

A Qualitative Examination of Success Factors for Tenure-Track Women Faculty in Postsecondary Agricultural Education

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Abstract

With the growing need for agricultural institutions to provide solutions to global concerns, environmental issues, food security and sustainable agriculture, competent individuals are needed to lead in excellence and innovation. The role of gender in determining success in the workplace has been studied from many perspectives. The purpose of this qualitative study was to document success strategies of women agricultural education faculty in postsecondary education, synthesize these strategies into meaningful and useful suggestions, and review these strategies using the framework of the Theory of Work Adjustment. Data analysis involving a seven step process allowed confirmation of meaning and ensured that all concepts presented were included and accurately represented. The synthesized summary of success factors resulted in three cross-cutting areas: change is inevitable, reflect and prepare, and time management. The remaining concepts were grouped into four primary categories: (a) workplace awareness and expectations, (b) proactive strategies to facilitate success, (c) internal actions, and (d) external actions. Each of these four categories was further divided into context groupings that included: foundation, individual, cooperation, and balance. The findings of this qualitative study are not generalizable, but results can be transferrable and have utility in our field.

Keywords: Postsecondary Agricultural Education; Faculty; Gender; Success Factors

Introduction

With the growing need for agricultural institutions to provide solutions to global concerns, environmental issues, food security and sustainable agriculture, competent individuals are needed to lead in excellence and innovation. With a reported 45% female participation in FFA chapters studied (Lawrence, Rayfield, Moore, & Outley, 2013), a reported “increasing number of female teachers nationwide entering the profession” (Sorensen & McKim, 2014, p.126), and a reported 57.2% female enrollment in undergraduate studies in a College of Agriculture at a large land grant institution (Texas A&M University, 2014), it is critical that women faculty role models exist. Successful women serve as role models to younger women who aspire to the path of leadership (Lennon, Spotts, & Mitchell, 2012). Priority One of the National Research Agenda for Agricultural Education (Doerfert, 2011) calls for the preparation of a scientific and professional workforce that

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addresses the challenges of the 21st century. In order to prepare this workforce, diverse faculty in departments of higher education, including women, must be recruited and retained.

According to the American Council on Education (2011), the retention of women in tenure-track positions and advancement to full professor as compared to men is low. For faculty starting out in tenure-track positions, the numbers are about even for both men and women. However, the number of associate professors quickly drops to only about 42% for women. Within doctoral institutions, women comprise 29.1% of tenure track positions and men comprise 55.8% of tenure track positions. The remaining faculty (15.1%) come from non-tenure track positions.

Currently, there are few women positioned to step into critical leadership roles in colleges and universities (Airini et al., 2011; The White House Project, 2009). Postsecondary institutions face the challenge of finding qualified and effective leaders who can lead their college or university and take on other leadership positions (Rubin, 2004). One reason given for the lack of prepared leaders is that there are fewer women qualified and positioned to take on these critical roles like provost, vice president, dean, director, and department head (Airini et al., 2011; The White House Project, 2009). Because tenure is often a prerequisite for advancing to leadership positions, many women are at a disadvantage for being considered for these positions (Lennon, et al., 2012).

The role of gender in determining success in the workplace has been studied from many perspectives. The journey that women take to achieve career success is different than men due to many factors (Nicholson & West, 1988). Melamed (1996) reports that in order for women to progress to higher levels they have to rely on their merits and show that they have the required skills, abilities and qualifications to be successful at their job. Similarly, the factors of education level and work experience are more likely to benefit women in enhancing their credibility and credentials than men (Melamed, 1996). Adamo (2013) articulated that women within the biological sciences may be negatively impacted in regard to advancement due to timing related to when competition for positions occurs. The ability of women to compete may be impacted by geographic mobility, financial constraints, or time constraints due to children or a partner (Adamo, 2013). Challenges are also articulated within the secondary agricultural education environment in which female agricultural educators reported having to “prove their ability” (p. 17), deal with stereotyping, and handle the high stress environment (Baxter, Stephens, & Thayer-Bacon, 2011).

