

The Changing Academy – The Changing Academic Profession  
in International Comparative Perspective 7

Peter James Bentley · Hamish Coates  
Ian R. Dobson · Leo Goedegebuure  
V. Lynn Meek *Editors*

# Job Satisfaction around the Academic World

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# **The Changing Academy – The Changing Academic Profession in International Comparative Perspective 7**

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## **Scope of the series**

As the landscape of higher education has in recent years undergone significant changes, so correspondingly have the backgrounds, specializations, expectations and work roles of academic staff. The Academy is expected to be more professional in teaching, more productive in research and more entrepreneurial in everything. Some of the changes involved have raised questions about the attractiveness of an academic career for today's graduates. At the same time, knowledge has come to be identified as the most vital resource of contemporary societies.

The Changing Academy series examines the nature and extent of the changes experienced by the academic profession in recent years. It explores both the reasons for and the consequences of these changes. It considers the implications of the changes for the attractiveness of the academic profession as a career and for the ability of the academic community to contribute to the further development of knowledge societies and the attainment of national goals. It makes comparisons on these matters between different national higher education systems, institutional types, disciplines and generations of academics, drawing initially on available data-sets and qualitative research studies with special emphasis on the recent twenty nation survey of the Changing Academic Profession. Among the themes featured will be:

1. Relevance of the Academy's Work
2. Internationalization of the Academy
3. Current Governance and Management, particularly as perceived by the Academy
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The audience includes researchers in higher education, sociology of education and political science studies; university managers and administrators; national and institutional policymakers; officials and staff at governments and organizations, e.g. the World Bank.

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Peter James Bentley • Hamish Coates  
Ian R. Dobson • Leo Goedegebuure  
V. Lynn Meek  
Editors

# Job Satisfaction around the Academic World

 Springer

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# Contents

|          |  |            |
|----------|--|------------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Introduction: Satisfaction Around the World? .....</b>  | <b>1</b>   |
|          | Peter James Bentley, Hamish Coates, Ian R. Dobson,<br>Leo Goedegebuure, and V. Lynn Meek   |            |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Academic Work at the Periphery: Why Argentine Scholars<br/>Are Satisfied, <i>Despite All</i>.....</b>                           | <b>13</b>  |
|          | Mónica Marquina and Gabriel Rebello  |            |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Factors Associated with Job Satisfaction Amongst Australian<br/>University Academics and Future Workforce Implications.....</b> | <b>29</b>  |
|          | Peter James Bentley, Hamish Coates, Ian R. Dobson,<br>Leo Goedegebuure, and V. Lynn Meek   |            |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Job Satisfaction in a Diverse Institutional Environment:<br/>The Brazilian Experience .....</b>                                 | <b>55</b>  |
|          | Elizabeth Balbachevsky and Simon Schwartzman   |            |
| <b>5</b> | <b>Canadian University Academics' Perceptions of Job<br/>Satisfaction: "... The Future Is Not What It Used to Be" .....</b>        | <b>83</b>  |
|          | Julian Weinrib, Glen A. Jones, Amy Scott Metcalfe,<br>Donald Fisher, Yves Gingras, Kjell Rubenson, and Iain Snee                   |            |
| <b>6</b> | <b>Finland: Satisfaction Guaranteed! A Tale of Two Systems.....</b>  | <b>103</b> |
|          | Timo Aarrevaara and Ian R. Dobson  |            |
| <b>7</b> | <b>Determinants of Academic Job Satisfaction in Germany .....</b>  | <b>125</b> |
|          | Ester A. Höhle and Ulrich Teichler   |            |
| <b>8</b> | <b>Factors Determining Academics' Job Satisfaction in Japan<br/>from the Perspective of Role Diversification.....</b>              | <b>145</b> |
|          | Akira Arimoto and Tsukasa Daizen   |            |
| <b>9</b> | <b>An Academic Life in Malaysia: A Wonderful Life<br/>or Satisfaction <i>Not</i> Guaranteed? .....</b>                             | <b>167</b> |
|          | Norzaini Azman, Morshidi Bin Sirat, and Mohd Ali Samsudin  |            |

