

Sustainable Higher Education Management: Career Drivers of Academic Staff

Jevgenija Dehtjare

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6859-2327>

Kristine Uzule

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2633-6069>
EKA University of Applied Sciences, Riga, Latvia

Abstract

The quality of higher education (HE) is dependent on many factors, including the quality of teaching. As any profession, teaching is based on internal values and motives of individuals. The goal of the research is to identify the most dominant career drivers of academic staff based on their career motives and values in order to provide HE managers with information relevant to academic staff engagement policies to enable shaping of sustainable education policies at higher education institutions (HEIs). The research goal is grounded in the purpose of human resource management that is designed to stimulate certain employee behavior so that employee actions and intentions could be aligned with corporate strategic goals. If there is a wide gap between the needs and interests of employees and their employer, employee productivity gradually declines, thus decreasing the competitiveness of an organization. The following research question has been formulated: Is there a discrepancy in values between academic staff and managers of HE, who create the work environment for the academic staff? To attain the goal of the research, university lecturers from Ukraine completed Schein's questionnaire online in 2021, while in 2023 middle- and senior managers of universities from Ukraine, Latvia, and Lithuania were asked to prioritize career drivers for academic staff. Both groups ranked *technical / professional competence* and *service / dedication to a cause* as primary priorities. However, the value of *security / stability* was prioritized only by academic staff, while *autonomy / independence* and *entrepreneurial creativity* were selected by HE managers. The research outcomes indicate converging and diverging points in opinions on the career drivers of academic staff. Having this knowledge, HE managers are in a better position to modify the academic workplace to stimulate academic productivity, and enhance business models and quality assurance policies at their institutions on the path towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 "Quality Education". The diversity of opinions both within and between the groups of academic staff and HE managers supports the need to design human resource management policies consistent with the theory of personalized human resource management for higher productivity. The findings of the study contribute to the global discussion of career drivers of teachers by providing evidence in support of the increasing importance of professional (technical) competences and creative abilities for quality education.

Keywords: Career drivers, higher education management, staff values, sustainability.

Introduction

Sustainable development is a type of development that strives to satisfy a diverse range of needs of more than one generation often by driving innovation (Wilkerson & Trellevik, 2021). Sustainability in education ensures sustainable evolution of the human kind within a broader perspective of the phenomenon of evolution (Salite et al., 2022) that includes various aspects of life on the planet. To ensure its implementation, the United Nations Development Programs designed the framework of Sustainable Development Goals (henceforth – SDGs), which include SDG 4 “Quality Education” and SDG8 “Decent Work and Economic Growth” (UNDP, 2023). Consistent with SDG 4, the sustainability of higher education (henceforth – HE) development rests on qualified academic staff capable of promoting professional and sustainability knowledge (UN SDG 4, n.d.) via sustainability-induced learning experience (Zandvliet & Paul, 2023). This implies that academic staff “are key multipliers in the promotion of Sustainable Development” (Goller & Rieckmann, 2022) and, accordingly, should be enthusiastic to continuously update their professional competences and provide high-quality training. Therefore, it is important that education be oriented towards sustainability (Jurgena et al., 2021).

Under this interpretation of sustainability (SDG 8 and SDG 4), sustainability of the academic contexts in this paper is defined as follows: sustainable academic environment is the one in which the identify of academic staff is considered and the academic process, including management of academic staff, is structured in such a way as to map the identify of academic staff on the study process. Staff identify covers needs, interests, values, personality traits, and career drivers. Staff identity is based on individual traits. The knowledge of staff individual traits is important because individual traits affect the inclination to certain actions (Kovalcikienė & Buksnyte-Marmiene, 2021). When staff needs are ignored, the level of their well-being in an organization falls, which leads to lower productivity. Staff well-being and performance are interconnected (Kour et al., 2019; Isham et al., 2021), which is why the neglect of the needs of academic staff in the academic environment can negatively impact the study process, and, thus, student achievements. For example, Lopez-Martin et al. (2023) found a relationship between teacher characteristics, teacher attitudes, and students’ attainments, while Hazzam and Wilkins (2023) proved the effect of lecturer’s leadership on students’ engagement, and ultimately learning performance.

