

# Becoming a Professor: Exploring New Faculty Learning

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**Abstract:** *Faculty careers come with formal and informal expectations for how faculty should behave. This study investigates how faculty discover these expectations using an adult learning theory lens. Phenomenological interviews with faculty were conducted to identify themes in their learning. Diverse experiences from faculty of different fields and ranks were included. Key themes that emerged from our study include missing information, diversity of faculty work, emotional labor, and exceptional circumstances as a result of the pandemic. We found that adult learning theory explained certain aspects of faculty learning behaviors; however, andragogy did not address socio-emotional aspects of the learning process.*

**Keywords:** early career faculty, adult learning theory, phenomenological interviews

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## **Introduction**

Academia is neither monolithic nor static. Faculty work varies across institutions, departments, and time, and faculty careers come with formal and informal expectations for how faculty should behave. Therefore, faculty members who join a new institution, or change roles within an institution, have a lot of learning to do in order to understand their professional roles. This study examines new faculty learning about their roles. It is important to understand what and how faculty learn about their new jobs in the first year they are affiliated with an institution. Ensuring faculty fully understand their roles aids in faculty satisfaction and retention and contributes to successful job performance. This learning process can be different for minority faculty members who may be asked to conform to expectations of their gender or race as well as the expectations for their teaching, research, and service duties. This study considers the diverse experiences of faculty with a variety of identities. This study is of particular relevance in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, which often prevented faculty from engaging in the sort of informal learning which would normally occur in person.

## **Literature Review**

According to Lynch and Buckner-Hayden (2010), new employees learn to perform functionally after three months in a new organization if they are able to learn the organization's rules, regulations, processes, and governance. However, this does not ensure employee success if the employee is not fully trained for enduring success (Anderson et al., 1996). If the new employee does not acclimate socially, with all the professional competencies and knowledge, the probability of their reaching full productivity within their organization declines dramatically (Anderson et al., 1996). Recruitment of new faculty requires a significant investment of time, effort, and money, so it is important to set up new faculty for short and long-term success in their new roles (Baker & DiPiro, 2019). Universities can lose

significant investments of time, effort, and money if they do not aid their new faculty members in finding a community and learning the expectations of the institution for their role.

Socialization is a key component of an onboarding program (Rollag et al., 2005). It bridges the potential of a new employee's talent to the fulfillment of that potential as the employee begins to actualize full productivity (Snell, 2006). Employees who are not socialized are more likely to leave an organization. Socialization is especially critical during their first 30 to 180 days. New employees decide within their first 30 days whether they feel welcomed in an organization (Dai & De Meuse, 2007) and within the first six months whether they will stay (Aberdeen Group, 2006).

Schloss et al. (2009) mentioned that the success of new faculty is critical since the recruitment process is extremely costly, with an upward estimate of direct and indirect costs of \$100,000 per hire. Stupnisky et al. (2015) in their mixed method study, explored new faculty success predictors. They argued that faculty success is not only costly for the hiring institution, but also for the new faculty members transitioning to a new college or university, as it is "a tremendous personal, emotional, and familial investment that they hope will result in a successful new career and life" (p. 368). Webber (2019) found that university and departmental communication, mentoring, and colleague interaction were correlated with faculty satisfaction.

There are several studies, both qualitative and quantitative, about new faculty orientation. Many of these studies focus on new faculty expectations and perceptions of their role as faculty (Crawford & Olsen, 1998; Luce & Murray, 1998; Trotman & Brown, 2005) and their challenges of adjustment and transitions (Austin et al., 2007; Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008; Mullen & Forbes, 2000). A few studies mention issues related to equity and social justice and approach the new faculty transition from a feminist theory lens (Lease, 1999; Park, 2000). In comparison

to associate and full professors, several studies have mentioned higher rates of assistant professors' departure from academia, especially women assistant professors (Chang et al., 2016; Cristal & Hector, 1980; Smart, 1990; Zhou & Volkwein, 2004). Honeyman and Summers (1994) argued that "Proportionally, the largest number of departing faculty came from the rank of assistant professor or its equivalent; this fact was consistent with the findings in the body of literature" (p. 9). Amey (1996), in her study of 330 departed professors from a research university, mentioned that the highest proportion of faculty who left academia were assistant professors (48%), and the reason for their departure was associated with issues related to the tenure process. Similarly, Christal and Hector (1980) mentioned issues of retention of new faculty at lower ranks, especially non-tenure and minority faculty. They found that one-third of newly hired faculty had voluntarily left the job by the third year of their employment (Christal & Hector, 1980).