|           |   |            |
|-----------|---|------------|
| <b>10</b> | <b>Portugal: Dimensions of Academic Job Satisfaction .....</b>  | <b>187</b> |
|           | Diana Dias, Maria de Lourdes Machado-Taylor, Rui Santiago,<br>Teresa Carvalho, and Sofia Sousa  |            |
| <b>11</b> | <b>The South African Academic Profession:<br/>Job Satisfaction for a Besieged Profession? .....</b>   | <b>209</b> |
|           | Charl C. Wolhuter   |            |
| <b>12</b> | <b>Satisfaction in Stages: The Academic Profession<br/>in the United Kingdom and the British Commonwealth.....</b>                                    | <b>223</b> |
|           | William Locke and Alice Bennion   |            |
| <b>13</b> | <b>Academic Job Satisfaction from an International<br/>Comparative Perspective: Factors Associated<br/>with Satisfaction Across 12 Countries.....</b> | <b>239</b> |
|           | Peter James Bentley, Hamish Coates, Ian R. Dobson,<br>Leo Goedegebuure, and V. Lynn Meek  |            |
|           | <b>Erratum .....</b>  | <b>E1</b>  |
|           | <b>Index.....</b>   | <b>263</b> |

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Satisfaction Around the World?

**Peter James Bentley, Hamish Coates, Ian R. Dobson,  
Leo Goedegebuure, and V. Lynn Meek**

The initial working title of this book was *I Can't Get No....: Job Satisfaction Around the Academic World. Advice from the CAP Survey*. Intended as a play on the words of the Rolling Stones' classic 1965 hit, the publishers, however, felt that the editors were showing their age and that few readers born after 1960 would get the "joke". Nonetheless, the degree that academics are contented with and committed to their scholarly careers is increasingly becoming a key ingredient in social, cultural and economic well-being everywhere. A vibrant academic profession attracting the best and brightest of the next generation may indeed be what gives a nation a competitive edge in a global knowledge-based economy. Hit tunes may come and go, but the importance of academics' teaching and research efforts in producing highly skilled human capital and enhancement of innovation is an enduring feature of most if not all societies.

Given its importance, surprisingly little at an aggregate level is known about the people who teach and carry out research in universities, about the characteristics of the academic profession or about what is required to ensure its sustainability and future development. We do know, however, that there are a number of characteristics peculiar to the higher education and research sector: authority relationships are loosely coupled (Weick 1976) and goals are multiple and often ambiguous

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(Cohen and March 1974); organisational subunits are fragmented (Clark 1983), and the principal workers – “the academic professionals” – have a strong influence “on the determination of goals, on the management and administration of institutions and on the daily routines of work” (Enders 2006). Whilst acknowledging that there is debate over the degree to which academics constitute a profession in the classical sense and that insofar that there is an academic profession, it is one fractured by disciplinary tribalism (Becher 1989; Becher and Trowler 2001) and paradigmatic allegiance (Kuhn 1962); this book assumes that the academic community constitutes a field or collective worthy of analysis in its own right (Kogan et al. 1994; Graubard 2001; Levine 1997; Farnham 1999; Enders 2001; Altbach 2000). Perkin (1969) goes so far as identifying the academic profession as the “key profession” providing the knowledge base and certification for all other professions.

As higher education itself has grown and diversified in recent years, so has the academic profession. With the massification of student enrolments, universities no longer enjoy the privileges of their former elite status and neither do academics (Levine 1997). Under what Teichler (2003) terms post-massification, academics nearly everywhere are asked to work longer hours for less money relative to salary scales of a couple of decades ago and to that earned by other professional groups (Welch 1998; Ward and Sloane 2000). In many countries, the academic profession is increasingly insecure, more accountable, more differentiated, more internationalised and less likely to be organised along disciplinary lines. In most OECD countries, the academic profession is aging, whilst there is evidence to suggest that the most intellectually talented of the younger generation do not view an academic career as attractive as they once did (Harman 2003). Academics are asked to supplement their traditional functions of teaching and research with those of community relevance and entrepreneurial pursuits, clearly demonstrating to their institutional masters that they earn their salaries (Henkel 2001).

