

# *Condiciones de trabajo y configuración del sentido de la profesión académica en profesores universitarios colombianos*

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## Resumen

Enmarcada en el contexto de las transformaciones del trabajo académico, en especial con la irrupción del capitalismo académico, y situada en las organizaciones universitarias, la presente investigación tuvo como objetivo analizar la configuración del sentido de la profesión académica en 160 profesores universitarios pertenecientes a universidades públicas y privadas de cinco ciudades colombianas. Este estudio fue cuantitativo, no experimental, transversal y descriptivo. Se aplicó el instrumento QPW-5 –cuestionario sobre la calidad de vida laboral en organizaciones de servicios humanos, compuesto por 173 ítems que miden las escalas de condiciones de trabajo y bienestar laboral general–, el inventario de Burnout de Maslach, y un cuestionario de *engagement*, además de una parte cualitativa con cinco palabras clave que definen la experiencia de trabajar. Se realizó un análisis correlacional y un análisis de componentes principales para establecer el patrón de las dimensiones evaluadas. Como resultados, se encontró que los docentes encuestados evidenciaron tendencias generales a configurar un sentido de la profesión académica de forma ambivalente, en un polo positivo y negativo, donde se destaca la presencia de condiciones de trabajo fragmentadas que denotan agotamiento, cinismo y efectos colaterales, así como una nueva configuración del profesionalismo académico. Además de esto, se señala que la temporalidad del vínculo contractual se naturaliza como condiciones de trabajo precarias que colocan como foco de atención a los riesgos psicosociales de los docentes universitarios.

*Palabras clave:* sentido de la profesión, condiciones de trabajo, académicos, profesionalismo.

## *Working conditions and the meaning of the academic profession in Colombian university professors*

### Abstract

The aim of this research was to analyze the shaping of the meaning of the academic profession in 160 scholars, from public and private universities in four Colombian cities. The instrument QPW-5 (Questionnaire on Quality of Work life in Human Service Organizations) was applied. It was composed of 173 items distributed in five scales: Working Conditions, Perceived Workload, General Working Well-being, Maslach Burnout Inventory and Engagement, and five key words that define the work experience. This study was carried out following a quantitative approach, a non - experimental design with a cross-sectional descriptive correlation. A correlational analysis and Principal Component Analysis were performed to establish the pattern of the dimensions evaluated. The teachers surveyed showed general tendencies to shape their meaning of the academic profession in an ambivalent manner in a positive and negative pole, where the presence of fragmented working conditions that denote exhaustion, cynicism and collateral effects, as well as a new configuration of academic professionalism are highlighted. It is pointed out that the temporality of the contractual relationship is naturalized as a condition of precarious working conditions, placing a focus on the psychosocial risks of university teachers.

*Key words:* sense of the profession, working conditions, academics, professionalism.

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# *Condições de trabalho e configuração da percepção da profissão acadêmica em professores universitários colombianos*

## Resumo

Enquadrada no contexto das transformações do trabalho acadêmico, em especial com a explosão do capitalismo acadêmico, e situada nas organizações universitárias, a presente pesquisa teve como objetivo analisar a configuração da percepção da profissão acadêmica em 160 professores universitários pertencentes a universidades públicas e privadas de cinco cidades colombianas. Este estudo foi quantitativo, não experimental, transversal e descritivo. Aplicou-se o instrumento QPW-5 —questionário sobre a qualidade da vida laboral em organizações de serviços humanos, composto por 173 itens que medem as escalas de condições de trabalho e bem-estar laboral geral—, o inventário de Burnout de Maslach e um questionário de Engagement, além de uma parte qualitativa com cinco palavras-chave que definem a experiência de trabalhar. Realizou-se uma análise correlacional e uma análise de componentes principais para estabelecer o padrão das dimensões avaliadas. Como resultado, descobriu-se que os docentes participantes evidenciaram tendências gerais para configurar uma percepção da profissão acadêmica de forma ambivalente, em um polo positivo e negativo, no qual se destaca a presença de condições de trabalho fragmentadas que denotam esgotamento, cinismo e efeitos colaterais, bem como uma nova configuração do profissionalismo acadêmico. Além disso, indica-se que a temporalidade do vínculo contratual é naturalizada como condições de trabalho precárias que chamam a atenção para os riscos psicossociais dos docentes universitários.

*Palavras-chave:* percepção da profissão, condições de trabalho, acadêmicos, profissionalismo.

## Introduction

### *Academic work and its transformations*

Since the emergence of universities in medieval times, when they were characterized by the exclusivity of education that was only for certain communities of a religious nature (Brunner, 1990, 2014; Universia, 2015), and passing through the Enlightened Modernity, industrial and democratic times where the university functions as a social institution (Blanch, 2013b) adopting models whose dominant values include universality, autonomy, freedom, rationality, and wisdom, among others, universities have gone through a series of transformations that have permeated their administrative and professorial fields (Romero, 2015). According to Morales (2012), some of these transformations have come about with the globalized development and the Fordism crisis of the 1970s. One of these transformations was the introduction of a market logic and the business paradigm, which adopted certain standards like productivity, profitability, efficiency, effectiveness, competitiveness, and the assessment of skills, results and working relationships (Spicer & Flemming, 2007; Blanch, 2011b, 2014).

