



The Virtual Professor and Online Teaching, Administration and Research: Issues for Globally Dispersed Business Faculty

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Abstract: Changes in the manner in which universities are delivering education are revolutionary. Learning spaces are changing, online learning is increasing, the demand for more flexible learning continues to grow, and the skill set for academics is expanding. Recruitment and retention of academic staff to work in this type of context creates a range of challenges for universities. With a global shortage of quality academic staff, an ageing academic workforce and a younger cohort of casual academic staff looking to leave the sector, institutions may need to consider other ways of attracting staff beyond the traditional manner of resident faculty. One staffing model involves having permanent academic staff positions that are virtual. This case study reports on the experience of a professor in a university's business faculty working remotely in a foreign country. The experience of working virtually was successful across teaching, research and administrative dimensions. Reasons for this success related to the intrapersonal competencies and work preferences of the professor and the technology rich environment of the university. Maintaining communication richness with colleagues were noted challenges. Educational management and administration of these staffing arrangements offer new ways for universities interested in internationalizing their business.

Keywords: Virtual Faculty, Online Teaching, Telework, Internationalization, Distance Education

Résumé : Les changements dans la manière dont les universités offrent l'éducation sont révolutionnaires. Les espaces d'apprentissage changent, l'apprentissage en ligne augmente, la demande pour l'apprentissage plus flexible continue de s'accroître, et l'ensemble des compétences pour les universitaires est en pleine expansion. Le recrutement et la rétention du personnel enseignant à travailler dans ce type de contexte crée une série de défis pour les universités. Avec une pénurie mondiale de personnel académique de qualité, une main-d'œuvre universitaire vieillissante et une cohorte plus jeune du personnel académique occasionnel qui cherche à quitter le secteur, les institutions pourraient devoir envisager d'autres moyens d'attirer le personnel au-delà de la manière traditionnelle de professeurs en résidence. Un modèle de dotation implique d'avoir des postes de personnel académique permanents qui sont virtuels. Cette étude de cas rend compte de l'expérience d'un professeur à la faculté des affaires d'une université travaillant à distance dans un pays étranger. L'expérience du travail virtuel a réussi au niveau de l'enseignement, de la recherche et des dimensions administratives. Les raisons de ce succès ont été liées aux compétences intrapersonnelles et aux préférences de travail du professeur et l'environnement riche en technologie de l'université. Les défis relevés se situaient au niveau du maintien de la richesse en communication avec les collègues. La gestion de l'éducation et l'administration de ces dispositifs de dotation en personnel offrent de nouvelles façons pour les universités intéressées à internationaliser leur entreprise.

Mots clés : Faculté virtuelle, enseignement en ligne, télétravail, internationalisation, enseignement à distance

Introduction

The use of online educational delivery in universities has increased dramatically. Changes in the learning needs of students, increased competition, economic circumstances and advances in technology have forced universities to re-strategize their operations in order to maintain



educational and economic value (Flyvbjerg, 2011). In the United States, for example, it is estimated that 60 per cent of post-secondary institutions have online offerings and that the proportion of higher education students currently taking at least one online course is at an all-time high of 34 per cent (Babson, 2014).

Business schools embraced online learning early (Hawawini, 2005) and use this technology to bring together networks of learners and academic staff from around the world. Business schools can offer their lectures online, hire very talented instructors, and situate the learning by integrating it with extra-curricular work-related experiences (Murphy, 2013). The technology can also enable business schools to respond to the globalization of business education, as well as deal with the growing shortage of qualified faculty by using instructors in different locations from the parent university.

All of these changes in higher education have led to academic staff having to change the way they teach and design courses in multi-media environments. For example, in a review of the literature it is noted that much of the research to date on online instructors has focused on attitudes, practices, barriers, motivations and requirements for teaching online (Stewart, Goodson, & Miertschin, 2010b). However, very little research is available on what it is like to work in a virtual capacity as an online faculty member - geographically separated from the employing university.