Gender discrepancies in academia have been highlighted in recent literature. According to The White House Project (2009), women make up 57% of all college students but only 26% of full professors, 23% of university presidents, and women account for less than 30% of college and university board members. The average percentage of women leaders in academia is 24.5%; whereas, the average percentage of men is 64.7%. In addition, the salary gap between male and female faculty continues to exist. According to Lennon et al. (2012), women earn close to 20% less than their male counterparts at four-year institutions. While women are obtaining positions within higher education at a similar rate as males, they are not achieving tenure at the same rate (Ortega-Liston & Soto, 2014). “What discrimination exists in postsecondary education is likely to be expressed subtly and indirectly” (Menges & Exum, 1983, p.139). “[W]omen's stronger intentions to leave [their academic job] were influenced by how they perceived female faculty were treated and by their smaller share of workplace rewards” (Dryfhout & Estes, 2010, p. 122). Within higher education, it has been shown that men have historically been more successful than women in terms of salary, promotion, and prestige of the particular institution employing them (Manchester, Leslie, & Kramer, 2010). Furthermore, an examination of research productivity in the *Journal of Agricultural Education*, revealed no females as productive faculty (Harder, Goff, & Roberts, 2008) during the time period of 1996-2005.

A variety of factors have been identified in the literature as impacting the advancement of women in postsecondary education. Airini et al. (2011) found five themes to describe factors that

help or hinder the advancement of women in university settings: “work relationships, university environment, invisible rules, proactivity, and personal circumstance” (p. 59). Other influences identified as leading to success for women seeking leadership roles in academia include strong family upbringing (Astin & Leland, 1991; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Hennig & Jardim, 1977; Madsen, 2007), excellent mentoring (Madsen, 2007), and spousal support (Woo, 1985). Environmental aspects were also addressed in the literature. In a study conducted by McCoy, Newell, and Gardner (2013), “women reported significantly lower well-being and a more negative perception of all environmental conditions than men” (p. 309). “Work-life integration” (McCoy, et al., 2013, p.320) was identified as being a significant variable. In the specific discipline of agriculture, six women deans in colleges of agriculture were interviewed to describe their personal journeys to becoming deans of agriculture (Kleihauer, Stephens, & Hart, 2012). This study found that women who became deans had the following in common: (a) first born children, (b) influenced by qualities of their parents and had spousal support, and (c) had mentors who recognized their gifts and talents and encouraged them to seek out leadership positions (Kleihauer et al., 2012). In a study to understand faculty intent to lead within a land grant system, Lamm, Lamm, and Strickland (2013) reported that control over time to develop leadership skills “was the only significant predictor of intent” (p. 92).

Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Work Adjustment (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) guided this study by providing a framework for examining factors which lead to the success of women faculty in departments of agricultural education in university settings. Dawis and Lofquist (1984) assert that “work is central to human development and total life adjustment and that work provides a situation for satisfying needs” (p. 7). The Theory of Work Adjustment takes into account the continual interaction between individuals and their work environment while recognizing both the characteristics of the individual and the characteristics of the work environment. At the individual level, an individual retains or acquires abilities and values that become their “personality structure” (p. 24) and also allows for the development of a “unique personality style” (p. 24). The abilities, values and styles with relevance to work have been defined as “work personality” (p.24). This theory is based on the concept of “the interaction between the work personality and the work environment” (Rounds, Dawis, & Lofquist, 1987, p. 298). Each is depicted as impacting the other and level of satisfaction is a result of this interaction.

