

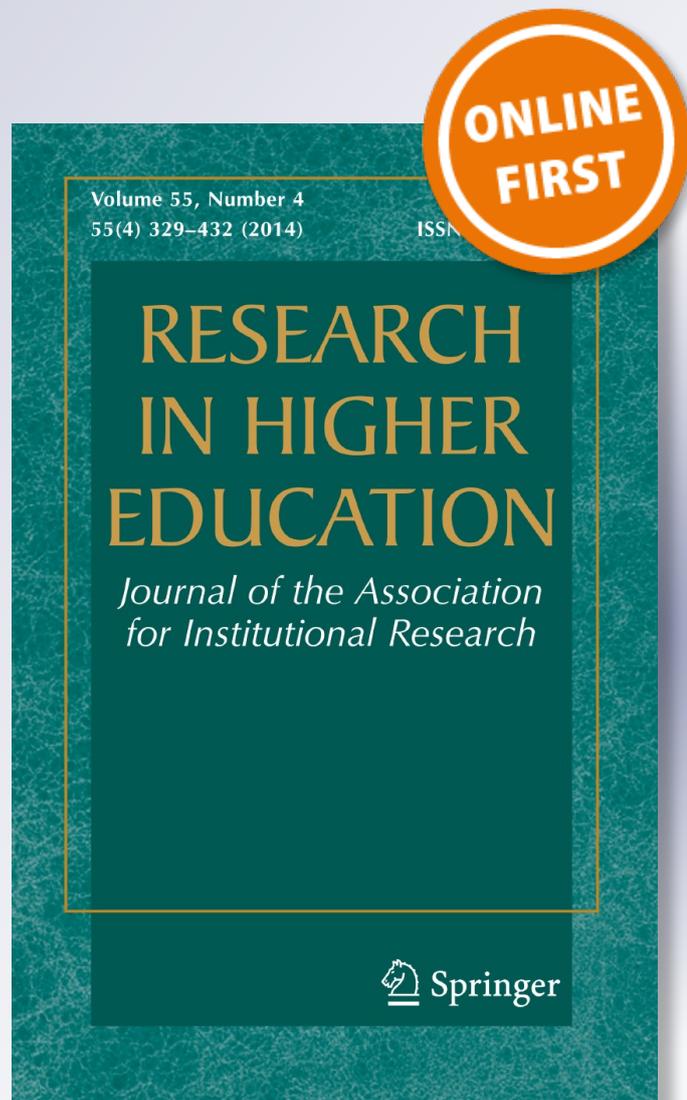
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Half-Way Out: How Requiring Outside Offers to Raise Salaries Influences Faculty Retention and Organizational Commitment

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Abstract This institutional case study examines the influence of a policy requiring outside offers for faculty salary increases on institutional retention efforts and faculty organizational commitment. Outside offers and policies governing them are rarely examined, and studied here from the perspective of administrators, leaving faculty, and faculty who receive outside offers and remain. Findings suggest such a policy has negative influences on institutional retention efforts and organizational commitment. Implications are drawn for campuses working to retain faculty and for future research.

Keywords Faculty departure · Outside offers · Faculty retention · Faculty organizational commitment

Introduction

Once somebody feels resentment enough to start looking for jobs, the door is already open and they're halfway out. You know? So the university has essentially forced us into a situation where we cannot proactively retain people. You know, we have been able to retain a couple of people by countering, but we've lost probably 80 % of the cases where people have gone out and gotten offers from other places.

In this quote, taken from an administrator expressing frustration with a university policy, three contexts emerge that contextualize this study. The first context is the policy itself and what it governs. The policy under question requires a faculty member to present an "outside offer" before their institution, fictitiously named Half-Way Out University (HWO University), will offer the faculty member a higher salary. HWO University is a selective, land grant, public research university on the East Coast. An "outside offer" is

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defined as a comparable offer of employment at another institution. Although some faculty resign from their positions without outside offers, outside offers and counter-offers are a major component of departure decisions, retention efforts, and academic reward systems. The second context is perceived consequences of the policy. The administrator feels the policy is preventing their university from being able to effectively retain faculty. The third context is why. The administrator argues that once a faculty member has become unhappy enough with their salary to look for other jobs, visit another campus, and obtain an outside offer, there begin to be more reasons to leave than to stay, and the campus loses that faculty member.

Faculty departure, and the factors that predict it have been widely studied by researchers using national survey databases (Barnes et al. 1998; Rosser and Townsend 2006; Smart 1990; Zhou and Volkwein 2004), studying multiple universities or state systems (Daly and Dee 2006; Johnsrud and Rosser 2002; Matier 1990), and single institutions (Gardner 2012; Ryan et al. 2009). Because it is difficult to track faculty who left a university and because providing explanations for departure can be complex and even uncomfortable, most departure research utilizes faculty “intent to leave” as the best predictor of actual departure. Decades of research suggests that this is an acceptable practice as “intent to leave” indicators are highly correlated with actual departure (Bluedorn 1982; Rosser 2004). However, there are several limitations to this strategy. Many more individuals will report intent to leave than will actually leave. Also, a small number of faculty will leave because they do not receive tenure, which makes their “intent to leave” distinct and perhaps less voluntary than the concept suggests. This way of studying faculty departure frames it as an overly voluntary and individual decision, when in fact intent to leave and departure are shaped by individual, organizational, and market factors. Using intent to leave as a proxy for actual departure also does not capture the effect of outside offers or whether the university has favorable retention policies and practices. This is an important limitation because faculty behavior is strongly affected by organizational practices and policies (Birnbaum 1991; Blackburn and Lawrence 1995; Fairweather 1996, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of a policy requiring outside offers for faculty salary increases on institutional retention efforts and faculty organizational commitment. Though little research has examined the issue of outside offers and policies governing them, research suggests organizational commitment influences intent to leave and departure (Daly and Dee 2006; Johnsrud and Rosser 2002). Here organizational commitment refers to “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (Mowday et al. 1982, p. 226). Daly and Dee (2006) found organizational commitment is a more “accurate predictor of intent to leave than satisfaction because it is more stable over time, rather than limited to immediate job circumstances” (Daly and Dee 2006, p. 796). Although other factors such as individual demographics and opportunities in the market are critical predictors of faculty departure (Daly and Dee 2006; Hagedorn 2000), the literature is unanimous in concluding faculty perceptions of and experiences with various aspects of their reward system, such as promotion and tenure, merit pay, and allocation of space and travel funds, influence organizational commitment, which in turn influences faculty departure (Daly and Dee 2006; Johnsrud and Rosser 2002; Rosser 2004; Smart 1990; Zhou and Volkwein 2004). This study adds to the literature by considering the explicit role of a policy governing outside offers on organizational commitment and retention (Daly and Dee 2006; O’Meara 2011).

