

“The Social Fabric of Career Development: Exploring Work Orientation and Employee Engagement in the Sensemaking Process of Newcomers at a Higher Education Institution”

Master Thesis

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Abstract

Purpose: Nowadays employees look for more in their work than just a salary. The way people make sense of their work differs per individual; a process which influences and is influenced by many different factors, including work orientation and employee engagement. Exploring how orientation and engagement relate to employee experiences becomes especially interesting in complex and uncertain environments like that of newcomers at higher education institutions, a context on which research is still lacking. This study aims at exploring how work orientation and employee engagement influence the way newly hired academics at a higher education institution (HEI) make sense of the organizational strategy. **Method:** Semi-structured interviews with seventeen newly hired full-time academic employees were conducted at a university in the Netherlands. The interview data was analyzed using an inductive and deductive content analysis. **Results:** The interviewed academics explained their experiences through a strong focus on career orientation and social engagement; perceived strategic goals and values which the employees believe optimize their chances for career advancement and making personal connections are considered very positive, while experiences which are believed to minimize these chances are perceived as very negative. Especially inclusiveness, diversity, openness, teamwork and continuous improvement were found to be the most important values for employees when describing their experiences relating to the goals and values of the university. **Conclusion:** This study highlights the importance newcomers at HEI's assign to professional advancement and personal connections. Especially the high prevalence of career orientation among the newly hired academics is a surprising result, providing interesting avenues for further research. Furthermore, the study offers practical implications for the management of HEI's on the attraction of personnel which goals and values fit the organization's, the importance of transparency and information exchange surrounding career advancement opportunities and the fostering of a collaborative work environment to provide in the need for personal connections and stimulate social engagement.

Keywords: newcomers, sensemaking, organizational strategy, employees, HEI

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1. Introduction

“Man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life.”

(Frankl et al., 1959, p.115)

Many employees nowadays want their job to be more than just a paycheck and need their work to mean something; they prefer meaning and meaningfulness over financial rewards (Hu & Hirsh, 2017; Steger et al., 2012). Through providing a source of meaning, belongingness, and identity, work can help employees strengthen their self-worth and self-esteem (Nazir & Islam, 2020). In the past decades, there has been an increased focus on meaningful work research due to its positive relation to multiple organizational and individual outcomes, like organizational change, individual motivation and well-being, psychological and physical health, happiness, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Vuori et al., 2012). Hackman and Oldham describe meaningfulness in this context as the “degree to which the employee experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile” (1975, p. 162). Meaningfulness, therefore, refers to the amount of *significance* employees attach to their work, which must not be mistaken for ‘meaning’ as the latter refers to the *type* of meaning employees assign to their work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

According to Pratt and Ashforth, meaning is the result of making sense of something; the outcome of how an employee interprets the role of their work in the context of their life. This could be materialistic, a higher calling, pastime, and so forth. How employees see their job and how it affects their lives is called ‘work orientation’. Work orientation explains the rationale behind and the way in which people find meaning in their work, and is considered a crucial element of sensemaking; an on-going retrospective process of placing stimuli into frameworks (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Weick et al., 2005; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Research on work orientations sheds light on people’s fundamental ideas about their jobs and how these beliefs affect a range of work-related actions and attitudes, which helps to explain what work is all about (Rosso et al., 2010). Scholars commonly divide work orientation in three main categories: job oriented, career oriented and calling oriented (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Glavas & Kelley, 2014; Nazir & Islam, 2020; Wrzesniewski, 2003). These distinctions basically delineate whether an individual finds meaning in work through material rewards, career opportunities, or a higher calling.

When employees find meaning and experience meaningfulness in their work, it increases organizational performance and retention, emotional commitment, and job satisfaction (Kaur & Mittal, 2020). It fosters a sense of purpose, connection, and fulfillment in employees’ work, leading to employee engagement (EE). According to Kaur and Mittal (2020), the level of meaningfulness employees find in their work is a key factor influencing employee engagement. It indicates how individuals perceive the value and significance of their job tasks, leading to increased levels of dedication and absorption in their work. Academics have typically divided employee engagement into three groups: cognitive

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(intellectual), affective (emotional) and social (physical or behavioral) engagement (Duthler & Dhanesh, 2018; Kahn, 1990; Soane et al., 2012).

Employees do not all experience the same kind of engagement because the meaning attributed to the same experience differs per individual, as each has their own subjective process in which they evaluate the experience (Bailey et al., 2019; Rosso et al., 2010). Put differently, employees all have experiences while working at an organization, and they all have their own individual way of making sense of them. They continuously process new information. As Ancona (2012) explains, sensemaking occurs in various contexts and situations, particularly during times of change, crisis, or when individuals are faced with new information or events that require interpretation and understanding, which is for example the case for newcomers at an organization.

Organizational entry is commonly associated with changes, contrasts and surprises; it can be described as an anxiety-inducing experience (De Vos & Freese, 2011). The way newcomers experience the entry process could have significant and long-lasting effects on their work behavior and job attitudes; they are inexperienced in the company and possible accompanying insecurity can result in increased turnover rates compared to incumbent employees (Jokisaari & Nurmi, 2009). Therefore, it is important that there is alignment between the individual's values, goals, and personality and those of the organization, as it ensures a smoother integration into the organizational culture and work environment (Van Vianen, 2000). In other words: this value-goal congruence facilitates a quicker adaptation process and helps them feel like they belong. The term used to describe this alignment is 'fit'. Research suggests that fit plays a crucial role in influencing various outcomes such as job satisfaction, engagement, and organizational identification among newcomers, emphasizing the importance of newcomers feeling connected to the organization and its values (Basit & Arshad, 2016). As sensemaking occurs when there are changes in the environment and the flow of experience is disrupted (Choo, 2002), taking newly hired employees as the subject of analysis should provide insights into how this group uses their work orientation and engagement to explain their experiences at this new work environment.

A dynamic environment, such as the one newly hired employees are compelled to navigate, makes for fertile ground for investigating how individuals interpret and respond to new policies, initiatives, and challenges. There are certain organizations which face different challenges than typical public and private organizations, making it more complex to navigate as newcomers. An example of such a context is that of higher education institutions (HEI's), which remains an underexplored area in individual sensemaking research. The existing literature primarily addresses sensemaking in the context of organizational change, strategic decision-making and sustainability transitions (Bien & Sassen, 2020; Degn, 2015; Van der Voet et al., 2016), but there is a paucity of research that delves into the unique dynamics through which individual sensemaking processes impact employees' work orientation and engagement within the higher education landscape. This can be considered a missed opportunity, as colleges and universities are considered 'complex sensemaking environments'; the higher education sector has seen significant changes in the last years (Degn, 2018; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Maitlis &

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Lawrence, 2007). Until a generation ago, academic institutions flourished in an environment of steady funding, student enrolment, and minimal competition (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). However, recent shifts in the economy, demography, and politics have placed schools and universities in an unclear environment that increasingly resembles a cutthroat market. HEI's have to face various environmental pressures at the same time, including evolving labor market trends, technological advancements, and innovative approaches to the development and execution of educational services (Akella & Khoury, 2021). An environment this dynamic demands that institutions adapt to these new circumstances, along with the accompanying consequences for employees—a behavior that is still largely unknown in academia but is practically a given in business (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Furthermore, they have a more cooperative management system involving faculties, administrators, committees, boards, students, parents and communities, of which the goals and wishes sometimes do not entirely match. The administrators, for example, are focused on being responsive to the external environment and accordingly developing the organization, while the faculty has a strong focus on their disciplines and the educational profession and is not always eager to make big changes in this area (Akella & Khoury, 2021). The unique blend of academic and administrative functions in higher education institutions presents a complex setting where employees must navigate between educational goals, bureaucratic processes, and external pressures, providing rich insights into the multifaceted nature of sensemaking within these organizations.

This study aims to expand the academic as well as the organizational scope by addressing the literature gap on the sensemaking process of newly hired employees at HEI's through conducting an in-depth investigation into the factors influencing this process, with a focus on work orientation and employee engagement. Primary data will be gathered from a university in the Netherlands, making use of its organizational strategy to explore sensemaking at HEI's. This work should eventually result in an understanding of how newly hired academics make sense of their experiences at a higher education institution by addressing the following research question:

“Looking through a lens of work orientation and employee engagement, how do newly hired academic staff at a higher education institution make sense of their professional experiences?”

2. Theoretical framework

This research explores how work orientation and employee engagement influence the way newly hired employees at a higher education institution interpret and give meaning to the organization they work for. This chapter provides a theoretical framework explaining the different concepts which are relevant for this study. Starting with an elaboration on newcomers, this framework lays a basis for understanding why this specific research group is interesting to further explore. Furthermore, it will expand on the concept of sensemaking and the different ways employees seek meaning in their work, highlighting the concepts work orientation and employee engagement.

2.1 Newcomers

When entering an organization, employees usually experience surprise or role shock and try to determine the nature of their new group and assess whether they "fit in" (Miller & Jablin, 1991). This process is frequently accompanied by a great deal of uncertainty as one must become familiar with the formal and informal needs of a new role and company. A sense of alignment or 'fit' between the individual and the organization can reduce this uncertainty (Tang et al., 2022). When individuals perceive a strong fit between their values, characteristics, and the organizational culture, it fosters a sense of congruence that can mitigate anxiety levels during the entry process (Cable & Derue, 2002).

