

## KEY DETERMINANTS OF JOB SATISFACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

*Job satisfaction is an extremely useful measurement for management and an employee's level of job satisfaction is one of the most important indicators that may help a manager solve specific employment issues. Recognizing the employee's level or extent of job satisfaction gives employers a chance to predict and eliminate such difficulties as low productivity, work inefficiency, an employee's high rate of absenteeism, decision to resign or to retire early, or employee's mental and physical exhaustion (burnout syndrome). The aim of the study is to highlight the significance of job satisfaction in general, and subsequently to focus on university teachers and researchers taking into account the fact that identifying job satisfaction in an academic environment is supposed to consider the unique aspects of academic work. The findings are expected to help higher education institutions to foster more positive and productive academic environment.*

### **Key words:**

*academic environment, employee, employer, job satisfaction, productivity, research, researcher, teacher, university, work performance*

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## INTRODUCTION

A pleasant or wishful atmosphere at the workplace, well-set conditions for the employee's work, regular feedback from the employer, support of the employee's growth, or the possibility to participate in the company policy creation seem to be vital elements that contribute to the employee's performance and thus to company development. The so called job satisfaction issue touches every type of organization, including higher education institutions. Faculty members' level of job satisfaction has a significant impact on their individual performance as well as on institutional goals that are to be achieved. Based on professional opinions and experiences of experts and knowledge drawn from professional literature in the field of career development, the study aims to identify the key factors that play a role in improving the job satisfaction of teachers and researchers in an academic environment and thereby support better institutional results. The research methodology has been chosen to penetrate deeper into the essence of the issue: common data on employee satisfaction, which

are already known, are applied to an academic environment. Nowadays, when the quality of education in general, and tertiary education included, is the subject of a wide debate in the professional and lay public, it may be considered relevant to discuss the quality of the working environment for faculty staff members. The contemporary period also brings the need to establish, adjust or modify working conditions for academics so that they correspond to current employment conditions and needs. It is obvious that the conditions and needs are changing significantly and dynamically – especially with the arrival of a new generation in the employment process who sets new requirements and implements changes to the employment environment. The conditions and needs are influenced also with the arrival of new technologies, moreover with artificial intelligence, and with the appearance of considerations about new forms of work, life-work balance preferences and other aspects that in the past were not so prominent. Current trends show the necessity to change the academic environment, which is now often regarded as a

traditional, “old-fashioned” and rigorous place, to a modern, flexible and innovative scene where science, research and critical discussions are met. The study opens the platform for further research in this area.

### **LITERATURE OVERVIEW**

Phenomena such as job satisfaction or work atmosphere have been in the centre of researchers’ interests since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1938, Robert Hoppock and Samuel Spiegel introduced their book "Job Satisfaction", publishing the results of their research. They investigated the impact of job satisfaction on the performance and personality of employees. Their research was carried out between 1935 and 1937, with eleven of the twenty-four studies dealing primarily with job dissatisfaction among different groups of employees and six studies dealing with the relationship between dissatisfaction and other variables. As for the variables, the authors mention the following ones: the employees’ personality traits, the management policy of the organization, membership in trade unions, nativity, age, gender, and the use of the employer's consulting services. Job satisfaction was then defined as any combination of psychological, physiological and environmental circumstances that cause a person’s satisfaction with his/her job. This was a rather unusual, comprehensive approach recognizing that satisfaction is not just about the job itself but is put into a broader context, which a person works in. R. Hoppock and K. Spiegel (1938) identified several factors contributing to job satisfaction, such as:

- a) work environment: when supportive and helpful, it may significantly strengthen and improve job satisfaction;
- b) employee perception: the impact on a level of satisfaction is determined by the way employees perceive their roles in a company, their responsibilities, as well as the significance of their work;
- c) interpersonal relationships: the more positive relationships with co-workers, associates, and supervisors, the higher level of job satisfaction was found;

- d) compensation and rewards: surprisingly, research showed that these factors were not the sole determinants of job satisfaction even though fair compensation and adequate rewards were noted as important.

