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Stuck in the Middle: Reflections from the AMCIS Mid-career Workshop

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Abstract:

Studies often show that mid-career faculty are some of the unhappiest people in academia. Many mid-career faculty have tenure, have more freedom to pursue different types of projects, and have many options ahead. Yet, mid-career faculty members also deal with the personal politics that arise during the tenure process, with figuring out what to do with the newfound freedom, and with finding their own way among the many options in an academic career path. As a junior faculty member, one often has a singular goal: obtaining tenure. However, mid-career faculty members need to concern themselves with not only becoming a "full" professor but also figuring out what to do once they have reached that milestone and feeling full in their overall career path. In this paper, we discuss the challenges associated with being a mid-career faculty member based on research and insights discussed in the mid-career workshop offered at the Americas Conference on Information Systems. We offer examples of how to support mid-career faculty through workshops and mentoring relationships. We also provide insights on how individuals at different career stages can support and understand the challenges among mid-career faculty in information systems.

Keywords: Mid-Career Faculty, Career Development, Academia, Mentoring, Workshops.

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1 Introduction

Mid-career associate professors comprise over half of the faculty in higher education (Baldwin, DeZure, Shaw, & Moretto, 2008). They are often the backbone of their institutions: they produce more published papers, teach more students, and participate in more service activities than faculty at any other career stage (DeFilippo & Giles, 2015). Typically, mid-career faculty are associate professors who have earned tenure and, after years of working toward achieving tenure, have earned the freedom to move forward with their careers on their own terms¹. In spite of their achievements, ongoing contributions, and freedom to define their career path, research has identified mid-career faculty as the least happy of all faculty ranks (Wilson, 2012).

One way to counteract the lower morale of mid-career faculty may be through professional development. Research has well documented junior faculty's needs and professional development's impact on them (Larson, Nelson, & Carter, 2015; Dennis, Valacich, Fuller, & Schneider, 2006; Watson & Dawson, 2007; Chen et al., 2015); however, the needs and challenges of mid-career faculty have received surprisingly little attention. Mid-career faculty play a critical role in the IS discipline and in the advancement of their universities and education of students; therefore, we need to understand the challenges of mid-career faculty.

In this paper, we reflect on our experiences as the creators, facilitators, and attendees of the Americas Conference on Information Systems (AMCIS) mid-career workshop. We do so to draw attention to the challenges faced by mid-career faculty in information systems using insights provided by the workshop. We share our reflections of recurring themes that have been discussed at this workshop and offer insights on how individuals can understand and/or support mid-career faculty throughout their careers.

2 Understanding Mid-career Issues in Information Systems

2.1 History of the AMCIS Mid-career Workshops

In 2013, Sandra Richardson and Stacie Petter approached the AMCIS 2014 conference chairs about hosting the first AMCIS mid-career workshop. The idea to create this workshop came about through discussions of the lingering effects from our respective tenure processes, which had occurred in the 2011-2012 academic year. During AMCIS 2013, we noted how our conversations had changed to focus on the new challenges of being mid-career faculty, and we realized that others might have similar questions, challenges, and concerns. After sharing the idea with some colleagues, we sought to create an AMCIS workshop to provide support, mentoring, and guidance for our peers as mid-career faculty.

The resulting 2014 AMCIS mid-career workshop had an interactive format to discuss "the mindset after tenure". We had two panels, one titled "the aftermath of tenure" (which discussed the challenges that occur as politics shift and change once the tenure decision has been made) and one titled "identifying goals" (which discussed how various mid-career faculty or faculty recently promoted to "full" professor identified the goals that kept them moving along in their career). Between each panel, interactive breakout sessions in which participants at roundtables had conversations on questions related to each theme occurred. The final activity was a group discussion about considering our future as we pondered how the IS field and academia may change throughout our careers.

In 2015, the AMCIS mid-career workshop adopted the theme "finding your fit" and had two panels, one titled "finding your fit" (which discussed how each person identified their definition of success and found their fit as they sought to achieve differing career goals) and the other titled "finding your brand" (which discussed how individuals could better market themselves to progress within their career). Similar to the previous year, the workshop had interactive breakouts and group discussions to allow participants to engage in small groups and with the larger group to discuss issues of concern. This workshop focused on

¹ The label of "mid-career faculty" can have different definitions depending on the region. In some areas, "mid-career" is a label based on the length of time a person has spent in the academy and does not depend on a permanent appointment or rank. In North America and some other regions, the "mid-career" label is typically associated with those faculty that have earned tenure or permanent appointment and/or have a title of associate professor (approximately six or more years into their academic career). Once faculty reach the title of "professor", it is less common to refer to these faculty in North America as "mid-career" even if they still have many years of an academic career ahead of them. Since this paper builds on reflections from the Americas Conference on Information Systems mid-career workshop, we use the definition of mid-career that is prevalent in North America, which is consistent with the vast majority of attendees at this workshop.

helping individuals find their place in their departments, universities, and the IS discipline based on their personal needs and goals.

