

Exploring academics' perception of work meaningfulness

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploratory investigation into aspects of work meaningfulness among academics currently employed in Australian Universities. It is important to understand the level of work meaningfulness for practising academics in the rapidly changing context of Higher Education, because academics have been historically, and still are, the foundation of the institution of the University. The reputation of a University lies fundamentally in the work of its academic staff, and any significant disruption in the conduct of their work will clearly impact organisational performance. In this respect, Kahn (1990, 1992), in developing and testing the job diagnostic model previously developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975), found that academics' level of work meaningfulness impacted severely on work engagement which, in turn, influenced work productivity and hence organisational performance.

In this thesis, a qualitative approach, guided by a Symbolic Interaction theoretical perspective, was undertaken using in-depth interviewing in order to determine what promotes and what impedes academics' work meaningfulness. The Health Belief Model (Nutbeam, Harris & Wise 2010), was used to develop the interview questions, to identify the perceived existing work place obstacles that were eroding work meaningfulness, and to understand the barriers to redressing resultant negative situations. Informants consisted of sixteen academics of various positions from selected universities within Melbourne, Australia. The informants were male and female from high and low ranked universities, and were purposefully selected using nonprobability sampling methods.

The findings show that, due to recent government policies involving cutbacks to education and research funding, universities have implemented a business model in order to be self-financing, which has quickly evolved into staff feeling that universities are becoming profit-making institutions. The resulting corporate style of management has encouraged unfamiliar types of competition between universities, and has instilled fear in staff for participating truthfully in opportunities for providing suggestions for institutional improvement. This has cumulatively resulted in negative outcomes such as loss of congeniality between staff, and the feeling that there is too much academic leniency for students, to the point that many academics have deemed that it has devalued education. These outcomes have resulted in academics distrusting their universities, many consequently feeling stressed, with a few even facing mind health issues which have impacted on their work meaningfulness. The

introduction of the corporate model was also perceived to be the reason for increased workloads, for unfair remuneration schemes and for impediments to work/life balance.

A major finding of the work was that what significantly impedes work meaningfulness for academics are the blockages which prevent them from providing quality education for their students, and this supersedes all other negative aspects of their job. It was also evident that the current move to using a corporate model into the university environment was, in itself not seen as a problem. However, the perception that the drive for profit has superseded the importance of the quality of education and the excellence of future graduates, was felt to be the real problem. This was particularly so for those academics who did not see themselves in any career other than being an academic.

Work meaningfulness, corporate/business model, performance management, role management

Student Declaration

“I, [Joanna Claire Miranda], declare that the DBA thesis entitled **Exploring academics’ perception of work meaningfulness** is no more than 65,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work”.

JClaire

Signature
Joanna Claire Miranda

Date 18/12/2017

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Background

Universities, like other major global organisations, are constantly subjected to significant external change pressures, which are often related to new technologies, competing markets, higher client demand, workforce capabilities and the emerging pressure to commercialise products and discoveries (Altbach 2015). Kallio et al. (2016) claim that with universities becoming market oriented or ‘marketised’ (Czarniawska & Genell 2002), academics are being removed from their traditional roles to one that expects them to have close connections with business and industry; and, as a consequence, Marginson (2008) notes, holding them (academics) accountable through sophisticated measures and metrics. Although important traditions of the academic profession have been retained to some extent, faculty members themselves, their work and their institutions have changed dramatically (Gappa & Austin 2010).

This new policy change has shifted Australian higher education from a traditional humanistic model to a highly ‘technicist’ model where education is seen as a ‘producer of goods and services’ (Zajda 2013, p. 236). An increasing number of universities are looking at commercialising their intellectual portfolio, which is now known as ‘academic entrepreneurship’ (Link, Siegel & Wright 2015). It started with licensing and patenting contributions to knowledge, which had economic implications, but this has now expanded into start-ups and setting up of laboratories for experiments for the scientific and technical disciplines, all for the purpose of generating funds (Siegel & Wright 2015). Later came the business version of academic entrepreneurship.

One example of this activity is given by an American state-supported university that now runs a unit combining the study of Small Business Institutes with Business Policy, which was formerly taken separately (Watts & Jackson 2015). The authors explain that this unit required the coordinating professor to establish contacts with small business clients who need consultancy operations. The professor allocated the students into teams where they took on the role of consultants to the small businesses, with the professor holding an advisory role. The purpose of this project was to develop workplace skills through the integration of theory and

practice under 'real world' conditions. Watts and Jackson note that the students' skills improved and that the course became more meaningful to students. In addition to the intended skill sets learning outcomes, the students learnt the difficulties of running a small business. However, this approach did not increase operational (entrepreneurial) skills and achieving good grades was still the main focus for these students.

The purpose of sharing this research here is to highlight the professor's skill set requirement and other expectations of the university, which are far different from what used to be expected. Siegel and Wright (2015) claim that many universities have ventured into these extensions for the wrong reasons, which includes trying to keep up with their rivals, even if they do not have the required expertise. Siegel and Wright further highlight that too much emphasis on academic entrepreneurship has also raised questions regarding insufficient focus upon teaching and education. It is fitting to point out that the articles referenced here are not intended to create any negativity towards any university extensions, but to highlight the changing roles of academics and the different skills that are required for their revised roles. In addition to this, there is also the impact of the changing nature of workforce diversity.

In their study *Rethinking academic traditions for the 21st century faculty*, Gappa and Austin (2010) point out that there are more women now making up the faculty, and there is a substantial increase in female representation at the senior faculty level. They also note that there are more people of different ethnicities attaining doctoral degrees. This has inevitably added to the diversity of faculty members, which is again further expanded by the influx of higher education international students who may decide to join the faculty of their interest. It has been commented that, in such an environment, successful change depends on the continuous development of human capital as the source of innovation and competitive advantage (Hazelkorn 2015), and for the university system, this change would clearly involve academic staff and the way they perceive their newly emerging roles. Indeed, in the past decades, Higher Education has undergone a number of significant reviews (De Boer & File 2008; Deem 1998; Shain & Gleeson 2010), and as a result there has been an eroding of traditional understandings regarding the practice and meaning of a Higher Education experience. All of these have impacted both students and staff, and as a consequence it is felt that it is timely to revisit some of the underpinning notions which are characteristic of university practice, and which intimately affect the practice of modern scholarship.

What is therefore of particular interest in this situation, is that these externally catalysed changes of work role can potentially affect academics' sense of *work meaningfulness* (Kahn 1990), which is of concern in terms of reframing traditional understandings of the vocational nature of higher education. This thesis is an investigation into this concept of 'work meaningfulness' in the context of Higher Education, and of central interest to this work is the personal and individual meaning that current Higher Education staff bring to their role as an academic.

This notion of work meaningfulness is a deep-seated belief system which is important to the everyday practice of a committed workforce (Kahn 1990, 1992; May, Gilson & Harter 2004; Woods & Sofat 2013). It is asserted here that all professional individuals carry with them some ideas that make them feel that their work has intrinsic and valuable meaning, and which therefore gives purpose and direction to their lives. However, it is also the researcher's contention that an individual's experience of work meaningfulness is unique; it is unlikely that two individuals would feel the same level or type of work meaningfulness, even if they were given the same task. This complements the work of Kahn (1990) who, in this context, uses the term 'psychological meaningfulness', because it is in the mind of an individual that he or she is getting a personal return on his or her investment in regard to performing a job. Indeed, it has been claimed that employees perceive their work to be meaningful when they feel that they have a sense of control and autonomy over the work that they perform (Hackman, JR & Oldham 1980).

Further, Kahn states that individuals who experience work meaningfulness believe that their work is valuable, worthwhile and useful. In some respect, work meaningfulness can go beyond income, as Hirschi (2012) noted in his study of academics entitled *Callings and work engagement: moderated mediation model of work meaningfulness, occupational identity, and occupational self-efficacy*. Work can become a *calling*, when the work is done for personal satisfaction. When work is meaningful and felt to be a vocation, the outcome is that work becomes engaging (Kahn 1992), which according to Saks (2006) leads to job satisfaction which will ultimately result in high quality work performance. It is clear from this perspective, that work meaningfulness is different from the meaning of work, where the latter refers only to work as being a means to something such as economic stability or social status (Pratt & Ashforth 2003). Of particular interest here is the notion that a positive experience of work

meaningfulness will result in better performance when compared to a situation in which work is taken to be just a means to an economic end.

This is not to undermine the importance of remuneration, rewards and benefits, which Herzberg, in his two-factor theory, labelled as hygiene factors. According to Herzberg's two-factor theory (Herzberg et al., 1967), there are two distinct sets of factors for job satisfaction and job performance in organisations. One set, labelled satisfiers or motivators, results in satisfaction when adequately fulfilled. The other set, labelled as dissatisfiers or hygiene factors, causes dissatisfaction when deficient. The motivators are typically intrinsic factors: they are part of job content and are largely administered by the employee

The hygiene factors are extrinsic factors and are under the control of someone other than the employee. The extrinsic factors affect job satisfaction and if not adequately fulfilled can cause dissatisfaction, even if the motivating factors themselves are addressed satisfactorily (DeShields Jr, Kara & Kaynak 2005). Therefore according to Herzberg et al. (1967) hygiene factors are not motivators but necessary conditions for employees to be able to perform their jobs. Wan Yusoo, Kian and Mohamed Idris (2013) disagree on the labelling, instead identifying these influences (hygiene factors) as external motivators that are stimuli which also contribute to job satisfaction. Whether it is regarded as a hygiene factor or a motivator, it is agreed that it has significant implications to employees' work experience. Furthermore, financial circumstances as a strong influence on work was one of the findings advanced by Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) through their conceptual paper *On the meaning of work: a theoretical integration and review*. They found evidence to show that when individuals are suffering from inadequate income, the economic value of work increases, deemphasising the intrinsic meaning of work. Gappa and Austin (2010) provide some information on the negative consequence arising from the absence of external motivators to academics' sense of value. According to these authors when any member of the academic community in a country is not respected or valued, or the member's talent is not fully utilised, the opportunity for that member to work at the highest level of his/her talent is diminished. This makes it not conducive for academics to live in their home country in their chosen profession with dignity; and with better prospects offshore, it could result in outflow of academics to offshore destinations.

These migrations, unlike inter-corporate transfers and investment opportunities, are self-organised (Bauder 2015). In particular, those academics who fall into the higher segment of the academic labour market can potentially move to countries that recognise their intellectual

status and can be thus remunerated at a higher level than in their native country. European and Latin American countries, as well as countries with European style universities such as Japan and Korea, may be preferred destinations. These destinations, Shin and Jung (2013) note, have strong Professor-Oriented Systems (POS) where academics have a strong influence. Despite studies which indicate that the UK is a highly stressful place to be employed (stemming from job insecurity), it is not a cause for stress for academic migrants whose sole purpose is to gain experience, higher financial rewards and exposure to different work cultures. This group of people have already pre-planned their work journey to move on to other locations at the end of their contract period. They are not looking for permanent migration. This was the case in Germany, under the early Humboldt research fellowship programme. Jöns (2009), studying the long-term effect of academic mobility into Germany between 1954-2000, found that 12% of inflows of academics stayed longer than anticipated, and 9% used their stay abroad to springboard their career into a third world country. Such migration behaviours can result in a brain drain, an outcome which can affect the perception of quality of education in the affected countries. One of the modernised forms of brain drain could be that migrated professionals return to their home country only when they have decided to settle down permanently (Jałowiecki & Gorzelak 2004).

In this context, Davies, Taylor and Savery (2001), through their study on the hospitality industry, highlight that Australian employees showed their least loyalty to their employers, which was attributed directly to their poor remuneration scheme. Even though remuneration is important for job performance (Cerasoli, Nicklin and Ford (2014), a matter of specific relevance to this investigation is that it is intrinsic motivation that results in a higher degree of effort. In this respect, an organisation's success depends largely upon employees' commitment to the profession and the quality of their work. Gappa and Austin (2010) identified a set of essential elements of faculty work which they refer to as (i) respect, (ii) employment equity, (iii) academic freedom and autonomy, (iv) flexibility, (v) professional growth, and (vi) collegiality. They claim that all of these elements are necessary for commitment and high work quality. Of critical importance here, however, is that Kallio et al. (2016) claim that changes in the higher education area have resulted in quantitative targets and metrics that are in conflict with these elements that Gappa and Austin claim are necessary for high quality performance and work commitment. The researcher believes, therefore, that all these elements will affect an employee's sense of work meaningfulness. Universities now, more than ever before, are situated in a rapidly changing world, due largely to the effects of globalisation. In addition,

continuing financial uncertainties have resulted in universities having to ensure that their faculty members can contribute their best work even though the role of education has been significantly modified. It is the researcher's contention understanding these changes is important, in order to understand the contemporary education scene from the perspective of the workforce, to look more closely at those factors that appeal to intrinsic motivation, such as work meaningfulness.

1.1. Research context

It has long been accepted that education plays an important part in the industrial, social and human development of a country (Varghese 2009). Through both general and vocational education, corporations and governments can continually upgrade their industries and their economies to meet the changing needs of the industrialised world. Indeed, Porter and Vidovich (2000) note that, in attempting to make the education sector more efficiently meet the changing needs of industries, governments are currently taking steps towards making universities more 'efficient and productive' through budget cuts, encouraging universities to diversify their income from increased student fees or increased recruitment of international students who have to pay full fees, aligning grants to research output, and also encouraging academics to pursue higher degrees. Of relevance to this work, Porter and Vidovich also note that in their study there were mixed reactions, and somewhat surprising outcomes, to these government initiatives. Whilst it was found that these changes were stressful to a number of academics, there were others who were ambitious, and have turned these initiatives into opportunities to seek international positions, either by pursuing education in a country other than their place of undergraduate degrees, or by pursuing higher degrees such as the PhD.

In Australia, the latest ANZAM 2008-2010 ¹ report shows that PhD qualified academic staff have increased from 63% during 2000-2002 reporting period to 84.3% in the current reporting period (2008-2010). Such strategies can lead to abilities that can be used as a ticket-to-work in countries that have higher remuneration packages. Research on academic mobility goes as far back as the 1980s, and includes the work of Borjas (1989), who studied the impact of globalisation on academic decisions, and noted that it resulted in market forces and

¹ <https://www.anzam.org/publications/surveys/>

competition between countries for human and economic capital, which encourages labour mobility.

Marginson and Rhoades (2002) explain that such mobility of professors and students has been taking place since the earliest days of universities in Europe. Similarly, Bauder (2015) states that some academics also take advantage of the current mobility structure to gain international recognition. Bauder further explains that besides pursuing prestige and credibility, academics are, in addition, extending their networks and social space. Well-developed professional networks can be seen to influence career outcomes, and lead to job satisfaction, rewards and recognition (Clarke, Hyde & Drennan 2013). It needs to be highlighted here that this government-led initiative has clearly led to a refocussing of the aims and objectives of some academics, and the traditional interest in developing a vocation seems to have been lost, an observation which is seen as being manifested in the change in work meaningfulness.

In Australia, changes in politics, population, social and community trends, along with economic changes, have significantly transformed the way Australian universities operate. These changes are resulting in the academic profession generally experiencing a range of unfamiliar stressors (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley 2010). This can be seen in the case of job security. Faculty members have always placed high value on employment security (Gappa & Austin 2010) but now job insecurity is one of the stressors reported among Australian academics, and is claimed to be due to universities adopting a private corporation style of management (Shin & Jung 2013). This could be due to the university governance trying to do too much too soon and at all levels (Lawler & Sillitoe 2010).

These changes have led to academic staff being redefined as 'service providers' to students who are now redefined as 'customers' (Lafferty & Fleming 2000). James (2000) contends that education has now become a money-making business with the Vice Chancellor's role being redefined to a role of a chief executive officer. This, along with other restructuring changes which the author has noted, has divided academic staff in terms of levels and tenure, with academic staff finding it very challenging to retain better aspects of collegiality, such as peer review and respect for scholarship. It is at a stage where academics need to rethink the concept of collegiality and community (James 2000).

Lawler and Sillitoe (2010) have also suggested more caution in this respect, since organisational change in a university, when not accepted by the staff, will result in ‘organisational silence’ (Morrison & Milliken 2000). In this instance, employees will choose to remain silent even though they know, or can foresee, a problem arising due to the change. This is because employees feel that they are not valued; they perceive they have a lack of control and feel that their beliefs are no longer in alignment with that of the organisation – all of which are necessary for work to be meaningful. To be purposeful employees, they need to have clear, coherent directions, know what to focus upon, and have adequate resources to support them (Kerns 2013). The domino effect of loss of sense of work meaningfulness is disengagement with the job and reduced or poor performance, and this ultimately results in poor organisational outcomes (Kahn 1990, 1992) Therefore, if there is serious concern about the eroding of traditional academic values, it is important and timely to attempt to create an environment that promotes work meaningfulness, which requires us to explore perceptions of meaningfulness among academics, which is the aim of this research.

The study will extend ethnographer Kahn’s conceptual model (1992) of employee engagement and disengagement, which introduced the notion of work meaningfulness as an important indicator of engagement. Although researchers have connected work engagement to a number of outcomes, an important example here being work performance, there is limited research which exists on how work meaningfulness plays into work relationships, especially in the context of academia. Furthermore, since Kahn’s research clearly demonstrates that work meaningfulness leads to work engagement, this raises the questions of ‘How does this work meaningfulness experience feel?’ and ‘How unique is it?’

1.2. Research questions

Due to limited empirical research on work meaningfulness among academics, there are some key questions which remain unanswered. Using the elements of the Symbolic Interaction theoretical approach, the research questions were constructed to investigate personal perceptions relating to work meaningfulness. Quoting Will Henry’s statement, ‘What is research but a blind date with knowledge’, Mintzberg (2005) suggests that in order to not be restricted in any form when researching a topic, it is essential to start with an interesting question. In line with that, three main questions were developed to which answers were sought:

1. What makes work, as an academic, meaningful?

2. When work is meaningful, what is the experience and how is it felt?
3. What positive and negative events affect work meaningfulness?

1.3. Academic and practical benefits

Limited research evidence exists on work meaningfulness among academics. A search of peer-reviewed top tier journals in August 2017 through Scopus yielded 25 relevant articles on academic work issues, but only six were directly related to work meaningfulness. The knowledge generated from this study will therefore contribute towards the scholarship of literature related to work meaningfulness among academics. It is anticipated that the findings may be usefully applied at both the individual and organisational system levels to inform job design and motivation (Oldham et al. 2005). Improved understanding of the experience of work meaningfulness will assist in the design of interventions to enhance work and organisational performance (Hackman & Oldham 1975). In support of this claim, Markos and Sridevi (2010) contend that where work is meaningful for employees, a positive impact on customers or clients ensues. Acknowledging the limited extant research on work meaningfulness, Woods and Sofat (2013) called for contemporary exploration of meaningfulness, particularly for highlighting the potential gains for organisations. University executives and other key decision makers may find use in the potential discoveries from this study to support changes in policies affecting human resource management, as well as work and the design of organisational systems.

1.3.1. Contribution to knowledge (academic contribution)

Research on work meaningfulness is limited in the academic milieu, but its importance to the area has been repeatedly highlighted. Among the few empirical studies found was May, Gilson and Harter's work (2004) that tested Kahn's (1990) theory on psychological conditions and meaningfulness of work. These authors found that meaningfulness had the strongest influence on employee engagement, with job enrichment and work-role fit affecting psychological meaningfulness. This current study will add to their work by extending the knowledge of work meaningfulness by specifically exploring how academics derive meaning from their work.

Most studies on meaningfulness have been conducted in the area of clinical psychology (Noble 1961a; Simon & Feigenbaum 1964; Underwood & Schulz 1960) and in the context of religion (Wright, Frost & Wisecarver 1993). Meaningfulness has been mentioned as part of

motivation and engagement theory (Chalofsky & Krishna 2009; Kahn 1990), though meaningfulness *per se* was rarely the main topic of study. However, the theme of the 2016 meeting of the American Academy of Management, *Making organisations meaningful*, is a strong indicator of the contemporary relevance and importance of new understandings of work meaningfulness². Apart from the benefits already mentioned, the current study will add knowledge to understand work meaningfulness among academics in three ways: first from a lived experience perspective, the study will contribute new understanding of the authentic contemporary definition of work meaningfulness among academics. Second, the study will reveal how academics deem their sense of work meaningfulness affects their work performance. Third, the study will explore academics' views on the impact of organisational changes on their sense of work meaningfulness. The outcome of this new knowledge could have theoretical implications for improving academic and university performance as well as encouraging cross-disciplinary research

1.3.2. Statement of significance (practical contribution)

Faculty members are an institution's intellectual capital, and are the primary, and only appreciable, asset (Gappa & Austin 2010). Therefore Coates and Goedegebuure (2012) findings that in Australia a large and growing number of academics will retire in five years' time, which will require Australian universities to replace half of their staff, is worrying, considering that surveys show staff numbers are growing at a lower rate than student numbers. Furthermore, fewer academics are willing to work in a revised job scope with a growing amount of work, choosing instead to work outside of the tertiary sector, with others seeking to move abroad. There is an urgency now to develop more understanding in this field and, as Schendel (1995, p. 1) points out, to continue to grow and develop important linkages between research and practice it is imperative to improve research and understand that relevance comes from rigour.

This study is grounded in the changing role of universities as noted by De Boer and File (2008) and Varghese (2009), and assesses the impact, if any, on academics' work meaningfulness. Meaningfulness can be impacted during organisational change and transformation where lack of resources leads to breaches in the 'psychological contract'

² (<http://aom.org/annualmeeting/theme/>,

through unfulfilled promised obligations (Robinson & Morrison 2000). The violation of the psychological contract could impact on the psychological state of employees, resulting in below optimum-level performance (Kahn 1990). The benefits of this study to practitioners thus include the understanding of work meaningfulness that could enable universities to improve market competitiveness. Second, practical ways to improve organisational efficiency through work redesign may surface. Finally, academic leaders may find a useful blueprint to create a work environment that is appealing and promotes a sense of being valued among employees, which in turn could favourably influence the reputation and standing of the university.

1.4. Methodology

Most of the studies on work meaningfulness have been conducted from a positivist/post-positivist, transformative and pragmatist worldview using quantitative methodology that involved testing of hypotheses, theory verification, experiment, observation, issues of power or gender, and have been problem-centred type of research (Mintzberg 2005). Minimal studies have used the constructivism worldview to understand work meaningfulness within a context such as a community of people or an organisation. However, to understand a phenomenon, Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) note that qualitative methods may provide the best fit, because qualitative research is concerned with how individuals make meaning of a phenomenon or experience. The interest in this investigation is concerned with the quality of an experience rather than in the determination of causal relationships, therefore this research explores academics' lived experience of work meaningfulness, a phenomenon that is experienced by a specific group of people. It is this concern that underpins the choice of a qualitative methodology. Qualitative methodology has a variety of inquiry methods and has to be compatible with the theoretical perspective of the study. In this interpretative study, an analysis using language and text (Laverly 2003) was used, which is compatible with the Symbolic Interaction theoretical perspective which guides this study. Data collection was through in-depth interviews with purposefully selected academics, using convenience and snowballing sampling approaches. More details on the methodology are discussed in Chapter 4, Methodology.

1.5.Higher education in the Australian context

The Australian higher education sector is regulated by an independent regulatory body, the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA)³ which was established in 2011. It was revised in 2015 and implemented in January 2017. TEQSA regulates and assures the quality of public and private universities in Australia and its branches overseas, to ensure that the interests of current and future students are safeguarded through their regulatory and quality assurance monitoring systems. TEQSA registers and evaluates the performance of higher education providers against the Higher Education Standards Framework – specifically the Threshold Standards that all providers must meet and maintain to remain within the higher education system. The Threshold Standards provide detailed requirements that must be met for registration standards, category standards, course accreditation standards and qualification standards.

Under the TEQSA regulatory requirement, academic staff must have at least one level of qualification (AFQ or equivalent). They must have a higher level of education than that which they are teaching, or have equivalent relevant academic, professional or practice-based experience. Those who supervise doctoral students must themselves have a doctoral degree or equivalent research experience.

1.6.Thesis presentation

Chapter 1, Introduction, has given a brief overview of the research, including setting the context of the investigation and introducing the questions that this study will answer. It has also anticipated the academic and practical benefits from the outcomes of this research, and given an overview of the methodology employed to assemble relevant data. This introductory chapter has established the reason for the study of work meaningfulness among academics, and has signposted the practical and theoretical implications of the anticipated findings. Below is the layout of the rest of the chapters of this thesis.

The next chapter, Chapter 2, Literature Review, begins with an introduction of the impact of globalisation on the education sector and the effects of these issues on academics and their sense of work meaningfulness. The role of empirical and theoretical evidence in such an

³ <http://www.teqsa.gov.au/about>

investigation is discussed and the ‘gaps’ in the literature are identified. In Chapter 3, a detailed discussion of the theoretical perspective underpinning this work is provided, and is compared with the theoretical perspectives used to date in other similar studies. In so doing, it emphasises the appropriateness of the chosen perspective for this contemporary study. The methodology is presented in Chapter 4, and to strengthen the conceptual framework of the investigation, the link between the ontology, epistemology and methods are discussed in detail to provide a clear theoretical rationale for the conduct of the study. In Chapter 5, the findings are presented in conjunction with the supporting data from the interviews.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with discussion on the implications of the findings and puts forth a number of recommendations. This chapter also explains the limitations of the study, the professional development gained by the student researcher and suggests a future direction that could spin off from this study. Chapter 7 lists the references used in this study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2. Introduction

Chapter 1 has provided the research overview and the justifications for this study. It has given a discussion of this exploratory study, which needed to be carried out in order to more clearly understand the notion of ‘work meaningfulness’ from the perspective of currently employed academics. Based on the available literature on work meaningfulness done in other industries, three research questions were developed, which were used to guide this investigation. These questions are:

- 1) What makes work, as an academic, meaningful?
- 2) When work is meaningful, what is the experience and how is it felt?
- 3) What positive and negative events affect work meaningfulness?

This chapter, the Literature Review, will examine published studies which are of relevance to these questions. In particular, studies which have looked at the recent changes that have impacted on academic staff will be discussed. Particular attention will be paid to the theoretical and empirical evidence which has been provided, and the chapter will conclude by identifying what appears as the important ‘gaps’ which exist in this literature, particularly with relevance to the field of academic work.

Of concern here is the slow progression of research in the area of understanding work meaningfulness among academics. When a search was first done in March 2016, 13 articles of interest resulted, and when repeated in August 2017, 25 articles resulted. However, when the abstracts were more closely analysed, only six documents addressed the issue of academics and their work meaningfulness. This seems to imply that, although there has been interest in the general field of work issues in Higher Education, progress and development in understanding work meaningfulness in academia has not evidenced much concern. In addition, the few published articles in the education sector which have been accessed are a test of the validity of previous research work. The findings of these published investigations resonate with research findings that indicate that work meaningfulness enhances work performance,

suggesting that this is an important area for further research, particularly in the current Higher Education area.

Of relevance to this current study is that the preliminary definition of work meaningfulness used in this investigation – ‘the degree to which an employee experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable and worthwhile’ – originates from the work of Hackman, JR and Oldham (1975, p. 162) who developed the job diagnostic model. This definition was subsequently used by Kahn (1990, 1992) in his study on engagement and disengagement at work, and later in developing his recursive model of psychological presence. All subsequent studies have been consistent in using this definition. As stated above, research on work meaningfulness and meaning of work has been widely conducted in other areas of industry, but is very limited in academia. This literature review is structured in the order of the research questions to ensure that the literature review can clearly guide, as well as limit, the literature information gathered to answer these questions.

Before proceeding further it is necessary to understand the difference between *meaning of work* and *work meaningfulness*, as both phrases have often been used interchangeably in the literature, and this may contribute to confusion among readers. Pratt and Ashforth (2003), have offered a clear segregation between these two phrases, suggesting that *meaning of work* is used to refer to a range of outcomes. It is related to external motivation such as income, promotion and social status, which are social constructs, whereas *work meaningfulness* solely refers to the way work has a personal significance to an individual. It consequently appeals to issues related to intrinsic motivation, and as such is a psychological construct. However, according to Amabile (1988), not all motivations are equal, and she believes that intrinsic motivation flamed by inner passion provides better output than external reward. Work can become meaningful when work changes from merely being a ‘means’ of income or sustenance, to being something of deeper and more lasting ‘significance’.

At this point, it is fitting to establish the necessity for exploring this topic. This will be best achieved by gathering appropriate empirical evidence. Edward Teller (1908 – 2003) commented that: ‘A fact is a simple statement that everyone believes. It is innocent unless found guilty. A hypothesis is a novel suggestion that no one wants to believe. It is guilty, until found effective’ (Cooper & Schindler 2014). Although this study does not aim to formally develop a hypothesis, it is nevertheless important to find evidence to justify the claims made of the importance of this study.

In relation to the outcome of work meaningfulness, the earliest available empirical evidence is given by Williams and Karau (1991) through their experiments with Introductory Psychology students. They held three experiments, using one batch of students from the University of Washington and two from the University of Purdue. A finding relevant to this study relates to their conclusion on work meaningfulness, where they note that in the context of group work, the students in the group would not compensate for the actions of a poor performer unless the task and its outcome was *meaningful to them*. This experiment helps to establish the claim that work meaningfulness triggers positive actions.

Positive actions are also believed to result in positive organisational outcomes, such as increased customer satisfaction. To support this claim, the study carried out by Leiter, Harvie and Frizzel (1998) on nurses from two hospitals in Canada is used for its relevance. In their study, Leiter et al. found that there was a link between employees' feelings towards their work and customer satisfaction. The authors found that when nurses lost their sense of work meaningfulness, it was clearly reflected in their declining care towards their patients, resulting in customer dissatisfaction. Leiter et al. pointed out that nurses, when they choose their profession, expect to be able to provide competent and compassionate care to their patients. If, for whatever reason, they are not convinced that the actions that they are required to carry out are the best way to provide this care, it will unknowingly be manifested in their work. This confirms Bowie's (1998) and Lips-Wiersma and Morris' (2009) hypotheses, which both suggest that for work to be meaningful, it must be in line with employees' personal beliefs. A similar outcome was seen in a more recent study on nurses after an implementation of a wide range of cost-containment strategies in Europe and in the USA. They found that changes in the quality of the hospital work environment were significantly associated with alteration in patient satisfaction, quality and safety of care (Aiken et al. 2012). It was interesting, but not surprising, to note that nurses in Norway reported the lowest work burnout, dissatisfaction and intention to leave, given that Norway's hospitals, in this survey, had the lowest patient-to-nurse ratio, a factor which some have related to work meaningfulness. The result was similar for the USA, which also had the lowest staffing ratio among all other countries surveyed besides Norway. High ratings were given by patients in the USA, Finland, Switzerland and Ireland, with almost 60% happy to 'definitely' recommend the hospitals to others. While studies on nurses, either on a small or a global scale, clearly show the strong relationship between nurses' sense of work meaningfulness and customer satisfaction, these studies also highlight the impact of stress to work meaningfulness, as shown in patient-to-nurse ratios, which significantly affect the quality

of organisational outcomes. Work related stress can lead to other negative implications as reported by Al-Sharaf (2006) citing a study done in Kuwait in the year 2000, highlighting that there was a shortage of teachers due to high student teacher ratios and unattractive salaries.

It is the researcher's contention that these studies can inform the present study in the academic area, due to the similarities in employment characteristics that they share. Nursing, teaching and lecturing have an important commonality, which is passion for care. Although studies relating to work meaningfulness in academia are limited, by drawing on studies in other service industries it is possible to analyse the implications of work meaningfulness to individuals and the organisation.

Given these comments on work meaningfulness and the implications for its importance in the meeting of institutional aims, the literature review will now continue to follow the contributions made by previous scholars to issues related to the research questions posed earlier.

2.1. What makes work as an academic, meaningful?

As there is not much research on what makes academics experience work meaningfulness, a literature review was carried out on what was available on work meaningfulness. For example, in developing their job diagnostic model, Hackman, JR and Oldham (1976), who wanted to test the psychological state of employees to determine aspects of their personal and work outcomes, found that skill variety, task identification and task significance strongly relate to work meaningfulness.

Kahn (1990), expanding the work of Hackman, JR and Oldham (1975), asserts that for work to be meaningful, work must be (i) challenging and (ii) a balanced combination of routine work to feel competent, with some work opportunities that lead to development of new skills. This has been recently supported by Beadle and Knight (2012), who state that if the work is not challenging, individuals will become bored and their work will cease to be meaningful to them.

Expanding on the work of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who was a German philosopher, Bowie (1998) posited that, for work to be meaningful, a worker should be in a job of his or her own free will, have autonomy and independence, have room to develop capabilities, be paid sufficiently, and work in an environment that does not go against his or

her personal life philosophy and morals. In an ensuing development of these ideas, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) suggested that for employees to experience work meaningfulness, they must have opportunities for moral development and personal growth, and be free to practice their beliefs in their work place.

Meaningfulness of the job could also depend on the goal that the individual aims to achieve. Davis et al. (2015), in their studies on what motivates students, note that by reflecting why they (the students) pursued a specific goal, it increased the sense of goal meaningfulness which resulted in increased motivation to achieve that goal. The relevance of this study to the current work is to emphasise that meaningfulness, related to performing some relevant task, comes with a knowledge of understanding why that task is performed. It also highlights that meaning and purpose can be a motivating force to overcome difficulties and setbacks.

In more recent work, Kettenbohrer, Eckhardt and Beimborn (2015), using Kahn's 1990 model, developed a theoretical approach that they claim could help in predicting employees' acceptance of Business Process Standardisation (BPS). They posited that job characteristics, work role fit, job construct and co-worker relations could be used to predict levels of work meaningfulness, which then can be used to predict the acceptance of BPS. Although it is still untested, this work can inform as a guide as to what ideal attributes to expect in job characteristics and co-worker relationships, which might impact on work meaningfulness.