Furthermore, there have been several studies that have examined faculty success and retention. Many of these studies mentioned unclear expectations for attaining tenure, conflicting expectations regarding faculty responsibilities, and a lack of guidance in their progress as leading causes of faculty departure (Austin & Rice 1998; Eddy & Gaston-Gayles 2008; Luce & Murray 1998; Mullen & Forbes 2000; Nir & Zilberstein-Levy 2006; Rice et al., 2000; Trotman & Brown 2005; Trower & Gallagher 2008). These studies also mentioned the lack of balance in personal and professional life as another major reason for faculty departure. These studies suggested that new faculty faced difficulties balancing research, teaching, and service requirements. Some studies highlighted collegiality, mentorship, and collaboration with colleagues as important factors in new faculty success (Austin & Rice, 1998; Luce & Murray, 1998; Mullen & Forbes, 2000; Rice et al., 2000; Sorcinelli, 1988; Trotman & Brown, 2005; Trower & Gallagher, 2008). These studies found that new faculty often suffered from isolation at work, lack of community, and distance from senior colleagues.

Despite the above-mentioned research, there is a lack of empirical studies on how new faculty learn about their job expectations and their role at new institutions. We approach this study from an adult learning perspective with a focus on work-related learning. The purpose of using this particular theoretical lens is to move away from the adjustment and transition perspective present in previous studies in order to better understand new faculty's learning process in their new environments and contexts. The goal is to understand how the elements which facilitate adult learning were or were not manifest in the experiences of new faculty members.

## **Theoretical Framework**

For this study, adult learning theory, particularly Andragogy, introduced by Knowles (1980) was used to better understand new faculty work learning processes. Knowles (1980) presented the following principles of andragogy:

- Adults are self-directed learners.
- Adults have rich life experiences which are useful in the learning process.
- The readiness of an adult to learn is associated with developmental tasks of his/her social role. In other words, learning needs are context bound for adult learners.
- Adults are more problem-centered than subject-centered.
- Adults are mostly driven by internal motivation.
- Adults need to know the reason to learn something.

Knowles (1980) recommends that adult learning environments should facilitate interaction. The author recommends that the environment should be collaborative, rather than competitive, and non-threatening. It is important to note that since 1980, adult learning theory has expanded into new directions such as transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991, 1997), spirituality and adult learning (Dirkx, 2001; English, 2001; Tisdell, 2008)

emotions and adult learning (Bierema, 2008; Dirkx, 2008), embodied learning (Freiler, 2008; Hyland, 2019; Lawrence, 2012), the neuroscience of adult learning (Cozolino, & Sprokay, 2006; Knowland, & Thomas, 2014), and narrative learning (Clark, & Rossiter, 2008; Rossiter, 2002; Merriam, 2009). Regardless of subsequent directions, Merriam (2009) argued that “Andragogy is here to stay” (p. 455). Merriam (2009) further suggests two important considerations for adult learning in current times: (1) focus on a variety of contexts and (2) learning as a multidimensional phenomenon, not just a cognitive activity. In our study, we will focus on the basic principles of andragogy and try to understand faculty learning experiences through these principles.

The theory of andragogy portrays a view of the adult life cycle as a largely predictable series of stages with their own learning tasks. However, Field (2008) and Merriam (1994) both argued that there is a probability of adults going through significant transitions throughout their lives. Field (2008) mentioned normative and non-normative transitions. Field (2008) argued that several studies show that social capital and social connections help individuals learn important interpersonal skills, create a sense of belonging, security, and trust to succeed in a new work environment (Benn, 2000; Strawn, 2003; Tett & Maclachlan, 2007). We agree with Field (2008) and Merriam (1994) and think there is a need to learn more about non-normative transitions and their impact on adult learning. Since this study was conducted during a global pandemic, we hope to better understand the learning processes during crisis situations and how such unusual circumstances impact learners and learning processes. We consider faculty hiring during a pandemic as a "non-normative" transition, per Field's assertion. This study aims to provide useful information regarding how faculty learn in crisis situations and examine the major challenges or barriers they face in their learning process. From a practical perspective, this study will help administrators and institutions of higher education learn how to better support their new faculty and ensure their retention and success.

