RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY BETWEEN ONLINE CONTINGENT FACULTY AND HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2021

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community between online contingent faculty and higher education administrators for a private university in the Midwest and to design a solution to address the problem. A multimethod design was developed, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Online contingent faculty participated in individual structured interviews and a focus group to examine the current perception, problem, and preferred solutions to the problem of a lack of a sense of community with the participating institution. Higher education administrators and online contingent faculty participated in a survey to gain clarity in the current perception, problem, and solutions to the problem of a lack of a sense of community between online contingent faculty and higher education administrators. After analyzing the data collected in this study, the most effective solution recommended to solve the central research question was to provide online CF with opportunities for job title advancement. The goal of the solution was to improve an SoC among online CF through increased perceptions of inclusivity, integration, influential value, and connection by providing a process that guided career advancement recognition.

Keywords: Higher education, contingent faculty, community, online education

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List of Abbreviations

American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

Center for Self-Determination Theory (CSDT)

Community of Inquiry (CoI)

Contingent faculty (CF)

Higher education (HE)

Higher education institution (HEI)

Higher education administrator (HEA)

Learning management system (LMS)

Self-determination theory (SDT)

Sense of community (SoC)

Sense of Community Index – 2 (SCI-2)

World Health Organization (WHO)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community between online contingent faculty (CF) and higher education administrators (HEA) for a private university in the Midwest and to formulate a solution to address the problem. The problem is the lack of a sense of community between online CF and HEAs at a private institution in the Midwest. This portion of the dissertation will examine the literature related to the problem. The historical significance of a sense of community theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008) will be discussed, along with its transferability into modern educational practices. Additionally, the integration of CF into higher education (HE) will be discussed in detail, particularly regarding how a sense of community applies to CF and how it is determined and executed within HE. Finally, a discussion of the factors associated with a sense of community (SoC), such as inclusivity, value, integration, and connection, will be applied to faculty performance. The problem investigation is led by the central research question: How can a lack of a sense of community be improved at a private institution of higher education located in the Midwest? An exploration of the problem will be specifically executed to answer three sub-questions: How would online contingent faculty in an interview improve a sense of community for online contingent faculty at a private university in the Midwest? How would online contingent faculty in a focus group improve a sense of community for online contingent faculty at a private university in the Midwest? How would quantitative survey data results conducted with university administrators improve a sense of community for online contingent faculty at a private university in the Midwest?

Background

An examination of the historical, social, and theoretical implications of HEA and CF relationships are explored to contextually frame the problem of an SoC between online CF and HEAs at a private university in the Midwest. This section of the chapter guides an understanding of the problem, interest, affected parties, and benefits of researching the SoC topic between online CF and HEAs. Further, the historical context, social influences, and theoretical examination guide the topic's importance.

Historical Context

Historically, technology advancements created a platform to serve HE students and expand postsecondary education while overcoming the geographic limitations of HE availability. As higher education institutions (HEIs) developed online programs, distance HE became an extension of the face-to-face classroom (Arasaratnam-Smith & Northcote, 2017). Over time, online education progressed as a unique instruction model with its own set of opportunities and challenges. As HE expanded, the need for part-time faculty, also known as CF, developed to support the growing student population (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Luna, 2018). Today in the United States, over two-thirds of all HE faculty are non-tenure track, with over half of all faculty classified as contingent (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2017). As a challenge, the online model of instruction impacted HEA communication methods to express institutional values that develop a sense of pedagogical continuity and an SoC while ultimately impacting HE instruction's overall effectiveness (Arasaratnam-Smith & Northcote, 2017).

Faculty Employment

HE faculty employment must be explored to explore the problem from which a lack of an SoC is evoked. Currently, CF make-up approximately 70% of HE faculty at many institutions (Chun et al., 2019) to support teaching needs for increasing HE student enrollments. While the majority of employed faculty are considered contractual, seasonal, sessional, or part-time, also known as contingent, such employees report feelings of limited support, compensation dissatisfaction, lack of professional development opportunities, and inadequate opportunities for advancement (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Kennedy, 2015; McGee et al., 2017; Meeker, 2017; Mohr & Shelton, 2017; Pons et al., 2017). As the majority of faculty at many HEIs presumedly, most students attending postsecondary education programs will experience at least one course taught by CF. The Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS] (2020) projects all postsecondary educators' growth as increasing at least nine percent from 2019 to 2029. This growth rate is considered faster than that of any United States occupation (BLS, 2020). HEAs must enable CF to act (Kouzes & Posner, 2017) and fulfill the duties associated with such a role, developing a sense of value and importance for which this topic is researched, explored, and evaluated. If HEAs continue to limit support and guidance for CF, HEIs may experience higher turnover rates (Danaei, 2019) as a result of perceived feelings of disconnection (Davis, 2018), isolation (Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015), and a lack of integration into cultural norms (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019).

Student Enrollments

Aligned with postsecondary educators' growth, the BLS (2020) expects student enrollments to continue growing throughout the next decade. The student body growth may require HEAs to continue increasing CF employee bodies to meet the demand. Historically,

distance and on-campus student enrollments have been on the rise since 2002 (Seaman et al., 2018). Specifically, private non-profit institutions have experienced continuous student enrollments (Seaman et al., 2018). Students enrolled exclusively in on-campus-only courses have dropped by 6.4% from 2012 to 2016 (Seaman et al., 2018). With distance education enrollments continuing to grow (BLS, 2020; Roney, 2017; Seaman et al., 2018) and the projected CF employment continuing to rise (BLS, 2020), a greater understanding of the development of how to improve an SoC between online CF and HEAs at a private, non-profit university will be detrimental in the institutional vision for which an adequate education is delivered. Such research will also provide recommendations for institutions interested in lowering turnover rates when CF perceive an SoC, which aids in the effective production of pedagogy and supporting student needs.

Social Influences

HEAs are now challenged to develop social networks with online CF who may be geographically separated from the face-to-face community that often naturally develops due to proximity. As the popularity of online and distance education increases among students and HEIs continue increasing non-tenure-track faculty employment (BLS, 2020), the value of understanding CF needs is significant and appropriate (Luongo, 2018). The overall success of online CF is often connected with feelings of worth and importance within the student body population and HEAs (Luongo, 2018). Through an SoC development, online CF may develop positive connections with peers and administrators, providing perceptions of support to guide pedagogical improvements (Ferencz, 2017). Alternatively, some online CF report feelings of intrinsic motivation that ultimately overcome feelings of disconnection (Davis, 2018), isolation (Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015), and little integration (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019). While the

lack of extrinsic motivators may be overcome by intrinsic motivation for some online CF, HEAs may find value in developing an SoC to advance the understanding of institutional culture, regulations, and pedagogical preferences that impact student learning outcomes.

Social Perceptions

Expanding current institutional community populations to include online CF may require HEAs to lead the change in the perceptions of CF by current constituents. Currently, HEAs are challenged to develop social networks through the application of developing an SoC with CF through inclusivity, influential value, institutional integration, and institutional connection (Ferencz, 2017; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Overcoming negative perceptions of distance education and online CF may be significant in successfully integrating an expanded SoC. Negative perceptions of the distance education field (Davis, 2018) contribute to the poor perception of CF educators. While some view traditional course structures as higher quality than alternative instructional modes, such as blended and online, the overuse of CF also concerns some institutional governing boards (Ciabocchi et al., 2016).

Through legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959), HEAs have the most political clout to impact perceptions of distance education, attitudes toward CF, and opportunities for CF involvement throughout HE (Ferencz, 2017). HEAs often have the most knowledge of opportunities, agenda control, and accessibility to resources within the institution (Morgan, 2006). In addition, program coordinators, department chair members, and college deans all hold vital power to the scarcity of technological, informational, and supportive resources (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Morgan, 2006). As HEAs become increasingly aware of the importance of developing an SoC with online CF, more significant academic decision-making associated with

online learning may impact the pedagogical outcome of student learning (Ciabocchi et al., 2016). Resultantly, the developed awareness for online CF needs will be of significant value to HEAs due to the impact CF have on student learning.

COVID-19

Upon the declaration of the COVID-19 world pandemic by the World Health Organization [WHO] in March 2020, HEIs were urged to move on-campus learning systems to online modalities (Ramlo, 2021). As educators transitioned courses from face-to-face to online learning management systems (LMS), an assumption of greater acceptance and appreciation for online education was developed (Ramlo, 2021). Historically, full-time faculty have reported lowered perceptions of online education's worth (Allen & Seaman, 2016). Although the COVID-19 pandemic required HEIs to alter face-to-face education settings to an online or blended format, full-time faculty experienced technology, support, and communication issues (Ramlo, 2021) that may have further developed a lack of acceptance for alternative modality education. As a result, the uncertainty of online learning effectiveness has yet to be overcome (Ramlo, 2021).

Interestingly, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 70% of HEAs reported that online learning achieved the same or better outcomes as face-to-face learning (Allen & Seaman, 2016). The most favorable HEA perceptions of online learning are often held by administrators of institutions hosting distance learning programs (Allen & Seaman, 2016). Further, larger universities are often correlated with a more positive online learning perception than smaller institutions (Allen & Seaman, 2016). The Carnegie Classification of Institutions (2017) reports that large universities have an enrollment of at least 10,000 degree-seeking students. Although the hesitation associated with online learning has yet to be improved among

full-time faculty, administrators should consider the online requirement for HE during the COVID-19 pandemic as a process for exploring and understanding faculty technology, support, and connection needs (Ramlo, 2021).

Theoretical Application

The theoretical application allows for further examination of the problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs. An analysis of the relationship development between HEAs and CF is explored by applying the sense of community theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008) as the theoretical framework. Further, the application of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), motivation theory (Herzberg et al., 1959), and social exchange theory (Homans, 1974) will provide insight toward individual aspects of the SoC problem. An explorative application of the theories will be addressed within the literature review to gain a greater understanding of the problem of a lack of an SoC between HEAs and online CF.

Theory of a Sense of Community

Developing relationships among online CF has been explored using the sense of community theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008) to explain how faculty teaching at a distance develop a perception of community with the employing institution (Ferencz, 2017). Developing an SoC encompasses four elements that guide membership, influence, integration, and shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, pp. 9-14). Observably, when one or more of the elements are absent from a community setting, individuals may be more likely to dissolve the relationship or separate from the community. Online CF often report feelings of disconnection (Davis, 2018), isolation (Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015), and a lack of integration (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019). The experiences associated with a lack of perceived community make online CF more subject to possible

dissolution and separation from the HE community or the employing institution. Questions have been raised regarding the responsible party for initiating and establishing an SoC with online CF (Davis, 2018; Ferencz, 2017). Most often, faculty perceive HEAs as the individuals responsible for initiating an SoC and providing the modes for which a community should be maintained (Davis, 2018; Ferencz, 2017). Regardless of the perceived responsible party, an SoC is reported as a desirable factor among online CF (Rios-Parnell, 2017). Currently, research lacks ample consideration for online CF's role as a responsible party for developing and executing community relationships of which fulfill individual needs.

Theory of Self-Determination

Online CF individual needs have also been explored using self-determination theory. This theory will be applied throughout the research to explore and examine online CF human competency, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Utilizing self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) may guide a deeper investigation of online CF and HEAs' experiences. While the theory of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985) offers insight into specific aspects of the problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs, the theory does not explore the nature of community as explained through the theory of a sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008), thus the theory of self-determination is utilized as a supporting agent to guide deeper exploration and examination.

As a mega-theory, self-determination is explored using six theories that guide an explanation of needs, goals, motivation, competency, autonomy, and relatedness (Center for Self-Determination Theory [CSDT], 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Guiding an implied understanding of CF needs through the application of self-determination theory (CSDT, 2020;

Deci & Ryan, 1985) showcased the lack of perceived relatedness, satisfaction, and disconnection within the HE field (Siepel & Larson, 2018). Further, emotions associated with passion (Greenberger, 2016), competency, and support (Ladyshewsky, 2016) are positively associated with CF determination. Interestingly, although a lack of an SoC is associated with online CF careers, constituents holding such positions often overcome perceptions of not mattering to the institution of employment and remain committed to the faculty role (Rios-Parnell, 2017). Ultimately, intrinsic and extrinsic motivators drive individual online CF satisfaction (Pons et al., 2017). The lack of practical implications for developing a perception of mattering and satisfaction among online CF is limited. As a result, while understanding motivational factors that drive self-determination among online CF members has been developed, few actionable steps have been recommended for HEI implementation.

Theory of Motivation

Guiding an understanding of overcoming limited satisfaction and perceptions of not mattering has been explored through the motivational and hygiene factors of the theory of motivation, also known as two-factor theory, dual structure theory, or motivation-hygiene theory (Herzberg et al., 1959). The application of motivation theory (Herzberg et al., 1959) may provide added insight to the researched experiences and perceptions of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs. Although, the theory of a sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008) provides a foundational system to specifically explore perceptions associated with the problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEA. Thus, motivation theory (Herzberg et al., 1959) will provide a fundamental examination of the literature and research data to examine perceptions of motivation experienced by online CF and provided by HEAs.

The theory of motivation (Herzberg et al., 1959) aims to explain organizational motivation by examining motivational and hygiene factors. Motivators are depicted as career achievements, appreciation, role requirements, responsibilities, advancement, and job growth (Herzberg et al., 1959). Hygiene factors focus on supervisor patterns, relationships, environment, pay, and job security (Herzberg et al., 1959). The more balanced each factor's elements are within the online CF role, the more satisfied constituents will report job satisfaction perceptions. Most often, individual aspects of motivation and hygiene factors are explored or uncovered resultantly through scholarly research. Reported dissatisfaction with compensation (Luongo, 2018; Rios-Parnell, 2017), limited advancement opportunities (Luongo, 2018), and a lack of recognition (Pons et al., 2017) have been uncovered as barriers to HE employee satisfaction. Alternatively, communication and satisfaction are positively correlated among HE employees (Bray & Williams, 2017; Kruse et al., 2018). Unfortunately, limited solutions for developing motivation that leads to an SoC are reported within the literature.

Theory of Social Exchange

A continued exploration of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that encompass initiated and reciprocal CF and HEA actions may lead to an awareness of how online CF perceive an SoC. The theory of social exchange (Homans, 1974) explores group members' actions and reactions through a balance of costs and benefits. By applying social exchange theory (Homans, 1974), the literature and research data may be explored more deeply, allowing additional insight into the nature of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs. Alternatively, the theory of social exchange (Homans, 1974) may help explore the perception of an SoC; however, it fails to provide a foundational structure for examining how an SoC is developed and maintained between HEAs and online CF.

Relationships between HE department chair members and CF showcase the reciprocal benefits of department chair members extending training and evaluating performance with improved retention rates of quality CF (Moorhead et al., 2015). When HEAs develop effective communication methods with online CF, a reciprocal perception of pride and skill competency is developed among online CF (Davis, 2018). Alternatively, when communication methods are maintained through high electronic mail levels between online CF and HEAs, the communicated message is dampened and reciprocates little understanding of shared content among online CF due to the over-saturation of messages (Hart et al., 2017). While the developed understanding of social exchange is beneficial to creating relationships between HEAs and online CF, HEIs will be limited in understanding how to apply social exchange to develop a sufficient SoC.

Problem Statement

The problem is the lack of a developed sense of community (SoC) between higher education administrators (HEA) and contingent faculty (CF) that may impact the overall effectiveness of CF pedagogy. This is evident among CF, who report feelings of disconnection, dissatisfaction, lack of influential ability, and distanced community involvement (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Larson et al., 2019; Murray, 2019). Specifically, CF report dissatisfaction with institutional support (Frisby et al., 2015), compensation (Murray, 2019; Pons et al., 2017), professional development (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Kennedy, 2015), lack of perceived value (Pons et al., 2017), and ineffective communication practices (Pons et al., 2017; Seipel & Larson, 2018). Current research has developed an understanding of CF motivation, professional development, support services, leadership styles, and communication barriers with HEAs. As a result, identified improvement methods are present in the current research; however, recommendations for best-practice communication approaches highlighting the mode, frequency,

and communication channels to support CF needs and provide practical communication opportunities that improve an SoC are not present. Additional research must focus on current communication tactics, the impact of communication, and measurable communication methods for the higher education institution (HEI). Such research will uncover an understanding of professional development, support services, culture, and CF values that may impact teaching methods, communication practices, and pedagogical quality. A multimethod research design with a theoretical approach will be developed to guide the assumptions and design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A transformative framework will guide fundamental ethical assumptions while improving social justice within HEIs while understanding the needed changes to develop a solution for creating stronger HEA and CF relationships that improve an SoC.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community between online CF and HEAs for a private university in the Midwest and to formulate a solution to address the problem. A multimethod design will be used, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The first approach will be structured interviews with online contingent faculty. The second approach will be a focus group with online contingent faculty. The third approach will be a survey with higher education administrators and online CF.

Significance of the Study

The benefits of improving an SoC between online CF and HEAs at a private university in the Midwest may include improved online CF inclusivity, value, integration, and connection (Ferencz, 2017; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Stakeholders, including HEAs and online CF within the institution, may experience improved levels of an SoC that may lead to increased retention of quality online CF (Moorehead et al.,

2015), enhanced pedagogical skill competency (Davis, 2018), effectiveness of communication processes (Bray & Williams, 2017; Hart et al., 2017; Kruse et al., 2018), and perceptions of employment satisfaction (Bray & Williams, 2017; Kruse et al., 2018). Further, HEAs willing to demonstrate and implement virtual collaboration and connection opportunities may provide more definitive collaboration roles (Schieffer, 2016) to guide CF toward preferred institutional standards of education. Students may experience higher institutional culture consistency levels through online CF pedagogy, leading to higher student retention and improved student learning outcomes. Further, while the Midwest private university research site may find improvements due to specific and practical implications for improving an SoC between online CF and HEAs, education scholars and other HEIs may translate such practices as fitting for alternative HE locations while extending future research and improving HEI effectiveness.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

How can a lack of a sense of community be improved at a private institution of higher education located in the Midwest?

Sub-question 1: How would online contingent faculty in an interview improve a sense of community for online contingent faculty at a private university in the Midwest?

Sub-question 2: How would online contingent faculty in a focus group improve a sense of community for online contingent faculty at a private university in the Midwest?

Sub-question 3: How would quantitative survey data results conducted with university administrators and online contingent faculty improve a sense of community for online contingent faculty at a private university in the Midwest?

Definitions

1. *Connection* – A relational development among individuals within a group experienced through shared symbolism, bonds, stories, and events (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008).

2. *Online contingent faculty* – Employees of higher education institutions teaching part-time in an online environment contracted term-by-term with no advancement opportunities, benefits, or paid-time-off (Luna, 2018). Also known as adjunct faculty, non-tenure-track faculty, or instructors (American Association of University Professors, 2020).

3. *Higher education administrators* – Postsecondary professionals responsible for overseeing student, academic, and faculty services within higher education institutions (BLS, 2020) to include program coordinators, department chair members, college deans, provosts, and presidents.

4. *Inclusivity* – A relational development among individuals within a group experienced through boundaries, safety, and belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008).

5. *Integration* – A relational development among individuals within a group experienced through shared responsibilities, values, and resources that benefit one another (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008).

6. *Sense of community* – A phenomenon experienced by a group in various settings through the ability to perceive membership, drive influence, integrate, and share connections (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008).

7. Value – A relational development among individuals within a group experienced through well-being, social norms, and influential value (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008).

Summary

The focus of this chapter aimed to provide a distinct understanding of the problem, purpose, background, research questions, and definitions of the problem of a lack of a developed SoC between online CF and HEAs at a private university located in the Midwest. The purpose of this applied study aims to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community for the private institution and formulate a solution to address the problem. An examination of the historical, social, and theoretical implications guides an understanding of the problem, interest, affected parties, and benefits of conducting the applied study on the SoC research topic. Such research aims to examine current perceptions of institutional culture, support, and community that may impact teaching methods, communication practices, pedagogical quality, and perceptions of satisfaction associated with connection, inclusivity, integration, and value. Resultantly, the examination and developed awareness for online CF needs will be of high value to HEAs and HE stakeholders due to the impact CF have on student learning.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community (SoC) between online contingent faculty (CF) and higher education administrators (HEA) for a private university in the Midwest and to formulate a solution to address the problem. In response, a systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore the lack of a developed SoC between HEAs and CF, which may impact the overall effectiveness of CF pedagogy. This chapter will present a review of the literature related to the topic of study. In the first section, the theories relevant to an SoC and motivation will be discussed, followed by a synthesis of recent literature regarding HEA and the CF community. Lastly, the literature surrounding the factors which lead to an SoC within higher education institutions (HEIs) will be addressed and guide a need for solving the problem of a lack of a sense of community between online CF and HEAs.

Theoretical Framework

An exploration of the theoretical framework to explore an SoC between online CF and HEAs within higher education (HE) will focus on a sense of community theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Further, a discussion of motivation theory (Herzberg et al., 1959) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) will provide insight toward individual aspects of the SoC problem. An explorative application of the theories will be addressed within the literature review to gain a greater understanding of the problem between HEAs and CF community development.

Theory of a Sense of Community

Exploring community development, maintenance, and dissolution, McMillan and Chavis

(1986) established a sense of community theory to develop an explanation for which individuals experience and perceive community. As an encompassing theory, the inclusion of four pillars describes the necessary elements of acquiring an SoC perception. The four elements focus on membership, influence, integration, and shared emotional connection (pp. 9-14). Within each component, various dynamics develop the fundamental structure for supporting a group's development or dissolution. Each element's dynamic nature describes a group setting's characteristics that promote either an attractive or unattractive draw to create or maintain membership of a community. In examining a sense of community theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008), researchers explored the validity and reliability of the theory through which comparative analysis was investigated to guide understanding of researchers claiming measurement weakness. Through such an investigation, declarative findings indicated that any inconsistencies of outcomes resulted from user measurement error rather than theoretical issues (Peterson et al., 2008). This outcome further establishes the validity and reliability of the sense of community theory as a theoretical framework (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008).

Theory of Motivation

Motivation theory, also known as two-factor theory, dual structure theory, or motivation-hygiene theory, was developed to understand the satisfaction employees have within the workplace (Herzberg et al., 1959) and was considered an alternative theoretical framework. While the theory of motivation (Herzberg et al., 1959) examines motivational factors that may lead individuals to seek and maintain online CF careers, the theory does not offer guidance for which the development, maintenance, or dissolution of an SoC is established. Thus, the inclusion of motivation theory (Herzberg et al., 1959) is applicable through the investigative needs of the

study as a supporting theory for examining the problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs at a private university located in the Midwest as individuals maintain or decline in the motivation needed to sustain a career as an online CF member. Within the theory, two factors were identified as motivators and hygiene factors. Motivators within the workplace include career achievements, appreciation, job requirements, responsibilities, advancement opportunities, and job growth. Motivators linked to a career as an online CF member may focus more significantly on completing job requirements and developing career achievements while maintaining a primary career within another organization (Ferencz, 2017). Hygiene factors concentrate on the workplace elements that focus on supervision tendencies, relationships, workplace environment, pay, and job security. Due to the nature of the career as an online CF member, workplace environments offer flexibility and the opportunity to work wherever an Internet connection is available. As a hygiene factor of motivation theory (Herzberg et al., 1959), the benefit of working from any location may drive individuals to overlook lowered satisfaction with other hygiene factors. A balance of motivator and hygiene factors may guide an understanding of the satisfaction experienced by CF of which drives knowledge of factors that may lead to an SoC. However, it does not identify which particular and fulfilled factors aid in developing the perceived community.

Theory of Social Exchange

A further consideration for understanding workplace relationship motivations allows for the exploration of social exchange theory (Homans, 1974). Social exchange theory considers group members interconnected through costs and benefits balance within the relationship (Homans, 1974). Specifically, influence within an interconnected community supports members with a sense of being valued and making a difference to the organization (McMillan & Chavis,

1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Although the majority, CF continue to experience a perceived lack of value through limited compensation and benefits (Chun et al., 2019; Murray, 2019). Further, while CF are recruited as experts within the field, HEA communication tendencies presume a lack of competence and value after being hired (Larson et al., 2019). Exploring online CF and HEA initiated and reciprocal actions may provide insight into the intrinsic and extrinsic behaviors that lead to a perceived SoC. However, it will not explicitly explain how an SoC develops. Both motivation theory and social exchange theory hold similarities in that relationships are theorized as most successful when a balance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators are present. While these theories offer insight into the development of motivation CF perceives, the theories fail to address the community developed from experienced motivation. Understanding the motivation of which empowers CF provides partial insight that creates value for the theories to be applied and explored throughout the literature review.

Theory of Self-Determination

Additionally, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) was considered as a theoretical framework. At the time of development, self-determination theory was comprised of three methods of analyzing cognitive evaluation, organismic integration, and causality orientations (Deci & Ryan, 1985). These theories explained the triadic approach for which self-determination was comprised. Together, the theories evaluated how individuals are impacted by events through which the actions and control change. As a result, self-determination theory described that three human needs must be present to evoke self-determination; those factors include competency, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Today, self-determination theory has evolved to include six theories of which extend the self-determination theory to a mega-theory (CSDT, 2020). The six theories guide

psychological needs, goals, and relational motivations, in addition to the original triadic approach (CSDT, 2020). Ultimately, self-determination theory aims to explain and define intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that impact psychological and societal factors (CSDT, 2020). Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) may guide an exploration of the intrinsic factors that motivate individuals to seek and maintain work within HE as online CF. Such intrinsic motivators may outweigh the limited compensation and benefits (Chun et al., 2019; Murray, 2019) reported by some online CF. Further, if online CF find satisfaction within other professional avenues, the need for connecting and integrating may be less critical than those working within full-time faculty positions. Thus, assumptively, any level of extrinsic motivator presented to online CF may have a limited impact on the self-determination of such individuals. While intrinsic and extrinsic motivators help explain these psychological and societal factors, an SoC interpretation would be developed from such a framework rather than explained.

Theory of Social Cognition

Similarly, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) focuses on the environment, behavior, and person. Thus, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) offers additional insight for assessing a perceived SoC between online CF and HEAs. The triadic reciprocality framework of the social cognitive theory that encompasses the impacts of environment, behavior, and person was applied to human behavior and learning (Bandura, 1986). Application of the triadic reciprocality model to HEA communication with online CF may provide insight into the motivations of online CF actions and behaviors. Further, the application of social cognitive theory predicts that the online CF member's behavior will determine the developed environment. Thus, both HEAs and online CF's actions may

determine the perceived feelings of effective communication or disconnection. The application of social cognitive theory to HEAs and online CF's communication methods may offer guidance in developing an effective support system and professional development opportunities. Further, the application of social cognitive theory may guide HEAs in developing effective communication methods to advertise professional development opportunities. Like that of motivation theory (Herzberg et al., 1959), social exchange theory (Homans, 1974), and self-determination theory (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) address only partial aspects of developing an SoC while guiding clarity to individual determination among HEAs and CF. Thus, the application of self-determination theory and social cognitive theory are explored within the literature review as explanatory measures rather than a guiding framework.

Related Literature

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community between online CF and HEAs at a private university in the Midwest and formulate a solution to address the problem. A complete understanding of an SoC's needed development with CF must be led by understanding the situation's context. Thus, an investigation of CF employment and distance education student enrollments is conducted to guide understanding. The contextual data is followed by an investigation of the sense of community pillars (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008) with a detailed exploration of each element of which develops an SoC among faculty. Further, the application of motivation theory (Herzberg et al., 1959), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), social exchange theory (Homans, 1974), and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) will be applied to further examine the review of literature as associated with an SoC between online CF and HEAs.

Faculty Employment

HE faculty employment must be explored to gain an understanding for which the problem of a lack of SoC is evoked. Currently, contingent faculty make up approximately 70% of HE faculty at many institutions (Chun et al., 2019) to support teaching needs due to the increasing HE student body. While the majority of employed faculty are considered contractual, seasonal, sessional, or part-time, also known as contingent, such employees report feelings of limited support, compensation dissatisfaction, lack of professional development opportunities, and inadequate opportunities for advancement (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Kennedy, 2015; McGee et al., 2017; Meeker, 2017; Mohr & Shelton, 2017; Pons et al., 2017). As the majority of faculty at many HEIs, presumedly most students attending postsecondary institutions will experience at least one course taught by CF. Such an impact developed by CF drives an element of the motivation for the study's significance.

