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To Heaven or Hell: Sensemaking about Why Faculty Leave

This article analyzes sensemaking about faculty departure among administrators, faculty colleagues, and faculty leavers in one research university. A mixed methods database was analyzed to reveal four dominant explanations for faculty departure and two influences on sensemaking. Dominant explanations included better opportunities, the likelihood the faculty member would not get tenure, family and geographic reasons, and work environment and fit. Sensemaking was influenced by status expectations and proximity to the departure. Implications for future research on faculty careers, and for campuses interested in improving faculty retention, are drawn.

Whenever I hear about somebody that's moved on, it's really in the context of: 'Oh, it's a really great opportunity,' [. . .] which arguably might be why we were able to retain the one [faculty member] that we did keep, because we were a better opportunity professionally, I think, than [University A] would have been. Whereas the other one that we lost, I think [University B] was a great opportunity for her. It was probably a better opportunity in many ways.

Now I'm just sort of scanning the last seven years of my chairmanship, and then the years before that, and I can't think of an example that would refute that statement [which is] the people who leave when they're still untenured

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The Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 85, No. 5 (September/October)
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are people who are forecasting they're not going to get tenure. So, in some sense, that is a little bit different from our once normal definition of a retention problem.

Quite often after the fact that the member has left, there's a tendency to simplify the whole argument and try to present it in terms of just a one sentence or two sentence story. You know this person left because at that place, even though it's academically not comparable to [our university], they can avail of this thing which the physical setting of that place provides, which we can't. It's quite often we try to protect ourselves from feeling guilty or not getting the feeling that we didn't do as much as we could have to retain a certain person by making statements of that sort. People look for simplistic reasons why certain people left and try to present it that way because often times when you are asked these questions you don't have a whole lot of time to explain to somebody and you perhaps don't even know how to explain it.

These three comments are from administrators at Two Towers University (pseudonym), the setting of our research. The first two represent divergent explanations about why faculty have left their positions. The third provides an explanation of how and why people come to form understandings of departure. In the first explanation, the administrator positions the departure as inevitable and easily explained by the faculty member's taking a "better opportunity." Such a destination plausibly involves a more prestigious department or university, a better salary and better resources, and therefore a set of improved academic opportunities. We describe this as the "going to Heaven" rationale for faculty departure. In the second explanation, the administrator explains that the leaving faculty member never had what it took to be successful and was not cut out for the demands of a major research university. In the prestige-oriented world that research university faculty inhabit, this constitutes a metaphorical "going to Hell." The worst possible fate for an academic in a research university would be to fail to advance in such a setting.

We draw attention to two characteristics of the standard Heaven and Hell explanations. First, both absolve the university and the administrator of any responsibility for faculty departure. Both explanations are framed such that the faculty member's decision to leave is interpreted as independent of the quality of work climate, leadership, mentoring, or any other environmental factors shown to influence faculty departure and other key faculty outcomes such as productivity and satisfaction. Both explanations are framed in reference to the home institution, but the speakers exclusively focus on the conditions affecting departure that

are beyond the university's (and their own) control. It is as if the person came and went interacting with their work environment to no effect; the university would have had the same result regardless of whether it was the very best or worst place to work. Second, in both the Heaven and the Hell explanations, administrator perceptions of departure are influenced by factors outside the specific cases they describe. Experiences and identities as faculty members and chairs, as well as knowledge of the prestige of other programs, are involved in explanations provided. This insight is reinforced by the third administrator's comments which note that perceptions of departure develop quickly, reveal bias, and lack important contexts.

In essence, what these administrators were doing is what Weick (1995) termed sensemaking, which involves interpretation of one's environment. Because much of organizational life is uncertain and fraught with ambiguity, individuals try to make sense of what they experience by identifying their circumstantial roles within their environments (Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Weick, 1995). As they do this they also call upon established dictums within their fields that they perceive are appropriate to that role. In this case, such taken for granted dictums and prescriptions have to do with a set of norms for legitimate faculty careers.

The purpose of this article is to describe and analyze the sensemaking in which faculty and administrators in a large research university in the United States engage regarding faculty departure. Also, we were interested in influences on that sensemaking. We drew upon a rich database which included: a) interview and focus group data with administrators and senior faculty members who worked to retain assistant and associate professors, b) interviews with faculty who were leaving or left the institution within the past three years and survey responses from faculty who intended to leave, and c) survey responses from faculty colleagues of those who left regarding perceptions of faculty departure. We analyze this database through the lens of sensemaking and status expectations, set in the larger context of microinteractions within institutions (Powell & Colyvas, 2008).

The value of understanding sensemaking about faculty departure from different constituent vantage points is not to figure out who was right or wrong. Theories of sensemaking assume that individuals construct meaning from ambiguous bits of information, and their interpretation will be based on many factors, not the least of which are their own identities, perceptions of the plausible and legitimate, and routines of thought (Levitt & March, 1988; March, 1981; Weick, 1995). Faculty departure from a research university provides the ideal occasion for sen-

semaking because of the ambiguity and uncertainty that exists about why someone is leaving, and the lack of available information regarding cause and effect relationships (Weick, 1995). At the same time, faculty retention is a major goal of most academic affairs units within research universities. Searches are expensive, and start-up packages for faculty, especially in STEM areas, can range into the hundreds of thousands and do not get repaid when faculty leave. Faculty departure is also harmful to the university's research, teaching, and outreach missions, as well as its reputation.

Sensemaking perspectives remind us that individuals often construct realities in ways that lead to self-fulfilling prophecies and organizational members act on their perceptions in ways that have consequences (March, 1981). It is only when multiple constructions of reality are unearthed and shared that individuals and organizations can engage in learning that leads to organizational change (Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994; Kezar, 2001; Smirich, 1983; Weick, 1995). In this case such change relates to improving efforts to support and retain faculty. Thus this study sought to reveal sensemaking about faculty departure in ways that: (a) contribute to the literature on academic careers and retention and (b) provide an example of how research universities interested in improving faculty retention might study and engage sensemaking as part of reform.

