following three areas that—following an analysis of the research literature by the author—could be said to integrate the key components of psychological sustainability:

1. Creating positive experiences, building relationships, and regenerating resources
2. Managing psychological resources in ways required by current working life
3. Adapting and responding to unpredictable environments

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data is appropriate for a study aiming to gain a more in-depth understanding of translators' feelings and psychological health. As Klaus Kaindl (2021: 22–23) notes, capturing the translator as a person is a complex task requiring, amongst other aspects, methods that allow for adequate representation. The inclusion of open comments is a way to enhance translators' visibility in this study and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their experience. To my knowledge, this is the first study reporting on both freelance and in-house translators' experiences of an intervention targeting their emotional skills and psychological wellbeing. Further details on the thematic analysis are included in section 6.2.

5.4 Ethical considerations

In this study, the four principles outlined in the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (2021a: 7–9) were followed: (1) Respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals, groups and communities, (2) Scientific integrity, (3) Social responsibility, and (4) Maximising benefit and minimising harm. As such, participants were provided with information on the purpose of the workshops prior to these taking place, the aim of the post-intervention questionnaire that followed, as well as an explanation regarding how the researcher would process and disseminate questionnaire data. Information regarding withdrawal rights, anonymity, and confidentiality was also provided⁵. The design of the interventions and questionnaires were reviewed, negotiated, and cleared by senior staff from the relevant sponsors prior to delivery. This helped ensure transparency and robustness, as well as maximising the benefits of the interventions and their potential to support optimal outcomes. Permission was also sought and granted for the UN Documentation Division to be identified in the present publication.

In addition, as the interventions were delivered online, the ethics guidelines for internet-mediated research outlined by the BPS (2021b) were also carefully considered. Especially

⁵ It is worth noting that although personal information such as name, job title, and years of experience were included in the post-intervention questionnaire, these variables were not relevant for this study's RQs and were therefore not included in the analysis. Participants were free not to provide this personal information.

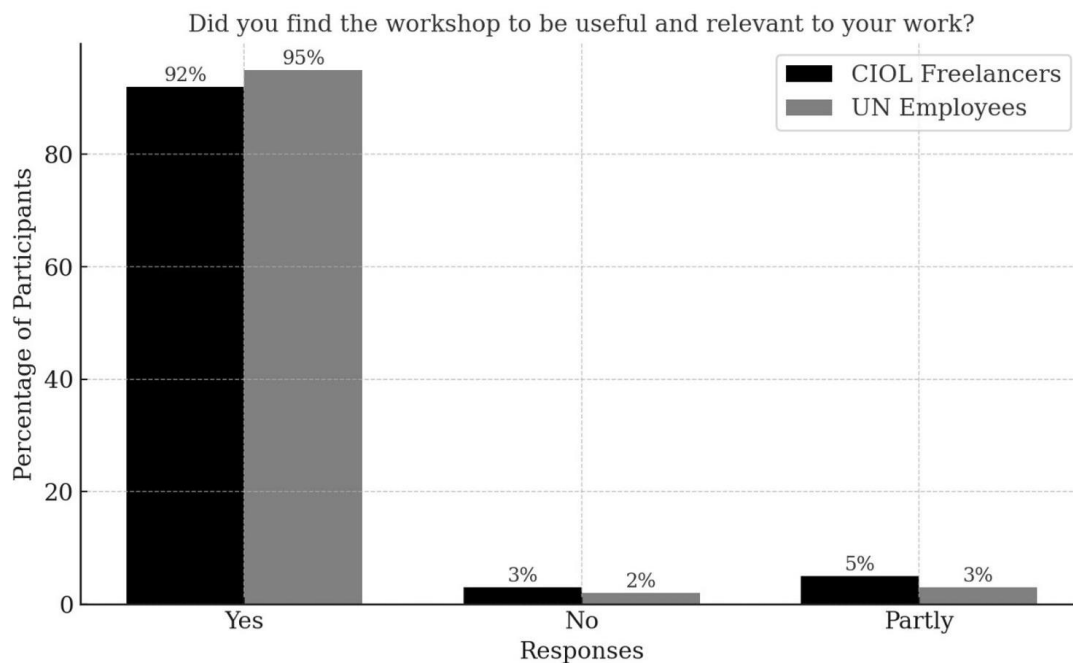
relevant was the point relating to the difficulty in monitoring participants' feelings and reactions during the intervention, potentially creating scope for harm (2021b: 18). As Katherine Schneeberger McGugan *et al.* (2023) highlight, coaching can evoke so-called edge-emotions that can be experienced negatively. To minimize risk, the interventions were therefore designed so that topics likely to be overly sensitive were not included (e.g., traumatic translator experiences) and coaching activities were chosen carefully. Rather than actively avoiding ones that might elicit emotions, as this may have prevented important learning from taking place, material was chosen that would provide opportunities for harnessing and processing feelings, thus prompting new understandings. Additionally, an ongoing supportive stance was adopted whereby the author provided upon request a debrief or email exchange post-intervention, an opportunity taken up by several participants.

