

Considering What Faculty Value When Working with Instructional Designers and Instructional Design Teams

Jason K. McDonald, Salma Elsayed-Ali, Kayla Bowman, & Amy A. Rogers

DOI:10.59668/378.10329

Instructional Design

Higher Education

Faculty Collaboration

Educational Simulations



The purpose of this research was to study what university faculty valued when working with instructional designers and instructional design teams to develop educational simulations. We did this through a case study of three faculty, where we analyzed what they discussed among themselves or communicated to other team members about what mattered to them about their team relationships or the design processes they employed. We structured our case report around three thematic issues that expressed how our participants depicted good relationships and processes. Our report concludes with a discussion of how instructional designers could use our findings in their practice.

Introduction

A key to success for instructional designers in higher education is the relationships they develop with faculty. Research has shown the positive effects working with instructional designers can have to improve faculty's ability to integrate technology into their teaching (Scoppio & Luyt, 2017), or to develop high-quality online courses (Olesova & Campbell, 2019). Research has also pointed towards several factors important for instructional designers to develop or maintain effective relationships with faculty. A common conclusion in the literature is that designer/faculty relationships should be collaborative (Chen & Carliner, 2021), presumably meaning that both designers and faculty work towards shared goals, and attempt to develop their association into a productive partnership (Ritzhaupt & Kumar, 2015). Other findings include that relationships should be flexible (Scoppio & Luyt, 2017), built on trust (Richardson et al., 2019) and empathy (Bawa & Watson, 2017), and allow designers to serve as mentors for skills in which they have expertise (Olesova & Campbell, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019).

As Chen and Carliner (2021) concluded in their systematic literature review on this topic, however, much of the research into instructional designers' relationships with faculty has been carried out from the designers' point of view. As useful as these findings have been, then, they have likely missed important insights that could be discovered if the faculty viewpoint had been studied as well. The scope of Chen and Carliner's review ended in 2017, and some further research has been published since that did provide more understanding of what faculty were looking for when working with instructional designers (e.g., Olesova & Campbell, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019). But even with these additional studies, it appears instructional design researchers have not explored the faculty worldview in the sense encouraged by Liu et al. (2007), who advised designers to seek to understand matters that faculty care about from *the faculty perspective*, and not only from how those concerns fit into the designers' communities of practice.

Our purpose in this paper was to contribute towards this end. We used a case study methodology, focused on three faculty members who were part of an instructional design team, to understand what they valued when working with other team members (instructional designers, software developers, and subject matter experts) to develop a suite of educational simulations. We focused on how the faculty depicted what mattered to them about work relationships and team processes when communicating with each other and with other team members. This case presented an opportunity to analyze faculty values from their own point-of-view, largely independent from the perspective they might have provided if they were directly asked what they thought about working with instructional designers or with their design team. This provided a way of understanding faculty concerns and interests that instructional designers can consider to help their own relationships with faculty be more effective (cf. Packer, 2018). The specific question guiding our study of this case was: how did university faculty depict what mattered to them about instructional design relationships and processes, both in conversation with each other as well as in communication with other members of an instructional design team?

The Relationship Between Instructional Designers and Faculty

Given that only a minority of faculty work with instructional designers in meaningful ways (Jaschik & Lederman, 2017), how to build relationships between designers and faculty is an important issue in instructional design research. Among other factors, this issue carried with it broad implications for how the results of their work (e.g., projects they complete) could affect the ultimate performance of the students they are both attempting to serve (Chen & Carliner, 2021). Prior studies showed two trends, both of which pointed towards the importance of improving designer/faculty relationships in higher education. The trends were summarized by Pan et al. (2003), who observed that the "relationship between the instructional designer and the faculty is intimate but vague" (p. 292). On the one hand, research indicated that faculty generally found their experiences with instructional designers to be rewarding (Olesova & Campbell, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019). Along with this, faculty reported enhanced course design (Brown et al., 2013; Drysdale, 2019) and improved student outcomes (Chittur, 2018) after collaborating with instructional designers. Further, Olesova & Campbell (2019) found that faculty skills and teaching strategies improved after being mentored by designers. Overall, faculty who worked with designers perceived it as beneficial (You, 2010) and were enthusiastic about continued collaboration (Drysdale, 2019). But at the same time, faculty have also experienced the other side of Pan et al.'s (2003) observation. Many faculty did not know what to expect from a designer, or understand the roles designers played in relation to faculty (Drysdale, 2019; Richardson et al., 2019). This hindered the relationships designers were attempting to develop with them, which sometimes led to unsatisfying collaborations (Halupa, 2019).

Several factors seemed to be important in developing or maintaining instructional designer/faculty relationships. In a systematic literature review, Chen and Carliner (2021) found seven factors recurring in the research. These were: "communication, attitude, trust, commitment, flexibility, empowerment, [and] healthy workplace culture" (p. 13). These reflected a conclusion drawn in Ritzhaupt and Kumar's (2015) study of skills needed by instructional designers in higher education, who stated that a key competency designers should cultivate was the ability to interrelate with faculty in a professional manner. As valuable as these factors were, however, they were not a comprehensive list. For instance, Richardson et al. (2019) concluded that faculty appreciated a sense of assertiveness on the part of designers they work with. While faculty wanted designers to be flexible as well, they also expected designers to take stands on important

matters, in a spirit of being an effective mentor (cf. Olesova & Campbell, 2019). This suggested that instructional designers should seek to tailor their approach to what faculty expected in their working relationships (cf. Bawa & Watson, 2017).

