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The five-day challenge: how to turn a change into a chance. An action-research to promote resilience and self-empowerment during lockdown

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Article info

Abstract

Introduction. The social and sanitary emergency due to the spread of Coronavirus has certainly represented one of the most difficult challenges of contemporary world that has put at risk the psycho-physical health of people. Some studies in the field of psychological sciences have turned their attention to the impact of restrictive confinement within own homes, on the well-being and quality of life. Isolation, the lack of opportunity to socialization, the sense of job insecurity and economic precariousness, as well as the difficulty in managing a daily life without routine and predictability, have put a strain on people's resilience, exposing them to numerous psycho-social risks. Aim of the study. Moving within Positive Psychology, the present action-research is aimed to investigate the level of well-being of Italians during the lockdown and promote the acquisition of proactive behaviours and self-empowerment. Method. We developed a self-report questionnaire and designed an intervention, called "the five-days challenge: how to turn a change into a chance". A triangulated methodology has been implemented in order to enrich the data from a double point of view, qualitative and quantitative. Results. Firstly, it was observed that dispositional optimism was positive associated with wellbeing, but that this positive association will be significantly mediated, in a negative way, by state anxiety. Secondly, the results have shown a statically significant effect of the intervention proposed on anxiety level reduction of participants. Implication. To sum up, the five-days challenge seemed to be a practical and operative intervention to promote self-empowerment in various situations dominated by uncertainty, which requires a great effort in terms of resilience and reappropriation of meaning.

Keywords: Covid-19; psychological risks; resources; Positive Psychology; Self-empowerment; Proactive behaviours; five-days challenge.

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Introduction

The socio-sanitary emergency resulting from the spread of coronavirus certainly represents one of the most difficult challenges in the contemporary world, which has put the psycho-physical health of people at risk. Faced with the spread of the virus, several studies have been conducted with the aim of not only collecting health and epidemiological data but also investigating the effect of Covid-19 on individuals and communities, as well as the consequences of the actions adopted by institutions to counteract its spread (Converso et al., 2021; Ergin, 2021). The main impacts have concerned not only friendships and family relationships but also the ability to relate to a new way of organizing and managing work, as well as the sense of precariousness and uncertainty about the future, involving people on multiple levels, from the physical to the psychological, environmental, and relational levels. These studies have facilitated a better understanding of the psychosocial impact of exposure to a pandemic, as well as the determination of its effects to mitigate them and cope with future pandemics (Ergin, 2021).

Regarding the restrictive measures adopted, primarily home confinement during the first phase of the pandemic, some studies have tried to emphasize their consequences on well-being and quality of life. In fact, isolation, lack of socialization opportunities, sense of job insecurity, and economic precariousness, as well as the difficulty of managing daily life without routine and predictability, have severely tested the resilience of people, exposing them to numerous psycho-social risks. These include the risk of stopping in believing that we have multiple possibilities in front of us and that we have power over reality. When we stop believing in our possibilities, we stop growing, and development dies.

In such a scenario, the ability to withstand setbacks, adapt positively, and cope with adversity becomes a priority, which is described as resilience (Killgore et al., 2020b). Resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic was significantly lower than normative data, suggesting that the crisis triggered by the pandemic negatively affected population resilience, perhaps due to acute changes in emotional outlook and perceived support (Killgore et al., 2020a). Masten (2018) defines resilience as "the capacity of a dynamic system to successfully adapt to disturbances that threaten the function, survival, or development of the system" (p. 187), whereas the American Psychological Association (APA, 2014) defines resilience as a process of bouncing back from difficult experiences and adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant stress sources. Individual resilience contributes significantly negatively to the prediction of depression, anxiety, stress, and obsessive-compulsive symptoms (Bonanno et al., 2004; Hjemdal et al., 2011; McEwen et al., 2015).

Thus, the protective role that individual resilience might play against COVID-19-related psycho-social risk seems evident, as does the study and implementation of an intervention to promote it. Studies and interventions of this nature find fertile ground in the panorama of positive psychology, whose key assumptions, though not exhaustive, are presented below.

Positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) is a psychology science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions that promises to improve the quality of life and prevent the illness and disease that arise when life is sterile and meaningless.

Thus, in contrast to the dominant approach in psychology characterized by an exclusive focus on human pathology or disfunction, positive psychology proposes a new approach aimed to "catalyze a change from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in a life to also building positive qualities" (Seligman, 2020, p. 5).

