

# Academic Deans: Perceptions of Effort-Reward Imbalance, Over-Commitment, Hardiness, and Burnout

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## Abstract

This study explored challenges and stressors facing academic deans within higher education. The study analyzed, via step-wise multiple regression, the degree to which current challenges and related stress were associated with the well-being measures of effort-reward imbalance and over-commitment as measured by the Effort/Reward Imbalance scale (ERI); hardiness, as measured by the Dispositional Resilience Scale (DRS); and aspects of burnout, as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). Results indicated that the stress related to certain challenges (e.g., balancing financial resources, creating a clear vision, promoting change) have particularly powerful influences on aspects of work well-being. Implications and recommendations are included.

**Keywords:** academic deans, challenges, stressors, burnout, hardiness, over-commitment, solutions

## 1. Introduction

Seismic changes are occurring in higher education thus far in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In a recent analysis, the Boston Consulting Group cited unprecedented pressures in the academic side of higher education. These include pressure for institutions to halt tuition increases, an increased focus on return on investment, greater accountability for student outcomes, and a more aggressive implementation of new business delivery models to remain financially viable (Henry, Pagano, Puckett & Wilson, 2014). These trends place substantial pressure on academic higher education leaders to make rapid and significant changes on a number of fronts within their respective institutions (Watson & Watson, 2013).

It is universally accepted that academic college or school deans serve as critical change agents in this transformational process as they are relied upon to push colleges to evolve in ways that are fitting for their unique challenges (Williams-June, 2014). Effective academic deans advocate for both faculty and administrative goals and are able to gain sufficient trust of the faculty to enact change. Additionally, effective academic deans work to strengthen their respective academic programs while collaborating with other deans to apply best practice innovations (Williams-June, 2014). Perhaps most importantly, because academic deans guide and oversee many departments, faculty, and academic programs, they have unique opportunities to make substantial and sustainable structural and/or transformative changes within their areas of responsibility (English & Kramer, 2017). Indeed, academic deans are now expected by donors, college presidents and provosts, and community partners to enact such changes.

However, being an academic dean is not an easy or straightforward position. Often described as leading from the middle (Buller, 2007; Eddy, Mitchell & Amey, 2016), academic deans are described as ‘the tip of the spear’ for higher education institutions to successfully meet the challenges of the current disequilibrium and pressures that confront them (Halonen & Dunn, 2017, Wasicsko & Balch, 2015). And, as the prototypical midlevel manager, academic deans are often caught in that difficult place between the intentions of central administration, the state, donors, the community, and the needs of faculty. Williams-June (2014) asserted that, given the current pressures of higher education, now more than ever, “you’re in the line of fire as a dean” (p. 2). Gmelch, Hopkins, and Damico, (2002) note that “deans are puppets on a string being pulled in multiple directions” (p.46). Monaghan (2018) specifies that a

major question for virtually all academic deans is, in effect, how do I shore myself up for the tasks ahead? Wasicsko and Balch (2015) agree that an academic dean's job today is fraught with significant challenges and stress.

In addition, due to current turbulence, academic deans tend to have relatively shorter tenures than in the past and typically have little formal leadership preparation (Bennett, 2015; Wasicsko & Balch, 2015). They must also oftentimes address challenges emanating from long-tenured disgruntled faculty (Krebs, 2015; Vaillancourt, 2015), uncivil internal climates (Vaillancourt, 2015), and low empathy from others concerning the challenges inherent to this work (Matos, 2015; Monaghan, 2108). Cumulatively, these factors can add up to considerable stress (Ammons, 2010) and is at least in part attributed to an increasing shortage of professionals willing to step forward to serve in the position (Halonen & Dunn, 2017; Krebs, 2014; Harvey, Shaw, McPhail & Erickson, 2013).

Yet, there exists a considerable gap in the professional literature related to what specific challenges academic deans perceive and how they distinguish the stress related to those challenges. Most research conducted about deans in the United States has focused on biographical, structural, and contextual factors (Bowen 1995; Bright & Richards 2001; Clifford & Guthrie 1988; Gmelch 1999; Howey & Zimpher 1990; Thiessen & Howey 1998; Wepner, Henk, & Lovell, 2015). Wepner, et. al., (2015) noted that academic deans are positioned in the middle of administrative hierarchies in colleges and universities. They must mediate between administration and faculty (Gmelch 2002; Zimpher 1995).

