

**LIFE ON CAMPUS: THE DYNAMICS OF A POSITIVE WORKPLACE SETTING AS
PERCEIVED BY ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS IN GRADUATE STUDIES
ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS**

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ABSTRACT

Administrative professionals are essential to the working of the university but are considered the “invisible workers” of campus (Szekeres, 2004). The growth in the importance of administrative professionals on campus has led to a “silent administrative revolution” (Gornitzka, Kyvik, and Larsen, 1998), a phenomenon that has been noted internationally. Although the academic staff and their work in the teaching and learning experience has received great attention, the silence in public forums and reports about the roles of administrative staff in universities is, as Conway (2002) has noted, “deafening” (p.28).

This study explored the dynamics of a positive workplace setting as perceived by administrative professionals in graduate studies administrative units in western Canadian universities. A qualitative multiple site case-study approach was used. Semi-structured interviews with seven administrative professionals at four universities in western Canada served as the basis for data collection. Data were compiled into a database and analyzed for themes at individual, unit, and university levels.

Although the size of the universities varied, the themes identified from the administrative professionals’ perceptions were consistent. At the personal level, making a difference across campus and especially making a difference in the lives of their students was key to participants’ positive perceptions. Being appreciated, through such actions as public recognition and work autonomy, was also important. Unit level themes reflected quality work relationships as expressed in the respect and support of others, safety and humour in the work environment, and being given voice in decision making, especially by unit leadership. At the university level, issues militating against a positive work environment came to the forefront. These issues included resource support, clarity of goals, and the place/image of administrative professionals in

the university. Participants rated their work environment as positive despite their struggle for work-life balance and the presence of several workplace tensions.

The positive organizational scholarship approach, combined with the more established organizational culture metaphor served as a framework for structuring and evaluating the information collected from the participants. However, Herzberg's hygiene-motivation theory (1987) offered a more satisfactory explanation of why participants perceived their environments as positive, in spite of relevant tensions.

Implications for theory include the inclusion of positive organizational scholarship into the study of administrative professionals. This study also provided a Canadian context for research into the work of administrative professionals. This study could encourage university level decision makers to more deliberately consider the place and importance of administrative professionals, and how university wide policy can be instrumental in supporting a work environment. Implications of this study for practice include the building of work units with a supportive culture that creates work environments in which individuals can thrive.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Universities are reinventing themselves. The buildings may remain the same but the working of the academy is radically changing. Environmental pressures have prompted internal changes that are reshaping campus and as a result, the organizational culture of the academy has been transformed (Birnbaum, 2000; Szekeres, 2004; Volkwein and Zhou, 2003).

The university has come into a new age where competition, marketization, globalization, and government accountability and audit are the norm (Briggs, 2004; Lohmann, 2004; Szekeres, 2004, 2006; Whitchurch, 2006, 2007). Any one of these changes would not have such a dramatic impact, but taken together “the combined impact of many actions can nearly suffocate an institution” (Carnegie Foundation, 1982 quoted in Volkwein, Malik and Napierski-Pranci, 1998, p. 43). These progressive changes have been taking place through the last century and resulted in the steady and significant growth in the administrative functions of the university institution. In the North American context, university administration grew 2100% from 1929 into the middle of the 1960s, with steady increases since (Scott, 1980). Studies in Australia report that administrative staff now constitutes 57% of the employees of campus compared to when they were almost non-existence a century before (Szekeres, 2006).

This growth in administration has led to a “silent administrative revolution” (Gornitzka, Kyvik, and Larsen, 1998) a phenomenon that has been noted internationally in Norway (Gornitzka and Larsen, 2004), Australia (Szekeres, 2004), the United Kingdom (Whitchurch, 2006) and the United States (Lauwreys, 2002). Part of this increase in the number of administrative professionals is due to the creation of such non-traditional administrative roles as fund development, marketing, and information technology, which have sprung into existence as

public accountability and competition for research funds and students have come to the fore (Gornitzka, Kynik and Larsen, 1998). This silent revolution has led to the increase in the incidence of “invisible workers” on campus (Szekeres, 2004).

Academic staff tend to take centre stage on campus because they carry out the important teaching and research functions (Hoare, 1995) and overshadow the work of the non-academic managers on campus. These invisible workers are the midlevel (Johnsrud and Rosser, 1999) or middle managers of the university, and they have been largely neglected in research (Szekeres, 2004). Although the academic staff and their work in the teaching and learning experience has received great attention, the silence in public forums and reports about the roles of administration staff in universities is, as Conway (2002) has noted, “deafening” (p.28).

Professional managers are essential to the success of the university (Szekeres, 2004). Briggs (2005) pointed out that administrative professionals carry out the key tasks of corporate agent, implementer, staff manager, liaison or bridge builder, and leader. Huy (2001) showed that middle managers are the key to critical change in organizations and are central in helping the universities adapt to the increasingly turbulent environments.

Briggs (2005) and Whitchurch (2006, 2008) have studied the roles and self-identities of these individuals and how they carry out their work. Research has shown that professional managers’ productivity and effectiveness are affected by the work environment; and Volkwein and Parmley (2000) showed the negative impact of the current environment on job satisfaction and retention. Johnsrud and Rosser (1999) profiled the environmental influences on work morale. Although Sporn (1996) and more directly Tierney (2008) discuss the importance of a positive university culture based on trust, they made no suggestions as to how to build this culture. There was little research on university professional midlevel managers generally (Selaj

and Holbrook, 2006), and what literature existed specifically on the university work environment was pathological in nature with little or no guidance as to how to build a positive environment (Johnsrud and Rosser, 1999; Volkwein and Parmley, 2000).

Schein's (2004) concept of organizational culture offered a conceptual base for the study of positive work environments. Organizational culture was the result of the learning that takes place in the organization as its people strive to adapt to the external environmental pressures and the resulting internal structural, psychological, and emotional changes that come about from normalizing this learning. Organizational culture is more than "how we do things around here"; rather it is the sum of the shared assumptions, values, norms, and actions as well as its stories, rituals, artifacts, and operational patterns (Schein, 2004). Schein (2004) and Morgan (2006) stressed that organizational culture is key in understanding the organization. Bergquist and Pawlak (2008), Birnbaum (1988) and Tierney (2008) have used organizational culture to illuminate the inner workings the academy. While research by Sandgren and Stromqvist (2006) has revealed a tendency for universities to move to a managerial culture of control, which discourages innovation and individual risk-taking and creativity, Sporn (1996) and Tierney (2008) argued that a positive organizational culture is critical to the future success of the university.

Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS), championed by such researchers as Cooperrider and Sekerka (2003), Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn (2003) and Luthans (2002) strives to identify the dynamics of such positive organizational cultures. Positive Organizational Scholarship has been defined as:

Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) focuses on the generative (that is life building, capability-enhancing, capacity-creating) dynamics in organizations that contribute to

human strengths and virtues, resilience and healing, vitality and thriving, and the cultivation of extraordinary states in individuals, groups and organizations (Dutton, Glynn, and Spreitzer, 2006, p. 641)

To put it more simply, POS deals with what makes individuals and organizations flourish (Dutton and Sonenshein, 2009) as well as broadening the notions of what makes up a positive environment (Caza and Caza, 2008).

POS works from a number of basic premises that draw attention to the “life –giving” aspects of organizational life. First, the issues, actions, and conditions that create the problem are not the same factors that will create the solution. Second, individual and organizational conditions of well-being and health are ends onto themselves; and such human conditions as integrity, fulfillment, wisdom and others are worthy goals. Third, POS focuses on the generative power of positive emotions, positive meanings and positive connections of individuals within the organization. Finally, although this perspective fights the natural human inclination to focus on the negative, POS research does not ignore negative aspects of organizational life, rather it focuses on building on strength (Dutton et al., 2006). Within the POS perspective, the concepts of organizational culture identify the positive dynamics of the workplace environment for administrative middle managers on contemporary university campuses.

If universities are to adapt to the rapidly changing environment they find themselves in, then it is critical that the administrative middle managers, who are often the keys to change within the institution, are effective. These workers/leaders need positive work environments in order to be effective (Johnsrud and Rosser, 1999). Where do these middle managers have positive environments to work in? What are the dynamics of the workplace that make it positive? Does a positive workplace depend on the quality of the people in the environment or

do the characteristics of the environment itself somehow contribute? This study will address the question of what positive organizational contexts look like for administrative middle managers within the university context.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the dynamics of a positive workplace setting as perceived by administrative professionals in graduate studies administrative units. The four research questions for this study were:

1. What were graduate administrators' perceptions of a positive work environment on an individual level?
2. What were graduate administrators' perceptions of a positive work environment within the context of their administrative unit?
3. What were graduate administrators' perceptions of a positive work environment within the broader context of their university?
4. What was the interplay of the administrators' perceptions arising from the individual, unit, and university contexts?

1.2. Significance of the Study

This study will make an original contribution to praxis, policy, and theory in general. This research will expand the limited research on administrative middle managers on university campuses (Selaj & Holbrook, 2006) in a number of unique ways. The identification of the dynamics of a positive work environment will be useful for all levels of the university to nurture uplifting and productive workplaces. By highlighting what is done well, organizational standards, benchmarks, approaches, and structures can be evaluated in light of enhancing relationships in the workplace setting.

This research will have implications for the development of university workplace and human resource policy. It is anticipated that the identification of the positive dynamics in the workplace could lead to the development of a set of “best practices” from the POS life-giving perspective, challenging the ‘business school’ model of human resource management (Nelson & Cooper, 2007).

The implications of organizational culture on the workplace environment of administrative professionals will be expanded through this research. The concept of a positive workplace environment generally and in the university specifically will be refined by this research. POS approaches the university workplace environment from a unique perspective that will not only to identify the positive dynamics of the workplace but will call into the question underlying perceptions of what makes a workplace positive (Nelson & Cooper, 2007).

1.3. Definitions

I define the following terms as used in the study.

Administrative Professionals: the non-academic, non-faculty white-collar administrative workers whose specialized skills, training, and experience are critical to the mission of the university (Briggs, 2005; Johnsrud & Rosser, 1999; Scott, 1980; Szekeres, 2004; Whitchurch, 2008b). In this study, the administrative professionals are the non-academic middle managers in graduate studies units.

Administrative Unit: a group of individuals usually defined by a specific administrative function or goal. For the purposes of this study, the administrative units were the schools or faculties that are responsible for graduate studies at the universities to be studied.

Organizational Culture: In this study the definition of organization culture as described by Schein (2004) was employed: That is:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17)

Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS): the study of that which is positive and life giving in organizations (Cameron & Caza, 2004). POS does not represent one theory or approach, but rather an intentional bias toward the factors that have positive outcomes for individuals, teams, and organizations. POS does not ignore or overlook the negative aspects of organizations, rather it seeks to focus and study positive deviance that produces exceptional beneficial work environments (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003). Positive Organizational Scholarship has been closely identified with Positive Organizational Behaviour which is the study and application of positive human strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, improved, and managed in the workplace (Luthans, 2002). Although there are differences between the two perspectives, for the sake of this study the positive approach to organizational life will be identified as Positive Organizational Scholarship.

Positive Working Environment: Quick and Macik-Frey (2007) identified healthy positive work environments as having three overall characteristics that are exhibited by both the individual and the organization: leading a life of purpose, quality connections to others, and positive self-regard and mastery.

1.4. Delimitations

I apply the following delimitations.

1. This study focused on the perceptions of administrative professionals in the graduate studies administrative units of three western Canadian universities.

2. The participants self-identified their work environments as positive.
3. This study primarily focused on the perceptions and factors related to positive work environments.
4. This study was bounded by the research methodology and the Positive Organizational Scholarship approach.
5. The research data were collected during the period of February 22 to March 22, 2011.

1.5. Limitations

The following limitations applied to this study.

1. The participants may not have been honest or sincere in sharing their perceptions of their work environment. Every effort was made to help the participants build a level of trust in and a sense of safe with the researcher and research process.
2. This study was largely dependent on the participants' ability to fully describe their experiences and to adequately recall past events and experiences. In the participant selection stage of research every effort was made to identify individuals with these skills.
3. While participants had no difficulty in identifying their positive experiences in their work environment, some of them had difficulty attributing these experiences to specific organizational environmental phenomena.
4. There was a possibility that participants' perceptions and researcher observations could have conflicted. These tensions, if they existed, were fully elaborated and possible explanations given.
5. Where the goals of the research were to identify positive aspects, there could have been a tendency to only identify positive aspects. However, every effort was made to

ensure that related tensions were also identified and expressed. POS does not ignore any negative aspects of research in its focus on positive aspects of the research (Cameron, et al., 2003).

1.6. The Position of the Researcher

Until September 21, 2010, I worked as an administrative professional as a director in the College of Graduate Studies at the University of Saskatchewan. I had worked in the same college in varying roles for fourteen years and had witnessed how the change in the organizational landscape affected the people who work within the college. I had been involved in two systematic graduate program review processes for the graduate college across campus. I had observed how the performance indicators used to evaluate performance of a graduate program had, in my view, not reflected the administrative reality of those involved in making the process function in an effective and efficient manner. I believe that the people involved are the key to high performance workplaces.

I also value people, because my first calling was that of a Lutheran parish pastor and university chaplain, which positions I held for about twelve years. Therefore, it is not surprising that I identify with the servant leader model of leadership (Autry, 2001) where the well-being of the followers/employees is the leader's first priority. This leadership model might be seen as overly idealistic but this goes well with my first calling as a Pastor who always points to the ideal.

Although the ideal may not be attainable, I believe that a more positive, human work environment where people not only work but thrive, is a possible and necessary goal. My work experience and my doctoral studies have convinced me that through the establishment of positive

work environments can long term, caring, sustained development and growth be maintained in a university administrative setting.

1.7. Overview of the Study

The first chapter has set forward the purpose, significance, delimitations, and limitations of this study, as well as identifying my stance in relation to the topic being researched. Chapter two is an overview of the literature related to this topic related to organizational culture, university culture, university administrative professionals, positive organizational behaviour, and positive organizational scholarship. In chapter three, I examined the methodology and epistemology of the study, as well as the issues of research rigor and reliability. The participants, their local situation and the interview data was presented in chapter four. In chapter five I present a discussion of the findings and their implications in relation to practice, research, and theory.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore the dynamics of a positive workplace setting, as perceived by administrative professionals in graduate studies administrative units. This study examined the administrators' perceptions as they related to the individual, unit, and organizational levels. A university is much more than bricks and mortar, it is also about mortar boards and convocations; history and traditions; rules and regulations; faculty and students; presidents and janitors; and the bright and the hardworking. It is about a dynamic complex organization. It follows that organizational theory in general and organizational culture of the university in particular would provide background to understand my research findings.

The true richness of the experience of being in an organization can be gleaned from the depth of understanding that organizational culture can provide. The works of Bolman and Deal (2008), Cameron and Quinn (2006), and Morgan (2006) showed how individuals have tried to incorporate the insights of the major thought schools into a system that could provide the best understanding of the dynamics of organizations. Schein (2004) helped to set a definition of organizational culture. The metaphor of culture iceberg illustrates the various aspects of an organization's culture. Birnbaum (2000) and Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) narrowed the focus to the organizational culture of the university.

The university culture specifically affects individuals who work there. The administrative professionals (APs), termed "the invisible workers of the academy" by Szekeres (2004), were put into the spotlight by such writers as Briggs (2005), Szekeres (2006), Volkwein and Zhou (2003), Whitchurch (2008b). The characteristics and roles of APs identified in current research were reviewed and a definition of APs was presented. Although most of these studies

dealt with the negative aspects of the university culture, this study dealt with the positive aspects of the work world of the AP and therefore a Positive Organizational Scholarship approach was used.

Drawing on the research of Cameron et al. (2003), Nelson and Cooper (2007), and Luthans (2002), a brief background to Positive Organizational Scholarship was put forward. The core assumptions of POS as a new holistic approach were discussed, and the benefits to individuals, groups, and organizations and a positive bias were also presented. Finally the characteristics of a positive or healthy individual and organization were explored through the writings of Quick and Macik-Frey (2007).

2.1. Viewing Organizations: Theoretical Lenses

Thinkers through the ages reflected on organizations. The writings of Socrates, Abu Yusuf, ibn Taymiyyah to Machiavelli, Adam Smith, and others (Shafritz & Ott, 2001), are required reading today. The twentieth century, however, added the unique perspective of scientific research into the study of organizations.

By the late 1800s and early 1900s, the industrial revolution had taken hold and changed the western world. Into this setting, three key thinkers of organizational theory emerged: Taylor, Fayol, and Weber (Owens & Valeski, 2007). Adam Smith, Henry R. Towne, and others were also important (Shafritz & Ott, 2001) – but Taylor, Fayol, and Weber were the focus of many textbooks in the field. Each of these three individuals had their own viewpoint on organizations that included the workers, the management, and the structure of the organization. These three writers along with Luther Gulick (1937) and others established what is labeled today as classical organizational theory, a set of perspectives that sought to establish the key principles or rules

underlying organizational life. Some of these key principles were division of labour, hierarchy, and lines of authority are key elements of the organization (Owens & Valeski, 2007).

The Human Resource movement shifted organizational research in a new direction. Parker Follett (1926), Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, and McGregor's (1957) Theory X and Theory Y helped set the stage for this new perspective. This perspective went beyond the Human Relations approach which focused on satisfaction and compliance, to a participation focus that emphasized the involvement of all in the work environment to discover creative solutions to issues (Miles, 1965).

Burns and Stalker (1961), and Blau and Scott (1962) among others tried to explain the obvious dichotomy of the organization – mechanistic/organic or formal/informal. Burns and Stalker (1961) indicated the two management systems that they identified as mechanistic and organic. The mechanistic management system was efficient in stable environments because it placed a strong vertical integration and emphasis on clear command and control structures. The organic management system was based on a more horizontal organization which relied on the expertise of the professionals within the various positions. These professionals gave the organization problem solving strengths to deal with a changing environment more successfully than the mechanistic structure. This underlying conflict between the professional and the organization was examined in some detail by Corwin (1965). The current university environment has been often seen as an organic management system (Schermerhorn, Hunt, Osborn, and Currie, 2005). Blau and Scott (1962) argued that the formal structure of the organization, no matter how carefully designed, cannot deal with the changing issues that face the organization. Thus, informal social networks tend to develop to enable employees to make

the connections necessary to overcome the limitations of the formal structure. This informal network has the flexibility to adjust to a constantly changing environment.

The power and politics researchers, such as Pfeffer (1981), March (1966) and Mintzberg (1983) saw the workplace as anything but rational. The “people” side of organizations again moved to dominance, as researchers saw organizations as individuals and groups who compete for scarce resources and power. Where the human relations approach strove for peace and harmony, the power and politics writers accepted conflict as normal and predictable. Mintzberg (1983) added the concept of the professional bureaucracy to the literature, which closely described most institutions of higher education.

In the 1980s, various organizational researchers began to question the limitations of the quantitative research methods. Researchers, such as Greenfield (1973), believed that the classical, structural, and systems schools were using the wrong tools to look at organizations. With the insights provided by qualitative research methodologies, research could look at the organizational structure or the rules of the game.

The questioning of established conventions did not end with the scientific method. The growth of globalism, information technology, the knowledge economy, definitions of identity and self, terrorism, super-complexity and economic breakdown have called all aspects of our modern world into question (Bloland, 2005). The Modern Age, growing out of the Enlightenment, focused on rationality, progress, individualism, and the scientific method. Whether it was considered a fad (Bergquist, 1993) or a historical era (Bloland, 2005), the Postmodern approach with its emphasis on contradictions, flux, chaos, and lack of interest in theory building has become a part of organizational thought (Bergquist, 1993). Postmodernism also might be understood as a response to differing views of reality. Objectivism postulated that

there was an “objective” reality that could be studied for unchangeable universal principles that could be used to improve the human condition. However, Bergquist (1993) argued that constructivism saw reality as being “constructed” by the individual or individuals as a result of their experiences, knowledge, and situations. Reality was much more fluid and localized and could not be generalized into universal truths (Bergquist, 1993). This dichotomy of ways of knowing changed how an organization’s work environment could be studied and understood.

Of course, the study of the work environment is as dynamic as ever and changes in the perspectives of the nature the organization views still continue. How the workplace is viewed becomes a topic in itself. Morgan (1986, 2006) utilized the metaphor as a way of thinking and seeing the organization. A metaphor has the ability to provide insight but also can provide blinders to what is there. Morgan’s (2006) dynamic use of metaphor encouraged individuals to look at the organization in new ways.

Other authors have also contributed to this re-envisioning of the workplace. Bolman and Deal (2008) in an effort to answer the question of “why do smart people often do dumb things” introduced the art of reframing, to view the workplace from multiple perspectives. Cameron and Quinn (2006) analyzed organizational culture through the competing values framework. Each of these approaches has its strengths and limitations.

2.2. Perspectives on Organizational Culture

In the present study of the perceptions of the workplace environment by administrative professions in the university context, the cultural metaphor as an approach to analysis was suitable. Workplace culture was summed up informally with the phrase “That is the way we do things around here”. However, that perspective was like describing ballroom dancing as two people hugging to music. Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel (1998) commented:

Culture is the soul of the organization – the beliefs and values, and how they are manifested. I think of the structure as the skeleton, and as the flesh and blood. And culture is the soul that holds the thing together and gives it life force. (p. 10)

This definition is interesting but there are more discrete parts of culture that can be studied. Ronnie Lessem had another approach along the same lines:

(Organizational culture) has to cultivate a humanly fulfilling context – a space and time – within which the production and consumption of needed, worthwhile, and quality products and services can take place (Lessem, 1990, cited in Bergquist and Pawlak, 2008, p. 9).

Malinowski employed a more practical approach, defining culture as:

(A) n integral whole consisting of implements and consumer goods, of constitutional charters . . . of human ideas and crafts, beliefs and customs . . . a vast apparatus, partly material, partly human, and partly spiritual, by which man is able to cope with the concrete, specific problems that face him (Malinowski 1948, p. 360 as cited in Bergquist and Pawlak, 2008, p. 9).

Schein (1993) stated that “culture” implies a group – in most cases employees- having some “structural stability” to their shared experiences, and that this stability would lead to the group members integrating the various interactions into a larger system of rituals, and shared values that helped them feel bound together. However, according to Schein, the group must exist long enough for the shared history of common experiences to develop. In order to survive, a group has two major problems to deal with, first, how to deal with its surroundings (external environment) and, second, how to deal with each other (internal integration). In learning to deal with the internal and external pressures, the people in the organization must develop a common

way of working together. New members of the established group have to discover these common rules and behaviours in order to thrive. Based on the above assumptions, Schein (2004) put forward a much quoted formal definition of organization.

The culture of a group can be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17)

Organizational culture is a dynamic and usually localized reaction of the individuals in an organization to the external and internal interplays at work in the environment. The unique mixture of the organization's history, the people within the organization, and the pressures of the environment make it difficult to reproduce a specific culture in another time and place.

2.2.1. Types and Conceptualizations of Culture

As groups grow into larger organizations, the core culture makes way for subcultures to form. These subcultures can form around such natural characteristics as function or geography. More artificial designations such as market, technology, or organizational division lead to subcultures. Finally, management levels have their own subculture within the organization (Schein, 2004).

Schein (2004) also identified three levels of organizational culture: Artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions. Just as the tip of the iceberg is the most visible (but small) part of the whole mountain of ice, so what can be seen, the artifacts, are a small part of the whole organizational culture. Figure 2.1 gives a visual from the work of Schermerhorn, et al. (2005) of these various levels of the cultural iceberg.

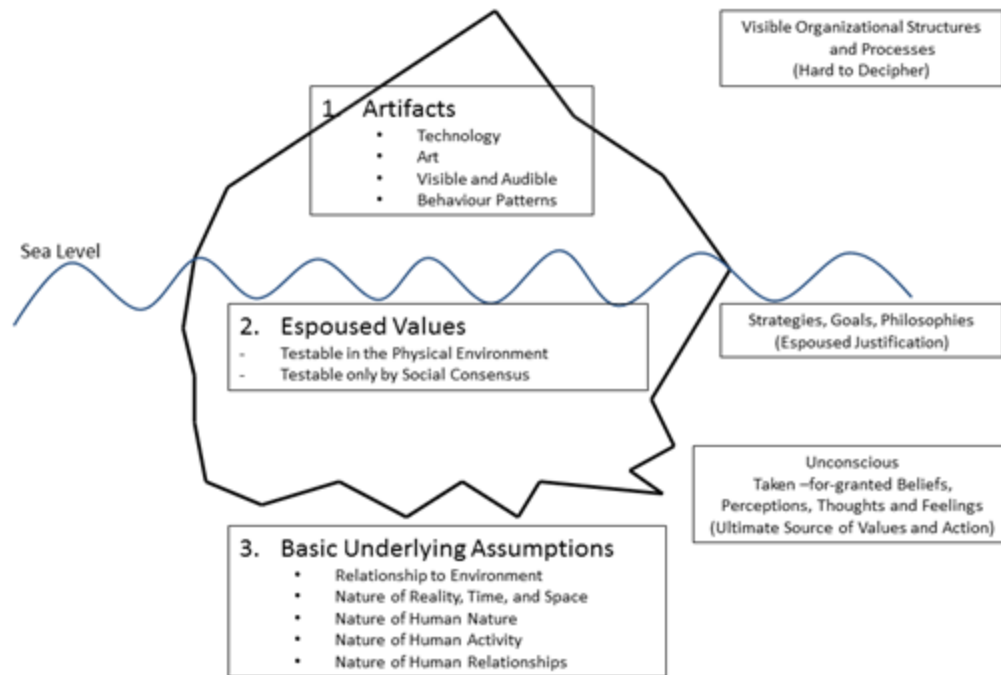


Figure 2.1. The Culture Iceberg (adapted from Schermerhorn, et al., 2005 p. 254)

The artifacts of an organization are the visible, tangible, and physical parts. This is the “what” of “what we do around here”. According to Schein, these artifacts are the obvious visible elements like buildings, products, dress, logos, and also include the stories, myths, and rituals. Although easy to see, these aspects can be hard to understand or explain. The espoused values are the shared values that help hold the organization together. In some ways this is the “how” of “how we do things around here”. The bottom of the culture iceberg is the unconscious underlying assumptions that are in place. This is the “why” of the question that is rarely asked “why we do things that way around here”. These underlying concepts are the basis of the higher levels of the culture and include such matters as the essence of human nature, the source of human value, the construction of reality, and so on. In his examination of how colleges work, Birnbaum (1988) saw organizational culture as the social glue that holds institutions together.

Schein (2004) identifies three intraorganizational topologies which align with the three levels of this study. The operator group parallels the front line workers of the administrative units studied. Schein's engineering culture applies more to a manufacturing culture than a university culture but it matches many functions of administrative professionals where APs are concerned with process improvement and improvement. This specialist culture also sits between the front line and the administrative level culture of the organization. The administrative level of the university twins the executive topology which is concerned with organizational direction and survival.

2.2.2. Organizational Culture and the Academy

Building on the work of Malinowski, Lessem, and Schein, Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) took a slightly different slant on evaluating the organizational culture of the Academy. Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) suggested that an organization's culture provides a number of benefits. First, it gives a group a sense of purpose and meaning. Second, it helps define reality for the people in the culture. Third, it provides a process for solving problems. However, they argued that the main purpose of organizational culture is the "containment of anxiety" (p.11). A positive culture provides safety, predictability, and meaning that help individuals maintain emotional stability. In discussion of the multiple cultures of the academy they stated:

Each culture alleviates only the symptoms of the anxiety, not its ultimate source. Fear and anxiety will only be fully addressed when people feel they are being freely served with the skills, knowledge, strategies, and resources of all members of the academy – regardless of culture. (p. 13)

From their analysis of academic institutions, Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) posited a perspective on organizational culture that elaborated on the phenomenon of tension among sub-

cultures. They identified six cultures of the university work environment that are useful in understanding the dynamics of the university: the Collegial; the Managerial, the Tangible, the Developmental, the Advocacy, and the Virtual.

In the context of the university environment, the *collegial culture* of Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) was the oldest of the six cultures and was represented by the faculty and the value this group placed on research, scholarship, and the ordering of each discipline. The members of this culture saw the creation and teaching of knowledge as the key reason for the existence of the university. The *managerial culture* focused on the proper running of the organization and on reaching the universities goals and plans. For the members of this culture, the student outcomes were the most important measure of organizational success. As the first two cultures focused on knowledge and the organization, so the *developmental culture* was primarily concerned with the individuals in the academy. In this culture, all aspects of the university should exist to further the positive development of all on campus – faculty, administration, staff, and students. The *advocacy culture* grew out of the universities' inability to equally distribute resources across campus. The members of this culture found it reasonable to enter into conflict in order to gain their proper share of the available resources.

A relatively new culture, the *virtual culture* existed outside of academy. This culture grew out of the developments of information technology and the internet in a postmodern world that called out new attitudes, new ways of knowing and new structures. Boland (1995, 2005) saw the postmodern world as shaking the foundations of the academy, its authority, community, and autonomy. If the *virtual culture* was a result of postmodern influences on the institution, then the *tangible culture* was a reaction to the postmodern “attacks” and harkened back to a time of stability, community, and trust embodied in the university buildings.

