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Employee career development and its impact on labour productivity: Evidence from Lithuania

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Abstract

Employee career development has become a critical factor in enhancing labour productivity in contemporary organisations, particularly in the context of dynamic labour markets and increasing competition for qualified employees. This study aims to analyse the relationship between employee career development and labour productivity by integrating theoretical insights with empirical evidence derived from statistical data and prior empirical studies. The research employs a questionnaire survey of employees from medium-sized companies in Lithuania. The findings indicate that career development opportunities, job satisfaction, remuneration and human capital accumulation play a significant role in improving labour productivity. The results further suggest that organisations investing in structured career development practices are more likely to achieve sustainable productivity growth. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing a comprehensive overview of career–productivity linkages in the Lithuanian context and offers practical implications for organisational management and policy development.

Keywords: employee career, labour productivity, human capital, job satisfaction, sustainable jobs

1. Introduction

Labour productivity has become a key concern for organisations seeking to remain competitive in dynamic and knowledge-based economies (OECD, 1996; Dima et al., 2018). Alongside technological advancement and capital investment, increasing attention is being directed towards human-related factors that influence productivity, particularly employee career development (Hosen et al., 2024; Arthur et al., 2003).

Contemporary labour markets are characterised by rapid technological change and growing competition for qualified employees (Ross et al., 2024; Michaels et al., 2001), which has transformed traditional career models into more flexible and individualised career paths (Baruch, 2004; Wiernik & Kostal, 2019). Employees increasingly expect opportunities for professional growth, skill development, and career progression (Kong et al., 2015), while organisations face pressure to align these expectations with performance and productivity objectives.

From a theoretical perspective, career development contributes to labour productivity through human capital accumulation and motivational mechanisms. According to human capital theory, investments in employee development enhance

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skills, knowledge, and adaptability, which directly increase a worker's productivity (Becker, 1964; Black & Lynch, 1996; De la Fuente, 2011). Furthermore, drawing on self-determination theory and Herzberg's two-factor theory, perceived career opportunities and fair reward systems strengthen job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and organisational commitment (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Herzberg et al., 1959; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2009). As a result, career development represents not only a human resource management practice but also a strategic instrument for improving organisational performance (Yarnall, 2007).

Despite extensive international research, empirical evidence on career–productivity linkages in smaller economies remains limited. In Lithuania, labour productivity growth continues to lag behind the European Union average — reaching approximately 50% of the EU-27 average in real productivity terms as of 2020 (Ministry of the Economy and Innovation of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021, 2023). This productivity gap highlights the need to better understand how career development practices affect productivity in medium-sized enterprises (Tvaronavičienė, 2014). Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyse the relationship between employee career development and labour productivity by integrating theoretical insights with empirical evidence from the Lithuanian context.

2. Literature review

Employee career development has increasingly been recognised as a strategic factor influencing individual performance and organisational outcomes. Contemporary career theory conceptualises careers not merely as hierarchical advancement within a single organisation, but as a dynamic and lifelong process shaped by individual agency, organisational practices and labour market conditions (Greenhaus et al., 2010; Korsakienė & Smaliukienė, 2014). Modern career models emphasise continuous learning, adaptability and personal responsibility for career management, reflecting changes in organisational structures and employee expectations.

Empirical research consistently highlights the importance of career development opportunities for employee motivation and work-related attitudes. Studies demonstrate that employees who perceive favourable career prospects tend to exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction, organisational commitment and engagement (Blokker et al., 2019; Kasdorf & Kayaalp, 2022). Career satisfaction has been identified as a critical factor reducing turnover intentions and strengthening employees' attachment to their organisations, particularly among early-career professionals (Mello et al., 2022). These findings suggest that career development serves not only as a personal growth mechanism but also as an organisational retention strategy.

From an economic perspective, labour productivity is commonly defined as the efficiency with which labour input is transformed into output, often measured as value added per employee or per working hour (Hanushek & Ettema, 2017). Traditional productivity theories emphasise technological progress and capital accumulation; however, contemporary research increasingly acknowledges the role

of human capital, motivation and organisational practices in productivity growth (Martinkus et al., 2006; Dua & Garg, 2019). Human capital theory posits that investments in education, training and skill development enhance employees' productive capacity, thereby contributing to higher productivity levels at both organisational and national scales.

