Towards Improving the Professional Competence and Success of New Faculty Members: Insights from Lyons's Principles

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Article Information

ABSTRACT

Faculty members constitute a significant part of the existence and operations of post-secondary institutions. They are an essential resource in the delivery of higher education. Typically, faculty members are appointed to fill a need in higher education institutions' efforts to get the pool of human resources to help in the intellectual and social development of students. How should newly appointed faculty members be treated? What needs to be done to make newly appointed faculty members feel they are valued, welcomed, and supported to successfully perform their roles? This article reflects on Richard Lyons' five principles and their germaneness to assisting new faculty members to finding their grounds and to be rooted in the academia. The author suggests that institutions of higher learning seriously mull over these areas to isolate issues that have implications for contributing to their context-specific faculty development agenda with particular eye on new faculty members.

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1. INTRODUCTION

From personal experience I have come to appreciate that faculty members deserve to be groomed in ways that would permit them to effectively perform the functions for which they were appointed. Indeed, the central role that teachers play in the success of any educational endeavor is widely acknowledged [1,2]. For instance, in 2009 UNESCO indicated that most educational reforms were not successful because teachers as drivers of the change were ignored [1]. Too, it has been underscored that a disciplined teacher contributes to molding student behavior [2]. Faculty members in post-secondary institutions, variously called professors, lecturers, university or college teachers, occupy similar instructive position as K-12 teachers but this time in post-secondary settings.

The purpose of this paper was to examine how post-secondary institutions can assist their newly hired faculty members to be firmly grounded in academia. This purpose relates to the need for new faculty members to become familiar with, be supported, and be guided to develop and be able to meaningfully contribute to efforts at achieving and extending institutional agenda for human resource development and socio-economic advancement. Failure to achieve this would render the new faculty member ill-prepared to undertake his/her role expectations effectively.

Undeniably, the core functions of higher education institutions (HEIs) have generally involved teaching, research, and service [3]. To perform these functions effectively, HEIs have had the discretion to determine but also to influence hiring, promotion, classroom curriculum and student evaluation to undertake their mission and to achieve stated vision [4]. Discourses on staffing practices show the interrelationships among recruitment and selection; orientation to position; supervision; performance appraisal; and staff development to influence institutional success [5]. And since staffing practices constitute an important aspect of leadership and management, the extent to which staffing practices are undertaken hold implications for organizational functioning and success [5].

Classroom curriculum and student evaluation have especially been regarded as areas that are traditionally determined by faculty members [4]. Also, in 2006, the American Association of University Professors indicated that faculty members must not be prevented from undertaking their primary oversight relating to such areas as curriculum, subject matter and instructional methods, and research activities [6]. This is because post-secondary institutions often do their assessment and evaluation to ensure that faculty members comply with institutional benchmarks in these areas. Thus, it is decipherable that faculty members' central role in human resource development to contribute to politico-socio-economic life of societies cannot be over-emphasized.

Too, it has been reported that institutional autonomy affords HEIs opportunity to foster academic freedom, which allows faculty members to evaluate society and propose change without fear of reprisal, students to develop skills to be engaged and critical members of society and society to be safeguarded against political repression [4]. Accordingly, autonomy is essential in ensuring that higher education can fulfill its role of evaluating society and proposing ways to improve it. Hence, encroaching upon the autonomy of HEIs could stifle this significant way in which colleges and universities serve humanity. Clearly, the above expositions underscore the central role played by faculty members in helping HEIs to achieve their relevance. This places responsibility on college leadership to ensure that faculty members are given needed support and morale to work effectively.

2. THE NEW FACULTY MEMBER, THE NEW ENVIRONMENT

The beginning campus life of every college teacher is critical in setting the stage for professional development and to contribute to the human resource enrichment efforts [9,8]. However, a study of faculty members has found that, among other things, there exist little systematic orientation, socialization, evaluation, and professional and curriculum development [9]. Also, there are concerns about academic freedom related to institutional affairs and a general lack of administrative or technical support for the non-tenured faculty. Unfortunately, such hidden or otherwise overt

unsupportive policies and practices may leave faculty members and administrators to assume that this anomaly is normative for academia [9].

