

Theories Used to Study and Understand Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

Concerns about the effects of part-time teaching on quality education often turn into critiques of part-time faculty as individuals or as a class of undifferentiated faculty—a problematic rhetorical move that shifts responsibilities from institutions to individuals who occupy the problematic positions.

—Schell and Stock, 2001, p. 326

THEORIES USED TO CONCEPTUALIZE non-tenure-track faculty significantly impact the research and assumptions brought to bear on this topic. Theories are also important for understanding and explaining the trends found in existing data (reviewed in Kezar and Sam, 2010). This chapter reviews theories that have been applied to the study of non-tenure-track faculty to chart how they have been conceptualized, to document underlying assumptions and beliefs, and to explore whether other theories might help better explain their behavior and experience.

As noted in the previous chapter, researchers use theories from four main social science disciplines to explain and explore the behavior and working conditions of non-tenure-track faculty: economic theories, sociological theories, psychological theories, and labor relations theories. At present, the application of theory is uneven. Some theories have helped shed light on the topic of non-tenure-track faculty, while others seem inaccurate or lack a strong fit. This chapter provides an overview of theories used, highlighting some promising

directions such as professionalization theory, underemployment theory, mobilization theory, and agency theory. It also critiques the use of inappropriate theories that bring in fundamental assumptions that are a weak fit for studying non-tenure-track faculty. For example, a differentiating assumption in these theories is whether non-tenure-track faculty are laborers or professionals. Is their behavior driven by the code or norms of other contingent labor in the business world or the norms of the academy? Can changes in employment contracts sufficiently alter socialization patterns learned from graduate school? Although scholars using these theories tend not to focus on these questions, we think these questions reveal important underlying assumptions and help identify pertinent theories. The conceptualization of faculty as laborers or professionals makes a big difference in understanding their behavior and effect.

Another issue is the tendency for the focus of studies to be too narrow because of the use of a single disciplinary perspective. These theories act as lenses that focus our attention on particular elements at the cost of paying attention to other elements. For instance, to understand non-tenure-track faculty only in economic terms means that it is difficult to see the organizational effect faculty may have. Likewise, scholars have yet to apply numerous theories in the various disciplines (such as intergroup contact theory or actor network theory) to non-tenure-track faculty, although they have the potential to expand our understanding. Our contention is that by juxtaposing these various disciplines and theories, we can better understand how we come to know non-tenure-track faculty and how we can begin to know them further. The chapter begins by reviewing theories in these four disciplines.

Economic Theories

Economic theories are primarily used to understand the behavior and impact of non-tenure-track faculty members. Labor economists have looked at the contingent² workforce and working arrangements of other professions, and higher education scholars have adopted these perspectives to understand non-tenure-track faculty in the academy, particularly dual-market theory. Dual-market theory documents the segmentation of the labor market into a primary market (tenure track) and secondary market (nontenure track), with each market operating

with different principles and rules (Doeringer and Piore, 1971; Shaker, 2008; Youn, 1988). Primary markets offer security, health benefits, and other privileges, while secondary markets offer less security and fewer benefits. To compete globally, companies began to downsize and restructure, adding a second contingent workforce. The oversupply of individuals with doctorates in the 1970s set up a situation for a secondary workforce to emerge.

Economists suggest that contingent work arrangements dramatically restructure the relationships between worker and organization. Before the 1970s when organizations in the United States began to downsize and restructure and rely more on contingent labor, employees often felt that they and their organizations were invested in one another for a lifetime and were strongly committed to it. As organizations have provided less job security and workers are less invested, workers have decreased their commitment and loyalty. The academy has mirrored the general labor market, with the number of non-tenure-track faculty increasing since the 1970s. In examining non-tenure-track workers in the academy, Umbach (2007) used social exchange theory to examine how the new contracts transform relationships between workers and the organizations in which they are located. According to Umbach (2007), "Social exchange theory posits that individuals form relationships with those who can provide resources. In exchange for these resources, individuals will reciprocate by providing resources and support, thus, individuals will exhibit greater commitment to an organization that they feel supported and rewarded them" (p. 93). Social exchange theory suggests that individuals under contingent work conditions would exhibit lower levels of commitment and potentially lower performance. Umbach (2007) notes that studies of contingent workers in industry and business show that they are less committed to employers and perform at lower levels than permanent workers. We question, however, whether faculty (as professionals) can be compared with laborers in terms of commitment and orientation to work. Most employees in the overall workforce do not have the long-term training and socialization that faculty have. Studies focused on freelance or contingent computer technicians, nurses, engineers, and other professionals have not found them lacking commitment; such workers are more apt comparisons for faculty (Connelly and Gallagher, 2004; Hipple and Stewart, 1996).

