UNEXPECTED SILVER LINING OF A WORLDWIDE PANDEMIC: STUDENT WORKERS WORKING FROM HOME

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ABSTRACT

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, our university leadership charged our department to shift academic and career support for our 20,000 ground students to a virtual modality. Through 100+ student workers, our department maintained similar service levels and outcomes to pre-pandemic times while working remotely during the pandemic. This reflective practice explores four working ideas for how and why our student worker team succeeded in remote work, including: organizational culture, departmental culture, adapting an existing technology model, and training. Ultimately, all four working ideas likely contributed to our team's success. However, it is likely an incomplete picture of what truly influenced our team's success working remotely for 18 months.

Keywords: *virtual student support, academic support, career support, student workers, remote work*

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this article is to reflect on the experience of transitioning 100+ student workers to work remotely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflective practice is an active opportunity to engage in organizational learning (Hilden & Tikkamäkki, 2013). Inspired by a meaningful experience, reflective practice encourages practitioners to uncover old meanings, explore different interpretations and dialogue, and change thoughts, behaviors, and actions (Hilden & Tikkamäkki, 2013). Responding to the COVID-19 outbreak and the subsequent global pandemic qualifies as a meaningful experience. Specifically, as an academic and career support team at our university, we experienced shifting student workers from primarily in-person efforts to completely remote work. Engaging in organizational learning practices is essential to improve as an organization. At its core, organizational learning highlights the need to reflect on learning behaviors and question the operating status quo (Hilden & Tikkamäkki, 2013). In preparation for future massive shifts in the world of work, it is critical to reflect on the pivoting process we experienced and executed in response to the pandemic.

According to Hilden and Tikkamäkki (2013), the practice of reflection is present within the 4I framework, including intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing. This reflective practice will apply the intuiting and interpreting phases to my experience of pivoting from in-person services to providing virtual academic and career support during the pandemic. The intuiting and interpreting steps are primarily individual activities. Intuiting requires reflection on an experience to recognize patterns and possibilities inherent in the experience, as simply experiencing an event does not lead to learning (Hilden & Tikkamäkki, 2013). Engaging in authentic, reflective practice requires reflecting and challenging prior assumptions to lead to new ways of thinking and new opportunities (Hilden & Tikkamäkki, 2013). These individual activities of intuiting and interpreting lay the framework for this reflective practice.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It was not known, at the height of the pandemic, whether student workers would transition to remote work and successfully fulfill their responsibilities. The COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges to the workforce across the globe, including our team of 100+ student workers. Universities worldwide were challenged to uphold health and safety while redesigning educational delivery and responding to constantly changing health protocols (Moon et al., 2023). The Student Success department at my university ensures students' academic and career success by delivering academic support for K-12 students, academic and career development for current students, and connections with employers for recent university graduates. This department traditionally offered these services in person via appointments, presentations, workshops, and walk-ins using minimal technology. In response to the pandemic, executive leadership and informational technology teams quickly provided technology for our student workers so they could work from home. This rapid pivot allowed our team to continue providing academic and career support services amid the pandemic's disruption. As a department that previously needed a table and a few chairs to meet with students one-on-one or in small groups, we had little demand for technology. The collaboration between departments helped us transition from entirely in-person to completely remote within about two weeks.

The unexpected pandemic led to many decisions, changes, and innovations. We finished the 2019-2020 academic year offering virtual support for students and continued virtually for the following 2020-2021 academic year. This reflective practice explores what factors contributed to student workers' productivity while working remotely. After quickly transitioning from our typical in-person services to solely virtual support, our student workers maintained appointment numbers from the prior year, indicating almost equal effectiveness even with the significant shift. Therefore, it is worth reviewing and reflecting upon how such a major shift was successful.

WORKING IDEAS

The university's innovative approach to everything we do led to our timely and creative shift to remotely delivering academic and career support for 18 months. Various factors may have played a role in our student workers' success while working from home. Upon reflection, four working ideas emerged related to the success: organizational culture, departmental culture, ability to adapt an existing template of technology use, and thorough training.

One possible contributor to the success of transitioning 100+ student workers to remote work could be our organizational culture. Our university is a private Christian university focused on integrity and educating people to lead and serve from the context of a Christian worldview. Inherent in this worldview, and thus in our culture, is a sense of integrity, doing the right thing, and doing our best. I have worked with our students and student workers for over 10 years, and the vast majority genuinely want to do things the right way. The organizational culture is also rich with service and servant leadership, demonstrated by our full-time staff and faculty and extended by our student workers. I consistently received student-worker questions and concerns over our students' well-being and customer service delivery. In everyday conversations with our student workers, I also hear story after story about how much our student workers care about the students they support and their well-being after working together.

Another possible contributor related to but different from the overall organizational culture is the departmental culture. Over the past four years, our student workers have often worked across multiple locations. This structure leads to a lot of self-leadership, self-management, and autonomy among our student workers, as their supervisors balance visiting our multiple sites and are accessible to the team through email, phone, and chat. Therefore, my program managers hire student workers who demonstrate integrity, self-management, and a dedication to responsibility and, again, doing things the right way. In other words, we hired student workers we felt we could trust. Our student workers were also used to autonomy, which was required during the 18 months they worked remotely.

