

UNIVERSIDAD LOYOLA ANDALUCÍA



TESIS DOCTORAL

“Análisis del bienestar y la satisfacción del personal docente e investigador universitario: una aplicación desde el enfoque de demandas y recursos”

“An analysis of well-being and job satisfaction among university teaching and research staff: a job demands–resources approach”

DOCTORADO EN DESARROLLO INCLUSIVO Y SOSTENIBLE

Doctoranda: María de la Sierra Rey Tienda

Directores: José Antonio Ariza Montes

Antonio Luis Leal Rodríguez

- Mención de Doctorado Internacional

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Llegó el momento. Después de tanto esfuerzo, por fin. En realidad, todo comenzó algunos años atrás.

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*No te rindas por favor no cedas,
aunque el frío queme,
aunque el miedo muerda,
aunque el sol se ponga y se calle el viento,
aún hay fuego en tu alma,
aún hay vida en tus sueños,
porque cada día es un comienzo,
porque esta es la hora y el mejor momento,
porque no estás sola,
porque yo te quiero.*

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Resumen

Introducción

En las últimas décadas, la academia ha experimentado profundas transformaciones estructurales asociadas a la expansión de los sistemas de evaluación basados en el rendimiento y a la progresiva intensificación del trabajo. En la actualidad, se espera que el profesorado destaque simultáneamente en docencia, investigación, tareas administrativas, visibilidad internacional, transferencia del conocimiento, rankings y compromiso externo, a menudo en entornos marcados por la incertidumbre, la competencia y un apoyo institucional limitado. Estas presiones han contribuido a que hoy en día los límites entre la vida profesional y personal sean casi imperceptibles, lo que se ha traducido en una preocupación genuina por la salud mental, la satisfacción laboral y el bienestar subjetivo en el ámbito académico.

Más allá de su función como organizaciones dedicadas a la generación y transmisión de conocimiento, las universidades actúan como instituciones públicas con una clara responsabilidad social en la promoción de condiciones laborales justas, éticas y sostenibles. Esta responsabilidad no se limita a su misión educativa, sino que se extiende a la forma en que el trabajo académico es organizado y valorado. En este sentido, el creciente debate sobre el bienestar en el ámbito académico se alinea estrechamente con los principios recogidos en la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible de las Naciones Unidas. Los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS), adoptados como un marco global para fomentar sociedades inclusivas y sostenibles, reconocen la salud, el bienestar y el trabajo decente como pilares fundamentales del progreso social. En este marco, el ODS 3 impulsa la salud y el bienestar, y el ODS 8 promueve el trabajo decente, el empleo productivo y el crecimiento inclusivo. En el ámbito de la educación superior, estos objetivos implican que salvaguardar la salud mental y la calidad del trabajo del personal académico no constituye únicamente una cuestión organizativa interna, sino un compromiso social más amplio.

Con objeto de traducir en un problema organizativo investigable estas preocupaciones de la sociedad en general y de las instituciones académicas en particular, esta tesis se centra en cómo las condiciones laborales académicas se estructuran como

demandas (ej. estrés por el rol, desequilibrio entre el trabajo y la vida personal) y recursos (ej. control del trabajo, apoyo social) que determinan el bienestar y las actitudes laborales. El modelo de Demandas y Recursos Laborales (*Job Demands–Resources Model*) ofrece un mecanismo parsimonioso para explicar las vías de tensión y motivación, mientras que la teoría del Ajuste Persona-Organización (*Person–Organization Fit*) se centra en el análisis de la compatibilidad, que es particularmente relevante en contextos impulsados por la vocación, como el académico. La integración de estas perspectivas nos permite conectar las presiones institucionales (por ejemplo, la gestión del rendimiento, la precariedad) con las experiencias y los resultados individuales. Apoyándose en estos dos enfoques teóricos, la tesis adopta perspectivas analíticas tanto relacionales como configuracionales para captar la complejidad del presente tópico de investigación.

Objetivos

El objetivo general de esta tesis doctoral consiste en desarrollar una comprensión integral del bienestar en la academia, examinando cómo las condiciones de trabajo influyen en la satisfacción laboral, el bienestar subjetivo y la salud mental del personal docente e investigador. En concreto, la tesis busca explorar las interacciones a través de las cuales los entornos de trabajo académico configuran las experiencias del personal. Asimismo, pretende contribuir a la literatura sobre el bienestar del profesional académico mediante la integración de marcos teóricos consolidados con enfoques metodológicos diseñados para captar la complejidad y la heterogeneidad propias de la academia. De este modo, la tesis aspira a contribuir tanto al debate científico como a la reflexión institucional y al diseño de políticas públicas, ofreciendo criterios para comprender cómo se evalúa y se apoya el trabajo académico de manera que se promuevan condiciones laborales sostenibles y decentes. Los objetivos alcanzados en esta tesis fueron los siguientes:

1. Realizar una revisión sistemática profunda de la literatura científica sobre bienestar subjetivo, satisfacción laboral, salud mental y ajuste persona–organización.

2. Analizar el impacto de las variables antecedentes, concretamente las demandas y los recursos laborales, sobre la satisfacción laboral del profesorado universitario perteneciente al ámbito de las ciencias sociales en España. Se examinaron tanto sus efectos directos como su influencia indirecta o mediada por el ajuste persona–organización.
3. Realizar un análisis comparado de las demandas y los recursos laborales del profesorado universitario en España y Portugal y examinar su relación con el bienestar subjetivo y la salud mental, así como su influencia a través del ajuste persona–organización.

Metodología

Para alcanzar estos objetivos, la presente tesis adopta un diseño de investigación multimétodo, fundamentado en investigaciones empíricas realizadas con muestras de personal docente e investigador (PDI) de instituciones de educación superior. En primer lugar, se llevó a cabo una revisión sistemática de la literatura siguiendo los postulados de la guía PRISMA, con el fin de recoger la máxima evidencia existente sobre bienestar subjetivo, satisfacción laboral, salud mental y ajuste persona–organización en contextos académicos.

Sobre esta base teórica, los estudios empíricos se apoyan en el marco del Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R Model) y en la teoría del ajuste persona–organización (P-O Fit) para abordar la problemática del bienestar del PDI en las instituciones universitarias. Posteriormente, en la fase cuantitativa, se administró un cuestionario validado a PDI de ciencias sociales en España. Para ello se empleó un modelo de ecuaciones estructurales por el método de mínimos cuadrados parciales (PLS-SEM), con el propósito de analizar las relaciones estructurales entre demandas laborales, recursos laborales y satisfacción laboral, así como el papel mediador del ajuste persona–organización. Con el fin de ir más allá de los efectos netos y captar la complejidad causal, se aplicó posteriormente el Análisis Comparativo Cualitativo (QCA) a los datos de la encuesta, con el objetivo de identificar configuraciones alternativas de demandas y recursos.

Finalmente, se recogieron datos cualitativos mediante entrevistas a personal académico de dos contextos nacionales, España y Portugal, lo que permitió una comprensión más profunda de las experiencias y las condiciones institucionales. Estos datos se analizaron mediante Análisis Comparativo Cualitativo con conjuntos difusos (fuzzy-set QCA) y Set-Theoretic Multi-Method Research (SMMR), lo que permitió identificar múltiples configuraciones de demandas laborales, recursos laborales, ajuste persona–organización y bienestar subjetivo asociadas tanto a altos como a bajos niveles de salud mental.

Resultados

Los resultados obtenidos muestran que el bienestar, la satisfacción laboral y la salud mental en la academia constituyen desafíos centrales en el contexto académico contemporáneo y por ello requieren atención. A lo largo de la tesis, los hallazgos subrayan el papel crítico de las demandas y los recursos laborales en la configuración de las experiencias del PDI.

En primer lugar, la revisión sistemática de la literatura pone de manifiesto la naturaleza fragmentada de la investigación existente sobre el bienestar del PDI y señala la necesidad de comprender la complejidad del trabajo académico. La revisión identifica el exceso de carga de trabajo y el conflicto entre vida laboral y personal como demandas recurrentes y especialmente relevantes, junto con el papel de recursos clave como la autonomía laboral y el apoyo social. Asimismo, revela que el ajuste persona–organización es un constructo escasamente explorado en contextos académicos, a pesar de su especial relevancia en una profesión altamente vocacional, donde la alineación de valores organizativos y personales desempeña un papel central. Además, un trabajo empírico previo subraya la importancia de incorporar el compromiso laboral en el análisis de la salud mental, ya que su inclusión mejora la capacidad explicativa del constructo dentro del marco JD-R.

En segundo lugar, el estudio central de la tesis se centra en la satisfacción laboral del profesorado de ciencias sociales en España. Esta investigación aporta evidencia empírica sobre cómo las demandas y los recursos laborales influyen en la satisfacción

laboral, tanto de forma directa como indirecta a través del ajuste persona–organización. Los resultados muestran que la alineación entre los valores individuales y las prácticas organizativas desempeñan un papel mediador clave, reforzando la capacidad explicativa de los modelos de satisfacción laboral y vinculando empíricamente el marco JD-R con la teoría del ajuste persona–organización. La relevancia y el rigor de esta contribución se reflejan en su publicación en una revista de impacto, *European Journal of Innovation Management*, clasificada en el primer cuartil (Q1) de Journal Citation Report (JCR), con el título de *Understanding Job Satisfaction and Person–Organization Fit in R&D and Innovation: Managerial Insights for the Job Demands–Resources Model*.

Por último, el último de los estudios amplía estos resultados adoptando una perspectiva configuracional sobre la salud mental y el bienestar subjetivo del personal académico en España y Portugal. Los análisis configuracionales revelan que el desequilibrio entre vida laboral y personal y el reducido bienestar subjetivo son condiciones especialmente influyentes en el empeoramiento de la salud mental, especialmente cuando se combinan con un bajo control laboral y un débil ajuste persona–organización. Al mismo tiempo, los resultados muestran que niveles similares en salud mental pueden alcanzarse a través de diferentes configuraciones de condiciones, poniendo de relieve la heterogeneidad de las experiencias académicas en distintos contextos institucionales y nacionales.

Discusión y conclusiones

Esta tesis concluye que la satisfacción laboral, el bienestar y la salud mental en la academia se comprenden mejor como fenómenos relacionales y configurados por la interacción entre demandas laborales y recursos laborales. La integración del marco JD-R y de la teoría del ajuste persona–organización (P–O Fit), junto con la aplicación conjunta de enfoques analíticos lineales y configuracionales, PLS-SEM y QCA respectivamente, ponen de manifiesto la utilidad diversidad y versatilidad tanto a nivel teórico como metodológico para el estudio del bienestar del PDI.

Los resultados ponen de relieve el papel central de las condiciones institucionales, destacando en particular la necesidad de regular el desequilibrio entre la vida laboral y personal, reforzar el control sobre el trabajo y el apoyo social, así como promover una mayor alineación entre los valores académicos y las prácticas organizativas. Asimismo, esta tesis contribuye a replantear la salud mental académica no como una carga individual que deba gestionarse, sino como una responsabilidad colectiva y organizativa. En consecuencia, ofrece una base para formas más sostenibles de trabajo académico y tiene importantes implicaciones no solo para las agendas de investigación, las políticas públicas y la gobernanza de las instituciones de educación superior, sino también para las futuras generaciones formadas en ellas. Desde esta perspectiva, el bienestar del PDI trasciende el ámbito universitario y contribuye a fortalecer la capacidad de la sociedad para la innovación y el desarrollo sostenible a largo plazo.

Palabras clave: Satisfacción en el trabajo, Salud Mental, Bienestar Subjetivo, Modelo JD-R, Ajuste Persona-Organización, Academia.

Abstract

Introduction

In recent decades, academia has undergone profound structural transformations associated with the expansion of performance-based evaluation systems and the progressive intensification of work. Today, academic staff are expected to excel simultaneously in teaching, research, administrative duties, international visibility, knowledge transfer, rankings and external engagement, often within environments characterized by uncertainty, competition and limited institutional support. These pressures have contributed to a situation in which the boundaries between professional and personal life have become almost imperceptible, leading to growing concern about mental health, job satisfaction and subjective well-being in academia.

Beyond their function as organizations dedicated to the generation and transmission of knowledge, universities operate as public institutions with a clear social responsibility to promote fair, ethical and sustainable working conditions. This responsibility is not limited to their educational mission but also extends to the way academic work is organized and valued. In this regard, the growing debate on well-being in academia aligns closely with the principles established in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted as a global framework for fostering inclusive and sustainable societies, recognize health, well-being and decent work as fundamental pillars of social progress. Within this framework, SDG 3 promotes health and well-being, while SDG 8 encourages decent work, productive employment and inclusive growth. In the context of higher education, these objectives imply that safeguarding the mental health and work quality of academic staff is not merely an internal organizational issue but a broader social commitment.

In order to translate these societal and institutional concerns into a researchable organizational problem, this thesis focuses on how academic working conditions are structured as job demands (e.g., role stress, work–life imbalance) and job resources (e.g., job control, social support) that shape well-being and work-related attitudes. The Job Demands–Resources Model provides a parsimonious mechanism for explaining

strain and motivation pathways, while Person–Organization Fit theory focuses on the analysis of compatibility, which is particularly relevant in vocation-driven contexts such as academia. The integration of these perspectives allows us to connect institutional pressures (e.g., performance management and job insecurity) with individual experiences and outcomes. Building on these two theoretical approaches, the thesis adopts both relational and configurational analytical perspectives to capture the complexity of the research topic under study.

Objectives

The general objective of this thesis is to develop a more integrative understanding of well-being in academia by examining how working conditions influence job satisfaction, subjective well-being and mental health among academic staff. Specifically, the thesis seeks to explore the interactions through which academic work environments shape staff experiences. In addition, it aims to contribute to the literature on academic well-being by integrating well-established theoretical frameworks with methodological approaches designed to capture the complexity and heterogeneity inherent in academia. In doing so, the thesis seeks to contribute both to the scientific debate and to institutional reflection and public policy design, offering criteria for understanding how academic work should be evaluated and supported in order to promote sustainable and decent working conditions.

The objectives achieved in this thesis are as follows:

1. To conduct an in-depth systematic literature review on subjective well-being, job satisfaction, mental health and person–organization fit.
2. To analyze the impact of antecedent variables, specifically job demands and job resources, on the job satisfaction of academics in the field of social sciences in Spain, examining both their direct effects and their indirect or mediated influence through person–organization fit.
3. To carry out a comparative analysis of job demands and job resources among academics in Spain and Portugal and to examine their relationship with

subjective well-being and mental health, as well as their influence through person–organization fit.

Methods

To achieve these aims, the thesis adopts a multi-method research design based on empirical investigations conducted with samples of academics from higher education institutions. First, a systematic literature review was conducted following the PRISMA guidelines in order to gather the maximum available evidence on subjective well-being, job satisfaction, mental health and person–organization fit in academic contexts.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the empirical studies draw on the Job Demands–Resources Model (JD-R Model) and Person–Organization Fit (P–O Fit) theory to address the issue of academic staff well-being within universities. Subsequently, in the quantitative phase, a validated questionnaire was administered to social sciences faculty in Spain. Structural equation modeling using the partial least squares method (PLS-SEM) was employed to analyze the structural relationships between job demands, job resources, and job satisfaction as well as the mediating role of person–organization fit. In order to move beyond net effects and capture causal complexity, Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) was subsequently applied to the survey data with the aim of identifying alternative configurations of demands and resources.

Finally, qualitative data were collected through interviews with academic staff from two national contexts, Spain and Portugal, allowing for a deeper understanding of experiences and institutional conditions. These data were analyzed using fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) and Set-Theoretic Multi-Method Research (SMMR), which made it possible to identify multiple configurations of job demands, job resources, person–organization fit and subjective well-being associated with both high and low levels of mental health.

Results

The results obtained show that well-being, job satisfaction and mental health in academia constitute central challenges in the contemporary academic context and therefore require attention. Throughout the thesis, the findings highlight the critical role of job demands and job resources in shaping academics' experiences.

First, the systematic literature review reveals the fragmented nature of existing research on university academics' well-being and highlights the need to better understand the complexity of academic work. The review identifies excessive workload and work–life conflict as recurrent and particularly relevant demands, together with the role of key resources such as job autonomy and social support. It also reveals that person–organization fit is a construct that has been scarcely explored in academic contexts despite its particular relevance in a highly vocational profession where the alignment between organizational and personal values plays a central role. Furthermore, empirical research highlights the importance of incorporating work engagement into the analysis of mental health, as its inclusion improves the explanatory power of the construct within the JD-R framework.

Second, the central study of the thesis focuses on the job satisfaction of social sciences faculty in Spain. This research provides empirical evidence on how job demands and job resources influence job satisfaction both directly and indirectly through person–organization fit. The results show that the alignment between individual values and organizational practices plays a key mediating role, strengthening the explanatory capacity of job satisfaction models and empirically linking the JD-R framework with person–organization fit theory. The relevance and rigor of this contribution are reflected in its publication in the *European Journal of Innovation Management*, a journal ranked in the first quartile (Q1) of JCR, under the title *Understanding Job Satisfaction and Person–Organization Fit in R&D and Innovation: Managerial Insights for the Job Demands–Resources Model*.

Finally, the last study extends these findings by adopting a configurational perspective on the mental health and subjective well-being of academic staff in Spain and Portugal. The configurational analyses reveal that work–life imbalance and low subjective well-

being are particularly influential conditions in the deterioration of mental health, especially when combined with low job control and weak person–organization fit. At the same time, the results show that similar levels of mental health can be achieved through different configurations of conditions, highlighting the heterogeneity of academic experiences across different institutional and national contexts.

Discussion and conclusions

This thesis concludes that job satisfaction, well-being and mental health in academia are best understood as relational phenomena shaped by the interaction between job demands and job resources. The integration of the JD-R framework and P–O Fit theory, together with the combined application of linear and configurational analytical approaches, PLS-SEM and QCA respectively, demonstrates the theoretical and methodological usefulness, diversity and versatility of these approaches for studying academics' well-being.

The results highlight the central role of institutional conditions, particularly emphasizing the need to regulate work–life imbalance, strengthen job control and social support, and promote greater alignment between academic values and organizational practices. Furthermore, this thesis contributes to reframing academic mental health not as an individual burden to be managed but as a collective and organizational responsibility. Consequently, it provides a basis for more sustainable forms of academic work and has important implications not only for research agendas, public policies and the governance of higher education institutions but also for the future generations educated within them. From this perspective, academics' well-being transcends the university sphere and contributes to strengthening society's capacity for innovation and long-term sustainable development.

Keywords: Job Satisfaction, Mental Health, Subjective Well-being, JD-R Model, Person–Organization Fit, Academia.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Context and Justification

Over the past decades, the academic landscape has been reshaped in deep and complex ways. In response to increasing demands for accountability, research excellence, internationalization and the integration of digital technologies in teaching and administration, universities worldwide are experiencing shifts in their structural and cultural landscapes (Ross et al., 2024). In Spain, higher education is at a critical juncture: ongoing structural reforms and demographic patterns are altering the nature of conditions under which academic careers in teaching and research are built and sustained (López-Castellano, 2025). These changes are not only altering institutional frameworks, but also deeply affecting the day-to-day realities of academic professionals (Caballero et al., 2024). Accordingly, this thesis asks how evolving employment models, policy directives and workforce trends shape academics' professional lives and well-being.

Academic staff occupy a uniquely demanding position within higher education institutions. Their work is characterized by high autonomy and intellectual stimulation, but also by substantial emotional labor, extensive working periods, the precarity of early-career contracts, and increasingly competitive funding environments (Bone, 2021). In such contexts, the increasing prevalence of performance metrics, such as publication quotas, student satisfaction surveys, and global university rankings, has decisively contributed to generate a climate of constant evaluation and pressure (Barnes et al., 2021). These dynamics have raised considerable concerns about the psychological cost of academic work and its implications for sustainable academic careers and institutional performance over time.

