

**Negative Career Feedback Effects on Career Goal Engagement: Exploring Goal  
Discrepancy and Professional Skills and Abilities Growth Mindset Dynamics**

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### **Abstract**

Negative career feedback from others guides individuals to adjust and redirect their efforts toward current career goals. Setbacks, such as negative feedback, often promote goal discrepancies, which represent the perceived distance between one's current progress and goals, resulting in reduced goal engagement. People's mindsets appear to play a significant role in how individuals respond to setbacks like negative feedback; while some are spurred into action by critical feedback, others may feel demotivated or discouraged. This study employed a newly developed concept, professional skills and abilities (PSA) growth mindset, to examine its moderating influence between perceived career goal discrepancy and subsequent career goal engagement. A sample of young adults ( $n = 100$ ) actively working towards their career goals (i.e., studying, employed, or both) completed an online survey. Consistent with our hypotheses, the results indicated that higher levels of negative career feedback were linked to lower career goal engagement, and career goal discrepancy mediated this relationship, suggesting that higher negative feedback increases discrepancies and subsequently lowers goal engagement. Contrary to our overall model hypothesis, PSA growth mindset did not significantly moderate the mediation between career goal discrepancy and career goal engagement. The present study contributes to the growing body of research on career development and suggests potential intervention strategies by elucidating the mechanisms through which negative career feedback influences career goal engagement.

*Keywords:* Negative Feedback, Goal Engagement, Goal Discrepancy, Professional Skills and Abilities Mindset, Career, Young Adults

## **Negative Career Feedback Effects on Career Goal Engagement: Exploring Goal Discrepancy and Professional Skills and Abilities Growth Mindset Dynamics**

In the dynamic landscape of career development, professionals and employees encounter a multitude of challenges and setbacks that shape their perceptions, aspirations, and actions toward their professional endeavors (Hu et al., 2017a). Among these frequently occurring experiences, feedback – particularly negative feedback – can hamper performance by eliciting negative affect and distress in employees (Shepherd & Cardon, 2009). Negative career feedback, arising from various sources such as supervisors and colleagues, can profoundly impact individuals' perceptions of their career goals and their engagement in pursuing them (Fonteyne et al., 2018; Hu et al., 2017).

Hirschi et al. (2013) characterized career engagement as the extent to which individuals proactively develop their careers through varying career management behaviors, emphasizing the active pursuit of career development through actions and behaviors aimed at advancing one's professional goals. Significantly, negative career feedback can alter career related behaviors by evoking discrepancies between an employee's desired and present career trajectory (Hu et al., 2017). Occasionally, this results in individuals either amplifying efforts toward achieving the goal, modifying the initial goal to a more achievable one, pursuing a combination of both approaches, or disengaging from the goal entirely (Creed & Hood, 2015). Hence, negative feedback and career goal discrepancies both demonstrate an effect on subsequent goal engagement.

External negative feedback can initially boost motivation more than positive feedback (Fishbach & Finkelstein, 2012; Ilies & Judge, 2005). However, an excessive amount of negative feedback can lead to disengagement from goals (Fishbach & Finkelstein, 2012; Ilgen & Davis, 2000). Research suggests that some individuals can remain actively engaged in their

goals (Fishbach & Finkelstein, 2012; Illies & Judge, 2005), while others give up when faced with negative feedback (Bandura, 1991; Choi et al., 2018; Creed et al., 2015; Hu et al., 2017). The question of whether negative career feedback is helpful or harmful, and for whom, remains open for exploration. It has been argued that the key to how feedback impacts the individual, particularly regarding the goal-progress discrepancy, depends on how actively the individual seeks and is receptive to the feedback they receive (Ashford, 1986). To explore this question, we bring forth a relevant concept of mindset.

The effects of mindset at the workplace have been extensively researched in academics (Burnette et al., 2023; Sisk et al., 2018), yet the present study contributes to the existing literature by applying a relatively novel concept of professional skills and abilities (PSA) growth mindset (Schmitt & Scheibe, 2022). Our aim is to explore how external negative career feedback and perceived career goal discrepancies influence individuals' subsequent career goal engagement, while considering the potentially activating and motivating role of PSA growth mindset in this dynamic.

### **Negative Career Feedback on Career Goal Engagement**

Individuals establish goals and standards to navigate progress and advancement towards their envisioned outcomes (Higgins, 1987). These “self-guides” serve as reference points against which current behaviors and performance are evaluated. Alongside one’s internal evaluations, external feedback is an integral part of comparing one’s actual performance against what is required for the desired career goal (Morrison, 1993; Renn & Fedor, 2001). Furthermore, feedback seems to be a crucial factor for stimulating goal achievement by directing individuals’ effort and resources (Bandura, 1991; Carver & Scheier, 1990; Fishbach & Finkelstein, 2012; Lord et al., 2010). According to the social cognitive

model of career self-management (Lent & Brown, 2013), receiving negative feedback stimulates self-reflection and evaluation of one's career goals.

