WORK AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION DURING COVID:

WHAT WILL COME BACK AND WHAT WILL NEVER BE THE SAME

FPOV
FUTURE POINT OF VIEW

PS
PLIRIS STRATEGIES

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INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2020, efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19 resulted in emergency work from home (WFH)
requirements across the United States. As states throughout the nation now wrestle to implement phased reopening
plans while facing surges of new COVID cases, business and organizational leaders are making
decisions around how they will work in the short- and long-term.

It is our goal with this research paper to help business and community leaders navigate the evolving landscape of digital transformation, a transformation that has been dramatically accelerated in an environment which required people to shelter in their homes for a period of weeks to months.

The findings from this study can help lead businesses, organizations, and communities to grow in forward-thinking, innovative, and resilient ways and to navigate a new normal where work and connection is much more dependent on digital tools.

Our research process involved polling a variety of state agencies, trade organizations, non-profit networks, and faith-based entities across the state of Oklahoma.

After compiling and analyzing the data, we identified seven key findings. Each of these findings are laid out in more detail on the pages that follow.

AMONG OTHER THINGS, OUR RESEARCH FOUND:

// Private business **was better prepared to switch to digital communication than were governments and non-profits.**

// People **found strong levels of connectedness despite social distancing requirements.**

// Access **to quality internet is not true for everyone.**

// People **were less connected to social organizations, friends, and their faith community than they were to their work and family connections.**

// People **connected better through real-time interaction**

// Organizations **adopted existing platforms and processes more than they invented new ones.**

// Remote work **has become a permanent way of life.**

In a time of unprecedented social distancing, the lessons learned about digital transformation and remote work have lasting implications on the future of social behavior and connections as well as workforce norms and expectations.

When analyzing the data we collected during our research, we attempted to answer the following questions:

- What happened when workforces shifted to remote work and became increasingly dependent on digital communication?

- How did digital communication affect people's sense of connectedness to others and ability to work collaboratively?

- Going forward, how will people prefer to utilize digital communication in the workplace to accomplish objectives and maintain personal relationships?

Leaders in private business, non-profits, state agencies, and community organizations can use the findings from this study to better understand the impact of emergency work from home conditions on organizational culture, productivity, and the necessary adoption of digital tools due to extraordinary events.

INTERRUPTION AND DISRUPTION:
PLANNING FOR THE NEW NORMAL

It is readily apparent that organizations globally are experiencing unprecedented alterations in business operations and workforce accommodation.

However, it is important to consider the distinction between a disruption and an interruption due to emergency events so that you may understand what has been temporarily altered versus what has been permanently transformed.

Interruption: *Halt in normal operation practices that will resume in the future.*

Disruption: *Halt in normal operation practices that may never return.*

The distinction is simple but has significant implications for the future of workforce development and practices.

OUR RESEARCH PROCESS

Empirical data from respondents across multiple sectors offer timely insights into the impact of digital communication on human interaction, connectedness, and collaboration. This impact will ultimately affect social behavior, work productivity, and organizational culture. It is our goal with this research to study the impact of digital tools on communication and connections within organizations, businesses, non-profits, and community organizations.

We compiled a list of questions and distributed a questionnaire statewide across Oklahoma throughout state agencies, trade organizations, non-profit networks, and faith-based entities. The study was undertaken in the midst of emergency WFH conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Survey respondents range from senior executives and business owners to entry level employees.
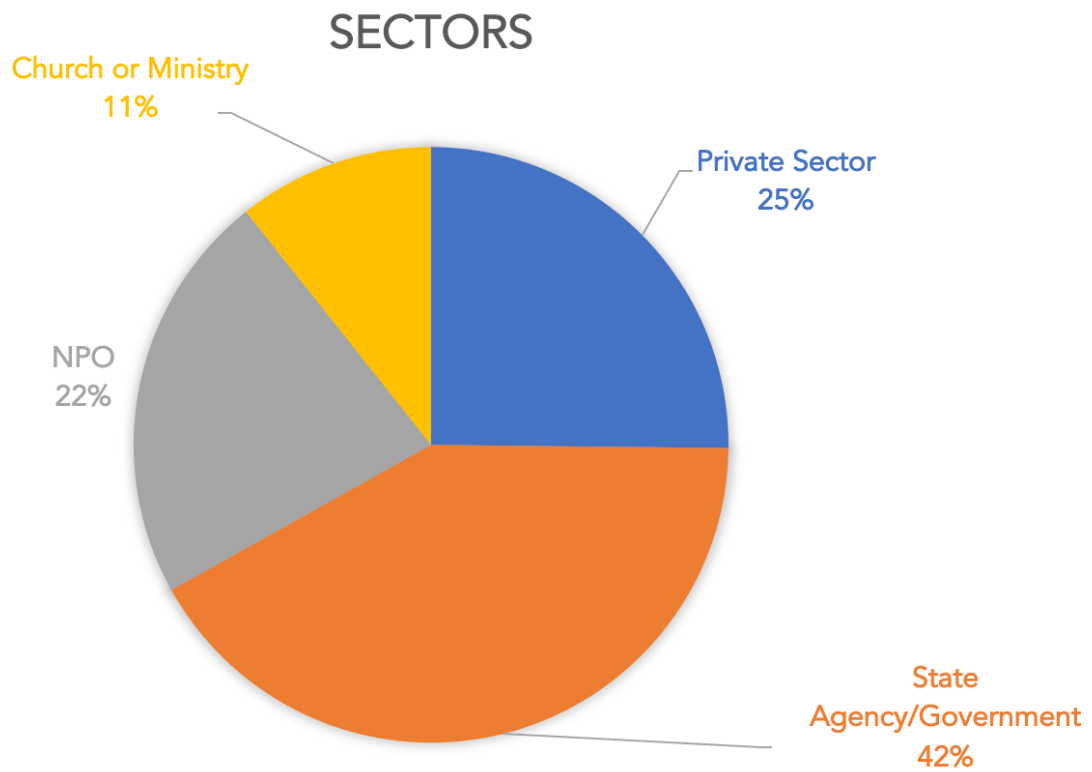
MULTIPLE SECTORS

Comparing data across industries and vocations helps us better understand how the broader workforce and culture are impacted as similar digital tools and platforms are implemented into the daily work and lives of individuals across these industries and vocations.

- **Private Sector: For-profit businesses and trade associations.**

- **Public Sector: Municipal and state government agencies and education systems.**

- **Non-profits: Community-based organizations and associations.**

- **Faith-based Organizations: Religious faith congregations and faith-based non-profit organizations.**
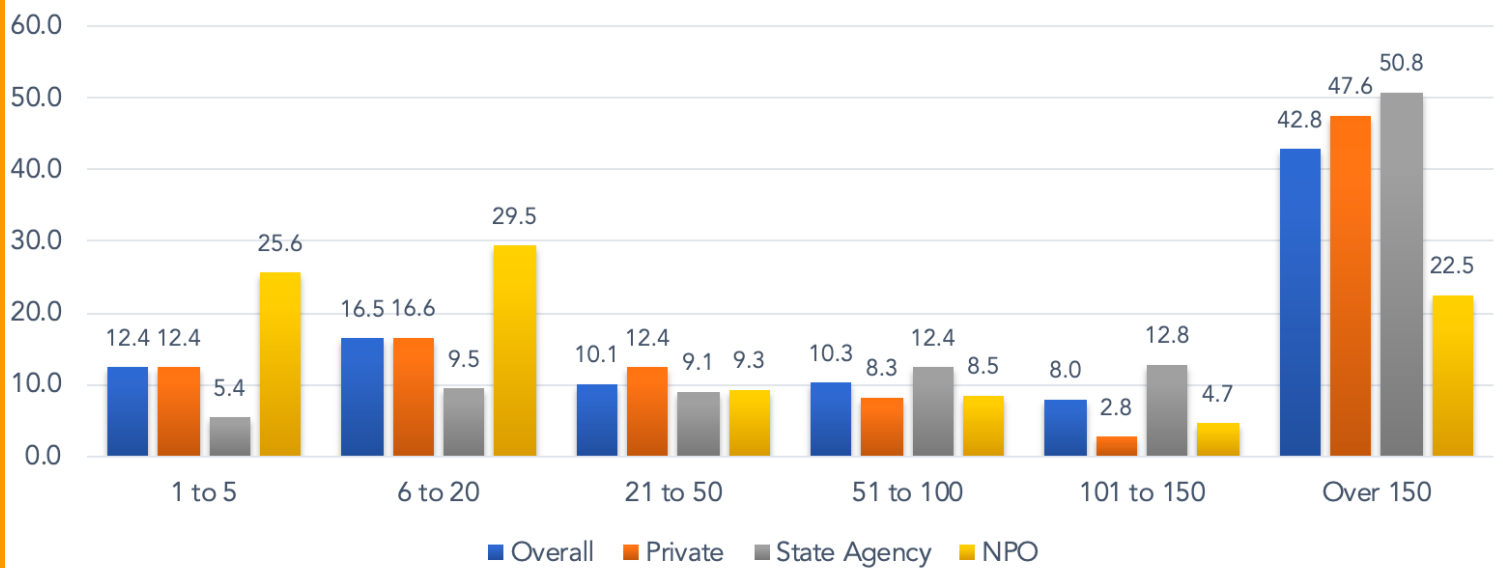
Over half of the respondents either work in large organizations of more than 150 employees (42.8 percent) or in the small-to-medium size organizations with 6 to 20 employees (16.5 percent).

