

Salomé Schulze

The work experience of white male academics

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This article reports on the work experiences of a group of white male academics from the human sciences and on the usefulness of some theories of job satisfaction. Quantitative data were collected from 25 respondents by means of a questionnaire. Thereafter, qualitative data were collected. Eight participants were provided with cameras and requested to photograph their work experiences. This was followed by interviews based on the images. A central theme that emerged was the attitude of each individual. Secondary themes relating to job satisfaction were a positive physical environment/support; satisfying interpersonal relationships, and independence/autonomy/freedom. Secondary themes relating to job dissatisfaction were promotion issues, administrative burdens, and heavy teaching loads, aggravated by weak students.

Die werkervaring van blanke manlike akademië

Hierdie artikel doen verslag oor die werkservarings van 'n groep blanke, manlike akademië in die menswetenskappe en die toepaslikheid van sommige teorieë oor werksbevrediging. Kwantitatiewe data is deur middel van 'n vraelys by 25 respondente ingesamel. Daarna is kwalitatiewe data ingesamel. Agt deelnemers is voorsien van 'n kamera en versoek om foto's te neem van die hoogte- en laagtepunte van hul werk. Dit is gevolg deur fotogebaseerde onderhoude. 'n Sentrale tema wat aan die gekom het, is die houding van elke individu. Sekondêre temas wat met werksbevrediging verband hou, is positiewe fisiese omgewing/ondersteuning, bevredigende interpersoonlike verhoudings en onafhanklikheid/ouonomie/vryheid. Sekondêre tema's wat verband hou met ontevredeheid, is bevorderingskewesies, administratiewe laste en swaar onderriggladings wat vererger word deur swak studente.

Job satisfaction is described by E A Locke (Oshagbemi 1999: 388) as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state, resulting from the appraisal of one’s job experiences”. Job satisfaction has been measured as a sum of facet satisfaction that provides information about how employees perceive certain aspects of their work. It has also been measured as a global, affective response that provides an overall view of how individuals view their employment.

Electronic databases reveal that the job satisfaction of academics has not often been investigated. With “job satisfaction” and “higher education” as key words, the ISAP Index to South African Periodicals produced only eight matches for publications between 1987 and 2004. There is also a void in the literature on how academics’ job satisfaction is influenced by transformation issues. For example, the higher education (HE) institution at which this study took place has merged with two others, causing significant upheaval. Employment equity in South Africa also places the white male last in line for appointment or promotion. This is in sharp contrast to the power, privileges and prestige previously accorded white males in HE institutions. This raises several questions. How do white male academics currently experience their work? How useful are the theories on job satisfaction in explaining the situation mentioned before? The job satisfaction of all academics is important since “satisfied faculty will generally be innovative and motivated to establish and maintain an environment conducive to learning” (Truell *et al* 1998: 120). Job satisfaction also affects absenteeism and turnover. Numerous theories have been formulated to explain job satisfaction. Those of significance to this study will now be outlined.

1. Theoretical background

Among the “older theories” is the two-factor theory postulated by Herzberg (1957). He argued that the intrinsic factors of a job lead to job satisfaction when present, but do not produce dissatisfaction when absent. Extrinsic factors cause dissatisfaction when inadequate, but do not cause satisfaction, even when they are present. Herzberg’s theory was partly confirmed in some studies (cf Diener 1985, Baron 2000) but not in others (cf Oshagbemi 1997, Winstead *et al* 1995, Muchinsky 1993: 296).

Need fulfilment theories of job satisfaction are related to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs. In one example, Alderfer (1969) postulated three categories of needs: existence (material and physiological desires), relatedness (social relationships) and growth (requiring individuals to make full use of their capabilities and develop new ones). Alderfer's categories are not strictly hierarchical. Need fulfilment theories can be criticised for not taking individual differences into account.

The discrepancy theories of Katzell (Staw 1995: 81) and Locke (Staw 1995: 81) see satisfaction as the perceived difference between what employees have and what they want or feel they deserve. The greater the difference, the more dissatisfied the worker is. Although discrepancy theories consider individual differences, they do not differentiate between employees who receive more and those who receive less than they feel they deserve.

Related to the above are the equity theories that focus on organisational justice. Disequilibrium is created if employees perceive their input to be unequal to (unfair to) their outcomes (for example, salary). Equity theories can be criticised for not considering the influence of different contexts and procedures on various aspects of an employee's work (for example, procedures for being allocated a parking space may be less important to an employee than procedures for promotion) (cf Brief 1998: 23).