If one sees the *collegial, managerial, and tangible cultures* as the historical cultures of the academy, then the *developmental, advocacy, and virtual* grow out of opposition to first three cultures. From the perspective of Bergquist and Pawlak (2008), the *collegial and developmental cultures* are in opposition to each other over the freedom and use of knowledge. The *managerial and advocacy cultures* clash over the access to control and the control of access. The *virtual and tangible cultures* wrestle over reality and how members become involved in it. This opposition is easier to understand in the underlying values and fears of each of the cultures. Table 2.1 lays out the differences in the values and fears inherent in these six cultures.

Table 2.1 Aspects of Six Cultures of the Academy (Bergquist and Pawlak, 2008)

Culture	Values	Importance	Fears
Collegial	Autonomy in their work	Academic Freedom	Ignorance (not knowing)
Developmental	Collaboration between areas	Innovation	Impotence (not acting on knowledge)
Managerial	Achieving institutional goals	Success of students (# of grads)	Loss of control
Advocacy	Access	# of underserved grads	Not valuing individual rights
Virtual	Global resources	Meaning in connection of people	Isolation/orderliness
Tangible	Primacy of place	Meaning in local people	Being cut off from the academy/Chaos

The *collegial culture* values autonomy and security of their work and fears ignorance and the lack of knowledge; therefore, academic freedom or rather control of the search for knowledge is of utmost importance to this culture. The *developmental culture* is founded on sharing knowledge, not controlling it, and fears not using knowledge for innovation. *Managerial*

culture thrives to achieve institutional goals, which are usually measured in the number of students registered. The *advocacy culture* sees access of student of underrepresented social segments as the goal of the academy. Therefore, the managers fear the loss of control to the advocates. The *tangible culture* requires the physical spaces of the institution to connect more effectively to the academy. The members of the *virtual culture* fear the isolation the single physical space can bring and strives to connect with the world.

In the six culture analysis of the academy, Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) portray a university where diversity of goals and organizational and personal conflict was to be expected. The work environment therefore must deal with the paradoxes that present themselves in these diverse cultures.

2.3. Work Environments of the University

I dealt with the dynamics of positive work environments in a University setting as perceived by administrative professionals, it was appropriate to focus on that environment in more detail. In this section, I examined the research on the culture of the university generally.

2.3.1. University Culture

The research of Birnbaum (1998), and Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) pointed out the various types of cultures on university campuses. Sporn (1996) and Bartell (2005) independently discovered a number of characteristics that help explain the culture of the academy. First, the universities' goals are vague, not universally understood, and therefore difficult to attain. Second, the academy is centered on its people; unfortunately there are many groups or stakeholders on campus and off, all with different views. Third, the dichotomy of Bergquist and Pawlak's (2008) collegial and managerial cultures as personified by professors and university administrators set up an environment where conflict is common and can hamper decision

making. Finally, universities are affected by pressures from the external environment, such as governmental funding and economic conditions. Sporn (1996) found that the understanding of the purpose and mission of the university is not consistent across campus; there are no generally understood guidelines for managing the institution; subgroups form across campus, each with differing and even contradictory goals; and complete integration and management across campus does not exist. Bartell (2003) argued that understanding and managing the university culture is even more important now in the current environment where the traditional bureaucratic and collegial management styles are becoming increasingly ineffective.

2.3.2. Environmental Pressures

The relative isolation from external factors enjoyed by universities in the past has changed in the last number of years. Szekeres (2004, 2006) and Sporn (2003) have identified a number of major changes to the external environment that have affected the academy, its management and its culture.

Globalization has not only changed the dynamics of research endeavours but it has reshaped how the university views itself. Instead of seeing itself as only part of a country or continent, the academy must now see itself as a member of the world community. The Bologna process, originally a European multinational initiative to enhance workforce mobility, is a move to internationalize and harmonize university education of over 46 countries in Europe (Bone, 2009). The goals of the Process have been to increase student mobility, transparency of the higher education system, and to improve the attractiveness of European universities to international students (Carlin, 2007). Although first localized in Europe, the process is also quickly becoming a global standard by which university curriculum may be measured around the

planet (Bone, 2009). This process has represented a transformation of the university as being only for a chosen few to being a place of education for the masses.

As government and corporate funding to universities decreases and tuition costs escalate, the competition for students has increased (Bergquist and Pawlak, 2008). Steele (2009) pointed out that a university can no longer assume that students will come to their local or nearest institution. In an effort to justify tuition increases, the institution has moved to see the student as a customer to be served or as a consumer of education. This commoditization of education has significant effects on all aspects of the academy. Rankings of institutions by both public and governmental agencies have gained the attention of senior administration and students. Faculty and researchers are becoming entrepreneurs. University administrations are adding communications, marketing, and other specialties to their ranks (Steele, 2009)

Lohmann (2004) indicated that the “corporatization” of the university has been a much debated topic but few deny its reality. As the academy has moved to respond to the increased reporting needs of government, the higher levels of completion, and the shortage of funding, traditional business or corporate language and structures have been adopted. This change has led to more strategic planning and audit functions essential in the business environment. Again, Lohmann (2004) stated that the increase in complexity increased the need for more administrative support.

To summarize, the external environment has put pressure on the academy to change the way it functions. Whitchurch (2007) and Briggs (2004) found that the competition, commercialization, internationalization, increased governmental regulation, and accountability has all lead to an increase in the need, number, and importance of the administrative professionals, who act as middle managers, and change agents on campus.

2.3.3. The Rise of the Administrative Professional

Although administrative professionals are critical to the academy's response to the environment, this group often goes unnoticed on campus (Szekeres, 2004). For the purpose of this study, I examined the current research on APs.

Gornitzka, Kyvik, and Larsen (1998) in the conclusions to their studies of Norwegian universities stated that each of the above environmental changes, alone, would not have influenced the academy significantly, but together they have started an invisible revolution that has changed the shape of the institution. This quiet revolution has not gone unnoticed by researchers.

Research on universities in Norway has found that while the roles of clerical and faculty numbers have remained relatively unchanged, the number of APs has increased, especially the number of women in this group (Gornitzka & Larsen, 2004). Szekeres (2004) reported a similar pattern in Australian universities. Scott (1980) and Lohmann (2004) noted the same patterns in the United States. An increase in the professionalization of the APs has been identified as well. Gornitzka and Larsen (2004) defined the rise of professionalism in the following way:

(1) increase in formal status of administrative positions, (2) increase in the requirements for formal educational qualifications to hold administrative positions, (3) emergence of a common cognitive basis, and (4) the growth and formalization of networks between personnel in administrative positions. (p. 462-463)

In her research in the United Kingdom, Whitchurch (2007) found that APs had the following characteristics: graduate level degrees; backgrounds in adult or higher education; cross departmental team memberships to coordinate a variety of activities; duties that in the past would have been done by faculty; instructional functions related to study skills, international students,

and member disability, even though they are not academics and expertise expectations, possessing a specialized skill function required by the institution.

In spite of the increase in number and power, APs has been described as “the invisible workers” (Szekeres, 2004). In a survey of 23 authors, Szekeres (2004) found the majority of them had belittling or negative images of APs. It could also be that the APs tended to keep a lower profile than other professionals on campus, especially academics. They saw themselves as reacting to and serving academic staff, especially the elected academic administrators and they did not see themselves as active leaders. APs saw clear borders between themselves and academics. Although APs identified themselves as change agents, typical of middle managers, they saw themselves as being responsible to the elected bodies and academic leaders (Gornitzka and Larsen, 2004). However, Whitchurch (2007) found indications that APs are moving from their orientation from being of service to academics to being in partnership with the leadership.

2.3.4. Who are Administrative Professionals?

Whitchurch (2008a) pointed out that there is a lack of vocabulary in referring to this group of professionals. They are sometimes called non-academic administrators, professional administrators, support staff, technical support, or even bureaucrats, depending on who is speaking. This lack of official title is due to the multi-leveled and varied specialist work done on campuses by this group. Whitchurch (2006) identified four domains with which to identify APs: Knowledge, Institutional, Sector and Project. The Knowledge Domain speaks to the knowledge and skill-base associated with APs. This domain includes the individuals functioning as institutional memory by providing organizational continuity, market intelligence, and other information needs to the institution. The Institutional Domain is the area where professionals work to keep the academic and administrative plans in harmony across the institution. The Sector

Domain focuses on the individual skill set or accreditation of the individual, such as a specialty in finance or human resources. The Project Domain represents particular needs in such areas student services, human resources, and business services that cross functional lines and take on a life of their own. These needs have led to the development of groups of professionals who have the ability to cross traditional boundary lines, lack awareness of formal titles or status, are aware of the various subcultures within the organization; and interpret the unique languages spoken in each area, for example being able to speak “IT” to the Informational technology people when developing a student services system.

As a result of her research, Briggs (2005) defined the APs in broad categories based on the roles they fill. Typically APs move between all of these roles. In Table 2.2, I provide a summary of the activities of the various roles. This table is perhaps the best summary of function that I have come across, particularly for its relevance to the role of the work environment.

Table 2.2 *Aspects of Role (Briggs, 2005, p. 32)*

Aspects of Role	Defining activities
Corporate agent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding and taking part in the ‘big picture’• Contributing to strategy, and implementing it with an understanding of whole-college issues• Working within, and sometimes setting up, the management systems of the college
Implementer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ‘Making it happen’: carrying out curriculum and departmental activities• Developing the service department or curriculum area• Managing resources; managing students and managing for student• Managing the interface between the college systems and the activities of the department
Staff manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing and enabling staff• Organizing, monitoring and evaluating the work of staff• Understanding the individual strengths and needs of staff
Liaison	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being a ‘bridge’ between senior management and the departmental team• Liaison across the college at middle manager level for whole-college and cross-college operation• External liaison to promote and enable the work of the department
Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acting as role models• Being instigators of action• Creating and encouraging; being an entrepreneur• Having responsibility for substantial areas of provision.

The corporate agent role was sometimes described as being an officer of the university in that it requires thinking of the whole university while one responds locally. The “making it happen” role was essential in a service based institution like the university. This role was where the change agent function of this group would come in. APs were uncomfortable with the role of staff manager but this role was essential in the management and motivation of the local team. The bridge building function of APs is critical in building coalitions between staff and upper

management as well as across the institution. Briggs (2005) also found that most APs are uncomfortable with leadership positions even though APs are leaders by virtue of being in the position they are in and how they model their role.

This discussion has not led us to a clear definition of APs. American faculty defined APs as “non-academic, non-faculty, and even non-professional” (Scott, 1980, p.387). Johnsrud and Rosser (1999) defined this group as “not faculty and are usually a nonexempt, noncontract group” that are “differentiated by functional specialization, skills, training, and experience” (p. 121). The Australian government defined APs as not being faculty (Szekeres, 2004), but there are more constructive definitions. Szekeres (2004) more positively defined APs as the white-collar workers, who have work particularly administrative in nature. Whitchurch (2008b) built on the idea of those with administrative roles and added “but not an academic contract” (p.2).

2.3.5. The Effects of Environment on Administrative Professionals

The changes that are taking place in the academy in response to the environment have an effect on the individuals who work on campus. Current research has shown the effect to be: reduction in job satisfaction, increases in management layers, less trust between administrators and faculty, dismantling of offices and functions, less work space, less time and interaction with students, less support for academics, deterioration of industrial relations on campus, and more temporary positions (Szekeres, 2006).

The effects of the work environment on APs have been studied with three different approaches. The first to be examined was the research into the occupational stress on University campuses, mostly coming out of Australia. Volkwein and Zhou (2003) have tried to identify the factors contributing to administrative job satisfaction in the academy. Second was the research into the issues around explaining and improving APs morale.

In researching occupational stress in Australian universities, Winfield, Gillespie, Stough, Dua, Hapuarachchi, and Boyd (2003) reported that approximately 50% of administrative staff exhibited potential for mental illness compared to 19% in the normal population. This contributed to the stress in the work environment. Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua, and Stough (2001) identified five sources of stress on campus follows: “1) A lack of funding, resources and support services; 2) work overload; 3) poor management practice; 4) insufficient recognition and reward; and 5) job insecurity” (p.61).

All the groups surveyed by Winefield et al. (2003) reported the lack of staff as the biggest block to carrying out their work efficiently and effectively. The lack of physical resources such as space, information technology and other support services further added stress.

Winefield et al. (2003) also found that the increase in the amount of work and increase in the number of responsibilities added to the anxiety. The decline in staff, increasing student numbers, increase in the number of international students, higher customer expectations, introduction of new computer systems, and unrealistic management expectations were all identified as contributing to the increase in unpaid overtime.

Poor management and leadership were identified as another source of stress by Winefield et al. (2003). Their interviewees resented the lack of consultation and input into decisions that affected their work. Decisions seemed to be made based financial and business consideration not on student service. This lack of consultation led to staff not trusting management and their decisions and the changes that ensued. It was also obvious to the staff that the managers, many of whom were academics, did not have the training or skills to effectively manage. Winefield et al.’s study also identified the lack of gratitude and acknowledgment of work as stressors in the

workplace. The lack of opportunities for advancement and an unresponsive reward system contributed to the negative environment (Gillespie et al., 2001).

The consequences of this stress showed itself in numerous ways. Winefield et al. (2003) found that as employees maladapted to the environment, productivity declined, which resulted in the lowering of their self-esteem. This reaction to the stress created higher levels of conflict between individuals in the units. Individuals also adopted methods to get away from the workplace such as: absenteeism, stress leave, moving to part time, seeking jobs off campus, and refusing work beyond their job description. In their study, stress also showed itself in physical ailments such as: sleep disruption, forgetfulness, back and neck problems, migraines, and fatigue which in turn lead to feelings of anger, vulnerability, and fear. Higher levels of alcohol and medication abuse were also reported. It was not surprising that this affected the family lives of the university staff as well. The above results lead Winfield et al. to write: “there is growing evidence that universities no longer provide the low stress working environments that they once did” (p.52).

The job satisfaction of APs is critical in the effective running of the academy. Job satisfaction or “one’s feelings toward work” (Volkwein & Zhou, 2003) was affected by a complex set of factors. These factors are usually categorized as intrinsic (the nature of work), extrinsic (the reward system), and interpersonal (the relationships in the workplace). These categories can be influenced by the local workplace, stress, management, and adequate resources (Volkwein & Zhou, 2003). Volkwein and Parmley (2000) reported sources of stress that reduced job satisfaction as staff replacement, job insecurity, negative relationships with supervisors, and lack of personal respect. It was not surprising that their research reported that positive staff interaction and a culture of teamwork influenced all three categories of job satisfaction.

Generally, the intrinsic and interpersonal rewards of the workplace influenced the job satisfaction of APs more than the extrinsic rewards.

Johnsrud and Rosser (1999) studied morale on university campuses as an indicator of work performance specifically and work environment generally. They defined morale as “the state of mind of employees” (p. 122). In their research, they found that the morale of the research university was the lowest among the community, baccalaureate, and research institutions examined. They also found that the greatest positive impacts on workplace morale were recognition of an AP’s competence and ability and a positive trust relationship with their immediate supervisor.

Discrimination of any kind was seen as a clear destroyer of morale. Employee feelings of “feeling stuck” and their intention to leave also contributed to negative morale. These findings agreed with other research in which the lack of promotion, career growth, and advancement were seen as stress inducers. Johnsrud (2000) also interpreted “being stuck” to include the stress that is inherent in the middle management position of being “stuck” between senior administration above and staff below.

Another interesting finding of Johnsrud and Rosser (1999) was that salary was a single important factor affecting morale. The amount of the salary did not correlate with morale, but rather it was the perception of salary parity with others of equal level. This finding was congruent with the need for recognition of competence that APs feel. Johnsrud and Rosser (199) also found that APs highly value positive relationships with students, faculty, and outsiders. Again, the above research on the impact of scarce resources will impact this aspect of positive morale in APs.

In sum, research was clear on what can increase stress, decrease job satisfaction, and lower workplace morale for APs. It also identified factors such as recognition of competence, positive trusting relationships with peers and immediate supervisor, and an atmosphere of teamwork as all contributing to a positive workplace environment on campus.

2.3.6. Positive Organizational Scholarship

The above research suggests some factors contributing to a positive work environment but the researchers were not focused on studying positive work environments. Although job satisfaction (Volkwein & Zhou, 2003) and staff morale (Johnsrud & Rosser, 1999) address this subject, these studies represent what Cameron et al. (2003) would call a “deficit bias” (p.7) or a focus on the weakness of the workplace.

This concept of deficit bias was addressed by the then-president of the American Psychology Association, Martin Seligman in 1998. Seligman disputed the traditional clinical stance that focused on the weakness and flaws of individuals and called for a more balanced approach to studying the human condition (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). More specifically, Seligman saw psychology after World War II (and perhaps because the human impact of the war) as focusing on healing and the repairing of psychological damage rather than investigating human fulfillment and positive communities (Clifton & James, 2003). Referred to as positive psychology, this approach emphasizes building on individual strengths and the best in life. Positive psychology focuses on: positive experiences such as joy and fulfillment; positive individual traits such as integrity and resilience; and positive institutions including schools and workplaces (Cameron et al. 2003).

Positive Organizational Scholarship, then, was built along-side of and supporting positive psychology in its study of organizational life. POS deals with what makes individuals and

organizations flourish (Dutton & Sonenshein, 2009). POS has encouraged an increasing mass of research into the uplifting aspects of organizational life, positive emotion, positive meaning, and positive connections. These areas of research are not unique to POS. The studies of organizational development, appreciative inquiry, citizenship behavior, corporate social responsibility (Cameron et al., 2003), and the strength-based research of Gallup (Clifton & James, 2003) have often run in parallel to the work of POS.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI), for example, seeks to find the positive core of life in an organization through the asking of positive questions. AI is a “process of search and discovery designed to value, prize and honor” (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003, p. 226). The discovery, dream, design, destiny steps of the AI process seeks to build on the strength in the organization to positively change its future (Cooperrider & Sekerka, 2003).

For more than thirty years, Gallup has focused on strength-based research and has collected data from many sources that emphasizes the advantage to organizational and individuals of focusing on strengths. Their research showed that a strength-based approach to organizational life not only produced more employee engagement but also was good for customer loyalty, lower employee turnover, and financial performance (Clifton & Harter, 2003).

POS picks up from the work of AI and the research of Gallup to examine why these approaches work, and to understand the dynamics involved in positive organization settings (Cameron et al., 2003). POS has some core assumptions that drive its approach. First, POS agrees with Albert Einstein (n.d.) who stated: “we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them” that is, the mindset that brought about the problem is not always the approach that will solve the problem. The lessening of workload, for example, will not alone bring about a positive work environment. However, the building and promoting of

positive deviance will require a different kind of thinking (Dutton, Glynn, & Spreitzer, 2006). Deviance comes from two Latin words: *de* meaning “from” and *via* meaning “road”. So deviance simply means going off the road. This “off road” thinking is usually done quite intentionally with a goal in mind and it usually involves a moving away from the established norms of the situation (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003). Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2003) define positive referring to “honorable behaviors that improve the human condition” (p. 209). Thus positive deviance is a departing from the usual norms in a way that improves the human condition. These positive deviances can be identified by their deep caring for other people, self-determination, self-efficacy, and courage (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003). Some kind of positive deviance from the standard is necessary to solve the current issues facing an individual or organization.

The second assumption of POS is that there is a broader range of individual and group activities that impact organization that are not usually studied by organizational researchers. POS focuses on researching such human conditions as thriving, integrity, wisdom, resilience, and other conditions that improve the well-being and health of individuals and organizations (Dutton, Glynn, and Spreitzer, 2006).

A third assumption of POS is that it is beneficial for researchers to study positive individual, group, and organization situations in conjunction with other organizational research to encourage integration of these uplifting aspects into all research. In order to achieve a more balanced view of organizational study (Nelson and Cooper, 2007), POS takes a position based on its values.

POS promotes the idea that all people want to improve the human condition and that there is potential within all organizations, groups, and individuals to achieve that goal. Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn (2003) further described this tendency as “a bias toward life-giving,

generative, and ennobling human conditions” (p. 10). Nelson and Cooper (2007) portrayed this center of attention as “building (on) human strengths at work rather than only managing weakness” (p. 3). This generative lens is the basis on which POS links various organizational theories into a fresh approach for investigating organizational behaviour. This approach has uncovered new pathways for knowledge creation (Lee, Caza, Edmondson, & Thomke, 2003), unique patterns of resilience, and unexpected positive deviance (Cameron et al., 2003).

Fourth, POS assumes that humans are prone to attend to the negative aspects of an environment more than the positive to a mathematical ratio of three to one. That is, it takes three times as much positive occurrence to balance out the negative ones (Dutton et al., 2006). Neuropsychological research has identified positive responses associated with the basal ganglia area of the brain while negative responses, fight, flight or freeze, are associated with the amygdala (Ashkanasy & Ashton-James, 2007). The amygdala is the brain’s early warning system and almost instantly responds to negative situations, while overriding the higher brain functions (Goleman, 2006).

These four underlying assumptions have expanded POS research into a number of areas can be summed up by virtuous processes, upward spirals and positive change, meaningfulness, and positive organization design (Dutton et al., 2006). The focus on virtuous process involves such research topics as: resilience, virtue, thriving, strengths, and self-efficacy (Luthans et al., 2007). Positive deviance, positive emotion, authentic leadership, and appreciative inquiry are included in the second research area. Meaningfulness includes such topics as energy, creativity, quality relationships, and meaning in and of work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Finally, positive organization design involves reshaping of organizational structures to help create the topics of the first three research areas (Dutton et al., 2006). For the sake of this study however, I used an

overall framework to incorporate these research areas. Such a framework is provided by Quick and Macik-Frey (2007).

Using the POS approach, Quick and Macik-Frey (2007) described a positive work environment in terms of a healthy workplace. The idea of health is expanded to include “emotional, spiritual and even ethical dimensions” (p. 27) as well as the traditional topics related to physical health. Three transcendent categories of characteristics of positive health are described as *leading a life of purpose, quality connections to others, and positive regard and mastery*. These determinates of health originally come out of philosophical writings of Becker (1992) and were verified in research by Ryff and Singer (1998). Quick and Macik-Frey (2007) use these three categories to detail individual and organizational health. These researchers did leave out the group or team level of health as identified by Froman (2010) but these determinates may be filled in by this study. Quick, Macik-Frey, and Cooper (2007) spoke of emotional energy as part of interpersonal relationships, including teamwork. They also suggest that emotion may be the link between all three classes of characteristics.

The first category of *a purposeful life* has already been indirectly mentioned above as one of the key research areas of POS, meaningfulness. Pratt and Ashforth (2003) identified meaningful work as central to a positive workplace. The search for meaning usually revolves around the question of “Why am I here” but this question is connected in the work environment to two other questions: “What am I doing” (my role) and “Where Do I belong” (membership in a group). Figure 2.2 illustrates the ongoing dynamic involved in creating meaning in a work environment where role and membership may shift on a daily basis.

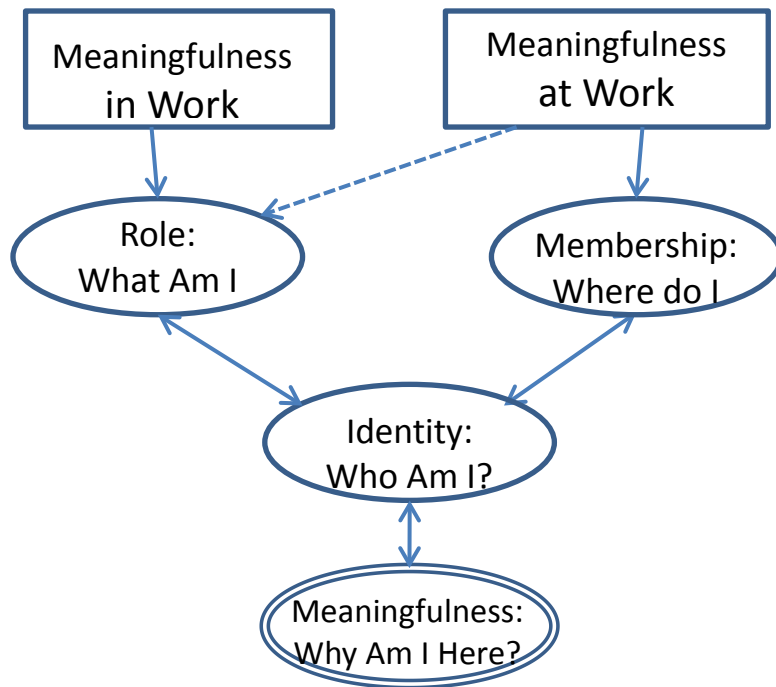


Figure 2.2. Work from an Identity Perspective (adapted from Pratt & Ashforth, 2003, p. 313)

Meaningful relationships, the second category of health, need some basic conditions in order to be created: abundance, safety, boundaries, and positive spirals (Kahn, 2007). A workplace that has a shortage of such positive characteristics as integrity, humour, and forgiveness cannot foster meaningful relationships. Where there is an abundance of such actions as selflessness, compassion, and care, relationships grow and flourish. The basic need for safety is essential to establish trust, which is the basis of building relationships and community (Kahn, 2007). A sense of safety helps release the higher levels of the brain from control of the flight, fight, or flee lower functions of our brain to build quality relationships (Goleman, 2006). The boundaries built by this need for safety help establish a sense of membership or feeling of belonging necessary in both establishing personal meaningfulness as well as building a strong positive group. Quality ongoing relationships also tend to be self-reinforcing and continue to grow over time. These positive spirals develop as members feel the safety and inclusion that

frees them up to act and feel positively toward one another. The establishment of positive relationships, although essential to wellbeing, is a complex interaction of informal and formal structures, groups and individuals – the culture – of the workplace environment (Kahn, 2007).

Quick and Macik-Frey's (2007) third category of health, *positive regard and self-mastery* goes beyond a simple understanding of being known or loved (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003) to personal confidence, self-awareness, thriving, and resilience. Quick and Macik-Frey (2007) identified some attributes for each of the three categories for both a health individual and a health organizations. In Table 2.3, I identify the physical, psychological, spiritual and ethical characteristics of healthy individuals.

Table 2.3. *Attributes of healthy individuals (Quick, et al., 2007)*

<i>Leading a life of purpose</i>
Clear mission and goals
Balanced – living within one's value system
Integrity
Productive
Purposeful work
Spiritual or higher purpose basis
Passion or motivation to achieve for the better good
<i>Quality of connections to others</i>
Interdependent: strong, positive social support system
Emotional competence
Mature, intimate connection to family and significant others
Communication competence
<i>Positive self-regard and mastery</i>
Humour
Hope and optimism
Self-efficacy or confidence
Self-awareness – strength focus – a component of emotional competence
Subjective well-being/happiness
Hardiness, self-reliance, and adaptability
Vigour, physical and mental energy
Personal challenge and growth goals

While Quick and Macik-Frey (2007) use the three-category pattern to organizational health, the focus is slightly different. Individual health deals on the micro level of individual characteristics: however, on the macro organizational level, the institution must “emphasize, facilitate and support the various categories of health for its members” (p.192). The organization and the people who work in it must help provide structures, policies, and cultures that provide support for the individuals. In Table 2.4, I identified the organizational attributes under each of the three health categories.

Table 2.4. *Attributes of organizational health (Quick, et al., 2007)*

<i>Leading a life of purpose</i>
Clear mission and goals
Giving back to the community
Integrity
Quality focus
Principled
Provides opportunities for growth
Rewards or recognizes achievement
<i>Quality of connections to others</i>
Open, honest communication norms
Fairness or justice in practices
Opportunity
Trust and safety norms
Mutual purpose and sense of belonging to the bigger whole
Embrace and encourage diversity of people, skills and ideas
Cohesiveness and positive affiliation
Pride in group accomplishments
Facilitates interdependent workers (high autonomy with strong social supports)
<i>Positive self-regard and mastery</i>
Encourage balance
Growth opportunities
Support systems for problems
Fitness support systems
Positive physical work environment
High safety focus.

Quick, Macik-Frey, and Cooper (2007) concluded by presenting two further notions from their research. First, individual and organization health are linked and interdependent. One cannot have individual health in the long term without organizational health and vice-versa. Second, health and productivity are joined as well. Thus, a healthy, positive work environment is a productive work environment as well.

There is more to individual and organization health than just productivity. First, in the post-modern environment characterized by discontinuity, uncertainty, and chaos, healthy organizations have the flexibility and adaptability to not only survive but thrive. Second, healthy individuals and organizations have the resilience to bounce back from crisis and chaos and incorporate the learning derived from overcoming these challenges. Third, which is both an ethical and financial issue, individuals in healthy organizations will be healthier and would therefore cause less drain on both the company's health plan and the country's health system (Quick et al., 2007).

2.3.7. Critiques of Positive Organizational Change

Fineman (2006a, 2006b), Ehrenreich (2009) and Hackman (2009) have been among the many voices in the critique of the POS approach to organizational studies. Their criticisms focus on three areas:

(a) POS ignores negative phenomena, (b) POS adopts an elitist (managerial) viewpoint, (c) POS is not defined precisely. The third criticism notes that POS does not acknowledge that "positive" may not be the same for everyone, and the concepts and phenomena associated with POS are fuzzy terms that lack construct and discriminate validity and careful measurement. (Cameron and Spreitzer, 2012, p.7)

Fineman (2006a) took POS to task for focusing only on the positive elements of life. He argues that both positive and negative elements need to be present in research (and life) to accurately reflect reality. For example, hope can give power to a person in an adverse situation where blind hope can prevent a person from seeing other positive avenues of action. For Fineman (2006a), social context helps identify what is positive and without the identification of the negative in the same context, a true picture of the situation cannot be perceived. Therefore, POS is seen as having seen as having a selective, Pollyanna view of the world that does not accurately reflect reality and life.

