

Chapter 1

Introduction

**Maria de Lourdes Machado-Taylor, Virgílio Meira Soares,
and Ulrich Teichler**

Today's higher education institutions are extremely complex social organizations and the confounding effects the human factor introduces to social organizations cannot be minimized. The academic staff is considered as a key resource within higher education institutions and taking a major role in achieving the objectives of the institution. The importance of the academic staff as a constituent group of higher education institutions is undeniable. As stressed by Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2009, p. 19),

The professoriate is at the center of the university. Without an effective, well educated and committed academic profession, universities cannot succeed. Yet, the academic profession is under stress as never before.

Academic staff can, with appropriate support, build a national and international reputation for themselves and the institution in the professional areas, research and publishing (Capelleras 2005). The performance of academic staff determines much of the student learning and has major implications for the quality of the higher education institutions (Machado-Taylor et al. 2014). The centrality of the faculty role makes it a primary sculptor of institutional culture and demand for academic

M.d.L. Machado-Taylor (✉)

CIPES – Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies, Matosinhos, Portugal

A3ES – Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education, Lisbon, Portugal

e-mail: lmachado@cipes.up.pt; mmachadotaylor@gmail.com

V.M. Soares

ULisbon, CIPES Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies,

Lisbon, Matosinhos, Portugal

e-mail: meira.soares@gmail.com

U. Teichler

International Centre for Higher Education Research (INCHER-Kassel),

University of Kassel, Kassel, Germany

e-mail: teichler@incher.uni-kassel.de

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staff in higher education is increasing (Altbach 2000, 2003). Academics have an irrefutable and central importance to higher education and, hence, to society in general but there are many factors that undermine the commitment of academics to their institutions and careers (Kogan and Teichler 2007). The emergence of mass higher education has deteriorated the conditions of academics everywhere, several authors notice the challenges and the criticism faced by the academic profession (Altbach et al. 2009).

Thus, it is important to stress that higher education institutions are now traversed by profound uncertainties, are expected to seek new knowledge, are more challenged than ever on quality issues, and are exposed to pressure for greater accountability (Deem et al. 2008; Taylor et al. 2008). Authors such as O'Connor and O'Haganb (2015, p. 2) contend that they can be seen as bureaucratic and hierarchical organisations. Those issues have an impact on the "job" of professors. As stated by Kearney (2007, p. 8),

Thus, universities and their academic communities face numerous dichotomies: academic freedom vs. institutional autonomy, the academic vs. managerial professions, the goals of teaching vs. those of research, and the steering role of institutional leadership vs. the disparity of scholarly priorities and concerns.

Nevertheless, the well being of the human capacity is emphasised by Tettey (2006, p. 6), when the author states that "In order for higher education to develop capacities, it must ensure that its own capacity is well-developed."

As Tettey (2006, p. 1) explained so clearly,

A well-developed human capacity is an asset that enables countries to promote forward-looking ideas, initiate and guide action, and build on successes; it also makes those countries attractive destinations for investment and intellectual collaboration, both of which, if managed appropriately, will lead to positive returns. A solid higher education base is crucial for such transformation to take place.

The work of academics is influenced, according to Altbach and Chait (2001), by global trends such as accountability, massification, deteriorating financial support and managerial controls. However, as noted by Altbach (2003, p. 1),

Conditions of work and levels of remuneration are inadequate, involvement in institutional governance is often very limited, and the autonomy to build both an academic career and academic programs [...] is often constrained. These changing trends have led to the rapid shift of the academic workplace and to the necessity of managing tensions within the academic profession.

Other authors such as Enders (1999) observe the great uncertainties that the academic profession faces. Also on this particular, Altbach (2003, p. 1) recently recorded that

Conditions of work and levels of remuneration are inadequate, involvement in institutional governance is limited, and the autonomy to build both an academic career and academic programs is constrained. The sad fact [is] ... the conditions of academic work have deteriorated.

There is a growing competitiveness for academics (between higher education institutions and between countries), growing demand for academic work and increased international mobility (Coates et al. 2009). Nevertheless, according to

Dunkin (2005), the impact of funding cuts, of increased accountability measures and wide-scale change in teaching processes and technologies, have left the academic staff de-motivated. Thus, institutions need to develop strategic responses to answer the huge changes and trends that are occurring. Higher education institutions need to identify not only what motivates existing academics, but also potential academics – knowledge workers who can meet desires elsewhere.

Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2009, p. XXI) have renewed thinking on the matter and contended that

The multiple and diverse responsibilities of higher education are ultimately key to the well-being of modern society, but this expanded role adds considerable complexity and many new challenges. Understanding the broader role of higher education in a globalized world is the first step to dealing constructively with the challenges that will inevitably loom on the horizon. The enormous challenge ahead is the uneven distribution of human capital and funds that will allow some nations to take full advantage of new opportunities while other nations risk drifting further behind.

