

Making Sense of Crisis: Instructional Designers' Experiences with Emergency Remote Teaching

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Abstract

Following the transition to e-learning due to COVID-19, instructional designers (IDs) went into action to prepare faculty for distance education using new technologies and pedagogical approaches. The purpose of this qualitative study was to interpret how five members of an ID team at a U.S. higher education institution made sense of their experiences designing and implementing faculty-training courses to aid the emergency remote transition. Using sensemaking theory (Weick, 1988), this study explored their collective meaning-making process through collaborative multistep narrative and thematic analysis. The themes progressed on a storyline depicting their immediate action in response to the crisis, their felt emotions considering the challenges they encountered, their interpretations of collaboration and implementation, and their retrospective feelings of success. Implications of findings will contribute to continuity planning to inform future iterations of faculty-training courses as well as approaches to change and/or crisis impacting online instructional innovation within higher education.

Keywords: instructional design, faculty training, sensemaking, emergency remote teaching, online learning

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Following the abrupt transition to e-learning in the spring of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, instructional designers (IDs) went into swift action to better prepare faculty for online instruction using new technologies and pedagogical approaches (Bao, 2020; Kilgore & Diaz, 2020). A growing body of research has since examined how faculty experienced the shift to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) (Bryne et al. 2021; Marek et al., 2021; Quezada et al., 2020; VanLeeuwen et al., 2021), but less attention has focused on the faculty trainers who pivoted to designing instructional online teacher training (but see Brereton, 2020; Xie, Gulinna, & Rice, 2021, and Xie, Gulinna, Rice, & Griswold, 2021). Building a rich description of the experiences of ID teams is imperative given the potential for future ERT, creating the need for ongoing online and hybrid teaching training.

Indeed, the flexible virtual learning environment has become part of our academic canvas. Continuing the dialogue on faculty training and ID during COVID-19 (Brereton, 2020; Hart et al., 2021; Rausch et al., 2022), this qualitative study explored the experiences of an ID team as they designed and delivered emergency online training courses to faculty at a U.S. higher education institution. Unlike previous research, however, this study illuminates the felt experiences of individual design team members and how they made sense of the collective process. Their perspectives will bring deeper understanding to the ID process as impacted by ERT and how this sensemaking can contribute to continuity planning both in times of crisis and for more efficient preparation in general.

Literature Review

Online learning has increasingly become part of our educational landscape since the mid-1980's (Harasim, 2000) and IDs have played an important role as change agents to help transition faculty both pedagogically and technologically (Campbell et al., 2009; Tracey et al., 2014; Halupa, 2019). Research on quality ID for online instruction has highlighted a scaffolded approach that includes orientation, mentoring, and continued support (Vaill & Testori, 2012) and being responsive to faculty (Northcote et al., 2015). In their comparative qualitative case study of two models for ID teacher training, Scoppio and Luyt (2017) found that individualized teacher training and support was ultimately one of the most important components for helping instructors transition to online instruction. However, the levels of support that instructors require involves an extensive commitment of time (i.e., two months) to assist in building the course, reviewing and approving the course before its official release, and providing continued collaboration and follow-up with instructors. The extensive time commitment necessary to prepare for online instruction is not a novel finding and has been commonly noted across the field (Mestan, 2019; Scoppio & Luyt, 2017; Vaill & Testori, 2012).

Collaboration amongst various stakeholders has also been highlighted as a top priority for IDs (Campbell et al., 2009; Miglani et al., 2018) especially since training faculty to teach differently can be a nuanced and delicate process. Magruder et al. (2019) conducted a mixed methods survey study with 139 IDs on how they define their roles based on what they do and found that collaboration with faculty was the top response. Drysdale (2021), however, found that collaboration may be impacted by the organizational structure of ID. They used a qualitative multi-case study approach to explore the experiences of IDs at three different higher education institutions with varying organizational structures and found that IDs who were in centralized teams with academic reporting lines felt more empowered and respected by faculty. IDs who were in administrative lines, however, had less collaboration with faculty, were often positioned as tech support, and felt more devalued for their pedagogical expertise.

Collaboration is also improved by establishing clarity of roles and expectations to avoid conflict and/or inefficiency (Mestan, 2019). Institutions should not limit online support and instruction to a single group and should instead build collaborative partnerships across university units for better efficiency in times of crisis (Bouchey et al., 2021). Halupa (2019) also stressed the importance of collaboration from the beginning between IDs and faculty to avoid conflict and also mitigate faculty resistance to online instruction. They suggested greater attention to role differentiation and associated areas of expertise in terms of faculty content knowledge and ID online pedagogy and design knowledge.

Emergency Remote Teaching

In a normal term, IDs support and train instructors to convey their content effectively through various online platforms (Kumar & Ritzhaupt, 2017); however, during an emergency situation the task of transitioning faculty to teach online is a more immediate and truncated process. Hodges et al. (2020) used the term emergency remote teaching (ERT) to describe “a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances” (p. 6). While this specific term came as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, ERT as a concept is not unique to the pandemic crisis.