Conversely, research indicated there were also factors that could interfere with instructional designer/faculty relationships. Chen and Carliner (2021) found five hindering factors in their literature review:

- Not understanding the role of the instructional designer, including beliefs on the part of some faculty that instructional designers are primarily “technical-support staff” (p. 15).
- Not being able to communicate clearly, especially when faculty or instructional designers used technical terminology that is unclear to the other party.
- Being overworked on the part of both faculty and instructional designers; having so many assigned tasks or expected duties that these got in the way of faculty and designers’ ability to consistently work together on a project.
- Uncertainty about independence, where faculty believe that working with instructional designers will impede their ability to teach what or how they want.
- Issues of institutional authority, where it was unclear who was really in charge, the faculty member or the instructional designer.

Problems could also arise when institutions sent mixed messages, such as when research universities deemphasized teaching improvements (Richardson et al., 2019; see also Bawa & Watson, 2017). Differentials in power structures (Schwier & Wilson, 2010), lack of professionalism on the designers’ part (Liu et al., 2007), or faculty being required to work with instructional designers (Albrahim, 2018) could also be concerns.

Our study explored factors that faculty valued in their relationships and processes when working with an instructional design team. Of course, prior research has also examined faculty attitudes about educational technology, online course development, and related issues (Harrison et al., 2017; Smidt et al., 2014; Tabata & Johnsrud, 2008; Wingo et al., 2017). Our study differed in that we did not focus on issues studied in prior research, like the effects of technology on students or challenges that faculty encountered when teaching online. We were interested in how they would depict valuable relationships with instructional designers or design teams, along with how they depicted the processes they thought would lead to worthwhile ends, apart from other issues that might also affect their satisfaction with matters related to educational technology. We were also interested in how faculty would depict these issues *in situ* as their work was unfolding, which also differed from prior research that often asked faculty to talk after the fact about their relationships with instructional designers (Richardson et al., 2019). This differing focus should provide new insights for instructional designers to understand how to work with faculty more effectively.

Method

We used a qualitative case study methodology, focused on three faculty leading a project to design and develop educational simulations. The case bounds were what they discussed among themselves or communicated to other team members about what mattered to them in their work with the instructional designers, software developers, and others associated with the project. Data were drawn from our ethnographic study of the team, specifically emails the faculty sent to each other about team organization, and project newsletters they used to communicate with the rest of the team. We completed a thematic analysis of this data, drawing on techniques associated with ethnography (Packer, 2018) and hermeneutics (Fleming et al., 2003), to develop an interpretive account of how the faculty depicted good working relationships and team organization, grounded in the details of their *in situ* project communications. Our report took a narrative form, common in interpretive research approaches like case studies (Newkirk, 1992). We did this to draw attention to the interrelated character of the values that mattered to the faculty, and to avoid reducing their experiences into an overly simplistic view that can occur when qualitative data is reduced into an abstract system of codes (Packer, 2018).

Case Background

The data for this case were taken from our ethnographic research project, studying an instructional design team that was developing educational simulations to teach students to collaborate in STEM careers. Our research began when the team was formed in June 2019. To date we have gathered 97 video observations of team meetings or other interactions, 30 interviews with team members, and over 800 artifacts team members produced (emails, design documents, project newsletters distributed to team members, etc.). The team itself was distributed across three universities, and was overseen by faculty members who had received an NSF grant to study the simulations. In addition to three faculty who were consistently involved as principal investigators, five other faculty worked on the project to perform certain tasks (including the lead author, who coordinated video production for the simulations). Over 30 graduate and undergraduate students have also worked on the project, some for a few weeks with others engaged for its duration (including two of the three co-authors, one of whom conducted an evaluation of the team's on-boarding processes and the other who provided research support for the principal investigators).

The specific team members we studied were the three faculty leading the team, referred to by the pseudonyms of Jack, Stacy, and Tim. Jack and Stacy worked at one university in the Eastern United States, and Tim at another university in the Western United States. All three belonged to departments of Information Technology and had extensive experience in the field of human-computer interaction (HCI). Although Jack had an advanced degree in the learning sciences, none of the three identified as instructional designers. All three faculty members played very active roles on the project, directing the day-to-day work of the other faculty and students. Other faculty and students, in turn, were the instructional designers, software developers, and subject matter experts engaged in designing and developing the simulations. They also provided subject matter expertise themselves, as well as contributed substantive ideas about the learning outcomes, pedagogical models and activities, and methods of assessment for each simulation. Finally, they coordinated the simulations' testing and evaluation, either in their own courses or those of colleagues in their departments.

Our case began five months after the project was funded. In November 2019, Jack, Stacy, and Tim flew as many team members as they could to one location, where they held a series of intensive meetings to begin designing the simulations' instructional components (basic learning outcomes, ideas for instructional events, etc.). Upon returning from these meetings, the three faculty began emailing each other about how to continue the progress they had made in-person. Over the next three months they debated how to configure the team to encourage relationships and processes they thought would help them complete the project, discussed advantages and disadvantages of different configurations, and communicated their conclusions to persuade the rest of the team to align with their ideals.

Data Sources

The data for the case were 51 emails and newsletters the faculty wrote over a three-month period, from mid-November 2019 to mid-February 2020. This was a time early in the project when the faculty were setting norms for their team relationships and design processes, and so were having frequent email discussions to persuade each other about the value of certain relational or process factors. They were also frequently communicating what they valued to other members of the team. Even though this data set included communication about, and to, team members other than instructional designers, since the background context was an instructional design project the way the faculty depicted their relationships and processes can still be a contribution to instructional design scholarship. As McDonald et al. (2021) argued, "it seems an unnecessary constraint to say that instructional designers cannot be informed by the motives of their colleagues, especially in the context of team-based design" (p. 1646).