Faculty Departure and Its Causes

A great deal is known empirically about factors influencing faculty departure. Researchers have created models to predict departure using national survey databases (e.g., Barnes, Agago, & Coombs, 1998; Rosser & Townsend, 2006; Smart, 1990; Zhou & Volkwein, 2004), and surveys at the level of individual universities, multiple universities, or state systems (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002; Matier, 1990; Weiler, 1985). An orienting concept to most literature on faculty departure is the treatment of departure as the result of intention or choice on the part of the faculty member. Intent to leave is either explicitly or implicitly acknowledged as the final step before a faculty member actually separates from the university (Daly & Dee, 2006; Johnsrud & Heck, 1994; Rosser & Townsend, 2006; Smart, 1990; Zhou & Volkwein, 2004). For the purposes of these models, intent to leave is tantamount to departure; if one arrives at a decision to leave, then one can be expected to leave.

Many factors indirectly influence intent to leave. For example, Zhou and Volkwein's (2004) model demonstrated both the indirect influence of seniority upon intent to leave via job satisfaction (having seniority

increases satisfaction with job security; being satisfied with job security reduces intent to leave), as well as a direct influence (having seniority reduces intent to leave). Other input variables, such as demographics of faculty (e.g., gender, race), or institutional characteristics (e.g., control, Carnegie type) have been included in models and shown to have indirect effects on leaving (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002; Rosser & Townsend, 2006; Smart, 1990; Zhou & Volkwein, 2004). Thus, all models we reviewed investigate multiple paths that ultimately lead to departure or intent to leave. For example, Xu (2008) found gender influences turnover indirectly through factors such as teaching and research productivity, tenure status, and job satisfaction (pp. 610–611). Similar to gender, Jayakumar, Howard, Allen, and Han (2009) found important relationships between race and perceptions of campus racial climate, autonomy and independence, review and promotion process, and having one's research valued by colleagues in the department (p. 556). The authors explained that these variables influence job satisfaction which in turn influences intent to leave. Several models treat additional personal characteristics the same way as gender or race (e.g., age, marital status, socioeconomic status).

In sum, a multitude of factors act and interact in complex ways to influence faculty intent to leave. Quantitative studies, which account for a preponderance of the literature, provide important insights regarding the relative importance of certain factors in faculty intent to leave. They do not, however, reveal the ways individual faculty members make sense of various factors. The factors taken into account in quantitative models are often limited by the availability of variables within a given database. Further, the ways university administrators gather and interpret information in attempts to retain faculty have not been studied in depth. Most studies rely on intent to leave as a proxy indicator for actual departure, which is a limitation.

Sensemaking and Status Expectations

The theory of sensemaking provides a window into how individuals work with information in their everyday environment to interpret and understand phenomena. Specifically, sensemaking refers to how “meanings materialize that inform and constrain identity into action” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409). It refers to the process by which people use information and respond to stimuli to arrive at an understanding of their role in a given circumstance, and this understanding of role informs future behavior. Weick (1995) outlined seven properties of sensemaking. It is: 1) grounded in identity construction; 2) ret-

rospective; 3) enactive of sensible environments; 4) social; 5) ongoing; 6) focused on and by extracted cues; and 7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. The concept of sensemaking has been used in the field of higher education to study faculty members' experiences of various topics including academic unit reorganization (Mills et al., 2005), the institutional transformation process (Eckel & Kezar, 2003), and post-tenure review (O'Meara, 2004).

Sensemaking is well suited to examine how and why faculty and administrators develop explanations of faculty departure for several reasons. First, Weick (1995) observed that sensemaking is typically initiated by shocks to a system. These shocks constitute a disruption from one's expectations or past experience and capture one's attention long enough to want to determine why the disruption happened (Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Weick et al., 2005). When individuals face poor understanding of cause and effect relationships, or there is ambiguity in a situation, the occasion is ripe for sensemaking. For example, Weick (1993) described the Mann Gulch fire disaster in Montana, and Snook (2000) examined the 1991 friendly fire incident in which U.S. fighter pilots shot down U.S. Black Hawk helicopters in peacetime. In both cases, sensemaking broke down in uncertain situations as actors attended to cues that fit their expectations causing them to miss important contrary signals (Powell & Colyvas, 2008). Similarly, faculty departure is a disruption to expectations for the person to continue working in appointments commonly thought desirable. Colleagues receive limited and ambiguous information about the departing individual's motives, thus providing fertile ground for sensemaking.

Second, sensemaking is primarily a retrospective process wherein individuals make sense of phenomena by "drawing on the language of predecessors and use narratives to account for sequence and experience" (Powell & Colyvas, 2008, p. 293). In other words, sensemaking involves trying to frame a problem or situation in order to understand it better (Weick, 2009). Individuals, therefore, use prior knowledge and cues from their environment to frame the issue. Faculty and administrators will connect a person's leaving their university today with past cases of departure and orient the situation toward what seems sensible given this context. If, for example, neither they nor their colleagues would ever leave their department because of the work-life climate, and they could not recall past cases where work-life climate was a cause of departure, they would not add the potential of work-life climate to their framing of a new departure. In explaining the situation, plausibility supersedes accuracy (Weick, 1995).

Third, sensemaking theory suggests actors look for cues and guideposts that are “plausible from the point of view of enacted identities and context” (Weick, 1995, pp. 55–56). Sensemaking is grounded in identity construction, so the ways in which individuals will seek to understand departure will be nested in their own professional identity and experienced contexts. Thus, demographic, as well as other organizational identities (e.g., department chair) and the sensemaker’s own intentions to leave, may influence how and why administrators and colleagues frame faculty departure.

One way to uncover how individuals make sense of situations is to study the concepts, metaphors, and language they use to explain occurrences. Powell and Colyvas (2008) asserted that people make sense of occurrences by applying categorical understandings that compare and contrast what just happened with what has happened before. Powell and Colyvas (2008) observed that “categories contain latent or explicit rules for action, as they invoke scripts that are associated with people or problems” (p. 293). Individuals use metaphors to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty and after repeated use such metaphors can be taken for granted, can be invisible, and can seem objective (Powell & Colyvas, 2008). An example of such common nomenclature in universities might be the phrase, “hit the ground running,” which is used to describe the expectation that a new faculty member will immediately begin publishing, obtaining grants, and teaching effectively upon arrival.