Under the influence of European policies and changes, academics' choices vary between European countries as regards the preferences for teaching and research, in the attraction of new researchers and concerning the evolution of pecuniary and non-pecuniary returns to academic careers. Moreover, there are also differences as regards the extent to which these changing perceptions have contributed to an increasing inequality in the financial and working conditions of academics and on the changing nature of academic strategy in the transformational world of higher education and its implications for academic structures, work and careers (Teichler and Höhle 2013; Shin et al. 2014; Santiago et al. 2014).

This book discusses the academic profession in Europe. It consists of three main parts. In Part I, the book deals with challenges and issues in the higher education academic career in the context of current dynamics and likely futures. It discusses the significance of academic work between teaching and research, reviews workforce characteristics, and analyses tensions and pressures.

In Chap. 2, Ulrich Teichler addresses the influence of European policies and changes, academics' choices as regards the preferences for teaching and research. In Chap. 3, Maria Taylor and Marvin Peterson discuss the changing nature of academic strategy in the transformational world of higher education, an evolutionary shift, of new models and their implications for academic structures and careers. In Chap. 4, Pedro Teixeira deals with the increasing influence of economic and management ideas in higher education and the evolution of pecuniary and non-pecuniary returns to academic careers.

Part II analyses the findings of a national study – An Examination of Academic Job Satisfaction and Motivation in Portuguese Higher Education, carried out at the Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies (CIPES). The main purpose of this research project, financed by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), was to identify factors and their interactions affecting the dimensions associated with job satisfaction and motivation of the academic staff.

The study was motivated by the fact that academic staff is an important resource of higher education institutions. As the processes of globalization takes shape, it is

becoming abundantly clear the need of societies to take advantage of their human resource capabilities. However, the importance of academic staff job satisfaction and although several studies have been examined around the world, little or nothing is known in Portugal and has not been discussed or well documented. Nevertheless, job satisfaction is important in revitalizing staff motivation and in keeping their enthusiasm alive and there is ample and somewhat obvious evidence that job satisfaction is related to employee motivation. Well motivated academic staff can, with appropriate support, build a national and international reputation for themselves and the institution in the professional areas, in research and in publishing. Such a profile may have an impact on the quality of higher education institutions. As indicated by Long (2005), job satisfaction not only is critical to an individual's overall well-being, but it also has important implications for organisational productivity and performance.

Portuguese higher education is diverse and has changed significantly over the past 40 years. Major reforms have included the implementation of the Bologna Process, a new legal regime for higher education institutions and new statutes relating to academic careers in the public higher education institutions (Magalhães and Amaral 2007; Neave and Amaral 2011). The explanation of all these changes does not fit here. However, it is worth noting that they resulted in a number of changes that are affecting and will continue to affect academic careers.

The legal provisions of academic careers in public higher education institutions have not changed in three decades although criticism over the years has been made. Until 2009, the legal documents regulating academic careers were dating back from 1979 for the university academic staff, and from 1985 for the polytechnic academic staff. In 2009, a new legal framework changed the academic careers regulations. According to the new legal framework, academics of university and polytechnic public institutions continue to have different careers against one old pretension to have a unique career. However, with recent changes, there was a rapprochement between the two sectors. One difference that remains between both careers is the weekly teaching load, which is higher in polytechnics than in universities. However, the requirement of a doctorate to gain access to the rank of professor, in both cases, means an approximation between both subsystems. In university education, it was required the degree of doctor to access the categories of professor. In the case of the polytechnics, the degree required to access the categories of professor was a master's degree. However, in the case of the polytechnic, one could also access these categories, without a master's degree, through the provision of public trials. This was the situation until 2009. The situation has now changed and the degree required to access the categories of professor in both subsystems is the degree of doctor. The implementation of the new statutes is just in the beginning and higher education institutions shall adopt internal regulations regarding the hiring of their academics, the assessment of their performance and the provision of services they must provide (Machado-Taylor, Meira Soares, & Gouveia 2011).