Separate from culture, a possible contributor was our ability to use a similar template for providing remote student support from a prior project. One of the departments under Student Success had offered virtual academic support for our university's significant online student population for

a few years. The virtual academic support team had already adopted the technology and mode of work necessary to provide remote support across the country and globally. I worked with the director of the online support team to promptly adapt his methods to our needs and execute them. We quickly modified critical pre-existing processes, training, documents, and systems. For instance, this team already had training documents about upholding FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) over the phone and through Zoom, which we could quickly adapt and use. Other examples included pre-existing phone and voicemail scripts, instructions for using Zoom, policies and procedures for academic integrity, rules for screen sharing, and how-to guides for crucial systems.

Finally, one possible contributor was extensive training. Our student workers were already skilled in building rapport with students, conducting appropriate academic and career appointments, and helping students overcome barriers. However, we trained them to transition these meetings to virtual ones through remote training sessions, step-by-step recordings, and leaning on our "Expert" student workers (identified leaders among our student worker teams) to help train their respective teams. Through consistent and thorough virtual communication, we trained our student workers to transition to remote work within two weeks. We continued our all-team meetings through Zoom and were available through multiple modes of communication for our student workers to ask questions. In line with the departmental culture outlined above, I also spoke with many of our student workers who had ideas and volunteered to help train their peers. Out of their desire to do their best, I interacted with numerous student workers who wanted to help virtually elevate our team's role in delivering academic and career support.

REFLECTIVE-NARRATIVE

In March of 2020, the world was in crisis mode. A crisis involves significant threats to life through unpredictability and urgency (Leidner et al., 2009). Furthermore, a crisis is an extraordinary situation that impacts existing systems, threatens our assumptions and overall self-concept, and demands increased effort to manage the event (Clinnin, 2021). As Italy and New York shut down, we in the Southwest explored what this might mean for us: a

university with 20,000 students on campus about to embark on spring break. I sat in a meeting with our VP of Student Success, fellow directors, and staff members to discuss the need to pivot quickly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussions revolved around how to continue academic and career support to campus students, which historically was only provided in person.

Under the umbrella of Student Success, multiple departments providing academic and career support combine to employ over 100 student workers, all conducting their business in a traditional face-to-face manner. From peer-to-peer academic support to assisting with resumes and engaging with employers, our student workers typically work alongside full-time staff on campus and in person. As COVID-19 spread and pushed the country into lockdown, we were forced to identify new ways to support student success.

In my experience, our university is an effective balance of education and business. Spearheaded by an innovative, daring, and successful executive leadership team, my tenure at the university has witnessed pioneering shifts to meet student, economic, and workforce demands, along with multiple service- and community-oriented efforts to better the lives of those at and around the university. From my perspective, if anyone was ready to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was our university. With a significant online student population, a traditional ground campus population, and multiple hybrid populations, including cohort evening students, we were well set for nimbleness and adapting to the new normal of working and learning from home. Additionally, our university leaders enabled rapid innovational and technological adaptations (Lalani et al., 2021). Such vision and leadership are critical for success (Lalani et al., 2021). As a university, it was natural for us to respond quickly, creatively, and adeptly to problem-solving with the value of technology at our fingertips.

As we brainstormed possible ways forward, information and understanding of COVID-19 changed rapidly. One challenge of crisis response is the duality of needing more information while needing to make quick decisions (Leidner et al., 2009). In line with the challenge of communicating information in response to a crisis (Leidner et al., 2009), communication regarding physical

distancing, hand hygiene, and sanitizing surfaces was shared across campus. Such communication, rooted in the unknown of the pandemic, had us preparing for a solution we did not know would go unrealized. While we solidified our initial plans, students prepared for spring break, unsure of what was to come. After several days of discussions and anticipating that some student workers would work over spring break and the rest would return after their vacations, my colleagues and I identified a plan. To uphold physical distancing, we would leverage multiple locations across campus to set up physically distanced workstations, create a schedule rotation, train students on virtual technology and appointments, and implement cleaning procedures. This plan and technology implementation would allow student workers to switch from in-person to virtual meetings and continue serving students without a break in service, all while remaining on campus and under our purview. Such rapid digitalization and leveraging of educational technology would support remote learning (Lalani et al., 2021) and, in our case, learning support. While I worked with my colleagues on this transition plan, our executive leadership also worked on a transition plan for full-time staff. As we finalized our student worker plan, we received word that our full-time staff would operate on a rotating schedule, working one week on campus and two weeks off campus. This announcement worked well with our plan for student workers, meaning at least four full-time staff would be on campus each week as supervising staff over the student workers stationed in our various locations across campus. Ultimately, we could not implement this plan because a new announcement forced us to pivot again. Soon after we finalized our plan, the university announced that students would not return to campus after spring break, and full-time staff and faculty would work from home until further notice.