Values can be defined as "general beliefs about the importance of normatively desirable behaviors or end states" (Edwards & Cable, 2009, p. 655). Values influence and guide individual or organizational decisions and behavior. The extent to which these individual and organizational values have similarities is referred to as value congruence. Value congruence is believed to enhance communication because it creates a common framework for characterizing, categorizing, and making sense of events, as people have similar standards for what is important. This shared framework makes it easier to communicate and lowers the possibility of miscommunication (Edwards & Cable, 2009). Furthermore, research shows that employees who share the same values as the company they work for are more likely to be satisfied in their work, feel a sense of belonging and identification, and a desire to stay with the organization (Aguilera et al., 2007; Edwards & Cable, 2009). Possibly the most important factor in value congruence is trust. Having the same values and goals as the organization enhances employees' beliefs that the organization won't harm them (Edwards & Cable, 2009). Moreover, it can enhance engagement through a greater sense of meaningfulness at work, as value congruence allows employees to do work that is true to themselves (Glavas, 2016). This emphasizes how essential it is for employees' and organizations' values to be aligned.

This research differentiates between three different types of values and hereby relies upon the definitions given by Choongo et al. (2019), Kwantes and Glazer (2017) and Tsirogianni et al. (2014). According to Choongo et al., *personal values* are values that drive a person's ethical and moral behavior. This study includes the personal values 'ethics' and 'integrity'. Tsirogianni et al. describe *social values*

as the standards that individuals and social groups use to determine acceptable social behavior and shape the order, nature and form of the collective. The social values this study includes are ‘respect to individuals’, ‘humanity’, ‘inclusiveness’, ‘diversity’, ‘responsibility & caring’, and ‘openness’. Lastly, *work values* are the weight that an individual places on particular outcomes related to their work (Kwantes & Glazer, 2017), of which this study includes ‘efficiency’, ‘competency’, ‘performance’, ‘continuous improvement’, ‘entrepreneurism’, ‘teamwork’, ‘cooperation’, ‘commitment’, ‘control’, ‘power’, and ‘reputation’.

Identifying these values and developing and applying judgements of fit is a common way for people to navigate organizational life, though it can be challenging for newcomers to try to make sense of all these new experiences and perceptions. This process, in which newcomers have to adjust to a new situation and interpret and revise their perceived role, function, and fit within the organization, is influenced by the underlying mechanism of sensemaking (Lance et al., 2000). Once employees are able to make sense of and ascribe meaning to their experiences, it helps them cope with the uncertain and new organizational environment (Asik-Dizdar & Esen, 2016). It is a process of seeking meaning through work and involves the creation of frameworks for understanding complex situations, which can help individuals make sense of their work and its purpose (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Ancona, 2012).

2.2 Sensemaking

Organizational theorist Karl Weick has had a significant influence on sensemaking literature since he developed the concept in 1995. According to Weick, the process of sensemaking provides an understanding of how individuals and organizations give meaning to events (Helms-Mills et al., 2010). This materialization of meanings shapes, influences and constrains identity and behavior, with communication as its most crucial aspect: “situations, organizations, and environments are talked into existence.” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2015) have proposed that substantial gaps in organizational theory can be explained by the concept of sensemaking. In his work, Weick elaborates on the relationship between sensemaking and organizing. He introduces organizing as ‘the resolving of equivocality in an enacted environment by means of interlocked behaviors embedded in conditionally related processes’ (Weick, 1969, p. 91). He proposes sensemaking and organizing to be mutually reinforcing concepts, as they are both considered ongoing communicative processes in which people extract cues from events and retrospectively use these cues to make sense of the situation and materialize their meanings (Weick et al., 2005).

As people make sense of reality and base their behavior and decisions on this formed reality, sensemaking becomes an important factor in the context of organizational strategy. It influences the way the strategy is actually interpreted and acted upon by the organizational members. As described by Brown et al. (2008), “To make sense is to organize, and sensemaking refers to processes of organizing using the technology of language – processes of labeling and categorizing for instance – to identify,

regularize and routinize memories into plausible explanations [. . .]” (p. 1055). As organizations are constituted of these different communication systems and processes, perceived organizational strategies are therefore also continuously being reconstructed, negotiated and acknowledged (Jiang & Luo, 2020). The frameworks that are created in this process can contribute to a sense of meaningfulness by providing a clearer understanding of how one's work contributes to the organization's goals and values; it makes meanings tangible. The variables that affect people's ability to interpret their ongoing experiences are referred to as "sensemaking factors" (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). Fundamental sensemaking factors influencing meaningfulness through work include values and identity and work orientation (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Glavas & Kelley, 2014; Wrzesniewski, 2003).

2.3 Work orientation

Employees all have experiences, which they interpret differently due to individual characteristics. In order to understand how employees perceive these experiences, it is important to know how they see their jobs. The way employees view their jobs and the impact it has on their lives is called ‘work orientation’. Work orientation is an essential component of sensemaking that clarifies the reasons behind and the way in which people generally find meaning at work (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Wrzesniewski, 2003). According to Wrzesniewski (2003), finding meaning is a personal and subjective experience, and it's crucial to investigate not just the nature of the work but also the relationship between an employee and the organization they work for. Employees can make sense of their work, and seek meaning, in three different ways: job oriented, career oriented or calling oriented (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Glavas & Kelley, 2014; Nazir & Islam, 2020; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Employees can have different work orientations, as it individually differs what they attach most value to and what they feel gives meaning to their jobs. Having a strong job orientation entails that the employees’ focus lies primarily on the financial benefits that can help provide for one’s family or facilitate desires outside of the workplace. A strong career orientation means that promotions and career advancement are considered most important, possibly improving social standing, self-esteem and power. Lastly, employees with a strong calling orientation view their work as a way to contribute to society and do something good for the world (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Glavas & Kelley, 2014; Nazir & Islam, 2020; Wrzesniewski, 2003).

It is not the work itself that defines an employees’ experience of the work, as the different kinds of orientations can be found in all kinds of jobs (Wrzesniewski, 2003). However, the kind of work orientation an employee has can affect how they structure their own work and tasks to make it more joyful and meaningful to them; they try to align their work with their own values. According to Alagaraja and Shuck (2015), individuals with a work orientation that aligns with the organizational culture are more likely to exhibit high levels of engagement due to the congruence between their personal values and those of the organization.

2.4 Employee Engagement

There are well-researched assumptions regarding the importance of employee engagement (EE), which are supported by empirical data. For example, various studies suggest that increased EE can enhance job and task performance, productivity, affective and continuance commitment, customer service, organizational citizenship behaviors, discretionary effort, levels of psychological climate, and lastly, significantly reduce turnover intention (Christian et al., 2011; Rich et al., 2010; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Additionally, businesses that effectively develop an engaged workforce have higher safety ratings, overall revenue generation, levels of profit, and growth (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). These outcomes demonstrate how important it is to pay attention to employee engagement.

Duthler and Dhanesh (2018) describe the idea of employee engagement as: “an employee who is cognitively, affectively and behaviorally ‘present’, absorbed and dedicated while performing an organizational role” (pp. 456). Several other authors also use these three dimensions to identify employee engagement: cognitive (intellectual), affective (emotional) and social (physical or behavioral) (Kahn, 1990; Soane et al., 2012). The cognitive dimension is defined as intellectual engagement and refers to the extent to which somebody is intellectually absorbed in their work. The emotional dimension is defined as affective engagement and relates to the degree to which someone experiences a state of positive affect relating to their job. Lastly, the physical dimension is defined as social or behavioral engagement, meaning the degree to which someone is socially connected to their work environment and shares common values with their colleagues (Soane et al., 2012).

The extent to which employees can be cognitively, affectively or behaviorally present is found to be influenced by meaningfulness (Kaur & Mittal, 2020). The more employees feel their work has a greater meaning and is more than a basic need for survival, the more they will become attached and immersed in their work and the organization. Additionally, meaningfulness is not only found *in work*, but also *at work*, through employees’ membership in the organization (Glavas, 2016). When employees perceive value and goal congruence with the organization, they will feel that they can be themselves at work and become more engaged (Kahn, 1990).

3. Method

3.1 Research design

Seventeen semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain rich, primary, qualitative data on the process of sensemaking of newly hired employees at a higher education institution, to investigate the relationship between different factors affecting this process. A narrative research approach in combination with structured questions about the values and strategic goals of a university in the Netherlands allowed the employees to share their stories in order to analyze and understand how they make sense of their experiences. Using this university's strategy as input created a context in which employees were able to explain how they relate to the new organization and made it possible to explore how they reflect on its goals and which values are important to them in this process. It enabled an exploration of the effects of work orientation and engagement on the sensemaking process, without explicitly inquiring. By highlighting mechanisms rather than numbers, case studies like this can provide insights that may not be obtainable with numerical methodologies (Rowley, 2002). The study was conducted with approval from the university's ethics committee (req. nr. 230984). Specific information about the concerning university and its strategy has been reframed or blacked out for anonymization reasons. This also regards the content of the interview guide and the codebook in the appendices.

