

# Chapter 5

## From Surviving to Thriving: Towards Career Wellbeing



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**Abstract** In the long-term future, the quality, brand and reputation of universities would be crucial factors impacting experiences of work of knowledge and innovation workers. Academics in universities will play a significant role in preparing knowledge and innovation workers for their work. The aim of this chapter was to investigate the relationship between job crafting, high-performance human resource management practices and thriving of academics in higher education institutions. A cross-sectional survey design was used. A convenience sample of 276 academic employees from three universities of technology in South Africa participated in the study. The participants completed the Job Crafting Questionnaire, the High-Performance Human Resource Practices Questionnaire, and the Thriving at Work Scale. As hypothesised, thriving, job crafting, and high-performance human resource practices were positively related. Additionally, a significant interaction between job crafting and high-performance human resource practices was found. The relationship between job crafting and thriving was found to differ with respect to the extent to which academics perceived high-performance human resource practices. When human resource practices were perceived to be good, academics' thriving depended less on job crafting. However, when human resource practices were perceived to be poor, job crafting was needed for academics to thrive. The implications of these results are discussed.

**Keywords** Fourth industrial revolution • Precariousness • Thriving • Job crafting • Human resource practices • Higher education

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## 5.1 Introduction

The experience of working and work have positive and negative effects on individual and family wellbeing (Burke, 2019). Positive effects include flourishing (Rothmann, Van Zyl, & Rautenbach, 2019) and thriving (Spreitzer & Hwang, 2019) at work. Negative effects include stress, burnout, and incivility (Burke, 2019). Longitudinal research showed that the nature of professional and managerial work has changed over the past decades: work now moves at a faster pace, individuals work longer hours in intense jobs, feel less control over their jobs and are more closely monitored (Worrall, Mather, & Cooper, 2016). According to Johannessen (2019), the Fourth Industrial Revolution will change workplaces and the nature of work dramatically and result in precariousness. The concept of precariousness captures the uncertainty and insecurity experienced not only by unemployed people living in poverty but also by individuals from the middle class who have good qualifications. Individuals who find themselves in the precariat are frustrated, angry and bitter at those who put them in the position in which they find themselves. Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies appear to undermine humans' choice and ability to apply their skills and interests to meaningful work and may lead to generations of workers living precarious and fragmented lives (Schwab, 2018).

In addition to the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, developing countries like South Africa, face the challenges of inequality, poverty and unemployment. People in societies with bigger income gaps between rich and poor are more likely to suffer from a wide range of health and social problems compared to those living in more equal societies (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018). Also, as Turok (2018) pointed out, poverty levels in Southern Africa are unsustainably high, and unemployment is a real challenge. For example, in South Africa, 76% of people face an imminent threat of falling below the poverty line. Market-creating innovation, defined as a change in processes by which organisations transform, labour, capital, materials, and information into services and products of higher value is needed to increase prosperity (Christensen, Ojomo, & Dillon, 2019).

Johannessen (2019) stated that in the future, the quality, brand and reputation of universities would be crucial factors determining the work and working levels of individuals. Students from the best universities will be given more opportunities in their working lives. The graduates from top universities will have the best opportunities. According to Savage (2015, p. 221) "universities are affecting future careers". The length and depth of education are essential: a master's or PhD qualification is vital to become an innovation and knowledge worker. However, the quality of the university where individuals complete their degrees is a decisive factor. Mediocre and poor universities will provide opportunities for individuals who will belong to the precariat (Johannessen, 2019).

Based on the above-mentioned discussion, two conclusions can be made: First, the new world of work presents challenges to the career wellbeing and performance of individuals and organisations. Second, the wellbeing of temporary and

permanently employed people and non-working people is crucial to ensure stability in countries, especially when inequality, poverty and unemployment are high. Moreover, thriving is a critical factor in the long-term individual and organisational wellbeing and performance of university staff (Spreitzer & Hwang, 2019). Their thriving, in contrast with surviving, will impact the lives of future knowledge and innovation workers.

Contrary to what many people believe, emotions like sadness, fear, and anger do not entirely obstruct the path to optimal functioning of people. Achor (2018) argued that the opposite of joy is not sadness but apathy which is the loss of energy to continue to pursue one's goals. Apathy means that people survive, rather than thrive. Consequently, the pursuit of potential becomes both meaningless and futile. Studies have shown that thriving is positively associated with critical organisational outcomes such as employee health, high job performance, reduced absenteeism, innovative work behaviour, organisational citizenship behaviour, organisational commitment, development, and job satisfaction, as well as lower levels of burnout, job strains, turnover intentions and actual turnovers (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Cullen, Gerbasi, & Chrobot-Mason, 2015; Niessen, Sonnentag, & Sach, 2012; Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Garnett, 2012; Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens, & Smith, 2016). Therefore, the question arises how people can thrive in their work, given the demands and challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, as well as challenges of inequality, poverty, and unemployment in developing countries.

According to Spreitzer and Hwang (2019), individuals desire a job situation that allows them to thrive, rather than merely survive. Thriving refers to a desirable subjective experience characterised by a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012). Academics who are thriving experience growth and motion marked by a sense of feeling energised and alive and recognise that they are incessantly improving and getting better at what they do (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). Thriving serves an adaptive function in that it helps individuals to navigate and change their work contexts to promote and sustain their professional development and efficiency (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Hence, thriving serves as a gauge of a person's progress at work and thus assists employees in increasing both their short-term functioning and longer-term development (Spreitzer et al., 2005). According to Herwitz (2018), academic staff at South African higher education institutions experience depletion and demoralisation, which are not acknowledged or addressed by authorities.

## 5.2 Chapter Objective

This study tested the notion that job crafting and high-performance HR practices predict thriving. It further investigated the interaction effect between job crafting and high-performance HR practices on thriving at work. The following hypotheses were set for this study:

Hypothesis 1: High-performance HR practices positively predict thriving at work.

Hypothesis 2: Job crafting positively predicts thriving at work.

Hypothesis 3: High-performance HR practices interact with job crafting to effect thriving at work.