Hoppock and Spiegel’s research introduced one of the earliest tools for measuring job satisfaction. They helped in quantifying the subjective feeling of (job) satisfaction and made it easier to study and analyse it. Many researchers have been influenced by their research and the tool itself since then. A link between job satisfaction and employee productivity was noted in their research suggesting that satisfied employees are more likely to be (more) productive. These findings laid the groundwork for further studies and research. They highlighted that rather than on external factors such as financial rewards and benefits, job satisfaction is determined by employees’ feelings and perceptions. Emphasizing the importance of a complex approach to understanding job satisfaction was a crucial part of the findings. Robert Hoppock is considered a pioneer in the field of vocational guidance.

In the 1950s, the topic of job satisfaction came to the fore again, but this time from the perspective of factors that motivate employees to perform better. An example could be the study named "The Motivation to Work" (Herzberg, Mausner, Bloch Snyderman, 1959). Research conducted by Frederick Herzberg's together with his colleagues Bernard Mausner and Barbara Bloch Snyderman looked at employee satisfaction in relation to two factors: hygiene and motivation. However, under the word "hygiene" it is necessary to imagine issues such as salary, supervision, and all other elements that can reduce employee dissatisfaction from the point of view of the working environment. The researchers call those factors that motivate employees “motivators” or “satisfiers”, this group includes for example achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, career or personality growth. These are intrinsic factors and lead to job satisfaction when present as they fulfil higher-level psychological needs. On the other hand, extrinsic factors related to “hygiene” were

named “dissatisfiers” because they can cause dissatisfaction when absent or inadequate. However, when improved or added, they do not necessarily lead to satisfaction. In this group, the researchers included for example working conditions, or salary. One of the interesting finding is that while enhancing hygiene factors might prevent dissatisfaction, it may not automatically create satisfaction (or motivation). That may suggest that to motivate employees, companies and organizations should focus on enriching work by improving motivators/satisfiers rather than approaching the hygiene factors. It is, therefore, practical and effective for companies and organizations to search for strategies that would make work more engaging or meaningful for employees - as this increases employee motivation - rather than to focus merely on improving salaries or working environment, which might only have a temporary effect. Employee recognition and achievement makes employees more productive, creative and committed as well as increased responsibility and variety of jobs. Frederic Herzberg’s work has had a continuing effect on management and organizational behaviour by suggesting how to understand employee motivation and job satisfaction and he is considered to be one of the most influential people in business management.

The 1990s were a period of rapid technological changes and subsequent restructuring of businesses, factories, manufacturing companies and services. Companies needed employees who were flexible, adaptable, resistant to stressful situations and upcoming changes, cooperative and efficient, and wanted to keep such employees at any cost. Interest in the topic of employee satisfaction at the workplace has grown again. The reaction to this situation was the extensive and important publication of the team of authors C.J. Crany, Patricia Cain Smith and Eugene F. Stone, who in 1992 published the research results of top academic researchers in the field in the collection of studies called “Job Satisfaction: How People Feel About Their Jobs And How it Affects Their Performance”. The authors of the publication offer up-to-date information on how to create job satisfaction and what benefits it may bring, and they also describe the negative side of having too many employees in a company who are dissatisfied

with their jobs. This book represents a key resource for understanding the dynamics of job satisfaction and its practical implications in the workplace as it offers a compilation of research divided into various dimensions of job satisfaction and its impact on employee performance. In their research, the authors emphasize that job satisfaction is a complex, multidimensional construct related to various factors that can influence the quality of employee performance. It is very closely related to attitudes and emotions. The authors also introduce and analyse various approaches and methods for measuring job satisfaction (such as surveys, interviews, observational techniques) and highlight the necessity to use reliable and valid measurement tools in order to assess job satisfaction accurately. According to the results and findings published in the book, satisfied employees are generally more likely to be loyal to the company or organization and remain with it, or they have shorter (or no) absence for work.

These findings demonstrate that many organizational researchers, applied psychologists and management scholars already in the past recognized the possible benefits of employee well-being and understood and presented the concept of a satisfied and productive employee (Wright, 2005).

