Axiological aspects of the work of academic teachers during the COVID-19 epidemic in relation to the assessment of the quality and well-being of life in higher education

Aksjologiczne aspekty pracy nauczycieli akademickich w okresie epidemii COVID-19 w odniesieniu do ich samooceny jakości życia zawodowego i samopoczucia

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The article is divided into two parts. The first part analyzes theoretical concepts like values and teacher stress during COVID-19, along with attitudes toward remote work. The second part uses qualitative survey analysis to evaluate productivity from self-assessment, well-being and work life-quality. The aim of this article is to show the relationship of values, formulated goals and their rationality with the quality of academic teacher productivity, working life, and sense of psychological well-being, during the COVID-19 epidemic. The research was conducted among a group of 18 (n=18) university teachers, through the use of 18 structured in-depth interviews, addressing the issue of the quality of life and professional functioning of this group of people. As part of the research process, was coded. This article is devoted to the axiological aspects of the lives of university teachers during the COVID-19 epidemic in Poland.

Key words: COVID-19, academics teachers, values, self-assessment of productivity, mental well-being, quality of professional life

Introduction

In Poland, COVID-19 disease risk status was introduced by the Polish government on 20.03.2020, resulting in a number of enforced additional requirements and conditions (Medexpress, 2020). This caused changes in the labour market in Poland (Flazyńska, 2020) and in different types of work environments and different professional groups, including academic teachers. Thus affecting the health, quality of professional life, and well-being of employees. The research conducted shows how the stress caused by the COVID-19 epidemic situation affected productivity levels, quality of working life and well-being, while also indicating identification with one or more values, thus showing changes in attitudes towards work in the work environment of university teachers before and after the COVID-19 epidemic.

The types of values, stress, and stress response as a threat situation

A person is an independent subject who has the ability to form judgments and beliefs in relation to certain values and to understand the consequences of his or her own actions. The evaluation of values, events and things depends to a large extent on a person's personality and cognitive structures. In turn, individual events, e.g., the influence of the environment, contribute to the assimilation of a new value system, thus modifying their previous structure and building a new hierarchy of values (Huntington, 1993).

Among the values that people strive for, the following hierarchies of values can be distinguished:

- **Dionysian values (V_d)** — type of values, referring to the attitude of people who consider as valuable the activities of unlimited consumption, living in comfort and seeking joy in a life based on materialism and positive somatic sensations;
- **Heracles values (V_h)** — type of values referring to an attitude of domination over other people, gaining fame and recognition, disregarding a comfortable and convenient life in favor of increasing the scope of influence on the lives of others;
- **Promethean values (V_p)** — type of values relating to a person who sees themselves as part of a community, helping others, and making it their goal to help other people and to fight against injustice, cruelty and repression;
- **Apollonian values (V_a)** — the type of values associated with the attitude of a person who considers learning about the world, creativity and development in science and the arts as the aim of his or her activity;
- **Socratic values (V_s)** — a type of value referring to the attitude of a person for whom self-understanding, self-education and improvement of one's own personality and inner life are important goals of action.

The five types of values presented are rarely found in pure form. Furthermore, by knowing a person's attitudes based on certain values, it is easier to describe and understand their behavior and to gain more insight into their lifestyle. The humanistic conception of human psychology draws attention to respecting values and related needs, emphasizes the pursuit of self-fulfillment, and performs work in accordance with expected performance and qualification levels.

However, stress, on the other hand, is identified with a stimulus, disruptive and disabling, as a reaction to such a stimulus and a dynamic relationship between the individual and the human environment (Kasl, 1984). Meanwhile, factors in the human environment known as stressors can be modified and cause significant changes in functioning (Newberry, Hinchcliff, 2023). However, research shows that positive changes can also occur. For example, a study by Folkman (1984) found that some teachers had positive experiences with the changes. This can also be applied to the situation with COVID-19. In this respect, the cognitive-transactional conception of stress by Lazaurs and Folkman

deserves more attention, who define stress as a relationship between an individual and the environment in which it is judged by the individual to be burdensome, exceeding his or her capacity to use resources, and threatening his or her well-being (Lazaurs, 1993; Folkman, 1984). Thus, in the transactional approach, stress is the result of a subjective and individual assessment of the social group under study, where a particular situation is not stressful in itself, but is so for a particular person. Such assessments take place in two stages. Primary, when the individual assesses the demands of the environment. This is particularly evident in the case of different ethnic groups (Boneh et al., 2022). Secondary in the context of adjusting one's own resources to cope with specific demands. The primary assessment results in a transaction as: meaningless, pleasantly positive or stressful (Kaczmarska, Curyło-Sikora, 2016). The secondary evaluation, if the former is classified as stressful, is treated as harm/loss, threat or challenge. If the situation is deemed stressful, a coping process is triggered. Coping with stress, as a general human disposition, should be understood as a person's ability to cope with stress, determining the course of the stress response and the choice of a specific strategy. Parker (Parker et al., 2021) listed the following styles of coping with stress: a) task-focused style; b) emotion-focused style; c) avoidance-focused style (Strelau, Jaworska, 2020).

