

**UNDERSTANDING WORK EXPERIENCES AND
SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS IN ACADEMIA:
A MIXED METHODS APPROACH**

AARATHI K



**DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI
JULY 2025**

© Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IITD), New Delhi, 2025

**UNDERSTANDING WORK EXPERIENCES AND
SUBJECTIVE CAREER SUCCESS IN ACADEMIA:
A MIXED METHODS APPROACH**

by

AARATHI K

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES

Submitted

in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

to the



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY DELHI

JULY 2025

CERTIFICATE

The thesis titled “Understanding Work Experiences and Subjective Career Success in Academia: A Mixed Methods Approach”, being submitted by **Ms. Aarathi K** to the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)**, is a record of bonafide research work carried out by her. She has worked under my supervision and has fulfilled the requirements for the submission of this thesis, which has attained the standard required for Ph.D. degree of the Institute. I understand from the student that the results presented in this thesis have not been submitted elsewhere for award of any degree or diploma.

Date: 17-07-2025

Prof. Shuchi Sinha

Research Supervisor

Department of Management Studies

Indian Institute of Technology Delhi

New Delhi-110016

India

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply appreciative towards Dr. Shuchi Sinha, my guide as well as mentor, without whom this academic journey would not have been possible. Her distinction for excellence and pursuit of sincerity, as well as enthusiasm for research has been influential throughout. She has provided continuous encouragement and guidance in this research work, even during the most trying times. I consider myself fortunate to have worked with her.

I would also like to thank Prof. Vivek G. Nair for his guidance in conducting my research work, and data analysis of the survey-based study. His helpful advice and feedback helped me in culling out deeper insights from my data.

I am extremely grateful to all other distinguished faculty members of the department for their encouragement and feedback for giving insights to develop my research and keeping my spirits high throughout the course of study.

This piece of work would not have been possible without the active participation of my valuable respondents, who spent time and efforts to share relevant insights for the study. I also place on record, my sense of gratitude to everyone, who directly or indirectly, helped me to complete my research. It was extremely difficult to collect data during Covid-19, especially the sudden shift from offline to online, as well as the accessibility to the respondents.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Mrs. Vijaya Kanthamani and Dr. Arumugam Kanthamani and Mr. Arun Kumar.K. Words fall short to describe their incessant love and support which was a constant source of motivation for my doctoral work. A special mention goes to Dr. Swati Dhir, Dr. Chitra Khari, Dr. Gautam Pant and Ms. Smridhi Saluja for their continuous support and valuable advice in all my endeavours. Although it was a difficult time for the entire family during COVID, their remarkable patience and support for my work was praiseworthy.

Last but not the least, I would also like to thank my colleagues who have extended valuable support and provided critical observations which have helped me develop my research analysis skills and refine my work. They have been an eternal source of my happiness and motivation. Their unceasing and unconditional care, adjustment, support and patience during my doctoral journey and otherwise, has constantly inspired me to give my best.

Thank you all for making this possible!

Aarathi K

ABSTRACT

The academic profession has undergone significant changes as universities transitioned into complex organizations, creating new challenges for academics like changing work nature and greater workload. Specifically, this transformation has impacted the work experiences of academics and how they make sense of them during the conduct of work roles and realisation of career success. The thesis acknowledges the relevance of multiple stakeholders in the university system (such as students, support staff, policymakers, etc.), but focuses specifically on the experiences and perceptions of subjective career success among faculty members. In doing so, it directs attention toward key factors such as career development and success of academics to understand the implications for their job satisfaction, engagement and commitment. This research employs a mixed methods approach and focuses on the question of how faculty members/academics in Indian HEIs construe subjective career success.

This thesis aims to understand: 1) the experiences of academics in the Indian HEI context (specifically the management discipline) using the method of qualitative study and 2) examine some of the individual and institutional factors influencing the subjective career success of academics using a survey-based study. Study 1 adopted a qualitative approach to investigate the work experiences of academics in HEIs in India, using semi-structured interviews for data collection. The sample of respondents consisted of twenty academics from HEIs in India, largely from the Management discipline. The diverse mix of participants allowed for rich insights into the career construction, work and subjective career success of academics through their work experiences. The main factors that shape subjective career success for the participants in our study include research productivity, teaching effectiveness, institutional policy, complementing academic work roles, as well as mentoring support and networking.