From Chomsky's (2014) point of view, these transformations are generating a change in the employment practices that have gone from stable and long-term, to fragile and temporary, where one of the most affected aspects has been the disappearance of the academic career. In turn, he argues that the ratio of administrative personnel compared to the number of professors is disproportionate, with the

number of administrative positions increasing in relation to the number of academic seats. From this perspective, a tiered bureaucratic business style is created in order to comply with administrative and educational procedures (Antunes & Alves, 2004). On the other hand, it generates an imbalance in coverage, class management and attention to students (due to the increase in the number of students per class), an increase in part-time teachers and an overload of administrative and academic work (Sánchez & del Sagrario, 2012; Blanch, 2011b, 2013, 2014; Calera, Esteve, Roel & Uberti-Bona, 2014).

These changes in the working conditions for academics are a result of neoliberal reforms, which have transitioned from a Keynesian-Fordist model to a model that modernizes state services, including higher education (Romero, 2015). This new paradigm has been called *New Public Management* (NGP, for its Spanish acronym), and with this type of management, public organizations must be designed and operated using programs that are measured by the achievement of results (Arellano and Cabrero, 2005; Sisto 2012; Sisto & López, 2014).

For Blanch (2013b), the NGP process is implemented through a management model that is driven by flexibilization, where quality, excellence, innovation, governance and sustainability are emphasized. He concludes that this process is achieved through the evaluation of skills and results, management of spending and the application of cost-benefit indicators. In this way, public institutions (social, sanitary and educational) adopt the rules of free trade, where the person who receives a service is seen as a

client. Following this logic, Sisto (2012) considers that the NGP defines the manner in which the relationship between the employer (university) and the employee (professor) has been constructed. It creates a new type of relationship, where there is a change in salaries and job stability related to the standards set for academic job performance. In other words, if one does not perform in the expected manner, according to the new standardized procedures, salary or other elements of the working conditions may be affected.

Under the new style of university management, which is seen as a new type of partnership, academic work is reorganized and educational centers are reconfigured from the perspective of curriculum and offers for tenure (Blanch, 2013a). New conditions for academic work emerge, characterized by flexible contracts where instability and the increase in work hours are common, and there is a reduction in what are considered to be acceptable conditions in the quality of working life and regarding the performance of academics in their duties (Morales & Blanch, 2013; Caballero & Nieto, 2015; Romero, Blanch & Rentería, 2016).

These new working conditions are taken on by professors in a variety of ways. Anderson (2008) proposes a classification of the different manners in which academics have chosen to face the new conditions. *Avoidance* is presented as the act of not complying with the new demands placed upon academics; *resistance*: academics project an attitude of complete rejection towards managerialism; *academic weakness*: professors manage to keep a low profile in their academic activities, while hoping that their low output is not taken into account by management; *qualified compliance* with assigned tasks, and new ones that are added. *Refusal* is one of the ways academics address the new managerial demands; occasional omissions result in a subtle form of rejection. These are some of the ways in which professionals in the academic field have addressed the conditions that produce discontent, and that have arisen from the changes in conditions in the university sector that tend to separate scholars from their primary objective, which is the passing of useful knowledge to others (Zamora Fortuny, 2004; Sánchez & Del Sagrario, 2012).

New university management, especially in Latin American universities including those found in Colombia, has affected the way in which universities are understood, given the fact that universities were created under the protectionist mantle of the State, granted autonomy, and not held accountable for their ideological perspective (Brunner, 1990, 2012, 2014). In Brunner's words (2014), in the Latin American context, reference is made to the public and private universities, where public institutions lend authority to research and free services, and private institutions act

more like a commercial endeavor in search of compensation and recognition. In this way, Latin American universities find themselves passing through the realms of the market (supply and demand) as an alternative to sustainability, financial solvency and a search for a new identity (Mollis, 2003; Romero, Blanch & Rentería, 2016).

In this context of university transformation, reflected in the academic profession in Colombia and Latin America as a whole, the changes that are framed within "*cognitive capitalism or academic capitalism*" as defined by Slaughter and Leslie (1997, 2001) are apparent. One of the primary premises of academic capitalism is to establish a new academic management through new practices in the Higher Education Institutions (HEI); these would guarantee the creation and expansion of income and be patterned on a market logic, creating a situation where the sale of goods and services leads to self-financing. From this point of view, the need to receive financing from the private or public sector requires academics to rethink their duties, as they are now working in spaces that were designed as if they were part of a market (Romero, 2015). In this way, the working conditions of the teaching body and academics in HEIs are seen as a manner to commercialize the production of knowledge and other aspects like culture, mission, vision and politics of the universities, with an emphasis on the value of research, and the changes in the scholarly and student subcultures (Mendoza & Berger, 2006). Consequently, the general logic of *academic capitalism* is a logic that is shared with industry; in other words, scholarly topics mingle with market forces where the contribution of research to knowledge is a commercial application (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Additionally, the effects of academic capitalism become variable according to the context, and therefore in Latin America, specifically in Colombia, the reforms that were meant to upgrade Higher Education (HE), still have not taken root. In Colombia, universities have been undergoing these changes since 1993. Public universities have been taking on certain aspects of the private sector, and have been revaluated by both academics and students (MEN, 2013). The national legislation that is responsible for HE, like the laws 115 from 1994, 30 from 1992, and the decrees 2904 from 1994, 1279 from 2002, and 2566 from 2003, have charted the course for higher education in Colombia, where universities have adopted a diversity of administrative practices, including policy based achievements or marketing to students for different programs, educational development and new policies for the recognition of intellectual productions and incentives for research (Romero, 2015).