Dialogue about e-working in universities has received little formal attention in the literature (Beadle, 2015). The mere possibility of being a full-time virtual faculty member in a foreign university flows from changes in learning spaces and the advances in educational technology over the past decade. Modern learning spaces enable students and faculty to interact beyond the campus through what Calhoun called then, a distributed cognitive network (Calhoun, 2006; Thomas, 2010). The drivers of technology and an economic structure pushing globalisation is also creating labour displacement and an emerging landscape for remote work (Dawson, 2013). Virtual learning spaces need to be viewed in the same light as physical learning spaces (Graetz, 2006) with strategies put in to place to support work in both of these environments (Calhoun, 2006; Thomas, 2010). University administrators need to create policies that enable the virtual educational ecosystem to evolve (Calhoun, 2006).

Strategies such as virtual academic staffing, based around the world, is one possibility to support this shift in teaching, student engagement, learning spaces and globalization. Yet this type of innovation is not anchored in the administration, management and leadership regulations of the organization (Flyvbjerg, 2011). For example, in the author's own university, its digital teaching strategy notes that it needs to have more flexible international employment arrangements as this would enable it to operate in different global time zones. To do this, however, requires streamlining its human resource processes and overcoming many complex regulations.

The changes that are taking place in e-learning are likely to have a profound impact on staffing and hiring practices in institutes of higher learning. These changes are disruptive to the ways in which universities traditionally have conducted their business (McIntyre, 2014; Nicoll, 2013) and require different ways of managing how academics work (Bexley, James, & Arkoudis, 2011).

Given the changing landscape for academic staff and the implications for educational management, administration and leadership in universities, the aim of this research was to explore the impact of working as a virtual professor in a business faculty (in a different country than that of the parent campus). A review of the literature on barriers and enablers leading to the adoption and diffusion of e-learning in universities noted that there is a gap in research, particularly around institutional structures that support virtual learning environments (Singh & Hardaker, 2013). This research contributes to the literature on

technology enhanced learning, and the changes facing the academic workforce as a result of increasing digital delivery of education.

Literature Review

Universities need highly qualified academic staff comfortable working with technology. However, finding such individuals, particularly those with the ability to teach and design courses online, is becoming difficult in an environment of global faculty shortages (Bexley et al., 2011). Universities may need to look outside their cities and possibly their borders to find such staff. Looking for permanent faculty who live offshore, and whom wish to remain offshore, requires “a reconfiguration of the way academic work is conceived, valued, and rewarded through recruitment, confirmation and promotion processes” (Bexley et al., 2011).

There is a range of pressures facing higher education which suggest that looking for permanent faculty that reside offshore may be necessary. As this case study is situated in an Australian university, some facets of the sector in this country are described, which may parallel other countries. In a large-scale survey of 5,525 Australian academics across 20 universities, a variety of pressures were found to exist (Bexley et al., 2011). First, there is a large cohort of academic staff who are ageing and facing retirement. Second, there is a substantial proportion of academic staff with medium to long-term intentions to either move to another overseas institution or leave the sector all together. Further, those intending to leave the sector are highest in the younger age cohorts. Third, while Australia has experienced a net increase in academic staff through migration over several decades, in terms of permanent migration the margin is quite narrow. Hence, an ageing workforce, impending retirements, reductions of younger academic staff in the sector who have completed their doctoral studies, and poor inflow migration of offshore academic staff, combined with the need for greater workforce participation as student participation grows, suggests some radical new approaches for the recruitment and retention of Australian faculty. One untapped resource is the casual labour pool. They represent a significant proportion of the Australian academic workforce and will become an important pool of labour for universities in the future - particularly in light of looming faculty shortages brought on by retirement (Bexley et al., 2011; May, Strachan, & Peetz, 2013).