Study 2 focused on determining the antecedents of subjective career success. Insights from career construction theory highlight that the career development needs of individuals and their integration with social expectations help us to understand subjective career success. According to the job demand resources theory, the workload of academics is increasing due to growth and expansion of higher education in the Indian context. The work role identity salience for research requires institute support for academics to remain engaged to realise subjective career success.

The mixed methods approach (across studies 1 and 2) offered rich insights into the ways academics in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India experience work and the factors influencing their subjective career success. These experiences highlighted the key challenges the respondents encountered, how they managed these challenges, and the influence of various internal and external factors on their subjective career success. The interaction between gender, career stage, and situational factors resulted in specific work demands that required respondents to perceive and define subjective career success differently.

Keywords: Academic, Subjective Career Success, Work Role Identity Salience, teaching, research, career adaptability, social capital, networking, mentoring, work engagement, modern career theories, Kaleidoscope Career Model.

सार

विश्वविद्यालयों के जटिल संगठनों में परिवर्तित होने के कारण शैक्षणिक पेशे में महत्वपूर्ण परिवर्तन हुए हैं, जिससे शिक्षाविदों के लिए कार्य की प्रकृति में परिवर्तन और कार्यभार में वृद्धि जैसी नई चुनौतियां उत्पन्न हुई हैं। विशेष रूप से, इस परिवर्तन ने शिक्षाविदों के कार्य अनुभवों को प्रभावित किया है तथा इस बात को भी प्रभावित किया है कि वे कार्य भूमिकाओं के संचालन और कैरियर की सफलता की प्राप्ति के दौरान इन अनुभवों को कैसे समझते हैं। यह शोध प्रबंध विश्वविद्यालय प्रणाली में विभिन्न हितधारकों (जैसे छात्र, सहायक कर्मचारी, नीति निर्माता, आदि) की प्रासंगिकता को स्वीकार करता है, लेकिन विशेष रूप से संकाय सदस्यों के बीच व्यक्तिपरक कैरियर की सफलता के अनुभवों और धारणाओं पर ध्यान केंद्रित करता है। ऐसा करने में, यह कैरियर विकास और शिक्षाविदों की सफलता जैसे प्रमुख कारकों की ओर ध्यान आकर्षित करता है, ताकि उनकी नौकरी की संतुष्टि, संलग्नता और प्रतिबद्धता पर पड़ने वाले प्रभावों को समझा जा सके। यह शोध मिश्रित पद्धति दृष्टिकोण का उपयोग करता है और इस प्रश्न पर ध्यान केंद्रित करता है कि भारतीय उच्च शिक्षा संस्थानों में संकाय सदस्य/शिक्षाविद व्यक्तिपरक कैरियर की सफलता को किस प्रकार समझते हैं।

इस शोध प्रबंध का उद्देश्य है: 1) गुणात्मक अध्ययन की विधि का उपयोग करके भारतीय उच्च शिक्षा संस्थानों (विशेष रूप से प्रबंधन अनुशासन) के संदर्भ में शिक्षाविदों के अनुभवों को समझना, तथा 2) सर्वेक्षण आधारित अध्ययन का उपयोग करके शिक्षाविदों की व्यक्तिपरक कैरियर सफलता को प्रभावित करने वाले कुछ व्यक्तिगत और संस्थागत कारकों की जांच करना। अध्ययन 1 में भारत में उच्च शिक्षा संस्थानों में शिक्षाविदों के कार्य अनुभवों की जांच करने के लिए गुणात्मक दृष्टिकोण अपनाया गया, जिसमें डेटा संग्रह के लिए अर्ध-संरचित साक्षात्कार का उपयोग किया गया। उत्तरदाताओं के नमूने में भारत के उच्च शिक्षा संस्थानों के बीस शिक्षाविद शामिल थे, जिनमें से अधिकांश प्रबंधन विषय से थे। प्रतिभागियों के विविध मिश्रण ने उनके कार्य अनुभवों के माध्यम से कैरियर निर्माण, कार्य और शैक्षणिक क्षेत्र में