In other words, positive psychology studies the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Its goal is not to deny negative aspects of life or the existence of human suffering, but to study the other side of the coin. In fact, understanding human strengths can usually help prevent or decrease stress and disorders.

According to this vision, prevention researchers have found that there are human strengths that can act as buffers against mental illness, including both personality traits, which are generally stable, and more flexible dimensions, such as empowerment and proactivity.

The construct of empowerment differs from some psychological constructs with which it is sometimes confused, such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, locus of control, or competence (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). According to Zimmerman (2000), three basic dimensions of empowerment—control, referring to the ability to make decisions; awareness, which relates to how decisions are made and how power structures operate; and participation, which refers to acting to make things happen and achieve one's goals—can be identified. Furthermore, we can analyze empowerment on three different levels: individual (or psychological), organizational, and community (Zimmerman, 2000). The first individual level is characterized not only by the learned hope component, which facilitates change, but also by the ability to set new goals. In particular, the learned hope component is characterized by the fact that it can be learned or unlearned depending on the influences of the external environment, so it is not a dimension that relates only to personality traits (Zimmerman, 1990), which tend to be stable. Rappaport (1987) also defines empowerment as a process through which individuals can exercise control over issues that affect them. Thus, empowerment seems to be a key resource for individuals, especially in times of fear and insecurity, because of its ability to educate hope while fostering a perception of control over reality.

Closely related to empowerment is proactivity, a self-directed, future-focused behavior in which an individual aims to bring about change, including situational change and/or change within oneself (Bindl & Parker, 2010; Parker et al., 2010; Parker et al., 2019). In other words, proactivity involves actively taking control of oneself and one's environment to "make things happen" (Wang & Parker, 2015). According to Greenglass and Fiksenbaum (2009), we can also understand proactivity as the ability to reinterpret demands as challenges rather than stressors, enhancing vitality. In fact, challenges can stimulate vitality, which generates more positive outcomes (Greenglass, 2006). This idea of proactivity has also led to a reinterpretation of coping styles, no longer from a reactive but from a preventive perspective. Proactive coping, in fact,

is an active construction of opportunities that can positively influence health and well-being (Schwarzer & Knoll, 2003) through the promotion of positive mood and cognitions, especially regarding future events.

From this perspective, the importance of designing an intervention aimed at promoting these adaptive dimensions to cope with the negative psycho-social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is therefore evident.

Aim of the study

Moving within the framework of positive psychology (Seligman, 2000), we wanted to look at the emergency context, particularly the period of lockdown imposed by the Italian government from March 9 to May 18, 2020, not focusing only on the obvious costs of the psycho-social nature related to it but trying to promote the aspects of opportunity offered by this situation. Considering only the negative aspects, there is the risk of not seeing some characteristics of the human being capable of playing a key role in crisis situations, such as hope, proactivity, resilience, and a sense of power.

Starting from these considerations, this research intervention aimed to investigate whether a self-empowerment intervention can reduce state anxiety and, in turn, reduce its negative effects on well-being. In particular, the self-empowerment intervention was designed as a five-day challenge based on the five letters of the word COVID, each dedicated to a key competence to be developed or enhanced (Communication, Organization, Self-Vision, Information, and Desire).

Methodology

Research design

This study is participatory action research (PAR), a research process to which all participants contribute their unique skills and knowledge and through which all participants learn and are transformed (Borda, O. F., Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. 2006). The choice of this research design can be briefly explained by the dual interests of the research: first, to investigate the level of well-being of Italians in confinement and the associated psycho-social risks; second, to test the effectiveness level of an intervention to promote resilience and empowerment. According to Yeich and Levine (1992), participatory research and the conceptualization of empowerment are related.

For the reasons mentioned above, we developed a self-report questionnaire and designed an intervention called "the five-day challenge: how to turn a change into a chance."

In particular, the intervention focused on five important dimensions of identity emphasized by the emergency context and restrictive confinement measures: communication, organization, introspection and self-analysis skills, information, and desire.

We decided to implement a triangulated methodology to enrich the data from a dual viewpoint—qualitative and

quantitative data together can represent a more comprehensive context (Cortini, 2014).

The qualitative part was implemented by processing the daily diaries completed by the participants. A discourse and an interpretative analysis were performed in line with the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the traditional exploration of metaphors and key themes in the text.