Besides job characteristics, it is important to include employees in decision making that can affect their self-worth. According to Moriarty (2010), employees should have a say in the decisions that a company makes because it may interfere with the employees' self-interest. When this conflict is disregarded, the act is bound to damage these employees' self-worth and self-confidence, interfering with their psychological safety and presence at work (Kahn 1992) and eventually affecting work meaningfulness. It is also important that an employers' compensation scheme does not negatively impact their employees' quality of life.

Compensation has long been associated with work meaningfulness, such as in the study by Bowie (1998). The definition of compensation extends beyond monetary rewards, encompassing financial and non-financial elements such as perks, discounts and other benefits (Sundaray 2011). Recent studies have reinforced past findings that adequate pay and attractive rewards are an important factor for quality of life, which relates to job satisfaction and which could lead to work meaningfulness and work performance (Gayathiri et al. 2013).

At this point there is a strong indication that work is meaningful when individuals feel that the work they do has a purpose (that is, they know why they are performing the task), and that it is both valued and worthwhile. Individuals must also perceive that they are adequately compensated, and have autonomy and independence when carrying out their roles. Furthermore, meaningful work also entails being in a safe environment that is in synergy with personal values and morals, where an individual is free to practice their personal work-related beliefs. In addition, there must be room for growth, both personal and professional.

It was anticipated that, when responding to the questions posed in this study, academics would have the opportunity to evaluate why they have chosen this profession. They could also reflect on whether they are satisfying the ‘why’ in this profession. In this respect, the informants’ responses would be an indication of whether academic work is a means to some specific short-term end, or if it holds a more profound personal significance for them.

2.2. When work is meaningful, what is the experience and how is it felt?

In general, those who report work experience as intrinsically rewarding, also report total absorption in the task and an enjoyment in engaging with it, among other outcomes (Beadle & Knight 2012). The authors explain that intrinsically rewarding job characteristics result in high job satisfaction and a reduced intention to leave their organisation. After extensive research on works of other scholars, Beadle and Knight concluded that positive work meaningfulness results in positive work performance.

When employees feel that their work is meaningful to them, employees are able to bring be themselves without being worried about any negative consequences (Kahn (1990, p. 708) which refers to employees being engaged with their work. Kahn goes on to state that employees must feel that they are in a psychologically safe work environment, which refers to, among other emotions, their confidence in their work teams and their leaders. This implies that these employees believe that they can freely express and share their thoughts, which can be referred to as a positive work environment. Experiencing sense of satisfaction, significance, inspiration and pride (Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli 2006) will result in work engagement, which happens because employees feel a sense of work meaningfulness (Kahn 1992). Work engagement is dependent on situational factors, particularly in the work place for instance, which when correctly managed will result in employees being able to totally concentrate on

their work, leading to better financial output for the organisation (Gayathiri et al. 2013; Xanthopoulou et al. 2009).

In testing the link between an employee's work environment and their perceived psychological safety, Brown and Leigh (1996) sampled sales staff from four different businesses; a paper goods manufacturer, two office supplies manufacturers and a large medical products company. The conclusion from this study indicated that while the type of organisation or industry did not have an impact on employees' performance, the work environment, on the other hand, had a major impact. Brown and Leigh confirmed that for work to be meaningful, the work environment must be perceived to be psychologically safe.

There is also evidence to show that work meaningfulness leads to job enrichment. This was tested by May, Gilson and Harter (2004) through their survey on employees from a large insurance firm in Midwestern USA. The questionnaire measured the participants' perceptions about themselves, their jobs, their supervisors and their co-workers. The sample of 213 participants included a range of employees and managers from various occupational categories from the administrative departments, and confirmed the findings of Kahn (1990, 1992) that psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety and psychological availability are important to work engagement, and furthermore that job enrichment and work-role fit are fully mediated by meaningfulness. However, they disagreed with Kahn on the role of co-workers in the development of the sense of work meaningfulness, stating that their data analysis indicated that relationship between co-worker's norms and engagement is only partially mediated by psychological safety. In this respect, the work of Fang, Wang and Chen (2016) appears to disagree with May et al. (2004). Fang et al. allege that collaborations through internal and external social networks increase knowledge cognition, leading to boundary-spanning through and across broader networks.

In another development, Bunderson and Thompson (2009) introduced the relationship between work meaningfulness and calling, a concept that somewhat challenges the positions of Bowie (1998) and Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009). The concept of 'calling', as used here, is not used in the religious context, but rather takes on the definition coined by Wrzesniewski (2003), which refers to individuals working for personal satisfaction rather than for financial fulfilment. It is based on the assumption that work, when done for economic purposes or for career advancement, will be unlikely to inspire a sense of significance, purpose or transcendent meaning (Dik & Duffy 2009; Hall, D & Chandler 2005; Wrzesniewski et al. 1997). The

collective claims made by the authors are that, for those to whom work is perceived as a calling, they will be more satisfied with their work and their career, they experience greater life satisfaction and they suffer less from stress, depression or conflict between work and non-work situations.

Bunderson and Thompson (2009) arrived at this finding through their study on zookeepers from institutions in the US and Canada. Through their mixed method study, they found that these zookeepers who were in the lowest bracket of hourly wages in the US, and could barely make ends meet (unless they took up an additional job or had a spouse or other family income), were required to work long hours and had no prospect for advancement. However they still decided to stay on the job because they felt that it was their calling, and despite all the odds that were stacked against them, these zookeepers were satisfied with their situation. A subsequent study by Duffy, Dik and Steger (2010) on 370 employees from a Western university in the US, also confirmed the positive outcome of perceiving work as a calling. It was Hirschi (2012) who finally made the theoretical link between calling and work engagement, and in his quantitative study on 529 university alumni from three universities in northern Germany, he further confirmed the relationship between calling and meaningful work, which resulted in work engagement.

In one of the few studies on the impact of work meaningfulness to academics, Kinman (2008) found that academics become resilient to stress when work was meaningful. Her study tested stress management through a concept termed Sense of Coherence (SOC), which is a model that she developed to understand the relationship between stress, health issues and work meaningfulness. The model consisted of questions that tested work meaningfulness, comprehensibility and manageability against measures of stress and health conditions of academics in selected universities across the UK. The study showed that many academics suffered poor health conditions due to work stress resulting from high work load, high student demands, low work-life balance and low support at work. The exception, however, was those academics who had strong SOC. The group of academics with strong SOC were able to manage their stress, resulting in fewer health issues. This outcome's importance to the current study is that Kinman's 2008 study highlights the *resilience* effect of work meaningfulness.

Drawing on the above studies, it can be summarised that when work is meaningful, it produces a range of positive feelings towards an individual's job. They may feel that the work that they are performing is a calling, overshadowing the need for financial fulfilment. They

become engaged in their work, they have a sense of job enrichment, and they are comfortable in their work environment. As a result, these individuals have been shown to be better able to manage work stress.

2.3. What positive and negative events affect work meaningfulness?

As already briefly highlighted in the previous section, stress can potentially disrupt an individual's sense of work meaningfulness. Although a large number of research studies have looked at work stress in the industry, limited research has been dedicated specifically to academic stress. One reason for this, advanced by Gmelch, Wilke and Lovrich (1986), is that while academics are very enthusiastic in researching and learning about other groups, they are less interested in aspects of their own profession.

Lack of research interest about this issue could also be due to the perception the public have of an academic's work-life. Academics are portrayed as having a large degree of flexibility and autonomy, and are thus not tightly bound to the locus of the university in the practice of their profession (Heijstra & Rafnsdottir 2010); that is, academics are seen as independent of the university they teach in. This implies, perhaps, that there is not much perceived stress involved in being an academic, unlike other professions.

However, Narayanan, Menon and Spector (1999), using a mixed method research approach, compared professors and clerical staff from the University of South Florida with the sales employees of a retail outlet. This provided documented evidence to the contrary. The sample consisted of clerical staff, who were all females, whilst the professors and the sales employees were of mixed gender.

The participants were first asked to describe an incident in the recent past month that was very stressful. They were asked to explain why it was stressful and how it was managed. After Narayanan et al. had conducted a content analysis on these responses, their findings showed that (i) the perception of stress differed across occupation and gender, (ii) the lower category clerical and sales people mainly suffered from stress due to lack of control, and (iii) all three categories (clericals, professors and sales staff) had differing reasons associated with stress, but none was position-specific. Overall, all three categories of participants suffered from stress due to interpersonal conflict (and here it was found to affect women more than men), mainly due to 'time wasters' in the organisation, and from general work overload. Narayanan et al.'s

(1999) study took place during the time when the education sector was going through restructuring exercises in response to global changes that were setting off many opposite binaries (Porter & Vidovich 2000) that had the potential to disrupt an academic's sense of work meaningfulness.

It is important to note that 'globalisation' is not a new phenomenon, and according to Yang (2003) globalisation was already a buzzword in the late 20th century. Lévy (2007) further elaborates on globalisation by identifying the spread of waves (or periods) of globalisation; the first period was between the years 1870 to 1914, with the second during the period 1945 to the mid-1980s. This historical tracking serves to justify the claim that globalisation is not a new phenomenon, and further implies that it will be an ongoing phenomenon. With Musselin (2007) documenting that the academic profession has always been in the process of change, it is realistic to anticipate that this trend of change will continue.

Thus, if globalisation is going to be an ongoing process, then it is important to keep in mind the findings of Porter and Vidovich (2000), that although globalisation affects everyone, it does so *in different ways*. Porter and Vidovich claim that these differences are noticeable even for people in the same group or community, and in explaining this in the academic context, they start by highlighting the changes resulting from pressures of globalisation on the role of higher education. The reaction to this pressure, they claim, was to increase the overall education level of a nation in order to be responsive to the needs of industry in an increasingly competitive global market, in an effort to ensure national economic survival. Porter and Vidovich substantiate this claim using evidence of the implementation of a corporate profit-making model in the recently revised higher education policies. They further add that, although university restructuring has taken place almost worldwide, the purpose and nature of the restructuring depended on the intention of individual governments, and in this respect they compare the approaches of Western and Asian countries, where differences in national approaches highlight the complexity of this issue.

In Europe, it is traditional to think of higher education as a driving force towards the production of a knowledge society and a knowledge economy (De Boer & File 2008). Thus, when it was perceived that the highly regulated education system was not producing a thinking society or bringing knowledge advancement in the 1990s, the nature of the restructuring was an effort to shift 'away from government towards governance', placing the accountability and responsibility for producing a thinking society onto universities (De Boer & File 2008, p. 10).

By contrast, in Malaysia around the same time, the education sector restructuring saw the local government initiating programmes to increase the number of undergraduates in the country as an attempt to move Malaysia into a *developed nation status* (Varghese 2009). This initially resulted in an increased number of government universities, but coupled with the government encouraging private sectors to be involved in the education sector, the outcome was a proliferation of private Malaysian universities. Varghese notes that this was also a time when there was a large outflow of students pursuing education overseas, prompting the government to allow private universities to offer overseas qualifications locally. This was a calculated move to decrease outflow of funds as well as to make Malaysia a regional education hub. In a drive to improve quality, the Malaysian government initiated major education reforms, such as transferring administrative control from the government to the universities, thus making universities accountable for their actions. This transition was effected through reductions in government funding and devolving decision-making power to the universities' management committees.

Clearly, the responses to the implicit needs of a nation being drawn into a globalised society have been quite different, as is evidenced by these examples. However, apart from the government's specific intentions, such restructuring activities and whether they were in Western or Asian countries, they have had a remarkably similar effect on the Higher Education sector. This was the introduction of significant additional demands on academics and administrators (Bedenlier & Zawacki-Richter 2015; Marginson & Van der Wende 2007). The consensus was that universities now had to design and manage themselves as businesses, which consequently required them to develop marketing activities in order to grow new segments and channels to increase their income (Aula & Tienari 2011; De Boer & File 2008). This was where, as universities tried to improve their market position, the concomitant changes to the academic role became most evident.

Whilst acknowledging the need for restructuring of the education sector in other countries, Currie (1996) claims that Australia did not necessarily have to follow the *corporatised* model, and further states that Australian politicians willingly moved into implementing this model. This was a move to keep Australian universities up with the global societal and economic changes, and was countenanced because the governments are so dependent on capital provided by international bankers. Currie further claims that even while universities are keen to reduce the regulatory hand of government, individual universities'

administrations have tried to exercise tighter control over their institutions through input and output measures, where inputs are indicators that refer to the resources used and/or activities that are carried out, and outputs are the indicators that refer to the institution's performance in terms of teaching/research (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn 2001). In following this path, university administrators brought elements of the market into the education sector, with all its attendant ideology of competition and individualism.

The overall pragmatic impact of this restructuring in Australian universities has been the introduction of longer working hours, with concomitant disruption to the traditional roles of teaching and research, which has resulted in generally higher stress levels (Currie 1996). Currie's observations are supported through the survey study of Winefield and Jarrett (2001) on 2040 staff members of an established metropolitan university in Australia, that found academics involved in both teaching and research experienced a high level of stress. This was thought to be due to having to deal with funding cuts and being expected to attract external grants, while simultaneously ensuring that they met their increased teaching expectations. It is thus claimed that academics are being increasingly subjected to fragmented roles, heightened stress and low morale (Currie 1996, p. 104).

Most frustrating to academics are the demands of other forms of work that are taking them away from teaching and researching (Musselin 2007). Particularly disturbing, in this regard, is Musselin's assertion of the reasons behind the claims of apparently decreasing scientific capabilities as research academics get older. Musselin claims that Professors and Associate Professors are being made to focus on the raising of funds, developing contacts and writing research proposals, while the actual experiments are carried out by supervised post-doctoral or doctoral students; this inevitably cuts out the senior staff from intimate engagement with their scientific work, resulting in the expectation of high level academics to be fund raisers instead. That they are not qualified for this modified role is noted by Peet et al. (2010), who conducted a study on academics from the Michigan University which found that none of the academics who were expected to take on non-academic roles were trained for such activities. There was no prior exercise, interviewing or training for those to whom the fund raising activity was assigned. It seems there is lack of knowledge and appreciation here on how difficult such an activity can be.

There is also the problem posed to a group of academics who are more inclined to teaching than researching. One of the participants in Winter and Sarros (2002) study stated that

for their group, teaching was the most enjoyable activity, and they further wished that it could be the only thing that they might do as a lecturer (p. 247). It is clear that this category of academics will be disadvantaged in countries focussing on research outcomes, which is an increasing proportion since more governments are aligning university funding with research publications (Herbert et al. 2014; Porter & Vidovich 2000). This questions the performance management system in a university, which, when done correctly, should fairly reward every task assigned to an academic (Aguinis 2009). However, there are countries that have chosen different options to rank their universities. Currently at least in three countries, Denmark, Netherlands and Sweden, fund is aligned with the amount of awarded degrees or accumulated credits (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn 2001).

There is, however, another reason why more university administrators and governments are aligning publication output to funding levels. According to Porter and Vidovich (2000), this is because publications help to improve the visibility of universities in the market place. They explain that a good publication record results in positive international peer recognition, which in turn affects the universities' global ranking and thus their marketing potential. Whilst this has resulted in more universities shifting towards this visible research outcome, Jongbloed and Vossensteyn (2001) point out that although publications highlight academic excellence, a good publication record is not reflective of students' performance. Jongbloed and Vossensteyn further point out that an ideal, quantitative measure for teaching or publication does not exist, suggesting that the correct way of measuring education performance is the increase in the knowledge and skills incorporated in the students. Research output, in terms of publication, is more likely to measure impact, originality and the magnitude of an institution's research performance. The original point of research was to make an impact, Bishop (2015)⁴ adds, citing that Daniel Kahneman's Nobel Prize was won through inexpensive experiments that contributed towards a cause. This highlighted the point of the research – to have an impact.

However, a good university publication record has become important as universities globally are trying to attract more international students. Seeing this through the lens of Porter and Vidovich (2000) insightful research on the effects of globalisation, it is hard to disagree with them that globalisation has set off *opposite binaries* within the university sector. These

⁴ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/comment/opinion/the-big-grants-the-big-papers-are-we-missing-something/2017894.article>

are things such as homogenisation and differentiation, which is evident in these attempts of universities, worldwide, trying to import full fee-paying foreign students (homogenisation) using ranking (differentiation). Ranking is important to attract foreign students, notes Hazelkorn (2015), who surveyed international students on how these students choose their overseas universities. All of her informants mentioned location and ranking as the determining factors. She contends that this is a strong compelling reason that drives more and more universities to attempt to improve their global ranking. However Adler and Harzing (2009) found that increased frenzy to publish in high ranking journals does not add to the scholarship of knowledge, but rather it has low impact, because practitioners do not read high ranked journals. They emphasise that CEOs do not read business research and do not even care what happens in the academic business schools.

Hopwood (2008) notes that, increasingly, research areas are restricted, suggesting that reasons for this include (i) a drive to create uniformity and having less tolerance towards diverse research perspectives, and (ii) having less interest in qualitative research, which is very visible in accounting-related papers where the analysis rarely goes beyond a financial statement analysis. Hopwood further points out that meetings between practitioners and academics are no longer taking place, hence the university is not able to access new marketplace knowledge. This situation is exacerbated because the majority of department heads are now not widely knowledgeable in workplace concerns, therefore restricting any research regarding mainstream practices. In parallel with these concerns, there is always the imperative to bring money to the university, which is often only possible through the enrolment of international students.

Hazelkorn (2015) suggests that education leaders and admissions officers are universally clear on this need for increasing numbers of international students to increase the dollar inflow, and that they are also actively readying their institutes for other drastic changes. In this respect, Hazelkorn proposes other methods education leaders could follow, such as those foreshadowed by Japan and Germany, noting that these latter countries are going to great lengths to transform the delivery of programmes and activities from local languages into English. There are also other ways that universities are differentiating themselves, offers Musselin (2007), citing examples of universities who have increased their interaction frequency with industry and become isomorphic with their corporate partners.

Besides ranking, universities also try to improve their image and student numbers through mergers and course acquisitions to improve quality, ranking and student numbers

(Aula & Tienari 2011; Melin 2015). Melin notes that mergers between a number of Danish universities resulted in improved rankings, and Swedish university mergers resulted in a strengthened university system. Although these are positive outcomes, Melin also notes that organisational changes can result in major negative consequences such as job losses, specific individuals' loss of autonomy or lowering of status when authority relationships are redefined. As Cartwright, Tytherleigh and Robertson (2007) and Iverson (1996) have highlighted, when there are changes in task definition, an individual's roles and leadership style may be required to be modified which may not be positive to all in an organisation.

When mergers are not managed well, problems arise as in the case of the University of Western Australia, which merged with two other member institutions to form a unified multi-campus university managed by a single administration and academic structure; the merger resulted in anxieties and unhappiness to the extent that it impacted students' learning, leading to public campaigns against the merger (Chawla & Kevin 2004). These authors noted that the negative consequences of the merger may be amplified if the organisation has been seen as being untrustworthy and dishonest in the past. Notwithstanding the persuasive nature of this position, Melin disagrees with its generalisability, stating that even when communication was transparent and included staff and students in internal communications and dialogues prior to a merger (citing the merger between Vaxjo University and Kalmar University College in the south of Sweden), there were still problems. These were only on a relatively small scale, and were due to a planning decision which was done to favour a reduced requirement for students to commute between campuses. This was at the expense of teachers having to travel back and forth between two universities, an arrangement that affected the subject delivery to the point that it led to a major outcry by the students; ironically the same ones that the arrangement was made to accommodate in the first place. This example reinforces the need to care for employees so that they can serve customers well, an element mentioned in the consideration of work meaningfulness.

Also, in another merger situation, employees who were unhappy with the incorporation of Stockholm School of Teacher Training (LHS) into Stockholm University, accepted early retirement package and left the organisation (Melin 2015). This outcome could be perceived to be due to a sense of breach in psychological contract between employee and employer, since the merger was a large scale exercise resulting in budget cuts that necessitated staff reduction (job losses) and other changes such as governance, facilities and strategies. Even those who

survive the cuts will feel betrayed, in that they feel that the organisation did not uphold their end of the bargain (Grunberg, Anderson-Connolly & Greenberg 2000) In this regard, Iverson (1996) notes that negative consequences inevitably follow an organisation change, whilst Drago (1996) argues that downsizing has the potential of highlighting the workplace as having a *disposable workforce*; that is, it implies that employees are dispensable. It also places the organisation and their profession in a negative public image, resulting in the surviving employees distancing themselves from their organisation using cynicism, which is actually a self-defence attitude that helps preserve some dignity at work (Naus, Van & Roe 2007).

The feeling of being expendable/disposable could lead to employees no longer being committed to the organisation due to job insecurity, resulting in lower job satisfaction and reduced communication (Cartwright, Tytherleigh & Robertson 2007; Kim & Choi 2010). Furthermore, the remaining employees suffer lack of enthusiasm which will inadvertently show through their lack of work commitment and may spread this attitude to others in the organisation, termed as *survivor sickness* (Kowske et al. 2009). However, it is not possible for an organisation to stay static. The organisation will inevitably be incompatible with its market, and Porras and Silvers (1994) explain that this will result in a mismatch between the organisation and its environment. According to Avey, Wernsing and Luthans (2008), it will also result in gaps between the organisation's goals and its current result, therefore requiring some form of change. Adding further comments regarding how complicated this may become, Domínguez-Cc and Barroso-Castro (2016) highlight that changes depend on the circumstances, which could result in a change of the CEO or the management team depending on how stable or turbulent the external environment has become. Whatever the circumstances, for an organisational change to be successful, employees must have the correct attitude and behaviour.

Organisational change implementation, in general, can be challenging, and the impact of change grows bigger when it provokes feelings of insecurity within the organisation (Bathmaker & Avis 2005). Employees are concerned with how they are being treated (Kivimäki et al. 2003) and if they are being treated with justice (Mishra & Spreitzer 1998). Often, large scale changes will understandably affect academics and their perception of their roles. Age and its related generational issues – such as Baby boomers and Generation X to name two of them – and work position also impact how a change will be accepted, with senior

employees being more receptive to change than employees who hold leadership responsibilities (Svensen, Neset & Eriksen 2007).

Taking all the effects on board, Georghiou and Harper (2015) summarise the impact of changes to the education sector, stating that although the core concept of a university may remain, it now has to (i) meet different sets of student expectations, (ii) fulfil university research requirements, (iii) actively ensure that the university remains financially viable, (iv) cope with changes in governance, and (v) adapt to new forms of assessment. This reinforces the assertion made by Musselin (2007), that the teaching profession is ‘no longer the same’ (p. 1). The alteration in structure and function of a complex organisation such as a University is a challenging undertaking, and even minor changes can impact on organisational outcomes in unanticipated ways, in particular on an academic’s sense of work meaningfulness.

It is important for university administration to understand the impacts of a negative work environment that ensues following a change in management or a restructuring exercise. These can be, but are not limited to: role overload, such as excessive teaching and administrative responsibility; working over 60 hours per week including a teaching load of 12 hours; supervising a large number of students; being involved in curriculum revision; and being required to participate in academic committees (Winter & Sarros 2002). A stressful work environment leads to frustration and stress, and a demotivating work environment can impact on job satisfaction and, ultimately, the quality of job performance (Winter & Sarros 2002). However, this is not a helpless situation because university management committees can undertake actions to create a positive work environment. Whatever the change is, it is important that the management team of the organisation manage the change with caution, failing which it could impact negatively on the organisation’s reputation and create significant health issues for the employees and, according to Nagar (2012), this could escalate the cost of the change.

Health related issues are not only detrimental to the employees themselves but also to the organisation as a whole. Recognising this, in the 90s, Nutbeam and Harris (1995), through their study, supported the Australian Government’s initiation of a program titled ‘Health for All’. In their framework, they highlight that it is not only important to reduce negative work events, but it is also important to increase positive work events, and this can be as simple as making the environment a *socialising environment* besides being just a *work environment*. More recently, Wolever et al. (2012) introduced a mind/body stress management programme

as a potential way to reduce stress, and to improve psychological wellbeing. It seems that even if only in small ways, positive events and positive feedback relate directly to reduced stress and improved health (Bono et al. 2013), and, in this respect, an important aspect of a good work environment is having a suitable leader.

Leadership has an important role in making work meaningful and it strengthens organisational outcomes (Tummers & Knies 2013). Leaders should be able to show their subordinates that their contributions are valued, which according to Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook and Irvine (2011), could be as simple as greetings, and as deep as trusting them enough to publicly empower them by giving them important jobs in which they are competent, and making them feel part of a team. Ismail and Ahmed (2015) highlight the importance of a show of recognition and appreciation between managers and employees. Through a survey conducted in the US that required managers and employees to rank a list of motivators from 1 to 10, Ismail and Ahmad found that employees rated ‘appreciation for job well done’ as No. 1 (most important), but the managers ranked it at No. 8. To add further, Nilsson (2011) points out that positive feedback and a show of appreciation are strong influencers to employees’ willingness to work in an organisation. In addition, a supervisor’s support and appreciation have been shown to be important job resources to buffer the negative impact from student misbehaviour (Bakker et al. 2007), hence they are important factors in promoting work meaningfulness.

Spinning off in another direction, Zeb et al. (2014) highlight the dependence of organisations on their employees for the organisation’s success and make the claim for proper reward and recognition. As stated earlier, leaders have an important role in establishing and executing this. Therefore, it is disturbing that Cleavenger and Munyon (2013) found most organisations fall so short in this area they have to identify leadership development as a future training need.

Scholars who have actively researched the topic of leadership and organisational development found transformational-style leadership is the most effective leadership style (Cleavenger & Munyon 2013). They define a transformational leader as one who is able to inspire and motivate employees to think and work in new ways, and they additionally assert that transformational leaders are able to reframe their employees’ roles to enable employees to understand how their role contributes towards meaningful outcomes, which leads employees to value their work-role. In addition, transformational leaders, according to Grant (2008), are

able to cue employees towards task significance which makes work meaningful, resulting in employees showing increased work performance. Arnold et al. (2007) suggest that this results in psychological wellbeing. Grant further adds that job performance did not necessarily always increase when employees were cued on how their job could personally benefit themselves, Grant further found that sometimes performance can increase when there is a perception of social impact and social worth. In the earlier part of this thesis, it was highlighted that personal values and beliefs have a significant influence on work meaningfulness. Grant's research further strengthens the notion that employees' sense of work meaningfulness is not restricted to personal wellbeing only, but that value and purpose can sometimes be related to social outcome which may positively contribute to an academic's sense of work meaningfulness.

While the role of a leader is noted as important, the impact of leadership on work meaningfulness is not always straightforward. Tummers and Knies (2013) found that the mechanisms that connect to leadership can significantly vary between professional sectors. In healthcare, leadership directly affects outcomes, but indirectly affects work meaningfulness; in contrast, in the education sector, teachers who have a good relationship with their supervisors claim increased sense of work meaningfulness which directly contributes to organisational outcome. It is unfortunate, though, that Cleavenger and Munyon (2013) found that in most cases transformational leaders are not at the top of the organisation chart, but are rather buried somewhere in the organisation with inadequate resources to effectively instil elements of task significance including an effective feedback process.

The importance of proper feedback to performance has been briefly introduced earlier. However, feedback can only make an impact to those strong feedback orientated type of employees to improve their performance and achieve their goals (Silverman, Pogson & Cober 2005). Silverman et al. have shown that feedback may not be an important factor to every employee therefore it is not just necessary but also crucial for a leader to be able to identify their employees for whom feedback is important. One way to achieve this may be by having employees evaluate their supervisors.

Reports have shown that when subordinates rate their manager's performance as low, it can cause self-doubt among managers. In contrast, some studies have shown that subordinate ratings, either positive or negative, had no impact on their manager's performance because managers tended to disregard negative feedback and felt contented with positive comments (Johnson & Ferstl 1999). To complicate this issue further, Cannon and Witherspoon (2005, p.

122) found that most people suffer from 'self-serving bias', which simply means crediting oneself for success and blaming others or external impacts for failures. Furthermore it is important to understand that just by giving feedback, miracles do not happen; that for feedback to be effective, it must be provided in relation to a specific task, suggesting reasonable ways to improve, and equally important, it must come from a trusted and knowledgeable source (Silverman, Pogson & Cober 2005). Feedback must be framed in a way that it does not apportion blame, but rather acts to work towards common success (Cannon & Witherspoon 2005). In order to have valuable feedback, it is important to have mutually agreeable and formal goals discussed at the beginning of a work cycle.

Although formal feedback as a yearly process as part of performance appraisal has been a practice in most organisations for a long time, DeNisi and Kluger (2000) note that it has not always been effective, and in some situations it could hurt subsequent future performance. One of the suggestions they advanced for effective feedback is to include a formal goal setting plan at the beginning of a performance management period. This may seem difficult to do, particularly taking on board points raised by Ferreira and Otley (2009) that organisations have multiple and competing objectives and therefore have to satisfy multiple stakeholders' expectations. They also state there is always a tension between what is desirable and what is feasible to achieve in all aspects of organisational performance. However, with proper planning and role management, it is believed that goal setting (mutually agreed) will be an effective way to guide performance

Leaders also need to understand the different impacts and influences of employee recognition. Well-known theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory have provided some foundation to the understanding of reward and recognition. Maslow (1943, 1954), in an attempt to explain motivation, claimed that people's motivation was unrelated to rewards but rather to the fulfilment of basic needs (McLeod 2007). The lowest on the need hierarchy is physiological, followed by safety, love, and self-esteem and finally the need for self-actualisation. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in the initial development of Herzberg's two-factor theory, fair pay, job security, work environment, leadership and various relationships were amongst those that were classified as hygiene factors. According to Herzberg's two-factor theory, these hygiene factors are not motivators but lack of them will result in an employee being dissatisfied at work. The motivators in this theory are intrinsic in

nature, such as job satisfaction, opportunity to grow, advancement, achievement and recognition (Alshmemri, Shahwan-Akl & Maude 2017).

However, recent developments have highlighted that motivating factors and hygiene factors are not necessarily fixed. Usugami and Park (2006) found, through their study of Japanese and Korean employees, that praise was a hygiene factor for the Korean employees but a motivational factor for the Japanese. Adding to information on motivational factors, Ismail and Ahmed (2015), in their study on reward and recognition, compared Malaysian and UAE employees, and noted that Malaysians ranked cash rewards as the No. 1 preferred form of reward and recognition, whereas for UAE employees, increased job power was their most preferred form of reward and recognition. In addition to this finding, Ismail and Ahmed found that receiving a certificate and plaque was in the list of the top five preferred forms of reward recognition, but was not mentioned by the Malaysian employees surveyed.

It is important to emphasise here that it is immaterial whether appreciation is a hygiene factor or a motivational factor, but it is important to recognise it as a factor that can influence work meaningfulness. This study also highlights the importance of leaders to be mindful of cultural influences on how employees expect their leaders to show appreciation for work performance. Furthermore as highlighted by Ismail and Ahmed (2015), rewarding and recognising positive results reduces high employee turnover as it creates a positive work environment, conducive to a strong organisational performance

In this section, a combination of literature review and conceptual papers have highlighted the consequences of external and internal changes that can affect an academic's sense of work meaningfulness. The outcome of the literature review highlight the potential positive effects of a socialising work environment, having a suitable leader and ensuring task-relevant feedback as a way to combat the negative effects of globalisation and other related organisational changes. Furthermore, it further gives weight to the cliché that *change is the only constant*, particularly in the Higher Education area, and is a reminder that managing these changes sensitively and intellectually is important to the success of an organisation such as a university. Up to this point, the importance of work meaningfulness in managing these changes has been highlighted. There are many theories that underpin work meaningfulness; the next section is dedicated to discussions of some relevant approaches.

2.4. Theories of work meaningfulness

Prominent theories in the studies on meaningfulness are related to motivation and its logical extension. At the outset of this study, the work of Hackman, JR and Oldham (1975) with their Job Diagnostic Survey, (JDS), highlighted that skill variety, task identity and task significance are the core dimensions that determine work meaningfulness. More recent, Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010) reaffirmed that these qualities hold specific value to an individual, because they relate to intrinsic motivation. This explains the reason why this theory is carried along in all meaningfulness related studies that use the JDS as a foundation, such as in the works of Kahn (1990) and Kinman (2008). Winter and Sarros (2002), in their discussion of whether a university is a motivating place to work, added job position of an academic as a factor that could potentially affect an academic's intrinsic motivation, justifying that a Professor has a better opportunity to experience work meaningfulness because all the core dimensions required for work meaningfulness, such as job autonomy and proper feedback, will be fulfilled at a professorial level, which is unlikely for an academic at a position of a lecturer.

Contributing to the family of motivation theories, Deci and Ryan (1985) introduced their self-determination theory which focuses on motivation and self-development. The authors explain that motivation is to be moved to do something but they also highlight that motivation varies in level and orientation. Level refers to how motivated a person is and orientation refers to the reason behind the motivation, which refers to intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The authors also introduced the notion that the more regulated the environment, the less motivated a person will be. If a task must be performed in a particular way, time and place then intrinsic motivation will be undermined. Subsequently Ryan and Deci (2000) reinforce that intrinsic motivation requires supportive conditions, as it can be easily disrupted due to a non-supportive milieu.

Another extension of the motivation theory is the Goal Setting Theory in which Locke et al. (2002) focus on motivation in the work setting. The emphasis in this theory is to improve performance through work meaningfulness using proper goal setting. This approach suggests that employees should be given goals that are both sufficiently challenging and within their ability to achieve, coupled with a good feedback system. Such a system can be used to guide the employee in a way which will result in work meaningfulness and motivate them to give good work performance (Locke & Latham 2002). Building upon the notion of goal setting, Davis et al. (2015) used Construal Level Theory to explain that goal meaningfulness drives an

individual's performance. Individuals become more disciplined and more focussed when they consider why and not how for an activity that they engage in (Lieberman et al. 2007; Trope & Liberman 2011). Locke and Latham later added the concept of self-efficacy to their Goal Setting Theory, which emphasises the personal growth aspect of work meaningfulness.

