

## AN ANALYSIS OF JOB SATISFACTION AT THE ACADEMIC LEVEL: A ROMANIAN CASE STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

*The present paper identifies and discusses factors, considerations and aspects from the jobs of university academic staff that contribute to their satisfaction and dissatisfaction at the working place. An institutional case study lies at the basis of the discussion, emphasizing the measurement of the job satisfaction of academic staff within a Romanian university. Among the debated aspects are: promotion opportunities, support and facilities, working conditions, climate at the work place, income level and others, some of them contributing to increased satisfaction, but others contributing to dissatisfaction at the work place. Based on the results of the research, institutional problems can be identified and suggestions for a new institutional profile and a modern management strategy can be formulated as a key in the new competitive context, where a functional redesigning is a necessity, as to set up a dynamic equilibrium at the crossroads between universities and economic, social and political environment.*

**JEL:** I21

### INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction refers to one person's feelings regarding the nature of the work and can be influenced by a variety of factors, such as the quality of the relationship with the supervisor, the quality of the working environment, the motivation system and its efficiency. A good deal of empirical research have been conducted on the job satisfaction in various business settings. But very little empirical research, however, has investigated level of job satisfaction in universities.

One reason for this situation is based on the fact that academics are commonly regarded as self motivated, working within highly motivated environment which enables them to pursue their aims in teaching, research, service and consultancy (Moses, 1986). To be consistent with this opinion, the enhancement of university teaching is a genuine scholarly activity and should be regarded as a professional commitment by all academic staff involved in teaching, supervising and tutoring. The evaluation of teaching is an integral feature of the enhancement of teaching. Teaching is a complex human activity and its quality is of concern to a variety of stakeholders.

Academic management should take into consideration that an appropriate recognition and reward of the accomplishments of staff is essential to the motivation, attraction and retention of quality staff. The ability to attract and retain key academic staff is one of the important components of the university's ability to achieve the strategic goals it has set for the future. A transparent and consistently robust process of promotion which is based upon meritorious performance in areas of research, teaching and service and seeks to recognize and reward academic work according to its quality and impact, will be one measure of the university's educational management performance.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Job satisfaction is important because of its effects on employees' performance and behaviour, as well as general health (Oshagbemi, 1999). Prior studies have shown that there is a close connection between job satisfaction and organizational outcomes: job performance (Meyer et al., 1989), customer satisfaction (Bitner, 1990), turnover intention (Tett et al., 1993), organizational commitment (Locke&Latham, 1990) and personal outcomes: workplace turnover and life satisfaction (Judge et al. 2001; Dickter et al., 1996; Morrison, 1997). According to Oshagbemi (1999) and Robbins (2001), the construct of job satisfaction is conceptualized as an individual's general attitude toward an object, the job. This is consistent with Locke's (1976) definition of job satisfaction as a "pleasurable or positive emotional state, resulting from the appraisal of one's job experiences". Dawis and Lofquist (1984) argued that job satisfaction is the result of the individual's appraisal of the extent to which the work environment meets the individual's needs.

Robbins (2001) notes that factors affecting job satisfaction include "interaction with co-workers and bosses, observing organizational rules and policies, meeting performance standards and living with working conditions". He acknowledges job satisfaction factors as relating to the work itself, quality of supervision, relationship with co-workers, promotional opportunities and pay. In addition, the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire identified various aspects of job satisfaction: working conditions, chances for advancement, freedom to use one's judgment, praise for going a good job and feelings of accomplishment (Weiss et al., 1967). This supports Locke's (1976) findings, which showed factors conducive to job satisfaction as including: mentally challenging work equitable rewards, supportive working conditions, and supportive colleagues.

Herzberg et al. (1959) expounded *the dual-factor theory of job satisfaction*, which states that there are two groups of factors, which determine job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction. Herzberg's (1966) two-factor theory suggests that only job content-related factors (achievement, responsibility, the work itself) lead to job satisfaction. On the other hand, job context-related factors (pay, security, working conditions) lead to job dissatisfaction.

*The situational occurrences theory* developed in 1992 by Quarstein et al. argues that job satisfaction is a function of situational occurrences and situational characteristics and that any given factor, e.g. pay or recognition, can result in either job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. There are important changes occurring in higher education today all over the world, changes that have arisen from pressures of demand, the cultural shift in the way in which higher education is viewed, financial pressures, structural and managerial diversity and diversity of university missions and such changes affect the job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of university teachers Oshagbemi (1997).

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted with all members of the academic staff from a higher education institution (HEI) specialized in the economic field, from Bucharest, Romania. Among the objectives of the study were to identify the degree of satisfaction of the academic staff in relationship with a number of aspects of the institutional life as important factors of job satisfaction. A written questionnaire was distributed nominally to all 832 full time employed academics of the studied institution in the period November-December 2006. The response rate was of 32.5%, as 271 academics participated in the survey. Table 1 presents the structure of the sample.