Policies governing outside offers are likely to impact faculty differently based on their career stage. In this study, I focused on early career faculty. The rationale for studying assistant professors and early associates (within 3 years of tenure) with regard to outside

offers was threefold. First, doctoral and research universities make significant investments in faculty recruitment, and in faculty start-up packages with regard to funding for research (Ponjuan et al. 2011; Trower 2012). It is true faculty departure overall causes disruption for research and teaching; it can negatively affect the reputation of the institution, integration within the department, and morale of the remaining faculty (Daly and Dee 2006; Mobley 1982; Price 1997). However, the institution takes a particular financial loss (e.g. recent recruitment and start-up costs) when early career faculty leave, as there is usually not enough time to offset such investments in grants won, or other productivity gains. Understanding how this group experiences outside offers and policies governing them is helpful for department chairs and deans trying to retain early career faculty. Second, outside offers are often discussed in career advice columns and between mentors and mentees as one of only a few ways faculty can raise their salaries (e.g. initial negotiation, promotion, outside offers, administration). For example, Kreuter (2012) observed: “many faculty members, especially junior faculty members, will at some point seek out a competing job offer, in hopes of either leveraging a raise from their current employer or landing a more lucrative new position. The game is simple: having a higher offer from another institution is a way to say to your university, essentially, ‘The discipline values me—do you?’” (p. 1). There is no data source to definitively know how many mentors or department chairs encourage junior faculty to obtain outside offers as they are going up for promotion. However, the topic is frequently discussed in career advice, professional development and networking circles as particularly relevant to this group. Third, assistant and early career associate professors are the most recent hires of departments, colleges, and the university. These positions therefore represent the most recent decisions made by those units about the direction of scholarship and critical areas where the university wants to invest and focus resources. Thus, early career faculty retention is especially important to institutional goals. From this point on, when I refer to early career faculty I refer to assistant professors and associate professors within 3 years of tenure.

This study examines the issue of outside offers from multiple vantage points, which include: administrators who try to retain faculty, faculty who leave, and faculty who consider leaving but remain. In doing so, it makes a strong contribution to understanding how organizational policies and practices (such as the outside offer policy in this study) influence organizational commitment and institutional efforts to retain early career faculty.

Faculty Departure and Outside Offers

A leading national voice on faculty matters for generations, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) (1961) asserts: “mobility of the faculty members among colleges and universities is rightly recognized as desirable in American higher education” (p. 1). The AAUP also makes recommendations for resignations and start dates that provide both the leaving and new institution reasonable accommodations for such transitions. The group acknowledges faculty receipt of outside offers as a natural part of the higher education field and markets. However, Schuster and Finkelstein (2006) used data from the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) to show that faculty moving fluidly from one institution to another is becoming a smaller part of the field. Faculty have become less mobile across all institutional types as the job market has become more crowded. At the same time, the National Science Foundation (2006), National Institute of Health, and private foundations have invested in programs aimed at retaining faculty in their institutions and in academe. Leadership training programs for academic administrators focus on

strategies to retain good faculty, underscoring the costs to institutions and disruption to teaching, research and service missions when faculty depart (e.g. Williams 2013).

The majority of studies on faculty departure and retention have used expectancy theory to frame faculty decisions to stay or leave their organizations (Daly and Dee 2006; Lawler 1994; Price and Mueller 1986; Vroom 1964). Expectancy theory holds that organizational members have “certain expectations for the structural properties of work” (Daly and Dee 2006, p. 778). Two such expectations are those of an equitable reward system and a positive work environment (Daly and Dee 2006; Rice et al. 2000; Tierney and Bensimon 1996). When faculty perceive equitable reward structures and positive work environments they report higher levels of organizational commitment, which in turn strengthens intent to stay (Daly and Dee 2006; Lindholm 2003).

Although a rich literature exists examining the various factors that influence faculty departure (Daly and Dee 2006; Rosser 2004; Smart 1990; Xu 2008), the literature on outside offers and policies governing them is sparse. Yet several organizational and psychological variables used in previous studies of employee and faculty turnover are instructive in contextualizing potential faculty responses and institutional outcomes from such policies. For example, it is possible to imagine faculty consider such a policy a natural part of the higher education market and retrieve outside offers as a way to leverage greater power, pay, resources and prestige on their campus. Gardner et al. (2010) observe that employers tend to have more power in most employer-employee relationships, but when an outside offer occurs, employees gain power. At the same time, the employer still has the ability to choose not to compete. Thus, the power obtained by the employee is contingent upon how the relevant university leaders value the faculty member’s human capital, skill sets, and contributions.

Human capital, mobility, and organizational loyalty are all factors that predict whether an employee will seek and receive an outside offer. As Gardner (2012) observes, the more mobile the employee and the greater their skill set, the more likely they will seek an outside offer and be considered a real “threat” to leave the organization. Decisions about whether to stay, go, or even to look at other positions are also influenced by what Maertz and Griffeth (2004) call calculative forces and constituent forces. Calculative forces relate to the probability of attaining important values and goals in the future through continued membership in the organization. Calculative forces are based on “rational self-interest with a future orientation” (Maertz and Griffeth 2004, p. 670), whereas constituent forces relate to employee attachment to individual coworkers or groups within the organization who they believe will stay. The more attached the employee is to individuals within the organization who they believe will stay the less likely they are to seek alternative employment (Maertz and Griffeth 2004).

