ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

# Social Sciences & Humanities Open

journal homepage: www.sciencedirect.com/journal/social-sciences-and-humanities-open



Regular Article

# Female university academics' reflections on the development of their academic careers in the Norwegian higher education context

Zada Pajalic <sup>a,\*</sup>, Diana Saplacan <sup>b</sup>, Iren Borgen <sup>a</sup>, Sofia Elisabeth G. Olsen <sup>a</sup>, Nima Neolene Wesseltoft-Rao <sup>a</sup>

- a VID Specialized University, Faculty of Health Sciences Research Group Sustainable Healthcare and Welfare Technology (SHWT), Oslo, Norway
- <sup>b</sup> University of Oslo, Robotics and Intelligent Systems (ROBIN) Research Group, Norway

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Education
Facilitation
Career
Participatory research
Story dialogue method (SDM)

#### ABSTRACT

The present study aims to get insight into how female university academic staff in teaching positions at various levels reflect on the development of their careers in higher education. A qualitative method was used with a participatory action research approach. The data were collected in the form of a workshop and analysed using the story dialogue method. Academic jobs, which are a mixture of teaching and research-related tasks, require that individuals prioritize their time well to be able to do research. In addition, the understanding and support of colleagues and management are crucial to achieving expected research results.

#### 1. Introduction

Postgraduate education and academic career systems differ between countries and scientific disciplines (Ates & Brechelmacher, 2013; Fumasoli, Goastellec, & Kehm, 2015; Kwiek & Antonowicz, 2015). Academic career development is essential for becoming an independent researcher. Different methods of postgraduate education and supervision exist to gradually achieve research autonomy (Yoshioka-Kobayashi & Shibayama, 2021). Motivation to invest in a research career can result in an academic career, a professional career, or a combination of these. For those who choose an academic career, there is an expectation that they will produce research publications (Wilkins, Hazzam, & Lean, 2021). Academic career development refers to how both employers and researchers work in research over time, with implications for researchers' work-related identity. There are five components of a research career: (a) individual characteristics, (b) contextual factors, (c) active regulation of behaviour, (d) career stages, and (e) work and non-work roles (Zacher, Rudolph, Todorovic, & Ammann, 2019). Career development for a researcher is mainly based on publications (Zou, Tsui, & Peterson, 2018). Antoher study (Jaeger-Erben et al., 2018) highlight the importance of having a mentor with experience for the early-career researcher and of bringing together early-career researchers to share personal experiences.

A number of studies have identified a gender dimension in academic careers (Ceci, Ginther, Kahn, & Williams, 2014; Levinson, Tolle, &

Lewis, 1989; Lin et al., 2019). Women are underrepresented in the top positions of the academic hierarchy (Berlingo, Girault, Azria, Goffinet, & Le Ray, 2019; Probert, 2005; Reed & Buddeberg-Fischer, 2001Reed & Buddeberg-Fischer, 2001). Structural and national characteristics of academia must be considered (Le Feuvre, Bataille, Kradolfer, del Rio Carral, & Sautier, 2018). Gender equality in academia has been on the agenda since 1970s (Husu, 2015, 2019) in the Nordic countries -Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Island and Norway - which have a high level of gender equality in research and academia (Bergman & Rustad, 2013; Husu, 2019). Three paradoxes may explain the Nordic setting: the paradox of change, the paradox of excellence, and the paradox of interventions (Husu, 2015; Seierstad & Healy, 2012; Silander et al., 2022). The paradoxes of change and excellence refer to the face that while the number of women with doctoral degrees and in leading positions in the Nordic countries is increasing, the number of women in the highest academic position, that of professor, is still low (Husu, 2015, 2019; Pinheiro, Geschwind, Hansen, & Pekkola, 2015). The last paradox, the paradox of interventions, relates to the history of gender equality, both as a theme in the political agenda and in the universities in the Nordic countries (Engstrand, 2019). Gender equality plans have been highlighted, including recruitment, promotion, and teaching. Nevertheless, the conditions of academic careers still favour men, and there is still a high proportion of male professors (Husu, 2019). Carlsson et al. (Carlsson, Finseraas, Midtbøen, & Rafnsdóttir, 2021) propose that the underrepresentation of women in professorships might be the result of

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author. Post-box 184, Vinderen, 0319, Oslo, Norway. E-mail address: zada.pajalic@vid.no (Z. Pajalic).

sorting mechanisms and the bias against female academics that occurs at the start of women's academic careers. Within the framework of Nordic universities, especially Norwegian universities, many research funds are invested internally to increase academic competence among the teaching staff. Staff with a doctorate are granted 30–45% research time in their full-time position. Employer institutions expect employees to produce scientific publications in reputable international journals and to seek external research grants. It is an excellent opportunity for the research staff to maintain and build their research competence. High research competence increases the quality of education and links it to the latest research. (Fägerlind & Strömqvist, 2004; Gornitzka, Maassen, Kwiek, & Maassen, 2012; Vabø & Aamodt, 2012). The aim of the present study is to get insight into how female university academic staff in teaching positions at various levels reflect on the development of their careers in higher education.

