



Faculty of Social and Health Sciences

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Master Thesis

Exploring Career Identity: Three Archetypes in Doctoral Candidates of Social Sciences and Humanities

Utforsking av karriereidentitet: Tre arketyper blant doktorgradskandidater i samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora

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Summary

This master's thesis explores the understanding of career and identity among doctoral candidates in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) at the University of Bergen. The aim is to contribute to the growth of knowledge on the topic and to improve career development for early-career researchers. The thesis begins with an introduction to doctoral education in Norway and how it is influenced by the European context. It then addresses Norwegian research on researchers and careers.

The topic of researcher career development has a long tradition as a distinct field. Recently, there has been a greater focus on researcher identity, while the field of career guidance and career development has not yet made a significant impact. The goal is to explore how these theoretical directions challenge and complement each other.

The research design is a qualitative method with semi-structured interviews. The method is a combination of reflexive thematic analysis and abductive thematic analysis, as described by Braun & Clarke and Thompson, respectively. Reflexive thematic analysis is a six-step approach to breaking down text into smaller meaningful units or codes and then identifying themes or nodes. Abductive analysis adds an analysis of both codes and the whole, allowing the full potential of the material to be utilized. Similarly, the presentation of data through abductive analysis is more informative about the connections in the data material.

Through coding and thematization, the thesis shows how some career identity positions emerge as archetypes. These are professor, researcher, and professional. These positions have different constructions of career identity and will require different career guidance. The thesis also shows that the decisive element for typification is how the positions handle uncertainty and their understanding of competence. The thesis pays attention to some specific elements of academia that are significant for future careers, particularly the academic supervisor.

The thesis concludes with a summary of the main findings, contributions to the field, limitations, recommendations for future research, and potential questions for further studies

Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven utforsker forståelse av karriere og identitet til doktorgradskandidater innen samfunnsvitenskap og humaniora (SSH) ved Universitetet i Bergen. Målet er å bidra til kunnskapsvekst om tema samt bidra til bedre karriereutvikling for yngre forskere. Oppgaven begynner med en introduksjon av doktorutdanning i Norge og hvordan den er påvirket av europeisk kontekst. Oppgaven tar videre for seg norsk forskning på forskere og karriere.

Tema karriere og forskerutvikling har lang tradisjon som eget fagfelt. Det har den senere tid blitt mer orientering mot forskeridentitet, samtidig som feltet karriereveiledning og karriere utvikling ikke har satt noe særlig avtrykk enda. Målet er å utforske hvordan disse teoretiske retningene utfordrer og utfyller hverandre.

Forskningsdesignet er kvalitativ metode med semi-strukturerte intervju. Metoden er en kombinasjon av refleksiv tematisk analyse og abduktiv tematisk analyse, hos hhv Braun og Clark og Thompson. Refleksiv tematisk metode en seks-steps tilnærming for å bryte tekst ned i mindre meningsbærende enheter eller koder, for så å finne tema eller noder. Abduktiv analyse tilfører analyse av både koder og helhet slik at en får utnyttet potensialet i hele materialet Likeledes er fremstillingen av data ved abduktiv analyse noe mer informativ om sammenhenger i datamaterialet.

Gjennom koding og tematisering viser oppgaven hvordan noen karriere identitets posisjoner fremtrer som arketyper. Disse er professor, forsker og profesjonell. Disse posisjonene har ulike oppbygning av karriereidentitet og vil kreve ulik karriereveiledning. Oppgaven viser også at det som er det avgjørende elementet for typifisering, er hvordan posisjonene håndterer usikkerhet og hva slags forståelse av kompetanse en har. Oppgaven vier oppmerksomhet til noen enkeltelement ved akademia som har stor betydning for fremtidig karriere, og det er den akademiske veilederen.

Oppgaven avsluttes med en oppsummering av hovedfunnene, bidrag til feltet, begrensninger, anbefalinger for fremtidig forskning og spørsmål for videre studier

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Many master's students describe the process as a lonely endeavor that has perhaps finally come to an end. I can certainly relate to feeling lost in both theory and data. Despite standing on the shoulders of earlier scientists, the actual work falls solely on us. All the decisions, rewriting drafts, and 'killing our darlings' are solitary tasks.

Yet, on the other hand, I really do not feel that this process has been mine alone. Being in the beneficial situation that I work in the midst of my research questions, there are so many fantastic colleagues, scholars and also clients that enrich my scholarly development. I get to discuss both theory and practice every day, so this study is a result of generous colleagues and friends.

First and foremost, I want to thank my previous colleagues in Euroguidance for evoking a theoretical interest in the role of guidance practitioners. Thanks to Nina Ahlroos, Dora Stefánsdóttir and Mika Launikari for insisting that we contributed with our Nordic perspective of the importance of mobility guidance (Launikari et al., 2020). This fostered an interest to delve into more theoretical and empirical studies. Thank you to staff and fellow students at the master study of career guidance Innlandet for creating such a nice network that keeps on giving.

In my current local context, I need to thank my colleagues at the University of Bergen for putting theory into practice and also vice versa in the collaborative process of setting up UiB Ferd Career Center for Early-Stage Researchers. Thanks to rector Margareth Hagen for the foresight and bravery of introducing career guidance for early-stage researchers to academia, thanks to Ingve Bergeheim and Ole Christian Laukli for taking me onboard. A big thanks to my wonderful partners in UiB Ferd, Cecilie Nordbotten, Ingunn Voster and Martha Eide for collegial sharing of your abundance of competence, experience and good spirits. To all the good people in HR, Elisabeth Nesheim for being my work bestie, and to Kristin, Marianne Signe and our energetic apprentices Mathilde and Maya. What would I do without you cheering? Thank you, Elizabeth Farmer, for taking UiB Ferd to another level of service – and for excellent proof reading. I also used Microsoft Copilot to assist with proofreading and enhancing the academic language of this thesis (Responsible AI, 2024). The tool provided suggestions for improving grammar, vocabulary, and overall clarity of the text.

An anonymous thank you to all the ESRs we have welcomed to UiB Ferd, whose shared stories have inspired me to write about career perspectives. And most of all, thank you to the candidates that offer their time and insight for me to learn from. Thank you!

And of course, I extend my gratitude to Morten Paulsen who supervised an earlier draft of the thesis before the current topic began to take shape. Prof. Tristram Hooley, the steady, patient and

constructive supervisor to see this version from start to end, thank you for keeping the project on track and for contributing to solving both methodological and theoretical knots. Thank you for the invaluable conversations!

Last, to my most important partner in crime, my soulmate Kjartan, thank you for being my everything! And to my grown-up children, Fredrik, Elise and Olav, I hope you have seen the joy of lifelong learning, not just the stress. Keep on being my proudest work ever!

List of abbreviations

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Meaning of, or Institution</u>	<u>URL</u>
ESR	Early-Stage Researchers	
ECA	Early Career Academics	
ECR	Early Career Researchers	
SSH	Social Science and Humanities	
HumSam	Norwegian description of the disciplines Humanities and Social science	
Ph.D.	Doctor of Philosophy	
VITAE	Non-profit programme, part of the Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC) Ltd. Cambridge, UK	https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/about-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework
Research Comp	THE EUROPEAN COMPETENCE FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCHERS	https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-04/ec_rtd_research-competence-presentation.pdf
Prosper	Unlocking Postdoc career potential	https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/
Nor-Cam	NOR-CAM - A toolbox for recognition and rewards in academic careers	https://www.uhr.no/en/f/p3/i86e9ec84-3b3d-48ce-8167-bbae0f507ce8/nor-cam-a-tool-box-for-assessment-and-rewards.pdf
CoARA	The Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)	https://coara.eu/about/
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics	
NIFU	Nordic Institute for Studies of innovation, research and education	https://www.nifu.no/en/
R&I/ R&D	Research and Innovation/Research and Development	
HE	Higher Education	
HEI	Higher Education Institutions	
EQF/FQ-EHEA	European qualification Framework	

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Chapter 1

“In fact, given the small number of researchers that progress to become academics, it is academia that is the alternative career.” ([EU Council Recommendation 2023](#))

1.1 Introduction

What thoughts and ideas do early-stage researchers (ESRs) have about their employability? This was the question that started this project. While working with ESRs on a day-to-day basis and having an overall knowledge of the disproportionality of recruitment positions and fixed positions in academia, there was not much Norwegian literature to be found describing how this group themselves see their prospective employment and the value of their current career. This work is not a case study; however, it is based on the author’s own experience as the head of the first - and currently only - career center for ESRs in Norway, at the University of Bergen (UiB). The center opened in 2022 and has since then welcomed around a hundred candidates per year for individual career guidance. In addition to this individual-focused service, the center offers courses in academic and non-academic skills development.

The Career Center documents the topics and concerns that candidates bring up during career guidance sessions. One common concern is an academic career being Plan A, with a contingency Plan B if that does not materialise. Candidates who have a clear desire to get a job in the industry and those who are just curious about what might be a good plan B are categorized together. Another common question from this group is whether a Ph.D. *is considered education or a job* - where to put it in a CV? Others want to discuss situations where things do not work out as expected, perhaps with supervisors. Yet another group of candidates want assistance reflecting on their individual situation and perhaps prioritising among competing objectives¹. If someone asked me to elaborate on employability perceptions of early-stage researchers, I could make some educated guesses, but I do not have scientific evidence to support them. There is not enough research on this topic.

¹¹ As the N = 220 candidates (autumn 2024), actual numbers should be handled with care. However, broadly speaking, 50 % come for non-academic career guidance, 15 % academic career, work-related difficulties 10 % and the rest 25 % a various set of issues.

1.2 University of Bergen

In 2019, UiB was bestowed the honorary badge of HR Excellence in Research by the European Commission². After a long process of gap analysis and user involvement, the University was accredited and hence, started to close the gaps highlighted in the analysis. Simultaneously, the Ministry of Higher Education and the National Coalition of Higher Education Institutions (UHR) had started to outline a strategy for early-stage academic recruitment and career development. Both the HR Excellence in Research and the national strategy laid out the current requirements in the field of researcher well-being and assessment and demanded developments in order to meet these requirements.

The UiB Board approved a policy paper titled “*Career Policy for Early-Stage Researchers at UiB*”³ as the foundation for establishing the service. The paper emphasized the importance of a clear career policy, identifying it as a key focus for ESRs and underscoring the need for competence and career development initiatives across various positions. UiB now stands at the forefront of service provision to early career academics in Norwegian academia, pioneering the establishment of a career service specifically for researchers. This center is still the first and only career center for ESRs in Norway.

In Norwegian, the term “guidance” in an academic context is reserved for supervision, with an academic supervisor called a “veileder”. The term for career guidance is translated as “karriereveiledning” – the similarity leading to some confusion over the perceived roles. The lack of a clearly separate Norwegian word for “supervisor” to help differentiate roles, is significant for understanding the discomfort experienced by academic stakeholders when introducing professional career guidance into the established academic tradition. When presenting the final plan of the center to the Steering Committee, the focus was both what the center *should* offer and, importantly, what it *should not*.

The steering group agreed that: *Career conversations are not academic supervision. They aim to enhance individuals’ career management skills without interfering with the role of the academic supervisor. This is not the task of the career guidance counselor.* UiB Ferd decided to label these individual career consultations as ‘conversations’ rather than ‘guidance’ to reflect and respect potential ambivalence about the concept.

UiB’ s introduction of the career guidance profession, despite some reluctance and ambiguity among the faculty, demonstrates their commitment to innovation. It is important to acknowledge and

² The legislative act of the framework: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15135-2023-ADD-1/en/pdf> and the University of Bergen webpage for HR excellence in Research <https://www.uib.no/en/hr/109791/hr-research>

³ https://ekstern.filer.uib.no/ledelse/universitetsstyret/2020/2020-02-20/S_04-20Karrierepolitikk_vngre_forskere.pdf

understand the uncertainty surrounding the integration of these new concepts. For effective service delivery at the center, it is crucial that ESRs themselves provide insights into their needs, the optimal timing for services, and the best ways to support them throughout the process.

Conversations with ESRs at UiB have revealed that the current understanding of early career academics' perceptions of their career trajectories, both retrospective and prospective, remains insufficiently developed from a career theory perspective.

Moreover, this study has the ambition to advance our knowledge of the concept of employability (Clark & Zukas, 2013; Fugate et al., 2004; Marginson, 1994; Weber et al., 2018) and career readiness for postgraduate candidates (Bettencourt et al., 2022; Clement et al., 2020; Dodd et al., 2022; Johnston, 2016; Suleman, 2021) as they perceive it during their first years of doctoral training.

1.3 Social Science and Humanities doctoral candidates

To focus the scope of this thesis, the sample comprises Ph.D. candidates from the Social Sciences and Humanities Faculty (SSH) at UiB. Literature shows that SSH candidates have rather different career trajectories than other disciplines (e.g., Guerin, 2019; Rasmussen & Andreasen, 2023; Schäfer, 2022; Shaik, 2016), with some literature focusing specifically on the humanities (Blaj-Ward, 2011; McAlpine & Austin, 2018; McAlpine et al., 2024; Vabø, 2007). In Norway, few empirical investigations about academic careers exist, except for studies by Nordic Institute for Studies of innovation, research and education NIFU (Frølich et al., 2019; Kyvik, 2014; Reiling et al., 2020; Reymert et al., 2017; Vabø, 2007) and The Young Academy of Norway (De Moor et al., 2018). According to Statistics Norway (SSB), less than 20% of doctoral candidates in STEM disciplines are employed by universities, compared to over 50% in SSH. Technically oriented fields, as well as law and psychology, often face challenges in retaining talent within academia due to higher industry salaries.

Table 1⁴ illustrates the current workplace distribution by field of study for individuals admitted to doctoral programs between 2005 and 2016, with degrees conferred by 2022. Between 50 and 60% of SSH candidates are still in the higher education (HE) sectors, with numbers up to 65 % if the Research Institutes are included. Conversely, 40% of the technology candidates work in the private industry sector. Holding focus on the SSH candidates, the table below illustrates that SSH candidates represent the discipline where most candidates find employment in the HE and research institute sector. Nevertheless, among SSH candidates, 30 to 40% do not work in the traditional HE sectors. Additionally, up to 10% of the candidates are categorized as unknown, which may include

⁴ The table is created by Statistics Norway (SSB)⁴ and was presented by Kaja Wendt from SSB at a seminar organized by Universities Norway (UHR), an association comprising 32 accredited universities and university colleges. SSB utilizes data from several registers, with the primary source of information regarding employment being derived from the Norwegian Tax Administration.

international candidates who have left the country. The numbers are rather stable over time, as Kyvik et al. in 2012 found that 56% of SSH candidates regarded the likelihood of obtaining a faculty job as 'poor,' and 21% had no clear vision of future work (Kyvik & Olsen, 2012).

Workplace by field of study for doctoral degree. Persons admitted to doctoral programs 2005-2016 with degrees awarded by 2022.

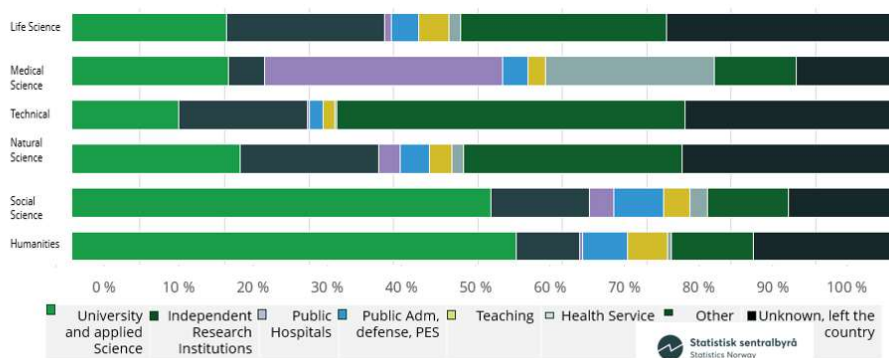


Figure 1 from SSB (Kaja Wendt presentation at the UHR conference 21.10.2024, Oslo, my own translation)

What is omitted from these statistics are the figures for attrition. Contemporary discussions of attrition are significantly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. It's difficult to examine recent numbers without considering this factor. However, looking at the completion rates for the period before the pandemic for the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Social Sciences, only 72% of candidates in the humanities completed their doctorates between 2007 and 2016, and 62% of candidates in the social sciences finalized their degrees between 2011 and 2016⁵. Low completion rates for SSH in Norway is not new or specific to UiB. At national level, the attrition rate for candidates starting in 2010/11, is 29% in the humanities and 24% in the social sciences (for comparison, the rate for natural science is 21%, life science 13%, and technology 16% - with an average of 19%) (DIKU, 2022). Even if we use the average number of 19%, nearly one in five Ph.D. students *do not end their contractual employment period with a degree*.

The reason for this specific phrasing is that, even without a degree, the skills and competencies gained from doctoral employment have value. At a national level, one can speak of talent waste or recruitment failure, however, for the people this affects, their personal career identities are really put to the test.

⁵UiB Ph.D., education report to the UiB University Board 2023 https://ekstern.filer.uib.no/ledelse/universitetsstyret/2023/2023-10-26/S_85-23Ph.d-utdanningsmeldingen2022.pdf

1.4 Research questions and aim

The research question of this thesis is what do doctoral candidates (ESR) in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) at UiB, preferably in the early phase, think, feel and imagine about (employability) and their future careers? However, to investigate this research question, it is beneficial to operationalize the problem and use multiple sub-questions. The object under study is the abstract thinking and emotions of employability of the target group. Doing research on perceptions, attitudes and beliefs is burdened with many issues of epistemic questions, and reliability issues. One major issue is if perceptions reflect reality. To omit various epistemic pitfalls, perceptions are operationalized into merely thought, ideas, emotions, beliefs and attitudes.

As thought and ideas are transient in nature, it is helpful to split up the research question into smaller units. To understand trajectories, it might give value to understand how people reach where they are today. The first question is therefore about their entrance into academia. Motivation is a marker for success (Skakni, 2018), however, entrance might be affected by educational habitus (Galimberti, 2023; vilhjálmsdóttir & arnkelsson, 2003). Background can also be a soft icebreaker question. As ideas about their future career is in question, we need to learn how they understand the concept of a career. As the conversation shifts to future ideas, it is crucial to understand their current situation and how they are supported in overcoming present career challenges. The last question is about the job future. This is the core question of the thesis, notwithstanding, often the reflections were given when they discussed the career concept.

Researchers use scientific terminology for precision and effective communication. While some terms overlap with everyday language, their meanings can differ. The term `career` is such a term, because everybody "has" one (According to discussions in e.g. (Haug & Plant, 2016; Højdal & Poulsen, 2012).

In *career guidance* literature, 'career' is often the dependent variable, while independent variables such as class, gender, level of urbanization, and age, among others, are used to explain its development. Accordingly, it is a daily expression of peoples' *vocational behaviour over time* (Savickas, 2002, p. 151) and is how this thesis understands the concept of career. The concepts of employability and career readiness will be defined in more detail in chapter three. But as a starting point, employability refers to values, skills and abilities that makes you suitable for getting and maintaining employment.

As this study not primarily is about the service offered by the career center at UiB, the study aims to increase our understanding of early-stage researcher perception of their current career position and

future work that again can inspire to more customized and flexible arrangements of service provision, as suggested by Ryan et al (Ryan et al., 2012, p. 434).

1.5 Added value and research gap

There are substantial literature on researchers careers (Caretta et al., 2018; Clement et al., 2020; Golovushkina & Milligan, 2012; Heffernan, 2021; Kyvik, 2013; Kyvik & Voje, 1984; McAlpine & Norton, 2006; McAlpine et al., 2021; Wöhrer, 2014; Yudkevich et al., 2015; Aarnikoivu, 2021) and what competencies are needed to be successful (Ashonibare, 2022; Bray & Boon, 2011; Cañibano et al., 2019; Mowbray & Halse, 2010; van der Weijden et al., 2016) and what competencies a doctoral training provides in terms of transferable skills for an industry career (Boulos, 2016; Chen, 2021; Chong & Clohisey, 2021; Germain-Alamartine et al., 2021; Hooley et al., 2022; Kvilhaugsvik, 2022; Kyvik & Olsen, 2012; Mowbray & Halse, 2010). Healy et al, mapping graduate employability and career development in HE, claims that literature on graduate employability and career development literature does not integrate (Healy et al., 2022). In addition, research from Norway on the subject is scarce, both in volume and perspectives. One exemption is the *Norwegian Institute for Research and Education Studies* -NIFU⁶, who has published several reports relevant for this study.

Authors such as Kyvik et al. and Reymert et al. have provided a comprehensive overview of the trends in researcher demographics in Norway over the past decades (Frølich et al., 2018; Kyvik, 2013; Kyvik & Olsen, 2012; Kyvik & Voje, 1984; Reymert et al., 2017). These studies not only describe career preferences among the research population but also illustrate how the terminology surrounding researcher careers has evolved over time. However, these studies primarily rely on quantitative data, revealing a research gap in understanding career inclinations on a qualitative level. Consequently, scholars such as Nästesjö and Hakala emphasize the need for a more detailed, as well as a more comprehensive, understanding of how scholars cope with uncertainties about their future (Hakala, 2009; Nästesjö, 2021).

The relevance of this study extends beyond Norway by offering interpretive qualitative data that enriches existing research with depth, context, and a nuanced understanding of employability. Qualitative data allows researchers to capture the complexity of career preferences by exploring individual experiences, perceptions, and meanings. This study, grounded in the social interpretivist discourse, aims to understand how ESRs think, feel, engage in, and reflect upon the concept of

⁶ <https://www.nifu.no/en/nifus-historie/>

employability. As doctoral candidates qualify for both academic and non-academic careers, this study does not favor any particular career path.

By exploring qualitative aspects of researcher careers, the study may offer insights to inform policy and practice, enhancing our understanding of doctoral employability. This is timely given new regulations on university recruitment in Norway, as described in the following chapter, which expands the objective for a doctoral degree to also qualifying the researcher for employment outside of academia and securing an ESR's right to career guidance.

The foundation for this new regulation is rooted in the current international movement to reform research assessment. This includes initiatives such as the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)⁷ and efforts aimed at improving working conditions and career development for researchers in Europe, such as the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R)⁸. UiB is currently being re-certified as an HRS4R institution, but, while the University has signed the CoARA agreement it is so far not a full member of the coalition. What can be regarded as the Norwegian version of the CoARA agreement, Nor-Cam⁹, builds on the same principles. Consequently, the research gap in Norway regarding how ESRs perceive their career prospects is both timely and highly relevant.

The significance of this master's study lies in its potential to unite the fields of researcher development and career guidance. The study contributes by integrating perspectives from researcher development, employability, and career theory, with a particular focus on career identity. It aims to create a more holistic understanding of support for the professional development of ESRs.

1.7 Motivation and positionality of the researcher

In the autumn of 2021, I was recruited by UiB to establish and oversee a career center specifically tailored for ESRs. Prior to this role, I served as the national manager for a European network known as Euroguidance¹⁰, operating under the Erasmus+ program¹¹. The primary objective of Euroguidance was to advance learning mobility and lifelong guidance by providing training to career professionals across Europe. This experience kindled a profound interest in career guidance as a powerful tool for advocating and exploring strategies to enhance individuals' emancipatory self-efficacy within the realm of work. Being cognizant of one's position within the field and practicing self-reflection to recognize the nuances of one's research journey holds immense significance. Describing my role and

⁷ <https://coara.eu/about/>

⁸ <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/hrs4r>

⁹ <https://www.uhr.no/en/f/p3/i86e9ec84-3b3d-48ce-8167-bbae0f507ce8/nor-cam-a-tool-box-for-assessment-and-rewards.pdf>

¹⁰ www.euroguidance.eu

¹¹ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>

professional work is crucial, as it can significantly impact both the comprehension of the field and the study's overall reliability. Doing interpretive studies, one strives not for objectivity, however, the illusion of objectivity is thus handled with constant reflexivity with respect to what literature to read and how theories illuminate the material - and even more importantly, how any preunderstanding influences the interpretation of the material (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018). By doing so, it encourages a perspective where personal experiences are recognized as assumptions rather than facts. These assumptions are discussed in the methodology chapter.

However, even if my interactions with candidates over the past three years have ignited an academic curiosity regarding the quality of the service provision, the center itself is not the research agenda. Nevertheless, there is an overall goal to be able to improve the service provision based on the new knowledge. How can we ascertain that the services offered by the center are tailored to meet the specific needs of our ESRs? Answers to this question might significantly influence the efficacy and appropriateness of our service.

1.8 Outline of the thesis

This thesis calls into question what we know about how SSH ESRs think, feel and reflect about their future career. ESR in this case is doctoral candidates at the University of Bergen. The second chapter will describe briefly how the Higher Education (HE) sector in Norway has developed, with its focus on equal opportunities and inclusion. However, as part of the wider international education and research arena, national policy has been highly influenced by European trends and developments. The first chapter also gives an account of research on Norwegian academic careers the last thirty years. This lays the foundation to understand the literature discussion on researcher development and career development that follows in chapter three. Chapter three is reserved for the theoretical discussion about how academic careers have been theorised and understood in the literature. The chapter starts with a thorough investigation of what kind of literature is available and under what domain this has been published. This thesis will argue that the researcher development field just recently has opened up for input from the emerging career guidance and development field. When discussing ERS and the career future, the added value of career theory is underscored. The concept of identity, employability and transfer will be defined in this chapter.