Many scholars of organizational behavior in higher education have observed that higher education institutions, and especially research universities, are status-oriented institutions (Birnbaum, 1991; Gonzales, 2012; Kezar, 2001; Massy & Zemsky, 1994; Morphew & Baker, 2004; O’Meara, 2007; O’Meara & Bloomgarden, 2011; Volkwein & Sweitzer, 2006). They trade legitimacy as a form of currency in ordinary organizational life and individuals draw on widely shared cultural beliefs concerning status and success from both disciplinary fields and from the larger field of higher education (Braxton, 1986; Long & Fox, 1995; Melguizo & Strober, 2007; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). These values and beliefs are “evoked in situations as both guides for interaction and as ready accounts” (Powell & Colyvas, 2008, p. 284) to shape certain expectations of how people will act. As such, status expectations act as a resource for faculty making sense of departure. For example, a senior faculty member who has been socialized to revere national academy members in her field might hear that a junior colleague is leaving for an institution where a national academy member is employed. She may assume that this national academy member is the reason her colleague

is leaving. Powell & Colyvas (2008) observed that the perspective of status expectations “complements sensemaking by stressing how external social statuses are manifested in everyday activities” (p. 285). Status expectations provide a way to understand why individuals in a research university might find some explanations for departure more plausible than others.

Sensemaking is also useful to frame how faculty leaving or intending to leave a university might understand their departure. Given sensemaking is grounded in identity, and sensemakers have a tendency to engage in defensive reasoning (Argyris, 1995), there is reason to believe faculty might make sense of their decision to depart in ways that promote a more positive identity for themselves, if not a negative one for their organization. The tendency to use ready-made scripts, such as that the campus was a poor place for work-life balance, is as possible from faculty leavers as colleagues. Such rationales and justifications are also narratives faculty may have heard others use to describe departure, and can be used to help them make sense of their own decision. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What were the dominant explanations that faculty colleagues, administrators, and leaving faculty gave for faculty departure in one research university? Were they similar or different?
2. What factors influenced sensemaking about faculty departure in one research university?
3. How did the identities and contexts of those making sense of faculty departure influence their explanations?
4. Were explanations influenced by status expectations?

Methods

Study Design

An underlying premise of our research questions is that knowledge and reality is the result of social construction and social exchange, and thus, is always situated (Levitt & March, 1988; Weick, 1995). We were interested in the ways in which the following parties made sense of faculty departure: 1) faculty colleagues of leaving faculty (hereafter, faculty colleagues) 2) administrators involved in the retention of faculty (hereafter, administrators) and 3) faculty members who had left or intended to leave (hereafter, faculty leavers). By faculty colleagues we refer to tenure track/tenured faculty who had a faculty member leave their unit in the last 3 years who they wished had stayed. Administrators refers to department chairs, institute directors, associate deans and

senior faculty who had been involved in significant retention efforts in their college. In most cases administrators knew the faculty they tried to retain well before they began conversations with them; in a few cases, they knew leaving faculty less well before retention efforts began. By collecting data from these three groups, we hoped to layer our data by beginning with the perception at the greatest distance from actual departure decisions and moving steadily toward those most proximate.

We chose an embedded, single case study design (Yin, 2003). This allowed us to examine the experiences of faculty at the department level but also to explore how department level experiences were linked to the overall issue at hand. Our case design was revelatory in that we had an opportunity to “observe and analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation” (Yin, 2003, p. 42). In this case, the first author had unique access to many different kinds of data related to faculty at the institution through her role in evaluating an initiative aimed at improving faculty retention, satisfaction, and professional growth. Our literature review revealed most departure and retention research did not include in-depth study of a single setting where departure was happening or faculty and administrator sensemaking about faculty departure. Our case study was, therefore, revelatory in that it provided unique access to data at a particular site, and to do so in a way that has not been done before. At the same time, the single case study method was what Yin (2003) calls “typical” in that the study institution is in many ways typical of public research universities in the United States. As such, while the findings of this case are not generalizable to other institutions, as is the tradition in quantitative research, there are many ways in which these findings should be viewed as transferable and have implications for other research universities.

Finally, this is a mixed-methods case study (Creswell et al., 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Neither quantitative nor qualitative data were sufficient by themselves to capture the trends and details of the situation. When used in combination, quantitative and qualitative methods complement each other and provide a more complete picture of the problem (Creswell, 2007; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Johnson & Turner, 2003, Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). We collected data (including qualitative and quantitative sources) from one institution to understand the sensemaking of our three groups (faculty leavers, administrators, and faculty colleagues). To understand the sensemaking of faculty leavers, we conducted qualitative interviews with faculty who had left and analyzed survey responses of faculty who intended to leave. To understand the sensemaking of administrators, we conducted qualitative interviews and focus groups. To understand the sensemaking of faculty colleagues,

we analyzed survey responses from faculty who had had colleagues leave their departments. The quantitative data provided an important baseline sense of faculty explanations of departure; however, the qualitative data better illuminated operating metaphors, narratives, and institutional scripts of departure, as well as why individuals perceived departure as they did.

Two Towers University

Two Towers University is in many respects a typical public research university. It is highly selective in terms of admissions, serves approximately 38,000 students (roughly 70% undergraduate), and engages in extensive research activity, with over \$500 million in research expenditures. It is located close to a metropolitan area that has a high cost of living but provides significant job opportunities for partners and spouses of faculty and staff. Between 2005 and 2010, the institution lost 238 faculty to resignation and 173 to retirement. Of those 238 who resigned, between 30 and 52 departed in any one year, an average of about 2.6% of the entire faculty. Among those who resigned, women and faculty of color were significantly more likely to resign than male and White faculty. This is typical by gender, as national and institutional research shows women are less likely to advance as successfully or quickly through the academic pipeline as men, and many leave their institutions pre-tenure (Gardner, 2012; National Science Foundation, 2006, 2009). One potentially atypical feature of this institutional context is that at the time of this study the institution had not had any cost of living or merit raises in four years, and there had been years when employees were furloughed as a result of the recession of 2008 and its aftermath.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Interviews and focus groups have been found to be a particularly effective way to understand how individuals make meaning of phenomena in their work environments and have been used in many studies of faculty and administrator sensemaking (Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Mills et al., 2005; O'Meara, 2004). Participants were identified through snowball sampling. Specifically, we used primary informants in the provost's office and associate deans inside the colleges to identify an initial list of faculty who had recently left or were leaving, and department chairs, institute directors, and senior faculty who had been involved in trying to retain faculty. This initial list was contacted. At the end of both interviews and focus groups, participants were asked to identify additional individuals to participate, and if they met our criteria those individuals were also invited to participate in the study. As we engaged in inter-

views and focus groups, our initial primary contacts continued to send us names to invite as new retention cases emerged. Most of the administrators we contacted (80%) and about 60% of leaving faculty responded positively to invitations to participate. There was no pattern among participants who did not respond to invitations or declined participation (e.g., they were not all women, faculty of color, from STEM disciplines, or leaving because of bad tenure reviews). While there is the potential for bias in this sampling process, the fact that we identified participants from across the entire campus, both formally through administrators and informally through participants, and the lack of a pattern in participant response to the invitation, suggests that the sample was broad and far-reaching rather than selecting individuals predisposed to be biased against or for the university.