Table 1: Structure of the Sample

No.	Academic Position	Total Number of Academics	Number Respondents	Response rate (%)
1.	Professor	253	70	27.6%
2.	Senior lecturer	125	42	33.6%
3.	Lecturer	169	61	36%
4.	Asisstant lecturer	201	75	37.3%
5.	Junior assistant lecturer	84	23	27.3%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>832</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>32.5%</b>

*This table presents the structure of the sample of the research.. The questionnaire was distributed to all academic staff within the university (832 persons) and the overall response rate was 32,5%.*

One can notice that there were slightly lower response rates (under the average) for the extreme academic positions (junior assistant lecturer and full professor), while more interested to express their opinions were lecturers and assistant lecturers.

## RESULTS

As we have already seen, a number of factors influence job satisfaction. In this context, we were interested to investigate the perception of academic staff over aspects that can be potential influencers of job satisfaction: the level of income, working conditions, access to information, teaching aids, climate at the work place, certainty of the work place, promotion opportunities and the teaching load. Respondents were asked to express their level of satisfaction with a number of aspects, part of the institutions' life. Table 2 presents how their opinion differed according to academic position.

Table 2: Degree of Satisfaction of Academic Staff according to the Academic Positions

Aspects*	Junior Assistant Lecturer	Assistant Lecturer	Lecturer	Senior Lecturer	Professor	Average
Level of income	2.70	2.15	2.13	2.36	3.69	2.64
Working conditions	2.70	2.74	2.95	3.15	3.51	3.05
Support services personnel	3.13	3.03	3.08	3.14	3.32	3.14
Access to information	3.00	2.89	3.12	3.34	3.55	3.15
<b>Teaching aids</b>	2.91	2.99	3.18	3.43	3.65	3.27

*This table presents how the opinion of the respondents differed according to their academic position.*

*\* Each aspect was ranked on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = very dissatisfied and 5 = very satisfied*

Academics in the studied Romanian HEI were most dissatisfied by the level of the income they earn from the institution, aspect that on average was appreciated as being under 3 (2.64), the acceptable level. However, there were differences according to academic positions, as presented in Table 2. The only category that had a higher degree of satisfaction as far as the income was concerned (3.69) was the full professor category (many of whom aged over 50), the position of full professor being so far the only academic position well paid in the Romanian higher education system. The least dissatisfied with the income they receive from the institution were lecturers (2.13) and assistant lecturers (2.15), generally corresponding to ages between 25 and 40 years old.

All other aspects scored on average around 3 and a little above, illustrating a level of average satisfaction, the highest score being received by the number and quality of the teaching aids (3.27), given the technological updating that took place in the last years in the institution. Again, there were differences on academic positions. Persons on lower academic positions (junior assistant lecturers, assistant lectures and lecturers) and younger (under the age of 30) were more dissatisfied with working conditions, access to information and teaching aids, than persons on more senior positions (senior lecturers and full professors). This is due on the one hand to the higher expectations of more IT and high tech literate younger junior positioned academic staff. On the other hand, senior people have better access to facilities (some have

their own offices in the buildings of the HEI, better access to IT equipment and consumables and better access to scientific information) and to support services (secretarial services, etc).

The t-test reveals that the level of income and the working conditions are significantly correlated with the academic position, while the other three elements are not (the critical value of the t-stat is 1.645), confirming that the degree of satisfaction of the academic staff is differentiated according to academic position for the level of income and the working conditions, while for the support service personnel, access to information and teaching aids elements, the degree of satisfaction is more homogeneous for academic staff on different academic positions (see Table 3).

Table 3: Mean, Variance and T-stat Values for the Degree of Satisfaction of the Academic Staff (according to the Academic Positions)

	Level of Income	Working Conditions	Support Services Personnel	Access to Information	Teaching Aids
Mean	2.6431	3.0544	3.1486	3.1533	3.2710
Variance	1.3265	1.1197	1.1445	1.5021	1.1982
Observations	271	271	271	271	271
t stat (Ac. Position)	-6.2360	-1.7007	-0.5744	-0.8343	0.5818
<b>Significance</b>	100%	91%	43.1%	59.3%	43.3%

*This table shows the correlation between the level of income, working conditions, support service personnel, access to information and teaching aids on the one hand and the academic positions on the other hand using T-stat tests*

Respondents were also asked to rank on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 – very bad, 5 – very good) the way they appreciate a number of aspects related to the activities of the HEI that constitute job satisfaction factors. Table 4 shows how results differed according to the academic positions.

