How Academics View Their Work

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◇　이 글은 Netherlands의 學術誌「Higher Education」의 최근 호 ◇
◇　에 揭載된 論文으로, Australia의　高等敎育　沈滯現象이　교수의 ◇
◇　職業生活에　어떻게 영향을 미치고 있는가에 대하여,　24명의 大 ◇
◇　學敎授와　面談을 통한 調査結果를 7개 영역으로 종합한 것입니 ◇
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I. Introduction

The traditional attractions which the academic profession offered to scholars and teachers lay principally in the opportunities which it gave for research and engagement in reflective thought. In return for a commitment to instruct students during part of the year it offered a modest income and the time and freedom to follow intellectual pursuits. Veblen (1954), writing in 1918, described the members of the profession as constituting:

> A vicarious leisure class...they have entered on the academic career to find time, place, facilities and a congenial environment for the pursuit of knoweledge, and under pressure they presently settle down to a round of perfunctory labour by means of which to simulate the life of a gentleman (pp. 121—122).

More recently, Halsey and Trow (1971) have also stressed the favourable conditions attaching to the academic life.

> There is freedom in the sense of personal autonomy of an order to be found rarely, if at all, in other occupational groups. These conditions permit the essential elements of what is considered a "gentlemanly" way of life. They also make professionalism possible in that, with assured income, both the self-respect of the university teacher and the pressure on him to work beyond the unexacting minimum of his formal duties derive in large measure from his repusation among his colleagues (p. 169).

How do academics see themselves in the changed circumstances of the 1980s? In view of the paucity of studies of the academic profession the answer to this question has considerable

intrinsic interest, but its practical import is even greater at the present time. There is every indication that the higher education system is entering a lengthy period of recession and retrenchment. This will place severe strains upon the institutions and those who work in them. If the universities are to continue to make their distinctive contribution to national life then the academic profession must adapt itself to changing circumstances without compromising its commitment to research and teaching. Those who are concerned to ensure that the profession is enabled to continue in the full exercise of its responsibilities need an understanding of how academics view their work and the ways in which this is being effected by current circumstances. The present study is intended as a contribution to the development of that understanding.

There have been very few investigations of what Baird and Hartnett (1980) rather awkwardly term the "sociopsychological environment" of academics. In Britain there has been the recent work of Startup (1979) and the large-scale survey conducted by Halsey and Trow (1971). The latter was undertaken in the early 1960s and was largely concerned with attitudes towards the post-Robbins expansion of the university system. In Australia there exist only a very small number of published studies, such as those of Magin (1973), Saha (1975) and Genn (1980), which have been concerned with academics as a professional group. A number of investigations are currently underway or about to be reported but most of these rely upon questionnaire data which, however valuable, cannot provide the richness of detail yielded by interviews.

The data to be drawn upon here were collected in the course of an investigation of the impact of the "steady state" upon the working lives of academics. The major findings of the study have already been reported elsewhere (Powell and Shanker, 1980; Powell, 1981) and the purpose of the present article is to explore the data obtained from one university in more detail in order to construct a detailed picture of the ways in which academics view their working environment and their own place within it.

Information was gathered from 24 staff in the faculties of arts and science. The group consisted of twelve lecturers, ten senior lecturers and two associate professors. All but two of them held tenured positions. The rationale for selecting this group was that we were seeking the views of people who had been in post long enough to have had experience of pre-recession times but who could still be expected to entertain hopes of career advancement. Arts and science disciplines were chosen because they not only constitute the traditional core of a university but are also less subject to the effects of those variations in the graduate employment situation which affect the professional faculties.

Data were collected in June/July 1979 using a structured interview which usually lasted about an hour. The interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. All references to individuals, departments and disciplines have been deleted. Assurances of confidentiality were given and the respondents spoke quite freely about all aspects of their work. They appeared to welcome the opportunity which the interview offered them to speak about their professional activities. In this article we present some facets of the reality of academic life as seen from the perspective of those who were interviewed (Filstead, 1970).