Sandra Richardson and Ann Fruhling organized the workshop for AMCIS 2017² with the theme “defining your future and negotiating a path to your goals” to support mid-career faculty in thinking about how to identify opportunities that they want to consider in the short, medium, and long term and in developing an action plan to meet those goals.

2.2 Reflections from the AMCIS Mid-career Workshop

For this paper, we reflected on our experiences in organizing and participating in the AMCIS mid-career workshop. We each took notes, developed ideas for the workshop, and researched various topics about mid-career faculty over multiple years. To better structure our reflections on the workshop and common themes identified among mid-career faculty, we each developed our own reflections of key lessons learned and takeaways from each of the workshops. We captured some of these notes prior to the various workshop, some during them, and some after them.

The third author performed open coding on the reflections to identify common themes in our notes. Some codes focused on goals and motivations, some codes identified challenges, and other open codes identified strategies for addressing these issues. This process resulted in 35 open codes.

The other two authors provided themes for the axial codes based on the open codes and the reflections and notes that we all provided. The second author provided five themes and the first author provided four. We all completely agreed on the development of four of the five themes. The third author (who performed the initial open coding) then grouped the open codes in the axial codes. We all then evaluated the axial codes and groupings of open codes and agreed on the resulting axial codes and groupings of the open codes.

The axial coding process identified five themes from our reflections: 1) purpose and motivation, 2) power and politics, 3) work/life balance, 4) isolation, 5) mentoring. Table 1 shows the themes and the open codes that make up each one.

Table 1. Axial and Open Codes for Concerns among Mid-career IS Faculty

| Theme | Open codes |
|------------------------|---|
| Purpose and motivation | Goals, measuring success, personal strategy, changing jobs, pursuit of full professor, stuck, lost years, motivation, cultivating risky projects, need for a different mindset, unafraid of failure |
| Power and politics | Power dynamics, contrast with junior faculty, environment, institutional support, managing perceptions, voice, culture, grants |
| Work/life balance | Service commitments, busy work, work/life balance, distractions, external activities, internal activities, pay, pulled in multiple directions |
| Isolation | Collaboration, connection with others, perspective, safe space, taboo topics, tackle challenges |
| Mentoring | Mentoring/sponsoring, peer mentoring |

We recognize that the needs of mid-career faculty can vary across regions of the Americas and the world. To further bolster our reflections, we informally discussed issues associated with mid-career faculty from countries other than the USA and Canada via email, Skype, and in person. Specifically, we spoke with faculty about the academic career process in the countries of Brazil, Canada, Chile, Mexico, Denmark, Ireland, Australia, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, China, Singapore, and Taiwan. In these discussions, we focused on understanding more about the similarities and differences in mid-career faculty across the three world regions of the Association for Information Systems. By conducting this exercise, we could further identify how well our themes resonated with mid-career faculty in different regions of the world. In Section 2.3, we describe some of these reflections and provide insights from the literature on these topics.

² Sandra Richardson and Adriane Randolph (substituting for Stacie Petter following her transition into an AIS council role) had organized a workshop for AMCIS 2016 but could not hold it due to issues associated with scheduling and promoting the workshop.

2.3 Issues among Information Systems Mid-career Faculty

2.3.1 Purpose and Motivation

Researchers have explored the motivations and challenges of mid-career faculty outside of the IS discipline, and several key issues have emerged. One common challenge is the absence of motivating professional goals, which can result in individuals settling into a tedious and unexciting routine (Baldwin et al., 2008). Without the structure of tenure-track expectations and mentoring that is common for junior faculty on how to achieve tenure, mid-career faculty can quickly become overwhelmed by a lack of direction, confused by a dizzying array of possibilities, and/or have difficulty finding new possibilities (Strage, Nelson, & Meyers, 2008). Our reflections identified many struggles associated with defining a purpose and motivation among mid-career information systems faculty. As junior faculty, particularly in North America, one generally has quite a well-defined goal: achieving tenure. At the mid-career stage, many different options for goals exist. Many focus on achieving the rank of professor, but others question this goal. For some, achieving the rank of professor feels like the next step in career progression but holds minimal value or changes in terms of their career opportunities. Others have concerns about moving to a “full” professor status too quickly because it might affect their ability to change institutions (i.e., many jobs are assistant or associate rank as opposed to professor or open rank). Further, one could establish many additional options as goals in addition to titles. Some choose to concentrate on research, on teaching, on service, on administration, on entrepreneurship, on grants, on their personal goals outside of academia, or many other options or combination of options. Yet, if mid-career faculty do not clearly establish their goals, identifying criteria to know if they are “successful” in their career can feel arbitrary. It becomes increasingly difficult to identify if one is “doing the right things” to be a successful academic. As a result, mid-career faculty do not tend to make decisions based on long-term goals, which can result in a lack direction; mid-career faculty find themselves stuck in ambivalence, pulled in too many directions, and overwhelmed by busy work and a lack of significant achievement (Rockquemore, 2011).