Table 4: Ranking of Job Satisfaction Factors according to the Academic Position

Job satisfaction factors*	Junior Assistant lecturer	Assistant Lecturer	Lecturer	Senior Lecturer	Professor	Average
Climate at the work place	3.43	3.34	3.41	3.21	3.30	3.31
Certainty of work place	3.96	3.61	3.43	3.29	3.64	3.55
Promotion opportunities	3.17	2.88	2.85	2.52	3.02	2.87
<b>Teaching load</b>	3.00	3.07	3.26	3.22	3.71	3.29

*This table shows the perception of the respondents related to the importance of different factors for their job satisfaction, according to their academic position. \* Each aspect was ranked on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = very bad and 5 = very good*

The aspect that was most appreciated by academics on all positions was the certainty of the work place (3.55), while promotion opportunities was the least appreciated aspect (2.87). As far as promotion opportunities are concerned, slightly more satisfied were junior assistant lecturers (who are promoted as assistant lecturers in two years time) and the full professors (who are at the end of their promotional ladder). All others appreciated that promotion opportunities are under the average level. This is due to the new (2005) promotion criteria introduced in Romania that are more demanding than the ones in the previous period. The senior lecturers are the least satisfied (2.52) as they are willing to be promoted to full professor positions. Instead, they are now required to fulfill a number of tougher conditions than before. Nicolescu et al. (2008) present how the promotion criteria have changed in Romania with higher orientation towards research and international publications, criteria that were not required previously and that imply a certain experience and longer periods of time in order to be fulfilled.

Another aspect positively evaluated by most academics was the climate at the workplace, with a score of 3.3. Persons on junior academic positions were the most satisfied by the climate at the work place. Teaching load was appreciated positively by persons on senior positions (senior lecturers and full professors) and older of age (over 50), who actually have teaching norms formed from a lower number of teaching hours, (other activities being included in their norms), while persons on junior positions have

norms with higher number of teaching hours. Male and female academics appreciated equally the aspects influencing their degree of satisfaction at the work place

The correlation between certainty of work place and promotion opportunities on the one hand and academic position on the other hand is statistically significant (computed T-stat values are higher than the critical value 1.645), illustrating differences in the appreciation of job satisfaction factors by people on different academic positions. At the same time a higher degree of homogeneity between people with different academic positions is noticed for the other job satisfaction factors (climate at the work place, teaching load), for which t-tests are not significantly correlated. Table 5 presents the t-stat values for the above discussed job satisfaction factors.

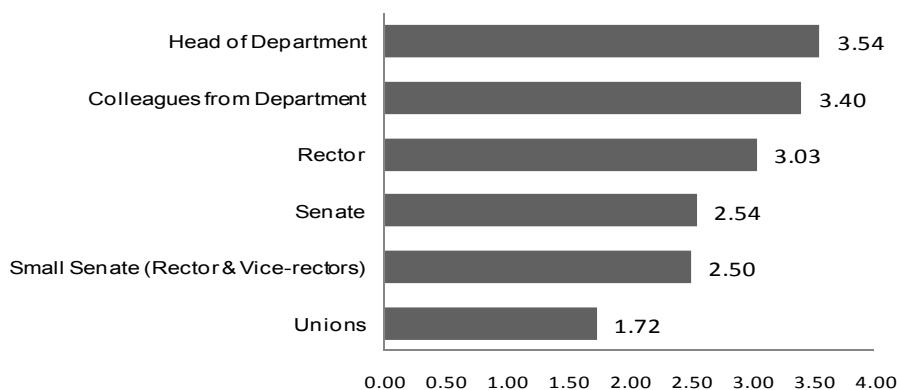
Table 5: Mean, Variance and T-stat Values for the Job Satisfaction Factors Ranking (according to the Academic Position)

	Climate at the Workplace	Certainty of Workplace	Promotion Opportunities	Teaching Load
Mean	3.3188	3.5589	2.8707	3.2901
Variance	1.3088	1.2100	1.5055	1.5338
Observations	271	271	271	271
t-stat (Ac. Position)	1.4082	3.4055	-3.2876	0.3890
<b>Significance</b>	83.8%	99.9%	99.8%	29.6%

*This table shows the correlation between climate at the work place, certainty of the work place, promotion opportunities and the teaching load on the one hand and academic position on the other hand using T-stat tests.*

Other aspects researched having possible implications for the job satisfaction were the following: the perceived level of the students' quality and the degree of trust in different persons and institutions within the HEI. The higher degree of trust the academics feel towards their direct bosses (heads of departments) and their department colleagues influences positively the good climate at the work place (see Figure 1). At the same time, unions are not trusted at all (1.72); an acceptable degree of trust receives the Rector of the university (3.03), while collective representative bodies (such as the Senate) enjoy less trust.