### 5.3 The Present Study

Positive psychological constructs like flourishing (Janse van Rensburg, Rothmann, & Diedericks, 2017a, 2017b) and work engagement (Barkhuizen, Rothmann, & Van de Vijver, 2014), which are related to thriving, have been examined in the South African higher education context. These studies showed that sound human resource management practices (Barkhuizen et al., 2014), person-environment fit (Janse van Rensburg et al., 2017a), and manager and supervisor support (Janse van Rensburg et al., 2017b) predict positive psychological functioning (Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Garnett, 2012).

Compared to constructs like burnout, work engagement and job satisfaction, workplace thriving has not enjoyed much attention in academic research and practice. A better understanding is required of how and why specific factors promote thriving at work which can have implications for human resource management scholarship (Kira & Balkin, 2014). Also, positive theories, such as thriving, offer new starting points for the consideration of wellbeing at work (Spreitzer et al., 2005). There is evidence of the relationship between thriving at work and various desired individual and organisational outcomes (Cullen et al., 2015). This study proposes individual and contextual enablers of agentic work behaviours that may be related to thriving at work.

Firstly, job crafting may play a role in thriving at work. Job crafting considers the role of proactive and self-initiated behaviours that academics can use to alter and craft their work roles (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Job crafting predicts employee engagement, organisational commitment, flourishing, psychological wellbeing and helping behaviours (Bakker, Tims, & Derks, 2012; Brenninkmeijer & Hekkert-Koning, 2015; Demerouti, Bakker, & Gevers, 2015; Leana, Appelbaum, & Shevchuk, 2009; Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2013, 2014; Van Wingerden, Bakker, & Derks, 2017). However, limited evidence could be found of job crafting studied in relation to thriving at work.

Secondly, an essential factor in the organisational context that has been overlooked in prior research on thriving at work is the quality of human resource (HR) practices. HR practices affect employee wellbeing (Guest, 2002, 2011; Huang, Ahlstrom, Lee, Chen, & Hsieh, 2016). More specifically, HR practices (whether labelled high-performance or high-commitment HR practices) such as

training, participation, and performance-related pay are associated with healthier work environments and lower levels of burnout (Castanhera & Chambel, 2010; Nishii, 2006).

## 5.4 Thriving at Work

Carver (1998) defined thriving as a positive response to a challenge. Thriving refers to “the psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality (i.e. the positive feeling of having energy available) and a sense of learning (i.e. the sense that one is acquiring, and can apply, knowledge and skills) at work” (Spreitzer et al., 2005, p. 538).

Spreitzer et al. (2005) described how thriving at work is similar to, yet distinct from, constructs such as resilience, flourishing, subjective wellbeing, flow, work engagement and self-actualisation. As they described, the fundamental distinguishing characteristic of thriving at work is the combination of learning and vitality, both of which are necessary for employees to thrive. Therefore, thriving reflects both the affective and cognitive component of psychological experience and combines the hedonic and eudemonic perspective of psychological functioning (Spreitzer et al., 2005).

The socially embedded model of thriving at work (Spreitzer et al., 2005) suggests that three types of agentic behaviours are associated with thriving. These behaviours are task focus, i.e. focussing behaviours and attention on job tasks and responsibilities; exploration, i.e. experimentation, innovation, risk-taking, and discovery to stretch and grow in new directions; and heedful relating, i.e. looking out for one another to heedfully connect to the social/relational environment. If the satisfactory enabling conditions and resources are present, there is an increased likelihood that individuals will thrive, even under onerous conditions that seem to exist within the higher education institutions in South Africa.

Porath et al. (2012) developed a ten-item scale to measure thriving at work. Although scholars have highlighted the importance of thriving for organisations (Gerbasi, Porath, Parker, Spreitzer, & Cross, 2015; Spreitzer & Porath, 2012a, 2012b; Spreitzer, Porath, Gibson, & Garnett, CitationID=“CR70”>2012), “research on thriving at work has been quite sparse” (Niessen, Sonnentag, & Sach, 2012, p. 468). Studies have shown the importance of thriving to work-related outcomes, such as individual task performance, innovative work behaviours, organisational citizenship behaviours, organisational commitment, and taking the initiative for career development, self-development and job satisfaction (Gerbasi et al., 2015). Thriving at work has also been linked to critical individual outcomes such as development, overall health (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Porath et al., 2008; Porath, Spreitzer, & Gibson, 2008), less burnout and strain (Porath et al., 2012; Spreitzer et al., 2012) and higher engagement (Gerbasi et al., 2015).

## 5.5 Job Crafting

In the ever-changing academic environment, it is essential to understand the ways to enhance the wellbeing of academics in higher education institutions for desirable work-related outcomes. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) suggest job crafting as a possible strategy. Job crafting refers to making proactive alterations to the content and confines of one's job and relationships with others to change the meaning of one's work and the social environment at work. Academics have to anticipate and create changes in how work is performed, based on increases in uncertainty and dynamism (Grant & Parker, 2009), which is prevalent in higher education institutions. This deliberation activity can help them cope with ongoing changes. Therefore, job crafting can be viewed as a strategic advantage during a change in which several positive outcomes may present themselves, including job satisfaction, work engagement and thriving at work (Bakker, 2011; Ghitulescu, 2007).

Job crafters may participate in three types of crafting: (a) cognitive crafting, which encompasses altering task-related boundaries and mindsets; (b) task crafting, which comprises varying the content of work—the number, scope and type of job responsibilities, and (c) relational crafting, which includes transmuting the quality and amount of interaction with others while working. When individuals craft their jobs in these ways, the jobs become more meaningful or enjoyable to them. However, there is evidence that multiple positive individuals, group and organisational outcomes arise when employees job craft, mostly in the areas of employee wellbeing and performance (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010).

It is important to realise that job crafting is not a single event. It is a process in which an employee engages over a period, and although job crafting is a form of proactive behaviour, i.e. actions that initiate and create change (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007), it occurs in the context of employees' prescribed jobs. These are marked by prescribed tasks, expectations, and positions in the organisational hierarchy. Thus, any of these features may limit employees' perceptions of their opportunities to proactively change their jobs. Leana, Appelbaum, and Shevchuk (2009) found that educators who took part in job crafting displayed improved performance compared to those who did not engage in job crafting. Furthermore, Peral and Geldenhuys (2016) uncovered that teachers who are given the opportunity to craft their working practices might experience increased subjective wellbeing, leading to some positive organisational outcomes.