The Theory of Work Adjustment suggests a relationship between person-environment fit, job satisfaction, and tenure (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) and posits that “job satisfaction represents the individual worker’s subjective evaluation of the degree to which his or her requirements are met by the work environment” (Bretz & Judge, 1994, p. 32). Job tenure is the most basic indicator of job satisfaction because it represents the state in which both the individual and the work environment find each other to be acceptable and thus fit. The factor of person-environment fit describes the attribute that those who fit the organization are more than likely attracted to the organization, are favorably evaluated by the organizational members, and display greater work motivation and perform better than those who do not have a good fit (Bretz & Judge, 1994). Person-environment fit also suggests that those who fit the organizational environment will be more successful over time than those who are not a good fit (Bretz & Judge, 1994). Consequently, the reinforcements of fit can even constrain the behavior of individuals to match those of what the organization desires. Thus, those who fit are more likely to stay longer, experience greater job satisfaction, and end up with more career success (Bretz & Judge, 1994).

Reinforcements implemented by organizations to influence employee behaviors to mirror the norms of the organization will ultimately impact individual behavior and those individuals who conform will most likely remain in the organization and be satisfied (Bretz & Judge, 1994). Further,

“it appears that salary and job level may be indirectly affected by person-organization fit” (Bretz & Judge, 1994, p. 48). Given that fit was documented as impacting both satisfaction and success at the individual level, concern regarding one’s fit with an organization is warranted (Bretz & Judge, 1994).

This study did not test the Theory of Work Adjustment; rather, it sought to contextualize this theory for women faculty in agricultural education by providing insight into factors that would enhance their ability to “fit” within their organization or department, be successful in achieving tenure and promotion, and lead to greater career success such as acquiring leadership positions within their institutions. Examination of the strategies of successful women agricultural education faculty in the context of the Theory of Work Adjustment allowed assessment of those factors which enabled these individuals to achieve fit within their institution and discipline and thus enabled greater job satisfaction and secure tenure at their job. These strategies ultimately facilitated an increase in success and positioned these individuals for leadership roles at their respective colleges and universities. Dawis and Lofquist (1984) reported that study of work is best conducted in the natural environment in which it is conducted. Thus, this study specifically focused on work within higher education by women faculty employed in the broad field of agricultural education.

Need for the Study

The need for this study evolved out of the literature and the necessity to increase the number of women in academia who are positioned for leadership roles in colleges and universities. Specifically, the need existed to understand what impacts the success of women in academic leadership positions in nontraditional career fields such as agricultural education in postsecondary education. Nontraditional occupations refer to those which are male-dominated (United States Department of Labor, 2016). To address this need, there must be an identification and examination of factors related to retention, tenure achievement, and general job success. This understanding will encourage capable and qualified women to be successful within their work environment and enable them to fill important leadership roles in postsecondary institutions for the discipline.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to document success strategies of women agricultural education faculty in postsecondary education, synthesize these strategies into meaningful and useful suggestions, and review these strategies using the framework of the Theory of Work Adjustment (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984).

Methods

Qualitative methods were utilized to accomplish the purpose of the study due to the nature of the study. Yin (2016) articulates five distinguishing characteristics of qualitative research: 1) focus on real-world people and lives, 2) representation of the views of real people, 3) real-world context, 4) insight to explain behavior and thinking, and 5) involvement of multiple sources of data. Each of these characteristics was represented in this study.

Description of the Women Faculty Who Shared Strategies

Individuals selected to participate in this research were women faculty members in agricultural education at the postsecondary level who were successful in gaining tenure and recognition within a university setting and who had served in leadership positions

A total of six women faculty, each employed by a different institution, provided input into the findings via the presentation each provided related to strategies for success within postsecondary education. Five institutions were represented in regard to where they obtained their

doctoral degree; only two of the participants had received their doctoral degree from the same institution. The women, as a group, possessed significant academic experience ranging from 16 years to 30 years in the profession, with a combined total of 141 years of academic experience. All held the title of professor and most had served in leadership roles at their respective institutions at the department, college and/or university level. Additional roles served by these individuals included journal editor, Fulbright scholar, and textbook author. Each had also received teaching and research awards in the profession and had been successful in obtaining competitive grants. The participants were selected based upon their past accomplishments and the recognition they had received as being successful in the broad field of agricultural education.