Self-efficacy theory is built on the concept of 'effectance motivation' which is conceptualised as an intrinsic need to deal with the environment effectively (Bandura 1997, p. 13). Bandura explains that the outcome that individuals expect is based on their own judgement of how well they will be able to perform their given task. Furthermore, when the outcome expectations are positive, it serves as an incentive, but, if negative, it becomes a disincentive. Hirschi (2012) tested the power of self-efficacy theory against the alternative option of work-as-a-calling on fairly young professionals. The findings of this investigation indicate that self-efficacy is built over time. Nonetheless, self-efficacy theory also underpins the study on work stressors, health and sense of coherence in UK academics by Kinman (2008).

In this section, the theories underpinning work meaningfulness have been introduced and discussed. The final section is a discussion on theoretical frameworks employed in the studies cited in this literature review, which guides the choice of suitable framework for this current study.

2.5. Theoretical Framework identified in the studies on Work Meaningfulness

The foundation framework for this study on work meaningfulness is taken from the job diagnostic survey (Hackman, JR & Oldham 1975). It provides measures on work meaningfulness, responsibilities for the outcome of work, and knowledge of the actual results of the work activity. Work meaningfulness is a measure based on skill variety, task identity and task significance. This is an objectivist epistemological approach, built on the assertion that scientific research can attain objective truth and meaning with the use of quantitative methods such as statistical analysis. Similarly Kettenbohrer, Eckhardt and Beimborn (2015) developed seven propositions that could be tested to understand employees' reactions towards business process standardisation, hypothesising that business process standardisation may distort few employees' sense of work meaningfulness. However, they have used a constructivist epistemology, through the use of qualitative approaches such as interviews and surveys to 'develop and refine the measurement instrument' (Kettenbohrer, Eckhardt &

Beimborn 2015, p. 552). Similarly May, Gilson and Harter (2004) tested Kahn's (1990) model to validate the impact of meaningfulness, safety and availability on work engagement.

Leiter, Harvie and Frizzel (1998) tested the relationship between nurses' burnout, intention to quit and meaningfulness, and patients' satisfaction to highlight the strength of the relationship between work meaningfulness and performance outcomes, and the impact on the organisation. Objectivist epistemology, using experiments and tests is, according to Fossey et al. (2002), used when the researcher intends to refute propositions or confirm probabilistic causal laws which are then used to make generalisations.

In some instances, researchers have first explored themes that surface from their study prior to testing for relationships. This is the approach that Bunderson and Thompson (2009) used during their semi-structured exploratory interviews designed to understand why zookeepers worked and remained as zookeepers when it did not have economic benefits or social emotional reasons. They found sense of calling emerging as the most frequently coded category (p. 36). They used a grounded theory approach, after which they proceeded to develop a hypothesis to test their findings further.

Similarly, when Davis et al. (2015) wanted to study goal meaningfulness, they took the qualitative approach of asking their participants to write about the how and what of their specific and tangential goals to allow their participants to think and reflect before writing the answers. Subsequently, they used a quantitative approach to study the correlation between those who chose to answer a why or how question to goal meaningfulness, to validate claims of construal level theory (Liberman et al. 2007). The use of simultaneous qualitative and quantitative methods is called the mixed method approach. Mixed method is used when the researcher intends to develop a study which is as complete and comprehensive as possible (Morse 2003).

When Kahn (1990) intended to explore work engagement and disengagement, he conducted a constructivist, interpretative qualitative study which involved observation, in-depth interviews and self-reflection in interpreting the findings. Although Kahn was researching work engagement, his research revealed the importance of work meaningfulness. Additionally, using a qualitative approach, Kahn was able to provide a detailed account of work that was meaningful to a scuba diver counsellor which was different to a draftsman's experiences. A qualitative approach aims to address questions that develop an understanding

of the meaning and experience dimensions of human lives and social worlds (Fossey et al. 2002).

These different approaches, highlighted through the few studies above, serve to explain the importance of selecting an appropriate research approach that a researcher must employ in order to ensure that it meets the purpose of the study. According to Golafshani (2003), when the purpose of the study is to measure and categorise a phenomenon in order to apply findings to wider subjects or situations, a positivist theoretical perspective using a quantitative approach, such as developed by Hackman, JR and Oldham (1975) for their job diagnostic model, will be used.

An interpretative perspective, using qualitative methods, on the other hand, is used to understand behaviour the way the participants themselves interpret and give meaning to the events being researched (Calder & Tybout 1989). It places emphasis and value on human perceptions, and attempts to interpret the lived experience of the participants (Ritchie et al. 2013). This was the approach taken by Kahn (1990) in his study on 'Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work', in which he discovered work meaningfulness to be an important contributor to work engagement. This present study is interested and concerned with how academics personally experience work meaningfulness, and, as such, a suitable approach for this study is the qualitative interpretative constructivist approach, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, Theoretical Perspective.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Perspective

3. Chapter Overview

This chapter discusses the theoretical perspective employed in this research, and introduces the Health Benefit Model (Nutbeam, Harris & Wise 2010), a development from the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980). In the following sections, the origins and the reasons governing the choice of theoretical perspective is discussed. As indicated earlier in the thesis, the study takes on an interpretivist theoretical perspective based on a constructivist epistemological focus, and thus a number of theoretical perspectives are available to guide the data collection, analysis and interpretation. Interpretivist researchers are interested to know how people understand their world and share meanings about their lives, emphasising the complexity of human life (Rubin & Rubin 2011).

Due to the nature of the information sought, that is, the current perceptions of a group of Australian business studies lecturers, it is asserted that the interpretation of their (academics') responses will be facilitated if a Symbolic Interactionist perspective is employed. Symbolic Interactionism focusses on the use of symbols in communication, especially in terms of language, as a means of uncovering and interpreting human perspectives. The central concept of this approach relates to who individuals are as a species, and how, through the influence of society and socialisation, they become the person that they are (Charon 2010). Charon explains further that, as a result of what happens in the external environment, the individual's overt (re)action provides a perspective on the meaning that has been socially derived.

This approach will be discussed in detail in this chapter, and it will be shown how this approach will allow the meanings of individual participants to be heard and interpreted in the data collection and analysis.

3.1.Origins of Symbolic Interaction as an interpretive theoretical framework

Symbolic Interactionism has its origins in subjectivist sociology, which emphasises the actors' point of view and, in particular, their definition and understanding of a social situation (Lal 1995). This author further emphasises that Symbolic Interactionism is not used to study

an actor's point of view in isolation, but it takes into consideration both the actor and the nature of the situation in which collective action is constructed. Therefore it requires methods that enables participants to speak for themselves, in a sense 'empowering' those that the research seeks to describe and understand whilst at the same time embedding this perspective in a wider social data collection (Lal 1995, p. 421).

Symbolic Interaction has its roots in sociological theories which focus on how the social world can be explained. Whilst Symbolic Interactionism specifically concentrates on what makes human collective life possible (Sean 2005), Reynolds and Herman (1994) explain that Symbolic Interactionism focuses on humans living in an interactive society and portrays them as acting and not being solely acted upon. Society is then seen as being made up of these humans interacting with each other and therefore, as people change, so do societies. Historically, Symbolic Interactionism has given rise to two schools of thought; the Chicago and the Iowa schools. Although there are differences between these two schools, they are in agreement in their view of society as a product of social action and interaction, and that meanings of objects and things are conceived as social products of these interactions (Stets & Serpe 2013).

Currently, Symbolic Interactionism is acknowledged as one of the several forms of interpretative sociology that (i) concern themselves with the actor's point of view, and (ii) show the actor as one who is capable of expressing and making his/her own decisions even under limited circumstances and inadequate knowledge, which is different from other psychological theories (Lal 1995). Sean (2005), in tracking the history of Symbolic Interactionism, noted that the founder, George Herbert Mead, who represents the Chicago school of thought at the turn of the 20th century, was a pragmatist. He was influenced by the theoretical orientation of evolutionism and behaviourism, which accepted that human beings are evolving biogenic organisms (evolutionism) and respond to various stimuli (behaviourism). However, Mead asserted that the social realm must be included in the theory, because it is through social interaction, which includes shared symbols, gestures and other interactions, that the mind is developed.

Although Mead introduced this perspective, the term 'Symbolic Interactionism' itself was only coined later by Mead's student, Blumer, in 1937 (Sean 2005). Blumer and Mead only differed in how the study should be conducted, and while Mead was a strong believer in the scientific method, Blumer maintained that the study should use ethnographic methods to study

life experiences and personal insights from the ground up, because social life cannot be understood through the scientific deductive method. Mead argued that people come together in different ways, sometimes cooperatively, sometimes competitively and sometimes in conflict, and that it would be absurd to reduce it to any one basic (objective) form (Sean 2005). Furthermore, according to Sean, Symbolic Interactionism has a distinctive conception of social life which is different from the scientific method that unduly simplifies a phenomenon such as life experiences into objective variables, which do nothing to explain a complex phenomenon (Cuff, Sharrock & Francis 2005).

Many variations have been introduced into Symbolic Interactionism (Sean 2005), such as (i) the introduction of dramaturgy, which sees Symbolic Interactionism as a theatrical performance (Goffman 1959), (ii) the school of Social Constructionism of deviance (Becker 1960), and (iii) the notion of Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967). Of key interest here, is that although Symbolic Interactionism has its roots in sociology, Blumer (1962) points out that Symbolic Interactionism, as advanced by Mead and himself, differs from sociological thought in that sociology rarely recognises or treats humans in societies as individuals with a self-concept, but rather understands them as organisms with some form of organisation that responds to the external world.

Although agreeing that self-conceptions are shaped by social processes, and social structures are created and maintained through social interactions, Kuhn (1964), from the Iowa school of thought, parts ways with (Blumer 1962) regarding the impact of social structures. He argues that once social structures are created, it constrains further interactions. Therefore the primary difference between these two schools of thought is the extent to which interactions are negotiated anew versus their initially structured form (Stets & Serpe 2013).

In this important debate, this thesis, whilst agreeing with the substance of both views, adds a pragmatic rider. Individuals and social structures are seen as analogous to a lobster and its shell. As the lobster grows, its rigid shell makes life uncomfortable, therefore, it sheds the old shell and grows a new one. Similarly, when individuals in a group feel too constrained in their current social structure, the resulting discomfort will prompt them to look for new social structures. This viewpoint will become clearer subsequent to the discussions of the principles and assumptions underpinning Symbolic Interactionism.

3.2.Suitability of Symbolic Interactionism

The objective of this study is to explore and expand the (constructed) understanding of work meaningfulness among academics. Their environment and work structures have been subjected to many (external) restructuring processes, as indicated in the introductory chapters. In investigating this issue, it is crucial to have a suitable theoretical perspective or framework that will allow the researcher to capture the voices of the academics, post this restructuring processes. Therefore Symbolic Interactionism seems to be the best fit because it rests on the conception that individuals structure the external world based on how they currently believe the world is (Benzies & Allen 2001).

Symbolic Interactionism operates on four principles; the Principle of Interactive Determination, the Principle of Symbolisation, the Principle of Emergence and the Principle of Human Agency (Snow 2001). Snow explains the four principles; the Principle of Interactive Determination stipulates that individuals, society and its environment all exist in relation to each other, and as such they can only be understood through examining their interactions. Second, the Principle of Symbolisation refers to the process by which individuals attach meanings to events, artefacts and environments which elicit specifiable feelings and actions; but this is not specific to an individual, it is shared by individuals in a group or a culture. The Principle of Emergence refers to the change (emergence) arising in social entities or in cognitive and emotional states, as a departure from current thoughts and practices. Finally, the Principle of Human Agency holds that the human actors' behaviour is not merely responsive to external stimuli, but it is done within the context of their culture, norms and values (Snow 2001). Together, these principles that underlie Symbolic Interactionism help to explain the dynamics of meaning-making of individuals within a group.

Benzies and Allen (2001) also make their contributions to this theoretical perspective. These authors state that there are certain assumptions that underpin Symbolic Interactionism, which can be directly matched to Snow's (2001) account of the four underlying principles. The first assumption is that people, individually and collectively, act on the basis of meanings that things have for them, which is akin to the Principle of Symbolisation, and the second assumption is that meaning arises through interaction, which is the same as the Principle of Interactive Determination. The third assumption is that meanings are assigned and changed through an interpretive process and thus take on a non-deterministic view. This indicates a freedom of choice in behaviour, albeit that the choices are bounded by their societal and cultural

norms, which Snow calls the Principle of Emergence. Finally, individuals actively shape their future from these new formed or emergent meanings, which is the basis of the Principle of Human Agency.

Given the above explanations, it becomes evident that Symbolic Interactionism provides a perspective for studying how individuals interpret the events in their lives in relation to how their environment changes and, of particular interest here, the act of working with other people. People do not respond to their reality directly, but instead define the new situation in terms of its influence on their social life. Charon (2010), using the analogy of billiard balls, states that people do not react like a rigid ball that responds directly and predictably to the impact of other billiard balls; rather, the human mind will first interpret an act and only then decide on the line of action. Therefore using Symbolic Interaction, with its carefully crafted social basis, has tremendous potential to increase the understanding of work meaningfulness over other theoretical perspectives such as listed by Crotty (1998), including positivism, post-positivism, critical inquiry and ideological approaches. Furthermore a Positivist or Post-Positivist perspective will not be suitable for this study because in both these perspectives, reality is assumed to exist independently of the human agency (Guba & Lincoln 1994) and as pointed out by Blumer (1962), human interactions cannot be studied through a scientific deductive method (Sean 2005). Critical Inquiry is based on the assumption that people live in a world of misalignment, and much can be done to alleviate the attendant strains, hence it can be used to study social issues such as racism for example (Lather 2004). However, it is not necessary, at least at this stage, to take a gendered or other ideological perspective, since these issues have not arisen during the literature review.

Symbolic Interactionism is one of the compatible theoretical perspectives under the umbrella of a constructivist worldview (Creswell 2014) or, as Crotty (1998) terms it, a constructivist epistemology. Crotty (1998) has identified several assumptions underlying constructivism:

- Humans construct meanings as they engage in the world that they live in;
- They interpret the world based on their experience and background; and
- Meanings are generated through interaction with other human actors, therefore their social meanings are largely shared.

It is evident that the assumptions underlying Symbolic Interactionism, and those of a constructivist epistemology, are similar if not identical, justifying the use of this theoretical perspective.

3.3. Health Belief Model

The Health Belief Model is an extension of the well-respected Theory of Reasoned Action introduced by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) which advances the notion that people are rational and will make predictable decisions in well-defined circumstances (Nutbeam, Harris & Wise 2010). The authors developed this model to predict the actions people would take towards protecting or promoting health. In this respect, Nutbeam, Harris and Wise (2010, p. 9) claimed that people will take action if:

- They perceive themselves to be susceptible to a condition or problem;
- They believe that the problem would have potentially serious consequences;
- They believe that a course of action is available that will reduce their susceptibility or minimise the consequence;
- They believe that the benefits of taking action outweigh the costs or barriers.

Later on, Nutbeam, Harris and Wise (2010) added self-efficacy to the model, which refers to a person's own ability to successfully perform a behaviour. The model is reproduced in Figure 1 below.

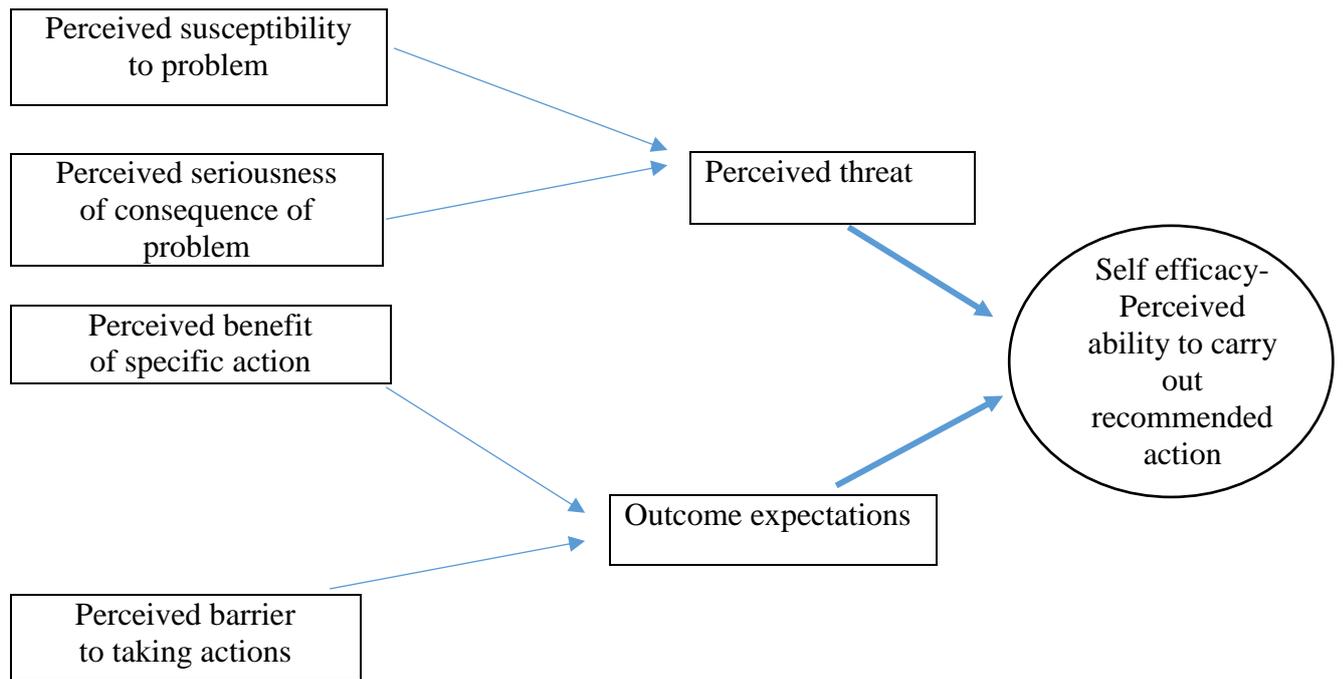


Figure 1- Health Belief Model taken from Nutbeam, Harris and Wise (2010)

In order to help systematise this investigation, the structure and definitions of this model are adapted to be more closely integrated with the research question regarding the impact of social and environmental changes to work meaningfulness.

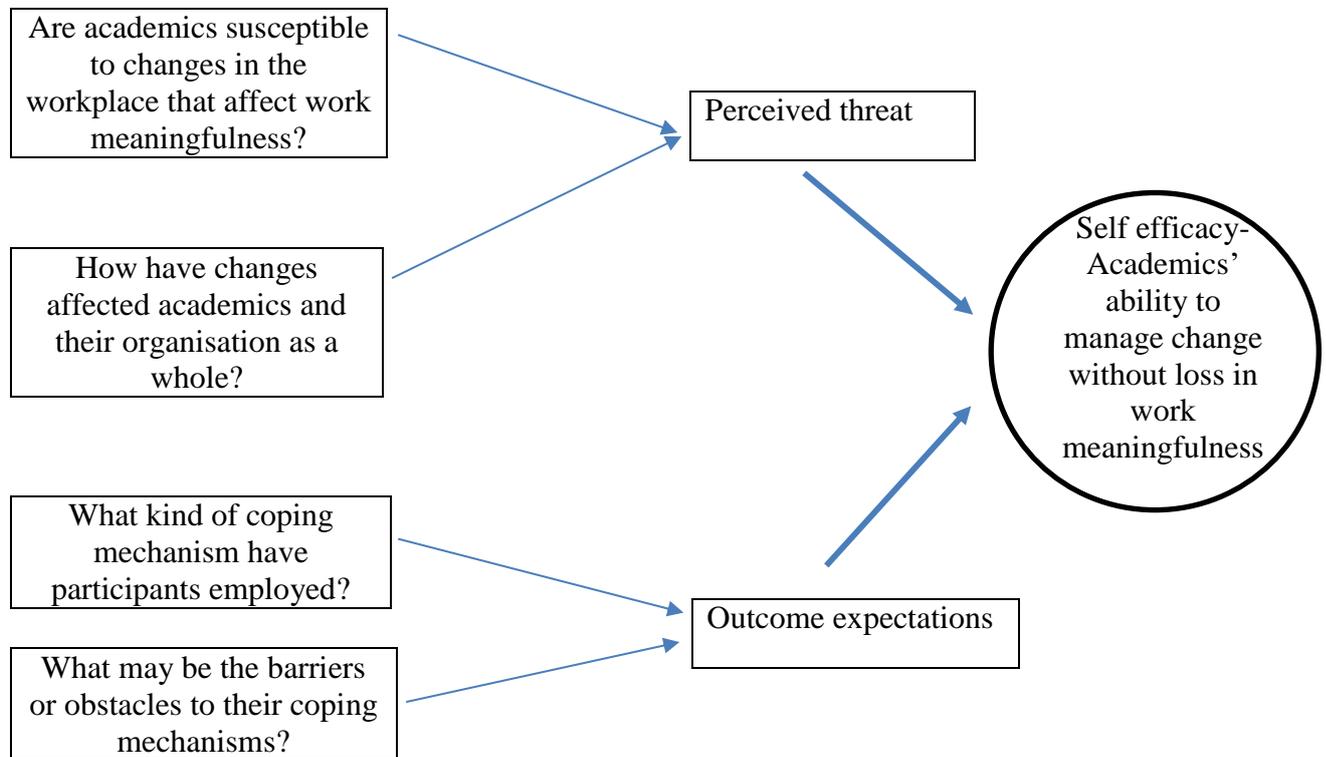


Figure 2- Health Belief Model adapted for the purposes of this current investigation

This model compliments the Symbolic Interactionist theoretical perspective in that academics in any institute or university are bound together by their profession as academics, and thus are likely to interpret ‘their world’ collectively as a society of educators. However, individually, their reactions and how each one of them interpret and manage the various changes and pressures, and how they perceive what constitutes ‘barriers’ to their work, is different. They do not behave predictably like billiard balls (Charon 2010). Indeed, to illustrate the complexity of these perceptions, in a study looking at the effects of describing the changes at the university level as moving towards an entrepreneurial format, Etzkowitz et al. (2000) note that some academics felt that this was a threat to the traditional integrity of the university, some resisted it outright, but some believed that it was positive because it forces academics to think in new ways.

3.4. Theoretical perspective used in other similar studies

The search of the current literature indicates that there are not many studies on meaningfulness that have used Symbolic Interactionism as their theoretical framework. In fact, evidence shows that most studies involving work meaningfulness have used a quantitative approach, and many have opted for a phenomenological perspective. As an example, in a study to test the hypothesis of their team empowerment model, Kirkman and Rosen (1999) tested the impact of work meaningfulness by the criteria advanced by Hackman, JR and Oldham (1975).

In a more recent study, in attempting to develop a research model to explain employees' job related attitudes and work collaboration towards organisational changes, which in their study was related to business process standardisation, Kettenbohrer, Eckhardt and Beimborn (2015) developed a test model to first study the sense of work meaningfulness through the correlation with job characteristics, work-role fit, job independence and co-worker relationships. They posited that in testing the strength of these variables, they would be able to predict work meaningfulness and the acceptance of organisational change. They were subsequently intending to test this model using qualitative methods such as interviews and survey-based studies. Here again, the researchers pre-determined the criteria for work meaningfulness based on past studies and were thus limiting the scope of their qualitative research.

In both the studies mentioned above, the test of meaningfulness was part of a bigger study, although the objective of the study was to investigate a hypothesis relating to work meaningfulness. Consistently, studies on meaningfulness have been part of bigger studies such as that of Kahn (1990), whose interest was to study the impact of work engagement to work productivity, and Kinman (2008) whose interest was to study the impact of managing stress for better health.

Summarising the comments on theoretical perspectives used in past studies, it is evident that the focus of past works on quantitative methods justifies the use of Symbolic Interactionism. The aim of this current study is to explore, expand and deepen knowledge of the current understanding of work meaningfulness, and to link it to the external influence of the current times, which impinge upon individuals within the academic community. The methodology undertaken for this research is discussed in the next chapter

Chapter 4

Methodology

4. Introduction

The aim of this research is to explore the perception of work meaningfulness among academics. This chapter will discuss the underlying principles of the data collection approach which was used in this study to achieve this aim, in order to assure the reader of the trustworthiness and veracity of the material upon which the analysis was drawn. Prior to commencement of the research, approval from Victoria University Ethics committee was obtained to conduct in-depth, confidential interviews.

4.1. Development of the thesis protocol

The approval of the Candidature Proposal required for pursuing a doctoral thesis by the Victoria University's research committee was communicated via email on August 15, 2016. Consequently, ethics approval to collect data which involves or impacts human informants was granted by the VU Ethics Committee on Dec 12, 2016, and was valid for a period of two years. Documents attesting to these issues are presented in Appendices A and B.

4.2. Development of the research process

Since a researcher must choose the data collection methodology carefully to ensure that an appropriate and defensible data bank will be accumulated, and that the reader will feel assured that this plan has been followed, it is also important that the underpinning research design be clearly outlined. In this respect, it is firstly useful to comment on the understanding and interpretation of the knowledge from the findings of the research, in terms of whether the knowledge which is generated is 'real' or 'relative'. If the researcher claims that knowledge outcome is to be real, it means that repeating the study will produce the same findings every time. If the researcher claims that knowledge is relative, it means that the findings are specific to the situation of the informants at that particular time and place. Researchers refer to this issue as the 'ontological stance'. The development of the research design, method and analytical processes are then tailored to be in concert with this stance.

Being mindful of the dangers of introducing inconsistencies in terminologies and methods which might be inadvertently used by scholars (Crotty 1998), careful consideration

has been given here to determine what type of contributions to knowledge need to be achieved and how the project should be developed in order to meet the intended aim of this research. In the following sections, detailed explanations of the ontological and epistemological stance taken for this work are provided, and this is followed by a description of the selected methodology and data collection methods.

4.3. Ontology and epistemology

Ontology refers to the nature and organisation of reality, whilst epistemology deals with the nature and sources of knowledge (Crotty 1998; Guarino & Giaretta 1995). Most researchers agree the nature of perceived reality (ontology) can be either real or relative, where ‘real’ refers to the world of universal and time independent issues, while ‘relativist’ perceptions are time and place dependent. In people’s normal dealings with the world, both types of perceptions are involved, but when carrying out research, it is convenient to separate the investigations into these concerns to systematise the research process, to avoid possible inconsistencies in the research design, and to minimise inadvertent overlapping of concepts and language. In this investigation, the concern is with the current perceptions of a defined group of informants which relate to a specific time and place. Hence the ontological stance of this work is relativist, and this understanding will underpin all of the following discussion.

To further inform the development of the research design, it is important to deal with the notion of the epistemological stance. Noting that the matters that are being dealt with are found in the relativist ontological space, the nature and sources of the knowledge will also lie in the relativist area. Whilst the terminology used to describe this epistemological stance is somewhat contested (for example Blaikie (1993); Charmaz (2008), in this research the epistemological term ‘constructivism’ is used in the same sense used by Schwandt (1994) and Ponterotto (2005) who suggest that knowledge and truth in this space is created, not discovered. This term is used to refer to the assumption that, in the area of interest, meaning (or perception) is constructed by the informants, and that just because it is constructed it does not mean that the knowledge derived is not ‘real’ to them in their environment. Schwandt (2000) agrees with this notion, adding that constructivism takes the view that whilst knowledge and truth are created, this is done with care, because the notions correspond to something in the real world. More on this issue is discussed in Section 4.4.

The reason that ontological and epistemological stances should be clearly identified is, according to Hall, P (2003), because they have a clear implication in regard to the methodologies that can be justifiably used. Indeed, they refer to the internalised premises about the deep causal structure of the world from which investigations begin. It is important to describe the ontological position taken in the research in order that a consistent research design can be built that will fulfil the aim of the research. Ontology sets the scene on how the research outcome should be understood by the readers, and proceeding from this, the research paradigm consisting of the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods can be appropriately aligned.

4.4. Epistemology

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective (Crotty 1998), and therefore is a philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to the study (Creswell 2014). There are several classifications of epistemology which arise from the existence of different ontological positions. Crotty (1998) lists three options: (i) Objectivism – where meaningful reality exists apart from the operation of any consciousness; (ii) Constructivism – where no objective truth is waiting to be discovered, but meaning comes in and out of social engagement with the realities of a person’s world, and lastly (iii) Subjectivism – where meaning does not come out of interaction but rather is imposed on the perceived object by the subject. In a research investigation, the epistemological position directly influences methodology and methods (Petty, Thomson & Stew 2012a). Reiterating what has been stated earlier, in the context of this research into a group’s perception of work meaningfulness, that truth is co-created through engagement of the group with the environment. This is a constructivist view, which is entirely consistent with the interpretivist paradigm which is guiding this study.

4.4.1. Research paradigm

As cautioned by Crotty (1998), there is an inconsistency of terminologies, and some years later, Trotter (2012) raised the same concern as he notes that in various qualitative disciplines such as anthropology, qualitative social sociology, nursing, and education, a profusion of discipline-specific terminology has arisen which has not been standardised. The consequences of this development is that using different names for the same processes or same terminology for different designs, has led to some understandable confusion amongst cross-

disciplinary researchers. As warned, the term ‘research paradigm’ has been defined differently by different scholars. Morgan (2007) noted that ‘research paradigm’ has been taken to refer to a worldview, which is a set of beliefs, morals and values, and that this is frequently the meaning used in social science. Other definitions include using the term as a direct reference to epistemology, which could be constructivism or realism, and it has also been used to refer to a shared belief system among members of a specialty area (Morgan 2007).

In this study, the interpretation which is defined by Morgan as ‘the shared belief of a research community’ (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2010, p. 14), which Crotty (1998) terms the ‘theoretical perspective’, is used. Crotty explains that a chosen research paradigm brings with it a set of assumptions that guide the research⁵. Crotty lists positivism (and post-positivism), interpretivism, critical inquiry, feminism and postmodernism as among the options that a researcher can use. Of particular interest here is the approach called interpretivism, which is held to be founded on the view that, when attempting to interpret a carefully collected data bank, an analytical strategy is required that respects differences between people and which allows a social scientist to grasp the underlying meanings of social actions (Bryman & Bell 2011). Crotty further subdivides the interpretivist theoretical perspective into Symbolic Interaction, phenomenology and hermeneutics.

As this research explores how changes in external policies and policies adopted by universities have affected the personal work meaningfulness of lecturers, the Symbolic Interaction perspective is used. This is an appropriate choice, affirms Flick (2009), when a researcher wants to examine the relationship between people’s personal issues and the public policies, and relevant public institutions, that created those issues.

4.4.2. Methodology

Methodology is the strategy, plan of action or process that lies behind the choice of data collection method(s) which researchers anticipate will contribute to the desired research outcome (Crotty 1998). Whilst methodologies are guided by the research aim and research questions, according to Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), the available choices are largely pre-

⁵ Kling (1980) further enlightens the use of a research paradigm by comparing it to tunes and harmonies of the most notable choruses of a song, providing a ‘patterned perspective’ that provides answers to questions that we are seeking to find.

determined by the selection of the underlying paradigm of the investigation. For example, within a positivist or post-positivist investigation, consistent choices of methodology might be experimental or quasi-experimental research, either of which would provide a defensible basis for data collection. In a similar sense, within the boundaries of an interpretivist investigation, consistent choices of qualitative inquiries can entail having a personal experience, by the maintaining of a personal diary of a phenomenon to be used in the inquiry (Moustakas 1990).

Another method of enquiry involves the seeking of what is already existing but in the context of how it is perceived by the subject, which comes out through language and text (Laverty 2003). It could also be through a methodology that aims to gather more information based on unpublished work or through an appropriate literature review, which is different to phenomenology, which starts with an unknown phenomenon (Thorne, Kirkham & MacDonald-Emes 1997). Any of these might be chosen⁶ depending upon the specific nature of the investigation. It is noted here that while many authors of research design approaches advocate starting the process with the chosen research method, for example Creswell (2014) and Bryman and Bell (2011), this research follows the advice of Crotty (1998), who argues that it should be the last element of design selection in the research design process.

4.4.3. Research method

Methods refer to the way data is collected and analysed. There are many ways of collecting data, and an appropriate data collection technique is required that allows for systematically collect data for this study to assist in the answering of the research question (Chaleunvong 2013). The top priority when deciding data collection, according to Lampard and Pole (2015), is firstly to know and justify what counts as data in the philosophical context that has been set up for the study. They explain that there are two sorts of data: that which can be generated and that which can be accessed or discovered. Data that is generated by collecting it directly from the informants of a study is primary data, whereas data that can be accessed or discovered in published sources, which might be internally provided by informants, or which is made available publicly having been collected by other persons or organisations and made

⁶ For completion, it is noted that a transformative paradigm would use critical theory, or participatory and change-oriented methodologies, whilst a pragmatist would employ problem-centred approaches and real-world practice-oriented methodologies (Crotty 1998).

available to others for free or at a concessional rate, is called secondary data (Sreejesh, Mohapatra & Anusree 2014; Wahyuni 2012).

Of particular interest to this investigation are those primary data collection methods characteristic of qualitative studies, which include unobstructed observation and interviews (Allen & Lane 1990). In a quantitative study, a suitable method would be the testing of objective theories by examining the relationship among numerical variables (Creswell 2014), emphasising quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman & Bell 2011). This approach attempts precise measurement of something that is usually gained by answering questions of 'how many', 'how often' and 'when', through a predetermined survey (Cooper, Schindler & Sun 2003), but this strategy would certainly not be suitable in the context of this study.

The aim of this qualitative study is to achieve an in-depth understanding of a complex situation, by extracting information regarding non-quantifiable attributes such as feelings, emotions and perceptions (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler 2014), which will give the researcher a way of understanding how informants interpret the world that they live in (Rubin & Rubin 2011). It facilitates a look into people's behaviour within specific social settings rather than surveying a broad population (Holliday 2007). Therefore the researcher in a qualitative study of this type will need to use a data collection method that provides details on events, situations and interaction between people and things from the perspective of carefully selected informants (Cooper, Schindler & Sun 2003), allowing the researcher to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell 2014); Zikmund et al. (2010). This approach is undertaken when there is a need for a deeper understanding of motivations. To achieve the aim of this study, data was collected through in-depth interviewing of informants. Below is a diagrammatical representation of the research philosophy of this study.