### **GOAL AND METHODOLOGY**

These days, the topic of job (dis)satisfaction is the centre of scholars’ attention again. Due to the huge technological boom and the implementation of artificial intelligence (AI), some job positions are disappearing. However, on the other hand, new technologies promote new possibilities and create new job positions, which (similarly to the 90s described above) requires having employees who are prepared, stress-resistant, loyal, and willing to adapt to the contemporary conditions. However, unlike the previous period, there is now a different generation of employees in the employment process. While the so-called Generation X – the people economically active in the 1990s – was relatively resourceful and eager to adapt to new working conditions, the present generations, such as Generation Y (Millennials) and

subsequent Generation Z enter the workplace with different expectations (Dimock, 2019). While Generation X was interested in significant job positions usually associated with responsibility and hard work, career success is not a goal or an ambition for the following generations. While in the 90s, people often "sacrificed" their personal lives for career growth, or work as such, their children today want to live and work in a different way. Young generations nowadays consider work only as a source of income needed; furthermore, they highlight such attributes as freedom, independence, autonomy. Some general differences between generations X and Z can be mentioned here as they not only influence their attitude to work, organizational behaviour and overall performance in a company but also have a great impact on their perceiving of job satisfaction. Members of Generation X were born between 1965 and 1980; they precede the Generation Y (the Millennials) born between 1981 and 1996, followed by Generation Z members born during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Following the ideas of K. White (2021), the very first contrast is technological adoption and different way of communication associated with it. Generation X has gradually adapted to new technology; they use it when they see a clear purpose or importance for work productivity and try to avoid being overwhelmed by it. Generation Z, on the contrary, is highly comfortable with modern technologies, applications, digital platforms; it is not hesitant to approach new tools in order to promote work efficiency. This may be closely connected to communication preferences: while the "older" generation prefers more traditional forms of communication, and perhaps more formal communication channels, such as emails, phone calls, and face-to-face meetings, the "younger" ones opt for quick, brief, less formal or even informal way of communication via social media, or instant messaging (chatting) often even simplified to emoticons. Generational differences have also been noted in the workplace. They are related to such features as work ethic, attitudes, beliefs, organizational behaviour, etc. While employees of Generation

X often appreciate independence, self-reliance, and have rather rational approach to work, Generation Z values innovative approach, creativity, collaboration. Generation X employees seek for autonomy to manage their work in their own way, in contrast to Generation Z, who prefers generating ideas within a team. Career expectations also vary. Generation X is more focussed on achieving job security and financial stability: staying in one job for a longer period and climbing the career ladder. They emphasize a clear separation between work and personal life, preferring having traditional working hours. Generation Z employees often blur the boundaries between work and life. They grow up with technologies that allow people to be constantly connected. "Workation" (Paulise, 2023) is a trend that may symbolize it: a model that combines leisure with work. It represents a remote or hybrid working style that enables the employees to have more control over when and from where they work. Certainly, this type of work is not suitable for every job position, however, it could serve as a good example of Generation Z work attitudes. Generation Z favours flexible work arrangements where work is just an extension of their personal lives. Work for them should be meaningful, it should contribute to the "good life" which they constantly look for, and should offer personal growth. If they do not feel that way, they have no qualms about changing jobs quickly. For Generation Z, environment, surrounding, the place where they are just now is crucial. They often choose workplace according to the company culture, policy, and values that the company supports (Twenge, 2010). They stay where they are popular and appreciated, where or with whom they are fond of. If they are not attracted by or interested in the place or colleagues, they simply quit, in other words, they "leave the platform".

The above stated variations highlight the diverse influences, technological progress, and cultural changes that have shaped each generation. Recognizing these differences can assist employers in developing better strategies for managing and engaging a workforce that spans

multiple generations. It would not be wise, however, to look at Generation Z only. Although they do change and influence the employment setting, in an academic environment there are employees who belong to the previous generations and are now at the age of about fifty and more. This is a rather specific type of employees, called by Dorothy Miller (1981) a “sandwich generation”. These employees are vital enough and experienced enough to bring new ideas, to raise a critical voice or to warn against wrong decisions. At the same time, however, they care for both: their elderly parents and their dependent children. This life situation often hinders their development, and although they do have a great interest and potential to adapt to new working conditions and requirements, they are not always able to achieve this goal. Therefore, speaking about job satisfaction, those employees often complain about being “forgotten” or overlooked. In this study, however, their experience will be reflected.