Reports from several authors underscore the point that policies and practices affecting morale of, for example contingent faculty, appear to affect the learning processes for students in post-secondary institutions [9]. What is done to enable the newly appointed faculty member to be successful in carrying out the responsibilities for which s/he has been hired, it can be argued, has implication for post-secondary education quality. Necessarily, policies and practices that are known to affect faculty performance include, among others, inclusion in orientation or governance and availability of professional development [9].

The place of the new faculty member in the existence and functioning of HEIs can thus not be under-stated. New faculty members are needed to occupy vacant positions created by retired faculty members or new openings to ensure and advance the continuous functioning of post-secondary institutions towards the generation and dissemination of knowledge vital for human and societal development. Hence, the person of faculty member must be schooled and seasoned as one who possesses skills and expertise necessary to perform the job for which s/he has been appointed. This usually follows years of graduate academic work and research. Also, appointment of new faculty members is contingent upon being successful in an interview session with high-level academic panel that queries and, if satisfied, endorses the suitability of the individual to become a faculty member. Thus the new faculty member can be described as a person with demonstrated capacity to succeed as a functional and essential part of the unit, department, or institution s/he is appointed to.

This assumption leaves a vital issue of purposely getting the new faculty member to be firmly rooted in the academia and off to a sound start vaguely considered or unattended to – often by the institutions or sections requiring the service of this person. Therefore, what colleges and universities need to, can, and must do to better prepare new faculty members to succeed and to extend their potentials merit exploration. The logical question then relates to what are required for HEIs to better prepare and support newly appointed faculty members to be able to perform their role expectations effectively. Insights from

the work of Lyons are instructive in this regard [7].

3. LYONS'S PRINCIPLES

Richard Lyons has done extensive work and published many papers on embracing adjunct professors. Lyons's published works have included a 2004 publication on success strategies for adjunct faculty and a 1999 work on the adjunct professor's guide to success: surviving and thriving in the college classroom. In spite of the importance of those works, this article is set to consider Lyons's publication on best practices for supporting adjunct faculty members [7]. I argue that the five key areas advanced by Lyons are worth the effort and time of college actors to mull over. Therefore, these five areas are explored and their relevance highlighted to underscore their applicability to helping and supporting new faculty members – not necessarily adjunct college teachers – to succeed as members of the academia.

4. A WALK THROUGH OF LYONS' BEST PRACTICES FOR SUPPORTING ADJUNCT FACULTY

The centrality of the position and work of faculty members can be deciphered from the importance of teaching to developing societies and advancing human resource agenda. If colleges and universities value faculty members as key to attaining institutional mission and mandate, then investing in faculty development is the right thing to do, which must be done right. The work of Lyons tackles the central issue of how to best connect part-time faculty members with their institutional cultures, provide ongoing faculty development, and enhance student learning [10].

The common assumption across each chapter of *Best Practices* – Lyons's publication under consideration – is that adjunct faculty members need to be connected to their colleagues and institutions where they teach [7]. In chapter one, Lyons highlighted the need for institutions to know their part-timers, understand their needs, and provide them with tailored human resource and professional development programs. In chapter two, a new employee orientation program that successfully handles a steady influx of adjuncts while respecting their diverse career backgrounds and work experiences is presented. Chapter three presents a part-time faculty member's tool that was developed out of a part-time faculty development and needs assessment

program. The need for needs assessment is also adequately presented in this chapter.

While chapter four presents online faculty development programs for adjuncts, chapters five and six provide information about mentoring programs for adjunct faculty members. Of particular interest is the program in chapter five that makes no distinction between part-time and full-time faculty members in terms of access to and participation in programs. Chapter seven presents an overview of a multi-institution consortium that includes a program for adjunct faculty members at participating institutions among its offerings. Chapter eight presents a graduate course offered through a communications department at a university aimed at preparing participants to teach in community colleges. Chapters nine and ten discuss associate models that result in a change of status (certification within the institution) for adjuncts completing the program while chapters eleven through fourteen outline programs that combine different approaches into comprehensive training and support plans for adjunct faculty members. In chapter fifteen, the reader is presented with an essay by a former adjunct instructor that highlights the life and struggles of adjuncts.