Other studies using the perspective of economics have looked at the way labor market principles shape the working conditions of non-tenure-track faculty. Both a supply of individuals willing to work part time and a demand from employers for part-time labor must be present. The wages and working conditions are often determined by the interaction of supply and demand. If a large supply of individuals is willing to take part-time employment, then wages and working conditions are likely to be less favorable. Economists also study whether certain groups of individuals may be more or less sensitive to wage increases. Faculty may enjoy the nature of the work to such an extent that they are willing to take lower wages to be involved in this type of work. In other cases, individuals may need more flexible work arrangements because they care for dependent children or adults and are thus willing to accept lower wages. Data suggest that non-tenure-track faculty have many different motivations: some teach for the love of being in the classroom and are retired, and others teach for a second income, but neither group depends on their salary as non-tenure-track faculty for total wages. This oversupply of individuals who are less concerned with wages and working conditions creates a situation where wages and working conditions remain low for the overall population of part-time and non-tenure-track workers. Toutkoushian and Bellas (2003) found that women are much more likely to prefer part-time employment for the flexibility it offers despite lower salaries, thus helping to create an oversupply of part-time faculty. These types of studies help to highlight the difficulty in creating more equitable conditions, as many people teach without concern for pay, while others depend on the salaries.

Another economic theory that has been brought to bear on non-tenure-track faculty is risk-taking theory. Cross and Goldenberg (2009) suggest that faculty are well aware that the statistical likelihood of a graduate student's ending up with a tenured position upon completion of a degree is extremely low. They postulate that this fact is now universally recognized and that graduate students are aware of the tight job market and the decline in tenure. They even suggest that faculty members were warned about enrolling in graduate programs and the poor prospects of jobs but that these warnings did not reduce enrollments. Cross and Goldenberg (2009) gloss over how having larger graduate programs benefits the school in other economic ways, despite knowing

that fewer jobs are available for graduating students. They perceive that graduate students understand that their odds of obtaining tenure-track jobs are low but believe they are willing to take the risk because they see a positive upside. They note, "Entering graduate school is thus like entering a lottery in which a win is a tenure track position and a loss is some alternative career. Those who purchased a lottery tickets do so in hopes of winning the grand prize. For nearly everyone, that hope is not fulfilled, but for most, the loss (the cost of the tickets) is not a disaster" (Cross and Goldenberg, 2009, p. 79). They suggest that if individuals do not obtain a tenure-track job, they enter some other alternative career that is also interesting and relatively respectable or a non-tenure-track job that is similar to their original goal. They describe how graduate education has moved increasingly away from an egalitarian culture toward a more competitive culture and marketplace, with this lottery-type system for obtaining a tenure-track faculty position. Thus, they suggest that non-tenure-track faculty go into graduate school and their early faculty career knowing a tenure-track position is unlikely and that some alternative career (a non-tenure-track position or entering another field) is much more likely.

Although economic theories are a primary lens for understanding non-tenure-track faculty, available evidence does not support some of the economic theories. As demonstrated in Kezar and Sam (2010), even though non-tenure-track faculty should exhibit less commitment, studies demonstrate that they have equal or more commitment than tenure-track faculty members (Maynard, 2000). Studies about the experience and understanding of non-tenure-track faculty demonstrate that they do not have a detailed understanding of the labor market as suggested by economists and did not understand how difficult it would be to obtain a tenure-track position (Baldwin and Chronister, 2001; Schell and Stock, 2001). In fact, the number of non-tenure-track faculty has been rising rapidly, and with doctoral degrees taking five to ten years to complete, it would be almost impossible for doctoral recipients to have evaluated the situation appropriately as economic theories would suggest. In addition, as research acknowledges, faculty members do not come to academe for money and traditional economic gain and are therefore less likely to follow labor market trends than those in other fields (Schuster and Finkelstein, 2006a). So the culture of academe itself may make some economic theories

and analogies less viable for understanding the behavior of faculty. This observation is not to say that economic theories are not valuable but that they have been marginally successful in understanding or explaining the behavior of non-tenure-track faculty as currently applied. We need more robust applications of economic theory that acknowledge the professional training and background of faculty. Moreover, because economic theories are so often used, we need researchers to be more critical about whether they are applicable and in what situations.