Cameron and Spreitzer (2012) responded by stating that POS does not ignore the negative. Indeed as this study points out, it is in the overcoming of negative aspects of the environment that virtuous aspects of organizational life show their true strength. POS is seen as researching the positive aspects of organizational life which are intermixed in, and in spite of, the negative aspects of the environment.

Fineman (2006b) has also asked “what can positiveness do for work that offers little to employees beyond tedium and a paycheck?” This statement suggests that POS only has a managerial and higher administration focus while overlooking front line employees. POS is therefore accused of only focusing on positive aspects of managerial life and the ruling elite while ignoring the impact on employees lower in the hierarchy. Cameron and Spreitzer (2012) respond to this criticism by stating that positive must be positive for all and to have one group ignored or disadvantaged to have a more positive environment another group goes against the basic assumptions of POS. Indeed, research identified that positive organizational practices have the greatest uplifting effect on the most underprivileged employees of an organization (Cameron and Spreitzer, 2012).

The third major criticism of POS was that “positive” is not precisely defined. Critics see “positive” as being culturally (Fineman, 2006b) and individually defined (Hackman, 2009) and not clearly defined across the POS movement. Caza and Carroll (2012) saw POS defining positive in three different ways: by acknowledging the natural or obvious nature of positivity; by not addressing the nature of positivity; or by narrowly focusing on positive deviance. None of these definitions lead to a clear definition of what is meant by positive.

Cameron and Spreitzer (2012) respond to this criticism by point to a number of terms used in organizational studies, such as leadership and quality, which are not clearly or uniformly defined in the literature. These terms are “constructs” used to identify concepts or ideas that are by nature hard to define. The strength of the term “positive” will depend on how precisely it is defined within a specific study or context. However, Cameron and Spreitzer (2012), then go on to say that POS must be conscious of maintaining scientific standards and research rigor in defining its research criteria and definitions.

POS has had individuals within and outside of its ranks that have criticized different aspects of its approach but even the critics (Hackman, 2009) have accepted that POS as an alternative to established organizational scholarship.

2.4. Summary

This literature review has dealt with the perceptions of the workplace by classical organizational theory and has expanded these views with current Positive Organizational Scholarship. First, I presented the insights of the organizational culture perspective. I then moved to an examination of various views of culture on the university campus and some characteristics that are essential in understanding the academy. I identified environmental pressures on university culture with the resulting rise of the administrative professional (AP). I

described the characteristics, roles and definitions of APs, and the effects of the environment on this campus group. The research on occupational stress, job satisfaction, and workplace morale point to negative aspects of the campus work culture but a number of positive aspects that one would expect in a positive workplace are also supported by research. Finally, I explored the relatively new area of Positive Organizational Scholarship and critiques.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the dynamics of a positive workplace setting as perceived by administrative professionals in graduate studies administrative units. This study examined the administrators' perceptions as they related to the individual, unit, and organizational level. In this chapter, I deal with the topics of trustworthiness and rigour, research method, research methodology including selection of sites and participants, approaches to data collection, data analysis, presentation of findings, and the ethical considerations for the study.

3.1. Research Method

Because I wanted to develop what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) would refer to as a rich description the individuals' views on their day-to-day life (a positive workplace), a qualitative research methodology seemed appropriate. Because I was focusing on the university environment, specifically graduate studies administrative units, I worked in a "bounded system", which lends itself to case study (Stake, 2005). Yin (2009) argued that a case study should be used when:

1. The study seeks to explain some present circumstances ("how" or why some social situation works);
2. The participants' behaviour cannot be controlled or manipulated;
3. The context is believed to be relevant to the phenomenon under study; and
4. The boundaries between context and phenomenon are not clear;

A case study approach was appropriate because this study fulfilled these four criteria.

First, I wanted to come to an understanding of the how and the why of administrative

professionals' perceptions of their positive work environments. Second, I examined what was normally happening in each work site (Stake, 2006) that made the workplace a positive work environment in the eyes of the selected administrative professionals. To try to control or influence the workplace for the sake of this study would negate the findings. Third, the context of this study was relevant. The individuals' sense of embeddedness in the office, the university, and societal culture had a dramatic impact on their perceptions of their workplace. Finally, although the phenomenon to be studied (the administrators' perceptions) was strictly limited to their own person, the interplay between the work environment (the context) and their perceptions (the phenomenon) was not. The interaction of the individual with the unit and the organization provided the richness that allowed for insight into the themes of a positive workplace environment.

This richness was further enhanced by a multiple case study approach. The multiple case study approach had some advantages over a single case study for this research. First, the multiple case study moved the emphasis away from what can be learned from one specific situation to the phenomenon to be studied (Stake, 2006). Because I wanted to find the themes of a positive work environment, having more than one site allowed me to focus more on the attributes of the administrators' lives that reflected a positive work environment across institutional settings. Second, because I focused on administrators' perceptions and given that there were a limited number of administrative professionals in any one graduate studies unit, having multiple sites provided more evidence to draw upon for analysis (Yin, 2009). Finally, in picking multiple positive sites, I had the assurance that a positive university work environment was not a unique and solitary event but rather a cross organization phenomenon.

3.1.1. Ensuring Trustworthiness and Rigour

Guba and Lincoln (2005) clarified the issue of trustworthiness in qualitative with the question: “Are these findings sufficiently authentic (...trustworthy ...) that I may trust myself in acting on their implications?” (p. 205). Guba and Lincoln’s works on trustworthiness have become a standard in evaluating the quality of qualitative research (Morse et al., 2002). Guba and Lincoln (1999) identified the rationalistic standards of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity with the qualitative research terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to help assess the quality of a qualitative research study. Guba and Lincoln (1999) also identified some specific methodological strategies to help achieve these standards: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, triangulation, and member checking. Many other writers in the field have also identified criteria to establish trustworthiness, validity and rigor (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Kitto, Chesters, and Grbich, 2008; Mays and Pope, 2000; Silverman, 2010; Yin, 2009).

The instructions of Kitto et al. (2008) to authors and assessors for submissions of qualitative research to the Medical Journal of Australia provided a good framework. Kitto et al. used four expressions or categories of research rigor, which supports trustworthiness: theoretical, procedural, interpretative and evaluative rigor, these categories are represented in Figure 3.1.

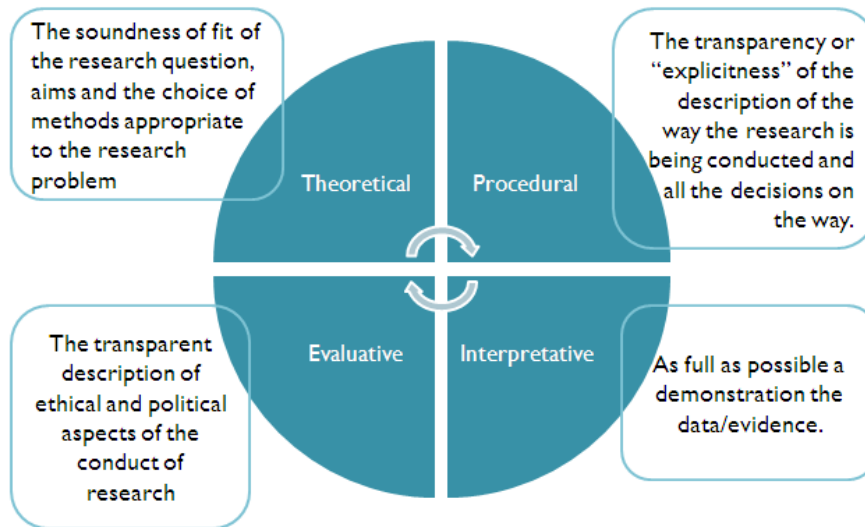


Figure 3.1. Four Expressions of Rigour (adapted from Kitto, et al, 2008)

Kitto et al. (2008) described *theoretical rigour* as “the soundness of the fit of the research question, aims and the choice of methods appropriate to the research problem” (245). The harmony of the research questions with the POS approach strongly supported the purpose of this study. The multiple case study approach was appropriate to gain insight into the experience of the administrative professionals (Merriam, 1988). Freeman, DeMarrais, Preissle, and Roulston (2007) also argued that *theoretical rigour* asks “how can we best listen to, work with and represent the people our work is intended to serve?” (p. 30).

Procedural rigour referred to the clarity of the description of the way the research is being conducted and all the decisions made during the process. This category involved such items as: the clear description of the selection of the participants (Kitto et al., 2008), full disclosure of all aspects of the interview process (Fontana and Frey, 2005), member checking (Guba and Lincoln, 1999; Mays and Pope, 2000), observations, research notes (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003); audit trails (Guba and Lincoln, 1999; Yin, 2009); internal and external audits

(Cohen and Crabtree, 2008; Yin, 2009), adequate documentation (Guba and Lincoln, 1999), and development of a case study database (Yin, 2009).

For this study, the participant selection process is identified below. An interview guide was used to direct the interview questions. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and verified with the interviewees. Direct quotes from these interviews were included in the presentation of the data. With the permission of the participants, I took photographs of the sites to support observation notes. All details of the collection and analysis of the evidence were recorded and presented in the final study. Peer debriefing (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) and peer consultation will provide audits. The goal of *procedural rigour* was to provide such rich description of all aspects of the study that the reader feels a part of all aspects of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)

Because the interviews were the most important source of data for this study, I did a pilot interview (Silverman, 2010). This interview gave me opportunity to pilot the interview questions and my interview procedures and to get feedback to improve the interview experience for the participants and enhance the richness of the data collected.

Interpretative rigour involved the full demonstration of all data and how it has been analyzed and interpreted. Triangulation of the evidence from multiple of sources of data is critical for interpretative rigour (Yin, 2009), although I sometimes found it difficult to correlate themes across the multiple cases/sites (Silverman, 2010). Evaluator triangulation, with multiple researchers or peers reviewing the data, was achieved with my supervisor as we analyzed the data.

Respondent validation or member checking is another essential part of the interpretative process. In this case member checking not only meant checking to see if I had the interview

verbatim, but rather to ensure that I understood the meaning of what the participant was trying to communicate (Mays & Pope, 2000). Silverman (2010) indicated comprehensive use of all of the data including deviant cases as another way of ensuring interpretative rigour. Full use of data across multiple cases contributed to the transferability or relevance of the study as well (Kitto et al., 2008; Mays & Pope, 2000)

Finally, *evaluative rigour* was the most personal part of this research process. Evaluative rigour involves the process of reflexivity. Reflexivity involved being sensitive to my personal interplay with the whole research experience (Mays & Pope, 2000). Reflexivity not only involved identifying the personal biases and assumptions that I had about the university environment, but also how my personality shaped and was shaped by the research experience, the participants, my fellow researchers, my peers, the data, and even the implied impact of the conclusions. It showed how these elements impacted the trustworthiness of the study.(Kitto et al., 2008). Morse et al. (2002) stated that: “The research is only as good as the investigator. It is the researcher’s creativity, sensitivity, flexibility and skill in using the verification strategies that determines the reliability and validity of the evolving study (p. 10)”.

This statement is both humbling and exciting. It is humbling because of the responsibility involved in my handling of the information trusted into my care by the participants. It is exciting because of the potential benefits that may arise from this study.

3.2. Research Methodology

An appropriate research methodology not only helps to gather the data needed for the study, but it helps establish the trustworthiness of the results (Guba & Lincoln, 1999). Morse et al. (2002) emphasized that establishing a clear methodology also helps the reader have

confidence in the competence of a researcher who follows established norms and therefore builds trust the results of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

3.2.1. Selection of Sites and Participants

For the purposes of this study, I sought participants who were non-academic middle managers or administrative professionals in graduate studies administration units, who saw themselves working in a positive work environment and who could communicate in depth their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about that environment. In keeping with the multiple-case study approach, I also searched for multiple participants from multiple physical sites (universities). A list of administrative professionals was provided on the Western Canadian Graduate Deans website. This list met two of my criteria: they were administrative professionals and they were working in graduate studies units across Western Canada. Limiting the selection to Western Canada also kept the participants to a manageable geographical limit.

Before I could move forward with the study, I requested and received ethics approval from the University of Saskatchewan. I then contacted the appropriate department in each of the universities I wanted to study to receive guidance on their specific research ethics approval requirements.

Once ethics approval was received, I forwarded an email to the administrative professionals describing the purpose of the study and asked for their participation. The email also asked the participants to answer three questions. The first question using a five point Likert scale for the responses posed: *“To what extent do you agree that you work in a positive work environment?”* Using the same response scale, the second question was: *“To what extent would your colleagues agree that they work in a positive work environment?”* The third query elicited a written response in: *“If you agreed that your workplace environment is positive, what would be*

the main reasons for your ranking?” This question was designed to determine key themes in the individuals’ perceptions and the ability of the participants to elaborate on their perceptions (Creswell, 2007). At the end of the email, respondents were asked to participate in the main study.

Once I tabulated the results of the initial survey, I consulted with my supervisor to consider the data. I had planned for a research base of three universities with a maximum of two participants from each site. Because agreement of a positive work environment was represented as a range and not a yes or no ranking, the sites and participants that were considered most positively rated should have been selected. Although the responses were limited to seven individuals from four sites, the respondents indicated positive work environments in their ranking of the first two questions. My supervisor and I jointly concluded that all of the respondents should be interviewed. Because all the respondents were used, there was little researcher bias in the selection process. This was important because I had previous contact with some of the individuals in graduate studies conferences. However, we concluded that this was reasonable number of sites and participants to provide depth and breadth of information demanded for this research question. .

The selected participants were contacted by email with further details of the study and possible interview dates. The Deans of the selected graduate units were contacted by email and were asked for permission to access their unit offices as well as the administrators during office hours.

3.2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Yin (2009) identified six sources of evidence that are commonly used in case studies: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and

physical or cultural artifacts, although he conceded that this list did not include all possible sources of evidence. For my study, interviews and email correspondence with the participants became the main sources of evidence.

Yin (2009) also indicated out that the impact of the sources of evidence was boosted by following three principles for data collection: use multiple sources of evidence or triangulation, create a case study data base, and maintain the chain of evidence. Stake (2005) defined triangulation as “a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (p. 454), which makes the multiplicity of data gathering methods essential. To support the use and triangulation of data in this study, I built a database using Microsoft Access to hold the appropriate data.

I considered a database as essential for triangulation of evidence for three reasons. First, a database increased the reliability of the whole study (Yin, 2009). Second, databases are a great way to store knowledge in a manner that is easily accessed and reformatted. This enabled me to easily correlate interview data across individuals and sites. Third, I am familiar with current relational database technology which helped me deal with the challenges of incorporating the various types of research materials (Yin, 2009) into a format that is compatible with the technology. The first two principles helped support the maintenance of the chain of evidence to further increase the perceived reliability of the case study. By ensuring that no original evidence was lost or important issues overlooked, I was able to present the evidence in such a manner that the reader would be able to retrace the information through the data analysis to the original data to draw their own insights not only into my conclusions but also into the procedures and data that were used (Yin, 2009). An examination of each of the data sources used for this study follows.

3.1.1.1. Interview Process.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated that “Qualitative interviewing is both art and science” (15). This statement expressed the tension I felt in the interviewing process. There were rules and standards for interviewing that needed to be followed in order to ensure trustworthiness but communication skills and empathy are always needed in working with the participants (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). There is the tension in the researcher’s roles as an objective observer and a subjective actor in the interview relationships. There is also the tension of the participant’s role as an expert source of information and co-creator of information (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The interview process needed to be structured enough to gather the needed information, but flexible enough to explore new areas as they arose (Rubin & Rubin, 2004; Yin, 2009). Rubin and Rubin (2005) summarized the tensions in the following guidelines:

1. The purpose of the interview is to obtain the interviewees perceptions and understanding of the day to day world.
2. Because the interview is a two-way process, the personality, mind-set, and preconceived notions of the interviewer affect the process and therefore should be acknowledged.
3. Because the interviewer is entering into the interviewee’s private world, there is an ethical constraint on the interviewer to protect the interviewee.
4. Because the goal is to discover the interviewee’s perceptions, the interviewer should not impose their own ideas into the interview situation.
5. Interview design (and the interviewer) must be flexible and adaptive to enable the researcher to take advantage of new insights as they arise from the interviewee and the interview process. (p. 36)

Yin (2009) further emphasized flexibility by describing the interview as “guided conversations rather than structured queries” (106). I wanted to use a guided conversation, which started with a standard set of open-ended questions (Stake, 2006), but I wanted to allow myself the freedom to follow the interviewee’s lead into new insights (Yin, 2009). Therefore, I chose to use a standard set of open ended questions (Appendix B) to facilitate the interview process. I emailed the interview guide to the interviewees before the interview, in the belief that giving the interviewees the questions would, first, give them time to reflect on the questions and therefore increase the richness of their answers and, second, increase the interviewee’s confidence and trust in the interview process. These issues of forethought and trust became clear in the pilot process that I performed to improve the interview process, as recommended by Silverman (2010). This strategy held true in the participant interviews as well.

I proceeded with a pilot interview with an administrative professional at the University of Saskatchewan, to test out the interview process in an environment where I could get honest feedback. The general positive feedback I received from the interview follows:

1. The questions were easy to understand and easy to follow and did not seem imposing.
2. The interviewee provided a wealth of information on the work environment.
3. The number of questions and length of time for the interview (about one hour) was considered appropriate.
4. My mannerisms, posture, tone of voice and so on were considered helpful in making the interviewee comfortable, relax and able to enjoy the process.
5. The interview process was a learning/insight process for the interviewee as well.

Also because of the feedback, a couple of changes were made to the interview questions:

1. The interview questions were re-numbered to be consecutive instead of restarting for each section.
2. An additional question to identify possible tensions in the work environment was added. The interviewee considered this was essential to balance the process and give an opportunity to the interviewee to express contrary feelings.

To conclude this section, I refer to Fontana and Frey's (2005) definition of empathetic interviewing, which is described as "a methodology of friendship" (Kong et al cited in Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 696). With empathic interviewing comes the emphasis on self-restraint and self-reflection, so that the researcher is to "continue to question, question and question" (p. 697) all aspect of the interview – the procedures, methodology, techniques, world view. Also, because of my background, the empathic interview approach was appropriate in that "it is a method of morality because it attempts to restore the sacredness of humans before addressing any theoretical or methodological concerns" (p. 697). I saw this concern for the sacredness of the individuals I interviewed consistent with investigating what was positive about their work environment.

3.1.1.2. Direct Observation.

Direct observation of the individuals as I interviewed them provided me with an additional source of information on the positive environment and the workplace of the participants. Guba and Lincoln (cited in Stake 2006) wrote:

In situations where motives, attitudes, beliefs, and values direct much, if not most of human activity, the most sophisticated instrumentation we possess is still the careful observer – the human being who can watch, see, listen, question, probe, and finally analyze and organize his direct experience (1981, p.213)

In fact, the interviews could be considered the observations of the participants and my observations of the physical space, and individuals' reactions provided greater depth to the evidence (Stake, 2006). With the participants' permission, I took photographs of the individuals, their physical space and other points of interest to first refresh my memory and to provide a second opportunity to reflect on what is in the pictures. The pilot interview provided me with a clear example of the positive use of photographs.

During the pilot interview, the participant referred to the importance of relationships, mentioning the cards and pictures she received from her children. She also mentioned the present she had received from her office colleagues as well. The photographs showed how prominently the cards and pictures were displayed in her office and how the bows that had been on her present were placed on the wall. This evidence could not have been as clearly identified from the text of the interview or from my research notes and observations.

3.1.1.3. Documentation.

Documentation was another important type of evidence in this study. It was of two types, collected during the on-site visits and from their website. This documentation included reviewing annual reports, strategic plans, human resources questionnaires, unit work plans, job descriptions, and mission statements. These documents helped verify some statements that arose from the interviews. A second type of documentation was from my own research notes.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stressed the importance of field notes as essential part of observational studies, because "the tape recorder misses the sights, smell, impressions, and extra remarks said before and after the interview" (p. 111). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) divided research field notes into two categories: descriptive and reflective. Descriptive notes are the researchers' attempt to objectively record what they see, hear, feel, and experience during the site visit.

These notes include descriptions of the participants, key words or phrases from interview, description of the physical plant, depiction of activities, and the observer's behaviour. Reflective field notes are the more personal, subjective part of the researcher's journal and include reflections on analysis, method, ethical dilemmas and conflicts, reflections on the researcher's frame of mind, and points of clarification.

3.2.3. Analysis

Yin (2009) presented four underlying principles that should be followed for high quality analysis.

1. Analysis should show attention was paid to all the evidence.
2. Analysis should address any major alternative interpretations of the data as possible.
3. Analysis should address the most significant elements of the study.
4. The researcher should demonstrate their expertise in the current scholarship on the topic under investigation. (pp. 160-161)

These principles guided my decisions as themes emerged out from the data.

According to Yin (2009) data analysis should start with a return to the propositions or in this case, the research questions to help keep the analysis focused. In this study, the research questions dealt with the administrative professionals' perceptions of a positive work environment on an individual, unit, and university level, as well as the interplay between the three levels. The coding system I used started with the four research questions, and additional coding was added to deal with assumptions and themes as they emerged from the interviews. Creswell (2007) suggested a lean coding approach to setting up coding categories, which starts with five or six

categories and expands the coding as the themes emerge during the analysis. Creswell (2007) suggested that codes will emerge from:

1. What the researcher expects to find. In this study this included coding for data on the individual, unit, organization levels and the interaction of the levels.
2. What the researcher did not expect to find. These surprises could not be identified beforehand in this study and therefore had to be accommodated as they arise from the data.
3. Evidence and concepts that need special attention. In this study, I provided special coding to unique evidence, concepts or ideas that stood out for special consideration apart from the rest of the evidence. (p. 153)

Because I was the only researcher conducting this study, there was no opportunity to have other co-researchers independently code the evidence (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I followed an alternate option of doing the initial coding as quickly as possible after the evidence was collected. The initial coding categories were derived from the characteristics of a healthy individual and organization and I added coding categories as necessary to accommodate new concepts that arose from the interviews. Individual statements from the interviews were coded on two levels. First level of coding reflected the characteristic discussed in the statement (for example, respect). The second level of coding identified the administrative level that the interview statement referred to (Individual, Team, University and Interactions). This second level of coding tied the coding back to the individual research questions. I reviewed the coding of the evidence after a period of time to ensure consistency of coding. This recoding process resulted in minor changes to the initial coding of the interview statements. This coding process

helped ensure consistent coding of evidence across sites and participants and set up the data for analysis.

Yin (2009) wrote “the analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies” (p. 127). He emphasized the need for an overall data analysis strategy to push the analysis. These data analysis strategies included: relying on theoretical propositions, developing a case description, using both qualitative and quantitative data, and examining rival explanations. Because this study focused on the positive aspects of work environments, emphasizing my theoretical basis helped keep my analysis focused. Baxter and Jack (2008), in their advice to case study researchers, also suggested using this strategy with the rival explanations tactic to help build confidence in the end results.

Another aspect of Yin’s (2009) advice on data analysis that drew me to his method was his encouragement to start data analysis by playing with the data. I found his suggestion of such data manipulations such as arranging data into different arrays and matrices, graphically displaying the data, counting and statistically analyzing the frequency of different events or statements to be helpful for my research. Even though, I did not include many of the tables in the final version of this study, the discussion with my supervisor on the inclusion of this information was valuable in the clarification of central themes arising out of the evidence.

I also followed Yin’s (2009) advice on looking for outlier evidence that adds unique information to the study. Individual participant singular statements, such as the concept of the “safe island”, sometimes brought insights that I felt added more emotional depth than multiple instances of other topics. Again, discussion with my supervisor helped identify which of these comments were included into the final analysis.

The themes from each site were compiled and the themes from each site compiled across the whole case study. I used the case study database to organize themes in the compiling process. I identified the major themes that arose out of the research by a simple count of the occurrence. I also included unique statements that provided emotional depth to the research. This final process (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) built a three dimensional picture of the perceptions of administrative professionals.

3.2.4. Presentation of the Data and Analysis

The description of the analysis should provide the reader with enough information to help them feel like an active agent in the research and to help them assess the relevance of the research and its conclusions. The rich description of their positive work environment provided by the participants should provide a clear understanding of the phenomenon under study, the context in which the study took place, and the interplay of the two (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case-study database helped me organize the themes from the different sites into a more manageable framework and allowed for what Yin (2009) identified as a comparative method of reporting.

In Chapter Four, I present the site description and general contextual analysis followed by the themes from the personal, unit, and university level. The research questions provided a framework to develop and present central themes arising from each site, which were elaborated with narratives, insights, and quotes from the participants.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

I submitted an application to the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research has been submitted (Appendix A). The following ethical procedures were followed:

1. The participants self-selected to become involved in the research project.
2. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, how the data would be collected, data analysis procedures and dissemination of the final study.
3. Participants were free to answer only the questions they felt comfortable in answering and further that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time and have their data removed from the study.
4. Participants signed consent forms for the interviews, transcripts and data release.
5. Participants approved the contact of their Dean to receive access to the unit for interviews, documentation and observations.
6. Every effort was made to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the participants including the removal of any identifying information.
7. I identified and positively dealt with any conflicts of interest or other ethical issues that might arise during the course of this study.

3.4. Summary

In this chapter, I described the research methodology used to explore the dynamics of a positive workplace setting as perceived by administrative professionals in graduate studies administrative units. I divided the chapter into the topics of research method, ensuring trustworthiness and rigour, research methodology, and ethical considerations.

In the research method section, I argued that this study should follow the case study, specifically a multiple case study, methodology. The topic of the study, the context, the interplay of the topic and context, and the focus on the broad phenomenon of the perceptions of positive work environments all suited the characteristics and strengths of the multiple case study approach.

I then addressed the subject of trust (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). I briefly examined Guba and Lincoln's (1999) use of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. However, I used Kitto et al. (2008) to supply the categories of rigour: theoretical, procedural, interpretative, and evaluative.

The research methodology section dealt with all aspects of the data collection, analysis, and presentation process. I identified the site and participant selection process. I explored Yin's (2009) three principles of data collection. I focused on the three data sources to be used in this study: the interview, direct observation, and documents. I added more detail into the interview section because of the importance of this data source. I included the interview questions and the adjustments made from the feedback of the pilot interviews.

I emphasized the data analysis by first focusing on the principles of quality analysis from Yin (2009). I then moved from the principles to the analysis strategies of relying on theoretical propositions and examination of rival interpretations to focus the analysis. I next presented the specific analysis techniques of triangulation of the data, investigator, and theoretical level. I then discussed the procedure of developing the individual themes in each site and of using cross case/site analysis to synthesize the themes of the study as a whole. I ended the research methodology section with details on presenting the data. I concluded this chapter with the section on the important ethical considerations of this study concluded this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DATA

In this chapter I summarize the data that I collected for this dissertation. I gathered the data mainly from the interviews with the participants of this study although some additional information was gathered by email correspondence. The purpose of the interviews and the follow-up questions was to develop a richer understanding of participants' feelings and interactions, and the environment in relation to their perceptions of working in a positive work environment.

The research questions for this study were:

1. What are administrators' perceptions of a positive work environment on an individual level?
2. What are administrators' perceptions of a positive work environment within the context of their administrative unit?
3. What are administrators' perceptions of a positive work environment within the broader context of their university?
4. What is the interplay of the administrators' perceptions arising from the individual, unit and university contexts?

I discuss emerging themes for each of these levels in order starting with the individual level and moving to the interactions among the levels. Although I coded the interviews and communications according to their level and topics, this coding did not express the depth of expression necessary to come to an understanding of the *Sitz im Leben* and inner world of participants. Participants' comments are used throughout this chapter to give depth to fully represent the dynamics of the work environment. For the sake of simplicity of reporting, I will

refer to the administrative professionals involved in this study as “participants” throughout this document. However, before delving into the themes on the various levels, I provided some general demographic information as context.

4.1. Demographic Information

I conducted research in universities in the four western Canadian provinces. As illustrated in Table 4.1, a total of 11 potential sites were identified and the administrative office in charge of ethics approval for each institution was contacted to clarify how the research could be conducted on their campus. Ethics approval requirements varied, from simply sending a copy of the certificate of approval from the University of Saskatchewan, to the need for applying for a completely new ethics approval. Because of the delays in the ethics approval process, I dropped two institutions from this study.

Table 4.1. Number of study sites

Potential Sites	11
Sites excluded due to Ethics approval delays	(2)
Total Possible sites	9
Sites that responded	4
Sites studied	4

As illustrated in Table 4.2, a total of 23 potential participants were identified in the remaining nine universities. Participants from four different sites responded to the initial email survey indicating a clear perception of a positive work environment.

Table 4.2 *Potential and Actual Respondents*

Respondent Group	Potential	Actual	Percent
Male	2	1	50%
Female	21	6	29%
Total	23	7	30%

A total of seven participants self-identified, six female and one male, which about 30% of the total population of administrative professionals working in graduate studies administrative units from the nine sites. The female respondents represented 29% of the total population of possible female participants from the nine sites and the male respondent represented 50% of the total population of possible male participants.

In Table 4.3, I summarized demographic and response information for the respondents.

