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Managing the potential of academic staff from the perspective of job satisfaction**

Summary

The article focuses on some characteristics of academic staff management by managers of organisational units in a higher education institution. It was assumed that high self-esteem and job satisfaction are factors that promote effective management. To generate positive results, managers should know academic teachers – be aware of: how and in which development areas they evaluate themselves and how they perceive their workplace in the perspective of building high self-esteem. The above mentioned issues were studied in a unit of a university located in southern Poland. The study was conducted by means of an employee self-evaluation tool in a sample of 38 people. Self-evaluation included the following areas: development, strengths and hobbies/passions. The analysis of results enabled some conclusion to be drawn regarding further scientific explorations as well as solutions for managers of the research and didactic employees in the unit.

Keywords: human potential management, academic teacher, self-evaluation, job satisfaction

Introduction

Managing the potential of academic staff is a challenge to university and academic unit authorities and managers. It does not refer only to macro-management of a university by rector management boards but mainly to the micro level in the

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university structure: faculties, institutes, departments (depending on institutional structure). Given that managing the potential of academic staff is treated as a highly qualified regulating activity aimed at acquiring and utilising this potential (cf. Pocztowski, 2002), we should assume that the managing persons are aware that they work with a potential of highly diversified knowledge and skills in many areas of scientific expertise (disciplines, subdisciplines or fields). It requires from the managers (directors, heads of departments) to be well informed about their staff potential and resources regarding both the areas of their scientific research work and their personal traits, predispositions, skills, professional (promotions) and personal development goals, needs and expectations towards their workplace or supervisors. These areas are the managers' determinants when it comes to: designing and developing staff policy, supporting staff development, improving internal communication, etc.

Activities taken by a good institute director/head of department are critical for staff development and contribute to the employees' well-being in the workplace and job satisfaction, ensuring balance between professional and other activities.

The paper focuses on the possibilities to recognise personal potential of scientific and didactic staff members in a unit functioning as part of a university structure by using self-evaluation (staff members' self-knowledge of their personal potential) for effective people management, growth management in the spirit of positive interpersonal relations in the workplace and maintaining work-life balance as indicators of job satisfaction.

Employee self-evaluation and job satisfaction

Self-evaluation is a regulating (Zdybek & Derbis, 2018) and subjective psychological construct. It is developed as a result of a balance made by a person and it includes both successes and failures. In case of academic staff, self-evaluation that follows identification of strengths and weaknesses, talents, passions and interests, life achievements or failures, is the main determinant of activities designed by institute directors/heads of departments as part of human potential management.

It is noteworthy that high self-evaluation enables employees to perceive themselves as competent persons who deserve happiness and are important to others (Lewicka 2021). Individuals with high self-esteem take on challenges and difficult tasks, confront problems and are flexible when solving them. Low self-esteem leads to discontent and low self-value, which in turn translates into lack of confidence, lack of belief in one's abilities, lack of trust to one's own decisions and struggling with building healthy interpersonal relations. Persons with low self-esteem look at

themselves and the world with hostility, which makes them even more vulnerable. Low self-esteem is also a source of struggle in the face of hardships and is accompanied by the sense of being unhappy (Dzwonkowska, Lachowicz-Tabaczek, & Łaguna, 2008; Niemczyk, 2009). This translates into the sense of failure (in personal and professional life), lack of satisfaction from work in the light of evaluation of one's own competence, activities and achievements.

Thus, high self-esteem is some kind of motivator to pursue goals and increase efforts to achieve them (Wojciszke, 2010). The goal-oriented attitude is promoted by high mobilisation which, in turn, results from high self-esteem, whereas achieved goals elevate one's self-esteem. As an effective response to the self, self-evaluation determines self-perception, self-experience and carries assessing, valuing judgments about self, one's own characteristics and relations with the world (Skorny, 1989). Therefore, positive self-evaluation which is based on recognition of one's own potential and identification of opportunities to use it in different situations (everyday, personal, professional), and is confirmed by outcomes such as completed goals and successes, is an extremely important motivator for academic staff to advance their development in the field of science. It is also an important factor for those who supervise them. For the management process, both self-evaluation and development areas that constitute it will be important for the employees' professional development and their ability to maintain balance between different activities at work and outside of it. In this perspective, activities related to managing personal potential of individuals with low, lowered or inadequate self-esteem will pose a special challenge. It is so because self-evaluation will determine the attitude and relations between staff members with low self-esteem and their environment. It will also determine the level of satisfaction and contentment in all spheres of their social and personal functioning.