#### 2. Design

The present study has a qualitative research design focusing on lived experience (Flick, 2022) with a participatory action research approach (McIntyre, 2008).

#### 2.1. Data collection and analysis method

The data were collected and analysed using the story dialogue method (SDM) (Labonté, 2011; Labonte, Feather, & Hills, 1999). SDM is based on structured dialogue led by an experienced facilitator (Hogan, 2005). The method was initially derived from constructivism, social theory, and the feminist movement (Labonte et al., 1999). It focuses on a person's experience through "self-interview", in which participants are asked to reflect on their own experience around a specific theme. The theme in this study was "My research career-my responsibility." The participants were asked to prepare a (written) reflective story around this theme, which they were then asked to share with the other participants. After sharing the story, the structured dialogue took a verbal form. The structured dialogue aimed to generate knowledge in a structured way by reviewing the story cards and creating insight cards. The insight cards were learnings, theory notes, or "takeaways" that were considered to be at a sufficiently abstract level that they could be used by others. These were considered the results, or the collective knowledge generated through the SDM session. The structured dialogue was based on the following process: a descriptive part, including stories about what the participants experienced related to the chosen theme of SDM (description); an explanatory part, in which the participants tried to understand why they experienced what they experienced (explanation); a synthesis part, in which the participants asked "so what?" questions, trying to get an in-depth understanding about why they shared what they experienced (synthetization); finally, in the last step, the participants asked "now what?" questions, indicating concrete actions that they could take towards improving their situation related to the chosen theme of the SDM (action). There are four roles involved in the story dialogue process: facilitator, storyteller, story-listener, story-recorder. The facilitator facilitates the SDM steps. The storyteller tells his/her story based on the previously written self-interview around the theme. The story listener listens carefully to the story (and asks questions), jotting down notes at the end. The story recorder jots down notes while the storyteller tells the story. For each step of the structured dialogue, the participants go through all the roles (storyteller, story listener, and story recorder), one at a time, except the facilitator, who stays the same during the whole process.

# 2.2. Ethics

The present study was reported to and approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) number 154263. All participants in the study took part of their free will and could withdraw at any time without

any consequences for them.

#### 2.3. Recruitment of participants

In November 2021, 15 potential participants and members of the research group Sustainable Healthcare and Welfare Technology (SHWT) received an invitation from the research group leader and co-author ZP to participate in the workshop with the theme "My research career – my responsibility." All invited participants were asked to write one A4-page reflection on the theme prior to the workshop. Ten of them declined to participate at the last minute due to the Covid-19 restrictions adopted the day before the workshop in response to the outbreak of the Omicron variant. In the end, five participants took part in the physical workshop, including the workshop facilitator. The research qualifications of those who participated were a master's degree in nursing, three PhDs in health sciences, one PhD in computer science and one professor in health sciences. Everyone who participated in the workshop chose to publish its process and results in article form. This means that the participants in the study are also co-authors of this article, with one participant also being the facilitator of the workshop (DS). The decision to publish was based on the belief that the insights that emerged during the workshop might be of interest to colleagues in a similar situation.

#### 2.4. Data collection and analysis through SDM step by step

The whole SDM process took around 3.5 h. The process was documented through 170 colour-coded story cards (n = 183 cards), 13 theory notes, and 67 photos. The values chosen for this SDM were *trust, vulnerability, care,* and *feeling welcome.* The facilitator asked each participant to share with other participants their favourite place and why it was their favourite with the aim of breaking the ice and creating trust within the group. To be able to distinguish what was written during each step, we chose different colours. Five steps were followed.

# 2.5. Step 1. storytelling

The facilitator (DS) assigned each of us roles at the start of the session: one was to tell a story, one would write notes, and one would listen to the story. Everyone told their story related to the chosen theme. We changed roles until everyone had told their story. This step resulted in 38 written story cards in orange.

# 2.6. Step 2. Reflection circle

During this step, we reflected on each other's stories in the form of text written as reflection notes. The reflection involved discussing the answers to the following questions: *How is this my story as well? What is similar/different in this from my story?* This step resulted in 24 cards in yellow.

