

Doctoral graduates' experiences of PhD engagement and outcomes

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Background

- Much existing support for doctoral students' employability does not fully recognise the diversity within student cohorts, diverse post-PhD pathways and undetermined outcomes.
- These factors continue to present multiple risks:
 - doctoral graduates missing opportunities to achieve fulfilling outcomes
 - organisations missing talent and knowledge
 - global and local challenges remaining unanswered

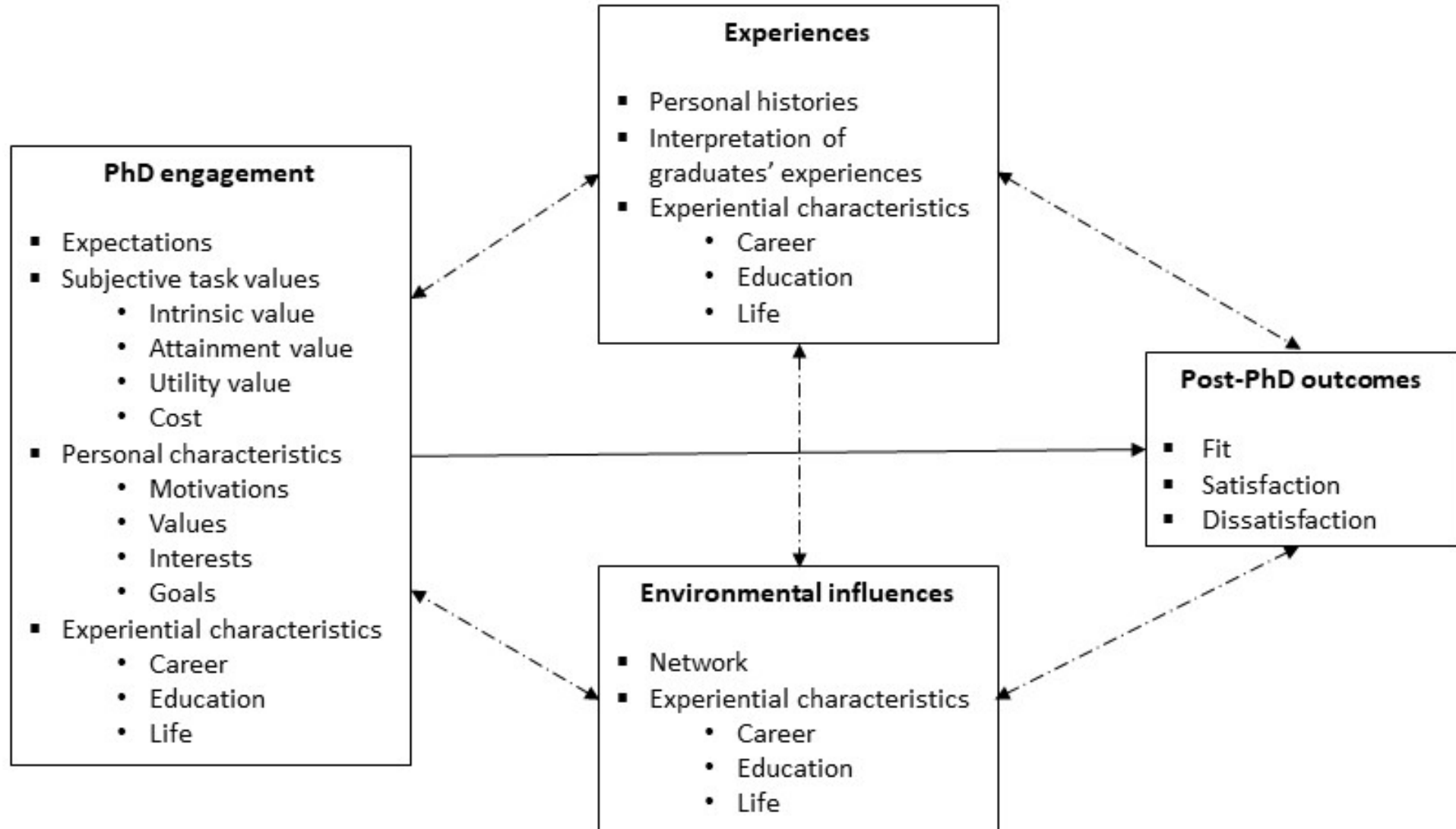
Research questions

- How graduates construe their PhD engagement and outcomes.
- Graduates' stage of career and influences on PhD engagement and outcome experiences.
- What a PhD engagement-fit framework reveals about graduates' PhD engagement and outcome experiences.