We soon realized our plans had to be as fluid as the situation. In crisis response, decision-makers must balance the need for information with the need to act (Leidner et al., 2009). As we initiated plans, new information would surface, and plans had to pivot again. Globally, higher education institutions had to cancel in-person classes and switch to remote learning (Lalani et al., 2021). Now that all student workers and staff were slated to work virtually, we adapted our strategy to provide academic and career support solely through virtual means, allowing student workers to work remotely without the option to have staff physically overseeing student workers on campus. Shifting our plans became challenging at this stage because many student workers had already left for spring break, and the rest would soon disperse across the country. In an inspiring collaboration with our executive leadership team and the Information Technology (IT) department, we quickly developed and executed a plan to fully pivot and transition our 100+ student workers to work remotely.

Two major planning components coincided with transitioning our 100+ student workers to work remotely. One of my colleagues focused primarily on physical technology, while I focused on training procedures and implementing our plan. When used effectively, technology allows for productivity and improved performance (Leidner et al., 2009). However, before the technology could be considered beneficial, we had to get it to our student workers at their remote locations. My colleague worked with our IT department to secure technology for our student workers to use from home. I am not sure what conversations occurred at the executive level. However, my colleague and I received word that we could deploy technology to our student workers who were interested in working remotely amidst the pandemic. The transition to remote work was a multi-layered project, considering some student workers had already left, and the rest were leaving within days. In this state of flux, we had to determine what technology was accessible, what technology would go to whom, how it would get there, and how we would train our student workers to use it. Fortunately, our IT department was incredibly flexible and accommodating. Student workers were allowed to take equipment with them as they left, or we could ship it to their homes if they had already moved. Executive leadership understood and approved the additional costs, allowing us to ship equipment through the on-campus mail center. The IT department packaged each technology set and mailed the packages to addresses we confirmed with each student worker through email and Microsoft Forms. Some students drove home to places like Nebraska, while others flew home to California, Washington, and Oregon, among others.

My colleagues and I identified, created, and executed an in-house tracking and liability system to document the technology exchanges. Using Microsoft Forms, we created a form for student workers to complete, including what technology they received, property tag numbers, and an acknowledgment that they were responsible for returning their university-issued equipment in the future. It took rapid pivoting and creativity to determine what student workers needed. Many received laptops with built-in speakers and video cameras suitable for using Zoom as their virtual appointment platform. However, some received Wi-Fi-capable desktops without cameras. Therefore, an additional cost arose with the need to send video cameras to some student workers to meet "face-to-face" with students via Zoom.

Additionally, many student workers needed headsets at home due to sharing rooms with siblings or having multiple people sharing space throughout the day. We had hoped that most student workers had the typical headphones that come with many smartphones today, but some did not. Therefore, in addition to the cameras, we also deployed headsets. The IT department helped with headsets, too. Therefore, a complete technology set included a laptop or desktop, a headset, and a video camera for those with desktops.

Of course, trying something new means uncovering issues along the way. Technology-in-hand was only the first half of the technology issue. The second was ensuring student workers had all the systems and access necessary to carry out their virtual appointments. For our team, this included gaining access to our student database to ensure they could carry out FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) verification. Student workers also had to download Zoom and a softphone to make and receive calls over Wi-Fi. The IT Help Desk for employees, which also supports student workers, was critical in helping our student workers gain access to and launch these various systems. The quick assistance from the Help Desk was yet another example of our IT department's flexibility to ensure we could continue working to support our student body.

Once we figured out the technology, the next phase included training. Training would be essential for the technology to be effective and increase productivity and performance, as Leidner et al. (2009) outlined. Some student workers had previously used technology to conduct virtual appointments to support online students but typically worked in person to be available for walk-in questions and in-person appointments, rarely leveraging technology. The few student workers who used technology pre-pandemic worked at desktop stations in designated offices across campus, although technology requirements for our department were minimal. Our shift to send student workers home with the ability to work from home meant adjusting our prior approach to technology use.

Leveraging our student workers who had previously delivered virtual support, I focused on solving the training problem. We knew most students would need math, science, or writing assistance, although we typically help with significantly more topics. Our primary focus was ensuring we could provide high-demand academic support for the remainder of the semester so our students could finish strong. Tutoring is essential, as the tutor upholds the role of mediator, companion, and counselor for the tutee (Tragodara, 2021). Our ability to continue delivering tutoring was critical because other academic support departments closed immediately when the pandemic sent full-time staff to work from home. Therefore, aside from faculty office hours, our academic support would be the only option left for students.

I reviewed the schedule for our existing student workers who had delivered support online and worked to pair each of those student workers with others who had only delivered academic support in person. The student workers who had supported online students in the past were comfortable and familiar with making phone calls and using Zoom to deliver virtual support. We instructed each of our student workers to create Zoom accounts using their student worker email address and taught them the basics, including how to use their Personal Meeting ID, launch meetings, and share screens. When working in person, our student workers wore a department-branded polo Monday through Thursday and a university shirt on the weekends. We asked our student workers to continue wearing their polos in their Zoom meetings to maintain the brand and ensure their backgrounds were clean, clear, and appropriate.