Study Design

The design for this study was a qualitative content analysis. Through content analysis, researchers are able to study indirect human behavior through analysis of communications (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Huyn, 2012). This study examined the presentations of six women faculty in agricultural education who shared success strategies for women in tenure-track positions in postsecondary agricultural education. These women were selected to participate in the presentation series because they met the following criteria: (a) rank of full professor, and (b) involved in academia (either in agricultural education or had advanced to a higher leadership position within their department, college or university). The presentations occurred over the course of one academic year and were shared with participants at one academic institution through a speaker series which involved a lunch and Skype™ format for the presentation. Each of the individuals presented a one-hour session covering best practices and top ten things to remember in regard to success for tenure-track women within agricultural education in higher education. The title of each presentation varied; however, the overall goal for each presentation was to provide recommendations and guidance for success in higher education. Each set of presentation materials was summarized into a one-page handout for each session. The participants agreed to have their presentations recorded. Institutional Review Board approval was received to conduct research using data collected and to follow-up with presenters.

Data analyzed as a part of the study included PowerPoint slides, presentation handouts, notes taken during the live session, and notes taken during a detailed review of the recorded presentations. Each set of top ten recommendations along with individual notes were coded with the letters A-F (a random letter representing each of the six presenters) to maintain confidentiality. Data analysis followed the ethnographic content analysis (ECA) approach (Bryman, 2012). “ECA follows a recursive and reflexive movement between concept development-sampling-data, collection-data, coding-data, and analysis-interpretation” (Bryman, 2012, p. 559). The data were unitized, compared, and integrated into units to investigate emergent themes, categorized, and reported as areas and constructs. Researcher reflexivity and transparency were addressed through the involvement of multiple researchers and the analysis focused on staying true to the participants’ observations and contributions. Data analysis involving a seven step process allowed confirmation of meaning and ensured that all concepts presented were included and accurately represented.

Step one involved each presentation handout being coded with a letter (i.e., A, B, C, D, E, F) to represent the presenter. Notes taken during the live session were also coded with the appropriate presenter code. Items from the handouts and notes were then sorted into categories. This initial analysis resulted in a one-page summary including nine primary categories which included: honesty, time, networking, being in the right place, training/learning, offering help, asking for help, personal life, and professional behavior.

The second step involved two researchers who had not attended the live sessions watching each of the recorded sessions and recording detailed notes. The six presentations were reviewed over a six-week time period. The two researchers compared notes following the viewing of each

presentation. Categories emerged as statements were grouped according to their representative areas based on topic/area mentioned. Combined research notes from the two researchers resulted in a one-page summary for each presenter and were coded with the same codes as the initial data analysis to ensure that all comments could be associated with the correct presenter.

Categories that resulted from step one and step two were compared during step three. This comparison revealed items to be combined or separated. The original nine categories transformed into 23 categories. Each of the 23 categories was supported by coded statements from the presenters.

Step four involved a peer debriefing that was held by a team of three researchers (i.e., the researcher who had coded the live sessions and handouts, and the two researchers who had coded the recorded sessions) to review the resulting summary (Peer Debriefing Document Number One) to “search for patterns” (Yin, 2016, p. 202) allowing concepts and themes to emerge. These concepts and themes were organized into an initial framework which consisted of three prominent areas that emerged from the data and represented actions within the participants’ control: (a) Workplace Awareness and Expectations, (b) Proactive Strategies to Facilitate Success, and (c) Internal Actions. In addition, there were three topics identified that did not fit directly within these areas: “Change is Inevitable,” “Reflect and Prepare,” and “Time Management.” This initial framework was documented in the form of a diagram with supporting codes to allow an audit trail connecting the areas with presenter codes.

The resulting initial framework was re-visited in light of the literature and additional modifications were made in the arrangement of areas and constructs for step five. The three researchers worked together to verify understanding and accurately categorize all statements. The concepts (which had been typed and categorized) were physically cut apart and rearranged on a large table to enable free movement of all concepts. Once arranged by order and category, these items were taped to a large sheet of paper. The framework was analyzed for consistency and care was taken to ensure that concepts were not duplicated and that all items listed were supported by comments/statements of the presenters. Each concept was noted with the codes of the presenter associated with that item. This analysis resulted in Peer Debriefing Document Number Two.