Sociological Theories

Sociological theories such as professionalization, deskilling, and academic capitalism have also been drawn upon to understand the behavior and experience of non-tenure-track faculty. Rhoades (1996) uses professionalization theory to problematize the move away from tenure to more non-tenure-track faculty positions. Although many economic theories treat faculty as laborers, Rhoades (1996) and others use professionalization theory that suggests that faculty are professionals who operate under a different set of principles and standards from other employees or laborers. As professionals, they are autonomous and not directed by managers. It is argued that professional groups seek autonomy, manage themselves, and create their working conditions because they can best establish the working conditions that will further their complex jobs (Sullivan, 2004). Two perspectives exist on professionalization. The first perspective views professionals as those who serve clients and society, therefore obtaining autonomy by living up to a higher standard or work ethic. They hold a high standard of work by implementing certain internal regulations such as peer review, self-policing, and clear professional codes of ethics and standards. Society grants professionals certain privileges such as autonomy, academic freedom, control of their work environment (governance), and tenure because professionals live up to these internal high standards, work aggressively at self-regulation, and are accountable rather than depend on external mandates (Sullivan, 2004).

Although Sullivan and others view professionals in idealized terms, the other perspective is less flattering. Rhoades (1998) critiques professionals as

“maintaining monopolies of expertise” and casts professionals as “self interested groups that serve the interest not of their clients and society but of themselves” (p. 20). He notes that faculty have struggled to establish autonomy from managers and boards over the last century. In his view, the concept of professionals is connected to a political struggle with other types of workers. With this lens, professionals are not as positively value-laden; instead, they are merely asserting power and a privileged role in relationship to others. Rhoades notes that feminist studies, labor studies, environmental movements, and consumer movements have also voiced his concern about professional expertise. In particular, labor studies and the union literature are critical of the notion of professionals, viewing it as creating an artificial hierarchical arrangement where certain groups are privileged over others. Professionals tend to be anti-union and not see themselves as united with other workers against management (Gulli, 2009). Although Rhoades (1998) believes that traditional notions of professionalism need to be challenged insofar as they support hierarchy and self-interest, they also are perhaps not to be entirely abandoned because professionalism has other inherently good qualities such as empowering workers and more democratic work conditions.

In the various critiques of professionalization theory in recent years, scholars have examined the failures of professions to live up to their ideals (Hamilton and Gaff, 2009; Sullivan, 2004). Sullivan (2004) reports how faculty are supposed to “weed out” colleagues who do not live up to the expectations of the profession, but few faculty are actually asked to leave when they have substandard performance or act inappropriately. In other words, the self-policing that is part of professions has largely not occurred in academia. Even though professionals have codes of ethics, faculty socialization largely does not enforce these codes and professional standards do not play a large part in graduate education. In the public’s eye, professionals have not lived up to their internal set of standards and therefore the privileges awarded such as tenure, autonomy, and control of work may no longer be tenable options (Sullivan, 2004). As Rhoades notes, “The 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s brought increased critique of and challenge to academic norms, autonomy, and job security. Faculty have been criticized for norms that focus more on their peers than serving undergraduate clients, more on research than teaching, and more on career self interest than

on the public interests” (1998, p. 132). Rhoades also suggests that faculty are internally stratified and that this stratification does not necessarily serve the profession well. Instead, the stratification creates classes of elites who control other professionals rather than create the type of autonomy intended by professionalization. Full professors are able to exert more control, and certain groups of faculty such as those who can obtain large grants (“academic capitalists”) enjoy more freedom and experience a different work life from other faculty members.

Several sociologists raise the question of whether faculty work is best suited to being considered a profession (with autonomy and professional control) or as managed labor (being managed by people with authority and held accountable externally). Although Rhoades (1996) does not address the professional misgivings of the academy, he emphasizes that the faculty position, by its very nature, thrives more when professionals control the work environment. As noted earlier, however, Rhoades does concede that professions are monopolies and are also largely self-interested. Various authors arguing for faculty to maintain their status as professionals suggest that faculty are likely better able to choose those who should enter the profession and socialize them to their positions; make decisions about teaching and learning and curriculum delivery to have control over their intellectual property; and have input into their salary, job security, and working conditions (Baldwin and Chronister, 2001; Finkelstein and Schuster, 2006b; Gappa, Austin and Trice, 2007; Hamilton and Gaff, 2009). Faculty are more likely to make better decisions related to these issues because they are closer to the ground and know how to design an environment that will work for students (Sullivan, 2004).