According to Strelau and Jaworska (2020), defensive echoes are unconscious and irrational by the subject; they consist in omitting certain information and searching for others, as well as in providing oneself and other false interpretations of one's own behavior (which sometimes take the form of compensation). In this way, it is possible to maintain consistency between the information received and one's own motivation and interpretation of the world.

Academic teachers' assessment of the productivity of own work (APW)

The definition of teacher productivity assessment in the world literature is somewhat controversial, with ambiguous models presented regarding the assessment criteria used. Some researchers refer primarily to the description of objective factors, i.e., students' level of preparation, students' competence, or time management in class preparation (Anisrah et al., 2020; Ndugu, 2014). The COVID-19 epidemic, has highlighted the importance of underutilized subcategories for assessing teachers' media competence. These subcategories presented in the table 1 consider the ability to work remotely alongside emotional well-being. In this way, media competence will be used as an indicator of university teachers' self-productivity.

ON.	SELF-PRODUCTIVITY ASSESSMENT CATEGORY IN REMOTE WORK TECHNOLOGY	SELF-PRODUCTIVITY ASSESSMENT CATEGORY SYMBOL REMOTE WORK	EXAMPLES OF SELF-PRODUCTIVITY ASSESSMENT IN REMOTE WORK TECHNOLOGY WITHIN A SPECIFIC CATEGORY
1.	Positive attitude to the need to expand their competences.	APW1	APW_{1a}: 'Teams make my happy and the fact that I could expand my competences, and I am still inspired and satisfied with myself. Certainly, such training that we went through was useful to everyone. This is the added value of COVID. I'm pleased that I effectively use this opportunity to conduct classes, although it should be remembered that. MS Teams is only a tool of our work' (Phd, Male, 39). APW_{1b}: 'Remote work is a sign of our times. COVID has accelerated the natural process. Nothing will be as it was before, but that is good for me because that's what development and our adaptation to the world is all about. I already know that I'll want to know the functioning of other platforms´ (Phd, Male, 33).
2.	Attitude to remote classes — acceptance.	APW2	APW_{2a}: 'I have already got used to working remotely, at some point I found that it is a time saver. With my commute, it matters. Of course, if time permits, I would like to develop in this matter. So far, I am not in trouble, and I even like to have remote classes. I think I'm at an average level of using tools for remote work' (Professor, Female, 45). APW_{2b}: 'I'm basically indifferent to how I work, but I do not like to hurry, so often remote work makes me less tired, in principle I like working through an educational platform, I'm constantly coming up with what to do to make it more interesting' (Phd, Male, 43).
3.	Lack of acceptance of the form of remote work.	APW3	APW_{3a}: 'On average, I like to work remotely. I do it right, but I do not like it. I have certainly learned a lot, like all of us. I agree that these skills can still be used by us many times, which does not mean that I will refer to this form of work with my students' (Professor, Female, 64). APW_{3b}: 'I guess I'm not from the right generation to work through a laptop, it tires me more, I don't have feedback, I think I often fall into a vacuum´ (Professor, Female, 64).

Table 1. Categories of Assessment of the Productivity of Own Work of Academic Teachers during remote teaching

Source: Own research

Quality of professional life (QPF) of academic teachers

The first description of quality of life was described by J. Bluestone as a quality of working life encapsulated in a program that allowed them to play an active role in decisions about the working conditions offered (Goode, 1989; Edwards et al., 2009). In the 1970s, the International Council on Quality of Life linked it to the mental health of employees. In contrast, it was later defined by Robbins as an organization's responsibility for the needs of its employees, thereby enabling them to participate fully in decisions about their lives at work (Robbins, 1989). Nowadays, it is pointed out that quality of work life refers to satisfaction and enjoyment in the workplace, influencing life outside work, and referring to a subjective sense of happiness (Sirgy et al., 2001). Table 2 shows the categories of quality of work life assessment provided by respondents.

ON.	CATEGORY OF EVALUATION OF THE QUALITY OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE OF ACADEMIC TEACHERS	SYMBOL FOR THE CATEGORY OF SELF-ASSESSMENT OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE QUALITY	EXAMPLES OF SELF-ASSESSMENT OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE QUALITY
1.	**Negative assessment.** A certain group of teachers, due to the epidemiological situation, fear for their current workplace, which translates into a negative assessment of the quality of their working life.	QPF1	Q_{PF1}: 'Besides the fact that we have COVID, and I may not survive, I regret switching to non-public school, after each semester I'm afraid I might be fired from my job' (PhD, Female, 45).
2.	**Negative assessment.** Some teachers rated usefulness lower due to limited contact with students, which significantly limited the possibility to verify knowledge, which in turn translated into a lower assessment of professional life.	QPF2	Q_{PF2}: 'I often wonder if it would not be better for students to read the texts themselves and they do not listen to us... and due to the size of the groups, we do not have the opportunity to ask them how to feel professionally fulfilled here?' (PhD, Male, 47).
3.	**Partially positive assessment.** Some teachers indicated that by working from home they do not lose time commuting and have more time for research or monographs, so these teachers rated the less time-consuming distance learning higher, despite the negative evaluation of the epidemic.	QPF3	Q_{PF3}: 'Finally, while working at home, I can finish my research, I waited a year and a half... I also have an article started, I'm going to write it right away. This COVID also has its strengths' (Professor, Female , 51).