Figure 1: Degree of Trust of Academics in Persons and Bodies within HEI



*This figure shows the degree of trust of the respondents towards different bodies within the studied HEI.*

Similarly, both the percentage of the total individual income earned from this institution and the direction in which the academic staff personal responsibility goes, can also explain the degree of job satisfaction at the work place.

Based on t-stat tests, we noticed that the correlations between the degree of trust of academics in persons and bodies within the HEI and academic position are statistically relevant for all analyzed categories, confirming the above presented results (see Table 6).

Table 6: Mean, Variance and T-stat Values for the Degree of Trust of Academics in Persons and Bodies within HEI

	Colleagues	Unions	Head of Department	Rector	Senate	Small Senate
Mean	3.4053	1.7295	3.5456	3.0330	2.5437	2.5095
Variance	1.5748	1.84383	2.3133	2.4869	2.3514	2.4811
Observations	271	271	271	271	271	271
t-stat (Ac. Position)	9.8612	-4.6887	10.9804	6.5431	3.0316	2.2399
<b>Significance</b>	100%	99.9%	100%	100%	99.7%	97.4%

*This table shows the correlation between the degree of trust of academics in different persons and bodies within the HEI on the one hand and academic position on the other hand using T-stat tests.*

Most academic staff feels responsible for their activity in front of their own consciousness (48.5%) and an almost equal group of academics feels responsible in front of the students (41.3%). This reflects on the one hand, the high degree of freedom that academics have that make them feel responsible towards themselves for doing a good job through a self-controlled system and on the other hand the actual tendency all over the world towards a client-oriented philosophy when dealing with students, towards whom, academics feel accountable for their activities.

The degree to which academics round their income by working supplementary outside the institution reflects on the one hand their degree of satisfaction at the work place, as well as their fidelity towards the institution. The majority of the academic staff from our sample (62.6%) earn more than 90% of their income from the HEI where they are employed fulltime and this reflects a certain degree of loyalty, given the fact that most of them (except probably full professors) are discontent with the level of income they earn from the institution. However, 22% of the respondents get 50% or more of their income outside the institution. Firstly, these are people hired on junior positions, who usually have lower salaries, higher expectations and more outside opportunities (some of them choose eventually to leave the institution for other jobs). Secondly, among the dissatisfied, there are people on senior positions who also have professional commitments outside the HEI.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Three types of institutional factors influence job satisfaction levels in the studied Romanian HEI. First, Dissatisfaction factors for a large part of the academic staff are the following: the level of income for all academic positions (except full professor) and promotional opportunities. Second, Satisfaction factors for most academic staff are the following: certainty of the work place, climate at the work place and the number of teaching hours. Third, The following factors are sources of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction: the access to information, the teaching aids and the working conditions. People consider the above factors as satisfactory or non-satisfactory depending on the differences in expectations (determined by personal factors such as age, academic position, working experience) on the one hand, and the access to different facilities, working conditions on the other hand. These factors relate to the organizational support offered to employees. Susskind et al. (2000) consider that employees' perceived organizational support influences their job satisfaction and the employees' job satisfaction influences work-related attitudes. The correlations with academic position of the majority of the variables are statistically significant, illustrating higher or lower differences in the job satisfaction's factors and influencers for people with different academic positions.

The results of the present study are consistent with findings of other similar studies. For instance, Kostelious (2001) has studied the relationship between personal characteristics and job satisfaction for

Greek teachers and showed that teachers were satisfied with the job itself and supervision but dissatisfied with pay and promotional opportunities. In addition, he found that various personal characteristics (e.g. gender, age, etc) were significant predictors of several aspects of job satisfaction, therefore moderating job satisfaction.

Oshagbemi (1997) considered the complexity of the decisions relating to both satisfaction and dissatisfaction and concluded that the two-factor theory is an over-simplification of reality in today's organizations. Thus, his study that has employed a content analytical methodology to investigate contributory factors to the job satisfaction and dissatisfaction of teachers in higher education, does not support the Herzberg's theory, which says that factors that lead to the job satisfaction are separate and distinct from those that lead to job dissatisfaction. Rather, the results of his investigation appear to support the situational occurrence theory, which argues that any given factor, e.g. the work itself or salary, can result in either job satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

This is also consistent with the results of the present study that illustrate how different factors influence positively or negatively the job satisfaction of the academic staff, depending on individuals. This means that the overall level of job satisfaction increases if employers concentrate their efforts at both situational occurrences and situational characteristics rather than by either factor alone. We do not claim that these results apply to the entire Romanian higher education sector, but they represent a good example of what can motivate or de-motivate academic staff in obtaining performance and can be a starting point both at institutional and at sector level for policy decision making.

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