Practical Extensions to the Donut Model for Agriculture Teacher Success

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Introduction

As the agriculture teacher shortage continues (Eck & Edwards, 2019; Smith et al., 2024), new ways of approaching teacher retention are essential (Haddad et al., 2024). This philosophical abstract builds upon a recently introduced framework for teacher success and retention, the *Donut Model for Agriculture Teacher Success* (McKim et al., 2024), by foregrounding the work responsibilities of agriculture teachers. Existing scholarship illustrates work-life balance is a concern given the ever-expanding responsibilities and expectations placed upon agriculture teachers (Marzolino et al., 2024; Solomonson et al., 2022; Sorensen & McKim, 2014; Thieman et al., 2012; Traini et al., 2019, 2021; Queen et al., 2025). Concurrently, scholarship notes some work responsibilities are motivators for teachers entering and remaining in the profession (Clark et al., 2014; Crutchfield et al., 2013; De Lay & Washburn, 2013; Eck et al., 2021; Lemons et al., 2015; Moser & McKim, 2020; Igo & Perry, 2019; Solomonson & Retallick, 2018). This suggests complexity in how teachers view different work responsibilities, with some contributing to dissatisfaction and attrition while others contribute to satisfaction and retention. This philosophical abstract explores the complexity of agriculture teacher work responsibilities via practical extensions to the *Donut Model for Agriculture Teacher Success* (McKim et al., 2024).

Framework: Donut Model for Agriculture Teacher Success

The *Donut Model for Agriculture Teacher Success* (McKim et al., 2024) was established to conceptualize and support teacher success. In the model, job success was defined as a teacher's level of productivity existing between an individually identified lower boundary (i.e., level of productivity which minimally satisfies their agriculture teacher identity) and an upper boundary (i.e., level of productivity that encroaches upon their ability to accomplish other work and life roles). In this way, job success was defined as doing enough in each dimension of work to uphold their professional identity as an agriculture teacher but less than what exceeds their capacity for success across all dimensions of work and life. McKim et al. (2024) linked the model to teacher retention through shifts in an individual's lower and upper bounds caused by new life roles (e.g., becoming a parent, caretaker for aging parents) reducing the maximum productivity an individual can accomplish within work dimensions (i.e., lowering upper bounds) and disciplinary pressures to accomplish more (i.e., raising lower bounds). Authors suggested these shifts yield "overlap effect" wherein an individual's lower boundary exceeds their upper boundary, resulting in attrition (McKim et al., 2024).

The *Donut Model for Agriculture Teacher Success* foregrounds teachers' conceptualization of productivity boundaries and links it to success and retention (McKim et al., 2024). A limitation of the model, however, is how this conceptualization interacts with the lived realities of being an agriculture teacher. These lived realities have been described as "a convoluted job description and growing list of competencies" (Traini et al., 2021, p. 167). In its current form, the model fails

to adequately explain how an individual interacts with those responsibilities. In this philosophical companion to McKim et al. (2024), we offer extensions to the model which attempt to address this limitation.

Responsibilities

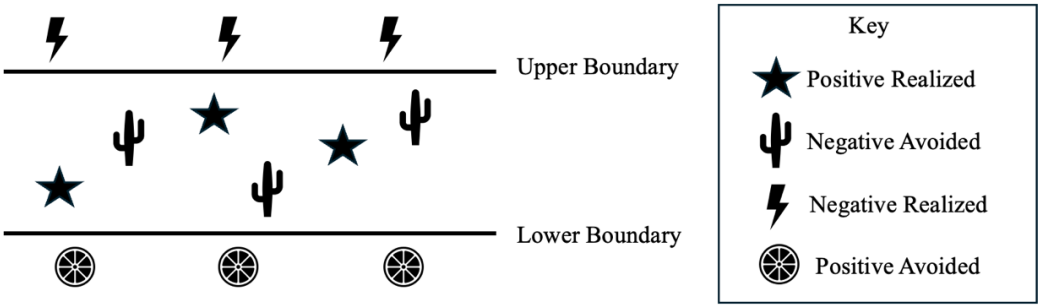
To explore the responsibilities faced by agriculture teachers using the *Donut Model for Agriculture Teacher Success*, we first considered how teachers may conceptualize a responsibility. Teachers view responsibilities on multiple continua (Lauermann, 2014), two of which are explored in this philosophical abstract. First, teachers react to a responsibility either negatively or positively. Second, teachers identify a responsibility as something they will be asked to do relatively infrequently or relatively frequently. Evaluation of responsibilities on these two continua are complex (Lauermann, 2014); a teacher may view a responsibility negatively because they feel unprepared to enact the responsibility, because they do not see the responsibility as valuable, or for many other reasons. Additionally, the frequency of a task is likely viewed relative to expectations. For example, meeting once a week in a committee may be viewed as frequent if this exceeds expectations, whereas managing classroom behavior once a day may be viewed as infrequent if less than expectations. The motivations for teacher evaluations of a responsibility as either positive, negative, frequent, or infrequent is an intriguing exploration; the omission of further discussion within this abstract is due to length constraints.