In interpreting the material presented here it is important to bear in mind some of its

limitations. The 24 people who were interviewed are in no sense a representative sample of Australian academics or even of staff in one university. The focus of the interviews was the perceived impact upon themselves and their colleagues of the termination of a period of rapid expansion in higher education. Respondents were invited to comment upon the negative and positive effects of what would be seen as a reduction in the resources available to the universities. This orientation of the original study may well have given a rather more negative overall tone to the responses than would have been obtained as a result of a straightforward enquiry into the experiences, values and attitudes of academics. The inclusion in the study of staff from faculties which may feel themselves to be the object of stronger institutional and community support might also have resulted in a somewhat different set of responses.

During the interviews staff were invited to comment upon the effects of the current situation upon their research, teaching, publication rate, administrative responsibilities and career prospects. They were also asked to comment upon any changes in the quality of students and of institutional life, the satisfactions derived from their work, and ways in which the university was responding to changing circumstances. In the course of the interviews no constraint was placed upon the range of topics which might be canvassed and the respondents could express their opinions and concerns quite freely. What emerges from the transcripts is a group perspective upon the realities of academic life in 1979 as seen by 24 university teachers. We have attempted to portray this perspective largely by allowing the respondents to speak for themselves. The quotations have been selected to illustrate opinions on topics which were discussed by almost everyone who was interviewed. In choosing quotations we have tried to make them representative of the views expressed by a substantial number of people, but we have also included material which indicates individual or minority opinion.

It must be stressed that no attempt has been made to establish the accuracy of the perceptions and claim which are embodied in the responses. Our concern has been to construct an account of how this group of academics see things to be and how they view their work lives. In a concluding section we identify some major themes in the interview material and comment on their implications.

II. Teaching

Academics are employed to teach and to undertake research. The demands of research on one's time are very uneven and the outcomes unpredictable, but for the great majority of academics teaching is a daily business, at least during term. Research can be neglected even ignored, without fear of calamitous consequences, but this is not true of teaching. Failure to turn up to give one's classes is impossible to conceal and a persistent failure to do so will lead to enquiries and a call for explanations. Teaching, and its attendant contacts with students, is a central responsibility of the academic and anyone who found it unrewarding or an irritating distraction from other activities would be engaged in a career which incorporated a large element of frustration. None of the respondents claimed not to enjoy teaching and many said that it offered them important rewards and satisfactions.

> I ike teaching, l enjoy teaching and I think the contact with young peoole is stimulating. I suppose the most enjoyable part of teaching would be supervising an honours student— just at the stage where you can get a lot of satisfaction out of working with them. That's about the pick of it, and third year classes, senior teaching, I enjoy. I also enjoy first year but it's very much a performance then—it's more like a theatrical thing and you don't have much rapport with such big numbers. But when you get to senior students, they're motivated, they're interested and they keep you up to date and I think that's what I enjoy the most. I think I enjoy that more than research and I think that's why I don't do as much of it as others because I'm intent on trying to do a good job with teaching. I think that any research I could do really wouldn't be world-shaking and the best thing I can do with my intellect is to train a few other people who will probably be a damn sight better than I am (Science).

In talking about the nature of the satisfaction to be gained from teaching some spoke of the pleasure of seeing students gain in understanding and of working with very able students who are able to stimulate the teacher's own thinking. Some of the expressions of satisfaction, however, were qualified by remarks on aspects of teaching which provoked some anxiety or were seen as unrewarding.

> I like writing and I like the research part of my work. I enjoy teaching in seminars and tutorials. I'm not that keen on lecturing. Some days I like it, some days I don't...There's some kind of psychic energy involved when you get up in front of a whole lot of people—it's hard work. It's not as good as tutorials where you have give and take. Sometimes I don't like lectures that much—it's a strain (Arts).

> I find tutorials a pleasure too but marking is something I cannot stand. The first time you mark an essay it's good to see what your students can do but when you have been marking them for a few years they are so similar—the same mistakes, you know, it's boring (Arts).

III. Students

Attitudes towards teaching and the satisfaction to be gained from it are to some extent bound up with views about the characteristics of students. Most of the comments about students were made in response to a question about the quality of new students. About half of the respondents said that they were not aware of any decline in quality in recent years. The remainder claimed that entry standards had fallen and that an increaisng number of students had an inadequate commitment to academic work.