Table 4.3 *Demographic information of Participants*

Person	Age Range	Years at Institution	Rating of Work Environment ¹		Institution
			Participant	Other	
Brian	30-34	6	4	4	Beta
Betty	45-49	20	4	4	Beta
Debbie	30-34	8			Delta
Dawn	50-54	8	4	2	Delta
Edith	35-39	1	5	4	Epsilon
Ellen	40-44	2	5	5	Epsilon
Terri	40-44	21	4	3	Theta
Mean	42	9.4			

¹Rating on a 5 point Likert type scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree)

The median age of participants was 42 years old. Participants' length of time employed on campus varied quite substantially, ranging from less than a year to 21 years, with a mean of 9.4 years.

Since this study was premised upon participant ranking of their work environments as positive, two quantitative questions were asked on the initial email survey. Participants responded on a 5 point Likert scale from one to five from one (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The first question asked on the initial email survey was "To what extent would you agree that your overall workplace environment is a positive one?" Six of the seven participants answered these questions. Although one respondent, Debbie, did not did not reply to either of these questions, her response in the general comments section was deemed to be within acceptable parameters. The criterion employed for selection of individuals for participation in the study was that they would rate their workplace environment at or above four on the five point scale. The second question, "To what extent do you believe that your colleagues would view their work environment as positive?" was asked to provide additional support for their ratings.

4.2. University and Administrative Unit Context

Participants represented graduate studies units in universities of varying sizes across the three Prairie Provinces. However, in spite of the variations in the total size of the universities and the relative sizes of the undergraduate, graduate, and staff populations, there were four similarities on the university level and on graduate administrative unit level across participants' institutions.

First, participants from three of the four universities reported that their university was seeking information from their employees in an attempt to make the university a better place to work (Dawn, I1, 893-910; Ellen, I1, 357-367; Terri, I1, Lines 668-709). The University of Beta

was seeking to become more efficient and Betty saw this as a hopeful step toward improvement of the work environment (Betty, I1, Lines 565-590).

Second, all participants indicated that their university had made graduate enrolment a high strategic priority. There was a consistent expectation in each of the universities that graduate enrolment was to increase. All participants also reported that their graduate populations were increasing steadily.

Third, even though each of the universities was expecting the graduate population to grow, participants did not see an increase in support resources to help administer the growing number of students and programs or an increase in additional funding for the graduate students.

Fourth, given the increase in administrative complexity due to underlying student numbers, the structure and work of the graduate units were similar across sites. The hierarchical structures of the units included the dean and one or more associate deans at the top. One or more administrative professionals constituted the middle layer with CUPE or other unionized workers filling the lowest level of the unit. The work of the units was also fairly consistent across the universities. The units were in charge of admission of students, funding procedures, discipline matters, convocation, and graduate program approvals. It was clear from the comments of participants that these duties were cyclical and overlapping (reoccurring each academic year). Even though the duties (like awards competitions and convocation) arose each year, these duties had to be dealt with concurrently with other regular activities in the graduate office.

4.3. Individual Participants

The individual participants were at the centre of this study and it is useful to have a description of these people, and their personal work environment. I give my impressions of their personality and my observations of their workplaces. Although the number of employees varied with the size of the institution, there were a number of similarities in the physical office spaces of participants. When I walked into their general offices, I saw what I would consider a typical general office space made up of cubical work stations. The offices were similar and the walls appeared to be the same color across institutions. Another constant observation from the photographs was the presence of paper – in piles (on desks or on the floor), and files and boxes throughout the work space. I also had the impression that there were too many people working in the space available in the general work space. All participants had their own offices, which varied little from institution to institution; and almost all of the offices had windows with a view onto the campus. I give my observations of participants in alphabetical order by their university's study name.

Betty and Brian, from the University of Beta, were different individuals. I had met Betty once before at one of the Western Deans Conferences, so I was known to her. Betty appeared to be a matter of fact, down-to-earth individual, who had been on campus long enough to see management fads come and go and was not afraid to say so. However, this characteristic was not to say she was not proud of her campus. One of the first things she did in our interview was to give me a guided tour of the university buildings that we could see from her office window, accompanied by a history of each building. Her office had few pictures but had many large plants. Her desk was almost covered with piles of papers with only a small space open for working. Brian, on the other hand, seemed philosophical, precise, thoughtful, and reflective in

his comments and was concerned that I came to a full understanding of his thoughts. He was the youngest of all the participants and that was reflected in his family situation and the importance of his work-life balance. Brian also brought into the conversation his experience with work environments off campus, which he contrasted to campus life throughout the interview. He had also written out some notes for the questions that I distributed prior to the interview. His workspace was neat, almost Spartan, with few papers on his desk and few pictures on the walls. Brian also had gone on the internet to search for information on me before our interview and he was pleased that I had a graduate studies background.

Had I not been guided by participants, I would have been lost in the office space at the University of Delta. The University of Delta was one of the two largest universities and the staff and office reflected this fact. I interviewed the two administrative professionals (Dawn and Debbie) who had supervisory responsibilities for a number of administrative and CUPE workers. Although their offices were not close together, it was obvious that Dawn and Debbie communicated on a daily basis on many matters. During their interviews, each made a point of the fact that the other might disagree with them on some topics. Dawn too had met me at a Western Deans Conference and she seemed quite comfortable with expressing her thoughts and feelings regarding her place in the institution. She was soft-spoken person, with a big smile, with much to say. Our interview went well beyond the allotted time. She, too, was thoughtful and reflective and aware of how her life was being affected by her job. Dawn also had the confidence to make decisions, and the self-discipline to make the changes that led to a better work-life for her and her staff. Her office had a lived-in, homely feel to it. There were some paintings on the walls and a number of decorations on the various shelves with small piles of

paper throughout the space. Her desk appeared orderly although it had a number of piles of paper on that as well.

In her demeanor and the nature of her office space Debbie was a contrast to Dawn. The piles of paper were absent from Debbie's desk and office. Debbie was precise about her terminology and descriptions, which seemed consistent with her exacting work. She had worked off campus and was conscious of the contrasts between the work environments and had an appreciation of the benefit of working on campus. She too was conscious of work-life balance and its effect on her health and life. Debbie also had a drive to make a difference in her work that was evident a number of times during her interview.

The University of Epsilon had the quietest environment with the fewest cubicles of all the institutions I visited. The reception area gave me the quiet, professional feeling of a lawyer's office. Edith and Ellen had been at their institution the least time of any of the other participants. Their comments reflected an enthusiasm and excitement that was missing in interviews with participants with longer tenures in other institutions. Edith mentioned her experience from other organizations to contrast with her positive impressions of her current position. Of all participants, she was the most appreciative of the health facilities and charity opportunities provided at the university. Edith also had a clear strategic stance to her work that went beyond simply meeting the day-to-day needs of the students. Edith's office was relatively tidy with few piles of paper and a few small ornaments on her desk and no pictures on the wall. Ellen's office on the other hand had many types of colorful art on the wall and many ornaments and toys on her desk. The piles of paper throughout her office and on her desk had a more organic feel. She appeared more business-like in her approach to the interview and had more questions to me

about my background and experience of any participant, but she seemed to become more comfortable during the interview.

Terri was the only administrator that I interviewed at the University of Theta but she was the most well-known to me. Terri and I had known each other for more than ten years through the Western Deans Conference, and we had email exchanges on various topics. Her positive response to the initial questionnaire was a surprise to me because at the Western Deans Conference the year before she had expressed her thoughts of moving out of graduate studies due to personality conflicts in the office. She did not appear as the tired, stressed out individual I had seen the year before, but was positive and energized about the future in graduate studies. We communicated easily and openly. Terri had the most experience in graduate studies of all the participants and also had the most senior position of all participants; therefore she had a lot of human resource and strategic planning responsibilities. She seemed to be the most alone of all participants I interviewed. The picture of Terri sitting at her desk gave the impression that she was sinking into the many piles of paper that surrounded, a feeling she expressed during our interview. However, the reception area of this graduate studies office did not present the same feeling of being overwhelmed by tasks; rather my observation was that the piles of paper were noticeable but not obtrusive.

These profiles showed participants as people who varied from each other and from institution. This diverse group provided a wide background of experiences, knowledge, personality types, and concerns. They had a commonality of seeing their workplaces as a positive one, but coming to their work and engaging in their environment in different ways.

4.4. An Initial Paradox

The purpose of this study was to study positive work environments and participants and sites were chosen because participants identified their work environments as positive. It also became clear to me early in the interview process that participants experienced some significant tensions in relation to their work situation. Yet, the participants considered their overall work environment to be positive in spite of these negative parts of their work.

Participants at all four sites identified two significant common and interrelated individual and unit tensions:

- *Workload* and the related theme of *Work-Life Balance*; and
- Impact of personnel change on the work environment.

4.4.1. Workload and Work-Life Balance

Participants most frequently mentioned the themes of workload and work-life balance. At every site, they quickly identified the large and ever increasing workload and its negative effects on their work environment as result of the growth in the number of graduate students and the lack of resources within the unit. This observation rules out the notion that the sites were more positive simply because participants perceived that they had manageable workloads and more resources. Although University of Beta and University of Delta had the most students, these two sites expressed the fewest concerns about workload. However, participants from the University of Theta and the University of Delta had the most comments on work-life balance. Individual comments and elaborations on issues of workload and of work-life balance are presented in the individual perceptions section.

4.4.2. Personnel Change

Participants from all four of the sites also reported a personnel change that disrupted the office environment and caused office morale to deteriorate and office stress levels to increase (Betty, I1, Lines 372-390; Dawn, I1, Lines 97-124; Ellen, I1, Lines 140-154; Terri, I1, Lines 379-414). Participants reported that the time of division and tension went on for a protracted period with the office staff “walking on egg shells” (Betty, I1, Lines 457-463; Terri, I1, Lines 449-464). These critical incidents were important to note because they appeared to be the driving force behind the intentional changes instituted by the participants to move the work environment in a more positive direction.

Nevertheless, these intentional changes to the initiative of the administrative professionals were common among all four sites. With the already high workloads and the critical incident involving staff changes that negatively impacted the work environment, the APs noted that there was intentional positive change that took place within and between themselves and the rest of the unit (Betty, I1, Lines 372-390; Debbie, I1, Lines 350-363; Ellen, I1, Lines 198-201; Terri, I1, Lines 379-414) . I discuss this topic in depth later in this chapter.

Attention must be paid to all evidence (Yin, 2009). Even though this research was focused on the positive aspects of participants’ work environment, the negative dynamics of the environment must be presented as well. The paradox of the negative effects of the workload and the disruptive personnel change on participants’ perceptions of their positive work environment was essential in understanding the lived experience of participants.

I now turn to the presentation of the data from the interviews for each of the levels of participant perceptions (individual, unit/team, and university) levels.

4.5. Perceptions at the Individual Level

In this section, I present the themes arising out of the participant interviews concerning the individual aspects of their work. For each theme, I present the encoding information followed by insights from the individual participants that shed light on their own individual situations. The voice of the individuals is allowed to come through with quotations. Because this section is on the presentation of the data and participants' stories make up the essence of the data, I put the quotes in a logical order based on the research questions, and I provide only the narrative content necessary to make sense of the flow of the comments.

In Table 4.4, I show the most common participants' responses to the question "What are the elements of a good workplace for you personally?" These seven themes made up 50% of the total responses for the individual level. In the first column shows the count of comments on the theme; in the second column I show the percentage of the total comments on the individual level. The final column gives the incremental total of each of these themes on this level. I counted any remark by a participant on a topic as a comment and was usually one or two sentences long.

Table 4.4 *Individual level themes*

Code	n	Percentage of Total Responses
Work-Life Balance	27	10
Mastery/Efficacy	18	7
Diversity/difference	17	6
Strategic planning	15	6
Student	14	5
Coping style	13	5
Contribution	13	5
Workload	13	5

Mastery/Efficacy related to comments about having mastery of skills and the ability to use those skills to get something done. This theme is connected to the related topics of respect, being appreciated and making a difference, which are included for more discussion.

Diversity/difference dealt with comments on the topic of differences among individuals and work styles. *Strategic planning* on this level referred to the importance that strategic planning had to the individual. The *Student* theme included all comments on the importance of students to the individual. *Coping style* pertained to comments on the individual's stress management techniques. *Contribution* included all comments on the individuals' need to contribute or the feeling that they had made a contribution.

Unlike the overall counts which had workload as the highest count and work-life balance as second, for individuals, work-life balance represented the most comments and workload ranked in 8th position. However, comments on work-life balance suggested the inner struggle within the individuals as they worked in the busy office environment. This inner struggle was the first step to understanding the motivation behind the intentional move to a more positive workplace on the part of administrative professionals in these environments.

4.5.1. Workload

Although individual workload was mentioned fewer times than work-life balance, workload affected the personal lives of the participants. Betty stated, "To me I don't think anything's average anymore. You know, to me average is being busy. To me average is now sometimes unfortunately being behind. And not to getting things done" (I1, Lines 91-93). Ellen expressed workload in the comment: "I'm the type of person that sort of puts in extra time anyway; it's just always the way I've worked so it doesn't bother me. But the continuing

workload is something that gets a little bit concerning. And that's everybody I think." (I1, Line 67-70). Ellen also explained what that extra workload was like:

So yeah, three times a year it's, you know, they can get to be 12 hour days pretty easily and coming in on the weekends. Other than that, I consider it probably an eight hour day but when I'm at home I probably do another hour of e-mails. And that happens pretty much every night. So I'm out of here in my eight hours, but still (I: You're not out of here.) Yeah. But I'm still working. (I1, Lines 55-60)

Terri also commented upon the long hours:

. . . my average workday has increased significantly. I'm usually here about 10 hours a day. Working through lunches as well to try and get everything done. And the often go home, 5:30, six, spend some time with my family, my kids, do their activities with them. Once they're in bed, get out the laptop and start working again for a few more hours. (I1, Lines 50-54)

And these long hours over a long period of time begin to take their toll as Debbie stated: Well, you do (fry) and I think that's kind of what happened to me in the sense of I mean it's just like - I hit the wall. And like, if somebody asks for me to do one more thing, nothing's going to get done at the end of the day, right? (I1, Lines 90-92).

Terri also expressed another effect of the long hours:

So some days it's really draining. Right now . . . there are days I go home and I know my family are taking the brunt of it for the few hours that I am there. I try not to let that happen but there are days that it does. So yeah, there are days that are really draining and very frustrating. (I1, lines 75-79)

The ever increasing workload was an significant reality in the positive work environment of participants. Though not representing a central factor in the overall positive nature of the workplace environment, this paradox was further expressed in the effects of the workload on the lives of participants.

4.5.2. Work-Life Balance

Terri expressed what many other APs had begun to realize: “Work-life balance seems to be the thing right now, the buzz thing. And having working ten to 12 hour days, obviously I need to work on my work-life balance a little more!” (I1, Lines 583-585). However, participants found it easier to encourage their staff than to do it themselves:

Yeah. So but knowing that work-life and balance is important to the staff that we really need to - and it's something that I've always maintained to staff. Don't look at me as an example because I'm not a good example 'cause I work ten hour days. You're here, you have a job to do, and you're 8 to 4:30. The work will be here tomorrow. Go home. (Terri, I1, Lines 619-623)

But a number of participants had begun to practice the discipline of work-life balance:

P: I've changed a lot. (I: Have you?) Oh, yes. On an average week, I would say 40 hours.

I: You're down to 40 hours! (P: You bet.) So tell me about that. 'Cause obviously there's been a change (P: Yep.) and I hope there was no doctor involved!

P: No. (I: Tell me what happened.) I became confident. I'm doing well enough. I don't need to prove anything to anybody by putting in more time. If I can't do my work in a regular week, then I'll let (the Dean) know. In fact I can pretty well always do the work that needs to be done in a regular week. And sometimes I put in some extra hours, you know, sometimes I do e-mail on the weekend because you know you haven't looked at it

for three days. And you know there's going to be a student crisis in there. And you need to deal with it. (Dawn, I1: Lines 245 – 258)

Debbie, within the same office, also addressed her work-life balance issues in terms of priorities:

P: I'm getting used to it. I've kind of turned it around actually recently that I get up and I shut everything down and I go - time to go home. So that we can kind of make light of it, it's not that I'm being - I'm at a high enough level that I don't need nor do I want to be managed. But I think it's teaching me, I'm in the learning stages. It's teaching me to sort of re-direct my priorities . . . From my perspective it's I'm actually changing my priorities about my personal value. And for me my focus was work. And I was defining myself that way. And that was also interesting for me on a leave to sort of say well, I'm not working so what am I. And so changing how I define myself has been really eye opening actually.

I: Wow. That is a major step for you.

P: Huge. Um hmm. Still in its infancy!

I: Well I mean, change is always a continuing process, it's a process. But wow.

P: And the weight that I place on my success at work and how I define what my success at work has actually changed as well. (Debbie, I1, Lines 771-792)

Work-life balance, in light of the growing workload, was an issue that the individual participants were struggling with – with varying degrees of success. The conflict was best summed up by the comments from Debbie on one hand: “lot of individuals in these types of positions, you're high achievers. You wouldn't have got there otherwise.” (I1, Lines 798 – 800) and Dawn on the other: “at the end of the day I have to manage my life and health and mental health and all of that goes

with it” (II, Lines 353-554). These people were in a constant tension between the high demands put on them by their jobs, their own personality type, and the need to take care of themselves.

4.5.3. Respect

Work-life balance had affected their personal work experience but when directly asked about elements of a positive work environment for them personally, participants had some clear responses. Words used to describe what made their workplaces positive were respect, freedom, feeling valued, emotional support, making a difference, challenge and creativity, camaraderie, and good humour. Each of these terms was illuminated in the words of participants.

Three of the participants from three different universities addressed the concept of respect in their response to first interview question on the aspects of a positive work environment for them personally. Terri started with an in depth description of respect as it is lived out day to day as a person and as a professional:

P: For me personally, respectful workplace. We have a respectful workplace policy which is great, which helps in I guess explaining to new staff that come in or to existing staff that have been here for quite some time, that's important for me. I need to be respected; we all do as human beings period. But then as staff members, we need to be respected, so that's important to me...

I: I have a couple questions. You said respect was important to you. How does that look, how does that feel on a day to day basis? Like you say respect but how do you see that, how do you feel that?

P: Given the responsibility that I have now . . . as the administrator of (graduate studies), to me when I make a decision, when a staff member comes to me and says I can't make this decision, I need your help. When I make that decision, I need that decision to be respected whether or not they agree with it. They're coming to me for that final decision, they don't feel that they can make it, thus I've made the decision, you've asked me to

make that decision, it's within my purview to make that decision, you need to respect it. You don't need to like it; you need to respect it and follow through with it. So that's important. Yes, I've made the decision now follow through with it and process whatever it may be accordingly. If that's not done, to me that implies they didn't like it but they're not respecting me and my position. So that needs to look, that's the look and that's the feel of it because you can certainly feel when someone has not done what I've asked them to do....So respectful in terms of what it is that we do on a day-to-day basis but also respect of me as a human being. So when I come in in the morning, if I say 'good morning' to you say 'good morning' back. You may be in a bad mood and you may have bad things going on at home, but you know what? We're now at work - say 'good morning', be respectful to me. Regardless of what's happening elsewhere in your life.

(Terri, I1, lines 106 – 142)

Terri's comments showed how respect was worked out, not in large critical situations, but in the personal relationships of a day-to-day work relationship.

Brian also saw being respected as a key to a positive workplace and added the importance of being able to respect those around you, seeing it as a reciprocal quality:

I: What are the elements for a good workplace for you personally?

P: Looking at it I'd say for me respect, camaraderie, and a good humor environment...

I: Tell me some more about respect, which was the first one you just rattled off.

P: Yeah, that was the first one. And I think that one's a bit of a both ways thing. Before I worked at the university, I wanted to find a place where I could respect my boss which was actually for me a fairly big thing. I think that I've had a pretty positive work experience as far as being capable, competent, and then getting respect from co-workers

and bosses for doing that but to be able to look at my boss in the eyes and not necessarily aspire to be him or her but to really respect them for what they're doing and how they're doing it means a great deal to me. And so it's being able to respect the people that I work with and then also being respected for it. I think that mutual respect makes a big difference in an office. (Brian, I1, Lines 57 -79)

Edith also picked up on the importance of mutual respect in the workplace:

P: I think a good workplace has respect for each other. So it goes both ways, like top, bottom, sideways, however you want to look at the structure of the office. Respecting each other's opinions and valuing their input. I think that's one key thing... (Edith, I1, lines 134 – 137)

Participants added a number of additional understandings for respect in the positive workplace: First, there was the concern that one individual has for another simply because they were human, a right. Second, Terri used respect in relation to the quality of the person's ability and, in this case, trusting those decisions and having them followed through. Brian mentioned respect, which is close to esteem when mentioning how others regarded his abilities and especially how he regarded his boss. Edith's understanding of respect combined positive regard for the person as well as valuing his/her ability.

4.5.4. Being Appreciated

Edith connected respect with valuing each other's opinion and input. Debbie took it further by pointing to *being appreciated* and the *emotional support* connected with it as critical to a positive workplace:

What's important for me in the workplace, it is important to feel appreciated, especially when your instinct is to work hard. If you're spinning your wheels for no reason, and it's

not appreciated, then that has negative repercussions. So for me in terms of the positive side of things 'cause that's the focus of your survey - I think feeling that I have the appropriate support, administrative support and also just I guess really I know it seems weird to say emotional support but I think that's part of it. It's not that I need them to counsel me daily or anything! But you know what I'm saying? (Debbie, I1, Lines 65-72)

For Debbie being appreciated or valued involved such relatively simple things as physical space:

The physical space is really critical to me. So 2 ½ years ago I moved from an office with no windows to this office. Although the sun was there so I have the blinds down right now. And I guess three years ago I got a new chair that actually fits me. So I don't have backache at the end of the day. And so again, that's also support, ensuring that I have the appropriate tools so that I can do my job effectively. (Debbie, I1, Lines 108-113)

Feeling appreciated, for these participants, also was manifested in other concrete ways such as tokens of appreciation:

P: Um hmm. I think from my biased perspective of what makes a good workplace, I think people are reaching out and communicating and sharing. And we're doing things, I mean our dean has got the office staff flowers after a particularly heavy registration time and recognized their hard work. Anyway, it was a single flower for everybody. Not a super expensive thing, but nice. And everybody appreciated it. It was a tangible recognition. (Debbie, I1, Lines 453-458)

Being appreciated was also closely linked to the complex issues of *autonomy* and *freedom* in their job as Ellen stated: "Freedom to do my job without someone over my shoulder all the time" (E1, Line 74). Betty added: "Some of the elements for me personally would be to have some freedom and knowing that if I was unsure of anything that help was just around the

corner” (I1, Lines 100-102). Ellen, when asked about the elements that made a good workplace for her personally, combined the idea of freedom with support as essential to a positive workplace:

P: For me personally is a team environment. Something that gives me enough freedom to be able to do my job, come up with ideas. You know, carry different things through but then also to bring those ideas to our team and so that we can sometimes work on those together. So independence but also teamwork and that’s something we do have here I feel. (Ellen, I1, Lines 74-81)

Participants felt appreciated on a personal level in a number of ways, some simple and some more complex in nature, all of which revolved around being valued and having others being aware of that value. To participants, being appreciated or valued was therefore closely aligned with respect and having worth. Having freedom and support in the workplace was seen as a manifestation of respect and being appreciated, all important concepts to participants.

4.5.5. Making a Difference

Participants emphasized the concepts of making a difference as relating to improving the work/student situation. It was apparent that participants were there to make a difference. Debbie noted: “But yeah, in terms of it’s that simple, yeah, is my work valued and do I make a difference. If it’s not valued and I don’t make a difference, I don’t want to be here.” (Debbie, I1, Lines 242-244). When asked a follow-up question, Debbie connected making a difference with job satisfaction:

I: So this feeling that you can sort of improve things, it keeps coming up again with you, that you feel that that’s a key part of what makes this place good.

P: Well, I'm given the opportunity to do things. Right? That will make a difference. I mean I suppose if I just brought these ideas forward and talked to the wall about it and nothing ever happened, I would be less satisfied. So for me job satisfaction involves being empowered to make a difference. I guess. (Debbie, I1, Lines 132-138)

Dawn stressed making a difference with two unique insights. For her, the first aspect of a positive work environment was the challenge to improve things:

I: Well, good. This is so good. Probably we've talked about this but the next question is: what are the elements of a good workplace for you personally. I mean, we've suggested it but I think this is the time for you to sum that up :

P: For me personally, challenge. I like projects where you're improving. Making improvements to the way things are done. That will have benefits for whoever the stakeholders are within the university, whether it's students, staff, faculty, a mix of everybody, I like to identify places where we could do it better because we have fewer staff than we used to and we have more students than we used to. So we have to do things differently. There's no option. (Dawn, I1, Lines 366-374)

Second, Dawn saw *making a difference* as helping make mundane work bearable:

So we all have to come to work and do a piece of day to day work which can be quite mundane. But at the end of the day, we should feel that we have some opportunity to make a difference. (Dawn, I1, Lines 90-92)

Dawn commented that changes have to be improvements that everyone could see and experience:

So I'm very aware that if there are changes, they can't be just changes, they have to be improvements and they have to be improvements that make a positive difference, they

have to be clearly and easily translatable for the people they affect. (Dawn, I1, Lines 515-519)

Betty added a dimension to making a difference that was a topic all to itself, making a difference in the students' lives:

What gets me excited? Some days, basically in the short, is knowing that I can make a difference in the student's life. In helping them meet their goals to obtain that higher degree that they came to this institution for. (Betty, I1, Lines 118-121)

The above comments highlighted the interrelationship of respect, being appreciated, and making a difference as integral elements in participants' perceptions of their workplace as a positive one. Having the ability, power, or authority that came with respect and honest appreciation, enabled participants to make positive changes. Participants felt these improvements must have impact and be a real perceived change. Participants' ability to make changes added the challenge necessary to keep work from becoming dull and kept them engaged. They also focused on enabling changes in the lives of their students.

4.5.6. The Importance of the Students

From the comments and accounts of these participants, they believed that students, their excitement, and their success, made the university a positive place to work. As Betty (I1, Lines 118-121) stated above, knowing that they made a difference in a student's life got her excited. Different participants focused on different aspects of the students' experience in graduate studies. Some interviewees focused on the beginning of the student's program, like Ellen (I1, Lines 453-455): "I like working with grad students, I like when they get in. I like when they're excited, I like when they're excited about their research. So yeah, it's a place I like to be." Edith reflected her co-workers emphasis on working closely with the students on a day to day basis:

“Yeah. I mean, I also I like being able to help students with writing their grants and stuff, like that whole aspect. I enjoy that.” (I1, 198-199). But Edith also put the student first when considering changes in funding, which would impact the students: “Because even now looking at our present funding and trying to re-think how best to use that funding, it’s the impact on the students that I always have to keep in the forefront. (I1, 293-295).

Dawn had a more philosophical and broader view of her work with students noting that: “But there’s something about working in an educational place with students or learners that gives some value that’s meaningful to people who choose to work in those places.” (Dawn, I1, 1154-1157). Further, even though Dawn had no direct dealing with students, she was still sensitive to the impact on the student:

Most people if you ask them why they work here or what they like about working here they’ll say oh, the students, the students are great. But I hardly ever see students. Very, very rare, that I see students. But what I - everything I do impacts the student experience. (Dawn, I1, 1121-1124)

For Dawn everything she did, from the creation of high-level policy to the development of student information systems, was there to support the students and their success: “The reason for the policy is to support student success. Right? So it’s not just that it’s a policy out of the blue, the whole rationale of it is we need to support our students” (Dawn, I1, Lines 625-627). She added: “I made it happen and I got credit and I got recognition and my system that I spearheaded is in place and functional and doing what it was intended to do, it’s supporting student success.” (Dawn, I, 665-667)

Terri took a more hands-on approach to student success and considered her work in graduate studies as critical to the successful completion of the graduate degree by the student:

Our students are different. Their needs are different. And if they got rid of grad studies and they would just be - they'd just be a number. Student ID number X. They're just going to wither away and there won't be that sense of accomplishment when they walk across the stage. To have those Ph.D. students walk across the stage first 'cause that's the highest level of academic degree that we offer. For them to be able to walk across the stage first - is huge for them. It's huge for us. To know that we've aided them through their 7, 8, 10 years. (Terri, I1, 1125-1131)

Participants did not see students as simple numbers, inanimate objects or "widgets". Even though they were not connected to the students on a day to day basis, the students' success and their' sense of purpose were closely connected. This personal relationship with students was emotionally connected to making a positive workplace for Terri:

I: What makes it a good place for you?

P: For me? Being in an academic educational environment. Knowing and seeing students come in the door and walk across the convocation stage. Whether it be at an undergrad level when I worked in the undergrad side or now the grad side. Having them - yeah, just walk across that stage at the end of the day, it's almost like a mother sending her child off to college sort of thing or off to marry. You know, and we often refer in our office anyway because we're so small, we often get to know our students quite personally, some of them better than others. And it is, it's - I enjoy going to convocation and I don't actually watch them walk across the stage, I'm downstairs getting them ready and getting their hoods on and folding their hoods and getting them ready. And it's seeing the smiles on their face that yeah, I'm done and that you can see that relief - it's off their shoulders, they're done. You can see that and that's just a great feeling. (Terri, I1, 560-573)

The culmination of many years of caring and hard work on convocation was “almost like a mother sending her child off to college sort of thing or off to marry” (Terri, I1, Line 565-566). This connection with the student was not the objective detachment one might expect from an administrator, rather the words of someone emotional involved in the success of the student, even though, as in Dawn’s case, they did not see the student often.