Recent official data from Spain (Ministerio de Universidades, 2024) points to a paradox. Although the aggregate number of university-affiliated teaching and research personnel has exhibited modest growth (approximately 9% since 2012), this expansion has not been accompanied by an increase in stable, long-term academic positions. Conversely, the number of permanent faculty members has shown a steady decline, amounting to approximately 15% during the same period. Conversely, the university system has placed increasing reliance on non-permanent staff, particularly adjunct

lecturers. As of the 2023–2024 academic year, approximately 43.2% of contracted faculty were employed under this category. A distinguishing feature of this group is that many maintain their primary employment outside the university setting. These individuals frequently lack integration, institutional belonging and long-term career prospects that are typically associated with traditional academic pathways.

These structural dynamics have also led to a sharp increase in employment precarity within the university sector. Data from the *Conferencia de Rectores de las Universidades Españolas* (CRUE) (2024) indicate that between 2008 and 2021, the use of temporary contracts increased by 30.6 % across Spanish universities. At the same time, the proportion of tenure-track positions has declined, further weakening the foundations of long-term academic development. Rather than investing in long-term academic capacity, institutions appear to be relying more heavily on flexible staffing models, which may offer short-term budgetary advantages but raise serious questions about continuity, academic commitment and the preservation of institutional memory. Parallel to this situation, a profound demographic shift is underway. Moreover, the aging of the academic workforce adds another challenge. The proportion of faculty aged 60 or older has more than doubled over the past decade and a half, while the proportion of tenure-track staff under the age of 40 has dropped dramatically, from 12.7% in 2008 to just 1.8% in 2021. Particularly in certain regions, such as Andalucía, the average age of tenured faculty now surpasses 50 years, illustrating a growing generational imbalance and an urgent need for renewing academic staff. Not only to ensure institutional resilience but to maintain the transmission of knowledge and mentorship across generations (CRUE, 2024).

These patterns reflect broader systemic challenges. Policy decisions, including restrictions on replacement rates following retirements, have progressively undermined the stability of academic careers. Temporary contracts, originally intended to address sporadic or short-term teaching needs, have increasingly become a prevalent practice (Burton & Bowman, 2022). These contracts are employed to address the ongoing absence of academics, thereby highlighting an absence of long-term workforce planning. Therefore, this environment creates barriers to career

progression, particularly for early-career researchers and teaching staff, and fosters widespread uncertainty regarding future prospects within this profession (Rosa, 2022).

The implications of these transcend institutional frameworks, resonating profoundly on a personal level. A growing body of research has begun to examine the impact of precarious employment in academics in greater detail (Burton & Bowman, 2022). Studies increasingly revealed that job insecurity, limited career prospects, and limited institutional recognition do not merely constitute professional impediments, they also exert a profound influence on their well-being and overall mental health among academic staff (Nicholls et al., 2022).

Insecure employment conditions, combined with insufficient institutional support, have been identified as significant contributors to heightened levels of stress, anxiety and emotional exhaustion among academic staff (Creely et al., 2022; Salimzadeh et al., 2020). In Spain, concerns about the consequences of current working conditions have become increasingly visible. Reports and empirical studies highlight worsening mental health, declining motivation and growing dissatisfaction with academic life, signals of a broader crisis affecting the emotional and subjective well-being of higher-education staff (Torrado & Duque-Calvache, 2023).

Among the profound structural and demographic shifts affecting academia, several psychological and organizational constructs have become especially relevant for understanding the lived experience of university faculty. These issues are not merely personal, they reflect broader organizational dynamics and systemic pressures that shape academic life in the present moment. Therefore, it is essential to examine the well-being, job satisfaction and mental health of academic staff from both individual and institutional perspectives. In doing so, it seeks to inform the development of evidence-based strategies to better support academics as they navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain professional landscape.

Subjective well-being captures how individuals experience and evaluate their lives and has become a key indicator of adaptation across personal and professional domains (Nicholls et al., 2022). In the academic sphere, subjective well-being is not only a sign of personal fulfillment but also plays a key role in supporting relationships, promoting

autonomy and improving feedback and compensation (Anjum & Islam, 2021). Academics with higher levels of well-being tend to exhibit greater persistence in the face of challenges, higher job performance, more positive relationships with colleagues and students, and a stronger sense of job satisfaction (Pavan Kumar, 2022). However, when subjective well-being begins to decline, the consequences can extend far beyond the individual. Low levels of well-being may manifest in burnout and emotional exhaustion, symptoms that not only affect personal health but may also reveal underlying institutional shortcomings. These include poor organizational climate, inadequate support structures, or misalignment between individual values and organizational expectations (Bao & Feng, 2021).

Closely intertwined with this, is the concept of job satisfaction, academics' affective and cognitive appraisal of their work. In academic roles satisfaction depends on a complex interplay of factors, including perceived autonomy, recognition of contributions and the alignment between institutional expectations and personal values. Engaged employees, in turn, are considered essential for the success and performance of academic institution (Prodanova & Kocarev, 2023). These elements not only influence how academics experience their daily work but also contribute to their overall sense of fulfillment and purpose within the university setting. Previous research consistently highlights job satisfaction as a key predictor of critical outcomes such as organizational commitment, employee retention and overall well-being (Puhakka et al., 2021). Academics who report higher levels of satisfaction are more likely to remain engaged in their roles, demonstrate loyalty to their institutions, and maintain subjective well-being in the face of professional demands. Conversely, low satisfaction is frequently associated with increased turnover intentions and a decline in performance (Pavan Kumar, 2022).

In this line, equally important is the construct of person–organization fit, particularly within higher education institutions that rely heavily on shared values to shape academic culture and guide students' development. While this concept has been extensively studied in psychology and management domains (Subramanian et al., 2023), its application in academic contexts remains relatively underexplored. There is a growing need to better understand how P–O fit influences satisfaction, engagement

and well-being among academic staff, given the unique demands and values of the academic environment. When they perceive a strong alignment between their personal values and those of the organization, a favorable environment is more likely to emerge, one that fosters motivation and encourages the sharing of knowledge with others (Haider et al., 2022). Value alignment can support goal attainment and satisfy employees' psychological needs, thereby contributing to favorable emotional states, including heightened satisfaction and overall well-being (Park & Hai, 2024). Conversely, misalignment between personal and institutional orientations can be detrimental not only to employees, undermining their well-being and engagement, but also to the organization. Capable individuals may become preoccupied with intentions to depart, leading to a decline in their commitment to meeting institutional goals and deadlines (De Clercq, 2025).

Work engagement adds a motivational lens for understanding how academics relate to their work and how institutions can sustain performance. Academic tasks often require deep concentration, emotional investment and high levels of autonomy, so engagement could become a crucial resource (Artates, 2023). Engaged academics are more likely to approach their teaching and research with higher doses of energy and meaning. However, work engagement is strongly influenced by contextual factors such as institutional support, recognition, fair workload, and opportunities for professional growth. When these conditions are lacking, due to excessive work demands, poor organizational culture, or unfavorable working conditions, engagement may erode (Afrahi et al., 2022; Becaro, 2022).

Higher education institutions undergo continuous transformations, marked by increasing demands, limited resources and uncertain career trajectories, academics' mental health has become an urgent concern. This evolving context has contributed to the heightened prevalence of stress, burnout, anxiety, and declining levels of well-being among academics, prompting greater recognition of the challenges faced within the profession (Johnson & Lester, 2022). These issues are not abstract concerns, they are reflected in observable outcomes such as increased anxiety, symptoms of depression, and particularly, elevated rates of burnout. However, there remains a significant gap in research focusing on how academic professionals perceive and

experience these demands in their daily work (Urbina-García, 2020). The organizational culture and practices within universities play a critical role in shaping these outcomes. Research has demonstrated that poor mental health can impair academic performance and diminish the career satisfaction that academics often find in their teaching and research responsibilities (Chen et al., 2022; Boamah et al., 2022). On the other hand, universities that implement effective mental health strategies are better equipped to create supportive environments that encourage sustained engagement, higher retention rates and a more positive academic climate.

Although some of these constructs have been studied in isolation, their interconnections remain insufficiently examined in contemporary academic contexts. This thesis addresses this gap by analyzing how academics experience demands and resources and how these relate to job satisfaction, value alignment (P–O fit), engagement, subjective well-being, and mental health. Understanding these interdependencies is essential for designing effective, long-term strategies that promote healthy, productive, and sustainable academic workplaces.

1.2 Academic, Organizational and Social Relevance

Universities are spaces for reflection that take shape step by step, where ideas settle slowly and where change requires patience, perseverance, and sustained commitment (Rey-Moreno et al., 2026).

In this line, universities are not merely spaces of knowledge creation and transmission, they are complex, evolving organizations shaped by a combination of structural frameworks, political agendas, and cultural norms. These forces directly influence the daily realities of academic staff, shaping their work environment and overall health. Accordingly, challenges to academic well-being are not only personal; they also affect institutional functioning and universities' capacity to serve society. A holistic perspective is therefore needed, one that integrates academic, organizational, and social dimensions of well-being.

Academics' well-being is academically relevant because it conditions universities' ability to fulfill their core missions. Through their dual endeavors in teaching and research activities, academic staff disseminate knowledge and generate new insights

that support societal progress and sustainable development (Berchin et al., 2021). Their work underpins the quality and rigor of higher education, fostering critical thinking, and mentoring future generations of professionals and academics. Previous studies have shown that academics who experience good levels of subjective well-being, mental health and job satisfaction tend to exhibit greater sense of community and sustained motivation (Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023). Such virtues underpin high-quality teaching, rigorous research, meaningful student engagement, and constructive participation in scholarly discourse.

Furthermore, recent studies have highlighted the intricate relationship between job satisfaction and well-being among academic staff. For instance, Stephen (2024) emphasizes that low job satisfaction impacts not only individual performance but also undermines broader institutional objectives, often resulting in decreased staff morale, disloyalty and constant labor migration. Therefore, it is suggested that universities should prioritize the implementation of strategies aimed at enhancing job satisfaction as a means to support the overall well-being of academic staff, ensuring institutional stability.

Similarly, Naidoo-Chetty & du Plessis (2021a) observed that excessive workloads and constant research demands contribute to lower levels of professors' efficacy and increased burnout among academics. These pressures associated with "publish or perish" cultures and competitive grant systems have been found to compromise not only the mental health of academics but also the depth and ethical character of their work. When research becomes primarily a metric for institutional prestige or funding acquisition, rather than a process of inquiry aimed at addressing complex societal issues, the quality and relevance of academic contributions are inevitably compromised. Supporting academic well-being, therefore, is not merely an act of institutional responsibility toward employees, it is a strategic imperative for preserving the intellectual integrity and societal value of higher education itself.

From an organizational perspective, the satisfaction and identity of academics is increasingly recognized as a strategic concern (Mula-Falcón et al., 2022). Universities today operate under escalating accountability pressures, financial constraints, and reputational competition; under these conditions, their capacity to attract, retain, and

motivate highly qualified academic staff becomes central to organizational performance (Kunene, 2019).

The experiences of academics are deeply shaped by how institutions are structured and managed. Factors such as leadership practices, transparency in decision-making, the fairness of reward systems, the balance of workload, and the degree of faculty involvement in institutional affairs all contribute to how academics perceive their roles (Jessani et al., 2020). These organizational elements can either foster a sense of value, belonging, and purpose, or, if poorly implemented, lead to disengagement, frustration, and diminished institutional commitment. When these practices align with staff needs and values, universities are more likely to cultivate resilient and mission-driven communities; when misaligned, they can generate disengagement, frustration, and reduced commitment (Liu & Xie, 2024).

When institutions fail to invest in the well-being and satisfaction of their staff, they expose themselves to a range of significant yet often overlooked costs. These may include rising levels of absenteeism, elevated staff turnover and associated recruitment expenses, and a decline in internal cohesion and morale (Kosec et al., 2022). Importantly, the burden of these consequences is not borne equally across all groups, often affecting the most vulnerable members of the academic community. Organizational environments characterized by inflexible bureaucracy, insufficient recognition, and ineffective communication are particularly prone to fostering increased levels of top-down policies that stifle universities' innovativeness and autonomy (Terjesen, 2022).

Research by Liu and Xie (2024) highlights key factors influencing employee experiences within higher education institutions, identifying organizational support and P-O fit as two critical determinants that significantly shape academic work. Their findings indicate that the combined impact of perceived support and value alignment between individuals and institutions permeates various dimensions of professional life-affecting job engagement, stress levels, job satisfaction, performance, and even intentions to search for alternative employment. As such, organizational support and P-O fit emerge not only as influential variables, but as foundational elements in understanding and improving the academic work environment.

Furthermore, the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, as articulated by Huang and Wang (2026), offers a valuable framework for examining how the interplay between job demands and available resources shapes the well-being and motivation of academics, particularly within the context of an increasingly “accelerated” and “super-complex” academic landscape. As academic work becomes more fragmented, competitive, and performance-driven, the JD-R model provides insight into how institutions can mitigate strain by reinforcing supportive conditions. Universities that intentionally cultivate environments characterized by autonomy and empowerment are more likely to develop resilient, motivated, and committed academic communities. In contrast, institutions that emphasize output metrics, such as publication counts, at the expense of human development may experience burnout, short-term performance boosts, and often at the cost of long-term institutional sustainability (Cadena-Povea et al., 2025).

Beyond the academic and organizational spheres, the well-being of faculty scholars carries profound implications for the civic and social mission of higher education. Universities are entrusted with generating knowledge that addresses complex global challenges, educating and training future professionals and citizens, and contributing meaningfully to democratic discourse and cultural life. However, these societal goals cannot be met if the academic workforce is systematically demoralized, overextended, or alienated from institutional values. Recent evidence shows that burnout and emotional exhaustion among faculty members negatively affect their ability to foster student engagement, undermine the quality of education, and weaken the capacity of institutions to serve as sites of civic learning and public discourse (Deep et al., 2025).

University social responsibility can be viewed as the ethical commitment of the academic community to manage the educational, intellectual, occupational, and environmental effects of university activities in a way that is both responsible and socially engaged. This commitment involves ongoing interaction with society aimed at fostering sustainable human development. It also reflects the institution’s ability to promote and apply a coherent set of values and guiding principles across four central functions: governance, teaching, research, and social engagement (Reichel et al., 2023). These functions are intended to meet the needs of both the university

community and the wider national context in which it operates. In environments characterized by excessive competition, emotional exhaustion, and disillusionment, it becomes difficult to cultivate graduates who possess the empathy, civic-mindedness, and critical reasoning skills essential for addressing the complexities of modern life. In contrast, universities that prioritize well-being, inclusivity, and respect are better positioned to create environments where scholarly excellence and public responsibility can thrive side by side (Koutsouris et al., 2022).

Similarly, as public institutions, universities have a social responsibility to uphold ethical labor practices and contribute to the promotion of decent work. This responsibility aligns with the principles established by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a global framework adopted in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Kaloutsa et al., 2025). In particular, SDG 3 promotes good health and well-being, while SDG 8 advocates for decent work and inclusive economic growth. Within this framework, safeguarding the well-being of academic staff extends beyond individual workplace concerns, to become a matter of public responsibility and social justice. Ensuring healthy, equitable, and sustainable academic environments is therefore essential not only for institutional integrity, but also for the fulfillment of universities' role as drivers of socially responsible development.

This research recognizes the multilayered impact of academic well-being and positions itself at the convergence of academic, organizational, and societal dimensions. By doing so, it addresses a significant gap in the literature and provides actionable knowledge to transform universities into environments that are not only efficient and competitive but also humane, equitable, and socially responsive. The relevance of this inquiry lies in its capacity to inform institutional reform, inspire policy development, and enrich public dialogue on the evolving role and future of higher education.

1.3 Key Concepts: Mental Health, Work Engagement, Subjective Well-Being, Person-Organization Fit and Job Satisfaction in Academia

1.3.1 Mental Health

Mental health encompasses a wide range of psychological states, ranging from good mental health to mental illness. Good mental health is not merely the absence of

disorder; it includes capabilities and emotional strengths that enable individuals to cope with demands and function effectively in daily life (Nicholls et al., 2022; Keller, 2020). Rather than being fixed, mental health is fluid and can vary over time, influenced by a combination of genetic factors, personal life events, and broader social and environmental conditions.

The World Health Organization defines mental health as a state of well-being in which individuals can manage life's stresses, realize their potential, function productively in learning and work environments, and contribute meaningfully to their communities (WHO, 2022). It is recognized as a fundamental aspect of overall health and well-being, forming the basis for decision-making, relationship-building, and participation in society. This definition emphasizes resilience, growth, autonomy, and social participation as integral components of mental health. Mental health conditions include a range of challenges, including diagnosed mental disorders, and other mental states characterized by significant emotional distress, functional impairment, or increased risk of self-harm (Limone & Toto, 2022). People with mental health issues are more likely to experience lower levels of mental well-being.

Mental health is not only a universal human right but also a key driver of individual, social, and economic development. In the context of academics, mental health has become a central concern in light of increasing workloads, performance pressures, job insecurity, and institutional instability. Numerous studies have documented elevated levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout among university faculty (Yingying et al., 2025; Zhou & Wang, 2025; Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023; Jayman et al., 2022). These mental health demands are often exacerbated by the precarious nature of academic contracts, particularly in the early stages of an academic career, lack of progression, and the competitive culture of publishing and grant achievement (Solomon & Du Plessis, 2023; Pérez & Montoya, 2018). Poor mental health among academics not only impacts individual performance and career longevity but also diminishing the quality of teaching, compromising research productivity, and weakening the collaborative and collegial atmosphere essential to a thriving academic community.

1.3.2 Work Engagement

While work engagement is not a central construct under assessment in this study, it has been incorporated given its theoretical importance within the Job Demands–Resources framework and its growing relevance in research on academic work. Its role as a mediator provides valuable insight into how job resources can enhance mental health among academics as well as alleviate job demands. Work engagement is a key construct in organizational psychology, referring to a positive, fulfilling, and work-related state of mind that is characterized by three core dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigor reflects high energy and persistence; dedication captures enthusiasm, pride, and meaningful involvement; and absorption denotes deep concentration and immersion in work. This construct is commonly measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) and is central to understanding motivation and well-being in professional contexts (Bakker, 2011; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Work engagement is typically conceptualized as a relatively stable, enduring motivational state rather than a momentary affective reaction. It differs from job satisfaction and organizational commitment by capturing a deeper psychological connection in which work is experienced as meaningful and intrinsically rewarding. Meta-analytic evidence suggests that engagement is moderately positively associated with job performance (Corbeanu & Iliescu, 2025). Engaged employees often exceed in-role expectations and display greater creativity and innovative behavior across diverse settings (Kelesoglu et al., 2024).

Within the Job Demands–Resources model, job resources (e.g., autonomy, social support, development opportunities) and personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy, optimism) are key antecedents of work engagement (Bakker et al., 2023). Engagement may also have interpersonal and team-level effects. For example, engaged academics can be more likely to support colleagues, and team engagement has been linked to team performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Engagement can ‘cross over’ between individuals, producing ripple effects within academic units.

1.3.3 Person-Organization Fit

Person–Organization Fit refers to the perceived alignment or compatibility between an individual and an organization, particularly in terms of shared values, goals, and cultural norms (Kristof, 1996). This construct has become a central focus in organizational behavior and human resource management, as it plays a critical role in understanding employee attitudes, retention, performance, and overall well-being within the workplace (Rey-Tienda et al., 2025b).

Person–organization fit develops through the interaction between individual attributes and organizational characteristics (Chatman, 1989; Kristof, 1996). It is commonly discussed in terms of supplementary and complementary fit. On the one hand, supplementary fit reflects similarity (especially value congruence) between employees and organizations and is frequently examined as a predictor of attitudes and behavior (Siegall & McDonald, 2004). On the other hand, complementary fit concerns mutual completion: needs–supplies fit occurs when the organization meets employee needs (e.g., recognition, work–life balance), whereas demands–abilities fit reflects the match between employee capabilities and organizational demands (Keane et al., 2024). These distinctions clarify how fit can shape satisfaction, well-being, and performance. Importantly, person–organization fit is subjective, it reflects an individual’s perception of how well they align with an organization, beyond any objective match on values or skills. This subjective perception of fit is especially significant in academic environments, where professional identity, teaching responsibilities, and vocational commitment deeply intersect with institutional culture (McCune, 2021). When faculty members believe their personal and professional values align with their institution’s ethos, research consistently shows they report higher levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and reducing job vacancies (Akkaya & Serin, 2020).