> It seems to me that students are getting worse and worse all the time, and I continually keep thinking back to when I finished high school. I'm sure that when I did I was nowhere near as illiterate as a lot of the students that we come across (Science).

> I wouldn't be averse, on the whole, to universities staying as they are and having fewer students because we have a number of students who are not really suitable for university education. I would not be dissatisfied if we had fewer students (Arts).

Some members of the arts faculty were concerned about declining demand for entry to the

faculty and spoke of some of the consequences of maintaining numbers by admitting a large-number of less able students. These consequences included more remedial teaching and less contact with good students. A few noted an increase in conservative attitudes among students and less intellectual vitality.

> ...now they are very conservative—they are not adventurous any more, and in a social science that's disastrous. Four years ago I was using text books that the students regarded as not radical enough—for the last two years those books are regarded as too radical. They have really narrowed their frame of reference— they are not adventurous intellectually any more (Arts).

Several cited the current difficult employment situation as an explanation for the decline in demand for entry to the arts faculty and another spoke strongly against re-introducing tuition fees. Many would have been aware of the relationship between university funding and enrolments and there was evidence of this being a source of some anxiety and concern.

> People were worried about student quality, student numbers and the relation of these things to finance, the cut back in the number of jobs in the faculty. These things all seem to be very closely interrelated and given the fact that they were interrelated people worry about one and they automatically percolate through to concern about the others (Arts).

Many of the comments about students are made from the perspective of the teacher and reflect anxieties about the implications of declining enrolments for the welfare of staff. A few of the respondents tried to see things from the students' viewpoint and expressed a concern for some of the difficulties faced by students.

> We are now doing things like running lunch time sessions for kids going for interviews. Things that we never would have dreamt about in years gone past, but now it's just an essential. It seems pointless teaching them if you don't try and give them an extra little chance of getting a job, and it's going to get worse I think. I get very distressed about that problem (Science).

IV. Research and Publishing

Academics are expected both to teach and to engage in research. As was pointed out earlier, the teaching function is simply taken for granted and neglect of it is likely to result in requests for explanations, if only in response to complaints from students. The taken for granted character of the teaching role is reflected in the absence of any expression in the academic vocabulary concerned with teaching which is analogous to "publish or perish".

All academics are under an obligation to make public the results of their work but the extent of publication varies widely and is related both to the discipline concerned and to individual inclinations to pursue research. Academics may not know a great deal about the teaching activities of their colleagues but presumably they are better informed about their productivity as researchers. Most universities issue an annual list of staff publications and it is quite an easy matter to determine the output of one's colleagues.

One generation consists of people who have been here for quite some time and whose publication output is very low. Then there are a middle group of people who publish steadily but not spectacularly but they may have an article a year or possibly an article every two years or something like that or it may be a maximum of two articles a year. And then there is a group you could label the 'new generation' who are all younger people who are very aware of the 'publish or perish' situation and who are publishing a tremendous amount of material. But I would think that some of that material is definitely being published for the sake of being published (Arts).

In some fields scholarly reflection and judgment are seen as being more appropriately expressed in relation to teaching rather than in publication.

I think there is a lot of unnecessary pious talk about research. After all in the humanities we are studying creative work, works of art and they're more important than one's opinions about them. I think the most important thing is bringing students into contact with works of art and the whole of teaching is geared to doing that (Arts).

One respondent pointed out that the very nature of creative and scholarly work in the humanities precluded the possibility of producing results to order. Another claimed that the "publish or perish" syndrome tended to result in the production of poor quality work.

People who publish much too often...it's often very poor. Fewer but very good things, articles in good journals, good books that are well reviewed, but far more than simply lists. I think people who do work that is in a good category do it anyway, so I don't think there has been pressure to publish more in that sense. I don't think people should sit as dumplings doing nothing; I think people would want to publish and do their own research and they get very annoyed of course when they haven't got the money or the time to do it when teaching takes up so much of their time (Arts).

