

WORKING CONDITIONS, WORK LIFE AND QUALITY OF LIFE OF THE TEMPORARY SUPPORT STAFF INVOLVED WITH TELEMATIC LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Transformation in the South African higher educational system compelled residential universities to introduce alternative education such as distance education (Department of Education, 1997:66-67). The university in this study also took this route and started offering Telematic Learning through a programme known as Telematic Learning Systems (TLS). Telematic learning refers to education offered through contact sessions presented over distance. It thus provides more intense contact than the traditional distance educational model. A consequence was that the university's academic administrative system and workload expanded, and mainly temporary support staff was employed to carry this burden. The workload for the telematic nursing programme was extensive, the remuneration package was poor with little benefits and working conditions were not pleasant, which caused frustrations and which affected the quality of life of the temporary support staff. The goal of this research was to explore and describe the experiences and expectations of the temporary support staff with regard to their working conditions, work life and quality of life by means of a qualitative, descriptive research design. A purposive sample according to set criteria was used for the selection of participants as identified by mediators. Data collection was done through a phenomenological method of unstructured in-depth interviews. Content descriptive analysis, as described by Tesch (in Creswell, 1994:153-159) was used to analyse data through open coding. Five major categories resulted: experiences of the organisational structure; work life; interpersonal relationships; occupational development and quality of life while working at TLS. Conclusions were that staff experienced working conditions mainly as unpleasant, but that they adapted because of the team spirit. Relationships are good amongst staff, but strained with management and training is needed. These factors resulted in frustration, in a feeling that life is without real meaning and in problems with a future vision. Guidelines were formulated for the facilitation of quality working conditions, work life and quality of life of the temporary support staff, as well as for encouraging management to take note of certain focus points.

OPSOMMING

Die transformasie in die Suid-Afrikaanse hoëronderrigstelsel het residensiële universiteite genoop om alternatiewe onderrig, soos afstandsonderrig, in te stel (Departement van Onderwys, 1997:66-67). Die universiteit in die navorsing het ook hierdie roete gevolg en telematiese leer begin aanbied deur middel van 'n program bekend as die Telematiese Leersisteem (TLS). Telematiese leer verwys na onderrig deur kontakssessies oor afstand en verskaf dus meer intensiewe kontak as die tradisionele afstandsonderrigmodel. Die administratiewe stelsels en werkslading, wat veral deur tydelike ondersteuningspersoneel behartig word, is gevolglik uitgebrei. Die telematiese

verpleegkundeprogram se werkslading was uitgebreid, die vergoedingspakket swak en die werksomstandighede onaangenaam, en dit het gelei tot frustrasie by die tydelike ondersteuningspersoneel, wat hul lewenskwaliteit beïnvloed het. Die doel van die navorsing was om deur middel van 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingontwerp die belewenis en verwagtinge van tydelike ondersteuningspersoneel ten opsigte van werksomstandighede, werkslewe en lewenskwaliteit te verken en te beskryf. 'n Doelgerigte en vrywillige steekproef is gedoen en deelnemers is aan die hand van gestelde kriteria deur tussengangers geïdentifiseer. Data-insameling het deur middel van die fenomenologiese wyse van ongestruktureerde indiepte onderhoude geskied. Inhoudsanalise, soos uiteengesit deur Tesch (in Creswell, 1994:153-159) is gebruik vir die data-analise deur oop kodering. Vyf hoofkategorieë is geïdentifiseer, naamlik: belewenisse ten opsigte van die organisasiestruktuur; die werkslewe; interpersoonlike verhoudings; beroepsontwikkeling; en lewenskwaliteit. Gevolgtrekkings was hoofsaaklik dat die werksomstandighede nie aangenaam is nie, maar dat die personeel aangepas het as gevolg van die spangees. Onderlinge verhoudinge was goed, maar stremming met die bestuur het voorgekom en opleiding is benodig. Hierdie faktore het aanleiding gegee tot frustrasie, tot 'n ervaring van gebrek aan sin en betekenis en tot probleme om 'n toekomsvisie te identifiseer. Riglyne is gevolglik geformuleer vir die fasilitering van kwaliteit werksomstandighede, werkslewe en lewenskwaliteit van die ondersteuningspersoneel en ook vir die bestuur om aandag aan fokuspunte te skenk.