5. THE FIVE KEY AREAS (PRINCIPLES) ADVANCED BY LYONS

The five key areas (referred to in this article as principles) that have been advanced by Lyons include:

1. A thorough orientation to the institution, its culture, and its practices;
2. Adequate training in fundamental teaching and classroom management skills;
3. A sense of belonging to the institution;
4. Both initial and ongoing professional development; and
5. Recognition for quality work that is perceived as appropriate and adequate. (p. 6)

The sections that follow detail what HEIs can and must learn from each of the principles to support their newly appointed faculty members to become professors to be proud of.

6. ORIENTATION

The idea of orientation relates to welcoming, introductory session the purpose of which is to brief a person or group of people to be familiar with, for example, a new thing, place, procedure, or discipline. Orientation session can be an environment for building an enriched relationship [8]. Hence, institutional actors must remember that persons employed come to the institution with varied backgrounds just as institutions vary one from another [8]. Therefore, orientation sessions need to be tailored to the needs and circumstances of individuals but must be aligned with institutional policies, processes and aspirations.

Because it is to familiarize a person or group of people in a new situation, orientation sessions must be held at the beginning of the new faculty member's assumption of duty at the earliest possible time [7,8]. All the orientation sessions must include tours of the campus, lecture places, offices and services available to faculty members, students, and others. Arranging for the new faculty member to meet with people such as senior colleagues; administrators; office and support staff; and junior members within the unit, department and school/faculty are also helpful in helping the new faculty members to become familiar with all but also to be encouraged to build and nurture endearing relationships [7,8].

Therefore, it is argued that it is essential that the following areas are addressed by the institution and clearly communicated by organizers of orientation sessions for newly appointed faculty members:

6.1 Secretarial Support

A visit to the secretary office will be of benefit for the new faculty member who is new to the campus and facilities. Such a support is extremely beneficial to faculty members who teach multiple courses.

6.2 Classroom Assignments and Access

Not all instructors will have opportunity to visit the facilities ahead of time. Hence, orientation organizers must provide a list of classroom details. Any attention to detail would lead to a more pleasant experience.

6.3 Office Space

Although providing a separate office for each faculty member can be problematic, it is wise to provide a space for faculty members to use while on campus. This provides a private and

confidential place for them to work and to attend to students' needs. Confidentiality is vital while meeting with students. A faculty member's meeting with students in the library as an office, for example, is not productive for students, the faculty member, or the library.

6.4 Phone and Email

Teaching at an institution requires the need for phone and email communication. An email account should be provided for each instructor so that students may contact the instructor for course questions.

6.5 Mail Distribution

Show the new faculty member where to pick up mail and how announcements are distributed within the institution. This may be a routine for full-time faculty members, however, it can be problematic for new and adjunct faculty members.

6.6 Materials Duplication

This service is necessary to permit new faculty members to make copies of materials for teaching and learning purposes [8].

In the event that there is not enough time to permit all of the above issues to be presented at orientation sessions for new faculty members, a manual or manuscript detailing what to do or where the new person may get what is highly recommended [8]. It is possible for some people to see a discussion of the issues enumerated as mundane. What must be appreciated though is that to the new faculty member, it can be very invaluable to aid him or her in locating and accessing what s/he needs to make his/her work less difficult and more fruitful.

I recall a time in my professional life as a new faculty member when I was asked to attend a meeting in a particular conference room. When I asked the department administrator where the location was I was dismayed when she quizzically retorted: "So you cannot find your way around?" The deeper issue lay with the sort of orientation that was done. What happened next is for a different forum. However, this unpleasant experience underscores the very reason why institutions must give orientation for new faculty members the seriousness it deserves (not taking anything for granted) to not only familiarize them, but to contribute to acclimatizing them, and also to making the new faculty member truly independent. Apart from orientation, Lyons also highlighted the need for training.

