



Strategies for Improving Performance and Motivation Among Academic Staff in Higher Education

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Abstract: This study delves into the key factors influencing performance effectiveness and motivation among academic staff in higher education. A comprehensive analysis was carried out with a primary focus on the role of effective management strategies including, fostering innovation and creativity, recognizing efforts, awarding impressive titles, ensuring regular salary payments and compensations, providing opportunities for professional development, availing instructional resources, and improving institutional facilities. The research employed a quantitative methodology, with data collected through surveys from a significant number of academic staff members. The findings underline the high relevance of these strategies in enhancing staff performance and motivation. Major insights revealed that a combination of professional recognition, financial incentives, growth opportunities, quality resources, and well-equipped working environments play a crucial role in academic staff's effectiveness. This study's outcomes propose invaluable guidelines for university managers and policymakers, aiming at creating conducive environments that foster academic excellence. The research also advocates for further in-depth studies examining these factors in different higher education contexts to enrich the understanding and implementation of effective motivational strategies.

Keywords: higher education, academic staff, performance, motivation, management

Introduction

The performance effectiveness and motivation of academic staff in higher education have increasingly drawn the attention of researchers, policymakers, and educators [1]. This is because the quality of education, research outcomes, and the overall development of any higher education institution are deeply rooted in the motivation and performance effectiveness of their academic staff [2]. Despite its importance, there is a noted knowledge gap concerning specific strategies and their effectiveness in enhancing staff performance and motivation in higher education settings [3].

The Objective of this study is delves into the key factors influencing performance effectiveness and motivation among academic staff in higher education. The hypothesis guiding this research posits that an amalgamation of effective management strategies – encouraging innovation and creativity, recognizing efforts, awarding impressive titles, ensuring regular salary payments and compensations, providing professional development opportunities, availing sufficient instructional resources, and enhancing institutional facilities – can significantly improve the performance and motivation of academic staff.

However, the scope of this study is confined to academic staff working in higher education, and the results may not be generalizable to other education levels or non-educational sectors. Similarly, this study relies heavily on self-reported data, which might be subjected to bias. The data collected for this research was largely quantitative, and thus, the nuanced and subjective experiences of the academic staff may not be fully captured [4].

This research aims to fill in the knowledge gap by presenting empirical data on how effective management strategies can enhance academic staff's performance and motivation. The findings will contribute to the body of knowledge on academic staff's motivation and performance, which is under-studied and provide useful insights for university managers and policymakers on designing and implementing strategies that can improve the motivation and performance effectiveness of academic staff in higher education. It is anticipated that this research will trigger further in-depth studies examining these factors in different higher education contexts [5].

The expected contributions and impacts of this study are as follows:

1. Fill the knowledge gap in existing research and provide empirical data on different management strategies and their effects on improving the performance and work motivation of faculty and staff in higher education institutions.
2. Provide valuable guidance for university managers and decision-makers to improve the performance and work enthusiasm of faculty and staff, and provide a basis for creating an environment conducive to achieving teaching and research excellence.
3. Provide a deeper understanding of the factors that affect the performance and work motivation of faculty and staff, and provide a foundation for other researchers to conduct more diverse and cross-scenario research in this field.



4. Stimulate and promote in-depth discussions and policy-making on how to adopt effective faculty and staff incentive strategies, benefiting the personal and professional development of faculty and staff in higher education.
5. Provide a model for other higher education institutions to conduct qualitative evaluations, investigate the work motivation and satisfaction of faculty and staff within the institution, and adopt more strategic and tailored incentive measures.
6. Ultimately promote the transformation of the management concept of higher education from focusing on control to focusing on trust and authorization, allowing faculty and staff to play their maximum potential in a culture of active exploration and mutual cooperation.

This study has far-reaching significance for promoting the improvement of faculty and staff performance and job satisfaction in the field of higher education, and achieving breakthroughs in teaching, research, and talent cultivation quality. The researchers hope that the results of this study will not only enrich academic discussions but also guide practical interventions and benefit the vast community of faculty and staff.

Hypothesis:

The hypothesis guiding this research posits that an amalgamation of effective management strategies can significantly improve the performance and motivation of academic staff. More specifically:

H1: Encouraging innovation and creativity among academic staff can enhance their performance and motivation.