The research value of this data derived from it being what Flyvbjerg (2001) called an "extreme" case (p. 77). Extreme case studies are not meant to test a hypothesis, but rather to yield large amounts of information about a single phenomenon. Their usefulness is at least partially found in their uniqueness. It is less important that a case can be generalized than that it provided a unique vantage point to view a phenomenon, one that could reveal fresh insights about common things (Packer, 2018). Our judgement that this case would be able to generate the type of information useful for our research questions was based on three criteria: (a) because the team was distributed they addressed

even minor issues through email, leaving a rich record for analysis; (b) during this formative phase of the project a number of issues arose that drew out details about what mattered to the faculty about their working relationships and team organization; and (c) the faculty were discussing these matters among themselves, not with instructional designers or researchers, so it is unlikely they were shaping their comments based on what they thought other audiences wanted to hear. While they all consented to be research subjects and knew the artifacts they generated could be analyzed, this specific case was not chosen until after the events had transpired, and the faculty members did not know in advance these specific emails would be selected for study, so it was unlikely that any of them were positioning their comments for public display.

Data Analysis

We conducted a thematic analysis of our data based on a procedure developed by Packer (2018), and a theoretical framing described by Yanchar and Gong (2019) that provided techniques for determining matters of significance to research participants. Beginning with the email and newsletter texts, we identified instances where the authors argued for some facet of their team relationships or processes as being better or worse than an alternative, as being good or bad, leading to better or worse simulations, etc. These claims provided material to analyze our participants' preferred ways of relating to each other (cf. Yanchar & Slife, 2017). Through close readings of these instances, we carried out a hermeneutic analysis of the effects participants' comments had on their own, and each other's, understanding of their experiences. This took place as we identified: (a) the context of each artifact – its background, purpose, and information it contained about our participants' project involvement; (b) participants' attempts to persuade each other along with other team members about the importance of certain relational or process factors; (c) breakdowns in their experience, and how participants' depicted their values or underlying assumptions while working through the difficulties; (d) any explicit values or other knowledge a participant identified as important for the team's progress; and (e) instances where a participant directly responded to another's statement of value, indicating the effect the original statement had for them.

From these details we developed a thematic structure of values depicted by our participants. This consisted of: (a) summarizing details using a word or short phrase that described the original participant's comments; (b) comparing/contrasting individual phrases, looking for relationships between phrases, merging similar phrases, etc.; (c) using whole/part analysis (Fleming et al., 2003) to refine our interpretations by considering individual phrases in light of all our data, as well as comparing the whole to the details of our growing structural system; and (d) selecting illustrative quotes from the original artifacts to build an account of our thematic structure. We reported these themes using a narrative style (Newkirk, 1992). This is common in ethnographic and case study research, because it allows for research to be presented in the context of the circumstances in which it is relevant (Stake, 2000; Van Manen, 2015), allows researchers to better explicate interconnections between findings (Flyvbjerg, 2001), and avoids the reductions of meaning that could occur when relying on methods like reporting the number of times certain codes were found in the data (Packer, 2018). Narrative reports have a tradition in educational research (Gong & Yanchar, 2019; Packer, 2011; Taeger & Yanchar, 2019), including instructional design research (McDonald & Rogers, 2021; Mertala, 2020; Nelson & Palumbo, 2014).

Limitations

This was a single case study, and so the particular issues that mattered to our participants will not necessarily be universal to faculty in all circumstances. There also might have been other issues that mattered to our participants that either they did not articulate, or that they were unaware of but were still shaping the situation in which they were working. Further, the context of our study was higher education; subject matter experts or clients that instructional designers work with in other industries may hold to different commitments than the faculty members we studied. We recommend future research investigate such issues in other industries. Finally, our qualitative method did not allow us to make causal claims about our participants' experience.

Findings

We structured our case report around three thematic statements that expressed how our participants depicted good team relationships and processes. Each theme contained a dual pair of concepts; each concept within a pair tended to arise near the other when the faculty were discussing the team qualities they sought. These were:

- Collaborative and inclusive – making decisions through discussion and consensus, while actively seeking to include team members’ ideas and perspectives.
- Rational and efficient – valuing objective decisions, made in a cost or time effective manner.
- Expert and engaged – seeking to include individuals with sufficient expertise, as well as those who had demonstrated their commitment to the project.

In the first two themes the concepts seemed to reinforce each other, while in the third the faculty sometimes experienced each as being in tension with the other. Additionally, there were sometimes tensions across the themes as well. Table 1 summarized the themes along with narrative accounts from our data that illustrate each. We then elaborated on them in the sections that follow.

Table 1

Summary of Themes and Illustrating Narratives

Theme	Illustrating Narratives
Collaborative and inclusive – faculty valued making decisions through discussion and consensus, while actively seeking to include team members’ ideas and perspectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jack proposed a design task force to allow many team members to be involved in design decisions. • Tim and Jack promoted the value of including student employees. • Stacy promoted the value of including people from different disciplinary backgrounds. • Jack and Tim promoted the value of including work from all team members.
Rational and efficient – faculty valued making objective decisions in a cost or time effective manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jack advocated for design processes based on rational criteria. • A project newsletter promoted the team’s rational ideals. • Tim trusted that orderly and efficient processes would facilitate the team’s progress. • Jack asked Stacy to generate design options that could be evaluated through rational criteria.
Expert and engaged – faculty valued the inclusion of individuals with expertise, as well as those who had demonstrated their commitment to the project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jack and Stacy proposed a subject matter expert be appointed leader of the design task force. • Tim proposed that he and Stacy lead the task force because they had design expertise and had been most involved in the project. • Tim advocated for other team members to take leadership positions because of their expertise. • Jack resisted Tim’s proposal because one of those individuals had not demonstrated commitment to the project. • Stacy suggested participation from someone with expertise in the team’s instructional design process. • Jack changed his mind about the task force leader because his first choice had not demonstrated commitment to the project; at the same time he requested further involvement from an instructional designer who had expertise in an area of need.