Placing teacher evaluations of responsibilities across these two dimensions into a matrix illustrates responsibilities can be concatenated into four categories (see top half of Figure 1). Analysis of these four categories suggests how responsibilities fall within the *Donut Model for Agriculture Teacher Success* (see bottom half of Figure 1).

Figure 1

Matrix of Responsibilities and Connection to Donut Model for Agriculture Teacher Success

		Task Frequency	
		Infrequent	**Frequent**
Task Reaction	**Negative**	**Negative Avoided** A task viewed negatively that is expected infrequently.	**Negative Realized** A task viewed negatively that is expected frequently.
	Positive	**Positive Avoided** A task viewed positively that is expected infrequently.	**Positive Realized** A task viewed positively that is expected frequently.



Connecting responsibilities to teacher retention, we posit an accumulation of responsibilities within two categories support teacher retention and an accumulation of responsibilities within two categories support teacher attrition. Responsibilities categorized as *positive realized* are believed to contribute to teacher retention. These are frequent responsibilities teachers have a positive association with; in this way, the responsibility meets their minimal self-expectation as an agriculture teacher without any negative association, suggesting the responsibility falls between the lower and upper boundaries of the model. Additionally, responsibilities categorized as *negative avoided* are also believed to contribute to teacher retention. These are responsibilities teachers have negative reactions to; however, are asked to do infrequently. Given their infrequency, *negative avoided* responsibilities likely do not impede a teacher's capacity for success across other work and life dimensions; additionally, the teacher likely feels no need to do these negative responsibilities more to satisfy their identity, placing it between the upper and lower boundaries. Alternatively, responsibilities categorized as *negative realized* are anticipated to contribute to teacher attrition because they are responsibilities which teachers view negatively which they expect frequently. The negativity associated with these frequent responsibilities suggests their abundance strains the teacher's ability for success across work and life roles, placing it above the upper boundary. The final category of responsibilities, *positive avoided*, is also thought to contribute to teacher attrition because the teacher views these responsibilities as positive; however, they are encountering those tasks infrequently. *Positive avoided* is placed below the lower boundary because the positive association paired with its infrequency suggest these are responsibilities teachers may desire more to satisfy their agriculture teacher identity.

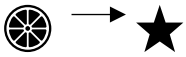
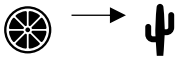
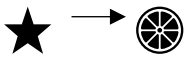
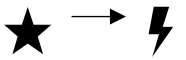
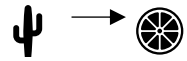
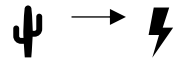
Shifting Responsibilities

It is essential to view a teacher's interactions with responsibilities as dynamic (Thieman et al., 2012; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Teachers at any career stage, especially those early in their career, experience continual changes in their reaction to responsibilities (Disberger et al., 2023). For example, a teacher may become more confident in their abilities, may "find their passion" for a task, the responsibility may become too complex for the teacher, or the teacher may "get tired" of doing something previously enjoyed. Additionally, the frequency of responsibilities may change as teachers craft their positions by eliminating or offloading undesirable responsibilities or adding responsibilities viewed favorably (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Thus, we must also consider the intersection of teacher and responsibilities temporally as these shifts occur. To do this, we return to the four categories of responsibilities and consider the situation and implication for a perception or frequency shift related to a responsibility (see Table 1).

Table 1

Situation and Implication for Responsibility Changes

Shift	Name	Situation	Implication
	Positivity Found	View a frequent responsibility more positively. *"I learned to enjoy it."*	Supports retention.
	Negative Removed	Do a negative responsibility less frequently. *"I am glad I don't do that anymore."*	Supports retention.

 Positive Added	Do a positive responsibility more frequently. *"I am glad I get to do that more often."*	Supports retention.
 Negativity Lost	View an infrequent responsibility more negatively. *"It's okay, I don't want to do that anymore."*	Supports retention.
 Positive Removed	Do a positive responsibility less frequently. *"I am going to miss doing that."*	Contributes to attrition.
 Positivity Lost	View a frequent responsibility more negatively. *"I am tired of doing that."*	Contributes to attrition.
 Negativity Found	View an infrequent responsibility more positively. *"I wish I could do that more."*	Contributes to attrition.
 Negative Added	Do a negative responsibility more frequently. *"I don't like doing that more."*	Contributes to attrition.