The relationship between employee career development and labour productivity has been examined in numerous empirical studies across different sectors and countries. Research indicates that career development initiatives, such as training programmes, mentoring and structured promotion systems, positively affect employee performance and productivity outcomes (Napitupulu et al., 2017; Ngari et al., 2025). However, the effect of career development on productivity is often indirect and mediated by variables such as job satisfaction, motivation and self-regulation. For instance, Delbari et al. (2021) found that career development enhances productivity primarily through the mediating role of employees' self-regulatory capabilities, highlighting the psychological mechanisms underlying performance improvements.

Remuneration and perceived fairness of reward systems are also closely linked to career development and productivity. Empirical evidence suggests that wage growth and promotion opportunities motivate employees to invest greater effort in their work, thereby increasing labour productivity (Beržinskienė & Raziulytė, 2012; Ku, 2022). At the same time, inadequate alignment between career progression, compensation and employee expectations may reduce motivation and negatively affect performance. These findings underline the importance of integrating career development policies with coherent reward and evaluation systems.

Recent studies further reveal that career development outcomes vary across career stages. Employees in early and mid-career stages tend to prioritise advancement opportunities, skill development and income growth, whereas later career stages are more strongly associated with job stability and work-life balance considerations (Dutta et al., 2021; Mello et al., 2022). This heterogeneity implies that career development practices should be tailored to employees' career stages in order to maximise their impact on productivity.

Despite the growing body of international research, evidence from smaller economies remains limited. In the Lithuanian context, labour market challenges such as qualification mismatch and demographic changes may weaken the relationship between employee competencies and job requirements, thereby constraining productivity growth (OECD, n.d.; Statistics Lithuania, 2024). Qualification mismatch has been shown to negatively affect job satisfaction and performance, reinforcing the need for effective career development and continuous upskilling strategies.

In summary, the literature indicates a clear and multidimensional relationship between employee career development and labour productivity. Career development influences productivity both directly, through skill enhancement, and indirectly, through motivational and attitudinal mechanisms. However, the strength of this relationship depends on organisational context, career stage and the alignment of career development practices with broader human resource management systems.

This study builds on existing research by integrating theoretical insights with empirical and statistical evidence to further examine career–productivity linkages in the Lithuanian context.

3. Methods

This study adopts a questionnaire survey to examine the relationship between employee career development and labour productivity. The results are juxtaposed with an analysis of scientific literature enabling a comprehensive and reliable assessment of the research problem.

The questionnaire survey was conducted online. The convenience sampling approach was followed. The analysis is based on data collected from 421 employees working in medium-sized enterprises in Lithuania. The survey was conducted in 2025-2026.

The chosen methodological approach allows for the integration of theoretical insights with empirical evidence and supports the internal consistency of the study. The approach applied is appropriate for addressing the research objective and for identifying general patterns in the relationship between employee career development and labour productivity.

4. Results

Respondents were first asked to evaluate whether a clear career system exists in their organisation. As shown in Figure 1, 41.1% of respondents indicated that a career system exists but is only partially disclosed and not fully understood, while 37.9% stated that a clear career system definitely exists in their organisation.