Following the Hurricane Katrina disaster, for example, Hartman and DeMatteis (2008) examined the narrative experiences of business students at the University of New Orleans, along with the researcher's experience as an instructor during this time, in response to their unexpected switch to remote learning. Few had ever experienced working in the online format and their narratives highlighted that establishing structure in the time of crisis through the online courses was critical in their transition. Students also felt that instructors' ability to pivot to remote learning and be flexible with online instruction were a top factor of success in their online learning. Similarly, the New Zealand earthquakes between 2010 and 2012 forced many teachers to switch to online instruction. Wright and Wordsworth (2013) collected survey data from 1,746 college students to measure what students valued from teachers during this period. In line with the previous research, they found that maintaining learning structure during chaos was considered of high importance by students along with instructors' level of adaptability and flexibility with online teaching. These localized experiences consistently supported the need for increased ID preparation and training for online instruction.

Despite the lessons learned from previous crises, the widespread impact of the COVID-19 pandemic caught many institutions and stakeholders unprepared and forced instructors at all levels of education to immediately switch their classes to the online environment without preparation. Faculty reported increased stress and workloads during ERT (Bidwell et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2020; Van Leeuwen et al., 2020) and Cameron-Standerford et al. (2020) found that faculty most frequently described their ERT experiences with the words: *challenging*, *concern*, *anxious*, *stressful*, and *relieved* (p. 5).

Not all faculty struggled with the transition to ERT, however, and earlier training predicted how easily and comfortably instructors transitioned their courses to the online environment during the initial months of the pandemic (Bryne et al., 2021; Jelińska & Paradowski, 2021). Worldwide survey studies from both Jelińska and Paradowski (2021) and Marek et al. (2021) found that instructors who had previous experience with remote teaching felt more prepared and were more engaged in ERT. Yet, in many cases, even faculty with previous online experience still were learning new technology or teaching methods (Johnson et al., 2020; Marek et al., 2021). Faculty felt that there should have had a “Plan B” ready for ERT since

learning various technologies and how to teach online “requires extensive planning” (Marek et al., 2021, p. 103).

Being prepared for crisis instruction also extends to the institutional level. In an interview study with 31 university chief online officers across the U.S., Bouchey et al. (2021) found that institutions that were already strong in online programming and collaboration across units before the pandemic were better able to pivot. However, the transition to ERT for less well-positioned institutions was much less efficient (Marek et al., 2021). With no end to the pandemic in sight, institutions moved into action to better prepare for the next instructional school year where all faculty would teach online. IDs were tasked to help faculty transition their courses to the online environment within a truncated period for preparation and execution (Johnson et al., 2020).

ERT ID Processes

Given the lack of time for substantial preparation (Marek et al., 2021), some literature related to ID has focused on the ERT methods and processes used by IDs (Rausch et al., 2022). Schrenk et al. (2021) reviewed the literature to determine best practices for online learning and Abramenka-Lachheb et al. (2021) documented their ID team's pedagogical approach to ERT with a step-by-step process to serve as a toolkit for other IDs during ERT. Labeling themselves as “first responders,” Abramenka-Lachheb and colleagues presented a triage system strategy to provide faculty support based on faculty need (p. 295). One of the greatest faculty needs that IDs have responded to has been a lack of online teaching fluency as well as instructors' ritualized face-to-face practices, which have proved challenging to overcome (Gonzalez & Ozuna, 2021). Some IDs have looked to specific pedagogical models to aid them in responding to these barriers.

Brereton (2020) used principles of backward design during ERT to introduce Zoom as an online instructional platform. Brereton found that while the emergency training was insufficient for developing expert online instructors, it was successful in preparing faculty on a limited broad level based on the circumstances. Xie, Gulinna, Rice, and Griswold (2021) instead examined how a humanizing pedagogical lens could help IDs better support faculty particularly regarding “emotional presence, community, accessibility, modality, and performance” (p. 342). To build a supportive community with their students in the seemingly isolated world of virtual learning, the six IDs in Xie et al.'s study focused on increasing engagement through multimodal courses, increased course accessibility and inclusivity, and the incorporation of humanizing assessment.