At the same time, they have lost some of their traditional autonomy of control over work time and output (Gappa 2001). “Overall trust in the self-steering capacities of academics as long-standing and deeply socialized professionals that are best left alone and only symbolically represented by institutional and governmental leadership is diminishing” (Enders 2006: 11). Whilst the number of students they each have to instruct rises, the resources per student for doing that task fall. The teaching task itself becomes more “professionalised”, requiring training and monitoring. Many of the teaching functions of tenured academics are being outsourced to lower-level casual contract staff (Clark 1997; Altbach 1997). Research is required to be strategic and relevant, whilst the presumed defining characteristic of university teaching informed by research is under challenge in several jurisdictions (Owen-Smith and Powell 2001; Rip 2004). A private higher education sector has become more prominent in many parts of the world, and new approaches to governance and management are evolving in both private and public sectors. Some argue that the very definition of an academic has become ambiguous, as have the boundaries between academic jobs and the jobs of other professionals, both within and beyond the walls of the academy (Askling 2001).

There are complaints that academic professionals are being turned into mere knowledge workers (Newson 1993), that the rise of the entrepreneurial university (Clark 2004) has turned some academics from the values of scholarship to those of academic capitalism (Slaughter and Leslie 1997) and that the academic profession is an endangered species (Graubard 2001; Delbanco 2005). It is a profession that “seems to have lost some of its political standing and bargaining power with society” (Enders 2006: 4).

With expansion of higher education has come increasing differentiation, increasing expectations from society and an evolution of professional roles that may take academics away from their original disciplines towards new forms of identity and loyalty. At the same time, knowledge has come to be identified as the most vital resource of contemporary societies, and many nations have taken great strides to improve their capacity for knowledge creation and application. This new devotion to knowledge has both expanded the role of the academy and challenged the coherence and viability of the traditional academic role (Rothblatt 1997).

Whereas the highest goal of the traditional academy was to create and transmit fundamental knowledge, what has been described as the “scholarship of discovery”, the new emphasis of the knowledge society is on useful knowledge or the “scholarship of application”. This scholarship often involves the pooling and melding of insights from several disciplines and tends to focus on outcomes that have a direct impact on everyday life. One consequence is that many future scholars, though trained in the disciplines, will work in applied fields and may have options of employment in these fields outside of the academy. This provides new opportunities for career mobility and knowledge transfer amongst sectors whilst it may also create recruitment difficulties in some areas and especially in fields such as science, technology and engineering. Moreover, pressures on the academic profession need to be seen in the light of the changing nature of work in the knowledge society generally (Gibbons et al. 1994; Nowotny et al. 2001), as well as a wider questioning of professional authority within society (Henkel 2001).

Despite global pressures, national traditions and local socio-economic circumstances continue to play an important role in shaping academic life and have a major impact on career attractiveness. Yet today’s global trends, with their emphasis on knowledge production and information flow, play an increasingly important role in the push towards the internationalisation of higher education (Marginson and Rhodes 2002). The international mobility of students and staff has grown; new technologies connect scholarly communities around the world; and English has become the new lingua franca of the international community.

The economic and political power of a country, its size and geographic location, its dominant culture, the quality of its higher education system and the language it uses for academic discourse and publications are factors that bring with them different approaches to internationalisation. Local and regional differences in approach are also to be found (Currie et al. 2003; Amaral et al. 2003). The lucrative international student market puts new pressures on the academic profession. The functions of international networks, the implications of differential access to them

(including student markets) and the role of new communication technologies appear to be internationalising the profession in various ways.

In academic teaching and research, where professional values are traditionally firmly woven into the very fabric of knowledge production and dissemination, attempts to introduce change are sometimes received with scepticism and opposition (Enders and Teichler 1997; Trowler 1998). At the same time, a greater professionalisation of higher education management is regarded as necessary to enable higher education to respond effectively to a rapidly changing external environment. The control and management of academic work will help define the nature of academic roles – including the division of labour in the academy, with a growth of newly professionalised “support” roles and a possible breakdown of the traditional teaching/research nexus. New systemic and institutional processes such as quality assurance have been introduced which also change traditional distributions of power and values within academe and may be a force for change in academic practice.

In summary, then, over the last few decades a host of complex but mostly inter-related factors have brought pressure to bear on the academic profession in all countries. Beside some anecdotal evidence, however, little is known about how the academic profession is responding to the pressures and changing environmental conditions outlined above, particularly from a comparative perspective. To this end, this book examines the academic profession internationally focusing on the organising concept of “career satisfaction”.