Betty’s enthusiasm, with which I started this section, also helped capture the importance given to the students and their success in the work of the participants:

...the time when I feel energized or excited, this to me has to be the ultimate and like you say even with all the workload and everything else, when I get to the point of the graduation and I’m looking at the final list that we are ready to produce, to provide to the Registrar’s Office, seeing the names of the students that I’ve helped along the way that are now on the graduating list. Some of the students which I first admitted when I first came into the program, getting their degrees - that to me just makes my day. Finally we’re getting you out, we’re helping you. You’re on your way. It’s nice that way. (Betty, I1, 132 - 140)

Student success was more important than being one part of a mission statement or slogan for participants. They had an emotional bond with “their” students. This connection energized them and gave focus to their work, which culminated when the student walked across the stage at convocation. The convocation event was an external symbol of the internal sense of purpose for participants: to improve or make a difference in the lives of their students.

In this section I set forward the foundation perceptions of participants on an individual level. Their internal needs or motivations started to build the complex set of dynamics that made up the university work environment. Paradoxically, the extreme workload and the individuals’

struggle to maintain work-life balance had not overshadowed their perceptions of their positive work environment. They identified factors that counteracted the weight of the workload. In the sections on respect and being appreciated, participants expressed their felt need for a work environment that strengthened their sense of self-worth. They needed to feel valued as human beings above all, and they desired their work and effort to be held in esteem by their co-workers and supervisors. The APs also strove to make a positive difference in their work environment and the lives of the students. Their passion for the students, even though they were removed for day-to-day contact, was a driving force for the participants' effort and retention in their work environments.

4.6. Perceptions at the Unit Level

Participants' perceptions of a positive work environment on the administrative unit level were more complex because of interactions among the various actors: team members, supervisors, the Deans and Associate Deans. Again, participants commented on the unit work environment in response to a specific interview question: "Describe the most important aspects of a great work team as you have experienced it."

To set the stage for individual comments, I use Table 4.5 to illustrate the themes emerging from the main question and subsidiary questions on a positive work environment at the unit or team level.

Table 4.5 *Summary unit level coding*

Overall	Team	Supervisor	Dean
Voice	Voice	Change management	Support
Quality connections	Quality connections	Voice	Voice
Support	Respect	Respect	Autonomy
Communication	Humour		Recognition
Humour	Communication		Clear mission/goals
	Diversity		

The first column in Table 4.5 indicates the codes or themes in order of frequency for the unit as a whole that was the combination of the counts for the team, supervisor, and Dean. *Voice* in this case was used by participants to refer to the person feeling heard and having honest back and forth communication among the unit. *Quality connections* referred to participants' comments on connection with other individuals, including the spirit of camaraderie. *Support* denoted the comments on support, especially as it related to support from other individuals such as teammates and the Dean. *Communication* related more generally to statements on communication between team members and/or the Dean. *Humour* registered comments about fun, humour, or laughter at this level.

In the second column, I show the coding with the highest codes as it specifically referred to the team and other team members. Voice, quality connection with others, respect, humour and communication have been defined above. Participants' comments on the diversity of their work or differences among individuals within the team were categorized under *Diversity*.

The Supervisor column was used to designate any comments from the participant about their supervisor, if they had one, or their own role as a supervisor. *Change management* relates to any comments on change, transformation, or renewal. Voice and respect are as above.

The final category referred to comments relating to the Dean from a unit-level perspective. Comments involving the Dean were also encoded for the University level because of their work on the campus-wide scale but here they refer to interactions with the Dean at the Unit level. Autonomy, recognition and clear mission goals were unique to the Dean in the Unit level coding. Autonomy was already discussed under individual perceptions, but here denotes the autonomy given to the team at the unit level by the Dean. Recognition was also listed on the individual level but it was related here to comments by participants of recognition on the unit level. *Clear mission goals* referred to any statement relating to the importance or comments on the need, desire, or positive impact of transparent, commonly understood, strategic directions, goals, and plans at the unit level as they are communicated by the Dean.

4.6.1. Voice

Although *Voice* was the theme that emerged as the top overall and first or second in the sub-categories within the unit, participants did not express their ideas in terms of voice, rather they talked about having a voice, being heard and heeded by others in the unit.

For a positive work team environment, Dawn closely connected voice with the idea of having an impact on the unit as represented in the following interview excerpt:

I: What are the important aspects of a great work team?

P: A culture of - what would be the word. Impact, perhaps? That as a team member, you have a *voice*. And the potential to impact what that team does and how it's done.

I: That sounds so simple. Have a voice, and feel you can make a change. Have some effect on that.

P: Yeah. And SEE that you can, I mean be able to see concrete evidence of that. I don't think - it's nice to make people feel good, but I don't think that's sufficient. So there has

to be some concrete evidence of impact. Otherwise the feeling good won't last. (Dawn, I1, Lines 644-657)

Betty reflected that having a voice and being listened to was key for a great work team:

and by all means, my suggestions are being heard. They're being listened to. Some of them may be acted upon, some may not be. But you know, at least you feel like you're a team member. Your input matters and that that certainly is to me a very good workplace. And of course everybody being treated equally. (Betty, I1, Lines 108-112)

Even though from a different institution, Edith followed up on Betty's comment emphasizing having a voice, being heard, and having equality:

P: I think having different perspective - the ability to communicate and accept different points of view is key. And thereby respecting each other to *voice* your own perspective and yet take in and listen to others. I think those things are all intermixed and when you have those amongst everybody, then the dynamic of the office is great. Because then there's no barriers. Nobody feels like they can't voice their opinion but nobody feels like they're being judged for their opinion either. And therefore your brainstorming, your ideas, your fleshing out of everything works better. And the creativity is there and you're willing to help each other with that. (Edith, I1, Lines 329-341)

Debbie reiterated her emphasis on *making a difference* to the concept of *voice*:

I: So this feeling that you can sort of improve things, it keeps coming up again with you, that you feel that that's a key part of what makes this place good.

P: Well, I'm given the opportunity to do things. Right? That will make a difference. I mean I suppose if I just brought these ideas forward and talked to the wall about it and

nothing ever happened, I would be less satisfied. So for me job satisfaction involves being empowered to make a difference. I guess.

I: So you're feeling like you're being heard? (P: Yes.) So you have a *voice*.

P: Exactly. (Debbie, I1, Lines 132-141)

Dawn, from the same institution, indicated that being heard and having equality of voice is not always easy and has to be managed at times:

I hope so. Yeah, I hope so. We have some very opinionated people, we're an office of pretty strong personalities, so I think - and that can be good because you get people who are thinking and have great contributions to make. As long as you can steer in a fairly positive direction and really try and create an environment where the bottom line is we have to have mutual respect. If somebody has an idea, you have to listen. That's rule number one. There aren't many rules in our meetings but rule number one, listen. And don't interrupt. And then let's everybody can have their say. (Dawn, I1, Lines 209 – 216)

Voice was also related to the other themes of respect, quality connections, support and communication. The interrelationship of these concepts was evident in participants' statements above and with Debbie's statement: "I think from my biased perspective of what makes a good workplace, I think people are reaching out and communicating and sharing." (Debbie, Lines 450-454)

Edith expressed this interrelationship as characterized by openness:

P: I think the biggest part is everyone feeling reward in their job and their being part of the team. Feeling supported by the other members of the team so on our team whenever anyone sort of gets overwhelmed, there's always an openness for others to go okay, well what can I do to help you. And so it always makes you feel valued. Or lets you feel

someone else - feel valued. I think that it's we have really open communications here. When I was only here about six months we kind of had an episode here that brought us closer together. We lost a couple of staff members and that sort of thing, so we really kind of bonded after that so there's very open communication if something's bothering you it's sort of brought to the table right away and it's given legitimacy. So you're felt like you're heard and then how to work through it. And our dean also is very good at that. Sort of bringing it and you're felt like you're heard. And what can a solution be and that sort of thing, so I think that's sort of the biggest thing is - yeah, the communication. The support. The willingness to listen (Ellen, I1, Lines 140-153)

Debbie stated the association when asked about the aspects of a great work team as she had experienced it:

P: Well, communication and sharing. And support. I think we've got some really good dynamics here that we talk about work but we can divert and have conversations that just sort of brighten things up and we can share and we can then get back to task and I think that makes a difference. If I was just, well I suppose because as you say I get energy from communication, when I am just shut in here to try and get reports done I'm really worn out by the end of the day. But if you can have these sort of breaks in between which again, we always resist, I think if you are motivated to succeed and you're really driven, you keep going and going, the tendency is to not take breaks and to put down your head and you don't chat - I've come to realize though that actually really makes the difference for me anyway. *That connection*. When I don't feel connected, I could be anywhere. (Debbie, I1, Lines 289-304)

Participants' statements suggested that having a voice related directly to the individuals' need for respect and appreciation as well as making a difference. By having a voice, or rather, to be given voice in the unit, they felt valued for themselves and their work by their teammates. By having a voice, they perceived that they were given power to make changes, to make a difference. Participants also experienced being given voice when unit members actually lived out their respect and appreciation for the individual, and when they felt the power to make a difference in the unit.

4.6.2. Humour

In this study, I identified humour as another key concept in the workplace. However, though participants identified humour in the workplace as critical, they varied in their views of the purpose and use of humour in their environment. Brian combined the concepts of respect and connection, which he labels as camaraderie with the concept of *humour*:

P: Looking at it I'd say for me respect, camaraderie, and a good humor environment. I think that appropriately timed play can make for very positive work. Especially I think maybe that comes with the creative side of my job. You have to think creatively and if you're just doing one thing after another all day without kind of standing up and walking away from your desk for a bit is that - yeah. And also I think just for getting - because I work with various people in the office that have, you know, I'm not the type to go out for drinks with my colleagues but I do want to be able to have fun with them at work and I think that helps me to do my job a bit better. (Brian, I1, Lines 59-67)

And later in his interview, Brian emphasized the importance of hearing laughter:

We want to be able to hear laughter coming from people's offices and frankly a good problem to have I think would be to tell people that they're disrupting other people's

work because they're having too much fun. I think that that's a good problem to have.

(Brian, I1, Lines 797-800)

Humour meant something different to Betty and Ellen, when they took on the role of "class clown" to add a bit of sunshine to another's day. Betty said: "when I usually find somebody sad or upset, I'm usually the class clown village idiot. Try to make people laugh, smile." (I1, Lines 768-769). Ellen saw being the class clown, having others help her with humour, and knowing one was supported as all connected:

So it's just things like that. Somebody has a bad day. I always was raised if somebody's had a bad day, be the class clown, village idiot, make them laugh, make them smile.

Somehow, some way. I've often told the gals too that sometimes if I get into a grumpy mood, just tell me. Smack me across - do me the favour, smack me across the back of the head type thing. So to me it always seems that there's always little things that happen that you never really ask for but it's there and you know you've got people's support (Ellen, I1, Lines 316-321)

There was a more serious side to humour. When asked on the most important aspect of a good work team, Terri identified humour as an essential part of a productive efficient work team, and suggested that perhaps humour was a part of keeping the work moving along:

P: Yeah, again respectful workplace. Committed, knowledgeable staff and not just knowledgeable and committed but efficient. And that for me is that they are knowledgeable enough about what they're supposed to be doing but they're efficient at it, they know what they're supposed to do and they do it. They don't procrastinate, they don't get caught up in university politics isn't the right word, university tensions or social things, I mean I enjoy having a fun office, we have a fun office right now, that's

important to me as well. But to be in a work team you have to be able to separate that fun from the job, from the tasks and be efficient at what you do. It's okay to have a laugh over something that comes in that you think, a transcript or whatever it may be it's okay to have a laugh about that or how something comes in or an envelope or whatever, whatever may trigger some humor in somebody's head, it's great to have that in the office and to hear that. Yet know that they have to do something with that! (I: There's still an expectation there.) Whatever it may be, there's an expectation that you need to do something with that humorous piece of paper. And quickly 'cause there's another one coming. (Terri, I1, Lines 225-244)

For Brian, humour was part of a mature, positive office environment, but he indicated an important aspect of humour. In an environment of a shared sense of humour, one could relax.

There's a maturity to this office, an understanding that we're here for a reason. Many of the staff have been here for a few years, so there's a good understanding of roles and expectations. While I don't expect my social interactions with co-workers to be the same across the board, I share a sense of humour with enough people that I can feel relaxed at work. (Brian, E1, Lines 35-38)

It was not surprising that participants like Debbie and Terri who had gone through trying times in their offices when there was no humour, were pleased when they witnessed humour return. Debbie focused on laughter lifting energy in the office:

. . . last year they laid off (hundreds of) people and there's lots of change and there's lots of change fatigue going on and I think environmentally I really feel the weight of that fatigue. And it's sort of how are you, how's it going and they're like aaargh. You know, you very rarely get really great, how are you doing kind of thing. So to be able to have

those kinds of relationships and connections with people in the workplace that they can look at the bright side of things and even when it's really crappy and you've got a lot of work to do or you've had negative feedback or negative energy around, if you can laugh about it and kind of let go of some of that stuff and commiserate, I think that does brighten in a sense, I guess lift spirits, lift energy, it lifts energy. That's what I mean. Sorry, it took me a long time to figure that out! (Debbie, I1, Lines 312-322)

Terri spoke of the staff cycling between times of quiet work and loud laughter:

So right now, the staff that are here come in and they're ready to work. They don't stand around and gossip for the first twenty minutes of every morning. They get to work and yeah, like you said when that something happens, it's quiet and they're all working then something happens and everybody erupts and *laughing* and then it's back down to work. So that's important, that's what the staff right now are doing. (Terri, I1, Lines 451-457)

Participants perceived humour as assuming many different roles in a positive work environment. Some perceived humour as an essential part of office camaraderie in uplifting each other and helping keep the work moving. Others saw humour as an indicator of a positive relationship. In all cases, participants saw humour as a key part of their positive work environment.

4.6.3. Teamwork

To understand participants' view of teamwork, it is essential to return to the common but separate histories that all they shared. Their views were affected by the personnel change that disrupted the office environment and caused office morale to fall and office stress levels to increase. Dawn described it as: "we had a big disruption in this office last fall . . . but we had to do a job abolishment but you can imagine how disruptive this all was. It got very personal, very

nasty” (I1, lines 97-124). Terri reflected that: “it was like walking on eggshells coming in to the office every day” (I1, Lines 451-452). Betty described the tension being in the situation as:

It was just after this person was let go. So you think anybody’s really going to speak their mind? Because they are going to be scared that their neck was going to be next on the block, people were walking around with egg shells. (Betty, I1, Lines 457-459)

In contrast to this history, Ellen expressed the change that has taken place in the office culture since the event in their office:

P: Yeah. It definitely became good and it became something that not only was good but something that changed our atmosphere I guess around here. So we were more conscious of being supportive. We made sort of a conscientious effort. (Ellen, I1, Lines 198 – 201)

Ellen’s perceptions of her current work environment conveyed what happened at other sites:

A positive workplace does not mean there are never issues – but rather it is the way the issues are dealt with. I feel free to bring up negative issues. This requires stress and I have acquired trust with my workmates. A positive workplace is an evolution not an expectation. (Ellen, E1, Lines 67-72)

For Dawn, this evolution of the workplace environment started with getting the right individual to join the team, a situation where fit was more important than skills:

And I think experience has shown me fairly clearly that having a good team gives you more to work with than an individual. It is a case where three good heads are much better than one and we have developed a good rhythm in getting to the information we want from our candidates and assessing their fit to our group. And for us the fit to the group is always the most important thing. We can train the skill if they have the aptitude so we’re looking for fit and aptitude. And I’m not really fussed about specific skills; I’m

concerned about demonstrated skill as a type of person. Does that make sense? (Dawn, I1, Lines 55-66)

In response to the question of the characteristics of a good team, Terri gave an example that summed other participants' views of a good work team:

P: I can explain that by an example that recently happened kind of down here and give some examples that make your place a good place to work. Recently most of the staff were ill, all at the same time. And or a couple were away on approved days off. So there was one day where there were three of us in the office, literally myself, the associate dean who was really doing other projects. And another staff member who really doesn't have much to do with the inner functioning; she has her own job but doesn't (know other functions). So she really pitched in and helped because there was just myself and her really in the office, so we had no front staff whatsoever, no admissions were occurring for about two or three days. No registrations were occurring, nothing was happening, the office really came to a standstill. And all that we could do, the two of us, was to greet our clients at the counter, take whatever they were handing in, and just explain the situation as best that we could and said we'll get to it as soon as we can sort of thing, so having this other individual step in and do some of that even though in her area she was really busy at the same time, behind schedule on some things but she knew that she needed to pitch in and help. At the front reception, so to me that's good teamwork because that will be reciprocated. When the rest of the staff came back, were healthy, hopefully, they were caught up on their work then after a week or so and I said okay. So and So pitched in while you guys were away and did some of that, she's behind, she needs some help so I need to revert you over there for two hours a day. So that to me is the good teamwork that

I as the supervisor shouldn't have to tell someone to help, that they can just see that as well themselves and help out where that's needed. (Terri, I1, Lines 153-176)

Building on the idea of reciprocity, Brian mentioned the idea of responsibility in a unique image of a team that helped fight territorialism in the office and was based upon interdependence:

P: I think to some degree the elements that I mentioned in number four (respect, camaraderie and humour). But with a sense of responsibility that doesn't become territorial. I think that certainly within a university and in many cases even within a unit or a faculty, there's a tendency to become defensive of our rules and I think that that really shuts down our ability to work together as a team when that happens and it's I think common enough in our nature to want to be defensive of our roles. But I think that when I look at times when we've really worked well as a team and even previous to Grad Studies when I've had really good team environments it's knowing each other's roles but also being willing to help out. I've played a lot of baseball growing up and for example I was a centre fielder and when somebody steals second it's either the shortstop or the second baseman's role, they discuss and determine based on conditions who's going to be covering the bag and they decide. Now it's that person's responsibility to catch the ball and it's the catcher's responsibility to throw the ball but it's the fielder's responsibility, the outfielder's responsibility, to cover them. To make sure that they're there in case something goes wrong. And that sense of knowing what somebody's role is and without stepping on their toes being there to assist and support, I think provides a pretty solid framework for how I would see a professional team to work together. Knowing each other's roles but being there for support and assistance and frankly if that outfielder isn't

there and the ball gets by, everybody's looking at the outfielder for the mistake. Not the catcher, not the second baseman. It's the outfielder who's looked at and I think that that's also a valuable dynamic to look at, why is the person who is really the backup seen as at fault but I think that it's because of the importance of being aware of what's happening around us and our role collectively as part of the team. So I think those would be very important aspects of a good working team.(Brian, I1, Lines 180-205)

Participants noted the expectation and wished that team members would help each other when an individual was feeling overwhelmed with work, and not only helping out but helping without being asked because the individual is part of the same team. This mutual support was seen as the way the team lives out each individual's need to be respected and appreciated by others in the work environment.

4.6.4. Relationships with the Supervisor

The relationship between participants and the supervisor was a rather complex one. First, some participants had supervisors who were in the same union as they were. Second, other participants were supervisors, themselves. Third, even if they had a direct supervisor for day-to-day work, all the participants reported directly to the Dean on their project work.

However, two issues concerning the supervisor emerged from the interviews. First, voice with their supervisor helped create a positive experience. The second, the perceptions of team members contributed to a negative work environment and how they dealt with these perceptions.

Ellen and Edith both reported to a supervisor as well as to the Dean and the open communication and voice that they had with their supervisor was an important personal part of the positive work environment:

(my supervisor has) a lot going on and some wide variety going on and yeah, so I think that's what's happening with him/her but (she/he) is - the really great thing is that (she/he's) very open in this communication and always sort of keeps that going. So I feel like I can go and talk to (him/her) and say if something's upsetting me or I can go and talk to (him/her) and even though I know (she/he's) really busy, (she/he) always has an open door to talk to me (Ellen, I1, Lines 282-287)

Edith also commented on the strength of good Voice with her supervisor:

And so it's really nice to be able to sit there and communicate and know that initially maybe my supervisor and I may see different aspects of it, but we can sit there and hash through it and then come to an agreeable result, answer, concern, or for me my next task or step to do in concerning that problem. So it's really nice to be able to get the feedback but it's also really good that they respect MY feedback. (Edith, I1, Lines 175-181)

Although Ellen and Edith expressed the ideal situation of open, transparent dialogue with their supervisor, participants also ran into situations where this cannot always be the case. Betty and Terri experienced times when the supervisor could not be totally transparent with their reports on what was going on in the office for human resource reasons. Betty experienced changes in her office from the viewpoint of witnessing a fellow administrator leave without a clear explanation:

Yeah - and just with like I said perceptions. You may see something happening that you may feel like I said earlier might be unfair and I'm of course for equality, so if you see something that you don't know fully what's happening you perceive the worst. And of course it stew in you and it stew in you and it stew in you that can make a nasty environment. I saw what happened a couple of years ago. I think it was a couple of years

ago now. I think a lot of it was because of perception. And nobody talked about it. And it seems now that everybody is able to talk about it. And if we perceive something and guess something that we don't like, people approach people now. They'll talk about it because we don't want it to get into that situation that we were in years ago. (Betty, I1, Lines 402-412)

Terri on the other hand was the supervisor who had to deal with the dismissal of an employee and the perceptions of the rest of the office team when information had to be withheld:

P: And I've talked to experts on campus, psychologists and counseling services or whatever resources we have available in human resources to help managers deal with this and they just said you know, it'll never go away, you can never correct it, you can't control people's perceptions. And you have to deal with THIS issue with this individual and not ignore the perceptions, but somehow just try to explain to those individuals that you're not in the know of what's going on. Okay, you perceive it to be this way but I can't tell you what's going on. And you just need to trust me and respect me, it gets back to that respect. Respect me, and the position that I'm in that I'm doing what I need to do for the greater of the office. (Terri, I1, Lines 300-309)

Managing the negative perceptions of the work team is a daunting task for participants in a supervisory role. Both Betty and Terri indicated the importance of the key elements of a positive team environment: *voice, respect, support* and *communication* as a preventative for these negative perceptions. I started the section on the importance of participants being in open dialogue with their supervisor as critical to their feelings of a positive work team. Terri provided a supervisor's insight into how they experience a positive team environment:

The staff are very understanding of the situation in the office and very understanding of my workload. So they try very, very hard to deal with it as much as they can. And so I'm grateful for that. I'm confident in their knowledge and their ability to do their jobs and I let them do their jobs.

I: It sounds almost like they're starting to take care of you.

P: Yes, some days. Yeah. (Terri, I1, Lines 457-464)

The role of supervisor added another layer to the complexity of the dynamics of the positive work unit as revealed by this study. Some participants acted as supervisors who reported only to the Dean. Other participants, although they also reported to the Dean, had direct supervisors as well. In this layer of the unit, participants were put into positions of reporting to other administrators, while having other unionized staff report to them as well. The participants were in the middle of another level of interactions. Having open, honest dialogue with their supervisors was essential to participants' feelings of a positive work environment, and this communication constituted another element of voice in the unit. Participants in the supervisory role also shared the struggles of being involved in challenging personnel issues that caused divisions within the unit. These situations were examples of where being in the middle was not necessarily an uplifting experience for them. Terri (I1, Lines 457-464) shared some of the joys of being a supervisor in her feelings of being supported and cared for. For participants, the supervisory role was a mixed experience of highs and lows.

4.6.5. Relationship with Deans

Participants reported their relationship with the Dean and the associate/assistant deans to be another key component of a positive work environment. In Table 4.5, the encoding identified the importance of support, voice, autonomy and recognition most frequently in their comments

on their relationship with the Dean. Although these issues have been discussed before, Dawn's comment showed the potential positive impact of Deans (and Associate Deans) on their administrators and their environment:

P: Oh, I think he's totally transparent. I think. So clearly his style works for me. I get really positive reinforcement. So how can that not help a person? And when you get it and you recognize it, how could you not want to do that for other people because it just makes you more successful. You know? He always gives credit to the person if there's an idea; he never EVER gives the impression that it was his idea or his thought or his work. He always, always, always gives credit. (Dawn, I1, Lines 476-482)

Clear mission goals was a category unique to the Dean in the Unit discussion. Terri, Edith, and Brian, each from different universities indicated the importance of the Dean interpreting and setting the goals and vision for the unit. Brian's description of his work as needing "that freedom and that framework" summed up the paradox of participants wanting autonomy in their work but at the same time wanting clear goals from the Dean. Terri emphasized the need for the Dean to provide clear mission and goals, so she would know where the team fitted in:

I need to be clear from my dean what his vision is, of where is it that we do fit. I mean, I have my own thoughts on where we fit into the university plan, but that might be a totally different vision than what the dean has and the dean should have the vision and leadership for the faculty. (Terri, I1, Lines 791-795)

Edith simply talked about the importance of "clear direction", which relied on an open dialogue with the Dean and being given voice:

The other key thing (to a good work environment) is clear direction. So between myself and like the coordinator or the dean, we both have the same picture as to what my expectations are day to day, as well as long-term. And we can communicate about that and tweak it as necessary but at least you're on the same page hopefully and if you're not then at least I'd feel comfortable talking with them. To find that out for me is huge.

(Edith, I1, Lines 137-141)

Brian also supported the idea of a clear direction, but with voice that enabled him to internalize the Dean's goals for the unit:

I report to the dean. But what he's done is created I think a fair bit of freedom within a very well defined framework. These are the goals, this is our strategy. We meet every now and then. But for the most part, there's a bit of a - the proof is in the pudding.

Relationship that as long as there is a continuous output and it matches with the goals of the unit, then everybody's happy. And that I think - not that I know that there are some areas perhaps where micromanaging isn't a swear word, but I think certainly with my role the fact that he provides that freedom and that framework so it's not me just wondering what I should do and making decisions that determine how we're representing ourselves on my own, which would also be unfair to the unit and to me. The framework is there but I feel very free in what I'm doing. (Brian, I1, Lines 298-307)

Participants stressed the importance of having a voice built upon clear communication, open dialogue, support, and acceptance. Being given a voice in the unit also supported the individuals' key needs for respect and appreciation, as well as empowering their work. They saw humour as necessary for a safe productive work environment, as well as an indicator of the positive nature of the office environment. The laughter, as mentioned by Terri (I1, Lines 449-

464), was a way they could use their ears to identify an active, positive work dynamic. As humour made the positive work environment real in the unit, so teamwork was also made real by the concrete actions of helping each other with their workload.

Participants were divided on their perceptions of the supervisor role in some aspects. Although all participants emphasized the importance of having open dialogue as a key to a positive supervisory role, perceptions varied on the dispersal of HR information in critical situations, depending on which side of the interactions they were on. Although the perceptions of the Deans shared many of the themes of supervisor, participants needed the Dean to provide clear strategic direction to the unit and to his/her direct reports. There was no desire to set their own strategic directions for the unit; rather they looked to the Dean and only the Dean for articulating that single clear vision.

4.7. Perceptions at the University Level

With respect to the institutional or university level, I asked participants about their perceptions of a positive work environment on a university level. On the university level, the themes that emerged from their comments related to: *resources*, *clear mission goals*, *professionalism*, *growth*, and *strategic planning*. Participants' descriptions of the university revealed more tensions than did their perceptions on the personal and unit levels.

4.7.1. Resources/Growth

Participants had some strong opinions on the topic of resources and how they were allocated. For example, Betty was critical of her university's lack of action on inefficiencies and keeping up with change:

P: Well, I said as this is the only university environment that I've actually worked in or have been in, some days I have to admit I'm not proud. Hopefully with all the new

experiences with (the new database), the new president, (the renewal project), it may change and hopefully it's things for the better. There's just been too many things that you've seen, that you've heard, that you've experienced. Yes. This university is too heavy. There's too many people that are just putting in time. I'm sorry, I would like to see some of these older professors that are no longer doing research, no longer teaching - get out so we can get new blood so we can get students in here. The new president to me in my opinion is going to be hopefully doing that. As much as he can. To run this almost as a business as well as an institution, which, to me, hopefully would be for the better. The world's changing. You have to change with it, you have to get on that bus or you're going to get left behind. And I'm sorry I feel that we've been left behind in some things. (Betty, I1, Lines 584-597)

Terri and Edith saw the resource situation for graduate studies as a paradox. The institution wanted to enroll more students, but there were insufficient resources to deal with the impact of those increases. Terri stated that the university cannot have more students and cut funding to support services:

P: . . . And the president has said yes, we want grad to grow. So there's things that are happening at the university that on one hand that impact us even though we've been told we need to grow. Yet the services are being cut to us. Or not made available to us. (Terri, I1, Lines 852-855)

Edith focused on the issue of finances in a context of planned growth:

...so we're now at the point where we see we need more admin. Now we have to convince Financial (Services) that it's okay but anyways - and the vision and strategy are now shifting for us. And I think that is exciting. There's been a lot of frustrations on

campus because I think the graduate program grew so fast that it's been very difficult to keep up. But now that we have a new person in charge, new dean, I think it's going to change. I hope to work through a lot of those frustrations and bumps in roads and so - from the student's perspective as well as those on campus who work with us. Right? Frustrations for everybody. So that I love. I love that part. And I think that is exciting. It requires patience. And it requires input. Right, don't just sit back and bitch. Tell me what your problem is so that we can work through it. (Edith, Ii, Lines 887-897)

Even though above Edith seemed quite excited about the challenge of getting more funding for graduate studies, she was also critical of the lack of resources for wages, overtime, and extra help and the impact on the lives of those participants caught in the situation for fear of the loss of their job:

P: Well, I think first of all the university should be offering competitive wages. Too often they throw the fact that you're in Epsilon so the cost of living is less. Well I'm sorry but a house here now costs the same as what it does in Delta. There really is no difference in cost of living. None. And so I think that's something that they've hidden behind for too long. And unfortunately I think we've lost a lot of great people because they weren't willing to accept the fringe benefits if you will as compensation. For the lack of funds, for the lack of - you know, even overtime or payment or realization of how big our job really is and we need another person, but they won't spend the money to bring on the other person to make your job a reasonable amount of work. Right, they're just like that's your job. Like I know people in Financial Services come in every Sunday. I'm like why aren't you spending this with your kids? They're like well I have to get this done otherwise ... (I: People don't get paid.) Well, I think it's actually a fear of losing their job to be honest.