4.	**Partially positive evaluation.** A few respondents attended webinars to improve advanced forms of remote working to pursue professional interests.	QPF4	Q_{PF4}: 'I follow Polish and English-language webinars to find out something else... I have a little more time to research what I like, not what the money is for'. (PhD, Female, 31).

Table 2. Categories of Assessment of the Quality of Working Life of the Academic Teachers during remote teaching

Source: Own research

According to Spector (1997) who refferred following indicators of the work satisfaction: a) pay, b) promotion, c) supervision, d) fringe benefits, e) contingent rewards, f) perating conditions, g) co-workers, h) nature of work, i) communistation.

Mental well-being (MWB)

One of the first definitions of mental well-being was given over fifty years ago by the World Health Organization, describing it as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (Callahan, 1973). However, as later established, the study of well-being refers not only to the elimination of pathology, but also to the study of increases in optimism and hope, interpersonal skills, insight capacity, courage, work ethic and others (Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This approach is in line with positive psychology as developed by humanistic psychologists, i.e., Malsow and Seligman (1954). In the study presented here, psychological well-being refers to optimal human functioning, acting in harmony with oneself, i.e., a recognized value system, self-actualization, and work-life balance (Greenhaus, Powell, 2006). C.D. Ryff's (2008) model identifies indicators by which psychological well-being can be described: a) autonomy; b) the ability to 'master' the environment; personal development; positive relationships with others (based on trust); awareness of values (life goals); and self-acceptance (Ryff, Singer, 2008). Table 3 shows the categories of well-being presented based on the survey conducted on respondents.

ON.	ASSESSMENT CATEGORY OF EXPERIENCED MENTAL WELL-BEING	CATEGORY SYMBOL	EXAMPLES OF THE ASSESSMENT OF EXPERIENCED MENTAL WELL-BEING
1.	Reduced level of wellbeing. And those indicated as extroverted felt a lack of social and professional contacts.	MWB1	M_{WB1A}: 'I feel very bad when I can't meet my friends and students... I can't imagine it would last longer' (PhD, Female, 56).
2.	Reduced levels of wellbeing. Some respondents indicated difficulties in completing the intended research, being forced to finish prematurely, considering non-personal values as important.	MWB2	M_{WB2A}: 'It was so important for me to complete the research... I think about the insertion material, which will be sick for several years...' (PhD, Male, 62).
3.	Reduced levels of well-being. Some experienced workers indicated an inability to maintain a balance between work, private life and leisure time.	MWB3	M_{WB3A}: 'I sit in front of the screen all day and sit... and take root, I have no time for anything..., as long as I can do it' (PhD, Female, 60).
4.	Reduced levels of wellbeing. Some respondents only focused on taking care of their health and that of their loved ones, i.e. children, grandchildren, etc.	MWB4	M_{WB4A}: 'Everyday my spine hurts..., my children are in constant contact with clients..., my grandchildren are so sensitive, they can easily get sick..., I don't see the light in the tunnel...' (PhD, Female, 61).
5.	Slight improvement in well-being, persistent feelings of insecurity and insecurity.	MWB5	M_{WB5A}: 'They inform us that a malignant strain of the virus is developing, which is not affected by vaccination. This could be the end of humanity...' (Professor, Male, 68).
6.	Welfare status unchanged. Some of the mature teachers regarding the meaning of their lives, noticed no change from the state before the epidemic.	MWB6	M_{WB6A}: 'I do not see any drastic changes in my life in the COVID period, I do what I always did, I probably like it... and I'll continue to do so...' (PhD, Male, 67).
7.	Identifying ways to cope with difficulties. Respondents emphasised the importance of life values, i.e. love or friendship, allowing them to survive the most difficult situations during an epidemic.	MWB7	M_{WB7A}: 'In the current situation, my wife and my closest friends allow me to survive and pursue other goals that are subordinated to permanent values' (Professor, Male, 64).

8.	Coping through immersion in responsibilities. Respondents with less seniority (irrespective of gender) were more dedicated to daily and family matters, as well as to work, and were less at risk of COVID-19 than their older colleagues.	MWB8	M_{WB8A}: 'I don't have time to think about COVID, my son has an eight-year exam, my daughter is in kindergarten and I run ... I don't feel particularly threatened... I really don't have time to think about why I'm doing this and what's the point of it…' (PhD, Female, 35).
9.	Deepening commitment to professional duties.	MWB8	M_{WB8B}: 'I don't know what to put my hands into... I don't think about an epidemic... I have so many things and responsibilities... and I have to finish the project' (PhD, Male, 39).
10.	Focusing on complementing other competences as a source of maintaining well-being. Some of the teachers interviewed improved competences other than media by indulging in some of their passions.	MWB9	M_{WB9A}: 'Now I cook my favorite dishes twice a week, bake a cake... for which I did not have time before' (PhD, Male, 41). M_{WB9B}: 'I bought equipment, a dinghy, I bought a fishing license and I run away from the threat to the lake, sometimes I take my son and a friend...' (PhD, Female, 44).
11.	Focusing on the development of non-work interests. Self-fulfilment through non-work interests as a return to passions that have been put on hold due to work.	MWB9	M_{WB9C}: 'My approach to life so far was only professional work, now I have culinary art and portrait painting. It is a COVID added value. I am happy about that' (PhD, Male, 41). M_{WB9D}: 'Owe COVID that I returned to fishing, which I did in my youth. This is my passion now. For this reason, we bought a plot of land by the lake. I'm afraid that I will pull myself in too much…' (PhD, Male, 44).