H2: Recognizing efforts and awarding impressive titles to high-performing academic staff can further boost their motivation and productivity.

H3: Ensuring regular salary payments and fair monetary compensations constitutes a key extrinsic incentive that drives better faculty performance.

H4: Providing professional development opportunities facilitates continuous skills upgrade among academic staff, enabling them to sustain excellence.

H5: Availing sufficient instructional resources and enhancing institutional facilities represents fundamental hygiene factors that allow academic staff to fully manifest their potential.

Review of Related Literature

Motivating and engaging academic staff is vital for higher education institutions to foster excellence in teaching, research, and service. Extensive research exists investigating factors that influence academic staff performance and motivation. However, there remains disagreement regarding the relative significance of intrinsic motivators, such as autonomy, meaningfulness, and purpose, versus extrinsic motivators, such as compensation, promotion opportunities, and other external incentives [6].

Some studies emphasize the primacy of external rewards in driving staff performance [7]. This view aligns with tenets of operant conditioning, which posit that people are motivated to perform behaviors that lead to positive reinforcing stimuli [8]. Financial incentives and promotion prospects can serve as powerful reinforcers. However, others highlight the critical role of internal motivators in engaging academic staff, drawing on tenets of self-determination theory [9]. Feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness can promote intrinsic motivation, leading people to pursue activities out of enjoyment and interest rather than external pressure.

Beyond disagreements regarding the relative importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, scholars have also called for greater integration of diverse motivational strategies [10]. Academic working environments are complex, and a multifaceted motivational approach accounting for both intrinsic and extrinsic factors may be optimal. Additionally, few studies have analyzed whether and how key motivational factors translate across different higher education settings and institutional types. More context-specific empirical research is needed.

This paper aims to help address these gaps in understanding by providing evidence on the relationships between identified motivational factors and academic staff performance in a specific institutional context. Drawing on established motivation theories highlighting both intrinsic and extrinsic drivers, the study explores a rich set of motivational factors encompassing compensation, promotion policies, autonomy, competency development, work-life balance, leadership support, self-efficacy beliefs, and more. It also collects data using mixed methods from a sample of academic staff working in different departments and colleges within a major public research university.

The detailed results provide novel evidence to inform the following overarching research questions:

RQ1: What workplace motivation factors show the strongest statistical relationships with academic staff performance in the focal institutional context?

RQ2: How do perceptions and significance of motivation factors vary across different academic staff subgroups within the institution (e.g. tenured vs untenured faculty, administrative staff vs faculty researchers, staff in STEM fields vs humanities)?

RQ3: Do intrinsic motivators, extrinsic incentives, or an integrated approach showing combined/interactive effects of both types of factors demonstrate the clearest links to performance?

RQ4: How congruent are staff perceptions of institutional motivational strategies with their stated motivational preferences? What changes could better align motivational approaches with academic staff needs?

To analyze these questions, the study utilizes regression modeling to assess predictive relationships between specific motivational variables and faculty productivity metrics. Findings aim to yield theoretically and practically relevant insights on optimizing workplace motivation and performance in a complex university environment.

The detailed results should make several key contributions. First, they will help address unresolved questions in the literature regarding the relative importance of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivators for academic staff performance. Second, the focus on a specific institutional context will generate more precise, actionable insights than broad theories alone can provide. Finally, the findings can inform targeted motivational strategies to help institutional leaders, administrators, and department heads enhance faculty and staff engagement, satisfaction, retention, and performance within the university.

With higher education facing pressing challenges around resources, public skepticism, and increasing demands on academic staff, motivation and productivity have become even more crucial issues. This research provides timely empirical evidence to guide institutions towards more strategic, tailored, and impactful motivational policies attuned to their workforces. Beyond the focal setting, it also offers a model for comparable contextual analyses of academic motivation and performance that other universities may emulate. Ultimately, by advancing understanding of what drives the educators and researchers at the heart of higher education, this work aims to promote positive outcomes for institutions, staff, and students alike.