3.2 Research context

The research was conducted within the context of the organizational strategy of a university in the Netherlands. This university is a higher education institution of which its research and education is currently organized within five faculties. Each faculty consists of different departments, research themes and projects. The university's has a ten-year strategy which is built upon core values and strategic goals to guide it in its mission and vision, which has a focus on corporate social responsibility. The organizational strategy of this university provides an interesting research context for examining how newly hired employees make sense of the strategy through their own experiences. It has the interesting advantage of investigating how the newly implemented strategy is perceived by employees who do not have a frame of reference in terms of the previous strategy.

3.3 Participants

All participants were recruited using several inclusion criteria. For the purpose of this research, it was decided that all of the participants should be full-time employees of the scientific staff (excluding solely PhD students), with a minimum work duration of one year and a maximum of five, and should be distributed as much as possible across all faculties and functions.

The reason for including only full-time employees of the scientific staff, excluding PhD students, was to increase the likelihood that participants have encountered, or have an adequate involvement in the strategy and that they have a basic understanding of the organization and its values.

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This was also the reason to include only employees who have been working at the university for at least one year. Furthermore, participants must not have been employed for over five years; the maximum amount of years allows for a selection of employees who have had zero to little experience with the previous strategy and thus have a limited frame of reference in relation to incumbent employees. In order to obtain a representative sample, participants across all five faculties and job functions were to be included. To achieve this, stratified random sampling was used to allow for the facilitation of sub-group research (Iliyasu & Etikan, 2021).

Employees who fit the inclusion criteria were selected from the university's LinkedIn employment page, after which they have been approached via e-mail and were invited to participate in a live or online interview. In total, 76 employees were approached, of which 10 indicated they did not want to participate because of time management issues, and 49 did not respond to the initial e-mail and reminder. Eventually, 17 participants were gathered and interviewed.

Of the seventeen participants, eight were male and nine were female. The distribution of academic degrees was twelve assistant professors, three lecturers and two researchers. Participants from every faculty were interviewed. Furthermore, the sample consisted of participants across eleven different nationalities. A summary of these distributions can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Distributions

Gender	Number of Participants
Male	8
Female	9

Academic degree	
Assistant professor	12
Lecturer	3
Researcher	2

Nationality	
Dutch	6
Italian	2
Chinese	1
Lebanese	1
Chilean	1
Russian	1
American	1

Ethiopian	1
German	1
Brazilian	1
Iranese	1

3.4 Interview guide

Based on the literature review, an interview guide was developed. The interview guide allowed for semi-structuration of the interviews, with open-ended questions to which participants could give in depth-answers. The aim of the interviews was to go into depth about the way the employees view the university and its values and goals, and to investigate what factors influence this perception. Therefore, the two main themes of the guide were organizational values and the strategic goals of the university, as they are the foundation of the strategy and provided a fruitful ground for eliciting statements and elaborations on employees' orientation and engagement without explicitly asking.

For the first theme, it was decided to show nineteen example organizational values and not only the three which are used in the university's strategy. This was done so the participant could choose which ones they thought were most representative, but also to maintain an open space in which the participant could elaborate on which values they might feel are underrepresented. If only the three values of the university's strategy were shown and asked about, there would be a chance that the participant simply did not notice them or not find them the most representative, or that they would have an acquiescence tendency, meaning that they will simply agree with what is stated as respondents have a tendency to choose a positive response option (Finlay & Lyons, 2002). For the second theme it was decided to include only the strategic goals as stated in the strategy, as this is a theme too broad to ask open questions about or to include examples for.

For both of the consecutive themes, participants were asked to first elaborate on the values and next on the strategic goals that were most visible to them. Subsequently, more in-depth questions were asked for each mentioned value and goal, starting with general questions, followed by a work-related view and possibly elaborating on an example, and further narrowing the scope to a more personal understanding.

This top-down approach is used to guide the participant in their thought process. By first asking general questions, such as "*Which values do you think represent the university the most?*" and "*Why do you think these values are most representative?*", the participant is forced to narrow their thoughts from a general perception into more specific and tangible examples, allowing the researcher to better understand what the participant understands by a certain value or goal. The next questions ask for a more personal contemplation, by inquiring what the mentioned values and goals mean in their own work and to what extent they personally find them important. In the case a participant has trouble answering this

question, the researcher asks for a concrete example, aiding the participant in organizing their thoughts and facilitating a way to explain how they link the values to their own experiences.

3.5 Interview procedure

Before starting the interview, participants were given information about the intention of the research and their rights, and were asked for consent to the recording and to the terms of the interview. After verbal agreement, the interview began with introductory questions such as “What is your impression of the organization?” and “Why did you choose [this organization] as a workplace?”, to make participants feel at ease and create an elaborating narrative environment. After this introduction, nineteen example organizational values (Appendix A) were shown to go into depth about their perception of the most visible, personally important, and/or absent values. The researcher asked questions such as “What do these values mean in your own work?” and “To what extent do you personally find these values important?”. Starting with this open approach allowed the participants to share their experiences without the researcher leading the narrative.

Next, the strategic goals of the university were shown and shortly explained to the participants, with the accompanying question to elaborate on which one(s) were most visible to them at the university. In this part of the interview the participants were guided more in the topics of the strategy but follow-up questions regarding their interpretation and experiences remained open-ended, by for example asking “To what extent do you feel this goal is important and why?” and “What does this goal mean for you and your work?”.

Lastly, several concluding questions were asked to gain further insight into what the participants find important about working at the university and what values or goals they feel are still missing or could be improved. Following an open approach, in which participants were led to evaluate their work environment, this section was aimed at filling the gaps in recollection that might have been overlooked at the beginning of the process. The complete interview guide can be found in Appendix B. The duration of the interviews was between 17 and 57 minutes (on average 32 minutes).

3.6 Data analysis

After conducting the interviews, the recorded audio was transcribed and pseudonymized. The qualitative data was analyzed in three rounds of coding, through a combination of deductive and inductive content analysis. The codebook eventually consisted of several sensemaking factors that were derived from the literature (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Choongo et al., 2019; Edwards & Cable, 2009; Kwantes & Glazer, 2017; Tsirogianni et al., 2014), completed and refined by additional codes and categories that derived throughout the coding process. An example of such a code is “Experiences”, which was developed to refer to the employee’s positive and negative experiences. A summary of the codebook can be found in Table 2.

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Table 2

Summary of codebook

Code	Sub-codes	Definition
1. Engagement	1.1 Intellectual Engagement	The extent to which someone is intellectually absorbed in their work.
	1.2 Affective Engagement	The degree to which someone experiences positive emotions relating to their job.
	1.3 Social Engagement	The degree to which someone is socially connected to their work environment and colleagues.
2. Orientation	2.1 Job orientation	A (strong) focus on material awards that can help fulfil ambitions outside of work and/or contribute to one's self-concept of being a provider for one's family.
	2.2 Career orientation	A (strong) focus on promotion and advancement which can improve self-esteem and increase social standing and power.
	2.3 Calling orientation	A (strong) focus on contributing to the common good and improving the world.
3. Values	3.1 Personal values	Values that drive attitude, behaviour and decision-making.
	3.2 Social values	Values which are used to define and shape the nature of a social collective.
	3.3 Work values	Values that define the importance someone gives to work-related outcomes.
4. Value & goal congruence	4.1 Value & goal congruence	The degree to which the participant's personal values and goals match with the organization's values and goals.
	4.2 Value & goal incongruence	The degree to which the participant's personal values and goals do not match with the organization's values and goals.
5. Experiences	5.1 Negative experiences	There was an event in the workplace that has made a negative impression.

5.2 Positive experiences

There was an event in the workplace that has made a positive impression.

After the codebook was finalized (Appendix C), it was discussed and agreed upon with a second coder who had not been involved in the research. The two researchers then individually coded three interviews to be able to assess the intercoder reliability. This accounted for 15 percent of the total corpus, which is considered an adequate proportion to measure intercoder reliability (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). To make sure that the sample was representative for the whole corpus, the sample included interviews of differing lengths. Furthermore it included interviews that were conducted at the beginning, middle and end of the data collection period. The intercoder reliability for each interview category can be found in Table 3.

After the coding by the two researchers was concluded, Cohen's Kappa was calculated to test the intercoder reliability. The five value categories reached a mean score of .76, ranging from substantially sufficient to almost perfect agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

Table 3

Intercoder reliability by interview category

Category	Coded elements	Cohen's Kappa
Engagement	17	.62
Orientation	13	.66
Values	49	.77
Value & goal congruence	38	.89
Experiences	10	.86
<i>Mean score</i>		.76

4. Results

The following chapter describes how newly hired employees make sense of their experiences at the university. Out of the extensive amount of data, the most pertinent results will be made concrete. Each section starts by providing an overview of the distribution of the different subcodes, followed by a description per individual subcode, including a summary of the outcomes and the interrelations between the subcode and the three different types of values. At the end of this chapter the co-occurrence between the main codes is investigated.