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

In South Africa, the developmental needs of the community indicated amongst others that a professional labour market characterised by competency and skillfulness should be fostered (Department of Education, 1997:66-67). In reaction to these needs, the White Paper on the Transformation of Higher Education, which inspired great changes in education, was promulgated (Department of Education, 1997:66-67). The changes included increased access to education, opportunities for lifelong learning and more flexible educational models. The goal was to provide higher education that ensured skills and innovations to the benefit of national development and consequent successful participation in the world economy.

Higher education therefore had to provide alternative methods of education which advocated lifelong learning, increased access and equitable opportunities, eradicated discrimination and promoted thorough planning and co-ordinated education and research, as well as a democratic ethos and culture congruent with rights for students (Department of Education, 1997:68; Reddy, 2004:1-5). Residential universities in the South African higher education system implemented transformational programmes to meet the changing needs of the community, including distance learning programmes (Department of Education, 1997:68). Some universities decided to alter the model of distance learning and to offer telematic learning programmes. Telematic learning systems (TLS) is described as an educational pro-

gramme that is designed to promote a learning strategy that is not dependent on direct day-to-day contact education, but implements appropriate technology to utilise learners' ability for optimal self-study by means of resource-based learning and structured contact (PU for CHE, 2000:4).

As students were now spread over the country, the researcher observed that the implementation of these telematic learning programmes necessitated the employment of more temporary support staff to provide in the need for increased organisational resources. These new temporary staff members needed to be empowered to take responsibility for new tasks (Householder, 1992:97-101) within the newly developed administrative systems. Several authors (Booyens, 1998:202-203; Kroon, 1996:99-100; Thompson & Strickland, 1998:947-955) mention that in such transformational circumstances, the work climate, work circumstances and quality of life of employees might be affected negatively.

The researcher, as a lecturer in health service management, observed these negative effects for and on the support staff when telematic learning nursing programmes were implemented at the University. She noticed that temporary support staff experienced increasing work pressure within unstable working conditions and insufficient infrastructure and that their levels of personal discomfort became high. Some of these staff members verbalised feelings of frustration, unmotivatedness, apathy, tiredness and unsuccessfulness. A very high turnover of staff was causing concern. All these factors could severely influence the qual-

ity of the services provided to the students in the TLS. The researcher thus asked the following questions:

- What are the experience and expectations of temporary support staff of the TLS at a university with regard to their working conditions?
- What is the experience and expectations of temporary support staff of the TLS at a university with regard to their work life?
- What is the experience and expectations of temporary support staff of the TLS at a university with regard to quality of life? and
- What can be done to facilitate quality working conditions, quality work life and quality of life of temporary support staff?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In view of the above-mentioned concerns the following objectives were set for the research:

- to explore and describe the experiences and expectations of the temporary support staff of the TLS at a university with regard to their working conditions;
- to explore and describe the experiences and expectations of the temporary support staff of the TLS at a university with regard to their work life;
- to explore and describe the experiences and expectations of the temporary support staff of the TLS at a university with regard to their quality of life; and
- to formulate guidelines for the facilitation of quality working conditions, work life and quality of life of temporary support staff.

PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

The research was conducted within meta-theoretical, theoretical and methodological parameters. The Nursing for the Whole Person Theory (Oral Roberts University, Anna Vaughn School of Nursing, 1990:136-142), which is based on a Judeo-Christian philosophy, formed the foundation of the research. This theory was adopted because it corresponded with the researcher's personal philosophy. Meta-theoretical statements were formulated regarding health, the person and environment. According to these meta-theoretical statements the temporary support staff members, as persons, are viewed holistically and in interaction with others. The

research focused on the quality of life of the temporary support staff in their working conditions (external environment) and work life, which influenced their internal environment. The focus is on the temporary support staff and the formulation of guidelines for the development of lifestyle enrichment.

