

Original Paper

A Qualitative Exploration of Connectedness During COVID-19: Faculty Perceptions Toward Communication, Collaboration, and a Sense of Community While Teleworking

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Received: September 30, 2020 Accepted: October 24, 2020 Online Published: November 5, 2020

doi:10.22158/fet.v3n4p83

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/fet.v3n4p83>

Abstract

The transition from face-to-face education to a primarily teleworking atmosphere following the Spring 2020 onset of COVID-19 left many faculty members floundering, struggling to effectively utilize online learning and communication platforms; to feel connected; and to continue accessing collaboration and professional development opportunities. This qualitative phenomenology study is one of the first in-depth qualitative reviews to explore faculty's perceptions toward connectedness since teleworking as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study was conducted during the Spring and Summer semesters of 2020, when the initial spread of COVID-19 occurred, forcing professionals and students alike to stay home to learn and work. The participants in this study included 11 full-time faculty from two universities in the United States who taught primarily face-to-face classes prior to COVID-19 and began teleworking as a result of the pandemic. The findings suggested faculty faced a slew of challenges related to communication, collaboration, and a sense of community while teleworking as a result of COVID-19, including ineffective communication, technology and access challenges, a lack of time and training, and feelings of disconnect. Participants also outlined strategies they believed to be effective to support connectedness while teleworking, such as video conferencing, regular communication, and enhanced collaboration opportunities. Given the volatile nature of COVID-19 and its implications for higher education institutions, it is highly likely that issues relating to connectedness while teleworking will remain relevant for the foreseeable future. Faculty and postsecondary administrators may use the findings from this study to guide discussions about whether their efforts to enhance overall perceptions of

connectedness and faculty satisfaction have been successful, or whether efforts need to be revisited, revised, or enhanced.

Keywords

higher education, distance education, faculty satisfaction, COVID-19, connectedness, telework

1. Introduction

Recent global events triggered postsecondary educational institutions around the world to cease in-person classes and to hastily implement online learning tools and programs, whether prepared or not. This study was conducted during the Spring and Summer semesters of 2020, when the initial spread of COVID-19 occurred, forcing professionals and students alike to stay home to learn and work (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). The transition from face-to-face education to a primarily teleworking atmosphere left many faculty members floundering, struggling to effectively utilize online learning and communication platforms; to feel connected; and to continue accessing collaboration and professional development opportunities (Flaherty, 2020). Even prior to COVID-19, there were very few studies that explored teleworking conditions and perceptions toward connectedness for remote faculty. No studies have been conducted to explore the ways in which faculty suggest enhancing these factors following the spread of COVID-19.

This study is one of the first in-depth qualitative reviews of faculty's perceptions toward connectedness since teleworking as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Until this time, the studies that have been conducted related to COVID-19 and faculty perceptions overall have utilized primarily survey designs and have not yet utilized interviews to explore how faculty describe experiences in their own words.

The participants in this study included 11 full-time faculty members in the United States who taught primarily face-to-face classes prior to COVID-19 and began teleworking as a result of the pandemic. For the purpose of this study, "connectedness" refers to perceived communication efforts, collaboration opportunities, and a sense of community. A brief literature review discusses previous literature related to remote faculty's perceptions toward engagement and connectedness prior to COVID-19, followed by a detailed description of the methodology utilized for this study. To follow, the findings, supported by rich, narrative data and participant quotes, are shared. Lastly, implications for research and practice are provided.

2. Review of Relevant Literature

Following the rapid spread of COVID-19, the vast majority of postsecondary students and faculty began to work and learn away from campus. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2020), 91% of the world's student population was impacted as a result of school closures. Within the U.S., The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) reported there were 19.6 million students enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary education institutions in Fall 2018 in the United States. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) reported there were

1,350,700 postsecondary teachers employed in 2018. The majority of these students and faculty learned together in traditional in-person classes. Following COVID-19, however, their correspondence and learning moved to online learning platforms. Consequently, millions of students and faculty members were required to rapidly learn to navigate the online learning arena, often with little prior experience.

2.1 Meeting the Needs of Faculty While Teleworking

Although navigating online technologies and learning platforms is essential to provide a quality education to students, addressing the social-emotional needs of students and faculty learning and working remotely is of the utmost importance. The World Health Organization (2020) suggested that many individuals are dealing with social-emotional issues as a result of the extreme changes necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19; particularly feelings of grief, overwhelm, anxiety, disconnectedness, and isolation.

Although very little literature has been published specifically related to working conditions for faculty between the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020 and the submission of this article (October, 2020), a myriad of online articles and statements have been shared via blog posts, YouTube videos, professional networking groups, and online newspapers (e.g., Baker, 2020; Kim, 2020; Reed, 2020). The content has primarily focused on supporting students, effective instruction and learning tools, and supporting faculty who are teaching online for the first time (Baker, 2020; Pietro, 2020; Grajeck, 2020). At the time this article's publication, there are virtually no resources discussing how to support the social-emotional well-being of faculty. There is no current peer-reviewed literature that specifically examines faculty's perceptions toward connectedness since being required to telework as a result of COVID-19.

Despite the lack of literature specifically related to faculty's experiences post COVID-19, a variety of recent articles have discussed the perceptions of remote faculty members related to communication, collaboration, and a sense of community, which may be applicable when considering the current circumstances and the new teleworking requirements for millions of faculty members nation-wide. Given the unique circumstances and a lack of peer-reviewed literature specifically related to faculty's experiences since COVID-19, a discussion regarding previous literature related to connectedness and faculty satisfaction is provided.

2.2 Faculty Perceptions Toward Teleworking

A variety of studies have examined the factors which contribute to an enhanced or decreased sense of faculty satisfaction. A sense of belonging, collaboration and professional growth opportunities, a sense of community, and collegiality have been documented as important factors influencing faculty's decision to continue or leave in their current position (Betts, 2009; Dolan, 2011; Golden, 2016; Lee, 2001; Munene, 2014; Ng, 2006). A sense of belonging and a strong community have been linked to faculty members' loyalty, motivation, and desire to remain with an institution (Betts, 2009; Dolan, 2011).

While some research has described faculty's perceptions toward the benefits of teleworking (e.g., flexibility, opportunity to gain teaching experience, use of technology) (Green et al., 2009; Luongo, 2018; Wu, 2014), other studies have identified remote faculty's perceptions toward the challenges associated with teleworking and remote work (Smith et al., 2018; Walters et al., 2017). The challenges frequently discussed by faculty were a lack of interpersonal relationships, no face-to-face communication, feelings of isolation, a lack of professional development, and feeling disconnected (Betts, 2009; Golden, 2016; Smith et al., 2018; Walters et al., 2017).

2.3 Connectedness and Faculty Satisfaction

Ample research supports that instructor effectiveness and longevity are among the strongest predictors of student satisfaction and academic excellence (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Kane et al., 2015). The Online Learning Consortium (n.d.) has suggested that there are five pillars essential for ensuring quality online education programs. Among these five pillars is "faculty satisfaction", which suggests faculty satisfaction is a critical pillar to address in order to ensure successful online learning.

Since the majority of postsecondary faculty are currently teleworking for a portion or the entirety of their workdays, away from their students and colleagues, one might assume there has been an enhanced sense of isolation, disconnectedness, and a lack of community in faculty, which are all factors which impact faculty's overall satisfaction (Betts, 2009; Dolan, 2011; Golden, 2016; Lee, 2001; Munene, 2014; Ng, 2006). However, there is no literature which has explored these factors after the onset of COVID-19.

