From Burnout to Belonging: A Sequential Mixed Methods Study of Comprehensive Support Structures for Online Adjunct Faculty

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Abstract

Online adjunct faculty often face significant challenges, including burnout, inadequate support, and organizational cynicism, which can result in poor student outcomes. Surprisingly in Phase 1 of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study, employing a quantitative correlational approach (n = 101) at one private online university, revealed exceptional outcomes that contradicted established literature patterns: high personal accomplishment scores (M = 38.01, SD = 8.21) with 82% in the high range, low emotional exhaustion (M = 7.56, SD = 8.74), low depersonalization (M = 2.95, SD = 3.47), and minimal organizational cynicism (M = 0.76, SD = 2.09), with significant inter-college variation (F(5,95) = 2.54, p = .033, η² = .12). Phase 2 employed a case study methodology with participants representing all institutional colleges: online adjunct faculty (n = 16), college leaders (n = 23), and support personnel (n = 13). This study sought to understand mechanisms behind these positive results. Grounded in Communities of Practice theory. Open-ended questionnaires were developed through document analysis using Cardno's systematic framework, which revealed comprehensive support mechanisms, including structured recruitment, extensive mentorship, ongoing development, and authentic relationship building. Thematic analysis identified four key themes that explain the quantitative outcomes: strategic leadership implementation, systematic support infrastructure, structural policy commitment, and genuine community building. Results provide evidence-based practices that enable institutions to achieve positive online adjunct faculty outcomes through systematic organizational commitment, offering a replicable framework for improving online adjunct faculty experiences.

Keywords: online adjunct faculty, faculty support, higher education, faculty development, Communities of Practice, sequential mixed methods

Introduction

The use of adjunct faculty in higher education has increased significantly, driven by declining public financing and institutional efforts to reduce operational costs (Danaei, 2019). Despite their critical role, adjunct faculty face unique challenges that negatively impact both their well-being and student outcomes, including burnout, excessive course loads, administrative work, inadequate training, role ambiguity, and limited institutional connection (Butters & Gann,

2022; Gelman et al., 2022). In Phase 1, quantitative correlational research conducted at a private online university yielded exceptional outcomes that contradicted established literature patterns: high Personal Accomplishment (PA), low Emotional Exhaustion (EE), low Depersonalization (DP), and minimal Organizational Cynicism (OC) among online adjunct faculty. These unexpected positive findings created an opportunity to understand the mechanisms behind these results. Phase 2 employed a qualitative case study methodology to investigate the institutional support mechanisms that contributed to the outcomes of Phase 1, using open-ended questionnaires with online adjunct faculty, academic leaders, and support staff from the same institution.

Problem Statement

Due to the increasing reliance on online adjunct faculty, higher education institutions must find ways to provide support that meets faculty needs while fostering engaged interactions with students and achieving quality outcomes (Gelman et al., 2022). The challenges are multifaceted. An online adjunct faculty member may struggle with skills required for effective online education delivery, inconsistently receive necessary preparation and development in impactful teaching practices, feel disconnected from institutional communities, and experience burnout that negatively affects their facilitation practices (Butters & Gann, 2022). The problem this study addresses is the gap between the documented challenges faced by adjunct faculty and the potential solutions demonstrated by an institution that exhibits high levels of engagement among its online adjunct faculty. Understanding the policies and people who comprise the support structures can provide best practices for broader implementation in higher education, resulting in an engaged online adjunct faculty workforce.

Purpose

This sequential explanatory mixed methods study explored support structures, policies, and practices at a private online university. Phase 1, the quantitative phase, demonstrated exceptional online adjunct faculty engagement outcomes. Following the quantitative findings, Phase 2 employed a qualitative case study methodology to investigate the perspectives of online adjunct faculty, college leaders, support departments, and institutional policies, to understand the comprehensive support mechanisms that contributed to the positive outcomes identified in Phase 1. The goal was to identify transferable best practices that bridge the gap between theory and practice, providing an in-depth understanding of how institutions can systematically support online adjunct faculty.

Literature Review

Phase 1: Quantitative Theoretical Framework

<u>Burnout</u>

Phase 1 quantitative research was grounded in established psychological and organizational theories. The study employed Maslach and Jackson's (1981) conceptualization of burnout as a psychological syndrome including three components: EE, DP, and PA. In terms of burnout, heavy workloads, job demands, limited autonomy, and emotional labor contributed to

faculty burnout rates (Yin, 2023; Lubbadeh, 2020). Adjunct faculty are particularly vulnerable due to job insecurity, isolation, multiple job holdings, and late course assignments (Coaston & Cook, 2017; de Araújo Leite et al., 2020). While online adjuncts may face slightly less stress, issues such as a lack of feedback and professional development contribute to burnout (McCann & Holt, 2009; Kara & Vildirim, 2022).

Cynicism

Burnout and cynicism are closely intertwined and can hurt faculty engagement and student learning. Based on Dean et al.'s (1998) framework, organizational cynicism was conceptualized as resulting from changes in employer-employee relationships and violations of psychological contracts (Grama, 2015). In higher education, rapid change, unclear communication, and administration-driven decision-making often led to cynicism, lower morale, and increased turnover (Chi et al., 2020; Yawer et al., 2019). Adjunct faculty, due to their marginal status, limited support, and exclusion from decision-making, are especially at risk (Yıldırım, 2022; Kim et al., 2019).

Contemporary Burnout Prevalence in Higher Education

Current data reveals stark realities of traditional adjunct faculty support. Recent statistics indicate that 35% of university teachers report feeling burned out very often or always at work, ranking them as the second-highest occupation for burnout (Alves et al., 2019). A comprehensive systematic review by Fernández-Suárez et al. (2021) analyzed the prevalence of burnout among 2,841 university professors from 2005 to 2020 and found consistently high levels, indicating a need for intervention. The review identified EE (23%), DP (16%), and PA (50%) as particularly problematic areas requiring institutional intervention (Fernández-Suárez et al., 2021).

Adjunct Faculty Challenges

Literature reveals three primary factors contributing to adjunct faculty dissatisfaction. Online adjunct faculty are hired into lower-paid roles with less job security, fewer benefits, and lower status than full-time faculty (Parsons et al., 2021). Many online adjunct faculty members reported that inconsistent compensation necessitated multiple institutional affiliations to achieve a sustainable income. Despite increased use of online adjunct faculty, temporary role perceptions create issues with feelings of belongingness (Swann et al., 2021). Kelley and Kilburn (2023) reported that online faculty dissatisfaction may lead to reduced classroom time, which can hinder students' success.