व्यक्तिपरक कैरियर की सफलता के बारे में समृद्ध अंतर्दृष्टि प्रदान की। हमारे अध्ययन में प्रतिभागियों के लिए व्यक्तिपरक कैरियर की सफलता को आकार देने वाले मुख्य कारकों में अनुसंधान उत्पादकता, शिक्षण प्रभावशीलता, संस्थागत नीति, शैक्षिक कार्य भूमिकाओं की पूर्ति, साथ ही मार्गदर्शन समर्थन और संबंध बनाना शामिल हैं।

अध्ययन 2 व्यक्तिपरक कैरियर की सफलता के पूर्ववृत्त को निर्धारित करने पर केंद्रित था। कैरियर निर्माण सिद्धांत से प्राप्त अंतर्दृष्टि यह दर्शाती है कि व्यक्तियों की कैरियर विकास आवश्यकताएं और सामाजिक अपेक्षाओं के साथ उनका एकीकरण, हमें व्यक्तिपरक कैरियर सफलता को समझने में मदद करता है। नौकरी मांग संसाधन सिद्धांत के अनुसार, भारतीय संदर्भ में उच्च शिक्षा के विकास और विस्तार के कारण शिक्षाविदों का कार्यभार बढ़ रहा है। अनुसंधान के लिए कार्य भूमिका पहचान की प्रमुखता के लिए शैक्षणिक संस्थानों से सहयोग की आवश्यकता होती है, ताकि वे व्यक्तिपरक कैरियर की सफलता प्राप्त करने के लिए संलग्न रह सकें।

मिश्रित पद्धति दृष्टिकोण (अध्ययन 1 और 2 में) ने भारत में उच्च शिक्षा संस्थानों (एचईआई) में शिक्षाविदों के काम करने के तरीकों और उनकी व्यक्तिपरक कैरियर की सफलता को प्रभावित करने वाले कारकों के बारे में समृद्ध अंतर्दृष्टि प्रदान की। इन अनुभवों ने उत्तरदाताओं के सामने आने वाली प्रमुख चुनौतियों, उनके द्वारा इन चुनौतियों का प्रबंधन करने के तरीके तथा उनके व्यक्तिपरक कैरियर की सफलता पर विभिन्न आंतरिक और बाह्य कारकों के प्रभाव पर प्रकाश डाला। लिंग, कैरियर चरण और परिस्थितिजन्य कारकों के बीच अंतःक्रिया के परिणामस्वरूप विशिष्ट कार्य मांगें उत्पन्न हुईं, जिसके कारण उत्तरदाताओं को व्यक्तिपरक कैरियर सफलता को अलग ढंग से समझना और परिभाषित करना पड़ा।

प्रमुख शब्द: शैक्षणिक, व्यक्तिपरक कैरियर सफलता, कार्य भूमिका पहचान प्रमुखता, शिक्षण, अनुसंधान, कैरियर अनुकूलनशीलता, सामाजिक पूंजी, संबंध बनाना, सलाह, कार्य संलग्नता, आधुनिक कैरियर सिद्धांत, बहुरूपदर्शक कैरियर मॉडल।

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATE	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xv
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Global Higher Education.....	1
1.2 Landscape of Indian HEIs.....	3
1.2.1 Structure of Indian HEIs.....	4
1.2.2 Funding Sources	5
1.2.3 Push toward a Flexible Workforce	5
1.2.4 Academic Career Development.....	6
1.3 Academic Profession in India	6
1.3.1 Academic Career	9
1.3.2 Women in Academia	10
1.4 Research Gaps	12
1.5 Research Objectives	13
1.6 Overview of Research Methods	15
1.7 Organization of the Thesis	16
1.8 Concluding Remarks	17
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	19
2.1 The Career Concept.....	19
2.2 Contemporary Careers.....	20