As suggested by Kim (2020), COVID-19 may change the landscape of how education is provided to students, predicting that educational institutions will be investing time, energy, and resources into developing and offering more online education classes than ever before. This will potentially change the instructional landscape of postsecondary institutions, with a more diverse offering of online, teleworking, and learning opportunities.

Postsecondary institutions must understand the needs of their faculty in order to foster environments that are collaborative and connected, whether staff are working at the institutions or from home. Moreover, postsecondary institutions must continue to hire and retain high quality faculty despite the model of instructional delivery. To do this, they must be proactive in understanding the needs of faculty who are navigating the landscape of providing online education courses while physically removed from their colleagues, as faculty satisfaction is strongly correlated with faculty retention, student satisfaction, and student success (Betts, 2009; Dolan, 2011; Golden, 2016; Lee, 2001; Munene, 2014; Ng, 2006).

3. Statement of Problem

With U.S. institutions announcing their plans for the Fall 2020 and Winter 2021 semesters, the majority of which include partial or full distance education, it is imperative that educational institutions are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and tools to meet the needs of their faculty, especially to support teleworking conditions. Although ample research has established remote faculty's perceptions toward

the challenges associated with remote work, very little research has sought to examine factors which impede or enhance feelings of connectedness while teleworking: specifically, communication efforts, collaboration opportunities, and a sense of community, for faculty who have traditionally taught face-to-face classes.

At the time of this study, no qualitative studies have been published which seek to understand the thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes of faculty since teleworking as a result of COVID-19. It is imperative to hear from faculty to gain insight into their needs related to staying connected, as their insights can help to evaluate, establish, and foster a collaborative culture, even while teleworking.

4. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology study was to explore postsecondary faculty's perceptions toward connectedness while teleworking following the global spread of COVID-19. E-mail interviews were used to gain an understanding of faculty's perceptions toward a sense of community, connectedness, and collaboration efforts during and following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Faculty are intimately familiar with the challenges and benefits associated with teleworking, as they were recently required to shift from working on campus to working from home. Consequently, they have relevant, contemporary insights related to the sense of connectedness in their institutions. The findings from this study may be utilized to analyze current strengths and potential needs for refinement of practices, policies, and procedures moving forward. Ultimately, faculty and postsecondary administrators may use the findings from this study to consider whether their efforts to enhance overall perceptions of connectedness and faculty satisfaction have been successful, or whether efforts need to be revisited, revised, or enhanced.

5. Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to explore faculty's perceptions toward connectedness since teleworking as a result of COVID-19. The research questions in this study explored faculty perceptions toward communication, collaboration, and a sense of community. Specifically, the research questions that guided this study were:

- 1) How do faculty describe effective communication while teleworking?
- 2) What are faculty's perceptions toward collaboration efforts while teleworking?
- 3) How do faculty perceive the workplace community while teleworking?

6. Methodology and Study Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenology design. E-mail interviews were used to explore the perspectives of faculty members, and the interview protocol was synthesized from previous published research interview and survey protocols which focused on teleworking conditions in other professional

fields; faculty satisfaction; and the overall perceptions of remote faculty toward their professional experiences (Back, 2016; Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Carpenter, 1998).

6.1 Participants, Sample, and Setting

A combination of snowball sampling and nonprobability purposive sampling approaches were utilized to select participants. Nonprobability purposive sampling allows researchers to use their judgement to select their sample based off of established inclusion or exclusion criteria (Given, 2008). For the purpose of this study, participants must have taught primarily face-to-face classes prior to COVID-19, and they must have made the transition to telework, delivering 100% of classes in an online format as a result of COVID-19 during the Spring and/or Summer semesters of 2020.

Alase (2017) suggested between 2-25 participants should be included in phenomenological research, and Creswell (2014) expressed the importance of all participants having had experienced the same lived experiences. This study included 11 full-time faculty members from two different universities in the United States. All participants taught primarily face-to-face classes prior to COVID-19 and were transitioned to exclusively online instruction as a result of COVID-19. Of the 11 full-time faculty members, three served as department heads in addition to their teaching responsibilities.

7. Procedures

Since this study utilized a phenomenological design, an emphasis was placed on developing high quality research questions, as guided by previous research (Back, 2016; Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Carpenter, 1998). As outlined below, trustworthiness and credibility were considered throughout the entire research process, and rich descriptions of each phase of this study are detailed in the following sections.

7.1 Recruiting Participants

The initial goal of this study was to recruit participants from one university. Before recruiting participants from the initial university, the researcher first obtained IRB approval to conduct research. Invitations to participate in the research were sent directly from the researcher to faculty members using publicly available data (i.e., professional e-mail addresses shared online). The initial invitations yielded a low response rate of six participants. Therefore, the researcher asked willing participants if they had other colleagues or connections whom might be interested in participating in the study. This resulted in five more participants who elected to participate in the study, all of whom worked at one of the two other universities included in this research.

Participation in this study was voluntary. The faculty members who agreed to participate in this study were sent an electronic informed consent form. The e-mail interview questions were then sent to all faculty members who gave consent to participate in the study by stating "I agree to consent" via e-mail. The e-mail interviews took approximately 30-45 minutes to complete.

7.2 Protection of Participant Identity

A variety of measures were taken to protect the participants' identity. The information faculty shared in this study may be perceived as critical, and their views may contradict the current practices, policies, and efforts put in place to address collaboration and connectedness between faculty at their institutions. Therefore, anonymity for all faculty members was kept.

To ensure anonymity, all participants were given pseudonyms. Additionally, if the demographic information provided by the faculty members made them or their university easy to identify, these identifiers were masked to ensure anonymity (Clark & Creswell, 2015). Lastly, additional considerations related to electronic communication were addressed. Meho (2006) explained, emphasizing to participants that certain measures will be adopted to maximize confidentiality is necessary. "Examples of these measures include the use of pseudonyms and hiding the user names, domain names, and any other personal identifiers when publishing or storing interview data" (Meho, 2006, p. 1289). All of these actions were taken to protect participant identity.

7.3 Data Collection and Storage

After participants agreed to the informed consent, they were sent the interview protocol and instructions for how to complete and return their responses. The interview questions were attached to the e-mail as a Word document. A reminder to submit responses was sent one week prior to the submission due date.

7.3.1 Email Interviews

This qualitative study sought to answer broad questions and to explore the perceptions of remote faculty, and therefore open-ended interview questions were utilized to collect data (Creswell, 2014). The participants in this study resided in different regions of the United States and worked remotely, using their computers. E-mail interviews eliminated the boundaries of time and space, reduced research costs, prioritized participants' comfortability, encouraged reflection before responding, and streamlined interview data (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015). Given their diverse locations and familiarity with electronic communication, e-mail interviews were selected as the most appropriate data collection method. Additionally, it is important to note that, according to James (2007), e-mail interviews are an effective way to gather rich, descriptive data for qualitative research. Multiple studies have found that the quality of data obtained from e-mail interviews is comparable to face-to-face interviews (Abrams et al., 2014; Denscombe, 2003; Meho & Tibbo, 2003; Murray, 2004). For these reasons and the "stay-at-home" orders enacted by the researcher's and participants' respective locations, e-mail interviews were the most appropriate data collection method for this study.