Theoretical statements of this research included the central theoretical argument, as well as the conceptual definitions of the core concepts applicable to this research, namely telematic learning, quality of work life, quality of life, temporary support staff and working conditions. *Telematic learning* is an educational programme for a qualification, developed to enhance a learning strategy that is not dependent on day-to-day contact education, but applicable technology is used for resource-based education and structured contact, and students' ability for self-study is also optimally utilised (PU for CHE, 2000:4). *Quality of work life* is described by Bennett (1992:166) as the totality of satisfaction at work and includes participation in decision-making, interpersonal relationships and organisational culture. *Quality of life* is defined by Möller, Schlemmer and Du Toit (1987:3) as the degree of well-being that the individual is experiencing in personal, social and economical situations. *Temporary support staff* are people who are in posts that cannot be filled by the organisational resources (Statt, 1991:348) and *working conditions* are those conditions in which persons have to function at work, including the physical environment, workload, norms and attitudes, as well as relationships between workers (Plug, Louw, Gouws, & Meyer, 1997:100). The methodological statements were based on the Botes model for nursing research (Botes, 1995:19-21).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

A qualitative, explorative and descriptive approach (Burns & Grove, 1997:27) was followed to explore the experiences and expectations of the temporary support staff with regard to their working conditions, work life and quality of life while working at the university. This design is described by Burns and Grove (1997:67) as well as by Mouton and Marais (1992:45-51) as appropriate when research endeavours to obtain insight into experiences in a relatively unknown terrain with

the aim of describing these experiences, as in this study.

Research method

The research method included sampling, data collection and data analysis.

Sampling

The sample was drawn from the temporary support staff at the TLS from the university by means of purposive sampling as described by Woods and Catanzaro (1988:108-109). Supervisors at TLS were requested to act as mediators. They were provided with information about the research project, as well as with selection criteria for the identification of possible participants. The selection criteria included the following:

The participants had to:

- have been employed as a temporary support staff member for at least three months at the TLS;
- be available and willing to participate;
- have given consent to participate and for the use of an audiotape during the interview;
- be conversant in Afrikaans and/or English; and
- be representative of the various cultural groups and of both sexes.

A list of possible participants was obtained from the mediators. An explanatory letter about the aim of the research was sent to those on the list who met the selection criteria. Of these participants, seven were interviewed. Data reached saturation (Woods & Catanzaro, 1988:565) after the seventh interview. One more interview was conducted to ensure saturation of the data. The sample included three white males, one black male, three white females and one coloured female, between the ages of 20-35 years.

Data collection

A trial run was conducted in order to test the applicability of the unstructured in-depth interview. Consent was obtained from participants to be interviewed and for the use of audiotapes to record the interviews. Interviews were scheduled in collaboration with a Psychiatric Nursing specialist who acted as the independent interviewer. Interviews were conducted at a venue in the TLS building where privacy could be ensured and no time limit was set, but with the understanding that the interviews

would last between one and two hours. The following question was asked:

- What is your experience of and your expectations concerning your working conditions, your work life and quality of life?

Field notes were written immediately after conducting the interviews.

Data analysis

Audiotapes were transcribed verbatim and open coding was done in accordance with steps as described by Tesch (*in* Creswell, 1994:155). The data analysis entailed that the researcher read through all transcripts to obtain a broad idea of what the interviews were about. She then critically read each interview, identifying themes and words relating to the experience and expectations of temporary staff members, clustering similar themes and words into categories and sub-categories and translating these into scientific descriptions.

A psychiatric nurse specialist experienced in qualitative research was appointed as an independent co-coder. She followed the same steps in analysing the data. A consensus discussion was held between the co-coder and researcher to finalise the categories and sub-categories.

LITERATURE CONTROL

A literature control (Woods & Catanzaro, 1988:135) was done in order to compare and contrast the findings of this research with similar research.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

To ensure the trustworthiness of this research Guba's model (*in* Krefting, 1991:215-217) as well as guidelines formulated by Woods and Catanzaro (1988:136-137) was used. To ensure credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability the following procedures were followed:

For credibility:

- Independent experts supervised the researcher in conducting the research.
- Interviews were conducted by an independent interviewer, as the researcher were in a work relationship with the interviewees and might

have been biased.