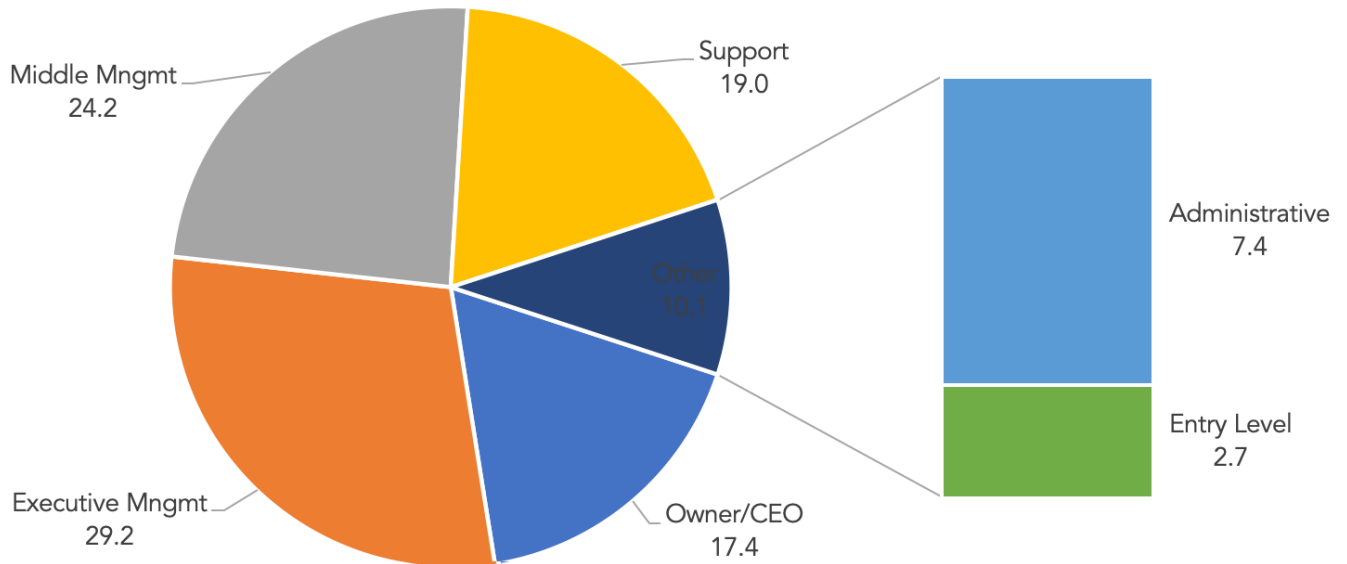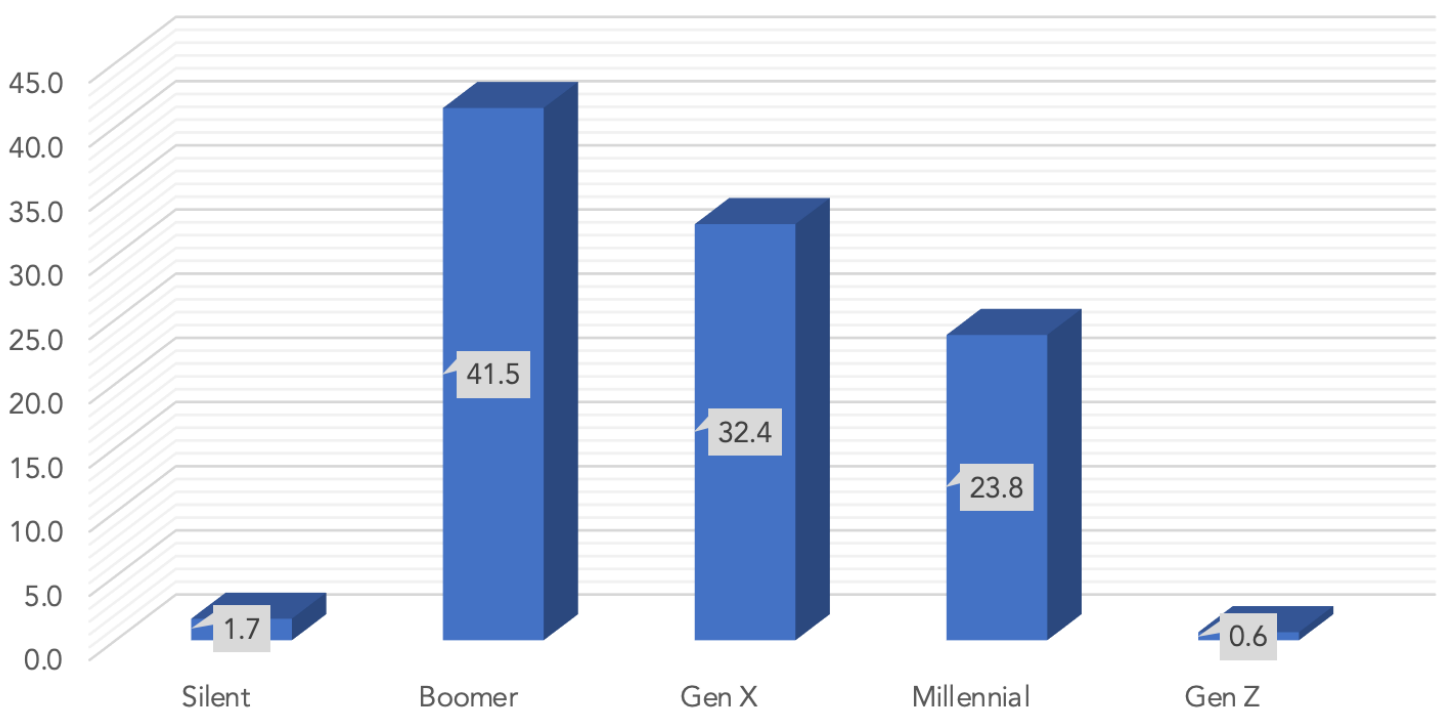Demographics from the study are presented in the following figures.

SECTORS

- Church or Ministry 11%
- Private Sector 25%
- NPO 22%
- State Agency/Government 42%

Size of Organization (number of employees)

Size	Overall	Private	State Agency	NPO
1 to 5	12.4	12.4	5.4	25.6
6 to 20	16.5	16.6	9.5	29.5
21 to 50	10.1	12.4	9.1	9.3
51 to 100	10.3	8.3	12.4	8.5
101 to 150	8.0	2.8	12.8	4.7
Over 150	42.8	47.6	50.8	22.5

Role in Organization

Pie chart showing Role in Organization:
- Support 19.0
- Other 10.1 (Administrative 7.4, Entry Level 2.7)
- Owner/CEO 17.4
- Executive Mngmt 29.2
- Middle Mngmt 24.2

Respondent's Generation

Bar chart showing Respondent's Generation:
- Silent 1.7
- Boomer 41.5
- Gen X 32.4
- Millennial 23.8
- Gen Z 0.6

WE LEARNED
PRIVATE BUSINESS
WAS BETTER PREPARED
## TO SWITCH TO
DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Respondents from the private sector indicated they were better prepared to switch to digital communication than those from the public and non-profit sectors. Private businesses either already utilized digital platforms in their operations or business model and emergency WFH conditions required them to expand their use. Respondents also reported an increase in productivity, such as those in sales-based occupations.

Organizations in the public and non-profit sectors may not have previously utilized digital platforms in their operations and this led to a greater level of adaptation to a new way of working.

When working remotely, we found that team leaders across all sectors effectively communicated expectations, with the greatest level of agreement from private sector respondents. Leadership within organizations adopted new ways of connecting with a dispersed work force and discovered digital communication strategies to engage team members that were more effective than before.

Our findings show private organizations believed that they were more prepared to handle a work from home event than were those in the state/government or non-profit/faith-based sectors. This may have been due to the fact that private organizations already had more of the infrastructure in place to handle a scenario in which a vast majority, if not all, of their workforce needed to quickly transition to work from home.

Organization Well Prepared to Transition

Agree and Strongly Agree

Overall, 63.8
Private, 80.0
State/Govt, 58.1
NPO or FBO, 59.2
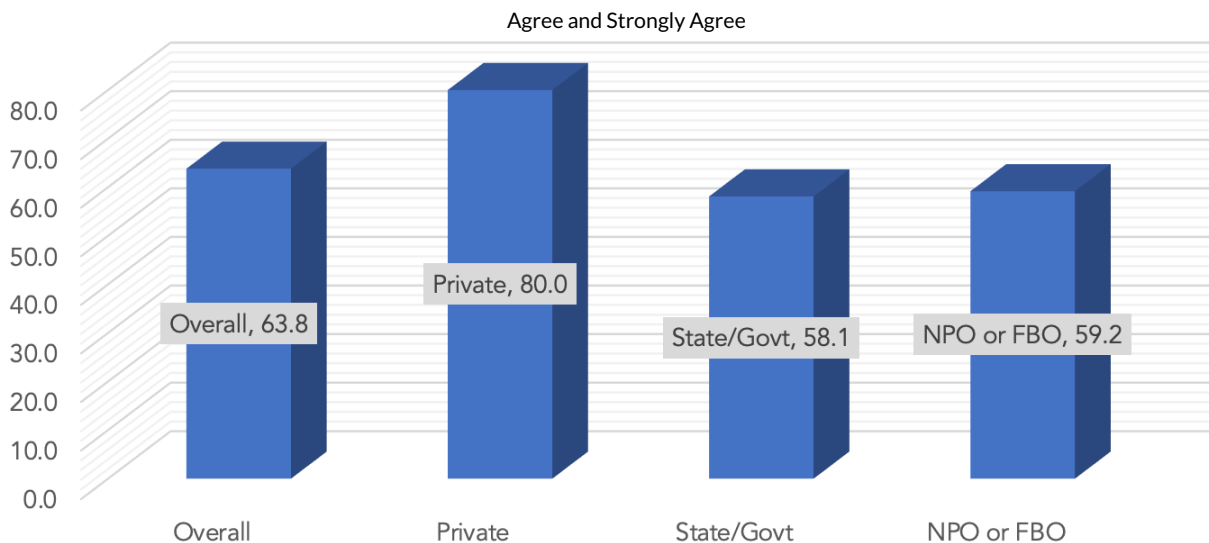
*"Because of COVID-19 pandemic, we converted to 100% online sales/communications with our customers and haven't luckily missed a beat. We've even **gained new customers** because of our ability to perform our business model online, where some of our competitors have not."*

*"We never used Zoom before, internally. **Now we use it daily.**"*

For leaders, developing communication rhythms with team members was one of the more challenging aspects of this recent work from home event. Communication is altered when it shifts from face-to-face interaction to virtual meetings. The expectations of work can also change as people find themselves physically disconnected from an office environment.