As we had issues with computers, systems, or

other technology, we consistently contacted our IT Help Desk. Some student workers had difficulty adjusting to the softphone software or needed access to specific systems or features they did not have access to before the pandemic. The Help Desk staff members were busy helping all employees transitioning to remote work. However, they efficiently ensured that each student worker had access to what they needed and could carry out their academic support duties remotely. It was an impressive display of collaboration, innovation, support, and putting students first.

Offering virtual academic support meant nothing if students were unaware of the virtual support option. Therefore, I worked with our marketing team to compose and deliver multiple emails outlining our virtual support options and instructions for access. We also worked with our internal social media team, comprised primarily of student workers, to post about the available virtual support. Finally, our student workers' first task when they had the necessary equipment and system access was to conduct courtesy check-in phone calls to all our ground traditional students and to let them know of the available virtual support. By the end of March and early April 2020, we had fully transitioned our student workers and full-time staff to delivering academic and career support 100% remotely.

Holistically, our efforts to transition our 100+ student workers to work remotely may have long-term implications not only for our university but also for academic and career support services across the globe. At our organization, the ability to continue our support services meant students had access to the support they needed to finish the semester strong, even amidst a worldwide pandemic. We believe that our efforts and ultimate success in delivering virtual support contributed to the overall success of our 20,000+ ground traditional students during an exceptionally difficult semester. Further, we have continued offering virtual support options for students who prefer this modality or who have continued learning from home even though our campus has reopened. Our world of delivering academic and career support services has forever changed, knowing that we can offer flexibility in service modality and access. Finally, engaging in this reflective practice will ultimately help evaluate what contributed to our success so we can continue adapting, learning, and trying new avenues in the future.

EVALUATION OF IDEAS
Organizational culture

Organizational culture was a possible contributor to the success of our student workers working remotely. Organizational culture combines inherent assumptions and beliefs its employees hold (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020). Specifically, organizational culture includes employees' collective norms, beliefs, and values, which influence employee behaviors (Aranki et al., 2019). Furthermore, a good relationship between organizational culture and its employees is crucial to organizational success (Aranki et al., 2019). In my 10 years of employment with the university, I have consistently witnessed the organizational beliefs and norms of integrity, doing the right thing, and doing our best. Specifically, our student workers often go above and beyond when caring for a student or representing our department. For example, we have had student workers stay late to ensure our locations were appropriately locked by public safety. We have also had student workers approach full-time staff with concerns about a student's well-being. Furthermore, student workers have spoken up when other student workers were not being responsible, and many student workers have taken the initiative to design and implement new programming options to serve students better. Faculty, staff, student workers, and students have demonstrated these beliefs and norms many, many times. My myriad collaboration experiences have focused on student success. The resounding response of people and departments is to jump in and help wherever necessary. Often, the "other duties as assigned" bullet points are exercised willingly by employees to do right by our students.

More specifically, the university is a non-denominational, missional Christian university. Dean (2019) explored Christian virtues in the workplace, emphasizing the virtues of the Fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Such virtues can be leveraged as indicators to assess educational effectiveness in a school setting (Hall, 2007). Furthermore, the Fruit of the Spirit can be an antecedent to organizational success through virtuous leadership and employees (Winston & Bocarnea, 2022). Ultimately, the virtues

of the Fruit of the Spirit can combine to support a healthy organizational culture. In my experience, all these virtues are evident across campus through interactions, programming, planning, offerings, service work, and more. I have witnessed all these virtues in my department, but the three that stand out the most to me are love, kindness, and goodness. Winston and Bocarnea (2022) provide helpful definitions of love, kindness, and goodness. Love in the Fruit of the Spirit context is defined as *agape* love, which is given regardless of merit and is a love focused on giving. Kindness is defined as behaviors benefitting or making others happy, often through self-sacrifice. Finally, goodness is the general focus on others' well-being. I often see love, kindness, and goodness demonstrated daily by my full-time staff and our student workers. Our team deeply desires to see students succeed. Such kindness is shown daily through acting generously and aiming to meet the needs of others. I see this in the goodness of our team members and their inherent concern for others' well-being.

For instance, we had a student worker notice that an older commuter student was having difficulty getting connected on campus, so she invited the student to her life group (spiritual group on campus), which was separate from her position in our department. Additionally, I witnessed a student walk in one day at the beginning of the fall semester and light up when he saw our student worker, a tutor he worked with in a prior course. The student immediately went to him and exclaimed how much the tutor had helped him in a prior chemistry course and that he wanted to know if he could work with the tutor again. After the tutor assured him that was okay and the student left, the tutor turned to me and said, "He's a smart kid, he just needs more time to go through everything than what he is offered in the classroom. I meet with him every week, sometimes multiple times per week. I know he can do it. I'm excited to work with him again this year!" We consistently have student workers and full-time staff members share their impactful interactions with students and express concern about their well-being and progress toward their goals. The overall concern and hope for others, combined with the service to do what is right and best for students, underscores our organizational culture rooted in the Fruit of the Spirit.

