

Impact of Faculty Development on Quality of Life

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a survey asking about the impact of attending professional development on 12 quality of life (QOL) factors and given during a collaborative session at the Adult Higher Education Alliance (AHEA) Annual Conference. Results showed that participants reported positive outcomes on the factors of increases in network of colleagues and confidence, satisfaction with career, job motivation, willingness to take on new challenges, sense of belonging, and feelings of health and well-being. During discussion, participants described the very positive impact of attending AHEA conferences over the years. Recommendations are made to create an AHEA mentoring program and provide more formally designed activities and opportunities during the conference to connect new and experienced conference attendees.

Keywords: Faculty Development, Higher Education, Quality of Life

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The numbers of adults taking classes in the past 20 years has risen significantly (U. S. Department of Education, 2007). A study of adult learners conducted by the University of Oxford revealed that classes improved overall physical and mental health and that individuals were more satisfied with their careers and lives. In addition, students reported benefits including increases in self-confidence, a greater feeling of self-control, and more willingness to take on challenges. Some said classes made them motivated to be more active even though the classes did not involve physical activity (Oxford News, 2016). Other researchers have found similar results with adults who attend a variety of types of classes with them reporting positive impacts on health, well-being, and social bonding (Launay, Machin, & Dunbar, 2016; Pearce, 2016). Quality of life (QOL) factors such as these are increasingly viewed as important to the mental and physical health of individuals and has led to increased research on how outcomes of different activities make people feel, function, and evaluate their lives (Pearce, 2016).

Faculty who teach in colleges and universities are experts in their discipline and often have no training in how to teach. As a result, many colleges and universities have created teaching and learning centers to build and enhance faculty teaching skills, and some offer training to help faculty develop their scholarship abilities. For many years, the primary way of assessing these programs has been participation numbers and satisfaction feedback (Chism & Sazabo, 1997; Fink, 2013). While a limited number of assessments have been conducted on the job-related outcomes of initiatives (Taylor, 2017), I did not find studies evaluating the outcomes of faculty development workshops on QOL factors such confidence, feelings of well-being, job satisfaction, motivation, and recreational activities.

Methodology

Because of this lack of information, I developed a self-report survey based on QOL categories presented in the literature. Research in the literature commonly used surveys as a way to gather information about quality of life. The survey asked faculty about the impact of teaching workshops on 12 QOL factors: satisfaction with career, level of confidence in job, feeling of control of work tasks, job motivation, willingness to take on new challenges at work, network of colleagues, sense of belonging, efficiency in doing work, time with family and friends, time spent in recreational activities, physically active, and feelings of health and well-being. I administered the survey to a pilot group of 13 faculty at my institution.

Findings revealed that faculty in the pilot group reported increases in QOL factors as a result of taking teaching professional development workshops. The majority believed they have experienced increases in their network of colleagues and confidence, willingness to take on new challenges, satisfaction with career, job motivation, and feelings of well-being. To expand the data on this topic to individuals outside of my institution and to gather qualitative data, I administered the survey to the seven individuals who attended my session at the 2018 Adult and Higher Education Alliance National Conference. A variety of people attended the session, ranging from active faculty, to an instructional designer, to retired faculty.

The survey asked about the impact of taking professional development workshops and programs on the same 12 quality of life factors. Because of the variety of the jobs of people attending, professional development was expanded from sessions just on teaching to any type of workshop that was job related. All individuals were either working in higher education or had worked in higher education and retired. Additionally, the survey given at the AHEA conference asked how many workshops they had attended in the past two years and if they were early, middle, or late stage in their career. The questions used a five-point Likert evaluation scale of positively impacted to a great extent, positively impacted to some extent, no impact, negatively impacted to some extent, negatively impacted to a great extent. The survey received Institutional Review Board approval.

After individuals completed the survey, we spent the remainder of the session discussing their responses. I asked people to report their responses by a show of hands during the session and everyone turned their surveys into me at the end of the session. The small size of the group enabled everyone to share and discuss their reactions in more depth than the pilot group.