6 Results

6.1 Closed questions

In answer to the question asking participants about the usefulness and relevance of the workshop for their work, 33 out of the 36 CIoL linguists answered in the affirmative, as did 55 out of 58 UN employees. The 6 participants who answered 'no' or 'partly' and left an additional explanation expressed that they felt the workshop may be more useful to them outside of work. Figure 2 illustrates responses to the question, expressed in percentage values.

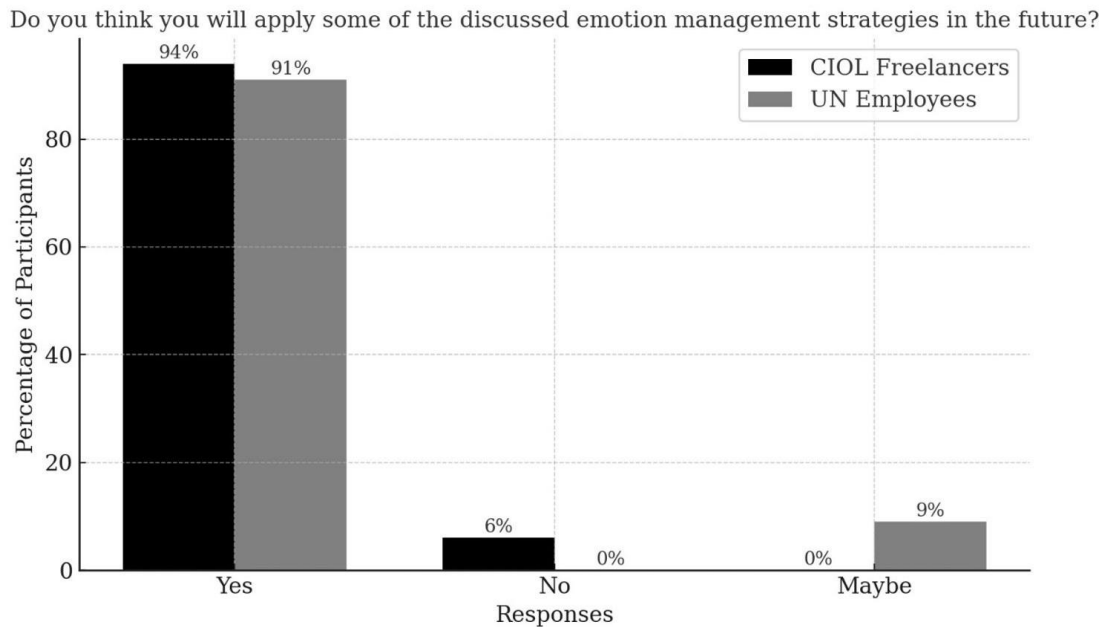
Figure 2. Usefulness and relevance of intervention workshop



When asked whether they might apply some of the emotion management strategies learned in the workshop, 34 out of the 36 CIoL linguists answered 'yes', as did 53 of the 58 UN employees. There were 7 participants who answered 'no' or 'partly'. Of those who left an additional

explanation, the main concern was being able to remember the strategies post-intervention. Figure 3 illustrates responses to this question.