# 2.7. Step 3. Structured dialogue

During this step, a facilitator led a structured dialogue. This step was divided into four different parts: description part (WHAT questions), explanation part (WHY questions), synthesis part (SO WHAT questions), and action (NOW WHAT questions). It resulted in a total of 108 written story cards in blue.

The first part was the **description** (light yellow, 26 story cards). During this part, we answered the WHAT questions, such as, What was the identified need/problem/issue? Who identified it? How did it arise? What did I do? How did I do it? What was successful, and what did I learn in this phase? What were the challenges? How did it turn out?

The second part was an **explanation** (green, 26 story cards). In this part, the following questions were provided as guidelines for discussions among the participants: *Why did I choose this topic? Why do I think it happened? What happened? Why did they/I react as I/they did? Why did I* 

do what I did? Why did I think that it worked? Why do I think it did not work? How do I know that I am right in my answers?

The third part was **synthesis** (blue, 31 story cards). In this part, the following questions were provided as guidelines for discussions amongst the participants: What have I learned? What remains confusing? How did people or relationships change through their process? Did anything unexpected happen?

The last part was action (pink, 25 story cards). In this part, the following questions were provided as guidelines for discussions amongst the participants: What will I/we do differently next time? What will be my or our next set of actions? What power do I/we have to do things differently in the future? What are the key lessons? How can my/our power be increased?

#### 2.8. Step 4. review of story records

In this step, we shared our notes and reflections with the other participants in the group.

### 2.9. Step 5. creation of insight cards (theory notes)

Thirteen story cards were created during this step (description, 4 insight cards; explanation, 2 insight cards; synthesis, 4 insight cards; action, 3 insight cards). In this step, participants were asked to read all the story cards (our own and others) for each of the earlier steps from the structured dialogue (description, explanation, synthesis, and action) and together create 2–4 insight cards for each of the parts. The facilitator highlighted that the insight cards needed to represent central learnings or findings that could have relevance for others reading them (e.g., readers of an article, others outside the group, and individuals in a similar working situation).

#### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Step 1

In general, female academics had different experiences with research, as well as different amounts of allocated research time. University lecturers had 20% for research and 80% for teaching-related work for full-time employment. Lecturers with a PhD and professors had 30--100% research time. Further, most of us struggled with finding and prioritizing time for research, regardless of how much time was allocated to reserach. When there was a lack of general structure for doing research, female academics encountered difficulties prioritizing this aspect of our work. One story card indicated the need for structure or a framework for carrying out research, such as an active research group, while other story cards pointed out the importance of a coach or mentor for carrying out research and staying motivated. Some story cards pointed to deadlines as a clear impetus for carrying out research. Other research cards revealed that many female academics even though they knew how much weight research carried for career advancement, they had trouble prioritizing it among their other responsibilities. The story cards also indicated the need for mental preparation before starting research (e.g., writing, reading research articles, designing a study etc.): "The need to prepare oneself mentally for research." Good collegial support is essential in this process, as indicated on one of the story cards: "It's important to get help from colleagues." In addition, based on these initial stories, the story cards indicated the need to properly value research time and plan one's own research and that doing research and teaching is a cognitively demanding process: "Research is a process with itself. You need to prioritize it and to plan it accordingly". Finally, it seems that, in general, based on the story cards, there was agreement that teaching is very energy-consuming, and thus a clear structure or framework is needed to do research at the same time. Often, this can be done with help from the research group leader in one's academic department. We summarized research as follows "Research is a process with itself - we should not take research time for granted; maybe we won't have the same opportunity next time if we don't produce research results."

#### 3.2. Step 2. reflection circle

"It is my responsibility to value these (research) hours. It helps to have someone externally to drive you forward." During this step, we were looking for solutions to solve the issue identified in the first step. In general, the story cards showed that most of us needed help to master the "research world." Some story cards showed that some of us were aware that we need to take responsibility ourselves, to put the time and effort into research to be able to advance in our careers: "It's up to me to value these (research) hours". Other story cards showed that some of us had to stop research for some time due to understaffing and increasing teaching loads. The story cards showed, in general, that we were aware that we needed to prioritize research time. However, many of the story cards indicated that we did not always have the "right tools" to do this. At the same time, several story cards indicated that several of us struggled with saying "no" to other tasks imposed by management to prioritize our research: "How can I learn to say No to things?" and "I also struggle with prioritizing the research. I need an external person to motivate me." Further, the story cards showed reflection on our role in taking responsibility for and valuing our own research time, staying motivated, and what works for us in practice in such situations. One story card mentioned, for instance, deadlines as being important in structuring research time. Other story cards expressed worry about getting stuck in meetings and other tasks, while others admitted a lack of clarity about goals. Conclusively, the story cards created during this step indicated that we were looking for some kind of structure, either from the organization, the group leader, or ourselves, to prioritize and value research time.

