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A look to academics job satisfaction and motivation in Portuguese higher education institutions

Maria de Lourdes Machado^{a1*}, Virgílio Meira Soares^b, Rui Brites^c, José Brites Ferreira^d,
Odília Maria Rocha Gouveia^e

^aCenter for Research in Higher Education Policies (CIPES), Rua 1° de Dezembro, 399, 4450-227 Matosinhos, Portugal

^bUniversity of Lisbon-Faculty of Sciences, Campo Grande, Edifício C5, 1749-016 Lisbon, Portugal

^cISCTE-Lisbon University Institute and Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology (CIES), Av. Forças Armadas, 1649-026, Lisbon, Portugal

^dSchool of Education and Social Sciences - Polytechnic Institute of Leiria, Campus 1, Rua Dr. João Soares, Apartado 4045, 2411-901 Leiria, Portugal

^eCenter for Research in Higher Education Policies (CIPES), Rua 1° de Dezembro, 399, 4450-227 Matosinhos, Portugal

Abstract

The academic staff is a key resource within higher education institutions, having a major role in achieving its objectives. Moreover, the performance of the academic staff determines much of student learning and success. Therefore, motivation and satisfaction of the academic staff is crucial for the quality of higher education institutions. This paper discusses a study on academic satisfaction and motivation, whose main objective is to identify factors and their interactions affecting the dimensions associated with job satisfaction and motivation of the academic staff within Portuguese higher education institutions.

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1. Introduction

The academic staff is a key resource within higher education institutions and, therefore, it has a major role in achieving the objectives of the institution. Moreover, the performance of the academic staff determines much of the student success and has an impact on student learning. Thus, motivation and satisfaction of the academic staff is crucial for the academics' performance and, consequently, for the quality of higher education institutions.

Several issues are impacting Portuguese academic careers. First, Portuguese higher education had changed significantly over the past 40 years. However the legal provisions of academic careers in public institutions have not changed in three decades, in 2009 a new legal framework changed the academic careers regulations. Until 2009 the legal documents regulating the academic careers were dating back from 1979 for the university academic staff, and from 1985 for the polytechnic academic staff. Second, the number of academics has increased significantly. Third,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +351 229398790; fax: +351 229398799.

E-mail address: lmachado@cipes.up.pt.

higher education institutions (HEIs) in general and academic work in particular have been influenced by global trends such as accountability, massification, deteriorating financial support and managerial controls that have led to the rapid change in the workplace and the need to manage tensions within the academic profession (Machado-Taylor, Meira Soares, Ferreira & Gouveia, 2011). Additionally, the recent change in economics – economic recession – has led to governmental priorities from unfettered expansion to a decrease in enrolments and strong emphasis on quality (Amaral & Magalhães, 2005). This is another aspect affecting the academic profession.

Here is discussed a study on academic satisfaction and motivation within the Portuguese higher education institutions - An Examination of Academic Job Satisfaction and Motivation in Portuguese Higher Education -, financed by the Foundation for Science and Technology. The main purpose of the research project is to identify factors and their interactions affecting the dimensions associated with job satisfaction and motivation of the academic staff.

This paper presents results from a national survey applied to all universe of faculty members including all sub-groups (professor, researcher, part-time, full-time, etc.), and institutional types of Portuguese higher education institutions (public-private, university-polytechnic, etc.). A diverse range of information on multiple dimensions of the faculty job in higher education, in particular dimensions of satisfaction and motivation within academia, is examined.

The findings from this study should heighten awareness, sensitivity and dialogue regarding the important issues that need to be addressed to promote and maintain job satisfaction and motivation within the ranks of the academic staff.