Studies have consistently indicated that when employees receive negative feedback suggesting a misalignment between their career aspirations and their current progress or when the progress toward their goals falls short of expectations, it often leads to negative affect and job dissatisfaction (Carr, 1997; Hesketh & McLachlan, 1991). Furthermore, individuals tend to diminish their commitment and exertion towards their career objectives, readjust their expectations downward, and in some instances, opt to redirect their focus toward alternative career paths (Fonteyne et al., 2018, Hu et al., 2017a; Hu et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2018), reflecting reduced career goal engagement. However, contrary findings suggest a nuanced relationship, where negative feedback might not always directly lead to goal disengagement but could be mediated by alternative behavioral strategies, such as lower or higher career planning (Jawahar & Shabeer, 2019), goal persistence, and career exploration (Anderson & Mounts, 2012; Lent & Brown, 2013).

In Burnette et al.'s (2013) meta-analysis, a self-regulation model (i.e., SOMA model) influencing goal achievement was presented, featuring goal monitoring as one of its key stages preceding goal achievement. Goal monitoring involves assessing potential limitations and available resources necessary to attain a goal (Carver & Scheier, 1982). Negative career feedback serves as an indicator of a professional's current progress, achievement, and shortcomings, and it can lead to goal discrepancies if performance falls short of the required levels for achievement (Creed & Hood, 2015). In the realm of goal attainment, negative career feedback has been linked to disengagement from career goals (Hu et al., 2017; Lent & Brown, 2013). The inquiry remains as to whether negative career feedback serves as a catalyst for individuals to abandon their current goals or as a trigger for renewed commitment and

reengagement with existing goals. Our primary expectation is that higher negative career feedback is linked to lower career goal engagement.

**Hypothesis 1:** Higher negative career feedback is linked to lower career goal engagement.

### **Career Goal Discrepancy – A Mediation Pathway**

Carver and Scheier (1998) discussed a concept of cognitive processes in goal pursuit: the action loop. The action loop focuses on monitoring the distance between current progress and the desired goal. Essentially, the action loop continuously evaluates how far one is from achieving a goal. The action loop, by monitoring discrepancies between current status and the goal, concentrates on the closeness to the goal. The action loop's focus on evaluating goal proximity through continuous monitoring of the distance from the desired objective aligns with the notion of career goal discrepancy, as referring to the perceived gap or distance between a goal and the progress made toward its attainment (Bandura, 2001; Carver & Scheier, 1998; Creed & Hood, 2015; Locke & Latham, 2002). These perceived discrepancies can arise from within oneself but are also likely to arise from the feedback that individuals receive from others (Bandura, 2001; Brandtstädter & Rothermund, 2002; Creed & Hood, 2015).

The perceived discrepancies between goals and actual progress play a pivotal role in goal appraisal, influencing how individuals think, feel, and regulate their behaviors concerning their goals (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Noticing a discrepancy between one's performance and goals can result in distress and disengagement from these goals (Brandtstädter & Rothermund, 2002; Creed et al., 2015; Creed et al., 2018; Praskova et al., 2013). Brandtstädter and Rothermund (2002) proposed two self-regulatory goal adjustment strategies – goal assimilation and goal accommodation – used by individuals, especially young people, to address discrepancies between career aspirations and current progress. Goal

assimilation involves actively pursuing valued goals by leveraging personal resources to minimize perceived discrepancies without altering the goal itself. This may include increased effort in studying or acquiring new career-relevant skills (Brandtstädter & Rothermund, 2002). In contrast, goal accommodation entails adjusting the current goal by either downgrading it to more attainable aspirations or shifting to a new, more promising career goal (Ilies et al., 2010; Wrosch et al., 2003), often manifested in educational or career path adjustments among young individuals.

Discrepancies may become particularly salient when being confronted with negative career feedback, inviting an immediate assessment and monitoring of one's progress and the likelihood of achieving a goal (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Creed et al., 2015). Given the acknowledged significance of career goal discrepancies in influencing individuals' emotional and behavioral responses concerning their goals (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Creed & Hood, 2015; Brandtstädter & Rothermund, 2002), the hypothesis that negative career feedback heightens career goal discrepancy, subsequently reducing career goal engagement, emerges as a natural extension.

**Hypothesis 2:** Career goal discrepancy mediates the relationship between negative career feedback and career goal engagement, such that higher negative career feedback leads to less career goal engagement due to increased career goal discrepancy.

### **Moderating Role of Professional Skills and Abilities Growth Mindset**

In accordance with the SOMA model (Burnette et al., 2013), factors such as negative career feedback, integrated into the feedback loop as an input, imply the necessity for adjustments in self-regulation processes of goal setting, operation, and monitoring. These adjustments, which indirectly predict goal achievement, can be shaped by a person's mindset, that is the conceptualization of one's ability and the perceived malleability of skills (Dweck,



1999; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Molden & Dweck, 2006) – something that can be improved with effort and practice (Dweck, 1999; Dweck & Yeager, 2019). Expanding upon Carver and Scheier's (1982) initial social-cognitive theory, Burnette et al. (2013) suggested that implicit theories act as a cognitive framework influencing how individuals perceive and respond to self-regulation and goal pursuit, particularly when facing hurdles. It is plausible that the impact of mindsets on performance and goal engagement becomes more pronounced when individuals face an ego threat, such as negative career feedback (Burnette et al., 2013).