#### 3.3. Step 3. Structured dialogue

During this structured dialogue step, we described careers and responsibility experiences. Some story cards indicated that we struggled with saying "No" to other tasks. This specifically applied to us as new employees during the probationary period who did not dare to say no, mainly for fear of being perceived by the employer as not compliant. Other story cards showed that we experienced research as "time-consuming", "much work", and "not a quick fix." One of the story cards compared research with an iceberg, as much of the work is invisible, metaphorically "under the surface". Other story cards expressed the chaos that some of us experienced when carrying out research and doing something for the first time. Many of us seem to have had the same experience regarding research, and we admitted that we often had feelings of stress and worry. Other story cards highlighted that the work should be broken down into smaller pieces to be able to digest it and avoid that feeling of chaos.

Similarly, other story cards suggested that reporting or writing down the hours spent working and what they are spent on can help make visible where and how this time is used. Therefore, prioritizing research time in this way can be more manageable. Becoming aware of what one has done may also help with feeling in control and learning one's limitations. Another story card suggested that one should have responsibility for one's own workload, and that learning by doing is a process, which comes with age and experience. One of us expressed it in this way: "Prioritize and get control and peace. It is a challenge to learn to know yourself and know how much you can work. When you get older, you get more experience."

# 3.3.1. Why? The phase of structured dialogue

During this phase, we tried to explain why we experienced the feelings or the situations we had shared in the first phase of this step when we described our experiences. In general, the story cards showed again that the most important thing was how research time was

structured. We highlighted the difficulties we had experienced with saying "no," especially to persons with whom we have a good relationship. Other story cards showed that a high volume of teaching-related work tasks was often experienced as overwhelming, often standing in the way and making it completely impossible to focus adequately on research. One story card showed that one of us admitted that she used her time the wrong way, which led her to realize that she needed to re-prioritize and work on what was important to her if she didn't want to end up in a situation where she was working during her own free time. Finally, the story cards showed that it is pretty common to do research work during the evening, at the expense of family life: "I must write research articles during the evening. I do not have time for my family. My family thought that I was working too much with those articles."

# 3.3.2. So what? Synthesizing phase

During this phase, we synthesized what had been discussed in the earlier steps. The story cards from this phase showed that we started to question the concept of a "career" and whether we had one. A career needs to have a specific place in our lives: it requires us to think about ourselves, what we want career-wise, and at what cost. Other story cards indicated that we were surprised by our reflections around academic careers and started thinking more deeply about what the concept of a career means for us.

For instance, one story card indicated, "I need to think through what a career is for me; a career needs to have a direction." However, one story card indicated that the notion of a "career" could be either negative or positive, although historically the concept of a career has had negative connotations, especially for women, but historically the concept of a career seems negative. We discussed that the explanation for this was the Nordic cultural code called *Janteloven* (in English, "The Law of Jante"), rooted in Lutheran teaching, which states that no one should be assumed to be better than another. This code strongly influences female-dominated professions, especially in the public sector. Other story cards showed that we reflected on our "need" to be selfish when it comes to our research time to be able to prioritize our own career goals.

Similarly, other story cards indicated that some of us realized that the problem of prioritizing time for research does not solve itself, and we have to be proactive to achieve personal goals. Further, other story cards emphasized that female academics must be honest regarding their career choices and development. We should also see career planning and development as personal development in our professional role – it should not be seen as something negative. However, we admitted that we have often experienced that the (work) environment is more hostile to female academics than their male colleagues. The story cards also showed that the research group leader had a significant role in female academics' development, inviting them to participate in research projects and to share their experiences. Finally, besides the research group leader, the academic organization plays an essential role in female academics' career development.

#### 3.3.3. Now what? Structured dialogue phase

During the last phase of the structured dialogue, we concluded with 20 concrete action points for prioritizing research time. They are presented below.

- 1. Plan and allocate time for research within the calendar.
- 2. Say "no" more often, and learn to say "no" to other tasks.
- 3. Book time with yourself that will be allocated to your own research
- 4. Do more from your home office to be able to work on your own research.
- 5. Do not open email first thing in the morning but focus on research.