ERT Experiences of IDs

While a few studies have mentioned the experiences of IDs, little research to date focuses specifically on the felt experiences of IDs and how they made sense of the ERT training process. Existing research does point to how IDs viewed their roles as crucial for faculty training and that they felt personally responsible for ERT preparedness (Abramenka-Lachheb et al., 2021; Brereton, 2020) even when they did not necessarily feel prepared themselves (Xie, Gulinna, & Rice, 2021). Although some IDs “lacked a feeling of certainty and confidence that this quick pivot to ERT would work” (Abramenka-Lachheb et al., 2021, p. 304), these same studies all reported feelings of success given the time constraints in post-ERT reflections. Additionally, Xie, Gulinna, and Rice (2021) also found that some IDs felt positive about the ERT training sessions because they perceived faculty to have increased “interest in asking for and accepting assistance” from IDs (p. 79) and they felt hopeful that they would see an increase in respect for their profession. One participant, for example, mentioned that before the pandemic, faculty saw

IDs as evaluators of their courses, but following ERT, faculty began to see them as helpful resources instead. Bidwell et al. (2020) added that the 130 faculty they surveyed also saw IDs as a supportive lifeline during ERT in helping them get through the process. They quoted one participant as saying, “[the IDs] have talked me down from the ledge on multiple occasions” and another as “I have [the IDs] on speed-dial!” (p. 68). While these comments were from faculty rather than the IDs themselves, they provide anecdotal evidence of the level of support that IDs engaged in to help their faculty through the crisis.

Research has highlighted that IDs were “invaluable” in helping with instructional continuity during the transition to ERT (Bidwell et al., 2020, p. 66), but their experiences as they engaged in the rapid overhaul to online instructional training are important for gaining a deeper understanding of ERT from the ID perspective. The perspective of IDs will be instrumental as we move forward with preparing for future emergencies. Grounded in a constructivist paradigm, we looked to sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) as a frame to interpret how members of an ID team reflected on and made sense of their experiences designing and implementing faculty-training courses during the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis-created experience provides a unique opportunity for sensemaking to occur (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). By examining the experiences of the five individual members of the design team, this theoretical lens enabled us to find collective meaning in their sensemaking process to potentially inform future iterations of the faculty-training course as well as approaches to change and/or crisis impacting instructional innovation in higher education. The study was guided by the following research question:

How did an ID team make sense of their experiences during the design and delivery of a training course to support faculty in the abrupt transition to virtual instruction caused by COVID-19?

Theoretical Framework

Sensemaking theory provides clarity around how members of an organization retrospectively interpret and create meaning of shared experiences in times of change (Weick, 1988; Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is a collective process that initially occurs at the individual level, but then is further shaped by shared experiences and reflection. Scholars have used this theoretical lens in times of crisis to understand the social actions taken in immediate response to chaos and turbulent change (Christianson & Barton, 2020; Stephens et al. 2020; Stieglitz et al., 2018). Weick (1988) noted that particularly in times of crisis, action in response to the abrupt disruption of an organization’s typical routine becomes the impetus for sensemaking following enactment. Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) additionally highlighted the role of emotion in sensemaking in that it includes both felt and expressed emotions which may be perceived differently throughout the process of the change event as meaning is constructed socially.

Methods

This qualitative study looked specifically at the experiences of the five members of the ID team at a small university in the southeastern U.S. as they designed and implemented three one-week training courses during the summer of 2020 to prepare faculty for online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. We approached our inquiry using a Heideggerian phenomenological frame informed by sensemaking theory to understand the lived experiences of our participants during ERT. Our interpretations of the phenomenon drew upon the relational dimension of our own positionalities and roles in combination with a narrative thematic analysis to communicate “storied ways of knowing” (Riessman, 2005, p. 1).

Reflexivity

As qualitative researchers, we recognize that our positionality and subjectivity are part of how we approach research and construct meaning from data and we acknowledge that “we cannot separate ourselves from what we know” (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 104). Each of the five researchers on this project had direct experience with conducting or participating in online training across two different higher education institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. At her previous institution, Moreno worked with an ID team as a faculty trainer for ERT and Flood and Rausch both participated as faculty in ERT trainings. All three had taught in higher education for six to ten years. In their positions as IDs, Takahashi and Kluge provided an emic perspective to understand findings bringing a combined total of 22 years of ID experience.

Both our emic and etic experiences play an underlying role in this study, and we have been intentionally conscious of our subjectivity. Furthermore, the two methodologists on the research team (Moreno and Flood) came to the project from different institutions and while they were familiar with the general context of online ID in light of the pandemic, they were able to approach the study with outside perspectives. Throughout the study, they reflected on their own experiences as faculty and as a faculty trainer during ERT in triangulation with the collected data and construction of the narrative.

In addition to our reflexivity, we employed other qualitative strategies for trustworthiness including a clear description of our methodological process, collaborative peer review as we interpreted the data, intentionality with searching for and highlighting negative cases, and member checks with participants after the findings were written.

Participants

This study focused on the experiences of one ID team and therefore used convenience sampling to recruit the five team members. The team included three IDs who were primarily responsible for developing and leading the faculty training program along with two leadership members in academic affairs who oversaw the team efforts and contributed big picture decisions on topics such as content leveling, training duration, and mix ratio of course design and technology. While all five participants had extensive experience in different capacities in higher education (5, 17, 20, 31, and 33 years), as a team they were still relatively young. The two leaders had collaborated with the ID team for one and one and a half years, respectively, and one of the IDs had joined the group less than two years before. The other two IDs, however, had been in their roles for 17 and 20 years. Three participants identified as male and two as female, but to ensure anonymity in such a small team, we gave each participant a gender-neutral pseudonym: Taylor, Cameron, Tristan, Kris, and Casey.