Academic staff have been leaving the profession and have been changing employment places (Roy et al., 2023; Wang & Klassen, 2023). Some causes of this tendency might be attributed to a possible gap between individual and corporate values, interests, and needs. One question that covers values, interests, and needs from the personal perspective is embodied in the concept of career drivers. While career drivers can be discussed within the theory of career anchors of Schein (1990), which is still relevant to modern contexts, the interpretation of their value and effect on teacher performance is related to a definition of a highly competent professional with a solid reputation and high productivity. According to Pipere et al. (2022), the definition of such a professional can be divided into two concepts: a good teacher and an effective or professional teacher. The interpretation of these two definitions depends on a perspective. In the former case, social aspects of the concept are considered, while the latter definition focuses on neoliberal approaches to performance (Pipere et al., 2022). Such differences in the perspectives indicate the merge of social and economic aspects

of the profession in relation to professional values, interests, needs, and career drives of teachers.

Given social and economic layers of the concept of a highly competent professional with a solid reputation and high productivity, it becomes obvious that the concept is not static; instead, it is fluid both in terms of interpretation of the conceptual composites and individual performance. To sustain high productivity, a teacher needs a proper work context and internal drivers. One driver of the teaching quality is professional enthusiasm (Falcon et al., 2023), which depends on the satisfaction of various criteria, such as professional goals, internal perceptions, attitudes, values, evaluation of the profession, job security, remuneration policies, work environment (Lucksnat et al., 2022) and well-being (Buerkle et al., 2023). To sustain professional enthusiasm, academic staff should be satisfied with the above-mentioned criteria. Therefore, SDG 8 emphasizes fair employment and a productive work environment, which ultimately leads to the attainment of SDG 4 (UN SDG 4, n.d.) and SDG 8 (UN SDG 8, n.d.). This link between education and economic sustainability has been acknowledged in the scientific literature (Buerkle et al., 2023; Jekabsone & Gudele, 2023). Therefore, managers of HEIs should set the quality of education as their priority to promote SDG 4 and SDG 8.

In practice, the effect of organizational management on teaching quality has been proven across countries and disciplines, for example, in entrepreneurship education at Finnish HEIs (Joensuu-Salo et al., 2023). To support teaching quality, senior managers are expected to be socially engaged with academic staff (Martinsone et al., 2023) and understand what, why, how, and to what extent to transform in the organizational business model. However, is it reasonable to invest in the transformation of the organizational business model to support career drivers and higher productivity of teachers? While organizations answer this question differently, it is important to bear in mind that teachers can enhance their productivity throughout their careers (Papay & Kraft, 2015). Thus, if organizations support teachers' productivity by considering teachers' career drives (which include their values, interests, and needs), they invest into the longitudinal sustainability of their institutions.

The consideration of the needs, interests, values, and career drivers of academic staff by managers points to the human-centric approach to staff management, which is consistent with Industry 5.0 goals and personalized human resource management (henceforth – PHRM). Within the theory of PHRM, uniqueness of human capital of an organization creates a competitive advantage of an organization. To retain human capital and maximize its productivity, organizations should design personalized HR solutions derived from matching of individuals' values, interests and needs with those of the employer (Huang et al., 2023), which is possible under two conditions. First, the concerns, values, needs and drivers of staff are identified at the personalized level and subsequently grouped for more effective decision-making. Second, personal / group and corporate goals are aligned (Ammirato et al., 2023), which is possible only if personal / group values, interests, needs, and drivers are mapped on organizational objectives. Under such conditions, staff members are motivated to continuously engage in work, and within the AMO (Ability, Motivation and Opportunity) approach to staff management, employees are driven to deploy their ability, motivation, and opportunity to yield more effective performance (Gu et al., 2023). Furthermore, such an approach is consistent with the framework of integrated reporting, which connects six capitals, including human capital, social and relationship capital, and financial capital, to the organizational business model through the encoding of these capitals as organizational inputs and outputs (IR, 2021).