Recently, Schmitt and Scheibe (2022) employed the concept of mindset in the context of professional skills and abilities (PSA), defining PSA growth mindset as an individual's belief in the potential development of work-relevant abilities through hard work, determination, and support. Individuals with a growth mindset tend to prioritize the goal of enhancing their abilities through effort and are more inclined towards tasks that present genuine challenges (Cook & Artino, 2016; Mangels et al., 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Specifically, individuals possessing a PSA growth mindset tend to enhance their adaptability resources through active participation in career management behaviors related to learning and proactive career engagement (Schmitt & Scheibe, 2022). Individuals eliciting a stronger growth mindset seem to respond more positively to criticism. In fact, having a growth mindset compared to that of a fixed one may lead to an increased openness towards critical feedback (Mangels et al., 2006; Moser et al., 2011) and inclination towards seeking feedback (Cutumisu & Lou, 2020) thereby reinforcing one's understanding of their actions and performance levels (Callister et al., 1999). Additionally, a more robust growth mindset heightens the probability that an individual will assume responsibility for their career development by setting goals and devising strategies to attain them (Schmitt & Scheibe, 2022).

Considering these insights, PSA growth mindset is expected to moderate the relationship between career goal discrepancy and career goal engagement. The strength of the growth mindset influences how individuals manage their resources and effort in the face of perceived career goal discrepancies; a stronger PSA growth mindset is expected to significantly reduce the impact of career goal discrepancy on career goal engagement. Respectively, should a professional with higher PSA beliefs perceive a significant goal progress discrepancy, they may experience a smaller drop in their career engagement because they see their skills as developable. Thus, a robust growth mindset can mitigate the negative effect of discrepancies between career aspirations and actual progress. The presence of a higher growth mindset may reflect increased motivation to mobilize resources and exert additional effort to bridge the discrepancy between current performance and the desired goal in individuals with stronger PSA growth mindset.

**Hypothesis 3:** People demonstrating a growth-oriented mindset may perceive career goal discrepancy resulting from negative career feedback as less negative, which predicts higher engagement with career goals.

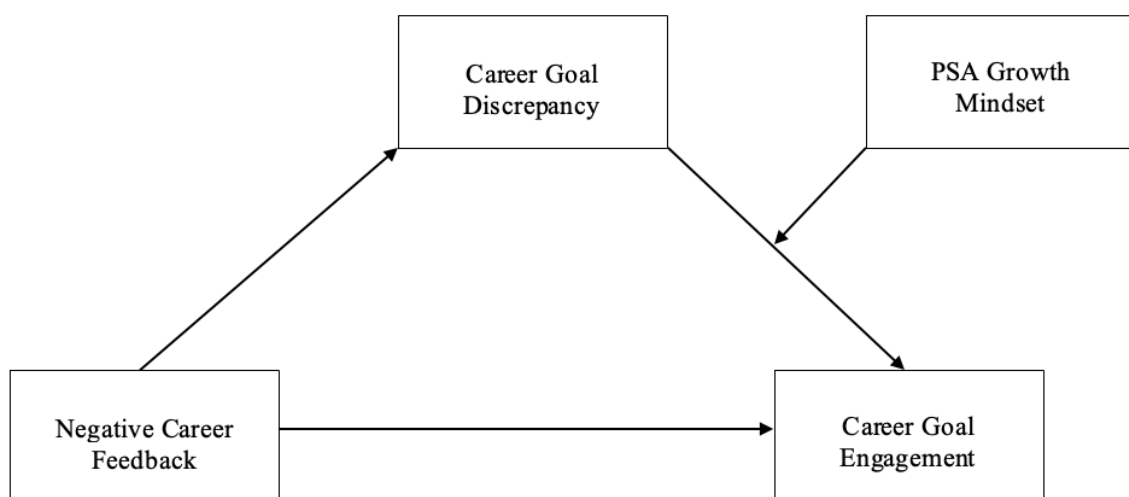
### **Present Study**

By elucidating the influence of external negative career feedback and career goal discrepancy, this study seeks to explore the subsequent impact on individuals' commitment, motivation, and active pursuit of their career objectives, namely career goal engagement. Furthermore, analyzing how individual beliefs in professional skills and abilities influence the relationship between career goal discrepancy and career goal engagement, this study aims to uncover the differential responses based on varying levels of growth mindset. An exploration of the multifaceted relationships between external negative career feedback, the perception of career goal discrepancy, and growth mindset sheds light on the complex dynamics underlying

subsequent engagement with career goals. Such insights hold promise in not only understanding individual responses to setbacks, but also in guiding interventions aimed at enhancing career goal pursuit and resilience in the face of professional challenges.

### Figure 1

*The Hypothesized Mediated Moderation Model of the Relationship Between Negative Career Feedback, Career Goal Discrepancy, Professional Skills and Abilities Growth Mindset, and Career Goal Engagement*



## Method

### Participants

A total of 100 participants were included in the study ( $M_{age} = 23.8$  years,  $SD = 3.2$ , range = 20-35, female 51%, male 48%, and others 1%). Participants were recruited by the research team targeting their personal networks. The recruitment criteria included active

pursuit towards a career goal, (i.e., studying, employment, or both) and an age between 18 and 35 years. This specific age range was chosen due to the explorative period and fluidity of career goals in early adulthood typically lasting until late 20s (Lemme, 1999). The present study consisted of three waves of data collection of which the first survey was completed by 100 participants. Due to time constraints and attrition rates, the present study focused only on the first wave of measurement. While majority of participants had Dutch nationality (69%), other nationalities were also represented, namely Finnish (27%), and others (4%). Majority of the participants were students (60%), others employed (31%), and some were both or self-employed (9%). Approval from the Ethics Committee of Psychology at the University of Groningen was obtained prior to commencing the sampling procedure.