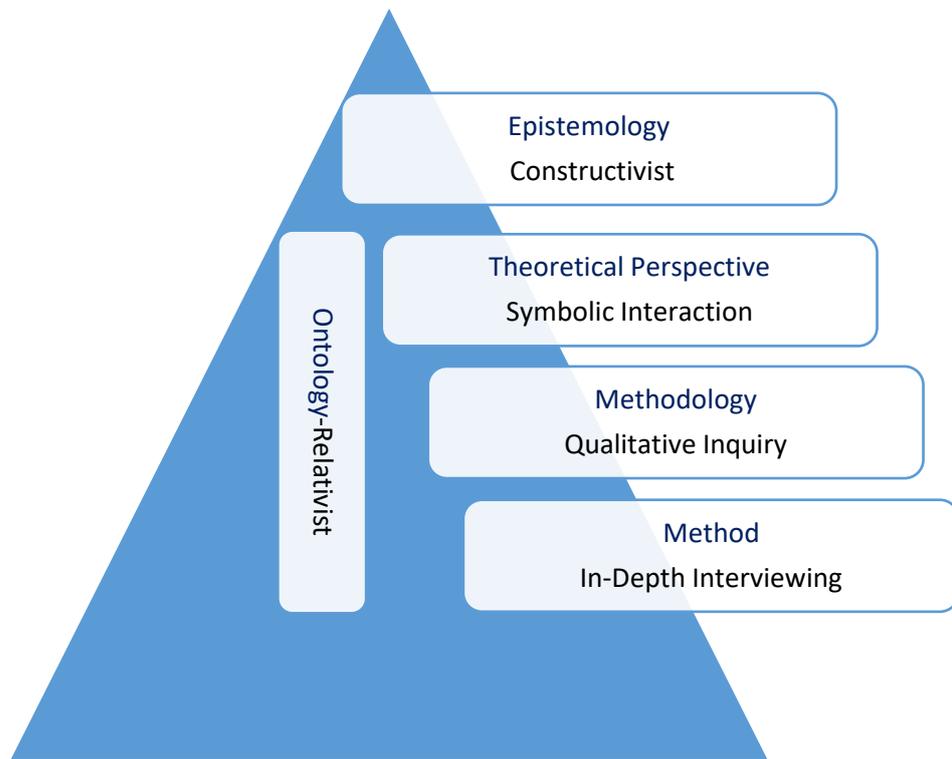


Figure 3 Research Philosophy (modified from Crotty, 1998)

Interviewing is commonly used when a researcher needs to explore informants' lived experiences (Rubin & Rubin 2011). Qualitative interviewing has a variety of ways of questioning of informants, which differ in the degree of emphasis on culture, choice of boundary and forms of information that is sought (Rubin & Rubin 2011). The interviewing procedure could follow a semi-structured or semi-standardised interview, giving freedom to the researcher to collect data or use interview questions that follow a strict order (Schmidt 2004). A qualitative data collection method allows the informants to share their experience of a phenomenon, as they view it (Marshall & Rossman 1995). Steinar (1996) uses the term 'traveller metaphor' to describe this interviewing method, and as the term implies, it portrays the interviewer as travelling on a journey with the interviewee.

Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003) explain that in this method, meanings of the interviewees' stories are developed as the interviewer interprets them, and this an appropriate method in the interpretivist theoretical perspective as it allows a researcher to examine the meanings constructed by the informants. Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003) assert that in order to obtain in-depth information the researcher must probe further any surface answers, which makes semi-structured interviews the best option as it gives the researcher freedom to pursue interesting and unexpected responses. Jenner et al. (2004) maintain that these semi-structured

style interviews are best suited for a Symbolic Interaction type of research paradigm. To provide a suitable data base for this study, the informants were selected through two sampling methods which are discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

Sampling of informants becomes a necessity in most investigations because it is often not feasible to study a whole population (Cascio 2012). A sample is understood to be a subset of a larger set of a population (Sreejesh, Mohapatra & Anusree 2014), and it allows an analyst to economise on the overall research effort by limiting the observations to manageable number of informants (Krippendorff 2004). Cascio states that there are two popular sampling strategies; probability sampling, where each member of the population has an equal likelihood of being selected, and nonprobability sampling. Teddlie and Yu (2007) explain that probability sampling is a scientific sampling method that is commonly used in a quantitative study where the population is homogenous; on the other hand, where the population is heterogeneous, nonprobability sampling is used, such as in qualitative studies. Petty, Thomson and Stew (2012b) provide us with a detailed list of types of nonprobability sampling, which is reproduced below.

Table 1: Types of nonprobability sampling.

Sampling method	Selection
Purposive	Sample members are selected according to their relevance to the study.
Theoretical	Sample members are selected on the basis of their specific analytical insights – used in Grounded Theory approaches.
Convenience	Sample members are selected according to ease and convenience.
Snowball	After initially sampling a few informants chosen by convenience, informants are nominated other potential informants.

Reproduced from Petty, Thomson and Stew (2012b)

Coyne (1997, p. 623) highlights the importance of relevant sampling in both types of study, suggesting that it should be consistent with the rules of the guiding paradigm. Inadequate or incorrect sampling for a quantitative study violates the quantitative principle requiring sample size to ensure representativeness, whereas in a qualitative study it violates the principle of appropriateness that requires purposeful sampling and the selection of valuable informants.

Trotter (2012) explains that as qualitative studies are normally undertaken to obtain in-depth understanding of a culture within a well-defined community, only a small sample size is needed to generate an idea of the shared understandings within the group. Fossey et al. (2002)

explain that qualitative sampling is concerned with information richness, and it is therefore important that informants who can best inform the study are carefully selected. They also explain that sample size in qualitative studies is small because it is not the size of the sample that is important and there is also no fixed minimum numbers for a study, but rather the informants selected should be able to provide sufficient depth of information to fully describe the phenomenon being studied. It is important to state here that lack of understanding on the purpose of sampling and sample size has resulted in some criticism regarding small qualitative sample sizes.

Nonprobability sampling, such as purposive sampling, has been shown to work well when researching time and place-bound behaviour, where information-rich cases related to a phenomenon are utilised (Palinkas et al. 2015). In this vein, Mason (2010) contends that, in reality, in sampling for funded work or work limited by time, researchers do not have the luxury of continuing interviews to the point of saturation because sponsors of research require researchers to declare who and how many will be interviewed at the point of proposal submission. Furthermore, Mason investigated PhD application submissions of the top 50 universities and notes that universities commonly required prospective PhD students to document and justify their sample size prior to the study.

In my candidature proposal and ethics application, I used the guidelines by Smith (2007) that a minimum of three should be sufficient for a student project. However, I stated in my ethics application that my interviewees will be kept at eight. This number was chosen because at the minimum I would need my sample to consist of male and female lecturers; made up of senior lecturers, associate professors and professors. But as the study progressed, I was able to get more informants for the project at various positions, so I carried on with the interviews until there were no longer new takers. My behaviour of gathering as many informants and roles as possible was consistent with a novice researcher's approach as described by Malterud, Siersma and Guassora (2016), and as they also point out, I had the benefit of having a widely experienced supervisor who has engaged in similar research in the past, who was able to guide me when the number of informants was adequate to meet the research aim.

Two sampling methods were used; initially a convenience sample of university staff was chosen, and this was followed by a snowballing sampling method where additional staff were recommended by interviewees. This resulted in a collection of representatives from the

various roles within a university environment. A fairly good representation of informants in different roles helped in obtaining answers to the overall research question regarding how academics perceive work meaningfulness. It enabled analysis of how the same external changes impacted on people working in a community in different ways – in this case it is members of the University community who are affected by government policies. By selecting informants from various universities, it gave the opportunity to draw out similarities and differences between informants holding similar roles in different universities. Additionally, it also added confidentiality to informants' identities. The informants consisted of research fellows, lecturers, senior lecturers, a program manager, head's of departments, associate professors and a dean of school who was still actively supervising HDR students.

Informants consisted of males and females, and fulltime, part time and sessional staff. Below is the demographic table of the informants.

Table 2: List of Informants

Name	Position	Age Group	Contract type	Go8	Gender
Blue Cornflower	Research Fellow	40 to 50	Full Time	Yes	Female
Carnation	Associate Prof	61 to 70	Full Time	No	Male
Daffodil	Research Fellow	51 to 60	Full Time	No	Female
Dahlia	Management Position	61 to 70	Sessional	No	Male
Daisy	Lecturer	61 to 70	Full Time	No	Female
Gardenia	Associate Prof	51 to 60	Permanent Part Time	Yes	Female
Grevillea	Lecturer	51 to 60	Sessional	No	Female
Hydrangea	Research Fellow	51 to 60	Full Time	No	Male
Iris	Associate Prof	61 to 70	Full Time	No	Male
Lily	Lecturer	51 to 60	Full Time	Yes	Male
Orchid	Lecturer	40 to 50	Full Time	No	Male
Rose	Lecturer	61 to 70	Full Time	No	Male
Tulip	Management Position	51 to 60	Full Time	No	Male
Wattle	Senior Lecturer	40 to 50	Full Time	No	Female
Alba	Consultant to University	60-70	Sessional	No	Female
Camellia	Consultant to University	60-70	Sessional	No	Female

4.5. The recruitment process

As the student researcher, I sent out the invitations though email to potential informants whose details were provided by friends, coursemates and supervisors. A sample of the email is attached in Appendix C. The invitations were sent out in mid-February to potential informants

from high ranked and low ranked universities. The response from informants working in high ranked universities was poor. However, despite the fact that the number of informants from high ranked universities was low, I proceeded to interview them to get the benefit of in-depth information of what was similar and what was different in alternative milieu. This followed the suggestion of Smith (2007) regarding in-depth interviewing, that one different respondent in a sample of three will provide in-depth information of a phenomenon that is being studied.

When an informant responded positively to an invitation to participate, the ‘Information to Participants’ document (Appendix D), a set of potential research questions (Appendix E), and a Consent form (Appendix F) were sent to them. The interviews were conducted between mid-March 2017 and early May 2017. The schedule is reproduced below:

Table 3: Interview Schedule

8-March	15-Mar	14-Mar	29-Mar
Rose	Orchid	Tulip	Daffodil
Daisy	Hydrangea	Carnation	
22-Mar	27-Mar	28-Mar	29-Mar
Dahlia	Blue Cornflower	Gardenia	Grevillea
Iris			
11-Apr	21-Apr	2-May	8-May
Lily	Wattle	Alba	Camellia

I met with eight informants on separate days at their offices. Three informants requested telephone interviews due to time constraints. Two informants met me at my university, and I met three informants in a café. In the ‘Information to Participants’ document, informants were made aware that the interview would be recorded, and if they did not wish to have the meeting recorded, they could inform me and I would just take hand written notes. In that information document, they were also informed that if more information was required, they would be contacted; likewise, if they needed to add more information, they could do this.

The transcribing was done immediately following the interview and was emailed to the informants for their verification. All except one informant emailed their proof read and edited version of the interview. The exception was the one informant who sent a handwritten edited

version through conventional mail. Two informants added information that they said they had missed out during their interviews due to time constraints. I did a follow up interview on three of the informants. As customary, I thanked all informants for their time and contribution. However, out of the ordinary, or at least I imagine this to be a rare occurrence, three informants thanked me instead, for giving them an opportunity to voice and share their feelings.

4.6. Analysis

The main questions of the research, as introduced in Chapter 1, are:

1. What makes work, as an academic, meaningful?
2. When work is meaningful, what is the experience and how is it felt?
3. What positive and negative events affect work meaningfulness?

Sub-questions to the main questions were developed, and these were used for developing the in-depth interviews. The sub-questions were:

- (1) What makes your work, as an academic, meaningful?**
 - What is work?
 - What is the best part of your work?
 - Is the work that you do in synergy with your personal values and beliefs?
 - Are you adequately compensated for the work that you do?
 - Do you feel that you have opportunities for growth, both personal and professional?

- (2) When work is meaningful, what is the experience and how is it felt?**
 - Are you happy in this job?
 - Do you have autonomy in carrying out your work?
 - How do you know that your work is appreciated?
 - Can you recall a situation/situations that you felt that management appreciated what you did?
 - Do you look forward to holidays and time off?

- (3) What positive and negative events affect work meaningfulness?**
 - Have changes affected your job fit?
 - How have changes affected your relationship in the organisation?

- How have changes affected your teaching expectations?
- Is the work stressful?
- Are there things that you do that you feel are not worth performing?

As each transcribed and proof read interview was received, it was read and initially analysed using the sub-questions as a guide. Excerpts of this analysis are attached as Appendix G. The response was analysed and its category was identified. The categories were then grouped to identify the themes. Then using the *Nvivo* qualitative statistical programme, I made a comparison of what the literature showed against the informants' responses, which is shown in Appendix H. The analysis by questions then showed the common threads/themes that emerged (see Appendix I and Appendix J). Groups of the issues were then compiled into major categories and the findings are reported in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Findings

5. Introduction

As indicated in the earlier chapters, the aim of this study is to explore the phenomenon of work meaningfulness among currently practicing academics. To achieve this aim, three main questions were used to guide the interviews. However, in order to obtain more detailed information regarding the main questions, a number of sub-questions were developed to guide the responses. These detailed questions are grouped for convenience of collection, and are shown under the main questions:

1. What makes your work, as an academic, meaningful?

- What is work?
- What is the best part of your work?
- Is the work that you do in synergy with your personal values and beliefs?
- Are you adequately compensated for the work that you do?
- Do you feel that you have opportunities for growth, both personal and professional?

2. When work is meaningful, what is the experience and how is it felt?

- Are you happy in this job?
- Do you have autonomy in carrying out your work?
- How do you know that your work is appreciated?
- Can you recall a situation/situations that you felt that management appreciated what you did?
- Do you look forward to holidays and time off?

3. What positive and negative events affect work meaningfulness?

- Have changes affected your job fit?
- How have changes affected your relationship in the organisation?

- How have changes affected your teaching expectation?
- Are there things that you do that you feel are not worth performing?
- Is the work stressful?

What follows is a treatment of the respondents' reactions to the research questions, gathered under headings reflecting the order of the discussions.

(1) What makes your work, as an academic, meaningful?

➤ **What is work?**

The way informants describe what work means to them will give an indication if work is just a means to something or if it has a special personal significance. According to Pratt and Ashforth (2003), the meaning of work is intimately related to what work signifies to a person or what role work plays in a person's life, and these authors thus define work meaningfulness in terms of a person's work role having some personal significance. The response to this first question showed that what work meant to these academics very much depended at which point they were at in their career. In general, for those who were beginning their academic career, work seems to be a means, but to long-standing academics, there seems to be something of personal significance, making work meaningful. The extracts presented below highlight these different situations.

Blue Cornflower, who is just starting out in academia, replied to this question, saying:

I am thinking ... work is stressful, a big part of my life, exhilarating sometimes, rewarding sometimes, demoralising sometimes, a bit of a constant battle, and draining.

Likewise, Grevillea, who has just completed Doctoral studies and is a sessional staff member, describes work in the following terms:

I need to be in an environment that I can use my current skills to extend my knowledge, and to keep learning as well. And work is also that cohort of friendship as well with your colleagues and your students.

As for Daisy, leaving behind a professional career and being in education for 21 years, the response was surprising:

... teaching is like sort of escapism, to go into a classroom and you escape to what you know best I suppose with the students.

The reason for this perspective could perhaps be because Daisy also mentioned:

I find that the work part is stressful at the moment, because I have issues with the way that we do things here.

In contrast, academics who have been in the service for a long time responded differently. For example Carnation, an associate professor who kept saying ‘I could retire now if I wanted to’ said:

Work is my passion for research.

Iris, who is also an associate professor, had a similar response:

It's fulfilling to see my book at production stage. It's cream on the cake. You will get the review, you'll get a kick out of that.

Daffodil's response perhaps is the closest to reality. It combines extrinsic and personal values, by describing work as necessity first but when examined further, also a fulfilment of personal satisfaction:

It would be good to retire but I would be bored within three months, work is a challenge, it's rewarding from individual relationships, it's where I stretch myself and develop, it provides a feeling of value, worthiness but it really is about stretching the mind, and most of the time it's about doing something that I enjoy doing.

This raises an interesting dichotomy, and begins to suggest that work meaningfulness is a developed phenomenon, and needs time to mature. The next question helped provide more understanding about what the respondents thought about their work.

➤ **What is the best part of your work?**

Here, there was a range of responses, which seemed to be related to the status level of the informants. A number of highly placed individuals suggested that the best part of their job was carrying out research and supervision. For example, Daffodil, a research fellow, said that:

... I am doing what I want to do and having more time to do research than I would if I were to be a Level B lecturer.

Carnation, an associate professor, said very positively that the best part of the work was:

All of it ... because now I am doing all the things that I like doing. My research, my own research, or research of the PhD students.

Dahlia, who is close to retiring as a Dean, said:

I like research. The individual contact with PhD students and assisting with how people work through major research problems, it's really entertaining. It really stretches your brain. When you get to a level of expertise in a certain area, it really is the fun side of it.

Then there was a second group of respondents who stated that teaching was the best part of their work. These respondents were at the lower status levels, being at Lecturer A or B level. For example, Rose, who is a senior lecturer, said:

Dealing with kids, having a teaching relationship with them. Get a kick when kids succeed.

Similarly, Daisy, who is a level B lecturer in Accounting and who teaches the Masters in Professional Accounting (MPA), spoke very passionately about teaching, indicating reasons why this area is the best part of academic work:

Teaching and interacting with students. ... and you're explaining things to them, and when you see the lights come on and they go, oh, is that why. Oh now it comes clear. That part to me, you can't put money on that. ... and when they come up and say, that was great, it makes a lot more sense, now, and I think right, I've explained it. No amount of money can be put on that ... and that to me, that's a reward.

Another level B lecturer, Orchid, also felt that teaching was the best part of the work:

I tend to like the teaching myself. That gives me the most reward. I feel like I am helping students. I like to know that they are learning something and developing ... it gives me a real sense of satisfaction, to know that they took something away that was meaningful to them. That's probably the most rewarding component of my job.

However, as an indication of the complexity of this issue, one respondent had a somewhat conflicted answer to the question on the best part of the job. This was Tulip, who was a lecturer at level B soon to be promoted to Associate Dean. Whilst early in the interview, Tulip commented that:

I think education fits me very well, I think coz it meets my need for social contribution, it meets my ego needs because I like it when I've done a good job...

When it came down to identifying the 'best part' of the role/job Tulip said:

I enjoy ... committee work and maybe leading a committee. I enjoy my place at the top table, that's very important to me, that I am part of the main game, part of the group that is directing the organisation. So I'm not very good at being a peripheral player. In organisations, I want to be a part of the real action in the middle ... I want to be seated at the top table to be able to determine the outcome as best as I can for the organisation.

It is clear from this comment, that almost everything Tulip stated as 'the best part of the job' was not directly related to teaching or research. Perhaps this means that for Tulip, an education work environment was a suitable workplace, but being an academic is not a necessary part of work meaningfulness. Again, from these responses, another interesting dichotomy emerges, which highlights the complex nature of this important issue.

As Williams and Karau (1991) claim, for work to be meaningful, the outcome must be meaningful. It was noted that, with the exception of Tulip, to those at higher status, research output was more meaningful than teaching; while for the lower status academics, teaching outcomes were more meaningful. These respondents' comments highlight that different aspects of an academic job can be the particular respondent's work meaningfulness.

Work meaningfulness has been linked to work environment (Kahn 1990, 1992), so the next questions addressed the academics' work environment.

➤ **Is the work that you do in synergy with your personal values and beliefs?**

An environment consistent with personal values and beliefs is an important factor for individuals to feel that work is meaningful. Researchers such as (Bowie 1998; Lips-Wiersma & Morris 2009), have found that for work to be meaningful, the work environment must be in synergy with personal values and beliefs, so informants were asked if their values were consistent with their work environment.

It was clear that most of the respondents shared some unpleasant feelings about the workplace. There were exceptions, where the work was of a highly specialised nature, such as technical, managerial or research positions. Daisy's response was quite direct; it was that the workplace and personal values were not in synergy, and Daisy explained:

No, I think that the pressures that are brought on in all organisations ... in all universities, there is a pressure to bring in students. I think it is unethical because it's leading students. I think we're selling students a false hope.

So far, no one had yet used the marketing term of 'selling' education. However, Gardenia, who works in a university within the Group of Eight (Go8), not only introduced this idea but also highlighted that the university is becoming a 'market place':

It's very difficult to give a simple answer to that. My first impulse is to say no ... universities are becoming more commercial in their approach to commercialising knowledge, ... that doesn't fit with my old fashioned values about a liberal university and education for citizenship and knowledge. So now I feel a certain amount of distaste for that.

Gardenia added an interesting qualification, highlighting that among academics, the traditional values are still prevalent therefore the work environment is still good:

But in another way, my workplace is wonderful. I've wonderful colleagues who are very supportive. Am here in a great intellectual community, here with my colleagues. I feel like I am well supported and I have lots of colleagues who share my understanding of the university as a centre for intellectual enrichment and personal growth for students.

Lily, who like Gardenia, works in a Go8 university, also sounded torn between two thoughts:

Well, it has been. But of course environments change, there's always new elements that appear on the horizon ... I guess in direct response to your question, I would say, 50-50 in terms of being in line with my personal values ... Everybody is affected by both the commercialisation and the massification of higher education. It's inescapable. And those two factors are probably the most significant in terms of the impact on the way an academic such as myself positions themselves within their personal value system.

Rose started out by saying:

No real conflicts. Not having a great ethical battle.

... but it became evident that the environment may not be totally in synergy with Rose's values and beliefs, because it was stated later that:

Universities prepare kids in writing wonderful essays, through academic assessments but for Accounting it is not relevant. People believe that hands on experience is they go to TAFE, but as accounting subjects I would rather that the kids have it – the hands on experience – here ... The kids are not prepared for the real world. It's hard to get work placements.

It is evident that the work environment for these respondents is not entirely in line with their personal values and beliefs. Being academics and having spent their career lives educating, they carry some frustration within them about the changes that have been introduced.

However, Carnation and Daffodil, who are mainly in the research stream, indicated that they are very comfortable. Indeed, Carnation said:

I'm very comfortable in my skin, in what I am doing ... I created the synergy – thank you very much. Not the university.

Daffodil feels almost the same, saying:

I think I think I can partly create the environment in which I work in.

Wattle had no doubts that the work environment and personal values and beliefs are in synergy, giving a detailed explanation:

I would say definitely ... it's coming back to why I do this job. I think I really feel that education empowers people and can have a transformative experience to their life. The university I am at ... is very keen on diversity in the workplace, and ... inclusivity and opportunities definitely align with my values.

Finally Tulip said, positively, that:

I like the position of our university, because it's somewhat egalitarian ... I am giving the underdog a bit of a handout ... I come from a sort of working class background myself ... I'm helping people just like me maybe have a degree of ability or potential.

It becomes evident here that while earlier, when discussing the best part of their work, a few academics were happy that they were able to carve a niche for themselves and the responses were appearing to be aligned to the informants' status and to the positions which they held, it now shows that status alone does not imply that the workplace environment felt in synergy with personal beliefs. The results show that for those in higher status positions such as Gardenia, it cannot be said with any certainty that higher status contributes to work meaningfulness. For work to be meaningful, the work environment must be in synergy with personal and moral values (Bowie 1998; Lips-Wiersma & Morris 2009) .

Scholars have highlighted that stress is an obstacle to work meaningfulness (Kinman 2008), and later in this chapter a discussion on the issue of overall work stress will be undertaken. However, in this next section, the questions are designed to gauge if compensation specifically is a factor that could be a source of stress and whether this could be a particular distraction to work meaningfulness.

➤ **Are you adequately compensated for the work that you do?**

In this context, adequate compensation includes financial and non-financial benefits, and these have been highlighted as important factors for work performance and quality of life (Bowie 1998; Gayathiri et al. 2013; Sundaray 2011); as such the informants were invited to talk on this topic.

To begin this discussion, it was necessary to know how informants defined compensation. So when asked this question, informants were told to include anything that they (the informants) felt counted as compensation and that it was important. Interestingly, almost

all of them included flexibility and resources as compensation, besides the more obvious area of salary.

According to Blue Cornflower:

So it's not financial compensation, but the flexibility that comes with the role is really, really, valuable, and for me, I really like that. So I think the salary together with the flexibility; and another thing is a lot of people are able to go to conferences, to go overseas.

Similarly for Gardenia, flexibility was important, but so was freedom of choice of research area and access to academic resources:

In terms of the work arrangement that I have, I have work flexibility; I can work from home, work provides me with a laptop, and a VPN so I that I can work from home, connect in, and that is very important to me as a mother. I can choose the areas that I want to research, and I have a wonderful library.

Dahlia felt that the opportunities to expand teaching networks was an important compensation:

Compensation is a very interesting thing. I think I was well compensated.... We travelled all over the world, I've taught throughout Asia, and England and I've done plenary sessions in Spain ... Travel all over the world, you might work half a day or a day, its intense when you do it but then you got two days to do some sightseeing. How can you get a better life?

Orchid adds another factor to non-monetary compensation:

That's an interesting question, because compensation means different things to different people. Compensation at the core is that extrinsic reward of money for labour, but also ... respect, acknowledgement.

Interestingly, Orchid, unlike the others, did not only state the obvious advantage of flexibility, but added respect and acknowledgement as part of compensation, confirming Sundaray (2011) finding which suggests that compensation now extends further than monetary compensation and rewards.

The informants were asked if in general academics were adequately financially compensated. In Gardenia's opinion:

... I don't think academic salaries are, really reflect the number of hours that I put in. Even with my colleagues, I think that's true. I've always asked to be paid more.

Tulip felt the same:

Relatively speaking, I don't believe so (adequately compensated) ... I think academics are reasonably well paid, generally speaking.

Carnation added:

Well, salaries are not and probably others have told you too, for what we do, on per hour basis and our skill level, our compensation in terms of hours of work; it does not commensurate with community standards.

... adding further, with frustration:

They can get us on the cheap, and they do. They ask us to do much more, they ask us to work not standard hours, we work for the passion so we work lot more hours ... I've got to feed my family.

However, not everyone gave a negative response to this question.

Daisy for instance had stated earlier that the work environment and personal values and beliefs were not in synergy, but did not allow that feeling to influence the answer on compensation:

.. but I think that I am more than that adequately compensated for the work I do.

Similarly, Hydrangea said:

Yes, yes, I feel like that I am more than adequately compensated, for what I do.

Iris also echoed the same, that the monetary compensation was adequate:

There's the money element, then there is the psychic element. Both of them are quite generous.

It appears that whether monetary compensation is adequate or not, very much depends on an individual's personal situation. For Orchid:

On a whole, the reason I say yes is what I regard as a reasonable standard of living, adequately, I live well.

However, for informants who are beginning their career or starting a family, compensation may be the source of a problem, as recounted by Carnation:

I've had good sessional teachers who have given up academia because they need a loan for a house, and you cannot get a loan from sessional teaching or research contracts because they're not in a continuing position. You cannot get a bank loan. So they gave education up. I've had three PhD students who have dropped out because they saw their future in academic career not being valid. Because they can't even get a job, they cannot get a loan, the teaching doesn't allow them.

There are two important findings which arose from this section on compensation. First, non-financial compensation, especially flexibility, was considered an important component of this area.

In Daffodil's words:

What you're actually looking at, is the combination of the financial combination, the intellectual compensation, the flexibility, and it's about that package together ... that will come to a point that if freedom is took away from academics, to the point that they may ... as well work in industry. As compensations (non-financial) dwindle, then the focus will be on financial.

Second, money is an issue. The majority of the informants agreed that the monetary compensation is inadequate, with Carnation highlighting the current economic situation and the implications to the younger generation. We believe that it is important to restate the research by Sundaray (2011) connecting compensation to quality of life, which influences work quality and the need to highlight this aspect. In addition, when Hirschi (2012) found that work could

be interpreted as a calling, it meant that finance was not an obstacle or a major concern to those zookeepers who were interviewed.

A related point was that if work did not come with opportunities for personal and professional growth, work could become boring (Beadle & Knight 2012; Hackman, JR & Oldham 1975).

➤ **Do you feel that you have opportunities for growth, both personal and professional?**

Work meaningfulness, as surfaced from the literature review, is complex to say the least, in that it includes other factors beyond what has been discussed so far. It also involves employees having the opportunity to develop new skills (Kahn 1990), and having room for personal, moral and professional growth (Lips-Wiersma & Morris 2009). Considering that the informants are academics in universities, a straightforward 'yes' was expected but a few of the responses were unexpected.

For instance, Blue Cornflower said:

No so much for personal growth. I do think that the university is really good, like making mindfulness session available to their staff, but personal growth, no. Don't think so at this stage. I think maybe people think academic work is connected to (which it is) personal identity and personal growth, not really.

Similarly, Tulip's response was unexpected, even ironic. Despite being able to identify all aspects of positive personal growth, Tulip was unsure if there was, in fact, personal growth:

I don't really understand what that means. Have I been able to push on and do the things that I want to do? Absolutely I have ... I've been given responsibilities ... and I've been given bigger roles. Has that brought about personal growth? ... I'm just a little bit, I'm not quite sure what that means? But if it means meeting things/dreams/goals, well I've certainly been able to push on, I've been encouraged to do that. Do I feel fulfilled, satisfied in whatever I'm doing? Absolutely, I do. So if that's the measure of personal growth, I think I have.

Wattle also sounded uncertain, despite talking about the university being in synergy with personal values and beliefs, in that there is a push for more women's participation,

inclusion of Aboriginal staff and students, but Wattle did not interpret these moves as an opportunity for personal growth:

I don't know, I mean it is what you make of it. Certainly we have our performance appraisal process that has that opportunity for reflection the end of the year.

Here it was puzzling that both Tulip and Wattle did not realise how much change they have undergone resulting from the opportunities through their various positions and responsibilities. This leads us to think that maybe academics in their busy schedule never have the time to reflect on how they have improved or changed, hence not seeing the meaningfulness in what they do.

However, this was not the case for the majority of the informants; many of them owned up to their personal growth. Hydrangea, for instance, said:

... the position is good for that because of the level of autonomy and because it does take a wide variety of skills to be able to do the job. That I think it does feed back into that sense of wellbeing and who you are as a person.

Grevillea stated:

I think the opportunity just to be able to network across different faculties, different levels of people is being really valuable. And everyone is so helpful. You know they want you to be involved.

Gardenia sounded somewhat romantic when talking about this topic:

I mean going overseas, meeting colleagues, you grow and you learn. I have got to travel to places overseas that I would never dreamt that I could go to and meeting amazing international colleagues, to collaborate, I've read books to elaborate ideas. You know that's what I wanted to do with my life and I'm doing it through my job.

Even though Hydrangea, Grevillea and Gardenia did not have as many opportunities in comparison to Tulip and Wattle, they were able to identify their personal growth. This dichotomy can be attributed to the personalised experience of work meaningfulness versus meaning of work. Some are able to experience work meaningfulness with far less opportunities

than others, and when work is to meet an external outcome, it may overshadow the personal growth experience.

When informants were asked about their professional development, almost everyone felt that there were many such opportunities. However their experience and ability to take up the opportunities varied; two informants mentioned that they lacked time to take up all the offers that came their way and one informant commented that there were more opportunities for students than for the academics.

Daffodil set the stage for these comments, saying:

I think as a researcher and academic, professional development is automatic, you are developing being maybe individually instigated. I think the spot for external professional development might be reduced financially but I think as an academic often, if I know of ways of achieving it and still be able to go to conferences ... sometimes that maybe even funding yourself.

Dahlia had enviable enriching experiences:

In the university, absolutely brilliant. I had various roles ... as part of my duties in different roles ... I was the chair of heads of school in Victoria at one stage, chair of the head of University in Victoria, at CPA Australia, ... my professional development. I've never been disadvantaged in any way.

Daisy, whilst agreeing that there are many opportunities available in a university, took on a personal attempt by pursuing a doctoral degree:

It's formal for me at the moment because I am doing a PhD. So that's my professional development.

Carnation pointed out the evolution of professional development as one's career progresses:

You never stop developing professionally. It's more informal now. I don't look for a degree. But I go on sabbatical by extending myself like going and working in a poor country, work with Cambridge University. Some people keep going back to the same university; but I

think professional development comes when you get out of your comfort zone.

However, there were comments that more could be done for staff, as Gardenia explains:

I don't think staff gets these opportunities for professional development, the same opportunities that graduate students do.

Sharing an example of a particular incident, Gardenia was able to elaborate why this was said:

I'm not good at statistics, Occasionally I see invitations to tell your graduate students the central university is running workshop on statistics for the humanities, or how to use your interview data or how to code or all sorts of, I'd think Gee I like some of that ... so I ring up and I say, can I do this. Oh our graduate students get the first preference, and it's already booked. It's booked within 24 hours ... so I've never got to do those sorts of things.

Orchid concurred with Gardenia, recounting that:

I think it would be good to have more. I think that there are some opportunities but I think it would be good to have more to choose from. There is a lot of repetition. Same opportunities will come up again and again. Once you've completed them there doesn't appear to be any further opportunities.

There was also the issue of time constraints, which was mentioned by Orchid:

This semester is a good example, I'm teaching across four days, so many research seminars and research engagement activities take place exactly when my classes are on. And I have to review that again in semester 2. But there's a huge gap of opportunities I've lost, it's unfortunate. But I understand that someone's got to be there delivering courses.

Wattle, besides mentioning time constraints, also informed that there was even a grant available for development:

Sometimes I get a lot of opportunity for professional development and I'm spoilt for choice... I feel like there are so many opportunity but not enough time. For me the one thing that I want to develop is research capacity and capability. Certainly there is a lot of programmes and I just got a mini grant for a project that I am working on.