It is also in the best interests of the university to have staff teaching courses (online or otherwise) who are part of the faculty. While using casual staff may be cheaper, there is evidence suggesting that casual staff perform less well than permanent staff in areas critical to student engagement and that relying excessively on such staff leads to higher undergraduate drop-out rates and fewer graduations (Ehrenberg, 2012; Umbach, 2007).

If employment of virtual academics is going to become a reality, there is very little literature on the experience of full-time permanent faculty working from locations other than the parent campus. In most cases, online courses and educational programs are still established by traditional universities using resident faculty who design and deliver courses (Stewart, Goodson, & Miertschin, 2010a) or contract staff (some of whom may live in the local area, inter-state or overseas).

One study (reported in two papers) describes the experiences of two off-site faculty who moved away from their parent campus (Stewart et al., 2010a, 2010b). The talents of these long serving staff was an important factor in enabling off-site relocation as the host university did not want to lose the organizational knowledge these individuals possessed. Faculty turnover in online courses can increase costs, delay adaptation and redevelopment and requires considerable faculty training and support (Green, Alejandro, & Brown, 2009). Hence, it is important that faculties consider off-site staffing models as a means of ensuring retention of highly qualified staff, in particular, those who enjoy working with technology.

Early research suggests that instructor behaviours and experiences are significant predictors of learning and satisfaction in Web based courses, and staff with talents for online teaching should be recruited and retained in these roles (Arbaugh, 2005). Self-discipline, strong time management skills, an ability to work without social reinforcement, a strong grasp of their content field, and capabilities in instructional design and technological literacy are additional important pre-requisites (Stewart et al., 2010a, 2010b).

Stewart and colleagues note that administrative support at all levels is also required. For example, human resource departments must be able to facilitate payroll and benefits and enable staff to fulfill regulatory training requirements from a distance, including occupational health and safety issues (Ferreira & Strydom, 2015).

Instructional design and technical support staff must also be available to assist staff from a distance. Communication systems are essential (Stewart et al., 2010a, 2010b) such as instant messaging, email, meeting tools such as 'Gotomeeting' 'WebEx', 'Hotseat' 'SKYPE' and 'Blackboard Collaborate' to enable off-site staff to remain in the communication loop with students and colleagues. Off-site faculty have to make an extra effort to maintain presence in their work unit (Stewart et al., 2010a) as faculty indicated in one study a reluctance to lose their personal connection with the university (Green et al., 2009).

Parallel research in teleworking provides an additional perspective to the virtual academic role. Telework is the use of information communication technologies to enable workers to perform duties remotely in accordance with a work agreement (Ye, 2012). The success of telework is contingent on a technical infrastructure within an organization that enables teleworkers to complete their work and requires good local and wide-area networks, high speed interaction, virtual private networks, online support and hardware-software management (Ye, 2012).

While teleworking appears to have increased over the years there are mixed results and less enthusiasm across organizations (Harker-Martin & MacDonnell, 2012; Ye, 2012) and cultures (Dockery & Bawa, 2014; Ferreira & Strydom, 2015). In terms of telework outcomes, job satisfaction was reported to be higher in teleworkers than office workers even though social isolation was reportedly higher in the former group (Grant, Wallace, & Spurgeon, 2013; Morganson, Major, Oborn, Verive, & Heelan, 2010). A recent meta-analysis of telework suggests that there is a small but positive relationship between this type of work and organizational outcomes (Gajendran & Harrison; Harker-Martin & MacDonnell, 2012). It appears to increase productivity, secure retention, strengthen commitment to the organization and improve performance (Day & Burbach, 2011; Gajendran & Harrison; Harker-Martin & MacDonnell, 2012). Research on academics and e-technology reports that teleworking provides greater flexibility for academics, but can blur the boundaries in one direction with increases in work intensification and work intensity (Currie & Eveline, 2010; Dockery & Bawa, 2014).