- Write down all the tasks you do to increase the visibility of your workload and the types of tasks you perform.
- 7. Be aware of your power to make decisions regarding your own time and research and do not give that away.
- 8. Reintegrate all routines, such as reading and writing, on Sundays or another day of the week.
- Get help from your research group leader on how to work more effectively.
- 10. Reflect on where you want to be in two, five and ten years.
- 11. Set concrete goals.
- 12. Get advice from those with more experience.
- 13. Have a better structure within daily work life.
- 14. Reward yourself for the tasks you accomplish.
- Be aware of not prioritizing your own needs as a female academic and stop doing that.
- Work on the right tasks and break down large tasks into smaller ones.
- 17. Ask yourself what you wish for your career.
- Visualize your career and your own work tasks and make them visible to others as well.
- 19. Make your recipe for a successful career.
- 20. Remember that doing work tasks "good enough" is good and that one does not need to do everything perfectly.

#### 4. Discussion of results

The results of this study highlight essential aspects of our responsibility for research careers in academia, such as considering research as an opportunity for personal development. Research requires focus, planning and structure. Therefore, finding a practical balance between research and teaching work is essential. Furthermore, our study shows that understanding and support from management and colleagues are essential to managing research time well. The results from our study are confirmed by Laver et al. (Laver et al., 2018), who point out that mentoring, education, professional development and networking programmes initiated by employees, i.e. "bottom-up" perspective, show the potential to improve results in the academic world. While sustainable effectiveness may have started with management practices, or "top-down" perspective. Relying solely on "bottom-up" methods appears to be undermine an intervention's success (Laver et al., 2018). It is essential to consider change not only from the perspective from below, that of the employees, but also from above, or management levels (Lv & Zhang, 2017) (Eckert, West, Altman, Steward, & Pasmore, 2014). Both perspectives are required to balance power, which is a prerequisite for a favourable academic career development environment (Pajalic, 2013). In our study, collegial support and mentorship were necessary for a successful academic career. Several studies have pointed out the importance of having a mentoring option in an educational institution as it affects future research careers. Results similar to ours were highlighted in an article by Zacher et al., 2019 who found that trust, awareness and collaboration between the research mentors and PhD and postdoc trainees were important for a successful academic career (Zacher et al., 2019). Likewise, Sarabipour et al. (2022) raw attention to the importance of having a mentor who supports your plan to pursue an academic career, noting that "positive mentee-mentor relationships are vital for maintaining work-life balance and success in careers" (Sarabipour et al., 2022). In addition, Ortega et al. (2018) ecognize mentoring as an important factor "in determining career success through enhancing trainees' goals and productivity" (Ortega et al., 2018).

In our study, we highlight the importance of planning research time on a personal and organizational basis. On a personal level, it is essential to review one's workload and the possibility of freeing up whole days for research to enter the "bubble". Furthermore, we also emphasize planning the working day so that everything affecting focus is moved forward in time. Gail Neely and colleagues (Gail Neely, Smith, Graboyes, Paniello, & Paul Gubbels, 2016) highlighted critical elements in

developing an academic research career. One of these elements is "dedicated time for research". The authors highlighted "the willingness to spend the time required" in a research career on a personal basis. In our study, the possibility of entering the "bubble" was crucial. Making progress in research requires time to understand and do the research.

In our study, we highlight the importance of organizing the working day and trying to break down large tasks into smaller parts to cope with the workload, setting realistic goals, and providing positive selffeedback for each step forward. Breaking down large tasks into smaller parts, called project decomposition, is a profitable strategy. Although academic institutions value research activity (Scott & Scott, 2016), it is known that work in academia is flexible in terms of time and space and can take place anywhere and at any time (De Vaujany, Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, Munro, Nama, & Holt, 2021). As indicated in our study, this may lead to different degrees of autonomy in one's work and requires temporal self-discipline to structure work to manage the allocated research time (Kunzl & Messner, 2022). In our study, we highlight the importance of investigating what resources are available in the work environment, such as senior colleagues and research group leaders who we can contact and ask for guidance on how to manage our research time well. Our results are confirmed by another study highlighting the importance of access to experienced, like-minded and committed mentors to optimize potential, foster a supportive work environment, and increase the productivity of female academics who want to advance their academic careers (Cross et al., 2019). Comprehensive and targeted mentoring with a specific focus on academic degree, research (writing and publishing articles), parenting and working time status was in demand (Blood et al., 2012). Another study characterized mentoring as an effective career strategy and found furthermore that it was essential to develop alternatives to formal mentoring that can more effectively engage female academics in a network or community of support to empower women to listen and learn from the experiences of others (Tolar, 2012), such as informal mentoring that can provide peer-to-peer social interaction for academic career development (Zacher et al., 2019). Similar results were found by Subramanian, Hutchins, & Lundsteen, 2022, who emphasize the importance of identifying experienced research staff and connecting with research mentors and academic programme leaders at their own institutions. Furthermore, the authors highlight the importance of enabling a 1:1 advising structure and establishing rapport with trainees (Subramanian et al., 2022).