The research methodology and design of the thesis are described in chapter four. Reflexive thematic analysis is an approach that identifies and analyzes themes that are significant to the description of the phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2022; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Haug et al., 2019; Klimašauskaitė, 2021; McAllum et al., 2019; Nowell et al., 2017; Roberts et al., 2019; Tracy, 2010). The primary reason for selecting thematic analysis was to

inductively explore an identified research gap. As there are little qualitative literature, especially in Norway on how ESR in the SSH disciplines understand their own employability, a qualitative and inductive approach was found appropriate. However, as repeated iterations and interchange between data and theory kick the legs under the grounded and inductive quality of thematic analysis, abductive analysis was added. Qualitative interviews with eight people from the relevant target group were conducted before undertaking an abductive reflexive thematic analysis.

The findings from the interviews are presented in chapter five. The research topics from the interview guide are used to organize the material. Longer excerpts from the interviews will be presented as they represent meaning units that have formed the codes in the thematic analysis. The description of the codes and the extracted meaning units are analysed using the Thompson and Braun and Clark eight step abductive reflexive thematic analysis, that allows theorizing of the coding (Braun et al., 2022; Thompson, 2022).

The most important element in the thesis, the discussion, is the sixth chapter. The various codes and themes are synthesized into archetypes and analyzed in this chapter.

The last chapter, the concluding chapter, is where the overall aim of the research is discussed. What are the implications for service delivery to the target group from this research? What have we learned and how may research, and practice move forward to improve the career navigation of ESRs?

Chapter 2 Doctoral Education

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the origins of Norway's modern education and research system, crucial for understanding its unique characteristics, especially for SSH-oriented ESRs. It then explores the European integration of higher education and research policy, highlighting its governance role. The chapter also examines researcher development and careers in Norway, discussing trends in skills assessments and how researchers in Norway has perceived their career prospects in the future.

2.2 European Influence on Norwegian Policy

After re-gaining its freedom in 1945, Norway lacked the capacity to educate the necessary number of skilled workers required for societal redevelopment. To address this knowledge deficit, Norway instituted a loan system enabling individuals from modest backgrounds to pursue higher education abroad. Thus, the establishment of Lånekassen made it possible to climb the social ladder through education (Austbø & Simonsen, 1987; Rotevatn, 1997). Reading a memorial volume marking the 40th anniversary of Lånekassen, Austbø et al, writes that¹²

“Lånekassen, as articulated in the purpose clause of the Education Support Act, aims to eliminate disparities, enabling education to occur irrespective of geographical conditions and the individual's economic and social circumstances. Additionally, Lånekassen will maintain its dual mandate: to address the financial support needs of pupils and students, and to ensure that society's demand for educated labour is fulfilled” (Minister of Education Hallvard Bakke in Austbø & Simonsen, 1987).

Throughout this memorial volume, the authors highlight these core values: admission for all, financing education abroad and support for education that is beneficial to the Norwegian labor market (Rotevatn in Austbø & Simonsen, 1987). Already from the initiation, Lånekassen can be understood as a policy instrument, not only for increasing the overall knowledge capacity of the population and for social equality, but also for supplying the labour market with desired skills. Legislation and financing to promote social equity and regulate labor market skills are key legacies of past education policies, crucial for understanding today's graduate and postgraduate education policies.

Even if higher education is mainly regulated at the national (Frølich et al., 2018) or regional level, covering legislation, administration, institution approval, curricula, credentials, teaching staff careers,

¹² In Norwegian: Lånekassen skal, slik det fremkommer i formålsparagrafen om loven om utdanningsstøtte, bidra til å fjerne ulikhet slik at utdanning kan skje uavhengig av blant annet geografiske forhold og den enkeltes økonomiske og sosiale situasjon. Videre vil Lånekassen fortsatt ha sin doble oppgave, dels å dekke elever og studenters behov for støttemidler... dels å sørge for at samfunnet får dekket sitt behov for utdannet arbeidskraft.

and research promotion (Teichler, 2005), the EU has had a deep impact on national education and research policy. Through the EEA agreement Norway participate on an equal footing with other union members and comply to EU recommendations and agreements. Investments and emphasis on education and research therefore align with international trends, governance patterns, and financial regulations.

2.2.1 Bologna Agreement

One of the most effectual changes in the Norwegian research and education system, came with passing of the Bologna agreement. It was initiated in 1999 based on the European Cultural Convention, aimed to create a unified European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Communiqué, 2012; Wachter, 2004). This has led to an increase in mobility for tertiary level educated¹³ (Auriol, 2010). The mobility aspect of Norwegian education and research was not the most transformative, internationalisation has, through the Lånekasse, been a core element of Norwegian education system. Through the Bologna process, Norway had to comply to the European Qualifications Framework¹⁴. The Bologna process was, above all, a skills and recognition reform. The overall objective was to strengthen the free flow of people and skills across national boundaries: For the formal education system, this meant that ERA needed to align national assessment system to a European standard. For Norway this meant to implement the 3-5-8 structure (from 4-2), introduction of the ECTS system using the A-F letter system (from number values from 1.0 to 6.0) and shift from what is put *in* to the education to what comes *out* of the education (Meld.St. 2000:14), *Learning outcome descriptions*¹⁵ have three focus areas, knowledge, skills and general competencies. Mastery of such a system ensures that a candidate from country X with a level 4 education possesses the same skills as another candidate with an equivalent level 4 education from another country. For Ph.D., the learning outcome descriptions are called *research, professional development and general competencies*. This facilitates comparison, alignment, and harmonization within a unified education and research area.

Frølich et al did a large comparative study of European (Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the UK) academic career structures (Frølich et al., 2018). For the use of this thesis, it is worth emphasizing a few main structural elements. Temporary positions are on the rise, most countries have some form of tenure track, and there are increasing numbers of the term `researcher` for academic positions outside the formal ladder. For academic career, there are mainly

¹³ Postgraduate, that is master level and doctoral level

¹⁴ https://ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/Framework_for_qualifications/69/0/EQF-LLL-2008_596690.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.nokut.no/en/norwegian-education/the-norwegian-qualifications-framework-for-lifelong-learning/beskrivelser-av-laringsutbytte-for-nivaene-i-nkr/>

two traditions, the promotion or the competition model. Norway employs mostly a promotion model, where individuals who meet specific criteria in teaching and research can be promoted to higher positions based on performance evaluations.

In Norway, a Ph.D. is an employment position. Ph.D. candidates are typically paid by the university and employment status provides them with benefits such as social security and pension¹⁶ contributions and are also regulated by “statsansatteloven¹⁷”. However, you need to undertake a formalised training through a Ph.D. program which gives you student status in some regards¹⁸. Identifying as a student or an employee have significant impact on how you see career progression. This duality creates some challenges for identity formation, as will be described in the discussion later.

In addition to the student/employee status, it is worth noting what academic tradition that supports the doctoral training. According to Bengtson et al, the Nordic doctorate is rooted in the *Germanic Bildung*-tradition, emphasizing a decentralized and discipline-oriented curriculum. The changing HE landscape has resulted in that the doctorate now faces a “double pull” between formalized, centralized Graduate Schools and project-based academic work, leading to a fragmented curriculum. For Ph.D. programs, this led to a division between investments aligned with the traditional Bildung approach at the rapid pace of contemporary Ph.D. studies. Both Bengtson et al, and Mowbray et al describe this development as driven by the overall political agenda where education and research is viewed as *policy instruments* for other economic and social growth, sustainability and international competitiveness (Bengtsson, 2011; Mowbray & Halse, 2010). The result of these processes is that the doctorate is entrenched with competing definitions of what doctorate is.

Furthermore, attention to the term ‘graduate employability’ in international literature is important. In the UK, for instance, ‘postgraduate’ encompasses both master’s and Ph.D. degrees. According to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), a bachelor’s degree with an additional year (top-up) is classified as level 6, while a master’s degree is level 7. After completing the top-up year, one can commence a Ph.D. program, and if unsuccessful, revert to a completed master’s degree. However, a full Ph.D. is classified at the same EQF level in Norway, which is level 8. In contrast, in Norway, a two-year master’s program is required to qualify for a Ph.D. Nevertheless, literature on postgraduate

¹⁶The EU Talent Pillar has a service called Resaver. This is a pension saving option for mobile (or what can be termed “fly in – fly out” academics <https://www.resaver.eu/>.

¹⁷ <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2017-06-16-67>

¹⁸ Though, you can also be employed by another employer (and get the funding/salary from there) and be accepted to the university Ph.D. program. This model, with external funding or self-funding is much more common in mainland Europe.

education and employability will be utilized in this study, as insights from international research remain relevant to Norwegian Ph.D. candidates.

In continuation of the discussion about changes induced by the Bologna process, Stensaker alleged that the doctoral journey has experienced a concurrent move towards stronger *standardization*. The concept of the *schoolification* of the doctoral journey has become increasingly prevalent. Along with this trend, new expectations for doctoral candidates have emerged, encompassing broader competencies beyond academic expertise. These include interdisciplinary skills and societal relevance. However, the field of academic development is not static, and one could presume that the changes caused by neo-liberal trends or massification of doctoral holders would have an impact on how ESR perceive their career opportunities.

2.3 Current trends and developments in academic careers in Norway

The terms we use to describe post-doctorate careers and their success in the labor market may vary, but there has consistently been a significant share of academics who remain uncertain about their career prospects. In the Norwegian context, Kyvik, S. has been in the forefront of research on academic careers (Kyvik, 2013; Kyvik & Olsen, 2012). As long ago as 1984, Kyvik et al undertook a seminal work on researchers' career in Norway (Kyvik & Voje, 1984). One key ambition was to learn more about recruitment patterns in national academia. The respondents were candidates defined as 'in an academic recruitment position'. Regarding prospects for the future, terms like 'employability' and 'relevance for the labour market'¹⁹ had not yet emerged in the field. Consequently, Kyvik & Voje asked respondents to assess their *job prospects* both within and outside the university sector. The respondents were asked what their primary goal in their current position was: *a) to qualify for permanent faculty position. b) professional development for career outside the university sector, c) other, give examples please*²⁰. Interestingly, as far back as 1984, the recruitment staff expressed significant uncertainty about their future careers. Approximately 50% indicated that an academic career was their primary ambition, while 20% favoured a non-academic path. Notably, Kyvik et al highlight that 16% left the question unanswered, and 11% responded with 'other' (Kyvik & Voje, 1984, p. 58). Among the candidates, 5% evaluated their chances of securing a faculty position as 'good' on a scale that included categories such as 'good, moderately good,' 'poor,' 'don't know,' and 'unanswered.' Meanwhile, 24 % perceived their probability as 'moderately good.' However, a

¹⁹ Arbeidslivsrelevans in Norwegian. The word appeared as an important policy concept in the white paper A Culture for Quality in HE. Sandsdalen has made a solid account of the concept in her master theses, claiming it is a highly contested word among faculty staff: Sandsdalen, G. V. (2024). *Karriere, karriereveiledning og arbeidslivsrelevans i høyere utdanning* Høgskolen Innlandet]. <https://brage.inn.no/inn-xmlui/handle/11250/3139464>

²⁰ My translations: Hva vil De si er Deres primære mål i den stillingen De har nå? A) Kvalifisere Dem for fast ansettelse i universitet- og høyskolesektoren b) Faglig videreutdanning fram mot en yrkeskarriere utenfor universitet- og høyskolesektoren c) annet, spesifiser (p. 58).

significant 56% regarded the likelihood of obtaining a faculty job as 'poor.' Remarkably, Kyvik et al found greater optimism regarding non-academic careers. Approximately 27 % of respondents considered their odds of success in this realm as 'good,' while 34% viewed them as 'moderately good' (Kyvik & Voje, 1984, p. 61). The situation in 1984 also exhibited disciplinary skewness. 77 % in the humanities and 60 % of social scientists viewed universities as their most favourable workplace. In contrast, the corresponding figures for medicine and natural sciences were 60% and 50%, respectively.

In 2012, Kyvik et al published a study on the relevance of doctoral training in different labour markets. Data was now drawn from a mail survey among Norwegian PhD holders across disciplines in 2007 (response rate = 67 % of a target group of 1544 persons). As part of this study, *initial career plans* among the doctors were investigated (Kyvik & Olsen, 2012 :211). In this study, Kyvik et al report that 43 % planned an academic career in a higher education institution, 21 % planned a career in another research institution, 15 % planned career outside the research system, while 21 % had no clear vision of future work. Again, there are variations between the disciplines, humanities rank highest with 75 % wanting academic university work, versus 20 % in technology and natural science. Kyvik et al did not explore the reasons why this significant group showed either openness to or a lack of openness to post-PhD opportunities. However, they found a correlation between candidates with defined future career plans and their actual subsequent occupations. 75 % of respondents who initially planned to pursue a career in academia were employed in the academic sector at the time of the study.

Comparing the 1984 and 2012 cohorts, there appears to be a consistent group of approximately 25% of ESRs who have no clear view of their future occupation. Subsequent research conducted by Reymert, Nesje, and Thune (Reymert et al., 2017) contributes to and enhances the existing knowledge put forth by Kyvik et al. Their report on research training, working conditions, and career expectations for ESR in Norway, has a section on career expectations. Once again, it is the candidates from the humanities who are less optimistic about their career prospects (Reymert et al., 2017). 48 % of the humanities candidates and 61 % of the Social Science candidates have academic career ambitions.

In 2016 the overall researcher population has changed considerably since 2007. The Bologna process and the establishment of the European Research Area has opened national academia to the international community. This is reflected in the study of Reymert et al. The international candidates are less positive to a career in public sector and are also less satisfied with the doctoral training.

Notably, the Reymert et al. publication can be credited with establishing research on the relevance of career guidance for research personnel in Norway. Under the section. 6.4 – *Guidance and networking for career building*²¹ they report on perceived experience with career guidance. (Reymert et al., 2017, p. 72). 8 out of 10 reports having no experience with career guidance, and Reymert et al interpret this as a matter of institutional timing of the guidance. They question whether offering career guidance only towards the end of the contract might explain why so many claims they have not received any guidance. Among the candidates who have received career guidance, 26% are optimistic about their chances of success in their preferred career, compared to only 19% of those who report not having received any guidance. As this is from the 2 out of 10 asked, these numbers are perhaps not convincingly significant.

In 2020, the Education and Research Ministry gave NIFU another assignment. The following report finds that unsecure prospect for permanent position is the most common explanation for why researchers do not work in academia (38,1 %). Poor salary conditions were given as the second reason for why researchers worked outside of academic (34,7%). Without knowing what more alternatives that were given, the list of reasons might be questioned. NIFU investigated career movements after Ph.D. and reported variations between disciplines.

In 2021, NIFU and the editor Ingeborgrud et al, on behalf of The Norwegian Association of Researchers, did an interview study with thirty participants, of whom 18 were early-stage researchers. The title of the report from Ingeborgrud et al is “*A Researcher’s Role in Transition: On Researchers’ Identity, Working Conditions, and the Tension Between Vocation (Calling) and Career*”²². The study was partly a follow up on the white paper “*Quality Culture in Higher Education*” (2016-17)²³ and the consecutive report (Underdal)²⁴ on researcher’s careers. This report identified three problems with academic recruitment. First, excessive use of temporary positions, second the unclear career paths, and third, the absence of a comprehensive policy for researcher education and recruitment, especially for younger researchers (Ingeborgrud et al., 2021).

These reports were crucial for the Government “*Strategy for the recruitment and career development of young researchers*” in 2021. Both the white paper, the Underdal-report and the strategy paved the way for the most recent alteration of Norwegian doctoral education.

²¹ Title of the section in Norwegian_ 6.4 Veiledning og nettverk for karrierebygging. This demonstrates the double use of the word veiledning as guidance and supervision in Norwegian academia.

²² En forskerrolle i endring: Om forskeres identitet, arbeidsvilkår og spenningen mellom kall og Karriere: <https://nifu.brage.unit.no/nifu-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2828371/NIFUrapport2021-21.pdf?sequence=9&isAllowed=y>

²³ <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/meld.-st.-16-20162017/id2536007/>

²⁴ <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/462ebb8a0c444fe2add926eaf6885bde/utvalgsrapport-stillingsstruktur-ved-universiteter-og-hoyskoler.pdf> Ministry translation

In august 2024, the government passed a new regulation that governs the content of the Ph.D. position. In addition to qualifying for academic positions, a Ph.D. “will now also qualify for relevant careers in other sectors of working life where research competence is required” (Universitets- og høyskoleforskriften, 2024)²⁵. Moreover, both Ph.D. candidates and postdocs are granted access to career guidance and are entitled to career development plans²⁶. The traditional “duty work” for Ph.D. candidates has been redefined as “career-relevant activity.” The law, which came into effect on August 1, 2024, includes a one-year implementation period. This newly enacted regulation is currently being interpreted by the higher education sector, with a comprehensive guide to the laws and corresponding framework expected by early 2025. Notwithstanding, the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills has created a framework for Career Guidance for ESR²⁷, that builds on the already existing National Quality Framework for Career Guidance²⁸. As one of the pioneers in the field of career guidance for ESR in Norway, UiB Ferd Career Center for ESR has been involved in the development of the framework. The framework will be presented later under the heading skills frameworks.

2.5 Summary

Doctoral education has undergone harmonisation through European integration policies. However, national variations persist. In Norway, this is influenced by the legacy of social mobility in higher education and the fact that doctoral education is considered paid employment. This chapter provides a brief summary of national and European policies on researcher development. For the ongoing discussion, the crucial point is that while researcher development policies may change, career understanding appears to remain relatively stable over time. The relationship between researcher development and career development will be explored in the next chapter

²⁵ Own translation of: En stipendiatstilling skal føre til oppnådd doktorgrad og bidra til at den ansatte kvalifiserer seg for relevante karrierer ved høyere utdannings- og forskningsinstitusjoner og andre sektorer i arbeidslivet der forskningskompetanse kreves.

²⁶ Det skal utarbeides en karriereplan som spesifiserer den kompetansen som stipendiaten skal opparbeide seg

²⁷ Only in Norwegian: <https://hkdir.no/karriereveiledning-og-utdanningsvalg/rammeverk-for-karriereveiledning-for-forskere-i-tidlig-karrierefase>

²⁸ <https://hkdir.no/kvalitet-i-karriereveiledning>

Chapter 3 Theoretical Perspectives

3.1 Introduction

The abundance of literature discussing the development of the Research and Development (R&D) landscape worldwide, but especially in Europe, is almost overwhelming. There are numerous international policy stakeholders and a whole branch of disciplines focusing on various cause and effects of decades of change in the Higher Education (HE) setting. Given that research is closely related to education and qualification, the concept of development can encompass various aspects, including pedagogy (Blaj-Ward, 2011), growth (Åkerlind, 2005), bildung (Bengtsson, 2011), transformation to becoming (Callary et al., 2012; Clark & Zukas, 2013; El-Sawad, 2005; Habibie, 2022; Halse, 2011; Mantai, 2019; Maritz & Prinsloo, 2015), all crossing into the realm of career development. However, research and especially researcher development has mostly focussed on talent cultivation for academic careers. Given the fact that only a minority of doctoral candidates choose and succeed in academic careers at academic institutions, policymakers have intensified skills training and career guidance. However, the literature on career guidance for researchers does not appear to have significantly influenced the researcher development literature.

This chapter will give an account of how the literature review has been performed. Then, the chapter will discuss some of the selected publications addressing researcher development. The chapter sets out to address how career development theory can play an important role in supporting the issue of employability for SSH doctoral candidates.

3.2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

A literature review is often the starting point for understanding a topic. As this study has an inductive approach and an exploratory research question, literature search was a natural place to start (Ferrari, 2015). A narrative review is useful for exploring the variation in scope and interpretation of a phenomenon, and for understanding the current state of the art (Sukhera, 2022). Sukhera suggests this approach suits an interpretivist study, where reality is subjective and dynamic.

The narrative review involves rephrasing key terms and applying specific filters, such as limiting the search to Ph.D.-level research, excluding studies about students. Additionally, the search variant included substituting 'career readiness' with 'employability' and conducting comprehensive searches across multiple databases. I have been inspired by *meta-narrative review* as it seeks to explore and understand contradictions and tensions within literature (Sukhera, 2022). A meta-narrative review maps multiple understandings of a topic. The words used in various combination with ESR, are

already established terms in career literature, like identity, employability, career readiness and transferability. For the first searches, I primarily used the Boolean operators AND/OR²⁹. Concurrently, literature reviews illustrate the evolution of various fields. A Web of Science search for “Employability AND PhD” found 99 results, rising from 1 in 1996 to 18 in 2023, highlighting a recent and swift increase in attention to Ph.D. employability. Use of reference lists can be used to *identify additional, potentially relevant material* (Horsley et al., 2009). Using Norwegian database such as Oria and Bibsys demonstrated that both the field of researcher development and career are currently developing fields. Using the Norwegian word for researcher `forsker` and career `karriere` returned 55 publications, the most relevant discussing social background and gender, and only two articles can be said to represent the field of career development³⁰. However, four publications were shortlisted as relevant, both being NIFU products (Ingeborgrud et al., 2021; Olsen, 2007). Using the reference list in the most relevant publications from Norway and then use the snowball method proved to be an efficient strategy, as the number of journals in Norway are limited. Using Norwegian literature reduces reproducibility due to language barriers. However, accessing Norwegian knowledge is crucial for this Norwegian case.

The already mention report by Ingeborgrud et al, included a systematic review of research literature for their report on researchers’ careers (Ingeborgrud et al., 2021). They focused on six selected journals: Higher Education, Studies in Higher Education, Research Policy, Higher Education Policy, Tertiary Education and Management, and Minerva. Ingeborgrud et al claim these journals are internationally leading in the study of academic professions and research. Further, they focused on publications from the last ten years, from 2010 to 2020, and limited the literature to mostly European countries. Ingeborgrud et al found a total of 19 categories of literature, however, they can be further limited to four overall groups; ten of their categories can be labelled dimensions of being a researcher, two categories are concentrated on mobility, two on gender and family and only the last five categories focus on academic identity. This is of interest for this thesis, as it understands academic careers and identity as a research gap in the literature.

Again, looking at the national context, only 10 out of the 109 listed titles are from Norway, and only 3 of the 10 most relevant titles have Norwegian authors. While the analytical perspective of Ingeborgrud et al has been helpful, it only partially aligns with the research focus of this thesis. For instance, Ingeborgrud et al selected their material exclusively from what this thesis describes as

²⁹ In the research question, ‘ESR’ is the subject, ‘think, feel, and reflect’ serves as the verb, and ‘employability’ as the object. A search for the terms from the research question that omits the verb, searching for ‘Ph.D.’ AND Employability²⁹ reduced the numbers of articles to the half – 109, with half of them from education studies.

³⁰ https://bibsyst-almaprimo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/search?query=any,contains,forskere%20%2B%20karriere&tab=default_tab&search_scope=default_scope&vid=UBB&offset=25

'researcher development literature.' The search was then broadened to include a wider range of career-related keywords.

Master's theses may not have the same estimation as professional research. However, career guidance as a discipline in Norway is relatively new, with limited research available. Master's studies addressing small research gaps can pave the way for further research. Notable work includes Sandsdalen's study on career guidance and faculty reluctance towards the concept of employability³¹ in higher education (*Sandsdalen, 2024*), Dyrop's research on how career counseling affects students' employability (Dyrop, 2019), and Jynge's work on practice-based learning and career competence development in HE (Jynge, 2021)

3.2.1 A myriad of concepts

Regarding replication for reliability, the concept of ESR in the research question is complex. ESR can refer to Ph.D. candidates, doctoral students, postgraduates, early-stage researchers (ESR), early career academics (ECA), or early-career researchers (ECR). Some literature includes postdoctoral candidates, sometimes labeled as tenure-track faculty. This study uses 'early-stage researchers' (ESR) even if this study only includes doctoral candidates in the SSH disciplines. This choice balances the terminology used in the literature with the decision to reduce potential variables. Despite varied titles, the early academic career experiences, marked by temporary contracts and intense competition, are comparable. Using these varied concepts was necessary for a comprehensive literature overview.

As a term for academics being in training for a career, the most generic search terms for this thesis were "career development" AND "researchers. In Web of Science this returned 6763 results^{32,33}. Most results are from health and occupational health (1016) closely followed by educational research (908). Biomedicine alone reported 185 contributions, this correlates with the statistics that biomedicine (life science related) employs the most people and has multiple career paths. The second most cited article in this search is the widely read work by Mowbray and Halse, with Halse being a prominent researcher in the fields of researcher development and Ph.D. supervision (Mowbray & Halse, 2010). However, changing the search term from 'career development' to 'career

³¹ As have mentioned, the term "arbeidslivsrelevans" is her key concept.

³² <https://www.webofscience.com/wos/woscc/summary/d1617279-8d00-49e6-935e-5346e773a02b-013147f737/relevance/1>

³³ A search for the words 'career development + researchers' (across all fields) on the Web of Science reveals remarkable growth in publications over the last 30 years. During the 1990s, there were fewer than 15 reported articles per year. However, by 2013, the number had increased to nearly 200, and in the early 2020s, there was an impressive surge to 787 articles in 2021 and 2022.

guidance`, but together with `researchers`, the return rate drops to 544³⁴. General medicine and health care yield 79 findings, psychology produces 39, while education returns 8. When sorted for relevance, the *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* tops the chart with a 2022 publication by Dodds et al, which mentions `career` twice in one heading³⁵ (Dodd et al., 2022). Very few of the cross-references, however, included ESR³⁶. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*³⁷ is indexed under Psychology. The relatively new Journal *Nordic Journal of Transitions, Careers and Guidance*, indexed as Level 1, and categorized under Pedagogic and Education in the Norwegian Channel Registry³⁸. Replacing the search word `researcher` to `Ph.D.` instead (with career guidance AND), Web of Science returns 229 publications³⁹. None of the first top 40 articles are from career or guidance related journals. The top 60 are from education, occupational health and nursing (61). Guidance is a relatively new field of study in Norway and especially the combination of researcher development (Meld.St. 2016:7) This supports the identified research gap, the lack of integration between the disciplines of researcher development and career guidance.