## **Measures**

The surveys completed by the participants consisted of self-report measures using Likert-like scales. The measures relevant to the present study were designed to capture aspects related to negative career feedback, career goal discrepancy, PSA growth mindset, and career goal engagement.

### ***Feedback on Career Goals Inventory***

This study employed 8 items of the 24-item Feedback on Career Goals Inventory (FCG Inventory; Hu et al., 2017b) to assess external negative feedback on progress (e.g., ‘People tell me that I am not working hard enough to get into my chosen career’) and on goal suitability (e.g. ‘I am told that my preferred career choice will not let me display my real talents’). All items were assessed by a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*. Hu et al. (2017) reported good internal reliability with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .85 for progress and .82 for goal suitability including items assessing both interior and

exterior feedback. In the current sample, alphas were .84 (progress) and .79 (goal suitability), employing items assessing external feedback.

### ***Career Goal Discrepancy Scale***

The Career Goal Discrepancy Scale devised for young adults (Creed & Hood, 2015) was employed to measure subjective perceptions of four underlying discrepancies between career goals and current state of progress: achievement, ability, effort, and standard-related discrepancies with 12 items (e.g., ‘I am making progress on my career goals, but I don’t think I have achieved enough to get the career I want’). The scale used a 6-point Likert format with responses ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*. Creed and Hood (2015) reported good internal validity ( $\alpha = .93$ .) In the current sample, Cronbach’s alpha was similar ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

### ***Professional Skills and Abilities Mindset Scale***

PSA growth mindset was measured by using a 6-item professional skills and abilities mindset scale developed and validated by Schmitt & Scheibe (2022). Three items assessed growth mindset (e.g., ‘People can always substantially improve their professional skills and abilities’), while the other three items, included as distractor items, represented fixed mindset (e.g., ‘No matter how hard they try, people can’t really develop their skills and abilities at work in any substantial way’). A 5-point Likert scale was employed with responses ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Schmitt and Scheibe (2022) reported good internal reliability with Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ s of .81 for the growth mindset and .78 for the fixed mindset. In the current sample, the internal reliability for the subscales of growth ( $\alpha = .67$ ) and fixed mindset ( $\alpha = .60$ ) were acceptable.

### ***Career Engagement Scale***

Career goal engagement during the last three to six months upon receiving negative career feedback was assessed by using nine items from a 12-item Career Engagement Scale (Hirschi et al., 2013). The scale was developed for measuring proactive career behaviors (e.g., ‘Undertook things to achieve your career goals’) using a 5-point Likert format with responses ranging from 1 = *not much* to 5 = *a great deal*. This scale showed good internal validity with Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of .88 (Hirschi et al., 2013). In the current sample, Cronbach’s alpha was .83.

## **Procedures**

This study was part of a larger study employing a cross-lagged study design with three waves of data collection. However, due to the low response rates and practical constraints, only the first wave will be analyzed. Participants were recruited through a convenience sampling method. The initial striving was to reach 150 participants by virtue of a previously completed power analysis. Invitations to participate were sent out via messages, email, and recruitment advertisements. Participation was voluntary, and individuals were informed that the initial survey would take around 15 minutes, with follow-up surveys taking approximately seven minutes each. No compensation was offered for participation. Data collection was conducted online using the Qualtrics survey platform. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study, including its purpose and procedures, through an informed consent form. Only those who provided informed consent proceeded to complete the survey.

Participants were initially asked to provide general demographic information, including employment status, age, gender, and country of residence. Following demographic questions, participants were asked to reflect on their current career goal and possible setbacks encountered in their goal pursuit within the last six months. Participants were then presented with questions assessing negative career feedback, and potential mediators and moderators related to their career goals. This included exploring perceived career goal discrepancy and

PSA growth mindset. Lastly, participants answered to items assessing their career goal engagement.

### **Statistical Analyses**

The data was transferred to IBM SPSS 28 for conducting a mediated moderation analysis, exploring the relationship between negative career feedback on career goal engagement, mediated by career goal discrepancy, and moderated by PSA growth mindset. The statistical analyses followed a structured approach, beginning with data integrity checks and descriptive analyses of demographic variables. Prior to the analysis, all items with negative wording were reverse scored. Assumption checks considered model validity, focusing on linearity, normality, and homoscedasticity. Linear regression analyses and diagnostic plots were conducted to assess model fit and identify outliers. A specialized toolkit provided by the PROCESS Macro developed by Andrew Hayes (2022) was utilized to facilitate mediation and mediated moderation regression analyses by use of Model 4 and 14. These analyses aimed to uncover insights into indirect effects and mediated moderation effects as shown in Figure 1 (see Appendix).

## **Results**

### **Preliminary Analysis**

Upon conducting the analysis, main assumptions for linear regression analysis were checked to assess the linearity of relationships, normal distribution of residuals, and homoscedasticity. Linearity was assessed using scatterplots, contrasting each predictor to the dependent variable. Furthermore, graphical checks of the assumptions were conducted. There are no significant violations of these assumptions. The residuals closely approximate a straight regression line, and the scatterplot does not exhibit any discernible patterns.