## Methodology

Phenomenological interview methods were used to investigate new faculty learning. Phenomenology is the study of experiences before they have been theorized or explained (Van Manen & Adams, 2010). Hearing narratives from faculty allowed us to understand new faculty's experiences regarding joining new institutions and how they learn about new institutional processes, policies, and culture pertaining to their role as faculty members in a rich, personal way. In-depth interviews that lasted for about 60 minutes were conducted via Zoom video call with each faculty member. The study was IRB approved. We examined the three aspects of faculty careers: research, teaching, and service. Additional questions were included regarding what surprised faculty members about their new roles, as well as what their biggest challenges were.

This project was conducted at a research university in the midwestern United States. For this paper, interviews were conducted with 10 new faculty members, three men and seven women. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling, since we actively sought out participants new to their institution. We also wanted to represent diversity in terms of gender, subject area, and tenure status. Although we had several participants who shared doctoral backgrounds in Educational Administration, these faculty were working in several different departments and had quite different appointments.

**Table 1***Participant Demographics*

<b>N</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Subject Area</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1	Daniel	Male	Entomology	Professor
2	Robert	Male	Musical Theater	Assistant Professor
3	Ajay	Male	Plant Pathology	Assistant Professor
4	Julie	Female	Mechanical Engineering	Assistant Professor
5	Jenna	Female	Educational Administration	Assistant Professor
6	Betty	Female	Educational Administration	Assistant Professor
7	Karen	Female	Architecture	Professor/Chair
8	Josephine	Female	Architecture	Assistant Professor
9	Elizabeth	Female	Educational Administration	Assistant Professor/librarian
10	Sofia	Female	Educational Administration	Assistant Professor

**Data Analysis**

According to Merriam (2002), qualitative data analysis is content analysis that explores concepts that could explain data and how they relate to the participants. Content analysis involves coding data for patterns, relationships, and tensions. We used content analysis to extrapolate common themes from the interviews. First, we created video and audio recordings of the interviews. We then transcribed the audio recordings and edited the automated transcriptions to ensure accuracy. Both researchers listened to all the interviews and created their own separate themes relating to the andragogy framework used for this study. The researchers then met and discussed these emerging themes. These themes were consolidated, and the findings were generated from this collaborative process.

The data were coded according to four themes: Missing Information, Diversity of Faculty Work, Emotional Labor, and Exceptional Circumstances of the Pandemic. Study participants repeatedly expressed that they felt they were Missing Information, as they had many questions about their roles which they did not know the answers to. Participant interviews also reflected the Diversity of Faculty Work, as interviewees described markedly different appointments and role

expectations. Participants, particularly those with minoritized identities, frequently referred to the impacts of Emotional Labor, and various social and emotional factors, on their learning. Finally, because the period of our study took place while social distancing due to the pandemic was in place, it was impossible to avoid discussing the Exceptional Circumstances of the Pandemic and its impact on faculty learning. The strategies new faculty used to cope with navigating these four categories of information and skills frequently aligned with the tenants of adult learning theory, including self-direction, context-based or problem-based learning, internal motivation, and the importance of an environment of collaboration. However, in some places these andragogy strategies conflicted with new faculty's efforts to understand their roles, and other supports were necessary to facilitate learning.