2. Background

2.1 Recent Changes and Reforms Impacting the Academic Portuguese Career

The origin of Portuguese universities traces back to the middle of the 13th Century. In our days Portuguese higher education (PHE) is divided into public and non-public higher education: public and private universities, public and private polytechnic institutes. The total number of academics in 1976 was 5,951. In 2009, the number had grown to 36,215: 11,123 in private higher education and 25,092 academics in public higher education institutions. In 2009, the number of students in private higher education was 90,564 and in public higher education institutions was 282,438 (PORDATA, 2011). The proportion of academics is higher in public higher education institutions. Therefore, the Portuguese system of higher education has grown significantly in the last few decades. Moreover, academic work has been influenced by global trends such as accountability, massification, deteriorating financial support and managerial controls that have led to the rapid change in the workplace and the need to manage tensions within the academic profession (Machado-Taylor, Meira Soares, Ferreira & Gouveia, 2011).

Over the past five years, there have been many changes in Portuguese higher education (Machado-Taylor, Meira Soares & Gouveia, 2010), including: the implementation of the so called Bologna Process, which was given particular visibility; the approval of a new legal regime for the higher education institutions (HEIs), which paved the way for the existence of the foundational regime and the approval of new statutes relating to the academic career in the public higher education institutions. The explanation of all these changes does not fit here. However, it is worth to note that they resulted in a number of changes that are affecting and will continue to affect academic careers. Higher education in Portugal is being set up by the Bologna Process and was even amended the basic law for the education system to enable the implementation of that process in the Portuguese education system. This change was effective by the Law No. 49/2005 of 30 August. The most visible segment was, at the beginning, the creation of the new system of education and higher education degrees. In practice, this meant changing the Portuguese system and harmonizing it with the *Bologna Agenda*. The degree system in place in Portugal since 1986 has changed. Thus, the existing four degrees (bachelor, bachelor, master and doctor) came to be three (graduate, master and doctor).

In what concerns the academic career in the Portuguese higher education system, there have been and still exist different academic careers for the two subsystems of higher education - universities and polytechnics. The legal provisions of academic careers in public institutions have not changed in three decades although criticism over the years has been made. Until 2009 the legal documents regulating the academic careers were dating back from 1979 for the university academic staff, and from 1985 for the polytechnic academic staff. In 2009 a new legal framework changed the academic careers regulations. According to the new legal framework academics of university and

polytechnic public institutions continue to have different careers against one old pretension to have a unique career. However, with recent changes, there was a rapprochement between the two sectors. One difference that remains between the two careers is the weekly teaching load, which is higher in polytechnics than in universities. However, the requirement of a doctorate to gain access to the rank of professor, in both cases, means an approximation between both subsystems. In university education, it was required the degree of doctor to access the categories of professor. In the case of the polytechnics, the degree required to access the categories of professor was a master's degree. However, in the case of the polytechnic, one could also access these categories, without a master's degree, through the provision of public trials. This was the situation until 2009. The situation has now changed and the degree required to access the categories of professor in both subsystems is the degree of doctor. The implementation of the new statutes is just in the beginning and higher education institutions shall adopt internal regulations regarding the hiring of their academics, the assessment of their performance and the provision of services they must provide. It's within this framework of change, marked by the Bologna Process, by the growing influence of the market, by a greater rapprochement between the two subsystems of higher education that emerges and develops our research on job satisfaction and motivation.

2.2 Academic Job Satisfaction and Motivation

Job satisfaction refers to an individual's positive emotional reactions to a particular job and these reactions result from comparing the actual and present results with those that are desired or anticipated by the individual (Oshagbemi, 1999). For Cranny, Smith, and Stone (1992, cited in Weiss, 2002) job satisfaction is an affective/emotional reaction to one's job, that results from the incumbent's comparison of actual outcomes with those that are expected or desired. Job satisfaction has been defined both as a global construct and as a concept with multiple dimensions/facets (Locke, 1969, 1970; Price, 1997; Scarpello & Campbell, 1983; cited in Lund, 2003), i.e., we can talk about the overall job satisfaction as well as the satisfaction with pay, physical conditions of work, the content of work, relations with colleagues, among others.