Context

While there were established online programs within the university and a designated office of instructional innovation that included online teaching and learning, up until the pandemic, many of the faculty at this university had not taught online or engaged in online instruction training. The university therefore supported the need to train faculty during the summer of 2020 in preparation for continued online instruction in the fall of 2020. The ID team also partnered with the university's informational technology (IT) team to develop the summer training program. The two collaborating groups were responsible for implementing different units across the whole training series. The IT team conducted the first session unit in a synchronous format and the ID members were responsible for units two and three, which were

delivered asynchronously. Each unit had a different theme with unit one relating primarily to technology, unit two toward instruction with technology, and unit three on instructional strategies and pedagogy. Due to high faculty participation, each of these units were offered twice during the summer of 2020.

Data Collection and Analysis

This research study and associated protocols were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. We developed an IRB-approved semi-structured interview protocol with 14 exploratory questions that focused on the design and implementation of the faculty training sessions and how the ID team members retrospectively made sense of their experiences. Rausch conducted the individual interviews with each of the five members of the ID team following the conclusion of the 2020 summer training sessions. The interviews were conducted virtually via the online Microsoft Teams platform and recorded for transcription purposes. The recordings were deleted following transcription. We also collected a six-page artifact written by the ID team that detailed an outline of the training process for ERT faculty development.

We analyzed the interview transcripts and artifact data using a collaborative multistep narrative and thematic process to understand the shared experiences of the individual participants through "common thematic elements across research participants and the events they report" (Riessman, 2005, p. 3). Riessman (2005) described this analytic typology as narrative analysis that is thematic in nature (p. 2). The narrative story is organized and communicated through illustrative themes and in doing so, thematic analysis contributes to the interpretation of the story. Braun and Clarke (2012) added, "Through focusing on meaning *across* a data set, [thematic analysis] allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences" (p. 57). Our narrative analytic process was strengthened by making meaning from our participants' collective experiences.

We first organized the data on NVivo software and then reviewed the transcripts together, talking through the developing story and writing memos throughout the process. One of our memos started with, "We are seeing this come together as more of a narrative of themes where we tell the story of how this process came together and played out" and we continued to memo the various plot sections of the interrelated data. In the second read-through, we coded the data guided by our research question. We inductively derived codes from the data using both an in vivo coding method as well as descriptive codes to tag the data. Following our multiple rounds of collaborative coding, we then grouped our codes into larger thematic categories noting negative examples across the categories. We created a code map to organize and label our themes and then returned to the transcripts for another read-through to recontextualize the themes along a narrative plotline. Our final stage of analysis overlapped with our writing process as we returned to our theoretical framework to make sense of our categories and develop our narrative of findings. Throughout our analysis we also reflected on our own experiences as part of understanding the overall phenomenon.

Findings

Guided by our research question and framed by sensemaking theory, we found that while the five participants had varying individual reflections, overall themes produced a collective narrative of their shared experiences, what they encountered and enacted, and how they interpreted the outcomes of the faculty training course. These themes progressed on a storyline depicting their immediate action in response to the crisis, their felt emotions in response to the

challenges they encountered, their interpretations of collaboration and implementation, and their retrospective feelings of success.

“You Better Have It Built When They Get There”

The team consistently described approaching the design of the training program as going into crisis mode and “mitigating the crisis,” as Kris stated, for the faculty within a short period of time. Indeed, Tristan reflected on their initial approach as going into “a crisis mode that required some crisis-management thinking that was supportive of faculty, so it gave them a way forward.” Yet, to do so was a demanding task for those involved. The team members used phrases like “horrific,” “a terrible thing,” and “the cards that were given to us” to explain their experiences. Taylor candidly described their initial realization of what they had to do as:

We were all in this “oh shit, what are we going to do?! Situation” and that’s when you’re just like “here’s what we’re going to do, here’s how we’re going to do it”—just like, all hands-on deck, right? There’s no point in complaining, it’s just [how it is].

Tristan referred to the crisis as the “storm” the team had found themselves in and, like Taylor, juxtaposed it against the necessity that the work had to happen. Tristan could not fathom leaving the transition to online learning up to faculty to navigate alone:

I could not live at peace without providing faculty with opportunities to find a way forward. To ask them to do that absent of sort of a unique, if not additional support, just seemed to be almost criminal. It was just unfair.