In regards to the problems discussed herein, it should be emphasised that employee self-evaluation will matter to managers oriented on scientific-research development and didactic activity of academic staff so that initiatives, goals and tasks implemented and completed lead to successes (individual and collective) and, consequently, to job satisfaction. Satisfaction and high self-esteem will indicate the effectiveness of not only academic teachers but also the whole organisational unit, they will also promote the development of specific disciplines/field of science represented by the academic team members. Thus, positive self-evaluation and job satisfaction will drive the development of individuals, communities and science itself. They will also determine people's positive attitude towards professional tasks (Jakimiuk, 2019).

In psychological literature, job satisfaction is understood as an emotional response which manifests itself as pleasant or unpleasant feelings experienced in

connection with the performance of certain tasks, functions and professional roles (cf. Bańka, 2000). It means that it can be viewed, like self-evaluation, as a positive or a negative experience. Viewed as positive, it means the level of satisfaction “at which work being done brings the sense of success and joy from professional development and realization of important values” (Jakimiuk, 2019, p. 73). It also means identification with one’s profession and workplace, and greater and better effectiveness in performing one’s tasks (cf. Sakanovič & Mayer, 2006).

The literature on the subject provides job satisfaction models which allow research that take into account satisfaction indicators and refer to activities managing persons should take to increase employees’ satisfaction with their jobs. Research into job satisfaction should be located within a specific model. Three main models are mentioned in psychological publications: 1. Herzberg’s (1996) two-factor theory; 2. Hackman and Oldham’s (1974) job characteristics model; 3. Katz and Van Maanen’s (1977) loci of work satisfaction model. For the purpose of this article, Herzberg’s two-factor theory was used in the empirical and implementation aspect (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). The theory assumes that there are two sets of satisfaction determinants: extrinsic and intrinsic. The extrinsic determinants are called hygiene factors, whereas intrinsic determinants are called motivators.

According to Herzberg (1966), hygiene factors include “relationship with supervisors, interpersonal relations, salary, working conditions, company policies, and administration. Negative evaluation of hygiene factors leads to dissatisfaction and lowered motivation, it can also result in unpleasant emotions like fear or frustration” (Paliga, 2021, p. 23). However, the positive evaluation itself is not sufficient for employee satisfaction because it is connected with motivators “whose name comes from the belief that these factors contribute to employees’ increased effort and effectiveness” (Paliga, 2021, p. 23). Motivators include, among others, “achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility and advancement” (Paliga 2021, p. 23). According to Herzberg’s model “the highest level of satisfaction is the effect of high subjective evaluation of hygiene factors and motivators” (Paliga 2021, p. 23). So motivators will also include beliefs about oneself that result from one’s self-evaluation which allows to determine, for example, that something is satisfactory or not (apart from external criteria).

Analyses conducted by Białas and Litwin (2013) showed correlations between satisfaction and employees attitudes towards work and professional tasks. They concluded that greater satisfaction from work influences change in employees’ behaviour as they are more content and in consequence: they identify more with the institution/enterprise goals (staff members see an opportunity to achieve their own goals along the way, which is connected with positive self-evaluation and the sense of agency); they care more about the quality of their work; they are more loyal and

engaged; they are less resistant to change; they are more willing to collaborate with others.

The theoretical assumptions regarding self-evaluation and job satisfaction outlined above indicate that people evaluate their environment and changes that take place in it, actions taken and emotions that accompany these actions; they also evaluate other people and themselves (including changes and processes that take place within them) (cf. Lewicka 2021). In addition, as they function in the world of social relations and experiences, they often seek self-affirmation from others. In the context of a university, they will seek affirmation expressed as recognition of their achievements from the managing and teaching staff members but also, when lacking external recognition/appreciation, they will seek affirmation through completed projects, published research results, the path of scientific development and promotion. Individuals who value themselves highly will feel satisfaction and recognition based on their own achievements. It can be reinforced by recognition from others. They will feel satisfied with their work because their professional achievements will motivate them to continue their efforts, strengthen their high, positive self-evaluation and direct their next steps towards professional and personal advancement. In case of staff members with low self-esteem, the key actions to facilitate job satisfaction by the managers will include strengthening employees' self-esteem and creating situations where they can experience positive effects of their professional initiatives and satisfaction from realisation thereof. In some sense, the managing staff will support these persons in discovering in themselves the source of affirmation and positive emotions as a result of goals achieved (cf. Lewicka, 2021).