DEPARTMENTAL CULTURE

On a smaller scale, our department's culture reflects the overall organizational culture. Like the organizational culture, our department values integrity, doing the right thing, and doing our best. By the nature of our department and its physical structure, our student workers typically work in various locations across campus. At the same time, our administrative offices are also spread across campus at different sites. Such a departmental structure means that our 100+ student workers often work autonomously, and we put significant trust in them to demonstrate integrity and do the right thing with minimal supervision. Such autonomy and independence are unique among student workers at our institution based on the typical departmental structure. However, due to our unique structure and disbursement across campus, we strive to find student workers who embody such traits so we can trust them to work autonomously. Sometimes, we get it wrong, or sometimes, our student workers behave out of their typical values. In these instances, other student workers will speak up and either address their colleague or bring it to management's attention. If something occurs in one of our spaces that does not align with our department or university standards, our student workers often bring it to management's attention. For example, one of our tutors reviewed a student's writing in an essay and dutifully answered questions along the way. At the end of the appointment, the student made a comment that alerted the tutor to malicious intent. The actual assignment was to review a peer's essay, but the student did not tell the tutor they were reviewing someone else's work until an off-hand comment at the end. Immediately, the tutor let his manager know so we could move forward with an academic integrity investigation.

Importantly, trust is a significant aspect of our department. This trust is not only among full-time staff but also the trust of our student workers, who inform much of what we do and how we do our jobs. Trust is considered the overall belief an employee has in the actions of others (van Zoonen et al., 2023). More specifically, trust is the assumption that a colleague's actions will be helpful and not detrimental to others (van Zoonen et al., 2023). Pre-pandemic, our department relied on the function of trust to operate due to being spread out across locations and, therefore, having a lack of

direct oversight regularly. Whereas I would not have considered our student workers "remote" under our normal structure, they were in a way "remote" due to working across campus in various offices and without oversight.

In many ways, trust and autonomy go together. Furthermore, autonomy specifically can contribute to overall employee motivation. According to Job Characteristics Theory (JCT), three characteristics of a job can contribute to motivation: meaningfulness of the work, feedback, and autonomy (Betts, 2019). Lysova et al. (2019) argued that autonomy and other job characteristics are essential to creating meaningful work. Ultimately, autonomy can motivate and lead to a sense of meaningful work among employees.

Job autonomy has many different definitions (Khoshnaw & Alavi, 2020). However, common threads among the definitions include the employee having freedom, independence, and discretion. Whereas our student workers must commit to specific schedules based on their availability, how they work and manage themselves is very much up to them. We have ethical guidelines, professional expectations, processes, and procedures for them to follow. However, for the most part, the student workers are expected to conduct themselves appropriately under minimal supervision. Therefore, our student workers have had job autonomy for several years in an in-person context. The transition to working from home may have been easy for them because they were already familiar with working under minimal guidance and oversight. Specifically, Wang et al. (2021) conducted an empirical study and found that autonomy was one of four virtual work characteristics that improve remote employees' effectiveness and well-being.

TECHNOLOGY ADAPTATION AND VIRTUAL SUPPORT TEMPLATE

The university already had extensive experience supporting distance learners, with much of the necessary technology already in place. One of the departments under Student Success previously offered academic support to our online student population for years; their methods were complete with phone calls, Zoom calls, and a system to schedule appointments. According to Savić (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic forced most organizations into a digital transformation. Digital transformation

means, at its core, doing things differently while leveraging technology. Most importantly, digital transformation requires organizations to adapt the essence of the business while placing the customer at the center (Savić, 2020). Higher education leaders were pressured to transition quickly to online learning to keep students, staff, and faculty safe (Moon et al., 2023). Our digital transformation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was guided by a department that had already adapted the appropriate student-centered methods of delivering virtual support while leveraging technology. The ability to adjust pre-existing processes and templates made our response to the pandemic faster and smoother and continued our student focus.

Furthermore, digital transformation in education (DTE) is a new area of educational research (Hervás-Gómez et al., 2021) and was on display during the pandemic. Digital transformation in education necessitates "technology, digital culture and leadership to be fully accepted in the educational environments" (Hervás-Gómez et al., 2021, p. 2). Such transformation also requires innovation and creativity within higher education. For staff members at the university, we have embraced technology and virtual support for years. For example, our doctoral studies program used Zoom for dissertation committee meetings years before the pandemic, primarily because our doctoral students are located worldwide. Advanced degrees have changed how they are delivered in response to the internet and digital technologies (Jiang et al., 2021). Even prior to the pandemic, enrollment in online degree programs had increased (Jiang et al., 2021), which was true for our doctorate programs leading up to the pandemic. On a grander scale, the university leverages the same learning management platform for the ground traditional students as it does for online students. The university has been at the forefront of DTE in higher education, and our department simply had to adapt processes already used in other departments.

