Faculty Thriving in Academic Institutions: Is it Possible in a High Demand and Stressful Workplace?

Preprint · May 2019

CITATIONS
0

READS
53

3 authors:

Wendy Rowe
Royal Roads University
22 PUBLICATIONS **128** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

Jennifer Walinga
Royal Roads University
12 PUBLICATIONS **94** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

Charlotte Gorley
Royal Roads University
7 PUBLICATIONS **8** CITATIONS
SEE PROFILE

Faculty Thriving in Academic Institutions
Is it Possible in a High Demand and Stressful Workplace?[1]

Wendy E. Rowe[2], Jennifer Walinga and Charlotte Gorley
Royal Roads University, Victoria, Canada

This article examines faculty capability to experience job satisfaction and thriving in stressful academic work environments. Although stress can have a negative impact on work-life balance, many faculty feel they are able to thrive, learn, and grow in high-demand environments. Faculty in this study from a small Canadian University identified four personal thriving strategies: maintain a sense of purpose and making a difference, strengthen self-care and positive outlook, cultivate positive and supportive relationships with colleagues, and seek opportunities for learning and growth. Organisational factors identified as critical to faculty thriving included: efficient and supportive institutional policies and practices, institutional recognition, respect and valuing of faculty contributions, opportunities for faculty to participate in decision-making at the school/academic unit level, transparency of institutional decision-making, faculty- centered design and management of their work plans, and faculty access to financial resources and time to carry out research. Recommendations to create thriving conditions were offered.

Key Words: academic work, workplace stress, job satisfaction, faculty engagement, thriving

[1] Pre-publication version 5-31-19

[2] For Correspondence: Dr Wendy Rowe, wendy.rowe@royalroads.ca

Faculty Thriving in Academic Institutions: Is it Possible in a High Demand and Stressful Workplace?

Workplace stress is increasing (Menkes, 2011) and faculty in academic institutions are not immune. Shin and Jung (2014) noted colleges and universities around the world have experienced increasing levels of stress as managerial reforms have been implemented in support of market-driven educational environments and, in some cases, the corporatisation of the higher education institutions. In most work environments, stress has been defined as occurring when work demands exceed a worker's capability or resources creating a sense of emotive and cognitive disruption (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Barrett & Campos, 1991). Additionally, in the case of academics, stress is associated with high work demands that impact work-life balance and inconsistent accountability systems that reduce autonomy and empowerment to practice their specialities (Shin & Jung, 2014).

High stress work conditions have often been associated with reduced performance, low job satisfaction, high turnover, and low commitment to the workplace (Catano, Francis, Haines, Kirpalani, Shannon, Stringer, & Lozanzki, 2010). However, Shin and Jung (2014) found it was not uncommon for faculty to perceive their academic environments as stressful but nevertheless experience high job satisfaction. Canada was one of a group of countries (including Japan, Netherlands, Finland, and Korea) where academics described an environment of high stress but also high job satisfaction. Weinrib, Jones, Metcalfe, Fisher, Gingras, Rubenson, (2013), in their survey of academic staff at Canadian universities, found 74 per cent of university faculty expressed attitudes of job satisfaction, despite negative, stressful and demanding work conditions.

Given this puzzling phenomena, the authors of this paper undertook an investigation to better understand the faculty work experience: the stressors and coping strategies adopted to deal with the demands of the stressful and high demand work environment. The purpose of the research is to better equip faculty with the tools to recognise stressors in their unique workplace while developing the capacity to thrive, learn and grow in the face of challenging work conditions. Walinga and Rowe, (2013) in their study of mid-level managers found that stressful work conditions could be transformed, under certain conditions, and could result in new energy, growth, and development – conditions fundamental to job satisfaction - what they referred to as 'thriving'.. Employees who have the capacity to adapt to stressful conditions experience higher levels of satisfaction and organisational engagement (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, Norman, 2007) and contribute to higher organisational performance (Peterson & Luthans, 2003; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). We argue thriving with energy and satisfaction is possible for faculty in higher education; despite stressful conditions, when they have a supportive organisational environment and take steps to transform the stressful conditions.

This study was carried out to explore the research question: what conditions and strategies facilitate job satisfaction and thriving among academics despite work conditions that are stressful and demanding? The study was carried out in a small university in Canada that is known for innovative teaching and learning focused on high

levels of student interaction, experiential learning environments, and innovative teaching technologies. Anecdotally prior to this study, faculty in this institution described high workload demands and constantly changing learning environments yet spoke to their commitment to their students and to the institution's learning, teaching, and research model and principles.

Literature

A review of the literature reveals a strong base of research conducted in the area of thriving as it relates to job satisfaction with an opportunity for further study within the context of higher education. There are several perspectives on unique stressors and challenges to thriving amidst stress within the academic environment including intrinsic and extrinsic factors. There are also unique facilitators to job satisfaction and stress thriving within higher education including the meaningfulness of educational work and reward of human interaction.

The Concept of Thriving

Spreitzer and colleagues (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005; Spreitzer & Porath, 2012; Spreitzer, Porath, & Gibson, (2012)) define thriving as a 'psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work' (Spreitzer et al, 2005, p. 538). Responding effectively to high workplace demands and adversity is labelled as 'resiliency' in the field of human development; 'adaptive capacity' in the field of organisational studies (Bennis, 2003; Bennis & Thomas, 2002; Story, 2004) and as 'hardiness' by those in fields of mental health (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn 1982; Maddi, 2006; Maddi & Kobasa, 2002). Success for individuals coping with challenges of their work environment is mediated to some degree by their personal traits and characteristics as well as the ways they respond and handle the crisis or problematic situation (Walinga & Rowe, 2013). Joseph and Linley (2008) describe a positive adjustment to stress as 'adversarial growth'. Carver (1998) observed that flourishing would become possible when stressors were defined as a growth opportunity, creating the possibility for new perspectives, new strategies, new skills, and new behaviours. However, thriving demands more than simply possessing certain personality traits and requires use of cognitive and behavioural processes that enable an individual to transform a stressful experience into an energizing and growth-inducing opportunity (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005).

In a narrative study on stress transformation for public sector managers dealing with complex and disruptive organisational events, Walinga and Rowe (2013) found a response pattern of thriving that was qualitatively different from coping/surviving the situation and significantly more positive than those who floundered (i.e. becoming ill, quitting, or transferring elsewhere). Thriving in response to stressful work conditions is more than just a trait or personal characteristic of the individual. It describes a way of responding to demanding conditions in the work environment, using workplace resources that is fundamentally different from merely coping or surviving the situation (Walinga & Rowe, 2013).