Methodological assumptions

The object of the study presented in this article is personal potential of academic staff in one of the units of a higher education institution. The study aimed at determining the potential of academic staff hired in this unit in terms of personal development, personal traits and passions and interests. Another goal was to identify directions of actions of the institution director regarding development of individual and institutional work strategies for strengthening the potential, elevating self-evaluation and job satisfaction among the scientific and didactic staff members. Even though the problem is so important for individual development as well science promotion, there are no study reports in this area in the Polish literature. This allows to assume that the results presented herein are innovative and fill the gap in the research. The research was conducted as a qualitative study. The

main research problem was formulated as follows: How do staff members evaluate their own development? What personal characteristics and predispositions do they identify as growth facilitators? What are their passions and interests? Secondary data analysis using archival documents such as employee self-evaluation sheets was used in this study (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2001). Self-evaluation sheets were found to be a valuable source of data (just like a letter, a story) “for all those researchers who are interested in an individual point of view on certain situations or events” (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2001, p. 328), as they “focus on the personal experiences of the authors and are an expression of their personal reflections” (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2001, p. 328).

The self-evaluation form covered the following areas of self-awareness and self-evaluation: directions of development and activities, strengths, passions, hobbies, expectations and needs. The analysis included 38 forms and, for the purposes of the research, the authors focused on data referring to the first three areas.

The research was conducted in the second half of 2024 in one of the units of a higher education institution. Selection of the institution was purposeful. The sample consisted of scientific and teaching staff members of one unit of the institution. The institution hires more than 1,000 staff members, of whom 38 work in the analysed unit (24 women and 14 men) and filled in the self-evaluation forms analysed in the study.

Self-evaluation and personal potential of academic staff in the light of study results

The following areas included in the self-evaluation forms were analysed: development, strengths (personal characteristics and competencies) and passions and hobbies. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1 by area and respondents' gender. Additionally, categories within the areas, and their descriptions were identified directly by the respondents. For some categories and their descriptions, the number of indications found in the forms is given in brackets, e.g., (5).

An interesting picture of the academic staff emerges from the above presented categories grouped in the three areas. In case of the growth category (cf. Łukasik, 2018), it should be emphasised the all the respondents (both women and men) indicated development areas connected directly with their professional work. They mentioned development in the field of science, with a focus on expanding knowledge, implementing research projects and activities that contribute to professional advancement (further academic or scientific degrees). A similar mindset was observed regarding the respondents' activity as academic teachers. They listed participation in different forms of training to improve or strengthen their competencies

Table 1. Self-evaluation of academic teachers in the areas: development, personal characteristics, hobbies

	Women	Men
Development categories	Scientific: • <i>Expanding knowledge:</i> participation in seminars, conferences, literature studies • <i>Research projects:</i> conducting research, interdisciplinary character of investigations, international projects • <i>Professional promotion/assessment:</i> writing scientific papers, learning languages, learning research methodology, gathering experience to get promoted Didactic: on-line courses, webinars, workshops, learning from good practices, trainings, work with students to support their self-development Education: obtaining additional qualifications through postgraduate courses Popularisation: implementation of prevention projects, work with children and young people, activities in associations Personal: widely understood individual growth (1)	Scientific: • <i>Expanding knowledge:</i> participation in seminars, conferences • <i>Research projects:</i> scientific studies • <i>Professional promotion/assessment:</i> scientific publications Didactic: focus on the quality of learning, developing skills in the area of public speaking Education: obtaining additional qualifications through postgraduate courses, learning languages Organisational: organising conferences and international cooperation
Strengths	Characteristics: Commitment (9) Openness (5) Patience (3) Reliability (2) Self-control (2) Peace (2) Diligence (2) Dependability (2) Perseverance (2) Consistency Punctuality Courage Energy Kindness Drive for development Curiosity Mindfulness Regularity Strive for development Positive attitude Conscientiousness Understanding	Characteristics: Diligence (5) Discipline Precision Conscientiousness Reliability Loyalty Accountability Punctuality Truthfulness Sense of humor Empathy Focus on relations Integrity Credibility

Table 1. Cont.

