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A QUALITATIVE METHOD FOR ASSESSING FACULTY SATISFACTION

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Universities attempt to hire the highest quality faculty they can, but they are not always successful at retaining them. Furthermore, some faculty members who do remain may not function as engaging colleagues who make others want to stay. This study investigates why some faculty members leave and why others stay by illuminating the complexities of individual experiences. Using semi-structured interviews rather than surveys, a matched cohort of 123 faculty members (half current and half former) from one institution was interviewed. Although some of their primary reasons for satisfaction or dissatisfaction (e.g., collegiality, mentoring) were predicted by general survey research, there were also unforeseeable issues that strongly influenced satisfaction and decisions to stay or leave, demonstrating the importance of institution-specific research. This paper provides a method for collecting institution-specific information as well as several arguments for conducting interviews instead of pre-defined surveys.

KEY WORDS: faculty retention; faculty satisfaction; qualitative research; collegiality; mentoring.

INTRODUCTION

Universities go to considerable effort and expense to hire new faculty, but how successful are they at retaining the faculty they hire? Are the faculty members they retain satisfied, and do they function as the kind of engaged colleagues who make others want to stay? Finally, how can colleges and universities most effectively confront the problem of faculty dissatisfaction and increase retention?

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While some amount of faculty turnover is both necessary and healthy, too much turnover can be expensive at multiple levels. Not only do universities lose valued faculty, searches for new faculty rob departments of time and resources that could be used more productively elsewhere (Johnsrud and Rosser, 2002; Solmon and Fagnano, 1993). Moreover, the financial costs of turnover are considerable, particularly at research institutions where start-up packages can reach a half million dollars or more (Ehrenberg, Rizzo, and Jakubson, 2003; Harrigan, 1999).

Faculty turnover rates vary from approximately 2–10% per year at well-established research universities (Harrigan, 1999). Smaller public institutions and two-year colleges lose faculty at a slightly higher rate (see Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2001), and turnover rates are higher for women than for men (e.g., Tolbert, 1995). These numbers, however, may be deceptively low because they report retention rates only on an annual basis and not over time. In one of very few comprehensive studies, the University of Wisconsin–Madison found that after 10 years, the mean retention rate for faculty at all ranks was only 55% (Harrigan, 1999). While Wisconsin's low retention rate may in part be explained by the quality of that institution's faculty (i.e., they are likely to be recruited aggressively by other institutions) and its high performance criteria (i.e., many faculty do not make it through the promotion and tenure process), the number remains disturbingly low and suggests that the issue of faculty retention is one that demands closer study within the contexts of particular academic institutions.

In light of these statistics, as Johnsrud and Rosser (2002) note, "Institutions would benefit from a clearer understanding of what contributes to faculty decisions to leave" (p. 518). However, it is equally important to understand the subtler dimensions of dissatisfaction that can lead even established faculty to feel disinvested and apathetic. These sorts of morale issues have implications for the retention of still other faculty, who by virtue of their colleagues' withdrawal from the institution may not receive adequate mentoring or experience the sense of intellectual community they require.

The present study was conducted at a small, private Research I university over a period of 2 years (2002–2003). We sought to gain a deeper, more contextual understanding of the ways in which various events and perceptions shape faculty decisions to stay, go and (if staying) contribute or withdraw from their immediate academic community. This paper will (1) argue for the importance of collecting institution-specific, qualitative data concerning faculty morale and retention, (2) describe the issues impacting faculty satisfaction and retention at this particular institution, and (3) discuss the relationship of our research to Matier's

1990 study of faculty retention and adapt Matier's classification framework to suggest ways in which other institutions might prioritize their efforts to address faculty morale and retention (Matier, 1990).

The Faculty Morale and Retention Literature

There is a robust literature that discusses the variables that determine faculty members' intentions to stay at or leave an institution (e.g., Barnes, Agago and Coombs, 1998; Bowen and Schuster, 1986; Johnsrud and Rosser, 2002; Lee and Mowday, 1987; Manger and Eikeland, 1990; Matier, 1990; Olsen, Maple and Stage, 1995; Smart, 1990; Weiler, 1985), and a second, partially overlapping set of findings that identifies the prominent "stressors" that junior faculty experience (Fink, 1984; Sorcinelli, 1988, 1992; Turner and Boice, 1987). Some studies have focused on the particular issues affecting women and minority faculty (Olsen et al., 1995) and others examine the impact of financial austerity on faculty morale (Kerlin and Dunlap, 1993; Williams, Olswang and Hargett, 1986). Matier's (1990) work has been particularly valuable in establishing a framework for predicting faculty decisions to leave an institution. We will discuss the connection between our research and Matier's in the Discussion section below.

The studies above, including Matier's, seek to illuminate issues relevant to faculty morale and retention nationally, and as such their focus has been broad rather than deep. While informative on a number of levels, studies such as these are of limited use in helping colleges and universities identify the particular features of their own institutions that influence faculty morale and retention. Because of its broad, normative nature, prior research has also offered little insight into the complex interaction of events and experiences in the lives of individual faculty members that shape their perceptions and ultimately their decisions to stay or leave. The current research speaks to these shortcomings.

Institution-Specific Data

Bensimon, Polkinghorne, Bauman and Vallejo (2004) have pointed out the limitations of national-level research for illuminating the local conditions that shape faculty experiences. They, along with other researchers, acknowledge that differences among institutions in regard to institutional culture, mission, financial and administrative structure, student bodies, funding sources, etc. have distinct implications for faculty morale (Bluedorn, 1982; Clark, Corcoran and Lewis, 1986;

Johnsrud and Rosser, 2002; Wimsatt, 2003). The university that was the focus of this study, for example, is in a medium-sized city with a relatively low cost of living, a somewhat stagnant job market, and an older population. It has a low endowment in comparison to many of the Research I institutions with which it actively competes for students and faculty, yet it has had a successful record of attracting research funding. Additionally, in contrast to otherwise comparable universities, it has a highly decentralized administrative structure, such that power is concentrated in the hands of department heads.