The quantitative part was implemented through an online questionnaire administrated before and after the intervention, using which we intended to measure the level of well-being and anxiety of participants and verify the relationships among some variables of interest, such as dispositional optimism and proactive coping. In particular, the main hypothesis was that state anxiety (due to the emergency context) can negatively mediate the positive relationship between dispositional optimism and well-being and that an empowerment intervention can mitigate this negative pathway. This hypothesis is in line with the recent literature affirming the greater psychological impact of Covid-19 in terms of reported anxiety and stress (Cao et al., 2020; Solomou & Constantinidou, 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

Qualitative methodology

Regarding the qualitative analysis of the diary content, a theoretical premise was necessary. According to Murray (2000), narrative construction, such as the diary, is a way of making sense of the world. The process of diary writing allows a person to make sense of the constant changes in their lives and to bring order to the disorder. In this sense, the description of some diaries as "documents of life" (Wallin and Adawi, 2018) indicates a "self-revealing record that intentionally or unintentionally yields information regarding the structure, dynamics and functioning of the author's mental life" (Allport, 1942, p. 22). Starting from these premises, we conducted a classic discourse analysis of the diary content (Minnini & Anolli, 2002).

Discourse analysis is a qualitative, interpretative, and constructionist methodology that allows researchers to explore how participants actively construct categories or clusters with respect to the themes being investigated. It considers metaphors and linguistic agency: metaphors are viewed as a tool for thinking, for conceptualization that can expand the view of the research object by creating connections to other themes; linguistic agency refers to the use of lexical and morphological aspects of the linguistic system to result or not result in oneself as a responsible agent. From this perspective, the content of diaries was analyzed, and all linguistic metaphors used to talk about the theme were identified, interpretated, and explained. The idea was to generalize from them the conceptual metaphors they exemplified and to use the results to suggest understandings or patterns of thought that construct or constrain people's beliefs and actions (Galanti, 2021).

Participants and procedure

The sample comprised 309 home-confined Italians, 56 males and 252 females, with Mage (mean age) = 34.11 and SD

(standard deviation) = 12.56. They completed an initial self-report questionnaire created on the Qualtrics platform and distributed through social media (i.e., LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram).

The research conformed to the Declaration of Helsinki of 1995 (and following revisions), and all ethical guidelines were followed as required for conducting human research, including adherence to the legal requirements of the study country. The participants gave their informed consent prior to participating in the research session and agreed to complete the questionnaire anonymously. No treatment, including medical, invasive diagnostics, or procedures causing psychological or social discomfort, was administered to the participants. Moreover, participation was voluntary without any reward.

For five days, the participants received an email containing a challenge to complete during the day. The first challenge focused on the need for relationships, partly denied by the lockdown experience. The participants were asked to call a person they had not heard from the beginning of the pandemic. Furthermore, every day, the participants received an invitation to write an experience diary, which comprised a short survey on a Google module platform created to not only explore their experiences with respect to the day's challenge but also to their state of well-being.

Finally, each day the diary provided the participants with insights into the day's challenge. Our idea was to "walk" with them and support their reactivation. After five days, the participants re-completed the stress and well-being section of the questionnaire to see the expected positive effect of the challenge.

Measures

In addition to the socio-demographic items (gender, age, education, current occupation, and presence of children under 14 years of age), the questionnaire also included the measures described below. Well-being was assessed using *Goldberg's short general health questionnaire* (GHQ 12) (e.g., "I have enough physical energy to face the day") (Goldberg & Illier, 1979). The locus of control was measured with a brief version of *Levenson's Locus of Control Scale* (Sapp & Harrod, 1993), comprising nine items evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = "Strongly disagree" to 5 = "Strongly agree") (e.g., "the possibility of success in life is mainly due to the help of others").

Dispositional optimism was measured with Scheier et al.'s (1994) *Revised Life Orientation Test* (LOT-R), a Likert scale comprising six items (from 1 = "Strongly disagree" to 6 = "Strongly agree") (e.g., "In times of uncertainty, I usually expect the best"). Finally, the Italian version of Spielberger et al.'s (1983) *STAI-Y* was assessed to measure state anxiety (form 1) and trait anxiety (form 2) (Pedrabissi & Santinello, 1989).

Statistical analysis

Before analyzing the data, the validity and reliability of the scales were assessed. Once established that all measures in this study had reliability and validity values in accordance with the cut-offs usually followed in research (Hair et al., 2018), the descriptive statistics and correlations among the major study variables were calculated.