Table 3. Categories of Mental Well-Being of Academic Teachers during remote teaching

Source: Own research

Test method

This research investigated values, life goals, an sense of well-being of academic teachers during the COVID-19 epidemic overt the period of approximately one and a half years. It also examined their competences in implementing education during this time and the overall quality of thier lives.

Academic teachers are a special research group; they are knowledge workers. Therefore it seems interesting to examine whether they will choose rational coping strategies in a situation of persistent, permanent threat.

The deliberations led to the following research problems:

1. What is the level of value of professional life among academic teachers after a period of fluctuating levels of COVID-19 and the restrictions imposed as a result of the epidemic?
2. How do academic teachers assess remote work and their competence to implement it?
3. How do academics assess the quality of their professional lives and sense of well-being during the epidemic?

To obtain an answer to such questions, the following items for an in-depth interview have been developed:

1. In the era of the anticipated 'functioning with COVID' and with the existence of fluctuations – how do you see your professional functioning, possible hybrid work and how do you assess your productivity as an academic teacher?
2. In this situation (functioning with COVID and possibly remaining an epidemic), how do you assess your attitude towards the world?
3. Whether the COVID-19 epidemic situation has affected your value system?
4. Are there life goals that you would like to achieve in the near and distant future changing?
5. How has the COVID-19 situation affected your personal development?
6. What is your perspective of further professional development?
7. How do you assess your current level of quality in your professional life and well-being?

To carry out the research procedure, an in-depth interview was planned, in which 18 academic teachers from Poland participated (n = 18), all of whom had previously conducted remote classes. The study involved 10 women and 8 men. The age of the

participants in the study was in the range of 31–67 years (the average age was = 47.5 years). The selection of teachers participating in the research was of a deliberate nature. The research involved both people (13 people) with a doctoral degree and with a professorship (5). They were carried out online from September to November 2021. The participants presented humanities and social sciences (11) and natural sciences (7) and were employees of public (10) and non-public (8) universities. Presentation of the results of this research is in tables 4 to 5.

Before proceeding with the study, the individual contents of the questions were encoded. On their basis, after obtaining the results, specific categories were created, which allowed for the operationalization of the obtained research material. The creation of categories was carried out using the method of competent judges[1].

Research results

In the academic staff's assessment of their productivity, the attitude towards remote learning (sometimes considered as an effective antidote to the inconvenience of commuting to face-to-face teaching classes), estimation of the level of mastery of the necessary competences, and willingness to improve them appeared most frequently.

The participants' statements made it possible to distinguish between those satisfied with the possibility of moving more freely in the 'world of media applications' and accepting remote teaching and those who accept the acquired competences, but have a negative attitude towards remote teaching.

Within the first group, it was also possible to distinguish those who, having mastered the skills of using educational platforms, felt inspired and expressed a desire to further enhance their competences. Furthermore, different attitudes towards remote learning were observed according to the age of the university teachers. As expected, older teachers expressed their skepticism towards remote learning and the associated acquisition of digital competencies. The results of the survey assoctiations of specific values with assessment of quality work life and well-being are shown in detail in table 4 below.

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[1] The competent judges were two psychologists, a sociologist and a pedagogue with a seniority of more than 10 years.

ON.	CATEGORY OF ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE BY TEACHERS	SYMBOL OF THE CATEGORY OF VALUES AND LIFE PURPOSE	SYMBOL OF THE CATEGORY OF SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE	EXAMPLES OF SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ONE'S OWN QUALITY OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE
1.	Negative, pessimistic attitude towards life, the world and the future, lack of formulated life goals.	Vd	QPF1 / MWB1	'I think it is harder to think about development, but it's not impossible. After some time, we will get used to it and live as we lived before the epidemic. You must learn to "take life as it is" and do your own thing. I would like to think about development soon in the material sense. I am building two houses as well as developing my competence: this month I'm completing a professorship. In December I fly to Mauritius for two weeks and this is my development, and at the end I'll indulging in mundane matters. For now, I'm not thinking about any other development. I don't judge the quality of life, I think if I have well-being, I just act' (PhD, Male, 37).
2.	Focus on professional and material promotion goals, Dionysian values, extensive and specific professional and non-professional goals, active attitude.	Vd	MWB2	'We have just bought a larger apartment and are renovating it, in a tenement house in the very centre, when we finish it we will start our garden in the house after parents. Now I don't have to write anything anymore… COVID was, is and will be… It's dangerous, but what to do...? I have to finish my research and write a book, and that's the second priority. If I do something, it means that it is bad either in terms of professional activity or well-being broadly understood… and in general, there are probably greater threats in the world than COVID´ (PhD, Female, 51).