Clearly, these characteristics (and many others) shape faculty experiences and influence morale profoundly. Housing is affordable – a feature of the local area which contributes to faculty satisfaction – yet it can be difficult for faculty spouses to find suitable work and for single faculty members to find partners. Likewise, the university's stellar reputation among funding institutions can work to a faculty member's advantage, but the heavy reliance on soft money creates intense pressure to produce grants, taking time away from the research itself, and creating a culture which some faculty describe as "money-grubbing." By the same token, the university's decentralized administrative structure, when working properly, can reduce bureaucratic delays and streamline new research projects, but it can also exacerbate the problem of ineffective or autocratic department heads and lead to frustration and bitterness on the part of faculty members.

The specific contexts in which faculty members live and work, in other words, matter, and it is to the benefit of colleges and universities to understand how their particular institutional features (e.g., large or small, rural or urban, teaching or research focused) shape faculty morale and retention. As Johnsrud and Rosser (2000) observe, "[t]o make a difference at the institutional level ... it may make most sense for an institution to measure faculty members' perceptions specific to their campus" (p. 537). Without such data, universities cannot effectively target their problems, identify their strengths, or fully understand where their own experiences intersect with or diverge from the experiences of other institutions. This research provides both an in-depth look at faculty morale and retention within the context of a specific university culture and also a model that other institutions might follow to study the issues that confront their own faculties.

A Qualitative Approach

Most previous studies on faculty morale and retention have relied heavily on survey data that, while permitting researchers to more easily

tabulate and rank reasons for faculty satisfaction and dissatisfaction, limit the range of possible responses from participants and isolate subjective perceptions from the objective events and experiences that have shaped them. We chose instead to collect detailed personal narratives from faculty. This approach capitalizes on what Maxwell has identified as the principle strengths of qualitative research: its capacity to examine (1) the *meaning* for participants (in this case, faculty members) of the events, situations and actions in which they are involved, (2) the particular *context* within which participants act and how the context influences their actions, (3) *unanticipated* phenomena and influences, which emerge spontaneously in open-ended interviews in ways that cannot in structured surveys, (4) the *process* by which events and actions take place and (5) complex *causal* relationships (in this case, the varying and interacting causes of faculty satisfaction) (Maxwell, 1996, pp. 17–20).

Like survey data, qualitative data can be coded and aggregated to reveal university-wide patterns, yet it goes beyond survey data in clarifying the particularities of a given issue (for example, what faculty mean when they talk about an "incompetent" or "power-hungry" department head, what a productive mentoring relationship entails). Narrative data, moreover, provide context and detail, revealing the chronology and interaction of events that shape the professional lives and influence the decisions of faculty members.

METHOD

Sample

Over the two-year study, a total of 123 faculty members were interviewed. They represented two groups: former tenured or tenure-track faculty members and a matched cohort of current tenured or tenure-track faculty members (hereafter referred to as "former faculty" and "current faculty", respectively). In the spring of 2002 we interviewed former faculty who left the institution between 1991 and 2000, excluding individuals who had moved from faculty to administrative positions before leaving the university, as well as individuals engaged in past or current litigation. Seventy-seven former faculty members were asked to participate, selected to form a representative sample of colleges and departments within the university. Seventy-three of these 77 faculty members agreed to be interviewed. Of them, 61were available for interviews during the necessary time period (others were on sabbatical, traveling, or proved to have scheduling conflicts that prohibited participation). It should be noted that of the former faculty interviewed, 54%

had left the institution of their own accord (i.e., they were faculty the university had tried unsuccessfully to retain[1]) and 26% had received tenure prior to their departure. They were not, in other words, professionally unsuccessful nor did they necessarily leave under duress. In fact, to date 43 of the former faculty are tenured at their new institutions and 11 left academe of their own volition to go into industry or to found their own companies; all in this group report success and satisfaction with their lives outside of academe. Three have not yet received tenure, and we have lost track of the final four.

From fall of 2002 to spring of 2003, we interviewed current faculty who were matched by date of appointment, department and college with the former faculty group. The two groups were also matched by gender and race whenever possible. They were not, of course, matched on tenure status since some former faculty had left the institution without tenure, whereas many of their colleagues who had stayed were now tenured. Letters of invitation were sent to 70 current faculty members, followed by a phone call or e-mail message, and 62 agreed to be interviewed. In this cohort of current faculty, 42 were tenured.

Procedures

Conducting the Interviews

The interviews were conducted over the phone[2] by an anthropologist and a social historian, employing a semi-structured interview protocol (Chilcott, 1987; Fetterman, 1990; Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 1998, 2002). Respondents were asked to describe their experience at the institution and any significant factors or critical incidents that affected their experience. They were encouraged to tell their own "stories" in their own style. As a result, faculty participants did not necessarily raise the same issues (for example, one person might describe his mentor in great detail, but another might not mention a mentor at all) and thus some comparability across interviews was lost. However, we believe that a non-directive approach yielded data that accurately reflect the priorities and concerns of the faculty themselves.

The interviews ranged from 20 to 120 minutes, averaging approximately 45 minutes. They were not audiotaped. Although our preference was to do so, the university's legal counsel advised us not to record the interviews because of a pending lawsuit against the institution and the possibility that the tapes could be subpoenaed. Because our primary concern was to protect the confidentiality of respondents, we chose to have the interviewers take notes by hand (it was less likely that interviewer notes would be subpoenaed). Following the interview, each respondent was assigned a number based on the order of the interviews and was referred to by that number, never by name, on all of the paperwork and coding sheets. No identifying information, not even the respondent's department, appeared anywhere on the typed notes from his/her interview.

Coding

Unlike coding in quantitative research, in which a pre-established set of categories are applied to the data, the goal of our coding was to rearrange the qualitative data based on categories that emerged from faculty's narratives (Maxwell, 1996). As a result, the coding is solidly grounded in the data.