Consequently, both public and private universities build their institutional and educational projects based

on their missions, defining principles, aims and strategies that encompass the fields of teaching, research and social diffusion (Rizo, 2004; Romero, Blanch & Rentería, 2016). The legislative reform has not been the only influence, but also changes at a social level that permeate the context, such as globalization, information and communication technologies; the job flexibility that HEIs have generated, the loss of independence, the hegemony that rearranges the types of relationships with scholars, creating technocratic links, and the merchandising of knowledge (Castro-Gómez & Guardiola, 2002).

The new academic jobs are based on new working conditions where scholars are required to adapt to these new productive standards and where they have to re-signify their relationship with the new labor context (Sisto, 2005, 2012; Blanch, 2014; Ochoa & Blanch, 2016; Romero, Blanch & Rentería, 2016). The parameters for measuring academic skills are set according to merit or by an increase in intellectual production (MEN, 2013), and generate competition between colleagues from the same university and other HEIs (Blanch, 2013ab; Romero, 2015). Work relationships of a temporary or occasional nature that are a response to student demand and enrollment in programs, deteriorate teachers' dedication to their scholarly tasks, especially to research and attention to students' needs; this situation is perceived as a psychosocial risk due to job instability and the worsening of working conditions for teachers (Blanch, 2011ab, 2013ab; Romero, 2015). The fragmentation of work contracts among the teaching staff brings up two issues that affect the possibility of seeing professorship as a career (Zabalza, 2009; Sánchez & Del Sagrario, 2012). This phenomenon can be explained from two different points of view: firstly, by the fragmentation of contracts which cut the continuity in the practice and formation of professors (Prieto, Valencia, Carrillo & Castellanos, 2011), and secondly, the combination of scholarly tasks and research and an obligatory administrative workload (Sánchez & Del Sagrario, 2012).

In the words of Fernández and Pérez (2011), the academic profession finds itself in a very peculiar situation that includes four important points. Firstly, the massification of HEIs that creates a greater number of enrolled students in different departments, and brings as a consequence a reduction in the possibility of building new areas of reflection on knowledge. Secondly, the proliferation of different kinds of HEIs that assign new characteristics to scholars, differentiated and negative for the educational system, considering job spaces that are occupied by people who do not see the academic activity as a career, but rather as

a job to be performed. Thirdly, a reduction in investments in research and development limits the research budgets and the academic training. Finally, internationalizing and regionalizing processes of HEIs have affected the academic profession in cases where globalizing processes are undergone and ICTs have been implemented.

This being the case, working conditions in the academic profession have been steeped in a series of transformations that have affected the very meaning of the profession. Or to a certain extent, they shape the context in which the university as an educational institution is immersed (Romero, Blanch & Rentería, 2016).

### *The Meaning of the Academic Profession*

The meaning of the academic profession is understood as *professionalism* by Romero, Blanch and Rentería (2016), involving a primary component: the relationship between the professor and the student. Another component, establishing a bond of responsibility, trust and respect, guarantees the social contract between education and society. The centrality of the professor-student relationship is taken on as part of the academic vocation, where interest for a third party is the source of satisfaction. The responsibility, trust and respect are meant to maintain the standards of quality of knowledge that is shared.

The degree of satisfaction not only depends on the compatibility between the academic area chosen to be pursued by an individual, or the degree of knowledge in the discipline, but also on the psychosocial conditions and risks to which the person is exposed in their place of work (Garrido, Uribe & Blanch, 2011; Arenas & Andrade, 2013; Blanch, 2013ab; Romero, 2015; Romero, Blanch & Rentería, 2016).

One of these conditions specific to the academic profession, academic freedom, is a component that qualifies the professor-student relationship as a requisite for the satisfaction gained by teaching others their area of expertise. This ethos of the profession provides the possibility to nurture the relationship using the important issues that create the possibility of different manners of thinking (Isola, 2013).

Academic professionalism is extending out in various directions, one of which is specifically moving towards knowledge that is driven by ethical and moral standards. Another is moving towards the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of working in the field of education. The motivation of teaching staff towards their profession is related to the relationship they establish with their students, as well as maintaining the energy required to execute a diverse and demanding workload that is enriching and worthwhile too (extrinsic elements). The desire to grow intellectually or



professionally (intrinsic elements) is an essential element in the formative process in the university (Eirín, García & Montero, 2009).