## 5.6 High-Performance HR Practices

Job crafting may not be enough for employees to thrive. High-performance HR practices matter for thriving and businesses. According to Ulrich, Krzyscynski, Brockbank, and Ulrich (2017), organisations' capabilities are vital for the optimal functioning of talented people and business success. Having talented people is

critical, but if human resource departments are not organised appropriately to enable the capabilities of individuals, opportunities will not realise. Business leaders should care about HR practices because HR issues are business issues.

There always has been an interest in understanding how HR practices contribute to organisational outcomes and competitive advantages. However, more recently, however, scholars have called for more research which examines individual-level outcomes of employee perceptions of HR management practices as it may be more proximal predictors of individual attitudes and behaviours (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008). High-performance HR systems are defined as “groups of separate but interconnected HR practices designed to enhance employees’ skills and effort” (Takeuchi, Lepak, Wang, & Takeuchi, 2007, p. 1069). Beardwell and Claydon (2010) define high-performance HR systems as a combination of HR practices intended for enhancing the commitment, flexibility and quality of employees. These practices foster employees’ shared perceptions of a supportive organisational environment that encourages participation in decision-making and motivates discretionary effort that contributes to improved organisational performance and sustained competitive advantage (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000; Sun, Aryee, & Law, 2007).

Even though researchers continue to investigate the fundamental mechanisms linking the utilisation of high-performance HR practices to firm outcomes (Chadwick & Dabu, 2008), there is a lack of agreement on the specific practices that should be included in high-performance work systems. However, the most widely used practices include recruitment and selection, training and development, promotion, job security, performance-related pay, communication, and autonomy (Iverson & Zatzick, 2007; McClean & Collins, 2011; Price, 2011).

Recruitment and selection are critical for hiring employees who are a good fit for the organisation. These practices usually create positive work environments for highly skilled employees who are likely to perform in ways that benefit the organisation (Iverson & Zatzick, 2007; McClean & Collins, 2011). Ample training and development are essential for furnishing employees with current knowledge, skills and competencies. Such activities enhance employees’ flexibility and increase their loyalty and commitment to the organisation (Iverson & Zatzick, 2007).

Providing promotion opportunities supports employees’ emotional attachment to and identification with the organisation. These opportunities signal to employees that the employer is concerned about their development and can invest in their advancement as employees (McClean & Collins, 2011). Job security reduces employees’ fear of losing their jobs. This will allow them to contribute freely to enhanced productivity and to act with the long-term in mind (Price, 2011). Performance-related pay will provide employees with a feeling of being rewarded. This is more likely to increase employees’ commitment to the organisation and encourage them to contribute more (McClean & Collins, 2011).

Effective communication helps employees understand their tasks and roles within the organisation. By communicating effectively with employees, they might value the reasons behind organisational decisions and sanctioned procedures which, in turn, is more likely to increase their trust and commitment to the organisation

(Den Hartog & Belschak, 2013). Lastly, autonomy provides employees with sovereignty, independence and foresight when carrying out their work assignments (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

It is vital to have high-performance HR practices aimed at managing employees in organisations in such a way that they work together to select, develop, and motivate a workforce that has appropriate qualities and that uses these qualities in work-related activities with flexible effort. It can result in employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, work motivation, intention to quit and citizenship behaviours (Alfes, Shantz, Truss, & Soane, 2012; Boon, Den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2011; Gould-Williams & Gatenby, 2010). However, it is not clear exactly how this relationship operates. Organisational outcomes do not originate from the HR practices themselves, but rather from the human efforts surfacing from these HR practices (Way, 2002).

HR practices have the desired consequences on employee attitudes and behaviours only to the degree that they are consistently experienced and perceived by employees as intended (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Nishii, 2006). However, employees all perceive and react differently to HR practices. Thus, high-performance HR systems have utility to the extent that they positively affect employees and inspire them to contribute to critical organisational outcomes. Scholars have presented a convincing body of empirical evidence supporting the high-performance HR practice–performance relationship (Combs, James, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Messersmith, Pankaj, Lepak, & Gould-Williams, 2011). However, limited evidence exists on the effects of high-performance HR practices on more connected outcomes, namely employee attitudes and behaviours.

## **5.7 Method**

### ***5.7.1 Research Design***

This study used a cross-sectional survey design, as data were collected at one point in time. According to Creswell (2012), cross-sectional survey designs are useful in collecting data relative to “current attitudes, opinions, or beliefs” (p. 377). Data were gathered by utilising questionnaires regarding thriving, job crafting and perceptions of human resource practices of academic employees.

### ***5.7.2 Setting and Participants***

Knowledge and innovation workers with good qualifications will be needed as a consequence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. They will have to be committed, engaged and focused on the customer, i.e. they should thrive rather than survive.



**Table 5.1** Characteristics of the participants

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	123	44.6
	Female	153	55.4
Age	20–30 years	38	13.7
	31–40 years	73	26.4
	41–50 years	87	31.5
	51–60 years	58	21.0
	Over 60	20	7.2
Home language	Afrikaans	109	39.5
	English	66	23.9
	African language	101	36.6
Highest qualification	Diploma	7	2.5
	Postgraduate diploma	7	2.5
	Degree	20	7.2
	Honours degree	31	11.2
	Master’s degree	128	46.4
	Doctoral degree	83	30.1
Tenure	Less than five years	51	18.4
	5–10 years	70	25.3
	11–15 years	46	16.6
	16–20 years	42	15.1
	21–25 years	31	11.2
	More than 25 years	36	13.1

Those who do not adopt these attitudes will fail to succeed in their endeavours. Therefore, this study was conducted among academics at three universities of technology who are involved in the education of knowledge and innovation workers. A total sample of 276 was recruited. Most participants (80.4%) were permanently employed. Biographical characteristics of the participants are reported in Table 5.1.