3.3 The relationship between researcher development and career development

One of the first journals addressing researcher development, was *Higher Education Research and Development*⁴⁰ launched in 1982 covering Australasia region. The journal *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education* was initially also a journal for researcher development but got its current focus and new name in 2008⁴¹. It now covers postgraduate development and career transitions. One of the most cited authors in the journal, Sutherland, acknowledges the difficulty in defining researcher development (Sutherland, 2017). However, Evans noted in 2011 that the journal's launch marked the recognition of researcher development as a new field. Evans argues that doctoral education and academic practice overlap with researcher development, exploring how researchers can be developed and what it entails (Evans, 2011).

Lynn McAlpine, one of the key theorists in this thesis has also published in this journal (McAlpine et al., 2013; McAlpine, Gibson, & Bengtson, 2024), however, the main journal for McAlpine's contribution has been in general higher education Journals like *Studies in Higher Education*

³⁴ <https://www.webofscience.com/wos/woscc/summary/5f4a08d0-e314-4514-8b67-55cf0e2858d6-0131480e59/relevance/1>

³⁵ Titled "*Increasing students' career readiness through career guidance: measuring the impact with a validated measure,*"

³⁶ The journal itself has an impact factor of 1.0 (0,9 without self-citations), but that has not been a requirement for the search or use of literature in this thesis.

³⁷ <https://kanalregister.hkdir.no/tidsskrift?id=438648>

³⁸ <https://kanalregister.hkdir.no/tidsskrift?id=500422>

³⁹ <https://www.webofscience.com/wos/woscc/summary/a28f82e6-939c-4699-a597-c91b91ca5e61-0131482961/relevance/1>

⁴⁰ [Learn about Higher Education Research & Development](#)

⁴¹ <https://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/journal/sgpe>, initially titled *International Journal for Researcher Development*, and renamed in 2008

(McAlpine et al., 2020; McAlpine & Emmioğlu, 2015; McAlpine et al., 2021) Higher Education Research and development (McAlpine & Inouye, 2022; McAlpine & Norton, 2006) and also in Journals covering higher education and continuing and further education (McAlpine & McKinnon, 2013; McAlpine & Turner, 2012). McAlpine has studied various angles of researcher development. One of the first articles about researcher development written by McAlpine, was the 2009 article together with Amundsen, Clement and Light (McAlpine et al., 2009). Here, even if the focus is on pedagogy and learning, they start the quest for questioning existing epistemological understandings of academic learning, and hence development.

3.3.1 Academic supervision as part of researcher development

For the third research question in the interview guide, about how their training and support may prepare them for the future, it was discovered that supervision needed to be addressed. This is also highlighted as one of the key factors for both completion and wellbeing in Ph.D. career (Amundsen & McAlpine, 2009; Bastalich, 2017; Deuchar, 2008; Halse, 2011; Jara, 2021; Kiley, 2011; Manathunga *, 2005; McAlpine & McKinnon, 2013; McCallin & Nayar, 2012), what kind of support (Cornér et al., 2024), how to become an academic supervisor (Maritz & Prinsloo, 2015) and supervision training (Halse, 2011; Kiley, 2011; Lee, 2018). According to Skakni et al, while the supervisory relationship has evolved, particularly towards joint supervision, the master-apprentice model remains a longstanding tradition in some fields (Skakni, 2018). This is especially true in the SSH disciplines where students are often expected to work 'autonomously' and mostly alone (Guerin, 2019; Nästesjö, 2021).

McAlpine et al describe the role of the supervisor as the most variable of variables (McAlpine & McKinnon, 2013) and the master-apprentice relation is a distinct feature of academic training itself and is of great importance for the career development of ESR. According to Clement et al, the success of aspiring faculty relies on *willingness, availability, and knowledge of one faculty member at each training level (graduate and postdoctoral) to serve as a mentor for aspiring (Mackinnon, 2004)*. When discussing supervision, we often distinguish between emotional, scientific and career support. It is also important to be aware of what one can ask from supervisors, as they also have limited training (Lee, 2018).

Mackinnon, borrowing a term from the legal and financial field, 'fiduciary' means both parties share the responsibility based on trust, but the academic (supervisor) has a special obligation to '*act on the candidate's best interest*' (Mackinnon, 2004). Supervision will be discussed as mainly having two roles, gatekeeper or mentor (in the sense of door opener).

3.4 Identity connects researcher development and career

In the 2018 review paper in the *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* Vol 13, Sverdlik and McAlpine et al agrees that most empirical efforts have been focused on understanding the developmental and structural aspects of the doctoral experience, while largely overlooking candidates' personal lives and well-being (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Professional identity drives professional behaviour, according to Larsen et al (Larsen et al 2023). This is why understanding identity, as career identity - is important. For the current day ESR, it is not enough to envision an academic career, making career identity formation a complex matter. According to Larsen, current ESRs are expected to *"be multi-skilled, flexible, innovative and entrepreneurial, responsible for developing their own career and a talented collaborator and capable of interdisciplinary research mobility"* (Larsen & Brandenburg, 2023, p. 1072). This applies to all vocation types, however, for ESRs there is a strong contrast between investment in education on one side and ongoing uncertainty on the other. Researcher developers urge educators and candidates to invest in becoming academics as part of their identity, however, the reward is blurry and elusive (Callary et al., 2012; Mantai, 2019; Maritz & Prinsloo, 2015)

Tracing the intersection between researcher development and career development in McAlpine's work, it was in their 2013 (initially prepared already in 2009) publication that McAlpine et al introduced the concept of *identity-trajectory*. McAlpine et al report how their work *"has cumulatively articulated a conceptualization of identity, what we term identity-trajectory, in which the influence of individual agency and personal lives is central to decisions related to investment in academic work and careers"* (McAlpine et al., 2013, p. 953). One of their targets was to address the problem of non-completion but later changed it to focus on *"learning to do academic work"*. The correlation between individual agency, investment and decisions, can be taken straight from a career development book.

McAlpine et al build on Geijssel and Meijers' 2005 work, which discusses how career guidance can empower clients to take charge of their careers through identity construction, viewed as a circular learning process involving boundary crossing (Geijssel & Meijers, 2005). Boundary experiences, according to Geijssel et al, happens *"when a person, trying to participate more fully in a social practice, encounters a situation in which one is unable to function adequately because one cannot fully identify with the new situation and its exigencies"* (Geijssel & Meijers, 2005, pp. 424-427).

Returning to McAlpine et al, they claim that the notion of agency is useful as most ESR are engaged in developing independence as researchers. They emphasize the structure/agent divide, particularly as individual career choices must align personal desires with broader structural contexts. They describe this merger as the need for a realistic view of the life course to reconcile competing intentions,

including personal adjustments to adapt to changing circumstances (McAlpine et al., 2014) p 959. McAlpine et al continue to discuss timing of discovering *opportunity structure* and the *horizon for action* (1960). McAlpine et al refer to Hodkinson in a footnote and the adjustment and adapting to circumstances and the horizon for action is in essence Hodkinson and Gottfredson's thoughts. Gottfredson, in her seminal work on career circumscription, claimed that: "*Vocational choice begins as a process of circumscription, of eliminating occupational alternatives that conflict with self-concept...Most such circumscription occurs without their knowing, or wondering much about, what workers actually do in the jobs they so peremptorily reject* (Gottfredson, 2005, p. 77). Gottfredson connected the individual development perspective with context and structure.

However, the concept of identity-trajectory has become closely associated with McAlpine & Amundsen and remains a significant part of their legacy. The book from 2017, *Identity-Trajectories of Early-Career Researchers* (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2017) they focus on the post-PhD experience (defined here as Ph.D. graduates who have research as their principal responsibility in a university). The definition of Identity trajectory, as they explain, is a preference for privileging agency while attending to structure, with interest in motivation, agency and intentionality (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2017, p. 20) and enables a unique way of examining *career decision-making and development* (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2017, p. 27). The work by McAlpine et al. is converging on career theories and can be seen as an early intersection between the realms of researcher development and career development. However, still, the cross over to career theory is only partly established, as they do not include non-academic post-Phd careers.

3.5.1 Career Decision-making

One important theme emerging from the studies discussed so far is how ESR makes sense of who they are and how they navigate the field. Career theory is about sense-making according to Law, in his article from 2002 titled "*How does careers really work*"? This ambitious work consists of nine career stories reflecting nine dimensions of sense-making, including emotions, relations, belief systems, time, psychological development, purpose, surviving and action. These dimensions are part of what creates *career action, or what people do*(Law, 2002, p. 19). Adding such complexity to career theory makes us move beyond fallacies of plain matching and (skills) fit. This is closely linked to what Bandura describes as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). When describing behavioral change, Bandura claims that people "*process and synthesize feedback... from sequences of events over long intervals about the situational circumstances and the patterns and rates of action that are necessary to produce outcomes*" (Bandura, 1977, p. 192).

Lent et al, referring to the original formulation of Bandura (Bandura, 1977), describe self-efficacy as “*beliefs about one’s own ability to successfully perform a given behavior*” (Lent & Hackett, 1987). Returning to Bandura’s original text from 1977, self-efficacy⁴² is how individuals can generate action based on cognitive representations of future outcome and influence their behavior to fulfil self-evaluated and perceived standards. Dissonance between performance and standards creates dissatisfaction that again motivates corrective changes in.

Bandura points out that believing in your own abilities affects how you start and keep up with coping behaviors. If people are confident in their effectiveness, they are more likely to try to handle a situation {Bandura, 1977 #520@193. In other words, self-efficacy may produce generalizable skills enabling future coping strategies.

The foundation of this thesis can be said to build on the paradigm that includes theorist like Krumboltz and social learning and Brown & Lent’s social cognition theories {Lent, 1994 #633}. *Studying thoughts and ideas* gives value and belief to individuals inherent dispositions as important for understanding agency and that these resources can be activated to ready themselves for the next step based on self-concepts. However, the developmental paradigm, according to Savickas, was also shaken by an earthquake. Ulrich Beck’s seminal work “the Risk Society” from 1992 (Beck & Ritter, 1992) describes how the then *new* modernity changed the risks of society collective institutions to the self, and by that individualizing global risks as environmental crisis, but also individual success and failure. Savickas cites a later work by Beck on individualization to demonstrate that the responsibility for *career* now shifted from *institutions to individuals* ((Savickas, 2015, p. 136).

Globalization has among many, one recognizable face, that of individualization. The field of career counselling in the 1980s onward becomes a scene for retrospective reflection and prospective 4reflexivity – in which Savickas distinguish as reflection is *considering what happened whereas reflexivity means examining a situation before acting* (Savickas, 2015, p. 136).

It has been several years since Hodkinson and Sparks published their seminal article on career decision making. Nevertheless, the article from 1997 on *careership* remains relevant. According to Hodkinson et al, the implicit discourse of rational choice that existed in HE, and still prevails today, needed to be examined. It was assumed that candidates opted for sector mobility after a rational evaluation of academic opportunities, finding other sectors more appealing, and assessing their skills to determine the best fit. However, Hodkinson et al, in their closing remark, they established their understanding of careership that incorporates other rationalities;” *everything takes place within a macro-context (field) where interactions, power struggles, alliances and negotiations unfold, where*

⁴² In Norwegian, self-efficacy is translated into *mestringstro*.

the rules of the game are determined by those interactions together within the formal regulations. Within a field, people make pragmatically rational decisions within their culturally derived horizon for action at turning-points" (cited 1331 times according to Google Scholar, including McAlpine et al who picks up on the trajectory term and horizon for action Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 41; Mantai, 2019; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2018; McAlpine & Turner, 2012; Sultana, 2014; Tomlinson, 2012).

Lately, researcher development theorists like McAlpine et al sees the concept of «`horizon for action` useful for highlighting the multitude of options across time according to an individual's intentions (McAlpine & Turner, 2012, p. 543). These horizons shape and limit the choices individuals perceive as available and appropriate. The concept of "the dialectic of constraint" explains how these horizons both enable and restrict decision-making, as Hodkinson et al describe it (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 35). All three concepts, fit, horizon for action and careership are important for understanding, not only the interviewees understanding of future career prospects, but also their current satisfaction. Ryan et al tries to identify predictors for staying or leaving academia. Using a large multivariate design, they included two other factors, "fit" and "support". According to Ryan and the team "fit" is defined with the words "feel" and "values"⁴³, abstract concept related to identity formation rather than skills matrix or framework.

Career decisions must be understood in terms of the life histories wherein identity has evolved, according to Hodkinson, or situated as Bourdieu (and other constructivists claim). There is nothing "outside" or clean from history and context. One can read Hodkinson et al to use Bourdieu's *habitus* to describe that *rationality* itself is contextual just as any other social practice. Embodied dispositions, or embodied knowledge as Bourdieu puts it, is the connection between actor and structure and becomes scripts for perception of the self and the world (Bourdieu, 1999; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). This is where the `horizon for action` comes in and makes change possible and learning a natural part of being human. Hodkinson & Sparks describe these as *turning points*, which occur when habitus interacts with opportunity structures in refined and modified ways based on different acquired schemas or learning.

These points in development occur when an individual has to take stock, to re-evaluate, revise, resee and rejudge (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 39). Others call them life-changing learning events, or `biographical discontinuity`. Horizons for actions are segmented, and what is not considered appropriate, is prone to non-decisions. Non-decisions are perhaps circumscriptions, in Gottfredson's terms (Gottfredson, 2002)?

⁴³ Likerst scale from strongly agree to disagree strongly: Feel good about direction of your life, Feel work adds meaning to your life, Have alignment between work/personal values

Hodkinson et al regards decision making as *enhanced pragmatic rationality*, which might be regarded as a pleonasm, since both enhanced, and pragmatic imply something original or basic. The situatedness of habitus rationality does not make decision making appropriate because the standard it is compared to its relative. The concept of enhanced pragmatic rationality does not have additional explanatory force to understand early career academics' perception of employability. However, Bourdieu's other concepts, capital and field, describe how value is determined in a specific setting (game), where the power of definition and accumulation dictates who wins and losses.

To overcome the divide between agent and structure that often trouble the guidance field, Guindon et al is inspired by an existentialist understanding of career theory. The authors use the term *synchronicity*, a concept introduced by Carl Jung that refers to the occurrence of events that are *meaningfully related but not causally connected*. With a Jungian understanding of the connection between the inner self and the outside world, synchronicity is what connects and gives meaning. They assert that "*career development across the life span is no less than a search for meaning*" (Guindon & Hanna, 2002, p. 196), giving career a fundamental place as a core essence of meaning of life itself. These authors claim that synchronicity is what Krumboltz (Krumboltz, 2008) term 'happenstance' and Bandura call 'change events' (Guindon & Hanna, 2002, p. 199). Mitchell et al, discuss the role of chance in their seminal paper from 1999, "Planned Happenstance: Constructing Unexpected Career Opportunities" (Mitchell et al., 1999).

This thesis builds on Krumboltz expansion of the social learning theory of career decision making, called 'planned happenstance' where individuals capitalize on all kinds of events to maximise their learning and potential (Mitchell et al., 1999, p. 117). Where Guindon et al can be said to represent an understanding of chance as fate, Krumboltz might be more in line with Inkson and Arthur explaining how career capital can be accumulated into capital and become career capitalists (Inkson & Arthur, 2001).

The study of Hollywood et al explore early career academic (ECA) and the transition into the academic sector. Hollywood et al can be said to serve the same purpose as Guindon et al in the search for finding oneself in authenticity and context. The title '*Overwhelmed at First*' underscores the main findings on how ECAs navigate the challenges of developing an academic identity. The study examines the interplay between intrapersonal dimensions and situational factors on 'imagined future' and their impact on wellbeing outcomes. Their study concludes that perceptions of career development vary based on either structural factors or intrapersonal characteristics. *Structural and institutional* factors, as respect from colleagues, quality relationships, and departmental friendliness, positively impact 'imagined future' happiness but not promotion likelihood or intentions to stay in

academia. On the other hand, likelihood of promotion and staying in the profession are tied to *intrapersonal* factors. Success in research, not teaching, influences promotion and career satisfaction (Hollywood et al., 2020, p. 1007). The same with engaging in teaching, it can be positive for wellbeing and happiness, but not necessarily for career development.

The Danish authors Rasmussen et al. interviewed PhD alumni and categorized them into three career groups: university (60%), mixed (26%), and public sector (4%). The interviews, reflecting on early-career strategies, revealed that employability is influenced by both individualist and structuralist orientations (Rasmussen & Andreasen, 2023). According to Rasmussen et al, the notion of employability has a discursive purpose to govern how the process of obtaining employability needs to be understood (Rasmussen & Andreasen, 2023). The objective of Rasmussen et al is to challenge this discursive frame by reanalyzing narratives from Ph.D. themselves to see if their stories align or differ from the broader policy around demand of being *employable*.

This is supported in a study by Matthews et al (Matthews et al., 2014) with the long title: *Early career academic perceptions, attitudes and professional development activities: questioning the teaching and research gap to further academic development*. Matthews et al draws attention to the tension between disciplinary culture and centralized Academic Development Units in shaping early career academics beliefs and attitudes toward teaching, as well as their identity formation as academics. The argument is that `a true scholar` paradigm prevails, as also demonstrated by Nästesjö (Nästesjö, 2021) in the study of SSH candidates and Quigly who aims to provide early career academics with practical tools for active self-reflection, fostering positive changes towards teaching or research.

3.4.1 What about skills?

While the thesis has explored researcher development, identity, and agency, it is also crucial to address the necessary skills for employment. What skills do doctoral training produce? Academic skills seem to be a disciplinary field of its own, especially the field of transversal skills (Jääskelä et al., 2018; Marginson, 1994; Mowbray & Halse, 2010; Nowell et al., 2021; Nägele & Stalder, 2017; OECD, 2012; Sgobbi & Suleman, 2015; Ulrich & Dash, 2013; Weber et al., 2018). These skills are not connected to their discipline specific skills; however, they are reconned as the skills you acquire through researcher development in general. Standardisation and schoolification of doctoral training have made it easier to define and systematise various (generic) skills, also according across levels.

The Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF)⁴⁴, established in 2011, is a pivotal framework for researcher career competencies. It assists UK researchers in evaluating and planning their

⁴⁴ <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers>

professional development. Over the years, it has significantly expanded its scope and tools, attracting users worldwide. Although it is a non-profit program under CRAC Ltd⁴⁵, access to premium content requires institutional membership, which includes guidance on utilizing the development tools. This framework has set a benchmark for subsequent skills development initiatives. In contrast, the *Prosper Framework*⁴⁶ offers career development tools for postdoctoral candidates in the UK and is available for free, serving as an alternative to Vitae.

Assessments of these frameworks reveal mixed outcomes. Bray et al. (2011) found Vitae to offer a balanced approach, combining self-assessment with an objective scale. However, Nowell et al. (2021) criticized it for its limited value in sector mobility, being more suited for academic careers (Bray & Boon, 2011; Nowell et al., 2021{Schäfer, 2022 #848}). The European Research Area (ERA)⁴⁷ Framework profiles different academic career stages (R1-R4) and aligns with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (See section 2.2.1 for EQF). It is designed to be sector-neutral, applicable to researchers in both public and private sectors. However, a common challenge with these frameworks is the assumption that merely presenting the skills will lead to their acquisition. Transparency in the hiring process is crucial for faculty success, as highlighted by Clements et al., who found that institutional, disciplinary, and professional dependencies play a significant role in evaluating academic fit. These assessments are often subjective and qualitative (Clement et al., 2020). Evans discusses whether researcher skills frameworks develop academics into professionals. She argues that Vitae's work only partially addresses this question, emphasizing that professionalism describes how individuals conduct themselves in a work context, regardless of whether their actions are commendable or reprehensible. This brings into focus the importance of identity, values, and practice for employability (Evans, 2024).

The latest development in EU skills frameworks is intertwined with an international movement against the reliance on quantitative publication metrics and advocating for the Open Access initiative. The Norwegian Career Assessment Matrix (Nor-Cam)⁴⁸ is a competence framework designed to broaden the recognition of academic achievements. However, there remains a question of whether creating a skills framework is truly equivalent to changing the culture in hiring and funding practices. As a follow-up on the regulation of ESR careers in Norway⁴⁹, the government has recently released their framework on how the legislative requirements for guidance are to be

⁴⁵ Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC) Ltd

⁴⁶ <https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/>

⁴⁷ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/7da29338-37bf-4d51-b5eb-a1571b84c7ad_en?filename=ec_rtd_research-competence-presentation.pdf

⁴⁸ <https://www.uhr.no/en/f/p3/i86e9ec84-3b3d-48ce-8167-bbae0f507ce8/nor-cam-a-tool-box-for-assessment-and-rewards.pdf>

⁴⁹ https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2024-06-28-1392/KAPITTEL_3-1#%C2%A73-1

implemented⁵⁰. This framework has been developed by the Directorate responsible for the national quality framework for career guidance in Norway, HKDir. The question in this thesis is if this framework represents a new form for researcher development and career guidance?

3.4.2 Employability

Traditionally, choosing the academic trajectory was based on a long-term joint commitment to academia and research. In today's boundaryless, protean (Arthur, 2008) and portfolio-based (Tomlinson, 2017) career landscape, the traditional long-term, hierarchical academic career has evolved into a temporary, insecure, competitive, rapidly changing, and low-commitment working life (Savickas, 1993). To address these challenges, employability is viewed as a solution, enhancing candidates' ability to secure employment beyond academia. As Sandsdalen show in her master thesis, employability, or "arbeidslivsrelevans" is not met without contradictions in Norwegian HE (Sandsdalen, 2024 #645).

Employability and `ansettbarhet` is a highly contested concept in Norway HEI⁵¹. According to McQuaid et al, already from the beginning of the 1990, the OECD with special focus on the people outside the work force, the OECD set out to: "*enhance the effectiveness of active labour market policies and lifelong learning to maintain employability*" (McQuaid et al., 2005, p. 199). Similarly, Holmes et al in their influential work, also place `employability` within the perspective of neoliberal commodification of education paradigm from the last twenty years. Holmes et al claim that funders and government impose this paradigm on educators and demand graduate candidates to be "work-ready" as the government now want to see "value for money" (Holmes, 2017). HEIs respond to this movement in various ways, often based on the three strategies: exit, voice, or loyalty (from the influential work of Hirschman) (Hirschman, 1980). Sandsdalen show that Norwegian universities reluctantly has accepted some elements of employability to ease the transition between education and labour marked for students. However, for ESRs, the new legislation will probably have an impact. Internationally, the debate is more established. In a literature review article, based on twenty articles targeting doctoral employability, Young et al allege that traditional doctoral programs are outdated and there is a for need soft skill development during the doctoral program. Young et al argue for a balance between specialized Ph.D. knowledge and practical knowledge for industry and classrooms

⁵⁰ <https://hkdir.no/karriereveiledning-og-utdanningsvalg/rammeverk-for-karriereveiledning-for-forskere-i-tidlig-karrierfase>

⁵¹ Employability, translated as "ansettbar" in Norwegian, simply means "being employable." Another term, "arbeidslivsrelevans," has gained popularity in policy discussions since the mid-2000s and is often used in the context of education-to-labor market transitions. The term "ansettbar" combines "Ansett" (hire/employ) with the suffix "bar," which forms adjectives indicating capability, similar to the German "beschäftigungsfähig." This concept emphasizes the alignment between the demands of the working world and an individual's competencies, health, and work ability.

and lastly that embedding research in industry helps students make informed career decisions (Young et al., 2020).

Others recommend an even stronger commitment to employability. One example is Ashonibare, who argue for universities to adapt their curricula to meet industry requirements and support innovative teaching. Additionally, private enterprises must continue training doctoral graduates, as not all skills can be developed within the university setting (Ashonibare, 2022). The rationale behind this a view can be interpreted as rational choice, instrumental understanding of the problem of doctoral employment outside academia. Ashonibare comes to this conclusion as a response to analysing European policy documents where *doctoral training contributes toward achieving a competitive knowledge economy* (Ashonibare, 2022, p. 165).

3.4.3 Transferability

Transferability as a concept has also caught the attention of policy makers and leaders in HE. The literature concerned about how institutions and graduates can re-label and apply their academic skills in the industry is considerable (Bridges, 1993; Marginson, 1994; Nägele & Stalder, 2017; OECD, 2012; Sgobbi & Suleman, 2015; Suleman, 2021; van der Weijden et al., 2016; Weber et al., 2018). The authors point to how this is based on a universalist view of competence as something outside context, disregarding other e.g. sociological interpretations where skills also can be social capital.

Engeström and Tuomi-Gröhn⁵², A11⁵³, discuss whether knowledge can be transferred at all, given that knowledge cannot be decontextualized (Engeström & Tuomi-Gröhn, 2003). They get support from Hager and Hodkinson who question the metaphor of `transfer` all together (Hager & Hodkinson, 2009). They argue that educational policy continues to make simplistic assumptions about learning, both as transfer and acquisition. They argue that the propositional learning lens, which encompasses most of today's standard learning theories, is closely linked to both transfer and acquisition. In this view, the mind is seen as a container, with knowledge being moved into it like items into a filing cabinet. Learning then is the accumulation of products and leaving the process out of the equation. Hager and Hodkinson argue further that there are three underlying assumptions, the first is that what is learned is a product independent of the learner. Second, learning involves, literally, movement from place to place, as from a teacher to a learner. Third, the context where this learning movement happens has no relevance. The skills learning lens is similar to the propositional,

⁵² the editors of an anthology based on the Working Group of Cost Action

⁵³ "Flexibility, Transferability, Mobility as targets of Vocational Education and Training" with the subtitle 'New Perspectives on Transfer and Boundary-Crossing.'

however the main critique is that skills in this lens are independent of both learner, place and context as *generic skills*.