The decision about how to conceptualize faculty is extremely important; if it is generally agreed that faculty (whether tenure track or nontenure track; full time or part time) are professionals, then particular theories and assumptions are adopted. If scholars conceptualize non-tenure-track faculty as inherently not on a professional path, however, then economic theories may make more sense to understand their experience, contributions, and impact. One challenge to studies comparing non-tenure-track faculty with tenure-track faculty can occur when non-tenure-track faculty are conceptualized as laborers, while tenured and tenure-track faculty are conceptualized as professionals in

an institution, resulting in different rights and responsibilities, as well as different expectations from others. Rhoades (1998) conceptualizes faculty (both tenure track and nontenure track) as becoming hybrids—managed professionals—increasingly moving away from a professional status and becoming laborers. Shaker's study (2008) of the full-time non-tenure-track faculty experience supports this concept; it found that non-tenure-track faculty appear to be hybrids—neither laborers or professionals, but possessing qualities of both.

Related to the notion of professionalization is the concept of “deskilling” (Rajagopal and Farr, 1992; Rajagopal, 2004). Throughout the last one hundred years, the move has been to routinize and deskill labor in bureaucratic organizations and to take away the complexity that often led to a better product for a cheaper, similar product. The role of managers is to determine ways to take parts of the skilled labor and develop automated processes to do similar or related work more cost-effectively. Various scholars suggest that the same process of deskilling is happening in the academy and that it threatens the quality of the academy and the teaching and learning environment (Rajagopal and Farr, 1992). One example is the move away from individualized syllabi to departmental or unit syllabi (or standardized lower-division courses) that can be taught by any faculty member and are not specific to the expertise of any one faculty, often with limited faculty input. Another example is the common curriculum for online courses.

Another sociological theory that has been brought to bear to understand the rise of non-tenure-track faculty is the notion of academic capitalism. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) have examined the trend in the academy to commercialize and commodify operations, which is part of a larger global trend and tied to a neoliberal philosophy. Neoliberals assert that society is best served when public functions are privatized and market values drive political, economic, and social institutions. This general philosophy applied to higher education means a public divestment from higher education, which can be better delivered through private sources such as for-profit institutions and private colleges. For the existing public institutions, neoliberalists would recommend that market principles drive services and operations. For example, if it is less expensive to run residence halls through an external contractor, then the institution should move to outsource that function. Many people are critical

of this philosophy and its effect on the academy, moving from predominantly educational values to market values that can compromise the educational mission (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004; Kezar, 2004). The link to non-tenure-track faculty is that their employment conditions operate much more like the U.S. economic market in which companies have largely moved to a contingent workforce. Rather than seeing higher education organizations as institutions that comprise professionals and operate under a professional code, neoliberalism provides the logic for operating campuses like corporations. Various studies have shown how higher education has shifted in the last thirty years to operate more like corporations, employing cost-saving measures, using more hierarchical leadership and management, and displacing professional self-regulation with external accountability processes (Kezar, 2004).

Sociological theories point to the systemic nature of the transition from a largely tenure-track to a largely non-tenure-track faculty under neoliberal philosophy. Scholars using sociological theory argue that this change has gradually taken place over a long period of time but is deeply embedded in the United States and other worldwide economic, social, and political systems. Yet these theories reinforce the notion that current conditions are fixed and do not contest the nature or the direction toward a commodified and corporatized academy. Sociological theories also demonstrate the decline in rationale behind professionals and their stature in society. Sociological theories are often helpful for understanding why certain trends occur, but they are less helpful for understanding the experience of non-tenure-track faculty or a way forward.

Psychological and Social Psychological Theories

To understand the experience and effect of non-tenure-track faculty, many scholars have used social psychological and psychological theories. Many psychologically framed studies have come from a deficit model, suggesting that non-tenure-track faculty lack qualities that are important to a functional workplace such as commitment, satisfaction, social capital, agency, the ability to learn and form collegial relationships, and the ability to integrate students on campus. The deficit framing often masks the reality that these faculty, for example, may not be less committed than tenure-track faculty. Authors sometimes

acknowledge that they take a deficit perspective because of the poor working conditions for non-tenure-track faculty (which is understandable), but this deficit assumption may not be accurate. It is important that researchers examine their assumptions carefully to more accurately discover the dynamics in play.