The results in Table 5.1 show that a total of 44.6% of the sample were males, while 55.4% were females. The ages of the participants ranged from 20 years to 79 years. The mean age of the participants was 43.83 ( $SD = 11.10$ ). Most participants were South African (88.8%), married (67%) and spoke Afrikaans (39.5%). Furthermore, almost half of the respondents (46.4%) held a master’s degree, while most respondents (81.6%) had served more than five years in an academic profession.

Not shown in Table 5.1 is the percentage of participants who were thriving or not thriving. However, the results show that approximately 11% of employees did not thrive at all. A lack of energy was evident in 22% of the sample. However, 58% of the sample did not show optimal vitality scores, while 43% did not function optimally concerning learning.

### 5.7.3 *Measuring Instruments*

In this study, the following measuring instruments were used: the Thriving at Work Scale, the Job Crafting Questionnaire and the High-Performance HR Practices Questionnaire.

The *Thriving at Work Scale* (TWS; Porath et al., 2012) was used to measure the level of thriving. It is a 10-item scale measuring two dimensions: learning (e.g. “I continue to learn more and more as time goes by”) and vitality (“I feel alive and vital”). Each subscale consists of five items. A Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*to a great extent*) is used to rate the 10 items. The alpha coefficient was 0.93 (Porath et al., 2012).

The *Job Crafting Questionnaire* (JCQ; Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2013) was used to measure job crafting. It measures ways in which employees take an active role in initiating changes to the physical, cognitive, or social features of their jobs. The full measure consists of three dimensions: *task*, e.g. “Introduce new work tasks that better suit your skills or interests”; *relational*, e.g. “Engage in networking activities to establish more relationships” and *cognitive*, e.g. “Think about how your job gives your life purpose”. These three types of activities represent three distinct, yet meaningful ways in which employees can shape their work experience. In total, the questionnaire has 15 items, and participants indicate the frequency with which they have engaged in each job-crafting activity—on a scale ranging from 1 (*hardly ever*) to 6 (*very often*). The Cronbach alphas of the three subscales were all well above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2013).

The *High-Performance HR Practices Questionnaire* (HPHRP; Mostafa & Gould-Williams, 2014) was used to measure employee perceptions of high-performance HR practices using 27 items. The practices included in the current study were divided into: (a) ability-enhancing HR practices (selection, and training and development; e.g., “My organisation’s hiring policy and process is fair”); (b) motivation-enhancing HR practices (job security, promotion and performance-related pay; e.g., “Job security is almost guaranteed to employees in this organisation”); and (c) opportunity-enhancing HR practices (autonomy and communication; e.g., “I have the opportunity to earn individual bonuses for my performance”). The 27 items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach alpha coefficients for the measures of the seven HR practices ranged from 0.77 to 0.92. Discriminant validity of the questionnaire was assessed by comparing the square root of the average variance extracted for each construct with the correlation estimates between constructs. The square root of the variance-extracted estimate for each construct was higher than the corresponding inter-construct correlation estimates, suggesting that all the constructs in the questionnaire are valid (Mostafa & Gould-Williams, 2014).

A *biographical questionnaire* was developed to measure socio-demographic and biographical data of participants. Items included were gender, age, marital status,

qualifications, job position held at the University of technology, tenure, home language of choice, race, nationality, and type of contract.

#### 5.7.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis was carried out using Mplus version 8.2 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2018), and SPSS24 (IBM Corp, 2018) was used to compute descriptive statistics and to test interaction effects. In Mplus, the maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (MLR) was used as an estimator. Scale reliabilities ( $\rho$ ) were computed using a confirmatory factor analysis-based estimate of scale reliability (Raykov, 2009). To measure the proposed relationships between constructs in the study, Pearson correlation coefficients were used. Effect sizes were used to determine the practical significance of the results (Cohen, 1988). Cut-off points of 0.30 (medium effect) and 0.50 (large effect) were set for the practical significance of the correlation coefficients (Cohen, 1988). The confidence interval level for statistical significance was set at a value of 95% ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

The following indices were used to assess model fit for measurement and structural models: (a) absolute fit indices, including the chi-square statistic (the test of absolute fit of the model), standardised root mean residual (SRMR), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and (b) incremental fit indices, including Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) and comparative fit index (CFI) (West, Taylor, & Wu, 2012). For TLI and CFI values to be acceptable, scores higher than 0.90 are required, while values larger than 0.95 indicate excellent fit. RMSEA and SRMR values lower than 0.08 indicate a close fit between the model and the data. Akaike information criterion (AIC) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC) values were used to compare different measurement models (Kline, 2010).

Farrell (2010) recommends that researchers establish discriminant validity in latent variable analyses. Discriminant validity of a latent variable exists if it accounts for more variance in its observed variables than measurement error and other variables in a measurement model. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the validity of indicators and the construct is questionable if discriminant validity cannot be shown. To establish the discriminant validity of the measures, the average variance explained (AVE) for each construct was compared with the shared variance between the constructs (Farrell, 2010). A latent variable has discriminant validity if the AVE for a construct is greater than its shared variance with any other construct.

A moderation model with the effect of job crafting on thriving moderated by high- performance HR practices was estimated using PROCESS Version 3.2 (Hayes, 2018) in SPSS25 (IBM Corp, 2018). The independent variable and the moderator were not centred given that factor scores were used in the analysis.

### **5.7.5 Research Procedure**

The researcher obtained ethics clearance from research ethics offices of participating universities. Ethical clearance was also obtained from the Ethics Committee at the university from where the research was undertaken. The researcher administered the online electronic questionnaire in English via the *myresearchsurvey.com* platform. A cover letter which clarified the purpose of the study as well as highlighting the confidentiality and anonymity of the research project supplemented the survey. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and respondents had the option to withdraw their participation at any time. Participants completed an online questionnaire from mid-February to mid-September 2017. The raw data were captured and converted to an SPSS dataset for analysis.

## **5.8 Results**

The results of tests of competing measurement models followed by results of alternative structural models are reported.