Brief's (1998: 95-103) integrated model of job satisfaction considers individual personality characteristics as well as job context factors. As far as personality is concerned, negative affectivity (worrying, being emotional and feeling insecure or inadequate) and positive affectivity (being sociable, optimistic, active and person-orientated) influence how an employee experiences objective job circumstances — those that exist external to his/her mind (for example, salary). A study by Pretorius & Rothmans (2001) confirmed that job satisfaction is influenced by both job context and the characteristics of individuals.

Other relevant studies will be discussed briefly.

2. Job satisfaction of academics

Research among academics at a community college showed that they derived high satisfaction from student achievement, their own intel-

lectual growth, working under flexible and relatively autonomous conditions, and associating with stimulating peers (Diener 1985: 347). Their dissatisfactions related to job conditions (equipment and facilities, inflexible teaching schedules), personal conditions (lack of recognition, heavy teaching load), salary, red tape, and the apathy of students and colleagues. In general, respondents confirmed Herzberg's theory of job satisfaction.

Fifteen years later, Herzberg's theory was also confirmed in a British study (Baron 2000: 158). Negative factors such as heavy teaching loads, high bureaucracy, low pay and status were juxtaposed with positive emotional ones such as the pleasure derived from teaching.

Conversely, in his research involving 23 universities in Britain, Oshagbemi (1997: 358) found examples of elements of the job itself being responsible for satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Teaching and research-related factors contributed to about 50% of the academics' satisfaction. Examples included autonomy in teaching, helping students, research success, opportunities to attend conferences and research funding. Teaching and research-related factors also explained about 30% of their dissatisfaction. Examples included marking scripts, government interference in teaching, too many students, inadequate time for research, pressure to publish and lack of research funds.

Winstead *et al* (1995: 199) examined the relationship between quality of friendship at work and job satisfaction. The quality of an academic's best friendship at work was found to be predictive of job satisfaction. A negative aspect of friendship, maintenance difficulty, was related to lower satisfaction for administrative staff, but not for academics, nor for workers whose best friend at work was a supervisor or a peer. Wishing to spend free time with a best friend from work (voluntary interdependence) and an exchange orientation towards the friend were negatively related to aspects of job satisfaction. Among other things, male academics whose best friends at work were male experienced more job satisfaction than those whose friends were female (Winstead *et al* 1995: 205).

Other studies have reported that women tend to rate social needs (such as working with people and being helpful to others) more highly than men do (Tang & Talpade 1999: 345). Men tend to consider pay more important than women do. Tang & Talpade (1999: 347) found that

males tended to be more satisfied with pay than females, whereas females tended to be more satisfied with co-workers than males. For both genders, the overall job satisfaction was significantly correlated (in rank order) with the work itself as well as with promotion, supervision, co-workers and overall life satisfaction.

In his research, Kelly (1989: 446-52) focused on academics in journalism and mass communication at American universities. He determined that men were more likely than women to describe themselves as “very satisfied”. Women tended to moderate their satisfaction level to “fairly satisfied”. Similarly, Hemmasi *et al* (1992: 439-41), in their study of public universities, found that male academics were marginally more satisfied with their work than the females.

A Swedish study found that men attached less importance to their own work contribute something beneficial to others and to society, or to its compatibility with personal values. In addition, opportunities to utilise personal qualities constructively, the intellectual quality and the value of their work were less important to male academics than to females (Aronsson *et al* 1999: 209).

None of the studies referred to above took place in the context of the study described in the present article. This research project focuses on a group of academics whose circumstances in terms of promotion and participation in leadership positions have changed drastically from favourable to unfavourable. It is in this context that the study poses its main research question: How do white male academics in the human sciences experience their work?

3. Research design

In the multiple methods study described here, two phases were completed. In the first phase, quantitative data were collected relating to predetermined variables. The objective was to obtain a general impression of how satisfied white male academics were with various aspects of their work. The objective of the second phase was to arrive at a global assessment of how this group of academics perceived their working environment and their own place in it.