Many positive behaviors and outcomes have been noted for employees who are thriving. They demonstrate good health ((Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Garnett, 2012), lowered burnout and strain (Porath et al., 2012; Spreitzer et al., 2012), stronger family,

social, and community relationships (Spreitzer et al., 2012), and self-development capabilities (Paterson, Luthans, & Jeung, 2014).

Spreitzer et al. (2005) argued the organisational culture is an important factor of influence for employee thriving. Researchers have found employees are more likely to thrive in an organisational environment where there is collaborative problem solving, social supports, innovative practices, and systems thinking (Bacharach & Bamberger, 2007; Bell, 2002; Coutu, 2002; Luthans, Avolio, Avey, & Norman, 2007; Norman, Luthans, & Luthans 2005). Spreitzer and colleagues (2005; 2012) noted that employees who thrive are more likely to be working in supportive social and work environments that foster discretion, information sharing, a climate of trust and respect, performance feedback, and diversity. Paterson et al (2014) found a relationship between supervisor support and employee thriving. Supervisors who create a supportive climate show respect to their subordinates, express concern for employee wellbeing, and even help employees with career development, (Zhang, Tsui, Song, Li, & Jia, 2008).

Faculty collaboration implies a level of trust, which is an indicator of an organisation's culture.

> We suggest that trust in one's employer will be associated with more thriving at work directly, as well as indirectly through, or mediated by, connectivity. In terms of a direct relationship, trust is likely to enhance vitality which is one dimension of thriving. When individuals develop trust in their organisation, their level of vitality to engage in work tasks is likely to increase, contributing to the vitality dimension of thriving. Whereas a trusting organisational environment augments positive feelings and the vitality to participate and contribute to others and the organisation, a mistrusting environment grates on people (Mishra, 1996).

Organisations that create an environment for thriving may have an advantage over those that don't. Davenport notes that 'when employees thrive, so do organisations' (Davenport, 2015, p. 42). Carmeli and Spreitzer (2009) agree and define thriving as the sense of learning, growing, and improving at one's profession. They add that a sense of vitality or feeling energised and alive at work is a key component of thriving.

Factors Contributing to Faculty Job Satisfaction

Employees who are thriving in their work lives also express high job satisfaction (Spreitzer, Porath, & Gibson, 2012; Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Garnett, 2012). Job satisfaction is a measure of how employees feel about their job, their place of employment, and other factors related to the workplace. Additionally, for academics, job satisfaction appears to be related to how one's job aligns with personal values and goals (Mamiseishvili, 2012).

It is not hard to imagine faculty feeling a high degree of job satisfaction when job demands are easy and comfortable, but what does it mean to have a high degree of job satisfaction when job demands are stressful and taxing (as cited by Weinrib et al. (2013). Job/work satisfaction is often rated on variables such as the work context, interpersonal and institutional interactions, autonomy, recognition from their supervisors and colleagues, time for leisure and family life, and fair compensation

(Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011; Clark & Oswald, 1996; Kreps, 1997; Rynes, Gerhart, & Minette, 2004). Bozeman and Gaughan include the amount of time available to spend with students, coaching and mentoring them through their learning journey, as a factor unique to the academic setting, along with tenure status. They found that the determinants of faculty job satisfaction fall into three major categories as demographic characteristics, colleague interactions, and extrinsic pay motivation (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011, p. 175).

Faculty may have chosen their profession to make a difference in the lives of others. Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) found that public sector workers are often willing to receive less than market pay when motivated by evidence that they are making a difference (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011).

> Some have suggested that college faculty are highly motivated by a professional calling and, for this reason, extrinsic motivators (pensions, pay, benefits, geographic location) are not as important to their job satisfaction as might be the case with other managerial and professional occupations (p. 157).

Although making a difference in the lives of learners and colleagues may be paramount for many faculty, it's not the only thing that contributes to job satisfaction. Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) found that job satisfaction is also dependent on how one's colleagues view their work and research. Summed up according to Bozeman and Gaughan, 'it is the perception of fairness (and perhaps not actual fairness) that appears to be driving job satisfaction' (2011, p. 177).

Fairness and equity have been raised by other researchers. Erez and Isen (2002), Hagedorn (1996), Kalleberg (1977), and Whitehouse (2001) say that pay is less important to workers than perceptions of fair pay and the relationship between pay and performance. 'Although not directly related to job satisfaction, it is instructive that a study by Gmelch, Wilke, and Lovrich (2005) found that one of the most important factors in their 'Faculty Stress Index' is 'reward and recognition' (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011, p. 163). The elements of job satisfaction are closely knit together and 'it is difficult to unravel job satisfaction factors that seem discrete but are actually knit intertwined' (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011, p. 156, 157).

Much of the literature on job satisfaction emphasizes the importance of positive and healthy relationships between colleagues, supervisors, and executives. One's interactions and views about one's colleagues and the department play an important role in faculty job satisfaction (August & Waltman, 2004; Hagedorn, 2000; Rosser, 2004). Bozeman and Corley (2004) found that those who spend more of their time working collaboratively, and who have a higher number of colleagues they collaborate with tend to express a higher level of job satisfaction. 'We also expect that those who feel they have the respect of their faculty colleagues will have higher job satisfaction' (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011, p. 164).

Shin and Jung (2014) examined the role of specific intrinsic factors pertinent to academics (academic freedom, shared governance, and faculty empowerment) in comparison to extrinsic factors (salary, work conditions, workloads, and a feeling of affiliation) and found that the positive intrinsic factors were significant to increasing job satisfaction, regardless of extrinsic factors. However, extrinsic factors of access to

resources and opportunities also factor into job satisfaction ratings. Faculty who report having more access to resources such as equipment, library resources, technology, teaching assistance and research funding, and opportunities report higher levels of job satisfaction than those without access to these resources (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011).

