

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stress theory in the case of higher education students.

A longitudinal investigation using the Burnout Assessment Tool

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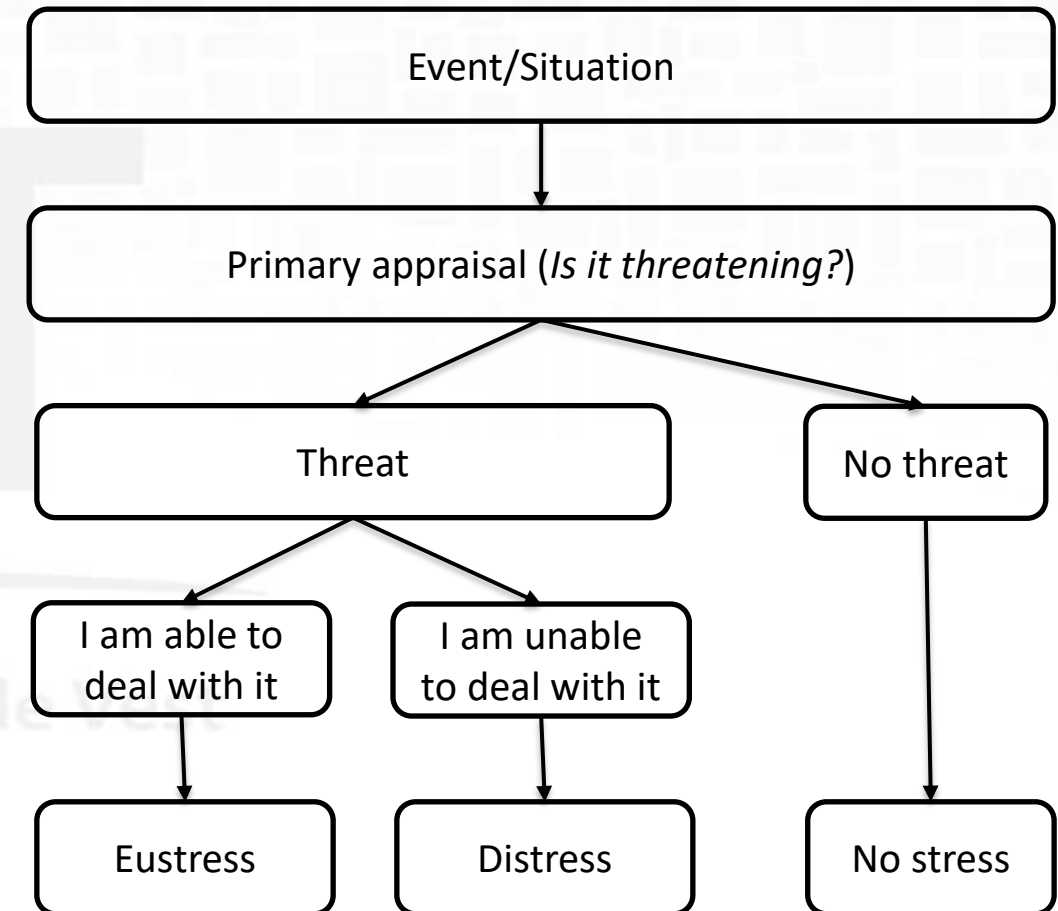
About us...

- Timișoara
 - About 350.000 inhabitants,
 - 600 km away from 9 European capitals (i.e., Bucharest, Belgrade, Budapest, Bratislava, Vienna, Zagreb, Sofia, Sarajevo, Skopje);
- medium-sized university (about 15.000 students)
 - Small Department (about 1000 students enrolled in all 3 study levels: BA/MA/PhD)
- Fair amount of time available to dedicate to research;



Aims of the study

- Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stress theory
 - Highly influential (THE stress theory), still used in clinical psychology research and practice (i.e., psychotherapy);
 - Theorised a sequence of processes: anticipatory appraisals (*what will happen?*), coping strategies (*what am I doing*), subjective experiences of stress (*is it working*);
 - These processes unfold in time, as the individual tries to adapt to the event/situation;
 - Too big to test it all at once;
 - Parts of it were thoroughly investigated
- Our aim: to test it all at once 😊