Additionally, the presence of influential outliers was assessed using the maximum Cook's distance. None of the data points displayed a Cook's distance higher than 1.

Table 1 (see Appendix) presents descriptive statistics with means, standard deviations, and Pearson's correlation coefficients of all focal variables, namely negative career feedback (predictor), career goal discrepancy (mediator), PSA growth mindset (moderator), career goal engagement (dependent variable), age, and gender. The results showed significant negative correlations between negative career feedback and PSA growth mindset, career goal discrepancy and career goal engagement, and negative career feedback and career goal discrepancy. Moreover, there appear to be non-significant negative correlation between PSA growth mindset and career goal discrepancy, and positive non-significant correlation between PSA growth mindset and career goal engagement. Age had a significant positive correlation only with career goal engagement and gender (Male or Female) with career goal discrepancy.

## **Hypothesis Testing**

### ***Hypothesis 1: Higher negative career feedback is linked to lower career goal engagement***

To explore the direct effect of negative career feedback on career goal engagement, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. The results showed that negative career feedback accounted for a significant amount of variance in career goal engagement,  $R^2 = .13$ ,  $F(1, 98) = 14.6$ ,  $p < .001$ . According to our prediction, negative career feedback had a significant direct effect on career goal engagement,  $B = -.41$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $p = .08$ ,  $CI [-0.63, -0.20]$ . Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

***Hypothesis 2: Career goal discrepancy mediates the relationship between negative career feedback and career goal engagement, such that higher negative career feedback leads to less career goal engagement due to increased career goal discrepancy***



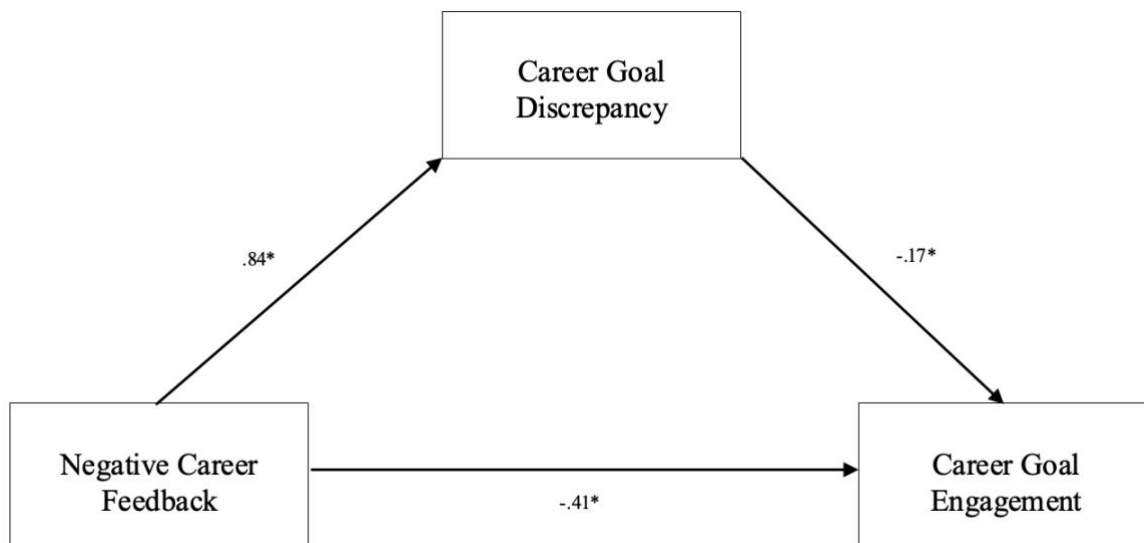
The regression analysis revealed a significant positive association between negative career feedback and career goal discrepancy, and negative career feedback explained a significant amount of variance in career goal discrepancy,  $B = .84$ ,  $R^2 = .32$ ,  $F(1, 98) = 45.6$ ,  $p < .001$ . To examine the potential mediating effect of career goal discrepancy (M) in the relationship between negative career feedback (IV) and career goal engagement (DV), PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2022) was used. As shown in Figure 2, the mediation analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of negative career feedback on career goal engagement through career goal discrepancy,  $B = -.17$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $CI [-0.34, -0.002]$ . Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

***Hypothesis 3: People demonstrating a growth-oriented mindset may perceive career goal discrepancy resulting from negative career feedback as less negative, which predicts higher engagement with career goals***

The mediated moderation effects of negative career feedback (IV) on career goal engagement (DV) through the career goal discrepancy (M) at different levels of PSA growth mindset (W) were investigated using PROCESS Model 14 (Hayes, 2022). The index of moderated mediation for different levels (-1SD, mean, +1SD) of PSA growth mindset was found to be non-significant,  $I = 0.001$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ,  $CI [-0.25, 0.23]$ . The simple slopes of the conditional indirect effect can be seen in Figure 6 (see Appendix). Hypothesis 3 was not confirmed.

## **Figure 2**

*Indirect Effect*



*Notes.* \*Coefficients are significant at .05 alpha level.