4.1 Engagement

Of the seventeen interviewed employees, fifteen have mentioned at least one of the three types of engagement. From these three types, ‘Social Engagement’ was mentioned most by employees (n=52). The two other types, ‘Affective Engagement’ (n=15), and ‘Intellectual Engagement’ (n=10), received considerably less attention. With regard to the latter two codes, only positive experiences were mentioned, while for ‘Social Engagement’, employees also referred to some negative experiences linked to it. Table 5 gives an overview of the most important type of engagement for the individual participants and the frequency of positive and negative experiences shared.

Table 5

Most important type of engagement for each participant and distribution of sentiments

Code	Number of participants	Frequency total	Sentiments		
			<i>Negative</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Positive</i>
Social Engagement	12	52	12	7	33
Affective Engagement	2	15	.	.	15
Intellectual Engagement	1	10	.	1	9
No type mentioned	2

4.1.1 Social Engagement

Social engagement was considered to be the most important form of engagement at the university for the academics; they have a need to feel connected, relaxed and at home while at work. The employees who experienced a high level of social engagement found the university environment to be welcoming and expressed satisfaction and a desire to continue working there. They experience social engagement at the university through the development of personal connections with colleagues in-and outside their departments. The academics feel that a requirement to establish these connections is a friendly environment. This gives them a sense of belonging and comfort and makes the work environment feel similar to being at home, therefore making it easier for them to develop social connections. When they

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do not experience a friendly environment and experience feelings of isolation, it makes it difficult for them to connect to people from other departments and to people outside the university.

The need to be socially connected is reflected upon and explained by the academics through frequently mentioning certain social values, with the most importance attached to ‘inclusiveness’, ‘diversity’, and ‘openness’. In the case of this university, the employees mentioned two aspects they perceived very positively relating to inclusiveness: creating a social network and having English as lingua franca. First, perceived inclusiveness facilitates the creation of a social network, enhancing an employee’s social engagement at the university. Second, having English as lingua franca is also important for socially-focused employees as it is said to increase feelings of inclusiveness. It makes communication, and therefore connection, between colleagues easier. One of the interviewed assistant professors explains this through the following quote (interview 3):

Especially having English as lingua franca is very helpful. My colleagues, as soon as I'm around, you know, it makes sense that if they are Dutch, they speak in Dutch, but as soon as I'm around, they switch to English. So that's very inclusive.

Furthermore, employees perceive the presence of diversity as very important for stimulating social engagement at the university; they explain that it is linked to feeling at home and bridging gaps between countries, which facilitates the creation and sustaining of personal connections. Employees feel that the diverse environment of the university has a positive effect on feeling included and ‘at home’, as this environment welcomes many different (ethnic) backgrounds and nationalities. They use diversity not only to explain how they find similarities with their own culture to feel at home, but also to explain that they find coherence in the fact that they are all different, due to the very international environment. What is noticed is that the only employees that mention diversity in relation to social engagement are international employees, Dutch employees do not seem to attach as much importance to this value in explaining their social engagement at the university. Furthermore, a member of one faculty talks about how internationals who come to the university can serve as a connector between different countries, and how they can provide a source of diversity (interview 12, researcher):

Yeah, especially in [this faculty], it’s an institution that’s originally established to bring in internationals, train them and then send them back to their country, or, they could also stay here to help bridge the gap between these two countries. Originally it was established to be international and very diverse, so you don't feel separated or excluded.

Lastly, socially-focused employees emphasized the open character of the university as an important characteristic for feeling socially engaged. However, not all employees were positive about this value, some explained that the ‘lack of openness’ had a negative impact on social engagement. The employees who were positive about the university’s openness, especially emphasized the supportive environment

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at the university. They explain that they appreciate the possibility to have open and honest discussions between professors, colleagues, and students, and that there is a good relationship between these groups as everyone is eager and willing to help each other. According to the academics, openness is very important to create this supportive and helpful atmosphere, as with openness comes approachability, which makes it easier to lend a helping hand to colleagues and further improves collegial relationships. One academic explains how a *lack* of openness (and inclusiveness and diversity), is experienced extra negatively, as it can lead to an environment which is unapproachable and unsocial, leaving them feeling excluded or isolated. This makes it more challenging for them to make personal connections and decreases their social engagement at the university. This employee illustrated a lack of these social values, by elaborating on the challenges related to language barriers for international employees through the following quote (interview 17, assistant professor):

Even when we are in the coffee break, they talk in Dutch and if I'm the only one English speaker there, then I just look at them. So yes, they tell me that I need to learn Dutch. I'm learning. But the thing is that, openness and being social, you know, or inclusiveness or diversity, all can be affected like this. Then I sit, I tell them that maybe you put yourself in my shoes. If a lot of foreign people are gathering and you are the only Dutch and we start speaking in our language, what do you think? The first thing that comes to your mind is that they are talking about you and you feel really isolated.

Additionally, next to the most important social values, socially-focused employees explained how certain work values are also important to them in creating and improving work relationships and personal connections. Especially 'teamwork' and 'cooperation' are used, intertwined with 'collaboration'. The connection between collaboration and social engagement at the university is one that was made very frequently; employees explain how being socially engaged and having close contact with colleagues makes it easier to collaborate with them. They describe that they feel very positive about the experienced high level of teamwork as this fosters social connection, and ascribe this to the way research is organized between groups and to their perception that this value is inherently ingrained in the Dutch culture. One employee even mentioned that the collaborative work environment was part of the reason they chose the university as a workplace, following a recommendation by an incumbent employee. This relationship between social engagement at the university and collaboration fosters collegial support and allows employees to: apply for grants together, give guest lectures for each other's courses, and receive collegial appreciation for their work. This improved collegial support, in turn, enhances employees' collegial connection and therefore level of social engagement further. The relationship between social engagement and collaboration is emphasized by a researcher who explained

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why he chose cooperation and teamwork as the core values of the university and whether he personally finds these values important (interview 10):

Absolutely. Absolutely. Together you stand stronger. So this is very strongly my point of view.

You cannot do research alone. Neither can you teach students alone. You obviously need colleagues, and *friends*, to help you out. So for sure, this is one of the main values I would say.

It is noticed that the employee also used the term 'friends' to indicate colleagues, highlighting the need for a high level of social engagement and teamwork to be able to work properly. This intention of working together and helping each other is very much present according to the interviewed employees, however, they point out that everyone is very busy and that there is not always time and room to do so, as one of the employees (interview 3, assistant professor) states: "It could be done more often. But of course, you know, you also need to consider that we are all super busy, lots of teachings going on. So it's also difficult to find a place in the agenda".

4.1.2 Affective Engagement

To be affectively engaged means that an employee feels positive and enthusiastic about their work and work environment, and that they identify with their work and/or the university. Half of the interviewed individuals indicated to be affectively engaged, having a need for a cozy, supportive and friendly environment. Several employees talked about the alignment of the university's values with their own, mentioning their identification with the organization (interview 3, assistant professor): "I think in general, there is quite an alignment between my own values and the [ones of the university]. So that's also why I think I like working here because, you know, I can really identify with the organization".

Employees explained their affective engagement by elaborating on positive experiences in which the values teamwork and close collaboration came forward. This can be explained by the notion that through working together, employees can become more socially engaged: "It feels like a little club of people working together" (interview 2, lecturer). Accordingly, social engagement indicates positive relationships with colleagues, making the work environment feel more comfortable, which brings forth feelings of happiness and positive affect related to working at the university. This relation between social and affective engagement becomes even more clear as some employees mention the challenges of adapting to a new country and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this process. One of the assistant professors explains how this period of isolation made it difficult to navigate the new work environment and digest new information on their own, making them feel overwhelmed and therefore less affectively engaged (interview 17):

When I joined, I was really busy with my job. And then when Corona started, everything has changed. I would say that I was like overwhelmed about everything, to digest everything. So now I think I'm improving in this regard because I could say that previous year and this year, when I receive an invitation I look at it. Maybe at that time my mind was full.

4.1.3 Intellectual Engagement

While it could be expected that intellectual engagement is a relevant type of engagement in HEI's, it was the least prevalent form of engagement among the newly hired academics at this university. Only one of the employees appeared to be significantly intellectually engaged, with a stronger focus on being invested in their work and tasks than being socially or affectively engaged. They attach great importance to the quality of their work, and have a need to be stimulated for their teaching and research while also stimulating others to become more engaged. However, there were still some experiences by other participants that were also linked to this type of engagement. Four of the interviewed employees mention experiences which had a positive effect on their intellectual engagement, such as the realization of successful project or activity initiatives, the ability to have intellectual discussions with students and colleagues, and the feeling of doing important work which shows the competence of one's faculty or department. The participants explain their intellectual engagement by stating they feel entrusted with responsibility and have control over their work, while being supported by their colleagues and higher-ups in developing ideas.

Employees who appear to be intellectually engaged are very focused on task-related values, mostly elaborating on their experiences through using the work values 'performance', 'competence', 'cooperation' and 'control'. The perceived presence of these values had a positive effect on how intellectually engaged the employees were. The following quote by one of the employees illustrates how being intellectually engaged increases the extent to which the task-related value performance is perceived as important (interview 11, assistant professor):

Well, my personal point of view is that everyone should feel a pressure to perform, but it should come from themselves. If it comes from the university, then something is not working very well. I hope it should be like that for every single academic, that you have interests and motivation and not that the university is putting pressure on you.