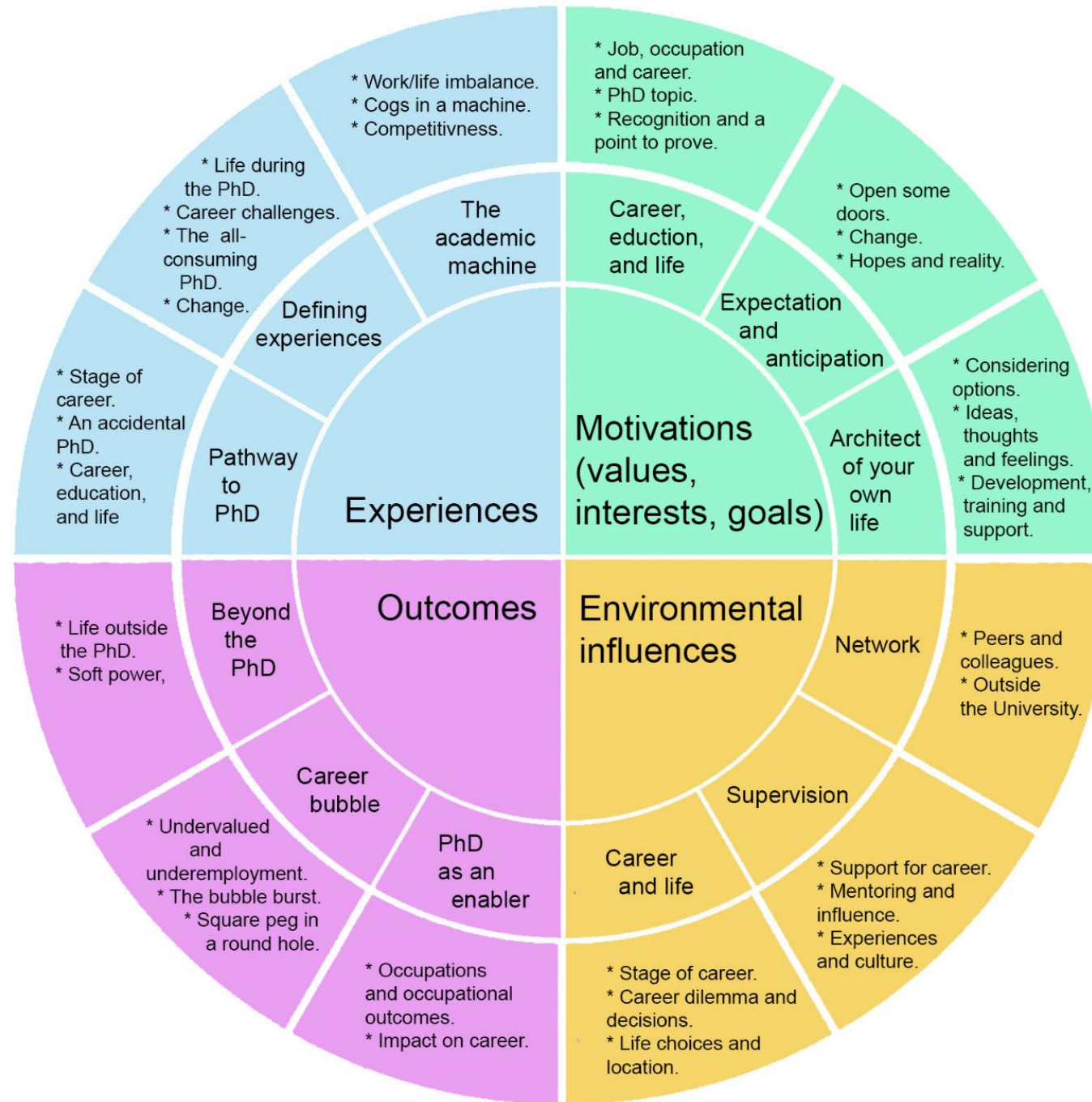
Methodology

- Phenomenological study.
- A conceptual framework approach:
 - Expectancy value theory
 - Person-vocation fit theory
- Semi-structured interviews with nine PhD graduates 1-6 years out.
- Participant sample included a range of disciplines, career stages, gender, universities and post-PhD careers.
- Interview questions themed around *motivations, careers activities and impact*.