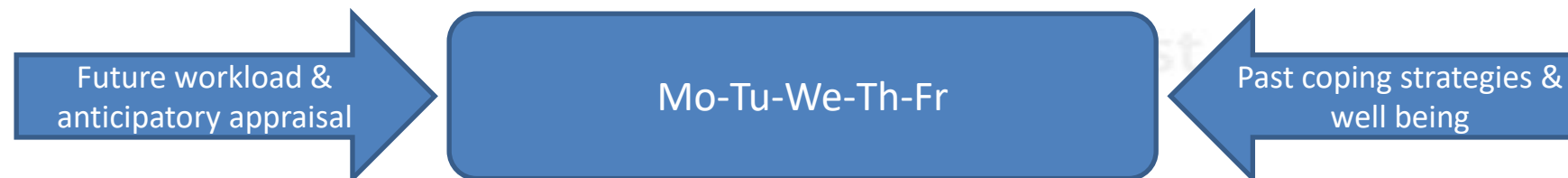
Method (1)

- Participants
 - In the 1st wave (N = 399, 60.70% female, Mage = 20.76 y.o., SD = 4.62 years) were Romanian bachelor students from the Faculty of Psychology (57.1%) and Computer Science (42.9%);
- Measures
 - “Outcome” measures were
 - *Burnout Assessment Tool* (BAT; Schaufeli et al., 2020),
 - *The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale* (DASS-21; Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995),
 - *The Symptom Checklist 90* (SCL-90; Derogatis & Cleary, 1977)
 - *The Primary and Secondary Appraisal* scale (PASA16; Gaab et al., 2005)
 - two scales for assessing primary appraisals (i.e., the *threat* scale and the *challenge* scale) and another two scales for the secondary appraisals (i.e., *self-concept of own abilities* and *control expectancy*);
 - *Brief Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced* (Brief COPE; Carver, 1997) – we scored the 4 main coping strategies: *emotion focused coping*, *problem focused coping*, *seeking social support* and *avoidant coping*;
 - we asked participants to indicate how many academic tasks they must prepare in the next week

Method (2)

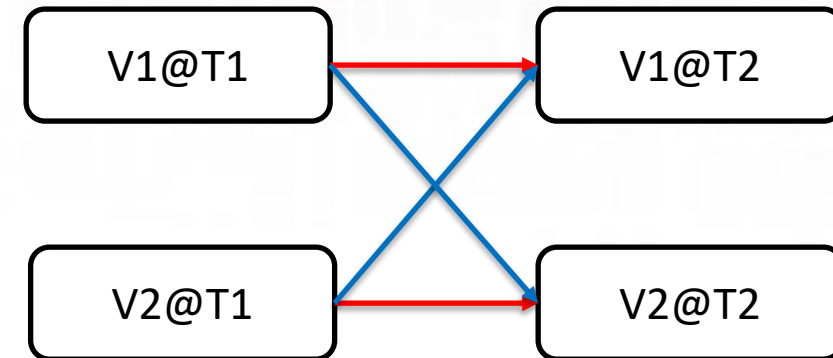
- Data structure

- 5 consecutive weekends - 354 participants completed at least 3 out of 5 measurement moments;
- Each weekend, participants had to
 - Indicate how many academic tasks they must prepare in the next week;
 - Appraise how they feel about these future tasks (i.e., prospective appraisal);
 - Report how they dealt with the academic tasks in the past week (i.e., retrospective coping strategies);
 - Report their general well-being across the past week (i.e., using BAT, DASS-21 and SCL-90);



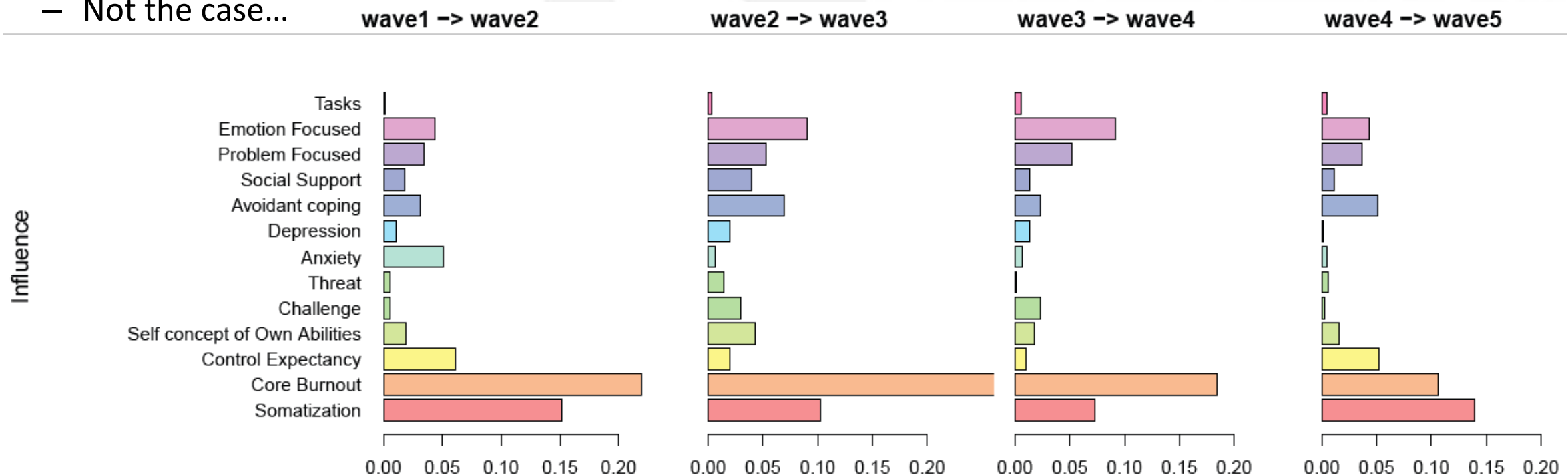
Method (3)