The issue of commitment is an important construct in psychology that is often examined in studies of employees. The move to a largely non-tenure-track faculty in which the organization provides less job security raises the question of individual commitment. Studies demonstrate that people with high levels of commitment tend to stay with organizations, resulting in less turnover, better morale, and increased function on their work (Bland and others, 2006). Although much of the commitment literature has focused on contingent employees in corporations, faculty as professionals go through extensive training for their positions and are likely to be more strongly committed than other contingent workers. So far studies of commitment have had mixed results, with some suggesting that non-tenure-track faculty have the same or higher commitment than tenure-track faculty and others suggesting they have less (reviewed in more detail later). But the current framing, drawing on theories from business focused on clerical workers and other non-professional workers, does not take into account the differences in faculty socialization and training—the professional element of faculty work.

To gain a better understanding of faculty motivation rather than viewing non-tenure-track faculty through a business lens, they could be equated with contingent professionals in other fields such as medicine. For example, organization-based career theory—a four stage model of professional careers—is used to help understand commitment levels of medical laboratory professionals (Blau, 1999) and may also be applied to non-tenure-track faculty. This theory takes into consideration the socialization processes of professionals as they enter a working community and determine commitment based on moving from the first level of apprenticeship to further levels of expertise in the community. This theory could also be used to understand the various mixed results of non-tenure-track faculty members' commitment to institutions; for example, non-tenure-track faculty who never move into full socialization in an academic community may be less committed compared with those who are included and socialized into the profession.

Studies have also examined the concept of satisfaction, although in largely atheoretical ways. Many researchers appear to come into a study to demonstrate that non-tenure-track faculty are dissatisfied (again using a deficit model), only to discover they are generally as satisfied as tenure-track faculty. An exception is Maynard and Joseph's study (2008), which investigates satisfaction as tied to the fit between a person and a position or job and whether an individual feels underemployed. Underemployment is "when an individual holds a job that is somehow inferior to or of lower quality than a particular standard" (p. 141). Underemployment has several dimensions: more education than is required for the job, involuntary employment in a field outside of one's area of education, more skills or experience than required by the job, involuntary employment in part-time or temporary work, and low pay relative to a previous job or others with similar educational backgrounds. Individuals who are underemployed are expected to be less satisfied and to have a variety of negative outcomes such as poor job attitude and job performance and adverse effects on their family and social relationships. Various empirical studies provide evidence that when job demands are aligned with a worker's abilities, the resulting fit has positive consequences (Maynard and Joseph, 2008; Bretz and Judge, 1994; Caplan, 1987).

Non-tenure-track faculty generally fit into many of these conditions of underemployment, as they receive lower pay than other colleagues for the same work and are in temporary part-time positions. Underemployment occurs, however, only when the employee desires full-time employment or higher pay. Theories of person-job fit suggest that we need to look at individual employees' preferences rather than assume that all employees have the same desired working conditions and specifications. Maynard and Joseph's study (2008) empirically demonstrates that the perception of the individual is the most important factor in determining underemployment and person-job fit, which translates into satisfaction and the way individuals experience their job. Their work extends to even the studies that have looked at differences by group, for example, the satisfaction among certain groups of non-tenure-track faculty (those who have another job or teach for pleasure rather than pay) and the dissatisfaction among non-tenure-track faculty who would prefer a tenure-track or full-time position. They demonstrate that even individuals in these groups vary based on their perception of underemployment.

Another social psychological theory—social capital—has been used to explore the impact of non-tenure-track faculty on students. Social capital theorists suggest that students can develop knowledge that will make them successful by creating networks with other important people in the educational context. The more students interact with faculty, the more likely they are to develop relationships and connections and in turn develop informal knowledge that will help them in the future. Students who interact mostly with non-tenure-track faculty may be disadvantaged because these faculty have little time to interact with students. Jaeger and Eagan's research (2009) suggests that students who are in two-year institutions or remedial education and introductory courses in four-year institutions are more likely to have non-tenure-track faculty who do not have the time to play nurturing and guiding roles, which are particularly important to students who lack access to social capital in their daily lives. Institutional agents help students to navigate the institution, to be successful in classes, and to learn all the implicit knowledge about how to be successful in the environment (Jaeger and Eagan, 2009). Social capital emphasizes both the agency and work by students but also the social environment that surrounds them and the types of accessible networks on campuses with large numbers of non-tenure-track faculty. It is hypothesized that fewer networks are available for students to tap into and that there are fewer institutional agents that can help them as non-tenure-track faculty numbers grow on campuses.