In Portuguese higher education academics are being challenged. First, Portuguese higher education has changed significantly. Second, the number of academics has increased significantly. Third, higher education institutions in general and academic

work in particular have been influenced the deteriorating financial support and managerial controls that have led to the rapid change in the workplace and the need to manage tensions within the academic profession (Machado-Taylor et al. 2014). Additionally, the recent financial crisis and the economic recession has led to governmental priorities from unfettered expansion to a decrease in enrolments and strong emphasis on quality (Amaral and Magalhães 2005). This is another aspect affecting the academic profession. Nevertheless, the academics face challenges and obstacles. Career advancement and inbreeding of faculty members are subject to criticism (Taylor et al. 2007). Moreover, there is virtually no mobility of faculty members between institutions. Taylor et al. (2007, p. 225–226) have explored some of these issues:

In general terms, one would have to say Portugal has shown substantial growth and improvement over the past half century and continues to progress in a positive manner. This is not to suggest, however, that the higher education system is not faced with legitimate challenges and obstacles. [...] Regulations governing careers are extremely rigid and inhibiting. [...] openings and advancement opportunities are currently limited, but will be increasing for young academics that now must wait in line for senior professors to move on or retire. At the same time, it means a heavy economic burden will soon be placed on a reduced workforce as the demand for retirement benefits increases. While this is clearly a policy in need of modernization for the public higher education institutions, the situation is exacerbated in the private sector by the fact there is no policy at all. Portuguese higher education is also notorious for ‘inbreeding’, where students who earned their degree are then placed in employment at the same higher education institutions. In many cases, former students become junior colleagues within the professorial ranks. Some argue that the worst effect from inbreeding is the absence of different ideas and approaches to professional conduct.

Moreover, there are complains that higher education institutions are not providing quality training to graduates. This is due to a variety of factors. Previous research indicates that dissatisfaction including inadequate and non-competitive salaries of academic staff and lack of job satisfaction due to non-monetary reasons is a key factor to undermining the commitment of academics to their institutions and careers.

This study seeks to understand if there is lack of job satisfaction and motivation to accomplish priorities of higher education institutions and suggest feasible responses to the problem. Thus, higher education institutions have to manage change in order to be proactively positioned so as to seize opportunities and confront threats in an increasingly competitive environment.

Part III of this book analyses the academic career in European countries, namely Austria (Hans Pechar and Elke Park); Germany (Ulrich Teichler, Ester Ava Höhle and Anna Katharina Jacob); Italy (Massimiliano Vaira); Switzerland (Gaële Goastelec and Fabienne Cretaz von Rotten) and United Kingdom (John Brennan, Rajani Naidoo and Monica Franco).

The studies from the European countries presented herein aim at answering questions on the changing relevance and increasing expectations around the academic career, including the impact of recent changes and challenges for the higher education sector on the academic profession. According to Altbach et al. (2009, p. 89),

To understand the contemporary academic profession, it is useful to examine the status and working conditions of the academic profession worldwide. The academic profession is aging in many countries.

Or, as stressed by (Henkel 2005), to know the boundaries within which academics might operate and the impact of recent changes and challenges for the higher education sector on the academic profession (Enders 1999).

The context of academic work has been changing everywhere, affecting expectations concerning working conditions, remuneration, and teaching and overall widening possibilities and reducing time and energy available. Generally speaking, the academic profession has lost its traditional respect and social status.

The attractiveness of the academic profession seems to be low today compared with other highly qualified professions. As stressed in the report written by Jeroen Huisman, Egbert de Weert and Jeroen Bartelse (2002), based on research on the academic workplace in the UK, Sweden, Finland, Flanders and Germany, “The fundamental problem in Europe is the loss of appeal of the faculty job” (Huisman et al. 2002, pp. 141, 156).

Also the professional stability is declining. The gender distribution of doctorates and habilitation clearly favours men and gender gap is being seen all over Europe.

Therefore, the academic workplace is bound to be changing, though, and its current appeal may be even smaller in the future, especially if globalisation processes will be transforming higher education systems as a part of transforming welfare states in Europe towards more Anglo-Saxon variations of them and if necessary reforms of the system are not introduced soon (Kwiek 2003, 2004).

Lastly, a final chapter presents the conclusions on the changing academic profession, using the different national cases to argue whether the academic profession is merely an artificial term that has to do with a heterogeneous range of occupations or whether there are important common elements of the academic profession across European higher education systems.

Today, the academic profession faces great uncertainties in terms of its future. And it has to live with professional tensions. One can consider that there are different conceptual traditions and variations of the academic profession according to countries with specific social and economic conditions. Therefore, we can ask if there are important common elements of the academic profession and if the recent changes and challenges for the higher education sector such as the massification of higher education and the trend towards a ‘knowledge society’, a ‘highly qualified society’ or an ‘information society’ have serious impact on the academic profession.

The impact of funding cuts, of increased accountability measures and wide-scale change in teaching processes and technologies, have left the academic staff demotivated. Thus, the development of strategic responses on people issues must consider the huge changes and trends that are occurring. Besides, higher education institutions need to identify not only what motivates existing academics, but also potential academics. Our hope is to help to understand and improve higher education institutions in relation to its main functions, such as teaching and research.

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