- Participants were informed that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained.
- A trust relationship was built with participants by explaining the role of the researcher and to clarify uncertainties and faulty perceptions.

For transferability:

- The research methodology was described thoroughly.
- The context of the research was described thoroughly.
- Mediators identified and recruited possible participants, guided by clear selection criteria.
- Participation was voluntary.
- A literature control was performed after data gathering and data analysis had taken place.

For dependability:

- Interviews were conducted until data saturation became apparent.
- The researcher transcribed audio-cassette recordings to ensure involvement with the data.
- A co-coder independently analysed the data and a consensus discussion was held to confirm the results.

For confirmability:

- A trial run was conducted before data gathering took place.
- Thorough field notes were taken directly after each interview to support the results.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Permission was obtained from the management of the university and participants. The researcher ensured that the participants' rights, namely the right to privacy, the right to anonymity and confidentiality, the right to fair treatment and the right to protection from discomfort and harm, were considered throughout the process (Brink, 1996:39; Burns & Grove, 1997:200-26; DENOSA (SAVV, 1991:1-7)). Participants were provided with information about the research, and were informed that participation is voluntary. Participants were free to withdraw at any point during the research. They were also informed that if they experienced emotional discomfort after the interview and needed support, a professional

person was available for this purpose. Interviews took place in a venue where privacy could be ensured, and participants' names, which were only known to the interviewer and the researcher, were replaced by codes.

Furthermore, the researcher conducted the research in a professional, respectful manner and attempted to give an accurate description of the data.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings resulted in five major categories concerning the experiences and expectations of temporary support staff of their working conditions, work life and quality of life while involved with TLS as illustrated in Table 1. Below is a discussion of the findings as well as the literature control to verify the findings.

Discussion of the findings concerning the experiences and expectations of the temporary support staff of their working conditions, work life and quality of life

A discussion of major and sub-categories as summarised in Table 1 follows.

Experiences of the organisational structure at the TLS

Staff experienced that the initial training was insufficient and that there was no process in place for the division of work. Participants mentioned that their initial experience of the work was that it was chaotic and unorganised. There was no structure to deal with the variety of duties. The following quotations relate to this finding: *"initially, when I started here, I thought it was chaos"; "we were thrown into the deep end and really did not have the training"; "it will take time to organise things"*.

Staff reported negative experiences of the fact that there was no division of work and of the work process itself, as due dates were continuously being changed and rules were altered without communication. Their perceptions were that there was a lack of information to resolve problematic situations, and that the telematic nursing programme had a heavier workload than other departments. They felt that the situation would improve if their administrative skills could be improved. Participants made the following remarks: *"due dates are not*

Table 1: Experiences and expectations of temporary support staff involved with distance learning regarding their working conditions, work life and quality of life in general