This feeling of being pulled in so many directions creates a sense of feeling “stuck” or “trapped” in ambivalence. If not careful, the mid-career faculty member ends up focusing on busywork that leaves them little time for other aspects of their career or life that brings them joy. It can create a vacuum in that there can be an accumulation of “lost years” that arise post-tenure because the faculty member is trying to find their fit in academia.

Other challenges that happen for mid-career faculty concern learning how to change their mindset and learning how to embrace the newfound freedom of tenure. Pre-tenure, an academic’s life is quite task driven and aimed specifically at developing a research, teaching, and service portfolio that will create a successful tenure dossier. Post-tenure, one needs to manage opportunities and/or establish oneself in one’s field. Further, the common advice of senior faculty for junior faculty is to wait for the big, interesting, and risky research projects until after tenure is secure. The advice is appropriate for junior faculty who seek to prove themselves and earn a permanent appointment. The assumption is that, once they reach tenure, they can pursue these risky, but interesting, research projects with less risk to their career. However, following this advice post-tenure has its consequences as well. If an associate professor pursues this type of strategy and ends up with a gap in their research productivity, they may face challenges if seeking a change in institutions, during performance evaluations, or when seeking new opportunities. The setbacks in productivity can negatively impact one’s sense of purpose in the pursuit of larger, more innovative projects that take time to develop.

2.3.2 Power and Politics

Navigating through the politics and expectations of varying levels of an institution can be challenging at any phase of one’s career. We found that different power dynamics arise during mid-career. As junior faculty, one typically seeks to stay out of politics and seek protection from it while on the tenure-track. Post-tenure, mid-career faculty are supposed to have the freedom to speak up and share ideas or concerns; however, having a voice can have consequences if that voice runs counter to those who have the most influence in the department, college, or university. At many universities, it seems like only those at the rank of professor, or even only chaired professors, can fully speak their minds. Mid-career faculty still find themselves dodging political landmines in a department, school, or university as those in more senior positions still have influence and power over mid-career faculty (through mechanisms such as promotion to professor, course schedules, access to resources, influence of doctoral students, level of service requirements). At this mid-career stage, some faculty can find that they grow tired of the power

and politics of academia and consider pursuing careers in industry. Yet, it becomes difficult to give up the job security of tenure and the autonomy of academia. Some have described this feeling as being “handcuffed” to tenure.

Many associate professors seek to achieve the rank of professor; however, the criteria for achieving professor are far less transparent than the requirements for tenure. This lack of clarity related to criteria for achieving the rank of professor is a challenge for mid-career faculty, especially in the absence of the mentoring relationships that are more common at the junior faculty level (Buch, Huet, Rorrer, & Roberson, 2011). The academic environment can be both slow moving yet constantly changing. Just when it seems like one has a grasp on the politics, the leadership changes due to new department chairs, newly appointed deans, or a new university president and can impact everyone throughout the hierarchy. Discussions occur and decisions are made that impact mid-career faculty, but they often provide little to no input (e.g., new committees, new fellowships on campus, new positions, even furloughs with state institutions). As such, they need to navigate changing opportunities; the opportunity provided today might not be available tomorrow (or the next one could be better or worse). We found that many mid-career faculty find it perplexing and challenging to figure out how to manage their career as these changing opportunities arise.

Having few opportunities for career development is also a common challenge for mid-career faculty. Many state that they have difficulty staying current in their field and often find little support for opportunities related to continued education, training, or career development programs for associate professors (Buch et al., 2011). Resources tend to be scarce for those in the middle with the majority of support going to support the junior and more powerful senior faculty. Mid-career faculty can feel like they have little control over their research activities due to funding constraints. Many mid-career faculty find themselves trying to learn how to navigate the path of grants because “money speaks” at many institutions or provides the freedom to attend conferences or pursue new opportunities. Yet, the desire to pursue grants differs from the motivation, action, and expertise that one needs to acquire them. If one has not obtained grant-writing skills in their career, then one can find it challenging as mid-career faculty to gain expertise in grant-writing and try to continue their research to avoid being forgotten or perceived as not continuing to publish post-tenure. Unlike in other disciplines, many information systems departments do not recognize grant writing as a time-intensive research endeavor that can result in a gap in publication. While reskilling to pursue grant opportunities, the gap in publications can lead to the perception that a mid-career faculty member is being lazy or unproductive, which can lead to increased teaching expectations, service loads, and lower ratings in annual reviews (which may affect raises in pay or opportunity for promotion).