Almost all respondents acknowledged the significance of publication in relation to securing tenured appointments and promotion. Many said that the pressure to publish was now increasing because of greater competition for positions, even though they may not themselves feel subject to that pressure.

I would hate to have an untenured position at the moment because I would not be able to concentrate on any real work at all. The pressure to publish anything reagrdless of quality would be very great, everything would be rushed and you wouldn't have any sense of secu rity or continuity (Arts).

It's all right if you succeed but if you don't succeed then you don't get any funds ,then you don't do any work and you don't publish and you don't get any graduate students. So then you have no hope of getting funds and that really must be terribly depressing for people who are caught in that sort of situation (Science).

Oh, the pressure is about the same, it's always been very high. It's more now throughout the whole university system throughout the Western world. To get on you have got to be very, very good. There are unemployed academics who have published and are very good. You know you are competing with them. They'll take a lower salary so they can get in, so

you are competing with them as well as people who are already established (Arts).

The general view was summed up by a scientist who said: "Basically, what it boils down to is what we all know—'publish or perish'."

There were a number of comments expressing concern that teaching might be neglected because of the demand for more publication. Doubts were also expressed about the value which was attached to teaching activities when career advancement decisions were being made.

> ...people always piously say, yes, we take your teaching qualifications into account, but I really don't think they do. Untenured staff because they are only going to have three or five years are going to be much more concerned with churning out their publications and doing their research (Arts).

> What saddens me is that there isn't sufficient emphasis put on teaching which I think would be my strength for promotion. The effort I should be putting should be on publication because I think that's the thing that really wins promotion. The impression I have is when you achieve some sort of excellence in teaching it doesn't count much (Science).

V. View of Colleagues

Academic work, like that of the general medical practitioner, is very much a private affair. Reflection, reading and writing are essentially solitary activities. Even the teaching of students, which would appear to be much more public in character, is rarely observed by colleagues. Most academics, however, have opinions—well-founded or not—about the professional competence of their colleagues and these often emerged during the interviews. There was a substantial number of unfavourable comments on other people but these were sometimes expressed with a degree of sympathy in that shortcomings were attributed to a lack of institutional vidual weaknesses.

> People used to be in doing their research but for the last couple of years they haven't really been around. You know, they have taken their holidays and this sort of thing. Three or four years ago there were people in the place at night, apart from the research students—even an awful lot of the research students are not there at night any longer (Science).

> There is one who wants to publish. He's working now because he wants to move and I think pretty much solely because he wants to move. But he's working and I think he's working very hard these days. The rest are not publishing at all and most haven't published in years. The head of the school, I think, may be getting back at publishing but he hasn't done anything for quite a while. He confesses that he thinks maybe he's losing interest in the subject (Arts).

> The system is there to be exploited even if it means exploiting some of your colleagues. I think that some of the people who are older certainly appear to me to be saying, well, the system is playing me for what it can get so I'll play the system for what I can get. I think if you get to be a senior lecturer and things are not going well and you have not got enough

money for research, then you just say 'Well blow it, I'm not going to be a senior lecturer for the rest of my life, I might as well retire.' Or still stay at university, still get your salary and do as little as you can, because it is a no-win situation for those people (Science).

Two respondents claimed that the rapid earlier expansion of the universities had led to the appointment and promotion of some staff who are not of the calibre of many of those now seeking positions.

I'm sure that if one's honest there are some of us in these jobs now who wouldn't be here if in fact there hadn't been the tremendous growth in the universities during the end of the 50s and during the 60s—it was the dearth of people (Science).

There were also, of course, other comments in praise of colleagues who continue to be dedicated to their work in the face of mounting difficulties and frustrations.

Assuming that you are willing to be in the same university and the same spot for the next thirty years it's fine. I don't personally think that many people teaching in the universities are as dull as that personally. Maybe it's that ours is a very lively department and has very good people. I think if they are intellectually lively they won't want to sit as dumplings for thirty years doing nothing. I think people like working, I think people like publishing (Arts).

I think most of my colleagues are hard workers and it't not as if we are leading an easy life or anything like that. We are leading an easy life only to the extent that we like what we do and I think we work hard at it (Science).