Leaders found themselves in the position of having to monitor work output, and broadcasting their expectations of their team, while being unable to share a boardroom or conference room with that same team. For many leaders, this was a new development, one that could be fraught with trials.

Our findings show that leaders in the private sector did a more effective job of communicating expectations to their team members than did those in the government and non-profit sectors. This may be that, once again, that many organizations in the private sector were further along on the spectrum of virtual work than were their counterparts in the non-profit and government sectors.

Team Leaders Regularly Communicated Expectations

Agree and Strongly Agree

Overall, 77.9
Private, 84.5
State/Govt, 73.2
NPO or FBO, 79.5
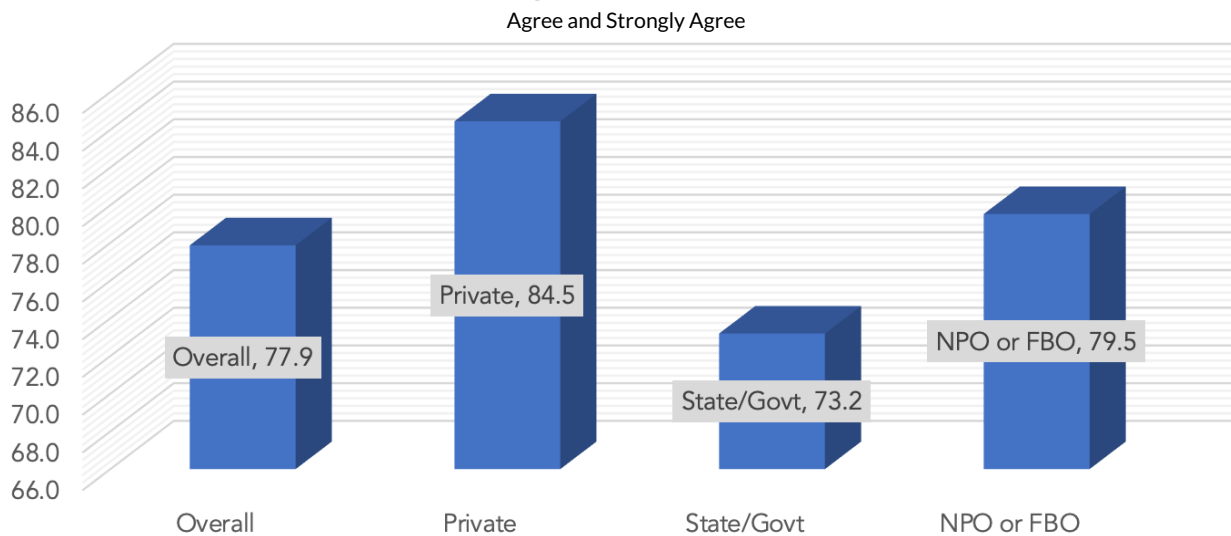
*"The logic of us now working from home and sending emails/Skyping and using social media for work is as useful as if we were in the office doing the same thing seems to be a new concept our **leadership understands.**"*

*"Use of real-time e-comms increased dramatically during COVID. With only about 65 of our 350 employees based at HQ, the overwhelming majority of our employees are scattered across the state with at least one employee in each county. COVID triggered our usage of weekly (now backed off to bi-weekly) "coffee with the director," which incentivized employees to quickly learn how to use this tool for real-time communication no matter where they were located in the state. Now **we regularly have 100 employees logging in** on Weds morning to chat about whatever concerns them. It's become an invaluable communication tool and one we will use much more going forward."*

WHAT IS INTERRUPTED

- We found that people enjoy the convenience of virtual meetings and their effectiveness in facilitating collaboration.

- However, respondents still value in working in-person.

WHAT IS DISRUPTED

- Leadership has now discovered the effective use of digital platforms and so will create policies for their continued use.

- People will be less likely to travel to meetings and conferences.

- There will be less physical interaction with customers during the sales process. As virtual sales processes improve, physical sales meetings and calls will decrease in favor of virtual meetings and calls.

- During times of increased volatility to industries or the economy, it will become increasingly important for leadership to communicate present realities and the future direction of the organization so that full-time employees understand the organization's current state and are comfortable in the direction the organization is heading.

- Leaders may become more transparent in communicating the current status and trajectory of the organization.

WE LEARNED
SOCIAL DISTANCING
DOESN'T MEAN DISCONNECTING

Across all sectors, we found strong levels of connectedness despite social distancing requirements. When people were required to socially distance and switch to digital platforms, they found their contributions were valued as much as in person, were able to give and receive feedback to accomplish objectives, and reported they felt supported by colleagues.
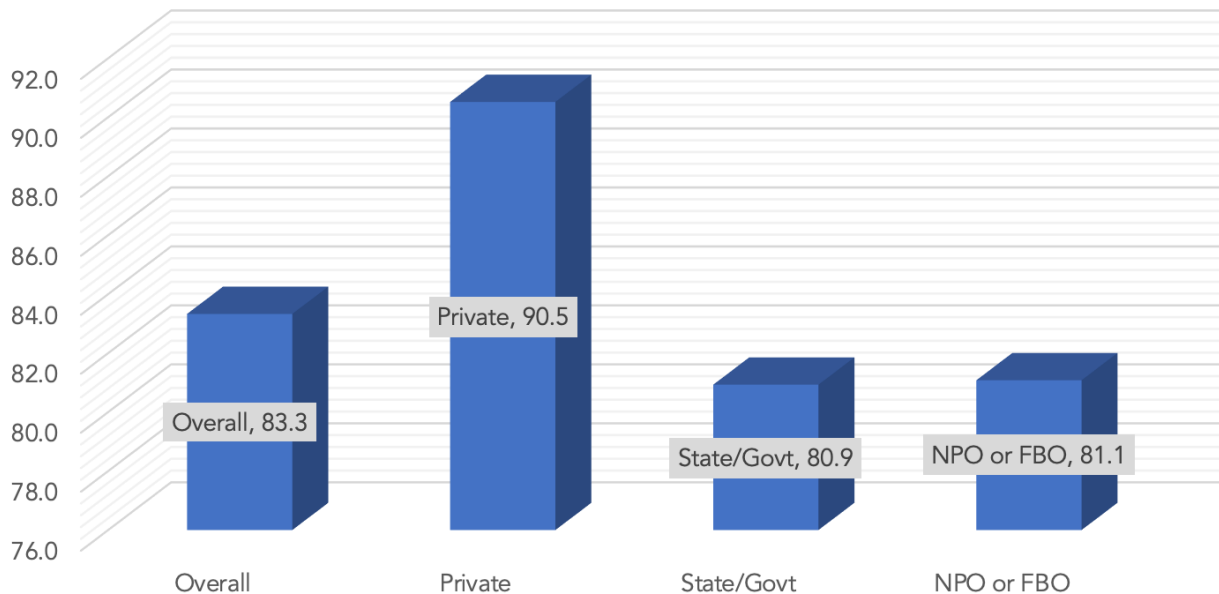
The use of virtual meetings in effectively facilitating collaboration cannot be ignored and will continue to be a part of how work and business is done.
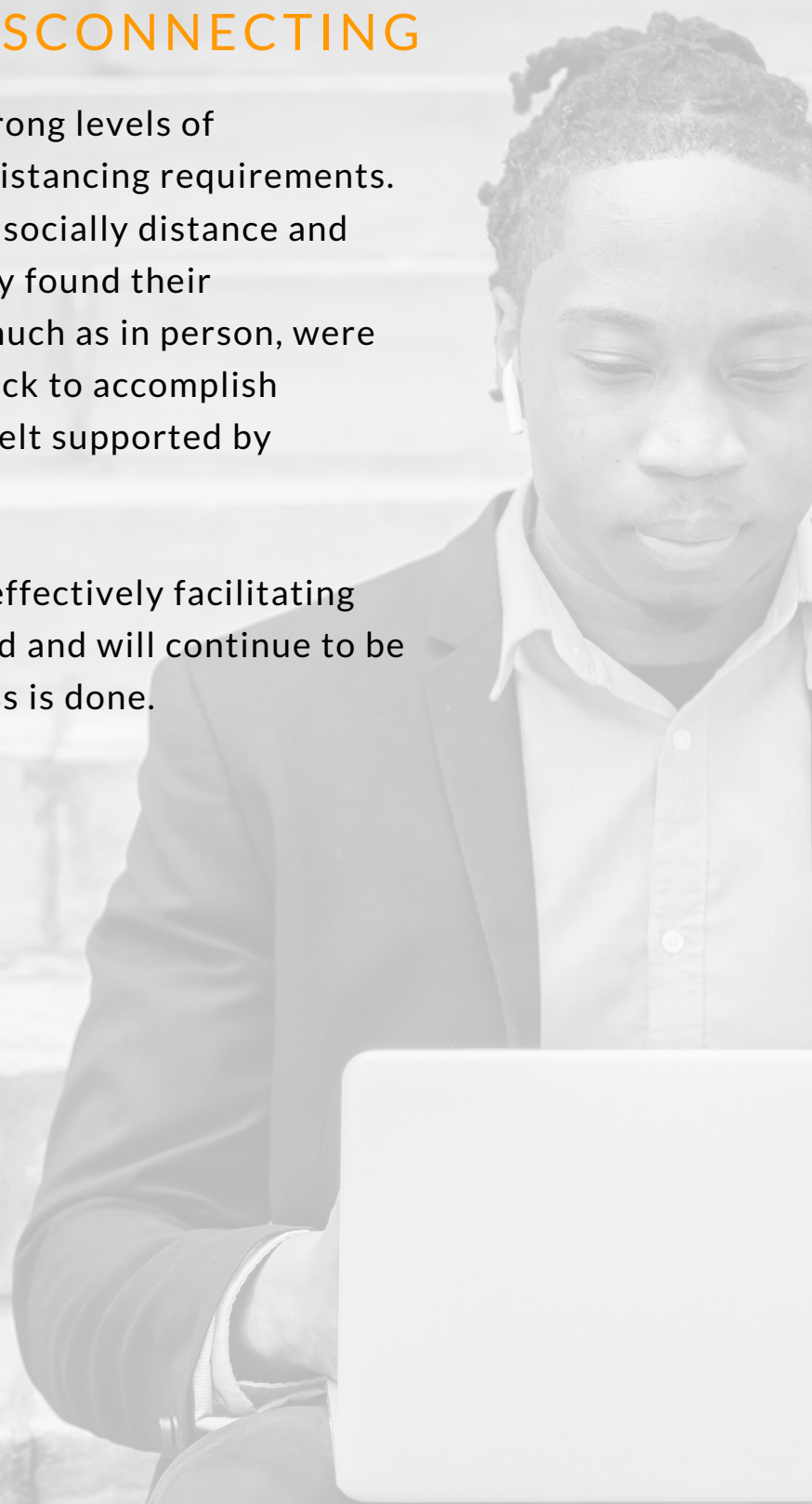
Felt Supported by Colleagues
Agree and Strongly Agree