3.1 Phase one

A questionnaire was used to gather data. The construction of the questionnaire was based on those compiled by Oshagbemi (1999), Fernández & Mateo (1993), and Olsen *et al* (1995) to measure job satisfaction in HE institutions. The first section of the questionnaire concerned a number of demographic variables. The second section dealt with teaching, research, community service, administration, compensation and job security, promotion, management, co-workers' behaviour, and physical support. Some general questions were added. For most questions, respondents had to indicate their responses on a five-point scale from "Very dissatisfied" to "Very satisfied". (In interpreting the results, the positive responses were grouped together, as were the negative ones). The judgement of experts ensured content and face validity while the *alpha* reliabilities were as follows: teaching = 0.57; research = 0.82; community service = 0.67; administration and own management = 0.80; compensation and job security = 0.87; promotions = 0.74; management and leadership = 0.88; co-workers' behaviour = 0.78; physical conditions and support facilities = 0.84, and general job satisfaction = 0.88.

The respondents were a nonprobability sample, chosen in a way that combined convenience and purposeful sampling. The managers of two similar departments in the humanities were contacted for permission to distribute the questionnaires. Of the 94 that were returned, the responses of the 25 white males in the sample are presented in this article.

3.2 Phase two

The sample of white male academics at one of the universities was purposefully selected as a sub-sample of the quantitative sample. Eight white males participated. Their ages ranged from 38 to 52 years. Two were full professors, one an associate professor, four senior lecturers and one a lecturer. They had between 13 and 20 years of experience in HE institutions. The methodology was nondirective, in that the men themselves defined what essentially constituted the best and the worst facets of their work. It was also projective, in that the men projected their own experiences and perceptions into the discussions. This methodology was inspired by Paulo Freire's use of "coded situations", such as photographs or sketches of some aspects of the viewers' reality, to stimulate members of a group to critically analyse their situations (cf Aubel 1986: 20).

Meetings were arranged with the participants in their own offices, during which the aims of the project were explained. They were each provided with a camera, preloaded with 12 exposures, and requested to take pictures of what they felt represented the agonies and the ecstasies of their work. If this was difficult, they could photograph something that symbolised such an aspect or issue. They were also requested to make notes on their reasons for each picture. Participants had one week in which to complete the project. Directly after the films had been processed (which generally took one hour), photo elicitation interviews were conducted.

Interviews started with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity as well as permission to use a tape recorder. Thereafter, participants were asked to place the pictures in rank order in two groups, one positive and the other negative. Sometimes a third group was formed for pictures that included both elements. Starting with the positive group, participants explained the meaning of each picture. Interviews lasted at least one hour. They were recorded and transcribed *verbatim*.

Trustworthiness was ensured by Guba's model, which addresses ways of reducing bias in the results (cf Poggenpoel 1998: 349-51). Within this model the following strategies were used: triangulation of methods (photographs and interviews); careful sampling decisions; tape-recording and making *verbatim* transcriptions of interviews; eliciting feedback from participants when unsure of the meaning of statements, and assuring participants of confidentiality and anonymity. In addition, the researcher was from the same cultural group as the participants, which meant that participants spoke quite freely about all aspects of their work and the interview material was extremely rich.

4. Data analysis

For the quantitative phase, data analysis was done by calculating frequencies and percentages. For the qualitative phase, the analysis did not focus on the content of the photographs taken by the participants, but on the meaning the participants attached to them. Hence, meaning was derived from the transcribed interviews. The data were divided into positive and negative groups and then analysed in a bottom-up way (cf Johnson & Christenson 2000: 426-31). The data in each group were first divided into meaningful analytical units. This was done by reading

through transcripts and identifying units of text that were important for the research. The units were given category names and entered onto a master list for further investigation of any relationships between them.

5. Results

In interpreting the results it is important to bear in mind certain limitations. The people who participated in the research are in no sense a representative sample of white male academics in South Africa or even of one university. No attempt was made to establish the accuracy of their perceptions. The aim was to construct an account of how a group of white male academics viewed their working lives. The results of the two phases follow.

5.1 Phase one

For the quantitative phase, the items that were significant (indicated by more than 50% of the sample) are reported. As far as teaching was concerned, they indicated satisfaction with the courses that they taught (96%); their own skills in teaching methods (92%); their autonomy in choosing course content (88%); their knowledge of course content (88%); their autonomy in choosing teaching methods (80%); their teaching load (64%), and the support available for writing teaching material (52%). It was only with the general quality of the students' work that 56% indicated dissatisfaction.