With CF and student interaction presumably high, HEAs must consider stakeholders' collaborative efforts to aid in supporting the success and retention of students and CF. Developing an open system of HEAs, faculty, and students guides more successful online HE environments through such collaborative efforts (Muljana & Luo, 2019). Systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1950) within education suggests a collective and shared responsibility for successful student learning, which engages faculty, students, staff, administrators, and technology (Muljana & Luo, 2019). When engagement is developed through an open system, educators, administrators, staff, and other stakeholders develop an increased student retention level (Muljana & Luo, 2019). When collaborators engage in concern for student engagement, the process of student learning is inevitable. Through engaging and integrative educational environments, faculty support a sense of belonging visible through course design and

instructional content (Muljana & Luo, 2019). Without such a sense of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008), students in an online environment may have a low perception of responsibility to the development of class discussions while embracing inactive social qualities (Muljana & Luo, 2019). Retention may even decrease when students become disengaged through such a lack of a sense of belonging. Employers within HE must consider how online CF retention and success parallels the impact of students' belonging and inclusivity and how such a process impacts the overall institutional mission. HEAs may consider developing an SoC with online CF to direct ownership and understanding of the impact of student retention. Through online support programs, such as mentorship (Danaei, 2019; Luna, 2018, Schieffer, 2016), specific expectations and direction may be dispersed among online CF to further embrace student achievement, belonging, and retention as the field continues to grow.

Interestingly, the Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS] (2020) projects all postsecondary educators' growth as increasing at least nine percent from 2019 to 2029. This growth rate is considered faster than that of any United States occupation (BLS, 2020). HEAs must enable CF to act (Kouzes & Posner, 2017) and fulfill the duties associated with such a role. If HEAs continue to limit support and guidance for CF, HEIs may experience higher turnover rates (Danaei, 2019) as a result of perceived feelings of disconnection (Davis, 2018), isolation (Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015), and a lack of integration to cultural norms (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019). Resultantly, higher CF turnover may impact student retention and the mission of HEIs.

Student Enrollments

Aligned with postsecondary educators' growth, the BLS (2020) expects student enrollments to continue growing throughout the next decade, requiring HEAs to continue

increasing CF employee bodies to meet the demand. Historically, distance and on-campus student enrollments have been on the rise since 2002 (Seaman et al., 2018). Specifically, private non-profit institutions have experienced continuous student enrollments (Seaman et al., 2018). Students enrolled exclusively in on-campus-only courses have dropped by 6.4% from 2012 to 2016 (Seaman et al., 2018). With distance education enrollments continuing to increase (BLS, 2020; Seaman et al., 2018; Schieffer, 2016) and the projected CF employment continuing to rise (BLS, 2020), a greater understanding of the development of how to improve an SoC between online CF and HEAs at a private, non-profit university will be detrimental in the institutional vision for which an adequate education is delivered.

Attempts at developing a sense of belonging through inclusivity (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008) have been explored using transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978) through which HEAs connect with faculty through empowerment and alignment of goals (Bass & Riggio, 2005). This process develops instructor-leaders who adapt teaching methods by evaluating pedagogical approaches through leadership lenses (Balwant, 2016). When transformational leadership (Burns, 1978) is integrated within HEIs, instructor-student relationships are impacted by improving student motivation, learning, skills, and abilities; thus, when students are academically motivated, graduation rates increase (Balwant, 2016). Resultantly, when students experience motivation, academic success, and improved skills, student satisfaction increases (Balwant, 2016) which translates to positive experiences that lead to long-term memory development of concepts and principles (Sousa, 2021). Even further, through improved student satisfaction, HEIs experience improved marketing responses from potential students (Balwant, 2016).

Further, student perceptions of belonging within a distance education environment impacts institutional retention and academic success (Mulijana & Luo, 2019). Developing effective pedagogical online processes and tactics is considered an essential factor in guiding students toward degree completion (Mulijana & Luo, 2019). Responsively, such research will also provide recommendations for institutions interested in lowering turnover rates when CF perceive an SoC of which aids in the effective production of pedagogy and supporting student needs with the most effective HE system.

Sense of Community Pillars

The sense of community theory, as the theoretical framework, will guide the literature review to explore and understand the research conducted on the individual pillars of which comprise the theory. Appropriately applied to HE, the sense of community theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008) is widely diverse in that it describes the phenomenon of which group members experience a perceived SoC in a variety of settings while guiding an SoC offered to stakeholders through the ability to perceive membership, also known as inclusivity within this study, drive influence, integrate to fulfill needs, and create shared connections (see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). As a needs-based theory (McMillan, 2011), each pillar's elements explore the principles needed for individuals to experience community. Specifically, inclusivity highlights the need for a perception of membership that encompasses boundaries, safety, and belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). When members of a group assert behavior to the community's overall well-being, develop social norms, and influence one another simultaneously, the need for influential value is fulfilled (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Integrated group members share responsibility, values,

and resources to benefit one another (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Finally, a connection is experienced through shared symbolism, bonds, stories, and events (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). An exploration of literature surrounding the four pillars of an SoC is investigated.

Inclusivity

As the first pillar, inclusivity is examined through the development of relationships that occur as inclusive communication and actions that offer a sense of belonging to community members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Inclusivity focuses on the perceived sense of membership through established boundaries, emotional safety, belonging, and common symbols. The development of boundaries is a notable factor of the developing membership within a community. Boundaries guide a system of members who identify with the community culture, artifacts, and communication patterns. Alternatively, boundaries also guide members to an understanding of who belongs to the community and who does not. While membership must be experienced to perceive an SoC, the alternative is also true where non-members may experience feelings of non-membership through a lack of belonging. In recognition of such a factor, HEAs have attempted to overcome geographical limitations various technological advancements. Unfortunately, educators filling distance education roles as CF often experience inclusivity limitations, also understood as non-membership status (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Moreira, 2016).

In attempts to overcome non-membership status perceptions, HEAs have responded to inclusivity needs through increased electronic messages, professional development opportunities, and additional computer-mediated communication, although CF continue to report feelings of isolation and disconnection (Davis, 2018; Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Moreira, 2016; Schieffer,

2016; Smith, 2015). One method utilized to overcome isolation and disconnection is the development of a community of inquiry (CoI) that guides the implementation of inclusivity through computer-mediated communication, driving social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence (Elliott, 2017; Garrison et al., 2000). Social presence is created through participant motivation, dedication, consistency, abilities, and time spent within a practice that aids in developing relational communication (Elliott, 2017; Garrison et al., 2000, p. 95).

One crucial factor of social presence is the impact of socio-emotional connection that supports cognitive development (Sousa, 2021) through the interconnection of either positive or negative experiences on memory development. Resultantly, HEAs should consider the importance of supporting positive socio-emotional environments that guide motivation to participate, share, and learn within professional development opportunities. The development of impactful socio-emotional domains is considered a significant factor of cognitive presence within a CoI (Elliott, 2017; Garrison et al., 2000). Cognitive presence is often considered the flagship event for which a CoI occurs. Through exploration, integration, and outcome developments (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 89), cognitive outcomes are created.

Alternative to previous educational predispositions that cognitive learning may occur independently from an education community (Sousa, 2021), cognitive development may be best supported by integrating aspects of socio-emotional concepts to guide positive memories and aid inclusivity (Garrison et al., 2000; Sousa, 2021). The connection between cognitive and social presence is developed through teaching presence (Elliott, 2017; Garrison et al., 2000). The factors associated with teaching presence guide the social and cognitive aspects that support learned concepts and systems through a professional development program. Among online CF, such a presence of training facilitators and HEAs communicative support are critical in

promoting value and collaboration (Balser et al., 2018; Garrison et al., 2000; Moreira, 2016). As HEIs consider the practice of fostering a CoI through increased engagement and improved experiences, HEAs may experience an increase in perceptions of membership and inclusivity.

Although HEIs have attempted to extend CF inclusion opportunities, the continued perception of a lack of such inclusivity may indicate that the current methods are insufficient for building an SoC. When HEIs support contractual faculty through well-developed and specific websites dedicated to faculty (Chun et al., 2019), the organization enables constituents to act and perform work duties in the expected manners (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Supportive web content may reduce the time frame for which new employees become engaged with the specific educational culture and improve work performance (Chun et al., 2019).

HEAs must be mindful of the motivation that guides online CF toward asynchronous professional development programs and website-specific data. While asynchronous programs may allow for flexibility and pace control, HEAs must not assume that intrinsic motivation alone will guide online CF toward activities that shape inclusivity. Contingent, also known as contractual, work may be conducted in the wake of a primary and full-time career (Ferencz, 2017). As a result, online CF may experience time constraints and a lack of intrinsic motivation to support pedagogical growth. Such a predicament may discourage HEAs from extending collegiality to online CF when communicated preference, completion, and participation of professional development opportunities are limited. Interestingly, collegiality is often aligned with job satisfaction that communicates perceptions of expertise, membership, and inclusivity (Haviland et al., 2017). Online CF variances that guide perceptions of inclusivity may hinder the availability of programming, supportive communication, and perceived equity for which opportunities are extended (Haviland et al., 2017; Nelson et al., 2020; Simmons et al., 2020).

While independent professional development opportunities, extensions of collegiality, and web investigation of institutional culture may support engagement, an SoC must support connection development and integration to guide stakeholders toward community perceptions. In developing such avenues to improve inclusivity and communication, HEAs play a crucial role in approving and communicating value for assessment, professional development, and collaboration programs (Balser et al., 2018; Moreira, 2016). Within a HEA career, legitimate power is often assumed through decision-making, responsibilities, and experience within a hierarchal structure (French & Raven, 1959; Razik & Swanson, 2010). If HEAs do not communicate value for online CF members or the developed inclusivity systems, perceptions of online CF developed by institutional stakeholders may deviate from the positive qualities required initially by HEAs for which online CF are hired. These inconsistent value perceptions of distance education impact the communication and rhetoric between HEAs and CF while limiting or extending offers for inclusion (Moreira, 2016; Santos & Cenchinel, 2019). Specifically, if institutional documentation expresses a value for the inclusion of all faculty members and alternatively communicates a verbal lack of value for CF, the inconsistent communication produces an unclear environment of inclusivity. Thus, HEA actions and messages must align to create effective environments for all faculty members to fulfill institutional missions.

The lack of aligned and communicated value for online CF contributes to pedagogical issues faced in HEIs offering online and distance education (Moreira, 2016). Extending interaction opportunities enhances feedback and encourages mentorship, technology training, and support (Chun et al., 2019; Danaei, 2019; Meeker, 2017; Moreira, 2016). Further, when HEIs strategically develop training programs, offer learning opportunities, and provide

educationally rich systems that introduce institutional culture and preferences, the institutional mission is further engaged within the classroom and supported by stakeholder actions (McCaffery, 2019). The role of economic pressures may contribute to the production of inclusivity systems. While HEAs hold political power to secure and allocate resources, education systems often find challenges that require providing more opportunities and support with fewer available resources (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Quality decisions must be made about staff development to support growth with the proper amount of economic and human resources (Razik & Swanson, 2010). Equitable resource allocation is also a challenge educational leaders must consider when supporting departmental staff development (McCaffery, 2019; Razik & Swanson, 2010). Such choices will produce societal outcomes through the workforce, classroom, and future innovations (McCaffery, 2019; Razik & Swanson, 2010). Guiding further exploration of membership and inclusivity limitations is supported through the application of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986).

Self-determination theory. Consideration of self-determination theory allowed for exploring HEAs and CF's competence, autonomy, and relatedness as depicted through the perception of inclusivity (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Research shows that HEAs have a developed awareness of CF's membership and inclusivity needs through increased electronic messages and professional development opportunities (Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Moreira, 2016). While the knowledge of the demand has developed a motivation for HEAs to offer inclusion opportunities, a lack of competency within the CF role and relatedness may have limited the rhetoric for communicating the opportunities. As a result, HEAs have provided opportunities for integration in which CF members admit to limited participation (Snook et al., 2019) and further reduced perceptions of inclusivity. With consideration of competency, online CF may perceive

themselves as non-members who maintain a role outside of the HEI member group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). If members, such as full-time faculty or HEAs, perceive online CF as non-members, an urge to protect the institution's boundaries may prevent the extension of competency-related programs and induction. As HEAs face economic pressures to support more faculty with fewer resources (Bolman & Deal, 2017), a perception of providing the member group of faculty with more resources may seem natural or expected. If this occurs, non-members or online CF may be limited in competency needed to fulfill the role and extend educational opportunities to students with institutional culture and values alignment.

As rhetoric depicted from HEAs remains unaligned with committed value for online CF (Moreira, 2016; Santos & Cenchinel, 2019), relational development may also suffer. Member faculty members may exclude or avoid communication with non-members, such as online CF, to protect the boundaries of the community. Since HEAs hold legitimate and influential power (French & Raven, 1959), the ability to persuade and guide member faculty toward the inclusion of non-members has significant value. As members extend inclusivity to online CF, perceptions of relatedness may improve then drive appropriate levels of autonomy that reflect the cultural values, pedagogy, and mission of an institution.

Social cognitive theory. Considering the environment, behavior, and person, Bandura (1986) explained through the social cognitive theory that the triadic approach to understanding human actions is a compilation of factors. Application of social cognitive theory aided in the prediction that CF and HEAs' behavior will determine the developed environment, resulting in the perceived sense of effective or ineffective communication through which inclusion or exclusion is experienced. As explained through the application of self-determination theory (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985), HEAs hold significant power in developing an environment

of membership and inclusion. Reportedly, HEAs have created environments of inconsistent value perceptions for the work of online CF (Moreira, 2016; Santos & Cenchinel, 2019). Applying social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) predicts that such an unstable environment will impact the person and behaviors of online CF. Alternatively, when HEIs offer programs designed to enhance the environment, such as training programs, learning opportunities, and professional development systems, the institutional mission is further carried out within the classroom and offers students a consistent perception of the institutional mission (McCaffery, 2019). Based upon social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1985), online CF may also impact the behavior and environment of the HEI. If HEAs utilize limited resources (Bolman & Deal, 2017) to offer online CF professional development programs and training systems but online CF fail to participate (Snook et al., 2019), HEAs behavior may be altered to reduce such offerings within the HE environment ultimately impacting the communicated and influential value for online CF.

Influential Value

Influence, the second pillar of developing an SoC within an interdependent community, supports members with a sense of being valued and making a difference to the organization (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Community members perceive an SoC through influential value, community influence, conformity, and simultaneous influence (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). A developed sense of influence and conformity is a significant factor addressed within the sense of community theory. Notably, influence and conformity are contradictory aspects of the second pillar of developing a sense of community. Individuals must find a sense of feeling influential and making a difference within a community to maintain a group member.

Alternatively, community members must also agree upon and conform to group norms and standards to experience the developed community system.

When CF conform to community norms, a sense of value may be perceived as an increase in compensation and benefits. Alternatively, CF often report perceptions of increased workload levels without an increase in salary or adjustment in remuneration (Chun et al., 2019; Luongo, 2018; Murray, 2019). While increases in responsibility indicate opportunities for influential value, the lack of compensation may negate the importance of such role opportunities. Further complicating the implementation of influential value systems is the consideration of intrinsic motivation that may be limited due to online CF accepting a HE teaching position as a secondary position rather than a primary career endeavor. As a secondary career, time constraints may limit online CF from accepting additional work duties within the online CF career path (Ferencz, 2017). Even without a sense of perceived value, CF continue to work within the field (Pons et al., 2017). This may indicate that CF experience a level of intrinsic reward that supports the drive to continue within the career field.

Despite being the majority faculty group at many HEIs who make up approximately 70% of institutional faculty (Chun et al., 2019; Ferencz, 2017), CF report feeling undervalued and overlooked for promotions and career advancement (Luongo, 2018; Moreira, 2016). With economic pressures experienced by HEAs to provide more opportunities with fewer resources, HEAs may need to develop creative options for compensation that make little or no impact on financial budgets. Unpaid mentorship opportunities often guide a sense of influential value among faculty members willing to support new or novice faculty members with peer guidance (Danaei, 2019; Hundley et al., 2020; Luna, 2018). Through mentorship programs, faculty are paired with new or novice faculty to support institutional integration and guide community

norms. Such pairings may also provide the mentor with a sense of influential value through experienced community and simultaneous influence (McMillan et al., 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Since online education is experienced as most successful for stakeholders when collaboration is developed (Muljana & Luo, 2019), the developed pairings of online CF may support collaborative work environments that create a perceived sense of influential value for the mentor and inclusivity for the mentee. Even further, a sense of influence and conformity may result from the collaborative mentorship programs.

Developing such programs requires the support of HEAs. HEAs play a critical role in promoting the value of influential positions. When CF experience HEA communication patterns that negate expertise and experience through a presumed lack of competence and value (Larson et al., 2019), online CF may not view voluntary opportunities, such as mentorship programs, with influential perceptions. HEAs must consider the communicated verbal and non-verbal stakeholder messages shared among stakeholders as a way of promoting and engaging future volunteers to support an institutional learning and engagement mission. Further, when communication patterns negate experience, indications of HEA perceptions of CF lacking the desired level of expertise to fill such a role are delivered. Interestingly, although CF experience an assumed lack of ability to communicate through verbal and non-verbal interactions, distance educators report a lack of support and professional development opportunities (Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Luongo, 2018). Without developed support and professional development systems, HEAs may need to consider how value is communicated to CF, who make up the majority faculty body (Chun et al., 2019; Ferencz, 2017).

CF often reported a lack of value through HEAs' communicated attitudes, influence, and decisions (Balser et al., 2018; Gehrke & Kezar, 2015). Resultantly, HEAs must be purposeful

and aware of the communication extended to institutional constituents as a method for promoting an SoC and value for all employees. HEAs play a crucial role in developing communication, which drives perceptions of value, development of support, and institutional change initiatives to promote CF members' value (Balser et al., 2018; Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Luongo, 2018). Interestingly, CF pedagogy is positively impacted when a perception of value and mattering are communicated (Peterson, 2015). Thus, HEAs hold powerful positions for which student education experiences may be affected due to the expressed sense of value for CF members.

Transformational instructor-leadership is often associated with increased student motivation, learning, and satisfaction (Balwant, 2016). Students are motivated by transformational leadership through emotional contagion experienced through energetic and enthusiastic faculty (p. 24). When students experience a positive learning environment, concepts and principles are more easily transferred to long-term memory aiding in the ability to recall and apply learned concepts and principles (Sousa, 2021). Even further, HEIs may experience a stronger sense of marketability due to the perception of instructor credibility and student satisfaction (Balwant, 2016). Thus, HEAs may find programs that encourage CF to share experiences and expertise with other faculty members as rewarding for stakeholders, including future students, current students, and faculty. An exploration of the motivation and exchange of social factors may explain the current literature associated with the perceived sense of influential value experienced by online CF and instigated by HEAs.

Motivation theory. As politically influential figures within a HEI, HEAs must consider how faculty members experience the workplace environment. As explained by the theory of motivation (Herzberg et al., 1959), an ideal workplace condition is developed with high motivation and high hygiene factors when HEAs communicate CF members' value (Herzberg et

al., 1959). Workplace motivators focus on career achievements, appreciation, job duties, responsibilities, advancement opportunities, and job growth. Hygiene factors are elements concentrated on supervision tendencies, relationships, workplace environment, pay, and job security. Unfortunately, CF report experiences of little value, low compensation, increased workload, and few benefits that contribute to low motivation (Chun et al., 2019; Herzberg et al., 1959; Luongo, 2018; Murray, 2019). When HEAs fail to communicate value for institutional support programs, low hygiene factors are the result. Alternatively, job growth within the field (BLS, 2020) may contribute to workplace motivation. If CF hold primary careers in a market with low or average growth, the motivation to seek and maintain employment in a higher-than-average job growth position may be the result. Such a consideration may explain the motivation online CF experience to seek employment in a professional position where limited opportunities for advancement (Luongo, 2018) and limited perceptions of recognition (Pons et al., 2017) are experienced. Thus, turnover rates may increase among online CF who value teaching as a primary career. In contrast, turnover rates may not be as significant for online CF who view the role as a secondary position.

Social exchange theory. Social exchange theory aids in explaining the relationships perceived by CF as community members who are interconnected through a cost and benefits analysis (Barsky, 2017; Homans, 1974). When the costs and benefits balance within a relationship, the partnership continues (Homans, 1974). The relationships framework may explain the balanced perception of CF costs and benefits who hold alternative primary careers. When the cost of taking on an additional career outweighs the perceived benefits, HEAs may experience the turnover of professionals working within the field of expertise. The increased

costs may be viewed as additional and unpaid duties, required professional developments, and mandatory training systems.

Interestingly, online CF working in the HE field without an alternative primary career may find volunteer duties, professional development programs, and training systems as a benefit of the position. HEAs must consider providing online CF with a balance of opportunities to develop a perception of value while recognizing when volunteer and mandatory programs oversaturate CF with additional duties outside that of teaching. Alternatively, HEAs may consider how social exchange theory postulates that CF members will reciprocate positive and valuable perceptions. Such consideration may provide HEAs with the necessary motivation to provide professional development opportunities and training systems that may improve the quality of pedagogical output.

Institutional Integration

Institutional integration, the third pillar of a sense of community theory, suggests that community members will feel an SoC when group members share responsibilities, values, and resources to benefit one another (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). A significant benefit of institutional integration focuses on the perceived values and reinforcement of values experienced within a community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The perception of HE employee values is that each faculty member finds the environment to be a reinforcer of values that benefit one another. Value reinforcement and integration may only be possible if CF members decide to seek employment within HEIs, and HEAs choose to extend work to CF. An understanding of intrinsic and extrinsic faculty influences drives the motivation to complete employment actions, providing insight into such employment decisions (Pons et al., 2017). Although CF continue to communicate a lack of support and recognition, internal

motivators are seemingly strong enough to overcome these barriers within the CF positions (Pons et al., 2017). While many CF positions are limited to part-time employment, the drive to continue employment may result from the lack of a need to feel integrated if CF already experience integration from an alternative personal or professional endeavor. Regardless, CF continue to report feelings of disconnection and isolation (Davis, 2018; Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015). The reported displeasure of the lack of integration may indicate that not all CF members find the lack of integration acceptable. Interestingly, career descriptions within HEIs communicate value for independent work, and such values reduce tendencies for collaborative work environments, which further complicate feelings of isolation and disconnection (Watson et al., 2018).

Although independence is valued within HE, a collaborative work environment guides clarity in developing consistent culture by understanding institutional vision, mission, and values (Moorehead et al., 2015). As a result, quality communication methods may be required to improve interactions regardless of geographical location. An exploration of preferred communication among HEI employees is ranked highest as face-to-face communication, followed by emergency texting systems, electronic mail, and telephone communication (Hart et al., 2017). As technology progresses, HEIs may experience a shift in the preference for synchronous or asynchronous communication and the perception of effectiveness experienced by employees. While communication satisfaction is linked to employee commitment to an organization (Bray & Williams, 2017), the methods at which communication satisfaction is experienced and interpreted may change over time. Since technology has advanced communication systems to include mobile textual and real-time communication as part of many United States citizens' daily communication patterns, communication preferences may have

shifted from preferred face-to-face communication to alternative communication methods. Reportedly, face-to-face communication was ranked highest by employees in 2017 (Hart et al., 2017). Asynchronous and synchronous communication methods, including face-to-face, electronic mail, and textual communication, were ranked similarly as indicators of communication and organizational satisfaction predictors just two years later (Santos & Cechinel, 2019). While communication satisfaction is a predictor of organizational commitment (Bray & Williams, 2017) and communication mode preferences may change over time (Santos & Cechinel, 2019), HEAs must remain aware of an organization's cultural preference and appropriateness of which is acceptable and expected within the normative environment. HEAs must remain diligent in the preferences, satisfaction, and effectiveness of communication methods (Bray & Williams, 2018) that promotes inclusivity, integration, connection, and value (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Specifically, online CF are more likely geographically distanced than faculty members teaching in a face-to-face modality and may require HEAs to utilize technological and telephonic modalities to communicate institutional standards' culture, value, and mission. Regardless of modality, when HEAs are perceived as using effective communication, HE employees report the highest level of satisfaction within the field (Hart et al., 2017). As employees experience satisfaction within the workplace, HEIs may experience increased employee retention (Bray & Williams, 2017; Moorehead et al., 2015).

Quality employee retention developed through institutional integration is visible when HE faculty discuss the impact of communication standards (Bray & Williams, 2017) and professional development opportunities (Vogel & Rogers, 2017) as experiencing membership, value, and relational connection. Improving communication practices and conducting

professional development opportunities for all institutional employees are significant factors in expanding the CF's organizational community. The practical implications of enhanced communication and professional development events guide the future development of recommendations for developing an SoC with CF. Specifically, the development of cohort faculty learning communities (Banasik & Dean, 2015; Cox, 2004) may direct cross-discipline communication that creates connection, membership, value, and integration of participants while promoting improved pedagogical practices. Executing HE plans of action to improve communication practices and guide higher commitment levels may help develop recommendations to strengthen a CF community.

As a catalyst for all relational systems, communication must effectively integrate, connect, share value, and include all employees within HEIs. A more remarkable ability to develop appropriate and expected communication events that satisfy both parties' needs significantly increases when leaders understand employees' communication needs. Alternatively, a lack of effective communication modalities limits feedback from CF of who report little support, dissatisfaction with compensation, limited opportunities for professional development, and few opportunities for advancement (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Kennedy, 2015; McGee et al., 2017; Meeker, 2017; Mohr & Shelton, 2017; Pons et al., 2017). Since online CF experience dissatisfaction with institutional integration, examining the motivation and social exchange factors that support continued online CF careers may guide further understanding.

Motivation theory. An application of motivation theory allowed for an exploration and guided understanding of CF's reported satisfaction and disconnection (Herzberg et al., 1959). When personnel communicate employment satisfaction, higher levels of motivational factors are present such as recognition, appreciation, and advancement opportunities (Herzberg et al., 1959).

Upon examining current CF experiences, few opportunities for recognition, appreciation, and advancement are present within the field, resulting in dissent perception. While online CF may be driven to seek employment within HE as a reinforcer of values (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), the lack of motivators, such as recognition, achievement, advancement, and responsibility, may reduce the perceived sense of a reinforced value and alternatively provide the opposite. A lack of satisfaction often indicates a higher probability for turnover of which may communicate a lack of value for such positions to HEAs. As a result of increased turnover or a lack of perceived integration interest from online CF, HEAs may respond to such situations with little value placed on recognition, achievement, advancement, and additional responsibility (Herzberg et al., 1959), further dividing CF and HEAs while developing a cyclical dissatisfaction for both parties.

Hygiene factors, which consist of working conditions, pay, and job security (Herzberg et al., 1959), may also contribute to the reported dissatisfaction from online CF within the field (Davis, 2018; Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015; Watson et al., 2018). Specifically, job growth for HE faculty members is expected to grow consistently throughout the next several years (BLS, 2020); however, the nature of online CF work is that of the namesake, contractual and contingent. Online CF are often employed on a needs basis and hired for a particular and designated length of time, such as term by term or semester by semester (Luna, 2018). HEIs may consider how the lack of job security develops a lack of a sense of satisfaction that may turn quality instructors from continued employment preferences.

As a growing industry, online CF may find the opportunity to explore various institutional contracts that offer higher pay rates. Since CF report perceptions of increased workload without increased pay or remuneration (Chun et al., 2019; Luongo, 2018; Murray, 2019), HEAs may need to consider how institutional pay rates compare to similar organizations.

Communicating such a comparison of pay scales to online CF may reduce dissent, dissatisfaction, and turnover. Such an exercise of effective communication may also aid in the improved sense of satisfaction HE employees experience (Hart et al., 2017).

Social exchange theory. Social exchange theory (Homans, 1974) considers the costs and benefits of relational systems. If HEAs develop an assumption that online CF fall into a high turnover category, the cost of investing in integrational programming may outweigh the benefits expected. The limitation of compensation and benefits (Chun et al., 2019; Murray, 2019) may also result from such a perception held by HEAs. Further developing the perception of online CF as high turnover may result from online CF viewing HEAs as the responsible party for developing effective communication (Davis, 2018). When the cost of creating institutional integration opportunities is higher than that of the benefit due to the lack of return perceived by HEAs, little integration of online CF may occur unless both parties consider the need to develop a system of perception checking (Edwards et al., 2020) to alter previously held views.

Interestingly, the job market predicts the work of contractual faculty to continue growing over the next several years (BLS, 2020). Even further, distance education student enrollments have continued to increase (Seaman et al., 2018). Such data may indicate that HEIs find the cost of hiring contractual faculty lower than that of the benefit experienced. If HEIs continue to find value in hiring CF, HEAs may need to continue advocating for the proper integration of online CF who support the institution's mission. In response, online CF may respond to the added benefits of integration by continuing employment and providing more significant pedagogical events within the online classroom. Resultantly, students may find that online CF provide a continuous system of shared symbols, culture, and values as marketed by the institution.