Overall, considering various challenges of HE in the 21st century, it is crucial to boost the quality of education (Deloitte, 2021). In modern times, there are professions other than teachers that are more prestigious in society (Kass & Miller, 2018). This translates into teachers leaving the profession, teachers being disengaged from the profession and HR managers experiencing challenges in teacher recruitment. At the societal level, individual values are prioritized over organizational loyalty and goals (Schein & Van Maanen, 2016). The career success in society is no longer assessed solely through the prism of remuneration and promotion; instead, an aggregate of individual values, needs and aims creates the perception of career satisfaction (Rodrigues et al., 2013). Under such circumstances, increasing the quality of education might be a challenging objective, yet, without addressing it, the attainment of SDG 4 might be under question. At the same time, the quality of teaching impacts student achievement (Kass & Miller, 2018) and the development of students' professional competences, which form a pillar of SDG 8.

Considering negative aspects of the teaching profession and their effects on the quality of education, the research question in this paper pertained to determining if there is a discrepancy in values between academic staff and HE managers, who create the work environment for the academic staff. The concept of values includes interests, needs and career drivers. By focusing on one aspect of values – career drivers, the goal of this research is to identify the most dominant career drivers of academic staff based on their career motives and values in order to provide HE managers with information relevant to academic staff engagement policies to enable shaping of sustainable education policies at HEIs. The research goal is grounded in the purpose of human resource management that is designed to stimulate certain employee behavior so that employee actions and intentions could be aligned with corporate strategic goals. If there is a wide gap between the needs and interests of employees and their employer, employee productivity gradually declines, thus decreasing the competitiveness of an organization. By studying the career drivers of teachers from the perspectives of both the academic staff and managers of HEIs, this paper takes on a fresh look on possible causes of passive confrontation between academic employees and their employers, which contributes to work disengagement and dissatisfaction with the quality of education among various stakeholders of HE.

Literature Review

The current context of HE is generally subject to decreased funding, increased pressure for scientific publications, changing employment conditions (Knott et al., 2015), increased bureaucratic workload (Veisson & Kabaday, 2018), all of which design unproductive work environment for academic staff, under which they can hardly be expected to increase productivity. Therefore, it is critical to identify factors that impact teaching productivity to include them into business models of HEIs.

The identification of such factors should focus on human teaching capital, which is both a resource and a driver of the sustainable development of an organization due to its capacity to acquire, generate, and manage outputs of performance, creating immediate and long-term values. Human capital embodies the accumulative intelligence capacity, expertise, and work experience of staff at an organization. While the development of intelligence capacity requires an accumulation of resources at the individual and organizational levels, work experience is subject to swift positive and negative changes at both individual and organizational levels. This volatility of work

experience exerts a more imminent impact on the quality of performance than intelligence capacity due to its immediate impact on staff emotions and immediate goals. Therefore, both HE academic staff and HE managers should create a positive and stimulating work environment to ensure job satisfaction, which should be viewed as a pillar of higher productivity.

Various factors result in a productive work environment that creates positive work experience. One set of factors encompasses monetary aspects. It is hardly a secret that there is a link between remuneration and work performance – the higher the salary, the higher the motivation to work (e.g., longer hours at work), and the higher productivity of performance (Green & Heywood, 2023). In education, pay incentives result in higher work engagement of staff, decreased teacher turnover (Jones, 2013), decreased teacher absenteeism (Greaves & Sibiet, 2019), and higher organizational commitment (Abebe & Assemie, 2023). Thus, remuneration policies should be used as both a reward tool for the past and present performance of academic staff and an impetus for higher productivity of future performance (Blaskova & Blasko, 2014).