With regard to research, the respondents were satisfied with the direction of their own research (80%); the availability of research leave (64%); colleagues' support in research (60%); the research expectations of the institution (60%); its encouragement of research activities (56%); the availability of equipment for research, and the quality of their publications (50% each). Dissatisfaction was indicated with the time available for research (64%); the amount of research carried out and published (60%) and the availability of research assistants (52%).

The respondents had no strong views on community service and nothing significant emerged from these items. In terms of administration, the males were only satisfied with their own administrative systems (64%). Dissatisfaction was indicated with the level of interaction at meetings (64%) as well as with the amount of time spent on administration and the amount of paperwork (52% each).

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On compensation and job security, the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with university benefits such as flexible working hours (68%). They were, however, dissatisfied with their salaries in comparison to those outside the HE system (56%). It was interesting to note that they were divided on the issue of job security: 40% satisfied and 40% dissatisfied. On the role of unions, 52% indicated neutrality.

Promotions was the only area in which dissatisfaction alone was demonstrated. This related to the politics surrounding promotions (76%); the importance (or unimportance) attached to teaching (64%) and the number of vacancies available at a higher level (52%).

When tested on their views of management, satisfaction was indicated with their relationships with their department head and his/her support (76% each). Dissatisfaction with the way faculty meetings were conducted was expressed by 52%.

Relationships with co-workers failed to evoke any negative reaction, although the participants were neutral on the issue of academic communication among colleagues (52%). Respondents were satisfied with their personal relationships with colleagues (88%); the quality of colleagues in the department (84%); support from colleagues in academic activities and personal friendships (76% each), as well as clerical support in the department (64%).

The respondents were also overwhelmingly positive about physical conditions and support facilities. This was indicated in regard to office locality (92%); the availability of supplies (for example, stationery) and the physical attractiveness of the office building (88% each); the pleasantness of the working environment (for example the temperature of offices) (84%); the freedom to use photocopying facilities or make telephone calls and the quality of office equipment (for example, computers) (80% for these items) as well as parking facilities (72%).

No significant negatives were indicated on seven general items. Respondents were satisfied with the opportunity to have a significant impact on others (80%); the opportunity for continued learning (76%); the overall reputation of the institution (72%) and the opportunity to use their skills as well as their sense of accomplishment (68% each).

The section of the questionnaire described above was followed by additional general questions.

- To the question about how satisfied they were with their job, all things considered, 20% of the respondents indicated dissatisfaction, 8% indifference and 72% satisfaction.
- If others expressed interest in a position at the university, 8% of the respondents would advise against it, 36% would have some doubts and 56% would recommend it.
- In comparing their current positions with the sort of position they initially desired, 12% indicated that it was not all that they had wanted, 36% that it was more or less what they had wanted, 48% that it was exactly what they had wanted and 4% that it exceeded their expectations.
- The best description of their feelings about their job was “dislike” for 12% and “indifference” for 8%, while 64% “liked” it and 16% “loved” it.
- 12% would have liked to change jobs or were uncertain about the issue, 56% were not eager but would have done so if they could have done better and 20% would not have considered changing their jobs.
- 12% thought they disliked their job more than most people, 40% that they liked their job about as well as most people and 48% that they liked their job better than most people do.

For the qualitative phase, the findings were divided into positive and negative aspects in accordance with how the participants presented their photographs. All quotations have been translated into English.

5.2 Phase two

5.2.1 Positive aspects

These aspects are discussed in rank order of importance to the participants. The aspects of academic life that emerged as most significant in terms of job satisfaction were physical conditions, support facilities and relationships with colleagues.

- Physical conditions and support facilities

Physical conditions and support facilities emerged as an exceptionally strong factor in job satisfaction. These included a physical environment of spacious and attractive offices (sometimes with a pleasant view), mo-

modern computers with electronic databases and printers, the infrastructure of the institution (including an excellent library with efficient librarians), a cafeteria in which to spend time with colleagues, convenient parking, bus transport (if needed), and the availability of funding to attend conferences or travel overseas.

One professor took three photographs that fitted into this category, namely of his office, his computer and the library. He described his office as “a big bonus [...] it is comfortable, big [...] attractive and clean, and well equipped”, enabling him to work effectively. He concluded: “I enjoy my workplace”.