While academic professionalism is moving towards ethics based teaching strategies influenced by the professor-student relationship, it is also affected by the transformations of the working conditions in higher education (Nixon, Marks, Rowland & Walker, 2010). The increase in student population, the reduction of time to perform as a mentor, and the administrative workload, among other conditions that are a product of the new university management practices (Guerrero, 2006; Sisto, 2005, 2009, 2012; Blanch, 2014), have created a situation in which the meaning of the academic profession (professionalism) is not viewed as a single thing; instead, it is nuanced, and is seen as resistance or as a joining and molding force for the new forms of measurement, quality and control programs for professorial management, research and administration (Nixon et al, 2008; O'Reilly & Reed, 2011; Evans & Cosnefroy, 2013).

The construction of the meaning of the academic profession is undertaken following various phenomena found within the profession itself: working conditions, nature of the job, commitment and satisfaction derived from doing

the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1974, 1975; Ardichvili & Kuchinke, 2009; Romero, 2015). The positive and negative poles that are used to itemize the organization (university) and the work itself, shape the meaning of the profession positively through the logic of satisfaction and commitment or *engagement* (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2004, 2009). While a negative pole causes the task of academic work to be taken on in a senseless manner, or negatively, similar to the *Burnout Syndrome*, under working conditions that have become precarious, containing little inspiration, and requiring a strong commitment but with the impossibility of responding to or coping with demands (Alcántara & Preciado, 2009; Salanova, Schaufeli, Llorens, Pieró & Grau, 2000; Romero, Blanch & Rentería, 2016). If conditions are determined to be favorable at every level of analysis, then the meaning of the profession will have characteristics that are similar to the frame of reference that nurtures them (Spink & Medrado, 2013). As a result, the meaning of the academic profession is built on the parameters of the contexts in which it is confined, and will therefore be denoted as favorable, optimal or positive. The absence of proportionality causes the meaning to be shaped on any one of the constituent elements, and therefore whichever level

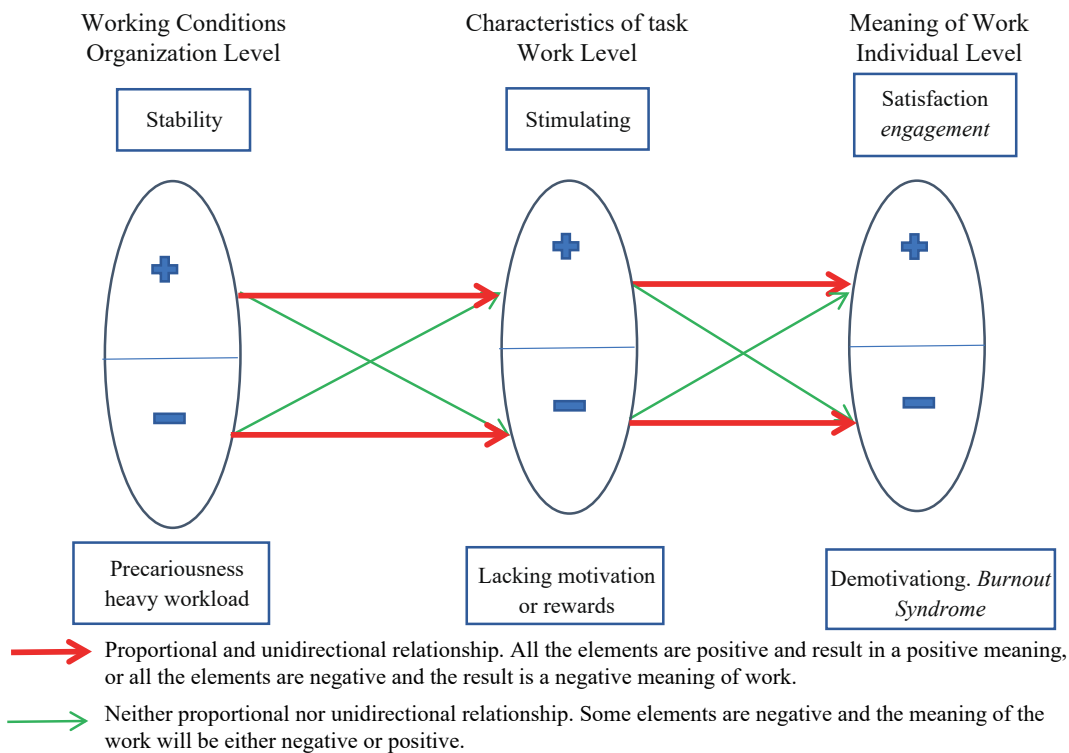


Figure 1. The positive or negative meanings of work as a result of the relationship between working conditions and characteristics of the task (Author's own elaboration, cited in Romero, 2015).

results as most significant will be definitive in establishing the meaning of the profession, as expressed in Figure 1 (Romero, 2015; Romero, Blanch & Rentería, 2016).