Perhaps more importantly, there is an absence of professional literature that explores what effects this dynamic has on key job dissatisfiers and well-being like burnout and effort-reward imbalance. Morris and Laipple (2015) noted that as much as one in five academic deans leave their position each year; and among those who abandon the administrative path, perceived high stress and low perceived rewards are primary causal culprits. To summarize, academic deans' jobs are difficult and they are often poorly trained. Indeed, few academic administrators have had any leadership training prior to beginning their post, in sharp contrast with corporate America (Morris and Liapple, 2015). People in these positions often pay a heavy price related to their work (Harvey, et al., 2013). The extent to which the price is paid depends at least in part on the extent to which perceived challenges and related stress influence aspects of their workplace well-being, which could manifest in burnout, effort-reward imbalance, over-commitment, and lack of hardiness.

Therefore, a study was undertaken to investigate how nine perceived current challenges and stressors found in the professional literature (independent variables- IVs) (Coll, Niles, Coll, Ruch, & Stewart, 2018) influence academic deans' perceptions of effort-reward imbalance, over-commitment, hardiness, and aspects of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) (dependent variables-DVs). It is hoped that this study's results provide needed insight for academic deans as they strive to maximize their effectiveness and coping. Such insight can help standing deans reflect on their own practices, and can assist prospective deans in understanding ways in which successful practicing deans are functioning in their positions. To that end, this article recommends specific interpersonal/negotiating skills that deans can use when they work closely with key persons inside and outside their institutions. (Wepner, Henk, & Lovell, 2015).

For this study, the independent variables were challenges and related stress for academic deans that were categorized into nine (9) typical job duty areas prominently found in the professional literature: finding a new vision for an academic major or discipline, promoting positive change, dealing with resistance and conflict, addressing financial challenges, fundraising pressure, coping with the tension of change within a shared governance structure, addressing community and state demands for teacher education reform, managing internal personnel matters, and receiving administrative support from the provost's office (Buller, 2007; Coll, et. al., 2018; Harvey, et al., 2013; Krahenbuhl, 2004; Monaghan, 2018; Sarros, Gmelch, & Tanewski, G. A., 1998).

The following research question was addressed- What effect, if any, do the independent variables -perceptions of challenges and related stressors, have on the dependent variables- perceptual scores on effort-reward imbalance, over-commitment, hardiness, and aspects of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment)?

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Participants*

All participants included in the results of this study were chosen with permission from the Council of Academic Deans from Research Education Institutions (CADREI). CADREI is an assembly of deans of education from research and land grant institutions (typically doctoral granting) throughout North America. The purpose of this Council and its affiliates is the preparation of education personnel in all phases of leadership development and the discussion and formulation of plans, policies, and programs to make the member institutions of the Council more effective in their

work (CADREI, 2018).

The lead author's university Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study. A recruitment e-mail that included the survey was sent out to all current CADREI member deans (130). Of those recruited, 58 agreed to participate (45%).

## 2.2 Instrumentation

Participants completed a Qualtrics survey that consisted of basic demographic questions (e.g. age, ethnicity) and more detailed demographic questions (e.g. time spent as a dean and Carnegie classification of current university). The survey also consisted of ratings of the nine (9) challenge and stress areas in terms of 'how often you are dealing with this issue' (1-5 scale), with 1 being almost never and 5 being almost always, and 'to what degree is this issue stressful to me', using the same 1-5 scale. Prior to participating in the study, those who chose to access the Qualtrics survey link from the recruitment e-mail were given a brief description of the main purpose of the research, assurances of confidentiality, and were asked to sign a document agreeing to participate. The survey took participants approximately 10 minutes to complete, after which they were thanked for their participation. The data collection period in total was approximately 30 days, allowing potential participants to access the link for that period of time.

In addition to demographics, and challenges and stressor ratings, three measures were included, the Effort/Reward Imbalance Scale, the Dispositional Resilience Scale, and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Bartone et al., 2007; Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1986; Siegrist & Montano, 2014).