- Relationships with colleagues

All but one of the participants took group photographs of their colleagues. Thus, personal and academic relationships at work emerged as one of the most satisfying aspects of academic life for them. They expressed appreciation of the knowledge of other academics, the level of academic discourse in their departments, and the support of colleagues. One participant said:

This photograph must give expression to the fact that I experience a special fraternity with my colleagues that has led to personal friendships [...] If things are a bit tight at work, the support you get [...] joint work projects [...] and when our work sends us together to other places these become highlights of our lives. The fraternity of the people in my department more than compensates for the problems that are experienced here. So, if people ask me if I am happy at work, I say, ‘Yes’.

- Teaching

Although also the most important cause of frustration, teaching enhanced job satisfaction in some ways. Positive aspects of teaching included the variety of the work, facilitating development and growth; the satisfaction derived from having master’s and doctoral students completing their studies; personal contact with students during discussion classes; creative work related to teaching, such as writing textbooks and developing new courses, and the academic freedom to select course content and teaching methods. One respondent said:

One has a lot of freedom and this means a lot to me. I think I am an individualistic person and I appreciate the freedom that I have here to do my own thing.

- Compensation and job security

Photographs of leave forms or the flexible clock system on computer screens revealed a level of satisfaction with the institution's generous leave benefits that compensated for other frustrations. This enabled some respondents to do outside work or participate in sport during the week. One professor, who experienced extreme frustration in his work, declared:

We have exceptionally good leave benefits. You have vacation leave, recess leave, flexi leave. And then there is research and development leave as well. I cannot think of another institution that allows you a whole year of leave. This enables me to play golf, fish, do four-by-four drives [...] I think this is the only thing that really keeps me going here.

- Research

Those academics who felt confident as researchers identified this as an enjoyable aspect of their work: "I enjoyed my interviews. They were extremely interesting" and "I experience research as one of the enjoyable aspects of my work here". Such satisfaction was related to personal growth and to projects that involved travelling to foreign countries.

- General satisfaction

Three of the participants expressed appreciation for the stature of the institution. One said that he felt proud to work there and that it afforded him "a certain status" in the community. Another experienced the merger of his institution with another very positively:

I am glad I am here at this university. The merger [...] is an opportunity to learn from others, to get others' perspectives. I strive towards a new institution and to playing a role in it. It is a medium for personal development and also a medium by means of which I can be part of the development in higher education in the new South Africa with its dynamics.

- Community service

Participants did not mention community service, with two exceptions. One participant's teaching had a strong community focus and he enjoyed how this facilitated his involvement in the community. Another said:

Because I'm at Theology I can preach on Sundays. It often happens. I can deliver talks at congregations or to groups of people and that I enjoy!

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- Management

Management did not enhance participants' job satisfaction. In one exception, appreciation was expressed for a (white, female) head of department as follows:

I appreciate her strong leadership. She makes space for the skills and the personality that I have. She leads in the merger. She has excellent vision and she is locally and internationally an academic and leader of note. I follow her readily.

- Administration

Administrative issues emerged as a significant cause of frustration, especially with regard to meetings. Only one participant experienced meetings as positive, because they gave him the opportunity to “benchmark” himself against others, to “see and learn what goes on” and to “develop a critical attitude”.

5.2.2 Negative aspects

These aspects are discussed in rank order of importance to the participants. Teaching and administrative issues emerged as the most important causes of frustration.

- Teaching

Frustrating aspects of teaching related to overload (involvement in too many and too diverse courses, as well as having too many assignments to mark); the poor quality of students' work; insufficient teaching autonomy (outcomes-based education and the social construction of knowledge being enforced as teaching methods); semesterisation, which was seen to inhibit quality teaching; the battle to overcome “distance” in distance education; the personal struggle “to get a grip on all the knowledge that is produced” and a sense that most dissertations are “irrelevant, trivial and not useful”. Examples included:

The work allocation [...] I am responsible for seven modules. You cannot deliver quality work if you are so divided. This is agony. I want to put my heart and soul into my work, but I cannot [...] I think we have had seven prescribed changes in the structure of the ACE since 1997 until now. Each time this implies rewriting curricula, study guides and tutorial letters. It is not possible to do quality work; you are on crisis management.

If you look at the quality of the [masters and doctoral] students' work! If you don't put in verbs or move them to the right places, first correct

the grammar mistakes and the structure, before you start to read for insight [...] there is no logic [...] You must indicate where the topic is 'significance', 'aim', 'research question' or 'background' [...] you must re-arrange the various sections — only then can you start reading for the student's insight.