Figure 3. Future application of intervention workshop strategies



All in all, answers to both closed questions highlight overwhelming agreement in relation to the usefulness and relevance of the interventions, and regarding future applications of emotion management strategies discussed, thus answering the study's first two RQs. Across both studies, over 90% of participants could see the importance of emotional competencies for their present and future psychological wellbeing and translation work. Some of the additional explanations that were included alongside positive responses to these closed questions highlight more specifically how the intervention could serve to influence translators' future work behaviours⁶:

- (1) There are several useful strategies I'll try to employ, especially interacting more [with] the problem and seeking to release negative emotions in a positive and constructive way.
- (2) I will definitely try because I need to reduce stress to a manageable level. I think the ABCDEF model can be useful, especially reframing my perspective to exchange a negative outlook with a positive one.
- (3) I recognized the "failure to forgive self and others" under the burnout category, so I think I need to do more work than I realized. I will try to do silent coaching, disputing negative perspectives/beliefs, thinking about action steps.
- (4) I would definitely attempt to be more mindful of my emotions, "catch myself" and analyse/identify them as they come up. Especially when there's the luxury of a written response and you don't have to react immediately.

⁶ All comments included are from different participants.

6.2 Open comments

To answer the study’s third research question and obtain a comprehensive understanding of specific aspects of psychological sustainability that the interventions impacted, participants’ open comments were analysed. For cohort 1, participants could type a free comment or testimonial at the end of the post-intervention questionnaire, not limited in length. A total of 22 open comments were made. For cohort 2, participants could type free comments after all questions, in addition to the additional comment or testimonial at the end of the questionnaire. This resulted in 246 open comments made. All open comments were compiled to form an overall text⁷ and were then analysed manually in relation to three key areas identified by the author as components of psychological sustainability. To avoid bias, the manual analysis and thematic organization were verified by a second researcher⁸. A selection of the most typical comments organised thematically are presented in Tables 1–3. All comments included in the tables are from different participants.

Theme 1: Creating positive experiences, building relationships, and regenerating resources. Comments relating to this theme include references to being proactive in seeking constructive work-related experiences, relating to colleagues, and self-awareness in identifying ways to recover or restore personal strengths.

Table 1. Open comments relating to theme 1

| Theme | Typical comments |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Creating positive experiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, [I’ll apply] the silent coaching exercise and the ABCEF model in challenging work situations - I will try to apply either or both of the models used in the two exercises to better identify my emotions in stressful situations and analyse and reframe the associated unhelpful beliefs |
| Building relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This workshop made me more aware that I am not the only one having the emotions and reactions I have, and that it’s very important to step back and reflect on your feelings - I’m more aware of how emotion management will improve team work |
| Regenerating resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I had some insights during the practical exercises. Mostly that for any problem, I can find myself the solution and often the best one - It reminded me of how I can recognize negative self-beliefs as unhelpful and that I have the means to counteract them |

⁷ For the purposes of RQ3 it was not relevant to differentiate between cohort participants.

⁸ When open comments were identified as overlapping two themes, a considered discussion ensued. For example, a comment made about being able to recognize negative self-beliefs could equally belong to themes 1 and 2, as it is both a personal resource and a strategy for managing stress. It was agreed however that comments would be allocated to the theme that best reflected context and participant intent. In this case, the participant mentions being *reminded* that they have this skill which suggests an emergence of self-awareness and a regenerating or restoring of this resource (Theme 1) rather than simply using this strategy for stress-management (Theme 2).

| | |
|--|--|
| | - It was an opportunity to dive in myself deeper and get to know myself better |
|--|--|

Theme 2: Managing psychological resources in ways required by current working life.

Comments relating to this theme include references to strategies for managing stress, anxiety, or other psychological challenges, particularly in the context of work.

Table 2. Open comments relating to theme 2

| Theme | Typical comments |
|---|---|
| Managing psychological resources in ways required by current working life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emotion management will help me combat anxiety and stress I face at work, which affects my productivity (quantity and quality) - A great opportunity to [...] think more deeply about how understanding my emotions and those of others can take my career forward - I like the idea that we can work around any situation and that there are options, including accepting that things won't change - [it was] very useful at many levels, especially recognizing that one is not alone in suffering work-related emotional stress - Gives an opportunity to stand back and reflect on how to manage stress – very relevant in our times! - In both my professional and personal life I will try to better control my reactions and emotions when faced with a stressful situation, put things into perspective. |

Theme 3: Adapting and responding to unpredictable environments.