Research linking telework, personality characteristics and identity have also been described in the literature (Clark, Karau, & Michalisin, 2012; Tietze & Musson, 2010; Ye, 2012). In the research by Clark et al (2012), 'agreeableness' was positively correlated with teleworkers. 'Emotional stability', in contrast was negatively correlated with teleworkers. Agreeable individuals tend to trust more easily, are more helpful and less competitive, which are attributes postulated to support virtual work. Individuals who prefer to work independently and who prefer to avoid the politics of working in traditional working environments were more inclined to telework, thus the inverse relationship with 'emotional stability'. Ye (2012) also emphasized the importance of using personality measurements to select staff for telework, citing attributes such as dependability, openness to experiences and challenges, and independence as key factors. Previous performance, trust, high level communication skills, time management and basic knowledge in the operation of computer and network applications were also considered to be important attributes for teleworker selection (Day & Burbach, 2011; Harker-Martin & MacDonnell, 2012; Pyoria, 2011). The shift to teleworking is an

emotional and value based proposition and staff selection into these schemes should consider broader criteria beyond just the technical and procedural perspectives (Tietze & Musson, 2010).

Method

A case study approach, in the form of a reflective practice inquiry, was the method used to explore the VP role. By doing so, it provides administrators with more evidence as to the real nature of telework in the university context for academics. Case study research is useful in investigating contemporary phenomenon in real life contexts (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2014) and has been a popular methodology in education for over twenty years (Stake, 1995). A case study approach enables reflection about the experience under study and is of value to others who read about the findings, especially those who have experienced (or may experience) similar situations (McKee, 2004).

Dewey's original work on the concept of reflection in education influenced Schon's seminal work on reflective practice (reflection-in-action and reflection-about-action) which provides a solid theoretical framework for this lifelong learning skill (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1991). The work of Kolb and Boud on experiential learning also adds rigour to the scholarship of reflective practice. Their work provides an framework which links reflection to theory building and future practice (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Kolb, 1984). Journal writing is also an important part of reflective practice (Boud, 2001; Kerka, 1996).

A useful methodology for framing one's reflective practice as an educator is described in the literature (Brookfield, 1995). The four reflective lenses of the Brookfield framework were used in this research to frame the outcomes of the VP role. The four reflective lenses encompass:

- autobiographies as teachers and learners
- the theoretical literature
- the experience of colleagues
- the experience of students.

A review of the theoretical literature (the second lens of Brookfield's framework) has been undertaken in the previous part of this paper. The other three reflective lenses follow. Throughout the VP experience a journal and portfolio of information were maintained to help reflect upon and document the autobiography and experience of working in a virtual environment. This ensured the process of critical reflection was incremental and ongoing and captured the essence of the experience (McAlpine & Weston, 2004; Oldland, 2011). The reflective inquiry encompassed one year.

The experience of colleagues was captured by inviting co-workers to comment on the role of the VP. They were asked to identify what they saw as benefits and challenges for having this role in the academic program. The experience of students was captured by interpreting official university course evaluation and teacher evaluation results. Both qualitative and quantitative data is collected in these voluntary and anonymous surveys, which occur at the end of each study period. Unsolicited emails from students about the performance of the VP were also included to capture the experience of students.

Reflection and Discussion

Teaching and Learning Autobiography

The faculty member in this study has a long-standing history of developing online course material and teaching online and was responsible for leading the development of a fully online MBA course. Nearly all of his duties, including meetings and doctoral student supervision could be completed online. The research of the faculty member is focused on peer coaching, professional development and online learning.

On a personal level, the faculty member has a preference for working with defined tasks and projects with clear time frames. This same individual has a high preference for working independently as revealed on personality testing (Briggs-Myers & Myers, 1995) and through analysis of career anchors (Feldman & Bolino, 2000; Schein, 1978). There is an affinity for working with educational technology and in online environments.