In conclusion, as the first members of our families to pursue academic careers, our journey was fraught with challenges. This means that we have had no resources in our immediate familiar environment that could provide us with academic support and guidance. We have all, in our own way, learned by doing research. During our journey, we have learned that it is important to have a mentor with whom you have a trusting relationship. With this article, our intention is to highlight the importance of personal, interpersonal, and organizational factors in having a successful academic career.

# 4.1. Discussion of SDM used in the context of academic career development

SDM (Labonte et al., 1999) has been used in various contexts (Saplacan, Herstad, & Pajalic, 2018, 2020; Pajalic, 2013; Pajalic, Persson, Skovdahl, & Westergren, 2012; Pajalic, Pajalic, & Saplacan, 2019; Saplacan, Herstad, Elsrud, et al., 2018; Saplacan, Herstad, Mørch, et al., 2018; Saplacan, Herstad, Tørresen, & Pajalic, 2020), including education and healthcare. However, to our knowledge, it has not been used to investigate how female academics experience their careers. Our present study illustrates that the method can also be appropriate in such contexts. The benefits of using SDM when several academics with research responsibility come together and share their experiences is that they can learn from each other's experiences. In addition, the method also facilitates a process whereby the participants generate knowledge together, resulting in a list of takeaway points or learnings that are

synthesized and can be shared with other colleagues. At the same time, it seems that the method can also be used with people from different fields and professions, as long as they have some common denominator: in this case, working at a university or academic institution and being in an academic position with teaching responsibilities. Compared to previous studies using SDM, the participants in this case did not necessarily need to have the same background or domain. Previously, SDM has been used with participants working within the same organization, having the same roles, or being in leadership vs non-leadership roles. Thus, our study shows that SDM is appropriate for co-generating new knowledge as long as the participants have some common denominator (sharing a network, sharing a common experience, having a common interest etc.). However, they do not necessarily need to work within the same organization.

However, a limitation of using SDM with participants from different organizations is that it does not result in a complete participatory action research process, which aims for organizational change. Instead, using SDM for people that come from different organizations or are in different positions focuses on *individual change*, raising awareness of individual participants about their own experiences related to a particular topic (in the case of this paper, on academic female career responsibility), but also as on collective awareness – first, of the group that comes together during the SDM process; and second, of the shared knowledge that emerges in the form of takeaway points as a result of the SDM process, which can be beneficial for a larger audience.

#### 5. Conclusion

Academic career development is crucial for employer universities and employed academic staff. Employer universities in Norway annually give their employees the conditions to develop their academic careers through research publications and applications to external research funds in the form of working hours. The time granted is integrated with educational and administrative tasks. The immediate supervisor is responsible for enabling a manageable teaching load so academic staff can focus on research. However, it is also the academic staff's responsibility to manage their allocated time well. Therefore, regular dialogue between leaders and employees is vital to find the optimal balance between research and educational tasks over a year. This study highlights that an academic career can be both a prerequisite and an obstacle to further development. Collegial support and mentorship are crucial in navigating this opportunity well.

#### CRediT authorship contribution statement

Zada Pajalic: Idea, Conceptualization, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, preparation. Diana Saplacan: Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, preparation. Iren Borgen: Writing – original draft, preparation. Sofia Elisabeth G. Olsen: Writing – original draft, preparation. Nima Neolene Wesseltoft-Rao: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, preparation.

#### **Declaration of competing interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

#### References

Ates, G., & Brechelmacher, A. (2013). Academic career paths. In The work situation of the academic profession in Europe: Findings of a survey in twelve countries (pp. 13–35). Springer.

Bergman, S., & Rustad, L. M. (2013). The Nordic region-a step closer to gender balance in research?. In Joint Nordic strategies and measures to promote gender balance among researchers in academia. Nordic Council of Ministers.