PhD engagement-fit framework



Findings



Findings

- Differences in relation to career stage, support for career development, experiences and outcomes.
- A range of positive or negative influencing factors determining PhD engagement and outcome experiences:
 - pre-PhD histories
 - experiences during the PhD
 - networks
 - supervision
 - training and support during the PhD
 - motivations and expectations
 - decision-making and choice

Findings

- A range of outcome experiences:
 - PhD as an enabler or barrier to post-PhD careers
 - Impact on graduates' lives outside the PhD
- The most **satisfactory outcomes** appeared linked to **recognition and value of the PhD qualification and skills**.
- The most **dissatisfactory outcomes** appeared linked to **undervalue, underemployment and barriers**.
- **PhD engagement** alone cannot influence how graduates construe their outcomes.
 - **Experiences and Environmental influences appeared strongly linked to outcomes** ie. networks, culture, support and development.

Experiences

- Prior career, education and life experiences clearly influenced their initial PhD engagement.
- Significant personal and life-changing events impacted or intensified their studies and changed their priorities and outlook beyond their PhD.
- Female participants discussed their circumstances and concerns relating to work/life imbalance associated with academic careers, and the negative consequences on their lives or families.

Motivations (values, interests, goals)

- Choice of PhD topic influenced by practical and pragmatic decision-making, familiarity with the broader field and department, career experiences, interests, and motivations.
- All had hoped for career direction and development or promotion however, only a few had clear direction and focussed on specific outcomes.
- Some expressed positive and beneficial experiences through their university careers service, however some questioned the appropriateness towards meeting the needs of PhD students.

Environmental influences

- Networks positively influenced PhD experiences or led to career development and opportunities. However, some lacked networking opportunities, experienced barriers and disadvantages.
- Supervision and research culture influenced socialisation, support, networking, professional and career development.
- Making challenging decisions towards post-PhD outcomes.
 - Motivations, values and goals were influenced across time through their sociocultural environments.
 - PhD engagement, environmental factors and experiences may shape one another and form, modify or change anticipated outcomes.

Outcomes

- PhD graduates continue within diverse and changeable careers.
 - Educator, teacher, trainer, people developer within other sectors
 - Academic, researcher or other roles within higher education
 - Researcher within other sectors
 - Other occupations
 - Consultant, freelance, portfolio career
- PhD attainment can lead to negative outcomes for graduates.

Lack of recognition and support within their role and occupational environment, most notably within an academic or research pathway, including a lack of career development, nurturing or collegiality.

Outcomes

- Influencing factors can lead to a change of aspired career for PhD students and graduates.

External or internal factors such as unavailability of funding or moving on from their topic led to a change of aspired career.

- PhD attainment can lead to positive outcomes for graduates.

Enhancements and benefits to their careers and lives including enhanced credibility and status, recognition, confidence, self-efficacy, advocacy, capability, resilience, independence, changed world views.

Recognised the versatility of their PhD towards their career opportunities.

Recommendations

- Designing support for doctoral students should consider ways to appropriately meet the career development needs of individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and at all doctoral stages.
- Approaches to the design and delivery of doctoral programs and training should enhance better opportunities for doctoral students to actively engage in career development at all doctoral stages.
- Networks need to be recognised as channels to enable opportunities for doctoral students to consider their career aspirations and options during their studies.
- Supervision, research environments and cultures need to be recognised as conduits influencing students PhD engagement and outcome experiences.

Future research

- Fit perspectives and doctoral framework approaches, for example:
 - Applicants and current students.
 - Sociocultural environments and other characteristics of student diversity.
 - Case study approaches considering employers' views of employing doctoral graduates.
- Further characteristics within doctoral student populations - gender, domicile status, ethnicity, disability, parents and carers, mode, field of study, type of doctorate.
- Alternative academic careers to highlight equivalency regarding recognition and value of PhD holders in non-academic occupations and different sectors.

Thank you for listening

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WELL
★
BEST Wishes from Jenie & Dylan to you!

Congrats

BEST Wishes from Jenie & Dylan to you!

Dear Sarah,
HUGE congratulations on your thesis submission.
TIME TO CELEBRATE
Thanks for all the support you have given us on our thesis journey!
Best wishes
PCU, all the way
best client
Sarah & Congratulate!
Cito

Dear Sarah,
congratulations and best wishes.
Luna

Congratulate
[con-grat-uh-tee-uh] noun, exclamation
A message of happiness about someone's amazing success.
and going, instead of having for you!