The movement of tasks between categories is believed to influence teacher retention (see Table 1). Furthermore, we propose the lack of movement among some categories may also contribute to attrition through the concepts of *stagnation*, *synergy*, and *missed expectations*.

Stagnation refers to a lack of new responsibilities moving into *positive realized* (i.e., no *positivity found* nor *positive added*). In this scenario, the teacher has stopped devoting more of their time to responsibilities which they view positively. Hypothetical quotes from a teacher experiencing *stagnation* include, "I stopped learning," "I accomplished what I had set out to accomplish," and "I didn't see any growth opportunities in the career." Importantly, *stagnation* could be attributed to the individual or the profession. For example, the individual could stop investing in their own learning, growth, or search for positive responsibilities (Thieman et al., 2012). Alternatively, the career may have a natural ceiling for some (Haddad et al., 2024), wherein a lack of perceived advancement opportunities causes *stagnation*. An additional complexity of stagnation is its intersection with burnout. To avoid *stagnation*, individuals must continually add items to their *positive realized*, which requires doing responsibilities more frequently or changing your view of frequent responsibilities to be more positive. Without offsetting this by doing other responsibilities less frequently, a possible outcome is burnout (Thieman et al., 2012).

The other lack of movement potentially related to retention is a lack of movement from *negative avoided*. As introduced earlier, responsibilities within *negative avoided* are typically considered beneficial for retention. However, the added dimension to the relationship between *negative avoided* and retention are stakeholder's view of the responsibility importance. If, for example, program stakeholders (e.g., teacher, administration, students, community) view a responsibility as unimportant, it remaining in *negative avoided* is a *synergistic boundary*, defined as a responsibility stakeholders mutually agree to avoid. Synergistic boundaries likely contribute to teacher retention. However, if program stakeholders view the responsibility as important for program success, that item remaining in *negative avoided* would be deemed a *missed*

expectation, which likely contributes to attrition (see Traini et al., 2020 and Haddad et al., 2023 for extended discussions). For example, if a teacher decides not to raise chickens for an annual FFA Broiler Contest because they view it as negative, this responsibility would be classified as a *negative avoided*. If program stakeholders support this decision, it is a *synergistic boundary*. However, if program stakeholders disagree with this decision because they see raising chickens as positive, the *negative avoided* may become a *missed expectation* which could contribute to attrition.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This philosophical abstract adds critical elements to the *Donut Model for Agriculture Teacher Success* and, in association, agriculture teacher success and retention. Specifically, the enhanced model provides a framework for organizing the myriad responsibilities faced by agriculture teachers (Marzolino et al., 2024; Solomonson et al., 2022; Sorensen & McKim, 2014; Thieman et al., 2012; Traini et al., 2019, 2021; Queen et al., 2025) and exploring how teacher perceptions of those responsibilities may influence their retention in the career. Furthermore, the enhanced model illustrates the influence of shifts in how teachers perceive responsibilities or the expected frequency of responsibilities. In total, these contributions open new doors for both practice and research, introduced below.

We recommend existing and new agriculture teacher induction programs consider having novice teachers longitudinally map their responsibilities using the matrix provided (see Figure 1). Program administrators are encouraged to monitor the placement of responsibilities throughout the induction program and, potentially, beyond. Teachers should be encouraged to reflect upon the movement of responsibilities between quadrants (e.g., “why do you feel more/less positive about this responsibility,” “what made this responsibility more/less frequent”) as well as evidence of *stagnation* (e.g., “how can you add new positive responsibilities to your job”) and *missed expectations* (e.g., “are stakeholders, including yourself, supportive of that responsibility not being addressed”). In addition to encouraging reflection, induction program facilitators should provide targeted interventions when responsibilities remain in *negative realized* (e.g., intervention highlighting the positivity of the responsibility, intervention to increase teacher confidence associated with the responsibility, or intervention to increase agency in delegating the responsibility) and positive avoided (e.g., intervention on crafting their position to include consistently more engagement with the responsibility).

Within scholarly work, we encourage utilization of the *Donut Model for Agriculture Teacher Success,* including the extensions posited within this abstract. The model may be particularly useful in scholarship on agriculture teacher retention and job satisfaction. Furthermore, scholarly work using the model should explore why teachers rate a responsibility as positive or negative and how they conceptualize frequency of responsibilities as they navigate their career. Finally, scholarly work exploring networks of stakeholders and norms within a community and how those networks and norms influence responsibilities being either *synergistic boundaries* or *missed expectations* is recommended, especially among new teachers and their satisfaction and retention within new programs, communities, and norms.

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