



## MEASURING DETERMINANTS OF EMPLOYEE CAREER GOALS: A PILOT STUDY OF MARINE ENGINEERS IN A RECTANGULAR HIERARCHICAL OCCUPATION IN SRI LANKA

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### Abstract:

This study aims to identify the determinants of employee career goals. By utilising social cognitive career theory, self-regulatory focus theory, and perceived organisational support theory, constructs and measures were derived from existing literature. A pilot study was conducted with 51 marine engineers in a rectangular hierarchy occupation in Sri Lanka. The reliability and validity of the measures were confirmed to ensure they accurately represent the constructs and to test the conceptualised relationships.

**Keywords:** self-efficacy, promotion-focused outcome expectation, prevention-focused outcome expectations, interest, perceived organisational support, and career goal

### 1. Introduction

Career goals are specific targets that guide professional development and advancement, providing a clear sense of direction and purpose in one's career journey (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2018). According to Ho (2023), career goals are a key component of a broader goal-setting framework that includes various life dimensions such as short-term, long-term, and personal goals. This structured approach helps individuals organise their efforts and achieve a balanced life. Career goals are crucial for directing professional growth, as they outline desired achievements like promotions, skill acquisition, or increased responsibilities (Greenhaus, 1987; Kim, 2017). They are integral to personal career development and organisational success, influencing job performance, motivation, and

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retention (Locke & Latham, 2002; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Career goals also facilitate effective human resource planning by aligning individual ambitions with organisational objectives, thus supporting talent management and strategic growth (Greenhaus *et al.*, 1995; Noe, 2008). They help individuals navigate their career trajectories, serving as a framework for measuring progress and achieving professional aspirations (Weng *et al.*, 2010). In contemporary settings, the dynamic nature of career progression—encompassing both vertical promotions and lateral role changes—reflects a more comprehensive view of career development, integrating personal and professional growth (Hall, 1976; Berry, 2020). This broader perspective highlights the importance of aligning career goals with both individual and organisational objectives to ensure long-term success and stability (Nawrin & Salam, 2022; Wesarat *et al.*, 2014). By pursuing career goals, individuals not only enhance their own career paths but also contribute to their organisations' competitive advantage and overall success (Jassim, 1998). At this point, we introduce the performance gap and the significance of delving deeply into understanding the factors that prompt individuals to make efforts to achieve their career goals.

This study aims to establish reliable measures to assess the determinants of career goals, providing valuable insights for both individuals and organisations seeking to optimise career development strategies. A review of the literature on the determinants of career goals highlights various factors influencing career aspirations and achievements, including individual factors such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal interests, as well as organisational factors like perceived support and alignment with organisational goals (Lent *et al.*, 2003; Greenhaus *et al.*, 1995). By examining these factors, this research seeks to uncover how they interact to impact career goal setting and attainment, ultimately enhancing career satisfaction and organisational performance.

The rest of this article is structured as follows: a review of the literature on the determinants of career goals, an outline of the research design for the pilot study, a presentation of the measurement results, and a discussion with suggestions for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

Previous research indicates that career goals are primarily driven by employees rather than organisations (Enache *et al.*, 2013; Lent *et al.*, 2000; Valickas *et al.*, 2015). Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) explains that career interests and goals are influenced by self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations (Lent *et al.*, 1993), with self-efficacy—the belief in one's ability to succeed—playing a crucial role. Lent and Brown (2019) argue for a deeper understanding of the interaction between self-efficacy and outcome expectations to comprehend career goal formation fully. Self-Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT) introduces the concepts of promotion-focused and prevention-focused outcome expectations (Higgins, 1998), suggesting that career goals are shaped by both aspirations for growth and the avoidance of negative outcomes, such as job insecurity (Borg & Elizur,

1992). Additionally, Perceived Organisational Support (POS) affects the engagement of employees in career-related activities, with lower POS decreasing the likelihood of converting career interests into specific goals and actionable steps (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). While SCCT broadly addresses external factors, it has not thoroughly examined the specific role of POS in mediating the relationship between career interests and goals (Lent *et al.*, 1994; Barnett & Bradley, 2007), underscoring the need for further research. Therefore, this study employs SCCT, RFT, and POS to elucidate the determinants of career goals. SCCT provides a framework for understanding how self-efficacy and outcome expectations shape career interests and goals. RFT offers insights into how promotion-focused and prevention-focused outcome expectations influence career goal setting, highlighting the dual roles of aspirations and avoidance of negative outcomes. POS examines the impact of organisational support on translating career interests into actionable goals, emphasising the importance of perceived organisational value and support in career development. Integrating these theories presents a comprehensive view of the factors influencing career goal formation and pursuit.