Several studies suggest perception of opportunities in the faculty labor market will influence solicitation of outside offers and faculty in growing fields will have more opportunities than those in fields that are contracting (Daly and Dee 2006; Zhou and Volkwein 2004). Specifically, Daly and Dee (2006) found that perceptions of external job opportunities negatively influenced faculty intent to stay.

Within the category of negative responses to a policy requiring outside offers to provide salary raises, the concept of distributive justice is helpful. Distributive justice refers to “the perceived fairness of the amounts of compensation employees receive” (Folger and Konovsky 1989, p. 115), though the concept can be extended to other rewards besides pay, such as lab space. Returning to the concept of expectancy theory, if faculty believe that decisions about their pay should be made based on their teaching, research, and service contributions, as opposed to their worth in the external market, they are not likely to

perceive distributive justice when colleagues receive higher salaries for outside offers. Procedural justice refers to a perception of fairness in the processes used to allocate resources (Lind 1988; Rawls 1971; Tyler et al. 1996). In this same case, faculty who believe that salaries should be based on work contributions, time in rank, or any other factor besides market value, will likely find the process used by a dean to provide higher salaries for those with outside offers as unfair, as such decisions often occur behind closed doors, without transparency. Daly and Dee (2006) found faculty perception of distributive justice (defined in terms of reward system), had a positive effect on organizational commitment, which in turn enhanced intent to stay.

Along these same lines, requiring outside offers to get a salary increase may decrease faculty organizational commitment. Outside offers may be sought most by faculty with less organizational commitment to an organization, and seeing others receive pay increases for obtaining them may cause resentment.

One of the few studies focused on outside offers was conducted by Matier (1990), who gathered data from faculty who had received firm offers to leave their universities for other work. He studied faculty decisions to stay or go in retrospect—with a questionnaire of tenure-stream faculty at two universities (60 % of whom left given the opportunity, and 40 % of whom stayed). Matier (1990) found faculty do not leave simply because of the “pull” of an outside offer; they leave because there is a “push” element internally that prompts them to pursue outside offers. Matier’s (1990) participants who left the institution increased their salary between 29 and 44 %, while those who stayed increased it by 19–29 %. Matier (1990) observed:

Administrators at [both case campuses] in anticipation of “raiding” during a bad budget year had at least informally initiated practices of attempting to meet market demand pressures by matching firm outside offers in an attempt to retain faculty. This was a matter of concern to many of those interviewed for one of two reasons. First, if an outside offer was not matched (at least in part) this often came as a surprise to individuals who were simply “playing the game.” Such faculty felt they were led to believe they were supposed to pursue outside offers in order to receive a salary increase. Second, for a much larger group of faculty at each institution, there was concern that this practice was promoting and encouraging disloyalty, which in turn was fracturing faculty morale at both the institutional and departmental levels (p. 48).

Little research since Matier (1990) has examined policies governing outside offers.

Several factors outside of career stage are likely to influence faculty experience of outside offers. For example, previous research on faculty careers has observed that faculty view their salaries as a form of recognition for their work and are concerned that it be fair by local and national standards (Barbezat 2002; Fairweather 1996, 2005; Hagedorn 2000; Morrison et al. 2011; Volkwein and Sweitzer 2006). Thus, faculty are likely to view outside offers and counter-offers as market and institutional signals of their professional worth. In addition, gender, race and ethnicity, and discipline may influence faculty views of policies governing salaries and outside offers. For space reasons this paper focused on the overall influences of the outside offer policy on early career faculty organizational commitment and retention, rather than individual differences. The research question guiding this study was: What impact did HWO University’s outside offer policy have on institutional efforts to retain early career faculty and faculty organizational commitment?

Methods

Study Design

The approach to these research questions was constructivist. I was interested in how participants experienced the HWO University outside offer policy, and how participants believed the policy influenced early career faculty retention and organizational commitment (Creswell 2007; Levitt and March 1988; Weick 1995). Assuming participant experiences would be influenced by their particular interactions with the policy vis-à-vis their role and identity (e.g. as department chair, leaving faculty member, remaining faculty member), I sought out participants with varied roles and identities. Thus, in designing the study I was interested in how the following parties made sense of HWO University's outside offer policy: (1) administrators involved in the retention of faculty (hereafter, administrators) (2) early career faculty who received an outside offer and decided to leave (leaving faculty) and (3) early career faculty who received an outside offer and decided to stay (remaining faculty). Administrators were department chairs, institute directors, and associate deans who had been involved in retention efforts in their college. In most cases, administrators knew faculty well before they began retention conversations with them; in a few cases, they didn't know faculty well before retention efforts began.

Since the purpose of this study was to understand the role of a specific policy on faculty retention and organizational commitment in a particular university setting, an embedded, single case study design was the best approach. Yin (2003) defines case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). This approach allowed me to examine the experiences of faculty and administrators at the department level, where many departure decisions were made, but also to explore how department-level experiences were related to the institution-wide outside offer policy. This case design was revelatory in that I had an opportunity to "observe and analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation" (Yin 2003, p. 42). In this case, I had unique access to many different kinds of faculty data at HWO University through my role of evaluating initiatives aimed at improving faculty retention, satisfaction, and professional growth. Most departure research has not explored participant experiences of outside offers, or policies governing them (Matier 1990, is an exception). 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.

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 (Kezar and Eckel 2002; Mills et al. 2005; O'Meara 2004). Leaving faculty and remaining faculty were interviewed between 2 months and 1 year after they made a departure decision. Administrators (e.g. department chairs, institute directors, program directors, and associate deans) who had been involved in trying to retain faculty were also interviewed.