## Results

### Missing Information

All the participants reported having to figure out their roles for themselves. Their graduate education and hiring institutions did not instruct them on tenure and promotion considerations, service and teaching expectations, or strategies for institutional governance. Participants reported not fully understanding the tenure and promotion process before becoming faculty members. Even after a full semester or even a full year at the institution, participants reported being confused as to what the research and service expectations were. In the absence of formal channels to instruct them on their expectations, participants turned to people in their lives with faculty experience. Several participants reported learning about faculty work from a family member with experience as a faculty member. For instance, Jenna said this about her thinking before she got her first faculty job:

I didn't really have a good idea of what service meant. I didn't have a good idea of how much time commitment

that is. Like, I had no idea how much work it took to do a search committee to hire somebody. Like, I didn't really have an idea of what kinds of committees even existed on campuses to be involved in prior to that job.

In the absence of thorough formal training for their jobs, faculty members found ways to learn their career expectations. Ajay spoke of the way he tried to learn parts of his job he had never been trained to do, relaying the following:

When I moved from a postdoctoral position to the faculty position, the first thing that I learned is that I'm not just a researcher. I'm a supervisor, also, right? So that was, I would say, like a big change in that sense, because now I'm managing employees and my duty is not just to conduct research, I have to manage a lot of other things and I think I felt a lot of responsibility when I switched to a faculty position. So, what I learned or what I did during my first semester, I think the first thing was like I contacted my senior colleagues who were already in this role or some of the people I know who are on tenure track. I contacted them first. So, what are the important things? What should I be doing during my first semester or in the beginning? So, what are the important things to be successful? What do I need for tenure to eventually be successful in this position?

The willingness new faculty showed to address the gaps in their understanding aligns with Knowles (1980) description of adult learners as self-directed.

Faculty members did receive some formal orientation from their institutions. However, participants reported feeling overwhelmed by some of the orientation activities. They felt some topics were stressed unnecessarily while others went unaddressed. This aligns with Knowles (1980) description of adult learning in which he noted that adult learners absorb

information best when it is delivered in the time and place when they will make use of that information to solve a problem facing them.

Although for some participants, there was little guidance on course design or research expectations, faculty members appreciated the autonomy of being able to define quality course design or scholarship for themselves. Although defining and justifying their careers for themselves was challenging, many of them reported they had pursued academia precisely for this autonomy. Many faculty participants were engaged not just in defining their own career goals, but in defining the goals and policies of their departments and colleges. Participants felt their own principles and those of their family and connections guided their career goals and they enjoyed being able to pursue their values rather than have values imposed upon them. This aligns with Knowles (1980) assertion that adult learners are self-directed and driven by internal motivation. The autonomy traditional to academic work provides faculty with the environment of trust and responsibility which facilitates adult learning.

Even participants who were experienced faculty members had new learning to do because the culture and policies of their new institution differed from institutions they had been part of in the past or with the principles of shared governance they learned as graduate students. Participants reported that the definition and execution of shared governance and academic freedom varied from institution to institution either because of regional differences in culture or dynamics associated with institutional size and mission. The power balance between administrators and faculty varied between institutions. Several participants mentioned that higher education in general has a struggle between the faculty and the administration. For instance, Karen, who had switched institutions, reported:

Institutionally, I think at the upper levels there were definitely some challenges with communication. Yeah,

I think this is not so uncommon in Higher Ed, but I think some of the thoughts and ways of doing things from the upper administration don't always align with the faculty. I think, even know, [this university] has been having some of its challenges with the faculty senate and stuff. From my experience, they're not that unusual.

Similarly, Daniel, who had also switched institutions, told us the following:

I was very heavily involved in, one of the primary people responsible for forming a faculty union at [my previous] university, and the reason for that is that a lot of us were becoming increasingly concerned about academic freedom and shared governance, those are the two principles of higher education here in the United States that make our system so incredibly strong and influential and we saw the corporatization of academia going on [there] and [that institution] is not unique. It's all over the country, we see a lot of that, but [that institution] was particularly far along with corporatizing the executives, the presidents, and vice presidents, and the rest of us, they forgot they were our colleagues and faculty colleagues, so that was a big impetus for forming the union there. So far what I have seen here [...] there seems to be more communication between administrators and faculty, and I don't see it as split as it was at [my last institution]. Having said that, there have been some issues that have come up that have demonstrated they're struggling. I think that they've been comfortable here and everybody's getting along. They haven't had issues come up where, hey, wait a minute, that's not shared governance, you're not supposed to do that, but I think maybe the times or the size of the university or whatever, they're beginning to experience that. They don't have a lot of strong background in shared governance. I've even heard this

from the highest-level administrators. They said, ‘we’re still struggling to figure out what shared governance is here.’