- Statistical approach
 - *auto-regressive cross-lagged network models* (Rhemtulla, Bork, & Cramer, *in press*)
 - combines
 - **auto-regressive** **cross-lagged** relationships to identify the temporal order between two variables measured in two different moments;
 - The network is a representation of all **cross-lagged relationships** between the variables (i.e., $V1@T1 \rightarrow V2@T2$);
 - psychological network modelling, that facilitate the understanding of complex relationships between numerous variables;
 - Estimations of the importance of each variable (or node) for the entire network, through centrality indices;
 - Influence: the sum of all squared cross-lagged relationships in which the variable is a predictor;
 - Predictability: the sum of all squared cross-lagged relationships in which the variable is a criterion;



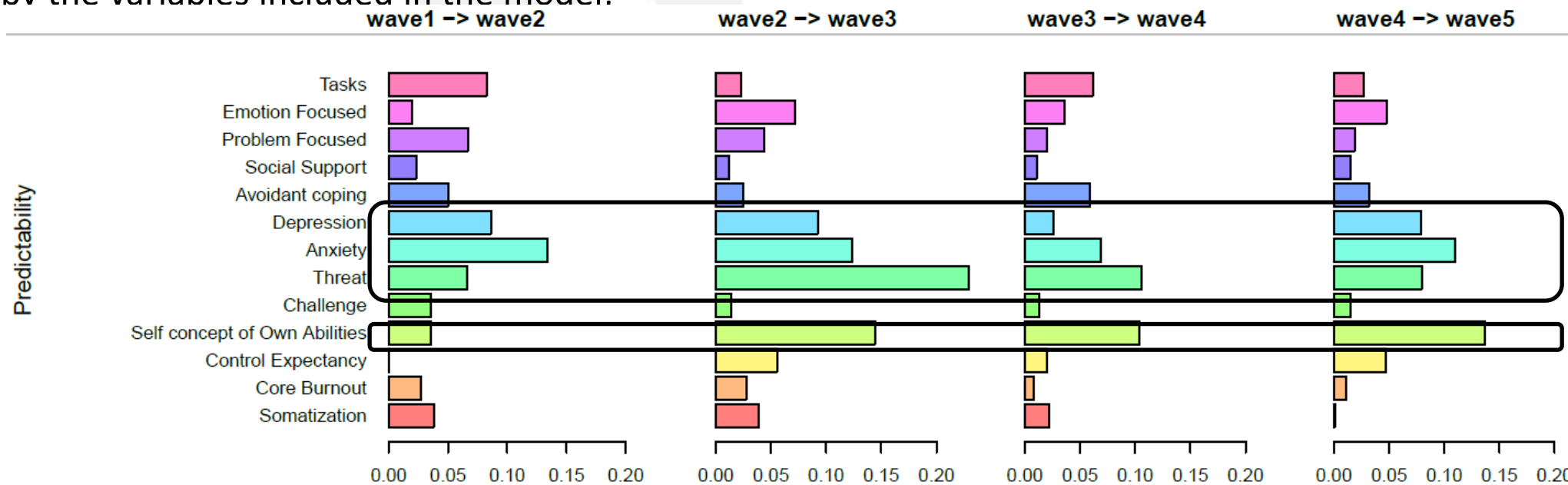
Results (1)

- What are the strongest predictors within the network?
 - Influence: the sum of all squared cross-lagged relationships in which the variable is a predictor;
- According to Lazarus and Folkman, prospective appraisal scales should have the highest levels of influence;
 - Not the case...