There were a number of factors that made purposeful (e.g., strategically selecting individuals with rich information) and snowball sampling (adding participants as new cases emerge) the best methods to recruit participants (Creswell 2007; Merriam 1998; Strauss and Corbin 1990). The timing and official notification of faculty departure decisions varied greatly and made using a list produced by HWO University's provost's office to contact leaving faculty impractical. Given past research noted the difficulty of reaching faculty after they left for a new institution, there was an advantage to contacting faculty before they left, if possible. Finally, there was no central or public university system for recording outside offer negotiations. Thus, I used primary informants in HWO University's provost's office and associate deans inside colleges as well as administrators who had been involved in trying to retain faculty to identify initial lists of faculty who had recently left or were leaving, or who had received an outside offer and decided to stay. At the end of interviews and focus groups, participants were asked to identify additional individuals to participate, and if they met study criteria these individuals were also invited. As interviews and focus groups progressed primary contacts continued to send names and lists of faculty to invite as new cases emerged.

About 80 % of the invited administrators (21 of 26), and 60 % of invited leaving and remaining faculty (30 of 50) responded positively to invitations to participate. Administrators who declined participation noted other time commitments. Leaving and remaining faculty noted time commitments and some bad experiences in leaving HWO University as reasons for declining interviews. However, participants who accepted the invitation also noted some bad experiences. Thus both the participants and those who declined participation included faculty with negative experiences with this process. There was no demographic pattern among participants who did not respond or declined participation (e.g., they were not all women, faculty of color, or from STEM disciplines). While there is the potential for bias in this sampling process, the fact that participants were identified from across the entire campus, formally through administrators and informally through participants, and the lack of a pattern in participant response to the invitation (either among those who accepted or declined) suggests that the sample was reflective of the range of perspectives found in these different groups.

The research team for the interview and focus group part of this project included two graduate students and me. We conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups that lasted 60–75 minutes with 21 administrators involved in faculty retention efforts. Of the 21 administrators, 9 (42.9 %) were men, and 12 (57.1 %) were women. Eleven administrators (52.4 %) were interviewed via focus group and ten (47.6 %) participated in an individual interview. The decision to conduct both interviews and focus groups with administrators was both logistical (to increase the number of participants) and purposeful (to provide complementary sources of data from the same group). Interview and focus group questions were the same and focused on administrator perceptions of the reasons for faculty leaving, the timing of when they learned about the potential departure, the nature of the outside offer the faculty member received, what was done if anything to counter it, and their overall thoughts about retaining faculty under the outside offer policy. Focus groups provided useful data on common experiences as participants were able to build off each other's reflections on how the outside offer policy was experienced by them and their faculty and how it influenced retention and organizational commitment. Individual interviews provided more in-depth examination of specific cases that administrators might not have shared in a focus group with colleagues.

My research team and I also conducted 60–75 minute-long, semi-structured interviews with 20 leaving faculty who had accepted outside offers and 10 remaining faculty who

declined them (see Table 1 for demographic information). Questions for leaving and remaining faculty focused on the process of revealing an outside offer, university efforts to retain them, factors that informed their departure decisions, and their perceptions of the impact of the policy on faculty retention and organizational commitment.

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 and Huberman 1994). I employed a constant comparative method (Merriam 1998), wherein I analyzed each transcript for discussion of the retention policy and participant experiences of the policy. I took notes on the sides of transcripts that were then coded and recoded to become themes. The data analysis process was both concept and data driven (Kvale and Brinkman 2009). Concept-driven coding involves the use of pre-determined 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 (Glazer and Strauss 1967). For example, based on my review of the literature I was cued to notice how faculty equated salary and recognition of professional worth. However, issues specific to the process itself such as the effect of visiting another campus on faculty intentions to leave or administrative calculations gone wrong emerged directly from the data.

To ensure trustworthiness of the data, I relied on several well-established practices. I maintained an audit trail to account for objective observations and potential biases and engaged in debriefing of initial conclusions with two peer researchers who acted as critical readers. Overall trustworthiness was strengthened by collecting data from multiple sources including interviews and focus groups with individuals from different vantage points and contextual survey data (Lincoln and Guba 2000). Participants were provided anonymity. I engaged in member-checking transcripts with participants and presented a summary of key findings to participants that both added to and confirmed the results, as participants agreed with conclusions (Creswell 2007; Maxwell 2012).

Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the results of this study include perspectives from multiple vantage points, but all are self-reported. The study would have benefitted from systematic investigation of outside offer cases and decisions (such as a review of case files). Unfortunately, this type of analysis was not available due to confidentiality and a lack of systematic record-keeping. However, given the central purpose of this study was to understand how faculty and administrators experienced and understood the influence of the outside offer policy on faculty retention and organizational commitment (Daly and Dee 2006; Hagedorn 2000; Rosser 2004), the data were comprehensive and appropriate to the questions at hand. Second, pre-tenure faculty do not know if they will receive tenure and promotion, and thus will naturally experience a policy on outside offers differently than more established faculty. Further research should compare experiences of outside offers and policies regarding faculty retention by career stage, as well as by demographics, and perceptions of social capital. Third, this study examines the experiences of administrators trying to retain faculty and faculty who made corresponding choices. Further study might be done to understand how such policies affect faculty who do not pursue outside offers for family, ethical or other reasons. Fourth, leaving faculty and remaining faculty were interviewed between 2 months and 1 year after they either accepted or declined an outside offer. It is likely that participants interviewed at different

Table 1 Demographics of Early Career Faculty

	Leaving faculty		Remaining faculty	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender				
Men	8	40	5	50
Women	12	60	5	50
Race				
Faculty of color	10	50	6	60
White faculty	10	50	4	40
# of disciplines represented (incl. STEM and non-STEM)	12		8	
Discipline ^a				
Natural sciences	2	10	1	10
Professional schools	11	55	4	40
Social sciences	7	35	5	50
Career stage				
Assistant professor	14	70	5	50
Associate professor	6	30	5	50

^a Natural Sciences includes biostatistics and mathematics; professional schools includes architecture, business, education, engineering, and public health; social sciences includes communication, criminology, hearing and speech, information studies, psychology, and public policy

points in the process, such as at the exact time of the negotiation or more than a year after the decision, would have different perspectives, and this should be considered in future research. With acknowledgment of these limitations, I propose that the diversity of sources of data collected over a two-year period at HWO University provides a rich examination of the research questions. Next, I describe the institution where this study took place.