## **2.1 Theories Underpinning Career Goals, Self-Efficacy, Promotion-Focused Outcome Expectations, Prevention-Focused Outcome Expectations, Interest, and Perceived Organisational Support**

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994), offers a framework for understanding career development through the interaction of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals, building on Bandura's social cognitive theory. In SCCT, self-efficacy reflects an individual's belief in their ability to perform tasks or achieve goals, which significantly influences their career decisions and actions (Bandura, 1986; Lent *et al.*, 1994). Outcome expectations involve the anticipated consequences of specific behaviours, affecting whether individuals pursue or avoid certain career paths (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). Personal goals guide behaviour, shaping career choices and persistence (Brown & Lent, 2013). While SCCT effectively explains the dynamics between these elements, it does not fully address why individuals with high self-efficacy might avoid certain goals or why some focus on avoiding negative outcomes (Sheu *et al.*, 2010; Lent & Brown, 2020). To address these gaps, this study integrates Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT) and Perceived Organisational Support (POS) into the SCCT framework.

Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT), developed by Higgins (1998), explores how individuals approach goals through promotion and prevention focuses. Promotion focus drives individuals to seek positive outcomes and personal aspirations, characterised by a desire for growth, advancement, and success, leading to proactive and innovative actions (Baxter & Gram-Hanssen, 2016; Lanaj *et al.*, 2012). In contrast, prevention focus centres on avoiding negative outcomes and ensuring safety, with individuals prioritising stability and risk avoidance (Kark & Van Dijk, 2007). RFT integrates motivational and cognitive elements to explain how these focuses influence goal pursuit and decision-making. Chronic factors, such as personality traits and long-term goals, and situational

factors, like immediate environmental demands, shape an individual's predominant focus (Higgins, 1998). This differentiation impacts emotional responses and behaviours, with promotion-focused individuals seeking growth and taking risks, while prevention-focused individuals aim for security and avoid potential losses (Johnson *et al.*, 2011). By incorporating RFT, this study examines how promotion and prevention-focused outcome expectations mediate career goals within the SCCT framework.

Perceived Organisational Support (POS), derived from Organisational Support Theory (OST) established by Eisenberger *et al.* (1986), refers to employees' generalised perception of how much their organisation values their contributions and cares for their well-being. OST, rooted in Social Exchange Theory, conceptualises the employment relationship as a reciprocal exchange where employees offer effort and loyalty in return for rewards and support from employers (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). High POS is associated with increased job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and performance, while low POS can result in stress, absenteeism, and turnover (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017). The key antecedents of POS include fairness, supervisory support, organisational rewards, and job conditions, which influence employees' perceptions of the value placed on their contributions (Eisenberger, 2002). Employees who perceive strong support are more engaged, experience less work-family conflict, and exhibit lower levels of burnout and turnover (Nawrin & Salam, 2022; Zhao, 2014). Furthermore, POS impacts motivation to align career goals with organisational objectives, enhancing career satisfaction and organisational loyalty (Wickramaratne, 2021; Armstrong-Stassen & Schlosser, 2008). Consequently, organisations that effectively foster POS can improve employee performance, satisfaction, and retention.

## **2.2 Determinants of Carer Goals**

### **2.2.1 Self-efficacy**

A central construct in social cognitive theory developed by Bandura (1986), self-efficacy refers to individuals' beliefs in their capabilities to achieve tasks and goals. It influences motivation, persistence, and performance by shaping how people engage with tasks, overcome challenges, and set career goals (Bandura, 1997; Brown & Lent, 2019). Self-efficacy is built through personal performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1977; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Key dimensions include magnitude (task difficulty), strength (firmness of belief), and generality (application across tasks), as reported by Stajkovic and Luthans (1998). High self-efficacy enhances task engagement and persistence, while low self-efficacy can impede career progress and motivation (Lee & Bobko, 1994; Wong & Cappella, 2009). Understanding self-efficacy's impact provides valuable insights into career development and performance outcomes.