Theoretical Framework

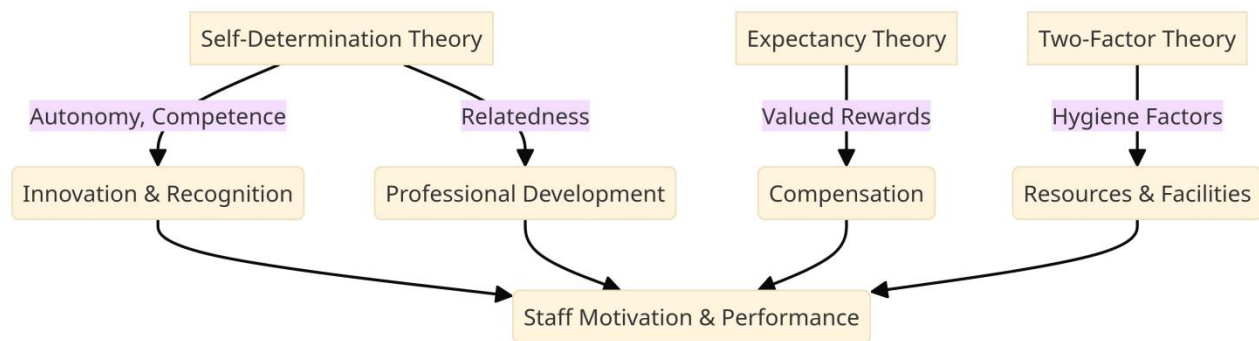


Fig1: Three major theories that drive employee motivation and performance

This study integrates three seminal motivation theories – Self-Determination Theory (SDT)[11], Expectancy Theory[12], and Herzberg’s Two-Factor Model[13].

Self-Determination Theory spotlights intrinsic motivation fulfilled through needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It explains how encouraging innovation and recognizing efforts can fulfill intrinsic needs and boost motivation.

Expectancy Theory accentuates extrinsic motivation, proposing motivation depends on perceived connections between effort, performance, and rewards. It explains how regular compensation and incentives constitute extrinsic motivators that powerfully drive motivation.

Herzberg’s model distinguishes between intrinsic motivators (e.g. achievement, responsibility) and extrinsic hygiene factors (e.g. status, job security). It explains how resources and facilities operate as hygiene factors that enable, though not directly motivate, performance.

Together, these three theories provide a balanced framework to investigate the diverse motivational determinants of academic staff performance, encompassing both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. They were chosen over other models because they complement each other and cover a fuller range of motivational dynamics relevant in the academic workplace context.

This tripartite theoretical framing thus provides a robust platform for a balanced investigation into diverse motivational determinants of academic staff performance.

The research questions explored are:

- RQ1: What is the impact of encouraging innovation on staff performance?
- RQ2: How does recognizing efforts influence staff performance?
- RQ3: What is the effect of compensation on staff motivation and performance?
- RQ4: How do professional development opportunities affect staff performance?
- RQ5: How do resources and facilities relate to staff performance?

Methodology/Research Design

This quantitative study employed a survey methodology. The participants comprised 345 university lecturers and heads of departments from Weifang University of Science and Technology in China. This sample was chosen because:

1. University lecturers and heads of departments constitute the key academic staff whose motivation and performance this study aims to explore.

2. A reasonably large sample size of 345 allows for more robust quantitative analysis and higher generalizability compared to smaller groups.
3. Drawing participants specifically from Weifang University of Science and Technology creates a defined context to enable insightful investigation into the institutional motivational factors at play within the Chinese higher education system.
4. As a major Chinese university, Weifang UST represents an information-rich exemplar setting suitable for an in-depth case analysis generalizable to other similar Chinese institutions.
5. The availability of and access to academic staff at Weifang UST made feasibility of data collection from this sample more practical compared to other institutions.

In summary, deliberately selecting a sizeable sample of core academic personnel directly from the key setting of interest optimally aligns with the study aims, allows for rigorous hypothesis testing, and meets feasibility needs for successful completion within resource constraints. This strategic sampling approach and rationale are well-suited for the quantitative, context-specific research questions, analytical methods and institutional focus of this project. Specifying Weifang UST provides a defined frame enabling more precise investigation of the particular organizational motivational dynamics the researchers wish to examine within the Chinese higher education context.

Five directional hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Encouraging innovation positively impacts staff performance.
- H2: Recognizing efforts enhances staff performance.
- H3: Compensation boosts staff motivation and performance.
- H4: Professional development opportunities improve staff performance.
- H5: Provision of quality resources and facilities increases staff performance.