3.	Focusing on strongly extended family and work responsibilities in the face of professional work is not associated with Socratic and Apollonian values. It is assumed to be a form of compensation as a defense mechanism and therefore an escape from family responsibilities and risks. In contrast, attitudes associated with Promethean values, fuzzy goals focus on action and the realisation of family and work goals.	Vs,Va,Vp;	MWB2	'I do my part all the time. I try not to waste time on unnecessary considerations. I have a lot of responsibilities ahead of me at home and at work. My son is graduating from elementary school this year, I care about a good high school. He, for now, does not yet know what he wants. At work, I don't know what to put my hands in first. I heard from colleagues that the minimum staff will return – I must start writing a book – I have materials, only "sit", but when? Other pleasures are out of the question. I used to be passionate about the art of arranging flowers, I dream to do it, I love sightseeing trips, especially Masuria. It's all a "melody of the future", but I have a plot of land in the forest and there we run away with my husband. I don't know if anything else can be done at my stage of life. I do not judge badly what I do, the quality of my life material conditions, I hope that one day I will live more peacefully' (PhD, Female, 44).
		Vs,Va,Vp;	MWB2	'There is nothing interesting going on in my life, be it a COVID or some other threat. I am constantly very busy. No time to reflect on what I am doing this; each day is similar to the next... I rate the quality of my professional life and this psychological or psychological well-being on average' (PhD, Female, 42).
4.	Focus on future-oriented, intangible goals based on Promethean values in line with a recognised system and undertaken through reflection on the meaning of life.	Vp	QPF4 / MWB3	'After COVID my way of approaching life has changed. I think I've lost my commitment to issues that were previously important. I'm in less of a hurry. I'm thinking about preparing a notarial division of property between the children, so that they do not quarrel after my departure. I should not complain about the quality of my professional life or well-being, for now I'm healthy. Psychological or psychological well-being on average' (PhD, Female, 24).

5.	Focus on future-oriented, intangible goals based on Promethean values in line with a recognised system and undertaken through reflection on the meaning of life and it sense when it ends.	Vp	QPF3 / MWB4	'After the COVID experience, I started to invest more in my inner life, in my future, but not in this world. It seems to me that this experience and the departure of three people I know made me realize in a greater way the transience of our earthly concerns. I try to do something useful and good for my loved ones, students, and people I meet, which of course does not mean that I'll neglect my family or professional duties, but I'll see them in the right proportions and from a distance. I don't complain about the quality of my life, what I do is more thoughtful, and I think it makes sense... . Welfare... I don't need to have anything more, I have everything I need, in a psychological sense, I'm calmer' (PhD, Female, 64).
6.	Keeping a distance from professional achievements perceived as professional success, pursuing personal development and/or hobbies, focusing on non-professional goals based on Socratic values.	Vs	QPF2 / MWB5	'Until the epidemic began, I thought it would be good to finish the book and apply for my professorship. Then I would have had a chance to work in a public school for a few years, but when the epidemic appeared, I changed my mind. Now I'm developing my life passion — I've re-gotten my license and I fly my paraglider as often as I can, and I praise such a lifestyle' (PhD, Female, 57).
7.	Keeping a distance from professional life, focusing on non-material goals and other content related around Socratic values.	Vs	QPF2 / MWB5	'During the epidemic, I obtained the postdoctoral degree and became the head of the department. I have, or I chose a good deputy, I decided to do nothing with any research for one and a half to two years, not to fight for PhD students and to have a minimum of teaching and not to do anything with it, but to do what I like myself. I drive, buy and renovate old cars. I already have 7 of them..., but I don't sell them, I dream of a small gallery of old cars. I get paid for it or something else, of course it is not a job at the university' (Professor, Male, 48).

8.	Focusing on extra-professional goals of a material nature, escaping from a sense of insecurity into action as a form of ,taking specific vicarious action'. Focusing on content linked to values, Socratic, Promethean and Apollonian.	Vs,Vp	MWB6	'At work I like to meet people, but maybe it's politically incorrect because I have to admit that I do what I have to do and I write the second volume of a guide to my city, comparing it with Rome and Paris. The way of narration is quite different than in typical guides, I cannot reveal... I want to bring out the knowledge of details that have already been completely forgotten. I'm not looking for any support. I'd like the publishing house to have a wide reception. Maybe I'll find a sponsor… I'm happy, I have peace at work, at home too, I don't think about COVID does not bother me, I must plan one more trip this year... I'm happy with everything' (PhD, Male, 52).
9.	Focusing on non-work goals of an intangible nature, distancing oneself from current responsibilities and situations. Devoting oneself to various life activities based on Socratic, Promethean and Apollonian values.	Vs,Vp	MWB6	'I'm a teacher who likes face to face meetings at my university, I do not complain about my professional life or well-being, but currently I'm absorbed by something completely different. I' working with two parents on a program implemented in the form of "home schooling" and we want to start in September. We have three willing children and housing opportunities, we will see. It will be an experiment. I've stopped thinking about COVID and engaging in other work which helps me not to think about a possible epidemic threat' (PhD, Female, 40).