Collaborative and Inclusive

The artifacts we analyzed indicated that our participants treated design relationships as good when they collaboratively made decisions through discussion and consensus, and actively sought to include team members’ ideas. They sought this across institutions, across disciplines, and between levels of their social hierarchy (e.g., faculty and student

employees). This should not be taken as evidence that their work was always as collaborative and inclusive as they claimed. While we did not analyze their actual decision making in this study, we noted that in reality small groups made many of the significant decisions about the simulations (such as each one's learning outcomes, the instructional strategies underlying their design, or how outcomes would be assessed). Yet, regardless of how their practice unfolded, the faculty depicted themselves as embracing collaboration and inclusion, while claiming that deviations were necessary adjustments needed to manage the project's complexity.

Our first examples were drawn from an email conversation where Jack proposed creating "a design task force" consisting of members from all three universities, to carry forward the momentum the team had generated during their in-person design meetings. Task force members would meet regularly to "share info and gather ideas from others who are not in the group so that others are involved," as decisions were made about the learning activities students would complete during each simulation. While Jack realized that "adding [people to decision making structures] adds complexity," he wanted to include anyone who was interested, "if a person feels strongly they want to be involved I would be open."

Although both Tim and Stacy had questions about Jack's proposal, as they replied they also expressed the same commitments of collaboration and inclusion. Tim agreed that "bringing in input from those on your list seems critical." But he was "concerned" about the specific structure Jack proposed, so he suggested that he and Stacy lead the design. He also attempted to preemptively resolve concerns Jack might have about his recommendation by saying, "perhaps you are worried that we would exclude others' opinions? . . . I can assure you that would not be what happens." In a series of additional emails, while they continued to disagree about the task force itself, they both affirmed their interest in collaboration and inclusion through statements like, "I would like a process where alternatives are discussed;" "any member(s) of the team can propose how things will work;" "I really like the idea that anyone can contribute designs;" and "we can all be part of decision-making." Stacy also agreed with the values her partners expressed and specifically noted the importance of including a certain individual with instructional design experience, "I don't see why he should not be included – it's better to be inclusive at this stage."

We found similar commitments to collaboration and inclusion in other artifacts. At one point Tim promoted the value of including student employees in the process, "it's essential that we get students heavily involved in the design." Later, in an email to students, Jack assured them that they would be meaningfully involved. Even though "because of logistics we are going to be a small group making the final decisions," he wanted the students to know "we will include people and support your ideas being part of this." In another email, Stacy proposed including people from different disciplinary backgrounds, offering an example of one individual who would be "an excellent sounding board" while the team was selecting instructional material. And finally, in another email, Jack asserted, "I am determined to include the work of everyone." In his reply, Tim began by reiterating Jack's position, "I like how we're trying to incorporate work from everyone."

Rational and Efficient

The artifacts we analyzed also suggested that our participants valued rational and efficient decision making, which they seemingly defined as making decisions based on objective criteria, in a cost- and time-effective manner. This was more than discussing options in a utilitarian sense, attempting to dispassionately weigh alternatives based on rational or efficient criteria. While at times they debated the merits of specific options in terms of how to maximize their ability to make rational or efficient decisions, they also described rationality and efficiency as being goods in themselves. They treated them like fundamentally better ways to design educational products. This suggested they viewed those motives as more praiseworthy than alternatives. Their team would be a better team, and their simulations would be better learning experiences, the closer they aligned with rational and efficient ideals.

One example was an email from Jack to Tim. Jack noted that, "I am primarily interested in a process that gives us a good design and team." He highlighted that a reason for this was if they did not have such a process, "we might just move forward and lose things we could have learned," and thereby become less efficient decision makers. Jack then encouraged Tim, "you and I will need to . . . exercise some discipline to have a complete process." Jack also alluded to

how their process should be rational. He suggested that the right process would facilitate a principle-based “analysis” of instructional design “options” the team generated. He added that, “[if] we give it what it needs . . . as a group we will find the best options.” He also suggested that using rational decision-making criteria would mean, “our first iteration [of the simulation] is the better in my view.” We draw attention to the language in Jack’s email suggesting the qualitative value he was attributing to rationality and efficiency. The team would find the “best” options if they followed a process that allowed them to rationally weigh alternatives. The first iteration of the simulation would be “better” if they did so. An efficient process was a “good” process. Even stating that they should have the “discipline” to follow such a process suggested that Jack saw these motives as being more exemplary than alternatives, as if those who did not adhere to them were lacking the virtue of self-discipline.