### **2.2.2 Promotion-focused Outcome Expectations**

Promotion-focused outcome expectations are based on expectancy-value theory, which suggests that motivation is influenced by both the likelihood of achieving an outcome

and its perceived value (Liguori *et al.*, 2019; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). In career development, individuals are more likely to pursue goals when they anticipate favourable results and these outcomes align with their personal values (Guay *et al.*, 2010; Luo, 2021). While outcome expectations shape career intentions, self-efficacy plays a critical role in enhancing these expectations and motivating engagement (Gülsün *et al.*, 2023; Bandura, 1986). Regulatory focus theory distinguishes between promotion-focused individuals, who are motivated by aspirations and growth, and prevention-focused individuals, who seek to avoid losses and ensure stability (Higgins, 1998; Tudoran *et al.*, 2012). The interplay between self-efficacy and outcome expectations, along with the impact of motivational focus, influences career behaviours and goal-setting (Higgins *et al.*, 2001; Scholer *et al.*, 2015).

### **2.2.3 Prevention-focused Outcome Expectation**

Prevention-focused outcome expectations in career development, particularly regarding job insecurity, highlight the significant impact of negative emotions such as fear and anxiety on employees. Job insecurity, often perceived as a threat to employment stability and well-being, is influenced by macro (economic conditions), meso (organizational factors), and individual (socioeconomic and demographic) factors (De Witte & Cuyper, 2015). It is associated with stress, decreased job involvement, increased turnover intention, and unethical conduct (Elshaer & Azazz, 2021a; Sverke *et al.*, 2002). The concept of job insecurity, exacerbated by contemporary changes like technological advancements and economic fluctuations, underscores a gap in career development theories which often overlook the role of fear as a deterrent rather than a motivational force (Kidd, 1998; Higgins, 1998). Individuals with a prevention focus are more sensitive to job insecurity and engage in behaviours aimed at mitigating perceived risks and maintaining job security (Jiang & Probst, 2016a). Quantitative and qualitative aspects of job insecurity impact motivation and performance, driving employees to seek additional security or avoid activities perceived as risky (Long *et al.*, 2021; Tu *et al.*, 2020). Thus, job insecurity, influenced by both external and internal factors, significantly affects employee behaviour and engagement, necessitating a deeper exploration of how negative emotions influence career development.

### **2.2.4 Interest**

Interest can be conceptualised as a basic emotion, an affective state, and an emotion schema, each offering distinct insights into how individuals engage with their environment (Reeve *et al.*, 2015). As a basic emotion, interest reflects instinctive responses to significant stimuli, while as an affective state, it represents a positive emotion that motivates purposeful action. Interest as an emotion schema integrates cognitive elements like value and appraisal, highlighting its role in shaping perceptions and interactions. Factors such as task complexity, personal relevance, and contextual support influence the development of interest (Fryer *et al.*, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Understanding interest involves recognising its dual nature as both a cognitive and affective construct (Silvia,

2006; Hidi & Baird, 1986), and how it mediates the relationship between antecedents and outcomes, influencing motivation and engagement (Renninger & Hidi, 2016). Interest is also closely related to self-efficacy and outcome expectations, impacting career decisions and success (Sheu *et al.*, 2010; Rottinghaus, 2003). Effective career development must consider the interplay of these factors, as well as the broader cultural and contextual influences shaping individual interests and motivations (Guan *et al.*, 2020; Song & Qu, 2018).

### **2.2.5 Perceived Organisational Support (POS)**

Perceived Organisational Support as outlined by Organisational Support Theory (OST), reflects employees' perceptions of how much their organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). OST suggests that employees attribute human qualities to the organisation, influencing their perception of support based on their experiences with fairness, supervisory support, rewards, and job conditions (Eisenberger, 2002). High POS fosters organisational commitment, extra-role behaviours, and enhances job performance and well-being (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017; Sefnedi *et al.*, 2023). Effective leadership, supportive management practices, and favourable job conditions play critical roles in cultivating POS (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2016a; Allen, 1992). Research indicates that POS mitigates stress, boosts motivation, and improves career satisfaction and performance (Afsar & Badir, 2017; Li *et al.*, 2022). The reciprocal relationship of POS is grounded in the norm of reciprocity, where supportive practices lead to greater employee engagement and career development (Gouldner, 1960; Armstrong-Stassen & Ursel, 2009). Therefore, organisations that prioritise supportive environments are more likely to foster motivated, committed, and high-performing employees (Brown *et al.*, 2017).