1.3.4 Subjective Well-Being

Subjective well-being captures how individuals interpret and respond to their own lives, incorporating both emotional states and cognitive assessments (Diener, 1984). The concept is generally defined by three core features. First, it is inherently subjective, since it depends on personal perception rather than objective criteria. As Campbell

(1976) emphasized, well-being exists within the individual's lived experience. External conditions such as physical health, financial security, or moral behavior may influence well-being, but they are not essential components of its definition. Second, it emphasizes the presence of positive experiences, not merely the absence of distress, distinguishing it from deficit-focused mental health measures. Third, it involves an overall evaluation of life, although assessments may also focus on particular domains (e.g., work) and timeframes (Diener, 1984).

Rather than being solely influenced by external conditions, subjective well-being is shaped by a combination of personal factors as personality traits, values, and goals, life circumstances, and contextual contexts. It is widely regarded as a core indicator of human flourishing and has been linked to improved health, productivity, and stronger social relationships (Diener et al., 2018). In academia, well-being is shaped by the distinctive character of academic work. Academic staff often manage a combination of teaching, research, service, and administrative responsibilities that are intensified by precarity, performance metrics, and organizational restructuring (Spina et al., 2022).

As a result, given the complex demands of academic work, understanding subjective well-being in this context requires a more refined perspective. Research suggests that academic well-being influences not only faculty mental health and performance but also student experiences and learning environments. This broad impact has increased scholarly interest in identifying the factors and processes that sustain well-being in academic settings (Sha et al., 2021).

Lower subjective well-being is associated with greater vulnerability to stress, burnout, and reduced professional fulfillment. This underscores the need for institutional supports and policy interventions that strengthen faculty resilience and reduce emotional exhaustion while promoting identity and a sense of accomplishment (Pakdee et al., 2025). Accordingly, subjective well-being is not only a personal health concern but also a strategic issue for institutions that seek sustainable academic careers and high-quality higher education.

1.3.5 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a fundamental concept in organizational psychology and human resource management, referring to an individual's overall emotional and cognitive appraisal of their job and its various elements (Locke, 1976). It captures the extent to which employees feel positively or negatively about their work, integrating both affective reactions and thoughtful evaluations of their job experiences.

This construct has remained at the forefront of organizational behavior studies due to its strong association with essential outcomes such as motivation, performance, retention, and general well-being. Locke's (1969) classic definition conveys job satisfaction as a favorable emotional state arising when individuals assess their work in light of personal values and goals. This understanding posits two important dimensions: emotional response and alignment with one's values. Rather than focusing solely on external job requirements or material compensation, job satisfaction also encompasses the pursuit of personal fulfillment and a sustainable work-life balance (Ram et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, job satisfaction is prominently incorporated into foundational models such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg et al., 1959), which separates hygiene factors (e.g., salary, organizational policies) from motivators (e.g., achievement, recognition), and the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), which identifies core job dimensions that drive intrinsic motivation and satisfaction. Recent empirical evidence continues to validate these frameworks: for example, Mitsakis & Galanakis (2022) demonstrated in contemporary education settings that both hygiene and motivational factors significantly enhance job satisfaction levels. Moreover, meta-analytic research confirms a moderate but meaningful relationship between job satisfaction and performance outcomes, including reduced turnover and absenteeism (Ranjan, 2025).

Job satisfaction plays a vital role in promoting organizational well-being: it correlates with higher work engagement and increased commitment while simultaneously reducing burnout and turnover intentions (Zhang et al., 2023). In occupations characterized by high emotional demands, such as teaching, satisfaction supports the maintenance of professional identity, resilience, and sustained enthusiasm.

Employees who experience high levels of job satisfaction are generally more engaged, committed, and productive in their roles (Sypniewska et al., 2023). In contrast, dissatisfaction often manifests through increased absenteeism, burnout, and turnover (Ranjan, 2025; Pham et al., 2023).

In higher education, the concept of job satisfaction takes on additional complexity due to the distinctive characteristics of academic work (Al-Ansi et al., 2023). Many academics members view their roles not simply as jobs, but as callings, underpinned by strong internal motivations and a passion for both knowledge creation and student development. The research dimension of academia often nurtures deep intellectual engagement and autonomy, while teaching fosters a sense of purpose through mentoring and contributing to students' academic and personal growth (Zhou et al., 2022).

In this context, job satisfaction is a key factor influencing motivation, performance, and the likelihood of long-term retention. It is influenced by factors unique to academic life, however, various demands can undermine satisfaction, particularly among early-career or those employed on precarious contracts (Kim et al., 2025). Persistent dissatisfaction in academic roles has been linked to mental health challenges, disengagement from institutional goals, and increased turnover rates (Torrado & Duque-Calvache, 2023).

Although subjective well-being, mental health, work engagement, person–organization fit, and job satisfaction are distinct concepts, they are closely intertwined in academic contexts. Together, they form a system that shapes how faculty experience their roles. Subjective well-being, including emotional and cognitive evaluations of life, is especially relevant in academia, where professional identity and intrinsic motivation are deeply embedded in the work. When academics perceive alignment between their values and those of their institution, they are more likely to experience job satisfaction, engagement, and psychological stability. Work engagement reinforces resilience and enhances performance, while job satisfaction supports motivation, retention, and well-being (Nagoji & Mackasare, 2023).

Finally, mental health is both influenced and shaped by these dynamics, acting as a foundation for sustainable academic careers. Understanding the interdependence of

these constructs is essential for promoting healthier academic environments that go beyond output metrics and prioritize human-centered institutional strategies.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters, each of which contributes to building a comprehensive and integrated understanding of how mental health, work engagement, person–organization fit, job satisfaction, and subjective well-being interact within the academic environment. The structure reflects a logical progression from conceptual foundations to empirical analysis and concluding reflections.

Following this introductory Chapter 1, Chapter 2 sets the stage for the research by outlining the study's objectives and presenting the proposed general research model. It begins with a critical review of the existing gaps in the literature and situates the research problem within the framework of the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model. Based on this foundation, the chapter defines the main research objectives and introduces an integrated conceptual model that guides the empirical investigation. It concludes with the formulation of research hypotheses derived from the theoretical premises.

Chapter 3 provides the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the study. It explores the main models used to explain our research, beginning with an in-depth analysis of the JD-R model and continuing with Person–Organization Fit theory and Institutional theory. The chapter also considers additional perspectives that complement the core models. It concludes with a systematic review of recent empirical literature on mental health, subjective well-being, person-organization fit, and job satisfaction in academic settings, highlighting both the relevance and the innovative contribution of the present study.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological framework and the specific research methods employed throughout the study. It describes the operationalization of the central constructs, job demands, resources, engagement, person-organization fit, mental health, and subjective well-being, and details the measurement instruments used. The chapter also explains the data collection procedures and discusses the analytical techniques, including Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)

and Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), which are applied in different phases of the research.

The empirical component of this thesis is presented in Chapter 5, which integrates complementary studies addressing different facets of academics' well-being.

Section 5.1 provides a systematic literature review and introduces a previous empirical study, which together establish the empirical background for the subsequent analyses.

Section 5.2, being the central study of the thesis, examines the role of job demands and resources in shaping academics' job satisfaction, with particular attention to person–organization fit as a mediating factor. To address these relationships, the study applies structural equation modeling in combination with configurational analysis, providing both statistical evidence and insights into complex causal patterns.

Section 5.3 extends the investigation to subjective well-being and mental health by exploring combinations of specific demands, resources and organizational fit. This analysis relies on configurational methods including quantitative and qualitative methods to uncover patterns associated with high levels of well-being and mental health among academics.

Chapter 6 draws together the findings from all three empirical studies and offers a general discussion of their theoretical and practical implications. It summarizes the answers to the research questions, highlights the contributions of the thesis to the existing literature and reflects on the broader significance of the results. The chapter also acknowledges the study's limitations and outlines potential directions for future research.

The final section of the thesis includes the bibliography and the appendices, which provide the questionnaires and measurement instruments used in the data collection process.

Chapter 2. Objectives and Proposed Research Model

2.1 Identified Gaps and Research Problem in Academia

Despite research on subjective well-being and mental health has expanded considerably in recent years (Martínez-Líbano et al., 2025; Hidalgo-Fuentes et al., 2024; Zhang & Sun, 2024), substantial gaps persist in understanding how these constructs interact within the specific context of academic work. The complex and demanding structure of academic roles introduces unique dynamics that are often overlooked.

The nature of academic work involves a unique and often contradictory combination of demands and resources. Academics may benefit from relatively high levels of autonomy and intellectual freedom; however, they also face considerable performance pressure, employment precarity, and increasingly complex organizational demands (Pace et al., 2021). These conditions differentiate academia from other professional sectors and create a set of psychosocial dynamics that require more targeted analysis.

The organizational complexity of academia introduces diverse challenges. At universities, management involves a combination of control from higher-level offices, such as rector's or dean's offices, and decision-making processes involving professors and departments (Facchini & Fai, 2021). While this dual structure aims to preserve academic autonomy and participatory values, in practice it frequently generates conflicting demands between departments, faculties, and administration. These tensions can foster role ambiguity and role conflict, creating uncertainty around performance expectations, often resulting in role stress (Anees et al., 2021). Especially when institutional strategic priorities and managerial imperatives come into conflict with the core academic values of teaching and academic research. Such misalignments not only weaken institutional coherence but can also erode professional identity and intrinsic motivation among academics.

A recurring theme in academic narratives is the autonomy paradox. While job control is traditionally conceptualized as a positive resource in occupational health literature (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), in the academic context it frequently coexists with overwhelming responsibility and ambiguous expectations. This is especially true with regard to research output. The perceived freedom can easily become a source of stress when not accompanied by adequate institutional support, clear performance

criteria or manageable workloads (Mgaiwa, 2021). Hence, the exploration of autonomy in academic well-being requires deeper empirical investigation.

Simultaneously, performance pressure in academia is increasingly shaped by competitive publication requirements, evaluation systems driven by bibliometric indices, and a strict culture of excellence. These systems, while intended to promote excellence, may often displace intrinsically meaningful activities (e.g., mentoring, collegial support) that sustain academic communities (Springer et al., 2023). In academics settings, as the Spanish one, progression through the ranks is nearly impossible without engaging with these performance metrics, leading many faculty members to experience poor mental health (Torrado & Duque-Calvache, 2023).

These pressures are exacerbated by the widespread use of temporary and part-time contracts, especially among early-career researchers and non-permanent teaching staff (Bone, 2021). This has led to a deeply rooted sense of job insecurity among academic staff, with clear repercussions for their subjective well-being. In the Spanish context, the precarious nature of academic employment has become so pervasive that it has prompted government-led efforts to implement structural reforms. For instance, the Spanish government, through Ley Orgánica 2/2023 del Sistema Universitario (LOSU, 2023), has introduced measures aimed at reducing academic instability and promoting more stable and predictable career trajectories, particularly for early-career researchers. However, as these reforms are still in their initial stages of implementation, their long-term effectiveness and institutional impact remain uncertain.

The increasing reliance on temporary contracts and the implementation of structural reforms have contributed to the individualization of academic work, fostering a climate in which academics often operate in isolation (Andro, 2021). Under growing pressure to meet short-term performance targets, many scholars have limited time or institutional support to participate in collaborative spaces or engage in interdisciplinary dialogue. When collaboration does occur, it is often transactional, rather than sustained or organically developed. Although academic work has traditionally emphasized individual contributions, universities now routinely promote values such as collaboration, inclusion, and academic excellence, frequently highlighting team-based

initiatives and collective research efforts (Pinheiro & Pulkkinen, 2023). However, these discourses are often undermined by internal practices driven by competition, productivity metrics, and institutional rankings (Van Dalen, 2021), which reinforce individual performance over genuine academic cooperation.

Evaluation systems that prioritize quantifiable outputs, such as publication counts or citation indices (Francke & Hammarfelt, 2023), often undermine essential but less easily measured dimensions of academic work, including teaching quality or supervisor and college support. When rewards are misaligned with core professional values, academics may experience cynicism, lower engagement, and value-based conflict with institutional priorities. Within this context, the expansion of bureaucratic demands, combined with limited institutional support for collaboration or peer exchange, further constrains opportunities for genuine academic interaction. Rather than fostering a vibrant community, these conditions contribute to an increasingly fragmented academic environment, in which many academics report a growing sense of professional detachment and disengagement (Hokka, 2023). Over time, this not only weakens professional relationships but also diminishes the collective dimension of academic life.

This dynamic reflects a systemic absence of institutional infrastructures that foster academic connection, cooperation, and shared responsibility, especially across departments, disciplines, and career stages. Studies show that increased workload and lack of community contribute significantly to disengagement and exhaustion among faculty (Koster & McHenry, 2023). Without formal mechanisms or dedicated funding to support collaborative spaces and joint problem-solving, the potential for fostering a supportive and intellectually stimulating academic community becomes severely limited. In this context, academics are often left to navigate their responsibilities in relative isolation, which contributes not only to professional disengagement but also to a broader deterioration of work–life balance.

In contrast to many other professional environments, academic work often blurs the boundaries between personal and professional life (Johnston et al., 2022). The expectation that academics perform across multiple demanding roles, teaching, publishing, supervising students, fulfilling administrative duties, and engaging in

community, creates a workload that often extends far beyond contracted hours. This combination of roles leads to evening, weekend and holidays work, constant email accessibility, and the interpenetration of identity and work, all of which can elevate work–life conflict and reduce recovery time, which are known risk factors for stress and mental-health deterioration (Rosa, 2022). As a result, achieving a sustainable work–life balance becomes increasingly difficult, particularly in institutions where support mechanisms are limited or poorly implemented.

The organizational and cultural configuration of academic institutions cannot be viewed merely as an administrative concern, it must be understood as a critical determinant of subjective well-being, job satisfaction, and mental health. This is particularly relevant given the extent to which institutional structures and practices shape the everyday conditions under which academics attempt to reconcile their professional responsibilities with their personal lives (Ramachandaran et al., 2024). Although concern about the working conditions of academic staff has grown in recent years, insufficient attention has been given to the role of institutional environments in shaping these lived experiences.

However, much prior literature conceptualizes subjective well-being or mental health primarily as individual outcomes (Ray, 2021), often disconnected from the broader organizational dynamics and cultural expectations that frame academic work. Yet subjective well-being, understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing life satisfaction, affective balance, and personal meaning (Diener et al., 2018), cannot be fully understood without examining how it interacts with key workplace variables such as institutional and family support, role stress, work-life balance or job control. This omission is increasingly problematic considering evidence pointing to declining well-being among academic staff.

In parallel, person–organization fit (P–O fit) remains under-studied in higher-education employment research despite its relevance for understanding job attitudes, commitment, and retention. While previous works have established the importance of value congruence between individuals and institutions (Kristof-Brown et al., 2024), there has been little effort to adapt this framework to the complex cultural realities of universities. Academic institutions operate with a mix of formal bureaucracies, implicit

norms, and symbolic commitments, conditions that make the idea of fit unstable, ambiguous, and difficult to measure. As Gasser (2024) notes, the university system imposes a tension between public-facing narratives of collaboration and academic freedom, and internal systems focused on competition, rankings, and output metrics. Thus, value alignment may be particularly consequential in academia, where professional identity and a sense of calling are often salient. Without critical adaptation, P–O fit in academia risks becoming a mechanism that reinforces compliance rather than genuine belonging, making the construct both unstable and conceptually problematic in higher education contexts.

Although there is growing recognition of the importance of occupational health in academic contexts, theoretical frameworks as the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) have seen limited and often superficial application in higher education research. The JD-R model provides a valuable lens for understanding how job demands, such as poor work–life balance or role stress, and job resources, such as job control and social support, interact to shape outcomes like job satisfaction or mental health. However, the application of the JD-R model to academia often fails to account for the distinctive nature of academic work and the sector-specific dynamics that define the profession, which differs substantially from other professional settings.

It is commonly assumed that the primary responsibility of academics lies in teaching, but this view significantly underestimates the complexity and multidimensionality of the academic role (Weenink et al., 2024). In addition to teaching duties, academics are expected to conduct research activities such as publishing their research outcomes in high-impact journals, supervising undergraduate and postgraduate students' work, obtaining competitive funding to pay for conference participation fees and research visits, participating in academic governance duties, and even contributing to societal outreach. These overlapping demands create a unique constellation of job demands and resources that cannot be fully captured through generic occupational models. Therefore, it is essential to study the academic profession as a case in its own, recognizing its specific structural pressures. Hence, a more context-sensitive application of the JD-R model is necessary to address the realities of academic work

would significantly enhance its value for both organizational reform and evidence-based policy development within universities.

This points to a broader gap in the literature: although various studies have addressed satisfaction, mental health or subjective well-being across various sectors, there is a notable absence of integrated models that explain how these outcomes are shaped by the specific characteristics of academic work and mediated by constructs particularly relevant to the university context. Moreover, while symptoms of burnout and emotional exhaustion among academic staff have been extensively documented (Xu & Wang, 2023; García-Rivera et al., 2022), far less empirical attention has been paid to organizational factors such as person–organization fit, that may buffer these negative outcomes. As a result, our current understanding of academic well-being remains partial, limiting the development of intervention strategies that would not only prevent harm but also support academics in thriving within their complex and demanding roles.

In this context, the research problem addressed arises from an insufficiently contextualized understanding of how job satisfaction, mental health, person–organization fit, and subjective well-being interact within academia. Although institutional awareness of well-being has grown in recent years, much of the existing literature remains disconnected from the concrete organizational dynamics and sector-specific demands that shape everyday academic life. Therefore, this thesis seeks to address this gap through the application of robust mixed-methods designs. By integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses, this research examines the connections between institutional context, individual experiences, and organizational outcomes, with the aim of developing a more robust, inclusive, evidence-based and sustainable understanding of academic life. One that moves beyond theoretical abstraction and is firmly based on the lived realities of academics.

2.2 Research Objectives

The overarching objective of this thesis is to develop a comprehensive and empirically grounded understanding of how academics' working conditions shape job satisfaction, person–organization fit, subjective well-being, and mental health. The thesis aims to produce actionable knowledge for universities and policy-makers seeking to improve the sustainability and human quality of academic work.

In contrast to more generic models of occupational health, which often fail to capture the nuances of university environments, this research places the distinctiveness of academic work at the center of its analysis. Academic institutions combine formal hierarchies with informal cultural norms, and their professionals are required to navigate multiple and often conflicting roles, that include balancing teaching, research, supervision and administrative duties. These conditions create a complex web of demands that can affect not only performance, but also individual well-being and long-term career satisfaction.

To explore these dynamics, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach, drawing on both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to better capture the multifaceted nature of academic work. This strategy allows for a more complete examination of how institutional context and personal experience converge to influence outcomes such as satisfaction or good mental health. By doing so, the research aims to transcend surface-level narratives of academic work by providing a more integrated framework for a better understanding of higher education.

Beyond identifying the most pressing demands, such as poor work-life balance or unclear role expectations, this thesis also investigates the positive mechanisms, in this case resources, that may help mitigate these challenges. Particular attention is given to variables like work engagement and organizational alignment, which are hypothesized to function as mediating factors in mitigating the impact of the primary job demands. Rather than treating these variables as isolated outcomes, the research explores how they function as mediating elements that influence how individuals respond to demanding conditions.

Therefore, the study aims to generate theoretical and practical knowledge that can inform policies and support the design of academic environments that promote not only individual well-being, but also institutional sustainability and long-term career satisfaction and development for academics.

This thesis pursues the following specific objectives:

1. To conduct a systematic literature review of academic well-being, job demands and resources, person–organization fit, and mental health, using PRISMA

guidelines. This objective aims to map the current state of knowledge, identify key theoretical frameworks, methodological trends, and gaps in the literature regarding occupational health and well-being in the higher education sector. By systematically reviewing empirical studies, the review will provide a structured foundation for the subsequent analyses and help refine the constructs and relationships examined throughout the thesis.