Overall, 83.3
Private, 90.5
State/Govt, 80.9
NPO or FBO, 81.1

*"I am very grateful for the various programs and technology that my organization had available to us as things unfolded. We had the resources available to us to quickly pivot, do internal training and continue to support our students, clients and staff. I actually think o**ur employee engagement will go up this year** because we have been **more intentional in connecting and communicating**, even if it was virtually."*

*"We were not adept at digital communication (Zoom, TEAMs, etc.) prior to COVID-19. Our staff has **become very proficient** and it has encouraged many who would have been averse to adoption to utilize these tools."*
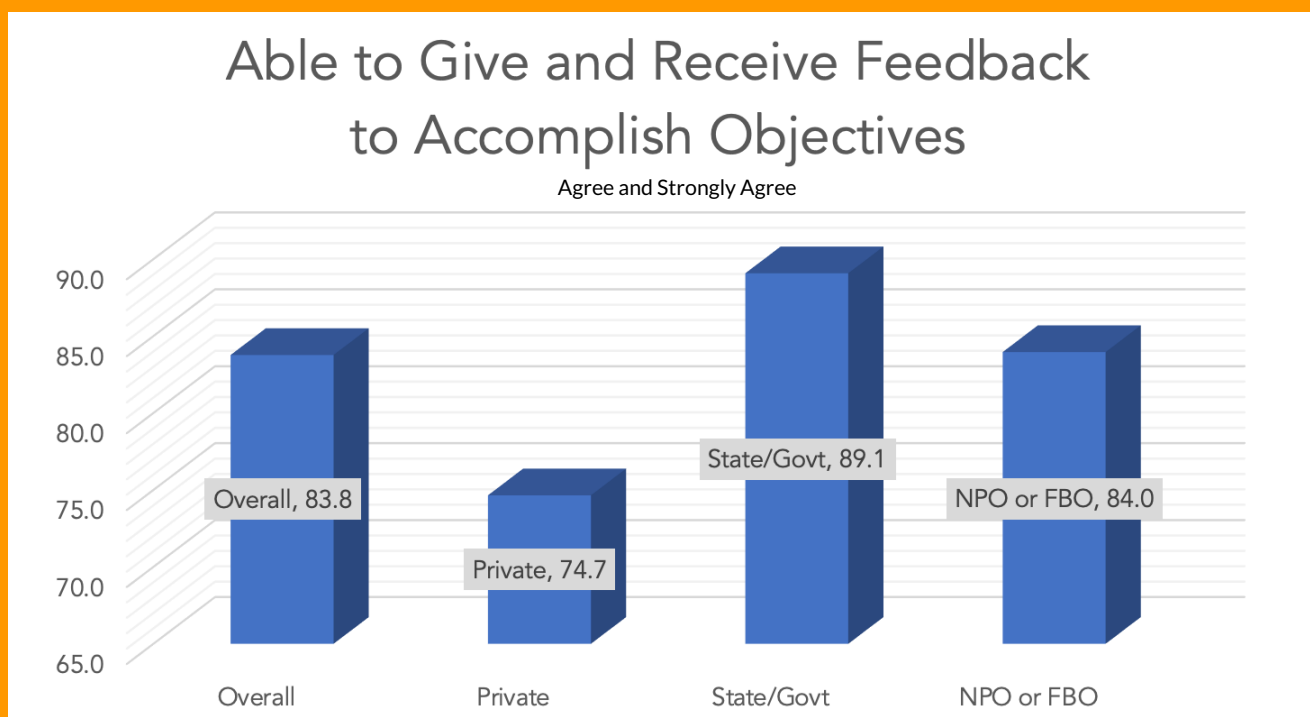
My Contributions Were Valued as Much as In Person
Agree and Strongly Agree

Overall, 79.6
Private, 81.8
State/Govt, 79.2
NPO or FBO, 78.1
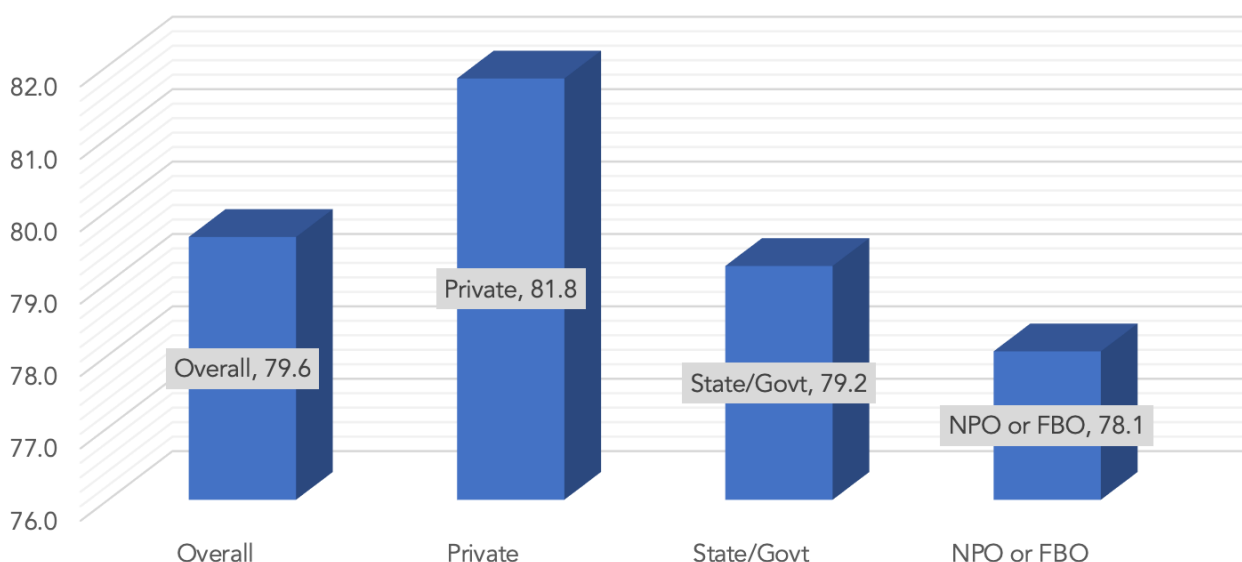
*"We traveled significantly throughout the US previously but now that has been completely eliminated in favor of online forums. The **online efforts allow a much more collaborative impact.**"*

*"We have become regular users of Zoom. Daily Zoom team meetings helped our organization work together and communicate but took up too much time during the shutdown. **Since returning our communication and collaboration has gone way down** which is unfortunate."*

Able to Give and Receive Feedback to Accomplish Objectives

Agree and Strongly Agree

Category	Value
Overall	83.8
Private	74.7
State/Govt	89.1
NPO or FBO	84.0

"Before the COVID-19 pandemic, our organization was stuck in the 20th century as far as communication. We primarily used email and in-person meetings. Most of the time these methods were unproductive and ineffective. Once the pandemic hit, we were forced to make a huge change in our communication methods and began to rely heavily on Zoom and social media."

"This forced reliance is exactly the kick starter we needed in order to bring us into the 21st century."

"In these past few months, we have used Zoom for a number of things such as staff meetings, district updates, community updates with legislative leaders, PD training, online learning, exercise classes, performance art events, and an awards show. All of this without affecting business or interrupting normal operations in any significant way. And from what I can tell, everyone has enjoyed this new way of communicating. We have been engaged and enlightened like never before."

WHAT IS INTERRUPTED

- The desire to interact on a personal level with colleagues (hear about vacations, personal milestones, etc.) will remain, but the use of digital platforms will create new ways to do it.

- Organizations will increasingly look to leadership to establish practices that promote a positive culture and the personal connections between team members.

WHAT IS DISRUPTED

- Organizational leaders will establish new rhythms for collaboration using both in person and virtual meetings.

- Meetings will become more focused, frequent, and shorter.

WE LEARNED
ACCESS TO QUALITY INTERNET
IS NOT TRUE FOR EVERYONE

We found the greatest level of frustration with digital communication was the lack of access to reliable or high-speed internet at home. Access to quality internet has become an unavoidable reality to equal opportunity in the labor force as well as in education.

"My internet is awful and cannot access a lot of things like programs that we use at work and live streams will not load. So, I can only hope that we could get better internet where we live in a rural area."

"Our organization has extensive digital presence, and it's incorporated into our everyday workflow. My biggest frustration regarding WFH is the incredibly unreliable and also incredibly slow service of cable internet we are forced to use from home. I've wanted to go to the office some days out of sheer frustration of trying to keep the slow internet from crashing my systems."

"We do not have access to internet at my church."

"We have always had online presence, so nothing really changed with that; but the internet services in my area are horrible, as well as cell service, so it made things even more difficult because I relied on the office for internet."