Two independent coders (a cognitive psychologist and a social historian, different from the interviewers) coded each set of interviews to identify the common issues. For each set of interviews, the two coders independently read and coded an initial set of 10 interviews and then discussed the categories that were emerging. When there was a decision to be made about having one general or two specific categories, we opted to preserve as much detail as possible. The coders agreed upon general categories based on this initial subset and used this mutually agreed upon, emergent coding system to recode the initial 10 interviews and to code the remaining interviews. The inter-rater reliability between the two coders was 93% for the former faculty and 95% for the current faculty.

Limitations of the Method

We recognize that the two groups of participants have a somewhat different perspective on the same institution because one group chose to stay and the other chose to leave. The narratives of former faculty reflect a distance from their experiences at the university that may not characterize the narratives of current faculty. A former faculty member might, for example, explain his decisions to leave the university in slightly different terms at the time of the interview than he would have at the time he left: his account might be colored by a sense of nostalgia, feelings of regret, or a need to justify his decision; it is also likely to involve comparisons with his current job. However, since both current and former groups of faculty were asked to comment on their experiences over a period of time and explain decisions that took place in the past (i.e., whether to leave or stay), both sets of narratives must be understood as having been filtered through the lens of memory and retroactive sense-making.

Another limitation to the methodology was that the interviews were not audiotaped, for reasons already explained. In making the decision not to audiotape, we sacrificed the ability to collect all but short, direct quotes from faculty participants. However, an unanticipated compensation was that faculty – perhaps because they knew they were not being audiotaped – told their stories with surprising, sometimes even shocking, frankness. Although it would have been optimal to verify the accuracy of interview notes by conducting member-checks (i.e., asking faculty participants to read and comment on the accuracy of the interview transcripts as reconstructed from the interviewer's notes), we were limited by time and resources from doing so. In the context of the interviews, however, the interviewers frequently asked clarifying questions to ensure that they were recording narrative details correctly, getting an accurate chronology of events, and preserving the nuances of faculty experiences and perceptions. In several cases, respondents corrected details of the narrative when the interviewer reviewed the notes over the telephone. The interviewers also transcribed their notes immediately following the interview to maximize accuracy.

RESULTS

Overall Experience of Current and Former Faculty

At either the beginning or the end of most interviews, faculty summarized their experiences at the university by saying "generally" or "overall" it was a positive or negative experience. If faculty did not provide an overall assessment of their experience, the interviewer prompted them at the end of the interview with a question to the effect of "So how was your experience overall?" It is significant that in these overall assessments, faculty members who left reported being just as satisfied as faculty who stayed. For former faculty, 54% of the 61 interviewees said that their overall experience was positive and 43% said that overall it was negative. Similarly, 53% of the 62 current faculty reported that they were quite satisfied and planning to stay and 39% concluded that their overall experience has been negative. (The remaining faculty described mixed sentiments and could not be decisively coded as positive or negative). General levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction thus proved to be a poor predictor of faculty decisions to stay at or leave the institution.

There are several possible explanations for this apparent lack of correlation between satisfaction and retention. First, it is important to note that faculty members do not only leave an institution because they are dissatisfied. A number of the former faculty in our study left to pursue

new professional opportunities, to be closer to family, or to accommodate a spouse's career, not because they were unhappy with their jobs. By the same token, not all faculty who stayed at the institution stayed because they were happy. Some remained, despite reporting low satisfaction, because of a spouse's job, the desire to live near family, etc. Consequently, it is necessary to look not only at job satisfaction but also at broader issues to determine the circumstances under which faculty leave.

Second, summative assessments may be a poor index of actual faculty experiences. We were struck by the fact that participants' stories often seemed to contradict their overall assessments; for example, a respondent might recall an almost exclusively negative or frustrating series of experiences but conclude by saying: "Overall, it was a good experience." The discrepancy between summative assessments and particular experiences (reported in survey research in general and in student evaluation research, see Arreola, 1995; Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski, 2000) suggests that there are layers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction which overall assessments obscure and which institutions would benefit from understanding in greater depth. Thus, in analyzing our data we concentrated on the experiences faculty emphasized in their narratives and the perceptions and decisions that arose from these experiences. Our principal focus was on identifying the patterns that link individual experiences across the university community. The section below describes the most commonly cited issues impacting faculty morale across the university. Although we include sources of satisfaction (i.e., those elements of professional life and institutional culture that lead faculty to feel invested and content), in the interests of space and perhaps the more pressing need to pinpoint problems that negatively impact faculty morale, we have devoted more attention to identifying sources of dissatisfaction.

Commonly Cited Reasons for Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction

Respondents' sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction clustered into seven general categories. Five of these (salaries, collegiality, mentoring, the reappointment, promotion and tenure process, and department heads – see Table 1) correspond to areas widely recognized in the literature on faculty satisfaction (Boyer, Altbach and Whitlaw, 1994; Matier, 1990; Manger and Eikeland, 1990; Olsen, 1993; Olsen, Maple and Stage, 1995; Smart, 1990; Sorcinelli and Austin, 1992; Tack and Patitu, 1992; Weiler, 1985). The other two categories were more unique to this particular

TABLE 1. Primary Reasons Cited for Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction by Current and Former Faculty

Issue	Reason for Satisfaction	Current Faculty (N = 62)	Former Faculty (N = 61)	Reason for Dissatisfaction	Current Faculty (N = 62)	Former Faculty (N = 61)
Collegiality within Department	Collegiality	47%	33%	Lack of collegiality	27%	67%
Surrounding city, Local Region	City an advantage (low cost of living, etc.)	48%	21%	City a disadvantage (poor weather, etc.)	10%	26%
Reappointment, Promotion and Tenure Process	Effective process	30%	20%	Flawed process (arbitrary, unfair, political, etc.)	50%	28%
	Regular, helpful feedback	11%	7%	Lack of regular, constructive feedback	21%	31%
	Clear and consistent criteria	15%	13%	Unclear and/or inconsistent criteria	15%	30%
Salaries	Competitive	3%	–	Not competitive	16%	34%
Leadership: Department Head	Effective department head	27%	23%	Ineffective department head	26%	39%
Mentoring	Effective mentoring	18%	23%	Lack of or ineffective mentoring	26%	34%
Interdisciplinary Nature of Institution	Support for interdisciplinary work	34%	10%	Lack of support for interdisciplinary work	10%	16%

Notes: The dashes (–) indicate that none of the faculty in this group (i.e., Current or Former Faculty) raised this issue in their interviews. It might appear from the above table that 100% of the former faculty raised the issue of collegiality (i.e., 33% satisfied + 67% dissatisfied = 100%), but as mentioned in the text, some faculty members were coded twice. Because former faculty members expressed a change in the collegiality of their department, from welcoming and collegial to non-collegial or vice versa, these faculty were coded as being both satisfied and dissatisfied on the issue of collegiality.

university as they involved regional issues and the university's interdisciplinary focus.