## **5.9 Testing the Measurement Model**

Seven measurement models were tested using confirmatory factor analysis. The three-factor measurement model and alternative models were assessed to test whether each of the measurement items would load significantly onto the scales with which they were associated.

Model 1 consisted of three latent variables: thriving, job crafting and human resource practices. Thriving consisted of two first-order latent variables: vitality (measured by five items) and learning (measured by five items). Job crafting consisted of three first-order latent variables: task crafting (measured by five items), cognitive crafting (measured by five items) and relational crafting (measured by five items). Human resource practices consist of seven separate factors. All the latent variables in Model 1 were allowed to correlate.

Models 2, 3, 4 and 5 followed the same template as Model 1. However, in Model 2, thriving was modelled as two separate but related latent variables (and not a second-order latent variable consisting of two first-order latent variables). In Model 3 job crafting was modelled as three separate but related latent variables (rather than a second-order latent variable consisting of three first-order latent variables). In Model 4 human resource practices were modelled as seven separate but related latent variables. In Model 5 thriving was modelled as a single latent variable (rather than a second-order latent variable consisting of two first-order latent variables). In Model 6 job crafting was modelled as a single latent variable (rather than a

**Table 5.2** Fit statistics of competing measurement models

Model	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	AIC	BIC
1	1,840.50	1233	0.93	0.93	0.04 [0.038, 0.046]	0.05	44,152.26	44,865.47
2	1,818.36	1226	0.93	0.93	0.04 [0.038, 0.046]	0.05	44,140.78	44,879.35
3	1,826.12	1217	0.92	0.93	0.04 [0.039, 0.047]	0.05	44,166.32	44,937.47
4	1,930.28	1259	0.92	0.92	0.04 [0.040, 0.048]	0.06	44,207.42	44,826.51
5	1,796.21	1208	0.93	0.93	0.04 [0.038, 0.046]	0.05	44,150.26	44,953.99
6	2,308.59	1261	0.87	0.88	0.05 [0.051, 0.058]	0.06	44,647.15	45,258.99
7	2,344.53	1262	0.87	0.88	0.05 [0.052, 0.059]	0.07	44,684.28	45,292.51

$\chi^2$ , chi-square statistic; *df*, degrees of freedom; TLI, Tucker-Lewis index; CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR, standardised root mean square residual; AIC, Akaike information criterion; BIC, Bayes information criterion

second-order latent variable consisting of three first-order latent variables) followed the same template with all items of thriving were ignored. And finally, in Model 7 human resource practices was modelled as a single latent variable (rather than a second-order latent variable consisting of seven first-order latent variables).

Table 5.2 presents the goodness-of-fit statistics for the five competing measurement models described above.

AIC and BIC fit statistics were used, including other fit indices in this study, to compare alternative measurement models. Although the AIC and BIC values of Model 2 were the lowest, they were not significantly different from the values of Model 4. For theoretical reasons, as well as in the interest of parsimony, Model 4 was used (AIC = 44,207.42; BIC = 44,826.51). This model yielded the following fit statistics:  $\chi^2 = 1,930.28$ ; *df* = 1,259; *p* < 0.001; TLI = 0.92; CFI = 0.92; RMSEA = 0.04; SRMR = 0.06. These statistics display a good fit for the hypothesised model.

## 5.10 Model Development

The analysis continued in an exploratory mode to improve the fit of the selected model. Based on modification indices (MIs), two items, item 21 (“The communication between other employees and me at work is good”) and item 22 (“The communication between me and the managers/supervisors at work is good”) in the High-Performance HR questionnaire, experienced a correlated error. Item 21 was removed because it significantly reduced the model fit. The revised Model 4.1 compared to Model 4 fitted the data better (AIC = 44,165.00; BIC = 44,787.72;  $\chi^2 = 1,892.69$ , *df* = 1,258; *p* < 0.001; TLI = 0.92; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.04; SRMR = 0.06). Items all loaded on their respective constructs as expected. The standardised regression coefficients were all statistically significant (*p* < 0.001).

**Table 5.3** Reliability coefficients, correlations, AVE and shared variance of the scales (n = 276)

Variable	$\rho$	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Vitality	0.95	5.36	1.33	<b>0.78</b>	0.48	0.12	0.17	0.14	0.14	0.13	0.12	0.17	0.10	0.18	0.11
2. Learning	0.91	5.93	0.99	0.69 <sup>b</sup>	<b>0.67</b>	0.10	0.14	0.12	0.13	0.12	0.10	0.14	0.10	0.15	0.10
3. Job crafting—Task	0.85	4.09	1.03	0.35 <sup>a</sup>	0.32 <sup>a</sup>	<b>0.53</b>	0.29	0.24	0.10	0.10	0.04	0.10	0.40	0.56	0.04
4. Job crafting—Cognitive	0.88	4.40	1.18	0.41 <sup>a</sup>	0.38 <sup>a</sup>	0.54 <sup>b</sup>	<b>0.60</b>	0.32	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10
5. Job crafting—Relational	0.77	3.68	1.09	0.37 <sup>a</sup>	0.35 <sup>a</sup>	0.49 <sup>a</sup>	0.57 <sup>b</sup>	<b>0.42</b>	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.04	0.09	0.10
6. HRP—Selection	0.91	3.85	1.63	0.38 <sup>a</sup>	0.36 <sup>a</sup>	0.25	0.29	0.27	<b>0.72</b>	0.40	0.35	0.50	0.29	0.53	0.34
7. HRP—Training and development	0.90	4.60	1.48	0.36 <sup>a</sup>	0.34 <sup>a</sup>	0.24	0.28	0.26	0.63	<b>0.68</b>	0.31	0.45	0.26	0.49	0.30
8. HRP—Job Security	0.87	4.37	1.53	0.34 <sup>a</sup>	0.31 <sup>a</sup>	0.22	0.26	0.24	0.59 <sup>b</sup>	0.56 <sup>b</sup>	<b>0.63</b>	0.40	0.23	0.42	0.26
9. HRP—Promotion	0.91	3.53	1.75	0.41 <sup>a</sup>	0.38 <sup>a</sup>	0.27	0.31 <sup>a</sup>	0.29	0.71 <sup>b</sup>	0.67 <sup>b</sup>	0.63 <sup>b</sup>	<b>0.73</b>	0.53	0.61	0.38
10. HRP—Job Design	0.92	5.21	1.46	0.31 <sup>a</sup>	0.29	0.20	0.24	0.22	0.54 <sup>b</sup>	0.51 <sup>b</sup>	0.48 <sup>+</sup>	0.57 <sup>b</sup>	<b>0.78</b>	0.35	0.22
11. HRP—Communication	0.85	4.64	1.48	0.42 <sup>a</sup>	0.39 <sup>a</sup>	0.28	0.32 <sup>a</sup>	0.30 <sup>a</sup>	0.73 <sup>b</sup>	0.70 <sup>b</sup>	0.65 <sup>b</sup>	0.78 <sup>b</sup>	0.59 <sup>b</sup>	<b>0.57</b>	0.41
12. HRP—Reward	0.92	3.03	1.70	0.33 <sup>a</sup>	0.31 <sup>a</sup>	0.22	0.26	0.23	0.58 <sup>b</sup>	0.55 <sup>b</sup>	0.51 <sup>b</sup>	0.62 <sup>b</sup>	0.47 <sup>a</sup>	0.64 <sup>b</sup>	<b>0.74</b>

