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March 2022

Informal Communication, Sensemaking, and Relational Precarity: Constituting Resilience in Remote Work During COVID

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Informal Communication, Sensemaking, and Relational Precarity: Constituting Resilience in

Remote Work During COVID

by

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A Master's Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Communication
Department of Communication
College of Arts and Sciences
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Date of Approval:
March 29, 2022

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 global pandemic disrupted every corner of the globe, impacting our personal and professional lives with intensity and scope that have yet to be fully comprehended. One such disruption has been to the workplace and organizational culture as businesses, non-governmental agencies, governments, and other organizations worldwide rapidly moved face-to-face operations to remote work. Two years into the pandemic, with vaccines available and the immediate health threat for most healthy individuals waning, businesses still find themselves confronting a changing paradigm as remote work becomes more of a permanent and competitive fixture.

This study explores the impact of remote work on organizational communication, particularly informal communication, sensemaking, identity, relational precarity, and resilience-building in the context of the pandemic. To further understand these issues, the following research questions served as the foundation for the design and structure of a qualitative study: *How have remote university workers enacted the resilience processes during the COVID-19 pandemic?* and *How does remote work in a large public university constrain and enable informal communication during the COVID-19 pandemic?* Participants for this qualitative study were recruited from higher education institutions, which provided a unique site of study as an extensive social system. In addition, participants included early, mid, and advanced public university career professionals representing faculty, staff, and administration.

The study included 13 semi-structured interviews based on a series of open-ended questions conducted via an audio/video-conferencing platform and provided rich data on the participants' feelings about their remote work and resilience experiences during the pandemic. Inductive and deductive thematic analyses led to results that extended the theoretical framework of the Communication Theory of Resilience (CTR; Buzzanell, 2010, 2019). These analyses found that all participants expressed a root sentiment, "*Root Affect Sensegiving,*" that permeated different questions in all the interviews and encapsulated affective responses embodying the fragmented, fluid, and non-linear nature of the communicative resilience processes and their adaptive-transformative tensional nature. Evidence of *how* participants adapted, transformed, and embodied resilience emerged through four themes: (1) strengthening close networks and disconnecting with distant networks; (2) empowering and hindering communication and community through technology; (3) performing, hiding, and feeling invisible; and (4) escaping routine, better work-life balance, and "I've never worked harder."

The study also uncovered insights into the ways workers enacted resilience to create, lessen, and manage perceived barriers to informal communication during times of remote work. These informal communication discussions pointed to a possibility of an additional resilience process of self/other care that could be considered an extension of dual-layer resilience processes (i.e., self-other, present-future; see Agarwal & Buzzanell, 2015; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012). Additionally, the findings contributed to CTR through practical applications; for example, the creation of a *Resilience Communication Framework*, which could be designed to prompt and cultivate the resilience processes while offering a set of guiding principles or considerations that addresses the associated relational and communicative needs of organizational members during disruptive events and institutional change.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

The global COVID-19 pandemic (SARS-CoV-2) was first reported in Wuhan, China, in late December 2019, with the first case in the United States reported in January 2020 (WHO, 2020). Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted life in nearly every corner of the world, infecting millions, according to the latest statistics from the *World Health Organization* (WHO), killing over 5.98 million people worldwide. In March of 2020, as the pandemic quickly spread, the world effectively shut down. Individuals were ordered to "shelter in place," businesses and schools transitioned from face-to-face operations to the home and virtual office and classroom spaces. Grocery stores, restaurants, and even health clinics instituted contactless services. Families and friends created "quarantine bubbles," limiting their in-person interactions while many went months not seeing one another except virtually.

As free vaccines became widely available and mandated lockdowns started to lift in Spring 2021, businesses, schools, and communities reopened and resumed face-to-face operations ("Reopening Plans and Mask Mandates," 2021). Yet, two years after the first case of COVID-19 in the United States, with variants like Delta and Omicron still an issue and more variants expected, coupled with sizeable unvaccinated populations, health concerns remain heightened (Reuters, 2022). These conditions and what some consider a more beneficial work-life balance make remote work more likely to be a permanent fixture and potentially competitive advantage in retaining and recruiting employees. In addition, the rapid move into a virtual world

changed the perception and value of connecting through technology and catapulted innovative uses of technology, allowing individuals to work together while being apart, host meetings and conferences, connect with loved ones, attend church, go to the gym, enjoy virtual happy hours, cooking classes, book clubs, and, most critically, continue with a sense of normalcy in their daily lives. According to the 2020 Pew Research Center report, *How the Coronavirus Outbreak Has ─ and Hasn't ─ Changed the Way Americans Work*, nearly half of all American workers desire, if given a choice, to continue to work remotely to varying degrees, citing largely positive experiences including increased flexibility, reduced commutes, fewer interruptions, and better work-life balance. Leading experts point to a seismic shift toward new models of and policies about work post-pandemic (e.g., Kossek & Lee, 2020). In many cases, the last two years have served as a real-time or "natural experiment," allowing employers and employees to measure the effectiveness and appeal of remote work (e.g., Shi et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021). As notions of where people work evolve, so does our understanding of remote work and its impacts on workplace cultures, productivity, health, professional development, and its diverse members (e.g., Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Hylmö & Buzzanell, 2002; Tang, 2021).

Emerging social science pandemic-era research is largely focused on social and physical isolation and the potential impacts on mental health, addiction, suicide ideation, and financial stressors (e.g., Abramson, 2021; Banerjee & Rai, 2020; Elbogen et al., 2021). Researchers in public and private industries are studying the current and future state of how and where work happens in the context of the pandemic. Including issues related to employee connectedness:

> Specifically, at the onset of the pandemic, we saw that interactions within close networks increased, while interactions with distant networks diminished. As people shifted into lockdown, they focused on connecting with the people they were used to seeing

regularly, letting weaker relationships fall to the wayside. Simply put, companies became

more siloed than they were pre-pandemic. (Baym et al., 2021)

While a 2021 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article addressed issues around faculty burnout,

other COVID related research topics include mental exhaustion, and technology fatigue, again

touching on the mental and physical impacts brought on by the conditions of living and working

in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic ("On the Verge," 2021; see also Bailenson, 2021;

Oakman et al., 2020).

A lesser studied phenomenon is the impact of remote work on organizational

communication, specifically informal communication, and issues of sensemaking, identity, and

relational precarity. To understand and define my notion of relational precarity, I combined the

concepts of *precariousness,* which typically signify states of vulnerability and insecurity

(Kasmir, 2018) and relation. Along with common definitions of *relational,* which focus on how

people or things interrelate or connect, and communicative conceptualizations, which emphasize

close personal relationships such as family and friends, I also incorporated a workplace lens.

Specifically, Jämsen et al. (2022) described how coworker relationships are "created and

maintained" communicatively. For my project, then, I define relational precarity as a state of

vulnerability or insecurity in creating and maintaining relationships within the organization as a

whole and the particular workplace. Coming to understand relational precarity and other lived

experiences involves *sensemaking,* namely, the process whereby individuals communicatively

create shared meaning and understandings of their experiences (Kramer, 2016; Weick, 1995,

2006, 2012).

Understanding that these phenomena are communicative in nature positions informal

communication as a priority in how workers make sense of the workplace, build relationships,

and navigate the remote work environment. Informal communication is generally defined as the social, casual, and interpersonal communicative interactions between co-workers (Fay & Kline, 2011). Informal communication differs from formal communication in that it is uncensored and does not represent the official work or communications of an organization, nor does it flow through traditional organizational channels (Lunenburg, 2010). Early in the pandemic, Stephens et al. (2020) brought together scholars with research backgrounds in sensemaking, health, and crisis communications and used their own experiences to engage in "collective sensemaking around COVID-19" (p. 428) and concluded that the pandemic is likely to "permanently change organizations and organizing practices" (p. 452). They also refer to COVID-19 as a "wake-up call" for organizational scholars and challenge communication researchers to take a more collaborative and sensemaking approach to their research agendas. Likewise, the pre-pandemic research on remote work (also referred to as telework and telecommuting) has focused on the lack of connectivity between remote workers and in-office colleagues, organizational commitment, and organizational identification (Fay & Kline, 2012; Wang et al., 2019). While other researchers touch on informal communication as part of larger studies focused on employee communication satisfaction, productivity, innovation, collaboration, and the benefits and limitations of mediated communication in the context of remote or telework (e.g., Akkirman & Harris, 2004; Gobes-Ryan, 2017) by and large research on remote work and the constraints on informal communication remain under-addressed topics prior to the pandemic and at the current time. Irrespective of previous research, one must recognize the scale to which organizations have been impacted by the still-evolving global pandemic. Large swaths of workers shifting to remote work present a unique opportunity to explore organizational communication in its various forms more thoroughly. It also provides an opportunity to better understand how informal

communication, sensemaking, and the processes by which people adapt to and sometimes transform their lives during and after disruption (resilience, see Buzzanell, 2010, 2017) intersect.

Humans are social creatures; it is baked into evolutionary history and how people flourished as a species ("The Cooperative Human," 2018). Using social construction as the meta-theoretical basis (Allen, 2004), people recognize that social interactions and communicative acts constitute reality "that humans construct the world through social practices" (Allen, 2004, p. 37). Social construction as a theoretical framework postulates that knowledge is not a priori. Instead, knowledge is socially constructed through a "communal" process: "Communities bring knowledge into existence…through various social situations, history, and especially language. Language, in turn, is the medium through which people apprehend the world. In a practical sense, language renders the world tangible, credible, and real" (Slater, 2018, p. 3). From this perspective, the workplace is a constitutive space developed and structured by talk and interaction which, in turn, changes everyday discourses and cultural formations in the workplace and society (see little "d" discourses and big "D" Discourses, respectively, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). To "know" an organization, its culture, the written and unwritten rules of how the organization operates is knowledge generated by the organizational members through a "communal" communicative process via formal organizational channels and informal or spontaneous and unofficial communication processes.

Thus, social construction serves as the meta-theoretical foundation to support workplace identification and greater understanding of the sensemaking, identity construction, relational precarity, resilience, and communicative processes during the continuing COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. To further explicate the concept of relational precarity, I frame the pandemic as a disruption or trigger for resilience processes. Given the interactional and linguistic

nature of my work, I do not use the trait, or individual difference approaches to resilience found in interdisciplinary research (e.g., Nakaya. et al., 2006; Wadi et al., 2020). Rather I use the Communication Theory Resilience (CTR) (Buzzanell 2010) as my primary theoretical approach. CTR emphasizes resilience as an "inherently communicative" process that aids an individual in reframing, rebuilding, and transforming or otherwise integrating after a loss, disaster, or traumatic event (Buzzanell, 2019, p. 68). Of interest to me is the resilience-building aspect or intentional collective action to incorporate means of adapting to and transforming the new normal (Buzzanell, 2019) or of continuity and change (Wilson et al., 2021; Kuang et al., 2021).

By employing social construction and Communication Theory of Resilience, as the meta-theoretical and theoretical approaches, this qualitative study explores the intersections of informal or spontaneous communication, sensemaking, identity, and disruption. It leans into a critical stance, as Buzzanell (2021) has done in her earlier and more recent work in CTR. As a result, my thesis also delves into power relations in perceived precarity, resilience, and connections among remote work and constrained informal or spontaneous communications in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study extends current research in organizational communication and resilience during moments of local, national, and global crises. Consistent with its meta-theoretical basis, this study does not make causal claims but contributes to greater understanding and support of remote workers and has implications for how change is enacted and sustained in large social systems.

In the broader context of society, specifically in the capitalistic and industrialized United States, an individual's work (goal-directed activity), career (both occupational progression and themes underlying lifelong work journeys), job or employment are ways people situate themselves in their social networks and identity claims (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Moser &

Ashforth, 2022). Work is so inextricably embedded in the American psyche that what individuals

do for a living in the United States has come to define who others believe they are within and

outside of workplace boundaries. As such, this intertwined identity marker of work, job, and

career place a great deal of emphasis on the need for a healthy workplace culture from

organizational productivity and societal points of view:

> Shared values, shared beliefs, shared meaning, shared understanding, and shared
>
> sensemaking are all different ways of describing culture. In talking about culture, we are
>
> really talking about reality construction that allows people to see and understand
>
> particular events actions, objects, utterances, or situations in distinctive ways. These
>
> patterns of understanding help us to cope with the situation being encountered and also
>
> provide a basis for making our own behavior sensile and meaningful. (Morgan, 2006, p.
>
> 134)

As this quote indicates, how people construct their cultures discursively and materially provides

ways of managing disruptions and meaningfulness in human activities such as paid labor.

