

## **CAREER DRIVERS AMONGST MANAGEMENT UNDERGRADUATES IN SRI LANKA: A STUDY OF DETERMINANTS**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Career drivers amongst university undergraduates, which motivate them to make effective career decisions, have been an area of study attempted by business practitioners and scholars. In a modern competitive world in which the employability of undergraduates has been a crucial factor, understanding the students' perception of what drives them most in pursuing a career would be a beneficial requirement in Human Resource Management (Donald et al., 2018). Multiple factors contribute to undergraduates' career potential, career abilities, and career success. Similarly, the reasons that drive undergraduates to make their initial career choices would be necessary for recruiters, career counselors, and higher education institution authorities to determine frameworks for career adaptability, career development, and employability of students. Apart from gaining the essential knowledge, skills, and training needed for a particular employment, many other attributes could contribute to employee retention, such as attitudes, dispositions, and perceptions. When the driving factors in selecting careers are concerned, the most common prevalent factor is salary. However, observing the tendencies of the new generation of millennials, it could be noted that undergraduates of the recent generation do not aim only for a high income as a driving factor. A study by Donald et al. (2018) identified how undergraduates rated nature and environment of work, chances for progression, and level of challenges as satisfying attractive factors amongst many other career drivers. Career drivers are not actively chosen; they are influenced by a person's personality, skills, values, and self-perception. Career drivers are the "unseen hand that directs personal decision-making" Francis (1985, p. 46). Francis (1985) further pointed out that the relative relevance of different job motivations may shift as people go through substantial life changes. A study by De Magalhaes and Wilde (2015) classified career driver variables as intrinsic and extrinsic factors, in which the most important results were identified under the extrinsic category. Previous research findings revealed that personality, attitudes, and behaviors, could typically have an impact on what motivates someone to pursue a career (Dickmann & Cerdin, 2014). Students in Bundy and Norris's (2011) study selected job stability, fascinating work, the possibility of growth, and health insurance benefits as the factors that matter most when selecting a job. Thus, considering numerous factors, this research study examined the impact of independent variables of Autonomy, Job security, material rewards, and Parental and peer influence on career drivers. Heaton and Ackah (2007), as cited in Perera and Weerasinghe (2019), describe how modern career paradigms have drastically changed over time into "self-directed, value-driven and boundary-less careers" owing to many 'careers- environmental changes.' Given this boundary-less nature and modern perspectives, the past literature regarding career drivers must be revised. It is questionable to determine how a novel careerist would think and act when choosing a prominent career in a learned field. Watts (2006), as cited in Perera and Weerasinghe (2019), explained how undergraduates usually pursue a degree to enhance their employability, focusing on mere job security rather than considering

career interest or long-term career success factors. However, this notion of undergraduates seems to have noticeably changed recently. Not much research has been conducted sufficiently to explore these new dimensions of career drivers, especially in the Sri Lankan tertiary education context. The key objective of this research study was to identify significant determinants of career drivers among university undergraduates with particular reference to the management stream. As described, the scope of the study was limited to third and final-year management undergraduates of state universities. Management graduates have diverse options for selecting careers in many fields, and many organizations are available for potential careers compared to other disciplines. Hence this provides the rationale for the scope of the study. However, not being limited to a specific subject field under the management stream, taking undergraduates of mixed specializations for the study, and not being able to collect data from many faculties around the country have been identified as the limitations encountered in the study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Previous literature results were followed in determining variables for the research framework. Accordingly, four career driver factors; autonomy, job security, parental and peer influence, and rewards were chosen as independent variables against career drivers as the dependent variable. Since the aim of the study is to identify significant career drivers among management undergraduates, the following hypotheses were formulated based on the research framework as shown below:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant impact of autonomy on career drivers
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant impact of job security on career drivers
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant impact of parental and peer influence on career drivers
- H<sub>4</sub>: There is a significant impact of rewards on career drivers

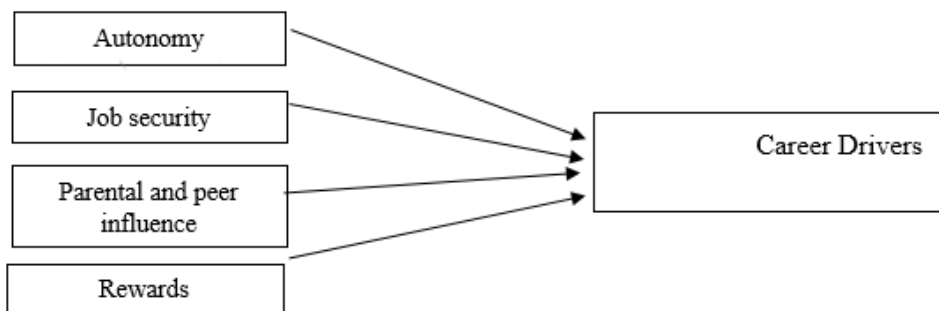


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

In order to use a quantitative approach to primarily collect data for the research, a questionnaire was circulated among the participants (Saunders et al., 2009). This study was conducted considering third and final-year management undergraduates of two national universities in Sri Lanka. One hundred twenty participants (according to Morgan Table) were selected through a random sampling technique to record data from a large, unbiased representative sample. 63% of respondents were male, while 37% were female. Most responses were from students specializing in Marketing, whereas the minor ones were from those who majored in Accounting. The SPSS software was used to analyze data to derive