The quotes from both of these participants demonstrate missing information among university administrators as well as new faculty. The lack of clarity or disagreement about the definition of shared governance led to additional burdens as new faculty members sought to understand their institutions and roles. The erosion of the traditional power of faculty to conduct their work autonomously erodes the environment of trust Knowles (1980) identified as needed for successful adult learning.

### **Diversity of Faculty Work**

Orienting new faculty fully is not possible at the university level, since faculty work varies greatly by discipline and career stage. Teaching in applied, professional disciplines leads to different workflows and time commitments than teaching in abstract, theoretical disciplines. Participants reported that the work of teaching varies greatly not just between disciplines, but between institutions. Teaching undergraduates leads to much different work than teaching graduate students. Teaching in different cultural regions of the country and institutions with varying levels of preparedness among their students also made great differences in their work. Expectations for advising vary widely by discipline and institution, meaning even those participants with experience as faculty could be surprised by their advising expectations. Advising was something new to participants who had teaching experience as graduate students but had never been faculty members before. Although the participants had rich career experiences in their graduate work or previous jobs, they still had a lot of learning to do in their new institution. Expectations for participants who were filling new roles in a department were particularly vague. Several participants had professional responsibilities, such as directing a program, which caused confusion in their departments as to

what their expectations for teaching were. Non-tenure track faculty felt orientations were not geared toward them.

Participants who worked in disciplines where collaborative research or teaching was the norm had much fuller introductions to the institution than those whose work was more individual. This is especially interesting since co-instructing is often less highly rewarded than individual instruction. This finding calls into question Knowles (1980) assertion that adult learners are primarily self-directed. Instead, it suggests that faculty benefit from scholarly community.

There was a wide diversity of experience in faculty work. Some participants were new to faculty work while others had transferred from other universities after years or even decades of experience. Some had come to their new institution after extremely negative experiences at other institutions. Jenna described one of the reasons she chose to leave her previous institution.

There were things that myself as an assistant professor was doing that I shouldn't have been doing. So I think in that first 2 years that I was there, I think that I was on like 8 search committees and of those search committees I was the chair of three of them, which doesn't really quite make sense when you think about new faculty.

Her experience demonstrates how faculty who are overburdened with responsibility can suffer and feel forced to look for careers elsewhere. The attrition of faculty after being overburdened as a new colleague with an unfair share of the workload reinforces once again the importance of the environment of trust that Knowles (1980) recommends for successful adult learning.

## **Emotional Labor**

Several faculty participants mentioned that the work of fitting into their departments and institutions was something they were not prepared for. Participants were surprised by the interpersonal dynamics of faculty work and the amount of politics that had been invisible to them as graduate students. Sofia, an international faculty member, who was working in a region of the country she had never lived in before, offered the following explanation.

I feel a sense of distrust and people don't have that kind of respect for their colleagues that they should have. This is my feeling, like whenever I go to meetings. People try to put down each other, they take things personally. It's very disturbing for me to see and if I say something I'm always worried and stressed, am I saying something right? Am I saying something wrong? Am I stepping on somebody's toes, because I don't know because it's very confusing.

The work of faculty to fit into the culture of a new region of the country compounds the work of carrying out their regular duties. Since definitions of respect differ from culture to culture and place to place, and since faculty work tends to take people far from their birthplaces and the places they are educated, faculty learning entails cultural adjustment as well as learning the technical requirements of the new job. The theory of andragogy could benefit from the consideration of cultural stressors in its description of ideal adult learning environments.

Female participants reported wondering whether their male colleagues faced the same battles for authority as their female counterparts. Female participants stressed the feeling that their gender combined with their young age led their colleagues to dismiss their perspectives. Several international participants expressed similar concerns that they did not always receive equal respect from their colleagues. The concept of

marginalization could help the theory of andragogy paint a more complete picture of adult learning.