I started with the fundamental assumption that moving from the physical office to a

remote work environment for most organizations posed challenges. These challenges were

infrastructural in terms of material needs for internet connectivity and hardware as well as

communicative in terms of formal and informal communication or the official and unofficial

information and decision-making channels. While traditional organizational communication

channels remained largely intact for formal communicative processes thanks to technological

developments (e.g., platforms for virtual meetings and e-mail and instant messaging; intranets),

opportunities for informal or spontaneous communication seemed to become severely limited.

Organizations communicate through both formal and informal systems, both of which function as constitutive agents and sensemaking tools; however, "the informal system provides a mechanism for employees to socialize with one another and to express themselves about organizational happenings 'off the record'" (Hellweg, 1987, p. 214). Informal communication is "spontaneous and unregulated" (Young, 1998, p. 21), operating in parallel to formal organizational communication but without the same bureaucratic controls as organizational communication (Young, 1987). Similarly, to Fay (2012), informal communication is considered more "accurate" (p. 213) and trustworthy than formal communication, whereas Eisenberg et al. (1983) view informal communication as a "key vehicle through which employees form meaningful interpersonal relationships and exercise some control in their working lives" (p. 179). Vital to the context of this study is the link between informal communication and "buffering effects against organizational stress" (Fay, 2007, p. 64; see also Ray & Miller, 1994).

Most physical workspaces have areas where employees causally engage (i.e., offices, conference rooms, breakrooms, elevators, and hallways). In popular media, Carl Cho (2020), the CEO of Cornerstone Montgomery and a member of the Forbes Councils, refers to these encounters as the glue that binds an organization together, a point made often by organizational researchers (e.g., Albert et al., 2000; Scott, 2019). These informal everyday interactions and shared communicative acts are the threads that stitch together a workplace community and organizational culture through organizational identifications or attachments.

From a social construction point-of-view, "human communication has practical outcomes on human behavior" (Slater, 2018, p. 3). So, what happens to organizational members when a communication process, such as informal communication, is constrained? Or, to phrase it in a communicative resilience way, what happens when organizational members experience a

disruption in their usual work processes? How do organizational members make sense of their work, their "new normal"? What, if any, workarounds do they create? Walther's (2008) social information processing theory suggests that eventually, individuals adapt their communication to the virtual modality by developing workarounds to maintain informal communication connections with colleagues. However, are the workarounds during times of forced online organizing sufficient to overcome the potential constraints? How might organizational members mitigate possible constraints and develop new ideas and opportunities for informal communication? What are the implications of these disruptions or constraints and prospects for the social constructions of the new normal for workplace culture, employee identity, identifications, and sensemaking? Finally, what are the consequences when more fluid and broad senses of interpersonal communication are replaced by transactional exchanges and deliberate or planned talk and interactions?

I argue that in organizations that are not primarily virtual, remote work constrains informal and/or spontaneous communication opportunities and challenges the co-constitutive sensemaking process workers engage in every day. In many but not all cases, these disruptions can contribute to feelings of isolation and disconnection from their co-workers and the organization resulting from the pandemic. As a result, organizational members may experience feelings of precarity and resilience in enactment processes. Additionally, I contend that the disruption of informal interactions in remote work poses longer-term impacts on the professional progression for individuals, particularly those who find themselves outside of the workplace decision-making circle or with limited interaction with leadership. These work and career issues can be profoundly complex for traditionally marginalized populations, women, and people of color.

As noted earlier, informal communication is generally defined as the casual or spontaneous exchange between individuals that are not necessarily aligned with formal communication channels: "Informal communication is an important interactional region in which meaningful organizational relationships can be created, and organizational members' needs can be met" (Fay & Kline, 2011, p. 147). Furthermore, the informal workplace talk is a relational practice contributing to feelings of "friendliness and collegiality, to enact the social norms of the organization to construct and maintain work relationships" (Fay & Kline, 2011, p.147; see also Holmes & Marra 2004). Although communication via virtual modalities can both enable and constrain healthy organizational cultures and workers' organizational identifications, my focus is on the many different ways that disruptions such as the rapid change to remote work and its continuation during the COVID-19 pandemic can be perceived by workers. Furthermore, what are the potential long-term impacts of constraining the "communal" process of informal communication, and could it negatively result in a re-calculation of how the organizational reality is constructed?

For this study, I chose to focus my research on organizational members who work for institutions of higher education. As extensive social systems, colleges and universities are particularly unique and significant sites of study. Social systems are defined as "the patterned series of interrelationships existing between individuals, groups, and institutions and forming a concrete whole social structure" ("Social System," n.d.; see also Altan, 2020; Baraldi & Corsi, 2017). Since the introduction of the Morrill Act in 1862 (Sorber, 2018) and the GI Bill in 1944 (John, 2013), American public universities have "widely thought to equalize opportunity for social mobility, to be catalysts for economic development, and to promote the knowledge and values of society from one generation to the next" (John, 2013, p. 57). Moreover, in a practical

sense, higher education institutions are responsible for producing the next generation of professional and managerial employees and entrepreneurs who will collectively constitute the future of work (Oakley, 2013; Teague, 2015). Another important factor of higher education institutions, particularly large public universities, is the organizational size and hierarchical structure (Murphy, 2009). Public higher education institutions are bureaucracies steeped in tradition, hierarchies, and deeply siloed communities of practice, making communication a significant challenge even under the best of circumstances (Abidin, 2020). The dichotomy of being an institution responsible for preparing the next generation of workers juxtaposed with communication constraints operating during a pandemic and other challenges such as racial injustice and political protests makes understanding how higher education organizational members navigate, make sense of, and enact resilience during transitions to remote work a relevant and necessary effort with both theoretical and practical implications.

Summary and Preview of Chapters

In Chapter 1, I summarized the central problem that I plan to investigate and ask what the implications of disrupted communication processes might be and how organizational members engage in sensemaking in remote work, a new work paradigm for many members of higher education. I also outline the objectives and significance of my research, which is to explore workers' constructions of the relationships among identity, precarity, and resilience by studying their connections between remote work and informal communication in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. While seeking to better understand how organizational members (i.e., employees) enact resilience within the workplace, particularly during times of crisis, I aim to uncover communication strategies to engage employees, build community, and mitigate feelings of precarity. This study extends current research in organizational communication and resilience

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during moments of crisis and contributes to greater understanding of and support for remote workers.

Chapter 2, the Literature Review, outlines selected research related to the primary themes and theoretical approaches, including the Communication Theory of Resilience, sensemaking, and informal communication.

In Chapter 3, Methodology, I detail my initial class study, which was the impetus for this project, describe the research participants, data gathering procedures, and data analysis. I note my Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

In Chapter 4, I describe an overarching theme, or root sentiment, that permeated all interviews and encapsulated the participants' feelings and reactions toward pandemic organizing and breakdown the qualitative participant responses into four themes that became evident during my thematic analysis: (1) strengthening close network connections and disconnecting with distant networks; (2) empowering and hindering communication and community through technology (3) performing, hiding, and feeling invisible, (4) escaping routine, better work-life balance, and "I've never worked harder."

Finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss the study's theoretical contributions and practical considerations, the limitations of the current study, possibilities for future research, and concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER TWO:
LITERATURE REVIEW

Uncertainty and instability could be considered universal themes of 2020 with a series of crises, including a global pandemic, racial-social-political unrest, a failing economy, millions of unemployed, wildfires, and a historically active Atlantic Hurricane Season. Any one of these crises could leave individuals feeling as if the world is facing another major event, but layer them one-on-top of the other, and individuals can be left with an overwhelming sense of doom. As Stephens et al. (2020) point out, organization theorists have connected disruptions to sensemaking processes:

> Karl Weick has long directed attention to how people navigate the liminalities of changing circumstances. An important premise of his work is that changes in our circumstances or "ecological changes" have the potential to bring substantial uncertainty, ambiguity, and equivocality, such that the world we thought we knew no longer makes sense. (p. 427)

In order to reflect upon and study current circumstances, sensemaking strategies are needed to understand (a) personal and work lives during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (b) the Communication Theory of Resilience.

Personal and work lives during the COVID-19 pandemic

In many ways, the world has been "reconfigured," challenging existing sensemaking methods and cultivating a seemingly permanent feeling that the current and future state is

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precarious. Precariousness is most often associated with persistent uncertainty or insecurity ("Precariousness," n.d.). Buzzanell (2021) describes precarity in the context of work "as contractual employment insecurity and status, with recent framings considering precarity as social processes" (p. 381). Buzzanell (2021) also points out that precarity is a fact of life that "plays out differently for various groups around the world" (p. 380), with a multitude of influencing factors including but certainly not limited to intersectionality, gender, age, and race/ethnicity (see also Edgell et al., 2016; Murgia & Poggio, 2019). The multiplicity of crises in 2020 brought awareness to the long-ignored and misunderstood systemic inequalities and precarity for people of color, including racial injustice and physical and mental well-being disparities. Many studies have brought attention to ongoing COVID-19 disparities in the lives and work of marginalized people. As one example, "Black families suffer a disproportionate burden of morbidity and mortality due to the COVID-19 pandemic" (Davis et al., 2020, p. 417, as cited in Ray, 2020). Furthermore, Davis et al. continue that:

> Scholars indicate the potential of this pandemic widening the already existing health gap between Black families and their White counterparts (Darby & Rury, 2018) in terms of physical and mental health, socio-economic disparities, loss of income, additional stress, and less access to healthcare. (p. 418)

The relationships between communication, organizational identity, and telecommuting (referred to as remote work for the purposes of this study) is not a new phenomenon. For example, Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found in their meta-analysis of telecommuting research "that telecommuters, compared to those who did not telecommute, had higher job autonomy and satisfaction and lower levels of work-family conflict, role stress, and turnover intentions" (Fay & Kline 2011, p. 145). However, Fay and Kline (2011) also found that for high-intensity

telecommuters (i.e., those who telecommuted more than 2.5 days per week), the more positive effects of remote work (i.e., lower levels of work-family conflict) were tempered by the negative impacts on relationships with co-workers. While other researchers have theorized that a managerial challenge of high-intensity teleworkers is to ensure they can develop feelings of identification and commitment toward their organization (Fay & Kline, 2012; Thatcher & Zhu, 2006), a 2019 study by Wang et al. investigated potential links between telecommuters' psychological and physical isolation and organizational commitment. The quantitative study collected data from 446 working professionals representing various industries, organizational sizes, and professions who telecommuted at least one day a week through an online survey (p. 615). The findings indicated that teleworkers experiencing psychological isolation did tend to feel *less* emotionally attached to their organizations.

These studies prompt questions as to why, meaning what is different in the experiences of "high intensity" remote workers versus "lower-intensity" remote workers? Fay and Kline point to communication and reduced opportunities for "face-to-face" interaction with colleagues due to "temporal and spatial distance" as a possible mitigating factor in remote workers' satisfaction. Fay and Kline also elevate informal communication or "informal talk" as they refer to it as a relational resource when traditional face-to-face context clues or non-verbal cues are constrained:

> Without the physical cues that reflect roles and relationships (such as who sits next to the boss in meetings), it is plausible that teleworkers rely on informal talk to clarify perceptions, negotiate their roles and ensure that information exchanges facilitate workflow (p. 146).

Moreover, from a constitutive vantage point, communication is about creating shared meaning and reality construction "it is through communication that connection is enacted and given meaning. (Chewning, 2019, p. 168)

As previously stated, the workplace is a significant contributor to identity construction both in and outside of online and offline organization boundaries. Work is a "central and significant facet of modern life and a direct and indirect source of meaning and self-worth" (Lucas, 2011, p. 354; see also Alvesson et al., 2008; Cheney et al., 2008; Ciulla, 2011). Employees' relationships with their organizations are equally impacted by identity constructs defined and refined through everyday talk (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2008; Fay & Kline, 2011). An organization's "everyday talk" helps constitute the relationships with individuals, colleagues, and the organization.

Informal communication is the "everyday talk" of the workplace providing organizational members access to the unwritten rules and culture of a workplace. Informal communication has permeable boundaries, often cutting across organizational charts, communication limitations related to chain of command, and the innumerable invisible and invisible barriers that tend to separate workers and constrain formal organizational communication. As such, informal communication is a powerful relational tool that provides crucial access to the "in the know" organizational information. This is particularly important in work environments that are highly bureaucratic and steeped in a hierarchal structure, such as public universities where communication is often constrained by external political forces and deeply embedded traditions that prioritize organizational members by rank (instructor, professor), discipline, and even perceived merits of scholarly work (e.g., Teague, 2015).