HWO University

HWO University is in many respects a typical public research university. It is highly selective in terms of admissions, serves approximately 40,000 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 with a high cost of living but significant job opportunities for partners and spouses of faculty and staff. In a five-year period (including 3 years before, and 2 years during this study), HWO University lost on average about 2.6 % of their faculty (with about 30–52 faculty leaving during any given year) due to resignation, not including retirement. Institutional research suggests that, on average, 30 % of those who resign are assistant professors, 29 % are associate professors with tenure, and 41 % are full professors. 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 4 years, and there had been years when employees were furloughed as a result of the recession of 2008. Also, HWO University is located in a region with a significant number of colleges and universities. Thus, faculty could consider local outside offers that did not require them to relocate. This could be interpreted as adding to faculty bargaining power in negotiations.

The outside offer policy was put in place across an entire state system of universities, of which HWO University was one, when there was a post-recession salary freeze. The policy stated that salary increases (or retention offers) were only allowable with a formal written offer from another institution. At that point, the provost could provide the department one-third of retention funding, with the departments and colleges providing the other two-thirds. The policy was later relaxed, so that preemptive retention raises became possible without written outside offers. However, in practice the initial policy seemed to remain unchanged at HWO University, for two reasons. First, a separate policy there required the provost and president to approve all retention offers, and the provost would not pass requests on to the president without an outside offer. Second, the provost would only release funds if there was a formal outside offer.

In 2013, HWO University implemented a faculty work environment survey (FWES) of all tenure track/tenured faculty to assess and measure change in work environment. The 2013 FWES was the second administration of the online survey. Prior to the first administration of the survey at HWO University in 2011, the instrument was validated through expert review and a small pilot test. Additional edits were made prior to the 2013 administration to strengthen the validity of the survey and to shorten the instrument so as to increase response and completion rates. Forty-seven percent of HWO University tenure track/tenured faculty members responded to the survey (a total of 784 respondents). Findings showed 27.9 % ($n = 50$) of assistant professors and 27.2 % ($n = 64$) of associate professors indicated they were likely to leave HWO University in the next 2 years. The most frequent reason assistant and associate professors listed for wanting to leave was the same for both groups: an offer with a higher salary (33.5 % assistant professors; 42.7 % associate professors). The second most frequent reason was also the same for assistant and associate professors: an offer from a more prestigious department or institution (21.6 % assistant professors; 22.2 % associate professors). In this same work environment survey, 17.0 % ($n = 29$) of assistant professors and 42.7 % ($n = 94$) of associate professors had received an outside offer while at HWO University. Among those individuals, 3.1 % ($n = 6$) of assistant professors and 14.9 % ($n = 37$) of associate professors stated the outside offer resulted in a salary increase.

Findings

This section is divided into two parts. First, I present the impact of the outside offer policy on efforts to retain early career faculty at HWO University. Second, I present how the outside offer policy influenced faculty organizational commitment.

The Failure of the Outside Offer Policy to Retain: Greener Grass, Miscalculations, and Advantaged Competitors

Administrators and faculty noted consistently that there are many reasons that faculty leave an institution and that some pursuit of outside offers is inevitable, especially in research universities. However, participants felt HWO University's policy of requiring outside offers in order to provide salary increases made it harder for administrators to retain good early career faculty. There were three ways the policy negatively impacted university retention efforts. First, looking for outside offers to raise salaries led faculty to see better, otherwise undiscovered opportunities elsewhere. Second, the policy opened the door to

miscalculations and fumbling of the counter-offer process. Third, the policy led the institution into market competitions for faculty it was unlikely to win.

Looking Leads to Leaving

Administrators explained that a major reason the outside offer policy hurt retention was perception of greener pastures. Once faculty began a conversation with another institution, visited the other campus, and received an offer, the other institution often looked better. The comparison became one between an institution where the faculty member's start-up funds were depleted and they were unhappy with their salary and an institution with a higher salary and new start-up resources. The promise of new relationships and intellectual engagement at the new institution was often compared to a place where existing relationships were a mixed bag. The comparison was between reality and the promise of a future untested possibility, and the untested possibilities inevitably looked more attractive to most people.

One administrator described the impact of the outside offer policy on his efforts colorfully. He said it encouraged his faculty to "get in bed" with another campus, and once that happened, it was hard to get them back. He said:

I think that sort of policy means that the faculty member is already out the door; before they even come into talk to you [as chair] they're out of the door. As a fellow faculty member, you know, they're already in bed with the other department. It's like learning that somebody's having an affair, it's sort of, you know, their car's parked outside the other house.....so it's very difficult to even the playing field from that point on.

Many leaving faculty agreed with this assessment of the policy. They noted that they had not been seriously interested in leaving until they visited the other campus, and then a world of possibilities seemed to open for them that they had not considered before. Suddenly, the prospect of getting an outside offer was not just about getting a better salary at HWO University. When faculty had partners who were not satisfied with their local commute, the cost of housing, or schools, the partners also began to imagine the promise of better living arrangements in the new location.

Administrators, leaving faculty, and remaining faculty all noted repeatedly that looking leads to leaving, and encouraging faculty to pursue outside offers was a big risk to take with faculty a department wants to retain. Administrators noted that even in cases where HWO University countered well, "the damage was done." Once the individual had gone to the other campus and been courted for the other position, the counter-offer was "too-little, too-late." The faculty member was already imagining their new life, and they compared it to the existing reality at their home institution.