Table 4. Discussions on values evaluation and Quality of Working Life (WLQ) and well-being (MWB) of the studied group of Academic Teachers

Source: Own research

Accepting as true the claim that values determine life goals, when analyzing the statements of the respondents in view of the values presented in them, the following types were observed: Dionysian values manifested in the realization of consumption and Socratic values, assuming that professional development serves at the same time as the cognitive development of the individual and is not just a means to achieve a more comfortable life. Sometimes Socratic, Promethean, or even Apollonian values are found together (Vp) / (QPF1 / WLQ3) / (MWB4 / MWB6). However, in addition to the current variety of values motivating academics to undertake and achieve specific goals, there were statements suggesting a 'suspension' of mobilizing values in favor of adopting a pessimistic life attitude, assuming a loss of desire to act. At the same time, it is difficult to exclude that these statements were a kind of attempt to attract attention or a cry for help (Vs / Va / Vp) / (MWB2). An element that deserves attention is the fact that more senior research participants focus on the values of spiritual life as 'a kind of investment in the future' and consider the possibility of their own death in the context of their family situation (Vs / Vp) / (MWB7).

Analyzing the life goals of university teachers, it is possible to observe an intensive formulation of life goals, which were perhaps previously blocked and are now preventing their realization. They include both the area of professional work and extra-professional activities related to family responsibilities that are of a material and intangible nature. The intangible nature of life values is most often referred to as the pursuit of interests and hobbies. Sometimes the formulation of values refers to both professional and non-professional values, and in other cases only to non-professional values (Vs / Vp) / (MWB7). With regard to the latter, university teachers presented a certain distance from their professional duties and achievements, giving more importance to what interests them outside their professional duties.

In the case of some university teachers, the occurrence of defense mechanisms was observed as a reaction to a stressful situation, involving the conscious undertaking of numerous activities that allow them not to focus on the threat posed by the epidemic (Vp) / MWB3 / MWB4). Such behaviors take the form of either a race against time in the case of simultaneous intensification of family and work values, or a form of escape to work as an antidote to the unpredictable threat of the COVID-19 epidemic. In addition, denial, and deprecation of threats during the epidemic (Vs, Va, Vp) / (MWB2) were observed, to a greater extent allowing for psychological balance.

Referring to the evaluation of their own quality of life, the university teachers who took part in the in-depth interview showed a variation. The respondents' statements regarding quality of life can be divided into three categories: positive (QPF2 / MWB7)

and manifesting Socratic values (Vs), partially positive (WLQ3 / QPF4 / MWB3 / MWB4), and negative (QPF1 /MWB1 / MWB2) manifesting Promethean values (Vp) and realizing Dionysian values (Vd). Similar to the discussion of values, negative attitudes towards all life activities and the inability to generate a sense of meaning in life result in low ratings of the quality of working life and sense of well-being. In contrast, very intense activity and 'throwing oneself into work and family responsibilities' in this study co-occurred with a partially positive assessment of the quality of working life and well-being. This may be due to the fact that, in the face of the epidemic, there is less time to reflect on one's life and on the risk situation.

Another category of evaluations of experienced well-being also emerged in the respondents' statements, emphasizing the 'peculiar stability' of this well-being, regardless of the presence of the epidemic. This condition indicates the resilience of a certain group (cf. Fokkens-Bruinsma et al., 2023) of university teachers to stressful situations and a strong focus on the realization of life values (including professional values).

Discussion

When considering the types of values of academic teachers, the diversity revealed in the research deserves attention, which seems to be adapted to the stage of life (Cibor, 2008), although on the basis of the research carried out, a broader generalization should certainly not be made. In detail, the relationship between individual values, quality of academic teachers' professional life and well-being is shown in table 5. Some people participating in the research presented Dionysian values and were focused on material stability (striving to have their own house or apartment); these values were associated with professional promotion, the pursuit of which causes dilemmas related to its classification Vd (APW1 / APW3) / (MWB2).

ON.	TYPE OF VALUE IN UNIVERSITY TEACH-ERS ATTITUDE	SYMBOL OF THE VALUE	RELA-TION TO LEVEL OF PRO-DUCTIVI-TY (LPA)	RELATION TO THE MENTAL WELL-BE-ING (MWB)
1.	'Remote work was treated by me as a necessity, I did not want to lose it therefore, I quickly adapted to the rules of the game. My motto is full of interesting experiences, a pleasant comfortable life, although I'm anxious to be a good specialist in my area of work… Trying to assess my productivity in remote work both now and at the beginning of the epidemic, I can confidently say that it is mediocre, I'm not fascinated by remote work, but I discharged my duties, I currently have stationary classes. The quality of my work life, of course, during the isolation was not the best and my sense of well-being the same, but now it is fine' (PhD, Male, 36).	V_D	QPF3 QPF1	MWB2
2.	'I do not pretend that I'd like to save humanity from climate catastrophe or find an antidote to aging, I' m not a hypocrite, but to survive in comfort for at least 15–20 years and working remotely was necessary for me like any of us in order not to lose employment. Although I have been working at the university for quite a long time I have various other interests' (Professor, Male, 53).	V_D	QPF3	MWB2
3.	'Remote work has been a challenge for me. I continue to improve it further. I'm not sure where it comes from, perhaps my greater interest in working remotely comes from a desire to test myself. I'm convinced that in my department I'm the best. I achieved my PhD at 27, now I'm struggling with my professorship... I did not suffer during COVID, although I sometimes felt worse. I rate the quality of my work life and my sense of well-being under COVID threat as average' (PhD, Male 33).	V_S	QPF2	MWB3