The changes in the working conditions in universities have brought about a debate on the employment and the tasks that are performed as part of the profession, due to the rising tensions inherent to the role of the university as a regulating institution of higher education (Romero, 2015). The fragmentation of working conditions, collateral effects manifested by academic professionals, and new manners of exploring the academic profession are some of the aspects that are nuanced by the transformations of the academic workplace. The experience of university teachers who socialize their work actually shapes the meaning of this profession, considered to be a way of life, as well as a goal of life itself. Thus, the present research aimed to analyze the configuration of the meaning of the academic profession and the working conditions of Colombian university professors.

## Method

A quantitative approach with a non-experimental and cross-sectional descriptive design was used in the present study (Hernández, Fernández & Baptista, 2010). Quantitative data were collected and analyzed with a focus on the interpretation of results, using descriptive statistical analysis.

### *Participants*

In order to put together the group to be studied, a purposive sampling was made up according to the following inclusion criteria that were carried out for convenience and stratification purposes: sex, age, length of service in the center, length of service in the profession, type of contract (stable or unstable) and type of university (public or private). 160 scholars from universities in five Colombian cities (Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, Cali, Santa Marta, Palmira) participated. The socio-demographic characteristics of the sample were as follows: 78 men (48.6%) and 82 women (51.4%). The average age was 33 years old with a range between 23 and 65 years of age, the majority of the professors, 37.9%, were concentrated in the range between 33 and 42 years old. 48.4% of the professors were associated with and working in public universities, while 51.6% were in private universities. Regarding the type of contract, 53.3% were hired at their universities with a permanent contract (full-time), and 46.7% were hired temporarily (paid by the hour). 59% held a single job (dedicated exclusively to academic work in

one university) and 41% affirmed that they held more than two jobs at the same time, without confirming if these jobs were in the field of academia. With respect to managerial responsibilities, 58.8% of the scholars surveyed responded that they had managerial responsibilities in their jobs as university professors, and 41.2% stated that they had never had administrative responsibilities till the date. According to the years of experience in academia, 43.7% had between 1 and 11 years of experience, 38.4% had between 12 and 22 years, 15.9% between 23 and 33 years and 2% had between 24 and 44 years of experience. Finally, with regards to the length of service in their current university, the majority, 76.2%, had been working between 1 and 9 years in their current institution, 15.9% between 10 and 18, 4.6% between 19 and 27 and 3.3% between 28 and 36 years, being the latter the least reported length of service.

### *Instrument*

A questionnaire called QPW-5 (Q= Questionnaire, P= Project, W= Wonpum and 5= Version five) was applied, and it was designed to collect data on the WONPUM (Working Under the New Public Management. Meanings, Risks & Results) Project. The questionnaire was made up of 173 items distributed in various scales, inventories and some open questions, in addition to the socio-demographic information. The scales that the instrument measured were: Working Conditions (WC), Workload (WL), General Working Well-being (GWW), Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), and Engagement (UWES). The set of scales for the Working Conditions questionnaire was designed and validated by Blanch, Sahagún, Cantera and Cervantes (2010). The open-ended questions allowed for deeper qualitative information gathering in aspects that were treated in the scales. The instrument has been validated through research projects carried out in medical population, where it was found that the WC and GWW models were reproduced with a Cronbach's alpha that ranges from 0.80 to 0.97 for both scales (Ochoa & Blanch, 2016). On the other hand, the instrument's psychometric properties were analyzed with a multi-occupational population (psychologists, doctors, lawyers, managers, supervisors, among others), where the instrument proved to have construct validity, thus ratifying its factorial structure. Likewise, the General Working Welfare model was confirmed as a main component of the psychological dimension of work (Millán, Calvanese & D'Aubeterre, 2013). In a Colombian university population (Morales, 2012), the instrument showed content validity in the WC and GWW scales, and a high reliability index in the two scales, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.96. The Cronbach's alpha scores for this research are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.  
Cronbach indices of the QPW-5 questionnaire scales

Name	Construct	Range of answer type	Psychometrics Wom- pum's model Cronbach Index	Psychometrics Research Cronbach Index
Working Conditions Scale	Perceived working conditions	Likert 0 to 10	$\alpha$ range between .83 y .97.	$\alpha$ 87.8%
Workload Perceived Scale	Perceived workload	Likert 0 to 10	$\alpha$ .86	$\alpha$ .724%
General Working Well-being Scale	Well-being and discomfort at work	Dimensions 1 and 2: semantic differential, from 1 to 7. Dimensions 3 to 4: Likert 1 to 7.	$\alpha$ .97	$\alpha$ .93
Maslach Burnout Inventory	Burnout	Likert 0 to 6	In the process of calculation	$\alpha$ .699%
Engagement Scale	Engagement, Involvement in one's work	Likert 0 to 6	In the process of calculation	$\alpha$ .869%

Source: Author's own elaboration

### Procedure

The following steps were undertaken in this study:

-Access to academics achieved through key personnel at universities that answered the call to take part in this study and met the inclusion criteria.