There was one negative response, when Hydrangea, a sessional staff member, felt that:

I have to admit that that is something that is really been lacking. Professional development is really bad, something that hasn't been pushed to me and I haven't felt that that was an expectation, really, a serious expectation of the job..... I know that they say that they expect that out of you but they don't provide the opportunities for that to happen.

There are a few major outcomes that are worth looking into. The first one is that the professional development for academics is not given the same importance and seriousness as it is for the students. It may create a situation of the students being better skilled than the lecturers who teach them. It was also noted that even when there were opportunities for professional development, the academics were not able to take up those opportunities due to work load. Also, it seemed that in some cases, academics are not able to pursue their area of interest. This again is stifling the academics' professional and personal development.

From this section of the interviews, it looks as if the performance management system is poorly administered; that the university administration seems to be downplaying the importance of performance management, not realising that it can be costly for the university, and that personal and professional growth are necessary for employees to feel that their work is meaningful (Lips-Wiersma & Morris 2009). By not recognising the need for or not having the opportunity for personal and professional growth, this could impact their sense of work meaningfulness and their work output. It is very important to highlight the many purposes of a good performance management system beyond a yearly appraisal process.

A performance management system helps the university as well as the employees by ensuring that the employees are fairly paid. Rewards and incentives administration should be transparent, and personal and professional development made available to every employee according to their personal needs in order to be able to perform their job well (Aguinis 2009). Most of these factors are out of the control of the employees. Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) found that uncontrollable factors have a stronger impact on employees' work performance; indeed they are stronger than their self- efficacy (Bandura 1977).

As stated, work meaningfulness is a personal experience, therefore the only way work meaningfulness can be explained is through sharing of personal feelings.

(2) When work is meaningful, what is the experience and how is it felt?

It has been claimed that when work is meaningful, the task becomes enjoyable and engaging (Beadle & Knight 2012), particularly when staff feel the work is done in a safe environment (Kahn 1990). In addition, under these conditions, staff enjoy greater satisfaction, pride and resilience in their workplace (Dik & Duffy 2009; Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli 2006; Wrzesniewski et al. 1997). As such, the respondents were asked to discuss how they felt, to see if these previous observations were still relevant.

➤ Are you happy in this job?

Many informants were quick to respond positively, like Camelia:

... on the whole ... very happy.

Similarly, Carnation said:

... at this stage, I'm happy where I am.

Lily, although answering quite positively, associated this response with the external motivator – organisation's reputation:

Mostly ... at this stage, mostly. Again, I'll tell you the truth, I feel like I am still very lucky to be working at a particular institution, in a particular faculty.

... and went on to explain further:

I think that I am at an institution where I am particularly lucky. I still have a certain sort of flexibility distinct from, what I hear from colleagues and friends that are at other institutions.

However, Orchid answered this questions in a notably different way from the other three informants:

I am not quite content but I'm not dissatisfied. I'm not sure about happy. I've to think about that. Happy enough. Satisfied but not content.

Although these informants expressed dissatisfaction over issues at their work place, they are also able to extract happiness either from the task that they perform or from something external such as the reputation of the university. Scholars have pointed out that people who choose an occupation very early on in their life and remain in it for a long time because it ‘feels natural’ and the most suited occupation are those who see their work as a ‘calling’ (Dik & Duffy 2009; Hall, D & Chandler 2005; Wrzesniewski et al. 1997). Earlier on in the interview, Carnation, Camelia and Lily, when asked the reason for choosing this profession, responded that it seemed the natural choice after their education. Therefore it may be that for these three informants, work may feel like a ‘calling’ (Hirschi 2012) and therefore hold a higher meaning than other informants who chose different paths before becoming academics.

Autonomy has been linked to work meaningfulness; the feeling that being in control or having autonomy was one of the pre requisite of work meaningfulness (Bowie 1998). In fact for some time academics were thought to have autonomy and were free from being dependent on a university (Heijstra & Rafnsdottir 2010). Therefore the respondents were asked how much autonomy they felt they had.

➤ **Do you have autonomy in carrying out your work?**

As the literature review has shown, Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) note that uncontrollable factors have an impact on employees work performance. Moriarty (2010) urged organisations to include employees in decision making, particularly on issues that impact on the employees.

Overall, the informants made it seem like the organisation were not interested in their opinion and they were disregarded in the making of major decisions.

Camelia, who has been in the education field for 25 years, was able to provide a long-term view in this area:

Something that I really valued about my job was that there was always autonomy. And yes, my unit coordinator certainly conveyed this too, there was no micro-managing. Get on with my job, do what I wanted to do and they trusted me to do that. And I loved that.

However, that situation changed for Camelia:

I think probably the last few years, it was being eroded a bit.

Daisy, who has been an academic for the last 21 years, expressed somewhat similar feelings:

I used to, but I don't think so anymore. Management seems to be taking more control, before say 4-5 years ago or even 3-4 years ago, you would have been in charge and you would have been allowed to do things and then you filled out your relevant reports, report back and if there were more queries, you answer those queries. I don't find that anymore. It's all gone.

Daisy related an experience to prove this point:

Something happened yesterday. One of my colleagues sent me an email, asked me if I knew what this anagram stood for, I said I forget. Apparently, it's a new incentive that's coming to our faculty. We are going to be monitored in our teaching. And this is the first I've heard of it. And apparently, it has already happened. But I missed the memo. She too missed the memo, she said that you're not the only one that doesn't know. I think that's bad. It might be that we are being monitored to make sure that we are doing it correctly.

Unlike Daisy, Iris, an Associate Professor, seems luckier in that there is a degree of autonomy at least in carrying out one's task:

Your personal autonomy is in research and you can come and go as you please.

Lily, on the other hand, did not think there is much autonomy in the area of research:

Now once a upon a time, a group of academics who thought that they had a particular perspective and set of principles within their discipline that they wanted to present, again some sort of manifesto, would have been fairly common place. Now the idea that you could actually present a critical manifesto of some sort would need to be assessed, regulated and evaluated, within almost a marketing context.

Orchid, however, who has been an academic for about half the amount of years as have Camelia, Daisy, Iris and Lily, felt autonomy is still good, despite the changes, but concurred with the other informants that it is eroding:

I think that there is still high degree of autonomy and control over the task performed as an academic even though the industry is changing, it's evolving. I think it's becoming

somewhat eroded. My concern is where will this industry be in 10 years from now, I'm not sure. Looking at 10 years that had passed, since I've been a full time academic for 10 years, I wonder how will things look 10 years from now.

There is consensus when it comes to organisational decision making; it is only the privilege of the management team. Iris, who felt that academics can contribute to the overall wellbeing of an organisation, was frustrated:

... when it comes to power or change of direction, the governing circle that decides all that. You'd think, maybe they should have consulted some of the actual marketers in the school about the decision. I mean they (academics) do have a bit of the expertise. No they (governing circle) didn't. They just took it upon themselves.

And further related a bad decision that has resulted in many academics losing their jobs:

Another example is buying up campuses for student catchment but later find out that that was not a very good decision. Because of that there has been cut backs. Again the academics weren't consulted ... just told. ... The point is, you as a lecturer don't run the ship. You're just a part of the crew.

Literature has taught us that a 'disposable workforce' (Drago 1996) may lead to lack of commitment, lower job satisfaction and reduced communication due to job insecurity (Cartwright, Tytherleigh & Robertson 2007). That was found to be still pertinent, because Iris commented:

If I tried to participate, how would I do it? Even if I became the Dean, and I questioned the governing team, I'd be slapped. They'd say, you don't know. Leave it with us. Or I may be told, you're getting too old, maybe it's time for you to move on, to retire.

Lily also substantiated this comment by highlighting how job insecurity has crept into the organisation:

So it's OK to be a high flyer in the sense of publishing papers and so forth but I think there are other aspects of your identity need to be restrained in a very careful way. Even the expression of humour for example.

Now that Tulip is currently on the verge of taking on a managerial position, while excitedly sharing an insight of the upcoming role in management, emphasised that managerial positions have more autonomy and have decision-making power:

I guess I will have more in my new job as Head of School, because I have people who I will be their line manager, and so they'll be, in other words be reporting to me and I'll be directing their work flow.

It seems that universities have given little regard to how academics feel about major decisions that are made, despite scholars such as Moriarty (2010) suggesting that employees should be included in decisions that will affect them. Failing which, it will affect their self-worth and self-confidence. It is becoming obvious now that many of the informants are feeling a sense of insecurity; as such it is highly probable that they are not able to make themselves fully present at their workplace (Kahn 1990, 1992). In addition, there is strong indication that attitudes such as Tulip's will worsen the current work environment. Now that the informants have stated that they were losing autonomy, the next question dealt with if the informants felt that their work was being appreciated.

➤ **How do you know that your work is appreciated?**

Work appreciation has been shown to improve job satisfaction (Stocker et al. 2010). It is considered a job resource the absence of which can potentially negatively impact on students' behaviours (Bakker et al. 2007). It was clear that the informants just assumed that their work was appreciated but being openly and verbally appreciated was a rare, 'few and far between' experience between these informants and their higher management.

An example of how academics interpreted appreciation came Blue Cornflower, a designated research fellow. The question was answered using a concept of appreciation derived from the idea of whether a person's opinion on important work matters is sought. Citing an example, Blue Cornflower explained how appreciation is shown:

I can feel that my work is really valued. If I didn't feel that way, it would be a very difficult job to stay in because it's hard, it's really hard ... they show it to me by asking my opinion, about it all the time, my opinion about the conceptual framework that guides the project. My intellectual input is very valued.

Then there were the ‘no news, good news’ stories, interpreting the silence from management as a sign of appreciation by Carnation:

I know my work is appreciated, because they have given me slack. Not through pay, but by allowing me to do what is valuable to me. Allowing me to help in poor countries.

Sharing a wider appreciation experience with pride, Carnation said:

They, (the external network), show their appreciation by inviting me for talks and for collaborations, and my organisation allows me to do that. That shows me that they (the organisation) appreciate me.

Carnation also pointed out:

I've been helping in terms of impact by this university.

As for Daffodil, the fact of not being retrenched is an interpretation of management's way of showing their appreciation:

I don't think you are a person to experience that ... It's obviously valued in that you have still got a position that you are getting the opportunity to contribute at the organisational level.

As with Carnation, Daffodil highlights the need to align research work with the organisation's objective in order to be really appreciated:

I think the way I measure it is more of my output, my research output, is valued by them because it's one of the matrix under which the organisation is judged. So, I think in some ways, what you're doing is you're being allowed to undertake the things that they do value. Maybe it's not that you get any feedback saying great work well done, but it's about being allowed to undertake those activities.

The above stories show that academics are expected to follow the universities' areas of interest with not much thought given to academics' area of interest. Therefore, it is clear that only academics that are able to align their interest with the universities will feel positively about their work.

It was concerning, though, that other informants had a strong negative experience regarding being appreciated by their higher management. Daisy for instance, mused that:

... I don't know that. If anything, I'm in conflict.

Taking another perspective, Gardenia expressed much gratitude for the work that the middle management level performs. The immediate managers interpret staff members' roles, and work to ensure that the academics have a position, and help by being the middle person between higher management and the academics. This role was very much appreciated:

I have great respect for all the people that do the really difficult, heavy lifting, senior management within the faculty, I don't want to do it. I think they have to be the interface between us and the university and to back university stupid things to shelter us from them, from cuts, from reorganisation, to make palatable, to say look, we are expected to do this could you please do it this way. I think they are doing great job.

However, when asked about the relationship between higher management with staff, Gardenia did not sound as happy, which can be easily interpreted from the extract below:

... in terms what I think about the central university organisation, I have complete contempt.

Gardenia went on, and related the following disturbing issue:

... they seem captured by this management-speak; performance, mission ..., we had enormous cuts recently, where staff (administrative staff) were forced/invited to take redundancy payments which means ... there's simply not enough admin staff to do the task. If we were told we have to find savings, this is what we have done, everybody's gonna have to try to support the admin staff a bit more, not making too many demands because there are fewer people to do the same jobs, ... if you said that, we'd understand. But instead, ahh this is an improvement, we are improving everything, it's all better and it's just been to hide the fact that we are doing more for less. And the people can't cope. We can all see through it. And it's nonsense. This is nonsense.

In relating the above, Gardenia was highlighting that not only the organisation is not appreciative of the staff, but that the organisation is also dishonest and therefore not

trustworthy. Implementing changes can be more challenging when the organisation is deemed dishonest (Chawla & Kevin 2004). Frustration was also very visible when Hydrangea expressed disappointment with higher management:

... but I have to admit, that senior, feedback from senior people is not so apparent, in my role anyway. As a matter of fact, at times I feel like senior people don't even know what I do.

Hydrangea sounded disappointed and felt let down in that management is not as committed to the staff as the staff is to management. This supported the findings of Zeb et al. (2014) that the importance of employees for the wellbeing of an organisation is often overlooked.

Citing personal experience Hydrangea informed:

... So looking at the top management, to the Deans, the Faculties and the Vice Chancellors and other senior people, I don't feel that they have the same commitment to me that I have to the organisation. Sometimes it becomes very much a sense of feeling that you're just one of the numbers ... on a pay cheque rather than being a person who is committed to the organisation.

Good student feedback will get the higher management's attention according to Lily:

... if you get sufficiently high student evaluations, you might get a letter from the office of the pro vice chancellor for learning and teaching recognising your work.... Apart from the mechanical SET, student evaluation results, if you score a certain level out of 5, automatically you receive some sort of letter, otherwise, most of the time, its self-driven where you might apply for an award of some sort or another.

Iris however had a negative opinion of the SET:

... No no it's pretty useless...

Explaining further:

It's not an effective system, because it's such a fluid feedback response ... if the students feel sidelined, or think that they are not going to do the course well, they may just write negative comments which would affect your confidence.

Wattle is unhappy on how management uses the student evaluation on lecturers:

I think I've seen over time, more and more emphasis on student evaluation of teaching ... but now you see that management across the organisation will put a number on us. Like you have to get above 80% student satisfaction and good teaching score or whatever it may be called ... But there's definitely because of the increased competition and the move to the more business like model for the universities, there is definitely more pressure in terms of how you perform in student evaluation. My philosophy is that some of the time the student evaluation can just be how popular you are with the students, rather than whether or not you can teach ... There is a lot of people who say that that's not a good measure of teaching, because it depends on the student's mood today, depends whether they are performing well, when they perform well, they'll say that they are good; when they perform bad, it's the teacher's fault ... I think it's a popularity contest to a degree. It could just be that you're cracking jokes, they've learnt nothing. ... I definitely want to be scoring in the 80s or 90s and not the 20s.

It seems that Daffodil and Carnation are not very concerned that they do not receive direct feedback, appreciation or otherwise. They are probably not the feedback-orientated type of employees (Silverman, Pogson & Cober 2005), they don't need feedback to motivate them. It could also be the nature of the job that does not require much external motivation. However, to Blue Cornflower, appreciation is important and to Gardenia and Hydrangea, not receiving any and not knowing how the higher management feels towards academics has created a strong negative feeling towards higher management. Lily, Iris and Wattle, aware that the management uses student evaluation as part of their feedback process to the lecturers, pointed out that it is not the best way to show appreciation, otherwise it affects their work performance.

Most of the responses above regarding appreciation validate the outcome reported by Cleavenger and Munyon (2013) who note that good leadership skills are in short supply in most organisations, and that transformational leaders (nicely described by Gardenia) are not at the top management level but usually buried somewhere, with inadequate resources. Nevertheless this was a surprising outcome, as one would expect that with all the research that is available

on appreciation, transformational leadership and positive organisational outcomes, this would not be the case in a university environment.

Although the responses were far less than was expected, responses to the next question provided some stories related to the appreciation from higher management.

➤ **Can you recall a situation/situations that you felt that management appreciated what you did?**

As a reward for embracing and helping the university's latest initiative, Orchid felt rewarded:

I can give you an example. Recently I was identified as a person who was involved in some of the online course development in this school. Also as a very early adopter of online course development. I was acknowledged at one of the faculty forum of some sort, where they basically acknowledged me for having done that work and said what a very good work that I've done.

And Tulip shared a story of management 'going the extra mile':

I feel appreciated by some of the senior leadership team at the university ... particularly remember a Vice Chancellor, I won a teaching award and he wrote me specifically and individually to say congratulations on this award, the university is very proud of you. And then he went on, and this is really the cool bit, he went on to say that I particularly like your reward on student delivery or something like that. But he'd actually got one of his minions to go into research and find out what it was and write to me. I was very impressed by that. This is the Vice Chancellor and I'm a nothing, that's wonderful leadership. I felt nice that I was appreciated by the leadership and particularly by Executive Dean.

Orchid and Tulip's stories confirm what Stocker et al. (2010) claimed; that a show of appreciation is not only an acknowledgment of work well done but also an indication that the person is capable of more and better work, which has obvious benefits to self and wellbeing. It is strongly recommended that university management should improve management team-teachers relationships, since studies have shown that supervisor-teacher relationships improve organisational outcomes (Tummers and Knies (2013).

When the work environment interferes with work meaningfulness, to continue being employed with the same employer, individuals will usually try to find some form of escapism, such as going away for a holiday. But, in some cultures and societies, going off on a holiday is a normal way of life or as a way to fulfil some inner desire. So then the respondents were asked why they went on holidays, to see where they fitted.

➤ **Do you look forward to holidays and time off?**

Academics' way of coping with stress, is by taking direct action or by talking to their superiors (Narayanan, Menon & Spector 1999). Yoo et al. (2011) found that absence and early leave have been associated with work place stress, so equipped with this background information, the informants were prompted to share their holiday habits.

The study showed that informants could not be totally free of work during their holidays. Besides a few exceptions, almost everyone spoke of a 'working holiday', despite it being taken from what was legitimately their personal time off. Carnation provided a general explanation for why this happens:

Sometimes organisations introduce pressure like Summer Schools. They ask to take leave but they give more work in the summer, so you cannot take leave. You look at the university, I reckon there is massively untaken leave. You have to work during semester and then try and research during the breaks. You do publications and research during break, so you cannot take holidays and organisations create this problem.

Although Daffodil started off by saying:

So, I'd want my leave. I work hard but I think you need to recharge your batteries as a researcher and you need a break from the place.

... but went on to explain that there cannot be a total break away from work for a few reasons:

To get the job done. To meet the deadline. And sometimes when you work in teams with other people, by the time you have got the information to do what you need to do and the deadline is coming up you don't have any options. I would work on a public holiday because I interview in another state and it wasn't a public holiday there.

Lily admits to looking forward to holidays, but also admits that it is not a work-free time:

Oh, like most things, it's just a chance to I guess ... well, I'll be working over my holidays of course. I've got marking to do. And I guess to recharge and yes, maybe do some of those other elements in my work that have been put on the side lines, some reading, some research, maybe even some writing.

It seems that situations may change with status, when comparing Gardenia's story as a level B lecturer and as an Associate Professor. Gardenia recalled, as a level B lecturer:

Holidays, I would take my work with me. So, when I was teaching full time, I really looked forward to holidays. To answer your latter question, I only looked forward to holidays because I so needed to be given permission to not think about how to prepare another lecture, or anticipate how the kid from the 3rd row from the back is going to be really difficult.

Although it was still a working holiday as an Associate Professor, the tone used from this higher position's perspective was different:

Now I always take my laptop with me on holidays and I continue to do my research. But I love my research. I don't think of that as work. I just think that as being able to do what I love to do, being by the beach.

Alba also shared two different scenarios, with two different outlooks:

Now in terms of holidays, I just like to say that early in my career, holidays meant nothing to me. My mind was always working creatively. How can I present these to students? What can I write about this? How can I write about this stuff in a paper, always very, very engaged with my career because I loved it all and found it so rewarding.

These days, however, holidays fulfil an internal desire for Alba:

Because it's a time of life for me where I want to continue my learning outside academia. So when I go on holiday, I go on a study tour, (laugh) so someone else is doing the presenting, the teaching the 'whatever' and I like being in a position of a student.

Dahlia and Iris share an altogether different perspective. As a soon-to-retire Dean, Dahlia felt a total 'work free holiday' was not necessary, because:

... the trips teaching overseas were good breaks, they took you out of your situation. They were still work, but I've never sort of needed to, you know we've always taken holidays.

It is strongly suggested here that work would have been more meaningful to Dahlia because there were opportunities to attend conferences sponsored by the university and have a holiday at the same time:

I don't take holidays because I'm stressed or anything like that. It's just the time that we are catching up with people that we've known for the last 30 years [again referring to conference attendance].

Iris, also did not feel that there was a need for a holiday, with this being strongly determined by personality:

Work is holiday. A famous English playwright, Noel Coward said, work is fun and fun is work ... I am just 'coasting' now, taking it nice and easy coz I just finished a major project. [Iris's definition of holiday]

Then there were the informants who really worked hard and played hard, like Wattle, who is teaching post graduate courses in a technical institute. The important points here are how different holidays and weekends are managed in a well-resourced organisation:

... you can take on a lot and just need time to have a rest ... And I've always sort of reflected on that and tried to make sure that when it was the weekend, I had the weekend. And if it's a public holiday like Anzac day, I'm not looking at my emails ... And the same goes for when I have two weeks off and I'm going overseas, or just staying at home on the couch, I do not look at email. I do not mark assignments ... that is a real priority for me to be so organised that I don't have to do it.

Similarly, Camelia managed to take time off and spent quality time with her children:

...it was just a thing to do. Yeah sure, when my kids were on school holidays, I would take a bit of time off. Yeah. But I never sort of hung out for holidays, thinking oh God, when is it going to end I need a break. No, I didn't feel like that. I still loved my job.

When asked if there was a tendency to check emails, Camelia's answer was:

No, I didn't. I'd usually set up an automatic reply (laugh). Not really, I usually took holidays during the breaks. There was an understanding in our unit that we didn't take time off during the semester, unless there was some particular reason, a special reason. It was usually expected that we would take our holidays during semester break time and summer.

Both Wattle and Camelia shared how a well-resourced and well organised workplace can contribute to work-life balance and the overall wellbeing of an employee.

Some of the major findings from this segment are:

- (i) The majority of the informants were not running away for a holiday to escape their work, and, on the contrary, it seemed that many of the informants were taking holidays to catch up on their commitments. Perhaps this could be an indication of job insecurity due to major changes and cutbacks which can potentially result in serious negative consequence, given that scholars such as (Brown & Leigh 1996; May, Gilson & Harter 2004) have found that psychological safety at work significantly impacts on work meaningfulness.
- (ii) Informants in higher managerial ranking, well-resourced and organised environments had better holidays
- (iii) Change in work type – full time to consultancy – has changed the holiday experience
- (iv) It is clear that academics benefitted from attending and presenting at conferences overseas through establishing networks to work collaboratively
- (v) When work fulfils intrinsic motivation, work becomes enjoyable

Furthermore, in this second segment of the research, there seems to have been stronger erosion of work meaningfulness among the senior informants who have been in this field for longer than ten years. These informants have lived their academic lives in a well-resourced,

participative form of management, and when changes such as cut backs and business style of management was introduced, it seemed to have left a deep negative impact on them.

In the final segment of questions, the purpose was to gather specific evidence on events that have affected work meaningfulness.

(3) What positive and negative events affect work meaningfulness?

Musselin (2007) notes that the education sector has been through ongoing changes that at times can be frustrating to academics. Musselin also alleges that universities have removed qualified professors from their core duties to other jobs, such as to raise funds, which systematically makes these higher level academicians incapable of performing as they should at that level. The next set of questions was to gauge what, if any, changes have taken place in the university and how that has affected these informants.

➤ Have changes affected your job fit?

As a new research fellow, Blue Cornflower did not experience any impact due to change, but felt:

I think in some ways the job really suits me, skills and temperaments. So I like working with abstract concepts. I really enjoy theory.

Quite similarly, Daffodil, who is also a research fellow but has been in academia longer than Blue Cornflower, was also happy with the job-fit:

... it is a fit for me. Being a researcher to me means I am not doing the same job day in and day out. I tend to work across disciplines. I have quite varied outputs. I am involved in very varied projects. So it's that variety that to me being a researcher is important.

But Tulip, who joined as a lecturer but in an upcoming positional change will be moving out of an academic's position into a managerial position, spoke about the irony of being good at a job:

You show that you're actually quite good at something and so you're promoted into a position that you're not doing that thing anymore. I've been lucky enough to win some awards, like for my teaching, but yet I am not doing any teaching anymore because they keep offering

me jobs that are higher up the tree, you know which is strategic role but the strategic role take you away from that thing that you joined up for, joined up to be the very best teacher and the very best mentor in some ways to my students if I could be. And now, I am lucky, if I see a student from semester to semester. So have my roles taken me into different area, absolutely they have.

Perhaps even Tulip was not aware that this change was not negative, given that in earlier questions everything that Tulip had stated as being meaningful was more related to a managerial task than teaching. Unlike Tulip, to other academics change may not be as positive, such as for Daisy. Although Daisy started by stating:

I feel that even though my work conditions have changed in the last decade, I feel that they are still very good.

... but goes on to state:

I feel everything I do is my job, but the things that go on beyond, you know I feel like there are things that happen that I'm responsible for, and someone else takes/does things and I find out two months later that something has happened, and I haven't been advised. I find that someone overrides my work.

Reflecting on this question, Orchid brought up an area that suggests that most academics' sense of job-fit seems to be seriously affected:

I think one of the key changes that I have observed probably thinking about the impact of government policy and the direction of the university, is that there has been a focus on certain fields of research for research publications. This probably has come up from other academics as well. As a consequence of that it has tended to direct us to research in certain preferred areas.... That existed when I first came in to a full time academic role. I was under the assumption that we could research into any area. I've continued to do that but it hasn't been without its problems. When you elect to not follow the status quo, many of the incentives that would normally flow to you through research publications tend to be removed and as a consequence, that affects your motivation to continue to play in the same way.

Orchid further pointed out that the level or status of the academic does complicate the matter further if one decides to rebel against the requirements:

I think that the more high profile that you are in academia, the more obvious it is that you're expected to follow the expected strategy towards the fields of research. And therefore, if you choose not to, the more obvious it becomes to the faculty and to the school, to the institution. Whereas I think if you're low in the hierarchy, perhaps to put it that way, the impact of your decision to follow the fields of research or not ... is less obvious.

However, even when it does seem like some senior academics, like Carnation, may be able to manage this better, Carnation revealed that:

I 'wangled' (worked it out for) myself out of the management role and into a role that I am comfortable in and as I said, the school is comfortable with me because they get the results from me and I'm exploiting myself.

Carnation also raised strong disagreement regarding the current restrictions on research:

Probably the only thing is I suppose they require now to publish in top A star and A journals, where I always had the view that I publish in the journal that I think is appropriate for the audience, and it could be a C journal. Sometimes I've got a C journal article that get highly cited, but because it is in the C journal we don't count because of the ERA. So that sort of things that I'm not really happy about. The university puts these constraints that I should publish in A star journal.

On this point, even Blue Cornflower commented:

The organisation is very focused on improving its ranking, generating higher ranking, encouraging people to publish, it's very performance driven. The top journal in our management field I'm pretty sure my practitioners have never heard of them, have never read them (laugh). But if you get like Harvard Business Review, that's a practitioner output. So if you published in Harvard Business review, I think our university would be rapt. I'm not sure it means anything, in terms of performance management.

Porter and Vidovich (2000) point out that the directive by university management committees to publish in high ranking journals is in order to improve visibility and global ranking. Most academics will argue that it is pointless. Furthermore, Jongbloed and Vossensteyn (2001) also argue that publication level is not reflected in student performance.

There are also academics who prefer to just teach, and therefore find it disturbing that promotion is linked to research, such as the case of Rose:

To get promoted, you must do research; if not promotion is limited ... It bothers me that, if there is no research, there is no promotion

Speaking in terms of academic-related promotion such as to be an Associate Professor or Professor, Rose also has observed that:

Even people who have done research don't get promoted. Would have preferred that if there was no over emphasis, we are teaching ... emphasis is not good for the kids.

This further substantiates Jongbloed and Vossensteyn (2001).

Carnation supplied the evidence for Rose's claim of not being promoted, despite being actively involved in research:

I haven't been promoted to professor, and I know why, and it's a lot of those factors that I feel are not recognised, the sort of social goods that I've been involved in. And in some ways I've been 'punished' for that and therefore not being promoted to professor, I'm only Associate Professor.

It was found that when it came to research and publishing, the informants seemed to be struggling with goal meaningfulness (Davis et al. 2015) of their research. Here again the weakness of the performance management system is highlighted pertaining to rewards and recognition in respect to promotion and publishing interest. The respondents highlighted that their perception to be able to actively research in their personal interest area and to be recognised among their specialisation peers was the draw card into academia which is fast slipping.

Theories in motivation such as Self-Determination theory (Deci & Ryan 1985), have emphasised that restrictions affecting internally motivating tasks can be counter-productive, and they reiterate that supportive work conditions are important. Motivation theories were used as the theoretical underpinning, in the following lines of questioning regarding changes that have affected various aspects of the informants' work life and their motivation.

➤ **How have changes affected your relationship in the organisation?**

It was anticipated that, generally, changes would have some form of impact on work meaningfulness of lecturers; however it was unclear at this point whether the impact would be positive or negative. This is because, as pointed out by Porter and Vidovich (2000), a single action can result in a binary and opposite actions, so people can either bond closer in times of adversity, or be pulled in different directions.

Grevillea, who is a sessional lecturer and now mainly delivers subjects online, quickly highlighted the different teacher-student relationship resulting from the change to online delivery:

... like you can't read their body language much, you can't see the expression on their faces.

Lily noted that relationships among colleagues have changed as a result of the environment shifts:

I think there is less collegiality to some degree, it's some business likeness, perhaps more competitiveness. ... I think there's sense of now being very cautious about expressing a sense of personality and individuality as an academic. That's just a general sense.

... however, Lily was quick to add:

So it's not completely bad. So it's very, what can I say, flexible to my perspective, possibly I only work with people with whom I have that rapport anyway, and so the more competitive or mechanical people within the system tend to work also with those sorts of people

This could imply a *birds of a feather, flock together* situation, where change draws colleagues into a bonding situation like 'us versus them'.

Daisy, as indicated earlier, is not in a Go8, but also felt that change has altered relationships:

Morale has dropped, you can see morale is very low with certain people, very low. It's hard because people keep in contact through email now, people just don't come on campus ...

and work from home. And they do work from home, I'm not saying that just because they're not on campus, doesn't mean that they are not working.

To put this in perspective, both Lily's and Daisy's organisation have gone through a retrenchment exercise.

Similar to Lily, Alba spoke about damaged work relationships:

Probably mid-90s I began to feel the changes ... there seem to be a change in philosophy and a feeling that if you pitted the people against each other and encouraged competition then everybody would react the same, everybody would strive to be better at what they were doing and that would lead to improvement across the system.

Alba shared the negative consequences that have replaced the traditional university environment:

You look after your own career. It doesn't matter who you walk over, whose work you take, who you denigrate as long as you end up on top of the pile, that's fine.

In reference to another retrenchment exercise, Daffodil reflects:

We are going through another change again, and I think I wouldn't say it messes up relationships but relationships themselves change over time, but we expect them to change, our role in the organisation changes just so we expect those relationships to change. I think perhaps the one thing that I would say is I value the relationships I have with people. I spend time to build my working relationships. And to put time into them because the value and the time you can save in the long term. So I always see the people I work with and the wider circle of people I work with is important to maintain that relationship.

Daffodil's reflection is specific to the role of a research fellow in that university:

I work across faculties at times, I see that I work for the university and not for the faculty. That can at times be problematic but it can be problematic working between departments in any organisation.

Tulip highlights the conflicting views between a group who is trying to bring in the money and a group that holds on to traditional teaching standards:

... they tell me they have their standards, and they're going to fail (the students) and you pray that does meet their standards. So you got a disparity between the university taking students in and teachers and educators having a strong likelihood of failing their students and because you know apparently students don't meet their standards.... So there is a tension in this whole area

In the case of Camelia, the impact of change to relationships came with the replacement of the unit coordinator, with Camelia stating that initially:

... but within our unit, I'd have to say that we had a very good coordinator and head of unit. They were very supportive.

All that changed for Camelia and the group:

Now, when our unit coordinator finally retired, we got a new person who was very nice, but she was a manager. She hadn't been a teacher. Came from TAFE; she didn't understand how things worked in our institution and in some ways she was more bureaucratic ... I think eventually it did, in the last five years that I was there. I think it did impact on the relationships in the unit.

Here an overview of the struggle between management and the academics is illuminated. Management wants to bring in the money, which academics are not against but are not happy on how it is implemented. Overall, most informants interviewed were uncomfortable about the impact of a business model on the education system. It seems to have derailed the focus of individuals, from education to a fight for staying alive in the job. With academics no longer having a single communal focus and with differing principles between academics and the management team, it is anticipated that there will be changes to teaching expectation and reactions to those changes.

➤ **How have changes affected your teaching expectation?**

Carnation explained the business model first, before explaining the impact of change on the teaching expectation:

The organisation has taken on a business model ... an 'exploitation model'.

Carnation explained this business model:

Because governments are squeezing academics, so from the top they getting 'us' squeezed ... in 2003, about 90% of the funding of the school came from the Commonwealth funding of teaching places. Now it is about 30%. The rest has to come from privately funded sources whether it be attracting full fee paying students, having MBA courses, partner institutions overseas; all these quasi-privatised education modelling models have come in and changed the whole balance of basically a publicly funded model up to 1996 now the amount of public funding of universities is miniscule compared to the need to get funding from private sources.

The consequence of adapting a business model, in Alba's observation, brought in some major changes:

... shift in values within the university, it seems to me that students became clients, they became a source of money, there was declining standards, the idea that everybody passes and I felt that that was really doing a disservice to the students.

Rose highlighted how such adaptation seemed to impact upon a university's mission:

Education has not become a primary goal ... Teaching expectations have changed. We look at fail rates now more than in the past. We look at normal kids must pass.

Dahlia shed some perspective on why institutes and universities partly changed their focus:

A lot of students particularly from India and China, don't come here for an education. They come here for citizenship. It's a great underlying problem that we have, they don't care, they just want passes.