*Effort/Reward Imbalance (ERI)*. ERI is defined as when perceptions of the rewards from working do not match their perceptions of the effort made, this can create an imbalance that affects well-being and related behavior (Siegrist & Montano, 2014). The questionnaire completed by the participants included 16 items from the short version of the Effort Reward Imbalance (ERI) Scale (Siegrist & Montano, 2014). The short version was designed to assess effort, reward and over commitment. All 16 items utilized a Likert Scale (from 1 = *strongly disagree*, to 4 = *strongly agree*). Example items include "Over the past few years, my job has become more and more demanding" and "I get easily overwhelmed by time pressures at work" (Siegrist & Montano, 2014). Published research has found satisfactory internal consistency with Cronbach Alphas typically greater than 0.70 (Siegrist & Montano, 2014). This instrument has two subscales: Effort and Rewards and Over-commitment. Over-commitment is defined as committing excessively: such as to obligate (someone, such as oneself) beyond the ability for fulfillment, to allocate (own resources) in excess of the capacity for replenishment (Siegrist & Montano, 2014).

*Dispositional Resilience Scale-15 (DRS-15)*. Dispositional Resilience (hardiness) is a personality style first introduced by Suzanne C. Kobasa and described a pattern of characteristics, captured in the *Dispositional Resilience Scale-15*, that distinguished managers and executives who remained healthy under life stress, as compared to those who developed health problems (Bartone et al., 2007).

This questionnaire completed by the participants is a 15-item hardiness or dispositional resilience scale developed by Bartone in 1995 (Bartone et al., 2007). This shorter, 15-item hardiness measure (DRS-15) with no sub-scales, was created from a longer (30-item) version. All 15 items utilized a Likert Scale (from 1 = *not at all true*, to 4 = *completely true*). Example items include "How things go in my life depends on my own actions" and "Most days, life is really interesting and exciting for me." Previous research has shown the scale to have good internal consistency with Cronbach Alphas ranging from .70 to .77 for each individual hardiness scale and .83 for the whole scale (Kardum, Hudek-Knežević & Krapić, 2012).

*Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)*. Standardized measures of burnout have been developed over the past 30 years providing researchers with more precise definitions and methodological tools for studying the phenomenon. In particular, the development and widespread acceptance of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI, Maslach & Jackson, 1981a, 1981b, 1986) fostered systematic research on burnout, resulting in specialized versions of the MBI (e.g., for educators, for college students) and a plethora of articles published in scholarly journals. The MBI has three components, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, (1986) describe emotional exhaustion as a chronic state of physical and emotional depletion that results from excessive job, personal demands, and/or continuous stress; depersonalization refers to a negative, callous, or excessively detached response to other people, who are usually the recipients of one's service or care; and reduced personal accomplishment refers to a decline in one's feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work.

The educator version was utilized in this study. Example items include "Working with people all day is really a strain for me," "I feel frustrated by my job," and "I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job". All 22 items were utilized to assess three scales, *emotional exhaustion*, *depersonalization*, and *personal accomplishment*, using a

Likert Scale (from 0 = *never*, to 3 = a few times a month, to 6 = *every day*). Previous research has shown the MBI scales to have excellent internal consistency with Cronbach Alphas ranging from .71 for Personal Accomplishment, .79 for Depersonalization, and .90 for Emotional Exhaustion (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1986).

### 2.3 Procedure

In a process approved by the lead author's institutional review board (IRB), a survey composed of the multiple parts addressed above was distributed via Qualtrics through e-mail recruitment. Prior to participating in the study, those who chose to access the Qualtrics survey link from the recruitment e-mail were given a brief description of the main purpose of the research, assurances of confidentiality, and were asked to sign a document agreeing to participate. The survey took participants approximately 10 minutes to complete, after which they were thanked for their participation. The data collection period was approximately 30 days during which potential participants had access to the link.

## 3. Results

Demographics, means and standard deviations of key issues and pressures from school/college of education deans were computed. Of the 58 participants, 64% were men, 34% women and 2% indicated that they were transgender or intersex. Respondents indicated they were 85% Caucasian, 14% Black/African American and 1% Asian American. Average age was 56.9 with a range of 41-70. Twenty-six percent (26%) were under the age of 52.

Twenty-six percent (26%) had served as deans at other institutions. The average tenure as dean at their current institution was 3.57 years, with 52% serving 3 years or less. Thirty-six percent (36%) of the participants had previously served as both an associate dean and department chair. Ninety-five percent (95%) of the deans indicated that their current institution was a doctoral granting university.