7. TRAINING

Training relates to preparation that enables a person to do what s/he is expected to do and for him/her to do it well. One way by which training can be given to new faculty members is through mentoring [7]. This requires institutions to assign the new faculty member to an experienced faculty member in the same discipline, but not necessarily in the same department, to give the new faculty member opportunity of learning under the tutelage and mentorship of the experienced faculty member. Through such mentorship training, it is expected that relationships will be built while salient information and skills would be passed on to the new faculty member regarding how to perform his or her functions effectively. This approach is opposed to indoctrination. It is rather supposed to give the new faculty member an opportunity to learn so as to develop essential skills for undertaking his or her responsibility as a member of the academic community. Therefore the role of the mentor must be that of a facilitator. If properly done, the training can afford the new faculty member an opportunity to build life-long learning, broaden teaching and classroom skills, and contribute to his/her professional development [8].

Also, training for new faculty members would have to include teaching approaches, course development and outline preparation. In this regard, it is suggested that HE authorities must ask questions as these: What teaching approach would suit the faculty member's professional development and students' needs? What preparatory skills and competencies do new faculty members need in the development of courses? What evaluation technique(s) must the new faculty member become conversant with? And what are the needs and expectations of the department? [8]. The answers supplied to these and other questions that align with institutional needs would reveal what must be done to help the new faculty member to be successful. A critique of the answers to the questions would create avenues to identify and avoid possible difficulties that can derail departmental or institutional agenda.

8. SENSE OF BELONGING

It is appropriate to ask this question: "How can one celebrate community, when one is not invited into the community in full measure?" (p. 401) [8]. The fact is that newly appointed faculty members must not be considered as island unto themselves. They need to relate to colleagues and other staff members and students to succeed. However, without feeling belonged, new faculty members may be overwhelmed by challenges that could make them ineffective. Hence, they must see and feel that they belong to and are welcome to the new *community* they have come to be a part of.

For example, individuals can feel not belonging to a group when different messages are communicated to people who are to act in a similar way [8]. This is ample reason for all segments of HEIs to ensure that new faculty members receive the same information as other members when they have to act in the same manner. Also, if senior faculty members and other people show gratitude to new faculty members, they can feel welcome and be motivated to draw closer to the sources of the motivation. Such an appreciative attitude would assure new faculty members that they are valued and are on track to doing things appropriately.

9. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The rate at which changes occur necessitates the constant need for institutions to engage employees since schooling alone is insufficient to assure long term professional ability and competence [11]. Thus, the reason for pursuing professional development for faculty members should be to improve their professional knowledge base, skills, and attitudes in order that they would become competent, effective, and more relevant to achieve improved performances [11]. In this vein, Lyons argued that based on the influential role that faculty members play in curricula implementation, "the quality of their teaching and the opportunities they have for professional development should be key concerns for academic leaders" (p. 5) [7].

But new faculty members must actively participate in professional development programs that are organized if they have to benefit fully from them. For any professional development to be successful, participants must be willing to learn something from participating in the program, reconsider their belief systems and

perception in light of newer information, engage in new ways of doing things as they endeavor to apply what they have learned, and be prepared to share and team up with other participants [12]. Therefore, it behooves new faculty members to show through use of the knowledge and skills acquired at professional development fora that what they learn has impact on their work. In that case, the confidence and trust that their colleagues and others have in them would be strong. This can pave way for new faculty members to be given opportunities in further professional development exercises such as attending conferences and workshops.

Further, a determination of the content and scope of professional development exercises would require authorities to conduct a needs analysis. In this sense, they would need to identify and operationalize desired goals and objectives and as well prepare program outline, materials and schedules, as well as communicate proposals to stakeholders [7]. Doing so would make it possible for others to share inputs that can be used to modify or enrich the original plan.