Miscalculations and Fumbling of Counter-Offers

The policy requiring outside offers for salary increases operated with an implicit understanding that HWO University could effectively counter-offer against faculty poaching. Yet, if the administrator handling the process thought that the outside offer might be less than it turned out to be, did not act quickly enough, or begrudgingly countered with less than desired, HWO University lost the faculty member to another institution. Also, some

faculty chose not to present the outside offer to be countered and simply resigned instead. Sometimes HWO University administrators would choose not to counter-offer. General confusion between faculty and administrators as to how the process was supposed to work led to many miscalculations and fumbling of counter-offers. In one example, a leaving faculty member explained administrator miscalculations as he experienced them:

So, at that point I let the department chair know and they basically have to make a choice. They could give me a sizeable raise; then I won't be on the market anymore...or they can see what I can get. Well I guess in hindsight, the chair was a little bit short-sighted. If the chair already gave me a big raise, I would have taken myself away from the market. So, that was a playing a bit. There was some uncertainty there, but then when other schools make offers which are significantly better than what HWO University can afford, the chance for keeping me is just really small.

A leaving faculty member negotiating his own counter-offer plus spousal hire noted that part of the reason he and his partner decided to leave was the speed with which the other institution moved them through the tenure process and the fact that HWO University took too long to provide a written counter-offer. When HWO University did come through, the offers were not as lucrative. More importantly, by this time the faculty had:

Already been down there again for the decision visit, everyone has already kissed our [backside], supplied us with wine and beautiful food, and turned out the chair takes us hiking so we can see the area, so it is clear they're really gunning for us.

This leaving faculty member felt the administrator negotiating with him miscalculated how interested he and his partner were in the other offers. He noted: "It was clear that they just thought it was a power play for me to get [name of partner] hired, and then they would give me a little something extra. And that wasn't the case." In fact, the new department was higher ranked and was located affordably and desirably.

One leaving faculty member with a big grant went on the market almost entirely as leverage to get more space for her lab. She had asked for this space repeatedly, and while the dean was empathetic, no one was moving fast. The pace of her research required the new space, so she responded to an invitation to interview someplace she never would have considered otherwise. However, something happened in that visit:

So I went, and I was really impressed, actually. I thought [location] would be terrible. But it wasn't – it was a nice town. And the research institute was awesome. And I really liked it. And I was submitting a grant...and between my department and the research administration and the dean's department, the grant got lost in the routing process. So the last few days, when I was supposed to focus on the science, I'm running after the grant. So this was really insane. So given all this, I asked the people in [the new place], "Has anyone ever lost a grant?" And they said, "No." I said, "Huh!" So, you know, they had windows. These things really make a difference. I had never thought - you know, I'm just not that kind of person - I had never thought that material stuff, like windows, would matter. But it's amazing how much it might. And I think windows don't matter so much when your institution is not losing your grant. You see?

This leaving faculty member went on to explain that she received an offer from this place, and then her department chair asked her what she would want in return for staying. She said space and administrative support. She did not ask for a raise. Her department chair

said: “I wish you’d just ask for a raise—it would be so much simpler to do that.” She then waited a long time with no response from the department chair, while the other institution continued to improve the contract she would sign. Then, at the very last moment when she was about to sign, a group of senior colleagues who had just learned what was happening negotiated a sweetheart deal for her. She said:

It was huge. It was unbelievable. It was like \$400,000 for the lab. A guaranteed 600 square foot of space. A new booth. It had everything you want... and for a moment I was really stunned. I went and spoke to the dean, and he was incredible. He said, “I’m really sorry about what happened in the summer with the space and we’ll do anything we can to retain you.” So it was a very positive response, but it was at the last moment. But reflecting back, I realized that I had lost confidence in the system, you see. So I wasn’t entirely sure - you know, like that space being yanked away, it could happen again. [In the new location] they haven’t jerked me around. We were very late in the negotiation - I felt I just can’t [stay]. I felt it just wasn’t honorable. I was told later that this is the game that is played -that there is money for attention. But I think they should have kicked that in earlier.

Such examples were common in the stories of leaving faculty. The process of requiring written outside offers enhanced the possibility for misunderstandings and miscalculations that unnecessarily led to faculty departure. Faculty members shared that they were looking for HWO University to signal their value through this process. They wanted a similar kind of courting they received from the competing side. When faculty had even a hint they would not get this, they moved in the direction of the other offer.

Competitions and Markets They Were Unlikely to Win

Another reason that HWO University retention efforts worked against institutional goals was that they entered administrators unnecessarily into “competitions they were unlikely to win.” By this phrase, participants meant competitions for prestige, salary, cost and quality of living with other universities. The outside offer policy seemed to unnecessarily bring their faculty into new “living rooms” where other faculty conducted their work. These new living rooms looked better than theirs for many reasons. One administrator said:

Money, money, money, money. It’s all about money. HWO University— for all of the people we’ve had offers for, I believe that every offer was met by the dollar figure. If you went through the ratio of cost of living, we could, let’s just say it is \$100,000 here. But \$100,000 in Iowa and \$100,000 here are not in the same playing field.

In this example, the administrator points out that faculty see how much more purchasing power they might enjoy for the same money in places with lower costs of living, and this caused HWO University to lose faculty. In some cases the competition was almost all about the actual salary number and what a university like HWO University could afford versus what competitors could muster. One leaving faculty member said he was making “double now what he was making” when at HWO University. A remaining faculty member said the outside offer process was more about prestige, and “basically they want to play the game that the Ivy League schools want to play, but well, the issue is they will never become Ivy League.” She went on to note that her department chair was always trying to “chase” the Ivy League rankings. However, the Ivy League institutions run the “game” and places like HWO University would always be playing catch up.

Impact of Outside Offer Policy on Faculty Organizational Commitment

There was recognition from several leaving and remaining faculty that getting outside offers was in general a normative part of a successful academic career. One remaining faculty member, said:

I think universities are set up to have a very strong loyalty tax. And you are completely taken for granted unless you're getting outside offers. That what we do is so unclear and ambiguous that you really need to be getting outside offers on a regular basis and playing that game if you want to be valued. And, you need to be willing to move.

Another remaining faculty member explained:

I mean, in academics you get kind of limited raises, you know a couple percent. If you want a big pay raise, then you play the market, obviously those at the top have played the game. Seeing how successful they've been and how well they've been able to flourish, successful senior faculty, well they made it work.