### 3.1 Challenges and Stressors

Results revealed that for current perceived challenges, on a scale of 1=low to 5=high, promoting productive change ( $M = 4.3, SD = .72$ ), balancing financial resources ( $M = 4.2, SD = .97$ ), and promoting a new vision for majors and academic disciplines ( $M = 4.1, SD = .97$ ) were most prominent. The least prominent issue was dealing with administrative support from the provost office ( $M = 3.2, SD = 1.4$ ). The means and standard deviations of the remaining five perceived challenges were fundraising ( $M = 3.9, SD = .9$ ); external demands ( $M = 3.8, SD = 1.1$ ); dealing with resistance to change ( $M = 3.6, SD = 1.1$ ); personnel issues ( $M = 3.4, SD = 1.4$ ); and tension related to change and shared governance ( $M = 3.4, SD = 1.4$ ).

In answering how stressful each challenge/issue was perceived on a scale of 1=low to 5=high, balancing financial resources ( $M = 3.3, SD = 1.2$ ), and new vision for majors and academic disciplines ( $M = 3.1, SD = 1.1$ ) were on average the two most stressful. The least common stressful issue was dealing with (lack of) administrative support from the provost's office ( $M = 2.6, SD = 1.5$ ). The means and standard deviations of the remaining six perceived related stressors were promoting productive change ( $M = 2.9, SD = 1.2$ ), personnel matters ( $M = 2.9, SD = 1.3$ ), external demands ( $M = 2.9, SD = 1.2$ ), and dealing with resistance to change ( $M = 2.9, SD = 1.3$ ); fundraising ( $M = 2.7, SD = 1.1$ ); and tension about change related to shared governance ( $M = 2.6, SD = 1.3$ ). All nine challenges and stressors were utilized as the independent variables in statistical analyses (IV).

### 3.2 Well-Being Measures

#### 3.2.1 Effort-Reward Imbalance

In terms of the dependent variables (DV) applied, participants average scores were *agree* or 3 on a scale of 1=*do not agree* to 4=*very much agree* on the Effort and Reward subscale ( $M = 3.12, SD = .33$ ). Highest scored items were "I receive the respect I deserve from my superior (effort,  $M = 3.3, SD = .74$ ), and "My job security is (not) poor" (reward,  $M = 3.22, SD = .79$ ). Lower (but still relatively high) scores were "Over the past few years, my job has become more and more demanding" (effort,  $M = 3.06, SD = .83$ ) and "Considering all my efforts and achievements, my salary/income is adequate" (reward,  $M = 2.85, SD = .81$ ).

#### 3.2.2 Over-Commitment

Participants overall scored 'somewhat agree' on ERIs over-commitment scale, or 2 on a scale of 1-4 ( $M = 2.53, SD = .55$ ), with the highest ratings being "As soon as I get up in the morning I start thinking about work problems" ( $M = 3.04, SD = .8$ ), and "work rarely lets me go, it is still on my mind when I go to bed" ( $M = 2.87, SD = .75$ ). A lower over-commitment score was "If I postpone something that I was supposed to do today, I'll have trouble sleeping at night" ( $M = 2.24, SD = .78$ ).

### 3.2.3 Hardiness

For results from the Dispositional Resilience Scale (DRS), the total score average was 2.84 ( $SD = .28$ ), in the ‘true’ range, with 1=*not true*, and 4=*very true*. Highest scored items were “I enjoy the challenge when I have to do more than one thing at a time” ( $M = 2.94, SD = .76$ ), and “Working hard (does) matter” ( $M = 2.83, SD = .7$ ). Lower scores (yet still in the ‘true’ range) were “By working hard, you can always achieve your goals” ( $M = 2.59, SD = .7$ ) and “When I make plans, I make certain I can make them work” ( $M = 2.63, SD = .56$ ).

### 3.2.4 Burnout

For MBI results, participants’ average scores were *once per month to a few times a month* or 2.52 on a scale of 0 to 6 on the Emotional Exhaustion scale, with 0=*never*, and 6=*every day* ( $M = 2.52, SD = .86$ ). Highest scored items were “I feel used up at the end of the day” (a few times a month to once per week,  $M = 3.77, SD = 1.3$ ), and “I feel emotionally drained from my work” (a few times a month to once per week,  $M = 3.57, SD = 1.2$ ). Lowest scores were “Working with people directly puts too much stress on me” (once a month or less,  $M = 1.94, SD = 1.0$ ) and “I feel like I’m at the end of my rope” (once a month or less,  $M = 1.77, SD = 1.1$ ). Participants overall scored *once a month or less* on the Depersonalization scale or 2 on a scale of 0-6 ( $M = 2.12, SD = .90$ ), with the highest ratings being “I feel [constituents] blame me for some of their problems” (a few times a month,  $M = 3.15, SD = 1.28$ ). The lowest depersonalization score was “I don’t really care what happens to some students” (once a month or less,  $M = 1.62, SD = 1.0$ ). Participants overall scored *almost every day* on the Personal Accomplishment scale on a scale of 0-6 ( $M = 4.94, SD = .57$ ), with the highest ratings being “I feel I’m positively influencing other people’s lives through my work” ( $M = 5.08, SD = .80$ ). The lowest Positive Accomplishment score (still high) was “I feel exhilarated after working closely with my students” ( $M = 4.72, SD = 1.1$ ).