Hager and Hodkinson offer a third lens to highlight the faultiness of the transfer metaphor, the learning through participation lens. Using vocational training as an example situation, where the learning is through activities, and the level of attainment is demonstrated in formal descriptions like “second year apprentice” or other level of acceptance within the community (Hager & Hodkinson, 2009, p. 626). To highlight the relevance for this thesis, academia is intrinsically construed as *learning through participation* and the level of accomplishment is rigid. A postdoctoral position follows a Ph.D. and then you advance as you acquire more skills and achievements, from novice to full participant. Notwithstanding, the master-apprentice relation between supervisor and candidate demonstrates to the point such an understanding (Engeström & Tuomi-Gröhn, 2003).

Hager and Hodkinson see *learning as becoming within a transitional process of boundary crossing* (Hager & Hodkinson, 2009, p. 635). Acknowledging the work of Tuomi-Grøn and Engstrøm⁵⁴. They argue that the debate around transfer or generalizability should focus on learning rather than knowledge. A person is not merely a vessel of knowledge, but rather an individual whose social and embodied self encompasses skills, knowledge, and understanding. Learning is a relational verb, transactional in nature and changes both the learner and the context.

3.5 Summary

It can be alleged that career theory differs from theories of researcher development mainly in two aspects. First, while researcher development theories, such as those exemplified by McAlpine, focus on the process of becoming academics, skills descriptions and academic identity, career theories predominantly emphasise identity transitions. Researcher development theory often evaluates the adequacy of practices in fostering young talent and highlights areas for improvement (Callary et al., 2012; Clark & Zukas, 2013; Mantai, 2019; McAlpine & Amundsen, 2017). This is highly relevant for career theories, nevertheless without unlocking the full potential of the pedagogy of career management skills. Other researcher development theorists, however, have explored how researcher skills are under-communicated to candidates seeking to change their career trajectories (Galimberti, 2023; Germain-Alamartine et al., 2021; Healy et al., 2022) thereby providing a solid foundation for discussing both skills and the concept of knowledge transfer in career theory terms. Career theorist can build on this knowledge then add to it how this can be a basis for the subsequent

⁵⁴ Hager and Hodkinson, they draw insights from a theoretical span from Dewey to Bourdieu, however the main theoretical new input comes from Tuomi-Grøn & Engstrøms work on transfer.

career endeavours. Nevertheless, comprehending the developmental journey of ESRs and the career identities they cultivate can potentially provide valuable analytical insights into their employability. This thesis posits that integrating these disciplinary perspectives on individuals entering academia as Ph.D. candidates can generate valuable insights. Such knowledge could enhance the support provided to these talents, potentially before, during, and after their doctoral training.

Chapter 4 Research methodology and Design

4.1 Introduction

This chapter delve into the methodological foundations that underpin this study. The study is a qualitative and interpretive approach that aligns well with an inductive research question. The methodology combines reflexive thematic analysis with Thompson's abductive thematic analysis. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted and processed through the eight-step process outlined by Braun & Clarke and Thompson. The chapter concludes with a discussion on ethical considerations, validity, and reliability. By exploring these perspectives, the hope is to offer insights into the complex interplay of factors that influence ESRs' career reflections. This chapter aims to lay the groundwork for a thorough analysis of the data collected, serving as a basis for the subsequent findings and discussions

4.2 Research Paradigms and philosophy of science

Understanding the difference between ontology and epistemology is crucial, as these philosophical foundations influence our research approach and methodology. Ontology clarifies what we are investigating, while epistemology guides us on how to study it and what knowledge we can derive from it. There are two common ways to describe how a study is linked to a specific philosophical understanding or paradigm. The first is by explaining how the *research question* determines the realm in which the study resides. The second is through *researcher positionality*, where the overall positioning within a paradigm influences the methodological selection and design. The research question route may seem like a short cut to defining a paradigm because it sometimes is reduced to choice of methodology. Do you want to know a little about many or much about a few, and do you refute or confirm claims, or do you create statements based on interpretations? However, this study takes its point of departure in researcher positionality. For social science, three main possible epistemological paradigms are *positivism*, *constructivism* and *interpretivism*. Being introduced to various isms can be confusing and difficult to comprehend. It is only when we begin to investigate the world on our own that the philosophy of science truly comes to life.

Positivism invites us to see reality as something that can be discovered, and claim that reality exists independently of *knowledge, observations and representations* (Belharar et al., 2023). This paradigm originates from the natural sciences and is now primarily found in the social sciences from a post-positivist perspective. Validity through confirmation, rather than traditional hypothesis falsification, is preferred. The most common approach, critical realism, views the induction/abduction/deduction loop as the most appropriate methodological basis for knowledge (Belharar et al., 2023). Induction involves moving from specific observations to general conclusions, abduction involves moving from empirical data to theory making probable conclusions based on existing knowledge, and deduction involves deriving conclusions from a chain of statements assumed to be true. For social scientists distinguishing between positivist and constructivist paradigms and thus criticizing (and refuting) positivism is understandable (Woolfolk, 1992). Distinguishing between constructivism and interpretivism, as both are based in the epistemological paradigm of seeing reality as constructed by those who experience it, is harder (Mills & Birks, 2014). Both are preoccupied by our `being in the world`, which implies that meaning is rooted in temporality and a historically effected consciousness (Maboloc, 2024). Truth in this sense is beyond method.

Interpretivist paradigm sees the situation as inseparable from the situation itself, and constructivists tries to understand the social dimension of interactions. Typically, interpretivist paradigm make use of thematic analysis and constructivist paradigm are more inclined to use discourse analysis (Fodouop Kouam, 2024). The stance taken in this thesis is a position within the interpretivist paradigm, that shares features with constructivist epistemology. The project is to understand ESR, more specifically within the SSH disciplines and how they themselves *talk* about their emotions, perceptions and their preconceived opinions of future career and employability.

This theoretical tradition called the narrative turn, with its focus on language as a way of accessing human experience, is also shared by both constructivists and interpretivists, regardless of quantitative or qualitative approach (Sarah, 2013). Sarah cites Donald Polkinghorne, who led our attention to parts and whole, "*narrative meaning is created by noting that something is a part and parcel and that something is the cause of something else* (Sarah, 2013, p. 66). The narrative mode is not a new epistemology, but more part of the reflexive turn that includes narrative-based studies of human reality and criticized positivism in general (Brockmeier & Meretoja, 2014). One of the thinkers dominating the development of hermeneutics, Gadamer, describe hermeneutic thinking is *ongoing*, which means that the fusion of horizons gained after reflection process may serve as new understandings in further research (Maxwell et al., 2020; Sarah, 2013). Returning to the part and parcel analogy, Gadamer was preoccupied with preunderstandings as they begin before our understandings form and thus influence emerging understandings. Maxwell et al, highlight Gadamer

expression that awareness of personal perceptions and opinions evolves as a person grows. Reflexive processes are essential to identify and revise these pre-understandings (Maxwell et al., 2020). The process of understanding cannot reach an end. As Brockmeier et al state, you never step into the same river twice (Brockmeier & Meretoja, 2014, p. 5). The discussion of part and parcel resembles the discussion of agency in social science. What is the dominant explanatory element, is it agency or structure. In this study, the analysis involves an interpretive exercise that continuously balances the a priori statements of the interviewees with my pre-existing understanding of the field and theoretic perspective.

Pre-understandings encompass not only prejudices and commonplace assumptions but also belief systems acquired through socialization (e.g., religious beliefs) or academic training (e.g., ideological beliefs). My pre-understanding of the field influenced my research question. The interest in understanding ESR SSH candidates' ideas of career identity and employability to enhance career center services. At both ideological and academic levels, my preconceptions about academia shape my understanding of who enters the field, who succeeds, and how academic identities are influenced by social factors such as class, gender, and ethnicity. Through a critical theory lens inspired by Habermas and Bourdieu, I believe opportunity structures vary by gender and class (Bourdieu et al., 1995; Clark & Zukas, 2013; Maritz & Prinsloo, 2015; Mills, 2008; vilhjálmssdóttir & arnkelsson, 2003). Contemporary trends show that the expansion of recruitment positions and increased internationalization in academia have led to precarious work and insecurity but also welcomed candidates from more diverse backgrounds. This shift challenges traditional assumptions about key players in academia. As a reader of Bourdieu, I interpret that this diversity represents challenges for academic training and socialization in faculty life. More women, first-in-family students, and ethnically diverse candidates are entering the field. This pre-understanding probably inspired the question of background. The formation of academic identities involves mastering both informal and formal codes (Evans, 2011), perpetuating inequality. Critical theory, as articulated by Foucault, has taught me to identify power asymmetries and the internalized mechanisms of governmentality, which direct human behavior according to specific logics (Bengtsson, 2011; Rose et al., 2006). The research question of support and underlying "fit" can be linked to this inclination to question hegemonic logics, in this case talent, skills and meritocracy. According to readers of Gadamer, all our interpretations are reinterpretations, interpretations of previous interpretations to which they add thus adding another level of *historicity*. Rorty, another of our prominent thinkers, calls this duality *contingency, it captures that historicity as presupposition of understanding* (Brockmeier & Meretoja, 2014, p. 5). The work in this thesis holds this to be probable, both for the researchers – and, as will be elaborated – for the participants.

4.3 Reflexive thematic Analysis

Although positioning within the interpretive paradigm does not directly dictate methodology, the research question's focus on depth, exploration, and rich descriptions suggests the use of qualitative thematic analysis. According to Peck et al, since qualitative research operates entirely *within and through language*, researchers need a theoretical framework that explains the relationship between the individual, the world, and language. This framework should clarify how an individual's experience of the world is connected to the role of language (Peck & Mummery, 2017). Peck et al, further claims that "thematizing meaning" is one of the few generic skills informing all forms of qualitative analysis (Peck et al cite Holloway and Todres (2003) in Peck & Mummery, 2017).

Peck et al points to other researchers explaining how "thematizing meaning" can be understood and how they determine the meaning embedded in significant aspects of interview material. Colaizzi (1978) recommends extracting "*significant statements*" and drawing meaning from them. Giorgi (1985) advises creating "*units of meaning*" by intuitively interpreting the data. Van Manen (1990) suggests composing "*linguistic transformations*" to make participants' words more meaningful. Smith (1996) uses the term "*theme*" to describe identifying significant material for analysis. Braun and Clarke (2013) propose "coding" to capture the essence of data that interests the researcher, allowing it to stand alone (All according to Peck & Mummery, 2017, p. 391).

Braun and Clarke alleged, and thus agreeing with Peck et al, that there is no unified thematic analysis. However, for the cause of this master thesis, the methodology of doing thematic analysis in this thesis will follow the thinking of Braun and Clarke. Regarding the frequent use of the Braun and Clark model, this thesis has followed the six-step procedure, but the presentation of the process is not organized according to these steps, as many studies do. Nevertheless, the common denominator of many thematic analysis models is focus on knowledge through language and the interpretive circle between the researchers' preunderstandings, the pre-understandings of the respondent, the meeting between the researcher and the respondent (distinguishing research setting from a guidance setting evolving around the *I - Thou* in Buberian⁵⁵ terms) (Peck & Mummery, 2017) that produce a set of *analytic themes* (Braun et al., 2022). In their later work, Braun and Clarke further refine the concept of thematic analysis by explicitly incorporating reflexivity, an element that was previously implied but not explicitly mentioned, as seen in their widely cited 2006 publication (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2022). Reflexivity in the later works, include the discussions found in e.g.

⁵⁵ According to Buber, the 'I' does not exist ontologically prior to relation; there cannot be an 'I' without it being related to an 'It' or a 'Thou'. Inter-subjectivity only arises when a relation is in place, whether it is an I-It or I-Thou relation. Morgan, W. J., & Guilherme, A. (2012). I and Thou: The educational lessons of Martin Buber's dialogue with the conflicts of his times. *Ich und du (Buber, Martin)*, 44(9), 979-996. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00681.x>

Peck et al. as written above. Braun and Clark now offer reflexivity as a form of “quality control” through questioning the assumptions and values that contextualize the knowledge we have produced (Braun et al., 2022, p. 22).

4.4 Abductive reflexive thematic Analysis

Repeated iterations of reading, coding, and theme creation gradually led to epistemic challenges. Questions arose regarding the nature of code comprehension and the theoretical reinterpretation of the data. The initial step to address the limitations of reflexive thematic analysis and shift towards a more theory-driven analysis was to incorporate a narrative reading of the material

McAllum et al. demonstrate how thematic analysis is flexible for identifying patterns, while narrative methods focus on contingent sequences, preserving text integrity and exploring how people make sense of events through storytelling (McAllum et al., 2019). Also, Nowell et al. see benefits of using a narrative approach as this could help mitigate the risk of over-simplification inherent in reducing complex social conversations to codes and themes (Nowell et al., 2017). Relying solely on coding and clustering can limit the full account of the material. Although changing the methodological approach was considered, the benefits of RTA would have been missed.

The way out of this conundrum was to draw some learning from Thomson who has proposed an 8-step approach to ‘abductive thematic analysis’, addressing the need for a structured and rigorous method for analyzing qualitative data. Abductive research aims to find the most logical solution and useful explanation for phenomenon. This approach balances theorizing with empirical data, as abduction ensures that findings are grounded in both empirical data and theoretical understandings (Thompson, 2022). In abductive research, researchers identify gaps in theoretical knowledge by examining unexpected empirical data. These surprising findings often reveal limitations in existing theories, prompting researchers to creatively develop new theories for better understanding. This thesis does not aim to uncover surprising gaps or introduce paradigm-shifting contributions to the field of ESR and employability. Instead, it seeks to bridge the gap between traditional researcher development discourses and career development theories. Thus, the approach is more about the methodology than the ambitious new findings.

Thomson's approach builds on the six steps suggested by Braun and Clark, adding theorizing as a new (and fifth step). According to Thomson, at this stage, it may become evident that theory needs to be refined, modified, adapted, or even integrated with another conceptual idea to better explain the empirical data (Thompson, 2022) p 1415. This process ultimately contributes to the study's overall theoretical insights.

The next step that deviates from Braun and Clark's six steps, is reviewing the themes and coded data analysis, examine if certain codes are more frequently expressed within a specific cohort.

Additionally, assess how each theme or code is expressed by different participant cohorts and identify any differences between groups. In this material this has been done extensively to extract the archetypes as personas of different ESR types. To be able to synthesize this, the coding is compared to other codes and thus theorized together.

The final distinction from traditional reflexive thematic analysis lies in the data presentation. This thesis uses a simple model to illustrate the relationship between clusters of codes and themes, demonstrating how they support the synthesis of archetypes (see figure nr. 8).

4.4.1 Selection of participants

ESR are defined in this thesis as doctoral candidates. As shown in chapter two, the career variations between disciplines have been consistent over decades. Humanities and Social Sciences (SSH) differs significantly from natural science and technology in staying in or close to academia. To limit the scope of the study, candidates representing SSH disciplines was selected because this academic group is thought to have the least predictable route into industry (Kyvik & Olsen, 2012). Other variables as gender (Aksnes et al.), ethnicity (Hooley et al., 2022) and age are not the objective of the study, however there are multiple sound criticisms to this choice⁵⁶. Gender is a relevant category in a highly gender-segregated academia. The same applies to underrepresented groups and ethnicity. Another research question would have required more categories, but for this study, with an inductive focus on learning more about the target group, it has been deemed acceptable to omit them. And the aim of the study is to explore and understand how they see their career future, not necessarily dig deep into various cause and effect elements. The main point is that candidates in SSH, compared to those in STEM disciplines, does not have access to an established and well-known labour market with competitive salaries outside of academia. Therefore, it could be argued that the need for career service supplements among SSH candidates is particularly relevant.

Working in close relationship with early-stage researchers, one can say that access to respondents was optimal. However, candidates coming for career conversations might not be representative of the typical candidate. Since the number of consultations at the career center is relatively low and covers all seven faculties, those who have attended a career consultation would constitute a small part of the total target group and thus affect the results. Even more so, asking candidates who came

⁵⁶ The article from Skakni et al on gender differences in career competencies can be recommended. Skakni, I., Maggiori, C., Masdonati, J., & Akkermans, J. (2023). Ready for careers within and beyond academia? Assessing career competencies amongst junior researchers. *Higher education research and development*, 42(4), 968-983. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2022.2120855>

for supervision if they would participate in a study could create a sense of obligation or the need to repay a favor.

The approach was to use homogenous purposeful sampling (Silverman, 2020, pp. 63-64). In practical terms that is to sample “typical cases” to illustrate what is average or normal for the group of interest. A letter⁵⁷ describing the study and requesting respondents was sent to the Ph.D. coordinators at the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Humanities at UiB, asking them to distribute the invitation to their candidates. A potential limitation of the homogeneous sampling approach is the unknown extent of variation within the sample. However, the following selection criteria was set:

The candidates had to be active in the relevant Ph.D. program (not dr. philos), and with at least one more year left of their funding period (or before submission). Candidates from both Norway and abroad were welcomed. Gender was initially not mentioned, however, there is a gender unbalance in the material.

Several deviating elements were unearthed during the interviews. For instance, one dimension not considered as a selection criterion was the source and nature of Ph.D. funding. It is common for candidates with different types of funding to work in the same department. Contracts may vary in length (three or four years), include or exclude compulsory duty-work, and involve individual projects or participation in larger research projects. This criterion proved highly significant, as the material suggests that the substantial differences in contract terms and conditions could profoundly influence individuals’ career perceptions. However, Frølich et al did not find difference in opportunity for getting a postdoc after Ph.D. based on financial source (Frølich et al., 2019). However, the difference in financial source may influence risk of attrition (Alves et al., 2024). Candidates working on large projects can get additional work added to their workload, taking time away from research (van Rooij et al., 2021). This issue affected two candidates in the study, where non-thesis work led to significant frustration and posed a risk of not completing their programs on time. Future research should address this concern. However, the overall parameters of the population were considered acceptable.

Six candidates responded positively right away, and two more replied after the PhD coordinators resent the invitation. The interviews were conducted between 09.04.2024 -30.05.2024. By the set deadline, eight candidates had been interviewed. Even though the goal of sampling ten individuals from the target group was not achieved, posing a potential risk to the study’s aim for saturation, it

⁵⁷ See attachment nr 2.

was considered an adequate number for the study. Braun and Clarke recommend 6-12 participants for a medium-sized master`s project (Braun et al., 2022, p. 24). The duration of the interviews varied between 1-1,5 hours⁵⁸. The interviews were conducted either at the career center, as the candidates chose to come there, or digitally via Teams for those who were off campus. Although candidates were offered the option to meet in a familiar location, no one preferred that.

Although the invitation that was sent out explicitly defined candidates in the beginning of their Ph.D., two candidates in the end of their contract accepted the invitation. The contract status was not confirmed prior to the interviews and only became apparent once the interviews were underway. Despite this, their input remained significant, and the stress associated with the concluding phase of the contract period was distinctly highlighted. It was therefore decided that the interviewees would be retained within the respondent group.

The objective of engaging with doctoral candidates in the initial stages of their program was threefold: firstly, to alleviate the burden of making additional career decisions by participating in a study about future career plans during the stressful final period; and secondly, to gain scientific insights into how candidates reflect during their initiation phase as researchers. Again, service provision is not the objective of this study, however, it is vital to understand when and what service to provide at different stages, according to assumptions on how they will respond to training. The third point was to keep the group as homogenous as possible.

4.4.3 Interviews

The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) approved the study as it did not involve the collection of any sensitive data⁵⁹. All conversations were recorded using the “Nettskjema Dictaphone app” with a University of Bergen smart phone connected to Nettskjema.no. This is the data storage and transcription service of University of Oslo that also University of Inland uses. To access Nettskjema, one needs to use the FEIDE⁶⁰ login service for optimal security. The signed consent statements were stored in a locked and secure place until the project is ended, declaring that the data will not be used for other purposes than this study. The candidates were informed about the non-disclosure agreement, that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The transcribed audio recordings were done automatically by Nettskjema.no and proofread and edited (washed) before uploading the files to the qualitative data software tool Nvivo⁶¹. The primary rationale for using a software tool is to digitize data management, thereby aiding in the analysis and synthesis of data. Nvivo was not fully

⁵⁸ The Dictaphone app has a recording time set at 90 minutes as default. No interviews lasted longer.

⁵⁹ See attachment nr 1.

⁶⁰ Accessibility: <https://uustatus.no/nb/erklaringer/publisert/8591a1de-fecf-42ad-8637-cf540a2d0004>

⁶¹ University of Bergen License: NVT14-JZ000dISca-3HA20-5R68H, Nvivo Release 14.23.2 (46), Copyright QSR International

utilized (lack of time to explore all the features of the tool), extensive use of written notes, Excel, and memos supplemented the process. Using Nvivo as a digital assistant was of great support for record keeping and structuring the material. However, the process of listening and reading transcripts is not done by Nvivo, it is merely a tool.

The conversations were designed as semi-structured, open-ended interviews⁶² (Silverman, 2020, p. 177). According to Kvale (cited in Krumsvik), the purpose of semi-structures interviews is to obtain descriptions of the life of the world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (Krumsvik, 2013). The interview guide was divided into four main questions:

1. Background Information and career route into academia
2. Perceptions of the concept `Career`,
3. Career Support to getting through the PhD. And perhaps finalize
4. Career Opportunities, their employability and career readiness

The interview guide consisted of these rather broad questions, but the questions were not always asked in that order. Sometimes, candidates spoke freely and addressed the questions without being prompted. The natural conversational style and the occasional free order of questions and deviations justify the “semi” in semi-structured interviews. However, one could argue that the design was more structured than semi-structured due to the relative rigidity of the questions. Despite this, the material provides richness and context rather than pure consistency.

The initial probe questions varied, focusing on participants’ backgrounds and their entry into academia. In some instances, this led to extensive personal narratives.

The subsequent question pertains to the concept of career, a fundamental aspect of career theory. This question sometimes led straight to discussions of the meaning of their own career and their career trajectory. Sometimes the concept yielded nothing but abhorrence and had no relevance to the interview.

The third question addresses support, encompassing both interpersonal and systemic mechanisms. It explores how interviewees perceive their current situation and the support available for their future careers, both academic and non-academic. The thesis examines how SSH ESRs understand their career futures and the significance of their support and pedagogical environments. While it briefly

⁶² See attachment nr 4

addresses the current performance of doctoral trainers, this topic is not within the scope of the thesis.

The final question pertains to career opportunities, employability, and career readiness. Although these specific terms were not used during the interviews, they were rephrased as: “Where do you see yourself in five years?”, “Do you believe you have acquired the relevant skills through your training?”, “What does the future look like for you?”, and “What is your ideal situation?” Some interviewees also discussed these topics without being directly asked.

4.4.4 Group Characteristics

The interviewees’ descriptions will be presented as composites to ensure anonymity, especially within the context of a small university where specific criteria might reveal their identities. Furthermore, it is the shared characteristics that define them as a group, while individual profiles such as age and nationality are not central to the research question.

The cohort consisted of two men and six women. Two participants used English, while six spoke Norwegian. This should not be interpreted as distinguishing between candidates of Norwegian origin and those internationally recruited. Two candidates are bilingual, speaking both Norwegian and another language. One candidate is a native English speaker, and another uses English as a second language. In academia, we operate with the concept of “academic maturity” rather than age per se. Consequently, the cohort was highly diverse in terms of previous work experience before starting the Ph.D. Age was not a significant factor in this study. The faculty affiliation was uneven, with three candidates representing the humanities and five candidates representing social sciences. Questions about care responsibilities were not included in the interview guide. Nonetheless, the topic was raised by the candidates themselves as important career decision variables. However, the question formulated in the interview guide as “career support” was open ended and set off for discussing both partner, family and work-related relations. Career guidance literature discuss how it is important to be aware of both your limitations and opportunities (it is one of the core buttons in the Norwegian quality framework for career guidance⁶³), and restraint on mobility can be an inhibitor to advance in academia.

It’s clear that care responsibilities can significantly alter the situation for some individuals, which is why ‘care obligations’ are addressed. Three of the candidates reported having children, and seven of the eight candidates mentioned being in a partnership.

⁶³ <https://hkdir.no/en>

Six of the eight candidates did not come from academic families, one of the candidates was not asked, unfortunately and the last one did not include family background but focused on personal previous work experience. Most candidates from STEM disciplines typically follow a bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. progression without gaining work experience in between. However, it is more common for candidates in SSH to have work experience before starting their Ph.D. Of this cohort, four candidates reported having more than ten years of work experience before starting their Ph.D. One candidate had a shorter period of experience as a research assistant, and another candidate held two master's degrees but had less than three years of work experience. However, seven of the eight candidates mentioned having work experience from side jobs while studying or immediately after graduation.

4.5 Coding

The interview questions served as topics, in which codes were created. The idea of thematic analysis is that in a rich material, there are patterns that can emerge through coding that might bring to the front elements that gives meaning that otherwise would get lost in, not translation but context. Thematic analysis is thus a way of getting a distance from the material that increases the validity of the study. Short-sightedness is a risk when studying a topic that you know empirically and perhaps also theoretically from before. Thematic analysis is not the only available interpretive design, but this was chosen as a way of avoiding bias and presuppositions, even though this is exactly the most important critique of the method.