Forming connections was something participants valued as integral to their success as faculty members. Department demographics played a role in whether faculty had formed any connections at their institutions. Being the only unmarried person in their department, the only person without children, or the only relatively young person could be very isolating. For example, Robert noted:

Everyone in my department that is faculty is married and all but one of them have children. So that's also hard, because I'm single and like they're very self-sufficient with their partners, whereas like I'm like, I have no friends.

Similarly, Jenna said that her biggest challenge in faculty work was not having interpersonal interactions to sustain her.

I think the biggest thing that surprised me was how isolating it is. I think when you're a student you think wow, being in academia seems so great, you get to be with people and you get to socialize and then you get into academia and that's such a small part of your job. A lot of the tasks that you do are actually just you doing them in an office, even though you're probably doing them collaboratively, like nobody's actually collaborating together at like one given time, it's all in delegation of tasks that you then do by yourself and bring together. So, I'm pretty surprised at the level of isolation that a faculty member experiences.

Jenna noted that she had to look beyond her department colleagues for research collaborators. She shared the following:

I probably wouldn't do research with any of them, not because, I mean, that sounds really harsh. It's mostly

because a lot of the current faculty are actually at the end of their careers, so they're not really doing research, so it's not that I wouldn't ask them, or that they wouldn't do it, but I know I've had conversations with some of them, where like they're getting ready to retire, and so it's a conversation of, you know, I'm happy to do publishing, but I'm also kind of done with it, and I'm wanting mostly to just be a third or fourth author. I don't really want to be doing the hustle, which makes sense. I mean, you're at your end of your careers, so I would probably do more consultation with them than I would anything else related to research.

Participants like Jenna and Robert who were not able to form social connections on campus struggled to get the information they needed. For those who were able to form connections, those personal connections could be a wealth of informal information about the institution and faculty work. This dynamic calls into question Knowles' (1980) assertion that adult learning is a self-directed and self-motivated process.

### **Exceptional Circumstances of the Pandemic**

The social distancing measures imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic limited the quantity and quality of interactions faculty were able to have with their colleagues and changed their work. The closure of campus facilities reduced informal communication which aids in getting to know a campus culture. Betty expressed her difficulties in getting information about her job with a comparison to the difficulties of teaching during the pandemic.

There's so much informal learning that our students are not receiving because, not that they're not receiving it, it's difficult to have the informal learning of a studio environment be replicated, because it happens when you're just there and you are vulnerable enough to say something about a project you're working on or you

trust the people enough to say something. So, for students, I think, building that trust, to share some of your big ideas, creative ideas, that people hold close, is harder right now because how do you engage with one person on a zoom meeting where you're not in control of it, you know? And you can't have these micro-conversations. Students can't. I can't either. And in that way, it's the same for faculty, like we're not together, everything has to be more intentional. And then there's this piece about well, everybody's so busy. Should I bother these people for more?

This finding highlights the importance of community in learning a new role. Knowles's (1980) theory could be expanded to include the value of community to adult learning.

Although video conferencing permitted faculty members to continue some of their group activities remotely, it was not the same as interacting in person. Participants reported having trouble focusing on video conversations. Participants also reported difficulty in controlling their emotional responses in faculty meetings over video conferences, where their facial expressions were much more on display than they would be in a physical meeting.

New faculty felt more pressure to teach in person and perform work on campus than their peers. Sofia reported:

Many of my colleagues opted out of in-person classes, even in the last semester, and they were teaching online. I think we new faculty, I think we were more anxious, and we tried to, you know, abide by the rules and everything and tried to be there in person, but those people who were already there in the institution, or comfortable, they, from early on opted out of in-person classes.

Because pre-tenure and non-tenure-track faculty members have the most vulnerable employment among faculty members, they felt pressure to take on tasks their peers would not. The pressure to impress as a new faculty member led to increased stress and decreased capacity for learning. New faculty members were in a catch-22 situation in which they either endangered their chances at job stability by declining to teach in person or endangered their chances at job stability by taking on the additional stress of teaching in person.

In addition to the difficulties of working remotely and the stress of working in person with additional health risks, the pandemic also had financial repercussions on faculty work. Some participants reported having logistical duties which demanded excessive amounts of their time due to the lack of other faculty on campus and the budget cuts which eliminated staff positions. This led to less time for learning their teaching, research, and service roles as faculty members.