### Discussion

We tested the correlates of negative career feedback in a model that proposed higher levels of negative feedback on career progress and goal suitability from others would be linked to more career goal discrepancy, which in turn would be related to lower levels of career goal engagement. Support was found regarding this indirect pathway. Additionally, the model proposed that PSA growth mindset moderated this relationship by higher levels of PSA growth mindset reducing the negative influence of perceived career goal discrepancy, subsequently predicting higher career goal engagement. However, no support was found for the conditional indirect effect. This model was informed by the combination of self-regulation principles with the idea that people experience goal pursuit and adjacent cognitive and affective processes differently depending on their beliefs regarding the malleability of ability (Burnette et al., 2013).

### Theoretical Implications

Aligned with the existing theories, we found that higher levels of negative feedback from others on progress and goal suitability was associated with less career goal engagement (Hu et al., 2017; Lent & Brown, 2013). This may be attributed to the doubts that negative feedback elicits in the recipient (Lent & Brown, 2013). Reduced career goal engagement may function as a self-protective strategy to avoid subsequent failure and disappointment (Creed & Hood, 2013). However, negative feedback can serve as a form of corrective information that prompts individuals to re-evaluate their strategies and exert greater effort towards their goals (Fishbach & Finkelstein, 2012; Ilies & Judge, 2005). An excessive amount of negative feedback can have detrimental effects, hindering performance and ultimately leading to goal disengagement (Fishbach & Finkelstein, 2012; Ilgen & Davis, 2000). This suggests that there may be an optimal threshold or "right amount" of negative feedback that is beneficial in motivating individuals without overwhelming them, especially if the goal or improvement point is of great importance to them (Hu et al., 2016).

Previous research has demonstrated that becoming aware of a discrepancy between one's performance and goals can lead to distress and disengagement from these goals (Brandtstädter & Rothermund, 2002; Creed et al., 2015; Creed et al., 2018; Praskova et al., 2013) and that discrepancies may inflate when receiving negative feedback regarding one's progress (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Creed et al., 2015). Consistent with earlier findings, the results showed that negative career feedback on career goal engagement is partially explained by its influence on career goal discrepancy. Thus, negative career feedback not only directly reduces career goal engagement, but also indirectly affects it through its influence on career goal discrepancy. This suggests that individuals who receive negative career feedback may experience higher levels of career goal discrepancy, which in turn contributes to decreased career goal engagement. Alternatively, negative feedback could also be more helpful granted that we protect the receiver from taking it as a sign of high discrepancy. Providing

constructive and incremental feedback can be beneficial for the recipient, while maintaining a realistic perspective on one's progress.

Additionally, the results demonstrate that perceived growth-oriented mindset did not significantly influence how individuals perceived and responded to career goal discrepancies resulting from negative career feedback. This finding contradicts the initial hypothesis that a growth-oriented mindset would mitigate the negative impact of career goal discrepancy on engagement with career goals following negative feedback. While previous research has demonstrated the benefits of a growth mindset in various aspects, such as individuals exhibiting a growth mindset typically respond to failure or setbacks with heightened effort and persistence (Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Mrazek et al., 2018; Taberero & Wood, 1999), the application of mindsets to specific career-related challenges, such as responding to negative feedback, may vary. The complexity of career goal discrepancy, particularly when compounded by negative feedback, may necessitate additional factors beyond mindset alone. Factors such as emotional regulation, self-efficacy beliefs, and the perceived controllability of the situation could play crucial roles in shaping individuals' responses to career setbacks.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Few methodological limitations of the present study pertain to sampling strategy and sample characteristics. Our study employed convenience sampling, which may have introduced selection bias and limited the generalizability of our findings. Future research could benefit from employing more diverse and larger samples to enhance the external validity of the results. Furthermore, since only the first wave of measurements was analyzed, it is important to note that no causal relationships can be inferred from the findings. Therefore, it is suggested that further studies employ a longitudinal approach to capture changes in individual responses to negative career feedback and shed light into its consequences in long-term.

Additionally, the scores on PSA growth mindset were notably high, ranging from 3.5 to 4.8 out of a maximum of 5, indicating an inclination towards a growth mindset among the participants and absence of true low scores. Factors such as high educational background (Blackwell et al., 2007; Yeager & Dweck, 2012) and relatively high socioeconomic status among the participants may promote or emphasize these growth-oriented beliefs (Claro et al., 2016). This highlights the importance of expanding research to include populations or contexts where growth mindset beliefs are less common or where diverse mindset orientations are more prevalent.

One theoretical limitation of our study concerns the construct of negative career feedback. Contextual factors, such as perceived source credibility, feedback quality, and feedback delivery or the manner in which feedback is given appear to play key roles in the perception of negative feedback and its consequences (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2004). These contextual factors may be included in further studies to assess their moderating relationship on negative feedback and its consequences more comprehensively. Importantly, supportive, and respectful delivery may enhance receptiveness and promote adaptive responses to feedback (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2004).

The moderating role of PSA growth mindset may further be explored by examining how it affects the relationship between negative career feedback and perceived career goal discrepancy. The proposed moderation effect examines whether PSA growth mindset influences how individuals perceive negative feedback. Supposedly, individuals with a stronger PSA growth mindset may be less likely to view negative feedback as an insurmountable gap between their abilities and aspirations (Burnette, 2013), providing valuable insights into how mindset may mitigate the effects of negative feedback.