- Application of the instrument in a voluntary way and under confidentiality criteria, after signing the informed consent form.

- Tabulation of the data using the statistics program SPSS 23 through which the mean and standard deviation were calculated.

- Categorical statistical analysis from the data obtained with the five key word questions, using the words written by the participants in order to quantify them and determine their frequency of use, and then to perform factorial analysis of principal components.

- Content analysis made through the systematization of textual information and emphasizing the meaning of the text (Bardin, 1996; Crespo, Bergère, Torregrosa & Álvaro, 1998; Ochoa, 2012; Romero, 2015). With the data of the keywords frequencies, analysis was carried out of the scales so-called Working Conditions (Organization and Method, Organization and Environment and Organization and Person), General Working Well-being (Psychosocial Well-being and Collateral Effects ), MBI-GS (Exhaustion, Cynicism and Efficiency) and Engagement (Vigor, Dedication and Absorption), using the statistical package R Language and Environment for Statistical Computing (Development Core Team, 2016) which allowed for the respective statistical analysis of the data.

-Use of the Shapiro Wilk test to identify the normality of the data expressed in the scores from the dimensions of the scales (Ahad, Yin, Othman & Yaacob, 2011; Razali & Wah, 2011; Patrício, Ferrerira, Oliveiros & Caramelo, 2017). Sufficient evidence was found to reject the assumption of normality of the data in the majority of the scores from the scales studied ( $p < 0.05$ , which allows for the normality hypothesis to be rejected).

-Subsequent use of the Spearman's correlation coefficient to determine the relationship between the scores of the dimensions of the three scales.

- Finally, the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used to establish the pattern of the dimensions evaluated among the definitions of work perceived by the participants.

### Results

The results shown below were obtained through the analysis of data gathered from the application of the instrument with its five scales and open-ended questions. The aim of the study was to show how the sense of the academic profession is configured in a group of professors surveyed. With respect to the sense of the academic profession, the correlation between the scales is presented in Figure 2. It shows the correlogram between the scores of the dimensions of the scales studied. The correlations are defined by color and graphic intensity and the degree of relation is shown in the circular diagrams that appear in the upper right part of the figure. The correlation between the Organization and

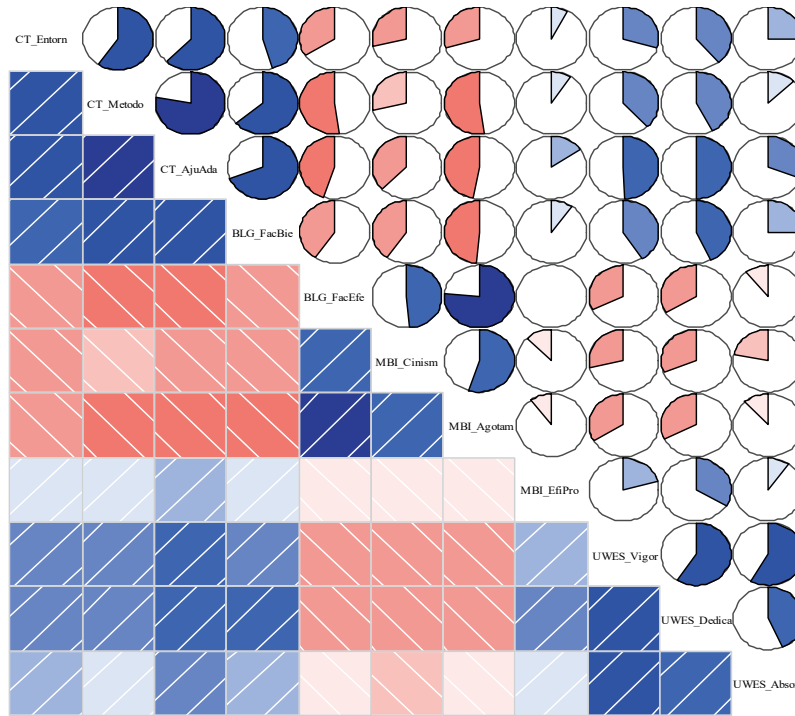


Figure 2. Correlogram between the dimensions of the scales studied and participants age

Method and Organization and Person dimensions of the Working Conditions scale was the highest, approximately  $r=0.78$  ( $p=0.000$ ). This was followed by the relation between the Collateral Effects (General Working Well-being) dimension and the Exhaustion (MBI-GS) dimension, with an approximate value of  $r=0.76$  ( $p=0.000$ ). 23 correlations were higher than  $r=0.40$  ( $p<0.05$ ) or lower than  $r=-0.40$  ( $p=0.05$ ). Some of them were negative, as in the case of the relation between the Exhaustion (MBI-GS) dimension and the Organization and Method (Working Conditions) dimension,  $r=-0.53$  ( $p=0.000$ ). Therefore, it shows that the higher the Organization and Method, the lower the exhaustion perceived by the participants.