Overall, the university, college, and departmental culture, climate, policies, and practice established by institutional leadership determine how well mid-career faculty navigates these changing power dynamics. Institutional leaders play a critical role in creating a culture where mid-career can thrive or creating a culture in which mid-career faculty feel burned out, helpless, or forgotten.

2.3.3 Work-life Balance

Once one has achieved tenure, one can experience a feeling of being pulled into many different directions. Service expectations in the university increase since it is most often junior faculty that are shielded from service work (DeFilippo & Giles, 2015). Yet, achieving tenure also creates a need for the faculty member to serve on additional departmental, college, and university committees. At this stage, many mid-career faculty also find themselves running programs (e.g., undergraduate or graduate programs). External service expectations in the field increase as well through editorial appointments, additional reviewer requests, or other means to engage with the field.

Regardless of one’s age during mid-career, other personal distractions will likely also impact how much one can accomplish. The challenge of juggling so many things can be overwhelming. Without mentors to help navigate the new environment and expectations, many find it challenging to negotiate these conflicting pressures in a way that also enables them to craft a career path and pursue their own professional goals (DeFilippo & Giles, 2015). The sense that there is always more research to conduct, another paper to write, another committee to serve on, and another paper to review in conjunction with personal matters that never cease, which creates a sense of being overwhelmed among mid-career faculty. Some mid-career faculty are disciplined at creating boundaries between work life and home life. Some mid-career faculty are adept at setting aside time for hobbies or activities that bring enjoyment. We also discovered that many at the mid-career level struggle in their effort to “do it all” by trying to balance work life, home life, and personal goals.

There might be a sense of burnout after the long and tiring push towards tenure. Obligations towards young children, aging parents, or others in one's family can increase the demands on one's time. Family members may not understand that, just because one has reached tenure, does not mean one simply plans to only teach one's classes and call it a day. All of those things that were put off "until I get tenure" are now waiting and vying for attention. Even finding time to prioritize sleep, a necessary human function, can be particularly challenging for many mid-career faculty.

2.3.4 Isolation

One recurring theme in our reflections about mid-career faculty is the feeling of isolation. The feeling of being isolated, invisible, and unrewarded is common among mid-career faculty. Mid-career faculty are often in a quagmire of service work (both internal service and professional service). They feel at times that they are invisible and unrewarded for this work. Mid-career faculty often assume challenging and unpopular roles in their institutions, are frequently at the bottom of the list for rewards and incentives, and often find little institutional support for their research and professional interests (Strage et al., 2008).

Many mid-career faculty seek out strategies to connect with others whether it be through collaboration efforts for conducting research or activities of service. However, finding those individuals that are safe to connect with, talk with, and share struggles with can be challenging. The institutional structures that facilitated collaboration while on the tenure-track are not common at the mid-career phase. Some mid-career faculty experience a deep sense of competitiveness if there are limited opportunities for higher-ranking positions or a desire to stay ahead in research topics. As mid-career faculty explore their different options and try to define what it means to be successful, it can be challenging to express these feelings to others. They can face difficulty in finding a safe audience to share thoughts or solicit advice. Some topics are considered "taboo" to discuss among others, such as desires to change one's job (whether it be shifting into a new role at one's current institution or looking for an opportunity in another institution). Many mid-career faculty fear that sharing discontent in their role, particularly when they still have room to grow in their career, can be damaging if the shift in role or institution does not work out. We reflected that, often, the only safe place to have these discussions is among close friends that also understand academia; however, such discussions limit perspectives, ideas, and knowledge that might be useful to navigate these types of transitions.

2.3.5 Mentoring

While some universities offer mentoring programs to junior faculty or incoming faculty, they seem to view the value of mentoring as less important for mid-career faculty. At this stage of their career, mid-career faculty are more likely to become mentors to junior faculty or new hires at their university. They may take on increased roles mentoring and advise doctoral students, and others can assume that, since mid-career faculty have reached the milestone of tenure and/or promotion, they have "figured it out". However, there are still opportunities for mentoring to aid and support mid-career faculty during this period.