2. To conceptualize and justify an integrated research model tailored to academic work, combining the JD–R framework with person–organization fit mechanisms. This objective aims to examine how distinctive features shape well-being, satisfaction and organizational fit. It seeks to refine and contextualize these theoretical frameworks by integrating variables that are specific to the structure and demands of higher education, thereby increasing their explanatory power and practical relevance.
3. Test, using survey data, the associations among job demands, job resources, person–organization fit, and job satisfaction (including mediation effects where theorized). Specifically, this objective explores how job control and social support, alongside role stress and poor work–life, influence the link between perceived value congruence and satisfaction. To this aim, this thesis uses Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) and Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to assess complex relationships and casual effects.
4. To identify and compare, using configurational analysis, multiple combinations of demands, resources, and fit that lead to high/low subjective well-being and mental health among academics. By applying GMET (Generic Membership Evaluation Template) and QCA, this thesis moves beyond traditional causal models, enabling the identification of distinct configurations of conditions that explain both the presence and the negation of outcomes. It aims to uncover equifinality patterns, where different combinations of factors can lead to similar states of well-being or mental health.

5. To derive evidence-based implications for university management and public policy, with a focus on sustainable career structures, supportive work design, and institutional responsibility for academic well-being. Based on the empirical insights from the three studies shaping this thesis, this objective seeks to develop practical recommendations for institutional policies and academic governance, with the goal of improving working conditions and supporting the long-term professional development and well-being of academics.

2.3 Proposed Research Model

This thesis proposes an integrated research model that extends the classical Job Demands–Resources framework to better reflect the specific conditions of academic work. While the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) is a well-established theoretical approach in occupational health research, its application to higher education remains limited and often fails to account for the sector’s unique structural and cultural dynamics.

The model proposed in this thesis aims to address this gap by integrating constructs that are specific to the academic sector, and by examining their associations with job satisfaction, mental health, and subjective well-being (Naidoo-Chetty & Mineshree, 2021a). A common starting point in occupational health frameworks is the notion that job-related strain emerges when there is an imbalance between the demands placed on workers and the resources available to them to meet those demands. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model builds on this idea by proposing that, although different professions may face distinct stressors, these can generally be grouped into two broad categories: job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013). This conceptual distinction allows the model to serve as a flexible framework applicable across various organizational contexts, regardless of the specific characteristics of each profession.

Job demands refer to aspects of the work environment that require sustained physical or psychological effort and are therefore associated with costs to the individual, such as role stress, poor work–life balance or excessive workloads. Job resources, on the other hand, are those elements that help individuals cope with demands, achieve

goals, or foster growth and development, such as job control, social support or meaningful work. Although job demands are not inherently harmful, they may become significant sources of strain when they require sustained effort without adequate opportunities for recovery. In such cases, these demands can evolve into chronic stressors that negatively affect both subjective well-being and overall functioning in the workplace (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

In academic settings, job resources like social support have been shown to buffer the negative effects of high demands, while job control can help mitigate stress and foster effective job performance (Mahade et al., 2025; Cao et al., 2024). Nevertheless, academia presents a set of distinct structural and cultural conditions, such as pressure to publish, employment precariousness, and increasing bureaucratic tasks, that are often overlooked in standard applications of the JD-R model. These context-specific stressors call for a more tailored adaptation of the framework to accurately capture the lived experiences of academic staff.

To account for this complexity, the model integrates the concept of person–organization fit, which refers to the perceived alignment between the individual’s values and those of the institution. While the traditional JD-R model focuses largely on the presence or absence of strain and motivation, the inclusion of person-organization fit allows this research to address how alignment with institutional culture and priorities can mediate the effects of both demands and resources as well as design strategies that enhance employees’ compatibility with their workplace (Kakar et al., 2023). In academia, where the mismatch between managerial objectives, due to systemic pressures, and academic values is often pronounced, person–organization fit becomes a critical variable in studying well-being in higher education. High levels of fit can foster satisfaction and protect against burnout and turnover, while misalignment may amplify negative outcomes even in the presence of formal support mechanisms.

Alongside person-organization fit, this thesis also includes work engagement as a mediating mechanism between job demands, job resources, and mental health. Although not the central focus of the model, its inclusion is grounded in the theoretical foundations of the Job Demands–Resources framework, where engagement plays a crucial role. Work engagement, defined as a positive, fulfilling state of mind

characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002), has been shown to mediate the relationship between job resources and overall mental health. Where work is often self-directed and identity-driven, engagement is not only a desirable state but also a potential buffer against the effects of role overload.

A distinctive feature of this thesis lies in the relevance of its methodological diversity (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), combining various approaches to capture the complexity of academic well-being and satisfaction. The research model is examined using complementary analytical logics: variance-based structural equation modeling to estimate net effects and mediation, and configurational methods to capture conjunctural causation and equifinality. This alignment between theory and method strengthens inference and practical relevance.

Specifically, the thesis combines (a) systematic review synthesis, (b) survey-based PLS-SEM and QCA, and (c) interview-based analysis integrated with fsQCA as part of a set-theoretic multi-method approach. Together, these components provide both generalizable patterns and context-sensitive explanations. This central investigation allows for a richer understanding of how different combinations of job demands, resources, and organizational factors influence outcomes, while also testing direct and mediating effects. Building on this, the chapter concludes with a study that extends the scope to subjective well-being and mental health, relying on QCA to explore causal patterns and multiple pathways that lead to high or low levels of well-being and mental health among academic staff. Instead of relying solely on linear and net-effect assumptions, this approach acknowledges that well-being in academia emerges from the complex interplay of multiple factors, such as job demands, available resources, and person–organization fit, which may combine in various ways to produce either similar or contrasting outcomes, depending on the specific institutional and individual context.

In contrast, this integrative approach accounts for causal asymmetry, recognizing that the factors contributing to well-being are not necessarily the mirror image of those leading to distress. Different configurations of conditions may produce distinct outcomes, highlighting the need for models that capture complexity rather than assume symmetry in causal relationships. For instance, having job control may not guarantee

high well-being, but its absence may be a critical factor in negative configurations. Therefore, the proposed research model provides a framework for analyzing the specific conditions of academic work. It incorporates job demands such as role stress and poor work–life balance; resources like job control and social support; mediating variables including work engagement and person–organization fit; and key outcomes related to job satisfaction, mental health, and subjective well-being. This model is tested across three complementary studies: one focused on engagement as a mediator of mental health, a second on the influence of organizational alignment on job satisfaction, and a third exploring configurational pathways based on interview data, leading to the presence or absence of subjective well-being and mental health.

By integrating structural equation modeling, configurational logic, and both quantitative and qualitative data, the model offers both theoretical depth and practical relevance. Rather than functioning only as a diagnostic framework, this approach offers universities a valuable perspective for understanding the complex conditions that shape academic well-being. By revealing how specific configurations of organizational and personal factors contribute to either positive or adverse outcomes, it offers actionable insights that can support structural reforms and foster healthier, more sustainable and inclusive academic environments.

2.4 Research Hypotheses

Given the multi-method structure of this thesis, the research is articulated around three empirical studies, each with its own analytical framework and methodological orientation.

Firstly, section 5.1 introduces a previous empirical study that applies the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model to the academic context in order to analyze how job demands and resources influence mental health. This study specifically focused on the negative role of stress and the positive contribution of social support, while also considering the mediating effect of work engagement. The underlying assumptions were that role stress would be associated with poorer mental health, whereas social support would foster positive outcomes. Furthermore, work engagement was expected to act not only as a direct predictor of mental health but also as a mediating

mechanism, buffering the detrimental impact of role stress and enhancing the beneficial effects of social support.

Secondly, Section 5.2 is quantitative in nature and rely on the formulation of hypotheses derived from established theories in occupational health, organizational behavior, and higher education research. These studies employ advanced statistical techniques, including PLS-SEM and QCA, to explore mediating effects and causal patterns.

Lastly, section 5.3 adopts a qualitative approach. It is based on a set of interviews conducted with academics that seek to capture the richness and diversity of academic experiences. The qualitative findings are then analyzed using GMET and QCA to identify multiple pathways that leads to outcomes as mental health and subjective well-being. Given this methodological orientation, the third study is structured around propositions that reflect the logic of causal complexity and configuration.

Subsequently, the hypotheses and the configurational propositions are presented (Tables 1 and 2):

Table 1. Hypotheses Section 5.2

H1	Poor work–life balance is negatively associated with job satisfaction among academics.
H2	Role stress is negatively associated with job satisfaction among academics.
H3	Job control is positively associated with job satisfaction among academics.
H4	Social support is positively associated with job satisfaction among academics.
H5	Person–organization fit is positively associated with job satisfaction among academics.
H6	Person–organization fit mediates the negative relationship between poor work–life balance and job satisfaction.
H7	Person–organization fit mediates the negative relationship between role stress and job satisfaction.

H8	Person–organization fit mediates the positive relationship between job control and job satisfaction.
H9	Person–organization fit mediates the positive relationship between social support and job satisfaction.

Table 2. Propositions Section 5.3

P1	Subjective well-being, person–organization fit, job control and work-life imbalance interact with the presence of good mental health outcomes.
P2	Subjective well-being, person–organization fit, job control and work-life imbalance interact with the negation of good mental health outcomes.

The hypotheses and propositions formulated across the research aim to capture the complex, multidimensional dynamics that shape the experiences of academics.

By combining statistical modeling with configurational methods, the thesis offers a more complete understanding of how university conditions and personal experiences interact. Therefore, it provides evidence that can inform strategies to improve well-being, job satisfaction, and mental health in higher education institutions.

Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Theoretical Multiplicity as a Driver of Scientific Advancement

This thesis is framed within an epistemological and methodological paradigm that embraces theoretical multiplicity as a core guiding principle, based on the premise that complex phenomena, such as the occupational well-being of university teaching and research staff, cannot be adequately understood through a single theoretical lens or analytical technique. Instead, this research embraces theoretical pluralism and methodological complementarity as essential strategies for capturing the multifaceted and dynamic nature of work-related experiences in academic contexts.

In the philosophy of science, epistemic pluralism refers to the position that it is beneficial to pursue multiple theoretical interpretations of the same phenomenon, even when these interpretations might compete or operate at different levels of analysis. Unlike monolithic approaches that seek a singular, all-encompassing theory, epistemic pluralism argues that maintaining theoretical diversity fosters critical dialogue and more robust explanations. By contrast, the mono-theoretical stance maintains that only one correct theory will eventually emerge, assuming that with rigorous empirical testing and improved measurement tools, the apparently true explanation will ultimately prevail (Ward, 2019).

Extending this line of thought, the notion of theoretical multiplicity has emerged as a meta-paradigmatic orientation, one that values the interaction among different theoretical traditions without erasing their internal logics or methodological distinctions. As Karpouzoglou et al. (2016) suggest, this approach encourages scholars to examine where theoretical domains converge or complement each other, facilitating more comprehensive understandings of complex realities. Rather than seeking theoretical uniformity, multiplicity welcomes conceptual heterogeneity as a strength.

This perspective is particularly relevant in fields such as higher education research, where phenomena like faculty wellbeing and professional fulfilment are shaped by overlapping psychological, organizational, social, and cultural dynamics. In such cases, no single framework can fully account for the range of influences at play. As Kurki (2019) argues, drawing on diverse theoretical resources allows researchers to access different layers of explanation, leading to deeper and more contextually grounded insights.

Therefore, efforts to understand job satisfaction, subjective well-being or mental health through a singular theoretical lens often fall short. Psychological theories may capture intrapersonal aspects of wellbeing, while organizational frameworks may explain structural dynamics, and sociological perspectives might illuminate normative or institutional influences. However, taken in isolation, each perspective offers only a partial account (Kenttä & Virtaharju, 2023; Livingston et al., 2022). The multifaceted and interdependent nature of these constructs calls for theoretical multiplicity, the deliberate use of multiple theoretical frameworks to interrogate the same phenomenon from different points.

The need for theoretical multiplicity becomes especially critical in empirical contexts where causal patterns exhibit nonlinear, asymmetric, and equifinal characteristics. In such cases, distinct configurations of conditions can lead to similar outcomes, and a single factor may produce divergent effects depending on its context. This complexity aligns with findings from QCA literature, which emphasizes that QCA is a non-additive and non-linear method that emphasizes diversity, acknowledging that different paths can lead to the same (Hanckel et al., 2021). In addition, recent advances in critical realism and complexity-based approaches highlight the limitations of applying universal, one-size-fits-all explanations in social science. Instead, these perspectives emphasize the importance of considering context. For instance, critical realism suggests that social reality is made up of different layers, and that the same mechanisms might operate differently across structural and cultural contexts (Noor & Darmaningrat, 2023). From this point, embracing theoretical multiplicity transcends a mere analytical option, it becomes a methodological imperative, essential for capturing the contingent, configurational nature of real-world social phenomena.

Engaging with the social world through multiple theoretical lenses enables a more sustainable and inclusive knowledge production. This approach acknowledges that complex social phenomena often resist reduction to a single paradigm and instead emerge from the interplay of diverse, and sometimes conflicting, theoretical framing, a position aligned with pluralism (Fiebich, 2021). Theoretical multiplicity encourages researchers to work across disciplinary boundaries, recognizing the value of tensions and complementarities in constructing richer explanations. Such pluralism is

particularly valuable in applied fields, such as education and organizational research, where outcomes are influenced by interdependent personal, institutional, and societal factors. As a result, traditional explanatory models based on single theoretical perspectives or linear causality are increasingly being questioned for their inability to capture the full range of factors at play.

In recent years, the landscape of social science research has undergone a fundamental transformation, driven by a growing recognition of the inherent complexity of the phenomena under investigation. Parallel trends are evident in organizational and well-being research. Issues such as person–organization fit are now understood not as a static attribute but as evolving through feedback from job clarity, meaningfulness, and individual–structural dynamics. For instance, Manolache & Epuran (2023) showed how job-role goal clarity mediates the relationship between feedback-seeking behavior and both job satisfaction and fit, reinforcing that complex outcomes often emerge from dynamic and multilevel interactions.

Therefore, within this evolving context, the use of theoretical multiplicity has gained prominence as a response to the limitations of reductionist frameworks. Rather than relying on a single explanatory logic, multiplicity embraces the idea that diverse theoretical perspectives can coexist and complement one another in the effort to better explain complex social outcomes. This pluralistic orientation reflects broader shifts in the philosophy of science, which prioritize contextual sensitivity, causal asymmetry, and theoretical openness over parsimony or generalization. In this view, the integration of multiple theories is not a sign of conceptual weakness, but rather a necessary strategy for addressing multifactorial realities that resist simplistic interpretation (Thomann et al., 2025; Meuer & Fiss, 2020).

This trend is particularly relevant in areas such as organizational studies and human resource management, where constructs like well-being and job satisfaction are influenced by a constellation of interacting conditions. Academics have increasingly acknowledged that traditional methodological approaches in the study of education tend to simplify what are, in fact, highly dynamic and interdependent systems (Candia et al., 2022). In response, a number of recent studies have begun to incorporate

configurational thinking, which involves examining how specific combinations of causal conditions, jointly lead to particular outcomes.

This shift has contributed to the emergence of a neo-configurational perspective, which not only adopts a configurational logic but also emphasizes the integration of theory-building and methodological innovation. At the heart of this development is Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), a method that operationalizes the logic of conjunctural causality and provides a powerful tool for modeling the complex relationships between conditions and outcomes (Nikou et al., 2024). Unlike regression-based techniques that focus on net effects, QCA allows for the identification of multiple, equally valid causal pathways, making it particularly well-suited for research guided by theoretical multiplicity.

Despite its considerable potential, complementing QCA with additional methodological approaches may offer valuable insights. Building on prior contributions to causal complexity (Hajiheydari & Delgosha, 2023), research argues that the intentional and transparent use of multiple theoretical perspectives can significantly enrich the explanatory depth of configurational models. In doing so, the research seeks to provide practical guidance on how scholars can more effectively integrate diverse theories into coherent and methodologically rigorous research designs. By anchoring the analysis within the domain of academic work and well-being, the thesis offers a concrete empirical context in which to explore the application of theoretical multiplicity, highlighting both its analytical potential and its inherent challenges.

The simultaneous application of diverse theoretical frameworks, such as the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, person–organization fit theory, and institutional theory, illustrates how configurational models can benefit from theoretical triangulation. This integrative approach reflects a conscious recognition that certain dynamics, organizational structures, and academic institutional contexts do not operate independently, but rather interact in complex, often nonlinear ways to shape outcomes as wellbeing, mental health or satisfaction (Mitchell & Alexandrova, 2021). By weaving together insights from multiple conceptual frameworks, the thesis aims to develop a richer understanding of how academics’ perceptions and experiences are deeply shaped by, and situated within, structural and systemic forces.

Furthermore, the integration of statistical techniques such as Partial Least Squares Path Modeling with configurational approaches like Qualitative Comparative Analysis enables the exploration of both linear and non-linear causal pathways (Woodside, 2014). This pluralistic approach aligns with contemporary trends in organizational research, which advocate for the integration of diverse perspectives to achieve a more complete, realistic, and context-sensitive understanding of complex real-world issues (Hanckel et al., 2021). This thesis intentionally avoids framing academic well-being through a single, reductive lens, but rather highlighting the diverse mechanisms and configurations through which it may emerge across institutional settings.

Understanding contemporary social phenomena requires analytical approaches capable of addressing their inherent complexity and variability. Constructs such as mental health, subjective wellbeing or job satisfaction are not only multifaceted but also embedded in evolving contexts (Liu et al., 2025; Monteiro & Joseph, 2023), that resist linear or one-dimensional explanations. Given that multiple pathways and combinations of conditions may lead to the outcome relying on a single theoretical perspective is often insufficient (Hanckel et al., 2021). As such, the integration of diverse theoretical lenses is not merely advantageous but essential.

Traditionally, research on organizational behavior has relied on isolated theoretical frameworks, such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Herzberg et al., 1959), sociological views of institutional roles, and cultural approaches that examine organizational norms and values. Similarly, the study of mental health has oscillated between range of paradigms, including clinical models, stress-strain frameworks, and socio-contextual theories that examine how environmental conditions support or undermine motivation, such as Self-Determination Theory in occupational settings (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

While each theoretical perspective has contributed valuable insights, their isolated application often overlooks critical interdependencies and obscures the complex interplay among key factors. The integration of these perspectives, what theoretical multiplicity precisely seeks, offers a way to better comprehend how personal resources, organizational environments, and value congruence interact to shape outcomes such as academic role stress, job satisfaction or social support. For

instance, combining the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model with Person–Organization Fit theory enables researchers to link structural conditions, job demands and resources, and organizational outcomes. This synthesis reflects the shift from linear to configurational thinking: researchers move beyond linear explanations, embracing a logic that captures the multifaceted nature of human experience within organizational settings.

In the case of academics, outcomes like job satisfaction or good mental health cannot be meaningfully understood through single-variable explanations. Factors like workload or job control, while important, interact with deeper dynamics, such as role conflict and role ambiguity, the strength of social support, and the degree of alignment between personal and institutional missions. It is precisely this layered complexity that calls for a multilayered theoretical framing. Rather than advancing one dominant explanatory model, this approach promotes a more self-aware and context-sensitive science, one that recognizes the limitations of individual theories while leveraging their collective strengths. As Miłkowski (2025) argues, this does not entail theoretical relativism but supports a holistic logic of explanation, where conceptual diversity is not a weakness but a necessary condition for engaging meaningfully with complex, real-world phenomena. Such an approach fosters knowledge accumulation that remains open and integrative.

The integration of multiple theories involves much more than merely combining different conceptual tools, it enables a dialogic approach, one in which conceptual tensions are productive, and overlapping insights are used to generate richer accounts. This approach fosters both theoretical innovation and empirical sensitivity by encouraging researchers to challenge the assumptions of established models, interrogate their boundaries, and explore how they might converge or diverge in specific contexts. In domains like higher education, where faculty experiences are increasingly shaped by hybrid work roles, intensified competition, employment precarity, and shifting societal expectations, the need for flexible and integrative theoretical approaches is more crucial than ever.