You know. If I don't get it done, then they'll just get somebody who does. Get it done. So they'll find somebody who is willing to put in the Sunday afternoons every Sunday. And I don't think that's reasonable. (Edith, I1, Lines 803-819)

Debbie noted that "there is a lots of change going on . . . We're in financial difficulties . . . we're all under pressure, we're all overworked and underpaid" (Debbie, I1, Lines 880-884)

Debbie's university, like many other institutions, experienced severe funding challenges. Dawn saw the effects of cut-backs on staff morale, but was optimistic as to the president's initiatives to improve the university:

I think that there was quite a negativity, you know, the budget problems and cuts to staff, cuts to resources, lots of cuts, all universities have had lots of cuts and that starts to wear people down. Many people lost their jobs. Not all of them through natural retirement, whatever. And that wears on morale and people felt quite negative about the university as an organization and an employer. So there are some steps are being taken to try and add some value back to people choosing to work here:

I: That's a positive step.

P: Yeah. She/he's involved in a lot of initiatives and when the person at the top is speaking very publicly and proactively I think there is some trickle down from that. And staff and faculty seem to have so far respect for him/her and for his/her goals and objectives and feel that she/he's - so far so good, you know. (Dawn, I1, Lines 896-909)

At the university level, participants felt caught between the competing and perceived paradoxical demands of the institution to increase student enrolment but to reduce resources to student services and graduate administration. Although they were experiencing tensions from

these incompatible demands, participants also expressed hope in the changes taking place at the university level.

4.7.2. Clear Goals/Strategic Planning

Dawn continued with her observations on the changes starting to take place with a new president and identified another important issue for participants, clear mission goals or rather the idea of having unified goals throughout the institution that drew people together:

I believe she/he's heard that in lots of the feedback she/he's got that people felt that their pride in working here had slipped, that they felt very fragmented in their little piece rather than being part of the university. And I think she/he's undertaking some initiatives to try and build a genuine community back into place where people might regain some pride.

(Dawn, I1, Lines, 887-891)

Although most of the participants had this concern, Terri expressed the need for the institution to have a unified strategic plan that the institution understood and understood down to the front lines as part of a positive workplace with a sense of purpose.

The other thing that needs to occur for current staff and I've said this ...because it was really apparent that our staff in this group of people for research didn't know where we fit into THE strategic plan. THE university. It's not clear to them. So that needs to come in my opinion from the senior leadership team which is comprised at this university of the president, the vice-presidents, associate vice-presidents, and all the deans and directors. And there needs to be I think a frank discussion about from our dean this is what we do, we know what we do, and we're good at what we do. This is where we fit into the university's strategic plan. This is what the university wants to do. And this is what we're

going to do to try to accomplish that on the graduate side of the house. (Terri, I1, Lines 765-776)

Terri went on to connect the university mission with a sense of purpose:

It's something that was quite apparent is staff, including myself, and I mean this wasn't surprising when I got the results (of the survey) - is knowing what we do, how that fits into the big picture of the university. Into the university's strategic plan. You know the university has a strategic plan, we have a new one. We're a year into it. Each individual faculty or administrative unit has their own strategic plan based on the university's. But for staff, like I said I'm including myself, what I'm doing I'm signing off on this transfer from this program to this program. What does that - how does that roll up into the big strategic plan. And that's been a struggle for staff to understand. Is we have this strategic plan. The president and vice-presidents speak about it wherever it is that we go and refer to it all the time, we have to refer to it for budget proposals and all sorts of things but what is it that we do in Grad Studies. What do we do that contributes to that overall thing? Sense of purpose? (Terri, I1, Lines 535-537)

Just as participants felt it necessary to have clear direction and vision from their Deans in their units, so they also wanted the university to respond to this need as well. The centrality of focus, through a clear sense of purpose that was understood down to the front line level, was highlighted in the comments and criticisms.

4.7.3. Treatment of Administrative Professionals: A Good Pair of Shoes

In the conversations, I specifically asked participant about their feelings about their status on campus as being “invisible” as a group. They had some powerful feelings on this matter. Terri expressed a typical feeling of administrative professionals being “caught in the middle”.

But I think because we're mid managers. We're in the middle of everything. We find ourselves caught between support staff who don't understand the big picture and then we're caught on the other side at the deans and directors and senior leadership who have that knowledge but aren't filtering it down. So we're kind of caught in the middle.

Knowing some of this stuff but not being able to implement it down here sort of so we're kind of caught in the middle. (Terri, I1, Lines 926-932)

Dawn expressed the feeling of being in the middle as "a challenge. Some days are easier than others . . . It's a bit of a no-fixed address kind of job I think sometimes" (I1, Lines 1166-1168). Debbie articulated the tension in administrators between wanting to work together to succeed as an institution and feeling taken advantage of by the very institution they worked so hard for:

I think we all have, that it's been a fairly - what's the word - complacent group. You know, we always complete. We want to believe in the team, and we do believe in the team actually. We want to do it together, we want to see succeed, and we'll work really hard. But there is a feeling out there and I'm probably part of it - or I probably agree with that feeling to a certain degree - that it's been taken advantage of. So we have no choice, we have to accommodate the union or we'll go to arbitration and we have to agree with the Faculty Association and there's no more money, so here's how it is and we get these lovely letters, you're very appreciated by the institution and just so you know, you're not the only ones taking the hit, the senior executive has also taken a zero. But - you start paying me half a million dollars, and I'll be okay taking no increase. (Debbie, I1, Lines 534-544)

In response to the question of feeling invisible, Edith and I had a long discussion trying to find the right word to describe how she felt. I present his whole discussion because it gives insight into this administrator's struggle to express her feelings regarding visibility and efficiency in her university:

P: I don't know if we're invisible; I don't know if that's a right term, I would probably say we're definitely the ones who are - I don't want to say taken advantage of either, but I'm trying to think of what the word is that I'd like to use. {pause} What is the word I'm trying to think of. You know, like when you're kind of pushed off to the side, you're not given the same amount of attention. You don't get the same - not belittled.

I: Almost the middle child syndrome almost.

P: Kind of. Because, really, the university can't run without us. They can't. There's no way. Just like if you - I mean, you could take away all the admin assistants and life would go to hell too. But we're just like that but at a higher level. Without us, the university can't run. And yet they kind of ostracize? No, I don't know if that's the right word either. I don't know. Hopefully you get the feeling I'm coming across.

I: I would like for you to wrestle with some more words for that.

P: I know there's a word that I want to use. Yeah, they're just not - we're not in their face. So they really do kind of ... (I: Forgotten?) Yeah, I don't - that kind of implies that oh crap, it just slipped my mind or something and I don't think it's that, I think it is a little more intentional than that. I think we really are the group that they know that they can squish around and move to the side and - because we're not unionized. If we were unionized, they know that there are certain things they can and cannot get away with.

Like their bargaining even. Whereas now they don't necessarily have to play by those rules so they don't. So it's almost like taking advantage of us.

I: Yeah. But like you said, they can't work without you.

P: No. And I think they're very, very lucky in that there's a lot of us who love the job so much that they're willing to be paid less, they're willing to deal with this, they're willing to deal with that. And a lot of it is because of the ambience and stuff of the university that I mentioned earlier that I liked about the university. Like those are fringe benefits if you will that to a certain extent most of us - and to a certain level, most of us are willing to balance off with. (Edith, I1, Lines 763-798)

Edith used phrases such as "being pushed off to the side" and "kind of ostracized" in her struggle to describe how she felt the university was treating the administrative professions. Edith also talked about how the university could not run without them and the university could be more intentional than simply forgetting the APs.

Terri agreed with the trend of APs as being invisible, complacent, and unheard by the institution. However, unlike others, she felt that this trend was beginning to turn around due to the two forces of the older generation getting close to retirement that was seeking for a better life balance and the younger generation coming into the institution expecting to have a job with a good life balance:

P: I would agree. We're a small group. Actually through our last negotiations, we said collectively we're a small but mighty group! So I think in the past historically we've been the invisible group but we're becoming a stronger, mightier, louder group. And so that senior admin they're paying more attention to us.

I: Why? Why are they getting louder?

P: Different generation. Younger generation. Again it gets back to that work-life balance or the commitment, loyalty. (Terri, I1, Lines 915-926)

Although the above statements expressed their dissatisfaction with their existing status with the university, participants were not leaving the institution. Other dynamics on the personal and unit level were keeping these hard working, committed individuals at their jobs. Brian's response to the "being invisible" question gave an insight into why they may have stayed with the unique image of the APs as a pair of shoes:

P: My first job was selling shoes, and what I learned then was that the best shoes were the ones you never noticed. I have a sense of my duty and responsibilities, and so long as my employer and co-workers are there for me as I am for them, I don't feel that I need to be noticed. I'm quite all right being a good pair of shoes, rather than a spur in their heel.

(Brian, E2, Lines 12-18)

Terri suggested that the existing situation could not remain because of the need of two different demographic groups for a more positive life balance. This was a unique comment. Brian seemed fine with being ignored – like a good pair of shoes. In this image, I had the feeling not only of being ignored but also of being useful and holding up the whole person. In spite of their overall feelings about their treatment by the university, the APs still remained in their positions, because of their perceived importance to the university and their ability to make a difference.

4.7.4. Positive University Initiatives

While it was clear that participants expressed a number of tensions at the university level, the situation was not all bad. Some of them expressed optimism on the future of their institution along with their criticisms (Betty, I1, Lines 584-597; Dawn, I1, Lines 896-909; and Terri, I1,

Lines 664-668). For Edith, the culture of the University of Epsilon provided her with an opportunity to be involved in a fundraiser that was important and meaningful for her and others involved in the event:

P: Exactly. And even university events, like every year we are involved with the (local charity event). Which is a fundraiser. And so they really encourage and the university puts money towards having two teams there. So that's all university donated money to the organization and they're encouraging us to come. So they make those events fun. And you actually want to hang out with your co-workers. Which I think is very lucky, there's a lot of people who don't want to see their co-workers after hours. But here I'll go spend an entire weekend paddling with you on the lake. So stuff like that or we have a university - like for the cancer walk that we do every year. We have a university team that's comprised of us university folk. So it was organized by us, our little group of ten or twelve people, and yet we can go to the university and say would you support the University of Epsilon team by providing whatever. And so every year they've actually - we give our receipts to the Finance and they'll reimburse for the water and the food that we brought that night. For our tent. And they provide us with - we'll go to Advancement and say can I get the University of Epsilon big banner and we hang that on our tent. Like everybody knows, like we are representing the University of Epsilon. But really, to be honest, this is a totally personal event for all of us. Deeply personal for all of us that are involved with the team. (Edith, II, Lines 684-701)

Edith gave her university high marks in its support for employee fitness, which helped her have a more positive sense of wellbeing as well as a more positive sense toward the institution.

In reflection on the transcription of our interview, Terri stated:

(In reviewing my transcripts)...it is apparent that although, there are frustrations and stressors in my workplace, overall, the university is a good employer. We are still young, and the senior leadership has made a commitment to employees to create a better workplace. (Terri, E2, Lines 6-8)

Participants had the most negative comments when asked about a positive work environment at the university level. They expressed the tension between the university's success at expanding the number of graduate students and its reduction of resources to provide services to those students. Because student success was one of the key personal needs for participants, not having enough resources to properly take care of these students went counter to the participants' basic motivations.

On the unit level, participants expressed the need for the Dean to provide clear direction and vision. This concern was also identified regarding the senior university administration as well. The university needed to provide a clear sense of purpose that was understood by all members of the university hierarchy. Participants agreed with the negative perception of the APs being "invisible" in the institution, but they had hope that the status quo was starting to change due to the need of individuals and the encouragement of the institution for a more positive work-life balance. They further perceived the institutions' support for charity and fitness involvement as positive aspects of the work environment at the university level as well.

4.8. Perceptions on the Interactions among the Levels

The last research question dealt with the interaction among the levels regarding the perceptions of the administrative professionals. The APs were at the juncture of two axes in the institution: one axis between the student on one end and the university on the other; and the

other axis between the Deans and the co-workers. These two axes represented a multitude of tensions, pressures, and opportunities confronting the APs.

Participants commented on their frustrations of being caught between the unit and the university. Regardless, university level involvement was important for the APs not only on a unit level but also on a personal level:

P: Yeah. I mean, I also I like being able to help students with writing their grants and stuff, like that whole aspect. I enjoy that. But I really enjoy the more wider perspective. Bigger picture stuff. Even though you have to take in all the details. I like that. (Edith, I1, Lines 198-201)

Edith found enjoyment and fulfillment in the integration of work with the students on a personal level with the “bigger picture stuff” of the university level. Dawn and Debbie expressed their satisfaction with being involved on campus wide improvements projects (Dawn, I1, Lines 1014-1044. Debbie, I1, Lines 545-595). Terri, too, was motivated by the personal challenge of interactions on unit and institutional level:

P: Well, right now again because of the new situation, the opportunity to do new things. Deal with situations that I had to deal with before. And sometimes those can be draining because of the nature of them because they're dean duties. But on the other hand, it's been exciting to again have that opportunity to do those. And I'm grateful that the dean had the respectfulness of me and knowing that I could do this. Otherwise I don't think he would have asked me to take on these extra duties. As well right now we have some couple projects, special projects that are underway in Grad Studies that are long term projects. It's a graduate student information system that will tag along with our Banner Student. It's a huge project. But I have a term position hired dedicated to work on that.

Because I couldn't do that too. But I am the project business sponsor, so I am still involved in any major decisions that need to take place and really it's my vision of what I want this product to do, so working on that, having that vision, that opportunity to work with (IT department) and this other individual who I worked with over the years at the university. Who is a great team player and knows the importance of what this project can do for grad studies and the university, so that's really exciting right now. It's a lot of work but it's going to benefit our office in terms of I guess bringing us up to the year 2011 or beyond (Terri, I1, Lines 178-198)

Participants felt they needed to make a difference through the appreciation shown regarding the importance of their being actively involved in projects and planning on the institutional level. Impact and voice at the university level was interconnected with their need for respect and making a difference on the individual level as well as having voice in their unit and with their Dean. These managers found it natural to be the middle of interactions involving the unit and the university, and they saw it as a natural extension of the respect shown to them by their Dean. To have their abilities respected, participants expected and needed to have the freedom and authority to have a voice on the institutional level as well.

4.8.1. Our Safe Island

Dawn presented an image of the interactions that illustrated the importance of the strong base in the unit that facilitated the individual to confidently interact at the university level to work for the unit:

P: Tensions across campus. I feel quite removed sometimes. Where we're like an island where we - you know, we touch all kinds of places but we also have our little safe island.

And our safe island is good. It's a good place. From which we venture! (Dawn, I1, Lines 1097-1110)

"Our safe island" expressed the complexity of the dynamics of interactions in a positive and emotionally laden manner. This image integrated the concepts of respect, recognition, mastery, and positive relationships at the unit level that could help the individuals deal with the frustrations and interactions at the university level. Dawn again linked the frustrations and rewards of being a middle manager:

I: That's interesting. And it sounds like you like (being in the middle).

P: I do like that. I think middle management is often forgotten and invisible in terms of compensation. I do think that and recognition. I don't mean just money,

I mean the whole package of recognizing people. Because the people in our front line teams have a negotiated contract and everything that comes with that, whether they like it or want it or not that's how it is and there's all kinds of rules and checks and balances and benefits etc. The faculty members have (a union) and all the checks and balances, all the benefits, all the negotiated contract that comes with that. The senior administrators have lots of money and power. And the middle managers have no negotiated contract, no authority except the delegated, and not really any checks and balances and no guarantee that any credit will be given. So I think I'm in an exceptionally fortunate position because I have some - I definitely get recognized. I definitely get visibility. I get delegated authority in a visible way. I get credit, and I get accountability either way. So if credit is deserved I get credit and if I screw up, I get that too.

I: But at least it's yours.

P: Yeah, it's mine. So that's - and I like that because it's not it's mine and I'm abandoned, I'm well supported.

I: So you can feel you can weather the storm because you're on a good footing. (P: Exactly.) This island that you talk about is safe. (P: Yes.) And strong.

P: And I have support, I'm not out there. Although sometimes I'm out there on my own, I'm not on my own. And because I do check back, I'm not generally running my mouth off about something that's not supported. (I: You're always getting feedback and you have a chance to ...) I'm always checking in. Yeah. (Dawn, I1, Lines 1205-1232)

Participants found that being in the middle of the forces of the university work environment was a dynamic and challenging place. But being in the middle was the place that met their personal needs for feeling valued and efficacious. Their ability to successfully operate at the unit level, depended on the strength and safety provided by the unit, the strong "safe island", that gave participants grounding, authority, and strength to affect change on the university level.

4.9. Summary

The research questions elicited the perceptions of the professional administrators concerning their positive work environment on the individual, unit, and university levels as well as the interactions between the levels. After identifying statistical information on response rates of potential participants, I discussed the similarities among the four interview sites. Participants from the majority of sites stated that the administration was actively soliciting opinions of their employees. All the universities had successfully increased graduate enrolment. The structure and work of the graduate units did not vary except to accommodate the increase in scale due to student numbers. They also reported having controversial changes in personnel that engendered

negative feelings and low office morale. Participants also conveyed that this toxic environment had changed to a more positive one.

Workload and the individuals' struggle for a positive life balance were common for all participants, and it influenced them on an individual level. The long hours of work and the personal and family stress associated working those hours has affected the lives of participants. The individuals varied on how they dealt with the time burden. Some participants worked the long hours with an idea to make a change. Others wanted to make a change in their own work habits, but could only support their staff to make changes. Still other participants not only supported their staff to limiting their work hours, but also implemented office rules that promoted proper behaviour. These participants and their Deans also consciously limited their energies to normal work hours.

On the personal or individual level, participants expressed their own needs for a positive work environment. Being respected by their staff and their supervisors and Deans was of key importance to participants. This respect expressed itself in having their decisions and abilities trusted through work autonomy. They also needed to respect and trust their staff and Deans as well. Participants also needed to feel that they, as persons were valued and to have that sentiment expressed by others. They perceived a positive work environment as a place where they could make a difference to improve the environment, especially for students; they said they would not stay in a situation where they could not make a change. The participants emphasized the importance of making a difference in the lives of the students, and graduation was the visible expression of these feelings.

Participants' need for respect, validation, and empowerment were lived out in their administrative unit. Having voice in the relationships and work of the unit was a perception of

participants that met their personal needs. They also perceived humour and teamwork as important at the unit level as well. Humour was an expression of a safe work environment, and teamwork became crucial as unit members helped each other with their workloads. Being a unit supervisor also played a part in the positive observations. Because most of the participants had supervisors, and were supervisors, they struggled with the communication necessary to deal with the perceptions unit members had of delicate HR situations. Deans had an influence in the work unit by actively supporting life balance of their staff, and by ensuring all their administrators were given voice. Furthermore, participants needed the Deans to give clear direction and vision for the unit.

Participants expressed the most tensions or criticisms when sharing their perceptions of work at the university level. The tension between the institutions wanting to increase graduate numbers while restricting the supporting resources for those students drew criticism from participants. The increase in graduate student enrollment negatively affected participants' workload and they were disappointed at the lack of extra resources provided by the university. They were concerned about how the lack of resources affected the graduate students. The university administration's lack of clear goals and direction was also an issue, and participants needed to have the institution provide clearer goals and direction that were understood by the front line workers. They wanted to see how the high level university policy made a positive difference in the lives of their students. The institutions' treatment of administrators as an employee group was another tension with participants. Feelings of being taken for granted or being taken advantage of by the institution ran contrary to the individuals' need for respect and appreciation. They did see some positive initiatives on the university level that were appreciated.

Although there were concerns with the university on an institutional level, participant generally felt that the university was a good place to work.

The web of influences at the various levels on the perceptions of participants was complex. Participants had to deal with a number of forces that affected their perceptions of their work environment. They were in the middle of the dynamics of the interactions with the Deans, co-workers, and other staff. Also, the participants saw themselves as links between the institution and the students. The positive work environment at the unit level gave them the authority, support, energy, confidence, and sense of safety they needed to reconcile the differences at the university level and make necessary changes.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Are there any good places to work on campus? This question arose from many of my colleagues when I was first framing the research questions of this study. But, as I was soon to find out, there were administrators on Western Canadian university campuses who identified themselves as working in positive work environments, in places of challenge, humour, growth, and meaning. These participants provided considerable insight into the dynamics of their positive workplaces. Their contributions helped me identify a number of major themes discussed in this chapter. I discussed the implications of these themes for organizational theory and on for university policy, practice, and research.

5.1. Discussion

The iceberg analogy of organizational culture draws attention to the visible and invisible features of workplace life. Participants of this study discussed the visible and concrete characteristics of their workplaces, but they often identified perceptions of the invisible, the emotional, and the meaningful aspects of their work, which were more difficult for observers to perceive. These hidden aspects of the workplace are keys to understanding their perceptions of a positive work environment.

5.1.1. Positive Organizational Scholarship

In organizing the themes emerging from the interviews, I was cognizant of the fact that I was also using a Positive Organizational Scholarship approach in this study. POS has been described as “the study of especially positive outcomes, processes and attributes of organizations and their members” and “a focus on dynamics that are typically described by words such as excellence, thriving, flourishing, abundance, resilience, or virtuousness” (Cameron et al., 2003,

p. 4). Dutton, in an interview on POS, added: “organizational research occurring at the micro, meso, and macro levels which points to unanswered questions about what processes, states, and conditions are important in explaining individual and collective flourishing. Flourishing refers to being in an optimal range of human functioning” (cited in Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). I studied the perceptions of the administrative professionals of the micro, meso and macro levels of their university environment to try to understand the dynamics of what made their environment positive for them. Through research questions and conversations, I strove to identify what helped the participants thrive and flourish in their specific university situation.

To further my analysis, I searched the POS literature for a suitable organizing framework. Ryff and Singer (1998), using a positive psychology approach, postulated three broad categories of human health: leading a life of purpose; quality connections with others; and positive self-regard and mastery. As I presented in Chapter 2, Quick and Macik-Frey (2007) brought these three categories of human health into POS and expanded the same three-dimensional approach to include organizational health. I have adopted and adapted these three categories as an organizer for the themes emerging from the study and have modified the three classifications to represent efficacy, quality relationships, and purpose to better reflect the results of the interviews.

I also dealt with the issues that were identified by the administrative professionals: workload and life balance; heavy workload and diminishing resources; and positive current environment with a negative past. Although these themes have been identified, I find it impossible to put absolute boundaries between and among the themes. In other words, I found that all these themes are interrelated, intermixed, and interdependent.

5.1.2. Efficacy: Making a Difference

For most of the participants, “making a difference” was an essential component of their perceptions of their work environment. If they did not have the opportunity to make positive changes in their environment, they would likely move on to other employment. But according to the analogy iceberg, there are both visible and invisible aspects to the idea of “making a difference” which go beyond simple achievement of specific project goals to more intrinsic issues. Briggs (2005) identified one of the roles of the administrator as the *Implementer*, someone who makes things happen. Participants’ imperative to improve their environment went beyond the external aspects of their role to an inner drive that motivated every aspect of their work. Their inner need reflected the basic premise of POS that people want to improve the human condition (Cameron et al., 2003).

This is not to say that completion of specific projects was not important. At least three of the participants had been working on or were in the process of the completion of the installation of campus wide database systems. These projects were important to them because of their concrete, visible contribution to the stakeholders of the university. In their roles as Corporate Agent and Liaison personnel (Briggs, 2005), participants felt it was important to have the opportunity to exercise authority and make a contribution to the university level.

The concrete outcomes in and of themselves were not of prime importance to participants. They showed two deeper, hidden characteristics of psychological health as identified by Ryff and Keys (1995): environmental mastery (“the capacity to manage effectively one’s life and surrounding world”, p.720) and personal growth (“A sense of continued growth and development as a person”, p.720). The concrete achievement was not as important as the sense of being able to achieve something, to make a difference, in one’s work environment. An

individual with sense of control or mastery over ones environment exhibits lower levels of stress (Goleman, 2006). Their positive work environment supported their need to feel a sense of control or at least have some influence over their environment. The challenge of these external projects also provided them with an expression of their felt need for personal growth and development, not only as individuals but also as administrators. In the midst of an overwhelming workload, the challenge, and skill involved in making improvements not only were rewarding but also made the work bearable. There seemed to be an upward spiral of achievement and personal growth reinforced by the workplace environment.

The sense of efficacy among participants was also expressed in this study with the emphasis on voice within their unit and with their supervisors. To be given voice was to have the opportunity to make a difference in the conversation, situation, or project. Participants' positive perception of their environment was shaped by being heard and heeded by those around them, at the unit and university level. The related day-to-day, low-key conversations that occurred added another dimension to participants' feelings of mastery and self-worth.

A sense of efficacy was exhibited by the participants in this study by what Quick and Macik-Frey (2007) identified as confidence, hope, humour, happiness, self-awareness, hardiness, and vigor. Participants all displayed a sense of confidence, both in the depth of their knowledge and in their ability to get their work done. Even though the workload was heavy, they showed hope and optimism in their willingness to persevere, and adapt if necessary, to make the needed changes (Luthans, et al., 2007) for their fellow workers at the unit level. This hope was manifested on such long term projects as database systems at the university level which helped improve the flow of information. Even though some participants had misgivings about some of the actions of the administration at the campus level, most of them still had a generalized hope

that their university was moving in the right direction and that things were going to improve overall in the future.

Participants seemed to be generally happy people and their interviews were laced with humour, smiles, and laughter. They were able to laugh at themselves and with their situation: and their propensity toward the positive was also evident in the level of their physical and mental energy, even in stressful situations. Participants showed considerable endurance and mental agility as they dealt with the demands of their position. Even if they were not at the point of making some positive self-care decisions in relation to their work hours, they still showed self-awareness as to the impact of their workload on themselves and their families. Generally, they were optimistic, happy, mentally strong individuals.

Leadership seemed to be central to the participants' sense of efficacy. Their leaders in their own administrative units provided support through modeling positive work behaviours for the participants. Participants gave concrete examples of how their Deans, Associate Deans, and direct supervisors went out of their way to encourage a positive work-balance. These behaviour patterns were some of the external artifacts of the unit culture. By exhibiting good work and leadership practices, such as urging participants not to stay late at work, the unit leaders emphasized the invisible espoused values of the unit.

These same key leaders, intentionally or not, continued to provide growth opportunities for their administrative professionals. By apportioning some of the responsibilities of their office, whether assigning higher level "deanly" duties at the unit level or mandating authority for the development of campus-wide systems, the unit leaders provided the APs with growth opportunities. Participants did not necessarily appreciate the extra work involved in their increased responsibilities and authority, but nevertheless they seemed to thrive under the

challenge. When they needed help in confronting these challenges, the support system of the Deans and other administrative professionals from within and outside of the unit, and even across universities was in place. Even the human resources departments of the universities were cited as a source of expertise and support in time of personnel change. Unit leaders were actively involved in the internal integration of the administrative unit into a culture that supported a sense of personal and unit efficacy.

The sense of efficacy was also supported by participants' feelings of safety in their work environment. Safety in this work context referred to job stability. Even though they did not appreciate their "invisible" status on campus, many participants expressed confidence in the unionized work environment and the relative stability of their positions. This confidence in their job security contrasted with the findings of Gillespie et al. (2001), in which job security was found to be one of the key sources of stress in the work environment.

Sense of efficacy seemed also to be related to another cultural artifact, office space (Schein, 2004). Winefield et al. (2003) found that the lack of physical space was a source of stress for university administrators. All participants in my study felt they had adequate office space. All but two had office windows overlooking the campus, a much sought-after commodity. The other two individuals, even though they did not have outside windows, were not overly dissatisfied because their office was being moved within the following year to a better location, which included offices with a view. This study identified personal office space as an important element in their positive work culture.

Participants expressed a need to make a difference in their workplace, and from the information they presented, they were effective in making changes. This environmental efficacy was also matched by a personal or self-efficacy (Ryff and Keys, 1995), and the characteristics of

personal psychological health crucial to their personal effectiveness in their workplace. Sense of efficacy was affected by the aforementioned cultural aspect, but another source of efficacy was the positive quality of relationships in their workplace.