(1) Salaries

At the university where this study was conducted, a number of administrators believed that salaries were the primary reason faculty members left the institution. Faculty interviews, however, did not bear this out. While about one-third of the former faculty respondents mentioned that their salary at the institution had not been competitive, no one claimed to have left the university because of low salary, and most respondents who mentioned the issue did so at the end of the interview almost as an afterthought (e.g., "So I ultimately left for X, where, by the way, my salary was 25% more"). Their narratives, moreover, did not focus on salary but rather on issues such as collegiality and departmental leadership (see Table 1).

Although it is certainly possible that salaries played a bigger role in decision-making than faculty cared to admit, our findings in this regard are consistent with the literature on faculty retention in suggesting that salary alone is rarely the prime mover in faculty decisions to leave (Caplow and McGee, 1958; Gartshore, Hibbard and Stockard, 1983; Johnsrud and Rosser, 2002; Matier, 1990; Smart, 1990; Toombs and Marlier, 1981). Salary is clearly important to faculty, but our data indicate that it generally acts as a catalyst in decisions to leave when compounded by other, more powerful sources of dissatisfaction. We turn to these in the section below.

(2) Collegiality

The issue of collegiality stood out *by far* as the single most frequently cited issue by both former and current faculty, a common finding in research on faculty satisfaction (Barnes et al., 1998; Manger and Eikeland, 1990; Olsen and Sorcinelli, 1992; Smart, 1990; Turner and Boice, 1987; Walvoord et al., 2000). The presence or absence of collegiality was an issue raised by 99 of the 123 respondents, making it the most popular topic for discussion in the interviews.[3] As shown in Table 1, almost half of the current faculty members interviewed were satisfied with collegiality within their departments and/or the university, but former faculty were not. The direction of causality comes into question for former faculty: it is not clear whether an inherently non-collegial environment provoked these faculty to leave, or whether in some cases their departments made early determinations that these colleagues would not be retained,

thus leading to an unfriendly climate. While causality cannot be determined from this research design, it is interesting to note that 14 out of 33 former faculty *whom the university wanted to retain* identified lack of collegiality as one of their reasons for leaving. Such findings would suggest that the institution's lack of collegiality can be costly. While many faculty spoke positively about their colleagues, there were also a number of serious complaints concerning collegiality. These fell into three major categories: lack of time and interest on the part of colleagues, intra-departmental tensions, and incivility.

(a) Time and Interest. Current and former faculty who were satisfied with the collegiality in their departments characterized their colleagues as supportive of and invested in each other's work (i.e., willing to listen and provide feedback on ideas, proposals, papers and teaching). Several faculty described the welcoming atmosphere they experienced when they first arrived, explaining that their colleagues took the time to orient them and help them find resources within their departments. In contrast, lack of collegiality was pronounced when senior faculty lacked time for or interest in junior faculty endeavors.

One current faculty member, for example, remarked that the senior faculty in her department were not interested in anything outside their own subfields. She was particularly frustrated by the fact that when she had organized a conference on campus at the encouragement of her colleagues, one that was well attended by faculty from other institutions, hardly anyone from her own department bothered to come. This story is one of many we heard in which a junior faculty member expressed frustration that senior colleagues were too busy or too focused on their own careers to interact with younger faculty. This lack of time and interest was also cited as a reason why some junior faculty lacked senior mentors.

(b) Intra-Departmental Tensions. Many faculty respondents described schisms and factions within their departments that created isolation, suspicion and resentment and left little room for collegiality. In a number of cases, there was tension between traditional and emerging fields, particularly when there was competition for limited resources. A current senior faculty member, for example, reported that one group of faculty in his department typically got most of the resources and received course and committee reductions while another group did not. He also described two groups of faculty who did experiments in his own field; the faculty in his group tended to get tenure, he said, while no one in the other group had received tenure in years. He could not explain the discrepancy but said that he thought personal issues and political tensions played a role.

Both former and current faculty described "warring sub-groups", "cliques" and "infighting" among groups within their departments. Faculty perceptions of secrecy and hidden processes added to these tensions. A number of respondents reported that their department head "played favorites," or said their departments reeked of an "old boys' network." This issue was raised both by male faculty who admitted benefiting from such networks and by female and minority faculty members who felt disenfranchised by them.

(c) Incivility. Lastly, respondents reported uncivil behaviors among their colleagues that ranged from thoughtlessness to outright hostility. For instance, one former faculty member, whose research interests fell outside the more traditional scope of her senior colleagues, was informed on her first day at the institution that, in 40 years, no one in her area of expertise in the department had ever received tenure. A senior colleague informed the same person, after presenting a paper at a department seminar, that her work was a "waste of time" (yet the paper was later published in a prestigious journal.) In her last year at the institution, this faculty member realized that she would not receive tenure only when senior faculty stopped speaking to her in the hallways.

Several respondents, using terms like "back-stabbing" and "blindsided," told painful stories of having been undermined or betrayed by colleagues they trusted. One current faculty member, for example, expressed dismay that two of his senior colleagues, who had never expressed any reservations about his work, had "stabbed [him] in the back" by approving him for tenure but not the promotion that usually accompanies it. Likewise, both current and former faculty recalled experiences in which colleagues tried to undermine their efforts or "trip [them] up." In all these narratives, faculty conveyed a palpable sense of disillusionment.