Note: AVE is reported on the diagonal of the correlation and squared correlation above the diagonal

All correlations are statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ )

<sup>a</sup>Correlation is practically significant  $r \geq 0.30$  (medium effect)

<sup>b</sup>Correlation is practically significant  $r \geq 0.50$  (large effect)

### 5.11 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of the Scales

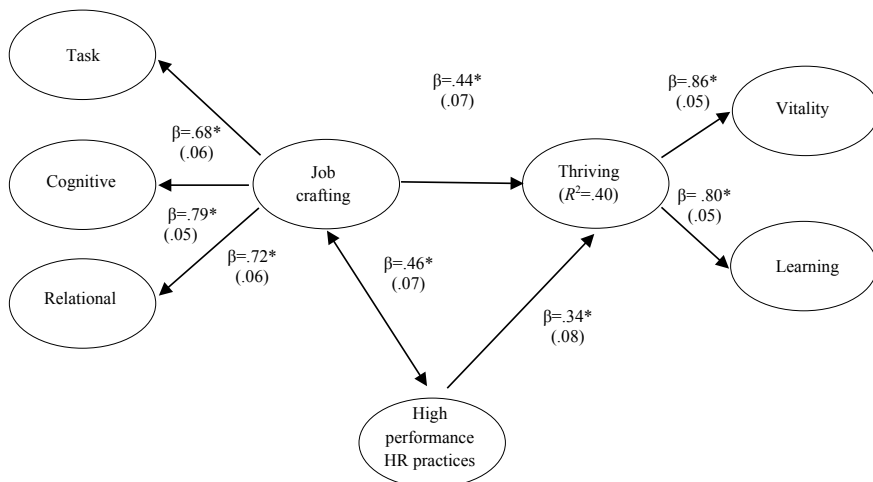
The descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients of the measuring instruments, the Pearson correlation coefficients between the constructs as well as the average variance extracted are reported in Table 5.3.

From the results in Table 5.3, the reliabilities of all the measuring instruments were acceptable, ranging from 0.77 to 0.95 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The TWS dimensions of learning and vitality had good reliability with values ranging from 0.91 to 0.95.

Table 5.3 provides the correlation coefficients of the study variables. Task, cognitive and relational dimensions of job crafting were all practically and statistically significantly related to thriving at work dimensions of learning and vitality with a medium effect. Selection, training and development, job security, promotion, communication and reward were all practically and statistically significantly related to the thriving at work dimensions of learning and vitality with a medium effect. However, job design was practically and statistically significantly related to the thriving at work dimensions of vitality (medium effect) and learning (small effect).

The discriminant validity of the scales of all measuring instruments was acceptable. The average variance extracted of each scale was larger than the squared correlations between the relevant scale and each of the other scales (Fig. 5.1).

Table 5.4 shows that thriving at work is predicted by job crafting ( $\beta = 0.44$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and high-performance HR practices ( $\beta = 0.34$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Selection ( $\beta = 0.82$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Training and development ( $\beta = 0.78$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Job security ( $\beta = 0.72$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ),



**Fig. 5.1** The structural model (standardised solution with standard errors in parentheses). Note: All the regression coefficients are statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ )

**Table 5.4** Standardised regression coefficients of thriving on job Crafting and high-performance HR practices

Variable	Estimate	SE	Estimate/SE	<i>p</i>
Job crafting	0.44	0.07	6.13	0.0001**
High-performance HR practices	0.34	0.08	4.60	0.0001**

Note: SE: standard error; Est/SE: estimate divided by standard error; *p*: obtained significance value  
\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Promotion ( $\beta = 0.87$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Job design ( $\beta = 0.66$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Communication ( $\beta = 0.90$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and Reward ( $\beta = 0.71$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Hypotheses 1 and 2 are accepted.

## 5.12 Moderating Effects

Consistent with the guidelines suggested by Hayes (2018) for examining moderating effects between continuous variables, hierarchical regression analyses were performed to examine the extent to which HR practices might moderate the influence of job crafting on thriving of academics. With thriving as the dependent variable, standardised job crafting scores (predictor) were entered in the first step, followed by standardised HR practices scores (moderator) in the second step. To examine the possibility of a significant moderating effect, standardised interaction scores between job crafting and HR practices scores were entered in the third and final step. According to Hayes (2018), evidence of a moderating effect is present when the interaction term between the predictor and moderator is significant. Regression results for the moderation effect are presented in Table 5.5.

The interaction between job crafting and HR practices accounted for a significant addition of 3% in the variance of thriving. The complete regression model accounted for 62% of the variance in thriving ( $F(3, 272) = 146.74$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Table 5.4 shows that the interaction of job crafting and high-performance HR practices is significant ( $\beta = -0.24$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $t = -4.98$ ,  $p < 0.01$  [-0.33, -0.14]).