7.3.2 Storage

All data was stored on an off-sight computer and password protected. All data will be destroyed after three years. With the exception of the approving IRB chair, no one was privy to the name of the universities being studied, and no one had access to participants' names or identifying information.

7.4 Data Analysis

Since the interviews were conducted via e-mail, participants' responses served as transcripts. The e-mail interview responses yielded rich, descriptive data that effectively addressed the research questions (Creswell, 2014). The data was reviewed and coded manually, then coded electronically using the NVivo software. After all coding was completed, the findings were presented via narrative data that provided rich descriptions of themes, supported by participant quotes and a synthesis of common attitudes, beliefs, and experiences toward teleworking.

7.5 Trustworthiness and Credibility

Rather than generalizability, the focus of this study was on trustworthiness and particularity, given its qualitative and explorative nature (Creswell, 2014; Given & Saumure, 2008). Since all interview responses were provided via e-mail, and participants had ample time to consider the research questions and ponder their responses prior to submitting their final answers, this acted as a means of member checking. E-mail follow up questions were sent if any responses were unclear or could potentially have been misinterpreted. As noted, the NVivo computer software program was used to identify themes in addition to manual coding of themes. The researcher was involved in all phases of this study, and any clarifications of personal biases or other relevant limitations are presented in the "limitations" section. In the findings section, each theme is discussed and supported with specific participants' quotes. Rich descriptions of each stage of the study have been outlined in this article, so future researchers may implement a similar methodology with future participant groups, enhancing comparison and transferability (Given & Saumure, 2008).

7.6 Limitations and Delimitations

A variety of limitations were applicable to this study. First, researcher and sample bias were possible limitations to this study (Ogden, 2012). The researcher worked as a remote faculty member at the time of this study. It is possible that past experience working in a remote setting may have influenced the conclusions drawn from participant responses. However, a double-coding process, combined with participant quotes, and rich descriptions of all stages of this research were provided to alleviate the potential for researcher bias. A sample bias may have also been present, since some of the participants had previous experience with providing distance education courses, and they regularly used technology to support instruction and to engage with their colleagues. Others had never facilitated online courses, nor had they worked remotely. Given their past experience, there may have been an inherent bias toward the preference or disfavor of utilizing technology to interact with colleagues and students.

Secondly, the data was self-reported, and an assumption was that all participants' responses were honest and expressed their perceptions accurately. Third, although appropriate for an exploratory study of this nature, the sample was not particularly diverse, and sample size was relatively low. Finally, there may have been logistical issues with the data collection. For example, the participants may have had multiple distractions while completing the interview, or they may have been multitasking while completing their answers (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015). This may have led to vague or

unfocused answers, as a participant's train of thought may have been continuously interrupted throughout the process.

8. Findings

This study sought to explore faculty's perceptions toward connectedness since teleworking as a result of COVID-19. Eleven full-time faculty members participated in the interview process. The research questions that guided this study were: 1) How do faculty describe effective communication while teleworking?; 2) What are faculty's perceptions toward collaboration efforts while teleworking?; 3) How do faculty perceive the workplace community while teleworking?

8.1 Demographics

This study included 11 full-time faculty members from two different postsecondary institutions in the United States. Of the 11 participants, three served as department heads in addition to their teaching duties. All participants taught primarily face-to-face classes prior to COVID-19 and were transitioned to 100% online instruction as a result of COVID-19.

Of the faculty members who participated in the study, nine were female and two were male. Nine participants identified as White/Caucasian, while two participants identified as Asian. Four faculty members taught at a post-secondary level between 1-5 years; two faculty members taught between 5-10 years; three faculty members taught between 10-15 years; and two faculty members indicated they had taught for over 15 years. Prior to the shift to distance learning as a result of COVID-19, nine faculty members indicated they taught 100% of their classes in a face-to-face format, while two faculty members had taught at least one online class in the past.

Six of the participants held Doctoral degrees, and five participants held Master's degrees. The faculty members in this study served in six different college departments. However, to protect participant identity, the specific colleges for which faculty taught have not been included in this section.

8.2 Themes

E-mail interviews were used to gain insight into faculty's perspectives toward connectedness while teleworking as a result of COVID-19. The data were coded and organized into themes. Themes were organized according to the prevalence of themes by number of references (see Table 1) and by prevalence of themes by the number of faculty who mentioned each theme (see Table 2). An analysis of the data revealed the following primary common themes: Effective Communication Strategies; Challenges to Community; Multiple Communication Platforms; Relationships; Strategies to Support Community; Challenges to Collaboration; Effective Collaboration Efforts; Opportunities for Growth; and Technology.

Table 1. Top Themes in Order of Prevalence by Number of References

Theme	# of References	# of Faculty
Effective Communication Strategies	36	11
Challenges to Community	32	11
Multiple Communication Platforms	31	11
Relationships	29	11
Strategies to Support Community	29	11
Challenges to Collaboration	25	11
Effective Collaboration Efforts	24	10
Opportunities for Growth	24	10
Technology/Access	23	8
Lack of Communication/Disconnect	15	4
Feeling Supported and Connected	14	5

Table 2. Top Themes in Order of Number of Prevalence by Faculty

Theme	# of Faculty	# of References
Effective Communication Strategies	11	36
Challenges to Community	11	32
Multiple Communication Platforms	11	31
Relationships	11	29
Strategies to Support Community	11	29
Challenges to Collaboration	11	25
Effective Collaboration Efforts	10	24
Opportunities for Growth	10	24
Communication Challenges	10	22
Technology/Access	8	23
Time and Boundaries	6	11
Training	6	9

All themes were supported with the faculty members' responses which were aligned with the research questions. Rich, descriptive data from the e-mail interview transcripts allowed for a thorough analysis of the data.

8.2.1 Effective Communication Strategies

A variety of effective communication strategies were identified through the faculty members' responses. Overall, faculty described effective communication while teleworking as timely and regular, supported by a variety of technology platforms, and by feeling supported by their administration.

8.2.1.1 Timely and Regular

When asked to discuss their impressions of communication while teleworking, six faculty members described effective communication as timely and regular, and suggested that communication is most effective when colleagues respond back to one another promptly. For instance, Ryan stated, “[Effective communication is when] answers to questions are responded to promptly, depending on whether they need to confirm info before responding.”

Rylee highlighted the importance of timely communication by stating, “I would define effective communication with colleagues as timely, back and forth responses to answer questions, obtain new information, etc.” Wally, Rachael, Sarah, and Rebecca all also suggested effective communication involved timely and back-and-forth communication.

8.2.1.2 Platforms to Support Communication

Through their responses, many faculty members commented on effective communication channels to support communication while teleworking. These modalities ranged, but included online video platforms, telephone, text, and e-mail. Six faculty members specifically identified video conferencing as the most effective method to support communication. Karen remarked that, “Seeing faces was most helpful, not unlike face-to-face communication.” Sarah shared a similar perspective by stating, “I think Zoom has been most effective because then you still have the visual and verbal information being exchanged.” Deb agreed with the use of video conferencing tools by explaining:

Blackboard Collaborate and Microsoft Teams work great for group meetings and visuals of seeing each other and effectively communicating. Facetime is much better than a phone conversation one on one as again—the visual is extremely important. All of these platforms have worked well to enhance our communication with each other.