Moreover, some students react differently to technology use in education. The technology acceptance model (TAM) explores student attitudes about technology use by perceived usefulness and ease of use. In our situation, the perceived usefulness of Zoom as a platform to deliver appointments was evident because, at the time, we had no other options. Anecdotally,

perceived ease of use varied from student worker to student worker and student to student. However, for our student workers, we worked diligently to train them on the technology so they felt comfortable and confident using it to carry out their work. As department leaders responsible for that training, we leveraged pre-existing training documents and leaned on student workers already familiar and comfortable with Zoom to help other student workers learn it. Leveraging an existing template for providing virtual support and leveraging the pre-existing knowledge from student workers familiar with the virtual support structure proved invaluable to our transition from in-person to virtual support appointments.

TRAINING

Upon reflection, I was fortunate to have had an existing structure of virtual academic support from which to work. That structure allowed us to quickly adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and deliver immediate training to our 100+ student workers. According to Kanapathipillai and Azam (2020), training aims to improve employee knowledge and skills while improving the organizational system. Further, Ozkeser (2019) emphasized that training quality is critical to the effectiveness and efficiency of the business or institution. Specifically, training can lead to increased productivity, safety, performance, and satisfaction (Kanapathipillai & Azam, 2020). I worked closely with my fellow directors and program managers to take the existing virtual academic support training curriculum, adapt it, and deliver it to our student workers.

We knew training would be important for our student workers to succeed in a new way of work. Training helps establish and improve the knowledge and skills needed to perform a task (Kanapathipillai & Azam, 2020; Ozkeser, 2019). Therefore, we leveraged an existing training manual and adapted it slightly for our needs. Because another department had already delivered virtual academic support and had an existing training curriculum, we quickly adapted the curriculum for our student workers and the population they served. It required minimal changes and, in essence, became a "copy/paste" situation where we could send out and leverage the training materials almost verbatim. We also connected student workers who had previously delivered virtual support with student workers who had not. This structure allowed student workers new to virtual support the opportunity to shadow and practice delivering appointments in this new way. Remote workers' effectiveness depends on adequate training (Manko & Rosinski, 2021). However, training effectiveness can be influenced by timing; training for remote work in advance can be valuable, compared to emergency training when remote work is forced on employees, which can be more difficult (Manko & Rosinski, 2021). We worked diligently to train given our circumstances; however, most student workers received training virtually after they arrived home from their sudden departure from the campus.

DECISION

The decisions outlined next are twofold. First, the aim is to identify which ideas, if any, resulted in the unexpected outcome of our student workers successfully working from home. Second, each idea is evaluated and expanded upon relative to possible duplication. Hilden and Tikkamäki (2013) asserted that reflective practice is not necessarily to identify new ways of operating but instead to "create best practices out of present practices" (p. 83). In other words, reflective practice allows us to challenge the status quo and long-held assumptions. Therefore, the decision for each working idea also outlines how our efforts may be duplicated elsewhere should other universities need to transition student workers to work remotely or transition support services to a virtual platform.

It is not easy to pick one contributor to our 100+ student workers' success working remotely for 18 months. Our student workers delivered nearly the same number of appointments working remotely as they had pre-pandemic. Maintaining that same level of service proves impressive given the circumstances, including the emergency responses, numerous pivots, and several iterations of the remote work structure. Ultimately, it is likely that each of the working ideas, along with other components not yet realized, contributed to our student worker team's success. After reviewing each working idea, separating each one from the result is nearly impossible. Furthermore, it is difficult to say that no other factors influenced the success of our transition to remote work.

The organizational and departmental culture at the university, specifically rooted in a Christian

worldview, likely guided each decision made from the executive level, through our departmental leadership, and on to each student worker. Our student workers are often exemplars of the Fruit of the Spirit, as explained by Dean (2019) and Winston and Bocarnea (2022). How many of them approach their daily activities, integrity and work ethic, and overall concern for the students they serve, their job, their team, and their department can be attributed to the underlying Christian worldview and the Fruit of the Spirit. Furthermore, our student workers consistently displayed traits such as clocking in and out on time, asking for help and clarification, taking initiative, following through, providing feedback, engaging in meetings and training, and offering ideas and suggestions. Most importantly, our student workers consistently put the students they served first and ensured their students' needs were met. It would not be easy to philosophically separate each individual involved during this timeframe from the ethics they uphold and estimate how they would perform in different circumstances.

Furthermore, I can say the same for the full-time staff involved in transitioning our department to work remotely. It is impossible to separate who they are and what they brought to their work every day before, during, and after the pandemic. Before the pandemic, they were people who cared first and foremost about the success of our students and about supporting our student workers to be the best they could be. That virtue continued, perhaps even strengthened, rather than waned during the pandemic. Ultimately, it would be difficult to say that how each person approaches their responsibilities day in and day out did not influence the overall success of our team.