Further, mid-career faculty need to identify individuals that can serve as sponsors (i.e., advocates). Sponsors go beyond the role of mentor (which often involves sharing advice and providing guidance) and actively promote and encourage others for to undertake opportunities; they invest in the careers and lives of others and develop them as leaders (Hewlett, 2013). Given that mid-career faculty often have new opportunities to engage with the profession as associate editors for our top journals, to undertake leadership roles (e.g., in their department, college, university, or our professional association and its communities), to change jobs (in their current university or in a new one), or to pursue myriad other possibilities, identifying sponsors (who are typically more senior peers or members in the field) can help them challenge themselves and explore new things.

Peer mentoring is also another opportunity that some mid-career faculty may find valuable. Peer mentoring occurs when individuals at similar status levels support and guide one another for career development (Eby, 1997). We found that having a support network of friends, colleagues, or others that understand the profession, understand the challenges of academia, one's university, and/or the stage of being a mid-career faculty member can offer valuable support when faculty struggle with the pressures of academia. Peer mentors may or may not work at the same institution, be a co-author, or a friend; it is implicit that that peer mentors are individuals that can provide support and advice and are willing to share their experiences. However, the opportunity for peer-mentoring can be limited in institutions, university systems, or countries with fewer opportunities for upward mobility. Peers are one's competition, so becoming vulnerable or relying on someone that might be a person that is being considered for the same

position is not always an attractive option. In these environments where the focus is competition as opposed to collaboration, mentoring (and particularly peer mentoring) may not be an attractive option.

3 Supporting Information Systems Mid-career Faculty

3.1 Mid-career Workshops

For mid-career faculty who seek advice and guidance outside of, or in addition to, their own universities, the discipline can serve as a means to offer mentorship. In the information systems discipline, we provide discipline-level mentoring opportunities for doctoral students through doctoral consortia or junior faculty through junior faculty workshops. In 2013, Sandra Slaughter and Jason Thatcher launched the first Mid-career Mentoring Workshop at the International Conference for Information Systems (ICIS). This workshop included panelists to offer attendees insights on various roles that mid-career faculty may consider in a university and in the discipline. The panelists included well-regarded, established professors that represented different regions of the world, different career choices, and different goals.

The mid-career workshop launched at the Americas Conference for Information Systems (AMCIS) uses a different approach than the mid-career workshop at ICIS. Mid-career faculty developed the workshop for other mid-career faculty who faced their own struggles and challenges post-tenure. Given this different focus of the AMCIS mid-career workshop, the facilitators sought out panelists that were peer level or one step ahead (i.e., recently promoted to full). The panelists represented different types of universities, different career goals, and different lengths of time post-tenure.

Both the ICIS and AMCIS mid-career workshops offer a means for mid-career faculty to socialize. Socialization is “the process by which one is taught and learns ‘the ropes’ of a particular organizational role” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). At the ICIS Mid-career Mentoring Workshop, senior faculty offer a means of serial socialization in which they are role models who can offer valuable insights on challenges, advantages, and lessons learned through their ability to reflect on their career to date (Driscoll et al., 2009). Having role models can provide value by lessening the confusion for mid-career faculty on how to reach certain career goals (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Yet, there is value in considering other types of socialization processes as well.

The AMCIS mid-career workshop offers a different means for socialization for mid-career faculty. Given that the workshop essentially comprises peers (or those that are just barely a step ahead as a newly appointed professor), the participants can collectively socialize, discuss their experiences, and solicit practical advice about issues they face in their universities with others at a similar level (Driscoll, Parkes, Tilley-Lubbs, Brill, & Pitts Bannister, 2009). The lack of senior faculty shifts the power dynamic mid-career faculty are often subject to and allows them to concretely discuss topics such as work/life balance, how to seek out the right opportunities to serve one’s department or university (and say “no” to the wrong opportunities to serve), and whether they should have a concrete plan for their next career goal (not having one is quite common). The answers provided tend to be actionable and practical, which is common in this peer-mentoring approach. For example, in one AMCIS mid-career workshop, a discussion arose about how to set up and plan for a sabbatical. Given that first sabbaticals tend to occur for faculty when they reach the mid-career stage, we had some people in the room that had already had their first sabbatical, some who were about to have one, and others that were curious as to how to plan or think about their first sabbatical. Conversations were candid, and attendees asked specific, operational questions because the format of the workshop allowed attendees to discuss the practical details associated with experiencing one’s first sabbatical or creating a similar experience if their home institutions did not offer sabbaticals.