Phase 2: Qualitative Foundation Theoretical Framework

Communities of Practice

The Phase 2 qualitative investigation was grounded in Communities of Practice (CoP) theory, emphasizing collaborative learning and knowledge sharing among individuals with common interests, goals, and expertise (Wenger, 1998). CoP theory further addresses the formation and identification of communities among online adjunct faculty, emphasizing spaces where faculty connect, share experiences, and develop a collective identity (Wenger et al., 2002). Specifically relevant are Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoPs), highlighting knowledge sharing through online forums, virtual meetings, and technology-mediated interactions (Beres & Janes, 2022). As institutions increasingly rely on online adjuncts, their limited access to institutional resources, professional development, and decision-making weakens their integration

into academic communities (Swann et al., 2021; Kelley & Kilburn, 2023). CoP theory further emphasizes the importance of shared learning and mutual engagement, suggesting that institutional leaders must actively support adjuncts' sense of belonging and professional identity to enhance institutional effectiveness (Layou et al., 2022; Tarbutton & Swisher, 2023).

Employment Lifecycle

The employment lifecycle framework provides a systematic approach to understanding employee experiences throughout their entire organizational journey, initially conceptualized by Ulrich (1997) and encompassing six primary stages: attraction, recruitment, onboarding, development, retention, and separation (Gladka et al., 2022). Recent scholarship has introduced the Faculty, Academic Careers, and Environments (FACE) framework, which explicitly addresses contemporary shifts to faculty contracts and roles in higher education (Culver et al., 2025). This framework is particularly relevant given that nearly 70% of U.S. faculty members held contingent positions in fall 2021, representing a significant increase, 47%, since 1987 (American Association of University Professors, 2023). Sato et al. (2019) suggest that employees encounter distinct challenges and opportunities at each stage of the lifecycle, with cumulative experiences shaping long-term organizational outcomes. For adjunct faculty specifically, the lifecycle approach addresses the reality that traditional support models often treat adjunct positions as isolated teaching assignments rather than integral components of faculty careers (Culver et al., 2025).

Traditional Adjunct Faculty Support Models and Their Limitations

Research consistently documents inadequate support for adjunct faculty across higher education institutions. Traditional models typically provide minimal systematic support, treating adjunct faculty as temporary contractors rather than integral members of the academic community (Kelley & Kilburn, 2023). According to Butters and Gann (2022), some adjuncts feel unprepared to teach courses, have limited time and resources to prepare, struggle with Learning Management System technology, and require improved communication methods. Traditional models often fail to recognize specialized skills required for online instruction. Despite increased reliance on adjunct instruction, perceptions of part-time, temporary, or contract roles create a sense of not belonging (Parsons et al., 2021; Swann et al., 2021). Many adjunct faculty members need clear and consistent access to professional development and administrative support (Layou et al., 2022). This lack of professional support, combined with the need for improvement in administrative policies, could lead to a decrease in commitment to institutional goals (Purdum & Evans, 2024).

Contrasting Approaches: Emerging Best Practices

Some institutions have developed systematic approaches recognizing that effective online education requires specialized skills and sustained faculty engagement. These comprehensive models typically include systematic onboarding programs, structured mentorship systems, performance-based support, and authentic community building (Sayyadi & Provitera, 2022; Tarbutton & Swisher, 2023). Research on the effectiveness and implementation mechanisms of comprehensive support models remains limited. There is a growing need to examine how these frameworks align with community of practice (CoP) principles, particularly in fostering faculty identity, shared learning, and a sense of belonging (Wenger, 1998; Layou et al., 2022). While some models incorporate virtual collaboration and feedback loops, few are evaluated for long-

term impact on teaching quality or institutional integration of adjunct faculty (Beres & Janes, 2022; Butters & Gann, 2022).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2014), where the quantitative results from Phase 1 directly guided the qualitative investigation in Phase 2. This approach was particularly appropriate because Phase 1 established that exceptional outcomes exist. In contrast, Phase 2 could explore the underlying mechanisms, providing both evidence of effectiveness and an understanding of the processes that create transferable best practices. The sequential design enabled the quantitative findings to inform the development of targeted qualitative research questions, ensuring that the subsequent investigation could explain the mechanisms behind the measured exceptional outcomes.

Phase 1: Quantitative Foundation

Phase 1 aimed to explore relationships between burnout, OC, and performance among online adjunct faculty. The study was conducted at a private online university in the United States, which has over 2,500 active adjunct faculty members. The university employs a practitioner model, where most faculty members are online adjuncts contracted on a class-by-class basis. The study included 101 online adjunct faculty members across six colleges within the university system. Participants demonstrated varying tenure lengths, with 34.65% having 11–15 years of experience and 30.69% having 16–20 years of experience. This distribution provided representation across experience levels while ensuring participants had sufficient institutional exposure to assess support structures and their effects on well-being outcomes meaningfully**.**

Phase 1 Quantitative Research Questions

RQ1**.** To what extent is there a statistically significant relationship between online adjunct faculty burnout and their facilitation performance?
RQ2. To what extent is there a statistically significant relationship between online adjunct faculty organizational cynicism and their facilitation performance?
RQ3. To what extent is there a relationship between online adjunct faculty burnout, organizational cynicism, and their facilitation performance?

Phase 1 Instrumentation

Three validated instruments were employed to measure the key constructs. The Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Survey (MBI-ES) served as the primary measure of burnout, using a 22-item instrument that assesses three burnout dimensions, EE, DP, and PA using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (every day). The instrument demonstrates strong psychometric properties with internal consistency estimates of Cronbach's alpha of .90 for EE, .76 for DP, and .76 for PA (Iwanicki & Schwab, 1981). OC was measured using the cynicism subscale of the MBI-ES, which focuses on emotional disengagement from the workplace as conceptualized by Viljoen and Claassen (2016). Faculty performance was assessed using the institution-specific Faculty Performance Evaluation (FPE), developed in 2019 through collaboration with college leaders and academic affairs personnel, based on current literature that measures faculty performance and its impact on student outcomes. The FPE consists of 12

facilitation practices covering engagement, feedback, and general classroom management requirements, using a 4-point rating scale from -1 (Needs Improvement) to 2 (Consistently Exceeds).