Other organizations and departments may duplicate or establish a similar environment through clearly articulated and demonstrated values. Whereas a set of Christian principles guides our university, any university or department could establish values and work them into the fabric of their daily work. In my experience, establishing and living by such values starts with articulating them, providing examples of what they do and do not look like in practice, reinforcing them through praise, conversations, meetings, training, etc., and always keeping them at the forefront. Perhaps most importantly, the values must be modeled by leadership so employees can see them in action and

understand their importance. Trust and remote work played a significant role in our response to the pandemic and in providing virtual support. Parker et al. (2020) quickly conducted and released study results about remote managers leading remote teams in response to the pandemic. Importantly, trust seemed to be a major issue for many managers overseeing remote workers during the pandemic, primarily if they had not previously been remote. Specifically, employees felt micromanaged, a need to be immediately available, and as though their bosses did not trust them or have faith in their abilities, skills, and knowledge (Parker et al., 2020). Perhaps trust is more important than the autonomy we afforded our student workers. Alternatively, perhaps we inherently trusted our student workers, which led to increased autonomy and self-management, which cyclically led us to trust them more. Future research should explore trust, especially among student workers working remotely.

I follow a lot of Simon Sinek's work on leadership and try to embody much of what he teaches. Sinek and Grace (2019) poignantly explained that "too many of us treat trust like a valuable asset that must be guarded. … If we can all learn to take the risk to trust first, it will give those around us permission to believe in themselves and their abilities in the most remarkable way" (para. 3). In some ways, I wonder if us trusting our student workers to do the work led them to a sense of responsibility, ownership, and being a part of the solution during a challenging time. Perhaps other institutions or departments might take the risk of trusting student workers first to build them up and facilitate the opportunity for them to rise to the occasion.

Digital transformation and digital transformation in education also likely contributed to our team's success. From the top down, our organization has been on the cutting edge of technology to promote education worldwide. Leveraging the same online learning management system for all ground traditional students, all cohort students, and all online students is one example of the university's innovation, adaptability, and efficiency. My fellow director's experience with adapting technology and delivering virtual support likely led to our department's success. Without his resources readily available, it would have taken us longer to establish methods and processes, execute them, and train our student workers. At the very least, we

likely would not have been able to transition fast enough to provide support for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester. As an innovative university and team, we could pivot quickly and positively impact our students and the university.

Should other institutions identify a need to transition support services to an online modality, whether leveraging student workers or otherwise, it is important for support to come from the top down. Executive leadership teams can foster an environment that promotes technology use, removes barriers to accessing technology, and encourages the steps necessary for appropriate technology use. Innovation is likely so far-reaching at our university because it stems from the leadership team, thus reinforcing the concept of a top-down influence. Other institutional leadership teams might consider evaluating their approach to innovation, change, and technology use for similar outcomes.

Finally, training is nearly impossible to eliminate as a contributor to our team's success during the pandemic. Whereas we had a template of methods and processes to adapt and execute quickly, they would have been useless without the ability to train our student workers on them quickly. Our team promptly delivered training documents and virtual training sessions for our student workers, ensuring they had the resources and training needed to fulfill their job responsibilities. Furthermore, our full-time staff were available for questions and consistently available for problem-solving through technology, including email, chat, and phone for any follow-up questions, clarifications, or re-training.

Other institutions interested in implementing training on technology use might consider leveraging pre-existing training at their organization. In our case, another department had already created similar training we could leverage for our purposes. It may be worth exploring whether other departments have already created such training before spending the time and resources to create training from scratch. Significant research exists on training, which could be a helpful starting point for an institution launching a new training program.

Working from home comes with many documented challenges. Green et al. (2020) identified key challenges to working from home, including communication, management, working environment, technology, well-being, and performance outcomes. Specifically, they highlighted the importance of trust and good faith in relationships, along with technological infrastructure, including training, software, and support. These aspects align with the working ideas and evaluation of them but present a model that successful remote work involves much more than culture, digital transformation, and training. Therefore, the working ideas presented here may be accurate yet incomplete.

Although I am a naturally deep thinker and almost always reflect, looking back on the pandemic experience and the transition to remote work, I was in survival mode. I did not reflect much, if at all, on what was happening. Instead, I was in "go" mode, working tirelessly to make the transition while balancing the stress of a worldwide pandemic. I did not reflect on why we were making a successful transition then; I just felt that we needed to make it. However, I remember being grateful for the opportunity to continue working and for the quick decisions of our leadership team to allow our student workers to continue working. Furthermore, I recall having a deep appreciation for the work ethic of our staff. That was a challenging experience for people in vastly different ways, yet they still worked hard to ensure we could keep going.

Engaging in this reflective practice reemphasized the factors contributing to our success and ability to push through. During the experience, I did not question whether a particular factor about our institution or department influenced our outcomes. However, upon reflection, I can see clearly that each of the working ideas presented here, and likely other factors not yet discovered, contributed to our successful transition to working remotely. The question becomes how much each factor contributed and what recipe works together for a successful outcome.