## **3. Study Design**

This study aimed to develop a comprehensive list of measures for self-efficacy, promotion-focused outcome expectations, prevention-focused outcome expectations, interest, perceived organisational support, and career goals. The questionnaire, developed using valid and reliable items sourced from the literature, was tested for content validity to ensure it covered a representative sample of the domain being measured. This process also aimed to reduce ambiguity and improve clarity for each item. Expert input and relevant literature were reviewed to ensure the reliability of the questionnaires and tools used in the study. The survey instrument was constructed using established scales to measure the variables. These scales were developed through a structured process involving the adaptation of existing measures to align with specific research objectives. Self-efficacy was measured using Chen *et al.*'s (2001) New General Self-Efficacy Scale, which consists of eight items and demonstrates high internal consistency and temporal stability. Promotion-focused and prevention-focused outcome expectations were assessed using Lent *et al.*'s (2003) 10-item scale with one additional

item, and De Witte's (2000) Job Insecurity Scale, respectively, both showing strong reliability. Interest in engineering-related activities was measured using a 7-point scale with revised items from Lent *et al.* (2005). Perceived Organisational Support was measured with an eight-item scale developed by Rhoades *et al.* (2001), reflecting high internal consistency. Career goals were measured with Gregor and O'Brien's (2016) career aspiration scale, focusing on educational aspirations. Control variables included demographic factors, and measures to control for common method variance included clear question wording, respondent anonymity, and varied item formats to enhance data validity. The questionnaire included a comprehensive overview of the research, an introduction to the researcher, and an explanation of the study's context. It outlined the necessity of the survey and its intended contribution to the field. To ensure participant comprehension, explanations were provided in both English and Sinhala (the native language). This approach aimed to accommodate all participants and enhance their understanding of the survey questions and instructions. Significant emphasis was placed on assuring participants of the confidentiality of their information to foster trust and security. The descriptive email approach aimed to clearly communicate the research objectives and ethical considerations, encouraging participants to engage actively with the survey. Given the context of the study, the sample frame comprised members of an online professional network with over 1,000 marine engineers. Due to the unavailability of precise population data for marine engineers, selecting an appropriate sample size was crucial for obtaining reliable and valid results. A sample size of 400 second and third marine engineers was chosen, informed by Roscoe's (1975) rule of thumb for determining sample sizes (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Consequently, a pilot study was conducted with 51 marine engineers to evaluate the face validity and reliability of the questionnaire. These marine engineers, who were preparing for an exam at a maritime college, were specifically selected on a convenience sampling basis for the pilot test and were not part of the sample intended for the final study (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The questionnaire, consisting of 51 items, was completed by participants in an average time of seven minutes.

Data was analysed using SPSS Version 20. The mean values of the overall constructs and the individual items were recorded. Each scale exhibited a Cronbach's Alpha exceeding 0.77, indicating a reliable level of internal consistency. Preliminary factor analysis confirmed sample adequacy, with significant KMO values above 0.60 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity significant at  $p < 0.001$ , allowing for reliable forwarding for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for self-efficacy (SE = .46), interest (INT = .39), perceived organisational support (POS = .44), and career goals (CG = .48) were below 0.5, indicating lower convergent validity. However, Ping (2009) suggests that AVE values between 0.4 and 0.5 can be considered acceptable, allowing these variables to be deemed as having acceptable fit values. All variables fell within the acceptable range of composite reliability (CR), between .64 and .96. Nunnally (1978) states that a CR value of 0.6 or higher indicates reasonable internal consistency, and Fornell and Larcker (1981) consider a CR value above 0.60 acceptable,

with Malhotra (2014) suggesting that a value above 0.7 is good. The CR values for the variables SE, PROOE, INT, POS, and CG ranged from 0.73 to 0.96, indicating that the items consistently measure the same construct with a high level of reliability. Therefore, the convergent validity of the measurement scales can be considered acceptable based on these justifications.