They further explain that they experience greater investment in their work when they have the ability to exert control over their tasks, and mention how cooperation can help to deliver exceptional work which results in feelings of competence and increased motivation. The importance of cooperation is stressed by several employees who have pointed out that for executing tasks correctly, help from colleagues is often needed (interview 17, assistant professor): "Of course, I always go to my colleagues to seek their advice, my senior colleagues, and that's what they like about me as well. I'm open to any comments". In this case, the social value 'openness' comes forward again. Employees explain how an open work environment and collegial atmosphere can have a positive effect on the level of intellectual engagement someone experiences; being intellectually engaged can help create an open atmosphere as there is a mutual need for seeking advice, similarly, the perception of an open environment can lower the social barriers to seek this advice and improve the level of intellectual engagement.

4.2 Orientation

Employees can have different motivations for seeking employment at specific universities and the professional choices they make during their careers. Participants mostly shared experiences about having a ‘Career Orientation’ (n=58), followed by a less prevalent ‘Calling orientation’ (n=12) and ‘Job Orientation’ (n=7). It was noticed that almost half of the codes assigned to career orientation were related to negative experiences, while for job and calling orientation most experiences were positive. Table 6 gives an overview of the most important type of orientation for the individual participants.

Table 6

Most important type of orientation for each participant and distribution of sentiments

Code	Number of participants	Frequency total	Sentiments		
			<i>Negative</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Positive</i>
Career orientation	12	58	26	5	27
Calling orientation	4	12	1	1	10
Job orientation	1	7	1	3	3
No type mentioned

4.2.1 Career orientation

The employees having a career orientation were especially focused on promotion and advancement during their professional careers as teachers and/or researchers at the university. Every experience with the perceived values or goals of the university which they felt minimizes their chance of career advancement was perceived negatively, while experiences that enhance this chance were found to be very positive. They highlighted the importance of guidance, the need for better communication and transparency in decision-making processes, and the lack of support for personal development. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of international collaboration and the reputation of the university's programs, as well as concerns about obtaining funding for research. Lastly, several employees shared their view on the organizational complexity of the university, having mixed feelings about the grandness and bureaucratic way of working. Despite these challenges, there is a positive view of the university's atmosphere and potential for career development.

Career-oriented employees explain how the work values 'teamwork', 'cooperation', 'continuous improvement', 'entrepreneurism', 'control', and 'power' influence or can be influenced by having a career orientation. A lack of these values was perceived very negatively by the employees, as they believe they need these values to be present to help them in their careers. The employees mention especially continuous improvement very frequently; it has a strong connection to career orientation as the latter is defined by a focus on professional advancement.

Another frequently mentioned value is control, linked to entrepreneurship. Employees explain that the university allows them to be entrepreneurial and to work out their own ideas, while helping them improve themselves. According to the employees, this experienced freedom, flexibility and feeling of control to be able to choose your own path at the university increases internal motivation.

Furthermore, employees mentioned collaboration to be essential for advancing in their careers at the university. Multiple employees explain how they chose this university specifically to develop a network of collaborators in their area of expertise, often mentioning the superiority of the university in this field and additionally highlighting that this university provides the right opportunities and freedom to establish collaborations herein. Moreover, they explain that collaboration emphasizes growth and improvement as a team, and motivates to push the whole university to a higher level. In this context, collaboration does not only apply to colleagues and other academics, but also to the working field. They state that it is essential to know how to work together with the industry and reach out to companies if you want to really understand what their problems are and how your research applies to this. The relationship between collaboration and career orientation therefore does not move merely in one direction, as collaboration increases employees' focus on advancement and, similarly, being focused on advancement can in turn result in more collaboration between colleagues and extra-organizational partners. Accordingly, when employees experience a *lack* of collaboration and have difficulty making

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connections and creating a professional network, they experience this extra negatively as this makes developing as an academic really hard.

A lack of collaboration is also linked to a lack of power. Some employees mention that they perceive the distribution of power is not entirely fair, stating that senior colleagues have more academic power and privileges and indicating a lack of collaboration between junior and senior academics. Career-oriented employees seem to be experience this as extra negatively as this has an effect on their professional chances. One of the employees shares that it is hard to 'get in' the consortia and lobbies of the senior colleagues, resulting in more difficulty attaining funding for research:

They know the system well and they're connected since many years. They get the money from the government and they share the money amongst themselves. And then typically the young generations who are, you know, thriving for doing more research and they're really committed, they get nothing out of it (interview 15, assistant professor).

Furthermore, career-oriented employees often mentioned the social values 'diversity', 'responsibility and caring', and 'openness'. They feel that diversity allows them to better cooperate and work together with different colleagues, resulting in an exchange of knowledge and experience, while having a positive effect on motivation (interview 4, lecturer):

Yeah having this level of diversity, this means that you are dealing with different people with different backgrounds, with different methodologies of working. So you can cooperate with them. You can gain from their experience, from their background, related to the teamwork. It is a good idea that every work within the group or within the team is divided into multiple tasks and by doing a small task that can contribute to a big task and give you a high motivation to continue.

However, some employees have the feeling that the university only gives attention to academics who broadcast themselves and their research loudly and overlooks the more modest ones, making it difficult to professionally stand out from one's peers and indicating that diversity is not yet fully incorporated.

Furthermore, in terms of openness, career-oriented employees feel that the university is not always very transparent in the way they communicate about the roadmap of requirements needed to advance in your career, which they experience as very negative as this makes it harder for them to climb the professional ladder. They highlight how difficult it is to get the right information on what steps to take to promote. It was noticed that the university's organizational complexity was a recurring theme, as all of the career-oriented employees shared some experiences regarding this subject. Employees have different opinions on this. Some view the university as not complex, being a cozy and personal environment, however, others find it bureaucratic and feel that the university is too big to have a strong

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working atmosphere. On the one hand there is a recognition for the well-planned and organized nature of the organization, with its many processes and procedures in place. On the other, almost half of the employees who mentioned the complexity of the university stated they think it is *too* bureaucratic and relies too much on these kind of processes, making carrying out initiatives very slow. The Dutch employees mostly mentioned the size of the university having an impact on its complexity, while the international employees pointed out the organized and bureaucratic side, indicating that they feel it might be a bit too much.

4.2.2 *Calling orientation*

Calling-oriented employees talk about how they believe that it is important for their work and research to improve the wellbeing of individuals. They value the connection with the public and believe that their work should be beneficial to society. They also emphasize the importance of open science and making research accessible. It was noticed that every employee with a calling orientation mentioned the importance of a strong alignment between their own values and the university's.

Especially the social values 'humanity', 'responsibility and caring', 'respect for individuals', 'inclusiveness' and 'openness' were found to be very important. Employees place the value humanity central in explaining how important it is for them to help other people and make a bigger contribution to society. When talking about the university, employees say that its principle of having an open science approach and making research available for disadvantaged groups plays a big part in this (interview 8, assistant professor):

I do believe that if we make our science available, open, and also accessible in terms of language, also in terms of how we communicate it, then it brings a lot of value to things, to groups that I care about personally [...] and who don't necessarily have the resources to do this scientific work themselves.

The employees state that the humanity aspect means more to them than work-related values do, however, it is noticed that multiple employees *do* implicitly connect teamwork and team effort to making societal contributions. The following quote illustrates this, while simultaneously highlighting how especially the real and direct impact motivates employees to keep helping people:

In my PhD work I helped more than 100 young people quit smoking. That is where I feel that I did something good. It's not about the publication that I did about that work, which is nice for reputation and competency, but I think what really makes me going is those hundred people that I helped, not *me* necessarily, but who *we* as a team helped. (interview 1, assistant professor)

Furthermore, several employees say they find it very important to do work that is in line with their personal beliefs and values. One of the assistant professors (interview 1) states the following:

So what *I* find important and what *I* want to see in my work... my values basically determine which projects I do and which projects I don't do. So it's a very explicit act of every year thinking about why do I do all the work that I do, and what is important to me, and what is the impact that I want to make and that's based on what I value.

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So by doing work that is in line with their personal values, employees can more easily work toward making the kind of impact in the world that they personally strive for and believe in. This shows how having a calling orientation is extremely closely connected to someone's personal values.

4.2.3 Job orientation

Job-oriented employees look at their work as a means to accommodate other ambitions outside work or to provide for one's family. In this research context, the questioned employees share personal reasons for choosing to work at the university, including better living conditions for their families: "I came to the [university] for professional and personal reasons. From the personal point of view, I knew because I wanted a better quality of life for my family. Yeah. For my kids and my wife" (interview 11, assistant professor). They are focused on the challenges of assessing teaching quality and the need to value teaching more in academia. Lastly, they mention the support provided by the university, such as language lessons, to help immigrants integrate into Dutch society. The underlying mechanisms which relate to having a job orientation were investigated by linking them to the three different kinds of values employees could experience within the university as their workplace, however, there were no explicit or implicit connections found.