While there seemed to be a preference for video conferencing on platforms such as Zoom, faculty also stated that e-mail, phone calls, text messaging, and a combination of all of these modalities was helpful.

8.2.1.3 Frequency of Communication

Along with a focus on timely, back-and-forth communication and using multiple platforms to support communication, all faculty members discussed the frequency with which they were in contact with their colleagues. The frequency of communication seemed to differ from individual to individual and was dependent on the intent and purpose of the communication (e.g., meetings vs. social).

Diane, who serves as a professor and department chair, stated she had meetings with her colleagues “weekly at the very least, sometimes daily... via Zoom or some other platform,” but also noted she was “available via telephone, text, e-mail, or private teleconference when needed” She also explained, “I occasionally e-mailed colleagues with a ‘check-in’ e-mail to see how they were personally doing.”

Deb, who is also professor and department chair noted the importance of frequent communication, at least weekly, by explaining:

I communicate with various colleagues on a daily basis through e-mail, text, and phone calls by answering questions, concerns, or assisting with various issues. I continue to send out group information to department faculty/staff as needed and have incorporated a purposeful weekly group communication which I had not done prior to teleworking. This includes weekly updates and forward actions needing to be accomplished. I found this weekly communication to be beneficial for faculty/staff in our department.

Rebecca, Rachael, and Rylee all suggested they communicated regularly with their colleagues for a variety of purposes, and the frequency ranged from multiple times per day, to monthly, depending on the purpose. Monthly communications were more typical for department meetings, while most all faculty indicated they communicated at least daily with their colleagues. It is important to note that nine of the eleven participants suggested they communicated with their colleagues less frequently than they did while on campus, with decreasing interactions as teleworking became more familiar. Nine faculty members expressed they missed seeing and interacting with their colleagues.

8.2.1.4 Feeling Supported

It is important to note that some faculty expressed feelings of disconnect from their administration, while others expressed feeling well-supported. Feeling supported seemed to influence faculty's perspectives toward effective communication while teleworking. For instance, Rachael stated, "Our department's educators do a great job of collaborating with any questions or concerns we have about [educational] services or our graduate [students]."

Rylee described a strength of her university to be "that our university really pulled together, during this time of need, to be there for our students. I felt supported by our department chair, building administration and university administration"; Krystie noted, "We have always had a pretty cohesive department that communicated well... We text, e-mail and share resources that we think will help each other out." Rebecca said, "Colleagues are open-minded and supportive. We solve problems together as a team." She also noted that her colleagues communicated effectively, describing a strength as "effective communication and flexibility." Generally, those faculty members who felt supported perceived communication to be more effective overall than those who felt disconnected from their department and university administrators.

8.2.2 Challenges to Community

Through the participants' interview responses, there were many concerns listed with maintaining a sense of community since teleworking. For the purpose of this study, "community" was defined by social workplace relationships, opportunities for social and professional networking, and social engagement overall. The main concerns seemed to be with a preference for face-to-face interactions (versus online platforms), an "all business" mindset, a lack of communication, and feelings of disconnect.

8.2.2.1 Online Platforms and Community

Seven participants commented on a diminished sense of community, specifically referring to challenges with teleworking and using online platforms. For example, Ryan noted a disfavor for the online community by sharing:

I find the “online community” to be a creature which I can’t help but associate w/Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, et al., -platforms w/ many personalities whom I readily dismiss-so viewing online engagement through solely the LMS lens is a paradigm which I have to keep reminding myself of. “Having to use platforms to communicate w/others is a strain on my sensibilities of ‘genuine contact’ per se”

Deb also noted that online platforms had a “lack of personal touch—visiting prior to or after the meeting—when ‘other connections’ are made [do not happen over video conferences],” which suggested technology impeded the maintenance of a positive sense of community. She also noted that a challenge to maintaining a sense of community was when “people [are] working independently and not engaging with others.” She went on to say, “Long-term, this could have very negative effects.”

8.2.2.2 All Business Mindset

Four faculty members specifically described interactions with colleagues as “all-business” since teleworking. Jelisa explained her perspective toward community via online platforms by stating, “The overall sense of community is gone. You can’t bring donuts to the Zoom meeting. You can’t have an office potluck. It’s all business now.” She also noted that her “University has not focused on social or professional networking...I think if the technology actually worked, everything we have at our disposal would be helpful to create community.”

Echoing the “all business” perspective, Sarah expressed a need for efficient communication, outlining challenges balancing work/life responsibilities. She stated:

When I have time to work (when not caring for my children), I have to maximize my time completely. Therefore, socially, I am not having much interaction. When I do interact with a colleague, it is all business—short and sweet, again, in order to make the most of what little time everyone has available.

Wally built upon this concern by stating:

You really lose that personal connection. When you communicate while teleworking, it’s different and mainly gets to the point. What we lose is the other aspects of communication, the nonverbals, the personal stories, which can add a lot to communication. Those things get cut, and we go directly to the main point and in a way, a variety of views may get lost since we don’t have that time to discuss every point of view... It’s mainly business while working on Zoom, but on campus, it adds a personal dynamic to the equation.

8.2.2.3 Lack of Communication and Disconnect

Through their responses, it was clear that a lack of communication and feelings of disconnect impacted faculty's perceptions toward a sense of community. Some faculty indicated that communication efforts were abysmal, and others expressed a noticeable disconnect with their colleagues and administration.

For instance, Diane commented on a lack of participation by stating, "I do think teleworking did damper social relationships with students, colleagues, and supervisors. At some tele-meetings; no one seemed willing to talk." Karen expressed, "[The] main communication from [our] department was limited and only provided as the Chair felt necessary. This was not unlike when we were all on campus. There was obvious disconnect in who knew what information." She went on to say, "Even in Faculty meetings, certain faculty members did not share nor turn on their cameras. The disconnect was very prevalent. The Chair was obviously sharing with certain faculty members and not others. Again, this is not unlike face to face meetings but did contribute to the cohesiveness felt or not felt."

Deb shared a similar perspective related to strained relationships by stating, "I also feel communication with administration is currently strained. I understand they have a lot happening during these difficult times, but they do need to increase communication now more than ever." Wally had a comparable experience and noted, "I feel the faculty is somewhat separated from the administration. The union has done a good job trying to get the administration to hear what faculty has to say. I think constant updates from the administration and provide more concrete answers as to what is expected in the Summer and Fall semester would be helpful."

8.2.3 Multiple Communication Platforms

Multiple technology platforms were utilized by faculty while teleworking, some of which were to be perceived as more effective than others. Different platforms were typically used for different purposes. Faculty described which platforms they used and which they thought were the most effective.

Examples of platform being utilized since teleworking included: text, e-mail, teleconference, Zoom, Blackboard Collaborate, video messaging, Box, Microsoft Teams, Pexip, Yuja, Adobe Meetings, Facetime, and Doodle Poll. The most commonly listed platforms to support communication, collaboration, and a sense of community were Zoom, phone, and e-mail. Generally, faculty expressed a preference for video conference platforms (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Blackboard Collaborate) to interact with their colleagues, although e-mail and phone were often expressed as effective tools as well.

8.2.4 Relationships

An overarching theme of this research was relationships, which were mentioned through all questions and sections of the interviews. Many participants expressed dampened social relationships with their colleagues, department heads, and students as a result of teleworking. Others expressed feeling supported by their colleagues and administration while teleworking.

