

Conceptualization of the Construct of Intention to Stay in Academia for Physician Assistant Faculty

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INTRODUCTION

Physician Assistant (PA) Faculty Retention

- A challenge for PA education and administrators of PA programs^{1, 2}
- Importance of the issue
 - High market demand for PAs³
 - Growth in PA education
 - From 100 programs in 1996 to 173 programs in 2013⁴
 - Large numbers of faculty new to academia
 - 43.3% of PA faculty in current position for ≤ 3 years⁵
 - Faculty turnover historically
 - From 1986-2005, an upward trend culminating in 14.2% of PA faculty leaving positions in 2005-2006 academic year⁶
 - Improvement recently – long-term trend?⁵

Current Knowledge about PA Faculty

- PAEA Annual Reports
 - Demographic information
 - Professional characteristics
 - Program directors' perceptions of faculty attrition
 - #1 reason given is “return to clinical practice”⁵
- PA Faculty Satisfaction Study by Boeve⁷
- Professional Burnout Study by Forister & Blessing⁸
- A thorough review of PA education literature and conversations with a few PA researchers did not reveal any other studies that have described PA faculty or investigated issues related to their retention. (D. Asprey, personal communication, October 23, 2010; M. Davidson, personal communication, February 9, 2010; R. Hooker, personal communication, February 7, 2011)

Approaches to Studying Faculty Retention in the Higher Education Literature

- Job satisfaction
- Identifying why faculty leave or stay
- Retention interventions
- Turnover intentions
 - Intention to leave has been studied much more frequently than intention to stay
 - No established methodology for proper measurement of turnover intentions was identified
 - No qualitative investigation of turnover intentions was identified

Measurement of Psychological Constructs

- Psychological construct: an abstract trait that exists in theory but cannot be perfectly predicted or measured⁹
 - “Intention to stay in academia” is a psychological construct
- So how do we measure a psychological construct?
 - Potential observable indicators of the construct are identified in a construct theory¹⁰
 - Measurement of the construct is then conducted indirectly through the construction of probabilistic inferences from discrete observations of these indicators¹¹
 - Caveat: not all psychological constructs are measurable!

Purpose of this Study

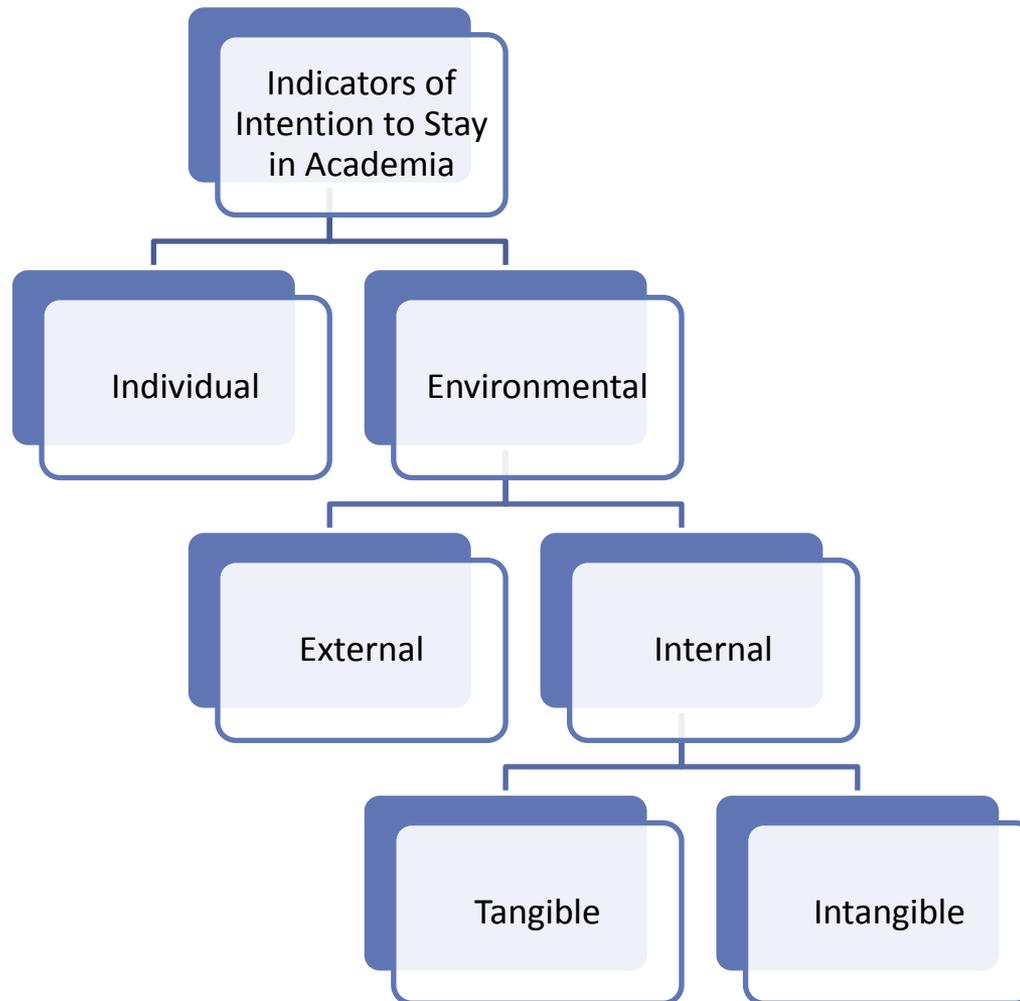
- To conceptualize the construct of “intention to stay in academia” for PA faculty
 - This was needed to identify potential observable indicators of the construct
 - This was conceived as the first step in developing a meaningful measure of “intention to stay in academia”

*“Intention to Stay in Academia” was defined as the anticipation or willingness to continue in an academic role

Theoretical Framework

- Operationalization of “intention to stay in academia” for PA faculty should
 - Incorporate a broad range of individual, structural, and contextual factors that may influence a PA’s decision to remain in academia. This was informed by the works of Barnes, Agago, and Coombs,¹² Johnsrud and Rosser,¹³ Matier,¹⁴ Rosser,¹⁵ and Smart.¹⁶
 - Reflect the meaning of the variable for PA faculty, specifically, due to the importance of discipline-specific factors in faculty retention noted by Xu¹⁷
- Matier’s classification framework was adapted.¹⁴

Classification of Indicators of “Intention to Stay in Academia”



METHODS

Sampling

- Guided by the principles of appropriateness and adequacy¹⁸
- Purposeful sampling experts in PA education
- Inclusion criteria
 - Being in a full-time position in PA education for at least 10 years
 - Being eligible to practice clinically as a PA
 - Being in a different program than faculty already selected for this phase

Procedures

- Semi-structured phone interviews
- Informed consent to tape interviews and use quotes
- Sample questions
 - Tell me about your choice to become a full-time PA faculty member
 - Think about PA faculty who you have interacted with over the years who have been in academia long-term and will likely persist in academia until retirement. How would you describe them?
 - Can you think of anything else that differentiates those PAs who stay in academia long-term from those who return to clinical practice after a few years?
- Interviews conducted until saturation was reached

Data Analysis

- Ongoing throughout interviews
- Extracted data coded in terms of potential observable indicators of “intention to stay in academia” for PA faculty
- Codes were categorized according to the expanded Matier’s classification framework

RESULTS

Expert Characteristics (n=15)

Characteristic	N
Female	7
PhD or other doctoral degree	8
Number of PA programs worked for	
1	5
2-3	7
4-5	3
Public institution	4
Geographic Consortium	
West or Heartland	4
Southeast	2
Midwest	6
East or Northeast	3

Example #1 of data coding

- Almost all experts emphasized the importance of having a mentor in academia
 - Coded as “mentor”
 - Categorized as an individual factor

Example #2 of data coding

- Code: multiplication effect
 - The ability to teach multiple students at one time in academia has “a bigger ramification for healthcare than teaching one student at a time.” [Expert #4]
 - “Every once in a while I get a student or a graduate coming, that they remember something that I taught them and they use it in their clinical care. So a piece of me is in that clinical encounter and I’m indirectly impacting patient care. That’s an awesome responsibility.” [Expert #5]
 - “I feel like I touch more patients by producing more providers than I’d ever be able to touch just working clinically...” [Expert #13]
 - Six other experts made similar statements...
 - Categorized as an internal, intangible factor

Example #3 of data coding

- Code: identify as educator
 - “I’m a PA educator. That’s really what I should do... I would be really frustrated being a clinician. I would just sort of eventually find ways to be an educator inside of a clinician, and probably not be as good of a clinician as I should be because I would be distracted by being an educator... I’m an educator and that’s all there is to it.” [Expert #7]
 - Several similar statements by other experts
 - Classified as an individual factor

Coding Results *(full list available in handout)*

- 114 unique codes used in data analysis
- 78 codes emerged with enough frequency to retain in the construct conceptualization
 - 3 external environmental indicators (e.g., family support of an academic career)
 - 5 tangible internal environmental indicators (e.g., faculty development activities)
 - 32 intangible internal environmental indicators (e.g., autonomy; sense of community in institution)
 - 38 individual characteristics (e.g., detail-oriented), motivations (e.g., sense of vocational calling to PA education), or experiences (previous teaching experience)

Comparison to Literature Review

- Interviews were a richer source of individual factors conceptualized to contribute to “intention to stay in academia”
- 31 individual factors and 15 intangible internal environmental factors not identified in the literature emerged with frequency in the interviews
- Only two factors identified with frequency in the literature review did not emerge in the interviews: “support for research” and “organizational commitment”

Discrepancies in Construct Conceptualization

- Varying views on the relevance of external environmental factors
- Specific discrepancies
 - Geography
 - Fringe benefits
 - Salary

CONCLUSIONS

General Conclusions

- Experienced PA faculty conceptualize “intention to stay in academia” as a complex construct that is influenced by many factors, particular individual factors and intangible aspects of the work environment
- The field of PA education is ripe for qualitative research!

Limitations of the Study

- Only experienced PA faculty were interviewed = potential for gaps in the construct theory
 - Less experienced PA faculty?
 - PAs who have left academia?
 - Non-PA PA program faculty?
- A broad theory of PA faculty “intention to stay in academia” was not extracted

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To be presented tomorrow at 11:00

VALIDATION OF A MEASURE OF INTENTION TO STAY IN ACADEMIA FOR PA FACULTY

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QUESTIONS?