A similar tone was evident in other writings. In one instance, the faculty sent a newsletter to team members that included a section seemingly meant to convince them of the value of the team’s rational ideals. Contrasting their instructional simulation with off-the-shelf games, the newsletter stated that entertaining games could presumably be designed through any process. But the intricate simulations the team was designing, that were meant to be more than “fun and engaging” but also would allow “student players to take away some knowledge,” needed a different approach. It “requires a deliberate design [process]” that would help them “structure” the many components of a simulation, so they aligned with the objective principles of the instructional strategy and the learning outcomes on which they were relying. And at another time, Tim described his trust in an orderly and efficient process that would facilitate the team’s “progress” towards decisions about “high level learning outcomes and the core [instructional] structure.” A further instance was an email where Jack proposed having Stacy and another individual generate some alternatives for the simulation narrative, which would then be evaluated by team members who “would look at it in terms of pros and cons.” Jack reiterated that Stacy and her colleague would generate “different possibilities,” but that “we will need some way to evaluate options” to choose the best one. In context, all these statements evoked a similar sense that rationality and efficiency were virtues, as they were entwined with expressions that suggested our participants considered such forms of decision making to be praiseworthy. These included Tim’s declaration that “I really like the idea” of a honed, efficient process, and Jack’s statement that “I expect we would be happy” to adopt ideas generated through rational means.

Expert and Engaged

As the faculty conversed with each other they tended to describe their relationships and processes as good when they placed people with what they called “expertise” in key positions. Although they rarely, if ever, explicitly defined how they were using the term, they used it often, frequently discussing it as a quality they should seek out and promote when they found it. However, in contrast to a pure expert-centric approach, they also routinely argued that at least in some circumstances people’s demonstrated commitment to, and prior engagement with, the project should be prioritized over expertise.

One example was found in Jack’s proposal for the design task force. This instance not only illustrated how expertise was important to the faculty, but also how they moderated its importance by also considering how engaged people had been with the project. When Jack proposed the task force, he also suggested a certain team member, Ann, be appointed “chair of the task force” because he thought it was “a good fit for her expertise.” She was the instructor of classes that taught similar subjects to those students would learn in the simulations. She also had HCI experience and so could provide input into the simulations’ user interface. Later, Stacy similarly recognized the importance of including Ann because of her expertise, or, as she put it, “she brings a wealth of knowledge.” But in contrast, when Tim expressed his concerns about the task force, he stated that while he agreed that “including [Ann] is wise,” he thought appointing her as chair was “unwise” because she had not “been involved in everything people have been learning over the past 6 months” (expressing his concern that Ann had not been as engaged as others). Further, when Tim argued that he and Stacy should lead the design, he justified the suggestion both by his own expertise, saying he had years of experience designing educational simulations and so “I typically play a similar role” in other projects, and because of Stacy’s prior engagement, since she had been “the most involved from [her university].”

The debate about Ann’s proposed leadership continued a few days later in further emails. Jack continued to advocate for Ann being the task force leader, “I need to have a role for Ann, and I thought that by chairing this group we could use

her expertise as we work through alternatives.” In contrast, Tim argued for including Ann somehow, but not to appoint her as leader, “don’t get me wrong, I think we should use her expertise, just not put her in a leadership role over design.” Tim also pointed out how promoting Ann might be problematic for those who had been committed to the project for a longer period of time. He said, “it may also seem strange” to other team members if Ann were given a leadership role, in the sense of wondering why a person who had not been involved was given a key position, and not one of them.

The faculty’s commitments to promoting expertise and engagement were also evident in other emails. In a discussion about two individuals in particular, Tim advocated that either, or both, of them should be included because they “both have extensive experience with this.” One was an instructional designer and the other was a creative writer, both of whom had worked with Tim on previous simulations. But Jack expressed reserve about how committed and engaged one of these individuals had been, “I would be worried with [this person] based on him not showing up to . . . meetings that were designed for him specifically.” In another email, Stacy seemed to prioritize an expert-centric quality to the team’s design relationships. She observed that a certain individual should be sought out and invited to participate because he was “familiar” with an instructional design process that “is aligned with our approaches.” Finally, at another time Jack requested that a particular instructional designer be brought into a discussion about the process the team would use to create learning activities, since that type of work “seems in his wheelhouse” (that is, an area of expertise). Additionally, by that time Jack had also become less enthusiastic about including Ann in the design task force because she had stopped responding to his emails, which indicated to him that she was possibly not as engaged as he wanted her to be.

Tensions Across Themes

At times in our analysis, the faculty’s commitment to certain themes seemed to be in tension with their commitments to others. One example was tensions between the values of rationality and efficiency, contrasted with their commitments to collaboration and inclusion. For instance, when discussing how to collaborate with various groups, the faculty would occasionally note there was a limit to how inclusive they would be—usually justified on grounds of helping the team be as efficient as possible. Some of these examples were described earlier, such as when Jack emailed student employees about their involvement. Before soliciting their participation, he was careful to state that “because of logistics” students would not be decision makers, but could offer “suggestions.” Also, when proposing the design task force Jack alluded to how “adding more [people] adds complexity,” and so as the principal investigators one of their roles was to “keep our meetings manageable.” And in a project newsletter, the faculty wrote that “we need to be efficient in how we use [the] expertise” of the individuals involved, due to the difficulties of “getting a large number of people” together, “complicated by geography and time zones.” Similarly, at times our participants seemed to recognize that their commitment towards collaboration and inclusion could be in tension with an expert-centric approach, or, alternatively, promoting team members who had been most engaged. We illustrate this by referring back to Jack’s concern that a certain individual was “not showing up” to meetings. In the same message where he expressed his concern, he reiterated, “again, anyone can spend time designing and propose a design,” but this did not mean those who were not committed could assume any role on the project. Those with a history of engagement were to be prioritized over others.