The process of coding was deliberately selected to avoid what Fereday et al. refer to as the "fabrication of evidence. That is unintentional, unconscious "seeing" of data what the researchers expects to find (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 90). Again, seeing as an inherent presupposition of the researcher after talking to numerous early-stage researchers about their career plans. According to McAllum et al, deciding what data is important enough to be coded and if the researcher is 'finding' or 'constructing' themes opens up Pandoras box (McAllum et al., 2019, p. 361). There is way around, however, as McAllum et al claim (and cites Charmaz 2023) that it is the *coder's subjectivity, the sensitivity, interests and experiences ... that shapes what we see and will define, code and analyse (McAllum et al., 2019, p. 362)*. Researcher positionality, both ontological and epistemological stance must be shared, along with clear descriptions of how the data was generated, coded and analyzed.

The initial coding process was done semantically, and it was the interviewees actual expressions and responses to answers that was in focus. This process "slowed down" the interpretation level and avoided the risk of jumping to conclusions, by organizing the material to show patterns. One

example, career decisions about staying or leaving academia can be understood as, understanding that you will not win in the hard competition and then decide to seek sector mobility (Golde, 2000; Irish, 2022; Kim et al., 2018; Tinto, 1993). However, decisions about life after Ph.D. after the first coding gave a much richer account for this simplistic decision-making assumption. Some had initially decided not to stay in academia, some described their dream as working as a researcher, some were firm believers in positive uncertainty and happenstance, yet for some the decision-making process was filled with fear and despair.

Disassembling data involves taking the organized data apart and regrouping them into lumps that gives meaning. Coding establishes the researcher's subjectivity in relation to the data and the framework through which the data are interpreted (Smagorinsky, 2008). One way is to organize according to pre-defined codes where a codebook has been established before the collection of data. Another method of coding is 'In Vivo' coding, which involves using the exact words or phrases from the participants' narratives to label the data units (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). As a coding novice, the coding in this study was initially created as "*coding along*" as the material was processed. Each Interview were coded with minimal censorship, labelling new codes as they appeared using the participant's voice. This semantic approach was not done systematically, and when constructing themes, a more latent approach was used in the further iterations. Latent in this context means creating more conceptual themes. As this study sets out to understand the thoughts, ideas and emotions of ESRs on employability, it is the *meaning making* that is of most value, thus uses a social-constructivist lens for interpretation. The codes are not static representations of reality, they align with the *theoretically informed analysis and intention of the study and make*, according to Smagorinsky, the subjectivity in relation to the data *clear and unambiguous* (Smagorinsky, 2008, p. 400). In this study, theories about career identity and decision-making on future employment are used to understand the units of meaning that turn into codes. At this point it is of interest to comment on the inductive research approach. The hermeneutic circle can illustrate the iterative process of analysis. Beginning with the intent to investigate a relatively unexplored phenomenon and learn from the data is futile if the processes of data analysis and theoretical exploration do not inform each other. After each iteration and reading of literature, the interpretation of what is going on changes.

The process has indeed been iterative. While the ideal is to achieve saturation (information redundancy), this study cannot claim to have fully reached it. It is ambitious to conclude that all themes are well supported, and that no significant data has been omitted. One can strive for "information power" that is to *make subjective judgements about whether your data provide a sufficient basis for the proposed analysis, and aligns conceptually with the values of reflexive*

thematic analysis (citing Malterud, Braun et al., 2022, p. 24). To enhance reliability, the study will prioritize rich, detailed reporting and contextualization within the broader context and existing literature.

4.8 Validity, Reliability and Research Ethics

In the following, the Tracys eight quality criteria for research has been the principle (Tracy, 2010). These are (a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence. The previous chapters have demonstrated research gap and how this research contributes to the knowledge field. Hopefully also that it resonates with an interested audience. The interview section elaborates on procedural ethics related to data. Rigor, credibility and ethics will be discussed in the subsequent section.

Terms like validity, reliability and generalisability are mainly used in quantitative studies. The debate whether these concepts are suitable in qualitative research is perhaps still going. Morse argue that the concepts of reliability and validity are *overarching constructs that can be used in all scientific paradigms because to validate is to investigate, check to question and to theorize* (Morse et al citing Hammersley and Kvale, Morse et al., 2002, p. 19).

Validity in this work is sought by representing as *accurately as possible the features of the phenomenon that it is intended to describe* (Krumsvik also citing Hammersley 1987, p. 69, Krumsvik, 2013, p. 151). In this study, the intention was to study how ESR at SSH disciplines experience, think and feel about future career opportunities. Transparency in the design and execution of the study is crucial for enhancing the trustworthiness of the procedures. Additionally, being open and transparent about the coding process and the subsequent interpretation of the material is essential for ensuring a degree of confirmability. To increase external validity, longer excerpts of citations and a more detailed outline of the coding procedures have been provided, laying the groundwork for verifiability. The initial plan was to present the interviewees with the citations used in the thesis. However, as Bryman allege; respondent *validation*, whereby researchers provide interviewees with an account of their findings for assessment, is *unlikely to assist where the researcher's conceptual and theoretical skills come into play* (Bryman, 1989, pp. 164-165). This of course, puts an extra ethical responsibility on the researchers, as the use and presentation of the data must carry the weight of all considerations. Further, *external validity*, or transferability, is constrained due to the small number of participants and the unrepresentative sample. To follow up, generalizability of the findings is inherently vulnerable in qualitative interview studies with few participants. *Internal validity* refers to the consistency between the theoretical framework, methodological reflections, and research findings. According to Morse et al, *"a good qualitative researcher moves back and forth between*

design and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis" (Morse et al., 2002, p. 17). The iterative nature of thematic analysis and the inductive approach of the study design will thus increase the congruence in this study. Congruence does also require the theoretical framework and choice of methodology must be suitable for answering the research question. This thesis is conducted under the social constructivist understanding of reality, where interpretation (hermeneutics) is both an epistemological frame and a method (thematic analysis), that together with theories of identity formation (Watts, McAlpine), learning pedagogy (Law) and career decision making (Savickas) creates a lens (reflexive hermeneutics) to investigate how SSH ESR reflect upon their employability. On the continuum from positivism to interpretive understanding, all elements in this study belongs to the interpretive side.

One way to increase the reliability of the coding, could have been to cooperate with another student. When two or more researchers code the same material, the credibility of what is conceptualized increase. Same codes of the same phenomena increase the solidity of the process (Olsen, 2002). However, a master's thesis typically involves individual work. In this context, the supervisor⁶⁴ and participants of the structured pre-delivery mandatory seminars organized by the University of Inland take on the collaborative roles usually filled by fellow students⁶⁵.

One last ethical reflection needs to be highlighted. First, all use of data after this thesis needs new approval from the candidates. It would be unethical to use the material in further detail, as the clients have not consented to the material being used for research, and trust in the non-disclosure agreements would be disrespected. An important reflection that has accompanied this work has been to protect the candidates from information that could reveal their identity, but also to safeguard information that has been sensitive or highly private in nature. A significant difference between serving as a career guidance practitioner at a career center and conducting interviews for a thesis lies in the focus of the topic. In a guidance session, the client determines the topic. Conversely, in a scientific interview setting, the researcher dictates the topic. However, at times, the interviewees share information akin to what they would disclose in a guidance session. It has been crucial for this study to exercise discretion and sensitivity to ensure such data is not misused.

One last point about access and open science: While master theses may not be the main focus of the open access movement, publishing them in Brage⁶⁶, the open knowledge archive, is recommended.

⁶⁴ Professor Tristram Hooley

⁶⁵ Thank you to the organizers and the other students for willingness to give feedback on drafts that were not easily accessible with poor structure and writing. A big thanks to the faculty present that also read and gave valuable feedback on the drafts.

⁶⁶ [Brage – lokale vitenarkiv](#)

As part of national and local open access policies⁶⁷, sharing our work on free and open platforms is encouraged (if judged acceptable). These platforms and university-owned journals could potentially counter the costly monopoly of large publishers in the future.

4. Summary

In conclusion, this chapter outlines the methodological framework and design of the study, emphasizing the qualitative approach and its philosophical underpinnings. By conducting eight in-depth interviews with early-stage researchers, the study aims to explore their perceptions of employability and career readiness. The use of social constructivism as an epistemological stance allows for a nuanced understanding of the co-constructed realities within the interview setting. Thematic analysis provides a structured yet flexible method to identify patterns and themes, ensuring a comprehensive interpretation of the data. It has been the ambition to maintain an audit trail of all decisions made during the research process, including coding decisions, theme development, and changes made along the way. Ethical considerations, validity, and reliability are addressed to enhance the credibility of the findings. Overall, this methodological approach lays the foundation for the subsequent analysis and discussion.

Chapter 5 Findings and Analysis

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings on how ESRs from SSH disciplines perceive career concepts, employability, and future career prospects. The findings are organized into key sections based on the four interview themes. The first section briefly introduces the eight SSH candidates. The chapter then explores their experiences entering academia, highlighting significant markers of their backgrounds and approaches to becoming academics. The concept of career is examined through the interviewees' acceptance or rejection of the notion. The subsequent section addresses employability, career readiness, and overall careership. The final section analyzes how candidates navigate their current career trajectories and the support networks they utilize for career success. By preserving more of the original context from the interviews, researchers can gain a richer and more detailed understanding of the subject being studied.

5.2 Presentation of the interviewees

All candidates have been assigned a three-letter name. This approach helps protect their identities while maintaining the ability to track their participation. Where the interviews were conducted in

⁶⁷ [Nasjonale mål og retningslinjer for åpen tilgang til vitenskapelige artikler - regjeringen.no](https://www.regjeringen.no/nasjonale-mal-og-retningslinjer-for-åpen-tilgang-til-vitenskapelige-artikler)

Norwegian, all translations have been performed by me. This disclosure is important as meaning may get lost in translation and represent a vulnerability in the data. However, it could be argued that it was important to let the interviewees talk in their preferred language and accept the weakness of translation.

BEA, a social scientist, volunteered to participate in the study, even though she was not in the initial phase of her Ph.D. She is a pragmatic academic, continually assessing career options and actions. Although she found studying exhausting, being a top student, she embarked on a Ph.D. with both the topic and department carefully selected. To Bea, a 'career' signifies progression, continuity, and accumulation. Despite having a few years of research-related work experience before starting her Ph.D., she still feels that she has not yet begun her career. As her contract nears its end, she fears attrition and what it means for her employability.

PAX, a humanities candidate, also signed up to participate even though she was close to the end of her contract. Being an internationally recruited Ph.D. candidate, Pax was deeply worried about her contract coming to an end and that her thesis work was not complete. 'Career' as a concept was not that familiar to her, but she expressed a lack of confidence in continuing in academia and was mostly concerned with getting a job where she could use her skills and find economic stability. All her siblings worked in academia; however, said she was not from an academic background.

JAN is also from humanities and is enjoying the honeymoon phase of the Ph.D. journey. Highly motivated by the research topic and devoted to his discipline, using words like *lifelong passion* and the topic being his *state of mind*. His parents were teachers, and he holds multiple degrees from several countries. He resigned from a permanent job he enjoyed before starting his Ph.D. journey. He defines 'career' as something planned but does not relate the concept to his own pre-Ph.D. experience. Jan is critical of contemporary university policies of short-term contracts as opposed to the larger role universities could play in democratic societies.

SAM, a social scientist, does not come from an academic background. However, being a top A student, her supervisor encouraged and motivated her to apply for a Ph.D. She sees her Ph.D. as an opportunity to constantly build a career and has invested a lot in local professional networking. Not continuing in academia is seen as a discontinuation of her career and will involve a re-start at the bottom. She expresses suffering from "*imposter syndrome*⁶⁸" and is concerned about the harsh competition in academia.

⁶⁸ Verbatim.

MEL is, like Jan, in the honeymoon stage of her journey. A social scientist with 15 years of experience from top bureaucracy employment. Re-establishing herself as an academic has been a dream, even if attaining the rank of full professor is not necessarily an option. She sees international mobility as a success factor, but with children she will perhaps not make that kind of investment. Her strategy is to make the most of it and see where it goes and is simply eager to use her skills, perhaps in an adjacent academic sector. She refers to her background as “intellectual.”

KIM, is an internationally recruited social scientist from a non-academic background. She decided to pursue a Ph.D. after succeeding with a Norwegian master’s degree after 15 years of very varied work experience. She sees the Norwegian Ph.D. system as economically sustainable, as opposed to foreign systems, and therefore saw it as a feasible option. Thematically, she works cross-disciplinarily, which closes the door for full professorship, because of what she sees as a “pure discipline paradigm” in her field. She sees a career as making an *impact* and having a *purpose* and can see many opportunities after her Ph.D.

LEE, a social scientist, and has also had a long career outside academia before becoming a student. Doing her BSc and master’s as an adult, with top grade results, she sees doing a Ph. D as selecting a learning environment where she has always felt at ease. She is not from an academic background but was encouraged into pursuing more academic work after her masters. This has resulted in a Ph.D. project that is based on her passion and her own design. While negative to the concept of ‘career,’ she recognizes that if she navigates right, things usually come her way. This notion of *positive uncertainty* can bring her further into or out of academia, either of which is fine, as long as she can work on her topic and experience *impact*.

REY recently embarked on a Ph.D. in humanities. A busy period in his private life occurred simultaneously as he started his Ph.D. He is concerned about his (lack of) international mobility (due to care obligations) will hamper his academic career. He remains very ambitious and expects success - he wants to be the “go-to expert” in his field. This could be in academia or perhaps as a commentator. His grades and performance are something of a “rags to riches” tale, and he sees jobs as livelihood and career as success. The dreariest outcome after the Ph.D. is to become a low-level bureaucrat at a university - which he sees as a realistic expectation.

5.3 Motivation and background for entering academia

Coding is an iterative process. The first round typically misses some relevant codes, making it necessary to perform at least two or three rounds of coding (Thompson, 2022). To be transparent about how the coding process has progressed, this section will draw attention to how the meaning units are interpreted and theorised to give meaning to the material. The theme of entering academia

was refined through several iterations into the following meaning units or codes: talent, imposter, and accidental academic:

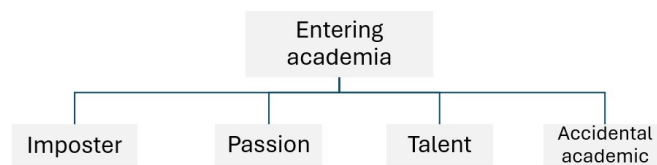


Figure 2 Theme entering academia, four codes

All four codes refer to dimensions of identity, and multiple codes can be presented simultaneously. The term “accidental academic” refers to individuals who find themselves in academic roles without having initially planned to pursue an academic career, which can contribute to feelings of imposter syndrome (Bright, 2021; Wilkinson, 2020)⁶⁹. Imposter syndrome can be exacerbated by marginalization based on factors such as gender, class, ethnicity, or language. Conversely, the code for talent represents situations where an individual’s talent is recognized, which can inspire them to pursue an academic career. It is thus the weight of the talent that fosters impostorism. One of the key points of Emmioglu & McAlpine is that the interaction between individual factors and structural elements influences completion, well-being and satisfaction, and in the end, the career trajectory of the ESR (Emmioglu et al., 2017). The next section will showcase what meaning units were coded as talent, imposter syndrome or impostorism and being an ‘accidental academic’.

5.3.1 Talent

The transition from undergraduate to postgraduate is the first selection or sifting of capacity. Academia is a meritocracy, where talent serves as the capital and merit as the currency. However, as with all markets, the question arises: how does one gain access to this market? The international movement for reform in research and researcher assessment aims to promote more responsible evaluation practices, emphasizing quality over quantity (e.g., CoARA Agreement). A more diversified talent description is the objective. For a Ph.D. it is often the success on master level that is the sole entrance criteria. The question is how this career capital transforms from mere talent into agency. In

⁶⁹ Wilkinson refer to Wrights article about comics kitsch and class for the use of the concept accidental academic. Wright, R. R. (2016). Comics, kitsch, and class: an autoethnographic exploration of an accidental academic. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 29(3), 426-444 However, one of the first accounts of the concept was Hilary Rose, who wrote about the gendered glass ceiling. Rose, H. (2005). An accidental academic. In *Negotiating the Glass Ceiling* (pp. 108-121). Routledge. Feminist writers and scholars, employing a gendered lens, were among the pioneers in identifying and articulating both oppression and barriers within academia. Many of these concepts have permeated mainstream discourse, elucidating the effects of being different. If this study had incorporated a gendered perspective, it could have further explored the experiences of female candidates in relation to both imposter syndrome and the notion of the “accidental academic.” However, given the sample size of only six women and two men, the reliability of such findings would be limited

this material, talent identification by the institution as a code is found in these meaning units. Lee describes how she was “scooped up” by professors after her master’s thesis and offered a position as a lecturer. This can be a way of maturing and nurturing talent, even if there is no guarantee of any secure employment.

-It’s not just anyone who gets offered a position as a lecturer, right?⁷⁰

“No, it was... I was very shocked myself because I hadn’t heard of it before, that they did that, but they do it occasionally with some students, who they sort of ‘scoop up,’ as they say. And what I understood afterward was that I had made myself noticed” (Lee).

Similarly, Sam experienced encouragement from her current supervisor

“After I had defended my master’s thesis, my supervisor said that he wanted to discuss pursuing a Ph.D. I had considered it before, but it was like...I know that the supervisor of my bachelor’s thesis, and a professor I worked for as a seminar leader, spoke very positively about me, as I eventually heard” (Sam).

Supervisors sometimes function as recruiters or mentors for candidates with promising aptitudes. According to Clement et al, the success of aspiring faculty relies on *willingness, availability, and knowledge of one faculty member at each training level (graduate and postdoctoral) to serve as a mentor for aspiring faculty (Clements et al, p: DOI:10.1187/cbe.19-11-0235)*, and they draw this conclusion based on a vast array of literature on the subject. The role of the supervisor will be discussed later; however, academic success is evidently also related to being discovered, encouraged and coached by faculty staff. Being talented is not always enough, display of talent and being recognised as talent is equally important.

5.3.2 Passion

In career theory, the concepts of impact, purpose, and contributing to society can be linked to a pastoral understanding of discovering one’s inner calling and prosocial spirit, thereby giving one’s actions a higher meaning (Kjærgård, 2018; Lemke, 2020). However, in the context of ESRs this study will assert that impact, purpose and passion are not merely emotional expressions of emotional drivers, but rather they can be career paths in themselves. Passion represents their intrinsic value system (Chen, 2021) that is part of what Schein calls ‘career Anchor’ (Schein, 1996). A person’s career anchor is their self-concept, which comprises: 1) self-perceived talents and abilities, 2) fundamental values, and most importantly, 3) career aspirations and goals (Schein, 1996). However, the passion in question here is the curiosity to indulge in a theme or topic or societal problem that is part of your overall value system. This is why it is linked to terms like calling

⁷⁰ In the presentation of quotes, the sign -, refers to the interviewer speaking.

"I have always known that I have something to offer academically, .. and that it is enjoyable to work with something I am passionate about... When I take on something, it's because I believe I can excel in it" (Rey)

Jan sees career as a plan and something that is *not* improvised. Adhering to a predetermined career plan appears to represent the ideal career trajectory. Nevertheless, both Lee and Jan develop their career identity assessing opportunity structures, career capital and passion as variables. This notion of having *passion and being authentic* (Irish, 2022) illustrates well the exhausting ongoing formation of career identity among early-stage researchers.

"So, I quit my job to start a Ph.D. So, it is mainly a passion project. And for me, the project is an interest that has been my companion for many years, since I was a teenager. This contributes to it being a passion project" (Jan).

Jan resigned from a stable relevant job to pursue a Ph.D. He describes it as a *passion project* that has been with him since childhood. He repeats the word passion several times⁷¹ and that working on this topic is more existential than *just a job*.

"So, it's not something I necessarily associate myself with, but I think of career for my part as a kind of, it's, yes, it's what I want to do. In relation to what I want to contribute to society, combined with work, and what is important to me, and my values, and such things" (Lee)

As in the interview with Irish, "*Finding your Passion and staying Authentic*" (Irish, 2022), there can be an alternative career story than career as a competitive, hierarchical and merit-based race. But for this to make sense, it is necessary to adapt meta-cognition of careering into the identity formation. Career learning is mostly about 'learning to learn', because, as Law et al describe it, developing a career identity is a learning process that confronts traditional understandings of among others, career (Law et al., 2002, p. 432). Career management skills (CMS), according to Sultana, are a competence in *gathering, analysing, synthesizing and organizing information about oneself and about pathways and occupations, as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions* (Sultana, 2013).

5.3.3 Imposter Syndrome

Several "meaning units" of background and entry into research have been labeled or coded as 'Imposter'. The concept of impostorism is about feeling like *being the exception rather than the rule* (Irish, 2022; Wilkinson, 2020) or not a 'typical academic' the core being negotiating ideals and self. Emmioglu & McAlpine discuss the same phenomena as '*feeling (or not) like an academic*' (Emmioglu

⁷¹ The word used in Norwegian is "*lidenskap*". Fascination, affection or excitement could also be used interchangeably with passion.

et al., 2017). With the abundance of metaphors in this thesis, it has room for Mountford-Brown who throws in just a few more; *zombies, ghosts and lucky survivors*, (Mountford-Brown, 2022)⁷². Despite the somewhat tabloid title, Mountford-Brown demonstrates how Bourdieu's concepts of dialectical confrontation come into play. Mountford-Brown cites Bourdieu: '*where dispositions (habitus of ESR) encounter conditions (including fields) (in this case the HEI), different from those in which they were constructed and assembled (social mobility), there is a 'dialectical confrontation' whereby the habitus may then adapt to accommodate the structures of the new field it encounters* (my own interpretations in brackets and underlined to highlight relevance for this study) (Mountford-Brown, 2022, p. 198). Mountford-Brown paraphrase Ingram (2011) when summing up three ways the dialectic confrontation can be executed. Being pulled by the forces of different fields simultaneously is known as habitus tug. When this leads to individuals feeling uncertain about their identity, the habitus becomes destabilized. The third scenario, where the forces from different fields cause internal division, is referred to as disjunctive habitus (Mountford-Brown, 2022).

In this material, Mel describes her background as the least academically inclined of three siblings. Mel has had her own successful career as a top government official. Now re-entering academia as a doctoral student, she argues for her academic capabilities and defends her place in academia.

"But I am more theoretically-analytically inclined than my former colleagues would think. I really enjoy it, even though I am also very good at systems and processes and such things" (Mel).

Sam, on the other hand, links the feeling of inferiority to cutthroat competition in academia. Sam asserts that everyone, including herself, experiences a shared sense of collective imposter syndrome

"Yes, the competition is very... a bit intimidating. I know it's the same in other positions too, so it's not like you can avoid it. But it's something like... you are in a situation where you might think you're not good enough, and I think that's what everyone has, like, imposter syndrome" (Sam).

Imposter syndrome is fluctuating and not necessarily defining or lasting. However, negotiating fit and adaptability (or dialectical confrontation) is also an integral part of career identity. Career identity is not fixed or stable. Every transition carries the risk of experiencing imposter syndrome. Especially if the transition is involuntary. To effectively manage transitions, resilience and stamina are essential career management skills.

⁷² from an article in the Palgrave Handbook of Imposter Syndrome in Higher Education. The actual reference: Mountford-Brown, V. (2022). *Zombies, Ghosts and Lucky Survivors: Class Identities and Impostorism in Higher Education*. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Imposter Syndrome in Higher Education* (pp. 189-207). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

5.3.4 Accidental academic

The concept of an accidental academic does not need to be a negative experience, even if writers such as Bond have used the concept to describe marginalization in academia (Bond, 2020). However, Bond uses it to highlight the necessity of cultivating academic environments that encourage collaboration and produce meaningful research. Accidental academic refers to being an academic despite of non-academic background or as an unplanned opportunity. This may be being first-in-family, like Sam. When asking why Sam considered an academic career, this is how Sam explained it:

“I found it exciting to work with research. I was involved in some research projects with the supervisor I have now... I thought academia could be something for me. I also have a friend who is working on a Ph.D. Through her, pursuing a Ph.D. didn’t seem so daunting, because that’s how my family is. Not many of us have master’s degrees. I have a cousin who is a doctor, but otherwise, at least in my immediate family, there aren’t many academics (Sam)”.

Wilkinson gives an autobiographical account of impostorism and being an accidental academic herself {Wilkinson, 2020 #277. Rey is also a kind of accidental academic, however,

“Because I had rather poor grades at high school, and here I am writing a doctoral thesis”.

-Quite a good leap.

“Yes, exactly. Being able to show the giant leap from poor grades in high school to now being at this high academic level. I think it’s an example to follow. So, I think that... if I can use this as an equally significant steppingstone “(Rey).

Rey’s approach differs somewhat from Kim’s, both coming from non-academic families.

“I feel like I’m kind of a person who hasn’t had this like - oh I go from A to B to C and it’s this upward line. I’ve gone up in salary and then down in salary” (Kim)

While there is a risk of over-interpreting these meaning units and potentially misrepresenting the interviewees’ expressions, it appears that Kim perceives her unconventional academic background as a potential academic pitfall, whereas Rey regards his as evidence of being an asset. Without imposing invasive characteristics on the participants, the most interesting aspect here is the difference in how challenges are approached. Obviously, both have encountered opportunities, which would align with Krumboltz’s “happenstance” and Bandura’s “chance events.” Mitchell et al. expand on this with “planned happenstance,” where unexpected events enhance career potential. Maybe the choice of applying for a Ph.D. position was not just a chance event, however, how one seizes opportunities and sees change is a big part of not just career competence, but also personality. Career skills are like fitness; they can be trained, developed, and need to be maintained. However, some individuality will always affect the result. From meaning units and codes, a narrative reading of Rey, adds to this example.

