

# Influence of a university merger on personnel at the University of South Africa

**E. J. van der Westhuizen**

Department of Public Administration and Management

University of South Africa, South Africa

e-mail: vdwestej@unisa.ac.za

## **Abstract**

The influence of a 'technikon-into-university' merger, as manifested in the former Technikon South Africa and University of South Africa merger, is the focus of this article. A quantitative research design was employed using a questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale. Randomly selected academic and administrative personnel formed the sample of 31 personnel from the Department of Public Administration and Management. The research results indicated that personnel were satisfied with their work and with management during the merger process. However, personnel were somewhat dissatisfied with the institution. A possible managerial implication for the newly merged institution is that the positive attitudes of personnel towards their work and management provide a sound basis on which the institution can build its future human resource activities. This study enables a better understanding of a university merger, and these findings may also be extended to a follow-up study in order to identify the main reasons causing the current negativity amongst personnel in the Department of Public Administration and Management towards the institution.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since the beginning of 2000, South African universities have come under ever-increasing pressure from the government to become more accountable for how they manage their affairs. Moreover, the government has been questioning the ability of universities to manage equity and deliver academic programmes and services efficiently and effectively. The government suggested that there were too many higher education institutions, which resulted in excessive duplication. It was therefore argued that some higher education institutions should be merged. The hope was that this would correct the ineffective public service delivery legacy of the apartheid system and achieve greater efficiencies (e.g. educating more students without additional costs) (Curri 2002, 133–134).

Although many reports identified financial benefits as a primary contributing factor to the success of a merger, there was also support for the notion that personnel issues play an important role in merger decisions (Hay and Fourie

2002, 116–121; Reddy 2007, 486). This implies that factors such as participative decision-making and feelings of loss, anxiety, frustration and demoralisation were equally important in the decision-making process, as regards higher education mergers (Cebekhulu and Mantzaris 2006, 98–102; Jansen 2003, 44–45). In support of this view, Kavanagh and Ashkanasy (2006, 83–85) argue that the human factor should guide the merger process. It is further clear from the literature that in the majority of cases, personnel report negative perceptions about mergers and that dissatisfaction is a major contributing factor to the failure of mergers (Reddy 2007, 486; Van der Westhuizen 2004, 154). Personnel have been profoundly affected by the implementation of the University of South Africa (Unisa) merger in 2004, and the implications of these changes have been substantial and far-reaching (Fourie 2008, 27–37).

Against this backdrop (the fact that a merger could have a negative impact on the perceptions of personnel), the main research problem investigated by this study was: Were personnel in the Department of Public Administration and Management (DPAM) negative towards their work, the university and the management of the university after the Unisa merger? In addition to the research problem, the researcher asked the following central questions: What is meant by the concept ‘merger’? What theories are there for analysing mergers? What policy measures drive the merger process? What effect did the Unisa merger have on the perceptions of personnel in the DPAM? The study mainly focused on the perceived experiences (perceptions) of personnel during the 2004 merger. The demarcation is outlined below:

- The major part of the research was conducted during the 2009 academic year, thus allowing a five-year gap between the merger and the study to emerge. The researcher is of the opinion that for the merger to be effective and show substantial results, a five-year waiting period is crucial, as it allows personnel to form specific perceptions of the process. However, conditions in the university have since changed to some extent, and caution should be exercised when making cross-departmental comparisons on merger issues, since the working environment differs significantly from one department to another.
- The perceptions which the research in this study highlighted, sketch a picture of the state of the merger only as perceived by personnel at the time of the study.
- This study took place within an open distance learning (ODL) environment. However, this excluded specific ODL themes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A range of analyses, namely conceptual, theoretical and policy arrangements, is explored.

### Conceptualisation

Experience has shown that terminology used around mergers in the international literature is not always consistent. In a number of instances the word ‘merger’ is referred to as ‘incorporation’, ‘amalgamation’ and ‘consolidation’ (Van der Merwe 2007, 539–540). Obviously, there will be differences in conceptualising the term, because generally the goals for merging institutions differ: there are two extremes on the continuum, varying from a form of loose cooperation to absolute integration. In view of the uneven use of the term internationally, without going into detail this study has adopted the following definition for ‘merger’, which is fully in line with Section 23 of the *South African Higher Education Act*, 101 of 1997:

A merger in higher education is the combination of two or more separate institutions into a single new organisational entity, in which control rests with a single governing body and a single chief executive body, and whereby all assets, liabilities, and responsibilities of the former institutions are transferred to the single new institution. (Hall, Symes and Luesher 2004, 2)

Given the above conceptualisation, the author is of the opinion that the unbundling of Vista University and the subsequent incorporation of the Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC), with the manifestation of the former Technikon South Africa (TSA) and Unisa (two separate institutions) into the newly merged Unisa, could be regarded as a fully-fledged merger. These three institutions merged into a single, open distance learning Unisa, whereby all assets, liabilities and responsibilities were transferred to a single governing body, namely the Unisa Council, and a single chief executive body, namely the Unisa Executive Management consisting of a principal and vice-chancellor, assistant principal, pro-vice-chancellor, deputy vice-chancellor and vice-principal: learner support, vice-principal: academic and research, vice-principal: strategy, planning and partnerships, vice-principal: finance and university estates, vice-principal: operations and university registrar (University of South Africa 2009). Within this newly merged institution it has become necessary to widen the scope of research around mergers, including the Unisa merger, to give a broader understanding of the main theme of the study.

## **Theoretical framework**

Very little of the literature provides guidance on mergers in the public sector, more particularly regarding the perceptions personnel have towards their work, the institution and the management of the institution (Sehoole 2005, 160). However, in a few local studies on mergers in South African higher education, the authors structured their reviews around the complex political interactions, conflicts, contestations and compromises of a merger (Cebekhulu and Mantzaris 2006; Fourie 2008; Hay and Fourie 2002; Jansen 2003; Jayaram 2003; Kilfoil and Groenewald 2005; Mentz and Mentz 2006; Reddy 2007; Sehoole 2005; Van der Merwe 2007; Van der Westhuizen 2004). Other authors highlighted the need for merger managers to take account of five interrelated concepts that provide the framework for understanding the broad theoretical basis proposed in this article.

In summary, the following five concepts are advocated: first, the transitional context. It would be difficult to understand the restructuring of higher education without grasping the nature of the transitional context of South Africa. In other words, the merger of the higher education system can only be understood by examining the macro-political environment before 1994 – more particularly, the transition from an apartheid state to a post-apartheid society.

Second is the macro-political environment. To understand what accounts for the unique South African macro-political environment, it is crucial to point out that the rationale for mergers in higher education was built around the following twin logics of transition: the logic of resolving the apartheid legacy in higher education and the logic of integrating the higher education system into the globalised economy.

The micro-political arena is the third concept. Soon after the mergers were effected on 1 January 2004, it became clear that the important fundamental in managing a merger in the South African context is the recognition that there is nothing fluid – it is complex in nature. Hence, not many mergers were consistently welcomed or pursued enthusiastically by the higher education institutions concerned. Experience of the merger process has shown that it created deep concern regarding, for example, cultural incompatibilities, loss of institutional ‘memory’, resistance to change, loss of key competencies, harmonisation of conditions of service, job losses, anxiety about institutional futures and a general loss of morale on the part of all involved.

The fourth concept is merger formations. On the formation side, interactions between governmental macro-politics and institutional micro-politics have been effective processes in forming the content of the mergers. This interplay has resulted in four types of mergers, namely institutional obliteration (disappearance of the college identity), protected disclosure (separate existence of the merged

entity), subsumed integration ('take-over' of a smaller institution into a larger established institution) and equal partnership (combination of two institutions). The equal partnership formation was adopted by the TSA/Unisa merger, which is regarded as the ideal type, i.e. where the combined resources of the two institutions lead to an expanded single institution.

The final concept is the merger outcomes. Seven such outcomes, which are contingent with the political forces at macro- and micro-level, are advocated in the literature: equity effects (greater representation of targeted groups – in this case black and women students and personnel), efficiency effects (sound financial management), curriculum effects (rationalisation of the curriculum), organisational effects (organisational integration and restructuring), student effects (consultation), physical integration effects (physical facilities, such as buildings and parking spaces) and personnel effects (emotional and professional lives) (Becker 2004, 165–167; Hay and Fourie 2002, 120–121; Jansen 2003, 29–45).

This article focuses on the personnel effects on the micro-political arena of the TSA/Unisa merger. Hence, the analysis is in line with views regarding the personnel effects.