10. RECOGNIZING QUALITY WORK

Individual faculty members are motivated by different things to do what they do or want to do [7]. Importantly, the role of scholarship as an important part of the work of faculty members must be recognized [7]. Because they need to publish and contribute to advancing knowledge in their disciplines, new faculty members must be encouraged, directed, and nurtured in the art and science of scholarship. It should not be that because faculty members are responsible to, as it were, *publish or peril*, the way to pursue scholarship is to be left hanging and without guidance for new faculty members.

It is worth highlighting that the quality of research output and publications of faculty members tells on the quality of the departments and institutions to which they are affiliated. Thus, an issue worth considering is whether it will serve anybody any good if new faculty members are not helped to succeed experienced, retiring professors. The future of HEIs and departments that fail to nurture new faculty members to research, write, and publish to advance their disciplines, will at the very least, be short-lived. Hence, HEIs and academic units owe it as a sacred, professional duty to engage with and help new faculty members to learn to advance scholarship and become scholars [7,8].

11. MATTERS ARISING

It must be noted that the relative position and importance of each of the principles in the operations of colleges and universities would depend, to a large extent, on the needs and peculiarity of both the institution and the new faculty member. The significance of each of the components can be noted by considering each principle in light of a wider system for promoting such human- and productivity-focused philosophies as needs identification, care, support, active participation, and commitment to growth [13]. In spite of the fact that the functions of these components are discrete, institutional actors can implement them to achieve symbiotic effect in which the derived synergies result in connectedness and empowerment to everyone involved [13].

It is discernible that opportunities for administrators, long-serving and senior faculty members and other personnel to embrace the tenets of each of the principles presented may open the way for continuous learning. It would also allow for a renewing of personal skills and competencies, which are vital for institutional growth and development. By these means, post-secondary institutions can witness improvements in the quality of the education they offer. This is what must guide what institutions do to support all faculty members and other college personnel.

Additionally, the principles must be pursued as a two-throng process of meeting the needs of the system and attending to the professional needs and development of the new faculty member. Fig. 1 is a pictorial representation of Lyons's principles to supporting new faculty members toward becoming professionally matured and effective members of the academia.
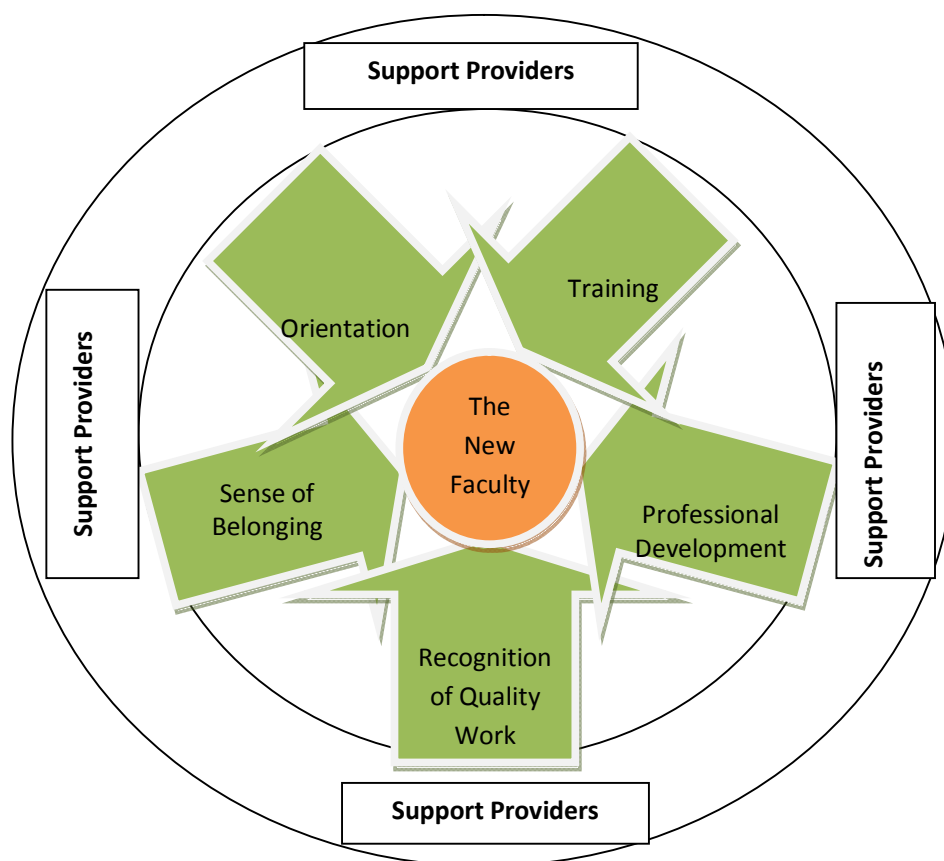