Phase 1 Data Analysis

Using Intellectus Statistics™ (2023) software, Phase 1 data analysis employed descriptive statistics to characterize the sample and identify distribution patterns, Pearson correlations to examine relationships between burnout dimensions and performance measures, and ANOVA to investigate differences across colleges. Effect sizes were calculated and interpreted using Cohen's standards to assess practical significance. The analysis revealed exceptional outcomes that contradicted established patterns in the literature, including remarkably low burnout levels, minimal OC, and significant inter-college variation in PA scores. This finding lays the groundwork for a Phase 2 qualitative investigation into the mechanisms underlying these positive results.

Phase 2 Qualitative Exploration

Phase 2 employed an exploratory case study methodology to understand how and why the exceptional Phase 1 quantitative outcomes occurred (Yin, 2013). A case study design was selected because it enables in-depth exploration of complex organizational phenomena within real-life contexts, making it particularly suitable for examining the mechanisms behind measured results while maintaining a contextual understanding. The exploratory approach enabled the investigation of "how" and "why" questions regarding support structures that foster positive faculty outcomes, providing explanatory power for the statistical findings observed in Phase 1.

Phase 2 Qualitative Research Questions

RQ4. What are college leaders' perceptions of online adjunct faculty support throughout the support lifecycle that may explain the high engagement and low burnout levels found in Phase 1?
RQ5. What are the support services departments' perceptions of support practices throughout the support lifecycle that may contribute to exceptional outcomes identified in Phase 1?
RQ6. What processes and policies are used for online adjunct faculty support throughout the support lifecycle that may create structural foundations for positive experiences?
RQ7. What are online adjunct faculty's perceptions of support practices that may explain their high PA and low organizational cynicism found in Phase 1?

Phase 2 Participants

The Phase 2 sample consisted of 52 participants from four stakeholder groups, representing all institutional colleges to ensure a comprehensive representation of diverse perspectives. Online adjunct faculty comprised of 16 participants (10% response rate from 158 invited), selected based on criteria including online teaching only, onboarding within the past five years, and representation across all colleges. College leaders were composed of 23 participants (a 37% response rate from 63 invited), including deans and faculty supervisors with direct adjunct oversight responsibilities. Faculty engagement personnel contributed 9 participants (a 28% response rate from 32 invited), representing all employees from departments that provide onboarding, training, or ongoing support services. The curriculum personnel included 4 participants (a 10% response rate from 40 invited), consisting of curriculum designers and managers involved in course development and faculty support activities. This purposive

sampling strategy ensured representation across all stakeholder groups involved in online adjunct faculty support, while maintaining college-level representation to understand implementation variations identified in Phase 1.

Phase 2 Data Collection

The questionnaire development process followed a systematic approach designed to explain the Phase 1 quantitative findings, which revealed exceptional faculty outcomes, including 82% high PA, low EE (M = 7.56), and minimal OC (M = 0.76). Questions were structured around the employment lifecycle and FACE frameworks from recruitment through separation, with different versions targeting each stakeholder group while maintaining core alignment for triangulation purposes. This lifecycle approach recognized that faculty needs vary by career stage and cumulative experiences influence long-term outcomes.

Questions were developed leveraging the research team's extensive institutional knowledge and understanding of departmental interconnections to ensure alignment with research objectives. The researchers' deep familiarity with institutional terminology, policy implementation, and support structure operations enabled them to interpret stakeholder perspectives while maintaining comprehensive lifecycle coverage accurately. Table 1 presents some representative questions that demonstrate the systematic approach to understanding how institutional practices contribute to positive faculty outcomes.

Table 1

Representative Survey Questions by Stakeholder Group and Lifecycle Coverage

Stakeholder Group	Lifecycle Phases Covered	Example Questions	Purpose
Online Adjunct Faculty	Recruitment, Onboarding, Development, Ongoing Support	"What factors influenced your decision to become an online adjunct faculty member?" "Please describe your experience with onboarding and mentorship." "How do performance reviews contribute to your professional development?"	Understand direct experiences with support mechanisms, creating high personal accomplishment, and preventing burnout
College Leaders	All Phases (Recruitment through Separation)	"What strategies does your college use to promote community and belonging?" "How does your college handle the separation of online adjunct faculty members?"	Identify leadership practices across complete lifecycle explaining inter-college variation ($F(5,95) = 2.54$, $p = .033$)
Faculty Engagement Services	Onboarding, Development, Ongoing Support,	"How is the onboarding of online adjunct faculty approached?" "How does your	Examine systematic prevention of typical adjunct problems

	Quality Assurance	department promote community and belonging?"	through proactive support mechanisms
Curriculum Personnel	Development, Ongoing Support, Academic Integration	"How does the curriculum department collaborate with online adjunct faculty?" "How does the curriculum department evaluate support effectiveness?"	Explore faculty involvement in meaningful academic work contributing to professional satisfaction

Online adjunct faculty questions focused on direct experiences from recruitment through ongoing employment, excluding separation, since the sample consisted of actively employed faculty. College leaders and Faculty Engagement Departments addressed all lifecycle phases, including separation processes, due to their overlapping responsibilities and oversight. Curriculum personnel focused on continuous support phases where their expertise directly affects faculty.

Phase 2 Document Analysis

Document analysis employed Cardno's (2018) policy evaluation framework to systematically evaluate 15 institutional policies found in Table 2 and procedures across faculty lifecycle phases. Following Cardno's systematic evaluation approach, each policy was analyzed using five criteria: purpose, ownership, values, summary, and impact. This analysis provided a structural context for understanding the mechanisms behind the exceptional outcomes in Phase 1.