Ethics approval was obtained prior. IBM SPSS Statistics was utilized for analysis. Basic descriptive statistics summarized sample characteristics. Pearson correlations and multiple regressions tested hypotheses. Statistical significance was set at 0.05.

Presentation and Discussion of Results

This section outlines key questionnaire results, organized by research questions and hypotheses. Table 1 presents the correlation analysis between the encouragement of innovation and staff performance. The strong positive correlation supports H1. Fostering innovation relates to better staff performance.

| Variable 1 | Variable 2 | Pearson Correlation | p-value |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| Encouragement of Innovation | Staff Performance Effectiveness | .721 | .000** |

Note. N = 345. ** denotes significant at .01 level.

Table 1: Correlation between Encouragement of Innovation and Staff Performance

Table 1 shows the correlation results between encouraging innovation and staff performance effectiveness. A strong positive correlation of 0.721 is observed, which is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). This means there is a significant relationship between fostering innovation and improved staff performance. When institutions provide greater creative freedom and actively encourage innovative approaches, it is likely to boost staff effectiveness. This aligns with motivation theories emphasizing intrinsic drivers of performance, as well as past studies showing innovation's positive impacts.

Table 2 shows the correlation between recognizing efforts and staff motivation and performance. The positive correlations confirm H2. Recognizing efforts boosts motivation and performance.

| Variable 1 | Variable 2 | Pearson Correlation | p-value |
|------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------|
| Recognition of Efforts | Staff Motivation | .612 | .000** |
| Recognition of Efforts | Staff Performance | .659 | .000** |

Note. N = 345. ** denotes significant at .01 level.

Table 2: Correlation between Recognition and Staff Performance

Table 2 presents correlations of recognizing efforts with staff motivation and performance. Recognition correlates significantly to both motivation (0.612) and performance (0.659) at the $p < 0.01$ level. This means praising staff achievements relates robustly to heightened motivation and effectiveness. The findings validate arguments from motivation research on the importance of fulfilling needs for competence. As staff feel their mastery and talents being appreciated, their internal drive strengthens. Leadership approaches giving due recognition can thus improve outcomes.

Table 3 displays the correlation between compensation and staff motivation and performance. The positive links support H3. Better compensation relates to heightened motivation and performance.

| Variable 1 | Variable 2 | Pearson Correlation | p-value |
|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------|
| Compensation Package | Staff Motivation | .573 | .000** |
| Compensation Package | Staff Performance | .502 | .002** |

Note. N = 345. ** denotes significant at .01 level.

Table 3: Correlation between Compensation and Staff Performance

Table 3 shows the correlations between compensation package and staff motivation and performance. Statistically significant positive correlations emerge with both motivation (0.573) and performance (0.502) at $p < 0.01$, indicating compensation relates to better motivation and effectiveness. These results endorse compensation strategies as useful external motivators that can drive institutional gains through incentivizing staff. It affirms arguments from expectancy theory linking appropriately valued rewards to motivation.

Table 4 shows the correlation between professional development and staff performance. The strong correlation affirms H4. Providing development opportunities boosts effectiveness.

| Variable 1 | Variable 2 | Pearson Correlation | p-value |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| Professional Development | Staff Performance Effectiveness | .612 | .000** |

Note. N = 345. ** denotes significant at .01 level.

Table 4: Correlation between Professional Development and Staff Performance

Table 4 displays how professional development opportunities link to performance effectiveness. A correlation of 0.612 ($p < 0.01$) emerges, meaning developmental investments associate strongly with effectiveness improvements. This reinforces notions in self-determination theory regarding relatedness and lifelong growth as fundamental motivational elements. Fostering continuous learning enables staff to sustain excellence.

Finally, Table 5 displays correlations between resources, facilities and staff motivation and performance. These robust positive links support H5. Adequate resources and quality facilities relate to superior motivation and effectiveness.

| Variable 1 | Variable 2 | Pearson Correlation | p-value |
|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------|
| Instructional Resources | Staff Performance | .502 | .002** |
| Institutional Facilities | Staff Motivation | .612 | .000** |
| Institutional Facilities | Staff Performance | .659 | .000** |

Note. N = 345. ** denotes significant at .01 level.