Institutional Connection

Institutional connection, the fourth pillar of a sense of community, is perceived through shared symbols, developed bonds, and collective events (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Community members experiencing a sense of shared historical events are critical aspects of connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Interestingly, participation in such circumstances is unnecessary; however, the understanding and identification with historical elements and events within a community are needed to guide a sense of connection. Considering the needed integration and connection to historical events, HEAs must consider how online CF, often geographically separated from a university setting, are connected to events. Perceptions of connection have indicated that the development and maintenance of relational connection to a HEIs requires a physical presence of geographically separated employees developed through periodic visits to the main campus (Ladyshewsky, 2016). As the continued growing body of contractual HE employees develops (BLS, 2020) and CF continue holding the majority of the faculty body in post-secondary education (Chun et al., 2019; Ferencz, 2017), HEAs may find it unrealistic to satisfy budget constraints and physically integrate CF who are geographically separated from the main campus.

While dissatisfaction reported by CF may stem from geographic separation from HEI campuses, such as disconnection (Davis, 2018), isolation (Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015), and a lack of integration into cultural norms (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019), benefits to such disconnection should be considered. Productivity may be regarded as a positive aspect experienced by online CF who may experience limited distractions (Ladyshewsky, 2016). Situational distractions, often experienced in a face-to-face work environment, may provide online CF with a benefit unknown to face-to-face employees who may experience continued

availability throughout the day. Further, online CF may find advancing technology a welcomed opportunity for creating a connection with HEAs, faculty peers, and students. Face-to-face employees provided with the opportunity to communicate in a physical setting may not have consistent occasions or need preferences for technological immersion. The limited technical use may reduce communication effectiveness with distance peers and students and ultimately impact pedagogical outcomes.

HE employees feel a shared emotional connection created by personal contact, interaction quality, historical events, investments, and bonds (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). When CF perceive a sense of institutional connection, staff turnover rates are reduced (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019). Reductions in staff turnover rates may be developed through virtual connection as online CF experience opportunities for professional relationships, personal growth, and increased self-efficacy (Schieffer, 2016). Unfortunately, CF often report feelings of disconnection (Davis, 2018), isolation (Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015), and unshared cultural norms of which contribute to increased challenges within the field (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019).

A relational connection is developed through shared cultural norms, symbols, events, and artifacts (Edwards et al., 2020). Improving institutional cultural integration by redefining communication standards may lead CF to a perception of connection. However, such developments must overcome challenges associated with collaboration time, lack of trust, and participation pressure (Schieffer, 2016). Time commitments associated with connection event participation may be particularly difficult due to the part-time status of many online CF members (Schieffer, 2016). The lack of an adequate communication foundation between HEAs and CF often contributes to challenges of emotional connection (Santos & Cenchinel, 2019), cultural

integration (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019), and faculty burnout (Frisby et al., 2015). Without an adequate communication foundation, constituents may have limited perceptions of trust and be less willing to share professional challenges to experience the benefits of growth and connection with the institution (Schieffer, 2016).

In developing collaboration events, HEAs must be aware of the preferences for online CF learning processes. If online CF members identify as digital immigrants, individuals adopting advanced technologies (Wimberly, 2014), a preference for learning in an environment where visual and social cues are ample may be needed. Some online CF may become frustrated with a lack of non-verbal communication, impeding trust, emotional connection, and safety in online collaboration events (Schieffer, 2016). On the contrary, if online CF members identify as digital natives, individuals born into a world already using advanced technologies (Wimberly, 2014), the need for visual and social cues may be diminished compared to digital immigrant peers or administrators. As such, online CF identifying as digital natives may find higher levels of connection, collaboration, and trust. A deeper understanding of the needs, preferences, and learning tools needed to support virtual educator roles may be more advanced when HEAs develop relationships with online CF. When communication between HEAs and CF is supported, integrated, and open, the result positively correlates with employee satisfaction and commitment (Bray & Williams, 2017). Such evidence further supports the need for HEAs to understand current communication patterns, evaluate communication problems, then develop improved communication events that are expected and appropriate for the specific institutional culture.

While many online CF members are geographically separated from the institution of employment, HEAs and CF must develop methods to reduce the communication and connection deficit through development opportunities (Danaei, 2019; Luna, 2018; Schieffer, 2016).

Communication technology resources, such as Zoom, Skype, and WEBEx, designated by the flagship campus, may allow for stronger clarity of messages (Ladyshewsky, 2016). Utilizing advanced technology with web camera capabilities may offer students, faculty, and staff who are geographically separated with more effective communication that allows for non-verbal cue reception. Consideration of such programs is of significant value to HEAs since non-verbal communication accounts for 60% of the decoded meaning during communication events (Edwards et al., 2020).

Mentorship programs also allow for more substantial interpretation of institutional communication meaning by allowing experienced and novice faculty partnerships that may introduce historical context, events, and culture. Further, mentorship programs aid in fostering collaboration, communication, satisfaction, and acceptance to guide institutional integration (Danaei, 2019; Luna, 2018). As programs introduce important aspects of institutional culture and expectations, technological competency and preferred pedagogical methods may also be shared between mentor and mentee, aiding in a stronger sense of connection (Danaei, 2019; Davis, 2018; Luna, 2018). While many online CF are geographically separated from the institution of employment, exploring opportunities and areas of improvement for online or virtual collaboration is of significant value to HEAs (Schieffer, 2016).

HEAs must also consider the unique institutional culture developed within an organization to develop practical and useful connection strategies. In other words, the connection tactics that work well for one institution may not work explicitly for a different organization. When HEIs utilize mentorship programs, faculty are provided with the opportunity to perceive and experience a sense of connection with other stakeholders and develop the unique institutional cultural norms (Danaei, 2019). Alternatively, CF may perceive exclusion if

mentorship programs are executed without integrating faculty perceptions and participation through the development process (Danaei, 2019; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Thus, while the extension of faculty engagement specifically designed and inclusive of CF is optimal for developing a community perception, administrators must be diligent in the organization and implementation of such support programs. HEAs creating a balance of asynchronous and synchronous community events may experience further integrated, connected, and influential CF members, potentially reducing turnover. Further, the application of CF determination and behavioral, environmental, and individual factors that lead to institutional connection guides a deeper exploration of the literature.

Self-determination theory. HEAs are viewed by CF as the responsible party for developing effective communication of which promotes institutional integration (Davis, 2018). While HEAs hold influential power, an understanding of CF self-determination for integrating within the institution is necessary. Self-determination theory guides an understanding of the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that impact individuals (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsically, CF report personal goals, educational desires, and the ability to work with students (Pons et al., 2017). Whereas extrinsic motivators often focus on compensation, rewards, and advancement opportunities (Pons et al., 2017).

The application of self-determination theory considers the psychological needs, goals, relationships, competency, autonomy, and relatedness of the individual (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985). When CF perceive a lack of one or more of these factors, commitment, integration, and connectedness are impacted, resulting in misalignment in goals, symbols, and communication standards explaining the perceived disconnection. Ultimately, self-determination theory (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985) considers how individuals are motivated to act or

make choices based on the perception of met needs. Thus, if online CF hold perceptions of needs being fulfilled from the employing institution or a primary career, the motivation may not be strong enough to develop a sense of connection. Even further, if a participant of research holds a primary career or another life endeavor that fulfills a sense of community but participates in research exploring the connection perceived through the secondary career as a CF member, responses may be altered in recognition that the participant does not hold a sense of connection with the HEI. Alternatively, online CF who have preferences for developing a sense of connection with the hiring HEI may not experience the motivation to seek connection if the individual lacks trust in constituents (Schieffer, 2016) and feels a sense of disconnection (Davis, 2018) from historical events and institutional culture.

HEAs could seemingly impact such motivation by providing a culture that allows for relational development, improved competency, and guided autonomy (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985). HEAs hold formal and influential power (French & Raven, 1959) to support environmental changes that guide programs, such as mentorship and advanced technology systems, to engage employees working remotely. Programming that allows for peer-to-peer support may foster a sense of competence for university culture, expectations, and preferences while guiding employees toward advanced autonomy. Peer-to-peer opportunities may also provide novice online CF with a sense of connection through relatedness as relational systems develop. If HEAs offer an environment of connectedness, online CF self-efficacy may improve, leading to further participation in voluntary professional development programs and institutional events. Without opportunities to foster connection, HEAs may find that online CF's disconnection and isolation ultimately impact pedagogical outcomes and student learning.

Social cognitive theory. Disconnection between online CF and HEAs may also be explored by considering the triadic reciprocality framework of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). When the environment is impacted by the lack of connection, the behavior and individual may be altered. In consideration of mentorship, novice and experienced faculty are connected to enhance the understanding, integration, and connection (Danaei, 2019). As effective mentorship opportunities are developed, novice faculty members will be guided toward the accepted institutional cultural norms (Edwards et al., 2020), thus impacting all areas of the triadic reciprocality framework (Bandura, 1986). HEAs must consider the environment for which such connection is developed. If the faculty members participating in the mentorship program are paired without consideration of learning preferences based upon digital immigrant or digital native (Wimberly, 2014) categorization, the effectiveness of the mentorship program may be limited. HEAs developing connective programming must be aware of these various factors to maximize benefit, reduce cost, and increase connection.

Alternatively, HEAs may assume that online CF are fluent and comfortable in technological advancements due to the environment in which online education occurs. Individuals with a high technological self-efficacy perception may be more motivated to integrate within institutionally delegated learning management systems (LMS) when hired as an online CF (Roney, 2017). Resultantly, the individual perception then impacts the behavior and ultimately affects how the proper integration of an LMS impacts the classroom environment. HEAs should attempt to foster a positive technological self-efficacy among educators by offering collaboration opportunities among experienced and novice employees while providing clarity in the roles for which technology should be utilized (Scheiffer, 2016). When HEAs provide such support, educators are more likely to integrate into the preferred institutional culture, which

improves a person's teaching satisfaction and impacts the learning environment received by students (Hampton et al., 2020; Zheng, 2018). Students are more likely to succeed when an educator exhibits behaviors aligned with high levels of self-efficacy that are experienced through the engagement of students, motivation, and commitment (Hampton et al., 2020; Zheng, 2018) like that of the implementation of a CoI that relies on cognitive, social, and teaching presence (Elliott, 2017; Garrison et al., 2000). With such consideration, HEAs may consider offering opportunities for training and integration to the delegated university LMS within the institutional environment to support educator technological self-efficacy and ultimately improve the individual actions educators have within the classroom that impact student educational success.

Alternatively, as posited through self-determination theory (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985), HEAs may hold significant power in developing environmental cultures that model the way, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). When leaders consider the power held in association with environmental impact, the behavior and person may be impacted positively or negatively (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Assumptively, HEAs who value online CF contributions will be concerned with empowering autonomous behavior appropriate and expected within the institutional culture. As positive environments are developed and online CF are impacted through altered perceptions of connection, educators may perceive higher levels of trust (Schieffer, 2016) that guide relational developments and aid in producing effective pedagogy to improve student learning.

Summary

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community between online CF and HEAs employed at a private university in the Midwest and formulate a solution to address the problem. A systematic review of the literature has guided the

exploration of the context for which the problem arises and the areas of an SoC left unfulfilled, which led CF to a perception of a lack of membership, undervalued influence, limited integration, and disconnection. As the mechanism for developing relationships, an understanding of the development of effective communication standards unique to each institution will help HEAs and online CF develop an SoC. In a field where competency is evaluated based on literacy abilities with little non-verbal communication (Arasaratnam-Smith & Northcote, 2017), HEAs and CF members must develop impactful communication habits to establish productive relationships.

Since CF self-efficacy is directly impacted by communication events that contribute to dissent within the field, altering communication is highly valued in developing relationships (Frisby et al., 2015). As a result of the modified communication, HEA and online CF may be impacted by productive, trusting, and effective relationships that promote and develop an environment of support, inclusion, and value (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Moreira, 2016; Watson et al., 2018). Guided by an SoC theory, HEAs may begin to understand the impact of a lack of membership, influence, need, and connection among CF (CSDT, 2020; Ferencz, 2017; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Such relationship improvement holds significant value as growing distance education systems promote the continued growth of CF employment (BLS, 2020; Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Kennedy, 2015; Luna, 2018). An exploration of the perceptions of community HEAs and online CF hold may guide clarity toward a solution to address dissent within the CF field of which will promote effective pedagogical methods for delivering content within the HE field.

CHAPTER THREE: PROPOSED METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community (SoC) between online contingent faculty and higher education administrators for a private university in the Midwest and to formulate a solution to address the problem. The problem is a lack of a developed SoC between higher education administrators (HEAs) and online contingent faculty (CF) that may impact CF pedagogy's overall effectiveness. This chapter will describe in detail the research design, procedures, and analysis for the present research study. The multimethod research design will incorporate interviews with online CF, a focus group with online CF, and a survey conducted with online CF and HEAs at a private university located in the Midwest. A theoretical approach will guide the research assumptions and design to solve the problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A transformative framework will guide the fundamental ethical assumptions while improving social justice within the higher education institution (HEI). The aim of this research is to create an understanding of the needed changes to develop a solution to the problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs.

Design

A convergent multimethod research design will allow for the most reliable application of both qualitative and quantitative data to examine the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The pragmatic design will also help develop added insights to the SoC problem unattainable through qualitative or quantitative methods alone (Check & Schutt, 2012; Claxton & Michael, 2020). Applying an inductive theoretical approach using the theory of a sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also Ferencz, 2017; McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al.,

2008) will guide the qualitative and quantitative research to collect, analyze, and interpret the data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Data collection will employ qualitative interviews and focus groups with online CF to examine the current SoC perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data collection will also incorporate a quantitative survey with HEAs and online CF to explore methods currently implemented in developing an SoC with online CF (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A direct comparison of open-ended interviews, focus group questions, and a closed-ended survey data will be executed by the researcher (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Investigating the current SoC methods and comparing quantitative data between online CF and HEAs will enhance the interpretation of interview data and communicated perceptions uncovered within the focus group (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By applying the multimethod design, participant perceptions and statistical trends will guide a practical solution to the institution's lack of an SoC (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Research Questions

Central Research Question: How can a lack of a sense of community be improved at a private institution of higher education located in the Midwest?

Sub-question 1: How would online contingent faculty in an interview improve a sense of community for online contingent faculty at a private university in the Midwest?

Sub-question 2: How would online contingent faculty in a focus group improve a sense of community for online contingent faculty at a private university in the Midwest?

Sub-question 3: How would quantitative survey data results conducted with university administrators and online contingent faculty improve a sense of community for online contingent faculty at a private university in the Midwest?

Research Site

The problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs will be investigated at a private institution of higher education (HE) located in the Midwest. This section will examine the institutional demographics and structural systems as pertinent to the present study. The purposeful selection of this site, referred to as University of the Midwest (UotM), is supported by student, faculty, and organizational need factors (University Personnel, personal communication, August 31, 2020).

Institutional Demographics

The UotM hosts over 10,000 students throughout the United States and internationally. Students attend in a traditional face-to-face setting, online, or at a distance (Office of Institutional Effectiveness [OIE], 2020a). The university offers two-year, four-year, and graduate-level degrees in addition to graduate and undergraduate certificates. Students are educated by faculty members employed as tenured, tenure-track, non-tenure-track, and contingent faculty. Such faculty teach within the colleges of liberal arts and sciences, health and education, and management. Considered an early adopter of online education, the institution employs approximately 1,000 part-time faculty and 125 full-time faculty to meet the student population's needs (OIE, 2020b). There are currently 653 part-time faculty employed by the institution and eligible to teach online (University Personnel, personal communication, April 13, 2021). The amount of part-time faculty teaching online varies by term to fulfill institutional needs. Thus, CF are a significant majority within the institution at a ratio of approximately 6:1, part-time online faculty to full-time faculty. Structured with a sizeable CF population, this institution is framed as an appropriate and suitable research site to examine online CF SoC.

Institutional Structure

Structural systems within the institution guide an understanding of the processes, accountability, and leadership of the institution's efficiency and effectiveness. A hierarchical structure developed with an authoritative leader, secondary leaders, and lateral directors guides communication, supervision, and assigned tasks (Bolman & Deal, 2017). With formal authority, the UotM president has the university's economic, legal, contractual, and collegial power while remaining accountable to a board of trustees. The vertical organization is well-supported among HEAs with clearly defined authority and structure systems on a centralized continuum (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The university's simple structure guides policies and direction to department chair members and program coordinators within lower and middle-level administration (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Professional development and training opportunities offered to HEAs and all faculty, then guide control supported by the formal policies and procedures (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Unfortunately, in a field where independence is preferred, processes' power and synchronization are presumable and predetermined contingencies (Watson et al., 2018). With autonomy a prevalent and preferred trait of faculty members, leadership communication may need to adjust the alignment of such factors with the university's cultural norms to remain effective.

Organizational Culture

Control systems and power structures within the institution lead employees to the agreed-upon mission tasks and goals from which norms and motivations are derived (Busby, 2017; Edwards et al., 2020). The UotM culture exemplifies normative language communication modes and decision processes (Busby, 2017; Edwards et al., 2020; Farrell, 2018). Normative language systems within the university have adopted the terminology as adjunct faculty to describe part-

time faculty who are contractually hired to teach on a term-by-term basis. Adjunct faculty, also known as CF members, are motivated to request classes and declare availability one term in advance to fulfill institutional needs. Documentation communicating the acceptance and assignment of courses congratulates the CF member through electronic mail if the CF is selected to teach in the upcoming term. Alternatively, full-time faculty are most often hired as regular employees with assigned courses, benefits, and potential tenure-track faculty status (Gonzalez, 2021). Culturally, CF and full-time faculty status significantly impact the control and power of the individual. Full-time faculty are often employed in an on-campus environment that may lead to stronger community relationships, providing added control and power to the position. Without the same authority as full-time faculty, online CF are limited in voice, power, and management of course assignments, longevity, and benefits.

Participants

Participant and sampling design are purposefully and strategically selected as needed to explore the problem of a lack of an SoC between HEAs and online CF (Bickman & Rog, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This section of the chapter aims to describe the sample pool, proposed sample size, type of sample, and sampling procedures as needed to produce explanatory data to solve the problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs at a private university in the Midwest and to formulate a solution to address the problem (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

Sample Pool

The sample pool to explore an SoC between online CF and HEAs is determined strategically by the purposive population to explain the research site phenomenon (Claxton & Michael, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As a result, the first sample population required for

this study are HEAs who have legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959) within the institution. HEAs must be included to explore the perception of the developed SoC with online CF as individuals with direct control of communication, perceptions, and opportunities within the institution. The selection of HEAs with legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959) and control will include department program coordinators, department program directors, department chair members, college associate deans, and college deans within UotM. The selected HEAs have direct knowledge and understanding of communication and actions associated with leading and directing online CF, resulting in a perception of institutional SoC (Check & Schutt, 2018; Claxton & Michael, 2020). Using a population census developed through organizational chart investigation, 45 HEAs meet the eligibility requirements to participate in the quantitative survey (OIE, 2020b).

The second sample population needed to complete the phenomenological explanatory research requires online CF data collection. Online CF have been purposively selected based upon the direct knowledge and perceptions of the developed SoC (Check & Schutt, 2018; Claxton & Michael, 2020). The institution employs approximately 1,000 part-time faculty members identified through population census derived from the institutional organizational data charts (OIE, 2020b). Within the 1,000 part-time faculty population, there are 653 individuals who are eligible and approved to teach online (University Personnel, personal communication, April 13, 2021). Only CF who instruct strictly online with any level of teaching experience will be eligible to participate in the study in order to explore varying perceptions of an SoC.

Proposed Sample Size

The perception of a developed SoC between online CF and HEAs is aimed to be explained through a quantitative survey with HEAs, a quantitative survey with online CF,

qualitative interviews with online CF, and a qualitative focus group with online CF. The proposed sample size for all primary research tools aims to reduce the explanatory study's total sampling error through power analysis management achieved through active recruitment of the potential participants (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The proposed sample size for HEAs participating in the quantitative survey is 41 HEAs, calculated using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The proposed sample size for online CF interviews is developed through purposive sampling. Three participants from each of the institutional colleges comprise a total of nine online CF member interviews. The proposed sample size for online CF interviews is approximately 1% of the total CF population and is determined based upon feasibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Finally, the proposed sample size for the online CF focus group is a total of six participants comprised of two online CF members from each college to aid in uncovering possible differences among perceptions of an SoC. The focus group proposed sample is approximately 1% of all CF employed within the institution and is determined based upon feasibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Finally, the proposed sample size for online CF participating in the quantitative survey is 242 online CF members, calculated using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.

Sample Type and Procedures

Nonprobability sampling will be utilized to purposively select participants who have direct experience with the SoC between HEAs and online CF (Claxton & Michael, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The use of purposive sampling, the process of selecting participants with a distinct understanding of a topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), will be utilized to explore the perceived SoC as held by HEAs and online CF at UotM. Applying nonprobability sampling will provide potential differences developed by comparing survey, interview, and focus group

outcomes (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The guided outcome differences may provide data for which a solution to the problem of a lack of an SoC will be produced (Claxton & Michael, 2020).

The Researcher's Role

The investigation of the problem of a lack of an SoC between HEAs and online CF at UotM will be conducted through the motivated interest and expressed need within the institutional department for university improvement (University Personnel, personal communication, August 31, 2020). Insight into the area of research was guided by the researcher's role within the institution as a current online adjunct faculty member, course developer, and faculty mentor. A convergent multimethod research design will support the need to uncover a solution for the problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs through purposeful and guided responsivity to stakeholders and participants by allowing for comparative analysis of qualitative and quantitative data (Check & Schutt, 2012). Due to the researcher's 11 years of professional history of institutional relations, the use of reflexivity, the recording of notes during the research process will reduce bias by allowing personal experience reflection and consideration of the varied data interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Historical institutional experience may also improve the qualitative investigation through contextual insight (Patton, 2003). Such an interest, understanding, and knowledge of the institution will help develop an accurate perception of participant responses (Patton, 2003). Although, limiting personal experience discussion with participants during the qualitative focus group and interviews will support improved opportunities for shared participant communicative data while reinforcing the research methods' importance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In further support of reducing potential bias, triangulated data investigation of the convergent multimethod design will improve the validity of outcomes through the proven accuracy of the research outcomes

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Finally, the institutional review board's (IRB) approval will be collected before the multimethod research data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Procedures

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to stakeholders of a private university in the Midwest with possible solutions to the problem of a lack of an SoC between HEAs and online CF. As a private university employing approximately six times the amount of online part-time faculty compared to full-time faculty (OIE, 2020b), the need for exploring SoC perceptions will be of high value to institutional stakeholders. Such an investigation will be conducted through qualitative interviews, a qualitative focus group, and a quantitative survey. IRB permission will be obtained to conduct research (see Appendix A for IRB approval). Written authorization will be acquired from the institutional associate provost (see Appendix B for permission request letter and permissions).

Data Collection and Analysis

The exploration of the problem of a lack of an SoC between HEAs and online CF will be conducted through a multimethod data collection and analysis process. Data collection will be performed using qualitative interviews with online CF, a qualitative focus group with online CF, and a quantitative survey with HEAs and online CF. An analysis of the data will be achieved through the qualitative interview and focus group transcription, coding, and analysis of online CF themes, then compared with quantitative themes and data. The convergent multimethod design will guide an investigation of perspective and need fulfillment misalignment between HEAs and online CF to help develop recommendations to improve the institutional SoC. This portion of the chapter will provide procedures and analysis of the interviews, focus group, and survey.

Interviews

The first sub-question for this study explores how online CF would solve the problem of a lack of an SoC in an interview at a private university located in the Midwest. The use of interviews within the multimethod approach will follow Patton's (2003) qualitative evaluation procedures to ensure the effective application of qualitative investigation, evaluation, techniques, analysis, and ethical implications. Utilizing a semi-structured interview procedure, the process of allowing for structured and unstructured interview questions to guide an in-depth investigation of participant responses using follow-up questions (Claxton & Michael, 2020) will aid in the exploration of online CF perceptions of a developed SoC. The semi-structured interview process will support a more in-depth investigation of the problem of a lack of an SoC experienced by online CF by allowing for follow-up questions based on participant experience (Claxton & Michael, 2020). An SoC is experienced through perceptions of inclusivity, value, integration, and connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Using interviews to explore how online CF experience an SoC will allow the researcher to determine how online CF would solve the problem of a lack of an SoC experienced at the UotM. Purposive sampling will be used to select participants due to the specific knowledge of the problem of a lack of an SoC (Claxton & Michael, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2003). The proposed sample of nine online CF members will consist of three participants from each university college to explore potential variations of a perceived SoC within the institution.

Interviews will be conducted off-campus in a one-on-one, synchronous online environment. The researcher will follow a standard interviewing protocol for all interviews (Claxton & Michael, 2020; Patton, 2003). Each interview will last no longer than one hour and will be recorded using the online synchronous video chat feature and a secondary recording

device. The use of reflexivity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) will be used during the interviews to mitigate potential researcher bias. After each interview, transcription will immediately begin for data analysis. Diligent notetaking will include recording non-verbal communication responses, such as body language, tone, facial expressions, and gestures (Edwards et al., 2020), to explore participant connotation and responses to the interview questions (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Upon participant consent, interviewing will begin with demographic questions to help analyze the context of responses and communicated experiences (Claxton & Michael, 2020) and directly followed by ten interview questions.

After the interview data is transcribed, the transcriptions will be reviewed and coded to determine the participant data's themes (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The use of coding and categorization allows the researcher to uncover reoccurring themes and patterns that converge or diverge with current literature (Claxton & Michel, 2020; Patton, 2003). Organizing codes in a table will allow the researcher to determine themes for a more in-depth exploration of participant data (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Further, coding will allow for key phrases, ideas, and words to be uncovered and systematically organized (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The central research question will be answered by exploring the first sub-question that explores how online CF would solve the problem of a lack of an SoC at a private institution of HE in the Midwest. The qualitative interviews will be conducted using the following questions upon participant consent.

Interview Questions

Part 1: Screening Statement. The screening statement is established to determine the eligibility of individuals to participate in the survey. Survey participants must only teach in the online modality rather than teach in a multiple modality setting, such as face-to-face or a hybrid of online and face-to-face. Individuals confirming the statement to be true will move forward to

the consent form. Individuals confirming the statement to be false will be directed to a disqualification page to which an exit of the survey will be directed.

1. I teach online courses for the university and do not teach in any other modality (such as face-to-face, hybrid, etc.).

- True
- False

Part 2: Consent. Potential participants will be provided an informed consent document. The document will aid human subjects in developing an understanding of the research being conducted while guiding a clarity of expectations for privacy, confidentiality, processes, risks, benefits, and protections. All participants must provide informed consent before moving forward with the survey (see Appendix C for the interview and focus group participant consent form).

Part 3: Demographic Questions. The demographic questions are composed of six parts to help evaluate participants' data (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The demographic questions are concisely constructed to gather crucial demographic data needed to examine the problem of a lack of an SoC at a private university in the Midwest (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Collecting data regarding age, race, gender, education level, experience, and college of employed status will help the researcher identify similar verbal and non-verbal responses to the interview questions.

1. Which category best describes your age in years?

- 18 – 29
- 30 – 39
- 40 – 49
- 50 – 59
- 60 or older

- Prefer Not to Answer

2. What is your race?

- White or Caucasian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian or Asian American
- Native American or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- Another race
- Prefer Not to Answer

3. To which gender do you identify?

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Gender Neutral
- Non-Binary
- Prefer Not to Answer

4. What is the highest educational level you have achieved?

- Less than a high school diploma or equivalent (e.g., did not graduate/ no GED)
- High school diploma or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Associate degree
- Bachelor’s degree
- Graduate degree

- Doctorate or Post-Doctorate
- Prefer Not to Answer

5. How many years of experience do you have working in higher education?

- 1 – 3 years
- 4 – 8 years
- 9 – 15 years
- 16 – 25 years
- 26 years or more
- Prefer Not to Answer

6. Which college within the university do you hold a position?

- College of Liberal Arts and Humanities
- College of Management
- College of Education and Health Professions
- Prefer Not to Answer

Part 4: Interview Questions.

1. How important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other institution members as an online contingent faculty member?