It was also notable that while faculty members’ communication among themselves and with the rest of the team reflected the existence of competing commitments, they never explicitly or directly commented on the tensions. We can imagine that if any friction had been pointed out to the faculty, they would have been able to recognize it, and even been able to comment on why the tensions existed, or what commitments they consciously thought should be prioritized. Yet in the moment, such self-reflection seemed to be absent. There was not evidence of any conscious attempt on the faculty members’ part to reconcile the tensions. Instead, if any sense of why they were acting as they did was evident in their communication, it seemed to be based on their affective responses to salient features of the individual situations. Certain situational aspects presented themselves as the decisive motive for taking an action. This was evidenced by statements from the documents that highlighted faculty members’ affective motivations, such as a newsletter’s claim that logistical challenges “raises the importance” of choosing a team organization that balanced collaboration and efficiency, or when Tim noted that he was “extremely anxious” that the team not let collaboration get in the way of making efficient decisions about the simulations’ learning outcomes or learning events.

Discussion and Implications for Practice

The themes our participants expressed throughout our study suggested several possibilities for action that instructional designers could consider to help their own relationships with faculty be more effective. First, the consistency between our findings and prior research could increase instructional designers' confidence in what scholars have previously reported about important elements in designer/faculty relationships. Second, a more unique contribution of our findings was the further detail they provided about concepts found in prior literature, that address gaps in the field's understanding about what might matter to faculty in instructional design relationships and processes. Third, our study illustrates our participants' commitments to multiple values about design relationships and processes. This highlights the importance of instructional designers being sensitive to the same possibility in their own relationships with the faculty they work with. Further discussion of each of these points is provided below.

We first note the consistency of our findings with previous instructional design research. For instance, collaboration was a recurring theme among our participants, aligning with one of the more common findings about instructional designer/faculty relationships in the existing literature (Chen & Carliner, 2021). Similarly, our participants also valued efficiency as found by Olesova and Campell (2019), engagement as found by Bawa and Watson (2017), and expertise as found by Chittur (2018). Although case studies can be valuable even if they differ from prior literature, the alignment of our findings with other research suggested a useful implication. At least in part, it means this study is a form of source triangulation with what other scholars have reported (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and helps contribute to the soundness of what scholars have investigated in instructional designers' relationships with faculty. For instance, because our findings were generated from analysis of faculty communications when they did not know researchers would be listening in, this supports the trustworthiness of similar factors that faculty have reported to researchers through interviews (the method used for many prior studies). Consistency between studies is evidence that the results of prior research have not been a result of faculty giving researchers what they perceived to be socially acceptable answers. This should increase instructional designers' confidence in regard to aligning their relationships and processes with what the literature has previously reported. A further practical implication of this consistency is the likely overlap it indicates about what matters to instructional designers and faculty about their working relationships. This suggests that instructional designers could explicitly talk to faculty about their similar values, which might help lay a foundation for developing a successful relationship themselves (cf. Rogers & Ballard, 1995).

Second, our findings offer a more unique contribution through the further detail they provided about some of the concepts reported in prior literature. This can address gaps in researchers' or practitioners' understanding of what might matter to other faculty about instructional design relationships or processes. Using collaboration as an example, Chen and Carliner (2021) noted that while many researchers have discussed its importance, they have not defined the construct itself; "despite a strong pattern . . . of studies that characterize the working relationship between faculty and instructional designers as 'collaborative' . . . few studies actually provide definitions of a 'collaborative' relationship" (p. 20). While our study did not provide a formal definition of the term either, the detail our participants provided about it could help instructional designers develop robust notions of what faculty might mean when they talk about collaboration, without reducing what is likely a multi-dimensional construct into a simple definition that could eliminate the nuance or distinctions that mattered most (this was a particular strength of our narrative case method; it allowed for rich exploration of topics that could be easy to oversimplify). For instance, when our participants talked about collaboration they included sharing ideas, actively seeking out others' opinions, allowing any team member to propose ideas, discussing alternatives people might raise, and joint forms of decision making. If instructional designers understood collaboration in the rich way our participants discussed they could be better prepared to have meaningful discussions about the type of collaborative relationship they might develop with the faculty with whom they are working.

The same is true for other themes from our findings. The detail our participants discussed about rationality in instructional design (e.g., deliberate action; finding the right process) could inform designers' conversations with other faculty about what types of processes will be most advantageous to them. Or, our participants' understanding of engagement (e.g., commitment to the project's cause; being present and involved with other team members) could

contribute towards designers' understanding of why faculty they work with may or may not welcome the help of certain individuals in an instructional design project.

Third, there were times in our analysis when it appeared that issues that mattered to our participants were experiencing tension with each other. For instance, even though our participants valued expertise and often attempted to align their team structure with this ideal, expertise was not the only value they held to about the team, and so at times we found them prioritizing engagement or collaboration over expertise. Similarly, while there were instances where they prioritized collaboration over efficiency, there were also cases of them doing the reverse. Overall, the faculty in our study were navigating a rich landscape of values that mattered to them, while at the same time trying to cope with the practicalities of their situation as they encountered it. This meant that at certain times one value could speak to them more loudly than others, and their different values were either more or less relevant based on the most salient characteristics of the moment. So, it appears overly simplistic to promote a set of values as being what matters to faculty about team relationships or processes, without also recognizing how those values could be stronger or weaker in certain contexts, or how certain values might be what faculty prioritized in one setting, while in a different setting they prioritize others that might even appear to be in competition with what they had valued only a short time before.