Stress and low job satisfaction often occur when there are negative intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Shin and Jung (2014), but these effects can be ameliorated when individual's adopt thriving perspectives and strategies (Walinga and Rowe, 2013). First one's personal outlook, personality, and perspective can play a large part in the ability to thrive and enjoy a high level of job satisfaction (Porath et al., 2012; Paterson et al., 2014). People who thrive see stress differently. 'They saw it as a normal aspect of life, and they didn't believe that it was possible or even desirable to have an entirely comfortable, safe life. Instead, they view stress as an opportunity to grow' (McGonigal, 2015, p. 92). They were more likely to continue making choices, take what action they can, and they are connected with others. They also practice self-care and built a reserve of strength (McGonigal, 2015).

Barriers to Job Satisfaction and Thriving in Academia

The academic working environment is a unique environment. Faculty are expected to work autonomously and creatively doing teaching, research, and service yet are subject to continuous external performance evaluation from administration, students, and scholarly peers. Faculty are expected to produce high levels of output in teaching success (i.e. happy students who graduate) and a high volume of research and scholarly outputs, in a fiscal environment where there is often limited organisational support and a highly competitive process for accessing research funding. Adrian, Cox, Phelps, Schuldt, and Totten (2014) report that stress factors include high workloads, insufficient time to complete tasks, and high research expectations. Sabherwal, Ahuja, George and Handa (2015) identified major stressors as work demand, problematic work relationships, lack of organisational supports, and changes in role and pace. Yet, while faculty report high levels of stress in their jobs, oddly many still report relatively high levels of job satisfaction (Houston, Meyer, Paewai, 2006; Shin & Jung, 2013). This is a perplexing relationship that requires investigation.

There are often significant organisational obstacles for faculty job satisfaction and thriving. According to Bozman and Gaughan (2011), common among the barriers is lack of supervisor support and a tendency for administration and faculty to cover up or deny the existence of problems. Putting on a brave face amidst stressful conditions is indicative of non-coping strategies and leads to burnout, presenteeism, and disengagement. Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) summarise a set of challenges for faculty thriving: context of work (administrative vs teaching), the degree and quality of interpersonal relations in the workplace, the level of autonomy afforded to faculty (bureaucracy and decision-making processes), how they are recognised by peers and superiors, and how much time they have to renew their own energy (down-time and time with family and friends). Decreasing representation of tenure-track and tenured faculty members has diminished faculty control and shifted the decision-making power and authority to administration (Gappa, Austin, & Thrice, 2007). Bozeman and Gaughan (ibid) also reported that the amount of time faculty had to spend with students to 'make a difference', along with their access to resources and funding to achieve their academic goals and aspirations affected their feelings of thriving. Mishra (1996) adds

that a real or perceived lack of trust is another key challenge to fostering an environment where faculty feel they can thrive.

Administrative work can drain the energy and motivation from those who feel a commitment to teaching and supporting students. Jacobs and Winslow (2004) concluded that the longer the workweek, the more dissatisfied faculty were with their workload, which suggested that workload was not self-imposed or willingly chosen but was driven by institutional and professional demands. In Bozeman and Gaughan's study they found that those who spend more time writing grant proposals will lower satisfaction (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011). In response to the question: 'What single change, other than increased pay, would increase the quality of your work life,' one of the most common responses was 'less time devoted to writing grants' (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011, p. 163).

In summary, the biggest challenges to job satisfaction and capacity to thrive amongst faculty include lack of integration between teaching, research and service; 'overloaded plates' and increasing administrative workload; lack of flexibility and trust. Pressure to publish continues to be the main stressor for faculty but impinges on capacity to teach and serve the university – the three elements of a faculty work life seem mutually exclusive. It is suggested new models of reward for different kinds of scholarship would help faculty find balance between teaching, service, and research (Boyer, 1990), but that clarity of expectations for promotion and tenure must come hand in hand with greater flexibility and recognition in order to avoid an expectation that faculty do it all. O'Meara's (2005) principles included a recommendation about not expecting or rewarding the 'overloaded plate' of faculty (p. 296). According to Mamiseishvili (2012), it is important that institutions capitalise on faculty strengths and allow flexible workload practices or other incentives to enable faculty to best utilise their talents or different interests throughout their professional career.

Method

This investigation into thriving and how faculty maintain job satisfaction in stressful and demanding work environments started with a mixed methods survey of all 72 faculty and librarians at the Canadian University, classified as full time and tenure or tenure track. The survey included three open-ended qualitative items on barriers to thriving quantitative plus likert scale question, extracted, with permission, from a survey developed by Spreitzer and Porath (2012). Additional questions on satisfaction and engagement were extracted from a scale developed by Fischer (2014) based on the Diener and colleagues' (2010) flourishing scale, in addition to items taken from the Parker and Hyett (2011) Work Wellness Questionnaire. (See Table 1).

Respondents were told that the overarching goal of the study was to learn what was needed for faculty to build increased capacity to thrive in their work environment. The survey asked participants about their experience of learning and engagement, their work satisfaction level, barriers they encounter to feeling like they are thriving, and strategies they draw on in the workplace. Invitations were sent via internal email to all faculty and librarians. The invitation and consent form informed potential participants of the purpose, process, potential risks and benefits of the survey, description of confidentiality and anonymity procedures, and the process for withdrawing from the research.

Table 1
Items in Survey (* reverse scored items)

General Feelings of Learning, Growth and Vitality
I find myself learning often
I continue to learn more and more as time goes by
I see myself continually improving
I am not learning (*)
I have developed a lot as a person
I feel alive and vital
I have energy and spirit
I do not feel very energetic (*)
I feel alert and awake
I am looking forward to each new day
Work Satisfaction and Engagement
My social relationships at and through work are supportive and rewarding
My workplace gives me sense of satisfaction
My workplace allows me to recraft my job to suit my strengths
My workplace offers me challenges to advance my skills
I collaborate and problem-solve with others to advance my skills
I feel personally connected to my organization's values
Open Ended Questions
What strategies do you use to thrive and grow in your work environment?
What are the barriers or challenges to thriving in your current work environment?
What suggestions do you have to enhance thriving in your workplace?

The results of the survey were themed using NVivo, a computer-assisted data analysis software. The data was combed to 'search for themes and patterns' (Glesne, 2011, p. 187) and the responses were grouped into categories, which identified key themes.

Results

Quantitative and qualitative data was compiled based on 38 faculty respondents. These results are not intended to be presented as statistically significant but rather to illustrate how concepts of faculty engagement, job satisfaction, and thriving are interrelated. Qualitative responses were comprehensively analysed to learn more about the barriers to engagement and thriving and to uncover strategies used by faculty to thrive in a challenging and stressful work environment.