2.3 Career Theories and Success.....	21
2.4 Relevance of Subjective Career Success.....	23
2.5 Academic Career Success	25
2.5.1 Academic work roles and success	27
2.5.2 Gender and Subjective Career Success	29
2.5.3 Academic Career Success from a social perspective.....	30
2.6 Implications for studying subjective career success	32
2.7 Concluding Remarks	33
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS (STUDY 1).....	34
3.1 Introduction	34
3.2 Data Collection Procedure	35
3.3 Selection of Respondents	38
3.4 Thematic Data Analysis	39
3.5 Subjective Career Success Framework	41
3.6 Concluding Remarks	44
CHAPTER 4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS (STUDY 1)	45
4.1 Introduction	45
4.2 Work Demands.....	46
4.2.1 Research-related Expectations and Experiences	47
4.2.2 Teaching related Expectations and Experiences	51
4.2.3 Designation-wise Seniority and Workload Assigned.....	53
4.3 Social Capital	57
4.3.1 Family Support	58
4.3.2 Mentoring	60
4.3.3 Networking	62
4.3.4 Collegial Support.....	66
4.4 Construction of Career Success.....	68

4.4.1 Teaching Effectiveness.....	69
4.4.2 Research Productivity.....	72
4.4.3 Complementing Academic Work Roles.....	75
4.4.4 Work Role Identity Salience.....	77
4.4.5 Meaningful work.....	81
4.4.6 Institute Mechanisms.....	83
4.4.7 Career Adaptability.....	86
4.4.8 Work Engagement.....	88
4.5 Overview of Findings from Demographic Perspectives.....	90
4.5.1 Gender as a demographic variable.....	90
4.5.2 Career Stage as a demographic variable.....	92
4.6 Concluding Remarks.....	94
CHAPTER 5 OVERVIEW AND RESEARCH DESIGN (STUDY 2).....	96
5.1 Introduction to Subjective Career Success.....	96
5.2 Linkages between Study 1 to Study 2.....	97
5.3 Study 2 Conceptual Model 1.....	98
5.3.1 Overview.....	98
5.3.2 Independent Variables.....	99
5.3.3 Background: Changing Nature of Work Perspective.....	106
5.3.4 Hypotheses Development.....	107
5.4 Study 2 Conceptual Model 2.....	111
5.4.1 Overview.....	111
5.4.2 Independent Variables.....	112
5.4.3 Background: Situated Academic Perspective.....	117
5.4.4 Hypotheses development.....	118
5.5 Research Methodology.....	123
5.5.1 Survey-based Study.....	123

5.5.2 Data Collection Method and Tools.....	123
5.5.3 Survey Instrument.....	124
5.5.4 Sampling Strategy.....	124
5.5.5 Data Preparation and Cleaning.....	125
5.5.6 Measures.....	126
5.6 Concluding Remarks.....	128
CHAPTER 6 DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS (STUDY 2)	129
6.1 Introduction.....	129
6.2 Data Analysis and Findings	129
6.2.1 Reliability Analysis	129
6.2.2 Discriminant Validity.....	136
6.2.3 Model 1: Hypothesis Testing and Mediation Effects.....	141
6.2.4 Model 1: Discussion of findings based on Career Construction Theory.....	143
6.2.5 Model 2: Hypothesis Testing and Mediation Effects.....	144
6.2.6 Model 2: Discussion of finding based on Job Demand Resources Theory.....	146
6.3 Concluding Remarks.....	147
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS.....	151
7.1 Introduction.....	151
7.2 Research Overview	151
7.3 Key insights and theoretical contributions.....	152
7.3.1 How Study 1 contributes to Study 2.....	153
7.3.2 Triple-Level Model of Academic Career Success.....	154
7.3.3 Overall implications	159
7.4 Practical Implications.....	160
7.5 Limitations and Future Research Avenues.....	163
7.6 Concluding Remarks.....	166
REFERENCES.....	167

