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## **UNIVERSITIES AS SYSTEMS: EXPLORING THE LECTURERS' EXPERIENCE**

### **Abstract:**

South African higher education institutions are faced with a number of challenges (Mushemeza, 2016), and as an important role player and service provider in society (PwC, 2013), higher education institutions should be enabled to respond proactively to societal needs and changes. Systems theory dictates that organisations (including higher education institutions) need to understand that they function within a system, and that all the areas within this system are interrelated and should work in synergy (Ingram, 2018). Mofokeng (2002:69) specifically argues for the importance of the role of the lecturer within higher education institutions, because they serve as important service providers in a people-intensive system. As an initial step towards understanding how universities can become more responsive to changing needs, this paper takes a systems perspective of a university. It opens with a focus on one unit: the role of the lecturer as an important service provider in this complex and interrelated system. The objectives of the study also include a service design perspective to understanding lecturers, and therefore focus predominantly on exploring and uncovering their overall experiences at a specific university in South Africa. The study makes use of a qualitative and exploratory research design, and presents findings from in-depth interviews conducted with eight lecturers. Data were analysed using an interpretative analytical perspective (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and themes were developed. The main themes identified include 'Time management', 'Student concerns', and 'Teaching and research'. A framework demonstrating the interrelatedness of the themes, as well as the impact of the two themes, 'Time management' and 'Student concerns', on lecturers' core function (teaching and research) is presented. Recommendations focused on the removal of specific time-consuming duties, as well as the improvement of identified concerns about students, are proposed. The recommendations strive to provide initial solutions to optimising this specific unit in the greater complex system of a university structure.

### **Keywords:**

Systems theory, Service design, Higher education institutions, Lecturers

**JEL Classification:** M31