Learning and Engagement

When asked about general feelings of learning and engagement in their workplace over the past year (see Table 2), almost 70-80 per cent responded positively.

Table 2
Responses on Questions of Learning and Engagement

Rating Scale in Brackets	% Disagree (1,2,3)	%Neutral (4)	%Agree (5, 6, 7)
I find myself learning often	10.5	10.5	77.0
I continue to learn more and more as time goes by	7.9	15.8	76.3
I see myself continually learning	13.2	18.4	68.4
I have developed a lot as a person	7.9	15.8	76.3

The questions about having energy and feeling alive and vital in their roles (see Table 3) revealed about half the faculty respondents (47-55 per cent) responded positively, although only 10 per cent strongly agreed. About a third to half of the faculty stated they were NOT feeling energised and vital in their work lives.

Table 3
Responses on Questions about Vitality and Energy

Rating Scale in Brackets	%Disagree (1,2,3)	%Neutral (4)	%Agree (5, 6, 7)
I feel alive and vital	23.68	28.95	47.37
I have energy and spirit	23,68	18.42	57.89
I feel alert and awake	23.68	18.42	57.89
I look forward to each new day	21.05	23.68	55.26

The survey asked participants to describe strategies and actions they rely on to thrive and grow. One participant summed it up by saying *'I work hard to engage with others – students, staff, colleagues – and try to learn from them and gain inspiration from the relationships.'* Others stated they made an effort to contribute to the work environment by getting involved when they are able, seeking out opportunities to connect with colleagues to learn about their scholarly work, and explore possibilities for collaboration.

Work Satisfaction

Satisfaction in the workplace focused on satisfaction with working relationships and opportunities for incorporating creativity into their work. (See Table 4) Responses varied on the questions, ranging from 47 per cent of respondents who said their social relationships at work and through work are supportive and rewarding, 56 per cent of respondents indicating they felt a connection to the organisational values, and a high of 76 per cent who said they collaborate with others. However, only 55 per cent of faculty agreed (ratings 5, 6, or 7) that the workplace gave them a sense of satisfaction. Clearly faculty derive satisfaction in some areas of their work lives even though overall work satisfaction may be impaired. Reported levels of overall work or job satisfaction appear to be somewhat lower than were reported in the Weinrib et al. (2013) study where 74

per cent of 'full time academics working at Canadian universities reported high levels of job satisfaction' (p. 87).

Almost half the faculty said they felt somewhat to greatly constrained in their jobs; only 40 per cent said they felt they could craft their job to suit their strengths. However, on the positive side, more than 65 per cent said they were offered challenges to advance their skills and 76 per cent said they could collaborate and problem-solve with others. When asked about their ability to connect their personal values with those of the institution as a whole, only half of the faculty that responded to the survey said they have some degree of alignment with the organisational values.

Table 4.
Responses on Job Satisfaction and Opportunities for Creativity

Rating Scale in Brackets	% Disagree (1,2,3)	%Neutral (4)	Agree (5,6,7)
My social relationships at work and through work are supportive and rewarding	18.41	34.21	47.36
My workplace gives me a sense of satisfaction	28.94	15.79	55.26
My workplace allows me to craft my job to suit my strengths	32.44	8.11	59.46
My workplace offers me challenges to advance my skills	23.68	10.53	65.79
I collaborate and problem solve with others to address challenges in the workplace	23.68	0.0	76.31
I feel a personal connection to the organizational values	29.73	13.5	56.76

Barriers

Barriers were identified through an analysis of survey respondent comments to specific open-ended questions. Barriers noted included high workload and burnout, not feeling valued or appreciated, restrictions on research goals for faculty, institutional priorities that seem misaligned to educational goals, and unnecessary bureaucratic hierarchy and chain of command structures. Faculty discussed the challenges of having too many work-related tasks to complete in compressed timeframes. Other factors including large class sizes with little support; absence of time to rest, reflect, and learn; and an unfair distribution of work among faculty were noted as significant barriers to build a capacity to thrive. One faculty member shared

> *I find that I am pulled in too many directions and cannot seem to focus on any one activity, which results in stress and feeling unproductive. This in turn leads to depression and a feeling of inadequacy. Then I retreat from other activities and events.*

High workload demands were frequently commented on by the faculty respondents, *'A workload which is unsustainable because of the mounting commitments', 'overload and burnout', 'I feel overwhelmed by the multiple challenges requiring me to learn and perform at the same time in teaching, administration and learning'* and *'amount of work to be done for the time available; balancing work commitments with life commitments'.*

Faculty commented on institutional priorities and financial goals that are not aligned with the academic mission, as expressed in this comment, '*institutional priorities shift or aren't compelling; lots going on, but alignment is not strong; lack of leadership discipline re: clarity and consistency of vision/direction/priority*'. As one faculty said, there is a '*lack of an authentic commitment to academic quality, in pursuit of financial goals….a negative attitude towards faculty role in the institution from some administrators.*' There was frequent mention of a lack of academic resources (such as faculty and academic administrative supports) to achieve the academic mission, '*too many administrative tasks; lack of faculty colleagues in same department*'.

There were also comments made on a lack of transparency at the executive level on how academic decisions are made, as expressed '*lack of clarity, transparency, and common operational values*'. Another faculty commented, '*the heavy layers of bureaucracy, 'the ambiguity of roles at work between administration and academic roles.*' '*lack of control over program budgets and direction'.* Multiple approval levels, silos, slow decision-making, and micromanagement were also cited by some individuals as stressors and de-motivators.

Some faculty felt supervisors and executive were unwilling to listen to them, resulting in a reduced flow of innovative ideas, and a '*resistance to change*'. As one faculty said, '*faculty have no real agency; I've never found that my opinion made any difference to how the organisation is run.*' As another said, '*There is a sense of pessimism at [institution] …new ideas are met with no…and a lesson on why things are the way they are.*' These indicators of a poor communication system contribute to feelings of mistrust, which in turn cultivates an unhealthy working atmosphere. One participant stated, *'There are management and leadership issues that over the past year have really posed challenges to my ability to thrive at [institution].'*

Faculty reported feeling unvalued and unappreciated, and managed instead of supported. Comments included, '*sometimes I don't feel valued*', '*I do not feel supported*, '*Micromanagement at the program and course level; a sense of being managed, rather than supported by the various service units; no way to create a period of time each year to read, reflect, rest, and renew relationships'.* They described feeling a lack of support from higher levels in the institution and some administrators.