Table 2

Summary of Institutional Policies and Procedures by Faculty Lifecycle Phase

Lifecycle Phase	Policy/Procedure	Primary Purpose	Key Values Demonstrated
	Content Area Requirements Approvals	Ensure faculty qualifications meet accreditation standards	Quality assurance, credentialing integrity
Recruiting & Onboarding	Faculty Hiring Process and Lifecycle	Systematic recruitment and onboarding framework	Comprehensive support, clear expectations
	Faculty Interview Guide	Standardizing the selection process	Fairness, consistency in hiring
	Job Requisition Creation	Define role requirements and qualifications	Transparency, strategic planning

	Mentorship SOP	Structured new faculty support and development	Investment in growth, quality teaching
Ongoing Support & Development	Annual Recognition Program	Acknowledge faculty contributions and achievements	Recognition, community building
	Annual Self-Reflection	Promote faculty self-assessment and growth	Professional development, continuous improvement
	Classroom Issue Management	Address teaching challenges systematically	Support over punishment, problem-solving, and quality assurance
	Classroom Performance Reviews (CPR)	Monitor and support teaching effectiveness	Development focus, quality assurance
	CPR Inquiry Process	Faculty appeals and clarification procedures	Fairness, due process
	Faculty Scheduling and Solicitation	Coordinate course assignments efficiently	Flexibility, communication
	Faculty Supervisor Job Guide	Define supervisor roles and responsibilities	Clear expectations, consistent support
	On-the-Spot Recognition	Immediate acknowledgment of excellence	Timely feedback, appreciation
	Progressive Discipline Process	Provide improvement support before termination	Development over punishment, second chances
	Schedule Changes/Requests/Preferences	Accommodate faculty scheduling needs	Flexibility, work-life balance

	Faculty Resignation Process	Manage voluntary departures professionally	Respectful transitions, knowledge retention
Separation			
	Progressive Discipline Process	Final step for performance improvement	Due process, fair treatment

Phase 2 Thematic Data Analysis

The questionnaire responses were uploaded, coded, and thematized using Intellectus Qualitative™ until saturation was reached (Intellectus Qualitative, 2024). Phase 2 data analysis employed systematic thematic analysis, with two researchers independently coding 25% of the responses, achieving an intercoder reliability of 89%. Disagreements were resolved through consensus. The initial coding process used both deductive codes derived from Phase 1 findings and inductive codes generated from emerging data. Theme development identified patterns that explained quantitative outcomes until saturation was reached. Triangulation across survey responses, document analysis, and Phase 1 findings validated themes through multiple perspectives, ensuring qualitative findings explained exceptional outcomes.

Phase 1 Results

Exceptional Outcomes Contradicting Literature Patterns

The summary statistics presented in Table 3 reveal a remarkably positive profile that directly contradicts typical adjunct faculty experiences documented in the literature. When compared to established benchmarks for postsecondary teachers (Maslach et al., 2018), this study's participants demonstrated EE levels (M = 7.56) approximately 59% lower than the benchmark average of 18.57, and DP scores (M = 2.95) approximately 47% lower than the benchmark of 5.57. PA scores (M = 38.01) remained comparable to the benchmark (M = 39.17), indicating that while participants avoided the negative aspects of burnout, they maintained similar levels of professional fulfillment as their peers in traditional settings. The OC measure (M = 0.76, SD = 2.09) approached theoretical minimums, suggesting minimal cynical attitudes despite the contingent employment status typical of adjunct positions.

Distribution Characteristics Indicating Systematic Positive Experiences

Distribution characteristics (Table 3) illuminate exceptional outcomes. EE and DP showed positive skewness (1.50 and 2.02) with high kurtosis, indicating faculty clustered at low burnout levels. PA demonstrated negative skewness (-1.39), with faculty concentrated at high satisfaction levels. These distribution patterns suggest a systematic rather than random pattern of positive experiences, indicating that institutional factors may be creating conditions that prevent typical adjunct faculty problems while fostering high levels of professional satisfaction.

Table 3

Summary Statistics Table for Interval and Ratio Variables

Variable	M	SD	n	SE_M	Min.	Max.	Skewness	Kurtosis
EE	7.56	8.74	101	0.87	0.00	35.00	1.50	1.45
DP	2.95	3.47	101	0.35	0.00	19.00	2.02	4.76
PA	38.01	8.21	101	0.82	9.00	48.00	-1.39	2.06
OC	0.76	2.09	101	0.21	0.00	12.00	3.61	13.25

Personal Accomplishment: Evidence of Exceptional Faculty Engagement

The PA scores reveal particularly compelling evidence of exceptional faculty experiences. With 82% of faculty scoring in the high range (scores > 34), this population demonstrates remarkably high levels of professional fulfillment, which contradict typical patterns in the literature on adjunct faculty. The eight-item PA subscale measures feelings of competence and achievement in one's work, with lower scores corresponding to greater experienced burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The mean score of 38.01 (SD = 8.21) approaches the theoretical maximum for this subscale, with negative skewness (-1.39) indicating that most faculty members cluster at the highest levels of professional satisfaction. This concentration at high PA levels suggests that faculty members experience genuine meaning and impact in their work, feeling successful in their educational roles and confident in their ability to make a positive difference in students' lives. Maintaining high levels of personal accomplishment, even in contingent employment positions typically associated with professional dissatisfaction, suggests that systematic institutional factors foster faculty success and recognition (Parsons et al., 2021).

Correlation Patterns: Theoretical Consistency with Practical Implications

The correlation analysis revealed theoretically consistent but practically significant patterns. The strong positive correlation between EE and DP (r = .73, p < .001) aligns with established burnout theory, which posits that emotional depletion leads to cynical attitudes toward work (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The moderate negative correlation between EE and PA (r = -0.34, p = 0.019) indicates that even minimal levels of EE in this population are associated with reduced feelings of accomplishment. The strong correlation between OC and DP (r = .78, p < .001) confirmed theoretical expectations that cynical workplace attitudes manifest as interpersonal detachment (Dean et al., 1998). Burnout symptoms are measured by high scores on the EE and DP scales and low scores on the PA scale. Nevertheless, these correlation patterns occur within a restricted range of predominantly positive scores, suggesting that the institutional environment successfully prevents the typical escalation from low-level stress to significant burnout symptoms.

Performance Relationships: Ceiling Effects and Measurement Considerations

The absence of significant correlations between burnout dimensions, cynicism, and faculty performance measures provides important insights about both the population and measurement considerations. The clustering of participants at the positive end of well-being

measures may create conditions where traditional burnout-performance relationships are challenging to detect due to a restricted range, rather than a genuine absence of relationships. Uttl (2005) defined ceiling effects as occurring when tests or scales are relatively straightforward, such that substantial proportions of individuals obtain either maximum or near-maximum scores, and the true extent of their abilities cannot be accurately determined.

Given the concentration of faculty at low burnout and high engagement levels found in Phase 1 (82% high PA, M = 38.01 for PA; low EE, M = 7.56), combined with uniformly high-performance scores, this likely reflects ceiling effects rather than a genuine absence of relationships. Uttl (2005) demonstrated the attenuation in reliability and validity that occurs when ceiling effects are present, using empirical data. This interpretation is supported by the fact that significant correlations were detected between burnout dimensions themselves, such as EE-DP r = .73 and EE-PA r = -.34, suggesting that the instruments retained sensitivity for detecting relationships within their effective range. At the same time, the performance measures may have had insufficient variance to detect relationships with well-being indicators.