Communication Theory of Resilience

The Communication Theory of Resilience (CTR) is a constitutive process that recognizes resilience as an "inherently communicative" act whereby individuals make sense of a crisis/trauma or "trigger event" and actively construct new realities. CTR posits that resilience is not a characteristic or trait that individuals possess or not, but rather a situated process (Buzzanell, 2010). The CTR process contains "three components: (a) trigger events, (b) a focus on anticipatory and reactive resilience, and (c) five core processes that enable humans to enact control or empowerment in their lives when confronting disruptions and to shape the new normal that ensues (Buzzanell, 2019 p. 68). It is the five processes--(1) crafting normalcy, (2) foregrounding negative feelings (legitimizing), (3) affirming identity anchors, (4) maintaining and using communication networks, and (5) putting alternative logics to work--that are used to investigate the research questions in this study.

Crafting Normalcy

The process of *crafting normalcy* is the constitutive act of "saying and doing things" to get back to "normal," those commonplace routines that structure our daily lives. As Buzzanell (2010) puts it:

> In normalcy discourse and performance, family members [who recently experienced a job loss] described how they implicitly and sometimes explicitly produced a system of meanings that enabled them to maintain the mundane, the regularities in life that previously would have gone unnoticed. (p. 2)

From personal experience, as a highly social extrovert diagnosed with ADHD, disruption in my daily routine during the COVID-19 pandemic created relational challenges that could have become problematic in work performance if not understood and managed. As a response, early

into lockdown, I reinstituted my morning "going to work" routine with a few modifications. I woke up at the same time even though I had no commute. I got dressed for work, put on makeup and earrings, and then I would get into my car and go through the drive-thru of my local Starbucks, while I made calls to various colleagues where we would share work-related frustrations, office gossip, and personal concerns just as I did when commuting to and from the office. The main difference is that my pandemic commute would simply lead me back home. These seemingly innocuous acts were significant relational tools and rituals that allowed me to mentally shift from home to work.

Affirming Identity Anchors

Buzzanell (2010) defines identity anchors "as a relatively enduring cluster of identity discourses upon which individuals and their familial, collegial, and/or community members rely when explaining who they are for themselves and in relation to each other" (p. 4). Importantly, identity anchors are "constructed by and for" an individual by "being affirmed or supported by others" (p. 4). Thus, affirming identity anchors is a discursive action that describes how we distinguish ourselves to and from others (e.g.., strong faith, family decision-makers, problem-solver). As mentioned previously, the workplace is a fundamental contributor to identity construction: "Without question our identities are linked to the organizations we work for, belong to, and buy from" (Scott, 2019, p. 207).

In my case, my identity anchor as a communication professional in a large metropolitan public university was a source of pride and stress. As the communication lead for the university academic community, I found myself at the center of the university information network working closely with public health officials and university leaders. I can honestly say that there has been no other time in my career where I felt more connected to my colleagues and clearer on my role

and purpose. As a communication professional and constructivist scholar, I understood the role of communication to reduce organizational anxiety and help organizational members make sense of what was happening. At the same time, I was personally living through the pandemic, experiencing my own feelings of uncertainty and fear. It was the sense of purpose and responsibility I felt in relation to my identity as a communicator that, during the early days of the pandemic, helped anchor me during a time when the entire world seemed unmoored.

Maintaining and Using Communication Networks

Creating, maintaining, and utilizing communication networks is a crucial step in the resilience process. The ability to garner information and build support from others during a crisis is an ongoing communicative process "networks are how we organize and have implications for important social and organizational outcomes" (Chewning, 2019, p. 168). Importantly, the process of building networks must "start before a disaster, developing ties that enable you to cope and rebuild" (Buzzanell, 2019, p. 74). The word "ties" in this quote speaks to the relational and constitutive nature of communication. For example, before the pandemic, I had a well-established informal communications network consisting of professional and personal relationships that grew organically over time; these individuals provided emotional support, communication guidance, affirmation of identity (they knew me), and comfort in our shared experiences. The network also consisted of organizational members who were part of a more strategic and intentionally developed professional network. By nature of their role within the organization, these individuals provided access to inside and/or non-public information to contextualize and deepen my communications with other organizational members and insight into my own experiences. In other words, these networks fostered my ability to better serve organizational stakeholders and facilitate my understanding of what I was experiencing.

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According to Chewning (2019), the "interplay of formal and informal communication inherent to networks creates both bottom-up and top-down social structures that can be reified into organizations (p. 174). Informal and formal communication networks play a vital role in negotiating trigger events. It is worth noting that the informal communication networks may be more accessible and active during trigger events, while the formal communication networks can be disrupted or otherwise preoccupied. In the case of the global pandemic, I was fortunate to have a strong and well-established informal communication network and, at the same time, opportunities to leverage my role within the formal communication network as part of my resilience process. Yet, in my observation, the rapid shift to remote work did constrain the more opportunistic communicative connections (i.e., hallway conversations, spontaneous office visits, etc.) that typically strengthen the informal communication networks. So profound was this observation that it ultimately led me to conduct this study of informal communication, sensemaking, and subsequent notions of precarity.

Putting Alternative Logics to Work

Putting alternative logics to work is a co-constitutive sensemaking process where "resilient systems incorporate seemingly contradictory ways of doing organizational work through the development of alternative logics or through reframing the entire situation" (Buzzanell, 2010, p. 6). In Buzzanell (2019), a fundamental premise of CTR, namely, that resilience is not an end goal but rather a process, is made explicit:

> Resilience operates within and can transcend, adaptive and transformative interactions in
> talk, stories, linguistic choices, and structures that support ongoing meaning-making in
> the moment and over time. These distinguishing features of CTR indicate how resilience
> itself is not the goal or outcome: resilience is the process whereby people keep on living-

stumbling, struggling, enduring, leaping with joy, and mindful of advantage and

disadvantage that can shift overnight--despite of, and perhaps because of, hardship as we

constitute new normal. (p. 46)

At first, I approached negotiating the pandemic much like a natural disaster. Living in Florida,

hurricanes are a familiar concern and something I know how to plan, prepare, and navigate. Life

would be difficult and perhaps potentially dangerous. There would be inconveniences and

disruptions for an extended period, but eventually, the storm would pass, and cleanup and

rebuilding would begin. Much like my hurricane preparations, I stocked up on food, water, and

other household supplies. I insisted my eldest son come home from college because, in my mind,

we were safer under one roof. Although perhaps not a logical response by recontextualizing an

unknown trigger event (the pandemic) into something I was emotionally and experientially

equipped to handle, I could reframe and make sense of the situation.

Legitimizing Negative Feelings While Foregrounding Productive Action

How does one reintegrate or move forward after a loss, disaster, or triggering event? The

ability to become washed over with anger, loss, regret is often paralyzing. However, this process

deliberately foregrounds productive action while acknowledging and legitimizing that the

triggering event has real negative emotions associated. For me, this brings to mind the Serenity

Prayer that still hangs in the kitchen of my family home: "God, grant me the serenity to accept

the things I cannot change, The courage to change the things I can, And the wisdom to know the

difference*."* This is also a commonly spoken refrain used by twelve-step programs (e.g.,

Alcoholics Anonymous, n.d.). Religious meanings aside, the process of focusing on the things

that can change (productive action) and acknowledging the negative (the things you cannot

change), and moving forward is a kind of entreaty to oneself. It is "talking" into reality positive

and accepting the negative. In reflecting on how I may have enacted this process as part of my resilience efforts, I have come to see that although this study is part of my master's thesis work, the subject of my research is, in part, a way for me to understand my feelings that, in the long run, do not help me achieve my goals and to engage in productive action.

Summary and Statement of Research Questions

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and continued uncertainty around variants, vaccines, and when, if ever, the virus will cease to be a threat have challenged every facet of life. In March of 2020, people were forced to move from the communal to isolated ways of work in many different industries, including education. While technology provided connectivity in ways people previously could not have imagined, many felt and still feel that technologically-mediated communication was not the same; it was not satisfying in many respects.

This study seeks to understand workers' sensemaking when certain relational processes such as informal communication are potentially constrained or disrupted (i.e., the rapid transition from face-to-face work to remote work). At these times, people may experience a sense of precarity. To explore these issues, two primary research questions guided the structure of the interview questions and serve as the foundation for this qualitative study*: R1. How have remote university workers enacted the resilience processes during the COVID-19 pandemic?* and *R2. How does remote work in a large public university constrain and enable informal communication during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

CHAPTER THREE:
METHODOLOGY

Participants

Given the disruptive nature of the pandemic and the increased demands placed on education systems to support students and operations, blanket outreach to recruit participants seemed impractical. Therefore, to maximize my recruitment response rate, participants for this study were recruited from my professional network from universities across the United States. Participants included early, mid, and advanced public university career professionals representing several segments of organizational membership. Ultimately, I reached out to 30 potential participants; 18 responded and agreed to participate, of which 13 were interviewed. Five of the respondents who initially agreed to participate were ultimately unavailable due to scheduling conflicts. Participants represent all categories of university organizational members and were recruited from a large multi-campus public university, a smaller private metropolitan university, and a faith-based private university. They include early, mid, and advanced-career faculty, instructors, adjuncts, university staff, and administration employed full or part-time and who have worked remotely or are currently working at least some of the time remotely as a result of the COVID pandemic. A complete list of education and career characteristics can be found in Table 1. Participant ages range from the mid-20s to mid-60s, with the largest age group, 60 or older (38%), followed by 40 and over.

Additionally, every effort has been made to recruit a diverse pool of participants to include the multiple perspectives and experiences present in today's academic workforce. Of the

participants interviewed, 8 (61%) identified as white, 2 Black, 1 Hispanic, 1 Asian, 1 Native

American, 0 preferred not to say, and 85% identified as female, while 15% identified as male.

See Table 1 for a complete demographic breakdown of participants. Other than demographic

data, title, and career status, all other identifiable indicators have been removed, including the

use of pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of respondents.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Highest Education Level	
Less than high school degree	
High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)	
Some college but no degree	
Associates degree	
Bachelor's degree	1
Graduate degree	12
Employment	
Full-time (working a minimum of 32 per week)	12
Part-time (working 32 hours per week or less)	1
Annual Individual Income	
$10,000 - $19,000	
$20,000 - $29,000	
$30,000 - $39,000	
$40,000 - $49,000	1
$50,000 - $59,000	1
$70,000 - $79,000	3
$80,000 - $90,000	
$100,000 or more	8
Prefer not to say	
Career status (work experience level)	
Early (5 to 10 years)	2
Mid (10 to 25)	5
Advanced (25 or more)	6
Higher Education Career Sector	
Faculty (includes all levels from adjunct to full professor)	3
Staff/Faculty	2

Staff	4
Administration	4

Table 1 (continued) Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Age	
18-20	
21-29	2
30-39	2
40-49	3
50-59	1
60 or older	5
Race	
White	8
Black or African American	3
American Indian or Alaskan Native	
Asian	1
Hispanic	1
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	
From multiple races	
Other (please specify)	
Prefer not to say	
Gender	
Male	2
Female	11
Prefer not to say	

Procedures

In this section, I first describe my (a) class study, then my (b) data gathering procedures for the current study, and my (c) data analytic techniques.

Class Study

As part of a class research project, a preliminary or exploratory research study was conducted through qualitative interviews with higher education professionals in the spring of 2020, shortly after the pandemic forced millions to transition to remote work. Interviews were designed as exploratory conversations to ascertain the most salient questions needed to understand individual remote work challenges and benefits, work-life balance issues, feelings of isolation, the communicative and relational impacts of remote work, and related perceptions of precarity and job security. For example, participants were asked questions like: *"How is your experience different working remotely versus the office? "How do you stay connected to colleagues?"* and *"Do you believe the shift to remote work has changed your relationship with your colleagues or supervisor?"*

Although this class project involved only two participants,[1] the study indicated connections between the limited opportunities for informal or spontaneous communication and feelings of precarity. These preliminary findings were suggestive of new insights regarding pandemic processes and resilience-building that prompted the need for further inquiry. Furthermore, the de-identified findings from analyses of qualitative interview data collected during the class study became the basis of conversations in which faculty, students, and family members or friends eagerly engaged as they, too, sought to make sense of their experiences. Based on such enthusiastic and supportive responses, the class project became the basis of the current thesis.