Faculty also made reference to a lack of support from other faculty due to a highly competitive environment where resources must be proportioned out. As one faculty said, the institution is a '*competitive environment that is judgmental towards others' success…secret deals advantage some over others*.' Restrictions on research goals for faculty was identified as another key barrier to building capacity to thrive. Based on respondent's comments, it appears expectations about research requirements are not clear, especially as there was a lack of research funding and dedicated time for faculty to devote to research and scholarship activity.

The challenges for some faculty are expressed in this comment.

> *Too much work for too little time and of course human relationships take time – both with colleagues, for ideation and learning and with students in their processes…trust is missing to allow faculty to create a framework within which*

to do their work, …… part of our work should include institutional engagement and contribution aside from research and teaching in order to build a more resilient and thriving culture that is diverse and made up of staff and faculty. It seems the same small contingent of faculty show up for events and engagements while the rest do not. Fear pervades – fear of not enough publications (how to fit in research amidst the high admin load?), fear of missing something in the juggling, fear that we cannot keep going, fear that we won't get promoted, …..mistrust seems common and rarely is there ever any recourse for those faculty who behave badly…overall a strange system to try to thrive in!

Personal Efforts Taken by Faculty to Self-Thrive

Despite the challenges and frustrations, faculty respondents offered many perspectives and suggestions on how they personally seek to thrive in their workplace. The strategies that faculty said they were using fell into four categories

- positive relationships with students, colleagues and staff;
- work or research collaborations with faculty;
- learning and development activities; and
- personal wellness, self-reflection, and private practices.

Enhancing positive relationships with colleagues, students, and staff was mentioned commonly as a strategy for thriving at work. Comments included*: 'I cultivate positive relationships with colleagues'; 'develop… relationships with colleagues...networking..., ''I work hard to engage with others— students, staff, colleagues— and try to learn from them and gain inspiration from the relationships'* and, *'Care and empathy for students and the learning journey they are on…..seek out fellow faculty for support and fellowship'.*

Collaborative activities with other faculty were also mentioned as a strategy for thriving, *'share ideas and collaborate with colleagues', 'colleagues' scholarly work and explore possibilities for collaboration',* and *'I seek out intellectually engaging conversations*.'

A couple of faculty said they thrived by seeking out learning and development activities, '*design new teaching activities, programs, courses, seek new research and dissemination opportunities',* and *'I create my own opportunities for growth if I don't like the ones presented to me*'. Another faculty commented, '*ask questions; approach each day with an open mind; find ways to be creative and innovative; connect with others; find ways to give back'.*

Mostly the faculty said they sought to thrive by focusing on their own personal wellness, as expressed in these comments: '*Rest, meditation, continuing to push myself outside of my comfort zone', 'Stay focused on my goals and carefully chart my day's activities. I tend to work more from home these days as I find that more conducive to positivity'.* One faculty member's comment is illustrative

I have a full life outside of work that includes other passions and a part-time practice in my field, lovely home, connection with family and friends, time to rest, read, and learn and exercise with my dogs. I also do regular breath work, take time for creativity, and solitude in nature.

In summary, these comments can be organised into four key strategies on how faculty can achieve self-thriving in the workplace.

1. Maintain a sense of purpose and making a difference (focus on students, teaching innovation and effectiveness, learning from students)
2. Strengthen self-care and positive outlook (meditation, work from home, avoid distractors)
3. Cultivate positive and supportive relationships with colleagues (friendships, social support, collaborations, intellectual conversations)
4. Seek opportunities for learning and growth (new research, curriculum development work, volunteer on good causes)

Survey findings suggest a significant number of faculty are exercising these strategies and as a consequence experience satisfactory levels of work satisfaction.

Faculty Comments About an Organisational Culture to Support Self-Thriving

Comments were made about organisational culture at two levels – the school (or academic department) level and the institutional level. At the school or academic unit level, faculty talked about the importance of faculty supporting each other through collaborative initiatives, learning about each other's scholarly work and taking steps to develop cohesiveness

- *More opportunities to learn about colleagues' scholarly work and explore possibilities for collaboration*
- *More cohesiveness and support in the school*
- *Work together, respect colleagues, assume others are coming from a place of trying to help/do their best.*

More frequently, faculty respondents made explicit there was a need to change institutional culture, and relationships across faculty and between administration and faculty. There was frequent reference to a desire for a culture of respect and recognition, for faculty input and involvement in transparent senior level decision making, and for collaboration on innovation and emergence.

- *We need time to meet, to talk and plan, and we need to feel respected by the administration, even when things go a bit sideways*
- *More internal communication involving the administration/executive and we grassroots folks*
- *Perhaps we could focus on operationali[sing] the organisational values through clearer objectives, and processes*
- *Let's start to celebrate teaching and service more*
- *Create a culture of recognition and appreciation, one that doesn't threaten those who do not wish to thrive*
- *Improve relationships between executive and faculty. Deans should be more interested and visit faculty more often in their schools*
- *An institution culture that genuinely allows for more collaboration and input from staff and faculty.*
- *Cultivate an openness to emergence and innovation*
- *Offer ways for all of us to contribute to the ongoing growth and development of the organisation and not be just a cog in the wheel*

- *Allocate more power and responsibility to program heads and directors, and overall greater faculty control of the schools*
- *Transparency about why decisions are made, as a sign of respect and appreciation*
- *Acknowledgement by [institution] leadership of the hard work, commitment, creativity of faculty and staff*

Faculty also called for change in specific institutional practices such as eliminating the faculty evaluation process and changing the nature and volume of academic administration work performed by faculty.

- *Get rid of yearly appraisals by the executive. Time consuming and don't achieve much. Make them every two years.*
- *[Implement] leadership development program for faculty in administrative roles and time allotted in workplan to participate in it*
- *[Set] realistic expectations re: work/life balance*
- *More administrative power for program staff (I shouldn't be the one tracking students down as program head – it just doesn't make for efficiencies or financial sense of my time)*
- *Finding a way to have less of an administrative load.*

In addition, faculty suggested new initiatives that reflect innovation and opportunities for faculty development, such as the expansion into the broader community. '*The proposed initiative to take our model into a new location ….is a welcome source of new energy at [the institution] and should be supported'.*

What is interesting about the organisational factors that faculty identify is the call for more agency and involvement in institutional decision-making as it pertains to the educational mission, less restrictive management controls, and more faculty control over designing a manageable workload. Interesting when asked about conditions to improve faculty thriving, there was no mention that greater pay or benefits would be sufficient.