Comments relating to this theme include references to transferring knowledge from the intervention in order to adapt/respond to the working context, increase flexibility, and deal more effectively with uncertainty or change.

Table 3. Open comments relating to theme 3

| Theme | Typical comments |
|---|---|
| Adapting and responding to unpredictable environments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There were practical and effective exercises which can easily be adopted in the real world (it literally assisted me in finding some answers during the practice) - The mere exercise of putting myself once more in the context of the work issue at hand and re-considering it step by step worked particularly well - The course gave me a structured way of reappraising and coping with my emotions and I left the training with greater clarity and confidence in myself - I think practicing the strategies will help to liberate myself from the obsession with future uncertainties and |

| | |
|--|--|
| | find peace of mind by focusing on the enjoyable experience of the moment - I benefitted a lot [...] would recommend this course to anyone (translators, other specialties) who are faced with anxiety and stress in the workplace |
|--|--|

Together, the open comments reflected strong enthusiasm for the intervention and identified a number of benefits generated which pertain to specific aspects of psychological sustainability, thereby answering the study's third research question.

7 Discussion

The aim of this study was to deliver and report on two evidence-based interventions explicitly focused on emotional competencies and psychological wellbeing. In doing so, it addressed a lack of professional development opportunities in this area. The interventions explored whether professional translators' psychological resources could be improved with a primary prevention approach, and gauged perceptions of the usefulness of such an intervention for their work and careers. Findings from post-intervention questionnaires suggested that the interventions were perceived to be useful and relevant, and that participants would apply learned strategies in the future. Participant feedback also highlighted a number of specific aspects that can foster translators' psychological sustainability. The next sections expand upon key themes and broader issues deriving from the data.

7.1 Translators' perceptions

There was significant agreement amongst participants that the emotion-based interventions were useful, beneficial, and relevant to their work. If individuals need to perceive themselves as having the potential to succeed in order for sustainability to be fostered (Di Fabio & Rosen 2020), it could be argued that the interventions were successful in achieving this result. Translators reported increases in a number of useful psychological resources such as self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. For instance, participants noted being more aware and gaining insights (Table 1), leaving the training with greater clarity and confidence (Table 3), and having a renewed sense of ability to combat stress (Table 2). Self-efficacy in particular has been mooted as potentially vital for translator's psychological capital (Hubscher-Davidson 2020), especially as they are working in a profession still predominantly perceived as low-status and low-pay (Lambert & Walker 2022).

Gaining belief in one's ability to overcome challenges could lead to a more proactive and agentic workforce, as translators are often depicted as relatively passive in accepting to work in an increasingly unsustainable industry (*ibid.*) and/or unable to maximise their agency due to power disparities which impact on the sustainability of their work (e.g., Moorkens 2020). Self-efficacy can lead to actions and behaviours that contribute to job satisfaction, such as (re)gaining a sense of control and autonomy (Ruokonen *et al.* 2020). Participant feedback showed this willingness to adopt new behaviours.

Translators perceived coaching as having potential to play an important role in helping them to work through job-related problems. In the same way that Argyropoulou *et al.* (2020) found that counsellors need experiential training interventions that trigger self-awareness, reflection, and

reflexivity in order to work more sustainably and also to benefit their clients, translators may do so as well. Cohort 2 were asked whether they found the workshop to be engaging and enjoyable (93.1% agreed), and if they would recommend it to their colleagues (90% agreed), a clear endorsement of the coaching approach employed in this study. It would seem that adopting coaching techniques for work-related sustainability purposes could be transformative for translators, as this quote from a Cohort 2 participant suggests: ‘I wish it had been a week-long in-person workshop, which would be life-changing.’