On the local front, Carnation explained:

Well, the cohorts are much more, first of all they're very accreditation-oriented. They don't come in to learn. They come in to get the certificate, the degree/diploma/whatever, so it has become a private good so the students reflect that culture and only come for that.

Iris supported Carnation:

Some are here because they don't know what to do. It's an iffy thing. If they don't go to university, they would be unemployed.

Iris added that because of these reasons:

There's a high percentage of dropout.

But that creates problems for the academics:

The expectation is you don't want to have a high failure rate, more than 20%. You'll be called into question. Your exam may be said to be too difficult. So, you've got to cater to the market. And similar local students, you've got face-to-face. See how good they are, and set appropriate exam. So when you teach the Chinese students, then you've got to be like ok I won't use many big words. I try to use much simpler language in my lectures and the exam. You take your cohort into account.

Rose validated Iris's point that the course should be tailored to the cohort:

Some people here have problems with students who cannot speak English. They cannot speak English but they can do the course. We have taken their money so we must teach;

Tulip saw the shortfall, but perceived it as a current necessity given the current scenario:

... caps [gloves] are off, universities are in a market place fight and so there's pressure on universities to get... universities like ours to take students where maybe their English levels mean that they are going to struggle in the course. We're actually to a certain extent signing students on false pretences knowing their English is not probably up to it. But we like their money.

Carnation pointed out the mistake of this move:

It's a way of finding a niche to attract students which they can't attract through ATAR. It is more a survival strategy for these smaller universities to have students come in because they are not going to attract them on ATAR scores. So they have to find alternatives and the outcome of that, the result of that, is that there are students (some students) getting access and universities have been putting more effort in to what they call retention, and providing

resources for those students because a lot of them drop out. They have put more efforts into retention so that's adding cost to the university.

Carnation further emphasised the cost effect of this situation:

... have to put a lot of cost into, not just for teachers but also backend, for retention programmes to the people they are trying to keep because they are mature age students or lower ATAR who have less experience and are much more labour-intensive in terms of getting them through the course ... because a lot of them drop out, so there's a cost-benefit thing you know, yes they get more students, but they have to keep them. Because what is the point of attracting the students if on the 1st of April they drop out? You don't get them paying.

Carnation agreed with the other respondents that:

And so on, there's pressure and I know a lot of the staff are pressured to pass students.

Dahlia, in a way agreed with Carnation:

I think once you've introduced competition, students tend to say that I can get into this university that has better reputation so those students will go where they think employers will want or be impressed by the university.

Gardenia was not entirely certain students have the correct information on getting a good job placement. According to Gardenia;

... to get a proper professional placement within the industry, after they graduate, ... There are interviews that they have to go through. They have to be personable, team players, eager...

Gardenia was right in saying that getting a job placement extends beyond the reputation of a university and the students' grades.

The data so far supports Musselin (2007) that the educator's job is much different from what it used to be. It also confirms Cartwright, Tytherleigh and Robertson (2007), that among other things, change impacts communication, brings about job dissatisfaction and job insecurity. It is also anticipated at this point loyalty is also impacted.

As literature has shown, changes within the universities have resulted with academics carrying out other types of work apart from teaching and research. It raises questions as to whether academics felt it was worth their time performing these other job functions.

➤ **Are there things that you do that you feel are not worth performing?**

Carnation mentioned the wasted cost on efforts spent in retaining students, but Daisy brought up another point:

I suppose it would ... to give supplementary exams. And if a student is entitled to a supplementary exam, under our policy they're entitled to but you can tell that the student isn't going to pass the supplementary exam based on their first exam, and what they have done through the semester, to me to give them another exam, and to go through all of that is a waste of time for the student in particular and ... its only delaying reality for the student. And I think it is unfair. It's extra pressure on the student, you know that they are not going to pass.

It was unexpected to know that a lecturer would feel that teaching had no value or purpose, but Iris felt that way:

Teaching – I think I 've put enough effort into that and the returns that I am getting is not so high so I won't put too much effort on the teaching, I will put up my lecture notes and I will try and engage my students but I won't go crazy over it. I won't sort of agonise over it.

However, taking into account the change in focus and motives of universities, Iris's frustrated response is totally understandable. Whilst there were other responses to this question, the most consistent themes were the burden of administrative work and the pointless meetings.

Camelia did not find any purpose in the long reports that had to be written:

I had to write extensive reports. We'd have an interview each year about what we were doing, having to sort of justify what we were doing in our roles. Maybe not the right word but, yes, just go through a process.

Lily expressed a strong disdain for the same:

Oooo, like most people, just the endless administrative changes and the book keeping for the sake of book keeping , the technological imposition that are driven by the managerial

class within the university, the so called innovations that are really about their positions and roles rather than actual productivity. And so the academics, really the fodder for the managerial class within the university to maintain their own positions. So we are the matrix, we are the data that they need to justify their own positions. And so there is this continued sort of change to generate different sort of data to justify their own positions.

Gardenia too, in quite a similar tone, took a crack at ‘management talk’:

I think if our core mission, to use ‘their’ language is to teach and do research and communicate that research to our academic peers, to our community, to the public, to the government, to students then that’s where the resources should go. Not in marketing us, not in redesigning the bloody travel portal or whatever, so there’s a lot of pointless stuff, and I think I don’t have to do it yet. If I wanted to be promoted further, I’ll probably be expected to but I don’t, again I’d rather have less money and more job satisfaction, than have to do stupid things. So, I don’t have to do too many pointless things.

Wattle, who caught the attention of the researcher with the comment of being in ‘a better place’, felt that everything has a purpose and value, but this was not necessary so to one person:

I think this is where I have the perspective of working at three different universities and working as administrator if you like as well as academic. The university I am at now is very well resourced. Whereas, I was a programme director at my previous university, every day I would have a line of students outside my office and I quite enjoyed that coz you’d hear their personal stories but I could be signing the same form 10 times, 15 times most of the day. It’s not potentially, [some people would feel that it’s not academic work or] good use of my time to sign forms that could be signed by someone in administrative role. Here, I don’t have the line of students with forms and paperwork and those repetitive task to do. That’s resourced.

Daffodil similarly stressed the need for effective use of an academic’s time:

I think that there are things that I would say I would be best to spending more time on research and somebody else performing those task, but the task are actually worth performing – its whether that is valuable for me to perform.

Orchid agreed:

There's a lot of administrative things that we tend to become burdened by, it's probably being a consequence of restructuring in this university and indeed across the sector.... And I'm not saying that our time is better spent than anyone else, sometimes there are people better able to deal with certain administrative functions.

The informants also stated attending meetings as purposeless.

Tulip, who has moved on to a management position, felt meetings were not as purposeful as they might be:

You know, I think that a lot of the things that I do in my role is a bit purposeless ... in my view anyway, waste a lot of time sitting around in meetings, pontificating policies and procedures which in my view make no difference whatsoever.

Camelia, a sessional lecturer at the time of this interview, agreed with this point that many meetings seemed to be pointless, and went on to explain where this attitude came from:

I didn't always enjoy the meetings with management [laugh] ... Decisions made without consultations with staff, made by senior management. I mean they used to go through this charade of consultation, but they had already made their decision as far as I was concerned.

Hydrangea, a sessional research fellow, agreed with this somewhat exasperated view when reflecting that:

... the negative impact of administrative work as well.... Some of the more the administrative side of it, a lot of the meetings that I have to go to, really I don't see a lot of value in my being there. I don't see a lot coming out of those kind of meetings, so I guess that is the least rewarding.

Of special interest is what Alba, who moved from a senior lecturer's position to a coordinator of post graduate of research study in a support programme, had to say about participating in meetings:

... Even if people said, 'Now we're going to take all of your comments into consideration, then we'll come out with our report', I still felt that myself and others were

ignored. The report would come but with things that had nothing to do with what was discussed, would be reflected.

Giving substance to this experience, Alba recounted an actual incident:

... They had brought in a consultant and throughout the meeting and at the end, the consultant said to us 'I think what you're doing is fantastic, I really encourage you to work collaboratively with people in these other institutions, and gave us a list of three or four universities ... however, when the report came out, it didn't reflect any of that ... it contained strong recommendations that would change what we were doing, and the feeling was that the administration actually interfered in the outcomes of the report.

After reading these accounts, it is clear why meetings are regarded as being pointless by academics. The outstanding experience which was shared was that they felt that whatever their opinions, which were presented in the meetings, the outcome was that they would not be taken on board by management. This common experience could be a contributing explanation as to why academics do not feel any more that it is their role to make decisions – perhaps somewhat pragmatically because they cannot find a forum for their voice, and therefore, as Tulip noted, meetings end up as being ‘pontification without purpose [and therefore a] waste of time’.

However, as the tagline of American Express says ‘Membership has its privileges’: it was a privilege to be at a higher ranking, such as Carnation, an Associate Professor:

No. I'm so blessed I think. There might be a few things very minor. I go to an Open Day, on a Sunday, very boring, talk to students, some things like that.

And Gardenia, also an Associate Professor:

But I don't think I get asked to do many pointless things. But if I were to take the next step and become a professor, I think I will be expected to be involved in university level committees, I think they're pointless.

Although Carnation and Gardenia are only at Associate Professors' level, in a way their responses reinforce findings by Winter and Sarros (2002), that Professors have a better opportunity to experience work meaningfulness. Although Georghiou and Harper (2015) feel

that the core concept of the university still remains, this is no longer true. De Boer and File (2008) state that in Europe, the traditional role of higher education was to produce a knowledge society and knowledge economy.

However, not just in Europe but everywhere, that was the role of higher education, but it seems now that higher education has gone off course with the lowering of standards and focus on profit, therefore contradicting Georghiou and Harper (2015) on the idea that the core concept of the university still remains.

The investigation was concluded by asking informants if work was stressful and allowing them to share parts of their work that they felt were stressful.

➤ **Is the work stressful?**

In their study on nurses, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) showed that stress impacted work meaningfulness which eventually and unconsciously manifested itself in the interactions between nurses and patients, resulting in patient dissatisfaction. Similarly Chawla and Kevin (2004) showed the implications of a badly managed merger between the University of Western Australia with its member institutions where the academics were so stressed that they could not perform well, resulting in student protests.

Overall, with two exceptions of informants who dealt less with teaching and more with administration, all the informants were stressed due to the ‘marketisation’ of the education system. This not only affected teaching expectation but also the attitude of the new generation of students who demanded or expected to obtain a degree effortlessly. Many academics were also frustrated having to cope with students who were not ready for higher education.

When Dahlia was asked this question, the response was:

I was never stressed teaching. Never ever stressed. It was just a working entertainment. I just loved it. But it was always a challenge to find a way to explain something to a lecture theatre or a tutorial ... get the best out of the students ... that have limited English for a start in some cases and also limited interest to get them motivated.

Dahlia added that the stress stemmed from:

Management [hearty laugh]. Managing staff. When you get into management in the university, it's time to jump out the window. That's the tough stuff. Managing academics has been described as herding cats.

Dahlia had a specific reason; being a Dean in a university when it was going through major reorganisation, it was very stressful when it was time to inform a staff member that he/she was going to be retrenched:

... you sort of tapping on the shoulder, look it's time for you to leave the university and if they were quite resentful, that caused a lot of stress. Managing people in those sorts of circumstances creates an enormous amount of stress. Both for them and for you.

When Lily was asked:

I think similar with most of my colleagues, the imposition of the more corporate mentality that has very much taken hold of academia.

Most informants who were not in the Go8, felt that their counterparts in Go8 would not be stressed with the effects of massification or commercialisation of education, but Lily stated that the Go8 was not any different:

Everybody is affected by both the commercialisation and the massification of the higher education. It's inescapable. And those two factors are probably the most significant in terms of the impact on the way an academic such as myself positions themselves within the personal values system. That seems to be probably the commercialisation more than massification, people don't want to identify massification as one of the key factors of negative impact but it's certainly significant as commercialisation.

Gardenia, also from a Go8, in relating about stress due to student cohorts said:

Enormous amounts of pressure, and students sometimes can become, especially when they first start the degree, they can be quite aggressive.

... or the students are not university ready, explained Gardenia:

You know my heart breaks sometimes, I can see that they are not well prepared and an extra year learning English would make a world of difference to them. And for some reason,

they don't have it. Because they have been allowed to get in with a language test, whatever it is, Pearson's Language test or whatever language test, Cambridge test, which says that they are university ready but they are not

Relating a story about one student, Gardenia expressed sadness:

I mean I actually wept once when the student left the room and another student was coming for an interview and I was sitting in tears thinking that the poor kid, wish I can help her more and I can't, it's awful. It's not fair on her and not fair on me either. I know I would like more say [starting to tear] but I don't know enough about English language testing to have a say in that. I mean I don't know enough about what qualifications students need to have to come here to even want to have a say in that. I just wish that people who do would think more carefully and provide a bridging course, genuine bridging course so these kids can be actually be properly skilled.

[At this point, I had to turn off the voice tracer to let the informant calm down. In fact many times during the interview, relating incidents about students, this informant started to cry.]

Iris started to show signs of stress as well when talking about the student cohort, especially about the students not purchasing the textbook:

New problems coming around, why do I have to buy the text book? The text book publishers, they still want to sell their books for very high price.... So it's sort of a Mexican stand-off here. The students won't buy the book. The publisher and publishing house won't make the books available online.

Iris's frustration is understandable, part of Iris's work meaningfulness comes from reading and publishing books. Iris is frustrated probably because the university is not placing enough emphasis on the importance of textbooks.

Iris also felt stressed about publishing in a high ranked journal:

The university encourages you to publish in A star journals, and they'll give you some fanfare, give you some publicity if you do publish in A star, but I think it's a poisonous game. Coz a lot of the good journals are C ranks. If you're an incentivised publisher, you'll never

publish in C rank journals because you're bringing down your average and your departmental average. A lot of good journals are C ranked. 50% journals are currently C ranked. I've published in some of those C ranked journals. I blame the Australian Business Deans' Council for all of these. They're the ones that still do this ranking.

Iris' comments support two theories; the first confirming Deci and Ryan (1985): the more restricted the environment, the less motivated employees will be. Second, which was similarly put forth by Bandura (1997), when an individual's work outcome is regulated, it becomes a disincentive to that individual.

This is a major cause of stress, more so because according to Iris:

And they downgraded the journals that I specialised in and I had to appeal against it. A bit of trepidation waiting for end of 2017 to see if my journal is downgraded. Why do the ABDC rank journals? History people don't rank journals. Everybody who contributed to that journal is downgraded. Your work is devalued. These people who are downgrading, don't take people's reputation and ego that would also be affected by the downgrade.

The effects of high stress level can be dangerously detrimental as may be the case for Daisy:

Quite sick at times, I've had issues. I do go and speak to DVCs (Deputy Vice Chancellor) here about issues, I feel as if I am hitting my head against the brick wall.

Realising that talking to higher authority did not yield any reaction, Daisy decided to put an end to a pointless situation:

... I have put in for the voluntary package, so I'm hoping to leave at the end of this financial year.

Explaining what the big issue was that was bothering Daisy:

We are an educational institution, and I feel that if we take students in, we have to make sure that when they leave, that they are competent to do the job, so therefore, we need more support systems here to help our students ... And we don't. In my opinion, we just take the money and we run.

Two academics had a different response to stress.

Daffodil said:

Probably depends [Laugh]. I think whilst I am achieving what I believe I need to achieve, its fine ... I suppose I think my view is as long as it is for a job that you really enjoy doing it then you get a positive feeling from, a positive benefit, to me it's that balance.

And when asked if the stress level brought about health issues:

No, I think if it was at that level, that it would be totally different, but it's not at that level, yet.

Similarly Tulip too felt very capable of handling stress, making a conscientious effort to not be overwhelmed:

My stress levels are not such that I need a break. You know these people drag themselves in and say, ah I need a break here, I've never allowed myself to do that, you know. I've never said those words. Because I like people to think that I am competent in my work. And so if I'm stressed to the max, unable to operate, well you know, that to me is a sign of weakness in some ways. Or my inability to cope with whatever stressors are there.

It is evident that the change in university environment and requirements on teaching has resulted in academics facing various sorts of stressors, to the point that a few informants were facing adverse consequences. The informants complemented the findings by Kinman (2008) that high Sense of Coherence (SOC) resulted in work meaningfulness that built a strong resilience towards stress.

5.1. Summary of the findings

The interviews were conducted in a manner guided by the research questions and the sub questions that were developed to explore work meaningfulness among academics. The findings show that there were two categories; one set of themes that emerged based on actions taken by the university and how it impinges upon an academic's sense of work meaningfulness and a second category of themes that developed from academics managing the change to either

regain work meaningfulness or adapt to treating work as a means to something. The following discussion begins with the impact from institutional actions

5.1.1. Impact of institutional actions to academics

➤ Shifted values

There are many actions taken by the university that mean academics, overall, seem to feel that they are now on separate paths or thoughts with the university management on what the role of the university should be. Rose, for instance, felt that education is no longer the focus for university management, but making a profit is. This was supported by other lecturers stating that there was an emphasis on academics ensuring that the failure rate was low despite the fact the students that were accepted were not proficient in English, given that the exams were set in English. It seems that Rose and a few others are trying to understand the motives by the university's management team and adapt to the situation. Furthermore, they probably see the 'other side' of what can possibly happen, which is, if this university does not do it, some other university will, because now attracting students has become a competition. It became evident that the lecturers who are affected by the value shift are in their sixties, nearing retirement, and interpret their acceptance as having moved into 'organisational silence' (Morrison & Milliken 2000) mode, hoping that whatever disaster they think will impact, happens after they have retired. Whatever the reason, it is apparent that a large number of academics are unhappy with this shift and feel disdain towards the management of the universities, holding them responsible for destroying the value of education. The conclusion from this section is that for those affected by this shift in value, work is a source or meaning.

➤ Mostly a work-intruding holiday

The majority of academics interviewed were not able to have a work free holiday, because there were always deadlines that needed to be met which could only be done using holidays and weekends. This was because many of these lecturers interviewed were not able to meet the deadlines of their work during work days. Past research cited absenteeism and sick leave as ways employees chose to stay away from work but being an academic, holidays seems to be a way to catch up on work. It portrays a sense of insecurity and lack of work-life balance which probably affects the sense of work meaningfulness.

There were exceptions; Wattle and Camelia. Wattle worked in a university that was well resourced and technology driven, Camelia worked in a university that was well resourced and well organised. Both these academics enjoyed holidays in the true sense.

The learning from their experience is that for a university to be an effective and efficient work place, it has to have both these elements, well-resourced and well organised. This complements previous research; unhappy employees result in unhappy customers (Aiken et al. 2012).

➤ **Constraining flexibility**

The long hours (outside of officially contracted hours), non-work free holidays as discussed above and comparatively low salary packages highlight the importance of workplace flexibility. The danger of tightening this flexibility can be gauged through Daffodil's comments which implied that if flexibility is removed and the work environment gets more constrained than what has already taken place, academics may focus on the dollar remuneration package and seek jobs outside of teaching in universities, stating further that there are plenty of work opportunities outside of the university. Blue Cornflower implied that if staying gets harder, there is always an industry opportunity, and Orchid implied that working with the government is most interesting.

In addition, low salary package, and the economic state of the country as pointed out by Iris and Carnation, makes the teaching profession unattractive compared to other jobs such as being a lawyer or HOD, although teachers/lecturers play a substantial role in raising these professionals.

It was also noted that both senior and junior level academics highlighted the importance of workplace flexibility. This indicates that flexibility impacts work meaningfulness either as a hygiene or a motivational factor, and given that these factors are interchangeable depending on individual and cultural influence (Usugami & Park 2006), further tightening of flexibility will further decrease motivation among all levels of academia.

Initially, academic positions used to be seen as flexible, with autonomy and independence of working conditions (Heijstra & Rafnsdottir 2010), which was perhaps a pull factor and a trade-off to working in an industry for higher salary or being employed with the

government for better work-life balance. As the flexibility gap is fast narrowing between working in the university and corporate sector, and with there being more emphasis on work life balance in the government and corporate sector, it can be anticipated that these factors along with a poor remuneration scheme, and more constraints, will lead to more job seekers in other sectors than the education sector. It can be further anticipated that there will be a crossover point between the older generation preparing for retirement and a decent life post-retirement and a younger generation preparing for family life when the influx into higher education will drop due to the unattractive work environment resulting in a shortage of qualified lecturers.

➤ **Poor Performance Management Systems**

Although there seems to be an attempt to adapt a business model by the universities' administrators, it seems that it is not correctly implemented. This claim is because a business model entails having Key Performance Indicators (KPI) discussed and agreed at the beginning of a financial year (Arthur 2008; Maimunah 2008). The KPI will include every major task that needs to be completed with mutual agreement, a discussion and agreement of performance development and training identified and some areas of interest that can be pursued for other rewards. This planning process seems to be absent in these university settings.

On the topic of personal and professional development, while in agreement with past scholars that it is a personal interpretation, this study found that some academics felt that their position automatically allowed for development, but others felt that they were either not given the opportunity or did not have the time to pursue the available opportunities. This can be attributed to poor performance management which should have identified and scheduled the required or requested programmes or training at the beginning of the year. By identifying and scheduling these programmes, lecturers could and should made necessary arrangements for classes taught during that time.

It became clear that workload is not taken into consideration for academic promotion. Similarly additional roles and responsibilities such as heading a committee or being a head of department are not taken into consideration for higher level academic promotions.

Another weakness found in performance management was related to research and publication. It became evident that academics who pursue research for the purpose of impact

or interest are not recognised by the university and thus not rewarded in any way even though the research output is published in impact journals such as practitioner journals. It was an unexpected revelation that academics were being reprimanded and insulted for publishing in their choice of publication. One academic even stated that it encourages some to publish for publishing's sake and collect the rewards that came with publishing in the journals that the universities approve. It brings to life the impact of tight restrictions to work, as highlighted by Winter and Sarros (2002) where a restrictive environment could weaken internal motivation and given the negative outcome, it will be a disincentive (Bandura (1997).

Finally, in terms of poor performance management, the use of student evaluation was found to be too simplified with ratings without narrative or feedback for improvement for each question as a measure for rewards and benefits unsuitable. Many lecturers have raised this issue and have even hinted how the evaluation can be manipulated without any real benefit to the students while actively enrolled in the university or after graduating. The students will have to be able to demonstrate knowledge and capabilities at interviews which most of them would not be able to. It would then become a negative reflection of the university.

➤ **Conference constraints**

Being restricted to attend a conference only if a paper is presented is not necessarily detrimental; however not encouraging academics to present at conferences, local and international can be seen as negative. Conferences are good opportunities for networking, collaborative work and also have the potential for boundary spanning opportunities. It is a form of social networking, although not in the sense meant by (Fang, Wang & Chen 2016), but has all the benefits of social networking opportunities all the same. It has been noted in the past by scholars and was also noted in the ANZAM 2008-2010⁷ report, that conference publications are the easiest way to publish. Here it seems important to emphasise that any form of exposure and publication is good and has positive effect, and to further suggest that there should not be a restriction or preference to flock towards one group of organisers. By presenting at different countries under different organisers' banners, universities and academics gain wide visibility internationally. It is recommended that restricting conference attendance to western or certain parts of Europe is removed and instead to explore wider areas to promote research work and to

⁷ <https://www.anzam.org/publications/surveys/>

find collaborators in countries that can benefit from Australian collaboration. It would be a two way learning and teaching experience like Carnation does, working with poor countries.

➤ **Reorganisation and cutbacks**

This study showed that the removal of administrative support is a reflection of poor talent management by the university. Ironically, cost-cutting actions are not cost effective. When academics get involved in out-of-job scope areas, it limits the time and attention that they have available to invest in research or teaching. Furthermore, being time-pressured may unintentionally be manifested in poor service to students, resulting in student dissatisfaction as was the case as reported by (Chawla & Kevin 2004). Academics have repeatedly conveyed the message that administrative work is purposeless, further implying that their time is better spent elsewhere, and that is a valid point. It is important that the university management team value academics' time, in and out of the work place

➤ **Autonomy at work**

Academics who have been in academia over a ten year period or longer are aware of and sensitive to their loss of autonomy in carrying out their work as academics. Introduction of controls such as uninformed class observation and requiring reports on work done, impinges their sense of self-esteem and work satisfaction which affects work meaningfulness.

It seems odd that academics are recruited and selected on the basis of being a specialist in their subject area, to 'train' the future generation yet are not valued enough to be in charge of their task or be consulted over decisions that could alter their future. It gives a mixed signal, that the academics' knowledge and skill sets are only good for teaching but not for the real world, whereas academics are training students for the real world. A warning here to the university management team that students may be able to see these double standards as well, and thus lose confidence in the university.

➤ **Feedback-appreciation**

This research revealed that only two informants received positive feedback from a member of the management team directly, while others referred to the usual performance appraisal feedback which has already been highlighted as flawed, purposeless and in fact demotivating. Surprisingly, some informants interpreted management's silence and still having

a position at the university as management appreciation of their work. This reduces the management team to being the bearers of bad news who only come around to tap the shoulders of the staff that are being retrenched, which is drastically different from the corporate world.

Furthermore, the media constantly highlights that in the corporate world, entrepreneurs like Tony Fernandez of Air Asia and Richard Branson of Virgin Airlines emphasise the importance of appreciating employees through public acknowledgment and appreciation of their employees. While the management team of the university are trying to emulate a business model, they however have failed to emulate motivational actions taken by corporations. Showing lack of appreciation is totally unbecoming of a university that is training a future generation. There is no dearth of literature highlighting the importance of feedback such as the finding that feedback improves performance by Silverman, Pogson and Cober (2005) and that feedback can be used to highlight common success according to Cannon and Witherspoon (2005). It could be because maybe a few university management teams treat the work environment as a *disposal workplace* (Drago 1996) that it would seem most inappropriate to appreciate the staff. It is timely to highlight, just as a rolling stone will not gather moss, a disposal workplace will not gather human capital. That is detrimental as the organisation is only as good as its employees and in the university, that refers to the academics.

➤ **Job fit**

This study found that in universities that have undergone major reorganisation, be it internal, structural or strategic or due to government policies, the research-only academics or research fellows such as Daffodil and Blue Cornflower were least affected in terms of job fit. The reason was that research-active academics are usually working on special projects taken up by the university, or the academics have aligned their research work with government funding. This may not always be meaningful work.

For those involved in tutoring and lecturing, teaching expectations have changed such that these academics are expected to pass students who ordinarily they would not. Furthermore, the classroom has become bigger, with a wider spread between the ‘university ready’ and ‘the not ready’, all seated in one classroom under the care of one lecturer. It was evident that for academics in this situation, there was a feeling of powerlessness, being at the ‘mercy’ of students, that is impacting on work meaningfulness. A few negative outcomes from work not being meaningful can be anticipated; academics willingly reorganising themselves, such as

going part time or choosing to be sessional staff. Another more serious negative effect could be that academics may decide to treat the classroom as a ‘ticking attendance’ exercise for themselves by lowering their standards to meet students’ (customers) expectations, being popular with the students and keeping them happy. Although collectively these negative outcomes may keep all parties happy in the short term, in the long term, low quality education outcomes will not sustain the organisation’s life cycle.

There seems to be a lack of planning when universities undergo reorganisation. As Carnation pointed out, there is little to no purpose for a Professor or Associate Professor to give a talk at a university’s open day, which is fair comment as this should be done by the management team members such as the VC or someone heading the education group.

➤ **Changed work relationships**

It was found that the implementation of a business model and running a university as a business entity (minus the business style performance management system) have impacted on the work relationships, consistent with the findings of Jongbloed and Vossensteyn (2001). Daisy stated that work stress resulted in less communication among academics, Alba noted high competition among colleagues and Lily noted less congeniality and trust. Scholars such as Currie (1996) have already anticipated that when a university puts itself in a *market* environment, these negative outcomes will invade the university work environment. It is also important to note that competition among staff, which is strongly encouraged in industry, should not be emulated in a university environment. University being a place to educate and train future workforces or generations should not introduce negative competition. Above all, perhaps what would not have been anticipated is that, academics being a community of resilient people, they will form out of the university collaborations for personal gains independent of the organisation.

Even if all of this has already been pre-empted by the university management team, it is probable that perhaps the universities have not yet seen themselves as customers to their employees. The result will be the same as giving students what they want; there will be loss of quality and, eventually, a collapse of that university if more academics are unhappy.

➤ **Change in cohort**

The introduction of commercialisation and massification has resulted in a change in student cohort. Carnation and Gardenia are of the opinion that local students now feel that they are entitled to pass. They probably interpret being able to enter a university although not qualified as that university is interested in just money and therefore they can bully their way through for certification, and this situation disturbs many academics.

Academics are also upset and disturbed that the international students are struggling due to lack of English proficiency. Gardenia even feels that the scores that are currently used to take students in are not compatible for a specialised course or post graduate study. At the point of this thesis being written up, Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham, the Australian Minister of Education and Training, announced that the government is making some changes to the English language requirement for foreign students who want to study in Australia. However, the requirement will not be imposed on refugees who are increasing in population and are attempting to pursue higher education.

Academics have also pointed out that there should be more discernment about which courses can be offered to international students because some specialisations require knowledge of local practice such as Accounting and Law which currently is not part of the curriculum.

It can be anticipated that eventually lowering standards may impact the reputation of education locally and its standing worldwide. There are already reports on the decline of standards in primary schools. In March this year, ABC news reported that year six students are slipping behind the rest of the world in maths and science. If the education standard is continuously lowered to match the students' performance instead of raising the bar, it is an encouragement for students to perform poorly. This will impact their employability as companies will not be willing to hire local graduates, requiring the import of foreign skills which will then result in social problems.

In the following section how academics have managed their work changes is discussed.

5.1.2. The way academics managed their sense of work

This study showed that to informants who had ten years or less length of service as academics, work was a means, role or a place to go to, meeting an external need. Those who

have been academics longer than ten years, have remained as academics because it fulfilled a deep internal need, a need to be in a place to be able to teach or publish. The senior academics have found ways to make their work meaningful.

➤ **Doing the required task or work to get promoted**

Academics at higher levels preferred research over teaching. It also seemed that those that preferred research over teaching have fulfilled all the requirements necessary for promotion to move away from teaching. It was manifested verbally with a sigh of relief from Carnation and Gardenia that they no longer had to deal with big classes now that they are at this level. This may have reinstated their sense of work meaningfulness that may have been lost.

➤ **Finding a *niche***

A few academics who managed to find their *niche* or align their work with their university's interest are happier and work is meaningful. There are others who have chosen to move to the managerial path within the university to experience their sense of work meaningfulness.

➤ **Managing stress**

Narayanan, Menon and Spector (1999) were right in stating that academics encounter stress like other professionals, but certainly their stress is unique in that it is different from that experienced by professionals in the industry such as nurses. However, these academics have also been shown to be resilient people as Kinman (2008) pointed out, and a few of these informants have found a way to work with the system, some have found a way to make the system work for them and some have decided to be sessional or part time to concentrate on areas that they feel content to deal with.

Daffodil, while acknowledging that stress is always present, admitted that if it got to a point that it was affecting health or other areas of life, it would be time to leave the organisation. This is the option that Daisy had to take. Daisy felt that the work stress could not be resolved at the time of this interview, causing mind and health problems, and therefore chose the separation scheme.

So somehow, these academics, being the source of knowledge/human capital as they are, have found ways to adapt. It seems at this point that maybe the scale is tipped towards work as meaning instead of meaningful.

The findings from the interviews are updated in the Health Belief Model (Nutbeam & Harris 1995) on the next page.

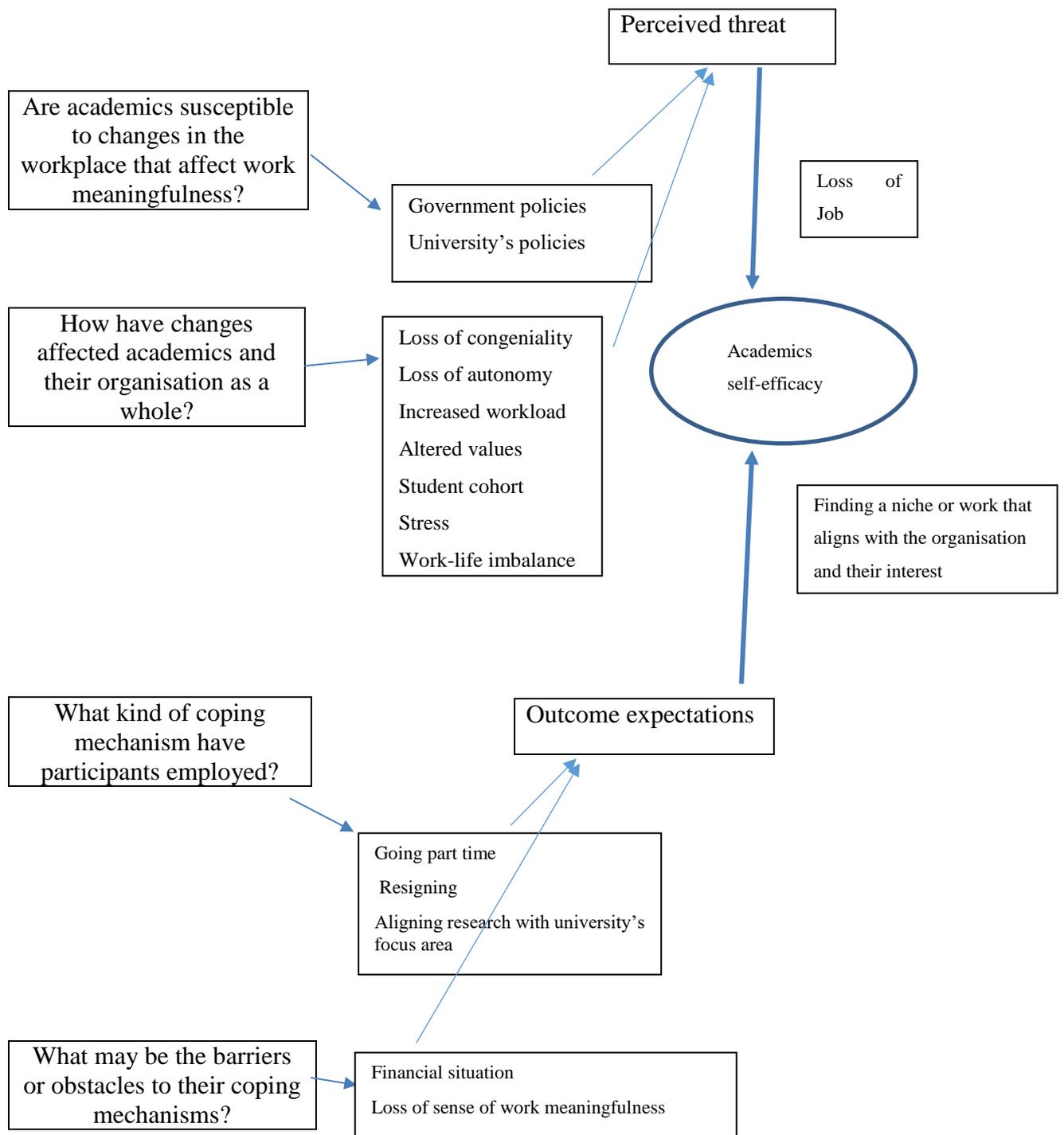


Figure 4: Findings

Chapter 6

Implications and Recommendations, Future Directions and Conclusion

6. Introduction

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore work meaningfulness among academics. In order to explore this phenomenon, interviews were conducted with practicing academics from several Australian universities and the findings reported in Chapter 5.