Results (2)

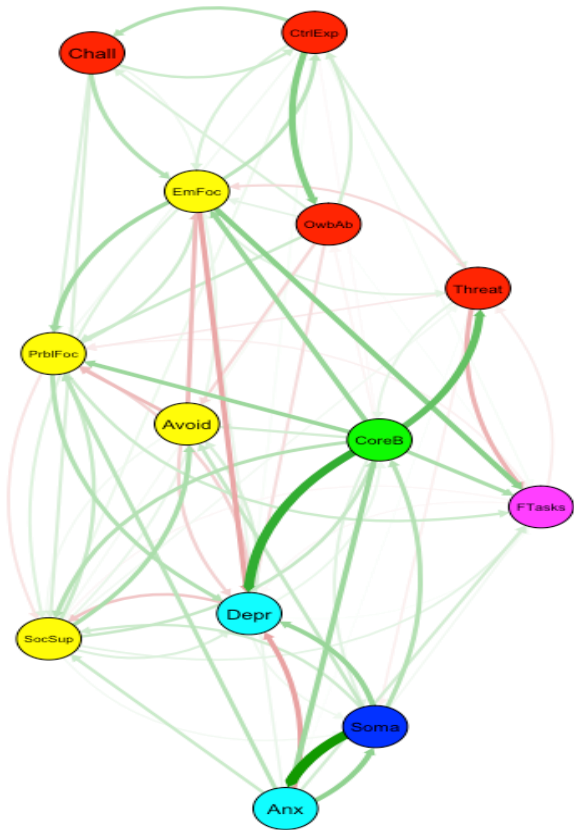
- What are the variables predicted by all variables in the network?
 - Predictability: the sum of all squared cross-lagged relationships in which the variable is a criterion;
- According to Lazarus & Folkman, mental health variables and burnout should be predicted by all other variables in the model
 - Partially confirmed: some mental health variables are indeed predicted by the variables included in the model (depression and anxiety, NOT burnout or somatization);
 - Surprising findings: anticipatory appraisal variables (i.e., threat and self-concept of own abilities) are predicted by the variables included in the model:



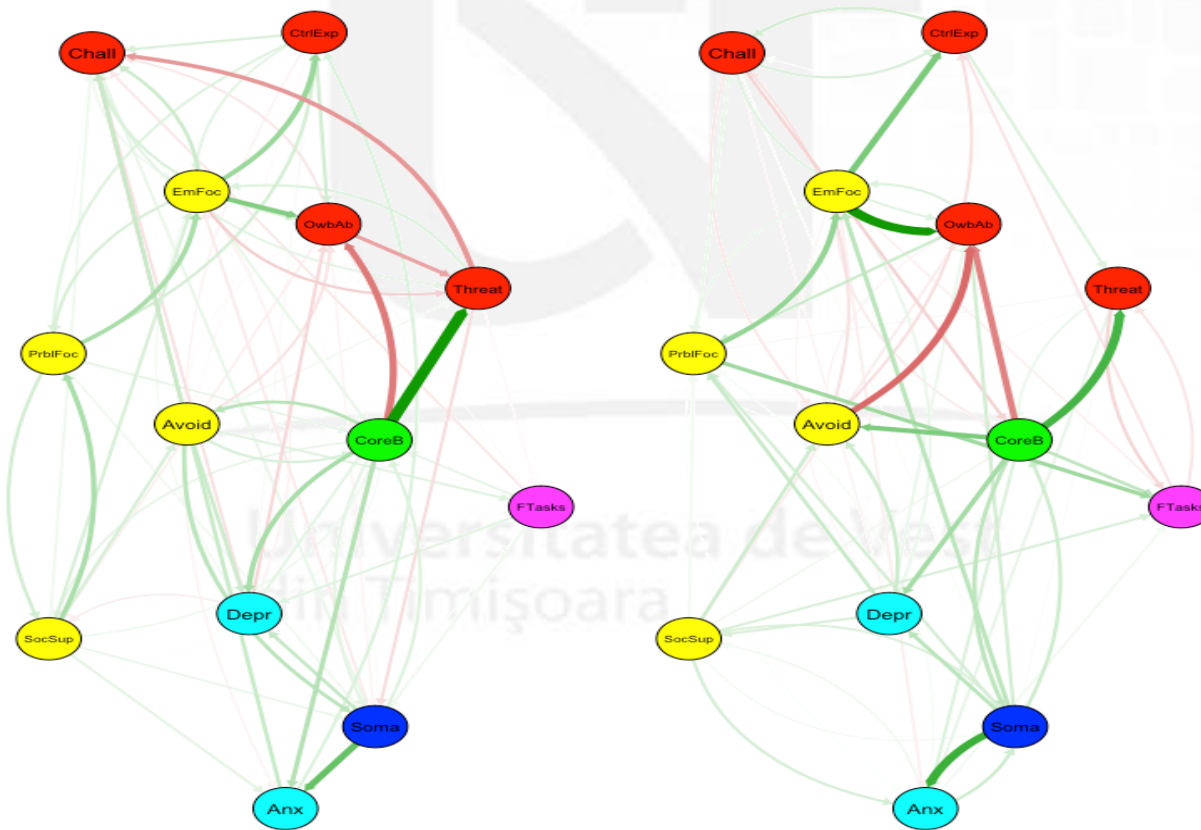
Results (3)