8.2.4.1 Relationships with Colleagues

Relationships with colleagues were discussed at various times through the interviews. A variety of barriers to maintaining relationships were discussed. These mainly consisted of missing daily interactions with colleagues, and diminished relationships as a result of COVID-19.

8.2.4.1.1 Missing Colleagues

Nine faculty members indicated they missed social interactions with their colleagues. Deb commented on the impact of social relationships on personal and professional development by explaining, “I miss the social relationships. I think those relationships develop people, help you think differently, and assist in moving an organization forward as well as professional development.”

Krystie also expressed missing her colleagues and shared, “It is tough not seeing everyone, faculty and students alike.” However, she did elaborate by stating, “That said, I think all have developed a greater appreciation for what we took for granted in the pre-covid environment.” Wally acknowledged the difficulty in not seeing his colleagues, but like Krystie, expressed a sense of optimism. He said, “We miss our colleagues, but with the current situation, it is expected that until things get better, we will have to put our social relationships aside. The new normal is isolation and once things are better, we can go back to these prior social relationships. In the meantime, it’s Zoom and e-mails. With Zoom, we can at least see each other, without seeing each other, I believe social relationships would be more effected.”

Rylee also commented on the challenge of missing her colleagues, although focusing on her department’s efforts to pull together. She wrote:

I am a very social person, so [teleworking] was difficult for me. While we were e-mailing, texting, calling each day, there was not that socialization that takes place in the workplace, which was difficult for me. I missed seeing my colleagues and continuing to build those important relationships... [However], I found the greatest strength to be that our university really pulled together, during this time of need, to be there for our students. I felt supported by our department chair, building administration and university administration.

8.2.4.1.2 Negative Impact on Workplace Relationships

Four faculty members indicated that teleworking resulted in strained workplace relationships. For instance, Diane who serves as a department head in addition to her teaching responsibilities, noted:

I do think teleworking did damper social relationships with students, colleagues, and supervisors... I also seemed to lose my sense of how some of my faculty were doing. I like to check in everyday with all faculty—this was not possible via tele-work and when we were able to connect it was not quite the same---especially with those faculty I am less familiar with.

Sarah also explained that teleworking negatively impacted her social workplace relationships. She expressed:

My relationships are not as strong with my colleagues and supervisor. Since we do not have daily ‘water cooler’ or professional interactions, relationships suffer. I feel disconnected to many of my

colleagues, specifically, as I have not had as regular interactions with them. My supervisor and I still have frequent interactions, but it is just not the same.

8.2.4.2 Relationships with Students

Although the focus of this research was on faculty relationships, seven faculty members described their perceptions toward relationships with students as a result of teleworking through their responses. A variety of challenges were presented. Rylee noted that “student ‘buy-in’ was difficult.” She explained, “I had several students that stayed engaged during this time, but I had a few that kind of just ‘gave up’ on their classes or did the bare minimum to get by. It took a lot of effort to reach out to students to continue to build that sense of community so they would keep working hard and do their best work.”

Krystie agreed that student engagement and buy-in was a challenge. She wrote, “Remaining connected to the work with a schedule has been hard for students. Some checked out, but with coaxing have come back. The sense of community and some structure have been maintained in the courses that I met online with the students.”

Wally described a specific impact on student engagement and interaction, explaining that “seeing students and working on research projects have been a challenge. I even had a research trip to Chicago with four students (2 undergrads and 2 graduate students) cancelled at a national conference due to COVID-19. Sense of community has also suffered since many students have left the college town to go back to their hometown, so there aren’t many college students around.”

Lastly, Sarah described her perspective toward student relationships while teleworking, although her experience seemed to be more positive. She also described strategies which were helpful in maintaining relationships with students by writing:

I do think I have been successful in staying connected to my students since transferring to teleworking. Having weekly Zoom meetings was especially helpful and beneficial (and well-received) by my graduate students. Our discussions were mostly related to class content, but we also allowed time for just casual conversation each week and it was good for all of us.

8.2.5 Strategies to Support Community

As previously noted, a variety of faculty expressed they felt supported and connected to their colleagues, supervisors, and the university while navigating the transition to telework. Through their responses, faculty outlined a variety of actions, activities, and tools used to support a sense of community while teleworking.

8.2.5.1 Activities and Actions to Enhance Community

Diane described the format of her department’s meetings, explaining they made time for social engagement to support a sense of community. She said, “We spent the first bit of time at our faculty meetings just visiting. We also started a group text on which we connected with important social and personal issues.” Diane also expressed an interest in exploring more social opportunities for faculty and students and provided an example of how Zoom was used to foster social relationships at her university. She stated, “I am interested in the ‘parties’ people had during social isolation—I would like to know

more about this. We did have small graduation parties for our seniors and second year grads. They were fun and not difficult to put together. These were done on Zoom.”

Six participants described specific activities used to maintain a sense of community while teleworking. For instance, Rachael said, “Our department chair scheduled a few social activities (movie nights) as a way for us to keep in touch and connected.” Deb, who is a department head, provided a specific suggestion to enhance community. She stated:

Administrative weekly webinar or presentations [would support community]—[it] does not need to be interactive but a short 15-minute video presentation to faculty/staff would be helpful—where are we going and how are we getting there organizationally... two administrators could present each week and just give a brief overview. Each would only present about once a month but I think it would be extremely helpful to all and assist in the sense of community and relationships in the workplace while teleworking.

8.2.5.2 Tools and Platforms to Support Community

The tools and platforms generally suggested to support, maintain, and enhance a sense of community while teleworking were videoconferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom, Blackboard Collaborate), phone, and e-mail. The faculty were also asked to discuss which types of activities or strategies would help to support their social workplace relationships.

Faculty were also asked to discuss specific types of activities they would like to be made available to support community in case of continued teleworking conditions in the future. The participants recommended think tanks, video chats, webinars, canned how-to modules, support groups, and chat boards to enhance a sense of community while teleworking.

8.2.6 Challenges to Collaboration

The faculty expressed a variety of challenges impeding successful collaboration while teleworking. The most common challenges discussed were a lack of time, technology and access issues, ineffective or absent training, and scheduling. Many faculty members reported collaboration to be a challenge, since their universities were in “survival mode”.

8.2.6.1 Lack of Time

Six faculty members listed “time” as a barrier to effective collaboration. When asked to discuss the greatest barrier to collaboration, Rylee indicated:

Time! Again, with all the information and updates that were being provided hourly, it was difficult to keep up with everything. Between online instruction, supervision of graduate clinicians, taking care of my family, etc, somedays felt unmanageable... It also felt that there were very little boundaries for work, meaning that it felt like I was working 24 hours a day to stay afloat... I think the number of e-mails, meetings, etc., is so different when working from home. It takes much longer to draft an e-mail vs. walking to a colleague’s office to discuss something.

Jelisa, a department head, also referenced “time” as a barrier to collaboration for her faculty, stating, “I believe my faculty with children and another parent working from home also have time constraints. I do not know if meetings focused on collaboration or socialization would be welcome right now.” Karen expressed the same concern when asked to describe barriers to collaboration, exclaiming, “TIME... time to learn more, time to develop appropriate assignments, time to create a true online course, time to adjust.”