## 3.3 Statistical Analyses

### 3.3.1 Effort/Reward Imbalance and Over-Commitment

We explored the degree to which challenges and stressors were associated with Effort/ Rewards Imbalance and Over-commitment as measured by the ERI, Hardiness as measured by the DRS, and aspects of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) as measured by the MBI. Step-wise multiple regressions were employed to explore the question.

Effort/reward imbalance and over-commitment were regressed onto issues and stress in two separate multiple regression analyses, to indicate the extent to which these predictors account for variance in deans’ ERI and DRS scores. Type of current issues/challenges was non-significantly related to effort/reward ( $p = .31$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .20, nor was over-commitment, ( $p = .22$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .22. Therefore, type of issue did not account for a significant percentage of variance in effort/reward or over-commitment. However, stress related to administrative support from the provost’s office, balancing financial resources, and external demands on the college/school accounted for 35% of the variance in effort/reward scores, meaning that the higher the stress indicated in these three areas, the more participants perceived lower rewards for high effort (See Table 1).

Table 1. Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis: Stress Predictors of Effort/Reward Imbalance

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>
Constant	3.29	3.03	3.13
Administrative support from the provost office	-.07	-.10	-.08
Balancing financial resources		-.11	-.18
External demands to the college/school of education			-.14
$R^2$	.09	.21	.35
<i>F</i>	4.82	6.95	9.00***
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	1/52	2/51	3/50

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

Stress was also significantly related to over-commitment. Specifically, stress related to a new vision for majors or disciplines accounted for 28% of the variance in over-commitment scores, meaning that the higher the stress related to the ‘new vision for majors or disciplines’, the more participants experienced over-commitment (see Table 2).

Table 2. Simple Linear Regression Analysis: Stress Predictors of Over-Commitment

Variable	Model 1 <i>B</i>
Constant	1.74
New vision for majors or disciplines	.25
$R^2$	.28
$F$	4.36**
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	1/52

\*\*  $p < .01$ 

### 3.3.2 Hardiness

The next multiple regression included the outcome variable, hardiness, and each of the predictors—challenges/issues and stress. Hardiness was regressed onto issues and stress to indicate the extent to which these predictors account for hardiness in deans. The prominence of particular issues was not significantly related to hardiness ( $p = .44$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .17, and therefore, did not significantly account for the variance in hardiness scores. Stress related to the issue, however, was significantly related to Hardiness scores. Specifically, stress related to personnel matters, balancing financial resources, and administrative support from the provost's office accounted for 27% of the variance in Hardiness scores, meaning the higher the stress indicated in these areas, the less hardiness participants experienced (See Table 3).

Table 3. Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis: Stress Predictors of Hardiness

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>B</i>
Constant	3.10	2.93	2.97
Personnel matters	-.08	-.11	-.09
Balancing financial resources		-.08	-.10
Administrative support from the provost's office			-.06
$R^2$	.12	.21	.27
$F$	7.22	6.56	6.21***
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	1/52	2/51	3/50

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ 

### 3.3.3 Burnout: Emotional Exhaustion

The next multiple regression included the outcome variable, emotional exhaustion, and each of the potential predictors—issues and stress. Emotional exhaustion was regressed onto issues and stress, to indicate the extent to which these predictors accounted for emotional exhaustion in deans. The prominence of particular issues was significantly related to emotional exhaustion ( $p = .003$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .16. Prominence of particular issues accounted for 16% of the variance in emotional exhaustion, meaning the more a dean was dealing with resistance to and conflicts about change, the more participants perceived emotional exhaustion (see Table 4).

Table 4. Stepwise (Simple Linear) Regression Analysis: Issues Predictors of Burnout: Emotional Exhaustion

Variable	Model 1 <i>B</i>
Constant	.1.46
Dealing with resistance to and conflicts about change	.301***
$R^2$	.162
$F$	9.88
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	1/52

\*\*\* $p > .001$ 

Stress related to promoting positive change and new vision for majors or disciplines accounted for 39% of the variance in emotional exhaustion scores, meaning the more stress related to these issues, the more emotional exhaustion for participants. (See Table 5).