- But which variable predicts which ?

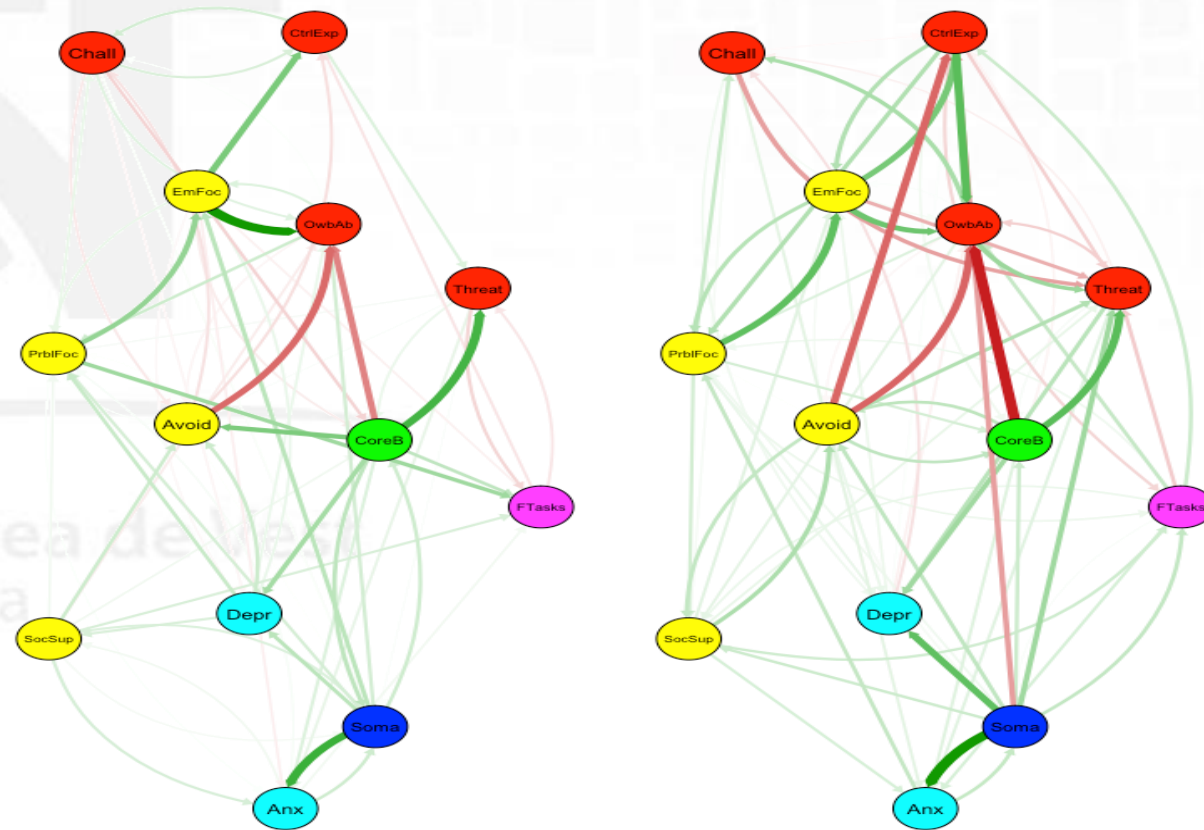
W1->W2



W2->W3



W3->W4



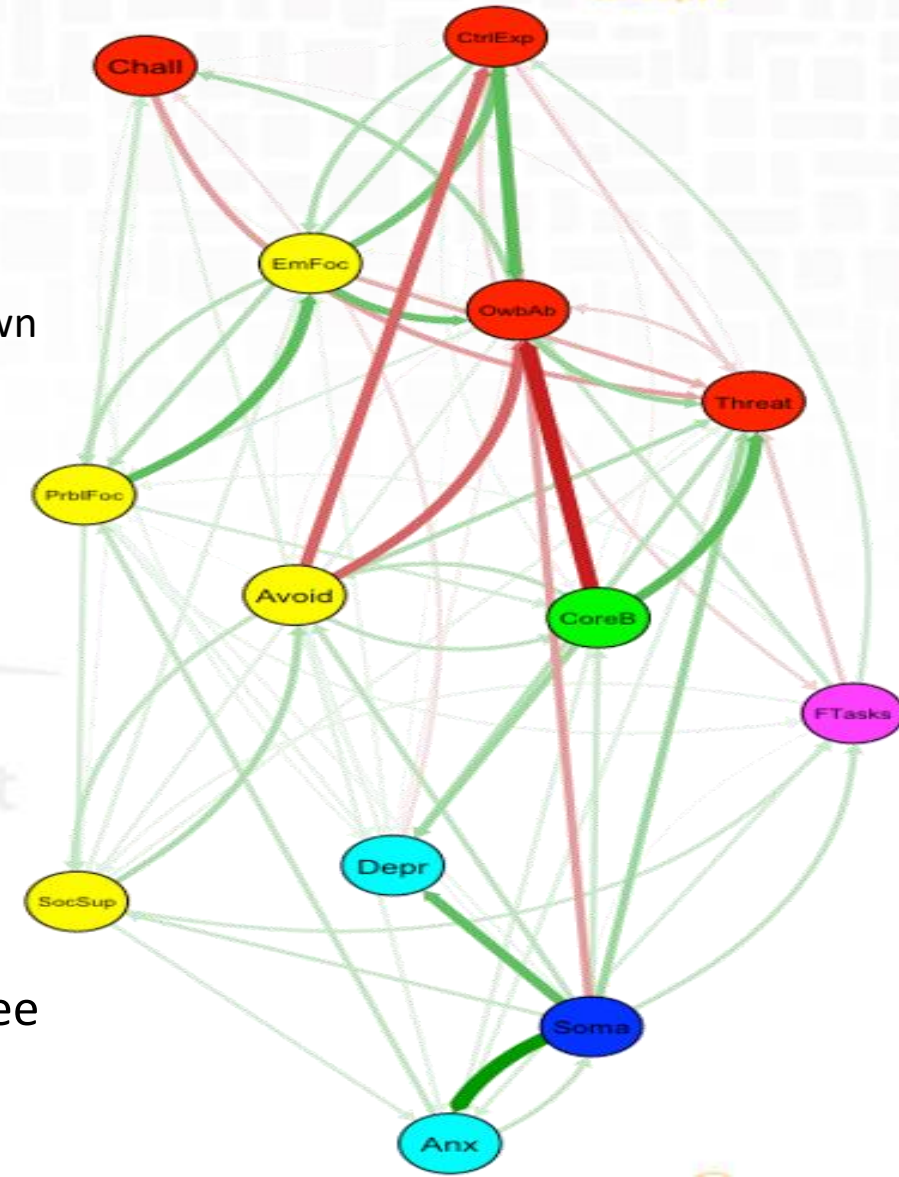
W4->W5



Results (4)

W4->W5

- The temporal order of appraisal and coping – reversed, if existing:
 - avoidant coping negatively predicted future evaluations of own abilities, and future control expectancies;
 - Emotion-focused coping positively predicted future evaluations of own abilities and future control expectancies;
- The role of core burnout – not an outcome
 - Strong predictor for future appraisal evaluations: positive for threat and negative for evaluations of own abilities;
 - Bidirectional relationship with avoidant coping;
 - To some extent... predictor for future depression;
- The role of somatic complaints – not an outcome
 - Strong predictor for future depression and anxiety
- The marginal role of social support...
 - Data collected during online classes;
 - Probably our students interpreted social support as venting (see the relationship with future avoidant coping);



Discussion

- What is the role of appraisal evaluations and coping strategies... if they are mostly outcomes of the L&F model?
 - Not very useful in predicting future burnout or future mental health;
- How can we integrate the central role of burnout in the unfolding of future appraisal evaluations and coping strategies,
 - and, to some extent, unfolding of future reports of depression;
 - Strain effects (Guthier, Dormann, & Voelke, 2020) are present here...

Thank you for your attention

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