VI. Career Prospects

The rapid expansion of the higher education system during the 60s and early 70s created a large number of new academic positions, increased promotion opportunities and encouraged job mobility. That expansionary thrust has now been halted and has begun to go into reverse. The impact of this on the profession has been felt most acutely in the area of career advancement so that respondents' views of career opportunities were very much coloured by their impression of the extent to which financial support for the universities had been cut back. There were many comments upon the consequences of decreased job opportunities and mobility both for talented young people who are now unable to pursue an academic career and for the longer term vitality of teaching and research.

If our best graduates drift off and do something else then it's not a visible social problem but it will invisibly eat away at the foundations over 20 years or so. It will mean that the graduates who should be the lecturers of 1986, or whatever, won't be there, they won't have continued their difficult professional self-preparation. That's terribly important (Arts).

It's going to create the sort of structural problems we have seen happen in the public service where they put staff ceilings on and you don't get young talent in. It's going to mean a population of academics who will inevitably, with whatever good will in the world, be out of touch with the needs of generations of students coming through. It will mean a de-

cline for the future (Arts).

Others commented on the absence of mobility as a threat to the quality of research and teaching and as possibly leading eventually to a sense of disillusionment and doubts about the value of academic work.

> Promotional prospects have changed dramatically. They are largely non-existent except within your own institution, just going up the hierarchy. But if one thinks back to the 1960s, particularly the mid-1960s when I came here, the academic staff was quite mobile and people would move from a lecturer in one institution to be senior lecturer in another. This is one of the accepted paths of promotion, and from senior lecturer to reader or associate professor. This really just is not happening now. If you want people to remain active, you have got to keep stimulating them mentally and one of the best ways of doing this of course is to change the people they are working with, their surrounding. To appoint young people in their twenties and have them stay there until they retire is not the way to keep people active (Science).

Most of the views on this topic, however, related to the effects of reduced promotion opportunities. Some of these were concerned with the advancement prospects of the respondent but the majority were to do with the difficulties faced by younger colleagues.

> The most dramatic effect is that the young ones have no career prospects. It's messing them about disastrously. In some cases they've been committed to becoming academics: Again, you are not getting the sort of postgraduates you are looking for because there is no future (Arts).

> Oh, it's very bad, very bad, very demoralising for young people. People who have jobs are hanging on to them. When jobs become available they are either not filled or if they are filled you have enormously large fields and you are in competition (Arts).

One spoke frankly about his own response to the situation in terms of academic gamesmanship.

> I obviously have to publish—make an effort to get stuff out. There are gambits I can employ: short communications, papers one can combine you split into two to increase the numbers. It's a game and I'm sure I can play it as well as anyone else. There's the unpleasant thing that I have to be involved in administrative duties, on committees, that sort of thing. I can see pressure to get on committees not because I'm interested in what the committee is going to do or what I can contribute to the committee but so that I can put down on the list that I was on such and such a committee (Science)

VII. Quality of Professional Life

Academic life has many attractions but there was a quite widespread feeling among respondents that the extent of its attractiveness had recently been, or would soon be, diminished. This was attributed partly to such factors as inadequate public support and the threat of declining enrolments. Any perceived falling away in the support or demand for one's work is

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likely to have an impact upon morale and thus upon commitment and productivity. Several respondents felt that the community was now less convinced of the value of what universities have to offer.

> Mainly one feels that one is being given less and less value in the community at large, so that the community places less importance on the work of universities (Science).

Some saw the lack of job mobility as reducing the attractiveness of an academic career.

> I think you will find that a lot of people will begin to wonder about the old feeling that the university academic's job is a job of great prestige and a very worth while job and one to be fought for and hung on to at all costs. I think that idea will fade slightly and one of the reasons it will fade is a paradoxical reasoa, that as jobs get harder to get, as people be-come more immobilised, they will think well O.K., I can have the job but the price I have to pay is to stay here for the rest of my life. And I suppose the decline in the availability of sabbaticals will encourage that too. So, oddly enough, as university jobs get harder to get some people, because of their temperament, will feel, oh bugger it, and do something else, just for the sheer sake of mobility, being able to move around (Arts).