### **Policy arrangements**

The specific nature of higher education restructuring in South Africa forced the government to take the route of mandatory merging, because most institutions failed to explore such solutions voluntarily. Therefore, it is important to underscore the fact that the merging of the TSA and Unisa was policy- or politically driven and was prescribed by government (Hall and Symes 2005, 204–211). By taking the route of mandatory restructuring, the government was able to strategise the merging process into two main categories. As a consequence, higher education institutions were instructed to transform both 'fitness of purpose' and 'fitness for purpose'. The former strategy implies institutional fitness in terms of compliance with national policy goals, priorities and targets. The latter strategy means that once institutions have grasped this challenge by formulating their own visions, missions and strategies within the boundaries of national instructions, it is then their responsibility to manage (implement the vision, missions and strategies) the merger in practice (Hall et al. 2004, 64). The literature relating to national policy reveals that the restructuring process in the higher education sector took place against the background of the following policy arrangements: the National Commission on Higher Education in 1996, the *Education Draft White Paper 3* of 1997, the *Council On Higher Education Report On Size And Shape* of 2000, the *National Plan for Higher Education* of 2001 and the *Higher Education Act* 101 of 1997.

The Department of Education formally announced, on behalf of the then Minister of Education, the intention to merge the identified institutions based on the content of the abovementioned policy guidelines (Hall et al. 2004, 43). Subsequently, the Unisa merger was effected on 1 January 2004 as outcome 11 of the *National Plan for Higher Education*. The newly merged institution is regarded as the only open distance learning institution in South Africa. Van der Merwe (2007, 538) points out that in practice, outcome 11 determined the merger of the former TSA with the former Unisa, and the incorporation of the Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEEC). The rationale for the establishment of the newly merged Unisa was based mainly on the imperatives of equity and merit, as proposed by the NCHE. Although this is not the only merger study done at Unisa (see Fourie 2008; Kilfoil and Groenewald 2005; Meyer, Groenewald and Bushney 2009; Ngambi 2011), it is unique in the sense that it was the first study designed to investigate whether the ‘people issues’, in terms of work satisfaction and attitudes towards the institution and management, are relevant.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design is explained in this section. The first part focuses on the method of research. Details are also given about the target group, instrument, pilot testing, data analysis and limitations. The article ends with the results and discussions.

### **Research method**

Merger terminology, theories and policies in previously documented literature were used as the basis for constructing generic principles for this study. According to the literature, most studies on mergers are quantitative and qualitative in nature, frequently using, for example, course experience questionnaires, case study experiences and literature studies (Cooper 2006, 260–290; Kilfoil and Groenewald 2005, 12–17; Mentz and Mentz 2006, 112). It was decided to use a quantitative paradigm for this study. Within this paradigm, the empirical method of investigation (survey) was used, which implies that the researcher used a questionnaire as well as individual discussions to collect the data. The questionnaire included a combination of closed- and open-ended questions. To inform the literature review, the evidence sources used included books, journals, government legislation, university merger (and other) documentation and (mainly) the data from the structured questionnaire.

## **Target group**

In view of the invaluable contribution that all personnel (academics and administrative) make to ensure quality service delivery, questionnaires were sent to and completed by all 31 personnel (response rate of 100%) employed in the DPAM. Individual discussions were also held with these personnel.

## **Instrument**

The questionnaire used for the study was mainly based on a combination of the Brayfield-Rothe (BR) (work satisfaction), the Index of Organisational Reactions (IORCI) (company identification) and Index of Organisational Reactions (IORS) (management) questionnaires (Cook, Hepworth, Wall and Warr 1981, 16–43). The questions were grouped into the following four sections (key variables):

- Section A: Biographical information
- Section B: Work satisfaction
- Section C: Perceptions regarding the institution (Unisa)
- Section D: Perceptions towards management at Unisa.

In Section A, respondents were required to respond on their biographical characteristics such as age, years of service and gender (independent variables). In all other sections respondents were asked to rate their experience of their work, the institution and management. The majority of the questions used a five-point Likert scale ('strongly agree' – 'strongly disagree'). For example, in the BR questionnaire respondents were expected to respond to the following question: 'My job is like a hobby for me.' After each section, space was provided for qualitative comments.

## **Pilot testing**

Pilot testing involved seven randomly chosen personnel members in the DPAM. A few suggestions were received and the questionnaire was adapted accordingly. This was done to ensure that the questions were suitable for the study and that they would provide a true reflection of the personnel issues affected by the merger (based on the literature). In addition to the pilot testing, informal discussions were held with selected academics to refine the questions. This further increased the reliability and validity of the questionnaire for this specific study.