Data Gathering for the Current Study

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[1] The class study was conducted as part of an assignment and proposal for an empirical study during my masters' course work and therefore did not necessitate a large sample size or approval from the university Institutional Review Board (IRB). Therefore, participants in the class study are not included in the *N=13* of the current thesis study. Participants were, however, intentionally recruited to represent diversity in ethnicity, life experiences, and career status to provide diverse and compelling viewpoints despite the small sample size.

I completed 13 interviews with 19.5 hours of recorded discussions and 172 pages of single-spaced transcription. Similar to the class study, this current qualitative study was conducted through semi-structured interviews with a series of open-ended questions and via an audio/video-conferencing platform. The interview questions were designed to prompt conversations around the participants' feelings about their remote work experiences during the pandemic. Given my meta-theoretical approach of social construction, a semi-structured interview approached with open-ending questions seemed the most applicable method to engage participants in a sensemaking discourse, a vital component to understand how participants were constituting and making meaning about their circumstances.

As a result of the class study and feedback from my committee, the interview questions were slightly expanded to better understand communication modality (e.g., phone calls, video conferencing, texts) and frequency and times of communication (e.g., time of day, how often) between participants and other organizational members. At the recommendation of my committee, I also conducted a more detailed literature review to include more background on informal communication in the workplace and remote worker organizational connectedness and organizational commitment. As part of the discovery process during the literature review, I was also able to settle on my meta-theoretical approach of social constructionism and theoretical framework of the *Communication Theory of Resilience* and expanded my research and literature review to include those grounding perspectives.

Upon IRB approval recruitment outreach to my professional network was done through e-mail and social networks (i.e., Facebook™). A recruitment script for e-mails and social network posts is included in Appendix A. At the start of each interview, participants were asked for permission to record the interview and their verbal informed consent (see Appendix C). In

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addition, participants were asked approximately 16 semi-structured/open-ended questions. As in

the class study, the questions were designed to help understand the individual challenges and

benefits, work-life balance issues, feelings of isolation, the communicative and relational impacts

of remote work, and related perceptions of precarity and job security such as, for example, "*Do*

you believe the shift to remote work has changed your relationship with your colleagues or

supervisor?" and *"How do you ensure you're communicating effectively while working*

remotely?" Participants were also encouraged to provide any additional thoughts. For a complete

list of interview questions, please see Appendix E.

After the first few interviews were conducted, it became clear that participants were

engaged in a sensemaking process as they responded to the questions. As a result, one additional

question was added to allow participants to have any open comments and/or thoughts about their

remote work experience during the pandemic. After reviewing the consent document and

receiving participant consent, participants were asked a series of baseline demographic questions

(see Table 1) that took approximately 15 minutes; interviews were approximately 60-90 minutes,

with the average around 70 minutes, including verbal consent. Thus, the total time commitment

for participants was no more than two hours per participant.

Data Analytic Techniques

I chose to conduct a thematic analysis of the data given that my research is exploring

possible linkages between remote work, informal communication, sensemaking, and resilience-

building within the context of an unprecedented and ongoing event. This qualitative

methodological approach provides necessary flexibility within rapidly changing circumstances,

deeper insights into the nuanced experiences of participants, and a framework for the analysis of

patterns and reoccurring themes in the data (Hawkins, 2018). The data analysis began during the

interview process, with the researcher notating key phrases, words, or themes that participants used repeatedly.

Using the Otter.ai transcription platform, I transcribed over 13 interviews resulting in 19.5 hours of interviews. Once fully transcribed and reviewed for accuracy of transcription content (Fay, 2011), I utilized Owen's (1984) criteria for discourse analysis: *Recurrence* to identify themes in meaning and/or sentiments; *Repetition* to identify specific keywords and phrases used repeatedly, either by the same participant or among all participants; and finally; *Forcefulness* to mark the emphasis on placed upon specific responses via "tone, volume, and inflection." I began by noting the meanings generated by my research participants from the data themselves and without overlaying theoretical perspectives of precarity and resilience. In this way, I engaged with the data to understand how participants voiced their lived experiences. However, given my project's emphasis on disruption, Buzzanell's (2010, 2019) resilience processes were evident in the interview content and prompted me to then analyze the data with an eye to what was similar to and different from the five CTR processes, the overarching adaptation-transformation dialectics, and the construction of new normal.

As a result, during the data analysis, I noted what appeared to be occurrences of the resilience communication processes and identified potential themes. Through iterative processes of reading and rereading transcripts, notating and discussing data, and emerging insights with my thesis advisor, these instances of participants' meaning-making and sense-giving to professional and personal experiences coalesced around broad categories and subthemes. When my advisor and I were comfortable with these themes, I went back through the data to locate instances of negative cases that did not fit or that provided variation on themes. Once satisfied with the

findings, I changed names and identifying information to preserve participant confidentiality and

began pulling together notes and writing my findings.

CHAPTER FOUR:
RESULTS

In this section, I outline the results of my thematic analysis of the qualitative interview questions through the meta-theoretical framework of social construction (Allen, 2004) and the theoretical lens of Communication Theory of Resilience (Buzzanell, 2010). First, it is necessary to contextualize the results by characterizing the disruption and cascading triggers (Hintz et al., 2021) and their pervasive, unyielding, omnipresent nature through the affective language expressed by participants during the interviews. Then I discuss the processes and themes that speak to both of my research questions (*R1) How have remote university workers enacted the resilience processes during the COVID-19 pandemic?* and (*R2) How does remote work in a large public university constrain and enable informal communication during the COVID-19 pandemic?* which are more fully answered in the Discussion chapter.

This qualitative study and subsequent findings do not make causal claims but rather seek to further contribute to organizational communication and resilience research and advance our understanding of how workers engage in sensemaking and resilience-building during a disruptive or trigger event. The COVID-19 global pandemic is a unique trigger event that produced and continues to produce unprecedented cascading triggers. As new variants arise and the lingering health, social, mental, political, and economic effects of the pandemic continue to unfold, much of the world is still working to temper expectations for the future while constructing meaning and a new sense of normal (Abramson, 2022). These concerns and others were also evident in

the nearly 20 hours of interviews conducted over six months in the fall of 2021 and through the spring of 2022. During the interviews, participants talked about the many tensions they experienced between the positive and negative effects of remote work during the pandemic. They also spoke about how the experience impacted their relationship with coworkers and their supervisors, how it changed their approach to communication, and whether or not the experience altered their professional path.

Root Affect Sensegiving

Before describing the four themes that emerged from my analysis, I describe a root sentiment that underlay participants' sensemaking. This underlying affect is akin to Smith and Eisenberg's (1987) root metaphor for organizational culture and subcultures since it permeated all the data. Moreover, sentiments shifted during pandemic experiences, and their expressions often invoked metaphorical phrasing, similar to the work of Stanley et al. (2021). Participants' affective responses and anticipated continuing uncertainties and feelings of disruption that were perhaps most illustrative of their participant experience as a whole were the responses to the question: *If you had to describe your average daily mood, what one word would you use?* While the answers were not altogether unexpected, they demonstrated in real-time how participants were attempting to make sense of the rapidly evolving situation while revealing the fluidity and non-linear nature of communicative resilience processes. They provided windows into people's humanity that may or may not be able to be verbalized completely or in part (see Stanley et al., 2021) and therefore are different from the verbalized themes in the next section of my findings.

In many ways, the moods or sentiments were multilayered, even dual-processes with regard to participants' resilience labor (see Agarwal & Buzzanell, 2015; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012) insofar as the efforts to constitute new normalcies involved sensemaking for self and

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others, for the present and the future, for the personal and professional, for discursive-material processing, and in often paradoxical, contradictory, and/or ironic ways (for paradoxical organizing during the pandemic, see Carmine et al., 2021). For example, consider the following responses:

> I am anxious, anxious. I mean, I am a general anxiety disorder guy anyway, but there was a lot of anxiety on *Can I pull this off? Are the students learning anything?* That made me very, very anxious. I had to sort of really work on, you know, trying to meditate more, and even up to medications I take whether I take more or less of them and that kind of thing. It was hard to divorce feelings of COVID and am I anxious because I don't want to get it and what's going to happen with the anxiety of the teaching experience and the professional experience. Having said that, there was an under [current], although they are contradictory, in a way, I think it was very relaxing because I didn't have to go anywhere. I always wore shorts. I could roll out of bed and put on some crocs…it was fun and liberating [from] all the junk of looking great or trying to be professional. I didn't have to do any of that crap. (Sam, advanced career professional and faculty member; emphasis added)

Rather than looking at Sam's responses as contradictory tensions, that is, describing his situation as both high anxiety and fun, the paradoxical approach (Carmine et al., 2021) points to how Sam is discursively processing the experience and constructing resilience. For example, when Sam describes himself as a "general anxiety guy" and expresses his concerns about his students and the teaching experience, he affirms important identity anchors both by claiming his existing anxiety issues and by reiterating his role as an educator. This combination of affect or stance toward life experiences and role or obligations and responsibilities coalesce into an

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identity anchor that is more than a general descriptor because it positions Sam in particular ways with regard to his sense of self and engagement with others: "Affirming identity anchors occurs when individuals uphold attachments to roles/identities (e.g., mother, romantic partners) and values (e.g., Christian) which are threatened by the disruptive event(s) through performing them" (Hintz et al., 2021, p. 3).

As another instance, Emma, an advanced career professional and manager, described her fluidity of feelings with their shifts in the moment and her self-questioning of what is healthy or unhealthy to her wellbeing:

> Schizophrenic. Bipolar? I actually feel like it is extreme. It's like when I have a high; it's like I am holding on to that high in a way that's unhealthy because it's like, oh my God, that's a high, and I will not let it go! To within 30 minutes being in a complete low because of whatever meeting I am in, and so it just bounces back and forth, back and forth.

Emma attempts to label the situation using popular or commonplace descriptors of mental health categories. For her, it is not a self-diagnosis but the understandings of mood variation and extreme sensate experiences. Her explanations are similar to that of the work done by Stanley et al. (2021) on metaphor analysis and collective trauma. The use of "schizophrenic" and "bipolar" are metaphors that "symbolically and cognitively frame phenomena" (Malvini Redden et al., 2019, p. 502) and provide a way of relating grounded in feeling and emotion (Stewart, 2007).

Thomas, a mid-career professional who is both faculty and a staff member, tried to bring his feelings together by saying "resilient" with a description that invoked and made concrete the adaptive-transformative dialectical processes in Buzzanell's (2019) CTR) with "persisting and

surviving…. some thriving…" and a return to earlier feelings of disruption with Omicron. Unlike Emma, who used the ubiquitous "bounce" forward and backward metaphor found throughout resilience scholarship (e.g., Buzzanell, 2010; Houston, 2018), Thomas also described temporal-circumstantial-affect cycling ("seemed like it was coming to an end…and all of that just went out the window"). Thomas said:

> Can I say resilient? Because that is what is in my brain. I can say still feeling, you know, persisting and surviving. You know, every once in a while, there's some thriving, maybe you know, joys, successes, but I'd say on average, just been a getting through, you know, the challenges of today, thinking maybe about tomorrow, literally, just tomorrow, not too far away from tomorrow. I would say maybe in the last month or two; the pandemic seemed like it was coming to an end…vaccines were rolling out, and then, of course, Omicron…and all of that just went out the window.

Thomas's quote indicated that he is attempting to find a concise descriptor for expressing his feelings and paradoxical expressions during the pandemic. In selecting "resilient," he defined this term through using the range of conceptualizations and imagery from interdisciplinary research (e.g., persisting, surviving, thriving, joys, anticipatory and proactive as well as reactive processing, and unexpected happenings that necessitate re-sets and new cycles of resilience processing; see Afifi et al., 2019, Southwick et al., 2014; Coutu, 2002, Houston, 2018). The point here is that Thomas's response is a jumble of conflicting emotions, strategies, and sensemaking for which he could only offer the concept of "resilient." Even as he attempted to summarize his experiences, he looked to his interviewer for approval and confirmation that his linguistic choice of "resilient" would be appropriate ("Can I say resilient?").

Where Chasity, an early-career professional and faculty member, jokes about the highs and lows she is experiencing, her quote below demonstrates active engagement in the process of resilience labor (Agarwal & Buzzanell, 2015). In caring for her students, Chasity is participating "dual-layer processes" of fostering resilience in others (students) and, conversely, building resilience in herself:

> Fluctuates. Is that a word? You know it is true, that's probably the best word because it depends on the day, depends on what I've encountered. There have been times where I am like in deep despair, and then a student reaches out to me, and they're like, I am so glad I got to talk to you, and I'm like, just kidding, I am on top of the world now!