"Our school administration did not feel like Zoom was a good option for us because over half of our students do not have internet access in their homes."

WHAT IS INTERRUPTED

- Working in offices will persist, in some capacity, due to the need to maintain security of proprietary or sensitive information.

- There will need to be a centralized location for many organizations and entities to maintain paper records and house sensitive data and intellectual property.

WHAT IS DISRUPTED

- People will rely on technology to a greater degree, and those who can use technology most effectively will flourish while those who cannot will be left behind.

- Access to quality internet is paramount for personal and professional development.

- The divide between those who do or do not have access to high speed internet and devices to capitalize on it will continue to widen.

- Organizational leaders will be required to make greater investments in technology and reliable connectivity for remote personnel.

- Public policy will need to address access to quality high speed internet in underserved areas either directly or through private/public partnership.

WE LEARNED
PEOPLE WERE LESS CONNECTED TO SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS, FRIENDS, AND FAITH COMMUNITY

Exploring the variation in connectedness to different groups of people, we asked:

To what extent was your connection to other people hindered by the use of digital communication, on a scale from 1 (Completely Blocked) to 7 (Not Hindered at All)?
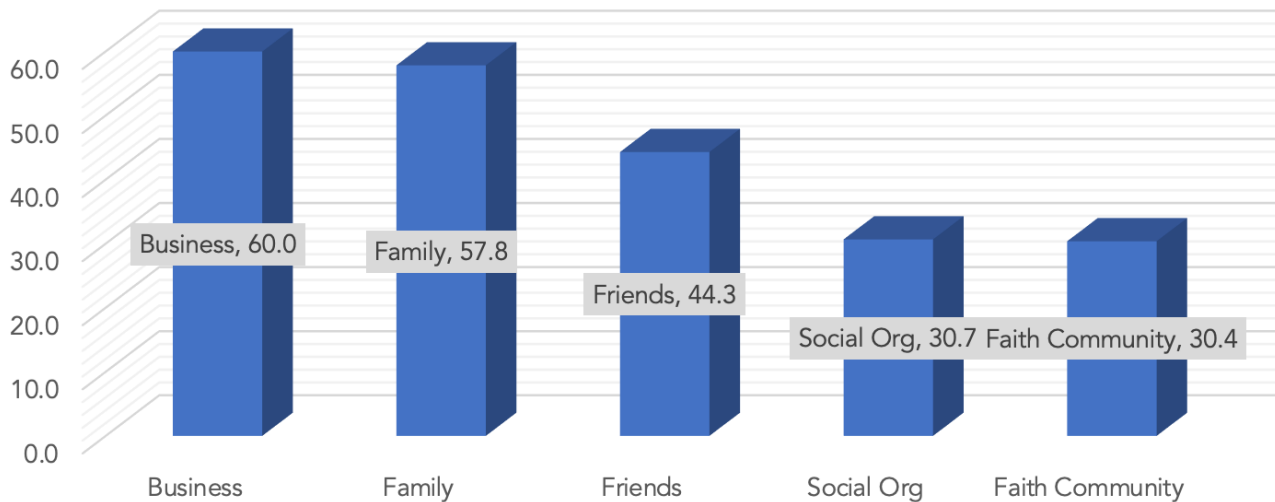
Respondents rated their connection to other people for the following groups: Business/Work Connections, Family Connections, Friends, Social/Community Organizations, Religious/Faith Community.

When it comes to business connections or family, we found people's sense of connectedness was less hindered. Conversely, connection to social groups, friends, and faith communities were more hindered or completely blocked.

One factor contributing to the decrease of connection to friends, social groups, and faith communities may be that people grow weary of virtual meetings after the workday. It's also possible that connecting to personal friends, social organizations, or one's faith community is simply more challenging when done through digital platforms. More research is needed to understand the reasons for the variation range in connectedness with the different groups found in this study.
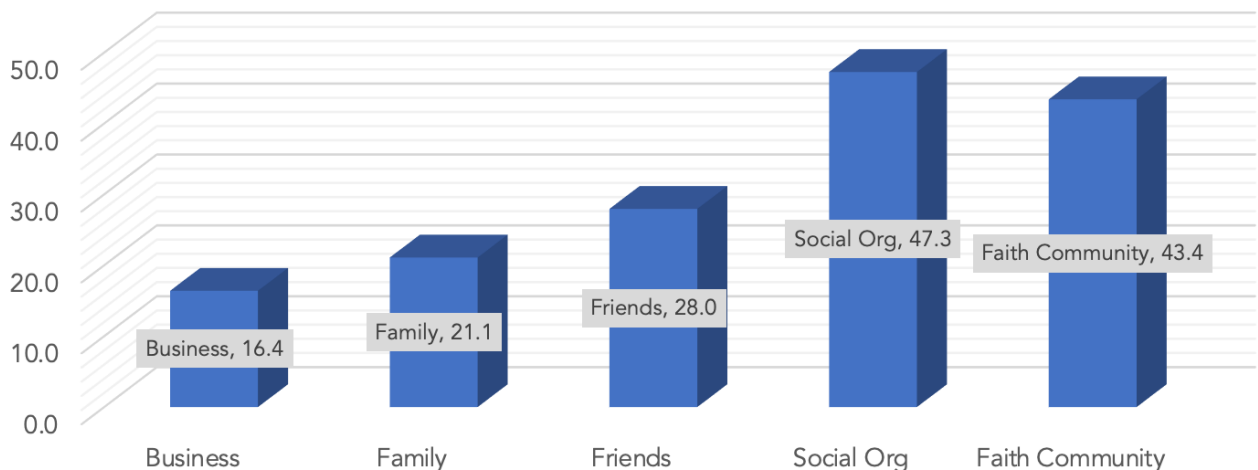
Connection to Others Not Hindered

Agree and Strongly Agree

Business, 60.0
Family, 57.8
Friends, 44.3
Social Org, 30.7   Faith Community, 30.4

Business   Family   Friends   Social Org   Faith Community

Connection to Others Hindered or Completely Blocked

Agree and Strongly Agree

Business, 16.4
Family, 21.1
Friends, 28.0
Social Org, 47.3
Faith Community, 43.4

Business   Family   Friends   Social Org   Faith Community

"Before we started moving people home, only a few people were using TEAMS for their meetings with our current at-home staff. Now, everyone uses it routinely and we have allowed employees to use our TEAMS platform for personal get-together's after work hours."

WHAT IS INTERRUPTED

- Getting together in person with friends, social organizations, and faith communities will return.

- Social gatherings such as seasonal events, benefits, banquets, and galas will resume, but it is not clear how quickly.

- Planning for the return of such gatherings will be a priority for leaders of non-profits and social organizations that historically utilize them to raise money and build awareness of their mission and work.

WHAT IS DISRUPTED

- As continued investment in technology and creative use of online programming develops, online participation with faith congregations may become the preference for some people over regular in-person attendance.

- The way non-profits communicate their mission and connect their work to stakeholders or donors will need to adapt beyond annual events or gatherings.

WE LEARNED
PEOPLE CONNECTED BETTER THROUGH REAL-TIME INTERACTION

An important characteristic of digital communication is that it can be either asynchronous or synchronous (in real time).

Examples of asynchronous communication include text messaging, email, or message boards. The advantage to asynchronous communication is the ability to respond at more convenient times. Sufficient time can be taken to gather additional information and provide a more thoughtful or accurate response – such as when responding to a work colleague.

Real-Time Interaction, or synchronous communication, whether through a voice call or videoconference, allows participants to speak more candidly at times, have conversations of a more personal nature, and to pick up on verbal or non-verbal cues in the moment.

The use of both synchronous and asynchronous digital communication was the normal practice for nearly all respondents. Where one-third of respondents reported the use of RTI for 1 to 30 percent of their digital communication, more than half reported the use of RTI from 31 to 90 percent of their digital communication.

STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT CORRELATIONS BETWEEN REAL TIME INTERACTION

We found the use of Real-Time Interaction (RTI) is helpful in promoting a greater sense of connection when using digital communication platforms. An additional level of data analysis of found multiple positive correlations at statistically significant levels ($p < .05$). Using the percent of RTI as an independent variable, linear regression analysis was performed on a series of dependent variables related to connectedness.

As the rate of RTI increased from zero to one hundred percent, respondents found a positive increase in the following areas:

- *Connection with business and work contacts became less hindered.*
- *Connection with religious and faith community contacts became less hindered.*
- *When working with a remote team, their contributions were valued as much as in person.*
- *They were able to give and/or receive needed feedback to accomplish goals or objectives.*
- *Team leaders regularly communicated expectations.*
- *Employees felt supported by co-workers and colleagues.*

Interaction in Real-Time
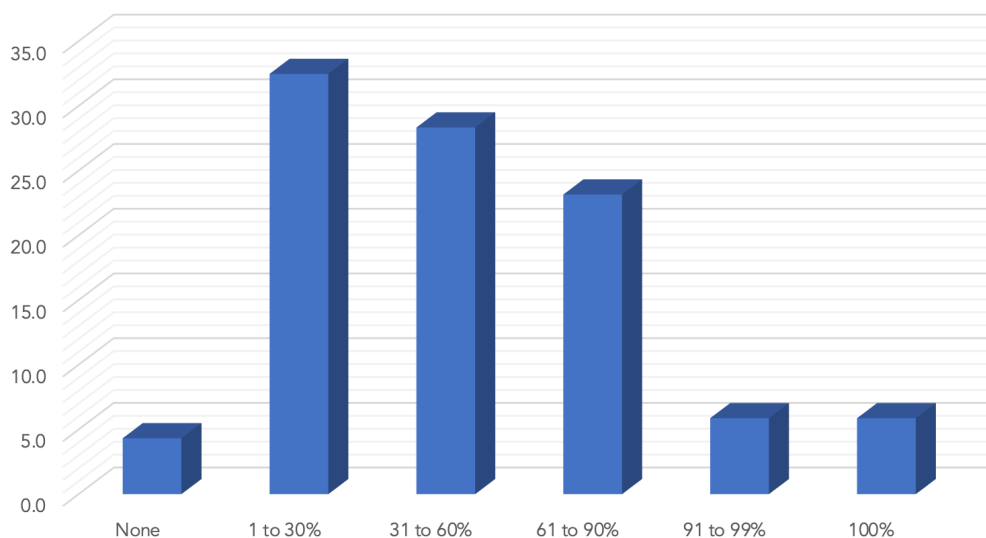
WHAT IS INTERRUPTED

- Technology is only a tool, however advanced it becomes. The task of valuing, engaging, communicating, and connecting is the responsibility of those using the tools of technology to facilitate communication and collaboration through digital platforms.