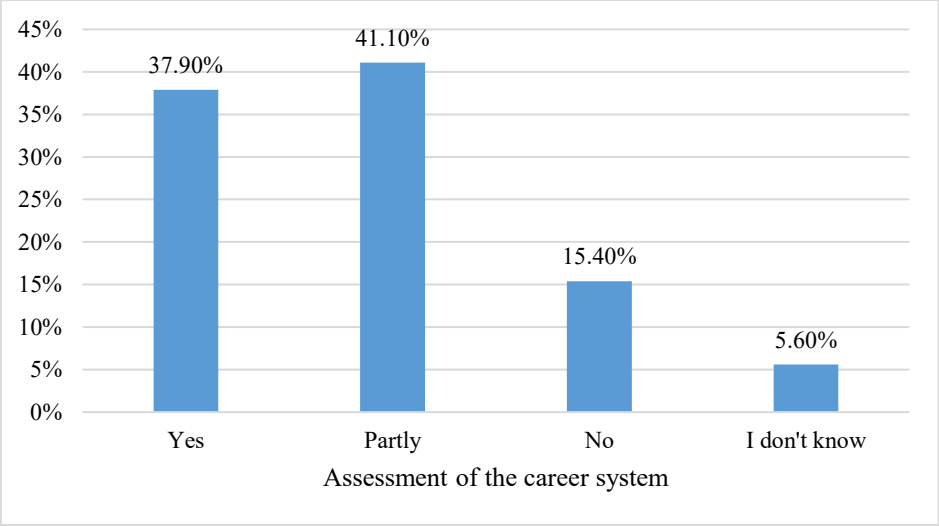

Fig. 1. Existence of a clear career system in Lithuanian companies (survey data). Source: designed by the author.

A smaller share of respondents reported that a career system does not exist or is not visible. Overall, the results indicate that the majority of respondents report at least partial clarity regarding career systems within their organisations. Respondents' evaluations of career-related factors supporting career development are presented in Figure 2.

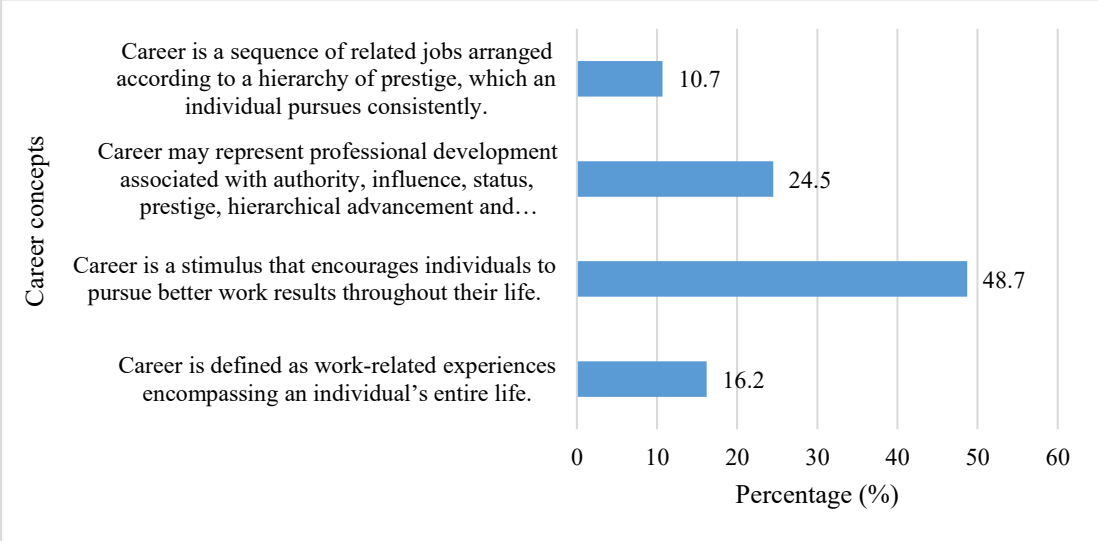

Fig. 2. Career-related factors supporting career development in Lithuanian companies (survey data)
Source: designed by the authors.

The results show that the majority of respondents (48.7%) perceive career as a stimulus encouraging individuals to pursue better work results throughout their life. A smaller share of respondents associate career with professional development related to status, prestige and hierarchical advancement (24.5%). Other respondents define career as work-related experiences encompassing an individual's entire life (16.2%) or as a sequence of jobs arranged according to a hierarchy of prestige (10.7%). The perceived impact of career-related factors on labour productivity aspects is illustrated in Figure 3.