4.3 *The interplay between career orientation and social engagement*

Career oriented employees seem to assign great value to social engagement, and are strongly concerned with personalized talent development and the improvement of the university's reputation. First, the career-oriented employees explain their social engagement by using values such as teamwork, collaboration, and cooperation in elaborating upon how these help make it easier to share ideas with colleagues. The employees feel connected to their colleagues and are socially engaged. This connectedness helps in gaining feedback from peers and allows and motivates to keep improving and developing oneself even more, highlighting an increased focus on career advancement:

Yeah, as I have said, there is no one man show in the world, and in work there should be collaboration between different members, because whenever you share ideas with other people, then you are sharing their minds. And I think the teamwork helps you to share ideas with the people, gaining feedback, and trying to improve. And even in teamwork, somehow teamwork gives you the ability to, or, it increases your motivation, especially if you are a productive person in your team, then you will be motivated to be developed more and more and more. (interview 4, lecturer)

However, the employees also state if they experience a *lack* of social engagement, different problems arise which make it difficult for them to improve in their career. These problems include difficulty expanding ones professional network, and having trouble connecting to the local culture and community. Some employees indicated that a continued lack of social engagement would be a reason to leave the organization.

Second, personalized talent development was noticed and valued especially by career oriented employees. They mention several factors to explain how they view and experience this, namely; the presence of HR team assistance to discuss career growth, evaluation and professional consultancy, support from supervisors, support from colleagues, annual reviews, and autonomy in choosing topics of interest. However, some feel that the steps to take in the career development path for academics are rather unclear and not tailored for individual situations. They feel that the criteria are not very objective and transparent, and state that "the criteria are more related to having an impact on society, which in principle is wonderful, but in practice is very difficult to assess" (interview 3, assistant professor). These career oriented employees find it very important that they know *how* they can work towards promotion and advancement, something which some of these employees feel is still lacking and which results in decreased satisfaction.

Third, another strong focus of the academics that is often linked to career orientation is the improvement of the university's reputation and its connections outside the university, by for example partnering with other institutions. Career oriented employees frequently mention how important it is to

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them that knowledge is shared throughout the world, highlighting value this brings to society and research. An example of this is illustrated by the following quote (interview 2, lecturer):

In the minor that I'm teaching now we also have students from abroad, quite a handful, a lot of students from Spain, from Korea, and some other countries. And I think it's really nice that they can also take the education that we offer them here to their own job development which they might want to continue in their own country. And I think that spread of knowledge that you could gain in some countries could be very valuable for the knowledge that you might already have, or the job that you might want to enter. So yeah, I think that's also really important.

Next to transferring knowledge, another significant point that the employees consider in this is the university's international reputation. Several employees mention that the university excels in certain areas and that they specifically chose to work at this university for this. Having a career orientation seems to increase the importance employees assign to the university's reputation and its connections outside the university.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to investigate how engagement and orientation are evaluated by newly hired academic staff and influence their evaluation of the university they are working for. Through an exploratory approach, participants were able to provide in-depth insights and motivations on their experiences at the university.

5.1 Main findings

The findings highlight the importance of career orientation and social engagement in the sensemaking process of newly hired academics; they try to make sense of their new work environment by placing stimuli into frameworks, a process which is influenced by their focus on professional development and need for social connections. Because they find meaning in their work through these factors, they explain their experiences accordingly.

That the majority of academics holds a career orientation became especially apparent through their strong focus on increased opportunities for personal development at the university and the improvement of the university's reputation; aspects which are greatly valued by career-oriented employees. This study shows that the academics attach the greatest importance to the goals of the university which match their own, and navigate their experiences through evaluating to what extent the university provides opportunities to achieve these goals. They experience a lack of resources, support or opportunities that relate to personal development and the improvement of the university's reputation as very negative, as this negatively affects the achievement of their personal goals. The employees explain their experiences with personal development through mentioning that there is a lot of freedom in choosing your own career path at the university, and that having this kind of control increases internal motivation to further develop oneself. Furthermore, the employees attach great value to a good university reputation and recognition, as this can also lead to several professional benefits for them.

Even though social engagement, with its *collective* nature, is also considered to be essential to the academics, these findings relating to career orientation indicate a focus on *individual* gains and a certain individualistic mindset when it comes to the meaning of their work, which would not be expected in the field of research and education. This finding is an interesting result and can prove to be a challenge for HEI's as their strategies often have a strong focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR) –like the university in this study. CSR is said to offer a perfect way for people to find meaningfulness through their work, as it broadens the concept of work from being merely a materialistic and individualistic means to including prosocial and pro-environmental goals (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). This particular university's strategy, therefore, would be expected to have resulted in the academics finding increased fulfillment in their work through non-individualistic goals, such as sustainability, instead of individualistic professional goals. As such, this finding could highlight a discrepancy in overall fit between the organization and employees' goals and values.

Another interesting result, which was not explicitly questioned, is that all career-oriented employees mentioned the organizational complexity of the university. Furthermore, it appeared there was a distinction in the way Dutch and international employees relate to organizational complexity, as the Dutch employees merely mentioned the grandness of the university and the international employees were solely focused on its extensive bureaucratic processes.

With regard to engagement, the results especially indicate the importance of social engagement for the academics in making sense of their experiences. This process is mostly influenced by the significance they assign to the social values diversity, openness and inclusiveness, they use these to explain their need for social engagement within the organization. Employees connect these values to improved working relationships; they feel these are essential in lowering social barriers and connecting to colleagues. A lack of these values is therefore logically experienced very negatively, as this results in an unfulfilled need for social connection, indicating a discrepancy in the need-supply fit and person-organization fit. The value diversity was mentioned to be especially important for international employees, and less for Dutch employees. Furthermore, the employees stress that having strong personal connections at work is the reason for their sense of belonging, satisfaction, and their desire to stay at the university. They find meaningfulness not only *in*, but also *at* work through these social connections. As the employees experience great alignment between their own values and the university's, it indicates a good person-organization fit.

Lastly, a strong connection came forward between work orientation and employee engagement: employees need and use social engagement as a tool to achieve their professional goals and find meaning in their work. In other words: next to the meaningfulness they already experience through these social relationships, career-oriented employees also feel that these relationships are essential for them in order to achieve their professional goals, which is the main goal of their work. They use the values teamwork and continuous improvement to explain how working with diverse colleagues fosters a knowledge and experience exchange, which increases motivation to strive for professional advancement. Concludingly: the social connections people have at work are the basis people need for individual professional development.

5.2 Theoretical implications

By analyzing the factors that influence the underexplored sensemaking process of employees at a university, this study adds to the body of literature on individual sensemaking, work orientation, and engagement of newly hired academics in HEI's. It expands the knowledge on this particular level of analysis by zooming in on the role and experiences of individual academics at a HEI, a specific research context which overall still remains a relatively unexplored area in individual sensemaking research (Akella & Khoury, 2021). Some interesting results were found, providing implications for future research.

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By linking work orientation and value-goal congruence, this study showed that academics at HEI's are mostly career-oriented and are therefore especially focused on the goals of the university which relate to professional development. This follows the logic of earlier research on person-organization fit and need-supply fit. Person-organization fit entails the extent to which the employee's culture, goals and values are in line with those of the organization, while need-supply fit relates to the match between the needs of the employee and the opportunities and resources the organization provides (Cable & Derue, 2002; Saraç et al., 2014; Travagianti et al., 2017). When the academics perceive fit between their needs and values and how the university provides for and communicates them, they talk about their experiences in a positive way and vice versa. When talking about this perceived fit with the organization, academics explain how the experienced freedom relating to personal development leads to feelings of control and increased motivation. This finding is in accordance with the results of a study by Vilde et al. (2017) who state that experienced control over decisions results in increased felt trust by the organization, which is related to internal motivation and feelings of mastery; the belief that one's actions will result in a favorable outcome. Furthermore, they believe that a good university reputation can also help them further on their career path. This belief is in line with a study by Zinko and Rubin (2015), who found that a good organizational reputation can lead to increased career opportunities, improved job security, and enhanced professional standing.

Though there are studies that have showed a growing perceived importance of career development among scientists (Mallon et al., 2005), there is a paucity of research on the relationship between academics and having a career-orientation. There have mostly been studies done on, for example, academics' career-development experiences overall (Hollywood et al., 2020), scientists' careers in relation to societal changes (Mallon et al., 2005) or academics' strategic research agenda's (Santos et al., 2022). It is possible that employees at HEI's may be particularly interested in opportunities for professional growth and development as the culture of learning and growth within higher education institutions encourages employees to set goals, enhance their skills, and take proactive steps towards career advancement. Another reason could be that, due to the rapidly changing and increasingly competitive higher education sector, newcomers in academia feel that it is a necessity to focus on advancement in order to increase opportunities for permanent contracts and job security (Hollywood et al., 2020; Mallon et al., 2005). Further research is needed to dive into the factors that make new academics more focused on career improvement.