The aim of research is to analyse what elements can influence the perception of job satisfaction of researchers and teachers in an academic environment and how this perception may affect the quality of their research, interaction with students, colleagues and management in order to meet the institutional goals. In the beginning, terminology specification is important so that there is no misunderstanding or no underestimating of the issue. As Porvazník (1997) states, work is a purposeful, systematic and intentional action on nature. It is a basic social activity that transforms natural objects into useful objects. This ensures the material existence of human society. In the process of social work, a person creates social values. At the same time, active work develops not only a person's psyche, but also personality. Therefore, it can be said that work is a specific activity by which a person is distinguished from the animal world (Živčicová, 2019). Pauknerová (2012) divides work according to the load on systems and psychological functions as follows:

- predominantly muscular work, when mainly muscle groups are active;
- predominantly sensory work, which is tied to the activity of individual senses and neuro-psychic processes;
- predominantly mental work, in which psychological processes such as thinking, decision-making, attention, willpower are most represented;
- work performed predominantly in contact with people, which includes the demands of both sensory and higher psychological processes and places on the personal/personality level of the worker.

The presented study will focus primarily on mental work and work performed in contact with people. Workplaces where these types of work are most often represented include for example, the department of human resources, marketing, and public relations (PR). It includes the banking sector as well, and also the public administration field, which is divided into several sectors. One of them is the sector of human development and social welfare, which includes education, healthcare, culture, social services and physical education. Job satisfaction is defined by Vojtovič et al. (2013) as a positive emotional state of an individual resulting from the evaluation of work performed, work experience and work relationships. Furthermore, he characterizes job satisfaction as a general work attitude that leads to better employee's performance, which positively affects the employee job satisfaction. In this way, job satisfaction affects the reduction of absenteeism and employee turnover. Vojtovič et al. (2013) also mention a situation where a highly productive employee may not find satisfaction in work because the work does not fulfil him/her intrinsically. The authors emphasize that a satisfied employee is able to concentrate better on the work duties, such work is of higher quality, there are fewer accidents at work or fewer mistakes made. A satisfied employee has quality relationships with colleagues, superiors or subordinates. Last but not least, job satisfaction has a positive effect on the employee's personal life and helps maintain life-work balance or general quality of life, the so-called well-being (Štikar et al., 2003). It also strengthens work altruism, in other words, selfless service to colleagues, co-workers, tolerance of some shortcomings (for example, not always pleasant behaviour of a colleague,

frequent requests for work beyond the scope of their duties, etc.), dedication and loyalty of the employee to the employer, it also reduces turnover. It is, therefore, obvious that job satisfaction or satisfaction at the workplace are important aspects which the employer currently (perhaps more often than ever) focuses attention on.

Job satisfaction changes in dependence on other factors – variables - therefore it can be understood as a dependent variable. Following Vojtovič et al. (2013), it is possible to mention some variables (factors) that play a significant role in the issue of job satisfaction and its experiencing at the workplace. These variables (factors) are going to be mentioned further on in this study. As already mentioned, the study tackles the issue of job satisfaction of employees working in the environment of education and human development, therefore, the factors will be presented from the this perspective. At the beginning, however, it is important to introduce the concept of education. As formulated by Jakubčinová (2021), a state can be considered developed if it emphasizes the qualitative development and growth of its citizens. By highlighting the values and importance of upbringing and education, respecting the human nature, basic human rights and needs, preserving, supporting and protecting the cultural identity of the nation and cultivating movement and aesthetic expression, the state demonstrates its maturity and interest in achieving high creditworthiness of citizens. Education, as Jakubčinová (2021) continues, is a general term meaning targeted action and learning focused on training and upbringing. Since the right to education is one of the basic human rights, the sector of education is included among those ones with a significant position. Quality education leads to the economic prosperity of the country, supports the growth of the standard of living and contributes to the improvement of the ordinary life of the individual. Therefore, it is understood that education is one of the important sectors, and it is crucial to focus on the working environment of teaching or non-teaching personnel. Within this study, it would not be possible to map the working environment and job satisfaction at all grades and types of schools. The study thus deals with working conditions or the atmosphere at the workplace

and the subsequent job satisfaction of teachers and researchers in an academic environment.