#### 4. Results

Table 1 presents the profile of the pilot study respondents. The majority are between 33 and 45 years old, possess operational level (Class 3) qualifications, and have the required sea time to be eligible to sit for the next higher-level exam. Most of the respondents are married and hold junior officer positions.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Pilot Study Respondents**

Item		Frequency	Percentage
Educational Qualification	Management (Class 2)	17	33.3
	Operational (Class 3)	34	66.7
Having Sea Time	No	16	31.4
	Yes	35	68.6
Age	22 - 26	1	2.0
	27 - 32	13	25.5
	33 - 45	27	52.9
	46 and above	10	19.6
Marital Stats	Married	41	80.4
	Single	10	19.6
Occupation	Junior Officer (4th or 3rd Engineer)	37	72.5
	Senior Officer (2nd Engineer)	14	27.5

The construct measurements addressed in this study include six first-order constructs: self-efficacy, promotion-focused outcome expectations, prevention-focused outcome expectations, interest, perceived organisational support, and career goals. The reliability and preliminary exploratory analysis results for each construct are presented.

Self-efficacy had an overall mean value of 4.30, with each of the eight items having mean values ranging from 4.06 to 4.43. All eight items' highest inter-item correlation values were within the range of 0.315 to 0.519, and the corrected item-total correlations were above 0.3. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for self-efficacy, measured by the eight items, was 0.831. Therefore, all eight items can be accepted as reliable measures of self-efficacy. Exploratory factor analysis, conducted to confirm the correlation values, resulted in a KMO value of 0.804, factor matrix values ranging from 0.510 to 0.833, and a total variance explained of 48%.



Eleven items represented the promotion-focused outcome expectations. The overall mean of this construct was 7.3, with the means of the 11 items ranging from 7.0 to 7.05. Reliability analysis of the items revealed that the highest inter-item correlation values for all 11 items were 0.672 to 0.881. Furthermore, the corrected item-total correlations were above 0.526, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all 11 items was 0.980. All 11 items were thus deemed suitable to represent promotion-focused outcome expectations. Exploratory factor analysis confirmed the correlation values, with a KMO measure of 0.916, factor matrix values ranging from 0.846 to 0.945, and 81% of the total variance explained.

The analysis of the four items of the prevention-focused outcome expectations construct reveals that the overall mean score for this construct was 2.73, with individual item means ranging from 1.88 to 2.51. The inter-item correlations for these items ranged from 0.288 to 0.752, and the corrected item-total correlations varied between -0.378 and 0.571. The construct demonstrated unacceptable reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.449. Further scrutiny of the individual items through reliability analysis suggested that removing the item PREVQ2R would enhance the internal consistency of the construct. Specifically, the item-total correlation for PREVQ2R was -0.378, and its Cronbach's alpha if the item deleted was 0.816. This indicates that excluding PREVQ2R would improve the overall Cronbach's alpha, suggesting that this item may not align well with the other items in measuring prevention-focused outcome expectations. Therefore, it would be prudent to consider removing PREVQ2R to increase the reliability of the construct.

Seven items were identified to measure interest. The overall mean value was 4.17, with the mean values of the individual items ranging from 4.01 to 4.33. All seven items showed the highest inter-item correlation values between 0.517 and 0.763, with corrected item-total correlations above 0.686. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the construct, based on all seven items, was 0.947, indicating that the items are suitable to represent interest. Exploratory factor analysis confirmed the correlation values, with a KMO measure of 0.882, factor matrix values ranging from 0.753 to 0.909, and 71% of the variance explained by the items.

Perceived organisational support had an average mean value of 4.67, with the eight items chosen to represent the construct displaying mean values ranging from 4.11 to 5.17. The highest inter-item correlations for the items ranged from -0.142 to 0.845, and the lowest corrected item-total correlation was -0.248. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the dimension, consisting of the eight items, was 0.887, indicating that the items are suitable to represent the dimension of perceived organisational support. The KMO measure, confirming the correlation values, was 0.719, with factor matrix values ranging from 0.322 to 0.918, and 63% of the variance explained by the eight items.

Eight items were identified to measure career goals. The overall mean value was 4.25, with the mean values of the individual items ranging from 4.09 to 4.45. All eight items showed the highest inter-item correlation values between 0.310 and 0.771, with corrected item-total correlations above 0.633. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the

construct, based on all eight items, was 0.924, indicating that the items are suitable to represent career goals. Exploratory factor analysis confirmed the correlation values, with a KMO measure of 0.861, factor matrix values ranging from 0.707 to 0.891, and 66% of the variance explained by the items.

Table 2 summarises the results of the pilot study, including reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, AVE, and CR. The findings indicate that all retained items had KMO measures greater than 0.6, with Bartlett's test of sphericity showing significant results at  $p < 0.001$ . Additionally, the AVE values exceeded the threshold of 0.5, and the CR values surpassed the threshold of 0.6, confirming the validity of the items. The Cronbach's alpha values, all above 0.6, further affirm the reliability of the retained items.