Table 5. Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis: Stress Predictors of aspects of Burnout: Emotional Exhaustion

Variable	Model 1 <i>B</i>	Model 2 <i>B</i>
Constant	1.40	.97
Promoting positive change	.38***	.25**
New vision of majors or disciplines		.26*
$R^2$	.31	.39
$F$	23.04	16.28
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	1/52	2/51

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ 

### 3.3.4 Burnout: Depersonalization

The next multiple regression included the outcome variable, depersonalization, and each of the potential predictors—issues and stress. Depersonalization was regressed onto issues and stress to indicate the extent to which these predictors account for depersonalization in deans. The prominence of the particular issue ‘dealing with resistance to and conflicts about change’ was significantly related to depersonalization ( $p = .000$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .34. The more deans dealt with resistance to and conflicts about change the more they perceived depersonalization. (Table 6).

Table 6. Stepwise (Simple Linear) Regression Analysis: Issue Predictor of Burnout: Depersonalization

Variable	Model 1 <i>B</i>
Constant	.49
Dealing with resistance to and conflicts about change	.46***
$R^2$	.34
$F$	26.41
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	1/52

\*\*\*  $p > .000$ 

Stress related to ‘dealing with resistance to and conflicts about change’ was also significantly related to depersonalization scores. Stress related to dealing with resistance and conflicts about change accounted for 28% of the variance in depersonalization scores, meaning the more stress perceived with this issue, the more participants experienced depersonalization. (See Table 7).

Table 7. Stepwise (Simple Linear) Regression Analysis: Stress Predictors of Burnout: Depersonalization

Variable	Model 1 <i>B</i>
Constant	1.09
Dealing with resistance to and conflicts about change	3.58***
$R^2$	.28
$F$	20.94
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	1/52

\*\*\* $p > .001$ 

### 3.3.5 Burnout: Personal Accomplishment

The last multiple regression included the outcome variable personal accomplishment and each of the potential predictors—issues and stress. Personal accomplishment was regressed onto issues and stress to indicate the extent to which these predictors account for personal accomplishment in deans. The prominence of particular issues was not significantly related to personal accomplishment ( $p = .22$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .07, and therefore, does not significantly account for the variance in hardiness. Stress was, however, significantly related to personal accomplishment scores. Stress related to promoting positive change accounted for 10% of the variance in personal accomplishment scores, meaning the more stress perceived in ‘promoting positive change’, the less participants experienced personal accomplishment. (See Table 8).

Table 8. Stepwise (Simple Linear) Regression Analysis: Stress Predictors of Burnout: Personal Accomplishment

Variable	Model 1 <i>B</i>
Constant	5.37
Promoting positive change	-1.45*
$R^2$	.10
$F$	5.81
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	1/52

\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ 

## 4. Discussion and Implications

Significantly predictive for influencing perceptions of efforts/rewards imbalance (DV) were administrative support from the provost’s office, balancing financial resources, and external demands (IVs). The stressor that predicted over-commitment was developing a new vision for majors and academic disciplines.

Stressors that negatively predicted levels of hardiness were personnel matters, balancing financial resources, and administrative support from the provost office. Less hardiness occurs when deans are dealing with personnel matters, balancing financial resources, and administrative support from the provost.

In terms of burnout, emotional exhaustion was associated with promoting positive change and a new vision for majors. Depersonalization related to dealing with resistance to and conflicts about change, and personal accomplishment was linked with promoting positive change.

Based on these results, academic deans and potential academic deans would be wise to pay the most attention to the following five dean’s functions, as they appeared at least two (2) times in the regression models (see Tables 1-8).



1. Balancing financial resources (significantly predicting effort/reward imbalance scores, hardiness)
2. Administrative support from the provost office (significantly predicting effort/reward imbalance scores, hardiness)
3. A new vision for majors or academic disciplines (significantly predicting over-commitment, emotional exhaustion)
4. Promoting positive change (significantly predicting emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment)
5. Dealing with resistance and conflict about change (significantly predicting emotional exhaustion, depersonalization)

It is hoped that this study's results provide needed insight for academic deans as they strive to maximize their effectiveness and coping. To that end, this article recommends specific knowledge and skills in these five areas that deans can use to promote more work well-being and effectiveness inside and outside their institutions.