An academic environment is mostly related to colleges and universities, and rather than gaining practical skills, it is connected to studying, analysing, and thinking (Cambridge Dictionary). This place combines teaching and knowledge sharing with research either done or just being conducted, with academic and administrative responsibilities, such as project implementation, publishing activities, and so on (Brady, 2010). Lane (2010) proposes that a good academic environment should promote faculty members' job satisfaction, tackling primarily such factors as pay and benefits, work hours, faculty members autonomy, organizational structure, and communication between employees and management. Based on Brady's research results (2010), when faculty members feel valued by the university management, their level of job satisfaction rapidly increases. They also show increased commitment and a strong sense of ownership of the institution (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). As Stephen W. A. (2024) comments on the previously mentioned results, it is sad to know this is rarely the case of most tertiary institutions. It is also a common event in Slovak universities when – based on the hunt for economic efficiency, job satisfaction of faculty members is often out of the centre of attention. However, measuring the economic efficiency of an educational institution cannot be done in the same way as it is with enterprises, for example, whose mission is to produce products and offer services with the only aim: to sell them. In the case public universities, profit cannot be considered as the main objective (Krajčo, K. et al., 2024).

In recent years, Slovak universities and higher education institutions have invested considerable funds in the development of infrastructure, in new technologies, modern laboratories, technical devices, etc. They have devoted their effort to the improvement of buildings and facilities, the surroundings, and the green economy. It is a huge leap and commendable development compared to the past twenty or more years back. However, they forget one thing: and that is the investment in human capital. Scientific and academic employees, university teachers and

researchers are significantly affected by these changes but their working conditions within the system do not change. Contrasted with modern buildings and superbly equipped classrooms, they mostly remain part of the unfashionable and outdated machinery of customs and face the remnants of old requirements - as if times have not changed at all. This is an academic sore spot that deserves expert attention and academic debate at the level it is worthy of. Also for this reason, job satisfaction in an academic environment is a hot but not very researched topic.

Going back to the variables (factors) that influence the degree of employment pleasure or happiness felt by an individual or, in other words, work fulfilment, which is closely related to career contentment, following Vojtovič et al. (2013), a group of them can be introduced. The factors are to be specified and analysed within the academic environment:

- Variety of work. This is one of the main factors influencing job satisfaction. There are such workplaces that are dominated by monotonous and routine work; and there are such employees comfortable with this type of work who feel performance satisfaction. However, since the presented study focuses on mental work and work with people, there is no assumption of monotony and routine in this type of work. Working with people and mental work as such involves various complexities and nuances that arise from individual differences and organizational policies. Such work often comprises unpredictable activities or people's reactions, understanding of different personality traits, different cultural backgrounds that people have, or adoption of various communication styles. The work that requires interaction with people and the use of cognitive competences allows the employee to use broad potential, previous life and work experience, emotional intelligence, social skills, etc. In an academic environment, among other features, it is crucial to let the academic

employees be creative. Creativity is one of the possibilities to avoid monotony and routine. The way a teacher achieves the set goals may not be identical to the ways of other colleagues. It is, nevertheless, rather debatable whether it is desirable for all academics to have the same style of interaction. It can be hard for many to try to follow or adapt to the "uniform" rules. Each teacher approaches students diversely: he or she motivates, explains, presents with the use of various methods and strategies, very often in reflection to the current atmosphere in the classroom. If these individual characteristics are not respected and higher education institutions strictly strive for a uniform style, creativity is suppressed and it may promote academics' dissatisfaction, frustration, and burnout. As mentioned above, it is a key aspect to give the academic employee opportunity to make full use of his or her experience, knowledge, skills and to allow them to involve their personality potential.