Adding to this, the finding that career orientation is the most prevalent among academics provides an interesting future research direction as many earlier research suggests academics are expected to have a calling orientation (Berthoin Antal & Rogge, 2020; Fetherston et al., 2021; Gradišek & Habe, 2020). Moreover, it is the *oldest* profession associated with having a calling (Berthoin Antal & Rogge, 2020). The context of HEI's has been linked to callings in multiple ways, as earlier research also found that most undergraduate students demonstrated to *have* a calling, *look for* a calling, or *found it to be relevant* in their search for careers (Santos et al., 2022). This could have been a predictor for callings

in academic staff as each academic has been an undergraduate student sometime prior to their employment. Moreover, a calling orientation would have been more likely to be found in these academics as the education profession can be regarded socially useful work in which one can find fulfillment –characteristics that are often linked to having a calling orientation (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). To explore whether this is an overall development in the field of academics and what factors could have influenced this shift in work orientation among this group, more studies are needed. Future research could also address questions relating to what effect this development has on organizational and employee outcomes and whether it would be preferable –and possible– to try to bring the main orientation in academics back to calling. This could be interesting as earlier research on callings shows that this type of orientation brings forth many positive outcomes for teachers at universities, such as: a greater focus on student’s well-being, the awareness of having a positive influence on students, commitment to students and energetic, enthusiastic teaching (Gradišek & Habe, 2020). They are found to work more efficiently, have a more positive attitude towards work, are more satisfied with life and work, are more committed to their organization and less inclined to change jobs. Furthermore, they strive for improvement, set themselves high work goals and have high expectations of their professional role (Gradišek & Habe, 2020). Investigating this development is especially needed in the context of HEI’s, as they generally stand out as organizations with an exceptional focus on non-individualistic and pro-social goals and making a contribution to society through education and research. A development in which the majority of employees is increasingly focused on personal and individual goals could therefore have a variety of interesting effects on this industry.

Furthermore, the results have showed that especially career-oriented employees seem to be affected by their perceptions of the complexity of the organization, and suggest that nationality influences these perceptions. While there is no direct evidence that certain employees are inherently more focused on organizational complexity, employees' attitudes, behaviors, and skills can be related to how they experience the complexity of the organization they work for. Employees who are more adaptive and have a higher tolerance for ambiguity may be more inclined to focus on and deal with organizational complexity. Further research could investigate whether career-oriented employees share certain characteristics that makes them more focused on this phenomenon. Secondly, a reason for the difference in perceived complexity between nationalities could be that Dutch employees might be better adjusted and used to the bureaucratic way of the Dutch university than their international peers, and international employees might be more used to the grandness of the organization due to previous experiences in other bigger international universities, however, this is just speculation. This study indicates the possibility of a relationship between these factors which earlier research has not yet investigated. More research is needed on perceived organizational complexity in HEI’s to be able to make statements about factors that influence the perception of local and international academics, in order to understand what HEI’s can do to minimize uncertainty during the sensemaking process of newly hired employees.

This study also found that social engagement in the workplace is very important to the academics. This result is not surprising, as social interaction is considered an essential aspect of sensemaking. In making sense of the dynamic and complex environment of a university, which is new to the newly hired employees, individuals place stimuli into frameworks and construct meanings through interactions with each other and their environment and respond to it accordingly (Asik-Dizdar & Esen, 2016). With regard to the values, the results indicate that diversity is more greatly valued by international than local academics. A reason for this could be that Dutch employees might already feel more at home, and have less need for diversity to connect with colleagues. Further research could dive into the difference in the need for diversity for local and international employees, so that HEI's can assess how to further narrow the possible gap between these two groups and enhance social connections in the workplace. This is important because shared values lead to better personal connections, which are extremely important to the academics as they claim this leads to a sense of belonging, satisfaction, and a desire to stay at the university. These findings are in line with studies done by Aguilera et al. (2007), Edwards and Cable (2009), Glavas (2016a) and Wollard and Shuck (2011), which have found that employees who share the organization's values are more likely to have a greater sense of meaningfulness, identity and belonging, are more satisfied in their jobs, and experience an increased engagement and desire to stay at the organization.

Lastly, there was a strong relation found between social engagement and career orientation. This is supported by earlier research which has found that a strong, collegial work atmosphere results in more strategic and successful careers for academics (Hollywood et al., 2020). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the interviewed employees seem to value collegiality greatly, as it has a chance to help them fulfill the need to advance in their careers. The finding that teamwork fosters knowledge exchange and increases motivation is supported by earlier research done by Abbas and Nawaz (2019), who claim that teamwork allows the group to benefit from its collective intelligence rather than relying solely on individual decision-making. They explain that teamwork fosters confidence, which is thought to be the most important precursor to motivation. Moreover, a study done by Soane et al. (2012), also shows that complicated and goal-oriented tasks call for active collaboration with others, requiring establishing and maintaining professional social interactions.

These results demonstrate the usefulness of taking a sensemaking perspective to investigate how newly hired employees at HEI's are influenced by work orientation, engagement and value-goal congruence and how this relates to their work environment.

5.3 Practical implications

As this study is one of the few studies that investigates sensemaking of newcomers at an individual level in the context of HEI's, there are some practical implications which can be made for HEI's which are interested in the way their employees make sense of their experiences at the university and the

organizational strategy. Though some general themes emerged, the results also showed that it is difficult to make generalizations about how an organization's strategy is perceived by its employees, as there are many different factors involved in the individual sensemaking process. This highlights the level of complexity for employees in understanding all aspects of an organizational strategy. This study has found that ambiguity, absence of knowledge and lack of transparency lead to negative experiences, especially for career-oriented employees, which was the majority of interviewed academics. This indicates the importance of adequate communication to minimize any information gaps experienced by employees.

Furthermore, the results revealed the importance that career-oriented employees assign to social engagement. Collaboration is the key factor linking career orientation and social engagement. To foster and nourish this relationship, it is essential that any barriers and obstacles relating to it are minimized by the HEI. The promotion of social values, especially diversity and openness, could help to enhance or create a collaborative work environment and consequently result in more socially engaged and satisfied career oriented employees.

Lastly, the study shows that it is important for HEI's to attract the right employees that fit their strategy. When they employ employees with strongly different goals and values than the organization, there will be an insufficient person-organization and need-supply fit, leading to decreased satisfaction and increased turnover intention.

5.4 Limitations

This study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the participants of this research were not equally distributed among all faculties and functions. This is because after approaching all employees who fit the research criteria, only a relatively small number answered and was willing to participate. This has limitations for the research results as members from different faculties and functions might have different characteristics due to the field they work in. However, the large number of assistant professors can be explained through the short period of employment, as academic staff at the university usually starts their academic careers at this position. Furthermore, important input might not have been gathered due to the sampling procedure. Many approached employees did not respond to the e-mail and the reminder, resulting in a research sample of employees who were invested enough in the university's strategy and had enough time to spare to be willing to participate. This excluded employees who were too busy with their regular tasks and employees who did not feel inclined or involved enough to participate. However, the study presents a multitude of different experiences, also including experiences from employees with a high workload and with ranging knowledge of and involvement in the university's strategy. The second limitation concerns the research context. This study only explored the individual sensemaking process at one HEI and its organizational strategy, though results can differ greatly for other universities with different characteristics and other organizational goals. This makes the research context quite narrow.

5.5 Conclusion

In summary, this study adds to previous research on the topic of individual sensemaking of newly hired employees at HEI's, by investigating different factors that influence the way an individual makes sense of their experiences at work. It is found that especially career orientation and social engagement are closely related factors in the sensemaking process, and that this process is influenced by the perceived value-goal congruence and fit of the employees, which in this study is linked to teamwork, continuous improvement, diversity, openness and inclusiveness. Lastly, this research provides theoretical and practical implications which can benefit HEI's in investigating the different factors that influence their employees' sensemaking and help attract the right employees to the organization. Future research is however needed in order to investigate further what possible relations there could be between employees at a HEI and career orientation, and between career orientation and perceived organizational complexity.

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Appendix A: Visualization of example organizational core values



Appendix B: Interview guide

(The interview guide is adjusted for anonymity reasons)

1. Introduction of research and consent

Thank you for participating in this interview. This interview is aimed at understanding how newly hired employees make sense of the organization, in order to improve the alignment between employees and [the university]. This research is done for and in collaboration with [the strategy department of the university], furthermore, it will be used for my master thesis at the University of Twente.

All that is discussed here will remain confidential; names will be pseudonymized and will not be able to be traced back to you or others personally. If you are not comfortable disclosing personal identifiable information in this interview, please refrain from doing so. If you do not feel comfortable answering a certain question for any reason, you are allowed to refuse to answer without justification. You may always ask for clarification if a question is unclear. Lastly, you have the right to stop the interview at any time and are allowed to withdraw your participation and data at any point.

For the purpose of analyzing the data, I need to record the interview and transcribe it. The recorded audio will be deleted after transcription and all personal data will be deleted from the transcribed text. Do you consent to this interview being recorded?

- If participant agrees, the recording will start -

Do you have any questions beforehand? Do you agree with the terms of this interview?

- If there are no more questions and the participant answers yes, the interview starts -

2. Introductory questions

<i>Personal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Could you shortly introduce yourself?
<i>Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How long have you been employed here? ○ Could you explain your position at [the university]? ○ Why did you choose [this university] as a workplace? ○ What is your impression of the organization?