*“And then there’s also the matter of my personality, how my personality is perceived.”
(Rey).*

In addition to the aforementioned statement, this remark suggests that Rey perceives his personality as a significant factor influencing the development of his career.

5.4 Reflecting on the concept of Career

5.4.1 Adverse

The concept of career, as discussed in the introductory chapter, does not necessarily sit well in the Norwegian tongue (Bakke, 2023{Sandsdalen, 2024 #645}). Some of the candidates in this study display negative connotations to the word. Competition and climbing the corporate ladder are what the interviewees ascribe the negative associations. A research career is competitive and has a strong hierarchical merit-based structure and is thus suited for the career-label in this traditional sense. The aim of this question is not to determine whether they deny or accept the concept *pr se*, but rather to initiate a discussion on how they comprehend the concept in relation to their own identity and future career.

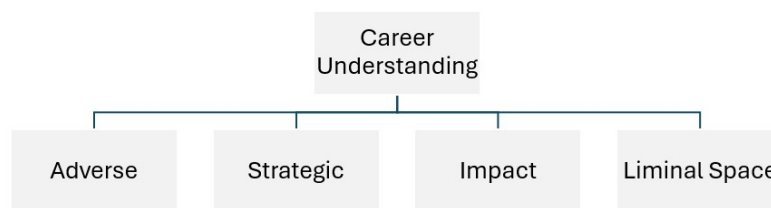


Figure 3 Codes for the concept of career

Lee distinguishes between being subject-oriented in her field (positive) and exerting harsh competition (negative) as something to be frowned upon. She has created for herself a space for career identity manoeuvring.

-The word career, what do you think about it?

“Personally, it’s perhaps a bit of a burdened word. Because, I think maybe, but I think especially those who work within my field of science, you are motivated, maybe not necessarily primarily by career, or at least it’s not necessarily alone at the top of what motivates you, to do what you do, but there is a kind of, yes, desire for a purpose and such things, or there is a great significance with the themes you work with.

Career is kind of something impersonal for me. I perceive it as a bit of elbowing and such things, and yes, things that I personally am not a big fan of” (Lee).

For Lee, driven by a profound interest in her subject, the topic serves as the primary motivating force. Her pursuit of knowledge and the quest for truth align more closely with the academic ideal than with personal career advancement up the ladder. SSH candidates are more prone to identify

with an academic ideal of being driven by knowledge itself, not prestige, money or fame. This is a dual-edged sword: It can take the pressure of vertical climbing as you go where knowledge takes you. Second, it can become a harsh reality if you suddenly, for some reason, pursue careers outside of academia. Lee identifies her values and research interests as legitimate reasons for participating in the competitive academic field. She navigates the complexities of career identity and liminality by refuting the concept of career (Bright, 2021; Larsen & Brandenburg, 2023).

Pax did not share the Eurocentric understanding of the word career. However, after explaining how the word could mean different things from pointy elbows to vocational journey, Pax gave some reflections about fulfilment, stability and work/life balance.

“It’s more feeling the fulfillment of using my knowledge and making some difference. I think I still would want to get the fulfillment from the job that I have after this the Ph.D., But I think now my priorities have changed and I am a bit of a different person. In the future, I would like to get a stable job where I don’t really have to worry about, yeah, making a living or something (referring to precarious lifestyle in academia).

One thing that I like about Norway is that people are very relaxed, and you have the job and then the job and life balance is good. And my job is not the whole thing in my life” (Pax).

Pax has dedicated significant time, energy, and effort to her academic pursuits. However, she now feels that an academic career may be unattainable and perceives this as a loss of ambition. Career transitions are viewed differently depending on whether they are voluntary or imposed, and whether they are anticipated or unexpected (Manzi et al., 2019). When talking about career, she says that she is a different person, highlighting how the question of career largely is a question of identity.

Bea is not adverse directly; however, she will include other perspectives to what she understands is the prevailing understanding of the concept. She explains how traditional understandings of career equals a certain linear progression. In addition, she describes it as finding one’s path or shelf. Despite having over fifteen years of experience in the service industry, completing her master’s degree with top grades, working at research institutes for several years, and nearing the completion of her Ph.D., she still feels that she has not yet embarked on her “real” career.

“If I say the word career, what do you think of then? I think, yes, because then there is an idea that you are on some kind of path that has progression and some sort of continuity. “Yes, so when I, for example, say that I feel like I haven’t really started with the potential career I should have, or the job I should have, ... like to start getting into the path that I should be on.

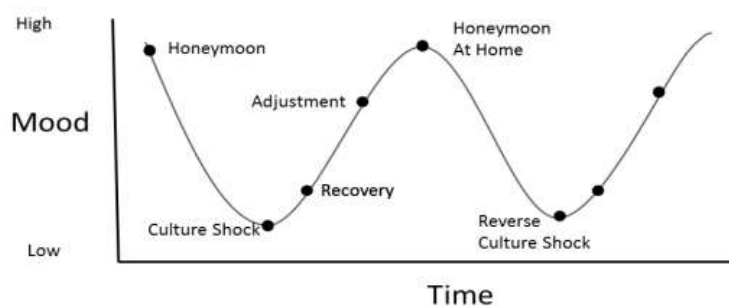
But it might be a bit problematic, it can certainly be a problematic concept actually, because it really suggests a kind of an accumulation rather than that you can have a job and be satisfied with it, and do the same thing for a long time, for example” (Bea).

The idea of thinking a career should be on track supports the upward, linear idea of career.

Alternative opportunities and value of unplanned events (Krumboltz, 2008) might go by unexplored in search for the straight path.

5.4.2 Liminality

When entering a new (working) culture, the established u-curve description of the culture shock by Kalervo Oberg (Oberg, 1960) lay the foundation for the later w-curve for students going abroad (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 2010). This is what Hollywood et al describe in the “*Overwhelmed at first*” article (Hollywood et al., 2020). Culture shock (transitions) can be described as anxiety resulting from losing familiar social cues and symbols when suddenly transplanted into a new cultural environment.



Source: Based on the U-curve (Oberg 1960) and extended by (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963)

Figure 4 Model copied from (Hommadova, 2017, p. 172)

This can lead to feelings of frustration and anxiety. Before culture shock sets in, even before the adventure begins, there is a period filled with excitement, stimulation, and curiosity. This phase lasts until the initial novelty wears off, hence the word *honeymoon*. Mel is in a honeymoon phase, where the excitement is overshadowing the feeling of risk, overwhelm or impostorism.

“I hope I can ride this beginner’s wave for a while longer. I find it incredibly enjoyable to be allowed to think, work, write, read, read, read. There has been too little of that in recent years, and perhaps that’s the big boost now” (Mel)

After the culture shock, where everything is compared with the original cultural context, a phase of recovery and adjustment follows (Skakni et al., 2022; Skakni et al., 2023). The W phenomena set in when people repatriate to their original cultural setting, where one questions your original sets of ideas and values against the recent experience. This might happen to “first-in-family” academics returning to their root environment (Henderson et al., 2020). As the Norwegian Lånekasse has made HE available for more people than just children of academics, the “first- in- family” can be seen to have no effect at all on researcher development, or it can be seen as the status is quite common Norwegian academia. The concept of normalizing and adopting meta-cognition of the emotions triggered by this change has attracted scholars from various disciplines. McAlpine discusses the same

phenomenon under the heading “re-locations” (McAlpine et al., 2014). The shifts can be about shift from student to employee, geography, culture and linguistic (McAlpine et al., 2014, p. 961).

We need to distinguish between normal reactions to change versus unhealthy situations causing mental health issues. Bright discusses a similar phenomenon when studying impostorism (Bright, 2021). Impostorism occurs when a phenomenon causes individuals to doubt their abilities and feel like frauds despite evident success. According to Bright, emerging academics must navigate a *liminal space* (See also e.g. Larsen & Brandenburg, 2023) where they feel like novices but must present themselves as experienced scholars. This process involves continuous self-doubt and comparison with peers. According to Bright, it is the nature of academia itself, the inner logic and beliefs that exacerbates the condition (Bright, 2021, p. 114). The hyper-competitive scholarly community with the ‘publish or perish’ doctrine, together with many young academic’s identity construction of “*I theorise- therefore I am*” makes, according to Bright, an academic identity built on fear of not living up to an ideal image of what it is to be an academic (Bright, 2021, p. 115). It is expected that career perspectives, identity formation and impostorism will fluctuate as candidates progress in the doctoral training. Imposterism is therefore not a solid identity marker, one cannot say that Imposterism has a certain career path. This is just the same as self-efficacy is not a stable entity within (Bandura, 1977). Navigating liminal space, however, is a career management skill.

“But I think the really nice thing has been ending up in this office. So the small environment has probably had a lot to do with things working out as well as they have for me so far” (Mel)

According to Rienties et al, the value of social networks is an antidote to impostorism, because it increases the activation of social capital. Mel explains how her peers are supportive and foster inclusion into the research environment (Rienties & Hosein, 2020). Even if impostorism can be paralysing and destructive for career development, there is no determined correlation between feelings of impostorism and career choice.

5.4.3 Strategy

The code strategy is linked decision making and rationale. What is considered rational will define what strategy is available. Therefore, to understand strategy, one needs to understand what rationality and meaning discourse the action is performed. According to Hodkinson et al, the implicit discourse of rational choice that exists in HE needs to be understood (Hager & Hodkinson, 2009). It is assumed that candidates opt for sector mobility after a rational evaluation of academic opportunities, finding other sectors more appealing, and assessing their skills to determine the best fit. This is a rational choice understanding of career decisions that can be questioned. Non-decisions, where the possibility of choice is removed, are also rational decisions. Pragmatic rationality, as

described by Hodkinson et al, might be an appropriate option (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). The code for strategy or strategic is set for meaning units where they see themselves a plan or a strategy. Sam claims to have been (in retrospect) strategic.

When I was a master's student, I said yes to all sorts of things that the professors offered me, like research assistant, seminar leader, working a bit at the department... And it was based on my desire to build a career in academia that I said yes to all kinds of things. And that made people know who I was, and it was very important for... The reason I got my PhD scholarship, I feel, has a lot to do with that" (Sam).

Sam emphasizes the strategic aspect of career development. Building career capital is a crucial component of this concept (Inkson & Arthur, 2001). Notably, investing in an academic career extends beyond acquiring skills, competencies, and knowledge. It also involves cultivating relationships, establishing a professional presence, and demonstrating one's value through academic fit and intellectual expertise. Being strategic involves investing in what is recognized as valuable. Hager and Hodkinson and also McAlpine describe how such investments are decided within a field where interactions, power struggles, alliances, and negotiations shape the rules. Within this field, individuals make pragmatically rational decisions about assets based on their culturally derived perspectives at critical turning points (Hager & Hodkinson, 2009; McAlpine et al., 2014).

However, the code strategy/strategic is not reserved only for academic careers. Even if Rey is considered as mainly academic advancement oriented, he still plays his cards carefully:

- *"So, do you have any thoughts on what this will do for your career and your future, let's call it market value in the job market?"*

- *Initially, it was one of my ambitions (becoming a professor), but when you have children, you become pragmatic, right? And putting all the eggs into one basket, I feel, is not very practical for my life. Of course, I will strive for a balance between my ambitions and pragmatism, but I think it's possible to aim for more than just becoming a professor. And that's part of my point about connecting with the job market and various actors. It's not that I'm hedging my bets, but it's something to provide some security. Because being a professor is hard to reach" (Rey).*

A kind of hedging strategy is a natural and well-developed coping strategy to face liminality. Strategy is linked to coping that again is linked to self-efficacy. To navigate the current landscape of higher education and research, the career identity of ESRs must be flexible and resilient. It may also serve as a coping strategy to focus not on attaining a specific target as the end goal, but rather on the ability to continue excelling in one's area of expertise.

Using an abductive approach⁷³, comparing the codes to the full interviews suggests that Kim is navigating her career and transitions with a diverse background, where the Ph.D. does not stand out as more significant than her other experiences—it's simply her current focus.

-“ so if I ask you the question- what is a career to you?

.... So, I think for me a career is mostly focused on impact and what kind of focus I have and what impact I have. . So for me it's more of like a wandering path. but I don't have anxiety or fear about it. I feel like there will be a lot of kind of interesting options to consider afterwards.

So, for me career is really dependent on what impact I have and who I can kind of involve. And I think maybe that's a little bit different than most people. So, I kind of feel like for me a career can be like anything really. You know, like I could take my PhD and then afterwards be like - oh I want to part-time be a researcher and part-time also have an organic garden” (Kim).

However, Kim does see the Ph.D. as a possible training to be a researcher (not professor- later she explains that this is out of her reach because she lacks disciplinary training) and perhaps do this part time and grow greens on the side. Kim focuses on skills and how her skills can be easily transferred into academia, and perhaps out of academia. The role of being an academic is de-emphasized as an identity marker in comparison to the other candidates. In the analysis, this is discussed as whether Kim is “*careering about*”? Looking at the concept introduced by Arthur (Arthur et al., 1999) and cited by Watts (Watts, 1999), Kim seems to be “*careering about*” by not adhering to any linear or progression trajectory. Decision making is a process of constant evaluating opportunity structures with one’s career capital (Bentley, 2019; Inkson & Arthur, 2001).

5.4.4 Impact

Nevertheless, career is linked to making a difference and some kind of fulfilment. Here again, one can assert that this has some resemblance to purpose and impact strategy of a prosocial imperative linked to performance.

- “*When I say career, what do you think about that concept?*

Well, where I am now, I think it's something I should think about in four years. And that's because of my current situation. But I'm not yet ready to think about an academic career. But I think that's mostly because of...Well, all the rumours one hears through work, for example. About work pressure and expectations and internal competition and elbow culture and such things. And the chase for publishing and external funding and so on. And how I will fit into such a work environment, I don't know yet. Whether it's something that will trigger and motivate me. Or if it will stress me out. I don't know. But I also feel like there are many kind of ends to a means where you know my life could look many different ways and as long as I kind of keep that impact thread that is career to me” (Mel).

⁷³ The abductive approach where the full range of Kim is analysed together with codes, see attachment nr 5

Not making long term planning is what makes the most sense, according to Mitchell et al. The decision-making skills or the ability to cope with uncertainty among ESRs are perhaps the most appropriate response to the current situation for prospering academics (Mitchell et al., 1999, p. 117).

Mel envisions her life taking various paths. With extensive work experience, her career identity is flexible and adaptable. Her strategy involves accumulating skills and seeing where they lead, a strategic and natural approach in an uncertain work environment. This competence-based career strategy is coded as 'strategic' in this thesis.

5.5 Employability and future career perspectives

The concept of employability, a central theme of this thesis, required operationaliation's during the interviews. Since "employability" is not a well-established term in Norwegian, questions about future career opportunities were framed as "Where do you see yourself in five years?" or "What are your career plans?" Participants were also asked if they could envision themselves in roles such as a professor.

As the interviewees have already shared thoughts and ideas about how they became academics and how they see the concept, they have already talked quite extensively about their career aspirations, goals, coping skills and plans. In this section, the thesis will highlight some of the meaning units and codes for employability. These are *competence oriented*, *path dependency* and *positive uncertainty*.

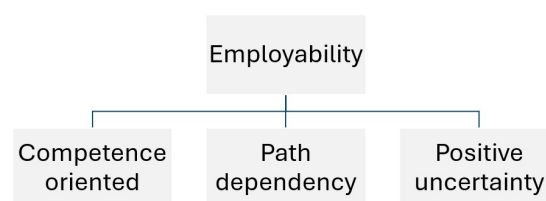


Figure 5 Codes for Employability

5.5.1 Path Dependency

The topic of path dependency will be thoroughly discussed in the next chapter. However, the meaning units and code *path dependency* will be presented here.

For SSH candidates, academia is perceived as the most natural career path (Guerin, 2019; McAlpine, Gibson, Bengtson, et al., 2024). Both Jan and Bea have envisioned academic careers due to the intrinsic nature of their discipline. Jan finds it easy to envision, however, Bea sees it more as an outdated vision.

“So, again, in the humanities, it is perhaps the most obvious career and future prospect one can imagine. An academic career is very easy to envision as a student, so I have envisioned it. I have thought that, okay, after a master’s degree, you can pursue a doctorate, or something like that” (Jan).

“Maybe I’m a bit stuck in the old idea that, at least in the humanities and social sciences, a doctorate leads to a research career” (Bea)

However, path dependency relates to how former investment limits later options by narrowing down possible trajectories. (Czaika, 2015).

“I have always known that I have something to offer academically, .. and that it is enjoyable to work with something I am passionate about... When I take on something, it’s because I believe I can excel in it” (Rey)

Path dependency is about how past decision-making repertoires limit the number of alternatives. For Rey, he is very capable of imagining alternative career futures. The path dependency code says something about habits and investment and return, and where these don’t align, identity formation is in a state of turmoil.

“I have tried to visualize myself, that is, where I will be in five years. Initially, I imagined myself in a position as an associate professor. But then personal things happened, so I have shifted from seeing myself as an associate professor to a low-level bureaucrat, due to

-Will being a low-level bureaucrat be a bleak existence?

“Yes, I say that with all due respect to those who thrive in those positions. It doesn’t quite align with my level of ambition” (Rey)

For Sam, the return on investment is at risk, as she sees different investment paths for different vocations. Changing her career path would render her academic investment futile.

*“In any case, everything I’ve been doing **isn’t completely wasted**, even if I choose a different career, then. But it is clear that if I had gone straight into **relevant work**, then I would have gained experience there and been more relevant to the type of positions through that. But now I’ve made that choice, so **I just have to stick with it**, if I choose another position later. But I think that a Ph.D. is something that at least shows that you can do something although there are extremely niche parts of what I do⁷⁴” (Sam).*

The language used to describe alternative careers for ESRs tells a lot about the self-perception academic (Chen, 2021; Ryan et al., 2012). Both Chen et al and Ryen et al has studied why ESR decide

⁷⁴ The bolding is the authors doing for highlighting key features in the “meaning unit”.

to leave academia. From an academic perspective, the term “leaving” can sometimes give non-academic career paths a negative connotation, especially since half of ESRs work outside academia. This contributes to a limited view of career options. According to among others Hakala, academic identity formation is altering due to structural changes (neo-liberal) (Hakala, 2009) and that there is a need for a new ethical framework for academic work. Hakala claims that we need a new set of “worth” to accompany modern academia. Hakala believes that ESR identity work focuses on different questions than the traditional academic ideals of autonomy, the search for truth, and academic calling, suggesting that new values and ideals may have emerged (Hakala, 2009). However, still the question for career identity among ESR evolve around do I fit in, am I good enough, what skills to improve and will I get a permanent position.

5.5.2 Competence Oriented

In the theory chapter, skills, employability and transfer are listed together under the *main heading Identity connects researcher development and career* (3.4). These three concepts are tightly interlinked. Being a pedagogical institution, competencies and self-assessment of competencies are part of academic life.

Much of the researcher development literature discusses what constitutes academic skills and how to perfect them. In this section, skills and competencies are framed as codes for career capital. Mel could be a career capitalist (Inkson & Arthur, 2001) absorbing as much as she can is her career strategy. And not necessarily for an academic career. Perhaps because she has experienced working life outside academia, the flexibility increases and there is less path dependency.

“Yes, that’s also one of the things that motivates me. It’s not just about learning to write some articles and such. I also want to gain insights that I can use in my future career. That was one of the big motivations” (Mel)

When talking about skills relevant for other sectors, Rey refers to what is the achilleas heel of humanities in general, both undergraduate and postgraduate:

“We are just told that many become teachers, many work in public administration, and some also work in the private sector... There is a fundamental problem with reputation” (Rey)

The career trajectory for SSH Ph.D. candidates show relatively high probability to remain in research-related employment (Sarkar et al., 2020; Weber et al., 2018) (see statistics from chapter 1). Even more so, the unemployment rate for Ph.D. candidates is low, indicating that employability for SSH candidates is positive. However, the consciousness about their relative skills and lack of career

positivity related to employment is low. Nevertheless, the assumption that there is a mismatch between SSH, and the labour market is solid. Another question related to competence is the insecurity one can feel about not finishing on time or at all.

- *“What do you think the consequence would be if, as you say, moving on with life (without the Ph.D final degree)?*

*Yes, no, I’m very unsure about that. I’m very anxious about it. Because, as you understand, I don’t have a lot of work experience. Or, I **don’t have a lot of work experience that is relevant to my degree. I mean, my master’s degree.** So, I don’t know how it will be to... I mean, I don’t know how I stand as a job seeker with, like, a failed Ph.D. ...But I’m very unsure if I am at a disadvantage compared to coming straight from my master’s degree, or if I am in a similar position. But I really don’t know” (Bea)*

Considering career identity trajectories, employment by a university to conduct Ph.D.-level research and perform duty work equivalent to one year of employment is often not recognized as work experience. The emphasis on degrees obscures the value of acquired skills and competencies, making it difficult to communicate these to potential employers. Additionally, employers may prioritize degrees over skills, which can be a double-edged sword for highly educated individuals. Those with a Ph.D. might be perceived as overly academic or too costly for positions requiring only a master’s level of expertise. The discontinuity in their career trajectory can be likened to the children’s game of snakes and ladders: failing to proceed correctly results in sliding back to the bottom. This analogy helps to understand the range of negative emotions associated with exiting without completing a degree

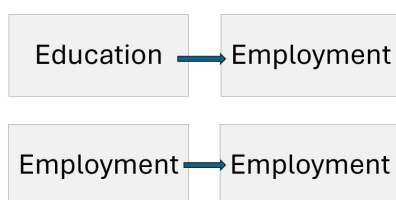


Figure 6 Is Ph.D. education or employment?

Transition from Ph.D. to employment can be understood as transitioning from education to employment or as a shift between jobs

The debate surrounding Ph.D. completion versus attrition predates the ‘publish or perish’ dilemma faced by academics. The issue of skill acquisition and the transferability of these skills becomes particularly salient when discussing attrition. Unlike in the UK, where postgraduate students may have the option to “fall back” on a master’s degree, in Norway, attrition is perceived as a significant loss, with no comparable fallback option.

Skills are considered compartmentalised into skills units that does not accumulate. This perspective is not unique to Bea; it reflects a common academic view on knowledge and competencies. Skills acquired outside the academic field are often undervalued, as they are perceived to be generated externally. Bea is contemplating the extent to which experience contributes to career capital. This perception may arise from viewing a career as a continuous path with a clear trajectory. However, career decisions are shaped by both individual choices and external opportunity structures (McAlpine et al., 2013).

5.5.3 Positive uncertainty

Positive uncertainty is a decision-making theory (Gelatt, 1989). According to Hodkinson et al, the implicit discourse of rational choice that exists in HE needs to be examined. It is assumed that candidates opt for sector mobility after a rational evaluation of academic opportunities, finding other sectors more appealing, and assessing their skills to determine the best fit. Gelatt claims that positive uncertainty should assist clients in avoiding the common pitfall of the old decision theory in HE: assuming they already know what they want (Gelatt, 1989).

Non-decisions are where the possibility of choice is removed, what is not regarded appropriate. This is also a rational decision-making strategy. Pragmatic rationality, as described by Hodkinson et al, is another way of understanding positive uncertainty (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Being open to opportunities, expecting unexpected events to be positive (Krumboltz), are all pragmatic rationality.

“And then I hope that when I have completed the four years of research and everything I need to do here, I will be proud of what I have accomplished. It’s not about prestige or where I end up after that” (Mel)

“But it’s more about keeping the doors open than being completely certain that it’s where I will want to be in four years. Yes. And is that uncertainty acceptable, painful, or good to endure? It’s very pleasant. Now I will do this for four years. And then we’ll see what comes out of it” (Mel)

Mel sees certainty as closing doors. This is the opposite of path dependency. Another question prompted for discussing future career perspectives, was whether they could see themselves as a professor, or if they could describe a professor. Kim pointed to a dilemma faced by ESR as research is becoming more and more interdisciplinary.

Do you think... do you talk about this career concept or what you are going to do after your PhD? Do you talk about that with your peers?

“There really isn't a department that is like multidisciplinary studies. Like it's moving that way in academia for sure. But we're not really there yet. So there almost isn't really like a good professorship for me because I wouldn't be able to teach pure social science and I wouldn't be able to teach natural sciences. So it almost feels like you know there's a bit that's like determined for me where I wouldn't really be a great fit for a professor unless I like really invested in learning about classical social science or something. And I actually don't really know some of these like you know a classical, what a classical social scientist knows. So, I think that is like almost a little predetermined for me” (Kim).

Kim can also be regarded as first in family; however, this is not what might stop the plans of becoming a professor. Wilkinson claims to be an imposter because of her varied background (Wilkinson, 2020). As academia often rewards pure discipline, being disciplinary divers does not always pay off. This is also the case for Kim, who believes she lacks the disciplinary training in pure science to become a professor (see under 5.6 Future career perspectives, p. 65). Muller and Kaltenbrunner has studied how Swedish social scientist navigate interdisciplinary career ambitions (Müller & Kaltenbrunner, 2019). They find that researchers at the intersection of natural and social science (as with Kim) try to balance their interdisciplinary ambitions with the institutional career structure. They claim that researchers operate with a dichotomy between disciplinarity associated with ideals of scientific rigor, while interdisciplinarity is conflated with application-oriented work and lack of theory (Müller & Kaltenbrunner, 2019). According to Muller and Kaltenbrunner, academic socialization may regard interdisciplinary researchers to be *politically correct and opportunistic* rather than successful because of *intellectual merits* (Muller and Kaltenbrunner, 2019. P. 15). Kim might have internalized such a normative hierarchy of funding and career. So, returning to the discussion about if Kim is *careering about*? She is navigating epistemic, economic, and identity uncertainties by skillfully analyzing both formal and informal opportunity structures, as well as traditional ideas of ‘real’ academics (Hakala, 2009).