This observation could help contextualize factors regarding instructional designer/faculty relationships reported in prior research. For instance, Chen and Carliner (2021) described good designer/faculty relationships as being based on "clear [agreement] upon the ownerships and leaderships involved in the design process beforehand" (pp. 14-15). They also described good relationships as being flexible, "adjusting instructional-design processes and types of support" as different needs arose (p. 14). While much of the time these values could complement each other, it could also be possible for them to be at least somewhat incompatible as well. For example, there may be circumstances where a more flexible approach could overcome a roadblock in a project, yet such flexibility might conflict with agreed upon responsibilities that faculty and instructional designers had previously determined. Instructional designers should be sensitive to these possibilities, and consider the particular needs of the faculty they are working with at a particular time, which could alter how the faculty might value one course of action over another. Explicit conversations with faculty about potential value conflicts could also help instructional designers navigate these kinds of circumstances.

Conclusion

In this study we investigated what university faculty valued when working with an instructional design team to develop educational simulations. This provided insights into matters the faculty found to be significant about their relationships and processes with the team. Specifically, they valued: (a) collaboration and inclusion; (b) rationality and efficiency; and (c) expertise and engagement. In the first two themes the dual concepts seemed to reinforce each other, while in the third the faculty sometimes experienced each as being in tension with the other. Additionally, there were sometimes tensions across the themes as well. These issues were consistent with prior research, suggesting that instructional designers can have confidence in the growing body of scholarship pointing towards what kinds of factors matter in designer/faculty relationships. Unique contributions of our study were the further detail it provided about constructs our participants found to be important in their relationships and processes, as well as how it illustrated that their commitment to multiple values about design relationships and processes can be in tension with each other. While further research will be useful in understanding how these factors could affect instructional designers/faculty interactions in other settings, even with the limitations we noted our study pointed to some of the ways that instructional designers can build a foundation for successful relationships when engaged with faculty in instructional design work.

Funding

Part of this work was supported by the National Science Foundation grant number 1915620.

References

- Albrahim, F. A. M. (2018). *Go hand in hand: A case study in the collaboration between faculty and instructional designers when developing online courses* (Publication No. 2442633850) [Doctoral dissertation, Ohio University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Bawa, P., & Watson, S. (2017). The chameleon characteristics: A phenomenological study of instructional designer, faculty, and administrator perceptions of collaborative instructional design environments. *Qualitative Report*, 22(9), 2334–2355. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2017.2915>
- Brown, B., Eaton, S., Jacobsen, M., Roy, S., & Friesen, S. (2013). Instructional design collaboration: A professional learning and growth experience. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.11575/PRISM/34910>
- Chen, Y., & Carliner, S. (2021). A special SME: An integrative literature review of the relationship between instructional designers and faculty in the design of online courses for higher education. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 33(4), 471–495. <https://doi.org/10.1002/piq.21339>
- Chittur, D. (2018). *A phenomenological study of professors and instructional designers during online course development leading to enhanced student-centered pedagogy* [Doctoral dissertation, Pepperdine University]. Pepperdine Digital Commons. <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/etd/935>
- Drysdale, J. T. (2019). The collaborative mapping model: Relationship-centered instructional design for higher education. *Online Learning Journal*, 23(3), 56–71. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v23i3.2058>
- Fleming, V., Gaidys, U., & Robb, Y. (2003). Hermeneutic research in nursing: Developing a Gadamerian-based research method. *Nursing Inquiry*, 10(2), 113–120. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1440-1800.2003.00163.x>
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2001). *Making social science matter: Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gong, S. P., & Yanchar, S. C. (2019). Question asking and the common good: A hermeneutic investigation of student questioning in moral configurations of classroom practice. *Qualitative Research in Education*, 8(3), 248–275. <https://doi.org/10.17583/qre.2019.3947>
- Halupa, C. (2019). Differentiation of roles: Instructional designers and faculty in the creation of online courses. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 8(1), 55–68. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v8n1p55>
- Harrison, R., Hutt, I., Thomas-Varcoe, C., Motteram, G., Else, K., Rawlings, B., & Gemmell, I. (2017). A cross-sectional study to describe academics' confidence, attitudes, and experience of online distance learning in higher education. *Journal of Educators Online*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.9743/jeo.2017.14.2.3>
- Jaschik, S., & Lederman, D. (2017). 2017 survey of faculty attitudes on technology: A study by Inside Higher Education and Gallup. In *Inside Higher Education*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/booklet/2017-survey-faculty-attitudes-technology>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.