- Freedom and autonomy. A certain degree of freedom and autonomy given to employees contributes to their job satisfaction. That requires the employer to provide the employee with some extent of responsibility and show trust in his/her decisions. This applies to academic employees as well. Being constantly under the pressure of control where every decision must first be explained and justified, this hardly indicates any degree of trust in their competence. Moreover, it gives them little or none of freedom and autonomy in their performance. The requirement of the superior to be included in every electronic conversation may be frustrating and painful. Although it is legitimate for a superior to demand to be informed about work matters, he or she does not always need to witness the decision and solving processes. In an academic environment, this means for example respecting the teacher's communication with students, or the way of solving a conflict or problem or some

internal agreements as long as they are in accordance with the institution policy and do not violate human rights, and are agreed by both parties. In this context, it is also important to stress that the freedom of research and publication should be a matter of course in the academic environment. This also includes active participation in conferences and other scientific events, where the purpose is not only to present one's scientific results but also to meet other researchers, to exchange information, connect (network) experts with common research interests and look for breakthroughs in other areas of research, etc. If the superior opposes these conditions to academics, dissatisfaction, mistrust, and frustration arise. The same is the case if the superior does not value the approach of an academic employee to support and spread the good name of the higher education institution where he or she works.

- Communication. The way of interaction between the superior and employees is another factor affecting job satisfaction. An authoritative, directive-persuasive style of communication can relatively easily create a barrier between communicating parties. By listening to the superior who does not give an employee the opportunity to be involved in a conversation, the employee can resign, surrender, or rebel but none of these reactions are desirable. Although there may be certain situations where a directive style of communication could be effective, it is important to be aware of the fact that its frequent or the only use leads to employee dissatisfaction. Even in an academic environment, it is crucial that the superior is able to formulate requirements and main ideas clearly and concisely, that he or she can listen to subordinates actively, overcome communication barriers, and professionally manage manifestations of ineffective communication. It is vital to be aware of the fact that communication styles may significantly affect one's motivation and may either encourage him or her to perform better or "take away"

one's energy and enthusiasm. It is necessary to realize that academic employees are people with higher and highest education, people who know why they are at that place, what they want to achieve and what strategy could be used to be successful. There is no need, therefore, to speak in a superior, arrogant and imperative tone or give orders without any explanation, instead, to demand as much input information as possible when solving any problem is appreciated.

Other researchers (e. g. M. A. Ahmad & A. S. Jameel, 2018; O. Ch. Hee et al., 2020) mention more variables affecting job satisfaction among academic staff members, such as workload, work environment, pay and benefits, top management leadership, job security, and empowerment.

- Workload can be characterized as a number of lessons taught and tasks given to an academic employee within a specified period of time. In Slovakia, workload is usually set per week or per academic semester, rarely also per academic year. The findings (Hee et al, 2020) show that increasing the workload of academic staff result in low efficiency, poor performance and job dissatisfaction.
- Work environment does not need to be understood only as a place where a teacher or researcher works (classrooms, libraries, laboratories, offices, canteens, etc.) but it also touches the issue of possibilities offered to academic employees to develop, such as further education, career growth encompassing different roles and responsibilities. Employee appreciation in the form of regular appraisal, rewards, positive assessment also belong to quality and pleasant work environment.
- Pay and benefits are often considered one of the strongest motivational elements that increases employee performance and productivity. Pay in Slovak academic environment is included in the tables or schemes, i. e. a fixed amount of compensation (salary) is awarded to an academic employee based on the education achieved, scientific growth, and the number



of years of service. Except for luncheon vouchers, academic employees do not usually receive any other financial or non-financial benefits. In European or world universities and higher education institutions, sabbatical as a form of non-financial benefit is often offered to university teachers and researchers, however, this very rarely, if ever, happens in Slovakia. Many institutions attempt to create room for personal and professional growth and development by allowing their faculty staff members to work flexibly and implement home office whenever possible. Again, this is not the case of all Slovak universities and thus the working conditions related to benefits cannot be comparable. Depending on the type and nature of the research being conducted, the researcher may spend time in the laboratory or in the field. It is therefore counterproductive to demand that the researcher only carry out his or her activities during working hours and also that he or she only publishes scientific papers during working hours. Collecting data and formulating research conclusions is not related to established working hours. Even writing is not possible on command, it is a creative process that requires time, place, will and determination, and current mood of the author. Therefore, insisting on the observance of 8-hour working hours five days a week for university teachers and researchers, and especially in the present era of rapidly changing working habits, is outdated and undignified.