To perform the mediation analysis, a Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) macro called PROCESS, described by Preacher and Hayes (2004), was used, which incorporated the traditional approach (e.g., the Sobel test) and the approach developed by Baron and Kenny (1986) to quantify the indirect effects of the predictor on the dependent variable with the bootstrap approach.

Results

Quantitative results

Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alphas, and correlation analysis among variables are listed in Table 1. All variables were correlated in the expected direction. Dispositional optimism was found to be positively related to well-being and internal locus of control and negatively related to anxiety. In contrast, state anxiety was negatively related to dispositional optimism, well-being, and internal locus of control.

Tab. 1. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alphas, and correlations among the study variables

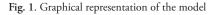|	1	2	3	4
1. STAI_Y (2)	(.79)	-.39**	-.46**	-.193**
2. WELL-BEING		(.78)	.35**	.30**
3. DISP. OPTIMISM			(.87)	.30**
4. INT_LOC				(.79)
M	43.92	4.51	4.20	4.20
SD	12.42	0.83	.91	.58
SKEWNESS	.201	-.413	.151	-.277
KURTOSIS	-.746	-.231	-.161	.134

Note *= p < 0.05; ** = p < 0.01.

Path analysis performed using the SPSS macro PROCESS (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) was used to test the hypotheses. The first mediation was tested using Model 4 of Preacher and Hayes (2004); the graphical representation of the model is shown in Figure 1.

First, dispositional optimism was found to be positively associated with well-being (Direct effect .19, SE .05). However, this positive association was significantly partially mediated in a negative way by state anxiety (Indirect Effect 0.13, SE .03, LLCI .069, and ULCI .191).

This result confirmed the first hypothesis and supported the second hypothesis, which is related to the efficacy of an intervention to reduce the level of anxiety generated by the emergency context, primarily by confinement measures adopted during the first pandemic wave.

To test the longitudinal effects after the intervention phase, a repeated measures ANOVA (within subjects) was performed. As shown in Figure 2, a statistically significant effect of intervention was proposed on anxiety level reduction (F (1,64) = 557.23, p = .000).
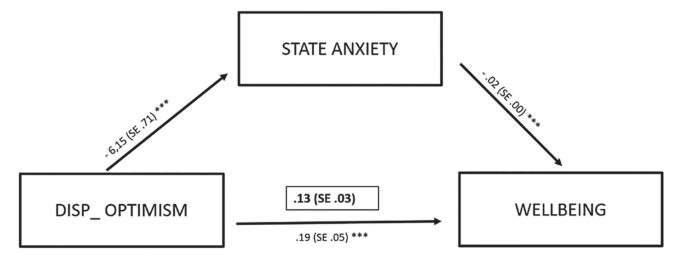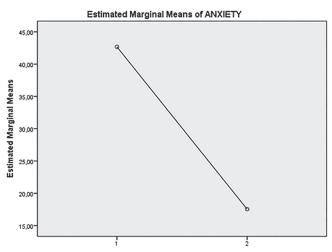
Fig. 1. Graphical representation of the model

Fig. 2. ANOVA within subjects T1-T2

At time 1, there were higher levels of anxiety among the participants (means = 42, 67, SD = 11.52) compared to time 2 (mean = 17.53, SD = 6.37). The extraordinary significance of this second result is, at least partly, attributable to the timeliness of the intervention. Thus, *the five-day challenge* could be seen by the participants as an operational guide to restart in small but daily steps to contrast the feeling of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1972) with the real possibility of self-empowerment (Zimmerman, 2000).

However, regarding the impact of our intervention on well-being, no statistically significant changes were found. This result is, at least partly, explained by the short duration of the proposed intervention (only five days), which could positively affect state anxiety but not as much the overall sense of well-being.

Qualitative results

For the qualitative analysis of the participants' diaries, a classic discourse analysis (Minnini & Anolli, 2002) was conducted, which is a qualitative, interpretative, and constructionist methodology that allows the exploration of how participants actively construct categories, or clusters, regarding the investigated themes.

In this study, four thematic clusters were identified: self-knowledge, planning, well-being, and gratitude. "Communicating is not dialoguing with someone, but it is first of all admitting to oneself that one is not alone in the world" (diary no. 89) and "It was extremely liberating to speak to oneself, to suddenly take a new perspective on oneself" (diary no. 56) are a few examples of the self-knowledge cluster.