In this final chapter, the implications of the study and the recommendations for change, based on the empirical findings, are presented. In addition, this chapter reiterates the justification for this study and highlights the practical insights and knowledge contributions this study has provided. A discussion for future research and the researcher's personal experience pursuing this degree is also included.

6.1. Justification of the study

This study had three major objectives. The first was to investigate what aspects of academics' work were seen to be meaningful in the opinion of the interviewees. The answer to that depended on whether the academics were oriented towards research or towards teaching. Academics whose sense of work meaningfulness came from teaching had difficulty accepting the emphasis on research. These academics felt that engagement with research did nothing to help their students in any way. At the same time, they were further impacted with large classes and a diverse range of students, situations which arose due to the growing commercialisation and massification policy. It seems that their negative feelings arose from them not being able to provide appropriate support to needy students, whilst being bullied by other students who are not so much focussed on getting proper education, but instead are there just to get a qualification. Academics who defined themselves in terms of their teaching are also being impacted by inappropriate student evaluations that are being used for simplistic performance appraisal. The majority of the academics who teach said that this form of evaluation served no purpose as a feedback mechanism, and it certainly did not promote work meaningfulness –

rather it had a negative impact. Of interest was that this issue was also felt to be inappropriate by those staff who prefer research to teaching.

Academics who prefer the research stream often chose this avenue in order that they would be able to pursue an area of knowledge generation and interest that was meaningful to them. However, that route is now being threatened, as research areas are being decided by levels of available funding, and furthermore career building is also dependent on whether the research outcomes can be published in high ranked journals. Academics who want to be research active stated that they would like to be able to make an impact in the field of their choice, and they attested that publishing in high ranked journals will never make any practical impact because practitioners outside academia do not know of, or read, these high ranked journals, as pointed out by Adler and Harzing (2009). As a consequence, these academics who want to make practical and real-world impacts are battling with the issue of attaining work meaningfulness.

A complicating reason for this conundrum arises because *perks* that are given as rewards for publishing in high ranked journals do not necessarily satisfy academics' intrinsic motivation. As Orchid pointed out, monetary compensation is linked to high publishing outcomes, and money is clearly important for academics to be able to live a decent life in this economy where costs keep rising. It seems from the responses gathered that not surprisingly academics are being torn between these two extremes. They are willing to disregard the need to satisfy their intrinsic motivation and instead work for the additional *perks* and possible monetary increases, because they feel that non-recognition of their chosen work is affecting their sense of accomplishment and feelings of worth. This confirms what Ryan and Deci (2000) theorise; that intrinsic motivation can easily be disrupted in a non-supportive environment. The domino effect that will arise from being driven by external motivators is inferior work quality given that Amabile (1988) has noted that work output flamed by intrinsic motivation is superior that that flamed by external motivators.

The informants seemed to imply that the current policies implemented by their organisations have the potential to turn work meaningfulness into just work for money. It is quite possible that, for many of the informants, work is now not meaningful but has been pragmatically turned into a source of income, or a promotions network in a place with like-minded people.

The next objective was to find out what fundamental individual and organisational factors influenced a sense of work meaningfulness. In essence, this was a question of what were the synergies and differences between academics who work at different levels in different universities. It became clear that, generally, when management appreciated the work academics produced, there was pride, happiness and motivation to perform better. Also, it appeared that networking outside of their daily work environment, such as attending conferences and professional development, made academics feel that the organisation cared for their personal growth and wellbeing. Interestingly, when managers gave specific attention to personal and professional development, or a note of appreciation which might include a simple complimentary acknowledgement regarding work done, it left a long-lasting feel-good situation. It was also evident that, conversely, management's fixated focus on money, shown through cuts and restrictions together with revenue raising, impeded the sense of work meaningfulness for those who were active and committed academics, with a few academics feeling betrayed and let down. It seems that the restructuring has resulted in some academics suffering financial stress or left feeling disrespected or undervalued, resulting in these affected academics being unable to perform at optimum (Gappa & Austin 2010; Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski 2010).

The final objective was to understand how academics perceived the meaningfulness of their work, and how this affected students' learning experiences within the broader impact of the university. It seems that the majority of the informants were not able to associate any element of their own sense of work meaningfulness to students' learning outcomes. Many of the respondents felt that the students were not at the universities for the traditional reasons such as knowledge and skills upgrade. As indicated by Carnation and Alba, informants often felt that the students were there to simply obtain a piece of paper or qualification by any means they could. This resulted in a few academics such as Gardenia and Daisy feeling that being a 'traditional' academic is no longer valued and while a minority of the informants said that the university environment is still appropriate, the majority of them stated that they are not sure what will happen, giving a strong hint that pursuing the current path may not be good for the university. In the next section, the implications of eroding work meaningfulness are discussed in detail under the aegis of three main categories; organisational goal, performance management system and role management.

6.2. Organisational goal

The introduction of a business model in an education environment has been interpreted by interviewees as the university being derailed from its proper purpose and focus. Academics have commented that education and learning are no longer the key foci of the organisation, but instead have been replaced by a fixation on money flows. Reasons for these comments and perspectives are discussed below, and recommendations relevant to this problem are also provided.

6.2.1. The overworked lecturer

There are a few consequences arising from the perceived situation of lecturers being unfairly overworked that were illuminated through the interviews. In particular, academics who are keen to work both on research and publication do not have enough time to pursue both areas and do either justice. Indeed, comments were that teaching alone takes up the majority of academics' time due to large classes. Furthermore there are additional demands on lecturers' time to carry out additional administrative duties. This perception of an overworked and imbalanced work environment resulting in poor work quality, has affected work meaningfulness, and, for two of the informants, this has led to mental health issues.

A few of the informants have the option of retiring. Given the insecure employment environment with the universities, it may be that quality replacements may be scarce and/or temporary. The implications may be that some courses may become unavailable to students due to a shortage in staff. Young graduates may opt to seek employment in countries with a strong Professor Oriented System (Shin & Jung 2013) where the investment into qualification is respected and appropriately rewarded. Academic short supply is not an improbable situation; to the contrary Al-Sharaf (2006) found that overworked and underpaid teachers in Kuwait left their profession, creating a shortage in teachers.

On the basis of these comments, recommendations regarding strategies to reduce the burden of teaching administration and assessment would be welcomed by the informants. If the university management teams were to introduce supportive and user-friendly technology and modern learning technologies into the classroom, this would remove the necessity for big lecture halls, and a modern learning team approach could modify high student-to-lecturer ratios. This approach is suggested by taking into consideration the feedback from the informants. Tulip mentioned that the new generation of students are not willing to just 'sit and

listen', whilst Wattle was able to differentiate the level of accomplishment felt in a highly technology-driven organisation versus organisations that did not have such modern technological teaching facilities. The younger generation are tech savvy and respond better to technology and modern teaching methods such as interactive workshops. This does not mean to simply recourse to YouTube, amateur production web-sites or the use of pre-prepared slides or total online teaching, but suggests the use of technology to streamline automated assessment and meaningful group works. Automated assessments are not just helpful to lecturers in terms of reduction in time spent in marking, but will also be appealing to the younger generation as they will get their instant gratification through immediate results. Even if results are not immediate, typing a timed bound assignment online will be far more palatable to the new generation than writing in a class assessment mode.

Workshop style classrooms, with hands-on learning, be it developing a report or solving problems and presenting the solutions, can be used to train students to work in groups. This will help to put aside cultural barriers and encourage everyone in the team to strive for good results. This should be implemented with strict integrated grouping requirements at the beginning of their programme. This will help when the students go out to work in an integrated workforce, which in many areas is the future of a workplace.

6.2.2. Inferior level graduates

In a business model, students are redefined as customers. In a business world, it is implied that the organisation meets the customer's demands, so if students are being treated as customers, and they work under this mind-set, then it is not unlikely that standards will have to be lowered to meet the 'client' students' demands. Based on the interviews, it seemed that the new cohort of students often are not seen to be qualified to be in a university level program. Academics take their role as educators seriously, and this has created a situation of tension between professional standards and client expectations which is similar to the studies done on nurses (see Aiken et al. 2012). During the interview Tulip stated that lecturers have continually pointed out that they have a moral obligation to maintain educational standards, and to be driven to ignore their inner need to do the right thing will affect academics' sense of work meaningfulness. As highlighted by Aiken et al. (2012), ignoring employees' sense of work meaningfulness, will have an important (negative) implications on organisational outcomes.

The implementation of bridging courses, as suggested by Gardenia and Daisy, would be a move to correct the intake of under-qualified students. Allowing students who would

normally fail to pass will eventually affect the reputation of the university. Having said this, the tension again arises with workload issues, since meaningful bridging programs require significant staff teaching input at a time when space to carry out research is being eroded.

Interviewees' comments also seem to recommend a stricter higher education policy. For example, Carnation, Iris and Gardenia spoke of the current behaviour of student cohorts, and this was inclusive of domestic students. While Carnation and Gardenia were troubled by the current cohort's demands to be spoon fed and their demands to pass, Iris pointed out the phenomenon of students' reluctance to purchase academic textbooks: a basic requirement for learning. These attitudes of students have significant implications on the institute. If students are able to bully lecturers into spoon-feeding them, or awarding them passes for substandard work, then there is no value to the certificate. Interviewees implied that awards should only be presented to deserving students who have worked and demonstrated the ability to grasp the basics of formal education. This includes the purchasing, or at least borrowing of textbooks, to understand the foundations of courses, to be physically present in classrooms, and to be engaged in group work and assignments to demonstrate the ability to apply their knowledge obtained to real world situations.

While the more open system of universities is doing students a favour by giving them an opportunity that was traditionally denied to them, as correctly pointed out by Tulip, it is worth mentioning here that academics should not feel threatened as long as they are properly performing the work that they had been contracted for. The purpose of producing graduates must be reassessed to ensure that the right kind of graduates are produced to avoid having high numbers of unemployed graduates.

It is evident that the reputation of a university has an implication on some academics' sense of pride, as clearly mentioned by Lily and Gardenia. They are from Go8 universities, and refer to themselves as being lucky to belong to their current organisation. However, not everyone wants to work in Go8, like Iris for instance, who felt that working in a Go8 would be too stressful mainly due to where and what to publish. So there are academics whose work meaningfulness is not related to external motivation such as a university's rank in the league tables, but rather being able to pursue research in fields of interest and relevance. Therefore it is suggested that non-Go8 universities should take more advantage of academics' dedication and meaningful contributions, and thereby create their own reputation. However, it should be understood that this should not be seen as a brand of *easy* education but rather as *quality* and

purposeful learning, meeting the needs of academics and students together. Such a system would allow the academics to pursue their interest area, and bring that knowledge into the classroom. This is where the future sales (the term commonly used in the corporate world to refer to repeat customers and referrals) should ideally come from.

The present Australian education minister is currently proposing new formal measures for English testing for foreign students to pass prior to being accepted into the university (Renaldi & Xiaoning 2018). Bearing in mind that Australia is a popular refugee and migrant destination, the English course should be implemented for every student wanting to enrol in a university. Grevillea pointed out that some who are considered locals also did not have a good grasp of the English language. Furthermore it is recommended that if such a test is implemented that it should be automated to give the test-takers the confidence that the results have not been tampered with, an implication made by some interviewees such as Daisy, and that may increase acceptance of the standard by the university community.

6.2.3. Narrow definition of responsibility and accountability

It seems that university administrators have defined responsibility and accountability in accounting terms; revenue-profit-loss. It started with the vice-chancellor now taking on the role of a CEO (James 2000) and a drive to employ industry employees into the university administration presumably to run a business model within the university context. One example in particular is Tulip who came from a banking background, and suggested that academics should be treated as sales personnel to keep their employment, citing that as a motivation. It became clear that this informant not only lacked knowledge of how to apply the past work experience into a different environment, but that there was lack of understanding about what an academic's purpose and role is in a university.

Instead of treating students as dollars and academics as costs, the university administrators should be responsible and accountable in providing good professional development to their academics to avoid a situation in which the students are more skilful than the academics. Gardenia shared an example of how students were always prioritised for training in a mathematical computation programme and academics were never given the opportunity to attend. It could be costly and perhaps even a waste of time to try to run one for the academics given their hectic schedule, so it seems a better option for interested academics to be able to participate in an already running programme. It is a training that clearly has use in research and could also be used to teach students. It amplifies the narrow mindedness of the

university's management team. How will it benefit the university if the students know more about research tools than their lecturers, some of whom may become their supervisors? It should be the responsibility of the university administrators to ensure that academics have the same opportunity to learn a new programme that they deem as important.

Administrators should realise that accountability in a university context means providing quality education which entails ongoing professional development of the academics. Furthermore, it should be the responsibility of the university administrators to ensure that the hygiene factors (as in Herzberg's two factor theory) are provided for the academics so that their academics focus is not affected worrying about their wellbeing or professional capability.

6.2.4. Lost values

Universities in the past have played a major role in developing a knowledge society, to contribute positively to the economy (De Boer & File 2008), and also in creating a developed nation (Varghese 2009)(Varghese 2009). As mentioned in the opening section, there is an outcry from the interviewees that universities have been derailed from their original focus, and now are profit oriented. By stating this, the informants are not blaming the universities for accepting students with low ATAR scores or accepting international students with poor proficiency in English in order to increase revenue, but rather because there seems to be no initiative taken on the part of the university to run meaningful bridging programs to upgrade these students. Gardenia and Daisy, the former from a Go8 and the latter from a lower ranked university, both were concerned on this point. It is troubling for dedicated academics to see that pass rates are being lowered to enable these students to graduate, stating that they are selling *false hopes*, while simultaneously eroding any residual work meaningfulness for the informants.

A similar situation is happening with research and publications. The original purpose of research was to extend knowledge in a field, an attraction to Orchid and Blue Cornflower but now universities are aggressively pushing academics to publish in high ranked journals that may improve the university's and the academic's ranking but as Adler and Harzing (2009) point out, it does very little in the form of knowledge contribution. It was implied by the respondents that by universities aligning rewards only to research that attracts grants and publications in high ranked journals, it further strengthens the off-course direction that research and publication has stumbled into. Indeed, staying within mainstream publications, particularly in business research, is not in touch with reality (Hopwood 2008). In this respect, ranking is

not the only way to be visible. Many respondents are unhappy with the ranking system, such as Gardenia for example, who highlighted that it does not reflect student achievement or satisfaction. It was noted that as long as there is a public demand for education, universities' management teams should look at alternate ways to improve their image in this area with quality programs.

A possible implication of these responses is that a 'modified talent management' system is needed. This would consist of two sets of publishing pools, formed from lecturers who are multi-disciplinary. One pool, containing membership of lecturers who are focused on a scholarly career, would target the high ranked journals and competitive external grants for the university as a whole, whilst another group of lecturers would publish in practitioner journals and pursue short-term and pressing business needs. It is recommended that publishing is done with the students whom the informants supervise. A student should be allocated one supervisor from each research pool when a student is accepted into a research degree course. This is in line with the stand that publishing should not be just the remit of a restricted group of academics in the university; there should be real benefits flowing to students who are pursuing a meaningful research program. The students will thus be rewarded with the opportunities for two types of publications as a result of pursuing their research program.

Lily pointed out that academics came into academia, research or tertiary education because they thought they were in areas which had high and worthwhile values and that might be pursued or retained, but, sharing some frustration said, *you feel as if your identity, or your commitment as an academic has been subjugated or downgraded basically by the more dominant commercial principles that the whole institution is following*. It is recommended that the university administrators should take actions to make the work environment suitable for pursuing and promoting quality education.

It was also thought that commercialisation, per se, should not result in negative branding for the university. Commercialisation should result in students choosing a university for its employability record and the quality and experience of its academic team. Dahlia pointed out that in this competitive environment that universities are now operating, students have more choices to choose from. Therefore it is important to make this information available or transparent to capture the student market earlier than at open day. As Carnation pointed out, students have already made up their minds prior to attending open day. According to Ball (1993), organisations should protect their customers through competitive productions in the

market buttressed by legal safeguards, failing which it would be just serving the short term interest of its organisation and its stakeholders. In the case of many universities, their actions are neither safeguarding academics nor students, whom most often are not considered as stakeholders.

It was also evident that much of the frustration and confusion among academics could be removed through proper performance management system.

6.2.5. Perceived inferior quality of education

Rising cost of living and a low employment rate are two major negative factors that can have an unfavourable impact on the country's economy. Grevillea mentioned that employers are aware that overseas students are making Australia their education destination to be able to migrate into Australia. Grevillea further stated that employers are also aware that more and more unqualified students are graduating. The implication from this is not just that Australia ends up with high numbers of unemployable graduates but it also means less influx of quality foreign students and more Australian students seeking overseas higher education, in countries perceived to have superior quality of education.

The opportunity of overseas employment for academics and Australian students pursuing higher education overseas will have a negative impact to a few Australian universities, especially those universities that have low international rank. Rose and Tulip mentioned that their universities needed the money from the students, local and overseas. That is not the contention, but this is where the customer service comes in, which is to provide student with quality education that they have paid for.

Most often, when a customer purchases a product, there is some form of recourse for faulty or incompatible products where the store will either repair or replace the product with no additional cost to the customer. Applying that customer service concept into a university context, the university administrators should implement proper transparent intervention. The reason it has to be transparent is to ensure that students or parents do not assume that it is a move to make more money out of the students. Agreeing with Daisy and Gardenia it is recommended that there should be compulsory bridging courses but they should be offered as a free service to students without additional cost as the students have already paid and been accepted into the programme. Although pricing is important as a revenue driver the university

management should be aware of the negative consequence of unjustifiable fee increases, as Iris pointed out.

6.3. Performance management

An effective performance management system sets out guidelines on managing key human resources effectively. Aguinis (2009) has detailed information on the importance of performance management, emphasising reward and recognition purposes, accountability, and being transparent. These are some major areas that needs to be carefully attended to, to ensure that academics trust their organisations. Here we are reminded of Daisy and Gardenia, who shared strong distrust of their organisations, and Iris, who showed great fear to share or voice opinions. It is common knowledge that not all activities are measurable, but Aquinis has provided guidelines of how to manage the ‘grey’ areas as well. It is important to highlight here that information on performance management is amply available so therefore it raises concerns that the human resource departments of the universities seem to not have taken steps to implement a good system. There are possibly two (2) reasons, the cost cutting measures have resulted in underqualified staff in the HR department or, as explained by Alba and Camelia, it could be pointless for the HR team to make any proposals as the management team will just pretend to take these proposals on board but make their own decisions for their own purpose. Ideally a qualified management team will realise that those who work the floor will have more knowledge and information than those who are managing from the top level. In this instance, it is appropriate to point out that Tulip placed the wrong group of people in the *ivory tower*, it is not the academics but the management team that seem to be the occupants there. The overall impact of bad human resource management decision-making impacts academics’ sense of work meaningfulness and, as mentioned earlier, impacts their productivity and damages the overall organisation’s performance. With these evaluations in mind, below are some recommendation for improvement in terms of HR management.

6.3.1. Research rewards and management

It was noted that most academics had research flexibility at the beginning of their university career. Orchid, Tulip, Iris and Blue Cornflower indicated that freedom to research in a particular area of interest was their drawcard to academia. However, they have lost this freedom due to restrictions such as demands to research and publish in specific areas by the university in response to government policies. Regrettably, this also extends to types of

research. Blue Cornflower explained that an acquaintance at a conference stated that ‘it was a pity’ that Blue Cornflower conducted qualitative research, since it would not be sustainable in the future due to its lack of recognition and support. At first and surprisingly, this seemed to be the narrow mindedness of an academic who does not favor or support new methods. It also seemed to indicate that since quantitative research methods have been more rigorously pursued and published, the interest to learn new information is overshadowed. But then again, it can also be justified that it was honest advice to go where the money is, not realising that people are motivated differently. Lack of this realisation could also apply to the management team. It could be due to lack of initiative or knowledge that more and more universities are mimicking universities that are seen as successful instead of making their own mark in the market.

Reiterating the responses from the informants it is suggested that universities might consider rewarding research and publications fairly for all. Although their research may not be in line with government funding, universities must realise that impact and relatability to industry, when academics passionately work in an area of research, will improve a university’s visibility and community impact. Wherever the research is published, when it reaches its audience, it may be cited or used for future networking projects. Either way, that research has a place, and since research is flamed by intrinsic motivation (Amabile 1988), it will be research of good quality.

6.3.2. Promotion

Academic promotions are limited to research-stream academics, and even that is not without its limitations as Carnation pointed out, with some frustration. Academics who seek promotion prospects have to move away from main stream teaching and research, and accept managerial positions. This could mean that the academics are choosing means (salary) over work meaningfulness which will be a disadvantage to the university. As such it is recommended that promotion pathways to associate professor and professor to be redefined to make these positions achievable to both streams.

6.4. Role management

The dividing line between academic work and non-academic work seems to be blurring in university settings. Interviewees implied that it is unbecoming for a university to not have clear job descriptions dividing academic and non-academic work, for the reason that this is a place for educating and training a future generation. The blurred lines create unnecessary stress,

as academics have to juggle their academic work and that work which is not related to being an academic, since, as mentioned by Orchid, *there is only finite time to get things done*. It is suggested that if university administrators evaluated the ‘why’ (Davis et al. 2015) of making academics be involved in non-academic activities, the reasons they would come up with would be dollar related and that should be a strong indication that they have derailed, because they have compromised the quality of their education for profit. However, this is not to say that academics should not take on non-academic roles. That would be stifling an academic’s progression in some ways, therefore it should be a choice and it should be followed with good training, and maybe even through mentoring.

Peet et al. (2010) highlighted the importance of adequate knowledge transfer for someone who is moving from an academic job into an administrative position, using fund raising activities as an example. Peet et al. found that there was no knowledge transfer from the person currently assigned with this responsibility to the one who will be handling it in the future. Choosing a portfolio and being given the correct training for it will have a positive impact on their sense of work meaningfulness, which as scholars have shown will somehow be manifested to the stakeholders.

It was also implied by informants that instead of asking lecturers, professors or associate professors to carry out the marketing functions on open day, it should come under the purview of the management and marketing team, and the university should hire the correct personnel with the correct experience to manage the job effectively and efficiently. Although agreeing that open day activities should come under the purview of the marketing department, a further suggestion is that the marketing department should extend the learning experience of marketing students by employing them to carry out these functions. It will add value to the students’ education.

6.5. Conclusion to implications and recommendations to university

Overall this study shows that a corporatised model for the university will not necessarily be a threat to an academic’s sense of meaningfulness if it is structured to meet the demands of academics and the university’s bottom line. However, the danger of too stringent a structure is detrimental, note De Boer and File (2008), referring to a situation when education was highly regulated, and did not provide a thinking society or improvement to the economy of a country. An alert to Tulip’s outlook, *I enjoy strategy, I enjoy determining the future of the organisation by helping with direction, and as you’re moving those human resources around the chess*

board, to meet organisational needs..., which are comments relating to an upcoming powerful position that may not improve the university but have a negative consequence. This is because academics look at student outcomes in terms of knowledge shared or transferred, and that is what meaningful work is to them and not the bottom line (*labelled as management speak in university*). The role of *educator* has been a dignified and respected role so it must be maintained in the same form to protect the quality of education.

It is also crucial to understand that performance management is not an instrument to abuse employees, it should have understood measures for every required outcome (Aguinis 2009). It is important to manage the process professionally without making anyone, in Gardenia's words ... *feel quite alienated... And I have been here long enough to see that shift and feel betrayed by the university*. This is an indication that work meaningfulness is slowly, but surely, eroding.

It is with strong conviction that it is recommended that the implementation of at least some of these recommendations will see improvement in the quality of education, and that lecturers, professors and associate professors will improve the overall image of the university. It is important to have a management team or administrators that have the qualifications, not just in terms of education degrees, but also the experience and understanding of the role of an education institute to make a university work properly. Acknowledging that financial constraints may impede the implementation of this recommendation, if this is well managed, it is certain that the negative financial implications can be reversed after a period of time.

6.6. Knowledge contribution

Based on the literature review on work meaningfulness it became clear that while work meaningfulness has been actively researched as mentioned in Chapter 1, this has not gone far enough. It is important to reiterate that the findings from studies relating to work meaningfulness and improved organisational performance are a strong indication that work meaningfulness among academics is an important study that will have positive and practical implications. This is particularly given that there have been many reorganisations and cutbacks at various universities at different ranks which not only have the potential of affecting academics' sense of work meaningfulness, it is also damaging to a university's reputation and student numbers.

In this study, the foundation work was taken from studies unrelated to academia, as it was the best starting point given the paucity of research into work meaningfulness among academics. This availed an opportunity for the current study to contribute some new information.

While there were similarities such as (i) work having to be in synergy with personal values and beliefs, (ii) having enough room for professional development, and (iii) having autonomy and a role in decision making, university management should be careful to not create an environment that disrupts team synergy. This study found that unlike employees working at a management level or office environment where competition is assumed to be *normal*, academics were not comfortable to be in a competitive environment. The academic profession has been about collaboration and team achievement, so when a business model with its market forces was introduced, perhaps even university's management team would have been unprepared and surprised to find that the breaking down of collegiality disrupted rather than promoted a productive organisational outcome resulting in further cuts.

This current research has illuminated the values and beliefs of academics being profoundly different from other professions. It is important to academics to be able to share knowledge and see the impact of their work, since it is felt that this it is a testimony to their hard work.

Promotion for academics is more about status than monetary benefits, which is understandable when they see themselves as a community of scholars. Therefore, it is important that they are consulted and heard as specialists in their area of interest. It is important that they are included in decision making because any decision that is made affects them, therefore they will not jeopardise their own reputation by giving bad feedback. It is recommended that the university management teams make their universities a strong Professor-Oriented System (POS) (Shin & Jung 2013) where academics have a strong influence and are respected so as to reinstate work meaningfulness for academics for the overall benefit of the university.

6.7. Practical contribution

The role of education has always been to improve the industrial, social and human development of the country (Varghese 2009). The findings of this study have confirmed that academics take this role seriously, and strive to live up to fulfilling the requirements of that

role. It is worth repeating this comment, loud and clear, from Gardenia; *I think if our core mission, to use their language is to teach and do research and communicate that research to our academic peers, to our community, to the public, to the government, to students then that's where the resources should go. Not in marketing us, not in redesigning the bloody travel portal or whatever...*

The recommendations provided above are practical ways that universities can improve organisational effectiveness. Through this study, the management teams have a useful blueprint to create a work environment that is appealing and promotes a sense of being valued which will likely positively influence the reputation of the university.

6.8.Limitations and future direction

Due to time and financial constraints, the informants were limited in numbers, but despite this limitation, the information obtained was rich and insightful. However it is also recognised that it cannot be generalised to the entire academic community. For this study to be generalisable, a wider replication and repetition of this study would be necessary.

Furthermore, this is the first study known to be carried out on work meaningfulness among academics that has looked at the large number of factors identified from prior studies of other industries and applied them to a group of academics. Based on this finding, a quantitative study with a larger group of participants could strengthen the outcomes of this study.

Notwithstanding the limitations, this study has provided useful academic and practical contributions and benefits.

6.9.Conclusion

Universities globally and in Australia have been constantly undergoing changes. The latest policy moving the role of universities from a traditional humanistic model to a highly technicist model where education is seen as a 'producer of goods and services' (Zajda 2013, p. 236) has resulted in an eroding of traditional values of Higher Education. The situation has worsened with a series of reorganisations and retrenchments. Academics have for a long time been used to tenured employment; now with the change to a business model they are redesignated to contract employment which, according to Gappa and Austin (2010), has

resulted in job insecurity turning into the highest stressor among Australian academics which has now eroded work meaningfulness. This study has provided information on how to reinstate academics' sense of work meaningfulness that this research has proved is lost in some or eroding in others due to constant changes.

6.10. Researcher's personal reflection

This study was enriching in terms of personal and professional growth. Due to this study, the researcher had the opportunity to interact with a group of strong and dedicated academics, reinforcing trust in the profession. Although the researcher has some years of experience as an academic, it was a privilege and a learning experience to be exposed to the challenges of academics in a different nation and culture. Professionally, the most fulfilling professional development was the opportunity to present at an international conference alongside learned highly qualified educators. Presenting at this international conference made personal the positive experience that informants shared on conference attendance and networking.

Chapter 7

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Appendices

Appendix A

RE: Feedback on Candidature Presentation Amendment

Tina Jeggo <Tina.Jeggo@vu.edu.au>

Mon 15/08/2016 10:14 AM

To: Joanna Claire Miranda <joanna.miranda@live.vu.edu.au>;

cc: Elisabeth Wilson-Evered <Elisabeth.Wilson-Evered@vu.edu.au>; Sian Ellett <Sian.Ellett@vu.edu.au>;

Dear Joanna,

Your application for candidature was approved late last week. Sian will send through the formal confirmation when she is back in the office tomorrow.

Kind regards,
Tina

Application for Candidature - Joanna Miranda

Sian Ellett <Sian.Ellett@vu.edu.au>

Tue 16/08/2016 11:58 AM

To: Joanna Claire Miranda <joanna.miranda@live.vu.edu.au>;

Cc: Elisabeth Wilson-Evered <Elisabeth.Wilson-Evered@vu.edu.au>; Joanne Pyke <Joanne.Pyke@vu.edu.au>;

Dear Joanna,

I am writing to confirm that the Acting Director (Research and Research Training), College of Business has approved your application for candidature:

Thesis Title: Exploring Academics' Perception of Work Meaningfulness
Principal Supervisor: Professor Elisabeth Wilson-Evered
Associate Supervisor: Dr Joanne Pyke
Expected completion: 24 July 2017

Congratulations Joanna. If you have any questions in relation to the above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards,

Sian Ellett
Senior Officer – College Support
Graduate Research Centre
Office Hours – Tuesday and Friday
Victoria University
phone: 9919 5479

CRICOS Provider No. 00124K (Melbourne)



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Appendix B

Quest Ethics Notification - Application Process Finalised - Application Approved

quest.noreply@vu.edu.au

Mon 12/12/2016 10:11 AM

To: Jim.Sillitoe@vu.edu.au <Jim.Sillitoe@vu.edu.au>;

Cc: Joanna Claire Miranda <joanna.miranda@live.vu.edu.au>; jo.vu@vu.edu.au <jo.vu@vu.edu.au>;

Dear ASPR JIM SILLITOE,

Your ethics application has been formally reviewed and finalised.

- » Application ID: HRE16-266
- » Chief Investigator: ASPR JIM SILLITOE
- » Other Investigators: DR JO VU, MS Joanna Claire Miranda
- » Application Title: Exploring academics perception of work meaningfulness
- » Form Version: 13-07

The application has been accepted and deemed to meet the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)' by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval has been granted for two (2) years from the approval date: 12/12/2016.

Continued approval of this research project by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) is conditional upon the provision of a report within 12 months of the above approval date or upon the completion of the project (if earlier). A report proforma may be downloaded from the Office for Research website at: <http://research.vu.edu.au/hrec.php>.

Please note that the Human Research Ethics Committee must be informed of the following: any changes to the approved research protocol, project timelines, any serious events or adverse and/or unforeseen events that may affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. In these unlikely events, researchers must immediately cease all data collection until the Committee has approved the changes. Researchers are also reminded of the need to notify the approving HREC of changes to personnel in research projects via a request for a minor amendment. It should also be noted that it is the Chief Investigators' responsibility to ensure the research project is conducted in line with the recommendations outlined in the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).'

On behalf of the Committee, I wish you all the best for the conduct of the project.

Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee

Phone: 9919 4781 or 9919 4461

Email: researchethics@vu.edu.au

Appendix C

Dear Dr JJJ,

My name is Joanna Claire Miranda. I am currently pursuing a Doctorate in Business Administration at Victoria University, Melbourne Australia. My Supervisors are Assoc Prof James Sillitoe and Dr Jo Vu, both of them are with Victoria University.

The title of my research is 'Exploring Academics' Perception on Work Meaningfulness'. The findings of this study will contribute towards understanding the relationships between work meaningfulness and job performance. Academics and students may find the outcomes can be usefully applied to improve performance by identifying salient levers that influence work meaningfulness among academics. Policy impacts are possible through translation of findings to recommendations for organisational performance management.

Participants will be interviewed. Each participant will be coded with a name of a flower. I will be the only person who will know the names and contact information of the participant. There is no necessity for me to share this information with my supervision team. As a team, we are only interested in the age of the participant, the seniority of the participant and the gender of the participant. This information is important for the purpose of analysis and drawing out as accurate as possible findings that could be used to meet the objective of the study.