In summary, comments point to the following five organisational factors that were perceived as negatively impacting faculty job satisfaction and thriving.

1. absence of transparency of institutional decision-making
2. restrictive institutional policies and practices that interfere with faculty work efficiency
3. institutional recognition, respect, and valuing of faculty contributions
4. overly controlled and negative workload planning and performance systems
5. insufficient financial resources and time to carry out research

On a positive note, faculty described sufficient opportunity to participate in school/departmental level decision-making about the content and delivery of the academic programs. Weinrib et al. (2013) noted that academics' influence at the local department level appears to be more meaningful in terms of job satisfaction rather than having influence at higher levels of the institution.

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings are encouraging as it is apparent many faculty in the university are exercising personal strategies to facilitate a capacity to self-thrive and as a result experience work satisfaction. Faculty appear to have a strong sense of purpose as educators, researchers, and academic administrators. They build social relationships with colleagues both within and external to the institution and engage in a variety of personal wellness and self-care activities. Finally, they take steps to promote continued development and growth, often external to the university.

However, the findings demonstrate personal self-thriving strategies are not sufficient, and at least a third of the faculty within this academic institution are not thriving or experiencing job satisfaction. Some faculty are struggling to thrive in their work environments due to perceived high work load demands, lack of institutional support and recognition, failure to achieve work goals due to a competitive research environment for limited resources, feelings of alienation and disengagement due to an insufficient role in institutional decision-making, and frustrations and wasted time due to micromanagement practices that restrict faculty autonomy. These findings are consistent with the Weinrib et al. (2013) Canadian survey where negative job satisfaction factors were found to be related to top down management, cumbersome administrative processes, lack of research funding, and lack of academic influence in institutional decision-making processes.

The factors for faculty thriving and job/work satisfaction are expressed below as strategies for individuals and for the organisational administration and human resource personnel. (See Figure 1)

Personal thriving strategies

1. Maintain a sense of purpose and making a difference
2. Strengthen self-care and positive outlook
3. Cultivate positive and supportive relationships with colleagues
4. Seek opportunities for learning and growth

Organisational thriving strategies

1. Efficient and supportive institutional policies and practices
3. Institutional recognition, respect and valuing of faculty contributions
4. Create opportunity for faculty to participate in decision-making at the school/academic unit level/ Transparency of institutional decision-making
5. Adopt faculty- centered design and management of their work plans
6. Increase faculty access to financial resources and time to carry out research

Higher education institutions can cultivate an environment of respect and enablers for faculty and other employees to thrive, when they create a reliable and open system of communication to allow for greater consultation and collaborative decision-making, access to resources that help faculty to do their teaching and research better, and more transparency and consultation around decisions that affect faculty. More initiatives are needed to foster collaborative work within and across schools. Leaders and managers at the institution could do more to create a culture of recognition and appreciation for faculty and encourage a more realistic expectation of what can be done with the resources available.

Leaders can reduce some of the causes of stress and, as a result, create a more positive environment conducive to creating positive energy. They may do this in a variety of ways: matching the individual to a role where they can shine, providing support, giving autonomy, and seeing that 'intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are commensurate with employees' perceived contributions (Davenport, 2015, p. 29).

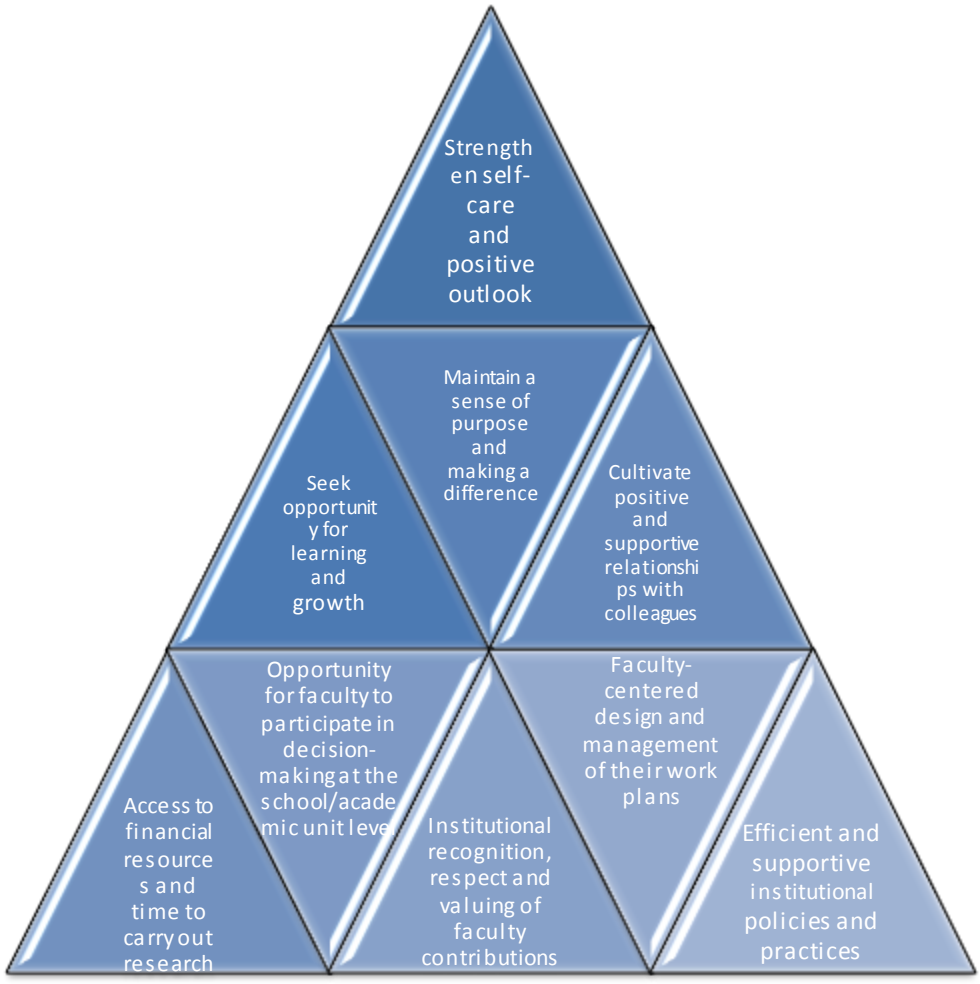

Figure 1 **Personal and Organizational Factors to Support Thriving**

Finally, regardless of the organisational culture, there is much that individual faculty can do to manage stress and increase their capacities to self- thrive. Self-thrive begins with having a higher order purpose and practicing self-care and positive perspectives about the demands and expectations of the academic work world. This includes one's attitude about stress in the workplace. A positive mindset about stress can transform fear into courage, isolation into connection, and suffering into meaning' (McGonigal, 2015). Similar to the aikido concept, stress energy can be channeled or transformed toward positive momentum 'How you think about something can transform its effect on you' (McGonigal, 2015, p. 4). Rather than fearing stress, one can deliberately harness it

towards a positive outcome. McGonigal tells us that the 'challenge response' to stress produces energy to help perform under pressure.