Work is more than a means of subsistence, conferring to the worker a personal identity, self-actualization and social image (Al-Rubaish, Rahim, Abumadani & Wosornu, 2011). Therefore, job satisfaction is associated with labor market behavior (for example, productivity or absenteeism) which is related with employee's attitudes. Satisfaction is viewed, by some, as a predictor of positive attitudes at work, productivity, and, consequently, good results for the organization. As stressed by Tietjen and Myers (1998), the instilling of satisfaction within workers is a crucial task of management since satisfaction creates confidence, loyalty and improved quality in the output of the worker. Also Kirkman and Shapiro (2001) argue that employees who are more satisfied with their jobs are also less absent, less likely to leave and more likely to be satisfied with their lives. Besides, the importance of job satisfaction lies in its consequences for human health and well-being of employees. "The understanding of workers' subjective well-being thus provides an additional route towards the understanding of certain important labor market behaviors" (Clark, 1997, p. 344).

The consequences of job satisfaction are, therefore, individual and varied, covering personal and professional plans. Job satisfaction can hence be a source of health, as well as dissatisfaction can lead to damage to physical, mental and social health, leading to problems in the organization and in the work environment (Marqueze & Castro Moreno, 2005). Thus, job satisfaction is a widely studied phenomenon and this interest stems from the influence it can have on workers, affecting their physical and mental health, attitudes, professional and social behavior, both with implications for individual's personal life and for organizations (Martinez & Paraguay, 2003).

Beyond academic staff job satisfaction, another aspect addressed in this study is academics' motivation at work. Human motivation, is defined as something that moves a person to action (Bhalraj, 2008), and has been studied in a diverse collection of academic disciplines, namely sociology, psychology, education, political science, and economics. One cannot minimize the importance of motivation in an organization, being an important contributor to performance (Mitchell, 1982) and human behaviour (Bhalraj, 2008). According to Vallerand et al. (1992), an individual is unmotivated when he/she doesn't perceive contingencies between outcomes and his/her own actions; the individual perceives their behaviours as caused by forces out of his/her own control.

Authors such as Bhalraj (2008) identified some characteristics of motivation:

- Motivation is based on human needs which generate within an individual;

- Motivation is total, not piece-meal. Thus, an individual cannot be motivated by fulfilling some of his needs partly;
- Motivation is a continuous process; as soon as one need is satisfied new ones arise;
- Motivation causes goal-directed behavior; a person behaves in such a way that he/she can satisfy his/her goals or needs;
- Motivation is a complex process: there is no universal theory or approach to motivation and individuals differ in what motivates them. Thus, a manager has to understand a diversity of needs and has to use a variety of rewards to motivate them.

Motivation is influenced by institution-specific issues, situations and circumstances, which constitute academics' working lives, because things matter to people only within the contexts of their own lives (Evans, 1999). According to Evans (1999), some ways to motivate professors are: giving professors a voice, by effective consultation and sharing of decision-making; motivating through recognition of professors' efforts and achievements (reminding, thus, that staff's commitment and conscientiousness are appreciated); adopting a 'teacher-centred' leadership (it's not just about working with teaching – and other – colleagues to work for the good of the students, but also about working for the good of the faculty). Besides, the success in motivating staff will be influenced by how faculty perceive the leader – his/her personal and professional qualities.

Faculty motivation in higher education has been receiving little attention by researchers. The study presented here aims to be an incentive to the development of more studies in this thematic area.

Linking satisfaction and motivation, Hwang and Chi (2005) showed that satisfied employees exhibit higher levels of motivation than their counterparts. Oishi, Diener, Lucas and Eunkook (1999) concluded that job satisfaction is connected to life satisfaction and intrinsic motivation. The employees who express satisfaction with their jobs often are motivated in their jobs (Thierry, 1998, cited in Sledge, Miles & Coppage, 2008). Tietjen and Myers (1998) concluded that once managers understood what motivated employees, they could focus on the best strategies to create job satisfaction. Similarly, Saleem (2009, p. 8) argued that "...one way of stimulating people is to employ effective motivation, which makes workers more satisfied with and committed to their jobs".