While the experience of working off-site was very positive it was not without its challenges. To expand the teaching and learning autobiography of the faculty member, a secondary framework was employed to categorize the experience into several domains (Stewart et al., 2010a). These domains include: important ground work, benefits, technology, communications, challenges, and curriculum instruction.

Important Ground Work

On reflection the ability to work off-site was enabled by having a long-standing history of good performance in teaching and research. Having credibility leads to trust and the administration's belief in the ability of the faculty member to perform their duties off-site (Grant et al., 2013; Stewart et al., 2010b). Senior leadership of the university supported the off-site working arrangement but it took considerable effort to convince them of the merits. They could see this sort of staffing model becoming more common in the future. Convincing the human resources department was more challenging, given quasi-legal barriers that had to be overcome. Obtaining medical clearance, compliance with work safety and ergonomic policies, and organizing insurance all needed to be in place.

The Head of School at the time was less supportive of the venture because of a desire to have a valued member of the team in close proximity. Yet, management support has been shown to be important to staff who seek a more flexible work arrangement (Yuile, Chang, Gudmundsson, & Sawang, 2012). There were concerns from the Head of School about precedent and the impact on other staff. This is not surprising given that there was a lack of an established contractual framework or culture for teleworking in the organization (Pyoria, 2011). However, having the support of the Vice-Chancellor's office and the Pro-Vice Chancellor's Office reduced the pressure on the Head of School. These concerns about precedent, loss of team proximity and perhaps loss of power and control were not unusual and have been identified in the literature (Pyoria, 2011; Stewart et al., 2010a).

On reflection, the VP exerted a considerable amount of effort over time to convince the various offices of the university that this employment model was positive. The VP has a long-standing and trusting relationship with different tiers of the university through committee work, university service, projects and teaching. The importance of trust in permitting telework has been identified across the literature as an important determinant (Day & Burbach, 2011; Harker-Martin & MacDonnell, 2012; Pascale, den Dulk, & de Ruijter, 2010; Pyoria, 2011).

Benefits

The main benefit for the university was the retention of the VP who had extensive organizational knowledge in the area of online learning. The benefit for the VP was the ability to work in a more flexible way - a benefit noted in the literature for staff who teach online and prefer autonomy (Grant et al., 2013). The flexible working arrangement also enabled an increase in perceived work-life balance. This outcome being noted in a study of public sector workers who reported an increase in perceived work-life balance when offered flexible work schedules (Yuile et al., 2012). The experience also elevated the skill level of the VP, as that person had to expand their abilities to work in a virtual environment, learn new technologies and put in to place practices that enabled mobility and a paperless work environment. Teleworking is seen as a strategy for more eco-friendly ways of working and reducing costs of operating an office environment (Pyoria, 2011). The nature of the virtual work also required other faculty to elevate their computer literacy skills as a result of having to interact with the

VP through technology. Such improvements in personal and organizational performance have been noted in a meta-analysis of teleworking (Harker-Martin & MacDonnell, 2012).

Technology

Technology was the most important aspect of being able to work off-site (Stewart et al., 2010a) and in hindsight was very straightforward to set up. Two computers, a tablet, and two microphone/speaker sets were all that was needed. Two sets were maintained in the event one of them ceased to function or were stolen. A portable printer and an external hard drive storage device to create additional data backups were also available. A VPN connection was available for the VP to access, save and upload corporate documents on the university servers. Shared folder technology on Dropbox was another way to collaborate with colleagues on common documents and to store data.

The main conference room at the parent campus was set up with a large wall computer screen, a wide angle web camera and two room speakers/microphones. SKYPE was used predominately to communicate with staff with newer technologies emerging to support communication such as WEBEx and HOTSEAT.