To understand the impact of non-tenure-track faculty on student outcomes, several scholars have examined theories of involvement, engagement, and student integration (Benjamin, 2002; Jacoby, 2006; Jaeger and Eagan, 2009; Eagan and Jaeger, 2009; Umbach, 2007). Benjamin (2002) and Jacoby (2006) hypothesize that the overreliance on part-time non-tenure-track faculty could undermine successful student integration and retention on campus, and Bettinger and Long's studies (2005a, 2005b) on part-time faculty suggest that they affect students' interest in subject areas and second-semester retention. Studies have demonstrated that as students become academically integrated on campus, they are more likely to be retained. A factor in academic integration is interaction with faculty members and availability of faculty for the student. Therefore, these authors hypothesize, the reliance on part-time faculty could hinder academic integration because many part-time faculty are not present on

campus as often as other faculty. Umbach (2007) also posits that non-tenure-track faculty, particularly part-time faculty, may affect students' success because non-tenure-track faculty are unable to spend as much time with students. Faculty engagement with students is an important characteristic that has been found to lead to students' success. The studies are inconclusive on this issue (for example, findings that are statistically not significant, findings that lean in both directions, or methodological limitations), and the concern about whether non-tenure-track faculty affect student integration remains a hypothesis with only limited evidence in support of this hypothesis.

Another psychological theory that has been used to understand non-tenure-track faculty is psychological contact theory. As noted earlier through social exchange theory, in some studies non-tenure-track workers (in other fields) demonstrate lower commitment and performance in the organization, but findings have been mixed. As individuals with lower commitment and performance interact with other employees in more permanent work conditions, it can affect the overall morale of the organization. In addition, long-term employees may feel less secure about their job status because of the increasing number of contingent or part-time workers employed by the organization. Therefore, job performance can decline for not only non-tenure-track faculty members but also for tenured faculty members who sense that the implicit contract between employee and employer has been broken (Umbach, 2007). Yet it remains a hypothesis, and we do not have empirical proof in the academy of this phenomenon.

Hollenshead and others (2007) use Maslow's theory of human motivation to examine a host of perceived needs or concerns of non-tenure-track faculty. They suggest that their concerns fit into his framework and that this lens can help to explain their behaviors. Maslow suggested that "people require certain conditions in their lives, and that each lower level of need must be realized before a person is motivated to seek fulfillment of a higher level need" (Hollenshead and others, 2007, p. 11). Administrators perceive non-tenure-track faculty to have several basic needs: increased compensation (75 percent), job security (72 percent), respect (70 percent), and working conditions such as office space and equipment (61 percent). Interestingly, the issue of respect would not necessarily fall into Maslow's more basic needs (but are important

in his second stage of belonging and self-esteem) and suggests that the issue of inclusion and valuing non-tenure-track faculty may be just as important as some of these basic needs. Administrators perceive that non-tenure-track faculty cared less about promotion (33 percent), research support (26 percent), access to the tenure track (23 percent), and governance (11 percent). Hollenshead and others (2007) point out that non-tenure-track faculty are a very diverse group, however, that some are getting their needs met in work outside the academy; moreover, administrators are likely to misunderstand many of their non-tenure-track faculty members unless they speak to them regularly because of the group's heterogeneity. They note that generalizations about needs are difficult to determine.

O'Meara, Terosky, and Neumann (2008) suggest the primary lenses for understanding faculty members are agency (the ability to assume) and learning (the ability to learn and change, personally and professionally), which lead to growth and development—the heart of understanding faculty members. They hypothesize that non-tenure-track appointments create different opportunities for learning to inform one's work. They define agency as the desire to create a work context conducive to thought over time. Agency is affected by the way faculty roles are constructed and whether they can create time to think and learn. As they note, "Appointment types and job security may change faculty access to important work resources or feelings of agency in gaining access to resources and time" (O'Meara, Terosky, and Neumann, 2008, p. 29). The authors suggest that non-tenure-track faculty are constrained in their ability to learn or have agency and are thus stripped of their access to a professional and meaningful career. They go on to also discuss professional relationships and commitments such as being an activist on campus or being involved in one's teaching as possible other sources of being a professional that non-tenure-track faculty appointments often make difficult. They suggest that until agency, learning, and the ability to form relationships and commitments are addressed, non-tenure-track faculty are fundamentally constrained from being full professionals. In our earlier research, we found much evidence to suggest that the hypothesis of O'Meara, Terosky, and Neumann (2008) about the limitations of non-tenure-track faculty to work as professionals is accurate (Kezar and Sam, 2010).