Managers always wanted to increase employee's satisfaction and motivation, because, according to several studies, satisfaction and motivation creates productivity (Shah, 2007; Gazioglu & Tansel, 2006), lower turnover (Shah, 2007), lower absenteeism (Gazioglu & Tansel, 2006), and lower quits (Gazioglu & Tansel, 2006). All organizations must operate with and through people in order to achieve their goals or objectives. According to these views, understanding of motivation and job satisfaction can help leadership managers to adjust employee's behavior and, consequently, to improve results and quality of work in that organization. Our study emerges from considering and planning to help higher education institutions to achieve this main goal. In the changing environment of higher education institutions, in a competitive global educational market, academic staff job involvement and good performance, that may result from satisfaction and motivation in the academic career, is more and more important. Moreover, the research aims to increase knowledge on this theme, being a contribute to international studies on academic staff satisfaction and motivation, showing also the specificities of the academic profession in Portugal (Machado et al., 2011).

3. Methodological approach

The study on academic satisfaction and motivation within Portuguese higher education institutions - An Examination of Academic Job Satisfaction and Motivation in Portuguese Higher Education - involved a quantitative non-experimental design that utilized a survey (questionnaire). The target population was all the academics in Portuguese higher education institutions - including all sub-groups (professor, researcher, part-time, full-time, etc.), and institutional types (public-private, university-polytechnic, etc.). The questionnaire was administrated on-line, available on the website <http://questionarios.ua.pt/index.php?sid=19766&lang=pt>, whose address was sent to academics. It was composed of seven parts: I. Satisfaction Dimensions; II. Motivation; III. Satisfaction, Motivation and Performance; IV. Academic Decision at Your Institution; V. The New Regulation for Faculty Careers; VI. Academic/Professional Context; and VII. General Information. It included questions about the motivation of the academics, their general satisfaction and the degree of satisfaction with a variety of aspects related to the academic profession and to the higher education institution where academics worked (the satisfaction dimensions). The satisfaction dimensions considered were Teaching Climate; Management of the Institution/Department/Unit;

Colleagues; Non academic staff (administrative staff, technical and laboratorial staff); Physical Work Environment; Conditions of Employment; Personnel and Professional Development; Institutions' Culture and Values; Institutions' Prestige; Research Climate and General Satisfaction.

Most respondents to the survey work in public higher education institutions (79%; universities and polytechnic institutes – 42.8% and 36.2% respectively). Only 13.2% of the respondents pursue their academic profession in private universities and 7.8% in private polytechnic institutes. With regard to age groups, respondents are concentrated in age groups “41-50 years” (38.2%), “31-40 years” (28%) and “51-60 years” (23.7%). It should be noted that, on average, the age of respondents is 45 years; the mode is 44 years. Considering the distribution of the respondents by sex, we can verify that 50.7% of them are men and 49.3% are women. There are, therefore, slightly more men than women among the respondents. Finally, with respect to the academic positions in Portuguese higher education (Full Professor; Associate Professor; Assistant Professor; Assistant; Coordinator Professor; Adjunct Professor; Professor Equiparado), the highest proportions are of respondents who are “assistant professors” (22.4%) and “assistants” (14.1%). Only 3.2% of the respondents are “full professors” and 3.6% are “coordinator professors” (the highest academic positions in universities and in polytechnic institutes respectively). In public universities, the predominant academic positions are “assistant professor”, “associate professor” and “assistant” in this order (55.5%, 18.6% and 14.5%). In public polytechnic institutes, the highest proportions are of academics who are “adjunct professor” and “professor *equiparado*” (39.9% and 28.8%). In private universities, the predominant academic positions are “assistant professor”, “assistant” and “associate professor” in this order (34.4%, 33.2% and 20.7%). In private polytechnic institutes, the highest proportions are of respondents who are “adjunct professor” and “assistant” (34.1% and 22.6%).