4.	'My motto in life is continuous learning, so if I have the opportunity, I take it. I believe that during the epidemic my productivity in remote teaching was not and is not on the highest, but on average level. I like remote work and sometimes avoid it, but not because I had or have any problems I just like direct contact with students. During COVID I improved my Spanish, and now I'm learning Italian. I'm currently a certified translator of two languages. I'll be taking the Spanish exam in September… In retrospect, I believe that the quality of my work life will improve because of the epidemic, although during the epidemic, like everyone else, I felt the uncertainty of tomorrow… and did not feel my best' (Professor, Male, 43).	Vs	QPF3 QPF2	MWB3 MWB6
5.	'I think everything can be learned. I did not have any problems working remotely, I helped my colleagues. I like working remotely, and I'll say immodestly that I rate my productivity in remote work highly. Epidemic time also allowed me to carry out my publishing plan. Contrary to appearances, I did not experience a lot of stress and nothing bad happened in my environment. I finished a book that I had put off many times, and I think it is finally what I had in mind before, and I know what I should research further... . We'll see what the reviewers say... My passion is also the classics in theatre. During the COVID threat, of course I was afraid for my and my family's health like everyone else. However, I do not think that the quality of my professional life decreased, vice versa…' (PhD, Female, 39).	Vp	QPF2	MWB7
6.	'COVID time was a time of deepened self-reflection for me, which I did not have time for before. For working remotely, of course, I was not fond of and still am not. I had to work this way, there were no complaints, and if there were problems it was not culpable and not because of me, but the stress and my daughter's illness allowed me to recognise how important my family is to me. I tried to think beforehand about what I care most about and not do anything against myself. I even thought about giving up my job at the university and leaving the work to the younger generation, Truth be told, this experience has made me still hesitate. Perhaps I should take care of my grandchildren and I have been working for so long… My daughter is so burdened with work… I rate the quality of my work life during COVID as low and my sense of well-being the same' (Professor, Female, 62).	Vh	QPF3	MWB7 MWB1

7.	'I have gotten used to working remotely, the positives include the ability to save time on commuting. My productivity did not change during the epidemic, I do not think it is too bad, and I think it stayed that way until today. COVID, like any difficult experience, helped me understand the meaning of my existence. I had some trouble with it before… I'm alone, I took a dog from a shelter… I may be considered a freak, but I feel fulfilled… Although it was hard for me during the epidemic and I don't think that the quality of my work life suffered excessively, although at times I had a bad mood, but I managed to keep my mental balance' (PhD, Female, 63).	V_s	QPF3	MWB7 MWB8
8.	'I am working on improving the implants, to date much shorter to which I gave a warranty which was only 5 years. Our productivity during COVID was oscillated only as a learning activities, which I did not like and do not like if done online. After the epidemic, we went back to work… I currently have three PhD students in the team. We still need about a year. The quality of my work life was none, I was annoyed like everyone else and eventually got sick, but I guess I'm still needed...' (Professor, Male, 67).	V_P	QPF3	MWB1 MWB3 MWB4 MWB6

Table 5. The discussion about the relation between Values, Quality of Working Life and Mental Well-Being to university teachers attitude

Source: Own research

It is difficult to assess whether it is based solely on the desire to achieve professional stability or cognitive motivations; then they should be classified as Socratic values (Vs) / (APW2) / (MWB1) and (Vs) / (APW2, APW3) / (MWB1, MWB6) and (Vs) / (APW3) / (MWB7, MWB8). Other study participants were motivated by Promethean values associated with a pro-social attitude (Vp) / (APW3) / (MWB1, MWB3, MWB4, MWB6) (Pilger et al., 2021). Another category observed among academic teachers turned out to be the Socratic artiness already mentioned in the art. These values were mainly related to the pursuit of non-professional interests. In the case of the analysis of the statements of academic teachers, it can be assumed that in addition to striving to acquire new knowledge and ethics, they show a connection with Dionysian values, leading to a feeling of satisfaction with the activities performed. However, respondents were less aware of the Apollo values Vp / (APW2) / (MWB7) and Heracles values and (Vh) / (APW3) / (MWB7) / (MWB1). Moreover, Apollo values correlated less with any type of self-assessment of work and mental well-being than other values. Therefore, people were more likely to endorse attitudes related to the Socratic and Dionysian types of values.

Among the goals mentioned by academic teachers during the epidemic, one can distinguish material, intangible, related to professional promotion and non-professional interests, specific and fuzzy.