In these exemplar quotes, participants encapsulate both positive and negative sentiments in each depiction of their daily mood while evoking a sense of constant and rapid movement between extremes. Overall, these quotes and their interconnections to the discursive and embodied nature of resilience affirms this process's interpretive or sensemaking properties (Latzoo, 2021) and its intersubjective construction with others rather than an individual characteristic or trait (Ahn et al., 2021). For additional words that participants used to describe their average daily mood, see Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Participant Mood Graphic

Figure 1 pulls together participants' responses to questions about daily mood, attempts to categorize what is happening, and finds ways to reintegrate amidst confusion, ambivalence, contradiction, and uncertainties. The visualization in Figure 1 is illustrative only and is intended to visually demonstrate the number of times the negative words were cited, in larger font, compared to more neutral words shown in medium font size, and the more positive words which were rarely stated in the smallest font size. The dichotomous descriptions of the average daily mood symbolize active engagement of the CTR processes. For example, in the case of Sam, the CTR process of *Putting Alternative Logics to Work* becomes evident as a silver lining amidst all the chaos he is experiencing. He described his ability to wear shorts and crocs as "relaxing" and "liberating" from "looking great or trying to be professional," even though in the same discussion, he explicitly labeled his average daily mood as "very, very anxious."

Similarly, Chasity used the word "fluctuates" and described moving from "deep despair" one minute and then being "on top of the world" when she had an opportunity to engage with and help one of her students. In doing so, she was *Affirming Identity Anchors* as teacher, mentor, and advisor for undergraduates and leaning into their sense of purpose. At the same time, the extreme uncertainty and back and forth expressed by participants Emma and Thomas demonstrate that resilience is not a goal but a process that people cumbersomely "stumble" and "struggle" through while experiencing ups and downs (Buzzanell, 2019, 2021; Jarvis, 2021).

The participants' mood responses represent *ordinary affects* (Stewart 2007), an attempt to bring to life the "intensity and texture that makes them habitable" (p. 4) to animate the intensities, disjuncture's, exhaustions, intimacies, and joys of everyday life during the pandemic. Like *ordinary affects*, participants offer snippets of their lives in moments that have the potential to move in different directions but that indicate how agencies collaborate to construct resilience

during pandemic times (e.g., the joy in meeting student needs that usurp feelings of loss and meaningless in work). These affects or moods give context to the themes that follow.

In addition to the tensions expressed with the average daily mood responses, other questions were designed to engage participants in a sensemaking discourse to identify the challenges and benefits of remote work during the pandemic, work-life balance issues, the communicative and relational impacts of remote work, and related perceptions of precarity and job security.

Resilience Themes and Processes

While studying the transcripts, four themes and associated tensions became apparent: (1) strengthening close networks and disconnecting with distant networks; (2) empowering and hindering communication and community through technology; (3) performing, hiding, and feeling invisible; and (4) escaping routine, better work-life balance, and "I've never worked harder."

Strengthening Close Networks and Disconnecting with Distant Networks

While all survey questions were designed to explore the relationship between remote work, informal communication, sensemaking, and resilience, there were a few questions that offered incredible insight into participants' current state: *"How do you stay connected to colleagues (in the remote environment)?," "Do you believe the shift to remote work has changed your relationship with your colleagues?,* and *Has your communication style changed since going remote?*

Similar to the results in Baym et al. (2021), participants expressed an increased sense of closeness with colleagues in their existing close personal networks and stated that they rarely saw or spoke to those outside their close networks. At the same time, nearly all participants

expressed awareness that it was necessary to engage in more social-emotional communication and referenced an intentional effort to reduce the perceived emotional distance experienced in the digital modalities. These sentiments were expressed regardless of position, career phase, or whether individuals were engaging with students or day-to-day colleague interactions. These expressions illustrate the CTR process of *Maintaining and Using Communication Networks* in action and underscore the relational and co-constitutive work of social construction.

However, several participants also described a process of selective communication and intentionally controlling the flow of incoming and outgoing communication to protect their professional and emotional well-being. For example, when Evette, a mid-level manager working in academic affairs, was asked how she stayed connected with colleagues, she responded that she "leaned heavily into one-to-one communications" and would frequently ask colleagues for opportunities to "just talk and not being in a meeting so that we can like figure some stuff out." Group meetings for Evette also represented more formal and constrained communication:

> Yeah, for me, I know meetings aren't always productive. I go into a meeting having an expectation that there is a specific agenda, specific deliverables that you are trying to either plan or produce as part of that. And it's more feeling like I needed people to have conversations with me and know that there wasn't an agenda, more of just trying to find out where they were, and if we are on the same page, if we're not on the same page. If there was context, they could help provide it to me or if there was context that I can help provide to them [deep sigh]. I think that is especially with the people that are in your circle of trust; the one-on-one conversation for me is important for sensemaking. So, that's what I needed. Just being in a meeting, I couldn't get that. I would think, "Oh!

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They are not saying everything because this person's [nods head to the right as if to point to someone] in the meeting."

In this quote, Evette described how she understands the need for close connections through her communication networks regarding her and her colleagues' sensemaking process and notates the limitations and advantages of certain communication networks (i.e., group meetings, e.g., "Oh! They are not saying everything because this person's [nods head to the right as if to point to someone] in the meeting."). Evette perceived her efforts to seek out "one-to-one communications" to be her workaround to strengthen her communication networks and overcome potential limitations in modality and meaning making. Evette also seemed to express equivocality (Kramer, 2016) in her understandings of her coworkers by paying attention to what was not being said during meetings. Her reported interactions and reflections about these encounters pointed to the resilience process of putting alternative logics to work as she pivoted from task-based discussions (i.e., meetings with agendas) to more interpersonal "goal-oriented talk" (Craig et al., 2020; see also Buzzanell, 2010). As she puts it, she participated in meetings "to find out where they [her co-workers] were and if we are on the same page."

In some cases, the shift to remote work forced participants to reassess the value of their existing networks, actively removing themselves from communication networks that did not appear (to them) to provide a meaningful return. At the same time, the rapid shift to remote work coupled with a unifying sense of "all hands-on deck" effort to move an entire university online nearly overnight removed many siloes and departmental boundaries, creating unique opportunities for colleagues who would not typically work together to develop new communication networks. Evette's response to the question: *Do you believe the shift to remote work has changed your relationship with your colleagues?* illustrates the ways in which

participants managed and created communication networks to support sensemaking and the resilience process:

> I definitely learned who the people were that I had strong relationships with. I think I found more people, or they found me? So, I was able to build some new relationships. And then I think I found some people that, and I think this happened a lot in the pandemic, I think a lot of people didn't know what to do with themselves and aren't and weren't always productive. And that was clear. And so, I think it was just another way to learn about how people work and what your relationship is, in terms of hitting goals or supporting you work. There were a lot of people who I had not talked to after like four or five months, and I was like yeah, I'm not, I don't need to talk to that person.

For Evette, the shift to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic clarified the value of her existing communication networks. During the interview, Evette frequently spoke about "managing work" and "blocking off chunks of time." Even while discussing the benefits and challenges of remote work and work-life balance, Evette was more temporal- and task-oriented than other participants. She spoke of making "lists," "task-segmentation," and getting on a "schedule to eat and take breaks and get up." Evette also talked about "70-hour workweeks" for the first six months of the pandemic and meetings having "quadrupled" to accommodate the high level of "coordination and collaboration needed in higher education." For Evette, managing her communication networks was also about prioritizing when, what, and where communication flowed to her, an effort that was just as salient to her resilience process as connectivity.

Nearly all the participants referenced challenges in connecting with colleagues, whether these colleagues were perceived as in or out of their routine communication networks. For some respondents, the constraints on communication through remote work hampered connectivity.

Although not explicitly stated, there was an underlying sense that communication in a physical office space mitigated some of those challenges.

For example, Sam shared frustrations about space and place constraints in remote work communication:

> You have to try harder to connect with people. So, you know, you have to, and then it's kind of like, well, you don't want to bother them, so you message them. Are you available? When you are in the office, you can walk down the hall and see if their door is open. You can knock and pop in.

For Sam, the physical office space allowed for ease of connection and (perhaps) more informal communication opportunities. However, while technology provided many options to connect during remote work, the physical workplace often placed individuals in similar spaces (e.g., offices, conference rooms, breakrooms, elevators, hallways) where informal communication may happen more organically and thus potentially hindering the interpersonal value and stress reduction of informal communication (for the importance of informal communication in the workplace, see Fay & Kline, 2011; Ray & Miller, 1994).

For some participants, such as Isabel, the social-emotional aspects of communication became all the more salient:

> Being kind and considerate because people had kids and, you know, things, you know, personal situations that they were dealing with and COVID. So, it was a lot more of the social-emotional, more than just day-to-day work type of things. I don't think we were as much in tune to [before the pandemic], which was, you know, was kind of sad.

Here, Isabel incorporated concepts associated with compassionate communication: *noticing*, *connecting*, and *responding* (Miller, 2007). At its foundation, compassionate communication attends to connections, empathy, and caring for others communicatively. When Isabel described being "kind and considerate because people had kids," she was "noticing" her co-workers' various circumstances and challenges. Her expressions of "social-emotional" spoke to "connecting" and adapting her communication from the "day-to-day work type of things" to incorporate more social-emotional displays. Her quote indicates intentionality in communication and represents "responding." Isabel also added reflexive commentary and a small bit of self-reprimand ("which was, you know, was kind of sad") to express her awareness of what was missing previously in her workplace communication -- a general sense of empathy, patience, and compassion in the day-to-day talk -- and thus affirming the notion of resilience as an adaptive-transformative process (Buzzanell, 2017).

For the second interview protocol question, participants' responses were split. When asked, *"Do you believe the shift to remote work has changed your relationship with your colleagues?"* 61% of the respondents said they believed their relationships with colleagues had changed. For example, one participant Jackie, an early career visiting instructor, "felt a real disconnect from…colleagues, lots of disconnection from the university and the students." Vicki, a senior level employee and advanced career staffer, felt so disconnected she seriously considered leaving, "I felt less connected to the institution. I started looking at other opportunities."

However, the change in relationships with colleagues was not always perceived as negative. Some individuals expressed avoiding social pressures brought on by in-person work environments as a benefit of remote work: "It is more comfortable to be in be in your own home

in some regard and (avoiding) anxieties that come from being in social situations" (Jackie). In addition to avoiding stressful social interactions and to having to be "on" while dodging less than desirable colleagues, their remote work was often cited as a benefit:

> I can't think of any colleagues that my relationship has changed with. I only say not running into colleagues who I don't particularly like or don't particularly like me was a very positive thing and remains a very positive thing [laughs]. (Sam)

Ironically, Sam said nothing had changed while, in the same breath, noting profound differences in workplace interactions, reminiscent of Buzzanell's (2010) crafting normalcy process.

Notably, participants showed little concern about the increasing disconnect with those outside their close networks. They also did not report any immediate or evident repercussions over their intentional efforts to disconnect with some coworkers (e.g., work seemed to continue unhindered despite lack of contact).

Unsurprisingly, the one exception to this general trend was when the perceived distance was with their supervisor. Nearly 62% of the respondents stated that the shift to remote work did change their relationship with their supervisor. Moreover, for some participants, the change was deeply personal with potential professional implications in how they intended to engage with their supervisor in the future:

> I spent a lot of time being more tolerant and polite [referring to supervisor prior to the pandemic and remote work], and now I am 100% honest about what is going on [with the supervisors' team], what I like, what I don't like, you know, what I will and won't tolerate. That didn't happen before." (Emma)

Emma did not elaborate on her comment, but its content points to a movement toward prioritizing one's own needs/self-care (i.e., the need to be honest about what is going on in the workplace that the supervisor is not seeing) over that of any professional discourtesy to her supervisor.

Other participants described how they had to adjust their communication processes and expectations of their supervisors to accommodate new constraints that had developed in the remote work environment: "I had to be more understanding of their limitations [referring to their supervisor]," said Lynn, an advanced career staffer. "It limited my ability to ask questions and just pop into their office. So we had to schedule more conversations," added advanced career administrative professional Julie. In these cases, limitations referred to how workers dealt with their expectations of their supervisor, given that the usual mode of communication and workflow had been disrupted. Such comments and behaviors also illustrated the CTR process of *crafting normalcy* through the reframing of their expectations and work processes.

Another common theme that appeared throughout the qualitative interview responses centered around technology and its many benefits and challenges. While implied in participants' responses throughout the first theme, the next section explicitly identifies the complex and sometimes paradoxical ways technology-enabled and hindered communication and community building.