- Berlingo, L., Girault, A., Azria, E., Goffinet, F., & Le Ray, C. (2019). Women and academic careers in obstetrics and gynaecology: Aspirations and obstacles among postgraduate trainees—a mixed-methods study. BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, 126(6), 770–777.
- Blood, E. A., Ullrich, N. J., Hirshfeld-Becker, D. R., Seely, E. W., Connelly, M. T., Warfield, C. A., et al. (2012). Academic women faculty: Are they finding the mentoring they need? *Journal of Women's Health*, 21(11), 1201–1208.
- Carlsson, M., Finseraas, H., Midtbøen, A. H., & Rafnsdóttir, G. L. (2021). Gender bias in academic recruitment? Evidence from a survey experiment in the nordic region. European Sociological Review, 37(3), 399–410.
- Ceci, S. J., Ginther, D. K., Kahn, S., & Williams, W. M. (2014). Women in academic science: A changing landscape. Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 15(3), 75–141
- Cross, M., Lee, S., Bridgman, H., Thapa, D. K., Cleary, M., & Kornhaber, R. (2019). Benefits, barriers and enablers of mentoring female health academics: An integrative review. *PLoS One*, 14(4), Article e0215319.
- De Vaujany, F.-X., Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, A., Munro, I., Nama, Y., & Holt, R. (2021). Control and surveillance in work practice: Cultivating paradox in 'new'modes of organizing. Organization Studies, 42(5), 675–695.
- Eckert, R., West, M., Altman, D., Steward, K., & Pasmore, W. A. (2014). Delivering a collective leadership strategy for health care. King's Fund.
- Engstrand, Å.-K. (2019). From quotas of men to gender mainstreaming: Gender equality policies in academia from the 1960s to the 2000s. In *Nordic gender equality policy in a europeanisation perspective* (pp. 155–168). Routledge.
- Fägerlind, I., & Strömqvist, G. (2004). Reforming higher education in nordic countries. UNESCO.
- Flick, U. (2022). The SAGE handbook of qualitative research design. SAGE.
- Fumasoli, T., Goastellec, G., & Kehm, B. M. (2015). Academic careers and work in Europe: Trends, challenges, perspectives. In Academic work and careers in Europe: Trends, challenges, perspectives (pp. 201–214). Springer.
- Gail Neely, J., Smith, R. J., Graboyes, E. M., Paniello, R. C., & Paul Gubbels, S. (2016). Guide to academic research career development. *Laryngoscope investigative analysis* 1(1), 19–24.
- Gornitzka, A., Maassen, P., Kwiek, M., & Maassen, P. (2012). University reform and the nordic model. National higher education reforms in a European context: Comparative reflections on Poland and Norway, 2, 111.
- Hogan, C. (2005). Understanding facilitation: Theory and principle. Kogan Page Publishers.
   Husu, L. (2015). A comprehensive national approach to promote gender equality in science: The case of Norway. Advancing Women in Science, 307–340.
- Husu, L. (2019). Gender equality in Nordic academia: Advances and challenges.
- Jaeger-Erben, M., Kramm, J., Sonnberger, M., Völker, C., Albert, C., Graf, A., ... Schröter, B. (2018). Building capacities for transdisciplinary research: Challenges and recommendations for early-career researchers. GAIA-Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society, 27(4), 379–386.
- Kunzl, F., & Messner, M. (2022). Temporal structuring as self-discipline: Managing time in the budgeting process. Organization Studies, Article 01708406221137840.
- Kwiek, M., & Antonowicz, D. (2015). The changing paths in academic careers in European universities: Minor steps and major milestones. In Academic work and careers in Europe: Trends, challenges, perspectives (pp. 41–68). Springer.
- Labonté, R. (2011). Reflections on stories and a story/dialogue method in health research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 14(2), 153–163.
- Labonte, R., Feather, J., & Hills, M. (1999). A story/dialogue method for health promotion knowledge development and evaluation. *Health Education Research*, 14 (1), 39–50. https://doi.org/10.1093/her/14.1.39
- Laver, K. E., Prichard, I. J., Cations, M., Osenk, I., Govin, K., & Coveney, J. D. (2018).
  A systematic review of interventions to support the careers of women in academic medicine and other disciplines. BMJ Open, 8(3), Article e020380.
- Le Feuvre, N., Bataille, P., Kradolfer, S., del Rio Carral, M., & Sautier, M. (2018). The gendered diversification of academic career paths in comparative perspective. In *Gender and precarious research careers* (pp. 50–80). Routledge.
- Levinson, W., Tolle, S. W., & Lewis, C. (1989). Women in academic medicine. New England Journal of Medicine, 321(22), 1511–1517.
- Lin, M. P., Lall, M. D., Samuels-Kalow, M., Das, D., Linden, J. A., Perman, S., ... Agrawal, P. (2019). Impact of a women-focused professional organization on academic retention and advancement: Perceptions from a qualitative study. Academic Emergency Medicine, 26(3), 303–316.