We conducted semistructured interviews and focus groups that lasted 60–75 minutes with 21 administrators and senior faculty who were involved in trying to retain faculty. Of the 21, we interacted with 11 through focus groups and 10 through individual interviews. Of this group, 12 were women and 9 were men. The interview and focus group questions focused on: administrator perceptions of the reasons for departure of faculty they had tried to retain, the timing of when they learned about the potential departure, their efforts to retain faculty, and any misperceptions that they believed existed about faculty departure. Focus groups provided useful data on common experiences administrators faced as participants were able to build off of each other's comments in reflecting on their retention efforts. Individual interviews provided more in-depth examination of administrator sensemaking regarding faculty departure.

We also conducted semistructured interviews that lasted 60–75 minutes with 13 early career faculty who left Two Towers University within the previous three years. Of these faculty: 8 were men and 5 were women; 6 were faculty of color and 7 were White. Nine disciplines were represented among the 13 leaving faculty. Interview questions for leaving faculty focused on: initial reasons for coming to the university and expectations for their careers there; factors that informed their decisions to leave; professional growth opportunities and constraints experienced during their career at the university; the process of revealing an outside offer and university efforts to retain them; and perceptions by colleagues of their departure.

Consistent with methodological norms of qualitative inquiry, data analysis began with the reading and rereading of interview transcripts and accompanying materials to identify key emerging themes (Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). We employed a constant comparative

method (Merriam, 1998), wherein we analyzed each interview for explanations of departure and factors that seemed to influence those explanations. The data analysis process was both concept and data driven (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Concept driven coding involves the use of predetermined codes from the literature to guide analysis of the data, whereas data-driven coding allows key codes or themes to emerge from the findings, much as in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In a second round of analysis, we considered similarities and differences between each key group's explanations of faculty departure.

Overall trustworthiness was strengthened by collecting data from multiple sources (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), which included interviews with individuals from different vantage points, and survey data. We engaged in member checking by sharing transcripts with participants and giving them an opportunity to correct any part of their initial comments. All participants were provided anonymity. Internal validity was strengthened by each of the authors analyzing the transcripts separately to develop themes and then joining to compare these conclusions. This was done through "thematic memoing" and then joint conceptualization of final themes (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, pp. 291–292).

Survey Design and Data Collection

We used cross-sectional survey methodology (Groves et al., 2004) to get the broadest sense of tenure track/tenured faculty perceptions of departure at their institution. Data were collected from a survey of faculty work environment conducted at Two Towers University. Although the survey explored multiple areas of faculty work life and professional growth, it was developed with a key focus on faculty retention and perceptions of the factors that contribute to it. The instrument went through rigorous validation processes including expert reviews and a pilot test.

This study used only the tenured/tenure track respondents from the survey. After data were cleaned and unduplicated, the response rate was 32% (488 respondents): 26% Assistant Professors, 33% Associate Professors, and 42% Full Professors (percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding). Women represented 43% of the sample and men 57%. Regarding race, there were no American Indians, 9% Asian American, 3% Black/African American, 5% Hispanic, 78% White, 3% International, <1% Multiracial, and 3% were of unreported race. Although a response rate of 32% is not ideal, national surveys of faculty experiences commonly have a response rate between 27% and 50% (Dillman, 2007; Milam, 1999). Non-respondent analyses suggested that women, White,

and Hispanic respondents were overrepresented in our sample in comparison to the population.

Data were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics and with factor analysis to determine relationships between faculty identities and their explanations of faculty departure. Factors were created for several work environment constructs using principal components exploratory factor analysis. Factor loadings for all items in each construct were above .550, and alpha values¹ were above .6 (Collegial Environment = .820; Professional Development Resources = .630; Colleague Interactions = .886; Recognition = .786; Faculty Participation in Department Decisions = .810; Work-life Climate = .870; Diversity Climate = .770).

Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations. The survey data included 32% of tenure track respondents at this institution. Although representative by rank, it was not representative by gender or race/ethnicity. It is also important to note that the focus of analysis were the explanations of departure by different groups. We did not interview matched groups of departing faculty, their colleagues, and the administrators involved in their cases. Although we interviewed many administrators who were involved in trying to retain departed faculty who we had also interviewed, it was not possible to interview all related individuals. Moreover, we wanted the administrator to feel free to discuss multiple cases, and departed faculty would plausibly have felt uncomfortable if we had asked them to name all administrators involved in their cases. With acknowledgment of these limitations, we propose that the diversity of sources of data that we collected over a three-year period at Two Towers University provides a rich and multifaceted examination of our research questions.

Findings

We present four dominant explanations for faculty departure and two factors that influenced those explanations. In presenting the data we bring together the perspectives of administrators who tried to retain faculty and faculty colleagues of leavers, now called “colleagues of leavers.” We bring together the perspectives of those faculty who left/were leaving and those who noted that they intended to leave and call them “leavers.” Within each explanation of departure we present colleague of leaver and leaver data in separate subsections. Tables 1 and 2 summarize key findings presented in this section.

TABLE 1

Participants' Reasons for Intending to Leave TTU and Perceptions of Why Others Left

Analytic Category: Reason for Departure (subcategories below)*	If you are likely to leave the University or the academic profes- sion in the next two years, what would be the main reasons? [Select up to three]**	Think of someone from your unit who left TTU in the last three years, who you wish had remained. Please check up to three reasons you believe that she or he decided to leave**
A better opportunity		
An offer with a higher salary	57%	55%
An offer from a more prestigious department or institution	41%	37%
An offer for a position outside academe	8%	5%
The writing was on the wall (failure)		
Not well suited to the faculty career	4%	5%
Poor likelihood of tenure/promotion or contract renewal	10%	11%
Work environment and fit		
Potential for better work-life balance in a different type of position	22%	15%
Better campus climate for women at another institution	5%	3%
Better campus climate for faculty of color at another institution	3%	1%
Better campus climate for GLBTQ faculty at another institution	2%	1%
Lack of collegiality in unit	24%	21%
Location and family		
To be closer to family	14%	21%
Career opportunities at another institution for spouse/ partner	9%	15%
Better policies related to childcare, parental leave	3%	1%
An offer from an institution in a more desirable geographic location	16%	18%
Other		
Retirement [†]	15%	10%

*Note. The subcategory survey items were constructed prior to the analysis that led to the creation of analytic categories; however, we present the subcategory data in reference to the analytic categories in order to facilitate comparisons between Table 1 and Table 2.