Annexure I Guiding Questions for the Interviews – Study 1.....	193
Annexure II Survey Items – Study 2.....	194
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	201

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1:	Flow Diagram of the research.....	15
Figure 5.1:	Hypotheses Conceptual Model 1.....	110
Figure 5.2:	Hypotheses Conceptual Model 2.....	122
Figure 6.1:	Results of Conceptual Model 1.....	142
Figure 6.2:	Partial Serial Mediation.....	142
Figure 6.3:	Partial Single Mediation.....	143
Figure 6.4:	Results of Conceptual Model 2	145
Figure 7.1:	Triple Level Model of Academic Career Success.....	158

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1:	Respondent Demographics.....	37
Table 3.2:	Themes Fitting Heslin Subjective Criteria Framework.....	43
Table 4.1:	Respondents' Experiences based on career stage.....	93
Table 6.1:	Reliability Analysis Model 1.....	131
Table 6.2:	Reliability Analysis Model 2.....	134
Table 6.3:	The Results of Correlation Matrix Model 1.....	138
Table 6.4:	The Results of Correlation Matrix Model 2.....	139
Table 6.5:	Discriminant Validity – Fornell-Larcker Criterion Model 1.....	140
Table 6.6:	Discriminant Validity – Fornell-Larcker Criterion Model 2.....	140
Table 6.7:	Results of Hypothesis Testing Model 1.....	141
Table 6.8:	Results of Hypothesis Testing Model 2.....	144

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AISHE	All India Survey on Higher Education
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BRICs	Brazil, Russia, India, and China and South Africa
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CAAS	Career Adapt – Abilities Scale
CAAS Cern	Career Adapt – Abilities Scale Concern Sub Dimension
CAAS Cont	Career Adapt – Abilities Scale Control Sub Dimension
CAAS Sity	Career Adapt – Abilities Scale Curiosity Sub Dimension
CAAS Conf	Career Adapt – Abilities Scale Confidence Sub Dimension
CMIN	Chi-square fit statistics
CMIN/df	Chi-square fit statistics/degree of freedom
CR	Composite Reliability
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GFI	Goodness-of-Fit Index
GoI	Government of India
HEIs	Higher Education Institutes
IIMs	Indian Institutes of Management
IITs	Indian Institutes of Technology
INIs	Institutes of National Importance
KCM	Kaleidoscope Career Model
KCM Au	Kaleidoscope Career Model Authenticity Parameter
KCM Bal	Kaleidoscope Career Model Balance Parameter
KCM Ch	Kaleidoscope Career Model Challenge Parameter
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resources Development
MoE	Ministry of Education

MS	Mentoring Support
NFI	Normed Fit Index
NIRF	National Institutional Ranking Framework
NKC	National Knowledge Commission
NWB	Networking Behaviour
PLS SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling
PUS	Perceived University Support
RUSA	Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan
SCS	Subjective Career Success
SCSI	Subjective Career Success Inventory
SCSI Auth	Subjective Career Success Inventory Authenticity Sub Dimension
SCSI G&D	Subjective Career Success Inventory Growth and Development Sub Dimension
SCSI Inf	Subjective Career Success Inventory Influence Sub Dimension
SCSI MW	Subjective Career Success Inventory Meaningful Work Sub Dimension
SCSI PL	Subjective Career Success Inventory Personal Life Sub Dimension
SCSI QW	Subjective Career Success Inventory Quality Work Sub Dimension
SCSI Rec	Subjective Career Success Inventory Recognition Sub Dimension
SCSI Sat	Subjective Career Success Inventory Satisfaction Sub Dimension
Scap	Social Capital
SD	Standard Deviation
SE	Standard Error
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SRMR	Standardised Root Mean Square Residual
Weng	Work Engagement
WRIS	Work Role Identity Saliency
WRIS T	Work Role Identity Saliency for Teaching
WRIS R	Work Role Identity Saliency for Research

UGC	University Grants Commission
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor