



### 3.2.3 Navigating and flourishing in the organization

#### Mobility

I was just wandering around...very confus[ed] ...because I moved from one [national] system to another ...which are very different ...a year it took me to understand what's going on here, who's against who, how they study here, how they do their MA and MSc, the degrees are... I'm still...I'm still discovering (CM)

Mobility is often a fact of life in academia. Many of the study participants relocated to do their PhDs and most of those in academic roles moved again afterwards, often more than once. Each time they moved, particularly if they changed country, they were faced with challenges as they negotiated new cultures, languages, institutional practices and, for research, new funding regimes. Here Fracatun describes how he found himself in an odd position in a new country given changes in government policy:

And my position is a bit special...[given the national ] move more towards the tenure-track kind of system ...but since it is new ...I am ...the only one in my department that is in this situation ...the people in the department don't even know how they should treat this and how it will turn out in the future. How will the evaluation of the tenure take place, what are the criteria, it is still kind of all unclear. (Fracatun)

Both CM and Fracatun also were often helping their families make similar adjustments (look to Life Events section) Being prepared for this new learning can help you to make the most of your new environment.

#### The role of service/administration

I think there is responsibility to contribute to your university in terms of the structure, the organization, the committees. (Regina)

I'm on a new campus ...so much of my energy was put toward administration, you know, doing the kind of things that most of the people ...who came through the system with me, none of them have the kind of administrative responsibilities that I've had to undertake. (Ginger, the most senior of the new hires)

Regina's comment reminds us that service or administration is often expected of those in research-teaching or teaching-only positions. Such responsibilities fall across a number of themes:

- educational, e.g. program director or co-ordinator, education committee member with decisions influencing the learning experiences of students



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- hiring, e.g. member of selection committee with decisions influencing the future direction of the department
- policy at departmental, faculty and university levels, which can provide insight into how the university operates

If you are aware of the potential ways to demonstrate your service, you will be in a stronger position to negotiate your preference.

### Navigating your new organization

The college that I teach at is a very small college and, you know, there is always the transitional kinds of things that happen as you figure out the politics of whatever kind of place you are in, but in general I have felt very valued and very welcomed and very much respected and so that has also contributed a lot to feeling really good about what I do. (Holly)

What I found out when I arrived was that there was a huge animosity amongst the senior faculty [who] ...really have made it clear that they are not happy. So when I arrived ... one professor—she had just gotten tenure and within a year she was gone and another professor had done the same thing ...I actually went to see the dean ...it was an untenable, toxic situation (Nellie)

Holly and Nellie are describing what they learned about their new institutional ‘homes’ soon after arrival. Their comments provide contrasting views of the departmental (and institutional) climates they experienced. Unfortunately, not everyone will have Holly’s experience. Even if your experience is as positive as hers, the adjustment to a new setting still requires investment, since the history behind how people interact and the implicit rules of behaviour are rarely discussed in a selection interview. For instance, in some universities, if you are supervising a relatively large number of postgraduates, this is recognized by giving you fewer courses to teach, whereas in other universities supervision is seen as an additional activity and engenders no reduction in teaching load. Similarly, what is expected to achieve tenure will vary, as will the extent to which the criteria are explicit. Fortunately, you can learn these invisible practices using your social science research skills: observe and interact with the new environment and use this information to reflect on and draw conclusions about how habits and beliefs guide interaction and decision-making.

### Observe how people interact with each other.

For instance,

- Does your department or faculty, operate informally on an ‘open-door’ basis or is interaction more formal, distant or even nearly non-existent?
- Do different groups interact? If not, how might you get to know individuals beyond your local environment to get a better sense of the university as a whole and have some peer support?



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- In the day-to-day work environment, how do others find out about what is happening? Who do you need to know to gain a sense of what is going on?

### **Feel free to ask questions in order to learn the ropes.**

- Ask questions about what you observe to check whether your interpretation is correct.
- Also, ask questions about what you can't see. For instance,
  - What happens if people 'mess up'? What is considered a 'mess up'?
  - How do people progress their careers? What do they need to do institutionally to progress? What role does taking on administrative duties play in success?
  - What resources and/or people elsewhere in the university might be useful to help you settle in, carry out your work and move your career forward? For instance:
    - Where can you find information on policies and procedures?
    - Is there a list defining acronyms commonly used across the university/ department/ faculty?
    - Does the university/ department/ faculty offer a mentoring scheme to help you find your way around and assist you to achieve personal and professional growth?
    - Is there a primary source of support for research and researchers?
    - Is there a centre that promotes professional and educational development for staff?
    - Is there a health and wellness centre (e.g. occupational health or counselling services) to support your wellbeing?
    - Are there any local networks to help you make connections or offer support? E.g. research staff societies, women's network, academic LGBT network, BME network

### **Some non-academic but useful resources**

- [Strategies for effective communication](#)
- [Ideas for handling conflict resolution](#)

See also 'Having a life!' section.



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