Sarah expressed difficulty with time constraints and balancing work and life responsibilities. She noted:

It is challenging to balance everything in a healthy manner—shifting to remote work and having my children at home full-time is making my “workday” never-ending. I am checking e-mail, grading, doing whatever I can in the short windows of opportunity I have during the day. Then, when I would typically have some down time after my kids are in bed, I am now going to ‘work.’ It is exhausting.

8.2.6.2 Scheduling

Scheduling challenges were also frequently referenced as a barrier to effective collaboration while teleworking. Rachael found that “sometimes scheduling a time for collaboration can be difficult, but this is also true when we aren’t teleworking.”

Sarah agreed, suggesting:

We are all working on different schedules so it is hard to incorporate “live” communication (i.e., I have two young children at home, so I tend to get most of my work done when they are napping and late at night, while others are maintaining a typical 9-5 schedule)... Maybe having a better sense of everyone’s availability would help identify clear “windows” of opportunity for “live” communication... differing schedules has been the biggest hurdle for me in engaging in collaborations with colleagues while teleworking.

8.2.6.3 Survival Mode

The term “survival mode” was referenced by four of the participants in a variety of contexts. For instance, when asked to describe collaboration efforts set forth by the university, Deb replied, “[The university] has not worked towards this goal. It’s just been survival mode.” Karen echoed this perception by stating, “Survival teaching has necessity of this format but hasn’t really allowed for time to develop a creative environment.”

Jelisa also referenced “survival mode”, stating, “I would say my program is in survival mode. We have not been focused on anything new in terms of innovation or socialization. We have been focused on getting our work done and only having meetings when absolutely necessary. I do not know if anyone would want to go beyond survival mode.”

Rylee felt the same way. She wrote:

From March until now, it has really been about “survival” and helping the students to feel comfortable in this new type of instruction... I think that as we were all in “survival mode” and changing classes from face-to-face to online it was helpful to get to reach out to colleagues as

needed but it wasn't required. There were so many things going on at one time that if more collaboration were required, it really would have felt like a burden.

8.2.6.4 Technology and Access

Although an overarching theme of "technology and access" will be discussed in a following section, it is important to make note that there was a large focus on technology and access needs, specifically related to supporting collaboration efforts.

For example, when asked to describe the greatest challenges associated with collaboration, Ryan noted "connectivity variances" as a struggle. When conducting video conference meetings, Jelisa found the greatest challenge to be "technical difficulties." She elaborated by saying, "There seem to be many issues to work out just to get the meetings off the ground. Someone does not have sound, someone does not have video, etc." Wally had a similar experience, suggesting, "Bandwidth may be an issue since we have had to turn off cameras since speakers sometime have drop calls on Zoom (or their voice breaks-up)."

8.2.7 Effective Collaboration Efforts

Throughout their responses, faculty described what effective collaboration looked like from their perspectives, and efforts that were made to support collaboration while teleworking. Many faculty members defined effective collaboration as setting tasks and coming together to complete a project or task. Role clarity and responsibility seemed to be important concepts related to effective collaboration.

8.2.7.1 Factors That Define Effective Collaboration While Teleworking

As noted, many faculty members defined effective collaboration as setting tasks and coming together to complete a task. For example, Diane stated that "effective collaboration involves meeting, setting tasks, sometimes smaller sub-meetings, and then coming back together with the group for finalization of a project with input at all stages." Rylee echoed the importance of coming together to complete a task, indicating, "To me, effective collaboration would be when we can all come together to complete a task. Everyone has a piece of this task to complete and gets their work completed in a timely manner."

Wally built on the definition of effective collaboration, emphasizing the importance of effective communication to support collaboration while teleworking. He wrote:

Effective collaboration is getting the message through loud and clear. Because we don't have all the nonverbal channels of communication when teleworking, it is very important to get the correct message across through Zoom. Effective collaboration includes follow-ups as well, mainly through e-mail.

Krystie described her experience with collaboration since teleworking and suggested futuristic thinking was necessary to effectively collaborate while teleworking. She shared an experience in which her department was resourceful and effective by describing "[Our department] sticks together and have looked at some important facets of our curriculum, visioning what might make it the best post-covid environment with the immersion in the technology."

8.2.7.2 Strategies to Support Collaboration While Teleworking

Faculty expressed a variety of suggestions to support and enhance collaboration efforts while teleworking, which included sharing resources, using a variety of platforms, and having support (communication and technology) in times of need.

Ryan noted that his university “invited us to share best practices and to seek help when needed.” Rylee remarked that her university was effective in using technology and providing resources to support collaboration by stating, “We have had a variety of Zoom meetings within our department and university to share ideas with each other. Our university also has an eCampus that has greatly assisted in online teaching, especially for those that have never instructed in this manner before.”

Krystie felt that the sharing of resources between faculty helped to support collaboration. She said, “The sharing of resources and methods has been beneficial for our faculty”. Even the casual, “Hey, have you seen this Facebook page on [instruction]. That might help for us to stay connected. To have shared ideas and information that has come to light via e-mail, with later discussions on Teams.” She also felt that having IT support was helpful to support effective collaboration, sharing that “[We] had the full support of our online facilitators. The e-mail responses were phenomenal with replies within minutes.”

Lastly, while specific platforms are discussed in more detail in the “technology” theme of this paper, it is notable that all faculty members stressed the importance of online platforms to support collaboration. Zoom was the platform most frequently referenced. Microsoft Teams, Doodle Poll, and e-mail were also mentioned as effective collaboration tools.

8.2.8 Opportunities for Growth

Faculty were asked to describe their perceptions toward connectedness while teleworking. Through their responses, faculty expressed a variety of suggestions which would enhance overall feelings of connectedness. The most notable suggestions were for institutions to provide training, professional development, and collaboration opportunities for faculty. The participants also made a variety of suggestions which focused on technology and telework implications for the future.

8.2.8.1 Training and Professional Development

Four of the faculty members indicated a desire for more professional development opportunities online. It is important to note that while four of the faculty members expressed an interest in more professional development opportunities in general, seven faculty members focused on the need for immediate need for training to support online instruction and engagement with colleagues.

Diane felt training is instrumental to facilitate effective collaboration and communication, explaining, “I think familiarizing people with what is available is a great first start. Then providing training for how to use as well as possibilities for use would be the next logical step.” Jelisa concurred, expressing the importance of technology-specific training. She suggested that universities “choose a platform and make sure everyone has the technical capability to run it.”

Wally noted his university provided, “lots of e-mails from faculty on using free online resources related to innovative thinking and sharing of ideas. This was true as we transitioned from face-to-face to online teaching. Many universities and nonprofits provided lots of free materials for faculty to use as well.” He recommended that an opportunity for growth would be to “have step-by-step guides ready for anyone who wants to read or brush-up on the latest technology for teleworking. Also, provide resources to faculty or students, where they can access for free, online materials that can help them through their academic journey. The more choice for students and faculty, the better.”

8.2.8.2 Collaboration Opportunities

Through their responses, faculty expressed interest in collaborative research opportunities, sharing modalities to collaborate with colleagues, and teamwork options for students. Diane expressed an interest in collaborative research online. She stated:

It would be interesting to engage in collaborative research. Professional conferences on-line are also interesting to me. They would be much more cost effective; although I am not sure everyone would love them as it would eliminate travel to “fun” places. I am interested also in developing student projects for my coursework that can be completed online. I also think we should explore more on-line clinical and other educational simulation experiences for our students.