When examining the drivers of subjective well-being, mental health, and job satisfaction among academics, theoretical multiplicity becomes more than a

conceptual choice, it becomes a necessary lens for capturing the heterogeneity of academic life. Rather than assuming uniform causes, this approach recognizes that individual experiences are shaped by a constellation of interrelated factors such as personal values or organizational culture. By drawing on multiple theoretical frameworks, researchers can move beyond narrow, one-size-fits-all models to explore how different mechanisms operate across varying academic contexts.

Crucially, this perspective allows for the coexistence of multiple causal explanations. Some academics may report high satisfaction due to strong intrinsic motivation, while others may benefit from value alignment with their institution or supportive working conditions. The diverse pathways do not cancel each other out, instead, they reflect the complexity of real academic settings. Configurational methods such as QCA are well suited to uncover these patterned combinations, offering empirical clarity without forcing artificial uniformity. Embracing theoretical multiplicity allows researchers to build more honest, flexible, and context-sensitive explanations, opening doors to insights that are not only more truthful and contextually grounded, but also capable of inspiring meaningful transformation within institutions.

3.2 Theoretical Models applied to Academic Well-Being: From JD-R to Person-Organization Fit

Understanding academic well-being requires a multidimensional theoretical lens that captures both the pressures of academic work and the structural forces shaping institutional life. This chapter presents an integrated view of the main frameworks used to explain how workplace conditions, individual experiences, and organizational factors interact to influence the well-being of university staff. Among the most prominent is the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, which provides a dynamic structure to examine how specific job demands (e.g., role stress, poor work–life balance) and job resources (e.g., social support, job control) impact on mental health, job satisfaction, and subjective well-being.

However, while the JD-R model effectively captures the mechanisms through which job characteristics influence well-being, it does not fully address the relational and value-based alignment between individuals and their institutions. To address this, the chapter also incorporates the Person–Organization Fit (P–O fit) perspective, which

emphasizes the compatibility between employees' values, goals, and needs, and the culture of its institution. In academic settings, where vocation, autonomy, and mission alignment are essential, this theoretical lens adds explanatory power to its understanding.

Additionally, to capture the broader socio-organizational context, the chapter considers insights from Institutional Theory, which helps explain how norms, formal structures, and cultural environments influence both organizational structures and academic outcomes. Finally, in the complementary theories section, Conservation of Resources Theory and Social Exchange Theory enrich the analysis of motivation, satisfaction and resilience within academia.

3.2.1. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is a widely recognized theoretical framework within occupational health psychology, developed to explain how different job characteristics influence different outcomes such as employee well-being, satisfaction, motivation or performance.

Initially proposed by Demerouti et al. (2001), the model was designed to overcome the limitations of earlier stress models such as the job demands-control model (Karasek, 1979) and the demand-control-support model (Johnson & Hall, 1988), which posited fixed job characteristics applicable to specific occupational contexts. In contrast, the JD-R model is flexible and generalizable, allowing researchers to classify job characteristics as either demands or resources depending on the specific occupational setting (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Within the framework of the JD-R model is the distinction between job demands and job resources. Job demands are aspects of work that require sustained physical, emotional, or cognitive effort and are associated with certain physiological and psychological costs. These include high work pressure, poor work-life balance, role conflict and poor environmental conditions. Drawing from Hockey's (1993) theory of demand management, individuals facing environmental pressures, such as excessive workload, role stress or tight deadlines, often adopt energy-preserving strategies to maintain performance levels. While such adaptive mechanisms can preserve task

effectiveness in the short term, they also accumulate physiological costs and contribute to fatigue over time. Although job demands are not necessarily negative, they may become stressors when they exceed the employee's adaptive capacity and energy levels, leading to fatigue, poor mental health, and ultimately, to burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). Numerous studies have validated this relationship. For instance, a study conducted among academics (Selim & Kee, 2022) found that emotional job demands, such as handling student stress, were strongly associated with poorer work-life balance and elevated stress levels. This real-world instance illustrates how job demands in academia can degrade overall mental health and elevate burnout risk when unmet by sufficient support mechanisms.

Job demands may be broadly categorized into three main types: quantitative demands, qualitative demands, and organizational demands (Naidoo-Chetty & Plessis, 2021a). Quantitative demands are concerned with aspects such as workload volume and the time pressure under which tasks must be completed. When these demands increase, they often result in employees needing to allocate more time and effort than originally anticipated to fulfill job expectations (Van Veldhoven, 2013). Qualitative demands, on the other hand, relate to the nature and intensity of the emotional experiences attached to them, including anger or anxiety versus joy or relief (Zapf et al., 2013). Meanwhile, organizational demands are systemic pressures arising from the broader work environment, such as bureaucratic constraints, role ambiguity or job insecurity which can undermine performance and satisfaction (Boyd et al., 2011).

A question arises, what enables individuals to maintain health and satisfaction even under intense pressure. The answer lies in the presence of resources, understood as conditions or attributes that buffer the impact of demands and promote optimal functioning. Job resources, then, can be defined as work-related factors that either help employees accomplish their professional goals, lessen the impact the strain caused by demands, or support personal development and skill enhancement, in line with the principles of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2024). Marozva & Pelsler (2025) found that social support and timely feedback were key job resources for university staff working in hybrid environments. These resources helped buffer the

negative effects of isolation and poor work–life balance, promoting greater engagement and mental well-being among academics.

Furthermore, the model distinguishes between organizational resources and personal resources (Naidoo-Chetty & Plessis, 2021a). Organizational resources arise from the social and structural context of the workplace. These include access to performance feedback, recognition, self-development opportunities, job stability, and support from supervisors and colleagues. Personal resources are internally driven, reflecting an individual's self-appraisal. These include confidence in one's ability to succeed (self-efficacy), positive future expectations (optimism), and organization-related self-esteem (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007).

Empirical studies show that job resources are strongly associated with work engagement (Hakanen et al., 2024), a positive psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Supporting this, Tontodimamma et al. (2023) conducted research on non-tenured academic staff in Italy and found that perceptions of fairness, professional development opportunities, and relational support from supervisors and peers were significant predictors of improved well-being and reduced anxiety. Their findings demonstrate how organizational resources can mitigate the negative impact of job insecurity and demanding work conditions, thereby enhancing engagement and health among academics.

The JD-R model is structured around two key areas of occupational research: the study of stress and the study of motivation (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). It outlines two core psychological mechanisms. The first is the health impairment process, whereby excessive job demands exhaust an individual's physical and mental resources, potentially leading to burnout and health problems. This process has been particularly evident in high-strain professions such as education, where chronic exposure to emotional and workload demands can significantly impair well-being and decrease performance. The second core mechanism is the motivational process, whereby job resources stimulate employee engagement and are linked to higher performance and lower levels of cynicism (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Engaged employees tend to

experience positive emotions, take initiative, and demonstrate greater effectiveness in their roles.

These two processes, the health impairment and the motivational pathway, function simultaneously and may influence one another. For instance, having supportive colleagues and receiving constructive feedback from supervisors can enhance an employee's ability to meet work goals, thereby reinforcing motivation. Whether by fulfilling basic psychological needs or facilitating task accomplishment, the availability of job resources fosters engagement. In contrast, when such resources are lacking, employees are more likely to develop disengaged or cynical attitudes toward their work.

A third component of the model, known as the buffering hypothesis, consistent with Kahn & Byosiere (1992), suggests that job resources can moderate the relationship between job demands and stress. In other words, the presence of sufficient job resources can reduce the detrimental effects of high job demands on employee health. This interactive effect was demonstrated in several empirical studies, including the work by Mensah (2021), who showed that employees with access to social support were less negatively affected by job stress and demonstrated an improved mental well-being.

One of the major strengths of the JD-R model is its empirical validation across various occupational settings and national cultures. For example, in a qualitative study of Swedish academics, Karatuna et al. (2022) reported that job demands such as remote teaching and work-home interference intensified stress, while job resources, including online communication tools and organizational support, played a key role in preserving occupational well-being and engagement. Furthermore, a recent empirical study (Pirrota et al., 2025) applied the JD-R framework to examine how staffing adequacy, that is, whether there are enough personnel to meet workload requirements, interacts with job demands and job resources in predicting employee well-being and job satisfaction. The study found that when staffing levels were insufficient, even moderate, job demands led to elevated stress and reduced satisfaction. However, in contexts where staffing was adequate and key job resources such as autonomy were present, employees reported significantly higher levels of engagement and job

satisfaction, despite high demands. These results underscore a central principle of the JD-R model, the balance between demands and resources is critical, and the presence of adequate resources can buffer the negative effects of workload or role stress on employee well-being.

Academic workplaces significant emotional and social strains on their employees. Beyond heavy quantitative demands, such as heavy teaching responsibilities or tight research deadlines, academics also face qualitative demands. These include complex ethical decisions related to research integrity, the pressure to publish in high-impact journals, and managing interpersonal conflicts in teaching or research settings. Moreover, organizational demands, such as bureaucratic overload, role conflict, and misalignment between personal values and departmental goals, further harm both well-being and job satisfaction.

At the same time, the JD-R model highlights the critical role of job resources, attributes of the work environment that help individuals cope with their professional goals. In academic settings, organizational resources may include colleagues and supervisor support, feedback mechanisms, opportunities for professional growth or stable employment contracts. These elements not only protect against burnout but also enhance job satisfaction and foster a sense of belonging, which aligns with the concept of person–organization fit (Liu & Xie, 2024).

Additionally, personal resources such as optimism, a strong vocational identity or intrinsic motivation are recognized as vital for sustaining engagement and good mental health. For instance, Ueno et al., (2025) showed that in academia, social job resources reduced feelings of loneliness while improving mental health across isolation-prone academic roles. In addition, a systematic review of hybrid academic work (Al-Naabi & Al-Shukaili, 2024) posits that organizational support, technical infrastructure, and opportunities for connection are essential job resources that promote well-being.

In sum, the Job Demands-Resources model is a robust framework for understanding the complex interplay between job characteristics and employee outcomes. Its adaptability and empirical support make it a powerful tool for those interested in improving employee well-being and organizational performance. Within the academic context, the model is particularly well-suited to explore how certain demands and

resources shape outcomes such as subjective well-being, job satisfaction and mental health, among others. The demands under examination, poor work–life balance and role stress, represent common and persistent challenges faced by academics. On the other hand, this study also focuses on two key resources: social support and job control, as key organizational resources that help maintain well-being and job satisfaction. The JD-R model enables an integrated view of how these demands and resources interact, either undermining well-being or promoting satisfaction and enhancing alignment with the institution. Its flexibility in capturing both the stress and motivational pathways makes it the most appropriate framework for understanding the dynamics of academic work in today’s university environment.

3.2.2 Person-Organization Fit Theory

Person–organization fit is a foundational concept in organizational psychology that explains how individuals perceive their compatibility with the organizations they belong to (Kristof, 1996). It suggests that when there is alignment between an employee’s values, goals, personality traits, or work preferences and the overarching characteristics of the organization, individuals are more likely to experience higher levels of job satisfaction and well-being (Shah & Ayub, 2021).

The theoretical foundation of person–organization fit is deeply rooted in different theories of behavior, which emphasize that workplace outcomes arise from the dynamic interplay between individual characteristics and environmental conditions. This perspective was formalized by Lewin (1936), whose study posits that behavior is a function of both the person and the environment. Building on this principle, researchers have developed models that highlight how individuals are drawn to, selected by, and remain within environments that reflect their own values and traits. In this context, Schneider’s (1987) Attraction–Selection–Attrition (ASA) framework proposes that organizations naturally evolve toward homogeneity, as individuals who fit well are more likely to be hired and stay.

Chatman (1989) further refined this approach by demonstrating how value congruence between individuals and institutions influences organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Finally, Kristof’s (1996) review of Person–Organization Fit marked a turning point in how compatibility at work is conceptualized. Rather than focusing solely

on the characteristics of the individual or the organization in isolation, her framework underscores the importance of their interdependence. By highlighting how fit involves the mutual alignment of individual needs, values, and goals with the structural and cultural attributes of the organization, the author positions P–O fit as a dynamic process that unfolds within the broader organizational context. Therefore, Kristof (1996) defined person–organization fit as a state of compatibility that emerges when an organization and an individual either meet each other’s needs, possess similar core attributes, or experience both simultaneously.

Kristof’s framework, building on Muchinsky and Monahan’s (1987) taxonomy, distinguishes between supplementary fit, which occurs when individuals and organizations are similar, especially in terms of values and culture, and complementary fit, which arises when differences between the two create a productive synergy, such as when an individual contributes skills or attributes that fulfill unmet organizational needs. These distinctions helped clarify that fit is not merely about homogeneity, but also about mutual benefit and alignment across multiple dimensions.

Supporting this perspective, Kristof-Brown et al. (2023) advance this conceptualization by acknowledging the complexity and multidimensionality of person-organization fit. They argue that traditional research has often relied heavily on perceived fit, without adequately distinguishing between actual congruence and subjective impressions. This highlights the need to consider how shifting employee expectations, evolving organizational cultures, and changing external conditions continuously influence how fit is experienced and understood over time. Similarly, Jaškevičiūtė et al. (2024) found that fluctuations in value alignment over time significantly impact different dimensions of well-being. Their findings highlight the dynamic nature of person–organization fit and its critical role in fostering sustained employee well-being and overall organizational health. Taken together, these modern perspectives reinforce a move away from a static understanding of fit toward one that recognizes its fluid and co-constructed nature, responsive to both individual growth and organizational change.

A widely adopted approach to measuring perceived Person–Organization Fit was developed by Cable and DeRue (2002), who proposed a multidimensional scale encompassing three distinct components: person-organization fit, conceptualized as

value congruence between the individual and the organization; needs–supplies fit, which captures how well the organization satisfies the individual’s needs, such as autonomy, growth, or recognition, and demands–abilities fit, which assesses whether the individual’s knowledge, skills, and abilities align with the demands of the job clarity. Rather than viewing fit as a singular construct, this perspective posits a multidimensional nature that highlights how individuals engage with organizations on both motivational and functional levels. While each dimension operates through different mechanisms, both are complementary and critical in explaining how individuals experience their work and how they respond behaviorally and emotionally to their organizational environment.

Building on this multidimensional approach to person–organization fit, recent work has introduced methodological innovations that extend fit measurement beyond traditional self-report value congruence scales. One such advance is the Cultural Fit Assessment Method (CFAM), developed by Leal Rodríguez & Sanchís-Pedregosa (2025), as a structured, value-based assessment technique for evaluating both individual and organizational culture and the degree of alignment between them. CFAM operationalizes cultural fit through a psychometric evaluation of dominant cultural traits and individual values and produces key performance indicators (KPIs) that reflect how well the values of individuals coincide with those of the organization in practice. The method draws on Competing Values Framework (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1981) to identify archetypal cultural patterns and then quantifies congruence in a way that can be used for diagnostic, predictive, and strategic decision-making in talent management and organizational development contexts, including improving recruitment, retention, and alignment of work expectations. By incorporating CFAM into person–organization fit research, scholars and practitioners can more precisely capture the interaction between individual value profiles and organizational culture.

Furthermore, empirical research has consistently linked strong person-organization fit to a host of positive outcomes (Pérez-Temprano et al., 2023). These include higher organizational commitment, increased work engagement, lower turnover intentions, and better overall job performance. These patterns suggest that P–O fit not only shapes external behaviors but also influences deeper states that sustain motivation

and belonging. In this context, Zeng and Hu (2024) found that higher levels of P–O fit significantly reduced work pressure and in turn lowered job burnout and turnover likelihood. The authors concluded that employees who feel aligned with their organization’s values and practices are more psychologically anchored, energized, and loyal, even in high-pressure environments.

In higher education, the relevance of person–organization fit becomes particularly pronounced due to the nature of academic work. When the values, expectations, and mission of the university resonate with those of individual academics, such a fit fosters subjective well-being, institutional loyalty, and a sense of meaning in one’s work. On the contrary, when institutional priorities are centered on managerialism or strict performance metrics, this might lead to academic disengagement and emotional exhaustion. Empirical studies have reinforced these associations in recent years. For instance, Liu and Xie (2024) analyze data from eleven countries concluding that stronger person-organization fit was linked to lower burnout and higher job satisfaction among researchers. In parallel, Marmaya and Balakrishnan (2025) demonstrate that alignment with institutional values and practices predicted better work adjustment, higher job satisfaction, and stronger engagement in cross-cultural academic settings.

University is not merely a workplace, many academics enter the profession with strong intrinsic motivations, including a commitment to knowledge creation and dissemination, societal impact or student development. When institutions uphold these values, by promoting academic freedom, supporting research excellence, and valuing teaching proportionally, academics are more likely to perceive high levels of fit. Recent research has begun to explore these dynamics more explicitly. For instance, El-Sakka (2016) examined the relationship between person–organization fit, burnout, and turnover intention among academic staff. The study revealed that low perceived person-organization fit was significantly associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion and intentions to leave the institution, whereas strong perceived fit acted as a protective or buffering factor against burnout. Similarly, in contexts of structural change, such as funding cuts or shifts in governance, person-organization fit has been shown to moderate the negative impact of instability on mental health.

Moreover, the P–O fit concept provides valuable insights into the experiences of non-tenured or early-career academics, who often navigate uncertainty surrounding their long-term role within the institution. Studies in educational settings have underscored that institutional support and mentoring significantly boosts academics' sense of belonging. For example, Ahmad Saufi et al. (2023) showed that among academic staff, higher person-organization fit was strongly linked to a sustainable work–life balance and lower turnover intention when career development opportunities were also present.

When considered alongside models like the JD-R framework, person-organization fit helps explain how organizational cultures can either complement or undermine formal job resources. Even when autonomy or social support are provided, their positive effects on satisfaction and well-being may be muted in contexts where individuals feel misaligned with institutional values. Conversely, high P–O fit can amplify the benefits of these resources, leading to greater engagement and superior mental health.

3.2.3 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory provides a sociological lens through which it is feasible to examine how social structures such as rules, norms or routines become institutionalized, and in turn, shape the behavior and identities of organizations and individuals. Rather than assuming that organizations act purely on the basis of economic rationality, institutional theorists argue that plenty of organizational behavior is driven by the pursuit of legitimacy and alignment with the expectations of a wider institutional environment (Scott, 1995).

Within this framework, Zucker (1987) highlights how institutional theory reveals the deeply embedded, taken-for-granted nature of many social arrangements. Institutionalization refers to the process through which specific organizational practices or structures become perceived as natural and inevitable, even when they are not the most technically efficient. This conformity enhances organizational legitimacy and increases the opportunities of survival. However, it can also lead to a disconnection between formal structures and actual practices, a phenomenon described as “decoupling” by Meyer and Rowan (1977).

Zucker (1987) further advanced institutional theory by distinguishing between two foundational models: the “environment-as-institution” and the “organization-as-institution” perspectives. The first model highlights the influence of macro-level forces, such as state regulation or professional norms, that impose structures on organizations from the outside. In this view, institutions are external, stable, and widely shared, shaping organizational behavior through rationalized myths that promote legitimacy and survival, even at the expense of technical efficiency (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). By contrast, the “organization-as-institution” approach views institutionalization as an internally driven, bottom-up process in which new practices emerge organically from routines or group interactions. Over time, these practices acquire a rule-like status, becoming embedded within the organization’s structure and gaining legitimacy through repeated application. Once institutionalized, these elements persist independently of individual actors, shaping organizational behavior and identity from within as carriers of taken-for-granted meaning.

The emergence of new institutionalism brought with it more rigorous analytical tools, particularly through the work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), who identified three forces or mechanisms by which organizations within a field tend to converge: coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism arises from formal and informal pressures exerted by the state or other powerful entities. In contrast, mimetic isomorphism occurs in conditions of uncertainty, prompting organizations to imitate others that are perceived as successful. Finally, normative isomorphism stems from professionalization, including shared educational backgrounds. These three mechanisms illustrate how organizations enhance their legitimacy and gain access to critical resources by aligning with established institutional norms. However, this pursuit of legitimacy can come at a cost. Conformity may discourage innovation and lead organizations to adopt practices that are not necessarily the most efficient or well-suited to their specific needs.

DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) framework of institutional isomorphism intersects with Zucker’s (1987) distinction between the “environment-as-institution” and “organization-as-institution” models. Both perspectives acknowledge that institutionalization often occurs through mimetic processes, where organizations imitate successful peers, and

normative mechanisms, driven by shared professional standards. However, they diverge in their interpretation of coercive pressures. In the “environment-as-institution” model, coercion, particularly from the state or regulatory bodies, is seen as a central force that legitimizes and stabilizes organizational structures. In contrast, the “organization-as-institution” model regards coercion as potentially destabilizing. When behaviors are enforced through external pressure or sanctions, it signals that other alternatives are possible, thereby weakening the perception that these practices are natural or inevitable.

These perspectives open a broader view on how institutional structures evolve. Organizations do not only passively absorb norms, but they may also be active sites of institutional creation, diffusion and even resistance. Recent studies emphasize the relevance of institutional theory in analyzing academic environments, where legitimacy is shaped by overlapping and often competing expectations (Brankovic et al., 2023). In response, universities adapt internal processes, such as research evaluation systems or tenure policies, not only to achieve their missions, but also to align with external demands from governments, professional associations, international rankings, and bibliometric indicators. Similarly, Kim (2018) shows how universities engage in strategic reputation management to meet these external expectations. Rather than focusing solely on performance, universities should construct symbolic narratives to gain legitimacy. These actions often reflect institutional pressures and can lead to a gap between formal image and internal practices, illustrating how legitimacy is maintained through symbolic alignment rather than substantive change.

This insight is particularly relevant when examining the working conditions and well-being of academic staff in the current higher education landscape. Contemporary institutional norms increasingly prioritize measurable outputs, such as publication volume or global rankings, as the dominant indicators of success. While these metrics aim to signal accountability and competitiveness, they often clash with the vocation-driven nature of academia, where purpose, curiosity and public service outweigh measurable outputs. This misalignment between institutional expectations and academic values may entail significant consequences.

Recent empirical evidence confirms the impact of these institutional pressures on academic mental health. A global study conducted by Rahman et al. (2024), involving academics from 16 countries, found that burnout levels were alarmingly high, with over 70% of respondents reporting moderate to severe psychological distress. The most frequently cited causes included excessive workloads, job insecurity, and the growing bureaucratization of academic life driven by institutional restructuring. In addition, qualitative research reinforces this picture. Jayman et al. (2022) show how the growing emphasis on rankings and competitive pressures in higher education undermine professional autonomy and fosters stress-inducing work cultures. Their study documents how academics, especially early- and mid-careers, feel compelled to prioritize performance targets over educational integrity, leading to emotional exhaustion and professional dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, Douglas et al. (2024) found that intensified performance management systems in higher education, driven by external influences such as political, financial and workload factors, are significantly linked to increased job strain and mental health risks among academic staff. Similarly, Kyumana and Ponera (2025) reported high levels of burnout in academia, where excessive teaching loads, inadequate incentives, and lack of recognition resulted in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, ultimately affecting job satisfaction.

Together, these findings reveal that institutional norms, once intended to enhance transparency and effectiveness, now contribute to systemic stress and deteriorating well-being in academic workplaces. This aligns with the Job Demands–Resources model, where excessive demands combined with limited resources often lead to increased levels of stress and burnout.

Linking this to institutional theory, these productivity-driven norms are sustained by a combination of coercive pressures, such as funding based on metrics, mimetic pressures, such as emulating peers to climb rankings, and normative pressures, rooted in professional standards that prioritize output. While these practices may enhance organizational legitimacy within higher education fields, they often do so at the expense of core academic values and employees' well-being. Therefore, this theory provides a useful framework for examining how these systemic pressures shape working

conditions and how thoughtful reforms at the institutional level can promote healthier and more sustainable academic environments.

3.2.4 Other complementary theories

While the Job Demands–Resources model, Person–Organization Fit theory, and Institutional theory serve as the primary theoretical pillars for this study, their explanatory scope can be broadened by drawing on complementary frameworks that capture additional motivational, resource-oriented, relational, and perceptual aspects of well-being. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) is especially relevant in this context, as it advances a detailed account of how meeting needs such as autonomy or competence fosters intrinsic motivation, engagement and resilience in the face of challenges. Within the JD-R framework, these needs can be considered vital personal resources that interact synergistically with job resources to buffer against excessive demands. From the view of Person–Organization Fit, they underscore the importance of aligning individual values and institutional culture to create an environment in which academic staff can experience both professional growth and personal fulfilment.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) further strengthens the resource logic embedded in the JD-R model by conceptualizing stress as the result of threatened loss of valued resources, whether material or social, and by framing well-being as the outcome of resource accumulation and protection. This perspective is grounded in the premise that individuals actively strive to retain, protect and build such resources, and that the demands that affect these assets are inherently stressful. In academic environments, the dynamics of resource loss and gain are heavily shaped by institutional policies, funding opportunities and the degree of collegial support, thereby linking directly to Institutional Theory's emphasis on how formal norms and structural arrangements determine access to and distribution of resources.

A relational dimension is provided by Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958), which focuses on the reciprocity and balance of exchanges between individuals and organizations. According to this view, the quality of these exchanges, whether manifested as recognition, professional development opportunities, or organizational support, influences trust, commitment, and the willingness to go beyond contractual

obligations. Individuals seek to maximize the net benefits of these exchanges, balancing perceived costs against received rewards, while also monitoring fairness within their peer group. This behavioral calculus complements the Person–Organization Fit perspective by highlighting the role of perceived congruence in sustaining positive work relationships, and it aligns with Institutional Theory by underscoring how legitimacy and mutual trust underpin stable organizational systems. By integrating these complementary theories into the conceptual framework, academic well-being can be viewed not as a static condition but as an emergent outcome of interdependent systems. It reveals how motivational factors, resources and social relationships interact with institutional norms, policies, and cultural values. This expanded perspective not only enriches the interpretation of empirical evidence but also positions the phenomenon as the product of complex processes, shaped simultaneously by realities of academics and the wider organizational and cultural frameworks that sustain it.

Chapter 4. Methodology and Research Methods

4.1 Operationalization of Constructs: Scales for Measuring Demands, Resources, Work Engagement, Person-Organization Fit, Job Satisfaction, Mental Health and Subjective Well-Being

The empirical investigation of the proposed research model requires the use of valid and reliable measures for each of the constructs under study. The complete versions of the questionnaire, interview, information sheet, and informed consent form are presented in the appendices.

In this vein, all constructs were operationalized using well-established and validated instruments with documented psychometric properties. The selection of these scales ensures conceptual clarity, comparability with previous studies and robustness of the analyses. Each measure was carefully adapted to the specific context of academic staff, while preserving the equivalence with the validated versions.

Below, this section describes in detail the instruments used to assess job demands, job resources, work engagement, person–organization fit, job satisfaction, mental health and subjective well-being.

Firstly, job satisfaction is one of the most extensively studied constructs in organizational psychology, capturing the degree of employees' contentment with their work and assessing whether they are satisfied with their job as a whole or with specific aspects or facets of it (Spector, 1997). As such, it is associated not only with employee well-being but also with important organizational outcomes such as productivity, retention and the overall workplace climate. In this thesis, job satisfaction was assessed using the Generic Job Satisfaction Scale (GJSS) developed by Macdonald & MacIntyre (1997). The GJSS was specifically designed to provide a broad, reliable and concise measure of job satisfaction that is applicable across diverse occupational groups. One of its main strengths is that it combines an evaluation of specific facets of satisfaction, such as pay, job security, or recognition, with a global assessment of overall satisfaction with work.

The scale consists of ten items, each addressing a particular aspect of job satisfaction while collectively contributing to an overall measure of the construct. The items are:

1. *I receive recognition for a job well done.*

2. *I feel close to the people at work.*
3. *I feel good about working at this company.*
4. *I feel secure about my job.*
5. *I believe management is concerned about me.*
6. *On the whole, I believe work is good for my physical health.*
7. *My wages are good.*
8. *All my talents and skills are used at work.*
9. *I get along with my supervisors.*
10. *I feel good about my job.*

Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). The total score therefore ranges from 10 to 50, with higher values reflecting greater job satisfaction. The interpretation suggests that scores of 42–50 represent *very high* satisfaction, 39–41 *high*, 32–38 *average*, 27–31 *low*, and 10–26 *very low*.

In addition, psychometric evaluations of the GJSS indicate satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.77$) and solid construct validity, with significant correlations reported with related constructs such as occupational stress, job insecurity and workplace isolation.

Following, subjective well-being was measured using the World Health Organization Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5) (Bech et al., 2003), which is one of the most widely applied instruments for assessing general well-being in both clinical and occupational settings. The WHO-5 has been validated in numerous countries and across diverse populations (Kliem et al., 2025), consistently demonstrating strong psychometric properties.

WHO-5 comprises five items designed to capture fundamental aspects of positive mood, vitality, and overall interest in life. Therefore, the following items were included:

1. *I have felt cheerful and in good spirits.*
2. *I have felt calm and relaxed.*
3. *I have felt active and vigorous.*

4. *I woke up feeling fresh and rested.*
5. *My daily life has been filled with things that interest me.*

In this scale, a score of 1 corresponds to “Not at all” and a score of 6 to “All of the time,” such that higher values indicate greater subjective well-being. The composite score therefore ranges from 5 to 30, which can be linearly rescaled to the WHO’s recommended 0–100 index for comparability across studies. Within this framework, a score below 50 is generally used as a cut-off point to identify individuals who may be at risk of impaired subjective well-being.

Furthermore, the WHO-5 has demonstrated excellent psychometric robustness, with internal consistency estimates typically exceeding $\alpha = 0.80$ (Bech et al., 2003), alongside strong correlations with clinical assessments of depression and broader indicators of quality of life.

Following, mental health was assessed using the 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), originally developed by Goldberg (1972). The GHQ-12 is among the most widely employed instruments for the assessment of psychological distress and overall mental health worldwide and its validity has been extensively demonstrated (Wojujutari et al., 2024) across both occupational and educational contexts. The GHQ-12 has become particularly popular due to its ease of administration and strong psychometric performance. It captures difficulties such as problems with concentration, decision-making as well as the presence of strain, depressed mood and loss of confidence. Moreover, the scale comprises both positively and negatively phrased items. The items administered in this study were as follows:

1. *Have you been able to concentrate well on what you do?*
2. *Did you feel that you are engaged in activities that play a useful role in your life?*
3. *Did you feel able to make decisions?*
4. *Have you been able to enjoy your normal daily activities?*
5. *Have you been able to cope with your problems?*
6. *Do you feel reasonably happy considering your personal and professional circumstances?*

7. *Have your worries caused you to lose sleep?*
8. *Have you frequently felt overwhelmed and tense?*
9. *Have you felt that you are unable to overcome your difficulties on a regular basis?*
10. *Have you felt unhappy or depressed?*
11. *Have you lost confidence in yourself?*
12. *Have you felt that you are worthless?*

Responses were collected using a 4-point Likert scale in accordance with the standard GHQ response framework. For positively phrased items (e.g., *Have you been able to concentrate?*), the response options ranged from “Much less than usual” to “More than usual”, while for negatively phrased items (e.g., *Have you felt unhappy or depressed?*) the scale ranged from “Not at all” to “Much more than usual”. Scoring was carried out using the Likert method (1–2–3–4), and items were coded assuring that higher values consistently reflected better mental health. This scoring procedure yields a composite score ranging from 12 to 48, with higher scores indicating more favorable mental health outcomes. Extensive validation studies have confirmed the reliability is consistently high, with Cronbach’s alpha values around 0.90 (Ruiz et al., 2017).

Subsequently, person–organization fit is understood as the extent to which individuals perceive their own values, goals and expectations to be consistent with those of the organization. Rather than being a generic concept, this alignment becomes particularly significant in academic settings, where professional identity, intellectual autonomy, and shared vocational ideals are deeply embedded in daily work. When congruence is present, these factors strongly contribute to higher satisfaction and a sense of meaningful connection between academics and their institutions.

To operationalize person–organization fit, the present study employed the four-item scale developed by Saks and Ashforth (1997). The items capture the degree of value congruence and perceived alignment between employees and their institutions, and are as follows:

1. *To what extent are the values of the organization similar to your own values?*

2. *To what extent does your personality match the personality or image of the organization?*
3. *To what extent does the organization fulfil your needs?*
4. *To what extent is the organization a good match for you?*

In this study, the term organization specifically refers to the university in which participants are employed. Responses were collected using a five-point Likert scale (1 = to a very little extent, 5 = to a very large extent), with higher scores indicating stronger perceptions of fit.

The psychometric properties of the Saks and Ashforth (1997) instrument are well established. It reports an average factor loading of .82 for the perceived P–O fit scale and a coefficient alpha of 0.92, demonstrating excellent internal consistency. In academic contexts, the role of person-organization fit is particularly relevant. A lack of congruence between academics' professional values and institutional priorities may lead to reduced satisfaction, disengagement, and diminished well-being and mental health highlighting the importance of value alignment in sustaining both individual and institutional effectiveness.

In this study, we also included work engagement, a positive psychological state of work-related fulfilment that has gained increasing prominence with the development of positive organizational psychology. In contrast to burnout, which emphasizes depletion and disengagement, engagement reflects high levels of energy, involvement and absorption in one's work.

To measure this construct, we used the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006). This short version was designed to reduce respondent burden while preserving the essential dimensions of engagement. The UWES-9 captures three core facets: vigor, characterized by energy, persistence and resilience; dedication, reflecting enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and a sense of meaning; and absorption, referring to concentration, immersion and enjoyment in work. The nine items are as follows:

Vigor

1. *At my work, I feel bursting with energy.*

2. *At my job, I feel strong and vigorous.*
3. *When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.*

Dedication

4. *I am enthusiastic about my job.*
5. *My job inspires me.*
6. *I am proud of the work that I do.*

Absorption

7. *I feel happy when I am working intensely.*
8. *I am immersed in my work.*
9. *I get carried away when I am working.*

Participants rated their responses on a seven-point frequency scale (0 = never, 6 = always, every day). Scores can be computed either for each of the three dimensions separately or aggregated into an overall engagement index, with higher scores reflecting greater engagement among academics.

Extensive validation studies conducted have confirmed the factorial validity of a global engagement construct (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The UWES-9 demonstrates high internal consistency, with reported reliabilities for the total score ranging between $\alpha = 0.85$ and $\alpha = 0.92$, which is considered highly satisfactory (De Bruin & Henn, 2013). Therefore, UWES-9 is regarded as the gold standard for measuring work engagement, widely adopted in academic research.

The present thesis now turns to the framework of job demands and resources (JD-R). One of the most prominent demands identified in occupational health research is role stress, long recognized as a major psychosocial risk factor. Role stress arises when employees face contradictory or unclear expectations in their work roles. The literature highlights two key dimensions of this construct: role conflict and role ambiguity. Both dimensions have been shown to predict a wide range of negative outcomes, including burnout or job dissatisfaction (Zhang & He, 2022).

To assess role stress in this study, the UNIPSICO battery is employed. A validated instrument developed to measure psychosocial risk factors at work. This construct is captured through the role conflict and role ambiguity subscale of UNIPSICO (Llorca-Rubio et al., 2022), which constitutes an adapted version of the classic scale originally developed by Rizzo et al. (1970).

In the UNIPSICO battery, role conflict is measured with five items:

1. *I have to do things differently from how I think they should be done.*
2. *I am asked to carry out functions and tasks for which I am not authorized.*
3. *I have to work with two or more groups who do things in very different ways.*
4. *I receive incompatible demands from two or more people.*
5. *I am assigned tasks/functions without the resources and materials necessary to perform them.*

Responses were collected using a five-point Likert-type frequency scale ranging from 0 "never" to 4 "very frequently: every day". In this case, the items are negatively phrased, and therefore scoring is inverted so that higher values reflect greater levels of role conflict. Satisfactory reliability indices have also been reported for this subscale, with Cronbach's α values around 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Furthermore, role ambiguity captures the degree to which employees lack clarity about expectations, objectives or evaluation criteria in their jobs. When tasks and goals are unclear, employees may experience a diminished sense of competence, which increases vulnerability to well-being and satisfaction.

In the UNIPSICO battery, role ambiguity is measured with five items:

1. *I know the degree of authority I have at work.*
2. *The objectives and goals of my work are clear and planned.*
3. *I know what my responsibilities are at work.*
4. *I know the criteria by which I am evaluated.*
5. *I know exactly what is expected of me at work.*

As with the role conflict subscale, responses were assessed using a five-point Likert-type frequency scale (0 = never, 4 = very frequently). In this case, the items are positively phrased, so that higher values reflect greater levels of role ambiguity.

The psychometric validation of this subscale has consistently confirmed its adequacy, with reliability coefficients typically around $\alpha = 0.77$ and satisfactory factor loadings.

Following, poor work–life balance refers to the extent to which employees are able to reconcile work and non-work responsibilities without experiencing conflict between these domains. In contemporary research, poor work–life balance is considered a key job demand, since persistent difficulties in achieving balance can generate stress and reduced well-being.

In this study, poor work–life balance was measured using the two-item scale developed by Wepfer et al. (2015). This instrument evaluates the perceived availability of essential resources such as time and energy for one’s private life after meeting work-related obligations. The items were as follows:

1. *I feel the relation between my work and my non-work life is optimal.*
2. *Next to my work, I have enough resources (such as time and energy) left for my non-work life.*

Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree). Given the focus of the present study on poor work–life balance, the scoring was inverted so that higher values represent greater imbalance. Furthermore, the original validation study reported good internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.84$).

Following, job control reflects the extent to which employees perceive autonomy in determining the pace, sequence and methods of their work. High levels of control facilitate self-regulation and adaptability, serving as a buffer against the negative consequences of excessive demands, whereas low control increases vulnerability to stress and strain.

In the present study, job control was assessed using three items from the Brief Job Stress Questionnaire (Shimomitsu et al., 2000). The items were as follows:

1. *You can work at your own pace.*
2. *You can decide the order in which you do your work and the way you do it.*

3. *You can reflect your own opinions on the workplace's work strategy.*

Responses were recorded on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Disagree, 4 = Agree). Items were coded so that higher scores reflected greater perceived job control, in line with the orientation of the questionnaire. Validation studies (Tsutsumi et al., 2017) have demonstrated that the job control subscale achieves satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha \approx 0.75$) and stable factor loadings across different samples.

Empirical evidence further shows that low job control is a significant predictor of job dissatisfaction (Blaese et al., 2021) and poor mental health. The inclusion of this construct in the present study therefore captures a critical dimension in the academic context.

Finally, social support represents a critical protective factor in both occupational and organizational health psychology. It denotes the extent to which employees perceive that they can depend on others, both within and beyond the workplace, for practical assistance, emotional reassurance and understanding. Previous evidence indicates that adequate support buffers the detrimental effects of job stress, enhances well-being and strengthens commitment and satisfaction, whereas insufficient support has been linked to burnout and psychological distress (Cao et al., 2024).

In this study, social support was assessed using the Caplan Social Support Questionnaire (Caplan et al., 1975), which measures perceived support from three distinct sources: supervisors, co-workers, and family/friends. For each source, four dimensions were evaluated: practical help, ease of communication, reliability under pressure and willingness to listen to personal problems. This structure produced a total of 12 items. The items are presented below, organized by source: supervisor support, colleague support, and finally family and friends' support:

1. *How much does your supervisor go out of their way to do things to make your work life easier for you?*
2. *How easy is it to talk with your supervisor?*
3. *How much can you rely on your supervisor when things get tough at work?*
4. *How much is your supervisor willing to listen to your personal problems?*

5. *How much do your co-workers go out of their way to do things to make your work life easier for you?*
6. *How easy is it to talk with your co-workers?*
7. *How much can you rely on your co-workers when things get tough at work?*
8. *How much are your co-workers willing to listen to your personal problems?*
9. *How much do your family or friends go out of their way to do things to make your work life easier for you?*
10. *How easy is it to talk with your family or friends?*
11. *How much can you rely on your family or friends when things get tough at work?*
12. *How much are your family or friends willing to listen to your personal problems?*

Each item was rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all, 4 = Very much). An additional option (0 = Not applicable) was included to account for differences in respondents' personal circumstances. Scores may be computed separately for each domain of support (supervisor, co-worker, family/friends) or aggregated into a global index of perceived social support. In the present study, composite scores were calculated after establishing reliability across the three subdimensions.