Others felt that those who were attracted by opportunities to engage in research would be likely to find universities less congenial workplaces than they were formerly.

> The academic life used to be, I think, a lot more attractive than it is now. There appears to be more work loaded on to people now and fewer privileges, such as sabbatical leave being diminished drastically. In my field it's very rare these days to get a permanent posi-tion, and all of this tends to influence people away from academia. The life style doesn,t have the appeal that it used to have. The big thing with academia I think was being bale to do research, there's a creative element in thas and with financial cut-backs people are hamstrung in trying to develop their ideas so they lose their incentive to do it (Science).

The great majority of comments on this topic came from members of the faculty of arts. It seems clear both from the nature of what was said and the language in which it was expressed that many of the staff in that faculty feel a degree of anxiety and threat with regard to their future. This largely stems from a fear of the consequences of a perceived decline in ihe nu mber and quality of students and was neatly summed up by the staff me-mber who said: "We might come to have a feeling that we have no purpose".

> ...a certain degree of anxiety in terms of selling oneself and the courses one teaches and the awareness that if one can't attract students then at some point the axe may fall. Secondly, an anxiety all around that the good old days have gone, that things like promotion and tenure just aren't happening and are not going to happen the way they used to (Arts).

> I think two things are happening in the faculty of arts. The first thing is that there is a general demoralisation because arts is losing its place as a sort of cultural leader. The best students are not doing arts, they are going else where or doing professional courses and this will have very strong effects on arts, So there is a certain amount of demoralisation (Arts).

Most recognised that their anxieties arose mainly from anticipated developments rather

than present realitiies, but these imaginings were no less damaging to morale.

> I think in most lecturers, in general, there have been some subtle changes in attitudes to work. I mean the work is not as attractive. The future is very uncertain. We don't know whether we are going to have students. We don't know if we'll have good students. Every year seems to be no growth or cuts. If they keep going on I sometimes feel that a lot of the brighter students may not come to the university any more. I don't know what the long term future is and even there's talk about the university wanting to terminate our positions. They could get by with paying us one year's salary. I heard people talking about that during lunch time. If this crisis goes on for five or ten years, from being an attractive place to work it may not be. So there is that long term anxiety gnawing away. I think people are possibly a bit less idealistic about their job, more pragmatic, just get what they can out of it (Arts).

VIII. Quality of Institutional Life

How this is viewed depends upon a number of factors such as individual preferences, characteristics of colleagues, size and administrative style of the institution, and the extent of participation in decision-making. Many respondents gave the impression that they were not satisfied with the social aspects of their contact with colleagues acd comparisons with experiences elsewhere often led to unfavourable judgments on their own university.

> I have found that this university is very compartmentalised and divided up. There is, I find, very little socialising. For example, on the same floor as us there is another school and I have been here four years and I met somebody at a conference last May on the same floor whom I had never met, never seen before, and we got chatty and pally and, you know, we must see each other. It's been a year, May 1978, and apart from just seeing him outside the building I have never seen him or visited him on the same floor (Arts)

> It's my impression that this university rather fragmented. I worked in Melbourne for five years and Melbourne had a much better social cohesiveness than this university and I think this is not simply in the arts faculty but in the university generally and I would say it's a result of policy decisions made early in the university's life. It's not going to be the kind of university where you have a central meeting place, and s o on, for staff (Arts).

> Well, I looked around shortly after I got here and I spent over a year actually looking for some kind of campus life. It's considerably different here from the U.S. where most people live on campus and there is a real university life. You can just go out in the evening to a university cafe or a bar and meet people and you talk to people, but there is none of that here. So I have given up. I don't do that anymore and I don't try (Arts).

There were a number of comments which reflected dissatisfaction with the administrative style of the institution. These typically incorporated references to "them" and "us", revealing a sense of not being informed about what was going on and not being involved in decision-making.

> I feel that those who make the most important decisions don't have any real close acquain-

tances hip with the real life and job of the university. They are hard-headed businessmen really aren't they? You know, totting up the figures and seeing what's the cheapest way to do this. That's how it seems, whether it's true or not, but that's how it appears. And that's demoralising when you think that people like that are making the decisions and it's a worry. Basically the effects have been very bad and demoralising (Arts).