7.2 Emotion skills for the future

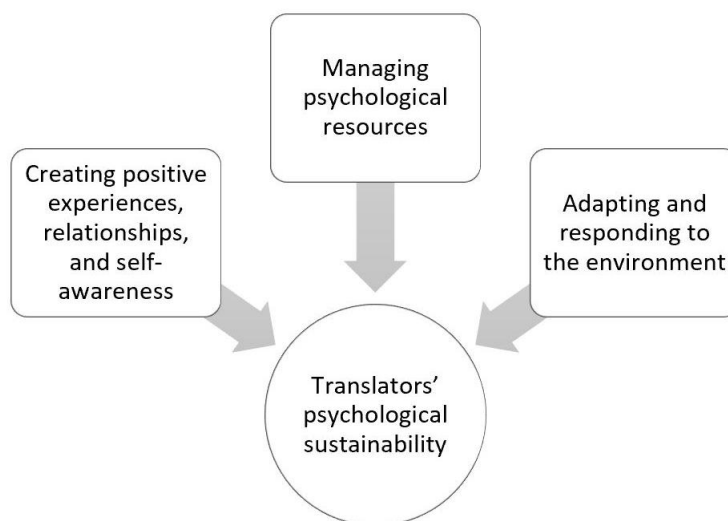
Study participants highlighted a number of ways in which they might apply emotion management strategies from the intervention going forward, hence showing a desire to enhance their talents in order to safeguard against potential future uncertainties and ensure resilience when faced with challenges. In particular, 33 comments referenced making use of the silent coaching exercise again, and 21 comments mentioned employing the ABCDEF model as a tool for reframing situations in the future (e.g., ‘I’ll redo the silent coaching exercise, but with a lot more time for thinking and expanding’, ‘I am definitely going to use the silent coaching exercise again’, ‘The ABCDEF model seems like a good way to assess future stressful situations in an objective manner’). This feedback shows an intention on the part of translators to continue learning how to draw on their emotional and interpersonal resources in order to improve both their work and wellbeing, something which Hubscher-Davidson and Lehr (2021: 5) noted was a key outcome of effective emotion-based interventions.

Consistent with prior research (e.g., Magnano *et al.* 2019), the language professionals in this study are working in a turbulent environment requiring them to build effective internal scaffolding and to reframe certain challenges as opportunities rather than stress-inducing events. A number of comments reflected this need to manage change in themselves in order to be able to cope with change in their contexts (c.f. section 6.2). The study thus confirms that it is necessary to improve individuals’ resilience, adaptability, and coping mechanisms to help them better understand their occupational and personal goals. In turn, Argyropoulou *et al.* (2020) suggest that this will lead to more sustainable careers with multiple meaningful professional experiences over time in the liquid labour market.

7.3 Components of psychological sustainability

In Section 6.2, participants’ open comments were organised in relation to three broad themes that, together, could be said to integrate the key components of their psychological sustainability (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Components of translators' psychological sustainability



The presence of these themes in the data supports the potential of an emotion-based intervention to promote translators' psychological sustainability. It further supports the connection found between translators' emotions and their behaviours in life and at work, including job satisfaction and performance (Hubscher-Davidson 2018). A number of psychological behaviours that can be influenced to make a difference to the careers of language professionals were identified (e.g., self-awareness, emotion management) and, while it is not new to suggest that translator training should incorporate activities to develop emotional competencies (e.g., Penet & Fernandez Parra 2023), the present study provides abundant evidence of the value of adopting a primary prevention approach for identifying and influencing the psychological components that will shape real-world outcomes in the translation professions.

One area that Figure 4 highlights, and was particularly visible in the qualitative data, is the intertwining of personal and professional aspects, and the usefulness of coaching for addressing both: 'I managed to focus the coaching exercise towards personal issues that are affecting my work life and choices and vice versa', 'I found it useful for both work and life. If you cannot manage your emotions effectively, this can have a huge impact on just about every area of your life.' These comments on work/life connections provide new insights for translator-centred research, especially regarding the iterative and recursive nature of translators' affective and cognitive experiences. They also reinforce Kaindl's (2021: 11) argument that researchers should adopt a humanized approach where subjective viewpoints are included to gain a more complete picture of the person of the translator. Analysing participants' subjective comments in the present study enabled a focus on "real processes", not easily measurable or fully replicable, something that Piotr Blumczynski (2022: 38) suggests is important for translation process research. It shed new light on the complexities and richness of translator psychology and its components, aspects that could be overlooked with so-called objective methods.

7.4 A sustainable profession

While appreciating the value of interventions, participant feedback also highlighted that developing a sustainable profession isn't only in the remit of individuals: 'Many of the stress-

related problems [...] have to do with systemic problems and a general atmosphere of underappreciation for our work', 'I would like to know more about expressing emotions in hierarchical settings where psychological safety may be a concern'. Gabriele Giorgi *et al.* (2020) noted the importance of a positive psychological climate at work, and interventions cannot be an alternative to necessary systemic changes. Although the focus in this study was on enhancing individual resources, psychological sustainability is dependent on the person/situation interaction in real-world settings, and changing the situation is equally relevant for the purposes of long-term wellbeing. It is patently clear that psychological sustainability is an area where various stakeholders have a role to play.