The planning cluster is compared with a *sharp weapon* (diary no. 20), capable of breaking down mountains (diary no. 9), or to a faithful companion who can help you in times of difficulty (diary no. 39). Emblematic, in a positive key, is the frequent recourse to words and expressions such as "gift for oneself," "liberating," "resize," and "like a caress" in referring to the lived experience and the possibility of reflection and introspection on the day spent by writing a simple diary page. Finally, the last theme is related to the ability to recognize the gifts received, the good of each experience, and the possibility of feeling gratitude. "This time is trying to teach me to live unpretentious every day and to be grateful for everything that, incredibly, happens." (diary no. 154).

Furthermore, the contents of the diaries were analyzed with a quantitative methodology using the statistical software T-Lab, which is capable of returning a mapping of the characterizing contents.
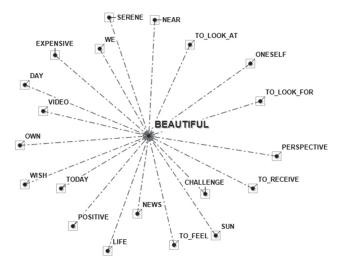
An automatic analysis of the content was performed, which starts from the idea that the more we refer to specific language families in speaking, the more these concepts are active in our minds.

The first thing T-Lab allows us to achieve with textual material is to analyze word occurrences and cooccurrences. The software output shows in the middle the most cited word and all around the words that co-occur the most with it, according to an association index: the Cosine coefficient; in graphical terms, the more two words co-occur, the closer they are in the dimensional space (Cortini & Tria, 2014). It is always possible to "dialog" with the software and ask to put in the middle a specific word of interest for the user to have a graphical representation of its associations; in this sense, T-Lab can assist the user in following both an automatic analysis path and a customized path.

Moreover, T-Lab allows us to obtain the phrase in which the two words co-occur, and this cue is particularly useful in terms of the mixed method, because just with a click, you get the original textual material, which can be analyzed by discourse analysis. We checked occurrences and co-occurrences, setting a frequency threshold of four. As Figure 3 shows, the value association of the thematic elements is graphically represented in terms of the distance from the keyword in the center.

The most common lemmas in the diaries were "beautiful" (Figure 3), associated with other keywords such as "wish" (Cosine, 0.26), "perspective" (Cosine, 0.23), "to share" (Cosine, 0.22), and "positive" (Cosine, 0.20), in line with what emerged from the discourse analysis. Table 3 reports the coefficient of Cosine and Chi² of co-occurrence with the lemma "beautiful."

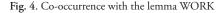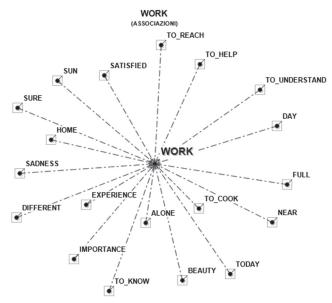**Fig. 3.** Co-occurrence with the lemma BEAUTIFUL

Tab. 2. Coefficient of Cosine and Chi² of co-occurrence with lemma BEAUTIFUL

LEMMA	COEFF	C.E.(A)	C.E(AB)	CHI²
wish	0.261	13	6	5.107
perspective	0.234	4	3	7
To share	0.222	8	4	1.697
Positive	0.201	15	5	1.39
Time	0.224	31	8	0.436
To search	0.221	18	6	1.697

Note. C.E.(A)= occurrence; C.E.(AB) co-occurrence

Other important lemmas that occurred frequently were "work" (Figure 4), associated with the word "satisfaction" (Cosine, 0.20); "experience" (Cosine, 0.25), "understand," "home" (Cosine, 0.20), and finally, the word "I" (Cosine, 0.14). This last association (Work-I) are powerful in showing how work represents an essential dimension of people's identities. The need for experience and knowledge, the urge to understand, and finally, the desire for personal work satisfaction appeared evident from the analysis of the diaries, as the need to safeguard work-life balance also seemed evident. Table 4 reports the coefficient of Cosine and Chi² of co-occurrence with the lemma "work."