### **Practical Implications**

The effect of negative career feedback on career goal engagement through career goal discrepancy underscores the importance of self-regulation and adaptive goal adjustment strategies (Creed et al., 2018). This highlights the need for interventions and support mechanisms that promote effective goal setting, monitoring, and adjustment strategies to mitigate the negative impact of career feedback on goal engagement. Moreover, these theoretical implications suggest the importance of providing constructive and supportive feedback in educational and career settings. By minimizing perceived discrepancies and fostering adaptive goal regulation strategies, educators and supervisors can enhance individuals' motivation and persistence toward their career goals (Creed et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of considering individuals' mindset orientations (PSA growth mindset) in understanding responses to negative career feedback and subsequent goal engagement in professional contexts. This suggests a need for further investigation into the interplay between mindset orientations and career-related outcomes. Practically, the present study highlights the potential benefits of interventions aimed at cultivating growth-oriented mindsets among professionals to enhance career goal pursuit resilience and engagement, particularly in the face of setbacks.

## **Conclusion**

This study sheds light on the impact of negative career feedback and goal discrepancies on individuals' career goal engagement, highlighting the role of PSA growth mindset. The findings revealed that higher levels of negative career feedback were associated with lower career goal engagement. Additionally, career goal discrepancy mediated this relationship, indicating that negative career feedback not only directly reduces goal engagement but also indirectly affects it by increasing perceived discrepancies between current performance and career aspirations. Unexpectedly, PSA growth mindset did not significantly influence individuals' subsequent career goal engagement based on career goal

discrepancies resulting from negative feedback, suggesting that additional factors may play a role in shaping responses to career setbacks. These insights contribute to our understanding of self-regulation and goal pursuit in career development, emphasizing the importance of constructive feedback and potential benefits of interventions aimed at cultivating growth-oriented mindsets among professionals to enhance resilience and engagement in pursuing career goals.

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## Appendix

**Table 1**

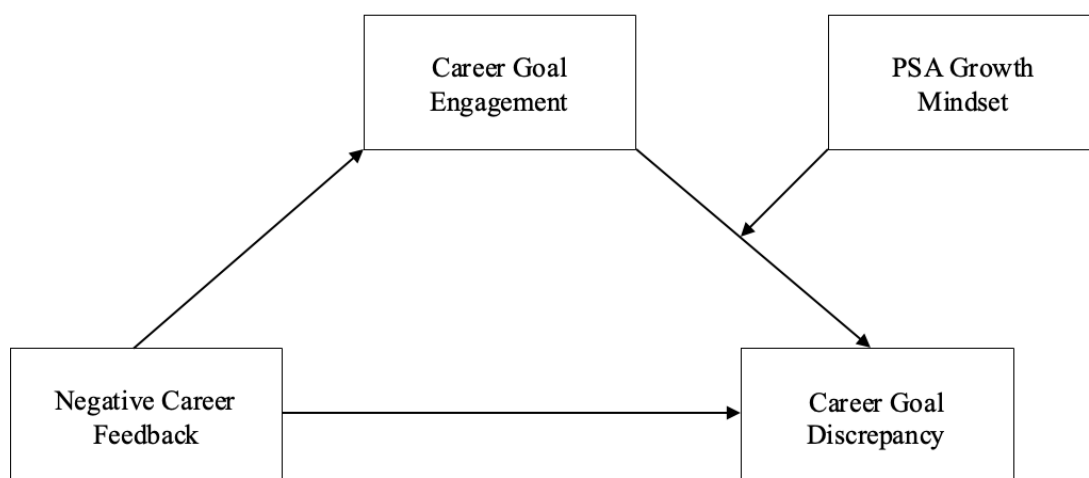
*Descriptives and Correlations of Focal Variables*

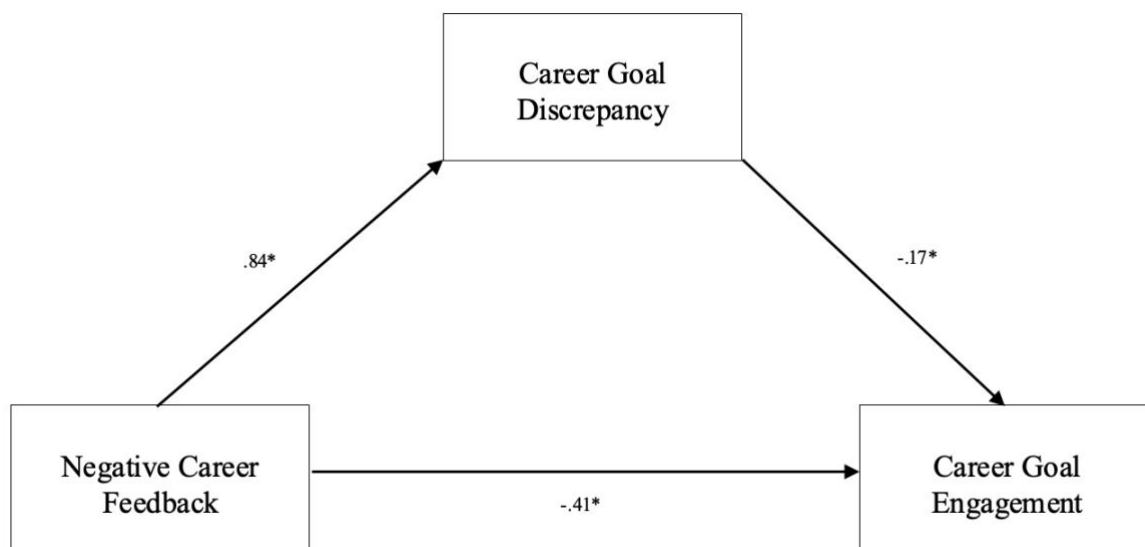
Variable	N	Mean	SD	Correlations						
				1	2	3	4	5	6	
1. PSA Growth Mindset	100	4.14	0.65	-						
2. Negative Career Feedback	100	1.84	0.64	-.198*	-					
3. Career Goal Discrepancy	100	2.53	0.96	-.141	.564**	-				
4. Career Goal Engagement	100	3.15	0.73	.162	-.360**	-.380**	-			
5. Age	100	23.78	3.24	-.033	.056	-.038	.242*	-		
6. Gender (Female)	100	-	-	-.097	.025	.218*	-.167	-.042	-	