4. Findings

Table 1 shows the indicators of general satisfaction by institutional type. With respect to general satisfaction with the job, academics in private polytechnic institutes are more satisfied (mean=7.3), followed by academics in private universities (mean=7.1). Academic staff in public universities and in public polytechnic institutes expresses less satisfaction (means are 6.4 and 6.7 respectively). Regarding general satisfaction with the institution, academics in private universities and private polytechnic institutes reveal more satisfaction (means are 6.4 and 6.3 respectively). Academic staff in public universities and in public polytechnic institutes expresses less satisfaction (means are 5.3 and 5.7 respectively). Similarly, respecting general satisfaction with the opportunity to update knowledge, academics in private universities and in private polytechnic institutes reveal more satisfaction (means are 6.3 and 6.2 respectively) and academics in public polytechnic institutes are those who reveal less satisfaction with this aspect (mean=5.5). Regarding general satisfaction with the adequacy of skills to the teaching activity, academics in private polytechnic institutes and in private universities are the most satisfied (mean=7.3 for both), being academics in public universities and in public polytechnic institutes slightly less satisfied (means are 6.9 and 7.0 respectively). Academics in private universities and in private polytechnic institutes are more satisfied with the social prestige of their job (means are 7.0 and 6.9 respectively). Academic staff in public universities and in public polytechnic institutes is less satisfied with this aspect (means are 6.1 and 6.2 respectively). With respect to overall satisfaction with teaching activity, academics working in private higher education institutions are the most satisfied (mean is 7.2 both for private universities and for private polytechnic institutes). Less satisfied are the academics who teach in public universities (mean=6.4) and in public polytechnic institutes (mean=6.7). Finally, respecting overall satisfaction with research the tendency is different: academic staff is more satisfied in public universities (mean=5.8), followed by academics in private universities (mean=5.6). In polytechnic institutes (public and private), overall satisfaction with research is lower (means are 5.1 and 5.2 respectively).

In sum, except with respect to this later indicator - research - academics are more satisfied in private higher education institutions when compared with those who work in public higher education institutions.

Examining means of satisfaction for each indicator, one can verify that academics are generally more satisfied with the adequacy of skills to the teaching practice, with the job and with teaching activity. On the contrary, they are less satisfied with research.

Indicators of general satisfaction by institutional type

[Table 1]

	Type of institution														
	Public University			Public Polytecnic			Private University			Private Polytecnic			Total		
	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
General Satisfaction with the job	1377	6,4	2,07	1167	6,7	1,94	425	7,1	1,98	252	7,3	1,88	3221	6,7	2,02
General Satisfaction with the institution	1377	5,3	2,47	1167	5,7	2,44	425	6,4	2,67	252	6,3	2,45	3221	5,7	2,51
General Satisfaction with the opportunity to update knowledge	1377	5,8	2,44	1167	5,5	2,47	425	6,3	2,52	252	6,2	2,47	3221	5,8	2,48
General Satisfaction with the adequacy of skills to the teaching practice	1377	6,9	2,29	1167	7,0	2,14	425	7,3	2,13	252	7,3	2,07	3221	7,0	2,21
General Satisfaction with the social prestige of the job	1377	6,1	2,45	1167	6,2	2,33	425	7,0	2,40	252	6,9	2,29	3221	6,3	2,41
Overall satisfaction with teaching activity	1377	6,4	2,07	1167	6,7	1,96	425	7,2	1,97	252	7,2	1,89	3221	6,7	2,02
Overall satisfaction with research	1377	5,8	2,24	1167	5,1	2,46	425	5,6	2,55	252	5,2	2,70	3221	5,5	2,41

Scale: 0=Strongly dissatisfied; 10=Strongly satisfied

When looking to the indicators of general motivation by institutional type we find that motivation to teach is higher in private universities (mean=8.5) and in private polytechnic institutes (mean=8.4). There is less motivation among academics in public universities (mean=7.4) and in public polytechnic institutes (mean=7.9). Motivation to do research is higher in private universities (mean=7.8) and in private polytechnic institutes (mean=7.6). There is less motivation to do research among academics who work in public polytechnic institutes (mean=7.1). With respect to motivation to serve the community, this motivation is higher, equally, in private universities and in private polytechnic institutes (mean=7.2 for both institutional types). Academics are less motivated to serve the community in public universities (mean=6.6). A similar tendency is observed for motivation to participate in the governing bodies – more motivation in private polytechnic institutes (mean=6.0) and in private universities (mean=5.8) and less motivation in public universities (mean=4.6). With respect to motivation to work in the institution, academics are more motivated both in private universities and in private polytechnic institutes (mean=7.4 for both institutional types). Academics who work in public universities are the less motivated to work in their institutions (mean=6.6). The same tendency is verified for motivation to remain as a faculty member in higher education – academics more motivated are those in private universities and in private polytechnic institutes (mean=8.5 for both institutional types); academics who work in public universities are the less motivated (mean=7.4).