COLUMN A	COLUMN B	COLUMN C	COLUMN D	COLUMN E
Experiences of the organisational structure at the Telematic Learning Systems	Experiences of the work life at the Telematic Learning Systems	Experiences of interpersonal relationships while working at the Telematic Learning Systems	Experiences of occupational development within the existing post at the Telematic Learning Systems	Experiences of quality of life while working at the Telematic Learning Systems
Experiences of the training at the Telematic Learning Systems -initially experience the organisation as chaotic and disorganised -do not receive sufficient training with appointment -staff not trained properly -structure with regard to a variety of duties lack	Experiences of concern regarding students -concerned about the administrative service to students -concerned about the financial affairs of the students	Experiences of the relationships with colleagues -everybody feels part of a group in a difficult situation -everybody tries to help each other -everyone feels thrown into the deep end -socialise to relieve work stress	Experiences of the remuneration package in the existing post at the Telematic Learning Systems -see the poor package as a reason for the high staff turnover -no overtime pay -even with the poor package and the scant benefits, staff are still prepared to do the work to the best of their ability	Experiences of quality of life at work -experience frustration because their work performance does not receive recognition -exposure to other cultures is positive -the current work will be beneficial in the future
Experiences of the division of work and process -due dates are continuously changed -rules are altered without communication -insufficient information available to resolve a situation by themselves -the work load is big in comparison with other departments -improving administrative skills	Experiences of poor quality service rendering -compassion for the students that struggle with the service they receive -experience that service provision can be improved -due to the big work load there are not enough time and attention for individual students	Experiences of the relationship with management -experience frustration because of the lack of training -do not receive recognition for the time and effort put in	Experiences of re- and term appointments -unrealistic expectations with regard to re- and term appointments -concern with regard to their appraisal	Experiences of quality of life at home -no consistency because the appointment is temporary -experience a lack of time for others at home due to a lot of overtime work and work taken home to be completed -experience positive support at home
	General emotional experiences within the working conditions -a positive feeling of teamwork prevails -everyone enjoys working together -everyone laughs in a difficult situation -they feel that they motivate each other -everyone shares the big workload	Experiences of the relationships in the family while working at the Telematic Learning Systems -experience uncertainty about the post and is not able to plan -even though the salary is low, it does provide independence -after-hours studies and the big workload result in neglecting the family at times	Experiences with regard to the future at the Telematic Learning Systems -see the temporary appointment at the Telematic Learning Systems as a stepping stone or a transitional phase -a preparatory phase for another, more rewarding post -promotional possibilities are rare, but they remain loyal to the organisation	Experiences of quality of life for the self -feel that something has been achieved -feel that even though the benefits are poor, it is still good to work here

kept"; "there is no standing work procedure"; "it feels like information just never reaches you"; "nursing has a crazy workload". In this regard Maistre (1996:44-48) mentions that most organisations are initially perceived as chaotic and disorganised by new staff, while Feinberg (1993:11) suggests that the staff should be fully informed at the beginning and that a supportive person should be available to answer any questions. Grensing-Pophal (1996:44) and Austin (1991:4-5) stress the value of an orientation booklet for all new staff mem-

bers.

Experiences of work life at the TLS

Participants expressed concern regarding the poor quality of the administrative services rendered to the telematic students and they had empathy with the financial pressures of students. They felt that neither they nor the students were adequately informed about administrative and financial regulations: "I really felt sorry for them"; "you should pay before receiving study ma-

terial". Austin (1991:4-5) shares this concern, and points out that the quality of service rendering is enhanced when employees are adequately informed.

Participants also experienced that service rendering were of poor quality, and in particular they experienced frustration with not being able to help students adequately; they felt that administrative service rendering could be improved; and they were of the opinion that the heavy workload prevented them from paying adequate attention to individual students. The following quotations are applicable: "*dit is amper onmoontlik om alles gedoen te kry*" (*It is nearly impossible to get everything done*); "*it is not an eight to five job, you carry on until all the work is finished*"; "*the nursing workload is so much more*". Fagiano (1994:4) confirms this finding, and mention that temporary staff should be empowered to render and promote adequate services.

General emotional experiences at work were that a positive feeling of teamwork prevailed, that temporary staff members motivated each other and that everyone shared the heavy workload. Statements such as "*the conditions and the people I work with are pleasant, like a family, they all listen and after a telephone call they help to rectify the student's case*"; "*everyone of my colleagues and my department are very nice*"; "*we all go out and discuss work away from work and it helps to see it differently*". Mittner (1998:54) agrees that teamwork enables staff members to realise the organisation's goals. In addition, Van der Kooy (2000:39) has found that humour in the team at work increases the realisation of goals.

Experiences of the interpersonal relationships while working at the TLS

Experiences regarding interpersonal relationships could be divided into three sub-categories, namely relationships with colleagues, with management and with family. Relationships with colleagues were important for these staff members, as it helped to be part of a group who were all in a difficult situation; they tried to help each other; they all experienced the same difficulties and they interacted socially to relieve work stress: "*we lean on each other*"; "*we all socialise and work together*"; "*the people you work with are very nice, good to work with, they are always there for you*". Briggs and Peat (in Rensburg & Ströh, 1998:52-64) are of the opinion that a strange coherency exists amongst staff members in

an organisation where chaos is experienced. These staff members support each other and work together to realise goals (Rensburg & Ströh, 1998:52-64).