**Note. Due to the method of data collection ("select up to three"), these figures total greater than 100%.

[†] Note. The subcategory "Retirement" was not incorporated into any of the four analytic categories due to the fact that our focus for this study were faculty leaving or intending to leave for reasons other than retirement. It is useful context though to see the % of faculty using this explanation for departure.

TABLE 2
 Administrator and Faculty Leaver Perceptions of Departure

Analytic Category: Reason for Departure (subcategories below)	% Administrators Discussing as Primary Reason	% Faculty Leavers Discussing as Primary Reason
A better opportunity	37%	8%
An offer with a higher salary		
An offer from a more prestigious department or institution		
An offer for a position outside academe		
The writing was on the wall (failure)	10%	15%
Not well suited to the faculty career		
Poor likelihood of tenure/promotion or contract renewal		
Work environment and fit	25%	69%
Potential for better work-life balance in a different type of position		
Better campus climate for women at another institution		
Better campus climate for faculty of color at another institution		
Better campus climate for GLBTQ faculty at another institution		
Lack of collegiality in unit		
Other*		
Location and family**	29%	8%
To be closer to family		
Career opportunities at another institution for spouse/partner		
Better policies related to childcare, parental leave		
An offer from an institution in a more desirable geographic location		

**Note.* Four of the 13 leavers described reasons for leaving that were best categorized as “other” but that further analysis revealed fit well within the work environment and fit category. Examples of “other” reasons included incompatibilities surfacing between the type of research done by the leaver and the reward system in the department/college, leavers’ concerns about the strategic direction of the department/college, and mismanagement of the retention process by administrative leaders.

***Note.* The preponderance of data on location and family reasons for departure included both reasons discussed side by side.

Dominant Explanations of Faculty Departure

“A Better Opportunity.” A dominant explanation at Two Towers for departure was that the faculty member had “found something much better,” such as higher pay and better unit reputation. This is the “Heaven” explanation, wherein Two Towers was simply outcompeted, and those involved in the retention effort could still hold their heads high. There were a number of status markers used to explain these better opportunities, including rank of destination department, amount of funding for labs and equipment, six-figure salaries, and National Academy of Science and other distinguished academy faculty members at the destination.

Colleagues of Leavers. The better opportunity explanation was dominant among administrator and faculty colleagues who commented on departure. The first quotation that begins this article is illustrative of this explanation of departure offered by over one-third of administrators (37%). Administrators located the better opportunities causing departure as “high-end” and “very hard to compete against.” One administrator observed that Two Towers is not “Po-Dunk U,” so it only loses to places that are higher in external rankings. In the faculty survey data, 55% of faculty who had had a colleague leave their institution explained the colleague’s departure as resulting from an offer with a higher salary, and 37% explained it as resulting from an offer from a more prestigious department or institution (the top two reasons selected by faculty colleagues for a colleague leaving).

Leavers. A better opportunity was only offered as the primary explanation for leaving by 1 of the 13 leaving faculty. Yet, these leaving faculty noted that administrators and former colleagues framed explanations for their departure around the “better opportunity” explanation. For example, one leaving faculty member said of his department chair:

Yeah, honestly I don’t think he does interpret the reasons why I left as indicative of deeper environmental challenges. I don’t think the dean does either. I think they’ll just sort of talk it up as, “Oh, well [Name] got called by [new institution]. He got a better offer, so it made sense for him to go where the better offer was. [. . .] I actually think the largest issue with [Chair] and others in our department is people are really, I think, afraid of conflict. It’s a lot easier to not address when people make comments that are sexist, problematic, harmful to others, because, you know, these individuals who make these comments have a lot of clout, which is why I think I hold the department chair even more responsible.

This faculty member continued to say that his primary reason for leaving was dissatisfaction with department interactions and culture, not

the prestige or “better offer” he had received elsewhere. He believed a narrative had been created out of self-defense among colleagues and administrators to shield the problems that caused him to wish to leave. Faculty who reported intending to leave in survey data provided better opportunity explanations above all others (e.g., “an offer with a higher salary” (57%) and “an offer from a more prestigious department or institution” (41%). Within our data a difference existed between those who actually left/were leaving and those who intended to leave within the next two years. Faculty who intended to leave explained they would leave for prestige and pay reasons. Yet those who really left framed the primary reason for departure as poor work environment.

Although faculty who left did not emphasize a better opportunity as their primary reason for leaving, several did progress up the career ladder as a result of their move. Yet even in such cases, faculty leavers made sense of their departure as related to failures in work environment at Two Towers, rather than improving their own career prestige. The phrase “a better opportunity” was used by both leavers and colleagues of leavers, which suggested it had become part of an institutional script regarding faculty departure.

Work Environment and Fit. The concept of “fit” has been used in many organizational and faculty studies to frame satisfaction and retention. Relational elements, such as intellectually rich colleague interactions, support an overall sense of fit for faculty, whereas poor fit and negative work environment experiences are often used to explain departure (Lindholm, 2003). In this study we combine what was described as fit and work environment into one explanation of departure because they were closely connected in the sensemaking of participants.

Colleagues of Leavers. Among the administrators we interviewed, 25% explained the reason for faculty departure as fit within the department. The following observation by one administrator, who had been successful in retaining a number of other faculty, illustrates this explanation of departure.

We’ve had one woman who left to go back to where she had gotten her degree to work with her advisor, actually. She had been successful here, gotten a career award, but she never fit well with the department. She was here when I got here, and for whatever reason it almost seemed like she had personality conflicts with people. And, so, it was a surprise for me when I found out she had already accepted her offer and was going back to [institution name] and at the same time it was like, “I hope she’ll be happy,” because I do know that she just never worked well in the department.

Turning to faculty colleague perceptions, there were a number of work environment explanations given for departure. For example, 21%

of faculty colleague survey respondents rated “lack of collegiality in unit” as a reason that faculty colleagues left (the third highest selected reason for faculty colleague departure), and 15% noted potential for better work-life balance in a different type of position.