What follows here are specific professional development recommendations for academic deans based on the results of this study and consistent with the recommendations of Morris and Laipple (2015); and Wepner, et. al., (2015) who called for more targeted training and professional development for deans.

#### *4.1 Balancing Financial Resources*

Hearn (2003) indicated that searching for and generating new revenue generating initiatives is the key for helping academic deans balance financial resources. Academic deans need to stimulate revenue generating instructional initiatives (e.g., online course offerings); research and analysis grants and contracts; pricing differentials per program of study and financial partnering arrangements with third parties. Each of these revenue-generating initiatives, in addition to traditional fundraising, makes balancing resources less stressful and even a source of reward and accomplishment that can stimulate other people to internalize the vision and goals for the academic college/school. These initiatives, however, often require new efforts (Hearn, 2003). The responsibility of such efforts including arranging and managing alternative revenue streams typically falls squarely on the academic dean.

Given the above, we recommend that current and aspiring deans pursue training in advancement/fundraising, develop strategies for building a strong relationship with vice-presidents of advancement, collaborate with other deans regarding fundraising strategies and look for opportunities to share donors (with deans across the university) when appropriate (Clevenger, 2018). Training programs and institutes preparing deans should also provide professional development activities to enhance deans' skill sets in these areas. Specifically based on this research, we suggest that deans pursue training in advancement/fundraising, focus on building a strong relationship with vice-presidents of advancement, collaborate with other deans regarding fundraising strategies, and look for opportunities to share donors when appropriate.

#### *4.2 Administrative Support from the Provost's Office*

Support from the provost's office varies greatly across academic deans. Some deans report that the provost is not aware of key aspects of their specific role, instead focusing on whichever aspects of the dean's role is important for the overall institution's success (Fagin, 1997; Monaghan, 2018). Examples include grant procurement and fundraising which both reflect well on the institution. In some cases, there is pressure from the provost and the president to focus on these aspects of a dean's position over all others (Fagin, 1997). However, Fagin notes that provosts are often more understanding and supportive of deans than presidents, as typically they themselves recently held the position and understand the stressors associated with the work. Given the essential nature of provost support, deans should be strategic and intentional about keeping the provost informed about new initiatives and emerging challenges. Moreover, meeting regularly with the provost provides not only opportunities for keeping the provost informed but also provides the opportunity to enlist the provost in finding solutions to potential challenges. Developing a positive and trusted relationship with the provost is essential for deans.

The push and pull of expectations that exists between the provost and the deans is typically due to the way in which the positions are designed. Although the provost's office may desire to give all the help each dean needs, their bandwidth is only enough for them to focus on the most important aspects of their role (Enrich, 1997). According to Enrich's own experience as a dean, provost, and president, the provost's main objective is to set key academic priorities for the university as a whole and aid dean under their supervision in accomplishing these goals. Deans' roles center around

their school or college. The most successful working relationships between deans and provosts tend to be when the dean can articulate how what they are attempting in their own college or school will benefit the university's academic agenda as a whole (Enrlich; Monaghan, 2018). If this balance between the role of the dean and the provost is met, the office of the provost is often able to be more helpful and supportive than if the two administrators have contradicting goals (Enrlich; Monaghan). Keeping the provost apprised of progress and challenges and soliciting guidance/advice from the provost represent important strategies for developing an effective provost-dean relationship (Jabbar & Hussin, 2019; Wepner, et. al., 2015).

#### 4.3 A New Vision for Majors and Academic Disciplines

Williams-June (2014) observes the importance of vision and articulating it, in that "Deans today are almost like mini-presidents, they are being called on to make really tough decisions and try to convince people to change" (p. 2). Advertisements in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the major source for listings of open academic dean positions, now include statements such as transforming curriculum to reflect the changes taking place in the world of higher education, implementation of interdisciplinary programs and projects, and landing donations and building community partnerships (Williams-June, 2014).

Indeed, academic deans are expected to approach their roles with explicit ideas about how to move the academic curriculum forward. Clarifying a new vision, setting goals, and developing buy-in from constituents (e.g., faculty, upper administration, staff, community) are each key and inter-related activities for deans. One major caution is to not get caught in the minutia involved in managing the day-to-day operations thereby leaving little time or energy for accomplishing your goals on a grander scale (Holenon & Dunn, 2017). Relatedly, deans must also identify important pockets of support within the college/school (e.g., departments, members of the dean leadership team, influential faculty members) when creating a new vision for the school and/or departments. Faculty must understand the problem that needs addressing and be part of the process in constructing a new vision to address the problem. Encouraging buy-in by strategically inviting others to contribute to the development of a new vision is essential for successful implementation of that vision. Making the vision a collective one rather than solely the dean's increases the probability of the vision being successful.