This question is aimed to understand the context for which participants will respond to the SoC questions (Chavis et al. 2008). By asking this question, the researcher gains a deeper contextual understanding of the participants' data (Chavis et al., 2008). Through the application of self-determination theory (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985), a greater understanding of the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that impact psychological and societal factors may be understood as it relates to the motivation for developing and maintaining an SoC.

2. What personal and professional needs are met due to your employment at this university as an online contingent faculty member?

This question aims to understand the perception of inclusivity and reinforcement of needs as experienced by the participant (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). When individuals experience a sense of belonging and commonalities within a community, an SoC is established (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). This question is critical in exploring the inclusivity experienced by online CF. By asking this question, the researcher will gain knowledge of needs already fulfilled by the institutional employment to aid in developing recommendations for developing an SoC between HEAs and online CF.

3. What needs are not met due to your employment as an online contingent faculty member for the university?

This question aims to understand the perceived lack of inclusivity and needs that the participant does not experience (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Research reports that CF experience feelings of disconnection (Davis, 2018), isolation (Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015), and unshared cultural norms that impact the development and sustainability of connection (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019). By asking this question, the participants will provide the researcher with key data to focus on the recommendations for improving an SoC within the university.

4. How does the university communicate value for online contingent faculty?

This question is aimed to understand how online CF experience influential value within the university. As a pillar of the sense of community theory, influential value guides interdependence among community members through communicated value and the ability to

make a difference within the institution (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Value is experienced through a wide range of actions. Some CF experience value through compensation and benefits (Chun et al., 2019; Luongo, 2018; Murray, 2019), while others communicate a sense of worth through professional development support (Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Luongo, 2018), influential ability (Balser et al., 2018; Gehrke & Kezar, 2015), and career advancement opportunities (Luongo, 2018; Moreira, 2016). Alternatively, CF report a lack of value through communicated attitudes, influence, and decisions executed by HEAs (Balser et al., 2018; Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Luongo, 2018). By gaining insight into the communicated value online CF experience, deficiency themes may be uncovered to help develop community improvement.

5. In what ways does the university communicate a sense of trust for online contingent faculty?

The purpose of this question is to explore the perception of trust experienced by online CF. Influential value, the second pillar of developing an SoC, supports community members with a sense of being valued and making a difference within the institution (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Research indicates that CF experience HEA communication patterns that negate expertise and experience (Larson et al., 2019). By asking this question, the researcher gains clarity for the successful methods currently utilized by the institution.

6. How does the institution support the integration of online contingent faculty members into the university?

This question aims to explore online CF perceptions of institutional integration and membership. Institutional integration is the third pillar of a sense of community theory that examines how community members experience an SoC through shared responsibilities, values,

and resources (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). This question will guide critical examination of the perceptions online CF hold regarding the extension of institutional influence and supportive integration techniques.

7. In what ways does the university communicate shared resources and information to support effective online pedagogy?

The purpose of this question is to examine how online CF experience shared resources and information to develop effective online pedagogy. In exploring preferred communication methods among HEI employees, the most preferred communication method was face-to-face, followed by emergency texting systems, electronic mail, and telephone communication (Hart et al., 2017). Face-to-face communication may be limited due to the geographic distance between online CF and the institution. Thus, the development of communication processes must be effectively implemented to guide understanding of institutional information that drives improved membership perceptions. The researcher will gain insight into the institution's effectiveness of communication processes currently held by asking this question.

8. In what ways does the institution invest in the longevity of online contingent faculty?

This question aims to understand how online CF interpret institutional investment in employee longevity. An institutional connection is often developed through effective communication, shared symbols, and collective events (Edwards et al., 2020; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). When employees feel a sense of connection to an organization, staff turnover rates are reduced (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019). Since the institution employs 653 eligible online CF, an understanding of how online CF experience institutional investment through employee longevity will help develop a solution to the problem of a lack of an SoC.

9. How does the university develop a sense of shared organizational culture with online contingent faculty?

The purpose of this question is to investigate how online CF experience a sense of shared organizational culture. HE employees feel a shared sense of emotional connection when personal contacts, interaction, historical events, investments, and bonds are created (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). By asking this question, online CF may provide insight into perceived HEAs' methods to extend an SoC. Such an exploration may help develop an effective solution to the problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs.

10. How do you develop a sense of connection with the university culture?

This question is aimed to understand how online CF experience a driven connection with the institution. As a pillar of the sense of community theory, an institutional connection is experienced through shared symbols, developed bonds, and collective events (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Research reports that CF experience feelings of disconnection (Davis, 2018), isolation (Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015), and unshared cultural norms that challenge the development of connection (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019). Applying self-determination theory (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985) provides an understanding of extrinsic and intrinsic factors that drive online CF to develop a connection. Exploring the motivators that drive connections, such as psychological needs, goals, relationships, and relatedness (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985), will offer a greater understanding of CF's connection methods. This exploration may uncover areas of connection deficit that result in misaligned goals, symbols, and communication tactics (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985) that lead to a lack of community.

11. What practices should be implemented to improve a sense of community for online contingent faculty?

The purpose of this question is to understand how online CF would improve a sense of community within the institution. An SoC is developed through membership, influence, need, and connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). When one or more of these factors are interrupted, online CF commitment, integration, and connectedness are impacted (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985) of which results in misaligned goals, symbols, and communication (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). As a result, dissatisfaction (Davis, 2018), isolation (Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015), and unshared cultural norms erupt and contribute to challenges within HE (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019). The examination of online CF improvement strategies may promote progressive change that develops an advanced SoC within the private institution.

Focus Group

The second sub-question for this study explores how online CF would solve the problem of a lack of an SoC in a focus group at a private university in the Midwest. Utilizing a focus group will allow the researcher to collect data from a group of participants while allowing the researcher to follow up on questions based on focus group participant responses (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Purposive sampling will enable the researcher to select participants based upon specific knowledge of the problem of a lack of an SoC (Claxton & Michael, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2003). The proposed sample population will include two participants from each college within the private university to establish six focus group participants. Focus group communication allows the researcher to communicate with group members to examine a

topic in a setting that will enable a thought-provoking communication event (Claxton & Michael, 2020).

The focus group will be conducted in a synchronous online conference group setting. A standard interviewing protocol will be followed for the focus group interview process (Claxton & Michael, 2020; Patton, 2003). The focus group will last no longer than 90 minutes and will be recorded using the online synchronous video chat feature and a secondary recording device. Using a semi-structured interview process will allow for pre-determined questions to lead the discussion while allowing the researcher to follow up on specific experiences and events as discussed by participants (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Throughout the focus group, non-verbal communication responses, such as body language, tone, facial expressions, and gestures (Edwards et al., 2020), will be recorded to explore further participant context and connotation of focus group questions (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Before the focus group, participants will complete a demographic survey hosted online using SurveyMonkey to help explore the context of responses and communicated experiences (Claxton & Michael, 2020). At the beginning of the focus group and upon participant consent, the group discussion will be guided by six semi-structured questions. During the focus group, the researcher will strongly urge participants to avoid discussing the content with non-participants. After the focus group, transcription will immediately begin for data analysis.

After the focus group, data will be transcribed. The transcriptions will be reviewed and coded to determine the data's themes (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Pseudonyms will describe the individuals participating in the focus group to protect privacy and confidentiality (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Coding and categorization will be utilized to allow the researcher to uncover reoccurring themes that converge or diverge with the current literature (Claxton & Michael,

2020; Patton, 2003). Additional coding will allow for phrases, ideas, and words often repeated during the focus group to be uncovered and organized in a systematic fashion (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The central research question will be answered by exploring the second sub-question that investigates how online CF would solve the problem of a lack of an SoC at a private institution of HE in the Midwest. The qualitative focus group will be conducted using the following questions.

Focus Group Questions

Part 1: Screening Statement. The screening statement is established to determine the eligibility of individuals to participate in the focus group. Focus group participants must only teach in the online modality rather than teach in a multiple modality setting, such as face-to-face or a hybrid of online and face-to-face. Individuals confirming the statement to be true will move forward to the consent form. Individuals confirming the statement to be false will be directed to a disqualification page.

1. I teach online courses for the university and do not teach in any other modality (such as face-to-face, hybrid, etc.).
    - True
    - False

Part 2: Consent. Potential participants will be provided an informed consent document. The document will aid human subjects in developing an understanding of the research being conducted while guiding a clarity of expectations for privacy, confidentiality, processes, risks, benefits, and protection of participants. All participants must provide informed consent before moving forward with the survey (see Appendix C for the interview and focus group participant consent form).

Part 3: Demographic Questions. The demographic questions are composed of six parts to help evaluate participants' data (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The demographic questions are concisely constructed to gather crucial demographic data needed to examine the problem of a lack of an SoC at a private university in the Midwest (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Collecting data regarding age, race, gender, education level, experience, and college of employed status will help the researcher identify similar verbal and non-verbal responses to the focus group questions.

1. Which category best describes your age in years?
    - 18 – 29
    - 30 – 39
    - 40 – 49
    - 50 – 59
    - 60 or older
    - Prefer Not to Answer

2. What is your race?
    - White or Caucasian
    - Black or African American
    - Hispanic or Latino
    - Asian or Asian American
    - Native American or Alaska Native
    - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
    - Another race
    - Prefer Not to Answer

3. To which gender do you identify?

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Gender Neutral
- Non-Binary
- Prefer Not to Answer

4. What is the highest educational level you have achieved?

- Less than a high school diploma or equivalent (e.g., did not graduate/ no GED)
- High school diploma or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree
- Doctorate or Post-Doctorate
- Prefer Not to Answer

5. How many years of experience do you have working in higher education?

- 1 – 3 years
- 4 – 8 years
- 9 – 15 years
- 16 – 25 years
- 26 years or more
- Prefer Not to Answer

6. Which college within the university do you hold a position?

- College of Liberal Arts and Humanities
- College of Management
- College of Education and Health Professions
- Prefer Not to Answer

Part 4: Focus Group Questions.

1. How do higher education administrators at the university influence a sense of membership and inclusivity for online contingent faculty?

This question aims to examine the perception of inclusivity as experienced by the participant (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). When individuals experience a sense of belonging and commonalities within a community, an SoC is established (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). This question is critical in exploring the inclusivity experienced by online CF. By asking this question, the researcher will learn how online CF currently experience an extension of inclusivity from the institution to aid in developing recommendations for improving an SoC between HEAs and CF.

2. How do higher education administrators at the university express a sense of value for online contingent faculty work?

This question is aimed to understand how online CF experience influential value within the university. As a pillar of the sense of community theory, influential value guides interdependence among community members through communicated value and the ability to make a difference within the institution (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Value is experienced through a wide range of actions. Some CF

experience value through compensation and benefits (Chun et al., 2019; Luongo, 2018; Murray, 2019), while others communicate a sense of value through professional development support (Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Luongo, 2018), influential ability (Balser et al., 2018; Gehrke & Kezar, 2015), and career advancement opportunities (Luongo, 2018; Moreira, 2016). Alternatively, CF report a lack of value through communicated attitudes, influence, and decisions executed by HEAs (Balser et al., 2018; Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Luongo, 2018). By gaining insight into the communicated value online CF experience, deficiency themes may be uncovered to help develop community improvement.

3. How do higher education administrators support institutional integration for online contingent faculty members?

This question aims to explore online CF perceptions of institutional integration and membership. Institutional integration is the third pillar of a sense of community theory that examines how community members experience an SoC through shared responsibilities, values, and resources (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). This question will guide critical examination of the perceptions online CF hold regarding the extension of institutional influence and supportive integration techniques.

4. How do higher education administrators establish a sense of connection with online contingent faculty?

This question aims to investigate how online CF experience a sense of connection. Community members feel a shared sense of emotional connection when personal contacts, interaction, historical events, investments, and bonds are created (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). By asking this question, online CF may provide

insight into HEAs' methods of extending an SoC and help develop recommendations to improve the lack of an SoC between HEAs and online CF.

5. How do you develop a sense of connection with the university?

This question is aimed to understand how online CF experience a driven connection with the institution. As a pillar of the sense of community theory, an institutional connection is experienced through shared symbols, developed bonds, and collective events (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Research reports that CF experience feelings of disconnection (Davis, 2018), isolation (Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015), and unshared cultural norms that challenge the development of connection (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019). Applying self-determination theory (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985) provides an understanding of extrinsic and intrinsic factors that drive online CF to develop a connection. Exploring the motivators that drive connections, such as psychological needs, goals, relationships, and relatedness (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985), will offer a greater understanding of CF's connection methods. This exploration may uncover areas of connection deficit that result in misaligned goals, symbols, and communication tactics (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985) that lead to a lack of an SoC.

6. What practices should the university implement to improve a sense of community for online contingent faculty?

The purpose of this question is to understand how online CF would improve an SoC within the institution. An SoC is developed through membership, influence, need, and connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). When one or more of these factors are interrupted, online CF commitment, integration, and connectedness are impacted (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985) of which results in misaligned

goals, symbols, and communication (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). As a result, dissatisfaction (Davis, 2018), isolation (Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015), and unshared cultural norms erupt and contribute to challenges within HE (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019). The examination of CF improvement strategies may promote progressive change that develops an advanced SoC within the private institution.

Survey

The third sub-question for this study explores how online CF and HEAs would solve the problem of a lack of an SoC in a quantitative survey at a private university in the Midwest. The researcher will administer the quantitative survey through an online survey hosted on SurveyMonkey. This online survey host is a commonly used web-based survey software tool (B. Claxton, personal communication, March 23, 2021). SurveyMonkey will allow the researcher to develop and disseminate a closed-ended Likert-type quantitative survey and evaluate statistical analysis reports from the received participant data (Liberty University, 2019). The use of an online survey will allow the researcher to conduct and gather data in an efficient manner by notifying participants of the online survey location, developing the Likert-type survey to allow for only one response per statement, managing survey opportunity reminder messages, and securing all data responses for statistical analysis (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

The proposed participant sample will include a total of 620 online CF who teach strictly online and 41 HEAs holding positions within the Midwestern private university as a program coordinator, department program director, department chair member, college associate dean, or college dean. The purposive sampling technique will allow for selecting online CF and HEAs who have direct knowledge of the problem and interaction with online CF (Bickman & Rog, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participants will be electronically mailed a direct link to

the online survey hosted on SurveyMonkey. When participants open the online survey link, a consent form will be provided; upon consent, respondents will review the instructions to complete the survey. The participants will be given two weeks to complete the survey. Two reminder messages will be electronically mailed to participants on 7-day and 10-day intervals from the original receipt of the survey invitation message. Electronically sent reminders of the online survey will allow the researcher to efficiently communicate with potential respondents without postal system delays (Bickman & Rog, 2009). The close-ended Likert-type survey results will be analyzed for frequency and average using SurveyMonkey software. The survey will include demographic questions and 30 statements developed using the sense of community index – 2 (SCI-2) measure (Chavis et al., 2008) and literature review data that will allow participants to respond using a 4-point Likert-type scale. The quantitative survey statements will prompt participant responses to the following questions.

Survey Questions

A comparison between online CF and HEAs perception of a sense of communication will be developed using the same survey and supplemental questions. Alternative screening statements will begin each survey to confirm the eligibility of each participant. Online CF will have access to the screening statement specific for online CF. HEAs will have access to the screening statement specific for HEAs.

Part 1a: Online Contingent Faculty Screening Statement. The screening statement is established to determine the eligibility of individuals to participate in the survey. Survey participants must only teach in the online modality rather than teach in a multiple modality setting, such as face-to-face or a hybrid of online and face-to-face. Individuals confirming the statement to be true will move forward to the consent form. Individuals confirming the statement

to be false will be directed to a disqualification page to which an exit of the survey will be directed.

1. I teach online courses for the university and do not teach in any other modality (such as face-to-face, hybrid, etc.).

- True
- False

Part 1b: Higher Education Administrator Screening Statement. The screening statement is established to determine the eligibility of individuals to participate in the survey. Higher education administrator survey participants must serve the institution as a program coordinator, department program director, department chair, college associate dean, or college dean. If a respondent does not select one of the approved positions, then the participant will be directed to the disqualification page.

1. What is your current position as a higher education administrator with the university?

- Program Coordinator
- Department Program Director
- Department Chair
- College Associate Dean
- College Dean
- Other

Part 2: Consent. Potential participants will be provided an informed consent document. The document will aid human subjects in developing an understanding of the research being conducted while guiding a clarity of expectations for privacy, confidentiality, processes, risks, benefits, and protection of participants. All participants must provide informed consent before

moving forward with the survey (see Appendix D for the online contingent faculty survey participation consent form; see Appendix E for the higher education administrator survey participant consent form).

Part 3: Demographic Questions. The demographic questions are composed of six parts to help evaluate participants' data (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The demographic questions are concisely constructed to gather crucial demographic data needed to examine the problem of a lack of an SoC at a private university in the Midwest (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Collecting data regarding age, race, gender, education level, experience, and college of employed status will help the researcher identify similar responses to the survey statements.

1. Which category best describes your age in years?

- 18 – 29
- 30 – 39
- 40 – 49
- 50 – 59
- 60 or older
- Prefer Not to Answer

2. What is your race?

- White or Caucasian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian or Asian American
- Native American or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

- Another race
- Prefer Not to Answer

3. To which gender do you identify?

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Gender Neutral
- Non-Binary
- Prefer Not to Answer

4. What is the highest educational level you have achieved?

- Less than a high school diploma or equivalent (e.g., did not graduate/ no GED)
- High school diploma or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree
- Doctorate or Post-Doctorate
- Prefer Not to Answer

5. How many years of experience do you have working in higher education?

- 1 – 3 years
- 4 – 8 years
- 9 – 15 years
- 16 – 25 years
- 26 years or more

- Prefer Not to Answer

6. Which college within the university do you hold a position?

- College of Liberal Arts and Humanities
- College of Management
- College of Education and Health Professions
- Prefer Not to Answer

Part 4: Sense of Community Index – 2 Measure. The SCI-2 measure (Chavis et al., 2008) is selected as a pre-set measure based on the theory of a sense of community as developed by McMillan and Chavis (1986). The SCI-2 has been revised from the original SoC index measure to improve the measure's validity and reliability while enhancing statements' clarity (Chavis et al., 2008). The SCI-2 was determined to be significantly reliable with a coefficient alpha of .94 (Chavis et al., 2008). Within the SCI-2, four subscales exist for which the reliability coefficient alpha scores range from .79 to .86 (Chavis et al., 2008). While the original SoC index was the most frequently used quantitative measure to examine an SoC within the social sciences, the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008) has also been used in HE settings to investigate online CF who have a high SoC (Ferencz, 2018). Using this measure, the researcher will reliably differentiate between individuals within the university who have a heightened SoC and those with a lower SoC. Using the predeveloped measure with an existing reliability score of .94 (Chavis et al., 2008) will also aid in the findings' reliability and validity.

The SCI-2 measure (Chavis et al., 2008) is a pre-developed tool designed to examine an SoC in various settings. The measure is specifically designed by researchers and tested for validity and reliability (Chavis et al., 2008). While the SCI-2 is provided at no cost, researchers implementing the tool cannot edit or change the measure (Chavis et al., 2008).

1. How important is it to you that you feel a sense of community with other community members?

1	2	3	4	5	6
Prefer Not To Be Part Of This Community	Not Important At All	Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important

How well do each of the following statements represent on you *feel* about this community?

1. I get important needs of mine met because I am part of the community.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

2. Community members and I value the same things.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

3. This community has been successful in getting the needs of its members met.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

4. Being a member of this community makes me feel good.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

5. When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of this community.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

6. People in this community have similar needs, priorities, and goals.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

7. I can trust people in this community.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

8. I can recognize most of the members of this community.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

9. Most community members know me.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

10. This community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

11. I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

12. Being a member of this community is part of my identity.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

13. Fitting into this community is important to me.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

14. This community can influence other communities.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

15. I care about what other community members think of me.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

16. I have influence over what this community is like.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

17. If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

18. This community has good leaders.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

19. It is very important to me to be part of this community.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

20. I am with other community members a lot and I enjoy being with them.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

21. I expect to be part of this community for a long time.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

22. Members of this community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, and disasters.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

23. I feel hopeful about the future of this community.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

24. Members of this community care about each other.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

Part 5: Institutional Sense of Community. Please respond to five institutional sense of community statements.

1. Higher education administrators communicate value for online contingent faculty expertise.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

This question is intended to understand the communicated value online CF receive from HEAs. HEAs play a critical role in establishing perceptions, collaboration, and value for online

CF (Balser et al., 2018; Moreira, 2016). If HEAs demonstrate inconsistent communicative value for online CF roles, such a response may indicate that institutional departments vary in opportunities for online CF inclusion (Moreira, 2016; Santos & Cenchinel, 2019). Alternatively, establishing communication that frames perceptions of value for online CF improves retention (Moorehead et al., 2015) and increases employment satisfaction (Hart et al., 2017).

2. Establishing opportunities for career advancement will improve online contingent faculty satisfaction.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

This survey question is designed to identify HEA perceptions of career advancement opportunities for online CF to improve satisfaction within the position. CF communicate feelings of being undervalued and overlooked for career advancement opportunities, increasing dissent within the field (Luongo, 2018; Moreira, 2016). Alternatively, when employees communicate high levels of career satisfaction, motivation theory posits that motivational elements are present, such as recognition, appreciation, and career advancement (Herzberg et al., 1959).

3. Online contingent faculty attend integration opportunities provided by the university.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

This question is intended to examine the perceptions of inclusivity responsiveness held by HEAs. Inclusivity provides a sense of belonging for community members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Developing inclusion and support programs is often led by HEAs' values for online CF (Gehrke & Kezar, 2015). Unfortunately, CF admit to a lack of participation in inclusivity and integration programs (Snook et al., 2019).

Knowledge of HEAs' perceptions for online CF participation may guide a solution to developing an improved SoC.

4. Higher education administrators establish a sense of connection with online contingent faculty.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

This statement aims to investigate if HEAs attempt to establish a connection with online CF. Community members feel a shared sense of emotional connection when personal contacts, interaction, historical events, investments, and bonds are created (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). By investigating this statement with HEAs, an examination of the effort made by HEAs may be uncovered and aid in the development of recommendations to improve an SoC between HEAs and online CF.

5. Higher education administrators are responsible for developing a sense of community with online contingent faculty.

0	1	2	3
Not at All	Somewhat	Mostly	Completely

This statement aims to explore the perception HEAs hold regarding developing an SoC with online CF. Research shows that CF view HEAs as the responsible party for developing effective communication that aids in developing institutional integration and connection (Davis, 2018). Investigating this statement will allow the researcher to determine the perception HEAs hold regarding the responsible party for which a sense of connection is developed with online CF. As a result, the uncovered data may provide insight into the development of recommendations for improving an SoC created at a private university in the Midwest.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations within applied research must encompass the protection of participants while minimizing any potential risks or harm to those involved in the study (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Developing an ethically sound research design requires the consideration of participant privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (Bickman & Rog, 2009). Privacy is an individuals' preference for sharing information about oneself (Bickman & Rog, 2009). In consideration of privacy, participants will be provided with consent forms explaining the study's purpose in addition to privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity statements. Confidentiality is the agreement of controlled data access (Bickman & Rog, 2009). Confidentiality procedures will be developed within the informed consent participants will acknowledge before data collection (Bickman & Rog, 2009). Data collected during the study will be stored electronically, secured with password protection, and stored on an external hard drive off-campus within a locked cabinet. Anonymity during the study focuses on protecting the research site and participants from identification (Bickman & Rog, 2009). A pseudonym for the research site will be developed using generic cultural terminology (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Participants will be assigned basic pseudonyms to avoid any personal or cultural identifiers (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Finally, the process of receiving IRB approval before all data collection will be implemented. All ethical processes associated with privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity will be held to the highest standards to protect all participants while maintaining the research's integrity (Claxton & Michael, 2020).

Summary

The purpose of this applied research is to solve the problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs for a private university in the Midwest and to formulate a solution to

address the problem. The problem is a lack of a developed SoC between HEAs and online CF. The research design was described in detail in this chapter, along with the procedures and analysis for the qualitative interviews, qualitative focus group, and quantitative survey. Throughout the research design, the theory of a sense of community (Chavis & McMillan, 1986; also see Chavis, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008) guided the research assumptions and design to solve a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs. Further, the transformative framework was integrated to guide the fundamental ethical assumptions to improve social justice within the HEI. Aligned with the research design's goal, the exploration of the needed organizational changes to develop recommendations to solve the problem of a lack of an SoC between HEAs and online CF will be conducted through the explanatory process.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The objective of this chapter is to present the data collection and analysis results. The purpose of this applied study was to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community (SoC) between online contingent faculty (CF) and higher education administrators (HEA) for a private university located in the Midwest and to formulate a solution to address the problem. An applied research study was conducted utilizing a quantitative survey with online CF and HEAs, qualitative interviews with online CF, and a qualitative focus group with online CF.

Results

The exploration of the problem of a lack of a SoC between online CF and HEAs was conducted using a multimethod data collection and analysis procedure. Data collection was performed using a quantitative survey with online CF and HEAs, qualitative interviews with online CF, and a qualitative focus group with online CF. Analyzing the data was achieved through qualitative interview and focus group transcription, coding, and analysis of online CF themes and quantitative themes and data presented through the online survey results. The convergent multimethod design guided the investigation of perspective and need fulfillment alignment between the online CF and HEAs subjects to aid in developing a recommendation to improve the institutional SoC. This chapter will present the results of the interviews, focus group, and survey data collection.

Central Question

How can a lack of a sense of community be improved at a private institution of higher education in the Midwest?

Integration

The first theme that emerged from this study was integration, also known as reinforcement of needs or needs fulfillment (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Integration measures the perception of reinforced needs associated with individual motivation that impacts the behavior of group members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Specifically, group integration examines perceptions of a rewarding relationship established by association with others who have similar values and goals (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This theme emerged among findings within the qualitative interviews and the quantitative survey. Participants of both data collection methods communicated systems that impacted integration through monetary and non-monetary incentives. Specifically, online CF reported the rewarding nature of being a paid professional, stating, "I enjoy getting paid as a functioning professional even if it is just part-time." While monetary incentives helped continue employment as an online CF member at the Midwestern university, the benefits of continuing education and impacting students were significant sources of motivation for online CF members. Being part of a community with like-minded individuals was also a factor consistent among online CF survey responses. The integration subscale ranked the highest throughout the SCI-2 measure (Chavis et al., 2008), at an average value of 1.38. Aligned with current research, online CF maintain distance education employment regardless of experiencing little value, low compensation, increased workload, and few benefits (Chun et al., 2019; Luongo, 2018; Murray, 2019). Interestingly, quantitative online survey respondents reported limited attendance at integration programming offered by the institution. Current literature is aligned with this finding through reports that CF members experience limited participation in integration systems offered by HEAs (Snook et al., 2019). Regardless of limited participation, this study found that online CF continue

to seek and maintain employment in the distance education role due to the intrinsic benefits experienced by teaching and supporting students who seek higher learning, thus powering the integration pillar as the strongest among online CF.

Inclusivity

The second theme uncovered was inclusivity, also known as membership (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This pillar describes the relationships that occur from inclusive communication and actions, which offer a sense of belonging to group members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Specifically, inclusivity focuses on the perceived sense of membership developed through established boundaries, emotional safety, belonging, and common symbols. Boundaries are the most significant factor in developing membership as individuals gain membership or non-membership status. Current literature frames online CF as holding non-membership status due to inclusivity limitations (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Moreira, 2016). Online CF, within this study, share similar perceptions among data collected through the interviews, focus group, and survey. Specifically, online CF members expressed limitations in identifying individuals within the institution, developing relationships with others in the community, and determining the appropriate method to locate answers to inquiries. Even further, online CF in a focus group and during interviews report a lack of effective communication, aiding in understanding roles, membership, and impactful feedback for course development. For example, one individual stated during the focus group, “I have been teaching for seven years, and I have never been invited to a department meeting.” This statement showcases the lack of inclusivity perceived by the online CF member. Since inclusivity is the lowest ranking online CF subscale of the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008) with a calculated value of 0.93, developing more effective communication systems is suggested (Balser et al., 2018).

Inviting online CF members to departmental meetings or developing a learning management system course to share upcoming events, communicate leadership positions, and provide a discussion area may improve an SoC as discussed by the online CF of this study.

Connection

The third theme that emerged from this study was connection, also known as emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This pillar describes the perception of fellowship among community members developed through shared history (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In the online survey, HEAs ranked this subscale as the highest pillar at an average of 1.73, which was expected due to the nature of working in a full-time position within the institution. Alternatively, online CF ranked this pillar as the second to the lowest subscale at an average value of 1.15. While online CF may be geographically separated from the institution, other communication modes may make up for this deficit if utilized.