3.2 Mentoring

Research in disciplines beyond the IS discipline has found multiple strategies that can support faculty in their mid-career. Mentoring represents one strategy (Baldwin et al., 2008) that can be valuable as mid-career faculty navigate challenges and develop new skills (Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001). Many forms of mentoring exist; researchers have defined the most traditional forms as a relationship between someone more advanced in their career (i.e., mentor) with someone newer in their career that supports the career development for both parties (i.e., protégé) (Healy & Welchert, 1990). In these more traditional forms of mentoring, the relationship is dyadic with an implicit hierarchy. Even if a hierarchy is not imposed,

a hierarchical relationship often arises, which can create feelings of isolation or self-doubt (Driscoll et al., 2009).

Yet, mentoring has evolved over the years; researchers have come to define it more as “a reciprocal learning relationship characterized by trust, respect, and commitment, in which the mentor supports the professional and personal development of another by sharing his or her life experiences, influence, and expertise” (Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, 2008, p. 555). These new definitions have emerged as new forms of mentoring have deviated from a dyadic, hierarchical interaction among colleagues. For example, mentoring does not have to be a dyadic structure between mentor and protégé; it may occur in the form of a group with two or more members who interact and support one another (Santucci et al., 2008). Mentoring no longer requires one person in the relationship to be significantly more advanced in their career than the other. It is becoming more common to embrace mentoring in which the mentor is a step ahead (i.e., slightly more advanced in their career) than the protégé (Ensher et al., 2001). Peer or lateral mentoring in which individuals at similar status levels provide support for career development is also an alternative to hierarchical mentoring (Eby, 1997). Studies have demonstrated the success of peer mentoring arrangements for mid-career academics in other disciplines (Baldwin et al., 2008; Buch et al., 2011). Peer mentoring arrangements can be more effective than traditional one-to-one dyadic modes because mentoring relationships help alleviate isolation and trust and power issues (Driscoll et al., 2009) and are more inclusive of women and other minority groups (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007).

Reasons for seeking mentorship include a desire for skill development and coaching. For instance, mid-career faculty often seek to develop skills that differ from ones they learned early in their careers; these new skills include running meetings, leading committees, and fostering collaborations (Laursen & Rocque, 2009). Further, mid-career faculty can feel forgotten post-tenure because formal mentoring relationships pre-tenure seem to come to a close once one achieves tenure.

One source of finding potential mentors—whether traditional, a step ahead, or group—is in one’s own academic institution. We recommend that department chairs offer support to mid-career faculty through mentoring programs (Baldwin et al., 2008). Finding mentoring relationships, of any type, at one’s home institution has many benefits. The proximity and opportunities for rich conversation situated in the context of the university and department environment can offer useful guidance to mid-career faculty in identifying the next steps of their careers. However, not all mid-career faculty can find traditional, step-ahead, or peer mentors at their academic institutions. Smaller departments, differing career goals and trajectories, personality conflicts, limited resources, and politics can sometimes limit the opportunities for finding a mentor in one’s department or university.

One can also find potential mentors via career coaching. While a lesser-used approach, mid-career faculty who struggle to find others that can serve in a mentoring role may find that a career coach can help them develop and improve their skills. The challenge can be finding a career coach that understands the demands and politics of academia; however, there are career coaches with this type of expertise that can be a source of support if support from fellow academics is not enough to meet one’s needs.

3.3 Summary

Through our reflections as mid-career faculty, working with mid-career faculty, and supporting mid-career faculty, we identify recommendations or insights for individuals at various stages of their careers (see Table 2). For doctoral students and assistant professors, we can better inform and prepare them for this in-between period of their careers. Associate professors have the means to obtain support and guidance through this stage. And, for professors or chaired professors, department chairs, or deans, we offer ideas on how these individuals can support mid-career faculty through this challenging time.

Table 2. Guidance for Faculty at Various Stages

| Audience | Insights about mid-career faculty |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Doctoral students | At this stage, one primarily focuses on making it through the learning process as a doctoral student and planning for tenure. Doctoral students should realize that achieving the milestone of tenure and/or promotion to associate does not solve all problems. |
| Assistant professors | In this stage, one primarily focuses on earning tenure and/or promotion; however, an understanding of the challenges that can occur in mid-career can help assistant professors better deal with this transition. |
| Associate professors | For mid-career faculty who struggle with one or more challenges mentioned in this paper, they can realize that they are not alone in the struggle. Further, one can access resources (i.e., mid-career workshops through the AIS) and strategies (i.e., mentoring) that can help them. Identify fellow mid-career faculty and find ways to be supportive of peers. |
| Professors and chaired professors | Although tenure does change the power dynamic among faculty at different levels in a department or university, professors and chaired professors in IS still hold often significant power. If a mid-career faculty member seeks to achieve the rank of professor, the individual often must stay in good standing among faculty at the professor level to reach this level of promotion. Professors and chaired professors should recognize the challenges that mid-career faculty face and appreciate the challenges that they might be struggling with. As appropriate, seek out opportunity to mentor, sponsor, or support mid-career faculty in career. |
| Department chairs/deans | Mid-career faculty often are asked to bear the brunt of service work in many departments. Given that IS departments can be smaller than other departments in a college/school, performing such service work might mean that IS faculty have disproportionate service commitments at the college/school and university levels. Further, new course development and preparation might fall on mid-career faculty in an effort to “shield” junior faculty. Department chairs and deans should realize the amount of internal service they require mid-career faculty to perform and keep it in mind when examining performance and/or allocating resources to faculty members. |