Analyzing means of motivation in higher education institutions for each indicator, one can observe that there is more motivation to teach (mean=7.8), to remain as a faculty member in higher education (mean=7.8) and to do research (mean=7.4). Academics express less motivation to participate in the governing bodies (mean=5.1). Please see Table 2.

Indicators of general motivation by institutional type

[Table 2]

	Type of institution														
	Public University			Public Polytecnic			Private University			Private Polytecnic			Total		
	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Motivation to teach	1377	7,4	2,22	1167	7,9	1,96	425	8,5	1,79	252	8,4	1,76	3221	7,8	2,08
Motivation to do research	1377	7,5	2,20	1167	7,1	2,48	425	7,8	2,14	252	7,6	2,20	3221	7,4	2,31
Motivation to serve the community	1377	6,6	2,36	1167	7,0	2,21	425	7,2	2,27	252	7,2	2,16	3221	6,8	2,29
Motivation to participate in the governing bodies	1377	4,6	2,76	1167	5,4	2,76	425	5,8	2,82	252	6,0	2,79	3221	5,1	2,81
Motivation to work in the institution	1377	6,6	2,58	1167	7,0	2,47	425	7,4	2,62	252	7,4	2,45	3221	6,9	2,55
Motivation to remain as a faculty member in higher education	1377	7,4	2,57	1167	7,9	2,33	425	8,5	1,99	252	8,5	1,95	3221	7,8	2,40

Scale: 0=Strongly demotivated; 10=Strongly motivated

The diagram of the structural equations analysis illustrates the relationships between general satisfaction and general motivation. Please see Figure 1. The indicators of satisfaction and motivation have high and positive impact on general satisfaction and general motivation. Also, the correlation between motivation and satisfaction is very high (0.82). Satisfaction with research has the less impact on general satisfaction: 0.55. Satisfaction with teaching activity, satisfaction with the job and satisfaction with the institution have the highest impacts on general satisfaction: 0.87, 0.85 and 0.83 respectively. With respect to the impact of indicators of motivation on general motivation, we can verify that motivation to work in the institution, motivation to remain as a faculty member in higher education, and motivation to teach have the highest impacts on general motivation: 0.84, 0.77 and 0.72 respectively. Motivation to do research has the less impact on general motivation: 0.51.