- Administration

Administrative frustrations were caused by perceived bureaucracy in the university, a clocking-in system to register academics' times of arrival and departure, too many or meaningless meetings, too many student enquiries of an administrative nature, and an excess of electronic messages:

Change has become the aim and this requires forms and these forms must be in a certain style. I think the institution has become a big bureaucracy, busy with monitoring aspects [...] [management] do not think what the task of a university is.

All the administration one has [...] we as lecturers have become secretaries. If you think of all the e-mail we have to answer. We type our own examination papers, tutorial letters [...] you have hundreds of queries from students.

Meetings, meetings, meetings [...] I sometimes feel they do not get to the essence of anything. They can carry on for hours.

- Management

One participant was unhappy with the management of his department and mentioned "low levels of trust". A second participant believed that the university's managers lacked responsibility and that their aims were essentially political. He declared:

If it suits management, they are democratic [...] if democracy does not suit them, they are autocratic. They bring about changes of a political nature, but nothing of substance. We play at academe, but the focus is political [...] As far as I am concerned, we have a language policy that will not work [...] An African culture [...] textbooks that are sold on the pavement together with bubblegum and sweets. For me this is lowering standards [...] If you ask management something, it takes two, three weeks and it is sent back. Nobody wants to take responsibility. They talk endlessly without making a decision [...] There are also the one-sided appointments and the inconsistent application of employment equity.

- Promotion

Regarding promotion, four of the participants referred to lack of opportunities. This was caused by the promotion criteria used or the fact that white males were last in line for promotion. One stated:

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You are told that you have published only three articles. Nothing else was considered. You are not given credit for things such as SETA, or the departmental stuff, that take up a lot of time. The committees that you serve on [...] the learners' programme [...] there are hundreds of contracts to be signed and that takes up time and you don't get anything for it.

It [lack of potential promotion] influences my job satisfaction. I must change my idea from the traditional form of recognition to a level of intrinsic satisfaction [...] otherwise I will be a very unhappy person.

- Physical environment and support systems

One participant perceived his office as “small” and “uninspiring” while another complained of the inconvenience caused by the closure of certain access doors for security reasons. For a third participant, the institution's physical environment was a major cause of discontent. He took numerous photographs of this aspect to illustrate his dissatisfaction with lifts that consistently needed repair, unhygienic washbasins, broken furniture that was not removed and a lack of technical support with computer problems. “This is typical of a lack of responsibility”, he stated. He also experienced frustration with the inefficient security system. “At one university entrance, cars are spot-checked, but at other entrances this never happens”, he pointed out.

- Research

Research caused dissatisfaction in two ways: the emphasis on research as a criterion for promotion, when participants lacked confidence in their own research skills, and the supervision of postgraduate students.

- Compensation and job security

Perceptions of poor salary and a lack of job security caused job frustration. One participant indicated that he was preparing himself for a new career because of dwindling student numbers. Referring to salary, another participant, who described himself as generally very happy at the institution, stated:

Top of the list of negative issues is my salary. I think I am worth more [...] the ceiling that I have reached in terms of my annual raise and salary scale. I am worried [...] I am only 47 [...] where will it end? It makes me very negative.

- General

One participant lamented the many roles he had to fulfil as an academic. Two others referred to the lack of ethics they had experienced at the

institution. One described how a secretary had made numerous photocopies of a textbook he had written and sold the copies to students, bringing his own sales almost to a standstill.

Finally, participants were asked how happy they were at the institution, all things considered. Two participants indicated extreme dissatisfaction. One said that his professional self-concept was in shreds, especially because of poor student quality. The other stated:

I am unhappy and would go if I could. I am counting the days until retirement. I still have eight years left. I don't know how I am going to survive them.

The remaining participants indicated general job satisfaction. One stated:

I enjoy what I do and my colleagues make it worthwhile. I think one must be realistic. Life does not consist of choosing only the enjoyable and running away from those that are not satisfying. The hard things in life are part of life. I am not going to allow the things that worry me to stifle the satisfaction that I experience here. My overall feeling is that I enjoy my work.