Empowering and Hindering Communication and Community through Technology

The widespread availability of technological wonders such as video conferencing software with personalizing features like digital hand raise and clapping features and real-time chatting functions made connecting easier and served as helpful substitutes for face-to-face communication. However, the awkwardly frozen screens, constant refrains of "you're on mute,"

and the occasional humiliation from the professional and personal colliding on camera (e.g., children crying in backgrounds, family members walking past meetings, cats jumping onto keyboards during important meetings) reminded participants that the virtual workspace was not a replacement for in-person work but rather a new landscape with new benefits and challenges. One participant, Sam, noted that he "found it impossible to instructional recreate the same kind of relationship, interest level, and engagement that I did with in-person classes." "Not having the ability to see someone in-person…especially if you have to brainstorm and work, you know, work collaboratively," was a challenge for Isabel. In other words, both Sam and Isabel missed the subtle nonverbal cues that were not always visible during online classes and interactions.

The perceived loss of "community" was a real and consistent challenge, whether faculty or staff. As seen in Jackie's quote, community represents shared experiences which for her is something that happens (at least more readily) in a shared physical environment where coworkers can "see each other physically."

> I do think that loss of sort of the teaching community because even though it is such a, it's a very autonomous job, so it's not like you have someone you know, telling you what to do every day anyway. But you do have that community of other people who are doing your same kind of job around you at all times. And whether it's like commiseration or camaraderie, you know? Like talking to people about what they're up to, how they're feeling that's the sort of like the thing that made the pandemic, the pandemic. Which means they now can't see each other physically. It's, that's the exact kind of situation where you would want to be talking to other people and be like, "Isn't this crazy?" We're not able to do that.

In short, what Jackie missed was others' presence in the here and now with her and, as a consequence, the perceived immediacy of in-person sensemaking.

At the same time, participants also felt that technology provided opportunities to better know and get a glimpse of colleagues by seeing, hearing, and sometimes experiencing their home lives. This vicarious entry into colleagues' personal lives infused an important sense of authenticity and realness, or more aptly, perhaps, a sense of normalcy. With workspaces moving into living rooms, bedrooms, and family spaces, the more traditional thinking about keeping one's home and work lives separate, known as compartmentalization as boundary-making according to Kossek & Lautsch (2006, 2012) research, was suddenly impossible. Children climbed on laps and interrupted meetings; dogs barked in the background; cats walked in front of cameras. Indeed, co-workers shared personal spaces in ways not previously experienced and seemed to welcome the opportunity ─ "you learn so much about people because you are in their living rooms," said Isabel, a senior level manager. As a result, the professional and personal, formal and informal communication, and the multiplicity of goals that underlie daily interactions came together in much more visible and accessible ways, and their converse, through technologically mediated communication (for media affordances such as visibility and accessibility, see Rice et al., 2017).

Technology kept participants working, connected to friends and family, entertained, and functioned as the non-human agent in the resilience process *crafting normalcy*. It should be noted that all participants reported they had the means and access to secure reliable technology, including high-speed internet, whether provided by their university or paid for out of their own pockets.

These seemingly benign interruptions and disruptions to the virtual work environment were quite significant in that they integrated the ordinary and familiar daily life routines into an otherwise atypical way of working and living. Even for participants who had previous remote work experience, all survey participants were spending on average 50-80% of their workdays on their computers in mediated interactions. So powerful were these micro-introductions of "normal" daily life into their virtual interactions many participants began intentionally curating their home and virtual backgrounds as an expression of identity, often resulting in unique relational tools for presenter and viewer. For example, Sam described bringing his dogs on camera while teaching:

> My two dogs are well known by my students, and they were really good anxiety-reducing tools during [online] teaching, to the point where I am like, *okay*, I will try sneaking them on campus and let you guys see them. From that standpoint, it allowed you to bring more of your home and yourself into the teaching, and I feel like they know me better in a way even though they had never been in my presence.

Sam's introducing his dogs into the virtual classroom space also introduced a part of his identity (i.e., dog lover) to his students and as a co-constitutive act in which they all created a more welcoming, comforting space for their interactions during a time when many were experiencing isolation because of mandated lockdowns and concerns about catching or transmitting COVID-19. The students are comforted by the familiarity of the dogs, whether it reminds them of their family pets, or they simply enjoy interacting with something familiar and understood.

The introduction of pets may have been particularly important for students living alone and in isolation during the pandemic. Thus, a new routine was born, and now students and the professor have a familiar way to start each class – something to look forward to during class.

Several participants spoke about how they put thought into what was in the background of their camera and what books were on their shelves. They moved personal book collections and objects into camera view, enacting yet another resilience process, namely, *Affirming Identity Anchors*. This discursive-material action helped individuals establish and affirm their identities to themselves and others. I discuss the benefits and challenges of the performative aspects of self-presentation virtually in a later theme.

Additionally, a few participants expressed the adaptation to and mastery of newer technology as a positive side effect allowing for the engagement of another resilience process *Legitimizing Negative Feelings While Foregrounding Productive Action*. For Evette, her competency and comfort with new technology bolstered confidence and expanded their thinking about future career possibilities:

> It definitely opened my mind. I don't think I thought as heavily about maybe some of my options to work in technology spaces. So, it did encourage me to not put artificial limits on what kind of work opportunities I would be open to doing.

While other participants spoke excitedly about learning new software and digital equipment to enhance their teaching and research, others reported more negative feelings and behaviors, as illustrated in the next theme.

Performing, Hiding, and Feeling Invisible

I confess that this next theme, *Performing, Hiding, and Feeling invisible,* initially felt too untidy as a framework to comprehend this particular collection of participant responses. The sentiments are admittedly disjointed and sometimes rambling and therefore were difficult to contain or even reason into one cohesive theme. In fact, the common thread of fragmentation and

discontinuity felt so different from the other themes, or semantic units that encapsulated sensemaking, that I considered removing this theme altogether, wondering if, perhaps, I was forcing a discussion that did not belong. However, I further reviewed the participant quotes in the context of Stewart (2007) work on *ordinary affect,* which made salient that these "disjointed" responses are not meant to be finished and tidy sentiments. But rather, as Stewart states, "a mode of attunement, a continuous responding to something not quite already given and yet somehow happening" (p. 127). Much like Hintz et al.'s (2021) ante narrative analysis of anticipatory resilience, these partial understandings and expressions highlight the ongoing meaning-making that constitutes resilience, and that defies coherence at times. As a result, this finding expresses the messy nature of resilience when there are trigger events or anticipated disruptions, but people do not necessarily know how to feel, think, be, and value what is happening and how they might activate agencies can be simultaneously enacted freely, compromised, constrained, contested, and confounded (see O'Brien Hallstein, 1999)

This theme and participant responses are also illustrative of this work's root sentiment that sees resilience as fluid and shifting adaptive-transformative processes. The sentiments and situated understandings expressed in this theme reflect notions of relational precarity around identity, the authenticity of colleague connections, even the realness of the remote experience in the context of the pandemic. In other words, they harken back to the impetus for this thesis project that is grounded in a class project.

For the most part, participants expressed positive emotions toward technology and the relational opportunities brought about by sharing bits of their home life. However, some participants also expressed ostensibly contradictory feelings about the "artificial" virtual

environment. For example, Thomas described a surrealness to the virtual environment as he compared it to a "video game":

There's an artificial newness to even this, you know, for a long time I was saying, I just feel like I am playing a video game, you know? Some great simulation software, but these are real people we're getting to interact with, but it's, and I know that but there still becomes, there's still a coldness and separation there. That is hard to get past. I think it takes more emotional energy to reassure that, yes, this is real, these interactions that we're having because it's just not what we're used to.

For Thomas, this "new" and "artificial" environment necessitates a level of "emotional energy" to overcome the "coldness" and "separation." Initially, this creates a sense of relational precarity, defined here as a state of vulnerability or insecurity in creating and maintaining relationships within the organization as a whole and the particular workplace. Thomas's sense of precarity can be understood through his metaphorical comparison "I just feel like I am playing a video game, you know? Some great simulation software." In Thomas's words, we again see affirmation of the root sentiment of resilience as fluid and shifting adaptive-transformative processes.

Issues of representation, tokenism, performance and a perceived lack of authenticity in self-presentation also elicited strong feedback from some participants. The concepts of tokenism; the practice of making a symbolic or obligatory effort to give the appearance of representation (Mumby & Kuhn, 2018), and performativity, which is understood "not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but, rather, as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler 2011, p. 2). While race, ethnicity, gender, and representation were not specific foci of this study and certainly representation, tokenism, performativity are of deep concern in the physical workplace, both

Evette and Emma's sentiments (in the quotes below) prompt future exploration in research around how underrepresented populations are impacted in the remote work environment within the context of COVID-19 (see Ashby-King, 2021, Ellingrud et al., 2020). In their demographic questionnaire, both Evette and Emma identified as black women and indicated that they held mid-level leadership positions within their institutions.

As it relates to this study, there did seem to be something about the structure of the remote workspace, particularly video conferencing, that amplified issues of representation and performativity and caused some participants to question the intentions and motivations of their colleagues. For example, Evette saw "red flags" in some of her colleague's attempts to include her in various meetings:

> If someone can't articulate to me why I need to be there, then that's a red flag for me. And even if there's a disconnect, on my end, there has to be, again, some way of building the context of having me there. It's just like a reassurance for you, Or sometimes, is it a little tokenism, right? Like let's get someone from the office of X, let's get a female, let's get a person of color.

In the pandemic environment, Evette challenged her required participation in some meetings, calling her experiences "red flags," meaning that the incidents she recounted cause her to be suspicious and question others' motivations. In this quote, she is assertive in her challenge but also expresses vulnerability, ambivalence, and needs for justification for participation ("there has to be, again, some way of building the context of having me there"). In her quote, all of these conflicting feelings and rationalizations for what is happening to her come together in phrasing that she termed a "disconnect" but that others might note are challenges to her integrity, value, and well-being as a female and as a person of color situated in a predominantly white institution

(PWI). Her reaction and comments are not surprising since many women and faculty of color in higher education express similar feelings of being "presumed incompetent" despite their many accomplishments (see Jackson, K. F., et al.; Yi, V., & Ramos, D., 2022). For Evette, the pandemic exacerbated gendered, raced, and other injustices even as the formal system attempts to right the lack of inclusion by, in Evette's phrasing, forcing demographic representation on committees and in other formal organizing sites ("little tokenism, right? Like let's get someone from the office of X, let's get a female, let's get a person of color").

Whereas other participants like Emma spoke of seeing a certain amount of perceived fakeness or inauthenticity in her co-workers and how they chose to represent themselves: "There is a level of posturing that sort of skews who a person really is remotely…you can command this level of authority and confidence. You know it can all be fake." The fakeness, as Emma pointed out below, is compounded by the limiting features of virtual connectivity through video conferencing:

> The [video conferencing] environment doesn't even allow you to look at someone directly; you can pretend to be looking at the camera, ergo, looking at someone directly when you're really not doing that. I've just found that [video conferencing] allows you to represent yourself differently than who you are.

For Emma, "pretending" is not about representation but rather a misrepresentation of the authentic self, making the remote environment revelatory in many ways.

Whereas some colleagues were keenly aware of and actively cultivating, or branding, their on-camera presence via their often-ironic appropriation of technological affordances, others seemed to forget they were on camera and/or audio altogether (Bailenson, 2021, Shockley et al.,

2021). They could be seen or heard expressing disdain or disinterest at what other colleagues were saying in remote meetings, such as Emma discussed below:

> When you are in a room, and there's a meeting going on, it's hard to focus on everybody's physical reaction to someone talking. What I have found myself doing currently on [video conferencing] is watching everyone's face. Watching everyone sort of keep their face sort of neutral. As they're hearing someone, they think is ridiculous, or like I know there are some people who are not fans of mine, but *now* I know for sure, from watching them on [computer screen when I am speaking. (emphasis in original)

Emma first admitted that she found it "hard to focus" during virtual group meetings and sought a strategy to keep her attention ("what I have found myself doing currently"). Using this strategy of "watching everyone's faces," the veil of politeness or inability to track everyone's expressions simultaneously that might have pervaded face-to-face meetings now revealed colleagues' reactions to what was being said and by whom. Emma's colleagues struggle to keep expressions "neutral" yet fail when they find comments "ridiculous" or when they discount the speaker's intentions and credibility ("people who are not fans of mine").