Communications

With the technology set up above it was easy to maintain contact with staff, students and the Head of School, although one had to learn to manage multiple dates and time zones when booking and attending meetings. This had some advantages for the university as the VP could interact in different time zones (Grant et al., 2013) more easily, especially interviewing international students wanting to study at the host institution. Web tools such as World Clock Time Converter were very helpful for managing these complexities. Monthly SKYPE meetings were held with the Head of School and participation in the School's various meetings took place via the technology set up in the main conference room. The VP did not feel any less supported by the Head of School and had a strong communicative relationship. One study exploring leadership effectiveness and communication found that physical distance had no influence on leader performance or communication effectiveness (Neufeld, Wan, & Fang, 2010) and this was the experience of the virtual professor.

Email was used in the standard way, to maintain communication with academic and professional staff. SKYPE enabled telephone-to-telephone communication, group conferencing and face-to-face communication at minimal cost. Communication with online instructors, in addition to the means above, was supplemented with an asynchronous discussion forum in a purpose built Blackboard site. Access to important talks by the Vice Chancellor or senior leaders of the university was facilitated by having these available as i-lectures through the university Echo360™ system, WEBEx and HOTSEAT. As the university is a technology rich environment with campuses overseas, the necessity to broadcast important leadership announcements was advantageous for the off-site faculty member. Corporate training was completed easily as nearly all of these programs are delivered online to staff through an online educational portal managed by the university's organizational development unit.

Challenges

The experience of working virtually and remotely was effective. However, there were challenges. For example, not all corporate documents could be completed online with a digital signature. One large faculty-wide committee, of which the VP was a member did not have virtual meeting technology as it was located in another part of the university. Since it was an advisory committee and largely responded to discussion papers and policy changes, the VP was able to forward his views to the secretary and chair of the committee so their input was not lost.

One major obstacle that was unanticipated was software/hardware malfunction. On two occasions the VP's main computer experienced software and hardware issues, which interfered with the VP's ability to complete their work. Through the corporate information technology service desk and remote linkage software, the information technology service team was able to repair the faculty member's software problem remotely via desk top sharing. The foresight to have a second computer in place was fortunate and having an institution that can provide this type of support is essential!

Curriculum Instruction

Over the course of the reflective inquiry, the VP taught four courses, using Blackboard as the learning management system. Blackboard was used as the learning management system and offered a complete package for providing synchronous and asynchronous learning, student grade management, evaluations using the rubrics tool, and assignment submission management through Turnitin. The same software was used for maintaining contact with all online MBA students and all academic staff through purpose-designed Blackboard spaces. Collaborate was used for synchronous sessions with online students and the email, announcement and discussion board tools provided comprehensive communication tools for maintaining contact and presence with the students. At one point during the year, the VP returned to the parent campus for one month to teach an intensive course. This time was also beneficial in maintaining collegial contact with faculty and administrative support staff.

Experience of Colleagues

The academics at the parent university were invited to share their views on the VP role. Four senior members of staff offered their views. Three of them noted that the presence created by the VP through regular email and communication at meetings was adequate. They had confidence in the VP being able to complete their required duties through remote means. One senior staff member was a co-supervisor of a Doctoral student with the Virtual Professor. The Doctoral student lived in another state from the parent university. Hence, the supervision was all virtual and the senior staff member at the parent university found the experience to be very good and no different from face-to-face supervision.

Three of the four senior faculty members who shared their views on the VP role noted how his absence impacted on informal communication networks within the school. This finding has been reported in the literature (Stewart et al., 2010a, 2010b) and focused effort must be put in place to ensure open communication when a team becomes more virtual (Ginsburg, 2009; Morganson et al., 2010). On reflection the VP recognized that this engagement would need to be increased when future virtual work was undertaken.

A new member of the academic staff joined the faculty and this new staff member was assigned the re-development of an online unit. They approached the VP for support given the VP's role as Online Program Leader. The VP was able to provide extensive support to the new staff member through ongoing email communication and SKYPE meetings. The VP's organizational knowledge of the environment helped this new staff member to navigate through many of the issues not necessarily embedded in policies or procedures around course re-development. The VP was surprised with the effectiveness of this engagement through virtual means considering the two parties had never met.