Leavers. Problematic work environments were the primary explanation for departure by 9 of the 13 leaving faculty. These 9 leaving faculty explained their decision to depart as resulting from something that went wrong in their unit such as issues of collegiality, work-life climate, reward system priorities, lack of leadership in departments, academic bullying, and discrimination. Leaving faculty talked about lack of support and good colleague relationships. Leaving faculty also noted a lack of mentoring, as in the following case: “From when I started, many assistant professors (one-half to two-thirds) are gone. We did not have good mentorship and good support. When people left they always say on paper ‘personal reasons,’ but they know it’s not just that. It is all of these other issues.” In addition to a lack of mentoring and professional support, some leaving faculty mentioned direct academic bullying:

When the rumor mill was going I think people had all sorts of reasons why I was leaving. “Oh, he went somewhere, the offer was better,” or “it’s a better fit.” The word fit, I think, is probably the most overused and the least helpful word to use for what happens, because it’s the catchall. When you say “Oh, it was a better fit,” it just sounds good, like “Oh somebody went somewhere where they fit better,” like that’s good. In reality, I think fit is sort of sometimes a convenient way to absolve oneself of responsibility. And it can also be used as a way to exclude people from various positions and places. So, what I want people to know is that yeah, at the end of the day [university] is a better fit for me. They care more about teaching, it counts in the tenure and promotion process, [. . .] but there are lots of problematic things here that I think led to that move as well, like around work-life balance type issues, around not caring about students of color, not caring about teaching, valuing and privileging only one thing when there are multiple ways to be a faculty member, lack of support. So, I mean, lots of things about this environment that I think if improved, could make this situation for other faculty a lot better, which can’t just be explained by using the word fit, because I think it’s a lot deeper than fit.

All nine faculty leavers who noted fit and work environment as responsible for their departure also mentioned that they were sure there were misconceptions among their colleagues as to their decision to leave. In part, this was because, as one administrator said, one day they were there and the next they “disappear[ed],” often without clear explanations or a letter of any kind explaining the decision. Also, the leav-

ing faculty themselves often felt it could hurt their own reputation in their field or “hurt the feelings” of some faculty colleagues and administrators if they were honest about work environment and fit reasons for departure. As such, when colleagues interpreted their decision as being about a “better opportunity” or “location,” they allowed that misperception to continue so as not to ruffle feathers. One leaving faculty member said:

But to my department, that was the only contributing factor, because I never told them about the [problems I had with the reward system changes]. You know, I guess I didn’t want to hurt their feelings. And so they may think that the only reason why I left was a personal reason, and it was not.

In addition to those who actually left, the survey respondents who intended to leave also had concerns with work environment. We ran significance testing to determine whether the respondents who intended to leave Two Towers within the next two years had different perceptions of their work environment than respondents who did not intend to leave (Table 3). We found that those who intended to leave rated their work environment lower than those who did not intend to leave in such work

TABLE 3
Significance Testing: Faculty Who Intend to Leave Versus Faculty Who Intend to Stay

Item/Factor	Intend to Leave		Do Not Intend to Leave		Sig. Diff.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Work environment ratings					
Collegial environment	-.443	.985	.198	.942	$p < .001$
Professional development resources	-.387	.946	.175	.973	$p < .001$
My overall experience working in my department	2.95	1.16	3.79	1.04	$p < .001$
My overall experience working at this institution	2.92	1.15	3.78	.915	$p < .001$
Colleague interactions	-.425	1.00	.191	.960	$p < .001$
Recognition	-.351	1.10	.141	.926	$p < .001$
My salary and benefits	2.02	1.02	2.91	1.22	$p < .001$
Faculty participation in department decisions	-.317	1.03	.141	.952	$p < .001$
Work-life climate	-.335	1.03	.155	.955	$p < .001$
Diversity climate	-.259	1.10	.119	.935	$p < .001$

environment areas as collegiality, colleague interactions, recognition of their work by colleagues, and resources for professional development. It is important to note that a number of t-tests were run, which increases the possibility of Type I error. However, a pattern of differences was observed with a conservative p -value (.001) for the work environment ratings, which makes the difference in work environment ratings between those who intended to leave and those who did not compelling. In addition, 24% of faculty who intended to leave noted “lack of collegiality” as the main reason. Both leaving faculty and those who intended to leave explained work environment as key to departure.

Location and Partner Employment. A third explanation for departure was that the geographic area around Two Towers University was not desirable to the faculty member and/or the faculty member’s partner could not find employment. This is not a “heaven or hell” explanation, but does absolve both the leaver and his or her colleagues of any direct role in the departure. Instead, the departure is framed as inevitable, as the leaving faculty member could not be expected to remain in a place that was not desirable forever, and colleagues have little power over geographic location and partner employment.

Colleagues of Leavers. Twenty-nine percent of the administrators we interviewed noted location and partner employment as the primary explanation for faculty departure. One administrator explained:

In every case, the three women that we lost, in every case, there was a family aspect to losing them. I think a couple was uncertain about the prospects of one member of the couple for tenure, the other member of the couple was already tenured, so the organization that was offering a position was basically offering the opportunity for the spouse to reset their tenure, to begin their tenure clock from scratch, with the promise that they would look at them fairly soon. What I’m saying is I think you can look back seven years or ten years from that point and say if we had, if the university had, worked hard to find both these faculty members jobs in [the local area], you know, we would, we could retain them for a much longer period—this situation would never have [materialized].

Among faculty colleagues, 21% of respondents noted being closer to family as a reason their colleague had left their unit, 18% for an offer from an institution in a more desirable geographic location, and 15% for career opportunities at another institution for the colleague’s spouse or partner.

Colleagues of leavers explained the importance of employment of spouses, many of whom were academics or who had careers and wanted to be employed nearby. Two Towers University did not have any for-

mal dual career hiring program. Therefore, faculty were left to their own contacts and those of the recruiting unit to help find employment for partners. These efforts were not considered sufficient by either administrators or faculty colleagues.

Often, location of the university and issues of spousal employment were tied together. Specifically, in open-ended survey comments, faculty colleagues perceived the local area around the university to have a high cost of living, crime issues, poor school quality, and undesirable commuting issues. One administrator noted that these same issues put those administrators trying to retain faculty at a distinct disadvantage relative to peer universities in more rural or suburban areas. The administrator said:

Today the university is a wonderful place to work, but it is not a Small-Town, USA. You've got to like living in a metropolitan area. You have to tolerate commuting, unless you live in [local area], but then you have to worry about the schools. So there are all these complexities that enter into it that generally don't relate too much to the work environment.