During step six, a debriefing session was held with a fourth researcher who had not been involved in the initial data analysis but who had attended the live sessions. This review allowed confirmation of categories. Based upon feedback received during this session, minor adjustments were made to increase accuracy and understanding of the resulting framework. A summary table of major findings along with a one-page explanation of the table resulted from this analysis.

The final step, step seven, involved the summary table and one-page explanation of the table being submitted for review to the six presenters to check for accuracy. Feedback was received from three presenters within two weeks and minor edits and additions were incorporated into the table. The updated table was sent out to the remaining three presenters for review and two presenters responded with minor edits which were incorporated.

The trustworthiness of this study was established through Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through the peer debriefing sessions and follow-up with presenters (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); transferability was established through the use of purposive sampling and participant quotes throughout the findings of the study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993); and dependability and confirmability were established through the use of audit trails, peer audits, and researcher-kept reflexive journals (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were provided the summary which emerged from data analysis to allow each presenter the opportunity to provide feedback to the researchers to ensure the information correctly reflected their intentions.

The researchers were the primary instruments for collecting data in this study, which is a characteristic of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). The notes taken during the live presentations, the analysis of the recorded presentations, and the dissection of the topics and concepts presented were all completed by researchers, who by nature hold unique perspectives. To control for bias, the data was coded and analyzed by two researchers who were not tenure-track faculty and who did not attend the live presentations. This data and the resulting analysis underwent scrutiny by two additional researchers and were provided to the original presenters for review as a form of member check. These steps increased the likelihood that the data accurately reflected the participants' intentions. However, Peshkin (1988) noted that researchers' subjectivities can be the underlying factor for distinctiveness of the research and "one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected" (p. 18). Thus, the researchers recognized the importance of being aware of subjectivity and used this awareness to avoid bias and also add to the richness of the data analysis.

Results

Success Factors

The results were presented in the form of a summary table in an effort to allow items to be clear and easy to interpret. Table 1 provides the synthesized summary of success factors shared by participants.

Description of Areas

There were three cross-cutting areas that emerged: change is inevitable (A, F), reflect and prepare (A, B, F), and time management (B, C, D, E). Each of these items was mentioned multiple times in the context of impacting overall success. As noted by participants, "prepare yourself for change" (F), "reflect on where you are now and where you want to be" (D), and "organize your time by hours and days" (E).

The remaining items were grouped into four primary areas (represented by columns): (a) workplace awareness and expectations, (b) proactive strategies to facilitate success, (c) internal actions, and (d) external actions. A close examination of the items in each of the four areas revealed overlapping concepts or similarities across the columns. We found that there were four words that could describe the context of these categories (represented by rows): foundation, individual, cooperation, and balance. Foundation relates to the context of the basic building blocks in an environment. Individual relates to the context of specific items relevant to you; these items could be different for each person and relates to individual choice. Cooperation applies to the context specifically related to those actions that deal with interaction among individuals. Balance encompasses aspects that impact quality of life and productivity at the individual level.

Workplace Awareness and Expectations

Workplace awareness and expectations relate to the position and institution where one is employed. Awareness and acceptance of aspects that come with the position was expressed by participants as critical. It was noted that some situations already exist and some will evolve. Concepts included office politics, workplace culture, understanding expectations, gathering feedback, collegiality, and avoiding over commitment. As noted by participants, "don't get involved in office politics" (C) and "know department and university/college culture" (B). Further, the importance of knowing expectations (B, C, D) and gathering feedback (A, B, C, D) was stressed. As one participant stated, "Get 360-degree feedback early and often" (C). The significance to "seek balance in your job" (B) and avoid being over committed (B, C, D) was expressed as important for allowing you to have "time for creativity" (C).