5.1.3. Quality Relationships: the Heartfelt Appreciation of the Other

Sense of efficacy in this study was dynamically intertwined with the quality of the relationships with the co-workers in their administrative unit. The research of Golden-Bibble, Germann, Reay, and Procyshen (2007) showed that the organizational culture and positive relationships were interdependent, and that there was a dynamic between the relationships of the individuals that make up the unit and the culture of the unit itself. In this regard, communication became a critical quality of the work culture. Quick and Macik-Frey (2007) indicated healthy communication as the starting point to understand this interdependence of culture and relationships. They noted:

Healthy communication leads to healthy organizations in the interdependence, synergy and cooperation that it inspires. The ability of individuals to safely and effectively express opinions, challenge existing ideas, request support and suggest innovative solutions within a climate that minimizes conflict and fear promotes individual growth, a sense of control and a sense of contributing to a greater or mutual purpose. These outcomes are foundational elements of healthy individuals and organizations. Healthy communication is both task-oriented and relationship-orientated; it is personal, subtle and responsive, and is not primarily hinged on authority. (p. 33)

Healthy communication was key to developing positive quality relationships in this work environment. As suggested in the quotation above, it was not lack of conflict that made for a

positive work environment, but how conflicts were dealt with. The administrator, Ellen, put this concept into her own words:

A positive workplace does not mean there are never issues – but rather it is the way the issues are dealt with. I feel free to bring up negative issues. This requires trust and I have acquired trust with my workmates. A positive workplace is an evolution not an expectation. (E1, 68-72).

Positive resolution of issues and the development of trust rely on healthy communication or communication competence:

Communication competence is more than cerebral, verbal and nonverbal skill in sending and receiving messages. In addition, communication competence concerns a deeper understanding of emotions, or persons, and a deep appreciation of individual differences and personal integrity. Communication competence . . . gets to the heartfelt appreciation of the other, when that is appropriate, while attending to the task and performance issues at hand in the workplace. (Quick and Macik-Frey, 2007, p.35)

In my study, participants never used the term “communication competence” during discussions, rather they used closely related terms like respect and voice. On the personal level, they thought that respect was essential in building positive work relationships. This respect went beyond the needed respect for a person’s position of authority to include respecting the person as an individual, and on to respecting that person’s opinions, abilities, and input. When participants talked about having voice in their administrative unit and especially having voice with their Dean, their descriptions of having voice included undertones of respect and caring that very reflected what Quick and Macik-Frey (2007) would refer to as “the heartfelt appreciation of the other” (p.35). This heartfelt appreciation gave an emotional loading to voice that went beyond

the use of employee voice as identified in the research literature. It included any aspect that helped the employee express their views and be active in decision making (Renard & Eastwood, 2003). Voice, to the participants, was more than being able to express their opinions and shape decisions, which strengthened their sense of efficacy, but it was also connected with respect and their essential worth as a person. The worth of the individual was a key underlying assumption of the participants' positive work culture.

In order to build positive work relationships, or rather, any kind of quality relationship, a healthy individual must have emotional competence, communication competence, a strong positive social support system, and mature, intimate connections with family and others (Quick and Macik-Frey, 2007). Although I was not in a position to judge participants' emotional competence or social support systems, I observed that they showed a strong facility in communication throughout the study. Their connection with their families and loved ones was evident many times during our conversations, especially when discussing work-life balance. From my perceptions and their comments, they exhibited the personal traits necessary to develop quality relationships in a broad sense.

Individual personality traits could affect the overall culture or emotional climate in the unit. Participants indicated this effect when they described the stressful time of personnel change in their office. This time of "walking on egg shells" showed how the interaction and personality of certain individuals within the unit could affect the culture of the whole unit for the negative and call into question the basic understanding of the values of the office. However, participants perceived their existing office cultures as exhibiting many of the characteristics of healthy or positive organizations: open honest communication; opportunity; trust and safety;

mutual purpose; cohesiveness; and interdependent work (Quick and Macik-Frey, 2007). That culture could not be described as “walking on egg shells” at all. There had been a change.

Participants provided unique insight into the interdependence of group culture and individuals’ personalities within an administrative unit, but they also demonstrated how the individuals within the unit were not totally at the mercy of the existing culture. The personnel change event created a dramatic short term negative effect on the unit. This event could have negatively affected the long-term culture of the administrative, where the egg shell walk became the norm.

However, the culture was not permanently affected. This change was due, in part, to the positive personal traits and the maturity of individuals in the administrative unit. Participants had a set of long term, personal, underlying assumptions about themselves and their office culture that went beyond and contrary to the espoused values that arose in the culture during the time of negative personnel change. These administrators and their leadership were not only healthy, but they were intentionally able to change the culture. At best, the Deans and supervisors actively supported and modeled the attributes of a positive environment or, at worst, did not interfere with the initiatives of the APs. A number of participants related how they intentionally engaged in changing their work relationships by reopening the lines of communication between individuals within the unit, and by ensuring everyone within the unit had a voice, so they would not have to go through a dark time again.

In this study, voice described the open and honest communication that took place among all the individuals within the administrative unit. Voice was defined in the literature as any aspect that helps employees express their views and be active in decision making (Renard & Eastwood, 2003). For participants, voice not only strengthened their sense of efficacy, but it was

connected with respect and their essential worth as persons. The worth of the individual was a key assumption underlying their positive work environment.

Being given voice and having voice were independent of the hierarchical status within the unit, although it was modeled by the top leadership within the unit. The majority of participants commented on having voice with their Dean and being given the authority to have a voice at a university level. At the informal level, they intentionally kept clear, honest communication lines open between and among other administrators and co-workers within the unit. Not only did they model that behaviour with the work teams they were responsible for, but they prescribed group operating procedures that institutionalized the concept of voice, equality, and safety that became a visible part of their office culture.

Within the quality relationships expressed by voice and respect, participants experienced a feeling of safety that went beyond the idea of job security. Dawn's image of their graduate college being a "safe island" gave an indication of the current sense of safety within their home unit. Nembhard and Edmondson (2012) indicated that psychological safety was difficult to develop in work groups, but that it contributed to the creation of a positive work environment. Emotional safety enabled participants to deal with uncomfortable issues that could threaten work relationships and their positive workplace. Ryff and Singer (1998) believed that emotion was the necessary connection between body and mind that was essential for positive health. In this study, emotional safety and emotional connection played an important role in making quality connections between the individuals within the unit.

In this study, humour played an integral part in the positive relationships. Humour was a visible, audible expression of the sense of safety and the high quality connection evident in the unit. Some participants saw humour and laughter as a welcome relief to the strained silence of

the past negative environment; others identified the work cycle of laughter and silence as the behaviour of workers in a positive, productive work and safe environment. Brian and Terri suggested that humour helped people relax at work, and be more creative and productive. Cooper and Sosik (2012) described humour as: “a valuable character strength that allows individuals to transcend mundane work, stressful situation, hardships, and the imperfections of human beings” (p. 474) and thus develop positive work relationships. Humour plays a number of different functions in the workplace and I agree with Cooper and Sosik (2012), who suggested that the study of humour in positive organizational scholarship is sadly lacking and needs more attention. I believe my study supports this assertion by identifying some basic functions of humour, such as showing that it is an indicator of health and a precursor to creativity and productivity.

The need for safety and harmony was also essential in unit hiring practices. A group having open honest communication through voice and respect and expressing feelings of safety in many different ways, especially in laughter, shows a healthy cohesiveness and camaraderie that are critical in a positive work environment (Quick & Macik-Frey, 2007). A number of participants identified how a new employee’s fit with the group and environment was, in many ways, more important than the skills that the individual possessed. Therefore, some of the administrative units hired new members into their work teams based on their inherent individual personality traits as well as their job skills. These participants felt that a person could eventually learn new skills for the job, but that it was difficult for that individual to change her/his personality type in order to fit into the unit work team. The concept of fit over function in hiring practices again indicated the importance of quality relationship within the positive work environment.

The fit of the individual into the work team was critical for these participants because of the interconnected nature of the work within the administrative units. They described this relationship as simply “helping out” or “pitching in” when necessary. Joplin, Nelson, and Quick (1999) described this trait as interdependence: “an orientation characterized by a reciprocity and flexibility in relationships. It is based upon the secure knowledge that others will be available in stressful and anxious times of need” (p. 784). Participants stressed the importance of this “secure knowledge” of others helping in times of work overload as being part of their positive work environment. However, they also emphasized another seemingly paradoxical aspect of the work team in their positive environment, autonomy.

Quick and Macik-Frey (2007) identified the juxtaposition of interdependence and autonomy as a key component in developing healthy work relationships. In my study, participants wanted others to help them (in the same way that they would help others) in time of need, but they did not want anyone “looking over their shoulder”, especially their Dean. Brian described this paradoxical relationship of autonomy and support as the need for having freedom and also for having a guiding framework in the workplace: they wanted the freedom to do their work within the frame of accountability. But no matter how they described it, participants spoke of the comfortable co-existence between autonomy and accountability as an essential part of the positive teamwork experience.

The administrative professionals in this study perceived that having quality relationships with those in their work environment was an essential component of their positive work environment. The majority had experienced the negative effects of office relationships that had been disturbed during personnel changes, and they had purposefully used their communication skills to ensure that this negative event did not permanently affect their organizational culture.

Through open and honest communication, they strove to build a safe environment where humour and camaraderie could prevail, and they used subsequent hiring practices to support the positive relationships within the unit. Building on the cohesive, supportive and high trust environment of the unit, the APs endeavoured to establish a culture of interdependence and autonomy that flourished.

5.1.4. Bringing Emotion to Purpose: Like a Mother Sending her Child Off

There was a purpose to the APs' work in these units that made the work experience not only positive but meaningful. It was more than a general "making a difference": it was a specific making a difference "in a student's life". This desire to promote the well-being of the students, related to what Grant and Berg (2012) referred to as prosocial behaviour, was an the intrinsic reason why making a difference in the workplace was so important to participants. The students were the main focus of participants' sense of purpose for their work, but as Quick and Macik-Frey (2007) pointed out, there were other issues both at individual and organizational levels that were also necessary for this sense of purpose to develop.

Participants identified with the purpose of the university as helping to improve the world, but it became clear, in further discussion that this abstract goal was superseded by one of student success, which proved to be much more than simply getting the student successfully through their program. Caring for the individual student on personal, emotional, financial, and academic levels was their purpose for being on campus. Participants developed an emotional bond with the students that brought a focus to their work and kept students' best interests in mind in every part of their work. Whether they were developing policy for awards or admissions, or working on a campus-wide database project, student success was in the forefront of APs' work. Even participants who had no direct daily contact with the student similarly had this mindset of student

success. I found this concentration on student success being at the psychological and philosophical centre of their work seemed to be lacking in the current research on the work of administrative professionals.

Participants appeared proud of the fact that, in graduate studies, they did not consider the student to be just a number, but each was an individual. This focus on the individual student diverged from Bergquist and Pawlak's (2008) view of the *managerial culture* of the academy, which they described as focusing on student enrolment numbers and the overall goals of the institution. Although participants were aware of the institutional goals to increase graduate student enrolment, the individual student was the center for their work. The administrative units developed a culture that not only allowed but supported this focus on student success. Even though resources provided by the institution did not keep up with the needs of their administrative units to deal with the growing numbers, the participants, and others within the units, put up with the extra workload to ensure the success of the student, which culminated with their graduation.

Convocation was a key cultural symbol of every university, and it was also a central event for participants in this study. Schein (2004) argued that external artifacts, such as the convocation ceremony with its pomp and circumstance, are easy to observe, but it is difficult to comprehend the meaning of the event for all the groups present. For the faculty and administration on the stage, this event is a reflection of the deeply rooted identity and traditions of the organization and the tangible culture of the institution (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). For the majority of participants, most of whom worked behind the curtains to make sure their students were lined up on convocation days, seeing the graduand walk across the stage was a visible manifestation of all the work helping the student reach that point. This external event had a

strong emotional impact on participants: “like a mother sending their child off to college or to their wedding” (Terri, I1, Line 565-566). Attendance at the graduation exercises was a highlight of the participant’s work-life. Convocation was not only a concrete expression of their sense of purpose, but the ceremony, itself, seemed to reinforce their sense of efficacy and was a powerful recognition of their own efforts to assist the student achieve that objective.

Recognition for their accomplishments strengthened participants’ sense of purpose, though they expressed mixed thoughts about it. Gillespie et al. (2001) found in their research with administrative professionals that insufficient recognition and reward were significant sources of stress. Johnsrud and Rosser (1999) found that salary was the single most important factor affecting administrator morale. They also found that recognition and positive trust relationships with their immediate supervisor had the greatest impact on improving morale. Similarly, in my study, insufficient recognition and reward at the university level and recognition and positive trust relationships at the unit level, were both present in the participants’ perceptions.

At the university level, participants felt like “invisible workers”, and while they knew their work was essential to the success of the university as a whole, they perceived that the university administration did not acknowledge their contributions. This finding agreed with the research by Szekeres (2004). Dissatisfaction with salary (Johnsrud & Rosser, 1999) and deterioration of industrial relations between the university and the administrator unions (Szekeres, 2006) were mentioned by participants in relation to their feeling neglected by the university. Even in light of their existing situations, their basic disposition toward hope and optimism was evident when they spoke expectantly, for example, about the university surveying their employees on how to improve the work environment.

Participants' sense of purpose was buoyed by their experience of receiving recognition at the unit level. Participants spoke of recognition in terms of "being appreciated", which to me expressed a more heartfelt connotation to the recognition process. In their minds, being appreciated took on many of the forms that Quick and Macik-Frey (2007) associated with a sense of efficacy and quality relationships. Participants perceived provision of adequate physical space, emotional and administrative support from others in the unit, and autonomy with support as all being forms of recognition.

Unit leadership, especially from Deans, played a central role in the recognition of participants' person, skills, and accomplishments as well. From such simple personal gestures as giving flowers to those of providing heartfelt public acknowledgement of accomplishments, the Deans built a positive work environment for participants by genuinely recognizing their contributions. This "heartfelt appreciation of the other" (Quick and Macik-Frey, 2007, p.35) within the unit, not only helped strengthen the relationship bonds within the unit, but it had a positive impact on participants' sense of efficacy and their sense of purpose within the unit. This recognition at the unit level minimized the effects of the lack an effective recognition and reward system at the university level.

The universities' failure to provide clear goals was another area that frustrated the participants' inner sense of purpose. However, their sense of purpose (centred on student success) was carried out, supported, and rewarded at the unit level. The Dean played an instrumental role in developing specific goals for participants' work, by providing the freedom and the framework at the unit level that were needed to help sustain a positive work environment.

At the university level, participants' perceptions become divergent. On one hand, they stated that the university did not establish clear goals that were understood down to the front line level. On the other hand, they were aware of the university's specific goals to increase graduate student enrolments. Their perceptions agreed with Sporn's (1996) research that found there were not consistent or congruent goals across campus. One explanation of the inconsistency of campus goals was that the external goals of the institution (e.g., higher student numbers) were so at odds with participants' internal goal (student success) that they simply seemed to ignore the campus goals as being less valid or even nonexistent. Another explanation for their rejection of the university-wide goals was that these campus-wide goals did not "grab the heart", that is, the goals were not emotionally compelling enough to replace the pre-existing goals that made up their personal sense of purpose.

Yet another explanation of the divergence of goals was the rise in the professional identity of administrators on campus (Gornitzka and Larsen, 2004) and the tension that arose between the professionals and the bureaucracy of the university (Corwin, 1965). Corwin documented the rise of the profession of teaching in public schools and the teachers' support of their students even in light of contrary organizational practices. Corwin's work closely paralleled and possibly explained the rise of the status of administrative professionals on campus and their support of student success in the face of the seemingly contradictory bureaucratic goals of the university.

Winefield et al. (2003) found that university employees maladapt to stressful situations leading to lowering of productivity and self-esteem. In the case of my study, however, the maladaptive employee behaviour of rejecting or denying institutional goals had a positive effect on participants by re-affirming their sense of professional purpose, self-esteem, and productivity.

My findings suggested that the participants' life of purpose was supported by the actions of the unit leaders and co-workers. The graduate studies unit, whether intentionally or by default, supported their personal sense of purpose in making a positive change in the life of the student. They felt appreciated by the members of the unit and by their Deans through acts of recognition that elevated their abilities and accomplishments. Participants were also given the freedom to operationalize their own personal goal of student success into the routine workings of the unit, even in light of absent or contradictory university-wide goals. This individual recognition and cohesive unit goals also helped support their sense of accomplishment and further strengthened the quality relationships that existed within the unit.

5.1.5. Paradox Revisited

The tri-dimensional model of efficacy, quality relationships, and purpose served as a useful framework in explaining many of the findings from the interviews, but this framework does not adequately deal with the tensions evident in participants' perceptions of their work environment. This research identified the paradox of participants identifying their work environment as positive yet, at the same time, struggling daily with heavy workload and associated work-life balance issues. They also identified their existing environment as positive in spite of experiencing a negative impact of personal change. Quick and Macik-Frey's (2007) adapted model did not easily provide explanations why participants still gladly came to work when their workload was overwhelming and their past experience was painful.

The organizational culture metaphor seems to have more explanatory power in this aspect. Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) stated that the function of organizational culture was to contain symptoms of anxiety or pain. The organizational culture model might be able to explain the containment of the pain from the past personnel challenges but it does not explain why the

existing culture was identified as positive by the same individuals who went through the pain. Even taking into account that these participants may be more positive, resilient, hopeful, and optimistic than the norm, neither model adequately deals with their positive perceptions in light of the potentially disabling workload. Both Gillespie et al. (2001) and Winfield et al. (2003) found in their studies that workload combined with the lack of resources increased administrators' stress, even potentially leading to mental illness.

In my search for other perspectives to explain the paradox of these positive work environments, I recalled two expressions from the study. Brian's description of a positive work experience having both *freedom* and *framework* and Dawn's description of her administrative unit being a *safe island* from which to journey across campus. Both images have a dichotomy of meaningful autonomy (freedom, movement across campus) together with structural security (framework, safe island). With the duality of intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the work environment in mind, I searched for another framework that might explain the paradox – and I found it in Herzberg's original hygiene-motivation theory.

Although Herzberg postulated his controversial theory in 1959, it is still considered applicable and valid (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005). Moreover, Sachau (2007) has shown that Herzberg's theory is compatible with the field of positive psychology, on which POS was built (Dutton & Sonenshein, 2009). Also, Herzberg's (1987) description of Movers, as moving people away from pain, and Motivators, as moving toward growth, parallel organizational culture and POS but goes beyond these two approaches to possibly explain the tensions within the participants' perceptions in my study. Herzberg (1987) argued that being satisfied with one's work and being dissatisfied with the same work were **not** on the same continuum, but that they represented two continua (satisfied - not satisfied and dissatisfied - not dissatisfied). Therefore, it

is possible to have factors for satisfaction and factors for dissatisfaction active within the same work environment. Table 5.1 summarizes Hertzberg's (1987) major hygiene and motivation factors.

Table 5.1 *Summary of Hertzberg's (1987) Hygiene and Motivational Factors*

Hygiene Factors	Motivational Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company policy • Supervision • Relationship with supervisor • Work conditions • Salary • Relationship with co-workers • Security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement • Recognition • Work itself • Responsibility • Achievement • Growth

Hertzberg's hygiene or extrinsic factors relating to dissatisfaction included: policy, relationship with supervisor, work conditions, salary, relationship with peers, status, and security. As these hygiene factors are fulfilled in the work environment, the level of worker dissatisfaction diminishes and can lead to an employee being content with their position, in the short term (Sachau, 2007). But the hygiene factors cannot alone lead to a long term positive work environment. According to Hertzberg (1987), a positive work environment can only be accomplished by fulfilling the motivators or intrinsic factors of the work environment, which include achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth. Existence of these intrinsic factors has a long term positive effect on the workers perceptions of their work and work environment (Sachau, 2007).

Hertzberg's (1897) two factor theory effectively explains why participants in my study still perceived their work environment as positive despite the tensions. Participants identified tensions that could be classified as hygiene factors. The issues around the tense personnel change included many of Hertzberg's (1987) hygienic factors related to workplace relationships.

Participants talked about their relationship with their supervisor, peers and subordinates being negatively affected by the past event. This personnel event even had them considering leaving their work units to avoid pain. However, Herzberg's (1987) theory can explain why, although this memory was still there, its continuing effect on employees' perceptions of a positive work environment were limited. Hygiene factors have a relatively short-term effect. For example, an increase in salary will diminish employees' dissatisfaction but only for a limited period of time. In this study, the past personnel change increased the level of dissatisfaction but only for a short time. This view helps explain why, even though participants expressed memories of pain and stress connected with the actual event, the past event had quickly lost its power over the current work environment.

Workload was the hygiene work condition that caused the greatest dissatisfaction. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the size and the enduring nature of the workload. The policies of the university that encouraged growth in student numbers without the corresponding administrative support were another source of administrator dissatisfaction. The invisible nature of administrators on campus was a source of status dissatisfaction. Salary, another hygiene factor, was identified by some participants. All these extrinsic factors were enduring sources of dissatisfaction. How can these sources of dissatisfaction be reconciled with participants' positive perceptions of their workplace?

If the hygiene factors were the only dynamics operating in the work environment, then participants' statements about their positive work environment would be difficult to explain and understand. This study was a journey into administrators' perceptions of their positive work environment. Or to put it a different way, participants were questioned about the sources of satisfaction with their workplace. In retrospect, by asking about their insights into the positive

work situation, I was probing what energized them to come to work and stay in their position. Participants consistently and enthusiastically identified achievement and recognition as necessary aspects of their positive work experience. In their discussions around the centrality of their work to change the life of the student, participants identified how the work itself motivated them. They also recognized their need for growth and challenge as they took on the additional responsibility of cross-campus projects outside of their unit.

These enduring motivating factors raised their levels of satisfaction with the work environment to more than compensate for the shorter term effect of the sources of dissatisfaction in their workplace. Connected with the motivators of achievement, recognition, growth, and student success, they also saw their existing status and their relationships with their Deans, supervisors, peers, and subordinates as positive. Not only were the long-term sources of satisfaction present, many of the sources of dissatisfaction (workload, status, and salary) were minimized by the effect of the positive relationships in the unit.

As this study pointed out, even positive work environments have tensions. These tensions were a part of the participants' reality and cannot be overlooked, but the tensions could be overcome. The positive aspects of the workplace far outweighed the negative aspects of the participants' current and past tensions. My research suggests that it is possible for university administrators to have a positive work environment and, in spite of negative forces, to bring about cultural change and thrive.

5.2. Implications

One of the joys I experienced using a qualitative approach to this study was the depth and breadth of information and insights contributed by participants. They talked about what worked in their environment and how a positive work environment was a reality for them. Their

experiences could have an impact on how other administrators could act out their roles on a day-to-day basis, on what unit leaders consider in improving their unit environment, and on how the university could respond by encouraging that reality through their policies.

5.2.1. Implications for Practice

Although these qualitative findings are not intended for generalization to other situations, I find myself asking this question: What would I as an administrator, unit leader or even a dean take away from this study? One outcome is that there were administrative professionals on campuses across Western Canada that did work and thrive in positive work environments. This fact is critical for those administrators working in toxic or near toxic environment and who hope for something better. This study demonstrated that administrators can effectively change their work environment through self-discipline, authentic communication, resilience, and collaboration with others within the unit. The first step to breaking down the feeling of isolation in a negative environment is to engage in communication with others in the unit, with or without the senior leaders' assistance and/or permission. This open communication was a first step to creating a "supportive counter culture" at the administrative unit level.

Participants identified the risk involved in open discussions but as trust grew so did the communication. As relationships grow so does the individual's voice, the feeling of not only being heard but also having some power to make a difference. In this study, voice and respect promoted individuals' sense of efficacy, the ability to make a difference. This sense of efficacy had both individual and team dynamics for the participants. The need for personal achievement and recognition was balanced by the awareness of the interdependence of the individuals within the unit: one could not get his/her work done without the support of another. Strong relationships and productivity were essential in the administrative units in this study.

For the participants, the ability to make a difference, especially in the lives of the students to whom they were so emotionally committed, was central to their perceptions of a positive work environment. Participants' focus on student success might resonate significantly with the beliefs of other administrators. The administrative professionals in this study were at odds with the established goals of the university in that they primarily focused on student success over increasing student enrolment. This contradiction, in part, is a function of being a professional in an educational bureaucracy (Corwin, 1965). An administrative professional may feel out of sync with the goals of the institution but participants of this study, also out of step with their university's goals, were unified in their focus on the student.

This study also legitimated the desire and need among administrative professionals to work on a cross-university level outside of the unit. Participants found challenge, recognition and achievement, and long term positive satisfaction at the university level. Individuals who feel cramped, restricted, or bored within their unit may wish to look for opportunities to serve on committees or projects elsewhere at the university level to stretch their abilities. This finding may also encourage a dialogue at the unit and university levels on creating occasions for employees to experience challenge and growth. A related question is: is there a place for the development of communities of practice for administrative professionals to facilitate and formalize personal and professional growth and development beyond the usual complement of skill training courses provided by human resources departments?

Participants, in this study, focused on their need for the balance of autonomy and accountability in their work. This positive tension formed another key component of their energizing work environment. An administrative middle manager may be encouraged to look at his/her own work environment in terms of this tension between freedom and framework and see

if there is a positive balance within the work and the unit. This study could invite dialogue within a unit to explore creative ways of finding this balance and strengthening the trust to further this harmony of freedom and framework.

Another question this study may raise is: “Why am I staying in this position?” If all administrative units are “psychic prisons” (Morgan, 2006), then why trade a prison and warden you know for one you do not know. But this study showed that there were administrators in positive work environments and, even though they were overworked, they were thriving. Participants felt they were making a difference, they had others in the unit with whom they connected and even cared for, and they were actively engaged in the purpose of their work. If there was no difference, there was no choice, but I believe there is a positive difference and there is a choice.

For administrators who see themselves in positive work environments, the results of this study could suggest that, although they do exist, positive work environments on campus are possibility in the minority and need to be appreciated. Although there might be a certain amount of serendipity involved in the creation of positive work environment, most participants in this study took responsibility for the building and strengthening of the relationships and culture needed to support their workplace. The findings of this study may provide others with an awareness to seek for the dynamics involved in creating and maintaining a positive workplace.

Other deans and unit leaders could reflect on participants’ perceptions of the place and function of unit leadership in the creation of a positive and productive office environment. Participants in this study talked about the unit leadership exhibiting openness, honesty, transparency, and modeling of the work-life balance in a way that strengthened participants’ sense of worth and efficacy. Karak (2012) saw these characteristics as a new style of leadership

that creates positive interdependence, physical well-being, loyalty, commitment, and cooperation, all of which this study identified.

Quality relationships in the administrative unit are essential for the development of positive work environments. This study could be used as a catalyst for other leadership to recognize the importance of work relationships, and to question the status of relationships within their administrative unit. A leader could start identifying the health of relationships in the workplace by simply listening to personnel in the office. Humour was identified in this study as an indicator of positive relationships within the unit. Given the cultural value of humour as an indicator of a positive work environment, consideration could be given to such questions as: What is the place of humour and trust in the workplace? What are the limitations of humour as source of positive energy? What is the relationship of humour to productivity, loyalty, and communication? How is humour reflected in reciprocity with the unit leaders, administrative professionals and clerical staff? What is the place of formal/informal and intentional/spontaneous group events in creating this dynamic?

Key unit leaders also need to be aware of the need for challenge, opportunities for growth, and achievement outside of the unit. Are there places where unit administrators can be given more campus-wide authority and responsibility on behalf of the Dean or Associate Dean? What allowed the Deans in this study share this authority and the achievement that goes along with campus wide responsibilities? What is the balance of freedom and framework within the work unit and why is it so?

Participants in this study not only were given freedom and autonomy to work on a campus-wide level; they were also given unit and campus wide recognition for their achievements as well. The honest and heartfelt words of appreciation from the Dean in a public

forum were remembered, and these events strengthened participants' commitment to their work and their leader. Hertzberg (1987) reminds us that recognition is one of the top motivators in the development of workplace satisfaction; it might be wise for key unit leaders to do an analysis of the recognition accorded to their administrative professionals.

Finally, key unit leaders may wish to pay more attention to the focus on student success. Participants saw the university-wide goals of more growth with fewer resources as incongruent with their goals of student success; but were willing to pursue that objective in spite of the increased workload to ensure that the students succeed. Participants did not see their unit leadership as causing conflict with these goals at the college level. Moreover, by allowing/requiring attendance at convocation exercises, the leadership seemed to be supporting the deep connection of the administrators to the students. Deans and other unit leaders may choose to become more aware of the actual day-to-day focus of their APs in relation to the established college and university mandated goals. The unit leadership may also want to review the college policy on administrators' attendance at convocation exercises.

5.2.2. Implications for Policy

In the current competitive, post-modern environment (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008), I believe that university policy makers, who deal with a multitude of external and internal issues, could regard the findings of this study as discussion starters in the regular policy review process. Winfield et al. (2003) regarded university campuses as stressful work environments that can cause physical and emotional stress on administrators. Campus policy makers could be informed by this study's insights. They could see administrative professionals' struggle with the reality of this stress, and how they managed to negotiated the high workload with a positive work environment.

In this study, I identified the prevalent culture on campus that promoted an unhealthy work-life balance of working late and coming in on weekends and how participants were struggling to develop a positive counter-culture in their personal and unit work-habits. In the most positive workplaces, the unit leadership encouraged and modeled this shift in the work-life balance for the administrators. The old adage of “don’t listen to what I say, watch what I do” seemed to describe the scene in those workplaces. In these units, no matter what the established policy or culture was outside of the unit, participants saw their leaders living a positive life-balance and supporting participants’ pursuit of the same. I believe there is a way to learn from the actions of these positive deviants (Lavine, 2012) in order to impact all of campus through constructive policy.