Despite such recognition of this process as a common aspect of academic careers, administrators, leaving, and remaining faculty consistently stated that HWO University's policy backfired because it sent a message to faculty that in order to be recognized and valued (at least salary-wise) they had to prove their worth. Administrators noted the outside offer policy made all faculty feel less valued by and less committed to the institution. Most faculty resented the outside offer policy, whether they left or stayed. One administrator explained:

From the point of view of the faculty member, what the university is saying to them is that our university does not trust, you know, we don't have a judgment of you. We don't think you're the hottest thing since sliced bread; we have to wait for somebody else to tell us that you're the hottest thing since sliced bread, and that is, I think, immensely insulting to some. I've heard this again and again, not just from people who I've dealt with as faculty but also people who I've known as colleagues who've gone through this process of leaving. They don't understand why the university, whatever that is, can't look through their achievements and make a preemptive decision about retaining them.

A remaining faculty member echoed the same observation from her vantage point about the signal the institution was sending about her value and worth:

It became clear to me that if I wanted to feel like I was being paid what I am worth I had to give the University a reason to do that. They made it clear that in order to do that, you had to give them an indication that you could very well be recruited...you are mobile. So, I gave people an indication that I could be mobile, and after a little while a couple of the people said, "Hey I guess if you are mobile, then we'd like to take a look at you." Then, once I relayed that [offer] information back to the department, they came back with an incentive for me to stay, so I did.

Overall, faculty resented this additional way (beyond promotion and tenure) that they had to prove themselves to their institution.

All groups observed that the policy of requiring outside offers to increase faculty salaries decreased loyalty to the institution by fostering resentment. Some leaving faculty had pursued outside offers just to receive a pay raise at HWO University, which left a bad

taste in their mouths about HWO University just when the other campus was courting them. Remaining faculty described feeling resentment that courting an outside offer was the only way that they could receive a higher salary, given all of their contributions on campus and in their fields. One administrator said:

I don't think this business of what counter-offers are made and how those mechanics work, I don't think it's relevant to this question of how to retain people. You know, I don't think you retain people by offering more money or more space or more bennies. It's just too late, and all it does is sow the seeds of resentment amongst the existing faculty.

Faculty tended to describe feelings of decreased organizational commitment in two ways. They noted the policy seemed "wrong" and "unethical," and they observed it made them feel less valued by HWO University. One remaining faculty member said:

There is no stated policy on retention other than to "go on the job market and get another offer." This is not the best way to keep top faculty. Going on the job market is distracting, and it can lead to decisions to leave the university. There should be more effort to reward strong faculty members than to tell them to "get a job offer."

There was also the issue of ethics. In the following comments from a leaving faculty member, the opinion is expressed that the policy encourages tactics that were inappropriate or that felt wrong:

Once they realized I was going to leave they made tremendous effort to retain me. But I just felt like I shouldn't have had to decide to leave for them to do such a thing. I just didn't feel this was the right way to do stuff.

Faculty noted the policy encouraged questionable professional ethics which in turn motivated them to leave, or to feel less connected to HWO University if they stayed.

Though pursuit of outside offers for bargaining power was acknowledged as commonplace, and necessary under the current policy, most faculty were uncomfortable, embarrassed, cynical, and resentful when discussing it. Both remaining and leaving faculty noted that they did not want to be perceived as trying to trick either institution involved in the negotiation, "string them along," or upset the other campus, given the expense of interviewing. They did not understand why some proactive measure was not in place to reward highly productive faculty without outside offers. Thus, the outside offer policy weakened faculty commitment to HWO University, because even in the cases where counter-offers were generous it made faculty feel as if they had to prove their worth to HWO University via uncomfortable or unethical practices.

Discussion and Implications

HWO University's policy requiring outside offers to increase salary worked against institutional efforts to retain early career faculty and negatively influenced faculty organizational commitment. There was consensus between leaving faculty, remaining faculty, and administrators on these findings. Expectancy theory holds that when organizational members have different expectations for the structural properties of their work than they subsequently experience, their organizational commitment weakens (Vroom 1964). Embedded throughout faculty experiences in this study was an expectation that: (a) faculty salaries should be based on faculty work contributions to HWO University, and (b) their

salary was reflective of their worth to their institution. The outside offer policy and process contradicted the first expectation by basing salary decisions on the presence of an outside offer, and the second if counter-offers were not generous. Even faculty who received generous counter-offers felt less valued by their institution because they felt their institution was forced into the higher salary reluctantly. In these ways, faculty expectations were not met, and their organizational commitment decreased. There were some leaving and remaining faculty who noted the process of obtaining outside offers was a natural part of being a successful academic—thus part of their expectations for their career. However, such observations were quickly followed with assertions that there should be some kind of proactive mechanism to keep productive faculty happy, illustrating an unmet expectation that there should be another way to reward productive faculty.

A second reason the outside offer policy had negative influences on retention and organizational commitment related to how the policy tended to activate calculative forces within faculty and de-emphasize and lessen constituent forces (Maertz and Griffeth 2004). Many leaving faculty members noted they had excellent colleagues, students, and experiences at HWO University, and sometimes even family nearby, which are all constituent forces likely to keep them in place. However, since there was no other option to get higher salaries or more resources (such as for labs), faculty would have to “play the game.” This response revealed an understanding that HWO University had calculated that it was in their best interest to wait until faculty had an outside offer to negotiate with them. Given this positioning, they would consider their own self-interest, and if there were “greener pastures,” they would leave.

Consistent with previous research, the outside offer policy also worked against retention efforts by increasing faculty knowledge of career opportunities available to them elsewhere (Daly and Dee 2006). For example, one leaving faculty member was wooed by a department chair that wined and dined him, and another by the offer of a lab with windows and the promise of no bureaucratic mistakes. The travel visits to other campuses seemed to psychologically separate faculty from their home campus and increase expectations (whether reasonable or not) that opportunities would be better in the competing institution. Likewise, HWO University put itself in a risky position of having to compete with institutions that could provide better salaries and department rankings, both of which were noted in institutional data as reasons for intended departure.