Though in many ways the restrictions imposed by the pandemic limited faculty learning about their new careers, a few participants found some benefits to faculty orientation via video conferencing which they hoped would continue after the pandemic recedes. Julie mentioned:

Our Research and Creative Activities office has done a handful of new faculty workshops as well. And those have been kind of nice on Zoom™ because you can connect with so many different, you know like there's so many different faculty, I mean in some cases, Zoom™ is nice because you don't have to walk all the way across campus to get to something. You can fill your day with more things. On the other hand, human connection is nice too, but for those Research and Creative Activities ones, it's been nice to see what other people are doing and learn about what opportunities [the university] has to support you through your research.

The additional pressures of Covid-19 took faculty time away from their core responsibilities of teaching, research, and service. Covid-19 diminished time faculty could spend networking. It shortened the period before their tenure evaluations in which they could build connections across their campus. Time was a precious commodity to these faculty with regard to learning their career expectations.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of our study was to better understand the learning processes of new faculty from an adult learning perspective and how the unusual circumstances of the global pandemic impacted faculty learners and learning processes. Findings from our study confirm the assertion of andragogy (Knowles, 1980) that adults are problem-based learners, since all the faculty members interviewed identified learning needs for themselves based on their experiences. However, despite their learning motivation, the faculty members often did not have the network they needed to learn their roles. The assumption about the utility of past life experiences in the learning process is partially borne out by this study. Although the faculty members who had previous academic backgrounds and training were better equipped to navigate their new role as a faculty member, faculty members who came from professional fields outside of academia had habits and expectations which conflicted with the culture of academia. The faculty members' learning needs were certainly context-bound, since they were able to absorb information best at the moment of need and felt overwhelmed receiving information before it was useful to them. While in many ways the theory of andragogy was affirmed by our findings, we found that the theory fell short in the following areas: relationships, identity, and emotions, context, and motivation.

## **Relationships**

For the new faculty participants, learning was a social process, and they heavily depended on their colleagues for their learning. Due to the pandemic, the process of relationship-building was slowed or completely halted for some time, and participants were not able to build relationships with their new colleagues, which meant they were unable to build support structures for their emotional well-being and academic success. Knowles's (1980) theory does not include the communal and relational aspect of learning and approached learning from an individualistic perspective. According to Field (2008), several other studies have shown that social connections and civic engagement appear to exert a positive influence on participation in education and training through adult life (Benn, 2000; Strawn, 2003). We found that community and relationship-building are crucial aspects of learning at work. Particularly in the pandemic, the new faculty were not able to build trusting relationships, which made the environment less conducive for learning.

## **Identity**

In this study, we found that learning experiences at work are often impacted by identity and marginalization. Female faculty mentioned emotional aspects of their learning experiences. We also noticed that our participants belonging to minority groups experienced certain challenges and hurdles in their learning process which their counterparts belonging to majority groups did not experience. This was exacerbated by the phenomenon observed by James and Thériault (2020), who mentioned in their paper that the challenges of the pandemic have worsened issues of equity and social justice for historically underrepresented and minoritized groups. However, andragogy remains unclear about the role of identity in adult learning processes.

## **Emotions**

The andragogy theory does not consider the emotional aspect of learning but considers it more of a rational and pragmatic process. Dirkx (2006, 2008) discussed the role of emotion and adult learning, but he did not include the impact of different gender expectations on the role of emotion in the learning process. Knowles (2000) emphasized that for effective learning to happen, the environment should be non-threatening and collaborative. However, in our study, we found that institutions of higher education failed to provide a collaborative environment to their newly hired faculty. Particularly during the pandemic, the process of relationship building was slowed or completely halted for some time, and new faculty were unable to build relationships with their colleagues, which meant they could not build support structures for their emotional well-being and academic success.

## **Context**

Although learning needs are context-bound, the learning process is not context-bound. In our study, we found that our participants drew information from their previous institutions, as well as their friends and colleagues from different locations and institutions.