Caplan's Social Support Questionnaire has been extensively employed and validated in diverse occupational contexts. Reported reliability indices are consistently strong, with Cronbach's α values ranging from 0.73 to 0.83 across the three subscales. A factor-analytic study also confirms the expected three-source structure, while criterion validity is supported by robust associations with job satisfaction, burnout, mental health and turnover intentions.

4.2 Data Collection Methods

This thesis employed a multi-method strategy for data collection, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches across the various studies. This design was selected to strengthen the validity of findings, provide both breadth and depth of insights, and enable comparison across different methodological perspectives.

At the initial stage of the research, information was gathered from secondary sources by conducting a systematic literature review. This review was carried out using

internationally recognized academic databases, Web of Science and Scopus, which ensured access to high-quality, peer-reviewed scientific publications. By systematically reviewing prior contributions, the study not only established a solid theoretical and conceptual foundation but also revealed important research gaps that justified and guided the subsequent empirical phases of the thesis. The rigorous screening and selection procedures applied during the review ensured that only relevant and methodologically sound studies were included, following the standards of transparency and replicability promoted by the PRISMA framework.

Building on the insights obtained from the literature review, the next phase of data collection involved the design and implementation of an online questionnaire targeted at faculty members working in the field of Social Sciences in Spanish universities. This population was selected because of its representativeness within academia and the particular demands associated with teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities (Ministerio de Universidades, 2024). The decision to employ a survey methodology was driven by the need to reach a broad population in a systematic and efficient manner, while also guaranteeing anonymity given the sensitivity of the subject matter.

The questionnaire was developed and hosted on Google Forms, a platform chosen for its accessibility, security, and ease of distribution. The survey link was disseminated widely through faculty networks and professional associations such as the European Academy of Management and Business Economics (AEDEM), the Association of Young Researchers in Economic Sciences and Business Management (AJICEDE), the Spanish Association of Academic and Professional Marketing (AEMARK), and the Academy of Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Knowledge Conference (ACIEK), among others. Thereby enabling the recruitment of respondents from different institutions and backgrounds. This strategy enhanced the diversity of the sample, while ensuring coverage of academics with varying ranks, levels of experience, and contractual situations. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no financial or material incentives were offered, ensuring that responses were provided out of interest and commitment to the research.

The instrument itself was structured into several sections. The first and main section contained validated psychometric scales that had been carefully selected for their robustness and applicability to the academic context. These instruments captured the core constructs of the research, including job demands and job resources, indicators of well-being and mental health, as well as measures of engagement, person–organization fit and job satisfaction. The deliberate use of scales that had already been widely applied and validated in previous empirical studies ensured not only the internal consistency and reliability of the data but also facilitated meaningful comparison with findings reported in the broader literature. The choice of scales was aligned with the theoretical models guiding the thesis, particularly the Job Demands–Resources framework and Person-Organization Fit. In addition to these scales, the questionnaire also included a section related to socio-demographic information, including age, gender, academic position, years of service, and institutional type. Therefore, providing a valuable contextual layer and facilitating the interpretation of results.

Prior to the large-scale administration, the questionnaire was subjected to a pilot test with a small group of academic experts. This preliminary step was designed to assess clarity, logical flow of the sections and the overall length of the survey. Therefore, the study ensured that only valid, reliable and complete responses were preserved for subsequent analysis. Ethical considerations were also addressed carefully throughout this process. At the beginning of the survey, participants were provided with an introductory statement outlining the objectives of the study, procedures for maintaining confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation. The study was approved by the doctoral committee of the home institution and data were managed in line with institutional ethical standards.

While the questionnaire-based phase yielded valuable quantitative data and enabled the examination of theoretical relationships among job demands, resources, well-being, health and organizational outcomes, as well as providing insights into causality, the scope of the research was not restricted to survey evidence alone. Recognizing the limitations of purely quantitative designs in capturing the complexity and subjectivity of academic experiences, the study incorporated an additional qualitative dimension. To complement and enrich the findings, a series of structured interviews

was conducted with faculty members. This qualitative phase was conceived not only as a means of validating and extending the patterns identified through the survey but also as an opportunity to explore in greater depth how academics themselves interpret and give meaning to the challenges and resources shaping their professional lives. By combining both methodological approaches, the research design ensured a more holistic understanding of academics' individual perspectives and lived experiences.

The interview guide was developed around the same central constructs as the survey, with particular emphasis on alignment with institutional values, mental health and subjective well-being. To broaden the scope of the thesis, this phase extended beyond Spain to include academics from Portugal, drawing on the international networks established during the doctoral candidate's research stay abroad at the University of Beira Interior (Covilhã, Portugal). This comparative element enriched the analysis by incorporating cross-national perspectives, allowing the study to highlight both shared challenges and context-specific differences in academic work and well-being.

Participants for the interview phase were recruited through a combination of academic associations, networks and contacts established during the doctoral research stay. As in the earlier stages of the research, careful attention was devoted to ethical considerations. All participants were informed about the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any point without consequences. Furthermore, informed consent was obtained prior to each interview, and all data were stored in a secure manner, safeguarding confidentiality and complying with established ethical standards for academic research.

By combining the quantitative evidence generated through the questionnaire with the qualitative insights obtained from interviews, the research adopted a sequential and complementary strategy of data collection. Therefore, enhancing both the robustness and the interpretative depth of the findings offering both generalizable evidence and an in-depth understanding of academic experiences in Spanish and Portuguese universities.

4.3 Data Analysis Techniques

The analytical strategy of this thesis was designed as a multi-method approach, combining literature review protocols, quantitative techniques and qualitative–quantitative integration.

First, a systematic review was conducted using the PRISMA framework to map the state of the art and identify research gaps. Second, survey data were examined through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) combined with Necessary Condition Analysis (NCA), allowing for the assessment of both sufficient and necessary relationships among constructs. Third, PLS-SEM was integrated with Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to uncover configurational pathways leading to relevant outcomes. For the final stage, the innovative use of GMET (Generic Membership Evaluation Template) enabled the transformation of interview data into quantitative matrices, which were subsequently analyzed using QCA to identify causal configurations. This multi-layered strategy ensured methodological rigor and pluralism, providing an improved understanding of academic well-being, satisfaction, mental health and person–organization fit across different contexts.

Before initiating the empirical phase of the research, and as previously outlined, the thesis began with a systematic review of the literature to map the state of research on subjective well-being, mental health, job satisfaction, person-organization fit within the academic context, through the Job Demands-Resources Model. The PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework was employed to ensure methodological rigor, transparency and replicability.

The literature search was carried out across two of the most comprehensive and internationally recognized academic databases: Web of Science and Scopus. These platforms were chosen since they index a vast body of peer-reviewed publications across disciplines, offer a broad coverage of high-quality research outputs and minimize the risk of omitting relevant studies (Zhu & Liu, 2020). To capture the widest possible range of relevant contributions, the search strategy employed a carefully designed combination of keywords related to higher education, job demands, resources, well-being, mental health, and person–organization fit. Inclusion and

exclusion criteria were clearly defined to identify relevant peer-reviewed empirical studies. Duplicate records were removed, and independent reviewers screened titles, abstracts, and full texts to ensure reliability of selection.

The PRISMA flow diagram was used to document the screening process, recording the number of studies identified, excluded and retained at each stage. Final studies were coded according to their research context, the authors and year of publication, the study population under investigation, and the methodological approach employed. In addition, attention was given to identifying the main job demands and resources examined, the key outcomes reported, and the overall aim of the study. This stage not only provided a robust theoretical foundation for the empirical work but also enabled the extraction of patterns and trends across the literature and revealed existing gaps in the literature, thereby guiding the design of the subsequent studies.

The first empirical analysis employed a combination of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) and Necessary Condition Analysis (NCA). PLS-SEM was selected because of its strong suitability for exploratory and prediction-oriented research and its capacity to handle complex models that include multiple latent constructs and mediating relationships. The analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4 software (Ringle et al., 2024), following a two-step procedure recommended in the methodological literature. In the first step, the measurement model was assessed to verify the quality of the constructs. This involved examining construct reliability through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, evaluating convergent validity using the average variance extracted (AVE), and testing discriminant validity through the Fornell–Larcker criterion and heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT). Factor loadings of individual items were also inspected to ensure that they loaded appropriately on their intended constructs.

In the second step, the structural model was evaluated. This included estimating path coefficients to test the hypothesized relationships between constructs, as well as analyzing the explanatory power of the model by examining the coefficient of determination (R^2) for the endogenous variables. Furthermore, a bootstrapping procedure with 10,000 resamples was performed to test the significance of coefficients.

Complementing this, NCA (Dul, 2016) was applied to identify conditions that are necessary for desired outcomes, such as high levels of mental health. Unlike correlational methods, which assess average effects, NCA allows the identification of thresholds below which an outcome cannot be achieved. This approach thus shifts the analytical perspective from sufficiency to necessity, offering valuable insights into critical constraints within organizational contexts.

The second empirical stage again employed PLS-SEM but this time in combination with Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). PLS-SEM enabled the testing of structural relationships between person–organization fit and job satisfaction, while QCA introduced a configurational lens. PLS-SEM was employed to test the hypothesized structural relationships among the constructs of interest. Following the same two-step approach, the analysis first focused on the measurement model, and then, the structural model was evaluated, examining path coefficients, the explanatory power of the model (R^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2).

Further extending the analysis, QCA was implemented using fsQCA software (Ragin et al., 2022), which allowed for the identification of combinations of conditions associated with the outcomes under study. By acknowledging equifinality, QCA made it possible to recognize that multiple causal pathways may coexist, leading to similar levels of satisfaction. For this purpose, data were carefully calibrated into fuzzy sets, applying thresholds for full membership, crossover, and full non-membership in line with established methodological standards.

Particular attention was paid to the intermediate solution, which highlighted the presence of both core and peripheral conditions across the identified configurations. The distinction between core and peripheral conditions provided deeper insight into which factors were central and indispensable in producing the outcomes, and which acted as complementary or context-dependent elements. To further refine the interpretation, a linear regression analysis was conducted on the solution terms, which allowed the estimation of the relative weight and contribution of each configuration. By combining PLS-SEM and QCA, the thesis was able to recognize the complexity and multiplicity of pathways leading to job satisfaction in academia.

The final analytical stage focused on the qualitative interviews conducted in Spain and Portugal. While interviews were primarily qualitative in nature, an innovative methodological step was undertaken by employing GMET (Grid Multiple Extraction Technique) to convert narrative data into a structured quantitative format. GMET allows researchers to extract and code key constructs from interview transcripts systematically. In doing so, GMET effectively bridges the traditional divide between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, allowing researchers to capture the richness of personal accounts while simultaneously generating data suitable for advanced configurational techniques

Once coded, the interview data were analyzed through QCA, in continuity with the earlier stage. This ensured methodological consistency across studies, while also being able to combine the explanatory power of quantitative techniques with the contextual sensitivity of qualitative evidence. In this stage, QCA was used to explore which combinations of demands, resources, and alignment factors were sufficient or necessary to explain high levels of subjective well-being and mental health across both Spanish and Portuguese contexts. The inclusion of international data not only extended the scope of the analysis but also enabled a cross-cultural comparison, highlighting both universal and context-specific drivers of academics.

Chapter 5. Results

This chapter correspond to articles that have been published or are currently under review in indexed scientific journals. For reasons of editorial confidentiality, their content is not included in this version of the thesis deposited in the institutional repository.

Chapter 6. Discussion, Conclusions, Limitations and Future Lines of Research

6.1 Discussion and Main Findings

6.1.1 Systematic Literature Review and Empirical Antecedents

For many university professors, the experience of academic work is defined less by isolated tasks than by a continuous negotiation between competing expectations. Teaching, research, administrative duties, and evaluation processes rarely unfold as clearly bounded roles, instead, they overlap, collide and accumulate over time. Within this context, mental health, job satisfaction and subjective well-being becomes not merely an individual concern but a reflection of how academic work is organized, evaluate and supported.

Chapter 5.1 opens by engaging with prior research, positioning the study within the existing literature through a systematic literature review of studies on academic work and well-being, identifying the most salient job demands and resources of academics. Rather than merely identifying recurrent constructs, the review provides a conceptual foundation for the analytical choices made in this study by clarifying which aspects of academic work are most consistently associated with well-being, job satisfaction and mental health outcomes. Particular attention is paid to those demands that academics perceive as structurally embedded in their roles, as well as to the resources that appear capable of buffering their impact. Moreover, the inclusion of person–organization fit further extends this framework by introducing a value-based perspective that resonates with the vocational nature of academic work and with the growing emphasis on alignment between individual and institutional expectations.

Consistent with the patterns observed in the literature, job demands, especially high workload and work–life imbalance, emerge as central stressors in academic contexts, with clear implications for job satisfaction, well-being and mental health. Prior studies have repeatedly shown that when these demands are sustained over time and combined with limited resources, they contribute to burnout, health complaints and disengagement (Sabagh, 2020). In this line, work–life imbalance examined in greater depth in Chapters 5.2 and 5.3 and weak organizational support mechanisms have been identified as key drivers of impaired mental health among academics, supporting the treatment of mental health as a core outcome variable rather than a peripheral consequence of academic work.

The literature also highlights the importance of job resources in shaping how academics experience and respond to these demands. Resources such as job autonomy and social support from supervisors and colleagues are consistently associated with higher levels of job satisfaction and well-being (McGaughey et al., 2022). Additional organizational resources, including job control, flexibility and institutional trust, have also been linked to more favorable well-being outcomes (Ababneh, 2020). Moreover, despite the common use of the Job Demands–Resources model across occupational contexts, its systematic application to academic work remains relatively scarce (Naidoo-Chetty & du Plessis, 2021b). Reviews within the academic domain have tended to privilege stress and burnout as primary outcomes (Palafox-Carvajal & Domínguez-Guedea, 2021), thereby offering a more limited view of well-being in academic settings. In contrast, this review both aligns with and extends this body of work by explicitly integrating job satisfaction, subjective well-being, mental health and person-organization fit into the JD–R framework. Given the strongly value-driven nature of academic work, also examining how congruence or misalignment between individual values and organizational practices influences experiences of overall well-being is especially valuable.

Furthermore, Chapter 5.1 incorporates previous research emphasizing that understanding mental health in academia requires close attention to the structural conditions shaping everyday academic practice. Focusing initially on the Spanish context, the literature documents how recent transformations in higher education have altered not only the architecture of academic careers but also the concrete conditions under which university professors perform their work. In response to these changes, the present study adopts the Job Demands–Resources model to examine how job demands, resources and motivational processes interact in shaping academics' mental health. By combining PLS-SEM with Necessary Condition Analysis, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of academic mental health that moves beyond purely linear explanations.

One of the central contributions of this research lies in its conceptualization of role stress. Rather than being incidental features of academic work, role conflict and role ambiguity emerge as structural characteristics of contemporary universities. The

simultaneous demands together with the performance pressures associated with evaluation and accreditation systems such as those imposed by ANECA, generate persistent tensions that academics must manage throughout their careers. While previous studies have consistently linked these demands to adverse mental health outcomes (Li & Ye, 2022; Pace et al., 2021), the findings of this study point to a more complex dynamic. More specifically, once work engagement is accounted for, role stress no longer shows a direct effect on mental health, rather, its influence operates indirectly through engagement, highlighting the pivotal role of motivational mechanisms in translating structural working conditions into mental health outcomes. This pattern is consistent with JD–R theory, which suggests that job demands and resources shape mental health primarily through motivational processes such as work engagement, rather than through isolated causal pathways (Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti & Bakker, 2023). In this sense, role stress becomes problematic not merely because it exists, but because of how it interferes with academics' capacity to remain meaningfully engaged with their work. When role stress erodes engagement, mental health suffers, when it is kept within manageable limits, its effects are less detrimental and may even be functional.

In this regard, the use of NCA proves especially informative for clarifying this dual role. The analysis indicates that low levels of role stress are a necessary condition for good mental health, reinforcing earlier evidence that excessive ambiguity and conflict are incompatible with well-being in academic settings (Dorenkamp & Ruhle, 2019). However, the bottleneck analysis reveals an additional and less intuitive insight: a complete absence of role stress is not associated with optimal mental health. Instead, a certain degree of demand appears necessary to reach the highest levels of mental health, suggesting that challenge and stimulation remain essential components of academic work. This finding resonates with Schaufeli's (2017) argument that not all demands are inherently harmful, and that "healthy" demands can sustain engagement, professional identity and a sense of purpose.

With respect to job resources, social support emerges as a cornerstone of mental health in this study. Its positive association with mental health is evident both directly and indirectly through work engagement, underscoring its role as a key job resource.

Consistent with prior research (Taylor & Frechette, 2022; Heng et al., 2020), the findings highlight those academics who perceive strong support are better equipped to cope with the multifaceted demands of their roles. Importantly, social support extends beyond institutional boundaries. Support from family and close social networks plays a critical role in buffering the cumulative pressures of academic work. As Usman et al. (2023) argue, well-being in academia is deeply relational, shaped not only by organizational climates but also by the wider social contexts surrounding academic work.

Work engagement occupies a key position in the model. On the one hand, engagement functions as a protective mechanism that enhances mental health, consistent with previous evidence linking engagement to positive psychological outcomes (Dooris et al., 2021). Engaged academics are more likely to experience their work as meaningful, energizing, and aligned with their professional values. On the other hand, the findings caution against an uncritical celebration of engagement. Excessively high levels of engagement may evolve into workaholic patterns, ultimately undermining mental health rather than supporting it. This observation echoes recent warnings in the literature regarding the dark side of engagement (Huyghebaert-Zouaghi et al., 2023; Taris et al., 2020), suggesting that engagement contributes to mental health only when supported by adequate resources and bounded by realistic demands.

Therefore, this previous study suggests that mental health in academia arises from a delicate balance between job demands, resources and work engagement, situated within broader institutional and social contexts. By applying the JD–R model and integrating complementary analytical approaches, the study highlights the need for universities to manage demands carefully, strengthen social support systems, and promote sustainable forms of engagement.

6.1.2 Job Satisfaction and Person-Organization Fit in Academia

Building on the insights derived from the preceding study, the focus now shifts toward job satisfaction as a key outcome of academic work, examining how it is shaped by the interplay between job demands, job resources and also including a new variable, person–organization fit. Rather than treating satisfaction as a secondary variable, this study positions it as a central indicator of how academics experience their work within

contemporary university environments. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources model, the analysis seeks to clarify how specific demands and resources affect satisfaction both directly and indirectly, particularly through their influence on perceptions of fit.

The empirical analysis, conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling, provides consistent evidence of the detrimental effects of job demands on job satisfaction. Poor work–life balance emerges as a salient negative predictor, illustrating how sustained tensions between professional obligations and personal life undermine satisfaction among university professors. This finding reinforces the idea that work–life imbalance is not merely a peripheral inconvenience, but a structural condition with tangible implications for how academics evaluate their work. Role stress also shows a significant negative association with job satisfaction, confirming that persistent role ambiguity and role conflict diminish satisfaction by generating uncertainty and incompatible expectations. These results align with earlier research documenting the adverse consequences of excessive demands in academic settings (Boamah et al., 2022), while reinforcing the relevance of job satisfaction as a meaningful outcome within the JD–R framework.

In contrast, job resources display a consistently positive relationship with job satisfaction. Job control is positively associated with satisfaction, highlighting the importance of autonomy and decision-making authority in academic roles. This finding reflects the distinctive nature of academic work, where control over teaching methods, research agendas and work organization remains a crucial source of satisfaction. Even more prominently, social support emerges as the strongest predictor of job satisfaction in the model. Support from colleagues, supervisors, personal networks and family appears to play a decisive role in shaping how academics experience their work. In line with previous studies (Kovács et al., 2024), these results draw attention to the central role of supportive social environments in sustaining satisfaction under conditions of high demand.