Other factors that are thought to boost teacher productivity pertain to the institutional support of their professional development and proper arrangement of work processes. One aspect of professional development relates to staff training. Industries that offer training programs for academic staff have earned billions of dollars globally due to the proven link between student attainment and teaching quality (Gore et al., 2021), which is the key aspect of teacher productivity. When organizations provide opportunities for career development and staff training, create the organizational culture for tackling work-related challenges (Carvajal-Arango et al., 2021), staff develop organizational attachment, which ultimately enhances the quality of performance. To be productive at the workplace, staff need to develop enterprise behaviors attuned to the context of their organization (Jackson et al., 2022), which might be difficult to attain without the support of the organization. The organizational support also stretches to other aspects of staff well-being, such as adequate allocation of time slots for task completion, health and safety issues, work hours, proper provision with materials and resources required for work, offers to acquire new knowledge at the workplace, communication environment, etc. (Carvajal-Arango et al., 2021).

The interpretation of the above factors and their effects on work experience largely depends on personal values. Personal values of teachers directly impact the quality of performance (Jud et al., 2023). For example, personal values of teachers impact the promotion of self-regulated learning among students at universities (Jud et al., 2023). Personal values of the heads of academic departments affect their leadership practices and decision-making at universities (Reyes & Redona, 2021). Personal values create psychological and cognitive dissonances that teachers solve in different ways often by leaving the employer or changing the profession. Personal values are shaped by personality traits, personal needs, attitudes, professional values, aspirations, and beliefs, all of which yield long-term career plans, which, in turn, are affected by work experience and work conditions. For example, a positive work experience in a specific position can drive future career aspirations in association with the current environment, while a negative work experience in the field of specialization can trigger interest in a new career path. At the same time, a strong career attachment might stimulate re-interpretation of a given negative work experience through the mechanisms of cognitive dissonance to ensure continuous employment. The factors that simultaneously affect both work experience and career development are career drivers, also known as career anchors. Career anchors evolve around the internal

motives, values, and needs of workers (Unal & Gizir, 2014), which might persevere even in the context of work volatility because they are the foundation of workers' professional identity.

Edgar Schein developed a theory of career anchors that explains career development paths and job satisfaction and yields predictions regarding future career moves based on many of the above factors, especially those related to employees' attitudes and values (Schein & Van Maanen, 2016). Subsequently links between job and career satisfaction, on the one hand, and motivation and performance, on the other hand, have been proven across various fields, for example, in health care (Meilanti et al., 2022). Within Schein's theory, all anchors are interrelated, affecting each other, even when the most dominant anchor is identified (Lambert et al., 2020), which is why career anchors should be viewed through the prism of factor ranking rather than concentration on one decisive anchor, which is subject to change over time. According to Schein (1990), eight major areas of work experience motivate career development and form career anchors:

- Employees' technical and functional capabilities, or their level of professional expertise;
- Employees' general managerial skills, including capabilities to manage and lead people;
- Autonomy and independence at the workplace, when people have a certain degree of freedom to make their own decisions and structure their own work pace;
- Security and stability at the workplace, stable employment with prompt salaries, few risks, and limited stress factors;
- Entrepreneurial creativity, people's capabilities to launch start-ups and to work in a dynamic work environment with a lot of new stimuli;
- Service / dedication to a cause, employees' commitment to the organization;
- Pure challenge, when employees wish to work in a challenging environment;
- Lifestyle, employees' aspiration to balance work with personal life.

As career development is a dynamic process (Lambert et al., 2020), these career anchors might be ranked differently depending on an employee's past, present, and future aspirations. Even today, these anchors can explain the needs and values of employees, for example, those employed in the financial sector (Lambert et al., 2020). They have also been used to determine possible career preferences and occupational identity (Rodrigues et al., 2013), which are linked to employees' attachment to the field of occupation and commitment to a specific employer in the field.