(3) Mentoring

Mentoring potentially provides support that many new faculty need to survive and flourish in academe (Boice, 1992; Boyle and Boice, 1998; Bowen and Shuster, 1986; Murray, 1991; Philip and Hendry, 2000). Effective mentoring emerged as a primary source of satisfaction in our study, whereas lack of mentoring was a source of dissatisfaction. Throughout the narratives, three kinds of mentoring emerged as particularly important for faculty: mentoring in intellectual activities, professional/career development and departmental politics. Intellectual mentoring included the standard expectation that someone should

provide guidance and feedback on different areas of work (e.g., proposals, papers, courses). Under the category of professional/career development, faculty wanted advice in two areas: how to establish professional connections outside of the department and, maybe more importantly, how to balance professional demands within the department.

The latter type of career mentoring was often lacking. For example, one former faculty member reported that she had received regular mentoring from two senior colleagues but that their advice had been very "production-oriented," focusing on the goals she should achieve for career advancement. This aspect of professional life, she thought, was more or less self-apparent ("We all know what good work looks like"). What was less obvious to her was how to manage her time to accomplish those professional goals and still balance life outside of work. "What you really need is someone to watch the way you work and tell you not to spend so much time doing X, or to spend more time doing Y," she said. The desire for career mentoring expressed in faculty interviews was not limited to junior faculty. Both junior and senior faculty members said they needed guidance in setting reasonable expectations, knowing where to put time and energy for the biggest pay-off, knowing when and how to say no, and balancing work and life outside of work. In other words, in addition to advice on setting appropriate career goals, faculty members need mentoring on how to survive and thrive while reaching those goals.

Respondents also voiced the need for political mentoring. Many, viewing their experiences in retrospect, said they wished someone had given them advice about navigating the political landmines of departmental life, reading the hidden agendas underlying departmental affairs, and learning how to "play the game" successfully to secure departmental resources (e.g., graduate students, lab space). Several also expressed regret that no one had presented a more realistic vision of the profession. Good political mentoring, in other words, helps to correct naive assumptions (e.g., "If I just do good work, everyone will notice").

Faculty commented on the need for not just one but multiple mentors. Because each kind of mentoring involves a different body of expertise, it is not always possible for the same person to provide advice or support in all three arenas. One current faculty member, for example, valued the different sorts of mentoring that he received from his two mentors: one mentor, from outside the department, showed him how to keep his service commitments in line with his research interests so that his service work would transfer to other institutions and advance him professionally; the other, his department head, provided political mentoring, supporting him against a particularly problematic

senior colleague. Neither of these mentors could or did provide the advice or support that the other did, but both were important to this faculty member's professional development and job satisfaction. Multiple mentors are also important because of faculty turnover. Several current and former faculty received excellent mentoring from a single person (often a department head) who then departed the institution, leaving the junior person with no strong allies or senior representatives in the department.

(4) Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure (RPT) Process

The RPT process was the one issue in this study that stirred more negative comments from current faculty than from former faculty, as seen in Table 1. In fact, 10 out of 11 current untenured faculty members mentioned that they saw problems with the RPT process, particularly when they witnessed a colleague who seemed to meet all of the promotion criteria but was nonetheless denied tenure or a promotion. The high level of skepticism on the part of untenured faculty is, perhaps, understandable. For many of them (and for junior faculty in general) the RPT process is both imminent and anxiety producing (see Bowen and Schuster, 1986; Finkelstein and LaCelle-Peterson, 1992; Sibley-Fries, 1986); viewing it as problematic and arbitrary may serve as psychological preparation for possible failure (see Brown and Rogers, 1991; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon, 1982; Miller and Ross, 1975). But a surprising number of *tenured* faculty members – 20 out of 42 – were also skeptical of the RPT process, despite the fact that the system had worked in their favor. These senior faculty members often reported that their tenure process had "left a bad taste in [their] mouths." Many felt "battered" by the tenure process, even when the outcome was successful, and several said they wished that someone (a department head, for example) had prepared them better for what was to come. Some senior faculty members whose own tenure decisions had gone predictably and smoothly, were nonetheless disillusioned by other tenure decisions they had witnessed which they thought reflected inconsistencies and unfairness in the system.

Lack of communication was the most frequently criticized aspect of the RPT process. Both former and current faculty members were particularly frustrated by two communication problems: their senior colleagues failed to provide regular, honest and constructive feedback (see Gmelch, 1987; Seldin, 1987; Sorcinelli, 1992) and the department lacked clearly stated criteria for promotion and tenure. One former faculty member reported that he had received no negative feedback or

comments during the entire review process, yet he was denied tenure unanimously. He never knew the reasons for his tenure decision because "it was a completely opaque process". What bothered him most about the tenure decision (which he described as "like a death") was that he had been "jerked along" for years because his skills were useful to the department, but he had never been given any indication that his performance was lacking. If he had received honest feedback he might have been able to make changes or at the very least anticipate the department's concerns and defend the direction of his research. As it was, by the time he knew there was a problem it was too late. Current faculty, many of whom had heard stories such as these, sometimes expressed concerns that they would meet a similar fate. A number of junior faculty members, despite having received positive performance reviews, wondered if they could trust the feedback they received. Others expressed frustration with the fact that, in many departments, criteria for promotion and tenure were unclear or seemed to be inconsistently applied across candidates.

(5) Department Heads

The role of the department head [or chair] is vital to the success and satisfaction of junior faculty (Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, and Beyer, 1990; Tucker, 1984; Wheeler, 1992). The importance of departmental leadership at the institution we studied (which is particularly pronounced because of its decentralized administrative structure and the power concentrated in the hands of department heads) was reflected by the fact that faculty invariably framed key periods and turning points in their professional experiences in relation to who was department head at the time. The effectiveness or ineffectiveness of department heads clearly made a critical difference in faculty morale. Problematic department chairs were characterized by their failure to play certain management and communication roles effectively: they failed to settle disputes between warring sub-groups, they provided little or no feedback on progress, and they did not "protect" junior faculty from committee work, difficult teaching assignments or the politics of the department. Effective department leaders were defined in the opposite terms: they managed conflict well, created a sense of community within the department, provided constructive feedback and mentoring, and communicated effectively. Good department heads also treated people in ways that were fair, consistent, inclusive, responsive and encouraging.