While the absence of burnout-performance correlations might suggest that faculty well-being is not related to their performance in this institutional context, ceiling effects provide an alternative explanation that performance measures may lack sufficient sensitivity to detect such relationships when faculty well-being is uniformly high. The restricted range in both burnout measures and performance outcomes in this study suggests that this institutional model successfully maintains both faculty well-being and teaching effectiveness simultaneously, creating conditions where traditional burnout-performance relationships may not manifest due to measurement limitations rather than actual absence of relationships.

Inter-College Variation: Evidence of Implementation Differences

The statistically significant differences in PA by college (F (5,95) = 2.54, p = .033, η² = .12) provide crucial evidence that institutional practices, rather than external factors, influence faculty outcomes. With two colleges showing lower mean PA scores than others, this variation suggests differential implementation of support practices across units. This finding suggests that, although the institution overall achieves exceptional outcomes, consistency in support delivery varies, creating opportunities for sharing best practices within the organization. The medium effect size (η² = .12) suggests that these differences are not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful, potentially reflecting differences in leadership approaches, communication patterns, or resource allocation across colleges within the same institutional framework.

Implications for Phase 2 Investigation

These exceptional Phase 1 outcomes established this institution as demonstrating outcomes that contradict established literature patterns of high burnout in adjunct faculty, creating a compelling research opportunity to understand the specific mechanisms behind these positive results. These findings guided the development of Phase 2 qualitative research questions designed to understand how comprehensive support structures create and maintain these exceptional faculty outcomes, transforming this from a problem-focused investigation to a solutions-oriented exploration.

Phase 2 Results

Phase 2 Document Analysis Findings

Policy analysis revealed a systematic institutional commitment to comprehensive online adjunct faculty support that fundamentally differs from traditional models documented in the literature. Three interconnected patterns emerged that collectively explain the exceptional quantitative outcomes observed in Phase 1.

Systematic Investment in Development

The institution demonstrates systematic investment in online adjunct faculty development rather than treating them as temporary contractors. Policies spanning recruitment through separation create comprehensive support structures that address the economic insecurity and institutional disconnection identified by Parsons et al. (2021) as primary sources of dissatisfaction among adjunct faculty. This systematic approach provides a structural foundation for the high PA scores (M = 38.01, SD = 8.21) documented quantitatively, as faculty experience genuine institutional investment in their professional success.

Development Over Punitive Approach

The policy framework emphasizes development-focused rather than punitive approaches for faculty management. The Progressive Discipline Process, Classroom Performance Reviews, and related policies prioritize coaching, support for improvement, and professional growth over compliance monitoring. This supportive orientation directly explains the exceptionally low OC scores (M = 0.76, SD = 2.09) found in Phase 1, as faculty experience institutional care rather than bureaucratic indifference that typically characterizes adjunct employment relationships.

Systematic Community Building

Formal policies mandate systematic community building through recognition programs, regular communication, and structured development activities. Unlike institutions where faculty connection occurs by chance, these policies require specific activities that address the institutional marginalization identified by Swann et al. (2021). The Annual Recognition Program, Faculty Supervisor Job Guide, and related policies create systematic opportunities for belonging and professional identity development that contribute to sustained faculty engagement.

Collectively, these policy patterns create an integrated support ecosystem that transforms typical online adjunct faculty experiences from marginalization to meaningful membership in a professional community. The systematic nature of this approach, formalized through institutional policies rather than dependent on individual supervisor discretion, provides a sustainable foundation for the exceptional faculty outcomes documented in Phase 1 quantitative analysis.

Thematic Analysis Findings

Thematic analysis of Phase 2 qualitative data revealed four interconnected themes that systematically explain the exceptional quantitative outcomes documented in Phase 1. Each theme directly corresponds to and answers one of the four Phase 2 research questions, demonstrating how comprehensive institutional practices create conditions for high faculty engagement, prevent burnout, and minimize OC among online adjunct faculty.

Theme 1: College Leaders' Comprehensive Support Strategy for Online Adjunct Faculty

This theme directly answers the research question: What are college leaders' perceptions of online adjunct faculty support throughout the online adjunct faculty support lifecycle, that may explain the high engagement and low burnout levels found in Phase 1? The analysis of college leaders' responses (201 coded excerpts across 10 sub-themes) revealed that leaders perceive their role as strategic architects of faculty success through four interconnected practices that directly explain Phase 1 outcomes. College leaders' comprehensive approach encompasses the entire faculty lifecycle, from recruitment through ongoing development, creating systematic conditions that produce high engagement and prevent burnout.

Strategic Recruitment

The strategic recruitment processes emphasized character assessment alongside technical qualifications. As one leader explained, "I look for certain qualities explicitly. But I try to stay alert for things the potential faculty member may do or say that provide insights into their character... Being conscientious is something I look for as well as the ability to communicate clearly and confidently, especially when discussing their professional roles and when explaining and relating course content to careers." This careful selection process ensures faculty-institutional alignment that supports sustained engagement.

Authentic Relationships

Authentic relationship building formed the foundation of leader-faculty interactions. Leaders prioritized genuine connection over bureaucratic management: "Building relationships with faculty so they feel a sense of belonging and investment in the success of the programs in which they teach. Regular communication with faculty about college happenings and opportunities." This personal approach directly explains the exceptionally low OC scores ($M = 0.76$, $SD = 2.09$) found in Phase 1, as faculty experience authentic personal attention rather than administrative indifference characteristic of traditional adjunct employment relationships.

Comprehensive Onboarding

Comprehensive onboarding ensures systematic preparation for faculty success. Leaders described structured support transitions: "Once hired, the faculty member undergoes a training program with a faculty mentor. After completing the training, the new faculty member is supported directly by their Faculty Supervisor." This systematic preparation contributes to high PA scores by ensuring faculty enter roles well-prepared rather than overwhelmed, directly addressing the preparation challenges identified by Butters and Gann (2022).

Performance-Based Support

Performance-based support emphasizes development over punishment. Leaders implemented supportive approaches to performance challenges: "We follow the PDP process and allow faculty members to improve before termination. For valued faculty members, we look for other opportunities for them to stay engaged with our programs." This development-focused orientation maintains faculty engagement while constructively addressing performance concerns.