Not only do career anchors of Schein reflect on staff values, attitudes, and aspirations, they also indicate the intentions of long-term professional commitment without which sustainable quality of education could hardly be ensured. At the organizational level, career anchors could be deployed for the design of PHRM solutions, which are co-designed by the business analytics and artificial intelligence tools. According to the theory of PHRM, to increase productivity and competitiveness of an organization, staff should be able to access HRM solutions trimmed for their specific individual needs (Huang et al., 2023). Hence, HR departments should design diverse and personalized staff programs and practices (Huang et al., 2023), which can be accomplished by considering staff values identified through career anchors. Career

anchors could also suggest behavior theories that could better explain and predict staff actions across work and training contexts. This research intends to contribute to HE management policies by identifying career anchors of academic staff for PHRM. Although some aspects of a positive work environment and staff well-being are universal, some of them and their interpretation might be occupation- and culture-specific. Therefore, academic staff in specific cultures should be surveyed for their preferences in career anchors to create a ranking matrix for the stimulation of their performance. It is also important to interview middle- and senior-level managers of HE to identify congruence and incongruence of opinions with academic staff to align efforts on the path towards higher quality of education in line with SDG 4.

Research Methodology

The research aimed to identify the dominant career drivers of academic staff based on their values. The dominant career drivers were encoded through the prism of Schein's career anchors grouped into a cluster of three anchors consistent with the literature review of Unal and Gizir (2014). The quantitative research method, a survey, was used to determine the opinions of academic staff. The survey comprised Schein's questionnaire of career anchors, consisting of 40 questions assessed on the Likert scale. Additionally, one question was included in the questionnaire on the effect of career anchors on career choices and strategies that people develop to attain their career goals. The final question was open-ended for any comments.

The questionnaire was distributed online to academic staff of HEIs in Ukraine in the spring of 2021. The sample included academic staff from different parts of Ukraine, such as Kiev, eastern, western, northern, and southern regions. These academic staff members participated in online staff training on teaching methodology, which was conducted from Latvia. After the completion of training, they were asked to complete this research questionnaire on a voluntary basis. Seventy-four percent of the participants completed it. Given their interest in the online training and a relatively high response rate of the survey completion, this group of participants could be concluded to have higher levels of engagement with the profession.

A qualitative research method was used to determine the opinion of HE managers on the career anchor priorities of their academic staff. A short interview consisting of four thematic questions was conducted as a survey during which participants were asked to cluster three Schein's career anchors for academic staff in the priority order and explain their decision in the comment section. The purpose of the survey was to collect information on career drivers of academic staff from the perspective of HE management because the views of decision-makers (managers) might be different from those for whom decisions were made (academic staff). A lack of comprehension or disregard for the career values of academic staff could result in the decreased levels of motivation among staff, lower productivity and professional burnout of staff, and, ultimately, a decline in the overall quality of services provided by HEIs. Members of middle management (department heads, program directors) and senior management teams (rectors, vice-rectors) participated in the survey, which was conducted online in the summer of 2023. The questionnaire was sent to both public and private HEIs of various specializations. This group of participants represented experts in HE, which is why it included representatives of different nations (Ukraine, Latvia, and Lithuania) to assign an international perspective to responses.

The method of descriptive statistics was used to analyze the results.

Research Results

The first research stage comprised the survey of 261 academic staff members from Ukraine, of whom 168 were women, and 93 were men (see Table 1).

Table 1

Three Top Career Values for Career Development Among Ukrainian Academic Staff in 2021 (created by the authors)

Career anchor (value)	Distribution by significance for career goals, total			Distribution by significance for career goals, females			Distribution by significance for career goals, males		
Career anchors	FP, %	SP, %	TP, %	FP, %	SP, %	TP, %	FP, %	SP, %	TP, %
Autonomy / independence	10	13	10	10	15	10	10	10	10
Entrepreneurial creativity	1	2	6	2	2	5	0	2	6
Lifestyle integration	7	13	30	7	14	33	8	6	24
Managerial competence	5	5	5	4	4	6	6	6	4
Pure challenge	1	2	7	1	1	5	1	4	11
Security / stability	28	30	16	28	30	16	27	30	15
Service / dedication to a cause	16	26	19	21	25	20	6	28	18
Technical / functional competence	33	8	7	28	8	5	42	9	12
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	95	100

FP – first priority, SP – second priority, TP – third priority

Within the first priority level, overall, *technical / functional competence* (henceforth – technical competence) (33 %) emerged as the top anchor. The second most crucial career anchor was *security / stability* (henceforth – security) (28 %), which was followed by *service / dedication to a cause* (henceforth – service) (16 %).