Results and Discussion

For analysis during the session and in this paper, I combined the two categories of *positively impacted to a great extent* and *positively impacted to some extent*, and the two categories of *negatively impacted to some extent* and *negatively impacted to a great extent*. Combining the two positive and two negative categories allowed for ease of analysis during the session when time was limited. The same strategy was used for this report. All participants evaluated the factors of satisfaction with career, sense of belonging, and confidence in job as positive outcomes of attending professional development sessions. Other factors rated as having a positive impact by six participants and no impact by one individual were feelings of health and well-being, control

of work tasks, network of colleagues, and willingness to take on new challenges. The remaining factors were evaluated as positive by fewer participants. Table 1 displays the complete results and QOL factors are displayed in descending order of impact beginning with the ones receiving the most scores of positively impacting their quality of life.

Table 1

Impact of Professional Development on Quality of Life Factors

<u>QOL Factors</u>	<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>No Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
Satisfaction with career	7		
Sense of belonging	7		
Confidence in job	7		
Feelings of health and well-being	6		
Control of work tasks	6	1	
Network of colleagues	6	1	
Willingness to take on new challenges	6	1	
Job motivation	4	3	
Efficiency in work	2	5	
Time in recreation	2	5	1
Physically active	1	5	1
Time with family and friends	1	4	2

During conversation with participants, they said that while the results were not surprising, they had previously not thought about most of these as outcomes. Instead, they had always viewed the primary outcomes of professional development workshops as being increases in specific job skills. The importance of a sense of belonging and creating a network of colleagues was discussed and subsequently linked by all attendees to feelings of health and well-being and time with friends. This connection constituted much of the discussion time. Participants especially wanted to share what it was like for them to attend the AHEA conference. Examples of comments are “I feel like I can be who I am at sessions and this makes me feel good,” “I feel like I am with ‘my people’ at this conference,” and “I have developed a wide network of colleagues that I can call on during the year.”

Other factors participants talked about where time spent doing recreational activities and being physically active. While the majority of individuals evaluated these factors as not having positive or negative outcomes, the ones who did see them as positive outcomes stated that professional development activities helped them to establish connections with others that they were then able to carry on afterwards. Conversations around this outcome resulted in three individuals stating that had not looked at it in this manner and they would change their response to “positively impacted to some extent,” as they sometimes established relationships that resulted in meals and other activities together that could be called recreational activities and, in some instances, physical activities.

Stage of career was related to their responses. Four individuals reported themselves as being in late career, two in early career, and one in mid-career. In discussion, participants reported that when they were early in their career they saw more increases in factors such as level of confidence, job motivation, and feeling of control of work tasks. Later and mid-career

participants said that a sense of belonging and network of colleagues became more important as they moved through their career. Some said that attending AHEA conferences over the years had become very important to them in fulfilling this desire on a continuing basis. Individuals later in their career also reported attending fewer (1-5) developmental sessions in the past two years than early and mid-career participants who had all attended more than five sessions in the past two years.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of the survey administered at AHEA were similar to those in the pilot study and in the literature. The ability to discuss the results in some length during the AHEA provided additional meaning to the numerical results. The pilot study at my institution and the presentation at the AHEA conference revealed that asking individuals who have participated in professional development about the impact of their attendance on their quality of life can yield valuable insights. This type of survey is a more in-depth method of determining outcomes of attendance as compared to satisfaction surveys. The results provide a holistic perspective on the impact of programs and give an additional incentive for administrators to offer programs. Quality of life assessments would be most useful when asking people about attendance at numerous sessions rather than at the end of an individual session.

Noteworthy results of this study and for this paper was the value people saw in attending AHEA conferences. Building and maintaining connections over the years was viewed as being very important to attendees of the session. Based on the results of my session, I recommend that the formal mentoring program among AHEA members under consideration by the board be established. A second recommendation is that the conference planning committee schedule a formalized time during the conference that new conference attendees and seasoned conference attendees meet and talk. While there are several times during the conference that informal conversations can occur such as lunches and the scholarship reception, human behavior is such that people often have a tendency to talk with people they already know. Designing specific activities for seasoned and new members to become acquainted could help foster the development of these important relationships that can continue throughout the years. Examples might be asking people to sit at lunch with someone they do not know and discussing things such as their backgrounds, their career path, and why they are attending the conference. Immediately before the keynote speakers could be an alternate time for having a “get-to-know you” formal activity as these presentations are usually attended by many people. Organizing dinners for people who would be interested in eating together and who could then sign-up for them could be another method of creating relationships. In conclusion, my work to date has shown that attending professional development workshops and the AHEA conference can have a very positive impact on individual’s lives. Individuals who have these types of opportunities would be well served to take advantage of them and conference planners can take heart at the positive outcomes of their work and look for additional ways for attendees to create relationships.

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