Interestingly, online CF participants reported limited communication with others within the university, which may have led to a lower value within the inclusivity subscale. For example, one interviewee noted, “Most communication is done through electronic mail, and that does not create a sense of connection for me.” Alternatively, findings within the interviews and focus group emerged as praise for the institution's mentorship program. For example, within the focus group, one individual stated, “The onboarding mentorship program is fantastic; I still communicate with my mentor today.” Finally, the most surprising finding stems from the online survey statement, “I expect to be part of this community for a long time.” This statement is ranked the highest among online CF (1.61) and HEAs (2.00) in the SCI-2 scale (Chavis et al., 2008). Thus, while online CF continue to express dissatisfaction within the distance education field in this study and throughout current literature (Davis, 2018; Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015;

Watson et al., 2018) and the nature of contingent work is limited by contract, an expectation of limited perception of longevity would be anticipated. Alternatively, online CF at this institution continue to maintain and expect employment regardless of perceptions of little connection.

Interview Findings

The first approached used in this study was interviews to answer sub-question one, "How would online contingent faculty in an interview improve a sense of community for online contingent faculty at a private university in the Midwest?" Semi-structured interviews consisting of 11 questions were conducted with seven participants on an individual basis. The purpose of the interviews was to qualitatively explore the SoC perceptions of online CF and to solve the problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs. Interviews were conducted off-site utilizing a semi-structured interview procedure that allowed the use of follow-up questions administered by the investigator to gain an in-depth exploration of the perceptions of an SoC at the Midwestern private university. The use of interviews allowed the researcher to determine how online CF would solve the problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs within the institution. Purposive sampling was utilized to engage with seven interview participants due to the specific knowledge of the problem of a lack of an SoC as an online CF member (Claxton & Michael, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2003). Before each interview, participants completed the online screening question confirming the teaching status as online CF in addition to completing the online demographics questionnaire and consent form. The consent form allowed the participant to identify the specific electronic mail communication location for which the investigator contacted each participant. Twelve individuals completed the online documents, although only seven participants fulfilled the interview process. One individual did not complete the consent form with a preferred electronic mail address which

failed to allow the investigator a means to extend an interview invitation. Two potential participants did not respond to the follow-up invitation for an interview, and two additional individuals chose to participate in the focus group rather than an individual interview. Each interview lasted no longer than one hour, with an average of 40 minutes per interview. The interviews were recorded in the online virtual meeting room and on a secondary voice recording device. The investigator recorded non-verbal communication patterns during the interviews, such as body language, tone, facial expressions, and gestures (Edwards et al., 2020), to support a more robust investigation of verbal responses (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The standard interviewing protocol was followed for all interviews (Claxton & Michael, 2020; Patton, 2003). Transcription of the interview data was completed at the close of each interview then coded to determine participant data themes (Claxton & Michael, 2020).

Interview Participant Demographics

Participant data collection began with gathering demographic information to guide a deeper investigation of qualitative responses. Demographic data was collected using SurveyMonkey as part of the initial screening and consent process. Collecting demographic data before the interview allowed the investigator and participant to focus on the SoC interview questions at the start of the interview time frame. Online demographic data further guided the investigator's ability to analyze and interpret results utilizing SurveyMonkey technology. All seven interviewees completed the SurveyMonkey demographic questionnaire. Interviewee demographic data is reported as a group to support the confidentiality of the interview process.

All interviewees completed the six demographics questions. Resultantly, 100% of the interviewees identified as White or Caucasian, with 57.14% of respondents identifying as male and 42.8% of respondents identifying as female. Interviewees were aged 40 - 49 (28.57%), 50 -

59 (14.29%), and 60 or older (57.14%). All respondents held a graduate degree (42.86%) or a doctoral or post-doctoral degree (57.14%). Interviewees reported varying levels of experience working in higher education, with 14.29% of respondents holding 1 – 3 years of experience, 28.57% of respondents holding 9 – 15 years of experience, and 57.14% of respondents holding 26 years or more of working in higher education. Finally, all three colleges within the Midwestern private university were represented by interviewees, with 14.29% of respondents teaching for the College of Education and Health Professions, 28.57% of respondents teaching for the College of Management, and 57.14% of respondents teaching for the College of Liberal Arts and Humanities.

Interview Results

Interviews were conducted with seven individuals representing the three colleges within the private Midwestern university of higher education. The qualitative interviews were conducted to find themes related to the perception of an SoC at the university between online CF and HEAs. At the close of each interview, the investigator transcribed the qualitative data and examined the information for phrases and words to determine the participant data's themes (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The coding application guided the investigation to uncover patterns and themes aligned or unaligned with current literature (Claxton & Michael, 2020; Patton, 2003). When all interviews were transcribed and coded, the qualitative themes were joined to examine the content for similarity, which exposed three themes and eight codes for analysis. The themes, codes, and participant wording examples are reported in Table 1 Codes and Themes from the Interview Data.

Table 1

Codes and Themes from the Interview Data

Themes	Codes	Examples of Participants' Words
Integration	Compensation	I enjoy getting paid as a functioning professional, even if it is just part-time.
		If you do more than another adjunct, you are not compensated differently.
		If adjuncts were paid more, maybe they would do more, like attending conferences on a stipend.
	Benefits	Continuing education opportunities are a wonderful benefit of being an online adjunct.
		I cannot think of a way that the university has invested in me as an online adjunct.
		I do not need a lot as an online adjunct since I am here to serve them and the students.
	Students	The more impactful incentive for teaching is seeing my students succeed.
		It is fulfilling to hear that the courses I teach positively impact my students.
		I communicate to my students that I am here for them.
Inclusivity	Online Versus Department	I am not sure if I work for the online office or the department.
		Figuring out the organizational structure is like a puzzle; I do not know who does what or who to contact.
		There is a mismatch of expectations between the online and the department.
	Course Developer	I do not know the relationship between the Course Developer and the department.
		There is a disconnection between the Course Developer, the department, and the online adjuncts.
		There is little communication between the Course Developer and online adjuncts.
Connection	Electronic Mail	The university does not share much about online adjuncts in electronic mail newsletters and messages.
		People do not read the email messages.
		Most communication is done through electronic mail, and that does not create a sense of connection for me.
	Canvas	I love that some departments are utilizing Canvas discussions and announcements more to communicate.
		The university communicates trust in me as an adjunct when they offer me a Canvas class to teach.

		The Peer Review of Teaching program is very helpful in developing my teaching.
	Communication	The university's core values are not expressed throughout institutional communication.
		I do not see a lot of communication from the administrators about value or investment in adjuncts.
		The on-boarding mentorship program is fantastic; I still communicate with my mentor today.

Note. This table provides themes, codes, and examples from interview participants.

The investigator identified themes and codes through a word search. The word search results can be found in the Frequency Codes Across Interview Data as reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes and Frequency Codes Across Interview Data

Themes	Codes	Occurrences Across Data
Integration	Compensation	23
	Benefits	7
	Students	99
Inclusivity	Online Versus Department	90
	Course Developer	22
Connection	Electronic Mail	37
	Canvas	13
	Communication	26

Note. This table provides the themes, codes, and frequency of occurrences across interview data.

Interview Discussion of Findings

Three themes were identified through the analysis of qualitative interview data transcription and coding. The first theme was integration, the second theme was inclusivity, and the third theme was connection. The purpose of this section is to discuss the findings resulting from the analysis and data interpretation of the qualitative interviews conducted with seven online CF members at a private university located in the Midwest. Application of the sense of community theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson, 2008) elemental pillars of inclusivity, influence, integration, and shared connection were also applied to examine the perceptions of an SoC among online CF. The application of each element to the

interview findings guided the depth of this investigation, which explored the attractive or unattractive draw to create membership within a community.

Integration

The first uncovered theme was integration with three pronounced codes aiding in the categorization of participant data. The codes exposed within this theme were compensation, benefits, and students. Coding guided further investigation of the qualitative data, allowing for a deeper examination of the convergence or divergence with current literature.

Compensation. As the first code, compensation was a significant source of support reported by online CF as a personal and professional need met by the employment as an online CF member of the Midwestern university. One participant stated, "The reason I teach online is the pay is better online than it is face-to-face." Alternative to current literature, online CF at this specific institution are seemingly satisfied with the rate of remuneration per online class (Chun et al., 2019; Murray, 2019). Supporting this finding, an interviewee reported, "I get paid more at this university for an eight-week course than I do for a 15-week course at another institution."

Interestingly, while some online CF express satisfaction with the pay scales associated with teaching online, the perception that online CF should do more without additional pay was a significant focus for most interviewees. "If online adjuncts were getting paid more, then maybe they would do more," one participant added. Such perceptions are not limited to this study. Value perceptions associated with an SoC are aligned with pay increases; however, online CF report perceptions of increased workloads without increasing salary or adjustment in remuneration (Chun et al., 2019; Luongo, 2018; Murray, 2019). In addition, expectations of course contracts were a concern of some online CF members. One interviewee shared, "You do not know if you are going to have a class each term; it seems a bit like a lottery." Unsurities

associated with course teaching assignments parallel online CF dissatisfaction with compensation, support, and advancement without reliable teaching longevity opportunities (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Kennedy, 2015; McGee et al., 2017; Meeker, 2017; Mohr & Shelton, 2017; Pons et al., 2017). While extrinsic motivators, such as compensation, rewards, and advancement opportunities, are limited (Pons et al., 2017), intrinsic motivators, such as personal goals, educational desires, and the ability to work with students, seemingly outweigh such dissatisfaction as online CF continue to request courses and teach when the opportunities arise (CSDT, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Regardless of the dissatisfaction with course assignments and compensation limitations, some online CF express interest in further responsibilities. One participant said, "There is no financial incentive to continue in terms of [professional] development; even if I wanted to gain more [responsibility], I am not sure how to do that." Further, a lack of HEA follow-through seemingly hinders the opportunities for online CF advancement. For example, two interviewees reported being offered departmental course development opportunities but never seeing the opportunity extended for the CF member to accept officially. One interviewee noted, "I did pursue [the role] through email, but they didn't respond back to me…I am still interested." While some online CF express interest in further responsibility, this study found that online CF find the compensation professionally fulfilling and supportive of personal goals. One participant stated, "I enjoy getting paid to [teach] as a functioning professional even though it is part-time." Overall, this study found that the value online CF experience through remuneration is satisfactory to all interviewees, with the exception that if online CF are expected to do more, then payment or incentives should also increase.

Benefits. The second code uncovered through the interview qualitative data was benefits. For this study, benefits are defined as additional non-monetary compensation provided in addition to employee contractual pay (HRZone, 2021). Non-monetary compensation reported by interviewees focused on professional development opportunities, the ability to take courses at a lower cost or no cost, support for family continuing education, and the chance to take part in a retirement plan. For example, one interviewee reported, "In terms of professional development, there are some really nice things that university offers to adjuncts." Supporting this position, a different interviewee stated, "The university does a fantastic job offering professional development; more so than any other university where I have worked." Such reports hold significant alternatives to current literature reporting the lack of support and professional development opportunities for distance educators (Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Luongo, 2018). One interviewee even declared, "[The university] gives us a lot of resources and tools." This finding indicates that this private higher education university provides more substantial professional support and development opportunities than other institutions, potentially communicating a higher perception of value for online CF.

Interestingly, many interviewees reported that while opportunities for compensation and benefits were provided, the expectation of such allowances was not necessary. "It is on the professors to keep our skills fresh," stated one interviewee. Even further, many interviewees expressed the perception that benefits were not the primary reason for pursuing a career track as an online CF member. For example, one interviewee stated, "I don't need a trophy for doing what I do [as an online CF member]." The perception of intrinsic and self-motivating behavior that does not require support from the institution is a unique finding when compared to the current literature of which frames distance educators as dissatisfied with support, compensation,

and professional development opportunities (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Kennedy, 2015; McGee et al., 2017; Meeker, 2017; Mohr & Shelton, 2017, Pons et al., 2017). Further, current literature showcases distance educators as perceiving a lack of value through limited compensation and benefits (Chun et al., 2019; Murray, 2019).

Even though online CF within this study report appreciation for professional development opportunities and support, the options provided are reportedly not well utilized. About half of the interviewees communicated their gratitude to university-specific professional development website, although two of the interviewees could not recall the name or purpose of the resource. In addition, at least two interviewees confirmed that they do not utilize the resource even though it is an excellent resource to have available. "I very rarely go to the website…I am not sure what motivation there is to do so since I do not have much experience with [the resource]," admitted an interviewee. Further, while interviewees reported professional development opportunities positively within this study, the motivation to complete or participate is not there due to the lack of incentives. "As far as getting forward professionally, [the professional development opportunities] just do not do it for me," shared one interviewee. Another interviewee communicated, "There has to be mutual motivation from each party…what motivates adjuncts to do more? Sending an email [about a professional development opportunity] may not do it." Such a finding aligns with social exchange theory that considers group members interconnected through a costs and benefits balance within the relationship (Homans, 1974). If the cost of time and work outweighs the benefit of attending a professional development program, interviewees within this study report that online CF members may not utilize the professional development opportunity. Thus, as HEAs have responded to inclusivity needs through increased professional development opportunities, CF may continue to report the lack of

connection through such avenues since the motivation to participate is limited by advancement or non-monetary motivators (Davis, 2018; Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Moreira, 2016; Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015).

The perceptions of the lack of needing recognition or support from the institution to advance professionals may result from participant interviewee demographics. More than half of the interviewees were aged 60 or older (57.14%). Self-reporting interviewees reported that a limited need for support might result from the advancement and experience within the primary field and the little need for benefits due to the retirement status. “If I was younger, I might want more benefits, but at this stage, I do this to keep my mind sharp,” stated one interviewee. “I work as an [online CF member] to help my students advance their citizenry status and grow our society,” proclaimed another interviewee. Only one interviewee shared the preference for additional healthcare benefits shared with online CF members. “I would love to have health insurance even if it was a buy-in; I would love to have the option to [buy-in],” shared an interviewee. Other interviewees expressed contentment with the private university's benefits due to their primary employment offering inclusivity, support, financial compensation, and benefits needed to maintain a preferred level of societal comfort. One interviewee shared that a primary career role meets the social interaction and support by stating, “I do not see [my career as an online CF member] as a social outlet, [since] I get that from my full-time position.” This finding aligns with current literature and assumptions that contingent and contractual educators work in the wake of primary and full-time careers (Ferencz, 2017), limiting the impact of extrinsic motivators, such as benefits, on the self-determination of online CF members. In support of such a claim, the implementation of influential value systems within the university seemingly has

limited impact due to the lack of intrinsic motivation found within online CF members who hold full-time positions elsewhere or are within retirement status.

Interestingly, two online CF member interviewees reported the preference for a communicated path for online CF members to follow if a preferred position as a tenured faculty member is desired by stating, “I would love to see a path for online adjuncts to move toward a career as a full-time faculty or tenured faculty position.” However, this may be difficult for HEIs to fulfill due to the limitations for full-time positions within higher education. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) showcases this as a challenge by reporting the job growth for contractual higher education employees and the continuation of CF holding the majority of faculty positions within post-secondary education (Chun et al., 2019; Ferencz, 2017). Thus, HE institutions may be limited in offering full-time or tenured positions to online CF individuals even if an online CF member holds qualities and experience, which makes one eligible for such a position.

Students. The third code uncovered through the interview qualitative data was students and the motivation to impact students through education. Six of the seven interviewees stated that the primary reason for teaching as an online CF member is to benefit students. “For [students] to say that I impacted them and that I am going to take what you taught me and apply it means a lot to me. That is why I do what I do,” shared one interviewee. “I feel that I am [employed as an online CF member] to do what is right for the students and honor the institution I represent…I do not worry about inclusion as an online CF member since I am employed full-time elsewhere,” stated another interviewee. Other interviewees shared the importance of making a difference in a student’s life, aiding in student success, and communicating to students that “I want you to succeed,” as shared by one interviewee. This finding holds a paralleled paradigm to current literature that conveys the transfer of online CF success, support, and belonging to

students' perception of such attributes (Balwant, 2016). Thus, while instructor-student relationships may be impacted by the perceptions held by online CF members, alternatives may also be true where online CF are so significantly affected by intrinsic motivation to aid in student success and achievement that the perception of or lack thereof, a sense of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008) has more impact than that of extrinsic motivators provided by the employing institution. This inference is supported by current literature that frames intrinsic motivators as outweighing compensation and benefits to motivate online CF (Chun et al., 2019; Murray, 2019).

HEAs should not use this inference of motivation and student success as a basis for which to negate benefits, support, and inclusion for online CF. Such extrinsic motivators may be enough to motivate online CF who do not hold as significant of intrinsic motivation seen within the interviewees of this study. HEAs may find that the process of developing instructor-leaders who adapt teaching methods by evaluating pedagogical approaches through leadership lenses is an appropriate method for encouraging and training online CF members (Balwant, 2016). Research shows that when transformational leadership (Burns, 1978) is integrated within higher education institutions, instructor-student relationships are impacted by improved student motivation, learning, skills, and abilities (Balwant, 2016). In addition, developing effective pedagogical online processes and tactics is considered an essential factor in guiding students toward degree completion (Mulijana & Luo, 2019). Thus, although interviewees were seemingly intrinsically motivated to support student growth, learning, and success, HEAs may consider supporting effective pedagogical tactics that online CF members utilize to meet their own expectations of student impact.

Inclusivity

The second uncovered theme was inclusivity, with two pronounced codes aiding in the categorization of participant data. The revealed codes were online versus department and course developer. The codes guided further investigation of the qualitative data to examine the alignment or misalignment with current literature.

Online Versus Department. The first code, online versus department, was highlighted by interviewees through discussions associated with a sense of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008) and communicated messages. A sense of belonging is developed through the inclusivity of community members and evoked through established boundaries, emotional safety, belonging, and common symbols (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Current literature reports that HEIs have attempted to develop inclusivity through transformational leadership (Burns, 1978), increased electronic messages, professional development opportunities, and additional computer-mediated messages, while CF continue to hold perceptions of isolation and disconnection (Davis, 2018; Gehrke & Kezar, 2015; Moreira, 2016; Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015). Interestingly, this study reports that online CF participating in the interviews find professional development offerings satisfactory. On the contrary, online CF report that significant confusion is associated with where the sense of belonging should be evoked. For example, one interviewee questioned, “Well, do I work for the department? Do I work for the online education folks?” Even further, the confusion of pedagogical style preferences for teaching content was expressed as a significant issue for one interviewee who stated, “Our reviews were not reflective of what our department thought of our teaching…there was a mismatch [of preferences] between the online department and our [subject] department.” Without a clear sense of belonging to one department or another, online

CF may have limited perceptions of boundaries that guide members to identify with institutional culture, artifacts, and communication patterns while misguiding departmental HEAs to limit inclusion opportunities for online CF teaching subject courses for their departments.

Interestingly, some of the online CF interviewees reported the perception of support when needed from the subject department. One interviewee stated, “The department chair emails us all of the time; although I do not use what is sent, it is nice to see the communication.” Alternatively, some interviewees believe that the department should extend meeting invitations to online CF. “We used to have department meetings [but we do not anymore],” shared one interviewee. Without the perception of belonging, one online CF member shared that the department holds a perception of preference for full-time faculty by stating, “It is an us [adjuncts] versus them [tenured faculty] feeling. The elite versus the part-time.” Should subject department HEAs offer inclusion of online CF members to department meetings, higher education employees may feel a shared sense of emotional connection that would be created by personal contact, interaction quality, historical events, investments, and bonds (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008).

Alternatively, interviewees also shared the preference for autonomy and the empowerment given to online CF through the confidence of subject department administrators. “The administrators go above and beyond to let my department boss run the department as seen fit,” shared one interviewee. Another interviewee shared the importance of communication and autonomy with the university by stating, “Tone and inflection of the communication are important. When I have written to the [department] chair, the chair member was confident that I could handle my business and gave me the ability to do so.” This finding is supported by the legitimate power function associated with HEAs' positions as decision-makers and experience

within the hierarchal structure of HEIs (French & Raven, 1959; Razik & Swanson, 2010). With positive communication tone and inflection, value is then assumed by online CF through HEAs communicated attitudes, influence, and decisions (Balser et al., 2018; Gehrke & Kezar, 2015). HEAs must consider the unique institutional culture developed within the subject department to create practical and valuable connection strategies appropriate for department members. Such a stance must only be taken by the department responsible for the inclusion and belonging of online CF.

Course Developer. The second code uncovered within the organizational structure theme was course developer. Five of the seven interviewees reported the role of the course developer as impactful to the ability to teach in the online platform successfully. First, one interviewee discussed the confusion associated with the course developer's role by stating, "I do not know what the relationship between the course developer and department is [at the university]." Such confusion may impact the overall sense of belonging online CF perceive through the course design and instructional content (Muljana & Luo, 2019). When course developer roles are not well defined, the empowerment and alignment of course goals may be impacted (Bass & Reggio, 2005). Many online CF member interviewees reported perceptions of the frustration associated with the course developer describing those in such roles as "flakey," "unmotivated," and "reactive rather than proactive." Such perceptions are described as "there is a bit of a disconnection with the course developer and department." Without active communication and understanding of course developer roles, online CF may have limited perceptions of influence within the institution (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008).

This unexpected finding, of course developer role confusion and lack of communication, highlights the lack of communication associated with roles and leadership within the institution. For example, one online CF member reported the concern for course redevelopment and keeping the integrity of the course, stating, “The point is there is no proactive effort on the part of the department or the course developer to change the assignments to impact the frequency of plagiarism.” This finding aligns with the perception of a lack of value reported by online CF through HEAs influence and decision-making (Balser et al., 2018; Gherke & Kezar, 2015). Further communication issues are reported through course changes and updates when syllabi are submitted to the department for approval but are declined based on changes to the course that are uncommunicated to online CF from the course developer. “When things are changed [online CF] do not know about it until the syllabus is declined and we need to revise then resubmit,” shared one interviewee. Such a finding may indicate that online CF have limited perceptions of influential value due to the lack of concern for the well-being and mutual influence communicated by the actions of the course developer and department leadership (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008).

Connection

The third uncovered theme was connection with three pronounced codes aiding in the categorization of participant data. The revealed codes were electronic mail, Canvas, and communication. The codes guided further investigation of the qualitative data that drove an examination of the convergence and divergence with current literature.

Electronic Mail. The first code, electronic mail or email, was highlighted by the discussion of all seven interviewees as a method for which the university communicated with online CF. Two interviewees communicated the disconnection perceived by the majority of

university interaction happening through email. One interviewee stated, “Most communication is done through email. This does not create a sense of connection for me.” A second interviewee commented, “They communicate integration through email and telling [employees] what is going on in the university. You do not get the full feel of assimilation though.” This perception was held and expressed further through the description of electronic mail being “indirect.” The finding of increased electronic mail communication aligns with current literature showcasing the efforts of HEAs attempting to overcome geographical limitations through the use of technological advancements and electronic mail of which often does not improve perceptions of online CF inclusivity (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Moreira, 2016).

Alternatively, communication conducted through electronic mail was appreciated by one interviewee who stated, “The university has done a fantastic job of sending out campus-wide emails. The last two years have been intense [due to COVID-19], and I really appreciated the direction.” This perception may result from alternative communication preferences due to the hiring and onboarding of this specific online CF member during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even further, in alignment with current literature, technological advancements over the years may have altered communication preferences for United States citizens shifting from face-to-face communication to alternative communication methods. For example, in 2017, face-to-face communication was ranked as the preferred method of communication for employees (Hart et al., 2017). Thus, communication preferences may have impacted expectations for distance education CF members who rarely have the opportunity for synchronous communication with leadership. Similar findings are reported in a 2019 study that explored organizational satisfaction and ranked face-to-face communication satisfaction comparable to textual communication (Santos & Cechinel, 2019). While this study found that one interviewee found textual

communication to be satisfactory, HEAs may need to explore the appropriateness and expectations for online CF and other employees within the department to support inclusivity, value, integration, and connection within the community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008).

Canvas. The second code, Canvas, was revealed during interviews. Canvas is the private university's learning management system that hosts the institution's online courses. Online CF discussed the Canvas learning management system several times during the interview process with varying perspectives of praise, frustrations, and solutions for improving an SoC within the institution. Problems associated with the system focused on the ability to utilize the classroom program efficiently and proactively. One interview reported, "There is a lot of stuff in Canvas that [instructors] can use, but I have no clue [how to use them]." Another participant's comment focused on the confusion of where to direct questions associated with online teaching technology by stating, "There are places you can go and figure things out [when you have a classroom or IT problem]. Certainly, it can be challenging if you do not know if you have a Canvas issue or if it is a university Internet problem." Further discussion focused on the confusion of where online CF should direct phone calls when or if a problem arises, with one interviewee recalling, "You end up calling [the university] IT helpdesk, and then they say to call Canvas." Like this institution, current literature reports that higher education institutions have attempted to extend inclusion opportunities to CF through specific online educator websites (Chun et al., 2019) to enable constituents to act and perform work duties in expected manners (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Problematically, if HEIs have developed such resources but online CF find the systems insufficient for supporting effective online teaching, the system has seemingly failed. Interestingly, supportive web content may reduce the time frame for online CF to integrate into

the institution and utilize systems properly to improve work performance (Chun et al., 2019). Resultantly, the findings from the qualitative interviews uncover that the institution may be attempting to provide inclusivity and membership opportunities with online systems that support effective teaching, integrated culture, and guidance, although some online CF find the communicated direction limiting, unsupportive, and confusing.

Other perspectives uncovered within this study frame online systems and Canvas programs as supportive and inclusive for communicating and bonding with other educators within the institution. For example, one interviewee stated, "I love that some departments are now actively [utilizing] discussion groups on Canvas [to communicate with online adjuncts]." Another interviewee recommended more substantial use of the online learning management system to communicate university happenings, essential data, and news by stating, "[We should] utilize Canvas more to communicate with online adjuncts. We are already [online] four days a week; why not add more to the learning management system for communication purposes? It might help improve a sense of community." Aligned with current literature, HEIs have continued to recognize the need for communication methods alternative to traditional face-to-face approaches by using various technological advancements. However, without developing effective systems that encourage inclusivity, online CF continue to perceive a non-membership status that limits perspectives of responsibility, value, and beneficial resources (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Moreira, 2016; see also Peterson et al., 2008).

Communication. The third code, communication, was the focus of almost 75% of the interviewees. Participants who discussed communication as a method for which an SoC is evoked focused on positive aspects and areas for improvement in communication. Interviewees

reported positive areas of communication within the institution developed through the mentorship program and specifically named individuals who run the faculty mentorship program. One interviewee proclaimed, “The mentorship program is fantastic!” This perspective is supported by reports from current literature that showcases online education as most successful when collaboration is developed through environments where influential value is fostered by a mentor, and inclusivity is created for a mentee (Muljana & Luo, 2019). The perception of value then guides institutional integration that aids in developing an SoC (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008).

While some participants praised university communication, most interviewees focused on improvement and limitations to the current communication systems with online CF. “The community does not communicate well with adjuncts,” shared one interviewee. In a separate interview, another online CF member shared the perspective, “There is not a lot of communication between adjuncts and the main campus.” Such views align strongly with current literature framing CF as disconnected (Davis, 2018) and isolating (Schieffer, 2016; Smith, 2015). Without supportive communication processes developed, some online CF reported limitations of integrated university values in the institutional communication and culture by sharing, “The core values are not expressed throughout the university. They may be listed on the webpage, but they are not expressed.” This perspective is not unique to the Midwestern private university. Reports from current literature showcase the lack of integrated cultural norms (Barton, 2019; Chun et al., 2019) as a place for improvement within HE as a whole.

Additional areas for improvement focused on perceptions of communicated value and investment in the longevity of online CF relationships with the institution. For example, one online CF member stated, “As an adjunct, I do not see a lot of communicated value going on.” In

a separate interview, another CF member expressed, “I do not see much communication about the investment in my longevity with the university.” Such perceptions indicate limited perceptions of an SoC among online CF. Without HEI communication patterns that incorporate value and longevity support for online CF, the institution may limit the overall SoC with online educators.

Interestingly, some of the interviewees did not hold the university responsible for online CF perceptions of an SoC, stating, “Well, to be honest with you, I do not expect my adjunct needs to be met by the university because I am here to serve them.” However, another interviewee shared the perception that “…you get what you put into the [relationship with the] university.” Such perceptions are explained well by Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory triadic reiprocality model that predicts online CF member’s behavior will determine the developed environment. The triadic reciprocality framework of social cognitive theory showcases the impacts of the environment, behavior, and person as applied to human behavior and learning (Bandura, 1986). Thus, the more involved an online CF member is with the institution, such as reaching out to actively develop, maintain, and explore community relationships, the more likely a positive perception of an SoC. Conversely, if online CF do not expect support, relationships, value, and inclusivity from the institution and do little to integrate actively, there is a theoretically more substantial chance that the online CF member will hold limited perceptions of an SoC.

While Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory may aid in examining the perceptions of an SoC within this specific private university, the continuation of improving communication patterns within the institution may help foster motivation of new and existing online CF to participate within the university. Motivation theory (Herzberg et al., 1959) indicates that

motivation is fostered by balancing motivators and hygiene factors. Interviewees specifically mentioned these factors as ideas for which an SoC may be improved through communication. One interviewee stated, “There is a lot of room for improvement with communicating value for online adjuncts.” A solution for which aids such communication was recommended by another interviewee, “[The university] should provide some sort of upward mobility [for online adjunct advancement opportunities].” Such perceptions align strongly with current literature that reports the limitations in advancement opportunities (Luongo, 2018; Moreira, 2016; Pons et al., 2017). The university may find that online CF members hold an improved SoC perception if opportunities for advancement were provided for online educators holding part-time status within the institution. One interviewee even expressed an idea that would guide online CF toward tenure faculty status, “[The university could develop] a path for adjuncts who want to be tenure and provide them a path to follow.” Such a recommendation is supported by motivation theory (Herzberg et al., 1959) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) that predict a balance of fundamental factors supports motivation and relational systems that may evoke an SoC through membership, influence, and shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008).

Focus Group Findings

The second approach used in this study was a focus group to answer sub-question two for this study, “How would online contingent faculty in a focus group improve a sense of community for online contingent faculty at a private university in the Midwest?” A focus group was conducted with five online CF to aid in uncovering themes associated with improving an SoC between online CF and HEAs within the private university. Six semi-structured questions were developed to explore the perceptions of an SoC held by the focus group participants. The

purpose of the focus group was to examine the SoC perceptions of online CF qualitatively and to solve the problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs. The focus group was conducted off-site utilizing a semi-structured interviewing procedure that allowed the participants to guide follow-up questions administered by the investigator to gain an in-depth exploration of the perceptions of an SoC at the private university (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Purposive sampling was utilized to engage with five focus group participants due to the specific knowledge of the problem of a lack of an SoC as an online CF member (Claxton & Michael, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2003). Before the focus group, the participants completed the online screening question confirming the teaching status as online CF and the online demographics questionnaire and consent form. The consent form allowed the participants to identify the specific electronic mail communication location for the investigator to contact each participant. Six individuals confirmed availability to participate in the focus group, with one unable to join the meeting due to personal commitments. The focus group lasted approximately 35 minutes in the virtual meeting room and was recorded using the online meeting technology as well as on a secondary voice recording device. The investigator recorded non-verbal communication patterns during the focus group, such as body language, tone, facial expressions, and gestures (Edwards et al., 2020), to support a more in-depth investigation of verbal responses (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The standard interviewing protocol was followed for the focus group interviews (Claxton & Michael, 2020; Patton, 2003). Transcription of the interview data was completed at the close of the focus group then coded to determine participant data themes (Claxton & Michael, 2020).

Focus Group Participant Demographics

Participant data collection began with gathering demographics information to guide a deeper investigation of qualitative responses. Demographic data was collected using SurveyMonkey as part of the initial screening and consent process. Collecting demographics data before the focus group allowed the interviewer and participants to focus on the SoC focus group questions at the start of the focus group meeting time. Online demographic data collection further guided the investigator's ability to analyze and interpret results utilizing SurveyMonkey technology. All five focus group participants completed the SurveyMonkey demographic questionnaire. Focus group demographic data is reported as a group to support the intended confidentiality of the focus group process.

Six demographics questions were completed by all focus group participants. All five participants self-reported their race as White or Caucasian. Of the five participants, three individuals identified as female, and two individuals identified as male. Focus group participants represented two age groups with three individuals aged 30-39 and two aged 60 or older. Focus group participants held varying levels of experience working in higher education. One individual held 1 – 3 years of experience, two individuals held 9 – 15 years of experience, and two held 16 – 25 years of experience. All respondents had a graduate degree or higher, with two individuals holding a graduate degree and three individuals holding a doctorate or post-doctoral degree. Finally, the focus group participants represented two of the three colleges within the Midwestern private higher education university. Four individuals worked for the College of Liberal Arts and Humanities, and one working for the College of Management.

Focus Group Results

The focus group was conducted with five individuals representing two of the three colleges within the private Midwestern higher education university. The qualitative focus group intent was to find themes related to the perception of an SoC at the university between online CF and HEAs. At the close of the focus group, the investigator transcribed the qualitative data and examined the information for phrases and words to determine the participant data's themes (Claxton & Michael, 2020). The application of coding and categorization guided the investigation to uncover patterns and themes aligned or unaligned with current literature (Claxton & Michael, 2020; Patton, 2003). The themes, codes, and participant wording examples are reported in Table 3 Codes and Themes from the Focus Group Data.

Table 3

Codes and Themes from the Focus Group Data

Themes	Codes	Examples of Participants' Words
Inclusivity	Online Versus Department	I teach online, but I feel like I belong to my [subject] department rather than the online learning department.
		I would say logistics and accreditation go through [the] online learning [department] and [course] content [questions] would go to my department chair.
		I have been teaching for seven years, and I have never been invited to a department meeting.
	Communication	I do not feel integrated at all [with the university] beyond the syllabus approval. That is all the contact I have with anyone.
		The communication I receive is mostly from my [subject] department through email and Zoom.
		The department emails [online CF] each term. I think that opens the door for communication. Our feedback is always taken seriously, and this has been helpful.
Connection	Value	When my department listens to me and uses my input constructively, I feel valued as an online adjunct.
		Hosting a consistent event that invites adjuncts to participate on the main campus would drive a connection that seems to be missing.

		The mentorship program guides connection and helps me feel like I am a valued member of this community.
	History	I feel really connected because I went [to this university] for my master's degree. But had I not, I do not think I would have the same sense of connection.
		I went [to this university] as a student, so I feel more connected than just as a faculty member.
		I connect with others through the university's faculty center. I would not have this connection if I did not reach out first.

Note. This table reports themes, codes, and examples of focus group participant responses.

The investigator identified themes and codes through a word search. The results of the word search are found in the Frequency Codes Across Focus Group Data as reported in Table 4.

Table 4

Frequency Codes Across Focus Group Data

Themes	Codes	Occurrences Across Data
Inclusivity	Online Versus Department	36
	Communication	26
Connection	Value	8
	History	13

Note. This table reports the frequency of codes recorded from the focus group data.

Focus Group Discussion of Findings

Two themes were identified through the analysis of the qualitative focus group data transcription and coding. The first theme was inclusivity, and the second theme was connection. The purpose of this section is to discuss the findings resulting from the analysis and data interpretation of the qualitative focus group conducted with five online CF members employed by the private university of higher education. In addition, the application of a sense of community theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson, 2008) pillars of membership, influence, integration, and shared emotional connection were also applied to examine the perceptions of an SoC among online CF. The application of each element to the

focus group findings guided the depth of this investigation, which examined the draw to create membership within the private Midwestern university.

Inclusivity

The first uncovered theme was inclusivity, with two pronounced codes aiding in the categorization of participant data. The codes uncovered within this theme were online versus department and communication. The codes guided further investigation of the qualitative data that drove an examination of the alignment or misalignment with current literature.

Online Versus Department. The focus group participants uncovered the first code, online versus department, through discussions associated with a sense of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). A sense of belonging is developed through membership developed by inclusivity within a community through established boundaries, emotional safety, belonging, and common symbols (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Belonging to a specific department within the institution guided perceptions of understanding role requirements and influencing course curriculum development. One participant explained the perception that teaching for two departments and belonging to the online department may create potential confusion for educators who do not hold an assertive personality, stating, "My departments do not keep me in the loop [about department happenings]…I do not have a problem with it [because of my assertive personality], but someone with a different personality may feel lost." Another focus group participant added a feeling of confidence in understanding the roles of dual integration between the online and subject departments, sharing, "I took part in the mentorship program for online learning, so this term I have been really connected with [the] online learning [department]." Such perceptions align with the inclusivity pillar of McMillan and Chavis's (1986) sense of

community theory that discusses the importance of inclusive communication and actions that fosters a sense of belonging for community members. Without clear communication from the Midwestern institution, online CF report that the clarity for which department membership should develop is unclear. Resultantly, without well-developed communication, online CF may find limitations in acting and performing work duties in the expected manners set forth by the university (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Developing a limited sense of belonging to one department or another may also restrict perceptions of inclusivity online CF members hold. Inclusivity focuses on the perceived sense of membership through established boundaries, emotional safety, belonging, and common symbols (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Boundaries are specifically crucial to develop community culture, understand artifacts, and cultivate accepted communication patterns. Members of the focus group shared perceptions of boundaries formed when invited to department meetings as a method for which this understanding is created. For example, one focus group participant shared, “In our department, we have a Canvas classroom where faculty and adjuncts just have random banter. It is quiet, but on occasion, there is an announcement [from the department] or some good memes, but it is another way to stay connected.” Alternatively, another focus group participant expressed, “I have been teaching for seven years, and I have never been invited to a department meeting.” These experiences align significantly with the sense of community theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008), which showcases how boundaries developed within a community guide members to understand who belongs to the community and who does not. While one department within the university provides opportunities for inclusivity to foster a sense of belonging that guides an understanding of boundaries for membership, another department fails

to provide communicative patterns that identify membership with the department. Resultantly, focus group findings indicate an inconsistency for which departments across the institution guide online CF toward membership or non-membership.

HEAs may find the inconsistency alarming due to the impact such online CF membership or non-membership status has on pedagogical outcomes. Current research reports that HEIs have attempted to utilize transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978) to connect with faculty through empowerment and alignment of goals (Bass & Riggio, 2005). This process develops instructor-leaders who adapt teaching methods by evaluating pedagogical approaches through leadership lenses (Balwant, 2016). Such practices impact student learning through improved instructor-student relationships. Improvements focus on student motivation, learning, skills, and abilities that increase graduation rates (Balwant, 2016) and lead to long-term memory development of concepts and principles (Sousa, 2021). Thus, HEAs should consider developing consistent communication that leads online CF members toward perceptions of membership status as a method for supporting student learning.

Communication. The second code found within the integration theme was communication. Communication is a catalyst for all relational systems that offers the opportunity to effectively integrate, connect, share value, and include all employees within HEIs. When HEAs understand online CF communication needs, the ability to develop appropriate and expected communication events that satisfy both HEAs and online CF needs is more likely developed. Current research reports that communication preferences of United States citizens rank asynchronous and synchronous communication methods, including face-to-face, electronic mail, and textual communication, similarly as indicators of communication and organizational satisfaction (Santos & Cechinel, 2019). Since communication satisfaction is a predictor of

organizational commitment (Bray & Williams, 2017), HEAs must remain aware of the organizational cultural preference and appropriateness of such communication that is acceptable and expected within the institution. Such research aligns with this study's focus group outcomes, showcasing a sense of connection with the university and communication. One focus group participant shared, "I do not feel integrated at all [with the university] beyond the syllabus approval. That is all the contact I have with anyone." Such a perception indicates that without fulfilling expected communication methods between online CF and HEAs, a limited perception of integration and inclusivity is developed for online CF.

While many online CF members may be geographically separated from the employing institutions, HEAs may need to integrate technologically based communication methods to support distance employees. For example, focus group participants communicated that the use of electronic mail and online web conferencing were the primary modes of communication used to integrate online CF within the university, sharing, "The communication I receive is mostly from my [subject] department through email and Zoom." Alternatively, while some focus group participants found the lack of communication ineffective in developing a sense of integration, one participant found the communication as a conduit for which further contact is created by stating, "The department emails [online CF] each term. I think that opens the door for communication. Our feedback is always taken seriously, and this has been helpful." Such perspectives may be explained by applying social cognitive theory's (Bandura, 1986) triadic reciprocality model that encompasses the impacts of the environment, behavior, and person. This model predicts that an online CF member's behavior will determine the developed and perceived environment. Thus, if the online CF frames an electronic message as a conduit for further

communication, the environment may alter, or the perspective may change due to the behavior of both the HEAs and the online CF member.

Connection

The second uncovered theme was connection with two pronounced codes aiding the categorization of participant data. The uncovered codes were value and history. The codes guided further investigation of the qualitative data with current literature.

Value. The focus group participants uncovered the first code, value, through discussions associated with a sense of integration and connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). When community members are integrated through connection, group members share responsibilities, values, and resources to benefit one another (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Focus group participants expressed a perception of value developed from communicated HEAs department members gratitude, saying, “When the head of our department asks for our opinion, a response of gratitude is given. The thank-you received makes me feel valued.” This perception of value evoked from communicated gratitude is unique to that of current literature that fails to display types of messages received from various community members as a method for feeling valued.

Other methods of organizational development, such as collaboration, may guide perceptions of value. Systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1950) within education suggests a collective and shared responsibility for successful student learning, which engages faculty, students, staff, administrators, and technology (Muljana & Luo, 2019). Such engagement is developed through an open system that guides collaborative efforts, such as creating an online course curriculum. One focus group participant expressed, “Irregular communication with online adjuncts from the course developer makes developing the syllabus difficult if there are changes.” Other expressions

from this participant challenged the methods for which the department redevelops courses due to the high level of plagiarism experienced within a class taught by this online CF member. Current literature aligns with these findings as a method for which faculty support develops a sense of belonging and value through engaging and integrative educational environments created through collaborative course design and instructional content (Muljana & Luo, 2019). Without the developed sense of belonging to course content among online CF (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008), students may sense the limitation of instructor ownership of the online environment resulting in lower perceptions of student responsibility toward online classroom discussions (Muljana & Luo, 2019). Without a sense of responsibility, students may find alternative methods for integrating unoriginal content recycled from previous course students. Thus, limitations surrounding the involvement of online CF in course curriculum may encourage insufficient student involvement in an online classroom setting.

Alternatively, mentorship programs may guide an open system that produces perceptions of being valued as an online CF member. One focus group member explained that "the mentorship program guides connection and helps me feel like I am a valued member of this community." Aligned with current literature, online support programs, such as mentorship (Danaei, 2019; Luna, 2019; Schieffer, 2016), guide specific expectations and direction dispersed among online CF to embrace student achievement belonging and retention. As reported in the previous theme within this study, some focus group members experienced the benefits of online mentorship as a process for establishing membership status. In contrast, others did not experience mentorship that may guide the online CF members toward perceptions of non-membership status. Without membership status, the perception of connection is significantly limited in developing a sense of value.

History. The second code found within the connection theme was history. Focus group members reported historical student or employee experience with the university as a pillar for developing a perception of connection. Institutional connection is the fourth pillar of a sense of community theory and is perceived through shared symbols, developed bonds, and collective events (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Historical event experiences are considered a critical aspect of developing connections (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Three focus group participants shared experiences as prior students of the institution as a method for which a sense of connection, understanding, and bonds was developed. "I feel really connected because I went [to this university] for my master's degree. But had I not, I do not think I would have the same sense of connection," stated one focus group member. Another added, "I went [to this university] as a student, so I feel more connected than just as a faculty member." Two focus group participants expressed interest in participating in on-campus events that invite online adjunct faculty members to campus to aid in the perception of connection. One focus group member even shared that the monetary investment for traveling to the university to participate would be worth the experience. This suggestion may allow the university to continue extending historical connection opportunities for online CF; sharing on-campus experiences with distanced employees aids in fostering relational connection (Ladyshewskey, 2016).

Focus group members reported additional opportunities for fostering a historical connection with the university through the university faculty center website. "I connect with others through the university's faculty center. I would not have this connection if I did not reach out first." Such a perspective may consider the online CF member's sense of responsibility for developing the preferred sense of connection through one's actions rather than the actions of

others. Participation in programming, professional development opportunities, and connecting with department members may seemingly be a process that is developed through the motivation of online CF members looking to establish the preferred integrative connection.

Survey Findings

The third approach used in this study was a survey to answer sub-question three for this study, "How would quantitative survey data results conducted with university administrators and online contingent faculty improve a sense of community for online contingent faculty at a private university in the Midwest?" The purpose of this survey was to explore the perceptions associated with improving an SoC between HEAs and online CF at a private university of higher education located in the Midwest. The survey contained a screening tool to determine study participation eligibility, demographics questions, a 24-item Likert-type scale survey applied using the SCI-2 measure (Chavis et al., 2008), and five Likert-type statements, in addition to the measure, to explore institutional-specific perceptions.

Purposive sampling was applied to recruit potential participants due to the specific knowledge of the problem of a lack of an SoC as online CF members and HEAs and to ensure investigation confidence (Claxton & Michael, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2003). Before each survey, potential participants completed a screening tool to determine survey completion eligibility. Specifically, online CF confirmed institutional online-only teaching status, whereas HEAs confirmed employment as a HEA within one of the three colleges at the Midwestern university. Responses to the quantitative survey included 110 online CF with 67 eligible responses completed for analysis. The analyzed response rate is 1% of the population of eligible and approved online CF for the university (University Personnel, personal communication, April 13, 2021). The resulting population size was produced with a 95%

confidence level at 1% of the population with a 2.26% margin of error. Alternatively, the university employs 45 HEAs, of which 18 individuals responded to the survey with 10 responses completed and eligible for analysis. This response rate is 22% of the population of college-level HEAs within the institution. The resulting population size was produced with a 95% confidence level at 22% of the population with a 22.90% margin of error.

Survey Participant Demographics

Participant data collection began with gathering demographic information to guide a deeper investigation of the perceptions held by online CF and HEAs within the university through six demographics statement responses. Demographic data was collected using SurveyMonkey as part of the initial screening and consent process. In addition, demographic data were collected before participants responding to the SCI-2 measure (Chavis et al., 2008) and the five institutional community statements. Online demographic data collection further guided the investigator's ability to analyze and interpret results utilizing SurveyMonkey technology. Respondents were not required to answer demographics questions, allowing participants to move forward within the study. As a result, one online CF and one HEA participant chose to skip a single demographics statement that requested the respondent's race. All other demographics questions were responded to in total by participants.

Online Contingent Faculty Demographics

Demographics of the 67 online CF members were collected prior to participants completing the SCI-2 measure (Chavis et al., 2008) and five institutional community follow-up statements. Respondents self-reported their ages as 1 individual (1.49%) aged 18 – 29, nine individuals (13.43%) aged 30 – 39, 19 individuals (28.36%) aged 40 – 49, 11 individuals (16.42%) aged 50 – 59, and 26 individuals (38.81%) aged 60 or older. One individual responded

with the preference of not to answer. The majority of online CF survey participants (53 individuals; 80.30%) reported their race as White or Caucasian, three individuals (4.55%) reported their race as Black or African American, one individual (1.52%) reported their race as Asian or Asian American, and two individuals (3.03%) reported their race as American Indian or Alaska Native. Four individuals (6.06%) of respondents preferred not to answer, and one participant skipped this question. Participants identified as female (37 individuals; 55.22%), male (27 individuals; 40.30%), gender-neutral (1 individual; 1.49%), and non-binary (1 individual; 1.49%). One individual preferred not to answer. All respondents held a graduate degree (42 individuals; 62.69%) or a doctoral or post-doctoral degree (25 individuals; 37.31%). Experience working in higher education varied among participants, with five respondents (7.46%) reporting 1 – 3 years of experience, eight respondents (11.94%) reporting 4 – 8 years of experience, 20 respondents (29.85%) reporting 9 – 15 years of experience, 14 respondents (20.90%) reporting 16 – 25 years of experience, and 20 respondents (29.85%) reporting 26 years or more working in higher education. Finally, the majority of respondents reported as teaching courses for the College of Liberal Arts and Humanities (37 individuals; 55.22%), 19 respondents (28.36%) teaching for the College of Management, and five respondents (7.46%) teaching for the College of Education and Health Professions. Interestingly, more than any other demographics question, six participants responded with the option of preferring not to answer.

Higher Education Administrator Demographics

Demographics of the 10 HEAs were collected prior to participants completing the SCI-2 measure (Chavis et al., 2008) and five institutional community follow-up statements. Participants holding positions as college-level HEAs self-reported as one individual aged 30 – 39, one individual aged 40 – 49, three individuals aged 50 – 59, and five individuals aged 60 or older.

Most respondents reported their race as White or Caucasian (7 individuals), with two respondents reporting their race as Asian or Asian American. One individual chose to skip this demographic question. Four of the participants were female, and six were male, with all participants holding a graduate degree (four individuals) or doctorate or post-doctorate (six individuals). Experience working within higher education varied for HEAs with one individual having 1 – 3 years of experience, one individual holding 4 – 8 years of experience, three individuals holding 9 – 15 years of experience, two individuals holding 16 – 25 years of experience, and three individuals having 26 years or more working in higher education. Finally, three participants worked for the College of Liberal Arts and Humanities, four worked for the College of Management, and three worked for the College of Education and Health Professions.

Survey Results

The survey was conducted through SurveyMonkey and distributed electronically via electronic mail to online CF and HEAs at the Midwestern university. The Likert-type scale allowed participants to respond to each statement using one of four possible answers: Not at all (value = 0), somewhat (value = 1), mostly (value = 2), and completely (value = 3). The 24-item measure was scored following the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008) instructions to examine an SoC. The results of the surveys were compared using quantitative data analysis to investigate the perceptions of community between both parties. The total sense of community for each group was explored using the following equation:

$$\text{Total Sense of Community Index} = \text{Sum of Q1 to Q24}$$

The following equations were utilized to gain insight into the pillar subscales:

$$\text{Inclusivity} = Q1 + Q2 + Q3 + Q4 + Q5 + Q6$$

$$\text{Influential Value} = Q7 + Q8 + Q9 + Q10 + Q11 + Q12$$

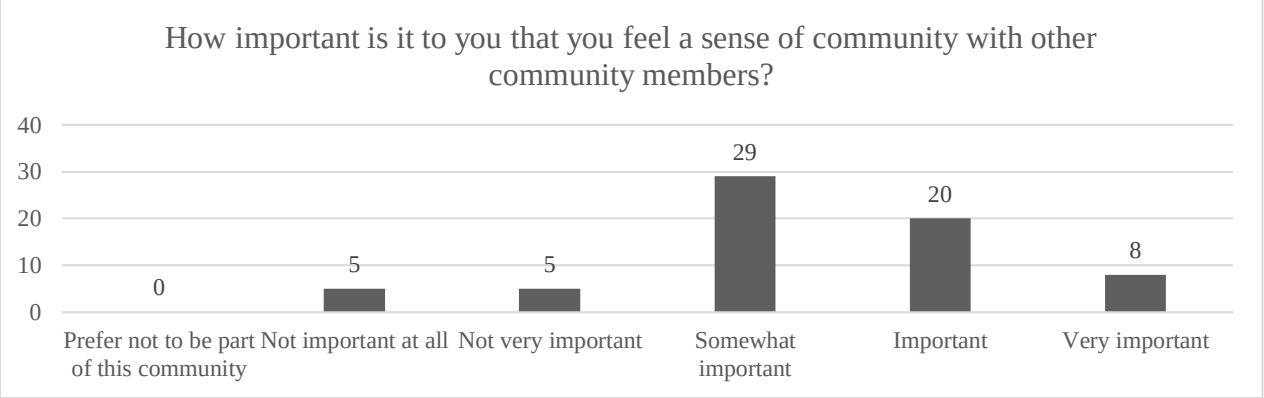
Integration = Q13 + Q14 + Q15 + Q16 + Q17 + Q18

Institutional Connection = Q19 + Q20 + Q21 + Q22 + Q23 + Q24

The integration of a quantitative survey allowed the researcher to determine how online CF and HEAs would solve the problem of a lack of an SoC. Additionally, comparing the perception of an SoC between online CF and HEAs guided further study depth to gain insight into how an SoC is viewed within the institution. The SCI-2 measure (Chavis et al., 2008) validation question results for online CF are reported in Online CF Community Importance Validation Figure 1. HEAs results from the SCI-2 measure (Chavis et al., 2008) validation question results are reported in HEA Community Importance Validation Figure 2. The validation question, "How important is it to you that you feel a sense of community with other community members?" guided interpretation of the SCI-2 measure for which participants' responses were given through the 24-item measure (Chavis et al., 2008).

Figure 1

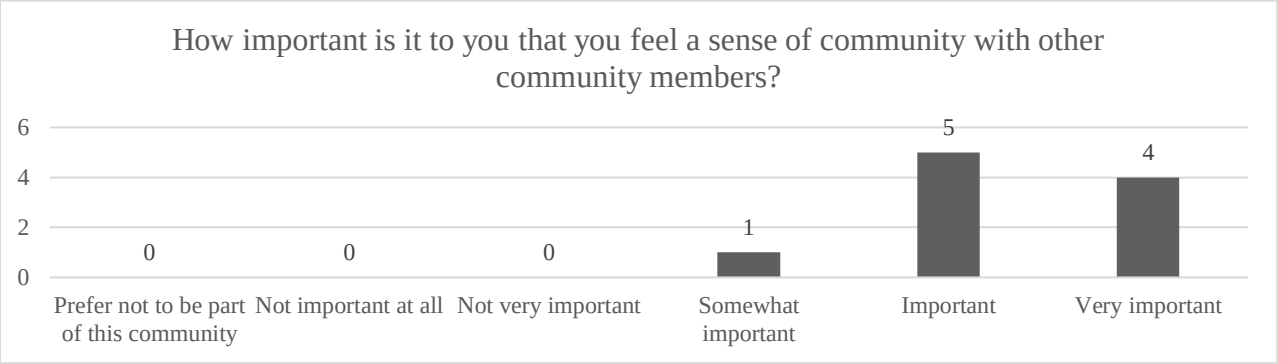
Online Contingent Faculty Community Importance Validation



Note. This figure provides response data for the Sense of Community Index – 2 (Chavis et al., 2008) validation question aiding the interpretation of online contingent faculty sense of community perceptions as calculated by the measure.

Figure 2

Administrator Community Importance Validation



Note. This figure provides response data for the Sense of Community Index – 2 (Chavis et al., 2008) validation question aiding the interpretation of higher education administrator sense of community perceptions as calculated by the measure.

Online CF results showing the frequency and average for each statement are found in the Online Contingent Faculty Frequency and Average of Survey Responses as reported in Table 5. Results showing the frequency and average for HEAs are located in the Higher Education Administrator Frequency and Average of Survey Responses reported in Table 6.

Table 5

Online Contingent Faculty Frequency and Average of the Sense of Community Index - 2 Responses

	Statement	0	1	2	3	Avg.
	Integration (Reinforcement of Needs) Subscale					
1.	I get important needs of mine met because I am part of this community.	18	26	14	9	1.21
2.	Community members and I value the same things.	5	32	26	4	1.43
3.	This community has been successful in getting the needs of its members met.	11	27	23	6	1.36
4.	Being a member of this community makes me feel good.	9	25	21	12	1.54
5.	When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of this community	13	30	15	9	1.30
6.	People in this community have similar needs, priorities, and goals.	8	30	21	8	1.43

Subscale Total		**64**	**170**	**120**	**48**	**1.38**
Inclusivity (Membership) Subscale						
7.	I can trust people in this community.	7	21	28	11	1.64
8.	I can recognize most of the members of this community.	29	23	12	3	0.84
9.	Most community members know me.	28	33	5	1	0.69
10.	This community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize.	33	24	7	3	0.70
11.	I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community.	22	34	7	4	0.90
12.	Being a member of this community is part of my identity.	26	30	7	4	0.84
Subscale Total		**145**	**165**	**66**	**26**	**0.93**
Influence (Influential Value) Subscale						
13.	Fitting into this community is important to me.	13	28	24	2	1.22
14.	This community can influence other communities.	11	35	17	4	1.21
15.	I care about what other community members think of me.	12	32	17	6	1.25
16.	I have influence over what this community is like.	38	21	8	0	0.55
17.	If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved.	12	26	24	5	1.33
18.	This community has good leaders.	7	28	22	10	1.52
Subscale Total		**94**	**169**	**112**	**27**	**1.18**
Connection (Emotional Connection) Subscale						
19.	It is very important to me to be part of this community.	8	31	18	10	1.45
20.	I am with other community members a lot and I enjoy being with them.	43	15	8	1	0.51
21.	I expect to be part of this community for a long time.	8	24	21	14	1.61
22.	Members of this community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, and disasters.	36	24	4	3	0.61
23.	I feel hopeful about the future of this community.	13	25	19	10	1.39
24.	Members of this community care about each other.	12	27	20	8	1.36
Subscale Total		**120**	**146**	**90**	**46**	**1.15**
Total Online Contingent Faculty Sense of Community						**1.16**

Note. Data in this table reports the frequency and averages for online contingent faculty responses to the Sense of Community Index – 2 (Chavis et al., 2008).