An overarching concern with psychologically based studies is that they may ignore societal and organizational conditions that shape non-tenure-track faculty behavior and outcomes. Most of the studies do not control for varying working conditions and different contexts that non-tenure-track faculty find themselves in. Also, only a limited set of work examines important differences in motivation and examines nontenure track as a heterogeneous group that is situated within very different working conditions making general explanations quite difficult.

Organizational Theory

Organizational theory has been used more tacitly than other theory bases. Studies that have examined current policy and practices related to non-tenure-track faculty often take an organizational perspective but do not cite any specific theoretical concepts or works. Organizational theory tends to focus on concepts, trends, and changes that happen at an institution or campus. Economic and sociological theories sometimes question the scope of organizational theories, as the latter ignore broader forces that brought non-tenure-track faculty into being. Rhoades (1996), for example, questions what he terms “functionalist organizational theories” that he feels take the non-tenure-track faculty situation as a given (that they now exist, so we need to create policies and practices to support them). His sociological work demonstrates how non-tenure-track positions emerged and focuses on reversing this trend rather than accepting it, which he feels functionalist apolitical studies tend to do. By stepping back from the institution and examining broader trends, we might question the move toward non-tenure-track faculty. Rather than providing policies and practices to support non-tenure-track faculty, we should focus on creating more tenured positions and strengthening the institution of tenure.

Examples of scholars who use an organizational approach are Gappa and Leslie (1993) and Baldwin and Chronister (2001). We note, however, that organizational theory has been used only tacitly, as these authors do not frame their research in any particular organizational theories and concepts. Instead, they focus their research on the organizational level and at non-tenure-track faculty as an empirical reality. At present, organizational theory has been

underused. We agree with Rhoades (1996) that many studies have examined non-tenure-track faculty in the organization but have not explicitly applied specific theory to understand non-tenure-track faculty.

One theoretically informed study examined the organizational concept of productivity (Bland and others, 2006). Studies of faculty productivity find that three main characteristics (individual faculty qualities, environments, and departmental leadership) lead to more productive departments in terms of grants, articles, effective teachers, and committed faculty (Bland and others, 2006). The environmental characteristics that enhance productivity include a decentralized organization, recruitment of driven faculty, clear mission and goals, shared culture of excellence, positive group climate, sufficient size and diversity, mentoring, communication and networks, resources, adequate work time, rewards, and opportunities for professional development. Almost all of these departmental qualities are missing for non-tenure-track faculty and, as we discuss later, most likely affect their ability to be productive. Bland and others' study (2006) demonstrated how non-tenure-track faculty have less access to productivity-facilitating features of the workplace such as professional development, rewards, clear expectations, mentoring, and participation in governance. Bland and others (2006) hypothesized that the tenure system is a major organizational mechanism for ensuring the presence of the environmental features necessary for productivity. Certainly, as they claim, tenure is a system that can help to operationalize the positive features such as mentoring, communication, autonomy, and commitment, but it does not necessarily follow that other systems or approaches in place could not also meet these goals.

Labor Relations Theory

Labor relations theory has an interdisciplinary perspective and attempts to fuse economics principles, sociology of work, and political science ideas such as conflict and power. This discipline provides some insight into the way that an interdisciplinary perspective might enhance our understanding by drawing on key concepts across a host of disciplines. Because of its interdisciplinary focus, labor relations theory ranges from understanding the status quo of employee-employer dynamics and the relation of employees to work to theories of mobilization and

enacting change. For example, Tilly (1996) uses institutional theory as one of his theoretical lenses to better understand the current relationship among employers and labor markets and employees. He uses institutional theory to understand how firms create various types of labor markets, depending on their needs (flexibility, cost minimization, and predictability) and constraints (physical technology, social technology, available workforce, and state policy), which results in the availability of various types of work, especially involuntary part-time work. Tilly argues that as a result of the power that firms wield, the only way workers can become active agents in the labor market is to be a collective and unionize.