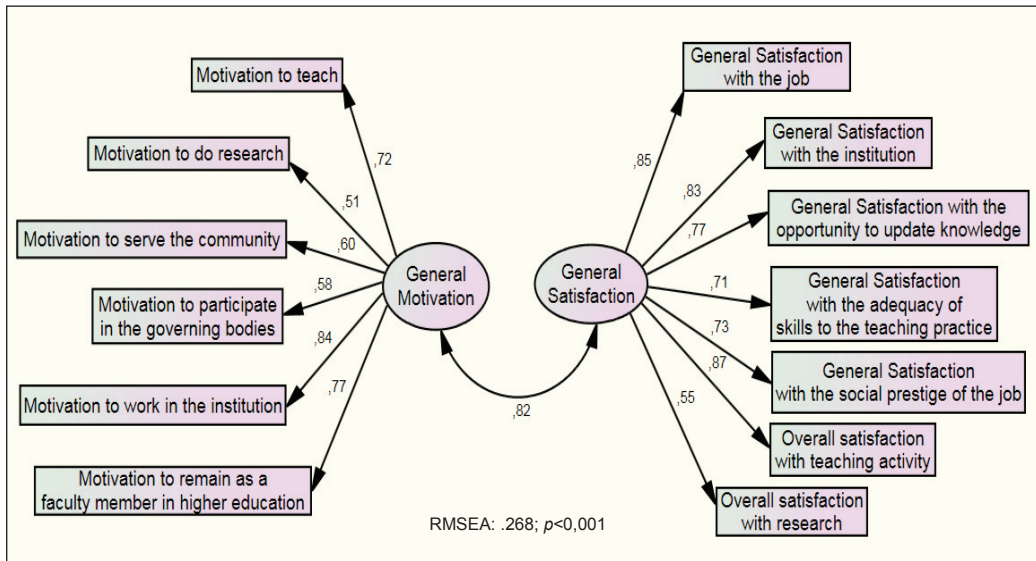


Figure 1. General motivation and general satisfaction

Comparing the four institutional types, one can observe that the proportions of academics very satisfied are higher in private universities (25.6%) and in private polytechnic institutes (24.1%). Considering percentages of academics satisfied and very satisfied, the proportions of academics who reveal these degrees of satisfaction are higher in private institutions when compared with the proportions in public institutions. Moreover, the proportions of academics dissatisfied are lower in private higher education institutions, when compared with the proportions of academics in public higher education institutions. There are more academics dissatisfied in public universities (29.4%). Please see Figure 2.

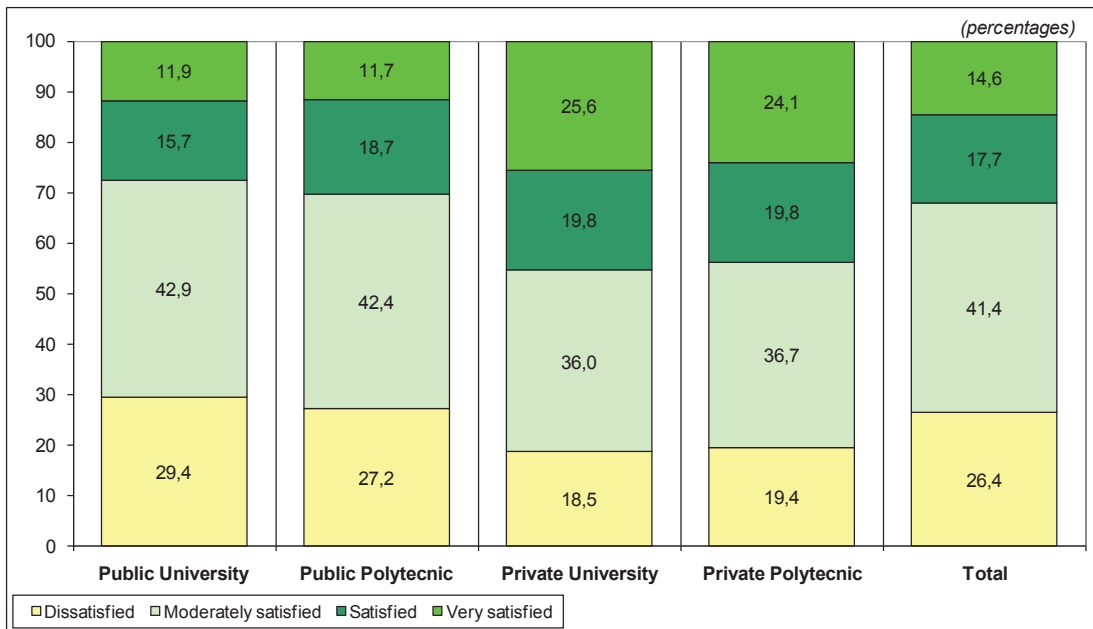


Figure 2. General satisfaction by institutional type

As can be seen in Figure 3 there are more academics unmotivated in public universities (32.1%) and in public polytechnic institutes (23.2%). There are less academics unmotivated in private polytechnic institutes (15.4%). Clearly, the proportions of academics very motivated are higher in private universities and in private polytechnic institutes (25.4% and 25.6%). The proportion of academics very motivated is lower in public universities (9.6%). In sum, academic staff motivation is higher in private higher education institutions.