Wally noted an interest in collaboration but suggested that for effective collaboration to occur “[The university must] setup a platform for people to add-in their ideas (like a discussion board on Canvas).” Krystie described her perspective about collaboration opportunities she would like to see for students, by explaining she would like to see “a more robust tracking of teamwork commitment for students.” She noted that since COVID-19, “mostly mine have worked individually, rather than in group.”

8.2.8.3 Telework and Technology Implications

Five faculty members discussed their impressions of the potential for telework and distance learning moving forward. Most perceptions were optimistic, although not without perceived obstacles to overcome.

Diane shared her experience with the transition to telework, describing how her and her colleagues overcame many challenges, and suggesting how the COVID-19 pandemic may have changed her department permanently, explaining:

Within our department we solved many problems and were able to quickly move to on-line instruction, meetings, thesis defenses, oral comprehensive exams, and the like. Having this experience allowed those who were reluctant to teach online to realize that they could do it. Two of our department faculty were even voted by students to have provided the best instruction. It also forced us to learn to provide therapy through tele-practice; something that is up and coming in our field. We also realized this was not as difficult as some thought it might be as long as we were patient and could work through issues that arose both technologically and client-related. I think the experience has changed our department for the good--we will move forward again as a result of the required tele-work.

Despite the overall sense of optimism about teleworking implications moving forward, Diane expressed the concern about the university's plan to adapt to changed working and learning conditions. She noted, "In terms of the university—I am not sure [about how they will facilitate collaboration]. It seems as though we would like to move back to old ways as quickly as possible." She went to explain, "Our institution seems particularly resistant to change. Practices that had moved online are being walked back and faculty seem reluctant to stay online. They seem to fear cheating most and lack of student collaboration and engagement secondly."

Deb also suggested opportunities for growth related to telework in the future by saying, "I feel we could do more via online platforms in the future, especially when faculty/staff/members are out of the office/town/state. Typically, they just miss the meetings or have someone else attend. I think we could use some of these resources for the future."

Rylee made a prediction about collaboration efforts moving forward. She predicted "the longer this continues we will begin to get into more collaboration on other 'things' including program changes, research, future instruction, clinic needs, etc." Lastly, when considering opportunities for growth, Krystie recommend that universities need "better ways to collaborate in real time and asynchronously, and the programs that would facilitate it, along with support and time bought out to learn and develop these collaborative actions. Some things cannot be done online."

8.2.9 Technology and Access

The majority of faculty members noted concerns with access and technology. Of their concerns, the most notable issues related to technology and access were a lack of familiarity with technology, bandwidth and access concerns, and a need for training.

8.2.9.1 Familiarity with Technology

Eight faculty members discussed an unfamiliarity with using technology to communicate with colleagues and to support instruction. As an example, Krystie stated, "I can tell that teaching online has been a struggle for my colleagues, as well as myself" and suggested she would like to see "some way for us to quickly become more familiar and at ease with virtual meetings, better Internet capabilities for all and the time and resources to practice these things." Specifically related to conducting meetings with her colleagues, Krystie felt that if these issues were addressed, "[she and her department] could do quite well with virtual meetings."

Wally expressed a similar experience for some of his colleagues by suggesting, "There are people who are more old-school and only teach face-to-face so being on an online platform has been hard for them." However, while acknowledging these difficulties, Wally indicated a general familiarity and level of competence from he and his colleagues when using technology. Wally commented on his institution's general familiarity with technology, explaining, "Since [my university] is fairly strong online, and in the past we have had faculty Zoom into face-to-face meetings (i.e., monthly faculty meetings), so it's not too strange for all of us to work online. Most of the time, we all bring our computers to faculty meetings so teleworking did not catch us off guard and out of the blue."

8.2.9.2 Bandwidth and Access Issues

Six faculty members referenced bandwidth and access issues to be barriers to remaining connected since teleworking. For instance, Sarah noted, “Technological difficulties also poses problems occasionally (losing internet during a Zoom meeting, for example),” and suggested, “secure, reliable internet for all [is necessary]. Making sure that all parties have access to stable internet in their location is important.”

Similarly, Diane explained that, “Sometimes technology ‘fails’ occurred, but most everyone was patient and innovative when this occurred.” Related to student access, she also noted, “[A] lack of adequate infrastructure may also be a problem as some students had internet issues and the internet was down in [our state] fairly often this spring and summer.” Ryan agreed, stating that “connectivity variances” were a challenge when communicating with colleagues.

Jelisa also touched on access issues, indicating, “Not being able to call some members of campus because they did not have phone connections at home” was a challenge to communicating with colleagues. She went on to say, “Technical difficulties [made it difficult to communicate with colleagues]. There seem to be many issues to work out just to get the meetings off the ground. Someone does not have sound, someone does not have video, etc.”

Lastly, Wally described technological difficulties which impeded communicating with colleagues by explaining, “Bandwidth may be an issue since we have had to turn off cameras since speakers sometime have drop calls on Zoom (or their voice breaks-up). This plays a big role in larger projects and meetings.” He provided a suggestion to provide a way “for multiple people to edit a document online and others can see what is being edited. This helps with teamwork and allows others to see groupwork done at the same time.” He also suggested, “Internet speed, especially rural connections may not be the most robust/reliable” as a barrier to collaborating with colleagues, indicating a potential access issue for faculty. As a result, he suggested for institutions to “provide a place where [people without the means] can go (social-distance in mind, of course) so they can access a room with a computer to connect with others”.

8.2.9.3 Training to Support Technology

Training and IT support to help faculty with technical issues was a suggestion made by the majority of faculty members. Ryan discussed the importance of high-quality technology supporting by saying, “The tech staff who are conduits being responsive is the most important thing. If tech support staff are N/A, then all is for naught.”

Jelisa shared similar advice by stating, “The University should have said—we are all using Microsoft Teams or Zoom versus everyone doing their own thing. Getting the tech to work and trying to figure it out has been challenging. No one sends instructions and sometimes I don’t even know how to get into the meetings!” Jelisa suggested, “[Universities should] choose a platform and make sure everyone has the technical capability to run it. Mass training will be required. Faculty/Staff computers will need to be able to support the platform.”

Karen expressed difficulty with navigating some online platforms, stating, “Novice learners meant there were lots of etiquette issues and technical problems.” She went on to express gratitude for training and support from her university’s IT department. She said, “The Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning/IT were VERY helpful in getting us up and running as well as troubleshooting. They provided numerous workshops online during our spring break to help us prepare.”

Wally offered a technology training suggestion by stating:

For newcomers, [universities should] have a Zoom learning session, so they aren’t intimidated with the technology. [Universities should] have step-by-step guides ready for anyone who wants to read or brush-up on the latest technology for teleworking. Also, [universities should] provide resources to faculty or students, where they can access for free, online materials that can help them through their academic journey. The more choice for students and faculty, the better.

9. Discussion and Implications

This research provided a snapshot in time of faculty’s perceptions toward connectedness while teleworking amidst the COVID-19 crises. This study explored how faculty described their perceptions toward communication, collaboration, and a sense of community while teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic. This section includes an overview of participants’ key perceptions and provides recommendations for practice and future research.