The Principal Correspondence Analysis (PCA) of the scores from the dimensions evaluated in the participant group showed that the first two components explain 57.8% of all variance, 44.3% for the first components and 13.5% for the second principal component (See Figure 3). As for correlational analysis, the PCA reveals that the Organization and Method (0,595), Organization and Person (0,780), Organization and Environment and Psychosocial Well-being (0,453) dimensions showed high correlations between each other, creating a group of four variables. The Cynicism (-0,403), Exhaustion (-0,520) and Collateral Effects dimensions (-0,486) were found in the opposite quadrant, reflecting that this group of three dimensions is negatively related to the group of four variables mentioned

before; in other words, less cynicism, exhaustion and collateral effects produces better working conditions and psychosocial well-being for the participants ( $P=0.040$ ). At nearly a 90° angle between the two groups of variables that have been mentioned, there is a third group made up of the Energy, Dedication, Uptake and Efficiency dimensions. This demonstrates the disassociation with the other two groups of variables.

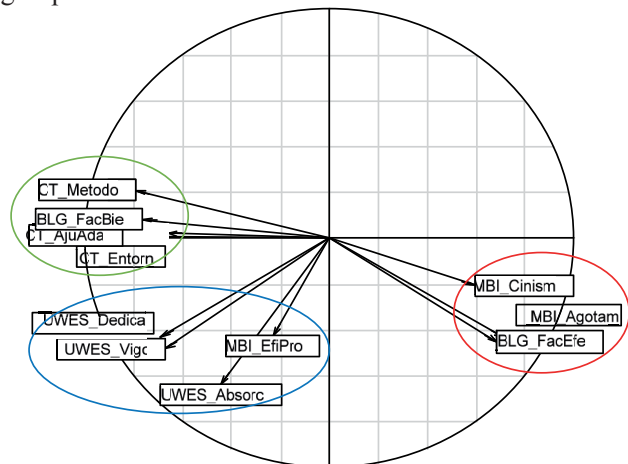


Figure 3. Circle of correlations of the first two principal components in the point cloud of the dimensions studied.

Figure 4 illustrates the point subclouds of the participants who described a positive or negative element of their current job in their fifth word, above the plane of the



first two principal components. The Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there is a statistically significant difference in the first component (horizontal axis) between participants who used a positive fifth word to describe their job and those participants who described it negatively ( $p = 0.008$ ). The result indicates that those professors who described their job with a negative word are those that present greater scores in the Cynicism, Exhaustion and Collateral Effects dimensions, locating them on the right side of the point cloud. It is worth highlighting that no statistically significant differences were found in the first four words that were used to describe their jobs.

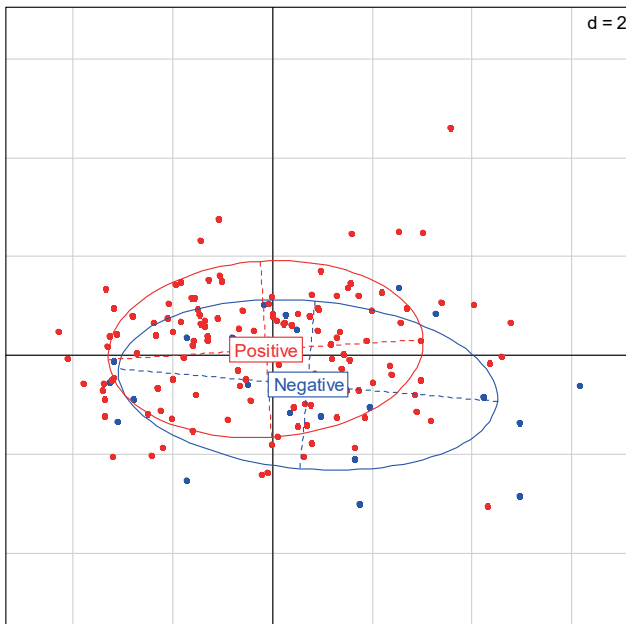


Figure 4. Projection of the participant groups who used a positive/negative fifth word to describe their job, above the principal component plane.

Within the set of words that may be considered “negative” for the participants are: Bad Management, Overwork and Malaise, as can be seen in Figure 5, with a  $p$  value = 0.049.

## Discussion

This paper explores the shaping of the meaning of the academic profession in university professors faced with changing working conditions in Colombian universities. The results of this study confirm the influence of working conditions on subjective aspects of individuals, like the sense of their profession (Blanch, 2011ab, 2013b; Ochoa & Blanch, 2016; Sisto, 2005, 2013; Romero, Blanch & Rentería, 2016). The Organization and Method and Organization and Person dimensions showed a significant correlation with the Exhaustion dimension on the MBI scale (Maslach Burnout