The relationship with the management of the TLS was perceived as frustrating due to the little training the temporary staff received and because they felt that they received no credit for the time and effort they had to sacrifice: "*nobody knew what was going on, it was very frustrating because we were all new in a new programme*"; "*there is just no credit for a person or it is as if nothing is noticed*"; "*credit is not about money, it is about being noticed that you are doing the work*". Clark (1996:97) mentions that staff members' loyalty decreases if they are not supported or rewarded by their employees, as in this case.

Temporary staff experienced their family as supportive, where they (staff members) were uncertain about the continuation of their appointments and consequently could not do future planning: "*what really is difficult is that you are appointed as a temporary staff member. Luckily my family is very supportive*"; "*you know, a person must think about the future, buying a house or car*". Cronin and Hise (1994:149) mention that even though the remuneration packages are poor, it serves as a boost for these staff members. Furthermore, staff members experienced their salaries (even though it is little) as a great help, as it gave them some independence from their family: "*your quality of life increases with the couple of cents you receive*"; "*ek studeer ook nog na-ure wat dit vir my baie moeilik maak, maar ek hoef nie in my pa se oë te kyk vir hulp nie*" (*I also study after hours, which makes it very difficult for me, but I don't have to look to my father for help*). Another result of staff members' heavy workload and the overtime work that was required was that their relationships with their families were influenced negatively: "*your social life suffers, at times you are in a bad mood and your family has to suffer*".

Experiences of career development within the existing post at the TLS

Career development within their existing posts was experienced as negative. Remuneration packages were poor and this was seen as a reason for the high staff turnover. Overtime work was expected, but no remuneration was paid for it. In spite of the poor package with no benefits, temporary staff members were still

prepared to do their best: *"I feel they can provide a better package, that includes benefits"; "it's not an issue of working overtime, you are not paid for overtime, but a person does have an obligation towards your job"*. Jefferson and Bohl (1998:23) agree that temporary staff should be treated as permanent staff and that remuneration packages should be revised. Clark (1996:97) mentions that temporary staff members in this situation are always on the lookout for a new position.

Temporary support staff also felt that management had unrealistic demands and they experienced anxiety regarding re- and term appointments. They feel that they should be very careful not to make mistakes, as these would be would jeopardise their chances for re-appointment: *"you should be appointed for two years before you can get a term minimum, this is terrible prerequisites that are set"; "they can basically terminate your contract at the end of the year and the whole time you ask yourself whether you will still be around next year"; "you just don't get ahead, it's very negative and stressful, I really don't want such a letter"*. Clark (1996:97) confirms that temporary contracts are unfair as it produces no permanence – the worker experiences no connection to the organisation and it causes stress and frustration.

Temporary support staff regarded their position at TLS as a stepping stone, a transitional or preparatory phase to a more rewarding position. They experienced promotion possibilities as rare, but still remained loyal to the organisation, as they regarded their tasks as enriching and with potential for personal development: *"I don't think there is a future for me"; "this is a temporary post, if I think about promotion, I don't think there are any promotional possibilities, I think you will have to go somewhere else if you want promotion"; "it was very confusing, but you can see what has happened up to now, how it has changed and you feel as if you have achieved something"*. Literature (Maistre, 1996:44-48; Grensing-Pophal, 1996:44) confirms that future planning and expectations of permanency are difficult when people are appointed in a temporary post.

Experiences of quality of life while working at the TLS

Temporary staff members' experiences of their quality of life varied from positive to negative, and included experiences with regard to work, their families and them-

selves.

The temporary support staff experienced frustration at work, as they felt that their supervisors did not demonstrate either financial or verbal recognition for their efforts: *"as ek kan kies sal ek sê gaan eers by die ander departemente kyk of daar nie meer bevorderingsgeleenthede is nie"* (If I could choose I would say first look at other departments if there are more opportunities for promotion). Relevant literature that directly refers to these findings could not be found, although Lynn (1995:40) and Fagiano (1994:4) agree that temporary support staff should receive recognition for their work.