Theme 2: Support Departments' Holistic Approach to Supporting Online Adjunct Faculty

This theme directly addresses the research question: What are the perceptions of support services departments regarding support practices throughout the online adjunct faculty support lifecycle that may contribute to the exceptional faculty outcomes identified in Phase 1? Support departments' responses (76 coded excerpts across six sub-themes) revealed that support personnel perceive their role as systematic prevention specialists who proactively address potential faculty problems before they develop into burnout or cynicism. Their holistic approach encompasses three specific mechanisms that directly contribute to the exceptional Phase 1 outcomes: comprehensive onboarding, authentic personal attention, and intentional community building.

Comprehensive Onboarding

Multi-stage comprehensive onboarding prevents overwhelm through systematic preparation. Support staff described detailed processes: "There are multiple stages to the faculty onboarding process. Once hired, the Faculty Credentials & Onboarding team sets up the necessary systems for the faculty member and then reaches out to schedule a live welcome call. The welcome call covers everything from walking the faculty through the systems, to providing links and resources, to advising about faculty requirements." This systematic preparation directly explains low EE scores, as faculty enter roles well-prepared rather than struggling with unclear expectations.

Authentic Relationships

Authentic personal attention creates a genuine institutional connection. Support personnel demonstrated investment in faculty as whole persons: "Our department promotes a sense of belonging by welcoming the new faculty members and by getting to know our faculty. Checking on them when they let you know they are sick or there is a new baby... What I have found is that faculty share their lives with us, and they must know what they share is important to us." This genuine investment explains low OC scores, as faculty experience institutional care rather than the bureaucratic indifference typical of contingent employment relationships.

Systematic Community Building

Systematic community building fosters intentional opportunities for individuals to feel a sense of belonging. Support departments prioritized connection: "Creating a sense of belonging and connection is a critical part of onboarding and faculty development... The personal touch is important, so connecting with the mentor and supervisor by phone works well." This intentional community-building directly connects to the high PA scores documented in Phase 1, addressing the institutional disconnection that Swann et al. (2021) identified as a primary source of dissatisfaction among adjunct faculty.

Theme 3: Systematic Faculty Lifecycle Support Framework Through Institutional Policies

This theme directly addresses the research question: What processes and policies are employed for online adjunct faculty support throughout the online adjunct faculty support lifecycle that may establish the structural foundations for positive faculty experiences? A document analysis of 15 institutional policies and procedures revealed systematic processes that create the structural foundations for the positive faculty experiences documented in Phase 1.

Unlike institutions that treat adjunct faculty as temporary contractors, these policies demonstrate comprehensive investment throughout the employment lifecycle, from recruitment through separation. The systematic policy framework addresses each phase of faculty employment with specific processes designed to prevent typical adjunct faculty challenges and create conditions for success.

The recruitment phase establishes success through a comprehensive needs assessment, detailed job descriptions that emphasize practitioner experience, and multi-stage interviews with college leaders, ensuring suitable faculty selection and clear expectations. The onboarding phase includes credential evaluations, content area assessments, HR enrollment, and an introduction to university resources, thereby preventing overwhelming experiences that can contribute to faculty burnout. Training and certification include orientation, performance criteria training, and policy education, addressing preparation gaps identified by Butters and Gann (2022). The mentorship phase offers structured support through experienced faculty partnerships, supervised teaching, weekly feedback, and Faculty Quality Assurance oversight, creating meaningful development experiences that contribute to high PA scores

Analysis of institutional policies and qualitative responses revealed a systematic timeline for first-year support, demonstrating the university's structured approach to developing online adjunct faculty. This timeline illustrates how support intensity progressively decreases as faculty develop independence while maintaining consistent access to institutional resources. Table 4 visualizes this comprehensive support structure and its alignment with faculty developmental needs.

Table 4

First-Year Online Adjunct Faculty Support Timeline and Activities

Timeframe	Phase	Support Activities	Support Level
Months 1–3	Intensive Onboarding	Welcome communication from supervisors; introduction to Faculty Resources Center; guidance on Faculty Viva Engage Community participation; first Annual Classroom Performance Review; coaching support implementation	High
Months 3–6	Development	Regular supervisor check-ins, facilitation skills development recommendations, performance evaluation preparation, and continued encouragement of community engagement	Moderate
Months 6+	Independence	Policy guidance provision, student challenge preparation, professional development invitations, second Annual Performance Review, and ongoing coaching as needed with a performance-based approach to feedback and recognition.	Sustained

Theme 4: Faculty Experiences and Development Creating Exceptional Quantitative Outcomes

This theme directly addresses the research question: What are the perceptions of online adjunct faculty regarding support practices provided through the faculty support lifecycle that may explain their high PA and low OC found in Phase 1? Online adjunct faculty responses (102 coded excerpts across six sub-themes) revealed that faculty perceive institutional support practices as genuinely transformative professional experiences that directly generate the exceptional quantitative outcomes documented in Phase 1. Faculty described four types of experiences that explain their high PA scores (M = 38.01, SD = 8.21) and exceptionally low OC levels (M = 0.76, SD = 2.09): meaningful professional growth opportunities, supportive rather than punitive evaluation processes, responsive and caring supervision, and connection to meaningful professional purpose.

Meaningful professional growth experiences created transformative development opportunities. Faculty described comprehensive mentorship: "It was one of the best experiences in my academic life... I learned a great deal during the mentorship process, including patience, empathy, and, above all, the art of teaching. The mentor was always available, provided constructive feedback, and helped me understand not just what to do, but why certain approaches work better for online students." These transformative experiences directly explain the high PA scores (M = 38.01, SD = 8.21) documented in Phase 1, as faculty experience genuine professional growth rather than the stagnation typical of adjunct employment.

Supportive evaluation approaches seemed to foster development rather than anxiety. Faculty valued constructive feedback: "Performance reviews validate my teaching methods. I got some constructive feedback, which I found helpful." This positive approach to evaluation explains low EE scores, as faculty view feedback as a development opportunity rather than criticism or threat, contrasting with the punitive evaluation experiences documented in traditional adjunct employment literature.

Responsive supervision created authentic institutional relationships. Faculty experienced genuine support: "My faculty supervisor is amazing and answers any questions I have. My faculty mentor is also wonderful and supportive... If he did not know the answer to my question, he looped in someone who did." These supportive relationships account for the exceptionally low OC scores, as faculty members experience genuine institutional care rather than the neglect or exploitation characteristic of typical adjunct employment relationships.