Fig. 4. Co-occurrence with the lemma WORK

Tab. 3. Coefficient of Cosine and Chi² of co-occurrence with lemma WORK

LEMMA	COEFF	C.E.(A)	C.E(AB)	CHI²
Satisfaction	0.2	10	2	4.675
Experience	0.25	6	2	9.92
To understand	0.18	4	1	3.241
Home	0.2	10	2	4.675
I	0.141	5	1	2.275

Note. C.E.(A) = occurrence; C.E.(AB) co-occurrence

Finally, a personalized analysis was conducted, asking the software to map the co-occurrences with the word "future" (Figure 4). This choice can be explained by the research interest in investigating how the created intervention helped people to assume an attitude of openness and trust toward the future.

First, the lemma "future" was associated with the lemmas "hope" (Cosine, 0.45), "thanks" (Cosine, 0.31), and "positivity" (Cosine, 0.22). These are keywords in the field of positive psychology for their relation to the possibility of reversing the situation and grasping the positive side of each day.
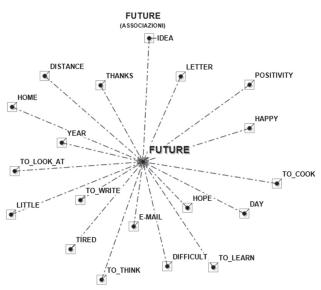
Second, the association with the words "to learn" (Cosine, 0.22) and "to look at" (Cosine, 0.2) refer to two opportunities to be grasped despite the limitations imposed by the lockdown. In addition, these associations seemed to confirm what emerged from the discourse analysis: most participants affirmed that they had learned considerably from everyday challenges, especially in terms of self-awareness. Table 5 reports the coefficient of Cosine and Chi² of co-occurrence with the lemma "future."

Tab. 4. Coefficient of Cosine and Chi² of co-occurrence with lemma FUTURE

LEMMA	COEFF	C.E.(A)	C.E.(AB)	CHI²
Hope	0.452	12	7	31.494
Thanks	0.31	13	5	11.753
To learn	0.224	4	2	6.859
Positivity	0.224	4	2	6.859
To look at	0.2	21	4	1.882

Note. C.E.(A) = occurrence; C.E.(AB) co-occurrence

Fig. 5. Co-occurrence with the lemma FUTURE

Discussion

The present study intended to investigate the level of well-being of Italians during the first lockdown (March–May 2020), considering not only the negative impact of the pandemic but also the personal resources that can mitigate these effects, such as empowerment. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our society at different levels and with different intensities, affecting human and social capital, which is impossible to address through a simple adaptation of the situation.

Isolation, the absence of routine and predictability, has weakened people's resilience, convincing them that they have little or no power over reality. This condition seems to recall the well-known learned helplessness theory (Seligman, 1972), according to which individuals show more stress when faced with traumatic situations they cannot control as compared to the case of equivalent controllable trauma. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic can be reasonably considered an unpredictable and uncontrolled trauma against which the participants of this action research—and, more generally, the Italians—found themselves unprepared and shocked.

In contrast, it should be seen as an opportunity to progress and "bounce forward" through adaptation and transformation. Thus, individual and collective resilience can play a strategic role in strengthening people and mobilizing their creativity to deal with the crisis (Killgore et al., 2020a)

Moving within the framework of positive psychology, this participatory action research aimed to promote a different way of looking at the COVID pandemic and the restrictive measures adopted to contain the spread of the virus: an opportunity to look at this crisis as a chance to learn and develop individual and collective resources, above all empowerment and proactivity.

Several recent studies have highlighted the role played by personality traits in predicting the impact of COVID-19 on people's behaviors and well-being (Carvalho et al., 2020; Prentice et al., 2020; Rettew et al., 2021). In this study, we aimed to investigate how a positive trait such as dispositional optimism can improve the well-being of Italians in the lockdown. This is because extroversion, the macro factor that also includes

dispositional optimism, is generally associated with lower levels of perceived stress (Jackson & Schneider, 2014; Schneider et al., 2012). Yet, our first result suggests something else. If the positive relationship between dispositional optimism and well-being is confirmed, it also determines how the state of anxiety experienced by Italians during the lockdown is configured as a threat to the aforementioned relationship.