## **Data analysis**

Data from the completed 31 questionnaires were entered into the Statistical Package SAS-JMP version 8.01 for Windows. The effect of the merger on

personnel issues such as work satisfaction, perceptions of personnel regarding the university and perceptions of personnel towards the management of the university were measured using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage scores and mean differences). In addition, the reliability of the dimensions (or subscales) in the questionnaire was determined by means of the Cronbach's alpha, to ensure that the same set of items would elicit the same responses if the same questions were recast and re-administered to the same respondents (Santos 1999). In general, the reliability analysis of the subscales (dimensions) recorded relatively high Cronbach alpha values. All the subscales showed a high alpha, which is an indication that the dimensions are reliable. Mean scores were calculated for each of the dimensions, after which an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test for significant differences between gender, age, group, occupation, education and experience for each of the different subscales.

The limitations of this study included personal perceptions and limited data. Regarding personal perceptions it is accepted that questionnaires and individual discussions may have uncovered personal attitudes rather than deeper realities that existed during the merger process. Data were limited, since this study was based on the experiences of one academic department at Unisa (with only 31 respondents), namely the DPAM. The data may not have been adequate to generalise on conclusions of this nature. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study, perceptions were helpful in determining whether the implementation of the merger had a negative effect on the work satisfaction of personnel, perceptions of personnel regarding the university and perceptions of personnel towards the management of the university. This study has established a foundation from which further research may be undertaken in the open distance environment.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The respondents' biographical information, their perceptions towards work, the university and the management of the university, are presented below.

### **Biographical information**

Most respondents were between the ages of 36 and 50 (54.83%), with 19.36 per cent aged 20–35 years and another 25.81 per cent aged 51+ years. Only 32.14 per cent of the respondents had been employed at Unisa for 11+ years. The majority had been working at Unisa for fewer than ten years (67.84%). The sample was fairly evenly split between males and females, although there was a slight weighting towards female employees (51.16%). The majority of the respondents had a university degree (72.41%). Over 74.19 per cent were academics and 25.81 per cent were administrative staff. Given the above data, it is clear that the sample consisted of an acceptable degree of diversity and representivity.

## **Perceptions towards work**

The interpretation of the respondents' responses concerning their perceptions towards their work after the merger was guided by their perceptions of particular work-related issues, as measured by the Brayfield-Rothe questionnaire (work satisfaction). These perceptions were embedded in their experiences of the Unisa merger, and each respondent was required to bring this into their respective responses. In general the work satisfaction subscale showed a mean of 2.14 (standard deviation=0.65) out of 5 on the scale (relating to 1=strongly agree and 5=strongly disagree). This demonstrates that the respondents were positive towards their work at Unisa.

When compared to the biographical information, the following interesting research results emerged: a comparison of the mean work satisfaction scores for the different biographical variables with one-way ANOVAs showed no significant results, although a slight deviation was detected for age groups. The mean score of 2.34 for the age group 20–35 years was slightly higher than for the other two age groups, with mean scores of 2.08 for the age group 36–50 and 2.12 for the age group 51+. The mean score of respondents aged between 20 and 35 was slightly lower (mean score=2.34) than the group of personnel over 35. This may imply that the degree of work satisfaction seems to increase with age. Although it fell outside the scope of this study, it was interesting to note that older employees were generally more positive towards their work than their younger counterparts. According to Theophanides (2010) this may be due to a number of factors, including greater autonomy and flexibility, as well as having greater influence on the strategic processes of the institution.

The data further illustrated no statistically significant differences (with one-way ANOVA) between the other biographical variables. There were no significant differences for the mean scores between the number of years in service categories 0–5 (mean=2.2) years and 11+ years (mean=2.2), with a slightly lower mean score (mean=2.14) for the category 6–10 years. There were almost no significant differences in the responses of the females (mean=2.18) and males (mean=2.10). It is also interesting to note that the respondents with grade 12 (mean=2.3), those who held a technikon degree (mean=1.9) and those with a university degree (mean=2.2) revealed very similar mean scores. Similar mean scores (mean=2.14) were also obtained for the two occupational categories (academics and administrative personnel).