Researchers from 11 countries accepted an invitation to participate in this project, using data drawn from their participation in the recent international survey of the Changing Academic Profession – or CAP survey. CAP involves a common survey of academics in 18 countries from 5 continents. CAP national experts from the following countries contributed to this book: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Germany, Japan, Malaysia, Portugal, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

Taking academics’ impressions of their job satisfaction as the focus, contributors were asked to address a number of dimensions that may influence satisfaction, such as:

- For those countries with a binary system of higher education, is there a difference in academics’ attitudes from either side of the binary divide?
- Are there different levels of satisfaction based on seniority?
- Are there different levels of satisfaction based on gender?
- Are there different levels of satisfaction based on both seniority and gender?
- Does the discipline have an impact?
- Do academics with a preference for teaching over research have different opinions?

The national experts were asked to build their analysis around the job satisfaction questions from the CAP survey and the variables that lead to lower or higher job satisfaction in their country. Where relevant, the contributors were asked to consider a number of composite indices based on the relevant CAP survey questions (these are specified in the individual chapters as appropriate).

The following country chapters examine the nature of academic job satisfaction and the role it plays in academic attitudes about their profession in each of the countries.

The concluding chapter attempts a comparative analysis of the data present in each country-specific contribution.

The country chapters begin with Argentina. The academic profession in Argentina shares some common characteristics with other Latin American countries, such as low salaries and high levels of part-time staffing. Therefore, most teachers do not conduct research in addition to teaching. The low teaching salary levels have been another feature of Latin American university conditions. The academic profession in Argentina, in the context of Latin America, is a profession at the periphery, dependent on the main centres of knowledge and scientific networks worldwide.

The Argentina CAP survey comprised all academics in public universities, i.e. those teachers in any position and time devoted to work, as the target population. Satisfaction in this chapter is measured by considering responses to 33 questions grouped into eight items, based on overall satisfaction, physical infrastructure, service provision, teaching- and/or research-related issues, influence, support and the “would I do it again” question.

Compared with other countries, Argentina has an overall satisfaction value similar to the international average, and it is significantly above that average when considering career improvement. The Argentina data suggests that the closer environmental and career conditions are to international standards, the greater is the satisfaction with academic work.

Studies of job satisfaction in Australian universities have routinely offered a somewhat depressing image of life in the academy, calling into question the sustainability of an industry reliant upon autonomously motivated knowledge workers. For universities to reverse the despondent outlook of their academic staff, one must pay attention to their primary sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the factors associated with job satisfaction amongst Australian university academics, with reference to Hagedorn's (2000) conceptual framework.

Satisfaction tends to be higher amongst those who have recently been promoted and lower amongst mid-career academics. And Australian higher education has experienced profound change over the last 15 years in all areas that matter to its primary functions of teaching and learning and research: financial resources, competition, volume of students and the diversity of the student body, accountability, regulation and governance.

At the same time, the core issues identified in this chapter are not new. The degree of satisfaction has been an issue for concern since the early 1990s, and academic time spent on nonacademic activities and the perceived inability to spend sufficient time on research have been persistent factors contributing to these relatively low levels of satisfaction. It would be very difficult to ignore management responsibility for “cumbersome administrative processes” as it would be equally difficult to deny institutional management and academic leadership responsibility for both a reasonable work-life balance and a reasonable workload distribution that reflects both institutional/departamental needs and staff interests and abilities. There are persistent issues that look unlikely to be resolved in the very near future. This, first, raises the question of what this means for Australian academe in the coming

years and second, what the implications are for the governance and management of the university system and its institutions.

Brazilian higher education is a known case of extreme diversity with 89% of its more than 2,300 institutions being private. Institutions range from small, family-owned, professionally oriented schools to huge research universities with budgets of more than two billion dollars a year. This diverse institutional environment creates differences in opportunity and expectations amongst academics and is relevant to understanding variations in the general satisfaction academics hold towards different aspects of their professional life.

One would expect that job satisfaction of academics would vary according to the type of institution in which they work. Surprisingly, in Brazil satisfaction tends to be uniformly high regardless of the institutional setting. Moreover the patterns of distribution of answers to questions that cover different aspects of job satisfaction tend to be the same, regardless of the huge differences in contracts and working conditions.

Each kind of institution is marked by a particular environment and promotes different values. So, for academics working in different types of institution, job satisfaction is linked to different dimensions of academic life. Satisfaction is related to specific strategic dimensions that vary from one type of institution to another and define the institutions' place within the country's higher education system. Brazilian academics generally expressed a great degree of satisfaction with their job conditions, and it appears that academic institutions in Brazil continue to be successful in attending to their academic staff's core expectations.