Emma's candid quotes revealed a window into the underbelly of organizational culture and member interactions by providing instances or disruptions that warranted sensemaking and creation of a new normal through affirming identity anchors, foregrounding productive action, and reassessing communication networks. In this sensemaking, Emma created alternative logics, a temptation to locate deeper meanings into her own and others' expressions and positionality and make inferences about the organizational culture she operates within. Through the ordinary affects that she sees and experiences, she experiences relational precarity and confirms her earlier suspicions about her collegial relationships ("like I know there are some people who are

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not fans of mine, but *now* I know for sure"). However, I note that this interpretation would be an oversimplification and an attempt to tidy up a complex situation and remove the "intensity and texture" (Stewart, 2007, p. 4) of Emma's sensemaking and resilience process.

Feelings of invisibility were also salient, especially for early-career participant Jackie, who expressed fears that no one could see or remember her:

Also, like the fear of does anybody know who I am anymore. I am going to be up for review at the end of this year. Are they going to re-hire me? They didn't even get a chance to observe my class.

Jackie was not expressing FOMA (fear of missing out) that can operate in ordinary circumstances (Tandon et al., 2021). Instead, she was describing her fear that the technologically mediated interactions and lack of casual meetings that ordinarily would occur in her workplace would prove detrimental to her career stability and employability ("I am going to be up for review at the end of this year"). The ordinary career passages of "re-hire[ing]" and classroom observations have not occurred. Instead, the routines are disrupted ("They didn't even get a chance to observe my class"), and the sense of not knowing what might happen as a result weighs on Jackie, as they did on others who were concerned about furloughs, contract renewals or lack thereof, delayed promotions because of costs, and other changes recorded in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* during the pandemic (e.g., Gannon, 2021; Pettit, 2020).

Lynn expressed concerns about career competencies and how the remote environment inhibits the ability for younger staff members to model behavior (again, not an impossibility but a challenge virtually), and the difficulty in establishing mentors to "see how it [work] is being done":

I feel sorry for younger people who don't know how to do their job, [with] no one to teach them in the remote environment, protocol, you can't do your job if you can't see *how* it is being done. (emphasis in original)

In many ways, the theme of *performing, hiding, and feeling invisible* is most illustrative of relational precarity through expressions of vulnerability and insecurity in creating and maintaining authentic connectivity and relationships with colleagues. Admittedly, authenticity is always raced, classed, and situated in privilege-marginalization intersectionality's (see Dubrofsky, in press) but organizing in higher education during the pandemic made such common tensions of (in)authenticity, (in)vulnerability, and (in)visibilities that form the bases of relational precarities ever more salient.

Certainly, from a social construction point-of-view, if people make sense of themselves and others through everyday talk and interactions and those interactions are (a) not happening or satisfying or are perceived as (b) inauthentic or fake, one must question what kind of organizational culture is being created. At the same time, the fact that workers are aware and discussing these challenges illuminates the adaptive-transformative resilience process. In other words, these discontents and disjuncture's offer opportunities for relational and organizational change. Participants are attempting to make sense of how they and their co-workers fit in this new paradigm of remote work in the backdrop of a massive trigger event, a global pandemic. At the same time, the above quotes support the notion that CTR is made up of communicative actions happening simultaneously, individually and relationally, or even momentarily stalled as individuals talk, take in information, adapt, and construct a new reality.

Escaping Routine, Better Work-Life Balance, and "I've never worked harder."

As we have seen throughout the interviews, participants frequently expressed tensions between the positive and negative impacts of the rapid shift to remote work during the pandemic. In many cases, the benefits and challenges of remote work seemed to contradict one another. In addition to being asked to describe their remote work environment, participants were also prompted to reflect on their day-to-day remote experience with questions like *"How is your experience different working remotely versus in the office?"* and more pointedly, *"What are the challenges resulting from the move to remote work?"* and *"What are the benefits resulting from the move to remote work?"*

Among the many benefits of remote work listed by participants, several--better-work-life balance, no commute, not having to 'dress up for work,' and increased productivity due to minimal interruptions from colleagues--were the most frequently mentioned. These fringe benefits are also commonly cited in current and pre-pandemic literature around remote work and the employee perceptions of benefits and challenges (e.g., Bloom et al., 2015; Flores, 2019; Tursunbayeva et al., 2022).

Participants also talked about having more control and autonomy over their day and eliminating the physical demands of running from meeting to meeting as additional benefits. The attachment to these newly discovered benefits was surprisingly strong and challenged my initial supposition that perhaps the isolation of remote work and missed opportunities for informal communication (a critical sensemaking tool for organizational workers) would create feelings of precarity, ultimately driving folks back to the office.

However, when asked, *"Do you feel more or less secure in your position working remotely?* 54% of the respondents said they felt the same, 31% felt more secure, and 15% felt

less secure. When asked, *"Has the experience working remotely changed your professional path and/or interests? If yes, please explain how."* Over half, 53% of the respondents said no, 38% said yes, and one respondent was a maybe. Of those who said yes, several were positive, reflecting that the remote environment generated new interests in research and a desire to perhaps work in technology.

Even while describing the difficulties of working from home, some participants were unwilling to trade the perceived benefits of remote work. For example, one participant, Isabel, gave herself the title "chaos coordinator" when asked to describe her home office environment:

> So, I have two young kids. So that was a little different because we were on lockdown, so that was a little bit chaotic. I had to build in a lot of structure at home and a lot of shifting of schedules so that I would be able to do my work.

Conversely, when asked if the experience of remote work had changed her professional path, Isabel's response was a very pointed "That depends, are you now forcing me to come in?" This seemingly contradictory reframing is another key part of the CTR process of *Putting Alternative Logics to Work*. While organizational members described better work-life balance and spending more time with kids and partners, they also talked about massive increases in workload and "out-of-control" expectations. Logically, it appeared that most people did not reduce work or come to a better balance between work and their personal lives. Instead, it seemed that they simply borrowed time not spent commuting or getting ready for work to engage in more job-related labor. However, the autonomy to fill that borrowed time with more personal activities of their choosing left them feeling empowered whether they used that extra time for professional activities or personal pleasure.

Summary of Findings

  In summary, throughout the nearly 20 hours of interviews, a root sentiment took shape. Although participants' feelings or sentiments were mostly expected, especially given the health risks and the historical and global nature of the pandemic, articulating the dichotomy, intensity, and weight of the many multi-layered and paradoxical expressions into a meaningful, representative, and succinct root sentiment was a complex challenge. It is worth noting here that adding to the complexity in summarizing these findings and the root sentiment is that I have not observed these sentiments from a distant, unencumbered position. I, too, am experiencing the pandemic professionally and personally. I, too, am enacting the resilience process in complex and contradictory ways.

  Perhaps, the root sentiment is easier to describe when considering the similarities in *how* participants experienced resilience enactment, which was an adaptive-transformative and embodied resilience process. Evidence of *how* participants adapted, transformed, and embodied resilience is provided throughout the themes of (1) strengthening close networks and disconnecting with distant networks; (2) empowering and hindering communication and community through technology; (3) performing, hiding, and feeling invisible; and (4) escaping routine, better work-life balance, and "I've never worked harder." Whereas the themes provided the framework to the participant experiences, the affect responses in the supporting quotes make real the "intensity and texture" (Stewart, 2007, p. 4) of the resilience experience, which continues today.

CHAPTER FIVE:
DISCUSSION

In this section, I present the theoretical and practical contributions of this study, how the results extend the *Communication Theory of Resilience*, the limitations of the study, possibilities for future research, and concluding thoughts.

I started this study with the assumption that as the COVID-19 pandemic forced many workers from the physical office to remote work, opportunities for informal communication would be disrupted or constrained, potentially challenging the communicative and co-constitutive sensemaking and relational processes, leaving some workers with feelings of precarity. The study was not intended to make causal claims and therefore was not designed as such. Instead, this study sought to better understand the disruptions or constraints and how workers managed potential feelings of precarity and enacted resilience in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As it turns out, my initial assumptions were only partially true. Opportunities for informal and relational communication were constrained and created discursive and relational barriers. However, respondents developed workarounds through intentional and creative communicative outreach and sheer happenstance (i.e., pets or children introducing themselves on their computer screens). Participants also went out of their way to improve their communication and consider, for some individuals for the first time, the timing, frequency, and intention behind their

communication. The trigger of COVID-19 and cascading triggers or disruptions (for cascading triggers, see Hintz et al., 2021), such as the rapid movement into online instructional formats, necessitated the co-construction of new normal through adaptation, coping, and changing their relational dynamics, structural bases for work, and their work and personal life integrations.

The constitutive nature of new normal and reactions to and anticipation of disruptions led me to the Communication Theory of Resilience (CTR, Buzzanell, 2010, 2019). The findings from my study extend understanding of the resilience processes and answer my first research question; *How have remote university workers enacted the resilience processes during the COVID-19 pandemic*? Specifically, I found that workers enacted the resilience processes in multi-layered and paradoxical ways.

The study also uncovered interesting insights into the ways workers created and managed perceived barriers to informal communication to aid their unique sensemaking needs. These insights—such as sharing bits of their personal lives via pets or children on screen, sharing hobbies and displaying collections in camera view, prioritizing some communication networks over others and creating new networks to serve a new paradigm, engaging in more social-emotional and compassionate communication--answered my second research question. *How does remote work in a large public university constrain and enable informal communication during the COVID-19 pandemic?* In doing so, participant responses also revealed four themes with underlying tensions: 1) strengthening close network connections and disconnecting with distant networks; (2) empowering and hindering communication and community through technology (3) performing, hiding, and feeling invisible, (4) escaping routine, better work-life balance, and "I've never worked harder." I also found a root sentiment that paradoxically and dialectically shifted adaptive-transformative and embodied resilience.

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Theoretical Contributions

In popular parlance, people tend to think of resilience as a kind of strength, a real-life superpower. Resiliency is frequently described using language that signifies strength or toughness. The *Oxford Dictionary* (2022) defines it as "the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness" or when speaking of an object, "the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape; elasticity." In contrast to resilience, fragility signifies the delicate, weak, easily broken, brittle, and inflexible. Being resilient is positioned as favorable, while fragility is something to avoid. And who could argue? Flexibility and toughness seem the appropriate characteristics to deal with a crisis, especially one of unprecedented proportions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which is typically described using the language of uncertainty and fear.

The Communication Theory of Resilience (CTR), however, helps people to understand resilience and, I would argue, fragility in more nuanced ways. Indeed, resilience is not an individual superpower or characteristic but a communicative and communal process. In exploring the themes and ongoing tensions in the study findings, several extensions of CTR emerge. Specifically, CTR and its theoretical underpinning propose that resilience is not innate or a byproduct of training or life experience but a process that empowers individuals to make sense of disruptions or trigger events in an inherently communicative way (Buzzanell, 2010, 2019).

The notion that CTR empowers individuals in the sensemaking process is worth emphasizing as the theoretical contributions of this study are noted. As a social constructivist, a predominant question for me was whether or not constrained or disrupted informal communications, critical to the sensemaking and relational processes, left workers feeling isolated and potentially precarious (or less secure in their positions). While a small number of

participants (15%) indicated that they felt less secure in their positions since going remote, they also suggested that the transition to remote work had not prompted feelings of precarity as I had initially suspected. Those who did indicate feeling less secure in their position since going remote did not attribute those feelings to communication or remote work but instead pointed to other organizational forces unrelated to the pandemic.

Participants did, however, describe a range of conflicting emotions and experiences that demonstrated their overall sense of fragility even as they were actively engaging in the resilience process—further affirming the notion that resilience is not a binary condition. For example, participants expressed anxiety, stress, moments of deep despair, and extreme lows over the loss of the familiar and isolation. Yet, at the same time, they expressed relief in avoiding stressful and anxiety-ridden social situations, their ability to avoid people they did not like or vice-versa, and even joy at newly discovered autonomy over their daily schedules and freedom from the routines of getting ready for and going to the office.

Recognizing that a multiplicity of contradictory emotions such as fragility co-exist throughout the resilience process, which is, as stated earlier, an empowerment process, prompts new considerations for CTR and our thinking of fragility. After all, do people not tend to care for fragile things differently? Treat them more gently and value them a bit more because people understand they must be cared for in order to last. What if the fact that people can be both fragile and resilient points to an additional resilience process of self/other care or an extension of dual-layer resilience processes (e.g., Agarwal & Buzzanell, 2015 Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012). Nearly all of the participants in this study talked about the intentional steps they took to manage their professional and emotional well-being while also taking proactive steps to intentionally connect in more meaningful ways with others in their communication networks.