Despite the team’s collective sense of duty in helping the faculty navigate the crisis, they found themselves slipping into survival mode as they became overwhelmed with the quick turnaround, compounding factors, and overall workload. Taylor voiced it as “a lot of the ‘outside-of-our-control’ factors and stress levels [crept] in and it just sort of turned into a survival thing.” This perception of the consuming nature of the task was also mentioned by Kris and Casey who respectively referred to their experiences as “not sustainable” and that “we wished we had more help because it was—gosh—it was a lot.” Kris further painted the picture of “the tremendous amount of work” the team found themselves doing:

I was working 60–70-hour weeks all summer . . . The other people on the team . . . were working so hard all of the time and you know, so really, it was just getting it done. And the only way to get that amount of work done was to cut into your personal time in a significant way, at least for me. So that was probably the bumpiest part, you know, it had to be done. You tell people you’re going to build it and they show up, you better have it built when they get there.

The limited time frame proved to be one of the team’s greatest challenges, which was then heightened by contributing factors related to program design.

Design Obstacles

The team also experienced internal institutional obstacles that contributed to their collective sense of chaos and uncertainty. These issues included concerns with bandwidth, accessibility, IT security, and general infrastructure related to technology. Cameron provided a glimpse into some of the challenges:

At the same time that our faculty had not actively engaged in online teaching, our institution’s infrastructure was not set up to handle it. So, I needed to make sure that the Wi-Fi connection was significantly improved in all buildings because we anticipated not only the faculty would be using greater bandwidth but that students would be clustering

in those buildings to use it. So, significant upgrade in that. Secondly, we needed to make sure about accessibility and that we were meeting Federal Accessibility standards which meant that many, many more of those classes were going to have to be transcribed and the automated services that are used to transcribe these had to be enhanced so we had to make investments in additional hours to be able to have that transcription process go through. We also needed certain technologies to be approved . . . So, throughout a lot of different systems we had to go back and do additional reviews and augmentation so that technology would be ready and capable of handling the added load.

Despite these challenges, team members felt supported by the institution itself, which helped them move forward with their task. Kris stated, “the institutional infrastructure was very supportive. The provost was extremely supportive of the effort and was behind it in every way [and] the institution was financially supportive in incentivizing faculty to participate.”

The team experienced other hurdles related to role clarity, implementation of processes, and issues related to communication and coordination. Taylor articulated that, at times, the program design was hindered by the lack of time to adequately develop a systematic approach:

I think there was a lot of like, “oh, well, I was going to do this,” “well I did this already and . . .,” “well, I thought we were doing this that way now,” and “well, it’s that way now” . . . What’s important to me is to make sure everybody knows what the hell they need to do and by when, especially when there’s . . . a crunch sort of thing going on? And then . . . follow through, you know! Like, don’t make last minute changes, please? Or if you do, make sure they’re communicated to all involved parties.

Casey attributed this to the “rush at the beginning to make decisions . . . without us having all the information that we could to make the best decision possible.” Kris, on the other hand, had a more positive view of the constant state of flux the team found themselves in and understood it as necessary for improvement:

Everybody was working very hard and everybody wanted to get this right and because of that, things kept changing. People kept getting different ideas about how we could make it better if we just did it “this way” or, um . . . “oh, well, no, let’s assess this way,” so there was a lot of iterations and changes going on and so . . . things changed a lot and I think, you know, the changes that we experienced as the project unrolled, probably each one contributed to making it better. But things were constantly changing and in a state of flux.

Regardless of how team members viewed the continual changes as frustrating or simply necessary, they contributed to how the team experienced the design process as both unpredictable and chaotic.

“It Wasn’t for Lack of Effort”

In line with their experiences designing the program, the team members continued to navigate issues with concordance, but this time across institutional teams. The team further faced challenges trying to keep up with the unexpected high level of faculty participation. Although there was some overlap in the design and delivery of the instructional units, the delivery phase elicited different perspectives from the team members as they articulated what they experienced.

Coordinating Across Institutional Teams

Having two teams responsible for managing different units sometimes created a lack of congruence given the limited time to collaborate. Casey explained:

I think we could have coordinated that effort a little bit better. But again, when you have different teams participating in that—especially the first time that we worked together to deliver such a big training—I mean we're going to have things that we can work out and improve. So, I think that's a good experience for us in coordinating with a different team, outside of [our office], to deliver this type of training.

Taylor agreed and added further insight that the circumstances of the crisis were at the core of their collaboration issues: "There was a huge gap and mismatch [between the session units] because we didn't coordinate with them very well and it wasn't for lack of effort but just circumstances."

Kris likewise noted, "It was kind of hard . . . because we didn't always know what IT was going to do," but then went on to further explain the nuances of delivering a program through two different institutional teams:

I think we collaborated and worked very well with IT, but . . . then there's the fact that the technology training is under IT and the instructional training is under Academic Affairs, and so that stuff really overlaps a lot and is separated structurally and that can be challenging. And I think everybody did a great job working together and we've continued to grow our relationships collaborating, but, you know, it would be easier if structurally we were more integrated. Or, maybe not structurally, but the processes and procedures that go along with the roles of IDs and [IT] were more fluid.