Walinga and Rowe (2013) found that managers who appraised stress events as challenging and initially aversive, could thrive when they viewed the stress as within their control and reframing it as an opportunity for new learning and growth. Further, steps to managing the stress involved reaching out to others and initiating collaborative action plans through researching alternative strategies and engaging in learning about new ways of addressing unfamiliar challenges.

Asking for help in a time of stress contributes to being socially connected and supported. Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, Grant, (2005) were adamant that 'vitality and learning, the two dimensions of thriving, are deeply rooted in social systems that are connective'. Miller and Stiver's (1997) view also argue that 'zest' in life comes from connecting with others and having deep generative relationships. Menkes (2011) and Achor (2010) advise creating a support network so that you are more likely to achieve your goals and build a strong capacity to thrive. Achor goes on to say that it's important to focus on what you can control, and what you can do to build capacity. Building the capacity to thrive requires individuals learning how to use different strategies for dealing with stressful, demanding, and turbulent work conditions. But it also requires an organisational system that encourages systems thinking and collaborative problem-solving and designs strategically focused processes (Rowe, Walinga & Anderson, 2018).

> Thriving at work not only enables employees to get their job done well but also increases their capacity to display innovative work behaviors – bringing new ideas to the table, gaining buy-in for these ideas, and creating [increased] momentum for implementation. (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009, p. 184).

The importance of a supportive organisational culture cannot be understated. It contributes to a certain level of freedom, confidence, community and trust that supports individual self-care. In conclusion, this research offers us a place to begin conversations about thriving and it is hoped that by sharing this work, the academic institution and the faculty can dedicate themselves to creating a supportive organisational culture and to learning how to model collaboration that contributes to personal, professional, and academic thriving.

References

Achor, S. (2010). *The happiness advantage: The seven principles of positive psychology that fuel success and performance at work*. New York, NY: Random House.

Adrian, C. M., Cox, S. S., Phelps, L. D., Schuldt, B. A., Totten, J. W. (2014). Issues Causing Stress among Business Faculty Members. *Journal of Academic Administration in Higher Education*, *10*(1), 41-46.

August, L., & Waltman, J. (2004). Culture, climate, and contribution career satisfaction among female faculty. *Research in Higher Education, 45*, 177-192.

Bacharach, S.B., & Bamberger, P.A. (2007). 9/11 and New York City firefighters' post hoc unit support and control climates: A context theory of the consequences of involvement in traumatic work-related events. *Academy of Management Journal, 50*(4), 849-868.

Barrett, K.C., & Campos, J.J. (1991). A diacritical function approach to emotions and coping. In E.M. Cummings, A.L. Greene & K.H. Karraker (Eds.). *Life-Span Developmental Psychology*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum. 21-41.

Bell, M.A. (2002). *The five principles of organizational resilience*. Retrieved from http://www.gartner.com/DisplayDocument?doc_cd=103658

Bennis, W. (2003). *On becoming a leader: The leadership classic updated and expanded*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.

Bennis, W.G., & Thomas, R.J. (2002). Crucible of leadership. *Harvard Business Review 80*(9), 39-45.

Boyer, E. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered*. Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990.

Bozeman, B., & Corley, E.A. (2004). Scientists' collaboration strategies: Implications for scientific and technical human capital. *Research Policy, 33*, 599-616.

Bozeman, B., & Gaughan, M. (2011). Job satisfaction among institution faculty: Individual, work, and institutional determinants. *The Journal of Higher Education, 82*(2), 154–186. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2011.11779090

Carmeli, A., & Spreitzer, G. M. (2009). Trust, connectivity, and thriving: Implications for innovative behaviors at work. *The Journal of Creative Behavior, 43*(3), 169–191. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2162-6057.2009.tb01313.x

Carver, C.S. (1998). Resilience and thriving: Issues, models and linkages. *Journal of Social Issues, 54*(2), 245-266.

Catano, V., Francis, L., Haines, T., Kirpalani, H., Shannon, H., Stringer, B., & Lozanzki, L. (2010). Occupational stress in Canadian universities: A national

survey. *International Journal of Stress Management, 17*(3), 232-258. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0018582

Clark, A.E. & Oswald, A.J. (1996). Satisfaction and comparison income. *Journal of Public Economics, 61,* 359-381.

Coutu, D. (2002). How resilience works. *Harvard Business Review, 80*(5), 46-55.

Davenport, T. O. (2015). Thriving at work: How organizational culture affects workplace fulfillment. *People and Strategy, 38*(3), 38.

Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D. W., Oishi, S., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2010). New well-being measures: Short scales to assess flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research, 97,* 143–156.

Erez, A. & Isen, A.M. (2002). The influence of positive affect on the components of expectancy motivation. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87,* 1055-1067.

Fisher, C.D. (2014). Conceptualizing and measuring wellbeing at work. Wellbeing 3(1-2), 1–25. Doi: 10.1002/9781118539415.wbwell018

Gappa, J. M., Austin, A. E., & Trice, A. G. (2007). *Rethinking faculty work: Higher education's strategic imperative*. San Francisco, CA, US: Jossey-Bass.

Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Gmelch, W., Wilke, P., & Lovrich, N. (2005). Dimensions of stress among institution faculty: Factor analytic results from a national study. *Research in Higher Education, 24*, 266-286.

Hagedorn, L.S. (1996). Wage equity and female faculty job satisfaction: The role of wage differentials in a job satisfaction causal model. *Research in Higher Education, 37*, 569-598.