- We believe leaders must continually assess the needs of those in their organization to choosing when virtual meetings are appropriate or when meeting in-person is necessary.

WHAT IS DISRUPTED

- The positive correlations between RTI and the sense of connection indicates digital communication was effective in promoting personal and professional relationships. Organizational leaders need to continually improve the way they facilitate real-time interaction and be mindful when people are not connecting.

- There will continue to be the use of RTI through digital communication for supervision, mentorship, e-health services, sales calls, work-team collaboration, and in many more ways.

WE LEARNED
ORGANIZATIONS
ADOPTED EXISTING PLATFORMS
AND PROCESSES MORE
THAN INVENTING NEW ONES

While many businesses developed new products to contain the spread of COVID, data in
this study offers insights into how organizations adopted existing digital platforms more than invented new practices, products, or technologies.
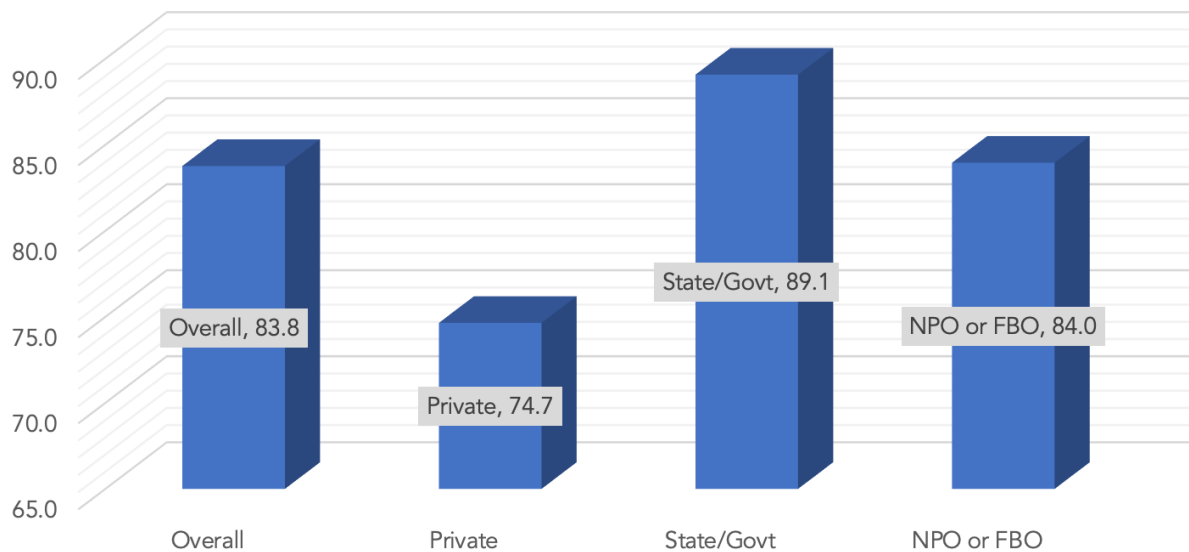
We found that there was a significant increase in the use of digital communications and that it was most pronounced in the state/government and non-profit and faith-based sectors.

This may indicate that these sectors were less prepared for a WFH event and were forced to more significantly increase their reliance on digital tools.

It could also indicate that the shift to using digital tools was greater in these sectors. As an example,
religious houses of worship were forced to pivot their entire congregations and services to digital technology.
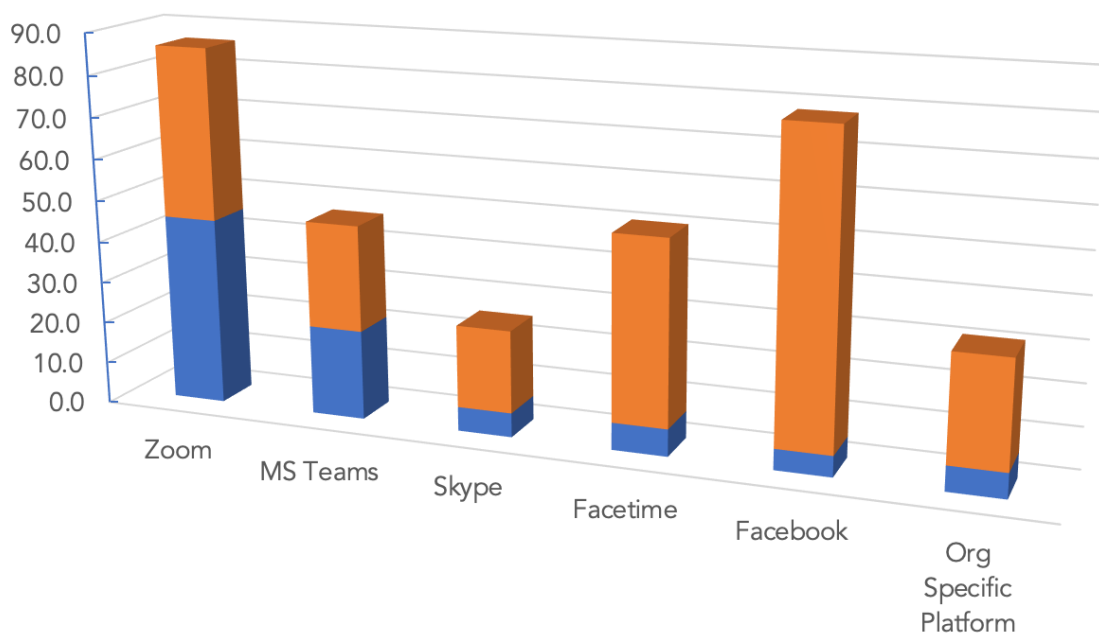
Significantly Increased Use of Digital Communications Tools

Overall, 83.8
Private, 74.7
State/Govt, 89.1
NPO or FBO, 84.0

| | Overall | Private | State/Govt | NPO or FBO |

We also found that organizations implemented digital communication and collaboration tools such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, in many instances for the first time.

Adoption of Digital Platforms

	Zoom	MS Teams	Skype	Facetime	Facebook	Org Specific Platform
Have and Currently Use	41.3	25.5	19.7	44.2	73.4	25.5
Haven't But Do Now	45.1	21.5	5.8	6.5	5.0	6.0

*"Prior to the shut down my organization was reluctant to use digital platforms for communication. We were thrown in the deep end and had to move quickly, fortunately **we had the platforms in place and the communication channels we already had proved very useful** and now we will continue to use them with greater frequency. It will change our travel schedules as well as how we handle meetings, actually expanding our capability."*

*"Prior to the shutdown we used WebEx often and exclusively. Since the shutdown we now use Microsoft Teams as well as WebEx, and together **we have doubled our usage."***
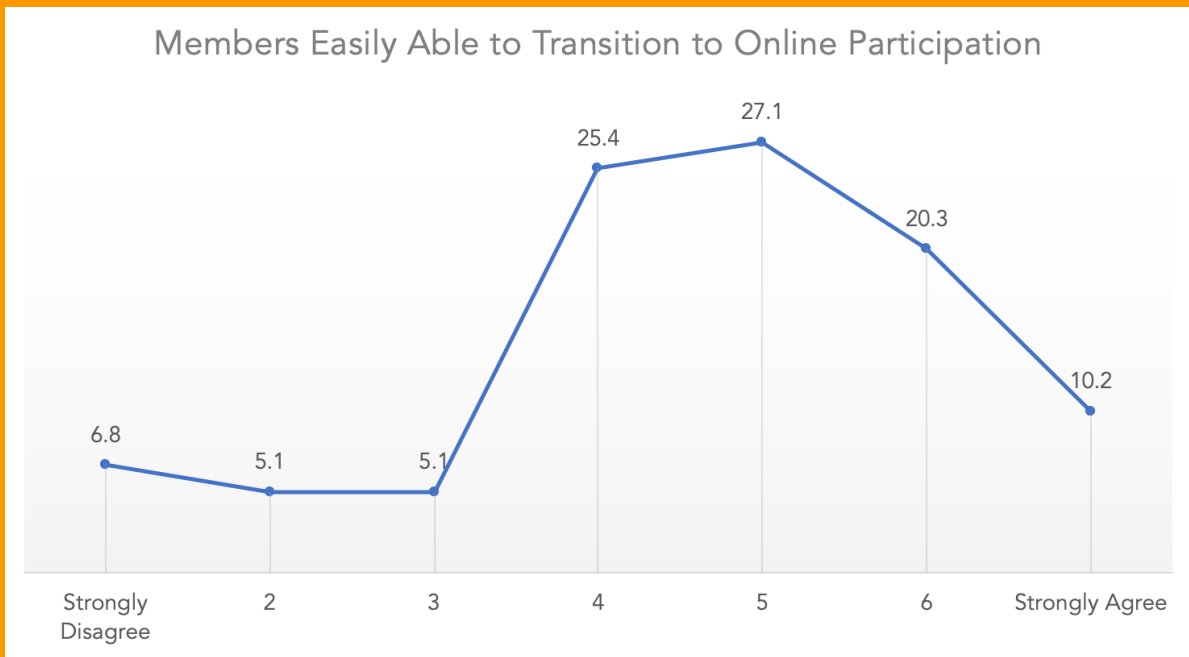
INNOVATION IN FAITH BASED ARENA

Faith-based organizations and houses of worship in particular innovated dramatically during social distancing requirements due to COVID. Individuals surveyed in the faith-based arena were asked additional questions about the impact of digital communications in their particular context.