Another theoretical contribution was the creation of new communication networks. While several participants discussed how their communication improved with their existing networks primarily due to more intentional outreach and thoughtful interaction, others talked about the active steps they took to create new communication networks. For some participants, the pandemic and rapid transition to remote work clarified relationships and exposed fault lines in existing communication networks.

Instead of expressing feelings of precarity related to their work, most participants referenced how they were busier than ever. For some, the experience affirmed their passion for teaching generated newfound research interests, while others found new career possibilities utilizing technology.

Practical Contributions

As a professional communicator, I often look for the applied and more practical applications of the study's theories and data. I was drawn to CTR as my theoretical framework for this study because of its practical use cases in organizational communication and change management. One such practical application might be the creation of a *Resilience Communication Framework*. Such a framework could be designed to prompt the resilience process while offering a set of guiding principles or considerations that addresses the associated relational and communicative needs of organizational members as they move through the resilience process. An example of what a framework might entail is depicted in Table 2 (see next page).

Limitations and Future Research

While the qualitative responses suggest intriguing possibilities for self/other care as a theoretical extension of the resilience processes, the data from this study are not sufficient to make that determination. However, the feedback is compelling enough to merit future research in self/other care as part of the resilience process.

Let's first consider this idea through a social construction lens which posits that reality is co-constituted through everyday talk. Next, combine that with the understanding that resilience is inherently communicative and a process of empowering individuals to make sense of their reality. Finally, reflect on the fact that the trigger event, the pandemic, has persisted now for two years, leaving no corner of the globe untouched, essentially creating a mass trigger event that is unprecedented in its impact and disruption of what all of humanity once called normal. I contend these unique combinations of factors make it plausible that individuals adapted and expanded the resilience process to meet their needs and the needs of those they care for and about.

Table 2. Resilience Communication Framework

CTR Processes	Considerations
Crafting normalcy	1. How can you contextualize the change event/crisis through your organizational communications? 2. If possible, remind organizational members of the mission of the organization. But, again, focus on the familiar as much as possible. 3. Encourage re-engagement with routines and/or development of new routines.
Affirming Identity Anchors	1. Acknowledge that formal organizational communication is limited by its homogeneity, 2. Engage with communication partners across a diverse range of audiences to review organizational communications from diverse perspectives, 3. Avoid language that inadvertently or overtly ignores the unique experiences of your organizational members, i.e., "we are all in this together."
Maintaining and Using Communication Networks	1. Ensure that organizational communication networks remain open and active. Bad news travels

	fast, and the absence of information breeds insecurity and misinformation,
	2. Provide intentional opportunities for organizational members to engage and encourage the development of informal networks.
	3. Ensure communication is flowing both ways to and from the organization.

Table 2 (continued) Resilience Communication Framework

Putting alternative logics to work	1. Be patient. Remember, resilience building is a journey, not a destination,
	2. Allow organizational members ample time to reframe and process the change in a way that makes sense to them,
	3. At the same time, keep organizational communication simple and straight to the point. Don't over-complicate an already complicated situation,
	4. Be authentic. If you don't have answers, say so. Avoid highly choreographed messaging.
Legitimizing Negative Feelings While Foregrounding Productive Action	1. Acknowledge the negative emotions associated with the triggering event,
	2. Focus on and recognize how organizational members are contributing to the productive action and mission of the organization,
	3. Ensure all members of the organization see themselves in the productive action.

Similarly, the CTR Communication Framework outlined in this discussion chapter could be used as a practical tool for organizational leadership and professional communicators to help cultivate more compassionate formal organizational communication and promote resilience thinking. Such a framework could prove helpful as it provides a practical guide to help with the emotional labor involved in constituting resilience for self and others. Emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) is typically thought of in the context of the hidden work done by certain professions (e.g., nurses, flight attendants) to manage, display, or suppress certain kinds of emotions in the workplace. Additionally, the framework also considers concepts of compassionate communication which include Miller's (2007) processes of *noticing*, *connecting*, and *responding,* and Way & Tracy (2012) extensions of Miller's work through the concepts of *recognizing*, *relating*, and *(re)acting*. These foundational concepts of compassionate communication prioritize impact over intent in communication. While many respondents

described being more "intentional" in their communication as a result of the rapid move to remote work during the pandemic, the sentiments expressed in their responses pointed to a need or a desire to be more thoughtful around the impact of communication. However, the possibilities and potential effectiveness of such a framework need more intentional investigation and analysis, which is currently outside the scope of this study and thesis.

Consistent with my research interests and one of the stated intentions of this endeavor was to better understand what implications this study might have in understanding how change is enacted and sustained in large social systems. I believe the qualitative responses provided by participants offer a persuasive argument for investigating how CTR might apply to institutional change management, which certainly could be interpreted as a trigger event.

Another limitation was the smaller sample size for the survey; this study was intentionally focused on higher education faculty and staff. However, future studies should consider expanding the participant pool in numbers and diversity for a wider perspective and broader understanding of informal communication, remote work, and resilience.

Conclusion

This study produced compelling and sometimes unexpected insights into how remote workers discursively manage disruption, locate meaning, and persist in times of crisis. Likewise, this research and the many examples included in this thesis provide a moment-in-time window into a historical event and, in doing so, a rich landscape for future study and possible expansion of the *Communication Theory of Resilience*. But, perhaps, the most critical takeaway for me is that despite the profound ways the pandemic has managed to separate people, and in so many ways, it has divided people emotionally, socially, economically, and politically. Yet, despite that, an undeniable part of the human condition is an astounding need to seek out one another, share

our experiences, try and make sense of ourselves and a chaotic world, connect and communicate, and understand and appreciate that we are both fragile and resilient.

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APPENDIX A:

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT ANNOUNCEMENT

STUDY 002574

UNIVERSITY of SOUTH FLORIDA

Remote Work Participant Recruitment Announcement

The following announcement will be used for digital recruitment through e-mail, Facebook, and LinkedIn posts. No other recruitment methods will be used (i.e., flyers or advertisements). Outreach to potential participants will be through PI's professional and social network.

Researchers at the University of South Florida are conducting a research study to understand how the rapid transition to remote work resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic impacted opportunities for informal communication within the workplace and unscheduled or impromptu engagement with work colleagues.

Only those over the age of 18 and employed either full or part-time and have worked remotely and/or are currently working remotely during the COVID pandemic are eligible.

These will be one-time interviews conducted through an online audio/visual platform. The total time commitment for participants, including verbal consent, demographic survey, and interview, will be approximately 60-90 mins and no more than two hours.

For more information about the study and/or to participate, please contact, Principal Investigator, Tanya Vomacka, tvomacka@usf.edu. Or, call (813) 974-6216.

Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study
Title: *Informal Communication, Sensemaking, and Relational Precarity: Building Resilience in remote work during the age of COVID*
Study # _____002574_____

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Overview: You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this document should help you to decide if you would like to participate. The sections in this Overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information is provided in the remainder of the document.

Study Staff: This study is being led by Tanya Vomacka who is a graduate student at/in College of Arts and Science, Department of Communication. This person is called the Principal Investigator. Tanya Vomacka is being guided in this research by additional personnel faculty advisor and department chair Patrice Buzzanell. Other approved research staff may act on behalf of the Principal Investigator.

Study Details: This study is being conducted at the University of South Florida as part of Master's Thesis work. The purpose of the research study is to explore the relationship between remote work and how shifting the workplace into the virtual-home office constrains informal or spontaneous communication, potentially challenging the essential sensemaking and placemaking process enacted by workers. Specifically, I will investigate how the rapid transition to remote work resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic created new paradigms of relational communication by limiting opportunities for unscheduled or impromptu engagement with colleagues. As a result, communication with co-workers and supervisors has become more transactional, potentially contributing to feelings of isolation and relational precarity.

The study's primary objective is to explore the relationship of power, identity, precarity, and resilience by studying the connection between remote work and feelings of precarity and legitimacy in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study's secondary objective is to better understand how organizational members (i.e., employees) build resilience within the workplace, particularly during times of crisis, potentially uncovering communication strategies to engage employees, build community, and mitigate feelings of precarity.

Participants: You are being asked to take part because you are an early, mid, or advanced career professional employed full or part-time and have worked remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you start. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities.

Benefits, Compensation, and Risk: There is no cost to participate. You will not be compensated for your participation. This research is considered minimal risk. Minimal risk means that study risks are the same as the risks you face in daily life.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

Study Procedures
If you take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in one-time interviews via audio/video platform. Upon consent you will be sent a short survey/questionnaire to gather basic demographic data. The survey/questionnaire will take approximately 15 mins, interviews will be approximately 60-90 mins, including verbal consent. The total time commitment for participants should be no more than two hours per participant.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You do not have to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study

Benefits and Risks
We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study. This research is considered to be minimal risk.

Compensation

You will not be compensated.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are: Principal Investigator, Tanya Vomacka. The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB).

It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the Internet. If you complete and submit an anonymous survey and later request your data be withdrawn, this may or may not be possible as the researcher may be unable to extract anonymous data from the database.

Contact Information

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Tanya Vomacka at (813) 477-6016. If you have questions about your rights, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact the IRB by e-mail at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are. You can print a copy of this consent form for your records.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by proceeding with this survey, I am agreeing to take part in research and I am 18 years of age or older.

APPENDIX C:

IRB APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY of SOUTH FLORIDA

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

May 6, 2021

Tanya Vomacka
29442 Tansy Pass
Wesley Chapel, FL 33543

Dear Tanya Vomacka:

On 5/5/2021, the IRB reviewed and approved the following protocol:

Application Type:	Initial Study
IRB ID:	STUDY002574
Review Type:	Exempt 2
Title:	Informal Communication, Sensemaking, and Relational Precarity: Building Resilience in remote work during the age of COVID
Protocol:	• Tanya Vomacka Informal communication and Precarity study;

The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Please note, as per USF policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in BullsIRB. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated change to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant a modification or new application.

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Walker
IRB Research Compliance Administrator

Institutional Review Boards / Research Integrity & Compliance
FWA No. 00001669
University of South Florida / 3702 Spectrum Blvd., Suite 165 / Tampa, FL 33612 / 813-974-5638

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APPENDIX D:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Q1:	*Are you currently working entirely remotely?*
Q2:	*How long have you been working remotely?*
Q3:	*How is your experience different working remotely versus in the office?*
Q4:	*What are the challenges resulting from the move to remote work?*
Q5:	*What are the benefits resulting from the move to remote work?*
Q6:	*How do you stay connected to colleagues?*
Q7:	*Do you believe the shift to remote work has changed your relationship with your colleagues?*
Q8:	*Do you believe the shift to remote work has changed your relationship with your supervisor(s)?*
Q9:	*Do you feel more or less secure in your position working remotely? Or, has your sense of security changed since going remotely?*
Q10:	*Has the experience working remotely changed your professional path and/or interests?*
Q11:	*How do you ensure you're communicating effectively while working remotely?*
Q12:	*If you had to describe your average daily mood, what one word would you use?*
Q13:	*How much time throughout the day would you estimate you spend having mediated conversations (virtual meetings, conference calls, etc.)?*
Q14:	*How do these interactions happen (via what media) (how often) (what times of day)?*
Q15:	*How do you balance your work and personal schedules?*
Q16:	*This completes my study questions, but I like to end our discussion to allow you time for any additional comments, thoughts, or questions regarding your experiences working remotely through the pandemic.*

APPENDIX E:

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Self-Identifying Demographic Qualtrics Questionnaire:
1. Which category below includes your age?
- 18-20
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older

2. Please indicate your Race.
- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander
- From multiple races
- Other (please specify)
- I prefer not to say

3. What is your gender?
- Female
- Male
- Other (specify)
- I prefer not to say

4. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
- Less than high school degree
- High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Graduate degree

5. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

- Employed Full-time (working a minimum of 32 per week)
- Employed, Part-time (working 32 hours per week or less)

6. What is your annual individual income?
- $0 – $9,999
- $10,000 – $19,999
- $20,000 – $29,999
- $30,000 – $39,999
- $40,000 – $49,999
- $50,000 – $59,999
- $60,000 – $69,999
- $70,000 – $79,999
- $80,000 – $89,999
- $90,000 – $99,999
- $100,000 or more

7. Please describe your Industry/Career sector (i.e., Education, Business, etc.)?

8. Please provide your current Job Title.

9. Please indicate your current Career status and the number of years in the workforce:
- Early (5 to 10 years of work experience)
- Mid (10 to 25)
- Advanced (25 or more)