When diplomas are equated with skills, it can create problems. How does attrition impact your career identity if you fail to submit your thesis within the contract period, or even after multiple extensions and working through holidays and weekends (Devos et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2018; Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, the research question of perceived employability in this study covers the whole range of imagining themselves as full professors, to nothing more than a feral cat. The conversation with Bea illustrates the challenging career trajectory that may become a reality if completion is not achieved:

“I think it would be very, very, very positive to complete it, both in terms of... Even if I apply for jobs outside academia, I can do so without feeling like I'm coming with my hat in hand. Because it's an incomplete role. Then I feel very much like I'm coming as... like a more scruffy, mangy cat....Whereas if I had completed it, I would have more places where I could

go... where I have some competence to offer. But I agree that I actually have quite a lot of the same competence, whether I complete it or not. But if you haven't completed it, it's kind of obvious that you don't have the choice, you need a job, you don't have a job, and you can't continue working where you were because continuing the work means a lot" (Bea).

Following the discussion of transfer or becoming, when so highly connected to identity, the transferability dimension of being employable faces another conundrum. In this work, discussing knowledge transfer as in transferability and hence employability, most literature focuses on the "to" dimension of the concept, rather than the "from". The idea is that you can take the skills you have from previous experience and use them in another future setting. The job is to detect and translate the skills you have for a future employer. However, when the skills are connected to a role, as in the case of Ph.D., the position you come *from* has a great impact on how you frame skills. Bea wonders if a non-submitted Ph.D. will be a waste of time on her career development in industry.

"But I'm very unsure if I am at a disadvantage compared to coming straight from my master's degree, or if I am in a similar position" (Bea).

The equivocality of these examples illustrates the complexity of how to frame a Ph.D. in Norway, is it education or is it a job? Is a Ph.D. just a degree following masters? Or is it a vocation, a job?

5.7 Promoters and inhibitors for success

As mentioned in the introduction, a full analysis of how the interviewees perceive their current support system, and their overall satisfaction with the current Ph.D. program is not the theme of this thesis. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to engage in a process where listening to audio, rereading transcripts and re-reorganizing categories and themes. To illustrate, when talking about current career situations and support, the initial coding for talking about the theme `support` was divided into sub-nodes supervisor, private life (with sub-nodes children and partner), coping and navigation and competence. The subsequent iteration rearranged the codes, private life and children as barriers for mobility and thus career advancement is included in discussions of compromising and ambitions, and the supervisor/candidate role as one theme. Competition as influence for career ambitions was moved into the discussion of impostorism.

5.7.1 Supervisor

Supervision is one of the main topics in the interview. This is also highlighted as one of the key factors for both completion and wellbeing in Ph.D. career (Amundsen & McAlpine, 2009; Bastalich, 2017; Deuchar, 2008; Halse, 2011; Jara, 2021; Kiley, 2011; Manathunga *, 2005; McAlpine & McKinnon, 2013; McCallin & Nayar, 2012). The renowned Norwegian psychologist Sissel Wold once

said: “A river runs through every therapist's office, and that river is called mother”⁷⁵. It seems that in every doctoral candidate's experience, there runs a river called *supervisor*. The analysis in Nvivo counted early on⁷⁶ the word supervision as ranked highest of both length and number (11/7). The supervisor role is mentioned when we talk about who influenced you to start a Ph.D., when we discuss future career, support or lack of such and career expectations. The supervisor was thus moved from sub-node to main theme, representing two paths, one with inclusion into academia and with lack of support into academia.

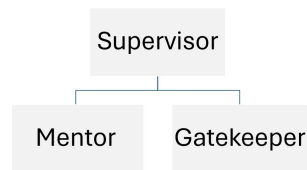


Figure 7 Codes for support (promoter or inhibitor for success)

Supervision, thinking in terms of Bronfenbrenner ecological development system (Leaf Zhang, 2018), the supervisor can be placed close to or further apart as significant `other`. Supervisors may hold the role of either supportive allies or antagonists within this context. Difficulties encountered during Ph.D. work are frequently associated with challenges in integrating into the research community, insufficient support, or inadequate duty-work related activities. However, in these eight interviews only one candidate reported lack of support from supervisor as the main cause for risk of attrition. This candidate describes the “*ideal situation*” where the “*supervisor or PI is supportive*” and “*creates an environment for learning*” and “*involvement*” in the candidates' projects. This is also what she sees in others:

“I have heard from other people, and I have experienced it myself that an involved PI or supervisor would try to talk with you about your future and.. like.. give you guidelines and try to kind of like pull the rope and see like who they can find so like at least they try themselves to support you because, to be honest, three years is not enough for a PhD at least in UIB, and six months of that is dedicated to training components, so it's only two years and a half. And most PhDs don't really...at least when I look around, I see that either they don't finish it within those three or four years or when they finish it, they actually get support from their PI” (Pax).

The duality of the role as both enabler and promoter is of pivotal importance for some Ph.D. Mel was supported and encouraged by her now supervisor when she wrote her Ph.D. application, and experienced her supervisor as very supportive:

“And the first conversation I had after I started here with my supervisor was about how we can build my duty-work and career portfolio, so that I build my CV while doing duty work.

⁷⁵ <https://www.dagsavisen.no/helg/portrett/2021/05/08/sissel-gran-begjaerets-budbringer/>

⁷⁶ 24.04.2024

-Had you thought about that before she mentioned it?

No. But as soon as she said it, I thought, damn, I'm so lucky to have her as my supervisor!

-But when she says build a CV, does she specifically mean an academic CV, in her words?

Yes. And I think she does that with everyone. As a supervisor, she shouldn't give me advice that closes doors for the future" (Mel).

However, there is also another aspect to being supportive and acting as a patron for the candidates. And with that, balancing between being included in the research community and fulfilling the role of an assistant is challenging.

*"Firstly, I am so fortunate with my supervisor, as she actually considers the breadth not only in the methodology courses I should take but also in the duties I should perform
(Mel)*

The co-dependent relationship between the supervisor and the candidate, along with its asymmetrical aspects, makes it difficult to set boundaries for managing their own time and priorities.

Kim expressed concern that participating in her supervisor's project would confine her to monotonous routine tasks at the expense of her own thesis work.

"When I was interviewed for the position, they kind of talked about the PhD and the project so I was well aware that I would have project parts...I have to be careful where I put my time and energy because I could just spend my whole three years working on this project and not get a PhD at all and that would be a bummer. ...

You know, I think about this sometimes it does kind of require still more work to kind of have to say these things over and over again and I still end up doing quite a lot of project management in this project where you know it's definitely slowing down my progress on my PhD and definitely kind of slowing down my progress" (Kim).

Moreover, in the Norwegian system, supervisors have both career development⁷⁷ and financial incentives⁷⁸ to ensure their candidates complete their work. To qualify as a full professor, you need to demonstrate, according to your discipline, that you have been supervising a certain number of lower-level students and Ph.D. candidates. The master-apprentice relation is critical for academic success, for both parties. The fiduciary, which means both parties share the responsibility based on trust, but the academic (supervisor) has a special obligation to *'act on the candidate's best interest'*.

⁷⁷ Translation of the requirements from faculty of Humanities at UiB board meeting 20.02.2024 regarding *Change in guidelines for the evaluation of applicants for employment as a professor and promotion to professor* :

<https://ekstern.filer.uib.no/hf/Fakultetsstyre/Styresaker%202024/20.02.2024/S%2012-24.pdf>

"Extensive experience in supervising at the master's and Ph.D. levels. Normally, the applicant should have actively supervised at least two Ph.D. candidates through to the completion of their doctorates.

At the Social Science Faculty, the requirements are: At least 2 years of experience in supervising at Ph.D. level.

<https://www.uib.no/svf/foransatte/97669/veiledning-s%C3%B8kere-til-kompetanseoppykk>

⁷⁸ Norwegian state-owned educations are financed according to two posts, one fixed (65,6 %) and one performance based (open frame 29,8%, competitive frame 4,6%). Production of Ph.D. is one measurement for performance. The allocation of funds to each department, and potentially to each supervisor, is determined by the respective institution.

5.8 Summary

The empirical findings and the analysis conducted through the coding are presented in this chapter.

Your motivation for entering academia greatly influences your career understanding. Whether driven by talent or passion, it shapes your academic journey. Imposter syndrome is a common response to cultural change and doesn't define your future career. However, if it leads to mental health issues, it can be harmful.

The concept of career

Through the coding process, several barriers and promoters for academic career success were identified. Barriers to academic career success include both individual and structural factors. Individual factors encompass feelings of imposter syndrome, lack of training in a specific discipline, and the realization that an academic career was never the individual's true aspiration. Structural factors involve intense competition, limited opportunities, prolonged periods of temporary employment, and insufficient support. Effective recruiting and mentoring by supervisors play a crucial role in fostering academic success.

Chapter 6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction:

The previous empirical chapter, through coding, clustering and analysis, has established the foundation for three distinct career identity positions. These positions are not meant to be directly attributed to any specific ESRs or interviewees; rather, they represent archetypal personas that vary in their perceptions of competence, motivations for academic work, and strategies for managing precarity and uncertainty. This chapter will explore the characteristics of these archetypes.

6.2 Archetypes of Identity Positions

This section is where the main findings of the thesis are described. The overall aim for the thesis is to learn how SSH ESRs think, feel and perceive their own career future. *Career identity* is from where the future occupation will be derived, as there is no such thing as a separate identity outside the career aspirations. *Employability*, as outlined in the theoretical framework, encompasses both the capability to secure employment and the self-efficacy in one's employability. This includes the belief that one's skills are adequate for achieving future career aspirations.

Inspired by McAlpine, Lefebvre, and Salter's prototypes of ESRs as distinct identity dispositions, I interpret archetypes similarly. These identities provide various perspectives on self-perception and career futures that appear desirable, accessible, or probable to current SSH ESRs. Through coding and subsequent interpretations, three distinct professional future perspectives emerge. In research using thematic analysis, some authors use clusters "*based on the identified regularities and consistent patterns*" (Castelló et al., 2021, p. 576). The archetypes are clusters of such patterns, that can say something about how the `personas` in the clusters think, feel and act (Ward, 2010). According to Ward, `Personas` are detailed descriptions of imaginary people based on real data. They help create a shared understanding of type characteristics and motivations, that in the end can help design, in this case, career services (Ward, 2010).

Larsen et al has also collected multiple understandings of being an ESR. She cites Facer (2017) who categories ESR identity orientations as the "Disciplinarian", "Worker Bee" and "Social Activist" in a UK study (Larsen et al 2022). Larsen et al do also cite Mantai (2017) who discuss the *market value* of ESRs and how this makes them "feel like researchers". Mantai has elaborated on this "feeling of being an academic" in the 2019 publication "*Feeling more academic now*" from 2019 (Mantai,

2019)⁷⁹. Skakni found three profiles of motivation for starting a Ph.D.: the quest for the self, the intellectual quest, and the professional quest (Skakni, 2018).

McAlpine and Amundsen differentiate between three types of positions, all of them working outside of academia, or what traditionally has not been regarded as academia. These positions are (1) professional careers with no research role, (2) research professionals doing research, and last (3) academic professionals supporting research. The researchers have investigated what these individuals do in their current profession. In a later article from the same authors, Castelló et al (McAlpine being one of the authors), used a meta-literature review, and found four stances or identity markers (clusters) where the main aim is to discuss *identity* as a productive notion for understanding ESRs (Castelló et al., 2021). The identity types are described using dichotomies of explanatory models. Some see identity as primarily an individual construct, others as collectively formed, while the dichotomy stable/dynamic is another dimension, with identity understood as unity or multiplicity, with a focus on thinking versus action (Castelló et al., 2021).

Another inspiration for the use of archetypes in this thesis, is Lefebvre: in her dissertation in philosophy on Archetypes of the Scientist, she describes how “*archetypal psychology offers us an enlightened way of viewing differing concepts of reality*” (Lefebvre, 2017, p. 304). In her philosophical work, Lefebvre analyses characters or ideal types in mythologies, based on the Jungian definition of archetypes (Lefebvre, 2017) also found in Salters work (Lefebvre, 2017). Archetypes are defined as being “*unconscious, inherited dispositions or potentialities (not specific ideas or knowledge) that guide people’s reactions to the challenges and problems they face*” (Salter, 2019, p. 527). Salter uses the concept of archetypes to explore the ‘journey’ metaphor in doctoral education, critically investigating the transformative and implicitly successful transformation of the doctoral candidate (Salter, 2019). Salter creates types based on three phases: before entering the doctoral program, during, and after.

The formative potential of career guidance is most impactful when it shapes perspectives and perceptions before and during the establishment of future career selves. Archetypes may function as a cautionary signpost to those who are responsible for ESR training that “no size fits all”.

⁷⁹ Both Larsen and Mantai draw their insights from an Australasian context.

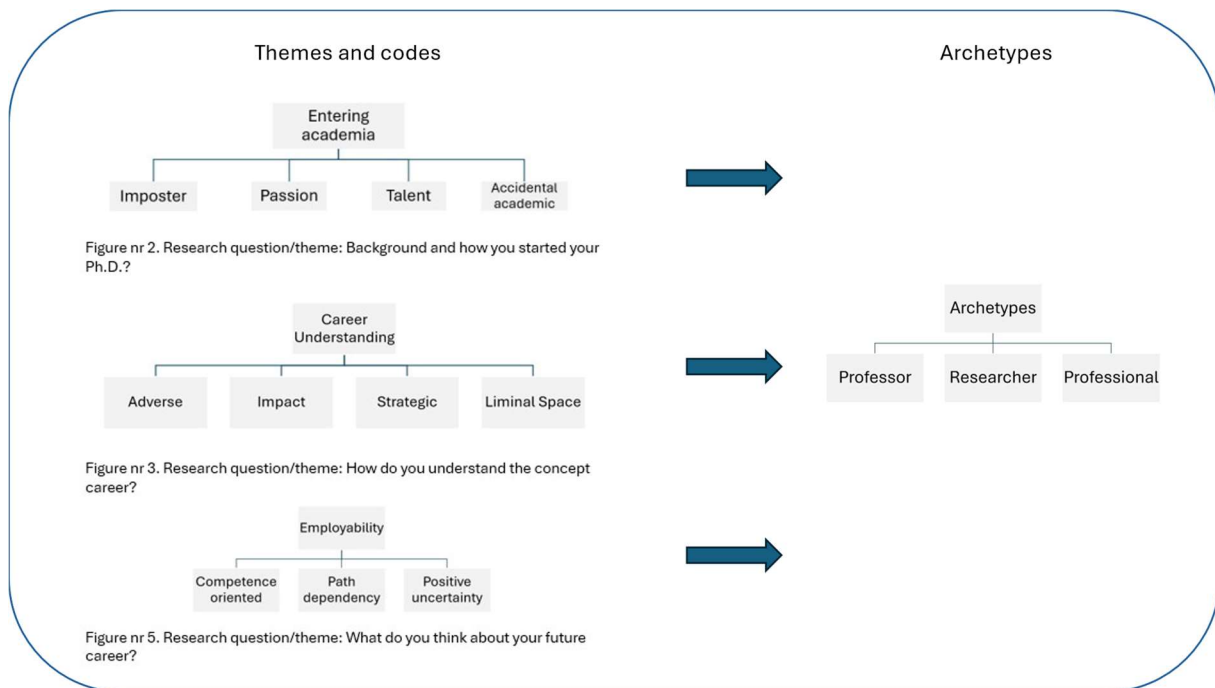


Figure 8 Archetypes reduced from three sets of codes into archetypes

The codes in this thesis have been synthesized into three archetypes, Professor, Researcher and Professional.

One important outcome of using archetypes to demonstrate differences is the recognition of multiple possible types of ESR. Following this line of argument, there must be more than one approach to ESR training and development. And even within archetypes, there is tension and ambiguity. As with Rey, one of the candidates coded as archetype `Professor`. Rey is hedging his bets wanting both an academic career but holds the door open for alternative careers. He even urges the university to provide both academic training and industry knowledge and connections. Kim, together with Mel, can be coded as the `Researcher` archetype, aspiring to pursue a career in the adjacent research institute sector. However, Kim also remains open to various possibilities, including roles as both an academic and a gardener. She is, however, explicit that she wants to work in a research institute, so, also expresses identity features of *careering about* and is quite open for other `Professional` career types. The archetypes are thus fluid, and none of the interviewees really fit tightly into one of the boxes. They are more inclinations of career identity decision-making opportunities.

6.2.1 Archetype: Professor

For the archetype Professor, the key codes that were synthesized were *passion*, *strategy* and *path dependency*. Although there can be blurry lines between talent and passion, (since passion often leads to self-discipline and rehearsing of skill), r, passion is often a key element in career theory. The

simplest version of this question is: “what you like doing?”. It is the S in the DOTS model: self-awareness of selves, their strengths and weaknesses, skills, personality traits, values and more (Law, 1999). For a research career, passion about a topic may be the necessary fuel that develops stamina that again may lead to becoming an expert in a certain topic. Some even refer to it as a calling, a lifelong attraction, something to fulfil. According to Duffy et al, a calling can be described as an orientation, mind-set or perspective, or a psychological construct similar to *self-efficacy* or *outcome expectations* (Duffy & Dik, 2013).

The code for *strategy* refers to consciousness about how investing in not only skills, but also network and experience in key activities, are part of the `becoming`. Sometimes the expert-identity overshadows insight in all the generic researcher skills one has acquired as an ESR, making the transition into other careers dependant on skills analysis competence. In a study of Rasmussen et al, being in the “right place at the right time,” or network and connection structures, plays a major role in achieving advancement and tenure (Rasmussen & Andreasen, 2023, pp. 87-93; Watts, 1999, p. 5). Being able to invest long term in a career goal is also something that defines the Professor archetype. Although other types also invest and have long term planning, the Professor type more strongly links the concept of career to success and becoming successful. According to Meijers et al, a career identity is a structure of meanings where individuals link their motivations, interests, and competencies with acceptable career roles (Meijers, 1998). The interest both Rey and Jan have in how the university allocates resources for academic learning connects well to seeing career identity as a social learning process, highlighting the necessity of a solid learning environment to facilitate academic growth.

The third code, the concept of *path dependency*, is derived from economic theories and is also utilized to explain the impact on organizations when they seek solutions in historical records. Previous decision-making processes constrain the options that an organization deems appropriate, resulting in path dependencies. Greener, often cited as one of the pioneers of the concept, derives it from the renowned economist Veblen⁸⁰ (1915), and later it was applied more organizationally by Arthur (1989). However, the theoretical foundation informing this study is that of March and Olsen (1989), who describe how institutional decision-making repertoires limit innovation and change because previous choices have constrained both options and incentives for change (Greener, 2002).

⁸⁰ Veblen is best known for developing the concept of “*conspicuous consumption*” in his 1899 book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. This concept describes the practice of purchasing and displaying luxury goods to showcase economic power and social status. Veblen argued that this behavior is driven by the desire to signal wealth and attain higher social standing, influenced by the need for social validation and societal norms. Veblen, T. (2014). *Den uproductive klasse*. Res publica. Seen through the lens of career theory, for the few that does not need to labor to survive, excessive demonstration of leisure, goods and status can lead to economic inefficiencies, as resources are spent on non-essential goods that do not contribute to overall well-being. Considering both social justice and green guidance, the “unproductive class” as Veblen describe it, produce an unrealistic ideal of success (in the labor market) that is both unjust and unsustainable.

Even though March and Olsen theories about how *institutions* act, they make the claim that justifies the transferability to ESR career development. All actions are “*expectations, preferences, identities, and meanings...[which] are affected by human interaction and experience. They coevolve with the actions they produce*” (March & Olsen, 1998). Greeners own contribution is that this leads to organizational “lock-in” to behavioral patterns. Using Greener to understand the process, the self-reinforcing factors result in a “*lock-in of possible selves that is extremely difficult to escape*” (Greener, 2002, p. 6). This also resembles what has been called ‘cruel optimism’ - a type of attachment to compromised opportunities (citing Berlant 2006)Guerin, 2019, p. 306). For the Professor archetype, career trajectory until this point has been invested in academic advancement, and, as some of the interviewees explain, ending up as a *public executive officer at the university (Rey) or starting from scratch with internships and summer jobs in the related industry (Sam)*, will be perceived as an identity de-stabilising event, not simply a change in work or source of income. While emphasizing again that this is a theorizing of codes, not a diagnosis of the interviewees, their statements certainly illuminate possible outcomes of various career positionalities

Another theory, the *sunk cost fallacy*, may provide valuable insights into why changing careers for those on the Professor path is particularly challenging. The sunk cost fallacy occurs when individuals feel they have invested too much to quit. This concept is discussed at the Prosper career development site for postdocs in the UK⁸¹. This thesis cautiously suggests that identity formation influenced by sunk costs can increase the risk of losing self-efficacy and self-worth, and this issue should be considered urgent.

This discussion is not an evaluation of the interviewees’ prospects of becoming professors. Rather, it aims to contribute to a better understanding of the identity formation processes and the rationale that can make career mobility out of academia challenging. The logic behind the path dependency theory is equally as important as the focus on previous decisions and limitation of scope. The logic is that of academia as an **institution**, with its own “*practices and rules defining appropriate behavior for specific groups of actors in specific situations [that] are imbedded in structures of meaning that legitimize particular identities and practices associated with them*” (March & Olsen)⁹⁴⁸. Action becomes, according to March and Olsen, a logic of appropriate behavior, as opposed to a logic of consequences. A logic of consequence is when “*human actors choose among alternatives by evaluating their likely consequences for personal or collective objectives, conscious that other actors are doing likewise*” (March & Olsen 1998, p 949). The practice, according to the logic of consequences, is closely linked to rational choice theory, where actions are aimed at producing the

⁸¹ <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/researcher/prosper/blog/prosper/when-holding-on-holds-you-back-navigating-the-sunk-cost-fallacy/>

best possible outcomes. Academia, accepting that it is an institution, can be said to exert both these logics simultaneously, as participants are socialized into both conforming (fit) and excelling (becoming a professor). The archetype Professor navigates academia with its double rationale of “becoming” where the competition is hard, cost is high, and the chance of winning is minimal. Watts introduced the concepts of “careerquake” to describe the shaking of the foundations that societal development has fostered (Watts & Watts, 1997). Moreover, according to Watts et al, a careerquake presents the opportunity to build new and more robust structures in its wake, one can perhaps see how both *path dependency* and *sunken cost fallacy* can lead to a careerquake if the strategy and investments fall through. However, Law (ref) also agrees that a disruption of traditional conceptions can be an opportunity to construct new and more resilient frameworks in its aftermath. The ability to know when to hold on and when to let go is part of what career management skills entail (Law, 2015). Before discussing the other two archetypes, it is important to clarify that both the Researcher and Professional archetypes may also aspire to an academic career, although it is not a necessity.

6.2.2 Archetype: Researcher

The archetype `Researcher` is perhaps self-explicatory, as being an ESR is all about training to become a fully certified researcher. The primary codes for this archetype are *talent*, *ideal vs reality* and *competence oriented*. If the archetype Professor sees the career future as black or white, the Researcher type sees shades of grey. The talent label code describes how, even if you are an accidental academic or follow a lifelong dream, it is *talent* you rely on to advance in your career. This can be said to be the case with Kim, Pax, and Bea.

In Mel’s view, the skills acquired during the Ph.D. experience will undoubtedly enhance her future employability, even beyond academia.

“But what I can say, because it is something I have specifically thought about, is a kind of career dream. To work for, maybe not necessarily a university, but to work for a smaller research organization that delivers knowledge” (Mel)

Mel pictured a career in a research institute as a dream, literally. However, Mel does not really want to think about it before she is towards the end of her Ph.D. She will first see how she navigates academia, the combination of mobility and care and how she has developed her skills. Here Mel demonstrates a highly functional happenstance position, preferably in research.

Kim sees being a researcher as the most preferable way of making impact. Here the academic career is the means to an end.

“And I think especially with the research career- I'm feeling like I can have a bigger chance of having the impact that I'd like to have which is you know adding to like thought leadership and seeing things change” (Kim)

The Researcher archetype must navigate liminality, or the code in academia as a place where you need to find your peace somewhere between the *ideal vs reality*. Larsen et al claim that the longer you are in the liminal phase, the more difficult it is to achieve career goals (Larsen & Brandenburg, 2023). As the interviewees in this study are mostly in the beginning of their temporary contracts, it is not a study of their success, but of their ideas about coping with uncertainty and liminality. However, some may hold the door open for a professorship, and if their skills lead them there, they might be open for opportunities beyond their Researcher archetype. Gelatt claims it's a virtue to be able to change your mind, and that coping strategies are evidently a core feature for the Researcher archetype (Gelatt, 1989).

The third code is being *competence-oriented*. As a Researcher, it is the research skills that are in focus. Although the other archetypes labeled as *passion-* or *impact-oriented* are also highly talented, the benchmark for this archetype is a positive attitude towards conducting research for its own sake. It is not necessary to remain confined to the specific topic or expert position you have established through your doctoral training. What this archetype shares with the Professional archetype are the challenges posed by the various ESR skills frameworks (see section 3.4.1). The various skills frameworks are designed to assist ESRs in making informed decisions regarding prioritization, current proficiency levels, and the requirements for advancing to the next level. These frameworks encompass academic skills and often include some generic or transferable skills. However, the deficits of all traditional skills frameworks are threefold. First, these frameworks are decoupled from the overall context the ESR is trying to navigate. Skills are connected to pedagogy, but these frameworks seem to be somewhat separated from any specific pedagogical practice. Second, the skills frameworks of the EU especially are connected to *mobility* and often *transitions*, which is not self-explanatory. Third, these frameworks are designed to show an overview of possible skills, leaving the user alone with guessing where and how (Blaj-Ward, 2011).