"Before the shutdown we used email, Facebook, and our webpage, to communicate with church members. We had been thinking about Facebook live before the shutdown but didn't know how to implement it. When the shutdown came, we had no choice but to jump in and try. We now use Zoom, email, Facebook page, Facebook live, webpage, and radio, and intend to continue to use all of these even later after this is all over."
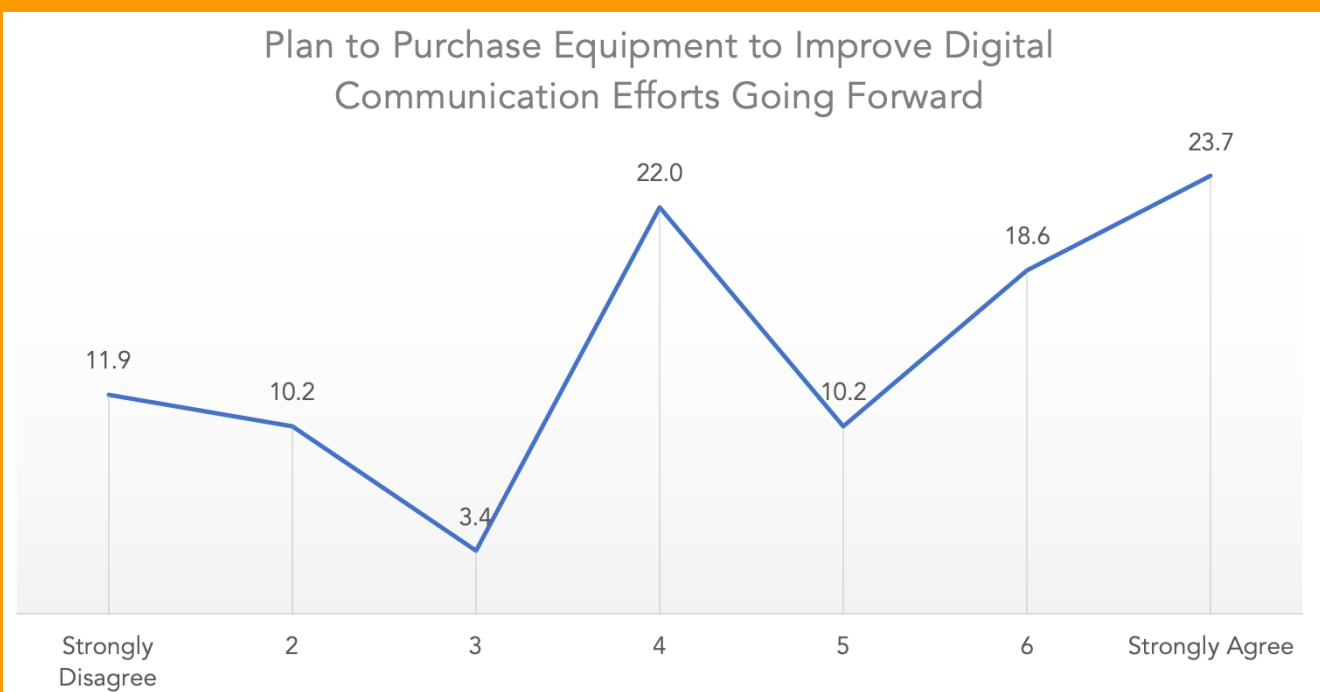
"We will be Live Streaming more of our events in the future and had a greater level of engagement using our digital platforms than we do with in-person meetings."

Our research found that most members found transitioning to online participation easier than it was difficult.

Members Easily Able to Transition to Online Participation

6.8	5.1	5.1	25.4	27.1	20.3	10.2
Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree

We found that a majority of those polled plan to purchase equipment to help them improve their digital communication efforts moving forward.

Whether to strengthen digital offerings to broadcast services or to find new ways to reach members such as podcasts or video conferencing tools to reach existing and new members, the drive to obtain tools to improve digital offerings definitely increased.

Plan to Purchase Equipment to Improve Digital Communication Efforts Going Forward

|						
11.9	10.2	3.4	22.0	10.2	18.6	23.7
Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly Agree

SMALL GROUPS

Social distancing requirements certainly impacted small group meetings. Our research found that nearly half of all small group meetings halted meeting altogether when in-person gatherings were not possible.

Even with greater investment in digital platforms, in-person gatherings will likely remain a preferred way for people to connect to their faith community.

Small Groups Continued Meeting Using Digital Platforms

All	Most	Some	Barely	None
8.2	13.1	21.3	13.1	44.3
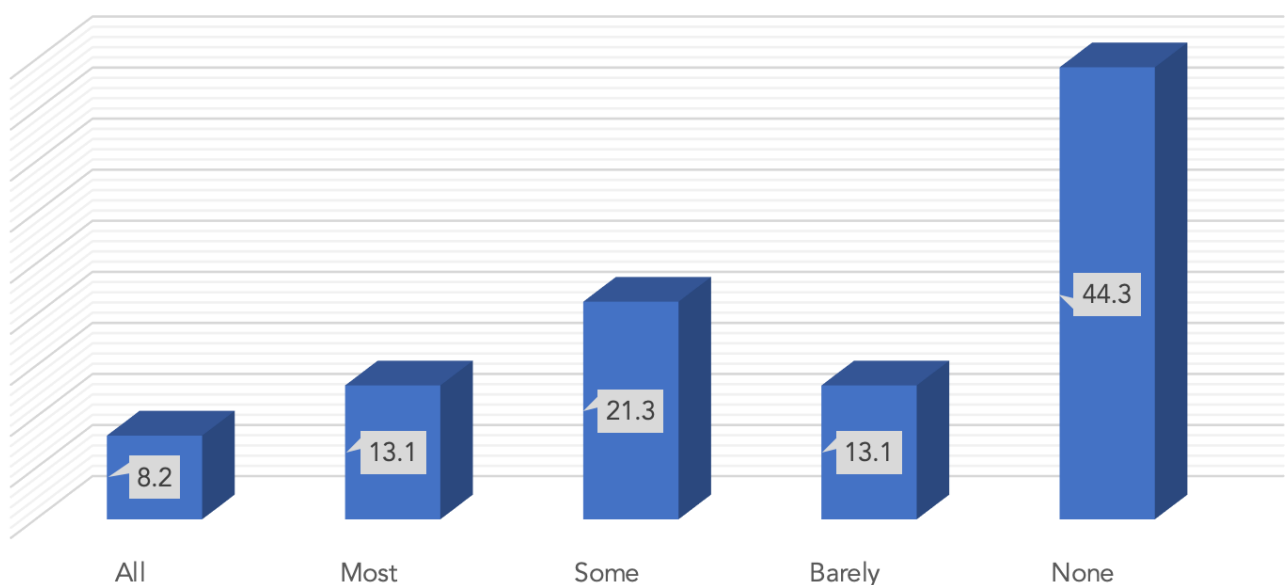
WHAT IS INTERRUPTED

- When it comes to faith-based organizations, it is clear that in-person gatherings are still highly valued.

- In these types of situations, digital communication platforms were not a replacement for in-person gatherings. It is likely that as social distancing requirements are eased or lifted, small group meetings will quickly transition back to in-person meetings.

WHAT IS DISRUPTED

- Organizations will continue to be reliant and harness digital tools for communication and collaboration. Industries and governmental entities will use these tools to conduct everyday meetings and day-to-day processes as well as share important documents and intellectual property.

- When it comes to faith-based organizations, they found digital platforms to be a helpful strategy in reaching a new audience. New investment in technology infrastructure is expected. They will continue to utilize digital tools to reach existing members and potential new members as well as to promote content or broadcast services online.
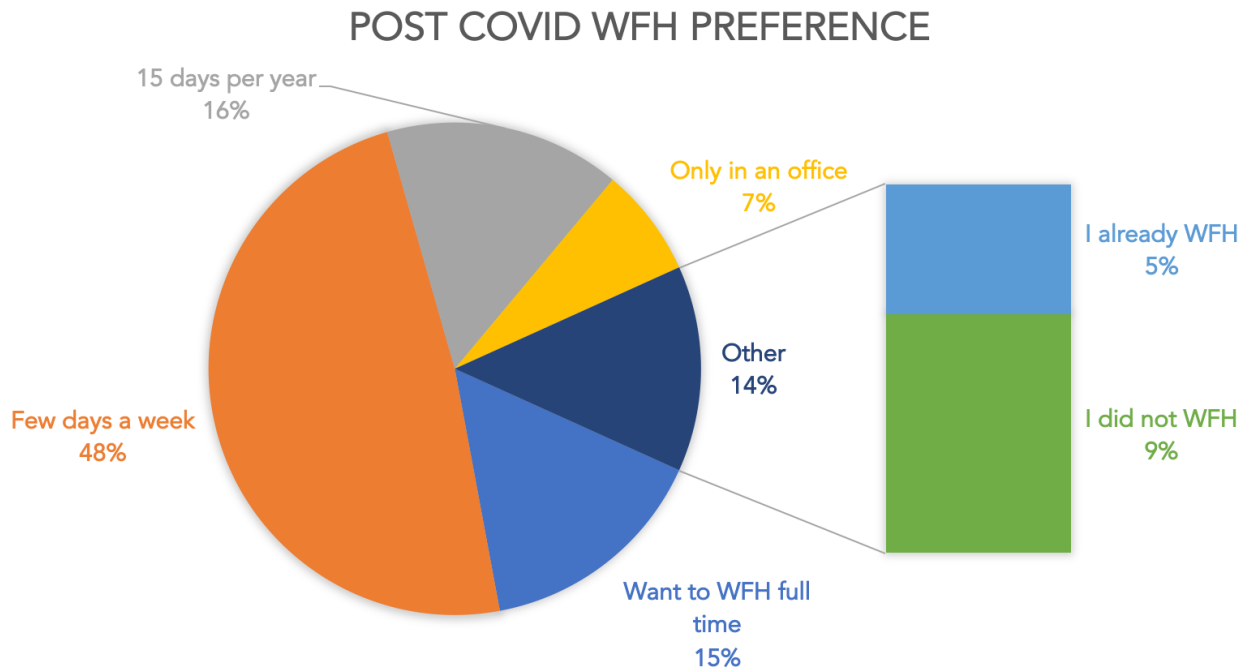
WE LEARNED
REMOTE WORK IS MORE THAN JUST AN OPTION

When asked about post-COVID WFH preferences, respondents were given a number of options to consider, including 15 WFH days they could use whenever needed throughout the year. Despite the availability of this option, nearly half of respondents (48 percent) indicated they prefer to WFH a few days each week. This indicates the use of digital communications during COVID presents a workforce disruption more than interruption. Remote work through digital transformation will become a way of life for workforces in the future.