**Table 2:** KMO, Reliability, and Validity measures of the constructs

Construct	No. of Items	KMO	Bartlett's sphericity (p-value)	AVE	Construct Reliability	Cronbach $\alpha$
Self-Efficacy	8	.804	.000	0.565	0.875	.831
Promotion-Focused Outcome Expectations	11	.916	.000	0.781	0.977	.976
Prevention-Focused Outcome Expectations	3	.654	.000	0.675	0.849	.816
Interest	7	.882	.000	0.764	0.945	.947
Perceived Organisational Support	8	.719	.000	0.681	0.947	.854
Career Goal	8	.861	.000	0.644	0.939	.924

## 5. Discussions

The study's findings provide significant insights into the psychological constructs that influence the career goals of Sri Lankan marine engineers, with self-efficacy, promotion-focused outcome expectations, prevention-focused outcome expectations, interest, and perceived organisational support emerging as key factors. The validity of all the identified measures was confirmed (see Appendix). The construct of self-efficacy is strongly represented in the findings, indicating that engineers' belief in their ability to achieve their career goals plays a crucial role in shaping their aspirations. Items such as "I believe I can succeed at most any endeavour to which I set my mind" (SEQ4) and "Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well" (SEQ8) exhibit high factor loadings of 0.873 and 0.856, respectively. These results underscore the importance of self-confidence and resilience in the pursuit of career goals. Participants' overall sense of self-efficacy, reflected in the range of factor loadings from 0.522 (SEQ3) to 0.873 (SEQ4), suggests a moderate to strong association between self-efficacy and career goal commitment (Bandura, 1997). Promotion-focused outcome expectations also exhibit a strong influence on career goals, with items such as "... increase my sense of self-worth" (PROMQ5) and "... earn an attractive salary" (PROMQ2) showing exceptionally high loadings of 0.923 and 0.921, respectively. These findings highlight the engineers' motivation to achieve positive

outcomes, such as job satisfaction, financial rewards, and recognition, as key drivers in their career decision-making processes. The strong association between these factors and career goals is evident across all items in this construct, with factor loadings ranging from 0.828 to 0.923, illustrating the engineers' focus on achieving desirable career outcomes (Bullard & Manchanda, 2017). Conversely, prevention-focused outcome expectations reveal a different dynamic, where concerns about job security and potential negative outcomes are inversely related to career goals. Items like "*Chances are I will soon lose my job*" (PREVQ1) and "*I think I might lose my job in the near future*" (PREVQ4) exhibit negative loadings of -0.841 and -0.771, respectively. This inverse relationship suggests that engineers who are more focused on avoiding negative outcomes may experience heightened anxiety or insecurity, which could detract from their career aspirations. The negative factor loadings in this construct highlight the complexity of prevention-focused thinking and its potential impact on career goal formation (Higgins, 1997). Interest in the field is another pivotal factor influencing career goals, with items such as "*Solving complicated technical problems*" (INTQ5) and "*Working on a project involving scientific concepts*" (INTQ7) showing strong loadings of 0.876 and 0.854, respectively. These results indicate that a deep engagement with and passion for engineering-related activities significantly contribute to the engineers' commitment to their career goals. The factor loadings for this construct, ranging from 0.654 to 0.876, reflect the importance of interest as a motivator in pursuing career-related objectives (Leung, 2008). Finally, perceived organisational support plays a critical role in influencing career goals. Items such as "*Help is available from my organization when I have a problem*" (POSQ6) and "*My organization really cares about my well-being*" (POSQ1) exhibit high loadings of 0.900 and 0.849, respectively. These findings suggest that when engineers perceive strong support from their organisation, they are more likely to commit to their career goals, as organisational backing provides them with the confidence and resources needed to succeed. The range of factor loadings from 0.719 to 0.900 in this construct underscores the importance of organisational support in career goal development (Ho, 2023). The detailed factor analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how these psychological constructs—self-efficacy, promotion-focused outcome expectations, prevention-focused outcome expectations, interest, and perceived organisational support—interrelate with the career goals of Sri Lankan marine engineers. Each construct plays a distinct role in shaping career aspirations, with self-efficacy and promotion-focused outcome expectations showing the strongest positive correlations, while prevention-focused outcome expectations reveal an inverse relationship. This nuanced understanding contributes significantly to the literature on career goal determinants within this specific occupational context, offering valuable insights into the factors that drive the career aspirations of professionals in a rectangle-shaped hierarchy occupation (Bullard & Manchanda, 2017).