Cameron instead discussed the collaboration with a forward-thinking positive lens:

[We] actually forged a better relationship . . . so that we worked cooperatively and that cooperation in terms of ongoing training has continued throughout this semester. We have an ongoing series now that is offered at least 6–8 trainings on technology, additional trainings on tenure and promotion, additional trainings on research, so there is so much more faculty training going on now than we ever had.

Cameron felt their experiences paved the way for stronger collaboration across institutional units.

Responding to Faculty

In addition to the challenges (or successes) related to collaboration, the delivery of the training courses forced the team to serve as direct points-of-contact for the faculty members enrolled in the courses. Casey described the work related to responding to faculty questions and discussion boards: "We saw a lot of faculty [members] engaging and just asking great questions, coming up with great suggestions." However, the high volume of faculty interaction created challenges related to team member workload. Casey mused, "how do you go through 50 comments that were posted since the last time that [you] checked the boards, right?" to elucidate the deluge of work that resulted from faculty interaction within the training units. Kris shared that "At the end of the first day there were . . . 250 plus posts from faculty in the discussion board and I was just astonished." Kris continued:

Even though each session was short and focused just for a week, it was very challenging, those faculty who elected to participate in the discussion boards participated at a very high level. We were having hundreds of posts per day, especially in unit 2 and we would need to read all those posts to make sure there weren't any questions that they needed us to specifically respond to.

For the synchronous units, the amount of work that resulted from faculty engagement was similar. Tristan recalled that “there weren’t enough people to respond to all the questions in real time.”

The ID team also included faculty Q&A boards where they encouraged participants to leverage their own expertise to help each other, but the ID team still had to sift through the questions to make sure they were all answered. Even though the team members were “excited” to have faculty be so responsive to the training program and to each other, their team simply did not have enough staff to balance the level of engagement.

“Overall I Feel Satisfied”

Following the conclusion of the training modules, the design team members expressed general feelings of positivity regarding the delivery of the sessions, which came as a surprise to them given the constraints brought on by the crisis. Optimistic descriptive words such as “fulfilling,” “pleased,” and “very happy” were more prevalent in their discussions about the overall success and impact of the program. Casey and Kris both communicated a sense of achievement in better preparing faculty to teach online. Casey reflected, “And the fact that this training was helping so many faculty . . . this to me, was the most fulfilling part of this entire project.” Casey also described how the team had been worried that the faculty would have been critical of their efforts but was happily surprised to learn that they instead found the trainings helpful.

We were actually expecting more criticism, right? And we did not get a lot of that from faculty, which was, I guess a good surprise in the sense that, you know, faculty are telling us that it was good training. So, that was a really, really good surprise for us.

Kris explained that “the most important thing was to meet the faculty needs” and felt that this goal was accomplished by the way they laid out the training program for all skill levels with training on technology, course design, and how to teach online. Despite all the challenges presented by the pandemic, Kris concluded “overall I feel satisfied given the constraints we had.”

Not all of the team, however, seemed to have the same concluding feeling of satisfaction. Taylor was more critical of the overall product, but felt it was a great starting point for continued development. Taylor stated:

Was the program perfect? Heck no! Will it ever be? No. But we can make it better over time. I think that ultimately the final product was much better quality, [but] I tend to see the flaws . . . some of the synchronous sessions that were delivered were exceptionally well received and that was a highlight. So, if we could focus on “how did they do that?” and then “what can we replicate to make it better in the future?” [then] that’s great!

Despite Taylor’s more critical framing of the end result, Taylor still expressed a positive outlook toward future iterations of the program.

The faculty’s level of engagement with the delivered content unexpectedly became an important marker of success for the design team. The team members reflected that they were “pleased” as Tristan noted with how much the faculty engaged with the courses particularly in the discussion boards. Kris articulated, “Faculty participated in [the discussion boards] at such a high level that it blew my mind . . . I was just astonished. I had never expected faculty to engage at that level and that was the most surprising thing.” Casey added, “the number of faculty that engaged in the discussions, that to me, was . . . gosh, we were so excited.” This created a feeling of accomplishment that on some level seemed to temper the challenges they had faced during the actual delivery of the sessions.

Contrasting Emotions as Sensemaking

Nevertheless, the participants vacillated in how they made sense of their experiences, oftentimes within the same breath. Indeed, Kris juxtaposed the positive and the negative in the same statement: “It was fine. It was a bit overwhelming.” Kris continued, “It’s not sustainable, it’s not something I feel like we could do all the time, but it was fine for what we needed to do this summer.” Casey also remarked on the simultaneous overlapping of contrasting emotions in reference to the overwhelming amount of work they had to do to stay on top of the faculty comments and questions. Casey stated, “that’s something that was . . . a negative by-product, but at the same time positive because we had a lot of faculty [members] engaging.” Taylor outwardly reflected on this negative versus positive contrast stating, “I’m trying to think of not just negative things but good stuff.”

