An Exploration of the Pre-Tenure and Tenure Process Experiences of Nursing Faculty

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Recruiting qualified applicants is a challenging priority in a very competitive market with some schools experiencing vacancies that remain unfilled for extended periods of time.

The scarcity of qualified applicants for vacant positions has prompted some schools to “grow their own” through the creation of limited-term positions that convert to tenure-track upon completion of a PhD.
Limited-terms are often labour intensive with increased teaching responsibilities and unforgiving of the workload demands of PhD study.

Some new hires may attempt to maintain a clinical presence that adds to their stress and energy expenditures.
The work environment for new faculty hires is often very stressful as they adjust to the many pressures of academia that includes teaching responsibilities, research, publishing and service (Baker, Fitzpatrick, and Griffin, 2011).
To explore the experiences of nursing faculty in pre-tenure and recently tenured academic positions.
A mixed-methods approach was used for data collection and data analysis.

Quantitative results of this study have been presented and published separately.
Research Methods

- Following an online survey: 14 faculty volunteers participated in telephone interviews using semi-structured questions.

- Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim (personal identifiers were removed as per ethical requirements).
Major themes were identified through

- Independent Analysis, Coding, Joint discussion

- Research team used NVIVO 9 qualitative software
Interview Questions

► What are some of the strategies that build a healthy work environment?

► What are some of the strategies that help develop a productive work environment?
Interview Questions Continued

- What would you expect from the mentorship program at your school?

- What support do you need to succeed in gaining tenure and promotion?
Findings

“The biggest challenge of adjusting to academia is the competitiveness” (participant quote).
Strategies Healthy Work Environment

- “Interactions with others that are supportive, collegial and safe”.

- “Fairness, trust, respect- an environment context in which you work that values these things”.

- “Stability of the environment”.
These quotes emphasize the need to have a healthy work environment that promotes shared responsibility, supportive leadership, shared visioning and acknowledgement by peers.

In a study on the impact of organizational culture on quality of work life in nurses (Goodman, Zammuto & Gifford, 2001) found that a group (or collaborate) culture is the most conducive to work place satisfaction.
Strategies: Productive Research Culture

“ I would hire research assistants on my grants, but they don’t last long sometimes” (participant quote).

“Valuing of research” (participant quote).
Findings

“one of the things our Director did with the intent of making a more productive research culture was she hired a senior scholar and brought in someone with a well established research program as a consultant and began to create infrastructure resources for use in terms of administrative support.....and then the budget cuts happened” participant quote.
These quotes indicate a need for an infrastructure of support with balanced workload and opportunities for research stability. This can be theoretically supported using Structural Empowerment.

Kanter (1993) suggests that structural empowerment comes from resources, information and support. When workers feel that they have the tools they need to do their work more effectively they are more productive and innovative.
Expectations for Mentorship

- “Access to more than one mentor” participant quote.

- “If you connect with the person you are more prepared to take them under your wing and take them along. I think it is something everyone should have, but I’m not sure how you make the match” participant quote.

- “Pairing a new faculty up with established faculty” participant quote.
Mentoring: How the Geese Do It!

Guide & walk along side

Protect from harm
“Research development and career development often require different types of mentoring. For any one senior faculty member to perform all of the roles of mentoring would greatly limit the ability to mentor more than a few junior investigators. Systems of mentoring make use of many faculty with specific expertise” (Lichtenberg, 2011, p. 414).
Support Needed For Promotion and Tenure (participant quotes)

- “Have clear expectations, standards for tenure and promotion”.

- “Reduced teaching load for at least one year maybe two”.

- “University could make information sessional available on the website, so people can access them if they cannot attend (sessions)”.
“Kanter’s belief that employees’ access to the information, opportunity, support and resources necessary for their work has positive effects on the employees, such as lower degrees of burnout and greater amounts of job satisfaction was supported in the nurse educator population” (Sarmiento, Lasch & Iwasiw, 2003, p. 140).
“Everyone should have a voice and people need to be listened to; need to support each other more; people who are vulnerable (untenured) need to feel safe”.
The small sample size limits the generalizability of the qualitative findings.

Perceived support within an organizational culture that empowers individual professional growth towards tenure in academic settings may increase retention and promote success of new faculty in an increasingly competitive environment.
Future studies should explore the impact of bullying cultures in academia with faculty job satisfaction and the movement of faculty from institution to institution without seeking permanence.