Adopting a primary prevention perspective, however, requires a significant shift in terms of our education and professional development strategies. As Moorkens (2020: 28) notes, "a broad conceptualisation of sustainability needs to be at the forefront of thinking at all levels within the translation ecosystem". The needs of the language industry are short-term and we are no longer educating translators for a single lifelong profession. Currently, when scholars speak of 'the sustained health of the industry' (e.g., Massey *et al.* 2023) they tend to refer to market growth, productivity-enhancing technologies, and employment figures. I would argue that an industry where neoliberal discourse is normalised and efficiency is prioritised above all else, however, is far from a healthy one. Although there is increasing acknowledgment that so-called soft skills are valuable, their value tends to be linked to a narrow conception of language industry needs rather than to a duty to educate citizens of the world who feel empowered to advocate for necessary systemic changes, for instance regarding de-professionalization and perceptions of a low-status profession.

Educating for psychological sustainability requires long-term thinking, the debunking of accepted wisdom that translators only need to learn a narrow set of technical, business, or marketing skills, and that emotions don't belong in the classroom or at work. There remains a critical role for universities and professional bodies in increasing their offer of evidence-based CPD targeting psychological sustainability or, in Rossier *et al.*'s (2020) terms, 'life designing interventions'. As one participant noted: '[the intervention] turned a topic that is sometimes regarded as a little fuzzy and 'nice to have' into a vital factor for your personal and professional life.'

8 Limitations

The interventions in this study can be replicated with more participants, potentially improving the psychological sustainability and wellbeing of language professionals in similar contexts. There are, however, some limitations to this study.

First, effects observed shortly following an intervention may not be sustained in the long-term and could merely be a reflection of participants' augmented understanding stemming from the intervention (Kotsou *et al.* 2019). Myrto Kyriazopoulou and Sotiria Pappa (2023: 9289) observe that longer interventions may be required for participants to internalize aspects of the theory, and Robert G. Jones (2020: 305) suggests that interventions are ongoing processes that need to be repeated down the line. Emotion-based interventions are thus likely to be more helpful when they are of longer duration, starting early on in a professional's career and repeated throughout.

Second, it was not possible to include a control group due to the interventions being delivered as CPD rather than organised as research experiments. Control groups are important for evaluating interventions because they enable us to exclude the possibility that intervention effects are simply due to being immersed in a learning environment (Hubscher-Davidson & Lehr 2021).

Despite some documented difficulties with including control groups in translator education contexts (e.g., Penet & Fernandez Parra 2023), future studies should nevertheless explore this option.

Third, the interventions were delivered to willing participants who signed up for the opportunity. It could be argued that professionals who choose to attend a workshop on this topic already possess some level of self-awareness and openness to learning, and that those who do not (and would therefore benefit most from the intervention) are unlikely to attend. Similarly, it could be that satisfied participants were more likely to complete the post-intervention questionnaire⁹. While optional attendance and feedback can be regarded as a drawback, it would be difficult to make these compulsory as emotion-based interventions work best when participants are fully engaged and self-motivated (Mikolajczak & Peña-Sarrionandia 2015).

Fourth, the interventions could have been further improved in terms of interaction. While opportunities for questions and interactions were built in, several participants mentioned wanting to share ideas with one another and discuss more elements of the content (e.g., ‘Best way to improve it is to actually expand it so as to allow for more interaction and to deepen the work on relevant concepts’). This feedback is consistent with the intervention literature which highlights that training is especially effective when a decidedly experiential and active approach is adopted (Mattingly & Kraiger 2019).

Finally, culture is another aspect worth mentioning when discussing the enhancement of people’s personal resources. Cultural differences influence how people’s intentions translate (or not) into psychologically sustainable behaviours, and culture may also play a role in whether and how individuals engage in workplace training and development (Jones 2020). Hubscher-Davidson and Lehr (2021) advised that emotion training should be delivered in the native language of individuals to minimise the effect of cultural influence on the validity of interventions. Although not possible within the constraints of this study, it may be useful in future research to keep track of participant characteristics in order to increase understanding of the conditions of psychological change on the various groups engaging in emotion-based interventions.