Taylor further commented on the temporal arc of their experience from extreme challenges to feeling surprised that it all came together: “I was surprised at how . . . this is from then till now, from that perspective. Things have improved a lot, from that perspective actually. It was kind of a horrific experience at the time.” Casey echoed this feeling of having made the best of it:

To me, it was really creating the best product possible, given the time frame that we had, right? We knew it was probably not going to be perfect, um . . . you know, but we really did our best to do the best training possible for faculty, given the timeframe that we had.

Despite the efforts involved in designing and implementing the training program, the team members came away feeling pleased with what they had accomplished.

Discussion and Implications

In response to our research question, the findings highlight the ID team’s felt experiences along a narrative timeline as interpreted through sensemaking theory. Given that sensemaking is a process that happens in retrospect that involves individuals ordering, rationalizing, and symbolically assessing the preceding events (Weick, 2001), this research study opened up space for our participants to work through their experience in relation to ERT. Through our combined narrative and thematic analysis, we were able to further make sense of their individual perspectives as part of a collective story. That story highlighted creating order out of chaos, coming together despite disconnects related to infrastructure, sacrificing for the collective good, and, ultimately, completing a task that was once thought nearly impossible.

As other researchers have reported (Bao, 2020; Cameron-Standerford et al., 2020), the crisis created a survival-type of response that was immediate, on-the-fly, and overwhelming for the ID team. Yet, they made sense of their situation through a shared perception of a collective willingness to help faculty and students get through it. They knew the faculty and students needed the support, and that they were the ones who had the expertise to do it—a sentiment that was reported by other IDs during ERT (Abramenka-Lachheb et al., 2021; Xie, Gulinna, & Rice, 2021). This sense of duty required overcoming challenges and obstacles but resulted in the design and delivery of a product that helped to ameliorate faculty stress by improving the online delivery of courses. Like other IDs, one of the greatest challenges for this team was the truncated amount of time (Johnson et al., 2020). Given that best practices for quality design highlight having ample time (Marek et al., 2021; Scoppio & Luyt, 2017), it makes sense that this was a major issue for the team not only for wanting to develop a quality training, but also in terms of sheer stress for the rapid pivoting and looming deadlines. The unsustainable stress and workload

for the small team illuminates the reality of working in crisis mode and supports the need to prepare in advance for future emergencies.

Despite the challenges and working harder than they ever had “in their lives,” they were happy with the result and were surprised at how positively the faculty reacted. As reported by other IDs (Brereton, 2020; Xie, Gulinna, & Rice, 2021), the participants in this study came away from their experience ultimately feeling positive that they met the needs of their faculty and they succeeded in engaging them in ID. Part of this positivity may have also been related to the elapsed time between the trainings and the interviews as was the case with Brereton (2020) who noted feeling less critical and more proud of their work after having some distance from the training. Additionally, the team felt supported by their institution, and they recognized that having institutional infrastructure during ERT was crucial, a point also emphasized by other scholars in the field (Migliani et al., 2018; Northcote et al., 2015; Xie, Gulinna, & Rice, 2021). Despite these positives, the process of implementing an ERT training program in such a truncated timespan was not sustainable for this ID team; we argue that by addressing certain elements now, the process could be made more tenable in future iterations.

Considering Roles and Collaboration in Preparing a Plan of Action

The ID team found confusion with role clarity amongst themselves to be detrimental to efficient design and implementation. While role clarity has been discussed in the literature, it has focused on role clarity between IDs and faculty (e.g., Halupa, 2019; Magruder, 2019), but not within ID teams themselves. This finding implicates the need for a strong plan of action that includes role delegation to help mitigate confusion during ERT. Teams should also be intentional in times of crisis by explicitly assigning roles and tasks prior to the design stage.

Another challenge seemed to be working with two teams from different fields, which scholars have noted is critical in creating a smooth experience (Migliani et al., 2018; Northcote et al., 2015). Whereas this collaboration might be considered positive and desired in other situations, it was a challenge when there was not enough time to coordinate together. The result was a lack of cohesiveness between the separately prepared units. Chief online officers in Bouchey et al. (2021) also argued the need for more collaboration across units for improved institutional efficiency during ERT: “isolating expertise in online operations among a single set of people was not good for institutional efficiency” (p. 37). Mestan (2019) confirmed that a lack of collaboration across units is an issue that should initially be addressed by the institution who can help develop more fluidity between units that tend to overlap, e.g., ID and instructional technology. In creating a plan of action, teams should also highlight potential crossover points with other units with the intention to initiate and build early collaboration and communication.