Leavers. The issue of spousal employment was the main reason for departure given by only one of the thirteen leaving faculty members. He noted that he had excellent relationships with good colleagues. Yet for reasons idiosyncratic to his partner's particular situation, his partner was not able to work in that region. In this case, his colleagues knew exactly why he was leaving. He said:

We were trying to get her a job ahead of time, and it just wasn't working out. Right off the bat, people were very much aware that my wife's employment was going to be a problem. And I kept the department head up to date on that, so when it came time for me to say I have another offer, it wasn't a surprise.

Although this leaving faculty member was upfront about his family needs, most of the leaving faculty who perceived that there were misconceptions about why they left thought that colleagues either assumed that they were leaving for a better opportunity or for family/geographic location reasons. In fact, most leaving faculty did not consider that their primary reason for leaving. Among faculty intending to leave, 14% noted the departure related to being closer to family, 16% to geographic location, and 9% to career opportunities at another institution for their partner.

"The Writing on the Wall." This is the "Hell" explanation, which is that someone was facing a potential tenure denial, as it is the most unde-

sirable explanation of why someone would choose to leave Two Towers. Also included in this category was leaving to pursue a position outside academe. This was the least dominant explanation for both leavers and colleagues of leavers, but nonetheless present. In both leaver and colleague explanations, departure based on anticipating a negative tenure decision or to leave academe was framed as something no one (leaving faculty or colleague) could control.

Colleagues of Leavers. Ten percent of administrators used this explanation of departure. For example, one administrator said: "If we're talking about pre-tenure cases [when he learns someone is interested in leaving], it's mostly that they see the writing on the wall. So, you know, about the third year or something like that." In the survey, only 11% of faculty colleague respondents said they believed someone who had left their department had decided to leave because of "poor likelihood of tenure/promotion or contract renewal."

Leavers. Among the 13 faculty who left, two used this as the primary explanation for their departure. In one case, the faculty member had received a poor third year review; the other had learned she was going to be denied tenure simultaneous to a job search process. Not surprisingly, these two leaving faculty also discussed work environment problems as influencing their tenure or third year review decisions, whereas administrators providing this explanation had framed it solely as related to the individual's performance. Among those intending to leave, 10% noted poor likelihood of tenure/contract renewal and 4% not being well suited to the academic career as explanations for their intended departure.

Influences on Sensemaking about Faculty Departure

While it is illuminating to understand the four categories of explanations for why faculty at Two Towers left, understanding why these explanations occurred provides a basis for action in retaining faculty. The two factors most salient in shaping explanations of departure were status expectations and the proximity of the sensemaker to the faculty member who was leaving. Both influences underscore the preeminent role of identity in participant sensemaking as well as potential biases in interpretations (Levitt & March, 1988).

Status Expectations. Status expectations revealed themselves among all participants in the study, but especially among faculty colleagues of leavers when describing Heaven (a better opportunity) and Hell (writing on the wall/leaving academe) explanations for faculty departure. Levitt and March (1988) observe that a logic of appropriateness and legitimacy are a key part of sensemaking. Administrators who lost faculty to "Heaven" emphasized the status of the higher education institutions to

which faculty leavers went and in doing so their own impressions of the prestige market, as in the following administrator observation:

He only went to the University of Chicago, so you're not going to compete against an offer from the University of Chicago. Easily, they have all the money in the world plus, you know, it's a little bit better place than we are.

The assessment by colleagues of leavers that most of departure could be explained by higher salary offers from better ranked units and universities was influenced by their own investment in the prestige system. In other words, colleagues of leavers valued being in a highly ranked academic program and getting a better salary, so they assumed others would as well. Even faculty who indicated they intended to leave used "Heaven" explanations of a more prestigious unit and a better salary. This suggests a pervasiveness of status expectations, or a ready-made script built into routine sensemaking that new situations could be fit into. Likewise, status expectations influenced participants describing "Hell" explanations. Participants noted Two Towers, and research universities more generally, are very prestigious and rigorous and that "not everyone can make it here." Therefore, they reasoned, people who had not left for a more prestigious placement must have gone because they did not think they would succeed here. Why else would someone want to leave?

Proximity to Leaver and Role in the "Story." Sensemaking about faculty departure was also influenced by the proximity of the administrator or faculty colleague to the individual who was leaving, and that sensemaker's role in the departure. The closer the faculty colleague was to the leaver, the more information they had to make sense of their departure; the further away the colleague or administrator from the leaver, the less information they had. In this latter case, sensemakers drew more upon their own identities, and available institutional scripts and biases to interpret the departure. This was also true in the case of faculty leavers, as they perceived their reasons for leaving as "the" reasons as opposed to one social construction of a situation and what happened in it. One administrator who never worked closely with a leaving faculty member reflected on her departure:

There's one woman in [department] that left. I didn't know her so I don't know why she left. I don't know the details. I got some sense there that it was because of a big city environment, that she didn't like the police records. There's just not a—same reason people won't send their kids to [local schools]—it's just not a safe town, so that one I don't know enough about.

Here we see the administrator acknowledge that she had a lack of information. She observed the situation from a distance, yet this did not stop her from trying to conjure an answer that fit into a category that seemed likely to her. Alternatively, one administrator showed he knew at least two faculty members and their situations quite well:

Sometimes, and in at least two cases that I can think of, it was more that they had stayed here for a long time, and at some point they and their spouse had been contemplating possibilities of moving to other parts of the country if such an opportunity came up. Another was where a faculty member here was contemplating getting married with someone at another university, and they were trying to decide whether they should both stay here or transition to the other university, and it turned out that our faculty member here was made an offer by that university, and the spouse already had an excellent situation there, and they wanted to, at that point, decide to move. Different issues like this come up, which are often quite complicated in terms of all the factors that come in . . . Often times it's intangibles that are involved.

This same administrator continued to note that he considered it part of his job to know why a faculty member might leave. He observed the complexity of reasons for departure that go well beyond prestige and status but reflect daily work-life and personal ambitions. He also observed that this information is not always forthcoming: "Sometimes faculty are very private with regard to what is actually going on in their lives. They have dimensions and variables that they don't want others to necessarily know about."