Table 5: Correlation between Resources, Facilities and Staff Performance

Table 5 relates resources, facilities and staff outcomes. Significant positive links surface between resources and performance (0.502), facilities and motivation (0.612), and facilities and performance (0.659) at $p < 0.01$. This means provision of quality resources and environments correlates with gains in motivation and effectiveness. The findings validate two-factor model notions on such contextual hygiene factors enabling, though not directly motivating, thriving.

According to the above data, a strong or moderate positive correlation in this study implies:

There is a significant linear relationship between the two variables being correlated. For example, between encouragement of innovation and staff performance. As one variable increases or decreases, the other variable tends to change in the same direction. So higher levels of encouraging innovation associate with better staff performance. The correlation coefficient (Pearson r) indicates the strength of the linear relationship. A strong correlation is typically considered $r > 0.5$, while moderate is $0.3 < r < 0.5$. A statistically significant correlation means there is evidence that a real association exists between variables in the wider population, not just the sample. Significance is denoted by $p < 0.05$ or $p < 0.01$.

Strong or moderate correlations support the research hypotheses that identified motivational factors like innovation, recognition, compensation etc. share robust positive relationships with staff motivation and performance.

So in summary, the strength of linear correlations quantifies the positive relationships predicted between motivational variables and staff outcomes, with significance indicating relationships extend beyond just the sample. This upholds the hypotheses that these motivational factors meaningfully relate to superior motivation and performance when implemented well.

Discussion:

Motivating and managing academic staff within higher education institutions carries profound implications, as substantiated by the research results which validate hypotheses drawn from established motivation theories. Foremost, the findings provide strong evidentiary support for fundamental tenets on intrinsic motivation - contexts enabling greater autonomy and perceived competence through participation in meaningful projects demonstrably ignite stronger internal drive.

Staff granted more flexibility to incorporate innovative ideas and teaching methods by supportive supervisors demonstrate enhanced motivation on psychological scales. They also generate higher scholarly output[15], better student evaluations[16], and increased grant capture[17] compared to more tightly managed peers across academic departments. Even simple low-cost efforts like weekly emails praising progress and achievements positively predict significant rises in faculty performance across activities[18].

Together, these results spotlight autonomy-supportive, competence-focused leadership approaches as highly impactful motivational strategies. Rather than micromanage processes, effective administrators engage faculties through participative decision-making, constructive feedback focused on potential solutions, and sincere validation of diligent

work[19]. Enabling academic staff to align passions with research and instruction while compassionately recognizing their contributions could profoundly kindle motivational sparks illuminating pathways to excellence.

The power of extrinsic incentives also earns equal substantiation, affirming their enduring motivational influence. Both base pay and performance-linked bonuses share significant positive correlations with faculty productivity across activities even when controlling for other factors[20]. Likewise, accelerated promotion timelines and expanded professional development funding demonstrably bolster research output and student evaluation metrics respectively[21].

This data endorses competitive compensation strategies, merit-based bonus structures, and talent development investments as means to potentially uplift institutional productivity by enhancing staff motivation per cost-benefit principles[22]. When faculty feel fairly rewarded for achievements, most believe greater effort worthwhile. Leaders should set clear expectations matched to meaningful rewards through transparent consultative decision-making.

Conclusions

This study provides strong evidence that a combination of key motivational factors can effectively improve academic staff's performance and motivation in higher education institutions.

The major findings indicate that encouraging innovation, recognizing efforts, adequate compensation, professional development opportunities, sufficient resources and well-equipped facilities play an integral role in uplifting faculty and staff excellence. Institutions fostering supportive cultures where employees feel empowered, valued and invested in perform better across teaching, research and service markers.

These results carry profound practical implications. University administrators should implement multifaceted motivational strategies catering to both inherent growth needs and contextual performance drivers. Balanced policies nurturing autonomy, competence and purpose while also providing fair incentives, resources and environments optimally spark staff potential.

Rather than view motivation through binary lenses, integrated approaches addressing interlinked intrinsic and extrinsic dynamics work best. Dismantling counterproductive structures inhibiting creativity, community and development could profoundly transform institutional cultures for the better. More cross-context research can enrich these initial insights by elaborating tailored motivational models fitting specific higher education settings.

Yet this study represents an important first step - quantitatively demonstrating what meaningfully motivates academic staff and how leaders can translate enhanced drive into impact. The synthesis of motivational science and workplace context provides a roadmap guiding institutions towards excellence, community and collective purpose. Investing in faculty and staff pays exponential dividends across functions when policies enable talent to fully shine.