Hagedorn, L.S. (2000). Conceptualizing faculty job satisfaction: Components, theories, and outcomes. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 2000*(105), 5-20.

Houston, D., Meyer L.H., & Paewai, S. (2006) Academic staff workloads and job satisfaction: Expectations and values in academe. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management,* 28:1, 17-30, DOI: 10.1080/13600800500283734

Jacobs, J. A., & Winslow, S. E. (2004). Overworked faculty: Job stresses and family demands. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 596*(1), 104–129. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716204268185

Joseph, S., & Linley, P. A. Psychological assessment of growth following adversity: A review. In: Joseph, S. & Linley, P. A. (Eds.), (2008). *Trauma, recovery, and growth: Positive psychological perspectives on posttraumatic stress*. (pp. 21-38). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Kalleberg, A.L. (1977). Work values and job rewards: A theory of job satisfaction. *American Sociological Review, 42,* 124-143.

Kobasa. S.C., Maddi, S.R., & Kahn. S. (1982) Hardiness and health: A prospective study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 42*(1), 168-77.

Kreps, D.M. (1997). Intrinsic motivation and extrinsic incentives. *American Economic Review, 8*, 359-364.

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal and coping*. New York, NY: Springer.

Luthans, F., Avolio, B., Avey, J.B., & Norman, S.M. (2007). Positive psychological capital: Measurement and relationship with performance and satisfaction. *Personnel Psychology 60,* 541-572.

Maddi, S. (2006) Turning lemons into lemonade: Hardiness helps people turn stressful circumstances into opportunities. Retrieved from PsychologyMatters.org/hardiness.html

Maddi, S., & Kobasa, S. (2002). The story of hardiness: Twenty years of theorizing, research and practice. *Consulting Psychology Journal, 5,* 173-185.

Mamiseishvili, K. (2012). Thriving in academia: Understanding and managing the complexities of faculty work. *Perspectives on Issues in Higher Education, 15*(2), 77-77. doi:10.1044/ihe15.2.77

McGonigal, K. (2015). *The Upside of stress: Why stress Is good for you, and how to get good at it* (Second edition). New York, NY: Penguin Random House.

Menkes, J. (2011). *Better under pressure: How great leaders bring out the best in themselves and others*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

Miller, J.B., & Stiver, I.P. (1997). *The healing connection: How women form relationships in therapy, and in life.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Mishra, A.K. (1996). Organizational responses to crisis: The centrality of trust. In R. Kramer & T. Tyler (Eds.). *Trust in organizations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 261-287.

Norman, S., Luthans, F., & Luthans, K. (2005). The proposed contagion effect of hopeful leaders on the resiliency of employees and organizations. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 12*(2), 55-65.

O'Meara, K. (2005). Encouraging multiple forms of scholarship in faculty reward systems: Does it make a difference?" *Research in Higher Education, 46*(5), 479 – 510.

Parker, G.B., & Hyett, M.P. (2011). Measurement of well-being in the workplace: The development of the work well-being questionnaire. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, *199*, 394-397.

Paterson, T. A., Luthans, F., & Jeung, W. (2014). Thriving at work: Impact of psychological capital and supervisor support. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 35*, 434–446. doi: 10.1002/job.1907

Peterson, S. J., & Luthans, F. (2003) The positive impact and development of hopeful leaders, *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, *24*(1), 26-31, https://doi.org/10.1108/01437730310457302

Porath, C., Spreitzer, G. M., Gibson, C., & Garnett, F. G. (2012). Thriving at work: Toward its measurement, construct validation, and theoretical refinement. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 33(2), 250– 275.

Rosser, V.J. (2004). Faculty members intentions to leave: A national study on their worklife and satisfaction. *Research in Higher Education, 45*, 285-309.

Rowe, W., Walinga, J., & Anderson, M. (2018). When managers thrive in the face of organizational complexity and disturbance: Strategies for effective leadership. Unpublished manuscript.

Rynes, S.L., Gerhart, B., & Minette, K.A. (2004). The importance of pay in employee motivation: Discrepancies between what people say and what they do. *Human Resource Management, 43*, 381-394.

Sabherwal, N., Ahuja, D., George, M., & Handa, A. (2015). A study on occupational stress among faculty members in higher education institutions in Pune. SIMS Journal of Management Research, 1, 18-23. Retrieved from http://www.sims.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/5_SIMSJMR_Iss1_Paper3_Pg18-23.pdf

Spreitzer, G., & Porath, C. L. (2012). Creating sustainable performance. *Harvard Business Review* (Jan/Feb).

Spreitzer, G., Porath, C.L, & Gibson, C.B. (2012). Toward human sustainability: How to endure more thriving at work. *Organizational Dynamics, 41*, 155-162.

Spreitzer, G., Sutcliffe, K., Dutton, J., Sonenshein, S., & Grant, A. (2005). A socially embedded model of thriving at work. *Organization Science 16*(5), 537-549.

Shin, J.C, & Jung, J. (2014). Academics job satisfaction and job stress across countries in changing academic environments. Higher Education. *67*, 603–620. DOI 10.1007/s10734-013-9668-y

Story, J. (2004). Changing theories of leadership and leadership development. In J. Story (Ed.). *Leadership in organizations: Current issues and key trends.* New York, NY: Routledge. 173-202.

Walinga, J., & Rowe, W. (2013). Transforming stress in complex work environments: Exploring the capabilities of middle managers in the public sector. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, *6* (1), 66-88.

Weinrib, J., Jones, G., Metcalfe, A. S., Fisher, D., Gingras, Y., Rubenson, K., & Snee, I. (2013). Canada: Canadian university academics' perceptions of job satisfaction—'*…the future is not what it used to be.*' In P. J. Bentley, H. Coates, I. R. Dobson, L. Goedegebuure, & V. L. Meek (Eds.), *Job satisfaction around the academic world*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Whitehouse, G. (2001). Recent trends in pay equity: Beyond the aggregate statistics. *Journal of Industrial Relations, 43*, 66-78.

Youssef, C. M., & Luthans, F. (2007). Positive organizational behavior in the workplace: The impact of hope, optimism, and resilience. *Journal of Management, 33*(5), 774–800.

Zhang, A. Y., Tsui, A. S., Song, L. J., Li, C., & Jia, L. (2008). How do I trust thee? The employee–organization relationship, supervisory support, and middle manager trust in the organization. Human Resource Management, 47(1), 111–132.