9 Final remarks

In the evolving landscape of translators’ professional development, this distinctive study offers new insights into how a brief, yet focused, intervention could bring about substantive shifts in the emotional skills and overall well-being of language professionals, thus contributing to their psychological and career sustainability. The implications of these findings are potentially significant, not only for practitioners but also for those aiming to cultivate a sustainable and resilient translation workforce that will successfully navigate the challenges of a profit-driven industry. Indeed, the study’s findings shed light on the ripple effects that successful interventions targeting psychological skills can have, not only on individual well-being but also on future work behaviours. By fostering psychological sustainability, we can expect to witness enhanced job satisfaction and performance, reduced stress, and a more committed and engaged workforce. This not only feeds into the immediate goals of academic institutions and industry associations, but also lays the foundation for a long-term, sustained, and healthy translation work environment. By increasing awareness around the role of psychology in sustainable translation careers, and adopting a primary prevention perspective, there is an opportunity to engender more advocacy

⁹ Response rate was approximately 52% however, higher than the 44% average online questionnaire response rate in education-related fields (Wu *et al.* 2022).

and regulation to meaningfully address vital issues in the profession, such as the ecological consequences of current translation practices (Cronin 2021).

Additionally, the study showed that language professionals clearly value opportunities to learn how to draw on their emotional and interpersonal resources. Their participation in the intervention and enthusiastic contributions indicated that emotional skills should no longer be considered as peripheral, but rather central pillars of a successful career and positive work/life environment. This finding helps assuage the doubt raised by Hubscher-Davidson and Lehr (2021) regarding whether busy translation professionals would have as much incentive as students to engage with emotion-based interventions. While providing a wider range of CPD options focusing on psychological skills is a good solution for freelancers, the psychological sustainability of in-house professionals and translation students could be developed via existing formal and informal learning situations at work and university. This is helpful in less flexible contexts where there may be resistance to change. Jones (2020: 104) observed that psychologists could have sounded the alarm much sooner regarding environmental sustainability if there had been more recognition in the natural sciences of the value of psychology and its role in dealing with issues of sustainability. I contend that we run the same risk in translation, unless translation psychology becomes much more fully integrated within translator education and professional development.

The present study arguably offers two additional important contributions to translation practice and research. First, the theoretically-informed intervention design can serve as a blueprint for creating customised and innovative training modules, workshops, or coaching sessions. In particular, it is hoped that this study will incentivize further emotion-based primary prevention approaches in the less-researched context of large organisations employing translation staff. Second, this study offers a theoretical contribution by identifying a framework of key components constituting translators' psychological sustainability. Derived from an analysis of translators' own observations and explanations, the framework extends our understanding of their experiences and provides a tool that other researchers might draw on in future to investigate more systematically the health and wellbeing of language professionals.

In closing, results from this study are promising in refining our knowledge of how professional translators might construct their future psychological and career sustainability. It offers a timely contribution that could empower professionals, educators, and associations to build a resilient and thriving translation community, responding to broader societal needs and aligning with the UN's vision for sustainable development.

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Appendix. Sample workshop outline

| Timing | Activity |
|---------------|---|
| 10 mins | Introduction: personal background, aims, and context |
| 10 mins | Self-evaluation test and reflection on results |
| 20 mins | Presentation of key theory and relevant concepts <ul style="list-style-type: none">- What are psychological wellbeing and emotional competence and how do they work?- Relevance at work: internal/external factors- The importance of managing emotions in translation work: examples of stressors and their impact on wellbeing (peer feedback, illness, cognitive demands, technology, etc) |
| 20 mins | Silent coaching exercise |
| 15 mins | Break + Q&A |
| 10 mins | Understanding stress <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Facts about stress and the Fight-Flight-Freeze response- Recognising stress symptoms- Links with emotion labour, ethical stress, and burnout |
| 25 mins | Regulating in emotion-eliciting situations <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The ABCDE process: reframing thoughts- Introducing a selection of self-regulation strategies- Opportunity for participants to identify and share coping mechanisms |
| 10 mins | Q&A |