**Table 5.5** Regression results for the moderation effect

Variable	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	0.09	0.04	2.24	0.03	0.01	0.17
Job crafting	0.91	0.08	11.88	0.00	0.76	1.06
High-performance HR practices	0.28	0.04	7.83	0.00	0.21	0.35
Interaction	-0.24	0.05	-4.98	0.00	-0.33	-0.14

Note: SE: standard error; Est/SE: estimate divided by standard error; *p*: obtained significance value  
\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$



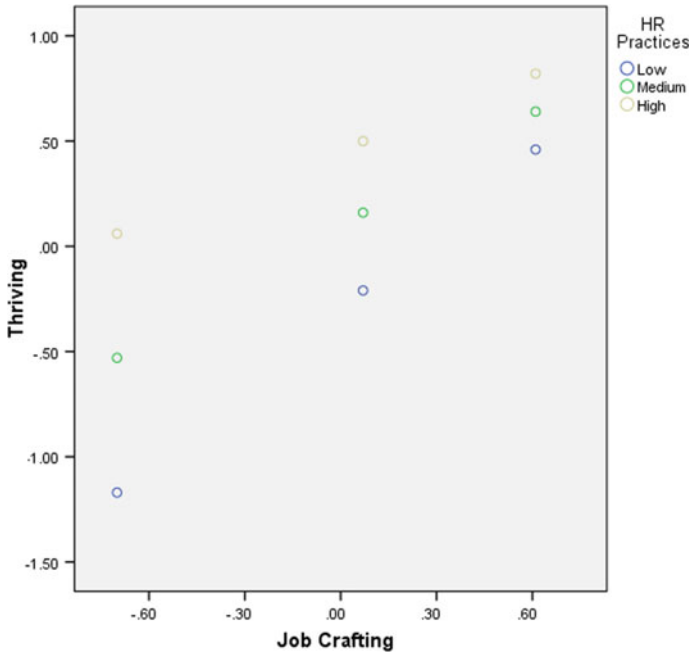


Fig. 5.2 The interaction between job crafting and HR practices

High-performance HR practices were found to moderate the relationship between job crafting and thriving significantly. Overall, these results indicate that high-performance HR practices have a direct influence on thriving beyond what can be accounted for by job crafting and moderate the relation between job crafting and thriving.

To examine the interaction effects that emerged, we plotted the simple slopes of the job crafting–thriving linkage at the 16th, 50th and 84th percentiles, which correspond to a standard deviation below the mean, the mean and a standard deviation above the mean (Hayes, 2018). We also tested whether each slope was statistically significant (Fig. 5.2).

As shown in Fig. 5.1, the results matched the predicted pattern: The job crafting–thriving linkage exists in the low HR practices condition (simple slope = 1.24,  $p < 0.01$  [1/05, 1.44]), but was not lower in the high HR practices condition (simple slope = 0.58,  $p > 0.01$  [0.38, 0.78]). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported. Specifically, when high-performance HR practices are perceived to be good, academics who measure low on job crafting thrive more than those who perceive high-performance HR practices as high. When the scores on high-performance HR practices are low, academics’ thriving increase when job crafting increases.

### 5.13 Discussion

This study aimed to test a structural model that distinguishes the nature of relationships between job crafting, high-performance HR practices and thriving. Results confirmed the two-factor structure of thriving (vitality and learning), a three-factor structure of job crafting, and a seven-structure of high-performance HR practices. The findings support a model in which job crafting and high-performance HR practices interact to affect the thriving of academics in higher education institutions.

As hypothesised, job crafting positively predicted thriving at work. The more academics practised cognitive, task and relational job crafting, the more they experienced vitality and learning in their jobs. According to Spreitzer and Porath (2012), individuals could affect their thriving through specific actions. First, crafting jobs could result in meaningful work, which impacts vitality and learning, confirming the significant role of individual thriving at work. Second, by looking for opportunities to innovate, academics gain knowledge that could fuel thriving. Third, by investing in relationships that energise, academics experience higher vitality and learning.

The results showed that job crafting was a stronger predictor of thriving than high-performance HR practices. However, high-performance HR practices such as recruitment and selection, training and development, promotion, job security, performance-related pay, communication, and autonomy (Iverson & Zatzick, 2007; McClean & Collins, 2011; Price, 2011) play an essential supporting role in thriving at work.

Findings from the present study confirmed that employee perceptions of high-performance HR practices have a direct impact on the extent to which academics thrive. Academics who perceive high-performance HR practices experience higher levels of thriving (vitality and learning). Communication, promotion, and selection had the strongest associations with thriving. Furthermore, the results showed that high-performance HR practices play a significant role to enable academics to thrive, even when they are not crafting their jobs. If high-performance HR practices are poor, academics will thrive when they are crafting their jobs. Therefore, high-performance HR practices are critical to enable academics to thrive, rather than only survive.

What practices can higher education institutions implement to promote the thriving of academics? According to Spreitzer and Porath (2012), sharing of information, providing decision-making discretion, minimising incivility and offering performance feedback lead to the thriving of people at work. Understanding the mission and strategy of their institutions is vital to promote feelings of competence, which increase vitality and growth. Providing decision-making discretion acknowledges the autonomy of individuals, which fuels their vitality and growth. High-performance HR practices which minimise incivility in the institution build experiences of vitality and learning. Feedback creates opportunities for learning.

Three types of job crafting, namely cognitive crafting, task crafting, and relational crafting, are relevant for academics (Wellman & Spreitzer, 2011). Individuals could craft their jobs cognitively by enlarging their perspectives and by leveraging more of their best selves. Enlarging their perspectives could be done by appreciating different ways in which their work can impact others, e.g. through the advancement of knowledge, integrating disciplines and paradigms, applying their knowledge to solve societal problems, and by extending and transforming the knowledge of students. Task crafting can be attained by focussing on meaningful work and by crafting more challenges into their jobs by developing new teaching modules. Relational crafting entails changing the quality and amount of interactions with others at work through building high-quality connections and by increasing their contact with beneficiaries of their work (e.g. students, parents, and community members).