## **Motivation**

Andragogy assumes that adult learners are internally motivated. This is partially borne out by the study, since participants were self-motivated, but they also had institutional pressure to learn about their jobs and the institution. Institutions expect faculty to learn about their students, their colleagues, and their institutions and build relationships with others from different departments, colleges, and even institutions. Faculty are also expected to build community connections through their outreach work. These relationships have a strong impact on their motivation. Lukinova (2016) mentioned several studies

conducted in Russia, Europe, the USA about motivation and adult learning. Lukinova argued that for adult learning, situational factors such as the influence of different people and the specifics of activity and situation play an important role.

## **Recommendations**

Our findings show that although faculty members make an effort to be self-directed, faculty participants in this study were working with a lot of missing information about their roles, even after months of employment. Future faculty members and departments could benefit from workshops or courses for graduate students on the work of being a faculty member, including the dynamics of shared governance, the rights granted by academic freedom, and the process of tenure and promotion. Many institutions have programs on higher education administration that might offer such workshops or courses. This could be an opportunity to develop skills in interacting with future faculty in diverse disciplines. It might also provide insight into the roles of higher education administrators in order to help faculty understand the division of power in higher education, variants in the execution of shared governance, and what their roles might be if they chose to eventually pursue administrative positions. These workshops might also include some introduction to faculty job offers and possibilities for negotiating a contract. Giving graduate students the opportunity to serve on college or university committees could also help prepare them for faculty work, building a foundation of past experiences for new faculty to draw experience from.

New faculty members might also benefit from such workshops. This could be particularly beneficial for faculty members for whom a doctorate is not the terminal degree, since they may have the least enculturation into what it means to be a faculty member. Since faculty come to their careers with a diversity of educational and workplace experiences, offering them some unifying learning opportunities around their career expectations

could provide more consistent knowledge of the procedures and values of faculty work. New faculty members could benefit from systematic mentorship programs to help them connect with colleagues and find a community at their new institutions. They may benefit from multiple mentors serving different purposes.

In our study, faculty participants reported a lack of respect in their environments hindering their work, indicating academia could benefit from some trust-building initiatives. The rise of academic capitalism damages the faculty learning environment. The neoliberal academy is competitive and threatening in opposition to the type of learning environment Knowles (1980) describes as facilitating adult learning. As the responsibility to perform university governance is taken from faculty, the environment for faculty learning suffers. If prospective faculty members and/or new faculty members had some education in shared governance, this could foster respect and alleviate some of the threats to shared governance and trends toward academic capitalism in academia. Spreading the duty of protecting shared governance across more faculty members, especially younger faculty members, could take some of the burden of this work off those who have taken on these heavy responsibilities. This would foster the kind of environment of shared responsibility touted by Knowles (1980) as beneficial to adult learning. Overall, we suggest that institutions of higher education create opportunities for social interactions among faculty members at departmental, college, and institutional levels to create supportive community environment to accelerate new faculty learning process to ensure their retention and success in long run.

For faculty candidates looking for a job during Covid-19, recruitment and orientation have looked different from previous years, with Zoom interviews and onboarding in lieu of in-person meetings. The absence of an in-person interview can be challenging for faculty candidates as they may be missing out on activities that facilitate accepting a new job offer, such as

exploring the area, looking at real estate, eating out with faculty hosts, and interacting with the department and students. If a faculty candidate accepts an offer, especially an out-of-state position, the department chair should identify a mentor as soon as possible to help fill the void left by a virtual interview process. Assigning a mentor before arrival on campus can be helpful even for a person who completed an in-person interview, especially if the new faculty member is relocating to a new area without an existing social or familial network, as the need for support and guidance is high during this transition time (Bhakta & Medina, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

The new faculty learning process aligns with the principles of andragogy. However, the new faculty participants faced certain challenges in their work learning process due to missing information, the diverse nature of their work, and the added burden of emotional labor. Covid-19 also exacerbated these challenges and made it difficult for faculty to access information and build relationships with their new colleagues. This has serious implications for the retention and success of new faculty, particularly new faculty from diverse backgrounds. Hence, it is important that institutions of higher education provide support to new faculty members by streamlining and disseminating work-related information and facilitating relationship-building.

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