Among the values in the second priority list, *security* (30 %) and *service* (26 %) also took the lead, followed by *autonomy / independence* (henceforth – autonomy) (13 %) and *lifestyle integration* (13 %).

At the third priority level, the opportunity to achieve *work-life integration* emerged as the lead anchor, taking up 30 %. *Service* (19 %) and *security* (16 %) were selected as the second and third top options.

As for data distribution by gender, for women, it was equally important to possess expert knowledge (*technical competence*, 28 %) and feel secure at the workplace (*security*, 28 %). Such value distribution might have historical grounds, for example, when women experienced difficulties returning home after maternity leave. In contrast, men were oriented toward professional expertise (*technical competence*, 42 %) and to a lesser extent to acquiring stability at the workplace (*security*, 27 %). This result might indicate men's aspirations for leadership positions and promotion. Although for both women and men caring for others and passing on knowledge was less important (*service*, 21 % for women, and 6 % for men), for women, it was still among top priorities, while for men, it was outside the priority list.

At the second priority level, for men, *security* and *service* were almost equally important and were prioritized over *autonomy* (10 %) and *technical competence* (9 %). The average difference between the former and latter competences was 20 %. Similar to men at the second priority level, women were mostly driven by *security* (30 %) and *service* (25 %). The third choice was *autonomy* (15 %) and *lifestyle integration* (14 %).

Within the third priority layer, for both men and women, the primary choice was *lifestyle integration* (24 % and 33 %, respectively), the second choice was *service* (18 % and 20 %, respectively), followed by *security* (15 % and 16 %, respectively).

Overall, the career anchors of the top cluster for both male and female academic staff included *technical competence*, *security*, and *service*, whereas the second cluster included *autonomy* and *lifestyle integration*. Academic staff (of both genders) consider values such as *managerial competence* (5 %) and *pure challenge* (1 %) to be the least important for career development. This suggests that academic staff are not interested in management-related competences, such as communicative abilities and leadership skills, time and project management, budget activities.

Then, it was important to determine if academic staff considered these anchors as factors affecting career goals. Therefore, participants were asked to answer a relevant question (see Table 2).

Table 2

Participants' Answers to the Question: "Do Three Career-Defining Values (Career Anchors) Influence the Formulation of the Career Goal and the Steps Taken to Achieve it?" (created by the authors)

Gender	Answer options		
	Yes	No	Partly
Females	93 %	0 %	7 %
Males	85 %	1 %	14 %
Total	90 %	1 %	9 %

The vast majority of the participants converged on the opinion that career anchors affected both the career goals and strategies used to achieve these goals.

As for the open-ended question, the responses could be summarized as follows:

- Possible future instability will require continuous adaptation and expansion of tasks beyond my profession.
- I know that my problems can be solved; it is not a dead end as it seemed to me before.

- The acquired knowledge and skills will help me in scientific and academic work.
- I have not always been able to act on my career values. Most of these values are aligned with the SMART goal of my career. I will not change my career path.
- I consider career values, but often my reality prevents me from acting on my values.
- Understanding how to design my career will help me develop relationships with my colleagues.
- I often think about changing my career path because my career and life values are not fully compatible.
- After analyzing my career values, I am convinced that I am in my field, I enjoy my work, it fulfils me.
- Our university considers the values of academic staff. This surfaces in student surveys, and teacher, department, and institute ratings. This translates into salaries and contract extensions.
- Attitudes to the profession and educational contexts should be changed to satisfy the needs of students.
- The current interpretation of a career expands beyond success in professional activities; it includes success in other areas of life. People plan their careers having a clear vision in mind. This boosts their professional development and increases personal competitiveness in the labor market. Such an approach extends to other aspects of life.

The results of the open-ended questions converge on the importance of career values, earlier encoded through career anchors.