Department heads who lacked people-managing skills can quickly corrode a department's cohesiveness. One current faculty member, for instance, had come to the university excited about the prospect of working with a "social, interactive" group of junior faculty who had been hired just before him. Unfortunately, shortly after he arrived, a number of these colleagues left, in large part because of problems with the department head, who had no previous experience in academia, and who alienated faculty by acting in ways that they viewed as arbitrary and inappropriate (for example, he threatened to withhold salaries if faculty did not attend seminars). Not only was the faculty member disappointed to lose colleagues he valued, his own research was disrupted when one of his close collaborators left the institution because of conflicts with the same department head. Although the participant describes his current department head as considerably better than the last, he said his department's history of choosing heads who are good researchers but bad managers/communicators has been a very negative aspect of the job.

Institution-Specific Reasons for Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction

In addition to the five sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction discussed above, faculty frequently raised two other issues in the interviews that are unique to the institution: the surrounding city and the interdisciplinary nature of the university. These issues were not predicted by the existing literature and highlight the need for institution-specific research.

(6) City/Local Region

Along with collegiality and RPT, the city/local region was the third critical issue that distinguished the experiences of former faculty from those of current faculty. As shown in Table 1, former faculty were almost equally likely to consider the city an advantage as they were a disadvantage, but for current faculty, many more spoke highly of the city than disparaged it. None of the participants listed the city or the surrounding area as the single determining factor in their decisions to stay or leave, but several faculty members remarked that their spouses'/partners' ability or inability to find work in the city was highly influential in their decision-making. Others – particularly minorities, gay and lesbian faculty, and unmarried faculty – simply did not like the city. For instance, most current faculty members who were unhappy with the institution were considering leaving, *except* for a small group who had spouses or partners who were happily employed in the city. Despite their dissatisfaction with the university, these faculty members planned to stay because they liked the city and found it a good fit for

their families. On the other side of this issue, several former faculty members, who liked the university and had wanted to stay, left because their partners could not find meaningful work locally. These faculty members expressed frustration that the university did not make a greater effort to find work for their spouse/partner, and several reported that their new institutions were more accommodating in this regard.

In addition to the limitations of the local job market, a number of faculty (former faculty in particular) disliked characteristics of the city itself, particularly the weather and social conservatism. Whereas faculty with families often reported positively on the city's family-friendly atmosphere and affordable housing, minority, gay and lesbian, and unmarried faculty frequently described feeling lonely and isolated.

(7) Interdisciplinary Nature of the Institution

For about one-third of the current faculty, the interdisciplinary nature of the institution was a compelling source of personal satisfaction (not all faculty do interdisciplinary work, and thus a number did not comment on it). Faculty members who were satisfied with the interdisciplinary emphasis, many of whom were initially attracted to the institution because of this, commented not only on the intellectual value and excitement of such work, but also on the ease with which they were able to work across disciplinary lines. Former faculty members, on the other hand, were just as likely to criticize the weaknesses of the university's interdisciplinary focus as they were to praise its strengths. Some former faculty reported that the RPT process did not support interdisciplinary work as efficiently or effectively as it should; others complained that, despite its rhetoric to the contrary, the university did not facilitate efforts to develop or teach interdisciplinary courses. Several faculty members with joint appointments in two departments said that they were judged by two very different sets of RPT criteria. For example, journal publications that were highly regarded in one of their departments were judged as inferior by the other department, leading to anxiety, frustration and seemingly impossible standards for the junior faculty.

DISCUSSION

Understanding how the seven issues discussed above affect faculty satisfaction is a critical step in addressing faculty morale problems. However, it does not in itself explain the differences between faculty who stayed at the university and those who chose to leave. As shown in our results, these issues were complaints for current faculty as well as former faculty; both groups have confronted the same basic issues, but they have made different choices. To understand how these factors combine to motivate different career decisions, it is helpful to interpret our findings with respect to Matier's (1990) work on faculty retention.

Matier distinguishes between two sets of factors relating to faculty retention. The first, *internal benefits*, includes intangible (personal and institutional reputation, autonomy, influence, a sense of belonging) as well as tangible (salary, facilities, fringe benefits, work rules) benefits of the job. The second, *external benefits*, are non-work related and include quality of life, family, friendships, and financial considerations outside of salary. In this paper we will consider three of Matier's conclusions: (1) internal, intangible factors are significant in influencing faculty decisions to stay or go, (2) external factors are *not* particularly significant, and (3) the combination of factors most likely to predict faculty decisions to leave reflect a convergence of low internal benefits at the institution in question, the expectation of high internal benefits elsewhere, and the freedom to go (e.g., other job offers, no family constraints).

Our research strongly supports the first of Matier's conclusions: intangible, internal factors (in our case, collegiality, departmental leadership, mentoring, interdisciplinarity, and the perceived fairness of the RPT process) ranked extremely high among the reasons for faculty satisfaction and dissatisfaction. With respect to these issues and the relatively minor emphasis faculty participants gave to salary concerns, our data supports Matier's conclusion that "without strong internal pushes to invite individuals seriously to consider external offers, lavish external pulls are typically not sufficient in and of themselves to disengage a faculty member" (1990, p. 58). Our research, however, found that external factors were also important in faculty decisions to stay or leave, and this finding contradicts Matier's conclusion. Specifically, almost a quarter of the former faculty cited the city as a source of real dissatisfaction. Moreover, both former and current faculty members cited the inability or ability of a partner to find meaningful work locally as significant in their decision to leave or stay. This discrepancy between our results and Matier's may simply be a product of the particular characteristics of the cities in which the different studies were conducted. This argues once again for the importance of institution-specific data when assessing the relative importance of issues affecting the faculty experience. It also calls into question Matier's third conclusion, that faculty are unlikely to leave the institution unless they perceive low internal benefits to their current job, high internal benefits to another job and the opportunity to leave. What is clear from our data is that high external benefits elsewhere (e.g., the opportunity for one's spouse to find more fulfilling

work, to live closer to family, or to work in a more cosmopolitan city) in combination with low internal benefits at one's current job can also dislodge faculty and motivate them to leave.