- Liu, M., Kishi, C., & Rhodes, S. (2007). Strategies and heuristics for novice instructional designers as they work with faculty content experts in a university setting. In M. J. Keppell (Ed.), *Instructional design: Case studies in communities of practice* (pp. 36–67). Information Science Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-59904-322-7.ch003>
- McDonald, J. K., Jackson, B. D., & Hunter, M. B. (2021). Understanding distinctions of worth in the practices of instructional design teams. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 69 (3), 1641–1663. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-021-09995-2>
- McDonald, J. K., & Rogers, A. (2021). “I can do things because I feel valuable”: Authentic project experiences and how they matter to instructional design students. *Journal of Applied Instructional Design*, 10 (2). <https://doi.org/10.51869/102/jmar>
- Mertala, P. (2020). Paradoxes of participation in the digitalization of education: A narrative account. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 45 (2), 179–192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2020.1696362>
- Nelson, W. A., & Palumbo, D. B. (2014). When design meets Hollywood: Instructional design in a production studio environment. In B. Hokanson & A. S. Gibbons (Eds.), *Design in Educational Technology: Design Thinking, Design Process, and the Design Studio* (pp. 75–88). Springer.
- Newkirk, T. (1992). The narrative roots of the case study. In G. Kirsch & P. A. Sullivan (Eds.), *Methods and methodology in composition research* (pp. 130–152). Southern Illinois University Press.
- Olesova, L., & Campbell, S. (2019). The impact of the cooperative mentorship model on faculty preparedness to develop online courses. *Online Learning Journal*, 23 (4), 192–213. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v23i4.2089>
- Packer, M. (2011). Schooling: Domestication or ontological construction? In T. Koschmann (Ed.), *Theories of learning and studies of instructional practice* (pp. 167–188). Springer Science+Business Media, LLC. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-7582-9_10
- Packer, M. (2018). *The science of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Pan, C. S., Deets, J., Phillips, W., & Cornell, R. (2003). Pulling tigers’ teeth without getting bitten: Instructional designers and faculty. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 4 (3), 289–302.
- Richardson, J. C., Ashby, I., Alshammari, A. N., Cheng, Z., Johnson, B. S., Krause, T. S., Lee, D., Randolph, A. E., & Wang, H. (2019). Faculty and instructional designers on building successful collaborative relationships. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 67 (4), 855–880. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-018-9636-4>
- Ritzhaupt, A. D., & Kumar, S. (2015). Knowledge and skills needed by instructional designers in higher education. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 28 (3), 51–69. <https://doi.org/10.1002/piq.21196>
- Rogers, J. L., & Ballard, S. (1995). Aspirational Management. *NASPA Journal*, 32 (3), 162–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1995.11072382>
- Schwieb, R. A., & Wilson, J. R. (2010). Unconventional roles and activities identified by instructional designers. *Contemporary Educational Technology*, 1 (2), 134–147. <https://doi.org/10.30935/cedtech/5970>
- Scoppio, G., & Luyt, I. (2017). Mind the gap: Enabling online faculty and instructional designers in mapping new models for quality online courses. *Education and Information Technologies*, 22 (3), 725–746. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-015-9452-y>
- Smidt, E., McDyre, B., Bunk, J., Li, R., & Gatenby, T. (2014). Faculty attitudes about distance education. *IAFOR Journal of Education*, 2 (2), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.22492/ije.2.2.06>

- Stake, R. E. (2000). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.). *The handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 435–454). Sage Publications.
- Tabata, L. N., & Johnsrud, L. K. (2008). The impact of faculty attitudes toward technology, distance education, and innovation. *Research in Higher Education*, 49 (7), 625–646. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-008-9094-7>
- Taeger, S. D., & Yanchar, S. C. (2019). Principles and practices of designing narrative distance for transformative learning experiences. *Educational Media International*, 56 (2), 164–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523987.2019.1614322>
- Van Manen, M. (2015). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Left Coast Press. <https://www.amazon.com/Researching-Lived-Experience-Second-Manen/dp/1629584169>
- Wingo, N. P., Ivankova, N. V., & Moss, J. A. (2017). Faculty perceptions about teaching online: Exploring the literature using the technology acceptance model as an organizing framework. *Online Learning Journal*, 21 (1), 15–35. <https://doi.org/10.10.24059/olj.v21i1.761>
- Yanchar, S. C., & Gong, S. P. (2019). Inquiry into moral configurations. In B. D. Slife & S. C. Yanchar (Eds.). *Hermeneutic moral realism in psychology: Theory and practice* (pp. 116–127). Routledge.
- Yanchar, S. C., & Slife, B. D. (2017). Theorizing inquiry in the moral space of practice. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 14 (2), 146–170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2016.1264517>
- You, J. (2010). *A study of faculty members' perceived utilization of best practices in distance learning course design and delivery and the role of instructional designers* (Publication No. 3423881) [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Toledo]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.





Jason K. McDonald

Brigham Young University

Dr. Jason K. McDonald is a Professor of Instructional Psychology & Technology at Brigham Young University. He brings twenty-five years of experience in industry and academia, with a career spanning a wide-variety of roles connected to instructional design: face-to-face training; faculty development; corporate eLearning; story development for instructional films; and museum/exhibit design. He gained this experience as a university instructional designer; an executive for a large, international non-profit; a digital product director for a publishing company; and as an independent consultant.

Dr. McDonald's research focuses around advancing instructional design practice and education. In particular, he studies the field's tendency to flatten/redefine educational issues in terms of problems that can be solved through the design of technology products, and how alternative framings of the field's purpose and practices can resist these reductive tendencies.

At BYU, Dr. McDonald has taught courses in instructional design, using stories for learning purposes, project management, learning theory, and design theory. His work can be found at his website: <http://jkmcdonald.com/>



Salma Elsayed-Ali

University of Maryland

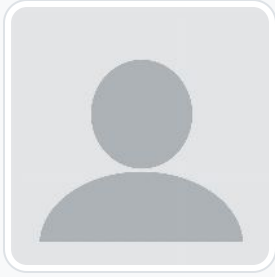
Salma Elsayed-Ali is a PhD candidate at the University of Maryland, focusing on Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), participatory design, and collective creativity.



Kayla Bowman

Brigham Young University

Kayla Bowman has an MS degree from the department of Instructional Psychology and Technology at Brigham Young University, and is currently a senior instructional designer at Weave.



Amy A. Rogers

Brigham Young University

Amy Rogers is a graduate student in the department of Instructional Psychology and Technology at Brigham Young University. As a former school counselor, she hopes her degree will allow her to design effective instructional materials and experiences that help bridge the gap between research and practice.



This content is provided to you freely by EdTech Books.

Access it online or download it at https://edtechbooks.org/jaid_11_3/_considering_what_fa.