	Women	Men
	Integrity Accountability Empathy Kindness Persistence Tenacity (not to be mistaken with stubbornness) Competencies: Communication skills (10) Team worker (5) Well-organised (5) People skills (5) Growth-oriented (4) Creative (4) Ability to work under stress (3) Fluency in a foreign language (2) Problem-solving attitude (2) Self-discipline (2) Taking new challenges Multitasking Listening skills Adaptation to changes Effectiveness Individual work Combining theory and practice Task-oriented Friendliness Didactics	Competencies: Team worker (5) Management (3) Public speaking (2) Experience (2) Professional competencies Communication skills Task coordination Friendliness People skills Openness to cooperation Teamwork Fast learner Event organisation Engaging students in initiatives Contact with students Professional improvement Contact with people
Passions and hobbies	Work: related to professional activities Recreation: travelling (8), mountain hiking (2), walks, mountains, trips, forest, water Sport: sport (3), horse riding, swimming, yachting, skiing, cycling, running, soccer, unicycle Culture: music (4), literature – biographies (2), photography (2), playing an instrument in an orchestra, dance, singing, historical and adventure books, good books, crime scene TV series, good movies, theatre Cooking: cooking (2), healthy diet, world cuisine, baking	Work: science Recreation: travelling (4), tourism (2), travelling around Poland, mountain trips, mountains, qualified tourism Sport: sport (5), soccer Culture: music (3), books (2), movies, literature, folklore Cooking: good cuisine

	Women	Men
	History: history of art Other: fashion, furniture upcycling, modern technologies, work with people, dogs, gardening, psychotherapy, learning languages	History: Polish history, history of automotive industry in Poland, history, social history of Poland in the interwar period Other: automotive (2), culture management, problem solving

Source: Authors' own compilation

in teaching certain subjects. Several respondents (women and men) also identified their growth with improving the effectiveness of their teaching. Women also pointed out to the area connected with popularisation of science, while men with administrative activities. Only one person (a woman) mentioned a personal growth area outside of work, that does not result from their research or teaching activity. It can be assumed that absence of some of the categories in the self-evaluations may be due to the fact that the forms were filled in at the request of the unit management (even though this category was named “development” in general and not described as referring to professional sphere only). The respondents might have assumed that their answers should refer to work (the self-evaluation forms were filled in the workplace). Another explanation of the lack of other development areas in the forms may be that the respondents are so focused on their professional activity that in the context of growth, they do not view themselves outside of work (they do not focus on development outside work, for example on developing passions or hobbies) (cf. Łukasik, 2022). This information is important for the managing staff and it requires further exploration and actions supporting employees' satisfaction from life and activities outside of work. Enjoying life and drawing energy to act from personal growth is the basis of other motivation and attitude towards work, as well as the basis to experience satisfaction from professional activity (ability to distance oneself from work and restore one's energy).

The second self-evaluation area was the respondents' strengths. During the analysis, a catalogue of traits and competencies of the academic staff members was created. It is noticeable that commitment to work is a dominating characteristics in women, whereas diligence prevails among the male respondents. Other characteristics in the group of women are: openness, patience and many other, single traits (similar to the men's group) which confirm that individuals working in this unit are kind, empathetic, responsible, loyal etc. Women most often declared the following competencies as their strengths: communication skills (10 indications), ability to

work in a team, good organisation, ability to work with people (5 indications each), as well as many others such as creativity or ability to work under stress. Among men, the most often declared competencies were: teamwork (5 indications), management skills (3 indications) as well as experience, professional and other competencies. Awareness of the employees' strengths is extremely important for the managers as it not only allows to identify personal potential of staff members but also facilitates implementation of different scientific, educational, project, organisational or popularisation activities in the unit (including, for example, assigning people to tasks, identifying formal leaders or cooperation with informal leaders to create friendly working atmosphere). Of course, knowledge about individual strengths is used not only to reinforce these qualities but also to design activities for certain persons so that they can use their strengths and competencies for their personal development and to achieve new goals (cf. Łukasik, 2024). Thus, the catalogue of employees' characteristics enables coaching and support in change and development of: individual staff members, academic unit and science itself (scientific disciplines represented by each staff member) (cf. Herzberg, 1966).

The third area of self-evaluation was passions and hobbies of the academic staff members. Both women and men declared fairly similar activities in this area. It can be noticed that the respondents engage in typical leisure activities like recreation, sport, culture, cooking. In addition, men indicated interest in history (several of them further specified which period in history or what kind of historical events they were interested in), which was also declared by one female respondent (history of art). Some less popular passions or hobbies listed by women were: fashion, furniture upcycling, philosophy, learning foreign languages. The respondents most often described their passions and hobbies in general terms, e.g., sport and only few of them specified what sport discipline they had in mind. It was similar in the culture category. The respondents mentioned music, films, theatre, photography without further explanations and yet, people who have passions and hobbies can easily identify what kind of movies, music or photographs they are into (whether they take photographs themselves and what technique they use, or whether they love the works of specific artists, certain themes, if they visit exhibitions in Poland or abroad). As for the recreation category, the respondents who declared they enjoyed travelling or trips, did not specify where and why. Thus, it can be assumed that when writing about their passions and hobbies, they meant different forms of spending free time, leisure activities but not necessarily focused on the goals such as development of knowledge and skills. Perhaps this is one of the focus areas for the managing staff when designing activities supporting employees' personal development. Perhaps this kind of thinking and action is absent among

the respondents and that is why they do not have passions and hobbies, so they substitute them with leisure activities.