Staff members also felt that their work exposed them to different cultures, and they experienced this as positive: *"Dit bly 'n uitdaging om met ander kulture te werk, ek moet eers 'n ding 'n kans gee en die mense is gelukkig."* (It remains a challenge to work with other cultures, I have to give things a chance and then people are happy.) This finding seems to be unique to this research.

Temporary staff members also experienced that the skills and knowledge obtained through their work could benefit them in the future: *"I will really be able to use it in the future"*. Maistre (1996:44-48) agrees with this finding.

It was also found that temporary staff members felt that their quality of life was influenced by the lack of continuity of their appointments at the university. They experienced stress and uncertainty regarding being re-appointed and earning a salary: *"Die hele tyd vra jy jouself gaan jy volgende jaar nog hierso wees."* (The whole time you ask yourself if you are still going to be here next year.) Clark (1996:97) confirms that temporary staff experience frustration when they are competent to do work assigned to them, but they do not know whether they will be re-appointed.

Temporary staff members experienced that they sacrifice a lot of their own time and they consequently spend less time with family members. This causes stress and influences their social life: *"Dit sit ekstra stres op jou, ek meen jou sosiale lewe ly ook daaronder en om bietjie ontspanning vir jouself te kry."* (It puts you under extra stress, I mean your social life suffers and to get a bit of relaxation for yourself.) They, however, felt that they

did achieve something and had obtained new skills, and although the benefits were poor, it was still good to work there: *“you feel as if you have achieved something”; “my quality of life has improved, if I didn’t work I would have been at home doing nothing”*. Literature confirms that when temporary staff members experience that they contribute to the institution, they experience working at the institution as worthwhile in spite of limited benefits (Clark, 1996:97, Rensburg & Ströh, 1998:52-64).

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this study are that the working conditions and work life of the temporary support staff at TLS are generally difficult, and that this factor influences their quality of life negatively. If it were not for teamwork that helped them adapt, support from their family and their experiences of personal successes, they would have left the organisation. Relationships among staff members are good, but relationships with management are strained. They feel that initial training and orientation could have enhanced a more positive experience of delivering services, and that this need should have been recognised by supervisors. Temporary support staff members are constantly looking for better positions and express a need for more stability in their working conditions, work life and their quality of life.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Although the intention was to explore both the experiences and expectations of the temporary staff members, the results mainly reflect experiences. It was found that expectations were entwined in the experiences described by the temporary support staff members. Expectations were therefore not specifically mentioned or explored.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations were made for education, research and TLS practice. Educational institutions could aim to use knowledge of this research in future planning at TLS centres, as well as for in-service training regarding administrative tasks and processes. The findings of the research could assist in structuring training programmes for newly appointed staff.

Further research should focus on the exploration of:

- the experiences and expectations of management and permanent staff at a TLS centre;
- management’s perceptions of work performance;
- the expectations which management and permanent staff have of the temporary support staff; and
- the perceptions and expectations of academic staff and students regarding TLS and quality control with regard to service provision at TLS.

Recommendations for the practice were formulated as guidelines to facilitate quality working conditions, quality work life and general quality of life for the temporary support staff involved at the TLS centre. These guidelines focus on lifestyle enrichment, including empowerment of temporary support staff regarding coping mechanisms, taking proactive action, problem solving and decision-making skills, resolving conflict and self-assertiveness, activation of meaning and purpose, and restoration of relationships between staff members and management. Guidelines were also formulated for management to pay attention to specific focus points, which were identified in the research. A discussion of these guidelines follows:

Guidelines for lifestyle enrichment to facilitate quality working conditions, work life and life in general

Temporary support staff were working in circumstances over which they had no control. It would be valuable to empower them with skills to enrich their lifestyle, and to facilitate quality working conditions, quality of work life and quality of life in general, so that they may experience meaning and purpose in their work circumstances.