Table 6

Higher Education Administrator Frequency and Average of the Sense of Community Index - 2 Responses

	Statement	0	1	2	3	Avg.
	Integration (Reinforcement of Needs) Subscale					
1.	I get important needs of mine met because I am part of this community.	0	5	5	0	1.50
2.	Community members and I value the same things.	0	3	7	0	1.70
3.	This community has been successful in getting the needs of its members met.	0	6	4	0	1.40
4.	Being a member of this community makes me feel good.	0	3	6	1	1.80
5.	When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of this community	0	5	4	1	1.60
6.	People in this community have similar needs, priorities, and goals.	1	4	5	0	1.40
	Subscale Total	**1**	**26**	**31**	**2**	**1.57**
	Inclusivity (Membership) Subscale					
7.	I can trust people in this community.	0	3	7	0	1.70
8.	I can recognize most of the members of this community.	1	2	6	1	1.70
9.	Most community members know me.	1	1	7	1	1.80
10.	This community has symbols and expressions of membership such as clothes, signs, art, architecture, logos, landmarks, and flags that people can recognize.	3	3	3	1	1.20
11.	I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community.	1	1	7	1	1.80
12.	Being a member of this community is part of my identity.	1	3	4	2	1.70
	Subscale Total	**7**	**13**	**34**	**6**	**1.65**
	Influence (Influential Value) Subscale					
13.	Fitting into this community is important to me.	1	2	7	0	1.60
14.	This community can influence other communities.	0	3	7	0	1.70
15.	I care about what other community members think of me.	0	2	6	2	2.00
16.	I have influence over what this community is like.	1	8	1	0	1.00
17.	If there is a problem in this community, members can get it solved.	1	4	5	0	1.40
18.	This community has good leaders.	0	3	4	3	2.00
	Subscale Total	**3**	**22**	**30**	**5**	**1.62**
	Connection (Emotional Connection) Subscale					
19.	It is very important to me to be part of this community.	0	4	4	2	1.80
20.	I am with other community members a lot and I enjoy being with them.	2	5	1	2	1.30
21.	I expect to be part of this community for a long time.	0	2	6	2	2.00

22. Members of this community have shared important events together, such as holidays, celebrations, and disasters.	1	4	4	1	1.50
23. I feel hopeful about the future of this community.	0	3	5	2	1.90
24. Members of this community care about each other.	0	4	3	3	1.90
Subscale Total	**3**	**22**	**23**	**12**	**1.73**
Total Higher Education Administrator Sense of Community					**1.64**

Note. Data in this table reports the frequency and averages for higher education administrator responses to the Sense of Community Index – 2 (Chavis et al., 2008).

In addition to the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008), this study incorporated five additional statements to investigate specific perceptions of an SoC within the Midwestern university. Applying the additional statements allowed the investigator to gain insight into online CF and HEAs' perceptions of expertise, career advancement, participation, connection, and responsibility. The results of these statements are not combined with the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008) to keep the integrity, validity, and reliability of the SCI-2 scale. Alternatively, the statements are used to examine the results of the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008) data to gain further insight into the findings. Finally, averages for each statement are calculated to compare results based on the statement topic. Total averages for the institutional community perceptions statements are not calculated due to the variance of the subject topic. Results showing the frequency and average for online CF statement responses are found in the Online Contingent Faculty Frequency and Average of Institutional Community Perception Responses in Table 7. Results showing the frequency and average for HEAs statement responses are located in the Higher Education Administrator Frequency and Average of Institutional Community Perception Responses in Table 8.

Table 7

Online Contingent Faculty Frequency and Average of Institutional Community Responses

	Statement	0	1	2	3	Avg.
1.	Higher education administrators communicate value for online contingent faculty expertise.	15	27	15	10	1.30
2.	Establishing opportunities for career advancement will improve online contingent faculty satisfaction.	7	15	27	18	1.84
3.	Online contingent faculty attend integration opportunities provided by the university.	16	36	8	7	1.09
4.	Higher education administrators establish a sense of connection with online contingent faculty.	23	28	9	7	1.00
5.	Higher education administrators are the responsible party for developing a sense of community with online contingent faculty.	4	21	33	9	1.70

Note. This data provides the frequency and averages for the online CF perceptions of expertise, career advancement, participation, connection, and responsibility.

Table 8

Administrator Frequency and Average of Institutional Community Responses

	Statement	0	1	2	3	Avg.
1.	Higher education administrators communicate value for online contingent faculty expertise.	1	5	4	0	1.30
2.	Establishing opportunities for career advancement will improve online contingent faculty satisfaction.	0	2	5	3	2.10
3.	Online contingent faculty attend integration opportunities provided by the university.	1	5	4	0	1.30
4.	Higher education administrators establish a sense of connection with online contingent faculty.	2	5	3	0	1.10
5.	Higher education administrators are the responsible party for developing a sense of community with online contingent faculty.	0	4	4	2	1.80

Note. This data provides the frequency and averages for higher education administrator perceptions of expertise, career advancement, participation, connection, and responsibility.

Survey Discussion of Findings

Three themes emerged through the analysis of the quantitative survey data. The first theme was integration, also known as needs fulfillment, identified as the highest-ranking subscale among online CF, at an average value of 1.38, and the lowest ranking subscale among HEAs at an average value of 1.57. The second theme was online CF inclusivity, also known as group membership, identified as the lowest-ranking subscale within the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008) at an average value of 0.93. Finally, the third theme was HEA institutional connection, also known as emotional connection, identified as the highest-ranking HEAs subscale within the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008) at a value of 1.73. The purpose of this section is to discuss the findings resulting from the analysis and data interpretation of the quantitative survey conducted with 67 online CF and 10 HEAs within a private university of higher education located in the Midwest. An examination of the literature and the sense of community theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008) is applied to gain insight into the developed SoC among online CF members and HEAs.

Institutional Integration

The first uncovered theme was integration, also known as reinforcement of needs or needs fulfillment (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This theme was the highest-ranking subscale for online CF within the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008) at an average value of 1.38, and the lowest-ranking subscale for HEAs at an average value of 1.57. This subscale measures the perception of reinforcement of needs associated with individual motivation that impacts the behavior of group members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). In addition, group integration guides perceptions of rewarding relationships and established closeness of members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al.,

2008). Finally, the development of integration and needs fulfillment often comes from the perception of being among like-minded individuals who have similar goals (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Online CF survey participants share this perception of integrating with like-minded others through responses to the statement, “People in this community have similar needs, priorities, and goals,” at an average value of 1.43. Similarly, HEAs responded to this statement with an average value of 1.40.

Interestingly, current literature reports CF to experience little value, low compensation, increased workload, and few benefits (Chun et al., 2019; Luongo, 2018; Murray, 2019). Alternative findings within this study highlight online CF perceptions of needs fulfillment and goal alignment as the highest-ranking part of an SoC. Such an outcome may be explained by applying quantitative and qualitative data showcasing intrinsic value received as an educator as the reason online CF seek and maintain distance careers. Quantitative findings from this study further indicate that online CF find being among faculty and students with similar educational goals, even in a remote setting, rewarding and beneficial. Online CF survey participants share this perception of integrating with like-minded others through responses to the statement, “People in this community have similar needs, priorities, and goals,” at an average value of 1.43.

Similarly, HEAs responded to this statement with an average value of 1.40. Collected demographic data reports that all online CF hold a graduate degree or higher, indicating that participants are motivated to complete higher-level educational degrees. This is examined and evaluated through the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008) statement, “Community members and I share the same values,” with an average calculated value of 1.43 for online CF and 1.70 for HEAs. Current literature further supports this assertion that higher-level degree-holding individuals may find themselves among others with similar values and goals (Pons et al., 2017).

Interestingly, HEAs ranked the integration pillar as the lowest SCI-2 subscale (Chavis et al., 2008) with an average value of 1.57. Although this pillar is the lowest, it is still higher than that recorded from online CF at an average value of 1.38. An explanation for this may stem from the lack of being among the majority faculty body. Online CF are considered the majority faculty body making up approximately 70% of institutional teaching staff in the United States (Chun et al., 2019; Ferencz, 2017). Resultantly, HEAs may perceive the rewards and benefits of group membership as less impactful than that of the majority faculty body of CF members. Such a claim is, once again, exemplified through HEAs responses to the integration subscale statement, "People in the community have similar needs, priorities, and goals," with an average value of only 1.40. Interestingly, HEAs responded to the following statement with a more robust average value of 1.70, "Community members and I value the same things." This indicates that HEAs hold variances between values and needs, priorities, and goals. Even more interesting, online CF responded to both statements with an average value of 1.43, showcasing the perception that values, needs, priorities, and goals hold the same merit. Future research may consider investigating how HEAs view values, needs, priorities, and goals, in addition to the impactfulness of having a minority position within HEIs.

HEIs employing online CF as the majority faculty body must be mindful that while online CF may be intrinsically motivated to continue membership within the community, social exchange theory (Homans, 1974) affirms that a balance of costs and benefits must be met for employees to continue a workplace relationship. Improving communication methods with geographically separated employees, such as online CF members, may aid in developing experiences that support a balanced community relationship (Bray & Williams, 2017; Hart et al., 2017; Santos & Cechinel, 2019). Since communication satisfaction is a predictor of

organizational commitment (Santos & Cechinel, 2019), HEAs may need to develop effective methods for communicating benefits and integrative components of group membership. This claim is illustrated through online CF responses to the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008) statement, "When I have a problem, I can talk about it with members of this community," ranked at an average value of only 1.30 as compared to HEAs response value of 1.60. Resultantly, developing effective communication methods may require HEAs to utilize alternative communication modes. Synchronous and asynchronous forms of communication, including face-to-face, electronic mail, and textual communication, offer similar benefits for developing organizational and communication satisfaction (Santos & Cechinel, 2019). Qualitative findings from this study showcase electronic mail as the primary method by which HEAs communicate with distance employees, limiting the overall effectiveness of communication and the received value of the messages. Thus, HEAs may consider the impact of using online synchronous video communication methods to gain clarity of community members' needs, priorities, and values (Chavis et al., 2008). In addition, developing an online learning management system course that offers modules to display university values, training opportunities, and discussion boards may also provide community members, both HEAs and online CF, an opportunity for asking questions, creating solutions, and discussing problems to support an improved sense of integration and fulfillment of needs (Chavis et al., 2008).

Inclusivity

The second uncovered theme was inclusivity, also known as membership (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This theme was identified as the lowest-ranking subscale for online CF within the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008) at an average value of 0.93. This subscale measures the relationships that occur from inclusive communication and actions that develop a sense of belonging to

community members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Specifically, inclusivity focuses on the perceived sense of membership through established boundaries, emotional safety, belonging, and common symbols. Boundaries are a significant factor in understanding membership among a community through designated membership and non-membership statuses. Current literature frames online CF as experiencing non-membership as educators who experience inclusivity limitations (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Moreira, 2016). As non-members, online CF survey respondents ranked the statement, "Most community members know me," as the lowest statement of the inclusivity subscale at an average value of 0.69. This is a significant difference from HEAs, who ranked the same statement at an average value of 1.80. This is not a surprising finding due to the remote nature of online CF careers and the full-time career positions of HEAs. More surprising is the low-ranking statement responses focused on recognizing university symbols, logos, landmarks, and flags received by both parties. Online CF ranked this statement at an average value of 0.70 and HEAs at an average value of 1.20. Such a finding is unexpected due to the collegial branding that often takes place among higher education institutions.

Responsively, HEAs may consider developing a CF website to aid in creating a sense of membership and recognition of branding while respecting the nature of the contingent work of online CF members. Since online CF reported putting limited time and effort into being part of the community at an average value of 0.90, developing an asynchronous website may be fitting for those limited in time and dedication. In addition, a website offers easy communication options for online CF holding full-time or alternative careers (Ferencz, 2017). Finally, CF-specific websites may also encourage those interested in developing further relationships with the university to collaborate and establish sub-groups within the online CF community. Such

encouragement may benefit both the online CF member and the institution as more motivated online CF develop connections to serve the higher education community through collegiality (Haviland et al., 2017).

Consistent findings within this study, through the online CF interviews, focus group, and survey, showcase the inability for online CF members to identify the roles of individuals, appropriate lines of communication for inquiries, and the development of relationships with others in the community. As the lowest ranking online CF subscale of the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008), HEAs and other university personnel may consider developing robust communication methods for institutional connection to improve inclusivity among online CF members (Balser et al., 2018; Moreira, 2016). This may be difficult for HEAs who responded to this statement, "I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community," at an average value of 1.80. Such responses are unexpected due to the power positions held by HEAs and the perception that leadership may place a more substantial value on community development than the recorded HEAs survey value shows.

French and Raven (1959) showcase HEAs as having legitimate power through decision-making, responsibilities, and experience within the hierarchical structure (Razik & Swanson, 2010). Resultantly, the perceptions HEAs communicate to others about online CF members' value, expertise, and membership impact the overall perception held by others throughout the institution. Even further, HEAs communicated value for including online CF members in collaboration programs may impact the overall opportunities afforded to such individuals, affecting the perceived membership of such a group (Balser et al., 2018; Moreira, 2016). Therefore, to establish a university-wide improvement of online CF membership perceptions, HEAs may need to develop consistent communication patterns, inclusion programs, and

professional development practices throughout each university college and department. Without such a practice, inconsistent value perceptions of distance education and online CF members will impact the communication and rhetoric between HEAs and CF while limiting offers for inclusion (Moreira, 2016; Santos & Cenchinel, 2019).

Institutional Connection

The third theme identified through the online survey was institutional connection, also known as emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This theme was the highest-ranking subscale for HEAs within the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008) at an average value of 1.73. This subscale measures the perception of connection among community members developed through shared history (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Community members experiencing shared emotional connections do not need to have experienced historical events together to perceive a connection. Alternatively, group members must only identify with the historical nature of the event to experience a bond. Such connection is often established through the interaction of group members and supported through the quality, investment, honor, and bonding of community members. It is expected that HEAs, who work closely with one another within the institution, communicate a shared sense of emotional connection, unlike that of online CF members who work geographically separate from one another and the institution and ranked this subscale second to the lowest pillar at an average value of 1.15.

Working in a face-to-face or remote setting may not necessarily indicate a shared emotional connection in all community settings. Relational connection is developed through shared cultural norms, symbols, events, and artifacts (Edwards et al., 2020; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Improving institutional connection by redefining communication standards may guide the perception of a shared emotional connection enhanced among online CF who experience lower

levels of connection. Specifically, online CF ranked the statement, “I am with other community members a lot and I enjoy being with them,” as a value of 0.51, whereas HEAs ranked that statement as a value of 1.30. Interestingly, this scale does not differentiate between being physically present with community members and enjoying being with community members. Resultantly, some online CF members may find this statement to be ranked lower because they are not with other community members. This negates the second part of the statement to hold any significance for a response. Therefore, interpretation from this statement of the perception that online CF do not enjoy being with other community members within the HEI should be limited.

Most surprising about the findings within this theme is the declaration from both online CF and HEAs as expecting to be part of the community for a long time. This statement is ranked highest among online CF (1.61) and HEAs (2.00). This is a significant finding among online CF as this is the highest-ranking statement within the SCI-2 scale (Chavis et al., 2008). This finding is aligned with current literature data that showcases CF experiencing a limited sense of perceived value while continuing to work within the field (Pons et al., 2017). Interestingly, the institutional sense of community statement, “Higher education administrators establish a sense of connection with online contingent faculty,” is the lowest ranking statement among online CF and HEAs. Further, in a similar response rate, online CF (1.70) and HEAs (1.80) find that HEAs are responsible for developing an SoC with online CF. This indicates that HEAs are aware of the responsibility for developing a connection with online CF, although they may fail to do so. Again, this finding deviates from current literature, in which limited sources are found to showcase the perceived responsible party for which distance higher education faculty members develop an SoC.

Summary

The purpose of this applied study was to solve the problem of a lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs for a private university located in the Midwest and to formulate a solution to address the problem. The applied research study was conducted using a quantitative survey with online CF and HEAs, qualitative interviews with online CF, and a qualitative focus group with online CF. Three themes emerged from the collected and analyzed data. The first theme was integration, the second theme was inclusivity, and the third theme was connection. The collected data were examined and interpreted to uncover the interview and focus group themes through transcription and coding. The online survey was examined through the frequency and averaged Likert-type responses then comparatively examined to investigate perceptions of an SoC among online CF and HEAs. The convergent multimethod design guided the investigation of perspective and need fulfillment between online CF and HEAs to aid in developing a recommendation to improve the institutional SoC.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This study was designed to solve the problem of a lack of a developed sense of community (SoC) between higher education administrators (HEA) and online contingent faculty (CF) that may impact the overall effectiveness of CF pedagogy. The purpose of this applied study was to solve the problem of a lack of an SoC between HEAs and online CF for a private university located in the Midwest and to formulate a solution to address the problem. First, this chapter will present the research problem and proposed solution uncovered through the multimethod research investigation. Next, the resources, funding, roles, and responsibilities will be presented to implement the solution and solve the problem of a lack of an SoC. Last, the timeline and solution implications will provide the time needed to resolve the problem while examining the potential benefits and pitfalls of the solution. Finally, the presentation of the evaluation plan will guide the justification and rationale for the solution evaluation systems.

Restatement of the Problem

This study examined the problem of a lack of a developed sense of community between higher education administrators (HEAs) and online contingent faculty (CF) that may impact the overall effectiveness of contingent faculty pedagogy. This is evident among CF within this study and current literature, who report feelings of disconnection, dissatisfaction, lack of influential ability, and distanced community involvement (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Larson et al., 2019; Murray, 2019). Specifically, CF report dissatisfaction with institutional support (Frisby et al., 2015), compensation (Murray, 2019; Pons et al., 2017), professional development (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Kennedy, 2015), a lack of perceived value (Pons et al., 2017) and ineffective communication practices (Pons et al., 2017; Seipel & Larson, 2018). In addition,

current literature has developed significant evaluations of CF motivation, professional development opportunities, support services, leadership styles, and communication barriers with HEAs. As a result, identified improvement suggestions are present in current research; however, recommendations for best-practice communication approaches that highlight the mode, frequency, and communication channels to support CF needs and provide practical communication opportunities that improve an SoC are not present.

Interestingly, this study uncovered the various methods HEAs utilize within the private university to communicate with online CF. Responsively, investigator suggestions within the research findings provide alternative options for HEAs to consider implementing to develop more effective communication. While communication is required to establish and maintain relationships (Edwards et al., 2020), communication with remote faculty will only be successful if the receiving individuals interact with the message. This study indicates that university-initiated communication sent via electronic mail is unsuccessful in establishing connections with distance faculty due to the lack of reciprocated actions by the receivers. Thus, for communication to successfully develop, improve, or maintain an SoC, both senders and receivers must be willing communication participants (Edwards et al., 2020; Seipel & Larson, 2018). Resultantly, recommendations for developing best-practice communication standards may only impact willing communication participants but not all community members. In response, the recommendation for improving an SoC deviates from the original hypothesized method for solving the problem of a lack of an SoC at the Midwestern private university while providing a solution that will impact all online CF. Thus, the solution recommended for supporting a more robust perception of an SoC is to provide online CF with job title advancements to encourage the improvement of online CF integration, inclusivity, and connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Proposed Solution

The purpose of this study was to provide a recommendation to the University of the Midwest (UotM) with a possible solution to the problem of a lack of a sense of community (SoC) between online contingent faculty (CF) and higher education administrators (HEAs). The central research question for this study was, “How can a lack of a sense of community be improved at a private institution of higher education located in the Midwest?” After analyzing the data collected in this study, the most effective solution recommended to solve the central research question is to provide online CF with opportunities for job title advancement. The goal of the solution is to improve an SoC among online CF through increased perceptions of inclusivity, integration, influential value, and connection by providing a process that guides career advancement recognition.

Research indicates that job titles held by faculty members impact institutional constituents' perceptions of title-holding individuals (Morling & Lee, 2020). In addition, job title advancement opportunities allow the institution to provide career advancement recognition and differentiation among CF that is lacking within the university. The job title advancement system is proposed to align with the institution's established remuneration schedule. The current university system provides CF with increasing levels of pay as course teaching experience is obtained. The institution classifies these pay tiers as levels one, two, three, and four with coinciding course experience. As a result, CF increase in the ranks as experience with the institution increases. The CF level aligned with the classes taught is found in the Contingent Faculty Teaching Level Data in Table 9.

Table 9

Contingent Faculty Teaching Level Data

Teaching Level	University Courses Taught
Level I	9 or fewer
Level II	10 or more
Level III	20 or more
Level IV	40 or more

Note. This table shows the contingent faculty teaching level associated with the courses taught.

Between academic years, faculty data is updated to reflect current course standings and pay levels. Building upon this system would allow for CF levels to update and reflect the advancement through CF job titles. This solution provides a more robust sense of career progress and recognition for the longevity and commitment of the part-time employee. In addition, this solution recognizes that current CF who have taught nine or fewer courses may demote job title. In response, it is strongly recommended to support the self-efficacy and value of existing employees by allowing all current employees to keep titles of higher standing as a benefit of existing employment. All new employees and existing employees who qualify for advanced titles will follow the promotion system process. For example, a current employee with the adjunct faculty job title who has taught three courses for the university would hold the adjunct faculty title rather than demote to the adjunct instructor title then continue achieving advanced titles as classes are taught. Further, while this study aims to improve online CF SoC and the solution focuses on online CF employees, the university may extend this solution to include all institutional CF members to establish job title continuity. The proposed CF job titles associated

with the job levels and courses taught are found in the Contingent Faculty Career Advancement Data in Table 10.

Table 10

Contingent Faculty Career Advancement Data

Teaching Level	University Courses Taught	Job Title
Level I	9 or fewer	Adjunct Instructor
Level II	10 or more	Adjunct Faculty
Level III	20 or more	Associate Adjunct Faculty
Level IV	40 or more	Senior Adjunct Faculty

Note. This table shows the teaching level, university courses taught, and associated CF job title.

The job title advancement solution is recommended based upon the analysis of the themes, codes, and results of the interviews, focus group, and online surveys. During the interviews and focus group, online CF reported limited inclusivity that guided the perception of membership and a sense of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also, McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Current literature frames online CF as holding non-membership status due to inclusivity limitations (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2015; Moreira, 2016). Online CF, within this study, share similar perceptions. Specifically, one interview participant stated, “I do not see a lot of communication from the administrators about value or investment in adjuncts.” By building upon the current CF pay scale system to include job title advancements, online CF may find that the institution has made further investments into the career advancements of part-time employees, thus improving perceptions of inclusivity and membership.

Offering progressive CF titles may also be seen within the online CF community as an opportunity for promotion and advancement. Current literature showcases CF promotions and

advancements as effective incentives for motivating part-time educators (Luongo, 2018). HEAs and online CF survey participants agree. The statement, “Establishing opportunities for career advancement will improve online contingent faculty satisfaction,” was ranked by online CF at an average value of 1.84 and by HEAs at an average value of 2.10. This is the highest-ranking institutional community statement within the online survey supplemental questions and resultantly aligned with current literature that showcases the lack of satisfaction associated with CF promotions and advancement opportunities (Luongo, 2018). Specifically, less than a quarter of non-tenure-track faculty serving HEIs in the United States report being satisfied with professional development and career advancements (Yakoboski, 2016).

Interestingly, the theory of motivation (Herzberg et al., 1959) predicts that individuals who experience career achievement and advancement opportunities will have an improved sense of motivation. Advancement and promotion are often aligned with the effortful and timely actions of employees. While the sense of community index-2 (SCI-2) measure (Chavis et al., 2008) responses for the statement, “I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community,” was ranked at a low average value of 0.90, the improved job title advancement solution may motivate individuals to engage further within the institution. The theory of social exchange (Homans, 1974) supports this prediction by predicting that the university’s-initiated actions within the job title advancement opportunities will be reciprocated by online CF who will be more willing to integrate within the institution through professional development participation and community discussions.

Even further, more robust relational systems may develop through decisive organizational engagements that, in turn, improve pedagogical outputs and student achievements. It is known that student learning is inevitable when education collaborators engage in concern for

student achievement. Through interactive educational environments stemming from the integration of all faculty members, the supportive sense of belonging is visible through course design and instructional content (Muljana & Luo, 2019). Without a sense of belonging among faculty (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008), pedagogical outputs may impact students in an online learning environment resulting in lower perceptions of course responsibility (Muljana & Luo, 2019). Participants within the interviews and focus group report frustrations associated with limited student responsibility perceptions seen in discussions and assignments submissions. In response, higher education (HE) employers must consider how online CF retention and success parallels the impact of student belonging and inclusivity. By implementing job advancement opportunities, CF may find an improved sense of ownership for course development, student engagement, and institutional missions, thus improving the perception of CF integration.

Integration is guided by shared responsibilities, values, and resources to benefit one another (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). A significant benefit of institutional integration focuses on the perceived values and reinforcement of values experienced within a community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). One focus group participant stated, “I do not feel integrated at all [with the university] beyond the syllabus approval. That is all the contact I have with anyone.” Providing job title advancement opportunities may encourage stronger perceptions of power, value, and integration among the majority faculty body (Chun et al., 2019; Ferencz, 2017). French and Raven (1959) affirm that the developed sense of expert power associated with knowledge and skills is considered a power base for which others refer to individuals. Creating a job title progression system among CF allows institutional members to differentiate the skills and knowledge from one CF member to

another. The titles held by faculty members impacts perceptions developed by others (Morling & Lee, 2020). While students do not necessarily differentiate perspectives of college-level teachers based upon job title, the position ranking communicated by the title impacts the perception held by other education professionals (Morling & Lee, 2020). One interviewee commented, "You want the work you do to reflect in your job title…especially in academia where job titles mean a lot to some people." Responsively, developing a system for advancements guided by career progression recognition may provide online CF with opportunities for job satisfaction improvement (Egan et al., 2015).

Overall, the development of progressive job title advancements built upon a current remuneration schedule and ranking system may offer the institution a refreshed online CF sense of community. Ultimately, the goal of the solution is to improve an SoC among online CF through increased perceptions of inclusivity, integration, influential value, and connection by providing a process that guides career advancement opportunities aligned with current remuneration increases already established by the institution. As a benefit, implementation of the advancement system may further support the institutional mission for student learning as CF members are more integrated and engaged.

Resources Needed

Advancing the university's CF pay scale to a system of recognition and promotion will require a workforce of inspirational leaders that build a foundation for the successful change initiative. Implementing Kotter's (1996) change model, a well-known organization change framework (Chen, 2021; Hackman, 2017; Kang et al., 2020; Wentworth et al., 2020), will aid stakeholders within the private university in supporting, implementing, and maintaining the job title advancement program. Objections to change establishments within organizations are

significantly reduced when careful planning and flexibility are implemented (Razik & Swanson, 2010). Responsively, Kotter's (1996) change model outlines eight steps toward organizational change: establish urgency, create a coalition, develop a vision, communicate the vision, empower employees, create short-term wins, consolidate gains and produce more change, and anchor new approaches in the culture. Using Kotter's (1996) change model will guide the needed resources, funding, roles, responsibilities, timeline, and implications to establish the job title advancement system.

Kotter's Change Model

Kotter's (1996) change model is a well-known model developed to guide successful organizational change (Chen, 2021; Hackman, 2017; Kang et al., 2020; Wentworth et al., 2020). While the system may be used in various settings, scholars have successfully explored the change model application within higher education (Chen, 2021; Hackman, 2017; Kang et al., 2020; Wentworth et al., 2020). As a top-down model, Kotter's (1996) change model guides organizational change agents through eight processes to promote practical change implementation. The eight stages of Kotter's (1996) change model are applied within this section to guide valuable resources and support needs for successful implementation of the job title advancement initiative.