I think it is impossible to tell what they are doing, because we don't get told. We don't really know that the university is doing, we don't really know why the university has decided the study leave programme to be that way, and it seems to me if it's a reasonable approach why not tell us? I think we have a right to know those sort of things—the administration ought to work for the whole university and not just, as it appears, for itself (Science).

There is just no discussion of these fairly important policy areas outside the administrators, people like the Deans and so forth, but very frequently they won't report back (Science).

IX. Discussion

The interview material gathered from the 2 staff members whom we spoke is extremely rich and varied but it is possible to discern three themes which were touched upon in almost every case.

1. *Morale*—There is considerable evidence of an actual or impending decline in staff morale. Many people feel insecure and anxious about the future, they see their career prospects astonishing constricted and perquisites such as study leave being eroded. There is a sense that the work of the universities is not much valued by the community at large. Many staff feel that teaching is less rewarding because there are fewer students with a real interest in intellectual work. All of these factors combine to make the academic life appear less attractive than it was formerly.

The nature of academic life is such that a high level of morale is probably essential if the quality of teaching and research is to be maintained. Unless staff have a strong commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and a deep engagement in the task of teaching then these activities face the risk of being neglected. Teaching loads can be required to be carried but enthusiasm and dedication cannot be commanded by administrative fiat. Research productivity, at least for tenured staff, depends almost entirely upon individual commitment and informal pressure from peers. Apart from the evidence of publication it is not easy to determine the extent to which an academic is involved in scholarly and research activities: a great deal has to be taken on trust.

One of the prime attractions of the academic life is the freedom which it offers to pursue one's interests with a minimum of institutional demands upon one's time. The responsible exercise of this freedom requires both a commitment to the value of intellectual work and a continuing engagement in it regardless of the existence of exterior incentives. It helps, of course, to feel that what one does is valued by others and universities have traditionally provided a secure setting in which scholars can pursue their interests in a conducive atmosphere. If the feeling were to grow that this atmosphere was becoming less congenial then academic morale would lose one of its major sources of support. The significance of individual commi-

tment was very clearly expressed by one of the respondents:

> I think just because the money supply is tighter it surely mustn't affect your interest in work. Surely your interest in your work can't be related wholly and solely to the money supply—that's ridiculous. I'm just as interested in what I am doing as I was before (Science).

Members of the arts faculty appear to be particularly vulnerable to anxieties about the future and the impact of a perceived lack of public confidence in the value of what they are doing. The feeling of insecurity is exacerbated by fears of declining enrolments, the difficult employment market for some graduates, and current talk about accountability and the justification of humanistic studies.

If the morale of the profession suffers a serious decline then this will almost certainly have the effect of undermining the quality of teaching and research. The interviews indicate the current fragility of morale and thus the need to do everything possible to strengthen it. In order to achieve this leadership qualities of the highest calibre will be required of administrators and senior academics. During the recent era of expansion morale was not an issue and academic leadership predominantly demanded the skills of the entrepreneur. Quite different skills and attitudes are now required if institutional vitality is not to be dangerously eroded.

2. Opinions about Colleagues—We were surprised at the number of negative opinions which were volunteered during the interviews. It was alleged that some staff members did no research, or were neglectful of teaching, or merited the description "deadwood", or were lazy and were "exploiting the system".

It is not easy to know how to interpret such comments. They could be indicative of a very high level of professional standards and an intolerance of any failure to maintain them. They could reflect the personality characteristics of many people who are attracted to academic work. There is some support for this view in the findings of Mitroff (1974) who interviewed 42 researchers involved in the Apollo space project.

> In going through the comments of the respondents with regard to their feelings toward one another, the extreme volatility of the comments is most striking. For sheer intensity of emotion, vituperation, and overall vindictiveness, none of the other areas under investigation even begin to approach the areas concerned with the scientists' feelings about one another. So many of the remarks and judgments contained profanity and bordered on slander (if they did not cross over into it) that it would be difficult just to count them (p. 90).