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to be my research participant. For this purpose, I would like to request 45 minutes of your time for an interview. We can meet face to face at your office or at a café near your office, or we could Skype or FaceTime.

Please let me know via email if you would be willing to participate. After which, I will then send you the consent form, Information to participant document and potential interview questions. Contact details of my main supervisor will be provided in the above mentioned documents. Contacting my supervisor will no way be construed as agreement to participate. Therefore, your identity will not be compromised.

In addition, if you do have colleagues that you could recommend to be my participants, I will appreciate that very much.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Thank you.

Joanna Miranda

Appendix D

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled **Exploring academics' perception of work meaningfulness**.

This project is being conducted by a student researcher, **Joanna Claire Miranda**, in partial fulfilment of the Doctorate in Business Administration at Victoria University, under the supervision of **ASPR James Sillitoe** from the College of Business, Victoria University, Melbourne.

Project explanation

This project explores the phenomenon of work meaningfulness among academics. Recently, Universities have had to adapt to changes due to government policies and global education in order to improve their competitiveness. These changes are likely to affect academics' sense of work meaningfulness, which is of concern in the provision of high quality education. The study will be conducted through one-on-one, face-to-face meetings with academic staff of Business Faculties in Universities. Respondents will be asked to consider a series of questions relating to work meaningfulness. The interview will be audio recorded, unless the respondent specifically requests a non-recorded session.

What will I be asked to do?

A group of selected academics will be asked a series of questions that relate to their sense of work meaningfulness in order to contribute to a clearer understanding of the relationship between work satisfaction and academic experience.

What will I gain from participating?

Academics will gain awareness of their sense of work meaningfulness when reflecting on aspects of their work and their relationships in their work environment. Whilst most of the time, academics are busy managing their work, reflecting what the work means to them, and what is meaningful about their tasks, may help to illuminate some emerging areas of contemporary academic practice. A reframing of some tasks, in order to make the work more meaningful, may help to identify areas that may need to be differently managed in this changing scenario.

How will the information I give be used?

Personal details, such as your name and employer address, will not be able to be linked to your responses, thus assuring complete anonymity for participating academics.

There may be instances where significant words and phrases collected during the interviews may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs, but this will be done without identifying or divulging the identity of the informant.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

It is anticipated that it is minimal or unlikely a respondent will experience discomfort with the questions posed during the interview. However, if this should occur, the respondent may withdraw from the study without having to provide any reasons, and whatever information collected up to that point will be destroyed.

How will this project be conducted?

The study will be conducted as a recorded interview during a one-on-one, face-to-face meeting either at the academic's workplace or at a quiet public place if the workplace is not conducive for a personal interview. The reason for recorded sessions is to ensure that meanings are captured to be as intended by the academic, and misunderstood interpretations by the researcher will be minimised. However, if the academic would rather not have the interview recorded, his/her wish will be respected.

Who is conducting the study?

This research is undertaken as partial fulfilment towards the Doctorate in Business Administration study. The student researcher, Joanna Claire Miranda will be the person conducting the research. The chief investigator for this research is ASPR James Sillitoe, and his email is James.Sillitoe@vu.edu.au.

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator listed above.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Thank you for your participation in this work.

Appendix E

Research title: Exploring academics perception of work meaningfulness

Flower

Gender

Potential Interview Questions

Opening Questions

Why have you chosen this profession?

How long have you been with the organisation?

Can you tell me about your role and responsibilities?

1. Is the work environment in synergy with your personal values and beliefs?
2. Are you adequately compensated for all the work that you do?
3. Has your role changed during your employment here?
4. What is the best part of your work?
5. Have changes affected your job fit? +ve/-ve ?
6. How have the changes affected relationships in the organization?
7. How have changes affected teaching expectation?
8. Do you look forward to holidays? Why? Or is work always on your mind-why?
9. What part of your work do you feel has purpose; worth performing?
10. Anything you think is not worth performing? – how does it feel to have to do that?
11. How do you know that your work is appreciated?
12. Can you recall situation/situations that you felt that management valued something that you did?

13. Do you feel appreciated –students/management –how does that make you feel?
14. Are there things that you feel is not worth doing/performing?
15. Are you happy? Is it stressful?
16. Do you have autonomy/are you in control?
17. Have you opportunity for professional development?
18. Have you opportunities for personal growth?

Appendix F

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

We would like to invite you to be a part of a study into

Exploring academics' perception of work meaningfulness

Aim of the Project

The recent changes in political, population, social and community trends, along with significant restructuring of economic structures, have transformed the way Australian universities operate. These changes have resulted in the academic profession being under increasing stress (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley 2009).

The proposed research will extend Kahn's (1992) conceptual model of employee engagement and disengagement with work practices. This 1992 study introduced the notion of work meaningfulness as an important indicator of engagement, and would appear to be very useful in this current project. Although extensive research is available on work engagement and work performance, there seems to be limited research on the phenomenon of work meaningfulness, particularly in the academic area.

Methods

This research will interpret work meaningfulness based on the way academics have mentally constructed this phenomenon. This interpretivist-focussed methodology is claimed to be 'extremely powerful and valuable in producing unusual depth and richness of data' (Cope 2005, p 16).

Data Collection

Data collection will be through in-depth interviews. Interviews will be recorded to ensure that there is no loss or misinterpretation of information. Follow-up interviews may have

to be conducted after the initial meeting, which according to Morse (2000) is common to ensure that accurate data to answer the research questions have been captured.

Selection of academics will be through theoretical sampling, to obtain a group of purposefully diverse academics which will add richness to the data.

Significance

Limited research evidence exists on work meaningfulness among academics. Responding to Woods and Sofat's (2013) call for contemporary exploration of meaningfulness highlighting the potential gains for organisations, we note Markos and Sridevi's (2010) research which found that when work is meaningful, a positive impact on customers or clients ensues. This research extends the study of work meaningfulness to academic context, and the knowledge generated from this study will contribute to the gap in the literature on work meaningfulness among academics. Improved understanding of the experience of work meaningfulness will assist in the design of interventions to enhance work and organisational performance (Hackman & Oldham 1975), and thus Universities' executives and other key decision makers may find use in the potential discoveries from this study to support changes in policy affecting human resource management.

CERTIFICATION BY PARTICIPANT

I, _____ certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: **Exploring academics' perception of work meaningfulness** being conducted at Victoria University by: ASPR James Sillitoe

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Joanna Claire Miranda

and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- Face to face interviews
- Follow up interviews

The interview can be recorded

I do not want the interview to be recorded

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time, and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher

ASPR James Sillitoe

03-99194273

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix G

Sample Responses by questions

Participants	A : Adequate compensation	B : Best part of work
<div style="background-color: #e0e0e0; width: 100%; height: 100%; position: relative;"> <div style="position: absolute; top: 0; left: 0; width: 100%; height: 100%; background-color: #e0e0e0;"></div> <div style="position: absolute; top: 50%; left: 50%; transform: translate(-50%, -50%);">  </div> </div> <p>1 : Carnation</p>	<p>Ah, there are 2 aspects to compensation, there is the formal salaries, promotion aspect, and there is the compensation you get from yourself in what you're doing. And that [the latter] drives me.</p> <p>I've got to feed my family, got to be fed, my family. But on the other side it is monetary and formal rewards given by the organisation; well, on that level is where I have some problems.</p> <p>Well, salaries are not and probably others have told you too, for what we do, on a per hour basis and our skill level, our compensation in terms of hours of work; it is not commensurate with community standards.</p> <p>I work a lot of hours for relatively low pay, but as I said, I get (what the word is) I get the personal satisfaction.</p>	<p>All of it. Because now I am doing all the things that I like doing. My research, my own research, or research of the PHD students, I don't have, as years ago I used to lecture in front of 1000 students and organise tutorials for (I don't know) maybe 40 classes, and having to deal with 1st year students who don't know why they were there. That was tedious stuff. [Laugh].</p>



2 : Daffodil

(Laugh)No. I think the whole issue of promotion and responsibility can be problematic within universities everywhere so I would say no. It's very hard sometimes when you get into an administrative role.

I suppose yes, we have our flexibility. We don't have to clock in clock off, we may work longer hours but we/I do have some flexibilities, at times, at times you don't, when you've got deadlines. I think I think to me compensation if you talk money, isn't why you are an academic. I think as an academic, you are doing it because you get value from the activities that you do. It's what you enjoy doing,

I'd say working with people, whether that'd be colleagues undertaking research or that be the research students, I think the combination of my role is good because research can be a little isolating sometimes whereas I tend to collaborate a lot and I enjoy working with research students and see them developing as well

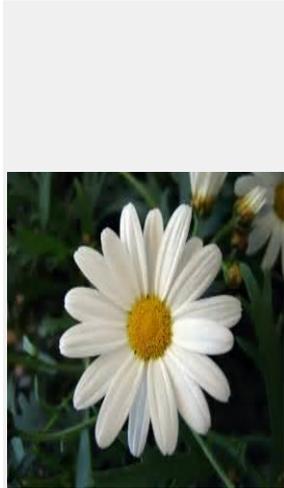


3 : Dahlia

Compensation is a very interesting thing. I think I was well compensated. You've got to remember that the superannuation scheme that we have in Australia is the best for academics. People don't understand it. I always figured, for what I was doing, the concessions that I got, we travelled all over the world, I've taught throughout Asia, and England and I've done plenary sessions in Spain, this is just brilliant stuff. Travel all over the world, you might work half a day or a day, its intense when you do it but then you got 2 days to do some sightseeing. How can you get a better life?

No. No. If I ever got to that place, I just wouldn't be there. When you're in a classroom, it's different than when you're dealing with management. The management can be appalling but it doesn't stop your level of enjoyment when you're teaching.

Teaching and research. I like research. The individual contact with PhD students and assisting with how people work through, major research problems, it's really entertaining. It really stretches your brain. When you get to a level of expertise in a certain area, it really is the fun side of it.

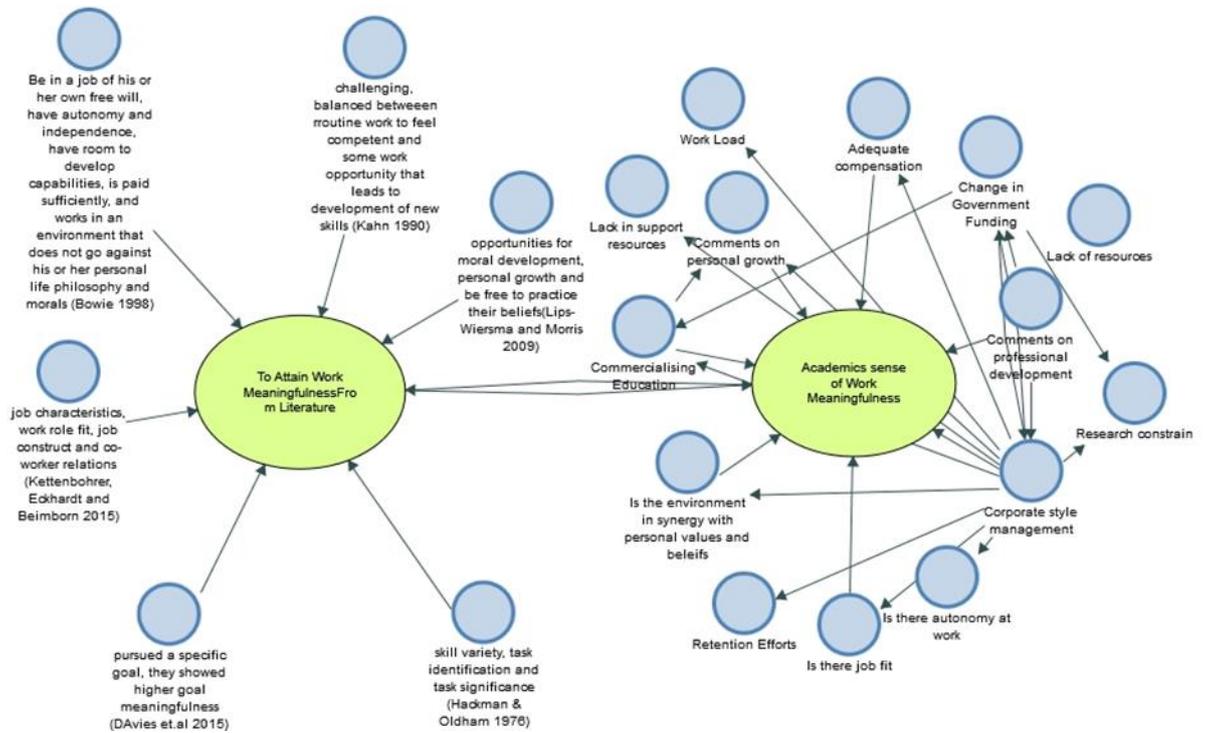


4 : Daisy

I feel that even though my work conditions have changed in the last decade, I feel that they are still very good, my work conditions, but everybody's work conditions have changed throughout the world. But I think that I am more than that adequately compensated for the work I do.

Teaching and interacting with students. Yes, like I've just come out of class now. It's a subject in the MPA and they are all mature age students, and you're explaining things to them, and when you see the lights come on and they go, oh, is that why.

Appendix H

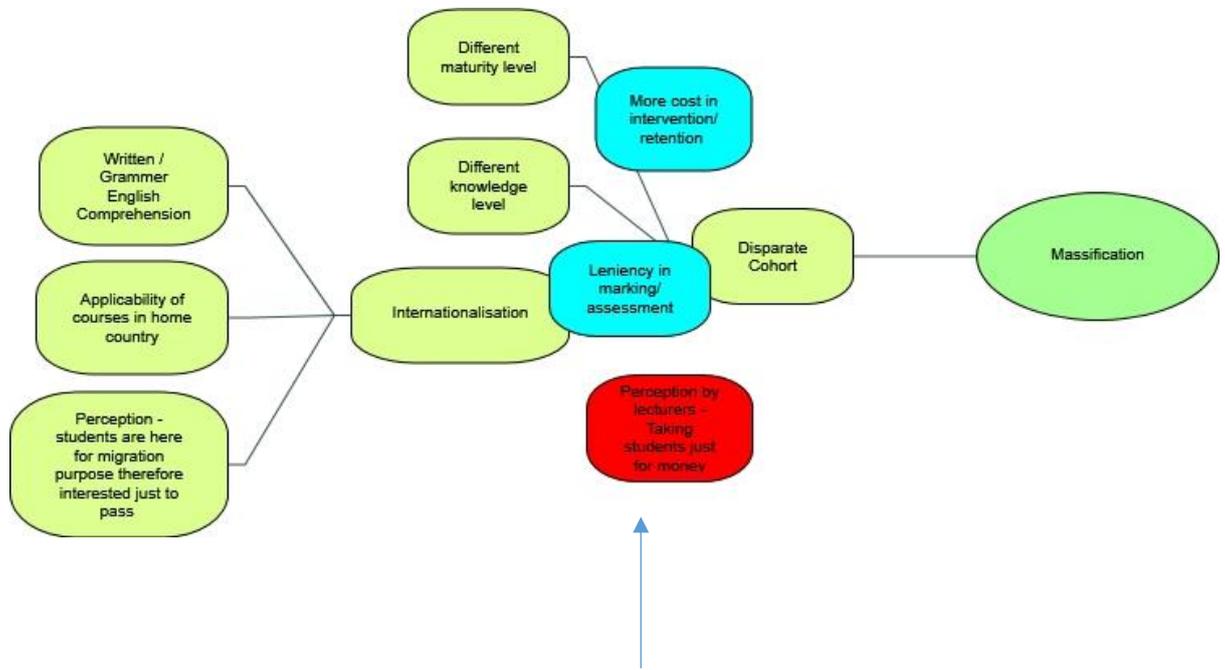


In first bubble – no space between ‘meaningfulness’ and ‘from’

In second bubble, needs to be Academics’ with the possessive apostrophe

Around the first bubble none have the first word capitalised except ‘be in a job...’

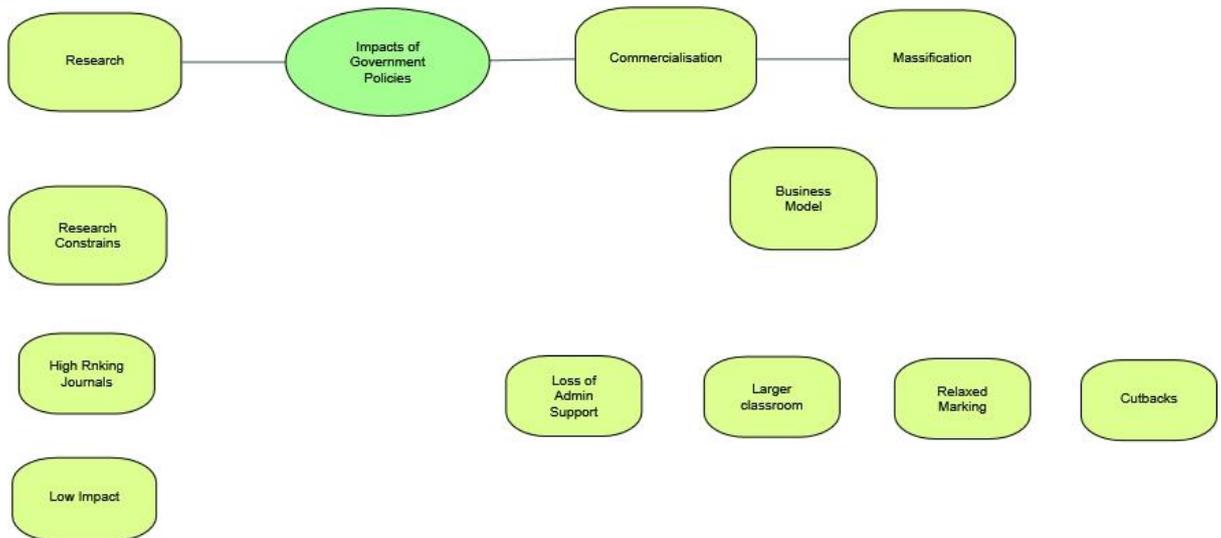
Appendix I



University has lost its focus

In top box 'grammar' needs to be spelled with an 'a'

Appendix J



In second box above 'constraints' is missing a 't' and in third box 'ranking' is missing the 'a'.
The 'C' in 'Larger classroom' should be capitalised for consistency.

APPENDIX K

There were two categories that emerged from the interviews of informants that participated in this exploratory study on work meaningfulness among academics. This has been discussed in detail in Chapter 5, Section 5.1. The findings are summarised in the table below for easy referencing. The findings are presented according to the two categories and the related themes.

Category 1: Impact of institutional actions on academics

Theme	Summary	Quotes
Shifted values	Academics felt that they were on separate paths with the university management team.	<p><i>We are an educational institution, and I feel that if we take students in, we have to make sure that when they leave, that they are competent to do the job, so therefore, we need more support systems here to help our students ... And we don't. In my opinion, we just take the money and we run.</i></p> <p><i>Universities are becoming more commercial in their approach to commercialising knowledge, ... that doesn't fit with my old fashioned values about a liberal university and education for citizenship and knowledge. (Gardenia).</i></p> <p><i>... shift in values within the university, it seems to me that students became clients, they became a source of money, there was declining standards, the idea that everybody passes and I felt that that was</i></p>

		<p><i>really doing a disservice to the students.(Alba)</i></p> <p><i>So you got a disparity between the university taking students in and teachers and educators having a strong likelihood of failing their students and because you know apparently students don't meet their standards.... So there is a tension in this whole area. (Tulip)</i></p> <p><i>Education has not become a primary goal... Teaching expectations have changed. We look at fail rates now more than in the past. (Rose)</i></p>
<p>Mostly a work-intruding holiday</p>	<p>Except for two informants one who has moved to part time and another who is now providing consultancy service to universities, all other informants had to work during their holidays.</p>	<p><i>And sometimes when you work in teams with other people, by the time you have got the information to do what you need to do and the deadline is coming up you don't have any options. I would work on a public holiday because I interview in another state and it wasn't a public holiday there. (Daffodil)</i></p> <p><i>...well, I'll be working over my holidays of course. I've got marking to do. And I guess to recharge and yes, maybe do some of those other elements in my work that have been put on the side lines, some reading, some research maybe even some writing. (Lily)</i></p> <p><i>You have to work during semester and then try and research during the breaks.</i></p>

		<p><i>You do publications and research during break, so you cannot take holidays and organisations create this problem. (Carnation)</i></p>
<p>Constraining flexibility</p>	<p>Almost every informant highlighted that they felt restricted and restrained.</p>	<p><i>...and so on there's pressure and I know a lot of the staff are pressured to pass students. (Carnation)</i></p> <p><i>So it's OK to be a high flyer in the sense of publishing papers and so forth but I think there are other aspects of your identity that need to be restrained in a very careful way. Even the expression of humour for example. (Lily)</i></p> <p><i>I think one of the key changes that I have observed probably thinking about the impact of government policy and the direction of the university, is that there has been a focus on certain fields of research for research publications. This probably has come up from other academics as well. As a consequence of that it has tended to direct us to research in certain preferred areas.... That existed when I first came in to a full time academic role. I was under the assumption that we could research into any area. I've continued to do that but it hasn't been without its problems. (Orchid)</i></p> <p><i>Probably the only thing is I suppose they require now to publish in top A star and</i></p>

		<p><i>A journals, where I always had the view that I publish in the journal that I think is appropriate for the audience, and it could be a C journal. Sometimes I've got a C journal article that get highly cited, but because it is in the C journal we don't count because of the ERA. So that sort of things that I'm not really happy about. The university puts these constraints that I should publish in A Star journal.</i> (Carnation)</p>
<p>Poor Performance Management System</p>	<p>It seemed that with the adapting of a business model, the performance management system was not addressing/fulfilling (i) rewards according to work performed, (ii) talent management, (iii) the mission of a higher education institute.</p>	<p><i>.... I don't think academic salaries are, really reflect the number of hours that I put in.</i> (Gardenia)</p> <p><i>....They can get us on the cheap, and they do. They ask us to do much more, they ask us to work not standard hours, we work for the passion so we work lot more hours ... I've got to feed my family.</i> (Carnation)</p> <p><i>I don't think staff gets these opportunities for professional development, the same opportunities that graduate students do.</i> (Gardenia)</p> <p><i>I think one of the key changes that I have observed probably thinking about the impact of government policy and the direction of the university, is that there has been a focus on certain fields of research for research</i></p>

		<p><i>publications... When you elect to not to follow the status quo, many of the incentives that would normally flow to you through research publications tend to be removed and as a consequence, that affects your motivation to continue to play in the same way. (Orchid)</i></p> <p><i>Even people who have done research don't get promoted. Would have preferred that if there was no over emphasis, we are teaching ... emphasis is not good for the kids. (Rose)</i></p> <p><i>I haven't been promoted to professor, and I know why, and it's a lot of those factors that I feel are not recognised, the sort of social goods that I've been involved in. And in some ways I've been 'punished' for that and therefore not being promoted to professor, I'm only Associate Professor. (Carnation)</i></p>
<p>Conference constraints</p>	<p>Academics are not encouraged to attend conferences unless they are presenting a paper. This in itself may not be detrimental to the university. However, that fewer numbers are presenting is a concern looking at the benefits that arise from attending conferences.</p>	<p><i>I think the spot for external professional development might be reduced financially but I think as an academic often, if I know of ways of achieving it and still be able to go to conferences ... sometimes that maybe even funding yourself.</i></p> <p><i>They, (the external network), show their appreciation by inviting me</i></p>

		<p><i>for talks and for collaborations, and my organisation allows me to do that. (Carnation)</i></p> <p><i>I mean going overseas, meeting colleagues, you grow and you learn. I have got to travel to places overseas that I would never dreamt that I could go to and meeting amazing international colleagues, to collaborate. (Gardenia)</i></p>
<p>Reorganisation and cutbacks</p>	<p>Informants overall were not happy. Re-organisations and cutback meant that it increased their work load in supportive roles.</p>	<p><i>Oooo, like most people, just the endless administrative changes and the book keeping for the sake of book keeping, the technological imposition that are driven by the managerial class within the university. (Lily)</i></p> <p><i>The university I am at now is very well resourced. Whereas, I was a programme director at my previous university, every day I would have a line of students outside my office and I quite enjoyed that coz you'd hear their personal stories but I could be signing the same form 10 times, 15 times most of the day. It's not potentially, [some people would feel that it's not academic work or] good use of my time to sign forms that could be signed by someone in administrative role. Here, I don't have the line of students with forms and paperwork and those repetitive tasks to do. (Wattle)</i></p>

		<p><i>There's a lot of administrative things that we tend to become burdened by, it's probably being a consequence of restructuring in this university and indeed across the sector.... And I'm not saying that our time is better spent than anyone else, sometimes there are people better able to deal with certain administrative functions. (Orchid)</i></p> <p><i>... the negative impact of administrative work as well... Some of the more the administrative side of it, a lot of the meetings that I have to go to, really I don't see a lot of value in my being there. (Hydrangea)</i></p> <p><i>... they seem captured by this management-speak; performance, mission..., we had enormous cuts recently, where staff (administrative staff) were forced invited to take redundancy payment which means ... there's simply not enough admin staff to do the task. (Gardenia)</i></p>
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<p>Autonomy at work</p>	<p>Academics who have been in academia for over ten years sensed that they were losing autonomy.</p>	<p><i>Now once a upon a time, a group of academics who thought that they had a particular perspective and set of principles within their discipline that they wanted to present , again some sort of manifesto, would have been fairly common place. Now the idea that you could actually present a critical manifesto of some sort would need to be assessed, regulated and evaluated, within almost a marketing context. (Lily)</i></p> <p><i>Something that I really valued about my job was that there was always autonomy. And yes, my unit coordinator certainly conveyed this too, there was no micro-managing. Get on with my job, do what I wanted to do and they trusted me to do that. And I loved that... I think probably the last few years, it was being eroded a bit. (Camelia)</i></p> <p><i>Something happened yesterday. One of my colleagues sent me an email, asked me if I knew what this anagram stood for, I said I forget. Apparently, it's a new incentive that's coming to our faculty. We are going to be monitored in our teaching. And this is the first I've heard of it. And apparently, it has already happened. But I missed the memo. She too missed the memo. (Daisy)</i></p>
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		<p><i>I think that there is still high degree of autonomy and control over the task performed as academic even though the industry is changing, it's evolving. I think it's becoming somewhat eroded. My concern is where will this industry be in 10 years from now.(Orchid)</i></p>
<p>Feedback - appreciation</p>	<p>With the exception of two informants, the other academics assumed that</p>	<p><i>Recently I was identified as a person who was involved in some of the online course</i></p>

	<p>their work was appreciated as they were still employed.</p>	<p><i>development in this school. Also as a very early adopter of online course development. I was acknowledged at one of the faculty forum of some sort, where they basically acknowledged me for having done that work and said what a very good work that I've done. (Orchid)</i></p> <p><i>... but I have to admit, that senior, feedback from senior people is not so apparent, in my role anyway. As a matter of fact, at times I feel like senior people don't even know what I do. (Hydrangea)</i></p> <p><i>I don't think you are a person to experience that... It's obviously valued in that you have still got a position that you are getting the opportunity to contribute at the organisational level... I think the way I measure it is more of my output, my research output, is valued by them because it's one of the matrix under which the organisation is judged. So, I think in some ways, what you're doing is you're being allowed to undertake the things that they do value. Maybe it's not that you get any feedback saying great work well done, but it's about being allowed to undertake those activities. (Daffodil).</i></p> <p><i>I know my work is appreciated, because they have given me slack. Not through pay, but by allowing me to do what is</i></p>
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		<p><i>valuable to me. Allowing me to help in poor countries. (Carnation)</i></p> <p><i>...if you get sufficiently high student evaluations, you might get a letter from the office of the pro vice chancellor for learning and teaching recognising your work... otherwise, most of the time, its self-driven where you might apply for an award of some sort or another... No no it's pretty useless... (Iris)</i></p>
<p>Job fit</p>	<p>The academics that sensed that they had a job-fit were</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) in research (ii) in a management team (iii) retiring or near retiring 	<p><i>... I am doing what I want to do and having more time to do research than I would if I were to be Level B lecturer. (Daffodil)</i></p> <p><i>All of it...because now I am doing all the things that I like doing. My research, my own research, or research of the PhD students. (Carnation)</i></p> <p><i>I think education fits me very well, I think coz it meets my need for social contribution, it meets my ego needs because I like it when I've done a good job... I enjoy ... committee work and maybe leading a committee. I enjoy my place at the top table, that's very important to me, that I am part of the main game, part of the group that is directing the organisation. (Tulip)</i></p> <p><i>I'm very comfortable in my skin, in what I am doing... I created the synergy-thank</i></p>

		<p><i>you very much. Not the university. (Carnation)</i></p> <p><i>...I don't know that. If anything, I'm in conflict. (Iris)</i></p> <p><i>I think in some ways the job really suits me, skills and temperaments. So I like working with abstract concepts. I really enjoy theory. (Blue Cornflower)</i></p>
Changed work relationships	Implementation of a business model brought with it competition among academics. This was an uncomfortable situation for a few academics.	<p><i>I think there is less collegiality to some degree, it's some business likeness, perhaps more competitiveness. I think there's sense of now being very cautious about expressing a sense of personality and individuality as an academic. That's just a general sense. (Lily)</i></p> <p><i>Morale has dropped, you can see morale is very low with certain people, very low. It's hard because people keep in contact through email now, people just don't come on campus... and work from home. (Daisy)</i></p>
Change in cohort	Informants commented that with the introduction of a business model, students became accreditation oriented and demanding in nature.	<p><i>... if the students feel sidelined, or think that they are not going to do the course well, they may just write negative comments which would affect your confidence. (Iris)</i></p> <p><i>My philosophy is that some of the time the student evaluation can just be how</i></p>

		<p><i>popular you are with the students, rather than whether or not you can teach... There is a lot of people who say that that's not a good measure of teaching, because it depends on the student's mood today, depends whether they are performing well, when they perform well, they'll say that they are good; when they perform bad, it's the teacher's fault... I think it's a popularity contest to a degree.</i></p> <p><i>A lot of students particularly from India and China, don't come here for an education. They come here for citizenship. It's a great underlying problem that we have, they don't care, they just want passes. (Dahlia)</i></p> <p><i>Well, the cohorts are much more, first of all they're very accreditation-oriented. They don't come in to learn. They come in to get the certificate, the degree/diploma/whatever, so it has become a private good so the students reflect that culture and only come for that. (Carnation)</i></p> <p><i>Some are here because they don't know what to do. It's an iffy thing. If they don't go to university, they would be unemployed. (Iris).</i></p> <p><i>...caps [gloves] are off, universities are in a market place fight and so there's pressure on universities to</i></p>
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		<p><i>get... universities like ours to take students where maybe their English levels mean that they are going to struggle in the course. We're actually to a certain extend signing students on false pretences knowing their English is not probably up to it. But we like their money. (Tulip)</i></p> <p><i>Enormous amounts of pressure, and students sometimes can become, especially when they first start the degree, they can be quite aggressive. (Gardenia)</i></p> <p><i>New problems coming around, why do I have to buy the text book? The text book publishers, they still want to sell their books for a very high price... So it's sort of a Mexican stand-off here. The students won't buy the book. The publisher and publishing house won't make the books available online. (Iris)</i></p>
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Category 2: The way academics managed their sense of work meaningfulness

<p>Doing the required task to get promoted</p>	<p>Academics fulfilled the required criteria to either get promoted or avoided promotion to be able to do what was meaningful to them.</p>	<p><i>But I don't think I get asked to do many pointless things. But if I were to take the next step and become a professor, I think I will be expected to be involved in university level committees, I think they're pointless. (Gardenia)</i></p>
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Finding a 'niche'	Academics found a niche to keep their work meaningful like getting promoted, or choosing a specific position or choosing an institute that is suitable	<p><i>I guess I will have more in my new job as Head of School, because I have people who I will be their line manager, and so they'll be, in other words be reporting to me and I'll be directing their work flow. (Tulip)</i></p> <p><i>... the position is good for that because of the level of autonomy and because it does take a wide variety of skills to be able to do the</i></p>

		<p><i>job. That I think it does feed back into that sense of wellbeing and who you are as a person.(Hydrangea)</i></p> <p><i>I would say definitely ... it's coming back to why I do this job. I think I really feel that education empowers people and can have a transformative experience to their life. The university I am at ... is very keen on diversity in the workplace, and ... inclusivity and opportunities definitely align with my values. (Wattle)</i></p> <p><i>I tend to like the teaching myself. That gives me the most reward. I feel like I am helping students. I like to know that they are learning something and developing ... it gives me a real sense of satisfaction, to know that they took something away that was meaningful to them. (Orchid)</i></p> <p><i>I like research. The individual contact with PhD students and assisting with how people work through major research problems, it's really entertaining. It really stretches your brain. When you get to a level of expertise in a certain area, it really is the fun side of it. (Dahlia).</i></p> <p><i>Work is my passion for research... It's fulfilling to see my book at production stage. It's cream on the cake. You will get the</i></p>
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		<p><i>review, you'll get a kick out of that. (Iris)</i></p>
<p>Managing stress</p>	<p>Academics suffered from stress, some more than other. Being academics, many shared how they handled stress.</p>	<p><i>I find that the work part is stressful at the moment, because I have issues with the way that we do things here..... I have put in for the voluntary package, so I'm hoping to leave at the end of this financial year. (Daisy)</i></p> <p><i>I think whilst I am achieving what I believe I need to achieve, its fine... I suppose I think my view is as long as it is for a job that you really enjoy doing it then you get a positive feeling from, a positive benefit, to me it's that balance.</i></p> <p><i>My stress levels are not such that I need a break. You know these people drag themselves in and say, ah I need a break here, I've never allowed myself to do that, you know. I've never said those words. Because I like people to think that I am competent in my work. And so if I'm stressed to the max, unable to operate, well you know, that to me is a sign of weakness in some ways. Or my inability to cope with whatever stressors are there. (Tulip)</i></p>