Establish Urgency

The first step of the change model (Kotter, 1996) requires the establishment of change urgency. Creating a united message of urgency may result from the guidance of the university's associate provost, who holds legitimate power within the hierarchical structure of university leaders (French & Raven, 1959). The guided evaluation of the research findings by the associate provost will aid in creating a system of urgency in communication with departmental leadership

members. Further, establishing a deadline for the change initiative may also guide the sense of urgency (Kang et al., 2020). The recommended initiation date is August 2022, as the beginning of the 2022 – 2023 school year. This deadline is developed based on the established remuneration review schedule. Finally, upon the associate provost's review of the research findings and acceptance of the solution, a coalition of change leaders with legitimate and influential power must be established (French & Raven, 1959). The resource needed for this step is the research data provided in this study to guide the buy-in of the associate provost.

Create a Coalition

The second step of Kotter's (1996) change model requires establishing a team of individuals to support and implement the organizational change. A coalition of change agents will support the initiative based upon the urgency created by the research findings to establish a foundation of movement need to support the university and departmental mission (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Showcasing institutional values, beliefs, and culture as a uniting foundation will guide a stronger sense of togetherness among departmental leaders (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The associate provost, holding a powerful hierarchical institutional position, will establish a coalition of leaders. Leaders may include college deans, department chair members, faculty support administrators, and select CF members who hold established expert and influential power (French & Raven, 1959). An integral part of this plan falls on the CF stakeholders as representatives and influencers within the distance education employee community. The CF stakeholders hold significant value in supporting, implementing, and guiding the buy-in among other CF members for this organizational change. The department chair members also have an influential position due to awarded credibility based upon the power position within each department to lead and manage team members (Kang et al., 2020). College dean coalition

members hold legitimate power to provide the necessary support for the department chair members to act out required tasks. Finally, the faculty support administrators are essential members of the coalition as individuals who hire, train, and initiate the pay scale increase reports for the institution (University Personnel, personal communication, August 23, 2021). Developing this power structure of institutional team members will require an invitational message from the associate provost that highlights the urgency and importance of participation. The invitation will set the first meeting date, time, and location. A video conferencing session should be established on the existing university-supported program to enhance the inclusivity of the meeting. Thus, resources needed for this step are video conferencing system access for all invited members, a list of departmental leaders, and an electronic invitational message. Due to the remote nature of the event, physical meeting space resources will not be the meeting leader's responsibility.

Develop a Vision

The third step in Kotter's (1996) change model requires stakeholders to determine the value of the organizational change and develop a strategy to implement it. Establishing the foundational value for CF members and recognizing service that demonstrates the longevity and success of the institution's international reach of students will guide the visionary goal. The goal of the solution is to improve an SoC among online CF through increased perceptions of inclusivity, integration, influential value, and connection by providing a process that guides career advancement recognition (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). The change initiative's vision is to establish a recognition system for CF members who fulfill the student achievement and learning mission for quality higher education and lifelong learning. While these goals are recommended based on the evidence and recommendations of this study, stakeholders are encouraged to revisit the goals and amend

fractions of the visionary statements based on evolving knowledge and perspectives (Kang et al., 2020). A resource needed for this step is the online video conferencing system currently established within the institution to establish a shared vision.

Communicate the Vision

The fourth step of the change model (Kotter, 1996) is to develop a plan for communicating the vision. Using the institutional communication lists and prescheduled meetings, stakeholders of the change coalition, are encouraged to share the change initiative with others (Kang et al., 1996). As the legitimate leader (French & Raven, 1959), the associate provost is highly encouraged to announce the initiative as a mass message to all faculty. Using an all-faculty message will aid in supporting message clarity and transparency while reducing uncertainty developed by change (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The announcement will focus on the achievements and recognition of the CF body and the value of service provided to the institutional mission and vision. Keeping the message concise will also reduce confusion and improve the focus of the message (Kotter, 2012). After the initial announcement, key coalition members will be encouraged to communicate the change vision goal in various formats. Kotter (2012) recommends including the change initiative in big and small meetings, newsletters, and formal and informal communication events. Stakeholders communicating the vision goal may also include the data in department-specific communication avenues. The resource needed for this step is the list of all faculty electronic messaging addresses to announce the initiative. The associate provost must develop the message to encourage a favorable temperature and value for the job title advancement change.

Empower Employees

The fifth step of Kotter's (1996) change model empowers employees to reduce barriers toward the change initiative success. Kotter (2012) highlights that while the first four steps may significantly reduce barriers, organizational change may still experience obstacles to overcome. The most common obstacles are structural systems, employee skills, leaders and manager communication, and informational approaches (Kotter, 2012). Overcoming these obstacles will require proactive and maintained communication systems through a developed timeline of video conferencing meetings. In addition, encouraging communication among stakeholders to evaluate concerns and barriers will support creative solution development that promotes further communication to reduce obstacles within the structure and culture of the institution. Therefore, the resource needed for this step is the video conferencing system for all coalition members to meet and discuss barriers.

Create Short-Term Wins

The sixth step within the change model is to create a system of short-term wins that encourages additional change (Kotter, 2012). Short-term wins associated with the job title advancement system may include announcements in various institutional meetings or informal vision communication with constituents. In addition, short-term wins are a method for enhancing the credibility of the change initiative (Kang et al., 2020). Thus, as coalition members report short-term wins and supportive communication, public recognition for the efforts and accomplishments should be acknowledged by the associate provost as the formal leader of the change initiative. Other short-term wins organized by the coalition must be recognized, as well. The change initiative resource needed is the university video conferencing system access. Coalition members will also find that developing a visual aid for introducing the change with

constituents during formal meetings will aid in the effectiveness of persuading stakeholders to buy into the system (Edwards et al., 2020).

Build on Change

The seventh step in Kotter's (1996) change model requires change agents to evaluate the change implementation and determine improvements. After the first implementation year, coalition members will meet to assess the recognition process, examine what went well, and consider future year improvements. Initially, the job title advancement initiative will require department leaders to develop a communication system to recognize advancing CF members publicly. Recognition systems may be implemented through electronic messages and within department meetings. Developing an outreach system to encourage the participation of all faculty within a yearly department meeting will provide the opportunity for inclusivity and integration of CF members. The recognition may result in an improved SoC through established value, integration, connection, and inclusivity (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also, McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Creating open communication and integrating communicated value for CF members will ensure that the new system is accepted into the institutional culture (Kotter, 2012). Resources needed for this step include developing electronic recognition announcement notices and the university video conferencing system.

Anchor Changes in Organizational Culture

The eighth step in the change model (Kotter, 1996) is to anchor the established changes in the organizational culture. Organizational culture guides communicated norms, actions, symbols, and values (Busby, 2017; Edwards et al., 2020). Establishing a new norm through the change initiative will guide various actions for recognition and improved systems that communicate the value for CF members. At the close of the final coalition meeting, departmental

leaders will be encouraged to continue recognition programs and develop inclusive rhetoric to promote integration, connection, and inclusivity (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008) of CF members. Resources required for this step are the online video conferencing meeting and the electronically delivered final meeting invitation.

Funds Needed

The CF job advancement solution aims to improve an SoC among online CF through increased perceptions of inclusivity, integration, influential value, and connection by providing a process that guides career advancement recognition. Using Kotter's (1996) change model, an evaluation of the resources needed for the change initiative was developed. Resources established for the implementation of the institutional change are grounded in university-established technology services. Even further, the job title advancement system was built upon a current remuneration schedule. Resultantly, the CF job advancement change will not create additional funding sources.

Roles and Responsibilities

An assignment of stakeholder roles and responsibilities is essential to the solution's success in solving the lack of an SoC between online CF and HEAs at a private university located in the Midwest. In addition, leading others in the way CF are recognized, valued, and integrated is a significant factor in the job title advancement program (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Therefore, the development of clear roles and responsibilities is an essential element of the system. Individuals needed to develop the institutional change success include the associate provost, department administrators, marketing department staff, online faculty department members, and CF members.

Associate Provost

The foundation of this system change is dependent upon the buy-in of the associate provost. The associate provost holds legitimate and influential power as the official leader of the college-level HEAs (French & Raven, 1959). When the associate provost has accepted the solution as an integral part of the institutional mission and vision success, inspiring a shared vision will support the buy-in of the departmental staff (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Ultimately, the associate provost will hold the official leadership position for the change initiative through the launch of the change program, recruitment of department staff, and the facilitation of the coalition meetings. In addition, the associate provost will be responsible for executing the plan of action to enable others to act out department recognition programs and provide recognition for the change agent's success (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). The associate provost will essentially model how the HEAs department members are recognized for accomplishments and encourage HEAs to recognize and support constituents within each department.

Department Administrators

The university comprises three colleges, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the College of Management, and the College of Education and Health Professions. Like that of other institutions, each college hosts varying departments and departmental staff. To maximize the effectiveness of the change initiative, the associate provost should call upon the dean of each college and chair members to act as change agents within each department. The participation of the college deans will provide the necessary support and examples needed for the department chair members to integrate each stage of the change (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). In addition, since college deans hold legitimate power, department staff participants may be more willing to commit and provide support for the institutional change (French & Raven, 1959). Ultimately, the

college deans will be responsible for supporting, encouraging, and empowering department chair members to implement the change.

The department chair member participants also hold legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959) that aids in the development of Kotter's change model (1996) to form a powerful coalition. Department chair members hold significant opportunities for initiating, supporting, and guiding change among department faculty members due to the power position acquired. One responsibility of the department chair members will be to communicate the vision for the job advancement program (Kotter, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2017). The goal of the solution is to improve an SoC among online CF through increased perceptions of inclusivity, integration, influential value, and connection by providing a process that guides career advancement recognition. In support, the vision for the change is to establish a recognition system for CF members who fulfill the student achievement and learning mission for quality higher education and lifelong learning. As vision communicators, the department chair members will execute the change through the recognition electronic messages associated with CF career advancement. Department chair members will also be responsible for developing communicative systems in formal and informal settings throughout the university to guide positive and encouraging actions from institutional constituents.

Faculty Support Administrators

The faculty support administration team will provide the additional and necessary support for the goal of the job advancement system. The faculty support staff hold key communication positions in providing online CF with university information, events, and opportunities. As communication gatekeepers, the faculty support administrator must hold a position within the coalition to support, guide, and communicate the change among faculty position titles.

Essentially, the faculty support administrator will provide unique guidance and insight as an individual holding direct knowledge of the faculty body. This position will enable the coalition team to act most effectively to guide collaboration and involvement (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). In addition, the faculty support administrator will hold the responsibility of communicating insight during coalition meetings and establishing support communication among faculty for the change.

Contingent Faculty

An essential part of the coalition will require the insight and inclusion of select CF members of each department. Department chair members will be called upon to recognize and invite a well-established and influential department CF member to join the coalition team. Seasoned CF hold critical insight into the needs and preferences of the part-time faculty body. Therefore, developing a coalition with CF participants will be essential to the success of the group. Further, CF member participants may hold influential positions due to expert and referent power established within the institution (French & Raven, 1959) to guide positive communication and support among CF for the job advancement title change. The responsibilities of the CF members will be to provide communicative insight to the change initiative coalition and develop positive communication in formal and informal settings among the contingent faculty body.

Marketing Staff

Finally, the support of a marketing staff professional will be necessary to guide consistent and effective electronic recognition messages and images. For example, the associate provost may call upon the marketing department to develop a compelling recognition image message for department chair members to send to advancing CF members each year. Using one consistent format will guide stronger perceptions of the job title advancement program's credibility.

Through the developed credibility, HEA communication is more likely to support and encourage CF members as they are publicly recognized and celebrated for their accomplishments (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Timeline

Implementing the job title advancement solution will take approximately eight months. The proposed timeline with coordinating action items is listed in Table 11 Timeline of Contingent Faculty Job Title Advancement Implementation.

Table 11

Timeline of Contingent Faculty Job Title Advancement Implementation

Date	Action Item
January 17, 2022	The associate provost identifies coalition team members, including the college deans, department chair members, and the faculty support administrator.
	Electronic invitation for coalition team is sent to identified members.
	Requests are made for the department chair members to identify contingent faculty team members.
January 24, 2022	An electronic invitation for contingent faculty coalition team members is sent.
February 7, 2022	Online video conferencing meeting is held establishing the urgency, goal, vision, and purpose of the team.
	Address concerns and questions from coalition members.
March 7, 2022	The second online video conference meeting is held to discuss disseminating the communicated vision among institutional staff.
	Visual aid tools are discussed to support introductory messages in formal settings.
April 4, 2022	The third online video conference meeting is held to discuss communication event outcomes and concerns.
	Requests are submitted to the marketing department to establish an electronic recognition message.
May 2, 2022	The fourth online video conference meeting is held to revisit goal, vision, and communication expectations for implementing recognition systems.
	The developed electronic recognition message is shared with coalition team members and provided for the inaugural recognition set for the fall semester.
June – July 2022	Summer break is observed for coalition team members.

August 1, 2022	Fall coalition meeting is held to revisit the job advancement solution's goal, vision, and implementation.
August 8, 2022	Associate provost announces recognition plan to all faculty through electronic mail.
	The faculty support administrator provides lists of advancing contingent faculty members to department staff.
August 9, 2022	Department chair members execute the recognition electronic messages sent to contingent faculty.
August 29, 2022	The final coalition meeting is scheduled to explore outcomes from the implementation of the job advancement solution.
	Requests for improvements are made and documented for future years.

Note. This table records the implementation proposed dates and actions items for the solution.

Solution Implications

The purpose of this study was to provide a recommendation to a private university located in the Midwest to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community (SoC) between online contingent faculty (CF) and higher education administrators (HEAs). After analyzing the collected data, the most effective solution recommended to solve the SoC issue is to provide online CF with opportunities for job title advancements. This solution aims to improve an SoC among online CF through increased perceptions of inclusivity, integration, influential value, and connection by providing a process that guides career advancement recognition. This section of the chapter will explore the implications of the proposed solution.

Inclusivity

The first solution implication expected from the job advancement program is an improved sense of inclusivity among online CF members. Inclusivity describes the relationship that occurs from inclusive communication and actions of which guide a sense of belonging to group members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Specifically, inclusivity focuses on the perceived sense of membership developed through established boundaries, emotional safety, belonging, and common symbols. As the most

significant factor of the pillar, boundaries aid in establishing a perception of membership or non-membership status. Such a perception of non-membership is common among distance faculty in higher education (Chun et al., 2019; Frankel, 2014; Moreira, 2016) and found to be a factor of the limitations associated with inclusivity among online CF within this study. Responsively, developing a system for recognition will aid in providing an avenue for HEAs and online CF to communicate and further guide professional relational systems. Alternatively, if departmental HEAs fail to buy into the solution and limit communication events with CF, the credibility of the job title advancement system will be limited. Ensuring positive perceptions are developed throughout the coalition team for the institutional change may reduce such outcomes. If stronger relationships are formed between HEAs and online CF, other areas of limited inclusivity will also improve. For example, online CF in a focus group and interviews report limitations with identifying individuals and processes that aid effective pedagogy. By introducing a system of recognition and guiding more substantial avenues for communication, online CF may establish a more robust understanding of the institutional roles and systems. The most significant implication falls within the perception of power that may be evoked from advancing titles. Since CF currently hold the same title regardless of service years or courses taught within the institution. There is no differentiation among new faculty and seasoned faculty, limiting the perceptions held by institutional constituents (Morling & Lee, 2020). By providing opportunities for advancing job titles, online CF who hold more experience with the institution may hold improved perceptions of expert power (French & Raven, 1959). Resultingly, individuals holding advanced job titles may have perceptions of increased self-efficacy and pedagogical influence.

Integration

The second solution implication derived from implementing the job advancement system is an improvement of online CF integration. Integration measures the perception of reinforced needs associated with individual motivation that impacts the behavior of group members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Specifically, group integration examines perceptions of rewarding relationships established by association with others who have similar values and goals (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Current literature reports that CF experience limited value, low compensation, increased workloads, and few benefits (Chun et al., 2019; Luongo, 2018; Murray, 2019). Interestingly, CF continue to seek and maintain employment within the field. This study found that the majority of interview and focus group participants continue to maintain employment due to the experienced intrinsic rewards achieved through their work with students. Unfortunately, CF in this study reports little participation in professional development opportunities offered by the institution. By providing job title advancement opportunities, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) predicts that the change in environment will impact the person and the behavior, improving CF participation in university offerings. The university may improve the overall pedagogy integrated within the online classroom to enhance student learning by strengthening integrational systems. Alternatively, suppose the system is not fully embraced into the institutional culture and limits communication that integrates CF. In that case, the system may be viewed as a façade that continues to negate the needs of CF members. Executive leadership individuals must incorporate the change into the institution culture by adopting positive integrative language for the job title advancement system. As executive leadership models the way for departmental leadership, encouraging communication may overcome such an implication.

Connection

The third solution implication experienced from the job title advancement solution is increased connection among online CF and HEAs. Connection is often developed through shared history (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also, McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). However, results from this study indicate that experiencing a shared connection is the least impactful pillar of developing a sense of community for online CF. This may be the result of online CF being geographically separated from the institution. While geographic distance may impact a sense of connection for some individuals, opportunities for developing connective communication practices that defy distance may provide relief. Responsively, as HEAs communicate recognition for CF who have advanced in job title, a sense of perceived connection and shared history may be evoked. Even further, while CF participants report in an online survey the expectation to be part of the private university's community for a long time, the advancement of job title may aid in supporting the retention of quality faculty committed to student learning and achievement.

Influential Value

The fourth solution implication resulting from the job title advancement solution implementation is an improved sense of influential value. Influence supports members with a sense of being valued and making a difference to the organization (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; see also McMillan, 2011; Peterson et al., 2008). Community members perceive an SoC through influential value, community influence, and conformity. A significant factor associated with influence is the necessity for conforming to the institutional norms and standards. While CF must be autonomous and self-driven individuals to manage online classrooms, a system of adherence to the university mission, vision, and values is necessary to establish an SoC from one classroom to another. Through implementing the job title advancement system, individuals may be guided

toward stronger perceptions of power and influence to guide student learning. Even educators who hold alternative full-time careers may find that the advancement of title exemplifies the expertise of knowledge held by the CF member. Alternatively, while some online CF have full-time positions with other organizations, the job title advancement system may not support any further perceived influential value. However, such a job title advancement may challenge the experiences that negate CF expertise (Larson et al., 2019) by altering HEAs' communication patterns with individuals holding more advanced job titles (Morling & Lee, 2020).

Evaluation Plan

A measurement of the success of this initiative requires the development of an evaluation plan. An examination of the implemented change guides an opportunity for evaluating successes and uncovering areas for improvement (Kotter, 2012). The evaluation plan will examine the effectiveness of the solution implementation, a review of the study's limitations, and recommendations for future research to help solve the problem.

Evaluation Plan

This research offers two methods for evaluating the outcomes of the implemented solution. The first evaluation plan is integrated into the solution resources plan of action by applying Kotter's (1996) change model and is considered summative. Evaluating institutional change offers leaders the opportunity to assess, examine, improve, and celebrate outcomes (Kotter, 2012). Specifically, the change initiative timeline designates the August 29, 2022 coalition team meeting as a method for qualitative evaluating of observations from the inaugural job title advancement recognition process. This method of evaluation is observational and allows for coalition team members to reflect on the system implementation.

Alternatively, the second evaluation plan for this research is a formal reevaluation of the outcomes from this study. The research outcome data records the average values of the four pillars of McMillan and Chavis's (1986) theory of a sense of community. Resultantly, it is recommended that the office of the associate provost readministers the sense of community index – 2 (SCI-2) measure (Chavis et al., 2008) to generate a comparison of outcome data. The associate provost's office is recommended to administer the measure due to the potential interest in the outcomes and the value of the data to provide change or further actions in developing an SoC within the institution. To compare the results, the office of the associate provost must administer the measure to online-only adjunct faculty, calculate the outcomes as directed by the SCI-2, and compare the data from the initial SCI-2 measure within this study and the secondary SCI-2 measure administered after the change initiative (Chavis et al., 2008). Improvements may be measured by the individual pillar and as an all-encompassing perception of an SoC.

Limitations and Future Research

This study holds limitations associated with developing a collective perception of the institutional SoC held by faculty members. First, the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008) was administered to online-only CF. By reducing the examination of community perceptions to part-time faculty who teach online, the outcomes are limited. Even further, while the online-only factor reduced the amount of faculty eligible to participate in the study, only approximately 1% of the CF responded. This further limits the outcomes of this study. Future institutional research should consider extending the opportunity for participation to all faculty regardless of teaching modality to examine community perceptions.

Second, this study focused on the perceptions of departmental administrators and their relationship with online CF. Participants within the interviews and focus group expressed

concerns focused on a sense of belonging and the perceptions that their subject department was the foundation of such belonging. Since HEA responses were limited to the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008), understanding how HEAs view online faculty as members or non-member of the department was unavailable. Resultantly, HEAs may perceive online faculty as belonging to the online faculty department, thus impacting the perception of responsibility for which an SoC is evoked among online CF. Future institutional research should consider evaluating how department HEAs view online CF to establish a consistent framework for a sense of belonging.

Third, this study utilized the SCI-2 (Chavis et al., 2008), a predeveloped measure that required administrators to maintain the survey's integrity by refraining from altering or adjusting the measure in any way. Resultantly, the measure included double-barreled statements that may have impacted the study's outcomes (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Specifically, one statement examined the impact of spending time and enjoying time with community members (Chavis et al., 2008). However, since online CF may be geographically distanced from institutional colleagues, it is unknown if the respondents answered the statement based on spending time or enjoying time with other community members. Therefore, future institutional researchers may consider developing a university-specific measure to examine the community with more effective survey statements to overcome this obstacle.

Summary

This study was developed to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community between higher education administrators and online contingent faculty at a private university of higher education located in the Midwest and to provide a solution to address the problem. To examine the problem, a multimethod research design consisting of qualitative and quantitative approaches was designed. Online contingent faculty participated in qualitative interviews and a

focus group to investigate perceptions of factors contributing to a sense of community. In addition, online contingent faculty and higher education administrators participated in a quantitative survey administered online using the sense of community index – 2 measure (Chavis et al., 2008) and five supplemental institutional community perception statements. Three themes emerged from the data analysis. The three themes were integration, inclusivity, and connection. Integration was the highest-ranking sense of community index – 2 pillar showcasing the alignment of current literature that implies online CF continue to seek and maintain employment in such positions regardless of limited perceptions of value. Alternatively, inclusivity was ranked the lowest among online CF. In addition, frustrations were recorded from the qualitative data collection showing that current online CF members hold similar perceptions to that of current literature. Finally, the third theme that emerged was connection showcasing. The most significant factor of the study emerged from this theme, as the declaration from both HEAs and online CF regarding the expectation to be part of the community for a long time (Chavis et al., 2008). Such an unexpected online CF outcome is created based on the limitations associated with contractual work and dissatisfaction communicated within the position. Responsively, a job title advancement system that promotes inclusivity, integration, connection, and value was proposed. Such a development may aid in creating the preferred levels of communication with online CF to more strongly develop a sense of community that aids in supporting the institutional mission and vision for establishing lifelong learners and student achievements.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 23, 2021

Heather Strafaccia
Bunnie Claxton

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-931 Recommendations for Improving a Sense of Community Between Online Contingent Faculty and Higher Education Administrators

Dear Heather Strafaccia, Bunnie Claxton:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B

Permission Request Letter and Permissions

2865 Biscayne Court
West Lafayette, IN 47906

March 22, 2021

Associate Provost
"University of the Midwest"
123 University Way
Midwest, US 12345

Dear Associate Provost:

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your institution. I am currently enrolled in the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership program at Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA, and I am writing my doctoral dissertation. This study is entitled, Recommendations for Improving a Sense of Community Between Online Contingent Faculty and Higher Education Administrators.

To conduct my research, I plan to request the participation of online contingent faculty and higher education administrators, such as department program coordinators, department program directors, department chair members, college associate deans, and college deans, from all three colleges within the institution. The requested participation will include documentation providing all potential participants with an informed consent form to approve before participation.

If the approval is granted, online contingent faculty participants will be interviewed, participate in a focus group to gather qualitative data, and have the opportunity to complete an online survey. Higher education administrator participants will complete an online survey. Data from this study will be kept entirely confidential and anonymous. Further, the institution will be kept anonymous using the pseudonym University of the Midwest and will be referred to as a private university in the Midwest. No other identifiers of the institution will be given to protect the research site's identity and participants. The university or individual participants will incur no costs. Lastly, research will only be conducted upon approval of the Liberty University Institutional Review Board.

Please sign below and return the signed form via email as a scanned document if you approve of this research contingent upon Liberty University IRB approval. Thank you for your consideration!

Respectfully,
Heather Strafaccia, Liberty University
Approved by:

[redacted]

Please print and sign your name on the line above. Approval subject to Liberty University IRB approval. Thank you!

APPENDIX C

Interview Participant Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: Recommendations for Improving a Sense of Community with Online Contingent Faculty
Principal Investigator: Heather Strafaccia, M.A., Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be over the age of 18 and employed as an online adjunct faculty member. You must only teach higher education in an online modality. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community between online contingent (also known as adjunct, seasonal, sessional, or contractual) faculty and college-level higher education administrators and to formulate a solution to address the problem.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a recorded interview that will last no longer than one hour via video-conferencing software.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the potential implementation of community improvement strategies that may promote progressive change to develop an advanced sense of community.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researchers will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the primary researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researchers at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The primary researcher conducting this study is Heather Strafaccia. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at (763) 228-9644 or hstrafaccia@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Bunnie Claxton, at blclaxton@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Your typed name will serve as your electronic signature. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You can print a copy of this document for your records. The primary researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____ _____

Typed Name/ Electronic Signature Date

Please provide your preferred contact email to set-up an interview date and time:

_____

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Participant Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: Recommendations for Improving a Sense of Community with Online Contingent Faculty
Principal Investigator: Heather Strafaccia, M.A., Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be over the age of 18 and employed as an online adjunct faculty member. You must only teach higher education in an online modality. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community between online contingent (also known as adjunct, seasonal, sessional, or contractual) faculty and college-level higher education administrators and to formulate a solution to address the problem.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a recorded focus group interview that will last for approximately 90 minutes via video-conferencing software.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the potential implementation of community improvement strategies that may promote progressive change to develop an advanced sense of community.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researchers will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the primary researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researchers at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The primary researcher conducting this study is Heather Strafaccia. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at (763) 228-9644 or hstrafaccia@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Bunnie Claxton, at blclaxton@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Your typed name will serve as your electronic signature. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You can print a copy of this document for your records. The primary researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____ _____

Typed Name/ Electronic Signature Date

Please provide your preferred contact email to set-up the focus group date and time:

_____

APPENDIX E

Online Contingent Faculty Survey Participant Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: Recommendations for Improving a Sense of Community with Online Contingent Faculty
Principal Investigator: Heather Strafaccia, M.A., Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be over the age of 18 and employed as an adjunct faculty member who teaches only online courses. Online adjunct faculty who teach courses in any other additional or alternative modality are not eligible for this study.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community between online contingent (also known as adjunct, seasonal, sessional, or contractual) faculty and college-level higher education administrators and to formulate a solution to address the problem.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete an online survey that should take no longer than 7 minutes. Within the online survey, you will be asked to respond to demographic questions and rate your agreement or disagreement to 29 statements exploring your perception of a sense of community at the university.
2. You may also be invited to participate in an interview or focus group. If you accept the invitation to participate in more than one part of this study, you will be asked to complete separate screening, consent, and demographics forms.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the potential implementation of community improvement strategies that may promote progressive change to develop an advanced sense of community.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researchers will have access to the records.

- The surveys will be anonymous, so the researcher will not know who participated or be able to link participants to their responses.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The primary researcher conducting this study is Heather Strafaccia. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at (763) 228-9644 or hstrafaccia@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Bunnie Claxton, at blclaxton@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

APPENDIX F

Higher Education Administrator Survey Participant Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: Recommendations for Improving a Sense of Community with Online Contingent Faculty
Principal Investigator: Heather Strafaccia, M.A., Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be over the age of 18 and employed as one of the following positions within a university:

- Program Coordinator
- Department Program Director
- Department Chair Member
- College Associate Dean
- College Dean

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of a lack of a sense of community between online contingent (also known as adjunct, seasonal, sessional, or contractual) faculty and college-level higher education administrators and to formulate a solution to address the problem.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete an online survey that should take no longer than 7 minutes. Within the online survey, you will be asked to respond to demographic questions and rate your agreement or disagreement to 29 statements exploring your perception of a sense of community at your university.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the potential implementation of community improvement strategies that may promote progressive change to develop an advanced sense of community.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- The surveys will be anonymous, so the researcher will not know who participated or be able to link participants to their responses.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The primary researcher conducting this study is Heather Strafaccia. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at (763) 228-9644 or hstrafaccia@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Bunnie Claxton, at blclaxton@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.