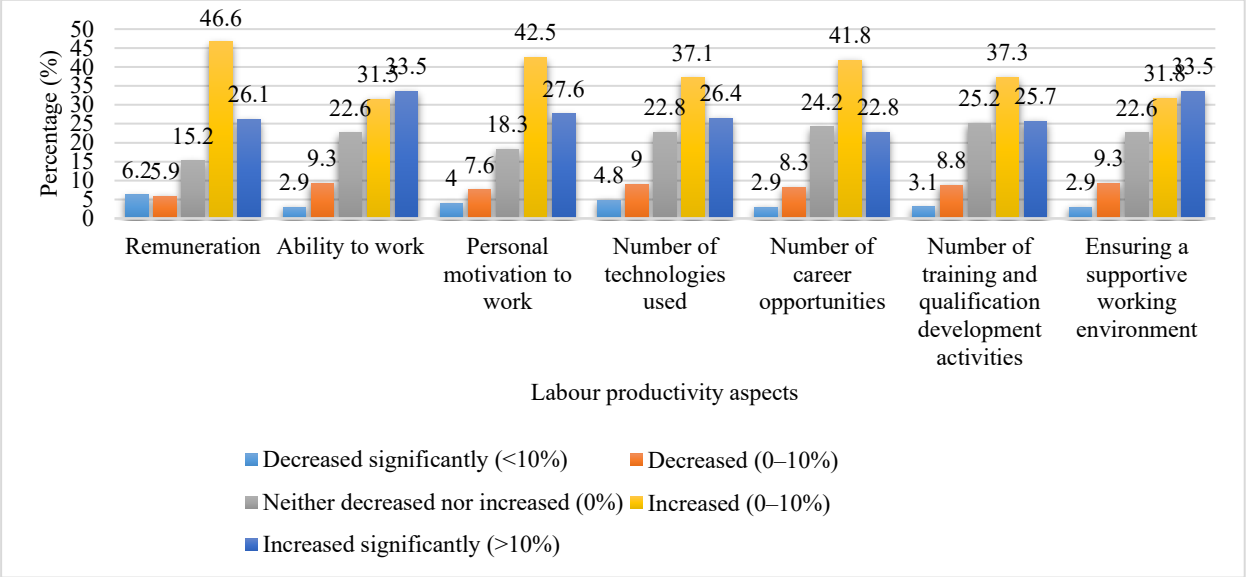

Fig. 3. Perceived impact of career-related factors on labour productivity aspects in Lithuanian companies (survey data)
Source: designed by the authors.

The results show that positive changes dominate across all assessed labour productivity dimensions. The strongest positive changes were reported for remuneration: 46.6% of respondents indicated that remuneration increased due to career-related factors, while an additional 26.1% reported that remuneration increased significantly. Improvements were also frequently reported for personal motivation to work (42.5%) and for the number of career opportunities (41.8%). Approximately 65% of respondents reported improvements in ability to work and in ensuring a supportive working environment. Furthermore, around 63% of respondents indicated increases in the use of technologies and participation in training and qualification-development activities attributable to career-related factors. Negative changes were reported by a relatively small proportion of respondents across all labour productivity aspects. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient was applied to examine associations between career-related factors and labour productivity aspects (Table 1).

The strongest statistically significant correlation was identified between satisfaction with career progression and remuneration ($\rho = 0.458$, $p < 0.001$), as presented in Table 1. A moderate positive correlation was observed between feedback about career and ensuring a supportive working environment ($\rho = 0.409$, $p < 0.001$). Informal career mentoring was also positively associated with ensuring a supportive working environment ($\rho = 0.374$, $p < 0.001$). Feedback about career correlated with changes in the use of technologies ($\rho = 0.363$, $p < 0.001$), while satisfaction with career progression was positively associated with personal motivation to work ($\rho = 0.365$, $p < 0.001$). All reported correlations were statistically significant.

Table 1
Correlations between career-related factors and labour productivity aspects in Lithuanian companies (survey data)

Career-related factor	Strongest association with	Spearman's rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Career satisfaction	Remuneration	.458	<.001
Career feedback	Ensuring a supportive working environment	.409	<.001
Informal career mentoring	Ensuring a supportive working environment	.374	<.001
Career feedback	Number of technologies used	.363	<.001
Career satisfaction	Personal motivation to work	.365	<.001

Source: designed by the authors.