*Note.* N = 100. Mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's R correlation between all variables. \* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level; \*\*. Correlation is significant at 0.01 level. Gender was coded 1 = female, 0 = male, 0 = non-binary.

**Figure 1**

*The Hypothesized Mediated Moderation Model of the Relationship Between Negative Career Feedback, Career Goal Discrepancy, Professional Skills and Abilities Growth Mindset, and Career Goal Engagement*



**Figure 2***Indirect Effect*

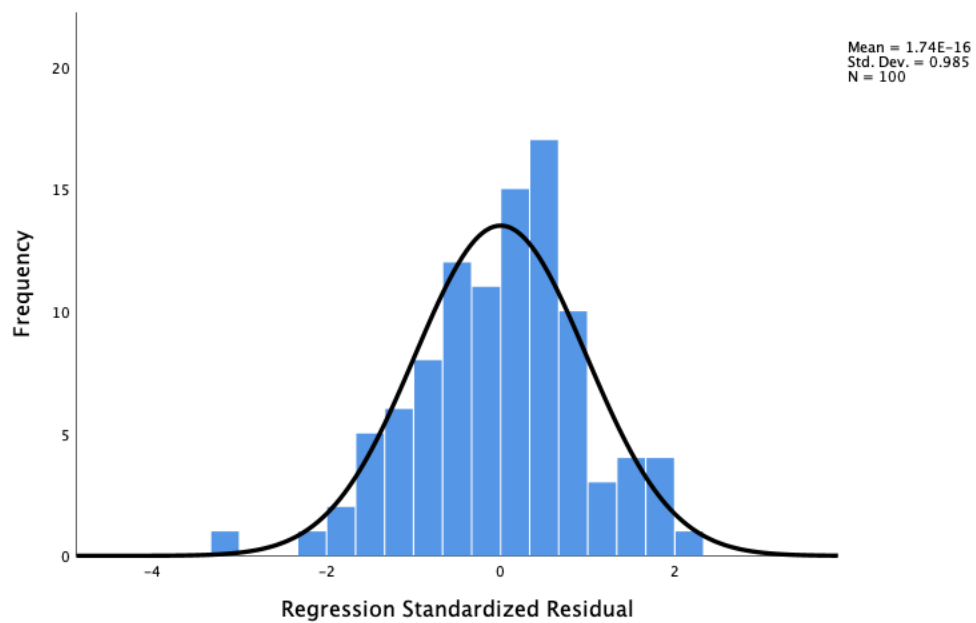
*Notes.* \*Coefficients are significant at .05 alpha level.

**Figure 3**

*Scatter Plot of the Regression Standardized Residuals and Predicted Values of Career Goal Engagement*

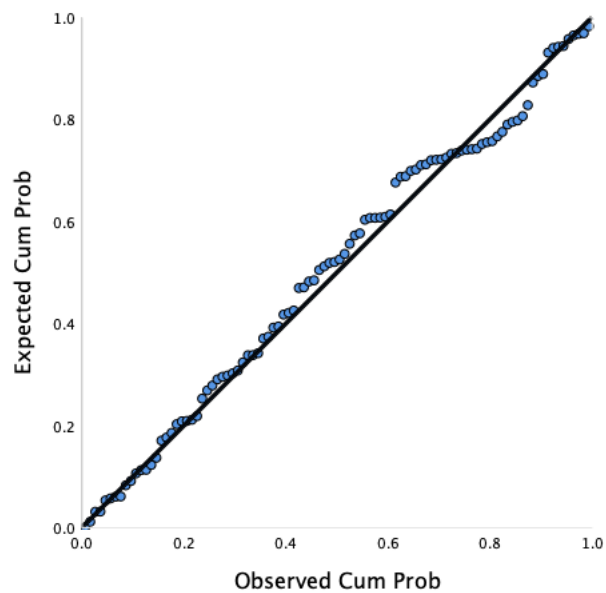
**Figure 4**

*Histogram of the Standardized Residuals of Career Goal Engagement*



**Figure 5**

*Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residuals of Career Goal Engagement*

**Figure 6**

*Conditional Indirect Effect*