Thoughtful consideration as it relates to putting in appropriate structures to help alleviate these issues related to disconnected and/or decentralized units also recalls Drysdale's (2021) assertion that:

Institutions that are restructuring or building new ID teams implement centralized structures with academic reporting lines for their teams. The benefits of both centralization and academic reporting lines are clear: better advocacy and empowerment, better alignment with the pedagogical work of both designers and faculty, and less role misperception for IDs. Structuring these teams toward empowerment and better definitions of their roles as pedagogy experts may help them sustain their leadership on the initiatives they led, to great effect, during the COVID-19 pandemic. (p. 73)

Considering roles both within an instructional team and across units can lead to more cohesive units and streamline processes. Furthermore, it is important to interrogate current structures and how they factor into enabling or preventing efficiency for ID teams.

Managing Responsiveness to Faculty

Strong faculty participation created conflicting emotions for the ID team. They were elated that so many faculty were engaged in the learning process and that they were able to help support the faculty in their transition to ERT. At the same time, they were overwhelmed in trying to respond to everyone particularly regarding answering questions and troubleshooting. While they were motivated to be responsive because they knew the faculty needed them (see also Bidwell et al., 2020), they found themselves working to the point of exhaustion to keep up. Brereton (2020) likewise struggled to be responsive enough to their trainees and felt they were not successful in doing so within the ERT context. However, some teams foresaw this and created a plan of action to manage the overwhelming need from faculty. Abramenska-Lachheb et al. (2021) understood that they would not be able to respond to everyone with the same attention and therefore had to create a triage strategy for being responsive first to those who needed it most.

Although the ID team in this study was ultimately able to respond to all the faculty, it caused the team members to work at all hours of the night logging 60 to 70 hours each week. Discussion boards played an important role in the exchange of information and troubleshooting, but it was too much to manage for the small team even when they had faculty share ideas in a collaborative discussion forum. We recommend that future IDs consider a co-construction model in faculty training, with more faculty empowerment as leaders within the training program. Faculty come to training programs with various levels of knowledge and experience (see Bryne et al., 2020; Marek et al., 2021) and IDs should involve faculty expertise in intentional ways. Future teams can outwardly remove the assumed hierarchy between instructor and student, by formally inviting all faculty participants to take on the dual role of expert and learner. In the case of this ID team, they still had to monitor the faculty collaborative discussion board, which continued to be time-consuming. IDs might consider creating teacher teams with faculty team leaders who would manage their team's discussion boards in addition to intentionally incorporating other strategies that will engage faculty as sources of knowledge. Using a co-constructionist model can build a stronger community as all the members become engaged in various ways to support each other. While this approach may conflict with Halupa's (2019) recommendation for role differentiation, we believe the ERT context creates the need for an "all hands on deck" design and would therefore benefit from a co-collaborative model where expertise from all stakeholders is leveraged. Such an approach aligns with Xie, Gulinna, Rice, & Griswold's (2021) call for a humanizing pedagogy within ID training during times of crisis.

Conclusion

Understanding how the ID team made sense of their experiences during ERT presents us with information to help guide future ID not only during emergencies, but also in more stable times to create a smoother process in general. As Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) explained, such sense-making evaluations during crisis "can have a powerful generative effect on organizations, enabling renewal, and energizing restorative action among their members" (p. 555). Knowing that a crisis-induced environment produces chaos, future program design would benefit from both a collaborative and systematic approach instituted outside of crisis. In the case of this

study's team, they have since commenced regular meetings with overlapping units to share ideas and work towards collaboration on faculty development projects. The institution has also formed a faculty development committee with ID, IT, and faculty development representatives to improve communication and continuity of professional development offerings and to identify faculty needs.

While there were several limitations to this study (e.g., one institution and ID team, a single interview design, and the non-iterative context itself caused by the sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic), the implications contribute to the emerging research on faculty training in the ERT context from a sensemaking perspective. As this study and others demonstrate (e.g., Bidwell, 2020; Xie, Gulinna, & Rice, 2021), IDs were crucial in helping faculty transition their courses during the ERT and should be considered part of the critical infrastructure of higher education institutions. Doing so may also help mitigate the stress experienced by this ID team. ID teams should advocate for, participate in, and even lead the planning for the next crisis. An instructional continuity plan should define roles of specific teams and their members during a crisis and include a process for how they should respond to different scenarios. Based on their experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, IDs can help their institutions formalize the process of moving all courses online when faculty and students cannot meet in person.

To be more prepared for the next crisis, our findings lead us to suggest that IDs should leverage the relationships they have cultivated with faculty, university administrators, and different units during ERT. They can also engage faculty as sources of knowledge in providing instructional assistance to peers for teaching in alternative modalities, such as encouraging faculty to facilitate submodules based on expertise and previous experience or lead small peer groups within the large training sessions. By bringing those different stakeholders together, IDs will be in a better position to not only develop a more comprehensive instructional continuity plan for their institutions but to also respond more efficiently and effectively to a future crisis.

Declarations

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The authors assert that approval was obtained from an ethics review board (IRB) at Augusta University, USA.

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