Full-time academics working at Canadian universities reported high levels of job satisfaction. In responding to a direct question on job satisfaction, approximately 74% of academic staff indicated very high or high levels of satisfaction, and less than 10% reported low or very low levels of satisfaction with their current job. The vast majority of respondents also reported that they were pleased with their career choice. Approximately 77% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "if I had to do it over again, I would not become an academic", whilst just over 11% of respondents agreed with the statement and roughly the same number provided a neutral response.

High levels of satisfaction with their current position were tempered by less positive responses to questions focusing on change over time, job strain and perceptions of the future. Almost 40% of respondents indicated that the overall working conditions in higher education had deteriorated over the course of their careers, and only 23% reported that working conditions had improved (with 38% providing a neutral response). When asked whether "this is a poor time for any young person to begin an academic career", almost 45% of respondents disagreed, whilst 35% provided a positive response. Approximately 42% of academics indicated that their job was a source of considerable personal strain, whilst 31% disagreed with the statement. In terms of overall job satisfaction, Canadian academics are satisfied with their jobs, but some believe that working conditions are not what they used to be and there are concerns about the future.

Finland's higher education system is a binary one, built around institutions known as the "university" and the "polytechnic". In contrast with recent higher



education history in other countries, the Finnish binary system was a recent creation, with polytechnics having just reached their twentieth anniversary. The polytechnics now refer themselves as “universities of applied sciences” but were established to provide vocationally oriented education and training. They were established primarily as teaching institutions, and in contrast with university academics, polytechnic teachers must hold a formal teaching qualification. However, no Finnish higher education institutions are “teaching-only”, and they are increasingly the source of applied research. Academics from both sectors were included in the CAP survey.

This organisational dichotomy might seem to be an important backdrop to academic job satisfaction in Finnish higher education, not the least because of the different orientation between teaching and research. At Finnish universities, 20% of academics indicated a preference for teaching, compared with 78% of polytechnic academics. However, in spite of this major sectoral difference, overall job satisfaction of academics turned out to be quite similar. Around two-thirds of Finnish academics, whether from universities or polytechnics and whether their personal leanings were towards teaching or research, announced that their overall job satisfaction was very high or high. Lower proportions of teaching- or research-oriented university academics would become an academic again, compared with their polytechnic counterparts.

“German academics are not among the most highly satisfied academics in comparative perspective”, so starts the conclusion of the German chapter. In fact, their satisfaction corresponds with the average of the 18 participating countries in the original CAP survey. However, this result averages out differences within German universities, universities of applied sciences and research institutes, from whence the sample was drawn. Both senior- and junior-ranked academics from public research institutes were clearly more satisfied than academics from the other two groups.

There were gender-based variations in the sample, with women being less satisfied than men, but academics with a preference for research and spending a relatively high proportion of their time on research tended to be more highly satisfied than those with academic jobs with a teaching emphasis. Employment conditions *per se* did not seem to have a strong influence on overall satisfaction.

The Japanese study produced a number of variables that seemed to lead to higher levels of satisfaction. Women who represent only 18% of the academic population in Japan and only 9% of the Japanese CAP survey sample tended to be less satisfied than their male colleagues, as did older academics. This latter fact matches with academic rank, and about 78% of senior academics reported being very satisfied or satisfied, compared with 59% of junior academics. There was little difference in satisfaction whether academics’ preference was for teaching or research. About 70% of both groups reported being very satisfied or satisfied.

Malaysian higher education has been going through a period of change, with developments that are parallel to those in other parts of the world. Malaysian universities are increasingly emphasising the control of academic work, through the advent of “low-trust” managerialism and managerial styles. Increased workloads and stress are reportedly having an impact on job satisfaction. Dissatisfied staff are



more likely to withdraw from being active in the workforce and to disengage from decision-making, and they avoid mentoring junior colleagues.

The Malaysian study has brought out a number of correlations built on binary subpopulations, such as that there is a ten percentage point difference between the job satisfaction experienced by women (about 60%) and men (about 70%). A gender-related gap exists in higher education and research institutes. Gender-based differences occur across most of the variables that relate to physical infrastructure, teaching-related services and research-related services, with women reporting lower satisfaction levels.

Female academics' perceptions of influence also differ from their male colleagues' opinions, with fewer women thinking they have influence in shaping key academic policies. They also rate communication from management and rate management attitude to teaching and research as being lower. Overall, however, Malaysian academics reported being satisfied, despite dissatisfaction with aspects of infrastructure and service provision.