Overall, the results indicate that employees working in medium-sized enterprises in Lithuania report at least partial clarity regarding organisational career systems and generally evaluate career-related factors positively. Personal career priorities, informal support, and career feedback received the highest evaluations among career-related factors. The findings further show that career-related factors are associated with positive changes across multiple labour productivity aspects, with the strongest effects observed in remuneration, personal motivation to work, and work ability. Correlation analysis confirmed statistically significant positive relationships between key career-related factors and labour productivity aspects, particularly between career satisfaction and remuneration, as well as between career feedback and indicators of the working environment and technology use. Together, these results provide empirical evidence of measurable links between career-related factors and labour productivity aspects.

4. Discussion

This study confirms that employee career development is an important determinant of labour productivity in medium-sized enterprises in Lithuania. Indeed, this has been confirmed in other contexts as well (Surya et al., 2021). The results indicate that both organisational and individual career-related factors influence how employees perceive their work performance and productivity outcomes.

The findings show that although career systems exist in many organisations, they are often only partially communicated. This suggests that transparency and clarity of career systems are critical for employees to meaningfully engage with career development opportunities (Jiang & Shen, 2023; Xin et al., 2020). These results support theoretical assumptions that effective career management requires not only formal structures but also clear communication and employee involvement to enhance organisational commitment and career success (De Vos et al., 2009; Sturges et al., 2005).

The strong emphasis on personal career priorities, career feedback and informal support highlights the increasing importance of subjective career success (Ng & Feldman, 2014). Employees value self-realisation, development opportunities and supportive relationships, which reflects a shift towards more individualised and self-directed career models, often conceptualised as the protean or boundaryless career (Arthur, 1994; Hall, 2004; Wiernik & Kostal, 2019). At the same time, the strong association between career satisfaction and remuneration indicates that objective career outcomes remain a key indicator through which employees evaluate career success and productivity (Hildred et al., 2023; Stumpf & Tymon, 2012).

The correlation analysis further demonstrates that career feedback and career satisfaction are closely linked to labour productivity aspects such as remuneration, motivation and the creation of a supportive working environment. These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasising feedback and mentoring as essential mechanisms for enhancing employee engagement and performance (Kram, 1985), particularly in medium-sized enterprises with more flexible organisational structures (Adebowale & Agumba, 2023).

In contrast, intercultural competencies showed a weaker relationship with labour productivity. While literature often highlights the value of cross-cultural skills for team performance (Lloyd & Härtel, 2010; Matveev & Milter, 2004), this weaker link may be explained by the specific national and organisational context of Lithuanian medium-sized enterprises, where international exposure is relatively limited, reducing the perceived relevance of these skills in daily work performance.

Overall, the results suggest that labour productivity is most effectively enhanced through integrated career development practices that combine financial incentives with continuous feedback and informal mentoring (Aguinis et al., 2013). Career development should therefore be viewed as a strategic tool for improving organisational effectiveness rather than as a standalone human resource practice (Zhao et al., 2022).

5. Conclusions

This study examined the relationship between employee career development and labour productivity in medium-sized enterprises in Lithuania by integrating theoretical insights with empirical survey data. The findings confirm that employee career development is a multidimensional phenomenon that plays a significant role in shaping labour productivity outcomes.

The results demonstrate that employees generally perceive career-related factors positively and associate them with improvements in key productivity aspects. Personal career priorities, career feedback and informal support emerged as particularly important factors, highlighting the growing relevance of subjective career success in contemporary organisations. At the same time, the strong relationship between career satisfaction and remuneration indicates that objective career outcomes remain central to how employees evaluate both career success and productivity.

The study further shows that career-related factors are linked not only to financial outcomes but also to motivational and organisational aspects of productivity, including personal motivation to work, work ability, the creation of a supportive working environment and the use of technologies. Statistically significant correlations between career-related factors and labour productivity aspects provide empirical evidence that career development contributes to productivity through both material and non-material mechanisms.

Overall, the findings suggest that labour productivity in medium-sized enterprises is most effectively enhanced when career development practices are integrated into broader human resource management strategies. Organisations that invest in clear career systems, continuous feedback and informal mentoring are more likely to foster employee engagement and sustainable productivity growth. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on career–productivity linkages in the Lithuanian context and underscores the strategic importance of employee career development for organisational performance.

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