All ideas likely contributed to the success of our student workers working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Love, kindness, and goodness are demonstrated daily across the university. Our technologically nimble university made it possible, quick, and easy to adapt to remote work through creative problem-solving, access to technology, and established methods and processes for delivering virtual support. Finally, effective training helped ensure our student workers knew what they were responsible for and how to carry

out those responsibilities through remote work. We could have a Christian spirit but not be innovative. We could be innovative but lack integrity, ethics, or a sincere desire to put the students first. A department can have great technology, but without creating a digital culture through effective training, it would lack true digital transformation. If one element is removed, it is difficult to say what the result could have been. All working ideas likely contributed to the overall success of our team.

REFLECTIVE CRITIQUE

In March 2020 and the following weeks and months, I was not paying attention to what practices contributed to our success in transitioning 100+ student workers to work from home. Instead, I was in survival mode, simply trying to ensure we could continue delivering our services to students remotely. I knew we would not have been able to accomplish what we did without the people, both at the top of the executive team and on the frontlines with our student workers. It took this reflective practice to begin exploring and, ultimately, to begin understanding how important these factors were, which I typically take for granted in our transition to remote work.

Upon reflection, there were likely many contributing factors to our student workers' success while working remotely. Furthermore, our department could not have been successful without the overall university being successful in a quick and agile transition in response to the pandemic. Innovation at the executive level undoubtedly flowed through each department within the university. If the executive leadership team had not pivoted quickly, individual departments would have been stifled. Therefore, there are many reasons why our shift to remote work for 100+ student workers succeeded.

While conducting this reflection, I am increasingly convinced that our successful transition came down to the people, which is tied to the organizational and departmental cultures. As an organization, the president, student workers, custodial crew, and everyone in between contributed to the success of our university's response to the pandemic. Our university's Christian worldview informed our actions during this emergency transition by exhibiting and upholding the virtues of the Fruit of the Spirit. Throughout the transition, comments were regularly made about the importance of putting our students first, ensuring we focused on giving, benefitting our students by our decisions, and focusing on their well-being. I am sure that many decisions could have been made that would have been easier, but they would not have put our students first and, therefore, were not considered. The organizational culture drove our decisions by upholding our values.

Furthermore, our department's success in the transition would not have occurred without the foundation of people who genuinely care about putting students first. In a sense, university leadership immediately decided we owed it to students to finish the semester and support them in the best ways possible while responding quickly. Our students' success was paramount, and every action following that decision aligned with that focus. I cannot imagine the leadership offices' discussions, strategizing, planning, and problem-solving. However, I know from my experience that our students came first.

I feel fortunate to work at a university on the cutting edge of online education, which ultimately helped us pivot quickly to align with the primary focus of our students coming first. I have seen incredible technology maximized as a tool for ensuring student success through the innovative methods of our doctoral program prior to the pandemic. In some ways, technology amplified our pillar of putting students first, allowing us to extend our care to more students across more locations in increasingly creative ways. Technology has allowed us to reach more students in more ways and provide a full array of support, even during a worldwide pandemic.

However, I also firmly believe in the importance of our technology, which has allowed our caring and student-focused staff and faculty to deliver such support and customer service to our students. Furthermore, our university believed in the importance of investing in such technology to ensure we could deliver services to our students virtually. Our IT department quickly acquired Zoom licenses and rolled out Microsoft Teams to the entire university, offering multiple ways to interact with each other and, most importantly, with students. In the fall semester of 2020, there were close to 10 different modalities in which students could attend classes, all identified, planned, and implemented over the summer. Innovative ways to administer

exams and check for learning and understanding were deployed to ensure students could continue progressing through their programs, whether they returned to campus or stayed home and continued classes online. Adapting technology in a short period underscored the importance of leveraging technology to put students first.

As with many other organizations, our experience transitioning 100+ student workers to remote work has forced us to consider our business practices moving forward. For instance, some of our students elected to remain home to continue their studies online, even after the campus re-opened. Therefore, we had to continue virtual support offerings to ensure they had access to everything they would have had if they returned to campus. Today, we are almost 100% back to in-person offerings, with a few virtual offerings remaining. We must ask ourselves what can and should stay virtual versus what we should continue in person. Whereas much in the world has become more adaptable, flexible, and mobile, we will need to continue evaluating our services and the best ways to reach our students given the significant cultural, academic, and professional changes post-pandemic.

Future inquiry into this area could explore more nuanced contributors to the success of student workers working remotely. Perhaps personalities, motivation, or work ethic played a role in how our student workers engaged remotely. A similar transition with less access to technology-established processes and methods or training could zero in on what may have contributed to our transition's success. Studies in organizational innovation, agile practices, and creative problem-solving could shed light on how these characteristics contributed. More in-depth inquiries into the Christian worldview, digital transformation, innovative technology use, and training could also highlight where and how certain aspects of our experience contributed to the result of our student workers successfully working remotely. Furthermore, exploring manager trust with remote student workers could continue the work of Parker et al. (2020). I hope we never have to respond to a pandemic like COVID-19 again. However, further inquiry into emergency responses and preparedness could also benefit future situations requiring global responses and cultural shifts in how we approach our daily work and higher education.

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