The second research stage aimed at identifying the views of HE managers on career anchors of academic staff. Fourteen HE managers (10 women and 4 men) participated in the study. Most managers had a long experience in leadership positions (36 % with 5 to 9 years of experience, 14 % with 10–14 years of experience, and 36 % with over 15 years of experience), which explained the age distribution of the participants. Only 14 % fell into the 30–39 age group, while 50 % belonged to the 40–49 age group. Seven percent were of the 50–59 age group, and 29 % were 60+ years old. As differences in responses between genders were minimal, only overall results were considered (see Table 3).

The opinions of HE managers largely aligned with those of academic staff. At the first priority level, *technical competence* and *service* were selected as the top priority (21 %), followed by *autonomy* and *entrepreneurial creativity* (14 %, each). All other anchors were equally distributed, taking up 7 % each.

At the second priority level, *pure challenge* and *entrepreneurial creativity* emerged as the top priority (21 %). The second most important anchors included *autonomy*, *security*, *service*, and *technical competence* (14 %, each). *Lifestyle integration* was chosen by 7 %, whereas *managerial competence* was ignored.

At the third priority level, the top choice comprised *autonomy*, *pure challenge*, and *service* (21 %, each). *Entrepreneurial creativity* and *technical competence* were selected by 14 %, whereas *lifestyle integration* by 7 %. *Security* was not selected.

Overall, the top cluster of career anchors of academic staff in the view of HE managers covers *technical competence*, *service*, *autonomy*, and *entrepreneurial creativity*.

Table 3

Experts' Responses to the Question: "As an HEI Administrative Representative Involved in Personnel Management, Please Indicate Three Important Career Values for Academic Staff to be Motivated, Engaged, and Work with Increased Productivity (created by the authors)"

Career anchor (value)	Distribution by significance for career goals, total		
	FP, %	SP, %	TP, %
Career anchors			
Autonomy / independence	14	14	21
Entrepreneurial creativity	14	21	14
Lifestyle integration	7	7	7
Managerial competence	7	0	0
Pure challenge	7	21	21
Security / stability	7	14	0
Service/dedication to a cause	21	14	21
Technical / functional competence	21	14	14
Total	100	100	100

FP – first priority, SP – second priority, TP – third priority

When comparing these results with those of academic staff, it is evident that both groups prioritized professional expertise (*technical competence*) and commitment to the profession (*service*). However, then the opinions diverged. While the academic staff ranked financial stability as the second most critical career anchor (*security*), HE managers mostly ignored it. The neglect of the *security* anchor by HE managers could have roots in the business models of their institutions. While the exclusion of financial and job security of academic staff from HE business models might reduce expenses, it can also reduce motivation of academic staff, and, consequently, the quality of education. Furthermore, academic staff included *autonomy* in the secondary cluster, while HE managers included it in the primary cluster. This result along with the selection of *entrepreneurial creativity* might suggest that HE managers wish to see academic staff more proactive in career development, resource acquisition, and task completion.

Conclusion

Irrespective of interpretations of sustainable development, not only governing bodies but also academia acknowledge its importance (Goller & Rieckmann, 2022); therefore, education for sustainable development has been promoted across the globe (Veisson & Kabaday, 2018) in the format of SDG 4 (quality of education) and SDG 8 (economic growth and decent workplace). Among the key drivers of education are teachers (Nithyanandam, 2020). Academic staff at HEIs have been found to have a greater impact on students than their peers, which should be translated into staff employment, training and evaluation policies (Brodaty & Gurgand, 2016). Despite recent advancements in artificial intelligence and deep learning models, they still have teaching limitations (Liang et al., 2023), which is why human teachers continue to dominate the educational landscape.

Various professional development programs have been designed to enhance the quality of teaching and alter teaching behavior of staff. However, not all professional development programs have been able to impact teaching quality (Gore et al., 2021). There might be other factors than the immersion in a teacher training program that have a more substantial impact on teaching practices. Veisson and Kabaday (2018) found that some teachers had intrinsically driven motivations to stay in the job. Intrinsic motivations are co-shaped by personal values (Jud et al., 2023), which include career drivers, which are among long-term components of any professional development (Shein & Van Maanen, 2016). Therefore, the aim of this study was to identify the key career drivers of academic staff from the perspective of both academic staff and HE middle- and senior managers. The survey of both groups was conducted to identify similarities and differences in opinions between those who did the teaching job and those who organized the work processes, created work environment and designed remuneration policies. By knowing such converging and diverging points, HE managers could design more affective business models and human resource management policies for sustainable education.