Table 1

A Synthesized Summary of Success Factors for Tenure-Track Women Faculty in Agricultural Education in Higher Education based upon Six Presentations by Successful Women Faculty

Areas:				
Change (A,F); Reflection (A,B,F); Time Management (B,C,D,E)				
	Workplace Awareness and Expectations	Proactive Strategies to Facilitate Success	Internal Actions	External Actions
Foundation	Avoid office politics (C,D) Know workplace culture (B,C,F)	Be an expert (C) Network and build relationships (A,B,D,E,F)	Maintain integrity (A,B,D) Be a good citizen (B,D,F)	Communicate effectively while recognizing office dynamics (A,B,C,F)
Individual	Understand expectations (B,C,D,E) Gather feedback (A,B,C,D)	Seek and apply for grants (A,B,C,D,E,F) Use grants to generate journal articles (C) Join professional associations to continue learning (A,B,C,D,E,F) Find a mentor and be a mentor (B,C,D,F) Take initiative for recognition (B,C,D,F) Serve on committees (A,C,F)	Know yourself and improve (A,B,D,F) Incorporate your passion with research (B,C,D,F) Practice scholarship (B,E) Enjoy your job (B,F)	Present yourself in a professional manner (A,C)
Cooperation	Maintain collegiality (B)	Collaborate with others (A,B,C,D,E,F) Know your external constituents (B2) Offer and receive help (A,B,C,D,E,F)	Know what you can contribute (B,D,F)	
Balance	Avoid over commitment (B,C,D)	Commit to the appropriate activities (B2)	Maintain personal time (A,B,C,D,F)	

Note. Columns represent “Primary Areas Identified”; Rows represent “Context”; Letters (A,B,C,D,E,F) represent participant codes.

Proactive Strategies to Facilitate Success

Proactive strategies to facilitate success focused on areas related to becoming an expert, building a network, taking initiative, and collaborating with others. Each of these items related to interaction with individuals. In order to succeed and thrive, you cannot do this by yourself – you need to be proactive in building relationships and your individual decision of engagement will impact your success. Communication and cooperation with others in your unit, department, college, university, and field was expressed as critical. Participants provided guidance that included to “become a content expert and know your science” (C), “engage with colleagues in the professional community” (F), “create a good reputation” (B), and “introduce yourself to people” (A). “Work relationships” (A, B, D, E) were indicated as a critical component of success.

Items specifically related to activities at the individual level included the application for grants, participation in professional associations, identifying a mentor, taking initiative for recognition, and serving on committees. All participants indicated the importance of applying for grants. However, specific advice included “use a team approach to obtain grant funding” (A), “serve on grant review panels” (D), and “apply for big and small grants” (F). As one participant stated, “grant seeking will naturally lead to more journal articles” (C). Involvement in professional associations was encouraged by all participants. Specific advice included, “use associations to stay updated on your field” (F), “attend professional development seminars to improve skills” (D), and use associations to “continue to learn” (A). An encouragement to engage in a mentorship process was not limited to “find[ing] a mentor” (F, D) but also extended to serving as a mentor (C, F). As one participant stated, you will be able to “learn from others’ experiences” (B). The importance of taking initiative for recognition was articulated by participants as a critical step. “Do not be humble about achievements” (D), “apply for awards” (B) and “keep good records” (D). Finally, “serv[ing] on committees” (A, C, F) was articulated as an important aspect of success because it allows others to know you.

Collaboration with others was noted by all participants as a critical aspect of facilitating success. It was noted that collaboration should take place “across different colleges, universities, and departments” (C). “Being a team player” (B), “clear communication” (A), and “get[ting] different perspectives and opinions from others” (B) can encourage success. Offering and receiving help was also noted as important by all participants. It was noted that it was critical to “get different perspectives and opinions from others” (B), “accept compliments” (A), and “offer help to others” (F).