results statistically. The Cronbach test was used to verify the reliability of the measurements; the present study ensured reliability by exceeding the accepted threshold of Cronbach's alpha the 0.7. The study was conducted to test whether there are significant or positive factors that determine career drivers among management undergraduates. Hence Pearson correlation and regression analyses were utilized to test the relationship between independent and dependent variables. ANOVA model summary results were derived from testing the overall predictability and the effectiveness of the model used.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results were derived from the SPSS software to test the Pearson correlation coefficient to determine the degree of association between four independent variables with the dependent variable, Career drivers. Accordingly, the results indicated that students' autonomy positively influences career drivers. The independent variable, Rewards, also showed a positive relationship with career drivers with a significant value of less than 0.05. Job security, too, showed a positive impact on career drivers. Interestingly, parental and peer influence negatively affected students' career drivers.

Table 1 Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std.error	B		
(constant)	.643	.223		3.125	.001
Autonomy	.736	.156	.528	2.716	.003
Job Security	.441	.107	.423	3.046	.282
Parental & peer influence	-.542	.267	-.633	-1.35	.001
Rewards	.710	.137	.251	2.673	.104

As depicted in Table 1, Autonomy and Parental and Peer influence are found to demonstrate a statistically significant relationship with Career drivers with p-values less than 0.05. Moreover, the independent variables Job security and Rewards do not demonstrate a significant relationship with the dependent variable Career drivers, as the p-values exceeded 0.05 of the significance level.

Table 2 Model Summary

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std.error	Sig.F change
1	.732	.524	.512	.344	.000

Furthermore, the results of the model summary were also evaluated in which the obtained R-Square value was 0.524, which indicates how all four independent variables explained 52.4% of the variation of Career drivers of undergraduates. Furthermore, the F value of the model indicated a 34.065 value at a 5% significant level, thereby accepting the statistical significance of the overall model. This study revealed that students tend to value to entertain; their Autonomy and potential material rewards are powerful career drivers in making career decisions. The study found a significant positive impact on the association between Autonomy and rewards with Career drivers. The study's results proved hypotheses 1 and 4, which stated that there is a significant impact of Autonomy and rewards on career drivers. Hence, of the four independent variables used, Autonomy and rewards were proven to be the most

influencing career drivers among management undergraduates in Sri Lanka. Out of the other variables, Job security is also an essential factor in determining career drivers, as the results revealed a positive association. Furthermore, undergraduates seemed to show less impact on social influences from parents and peers when determining driving factors for pursuing careers. A study by Chia et al. (2008) supports the implications of this study. As per their study, out of nine drivers, Material Rewards ranked eighth (one before the last factor) for Accounting Students in Singapore, Australia, and Hong Kong. Sri Lanka remains in the Middle-Income category, and material rewards influence individual career decisions. The results of the study by Perera and Weerasinghe (2019) also match similar implications. In addition, it was found that one of the most significant value preferences in a materialistic society or culture, particularly the society in a developing country, is Material Rewards. When considering the Autonomy variable, this study's results matched the results from Perera and Weerasinghe (2019), who also found a significant impact on Career drivers. Fancis (1985), as cited in Perera and Weerasinghe (2019), defined Autonomy as "taking personal responsibility for the structure, processes, and objectives at work." The results imply that the current generation of undergraduates seeks independence when performing their job. Given the tendency of undergraduates to move into entrepreneurship and start their businesses, these results are evident in their way of thinking regarding career drivers from the previous generations of undergraduates who did not show substantial implications to value independence as a preferable factor when making career decisions. Hence the change in social and economic conditions and change in thinking patterns and tendencies of generations also seem to have impacted the results of this study. Past studies revealed that students rated Job security and Rewards while only a lower rate was scored for Autonomy. Chia et al. (2008) also corroborated the high job security rate as a career driver for accounting majored undergraduates during an economic recession. Hence, the impact of economic as well as political conditions of a country could also affect the career drivers and career-making decisions of undergraduates. This implication can be applied further to the Sri Lankan context, too, to predict students' potential career drivers and preferences.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The study's objective was to identify significant determinants of career drivers among university undergraduates with particular reference to the management stream. Young undergraduates tend to consider social influence and expectations when deciding and to select their career paths. However, the results of this study revealed how the generation of existing undergraduates tend to focus more on their expectations as they seem to be aware of what they want, which further proves their ability in self-evaluation. Their decisions not being affected by social influences and showing high results on Autonomy as a significant driving factor further accentuate the undergraduate's perceptions of open-mindedness and free-thinking when deciding on career driving factors. Thus, it can be considered another positive direction and an exciting implication identified among the undergraduates through this research study. The results can be taken for career advisors and employers in making effective employee selection and consultation. The results could be especially beneficial for HRM practitioners as they can use them to be aware and make predictions about major factors affecting undergraduates' career drivers. Further, the information could be used to attract a potential pool of competent candidates and to effectively recruit the best talents of graduates for companies and firms. The organizations also can use the disseminated information to adjust the company values and culture to match the demands and requirements of the potential

graduate employees. They are enhancing the Autonomy in the culture to match the career drivers to attract and retain the best talents among graduate job seekers in one such practical implication to be exercised based on the results obtained from this study. Finally, the results of this study could be used for further enhancements in the university curriculum to make the programs more profession oriented in the university system and policymakers in Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** Autonomy, career drivers, job security, parental and peer influence, rewards

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