An examination of the qualitative data regarding work satisfaction revealed a similar set of positive responses. On the one hand, participants recognised that the merger had caused an increase in the workload, more demands to learn new tasks, more stress because of the new work environment and an increase in

'change fatigue'. On the other hand, there was unanimity among the respondents that the new work environment (after the merger) provided more opportunities – particularly in key performance areas such as tuition and research. In fact, everyone agreed that the new institution offered every staff member the opportunity to take on broader responsibilities. Most respondents were also of the opinion that in the newly merged Unisa there was a measure of renewed energy and optimism among personnel as regards the work they did.

A summary of the responses from the abovementioned data revealed that there was agreement among the respondents that they were positive towards their work after the merger. This indicates support for a study conducted at the University of Pretoria where it was found that despite negative experiences, personnel claimed that a strong sense of duty directed them in a positive way towards their work during the merger (Becker 2004, 157). The lesson to be learned – which is clearly suggested by both the quantitative and qualitative data – is that the impact of the merger on the work experiences of personnel was positive.

### **Perceptions towards the institution**

The respondents' perceptions towards the institution after the merger, as measured by variables represented in the Index of Organisational Reactions questionnaire (company identification), were reported. An analysis of the data showed a relatively low mean score of 3 (standard deviation=0.91) out of 5 on the scale (relating to 1=greatly encourages me to do my best and 5=definitely discourages me from doing my best). This implies that the institution ratings were slightly lower than those of the other two categories (perceptions towards work and perceptions towards management). These results indicated that the respondents were not so positive (in other words, slightly negative: 3 is neutral) towards the newly merged institution (Unisa). A number of interesting facts were evident. According to the one-way ANOVA analysis, the same mean scores (3.2) were reported for the age group 20–35 and the age group 51+. However, the mean score for the age group 36–50 was slightly higher (mean score=2.6). These results reveal, therefore, that the age group between 36 and 50 was more positive (not significantly) towards the institution.

The one-way ANOVA mean scores were basically the same for the number of years-in-service variable (0–5 years [mean=2.9]; 6–10 years [mean=2.9] and 11+ years [mean=3]). Interestingly, there is a difference in the mean score between the responses of the females (mean=2.7) and the males (mean=3.1). Although there was a tendency amongst female personnel to be more positive towards the institution, relatively high statistical differences ( $p=0.18$ ; t test probability  $p<0.05$  is statistically significant) emerged from the data. This implies that the

results between the two gender groups are not statistically significant. Further, noticeably high mean scores were recorded for the respondents with grade 12 and respondents who held a technikon degree (mean=2.4). Respondents with a university degree revealed a relatively lower mean score (mean=3.2). According to the analysis of the data, it is clear that those personnel with a grade 12 and technikon degree remained positive towards the institution after the merger, but respondents with a university degree experienced slightly negative perceptions towards the institution. In the occupational category, the responses of the academic personnel were substantially less favourable (mean=3.1). In contrast to the responses of the academics, the administrative personnel revealed a relatively high mean score (mean=2.4). These mean differences illustrate that the academic personnel were more negative towards the newly merged institution than the administrative personnel. The sharp difference between the mean scores of the academics and the administrative personnel seems problematic, since the academics are responsible for the core functions (for example, tuition and research) of the university.

Despite the negative responses, the qualitative results also revealed positive responses. It was mentioned that the merger offered prospects of greater job security. These results corroborate the view that personnel in academic institutions (particularly, academic personnel) have autonomy and security in their jobs (Reddy 2007, 496). Generally, however, the data underlined the following common negative feedback from the respondents:

- There is less loyalty.
- Confusion exists regarding the new organisational culture.
- There is a 'Florida campus culture' and a 'Pretoria campus culture'.
- A lot of institutional memory was lost.
- There is no commonly accepted vision.
- Morale and productivity have been negatively affected by the merger.
- Differing values, beliefs and assumptions amongst staff have set the scene for major conflict in the new Unisa.

In summary: the findings from the data confirmed that the respondents were negative towards the newly merged institution. This data correlate with the view that the impact of mergers on personnel, in all cases, has been devastating in terms of their emotional and professional lives (Jansen 2003, 44). In fact, in exploring the merger literature, it became clear that the central themes for a

successful merger are: good management (particularly in facilitating transitional structures); paying attention to cultural differences between the two institutions; establishing clear, consistent and frequent communication channels; and keeping human resource matters central throughout the process (Field and Peck 2003, 748). Generally, the analyses revealed that the Unisa merger had been experienced negatively, as was shown by the respondents' perceptions towards the institution. Overall, this situation could have a negative effect in terms of the operational management of the university and will have to be addressed, preferably in a strategic human resource management programme.