Internal Actions

Internal actions relate to self-awareness and being true to yourself. Participants expressed that you need to uphold elements of good character. Success was also expressed as encompassing the individual person being successful in their personal life. These aspects were recognized as ones that may be more difficult to change or control due to their very personal nature. Multiple participants indicated the importance of maintaining integrity (A, B, D). “Don’t undermine your credibility” (A) and “do what you say you will” (B). The importance of “be[ing] a good citizen” (B, D) was also expressed as important. The areas of internal actions also related to knowing yourself and improving. “Know your strengths and weaknesses” (B, C) and identify what you can improve upon (A, F). “Passion” (B, C) was a word used by participants to articulate the need for individuals to match their interests with their research, teaching, and service. “Passion helps you stay motivated” (C). You need to “find the right fit” (F) and “play to your strengths” (C). Caution was shared in regard to focus on teaching (B, E). “Don’t focus all of your energy on teaching, learn to be a scholar” (E). Participants also encouraged individuals to “do what you like and like what you do” (F). Enjoyment and fun was expressed as components that reflect true success. Finally,

the concepts of knowing what you can contribute (B, D) and how to maintain work-life balance were also expressed as internal actions. You need to “make a valuable contribution to your university” (B) but “work doesn’t define you, you define work” (A). The importance of maintaining personal time was articulated by multiple participants (A, B, C, D, F). As one participant stated, “we are doing a disservice to society by not having time to be creative” (C).

External Actions

External actions relate to how you handle yourself (i.e., dress, voice, manners, and behaviors). You can change or alter these aspects. Participants expressed the importance of clear communication. As one participant stated, “do not ruminate around men with power” (C). Effective communication requires that we “avoid negativity” (F), “be approachable” (A), “spread optimism” (F), and “develop credibility” (B). This can be further enhanced through presenting ourselves in a professional manner. “Be mindful of dress” (C), “speak in an authoritative tone” (C), and “look the part in presence, dress, and speech” (A).

Review of Results Using the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA)

The Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) provides a lens through which to look at the summarized results collected in the study. TWA suggests potential for interaction among person-environment fit, job satisfaction, and tenure. Given that study participants were purposefully selected due to their success within academia, tenure within the job environment is a given. Each of the participants had multiple years of employment at their respective institutions. Thus, the strategies documented in Table 1 are based on that success. The TWA factor of “person-environment fit” can be seen specifically in items listed under the category of “Workplace Awareness and Expectations” as well as across the contexts of “Foundation,” “Individual,” and “Cooperation,” while the factor of “job satisfaction” can be seen under the category of “Internal Actions” and across the context of “Balance.”

As noted by Dawis and Lofquist (1984), TWA reflects a continual interaction between an individual and their work environment. Thus, as one reflects on the items listed in Table 1, it becomes apparent that these items are not merely a list of “to-do” items but rather a list of recommended actions that a person should continually do in order to have a higher likelihood of success within postsecondary education. These items represent abilities, values and styles that makeup the “work personality” (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984, p.24) of higher education from the perspective of the participants and reflect the participants’ perspective of what actions they perceived allowed them to be successful within the work environment of higher education.

Conclusions

The findings of this qualitative study are not generalizable, but results can be transferrable and have utility in that manner. Based on results, it was concluded that women faculty in this study proactively controlled their career success in higher education through actions outlined or reactively responded to situations outside of their control. These findings are consistent with research studies related to what women must do to achieve advancement within their careers (Kleihauer et al., 2012; Melamed, 1996). The themes identified by Airini et al. (2011) which included work relationships, university environment, invisible rules, proactivity, and personal circumstance regarding the advancement of women are supported by this study. Findings articulate the importance of building strong work relationships and understanding workplace culture. The concept of proactivity is strongly supported through specific comments made by participants in regard to taking initiative and serving in specific roles such as serving on committees. Just as Madsen (2007) noted the importance of mentoring, participants from this study also emphasized the value that mentoring plays in the success of women faculty.

Given that the TWA elements can be seen within the summary of success concepts documented, we concluded that acting on the items noted in Table 1 has the potential to impact the outcome of interaction within one's work environment in a positive manner. The suggestion of a relationship between person-environment fit, job satisfaction, and tenure as noted by the TWA (Bretz & Judge, 1994) was supported by these findings. Participants specifically noted the need for individuals to find their fit within the organization. The concept of job satisfaction was also noted through the concepts of enjoyment and passion. In fact, given that study participants had achieved success in their field and also displayed high job satisfaction, we concluded that the strategies they provided could assist female faculty in achieving not only success but also job satisfaction.