9.1 Effective Communication While Teleworking

Overall, faculty defined effective communication while teleworking as timely and regular and supported by a variety of technology platforms. The majority of faculty also felt communication was effective when they felt supported by their administration. The primary communication challenges expressed by faculty were when their department heads or university administration was not communicative, when technology “failed”, and when communications were not acknowledged or reciprocated. The faculty expressed a preference for video conferencing (e.g., Zoom), phone, and e-mail to support communication, and suggested that frequent communication for a variety of purposes (e.g., social vs. department meeting) was important. This finding was similar to research conducted by Smith et al. (2018), who found teleworkers had a strong preference for video technologies, email, and phone, and consistent use of these platforms positively impacted overall job satisfaction.

As guided by the in-depth responses from the participants in this study, it is clear that there are obstacles to overcome in terms of providing effective communication to faculty while teleworking. However, the faculty in this study also provided a variety of suggestions for practice. Generally, as guided by the overarching themes and recommendations in this study, effective communication requires frequent, timely, and back-and-forth communication between colleagues, departments, and the university as a whole. It seems that communication was lacking in some departments. Faculty in previous studies, which have focused on communication between faculty and administration in higher

education, have shared the same communication struggles (Cummings & Finklestein, 2009; Hill et al., 2014; Kdouh, 2014; Smart, 2010).

As individuals and institutions continue to navigate how to effectively communicate with each other, it is imperative that institutions place a focus on enhancing communication overall. Some considerations, as guided by the suggestions from the participants in this study, may be to provide adequate training to all faculty in how to utilize a variety of technological platforms to support communication; having adequate technology support for faculty members; scheduling frequent meetings using a pre-established agenda and platforms; and providing culture training to leaders which focuses on helping faculty to feel supported and connected.

The faculty in this study also indicated multiple platforms were utilized to communicate with colleagues and department heads for a variety of purposes. Perhaps it may also benefit institutions to explore consistent platforms to be utilized institution-wide rather than utilizing a “piece-meal” approach to communication. Along with the adoption of consistent platforms would be the need to provide adequate training and support to all faculty, as they navigate how to effectively utilize technology to communicate with their colleagues.

This study explored the perspectives of full-time faculty in traditional four-year institutions who primarily had provided face-to-face classes prior to COVID-19. It would be beneficial to develop research with a larger pool of participants, and to focus specifically on pillars of communication as it relates to teleworking in academia. More research needs to be done to explore qualitative and quantitative aspects of communication efficacy, and perceptions of communication overall. Moreover, effective systems and policies which may help to establish communication need to be explored further.

9.2 Collaboration Efforts and Suggestions for Practice

Throughout their responses, faculty described effective collaboration while teleworking as setting tasks and coming together to complete tasks. Suggestions to enhance collaboration included establishing role clarity, effective communication, sharing resources, using a variety of platforms, and having support (communication and technology) in times of need.

A variety of challenges associated with collaboration while teleworking were noted throughout this study. The most common challenges discussed were a lack of time, technology and access issues, ineffective or absent training, and scheduling, which were similar to findings in previous research (Bolliger et al., 2009; Golden, 2016; Green et al., 2009; Walters et al., 2017). Institutions will need to remain flexible with their faculty and with their students during times of uncertainty. However, given the likely shift to more distance and hybrid courses in the future, it is also important institutions have focused conversations to establish policies and systems to aid faculty in manageable workloads, specifically when teleworking, which will likely occur intermittently until a permanent solution to COVID-19 has been found.

The participants in this study also indicated an interest in future collaborative opportunities, such as collaborative research, professional development, resource sharing modalities to collaborate with

colleagues, and teamwork options for students. A variety of faculty explained that virtually no collaboration opportunities were provided to faculty while teleworking, as their institutions were in “survival mode”. Given the interest in pursuing more online collaboration opportunities, institutions may collaborate to create a more diverse offering of online trainings, seminars, and professional development opportunities; to establish set policies and procedures for conducting collaborative research between colleagues and students; and to provide recommendations to departments in terms of scheduling and maintaining contact, even while teleworking.

More research to explore the efficacy of professional development, training, and collaborative research remotely versus in-person should be conducted. Five of the faculty members in this study specifically stated they did not want to continue teaching, engaging with their colleagues, or collaborating via online platforms. Therefore, faculty’s perceptions and openness toward adopting online collaborative modalities should be explored in future research.

9.3 Developing a Sense of Community While Teleworking

As suggested in this study and in other published literature (Johnson et al., 2020), there was a drastic shift in community and culture as a result of the hastily implemented teleworking conditions as a result of COVID-19. Faculty frequently discussed missing their colleagues and the social interactions that occurred when working at the university. They described telework as isolating and challenging, which was a challenge shared by remote faculty who participated in previous research related to inclusion and remote faculty (Golden, 2016; Munene, 2014).

However, faculty also noted that they remained in contact with their colleagues through e-mail, phone, and video messaging. Suggestions for maintaining a sense of community while teleworking included holding social events via video messaging; scheduling regular meetings; using a variety of platforms to communication; and providing options for think tanks, video chats, conferences, webinars, and chat boards to faculty.

Although many universities offer a variety of online courses and programs, the vast majority of faculty across the United States work at traditional universities who offer primarily on-campus face-to-face classes. This also means that faculty are accustomed to interacting with their colleagues face-to-face, and usually on a daily basis. Certainly, the shift from on-campus to telework conditions is met with a slew of challenges related to maintaining a sense of community. Very little research exists that explores perceptions, strategies, or feelings toward a sense of community in teleworking situations, even prior to COVID-19. Consequently, more research should be conducted to explore effective strategies which enhance faculty’s perceptions of belonging, community, and healthy workplace relationships.

10. Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore postsecondary faculty's perspectives toward connectedness at their postsecondary educational institutions following the global spread of COVID-19. As noted throughout this paper, a slew of challenges related to communication, collaboration, and a sense of community while teleworking as a result of COVID-19 were noted by participants.

Based on the unpredictability of COVID-19, it is likely that the most feasible option for providing post-secondary learning options will be some combination of distance and hybrid learning options, at least for the foreseeable future. As previously noted, of the 19.6 million students enrolled in post-secondary courses, over 16.5 million students were taking some or all of their classes on campus prior to the COVID-19 outbreak (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Approximately 1,350,700 faculty members taught these students, the majority of whom taught exclusively face-to-face courses (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Following COVID-19, however, their correspondence and learning moved to online learning platforms.

Given the volatile nature of COVID-19 and its implications for all public and private institutions, including universities and colleges, it is highly likely that issues relating to connectedness while teleworking will remain relevant for the foreseeable future. As noted in previous research, faculty satisfaction has a strong influence on hiring and retaining high quality educators (Betts, 2009; Dolan, 2011; Golden, 2016; Lee, 2001; Munene, 2014; Ng, 2006). As discussed in previous research, and now as noted in this study following COVID-19, there are many challenges to feeling connected which seemed to impact faculty's overall job satisfaction.

It is of the utmost importance that educational institutions support their faculty through these difficult and uncertain times. Many faculty across the nation felt unprepared to implement online programs and to telework (Johnson et al., 2020). Therefore, the findings from this study may be utilized to analyze current strengths and potential needs for refinement of practices, policies, and procedures moving forward.

Ultimately, faculty and postsecondary administrators may use the findings from this study to consider whether their efforts to enhance overall feels of connectedness and faculty satisfaction have been successful, or whether efforts need to be revisited, revised, or enhanced. These discussions will remain paramount for the foreseeable future, as universities globally must remain ready to respond to future closures and distance learning opportunities until a permanent solution to combat COVID-19 has been found.

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