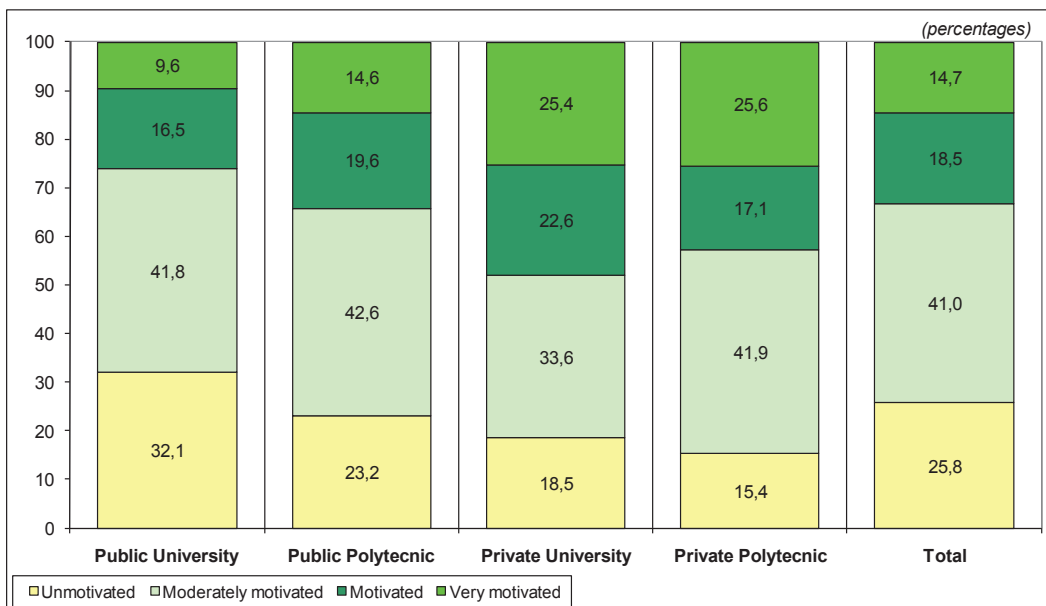


Figure 3. General motivation by institutional type

5. Conclusions

Academic staff job satisfaction and motivation play an important role contributing to positive consequences to the quality of the institutions and to students' learning (Machado-Taylor, Meira Soares & Gouveia, 2010). Therefore, the results presented here are crucial and should create sensitiveness to academics preoccupations and dissatisfaction respecting their jobs, and conditions under which they work. In sum, the main objective to be attained is to create job satisfaction, motivation, and, thus, the best results for institutions and for students.

Research contradicts the assumption that job satisfaction and motivation depends on pay, *per se*; this is not the main influence on job satisfaction and motivation (Evans, 1999; Saleem, 2009). This is shown in our findings.

One can verify that academics are generally more satisfied with the adequacy of skills to the teaching practice, with the job and with teaching activity. On the contrary, they are less satisfied with research. Except with respect to research - academics are more satisfied with all the other aspects considered in private higher education institutions when compared with those who work in public higher education institutions.

There is more motivation to teach, to remain as a faculty member in higher education and to do research. Academics express less motivation to participate in the governing bodies. The indicators of satisfaction and motivation have high and positive impact on general satisfaction and general motivation. Moreover, the correlation between motivation and satisfaction is very high.

In general, we can see that there are higher proportions of academics dissatisfied and unmotivated in public higher education institutions and higher proportions of academics very satisfied and very motivated in private higher education institutions. However, it's important to note that the sample is not representative of the population. Moreover, the results relate only to the academics who agreed to answer the online questionnaire.

From a practical point of view, the findings from this project should heighten awareness, sensitivity and dialogue regarding the important issues that need to be addressed to promote and maintain job satisfaction and motivation within the ranks of the academic staff. Moreover, the results about academic satisfaction and motivation in Portuguese higher education institutions may have relevance to other countries, in a comparative perspective.

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