

Money matters?



'What men of science want is only a fair day's wages for more than a fair day's work.'

Thomas Henry Huxley, that most respected English Victorian biologist (grandfather of Aldous Huxley) who spent nearly 31 years of his life as Professor of Natural History at the Royal School of Mines noted in his book, *Administrative Nihilism*¹:

'What men of science want is only a fair day's wages for more than a fair day's work.'

This is an interesting observation and one that is as controversial today as it was when written nearly 130 years ago. Of course money is important to the scientist as it is to every employee, but the question arises as to whether financial reward is the prime motivation of a scientist. Many would argue that it is not, as John Haigh, the Editor of *Laboratory Practice* so aptly put it in an editorial in 1988 (Ref. 2):

'Scientists tend to be individualistic, self-sufficient, idiosyncratic and strongly opinionated. While they respond to material rewards, they also set considerable store by the respect of their peers. It may be that the provision of new equipment, travel grants, and research assistants is a better incentive to the innovative scientist than an increase in salary.'

If this is the case, then why do so many of our learned societies and special interest groups undertake annual (or biennial) remuneration packages purporting to be of great value to members when considering employment offers or career changes? In addition to providing comparisons between academia and industry, age groups, industrial sectors and, more recently, gender, some even provide comparisons across

borders and continents. Some just compare salaries, while others attempt to compare total remuneration packages. The answer must be either to satisfy the inherent curiosity of scientists for such facts as there is generally little the individual can do to affect matters, or to provide management with a justification for their ideas of what a scientist is worth.

I recently came across a rather appropriate piece of verse (some would regard it as a doggerel) written in 1963 by George Galbraith³:

'He got a fair raise; or, to be precise,
Just half of what he estimated
He well deserved – and only twice
What the boss believed he rated.'

This goes some way to explaining the vexed issue of remuneration. Although remuneration must have some logical and defensible basis from the management perspective, it invokes many emotional issues from the point of view of the employee scientist. It is very important to individuals, as it is a measure of their worth to themselves, fellow scientists, families and society, as well as determining their scale of living. Relatively, it indicates the scientist's status and prestige.

Although it is safe to say that, in general, scientists will accept differences in remuneration based on defined principles (such as greater responsibility, ability, knowledge and managerial activities) and even factors they know they cannot influence (such as cost of living across borders or the academic-industry divide), they do become upset if the scientist down the corridor in the same building with less experience or fewer publications (in the case of the academic) gets a larger salary increase than they do. Such is the highly controversial issue of comparable worth. However, regardless of short-term wishes, in the long run an employer can only pay salaries based on the scientists' output as there must be income before there can be salaries and there must be profits if salaries are to continue to be paid.

So what is the answer? How can management square the circle? One way that appears to be on the increase is the idea of flexible benefit packages whereby the scientist is able to choose those benefits that are most appropriate or acceptable. However, if this becomes the norm, comparisons between remuneration packages will become even more difficult and the

Raymond C. Rowe, Pharmaceutical and Analytical R&D, AstraZeneca, Alderley Park, Macclesfield, Cheshire, UK SK10 2NA. tel: +44 1625 513112, fax: +44 1625 512381, e-mail: Ray.Rowe@astrazeneca.com

annual survey will have to be published as a book rather than a few graphs and tables in a current journal. If that happens, I doubt whether it would be read extensively. When will managers wake up to the fact that, as shown consistently in employee attitude surveys, a simple recognition for a job well done is the simplest way of improving morale. Of course money matters, but recognition combined with mutual trust and respect are important motivators to the professional scientist.

These are the personal views of the author and do not necessarily represent those of AstraZeneca.

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- 1 Huxley, T.H. (1871) *Administrative Nihilism*
- 2 Haigh, J. (1988) Problems of collaboration. *Lab. Pract.* 37(11), 3
- 3 Galbraith, G.S. (1963) Salary adjustment. *Management Rev.* May, 17

Raymond C. Rowe

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