Participants appreciated the help provided by university level human resource departments during times of disruptive personnel change. The human resource personnel provided support, alternatives, and education for the administrators during the challenging times, and the administrators were enabled to enact the changes at the unit level to reshape the environment. Serving as the bridge between the unit and the university, administrators were strategically situated to shape positive work environments. Human resource departments may wish to review their policy on follow-up in units where there have been staff changes, and further evaluate how the unit administrative professionals could be used to turn a potentially negative situation into an opportunity for growth, education, and support to develop a positive work environment. Perhaps some of Hertzberg’s (1987) direction on work and position design might be informative in this venture.

In this study, personal and unit goals of the APs appeared to overshadow the institution-wide goals. Participants called for the university to do a better job of communicating

institutional goals down to front line employees. In this study, the university level goal setting was not positively affecting the work reality of administrators. Campus leaders, goal setters and policy makers may want to study the level of goal incongruence across campus and match goal setting and policy development practice.

The administrators believed that they were essential to the working of the university, but they also felt “invisible”, overlooked, and neglected by the university. This study may give policy makers an insight into APs’ views of policy on the positive attitude of the administrators. An attending question may be, has university policy caught up to the reality of the growth in numbers, responsibility and education of the administrative professional on campus?

Finally, the human resource (HR) offices of the university may wish to review to the work of Herzberg (1987) and evaluate remuneration, hours of work, professional development, work design policy in light of the hygiene and motivational factors. HR policy could be evaluated the question: “Does this policy concerning hygiene or motivational factors? Does it lower dissatisfaction or raise satisfaction?” Does the HR policy result in need to continually increase positive hygiene factors that have only short term results or does the policy result in the building of work environments where long term motivational factors come to the forefront? This study suggests that the focus on motivational factors can help overcome the short term negative effects of hygiene factors.

5.2.3. Implications for Theory

At the time of this writing, this dissertation was first study of administrative professionals in western Canadian universities using the POS approach. Although there have been studies of APs in other countries, no research on the perceptions of administrative professionals had been done in Western Canada and possibly all of Canada. As well, POS literature contains no

research into the positive dynamics of work environments of university administrative professionals. This study can also inform research on university administrative professionals and the growing area of POS.

Spreitzer and Cameron (2012) commented that there is POS research focusing individually on the personal, team and institutional levels, but no studies examining the dynamics of the interactions of these three levels. This study starts to fill this gap.

A significant finding of this study was impact of the sense of efficacy, the participants' feelings of "making a difference", on perceptions of a positive work environment. This finding has a number of dimensions: the effect and focus on students; the effects beyond the boundaries of the official job descriptions; and the effects of work outside of the unit on a university wide level. Previous deficit-based research with APs had not dealt with the critical positive component of this focus in their work environment. Not only has the importance of "making a difference" been missing from this literature, but there has been little attention paid to the APs' focus on improving the condition of the student. Their student-success focus moved participants to look beyond the negative conditions to connect to the students on an emotional level that went beyond their job descriptions to a deep feeling of purpose and commitment, or a *sense of calling* (Wrzesniewski, 2012). Their sense of calling was closely connected to their sense of professionalism and, although first identified by Corwin (1965) in teachers, had not been identified in this context before. The APs sense of professionalism and trust in their own knowledge also helped explain how administrators can live in conflict with the established goals of the institution.

Another key component of the positive work environments that was missing from research literature was the need for working outside of the unit at the university level. Biggs

(2005) had identified the role of “corporate agent” as one of the roles of administrative professionals, but previous research has not identified the part this role plays in the development of positive work environments for administrators. This need to be efficacious at the university level may grow out of the administrators’ need for growth and challenge, as well as their need to achieve (make a difference). These desires could be encouraged by positive recognition from their deans, units and broader university leadership.

This study suggests that there was a need for organizational scholars to conduct research into the place of humour in the workplace. There was a substantial amount of research regarding the place of humour in developing relationships and in coping at work (Cooper and Sosik, 2012), but this study provided insights into the place of humour in the work environments of administrative professionals, such findings could be studied further.

Examining the balance between autonomy and accountability for administrative professionals was another unique contribution of this study. Some work exists in POS on the importance of job design and autonomy, but little exists regarding the balance of freedom and framework on university campuses. Although this study did not identify details on how autonomy meshes with accountabilities, it did identify this balance as an important aspect of positive work environments.

Although Sachau (2007) has argued that Herzberg (1987) is compatible with POS, more research and theory development is needed to explore the utility of Herzberg’s (1987) insights into the development of a positive work environment. The comparison of Herzberg’s (1987) motivational factors and the POS emphasis on such topics as virtue, thriving, calling, compassion is an area that has not been developed in POS literature.

One unexpected finding in this study was that all of the study sites experienced a negative and tension laden personnel change in their recent past. I found this finding surprising, especially when I was seeking the positive aspects of the workplace. Although there have been studies into negative work situations involving abusive bosses, unfair treatment, and job loss, there has been little research into the growth of a positive work environment after such events occur (Maitlis, 2012). Research is rare regarding administrative professionals intentionally developing a positive work environment after the occurrence of stressful work events. This study was also unique in identifying that extreme workload and negative historical events do not automatically prevent the development of a positive work environment.

5.2.4. Reconceptualization

I wanted to find out what led to a positive work environment for administrative professionals. The relatively new POS approach allowed me to focus on the merits of the environments not their deficits. The traditional organizational-culture approach helped me anchor this study into past research regarding the campus environments. Both approaches had their strengths in helping me make sense of the data.

POS allowed me the freedom to focus on the “life-giving” perceptions of the participants’ workplace. Although negative aspects of the environment were acknowledged, the main thrust of the discussions was on the positive aspects their work. POS also helped me identify the areas in this study that helped make a unique contribution to this field. The interdisciplinary approach of POS also complimented my diverse background as a researcher. The organizational-culture research helped me identify some of the underlying or hidden aspects of the participants’ observations that might have been missed using on only one approach. I found that the structure of the organizational culture framework provided an alternate view to the fluid POS approach.

Because POS was my primary approach to this study, I did not discuss in depth the effects of some specific cultural issues, especially around espoused values and underlying assumptions, which could have provided further insight into this study. The work of Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) did bring the study of organizational culture on campus settings and their work could have been addressed in this study. However, from the findings of this study and my personal experience, their observations of campus life did not seem to contribute greatly to the identification of the dynamics of positive work environments.

I found that POS and organizational culture were limited at explaining some of the perceived paradoxes within the workplace data. POS was still a new area of scholarship and has not yet produced a “grand unified theory” that encompasses all aspects of organizational life (Spreitzer & Cameron, 2012), which could have been useful in this study. The attributes of a healthy individual and organization adapted from Quick and Macik-Frey (2007) helped me organize the themes, but it did not suggest possible explanations for the reasons behind the observed behaviours. POS also showed a weakness in not completely dealing with the negative aspects of the work environment. However, I found Hertzberg’s hygiene-motivation theory (1987) was useful in connecting both approaches together to provide some explanations for the existence of stressful tensions in an identified positive work environment. It might have been useful to bring Hertzberg’s theory into the beginning of this study to help me set directions for my initial questioning. However, I was well into the study before I examined how Hertzberg’s work (and later research on that work) might inform my research. I therefore thought it more appropriate to employ it to help inform my reconceptualization phase.

5.2.5. Further Research

I believe my study identified a number of areas requiring more research. One area was the POS approach to my research into the perceptions of administrative professionals that produced a number of informative themes. I feel that more study into the life of the administrative professionals on campuses is needed.

A second area was related to humour. Cooper and Sosik (2012) had already identified the need for more research into humour from a POS approach; and my study supported this need. I confirmed that humour appeared to play a number of roles in the administrative professionals' perceptions of their work environment; and it would be prudent for these roles to be more clearly identified and expanded. In my findings, humour played a role in overcoming the past stressful event in the unit, but it was not completely clear what that role was. Therefore, stressful organizational events and the subsequent development of positive work environments should be further explored to help minimize harm and maximize opportunities for professional growth and reconciliation in the workplace.

I also contend that further research into campus-based administrative professionals, especially in Canada, could help universities learn not only to cope with the changing environmental dynamics, but to thrive in such periods of uncertainty. More studies need to be conducted into administrative professionals' sense of calling to their job and their desire for making a difference to students. Key questions to answer are: how does this sense of calling develop? What are its positive and negative aspects? What can be done to foster it? The place of key unit leaders in the development of positive work environments for administrative professionals would be another area needing further exploration. My study pointed to the

leaders' influence in developing a positive work environment, but more information on their influence was needed.

Gornitzka and Larsen (2004) identified the prominence of women in university administrative professional positions, and my study supported their findings. However, an additional question that needs addressing is to what extent was the development of interdependence and the emotional focus on the success of the student dependent on the gender of the administrator?

More research is also needed into the relationship between the subjective perceptions of the participants and the objective reality of their work environment. I identified the participants as being positive and upbeat individuals, what impact does their world view have on their perceptions of their workplace environment. Are they identifying their workplaces as positive simply because of their personal, emotional investment in improving the workplace environment and their inner need to have their environment positive, regardless of the objective reality?

5.2.6. The Research Journey

After driving for six hours through a white-out prairie blizzard at the end of January to get to a research site, I questioned the appropriateness of my chosen research methodology. A quantitative web-based survey would have been easier to administer and analyze but, such a survey would have certainly missed some of the key findings, including the unexpected ones.

I found that the qualitative multiple case study approach across multiple sites proved effective in acquiring data from the participants. Because I had been familiar with qualitative survey approaches, I felt uncomfortable with inviting myself into the participants' lives through the interviews. My initial misgivings were unfounded, because the participants welcomed me gracefully, and together we discovered aspects about their workplace of which they were not

previously aware. I always felt elated after an interview. I also was pleased that the similarities and contrasts between and among the four sites added depth to the information I gathered and increased the validity of the themes that arose from the discussions.

I thought that the semi-structured interviews based on the four research questions proved effective for gathering information from the participants. Looking back at the first site visit, I felt that I initially used the interview questions as a shield between the participants and myself and did not allow myself to deviate from the questions as much as I did in the later interviews. As I relaxed and my previous counseling skills re-emerged, I was able to adapt the interview questions to construct a type of road that we journeyed down together, and where we could take side roads into places of interest as we moved through the questions. I was able to use key questions as a springboard to other related questions.

The three levels of the questions (individual, unit, and university) did help me direct the participants' attention to the different areas, but I found that attention did not always remain fixed. The same theme would appear in different places in the same interview, no matter what question was being asked. Occasionally, I felt that the final question about the interaction of the levels among the participants' positive work was redundant because these interplays had been described as we went along.

These interactions among the levels made identification and cataloging of the themes interesting. I developed a database using Microsoft Access to hold and catalog the interview transcripts. I took considerable time to process the transcripts at first but, in the end, that strategy saved many hours by allowing me to search the participants' responses by theme, level, and specific word. If I was to do this type of research again, I would utilize one of the commercial

qualitative research software packages to enhance the convenience, and to provide additional features and functions that I did not have the time or energy to develop during my study.

Nevertheless, this research methodology did provide an adequate amount of data for the study, but I see now that more research could be done. I wish I would have had the resources to expand my study across Canada. If this study were replicated, once the administrators identified themselves as working in positive work environments, I would want to interview all the members in the whole unit to provide a more complete picture of the organizational culture.

5.2.7. My Personal Journey

The findings of this study have made an impact on me personally. I started a doctoral program because I was bored in my administrative position and needed a new challenge. That endeavor was indeed a challenge. I chose my topic because, in my position as senior administrator in my own unit, I wanted the knowledge to influence positive changes in our work environment. In retrospect, I intuitively knew that the environment needed changing in our unit and in my life, but at that stage I did not have the knowledge or even the permission to acknowledge these issues.

This research study was liberating for me. The administrative professionals I interviewed identified elements in their positive work environments that I came to realize were missing from my then-present work environment. These external findings helped validate my feelings of restlessness and helped me identify what were the key elements of my boredom and discontent that lead me to start down this research path. I now understand that in validating those thoughts and feelings, I could then release them and move on to new challenges.

This freeing experience and the deep respect that I now have for the participants of this study have left me wanting to do more research into administrative professionals on campuses and into the new area of positive organizational scholarship.

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APPENDIX A

Application for Approval of Research Protocol

Invitation Email - Sample

Informed Consent Form for Participation

Consent Form for Data Transcription Release

Letter of Permission to Access Sample

Site and Participant Selection Form

Interview Guide

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

Application for Approval of Research Protocol

1. Name of researcher(s)

Dr. Patrick Renihan Supervisor, Educational Administration

1a. Name of student(s)

Douglas Dombrosky Ph.D. Study, Educational Administration

1b. Anticipated start date of the research study (phase) and the expected completion date of the study (phase).

Anticipated Start Date: December, 2010

Anticipated End Date: March, 2011

2. Title of Study

Graduate studies administrators' perceptions of a positive work environment.

3. Abstract (100-250 words)

The purpose of this study is to explore the dynamics of a positive workplace setting as perceived by administrative professionals in graduate studies administrative units. A limited number of studies have identified the negative impact of the university environment on administrative professionals on campus. However, these represent pathological responses to the pervasive issues

of the workplace environments. A qualitative case study approach will be used in this study to identify what gives life to professional administrators at their place of work.

The first phase of this study will be to identify administrative professionals in graduate studies administrative offices across western Canada who self identify as working in positive, healthy environments. The second phase of the study will determine which administrative professionals and administrative units will be examined by an analysis of their responses to a brief survey.. The third stage will involve the interview of the administrative professionals. The participants will be interviewed three times: first to gather historical information and context; second, to identify the dynamics and unit culture as perceived by the individual; and third to clarify meanings arising from the discussions.

Further case evidence will consist of site documentation and direct observation. The multiple data sources will be evaluated for convergent themes. Research reliability will further be enhanced through the development of a case study database. The final report will combine the emergent themes with participant accounts to provide rich description and to enhance the chain of evidence for the outside observer (Yin, 2009). This study could inform future university policy and further the use of the positive organizational scholarship.

4. Funding

This study will be self-funded.

5. Conflict of Interest

There is no anticipated conflict of interest in this study.

6. Participants

An invitation will be emailed to the graduate studies administrators across western Canada as provided from the Western Canadian Deans of Graduate Studies web site

(<http://grad.usask.ca/wcdgs/index.html>). Interested participants will be invited to fill out a brief survey to indicate interest and provide basic information required for the selection stage of the study. Six individuals representing three sites will be selected.

7. Recruitment

Recruitment material is included in Appendix A.

- Invitation to participate
- Criteria for Site and Participant Selection
- Letter of Permission to Access

8. Consent

The consent form is included in Appendix A.

9. Methods/Procedures

This is a qualitative study and will be following the multiple case study approach.

10. Storage of Data

Upon completion of the study, all data (digital tapes, electronic, and paper) will be securely stored and retained by Dr. Patrick Renihan, Department of Educational Administration in the College of Education in accordance with the guidelines defined by the University of Saskatchewan. The data will be placed in a locked cabinet for a minimum of five years. The data will be stored for five years after the completion of the study. After this time, the data will be destroyed.

11. Dissemination of Results

Results of this project will potentially be used for scientific publications and presentations to professionals, and policy makers. Results of the study may be also used in a book or other

publishable format. The stories will be written using pseudonyms; the stories will be fictionalized in such a manner that third parties and locations cannot be identified.

12. Risk, Benefits and Deception

No deception is involved in this study. Participants will not be exposed to harm, discomforts, or perceived harm.

There might be one possible risk. Although the interview will be focusing on the life giving or positive aspects of the individual's work environment, some negative dynamics about the environment may come forward. These comments may put the individuals at risk.

Participants will be warned of this possibility at the initial contact by the researcher. However, the names and locations of the individuals will have no significance to the outcome of the study and these and other identifying information will be changed to protect all concerned. The participants will be able to change their transcripts if they feel the information they shared will compromise their identity or their position.

- a) *Are you planning to study a vulnerable population? This would include, for example, people who are in a state of emotional distress, who are physically sick, who have recently experience a traumatic event, or who have been recruited into a study because they have previously experiences a severe emotional trauma, such as abuse?* NO
- b) *Are you planning to study a captive or dependent population, such as children or prisoners?* NO
- c) *Is there an institutional/power relationship between researcher and participant (e.g. employer/employee, teacher/student, counselor/client)?* NO
- d) *Will it be possible to associate specific information in your data file with specific participants?* NO
- e) *Is there a possibility that third parties may be exposed to loss of confidentiality/anonymity?* NO (see risk above)
- f) *Are you audio or videotaping?* YES. Participants will be audio and video recorded, but recordings will be heard and seen only by the researcher and by the transcriber, who is separate from the interview locations. The transcriptions will be returned to participants will be asked if they think there is any information that will identify them to those in their place of work or university, and if they do find any such material, this information will be deleted or changed. Participants will review the changes. Participants will be asked to sign a transcript release form once the final transcript is agreed to.

- g) *Will participants be actively deceived or misled?* NO.
- h) *Are the research procedures likely to cause any degree of discomfort, fatigue or stress?* NO.
- i) *Do you plan to ask participants questions that are personal or sensitive? Are there questions that might be upsetting to the respondent?* ???? Background information – family of origin, employment history.
- j) *Are the procedures likely to induce embarrassment, humiliation, lowered self-esteem, guilt, conflict, anger, distress, or any other negative emotional state?* NO.
- k) *Is there any social risk (e.g. possible loss of status, privacy or reputation)?* NO.
- l) *Will the research infringe on the rights of participants by, for example, withholding beneficial treatment in control groups, restricting access to education or treatment?* NO.
- m) *Will participants receive compensation of any type? Is the degree of compensation sufficient to act as coercion to participate?* NO.
- n) *Can you think of any other possible harm that participants might experience as a result of participating in this study?* NO.

13. Confidentiality

All sites and participants will be assigned pseudonyms. Locations and other indentifying information will be fictionalized. The total number of respondents will be from ten to twenty. A Transcript Release Form (Appendix A) will be required of each participant. While we cannot entirely remove the possibility of identification of sites and individuals, all efforts will be made to protect anonymity. For example, sites and names will be changed and transcripts and reports will be read by the researcher and another colleague for instances of possible site and person identification.

14. Data/Transcript Release

Because it is possible that the anonymity of participants may be compromised through direct quotes, participants will be provided with the opportunity to withdraw their responses after their interview and prior to the publication of the findings. Participants will be asked to review the final transcript and sign a transcript release form wherein they acknowledge by that the transcript accurately reflects what they said or intended to say.

15. Debriefing and feedback

Participants are provided with information on how the researcher can be contacted if they have questions or concerns in the letter of information describing the study they received. A brief executive summary of the project will be provided to each of the participants upon request.

16. Required Signatures

_____	_____	_____
Douglas Dombrosky	Dr. Patrick Renihan	Dr. Patrick Renihan
Student	Supervisor	Department Head (Acting)
164 Delaronde Road	Educational	Educational
Saskatoon, SK	Administration	Administration
S7J 3Y4	College of Education	College of Education
(306) 717-0853	University of	University of
douglas.dombrosky@gmail.com	Saskatchewan	Saskatchewan
	28 Campus Drive	28 Campus Drive
	Saskatoon, SK	Saskatoon, SK
	S7N 0X1	S7N 0X1
	(306) 966-7620	(306) 966-7620
	pat.renihan@usask.ca	pat.renihan@usask.ca

Certificate of Approval



Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Patrick Remhan

DEPARTMENT
Educational Administration

BEH#
10-309

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED
University of Saskatchewan

STUDENT RESEARCHERS
Douglas Dombrosky

SPONSOR
UNFUNDED

TITLE
Graduate Studies Administrators' Perceptions of a Positive Work Environment

ORIGINAL REVIEW DATE
26 Nov 2010

APPROVAL ON
11-Jan-2011

APPROVAL OF
Ethics Application
Consent Protocol

EXPIRY DATE
11-Jan-2012

Full Board Meeting ☐

Date of Full Board Meeting

Delegated Review ☒

Expedited Review: ☐

CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics_review/

Please send all correspondence to:

Research Ethics Office
University of Saskatchewan
Box 1000 RPO University, 1602-110 Gymnasium Place
Saskatoon SK S7N 4J8

Appendix A – Relevant Forms

Invitation Email – Sample

Dear graduate studies administrator;

My name is Douglas Dombrosky and I am a PhD candidate with the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan. The title of my study is **Graduate Studies Administrators' perceptions of a positive work environment**. You are receiving this email because you are listed as an administrator on the Western Canadian Graduate Deans website. I am well aware of the work of graduate studies administrators since I was an administrator in graduate college at the University of Saskatchewan and a member of WCGD for 14 years.

I am interested in exploring the aspects of workplace environments that administrative professionals would consider positive. In order to identify possible study sites, I am interested in the general nature of your workplace environment. To do this, I would appreciate your response to these three questions.

1) To what extent would you agree that your overall workplace environment is a positive one?

1 2 3 4 5

(Strongly Disagree)

(Strongly

Agree)

2) To what extent do you believe that your colleagues would view their work environment as positive?

1 2 3 4 5

(Strongly Disagree) (Strongly Agree)

3) If you agree that your workplace environment is positive, what would be the main reasons for your ranking?

Would you be prepared to participate in the next phase of this study, which involve discussions you as th the aspects of your workplace that you consider positive?

YES NO NEED MORE INFORMATION (see contact information below)

I appreciate your support in this. I know you are all working hard to take care of your graduate students and I will respect your time and effort. If you have any questions on this please, contact me at douglas.dombrosky@gmail.com or call me at 1.306.717.0853.

Respectfully yours,

Douglas Dombrosky

Douglas.dombrosky@gmail.com

+1.306.717.0853

Informed Consent Form for Participation

You are invited to participate in a study entitled **Graduate Studies Administrators' perceptions of a positive work environment**. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

Researchers:

Patrick Renihan, PhD	University of Saskatchewan	306.966.7620
Douglas Dombrosky	University of Saskatchewan, PhD Candidate	306.717.0853

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the dynamics of a positive workplace setting as perceived by administrative professionals in Graduate Studies administrative units. A limited number of studies have identified the negative impact of the university environment on administrative professionals on campus. However, these represent pathological responses to the pervasive issues of the workplace environments. A qualitative case study approach will be used in this study to identify what gives life to professional administrators at their place of work.

The first phase of this study will be to identify administrative professionals in graduate studies administrative offices across western Canada who self-identify as working in positive, healthy environments. The second phase of the study will determine which administrative professionals and administrative units will be examined by an analysis of their responses to a brief survey. The third stage will involve the interview of the administrative professionals. The participants will be interviewed three times: first to gather historical information and context; second, to identify the dynamics and unit culture as perceived by the individual; and third to clarify meanings arising from the discussions.

Further case evidence will consist of site documentation and direct observation. The multiple data sources will be evaluated for convergent themes. Research reliability will further be enhanced through the development of a case study database. The final report will combine the emergent themes with participant accounts to provide rich description and to enhance the chain of evidence for the outside observer (Yin, 2009). This study could inform future university policy and further the use of the positive organizational scholarship.

Potential Risks: No deception is involved in this study. Participants will not be exposed to harm, discomforts, or perceived harm.

There might be one possible risk. Although the interview will be focusing on the life giving or positive aspects of the individual's work environment, some negative dynamics about the environment may come forward. These comments may put the individuals at risk. However, the names and locations of the individuals will have no significance to the outcome of the study and these and other indentifying information will be changed to protect all concerned. The participants will be able to change their transcripts if they feel the information they shared will compromise their identity or their position.

Potential Benefits: This research will provided valuable information for literature, theory and practice regarding the dynamics of positive work environments for administrative professionals on university campuses. This study could inform future university policy, further the use of the positive organizational scholarship and bring hope to administrative professionals in less positive university environments.

The information gathered from the participants in this study will be used for presentations at conferences, personal venues, and scientific publications. The recording from the interviews will be

transcribed verbatim. You will be asked to sign a transcript release form. Data resulting from the interviews will be analyzed for patterns and themes.

Storage of Data: Upon completion of the study, all data (digital tapes, electronic, and paper) will be securely stored and retained by Dr. Patrick Renihan, Department of Educational Administration in the College of Education in accordance with the guidelines defined by the University of Saskatchewan. The data will be placed in a locked cabinet for a minimum of five years. The data will be stored for five years after the completion of the study. After this time, the data will be destroyed.

Confidentiality: All sites and participants will be assigned pseudonyms. Locations and other identifying information will be fictionalized. The total number of respondents will be from ten to twenty. A Transcript Release Form will be required of each participant. While we cannot entirely remove the possibility of identification of sites and individuals, all efforts will be made to protect anonymity. For example, sites and names will be changed and transcripts and reports will be read by the researcher and another colleague for instances of possible site and person identification.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort. If you withdraw from the study at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. Throughout the study you will be asked to complete additional consent forms for each of the case study participant contacts. As researchers, we will advise you, the participant, of any new information that may have a bearing on your decision to participate.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above if you have any questions at a

later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (insert date).

Consent to Participate: I have read and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the first phase of the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

(Name of Participant – please print)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

Please provide the telephone number and email address you wish to be contacted at:

(Telephone)

(Email address)

Consent Form for Data Transcription Release

Study Title: The form of life on campus: Graduate Studies Administrators' perceptions of a positive work environment..

I am returning the transcripts of your audio-recorded interviews and copy of the social network diagram for your perusal.

I, _____, have reviewed the completed transcripts and charts of my personal interviews in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter and delete information from them as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcripts and charts accurately reflect what I said in my personal interviews with Douglas Dombrosky. I hereby authorize the release of the transcript and diagram to Douglas Dombrosky to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Data Transcription Release Form for my own records.

Participant Signature

Date

Researcher Signature

Date

Letter of Permission to Access Sample

Dear Graduate Dean;

Thank you for considering this request to allow me to conduct my research titled: **Graduate Studies Administrators' perceptions of a positive work environment**. The purpose of this study is to explore the dynamics of a positive workplace in a university setting as perceived by administrative professionals (non-faculty middle managers) working in Graduate Studies administrative units.

Some limited studies have identified the negative impact of the university environment on administrative professionals on campus. However, these represent pathological responses to pervasive issues in university workplace environments. A qualitative case study model will be used to identify what gives life to professional administrators at their place of work.

One or more of your administrators have already identified your graduate administrative unit as being a positive place to work in an email survey and has agreed to participate in this study. I would ask your assistance in allowing me to come into your graduate school to interview these individuals in your unit. Each of the three semi-structured, recorded, one-on-one interviews will be about one hour in length and take place during the month of January, and early February, 2011. Care will be taken to minimize any disruption to the unit's work day.

As part of the case study approach, I would also ask for a tour of your unit as well as permission to acquire copies of any documentation that might provide insight into the positive nature of your administrative unit.

I will take great care to ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of any participants and their locations will be preserved. Specific situations and people will not be identified; rather themes or commonality arising from the workplace environments will be examined. Some direct quotes from interviews may be used but these only with the permission of the participants and with adjustments to

preserve their anonymity. Each participant will also be provided with a copy of their data and transcripts, as well as a copy of the results of the study. If you wish, I can provide you with a copy of the study as well. The results will be used for my doctoral dissertation, and may later be published in a scholarly journal, and used for a presentation or at a conference.

The goal of this study is find out what is great about working at your graduate school/college. This study could inform future university policy and further the study of positive work environments generally.

Douglas Dombrosky

Researcher

University of Saskatchewan

Date

Interview Questions

Beginning:

1. How long have you been working at the University – in this unit?
2. Tell me about your work and your average work day.

Individual:

3. What are the elements of a good workplace for you personally?
4. What is it about your work environment that gets you excited about coming to work?
5. Can you give me an example of a time when you were energized/excited by your work?

Unit:

6. Describe the most important aspects of a great work team as you have experienced it.
7. Tell me about a time when people worked together as a team? What did that look like? What did that feel like?
8. Give me examples of what other people in your unit are doing to make this a great place to work?

Organizational:

9. What are your thoughts and feelings about this university?
10. What is the university doing to create a positive workplace for you?
11. Describe a time of a university level event/policy/issue got you excited about working here?

Ending:

12. What message you would like to tell everyone about this place?
13. Is there anything else that you think I should know to understand your workplace?
14. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Beginning:

1. How long have you been working at the University – in this unit?
2. Tell me about your work and your average work day.

Individual:

3. What are the elements of a good workplace for you personally?
4. What is it about your work environment that gets you excited about coming to work?
5. Can you give me an example of a time when you were energized/excited by your work?

Unit:

6. Describe the most important aspects of a great work team as you have experienced it.
7. Tell me about a time when people worked together as a team? What did that look like? What did that feel like?
8. Give me examples of what other people in your unit are doing to make this a great place to work?
9. We have dealt with the positive aspects of your workplace, now I would also like insight into the tensions that might influence this as well. Within the unit, are there any tensions with any aspect of work-life that would affect your perceptions?

Organizational:

10. What are your thoughts and feelings about this university?
11. What is the university doing to create a positive workplace for you?
12. Describe a time of a university level event/policy/issue got you excited about working here?
13. Across the university are there any tensions that would influence your perceptions of this work environment?

Ending:

14. What message you would like to tell everyone about this place?
15. Is there anything else that you think I should know to understand your workplace?
16. Is there anything you would like to ask me?