- Top management leadership can be associated with a strong motivational accent, leaders often significantly influence the achievement of institutional goals through innovations, engaging activities and developing the team spirit. Top management leadership style can affect academic staff members' job satisfaction by providing fair feedback and support. If a team activity is organized and all members (staff and/or students) are invited, then the education process should be stopped and the usual timetable should be modified so that

everyone has the opportunity to go and join the event. Otherwise, the activity cannot be called collective.

- Job security is another important element contributing to job satisfaction of academic staff members. Fixed-term employment contracts are a common part of Slovak university education. Such contracts do not give employees much security, the turnover of academic staff is relatively high, which is reflected in the quality of research, project outputs or publication activities, when quality is often hidden behind quantity. Science and research in Slovakia should certainly be evaluated from the aspect of the researcher's job security.
- Employee empowerment is a term borrowed from the authors Ahmad and Jameel (2018), however, it is widely known also as employee enrichment or employee engagement. In general it could be described as a management philosophy that enables employees take part in organizational strategic decisions and policy making. For faculty staff members it is common to be invited to participate in designing and preparing new curricula, modifying information sheets, suggesting and organizing educational events, such as guest lectures, workshops, conferences, project activities, and so on. By contributing in the previously mentioned activities, the loyalty of employees may grow and their need for appreciation may be fulfilled. This also strengthens one's identity to belong to the groups of scholars that share the same interests and increases the level of job satisfaction.

## ***FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS***

The study indicates that job satisfaction in an academic environment is miscellaneous, influenced by a combination of several features, such as academic autonomy, variety of tasks, communication styles, workload, and organizational support. The importance of autonomy and the ability to use diverse skills highlight the need for academic institutions to

create environments that permit not only personal but also professional expression. Over-regulation and uniformity in academic roles can stifle creativity and lead to negative outcomes, such as frustration and burnout.

Furthermore, the study suggests that a supportive work environment, including fair compensation, job security, and recognition, is essential for academic staff satisfaction. The lack of benefits and rigid structures in some Slovak academic institutions reveal gaps that could be addressed to improve job satisfaction.

Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping job satisfaction, as supportive and inclusive leaders can foster a positive work culture, while authoritative leadership can hinder staff morale and engagement. Therefore, leadership training and development should be a priority for academic institutions aiming to enhance job satisfaction among their staff.

Lastly, the empowerment of academic employees through involvement in decision-making and strategic planning fosters a sense of ownership and connection to the institution, further enhancing job satisfaction. Institutions should strive to create inclusive environments where academic staff can contribute meaningfully to organizational goals and feel valued for their expertise and input.

Overall, these findings suggest that academic institutions need to prioritize a flexible, supportive, and empowering work environment to maximize job satisfaction and productivity among their staff.

## *Conclusion*

Academic environment is specific, it does not generate financial profit but it produces research results, spreads knowledge and prepares young people for working life. It is a vital part of the country's economy and needs to be given due attention. If Slovak universities want to keep up with the times and create a modern place for science, research and education, it is necessary that investments go equally into technical equipment, building reconstruction but also into the development of human resources. Emphasizing the issue of job satisfaction should be one of the main goals of academic institutions management. Job satisfaction is not only a vague topic, it plays a key role in motivation for better performance and quality work outputs. Before managers can improve job satisfaction, they need to understand what it consists of. Various types of research show that an employee's job satisfaction depends not only on current and past experiences but also on their expectations for the future. Anticipating future opportunities for career advancement, job security, involvement in decision-making, or networking can significantly boost job satisfaction. In order to maximize job satisfaction and productivity among academic staff, academic institutions should focus on building a flexible, supportive, and empowering environment that values autonomy, recognizes contributions, and encourages active participation. A change in approach to academic employees is typical for a modern and stimulating academic environment as well as the decision to take a holistic approach to job satisfaction that addresses the diverse elements that job satisfaction is influenced by. It is above all freedom of research, trust in faculty staff abilities, the possibility of flexible working time and appreciation of work results.

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