Finally, the outside offer policy negatively influenced organizational commitment by violating faculty expectations for procedural and distributive justice. Some of the key characteristics of procedural justice are a sense of transparency of criteria, accuracy in information, same application of criteria to each case, and that the process is consistent with widely held moral and ethical values (Lind 1988; Lind and Tyler 1988; Tyler et al. 1996). Leaving and remaining faculty criticized the process of obtaining outside offers for salary increases as unnecessary. Some even felt it was unethical. This was particularly evident in the experiences of leaving and remaining faculty who did not want to “fool anyone in the process” of getting an outside offer and among administrators who felt the process itself seemed to insult faculty by making them prove their worth. The leaving faculty member who went on the market to get better lab space and eventually received a good counter-offer noted she lost confidence in HWO University’s system for responding to faculty requests fairly. Because faculty must pretend they are more or less interested in both institutions to get higher offers and counter-offers, the process seemed unethical to some, or a simple bargaining process to others. The outside offers policy violated faculty sense of distributive justice by emphasizing their external market worth and proven

mobility over contributions to the research, teaching, and service mission of their university. This, in turn, made them feel less connected to HWO University.

This study suggests several directions for future research. First, further research is needed to compare different kinds of policies governing faculty salaries and retention. Are other policies governing faculty salaries better at retaining faculty, and engendering organizational commitment than the one described in this study and practiced in many research universities (e.g., preemptive raises, policies of non-response to outside offers, step-systems, or union-negotiated salary raises for certain accomplishments)? Given institutions in state systems often operate under the same policies, it would be helpful to compare the outcomes across state systems that take different approaches to faculty retention and salary increases.

One of the main reasons faculty and administrators disliked the outside offer policy was that it did not feel right or seem fair. However, this study did not examine whether it was particularly unfair to groups such as women and under-represented faculty. Research has shown that women faculty are significantly less likely than male counterparts to negotiate pay, and men are more likely to receive higher salary packages (Crothers et al. 2010). Given decades of research showing lower pay for female faculty members (West 1995), future research should examine if outside offer policies disadvantage women who might be perceived as less mobile or less inclined to negotiate.

Turning to implications for practice, fiscal constraints suggest universities cannot preemptively raise faculty salaries whenever they are asked. Raising salaries indiscriminately would not serve institutional goals of using limited resources to reward the faculty most productive at meeting institutional goals. Arguably, the outside offer policy provided useful information to the institution about the worth of the individual in the external market where they were competing; it also provided the faculty member a way to raise their status, resources, and salary within their own institution and know about other opportunities. Thus, from the perspective of a market where both faculty and institutions are agents working to maximize their interests, the policy was effective. However, removing ourselves from a market orientation to one of faculty retention and organizational commitment, we see the policy played a negative role. The institution lost faculty it presumably wanted to retain, those who remained felt less committed to the institution, and there were strong feelings that the policy unfairly rewarded mobility over work contributions.

The findings from this study suggest universities might consider four alternatives to the kind of policy and process described here. First, many faculty only became truly interested in the competing institution when they visited and interviewed there. Administrators could modify an outside offer policy slightly to require proof of the invitation to interview, but not the full offer, in order to raise salaries. This would decrease the ability of the competing university to court the faculty member but also provide the home institution information about the marketability of their faculty as they make salary decisions. Second, at many universities outside offers have become one of the only ways (outside tenure and promotion) that faculty can increase their salaries and receive feedback regarding their performance and professional worth (Baldwin et al. 2008; Barbezat 2004; Eckes and Toutkoushian 2006; West 1995). Universities that wish to increase organizational commitment might consider creating programs that financially reward faculty contributions in areas where they need faculty performance to be high but have few built-in incentives. Examples might be teaching, center and program development, graduation of doctoral students, development of online programs, or outreach partnerships with K-12 schools. In the same way that a faculty member can now go to their dean and ask for a raise based on

an outside offer, there would be a parallel process for faculty to make a case for a higher salary based on consistently meritorious performance in these other areas.

A third recommendation relates to greater transparency and shared governance in the process. Both the process of deciding to offer a higher salary to retain a faculty member, and the process of providing a raise for meritorious performance would be viewed more favorably if faculty were given some voice in those decisions. Many universities operate post-tenure review and merit pay processes through department committees that review annual faculty reports and make committee recommendations to department chairs and deans. Similarly, adding greater transparency and faculty voice to the decision-making process around outside offers and meritorious performance salary increases could add to faculty sense of these procedures as just and fair, which in turn can facilitate organizational commitment (Daly and Dee 2006). A fourth and final recommendation considers what can be done when there is no money at all for salary increases. Part of the problem created by outside offer policies is that some faculty are getting raises and others are not; if no one is getting a raise that at least helps with issues of perceived fairness, though it does not help morale. Findings from this study suggest two strategies administrators and colleagues might use to increase organizational commitment in tough times: reinforcing constituent forces and recognizing research. Participants in this study were in part using salaries as a way to measure their institution's recognition for their research. However, institutions that take recognition seriously can signal the same worth through campus awards, nomination of faculty for disciplinary awards, increasing visibility and marketing of the research, and helping to extend faculty research networks through existing contacts (O'Meara 2011). Likewise, leaving and remaining faculty both mentioned strong constituent forces that either kept, or almost kept them, at HWO University. Thus programs that invest in the development of strong on-campus relationships, as well as marketing existing benefits that spouses, children and other family members might consume can help in faculty retention and organizational commitment (Trower 2012).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Matier (1990) observed that it was not just the pull of another offer, but the push of other aspects of their current organizational setting that predispose faculty to leave. This study contributes to the departure literature by revealing how the presence of a policy requiring outside offers for salary increases can act as a push that delivers early career faculty into the arms of a new academic home and lessens the organizational commitment of those they leave behind.

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