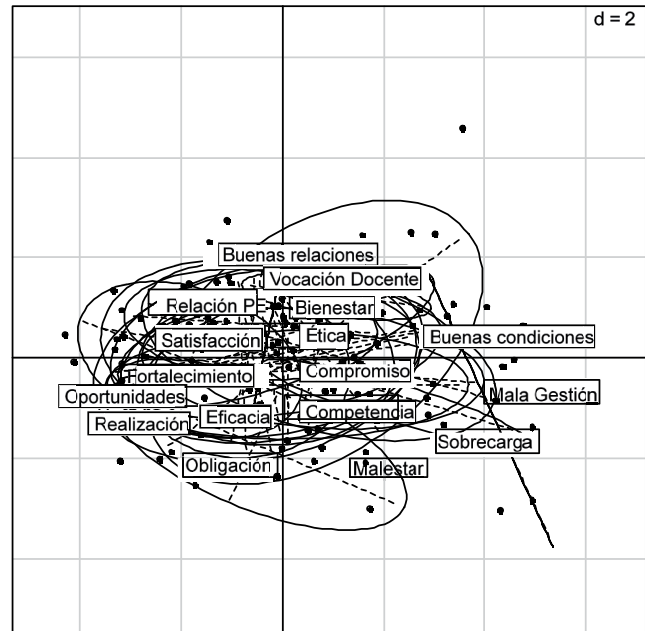


Figure 5. Projection of the groups of participants who described their jobs in words, above the plane of principal components.

Inventory) regarding the practice of the academic profession, with elements such as the physical environment, recognition of the work accomplished, autonomy to make decisions, type of contract, workload, and balance between work and private life. Considering this, if the working conditions are not well-balanced, a greater degree of exhaustion will be experienced by the professors.

Therefore, these results allow for the conclusion that the meaning of the academic profession is configured in terms that designate exhaustion by work, due to fragmented labor conditions that derive from the temporality in the link with the university institutions (Prieto et al, 2011; Romero, Blanch & Rentería, 2016). At the same time, working conditions that include the increase in responsibilities for teachers that follow “multitasking” type roles in university campuses, and combining teaching, research, and social services with administrative tasks that are itemized by the university, cause a negative impact with respect to the collateral effects academics experience, like exhaustion (Garrido, Uribe & Blanch, 2011; Sánchez & Del Sagrario, 2012).

Based on the above, it is clear that the transformations in universities that have brought about changes in working conditions have created a great impact in the meaning of the academic profession, where the well-being of university professors is deteriorating due to an overload in the tasks they must perform as part of their academic work. The words that university professors use to describe this situation include bad management, overworking and malaise, all of which

are located in a negative plane with respect to the meaning of the profession (Romero, 2015), and scoring high in the Cynicism, Exhaustion and Collateral Effects dimensions. All of this leads to the conclusion that professionals in the academic realm shape the meaning of their profession as an activity that is both consuming and exhausting. On the other hand, it is important to emphasize the nature of the activities related to teaching that demand professionalism from university teachers (Eirin et al, 2009; Nixon et al, 2010; Garrido, Uribe & Blanch, 2011; Ochoa & Blanch, 2016; Romero, Blanch & Rentería, 2016). This explains how the first words used to signify their work are in the first instance, positive, and finally, negative, as observed in the results. The configuration of the sense of the academic profession on the part of university professors is divided into positive and negative poles (See Figure 1, Romero, 2015). The first is understood as an inversely proportional relationship where good working conditions and high psychosocial well-being lead to less perceived cynicism, exhaustion and collateral effects in the academic work. The negative pole shapes a meaning of the profession in negative terms, where the proportional relation between precarious, fragmented and overloaded working conditions lead to negative words like malaise, bad management and overwork, where one of the dimensions that is affected is the teacher's vocation, understood as professionalism (Nixon et al, 2010; Romero, 2015; Romero, Blanch & Rentería, 2016).

Changing conditions in universities determine the ambivalence with which the Colombian academic faculty is debated. These changes have generated a resignification of academic work as an agency-creating element. A diversity of working conditions are found, according to the substantive functions of the university, or depending on whether the professor will exclusively teach in the classroom. By performing administrative tasks, both the research professor, as well as the vocational or academic professor, are required to re-signify and give a new meaning to their activities, depending on the contextual and organizational changes that the profession undergoes. On the other hand, the impermanence of the contractual link is a variable that has made the flexibilization of academic working conditions more common.

This study offers interesting perspectives for the exploration of how the meaning of the academic profession is shaped, with heterogeneous variables and methodologies that are not just quantitative, but qualitative and mixed, that tend to frame a bettering of the working conditions for university professors in order to minimize the psychosocial risk factors that are related to the university organization, which is understood as a working system with internal and globalized logics.

As a conclusion, it was found that there is a relationship between working conditions, well-being and the configuration of sense in the academic profession. Both in the global and national context, the transformations in the academic field show that the meaning related to the work experience is positively expressed as satisfaction and engagement and, on the other hand, work experience is negatively expressed as work overload and contractual fragility. In general, the information obtained gives an idea of transformations in the Colombian academic field and the impact that these transformations have on the sense of work in the teaching staff.

It is important for future studies to take into account the tensions between research standards and publishing issues in indexed journals, versus the research paper writing time, where there is an imbalance between academic activities and family life. By observing this imbalance, institutional policies and processes can be enriched in such a way that family life, work well-being and the balance work-family can be improved.

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