- Lv, C.-M., & Zhang, L. (2017). How can collective leadership influence the implementation of change in health care? Chinese Nursing Research, 4(4), 182–185.
- McIntyre, A. (2008). Participatory action research [Elektronisk resurs]. SAGE. https://methods.sagepub.com/book/participatory-action-research-qrm.
- Ortega, G., Smith, C., Pichardo, M. S., Ramirez, A., Soto-Greene, M., & Sanchez, J. P. (2018). Preparing for an academic career: The significance of mentoring. MedEdPORTAL, 14, Article 10690. https://doi.org/10.15766/mep\_2374-8265.10690
- Pajalic, Z. (2013). Matdistribution till hemmaboende äldre personer ur flera persperktiv. Örebro universitet. http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:oru:diva-27892.
- Pajalic, Z., Pajalic, O., & Saplacan, D. (2019). Women's education and profession midwifery in Nordic countries. *Journal of Health Science*, 9(3), 127–135.
- Pajalic, Z., Persson, L., Skovdahl, K., & Westergren, A. (2012). Facilitating change, the decision-maker's views of municipality organized food distribution to elderly people living at home and suggestions for development—A participatory action research study.
- Pinheiro, R., Geschwind, L., Hansen, H. F., & Pekkola, E. (2015). Academic leadership in the Nordic countries: Patterns of gender equality. In Women's voices in management (pp. 15–33). Springer.
- Probert, B. (2005). 'I just couldn't fit it in': Gender and unequal outcomes in academic careers. *Gender, Work and Organization, 12*(1), 50–72.
- Reed, V., & Buddeberg-Fischer, B. (2001). Career obstacles for women in medicine: An overview. *Medical Education*, 35(2), 139–147.
- Saplacan, H., Elsrud, M., & Pajalic. (2018). Reflections on using Story-Dialogue Method in a workshop with interaction design students.
- Saplacan, Herstad, Tørresen, & Pajalic. (2020). A framework on division of work tasks between humans and robots in the home. Multimodal Technologies and Interaction, 4 (3), 44.
- Saplacan, H., Mørch, K., & Pajalic. (2018). Inclusion through design and use of digital learning environments: Issues, methods and stories. Proceedings of the 10th Nordic Conference on Human-Computer Interaction.
- Saplacan, H., & Pajalic. (2018). Feedback from digital systems used in higher education: An inquiry into triggered emotions - two universal design oriented solutions for a better user experience. Studies in Health Technology and Informatics, 256, 421–430.
- Saplacan, H., & Pajalic. (2020). Use of digital learning environments: A study about fragmented information awareness (pp. 86–109). ID&A Interaction design & architecture. s)(43.
- Sarabipour, S., Hainer, S. J., Arslan, F. N., de Winde, C. M., Furlong, E., Bielczyk, N., ... Davla, S. (2022). Building and sustaining mentor interactions as a mentee. FEBS Journal, 289(6), 1374–1384. https://doi.org/10.1111/febs.15823
- Scott, D. E., & Scott, S. (2016). Leadership for quality university teaching: How bottomup academic insights can inform top-down leadership. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 44(3), 511–531.
- Seierstad, C., & Healy, G. (2012). Women's equality in the scandinavian academy: A distant dream? Work, Employment & Society, 26(2), 296–313.
- Silander, C., Haake, U., Lindberg, L., & Riis, U. (2022). Nordic research on gender equality in academic careers: A literature review. European Journal of Higher Education, 12(1), 72–97.
- Subramanian, S., Hutchins, J. A., & Lundsteen, N. (2022). Bridging the gap: Increasing collaboration between research mentors and career development educators for PhD and postdoctoral training success. *Molecular Biology of the Cell*, 33(2), pe1.
- Tolar, M. H. (2012). Mentoring experiences of high-achieving women. Advances in Developing Human Resources, 14(2), 172–187. https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422312436415
- Vabø, A., & Aamodt, P. O. (2012). 4 nordic higher education in transition. In Structuring mass higher education (pp. 57–71). Routledge.
- Wilkins, S., Hazzam, J., & Lean, J. (2021). Doctoral publishing as professional development for an academic career in higher education. *International Journal of Management in Education*, 19(1), Article 100459.
- Yoshioka-Kobayashi, T., & Shibayama, S. (2021). Early career training and development of academic independence: A case of life sciences in Japan. *Studies in Higher Education*, 46(12), 2751–2773.
- Zacher, H., Rudolph, C. W., Todorovic, T., & Ammann, D. (2019). Academic career development: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 110, 357–373.
- Zou, C., Tsui, J., & Peterson, J. B. (2018). The publication trajectory of graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and new professors in psychology. *Scientometrics*, 117(2), 1289–1310.