While Matier's predictions only partially describe our data, his analysis provides a framework that institutions can use to guide their reform efforts. Below, we identify four sets of faculty, grouped by their perceptions of the internal and external benefits of their jobs, and discuss the institutional implications of each group. In most cases, an institution has more control over faculty's perceptions of internal benefits and should address these concerns, even for tenured faculty, but there are a few cases explained below in which colleges and universities can make efforts to improve external benefits as well.

Low Internal Benefits/Low External Benefits

Our study showed that a large number of former faculty who were unhappy with their departmental experience (i.e., low internal benefits) were equally unhappy with the city (i.e., low external benefits). This seemed to be especially true for faculty who were minorities, young and single, gay or lesbian, or in "non-traditional relationships" (e.g., married but living apart). These faculty members described a lack of community within their departments and in the city, and thus were lonely, isolated and felt as if they did not belong. In many cases, this combination of low external and low internal benefits led to a decision to leave the institution.

Colleges and universities can do several things to address the problem of low external benefits. These include helping faculty spouses/partners find jobs, assisting faculty in locating good housing, and helping faculty identify the cultural opportunities offered by the city. However, since most aspects of the external environment are beyond the institution's control, it is clear that a higher priority should be to focus on internal issues and examine how internal deficits could be turned into benefits, so as not to risk losing talented faculty. As this research makes clear, one of the principle concerns of this particular institution should be to take steps to create a more collegial atmosphere that is welcoming to a diverse group of faculty. As Matier's framework indicates, improvements on these internal issues can help compensate for external drawbacks (e.g., perceived shortcomings of the city and region) and help to reduce the number of faculty in this category who opt to leave. Although offering more competitive salaries should also be an institutional priority, we remain unconvinced that salaries are as prominent a reason for faculty turnover as the university administrators perceive

them to be at the institution we studied. Rather, our findings suggest that, were other internal issues successfully addressed, the salary issue would likely recede in importance.

In addition to focusing attention on faculty who leave the university because of low external and internal benefits, it is also critically important to address the problem of disaffected faculty who *don't* leave. In our study, there were a small number of current faculty who lacked internal and external reasons to stay, but also did not feel that they could seek employment elsewhere (because of family circumstances, lack of job offers elsewhere, age, etc.). Although this group represents only a small proportion of the faculty we interviewed, our research suggests that their presence has the potential to be disproportionately detrimental, either because of the message they send to their colleagues through their disengagement or, in extreme cases, because of their vocal anger and resentment. Because faculty members who fit this description have not left, they may not be perceived as part of the retention problem. However, it is our belief that disengaged and disillusioned faculty members have a profound effect on the satisfaction of their colleagues, and thus *do* impact retention in indirect ways. The next category of people poses a similar problem.

Low Internal Benefits, High External Benefits

Some of the faculty we interviewed described unsatisfactory job situations (i.e., low internal benefits), but because they had a partner/spouse who was happy in a job, children settled in a good school or a great house in a nice neighborhood (i.e., high external benefits), they made the decision to stay. In some cases these faculty, many of whom were quite senior, had disengaged from their departments and were concentrating exclusively on their own work. While the majority of them continued to be highly productive and professionally successful, many no longer participated in mentoring relationships, committee work and departmental decision-making. According to the reports of junior faculty, senior faculty in this category neither noticed nor celebrated their colleagues' achievements. Like the first group – who lack internal *and* external benefits – those who perceive high external but low internal benefits can have a disproportionately detrimental effect on the collegial environment despite their relatively small numbers (12 of 42 tenured faculty reported low internal benefits). In other words, low internal benefits are problematic, even if external benefits are high. It is in an institution's best interests to devote considerable energy to re-engaging faculty who perceive low internal benefits so as to restore the value they

have to the university community, and prevent the damage they may otherwise have on their colleagues' morale, and thus (indirectly) on retention rates.

High Internal Benefits, Low External Benefits

Conversely, there was a group of current faculty who spoke positively about their departments and the institution (i.e., high internal benefits) but didn't like the city (i.e., low external benefits). Many in this group find both the intellectual and social aspects of their departments satisfying, and are able to make up for location by taking trips and spending summers away. There were also, of course, faculty in this category who chose to leave the institution. As discussed previously, there are a few things the university can do to counter the problem of low external benefits (e.g., help faculty spouses find jobs, offer flexibility in class scheduling if faculty travel to visit distant partners), but should these interventions prove insufficient, there is little the institution can do to retain people in this category. Turnover within this group of faculty is likely inevitable.

High Internal Benefits, High External Benefits

Finally, there were faculty members in our study who found their life at the university extremely satisfying (i.e., high internal benefits) and who loved the city (i.e., high external benefits). Their satisfaction was so high that they never seriously considered leaving the institution, even when other, sometimes more lucrative offers came in. This, of course, is the optimal situation for the institution. However, there were also a few faculty members who reported both high internal and external benefits who eventually chose to leave, despite being quite happy with the university and the city. Generally, these were faculty members who received job offers too enticing to turn down, or whose spouses' careers mandated a move. In many cases, they regretted leaving, and had positive memories of their time at the university in question. Although the loss of these individuals is a loss to the institution, there is nothing that can be done at an institutional level to prevent this from happening. By the same token, the loss is not a purely negative one. In fact, when faculty with overwhelming positive impressions of the institution take those impressions with them to other environments, it helps to enhance the reputation of the original institution, and foster a healthy flow of faculty among universities.