Empowerment of the temporary support staff to enhance their coping mechanisms

Steps to enhance coping skills, as identified by Kleinke (1991:28), could be followed. Coping skills could be enhanced as follows:

Staff members should be facilitated to strengthen existing *support systems*, and to activate management and supervisors as support systems. A network of *professional health care workers* should be available if

specialised support or care is needed by staff members. *Relaxation exercises* could be taught to staff members to relieve stress. Staff members could also be guided to take *internal control* of their lives and to learn to *cope positively with challenges*. Their *use of humour* to cope with stress could also be expanded. *Physical activity* in order to relieve stress could be encouraged as well.

Empowerment to take proactive action

Proactive action means to take responsibility for one's own life. People who take proactive action do not blame others or circumstances. Their behaviour is a product of their own choices based on values, rather than on a product of situations or feelings (Covey, 1994:75).

Workshops could be held during which the principles of proactive action could be discussed with temporary support staff. These principles include taking initiative, positive thinking, developing realistic perspectives on areas of concern, developing an awareness of areas of concern that staff members are able to change/improve and developing a language of proactiveness (for example, "Let's look at the alternatives").

Development of problem solving/decision-making skills

Training on these skills and relevant follow-up could be valuable in facilitating temporary support staff to adequately solve problems in their work circumstances, and to become confident in decision-making.

Principles as developed by Brammer and Shostrom (1982:296-297) could be followed during training and follow-up sessions.

These include that staff members should be encouraged to become involved in work-related relationships and processes, to prevent a situation where decisions are made on their behalf. Guidance on personal decisions could also be valuable. Staff members should also be encouraged to implement decisions taken. Thereby they experience that they are part of implementing new decisions and they could gain confidence in decision-making. They should also be encouraged to identify and describe problems and to look for reasonable alternatives and solutions and the implications of these. All staff members should be involved in such exercises.

Effective conflict management and assertive behaviour

Workshops and discussions could be held on these topics. Principles as identified and described by Kleinke (1991:112) could be followed. These include the facilitation of conflict management by means of negotiation, optimistic comparisons, ignoring the problem if applicable and acceptance. Self-assertiveness could be encouraged by teaching staff members the following skills: acknowledging own feelings and demonstrating this with responsibility and respect; demonstrating empathy to enrich relationships; differing from others with tact while keeping one's own opinion and listening to the opinions of other; and acceptance of responsibility for oneself and one's own behaviour.

Activation of meaning and purpose in work circumstances

Meaning and purpose could be facilitated by encouraging staff members to find their own meaning and purpose in the work situation, to value the uniqueness of this (Frankl, 1987:99) and to apply it in their work circumstances. Staff members could be encouraged to identify and build on their value system and to take responsibility for choices. It could be valuable to encourage staff members to discover the purpose and meaning of here-and-now situations (Fabry, 1987:37). Three specific areas in which meaning and purpose could be encouraged include creative activities, enjoying experiences outside work circumstances and attitudes.

Initiating, management and restoration of the relationship with management

It could be valuable to present workshops attended by both temporary support staff members and management, during which the principles on win/win interaction, as described by Covey (1994:206) are discussed. Principles as described by Kleinke (1991:112) on how to initiate, manage and restore relationships should also be discussed during such workshops. These include taking responsibility to initiate, manage and restore relationships and the evaluation of expectations in relationships. It would also be constructive if both management and staff members are guided regarding positive changes in work circumstances. Guidance regarding communication skills could facilitate healthy relationships as well.

Guidelines for management to encourage an awareness of the focus points of the research

An intensive exploration of the tasks included in the job descriptions of the temporary support staff would be meaningful. Structured training would be significant in that it would direct the organisations' expectations and it could be used productively as in-service training. A system of recognition could be installed, as this would ensure increased production, as well as a happy staff. Incorporation of the temporary staff into the day-to-day decisions and management of the TLS should be encouraged. Reflection on the remuneration package of the temporary support staff should be considered, as well as reflection on the overall division of work at the TLS. More staff should be appointed for larger programmes. Management should reflect carefully on re-and term appointments and meaningful in-service training programmes for all staff should be developed.

SUMMARY

The objectives of this research were achieved through an exploration and description of the experiences and expectations of the temporary support staff working at the TLS division of a university. This has contributed to the formulation of guidelines for lifestyle enrichment for the temporary support staff and of guidelines for management to encourage an awareness of focus points in the research.

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