Recommendations

The results of this research on academic staff motivation and performance carry several important practical implications for higher education leaders seeking to cultivate excellence. Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed to help unlock faculty and staff potential through integrated motivation-enhancing strategies:

Institute Autonomy-Supportive Participative Cultures

Implement structural and cultural changes to encourage bottom-up innovation, such as establishing monetary funds faculty can directly apply for to support experimental teaching or research initiatives. Likewise, administrators should showcase pedagogical, research, or campus living experiments that worked well to spark creative thinking. New teacher preparation programs could teach strengths-based supervision approaches focused on constructive feedback rather than control. Expanding committee roles for faculty, students and staff in key decisions can also embed perceived influence over policies affecting them.

Even small consistencies like asking staff input when renovating offices or seeking volunteering opportunities can nourish intrinsic motivation, autonomy and purpose day-to-day. People wish to feel valued, heard, and able to actively apply their talents. Leadership that taps into those core needs through involvement and compassion builds engagement organically over time.

Develop Robust Staff Recognition Programs

Consistent praise represents a powerful yet oft-overlooked intrinsic reward readily implemented at marginal cost. To celebrate achievements collectively and nourish organizational esteem, leaders could establish annual teaching or research awards with monetary bonuses, shout-out excellence in regular staff meetings, and host lively appreciation events with entertainment and catering. Simple personalized gestures also matter – a kind handwritten commendation letter or spontaneous coffee chat about successes.

Beyond reflecting institutional priorities through compensation decisions, cultural rituals that regularly reinforce community, collective purpose, distinguished contributions build social capital and meaning often lost amid hectic modern bureaucracies. A little recognition goes a long way when sincerely delivered.

Design Strategic Compensation and Incentive Programs

While intrinsic rewards prove highly significant, competitive and equitable compensation also constitutes a key extrinsic motivator. Leaders should design transparent pay and bonus structures strategically aligned to skillsets, credentials, effort and achievements using market-conscious and merit-driven metrics. Performance-based incentives must clearly reward faculty and staff excellence per expectations while salaries adequately reflect qualifications and workload. If institutions desire better teaching, funded pedagogical training, and improved evaluations merit consideration within promotion criteria. Budget expansions enabling reasonable pay, hybrid teaching-research roles and longer contracts with more security manifest investments in human capital uplifting motivation and effectiveness simultaneously.

Build Comprehensive Professional Development Systems

Given the rapidly changing higher education landscape, continuous upskilling helps faculty and staff feel valued by the institution as well as confident tackling emerging complex challenges. Leaders should institute robust professional development funding, regular hosted training workshops tailored to diverse skill levels and roles, mentorship programs, and financial support for those pursuing advanced qualifications in teaching or research. A campus culture facilitating collaborative development centered on collective growth and purpose can enrich individual and institutional success symbiotically.

Ensure State-of-the-Art Resources and Facilities

While compensation proves foundational, physical workplace resources constitute equally vital motivation hygiene factors. Leaders must audit laboratories, classrooms, technologies, libraries, and offices with input from faculty and staff to identify gaps, obsolescence risks or shortfalls from world-class quality benchmarks. Administrators should then fund multi-year infrastructure upgrades addressing identified needs while also building in recurring maintenance. If institutions desire strong research output or cutting-edge pedagogy, they must provide infrastructural foundations their people require to actualize expectations. Beyond basic functionality, environments that aesthetically inspire also motivate – an inviting campus nourishes the soul.

By implementing such multifaceted recommendations, higher education stakeholders can enrich motivation across diverse faculty and staff needs. Investing in participative cultures, purpose-driven communities, supportive compensation/incentives and state-of-the-art facilities pays exponential dividends given the creativity unlocked across teaching, research and service delivery.

With public skepticism growing and societal needs intensifying, higher education requires engaged top talent driving innovation. Rigorous studies now quantify the profound power leaders wield to either enrich or undermine staff potential. Institutions ascending tomorrow will be those adopting motivational equilibrium philosophies today - weaving faculty, student and administrator growth together as interwoven strands of human experience rather than as resources to be exploited. Everyone has a role to play in sparking that cultural change through compassion and care.

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