Professional purpose connection sustained engagement through meaningful work. Faculty described authentic motivation: "My passion to help others (Students) be successful by sharing my experiences... Passing Knowledge to the next generation of professionals." This connection to meaningful work contributes to sustained PA and engagement, addressing the professional isolation and meaninglessness that contributes to adjunct faculty burnout, as documented in the literature.

Triangulation of Mixed Methods Data

The convergence of data across multiple sources, quantitative outcomes, faculty experiences, leadership strategies, support mechanisms, and policy frameworks provides robust validation of the comprehensive support model's effectiveness. According to Creswell (2014),

triangulation in mixed methods research enhances the validity and credibility of findings by providing multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon. This triangulation employed both methodological triangulation, utilizing multiple data collection methods (quantitative surveys, qualitative questionnaires, and document analysis), and data triangulation, which involved different stakeholder groups (faculty, college leaders, and support personnel) and institutional policies to validate findings across the same organizational context. This approach reveals how systematic institutional practices at different organizational levels work synergistically to create exceptional faculty outcomes.

Each quantitative result corresponds directly to specific qualitative experiences across all stakeholder groups. For instance, the high PA scores ($M = 38.01$) found in Phase 1 are explained through faculty reports of "meaningful mentorship experiences," leaders' implementation of "strategic recognition programs," support departments' "comprehensive onboarding processes," and formal "mentorship policies with quality assurance" documented in institutional procedures. Similarly, the exceptionally low EE levels ($M = 7.56$) align with faculty descriptions of "supportive evaluation approaches," leaders' emphasis on "performance-based coaching," support staff focus on "proactive problem prevention," and institutional "development-focused review procedures" that emphasize growth over punishment.

The triangulation also reveals the interconnected nature of support mechanisms across organizational levels. Faculty experiences of authentic supervisory relationships, which contribute to low OC scores ($M = 0.76$), are facilitated by leaders' consistent communication practices, support departments' emphasis on personal connection, and institutional community-building practices. This systematic alignment across stakeholder groups and organizational policies demonstrates that exceptional outcomes result from coordinated institutional commitment rather than isolated interventions or individual leadership efforts.

Most significantly, the triangulation outlined in Table 5 confirms that the comprehensive support structure functions as an integrated system, where each department or role reinforces the others. Quantitative outcomes serve as measurable evidence that qualitative support practices achieve their intended effects. The qualitative data explains the specific mechanisms through which institutional policies and practices translate into positive faculty experiences.

Table 5

Mixed Methods Triangulation: Explaining Phase 1 Quantitative Outcomes Through Phase 2 Qualitative Data

Phase 1 Quantitative Outcome	Qualitative Faculty Experience	Qualitative Leader Strategy	Qualitative Support Mechanisms	Policy Document Analysis
High PA (M = 38.01)	Meaningful mentorship experiences	Strategic recognition programs	Comprehensive onboarding and mentorship processes	Formal mentorship policies with quality assurance
	Professional purpose connection			

| Low EE (M = 7.56) | Supportive evaluation approaches | Performance-based coaching | Proactive problem prevention | Development-focused review procedures |
| Low OC (M = 0.76) | Authentic supervisory relationships | Consistent communication practices | Personal connection focus | Community-building policy requirements |

Discussion

This sequential explanatory mixed-methods study successfully identified the mechanisms behind the exceptional online adjunct faculty outcomes documented in Phase 1 quantitative research. The four themes emerging from the Phase 2 qualitative analysis provide comprehensive answers to all research questions, while revealing transferable best practices that explain how this institution achieves results that contradict typical patterns in adjunct faculty literature.

College Leadership as Strategic Engagement Catalyst

The first research question examined college leaders' perceptions of online adjunct faculty support throughout the support lifecycle and how these practices explain high engagement and low burnout levels. Analysis revealed that college leaders function as strategic engagement catalysts through four interconnected practices: strategic recruitment aligned with institutional values, authentic relationship building that fosters genuine belonging, comprehensive onboarding to ensure success preparation, and performance-based development that emphasizes growth over punishment.

This comprehensive leadership approach could directly explain the high PA scores ($M = 38.01$, $SD = 8.21$) documented quantitatively. By investing in authentic relationships and strategic support, leaders can prevent the institutional disconnection that Swann et al. (2021) identified as a primary source of dissatisfaction among adjunct faculty. Unlike the minimal oversight typical of adjunct faculty management (Parsons et al., 2021), these leaders demonstrate that exceptional outcomes result from intentional institutional practices.

Support Services as Systematic Prevention Infrastructure

The second research question examined the perceptions and contributions of support services departments to exceptional faculty outcomes. Findings revealed that support departments function as a systematic prevention infrastructure through multi-stage, comprehensive onboarding, authentic personal attention, and genuine institutional investment, demonstrating a commitment to community building that creates opportunities for belonging. This proactive support directly accounts for the exceptionally low EE levels ($M = 7.56$, $SD = 8.74$) observed in Phase 1. Unlike institutions that provide minimal orientation and crisis-intervention support (Butters & Gann, 2022), these departments implement comprehensive preparation that prevents the overwhelming experiences contributing to faculty burnout, as documented in traditional adjunct faculty literature.

Institutional Policies as Structural Success Foundation

The third research question examined the institutional processes and policies used to support online adjunct faculty throughout their employment lifecycle. Document analysis revealed a systematic policy commitment that fundamentally differs from treating online adjunct faculty as temporary contractors. These policies demonstrated comprehensive investment through formal mentorship programs, quality assurance, performance-based review systems, and development, recognition, and advancement programs, all of which emphasized the importance of systematic communication requirements. This structural commitment directly supports the low OC scores ($M = 0.76$, $SD = 2.09$) documented in Phase 1. Unlike institutions where adjunct faculty experience policy neglect and bureaucratic indifference (Dean et al., 1998), these formal commitments prevent the perceived injustices that lead to OC, while providing a sustainable foundation for positive faculty experiences.

Faculty Experiences Support Quantitative Outcomes

The fourth research question examined online adjunct faculty's perceptions of support practices and how these experiences contribute to their exceptional quantitative outcomes. Analysis revealed that faculty experience institutional support as genuinely transformative professional development through meaningful professional growth, achieved via comprehensive mentorship, supportive evaluation that emphasizes development over criticism, responsive supervision that provides authentic care, and a connection to a meaningful professional purpose. These transformative experiences directly explain the convergence of high PA and low cynicism documented quantitatively. Faculty experience genuine institutional investment, rather than the exploitation and neglect characteristic of typical adjunct employment relationships, as documented in the literature (Kelley & Kilburn, 2023).