4 Facilitating Mid-career Workshops

Through our experiences of creating, developing, attending, and engaging with the AMCIS Mid-career Faculty Workshop, we have several learned lessons about supporting and running it and the needs of the diverse mid-career faculty that attend it. In this section, we share these lessons. These lessons may help others who may need to facilitate the AMCIS workshop in the future or for those who seek to develop a program to support mid-career faculty across disciplines at their own universities or localized workshops for specific regions in the AIS.

Given that AMCIS has an inclusionary spirit and often includes faculty from a variety of backgrounds, we specifically sought to identify panelists that could bring a variety of perspectives. We recognized that our potential participants would come from a variety of backgrounds. Some panelists came from teaching institutions that did not necessarily award tenure, and we also had panelists that came from research schools. Some panelists had a strong research focus, and some panelists were exploring opportunities in administration. Some came from business schools and some from non-business schools. We found that, given the variety of goals that exist for mid-career faculty, this deliberate attention to different types of diversity among our panelists created opportunities for attendees to connect with people in the room (both panelists and fellow participants) on many different levels. We learned through our conversations that, while we all had aspects of our careers and goals that differed, we all had similarities from which we could learn from one another.

Lesson 1: Incorporating panelists and facilitators with diverse backgrounds, interests, and goals (research/teaching schools, regions, and career goals, among others) enabled new connections to occur among all participants.

When we initially proposed the mid-career workshop for AMCIS, we were mindful that we sought to create a mid-career workshop by mid-career faculty for mid-career faculty. In this workshop, we wanted to provide a safe place for mid-career faculty to talk about those topics that might create a sense of isolation. From our own experiences and conversations, we had many topics that we wanted to discuss with others, but they felt taboo to discuss with people that had a more senior status in the field. We had questions about how to move to a new university and how to navigate post-tenure politics, we felt overwhelmed with service commitments, and we wanted to learn from our peers about their experiences. We have received

the advice on multiple occasions that we should have senior scholars present as panelists and mentors at the AMCIS mid-career workshop, but often senior scholars themselves made this recommendation. While we did not wish to exclude anyone from participating and offering their advice to mid-career faculty, we had concerns that the presence of an established IS professor could change how participants engaged with the workshop. We welcomed step-ahead mentors (i.e., those that had been promoted to full professor one to two years prior); however, we did not actively recruit panelists or participants that had been promoted to a professor many years before.

During the course of administering our workshop, we could see how power dynamics and conversations shifted in the room based on who was present. We did have more established, senior, full-rank professors join the workshop from time to time. We could easily notice how the conversations shifted, how participants appeared less candid, and how, at times, conversations ceased. As a result of these experiences, we offer the following lesson.

Lesson 2: Including peers and individuals who are a step ahead can be valuable. However, the workshop's conversations and its goals and nature will likely shift when an implicit or explicit hierarchy among participants exists.

With the AMCIS mid-career workshop, we sought to emphasize a peer mentoring culture among mid-career faculty. We wanted to create opportunities for mid-career faculty to support and mentor one another. As we progress in our career, we can make connections and identify those that we might sponsor in the future. Unlike many other workshops in our field in which people attend only once (i.e., doctoral consortiums, junior faculty consortium), we sought to make the AMCIS mid-career workshop something that participants could attend again and again. They would meet new people, reestablish current connections, and gain new advice and support from year to year as their careers shift and goals changed.

We have struggled in changing the mindset of participants (and potentially department chairs that fund attendance to these events) that the workshop is one they need attend only once—that they can gain more from attending it multiple times. We have tried to encourage participants to engage with each other after the workshop via a LinkedIn group but did not have much success. Anecdotal evidence from past attendees suggests that many individuals did make new connections but found it challenging to maintain those connections once the conference concluded unless they developed a strong personal connection. Although we struggled in creating this supportive, developmental culture among participants, we still recommend that the AMCIS mid-career workshop still strive to have this focus and goal by trying different types of activities and finding new ways to build connections among participants.