Spousal support (Woo, 1985) and family upbringing (Astin & Leland, 1991; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Hennig & Jardim, 1977; Madsen, 2007) were not mentioned by the participants in this study. It is possible that the absence of these items relate to the focus of the study which was to document success strategies. Given that both spousal support and family upbringing are not items that one would have control over, it is possible that participants did not see these items as relevant.

Discussion and Recommendations for Practice

Given the female enrollment in both secondary (Lawrence et al., 2013) and postsecondary (Texas A&M University, 2014) agricultural education, it is critical that women faculty in higher education emerge as role models for these students. The documented success strategies revealed realistic and practical advice that could benefit the profession of agricultural education by recruiting and retaining faculty who can provide excellence and consistency in building a scientific and professional workforce (Doerfert, 2011).

The identification of the areas of "change is inevitable," "reflect and prepare," and "time management" offer clear advice and guidance. It is recommended that these strategies be carefully considered especially by those early in their career. Multiple participants articulated these items as critical and analysis revealed that these three items cut across all categories.

The four primary areas that were represented by columns in Table 1 provide individuals guidance as to how to approach the strategies. The strategies that fall within "workplace awareness and expectations" relate to the specific context of the higher education workplace. Each institution has a unique context and it is critical to understand the dynamics that exist within that context. The area labeled "proactive strategies to facilitate success" reflects actions that can be taken by an individual to encourage positive relationships within the higher education context that can lead to success. The two areas that include "internal actions" and "external actions" are focused on actions that are independent of context and do not necessarily relate to interaction with others but rather how you handle yourself.

Categorization of the success factors across the areas of "foundation," "individual," "cooperation," and "balance," allows one to see how each strategy can actually compliment and contradict one another. For example, in the category of "balance," there is a recommendation to "avoid over commitment" but "commit to the appropriate activities." Thus, while participants encourage one to "maintain personal time," they are not advocating a lack of commitment. In other words, the strategies are not a list of "to-dos" but rather "guidelines for success" for women faculty according to where they are positioned within their organization and where they are in regard to their career.

There were four specific items noted by all participants: 1) seek and apply for grants, 2) join professional associations, 3) collaborate with others, and 4) offer and receive help. Given that these items were noted independently by all six successful women faculty, we highly encourage

individuals to carefully consider the importance of these items. Further, a majority of the items overall fell within the category of “Proactive Strategies to Facilitate Success,” thus, we encourage individuals to take the word “proactive” seriously and take steps to secure success within the higher education workplace by acting on the items listed.

While this study was focused on women tenure-track faculty in agricultural education, it is believed that the strategies identified are appropriate for all tenure-track faculty in postsecondary education as they are adaptable and articulate clear advice for advancing in one’s career. It is recommended that this information be shared broadly with faculty in agricultural education in order to provide guidance for future generations. This qualitative study adds to the body of research related to the advancement of faculty in postsecondary education.

Recommendations for Research

The topic of success in academic settings would benefit from additional study. The study we reported here focused purposefully on the female perspective. Successful women faculty in agricultural education shared their strategies for success and these strategies were synthesized into a concise summary. We recommend additional research that involves a male perspective of success in postsecondary education. It would be useful to have successful male faculty review the findings from this study and provide input as to additional strategies or modifications to the strategies listed. Input from diverse perspectives could add to the overall description of success factors.

It would also be beneficial to interview or conduct focus groups with successful faculty to determine additional strategies that may not have been identified in this study. Of particular use would be case studies that document successful implementation of the strategies in order to provide a clear picture of implementation. Knowing a strategy is much different than implementing one. It is also possible that success strategies could vary across phases of a career path. Further research to clearly identify success strategies based on these phases (e.g., pre-tenure, post-tenure) would be helpful.

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