### **Perceptions towards management**

The rationale for inquiry on the perceptions of the respondents towards the different management levels of the institution after the merger was derived from the variables represented in the Index of Organisational Reactions (IORS) questionnaire (management). The results of the analysis showed a slightly below-average mean score of 2.6 (standard deviation=0.81) out of 5 on the scale (relating to 1=I am extremely satisfied with the management I receive and 5=I am very dissatisfied with the management I receive). Taken together, results of this subscale suggest that the respondents were generally satisfied with (positive about) the management of the newly merged institution.

With regard to the variable age group, the one-way ANOVA analysis found basically the same mean scores for the subscales: perceptions towards the institution and perceptions towards management. The mean score for both the age group 20–35 and 51+ years was 2.9. The dispersion of the means score for the age group 36–50 was slightly higher (mean score=2.4). Thus, it was found that the age group between 36 and 50 was more positive towards the management division of the institution after the merger. In respect of the number of years in service at Unisa, the findings were basically the same. This means there were no significant differences in the mean scores for all three categories (0–5 years [mean=2.7]; 6–10 years [mean=2.6] and 11+ years [mean=2.6]). The findings also indicate that there were no significant differences in the gender variable with females (mean=2.6) and males (mean=2.7).

Although not significant, statistical differences emerged in terms of the educational variables. The one-way ANOVA mean scores for respondents with grade 12 (mean=2.5) and respondents who hold a technikon degree (mean=2.2) were relatively high. However, respondents with a university degree noted a lower mean score (mean=2.9). The lower mean score recorded for this variable, therefore, indicated that respondents with a university degree experienced negative perceptions towards the management division of the newly merged

institution. The prevalence of negative perceptions amongst respondents with a university degree in both categories of variables, namely perceptions towards the institution and perceptions towards management, is of particular concern. In the occupational category, responses were almost equally split between academic (mean=2.7) and administrative personnel (mean=2.4).

With some exceptions, the quantitative data suggest that positive feelings emerged amongst respondents concerning their perceptions towards management after the merger. This is supported by qualitative responses such as the following: 'distribution of work is fair', 'trust exists between employees and management employees', 'communication channels are open', 'employees have a feeling of personal empowerment' and 'employees participate in the development of strategic plans'. Less favourable responses included the following: 'there is a top-down approach', 'I miss my former managers', 'I don't have a clear duty sheet' and 'there is a lot of disrespect (for example, name-calling)'. These mixed results underline the mixed emotional experiences personnel generally have towards management during and after a merger (Becker 2004, 163).

What is noteworthy about the Unisa merger is that the responses indicated that respondents were positive about the management of the university. This implies that merger interventions should not always be seen in a negative light.

## CONCLUSION

Since the late 1990s the South African higher education system has experienced a complex restructuring process, particularly with regard to the merging of institutions. This process was driven by several policy guidelines which culminated in the *Higher Education Act*, 101 of 1997. This Act, which laid the foundation for a single, coordinated national higher education system in South Africa, resulted in the mandatory merging of Unisa on 1 January 2004. An examination of the literature illuminated five merger outcomes of which effects on personnel were identified as the most relevant. The Department of Public Administration and Management at Unisa was one of the academic departments affected by the merger. A study was conducted to determine empirically if personnel in the DPAM were negative towards their work, the university and the management of the university after the Unisa merger. The analyses revealed that personnel were positive towards their work and management, but negative towards the institution. The research presented in this study corresponds with other related studies that indicated dissatisfaction amongst personnel as a major contributing factor in the failure of mergers. Since the empirical work done in this study was limited to the experiences of only one academic department

at Unisa (with only 31 respondents), it may not be adequate to generalise on conclusions of this nature. Therefore, it is suggested that further corroborative research be conducted on merger issues at Unisa. In this regard, two preliminary implications may be suggested: first, as personnel are negative towards Unisa as an institution, there is a need for further research to explore the main reasons for the negativity. Second, since this study was limited to personnel in an academic department (the DPAM) that has merged, the findings cannot be generalised to other academic contexts that have not merged. These findings, therefore, need to be replicated with a broader target group at Unisa. This highlights the need for another merger enquiry, including a comparative study between an academic dept that has merged (DPAM) and one that has not merged in the School of Management Sciences at Unisa.

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