Employees need high-performance HR practices to promote their thriving even if they craft their jobs. Human resource management professionals within higher education need to develop an integrated set of high-performance HR practices and ensure they are consistently and fairly implemented. Hence higher the opportunity for job crafting the better the opportunity to thrive but if the perceived high-performance HR practices are seen as good and just it will give the opportunity for academics to thrive even if there is not much of an opportunity to job craft. Ideally, if academics can job craft and high-performance HR practices are implemented, academics will be more capable to thrive.

## 5.14 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study had various limitations. One limitation derives from the use of single time-point, self-report measures. Because of this study design, it was unable to assess whether employees appear to other observers to be thriving at work and whether their ratings of job crafting carry through to influence their job crafting at work. It was also not possible to provide insight into the direction of effects existing among job crafting, high-performance HR practices, and thriving. Future research would benefit from obtaining observer reports of thriving and workplace behaviours. Furthermore, longitudinal designs will allow greater insight into reciprocal influences over time.

Finally, this study focused on a very narrow topic, namely the thriving of academics to develop well-functioning and performing academics and universities. However, the effects of the Fourth Industrial Revolution are much broader. For example, as Rajan (2019, p. 2) pointed out “moderately educated workers are rapidly losing or are at risk of losing good middle-class employment.” The latter contributes to precariousness and has grievous effects on individuals, their families, and the communities in which they live. Moreover, inequality, poverty and

unemployment in communities make the challenges precariousness and (in)stability of countries more significant. These factors, which will impact individuals, organisations and communities must be researched in the future.

## 5.15 Conclusions

This study contributes to understanding of career wellbeing of academics in higher education institutions by focusing on “thriving at work” and its antecedents. Job crafting and high-performance HR practices are linked to career wellbeing in higher education institutions. Characteristically, academics who craft their jobs are more likely to thrive in their work, as are those who experience high-performance HR practices. Moreover, an interaction between job crafting and high-performance HR practices adds to the explanation of thriving and emphasises the importance of high-performance HR practices, particularly for people who are not crafting their jobs. High-performance HR practices may provide an essential route to thriving and may compensate for academics’ inability to craft their jobs.

## 5.16 Implications for Career Wellbeing

Institutions should focus on personal and contextual factors such as job crafting and high-performance HR practices to promote career wellbeing. *Job crafting* captures the dynamic changes individuals render to their job designs in ways that can create many positive outcomes. However, job crafting should be applied and administered effectively. To be appropriately implemented, job crafting needs alignment with both the academics’ and the university’s goals.

In order to entice and hold on to academic staff, higher education institutions should try to be innovative in the recruitment, selection and onboarding processes. Real innovation stems from the ability to knock down existing structures and arrange them back in a more meaningful manner. The HR department together with academics identify and remove the aspects of work that are not necessarily beneficial to the achievement of the overall purpose of being an academic and to then successfully reassemble the relevant parts. In this way, academics will be job designing, which puts them in the driver’s seat and helps them to proactively reorganise the boundaries of their jobs and to reframe how they would relate to their job and ponder about their contribution to the organisation, scrutinising the larger purpose of their work and whom it might benefit.

High-performance HR practices and job crafting are both essential constructs for career wellbeing. HR departments together with the managers should make use of the JCQ, which is a statistically validated tool to measure the extent to which their staff engage in job crafting strategies (Slemp & Vella-Brodrick, 2013) by indicating the frequency with which they have engaged in each job crafting activity. The HR

department can then initiate the use of the Job Crafting Exercise either as a group workshop or one-on-one coaching. It is a tool that allows employees to apply job crafting interventions by supplying them with an adaptable set of building blocks to build a graphic picture of how employees presently spend their energy and time at work. The Job Crafting Exercise has been used in a variety of ways successfully by many companies in the private sector internationally. Investing in it, within the higher education sector in South Africa might prove beneficial as academics can be trained on how to engage in activities that potentially impact proactive behaviour and thriving.

High-performance HR practices are a set of interconnected human resource practices intended to improve the quality and performance of employees in organisations (Messersmith, Patel, Lepak, & Gould-Williams, 2011). With regards to the *ability-enhancing HR practices* (selection, training and development), innovative selection methods and onboarding are crucial to select academics and keep them happy. There must be a learning culture, and this learning culture needs to be in sync with the universities' values and the broader macro environment. The higher education institutions should not silo their learning and development (L&D) away from their job crafting strategies and interventions and their employee engagement initiatives. Instead, there should be an integrated approach. L&D should not be a top-down approach. Employees should be able to create their individual learning goals in line with their development plans for job-related skills, and personalised L&D programmes should be designed to provide academics with competencies needed to satisfy their career aspirations (Mostafa, Gould-Williams, & Bottomley, 2014). This can imply that universities value their employees and are prepared to invest in their careers and expectations.

With regard to the *motivation-enhancing HR practices* (job security, promotion and performance-related pay), time should be devoted to developing a proper performance-related pay management structure and process by including all role players to ensure a shared comprehension of the purpose and the implementation and of what the performance at different levels looks like (Seyama & Smith, 2013). Offering performance feedback creates opportunities for learning. Opportunities for promotion and job security should be communicated; this reveals the universities' appreciation and recognition of employees' long-term worth.

Concerning *opportunity-enhancing HR practices* (autonomy and communication), Spreitzer and Porath (2012) advocate for the sharing of information about the organisation hence the universities need to make sure that they communicate their strategy, culture and values to the academics. Meaningful communication reinforces to employees that their contributions are valued and not only reassures them about the importance of their job; this is vital to promote feelings of competence, which increase vitality and growth. Advancement focused employees are most motivated when the communication they obtain emphasises how they can succeed in the attainment of their goals (Van-Dijk & Kluger, 2004). Furthermore, providing for decision-making discretion and latitude in the job will allow them to craft their jobs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) in a manner that provides for the ability to modify roles in a manner that will likely satisfy the employee's needs for autonomy

and competence, which fuels their vitality and growth. Moreover, the well-designed working environment should offer academics places for focused work as well as places for interaction with colleagues.

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