Fig. 1. Pictorial representation of Lyons's five principles to support faculty members

The support providers in Fig. 1 refer to all who play a part in the work of new faculty members. What they do or fail to do can influence how well new faculty members are helped to become familiar with and competent in performing their role expectations. These support providers must work with and for new faculty members to enable them to offer services that support and advance the achievement of institutional goals. These officials may include but not limited to the Dean, head of department (HoD), faculty members, administrators, and staff. It behooves institutional actors who have responsibility to ensure that the support providers actually work must assure that they *do* work to assist new faculty members to be effectively prepared to successfully contribute to institutional efforts for which they were employed.

The assumption is that knowledge is essential to determining the course of action one has to pursue. New faculty members need help. The best way to meet their needs is to hear from them. Authorities of post-secondary institutions cannot afford to allow the very people they have appointed to help with the achievement of institutional goals to be ineffective. Lyons has advanced five principles that primarily focused on supporting adjunct faculty [7]. As explored in this paper, the principles apply, arguably, in stronger measure and force to newly appointed faculty members. Therefore, HEIs players must study Lyons' principles to delineate and apply elements that bear on their faculty development efforts. In this regard, it is recommended for post-secondary institutions to create opportunity, create supervision, create community, create advancement, and create respect to advancing the professional development of faculty members [8].

12. RECOMMENDATION

Because professionals perform better on continuous professional development programs for which they were a part of designing [11], authorities of post-secondary institutions must actively engage new faculty members on what and *how* any measure meant to improve the way they function must be. This must include new faculty members whose out-of-department or -institution experience can greatly contribute to enriching the quality and outcomes of professional development activities. Similarly, new faculty members must be proactive. They should not expect that everything will be delivered to them on silver platter. They must take the initiative to talk to, ask questions, read,

explore and dare to engage others in meaningful conversations with a view to gathering information that would enable them to overcome any initial hurdles.

Too, new faculty members must be critical thinkers and self-reflective. They must undertake both reflection in and reflection on what they observe or do [14]. By such a reflective practice, they would be able to foresee areas needing attention and act accordingly. Thus they would not be helpless, dependent members of the institution but rather become independent, self-organized faculty members.

It is a truism that institutional acceptance is a sine qua non for reform of any type to succeed; otherwise it would certainly fail in the long term [9]. Hence, leaders who would lead change efforts in implementing Lyons's principles are implored to aim to fit their change model into the life and functioning of their institutions. This is because institutionalization is a process that makes change part of organizational life [9].

Further, professional associations can purposely shape change processes in post-secondary institutions. Thus, faculty professional associations such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the University Teachers Association of Ghana (UTAG) as well as subject- or discipline-specific associations must continue to champion the cause of new faculty members to ensure that they receive due support from their institutions. However, this cannot be done if new faculty members do not let their associations know of or about the institutional support that is lacking in their case.

Therefore, new faculty members should not hesitate to liaise with their professional associations to help them to get the needed institutional support for their professional development. It behooves the leaders of the associations to also avail themselves to help new members to find their grounds and to boost their morale toward establishing themselves as astute members of the academic community. This would be very helpful because it has been found that the use of networks and influential allies in mobilizing and supporting people for change works [15].