As for the results of the study, both groups ranked *technical competences* and *service* as top priorities. For academic staff, the inclusion of professional expertise might relate to the need to have competence-related security and interest in the career path in HE, which was especially critical for male participants. As for HE managers, the prioritization of professional expertise might pertain to the need to recruit competent professionals. The inclusion of a commitment to work might be linked to the need to establish a non-financial attachment to the career in HE in the context of possible underpay, communication challenges with administration and students, and continuous stress, leading to burnout. This commitment to work was especially important for female academic staff members of HEIs.

The value of *security* was prioritized only by academic staff. This implies that academic staff wish to enjoy current and future economic stability. This result is consistent with earlier findings on the contribution of monetary aspects to workplace performance (Green & Heywood, 2023) and higher commitment at work (Qi & Yao, 2023). The perspective of HE managers is also understandable, because otherwise senior managers might be expected to increase spending on staff remuneration and training, while middle managers can hardly affect the financial policies of their institutions.

Autonomy and *entrepreneurial creativity* were ranked as the third most important career drivers for academic staff by HE managers, which contrasted with the opinion of academic staff. HE managers might be interested in academic staff becoming more entrepreneurial and independent to promote social entrepreneurship at their institutions. This result is consistent with the current trend of redesigning the role of a teacher as that of a social entrepreneur promoting positive social transformations through innovations (Bates et al., 2023). If teachers acquire the functions of social entrepreneurs, their social status is expected to rise in society (Bates et al., 2023), and so is the status of educational institutions. Furthermore, the fact that management competence was not prioritized leads to a paradox, because planning, management of time, people, and process are essential for effective autonomous work and entrepreneurial activities.

The obtained results are similar and different from the research outcomes of other authors. For example, Unal and Gizir (2014), who studied career anchors of HE academic staff in Turkey, found that *security*, *service*, and *autonomy* were prioritized by

academic staff. Academic staff of HEIs in Indonesia also prioritized *security* (Meiliani, 2014). This similarity and difference in results across studies indicate common career drives of academic staff, such as financial security, but also emphasizes differences, which can be attributed to culture- and market-specific characteristics affecting the life quality of academic staff.

The gap in the opinion on career drivers, identified in this study, calls for a dialogue between academic staff and decision-makers at HEIs. By implementing key career drivers of academic staff into business models and quality assurance policies of HEIs, HE managers can create a roadmap for attaining SDG 4 and SDG 8 at their institutions. Earlier, Meilianti et al. (2022) argued for the inclusion of career expectations of healthcare workers in organizational policies for ensuring more effective performance.

Overall, the outcomes of this study are consistent with earlier findings, in which job security, autonomy, and service to others were ranked as primary drivers of teaching careers (Wang & Klassen, 2023). In addition, professional (technical) competences and creative abilities were also found important in this study. The authors recommend that the level of professional expertise (*technical competence*) and work performance (*service, autonomy*) be included in the remuneration policies (*security*), staff well-being and training programs, which should be financed / co-financed by HEIs. Staff well-being and training programs should also cover financial stability and performance aspects, as well as development of professional competences, entrepreneurial creativity, and proactive independent approaches to course and career management, while employment policies should instil a sense of confidence in the future work stability among academic staff. Within ecological economics that focuses on sustainable development of economies, researchers have identified a staff boost productivity and economic growth; the economic growth can decrease staff well-being, which can lead to mental health issues, ultimately reducing productivity (Isham et al., 2021). The priority career anchors of academic staff, identified in this study, could be used as HRM regulation indicators to ensure the sustainable (long-term) rather than short-term economic growth of HEIs.

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Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Dr. Jevgenija Dehtjare, EKA University of Applied Sciences, Riga, Latvia. Email: jevgenija.dehtjare@eka.edu.lv