Labor relations theories also focus on unions and their role in the workplace. Theories that conceptualize the relationship among unions, faculty, and administration are helpful because academic unions such as the NEA and the AFT, and even nonacademic unions such as the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, are increasingly part of the academic staffing landscape. At the other end of the labor studies spectrum, instead of studying how things are, labor relations theories can be used to understand mobilization toward change or activism—moving toward how things should be (depending on one's perspective). For example, Alinsky's work (1971) on community organizing and grassroots change incorporates the politics and economics involved in a change movement while also noting struggles for power and ways to confront the status quo. Scholars like Berry (2005) and Nelson (1997) use labor relations theories as a call to galvanize non-tenure-track faculty to some sort of activism to help change the academy. Those works that focus on unions and the relationship of unions to the academy often focus on the changing labor markets, reestablishment of faculty and administrative roles, and the need for change (Burke and Naiman, 2003).

This "call to action" component of many labor relations theories is a component not often explicitly found in the other categories of theory described in this chapter. The sociological and many of the psychological and social psychological theories applied to studying non-tenure-track faculty tend to be more normative or descriptive in nature. For example, academic capitalism explores the nature of the status quo and how it became that way and studies on satisfaction and commitment focus on the level of commitment held by

non-tenure-track faculty, but few of the theories look to changing the dynamic that currently exists. Though these lenses are useful, labor relations theories help provide a counterpart. Many of the labor theories draw from different areas of the previous disciplines. These theories focus on activism, which is prescriptive in nature, finding ways to get people involved from the bottom up rather than explaining the reasons why people get involved. In our earlier work (ASHE Higher Education Report, vol. 36, No.4) regarding plans of action and recommendations, we hearken to the importance of change occurring from the bottom up rather than relying on change to happen from those higher up in the institutional hierarchy.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the most prevalent theories that have been applied to understand non-tenure-track faculty. Our review suggests that non-tenure-track faculty as a phenomenon is undertheorized and that too few theoretical lenses have been applied to understand this broad and important landscape. By “undertheorized,” we mean that many studies are conducted with little attention to theory or the range of theories that might help to understand a particular research question. Also, research questions may be posed quite narrowly because of the theory brought to bear focusing on psychological issues and ignoring societal and organizational ones. And some theories (organizational theory, for example) have not been explicitly used, which prevents a fuller understanding of non-tenure-track faculty. We also believe that more interdisciplinary work (such as labor relations) might help address some of the complex questions. We believe the underlying assumptions brought to the study of non-tenure-track faculty will continue to need examination in coming years.

We explored three major assumptions: (1) whether faculty are laborers or professionals; (2) a deficit or asset model for faculty; and (3) whether contingency is the new norm for academic labor or whether it should be critiqued and not accepted as the norm. Evidence suggests that faculty are hybrids (both professionals and laborers) and that we need to embrace assumptions from both sets of literature (sociology and economics) and broaden the scope of

future studies. As noted in the chapter, studies are often framed from a deficit perspective, no matter what discipline is applied. Non-tenure-track faculty are studied for what they lack, not for the assets they have or the hurdles they overcome. Although certainly they come from a disadvantaged position in the job market, this deficit framing casts a negative light on non-tenure-track faculty as a group that is potentially damaging and inaccurate. We likely need more balance in the literature between deficits and assets. Review and application of ideas from studies of other professionals such as nurses, engineers, and computer technicians can help redirect research efforts. Lastly, much of the organizational and psychological literature accepts conditions as they are—that non-tenure-track faculty are here to stay. Yet some sociological theory and labor relations literature in particular suggest that the new status quo does not need to be accepted. Unions have been pushing for change during the last twenty years but with minimal success, given the systemic nature of the changes. Labor relations literature also notes that even if non-tenure-track faculty remain part of the academic fabric, the current inequitable policies and practices are not inherent in non-tenure-track work: they can be changed.

Although these theories are appropriate to understand both part-time and full-time non-tenure-track faculty, it is likely that some concepts will play out differently for these two different groups; future research should pay attention to these meaningful differences. Part-time faculty, for example, may be closer to laborers than professionals, while full-time non-tenure-track faculty may be closer to traditional professionals than laborers. Part-time faculty usually experience more difficulty obtaining support from labor unions, and labor relations theorists need to be attentive to power differences between full- and part-time faculty.