Experience of Students

Many of the same processes to maintain communication with the students and to review their work were unchanged. Hence, the relocation of the VP overseas did not have much of an impact on satisfaction as far as the students were concerned. Student satisfaction data was collected using the university's standardized course evaluation system – eVALUate (Oliver, Tucker, Gupta, & Yeo, 2008). To measure this satisfaction, students were given access to the university's standard survey three weeks prior to the end of the course. The survey was then

left open for four weeks before it closed. The survey was voluntary, anonymous and students were encouraged through a series of emails and notifications to evaluate their course learning experience.

Once the survey was complete, the controller of the course received a full report including quantitative metrics and qualitative comments. The university sets a quality benchmark of 80 per cent agreement, with 'agree' and 'strongly agree' scores combined, as the standard sought in the evaluation. Table 1 provides the evaluation scores for the VP's individual teaching performance for the online and blended units combined in both trimesters when the course was taught. As can be seen from the results, there was high satisfaction from the students for both the online course and the blended versions.

Table 1: Teaching Evaluation Report

eVALUate quantitative items	1st Trimester Percentage Agreement	2nd Trimester Percentage Agreement
Response Rate (per cent)	31.9	51.1
1. Appears knowledgeable in this subject area	100	100
2. Is enthusiastic in teaching this unit (unit = course)	100	100
3. Is well organised	100	100
4. Communicates clearly	100	100
5. Is approachable	100	100
6. Provides useful feedback	100	100
7. Is an effective teacher	100	100

Table 2 provides the evaluation scores for the overall course experience, independent of the instructor's teaching abilities, for both the online and blended units in both trimesters when the course was taught.

Table 2: Course Summary Report

eVALUate quantitative items	1 st Trimester Percentage Agreement	2 nd Trimester Percentage Agreement
Response Rate	70.2	74.4
1. The learning outcomes in this course are clearly identified	100	100
2. The learning experiences in this course help me to achieve the learning outcomes	100	97
3. The learning resources in this course help me to achieve the learning outcomes.	100	100
4. The assessment tasks in this course evaluate my achievement of the learning outcomes.	91	84
5. Feedback on my work in this course helps me to achieve the learning outcomes.	100	81
6. The workload in this course helps me to achieve the learning outcomes	97	97
7. The quality of teaching in this course helps me to achieve the learning outcomes.	100	100
8. I am motivated to achieve the learning outcomes in this course.	100	100
9. I make the best use of the learning experiences in this course.	100	97
10. I think about how I can learn more effectively in this course.	97	94
11. Overall, I am satisfied with this course.	100	100

Items 4 and 5 were lower in the second trimester the unit was offered (even though they meet the university's quality benchmark of 80 per cent agreement). The only thing that had changed across the trimesters was the introduction of a standardised grading rubric as part of an ongoing accreditation process. The rubric altered the usual manner of giving highly individualised feedback to the students to a series of checklists. While individual feedback was still provided, it was reduced significantly by the introduction of a rubric. There were also technical integration problems with the rubric and Blackboard in the second trimester the unit was offered. This may be why the lower scores were reported in the second trimester. There were no specific qualitative items from the students commenting on the VP's geographical location and the impact this had on their studies when these were reviewed. The comments

indicated a satisfied student cohort. The following two qualitative comments capture the essence of the students' satisfaction:

I found the unit very well paced, very engaging, permitted constant reflection of the learning, encouraged ongoing discussion/reflection with peers, enabled us to help each other work through issues/questions as we encountered them in the learning journey. The university, and *school* in particular, should be very proud of this unit and how it certainly has left me with a transformational feeling. Well done.

The course content was extremely varied, from Youtube videos, to various websites, to the textbook and iletures. Overall this enabled me to gain a broad view of the modules and really delve into the areas that I was interested in.