Linear regression analysis found positive correlations at a statistically significant level ($p < .05$) whereas the rate of RTI increased in the following:

- Digital communication platforms we've used have exceeded my expectations of what I thought we would be able to do.

- Digital communication has been the "saving grace" of our organization during this time.

- We will continue to use many of these digital communication tools going forward, regardless of our ability to meet and go "back to normal."

POST COVID WFH PREFERENCE

15 days per year
16%

Only in an office
7%

I already WFH
5%

Few days a week
48%

Other
14%

I did not WFH
9%

Want to WFH full
time
15%

"*The quarantine helped us be more aware of pockets of time that were heretofore wasted and robbed us of focus worked.*"

"*This has **absolutely changed the way we work**. I am in HR and several of our processes are now all digital (e.g. payroll, personnel files, etc.). We now have chat for our members on our website and many other processes are changing.*"

"*Because of COVID-19, we probably never would have had the opportunity to work remotely. This option was never presented to us until now. This one aspect alone has given me a whole new point of view into what it means to have work/life balance and has convinced me that the future of work is here and here to stay. **There is no going "back to normal"** now that we know what is possible. Why should we? There are too many benefits with the WFH business model that supports its continued use.*"

"*We never had a web-based board meeting prior to this time and found it was **very useful.***"

Continue Using Digital Tools Going Forward

Chart showing survey scores: Overall, 84.9; Private, 85.6; State/Govt, 86.5; NPO or FBO, 82.4
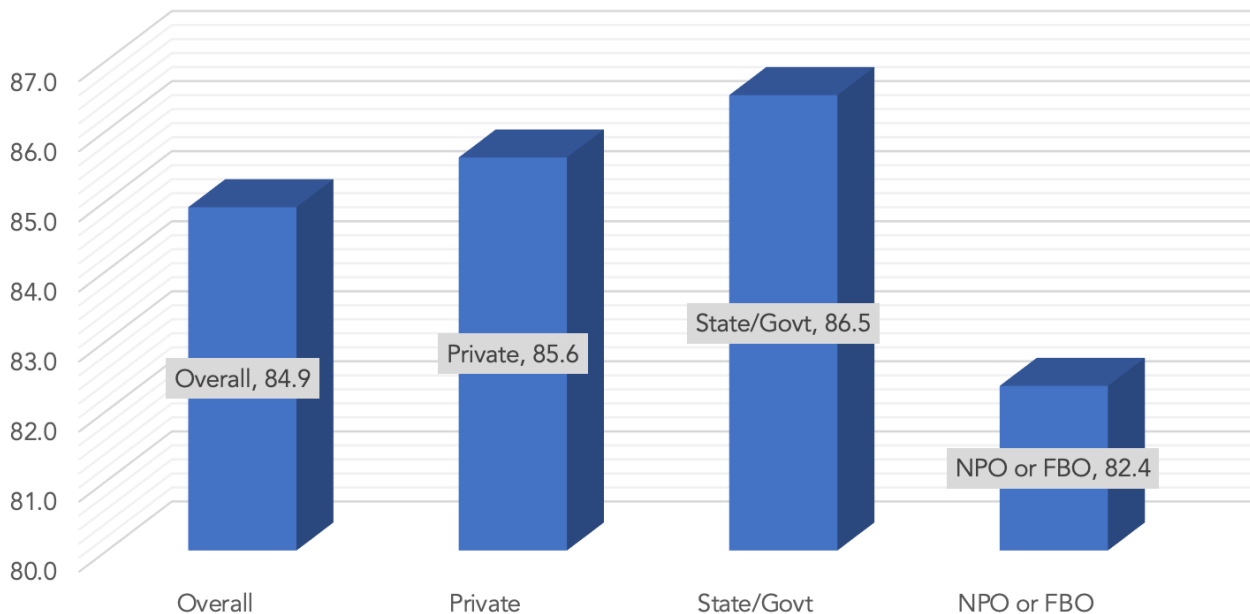
*"We now use zoom for all meetings. I can see the use of Zoom continuing and **decreasing the need for face to face meetings.**"*

*"We work closely with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Department. We have utilized technology for about 10 years in the provision of services; however, we expanded those services exponentially because of COVID19. We have actually had a great response from the people we serve and **will continue as long as we are allowed.** It has been beneficial to both staff and clients."*

WHAT IS INTERRUPTED

- Currently, most organizations and entities, due to social distancing restrictions, have their primary workforce entirely remote.

- The exception is of course "essential" and "front line" workers who have bravely navigated the pandemic to provide needed goods and services.

- However, at some point (whether it is later this year or further in the future) workers will begin to return to physical offices. Most will return, in some capacity, to an office environment. The question will be, to what extent.

WHAT IS DISRUPTED

- Many professionals will not return to the office full time. A hybrid WFH model will become the new normal for most organizations.

- Our research has shown that respondents want to work from home at least a few days a week.

- Employers and leaders have discovered that this model can help increase productivity and employee happiness as well as produce cost savings for the organization. Because of this, a hybrid WFH model will become the new normal for many organizations and entities.

CONCLUSIONS
THE MOVE TO DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND REMOTE WORK DUE TO EMERGENCY WFH CONDITIONS WAS BOTH UNANTICIPATED AND UNPRECEDENTED.

Despite this, we found the use of digital communication platforms during COVID-19 was discovered to be an effective option for organizations across private, public, and non-profit sectors in Oklahoma. In certain industries and occupations, there were unexpected increases in efficiency and productivity. Further, innovations to methods, business models, and approaches to work emerged.

As emergency social distancing requirements dissipate, the positive experiences with digital communications will have a lasting presence in the future of people's lives and work. The ability to meaningfully connect to others exists in digital communication platforms. In particular, the intentional use of Real-Time Interaction can positively increase the sense of connection to work colleagues, family, social organizations, and faith communities.

In-person interaction, work, collaboration, and relationships remain highly valued. But, as digital communication platforms and the methods for their use continue to improve, the transition to digital communication platforms will be more effective and incorporated into business models and the regular operating practices of organizations and employees.

Remote work is more than merely an option during emergency situations. The preference toward work schedules that regularly include remote work multiple days per week indicates a desire for a permanent shift in the future, regardless of the situation.

METHODOLOGY

An electronic survey of the Oklahoma business and organizational landscape was used to determine how individuals utilized digital communication platforms during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Given the scope of organizations represented, results are categorized by Private Sector, Public Sector, or Non-Profit Organizations (including churches). For individuals who indicated that they work in a Church or Place of Worship, their questions were worded to reflect their unique context.

The online survey was hosted on Equip Research's site, and respondents remained anonymous. Data was collected from May 12 to June 14, 2020, from a stratified sample of respondents statewide across Oklahoma throughout state agencies, trade organizations, non-profit networks, and faith-based entities. A total sample of 602 respondents was garnered and 580 were retained for quantitative data analysis.

An additional level of data analysis of found multiple positive correlations at statistically significant levels ($p < .05$). Using the percent of Real-Time Interaction (RTI) as an independent variable, linear regression analysis was performed on a series of dependent variables related to connectedness.

Sector:	Sample:	Sample Error:
Overall	580	+/- 3.9%
Private	146	+/- 8.1%
Public	242	+/- 6.2%
NPO/Faith-Based	192	+/- 7.0%

Note: Sample Error is calculated at the 95% confidence level. This means that were this survey repeated 20 times, results from 19 of those would fall within the sample errors listed.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

Dr. Joel W. Harder

Joel Harder is the founder and president of Oklahoma Capitol Culture. He has several years of experience working in leadership development through nationwide nonprofits and political arenas. Harder is a Licensed Master of Social Work (LMSW) and serves on the Oklahoma State Board of Licensed Social Workers.

In 2018, Harder earned a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) after conducting a nationwide study of e-mentoring and digital learning among marketplace influencers, publishing the results in his doctoral dissertation.

Harder is published in a peer reviewed journal and is a regular contributor to The Oklahoman and Tulsa World. As a consultant at Pliris Strategies and an an adjunct lecturer through Rose State College, Harder teaches seminars in the fall of 2020 on digital transformation and communication techniques.

He is the author of _When Leaders Matter: How Civility, Integrity, and the Leaders We Need Are Possible._

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ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

Scott Klososky

Throughout his career, Scott Klososky has stood on the nexus between technology and humanity. He has worked to define and help organizations discover the ideal blend of technology and human effort. He is widely recognized for his ability to forecast how technology will impact organizations, industries, and our world. He is the founder and principal at FPOV as well as a renowned consultant, speaker, and author.

Scott's unique perspectives on technology, business culture, and the future allow him to travel the globe guiding senior executives in organizations ranging from the Fortune 500 to universities, nonprofits, and countless professional associations and coalitions. He has worked with organizations such as American Fidelity Assurance Company, Roche, IBM, General Motors, Georgia Pacific, Legrand, International Franchise Association, and Great Clips.

He regularly speaks in front of major conferences helping leaders in countless industries improve the way they integrate technology into their organizations. He is the author of four books including his latest title, Did God Create the Internet? The Impact of Technology on Humanity.

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