Like Finland, Portugal has a higher education system that includes universities and polytechnics, and these can be differentiated by their goals, degrees and research orientation. However, Portugal also has public and private institutions, leading to a system of considerable diversity. Whereas academics in public institutions are public servants, the private sector has no regulations for "private" academics. Portuguese academia is also becoming increasingly feminised, with women comprising over 43% in 2010.

In terms of overall job satisfaction, Portugal ranks towards the bottom end on the international continuum, even if more than 51% claimed to be very satisfied or satisfied. Portuguese male academics are more satisfied than their female colleagues, and only female academics from the United Kingdom reported lower levels of satisfaction.

The overall job satisfaction of South African academics (aggregate) tends to be moderately high on average. Job satisfaction increases with rank, but at management level (director) it decreases again. Academics who are more interested in teaching are more satisfied than those who are more inclined to research. Female academics are more content than male academics. Job satisfaction decreases with age (the reversal of this trend for the 61-year-plus group might be ascribed to the fact that many of those in this group are emeriti who voluntarily stayed on after retirement age, in positions and assignments of their liking). No correlation could be found between years of employment in higher education and overall job satisfaction.

The academic profession in the United Kingdom consists of a diverse range of academic staff both in their demographic profile and in the roles they undertake. Often treated as a homogeneous entity, individual academics are positioned within much of the existing literature on the United Kingdom governance and management as rational actors, performing largely similar roles and operating on the basis of a core of common academic and collegial values. The UK chapter argues that academics differ in their responses to the changes and new influences in higher education. With the expansion of the United Kingdom higher education system,

there has been an increase not only in the number of young people entering the profession via the traditional route but also in the numbers of staff entering the profession at a later stage in their working lives, having already pursued a career in another profession. Analysis of “the academic profession”, therefore, needs to take into account at least these disparate groups of academics.

Compared with other countries participating in the CAP study, job satisfaction amongst the United Kingdom academics appears to be low, with only 45% of respondents describing their overall satisfaction with their current job as high or very high. However, young academics appear to be the most satisfied and the least dissatisfied, whilst the group of older, established academics appear to be the least satisfied and the most dissatisfied.

The conclusion to this volume examines job satisfaction from an international comparative perspective for the 11 countries presented in the previous chapters, plus the USA. The analysis draws upon Hagedorn’s (2000) Conceptual Framework for Academic Job Satisfaction and uses the CAP data to examine whether this framework (developed from an American context) is applicable to other countries. The results suggest that, whilst academics in English-speaking countries differ in their mean responses to the state of the academic profession and their individual job satisfaction, they share similar conceptions for how job satisfaction is related to job-related personal strain, the prospects for young academics and their choice to become an academic. By contrast, in other countries, such as Japan, self-reported job satisfaction is unrelated to personal strain or other views on the state of the profession. Taking a restricted definition of job satisfaction, a single question for self-reported satisfaction, the OLS linear regression results suggest that Hagedorn’s framework is more applicable to the USA, the UK and Australia, and to a lesser extent Brazil, Canada and Germany. Despite the weakness of the model in explaining variation in job satisfaction in the remaining countries, some common international patterns emerge from the results. Satisfaction with institutional resourcing is strongly associated with job satisfaction across all 12 countries. As a group, a combination of environmental variables (e.g. perceived student quality, personal influence on departmental decision-making and satisfaction with administrative processes) explains the greatest proportion of variance in job satisfaction in most countries. The variability across countries indicates that job satisfaction contains many culture-specific elements which are difficult to capture through a standardised international survey.

Academic job satisfaction, or more specifically, many of the factors influencing satisfaction, appears to be, at least in part, culturally and contextually determined. This for years to come will remain a rich area for research on job satisfaction generally and that of the academic profession specifically – an area in which this book makes an important contribution. That said, the global characteristics of the profession need emphasising as well. From the very beginning, the academic profession was by necessity internationally mobile as its members tramped between Paris and Bologna for higher learning and a bit later to Oxford and Cambridge. Now, academe is one of the most internationally mobile of all professions, and the most rapidly growing area of investment in research and innovation is in global research networks.

Universities wishing to be internationally competitive must attract and retain the best brains in the world, and as the chapters in this book consistently stress, their leaders will be wise to listen carefully when their staff hum the tune “I can’t get no satisfaction”.

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