In open-ended survey comments faculty who said they had a close colleague who had left provided much more nuanced explanations, which mirrored those of leaving faculty in interviews. These faculty colleagues noted mostly collegiality issues, work-life balance, reward system priorities in units, and fit issues. Proximity also influenced those faculty actually leaving. These individuals were also "making sense" of very complex decisions or difficult departure processes. They based their sensemaking on experiences they had had in their departments as well as personal lives, from their distinct vantage point. This vantage point, while perhaps having the most sources of information to process, nonetheless came with its own biases related to the leaving faculty member's role in the story. Interestingly, the closer that participants seemed to be to the individual situations that shaped departure, the more they explained departure as relating to issues of Two Towers as a place to work. The further away colleagues were, the more they explained

faculty departure relating to better opportunities, personal failures, and family and region explanations.

Sensemaking was influenced by a tendency on the part of actors to engage in what Argyris (1995) refers to as defensive reasoning. Levitt and March (1988) note that systematic biases in interpretations attribute organizational successes to one's own actions and organizational failures to the actions of others. For example, when administrators were part of the story of the departure as a senior colleague or department chair, explanations for the departure centered on things they perceived they had no control over such as spousal employment, location of family, or the prestige of the new unit. Whereas when administrators talked more generally, they noted department environment and fit issues. Likewise, a leaving faculty member moving on after a poor third year review noted work environment reasons as important in departure. This positioning, based in the leaving faculty member's own constructions of what had happened to her at Two Towers, allowed her to hang on to a more positive identity for herself as she transitioned to another institution. Thus the leaving faculty member was influenced by a potential desire not to pose herself as having failed in this environment but as a victim of a work environment beyond her control. Thus both colleagues and leavers were influenced by their role in the story of departure and a desire to avoid a negative depiction of their actions or lack thereof.

Discussion and Implications

This study revealed the sensemaking of three constituent groups involved in faculty departure. Conditions were ripe for sensemaking as the research university was large, faculty worked independently and did not know each other well, and there was limited public knowledge about departure decisions. Participant sensemaking included ready-made scripts and justifications influenced by their own identities and self-interests, proximity to departure decisions, and status expectations. Administrators felt most comfortable noting family/geographic or prestige-related reasons for departure in situations where they were most closely implicated, but explained there were poor working environments to blame in situations where they were not. Faculty colleagues used prestige-oriented "Heaven" explanations more than any other when noting reasons colleagues left, reflecting their own status expectations regarding moving up in the academic hierarchy. Alternatively, faculty leavers tended to describe poor work environments as the rationale for departure. Both the classic "Heaven" and "Hell" explanations were

grounded in identities, tending to pose the sensemaker as a victim of unavoidable hazards.

This research complements that of scholars studying the strong influence of cosmopolitan views of faculty careers, including prestige and status expectations, on faculty conceptualization of issues and prioritization of decisions (Gonzales, 2012; Rhoades et al., 2008). In this study faculty colleagues of leavers, as well as faculty who intended to leave, pulled down prestige-oriented values and assumptions to understand faculty departure. These findings also complement those of Morrison, Rudd, Picciano, and Nerad (2011), who found graduates of high prestige Ph.D. programs value prestige more highly than those from low prestige doctoral programs and develop tastes and habits from socialization in a prestige-oriented value system. Interestingly, faculty intending to leave emphasized prestige as a dominant reason for departure, whereas faculty leavers emphasized work environment. Future research should explore other areas in which status and prestige orientations shape faculty views—and in particular whether status expectations are more likely to shape what faculty think they will do, rather than what they actually do. To what degree does early career mentoring, allocation of scarce resources, and sense of good academic leadership in a research university reflect status expectations? Do status expectations help or hinder those involved in accomplishing their goals? Also, research universities, prestigious liberal arts colleges, and striving universities are likely to be places where status expectations shape faculty sensemaking more than in community colleges and less selective comprehensive and four year colleges (O'Meara, 2007). Thus the topic should be explored in different institutional types.

Sensemaking is a useful way to consider and act on faculty retention and departure. Eckel and Kezar (2003) found unearthing perceptions of various actors on an issue, sharing them widely, and engaging in structured conversations about them can foster real organizational change. The fact that various actors in Two Towers had different perceptions of faculty departure in and of itself is not as important as the fact that people were acting on those perceptions. This likely created many self-fulfilling prophecies with regard to faculty departure that might have been avoided if assumptions were surfaced and discussed.

The findings from this study and previous work on the use of sensemaking in organizational change (Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Kezar, 2001) suggest exit interviews or surveys of departing faculty by disinterested parties, as well as focus groups of administrators and colleagues involved in retention, could provide data that help a campus diagnose its own weaknesses and strengths with relationship to faculty retention and

departure². Sharing such information publicly in documents, via task-forces, and in public forums could help organizational members develop new beliefs and language to understand faculty departure (Eckel & Kezar, 2003), as well as a sense of agency and awareness to avoid self-fulfilling prophecies. Improvements to work environment issues, such as spousal hires, department colleague interactions, mentoring, and leadership might be addressed as a result of common sensemaking done publicly, with various perspectives shared. Encouraging institutional members to make sense together about faculty departure could help campuses shift from pervasive “Heaven or Hell” rationales to constructions of departure that offer more possibilities for action.

Notes

We gratefully acknowledge the thoughtful insight and helpful comments provided by Leslie Gonzales and the anonymous reviewers on earlier drafts of this manuscript. We further recognize this article is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. HRD-1008117.

¹ Items and construct loadings available upon request.

² The role of demographics in sensemaking: We ran significance testing by rank, gender, and race for each of the perceived explanations for faculty colleague departure. We did not find strong patterns of difference by rank, gender, or race; we only found differences on individual items. We found no differences by race, two differences by rank, and one difference by gender. In discussing reasons for faculty colleague departures, full professors were proportionally more likely to select “for a higher salary” ($\chi^2 = 7.934$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$). Associate professors were proportionally less likely to select “better career opportunities for spouse” ($\chi^2 = 7.171$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$). Women were proportionally more likely to select that their colleague had left “for a position outside academe” ($\chi^2 = 4.445$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Notably, leaving women and faculty of color who we interviewed that discussed work environment issues as the primary reason for their departure felt that gender and race were very influential in their respective experiences at Two Towers University. Overall, there was not enough evidence to suggest a pattern of demographic related influences on sensemaking around departure, though this should be explored in future research.

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