The criticisms expressed by our respondents were couched in much milder terms but still reflect the low esteem in which some colleagues are held. Further evidence of such judgments on colleagues is provided by a national survey (Roe and Vasta, 1980) of assessment practices in Australian universities which canvassed the opinions of departmental heads and which found that:

> ...21% of university heads of departments and 41% of college heads of departments referred critically to their colleagues in such terms as staff resistance. staff laziness, staff inflexibility, staff lack of interest and/or knowledge of alternative assessment methods (p. 238).

Another possible interpretation is that during the rapid expansion of the universities in the 1960s some staff were recruited whose commitment to teaching and research was to a considerable extent dependent on external incentives such as the rewards attendant upon promotion and mobility. As these become progressively more difficult to obtain staff members may find it increasingly difficult to maintain a high level of interest in teaching and research and this decline in commitment may become visible to colleagues.

Whatever the explanation for the quite widespread criticisms made of colleagues the existence of this phenomenon indicates a potential for divisiveness which could be exploited by those who are unsympathetic towards the universities. During a period when the profession will need to present a confident and united front it must be a matter for concern that the basis for this is far from being flawless.

3. Views of the Institution—Newman saw a university as an Alma Mater, knowing her children one by one. A very different view of their university appears to be held by many of those whom we interviewed. The collective impression is of a socially fragmented, highly bureaucratised organization in which a small group of people make most of the decisions without usually communicating or consulting with anyone else. As one respondent said: "That's how it seems, whether it's true or not, but that's how it appears".

On the face of it, not a very congenial environment for those engaged in academic pursuits. Many of the comments are indicative of feelings of alienation, powerlessness and hostility, rather than a sense of the traditional academic community working collaboratively to achieve shared purposes. The frequent use of the terms "them" and "us" is very revealing and suggests a serious breakdown of communication and the development of an adversary relationship which is displacing the collegial one.

It could be argued that the idea of the university as a "community of scholars" has been on the wane for some time and has little application to most contemporary institutions whose size and bureaucratic procedures render any sense of community increasingly elusive. If that is so then most of our respondents seem to be saying that their working environment is becoming uncongenial and unresponsive to their needs as teachers and researchers.

X. Conclusions

Perhaps the most striking feature of these interviews is what they reveal about the relationship between the perceived realities of university life and the preferred working environment of academics. Most people derived considerable satisfaction from teaching yet many indicated that they felt that this was undervalued by the institution. This is supported by the findings of a study of 796 academics by Genn (1980) which showed that 92% rated teaching performance as being ideally of high or extremely high importance yet only 12% thought it rated such importance in the actual academic world. Among our respondents many attached significance to social relationships and a sense of community but felt that their daily experience of these was less than optimal. There was a feeling that institutional arrangements largely failed to recognize their need to participate more fully in decision-making and policy formulation. The broader significance and worth of their scholarly and teaching activities were perceived

as being increasingly undervalued by the community at large. Growing and competing de-1 mands on their time were seen to be making it increasingly difficult to give adequate attention to the various elements in their professional role.

Our findings suggest a widening gap between academic ideals and the realities of daily experience which is likely to lead to frustration and dissatisfaction which in turn will weaken morale. It was suggested earlier that morale is of vital importance to academic work because of the role which it plays in maintaining a high level of commitment to teaching and research. If it is significantly weakened then this will have profound consequences for the work of the universities.

If recent events in Britain and North America provide any pointers then the Australian universities will face a difficult period in the near future. The role of the academic profession in overcoming these difficulties will be a crucial one and it is of the greatest importance that everything possible be done to enable the profession to respond effectively. Our findings indicate that there is a good deal of uncertainty, anxiety and frustration at the present time and a feeling that the academic life is losing some of its attractiveness. If allowed to go unchecked this could pose a threat to morale.

Much can be done from within the universities to correct this situation by supporting the idealism and commitment which is evident in many of the comments made by those we interviewed. There are strong indications of a willingness to respond to initiatives and institutional arrangements which are seen to be more closely aligned with academic values and aspirations. Those with administrative and academic leadership responsibilities, and the professional organizations, should be giving high priority to developing policies and creating a working environment which will help to give more substance to academic ideals.   *

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