Lesson 3: Focus on developing a workshop for participants to attend again and again with a different experience by encouraging them to build a network of peers.

Through our expanded discussion with those from other countries in the Americas and across the world, we recognized that some issues are specific to a region or university. Not only does the definition of mid-career faculty vary around the world, but so does the possibility of receiving tenure, the process for promotion, the titles of faculty members at each rank, and so on. For instance, in some countries, many mid-career faculty have no further aspirations beyond becoming an associate professor (or an equivalent role) with a permanent appointment. At this stage of their career, they have job security with a title that earns them respect in their community. These mid-career faculty are not looking for the next opportunity or promotion because it offers little value. In some regions of the world, once individuals receive a permanent appointment, they need to write grants and visibly promote their universities to further their careers. Other countries only universities to promote individuals to professor if a position becomes available through retirements or attrition, which makes the process of moving out of the mid-career stage appear virtually impossible and/or extremely competitive.

While mid-career faculty around the world experience many differences, we found that, regardless of how one defines mid-career faculty or a region's specific issues, the five themes we identified from reflecting on the workshop were still relevant (though they could manifest in different ways depending on the region). As such, mid-career workshops at a local level that discuss region-specific issues could also benefit mid-career faculty. These workshops might be localized for a university, a country (potentially through AIS chapter conferences), or a world region (potentially via workshops at AMCIS, ECIS, and PACIS). The insights from the lessons and these themes could guide localized workshops offered by AIS chapters or regional AIS conferences.

Lesson 4: While the general themes faced by mid-career faculty seem to be global in nature, they may manifest differently based on the locale. Providing regionally based mid-career workshops allows participants to gain advice, guidance, and support specific to their location and needs.

We also recognize that the “mid-career” label has its complications. Even with the definition traditionally used in North America, which appears on a surface level well defined (i.e., permanent position and rank of associate professor), many exceptions exist. Some faculty may not receive tenure at their home institution and find themselves starting over at a new school with a title of “assistant professor”. These individuals are not junior faculty in a traditional sense; however, they are also not mid-career faculty in a traditional sense. They face some similar challenges in terms of needing direction and purpose, isolation, and work-family balance but do not necessarily have a clear home in any of the traditional workshops offered for faculty support. Further, other faculty have been at the mid-career stage for quite a long time due to reasons such as limited upward mobility in their career or requirements for “full professor” that might be nearly impossible to meet in their institution. These individuals might be well known or respected for their research or teaching in the field but might feel uncomfortable attending a mid-career workshop if they do not have a direct career path upward.

Also, different regions can understand mid-career faculty differently. For many parts of the world, “mid-career” is simply the mid-stage of one’s academic career. It is based on age or years of service as opposed to earning certain achievements (such as earning tenure or a specific rank). When one considers mid-career faculty as those that are “middle aged”, the potential group broadens. It might include those that are assistant professors that earned their PhD later in life after having one or more careers in industry first. Mid-career could include full professors that earned a PhD younger in life and received promotions fairly quickly. The broad audience could help workshops draw a larger audience and perspectives; however, it may create challenges based on the expected nature of the topics in that the participants are at different stages of their careers.

We defined the AMCIS mid-career workshop as being for those who have earned tenure and/or have been promoted to associate professor (or an equivalent title). With that said, we have not turned away any participant due to their status. For example, several universities in the United States do not offer tenure but will promote faculty to the rank of associate professor. We have welcomed participants and panelists with this profile (promotion without tenure). While our definition for mid-career for the workshop might have exceptions, having a definition allows individuals to self-select if it fits their needs. The topics discussed in the workshop are based on the assumption of these milestones, so it can create an opportunity for people to have some shared experiences to discuss. Thus, those who run mid-career workshops need to clearly define what they mean by “mid-career”, which can ensure the audience is prepared and ready to engage in the discussion.

Lesson 5: Clearly defining a mid-career workshop’s goals and identifying what “mid-career” means is important to ensure participants have an experience that they expect.

5 Conclusion

Mid-career IS faculty are a critical component of the faculty workforce. Being a mid-career faculty member has various benefits, such as the freedom that arises due to tenure. However, we need to acknowledge that with this freedom comes new responsibilities and burdens that those individuals in this stage may not readily identify or realize. Hence, we need to support and guide our mid-career faculty through this process. With this paper, we offer insights into this challenging phase that we gained through our experiences with organizing, facilitating, and attending the AMCIS mid-career workshop. These annual workshops focus on providing key guidance and insights to support mid-career faculty in their pursuit of full careers.

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