A distinctive contribution of this study lies in the explicit integration of person–organization fit as a core explanatory mechanism. While person–organization fit has been examined in various organizational contexts, its role in explaining job satisfaction

among university professors has received comparatively limited attention (Doğan & Buyruk, 2024; Watanabe et al., 2024). The findings show that person–organization fit exerts a direct and positive effect on job satisfaction, suggesting that alignment between individual values and institutional practices constitutes a key variable for satisfaction in academic work.

The mediating analyses further reveal that person–organization fit operates differently across demands and resources. On the demand side, role stress displays a significant negative indirect effect on job satisfaction through person–organization fit, indicating that persistent role-related pressures undermine satisfaction in part by weakening perceptions of organizational alignment. In contrast, the indirect pathway linking poor work–life balance to job satisfaction via person–organization fit is not supported. This finding suggests that work–life imbalance may affect satisfaction through mechanisms that extend beyond organizational value congruence, pointing to the multifaceted nature of work–life dynamics in academia.

From the resource perspective, both job control and social support positively influence job satisfaction through person–organization fit. These results illustrate how job resources contribute to job satisfaction not only through direct effects, but also by reinforcing academics' perceived alignment with their institution, which in turn supports higher levels of satisfaction. In this respect, person–organization fit functions as a meaningful conduit through which resources are translated into more positive evaluative judgments about work, complementing the motivational processes described by the JD–R model.

To extend the analysis beyond symmetric relationships, the study also employs Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to identify configurations of conditions associated with high job satisfaction. Although QCA has been applied in prior JD–R research (Ye et al., 2024), its use in examining job satisfaction within academic contexts remains limited. The configurational results reveal that no single condition is necessary for high satisfaction. Instead, multiple sufficient pathways emerge, with combinations involving high social support and job control appearing consistently across solutions. These findings underscore that job satisfaction in academia arises

emerges from particular combinations of job demands, resources and organizational fit, rather than from isolated factors.

This combined use of PLS-SEM and QCA allows this study to capture both the net effects and the configurational logic underlying job satisfaction among university professors. By demonstrating how demands, resources and person-organization fit operate jointly to shape satisfaction, the study adds to the JD–R literature and deepens current understanding of academic work. Therefore, it complements the preceding analysis on mental health and engagement, contributing empirical evidence on well-being and satisfaction in academia.

6.1.3 Subjective Well-Being and Mental Health in Academia

Moving beyond linear approaches to academic well-being enables the examination of how combinations of work-related conditions give rise to distinct patterns of subjective well-being and mental health among academics in Spain and Portugal. By adopting a configurational approach, the study departs from assumptions of uniform effects and instead recognizes that similar mental health outcomes may arise through different pathways. This perspective allows for a more realistic representation of academic work, capturing the complexity and heterogeneity that characterize academic careers.

The findings provide clear support for the configurational model, showing that work–life imbalance, job control and person–organization fit interact in distinct ways to generate both favorable and adverse outcomes. These conditions do not operate independently. Instead, their influence depends on how they combine within specific configurations, reinforcing the idea that mental health in academia is shaped by patterned interactions rather than by isolated determinants. In this sense, the results are consistent with prior configurational research emphasizing causal complexity in well-being outcomes (Rao & Evangeline, 2026).

Across the identified pathways, mental health emerges from particular configurations of conditions rather than from any single factor operating independently. Person–organization fit, for instance, does not function as a decisive driver on its own. Instead, it appears as a contextual element whose relevance depends on the presence or absence of other work-related conditions. In pathways associated with positive

outcomes, organizational alignment tends to co-occur with manageable work experiences and access to key resources. Conversely, the conservative solutions indicate that person–organization fit alone is insufficient to counterbalance adverse conditions when other critical elements are missing. This limitation becomes especially visible in configurations leading to the negation of mental health. Combinations involving low subjective well-being and work–life imbalance show that alignment with organizational values does not offset sustained strain rooted in everyday work experiences. These patterns support the interpretation of person–organization fit as a facilitating rather than a main protective condition.

A central contribution of this study lies in clarifying the position of subjective well-being within the causal landscape of mental health. Subjective well-being is present across several configurations associated with good mental health, indicating that it plays a role in how work-related conditions are reflected in individuals' mental health. At the same time, its absence features prominently in pathways leading to poor mental health, pointing to sustained negative life evaluations as a key risk factor (Mendoza-Ocasal et al., 2022). However, subjective well-being does not emerge as a strictly necessary condition. Even when academics report positive evaluations of their lives, stress may still be present if working conditions are unfavorable, particularly when work–life imbalance is persistent or control over work is limited.

Work–life imbalance, in contrast, emerges as a particularly influential condition structuring mental health outcomes across configurations. Its presence and absence present a remarkably stable pattern in the conservative solutions, shaping the space within which other resources can operate. Importantly, work–life imbalance does not act in isolation. Results suggest that poor mental health is empirically bounded by combinations that include work–life imbalance and low subjective well-being, this supports existing arguments that academic well-being is shaped by the interaction between work structures and how academics experience their work (Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2022).

In this line, pathways leading to poor mental health in some cases include the presence of low subjective well-being or pronounced work–life imbalance, even when resources such as job control or person–organization fit are present. This pattern suggests that

autonomy and perceived organizational fit may lose their protective capacity once these adverse conditions emerge, highlighting the contextual limits of their buffering potential under these constructs.

These results contribute to ongoing debates on academic work and well-being. The central issue is not simply how much academics work, but the way academic work is integrated into everyday life and experienced by them. Chronic work–life imbalance appears to undermine mental health not only through fatigue or overload, but by gradually altering the meaning of academic work itself, transforming what is often perceived as a vocation into a source of sustained strain. From this perspective, work–life balance and subjective well-being emerge as key conditions for academic work to remain motivated and engaged over time.

The examination of typical cases further reinforces these conclusions. Similar configurational patterns are observed across different universities and national contexts, suggesting that the identified pathways are not institution-specific but reflect shared features of academic work. Typical cases associated with subjective well-being and job control cluster closely together despite differences in institutional affiliation, indicating that these experiences are rooted in common work practices rather than in idiosyncratic organizational arrangements. At the same time, comparisons with non-typical cases show that these resources are context-dependent, as high levels of control or subjective well-being do not necessarily lead to good mental health when other supporting conditions are absent.

These findings consolidate and extend the insights developed in the preceding studies. By demonstrating how mental health and subjective well-being emerge from specific combinations of demands, resources and organizational fit, the study provides a coherent configurational and account of academic well-being. In doing so, this study builds on and complements the evidence developed across the thesis, bringing together linear, mediational and configurational insights into a more complete understanding of academic well-being.

The thesis shows that work-related demands, resources, and subjective evaluations are relevant for overall well-being, but their implications differ depending on the configurations in which they are involved. By combining different analytical

approaches, the thesis makes it possible to capture a richer picture of academic well-being. The findings show that mental health, satisfaction, and subjective well-being are shaped by how demands, resources, and personal evaluations come together in practice, revealing patterns that would remain hidden if these elements were examined in isolation.

This combined perspective gives the thesis particular relevance in the current academic context, where growing levels of low subjective well-being and dissatisfaction are increasingly shaping how academic careers are perceived and pursued. At a time when academic work is becoming less attractive, especially for younger generations, this research helps to clarify what lies behind that shift by showing how demanding work conditions, limited balance and uneven access to resources shape academic work. By examining how these elements interact, the thesis provides a clearer picture of how a career once associated with autonomy and balance has progressively come to be experienced as demanding and difficult to sustain.

6.2. General Conclusions

This thesis examines academic well-being through different complementary studies that address mental health, job satisfaction, subjective well-being and the conditions under which academic work becomes sustainable or harmful. Rather than treating academic issues as the outcome of separate variables, the thesis shows that they arise from the organization of academic work and from the ways demands and resources are experienced together. This approach is particularly relevant in a context where universities face disengagement, precarious career trajectories, barriers to entering the profession and expanding administrative burdens (Bone, 2021).

The systematic literature review applies the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model to synthesize evidence on how demands and resources relate to academics' satisfaction and well-being (Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti & Bakker, 2023). Subsequently, the empirical research on work engagement and mental health indicates that role stress, particularly role conflict and role ambiguity, emerges as a key demand that reflects the incompatibilities of teaching–research responsibilities and the uncertainty surrounding evaluation and accreditation processes. Social support, by contrast, is repeatedly identified as a decisive resource, reflecting the relevance of both

workplace and family support networks within the academic profession (Bakker et al., 2023). Methodologically, the combined use of PLS-SEM and NCA strengthens causal interpretation by integrating sufficiency and necessity logics (Richter et al., 2022). While PLS-SEM estimates linear associations consistent with JD–R pathways, NCA clarifies which conditions appear to be minimum requirements for favorable outcomes, addressing a recurring limitation in occupational health research.

In line with this, the core study of this thesis analyzes how job demands, specifically role stress and work–life imbalance, relate to job satisfaction, and how key resources (job control and social support) may buffer these relationships. In addition, the study incorporates person–organization fit within the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework in order to capture the relevance of value congruence and organizational alignment in shaping these relationships. The results show that both job demands clearly undermine job satisfaction, in line with previous research (Boamah et al., 2022). At the same time, job resources such as job control and social support contribute to buffering these pressures, also consistent with prior findings (Kovács et al., 2024). In this regard, the mediating role of person–organization fit clarifies how alignment between academics’ values and institutional culture can amplify the benefits of resources and attenuate the harm of demands. Importantly, the methodological combination of PLS-SEM and QCA provides a fuller account of complexity, since PLS-SEM estimates net and mediated relationships while QCA identifies non-linear, configurational pathways leading to high job satisfaction (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Finally, a configurational account of mental health in academia across Spain and Portugal is developed. By comparing academics across two national contexts and multiple universities, it moves beyond explanations based on isolated net effects and demonstrates that mental health depends on configurations of work conditions through which academic work is experienced and sustained over time. The results are broadly consistent with the JD-R model in emphasizing the interaction of demands and resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024), but extend it by showing that resources such as job control or person–organization fit do not operate as universal safeguards. Furthermore, work–life imbalance and subjective well-being consistently distinguish configurations associated with the presence versus the absence of good mental health.

When severe imbalance or low subjective well-being is present, job resources may be insufficient to prevent poor mental health outcomes, underscoring the causal complexity and asymmetry between pathways leading to good and poor mental health.

The study situates these findings within cross-institutional realities, highlighting that workload pressure, bureaucracy and job insecurity are not confined to a single organizational context, particularly at early career stages. It suggests that institutional reforms focused on workload regulation, transparent evaluation criteria, the protection of non-work time and the development of problem-solving capacities are better positioned to support adaptation and innovation (Ballester-Miquel et al., 2026).

Taken together, the studies converge on a central conclusion: sustainable academic work requires structural conditions that reduce chronic role stress and protect recovery time, alongside relational and value-based resources that support belonging and meaning at work.

6.2.1 Theoretical implications

Across the studies, the thesis makes various overarching theoretical contributions.

First, it contributes to JD-R research in academic settings by showing that job demands and resources do not affect outcomes in a linear way, but depend on how they are experienced and interpreted within specific organizational contexts when shaping well-being, mental health, and job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024; Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti & Bakker, 2023). Prior evidence shows that role stress reflects the structural incompatibilities of academic work and is closely linked to work engagement. While a certain level of role stress may coexist with high engagement, excessive levels are associated with disengagement. The subsequent study indicates that, within the JD-R framework, job demands and resources are associated with job satisfaction, and that these relationships become more pronounced when person–organization fit is considered as a mediating mechanism. This positions person–organization fit, which has received limited attention in academic research, as a key construct for understanding how organizational culture and value alignment shape the way job resources operate within academic environments.

Second, the thesis advances theory by demonstrating that the protective role of job resources is context-bounded rather than universal. Evidence from the final empirical chapter shows that resources such as autonomy and person–organization fit, while clearly relevant, do not consistently buffer negative outcomes when academics experience persistent work–life imbalance or already low levels of subjective well-being. Under these conditions, the presence of resources alone is insufficient to prevent poor mental health or reduced satisfaction. This finding refines conventional interpretations of buffering effects within the JD-R framework and supports a more conditional, configuration-based understanding of how resources operate across different pathways and contexts.

Third, the thesis contributes methodologically to theory-building through a coherent research design that combines multiple sources of data and analytical logics in a cumulative manner. The work begins with a systematic literature review conducted in accordance with PRISMA guidelines, which provides a structured and transparent basis for theoretical framing. Empirically, the thesis relies on both survey data and qualitative interviews, allowing quantitative patterns to be interpreted in light of contextual and experiential evidence.

From an analytical perspective, the thesis deliberately integrates variance-based and configurational approaches. The use of PLS-SEM together with Necessary Condition Analysis makes it possible to identify not only net effects but also threshold conditions (Richter et al., 2022), highlighting constraints that would remain invisible under sufficiency-based models alone. This is followed by the joint application of PLS-SEM and QCA, which allows mediated relationships to be examined alongside the ways in which demands and resources combine across cases, responding to calls for mixed analytical strategies to better capture causal complexity (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). By integrating these approaches, the analysis contrasts average mediated effects with multiple configurational pathways, showing that similar outcomes may arise from different configurations of conditions.

The final analytical step applies QCA in full, positioning configurational analysis as a response to the limitations of conventional theorizing in the study of complex social phenomena (Arroyo-Revilla et al., 2025). Complemented by process tracing, this

approach makes it possible to examine how specific configurations unfold over time and to distinguish between the causal logics associated with the presence versus the absence of good mental health.

6.2.2 Practical implications

The thesis also points to a set of practical implications that are directly relevant to current conditions in higher education.

First, this study has implications for governance and career sustainability. The findings suggest that academic distress cannot be meaningfully addressed through individual-level interventions when structural conditions remain unchanged. Persistent workload pressure, escalating administrative demands, and insecure trajectories undermine mental health and satisfaction, especially for those entering the profession (Bone, 2021). While moderate demands may foster engagement, excessive role stress under weak support structures generates clear risks for mental health. Many academics face an accumulation of responsibilities alongside insufficient institutional support for both teaching and research, a pattern documented in previous research (Ghislieri et al., 2022).

Second, these findings concern to the institutional architecture of Spanish academia. The pressures identified in the studies align with broader shifts toward performance-driven models emphasizing productivity and accreditation. Earlier reforms increased reliance on temporary contracts while attempting to stabilize precarious roles (Torrado & Duque-Calvache, 2023), with particularly pronounced consequences in the social sciences where evaluation criteria have often been delayed or contested (Galán et al., 2014). The LOSU reform (Law 2/2023), which aims to reduce temporary academic positions from 40% to 8%, reflects institutional recognition of these structural problems, although its long-term impact remains uncertain. In this context, improving well-being calls for policies that reduce role ambiguity, stabilize career trajectories and establish credible workload standards is imperative, rather than relying on symbolic well-being initiatives.

Third, there are clear operational priorities for universities. The repeated prominence of work–life imbalance across studies implies that institutions should treat boundary

protection and workload regulation as core instruments for improving subjective well-being and mental health. Interventions aimed at clarifying roles, increasing autonomy and supporting work–life balance are essential, alongside investments in social support structures that are embedded in everyday academic practice. This is consistent with the idea that some conditions must reach a minimum level for mental health to improve, when this threshold is not met, changes in other areas may have little effect.

Fourth, the findings point to subjective well-being as an outcome rooted in how academic work is organized. Across the Spanish and Portuguese cases examined, academics operate within environments defined by sustained teaching pressure, growing administrative exposure and prolonged uncertainty in career progression. In such settings, initiatives that frame well-being as a matter of personal resilience or self-management are unlikely to produce lasting improvements in mental health. Instead, the evidence points towards the relevance of organizational practices that redefine everyday working conditions, including clearer limits on workload, more predictable and transparent evaluation processes and explicit safeguards for non-work time. These changes are better aligned with the realities of academic work and more likely to support sustainable careers and ongoing adaptation to institutional demands.

Fifth, the thesis invites reflection on the broader societal role of universities by drawing attention to the consequences of academic working conditions. Academics' mental health does not stop at the individual level, it directly shapes the quality of teaching, everyday interactions in the classroom, and students' educational experiences, with longer-term implications for learning, development and motivation (Sriram et al., 2020). When academics are able to work under conditions that support their well-being, they are more likely to engage meaningfully with students, provide guidance and sustain the relational aspects of teaching that are central to higher education.

At the same time, universities' ability to engage with societal challenges depends on the capacity of academics to invest time and energy beyond core obligations. Research, mentoring and public engagement, whether related to sustainability, social impact or innovation, require emotional resources that are difficult to sustain under persistent work–life imbalance and role stress. While academics could be expected to

contribute to agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals, these expectations become difficult to meet when everyday work is dominated by overload and insecurity (Tomasella et al., 2023). Under such conditions, both students and society ultimately bear the cost, as the human potential within universities is gradually pushed to operate in survival mode, with little space left for care, creativity or meaningful engagement beyond meeting immediate demands.

In sum, the findings of this thesis suggest that improving academic well-being requires structural and organizational interventions rather than isolated individual-level initiatives. The University system should prioritize the redesign of workload allocation systems to reduce chronic role stress and work–life imbalance, establish transparent and predictable evaluation and promotion criteria, and strengthen access to stable career pathways. Enhancing job resources, such as meaningful autonomy, collegial social support, and participatory governance mechanisms, appears particularly important, as these factors not only buffer the negative effects of demands but also foster job satisfaction and value alignment. Moreover, the configurational results indicate that certain conditions (notably persistent work–life imbalance and low subjective well-being) can undermine mental health even when other resources are present, implying that institutions must ensure minimum thresholds of time protection and support are met. In practical terms, this calls for clear workload caps, protected research and non-work time, mentoring structures for early-career academics, and leadership training that emphasizes supportive management practices. By addressing the organizational roots of strain while reinforcing value congruence and professional meaning, universities can move toward more sustainable, healthy, and high-performing academic environments.

6.2.3 Limitations of the Thesis and Future Research Directions

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings, while also pointing to future research directions.

First, the thesis relies on a cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to capture how patterns of demands and resources unfold over time. Although the configurational approach identifies robust associations and configurations linking working conditions to job satisfaction, subjective well-being, and mental health, they cannot account for

cumulative effects, adaptation processes, or critical transitions across academic careers. Longitudinal research would therefore be particularly valuable to examine how sustained work–life imbalance, shifts in job control or social support or changes in subjective well-being shape mental health trajectories throughout academic careers, including periods of transition such as early career, tenure evaluation or increased responsibilities.

A second limitation relates to the breadth of the analytical scope. While the comparative design strengthens the robustness of the conclusions, academic work remains highly heterogeneous in terms of disciplinary cultures, employment conditions and institutional expectations. While these sources of heterogeneity are present in the dataset, the analysis does not explicitly distinguish between disciplinary contexts or contractual arrangements, despite their potential to shape how work conditions are experienced. Future research could therefore examine whether specific configurations are more likely to emerge, in certain academic settings, such as health-related fields versus social sciences, permanent versus fixed-term positions, or teaching-focused versus research-oriented roles. Such differentiation would deepen understanding of when and for whom academic work becomes sustainable or, conversely, detrimental to overall well-being.

A third limitation is that, although the findings clearly point to the structural nature of key challenges, most notably work–life imbalance, limited control, insufficient social support and low subjective well-being, the study does not directly examine how institutions address these conditions in practice. As a result, the analysis remains unclear to what extent existing organizational arrangements contribute to sustaining or disrupting the configurations associated with poor mental health. In this line, future research could move beyond diagnostic analyses by testing concrete organizational interventions and assessing their effects on the configurations associated with academic well-being and mental health. Such intervention-oriented designs would allow researchers to evaluate not only whether change is possible, but also which institutional actions are the most effective. Therefore, linking configurational patterns to institutional policies and interventions, such as workload allocation systems, transparency in evaluation promotion criteria, opportunities for meaningful social

support, protected time for work–life balance, and targeted mental health support initiatives. Pushing research in this direction would help translate configurational evidence into actionable guidance, supporting universities in moving beyond individualized narratives of coping and toward structural, preventive models that address the organizational roots of academic well-being.

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Appendices

These appendices correspond to publications and other academic achievements. For reasons of editorial confidentiality, they are not included in this version of the thesis deposited in the institutional repository.



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