Comparison to Traditional Models: Evidence-Based Transformation

These findings provide compelling evidence that systematic institutional support can transform typical adjunct faculty experiences from problematic to exceptional. The study reveals how comprehensive approaches address the three primary challenges identified in the literature:

Economic Insecurity Transformation

This institution demonstrates faculty value through extensive training investment, formal mentorship programs, systematic recognition, and advancement pathways, creating engagement despite contingent employment status.

Institutional Disconnection Prevention

Systematic community-building, authentic relationship development, and meaningful participation opportunities create genuine belonging, transforming faculty from peripheral contractors to integrated community members.

Professional Development Integration

Comprehensive growth frameworks, including mentorship, ongoing training, performance-based coaching, and career advancement, create systematic professional development that enhances teaching effectiveness and career satisfaction.

Transferable Best Practices Framework for Implementation

Based on a systematic analysis of successful mechanisms, institutions seeking to improve online adjunct faculty support can implement four evidence-based areas. As illustrated in Figure 2, these components work synergistically to create comprehensive support systems that prevent typical challenges faced by adjunct faculty while fostering engagement, professional growth, and institutional commitment.

Figure 2

Transferable Best Practices Framework for Online Adjunct Faculty Support

A. Strategic Leadership Development
- Train leaders in authentic relationship-building and systematic communication
- Implement comprehensive recognition programs
- Develop consistent support implementation across units
- Create accountability systems for faculty engagement outcomes

B. Comprehensive Support Infrastructure
- Design multi-stage onboarding with personal connection opportunities
- Establish formal mentorship programs with quality assurance
- Implement performance-based support emphasizing development
- Create systematic community-building activities

C. Structural Policy Commitment
- Develop formal policies supporting adjunct faculty throughout employment lifecycle
- Establish clear expectations with development support
- Create advancement and recognition pathways
- Implement systematic communication requirements

D. Authentic Relationship Building Culture
- Train staff in genuine care and personal connection approaches
- Establish regular communication systems
- Create multiple community participation opportunities
- Systematically recognize faculty contributions

Integrated Implementation
All four components work synergistically to create comprehensive support systems that prevent typical adjunct faculty challenges while fostering engagement, professional growth, and institutional commitment.

Note. Transferable Best Practices Framework for Online Adjunct Faculty Support. Framework components emerged from a thematic analysis of mixed-methods data explaining exceptional quantitative outcomes, including high PA and low EE.

This framework provides institutions with evidence-based guidance for improving systematic online adjunct faculty support. Each component demonstrably contributes to positive faculty outcomes as documented in the quantitative phase. The strategic leadership development component (A) emphasizes authentic relationship-building that directly addresses the OC challenges typically experienced by adjunct faculty, partnered with accountability and recognition. A comprehensive support infrastructure (B) prevents the EE typically documented in traditional adjunct models through systematic onboarding, mentorship, continuous development support, and VCoP's. Structural policy commitment (C) creates an institutional foundation that transforms online adjunct faculty from temporary contractors to valued

community members by establishing clear expectations, values, and vision for faculty and those who support them. Finally, an authentic relationship-building culture (D) operationalizes genuine care, recognition, and understanding communication.

Implications for Online Learning Practice and Theory

This research demonstrates that comprehensive online adjunct faculty support is both achievable and measurably effective, offering transformative possibilities for institutions struggling with the typical challenges of adjunct faculty. The sequential mixed methods approach proves that positive outcomes can be systematically created through intentional organizational practices. The four-component framework provides actionable guidance that institutions can adapt while maintaining core principles of comprehensive systematic support, offering alternatives to accepting typical challenges as inevitable. Investment in comprehensive online adjunct faculty support yields measurable positive outcomes that likely enhance student experiences and institutional effectiveness, providing a sustainable foundation for scaling online education while maintaining quality. The research provides empirical evidence that VCoP principles lead to measurable engagement when implemented systematically, demonstrating how theoretical frameworks are translated into practical approaches with documented outcomes.

Limitations

This private online university study may require adaptation for public institutions with different constraints and regulatory environments, as private institutions often have greater flexibility and resources. The support mechanisms require significant organizational commitment that many institutions may be unwilling or unable to provide, with implementation feasibility varying across institutional contexts. While providing insight into "what works," the research offers limited understanding of how to transform struggling institutions from their current state to the implementation of best practices. Voluntary participation may have excluded less satisfied community members, though strong response rates (10%–37% across groups) partially offset this limitation. This snapshot study lacks longitudinal data to understand the evolution, sustainability, or continued effectiveness of the support structure over time.

Conclusion

This study successfully identified comprehensive best practices that explain exceptional online adjunct faculty outcomes, demonstrating that positive results can stem from a systematic institutional commitment to excellence. The research provides an evidence-based explanation of how comprehensive support creates measurable positive outcomes, offers a systematic framework for preventing typical problems through proactive support, and demonstrates that online adjunct faculty can achieve high engagement through institutional commitment. The four-component framework (strategic leadership development, comprehensive support infrastructure, structural policy commitment, authentic relationship building) provides institutions with adaptable guidance while maintaining core systematic support principles. As institutions increasingly rely on online adjunct faculty for delivering online education, this research demonstrates that comprehensive support is both possible and effective, offering evidence-based guidance for improving faculty experiences and student learning outcomes.

Ethics Statement

This study was approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Committee on Research (COR). All participants were provided with informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. Given hierarchical relationships, researchers ensured voluntary participation free from supervisory influence.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors systematically addressed potential conflicts through comprehensive ethical safeguards. Two researchers work in the institution's quality assurance department, and all four serve as online adjunct faculty at the studied institution; however, the quality assurance researchers had no direct supervision of faculty participants. Anonymous survey responses with no individual linking capability, exclusion of staff-adjunct dual-role faculty, multiple researcher coding for bias reduction, systematic triangulation across data sources, elimination of researcher influence on responses, IRB/COR conflict review and approval, and no outcome-related compensation. Researchers' institutional knowledge enhanced the interpretation of terminology and support structures, while ethical safeguards preserved research integrity and participant confidentiality, contributing to the depth of analysis without compromising objectivity.

Acknowledgments

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