General Implications

Our research strongly supports Matier's recommendation that academic institutions pay close attention to situations in which faculty perceive low internal benefits to their jobs (also see Caplow and McGee, 1958; Gartshore et al., 1983; Toombs and Marlier, 1981). In combination with attractive outside alternatives and the freedom to make a change, the perception of low internal benefits prompts faculty to leave, undermining retention and exacting a high toll on the institution's talent pool and resources. However, we depart from Matier in arguing that external as well as internal factors are significant in faculty retention, and in suggesting that specific combinations of internal and external factors demand closer investigation in the context of particular institutions. We also expand on Matier's work by pointing out the detrimental effect of faculty who remain at the institution despite low internal benefits. Although these faculty members will not show up in studies of retention, by withdrawing from the departmental or campus community these disengaged faculty can inadvertently erode collegiality in ways that have a profound effect on the morale and thus retention of still other faculty. We urge institutions to pay close attention to this group of faculty as well as faculty at greater risk of leaving, and suggest using an interview method and Matier's (1990) internal/external framework as an approach to focus efforts at reform most effectively.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In conducting this study, we discovered major sources of discontent across the university in a converging number of categories, leading us to believe that the institution in question needs to work harder to create an environment conducive to the ideals of academic life, both to retain those people who might leave and to increase the satisfaction of those committed to staying. Perhaps most importantly, we discovered that an alarming number of current faculty members (39% of the 62 we interviewed) do not feel supported by their colleagues and the institution, prompting further research to better understand the magnitude and intricacies of the problem. These numbers are alarming because by many measures of success (i.e., research dollars, number of publications, invited presentations), these faculty members would be seen as productive and noteworthy scholars in their field. Clearly, institutions should strive to empower both junior and senior faculty to seek the support they need to be successful and satisfied, and then assure that the support is, indeed, present. The success stories of some satisfied current

faculty show that it is an attainable and worthwhile goal to help junior faculty calibrate to life in the academy and to the culture of their institution.

There is an interesting paradox within our findings that we anticipate will be replicated at other institutions once further efforts are made to move beyond survey data. On the one hand, the problems that faculty cited were the same issues that have been identified throughout the literature regarding why faculty stay or leave. These foreseeable, predictable problems call for improving the global, structural factors at the university level and the local environmental factors at the departmental level. On the other hand, many of the factors that determined whether faculty stayed or left were institution-specific issues. For instance, some faculty were deeply frustrated with external issues, such as the surrounding city and culture, so that even high levels of satisfaction with their department and colleagues was not enough to retain them. Previous research predicted that such external factors would not be critical in faculty decision-making. Although the literature provides broad predictions regarding why faculty might be inclined to stay or leave, institution-specific research is needed to determine how faculty will weigh the competing sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction within a particular environment.

This study also argues for a qualitative approach to assessing faculty satisfaction. Although survey research has the benefits of statistical power and structural modeling, the interview method allows faculty to identify, in their own words and chronology, the complex set of factors that shaped their experiences at an institution and that influenced their decision to stay or leave. If we had initially generated a survey based on the issues commonly cited in the literature, we would have missed some issues or over-emphasized others. By conducting interviews first, we have identified the issues that are unique to our faculty population. Equipped with these rich narratives, we can now develop an informed, institution-specific survey to provide directed information to departments who wish to improve retention and satisfaction.

The present investigation raised important questions regarding how different sub-groups experience an institution. For example, we were deeply concerned by the levels of discontent expressed by senior faculty who, by most accounts, would be deemed "incredibly successful". These well respected yet disaffected senior faculty can have a tremendous impact on their entire department and, eventually, the institution as a whole. In a future report, we will examine why these otherwise vital senior faculty have become disengaged, and will identify approaches to re-engaging them. Most importantly, it is our conclusion that it is worth significant effort to identify the specific issues that shape faculty satisfaction at a particular institution. Once identified, however, an institution must decide how to address these issues in ways that can lead to meaningful change, both within individual departments and across the campus. In a future paper, we will present a study that examines one way to educate a community about what matters in the lives of its faculty. This paper will present a template for creating scenarios based on the difficult issues raised in the interviews and a method for conducting discussions with faculty in ways that prompt open dialogue and reflection rather than resistance and blame.

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ENDNOTES

1. This information is regularly provided to the Provost's Office by the deans and department heads when faculty members leave the institution.
2. Both former and current faculty groups were interviewed over the phone for consistency.
3. It might appear from Table 1 that 100% of the former faculty raised the issue of collegiality (i.e., 33% satisfied + 67% dissatisfied = 100%), but as mentioned earlier, some faculty members were coded twice. Because several former faculty expressed a change in the collegiality of their department, from welcoming and collegial to non-collegial or vice versa, these faculty were coded as being both satisfied and dissatisfied on the issue of collegiality.

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REDESIGNING FOR COLLABORATION WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: An Exploration into the Developmental Process

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As a result of both the external pressures and the known benefits of collaboration, many higher education institutions are trying to create learning communities, service and community-based learning, and interdisciplinary research and teaching. However, over 50% of collaborations fail. There has been virtually no research on how to enable higher education institutions to conduct collaborative work. This article focuses on examining *how* institutions moved from a culture that supports individual work to the ones that facilitate collaborative work. A three-stage model emerged. The first stage, *building commitment*, contains four contextual elements—values, external pressure, learning and networks. Here the institution uses ideas/information from a variety of sources to convince members of the campus of the need to conduct collaborative work. In the second stage, *commitment*, senior executives demonstrate support and re-examine the mission of the campus and leadership emerges within the network. The third phase is called *sustaining* and includes the development of structures, networks, and rewards to support the collaborations.

KEY WORDS: collaboration; organizational change; college and university administration.

Higher education institutions are realizing the importance of enabling internal and external collaborative work, e.g., interdisciplinary research or community partnerships. In recent years, researchers have documented the benefits of organizational collaboration including greater efficiency, effectiveness, and perhaps most important for higher education institutions, it can enhance student learning (Kanter, 1994; Senge, 1990). In addition, accreditors, foundations, business and industry and

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