## 6. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

This study successfully identified key determinants influencing the career goals of Sri Lankan marine engineers, guided by a comprehensive review of existing literature. The findings underscore the importance of self-efficacy, outcome expectations (both promotion- and prevention-focused), interest, and perceived organisational support in shaping career aspirations. The analysis highlights the intricate relationship between these psychological constructs and career goals, suggesting that fostering a supportive organisational environment, along with enhancing self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations, can significantly influence career trajectories. The study contributes to the field by validating measurement items for a robust set of constructs related to career goals within a unique occupational context. The insights gained are particularly relevant to organisations seeking to enhance employee motivation and career development, emphasising the importance of aligning organisational support with individual career aspirations. However, the study was conducted as a pilot with a limited sample size, which restricts the generalisability of the findings. Future research should involve a larger, more representative sample to validate the results and explore additional factors, such as cultural influences and organisational dynamics, that may impact career goals. Further studies could also investigate the role of longitudinal changes in these constructs, offering deeper insights into the evolving nature of career aspirations over time.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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## Appendix

Construct	Item Code	Item	Factor Loading
Self-Efficacy	SEQ1	I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself	.638
	SEQ2	When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them	.776
	SEQ3	In general, I think that I can obtain outcomes that are important to me	.522
	SEQ4	I believe I can succeed at almost any endeavor to which I set my mind	.873
	SEQ5	I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges	.556
	SEQ6	I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks	.643
	SEQ7	Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well	.756
	SEQ8	Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well	.856
Promotion-Focused Outcome Expectations	PROMQ1	... receive a good job offer	.857
	PROMQ2	... earn an attractive salary	.921
	PROMQ3	... get respect from other people	.860
	PROMQ4	... do work that I would find satisfying	.917
	PROMQ5	... increase my sense of self-worth	.923
	PROMQ6	... have a career that is valued by my family	.878
	PROMQ7	... do work that can "make a difference" in people's lives	.909
	PROMQ8	... go into a field with high employment demand	.899
	PROMQ9	... do exciting work	.828
	PROMQ10	... have the right type and amount of contact with other people (i.e., "right" for me)	.882
	PROMQ11	, the potential to supervise other	.845
	PREVQ1	Chances are I will soon lose my job	-.841
	PREVQ3	I feel insecure about the future of my job	-.527
	PREVQ4	I think I might lose my job in the near future	-.771
Interest	INTQ1	Solving practical math problems	.654
	INTQ2	Reading articles or books about engineering issues	.816
	INTQ3	Solving computer software problems	.773

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 MEASURING DETERMINANTS OF EMPLOYEE CAREER GOALS: A PILOT STUDY OF  
 MARINE ENGINEERS IN A RECTANGULAR HIERARCHICAL OCCUPATION IN SRI LANKA

	INTQ4	Working on a project involving engineering principles	.822
	INTQ5	Solving complicated technical problems	.876
	INTQ6	Learning new computer applications	.747
	INTQ7	Working on a project involving scientific concepts	.854
Perceived Organisational Support	POSQ1	My organization really cares about my well-being	.849
	POSQ2	My organization strongly considers my goals and values	.799
	POSQ3R	My organization shows little concern for me. (R)	.740
	POSQ4	My organization cares about my opinions.	.838
	POSQ5	My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor.	.719
	POSQ6	Help is available from my organization when I have a problem	.900
	POSQ7	My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part	.752
	POSQ8R	If given the opportunity, my organization would take advantage of me. (R)	.731
Career Goal	CGQ1	I plan to reach the highest level of education in my field	.653
	CGQ2	I will pursue additional training in my occupational area of interest.	.752
	CGQ3	I will always be knowledgeable about recent advances in my field	.804
	CGQ4	I know I will work to remain current regarding knowledge in my field	.763
	CGQ5	I will attend conferences annually to advance my knowledge	.570
	CGQ6	Even if not required, I would take continuing education courses to become more knowledgeable	.669
	CGQ7	I would pursue an advanced education program to gain specialized knowledge in my field	.724
	CGQ8	Every year, I will prioritize involvement in continuing education to advance my career	.630

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