As the latest addition to the array of skills frameworks, published on December 2, 2024, the Norwegian Framework for Career Development Guidance for Early Career Researchers aims to bridge the gap between researcher development and career guidance. This framework is founded on the distinction between researcher development and career guidance for early career researchers: *“At the individual level...the purpose of researcher development is to develop skilled researchers, while the purpose of career guidance is to help individuals develop their careers in the best possible way,*

*ensuring that their skills are utilized and further developed, and that work is seen in the context of their overall life situation*⁸².

Nevertheless, the competencies you develop as a researcher are transferable to multiple research and research adjacent positions. And the Researcher archetype is aware of this. How this transfers across are another matter.

6.2.3 Archetype: Professional

The decision to label this archetype as `Professional` was the fact that extracts from more than one candidate indicated such optimism about multiple career paths after their Ph.D. And not just as researchers or experts, but what they described as professional environments. Bea, Lee, Kim and Mel all voiced optimism about their future career prospects, noting that the Ph.D. had enhanced their competencies for diverse career paths. They all expressed a desire to apply their skills “professionally”, aspiring to roles such as high-ranking public officials (Bea) or positions closely aligned with their areas of expertise (Lee). While the Professor archetype is characterized by black-and-white thinking, and the Researcher embraces more shades of grey, the Professional can utilize the entire spectrum of colors. The codes for the archetype `Professional` are *accidental academic*, *impact*, and *positive uncertainty*.

The first code is being an *accidental academic*. This feature has been discussed in the previous archetype discussions. However, this can also apply to the Professional archetype. Kim, for example, has been “careering about”, and can be affiliated with being an *accidental academic*. With a varied career background and no linear path in her undergraduate, ending up doing a Ph.D. is for Kim her moment in the academic limelight. The same is true of Lee: talented and with a passion, she was encouraged to write a dream project for a Ph.D. proposal, and she got it. Their professional career identities have navigated them through non-academic and academic endeavours making them resilient, flexible and agile to transitions.

The Professional archetype is motivated by the desire to make an *impact*, whether it be political, societal, or aimed at addressing social injustices. What sector, workplace or employer gives them a chance to make an impact is less important. This type of identity needs to find meaning in their work, and they see meaning as making a difference or having a positive impact on people’s lives. Kim, for

⁸² In Norwegian: Målsetningen for de to tilbudene er ikke den samme: På individnivå kan en si at forskerutviklingens formål er å utvikle dyktige forskere, mens karriereveiledningens formål vil være å bidra til at den enkelte kan utvikle sin karriere på en best mulig måte, slik at kompetansen brukes og videreutvikles, og arbeid ses i sammenheng med livssituasjon for øvrig. Accessed: 04.01.2025: <https://hkdir.no/karriereveiledning-og-utdanningsvalg/rammeverk-for-karriereveiledning-for-forskere-i-tidlig-karrierefase/begreper-definisjoner-og-avgrensninger#Forskerutviklingstilbud%20og%20karriereveiledningstilbud>

example, likes teaching and could very well find fulfillment in an academic teaching position. Lee is driven by a desire to make a societal impact. As one of the few experts in her field, she finds that she can continue to apply her skills and exert influence both within and outside of academia. However, the blurry boundaries between the different archetypes remain: Rey envisions a career outside of academia where he can apply his expertise, aiming to become a recognized expert to influence the public. In contrast, Lee is more focused on using her expertise to address social injustices. Both approaches are valuable and are just juxtaposed to highlight the difference.

The last archetype code for Professional embraces uncertain pathways, or “*positive uncertainty*”, as described by Gelatt (Gelatt, 1989). This archetype is perhaps what the Norwegian legislators had in mind when they included sector mobility in the objectives for the new Ph.D. education regulation: *...”and relevant careers in other sectors of working life where research competence is required”* (Universitets- og høyskoleforskriften, 2024). Universities hold the ‘Professor’ type as the ideal, even if the statistics are clear: as few as 5-10% of all Ph.D. candidates will have a career as a professor (see Table 1 in the Introduction). However, academia does seem to give credit to research institutions as being relevant work, thus accepting this as a solid career path. The ‘Professional’, is perhaps the one that attracts less approval from academia but opens multiple career options for the ESR.

What unites all three archetypes is their shared ambition to make an impact and pursue a meaningful purpose. While the Professor archetype does not necessarily hold preference over the other two among ESRs, universities may still favor this type.

Chapter 7. Concluding chapter

7.1 Summary of the findings

This reflection is from a recent university event⁸³ where a distinguished emeritus professor in the humanities was invited to speak. He spoke about how he, upon retirement, had to share an office with three other emeriti, and there wasn't enough room for all their books and belongings. Although he was not done with his intellectual endeavors, his formal position within the university was now that of a pensioner. Nevertheless, he expressed discontentment with the relocation to a smaller shared office. Without falling into *'anecdotalism'* (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the large span from fresh Ph.D. to emeriti and the lone *scholar/magnum opus discourse* (Blaj-Ward, 2011, p. 698), highlight the contemporary multiple understandings of what becoming and being an academic entail. And thus, the complexity of career identity formation for ESRs.

Becoming an academic, a professor is unlike any other job. It's an identity and occupation so intertwined that even after retirement you are entitled to remain in the function as professor. The courtesy of office space, library access and perhaps university service is endowed to this distinct vocational group. Using Supers rainbow analogy for research staff, a research (professor) career does not end at retirement, it's inscribed (*habitus*) in your identity and acknowledged by the university and public. If this is the ideal still, how can ESR create flexible identities that encompass both a future emerita/emeriti and a professional outside academia?

This was the original research question. How can ESR, especially Ph.D. candidates, see themselves as training for a career possibly *outside* the university? Or regarding research experience as vocational experience? Notwithstanding, doing research is rightfully entangled with respect for its hard to achieve character. The dissonance between reality and ideal within the university makes career development for the temporarily employed research personnel challenging. All the interviewees in this study demonstrate versatility in navigating the significant disparities between ideal and actual conditions, with flexibility being the essential career management skill. They are "jacks of all trades" in juggling the precarious, boundaryless and protean realities of modern HE. Law defines such resilient behavior *buoyancy*, that is staying afloat in turbulence (Law, 2015). Career development is not as simple as choosing a vocation or being matched with a suitable job in any strand of labor.

⁸³ February 2024, University of Bergen

Looking from an emeriti perspective, research might look as straightforward as a combination of hard work, discipline and self-confidence, on top of a considerable talent. A research career in contemporary HE is not just uncertain, but risky. Academia accepts the unproportional contrast between individual risk and investment and the odds for success.

The main message of this thesis is that one size does not fit all. As this thesis demonstrates, different archetypes of career identities may have varying support needs. Career guidance literature highlights the significant value of career support during transitions. Training candidates in skills to manage their own careers is an investment that also prepares them for future transitions. Higher education policy advocates for increased mobility between academia and industry. Developing targeted career management skills among researchers can be a solid investment to manage mobility.

The archetype *professor* is often well taken care of in academia as long as an academic career is within reach. However, problems may arise if life happens and alters this situation. The identity disruption caused by not reaching this goal and then being left alone to search for suitable employment elsewhere, may cause a career identity crisis. Training in seeing opportunities and perhaps planned happenstance may improve such transitional phases.

The archetype *researcher* is perhaps the most attractive labour in the institute sector (in Norway), at government level and consultancy business. Referring to skills frameworks once again, learning skills demand more reflexive pedagogy and training than seeing a chart. And some of the skills that are attractive for employers can be tacit knowledge and need to be addressed. Career learning might be needed for this archetype as well.

However, it is the archetype professional that perhaps can teach us something about coping strategies and navigating liminal space. Nevertheless, this professional archetype may also feel impostorism and insecurity, even if they have a positive mindset about their own future career. To better support this archetype, it is essential to collaborate with academia to acknowledge that a career in academia is not the sole vocational path for researchers.

7.2 Contribution to the field

With eight qualitative interviews, each lasting one and a half hours, the volume of material for analysis was substantial. The research question explored how ESR in the SSH disciplines perceive the concept of career and future career prospects. The initial objective was to contribute to the broader understanding of employability for ESR. If employability is defined as the ability of ESR to develop skills that enhance their readiness for the future labor market, the thesis did not achieve this aim. The key finding of this thesis is that career identity is more significant than simple employability.

First, employability is connected to the idea of transfer, and that is a contested idea. Hooley et al, in their study of rationalities behind employability strategies in eighteen higher education institutions across eight countries, conclude that the practice of employability provision exists within the context of a neoliberal higher education system and labour market (Hooley et al., 2023) . The focus on skills frameworks can be seen as a return to the *formist* paradigm described by Savickas. The frameworks such as VITAE and *ResearchComp* offer an inventory of generic academic skills to be acquired, which are then matched with industry requirements. The implicit matching with a role or vocation outside of academia has an instrumental and rational choice logic embedded. The reflexive, always adaptive individual is responsible for “selling” their skills to the outside world (Sarkar et al., 2020; Weber et al., 2018).

This thesis concludes that career identity is better nurtured and developed when other perspectives of identity formation than pure researcher development. While this viewpoint may seem unexciting to career professionals, it could offer valuable insights to doctoral educators and researcher developers. The issue of employability is not a skills deficit or a mismatch. There is a disparity between the challenges of navigating transitional spaces and the level of investment academia makes in individuals experiencing this precarious liminality. Academia could consider offering ESRs transition pedagogy and support to better equip them for managing uncertainty. Healy’s work is here of interest as it argues that employability has created a new space and field of professional practice within which professional services staff can expand their power and influence (Healy, 2023).

The introduction of more professions into the research support system is not a threat to the institution; rather, it is a natural development resulting from increasing complexity. Researcher support systems began to evolve during the same period when disparities between ESRs and permanent positions became more pronounced. An example from Norway is the establishment of NARMA, the Norwegian Association for Research Management, in 2013. The heightened competition for funding has necessitated the involvement of professional staff to support researchers, institutions, and nations in securing grants. Similarly, there is now a growing need for professional services from career guidance experts to assist in the transition from the doctoral platform to subsequent career stages.

One of the primary goals of this thesis was to enhance learning to improve service provision at the career center for ESRs at UiB. A significant finding is the need to develop better pedagogical tools for navigating liminality for ESRs. The service must recognize the investment in skills and identity formation and find sophisticated ways to communicate that uncertainty can lead to positive outcomes. Another key takeaway for the career center is the need for a deeper understanding of

knowledge transfer. Knowledge is not a commodity; it is intertwined with identity, context, and presence. While skills frameworks can provide inspiration and an overview, career development requires more sophisticated and holistic approaches

7.3 Limitations of the study

It is important to acknowledge the weaknesses as part of research quality. Firstly, the richness of this thesis's material is thanks to all the interviewees. Without volunteers, qualitative social science would not be possible. However, this also highlights a limitation of the study: it involves only eight participants from a single university. Consequently, institutional and geographical differences were beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings must be carefully considered.

To increase the reliability of the findings, perhaps a longitudinal approach where graduates are followed or researched over a longer time period would give interesting findings. Durette et al, ask if the PhD students themselves are the correct group to ask about what skills a Ph.D. can give, since they are not completely done with the whole program yet. They might not be aware of the skills and have not had the opportunity to exercise their skills (Durette et al., 2016, p. 1356). This is a legitimate question, and worth reflecting on for future studies.

Some epistemological reflections are suitable. The initial draft of the thesis used "perceptions" to discuss ESR thought, ideas, feelings and assumptions. Studying perceptions are difficult as they are not the same as behavior. Nevertheless, there are multiple papers who use the term perceptions as their study object (To mention a few from this literature list Beasy et al., 2022; Bettencourt et al., 2022; Glover-Chambers et al., 2024; Leach, 2015; Lemke, 2020; Loveday, 2018; Matthews et al., 2014; McAlpine & Turner, 2012; Sakurai, 2019; Smith, 2002; Aarnikoivu et al., 2019).

Another epistemic challenge that remains unresolved in this thesis is how ESRs understand the term "employability," as this was not included in the interview guide. The question of their understanding of the concept was never directly asked; instead, it was rephrased to be more comprehensible to the interviewees. Consequently, the term "employability" is now associated with the thesis without having received full attention or inquiry.

One last limitation is that the thesis several places scratch the surface of a vulnerable topic, and that is mental health (see e.g. Stubb et al., 2011). How do the various identity positions deal with stress, insecurity, precarity and competition. And even more important, what do the universities do about it?

7.3.1. Future research

This thesis may be one of the first in to address the new legislation for ESR in Norway and the changing objectives for doctoral education. This opens for multiple research projects. How can we better support ESR? Addressing these issues requires a multi-level approach, involving not only ESRs and other precarious academics (such as postdocs and casual academics), but also doctoral school administrators, universities, and supervisors. Further, it is still a lack of knowledge on what type of employment SSH ESR holds outside of academia. This thesis did also have an ambition to increase knowledge for career service provision.

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Vurdering av behandling av personopplysninger

Referansenummer

342827

Vurderingstype

Standard

Dato

12.11.2024

Tittel

Master i karriereveiledning INN

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Universitetet i Innlandet / Fakultet for helse- og sosialvitenskap / Institutt for sosialfag og veiledning

Prosjektansvarlig

Tristram Hooley

Student

Ellen Hagen

Prosjektperiode

02.04.2024 - 31.01.2025

Kategorier personopplysninger

Alminnelige

Lovlig grunnlag

Samtykke (Personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a)

Behandlingen av personopplysningene er lovlig så fremt den gjennomføres som oppgitt i meldeskjemaet. Det lovlige grunnlaget gjelder til 31.01.2025.

[Meldeskjema](#)

Kommentar

Personverntjenester har vurdert endringen registrert i meldeskjemaet.

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg. Behandlingen kan fortsette.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

Vi vil følge opp underveis (hvert annet år) og ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet/pågår i tråd med den behandlingen som er dokumentert.

Lykke til videre med prosjektet!

Attachment nr. 2 Invitation to participate in master study

Ellen Hagen
Botnavegen 27
5725 Vaksdal

23.01.2024

Dear PhD candidate

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Ellen Hagen, and I am currently the head of UiB Ferd career center for early-stage researchers⁸⁴. I am also enrolled at *Inland University of applied Science (INN)* at the Faculty of Social and Health Sciences, studying Master in Career Guidance⁸⁵. I am writing to invite you to participate in a qualitative research study as part of my Master thesis.

I am conducting a research project titled "*Perceptions of Employability among HUMSAM Ph.D. candidates at University of Bergen*", which aims to explore how early-stage candidates think and reflect upon their employability both within and outside academia.

The wider goal for this study is to improve the career services provided by UiB ferd.

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to talk about how you perceive the career opportunities available to you after completing your PhD and what challenges you imagine in transitioning from a PhD candidate to your further career? The process should take approximately one hour (1-1,5 hour) and can be conducted at a time and place that is most convenient for you and it can be done either in person, over the phone, or via video call, depending on your preference.

Please be assured that all information provided will be kept confidential and used solely for the purpose of this research. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any consequences.

If you have any questions or would like more information about the study, please feel free to contact me at ellen.hagen@uib.no and/or phone: +47 99 51 85 40.

The study is supervised by professor Tristram Hooley⁸⁶ at *Inland University of applied Science*, and is registered at SIKT with nr: 342827

Thank you for considering participating in this research.

Best regards,

Ellen Hagen

Master student in Career Guidance at INN

⁸⁴ <https://www.uib.no/en/ferd>

⁸⁵ <https://www.inn.no/studier/vare-studier/master-i-karriereveiledning/>

⁸⁶ <https://www.inn.no/finn-en-ansatt/tristram-hooley.html>

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

” Perceptions of employability among early stage SSH PhD candidates – a case-study from a Norwegian University (Norwegian universities)”

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er undersøke kandidatenes forestillinger om karriere og karrieremuligheter etter avlagt doktorgrad. I dette skrevet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

Formålet med prosjektet er å øke kunnskapsgrunnlaget om hva yngre forskere (i dette prosjektet tidlig fase doktorgradskandidater) tenker om egne karrieremuligheter, samt hva som bidrar til disse tankene eller forestillingene og hvilke diskursive og praktiske utfordringer de står i.

Forskningsprosjektet er en individuell masteroppgave ved Høgskolen i Innlandet, master i karriereveiledning.

Målet er å gjennomføre 10 semi-strukturerte intervju med kandidater i målgruppen.

Forsknings spørsmål: “What are the perceptions of employability and career (readiness) among (HUMSAM) early-stage phd students at a mid-size Norwegian university?”

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Høgskolen ved Innlandet, Fakultet for helse- og sosialvitenskap er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Utvalget gjøres ved en henvendelse til PhD koordinator ved humanistisk fakultet og samfunnsvitenskapelig fakultet ved UiB. Disse vil bli bedt om å sende henvendelsen til kandidater registrert ved egen enhet, til de som er registrert som kandidater de siste 3 år. De som ønsker å delta henvender seg direkte til masterstudenten for å avtale tid og sted. PhD koordinatorene vil ikke ha noen medvirkning i selve utvelgelsen.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Det å delta innebærer å samtykke til et semi-strukturert intervju (norsk/engelsk) som varer mellom 1-1,5 timer. Samtalen vil bli tatt opp via telefon og transkribert ved hjelp av nettskjema dikatafon. Dataene lagres via onedrive Feide. Videre vil behandling av data bearbeides ved hjelp av dataprogrammet Nvivo.

Spørsmålene er laget for å få en samtale om hvordan den enkelte oppfatter og forstår seg selv i forhold til karriere og karrieremuligheter etter endt doktorgrad. En del av spørsmålene omhandler bakgrunn som familiebakgrunn, opprinnelsesland, tidligere arbeidserfaring ol. Den som blir intervjuet velger selv hva som er relevant.

Transkripsjonene vil kun være tilgjengelige for studenten og eventuelt veileder ved behov.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- *Veileder: Professor Tristram Hooley*
- *Masterstudent Ellen Hagen*
- *Kanskje, dersom Professor Hooley skulle bli utilgjengelig (force majeure, sykdom), Masterprogram koordinator Ingrid Bårdsdatter Bakke*

Intervjuene vil bli spilt inn via Samsung mobiltelefon med abonnement gjennom Universitetet i Bergen. Intervjuene lastes deretter opp i Nettskjema.no via FEIDE innlogging. Videre vil transkribering av intervju skje manuelt, delvis ved hjelp av transkriberingsfunksjonen i nettskjema diktafon som er en kryptert applikasjon.

Videre vil bebreiding av data skje gjennom Nvivo som lastes ned via UiB sitt programvarebibliotek. Opplæringen i bruk av Nvivo skjer gjennom Universitetsbiblioteket, som også har ansvar for opplæring i korrekt personvern-prosedyrer ved bruk.

Navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine vil jeg erstatte med en kode som lagres på egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrige data ved å adgangsstyre tilganger med passord.

Deltakerne skal ikke kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjonen. Sitater vil godkjennes av deltakerne før publisering.

Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes høsten 2024. Etter prosjektslutt vil datamaterialet med dine personopplysninger anonymiseres.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra *Høgskolen i Innlandet* har Sikt – Kunnskapssektorens tjenesteleverandør vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

Veileder: Professor Tristram Hooley, tristram.hooley@inn.no, tlf +47 62 43 03 48

Masterstudent Ellen Hagen, ellen.hagen@uib.no, tlf +47 99518540

Masterprogram koordinator Ingrid Bårdsdatter Bakke ingrid.bardsdatter.bakke@inn.no tlf +47 61 28 85 16

Vårt personvernombud Bente Marie Giset bente.giset@inn.no, tlf +47 62 43 02 95

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til vurderingen som er gjort av personverntjenestene fra Sikt, kan du ta kontakt via:

- Epost: personverntjenester@sikt.no eller telefon: 73 98 40 40.

Med vennlig hilsen

Prosjektansvarlig
(Forsker/veileder)

Eventuelt student

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet *Perceptions of employability among early stage SSH PhD candidates – a case-study from a Norwegian University (Norwegian universities*, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i *intervju*

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Interview guide

Time and place, length approx. 1- 1,5 hour, recorded by phone, transcribed.

Introduction

1. Briefly introduce me (master student) and the purpose of the interview.
2. Explain how the data will be used and assure the interviewee of their anonymity.

Background Information and career route into academia

Question	Elaborate or help questions
Can you tell me a bit about your background?	e.g., academic background, previous work experience, perhaps family background like “first in family” or international background
Can you tell me how or when you decided to apply for a phd?	Motivation, push &pull factors, many attempts, reactions to failure before succeeding, support team,
Influence on career perception: What experiences or individuals have significantly influenced your career perceptions (or thought on career)?	Family, peers, supervisor, ambitions. Intrinsic motivation?

Perceptions of Career, employability and/or career readiness

Question	Elaborate or help questions
Have you any associations or thoughts about the concept <i>career</i> in the context of your PhD?	Understanding the career concept
Do you think your phd is vital for your future career? Academic/non-academic, skills or lack of skills,	Reflections on employability and fit (understanding of elements relevant for <i>transition pedagogy</i>)
Can you describe an ordinary day at work, or perhaps a week if you wish?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>professional socialization;</i> 2. <i>professional skills;</i> 3. <i>academic development;</i> 4. <i>and personal effectiveness</i> <p>These skills are defined by Nowell as core skills in academic career development. Can be used to categorize skills.</p>

Can you describe the ideal professor or the academic star? Academic stars, ideal discourse and how they relate to that.	ideal discourse and how they relate to that.
Is the Ph.D. -program or research school the same as “professor school”?	Provocative question to understand how they understand the core task for PhD programs.

Career Support

Question	Elaborate or help questions
What types of career support have you received during your PhD	e.g., from your supervisor, department, peers)?
What do you find most challenging in our current work? Do you discuss this with someone?	Alternative question: What additional career support do you wish you had received? Discourses and “rules” in academia
Do you talk about careers or future work?	With whom, when and how

Career Opportunities

Question	Elaborate or help questions
How do you perceive the career opportunities available to you after completing your PhD?	Academia or industry, getting funding, next career move, plan A, B and C
Has your perception of your career prospects changed over the course of your PhD?	Looking back, change? More or less optimistic, or same? What has fueled confidence, lack of confidence,
What challenges do you anticipate after your phd?	

Change:

Are you more or less positive about getting a job now?	
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Closing

Is there anything else you would like to share about your perceptions of career as a PhD candidate?

Thank you, repeat the anonymity, how data will be handled and option to withdraw at any time. Let them read through the transcript and use of data.

Attachment nr. 5 Abductive Thematic Analysis

Meaning units from raw data (KIM) A	Original Code (node) label `Career`	Meaning units from raw data (KIM) B	Other Original Code (node) labels	Added Abductive analysis
<p><i>"I feel like I'm kind of a person who hasn't had this like - oh I go from A to B to C and it's this upward line. I've gone up in salary and then down in salary...."</i></p> <p><i>So, I think for me a career is mostly focused on impact and what kind of focus I have and what impact I have</i></p> <p><i>.. So for me it's more of like a wandering path. but I don't have anxiety or fear about it. I feel like there will be a lot of kind of interesting options to consider afterwards.</i></p> <p><i>And I think especially with the research career- I'm feeling like I can have a bigger chance of having the impact that I'd like to have which is you know adding to like thought leadership and seeing things change. So, for me career is really dependent on what impact I have and who I can kind of involve.</i></p> <p><i>And I think maybe that's a little bit different than most people. So, I kind of feel like for me a career can be like anything really. You know, like I could take my PhD and then afterwards be like - oh I want to part-time be a researcher and part-time also have an organic garden" (KIM).</i></p>	<p>Non-identification</p> <p>Strategic</p> <p>Purposeful</p> <p>Ideal vs reality</p>	<p><i>Yeah sure. I have kind of a varied background. I'm in my mid-30s so I have about 15 years of professional work experience behind me. I graduated ... in 2011. And I kind of started as like a project coordinator, account coordinator for a couple years and then became a project manager.... That was kind of in like the tech industry so you know relevant skills but very different industry.... Then I took a bit of a break and I actually became an outdoor guide for five years. So, like totally different but also like kind of surprisingly again the same thing like different industry but relevant skills.</i></p> <p><i>And it's just been in the last like three years that kind of trying to figure out what to do next. So, I took a master. And yeah and I like started thinking that research would be a really interesting area for me and I really like that kind of use like some of my skills that I've learned along the way like being a project manager is very useful has really come in handy. But I think for me like research you kind of start getting more into like philosophical questions and there are a lot of just different things you can do that I find really interesting. So this is kind of my I'd say like the PhD for me is like an introduction to being a researcher. So I don't really have like a lot of direct experience in research but this is like my introduction to you know kind of a new career path.</i></p>	<p>Background theme</p> <p>Work experience outside academia</p> <p>Transferable skills</p> <p>Meaningful, "calling" for a greener world</p>	<p>Focus on transferable skills, emphasize how skills are relevant from context to context.</p> <p>Focusing on academia is not very different from other industries.</p> <p>Together with information from column A, the career focus is making an impact, seeing things change.</p> <p>Career identity might be more closely linked to this overarching goal of making a difference, and (grow organic vegetables) be a sustainable (good) person.</p> <p>However, she recognize that the new knowledge arriving from this research experience will perhaps direct her into a new career path.</p> <p>Analysis – careering about?</p>