As the success or failure of colleges and universities partly depends on what is done to help employees to perform the roles for which

they were hired [9], post-secondary institutions must work to train their faculty members to acquire values and competencies necessary for them to succeed in performing their functions. Failure to do so would invariably result in under-performance, which ultimately would impact on the achievement of institutional goals. Therefore, HEIs must endeavor to study, adopt or adapt, and apply Lyons' principles to meet institutional needs with a view to increasing the relevance and productivity of newly engaged faculty members.

Moreover, there must be a one-to-one matching between new and experienced faculty members for the express purpose of helping new faculty members to acquire and develop skills in the conduct of research, scholarly writing and publishing – including the learning of unwritten rules that characterize the work of the academia [16]. In this regard, colleges and universities must promote inter-institutional, local and international scholar mentoring programs that aim to assist new faculty member throughout the critical first years of assuming faculty positions. This could help new faculty members to learn and to share best practices that are required for them to succeed and advance towards becoming seasoned professors. This initiative would require institutions to support or rather to continue to support cross-institutional and travel arrangements to help the new faculty to network and work with others to gain experiences across national and international contexts for future responsibilities [13].

Following from the immediate point above, post-secondary institutions must ensure that mentoring goes beyond simply pairing new and experienced faculty members. Mentoring efforts must establish that there is a good and healthy match between mentees and mentors that recognizes the professional needs and development of the mentee but also the personal interests that shape the mentee's needs and aspirations. Hence, I reiterate here the argument for deliberate institutional development and review of mentoring processes to continually determine the extent to which the parties involved are satisfied [16] with the mentoring arrangement and relationship. Implementation of policies that promote the filing and review of grievances and dissatisfaction is necessary. This must go beyond perfunctory rhetoric to embrace actions and responses that address any concerns to allow both the mentor and mentee to work in an atmosphere devoid of rancor or intimidation.

13. FINAL WORD

As has been indicated elsewhere [17], I solely humbly acknowledge and accept that this paper lacks the specificity required for HEIs or institutional actors to directly better able to assist new faculty members. However, I strongly believe that higher education leaders and representatives – including Deans and Heads of Departments or Units – are the best placed individuals to carve any specifics that would enable their particular institutions, departments, or units to implement measures to help newly appointed faculty members to achieve desired professional and personal development. Similarly, though the views espoused here are general, it is my modest belief that they shed light on assisting college actors to work to achieve stimulating and supportive environment for newly appointed faculty members to thrive and flourish as scholars, teachers, and researchers.

Too, the need to build and sustain partnerships cannot be more important in efforts at harnessing support to assist new faculty members to succeed as members of the academia. This collaboration must be seen as entailing social phenomena, such as relationship-building leadership development and logistics of tasks including how to communicate with others [3]. Such modest efforts, it can be argued, can potentially promote genuine, collaborative and beneficial work environment and ethics that would go a long way to aiding the professional development of new faculty members and the others they work with because collaborative partnerships have reciprocal benefits [3]. From my personal experience I know that I would have been a better prepared faculty member able to deal with unavoidable challenges in academic environments if the principles presented in this paper had been diligently applied to aid my professional development.

14. CONCLUSION

The analysis above shows that colleges and universities hire faculty members to join in efforts to develop the social and intellectual development of students as part of human resource development agenda of societies. As new members of post-secondary institutions, persons appointed as faculty members need the support of significant other people to succeed in playing their role expectations effectively. All employees of post-secondary institutions, from

the chief executive officer to the laborer or messenger, who supervise, work with, or work for new faculty members play or rather must play supporting roles in diverse ways to help new faculty members. This paper has highlighted Lyons's principles as a practical framework for assisting faculty members to develop professionally [9]. Thus, a focus on a thorough orientation to the institution, its culture, and its practices, adequate training in teaching and classroom management skills, an environment that creates a sense of belonging, continuous professional development, and a recognition of the quality work done by faculty members is expedient to assisting new faculty members to succeed if the reason for employing them and to nurture them to become seasoned professors is to be realized.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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