The above presented analyses suggest that the academic staff members employed in the academic unit in question focus on their scientific and research development as well as development in the area of teaching. They have traits and competencies that let them achieve it and, additionally, help them form research teams and the team of workers as a learning community (cf. Lysokon, Vasyliuk, Barulina, Razmolodchykova, & Zakharova, 2024; Mora, 2001; Mosyakova, 2022). The managing staff can use it when designing growth-oriented activities for this group (Pikuła, 2024; Sołtys, 2023; Sporn, 2003). It can also be assumed that the scientific and personal potential of the staff is conducive to activities which are in line with the statutory tasks of the academic institution (Sołtys, 2023; Sporn, 2003). The area which should be further explored and/or strengthened is the area of personal growth which can be identified with passions and hobbies. It is not the advantage of the investigated team. Therefore, the managers can encourage employees in individual conversations to start or refresh their hobbies. Such activities will help them recharge after work, gain a different perspective on everyday or professional life situations (distance) and be more efficient at their workplace (cf. Łukasik, 2024). This, in turn, is one of the conditions of being satisfied with tasks and goals realised at work as well as with the successes achieved (Moysakova, 2023; Pikuła, Jagielska & Łukasik, 2024; Sołtys, 2023).

Summary and conclusions

Information about staff members obtained through self-evaluation is an important tool for those who manage employee personal potential development. In the context of academic institutions, it is important in terms of implementing personal development strategies and using individual potential to empower employees and teams and advance in scientific disciplines (research, publications, implementations). It is also crucial when it comes to assigning people to tasks and working teams, as well as for their assessment, motivation and support (cf. Purcell, Kinnie, Swart, Rayton, & Hutchinson, 2009). Recognising employees' potential and managing thereof is also an important element of integration considered externally (integration of activities in the area of human potential management with the university strategy) and internally (integration of people management activities) (Lysokon et al., 2024). Thus, it can be concluded that it is important that the management of human potential of academic teachers is fully integrated with the unit's and university's strategy and strategic needs, and that management activities are

consistent with the teachers' needs and potential and focused on creating work environment that facilitates growth and job satisfaction (cf. Mora, 2001; Sołtys, 2023). Experiencing success is only possible when those who manage academic units and human potential within them are able to recognise, awake and sustain this potential and motivate academic teachers to develop it (cf. Łukasik, 2024; Pi-kuła, 2024). Such conditions can only be created by persons who are greatly aware of and responsible for both completion of goals and activities introduced to the university and among the academic staff members, while taking their needs and expectations into account (Mora, 2001; Sołtys, 2023; Sporn, 2003).

Therefore, in order to facilitate growth, positive self-evaluation and job satisfaction through people management the unit managers should:

- identify individual goals and directions of development of academic teachers based on their personal potential, goals and directions of development;
- motivate people to pursue individual and institutional goals;
- build relations with and between staff members by implementing interpersonal communication strategies;
- organise working environment (premises, physical space, equipment and access to modern devices, library etc.) that favours growth;
- evaluate and provide feedback (formative assessment) to staff members regarding their areas of activity (research, teaching, administrative);
- initiate self-improvement, learning and growth-oriented activities among the staff members (Lysokon et al., 2023; Łukasik, 2024; Mora, 2001; Mosyakowa, 2023; Pi-kuła, 2024; Pi-kuła, Jagielska, & Łukasik, 2024; Sołtys, 2023; Sporn, 2003).

Through implementation of the above listed solutions, managers of organisational units and teams will contribute to the improvement of employees' self-evaluation, growth and job satisfaction (Pi-kuła, Jagielska, & Łukasik, 2024; Ulrich 2001).

Limitations

On the basis of the analyses carried out, identify areas for strengthening the implementation of this type of project. Namely, it is worthwhile, in terms of the selection of institutions and respondents, to refer to several institutions and their employees and to compare the management strategies of the identified personal potential of academic staff, to determine the effectiveness of management strategies in the context of staff self-evaluation and satisfaction. The results presented in the article, due to the limitations indicated, make it impossible to formulate generalised conclusions from the analyses and require further in-depth analysis. On the other hand, they can certainly become an inspiration and a basis for further scientific research explorations.

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