Another indicated that, at times, he had experienced financial difficulties, causing frustration. However, he had made a conscious decision to shift his focus on to the intrinsic satisfaction he derived from teaching. When one participant was asked why he thought he was so positive about his work, he replied:

My positive attitude towards life. I don't see the negative side [...] or if I do see it, I look for something positive. I think if you operate this way, you get positive feedback from the people at work. I have seen people who are very unhappy at work and in academic life. And the more they project this, the more they get it back.

6. Discussion of results

Herzberg's (1957) theory on job satisfaction did not provide a useful explanation of the findings since extrinsic factors (physical environment and collegial relationships) proved to be mainly responsible for job satisfaction. What is more, intrinsic aspects related to teaching (e.g. overload) were responsible for dissatisfaction.

If need fulfilment theories are considered, it seems that the two basic needs of the participants, existence and relatedness, were met. However, the growth needs, which may be assumed to be most closely related to

the job satisfaction of HE academics, were not always met, for various reasons. Satisfaction of growth needs results from engaging in activities that require individuals to use their capabilities to the full and to develop new abilities. Inferior students' work and insufficient time or support for research inhibited the satisfaction of growth needs.

The discrepancy theories postulated by Katzell and Locke (cf Staw 1995) explained the dissatisfaction caused by the perceived difference between what the participants had and what they wanted or felt they deserved — for example, in respect of salary, promotion or opportunities to attend conferences. The related equity theories explained the frustration created when employees perceived their input (for example, teaching overload) as unequal to the outcomes they experienced (for example, salary).

However, of all the theories, Brief's (1998) integrated model of job satisfaction proved most useful in its consideration of personality characteristics and job context factors. Negative affectivity, such as whether worry (about lack of security, or promotion prospects, or inadequate research skills) and positive affectivity, such as being sociable, optimistic and people-orientated, influenced how the participants experienced objective job circumstances.

Comparison and integration of the quantitative and qualitative data revealed a central theme and a number of secondary themes. Attitude was central to the satisfaction or frustration of the participants. Differences in attitude may therefore explain why one participant experienced the clock system used at the institution as enabling him to move about freely and not be confined to his office, while another perceived it as a means of monitoring staff; why one experienced meetings as a chance for benchmarking and learning from others, while another experienced frustration; why one perceived the technical support of the institution as poor and another regarded it as excellent; why one perceived the physical environment as neat, while another found it untidy; why some observed the opportunity to travel overseas as a positive aspect of their work at the institution, while another perceived it as a feature of earlier times, no longer unavailable to white males.

Secondary themes relating to job dissatisfaction were administrative burdens (bureaucracy and numerous meetings) and heavy teaching loads, aggravated by the poor quality of students. Bureaucracy and teaching

loads also feature as sources of dissatisfaction in other studies (cf Diener 1985, Baron 2000). In this study, promotion issues emerged as an additional source. Although the participants were generally satisfied with departmental management, some expressed frustration about university management, which they perceived as being autocratic and having a strong political focus.

Secondary themes relating to job satisfaction included teaching under flexible or relatively autonomous conditions, enjoying satisfying interpersonal relationships at work and having a positive physical environment and support. Autonomy and positive social relations, along with various other factors, have also been mentioned by other researchers (cf Diener 1985, Winstead *et al* 1995). However, the fact that autonomy at work, social relations and physical conditions emerged as primary causes of job satisfaction among this group of white male academics was unexpected, since the core functions of academics are teaching and research.

In the institutional context of this study, transformation issues were related to the political forces governing the situation. Examples included the application of employment equity in general and the exclusion of white males from management positions in particular. These issues affected the white male participants in various ways. Although 72% said that they were satisfied with working at the institution, only 56% would have recommended it to others, which indicated a pessimistic view of the future. This may relate to their perceptions of bleak prospects for promotion, numerous administrative tasks, frustrating meetings and weak students. Such issues seem to have facilitated a move away from their core functions and a strong focus on compensatory aspects of their work, such as flexible working hours, generous leave benefits and satisfying friendships with colleagues.

7. Conclusion

This study found the interaction of personal attitudes and some job context factors to be major determinants of the job satisfaction of the white male academics under investigation. If current tendencies continue, more and more white males may be expected to experience frustration. This may stifle their creativity and make them unwilling to serve in leadership positions in departments or on committees.

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Dissatisfaction may lead to absenteeism, high staff turnover and a lack of motivation to establish environments conducive to learning. Means of improving the job contexts of white male academics are thus worthy of investigation and represent an area that should be addressed by university managements.

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