A possible explanation for this result (i.e., the fact that a state of situational anxiety can negatively mediate the impact of a stable trait on well-being) can be found in social isolation, which characterizes the home-confinement period. According to Liu et al. (2021), individuals with high dispositional optimism, particularly those with high levels of activity and sociability qualities, might not be as effective in controlling their environment once the social aspect is removed. Starting from the consideration that the pandemic is a "golden age for introverts", *the five-day challenge* invites Italians to metaphorically open the doors to react to a progressive closure that began as an imposition and risked becoming, albeit unconsciously, a choice. The importance of being open to communication emerged from the participants' experiences, parallel to the awareness that listening to each other is "the most human need we have" (diary no. 89). At the same time, the communication challenge forced the participants to step out of their "own little garden" (diary no. 92), taking on a different perspective and feeling "connected and less alone" (diary no. 45). Finally, the most hoped-for result is achieved: awakening the planning and desire to take charge of one's daily life. We believe that the satisfaction of the need for a relationship might have opened up the possibility of wishing for a different routine in which an individual does not passively undergo the passage of time but himself becomes a promoter of change. In other words, the five-day challenge was designed to accompany the participants day after day in the progressive rediscovery of personal resources to be put in place against the sense of helplessness favored by this situation. It was then configured as a trip of progressive reappropriation of the ability to manage their own time and achieve the desired objectives through the promotion of empowerment and proactivity, specifically proactive coping.

If dispositional optimism is a personality trait that is stable and not upgradeable, the abovementioned resources can be learned and, more importantly, re-learned. *The five day challenge* question participants on different dimension of life (communication, organization, self-reflection, information, and desire) to promote self-empowerment, that is, the ability of gaining or assuming power on your life and reality, and proactive coping. According to Greenglass and Fiksenbaum (2009), proactive coping plays a determinant role in the vision of life, which involves positive feelings and aspirations about future events. Thus, the urgency of promoting a proactive coping style appears even more evident in crisis contexts, where uncertainty and unpredictability threaten the ability to imagine a better future. The last two proposed challenges move in this direction: the participants were asked to write a letter to their future selves (challenge no. 4) and to choose a destination (challenge no. 5), with respect to which they become aware of the resources and obstacles along the way. Thus, we wanted to promote a process of reflection in the participants, according to

previous learning theories, which have shown that individuals learn through reflection on their experiences (Kolb, 1984; Korthagen, 2005, Mezirow, 1990; Schon, 1983). We believe that promoting self-reflection on the situation, as the personal response to it, can positively influence first the intention and then the implementation of proactive behaviors.

Limits and future perspective

This study has some limitations. First, the survey items were selected based on the literature review and qualitative investigations conducted by our team; thus, some relevant aspects of daily living might not have been included. Regarding the socio-demographic variables, future research should examine the different impacts of anxiety on the relation between dispositional optimism and well-being, underlining whether there are some categories to which individuals are more susceptible. Among the main limitations of the study, we indicate the convenience sample is susceptible to biases, including, for instance, the fact that the data collection and participant recruitment took place online. Another limitation is the use of self-report scales for data collection, with few variables measured, which limits construct validity.

Furthermore, in this study, we adopted a longitudinal research design to test the positive effect of our intervention on anxiety level reduction, but the time lapse of five days can be too short a temporal interval. However, the obtained positive results can be seen as confirmation of the genuineness of this choice, which can be characterized as a timely and easy-to-use choice.

Finally, regarding the future perspective of this study, it can be interesting to investigate the possibility of extending the five-day challenge to other contexts and populations, for example, to long-term patients, who live under a transitory condition of powerlessness, or even to workers and organizations struggling with outplacement transitions. Regarding this last point, we think of the models of protean and boundaryless career based on the assumption that the diversification of experiences and the multiplication of opportunities for learning and strengthening one's skills contribute to increasing the ability of individuals to become employable (Arthur et al., 1999).

Conclusion

This study aimed to highlight, in the field of positive psychology, the strategic role played by proactivity and self-reflection in the process of reacquiring the ability to desire that makes real individual development first conceivable and then possible. The analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data reveal the effectiveness of the research methodology used. Furthermore, the primary purpose of this PAT was undoubtedly to intervene in favor of a recovery of individual planning and a progressive reappropriation of the feeling of power undermined by the emergency period. The five-day challenge seemed to be a practical and operative intervention

to promote self-empowerment in various situations dominated by uncertainty, which require considerable efforts in terms of resilience and reappropriation of meaning. The study aimed to offer the participants a chance: to be able to see, behind the undoubted limits of the crisis, the different opportunities, such as in terms of growth and self-knowledge. From the perspective of stress management, health promotion can be realized by empowering people to take control of their lives. In fact, "healthy" choices seem to reflect an empowered individual capable of controlling stress and making decisions that have long-term benefits.

Author Contributions
The authors contributed equally to this manuscript.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

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The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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