Turning to the analysis of the content of the goals formulated by academic teachers during the COVID-19 epidemic, it is worth noting the presence of protective motives in the form of defense mechanisms that allow individuals to maintain mental balance to a greater extent. Somewhat controversial was the unreflective throwing of oneself into work, whereby the behavior of some academics was not entirely conscious. In addition, the desire to 'live and consume life' in a particularly intense way, reminiscent of the 'five minutes before twelve' behavior syndrome, which was a manifestation of a compensatory mechanism after several initiatives had been blocked due to the numerous restrictions as a result of the developing epidemic, appeared in the statements of some academics. In line with previous research (Falton et al., 2021), insufficient reflection and a lack of reflection on daily events in a threatening situation does not increase resilience to stress. It was also pointed out in their survey that actions by the government, individual ministries, or the media also affected teachers' work and their sense of well-being (McDonough, Lemon, 2022). Besides, this situation causes the formulated goals to become blurred, and the subject involved to become an object of accidental or other people's intentions (Obuchowski, 2000; 2001).

The confrontation of the subsequent research results obtained with the results of previous research on digital competence partly confirms the conclusions formulated by other authors.

The studies conducted observed lower levels of self-assessed productivity and quality of working life. Some authors point to the difficulties arising from the need for academics to learn a new way of training, as well as the need to make organizational changes in universities in relation to the teaching of digital competences, which involved new self-perceptions (Trujillo, 2021) and the forced change in learning outcomes for teachers that was caused by the COVID-19 epidemic. The study also made it possible to observe lower levels of self-assessment of productivity, quality of working life, and sense of well-being in people aged 60 and older compared to younger colleagues.

Some of the more senior respondents (aged 60 and older), regardless of the discomfort caused by working remotely, showed concern for the quality of education and its effectiveness, providing evidence of their willingness to fulfill the honorable mission of their profession (Newberry, Hinchcliff, 2023), while others emphasized the role of the enduring values of a sense of closeness and friendship as an antidote to threats to health or life.

As a result, in the research presented by Parker, Hansen and Brendowski, academics were, on average, rated by their students in terms of their digital competence (Parker et al., 2021), and in a study by American researchers, students indicated that academics were more involved in the preparation of offline than online classes. Notwithstanding the fact that the understanding of teacher productivity adopted by the authors of this article is a completely subjective category, these results do not match the self-assessment of the respondents in this study. However, due to the subcategory of self-assessment of productivity, they are consistent with the research of Huk, who, based on disengagement theory, indicated that university teachers over 45 are concerned about the pace of changes taking place and their inability to adapt to them, which may limit their activity in certain spaces of social life (Huk, 2014). The data obtained corroborate previous research findings on the relationship between age and recognized values.

Conclusions

By conducting research related to the phenomenon described above, it was possible to observe similar results among the 216 university teachers from different regions of Ecuador who participated in the study. The results of the study also showed differences in the acquisition of digital competencies according to age. Younger teachers worked much more easily than their older colleagues (Jorge-Vázquez et al., 2021). Also, although to a lesser extent, previous studies indicate a change in the quality of life of university teachers in relation to the COVID-19 epidemic. These results support the conclusions reached in other studies (Betancourt-Odio et al., 2021). Similar conclusions were obtained in a study conducted in Mexico (González-Nieto et al., 2021), which paid particular attention to the psychological burden felt in academia, caused not only by the need to teach at a distance, but also by psychological factors caused by isolation in the home environment. Furthermore, research presented by Sigurdardottir, Torfason and Jonsdottir indicated that the epidemic described above also affected social bonds, not only between students, but also between students and academics (Sigurdardottir et al., 2022). Undoubtedly, this is another important aspect, indicating the changes that followed COVID-19 and are already observable in higher education. On the other hand, as pointed out in the UK study, the need to migrate to online university teaching has, on the one hand, strengthened collegiality between faculties and also between individual academics. But also, the epidemiological situa-

tion, as indicated by the authors, will significantly affect the mental health of university teachers (Watermeyer, et al., 2020), and its change will worsen the relationship between them and the professional services staff of the universities in the mentioned country (Watermeyer et al., 2022).

The research conducted suggests the following possibilities for applied change. It would be good to organize training for university teachers, with voluntary participation, on the different levels of familiarity and use of learning platforms. In addition, it would be useful to consider the possibility of anonymous use of psychological therapy outside the university, not only for students, but also for academics or those who see a need for it. Workshops, held periodically, to reduce the experience of stress would be advisable. However, as Soncicni, Floris and Matteucci points out, it is worth it for teachers to receive, apart from emotional, instrumental and informational support (Soncini et al., 2023).

The research presented here inspires further in-depth analysis of the role of defense mechanisms as a factor leading to the achievement of planned goals through the reduction of emotional tension. Regardless, it would be worthwhile to compare the results of the study in the group of university teachers with other, e.g., taught qualitative studies. These analyses are not free of limitations; they include the resulting qualitative research procedure, the small research sample, the subjectivity in the sense of the disposition to in-depth interviews, and the scope of the research field. Regardless of this, it can be expected that this piece of research will value the resulting goals, attitudes towards one's remote work, and assessment of quality of life and well-being.

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