3. Values

Explanation:

Organizations use core values to express and represent their behavior and beliefs. They explain and justify what the organization does and what it stands for; in other words: they influence the vision of the organization.*:

** Notes:*

- (1) Values are visualized on cards and if possible laid out on the table, otherwise made visible on screen.
- (2) Participants can pick as many values as they want.

<i>General</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Which core values do you think represent [the university] the most? ○ Why do you think these values are the most representative?
<i>Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What do these values mean in <u>your own</u> work? ○ To what extent do you personally find these values important? ○ Can you give a concrete example of a time when these values became apparent in your work?*

**Note: let participant explain one value at a time*

4. Strategic goals of [the university]

Explanation:

To express and represent their values, [the university] has set up some guiding principles and strategic goals. Which strategic goals do you think represent [the university] the most?*

** Notes:*

- (1) Goals are visualized on cards and if possible laid out on the table, otherwise made visible on screen.
- (2) Participants can pick as many goals as they want.

5. Questions about chosen strategic goals:

** Note: For every goal the participant chooses, the accompanying questions will be asked which can be found in the scheme below:*

[Strategic goal 1]	<i>General</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To what extent do you notice that the university's research and education are [related to strategic goal 1]?
	<i>Work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To what extent do you think <u>your</u> work can be described as [related to strategic goal 1]?
	<i>Example</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can you give an example of a time when you noticed this and why you thought of this [in relation to strategic goal 1]?

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	<i>Sensemaking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To what extent do you feel this goal is important and why? ○ What does this goal mean for you and your work? ○ In what way does this goal affect your work?
[Strategic goal 2]	<i>General Work</i> <i>Example</i> <i>Sensemaking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To what extent do you see the university as [related to strategic goal 2]? ○ To what extent do you think <u>your</u> work can be described as [related to strategic goal 2]? ○ Can you give an example of a time when you noticed this and why you thought of this [in relation to strategic goal 2]? ○ To what extent do you feel this goal is important and why? ○ What does this goal mean for you and your work? ○ In what way does this goal affect your work?
[Strategic goal 3]	<i>General Work</i> <i>Example</i> <i>Sensemaking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To what extent do you notice that the university's research and education are focused on [strategic goal 3]? ○ To what extent do you think <u>your work</u> can be described as [related to strategic goal 3]? ○ Can you give an example of a time when you noticed this and why you thought of this [in relation to strategic goal 3]? ○ To what extent do you feel this goal is important and why? ○ What does this goal mean for you and your work? ○ In what way does this goal affect your work?
[Strategic goal 4]	<i>General Work</i> <i>Example</i> <i>Sensemaking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To what extent do you see the university as a place for [strategic goal 4]? ○ To what extent do you think <u>your work</u> can be related to [strategic goal 4]? ○ Can you give an example of a time when you noticed this and why you thought of this? ○ To what extent do you feel this goal is important and why? ○ What does this goal mean for you and your work? ○ In what way does this goal affect your work?
[Strategic goal 5]	<i>General Work</i> <i>Example</i> <i>Sensemaking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To what extent do you notice that the university has [made an effort toward reaching strategic goal 5]? ○ In what way do you think <u>your</u> work [relates to strategic goal 5]? ○ Can you give an example of a time when you noticed this and why you thought of this? ○ To what extent do you feel this goal is important and why? ○ What does this goal mean for you and your work? ○ In what way does this goal affect your work?
[Strategic goal 6]	<i>General Work</i> <i>Example</i> <i>Sensemaking</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To what extent do you see the university as [related to strategic goal 6]? ○ To what extent do you think <u>you or your</u> work can be described as [related to strategic goal 6]? ○ Can you give an example of a time when you noticed this and why you thought of this in relation to this goal? ○ To what extent do you feel this goal is important and why? ○ What does this goal mean for you and your work? ○ In what way does this goal affect your work?

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[Strategic goal 7]	<i>General</i>	○ To what extent do you see the university as [related to strategic goal 7]?
	<i>Work</i>	○ To what extent do you think <u>your work</u> relates to [strategic goal 7]?
	<i>Example</i>	○ Can you give an example of a time when you noticed this and why you thought that related to this goal?
	<i>Sensemaking</i>	○ To what extent do you feel this goal is important and why?
		○ What does this goal mean for you and your work?
		○ In what way does this goal affect your work?

6. Concluding questions

<i>General</i>	○ What do you find important about working at [this university]? ○ We have reviewed the most recognizable elements for you, is there something you <u>miss</u> at [the university] with regard to values or goals that you find important? ○ Would you like to share any other comments or elucidations?
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Appendix C: Codebook

(The codebook is partially adjusted for anonymity reasons)

Code	Sub-code 1	Content	Definition	Description	Example
1. Engagement	1.1 Intellectual (cognitive) Engagement		The extent to which someone is intellectually absorbed in their work.	The employee feels intellectually engaged with and invested in their work and tasks.	“Yeah, so, we show this way also that we are very important, at the same time delivering the job.”
	1.2 Affective (emotional) engagement		The degree to which someone experiences positive emotions relating to their job.	The employee feels positive and enthusiastic about their work and work environment. They identify with their work and/or [the university].	“No, no, definitely not a job. So I think it's really part of who I am and part of my identity.”
	1.3 Social (physical) engagement		The degree to which someone is socially connected to their work environment and colleagues.	The employee shares, or doesn't share, the same work values, goals and attitudes as their colleagues.	“What I do miss at [the university] is um, people with clear vision, and, and that are very inspirational.” “Um, especially, let's say, my direct colleagues feel like a warm bath, so to speak.”
2. Orientation	2.1 Job orientation		A (strong) focus on material awards that can help fulfil ambitions outside of work and/or contribute to one's self-concept of being a provider for one's family.	The employee sees their work as a means to accommodate other ambitions and activities or provide for themselves and/or their family.	“Um, from the personal style, uh, point of view, I knew because I wanted a better quality for my, of life for my family. Yeah. For my kids and my wife.”
	2.2 Career orientation		A (strong) focus on promotion and advancement which can improve self-esteem and increase social standing and power.	The employee sees their work as part of a process of improving their career.	“Well, I think with my specific research focus and expertise, [the university] for this part of my career is very helpful because they are entrepreneurial and they value, um, young talent, let's say to a certain degree.” “So I found this opportunity. Then I just stay here even to develop my, uh, my professional skills. So this is the reason I, I stayed here.”
	2.3 Calling orientation		A (strong) focus on contributing to the common good and improving the world.	The employee sees their work as a way to contribute something to society.	“In my PhD work I helped more than 100 young people quit smoking. That is where I feel that I did something good. It's not about the publication that I did about that work, which is nice for reputation and competency, but I think where I really, what really makes me going is, is those hundred people that I helped, or, but not me necessarily, but just we as a team helped”
3. Values	3.1 Personal values	Ethics, Integrity	Values that drive attitude, behaviour and decision-making.	The employee talks about values that influence their own attitudes, behaviour and decision-making or that of [the university].	“So what I find important and what I want to see in my work or, my values basically determine which projects I do and which projects I don't do.”
	3.2 Social values	Respect to individuals, Humanity, Inclusiveness, Diversity, Responsibility & caring, Openness		The employee talks about values that influence their social environment at [the university].	“My previous university, all emails were in Dutch than English and here it's the other way around which I think is very, just, it's a very small thing, but I think it's really helpful if you are not Dutch, if you come into an organization and they just read or write to you in a language you understand instead of always needing to scroll down to something you can read.”

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3.3 Work values	Efficiency, Competency, Performance, Continuous improvement, Entrepreneurism, Teamwork, Cooperation, Commitment, Control, Power, Reputation	Values that define the importance someone gives to work-related outcomes	The employee talks about values that influence their work and tasks at [the university] .	“But I think in general it’s nice if it’s not about competition, but about working together.”
4. Value & goal congruence	4.1. Value & goal congruence	The degree to which the participant’s personal values and goals match with the organization’s values and goals.	The employee’s values and goals align with the (perceived) values and goals of [the university].	“Yeah, I think it [sustainability] is very important because, like the world is not doing well, so it would be great that many smart people are focusing their attention to it and trying to come up with ways we can try to solve, or make sure that it's not getting worse, these issues, so I do think it's almost impossible to not have this as a guiding principle.”
	4.2. Value & goal incongruence	The degree to which the participant’s personal values and goals do not match with the organization’s values and goals.	The employee’s values and goals do not align with the (perceived) values and goals of [the university], or the employee feels that some values or goals that they find important are still missing or could be improved.	”It's not really competitive there, which sometimes is also not so good.”
5. Experiences	5.1. Negative experiences	There was an event in the workplace that has made a negative impression.	The employee has a negative experience at [the university], or their expectations are not in line with reality.	“So I have still that network, which is good enough for the moment, but I hoped when I moved here that I would meet lots of new people who will be able to give me this new inspiration, and I I've met a few, but not enough.”
	5.2. Positive experiences	There was an event in the workplace that has made a positive impression.	The employee has a positive experience at [the university], or their expectations are exceeded.	“My previous university, all emails were in Dutch than English and here it's the other way around which I think is very, just, it's a very small thing, but I think it's really helpful if you are not Dutch..”