Final Reflections

The experience of working off-site as a VP was positive and the reflections describe the experience of working in a virtual capacity. In hindsight the experience of the VP working online, and the technological infrastructure of the university was very important for the success of such a venture. Individuals without experience teaching and working online would struggle walking into this type of role and this is confirmed in research on teleworkers (Ye, 2012). It is important to note here that there are two types of teleworkers, those who work at least half or more of their time at home and have a formal agreement to do so with their employer, versus those who do some work at home (Dockery & Bawa, 2014). It is the former category that this research describes. It is also important to note that the mix of virtual staff and onsite staff has a tipping point. People generally come to the office for social interaction and the productivity advantages of interacting with colleagues face-to-face (Rockmann, 2015). When too many staff are working virtually and /or offsite, people then choose to work at home because there is no point coming in to the office because they feel isolated. There is a tipping point (Mangelsdorf, 2016; Rockmann, 2015) in regards to how many staff can work virtually and the negative impacts this might have on a faculty culture. This verifies the main negative issue identified by academic staff related to the VP not being part of the informal day-to-day communication network. While the same academic staff noted that the VP performed his required roles dutifully, the loss of collegiality was felt. This again points to the need for virtual faculty to have strong communication strategies in place to ensure presence within the team (Ginsburg, 2009).

Where the faculty member has been an in-house member of staff for several years, trust and credibility are also important considerations (Stewart et al., 2010a, 2010b). Periodic visits to the campus were important for maintaining collegial networks, for meeting new staff and for maintaining a psychological connection to the home campus. Again, research on teleworkers confirms that social isolation can be a problem and strategies to combat this are important (Morganson et al., 2010).

One advantage of being offsite, however, was the need for on-site staff to upgrade their technology and virtual communication skills. Having to use SKYPE conferences, speaking in to microphones and monitoring presence through a web cam were just some of the skills staff had to develop to maintain communication with the virtual professor. This meant staff had to become comfortable using a head set, setting sound and audio on their computer and considering lighting effects with their webcam. These insights are helpful as they can be transferred to designing materials for online learning and synchronous teaching.

Not having access to informal hallway conversations also meant the VP could use this time in other ways. One such way was enhancing research productivity. An increase in organizational productivity has been noted in research on teleworkers when staff are offered flexible work schedules (Ye, 2012; Yuile et al., 2012). For staff with a low need for social reinforcement at work, a virtual working arrangement can be a strong facilitator for enhanced productivity. What this suggests is that positioning staff into virtual roles can be linked to

career anchors (Feldman & Bolino, 2000; Schein, 1978), personality dimensions of the staff member (Briggs-Myers & Myers, 1995; Clark et al., 2012; Mukherjee, Hanlon, Kedia, & Srivastava, 2012) and the nature of the role.

Conclusion

The explosion of technology over the past 10 years in higher education and the increasing use of online means to deliver education are producing phenomenal change in university patterns of work, just as it is doing in other organizations where telework is becoming more common. As education becomes even more globally connected, universities will need to consider additional ways of recruiting and retaining staff that will enable them to fulfill their vision and mission. While this paper does not argue that universities will still largely have in-house faculty located in the same city as the university, it does argue that virtual employment or telework is increasing around the world and universities will not be immune. This paper has described the experience of a senior off-site faculty member working within a virtual environment with evidence that this type of working arrangement can be very successful for universities.

Faculty, Heads of School and senior administrators in universities will hopefully find the insights described in this paper helpful to them when faced with the possibility of a virtual staffing arrangement. Very little is written on this concept although there are strong arguments for a radical rethinking of teaching methodologies at an institutional level to prevent its business from losing relevance in contemporary society (McIntyre, 2014). More research on this employment model would be useful to assist organizations to deal with the impact of technology on their operations. Research in faculties other than business and with staff hired directly into a virtual position who are not long-standing employees of the parent university would be useful.

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