#### 4.4 Promoting Positive Change

Trust between faculty and deans is typically associated with organizational culture (Elliot-Johns, 2015). Organizational culture is an ever-changing entity that is affected by many factors, making it difficult for the dean to control (Elliot-Johns, 2015). Inspiring a team to make changes, the pressure to have a specific structure and the emphasis on maintaining a positive organizational culture can evoke stress and frustration for leaders as they are faced with attempting to change systems that in many cases have been in place for years. This pressure and the common resulting conflict and resistance by the dean's faculty can often have a negative effect on the dean. Additionally, the tension of creating timely change while dealing with the often-plodding hierarchal model of higher education has been a particularly difficult challenge for deans (Elliot-Johns, 2015). For example, vertical models of decision making that have focused largely on departmental authority, have more recently needed to give way to a more horizontal model, one which focuses on more widespread discussions about how to best improve teaching and learning (Bennett, 2015). Deans report the most challenging roadblocks to promoting change are dealing with long standing internal conflicts, incivility, and nettlesome personnel matters (Krebs, 2015; Monaghan, 2018; Vaillancourt, 2015; Wasicsko & Balch, 2015). Inaction or passivity on a dean's part around such issues often sends the message that others have permission to behave badly as well (Gmelch et al., 2001; Vaillancourt, 2015).

Although the promoting positive change can be the most stressful and difficult parts of the dean's job, it is recommended that academic deans recognize and become comfortable with the reality that "the buck stops with them" (Gmelch et al., 2001; Vaillancourt, 2015). With timely and courageous action, overcoming obstacles to promote positive change can increase deans' job satisfaction, as feelings of accomplishment and gained respect are often the result (Gmelch et al., 2001; Krebs, 2015; Vaillancourt, 2015).

#### 4.5 Dealing with Resistance and Conflict about Change

Dealing with resistance and conflict about change is more specific than promoting positive change. Resistance and conflict about change describes direct opposition. Undeniably, it is paramount for academic deans to expect such resistance at times and to provide information and promote understanding for their faculty, encouraging them to "rethink, unlearn, change, revise, and adapt" (Niess, 2008, p. 225 as cited in Elliot-Johns, 2015). In fact, studies show that an absence of a dean addressing inevitable conflict and resistance negatively effects the productivity and motivation of the faculty (Deluk, 2014 as cited in Elliot-Johns, 2015). Conversely the presence of a specific direction

decreases the frequency and intensity of faculty resistance and conflict (Elliot-Johns, 2015).

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 This Study's Importance

Academic deans experience significant challenges in their work. They also play a critical role, perhaps the most critical role, in advancing the academic mission of the college/school they serve. Understanding the specific challenges deans encounter and how these challenges impact the levels of stress deans experience is an important initial step in helping deans develop training and professional development strategies for performing their work successfully.

Given the dearth of studies focusing on challenges and stressors as related to aspects of work well-being, this study contributes to the professional literature in that the findings discovered five major stressors impacting well-being that a sample of deans working in research universities experience, which are: balancing financial resources, having administrative support from the provost's office, creating a new vision for majors and/or academic disciplines, promoting positive change, and dealing with resistance and conflict about change. We recommended targeted training and professional development strategies for addressing these challenges and encourage additional research from more diverse settings for advancing our understanding of the academic dean experience.

### 5.2 Limitations and Future Research

This study only included education deans and did not include deans from other academic colleges/schools. Additionally, we did not study deans working in universities that are masters or bachelor degree granting only. Whether non-education deans and/or deans working in non-research universities experience similar challenges and stressors is not addressed in this study. Moreover, the study participants were all members of one professional organization, thus we do not know if these results are relevant for deans who do not participate in CADREI (regardless of the nature of their institution). Our study relied upon survey data and a convenience sample so clearly the results of our study are purely relational and do not shed light on causal relationships among the variable of interest in this study.

Future research using more robust samples of deans from various colleges/school and from more diverse university settings would be useful to increasing our understanding of the challenges and related stress that deans experience. Studies that identify best practices for addressing the challenges and stressors we examined would also offer important recommendations for deans seeking to maximize their effectiveness.

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